

# Singapore Polytechnic Marine Engineering Course – 1961~ 1969

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## Preamble

### **Cheng Huang Leng,**

Self Appointed “Historian”! Memories of Singapore Pioneer Mariners Project

1967-71 Newcastle UniversityUK graduate with B.Sc in Marine Engineering and M.Sc in Shipbuilding. Deployed to Singapore Polytechnic (1971 – 1989), held various positions from Lecturer to Head of Marine Engineering division to Deputy Principal.

The Marine Engineering Diploma course modeled after the UK Engineer Cadet Training Scheme was first offered in 1961. The course comprised 2 years of full time study, 18 months of cadet training at sea and 12 months of workshop training and part time study. Not all cadets could leave for their sea stint at the same time for it depended on the availability of ships and the willingness of shipping companies to accept cadets. Not all cadets could return at the end of their 18 months at sea because their ship could be half way round the World and their shipping companies were not prepared to sign them off and fly them home! Thus whole process typically took at least 5 years! And because of such length, I had the privilege of teaching (more like learning) some of them from the later batches.

Kee Ah Bah and Tham Yeng Fai were from the first batch in 1961. Dennis Oei came from the last (1969) batch (9th). Their memories provide us with a better understanding of their course, their teachers and the kind of trials and tribulations that they went through that shaped their character and outlook.

**More memories of mariners from the first 9 batches are sought. Your accounts would make the “history” of the original marine engineering course more complete.**

## Author : Kee Ah Bah

Graduated with a Diploma in Marine Engineering in 1966, got his First Class Certificate of competency and sailed as Chief Engineer before coming ashore.

The SP Marine Engineering Course started in July 1961. 30 odd students enrolled in the first year and by the 5th year (Graduation Year in mid-1966), 23 or 24 were awarded the Diploma in Marine Engineering. Out of this number, 19 continued at sea to serve their sea time. However, in the process, a few of them left the sea before obtaining sufficient sea time for their Class 2 exam. Nevertheless, the end result was still very good - 11 or 12 obtained their Class 1 and a few came ashore after their Class 2.

### The Class 1 Holders:

Ahmad Haharah / Fong Kee Sung / Joseph Arul / Kee Ah Bah / Leong Ah Fatt / Lui Wai Yuen / Moey Hong Kong / N Ganesan / Omar bin Mian / Teo See Chay / Veerappan / Wong Bheet Huan

### The Class 2 Holders:-

Fong Swee Theng / Henry Wong Seng Chow / Tham Yeng Fai. / Toh Siong Hoe

**Author: Tham Yeng Fai**

Graduated with a Diploma in Marine Engineering in 1966, came ashore after getting his Second Class Engineer Certificate of Competency.

I joined the 1st batch in 1961 two weeks after it had started. I had just had a big row with my Dad about his insistence of my attending Pre-U class to pursue a medical career. So when he suggested that I could join the SP course in either mechanical or marine engineering, I jumped at it, and I have never had any regrets since.

The 1st batch had an interesting mix of students. One Ganesan had a degree from an Indian university, so we often approached him when we had difficulty with mathematics and the like. The lecturers were inspiring in the main. The Head of marine engineering was Mr. N. Gartland. He had been to sea as a marine engineer and was thus very qualified to teach us as well as to impart the practical aspects to us. Our mathematics lecturer was a Ms. Seet whom most of us took a liking to, especially Ganesan, who was a few years older than us. Our workshop technology lecturer was a Mr Cowland. He would often dictate pages of notes for us to copy down. It was very trying for me, especially after lunch, when I would often fall asleep while taking down his dictation.

We founded the Marine Engineering Society in 1962 with Mr. Helm as Patron and Mr. Gartland as Advisor. I found a picture taken shortly after with most of the founding members present and I have attached this for your viewing and also for the sweet memories of those in the picture. The Society was very active; organizing many social events sometimes involving our lecturers as well. There was very close communication with our Head Mr. Gartland, who, together with Mr. Helm made it their priority to seek recognition for our Course as well as to seek the support of the shipping companies for our compulsory sea service which was to follow.

We were assigned to various shipping companies for our sea service. Blue Funnel Line took six. The other companies, Straits Steamship, Kie Hock, & Guan Guan Shipping took the rest. I was on board the MV Rhexenor together with Lee Cheng Hong.

**Author: Dennis CL Oei**

Graduated with a Diploma in Marine Engineering in 1973, went on to get his First Class Certificate of Competency and is one of the two who got his Extra First Class.

The 9th batch started with about 40 students of which 25 proceeded to obtain the 1st Class Certificate of Competency and 2 obtained the Extra-1st Class Certificate of Competency. Marine Engineering was the most popular course in Singapore Polytechnic at that time and attracted those with very good grades, including some who passed their A-Levels.

Their paths into working life were not limited only to marine engineering. One is now a successful cashew nut trader (he holds a 1st Class Certificate). Another became an air force pilot after completing the 1st year of the Diploma course. One who detested cleaning duties on the cadet ship eventually went into the Cleaning business after his 1st Class certificate and made enough to retire early. Another cadet who had a flair for music made his living teaching music. Two from the cohort signed on with the Navy as regulars and two others became lecturers in SP. Whatever path marine engineers take, they display resourcefulness in whatever they do and never fear they will have nothing to do!