



Editorial

Welcome to issue 62 of AMERC News - *which doubles as **Circular 280** 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) which coincided with the **Annual General Meeting (AGM)** and associated **Examiners' Panel** – Combined report starting on Page 2 and includes a brief on: **the Company Secretary's Report; MNTB Technical Committee Report; Chief Examiner's Report** – which itself included a reminder of the required GOC course length – and the age requirement for entry to the GOC/ROC exam. Also covered were: **the use of Simulators for training and examinations**; a pointer to the '**Resources**' section of the AMERC Website; a pointer to the **Revised GK-paper practice template**; and a request from the National Administration Centre regarding '**legibility**' issues with exam' application forms. This is followed by a discussion on the new OPT Pre-sailing Checklist; an item on the 'battery load test'; and an update on **Exam Series 2017-18 and 2019-20 revision/production**.

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

Page 4 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 5) has questions on the **limit of range at which Distress Alerts should sound alarms** onboard receiving vessels; **using NNNN to terminate Sat-C messages** - and a photo taken by a radio surveyor of **a very dodgy ATU**.

Tales from the Key-Side, Member Profile(s) and Maritime Miscellaneous are all 'resting' – though some photo's of **a certain promiscuous Teddy-bear** attending AGM Dinner are present.

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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AMERC AGM/Examiners' Panel 2018

The dates for AGM and associated Examiners Panel for 2018 are

Wednesday-Friday June 13th-15th.

Location and venue to be confirmed.

Note that this Examiners' Panel will include a review of the updated General Knowledge and associated examination material for the 2019-20 series, and that all centres are expected to have an examiner in attendance to take part in that review.

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 Liverpool in June 2017, along with the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Examiners' Panel. The following items reflect discussions at MCG (full minutes will be circulated appropriately) - and/or associated items from AGM and Examiners' Panel that are of interest to Members and training centres. The items are placed according to size - not in any 'priority' order.

Company Secretary's Report: The Company Secretary's report include items on the AMERC fees to be charged for (e.g.) Chief Examiner visits outwith the normal audit cycle (e.g. where a subsequent visit is required to check on non-compliances); a more comprehensive review programme for new simulator applications/new releases; updates to the AMERC Administration Handbook; the MCA/AMERC Contract; and a request that Members' check their contact details as recorded on the AMERC website.

MNTB Technical Committee report: includes a number of items – the one most likely to concern AMERC members being the "Electro Technical Officer Cadet Training Standard" – a copy of the draft can be provided to interested AMERC members, on request, from Kevin Walsh.

Chief Examiner's Annual Report: included a reminder that the UK GOC course length is 60 hours, including 2.5 hours for examination (meaning contact time for the actual training days is still 57.5 hours). Noted also that the MNTB definition of a 'training day' is one which cannot be in excess of 10 hours, including all relevant breaks – and with no more than 8 contact hours; which means that it is impossible to provide those 57.5 hours in a seven-day programme.

There was a reminder that, in order to qualify for the issue of a UK GMDSS Certificate, the applicant must be at least 18 years old – this requirement being clearly stated in [MSN 1864 'Training & Certification Guidance: UK Requirements for Radio Operators'](#) – which also lists the other requirements.

Use of Simulation for Training and Exams: The Chief Examiner again stressed that, although it is acceptable for delegates to 'toggle' between different items of equipment during training sessions – this 'toggling' is not acceptable for examinations where each item of 'equipment' must 'stand-alone' (just as it would be onboard a vessel).

AMERC Website 'RESOURCES': The availability of a 'resources' section on the AMERC website was also highlighted. This 'login' area is open to all members/examiners and has, in addition to the improved and updated 'live signal modification' for Transas simulators: a number of other resources that provide demo's on using various items of marine radio kit; a 'quick guide' to using Admiralty Digital Radio Signals; links to online Software Defined Radio (SDR) sites - to visually demonstrate normally difficult to convey concepts such as Bandwidth and Sidebands; HF Propagation prediction tools; and a downloadable poster (with QR code) that you can post in the classroom to make it easy for your delegates to access the ['AMERC GMDSS Quiz'](#) on their mobile devices.

New 'practice GK paper' template: a revised 'mock exam' template has been added to the 'e-clear' documents section of the AMERC website. This revised template makes it clear that centres must write their own questions and not directly use actual questions from current or recent exam series. Centres may base their questions on GK scenarios up to and including the 2011-13 series.

NAC request: the National Administration Centre again stressed the need for Application Forms to be complete – and legible! An email address should be included to allow the NAC to contact the candidate to resolve any issues directly and efficiently with them.

AGM/Examiners' Panel items – continued:

OPT 'pre-sailing checklist': there was considerable discussion on the use of the 'pre-sailing checklist' for the Page-1 tasks of the Operational Performance Test (OPT), during Examiners' Panel - with notable differences of opinion on: (a) the value of this checklist; (b) how that part of the exam should be conducted; and (c) whether there should be more leeway for different centres in how they applied the checklist.

The actual list of tasks on the (GOC/ROC/LRC) OPT itself was praised – but the issue of 'candidate-led' versus 'examiner-led' seems to have resulted in considerable differences of application/opinion in different centres.

Application of the template will be monitored by the Chief Examiner during centre visits.

Battery 'load test': the lack of 'H3E' mode on most modern SSB radio equipment, and hence on modern simulators, has led to challenges on how the ship's 'radio operator' could effectively 'load' the battery bank – in the absence of a 'load test' tool - to check the internal condition of the batteries. Various suggestions (and explanations) of how this is might be done – including a method used by a practising radio surveyor included:

(a) monitoring the voltage drop whilst sending a routine DSC call on 2177kHz - to a (hopefully) fictional ship's MMSI; and

(b) monitoring the voltage drop when conducting the weekly 'DSC test call' to a coast station. This second suggestion was from one of our members who is a practicing radio surveyor and, when he does this as part of the annual radio survey (which goes further than an onboard operator test), he performs two DSC test calls, separated by about one hour, to check any change in voltage drop.

Note that, regardless of method, the battery charger would have been switched-off and the batteries allowed to 'settle' prior to loading. Other suggestions welcome!

Finally – I've just done the (single) 'DSC test call' method on my 'Transas Tutor' at home. With battery charger 'on' the voltmeter read 28.9V; charger off 26.4 and quickly 'settled' to 25.2; initiated the 'test call' to a Coast Station and quickly 'toggled' back to the voltmeter to see it drop to 23.9V and, when the call completed, back up to 25.1V. Yes, I had to 'toggle' on the tutor pack but (presumably) with a network version in 'examination mode' – which would 'link' all units as a single installation, toggling shouldn't be necessary?

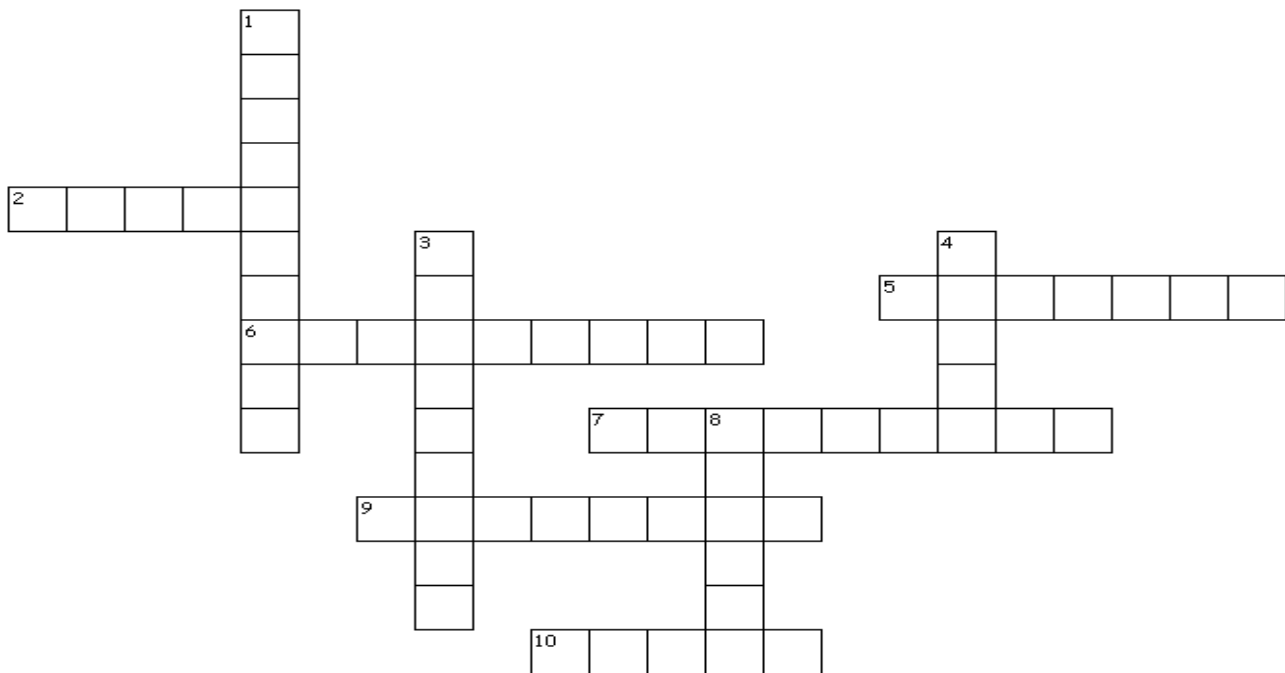
Exam Series 2017-18 and 2019-20: Centres should have received an email from the Chief Examiner pointing to Version 2 of the current (2017-18) GOC GK papers; and changes to some LRC papers - within the e-docs section of the AMERC website. These revised papers should be used with immediate effect. It is intended to post Version 3 for use from January 1st 2018.

The consultation period for the 2019-20 series will take place (as is normal) during September-October 2017 and a new series produced in time for introduction on 1st January 2019.

GMDSS Examination Statistics – quarterly report: National Administration Centre (NAC) examination statistics for the period **1st January 2017 – 31st March 2017** are shown below:

| EXAMINATION | ENTERED | (1 st time) | PASSED | (1 st attempt) | % PASSED | 1 ST ATTEMPT |
|-------------|---------|------------------------|--------|---------------------------|----------|-------------------------|
| UK GOC | 248 | (215) | 209 | (181) | 181/215 | (>84%) |
| ALL GOC | 488 | (437) | 431 | (385) | 385/437 | (>88%) |
| UK ROC | 34 | (34) | 34 | (34) | 26/26 | (100%) |
| ALL ROC | 49 | (48) | 48 | (47) | 47/48 | (>97%) |
| LRC | 33 | (32) | 32 | (31) | 31/32 | (>96%) |

GMDSS Criss-Crossword Number 62 - 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 [‘Triviaplaza geography quizzes’](http://www.triviaplaza.com/geography-quiz) website (where you might also find one or more of the answers required below).



Down

- 1. State in North East Australia
- 3. Port city in (1-down) bordered by Curtis Island, Facing Island and South Trees Island
- 4. Port city on the island of Mindanao, Philippines.
- 8. Navarea/Metarea in which (4-down) is situated

Across

- 2. Navarea coordinator for (8-down)
- 5. ‘Ocean Region’ (satellite) providing SafetyNET service for (9-across)
- 6. (4,5) Designation letters for the two SafetyNET Coastal Navigational Warning area broadcasts for (1-down).
- 7. (5,3) Philippines Port Authority project pursuing the use of renewable energy in all its controlled ports nationwide.
- 9. (5,3) Ocean area off the coast of (1-down)
- 10. Metarea coordinator for the more-western part of (8-down)

Issue 61 answers – with hyperlinks:

DOWN: 1. [CaboDeLaNao](#); 3 [RioTejo](#); 4. [OO211124O](#);

ACROSS: 2. [Tortosa](#); 5. [OO2241O24](#) 6. [Emse](#); 7. [Emden](#); 8. [RioEbro](#); 9. [Tarragona](#); 10. [PapaSierra](#) –
and see *ADRS1345/ALRS Vol 5 man!*

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 'GMDSS EXAMINER FORUM' on the AMERC website can open-up and discuss any subject/question that they have an issue with ☺*

Question: Reference Page 4 of AMERC News Issue 59: Discussion of DSC communications.

I thought that the latest shipboard DSC gear would ignore a received Distress Alert if the position of the vessel in distress was more than 500 miles away from the receiving vessel's position. Have you ever heard anything like this?

Answer: (with thanks to Michael Moir – practicing Radio Surveyor) – 'I did a bit more digging into the technical ITU spec on DSC and found the following statement in paragraph 12.1 of ITU-r M493-14, referring to the "Shipborne aural alarm":

'Distress calls and urgency calls should activate an alarm. For HF and MF distress calls, the alarm should activate only when a distress alert, distress acknowledgement, or a distress alert relay is received and the distress position is within 500 NM (926 km) of the receiving vessel's position, or if the distress position is in the polar areas (latitude greater than 70°N or 70°S. The alarm should also activate when the call is received and the distance between the vessel in distress and the receiving vessel cannot be determined.'

So – in 'normal' circumstances (valid position included in the Distress Alert from the casualty; and position up to date in the receiving vessel's equipment) – you are correct – alarms shouldn't sound unless the two vessels concerned are within 500 NM. Noted that, as Michael had to dig deep to find this info, I wouldn't be surprised to find that some (particularly older) kit might not comply!

Question: I see in various publications that the characters NNNN should be used at the end of Inmarsat-C messages, but can only find reference to this in 'to-ship' publications like the NAVTEX and SafetyNET manuals. Is it necessary to use NNNN when sending Inmarsat-C messages 'from ship'?

Answer: (from the Inmarsat Safety Manager) – it is recommended that you end all Inmarsat-C, from-ship messages, with NNNN. When your terminal instigates a contact with the LES (thru the NCS) the terminal does indicate the size of the message (amount of data) to be sent - and channel-time is allocated to cover this. However – when the LES receives the NNNN it does know that the message is complete and will forward it without further delay. If there happens to be an interruption on the channel before the message is complete (the LES will know that it has not received the expected amount of data) – a reconnection will be instituted to collect the remaining data before the message is forwarded. In this case the NNNN again helps to confirm that the message is complete.

Examiners please note – a 'Forum' question has been posted asking your opinion of how we might apply examination marks to the use of 'Over/Out' - and 'NNNN' - in exam' questions ... the Chief Examiner email mentioning this seems to have generated renewed interested in other items also on the forum ☺

Separate Item: The photo opposite was taken at the beginning of a Radio Survey. The logbook showed weekly DSC and RT tests as satisfactory!

'It is obviously dangerous to operate the MF/HF equipment with an antenna fault like this one'



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And finally ... that promiscuous Teddy-bear at AGM Dinner ...

