

My Life at Sea

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Sylvester Heng - who went to sea on completion of his Pre-sea course at the Singapore Polytechnic in 1969, served his cadetship with Blue Funnel and continued on all the way till his Master Mariner qualification. He returned to shore in Jan 1978, to join Straits Steamship Group as Central Ship Planner for Australia Straits Container Line.

Part 1: The Singapore Polytechnic Nautical Studies Course.

Having lived in the same kampong as Cheng Huang Leng who is 3 years my senior, I chose to attend Singapore Poly in the Pre-sea course for 1 year (1968-1969) before going to sea as a Deck Cadet.

In April 1968, after our O Levels were known, those of us who wanted to attend the Poly or University had to apply for a Certificate of Suitability from MOE to be eligible for acceptance into the tertiary institution. There were a few days of ragging before the course started and we were the only students of the Poly that had to put on our White Cadet uniform with long white stockings. (What a chore!!)

2 classes of 25 + 26 cadets (called Port Watch and Starboard Watch), commenced in June 1968, and we used the 5th (now 6th) floor at the rear block next to the YMCA hostels. Capt Milne was head of the School of Nautical Studies. Our class lecturer was Capt Brian Davis from Glasgow. Other lecturers included Capt Batchen, Capt Mitter, Capt McAlister, Capt Rajagopal, Capt Advani, Mr Soh and few others who I cannot remember (nice if others can add to this list).

For swimming lessons, we used the Norwegian Seamen's Mission situated next to Connell House and every Friday after lunch, we made our way to the Kallang boat station, below the Merdeka Bridge and near the current Police Coast Guard HQ.

On 9 Aug 1968, we participated in the National Day Parade as part of the S. Poly contingent and among the numerous activities and workshop, the Cadets had to attend a 2 day Fire Fighting Course at the Singapore Harbour Board Fire Station at Tg Pagar. This was similar to the descriptive version given by Mr Cheng for Marine Engineers.

At the end of the Pre-sea course, in May 1969, all of us were given the various shipping companies to sail and get our necessary sea-time to qualify for our 2nd Mates (FG) certificates examinations (Written, Oral and Signals). Originally, 4 of us were told to join NOL, but a few days before joining, both Goh Toh Sek and I were re-assigned to sail to Liverpool for interview at Blue Funnel HQ.

End of Part 1.....