



MY CADETSHIP - ENGINEER CADET TIMOTHY GALLAGHER

Engineer Cadet Timothy Gallagher commenced his Officer Cadetship in September 2020 and is fully sponsored by the Corporation of Trinity House. Timothy has already gained valuable seagoing experience aboard a variety of vessel types, such as a large yacht, two cruise ships (operated by Windstar Cruises and P&O Cruises) and a Trinity House Multifunction Service Vessel.

Timothy is currently undertaking his final academic studies and professional short courses at City of Glasgow College before qualifying as an Engineer Officer of the Watch and being awarded his Higher National Diploma (HND) in Marine Engineering.

What made you decide to follow a seagoing career and undertake an Officer Cadetship?

The first two decades of my life were split between Bedford, England and Modesto, California, both of which are nowhere near the sea. For that reason, nurture—rather than nature—is what ultimately led me to pursue a career at sea.

Both my mother and late father worked at sea, with my mother in the position of chef and stewardess aboard classic wooden schooners that traversed the seaways from Nantucket to the Grenadines. My father started out as a deckhand and angler on sport fishing vessels out of San Diego, then working in a variety of maritime sectors, including offshore oil and deep-sea tugs, before he was led to the yachting industry where the two would meet.



Figure 1: My father and mother

How did you learn about careers at sea and then decide upon your professional discipline (i.e. Deck Officer, Engineer Officer or Electro-Technical Officer)?

The stories and artifacts from my parents' previous life remained with me as I grew up. In my first year at university, the opportunity to learn to sail presented itself and I jumped at it. Within two years I began working as a sailing instructor with a small company in Redondo Beach.

I eventually completed my degree and, with a little over two thousand nautical miles accumulated in my logbook and a rudimentary knowledge of boat maintenance and repair, I bought a one-way ticket to Palma de Mallorca to get a job working as a deckhand on a yacht.



Figure 2: Learning the ropes (2015)



Figure 3: Mid Atlantic aboard MV Super Servant 4 (2018)

There is much to be said for being in the right place at the right time. This holds particularly true for the maritime industry where schedules are subject to change at the drop of a hat (or barometer). This was very much the case for me when I was hired on temporarily to help deliver a 50-metre yacht from Spain to Florida.

Despite it being a daunting opportunity and the largest vessel to date that I had worked on, the ship that carried this yacht across the Atlantic was even larger. It was during an engine room tour, kindly offered by the 2nd Engineer of this transport ship, that I first stepped foot in a real engine room. I had no mechanical background whatsoever but everything I saw intrigued me greatly. It was an entire world of its own that I seldom heard about and virtually never saw. My interest was piqued but for the time being I was still working towards a career on deck.



Figure 2: Taking my Yachtmaster exam

The moment when I began my journey down the engineering pathway came a year later. I had just completed my Yachtmaster examination in the Solent and was eager to advance to a higher position at work. Unfortunately, on a vessel with only eleven crew, the quickest way to move up a rank is to leave. And that's what I was prepared to do, had the position of deck/engineer not become available.

This dual role did not require a license and was my point of entry. Initially, I had every intention of continuing my deck officer training as this role was a way to gain understanding and hands-on experience to underpin my knowledge on deck.

However, as time went on and I immersed myself in the new role, I had two important realisations. The first was that I didn't just find the work enjoyable - it was deeply satisfying too. The second, which proved to be more significant for my immediate future, was that I lacked any theoretical knowledge of the systems I was working on.

Initially, I toyed with the idea of taking some short courses. I soon found that I could either take individual courses that would go more in-depth on their respective systems on board or take courses that covered every aspect of marine engineering at a surface level. The former would become prohibitively expensive very quickly and the latter would do little to give me the solid foundation of understanding to aid me over the course of a long career.

I then considered returning to university but baulked at being ashore for three years with no progress made towards an engineering license. During this research, I came upon the Merchant Navy training scheme for Officer Cadets and the possibility of gaining an academic understanding as well as a license.

In accepting your sponsoring organisation's offer of an Officer Cadetship, which factors most influenced your decision?

The Engineer Officer Cadetship was exactly what I needed so I interviewed with the Corporation of Trinity House as a sponsorship with them offers the chance to get experience aboard a variety of vessels.

Please describe your experience at college during your first training phase, in terms of academic delivery, safety training courses and preparation for your first seagoing appointment.

Following the offer made by Trinity House, I moved to Glasgow where I would carry out the first academic phase of my training. The first year presented challenges in wholly unexpected ways. Adapting to life in a new city under Covid restrictions proved to be equally as useful as the academics and workshop courses did in preparing me for shipboard life.



Figure 3: Pressure testing our pipework at college

Please describe your experience on your first seagoing vessel appointment, in terms of onboard integration, work experience, training support and general lifestyle aboard.

Before long the first phase of college ended, and I received instructions for joining my first ship. I would be going aboard the cruise ship Star Breeze, which is operated by Windstar Cruises. This particular ship, as well as its sister ship Star Legend, had just completed a hull lengthening in the shipyards of Fincantieri. I joined the ship in Sint Maarten (Caribbean), from where the ship would operate on a weekly basis for the months of July and August before making its way to Costa Rica via the Panama Canal. This was then followed by an ocean crossing to French Polynesia, where I would disembark.

The mindset I adopted going into this first appointment was to think of it as my last appointment as a cadet. Every task I completed or system I traced, I did so with the mindset that I would have to perform it unassisted as a certificated officer the next time around. This might not have worked so well if I was less fortunate with the group of officers I worked with. Most of them were more than happy to let me perform tasks and conduct rounds once I had demonstrated proficiency.

Following the first two weeks, which I had spent feverishly tracing all the ships systems, I was put on watch with a 2nd Engineer and motorman. We had the 4-8 watch on this cruise ship, which meant that we had all the port manoeuvring as well as the additional task of maintaining all of the auxiliary systems relating to fuel and lubricating oil.

I remained on that watch for the remainder of my time on board, save the last two weeks. Inexplicably, my body never came around to the idea of waking up at 03:30 every morning and sleeping in two disjointed times. However, as with all aspects of life, it is the people you live and work with that make or break the experience. I was fortunate again in this regard and in an unexpected way.

The 2nd Engineer I was on watch with regularly trained his own style of mixed martial arts in the crew gym. During my time at school, I had briefly tried wrestling but otherwise I had no experience with fighting sports. Seeing an opportunity to learn a new skill and get to know him better, we began training together on a regular basis outside of watch.

While not as relevant to my engineer training, this experience demonstrated to me that working at sea is also about living at sea. Humans are far more complex to understand than the ship's biodigester or sea water cooling system, although comparable systems exist in our own bodies. Getting along with individuals from around the world can be daunting at times but it usually just needs taking an interest in something they like.



Figure 4: Tracing pipes on MV Star Breeze

If I think back over the following academic phase and second sea phase that followed that first one, I can pull many similar stories. All of them usually involve both recognising and seizing opportunities that appeared. That I was able to take part in a 5-week complete engine overhaul or combat an economiser fire while reinstating the steam system with a 1st engineer are testament to the opportunities available to officer cadets.



Figure 5: The 4-8 Watch on board MV Star Breeze



Figure 8: Sitting in the engine crankcase

Prior to the cadetship, it was difficult to follow my Chief Engineer around to learn from him because I had my own slate of jobs to complete each day. The officer cadetship provided the opportunity to have proximity to the work of other qualified engineers without being pulled away by routine tasks. It's the ideal environment to build a great knowledge base for the future.

How do you see your career developing once you have successfully completed your cadetship?

Once I gain my Engineer Officer of the Watch (EOOW) Certificate of Competency (CoC), my immediate plan is to get employed on passenger vessels, where I have the most experience. Beyond the next few years, it is hard to say where this career might take me. If the past is any indication, there could very well be many more unexpected twists and turns along the way.

What personal benefits have you have gained so far from undertaking your cadetship?

What's made my life meaningful thus far has been a combination of pursuing a set goal with a focused determination, while allowing my own natural curiosity to lead me. For anyone that resonates with those two sentiments, an Engineer Officer cadetship is worth sincere consideration.



Figure 9: Replacing a light bulb



Figure 10: Taking the air on MV Azura