

POTENTIAL FOR MARITIME TRAINING IN SOUTH AFRICA

BY

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ABSTRACT

The long and respected track record of South African maritime training is the basis for the provision of training to meet the nation's future maritime personnel needs. Significant steps have been taken recently to expand important aspects of maritime education and training which now ranges from courses for 15-year-old school learners to advanced courses designed to train experienced maritime personnel and using the most sophisticated equipment.

While global shortages in qualified seafarers are documented elsewhere, South African training institutions could fill some of those gaps. However, some argue that aspects of local maritime training are fragmented, and, since resources are split, a common focus on some of the real issues is lacking.

A dynamic, unified voice is required to ensure that the best goals are set in terms of training – and that those goals are achieved.

From the days of the SATS *General Botha* in its various locations and with its various approaches over the years, South African maritime training has enjoyed a long and respected track record. Augmented by in-house training schemes initiated and run by shipowners themselves, training of both deck and engineering officers was thorough - an agreeable mix of theory and practical experience. Indeed, those combined packages of training produced most of today's leaders in the operational side of the local maritime industry.

With that as the strong basis for the provision of training to meet the nation's future maritime personnel needs, significant steps have been taken recently to expand important aspects of maritime education so that navigational and seamanship training now ranges from courses for 15-year-old school learners to advanced courses using the most sophisticated equipment that is designed to train experienced maritime personnel.

The two Technikons – Cape Technikon (the successor to the *General Botha*) and Durban Institute of Technology – provide courses ranging from entry-level to Masters (Class 1) certificates, as well as various maritime-related short courses. The over-subscription of the entry-level courses and increasing enrolments for the advanced courses is encouraging, not only in terms of numbers, but also, in the case of the younger set, the degree of interest in maritime careers that augurs well for the future. The Cape Town campus also has a fully-equipped Survival Centre that is in constant use for safety courses, not only for mariners, but also for airline personnel who undergo training in survival at sea.

Funded by the A.P. Moller Group, the South African Maritime Training Academy (SAMTRA) at Simon's Town will begin operation later this year for specialised training that is designed to complement existing courses. The product of long-term, proactive planning and the realisation of much discussion over the years, SAMTRA will be the latest and a hi-tech link in the training chain that in respect of navigational training now enjoys a continuum from elementary levels upwards. With two near-full bridge simulators as well as a PC-based engineering simulation centre and a facility to train technicians to meet the rapidly expanding containerisation of reefer products, SAMTRA will have the potential to provide a training service for the wider maritime family, including the South African Navy and National Port Authority. In respect of the latter, the bridge simulators will have specialised programmes focusing on several South African ports – as well as a wide range of other simulations that include major foreign ports, passages through convergence zones and emergency situations. Not only will this be of use for officers on ships trading this way, but also has the potential to train pilots and tug masters for service in those ports. Hitherto, pilot trainees were sent to Rotterdam for simulation training, a costly exercise in terms of airfares, the course fees, as well as living expenses for the trainees while abroad. Although scheduled to open only in July, SAMTRA has already provided specialised training for crews for anchor-handling vessels working the West African off-shore oilfields - potentially a large market for students - and, via the Unicorn Training School in Durban, for crews for a tanker in the A.P. Moller Group. In this entry to such courses, training will be provided for ratings for 10 anchor-handling vessels.

As providers of courses in safety at sea, SAMTRA and other training centres will also play a role in upgrading qualifications among the fishing industry where safety has been the subject of a major thrust by the South African Maritime Safety Authority.

Established in 1975, the Unicorn Training School was the first company-operated maritime training centre in South Africa, catering initially for Unicorn's own seafarers. That role has grown to the point where more than two thousand seafarers - both locals and personnel from nearly twenty other countries - received training last year. Courses ranged from entry-level training in firefighting, first aid and safety at sea, to advanced courses for senior tanker officers. Given the expanding international potential for training, Unicorn Training Officers will undoubtedly be busy over the next few years.

Having expanded the scope of their operations over the last few years, Smit Marine is also heavily involved in training to cater for the needs of the enlarged fleet of vessels they own and manage, and for which an increasingly sophisticated level of training is required.

Courses at the Port Academy in Durban are designed to meet the needs of the National Port Authority for harbour operations, while several fishing companies have developed in-house induction courses as well as more advanced courses for their sea-going employees. The Table Bay Campus of Wingfield College also has a significant role to play in training both for the local as well as the foreign fishing industry, and for ratings on commercial ships.

It is clear that South African training facilities are being used on an increasing scale by foreign companies and individuals, and that the advent of SAMTRA has added a significant dimension to the ability of local training courses to attract foreign students. Some of the factors that make South African courses attractive in the international market include

- the mandatory safety courses for new entrants and advanced courses for established seafarers provide an on-going pool of clients;
- the undoubtedly high standards of local training;
- the expanding off-shore operations surrounding West African oil and gas exploitation that require training courses specific to their needs, for which South African facilities are ideally placed;
- the paucity of maritime training elsewhere in Africa and the Indian Ocean islands, bringing students from those countries to South Africa;
- currency exchange rates and lower cost of living indexes that are favourable to foreigners while those same factors force South Africans to use local facilities for their training;
- the centrality of the country in terms of potential training markets in the eastern and western hemispheres;
and even
- the agreeable climate.

While global shortages of qualified seafarers are documented elsewhere, South African training institutions could fill some of those gaps, especially if certain niche markets for training can be exploited. A report in *Lloyd's List* earlier this year indicated the worldwide shortage of qualified seafarers to crew the expanding fleet of gas carriers and chemical tankers. Since an increasing number of these vessels are calling at South African ports, albeit for bunkers only in the case of the gas carriers, this could be one area of specialisation for local facilities. The off-shore oil industry is already a sizeable contributor to trainee numbers in South Africa and can be exploited further, as can the

numbers of young South Africans needing pre-sea induction courses prior to seeking work on cruise liners.

Training on offer in South Africa to seafarers from other African countries is in line with the government's NEPAD initiative and as such, could play an even more important role in upgrading maritime infrastructure of countries to the north.

Despite the current high levels of local training, there are two significant gaps in the training continuum.

- Trainees leaving the Technikons find it difficult to gain cadetships for the required initial sea experience owing to insufficient berths available at sea. This appears to be a product of current maritime legislation and the failure to introduce legislative revisions to attract ships to the local register. Trends in the international charter market make it economically preferable for local operators to charter foreign-flagged tonnage so that all large ships on the South African trade or operated by South African companies now are registered abroad. Apart from a few, locally-operated vessels carry foreign crews. The North American tanker owner, Teekay Tankers, has embarked on a programme to recruit South African cadets; the successes of the first intake prompted their allocating more berths to South African cadets on their tankers. Perhaps this model could be adopted in approaches to other foreign companies to assist in the training of local cadets who are as good as their foreign counterparts.
- Current training of engineering officers requires a more definite structure, especially in the more advanced courses, and through the intervention of Safmarine, funding for training in Cape Town came available last year. As was written in October last year :

Understandably restricted by their salary scales and by the need to have rear-ends-on-seats to justify the presentation of such a course, the Technikons are currently unable to meet a suitable salary package for a Chief Engineer, and unless the wider industry gets its act together, accredited engineering training could wind down, with possible negative implications for other sectors of local maritime training.

To continue this essential part of maritime training, solutions are sought at government level where either the Technikon salary scales have to accommodate an abnormal salary package for a lecturer with Chief Engineer qualifications, or funding from other sources such as the Maritime Chamber of TETA has to be expedited to top-up any Technikon contribution. *Sea Watch* understands that this will be under discussion in a TETA forum within a few days, where hopefully, rapid decision-making will occur.

One hopes that the urgency and importance of the issue is understood by all concerned, and that steps will be taken to address the situation before the start of the new academic year. The country cannot afford to let marine engineering - an essential science - be strangled.

On the contrary, HR practitioners within the industry want this matter finalised urgently and assurances given that some continuum in engineer training will be in place so that this attractive career can be marketed widely amongst school-leavers. They also want to know that their marine engineers will continue to have thorough, STCW-compliant training.

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The financial backing for this **fundamentally important sector** must be addressed to provide a secure training continuum for engineers, and requires the active involvement of all players. To attract new entrants, Although funding was sought from the Transport Education and Training Authority for this specific and

important sphere of training, at the time of writing, assistance has not been not finalised, plunging the Cape Town course into uncertainty.

- Training for auxiliary services such as crane operators (of both container gantries and vessels' gear) is also required, according to some sources, and certain training centres are engaged in planning to assist with this.

Some argue that certain aspects of local maritime training are fragmented, and, since resources are split, a common focus on some of the real issues for the future is lacking. For the most part, such fragmentation is not a deliberate policy, but rather a product of the evolution of individual training schemes to cater for specific needs of a particular company or sector of the industry. Navigation training, *albeit at various levels of competence*, is undertaken by the maritime studies departments at two secondary schools, the Technikons, the Navy, Wingfield College, Port Academy, some fishing companies, and leisure boat organisations. Word of additional simulation training centres being planned is further evidence of fragmentation of training, while duplication of effort is costly, and could result in the ineffective use of the facilities available as the respective parties throw resources into marketing rather than into the courses on offer. With its relatively small maritime community and therefore limited pool of potential trainers and resources, perhaps some rationalisation of courses would not be out of place. It is therefore interesting to note that pragmatically, the Navy is sending an increasing number of junior officers to the Cape Technikon for the T1 and T2 courses, and provide the specialised combat training themselves. Similar approaches could be adopted in other sectors of the industry.

Overall, South African training prospects – if managed correctly – can provide the nation with a significant number of highly-trained personnel and can render a valuable service to foreign maritime companies or parastatals, thereby earning considerable foreign income. To met this challenge, South Africa needs

- to maintain high standards of training that are comparable with any foreign training;
- to expand foreign marketing of courses
- a dynamic, cohesive thrust to ensure that the best goals are set in terms of training; and
- to ensure that those goals are achieved.

ANNEXURE 1

Extract from *Sea Watch* 30 June 2002

SIMULATOR FOR SIMON'S TOWN

IT WAS one of those special and happy events that comes occasionally to boost the flagging spirit. A soil-turning ceremony at Simon's Town a fortnight ago was just that, marking the first public phase of the construction of a multi-million Rand simulator training centre that will come on line in the first quarter of next year. It will be the first in Africa and the second in the southern hemisphere.

Funded by the Danish A.P. Moller Group that includes Safmarine, the centre will provide advanced, state-of-the-art simulation training for navigating officers, marine engineers and reefer container technicians. The building on the campus of Simon's Town School and close to the School's Maritime Studies Department, will have two near-full bridge simulators, and a PC-driven engine room simulator to be supplied by the Danish Maritime Institute,

To be known as the South African Maritime Training Academy (SAMTRA), the centre has been on the drawing boards for some time and that auspicious ceremony – AP Moller executives flew in for the day from Copenhagen – must have been a particularly satisfying event for many, including Deanna Collins, Safmarine's Training Manager and co-ordinator of the project on behalf of the Group.

Indications are that courses at SAMTRA will be in great demand. Naturally, the A.P. Moller Group will certainly use it extensively, but there could be quite a queue. No doubt Unicorn, Smit, the Navy and others will be keen to use it, as will the National Port Authority whose pilot training programme currently includes stints at a similar centre in Rotterdam. Considering the huge expense of carting some 20 trainees to Holland for weeks, the saving to NPA alone to train locally at Rand-based costs will be significant. The mushrooming oil/gas exploration activities along the entire West African seaboard (now as far south as St Helena Bay) will also provide clientele for SAMTRA. And foreign shipowners will certainly find the costs extremely competitive.

Correspondents in USA indicate that similar centres along the American seaboard are fully booked months in advance, and the same might apply to SAMTRA.

With their reefer container depot near Cape Town, and a substantial increase in the movement of integral containers through the port, Maersk are particularly interested in the reefer training facility that will be incorporated in SAMTRA. Within a relatively short time, the importation of foreigners with reefer expertise will be unnecessary as locals are trained at the Simon's Town plant.

Locating SAMTRA in Simon's Town is particularly significant in view of the town's long maritime history as well as the associated traditions and

atmosphere. Certainly, its delightful ambience will be enjoyed by those undergoing training, while restaurants and guest houses in the area can tap into a regular source of visitors, injecting a considerable revenue into the local economy.

The six-year-old links between Safmarine and the Maritime Studies Department at the School will be enhanced by this development. While the maritime students from the School will have occasional access to the facilities, the spin-off to their training will be extensive as students observe qualified navigation officers and engineers undergoing further training in the centre – and there will be times when the young people themselves can have hands-on sessions. Exciting times ahead for the School's Maritime Studies programme!

But where was the Minister of Transport who was to have been the Guest of Honour at the soil-turning ceremony, but chose instead to go abroad? He missed the party, but more importantly, has he also missed the significance of the event?

ANNEXURE 2

Extract from *Sea Watch*, 31 August 2002

TO TRAIN OR NOT TO TRAIN? A VEXING QUESTION

RESPONSE TO REFERENCES to training in the previous edition of *Sea Watch* has been interesting. "Training for what?" asked a respondent, pointing out that on the South African register there are harbour craft, fishing vessels, some leisure craft, a handful of research and supply ships, but only one large commercial ship, a very different scenario from that when Safmarine operated over 30 locally-registered freighters and a few flagged-out tankers, while all Unicorn's coasters were of the local brand.

South African training produces high quality officers who are assured of employment in the wider shipping world. While initial training is world class, the problem in the training continuum begins when aspirant officers need to complete their stipulated seamtime. The declining size of the national fleet has brought a severe shortage of training berths for those emerging from the two Technikons. Also important is the decline in the number of training berths for ratings, denying a sea career - and basic employment - to those unable for various reasons to follow the Technikon courses.

The reasons for the current state of affairs are varied, including South African shipowners chartering tonnage in a global climate of low charter rates. Flagging out - mainly for understandable financial reasons, given the current state of shipping legislation - has also enabled local companies to look beyond South Africa for their crews, many of whom are equally competent to their South African counterparts, but come at a cheaper rate. Until some financial incentives are given to South African companies, little will change. Several countries have introduced a range of measures friendly to the shipowner, including systems of tonnage tax that have attracted vessels to their flag. As a result of progressive reforms in the British ship registration laws, the Red Duster is now flying at the sterns of the most unlikely vessels - huge Evergreen and Neptune Orient Line containerships - and even a Unicorn tanker. In the wake of the revised legislation, P&O Nedlloyd was on record as promising to return some 50 flagged-out vessels to the British register. With tonnage tax goes the requirement to train one cadet for every 15 officers, a step many had hoped would encourage companies to embark on vigorous recruiting drives.

Whether tonnage tax and its associated incentives will enhance the number of young Britons going to sea remains to be seen, NUMAST, the officers' trade union, seems to believe that not enough is being done to attract - and keep - aspirant merchant naval types.

The suggestion that South Africa could provide a pool of seafarers *a la* Philippines is laudable from many points of view, not least as an employment-generating programme. What better than having thousands of dollars flowing into the bank accounts of local seafarers? However, in reality, several issues need to be addressed. One of these is the HIV/AIDS problem.

Foreign companies simply will only employ seafarers who are free of the disease and will demand that applicants be tested. In terms of foreign employment of ratings, companies usually want fully-trained, complete crews readily available; with few new entrants able to gain seamtime to qualify, crewing agencies will have their work cut out finding such crews *en masse* in South Africa. As we observed in our last edition, the spectre of masses of Chinese seafarers on the international market - as well as others from the Orient and eastern Europe - presents formidable competition for locals.

Sources in the industry are mentioning a proposal to operate a ship with a few hundred berths for trainees at various levels. If the Japanese and numerous other countries can do it, they reason, why can't South Africa? We can, but whence cometh the shekels? To buy or charter such a ship as well as to crew, operate and maintain it will require such vast amounts of cash that even if the ship could undertake some commercial activity, it is doubtful whether it would pay its way. Committed to their own training programmes, albeit limited, local shipping companies are unlikely to be in a position to assist. Other practical aspects of a dedicated training ship need thorough consideration. The presence of even a hundred cadets on such a vessel will require a juggling act to contrive a constructive training programme; after all, there is a limit to the number of cadets on watch at a given time, while steel decks can only be chipped and painted a given number of times. Arranging evening entertainment will be a full-time job for someone!

If money is available for training from some extraneous source, would it not be used more prudently by adding cadet accommodation - and even training rooms - to existing commercial ships, and offering incentives to the owners train the youngsters? Here a foreign tanker company has shown the way by employing two South African cadets this year and four next year. And they have two vessels fully-equipped for cadet training. A training commission to that company could get a few more of our young people away to sea.

Another option - given the source of money that otherwise might have been spent on running a large training ship - is to use S.A. *Agulhas* which has numerous berths, but which lies idle for many months. Its cargo capacity could be a useful foil for break-bulk

coastal operations, off-setting at least some of the operational costs which could be around \$10 000 per day.

Two additional proposals for bridge simulator training centres – one at Cape Town's Waterfront and another at the Port Academy in Durban - came to light as the first concrete was being thrown for the South African Maritime Training Academy that will incorporate two bridge simulators and an engineering simulator at Simon's Town. "From none to three simulators in a few months!" said one marine training officer with no link to SAMTRA. "We certainly can't afford more fragmentation of training!"

Some despairingly wring their hands at the prospect of successful Technikon students or those passing from school-based maritime studies departments sitting on the beach instead of being trained at sea. Handwringing does not help; neither does passing the buck to shipowners, while politicising the situation compounds the problem, and immediately alienates sympathetic shipowners.

What is awaited is strong, pragmatic leadership within our maritime family, and the presentation of concrete, viable measures to address the situation. And an urgent review and promulgation of appropriate maritime legislation will be a good starting point.