

AMERC NEWS

Incorporates Circular 226

June 2006

Issue Twenty-one — Read Inside

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AMERC NEWS is the Journal of the Association of Marine Electronics and Radio Colleges.
It is distributed to all Members, Associates and Affiliates of the Association.
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EDITORIAL

As I write it is but two weeks since the AGM at the RNLI College in Poole. This year it was held on the Saturday of the May 'long weekend,' driven primarily by availability at the College. The difficulties of travelling contributed in part to delegates resolving to revert to the custom of a Thursday AGM in 2007. The venue has yet to be decided but once it has we will be springing into action to let you know.

The format of the AGM is now well established and the business proceeded smoothly under Mike Webster's chairmanship. You can see elsewhere in this Issue the details of elections to the Executive Committee. There is no change in its make-up, reflecting the confidence of the Association in the individuals. Happily, prudent management of the budget with a degree of growth in membership and examinations conducted have meant that our finances have come back into surplus. Looking around I saw many familiar faces in the audience, and some new ones. The numbers of members of AMERC from outside the UK is growing and it was good to have with us ten delegates from overseas centres. We also admitted two organisations to full membership and one individual to associate membership.

We had an especially warm welcome for Roger Towner and colleagues from the MCA. AMERC as you know acts for the MCA and it is important for the Association to have the positive input that Roger et al give us. Together we have a confident, cordial and professional relationship and a measure of this is that Eric Lamb was invited to assist at this year's STW meeting.

The reports Eric and Sue had provided were used as guides for the discussions in the morning session. Circulating among the delegates later I was struck by how many were speaking positively about the proceedings. This year there were discussions of policy and structure as well as the detail of the current examinations. We are constrained by international agreements of course (as the revalidation discussions emphasised) but some syllabus changes could be agreed and were. More broadly a paper by Phil Davies promoted an important discussion on moving the OPT examination to scenario based questions. It caused sufficient interest to have it agreed that the format would be trialled in the Warsash series of examinations. It will be 2007 before it can move towards being adopted but it is a development that we shall watch and report on with interest. Later in the day the detailed work of constructing examinations began and this has been followed up by a meeting of examiners to hone the papers which will be sent to the parties concerned on a secure CD later this year.

It was good to reconnect with many of you again. I repeat what I said over the coffee cups - AMERC NEWS is the mouthpiece of the organisation, yours too, and we always appreciate copy.

Brian Cotton
Editor

CIRCULARS AND THE NEWS

AMERC NEWS has several functions - as an information source, members' forum, networker, mouthpiece, reporter, speculator and more. Sometimes the Hon. Secretary has the legal duty to approach members directly and there are occasional urgent needs for him to do so. If an Issue is pending the Hon. Secretary will commonly use AMERC NEWS as his vehicle for communication. It makes sense therefore to number AMERC NEWS in two ways - with an Issue number and a Circular number. Several members have been using filed back numbers of AMERC NEWS for information and so we reproduce below the last official AMERC Circular (225) to keep your files complete.

CIRCULAR 225

“Notice is given that the Annual General Meeting of the company will be held at the RNLI Lifeboat College, Poole, Dorset on Saturday 27th May, 2006. All posts on the Executive Committee are subject to re-election and nominations for these posts should be forwarded to the Honorary Secretary 28 days before the AGM, duly proposed and seconded.

Keith Mitchell
Honorary Secretary
20th March, 2006.

Please note that this will be the last communication using AMERC Ltd headed notepaper with Ward-Hadaway as the Registered Office. Our Registered Office has moved to Wray Castle in Kendal – more information will be available at AGM.”

To underscore this, here are the verbatim comments from the Chief Examiner's Report presented at AGM:

'REC Co-ordinators are again reminded that it is their responsibility to ensure that all examiners attached to their REC are fully briefed on current circulars, all aspects and any changes to examination procedures and guidelines. Regular meetings should be held, particularly with external examiners and those involved with outreach centres.'

This is taken seriously by the Maritime Board and are matters for check on the Chief Inspector's visit.

2006 AGM

The Association's 2006 AGM was held at the RNLi College at Poole on Saturday 27th May with in excess of forty attending. The Minutes will be distributed in due course, - it is in this Issue that we bring out some of the highlights of the discussions and decisions. Firstly to the business end....

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The following were elected for a one year period as the Association Officers and Members of the Executive Committee.

Officers of the Association

Mike Webster*	Chairman
Chris Harrison*	Vice Chairman
Keith Mitchell	Hon. Secretary
Julie Oates	Hon. Treasurer

Executive Committee Members

Phil Davies*
Willie Williamson*
Kevin Walsh*

*Also elected as a Director of AMERC Ltd.

MEMBERSHIP

The Meeting agreed unanimously to vote into Full Membership the following:

- Red Ensign Ltd., a training establishment based on the Isle of Wight.
- The Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI).
- Kim Holt of the RNLI as an Associate Member.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The annual membership fees for 2006 were agreed at AGM. These are to be £220 for Full Membership and £110 for Associate Membership.

2007 AGM

The date agreed for the 2007 AGM is Thursday 24th May. The venue has yet to be decided but Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Lowestoft have been mooted. Be sure to keep watching AMERC NEWS for updates.

FINANCE

Julie Oates, the Association's Hon. Treasurer presented a comprehensive report to the Meeting. There was a small surplus in 2005 as opposed to a loss the previous year. This was due to a rise in the number of examinations and to prudent management of the budget. The net worth of the Association has risen by near £3, 000 to £272,313. By contrast, last year it fell by £15, 000.

REGISTERED OFFICE

The Association's Registered Office has been transferred from Newcastle-upon-Tyne to Wray Castle Ltd. at Kendal. See Circular 225.

NAC REPORT AT AGM

Sue Jones of the AMERC NAC provided a comprehensive report at AGM using the statistics of the GMDSS examinations in the calendar year 2005, supplemented by a tabled paper. Quarterly returns in 2006 have been featured in AMERC NEWS.

The overall figures show a rise of 6% in the year on year figures from 2004 to 2005. In this time period, it can be seen that the GOC examinations rose by 7% while the ROC fell by 5% overall and more markedly by 16% in the UK. There was a marginal increase in LRC examinations but very few DSC and Satellite modules are sought. It is interesting to see the rise in numbers of papers taken in the Maintenance suite. Although examinations had been conducted for the British Marine Electronics Technician Certificate, the numbers have been small. If the Certificate becomes mandatory by 2007, the numbers may rise.

Sue praised the general standard of REC paperwork but left us with the following messages:

- Use full names on the Application Form, not the short forms. For example *James William Smith* is correct. *Jimmy Smith* is not.
- If a candidate has failed a component of the Sat Module, indicate his/her intention to retake the failed section/examination by marking the appropriate tick box.
- A collective cheque to cover separate examinations (e.g. GOCs and LRCs) is in order, as are other methods of payment such as BACS and credit cards. Overseas RECs may find it advantageous to have certificates returned using courier 'charge forward' rather than paying the courier fee to the NAC.

The Chairman, Chief Examiner and delegates all expressed heartfelt thanks to Sue for her willing and expert assistance.

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GMDSS EXAMINATION STATISTICS

In the last Issue (20) we omitted to mention that the quarterly statistics were for the period ending 31 December, 2005. We reproduce below the statistics for the period 1st January 2006 to 31st March 2006.

EXAMINATION	ENTERED	PASSED
UK GOC	207	162
ALL GOC	364	300
UK ROC	36	35
ALL ROC	48	46
LRC	111	104

THE EXAMINERS' PANEL AT AGM

The Chief Examiner's Report had been circulated as part of the AGM pack and was used as an agenda for discussion. What follows are some highlights from the Report and discussions, not everything said or decided have been recorded. It is therefore important to use the various minutes and official documents for authoritative and more detailed information. It was helpful to have the contributions of MCA colleagues Roger Towner, Denzyl Pereira and Rosemary Nelson at the Panel.

Opening the discussions, the Chairman stressed the fact that the Chief Examiner's role is to implement the recommendations and guidelines of the Examiners' Panel. He was thanked for his contribution to the Association's Quality Assurance methods. The Chief Examiner's analyses of the written papers had revealed few problems. The pass rates for GOC and ROC had fallen by about 2% but this was not significant. For the practical exercises, attention was drawn to the importance of tallying marks and noting the timings in the OPT examination. With the R/T examinations, REC Co-ordinators were reminded to include the examiners' marking sheets and logs when returning the scripts. In a number of cases more care should have been taken by examiners when checking the logs, especially the DSC Alert and Distress positions. In discussion, it was acknowledged that logging all R/T distress traffic is difficult. However, the Association believes that students must be taught and examined using the recognised international system, a view supported by the MCA. Your attention is drawn to the commentary relating to MGN 288 in this Issue.

Other discussions centred on the format and structure of the papers. Those adopted included using multi-choice questions for SOLAS in the ROC exercises while retaining the long questions. Phil Davies, from John Moores University tabled a paper and spoke to a proposition for a scenario based OPT examination. It was agreed that trials of the suggested new arrangements would be held at Warsash and that a report would be provided to the 2007 Examiners' Panel. It was also agreed that the telex exercises be removed from the OPT examination but that short questions relating to this topic area would be included in the SOLAS papers.

The Panel split into working groups and produced guides to the next series of papers which will be despatched to REC in December of this year. It was agreed that this would be in pdf format on CD. A sub-committee of the Panel met in June to draw up the next series; after scrutiny the papers will be despatched to REC in December.

If a problem with a question comes to light after distribution of the series this should be drawn to the attention of the Maritime Board which will then communicate any changes to REC Co-ordinators.

Co-ordinators should note that the Chief Examiners' Report includes the rota for his visits to REC and Outreach Centre Visits up to and including the year 2009.

MARITIME BOARD MATTERS

Maritime Board meetings were held in late March and just before the AGM. We review below some of the outcomes of those meetings and other matters which arose at the AGM itself.

REVALIDATION

Revalidating GMDSS certificates has been on the Association's agenda for some time. The Chief Examiner was asked to advise the MCA on this at the STW37 discussions and he provided a summary to the Maritime Board and the AGM. A written report was included in the pack. The UK is not able to isolate itself from any common EU position. The recommended way forward is that there should be onboard familiarisation with the equipment through the ship's SMS procedures. The proposed AMERC conference will not now go ahead.

APPLICATION FORMS

Sue Jones has picked up that a candidate had failed to declare a previous attempt at a GOC examination at another Centre. The Application Form is being amended to deal with this irregularity and Examiners must satisfy themselves as to the case.

GMDSS GUIDELINES

Some MNTB course guidelines have been revised and republished, including the GOC. These guidelines and others of interest to members can be viewed at the MNTB website:

www.mntb.org.uk/publications/

ACTIVE LIST

A GMDSS Examiner active in any capacity (e.g. as a double marker) is to remain on the Active List.

ETO

Phil Davies now represents the AMERC on the MNTB Technical Committee. With the introduction of Foundation Degrees, the Committee has been giving consideration to the Training Record Book (TRB) for ETOs. The TRB will follow the existing deck and engine models. SMarT funding for ETO trainees has been granted for first year graduate entry although with budgets oversubscribed.....

TST

The probationary period for TST, Italy has been successfully concluded.

CSOC

The Coast Station Operator's Certificate, that is. The Maritime Board has been taking an interest in the training methods and examinations for the CSOC conducted by HM Coastguard. Just before AGM, Eric Lamb went to the Coast Guard Centre at Highcliffe in Dorset for discussions and observations. The visit and discussions form part of a programme which will lead to AMERC giving its seal of approval to the CSOC. We will keep you posted on any progress.

M-NOTICES (1)

We continue our usual review of relevant MCA M-Notices that have appeared since the last Issue. This time we offer the selection with commentaries in some cases. It so happens that Notices have been published at the same time as other articles and developments have occurred

MSN 1795 (M) AIS CARRIAGE REQUIREMENTS

A Notice emphasising that AIS fittings should have been completed by the end of 2004. The accelerated schedule was brought about to enhance counter terrorism measures. The Notice quotes the IMO Solas Convention – ‘AIS should always be in operation when ships are underway or at anchor.’ It talks of exceptions but ultimately advises that the changes affect ships over 300 gt on international voyages.

MIN 231 (M+F) ACCURACY OF AIS TRANSMISSIONS

This Note expresses concern at reports of incorrect AIS data being transmitted by vessels. A danger that also weakens confidence in the system. Apart from technical problems there are operator errors from incorrect data input.

When incorrect data comes to light MRCC will contact vessels and if it remains remaining uncorrected, a report will be sent to the relevant port state authorities. The Note includes a form for reporting suspected AIS errors and says it is looking to VTS harbour authorities to alert users where there are inaccurate transmissions.

MGN 321 AIS: DOUBLE-ENDED FERRIES

This Note refers to ‘double-ended’ passenger ferries where the bow becomes the stern when sailing in the opposite direction. To retain accuracy of AIS on such vessels, the system heading must be switched to the reciprocal at the same time as navigation lights are changed for the reverse voyage. This means that the correctly oriented AIS icon will show to other vessels and shore stations.

The June Edition of Seaways carries an article, ‘AIS, Pirates and Maritime Terrorism.’ It is by Dr. Peter Lehr of the University of St. Andrew and discusses the dilemma of AIS being a beacon for terrorists as well as a navigation aid. It is an interesting and important article, well worth your attention, we say.

If you ask your Library for this copy, we suggest you call for the April Issue of Seaways as well. Here you will find troubling reports of an AIS left behind and transmitting from the dockside and another incorrectly set up. Look for MARIS 200618.

Seaways is the Journal of the Nautical Institute -Ed

M-NOTICES (2)

MIN 246 (M+F) RADAR RESEARCH

This Note relates how a working group reviewed the performance standard for marine radar. The current standard does not lay down performance levels for the detection of small objects in clutter.

The group modelled sea and rain clutter and developed a prototype device that simulated small targets. This is now being taken further with the intention of providing a standard for future radar testing and type approval.

MGN 320 (M+F) PIRATE BROADCASTING

This Guidance Note reminds seafarers that it is a punishable offence to establish and use a pirate broadcasting station onboard ship inside or outside UK territorial waters.

It is also a punishable offence to supply such stations and ferry personnel to them.

*In the March Edition of Seaways, a ship captain from Mumbai complains of Channel 16 in the Arabian Gulf being jammed with 'music and inane conversation.' He suggests IMO regulate for receivers to display the names and call signs of transmitting ships. **Just like my mobile 'phone - Ed***

MIN 232 (M+F) M-NOTICE AVAILABILITY

This Notice describes the categories of M-Notice:

- MSN – explaining or forming part of the merchant shipping regulations.
 - MGN – giving advice, guidance and strong recommendations about good practice
 - MIN – time limited information
- 'M' stands for merchant shipping and 'F' for fishing vessels.

The M-Notices must be onboard in either paper or electronic format and be available at all times to relevant personnel. MIN232 shows how they may be obtained or accessed.

MGN 288 (M+F) RADIO LOG BOOK

We mentioned MGN 288 and its examples of GMDSS Radio Logs in Issue 19. With the Chief Examiner expressing concerns about the marking of candidates' R/T logs, this Notice entered the discussions at AGM. It was universally agreed that the examples in the Notice are inappropriate and the MCA has agreed to look at them again. During the discussion we heard that MCA has a process for consultation on certain M-Notices and clarification of this is on its way to the Hon. Secretary.

MISCELLANY (1)

AIS AS NAVAI DS

The UK Department of Transport (DTp) has published a new strategy whereby AIS can be taken beyond its primary function of monitoring. It intends that AIS technology will act in a future 'e-navigation system.' The DTp strategy aims to put in place by 2010 a UK-wide network exploiting the full potential of AIS.

KEEP A LOOK OUT!

The Swedish P&I Club has published a report that highlights the danger of crews forgetting what might be called collision avoidance principles and assuming that tools such as AIS ECDIS and ARPA give all the information needed to perform a manoeuvre. Or even VHF for that matter. In one reported case two vessels were on a collision course. VHF had been used to try and negotiate a deviation from the Rules but a misidentification occurred i.e. communication and agreement with the wrong vessel. A collision was narrowly averted when the mistake was realised.

IET

The Institutions of Electrical Engineers and Incorporated Engineers have merged to form a new body. Known as the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) it will have some 160, 000 members. The IET title has been chosen to reflect the multidisciplinary nature of its membership. The IET will embrace chartered engineers, incorporated engineers and technicians.

EPIRB ALERTS

What appeared to be an EPIRB signal recently caused an extensive search by the RNLI and Solent Coastguard. Ofcom investigations showed that the signal came from a faulty television digibox and we understand that such erroneous signals are not uncommon. But there is good news in the press as well. Falmouth Coastguard received an EPIRB signal from a position more than 600 miles west of the Cape Verde Islands. It was from a couple sailing round the world in a catamaran. Falmouth Coastguard identified a tanker locally on passage to do the rescue, successfully we understand.

MOB HANDED

A contribution to personal safety on fishing vessels has been launched by the RNLI in conjunction with McMurdo Ltd. The MOB-Guardian system (MOB stands for Man Overboard) consists of a base unit, and crew personal safety devices (PSD). The base unit transmits via satellite, sending regular updates of the vessel's course, speed and position to the RNLI monitoring station. If regular updates are missed, SAR procedures are invoked. The PSD is worn by crew members automatically activating an onboard alarm and alerting the RNLI monitoring station if contact is lost. It can also be used as an onboard panic button and vibrates to let the wearer know of activation. There are plans to extend the use of MOB-Guardian to the leisure market. We understand Cecil Clark who sat on our Maritime Board before he retired developed the concept

MI SCELLANY (2)

EXCHANGE

A charity has been set up to fund industry placements for lecturing staff. The New Engineering Foundation is expected to fund staff from sixty colleges in a three year programme. So far 56 lecturers from twenty-seven colleges have applied. For further details, see:

www.neweng.org.uk

STAFF SHORTAGES

Across the globe, in excess of 4, 000 new ocean-going vessels are due to be commissioned in the next thirty-six months. This is equivalent to more than a quarter of the present day merchant fleet. Even allowing for the net gain being rather smaller due to scrapped vessels, this will inevitably produce a demand for extra seafarers. This will include a requirement for as many as 24, 000 *extra* officers.

With its share, the UK fleet has quadrupled in the last five years and shipping is now a £37 billion UK industry. Recruitment to college vacancies can be troublesome, though. To encourage entry for the planned annual intake of 600 UK students, the foundation degree course has opportunities for sponsorship with bursaries and fees abatements.

ONLINE BOOKS

The British Library has teamed up with Microsoft to digitise 25 million pages to provide searchable electronic content.

CHIRP

From time to time we have reported on relevant articles in 'Maritime CHIRP Feedback.' It is a quarterly publication in which individuals report on experiences and situations which appeared to be unsafe. The reports are then subject to comment. Maritime CHIRP has secured funding to continue beyond its initial trial period which ended in March 2006.

LAST SURVIVOR

Nicholas Swarbrick died in February aged 107. Nicholas who lived near Preston was the oldest survivor from World War I and the Merchant Navy. He was the last Radio Officer. from that era.

RADIO AMATEUR LICENCE

Ofcom has now ruled that a radio amateur licence will be issued for life provided there have been no changes in its conditions. Every five years, the licence holder will need to confirm that there have been no changes to the details. Electronic licences will be issued free, paper ones will be charged.

DOWNLOAD

For interesting articles have a look at www.tankeroperator.com, including its back numbers. It often features current technology and training centres.

NEWS OF PEOPLE

DAVID TURNER

Members will be sorry to hear that David Turner has retired from his post at Plymouth College. David had nearly ten years on the Association's Electronics & Communications Board. For much of that time he chaired the Board which had many achievements as members will know.

The Association sends David its good wishes and takes the opportunity to thank him for his past service.

BILL HALL

Sad to say, Bill Hall died on 10th April at the grand age of 92. Bill retired from the then Southampton College of Higher Education in December 1978 when your Editor succeeded him as Head of Department. Some of you might have known him in that role as a student or staff member, but there is a way in which we all knew him. Bill was one of the small group that set up AMERC over forty years ago.

Bill was born in South Africa and came to Britain in 1917. He was a Radio Officer prior to World War II but resigned to join the British Army in 1939, ending the War with the rank of major. Bill was held in great respect by all who knew him and the Association has much for which to thank him.

MCA STAFF

Roger Towner, Chief Examiner for Training and Certification at the MCA informed the AGM that the Chief Executive Captain Stephen Bligh had been replaced by John Astbury. Delegates were sorry to hear from Roger that Claude Hamilton had retired from the Agency on health grounds. The Meeting sent Claude its good wishes.

AND FINALLY - IT'S A SMALL WORLD!!

When Tom Kirkpatrick of Aberdeen College and Ian Waugh of GMDSS4all.net got talking at the AGM, they realised that they had not only joined the Royal Navy on the same day - they had travelled together by train from Glasgow to Ipswich, in the same compartment, to start their boy's training together at HMS Ganges in Suffolk. It was October 1962, they were both aged 15, and 'Telstar' (by The Tornados) was 'top of the pops'.

BACK PAGE

FROM THE HON SECRETARY THE WEBSITE

Elsewhere in this Issue of AMERC NEWS, we report on David Turner's retirement from Plymouth College. The Association is grateful that the College will continue to manage the AMERC website.

The website is not just an AMERC 'shop-window' it also acts as an important part of the internal communications of the Association. It is therefore vital that your details are correct. There have been changes to the list of members to the names and status of individuals, to addresses and especially to emails. The Hon. Secretary wants you to check your entry – *please do so now*. It is a matter of following simple instructions on the Website to make appropriate changes.

TECHNICAL UPDATES

Once again, Steve Brett has been busy with Technical Updates. This time he offers us some stripboard projects. Steve tells us that he has built and tested these circuits that he has designed, so he knows that they work. Our thanks to Steve for thinking of us.

FOR NOSTALGIA BUFFS

The Radio Officers' Association cooperates with the Chelmsford & District Science & Industry Museum with a ship's radio room display. A popular attraction locally we hear, with more than 500 visiting on Marconi Day last April. Oxford University's Bodleian and Museum of the History of Science are cooperating with a public exhibition of displays from the Marconi Archive until October of this year. Details are on the relevant websites.

This Newsletter duals as Circular 226. Check you have a full file. All Issues of AMERC NEWS appear on the AMERC Website and back copies of the Circulars may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary. *Don't forget to distribute copies to your colleagues.*

Articles and suggestions for the next Issue of AMERC NEWS can be sent at any time.

Brian Cotton, Editor.

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AMERC NEWS

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