

# Are Hawsepipers a Dying Breed?

*Training unlimited tonnage mariners.*

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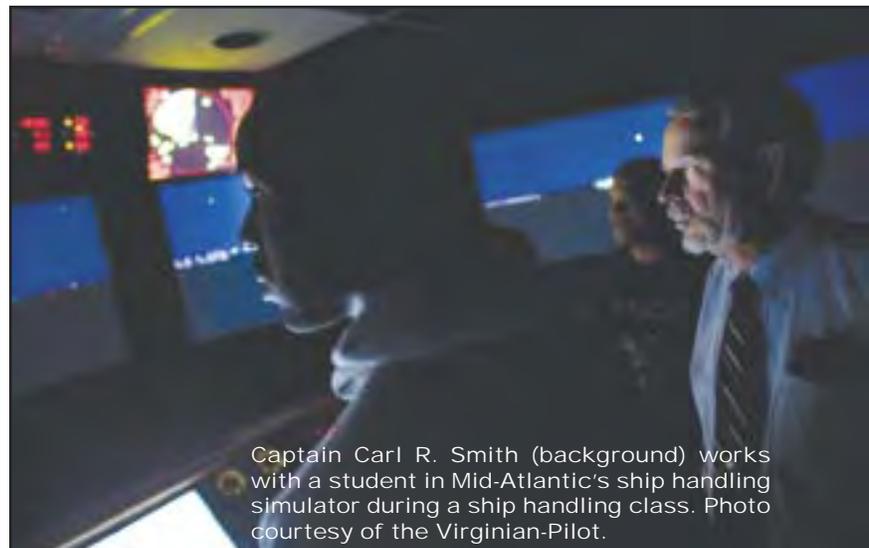
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The hawsepipe on a ship is the pipe that passes through the forward section of a vessel where the anchor chain leads down from the foc'sle<sup>1</sup> to its place in the water. The term hawsepiper is also a nautical metaphor referring to a ship's officer who began his or her career as an unlicensed merchant seaman and climbed the ship-board rank structure without attending a maritime college or academy.

In the not-so-distant past, the route of the hawsepiper was fairly simple: accumulate the required amount of sea time, then submit your documentation to the Coast Guard for approval. After that, study for the test, pass the license exam, and have your new third mate or third assistant engineer license issued so you can go to work in your new capacity.

This system, while straightforward, was unstructured. The maritime industry saw a continual increase in the number of serious marine incidents that resulted in loss

of life, cargo, or damage to the environment. In response to the need for stricter safety standards, new training regulations have been implemented over the



Captain Carl R. Smith (background) works with a student in Mid-Atlantic's ship handling simulator during a ship handling class. Photo courtesy of the Virginian-Pilot.

past 10 years. Becoming an officer is no longer a matter of simply studying for a test once you have the required amount of sea time.

## The New Route to Your License

The progression path to a maritime license now includes taking training courses and completing onboard assessments to demonstrate competency in particular tasks. While it is a laudable effort, has the significant time requirement and cost of completing this formal education exacerbated a shortage of qualified mariners? Are hawsepipers a dying breed?



A radar recertification class at Pacific Atlantic. Photo courtesy of Ms. Lee Goldman, Pacific Atlantic Professional Academy.





Captain James H. Miller, Jr., Pacific Atlantic Professional Academy, discusses rowing procedures. Photo courtesy of Ms. Lee Goldman, Pacific Atlantic Professional Academy.

Not necessarily. While the traditional hawsepole may appear to be dying a slow death, a new opportunity is evolving. For mariners who aspire to break into the industry, there are basically three options.

They can attend a state maritime school such as New York Maritime, Massachusetts Maritime, Maine Maritime, California Maritime, Great Lakes Maritime Academy, Texas Maritime Academy, or the federal U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. These schools all offer stellar programs for obtaining an entry-level license, either third mate or third assistant engineer, and you simultaneously earn a four-year college degree.

Entry-level officers may also obtain their license via union schools, which serve great numbers. However, their priority is to support their members and companies who support them.

They can also attend a private school, such as Mid-Atlantic Maritime Academy. Mid-Atlantic offers the AB

to mate classroom training program over an 18-week period.

#### **A Look at a Private Maritime Academy**

Under the old licensing system, the cornerstone of most successful private schools was test preparation. The complexity of USCG examinations (with some modules requiring a passing grade of 90%) drove mariners to seek out a place to study where reference materials, space, and guidance were readily available. The need for test preparation still actively exists despite the new STCW requirements for formalized classroom training, so much so that maritime colleges and union schools have started to offer it. Private schools, while maintaining test preparation as a necessary course of study, have mainly had to shift their focus to the hands-on training requirements in order to stay competitive in the highly regulated and dynamic market of marine education.

For active duty military personnel preparing to retire, those who have the right amount of sea service, train-

ing, and discipline look at these schools as a portal to life after the military. At Mid-Atlantic Maritime Academy, they can get career counseling to help them determine what licenses they might qualify for. We also train mariners to work on cruise lines, casino boats, and offshore supply vessels.

Another advantage to having a smaller training facility is the personal attention and encouragement instructors can provide to their students. This can be key to individual success. It's unlikely that this personal interaction could be facilitated in a traditional educational setting. In our opinion, warm, personal instructors with a vast knowledge base and a sense of humor help the student relate to difficult concepts while providing better hands-on individualized experiences. At Mid-Atlantic Maritime Academy, class sizes are limited in an effort to make sure no student becomes just a number. The staff and instructors strive to be a part of the student's career process, from initial counseling, through class completion, through—finally—test taking.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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Large, established maritime colleges are subject to the same accountability as small private institutions, so the “playing field” is level. The ultimate goal is a quality education.

Private training facilities have a place in the career advancement and certification of mariners at all levels, and no matter the size of the organization, each type of training facility has a place in the training of the merchant marine. Any school—whether a state university, union affiliate, or private organization—ultimately has the same goal: to provide the best possible training to mariners in order to strengthen the maritime industry as a whole.

#### *About the authors:*

*Mr. John Sitka III retired from the Navy as a chief quartermaster and while on active duty accomplished able seaman through unlimited 2nd mate. After retirement he operated various ships in the Gulf of Mexico and in 1995 was hired by Maersk Line Limited for work on government vessels. In 1999 he earned his unlimited master's license, and in 2005 he took over the Tidewater School of Navigation as chief instructor. He currently serves as vice president of academic affairs at Mid-Atlantic Maritime Academy.*

*Captain Cathleen Burns Mauro is a graduate of State University of N.Y. Maritime College and holds a B.S. in meteorology. After graduation, Captain Mauro sailed with American Maritime Officers over a 10-year period, serving primarily on Military Sealift Command contract vessels. Before coming ashore she spent two years as master of the USNS Capable. In 2006 she joined the instructional staff at the Tidewater School of Navigation, and now serves as director of deck education and training at Mid-Atlantic Maritime Academy.*

#### Endnote:

<sup>1</sup> The forecastle of a ship (may be spelled foc'sle) is a forward upper deck area that extends to the bow.

#### Final Thoughts

Traditionally, smaller private schools may have been viewed as a quick and easy way to obtain a U.S. Coast Guard license. In contrast, today's newer, more stringent regulations on mariners in the industry have brought about more rigorous regulations for the schools who train them.

All courses must be submitted to the U.S. Coast Guard for approval, and the schools are subject to random Coast Guard auditing.



Mid-Atlantic Maritime Academy lifeboat and davit. Photo courtesy of Mr. John Sitka, Mid-Atlantic Maritime Academy.

