

## STAKEHOLDER CRITICAL MASS

### Harnessing the Talents of the Private Sector via the National Response Plan

By Thomas P. Marian

It had all the markings of an epic storm – a Category 5 monster with hurricane force winds extending scores of miles beyond the eye and a projected storm surge that rivaled Camille’s: except Hurricane Katrina was much larger than Camille. Indeed, it was a deadly menace that created an unprecedented wake of destruction.

U. S. Coast Guard personnel stationed in New Orleans were keenly aware of the dangers Katrina posed to the low-lying areas of the Gulf Coast. Yet, hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico were a fact of life that required constant training and the annual exercise of “battle tested” hurricane plans. These plans were an integral part of the National Response Plan (NRP). While there are many moving parts and numerous governmental entities that participate in the National Incident Management System (NIMS), the private sector’s support and participation is an important element of this construct. Accordingly, as Katrina bore down on the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts, the seasoned New Orleans-based command and control staff ensured that the NIMS-based unified command included private sector port stakeholders. As demonstrated so many times before, these stakeholders would bring a depth and breadth of experience that significantly enhanced the Coast Guard’s ability to gather and distribute information on the state of the maritime transportation system (MTS).

Under the overall command of Rear Admiral Robert F. Duncan, Eight District Commander, a unified command was established in Alexandria, Louisiana. Similarly, consistent with the NRP, operational units from Mobile, Alabama, to Morgan City, Louisiana, ramped up their respective “incident command systems” so as to be poised to serve those that would be impacted by Katrina. Rear Admiral Duncan understood that members of the port community were force multipliers during the assessment and recovery phase of natural disasters or major waterways incidents. He had witnessed and nurtured the synergistic spirit that enabled Coast Guard personnel to leverage the contacts and knowledge of private-sector port stakeholders in restoring maritime commerce following major port closures attributed to hurricanes, prolonged fog and major vessel casualties.

Captain Frank Paskewich, New Orleans’ Captain of the Port and Commanding Officer of the newly created Sector New Orleans was also a firm believer of the necessity of capitalizing on the talents and resources of port stakeholders whose livelihoods relied upon the MTS. At his Alexandria command post, Captain Paskewich surrounded himself with storm veterans that would play a critical role in coordinating the response to what would turn out to be one of the largest natural disasters to befall the United States. A veteran himself of several hurricanes and numerous environmental disasters stemming from ship explosions and massive oil spills, Captain

Paskewich possessed the resources to save lives and assess Katrina's impact on the navigable waterways within his jurisdiction.

He knew that once those in danger were brought to safety it was critical that the ports and channels that delivered commerce to and from the United States had to be rapidly restored. In fact, the safe, secure and efficient movement of goods through his area of responsibility was so important that he – like many of his Captain of the Port counterparts – spent countless hours addressing navigational safety and security issues with an endless list of port stakeholders. If there was one thing Captain Paskewich understood, he could not effectively restore commerce without the assistance of those who knew the waterways best – the professional mariner. Two of those professionals who played an outstanding role in marshalling MTS-related information to and from the unified command were Ms. Kelly Teichman and Mr. Raymond Butler.

Kelly, as T&T Marine's incident command expert, was a veteran of dozens of incidents that had paralyzed ports and waterways throughout the country. Her zeal and energy were legendary as she always made her skills available to various federal advisory committees, U.S. Coast Guard responses and any other evolutions that had the potential to jeopardize the MTS. As usual, she was called upon to join the team at Alexandria as a documentation specialist. Additionally, her wealth of contacts within the "brown water" (i.e., towboat) community permitted her to rapidly push and obtain waterways information from this user group. As the response effort rapidly grew in size, Kelly was quickly promoted to join Vice Admiral Allen's team aboard the USS IWO JIMA in New Orleans. Those who knew Kelly were not surprised to see her airlifted from Alexandria's unified command to the heart of the response effort in downtown New Orleans. Meanwhile, to the east, Mr. Raymond Butler, Executive Director of the Gulf Intracoastal Canal Association (GICA), was in the thick of a massive waterways reconstitution effort at Sector Mobile's unified command. As a member of the Sector Mobile incident command staff he had earned a reputation over the years as a tireless worker with an exhaustive network of "brown water" contacts. Moreover, as a former tug captain, he was intimately familiar with the miles of intercoastal and inland waterways that served as the Gulf Coast's maritime highway. Raymond was also an avid proponent of the U. S. Coast Guard and had served on a host of federal advisory committees that provided advice to the agency on navigation safety and security matters. As such, he was a perfect conduit through which all information regarding the state of the ports and channels would flow. Most importantly, his network of maritime contacts would be fully and timely apprised of draft restrictions, salvage operations and any other issues that adversely impacted the MTS.

Located just down the hall from Raymond was Commander Barry Compagnoni. Commander Compagnoni was in charge of Sector Mobile's Hurricane Katrina response team. Since his assignment to Mobile, he had played an integral role in setting up the incident command system for Tropical Storm Bonnie and Hurricanes Frances and Ivan. After the devastation wrought by Ivan in the Sector Mobile area, Commander Compagnoni realized that it was crucial that he conduct an incident mobilization exercise with the full panoply of federal, state, and local response officials which included a number of local port stakeholders. The timing of this exercise combined with the lessons learned from Ivan was instrumental in providing Commander Compagnoni's team with a "running start" once resources could be brought to bear to assess

Katrina's damage. What made his job even more challenging was that as the enormity of the flooding unfolded in New Orleans there was a critical need for a massive redeployment of helicopters and personnel from Mobile, Alabama, to support the unprecedented New Orleans rooftop-to-rooftop rescue effort.

By the time Katrina had muscled her way ashore at Pass Christian, the Mississippi Coast from end-to-end was in shambles. From hundreds of tons of chicken parts to tens of thousands of board feet of lumber, an unimaginable tangle of debris littered the ports and the navigable waterways. As Commander Compagnoni's team assessed Katrina's impact it was readily apparent that supplies of every imaginable type were in demand throughout the Mississippi Coast. He realized that the overwhelming destruction to the Mississippi Coast infrastructure necessitated that resource and policy issues had to be facilitated at the lowest organizational level practicable. This approach was advocated by the NIMS process and was the key to the successful distribution of supplies in a rather chaotic environment. Hence, capitalizing on his network of contacts throughout the area from previous drills and incidents, CDR Compagnoni reached out to the State's Emergency Operation Center and provided them with his contact information in order to secure any supplies that were being offered to the stricken area. This permitted him to match available supplies with the greatest need in order to avoid distribution delays and his outreach paid vast dividends when offers of assistance poured in. Within days, Commander Compagnoni was provided with a score of RVs to berth on-scene personnel, thousands of vials of insulin to assist local medical facilities, and survey assets to assist in a rapid assessment of impacted waterways.

The well-orchestrated effort of hundreds of Coast Guard personnel was attributable to a culture that consistently reinforced the NIMS process and the sanctity of working within the NRP construct. This adherence to a systematic approach was reinforced when Vice Admiral Allen was appointed by Secretary Chertoff as the principal federal official for the Hurricane Katrina disaster recovery efforts. The fact that private-sector stakeholders were permitted to participate in the recovery process allowed stretched resources to attend to more pressing matters. It also ensured that the stakeholders that were most familiar with the MTS infrastructure were positioned to better align recovery resources with waterway needs. In short, the public-private sector relationships that had been forged in the past maximized what was possible during the frenzied pace of the recovery and MTS restoration operations.

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