



## Editorial

Welcome to issue 42 of AMERC News - which doubles as **Circular 255** 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) and **Annual General Meeting/Examiner's Panel** (Page 2-3) - reflecting relevant items covered in the AMERC Executive Committee (EC) earlier the same day, including: **Course/Centre Audits** – frequency of visits; **Sat-B/F77** reminder; **General Knowledge (SOLAS) question – English Language requirement** for training and exams; **MNTB Course Criteria booklets**; **Replacement certificate – cost increase**; and **GMDSS Certificates – initial Endorsement and subsequent Revalidation**.

AMERC organisation changes, including the appointment of a **New Chief Examiner**, and an update on **member numbers and locations** is included here, along with latest quarterly and annual examination statistics.

The **Member Profile** in this edition (Page 4) is about **AMERC** itself – on our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary – some history and evolution of the organisation - with thanks to previous News Editor and ex-Chairman Brian Cotton for his research and writing of this item.

The member profile is followed by an obituary to Dennis Brown – an ex-Radio Officer and AMERC participant at various levels over a number of years, on page 6.

We've another '**GMDSS Criss-Crossword**' (Page 7) to help stretch candidates knowledge of **international geography** and the use of **Admiralty List of Radio Signals** ALRS) publications. The answers to puzzle 41 are also included.

Our **Explanation Please?** is 'resting' for this edition (nobody has any questions!) - and **Tales from the Key-Side** (Page 8) includes a new link to make it easy for you to submit tales, questions, letters or other feedback.

This edition's **Maritime Miscellaneous** (Page 9) features a brief review of the updated **IMO GMDSS Manual (2011 Edition)** – and of the e-book reader '**IMO Bookshelf**' - which your editor downloaded to test (and was impressed by what he found).

I'd welcome more '**Tales from the Key-side**' from your memory banks, to keep readers entertained and/or informed – and, of course, any 'questions' you may have for '**Explanation Please?**' – every effort will be made to find the answer(s)!

Sláinte

*Ian W*

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Final Note: Steve Howard of the RNLI attempted to send a number of people his **Transas 'live signal' upgrade** material – but some of the email addresses 'bounced'.

If you were expecting this material from Steve and you have not yet received it – email [Steve.Howard@rnli.org.uk](mailto:Steve.Howard@rnli.org.uk) and he will be happy to forward the material to you.

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/or the MCA Deck & GMDSS Team Leader; and AMERC/industry specialists. The open meeting can (occasionally) be attended by other invited persons. The latest meeting – on AMERC’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary – coincided with the **AMERC Annual General Meeting** and the **Examiners Panel**. The following items reflect discussions at MCG, the AGM, and the Examiner’s Panel that are of immediate interest to Members and training centres (full minutes will be circulated appropriately).

**Course/Centre Approvals:** There is an MCA requirement for full course-and-centre audits at 5-year intervals, with one intermediate review during that 5-year period. The main visit will normally witness course presentation, in addition to reviewing the centre fitting and course materials.

**Sat-B/Fleet 77:** A reminder that, as stated in Circular 253, centres should introduce both types of equipment (where both are fitted) but need only examine on either Sat-B or F77 – not on both.

The proposed new **GK SOLAS Question format** - which would have included ship’s ‘static’ and ‘changeable’ information in the top three lines of each question - was rejected by Examiner’s Panel vote. The current format - providing only that information needed to answer the question, within the body of the question - will continue to be used for the upcoming question series.

**English Language requirement:** Further to previous items on this subject: centres are reminded that UK-GMDSS courses, regardless of country of delivery, are expected to be presented in English language. This does not preclude further explanation in local language when necessary and/or beneficial to attendees. Examinations, written and oral, must always be conducted in English – without the aid of dictionaries/translators.

**MNTB Course Criteria booklet(s):** The GMDSS GOC and ROC course criteria are being merged into a single MNTB booklet. The Executive Committee is drafting individual course equipment-fit lists, which will be included in the near future to supplement the [GOC and ROC information](#).

**Replacement Certificate – cost increase:** The MCA agreed increased replacement certificate charges to be raised by the AMERC National Administration Centre (NAC). The charge for replacing a lost certificate is £56, effective forthwith. Details of how to obtain a replacement certificate, and further information, are available from [www.amerc.ac.uk/lost.php](http://www.amerc.ac.uk/lost.php) - from where the official form can be downloaded.

**GMDSS Certificates – initial endorsement, and revalidation:** Certificate holders wishing initial STCW endorsement, and subsequent revalidation, **must use the official MCA forms** issued for each requirement - available at [www.amerc.ac.uk/endorsement](http://www.amerc.ac.uk/endorsement) and [www.amerc.ac.uk/revalidation](http://www.amerc.ac.uk/revalidation). Centres applying for endorsement on behalf of their candidates are reminded that the courier cost levied by the MCA assumes ‘batch’ processing. Any centre asking for individual certificates to be processed ahead of the normal 15-day turn-around period will be required to pay an additional courier charge.

**GMDSS Examination Statistics – quarterly report:** National Administration Centre (NAC) examination statistics for the period **1 January 2012 – 31 March 2012** are shown below:

EXAMINATION	ENTERED (1 <sup>st</sup> time)	PASSED (1 <sup>st</sup> attempt)	% PASSED 1 <sup>ST</sup> ATTEMPT
UK GOC	354 (281)	273 (215)	215/281 (>76%)
ALL GOC	743 (606)	590 (471)	471/606 (>77%)
UK ROC	41	36 (33)	
ALL ROC	89	83 (79)	
LRC	40 (40)	40 (40)	40/40 (100%)

***New Chief Examiner appointment:***

Eric Lamb – AMERC Chief Examiner for the past 21 years - has retired and Keith Mitchell has been appointed by the Executive Committee as Eric’s replacement. The EC and Members wished Eric well in his retirement – and a grand time was had by all at dinner. Keith is the one on the left, wondering what he’s got himself into – Eric is the one with the more ‘dreamy’ look – knowing what he’s leaving behind 😊 The Chief Examiner appointment, as before, is for a three-year period (or, some might say - sentence?).



**TRANSAS ‘live signal’ simulation:** Steve Howard of the RNLI demonstrated his ‘live signal’ application for the SSB Radio on the TRANSAS GMDSS Simulator. One signal consists of a ‘Mayday’ message on continuous loop, on MF; the other a simulated ‘Volmet’ message from Shannon Airport. Steve’s work received approval at the AMERC MCG just prior to AGM and is now allowed to be used in lieu of a live receiver. Anyone who requires this ‘upgrade’ should email Steve directly at [Steve\\_Howard@rnli.org.uk](mailto:Steve_Howard@rnli.org.uk)



As of publication date, AMERC has a total of 47 members (with some new applications pending).

Approximately 50% of AMERC members are based in the UK - with the balance being maintained by Australia, Austria, France, India, Italy, Jamaica, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa, Spain (Canary Islands), Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the USA.

This diversity was demonstrated somewhat by the display of national dress worn at our recent annual dinner.

**GMDSS Examination Statistics – Annual Report:** National Administration Centre (NAC) examination statistics for the period **1 January 2011 – 31 December 2011** are shown below:

EXAMINATION	ENTERED (1 <sup>st</sup> time)		PASSED (1 <sup>st</sup> attempt)		% PASSED 1 <sup>ST</sup> ATTEMPT
UK GOC	1429	(1153)	1109	(894)	894/1153 (>77%)
ALL GOC	2842	(2382)	2310	(1925)	1925/2382 (>80%)
UK ROC	162		146	(135)	
ALL ROC	196		179	(167)	
LRC	154	(154)	154	(154)	154/154 (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.

In recognition of AMERC being 50 years young in 2012, the Member Profile for this edition is all about AMERC itself – including some history and current membership information

**Member Name:** Associate of Marine Electronic and Radio Colleges (AMERC)

**Registered Office:** Bridge Mills  
Stramongate  
Kendal, Cumbria, UK  
LA9 4UB

**Main contact:** Mr. Terry Slack (Secretary)  
**Phone:** +44 (0)7771 361 141  
**email:** [secretary@amerc.ac](mailto:secretary@amerc.ac)  
[www.amerc.ac.uk](http://www.amerc.ac.uk)

### Current Membership:

New member applications approved at AGM 2012 brought AMERC membership up to 47. The list of current members is available on the [AMERC website](http://www.amerc.ac.uk).

### A brief history of AMERC - the Association of Marine Electronic and Radio Colleges - as recalled in conversation between your Editor and Brian Cotton, former Chairman & previous Editor of AMERC News:

**Ed.** When and how did AMERC Start?

**BC.** The Association of Marine Radio Colleges (AMRC) was founded by a small group of department heads, under the chairmanship of George Danielson - who headed the radio engineering department at Norwood Technical College, London - in 1962. AMRC subsequently re-styled its identity to include electronics training – evolving to become the Association of Marine Electronic and Radio Colleges.

**Ed.** Who could join AMERC?

**BC.** All UK centres were eligible for membership, including private colleges recognised as 'efficient' by the Department of Education. In time the polytechnics in Hong Kong and Singapore were admitted as were a number of private colleges in the Irish Republic. Unlike today this was the full extent of our international membership for many years. Many private centres of the day saw membership being in their interests as they might want to press an independent stand at times they welcomed the opportunities to network with the industry.

**Ed.** The recent Member Profile for City of Glasgow College (Glasgow College of Nautical Studies/GCNS) mentioned the demise of Glasgow Wireless College and the James Watt College in Greenock – how did private schools fare elsewhere?

**BC.** All but one of the private centres had gone out of business by the early eighties – the respected college at Manchester was the last to go. This accounted for a drop in membership at the time to two thirds of our peak of twenty-seven centres. Wray Castle remained in business having adopted the curriculum management processes current in further education, and backed these with significant investment. In these senses Wray Castle was indistinguishable from the public sector colleges, although it offered the advantage of residential accommodation.

**Ed.** Since I joined AMERC the Annual General Meetings/Examiner's Panel meetings have been in hotels around the UK – York, Tyneside, Birmingham, Southampton etc – and one in Italy. Has this always been the case?

**BC.** Until 1987 the annual meetings of the Association moved from college to college. There was intense competition for positions on the Executive Committee (EC) and liaison groups, especially with the Chairmanship where the role gave opportunities to direct policy. After a spell of virtually having to co-opt members onto the EC, it's good to again see healthy competition!

**Ed.** At last year's AGM we had speakers from Inmarsat and from the International Maritime Satellite Organisation (IMSO) – are guests from outside of the Association something new?

**BC.** The Association issued invitations to employers, external examiners, other associations, regulatory authorities and inspectors and professional societies to join 'open sessions' for presentations of interest. The closed sessions were restricted to college delegates and such was the intensity of discussion that these were spread over several days. Often we had as many as two hundred attending and organising the lunches, dinners and ladies' trip was a major task.

A part solution was to have civic receptions and these were always enthusiastically embraced by the local authorities. For a while we had shipowners and radio companies bidding to pay for the other functions and often quite aggressively too. However, all that went into sharp reversal when I came to be Chairman in 1986. At that time we moved from being in the highest demand, to 'buy an ARPA radar' as a pre-condition, to exhibition space, and to the venue of the college refectory. So ended the sponsorship! [Ed's note – the 2012 AGM included an invitation from the Lord Provost and Council of the City of Edinburgh, to a Reception, at Edinburgh City Chambers! - Photo from Sandro Poma of Star Centre Italia ☺



**Ed.** I did my MRGC in GCNS between 1974-76 and was examined by a Post Office official for the written papers and practical examination. Training and exams are all now in the hands of AMERC. Was it an easy transition?

**BC.** AMERC dialogue with the Post Office led to the birth of the Marine Radio General Certificate (MRGC) by splitting the examination into Parts I and II. The latter embraced the practical elements and the examiners even allowed AMERC to critique the papers in Part I. The Department of Transport (DTp) went further, engaging colleges to write the Radar Maintenance Certificate (RMC) papers. At the time it was recognised that the students' long term interests would be better served if they had 'shore qualifications.' The only home for that was with the City & Guilds of London Institute (CGLI). Relations with that body were extremely cordial and negotiations led to a special Marine Radio and Radar Technician's (MRRT) Certificate which, together with their Advanced Marine Electronics Certificate, took students to the highest level of a Full Technological Certificate. These were powerful recruitment aids, attracting high quality students even though the MRRT course had stretched to three years. The Advanced Marine Electronics Certificate was recognised by the Merchant Navy Training Board (MNTB) and was intended to cultivate the role of the Electro-Technical Officer (ETO).

**Ed.** So - we move from professional Radio Officers to GMDSS-trained radio operators, with 'radio' almost being an add-on to their 'normal' role?

**BC.** Yes – in a short time the Radio Officer as a discrete rank disappeared. However in the meantime we'd proved that we could manage training and examinations both within and across colleges. This urged the Association to offer to take on the GMDSS examination system on behalf of the Marine Safety Agency (MSA – now the Maritime and Coastguard Agency – MCA). Together with the business acumen of Wray Castle, this worked extremely well and the Association's relationship with the Agency is today professional, cordial and of mutual benefit.

**AMERC – the future?** AMERC Membership criteria are under constant review, to reflect changes in marine electronic and radio communications training and support. Any changes to membership criteria will be promulgated in future edition(s) of AMERC News.

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## Crossing the Bar/Silent Keys:

Readers who know Dennis Brown will be sorry to hear of his crossing 5<sup>th</sup> August, aged 78, after a relatively short period of ill health.

*'Prior to joining the teaching team in Southampton in 1963,' (reports David Heffer – a former student of Dennis, and later a colleague at Southampton for over 25 years), 'Dennis was with AEI - working on the Sky Bolt project for the Vulcan bomber and the Blue Streak rocket. That followed his seagoing career – which ended with him rising to the rank of 2<sup>nd</sup> radio officer on the Queen Elizabeth'.*

*'He had loads of good stories starting from his early days' (reports current Chief Examiner Keith Mitchell) 'He'd talk about being 13th R/O on the Queen Mary, or was it the first Queen Elizabeth? He used to say he was so young and inexperienced that he only got to do the dits ...or was it the dahs?'*

Dennis was part of the team that pioneered radiotelex in the 1950s; was heavily involved on the DTp Radar Maintenance/ENEM Panel; and was also a BTEC moderator for the ND/HNC marine programme. He was AMERC Chief Examiner (RADIO & ENEM) during the 1990's, and worked on the production of the GMDSS Examination Handbooks along with the (then) GMDSS Ch. Examiner and Chairman in the later 1990s – and also on the production of the Radar Principles Papers.

Dennis took over as Minute Secretary of the Maritime Board in January 1997, and reported the reduction in interest for running RADIO/ENEM at South Tyneside and Southampton - though he continued to run the examination system. In 1999 it was noted that Dennis had produced his last Principles examination and was thanked for his efforts. He also edited AMERC News for a period.

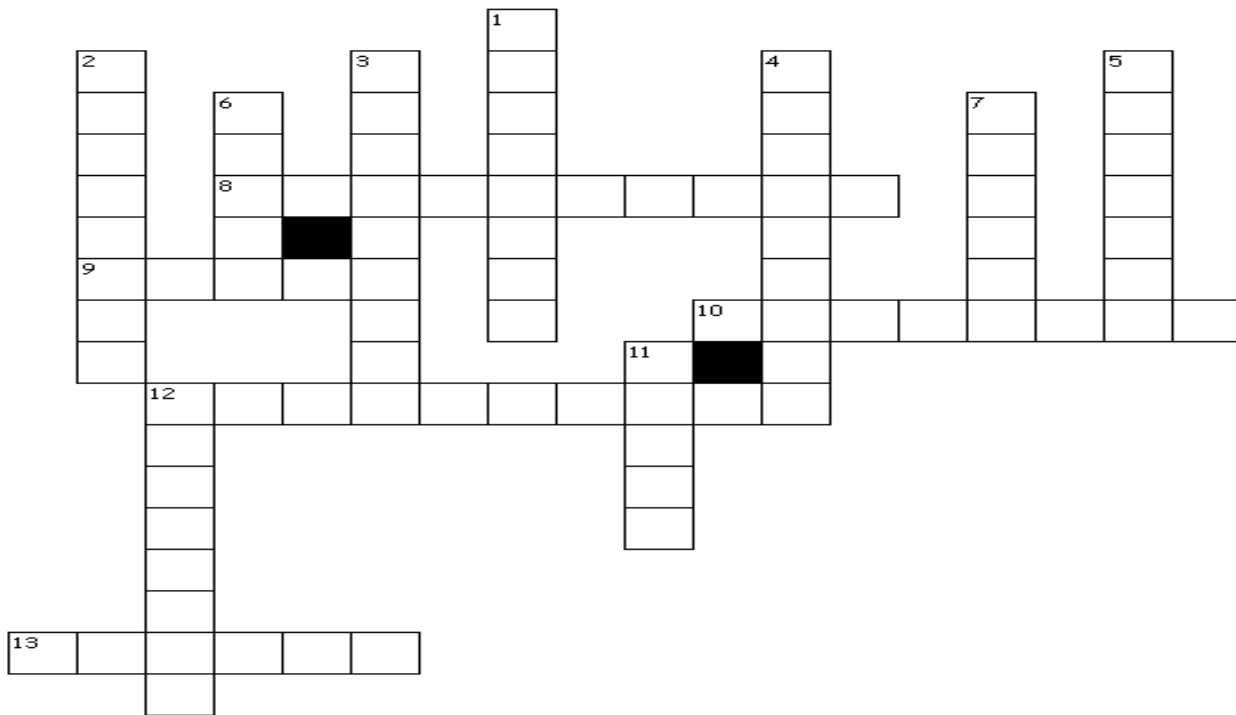
Although Dennis's teaching ability stretched from TV servicing to yacht and small boat electronics, he was involved in marine radar throughout his teaching career. *'A useful feature of this continuous involvement in RMC courses,' notes David 'was his practice of recording the results of every test or exam a student took during their course. If a question ever arose about a student who had taken the RMC course many years ago, Dennis took great delight in extracting his battered 'results' book and stating the year of study and what results the student had achieved. A level of detail the centralised records system could never seem to produce'*

The wide ranging practical skills that Dennis gained from his industrial experience meant that he was given the responsibility for laboratory work in his early teaching years at Southampton. Dennis frequently had a very clear view on how a particular task should be done. Terry Slack (AMERC Secretary) recalls *'I first met Denis when I was one of his students on the Radar Maintenance Course in the early 1970's. Years later I was again on one of his courses when I was training as a BT Radio Surveyor. Denis was running the Radio Observers Course in conjunction with Warsash' and that 'He always had a great turn of phrase and one that both Paul [Paul Martin – member 'Communication Matters'] and I remember to this day is 'One and a Third Turns' - Denis always liked a solder connection to be both electrically and mechanically strong!'*

Dennis continued as a GMDSS examiner into 'retirement' – and was the first to conduct exam's for GMDSS4all at Freedom Yachting, Antibes, in February 1997 - when overseas exam's could only be conducted onboard *'suitably equipped, British-registered vessels'*. Your current Editor remembers Truda waiting patiently on the sun deck of a 'superyacht' in Cannes, whilst Dennis attended to the business end below decks – my course delegates having become his examination candidates. On another occasion, in Palma de Mallorca, Denis arrived for the exams looking extremely poorly – having contracted a bad bout of D&V from the less-than-hygienic local conditions. During this period he also took advantage of the flexibility that a retired life could offer and became a prolific taker of last-minute booking cruises. This caused him to confess that his total tally of 30 cruises, with accommodation ranging from inboard aft cabins over the prop shaft to upper deck superior staterooms, must have meant that his sea days as a passenger came close to exceeding his sea days as a radio officer.

Dennis is survived by his wife Truda and four children – David, Shona, Neil and Fiona.

**GMDSS Criss-Crossword Number 42** - all answers should be researched and/or confirmed by reference to ALRS, *where appropriate*



**Down**

1. Iceland's second port, on the north coast.
2. (2,6) NAVTEX station in the Red Sea
3. HF RT, NAVTEX station, and Black Sea port city in Romania.
4. Canada's only arctic seaport; and closest ocean port to the vast grain growing area of Western Canada.
5. Port city in south-western Italy, in the Gulf of the same name.
6. Port on the Black Sea coastline, approx 13.5 NM north of 3-down.
7. Prepares Met information for Western Mediterranean Sea
11. NAVAREA III Co-ordinator for Nav information
12. NAVTEX station covering 1-down.

**Across**

8. Inland port on the River Rhine, Germany.
9. HF RT station; and Port which gives its name to Jordanian Special Economic Zone 'ASEZ'
10. Islands of Saint Pierre and (.8.) - Self-governing territorial overseas collectivity of France; situated off the coast of Newfoundland, Canada.
12. Port city on the Crimean Peninsula, Ukraine
13. Issuing authority for METAREA III weather information

**Issue 41 answers:** *DOWN:* 1. Kumsan; 2. Kitimat; 3. Kagoshima; 6. Savannah; 8. Williams; 9. Pusan; 11. Ushuaia. *ACROSS:* 4. Mandapam; 5. Humboldt; 7. Maputo; 10. Melbourne; 12. Arenas; 13. Kuantan; 14. Vladivostok.

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

This is the page for your stories – whether from personal experience at sea, at work, in the classroom or life generally – 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 may, of course, be withheld on request ...

**Dateline:** Wick Radio/GKR, Scotland – October 1978 – during Greenpeace vessel *Rainbow Warrior* attempts to block a Seal Cull by Norwegian hunters, in their boat the *Kvitungen*

**Time:** Shortly before the 6 o'clock news.

**Frequency:** VHF Ch26 - connecting a relatively unknown (at that time) and very proper-voiced – if a little breathless - young lady reporter to the BBC Newsdesk, via landline (and her with a hand-held VHF radio):

**GKR Op'.** *'You're connected – go ahead please'*

**Reporter** *'Newsdesk? Newsdesk? It's really exciting! We're buzzing around in an inflatable boat and it's absolutely pissing-down! ... Not for broadcast...'*

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**Dateline:** Wick Radio/GKR, Scotland – October 1978 – during Greenpeace vessel *Rainbow Warrior* attempts to block the Orkney Seal Cull.

**Time:** Later that same evening.

**Frequency:** VHF Ch26 – trying to connect the *Rainbow Warrior* Captain to a London telephone number, from where a (former Baltic state) Princess wanted to express her support ...

**GKR Op'.** *'Your call to Rainbow Warrior – go ahead please'*

**Subscriber** *'Wot?'*

**GKR Op'.** *You booked a call to the Rainbow Warrior? From Princess xxx ?'*

**Subscriber (off-Mic')** *'ere Effel – it's some geezer goin' on abaht a Princess an' a bleedin' rainbow!'*

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**Dateline:** Dumfries, Scotland – July 2012.

**Time:** Just after lunch.

**Frequency:** GSM-900MHz Phone-band (*avec text msg de Jules!*)

*'Congratulations! You have won a prize! It's either a £250 shopping voucher, or a night out to see an Elvis Presley tribute band!*

*To claim your prize - press 1 for the money, 2 for the show ...*

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Please use the following link to the AMERC website 'feedback' section to send-in your own *Tales from the Key-Side*, question(s), letters and/or feedback!

[Got a Tale to tell? Got a Question? Want to say something? Click on this link to the AMERC Website to generate a message to the AMERC News Editor. Nothing to say today? Click anyway and give it a test ...then you'll know how it works!](#)



## ***Maritime Miscellaneous: Review of the 'IMO Bookshelf e-reader' and the 'IMO GMDSS Manual (2011 Edition)'***

Your Editor recently acquired the **IMO GMDSS Manual (2011 Edition e-reader version)** – along with the MS Windows-based e-reader '**IMO Bookshelf**' software required for opening IMO e-books in ebk format.

Anyone considering formulating their own GMDSS course, or otherwise researching GMDSS history and current status, should start with the 2011 Edition of the **GMDSS Manual**. It is a clearly written, comprehensive guide to the history and evolution of the GMDSS. Taken alongside the IMO Model Course(s) for GOC and ROC; and any national documentation such as the AMERC Examination Handbook and AMERC Quiz; The Australian Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS) Handbook & Maritime Training Package; or the USA FCC GMDSS Question Pool – the **IMO GMDSS Manual** should be considered essential reading.

I was equally impressed with the '**IMO Bookshelf**' e-reader - a free download from the [IMO Publications website](#). You then have to download the individual 'books' – from the IMO Virtual Publications site - for 'unlocking' within your 'bookshelf' (using the code purchased from the IMO or your local distributor). Alternatively, you can obtain a CD with the e-reader software and over 50 current titles already loaded, and locked – so you don't have to download large individual files over the Internet (a bonus for those using maritime mobile communications?). Just load the CD onto your computer and then purchase a licence, then use the code provided to unlock the individual titles. The CD is available from the IMO distributor in your local country, or can be requested from the IMO in London who will send it by standard post, free of charge.

The bookshelf offers a number of features including: a search facility; the ability to add your own 'bookmarks'; a facility to add your own notes (annotations); a print facility; and a 'copy and paste' text facility. The search facility is also available on the CD version - containing titles not yet purchased - **allowing you to find where a particular subject may be included in a book that you hadn't yet considered buying**. For example, a search for the word NAVTEX revealed mentions in 21 publications on the CD. **Highlighting any particular publication then opened brief individual entries for that book, even although I hadn't yet purchased that publication**. It's like browsing a book in a bookshop before making the purchase decision.

Available books covering aspects of the GMDSS and Marine Communications generally include:

- The GMDSS Manual; The International Code of Signals; The NAVTEX Manual 2005; The SafetyNET Manual 2011; and the IMO Standard Marine Communication Phrases – all from the '**Communications**' section;
- IAMSAR Manuals Volume I; Volume II; and Volume III; and SOLAS (Consolidated Edition 2009) - from the '**Safety**' section;
- Performance Standards 2011 Edition (Shipborne Radiocommunications and Navigational Equipment) – from the '**Construction**' section; and
- STCW 2011 Edition including 2010 Manila Amendments – from the '**Crew**' section.

System requirements: The IMO Bookshelf runs on Windows XP/ Vista/Windows 7; and requires Microsoft .NET Framework 2.0 (pre-installed in Vista/Windows7). Hard Disk space approximately 550MB; and minimum 1024 x 768 resolution.

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