AMERC News

Issue 59 – Incorporates Circular 276 October 2016

Editorial

Welcome to issue 59 of AMERC News - *which doubles as* **Circular 276** *and, as such, must be circulated to all GMDSS instructors/examiners by their AMERC centre contact.*

In this issue we have a brief on the most recent ***Maritime Consultation Group*** (MCG - Page 2) - reflecting relevant items covered in the most recent AMERC Executive Committee (EC) meeting - including: ***syllabus updates for GOC, ROC and LRC*** now incorporated into the AMERC Administration Handbook; a ***guide to using ADRS1345 and ADRS6 for GOC, ROC and LRC training and exams*** now available on the 'resources' area of AMERC website; a pointer to ***MCA Safety Notice No.8*** (interference to radio equipment from other onboard kit); how to get round ***problems with 'autofill' PDF forms***; and a note on '***revalidation***' and how it does/doesn't apply to UK GMDSS certificates.

The ***quarterly statistics for GMDSS examinations*** are also included here.

Page 3 hosts our usual '**GMDSS Criss-Crossword'** to help stretch delegates' knowledge of **international geography** and the use of **Admiralty List of Radio Signals** (ALRS) publications. A new, additional suggestion has been received to exercise international geography by using the 'Triviaplaza world geography quiz' (my thanks to Chris Harrison for spotting this one). Further suggestions welcome!

Explanation Please? *(Page 4) has one question covering 'when might we acknowledge a Distress Alert on HF?*

- and **Tales from the Key-Side** (Page 5) features a not-so-good battery back-up power supply found during a Fishing Vessel Radio Survey.

There's no ***Member Profile(s)*** feature in this issue; but ***Maritime Miscellaneous*** is here with items on the US introduction of '***narrow band' VHF Channels***; and a press release introducing McMurdo's '***online MEOSAR knowledge centre***'.

Your submissions are always welcome for ***Explanation Please? Member Profile, Maritime Misc'*** and ***Tales from the Key-Side*** - and/or anything else you think would be of interest to readers. Further suggestions to help delegates develop their knowledge of international geography would also be welcome.

As usual – my sincere thanks to those of you who've provided feedback, questions, tales and other information for your newsletter.

Sláinte! *Ian W*

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FLASH*FLASH*FLASH

The earlier-promulgated date for the 2017 AGM and Examiners' Panel has ***been moved by one day*** and will now take place on Thursday 8th (AGM) and Friday 9th (Panel) of June, 2017 - and is expected to return to Liverpool.
More specific details nearer the time.

*The **Maritime Consultation 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; the NAC and other AMERC/industry specialists.*

The latest meeting was held in London in September 2016. The following items reflect discussions at MCG (full minutes will be circulated appropriately) - and/or associated items that are of interest to Members and training centres. The items are placed according to size - not in any 'priority' order.

Syllabus updates to AMERC Administration Handbook: The AMERC Administration Handbook has been updated to reflect changes in the GOC, ROC and LRC syllabi and including, for example, the inclusion of the Inmarsat-C Performance Verification Test (PVT - which will be reflected in the new GOC examination series).

Admiralty Digital Radio Signals (ADRS1345 and ADRS6): A guide to using ADRS1345 and ADRS6 for training and OPT examination tasks - for GOC, ROC and LRC - has been included in the 'Resource' links section of the AMERC webpage (accessible to those with login credentials). Recognised training and examination centres are reminded that a (time-limited) demonstration licence is available free through UKHO distributors and that very favourable pricing is also available to recognised training centres choosing this 'digital' route when replacing ALRS paper publications (ALRS Vol's 1,3,5 and/or 6)

MCA Safety Bulletin No.8: Attention is drawn to MCA Safety Bulletin Number 8, issued in September 2016, regarding Interference with Maritime Radio Reception by Onboard Equipment.

AMERC Expenses Claim Form: a small number of people have reported difficulties with the automatic mileage calculation part of the latest AMERC Expenses Claim Form. It appears that they are either:

(a) viewing the PDF form within a web browser - this is the default behaviour for many modern browsers (Chrome, Edge etc.), or

(b) using a PDF reader, but not Adobe Acrobat Reader.

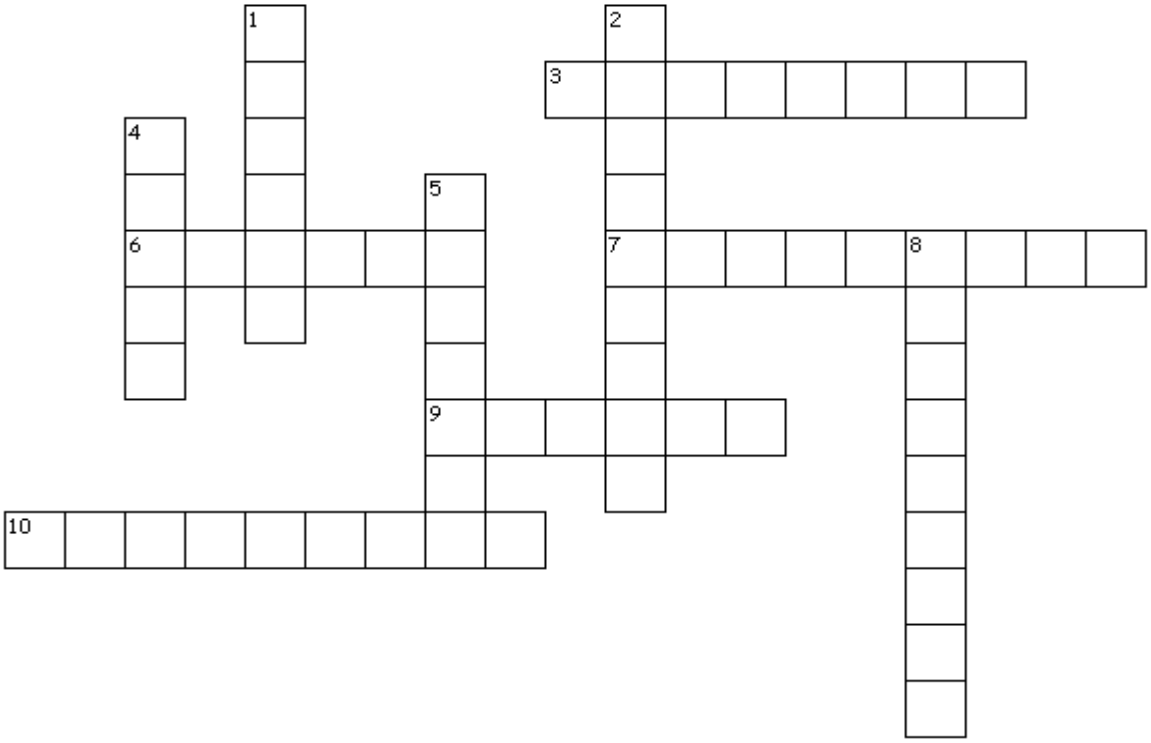
The advice is to use Acrobat Reader - this is available as a free download for all popular operating systems. Following Acrobat Reader installation, it may be necessary for individuals continuing to experience difficulties to configure their web browser to use Acrobat Reader rather than the browser's built-in PDF reader. The following Adobe link provides some advice on how to do this: https://helpx.adobe.com/acrobat/kb/pdf-browser-plugin-configuration.html

'Revalidation': It was noted that some GMDSS certificate-holders are presenting themselves at training centres and asking for 'revalidation' training. UK-issued GMDSS certificates are 'for life' and do not need revalidation. The only 'revalidation' associated with our GMDSS certificates is the 'STCW Endorsement' on the appropriate page(s) of the GMDSS certificate. Any certificate-holder who opts to take the examination again will only be issued with a new certificate if they surrender their existing one. Existing certificates will ***not*** be 'endorsed' to reflect the fact that they have passed the examination again. AMERC and the MCA are in consultation to establish how best to accommodate 'refresher' training and/or 're-assessment' examinations within the current system.

GMDSS Examination Statistics – quarterly report: National Administration Centre (NAC) examination statistics for the period ***1st April 2016 – 24th June 2016*** are shown below:

EXAMINATION	ENTERED	(1st time)	PASSED (1st attempt)		% PASSED 1ST ATTEMPT	
UK GOC	294	(264)	262	(240)	240/264	(>90%)
ALL GOC	515	(470)	465	(428)	428/470	(>91%)
UK ROC	37	(34)	33	(31)	31/34	(>91%)
ALL ROC	43	(40)	39	(37)	37/40	(>92%)
LRC	48	(47)	46	(45)	45/47	(>95%)

GMDSS Criss-Crossword Number 59 - all answers should be researched and/or confirmed by reference to ALRS/ADRS, ***where appropriate.*** Readers might also like to test their knowledge of international geography by using the the 'Triviaplaza geography quizzes' website (where you might also find one or more of the answers required below).



Down

1. NAVTEX station covering western areas of (1-down) and situated on the island of the same name.
2. Longest free-flowing river in the United States of America?
4. NAVTEX ID letter for station at (10-across).
5. Country known as 'South West Africa' until 1968.
8. MMSI for HF DSC Station situated at (1-down).

Across

3. Fishing port in south west (5-down) that also caters for the needs of the offshore diamond industry.
6. Gulf of ..... - body of water to the east of (9-across).
7. MMSI for HF DSC Station in the country immediately south of (5-down).
9. Sea into which (2-down) flows.
10. (6,3) Largest port in (5-down).

Issue 58 answers – *with hyperlinks*:
DOWN: 1. AORE; 2 Ordu; 3. 002500100; 5. EastBlackSea.
ACROSS: 2. 002712000; 4. Quebec; 6. FoylePort; 7. Londonderry; 8. MalinHead; 9. Samsun; 10. Alfa.

Explanation Please?

This is the area for questions that may puzzle you – whether you're a trainer without a specific 'radio' background; a seagoing operator who's finding that the 'real world' doesn't seem to be fully in-tune with what you learned in the classroom (or with what you've read in publications – official or otherwise); or because it's not particularly clear why a specific answer to a question on the 'AMERC Quiz' is necessary when it appears that one of the other answers may also appear appropriate. *Note that those of you who have access to our 'EXAMINER'S FORUM' on the AMERC website can open-up and discuss any subject/question that they have an issue with* ☺

Question:

I was told during GMDSS training that I should not '*normally*' ACK a DSC Distress Alert (or voice Distress Call) on High Frequency (HF) - which implies that there may be occasions when I *can* ACK on HF (but I can't remember what, if any, circumstance might have been explained in class – it was some time ago). Could you explain/ expand?

Answer:

Any vessel using HF for a Distress Alert would (normally) be using HF as his 'ship-to-shore' alert from an A3/A4 area (and would – time permitting – normally follow-up on MF/VHF for the subsequent ship-to-ship alerting).

HF uses 'sky wave' propagation for this 'long range' ship-to-shore contact – which will cause a HF Distress Alert to activate alarms in a number of coast stations; but also (by default as an 'all stations' alert) onboard a large number of vessels - the vast majority being too far away to offer help in the form of 'rescue'.

If a receiving vessel decided to Acknowledge (the Ack' – again by default - being an 'all stations' transmission) ... they themselves would then be generating alarms onboard very many other vessels most of which, again, would not be in any position to help. And that 'Ack' would also be 'cancelling' any 'repeat' Distress Alert from the casualty (by 'resetting' their kit). If more than one receiving vessel went into 'ACK' mode then pandemonium (in the form of 'data clashes' on the frequency being used) would result.

You'll have been told (during the training course) that, on receiving a DSC Distress Alert on HF, you should listen on the associated voice channel (i.e. the voice distress frequency on the same band as the DSC Distress Alert was received) - to make sure that the casualty does make contact with a shore station. The sky-wave propagation range will be the same for DSC and Voice, so you should hear the vessel and will know that contact has been established with a coast station/RCC.

If the vessel does not appear to have made voice contact with shore, and the DSC Distress Alert is received a second time (implying that there has been no DSC ACK from shore, which would have 'reset' the casualty DSC kit) – you should then 'relay ashore' by any appropriate method. In this situation it's possible that the shore authority (should they continue to fail to contact the casualty) might ask you to make direct contact with the casualty on HF. This would be attempted initially on the voice channel but, if no contact achieved and the DSC Distress Alert continues then, in this circumstance, it might be appropriate to send a DSC Distress Acknowledgement (and continue to update the shore authority on the developing situation).

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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 something to hit. Submissions may be edited, and the writer's name will, of course, be withheld on request.

Dateline: Fishing Vessel Radio Survey - North East Scotland – October 2013
Time: On commencement of survey.
Frequency: Five-yearly.

Bad batteries?

Picture the scene.
This class of fishing vessel is only required to be surveyed once every five years.
On arrival the skipper offered full assistance in the form of a strong cup of coffee and a chat.
The chat centred around the fact that he did not believe in repairing things - if they were broken then he would have them replaced.
Indeed he had just replaced his VHF/DSC and it was working fine.
The only slight problem was that one of the wires had come off the battery, but everything was working well on the vessels main power.
I informed the skipper that the purpose of the Radio Survey was to ensure that all GMDSS kit would work if the ship main supplies failed, and that I would have to test the radios using the batteries.
Skipper then called for his Chief Engineer 'Jimmie'. A head popped round the corner in answer to the call.
'*Jimmie, can you reconnect that battery lead*?' asked the Skipper.
'*There is more than one lead come off*' responded Jimmie.
Coffee finished, I started the survey - heading straight for the battery box behind the wheelhouse.
On opening the lid, this is what I found:

Note especially that the corrosion has eaten through the connector at the top right.
They had tried to clean up the other connectors but had given up.
The moisture is electrolyte, though I shudder to think how it got there.
Needless to say - they did not pass the survey.
On my revisit, two of the 6V batteries had been replaced, but they had managed to restore the other two to an acceptable condition.
Somehow I do not think these batteries were given the mandatory monthly checks.

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Maritime Miscellaneous 1: ***New international maritime VHF channel numbering for USA's "A" channels (simplex use of duplex-channel frequencies)***

The US has long used the ship transmit side of internationally duplex VHF channels, using the suffix "A" to indicate this difference. This use has not been internationally recognized. Consequently radios on some foreign ships in US waters could not (for example) use the US Coast Guard channel 22A or the VTS channel 05A. Most modern VHF radios now have a "**USA / INT** switch" to overcome this problem.

The ITU World Radio Conference in 2015 amended their VHF maritime plan legally recognizing simplex use of duplex channels on a world-wide basis, not just in the USA. The good news is that our peculiar use of these channels is no longer peculiar. Our use is recognized by ITU and past interoperability problems should no longer occur. The bad news is the four-digit scheme ITU decided to use to designate such channels will be unfamiliar to most mariners.

The ITU designation for USA's "A" channels is the prefix "10". For example, channel 22A is now channel 1022 and channel 05A is 1005. Other "A" channels used in the US are 01A, 07A, 18A, 19A, 20A, 21A, 23A, 78A, 79A, 80A, 81A, 82A, 83A and 88A. Each of these channels will now be designated by the prefix "10" rather than the suffix "A". Simplex use of the coast transmit side of a duplex channel, not used in the USA but used in Canada, will now be designated by the prefix "20".

The Europeans are updating their EN standard 301925 for Marine Electronics Directive (SOLAS) radios and EN 301025 for non-SOLAS radios to use this new four-digit channel scheme. When these channels are used, these radios will show the four digit channel number in their display. No decision has yet been made regarding VHF handhelds. Most radios should continue to have the US/International mode option.

Neither the FCC nor any existing US standard currently requires four-digit channels, but radios intended for sale internationally will likely have that capability.

NAVCEN has updated their US VHF channel http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=mtVhf webpage noting this change. More information regarding the four-digit numbering is available on the bottom of their narrowband webpage http://www.navcen.uscg.gov/?pageName=vhfnb. We plan to update the international VHF maritime radio webpage at NAVCEN to include this new ITU WRC15 requirement within the next few days.

[With thanks to Joe Hersey – regular contributor to Glenn Dunstan's GMDSS forum, on US GMDSS and related matters.]

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Maritime Miscellaneous 2: ***McMurdo Launches Online MEOSAR Knowledge Center to Increase Awareness of Next-Gen Search and Rescue System***

New web portal to educate global audience on status, functionality, benefits of emerging satellite-based life-saving system.

Lanham, Maryland – June 29, 2016 – McMurdo, the world's most trusted name in emergency readiness and response, announced today that it has launched a web-based MEOSAR Knowledge Center.

The site is a dynamic information portal for MEOSAR (Medium Earth Orbit Search and Rescue), the next generation version of the Cospas-Sarsat international search and rescue (SAR) satellite system that has helped to save over 40,000 lives since 1982. Distress beacon owners, government agencies, media groups and other SAR-related personnel globally will be able to track the progress of MEOSAR's deployment and better understand its functionality through a variety of informational and educational materials.

"*As the premier supplier of end-to-end Cospas-Sarsat solutions, McMurdo is proud to continue building awareness of MEOSAR and the significant benefits that it brings to the search and rescue community*," said Remi Julien, McMurdo President. "*We started by showcasing a working MEOSAR system in our world-leading, state-of-the-art Emergency Readiness and Response Experience Center last year, and now we are launching this online digital gateway so that critical MEOSAR information is available to a more widespread, worldwide audience*"

Visitors to the online MEOSAR Knowledge Center will have access to information including:

- MEOSAR roll-out and deployment schedule status
- MEOSAR benefits and its impact on existing SAR products, technologies and systems
- MEOSAR's role in SAR initiatives such as the European Commission's HELIOS project to develop next generation 406MHz beacon solutions
- Use case examples including the first MEOSAR-related rescue story
- Educational webinars, presentations and press articles
- Important Cospas-Sarsat resources and materials

When fully deployed in the next few years, MEOSAR will greatly improve the existing SAR process with global coverage, near-instantaneous distress beacon detection and a unique Return Link Service feature that acknowledges distress signal receipt. MEOSAR's advanced technologies, for example, will be able to accurately detect and locate a distress beacon signal almost instantaneously instead of taking 45 minutes or longer today. McMurdo recently installed the first MEOSAR systems in the U.S., Australia, New Zealand and other countries around the world (press releases on these installations can be found at http://www.mcmurdogroup.com/company/news-events/press-releases/).

"*Our decades of experience in pioneering the latest SAR advancements, our leadership position as the only company that provides an end-to-end SAR ecosystem and our ongoing commitment to saving lives put us in the unique position to provide continuous education on important subjects such as MEOSAR,"* added Julien.

Visit the MEOSAR Knowledge Center and sign up to receive the McMurdo MEOSAR Newsletter at http://www.mcmurdogroup.com/meosar-knowledge-center/.

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