

Marine Electronics course at Bristol Polytechnic

Advanced Marine Electronics course at Bristol Polytechnic

Shell not only wanted their Radio Officers to be able to look after the radar, but a lot of other ships systems as well. They were pushing Marconi to supply them with Electronics Officers, so Marconi in turn were pushing for their officers serving with Shell to go in for further training. There was the incentive of higher pay, as well as a much more interesting job. At this time I did not have a radar certificate, but realised that this and the electronics certificate would be essential for further promotion. I was offered the chance to work with Shell and be sent back for further full time study.

In order to become an Electronics officer, I had to have a much broader knowledge of maritime systems. I was required to go back to school to take two 3 month modules in order to learn about this new facet of my career! At the end of each module, the successful student received a Department Of Trade recognised Diploma. The college was in Bristol, where the company not only gave a subsistence allowance to cover board and lodging, but they also still paid my wages. I thought this was a grand idea, and accepted the offer at once!

Also using the opportunity presented by a longer period ashore, I learned to drive a car to increase my mobility. This was not without its problems in a hilly city like Bristol, but despite a few interesting incidents I succeeded, and added a driving licence to my slowly growing list of achievements.

At the Brunel College, I was introduced into the electronic complexities of the modern ship. As an Electronics Officer, I would be responsible for a much wider range of equipment. With the greater reliance now being placed on electronics in the marine world, my job would be an essential one.

Not only was I instructed on modern radio and radar equipment, but also on such things as radio telex (and CITOR error correcting systems), data logging, remote control systems, alarms, echo sounders, steering computers and servos, gyro compasses and engine room automation. We also had a good grounding in Satellite navigation (something very few ships carried at that time) and various hyperbolic navigation systems (such as Omega and Decca). We were also given a basic grounding in those new modern marvels called computers. At this time, these were still very new, and not often found aboard ships. It was quite clear however even then, that it was only a matter of time before they were.

At the end of the 6 months course, I thought I had a relatively good theoretical knowledge of electronics at sea. As I was to find out however, my education had only just started. Things are never as they seem, and in practice I was to find that delving around in a hot, dirty, oily and not to mention sometimes wet and smelly engine room, was a lot more difficult than I had imagined. I was also to learn, that in accordance with Murphy's Law, the wiring and diagrams – even if available - lacked the exactness I had been used to during the course. I also found that one needed to grow a third hand to hold the torch, when hanging on with both normal hands and gripping the screwdriver in ones teeth! What had seemed an easy exercise in the classroom, took on totally new dimensions in the depths of a heaving engine room of a ship at sea. At that time however, full of new found confidence, I waited for what Marconi would throw at me next.