



## Editorial

Welcome to issue 60 of AMERC News - *which doubles as **Circular 277** 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 two items from the Chief Examiner, in particular an explanation of the **process for developing and updating examination papers** – with emphasis on the timescales and processes for future examination series; and also his observations on particular issues identified during centre visits with **accessing ‘live signals’ for the SSB Radio**; and associated **poor demonstration of ‘gain’ and ‘fine tune’ controls.**

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, including a reminder about the [‘Triviaplaza world geography quiz’](#) identified by Chris Harrison and first introduced in News number 59.

**Explanation Please?** (Page 4) has questions on ‘lightning protection’; the use of ‘Over’ in a voice message’; and using ‘NNNN’ as termination characters for Inmarsat-C messages.

**Tales from the Key-Side; Member Profile(s)** and **Maritime Miscellaneous** are all ‘resting’ for this edition.

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!

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## NEW MEMBER APPLICATIONS?

A reminder that the annual cut-off date for new member applications – for full or associate membership – is rapidly approaching!

All new applications must be with the Secretary by 31<sup>st</sup> January 2017. The process starts with you completing the online ‘registration form’ at <http://www.amerc.ac.uk/join.php>

Following which full details will come to you from the Secretary.

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 December 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.

**Examination Papers Process:** The (fully-moderated and proof-read) 2017-18 papers were introduced online during October 2016, to give centres time to prepare for their introduction on 1st January 2017. This had followed a consultation period (Sep-Oct 2015) and production of draft papers – which were ‘trialled’ at Examiner’s Panel in June 2016. Final drafts were then produced and proof-read before posting V1 papers online.

Centres are reminded of the development process which - for the 2019-20 series - will begin during 2017, when input will be asked from all centres and examiners (consultation period September-October 2017).

Following that consultation period, new draft papers will be produced by the Moderation Panel and ‘trialled’ at Examiner’s Panel in June 2018 – after which final drafts will be produced for ‘proof reading’ – allowing the final version to be posted online in the secure area of the AMERC website in a timely manner for a January 2019 implementation.

Meanwhile: the Chief Examiner and NAC will be monitoring results of current exams, to identify any possible anomalies and/or other issues that might be revealed.

Noted that we tend not to make ‘wholesale changes’ to existing papers, but rather we aim to make incremental improvements – in an attempt to avoid ‘fixing’ one problem, just to replace it with another.

**Chief Examiner Visits – Issues?:** During his regular centre visits, the Chief Examiner has identified issues in some centres with ‘live signal’ sourcing - and associated poor demonstration of ‘gain’ and ‘fine tune’ controls on the SSB Radio.

Centres using live equipment (as opposed to simulation) must have a suitable receive-antenna arrangement that will allow reception of a ‘live’ radio signal (e.g. a marine radio station; aeronautical radio station; or a broadcast station).

Centres using simulators (e.g. Transas) are advised to install the ‘RNLI Fix’ radio signal - as written and provided by Steve Howard (contact details on the AMERC website).

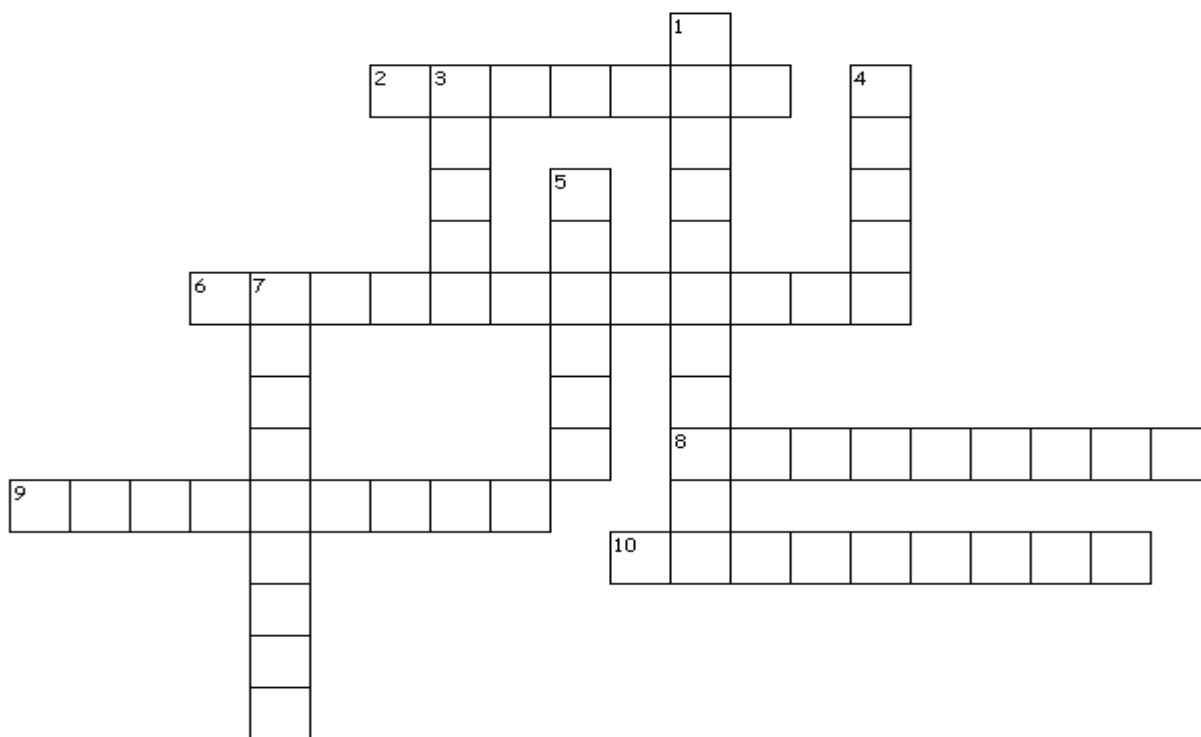
A reminder for ‘live’ equipment users using a ‘broadcast’ station for this demonstration – the ‘fine tune/clarifier’ control will not make any change to the signal unless you switch from H3E to J3E (to prevent the receiver ‘locking-on’ to the carrier frequency).

A further reminder (AMERC News 58 refers) that there is a ‘Useful Links’ area on the AMERC Website where Members/Instructors/Examiners who have ‘login’ authority can access some excellent ‘demo’ clips explaining radio and satcom equipment controls, setting-up etc – including the ‘gain’ and ‘fine tune’ controls that seem to be giving problems for centres who don’t have an ex-RO on the staff. Instructors who have a specific question can also make use of the ‘Explanation Please’ section of AMERC News. If you have a problem, someone else will probably appreciate the explanation!

**GMDSS Examination Statistics – quarterly report:** National Administration Centre (NAC) examination statistics for the period **1<sup>st</sup> July 2016 – 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016** are shown below:

EXAMINATION	ENTERED	(1 <sup>st</sup> time)	PASSED (1 <sup>st</sup> attempt)	% PASSED 1 <sup>ST</sup> ATTEMPT
UK GOC	223	(201)	196 (176)	176/201 (>87%)
ALL GOC	456	(424)	418 (388)	388/424 (>91%)
UK ROC	22	(21)	21 (20)	20/21 (>95%)
ALL ROC	27	(26)	26 (25)	25/26 (>96%)
LRC	21	(21)	19 (19)	19/21 (>90%)

**GMDSS Criss-Crossword Number 60** - 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. River separating (6 across) from Portugal
- 3. NAVTEX ID letter for station on (10 across)
- 4. Major port city on (6 across), originally founded as a Phoenician trading post. Location of a VHF DSC station remotely controlled by (10 across)
- 5. Local-language NAVTEX ID for station at (2 across).
- 7. MMSI for primary-service DSC station operated by CCR station on (10 across)

**Across**

- 2. With terminals for containers, coke, coal, ore, Ro-Ro and crude oil - is this the largest comprehensive port in northern China?
- 6. Spain's 'Coast of Light'?
- 8. Port at the southern end of (6 across)
- 9. MMSI for DSC station on (10 across) - operated by the MRCC and providing a complimentary service to the CCR DSC station.
- 10. Port, MRCC, DSC and NAVTEX station on the island of Gran Canaria

**Issue 59 answers – with hyperlinks:**

**DOWN:** 1. [Kodiak](#); 2 [Kuskokwim](#); 4. [Bravo](#); 5. [Namibia](#); 8. [003669899](#).

**ACROSS:** 3. [Luderitz](#); 6. [Alaska](#); 7. [006010001](#); 9. [Bering](#); 10. [WalvisBay](#).

## 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:** With regards to bad weather and electrical storms, most of the modern GMDSS systems do not appear to offer lightning protection. If the option for isolating or grounding the aerial was available how is the vessel legally w.r.t. SOLAS and GMDSS watch-keeping?

**Answer:** [From one of our Radio Surveyor members]. Most modern GMDSS sets ground themselves when switched off. Manufacturers recommend switching them off during lightning storms. This would indeed prevent a DSC watch being maintained.

Some manufacturers do build in lightning protection as basic spark gap modules which deflect lightning strikes to earth while instantly disconnecting the antenna circuit, like a fuse operating and grounding the circuit, so reducing the risk from lightning. However, this was always the case. We would ground both Tx and Rx aerials during severe lightning storms.

As to legality of this action ,,,,,?, I will let you know if I find out anything.

**Question:** I read in different (respected) publications that a voice 'Distress (Mayday) message' includes the word 'Over' at the end of the message – but see in Radio Regulations (specifically RR32.13D – Edition of 2016 and earlier editions) that the message actually ends with '*any other useful information*' - but does not specify 'over'. Which is correct and, more importantly, what should we be teaching in class?

**Answer:** The Radio Regulation is correct in that the 'message' (which consists of the information being passed) is complete before the 'invitation to reply' (the word 'Over') is appended. The respected publications to which you refer are not disputing what is contained in the message – rather they are showing the complete procedure (which, in the case of a 'Mayday' message, would invariably invite reply).

Regarding what should be taught in class: we should be teaching the procedure - which will include the word 'Over' when the message is complete. We should also be teaching the difference between the 'call' (address) and 'message' (information being passed) – but, hopefully, in such a way as to avoid unnecessary confusion to our delegates, who have a lot of information to process in a relatively short time. Over-use of terms like 'Radio Regulations' can raise fears in some delegates, who might think the information they are about to receive might be 'too difficult' - purely because of that 'label'.

**Question:** I see on the end of all received NAVTEX messages, the termination characters 'NNNN' - and also read in various publications that 'NNNN' should be used to terminate all Inmarsat-C messages. Is 'NNNN' a required part of the Inmarsat-C message? Should we be teaching it in class?

**Answer:** When using Inmarsat-C, the characters NNNN – like 'Over' in a voice message – is not a part of the 'message' but, as you state, the 'termination characters'. In some (store-and-forward) systems – including Inmarsat-C - if a message is not terminated with NNNN (or other recognised termination characters), the message might be forwarded with a statement that '*this message may be incomplete*'. For this reason, the taught procedure for Inmarsat-C should include the 'termination characters' NNNN (and which, for a routine message, would normally be separated from the 'message' by a 'signature').

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