Henry Ong cadetship experience on Neptune Emerald was unpleasant. His account triggered others including David Cheang to share their memories.

Cheng Huang Leng
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Cadetship

I am from 1975 batch of mariners whereby there were 3 categories of cadets in my time. They were:

a. The "brains" (i.e. cream of crop students). They got the foreign companies with good pay, food and 1st class treatment.
b. The "roadies" (middle-of-the-road ones) who got absorbed by the graciousness of NOL.
c. The "short time" ones - who opted for home trade routes (just in case they decide to quit sea life or can't bear being away from home).

I belonged to the "roadies" and can say that the best times of camaraderie was with my group of cadets! In my time, there were 2 "cadet ships" and to avoid the hassle of ITF detention for their Australia-bound vessels, NOL didn't employ greasers, stewards, AB or OS seamen. Furthermore we weren't paid for overtime work and did most of the chores from cleaning toilets and quarters, serving meals and still doing our engine or deck chores. That's not to say that we were abused ("exploited" maybe?) but the important point is that "one has to be humbled to serve before one can be served later in life".

This adage is so true because seafarers live in a closely-knit community where we had little choice of friends but needed to show a great deal of tolerance. In times of crises, we all need one another to pull through! Looking back, if not for my cadetship days, I wouldn't have been inspired to reach Chief Engineer status if I were to have an "aloof attitude" or "hands off mentality".

David Cheang Ngiap Choon
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David Cheang graduated in 1975 with a Diploma in Marine Engineering. He went to sea on a variety of ships: bulkers, containers/reefers and tankers. He got his Chief "ticket" before coming ashore to join W.H. Brennan. He left in 1996 to set up his own consulting business to offer services related to quality and safety management systems and to conduct audits on behalf of classification bodies & government agencies.