Henry Ong's account of his unpleasant experience on Neptune Emerald triggered these contributions from Mike Yip Wah Cheng, Daniel Chua and David Cheang. All three had tough times but they felt that their experiences made them better persons. Here is Daniel Chua's account of his cadetship on Neptune Sapphire.

Cheng Huang Leng
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Cadetship

We all had varying taste of bad things onboard during cadet days. For me, it was really bad but after 12 months on Neptune Sapphire, I realised that it changed me in many positive ways.

It was one of the most difficult periods in her history with problems after problems every day. I can tell you we did every imaginable job onboard. As the smallest guy, I had more crawling jobs into dark and narrow spaces than anyone onboard.

I kept watch all the time and work meant every day including Sundays. Finally, after 6 months, I was assigned to do day watch. To have a day off every Sunday was a fantastic moment for a cadet.

On my first ever Sunday morning "off day", the Second Engineer (from Poland) suddenly woke me up at 8.10 am and scolded me for being late. He wanted to know why I did not report for work as there were many more jobs to be done. Not daring to ask any question, I went into the engine room only to be given a mopping job on the turbo charger platform. I was very disappointed but did not protest. After duly completing the job, I asked for permission to rest after lunch. This led to an angry response from the Second Engineer and a quarrel. It was only then that he realised it was a Sunday. He felt ridiculous, and apologised to me. My relationship with Second Engineer became much better after that incident.

Months later in Oct 1981, the Second Engineer was going to sign off in Hamburg and his wife would be there to meet us. We held a great farewell party for him before arriving Hamburg. He was looking forward to a new Poland, as the new Solidarity movement had begun to show promise of a great future. But our celebrations for him were short-lived. Martial law was imposed in Poland just before our arrival in Hamburg, to clamp down Solidarity. That series of events will eventually shaped the modern history of Poland.

He signed off alone, stranded in Hamburg without a home to return to, since Polish borders were sealed. We were very sad to see him off on a cold and desolate Hamburg day. It was an unforgettable day of sadness for all of us.

The lessons learnt during my cadetship continue to shape me even today. In many ways, it was more valuable than National Service.

Daniel Chua Boon Leh
1 May 2010

Daniel Chua graduated with a Diploma in Marine Engineering in 1981. He then went on to Glasgow to pursue his degree in Naval Architecture and Ocean Engineering and returned in 1985 with a B.Sc Degree 1st Class Honours. His career was mostly in management positions in the areas of human resources, marketing, training and operations with organisations that included an airline and hotel. He is currently looking after customer service and operations for a major childcare organisation.