

SAILOR TODAY CONNECT



At the Seafarers Day celebrations organized at the Y.B.Chavan auditorium in Mumbai, Mr Chirmal Singh was awarded the DG Shipping prize for securing the highest marks in the Class IV CoC examination for the year 2012-2013.

In an interview with Capt. K.N.Deboo, Principal of Anglo-Eastern Maritime Training Centre, 4/E Chirmal Singh, talks about how he joined the sea career and his achievements so far.

Q. What prompted you to choose a career at sea?

I was doing mechanical engineering from MBS College of Engineering and Technology, Jammu University and it was my seniors who brought me tales of different shores and the challenging work on the ships that made me get interested in a career at sea. There are not many industries in Jammu and the

scope for an engineer is limited. Many of my seniors joined merchant navy as marine engineers and the interaction with them on the social media cemented my plans of joining sea. I am the first in my family to come out to sea. My parents though apprehensive at first were very supportive of the career choice made by me. I have a younger brother who is now also aspiring to be a marine engineer.

Q. What was your criteria on choosing the maritime training institute for the pre-sea training and then the shipping company for your onboard training?

From my immediate seniors' batch, 10 joined the merchant navy. Also their senior batch had a number of boys who joined as marine engineers. So they shared their knowledge about the standard of the topmost good institutes and also the

ones which were not up to the mark. Also it was very important that after completing my GME course I should get placement in a shipping company for the on-board training. Out of the 10 seniors who joined sea, 5 joined Anglo-Eastern. Their feedback prompted me to apply for IMS-Goa on-line exam and I opted for Anglo-Eastern as my first preference. Anglo-Eastern is very particular about its selection process, but fortunately I had secured 70% in BE (mechanical) and sailed through in all their selection tests.

From my Mechanical engineering batch, 15 joined sea of with 8 are in Anglo-Eastern.

Q. Did you find the GME pre-sea training course useful?

I found the training at IMS – Goa excellent, the best part being the practical, hands-on training onboard the transhipper. I did four transhippers, one month on each. We used to go in the morning by launch and return late evening. We also got practical training in Goa shipyard (15 days), Marine Electrical Agencies, electrical repair workshop (15 days) and on board the ships at Murmagao Port Trust (15 days). This training completed in Nov 2011. I stood 4th in the batch, and got the award for "Best Welder" and "Marine Electrical Technology Paper" for highest marks. The pre-

sea training was very useful as it prepared a base for me and helped me to grasp the work process on ships quickly.

Q. How would you describe your experience of stepping on board the ship for the first time?

Prior joining my first ship in Anglo-Eastern, I did the induction training at Anglo Eastern Maritime Training Centre - Mumbai. This training was very useful for me when I went on board as it covered the AE safety management system, the safety culture expected as well as honing my workshop skills and machinery operation done on the engine simulator.

I had just completed my Induction course at AEMTC- Mumbai and went to AESM manning office to inquire about my joining. To my surprise I was offered a slot on a tanker which had come available, but I would have to join in one week's time. I grabbed the opportunity even though I had to spend 4 out of the 7 days travelling up and down by train to Jammu.

I joined at Amsterdam, M. T. Unique Sunshine a product tanker of 47000 dwt on 8th March 2012. It was my first air flight and was very excited to be boarding a ship at Amsterdam. The ship was 11 years old but very well maintained. I did 9 months at a stretch, as Junior Engineer. I was the sole Junior Engineer on the ship, though the Deck Cadet on board had done 5 months already.

Even though I had been on a transhipper before, sailing on a ship was a different experience, as here I was day-in and day-out living and working in a small area and not being able to go out anywhere. I was nervous as to how my career will shape up and whether I will be able to satisfy the expectations of my



superiors.

My seniors from the earlier batch had told me that J/Engineer is the toughest rank and you are a nobody on board with all officers trying to find fault with you and make you feel worthless. I had this apprehension and though the initial days were tough, it was not as bad as the picture portrayed to me. Within 1 month of joining, I was totally fine and feeling strongly motivated to do my best. Since there was no 4/ Eng on the ship, I used to work with 3/E and 2/E and got experience of working on all types of machinery.

One of the instances I recollect was the decarb of the auxillary engine where when removing the main bearing, the hydraulic jack got stuck and could not be removed. I realized at that time how important it is to know the basics and the crucial role of gaining experience of working on a machinery. It was the 2/E who came up with an improvisation of cooling the hydraulic jack using a cooling agent such that due to the contraction the jack could come out easily.

In the nine months on board I learnt a lot, thanks to the 2/E and C/E who took extra effort to clear my doubts and teach me the nuances which one does not find in books. The chief engineer is now a superintendent in AE-Singapore

office. Being on a tanker I obtained good experience on the operation of cargo pumps and also learnt about the cargo discharging sequence from the third officer.

Q. You must be one of the first in your batch to clear your Class IV examination?

I got down from the ship on 10th December 2012 in Istanbul and within five days I joined the Advanced Fire-fighting course. My friend and colleague, who studied with me in IMS-Goa, Mr. Ranbir Singh Birjal, and also in AE, had finished his sea time earlier and booked my seat for the courses. All of us batch mates were in a hurry as to who will finish Class IV first. I did not even go home. My parents were anxious to see me but I told them that I will complete my exams and then come home. I did not want to lose the momentum. Of course joining Anglo-Eastern helped as the complete process of selection - pre-sea training - joining ship - booking exam seat in time, all worked like clockwork.

Q. Tell us something of your experience of appearing for the Certificate of Competency written and oral exams. What was your mantra for success,

obviously you did everything right to be able to top the exams?

I appeared for Class IV on-line written exam in February after 1 month of intense preparation and appeared for my orals in front of Mr. Vinod Kumar, Engineer Surveyor at MMD-Mumbai. I was extremely nervous. The word going around is that on first attempt you will never pass your orals. On that day, the 28th of Feb, only one repeat candidate had passed his orals and when I was called in I was calm, because in my mind I thought, whatever you say Chirmal, you will not clear all the functions, so be at ease and not to worry too much. This helped me as I was able to answer the questions comfortably and without nervousness. I was surprised and overjoyed when at 1700 hrs I was informed that I had passed. I had done very well in the written and was sure of passing, but topping the Class IV exam for the year 2012- 2013 was a big surprise but a very pleasant one.

I did not have any particular mantra for success, but I am driven to excel and you may say that is the secret of my obtaining this coveted DG Shipping award of "obtaining the highest marks in Class IV for the year 2012-2013". I was a topper in my school and secured 83% overall in the boards and in B.Tech (Mechanical) also I topped in Jammu University. I made a strong resolve to clear my Class IV on first attempt hence did not even go home until my orals were over.

I stayed in a Chembur lodge with all colleagues and friends who were appearing for Class IV. Almost 70 marine engineers were staying there studying for Class IV and Class II exams. I and my friend whom I have referred earlier used to study 18 hours a day until 3 am and whenever

we had doubts we discussed with other colleagues in the lodge. My basics are good, thanks to a good grounding at IMS-Goa and then with Anglo-Eastern, so I was able to cover the syllabus quickly.

I also attended Mr. Samant's classes for subjects EK Motor and EK General. Many of the candidates for Class IV attend his classes. Since the Class IV exams are multiple choices on the computer, I prepared for the exam by going through all the multiple choice questions on USCG website and also the MEO Class IV discussion forum on Facebook.

In the orals one needs to be calm, composed and confident. Questions on safety are asked first. I was confident about Safety as I had the opportunity to read the AE company manuals on board where safety practices were covered in precise detail. Also the overall high safety culture of the company helped me to easily answer those questions. Once the confidence was built, other questions I was able to answer fluently.

Q. What do you have to say about your employer Anglo-Eastern?

Firstly I am thankful to Anglo-Eastern for selecting me and giving me an opportunity to sail on ships as a marine engineer. AE is a well reputed, standard company with systems well-structured providing a long term career growth. The work culture is excellent and safety practices stringently adhered to.

I am now preparing to re-join as 4th engineer, for which I have to undergo a number of valued added courses at Anglo-Eastern Maritime Training Centre. These value added courses are application based and immensely useful to improving my knowledge and skill

for better efficiency in my work. At the AEMTC workshop, I have done practical training in overhaul of purifier, compressor, pumps and all equipment for which I shall be responsible for onboard as 4th/ Engineer.

Q. Do you have a message for the Junior Engineers?

Learn as much as you can when you are on board as junior engineer, as that's the period when you can learn the maximum. Be updated with the latest regulations. Put in hardwork, participate in all activities / work in Engine room, don't try to hide or shirk, as it will be your own loss as you will miss out on learning something new. Complete TAR book assignments on your own without copying as this will also help in gaining knowledge. Do more hands-on work as only then you will develop the skill and can do the job better and faster. Be open to learning from others, also from mistakes of others, so that you don't make the same errors. Do all the advanced courses at a good institute and prior appearing for Class IV exam, as the knowledge gained there will help in the oral exams.

Q. Anything else you wish to convey?

Finally I would like to thank my parents. My father is in the army and my mother is a homemaker. They have always supported me in the career choice I made and I am grateful to them for funding my GME course fee which was quite a financial burden to them. I shall always work hard in life to become successful in my career and make my parents proud. I thank DG Shipping for giving me the recognition.

Sailor Today wishes Chirmal the very best in future endeavors! •