

Cadetship I - Memories of Engineer Cadets Lo Pui Sang & Tham Choon Kin

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Authors:

Lo Pui Sang - who graduated with a Diploma in Marine Engineering in 1973. He was the 8th batch of students who took the "old" course i.e. 5 years comprising 3 years of study, 12 months of workshop practice and 12 to 18 months at sea. Email: lopuisang@yahoo.com.sg

Tham Choon Kin - who graduated with a Diploma in Marine Engineering in 1973 and a batch mate of Lo Pui Sang. Email: thamckin@gmail.com

Preamble

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Singapore Polytechnic marine engineering students were required to clock at least nine months of sea time as engineer cadets before they can graduate with a Diploma in Marine Engineering. Cadetship is when students (typically 17 year olds) go to sea for the first time in their lives to learn what it takes to be a marine engineer.

All would be leaving the familiarity of their home. The fortunate would enter a nurturing environment where caring "seniors" show them the way, share what they know and imprint them with fond memories. The less fortunate thought they entered Hell!

They all survive to tell their tales AND discover that they have what it takes to survive anywhere! The ships they signed on range from small coasters to VLCCs. Some tramped to neighbouring countries while others actually get to sail around the World. Some spent long periods in port while waiting for their cargo to be loaded and/or unloaded. They usually returned with empty pockets. A few never enter port and could from their mooring buoy see on a clear day, only the coasts of distant lands. Whatever their fate, ALL cadets returned with lasting memories of their cadetship.

Lo Pui Sang and Tham Choon Kin were cadets in the early 1970s. They are the first two to share their memories with us. I would encourage all mariners to do the same. From your accounts, readers (especially land lubbers) would come to know that mariners are indeed extraordinary people. Mariners are unsunk heroes who are rarely in the news and it is they that shipped most of what we eat!

Memories of Engineer Cadet Lo Pui Sang

For my batch, only the top students were given the chance to sail on Blue Funnel as cadets. But, I feel that this old adage is useless as the smartest students who excel academically might not be the best revenue earners in future.

I regretted very much sailing on Blue Funnel as it just deprived me of all the fun during my youthful days. I always envy those who sailed on coastal runs like Straits Steamship where the whole crew was Chinese and there was no racial discrimination. You got to enjoy all the Chinese food that you missed on Blue Flue (as was called that time). You were sandwiched between the “devils” (or “ang mohs”) and the sea (the crew were mostly from Hong Kong and Shanghai, who didn't like to mix with Singaporean cadets). I had to put on my full uniform (they are called “blues”) before I was allowed to enter the saloon for my “chow” (meals). Imagine the extra trouble one had to go through to take off one's boiler suit, take a shower, put on the blues, eat, and remove the blues, put on the boiler suit and then go back to work in the engine room. It was enough to sometimes make me go to the aft of the ship to beg for some miserable Chinese food from the crew!

However, I loved being paid in pounds (1 sterling pound was S\$ 8.00 in 1972) and enjoyed the privilege to take tea on Auntie Lisa (Queen Elizabeth). Blue Flu's pay was among the highest for cadets, supposedly only next to Shell tankers (see Tham Choon Kin's contribution).

When you sail on old ships it was like hell. Scavenge fires were often and the cadets had to do the entire “suckers” job like cleaning the scavenge spaces. And they were hot spaces due to the exhaust from many days of steaming full speed at sea. Nowadays, the younger breeds are so lucky. Whenever there is a problem, the shore gangs are called in and yet they behaved as if they know much more than their seniors. I don't think the younger breed had ever held a 7-pound sledge hammer to slacken the crosshead nuts. Today, hydraulic tools are used and as a result, their boiler suits are so white that they can go to parties in them!

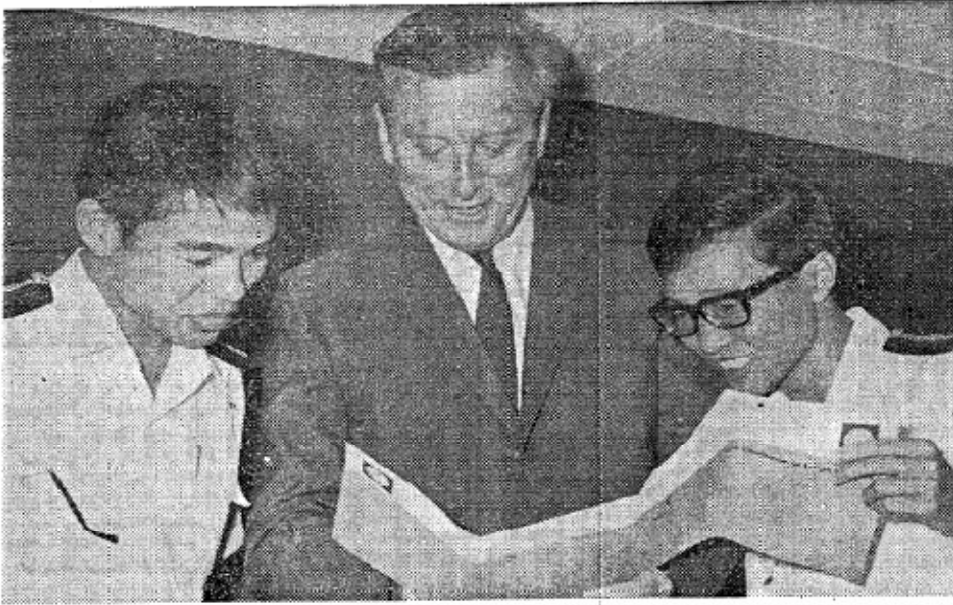
Memories of Engineer Cadet Tham Choon Kin

I attended the Singapore Polytechnic Marine Engineering Course from 1968 and graduated in 1973 as the 8th batch with the marine engineering diploma. I was one of the first two cadets to be awarded a Shell scholarship to do the cadetship onboard a Shell VLCC. I have a great time with the British mates onboard together with my mate, Foong Ah Pang.

Dr Toh Chin Chin Chye, the then Minister for Science and Technology and the then Shell CEO Mr. J.J. Gerzon (recently was awarded as an Honourable Citizenship of Singapore) sent us off with a fanfare onboard the Shell VLCC, SS Murex. It was the first time a VLCC came to Singapore and anchored at the newly built single buoy mooring system off Pulau Bukom. There were news reports in all the local newspapers (2 chippings are attached).

I sail on the SS Murex for six months and was very well treated with great food and training program. It was indeed a great experience sailing on the VLCC and on other tankers with Shell for the remaining period of my cadetship training.

Two Singapore Polytechnic Marine Cadet Engineers to sail with Shell 200,000 ton VLCC tanker



From left to right: Foong Ah Pang, Mr. J. J. Gerson, and Tham Choon Kin, talking on board the Murex.

Two Cadets To Work On Supertanker

Two students from the Singapore Polytechnic will sail on a 200,000-ton tanker as cadet marine engineers.

The two, Tham Choon Kin and Foong Ah Pang, both 19-years old, are in their third year of a five-year course in Marine Engineering at the Polytechnic.

This course requires them to serve on board a ship for 12 to 18 months.

This will be practical training before they take their final examination at the end of the fifth year, when Tham and Foong graduate as junior engineers.

Tham and Foong are the first of two annual scholarships that will be sponsored by Shell.

Ceremony

In a simple ceremony witnessed by the Minister for Science and Technology, Dr. Teh Chin Chye, the two trainee students each received from the skipper of the ship an adjustable micrometer.

In handing over the "little tokens", Captain G. Lomax, hoped they will serve the boys well.

Talking to Dr. Teh, he said that he hoped that Foong and Tham will keep "the Singapore flag flying."

He also remarked that he was very proud of them and in future they will serve on Singapore ships.

The Murex which is the largest oil tanker of the Shell fleet arrived in Singapore on Sunday.

According to the chairman and chief executive of Shell companies Mr. J. J. Gerson the crude oil, his ships carried, if only converted to petrol would be sufficient to supply energy for all the motor vehicles in Singapore for a month.

Two Singapore Polytechnic Marine Cadet Engineers to sail with Shell 200,000 ton VLCC tanker

殼蜆公司超油船抵本

昨在船上舉行招待會

殼蜆公司昨日下午，一艘「賽力士」號超油船抵埠，特政府高級官員及船務界代表，在船上舉行招待會，招待該公司董事及船務界代表。此外，殼蜆公司並派員向政府官員及船務界代表，介紹該公司之業務及船務界之發展。

該船乃於前日抵埠，載重二十萬零九千噸，身長一千零六十七呎。殼蜆公司董事主席，昨日在招待會上致詞，歡迎政府官員及船務界代表。他並表示，殼蜆公司之業務，將繼續擴展，並為船務界之發展，作出貢獻。



圖為科學工藝部部長、科學院董事會主席、殼蜆公司董事主席、船務界代表及船務界代表之合影。



圖為殼蜆公司董事主席、船務界代表及船務界代表之合影。

「今日這艘「賽力士」號，與新加坡之「賽力士」號，係同一公司之船隻。一九六九年，殼蜆公司之「賽力士」號，曾由新加坡開往檳城，載重二十萬噸。此種超油船，係由殼蜆公司之船務部所設計及建造。

「我相信，殼蜆公司之業務，將繼續擴展，並為船務界之發展，作出貢獻。此外，殼蜆公司並派員向政府官員及船務界代表，介紹該公司之業務及船務界之發展。」

上接受最初之實習或訓練。他們是受錄取在殼蜆公司之超油船上實習。殼蜆公司之超油船，係由殼蜆公司之船務部所設計及建造。該公司之超油船，係由殼蜆公司之船務部所設計及建造。該公司之超油船，係由殼蜆公司之船務部所設計及建造。

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