

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

Benjamin: Hi, it's Ben Strong from amver.com, and I'm joined today by Captain Linda Fagan, the Captain of the Port for New York Harbor. How are you Captain?

Captain Fagan: I'm fine. Thank you Benjamin.

Benjamin: I appreciate you taking some time to talk with the Quarterdeck podcast listeners, and really I asked you to come down today so that we could talk about the, it's obviously we're coming up on the tenth anniversary of the September 11th attacks here in New York, and the maritime community has both felt the consequences of that attack, and also during the incident that occurred in lower Manhattan, the maritime sector played a part in the evacuation as well. So perhaps, and I know that you are preparing for different events that are going on around the city to commemorate the anniversary, but if we can just for a minute briefly describe kind of the Coast Guard's role and the greater maritime role in the evacuation of lower Manhattan on that day.

Captain Fagan: Certainly. Obviously it was a major event that involved evacuation of anywhere from 350,000 to 500,000 people off of lower Manhattan. It was the first time that the Coast Guard used a calling all boats approach and sought the support of the broad maritime community to come and respond to lower Manhattan and help evacuate people from the area down near the World Trade Center site. And it certainly, what it highlights for me as I reflect back on that time ten years ago and look at where we are now in the port, with the port community is just how resilient the port community is here and in the greater New York and New Jersey area, and how much capacity, just how inherent capacity exists in the system whether it's our waterway taxis, the Staten Island Ferry, all of the tugboat and towing communities here, the cruise industry, it's an exceptionally diverse group of maritime professionals that we have here in New York that all lean in and get done what needs to get done in the times of need or potential big responses.

Benjamin: While the September 11th attack was extraordinary, incidents occurring in New York Harbor aren't that uncommon. I mean there was US Air Flight 1549 that went in the water, and I believe it was civilian waterway taxis that assisted and search and rescued there. There have been barge fires, there have been, I mean how often does something kind of come up here in the harbor that you have to deal with?

Captain Fagan: You know here in New York, the Coast Guard in New York, we're the largest operational sector command that the Coast Guard has. All total between the sector and our outlying subunits, we have over a thousand personnel assigned, a number of small boats, cutters, we conduct all eleven Coast Guard missions in the sector here, including ice-breaking up the Hudson river for a good portion of the winter but we truly are a 24-7 operation, have a large inherent capacity in our command center to manage all that goes on in the maritime environment here. It is truly a 24-7 operation. I never come in in the morning and wonder: gee, what will I do with myself today? There's always something going on. The vessel traffic system here manages over 1,400 vessel movements a day. So that's just part of the background buzz of activity that goes on. We move more petroleum products through here than most other ports. A lot of it will come in by tank ship or it will come in by one of the pipelines through a facility in New Jersey. It goes onto barges and then up into Long Island Sound. So with just that number of vessel movements occurring literally twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, you know, things happen. We have marine casualties in the port. We're out investigating accidents. We're out doing boarding. And then we're obviously spending quite a bit of time focused on

our ports and waterway security mission and protecting all of the critical infrastructure as well as the Staten Island Ferry that we see out your window here, from where we're sitting.

Benjamin: Well it's obvious that you have a good relationship with all of the players from pilots to the, I mean I remember on 9/11 a museum boat responded, but it was I think probably the September 11th incident that helped them further foster this good relationship you have with all of the maritime components here in New York harbor.

Captain Fagan: Yeah. It's certainly been one of the things that I truly appreciate and value, and having been here now for a little bit more than a year is the strength of the partnership that we have here in New York. And as you know, one of the commandant's guiding principles is strengthening partnerships. Well, the good news is that those partnerships were alive and well and strong here in New York. So it allows a level of discussion on challenging complex topics that you don't always find in other ports. It allows us to truly as partners lean in and get done what needs to get done and look for areas to continue to improve. In fact, I just came from one of the coordinating committees we use to do that: the Harbor Operations committee, which is not a federal advisory committee. It's a long-standing committee here in the port that brings together the key port partners to ensure that we got those partnerships in place and understand what each other's capacities are and roles in times of challenge.

Benjamin: Well obviously things changed in the maritime and the shipping community after September 11th being if not the largest, arguably one of the largest ports in the United States. How did the events of September 11th change shipping, and, more importantly, kind of port operations here in New York?

Captain Fagan: There were obviously a number of changes after September 11th, and there was the immediate response here in the New York area and with regard to the evacuation of lower Manhattan -- shipping was stopped and just trying to understand where the threats were and weren't. As we move forward after that event, and you saw the maritime transportation security act come into effect and a whole host of requirements then for vessels and for facilities. Obviously, the Coast Guard plays an integral role in implementing and enforcing those regulations. From a Coast Guard organizational capacity, many of the things that changed were, for example, Coast Guard station in New York which is on Staten Island is now the largest small boat station that the Coast Guard has. I don't know their number pre-9/11, but they're currently a 12 boat station. And that reflects the need to grow some of the inherent response capacity here. We vet ships now. Always did, or did before 9/11, but now with a 96 hour window in advance. We work in close cooperation with customs and border control on many of those vetting decisions. And you see much greater integration now both within the Coast Guard staffing, and how and what a boarding team looks like when it goes out to a ship that then has to be boarded and cleared for arrival and often those teams will include customs or any other law enforcement partners that may need to access that ship. And that's definitely something that's grown and improved since 9/11 where you see much more integrated federal partnership, and how we screen and ensure that those vessels that are calling those facilities that are here are fully compliant with all of the safety and security regulations.

Benjamin: You know, it wasn't too long ago I had an opportunity to actually kind of see that partnership between CPB and the Coast Guard. We had a container ship had picked up some German survivors that were, I don't know a thousand miles off the coast and had been rescued but they were being brought back in to New York to the container terminal over near where the Katherine Walker ties up. And because there were these extra people on the ship that weren't there when she departed her, you know, her last port of call -- Coast Guard, we were there to recognize the crew, and of course this was a good news story, so it's not that we had to deescalate, but we wanted to put the focus on the crew

having done something quite extraordinary and heroic. But customs and border protection people had to be there as well just to kind of, you know, to make sure that there were extra people that weren't there. To me, it appeared seamless. I mean, the professionalism and the way that the CPB folks worked closely with our Coast Guard personnel, it really showed that there is that unity of mission and that these people were, you know, let's recognize that a good thing was done. Let's also recognize that the ship needs to get this cargo off as quickly as possible, and, you know, reload containers and get out and it did seem to work pretty well.

Captain Fagan: Yeah, in fact there is a daily coordinating call with CPB. In addition to having access to the same information and the same databases, we do a morning coordinating call to help ensure that's in fact kind of a seamless sort of delivery to the port community. In the meantime, some of the other things that have happened since 9/11, we're beginning in the Coast Guard to develop and actually implement within some of the command centers, tools to help with that collaboration. Again, the goal is that when a ship presents itself to come into the port area, that anyone on the federal or state side that needs to access that vessel, that it's done as seamlessly and transparent as possible for the ship so that all of the regulations can be sure they've been complying with but not impede their need to continue to move cargo. One of the tools that we were beginning to roll out within our command centers is called Watchkeeper, and it's designed to help with some of the collaboration that we are already doing with phone calls and another mechanism -- that it'll just take us to another level of transparency with some of that coordinating that happens literally day in and day out in this port because of the volume of the commerce that comes and goes.

Benjamin: True, and we on this podcast, we've discussed in the past, you know, what ships can expect when they're coming into the port so there are no surprises there. All of these checklists are available online, and I'll include a link in the show notes to the previous post about what ships can expect, but what does the future look like? I mean obviously as the economy improves, presumably commerce will pick up and even more things will come in. Any changes coming to the port? Expansions or anything in the future that...?

Captain Fagan: No. You know obviously the port is about a year and a half from completing the fifty foot deepening project. That will increase the size of some of the ships that may start calling. The industry obviously continues to look for ways to continue to move cargo as efficiently as possible, so whether it's a new and innovative fuels for vessels, it's kind of a constant movement forward with the industry and with us as a regulatory agency. I don't see big changes coming in the future. I'm going to go back to the partnership comment I made. Here, those partnerships are going to continue to be even more important than they've been in the past. There's no one of us either on the federal side, either the states or the city of New York that have all of the capacity or the resources that we need to respond to a truly, you know, major event in and around the city. You only need to approach Manhattan once by water to get that this truly is an island, and it's very much constrained by water. And so that need to continue to work together collectively as maritime agencies in the area, that need will just continue and it's definitely been a great group of folks that are all there and leaned in to get that done and make sure that commerce is able to move quickly and efficiently.

Benjamin: Well, I think that was demonstrated just this past weekend when Hurricane Irene came through. I mean our, the AMVER offices here in lower Manhattan, anytime of the day or night you could look out the window and see hundreds of small boats to large ships out in the water, and I was home and watching news coverage from lower Manhattan on one of the cable channels and you could see behind the reporter that there was absolutely nothing on the water. And that alone takes a lot of coordination, and I think it demonstrates that partnership that you have. Ultimately it's the Coast Guard,

it's you as the Captain of the Port that makes that call on the various port conditions, whether it be x-ray or whiskey or who's allowed in and who's allowed out.

Captain Fagan: Right. And the way we worked that storm preparation going into the weekend was I used a series of afternoon, kind of coordinating calls to signal my intentions for the next twenty-four hour period that allowed the port community plenty of lead time and understand where we needed to be at a certain point the next day, and allowed us to get to a position where by 18:00 on Saturday with the storm predicted to come in after nightfall, have the large ships at sea, the barges were all buttoned down, the waterways had stopped moving. Obviously the city closed down the public transportation system, which stopped a lot of the passenger movements. Then by noon the next day on Sunday, it was apparent that we had seen the worst of the storm. And then talking to the great partnership we have, we were able to with the assistance of the Sandy Hook pilots and the Metro pilots get onto the water and start doing our waterways assessment so that by four o'clock on Sunday afternoon, we were ready to start moving ships.

Benjamin: So it was business as usual again?

Captain Fagan: Business as usual. And then obviously the vessel traffic system helps a great deal with that, and beginning to orchestrate it in an appropriate kind of a priority and the moving of ships back in. The Sandy Hook channel was the only thing that took then an additional twenty-four hours just because it's prone to shoaling because of the sandy beach there off the hook.

Benjamin: I guess calling that a delicate ballet is perhaps an understatement because it's a pretty significant coordinating event for your VTF folks.

Captain Fagan: It was definitely a significant coordinating event, and the minute you start talking about saying we're going to slow this down, sort of stop everybody from moving for a time period, you're absolute next thought has to be how are we going to start it up again and what and how. So we were beginning to have the conversations on how we were going to begin moving and kind of reconstituting. We were having those conversations Friday afternoon, thirty hours or plus before we had everything, what I kind of call ground hold. Lets just hold and figure out where we need to be when the storm passes.

Benjamin: Sure. You really need to be three steps ahead of where you are.

Captain Fagan: You do. You were talking about watching the forecast from lower Manhattan. I knew it was a bad sign when Jim Cantore from the Weather Channel showed up right outside your offices here. In fact, I think the Battery Building parking lot was in one of those broadcasts.

Benjamin: I think you're right, and the challenges are obviously for your team and for the folks in the sector at the command center are more than just, you've got guys in ships who are like, "When can we come in?" and you have the whole shoreside component. You've got charters, and you've got other folks who are calling up going, "Hey I need to get my cargo off first," so you faced a significant challenge and I think we -- really dodging a bullet is perhaps another understatement, but the port fared pretty well in the whole scheme of things.

Captain Fagan: It did. And I obviously would not wish a hurricane on anyone, and obviously some of the communities in fact just thirty miles west of here were significantly impacted by the rain and obviously the states to the north. But, the storm was significant enough here that as a port community,

we are all much better prepared for another storm event whether it's this summer or in subsequent summers. Definitely a number of lessons learned and good practices that we're busy incorporating and updating our hurricane plan as the Coast Guard to help provide some transparency and predictability to our thought processes and where and how the port community can expect some of those decision points. But in addition to all of the commercial port, we still had search and rescue going on as well. We obviously needed to move our resources out of harm's way, and the plan calls for all our small boats to go up the river to West Point and north, which then leaves us unable to respond to search and rescue to the two guys early in the morning on Sunday who decide to go swimming and to those kinds of things. So certainly the other waterway users other than the commercial community do need to remember that storms are serious events and that the water needs to be treated with respect.

Benjamin: Oh absolutely. If you had one piece of advice, if I'm a ship owner, I'm new to the shipping industry, and I wanted to bring in cargo or commerce into the port of New York, what one bit of advice would you give me if I'm deciding I want to make New York my next port call?

Captain Fagan: Well if New York is going to be your next port call and if you're going to be a regular caller in New York, I'd offer to you that you need to come see us over at the sector command center over on Staten Island. Come meet the people that you're going to be talking to on the radio, the folks at the waterways department that'll be doing the broadcast and waterways permits. Come meet me and the rest of the staff. It's always much better to meet over a cup of coffee when nothing is going on than to be talking at three o'clock in the morning in the middle of a major event. But I'd offer that for any port in the country. Get to know that Coast Guard team because they really are, I believe we're allies. This is about providing transparency and predictability and we all want that same outcome at the end, which is ships moving seamlessly in and out of our ports without anything going bump in the night where we may find ourselves in a major response.

Benjamin: Well, and I would add you are an approachable person despite your schedule and the city that never sleeps. I mean New York is a busy place and there isn't a minute that you're probably not going from one place to another, but you are approachable and you are available and I would tell our readers and our listeners that if you have questions for Captain Fagan, for the New York Harbor Captain of the Port, that you can leave comments on the blog, and I'll be happy to forward those on to Captain Fagan and if we have listener or reader questions, I trust that you'll answer them.

Captain Fagan: Absolutely.

Benjamin: I appreciate you taking a couple of minutes to talk with us today. I know that you probably got something else to dash off to shortly and I know, or at least I hope that our AMVER participants look forward to doing business here in New York, and we'll certainly will forward on those questions and thank you.

Captain Fagan: Thank you.

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.