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### CMSI Translations #14: Manual for Developing Ship Captains

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Li Mingyu

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# 翻译

TRANSLATIONS

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**Manual for Developing Ship Captains**



**中国海事研究所**  
China Maritime Studies Institute



CHINA MARITIME STUDIES INSTITUTE  
CENTER FOR NAVAL WARFARE STUDIES  
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## Manual for Developing Ship Captains<sup>1</sup>

Liu Xue and Li Mingyu

In 1949, the People's Navy set sail from Baimamiao in Jiangsu province. Throughout its journey, the People's Navy has produced numerous heroes, and an increasing number of talented personnel of all types have accelerated their growth on the deep blue waterways. Among them, Navy surface ship captains have become a shining group. How can young aspirants with dreams become captains?

The Dalian Naval Vessel Academy was established on November 22, 1949. It primarily focuses on cultivating military and political command officers for the Navy's surface forces, as well as technical officers in marine hydrology and surveying. Over the past 70 years since its founding, the Academy has trained more than 50,000 military and political command officers for the People's Navy, over 80 percent of ship captains, and more than 200 admirals of the Republic, earning a reputation as the "cradle of naval officers."

### **Q: What is the first step to becoming a ship captain? What are the requirements?**

A: Regardless of whether one is a sailor or eligible young person, the first step to becoming a ship's captain is to enter a military academy. The Dalian Naval Academy recruits unmarried high school graduates (including those who graduated from previous years) who are at least 17 years old and no older than 20 (as of August 31 of that year). Male applicants should be at least 1.62 meters [5ft, 4in] tall, and female applicants at least 1.58 meters [5ft, 2in] tall. For majors requiring vessel qualifications, male applicants should be no taller than 1.85 meters [6ft, 1in]. Their uncorrected visual acuity in both eyes should be above 4.5 (if either eye's uncorrected vision is less than 4.8, a corrected vision test is required, with corrected vision expected to be 4.8 or better, and the correction must be no more than 600 degrees).

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<sup>1</sup> 李雪 [Li Xue] and 黎明宇 [Li Mingyu], 舰长养成手册 [“Manual for Developing Ship Captains”], 解放军生活 [PLA Life], no. 4 (2023), pp. 20-23.

**Translator's note:** *PLA Life* is an official PLA-published magazine.

**Q: What special activities are there at the Academy?**

A: The Academy will periodically organize a variety of recreational and sports activities for cadets. Cadets can also join clubs based on their own specialties and interests, or organize their own extracurricular activities.

Some focus on enhancing military thinking on the naval battlefield, naval professionalism, and surface vessel job skills, polishing cadets' military professionalism and skills for winning. Examples include the Wargame Club, the Sea Wave Special Forces Club, and the Ship's Captain Forum Club.

Some focus on solidifying a specialist knowledge foundation, fostering a spirit of in-depth study and research, and stimulating enthusiasm for technological innovation, promoting the transformation of classroom learning into practical applications and enhancing the cadets' innovative vitality. Examples include the Beidou Innovation Club, the Military Modeling Club, and the Network Technology Club.

Some focus on enriching cultural heritage, developing recreational and athletic talents, and cultivating noble character, improving both the cadets' physical and mental qualities and also the ability of Navy grassroots units to organize recreational and sports activities. Examples include the Sea Melody Arts Club, the Hurricane Martial Arts Fitness Club, and the Swimmers Union Club.

**Q: What special courses are offered at the Academy?**

The Dalian Naval Academy offers a total of 14 specializations. After enrolling, cadets not only take classes in their major, but also take courses in ideological and political education, general education courses, and more. Among these are interesting and distinctive courses such as Navy foreign affairs etiquette, ship damage control training and organization, and other maritime courses.

Navy Foreign Affairs Etiquette: Navy [personnel] are referred to as "diplomats in military uniform." As the People's Navy continues to advance into the deep blue, exchanges with the navies of other countries are becoming deeper and more frequent. Ship captains must, naturally, master the etiquette of foreign affairs. In this course, cadets will learn about how to demonstrate respect, about how to organize and participate in foreign affairs activities, and about the particular etiquette that officers and sailors should observe. In practical sessions, cadets can even learn Western dining etiquette while enjoying a meal.

Ship Damage Control Training and Organization: This course is based on the model ship exteriors at the Dalian Naval Academy's surface vessel damage control training site. It creates realistic severe damage scenarios, such as compartment fires and breaches that cause flooding. Through these life-and-death tests of water and fire, this course cultivates cadets' damage control skills and command capabilities in ship firefighting and sinking-prevention, fosters their fighting spirit, and hones strong psychological qualities, solidifying the final line of support for vessel survivability in wartime.

Other Maritime Courses: As "future captains," Navy cadets naturally have distinctive maritime learning courses. The Dalian Naval Academy has modern, large, general-purpose ocean-going training ships such as the *Zheng He*, the *Deng Shichang*, and the *Qi Jiguang*, which are known as "mobile universities at sea" and can support cadets in maritime internships and distant-ocean training. At sea, cadets can learn important knowledge such as ship operation, seamanship, celestial navigation, and terrestrial navigation. Additionally, there are opportunities to accompany training ships on international visits.

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**Q: What distinctive training programs are offered at the Academy?**

A: During their time at the Academy, cadets will undergo various training sessions targeting physical and technical capabilities. Among these, the most distinctive are the "Strait Warrior – Training for Crossing the Bohai Strait by Rowboat," "Sailing Training," and "Thousand-Person Formation Training."

Strait Warrior – Training for Crossing the Bohai Strait by Rowboat: Since the 1980s, the Dalian Naval Academy has continuously conducted the "Strait Warrior" sea training. Participating cadets usually set off from the Liaodong Peninsula, overcoming harsh conditions such as high temperatures and high humidity, battling winds and waves along the way. They row a three-ton, 12-oar, unpowered rowboat, paddling tens of thousands of strokes daily, traversing multiple treacherous and swift waterways. They row a total distance of over 130 nautical miles to reach Yantai, Shandong, accomplishing the feat of crossing the Bohai Strait "by hand."

Sailing Training: Sailing is a challenging sport, and for the Navy, sailing training helps cultivate a spirit of fearlessness in the face of wind and waves and courage to navigate the oceans. Taking advantage of its proximity to the sea, the Dalian Naval Academy organizes sailing training for cadets in Xinghai Bay throughout the year. In 2006, the Dalian Naval Academy formed the Navy's first sailing team, which has since represented the Chinese Navy and won championship trophies in international sailing competitions such as the Italian International Naval Sailing Competition, the Brazilian Navy International Sailing Competition, and the China-Japan-Korea Sailing Competition.

Thousand-Person Formation Training: Composed of 1,050 cadets divided into 42 rows, with each row consisting of 25 people. During this training, the cadets simultaneously march in formation, sing military songs, and perform military music. Without anyone commanding them, the rows can achieve uniformity, coordination, and profound meaning while moving in vertical and horizontal lines like the edge of a knife. This achieves the training goals of a thousand people moving in sync, a thousand people speaking with one voice, and a thousand people with a unified spirit.

**Q: What development path will you experience after graduation?**

A: After graduation, one is assigned to a grassroots unit to become a deputy department head on a ship. Through continuous experience in various assignments, there is an opportunity to successively serve as a department head and an executive officer (*fu jianzhang*),<sup>2</sup> and ultimately become an honored ship captain.



Conducting sailing training.



Crossing the Bohai Strait by rowboat.

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<sup>2</sup> **Translator's note:** The term *fu jianzhang* (副舰长) is sometimes translated as “deputy captain.”



Learning foreign affairs etiquette.



Strengthening physical training.

### **Navigation Department Deputy on the [Type 052D Destroyer] *Qiqihar*, Fan Min**

In 2022, I graduated from the Dalian Naval Academy with a specialization in ship navigation command, and I am currently serving as the *Qiqihar*'s Navigation Department Deputy Director.

"Radio waves flow, connecting sea and sky." As a telephone operator (*huawubing*), I gained valuable grassroots experience that strengthened my belief in defending our sea frontier. "Observing the sky and measuring the sea, mastering the ocean"—during my four years at the Academy, I absorbed theoretical knowledge from books and laboratories, and strengthened my physical fitness.

Now, I have become a ship's officer with command functions (*zhihui junguan*). Learning about new types of equipment, seeking advice about practical experience, and transitioning from being at a loss to attempting independent watch duty, I gradually integrated into the vessel under the education and guidance of the organization and leadership. Amidst the high tension of combat alarms, I have become conscious of the mission and responsibility that this era has bestowed upon us young officers.

The first time I went to sea with the fleet, during a visit, board, search, and seizure (VBSS) drill with other ships, I picked up the radio microphone for the first time and

attempted to establish communication in English. I used to know nothing about military equipment, but now I can share every aspect of the ship with everyone during operational meetings. With each voyage and repeated attempts, I have become more certain of my new orientation and goals.

I am fortunate to be in a critical period of the Navy's transformation and talent development. I will seize the opportunity and meet the challenges of history and the times, hone my thinking, strengthen my physique, enhance my skills, and comprehensively improve my own qualities. I will plan and study operations, dedicating my youth and passion to ensure "the ship may sail thousands of miles without losing course."



Fan Min

### **Anti-Surface Warfare Department Head on the [Type 054A Frigate] *Wuhu*, Chen Changxiang**

Looking back all of a sudden, [I realize that] I have served in the military for over 13 years. From a local high school student to a cadet at a military academy, then maturing into a ship's department head, the floodgates of memory have opened, and thoughts flow like water from a clear spring.

I was born in Yancheng, a city famous for sun-dried sea salt.<sup>3</sup> Since childhood, I have had an inexplicable affinity for the sea. Whenever I stand on the beach and gaze at the boundless blue ocean, a strong desire for exploration always swells in my heart. In July 2009, after the college entrance examination, I applied to the Dalian Naval Academy and became a Navy cadet.

In August 2016, I was transferred to the *Wuhu* as a deputy department head. As a new-type main combatant, the *Wuhu* has a high level of automation and informatization, which means I had to start learning anew. Although it was a completely new challenge, without stepping forward, one cannot cross fences or climb mountains. Therefore, I delved into books, frequently sought advice, and learned component by component. I

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<sup>3</sup> **Translator's note:** Yancheng is located in Jiangsu province.

studied in depth, striving to thoroughly understand the equipment and make effective use of it.

In 2018, I deployed with the ship on the 30th Gulf of Aden escort mission and visited five countries, including Oman and Tunisia. This mission made me truly realize the power of the motherland's Navy and become conscious of the mission and responsibility borne by a Navy officer.

In the journey of life, every experience is a form of growth. At this new starting point, I will continue to strive, grow through challenges, and complete each task assigned to me by my superiors, living up to the earnest expectations of the motherland and the people.



Chen Changxiang

### **Acting Captain of the [Type 054A Frigate] *Daqing*, Sun Lin**

Since joining the People's Navy in 2007, I have served on seven ships of three different classes, leaving deep blue footprints across five continents and three oceans, covering over 100,000 nautical miles aboard warships. In sailing the ocean and interacting with navies from multiple countries, I have both witnessed and experienced the transformation, construction, and development of the People's Navy.

In the past, our warships were small in tonnage and only took short voyages, and the living conditions on board were relatively crude. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China [in 2012], the People's Navy has developed rapidly.<sup>4</sup> We now have our own large warships, formidable weapon systems, and comfortable living conditions, all of which have left a deep impression on me. At that time, as navigator, I was excited to unfold the "World Nautical Chart" for the first time. It depicted the deep blue course of a strong nation's navy, and I felt immensely proud.

Especially during visits abroad, when the confident People's Navy opens up exchanges with foreign counterparts and local overseas Chinese, I feel even greater honor and pride

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<sup>4</sup> **Translator's note:** The 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress marked Xi Jinping's ascension to the head of the Chinese Communist Party.

in being a member of the Chinese Navy, and it strengthens my belief in building a world-class navy.

From cruising the near seas to venturing alone into the distant oceans, from observing and learning to confidently showcasing, from a novice crew member to a captain of a great nation's ship, I have grown together with the People's Navy. Looking to the future, bearing the mission, and heading towards the deep blue, I have even greater expectations for the People's Navy, setting sail on the open ocean and forging ahead through the waves!



Sun Lin

**Captain of the [Type 052D Destroyer] *Guiyang*, Zhao Xuetao**

Every time I gaze at the sea, I have a new appreciation for it.

At the age of 20, as an academy cadet, I sailed aboard a ship for the first time. Watching the majestic trail of the vessel cutting through the waves, my youthful self was filled with ambition and passion, and I was full of hope for the future. Facing the sea, I strove to look into the distance, watching the shimmering ripples on the water, knowing that this would be the stage for my dreams.

Life at the academy was tough but unforgettable. Faced with the heavy load of specialty classes and military skills training every day, I gritted my teeth and persevered. Upon graduation, I still insisted on going to a front-line ship unit. After ten years of honing my skills, having made my choice, I will continue without any regret.

Time flies by quickly. Looking back, after serving as a department head and executive officer, I am now honored to be the *Guiyang*'s captain. Being confronted with a new-type destroyer with gradually advancing informatization following equipment upgrades, my sense of inadequacy in my skills has grown. Therefore, my daily routine has come to include specialized study day and night, as well as discussions with the officers and sailors.

Nowadays, I have gradually shed the restlessness of my youth and replaced it with a reverence for the sea. As a revolutionary sailor of the new era witnessing the transformation and development of the naval forces, I feel a heavy responsibility on my shoulders, with a long way to go. The Navy's transformation and development is a relay race, in which each generation must run its leg well, working together with the goal of successfully completing various missions and tasks.



Zhao Xuetao