

## Editorial

Welcome to issue 35 of AMERC News - *which doubles as **Circular 245** and, as such, must be circulated to all GMDSS instructors/examiners by their AMERC centre contact*

In this issue we have the report on the most recent **Maritime Consultancy Group** (MCG-Page 2) - which reflects relevant items covered in the AMERC Executive Committee (EC) earlier the same day - including (amongst other things): the new **AMERC/MCA contract**, which includes a review of the **status of outreach centres** and **overseas examinations centres**; proposals for **updated equipment fit** for training & examination centres; use of **Special Access Code 41/42**; status report on **GMDSS Exams 2011-2012 series**, including conduct of the **Operational Performance Test (OPT)** for current and 2011-2012 series exam's; the **audit process** for GMDSS Course Approvals and the Examination Procedures; **MGN 214 (M) Amendment 1** – which changes the requirement for 'initial endorsement' of GMDSS certificates; the **inclusion of GMDSS tasks in NAVRAS exercises and the Training Record Book**; the discovery of **forged (UK) GMDSS certificates**; and a reminder to all examiners regarding **public liability insurance**.

That's followed by our **Member's Profiles section** (Page 4) – this time featuring **Shetland School of Nautical Studies**.

We've another '**GMDSS Criss-Crossword**' (Page 5) to help stretch candidates knowledge of international **geography** and the use of **Admiralty List of Radio Signals**

(ALRS) publications. The answers to puzzle 34 are also included. As before - we'd all be delighted to hear *your* suggestions (with examples please?) of how to get our students thinking 'out of the box' and improving their geography and/or publications knowledge.

This edition's section for **Explanation Please** (Page 6) explores the implications of using 'Distress Alert' priority in a 'Piracy/armed attack' situation. Does the use of Distress priority mean that any vessel who receives the alert must go to the aid of the ship in Distress?

We've more **Tales from the Key-Side** (Page 7) – where we ask you to share stories showing the funny, confusing and/or tragic side of life – whether from experience at sea, in the classroom, or out in the wider world .

There's also a **Maritime Miscellaneous** section which, this time around, covers a historic transit of the Panama Canal (Page 8)

As happened with Issue 34, this edition is being distributed electronically. Anyone who downloaded the very first version of Issue 34 may have felt that it was a rather big file – I'm pleased to say that upgraded software has resulted in a much smaller file size, resulting in much more manageable PDF editions – making it easier for you to forward it to anyone who may be interested (your clients?).

*Ian W*

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The **Maritime Consultancy Group (MCG)** meets regularly - currently four times each year – for the AMERC Executive Committee ‘Open Meeting’. MCG membership consists of AMERC Executive Committee (EC) representatives; the AMERC Chief Examiner; the MCA Chief Examiner and the MCA Deck & GMDSS Team Leader; and AMERC/industry specialists. The open meeting can also be attended by other invited persons. (*You can ask to be invited by contacting the AMERC Secretary*). The following items from recent meetings & follow-up are drawn to your attention:

**AMERC/MCA Contract:** the new AMERC/MCA contract is currently being written and, as part of that process, the status of examination centres is being reviewed. It appears possible that, by the end of the new (5-year) contract, AMERC may no longer be required to approve new ‘outreach centres’ nor ‘overseas examination centres’. Existing centres will be kept informed of progress on this matter. Any new applications will be reviewed in light of the revised contract – which will be reflected in a updated [AMERC Examination Administration Handbook](#).

**GOC Examination: 2011-2012 Series:** Due to not all RECs receiving the 2011-12 Exam series cd at the same time, the date for responses was extended and, as a result, implementation of the 2011-12 series will be delayed. The intention is to introduce the new series GOC, ROC and LRC on the same date. RECs will be kept informed of progress. Meanwhile – the current set of papers should continue to be used.

**GOC Exam – Operational Performance Test (OPT):** The current system of handing-out ‘candidate’ sheets for the OPT will not be used for the new (2011-2012) examination series. The new series OPT exams will be conducted as pre-2009, with the examiner asking the questions. However – the ‘voyage’ map will be retained, with additional information to the 2009-2010 series - and examiners will present the candidate with ‘cards’ showing, for example, which ‘station’ is required (for relevant tasks). Examiner scripts - **for practice scenarios only** - should be made available in the classroom to allow candidates to understand what is required during that part of the GOC exam (and the marking system). Practice Scenario maps will reflect the type of information included in the exam maps.

**Special Access Code 41/42:** A question has arisen over the use of Inmarsat Special Access Code 41 for typed messages. There’s a thought that Code 41 will only work for pre-formatted ‘Met Observation’ messages, and may not be able to deal with plain language text messages. Clarification is being sought, but a definitive answer is proving elusive. For the present, any candidate who answers a SOLAS question seeking the procedure for sending, for example, a ‘hurricane warning’ ashore using typed-text, will not be penalised for using either Code 41 or 42 as part of their answer. Examiners have been circulated personally, but instructors who are not also examiners should take note. This will be further explored in a future ‘**Explanation Please**’

**Centre Equipment Fit:** it was noted that some more modern equipment does not always replicate the same control/operating functions available on earlier generation equipment, and which may be specifically referred to and/or implied in the OPT examination sheets. Trainers and examiners should take this into account when training for/conducting OPT examinations on different equipment.

**GMDSS Course Approvals – audit process:** Course approvals are subject to the AMERC audit process, which will look to see how any proposed course meets (and continues to meet) MNTB guidelines. This is separate from, and not to be confused with, inspections and assessments carried out during examinations. A checklist will be used for course approvals/audits to ensure that all requirements and recommendations have been met.

**GMDSS Examiners - PLI:** Examiners are reminded that they are liable for holding their own **Public Liability Insurance** when examining on behalf of AMERC.

**Maritime Consultancy Group (MCG) feedback – continued from previous page:**

**MGN 214 (M) Amendment 1:** This amendment to MGN 214 (M) requires that persons applying for **'initial endorsement'** to their GMDSS GOC or ROC must supply evidence of one-year sea service in the last five - either by Discharge Book or testimonials. Evidence of sea service was previously required only for **revalidation**. The application form for initial endorsement/revalidation is being amended accordingly. Once finalised, the changes will be reflected on the AMERC website.

**GMDSS Tasks for NAVRAS; and for MN Deck Training Record Book (TRB):** The present NAVRAS(M) – Navigation and Radar ARPA Simulation at the Management Level, Section Three, has now been amended to include: "Exercise(s) in either open or coastal waters involving the need to conduct a search and rescue operation while continuing practice in collision avoidance and navigational techniques and procedures. The exercise should **'reflect the implications of GMDSS'** and the additional facilities incorporated on modern navigational aids to assist the SAR operation. The exercise **'Objectives'** have been amended to include **'To evidence effective and explicit communication including the keeping of a full radio log'**. The outline of the exercise(s) already includes **'the use of EPIRBs and SARTS'** and **'co-ordination and planning of the search and rescue, including the use of the IAMSAR manual.'**

The **MN Deck Training Record Book (TRB)** (Stage 3 – Search and Rescue) is also now expected to include specific additional task(s) related to the GMDSS - in particular: (under the heading GMDSS) **'Identify the Search and Rescue Region (SRR) and the GMDSS Sea Area for the current voyage'** and **'Demonstrate the ability to initiate a DSC and Inmarsat Alert with follow up call for the current position'**

Final approval for the above items, including a (proposed) name-change for NAVRAS(M) – to become "Navigation, radar, TTD, ECDIS & AIS simulator training - Management Level, (NARTEA(M)) is expected to happen in December.

**Forged GMDSS Certificates:** The MCA recently received a number of applications for 'initial endorsement' of (apparently UK-issued) GMDSS General Operator Certificates. The GOCs themselves proved to be false, as was the supporting documentation – including basic STCW certificates, and 'course completion' certificates purporting to be from a centre running UK GMDSS examinations. There is no indication that the centre running the UK courses was involved in producing the course completion certificates (and AMERC NAC did not issue the GOCs!).

**GMDSS Examination Statistics:** Jackie King of the NAC presented the following examination statistics for the period 1 APR 2010 – 30 JUN 2010.

EXAMINATION	ENTERED	PASSED	PASSED 1 <sup>ST</sup> ATTEMPT
UK GOC	332	265	207 (>78%)
ALL GOC	862	685	531 (>77%)
UK ROC	19	18	17 (>94%)
ALL ROC	52	50	48 (96%)
LRC	41	41	41 (100%)

## Member Profile(s)

This area is for you to tell us who you are and what you do.

For new members, we'd like to know more about you.

For existing members: the others - new and long established alike – would like to hear about your own operation. Or you can tell us about some event you've been involved in, or one that's going to happen in the future.

The entry below from Shetland School of Nautical Studies shows the type of information that you may want to include – but, as it's your own area, you can say what you like (omitting, of course, profane, indecent and obscene language ;-))

**Member Name:** Shetland School of Nautical Studies (SSNS)

**Centre Location:** NAFC Marine Centre  
Port Arthur  
Scalloway  
Shetland, Scotland, UK

**Main Contact:** Jan M Rigden  
(Head of School)  
+44 1595 777200  
jan.rigden@nafc.uhi.ac.uk  
[www.nafc.ac.uk](http://www.nafc.ac.uk)

### Radio/Electronics Courses Offered:

GMDSS GOC, ROC, LRC, SRC;

### Other Courses Offered:

Navigation, Radar & ARPA; STCW Basic training (all 4 modules); Medical training at various levels; Navigational Control Course (fishing); Electronic Navigation Systems (fishing); EDH; and Workboat Skipper training; NaRaST Operational and Management; ECDIS, advanced simulator training; bridge resource management; pilot ship handling training, including Voith and Azipod Tug operations; Bridge and Engine room Simulation.

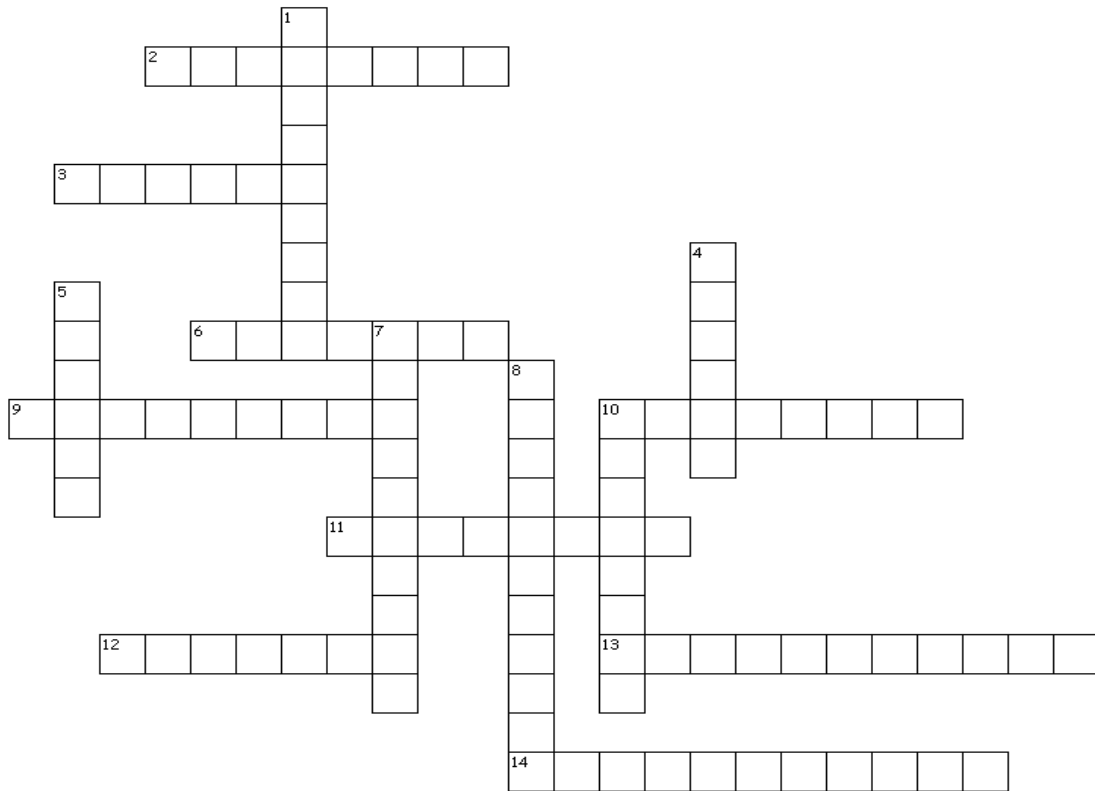
### About Shetland School of Nautical Studies:

Delivers training as part of the NAFC Marine Centre. The **North Atlantic Fisheries College** was opened in 1992 by the Shetland Islands Council as part of its strategy to support Shetland's fisheries industries (including fish catching, aquaculture, and fish processing). The range of training subsequently expanded to include Merchant Navy training - added for the crews of Shetland's inter-island ferries – which led to the launch in 2004 of a Merchant Navy Officer Cadet Programme. If you're on broadband and would like a (live) seal's eye view of Shetland, click on: [www.nafc.ac.uk/LiveWebCam.aspx](http://www.nafc.ac.uk/LiveWebCam.aspx) (user name = **webcam** ... password = **camera** ... both case sensitive)





**GMDSS Criss-Crossword Number 35** - all answers should be researched and/or confirmed by reference to ALRS, *where appropriate*



**Across**

2. PRACTICOS ..... **Pilot** service for Buenos Aires on the Rio de La Plata
3. India's largest privately-owned **port**, situated on the Gulf of Kutch
6. Pakistan's busiest port; and **NAVTEX** station.
9. **Inmarsat LES** in Japan.
10. **Port** of ..... - located on the St Lawrence River, Canada - approximately 1600km inland from the Atlantic Ocean.
11. Waterway separating Denmark and Sweden
12. **SafetyNET** Navarea covering Chilean waters.
13. Russian **port** and **NAVTEX station** in the White Sea.
14. Chilean **port**, and **NAVTEX** station using ID Letter 'A' for English language/'H' for local language - both on 518kHz.

**Down**

1. The only northern Spanish city and **port** that faces south.
4. **NAVTEX** station serving 1-down.
5. Malaysian **NAVTEX** station to the north of the Malacca Strait.
7. Busiest **seaport** in Bangladesh - situated on the right bank of the river Karnafuli, nine NM inland from the Bay of Bengal.
8. **NAVTEX** station serving 2-across (3,3,5)
10. Port ..... Bin Qasim - Pakistan's second busiest **port**, located in an old channel of the Indus River, approximately 45km east of 6-across.

**Issue 34 answers:** ACROSS: 5. IOR; 6. Suez; 7. Lyngby; 10. Newcastle; 11. Madrid; 12. Eik; 14. Advice; 18. Anchorage. DOWN: 1. Magellan; 2. Lisbon; 3. Rupert; 4. Sentosa; 8. Table; 9. Reykjavik; 11. Malacca; 13. Twelve; 15. Valpariso; 16. Yokohama; 17. Panama.

## Explanation Please?

This is the area for questions that may puzzle you - because it's not particularly clear why a specific answer is necessary when it appears that other answers may also appear to be appropriate – or, even if you as an instructor are satisfied with the question, you may want to know why the candidates should have to produce the level of detail being asked. In the case of 'Piracy/Armed Attack' (featured here) the question is whether it is appropriate to use 'Distress' priority – and whether doing so puts other vessels at risk.

**Question:** We are teaching candidates to use 'Distress Priority' when alerting other ships to a 'Piracy/Armed Attack'. It is my understanding that ships receiving a distress alert/message are obliged to go to the assistance of any ship in distress. Does using 'Distress Priority' and 'Mayday' compel other vessels to go to the assistance of the vessel in distress and, if so, does that not mean that they are putting themselves in danger?

**Answer:** A number of incidents over the past few years have generated much debate on the *obligation to assist* persons in distress. Not only the obligations of ships, but also of coastal states (e.g., when accepting/refusing to accept persons rescued at sea). This has led, on occasion, to partial quotes of the regulations regarding the master's obligation to provide assistance to vessels in Distress. The partial quote most often used is: *'The master of a ship at sea which is in a position to be able to provide assistance on receiving a signal from any source that persons are in distress at sea, is bound to proceed with all speed to their assistance ...' occasionally adding '... if possible informing them or the search and rescue service that the ship is doing so.'*

On the face of such a quote: it would appear that any vessel receiving a Distress Alert/message, regardless of the 'nature of distress', has no option but to proceed - even when the 'nature of distress' is 'piracy/armed robbery'.

However – a more complete quote of the Master's obligations *continues* to say: *'If the ship receiving the distress alert is unable or, **in the special circumstances of the case, considers it unreasonable or unnecessary to proceed to their assistance, the master must enter in the log-book the reason for failing to proceed to the assistance of the persons in distress, taking into account the recommendation of [the Organization], to inform the appropriate search and rescue service accordingly.***

This requirement to assist is included, in a more abbreviated version, in the IAMSAR Manual - which states *'Under long-standing traditions of the sea and various provisions of international law, ship masters are obligated to assist others in distress at sea **whenever they can safely do so.**'* And is also included at Article 98 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea as *'Every State shall require the master of a ship flying its flag, in so far as he can do so **without serious danger to the ship, the crew or the passengers [to render assistance/proceed with all possible speed] in so far as such action may reasonably be expected of him.***

So: we know that 'Piracy/Armed Attack' is a legitimate 'distress nature' and can reasonably be stated as part of a Distress Alert/message. But the master of a vessel receiving such an alert is the person best able to judge: (a) whether they could safely proceed to the location; (b) whether proceeding may cause serious danger to the ship, the crew or the passengers; and/or (c) whether it would be reasonable for the ship in distress to expect another unarmed vessel to proceed to their location. Or whether the most appropriate 'assistance' they could render is to ensure that the shore-based rescue authorities have been informed of the situation (e.g. using 'Mayday Relay' procedures).

**Next Issue:** Code 41 and 42 ... is there a definitive answer?

### Tales from the Key-Side - by AnonyMouse ...

This is the page for your stories – whether from personal experience at sea, at work, or in the classroom – recent past or distant past. Or it may be something you've heard. Doesn't matter – we're looking for interesting, funny or informative stories that may make us laugh, cry or look for someone to hit. Submissions may be edited, and the writer's name will only be included if specifically asked!

Dateline: Devonport Dockyard, onboard HMS Tiger; Families Day - September 1965  
Time: Looking-forward to dinner-time ...  
Frequency: Ship's Company Notice Board

*'Officers and their ladies will dine in the Wardroom.*

*Chief Petty Officers, Petty Officers, and their wives  
will eat in the Chief Petty Officer's Mess*

*Ratings and their women will be fed in the Junior Rates Dining Room'*

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Dateline: US Airways Flight, Callsign 'Cactus 1549' – New York – 15 Jan 2009.  
Time: 1525 local  
Frequency: Air Traffic Frequency – Departures - La Guardia Airport  
Note: Aeronautical communications tend to be much more 'abbreviated' than maritime.

Flight: *'Mayday Mayday Mayday – Cactus 1549 - We've had a bird strike – lost both engines – we're turning back towards La Guardia'*

New York Departures: *'OK ... you need to return to La Guardia – turn left heading two two zero'*  
Flight: *'two-two-zero'*

New York Departures: *'Should be less traffic on runway three one'*

Flight: *'Unable'*

New York Departures: *'OK - what do you need to land?'*

New York Departures: *'Cactus 1549 – runway four is available if you want to meet less traffic'*

Flight: *'You got anything in New Jersey? Maybe Teterboro?'*

New York Departures: *'You want to try to go to Teterboro?'*

Flight: *'Yes'*

[off-frequency messages between La Guardia and Teterboro confirm runway availability]

New York Departures: *'Cactus 1549 – turn right two eight zero you can land on runway one at Teterboro'*

Flight: *'We can't do it'*

New York Departures: *'OK – which runway would you like in Teterboro?'*

Flight: *'I'm not sure if we can make any runway ... we may end up in the Hudson'*

New York Departure: *'I'm sorry – didn't catch that – please repeat'*

Flight: *'It's gonna be the Hudson'*

New York Departures: *'Cactus 1549 – radar contact is lost ... '*

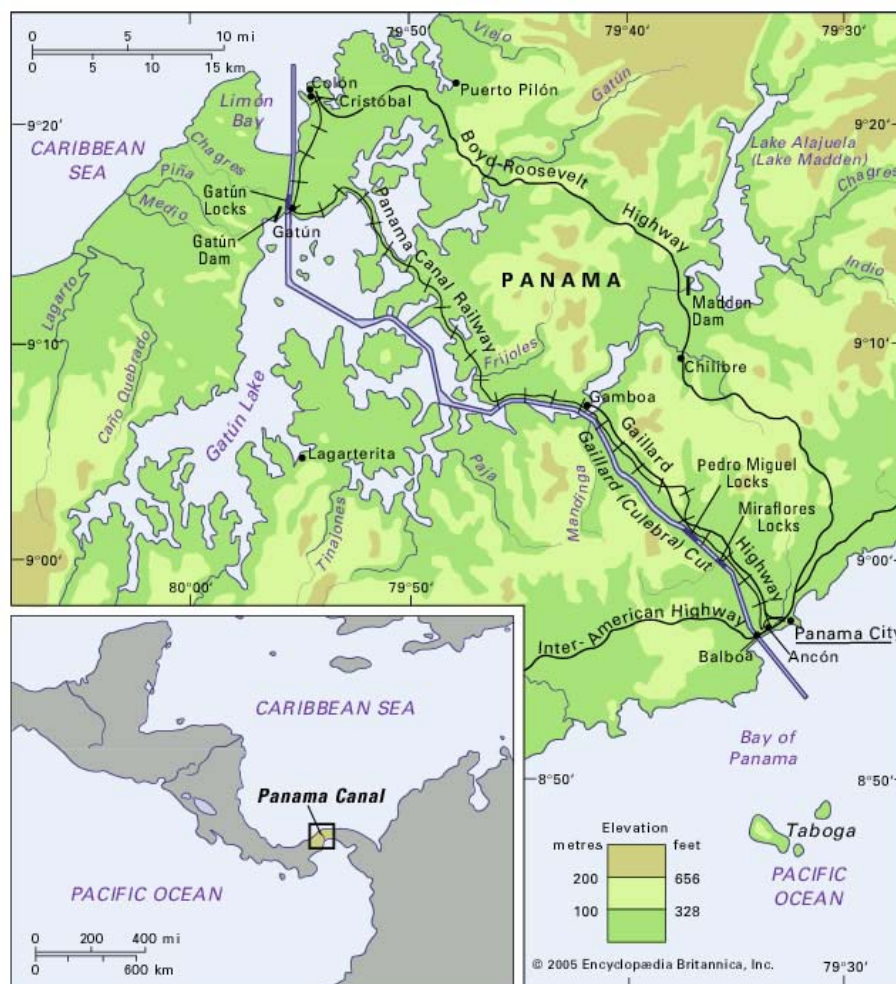
*[Flight landed successfully on the Hudson river. All 155 pax and crew survived with (apparently) negligible physical injuries. Seelonce Fini]*

## Maritime Miscellaneous: Millionth vessel transits Panama Canal - 28 Oct 2010

The bulker *Fortune Plum* was the millionth vessel to transit the Panama Canal since it opened in 1914. *Fortune Plum* left China in August carrying approximately 40,000 tons of steel products, heading for the Panamanian port of Cristobal - at the Caribbean end of the canal. At 57,000 MT, 189.99m LOA, and with a beam of 32.30m, the *Fortune Plum* is one of the largest vessels that can pass through the waterway. It started the transit from the Pacific Terminal and completed it 14.7 hours later, arriving at Miraflores Locks on the Atlantic side.

On the day the *Fortune Plum* made its historic passage, it was one of a total of 31 vessels that transited. Vessel number 999,999 entered the Gatun locks in the opposite direction seven minutes earlier than the *Fortune Plum* entered from the Pacific side. Five percent of the world's sea borne trade passes through the 80 kilometer (50 mile) canal every year.

It is anticipated that by 2011, 37% of the world's container ships will be too large for the present Canal. A Panama Canal enlargement scheme is in progress, with completion expected in 2014. The estimated US\$5.25bn project will double the Canal's capacity by allowing more traffic and for the passage of longer and wider ships.



(Information and map reproduced courtesy of The Maritime Journal – [www.maritimejournal.com](http://www.maritimejournal.com) )