Kan Seng Chut's Sagas at NOL

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Kan Seng Chut's NOL Sagas Part 1: How I ended up with NOL and Nightmares on Neptune Garnet

My joining NOL in 1969 was not planned for at that time NOL crew salaries were the lowest in the market. As 4th Engineer my basic pay was $450 per month when Bank Line paid me $1000 as junior engineer. I was tricked by Lua Cheng Eng to sign on for the delivery voyage of Neptune Garnet from Liverpool to Singapore as it would take only 2 months and that I could sign off on arrival Singapore. My main motive was to experience flying for the first time and to watch Liverpool play football. Lua's offer seemed attractive from this view point for I had no intention to stay with NOL. However, when we arrived in Liverpool, all crew members were ferried to a British general cargo ship named 'Eden' owned by the Royal Mail Lines. This ship was given by the British government to Singapore as part of the aid for pulling out all British forces from Singapore by 1970.

Our crew comprised the following (*many of the names supplied by Lim Tau Kok*):-

Master – John Parker Hogg (British)
Chief Officer - Lim Ong Tong
2nd Mate – Woon Kai Jee
3rd Mate – Lee Chong Yew
Radio Officer- Chong Nee Fee
Deck Cadets - John Lim, Tay Kes Siong
Chief Engineer - Mr. Jerzy Kukla (Polish)
2nd Engineer – Raja Gopal (Indian)
3rd Engineer - Joseph Arul (ex-Polytechnic)
4th Engineer - myself
5th Engineer - Yan Yin Tong, Tham…Seng
3 Engine Cadets including Lim Tau Kok
Electrical Engineer - Frank Holiday (British)

I cannot forget the welcomed from the British crew who handed this 1956 British built ship to us. They laughed and remarked, "You guys going to run this ship? Good luck!" Initially I did not catch their remarks until I went down to the engine room. The main engine was a Harland and Wolff opposed piston 6 cylinder engine. A quick glance at the engine tools for dismantling the pistons were big ratchets, big rams and big sledge hammers. Straight away I knew we were going to have a tough time. It was going to be a hard ship to crack. After 2 days of briefing by the old British crew we took over the ship and renamed her "Neptune Garnet" flying our Singapore ensign.

After taking some stores and bunkers we ballasted to Hamina, Finland for loading cargo. I then found out that the main engine had no diesel oil connections, only 180 centistokes viscosity fuel used for start/stop and sea voyages. Imagine this vessel was built in 1956 and the British have perfected the design/system to use heavy oil for manoeuvring on this Harland and Wolff engine. I think even MAN, Sulzer, B&W were using marine diesel oil (MDO) for manoeuvring at that time. Actually after tracing the system there was nothing much, all she needed was an extra circulating pump and heating the heavy oil in the service/settling tanks to a higher temperature. In my 8 months on board she never failed to start on heavy oil. While we were in Hamina loading newsprints for USA, our Chief Engineer decided to take out one unit of the main engine for overhaul. As usual, the 4th Engineer (myself) was assigned to dismantle the top exhaust piston while the 3rd Engineer (Joe Arul) would dismantle the bottom main piston. It took me and 3 others 2 hours to remove the top piston. The piston was lifted up and placed on a stool for cleaning on the top platform. Joe Arul and his gang could not unscrew the bottom piston nut from the crosshead bearing. After hammering 2 days the nut did not moved at all. I think the former crew has over tightened the nut. The Chief Engineer came down a few times, just shook his head and walked off. On the 3rd day the Chief Engineer gave instruction to box back the top piston since from the scavenge ports

there were no broken rings found in the bottom piston. After boxing back the unit the Chief Engineer gave instruction to do another unit, but for this occasion I was assigned to do the bottom piston while Joe Arul would remove the top piston. I then realised why this vessel has a 20 kg ram! With a lifting eye for chain block hook for lifting or swinging. Although I have not done it before but during my apprentice days I have seen fitters using rams to bang heavy duty spanner to turn very tightened nuts. Next with a chain block the ram was raised level with the spanner. The spanner was then tension tight with another chain block. The ram was then swung back to bang on the spanner. After almost 2 hours of banging the nut started to turn and finally got loose and removed. The main piston was then lifted out for cleaning and calibration. From that day onwards the Chief Engineer assigned me for all crankcase work and Joe Arul for top platform works.

When I found the cargo being loaded in Hamina was to be discharged in New Orleans it then occurred to me that I would not be able to sign off in 2 months time. I felt misled by Lua Cheng Eng. After discharging in New Orleans she called into Houston to load generals for Jeddah, Saudi Arabia around October 1969. Neptune Garnet was a 5 holds/5 hatches tween-deck vessel. It also had a small refrigerated cold room aft above the steering flat. In it were loaded with Christmas goodies for the USA Embassy in Jeddah scheduled to arrive before Xmas.

A few days after departure Houston steaming about 12 knots near the Bermuda triangle I heard knocking from No.4 crankcase around 10 pm during my 8/12 watch. I informed the Chief Engineer. He came down placed his ear on the crankcase door and said not to worry and left. By 2300 hours the knocking was louder and the crankcase doors were fairly hot. Again I alerted the Chief Engineer. This time he agreed to reduce speed to check if the knocking persisted. By then the crankcase doors were so hot not to touch. The Chief Engineer then decided to stop the engine for investigation. After allowing 20 minutes for cooling, the crankcase door was opened. The lube oil pump was stopped. To my shock, I found the bottom of No.4 crankcase flooded with white metal residues. The Master was informed of the reason for having to stop the ship.
On close examination the No.4 crankpin was badly scored, the bearing keeps were rubbing on the crankpin. The Chief Engineer told us to remove the No 4 crankpin bearings, to hang up the bottom piston on its crosshead guides and place the exhaust piston to blank off the exhaust ports. The No.4 crankpin lube oil holes were to be plugged so that we could operate the engine at slow speed to a port of refuge for repairs.

I was delegated to remove the crankpin bearings first and I did it without much problems. Next the tricky part, how to remove the 2 eccentric strapped side bearings. At that time it was decided to form 2 teams working 6 on 6 off to minimise fatigue. The Chief Engineer and I formed one team and the 2nd and 3rd Engineers the other. I suggested a safe way to remove the eccentric straps which was to lift the whole exhaust piston with its tie rods vertically together with the top halves of the straps and then lower the bottom halves into the bottom of the crankcase. To then remove both the bottom halves out of the crankcase then lower back the top straps on to their eccentrics. And then to remove the top halves holding down bolts and nuts and then sling out the 2 top straps. The 2nd Engineer thought otherwise. He felt that my method would take more time and suggested that the method described in the manual of the engine maker be adopted. The maker's method required the 2 straps to be removed by turning the engine slowly to lower the bottom halves into the crankcase first and then to lift up the top piston with its tie rods to take out the top straps bearings. I kept silent for as 4th Engineer, I could not overrule the 2nd Engineer.

I was off on my 6 hour shift and the 2nd and 3rd Engineers were to start with the removal of the 2 side straps. When I return to begin my 6 hour shift, I saw my nightmare.

The 2nd and 3rd Engineers were in the crankcase, the 2 eccentric straps were half open, the forward strap holding down studs were bent i.e. now the straps could not be separated, stuck solid. I asked the 2nd Engineer what happened. He said initially while turning the engine the straps started to separate but later the turning gear motor gave out smoke and stopped. He then tried to reverse but nothing happened, then he saw the forward strap was bent. I then told him had he followed my method this disaster could have been avoided. I told him now

with the strap stud bent we could neither lower nor box back both straps, so, “What are you going to do?” Next the Chief Engineer came down and he when saw the disaster he said "ma ma mia" being Polish. He virtually chased both the 2nd and 3rd Engineers out of the engine room. I told the Chief Engineer we have no choice but to hack saw the bent stud in order to remove the lower strap. The fitter went to the workshop and managed to find 3 hack saw blades only. I told everyone to be careful as we can't afford to break any blades. The sawing began; each one took turns to saw the 5 inch diameter stud. It took us nearly 2 hours of sawing to saw off the bent stud. The engine was turned back with the straps at top dead center. Using the engine room crane we lifted the exhaust piston together with its tie rods up and slowly allowed the 2 bottom straps to cascade down to the crankcase. Both the bottom half straps were slung out with chain blocks .The exhaust piston was then lowered back to rest on the eccentrics. The nuts were removed and the exhaust piston was lifted up free from the top half straps. The 2 top halves were the slung out of the crankcase. By then all of us were very tired and the Chief Engineer told everyone to take rest.

The next job was to remove the connecting rod out of the crankcase and hang up the bottom piston with its crosshead pin on the crosshead guides. This assignment was given to the 2nd Engineer/3E team. Before retiring I suggested to the 2nd Engineer to remove the exhaust piston out first then lift the piston with the crane, to bolt in the locking bar on the crosshead guides and then lower the bottom piston to rest on the locking bar.

I returned to meet disaster #2:
This 2nd Engineer just could not accept my suggestion so he took a shortcut. He rigged 2 chain blocks under the entablature to lift up the bottom piston with its crosshead. Lim Tau Kok was in the team and while heaving up the piston one of the wire ropes snapped and the whole piston came crashing down on the piston rod stuffing box and cracked the entablature. Tau Kok was lucky that the snapped wire ropes did not hit him.

Again the Chief Engineer chased the 2nd Engineer out of the engine room. Yours truly had to pick up the pieces again after this second mishap and from that day onwards I have a very poor impression of the competency of Indian engineers.

Although I was only the 4th Engineer at that time the Chief Engineer only trusted me in my work and he would address me as Mr. Kan but not to the 2nd or 3rd Engineer. He would just call them by their names.

After this 2nd disaster the Chief Engineer gave instructions that all work would be supervised by me. So I did the work, got the bottom piston hung on its crosshead guides, took out the crosshead bearings and its connecting rod. The engine makers had supplied a crankpin taper plug blank for blanking the lube oil holes should we need to blank a crankpin for emergency. This blank was then clamped over the crankpin, the lube oil pump was started to test for leakage and found intact. Luckily the 2 cracks on the entablature were not serious and we managed to seal it with plastic steel.

All in all this stoppage took us almost 5 days to get the engine back for operations. So from a 2 day job we ended up 5 days purely due to the stubbornness and stupidity of the 2nd Engineer and he nearly crippled the engine.

With the unit blanked we sailed at about 10 knots for Cape Town to repair the scored crankpin. After about 13 days we were safely moored alongside for repairs. The underwriter surveyor from London Salvage came on board for inspection. This surveyor was formally from Singapore (can't remember his name). The honing specialists from Golten Service, Norway were engaged to do the grinding. After thorough inspection and measurements of the scored crankpin, the specialist estimated he may have to grind off 2 mm or 4 mm undersized in diameter. The 2 specialists took 6 on 6 off shifts for the grinding and took almost 21 days to complete. The undersized bottom end bearings were then machined and fitted by the workshop .The eccentric straps were refitted with a new stud and the complete engine was ready for departure. Our port stay was almost a month in Cape Town. It took us another 2 weeks before we arrived at Jeddah, well after Christmas. Later we heard the American

Embassy had to airfreight their Christmas goodies in for their Christmas party as our ship was 6 weeks late.

This experience it taught us one thing - don't take short cuts, don't take unnecessary risks when working in the crankcase.

After this incident the remaining voyages were normal but she did not called into Singapore for after Jeddah, we sailed to Basrah to load bulk fertilizer for Japan by-passing Singapore. A week before arrival Osaka one main engine No.3 liner cracked. Fortunately we had one spare on board so we changed it in less than 12 hours. In Osaka we were lucky to visit Expo 70 when Singapore had a stand with its theme "Garden City of the East". (Singapore in the 70's started to plant a lot of flowers and trees to make her a green city.) However in Osaka we discovered 2 cracks near the exhaust ports of liner No 4. As we had no more spare liners, the Chief Engineer got in Metalock Osaka to metal-lock the cracks. By this time, the Indian 2nd Engineer was taken off and replaced by Low Tin Seh.

Within less than 8 hours of leaving Osaka for HongKong, the metal-lock repairs gave way. We then cut off No 4 unit and ran her dry into HK. Our luck ran out in HK when we discovered another liner, I think No 2 liner was also cracked. So with 2 liners out and with the message from NOL informing us that they have placed orders for 5 new liners from the makers but earliest delivery in 3 months time, we faced a crisis. The Chief Engineer called a meeting with Tin Seh and me on what to tell the Captain. If he is to tell him the truth, then he would definitely say the ship was not seaworthy and we would be stuck in HK for next 3 months. The 3 of us agreed to just tell the Captain that we could steam on only 4 units. We left HK and steamed at 7 knots to Singapore. We reached Singapore safely but for berthing we got an extra tug to assist her. I was the one on the manoeuvring stand but on occasion the engine could not start I had to do a quick reverse on air and start ahead again. All this while we did not tell the Captain of the actual state of the main engine until we finally berthed.

I still could not sign off yet and was told to stay back until her dry docking in Sembawang Shipyard and until the new liners' arrival. It was during the docking period that I met Mr Chan Boon Tin the Marine Department surveyor temporary seconded to NOL for docking period. About 6 weeks later 2 new liners were air-freighted in and the yard did the renewals.

I finally signed off after 8 months but I gained a lot of experience sailing on this 'hard ship' the Neptune Garnet. And that was the end of my service on my first NOL ship. I told myself I would not join NOL again but when I went up for my 3rd attempt on my EK the examiner Chan Boon Tin passed me and told me to go to Amsterdam to take over another British ship, also part of the British aid to Singapore. So I got stuck with NOL by circumstances.

This 2nd vessel was a ex-Cunard vessel, much younger and propelled by a Sulzer RD engine semi-automatic. Her 4 generators were Rolls Royce high speed diesels - a nightmare for any 3rd Engineer who is typically put in charge of generators. This 2nd British-aid vessel was named Neptune Amber. Although the main engine did not give problems, the 4 Rolls Royce diesels gave us lots of problems initially until I solved the recurrent problems permanently for NOL.

Allan Wong Weng Kam on reading SC Kan's saga had these to add:

After he took over Neptune Amber, I join him in Singapore in 1971 and sailed with him for 2 voyages. It was the second voyage that we got a lot of problems with the Roll Royce generators. One generator after another failed and subsequently all 4 were down at one stage. Even the men from Rolls Royce could not fix them for the generators failed after each repair. I remembered Chut worked until he slept in the toilet while shitting. That is what Chut became famous for!

Captain Say Eng Sin sent in this correction:

Lua Cheng Eng was a Seamen Employment Promotion Officer (SEPO) not a Seamen Welfare Officer and operated from a small office at the dingy corridor of 2nd floor of the old

Fullerton Building. Yes, it's correct to say “who you know" not "what you know" that matters in life.

Kan Seng Chut’s Sagas Part 2: Neptune Agate & Neptune Jasper

After my service on Neptune Garnet and Neptune Amber, and looking back it seems that I was destined to crack problems wherever I was assigned. I signed off Amber for my haemorrhoid operations. After a month leave I was called up to join Neptune Agate as 2nd Engineer. Also called up were Kee Ah Bah as Chief Engineer and Chai Chee Kiang who just got his 2nd Class Certificate of Competency as 3rd Engineer. When we boarded the vessel anchored at Eastern Anchorage where it was anchored, we discovered that the previous Chief Engineer, an Indian and the 2nd Engineer, Sam Choo had already left. So there was no formal handover of duties. The remaining engineers were 3rd Engineer Tan Seng Kong, 4th Engineer Khoo Boon San and 3 engine cadets - Yap Soon Huat (I may not got his name correctly) and Alias Katan. The 3rd cadet (I forgot his name) was Chinese whom I was later told that he gave up his career as a marine engineer.

The Master was Captain Mark Tozer and he told us that we needed to sail immediately for the Gulf and within an hour, we set off. The main engine was a 6-cylinder Harland and Wolff opposed piston engine, similar but newer to the one on Neptune Garnet. After dropping the pilot we increased speed. Soon the main engine tensioning rod for the timing chain was jumping at every stroke. I asked Seng Kong who said that this had been the situation since he joined the ship about 6 months earlier. Soon the exhaust temperatures for all the units were unusually high and then a scavenge fire started, filling the whole engine room with white smoke. It seemed that scavenge fires were a common occurrence for this ship with fires every 2 days! We reduced the engine rpm to allow the exhaust temperature to lower and could cruise at 9 to 10 knots. With the vessel on time charter (to COSCO), I then realised that I was being enlisted by NOL to solve yet another problem!

A quick check on her records revealed that 5 out of 6 liners were worn out. Only one liner was renewed recently during her docking in HK. Curiously, she had 5 new liners on board stored in the tonnage hatch, aft of No 6 Hatch instead of in the Engine Room. Through Seng Kong, I learned that Cheong Fook Kuen was the NOL Superintendent in charge during the docking and he supplied the new liners after the docking. The liners were stored in the tonnage hatch because the vessel’s cranes could not reach the engine room skylight and the Chief Engineer did nothing to transfer the liners into the Engine Room.

On top of this situation, it seemed that the generators often tripped causing blackouts and the records showed that based on running hours, all 3 auxiliary engines were due for complete overhaul. The air condition system also needed overhauling for our cabins were like saunas at about 30 degrees C. So practically we inherited and ship that needed a major overhaul from top to bottom. Even Kee Ah Bah shook his head cursing the previous Chief Engineer and 2nd Engineer for leaving without alerting us of the adverse condition the ship was in.

On arrival Basrah for discharge we began to tackle the tensioning rod problem. The engine record showed that NOL had engaged a specialist from Harland and Wolf to correct the jumping but was told it did not last. After 2 days the jumping started again. I found that the tension spring was renewed but its free length was shorter by 40 mm compared to her original spring. Thus we could not follow the Makers' instruction manual to reset the tensioning rod spring settings. While figuring out what to do, we received the message from NOL that Kee Ah Bah was recalled to join NOL's New Building Department as Superintendent. We had to continue without a Chief Engineer on board. We managed to persuade the shore crane driver to transfer one liner from the tonnage hatch to the Engine Room. So we got one liner changed.

After discharge we went to Khorramshahr to load bulk urea for Shanghai. About 2 days prior to departure I asked Captain Tozer when the new Chief Engineer would be coming. He said,” You are now the acting Chief Engineer. Chai Chee Kiang is promoted to 2nd Engineer”. I then asked him how come he did not inform me until I asked. He just replied that he forgotten but I doubted it. So now I have a 2nd Engineer whose Certificate of Competency was not even dry

yet, one “old” 3rd Engineer and 4th Engineer, one electrician and 3 cadets to tackle and a worn down main engine. it would be a challenge for us to turn the situation around.

As we set sail for Shanghai, I told Captain Tozer of our need to stop the main engine a couple of times in order to allow us to adjust the tensioning rod. Once in open sea we started to tighten the spring tension by trial and error. After each tightening we stopped the engine, opened the chain casing to manually check the chain tension to avoid over tensioning and then restart the engine to full rpm to check if the tensioning rod still jumps. It took a few iterations before we met with success. When the tensioning rod stopped to jump, we stopped the engine again to check the chain tension manually. The rule of thumb was the longest section of the chain between 2 sprockets wheels must be able to deflect one chain link length either way. Once this distance was within limits we locked up the tensioning rod with its lock nut. We even tack-welded the lock nut to prevent it from loosening while in operations. The engine was then restarted to continue the voyage to Shanghai. The voyage went smoothly. With one new liner in operation the scavenge fires occurred once every 4 to 5 days. During the voyage we started to overhaul the auxiliary engines one by one.

In Shanghai our port stay was estimated at 2 weeks. As the ships gears were occupied with cargo operations and as there were no shore cranes available for us to lift one more liner into the Engine Room, we had to think of alternatives. We then decided to lift one liner through the starboard accommodation spaces. Some eye pads were welded on to the under deck ceilings for hanging chain blocks. By using the ship's crane at aft No 5 hold one liner was lifted up to starboard deck between No 4 hold and No 5 hold. Then with the crane at forward of No 4 hold the liner was swung over to the starboard shipside adjacent to the alleyway door immediately below the boat deck. With 2 chain blocks the liner was then transferred to the main deck. The liner was then shifted into the alleyway and down two decks to the Engine Room entrance. With the Engine Room crane the liner was lifted on to the top platform. So the 2nd liner was renewed.

By the time we departed Shanghai we renewed 2 liners and overhauled 2 auxiliary engines. We also overhauled the air condition system and were able to enjoy a comfortable 22 degrees C in the cabins. Our next discharge port was Sydney and the voyage went smoothly with just 2 to 3 scavenge fires.

In Sydney the Aussie stevedores were slow giving us plenty of time to sling out the remaining 3 liners out the tonnage hatch, do the passing manoeuvres to transfer the liners via the accommodation spaces. We managed to change 2 more liners, leaving the last one for the next discharge port. We had almost a month stay in Sydney and beside working all of us had and good time ashore.

After loading we left Sydney for Dalian. Again, the voyage went smoothly. There was no stoppage or scavenge fire. On arrival Dalian we had to anchor while waiting for berthing instructions. I asked the Master if we could change our last liner. “It’s risky since we may be berthing anytime, however, I will bet one dinner if your team can do it by 5 pm the next day’ I took on the bet and told mY engineers and crew to be ready the next morning by 8am. By then our team was so good at changing liners that 4 pm Captain Tozer lost the bet. With the last liner changed we had within 4 months solved the tensioning rod and scavenge fire problem and completed all the necessary overhauls. I then told myself that now I could relax and stay for another 3 more months to fulfil the 18 months sea time requirement for my Class 1 Certificate of Competency examination.

After Dalian we called at Hong Kong to load for Osaka. On arrival Osaka we anchored for berthing instructions. After 2 days we were told to leave the anchorage as a typhoon was heading for Osaka. We steamed out and the Master found a safe spot. The Chief Mate was stationed at the forecastle. He dropped 8 shackles out of 9 shackles of the starboard chain into the water. The ship was dragging so the Master ordered to drop 8 shackles of the port chain into the sea. The ship was steady, despite the choppy sea.
The next morning the wind abated and we got orders to steam back into port for berthing. However I got a call from the Master that the windlass could not turn. I took a look and found the windlass port capstan drum bent about 30 degrees. Its driven gear was jammed dead with

the main drive gear. She could not turn clockwise or anti clockwise. I asked the Chief Officer how this could happen. The Chief Officer told me that he just joined the ship and did not know that the port chain had only 8 shackles instead of the standard 9 shackles. He thought the strong current must have exerted such a tremendous force on the port chain that it in turn transmitted the force on to the capstan drum shaft, bending it. I told the Master that it was Hopson's Choice to flame cut the port chain to free it from the capstan shaft. I called the 2nd Engineer to bring out the oxy-acetylene bottles to the forecastle. The port connecting link in the chain locker was cut off and we got all the deck crew to heave out the portion manually and lashed down the port chain to prevent it from dropping into the sea. Next we removed the port capstan shaft pedestal bearing top half. Without the top half bearing cover the capstan drum could now rotate. Slowly we heaved up the starboard chain into the chain locker. Next we flipped the port chain on to the starboard gypsy and slowly heaved up the port chain and laid her on the forecastle deck. Once the port anchor was up we secured the port chain with 2 chain blocks. We steamed into port and berthed for cargo operations. Through the agent we got the repair workshop to remove the bent capstan shaft ashore for repairs. The bent section was heated up and straightened. 2 days later the capstan shaft was refitted in place and tested.

Despite this mishap we still got the vessel into port in time and avoided any off-hires.

Two days later I was told to pack up and return home. The Captain did not know why NOL was taking me off when Agate was now in tip top condition. All he knew was that the agent was waiting for me and that a new Chief Engineer from Poland would take over. The agent took me to Osaka airport for check in and handed me my boarding card. I then saw my flight was not for Singapore but Kuala Lumpur. I pulled the agent and told him that he had booked the wrong destination. The Japanese agent said, 'no mistake' and proved it with a copy of the telex instructions from NOL. It said that I was to be flown to KL to take over Neptune Jasper in Port Klang. Again without any choice I boarded the flight to KL. While on the flight I asked myself what NOL was doing. They could have flown the Polish Chief Engineer to KL and left me alone to enjoy my last 3 months of sea time on Agate.

When I boarded Neptune Jasper, Captain Sze Shaw Pao told me that Chief Engineer RN Saxena's father passed away and he had to take emergency leave. I was his replacement. Sim Bock Seng was the 2nd Engineer on dispensation and since he had been on Jasper for the last 6 months, I was quite happy and confident that he could perform. After the introductions we heaved up anchor and sailed for Sydney. There was another Master on board, Captain Lim Kian Hock, who would take over on arrival Sydney when Captain Sze go on home leave. The voyage was good and we got to Sydney safely. She then called on Melbourne for loading, returned to Sydney for top up of more cargo and some deck containers. She was fully loaded when she departed Sydney. After dropping the pilot we took a portside turn. Instead of returning to upright position after we straightened our heading, it listed to port at about 6 degrees. Since her fuel tanks and ballast were full we could do nothing. We slowly consumed our fuel from one port double bottom tank only. After 5 days she gradually returned to upright. 2 days later the main engine suddenly stopped. After inspection her aft fuel pump drive shaft coupling was sheared off at its neck i.e. the aft 3 units no longer can fired. We did not have a spare shaft on board. The Master was informed and he asked if we could still steam on with just the forward 3 units. I replied, "Possible provided we can start the engine". We removed the coupling bolts and lifted up all the aft 3 units fuel pump rollers. We then tried to start the engine several times but she did not fire. Everyone started to look at me for ideas. And that was when my engineering knowledge was put to test. I turned the engine with the turning gear to and position with No 1 piston at 7 degrees before top dead centre (fuel injection).The turning gear was disengaged the gave the engine a kick start and she fired. With only the 3 forward units firing the engine was unbalanced and vibrating abnormally. So we slowly played with her rpm and eventually got the speed that gave us the least vibration (can't remember the rpm) and kept it all the way to Singapore. We managed to do 6 knots speed with only 3 units working.

On arrival Singapore a new shaft was supplied which we refitted during the cargo operations. The engine was tested and in order. I finally signed off as I have clocked 19

months sea time for my Class 1 Certificate of Competency exam. That's the end of my sea service with NOL.

Looking back I did not regret or curse NOL for sending me to those 4 problematic vessels as I gained a lot of experience and confidence in my shore job later on.

Kan Seng Chut
May 2013

Broadcast on 25 June 2013 and Uploaded by SNAMES on 15 July 2013

Memories of Kan Seng Chut as NOL Superintendent in the 1970's

I signed off from Neptune Jasper on 30th December 1972 after clocking about 19 months of sea time including 8 of those months as Acting Chief Engineer on dispensation. On 2nd January 1973 I was appointed Assistant Technical Superintendent at NOL. 2nd January 1973 is etched in my mind because our Finance Minister Hon Sui Sen decided not to tax seafarers sailing on Singapore flag vessels with effect from 1st January 1973. On top of that, NOL raised the salary of all seafarers giving a Chief Engineer $3,000 instead of $2,000. You can imagine the blow I felt. It is one of those times when you wish you were not born too early!

So on 2nd January 1973 I went to the wharf office where NOL had its Repair and Maintenance Department and Newbuildings Department. I then told my head of department, Mr. Setna that my course at Poplar College would start on 1st May so I would have to leave by end April. He said I could, "once Toh Ho Tay returns from London after his Class 1 Certificate of Competency". After this conversation Peter Yam came in and took me straight to Keppel Shipyard to take charge of the docking of Neptune Amber. I did not even have time to warm up my office chair and yours truly was thrown into the world of superintendents without any training whatsoever! NOL assumed that you knew your job and hopefully would survive. The other Superintendent was Cheong Fook Kuen ex-Naval Base Dockyard.

In my 4 months as Superintendent and before I left for London, the most memorable task was the docking of Neptune Taurus, NOL's only tanker at that time. She was purchased from World Wide Shipping HK. She was dirty and was time-chartered to Esso. The main engine was a 6 cylinder B&W. She had 2 Scotch boilers for her heating coils and cargo pumps. Before my time I heard that one boiler had collapsed and one furnace was renewed. The main engine had half her crankshaft renewed due a crack on one crankpin web. All these "casualties" happened while the ship was in NOL's ownership. When Taurus was due for docking and repairs, I was put in charge. All her main engine units were due for overhaul and one auxiliary engine needed a new crankshaft. There were many other repairs like pipelines. The repair list ran into a few pages. I was given 2 weeks to complete her docking and repairs as Esso needed her back in service.

First, we needed to gas free all her tanks after discharging at Esso terminal. This took 3 days in the South China Sea before we docked at Keppel Shipyard. Next I had to reduce cost by getting a lot of the overhauling work done cheaply. As Keppel did not allow contractors appointed by owners to do work while the ship was in the yard, I got around this restriction by rounding up 12 ex-apprentices to sign on as ship's crew to do the 7 main engine units. By so doing my gang of 12 did one auxiliary engine and 7 main engine units in 10 days. Keppel did the other auxiliary engine that required crankshaft renewal. While fitting the flywheel into the new crankshaft, Keppel's fitters over-pumped the hydraulic jacks and the flywheel went into the shaft taper by about 4 mm too much. The fitters tried to jack back the flywheel but it did budge at all. Finally it was decided to leave the flywheel as it was as it did not affect the support bearing and the thrust bearing. The engine was then boxed up and tested free running. Load was applied later with no problem. By the way, the Keppel SRM in charge was Mr Lee Teck Wee, one of our early pioneers who quit the sea for shore jobs.

Just prior to sailing off for the Gulf, I suggested that Taurus be blessed since she had so many problems. Even NOL MD Goh Chok Tong agreed. A Buddhist monk was engaged to

bless the vessel for $500. She finally departed and all of us were relieved. I took my gang of ex-apprentices for “makan” and drinks.

The next morning I got a call to say that Neptune Taurus was stuck in the Malacca Straits off Port Klang. She could not heave up her anchor after a minor breakdown. I flew to her via Kuala Lumpur and by car to Port Klang. There was no tug available for hire except one from the Port Authority of Port Klang. I was allowed 4 hours usage as the tug was needed for berthing duties later. The trip to reach Taurus took about an hour leaving me with only about an hour to get her chain freed. On reaching the vessel I found the chain entangled into a lump like a ball. The chain could not be retrieve through the hawse pipe. Using the tug we hooked up the ball with a strong wire and tried to pull and jerk the ball free. After an hour of pulling nothing happened, then the tug master told me he had to return to port for berthing duties. Without any choice I instructed the 2nd Engineer to bring up the oxy-acetylene bottles to cut the chain. The bottles were brought up and just before lighting up the cutter I asked the tug master to give it one last pull. Suddenly the whole ball miraculously dropped loose. It seemed that Taurus refused to be cut, so our blessing was answered. She quickly heaved up her chain and continued her voyage while I returned to Port Klang. But that was not the end of her story.

About 2 weeks later we got a message that the main engine timing chain had some problem. I flew to Kuwait to investigate. I found the timing chain had hair cracks on some of the links. Surprisingly the former owner World Wide Shipping had ordered a complete new duplex chain, still unused and kept in the ER platform. Thus it appeared that the former owner might have problems with her timing chain before. I had to summon some deck crew and with the engine crew pulled out the new chain from her packing box and laid it on the platform floor, Next I disconnected the joining link and connected the new chain to the old chain. With the turning gear we slowly turn the engine to allow the new chain to go in and the old chain to roll out of the crankcase, all done by manpower. Once the new chain was in place, the chain was reconnected. The chain tension was reset and the engine was ready for testing and found in order. We completed this job in time for her departure with full load of crude for Karachi. I was told to follow the ship to Karachi to monitor her performance.

Taurus had 2 main auxiliary diesel engines and one steam generator. The steam generator’s output was half that of the diesel. At sea she was designed to operate on one diesel and the steam generator to meet her full steaming load. About 1 day after her departure and while having dinner in the saloon with the Chief Engineer a loud bang came from the Engine Room and then blackout. The Chief Engineer and I ran down to the Engine Room. By then the engineer on watch had started her reserved auxiliary engine and restored power. We found the auxiliary engine overhauled by Keppel was damaged. One unit completely flew off the engine. The cylinder head, piston and liner were lying on the floor. Our examination showed that the crankpin bearing connecting bolts had sheared off causing the piston to hit the cylinder head and together with its connecting rod must have lifted the liner out off the engine casing. Luckily no one was hurt. We continued our voyage to Karachi with one diesel and the steam generator at half load without further problem and berthed for discharging. Then the steam generator gave way. For cargo discharge we had no problem as all her cargo pumps were steam turbine driven. We found that all the lube oil copper pipes in the steam generator sheared had off i.e. her main bearings were virtually lubricated by an oil bath only but were not damaged. We got a workshop to fabricate new copper pipes and refitted to the steam engine and she operated with one and half generators for the next 2 months without problem until the damaged diesel was repaired.

6 months later NOL sold Neptune Taurus to the Greeks. Thus we got rid of the ship noted for having the most number of breakdowns in the history of NOL. Unfortunately she was never mentioned in her NOL book. However, for those who had sailed on her the experience gained was very rewarding for future applications. Looking back it seemed that be it at sea or ashore I was given or landed with the 'hard' ships to tackle. After Taurus I finally left for my studies in Poplar for my Class 1 Certificate of Competency exam. And the changing of the timing chain on the Taurus came in handy during the EK lectures.

Kan Seng Chut