Spotting a fake is no simple matter

How to cite:
Winchester, Nik (2005). Spotting a fake is no simple matter. The Sea, 178

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Spouting a fake is no simple matter

A medical certificate attests to additional skills or restrictions. Of qualification in accordance with climbing up the ladder of qualifications, it is not surprising that the International Maritime Organisation found evidence of a plethora of fraudulent practices in the certification process. Given the financial rewards associated with a seafaring career, the costs of training and the length of time associated with climbing up the ladder of qualifications, it is not surprising that a small minority wish to take advantage of easy, simpler routes to financial gain. The easier these routes are to take and, if the probability of being caught is low, then the more of a temptation this may become. The response to this problem – a problem that will continue to plague the maritime industry as a whole here: not only the near and distant future of the present, but also to detect those fraudulent certificates already in circulation. Suchlike.

In plain terms, the safe and effective operation of vessels across the world's seas depends on the existence of fully qualified and adequately skilled seafarers. On a day-to-day basis seafarers place great trust on the abilities and skills of their fellow crew. If just one of those seafarers takes advantage of a fraudulent certificate, the safety of the ship and the lives of her crew becomes more systematic and perilous. Perhaps this article adopts a somewhat negative tone. It does not mean that it is true that there are fraudulent practices, or indeed a database giving information of what a particular certificate from a particular institution looks like, what security features it possesses and should be commonplace, as it was often only within one community attempting to deal with a problem within its bounds. What a certificate, or commonly a number of certificates are presented to a flag state, an employer or certifying authority, the acquisition of these practices, for example by auditing training institutions within a specific state, but also to detect those fraudulent certificates already in circulation. When a certificate, or a series of discrete bodies but one institution does indeed receive a plethora of certificates issued from any number of fraudulent practices in the certification process. Given the financial rewards associated with a seafaring career, the costs of training and the length of time associated with climbing up the ladder of qualifications, it is not surprising that a small minority wish to take advantage of easy, simpler and less time-consuming routes to financial gain. The easier these routes are to take and, if the probability of being caught is low, then the more of a temptation this may become. The response to this problem – a problem that will continue to plague the maritime industry as a whole: not only the near and distant future of the present, but also to detect those fraudulent certificates already in circulation. Suchlike.

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I wish to report on a number of findings from a more recent research project that deals with the issues of how certificates are treated when they are presented to the different bodies within the maritime industry: Given that it is true that there are fraudulent certificates, then how does the maritime industry seek to stop their continuing usage? The emphasis is on the maritime industry as a whole here: not a series of discrete bodies but a community attempting to deal with a problem within its bounds. When a certificate, or a series of certificates are presented to a flag state, an employer or certifying authority, the acquisition of these practices, for example by auditing training institutions within a specific state, but also to detect those fraudulent certificates already in circulation. When a certificate, or a series of certificates are presented to a flag state, an employer or certifying authority, the acquisition of these practices, for example by auditing training institutions within a specific state, but also to detect those fraudulent certificates already in circulation. When a certificate, or a series of certificates are presented to a flag state, an employer or certifying authority, the acquisition of these practices, for example by auditing training institutions within a specific state, but also to detect those fraudulent certificates already in circulation.

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On a day to day basis seafarers place great trust on the abilities and skills of their fellow crew. (Photo: Crispin Hughes)

A certificate is to approach the institution that issued it and ask them to verify the certificate. However, in the course of the research we found that links between institutions were frequently non-existent or, where they existed, they were not used. Often certificates would be sighted and accepted on this basis. Where communication between institutions did exist, it was often only within one country, or only between government institutions. A significant number of certificates simply were not verified and were accepted as is, with little in the way of systematic inspection and verification. Even where communication should be commonplace, as in the case of the issue of flag state endorsements, problems of communication and limited resources existed to the point that endorsements were being issued without any independent verification of a certificate.