

## **“When the eagles are silent, the parrots begin to jabber.” – Winston Churchill**

The sea year stand down is the opening salvo in an effort to fundamentally transform sea year as traditionally practiced at Kings Point. Its abrupt June 15th cancellation must be understood against the following backdrop:

(1) MARAD’s proposed legislation before Congress for up to \$1.2 Billion dollars in new multi-purpose training vessels for the state maritime academies – legislation which pre-dates current events by at least 6 months – the funding for which MARAD cannot easily establish as meeting any federal needs test without dragging KP somehow into the mix;

(2) MARAD’s proposed working group incorporated within said legislation that is tasked with reviewing the continued “appropriateness” of USMMA’s traditional sea year program;

(3) the extremely limited voice (2 representatives) USMMA will actually have in impacting such a decision, the preponderance of state maritime representatives and other potentially hostile actors with seats at this working group table, and a convenient “no quorum necessary” rule;

(4) MARAD’s curious and contradictory declaration that the commercial maritime industry is unsafe for KP midshipmen, while state maritime cadets (who are offered MARAD stipends) are allowed to freely take all the commercial billets that MARAD has forcibly denied to KP midshipmen;

(5) MARAD’s foreknowledge in April, and perhaps much earlier, that the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) Accreditation Report would be a 5 point indictment of both MARAD and the current USMMA Administration, actors who are disgraced with having presided over an historic but ignoble first: USMMA now has the lamentable “distinction” of being the very first Federal Service Academy ever to receive a set of accreditation warnings in the history of the United States.

I submit that MARAD has begun the process of transitioning KP’s Sea Year experience from a proven, time-honored, and yes, battle tested “one on one” apprenticeship model, to the training ship model practiced in the other State Maritime Academies. The public disclosure of the accreditation warning(s) was the triggering event which led the principal actors (MARAD & USMMA Administration) to accelerate this plan, using SA/SH to both firewall off objections to the sea year stand down from stakeholders & the BOV, and to deflect blame away from their own administrative, governance and leadership failures. Transforming Sea Year to a training ship model also creates the set of the conditions necessary to accomplish a number of other strategic goals and objectives of both MARAD and the current Administration, including:

**Increased Flexibility in the Academic Calendar.** For licensing purposes, the Coast Guard has determined that, for the state maritime training model, 1 day on a training vessel is equivalent to 1.5 days at sea. For Marine Engineering Majors, for example, this can free up to 100 calendar days for other course work (300 days sea days become 200 actual days using this CG metric). This provides a significant number of valuable calendar days that could be used for more “leadership development” courses, more humanities courses, and more sensitivity training-type efforts, all stated goals and objectives of MARAD and the current administration.

*“...The curriculum needs to be adjusted to incorporate a formal, interdisciplinary leadership program. If the Academy is serious about diversity, the culture needs to change to make diverse recruits feel welcome and equal among their peers. (2014 Van Wyk Advisory Report, pages 13)*

**Place a greater emphasis on a more Liberal Arts Education to improve USMMA’s “academic report card.”** The introduction of more humanities courses, a formal leadership program and a more Liberal Arts focus must, due to an already tight academic calendar, come at the expense of the highly technical, “hard science” content areas traditionally associated with the KP educational experience, reducing the overall “rigor” of the curriculum. Making the program less technically challenging would naturally lead to increased retention and graduation rates across the board, including competitive appointments, non-competitive appointments and other “preferred” cohorts. In turn, this would help

increase the overall diversity of future graduating classes – another stated and highly prized goal of MARAD and the current administration.

*“[The Academy needs to] make a higher level of commitment to diversity training and social justice to help the Academy expand its diversity among women and minorities.” (2014 Van Wyk Advisory Report, page 9)*

Of course, the natural push back against such a plan is that MARAD and the Administration would be fundamentally transforming USMMA’s curriculum in a manner that would make it quite indistinguishable from the other maritime academies, or, for that matter, even the other federal service academies:

*“USMMA lags behind the other Federal service academies and many other institutions of higher education in making leadership development a central focus of students’ experience both inside and outside of the classroom. For example, West Point has a formal leadership curriculum, and encourages exploration, discussion, and assessment of students’ leadership in student organizations, athletics, and the classroom, including in classes where leadership is not the main subject.” (2014 Van Wyk Advisory Report, page 6)*

In such a re-alignment, KP’s reputation as an “elite” institution would be blurred or eliminated, but to the “social justice” academics and engineers who never found a minimum standard they could not tweak or bend towards their agenda, the potential “report card” rewards are just too great. And besides, for the politically correct crowd, “elite” might be too controversial and impolitic a term in the current milieu – perhaps far too suggestive of supporting and maintaining a “privileged” class.

Realizing many stakeholders would strongly oppose any such move, it does not take much imagination to see how MARAD might find it useful to exploit an on-campus SA/SH concern in an attempt to:

- (1) use SA/SH as a red herring – the primary *raison d’être* for the poor showing documented in the MSCHE Report, as well as the sea year stand down;
- (2) misdirect attention away from the more embarrassing and shameful accreditation warning areas dealing with Leadership, Governance and Administration; and
- (3) silence any opposition to the sea year stand down by “pulling at heart strings” or through outright intimidation - MARAD knows full well that SA/SH is like kryptonite - a “hot potato” to the political class that will help keep the BOV watchdogs at bay. Besides, the sea year stand down action was taken “for the sake and safety of the children.”

Does all this seem too implausible? Two years ago Brian Blower, the MARAD Liaison to the Academy, spoke as an uninvited guest during a NY Metro USMMA Parents association meeting, wherein he proceeded to complain about the high costs of educating a KP midshipman relative to the costs of educating a SUNY Maritime cadet. He also complained that the KP curriculum was “too trade school” and “too technical,” and that it needed more leadership training and more humanities. The audience pushed back, pointing out that the curriculum was the recent product of a five year review & updating process that met or exceeded accreditation standards, and that its rigor and focus, particularly the sea year, was what distinguished Kings Point as an elite, more prestigious institution vis a vis the other maritime academies.

*“...the USMMA Superintendent is seeking significant curricular and structural changes to add a leadership curriculum to create a formal, interdisciplinary leadership development program incorporating aspects of students’ academic and regimental lives. The Board strongly supports the Superintendent’s objectives; **however, some of USMMA’s academic leaders have a philosophical belief that leadership is innate and cannot be taught. This philosophical difference needs to be resolved.**”*

Mr. Blower’s retort was, essentially, that KP was becoming an anachronism: that it needed to adapt to changing financial and educational circumstances. For all of those who doubt, this meeting was recorded. It was not long after this meeting that Dr. Kumar, the previous academic dean and architect of the current curriculum, was essentially forced out of the Academy.

*“...After initial progress [the Midshipmen Leadership Development Program Working Group] stalled because members could not reach agreement on the relative weight and priority of the Bachelor of Science Degree Curriculum, the U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Mariner Credentialing training, and the structured experiences to develop leaders of exemplary character in a four year period.” (2015 Van Wyk Advisory Report, page 4)*

So, there is obviously far more going on here than meets the eye. MARAD executes the stand down ostensibly because the risk of SA/SH makes it unsafe for KP midshipmen to work on commercial ocean-going vessels, though this risk is apparently minimal for the cadets from the other state maritime academies, who are taking all the commercial billets forcibly vacated from KP. Moreover this environmental safety deficit is compounded by alleged moral character deficits of your average KP midshipman, who, if MARAD and the USMMA Administration are to be believed, are unable to withstand what they characterize as the corrosive, salty, misogynist culture of the commercial maritime industry, and who therefore are the primary vector responsible for negatively impacting the campus climate with more and more SA/SH.

This tripe is not only highly insulting, it is utterly absurd: KP draws from the same outstanding candidate pool of high achievers of sound moral character as all the other service academies. Apparently what is lost on MARAD is the fact that a mariner vocation is full of many occupational hazards, not the least of which being, since time immemorial, a completely unpredictable and unforgiving sea. Also lost on MARAD, as many female alumni and current midshipmen have pointed out, is the fact that the KP sea year experience provides more than real world, on the job training – it provides LEADERSHIP TRAINING and LIFE TRAINING. Insulating midshipmen from the challenges that life entails helps no one and accomplishes nothing.

Certainly, the midshipmen must be adequately prepared to effectively deal with all potential hazards, including SA/SH, but they should not be denied their opportunity to go to sea ***on the very commercial vessels on which they will be obligated to serve just one short year after their initial sea year experience.*** Only a fool would part the tools from a carpenter and then ask him to build a home. Since MARAD Administrator “Chip” Jaenichen once commanded nuclear submarines, one can reasonably surmise that he is not a fool. Fools generally do not rise to such lofty positions of command authority. Therefore, one must conclude there is another agenda afoot, rendering the preceding analysis all the more plausible.

As Mr. Hill has clearly documented, the Sea Year SA/SH issue is a false narrative, but even if we were, for arguments sake, to assume MARAD’s and Senior USMMA Administration’s narrative was accurate, the effort to combat SA/SH will require a great deal of skill, thoughtfulness and effective, respected leadership. Any effort to drive up reporting of SA/SH incidents cannot be prosecuted in a ham-fisted, "the beatings will continue until moral improves" manner, which risks creating (or exacerbating) a climate of fear, intimidation and resentment within the regiment, with the possible unintended consequence of actually driving down empathy for SA/SH and its victims.

According to the MSCHE Accreditation Report, SA/SH has been an issue for 10+ years, the last 4 of which have been under the current administration's (and the current MARAD's Administrator's) watch. This report, together with the various SAGR surveys, indicate that these current actors have made SA/SH concerns worse, not better, over the last 4 years, to say nothing of putting the Academy's Accreditation in jeopardy for many other reasons unrelated to SA/SH, including deficits in areas of leadership, governance and administration.

Are we now to believe these current actors suddenly possess the skill sets and ability to work this in a positive manner that drives SA/SH occurrences down, and reporting and empathy “up” throughout the entire regiment? Assuming it is not simply a delaying tactic, this August 23, 2016 communique from the USMMA Administration is an indication that things are actually starting to spiral further out of these actors’ command and control:

*“Over the next few months, we will have independent outside experts experienced in assessing institutional and organizational culture examine all such aspects within the USMMA, both on campus and at sea, in an attempt to identify root causes and their impacts to the Academy culture and offer possible short term and long term corrective actions to address the issues.”*

If nothing else, this “new need” for external guidance provides a window into their own self-estimate of leadership ability and compassion. Indeed, all of the events that have occurred since June 15th suggest that these current actors have a stunningly callous disregard for the midshipmen being negatively impacted by their decision to "stand down" sea year. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in the abrupt, indiscriminate, ham-fisted manner in which the midshipmen were called back from sea, which was executed without any input or guidance from the Academy’s own Office of Shipboard Training. Furthermore, it was executed with complete indifference to the whole variety of working conditions these midshipmen were actually experiencing on each of their respective vessels, highlighting the lack of calibration, nuance, compassion, communication and overall competence we are dealing with here. Finally, by their own self-admission, MARAD and Senior USMMA officials incomprehensibly executed the stand down without any recovery plan, and, apparently, without adequate consideration given to both the short and long term negative consequences the sea year stand down will have on the midshipmen, the curriculum, the institution, its re-accreditation and future recruitment.