

Narrator: You're listening to the Quarterdeck with Benjamin Strong and Coast Guard Admiral Jim Watson.

Benjamin: Hi, it's Ben Strong from Amver.com and welcome to the August edition of Quarterdeck. I'm happy to say that my co-host, Admiral Watson, is back and in his new position at Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, D. C. Welcome back, Admiral.

Admiral Watson: Hi, Ben, it's good to be back. Yeah, I am in Washington, D. C. I made the journey up from Portsmouth, Virginia. It's actually the third or fourth time I've probably been in Coast Guard Headquarters since I was Lieutenant Junior Grade.

Benjamin: There you go.

Admiral Watson: You know, I grew up closer to this area than I did down in Portsmouth, Virginia, so I feel a little bit at home.

Benjamin: Well that's good. Welcome home to you and we can kind of jokingly call this our earthquake edition because we were going to try to connect yesterday, but that Virginia / Washington D. C. earthquake put the kibosh on that. So we're back and we're ready to go, aren't we?

Admiral Watson: We are ready to go. Yeah, that was a little bit unusual here. I've been in California in my career and was prepared when I was out there, but it was a bit unusual getting shook up in Coast Guard Headquarters. But we're all back to normal today.

Benjamin: We are. It's been a busy month for both of us. Amver's had a busy month. We've had a couple of rescues that I'd like to share. Really dramatic, and it demonstrates... It really shows the effort that our Amver crews will go through in order to save lives. The first that I want to share was July 27th. It took place about 780 miles northeast of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. We joke, and we talk about these cases, but again this is another example of where there are sailors essentially in the middle of nowhere that ended up in harm's way and we had a ship that was able to rescue them. This crew, these two sailors on a sailboat, activated their EPIRB and they sent a distress call to the rescue coordination center in Boston stating that their sails were torn, their engines were disabled, and they were taking on water. And really, about the only resources available that far out were Amver resources. Our shipmates up in Boston quickly queried the Amver system and found a tanker, the motor vessel Kim Jacob, that was able to divert and assist these sailors. Now what's really interesting is the case was complicated by both the size of the ship, which was over 600 feet long, and the weather conditions with winds at 30 knots and seas were between eight and twelve feet. The sailboat had a sea anchor deployed so as this tanker came alongside the ship it somehow snagged the sea anchor and started to drag the sailboat midships, and it was really a complicated rescue. There were two people on board, Admiral. The woman was able to get aboard climbing up a Jacob's ladder, but the male – her companion who was sailing with her – ended up being thrown overboard. This really speaks to the seamanship and the skill of these crews and masters. That ship stayed on station and searched for an additional three hours, was able to locate that survivor in the water, and then was able to hoist him aboard. But I also think it demonstrates that there are some significant challenges for our commercial mariners when they're forced... you know, when they encounter these kind of search and rescue cases. I mean the challenges that they face are amazing.

Admiral Watson: Absolutely. That was a great case. The seamanship of our professional maritime worldwide is just incredible. I know we ask a lot when we make these calls to the Amver participants

but it's just truly amazing how quite often successful they are, and it's so fortunate for those two sailors.

Benjamin: Oh, it was just an amazing case. I know my colleagues in the Office of Search and Rescue at Coast Guard Headquarters are looking at the actual difficulty of rescuing people at seas, and they're working through the IMO to either investigate if there's some standardized equipment or standardized procedures, or if the International Search and Rescue Manual needs to be updated. So, you know, it's important for the sailing community that may be listening to this, and to the commercial community that listens to this, that we do look at these cases. We do survivor debriefings, and we review how can things be done better. Hopefully a case like this will be able to yield some results and make searching and rescuing better for survivors, and the yachting and maritime community, and for the folks that we call on to do the rescuing. But the case is almost repeated down near the Dominican Republic when the clipper, Glory, which is another Amver participant, noticed flares that were being shot up, and there were two additional sailors that had to be taken off their boat after the This is something that perhaps folks don't realize but it was a young gal and her father were sailing, and the father developed a medical problem. Despite the blood pressure medicine and things that he had, the young gal and her father had to be medically evacuated off their boat. So this Hong Kong flagship was able to embark the two sailors and they were taken on to the next port of call. But, I'm sure, very scary for the sailors and I'm thankful that our Amver participants working with our flight surgeons and rescue coordinators were able to provide the kind of medical attention and safety that they required. But, anything can happen at sea can't it, Admiral?

Admiral Watson: It sure can. In my current job I'm really focused on the prevention side of this and I guess, in a way, I've been involved with that my whole career. It's actually with a great amount of pride and high expectations that I come to this new job from the old job, which really was more focused on the response. Of course I was paying very close attention on a day-to-day basis on the Amver rescues, and the Coast Guard's rescues, and all of the other things that we do as a service for the maritime at large whether it's safety, security, or environmental response. I'd like to tell you a little bit about what we're doing here in the prevention side of the Coast Guard's mission set.

Benjamin: You know, I think that's interesting and you're really in an area now where you're going to be touching mariners from the prevention side and affecting what they do. So, please, tell us the initiatives and some of the things you're working on, Admiral.

Admiral Watson: Sure. Well, you know your two cases did involve yachts and one of the things in my list of activities here is outreach with the recreational boating community, with the yachting community. The Coast Guard, of course, is responsible for providing standards for lifesaving equipment, for signaling equipment such as the flares and the EPIRBs. More recently we've really tried to work with our partners – the Coast Guard Auxiliary, the auxiliary squadrons, yacht clubs, boating associations – to have as much education as we can. This is where I think we can bridge the gap between what the professional mariners are capable of doing and how to interact with them in an emergency, and with the expectations that, really, we should have on yachtsman and recreational boaters that are going out on the high seas. So I'm excited to be working back with the boating safety folks here at Coast Guard Headquarters and one of the things that we remarked on is that it's the anniversary of the boating safety law that was passed in 1971. We've literally cut the number of deaths in recreational boating in half over those years. At the same time, the numbers of recreational boats and the numbers of people that are recreating on boats, has doubled.

Benjamin: Wow.

Admiral Watson: So in effect, we've reduced it by one quarter in real terms. So we're very proud of that. But there's still about over 700 people a year, unfortunately, who die in recreational boating accidents, and we're striving to find ways to reduce that number.

Benjamin: Well, you know, you read about cases where somebody dies in some kind of boating accident and I know that domestically, at least here in the United States, a lot of it come in messages of either drinking and boating or not having a PFD, a life preserver, on or some kind of life jacket. I know at least our public affairs people here in the Coast Guard are working very, very hard to communicate with the, you know, to let the boating community know you have to wear a life jacket, and you shouldn't be drinking and boating. Whatever you're doing at Headquarters, sir, I know the message is being passed along here. I hope, if we have recreational boaters that are listening, that you're wearing your life jacket, you're not drinking and boating, and I would add that you've got an EPIRB that's properly registered because those are the things that will save your life. We've demonstrated we can get Amver ships or other Coast Guard resources to people. They just have to be floating and we have to know where to go to get them.

Admiral Watson: Yep, that's for sure. There's also a couple of important changes in the works that will have impact on professional mariners. Moving on to those, there's a series of public meetings going on with regard to a notice of proposed rulemaking regarding the standards for training and watch-keeping. This is something that will affect the licensing standards for US merchant mariners, but it really stems from the international convention changes that the United States is simply a party to and implementing domestically. Some of these standards are coming into effect – I think most of them are coming into effect – this January for the world's mariners. That will, I think, ratchet up the professionalism of merchant mariners worldwide another notch. They've come such a long way in the last several decades that it's just incredible to see how professional and how this industry has changed over that period of time. So we're happy to do our part in making that happen here in the United States. A second rulemaking that is primarily domestic but it's very significant, both to the Coast Guard and to the industry here, is the Coast Guard has announced that it has plans to inspect what's currently uninspected towing vessels. So those notices of proposed rulemaking [inaudible] last month. And that will affect some 7,000 vessels in the United States, maybe 5,000 to 7,000, we're still not exactly sure. Our current number of inspected vessels is about 10,000. So that's a significant bump up for the Coast Guard and for the maritime industry. Of course, towing vessels come in all shapes and sizes. You have a lot of towing vessels that just work the inland waterways, or the ports and harbors, but you also have a lot of towing vessels that are already on international voyages. They already meet the SOLAS requirements but they will, in the future, have that Coast Guard certificate of inspection on them.

Benjamin: So does this include vessels even down to, like, TowBoat USA size? Like say, maybe a 25, 20-foot vessel?

Admiral Watson: Yes, it depends on what their service is. If it's a commercial towing vessel – and I think it may have a cut-off of around [inaudible], and there already is a requirement for licensing.

Benjamin: So, Admiral, we were discussing the proposed changes to towing vessels and the increase in number of vessels that will be inspected domestically here. You said that was an additional 7,000 vessels?

Admiral Watson: Could be up to 7,000, Ben, and you know, our program now includes around 10,000 so that's a significant increase. We think this is the right thing to do. We've been actually asked by the American Waterways Operators to inspect these vessels. It will provide a constant set of standards for

mariners, and they're all licensed merchant mariners that operate these vessels, that they have for that hull under their feet, and the machinery, and the safety equipment. I think a lot of them will benefit. We have seen that there is a difference in the number of marine casualties that we experience each year when you compare the inspected vessels – the Coast Guard inspected and certificated vessels – versus the uninspected and not certificated vessels. So this will put the towing vessels in the category with the other commercial vessels.

Benjamin: Well it sounds like, while it may be a significant workload, it sounds like – as you talk about the accident rate between inspected versus non-inspected vessels – it sounds like this will really just, ultimately, make things safer for everybody that's working on the water. If I have to be towed by a vessel it will be good to know that that inspection has taken place and there's a minimum standard. So that's a good thing all the way around.

Admiral Watson: Right. In the world maritime, I've been very busy with the piracy issue. I'm the co-chair of Working Group 3 of a UN contact group. They have an upcoming meeting in London in early September that will be followed immediately by a Maritime Safety Committee meeting of the IMO. There's a lot of synergy between these two groups because the contact group has been very active across the entire spectrum of issues that cause piracy, and that piracy is having on the maritime transportation system – not just from the perspective of the seafarers that end up hostages, but also in the cost of shipping in that area of the world. So the Working Group 3 is the one that focuses on the relationship between the governments of the world and the industry itself. The primary tool there are the best management practices that have been developed. So we hope in this next meeting to get consensus on the universal application of those best management practices, and then some discussion on this controversial issue of armed private security that would provide some means to fend off pirates from their attacks on ships while they're actually transiting those high-risk waters around Somalia.

Benjamin: Well, it's interesting. I'm glad that you brought the piracy matter up. I was just reading a piece today – I don't remember which maritime publication it was in – but apparently there was an attack on a vessel either at anchorage or at port in Oman. So the pirates seem to be testing new models of operation or business models, as it were. We know that they've hijacked pleasure craft and, sadly, killed Americans. Their reach seems to be expanding in the Indian Ocean and now it appears as if they've attacked a vessel that was in port. So certainly a timely and important matter and the Coast Guard is involved in the piracy fight. We've discussed it before, and I believe we still may have some law enforcement detachments, or at least some Coast Guard officers, out in that area don't we, sir?

Admiral Watson: Oh, we do, but not enough to provide means to fend off pirates from every single ship. But there is a combined fleet of navies, ships from all sorts of navies in the world, and Coast Guard members are embarked on the US portion of that coalition. But I think the most promising way forward is to actually have some form of capable security on each ship and that's what this private security guard concept is all about. And it's growing in popularity amongst the owners of some of the ships that transit those borders, but it's still a controversy among a lot of the operators and owners. So we'll see how that progresses. In the meantime I'd like to mention, because it is important for seafarers worldwide, that we really also have quite a program here under my direction in this department in Coast Guard Headquarters that focuses on port security. We have an international port security program where we've sent small teams – just two or three Coast Guard officers – to a large percentage of the world's seaports in an effort to verify compliance with the international port security code which requires some form of security on the part of those port nations. It is largely intended to assist seafarers when they're using the seaports of the world. Then domestically, we've had a program for a number of years to enhance the security in our own ports and we just had our Secretary announce the award of

grants for that program just yesterday. This year's total amount was about \$235 million just for the US ports. So a lot of money has been spent worldwide on providing safer, more secure infrastructure for seafaring and for the marine transportation system starting at the port facilities, then moving out into the high seas and into the high-risk waters, with these initiatives like the Working Group 3 and best management practices.

Benjamin: You know, we've had an opportunity here at Amver to work with the international port security liaison program, not from a security standpoint, but because we have Coast Guard representatives literally throughout the world, like you mentioned. We'll work closely with them as they're going through their daily duties of ensuring that the port facility is secure and dealing with agents, or charters, or the ship's crew, or really anybody that may have a question or a concern about security. They're also kind enough to mention the Amver system, or perhaps if there's been a rescue and a ship's coming into a foreign port, we've got Coast Guard people there that will go and recognize the crew. I have a very, very fond, strong relationship with the international port security liaison program. I'm sure most of our listeners would be surprised to learn that we've got so many people out, Coast Guard people around the world helping. If, perhaps, somebody needs to contact the Coast Guard and they're at a major international port, they could probably ask around and there's a Coast Guard representative there that can answer questions for them or help them out.

Admiral Watson: Absolutely, yeah. We are really proud of those folks. They're doing great work and their mission is quite literally outreach and to try to focus the world's attention on the things that can be done to make seafaring and the cargo operations more secure. The last thing I'd like to mention has a little bit to do with environmental, actually a lot to do with environmental. Huge interest in what's going on up in Alaska with regard to oil exploration, and we're working with some of the large companies there that have the potential to do exploration in the fairly near future. That also ties into the investigation report which will be coming out very shortly from the Deepwater Horizon incident which has really spawned a whole new industry for well containment, which we're starting to see new vessel designs and response methodologies. It's a fascinating new area that kind of reminds me of some of the things that came out of the Exxon Valdez incident. So there's a lot of work amongst our naval architects in the Coast Guard, as well as our policy folks, and a very tight relationship has sprung up between the US Coast Guard and the bureau responsible for giving leases to companies to drill anywhere in the coastal exclusion zone of the United States which of course includes the North Slope just like it does in the Gulf of Mexico and all through California, and so on.

Benjamin: I know the Arctic Council which deals with any kind of activity in the Arctic, at least from the shipping side, is even interested in the Deepwater Horizon report for the implications it may have in exploration and exploiting energy that's in the Arctic region. So the Arctic Council and our Arctic international partners are interested to see the results of that. I believe the Flag State has come out with a report as well, so there's a lot of information coming out about Deepwater Horizon and the environmental impacts of shipping and things all around the world right now, more than just the Gulf of Mexico.

Admiral Watson: Well, I'm sure there's going to be plenty to keep us busy in that area of our responsibilities for a long time. These investigations, unfortunately, keep a fair number of our staff very busy, not just here in Headquarters but out in all of our field units as well. There's always lessons learned from these things and our mission here is to try to do the prevention. Try not to make the same mistakes twice. So that's sort of a recap of what we do here in the Coast Guard Prevention Directorate and I look forward to giving you more details as it goes along, Ben.

Benjamin: I appreciate it, Admiral. I thank you for your time and you know, in a perfect world if our prevention worked, our Amver ships wouldn't have to be rescuing mariners, we wouldn't have environmental catastrophes, and we'll keep working on the prevention side of things, and we'll lean to you for more input. Hopefully we won't have to respond as much. But our Amver ships are ready and our Coast Guard responders are ready. We know that, sadly, tomorrow there will be another call for assistance. Admiral, thank you. It's good to have you back and I look forward to catching up with you again next month for another edition of the Quarterdeck.

Admiral Watson: We'll see you then, Ben.

Narrator: You have been listening to the Quarterdeck. Learn more about the Amver program at Amver.com. The Quarterdeck theme song is called Botany Bay by the Blaggards, available at Musicalley.com. or follow the link in our show notes.