

NOL First Cadet Ship – “Neptune Beryl”

Date Published : 17 May 2010

Author:

Dennis CL Oei – who graduated in 1973 with a Diploma in Marine Engineering. Dennis is one of two of his batch mates who got their Extra Chief certificate. Such a certificate is considered equivalent to a B.Sc degree. Email: dennis_oei@yahoo.com

I joined the Singapore Polytechnic Marine Engineering Course in 1969 (9th batch) and was the last batch to undergo the traditional Engineer Cadet Training Scheme comprising 2 years full time study, 18 months of Cadet sea time and 12 months of workshop training & part time study.

I was in the first batch of cadets to join the “Neptune Beryl” when Neptune Orient Lines inaugurated the ship as its first Cadet Training Ship in Apr 1971. The Salary was \$145 & the Uniform allowance of \$25 augmented the meager wages significantly. Fortunately, we sailed with Officers who were kind enough to invite us out and pay for the evening as they knew we could not afford much.

The ship was a second hand General Cargo ship with some holds which were refrigerated. It was of a design consistent of the time with a centre and aft castle. The officers stayed in the centre accommodation and the aft accommodation housed all the cadets.

The ship did not have air-conditioning and everyone became adept at taking old medium size paint cans, cutting them into the right shape and sticking them out of the portholes to act as effective “wind-catchers”. We kept our cabin doors open and closed them only when we were sleeping. We gathered on deck whenever we were not working.

The deck crew sealed the space between the last cargo hatch coaming and the aft deck house to create a swimming pool. Once the ship was in clear water for the long passage from Singapore to Australia, the Bridge would telephone the Engine Room for “water on deck” to fill up the swimming pool. This temporary pool brought welcome relief after watch keeping in the engine room and promoted camaraderie on board.

I was fortunate to sail with good marine engineers from the shipyards who thereafter assumed key management positions in the various shipping companies.

.....