National Maritime Assets

The beneficiary training trust funds.

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The United States is blessed with one of the most impressive, privately owned and operated non-profit maritime training infrastructures in the world today, the beneficiary training trusts.[1] As private institutions, the trusts can respond faster than government-sponsored schools when dealing with rapid changes in the industry. Unlike profit-making institutions, non-profits are able to invest more of their resources into the quality of the training without the restriction of meeting a fixed return.

The companies that contribute to such trusts also benefit by receiving a fixed training cost each year. In turn, the mariners have a formal structure to help them achieve their career goals. From ordinary seafarer to master, from wiper to chief engineer, there are funds in place to take mariners as far as they would like to go. In fact, most trust funds provide training at little to no cost for the mariner, as the charge is based on the amount of time the mariner works for the company that contributes to the trust.

For nearly half a century, beneficiary trust funds have been an integral part of the U.S. maritime training infrastructure. They have proven to be a testimony to the foresight of an earlier generation of labor and management leaders who understood that structured career paths are crucial to the industry and to national defense. Today, most trust funds are set up as a separate, non-profit legal entity with an equal number of trustees from both labor and management. All have legal structures that prohibit the use of assets for political activities (organizing, fundraising, etc.) to ensure funds stay focused on the training mission. To ensure compliance, the U.S. Department of Labor conducts regular audits.

The full mission shiphandling simulator. Photo courtesy of MITAGS.

The Key to Advanced Training

Many ship operators do not have the resources to train their mariners in proper use of advanced integrated bridge and propulsion systems. Increasingly, they are looking to the training trusts to meet this challenge. In response, MITAGS continually invests millions of dollars in simulation technologies.

It simply does not make sense to train mariners on old equipment when the new bridges are full of plasma screens and electronics. Again, this would not be possible without the trust's non-profit structure.

Technology has also expanded the mission of modern vessels. Larger ships go into the same ports, but they now face channels that have not expanded to the same degree as the vessels. This has translated into the need for higher-quality training and simulation programs.

Structured simulation training under the tutelage of experienced instructors helps transfer the knowledge and skills necessary to pilot these vessels with a minimum of mistakes. Today, deck officers and state pilots alike regularly use simulators to develop new skills and hone existing ones.

Military Sealift Command Courses for Civilian Mariners

The value of trust schools to our nation has been highlighted by their major role in training civilian mariners for the operation of government vessels. Increasingly, the U.S. government has supplemented its Military Sealift Command fleet with ships that are operated by private companies. This is primarily due to the lower overall cost structure of a civilian-manned vessel, and the desire to maintain a cadre of civilian mariners who are trained and capable of manning the reserve ships in times of national emergency.

In close cooperation with the government-sponsored schools and the training trusts, unlicensed engine and deck officers have made substantial investments in the mariners operating these ships. These investments have provided the U.S. government with enormous savings. They have also provided a pool of qualified mariners who are capable of operating the reserve vessels. Today, many civilian mariners have experienced new employment opportunities on government vessels because the trust schools were willing to make such a commitment.

The *Bob Hope*, one of Military Sealift Command's large, medium-speed roll-on/roll-off ships, is the type of vessel that is typically manned by civilian mariners. Photo courtesy of Military Sealift Command.

Training trusts have evolved to keep up with the changes in the industry and the financial challenges we all face. In an effort to expand program offerings and achieve economies of scale, most funds have opened their facilities and certain program offerings to non-affiliated companies. This makes financial sense, since the schools can offer a wide range of programs for members without raising the contribution rate for the contracted companies. This system also benefits non-affiliated students, since they now have access to some of the top training facilities in the country. Furthermore, the quality of the training improves as the school receives feedback and input from a diverse group of companies and industry segments.

MITAGS/PMI

The maritime advancement, training, education, and safety program trust,[2] which operates the Maritime Institute of Technology and Graduate Studies (MITAGS) and the Pacific Maritime Institute (PMI), provides access to over 150 training courses. Major offerings include:

- STCW-95[3] AB to mate program (22 weeks, for third mate unlimited license),
- STCW-95 workboat mate program (two-year apprenticeship earns 500/1,600-ton near coastal/oceans with the mate of towing endorsement),
- STCW-95 chief mate/master program (12 weeks, for an unlimited tonnage chief mate/master license),
- marine safety (firefighting, medical, and endurance),
- port and vessel operational research using full mission ship simulation.

Collaborating with industry and labor to "prepare for the future" probably best describes the organizational philosophy of MITAGS and its West Coast counterpart, the Pacific Maritime Institute. The schools' strength is rooted in the ability to conceptualize new training methods, redefine the relationship of the school to the workplace, and continually create new and affordable venues for individuals to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to work at sea.

Re-establishing the Chief Mate/Master and AB to Mate Pathways

A major impetus for this philosophy and approach was the implementation of the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchstanding (STCW) code, since it dramatically affects the maritime licensing, recruitment, and retention processes. This calls for more training, at a higher level, with more resources needed than any one school could provide.

MITAGS and another trust, RTM Star Center,[4] have made substantial investments in the areas of course development and simulation technologies to meet the new demands of the code associated with the upgrade to chief mate/master. Both training institutions have been offering the training to beneficiary trust students and tuition students. In the early years, MITAGS and RTM were the only schools in the country willing to make the up-front investment to provide the complete 12 weeks of training. Today, there are many mariners steadily advancing

Opportunities for U.S. Mariners in the LNG Industry

Today, there are more than 40 liquefied natural gas (LNG) import facilities in the planning or construction stage throughout North America. The growth of this industry is bringing new opportunities to mariners ashore and at sea.

On the shore side, MITAGS has been actively involved with pilot organizations and terminal operators in the modeling of terminals, waterways, and the liquefied natural gas carriers that are expected to serve the terminals. The new advances in simulation technologies now allow for accurate simulation and the ability for bridge teams, pilots, and tug masters to train together using integrated exercises.

At sea, MITAGS and the other union training trusts have collaborated with the maritime academies and Maritime Administration to establish U.S. training standards for Americans working on these carriers.

MITAGS simulator depiction of liquefied natural gas carrier operations. Graphic courtesy of MITAGS.

through the ranks due to the trusts' commitment to meet the licensing challenges that were created by STCW.

AB to Mate Under STCW

The code also dramatically changed the training requirements for "hawsepipers"[5] who were upgrading from able-bodied (AB) seafarer to third mate. The maritime advancement, training, education, and safety (MATES) program trust, utilizing PMI, took on the challenge of developing and implementing the 22 weeks of training now required. Partnerships within the maritime industry and Washington State were crucial to this effort.

As with the chief mate/master upgrades, many "hawsepipe" sailors have been able to continue their career paths, without interruption, due to the MATES program trust. In fact, the AB to mate program has been so successful at PMI on the West Coast that it is now being offered at MITAGS.

National Assets

Leaders at the U.S. Coast Guard, the Military Sealift Command, and various members of government, as well as many maritime leaders, have called the various trust schools "national assets." In MITAGS' case, this reflects the wide variety of training programs that are offered.

The campus, staff, and curriculum provide a truly unique, professional environment. Whether the challenge is recruitment, retention, training, or a new issue, the trust schools will be an integral part of the solution.

About the author:
During his tenure of nearly 10 years, Mr. Paine has been responsible for the implementation of more than 150 training courses at MITAGS. He currently possesses a master's degree in general administration from the University of Maryland and a U.S. Coast Guard chief mate's license. He is also a 1978 graduate of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy.

Endnotes:

1. The major nonprofit beneficiary trusts are MITAGS/PMI–Masters, Mates, and Pilots; RTM Star Center–American Maritime Officers; Calhoon Engineering School–Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association; and the Harry Lundberg School of Seamanship–Seafarers International Union.
2. The maritime advancement, training, education, and safety program was founded in the 1960s by the International Organization of Masters, Mates, and Pilots and major U.S. flag carriers. Its original purpose was to provide seafarer training, including programs for the advancement from AB to mate during the Vietnam War.
3. STCW-95 stands for the Standards of Training, Certification, and Watchstanding Code of 1978, as amended in 1995. Promulgated by the International Maritime Organization, the code set strict training, assessment, and certification standards for courses that are related to the safe navigation of a vessel. The code has been incorporated into the Code of Federal Regulations for all mariners sailing on vessels of 500 gross tons on near-coastal or foreign voyages.
4. RTM Star Center is a nonprofit beneficiary trust that was established by the American Maritime Officers Union and its contracted companies.
5. This is a ship's officer who began his or her career as an unlicensed merchant seaman and climbed the shipboard rank structure without attending a maritime college or academy. See related article in this edition.

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