



## TRAINING OF DECK CADETS & SEATIME REQUIREMENTS

The sea time requirement for Cadets intending to become Officers on Foreign Going vessels as per the STCW 95 is as follows:

- 1) To serve a minimum of three years at sea. This includes at least six months of bridge watch keeping duties under the supervision of a qualified officer.
- 2) The administration may however allow for the substitution of not more than 2 years of the required sea service with special training provided that it is satisfied that the special training is equivalent in value to the sea going period it replaces.

Many nations have taken the view that time spent at the Maritime Academies could aptly replace the two years that is supposed to have been spent at sea. In my view, this cannot be further than the truth. While the two years spent at the Academy is of great value, nothing can replace the hands on approach of working on the ship. I have seen cadets from various parts of the world return after one year of sea time, not knowing how to handle the mooring lines when a vessel is to shift its berthing position. They do not know how to shout orders. To be able to shout orders, it takes confidence and to build that confidence, it takes time.

I sailed from the late eighties to the late nineties. It was a time where there were six to seven deck cadets to a ship. We had fun in terms of learning & visiting the various nations that we only saw through the television during our childhood. The first Master that I sailed with would not allow any cadet to enter the bridge for the first three months of their sea time and even then, the cadet had to earn the right to go to the bridge. The sanctity of a safe bridge watch was on the mind of the Master. My first bridge visit was with a senior cadet who was instructed to give me an idea of what was to be expected of me on the bridge when I was on duty. On a lighter note, I even had to learn how to make a good cup of coffee for the officer of the watch before I was sort of accepted on watch. We learnt humility which many cadets lack today.

Chief Officers took it upon themselves to ensure that cadets got no shore leave if assignments given were not completed. Officers were instructed by the Masters & Chief Officers to teach the cadets the features of the job. We were taught to use drilling machines to bore holes through steel & ensure that the drill bit did not get broken in the

process. In the last six months of our sea time, we were given the opportunity to undertake bridge watches under the watchful eyes of trusted officers. Decisions were ours to take & the Officers only interfered when they felt that our actions were questionable. On the last vessel I served as cadet, we even had Saturdays & Sundays off for concentrating on our studies & to have some time for leisure. My first ship as an officer was on board a freedom class vessel where there were eight deck cadets with a training officer on board.

However, it is sad to say that the powers that be saw it fit that the sea time requirement be compromised to a certain extent. With reduced sea time, doing some of the above would be close to impossible if not impossible. I had to do two years before sitting for my first certificate of competency. Even then I must admit that much more could have been learnt with additional sea time. The cadets these days are only expected to complete a minimum of one year. They have a multitude of tasks to complete which are scheduled for them in their training books (TARB – Training & Record Book). I have serious doubts about the capability of the cadets of the current era to comprehend the material they are suppose to study & even more worrying, is the possibility that these tasks will not be completed satisfactorily. Learning to steer a vessel in one year is not an easy thing as one might like to think. A cadet who has only been on one type of ship might only know how to steer a particular type of ship & will not have the opportunity to get a feel of the other types of ships. In my two years as a cadet I had been on three different types of vessels; each with different methods of handling.

With virtually every accident in the shipping industry, more paperwork was created & so we find ships officers working more like clerks rather than professional seafarers who have not enough time to pass on what they have learned, to the young ones. Certain quarters are even trying to further reduce the sea time requirement for officers by putting them through “approved marine simulator based courses”. Marine Simulators are very useful but you can’t train the “Officer to be”, to go to the bridge wing & observe if the Pilot has boarded safely. You can’t test gears like you would test the gears of an actual ship. These are habits that can & have to be formed without the use of checklists. Cadets in my day use to assist the officer on watch to test gears without a checklist & there were no problems after.

An “MAIB(Marine Accidents Investigation Board)” safety flyer on the incident involving the **Ursine** & the **Pride of Bruges** states that the Bridge team on the Ursine was “relatively inexperienced”. The Master of the Ursine( a ro-ro vessel) had no previous experience on such a vessel. The Chief Officer was newly promoted & the Pilot, although an experienced ro-ro officer, was not an experienced ship handler. The report further stated that the Master was also not an experienced ship handler. We in the industry have to ask ourselves, why do such things happen? What’s with the early promotions and all? I believe the many answers are already there in the various forums but I think what many fail to see, is the effect reduced sea time has on the capability of the officers or officers to be. In this incident, the Ursine collided with the Pride of Bruges which was fast on the berth in the River Humber.

Hard boiled eggs are less dangerous than half boiled eggs. With half boiled eggs, there is a danger of poisoning by salmonella. It might take ten minutes to get hard boiled eggs & about half that time to get half boiled eggs. If the shipping industry is going the direction of the half boiled egg, I am afraid that we will hear of many more accidents.

Language problems still remain a major issue. I have come across cadets who can't tell the difference between **construing & complying (words found in rule 2 of the ROR)** or **congestion (port) & conjunction (of planets)**. With reduced time at sea, students will find it very hard to cope with the demands made on them as far as their studies are concerned. There are many who cannot comprehend the type of language found in the "rules of the road". There are Cadets completing sea time just when they are beginning to understand a little bit of English. I have sailed with cadets who give you a blank stare after you have given them an instruction.

It is my firm belief that we should revert to a system where the sea time for a cadet is longer than it is now because the skills of a maritime professional cannot be honed satisfactorily by just paying attention to documentary evidence. Having documentary evidence is one thing & real proficiency is another matter altogether.

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