

Editorial

Welcome to issue 36 of AMERC News - *which doubles as Circular 247 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): details of the venue for our **2011 Annual General Meeting**; Revised **publication requirements** for GMDSS Training and Examination Centres; an item on **retaining Centre Approvals when a change of facility** takes place; and one on documenting **course/examination numbers**; a status report on **GMDSS Exams 2011-2012 series**; an item on **centre equipment fit**, advance notice for **AGM 2012**; a follow-up item on **requirements for initial endorsement of GMDSS certificates**; notification about upcoming **Executive Committee vacancies**; a link to the **GOC/ROC Syllabi Review**, and the **latest quarterly figures** from the National Administration Centre (NAC).

That's followed by our **Member's Profiles section** (Page 4) – this time featuring **Lowestoft College**.

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 35 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 'Special Access Codes' 41 and 42 for reporting severe weather warnings, and navigation hazards, to-shore.

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 .

Maritime Miscellaneous explores the potential of the Northern Sea Route from North West Europe to the Pacific Ocean, through Russian waters. This route – also known as the 'North East Passage' (as opposed to the 'North West Passage' through Canadian-Arctic waters) – was opened to non-Russian vessels in 2010.

As is now the norm – this edition is being distributed electronically. In addition to ensuring that all trainers and examiners read the News, centres are encouraged to forward a copy to anyone you think may be interested – whether it be a client company or other person/body with an interest in marine communications and/or training in radio communication or related subjects.

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 meeting(s) & follow-up are drawn to your attention:

Annual General Meeting 2011: AGM 2011 will be held at [Park Farm Hotel, Norwich](#) on Thursday 9th June, followed by Examiner’s Panel meetings. Set in 200 acres of countryside, Park Farm is located southwest of Norwich near the A11/A47 junction and the village of Hethersett. Around 30 minutes from the airport/railway station by road (allowing for busy traffic on the ring road). You should already have received the pre-AGM notice from Keith Mitchell, Company Secretary, as Circular 246. Eric Lamb will provide full details of the venue & booking arrangements.

Flybe serves a number of UK airports from Norwich; and KLM has direct flights between Norwich and Amsterdam for those overseas delegates who may wish to travel.

Delegates will be expected to arrive p.m. on Wednesday 8th and depart after breakfast on Friday 10th.

Revised Publication Requirements for Training and Examination Centres: the [AMERC Examination Handbook](#) has recently been amended to show revised publications’ requirements for GMDSS training and examining. The requirements can be summarised as:

- For GOC courses: centres must have ALRS Vol 1 – complete set of Parts; ALRS Vol 5; and ALRS Vol 6 – complete set of parts;
- For ROC and LRC courses: centres must have ALRS Vol 1 – Part 1 or/and Part 2; ALRS Vol 5; and ALRS Vol 6 Part 1 or/and Part 2;
- For GOC and ROC courses: centres must have a copy of the ITU List of Coast Stations; List of Ship Stations; and List of Callsigns and Numerical Identities. For LRC training, centres are encouraged to make those ITU lists available to candidates.

All publications must be of an issue/edition that meets current examination requirements.

Centre Facility Changes: Centres are reminded that approvals are normally granted for a specific classroom/training area – including candidate facilities, and equipment layout/access. Any centre wishing to change to a different location, building or classroom must re-apply for approval of the new facility – which will normally require a visit by AMERC, at the centre’s expense.

Notification of any change of venue must be sent to the AMERC Secretary in advance of any move, so that an approval inspection can be made prior to the running of any course or exams at the new venue.

In addition to the specific requirements listed in the [AMERC Examination Handbook](#), items to be considered for all approvals/re-approvals include – but are not limited to:

- Equipment layout and accessibility;
- Individual candidate workspace; and
- Environment (including possible distractions - whether visual or audible).

Any existing facility that cannot continue to meet AMERC requirements will have their approvals suspended until the requirements are fully met.

Course/Examination Numbers- Parallel Courses: Course approvals are granted for a specific number of candidates – depending on resources (equipment and training staff) available at the particular centre. On those occasions where parallel courses are being run, and/or re-sit candidates may make it look like course numbers are being exceeded, centres should indicate the reason for the increased numbers in their returns to the NAC (e.g. by listing candidate groups as different ‘batch numbers’ on ‘Cheque/Payment Sheets’ – where ‘re-sit’ candidates are already shown as such; and/or annotating the Examination Application Forms). *Note that, where re-sit candidates have also taken a new course place, that person counts as one of the ‘approved number’ on the new course.*

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

GMDSS Exams 2011-2012 series: The 2011-2012 Exam Series papers are being finalised with the view to being introduced on 1 April 2011 – which should give time for feedback and discussion at our June Examiner’s Panel meeting. Disks will be circulated to RECs when ready, together with confirmation of the implementation date.

Centre Equipment Fit: It was noted that the Merchant Navy Training Board (MNTB) has been considering whether guidelines should be developed that would require new centres applying to run certain MNTB/MCA-Approved training courses, or any existing centre replacing (e.g. faulty) equipment, to install new-generation equipment. The MCA Chief Examiner has affirmed that equipment that meets the functional requirements of our GMDSS training/examination format may continue to be installed and used.

AMERC/MCA Contract: Our new contract with the MCA - to deliver the UK GMDSS Course Approvals and Examination Service – is expected to be finalised shortly. Once completed, a summary will be provided in AMERC News.

Annual General Meeting 2012: Advance notice for your diary - AGM 2012 is planned to be held on 6-8th June 2012, in Edinburgh, Scotland. Former Chair-persons and former Hon. Sec’s will be invited to this – the AMERC 50th Anniversary - gathering.

MGN 214 (M) Amendment 1: As mentioned in AMERC News 35 - this amendment to MGN 214 (M) required that persons applying for ‘**initial endorsement**’ to their GMDSS GOC/ROC would be required to supply evidence of one-year sea service. The MCA Chief Examiner has reviewed this requirement, with the result that MGN 214 (M) Amendment 1 has now been withdrawn. Applications for initial endorsement do not now require proof of sea service.

Executive Committee Vacancies: You’ll have read in Circular 246 – notice of AGM 2011 – that there will be up to two vacancies on the Executive Committee. *Just a wee reminder that organisations like AMERC depend very much on members putting themselves forward for this type of work.* The organisation cannot function without willing volunteers and so, if you’d like to have a go, see Circular 246 for more information regarding the procedure for nominations.

GOC/ROC Syllabi Review : An Ad-Hoc Group from the European Communications Office (ECO) is meeting in Istanbul 28-29th March for the review of ERC DEC (99)01 on the Harmonised Examination syllabi for the GOC and the ROC. The document is available at:

<http://www.erodocdb.dk/docs/doc98/official/Pdf/Dec9901e.pdf>

Eric Lamb will represent AMERC and will keep us informed of any changes.

GMDSS Examination Statistics: National Administration Centre (NAC) examination statistics for the period 1 JUL 2010 – 30 SEP 2010 are shown below:

EXAMINATION	ENTERED (1 st time)		PASSED (1 st attempt)		% PASSED 1 ST ATTEMPT
UK GOC	273	(184)	206	(158)	158/184 (>85%)
ALL GOC	745	(556)	552	(420)	420/556 (>75%)
UK ROC	24	(23)	23	(22)	22/23 (>95%)
ALL ROC	36	(35)	35	(34)	34/35 (>97%)
LRC	21	(21)	21	(21)	21/21 (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 Lowestoft College 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: Lowestoft College

Centre Location: St. Peters Street
Lowestoft,
Suffolk,
NR32 2NB - UK

Main Contact: Chris Harrison
+44 (0) 1502 525 061
c.harrison@lowestoft.ac.uk
www.lowestoft.ac.uk

Radio/Electronics Courses Offered:

GMDSS GOC, ROC, LRC, SRC; CAA (Offshore) Radio Operator

Other Courses Offered:

STCW-95 Basic Training modules; EDH; OOW; Ch. Mate; Master Unlimited Oral Prep; ARPA; NARAS; ECDIS; Dynamic Positioning (various levels); Bridge Team Management; Certificate of Proficiency in Survival Craft & Rescue Boats; ERRV Command & Control; IMDG Code Awareness; Marine Transfer Training; Shipboard Safety Officer; Ship Security Officer; Small Vessel Navigation & Radar; Wind Energy Safety Training; Management of Offshore Emergencies (inc. OPITO Control Room Operator; OIM; and Shore-base Control Centre training); and RYA short courses.

About Lowestoft College:

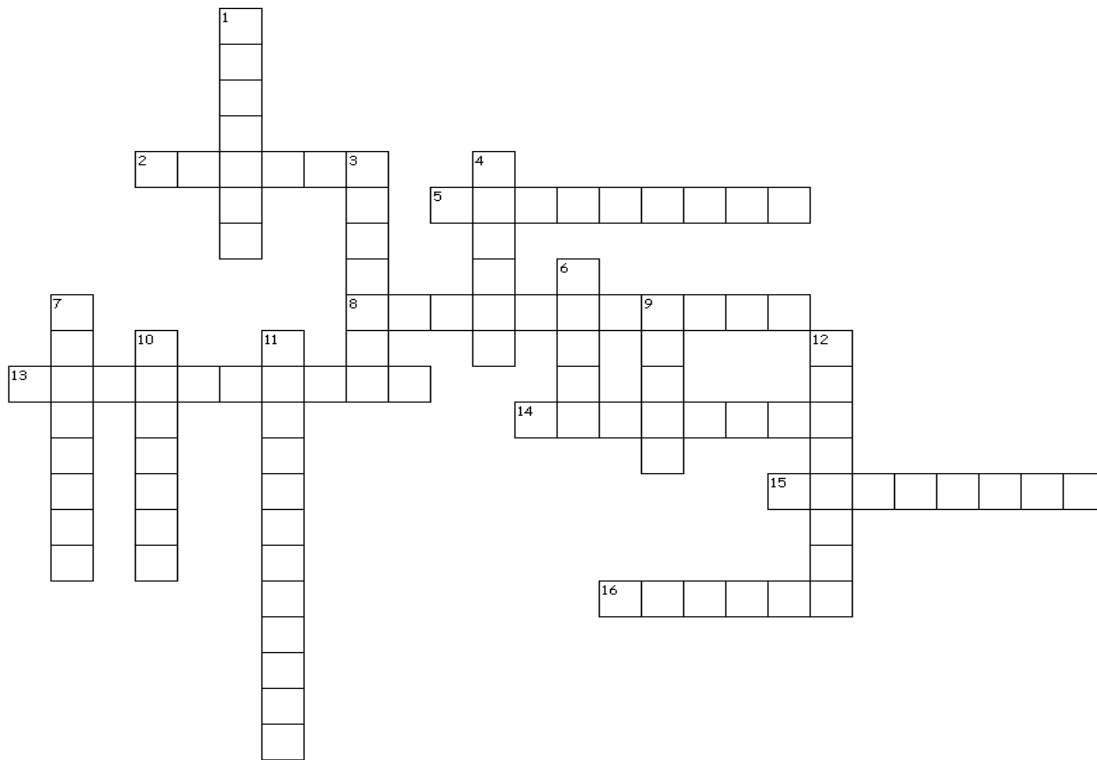
Lowestoft College has a long tradition of excellence in the training of maritime and offshore personnel. In addition to the GMDSS training suite, college facilities include a Norcontrol 'Polaris' Ship Simulator; DP Systems from Kongsberg and Alstom; and an environmental training tank which simulates as realistically and safely as possible a variety of sea conditions.

The specialist team has been providing training in the areas of Emergency Response and Crisis management for the offshore industry continuously since 1992. Training takes place in a purpose built simulation suite with interactive links to other facilities such as the Marine Bridge simulator. Facilities in the suite include a full range of authentic communications systems, alarms, process annunciators, data loggers, SCADA emulation,



hi-fidelity sound effects, video monitoring and recording and classrooms. Simulations available include Offshore Production Control Room, Offshore Radio Rooms, and Onshore (Terminal) Control Room.

GMDSS Criss-Crossword Number 36 - all answers should be researched and/or confirmed by reference to ALRS, *where appropriate*



Across

- 2. Sea **port** serving Lima (capital of Peru)
- 5. **RT(HF) Radio Station**, and **NAVTEX Station** - on the Pearl River, China (approx' 120 Km NNW of Hong Kong)
- 8. **NAVTEX Station** providing service for Scotland West Coast, and Irish Sea
- 13. **RT(HF) Radio Station** on East Kalimantan (Indonesian territory on Island of Borneo)
- 14. Situated on West Africa's largest natural harbour, this small **port** is also the capital of Sierra Leone.
- 15. New Zealand **port** on the Bay of Plenty
- 16. **SafetyNET Area** covering 13-across

Down

- 1. In ALRS Volume 1, **RCCs** are coloured (3), **commercial radio stations** are coloured (4)
- 3. Greek **Coast Station** providing **DSC and RT** service on **VHF, MF and HF**
- 4. US **port** at the extreme western coast of Lake Superior
- 6. **Port** and **NAVTEX Station** in a country north of 14-across
- 7. **NAVTEX station** on Mediterranean island of Crete
- 9. CAMSPAC Point - **NAVTEX Station** serving US Coast around 11-down
- 10. **SafetyNET Area** covering 2-across
- 11. Through the Golden Gate bridge and turn right to this **port**
- 12. Malaysian **NAVTEX station** on the Island of Borneo - north of 13-across

Issue 35 answers: **DOWN:** 1. Santander; 4. Coruña; 5. Penang; 7. Chittagong;
 8. Mar del Plata; 10. Muhammad; **ACROSS:** 2. Recalada; 3. Mundra; 6. Karachi;
 9. Yamaguchi; 10. Montreal; 11. Kattegat; 12. Fifteen; 13. Arkhangelsk; 14. Antofagasta.

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 'Inmarsat Special Access Codes (SAC) 41 and 42' (featured here) the question is whether it is appropriate to use SAC 41, or SAC 42, to report a Tropical Revolving Storm (Cyclone/Hurricane) to the correct/relevant shore authority.

Question: I understand that we are able to use Inmarsat 2-digit 'Special Access Code' (SAC) 41 to send weather information to Meteorological authorities; and SAC 42 to send information about Navigation Hazards to the appropriate NAVAREA Co-ordinator. I also read in SOLAS Chapter V Regulation 31 – that '*Danger Messages*' – which include '*dangerous ice, a dangerous derelict, or any other direct danger to navigation, or a tropical storm ...*' and '*winds of force 10 or above ...*' should be communicated '*to ships in the vicinity and also to the competent authorities*'. My question is – Does a tropical storm (cyclone/hurricane) constitute a danger (to navigation) message that should be sent to the NAVAREA Co-ordinator using SAC 42; or a weather message that should be sent to the Meteo' authorities using SAC 41?

Answer: There's been quite an exchange of messages on this subject over recent months - between AMERC members/representatives; the UK Met' Office; the Office of the Hydrographer of the Navy; and Inmarsat - and it seems that the 2-digit 'SAC' system is not as transparent as we might think when reading, for example, the Inmarsat Maritime Communications Handbook, ALRSs, or other publications. Also - the change during recent years from messages that were all processed manually, to computerised systems for receiving and processing some messages, has altered the way that messages are handled in many centres - and also who might deal with them.

Using the UK as an example: If a vessel selects **Goonhilly LES ID** to send a message to **SAC 41** using **Inmarsat-C**, the message will be routed automatically to the UK Met Office. However – the UK Met Office system has been fully automated to process 'Weather Observation (OBS)' messages that are correctly formulated (in the coding system used by Voluntary Reporting Ships). It will not process plain language (text) messages.

However – if you use **Goonhilly LES ID** and **SAC 42** to send a message reporting a hurricane (or any other 'met warning') - the message will be sent to the UK Hydrographic Office – where 'plain language' (navigation hazard) text messages are the norm – and the duty officer will forward any appropriate message to the Met Office for manual processing.

Additionally – although every Inmarsat Land Earth Station (LES) has an associated Rescue Co-ordination Centre (RCC) for dealing with Distress Priority traffic, when Inmarsat GMDSS systems are being used (currently Inmarsat-B, Inmarsat-C, and Fleet 77) - not all LESs process all SACs (complete list in ALRS Volume 1). [A list of Inmarsat-C LESs that forward SAC 41 messages is published on the WMO website.](#) – but that list does not show which authorities can only handle pre-formatted 'Met Obs' messages; nor which (if any) can handle plain-language text. A number of people – including ALRS editors and myself – are trying to establish which SACs are in use by which Land Earth Stations, for which services (Inmarsat-B, C and Fleet 77). If and when we manage to get a comprehensive answer – you'll be informed through these pages!

Next Issue: More about 2-digit Special Access Codes? Your question(s)?

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: Flight BD929: London Heathrow - Baku, Azerbaijan - November 2010

Time: Just before take-off – trundling towards the runway ...

Frequency: Cabin PA system – further distorted by tinnitus at the receiving end

'... there are three Russians onboard this aircraft. One at the front for the use of Business Class passengers - two at the rear of the Economy cabin. The washrooms are fitted with smoke alarms ...'

Dateline: GMDSS Training Centre – GOC Classroom – Any month/any year.

Time: Day 5 of the course – when that rare student who's always looking for something/someone else to blame for his lack of ability voices the latest excuse

Frequency: Student/Instructor semi-duplex voice frequency

Student: *'Don't you think there are too many people on this course?'*

Instructor: *'There's often one more person on any course than is good for us all – but our enrolment procedures have not yet found a way to identify that person in advance, or we'd have sent you somewhere else ...'*

Dateline: Lerwick Harbour, Shetland – January 1980

Time: 0035 local

Frequency: Channel 16 VHF

*Mayday Shetland Radio this is Danish Fishing Vessel xxx
My captain has fallen into the fish hold ... we just came back onboard ... we had dinner in Lerwick ... the captain wanted to check the fish and he fell into the hold ... I cannot see him.....
I think he has drowned in the fish ... please help ... this is the first mate ...'*

[Shetland Radio responded. Lerwick police and fire service attended.

Captain's body recovered. Pronounced dead at the scene. Seelonce Fini]

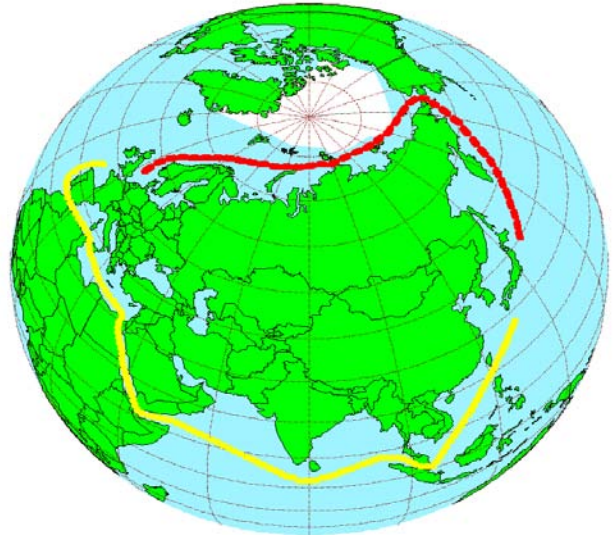
Maritime Miscellaneous: Northern Sea Route opens to non-Russian ships

The Northern Sea Route through Russian waters, from the Barents Sea to Asia, opened to non-Russian vessels in 2010. The first foreign-flag vessel to make the journey 'in transit' (i.e. without visiting a Russian port *en-route*) was the bulk-carrier [MV Nordic Barents](#) – which sailed from Kirkenes in Norway (September 2010), to China - carrying iron-ore concentrate.

Also in September, the 114,564-tonne Russian gas tanker [Baltica](#) made history by becoming the largest vessel ever to navigate the route – taking just 10 days to journey from Murmansk to Chukotka – the peninsula that separates the Russian Arctic and Pacific Oceans. *Baltica* was escorted by the world's two most powerful nuclear ice breakers – a key element of convoy-escort for vessels unable to tackle potential ice hazards on their own.

In the European Arctic, both [Kirkenes](#) in Norway and [Murmansk](#) in Russia are seeking to become Northern Sea Route hubs. Murmansk, situated on the northern shore of the [Kola Peninsula](#) - 12 kilometres inland from the [Barents Sea](#) - could well be Russia's most promising (western) transportation hub. Its waters do not freeze in the winter and its location provides ships with direct access to ocean waters.

The port of [Petropavlovsk](#) at Kamchatka in Russia's Far East is also gearing-up to become a hub, for traffic originating in Asian waters.



The Northern Sea Route – shown in red – is considerably shorter than the Suez Canal route for traffic from North West Europe to northern Asia, and is claimed to cut around 5000 miles and 8 days from the Suez route (shown in yellow).

The northern Russian summer lasts only around 2-3 months, but the waters of the Northern Sea Route can remain navigable for between five and seven months. Rosatomflot, the operator of the Russian national icebreaking fleet – expects to escort at least six oil-tanker convoys through the route during 2011.

Communications – particularly GMDSS comm's – is an obvious issue for the route. A look at the most recent versions of ALRS Volume 5 (SafetyNET section) shows new 'NAVAREAS' 17-21 covering Arctic waters – but, with Inmarsat's geo-stationary satellite footprint limitations, the complete route is not covered by Inmarsat GMDSS satellite systems.

As a separate issue - the European Space Agency Telecommunications Programme (ARTES) has instigated [ArctiCOM](#), a study to map future demand for maritime (and related) communications in the Arctic, including areas with communications gaps - for the years 2015-2020 and beyond. Meanwhile: vessels will be using the (gradually reducing) facilities accessible with Marine SSB Radio; and polar-orbiting satellite systems like [Iridium](#).