

\$17m boost to train ratings for HK register

By Ernie Pereira

TRAINING of seamen or ratings for Hongkong's present and future needs will be intensified when the Seamen's Training Temporary Centre, now located in sprawling Little Sai Wan, Chaiwan, moves next year to its new purpose-built \$17 million centre in Tajlamchung, New Territories.

Hongkong, says Captain John C.Y. Man of the Vocational Training Council which manages the STTC, has to attach considerable importance to the training of ratings, especially for the future when Hongkong becomes a Special Administrative Region (SAR) in 1997, still 12 years away. "We will be needing them as Hongkong-registered ships will need crews," he said.

Captain Man said the ratified Sino-British agreement states that Hongkong's present systems of shipping management and shipping regulation, including the system for regulating conditions of seamen will be maintained.

Hongkong will also have its own autonomous shipping register and, thus, will have to rely on its own crewing, emphasising the importance of the on-going training of ratings that is being done by the STTC.

Hongkong now comes under the

International Maritime Organisation's Convention on Standards of Training Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers 1978 (STCW), which came into effect on April 28, 1984. This made it mandatory for Hongkong watchkeeping ratings to obtain a certificate qualifying them to take up navigational and engine room watchkeeping duties on board ship.

Captain Man said the present centre, which encompasses 8.5 hectares of ground with extensive water frontage, has trained more than 1,500 ratings in compliance with the IMOC's high standards which will continue to apply in future. The centre was started in February 1984.

Now only those with in-service seafaring experience are accepted by the STTC, but when the centre moves to its future permanent home in November 1986, it will accept those without pre-knowledge of the sea and ships. This, in two words, means "raw recruits," Captain Man emphasised, adding that the new centre will be specifically built according "to its requirements." In-service training will also be continued to upgrade standards.

The courses provided by the centre will enable ratings to work in all kinds of ships — from container ships, tankers to general cargo vessels and bulk

carriers. The lashing of cargo on board is one of the important features of training, he pointed out.

Recruits are taught personal safety, tanker safety, survival training, fire-fighting and human relations. Captain Man said human relations was important as crew members, when out at sea, have to work and live together. Thus a harmonious crew means an efficient crew, he added.

Modules are used for instruction and the engineering room, for instance, is equipped with an engine which the recruits must learn to dismantle and reassemble.

Watchkeeping ratings must learn to do engine room watch and navigational watch.

The centre, says Captain Man, now has a capacity to train 240 seamen on various courses at any one time under the management of a total of 43 staff headed by Captain Jack Howarth, a master mariner, and his officer-in-charge, bearded Mr Bob Jones, formerly of the Royal Navy, who had applied for the post in the United Kingdom. "I like it here," Mr Jones said.

Deck and engine room ratings are put through a six-week basic course. Two more weeks are needed for a general purpose course.

The training programme also covers first aid and proficiency in survival craft. The centre has 14 instructors who lecture and demonstrate in Cantonese.

In addition, Captain Man said, facilities are available for training seamen in the following specific aspects:

- a steel mock up ship structure and fire bays for training in fire-fighting;
- a sea survival training pool fitted with a jumping platform;
- a lifeboat and liferaft training installation comprising five lifeboats and their launching davits and a fitted ship's gangway; and
- a cargo handling gear installation comprising a Macgregor hatch, samson posts, derricks and winches.

Training is free but trainees have to pay for their own meals. Trainees can live in the centre, but this is optional as most trainees prefer to live at home. They are each given a weekly allowance of \$100.

On completion of successful training, seamen are registered with the Seamen's Recruit Office to whom local shipping companies turn to for recruitment.

The new centre is likely to be ready by November 1986. Foundation work has already begun on the new centre, but the superstructure has not yet been built. Captain Man said the new centre will be streamlined and be able to accomplish more than the present one. Expenses in running the centre are borne by the government.