10-1-1983

# School for skippers

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Advanced maritime education for officers and maritime officials from developing countries is IMO's new answer to erratic standards in world shipping. **Ted Wilding-White** reports from Malmö in Sweden on the opening of the World Maritime University.

IN LATE JUNE this year, a very special group of about 72 maritime officials and ships' officers from some 42 different countries began assembling in a small town on the south-west tip of Sweden called Malmö, a short hydrofoil ride across the water from Copenhagen. But it was not for any esoteric nautical seminar or conference that so many had travelled from as far afield as Indonesia or Guyana.

The group comprised the inaugural intake of students for a bold new international venture called the World Maritime University. Returning here to the classroom for up to two years were some of the most qualified and experienced members of the Third World's maritime community. Their objective, to take the first steps towards achieving a worldwide commonality of maritime operating and administrative standards.

Far from being an academic ivory tower, the World Maritime University (WMU) has been established under the auspices of the International Maritime Organization as part of its campaign to provide shipping with the same rigorous international uniformity of standards as those enjoyed by airlines. Nor is there any attempt to disguise this fact. "The fundamental idea here," the University's rector, Captain Sölve Arvedson, told *Ocean Voice*, "is to propagate the standards of the IMO Blue Book – the 1978 International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers – with the aim of getting governments to implement its Resolutions." The Convention comes into force this year and is designed to improve the quality of the human element in maritime safety and pollution control.

Capt Arvedson stresses that the WMU is not a pet project for IMO interests but a logical development of the current trends in shipping. The most notable of such trends, which have transformed world shipping and dominate the nature of the maritime sector today, include greater interdependence among nations, advances in technology and establishment of global standards.

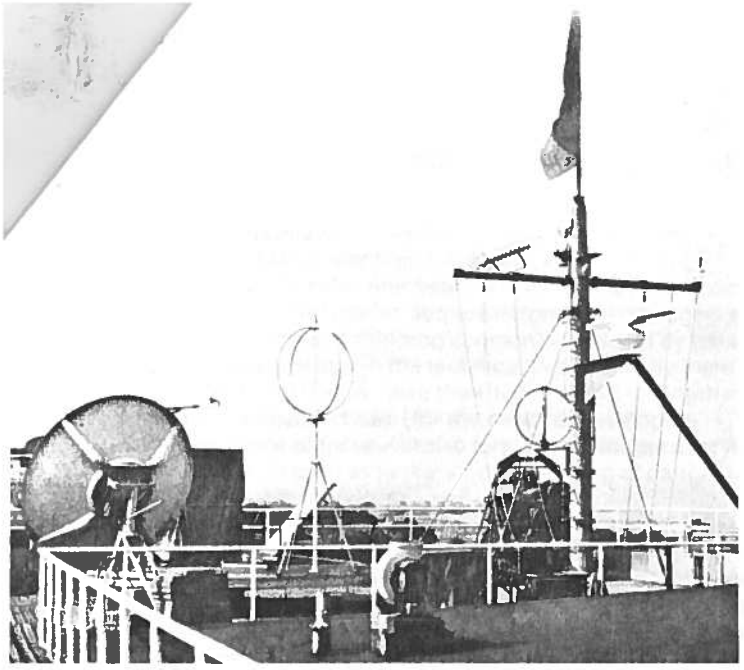
The basic thesis of the University's policy lies in an overall view of a developing country today. According to Capt Arvedson, an important factor determining the pace of economic and social change in such countries is their participation in world trade. In turn this is dependent on a country's infrastructure, human capabilities and administrative structure for handling the transport of that trade.

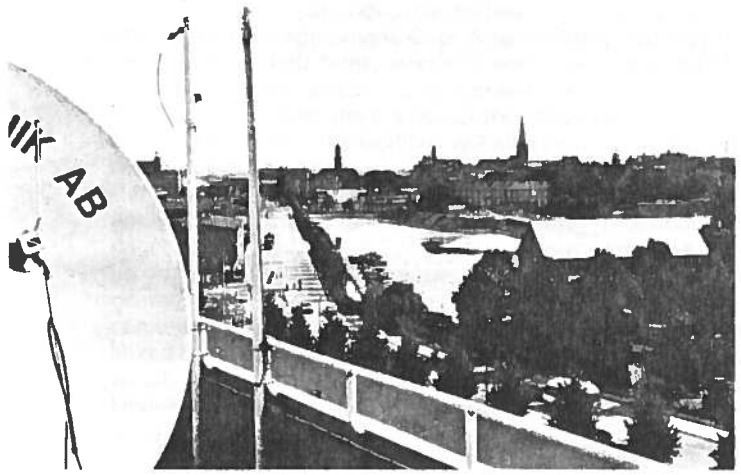
Nor is it only the rapid growth in world trade that has very much enlarged the scale of developing country involvement in marine transport. There has also been a substantial increase in the size of their individual merchant fleets, enabling them to carry more of their own cargoes as well as to have a larger role in world shipping generally. In addition, maritime states have been making greater use of crews from developing countries.

The shortage of expertise in developing countries is generally felt over a range of fields: teaching, administration, maritime safety and other maritime operations. Although there are a number of maritime academies in such countries throughout the world, many are hindered by a lack of teachers. This has led to an acute shortage of skilled personnel in many areas and these countries have had to turn to expatriate personnel to fill the gaps at very high cost. It is a situation which reveals a special need for training of nationals and a reduction of dependence on foreign expertise. Nor is this a local problem. "If the shipping industry worldwide is to develop in the most efficient and economical way," Capt Arvedson argues, "all countries must understand the need for continual updating to meet the most recent requirements."

It is the graduates of the WMU who will become the missionaries of this campaign. They are expected to return to their homeland as fleet managers or senior ship's crew, as inspectors and government officers and, perhaps most important, as teachers of teachers. The project is a highly ambitious one but the support it has received so far suggests that its aims have met very wide international approval.

**Aspects of maritime education, as the World Maritime University gets under way with its first intake of students. On its roof, the growing assembly of antennae will shortly include a ship earth station**

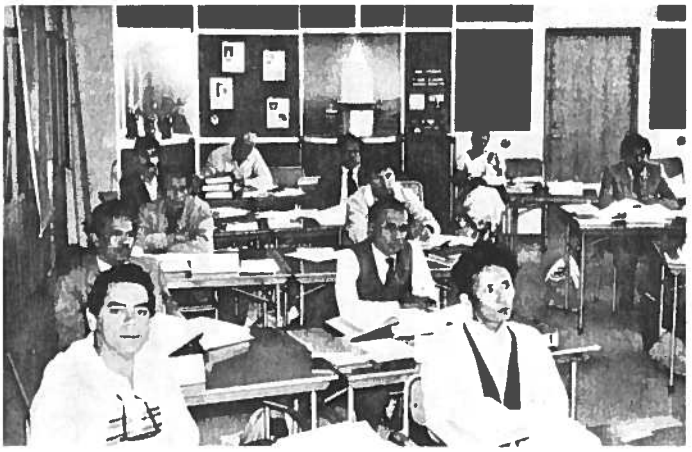




The project was actually born out of an informal discussion in Capt Arvedson's office in 1976 during a brief visit by the IMO Secretary General, Mr C P Srivastava. The place was then one of Sweden's five merchant marine schools and the Malmö establishment specialised as the school of navigation, with Capt Arvedson as rector. Both found that they shared a similar ambition and, over the next four years, put some of the ideas to the test within the school.

The WMU is specifically an aid project for developing countries and the measure was unusual in that any such UN-sponsored facility for developing countries is normally established within one of the countries concerned. The financial

**At work in the computer classroom, below, some of the 42 different nationalities represented in the first intake of students at the WMU, which overlooks the traditionally maritime town of Malmö (bottom left)**



support offered by the Swedish Government, however, plus the offer of the Malmö college facilities by the Malmö authorities, made the European location equally attractive.

The facilities became available because the Swedish authorities had planned to close the Malmö school in 1980. An IMO convention that year on training, navigation and watchkeeping, attended by some 60 nations, voted in favour of establishing the University in Sweden and authorised IMO to proceed.

In mid-1982, the United Nations Development Programme endorsed the proposal and also offered financial support and, in October that year, a contract was signed to open the University in Malmö just eight months later in July this year.

The teaching emphasis is to be on education rather than training. In other words, students are intended to develop an overall progressive approach to solving problems and to develop an attitude for high standards rather than be shown specific answers and values. Every problem in a developing country is liable to be unique and no standard solution is likely to be comprehensive enough. For this reason, the college is maintaining a teaching staff of only about eight professors, gleaned from different countries, including India, Japan, UK, USA and West Germany. Instead it will depend heavily on the support of visiting lecturers from all over the world. The aim is not just economy, Capt Arvedson is at pains to point out. It is a means of ensuring a continuous input of fresh knowledge, new techniques and specific experiences – in other words, to insure against the risk of developing academic isolation.

The syllabus is planned as a selection of long, medium and short courses, based on IMO's experience of providing technical assistance to developing countries, and students will be qualified personnel in mid-career. Two-year courses are run for future teachers and lecturers at merchant marine academies in nautical and engineering specialities, and for ships' inspectors and surveyors, leading to University level degrees – MSc in Fleet Management or in Maritime Administration, Bachelor of Nautical

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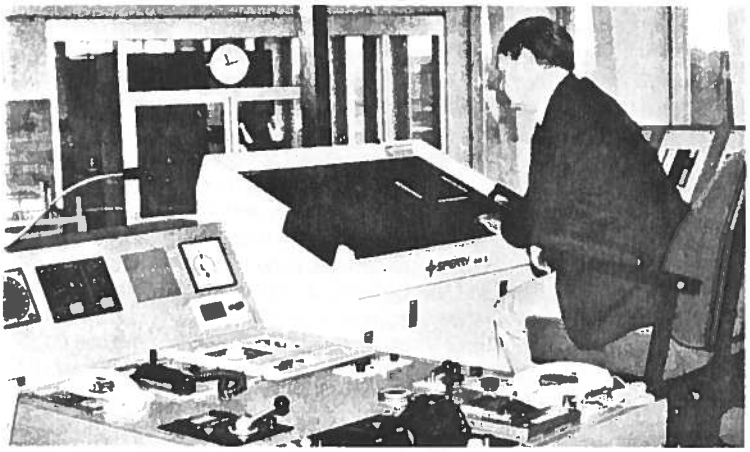
Sciences, Master in Maritime Education, etc.

Then there are also one-year courses for maritime accident investigators, senior marine administrators, port managers and technical managers of shipping companies, marked by issue of appropriate certificates in the technical topics. Finally there are a number of short courses, from three to six weeks in length in specialised subjects chosen for the needs of developing countries. Some of these will also form part of longer courses and include subjects such as tanker safety, handling of dangerous goods and marine pollution.

The change from merchant marine school to maritime university was signalled by the throwing out of every piece of equipment in the place and starting afresh with the most modern technology available. Re-equipment has been wholly dependent on loans or donations of hardware to specification from a number of countries and companies, notably from the USA.

The roof of the building now bristles with antennae ranging from ADF to direct broadcast television and due to include an INMARSAT ship earth station. Immediately below is a fully equipped cockpit bridge simulator, computer-linked and operating on a turntable. Training booths nearby contain every conceivable type of advanced navigation or communications equipment and, apart from conventional classrooms, there is also an extensive computer training centre, a key element of the University and built up under the irrepressible enthusiasm of its director, Capt Bertil Wagner.

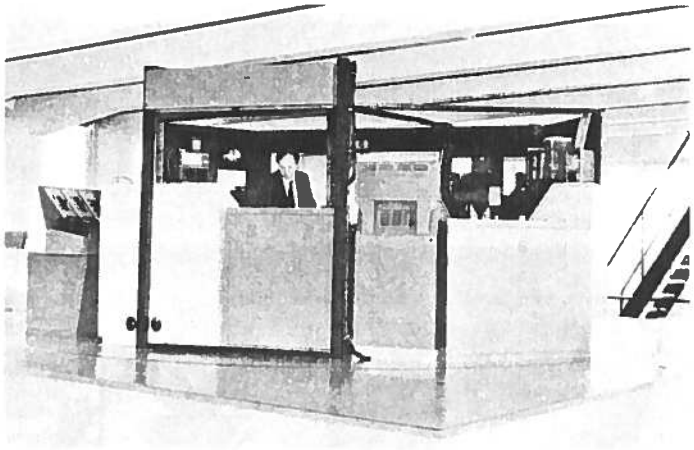
The importance given to this facility is due to the recognition of the future major role for computers in shipping, in spite of its slow growth to date. The aim here, according to Capt Wagner, is to teach the use and possibilities of computers rather than detailed applications. The emphasis will be on data-based systems, data communication and word processing. The University has also acquired an old, 200t tanker which has been specially rebuilt to WMU requirements. Apart from providing



practical training it will also be used to develop ship-shore links and data transfer – provided that somebody comes up with an offer of the right equipment. Capt Wagner noted that they had received better help from navigation equipment firms than from suppliers of communications equipment. He was optimistic of getting support from the big computer companies.

In this context, the facilities will also be used for some research work as well as education. Particularly important, in Capt Wagner's view, is the development of videotex for marine applications. This is a facility, already established ashore, where pages of prepared data in a shore-based computer can be called up on to a screen at sea on request. He also acknowledges the central role in his training programme of satellite communications, particularly for activities such as ship-shore linked computers, data transfer and videotex. In fact it is a facility which is also likely to be incorporated into all areas of the Arvedson regards as a very unusual mixture of high level theory and practical work. He stresses the importance of understanding all sides of an issue from the survival characteristics of LNG ships to the measurement of cracks with ultrasonics and he warns that students will be crawling around the double bottom of ships as well as operating advanced technology. "The fundamental need," he points out, "is to take away the awe of machines, to enable a person to see them only as aids, of which he is the boss."

Much of each course will therefore be fieldwork, away from the University, and a number of establishments from shipyards to insurance companies and testing stations have been lined up for this purpose. The Kokums shipyard, right on the University's doorstep, is considered likely to play a significant part and its well equipped sports and recreation hall, which has been made available to the University, is a crucial asset. Capt Arvedson is emphatic about the importance of leisure and recreation in the



**A proponent of advanced technology, Captain Wagner demonstrates the cockpit bridge simulator, with its fully operative, computer-linked controls, which even rotate the plinth in response to turning commands**

overall effectiveness of the courses. The success of academic work, he maintains, is a function of social adaptation, particularly important for students from radically different environments, and sports are seen as a means of developing the right peace of mind.

The WMU has been budgeted at some US$3·5 million a year, or about US$26,000 per student, once it works up to its full capacity of about 160 students. Much of this money will come from various national donations – Sweden is providing US$1 million a year and Norway a further US$200,000. The balance is expected to come from the UNDP Individual Programme fund and from student fees where IMO considers that the parent country is wealthy enough to pay. In such cases the fees could be as much as US$10,000 per year. But the majority are still likely to receive their training entirely free, including air fare, board and lodging and spending money.

At present, student intake is being handled by IMO on the basis of qualifications and recommendations from each applicant's own government. After the first year, applications will probably be processed at the University itself by the Board of Governors. The problem of selection from excess numbers has not arisen so far and the criteria for discrimination have yet to be established. But there is no doubt that factors such as geographical distribution of applicants is likely to play an important part. ●