



THE WAVE

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CAPTAIN'S LOG

As the saying goes, there are two things that are certain in life—death and taxes. April is tax season and millions of Americans took advantage of technology to prepare and submit their taxes. Many of our customers are also taking advantage of the technology we offer.

Each month, more than 21,000 mariners are checking the status of their application on-line using the Homeport Merchant Mariner Application Status form.

In April, we sent e-mails containing links to updated information on our Web site to over 1,200 subscribers to our list server. The NMC's call center received more than 8,000 phone calls and 600 emails per month from mariners seeking information about our products and services.

Mariners will soon be able to use a new on-line Sea

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Transport Canada audits NMC

Representatives from Transport Canada, the U.S. Coast Guard's counterparts to the north, audited the National Maritime Center earlier this month to determine the effectiveness of the United States in implementing the Standards of Certification and Watch-Keeping for Seafarers, known as STCW.

Auditors Capt. Jules St-Laurent and Paul Mannion evaluated the mariner licensing and documentation program to assess the U.S. Coast Guard's compliance with STCW.

"The (mariner) certification issuing system is by far the best I've seen," said Mannion, who holds a senior engineer license and serves as manager and principal examiner of engineering certification and personnel safety. "I'm quite impressed with the building and the people."

STCW, an international treaty signed by the U.S., sets forth standards for training, service and levels of competence for mariners working on ships.

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First Watch: How to Obtain a Mariner Credential

Since the 1700s, mariners in the United States Merchant Marine have been sailing the high seas, delivering passengers and cargo in support of the military and the maritime industry.

Merchant mariners, as they are known, have overcome countless dangers while traveling the world's waterways, from submarine attacks to raging tempests, yet these dedicated men and women remain steadfast in their commitment to ensuring the stability of global markets while championing the cause of the U.S. Coast Guard.

This elite group of more than 210,000 active duty licensed and credentialed mariners operate and maintain deep-sea ships, tugboats, towboats, ferries, barges, excursion vessels and other waterborne craft on the world's oceans, the Great Lakes, rivers, canals, harbors and ice-laden waters.

High school graduates and other individuals akin

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CAPTAIN'S LOG (continued from page 1)

Service Calculator to determine if they meet the service requirements to renew their license or Merchant Mariner Document. This feature will enable mariners to enter service data for multiple dates and calculate total service time. It will automatically compare their total service time with the service requirements required to renew their particular type of credential. Mariners will also be able to print a report summarizing their service.

The Sea Service Calculator is the first launch of the envisioned Merchant Mariner Secure Electronic Application System (MM-SEAS), a full service system that will enable mariners to conduct credential

David C. Stalfort
Captain, U. S. Coast Guard
Commanding Officer, National Maritime Center

transactions on line, drastically reducing processing time. New on line services planned for the future include features to track training requirements and to calculate service requirements in order to upgrade credentials. We are also planning on sending mariners e-mails to update them on the status of their credential application.

The NMC is committed to making substantial improvements to the Mariner Licensing and Documentation program. Increased use of technology is a key component of our strategy.

NMC Audited for STCW Compliance (continued from page 1)

The audit, required to be conducted every five years, included review two divisions concerning mariner training and evaluation, as well as operations and oversight of the Regional Examination Centers (RECs) and mariner application in-processing.

Specifically, Mannion drew attention to division and branch chiefs whom he credited with an overall understanding of functions in their own and others' divisions. "The people are extremely competent and know what they're doing," he said.

St-Laurent, who serves as manager of nautical certification and pilotage, agreed, saying, "The employees at the NMC are dealing with the livelihoods of mariners. They showed a genuine interest in helping them."

Mannion did note, however, one deficiency that, once addressed, may improve the overall aesthetics within the NMC. "It needs more maritime flavor, more pictures on the wall," he said smiling.

In their final evaluation, both men highlighted the similarities and differences concerning the process of mariner credentialing between the two countries.

The most obvious difference between Transport Canada and the U.S. Coast Guard is the sheer number of mariners. There are approximately 26,000

credentialed mariners in Canada compared to more than 210,000 in the U.S.

In terms of the credentialing process, 10 people in Canada are qualified handlers at each level, besides medical, compared to the more than 200 employees at the NMC where each person is assigned a specific task, making for what was described by the auditors as a more efficient system.

In addition, 29 examination centers in Canada compare to 17 RECs in America. "We've got to have a presence across the country," St-Laurent said.

The few potential problems that the auditors encountered in the credentialing process were not attributed directly to the NMC, but rather to "glitches in the system," Mannion said. Filling what he called "gaps in legislation" will more closely align the U.S. Coast Guard's compliance with international requirements.

In addition to evaluating NMC operations, the auditors visited U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, D.C., the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, NY, the Paul Hall Center for Maritime Training and Education at Piney Point, MD, and the REC in Baltimore.

By Michael C. Lewis

Feature: President of Local 333 United Marine Division Weighs in on Mariner Credentialing, Recruiting

Nowadays, it may seem like mariners have to jump through “hoops” to obtain credentials compared to years ago when standards for qualifications and training were slightly less demanding, says a New York union representative.

William Harrigan, president of Local 333 United Marine Division, believes it to be a sign of the times—that mariners now are more experienced, and more marketable.

“Today, you have to have more qualifications,” he said. “The mariner knows more about the rules and how things happen. It makes them more marketable because you have a more qualified person out there.”

Harrigan, a third assistant engineer of steam, motor or gas turbine vessels, shared his remarks during a recent discussion about the U.S. Coast Guard’s now centralized credentialing system at the National Maritime Center.

Local 333 United Marine Division, a seafaring union on Staten Island, NY, boasts a membership of more than 2,700 mariners.

According to Harrigan, some members who are renewing their credentials have encountered delays in processing. At least a few mariners’ credentials have lapsed, and as a result they are losing sea time. “We live paycheck to paycheck. When credentials lapse, it can seriously affect someone’s finances.”

Harrigan cautioned mariners who are considering credential renewal to allow enough time for

processing before the expiration date lapses.

Standardized credentialing at the NMC takes between 10 and 28 days. Mariners can renew their credentials up to 12 months prior to expiration.

In an effort to address the industry’s shortage of credentialed mariners, Harrigan explained that the union has been recruiting, though union officials may have to take more of a proactive approach.

“We’re recruiting. We’re also considering possibly starting an orientation program. We’ve got to build those relationships,” he said. “At the same time, the union is also trying to be more informative to its members.”

In recruiting more mariners, one issue that Harrigan would like to see addressed is the length of straight time deck hands are allowed to work. There are recommendations in regulations concerning the length of time for certain duties, he said, but for unlicensed deck hands, there are no rules on how long they can work.

“There are a lot of men working 18 hours straight. If you have to slave these guys, all of the sudden it becomes a young man’s game, a young man with physical strength who can maintain with lack of sleep,” he said.

“I think there has got to be something that comes down the pike to say deck hands can only work so long before they have time to sleep. We definitely need a rule set on that.”

By Michael C. Lewis



WHAT'S NEW AT THE NMC?

More Mariners Checking Credential Status Online

Over 21,000 mariners are now using the online Merchant Mariner Application Status form to check the status of their credential application, a huge growth in use of this feature since the service was launched in April 2007.

The popularity of this feature, located on the Coast Guard's Homeport web site, has increased substantially as more and more mariners and their employers are tracking the application as it is being processed.

In April 2007, the feature was used 5,802 times. In March 2008, 21,097 status checks were conducted.

Mariners or their employers can check the status of their credential application by simply entering their mariner identification and application identification number or their last name and the last four digits of the social security number, along with their date of birth and selecting "go". A report will be generated detailing the location and status of the application.

Credential Processing Time at NMC Falls Dramatically

Mariners that submit a complete application and don't have any significant medical or safety/security issues are now receiving their credentials within 30 days. A mariner in Los Angeles who submitted a renewal application received his new credential from the NMC in West Virginia 7 days from the date of application. Another mariner in New Orleans received his MMD is just 5 business days. For the past 6 months, the NMC and Regional Exam Centers

throughout the country have been aggressively working to improve the credential production processes. New initiatives have been implemented, such as improved quality control and streamlined production procedures. As a result, the inventory of credential applications older than 120 days has decreased by 32%. The average age of ALL credential applications being processed has decreased by 45% since the beginning of the year.

Former REC New York SIP Takes over Transition at NMC

The voice of the 17 Regional Examination Centers has arrived at the National Maritime Center to support the centralization of mariner credentialing.

Ken Skuches, the new branch chief of REC Operations in NMC-1, is responsible for the oversight of the 17 RECs scattered across the country as they become field units of the NMC.

Previously, Skuches served as the Senior Inspector Personnel for REC New York, where he helped rid the exam center of its 12-week backlog.

In his new position, Skuches intends to help bridge the gap between mariners, the RECs and the NMC, while also assisting in the development of policies that benefit mariners.

"The RECs are concerned that the voice of the mariner is not being heard and that the NMC is not

representing the mariner. I'll be the voice of the RECs concerning mariners," he said. "My mission is to get the mariners their credentials in the most efficient manner possible."

While serving as REC SIP, Skuches said he often saw mariners walk through the door "intimidated" at the onslaught of information and stacks of paperwork to fill out.

Nevertheless, he and his staff were able to provide one-on-one assistance in completing and processing mariners' applications.

"I may help only one person, but I had a direct affect on that person. That's an incredible feeling."

Skuches said his reasons for wanting to transfer to the NMC were simple:

(Continued on Page 5)

“The NMC is redefining the mariner credentialing process and I get to be a part of that. Every one of us is working to get what our customers are asking for,” he said.

NMC Recognizes National Maritime Day on May 22

When the S.S. Savannah left its home port of Savannah, GA, on May 22, 1819, bound for Liverpool, England, its crew had launched a new era in seafaring that would survive for more than 100 years. The ship “put to sea with steam and sails” reached Liverpool in 29 days and four hours, becoming the first steamship to motor across the Atlantic Ocean, which signaled the beginning of the steam era.

The U.S. Congress, in 1933, honored the technological advancement achieved by the S.S. Savannah and its mariners by passing a joint resolution that declared May 22 to be National Maritime Day.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration’s Web site, at <http://www.marad.dot.gov/>, the text of the resolution reads:

“Whereas on May 22, 1819, the steamship The Savannah set sail from Savannah, Georgia, on the first successful transoceanic voyage under steam propulsion, thus making a material contribution to the advancement of ocean transportation;

“Therefore, be it Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled;

“That May 22 of each year shall hereafter be designated and known as National Maritime Day, and the President is authorized and requested annually to



Photo of the commemorated stamp of the S.S. Savannah courtesy of the U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration’s Web site, at <http://www.marad.dot.gov/>.

issue a proclamation calling upon the people of the United States of America to observe such National Maritime Day by displaying the flag at their homes or other suitable places and Government officials to display the flag on all Government buildings on May 22 of each year.”

Presidential proclamations and other recognitions of National Maritime Day may be found at this site: www.usmm.org/md/maritprocs.html

Read more about National Maritime Day and its significance to the mariner, the National Maritime Center and to the United States in next month’s issue of The Wave.

NMC Employee Awards—Congratulations all!

Awards were presented to these individuals during the March 27 All-Hands meeting:

- Senobie Sterling for 30 years of government service
- Michelle Eichelberger, ATS Qualified Evaluator
- Tammy Getts, ATS Qualified Evaluator
- Tressy Janzen, ATS Qualified Evaluator
- Marissa Kennedy, ATS Qualified Evaluator

RECorner: Update on Transition

REC Seattle Swamped

Tom Curley and his staff have experienced “two major days of surprise” since the transition of the Regional Examination Centers in Seattle and San Francisco to the National Maritime Center.

The first day of surprise, said Curley, the Senior Inspector of Personnel for REC Seattle, occurred when the center transitioned its credential processing to the NMC on March 31.

“It doesn’t make a difference how much you advertise, for some reason or another, there are always a handful of mariners who never got the word (on the transition),” he said. “For all those mariners that didn’t get the word, there was some surprise there.”

Regardless, Curley and his staff got “very busy” in the days leading up to the transition. In fact, Curley said he thinks that the REC might have “shot ourselves in the foot” for conducting what he called a thorough advertising campaign.

“When the word got out, we were just getting hammered with folks trying to beat out our transition,” he said. And there’s been no reprieve since the transition began.

“When we opened the door from lunch this afternoon (on April 17), we had 30 people in our lobby, and it only holds 14. It overwhelmed my staff,” he said.

Part of the problem, Curley said, is that REC personnel are learning a new system of processing

applications while at the same time, trying to take care of legacy applicants whose records were taken in prior to transition, and as such, still require printing and creation of credentials until at least April 28.

“What happens is the staff can’t fully focus on the new system while at the same time being charged with printing credentials for legacy applicants,” he said. In the mean time, “there are mariners at the counter whose applications must meet the minimum requirements needed to make their applications eligible for sending off to the NMC.”

Curley suspects the second day of surprise will be on April 28, when legacy applicants can no longer have credentials issued by the REC.

“Some legacy applicants will be expecting to have their credentials processed at the REC, but it’s not going to happen,” he said. “Our job at that point will be to determine if the necessary requirements have been met in order to have their credentials issued by the NMC.

“If we can get through the barrage between now and then, then I think we’ll survive. I keep reassuring my staff that there is light at the end of the tunnel,” he said. “The staff is looking to April 28 when they’ll be freed up from having to print credentials and be able to focus primarily on processing applicants under the new system only.”

By Michael C. Lewis

RECs: Changing Roles

Employees at Regional Examination Centers across the country have expressed concerns about how their roles within the U.S. Coast Guard’s centralized mariner credentialing system are changing.

LCDR Mike Washburn, at the National Maritime Center, acknowledged those concerns, and said he

understands that for some, the changes have been somewhat difficult to come to terms with.

“The RECs themselves are losing the ability to issue credentials over-the-counter. They’ve been doing evaluations and licensing mariners for a long time,” he said. Now, “Their roles are changing.”

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Instead of licensing mariners, the RECs are conducting a cursory overview of the application and ensuring that each satisfies the required elements before forwarding them to the NMC.

Besides application in-processing, the employees at the REC will continue serving as one-on-one liaisons with mariners and testing those who qualify.

"We explain to them the importance of obtaining the items on the application checklist," Washburn said.

"We also want them to feel free to talk to mariners about the things they see on the application."

In REC Seattle, Washburn said REC Senior Inspector Personnel Tom Curly has done a "remarkable job."

Curly, Washburn said, has ensured that the REC maintained good flow and that there were no

backlogs.

"(Curly) had concerns throughout the transition that we wouldn't be able to do the same things that he was able to do in his office," Washburn said. "He was worried about the potential loss of cycle time in getting the credential to the mariner. He's a mariner advocate. He very much cares about the mariner."

Washburn said he believes that Curly's local customer base will not be negatively affected and that the NMC will be able to provide the same service while "keeping the good things going."

"We've shown the process is working," he said. "Mr. Curly recognizes that nationwide, there had to be a change in how we were working. He has taken his new role and is performing it to a 'T.'"

NMC representative visits West Coast RECs

LTJG Christopher Toms recently returned from visiting Regional Examination Centers in Seattle and San Francisco to assist both in making the transition to the National Maritime Center.

Generally, Toms said that he was "very impressed" with how well each RECs was operating. Though both are set up differently, they accomplish the same thing.

"By themselves, these REC chiefs were responsible for licensing our nation's mariners. They were given only some of the tools and very little training, yet they were able to create a working credentialing system," he said. "By taking the tools and training we have, we are perfecting and

Standardizing the system, and implementing the best practices."

Toms' role is to serve more or less as an inspector, to review the processes at the REC, and ensure the flow of files during the transition is consistent.

"The RECs are still being a true one-on-one with the mariner and there's a personal interaction that has to be maintained, a decorum," he said.

During his visit, Toms noted that both lobbies in Seattle and San Francisco were packed full with mariners looking to have their credentials processed.

"The people working behind the counter were skilled customer service representatives. I was impressed."

Prepping for the transition of REC Miami

LCDR Mike Washburn, along with other staff at the NMC, are spinning up for a two-week site visit to REC Miami in May to prepare for a July transition to the NMC.

REC Miami makes up 10 percent of the credentialed U.S. merchant mariner population, and according to Washburn, there are 1,400 applications waiting to be evaluated, making for a "tremendous pile of work" during transition.

"Their office has gotten overwhelmed by the

workload. That's why centralization is so important," he said.

In fact, Miami's workload is so large that the normal procedure for transitioning a REC will not suffice simply because of the volume of applications, Washburn said.

"We're making an attempt to assist their volume of work before the transition," Washburn said.

"Otherwise, that amount of work could curtail credential issuance."

A GOLDEN MARINER

Hammer Time: Academy Grad Shares Sea Stories that Span 50 Years

Paul Hammer first got his feet wet as a merchant mariner during school sabbatical in the summer of 1946.

As American soldiers were returning home from World War II battlefields, Hammer, then 16, traveled to Philadelphia where he met up with his uncle, who was a commodore with Sun Oil Co. (now Sunoco), and went underway aboard an oil tanker.

“Going to sea got me out of working in the steel mills,” said Hammer, who was born and raised in Johnstown, Pa. “It set the precedent for a career that I found very enjoyable.”

Over three summers, Hammer sailed as messman, ordinary seaman and acting able bodied seaman—skills that he says earned him a nomination and appointment to the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in King’s Point, NY, in 1948.

He graduated from the academy in 1952, having sailed as a cadet to the Far East and West Africa with Lykes and Delta Lines.

Hammer recalled a rather memorable occasion in Korea where he was nearly shot while returning to his ship, which was docked in the port city of Pusan. He and a few friends were coming back from a night on the town when they heard gunshots in their direction.

“We were a little late returning to the ship. I don’t know if they were shooting at us, but I think we set the record for the hundred yard dash that night.”

While sailing with Cities Services Co., Hammer and crew experienced what he called a “whiz-banger” of an ice storm during a return voyage from Europe across the Atlantic Ocean.

“The entire superstructure and rigging became

encrusted in ice,” he said. “We started getting itchy about whether there would be enough free board above the water to keep the ship afloat.”

Hammer, now 78, has maintained his mariner credentials for 62 years, and recently received his 12th issued license as a second mate unlimited oceans and 100 ton Masters.

Through it all, he has remained active in the maritime industry, including 25 years with the American Petroleum Institute and the American Institute of Merchant Shipping. Close cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard has been paramount.

“I was very fortunate in my whole career. I never got in to anything that was as enjoyable as this with such a fine bunch of individuals. I was always happy to be able to sit down with people and help solve problems,” he said.

Several years ago, Hammer, who is married and has two grown children, started a towing and salvaging business in Alexandria, Va., where he says he had a chance to “play on the water.”

“Some of the most interesting activities occurred when I was in the towing and salvage business,” he said. “It was fascinating because I never knew what was going to come up.”

He once raised the rescue boat that sunk inside its shed at Reagan National Airport. “We got it up and actually got it running again,” he said. “Then it sank again two weeks later.”

On another salvage mission, in moderate ice conditions, he brought up a 55-foot wooden sailboat with a 90-foot mast. “It was quite a sight,” he said.

Hammer and his wife, Janice, live in Bakerton, WV.

By Michael C. Lewis



Obtaining a Mariner Credential (continued from page 1)

to seafaring who are in search of adventure, travel and excellent wages can embark on a fascinating career in the maritime industry by applying for credentials with the U.S. Coast Guard.

This story is the first installment of a four-part series about how to obtain a mariner credential. The first installment, "Getting Underway," discusses the mariner career choices that are available. The next three issues of The Wave will include installments on the processing of the mariners' application at the NMC, a life at sea with new credentials and meeting qualifications for mariner advancement.

GETTING UNDERWAY

The U.S. Merchant Marine consists of a fleet of privately owned U.S. registered ships designed to transport cargo for domestic and international commerce. Employment on these ships is the responsibility of their owners and is often handled by the maritime labor unions.

In most cases, the unions may direct the applicant to one of 17 Regional Examination Centers, or hire an agent to assist the individual in filling out the application.

High school graduates and other individuals can attain employment as a mariner in one of the following ways:

- Contacting a maritime company or union directly.
- Attending a maritime technical training school.
- Attending a maritime academy or college.

(See Page 10 for a list of academies.)

The career path of a mariner leads to the following shipboard departments:

- Steward-food services and accommodations
- Engineering-propulsion and maintenance
- Deck-navigation, cargo handling and management

First, one must determine the level of mariner credential desired whether to obtain a license or a Merchant Mariner Document, which is needed to serve as an entry-level seaman. Both licenses and MMDs are issued by the U.S. Coast Guard's National Maritime Center.

Licensed mariners include captains, mates and pilots. Also called deck officers, they supervise and direct ship operations, its cargo and its crew. Besides



The tugboat Growler motors up the Hudson River in New York.

tracking the ship's movement and standing watch, they oversee crew members who steer the vessel, determine its location, operate engines, perform maintenance, handle lines and maintain equipment.

Pilots guide ships in and out of confined waterways, such as harbors, where a familiarity with local conditions is of extreme importance.

Ship's engineers, also licensed mariners, oversee the safe operation and maintenance of the propulsion engines, boilers, generators, pumps and other machinery to ensure the vessel arrives at its destination.

Wipers, along with stewards and ordinary seaman, operate the vessel under the deck officers' supervision, keeping their assigned areas in good condition. They also steer the ship, stand watch, measure depth in shallow water and maintain deck equipment, like lifeboats, anchors and cargo-handling gear.

Once a career has been chosen, the next step is to apply for credentials at one of 17 Regional Examination Centers (REC), or apply to attend a maritime academy or at another accrediting institution.

When applying at the RECs, the merchant mariner credential application acceptance checklist includes:

- Two recent passport style photographs
- Evaluation user fee
- CG Form 719B Application
- Signed conviction statement if criminal record
- Three character references

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- CG Form 719K Physical Examination Report
- CG Form 719P Chemical Testing Report
- Two unexpired forms of identification
- Proof of citizenship
- Social Security Card

If any of the required items above are missing at the time of application, the person applying will be provided a "Notice of Incomplete Application" letter.

From the date of this letter, the applicant will have 60 days to provide the missing information to the Regional Examination Center. Otherwise, the application will be returned.

Upon review of the application, the respective REC either will request additional information or forward the application, along with the applicant's finger prints, to the National Maritime Center in Martinsburg, WV, where credentials either will be issued or denied.

Information packets designed to assist individuals applying for mariner credentials can be obtained at the NMC Web site at <http://www.uscg.mil/stcw>.

Read next month's issue of The Wave to find out what happens to the application at the NMC.

By Michael C. Lewis

Federal Merchant Marine Academy

U.S. Merchant Marine Academy
Kings Point, NY 11024
(516) 773-5000
www.usmma.edu

State Maritime Academies

State University of New York Maritime College
6 Pennyfield Ave.
Throgs Neck, Bronx, NY 10465
(718) 409-7220 or 1-800-654-1874 in New York or
1-800-642-1874 out-of-state
www.sunymaritime.edu

Maine Maritime Academy
Admissions Office
Castine, ME 04420
1-800-464-6565 in Maine or
1-800-227-8465 out-of-state

California Maritime Academy
200 Maritime Academy Drive
Vallejo, CA 94590-8181
(707) 654-1330 or 1-800-561-1945
www.csum.edu

Texas A&M University of Galveston
P.O. Box 1675
Galveston, TX 77553-1675
1-877-322-4443
www.tamug.tamu.edu/corps/index.html

Massachusetts Maritime Academy
101 Academy Drive
Buzzard's Bay, MA 02532
(508) 830-5000 or 1-800-544-3411
www.mma.mass.edu/mma.html

Great Lakes Maritime Academy
Northwestern Michigan College
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For suggestions on newsletter articles, to sign-up as a guest columnist and for comments on the new format of The Wave, please contact Editor-in-Chief Michael C. Lewis at (304) 433-3481.

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