

AMERC NEWS

Incorporates Circular 243

May 2010

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AMERC NEWS is the Journal of the Association of Marine Electronic and Radio Colleges.
It is distributed to all Members, Associates and Affiliates of the Association.
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See the AMERC Website (www.amerc.ac.uk) for back numbers

EDITORIAL

Goodbye Chums

As I sit here in my study marshalling thoughts for this, my last, editorial, I glance up to the bookshelves and at the large file holding thirty-three sequential editions of AMERC NEWS, the first written in June 1999. This issue is my last as Editor as I resign at AGM and it is time to say take my farewells.

Although I tend to have little regard for my seventh decade, family activity has become more intense in the last few years. I had become used to my adult grandchildren taking *me* to the park, but we now have two energetic infants to cherish, help nurture and look after from time to time. The activities are relentless, time consuming, and glorious and I have had to come to the conclusion it is time for me to hang up the pencil and reporter's notebook.

From the Association's point of view, my going will give room for fresh ideas and some new styling that a new Editor would bring. To whomever that might be, I send my good wishes and the hope that he or she has as much fun out of it as I did.

Even without Parkinson's Law fully activated, the NEWS has taken me an appreciable amount of time to research and compile each issue. It is after all more than thirty years since I regularly held a piece of chalk in my hand and when I started I was still thinking in terms of FGMDSS – F standing for Future, in case you misunderstand! It has been interesting for me to read around as I prepared each issue, to observe the changes in the examination system and in the management of the business. AMERC has been a prominent part of my professional life and livelihood since I first started as a young lecturer in 1963 and I have enjoyed the research.

I have had to lean on others, sometimes heavily, and everyone has been so friendly, cooperative, responsive and patient. I am especially grateful for the support and advice I have had from the Executive Committee and its senior officers. So as I go I say thanks for everything and goodbye chums, although I sign off with a Macarthurish 'I will return.'

I am to come back for the Golden Jubilee celebrations in 2012 where I shall have a minor part. After all I am one of the few standing that can say I was there (almost) at the beginning. I shall not be there at the end since AMERC just goes on and on, reinventing itself for new circumstances. In one of the thirty-three editorials I have written I wrote with some feeling Floriat AMERC and I still say that with some feeling.

So my chapter comes to a close. No longer will Pam be able to confide as she once did to Roger Johnson that 'he thinks he's the b...y Editor of *The Times*.' One day perhaps my secret will be out, I really yearned for *The Beano*. Wish me luck as I move from Grub Street to Bash Street.

Every Good Wish
Brian

MARITIME CONSULTANCY GROUP (MCG) -1

The MCG met in at the Southampton Headquarters of the MCA in March and gave attention to the usual mix of operational matters. The Association is grateful for the warm welcome and hospitality given by MCA staff. Attention is drawn to the following.

NEW EXAMINATION SYSTEM

The meeting received a comprehensive report about the OPT examination from Terry Slack and this promoted a major discussion.

There was universal opinion that the examination has been an improvement for the students and their skill sets. Furthermore, the examinations had had a marked and positive effect on the courses and their delivery.

The subject will be returned to at the Examiners' Panel using the amended report as a basis for discussion.

One thing that has become apparent to the MCG is that responsibility of the examiners to lead and manage the OPT process. REC Co-ordinators are to note and communicate this to their staff.

COMSAR

Terry Slack will be the AMERC Representative at COMSAR.

SIMULATORS

REC Co-ordinators are to note that the Examiners' Handbook incorrectly specifies that one simulator should be provided for each student. That reference has been removed.

EXAMINERS' FORUM

Examiners have access to their own forum on the AMERC website. The facility allows for the exchange of ideas and information about GMDSS matters at any time.

The Association urges Examiners to use the Forum, seeing it as an important way to have their voices heard. (See the page 5 footnote).

GMDSS EXAMINATION STATISTICS

The NAC has provided the following GMDSS Examination Statistics for the period October 2009 to December 2009.

EXAMINATION	ENTERED	PASSED
UK GOC	324	252
ALL GOC	743	579
UK ROC	29	26
ALL ROC	41	37
LRC	63	60

AGM DETAILS

The meeting reviewed the details and arrangements for AGM in June 2010. The annex to this issue gives a reminder of earlier mailings together with papers for consideration at the Examiners' Panel. Please make sure you bring with you these papers and the circulars (242 and 240) relating to appointments.

MARITIME CONSULTANCY GROUP (MCG) -2

MANUALS DATABASE EQUIPMENT FIT

AMERC intends to hold and maintain an up to date database of the equipment and systems in use in all centres. The database would be expanded to include user guides and service manuals for current and new equipment. It would then act as a resource for members to check on equipment specifications and operational aspects prior to purchase etc. The database may also include an FAQ section and a technical forum.

The natural home for the database would be within the members' section of the AMERC web site. Terry Slack who is responsible for the project has requested an up to date list of all equipment and systems currently in use at course providers so that an initial database can be compiled. This database will then form the framework for the enhanced facilities and options in the future.

Jackie King is approaching all centres to provide the raw data and your cooperation will be welcome.

AMERC WEBSITE

It is interesting to note that the AMERC Executive now receives valuable information about the usage of the Website (www.amerc.ac.uk). You may be curious to know something of the April statistics:

Number of unique visitors to the site	1154
Total number of site hits during the month	16795
Busiest hour	2000-2059 UTC
Second busiest hour	1100-1159 UTC
Busiest days	Tuesdays
Quietest days	Sundays
Busiest day of the month	27 April (132 unique visitors)
Visits lasting more than an hour	87
Most commonly visited page	Index Page
Second most commonly visited page	GMDSS Quiz
Pages served up to UK visitors	4436 pages
Top five countries accessing the site	UK, US, India, Russia, the EU
Most frequent robot checker	Yahoo Slurp
Usage via Internet Explorer	9840
Usage via Firefox	3056

These statistics prove the value of the Association's website to Members and others. The popularity of the Quiz catches the attention.

AMERC is grateful to Kevin Walsh for collecting this information and providing it to the NEWS.

M-NOTICES

The following M-Notices appear to have some relevance to Members and are briefly reviewed here. The full list of the current M-notices appear on the MCA website (www.mcga.gov.uk) to which reference should be made from time to time. .

MIN 374 (M+F) MARINE SURVEILLANCE PASSIVE RADAR SYSTEMS

This Note refers to a research project which has investigated the use of passive radar systems for marine surveillance. It has been found that sensors can be used to pick up 'opportunistic transmissions' radiated involuntarily from vessels where (for example) digital radio is used.

The study, undertaken by University College London, has shown that there is sufficient promise for surveillance use to carry out further tests. The report recommends the building of a prototype detection system.

January 2010

MIN 380 (M) EC DIRECTIVE PORT STATE CONTROL

A new European Commission port state control directive will pass into UK law in January 2011. Principally this Note explains the new regime for EU ports which will involve 'high risk' ships being targeted for inspection rather than being dealt with by the current random arrangements.

The Note gives the criteria for high risk classification and describes new categories of inspection: 'expanded,' 'initial,' 'more detailed.'

March 2010

MIN 373 (M+F) VHF & AIS HAZARD REPORTING

New categorisations of hazard or pollutant are being introduced. These will BE reflected in new reporting procedures.

As new AIS equipment is installed, the revised categories will be progressively implemented. The previous categories will remain for older installations.

February 2010.

MGN 410 (M+F) WORKING AT HEIGHT

This comprehensive Note relates to new Maritime Health & Safety Regulations for working at height, in tanks, at depths and in restricted places. In particular it sets out the legal obligations for employers.

The Note defines requirements for the use of ropes, ladders and scaffolding.

March 2010

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GMDSS FORUM

AMERC NEWS has made reference over the years to the website of Densham Associates (Australia). The site now has a GMDSS Forum ranging across many topics and is worth a look.

www.gmdss.co.au

AMERC NEWS SELECTED INDEX

January 2005 - February 2010

NOTES:

- (i) **This is a selective index and only records items to which reference is likely to be needed. It is updated with each Issue of AMERC NEWS.**
- (ii) **Issues 17 to 33 are in pdf format and are fully searchable once loaded.**
- (iii) **Quarterly GMDSS Statistics appear in AMERC NEWS.**
- (iv) **Technical Update supplements in pdf format together with an index can be found on the AMERC Website: www.amerc.ac.uk.**

TOPIC	DETAIL	AN	DATE	Pp
Admiralty	Charts to common datum (MIN 272)	24	Jul 07	13
ADRS	Admiralty Digital Radio Signals Vol 6	23	Mar 7	9
ALRS	Relevant sets for examinations	30	Sep 09	5
Aerials	Dangers from lead-ins (MGN 330)	22	Nov 06	8
	Ditto (MGN 303)	20	Feb 06	8
African Centres	MRCC & MRSC established	22	Nov 06	8
	Capetown MRCC operational	24	Jul 07	12
AIS	Accuracy of transmission (MIN 290)	25	Nov 07	7
	Accuracy of transmission (MIN 231)	21	Jun 06	8
	Carriage requirements (MSN 1795)	21	Jun 06	8
	Class B UK trials (MIN 268)	23	Mar 07	6
	Double ended ferries (MGN 321)	21	Jun 06	8
	Greek coverage	27	Apr 08	8
	Monitoring coastal shipping – UK	22	Nov 06	13
	Navigation aids systems	21	Jun 06	10
	Non-SOLAS transponder coding (MIN 321)	27	Apr 08	5
	Operational guidance (MGN 277)	17	Feb 05	9
	Performance Standards	23	Mar 07	8
	RCC Network – UK	19	Oct 05	9
	Safety of Navigation (MIN 298)	25	Nov 07	7
	Small craft Class B (MIN 199)	19	Oct 05	7
	UK chain operational	22	Nov 06	8
	UK Third phase completed	26	Jan 08	7
	USCG space based AIS	24	Jul 07	13
	VHF use & ITU Regulations (MGN 324)	22	Nov 06	8
AMERC Address	Registered Office in Kendal	21	Jun 06	4
	Hon. Secretary address change	24	Jul 07	4
	Hon. Secretary telephone change	29	Feb 09	12
	New NAC Manager: Jackie King	26	Jan 08	6
	Treasurer's email address	27	Apr 08	18
AMERC Jubilee	Plans for Golden Jubilee in 2012 announced	31	Nov 09	3
AMERC Rules	Changes agreed and implemented	30	Sep 09	3
AMERC Titles	Revised for Association and roles	30	Sep 09	8
Arctic Signals	ESA study announced; new Navareas	31	Nov 09	4;
CEC	Amended procedures (MIN340)	29	Feb 09	5

Committees	New Committee & Board structures	22	Nov 06	3
Course Audit	Chief Examiner to inspect timetable & notes	23	Mar 07	5
Course Approvals	AMERC provides certificates	22	Nov 06	4
Criminal Checks	CRB and equivalents' checks needed in UK	29	Nov 09	4
CSOC	Discussions with HMCG	21	Jun 06	7
Direction Finding	At 406 MHz	30	Sep 09	9
DSC	Test call auto response from USCG	24	Jul 07	13
Dyslexia	Policy in Handbook	30	Sep 09	3
ECDIS	Software maintenance (MIN 316)	27	Apr 08	5
Electronic Charts	Approved standards by UKHO	28	Sep 08	8
ENEM	ENEM/Radio Maintenance (MGN 384)	29	Feb 09	5
	ENEM/RMC Structure	30	Sep 09	7
EPIRB	COSPAS-SARSAT statistics	29	Feb 09	5
EPIRB	Non SOLAS vessels (MSN 1810)	24	Jul 07	13
EPIRB	Registration (MSN 1816)	25	Nov 07	6
	Registration required (MGN 302)	20	Feb 06	8
	121.5/243 MHz ceasing Feb 09 (MGN 361)	27	Apr 07	05
Equipment Fit	SART & EPIRB duplicates	30	Sep 09	3
Examinations	Appeals on termination - flow chart	24	Jul 07	5
	Application Forms – completing	21	Jun 06	5
	Application Forms – Re-examination	23	Mar 07	4
	Digital photography allowed	23	Mar 07	4
	Double marking	30	Sep 09	4
	Dyslexic Candidates	20	Feb 06	4
	Dyslexia Policy in Handbook	30	Sep 09	4
	Earlier attempts	21	Jun 06	7
	Fee Schedule revised	28	Sep 08	5
	GMDSS Knowledge Paper adopted	28	Sep 08	7
	Payment Methods	21	Jun 06	5
	Payments to NAC – correction	19	Oct 06	6
	Retention of scripts	20	Feb 06	6
	Scenario-based OPT trial agreed	21	Jun 06	6
	Scenario-based OPT working party	24	Jul 07	8
	Scenario-based OPT adopted	28	Sep 08	7
Examiners	Active Lists	25	Nov 07	4
	Active Lists	21	Jun 06	7
	Active Lists	19	Oct 05	6
	Active Lists	17	Feb 05	3
	Access to Chief Examiner via REC only	24	Jul 07	7
	Deputy & Assistant Chief Examiners	23	Mar 07	3
	Deputy & Assistant Chief Examiner Roles	26	Jan 08	5
	Deputy Chief Examiner appointed	25	Nov 07	4
	Handbook 6th Edition	17	Feb 05	3
	Handbook 7th Edition	27	Apr 08	04
	Taxation & Insurance	19	Oct 05	10
Expenses	New Claim Form	25	Nov 07	14
Fleet 77	Incorporated in Handbook	30	Sep 09	4
GMDSS Installed	Indonesia and Thailand	29	Feb 09	11
GMDSS Quiz	Trialled on website	31	Nov 09	4
GOC	Proposed revision – Willie Williamson	23	Mar 07	15

	Critique of structure – Willie Williamson	24	Jul 07	9
GOC	Revising the structure – Willie Williamson	27	Apr 08	13
Handbook	GMDSS Handbook 5th Edition published	31	Nov 09	5
HMCG	AMERC recognition of CSOC	23	Mar 07	4
HMCG	CSOC & RCSOC recognition finalised	24	Jul 07	4
IMO	New GMDSS Manual published	25	Nov 07	18
IMO	Mandatory requirements	29	Feb 09	5
ITU WARC	Preparations for 2007 – Kim Fisher	20	Feb 06	11
	Ditto	22	Nov 06	11
	Ditto	24	Jul 07	11
	Outcomes & Updates – Kim Fisher	26	Jan 08	8
	2011 WRC – Kim Fisher	30	Feb 09	6
INMARSAT	Barring & SafetyNet (MGN 305)	20	Feb 06	8
Licences	Ofcom reforms to ship radio licences	23	Mar 07	7
LRC	Class E DSC controllers – examinations	22	Nov 06	5
Log Book	New design (MGN 395)	30	Sep 09	10
LRIT	Conversion from Restricted R/T withdrawn	26	Jan 08	4
	Identities for SAR and security	22	Nov 06	13
	New SOLAS Regulations January 2008	26	Jan 08	7
	SOLAS Requirements (MIN 302)	25	Nov 07	6
	SOLAS Ch V amendments (MGN380)	29	Feb 09	5
	SOLAS Ch V amendments (MIS 343)	29	Feb 09	5
	Trial transmissions from Rugby	19	Oct 05	8
	USCG Consultation	23	Mar 07	9
M-Notices	Distribution agent	31	Nov 09	5
Medical Certificate	Not needed for issue of GMDSS Certificate	31	Nov 09	5
Membership	(Full) Namibian Maritime Institute	28	Sep 08	3
	(Full) Red Ensign, RNLI, (Ass) Kim Holt	21	Jun 06	4
	(Full) Sir Derek Bibby Centre Mumbai	28	Sep 08	3
	(Full) THESI, CERNET, Starcenter, UKSA	24	Jul 07	3
	(Full) Western Training Association	24	Jul 07	3
	(Ass) Shetland School of Nautical Studies	24	Jul 07	3
	(Ass) TST, Australian Maritime College	24	Jul 07	3
	City College Plymouth (resigned)	24	Jul 07	3
	Hull College (resigned)	28	Sep 08	3
	St. Xavier Technical Institute (resigned)	28	Sep 08	3
MCA	Certificates of Course Approval	28	Sep 08	14
	Endorsement of certificates	30	Sep 09	8
MNTB	GOC approval documentation revisions	22	Nov 06	4
MNTB	GMDSS Guideline revised	21	Jun 06	7
Mobile Phones	Radar interference (MIN 290)	19	Oct 05	7
	Warnings against misuse (MSN 299)	20	Feb 06	7
MSI	Change to UK transmissions	23	Mar 07	9
	Summary of UK arrangements (MGN 375)	28	Sep 08	8
Navtex	Standard Abbreviations (MIN 265)	23	Mar 07	6
NAVRAS(M)	Use of GMDSS procedures	24	Jul 07	10
OPT	Erratum: only Sat B approved January 2008	25	Nov 07	5
	Sat B or F77 replace Sat A January 2008	24	Jul 07	9
Pirate Broadcasts	Forbidden (MGN 320)	21	Jun 06	5
	Update (MIN 366)	28	Sep 08	8

Piracy	Alerting by DSC	22	Nov 06	5
Piracy	Modern Piracy - W. Williamson	17	Feb 05	7
	Anti-piracy Measures (MGN 298)	20	Feb 06	7
Photographs	To UK passport standard	30	Sep 09	8
Poseidon Pharos	GMDSS simulator approved	30	Sep 09	5
REC	Shetland Islands REC approved	33	May 10	3
Replacements	Lost certificate procedures	30	Sep 09	8
Revalidation	Surveyors and pilots	24	Jul 07	10
	STW 37	21	Jun 06	7
Revalidation	Sea-time requirement	22	Nov 06	4
	Ditto	19	Oct 05	6
Radar	Performance standards(MIN 246)	21	Jun 06	7
	Corrigendum (MGN 298)	20	Feb 06	7
	Mobiles' interference (MIN 290)	19	Oct 05	7
	Radar Reflectors (MGN 349)	25	Nov 07	6
ROC	LRC/ROC Conversion	33	May 10	3
Safe Practices	MS Regulations 1998 (MIN 235)	22	Nov 06	8
SAR	Signals in distress & SAR (MGN 304)	20	Feb 06	8
Security	Ship Security - Phil Davies	22	Nov 06	9
Ship's Manuals	Need for accuracy and lucidity (MIN 312)	27	Apr 08	5
Shore Maintenance	Requirements (MGN 350)	25	Nov 07	6
SOLAS	Chapter V amendments (MSN 1812)	23	Mar 07	6
	Radiocommunications (MSN 1810)	23	Mar 07	6
	Revising SOLAS/Regs – Ian Waugh	27	Apr 07	16
SMCP	Standard phrases for communications	30	Sep 09	10
Space AIS	US Scheme	31	Nov 09	11
	Authorisations	30	Sep 09	10
Syllabus Revision	ROC & LRC	30	Sep 09	4
	Alternative Compliance	25	Nov 07	7
Training Schemes	Using the VQ route (MGN 8)	22	Nov 06	8
Transas	GMDSS Simulator	22	Nov 06	6
	Hard panel needed for Version 4000	24	Jul 07	4
	Live receiver & work station requirements	25	Nov 07	4
Transas	TGS4100 Simulator equipment consistency	27	Apr 08	04
	TGS4100 Simulator training of staff	27	Apr 08	04
Use of Equipment	Maintenance records (MGN 331)	22	Nov 06	8
VDR	Performance Testing (MGN 272)	17	Feb 05	9
VHF	Class D equipment warning (MGN 358)	31	Nov 09	6
VHF	Monthly tests in GMDSS Logbook	31	Nov 09	5
VOS	Meteorological data ship/shore (MIN 361)	31	Nov 09	6
	Review of new arrangements	27	Apr 08	6
W/T Act 2006	Consolidation of Acts post-1949	23	Mar 07	10
Yacht Officers	Deck Officer CoC (MSN 1892)	23	Mar 07	6

BACK PAGE

SAILOR DSC RM2151 REQUIRED

Ian Waugh of GMDSS4all.net is looking for a Sailor RM2151 DSC/Telex modem to partner his RM2150 DSC unit.

Anyone with a unit to offer should contact Ian on +44 1387 262329. or ian.waugh@btinternet.com

TED HACKETT

Eric Lamb has been in touch with Ted Hackett and tells us that he is in good spirits and progressing well. He is starting to put on weight and feels so good that he is even thinking about returning to examining.

We all send Ted our very best wishes and express our pleasure at the news of his improving health.

FAREWELL LORAN-C

The US Coastguard started to shut down its Loran-C stations in February of this year. It is expected that all the stations will be gone in June when those operated jointly with Canada and Russia are also closed.

The closures will reputedly lead to savings of US\$38m. The decision is not without controversy and there is an interesting critique including a review of Loran's sixty year history on the CNN website (www.edition.cnn.com). Official notification will be found on the US Coastguard site: (www.navcen.uscg.gov/loran).

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This Newsletter duals as Circular 243. Check you have a full file. All Issues of AMERC NEWS appear on the AMERC Website and are fully searchable from Issue 17 onwards. Copies of the Circulars may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary. ***Do not forget to distribute copies to your colleagues.***

Articles and suggestions for future issues of AMERC NEWS can be sent at any time.

Brian Cotton, Editor.

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AMERC NEWS
Editor: Professor Brian Cotton
AMERC Website: www.amerc.ac.uk

AGM ANNEXE

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A Few Reminders

The AGM and Examiners' Panel will have even greater importance this year. There are posts to fill and the examination system will come under scrutiny and review. Pleasingly, Eric Lamb tells the NEWS that there will be a goodly turn-out of forty-two delegates, so thorough and lively discussions are in prospect.

Eric also says that should you arrive early on the Wednesday a buffet lunch will be available between 1230 and 1400. He reminds you the AGM proper starts promptly on the Thursday at 0900. Besides the usual events, we look forward to Andy Fuller giving us a presentation on IMSO after lunch the same day, and to having a presentation on web-based GMDSS learning programmes.

On the business side, we urge you to check that you have received Circular 242 from the Secretary with its formal notifications. Also, don't forget that Circular 240 sent out in January gave details of vacancies and procedures for filling posts.

You are asked to bring with you this Circular with its Examination Panel papers. They follow his page and are grouped as A1-A4

WHY ARE WE EXAMINING? -1

by Ian Waugh

An Examiners' Panel Discussion Paper

To see whether candidates, at the end of a training course, can:

- (i) Bring important procedural information back from memory, in the correct order;
- (ii) Recognise different terminology when presented with a selection;
- (iii) Demonstrate key voice procedures for a particular situation on the radio;
- (iv) Correctly operate the range of equipment fitted for GMDSS purposes.

How best to do the above?

- (i) Have candidates provide written answers to particular questions, from memory;
- (ii) Have candidates select the correct answer from a range of possible answers;
- (iii) Have candidates respond to a particular situation on the radio;
- (iv) Have candidates demonstrate practical equipment operation on the full range of GMDSS equipment.

Why are written answers important for (i)?

Because they provide written evidence that the candidate has retained key procedural information at the end of the course. Written evidence is important because, without it, different examiners could produce different results from the same candidate. [Candidates should ensure appropriate procedure cards are in place when they return to their vessel]

Why are 'multiple choice' questions important for (ii)?

Because they provide written evidence that candidates were able to select the correct answer when presented with a choice and/or they show that candidates recognise the different terminology they may come across – e.g. 'Which SSB Radio control will automatically adjust the sensitivity of the receiver? (a) AF Gain (b) RF Gain (c) AGC (d) Volume? Why are 'short answers' less appropriate? Because they are more likely to encourage a candidate to memorise the correct answer to a particular question, without questioning the alternatives.

How best to test (iii)?

It is questionable whether testing people purely on their response to a 'Mayday' situation shows more than they have got over "mic' fright" and that they understand how to deal with that particular situation. However – when combined with the written answers in (i) above then it may well be considered adequate to test this single procedure.

How best to test (iv)?

The only way to properly test this is to have the candidate demonstrate the use of all controls and software relevant to GMDSS equipment operation. This can be done either by taking each item of equipment in turn, with the list of tasks presented verbally or on a written paper; or it can be done in the 'scenario based' format currently being used. Either way, all the important controls and software functions should be tested.

WHY ARE WE EXAMINING? - 2

by Willie Williamson

An Examiners' Panel Discussion Paper

The answer to that question is that candidates have “to demonstrate or show competency.”

This question came about as part of a wider discussion on the general format of the current GMDSS GOC examinations by the Executive Committee. It was agreed that the introduction of the scenario based OPT had been generally successful. However, some issues with this form of assessment have been raised and slight adjustments to the OPT scenarios will be made.

The introduction of the General Knowledge paper has not been quite so successful and several concerns about the current format and marking scheme have been noted. Therefore at AGM, the intention is that the Examiners' Panel will be given the opportunity to discuss changes to the examination format. Before then I want to offer some suggestions about the current examination format for consideration by the Panel.

General Knowledge Paper

One consideration would be to remove the general knowledge paper altogether as candidates can show competency by doing the various practical tasks in the RT and OPT sections of the examinations. However, this approach is unlikely to meet with approval by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency and quality assurance issues would preclude AMERC from accepting this proposal.

The alternative approach therefore, is to change the current format of the GK paper. Before considering that, it might be useful to look at what we expect from candidates. Detailed knowledge of GMDSS procedure and accuracy in using the correct RT voice procedures for distress, urgency and safety message are paramount. In doing this, candidates also demonstrate a knowledge of the English language in both written and spoken form. This requirement is outlined in the CEPT syllabus section 5.2.4 (a).

If we look at the current (2010) GK papers, we find that there is a distress question in Paper 1 (Q2), the same in Paper 3 (Q3) and a Distress Relay question in Papers 2, 4 and 5. All candidates will be confronted with a distress situation in the RT exercise and in the OPT operation 43 they are asked to type a distress message after using the Sat-C. Also OPT sections 36 – 39 deal with distress relay. Thus in the one examination, more or less the same information is being asked on three occasions. This seems to me to be examination overkill.

I would suggest that the GK paper be limited to two “long” and a number of short questions that would require candidates only to give brief written answers. Even the long questions should be broken down into a number of smaller parts, again requiring shorter written answers. Competency in the composition of the distress message etc would not be compromised with this approach. I would further suggest that a total of 40 marks be allocated to this part of the examinations. To pass, candidates would need

30/40 marks i.e. the requirement to get 75% for this paper would remain. However this would correct the anomaly in the current examination where candidates can score poor marks in the long questions but still pass overall by doing well with the multi-choice questions.

With the Deputy Chief Examiner, I have been looking at the long questions. Some of them lend themselves to 15 marks while others do not. Some questions seem to require answers where only 7 or perhaps 10 marks could be allocated. Questions relating to satellite communications fall into this category. Thus we could produce one GK paper with three long questions with marks 15, 6 and 7 allocated. The rest of that paper would be made up of 12 short questions to bring the total to 40 marks. Another paper might require two long questions of 15 and 14 marks the remainder of the paper being 11 short questions. The time element for this GK paper might have to be reduced to 20 minutes instead of the 25 minutes allocated at present.

The suggestion has been made to remove the multi-choice questions entirely. I generally agree with this. Some multi-choice questions, i.e. those currently displayed on the AMERC website can be reworded as short questions. However in some topics areas multi-choice questions are effective. Perhaps two multi-choice questions could be asked in each paper. See the Suggested Questions paper in Annexe 4.

In reporting back to the EC on the various REC inspections, the Chief Examiner has identified a serious problem with candidates' lack of geographic knowledge. I would suggest therefore that a question on this topic be included in all GK papers. A world map showing only the principal ports of the world but unnamed. Candidates would have to identify two locations e.g. New York and Capetown.

RT Distress Exercise

Generally this part of the examinations has functioned well and needs little or no alteration. However it has been suggested to me that rather than having the examiner act as the distress ship, one of the candidates (picked at random by the examiner) fulfils this role. The Examiners' Panel might like to consider this suggestion.

OPT

As previously stated the introduction of a scenario based OPT was deemed to have worked well, so this general format will continue in future examinations. Like all new systems however some teething troubles were experienced and minor changes will be made to the current scenarios.

There was some discussion that it was a bit unreal for a candidate to experience a distress situation, a distress relay situation, a false distress alert and an urgency or safety incident all on the one voyage. Further debate considered that in this respect we might be over examining. I suggest a possible solution to this problem as follows.

In OPT scenario No 1; we could examine candidates where their own ship is in distress i.e. retaining sections 40 – 43. However sections 33 – 39 would be removed. By removal of seven sections the total OPT marks would now equal 38.

In OPT scenario No 2, we could examine candidates where their own ship is made OSC and distress relay procedures examined, i.e. retain section 36 – 39. This time sections 33 – 35 and 40 – 43 would be removed. Total OPT marks would now equal 38.

Finally in OPT scenario No 3, we could examine candidates where their own ship is involved in urgency or safety incidents and these procedures examined, i.e. retain section 33 – 35. In this paper, sections 36 – 43 would be removed. Total OPT marks would now equal 37.

It will be noted that there is a disparity in the marks allocated to the three papers. However with a bit of ingenuity, two extra OPT tasks could be added to papers No 1 and 2 and three to paper No 3. This would bring the total mark allocation for all three papers to 40 marks and by retaining the current 70% pass mark for this element, candidates would need. 28 out of 40 marks to pass.

Another slight problem was identified with the OPT. It was suggested that candidates had to face the more difficult operations towards the end of the OPT examinations. Thus a change I would suggest is that the after doing daily tests candidates should do monthly tests (sections 22 – 29). This would settle the candidates down with relatively easy operations at the start of the practical examination. Then the distress/urgency/safety elements could be examined immediately after initial equipment set up leaving the routine communications sections and technical ability till the last giving the candidates a gentle end to this element of the examination. Some work on this aspect of OPT has been done by Terry Slack and Chris Harrison who will no doubt report their observations at the AGM.

If this suggestion is adopted, the time element would have to be adjusted and perhaps the time limit reduced from 90 minutes to 80 minutes per candidate.

OPT operation 43 requires the candidate to transmit a distress priority message using Inmarsat – C. It also includes the 50 cpm typing test. This operation is a grey box. Thus someone who does not meet the correct typing speed could fail on a grey box, even though they knew how to transmit a distress priority the message. There is nothing in the CEPT syllabus about typing speed. Maybe if this typing requirement is considered necessary it should be a separate OPT operation.

Further considerations

Please note that the proposals outlined above are my personal suggestions. They are open to debate and discussion. I do not expect individual replies to these suggestions, rather that they may form points of discussion at the Examiners' Panel. Other AMERC members and REC coordinators are free to come up with their own suggestions.

What is required is that we (AMERC) produce a form of GOC examinations that shows that candidates have mastered GMDSS as a subject and have demonstrated the competence as operators. We should be confident that we would be happy to sail with any candidate who has passed the examinations can handle radio communications in any emergency they may face at sea.

EXAMINERS' PANEL

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

BY Willie Williamson

GK PAPER - SOLAS QUESTIONS

Suggestion No 1.

Your ship is the CRINAN. You are in the South Atlantic (Sea Area A3) in position 43.03 South 022.33 West, 2000 miles from the nearest land and the ship is fully equipped for GMDSS. You have received a DSC distress alert on 2187.5 kHz.

Answer the following questions:

a) Briefly describe the type of communication you have received.

Marks 2

b) State the frequency on which you should set radio watch.

Marks 1

c) Given your ship's position, would you expect an MRCC to acknowledge this type of alert?

Marks 1

d) State the entries you should make in the GMDSS log.

Marks 3

e) Briefly state your initial response to this information as per GMDSS procedure and state the frequency you consider appropriate to make this response.

Marks 3

f) State what further information you should transmit to the ship sending the information.

Marks 3

g) State what information you would send to other stations

Marks 2

Total Marks 15

Suggestion No 2.

Question 4. Your vessel is ARCADIA/GRFP and your position is 328 miles south west of Landsend. The vessel has lost its propeller and the Master authorises you to send a message to request a tow using the Inmarsat-B.

- a) State the two-digit telex code you would use to indicate you require Maritime Assistance.

Marks 1

- b) Write down the message you would send when you receive “GA+” from the MRCC.

Marks 5

Total marks 6

Suggestion No 3.

- a) State the primary purpose of an EPIRB.

Marks 3

- b) Your SART has been activated and you observe rapid blinking of the alarm light. State what action you should take.

Marks 3

- c) State the frequency used by COSPAS-SARSAT EPIRB.

Marks 1

- d) State the purpose of a SART?

Marks 1

Total marks 8

SHORT GENERAL KNOWLEDGE QUESTIONS

Q1. On a receiver, state the control that automatically adjusts the Radio Frequency amplification.

Ans. Automatic Gain Control (AGC)

Q5. State the correct mode of emission for a RT distress message on 2182 kHz.

Ans. J3E

Q6. State the common abbreviation for the mode of emission for a RT distress message on 2182 kHz.

Ans. SSB (J3E also acceptable)

Q11. State a safety precaution when working aloft repairing radio antennas/aerials.

Ans. Disable the transmitter by removing the supply fuses.

Q12. State the effect dirty battery terminals may cause.

Ans. A decrease in the voltage of the battery when on load.

Q17. State the channel to be used when sending a VHF DSC Distress Alert.

Ans. Ch. 70

Q18. Your vessel is in Sea Area A1 and is in grave and imminent danger and requires immediate assistance. Briefly state the GMDSS radio procedure you should follow.

Ans. DSC Distress Alert on Ch.70 then RT Distress call and message on Ch.16

Q21. State whose authority is required before a DSC Distress Alert is transmitted from your vessel.

Ans. Master or person responsible for the vessel

Q24. Give an example of the correct format for an RT Urgency call.

Ans. Pan Pan (x3) All Stations (x3) this is Nonsuch (x3) GABC 232123456

Q25. Your vessel has sighted a hazard to shipping in GMDSS Sea Area A1. State how you should warn vessels in the area by a transmission on Ch. 70 DSC.

Ans. A Safety Alert addressed to All Stations.

Q28. State the frequency to be used for an RT call and message after transmitting a MF DSC Safety Alert on 2187.5 kHz.

Ans 2181 kHz

Q32. Briefly state what the signal “Seelonce Feenee” indicates.

Ans. A Distress has ended

Q34. State the RT signal used by a **control station** to impose silence.

Ans. SEELONCE MAYDAY

Q37. Can you use the Port Operations service to transmit public correspondence communications?

Ans. No

Q38. State the international English language Navtex frequency.

Ans. 518 kHz

Q43. State the procedural word that indicates, “I have received your transmission satisfactorily”

Ans. ROGER

Q44. State the main propagation path for an MF radio frequency.

Ans. Ground wave.

MULTI-CHOICE QUESTIONS

Q1. GMDSS Sea Area A2 is best described as being within:

- a) RT range of an MF shore station having continuous MF watch
- b) range of the Inmarsat system with continuous watch
- c) HF RT range of at least one shore station having continuous HF DSC alerting
- d) MF RT range of at least one shore station having continuous MF DSC alerting

Explain. GMDSS Sea Area A2 is best described as being within MF RT range of at least one shore station having continuous MF DSC alerting.

Q8. The information which must be included in a test transmission is the:

- a) vessel's ID
- b) vessel's position
- c) GOC operator's ID
- d) vessel's nationality

Explain. ITU radio regulations state that the vessel's identity must always be given during test transmissions.

Q9. To maintain serviceability and availability of GMDSS equipment on board ship, SBM means:

- a) the ships GMDSS GOC operator is responsible for maintenance
- b) a qualified maintainer is carried on board the ship
- c) a recognised shore based company is responsible for maintenance
- d) the ships GMDSS equipment is duplicated.

Explain. SBM means Shore Based Maintenance. A ship would have contract with a recognised shore based company who are responsible for GMDSS maintenance.

Q10. On a transceiver, SIMPLEX operation is the;

- a) use of one frequency to transmit and a second frequency to receive
- b) type of modulation used on 2182KHz
- c) alternate use of one frequency to transmit or receive
- d) use of one control for AF and RF Gain

Explain. Simplex operation is where one frequency is used for alternate transmission and reception

EXAMINERS' PANEL

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

BY Ian Waugh

SUGGESTED DSC QUESTIONS SHOWING MORE PROMPTS

Q3/4 – Receiving DSC Distress Alert on VHF/MF in Sea Area A1/A2 [question states ship name, call sign and position relative to the casualty]

(a) Initial procedure?

- 2 Set Watch Ch16/2181 kHz
- 1 Listen for Mayday Call/Message
- 1 Allow short time (15-20 seconds) for Coast Station/RCC Ack

(b) An Ack is received from xxx Coastguard and the Master instructs you to acknowledge and to offer assistance. State the call and message you should send.

- 1 Mayday
- 2 xxx Coastguard (x3) this is Ship Name (x3) call sign
- 1 Received Mayday
- 3 Position ...speed ETA

(c) State the procedure you should follow if there is no CRS/RCC Ack and the casualty has not been able to contact shore/another vessel

- 1 Ack by voice
- 2 Relay ashore by appropriate method
- 1 Follow instructions from RCC

Q5/6 – Receiving DSC Distress Alert on VHF/MF in Sea Area A3/A4

(a) Initial Procedure?

- 2 Set Watch Ch16/2182 kHz
- 1 Listen for Mayday Call/Message
- 2 Ack by Voice
- 3 Send position, speed and ETA
- 2 Only if able to help (Master's decision)

State the procedure you should follow if no contact achieved and no other distress traffic heard

- 3 Relay ashore by any appropriate method
- 2 Ack by DSC if Distress Alert repeated

Q7 – Receiving DSC Distress Alert on HF in Sea Area A3/A4 indicating J3E

(a) State the initial procedures you should follow

- 3 Set watch (HF) Voice Distress Frequency
- 1 Listen for Mayday Call Message
- 3 Allow 5 minutes for CRS/RCC to ACK

(b) State the procedure you should follow if the casualty makes contact with shore

- 2 Enter details in radio log
- 1 Resume normal watch

(c) State the procedure you should follow if no CRS/RCC Ack by voice or DSC and casualty fails to make contact with shore [receiving ship may not receive RCC Ack due to location but may hear the ship-side of conversation]

- 3 Relay ashore by any appropriate method
- 2 Follow instructions from R-C

Q8 - Receiving DSC Distress Relay on HF in Sea Area A3/A4 indicating J3E [ship's details provided in question]

(a) Initial procedure?

- 1 Set Watch [HF] Distress Frequency
- 1 Listen for Mayday Relay Call Message

(b) The Master instructs you to acknowledge and to offer assistance. State the call and message you should send.

- 1 Mayday
- 1 xxx Coastguard (x3)
- 1 This is Ship's Name (x3) Callsign
- 1 Received Mayday
- 1 Position...speed ETA

(c) You are appointed OSC – initial MF procedures to contact other vessels?

- 4 DSC DISTRESS RELAY ALL SHIPS 2187.5 kHz
- 1 Indicating 2182 kHz to follow

(d) What would be your subsequent voice CALL (message not require)

- 1 Mayday Relay (x3)
- 1 All Stations (x3)
- 1 This is Ship's Name, Callsign, MMSI