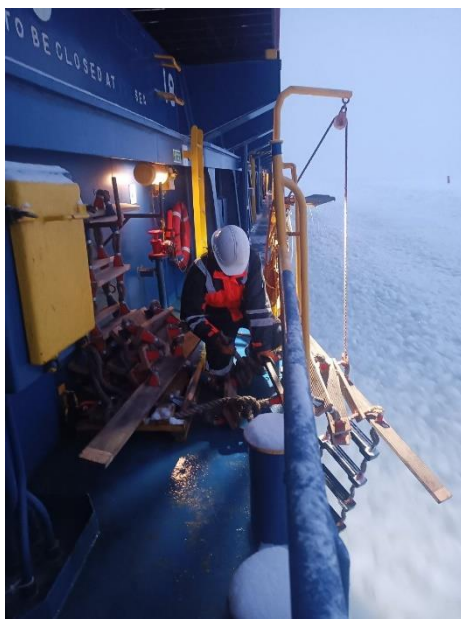


My first practical internship as NOA on WES GESA

My internship began on September 16, 2025, in Gdynia, Poland. Due to a flight delay, I arrived at the vessel at 2:00 AM. I was met at the gangway by an OS on watch, who helped me carry my bags to the cargo office, where the Second Officer greeted me. After some brief paperwork, a cadet who had already been on board for a couple of weeks showed me to my cabin. I stayed there to rest until the morning before my first shift on deck.



In the morning, I met the Chief Officer. He was very friendly and, upon learning it was my first time at sea, emphasized several times that safety must be my top priority. He encouraged me not to be afraid of asking even "silly" questions, noting that as a newcomer, it was in my best interest to "squeeze" the maximum knowledge out of this practice. I also met the Bosun and the ratings with whom I would be working on deck every day (except Sundays, which is a day off for cadets) from 08:00 to 12:00. That same day, the Second Officer conducted a ship familiarization tour, showing me the layout of the vessel. Having never been on a ship before, the 150-meter vessel seemed absolutely enormous to me.



Based on stories from other trainees in different companies, I expected that cadets might be looked down upon. However, the reality was quite the opposite. The Filipino crew members were incredibly friendly; within the first few days, we were already joking with each other as if we had known each other for a long time. It was clear that the Captain and Officers were very experienced mariners, yet they showed no hostility toward my lack of experience. They answered every question without mockery. Just like with the ratings, the atmosphere on the bridge was always excellent—simultaneously professional and welcoming.



My schedule was split: from 08:00 to 12:00, I worked on deck; from 12:00 to 13:00, I had a lunch break; and from 13:00 to 17:00, I was on the bridge. Because of my initially low expectations, I thought I would have to "earn" my place on the bridge, but I was allowed there from day one, which I truly appreciated.

On deck, cadets performed the same tasks as the ratings and the Bosun. Tasks varied: we chipped rust and painted the deck and cargo holds, and sometimes performed general cleaning to remove all dirt from the deck. Since my practice

took place during the cold season in the Baltic and North Seas, frequent maintenance of rubber gaskets and lashing bars was crucial. If gaskets freeze, they harden and fail to function; lashing bars must be lubricated to prevent freezing. We applied Vaseline to the rubber seals of doors and hatch covers and used grease for the lashing bars. During the first months, I also participated in mooring operations under the Bosun's supervision, which provided vital experience.

Naturally, as a trainee, the bridge interested me most. Initially, it felt like being inside a spacecraft: so many buttons, indicators, screens, and systems I had never heard of. The Second Officer, with whom I spent the most time on the bridge, was very supportive. He told me he was ready to teach me as long as I put in the effort. He recommended two books: Ship Construction and COLREGs. I had to study these and "pass" chapters to him twice a week. This gave me a solid foundation in ship design and helped me stop asking basic questions like "How do we pass this vessel?" or "Why do we have to change course and not the vessel on our starboard side?"





I also acquired essential skills in using the radar. The Second Officer explained the difference between true and relative vectors and taught me manual plotting. Furthermore, the Captain instructed the Second Officer to teach us voyage planning. After his guidance, I was able to create routes myself based on established routes.

By the end of my practice, I felt like a truly useful bridge assistant. I independently filled out the Deck Logbook, Compass Observation Log, and GMDSS Logbook. I

kept a radar watch and, if necessary, altered course to avoid close-quarters situations or when approaching waypoints while the Officer of the Watch handled paperwork. I also communicated with the VTS. I was preparing voyage plans which the Second Officer would

then check and sign off.

While in port, I either stood gangway watch—monitoring the mooring lines to ensure the ship didn't move from the berth, recording cargo operations, and maintaining the visitor log—or I was in the cargo office. There, I observed the Chief Officer's duties. Together, we took soundings, measured water density, and cross-checked the actual drafts with those calculated by the loading software.

I also spent two weeks in the engine room. I was involved in everything: oil changes in generators and mooring winches, daily tank soundings, cleaning sludge tanks, and weekly "safety days" where we tested lifeboat/rescue boat engines and the emergency generator, I also participated in bunkering and so on and so on. Although I am a Deck Cadet, spending time in the engine room was very interesting and provided a nice break from the deck and bridge routine.

There cannot be any complaints regarding life on board. We had frequent opportunities for shore leave to visit



the city. I was provided with three meals a day, and coffee or snacks were always available. The ship has a treadmill and a gym for use during free time. In the evenings after dinner, we often gathered with the crew to play cards and chat. We had several barbecues and karaoke nights where everyone sang in different languages. My advice to future cadets: don't be shy—join these gatherings. They help you relax and build a bond with the crew you'll be living with for six months. Six months is a long time; if you don't have fun with the crew, you will get homesick very quickly.

In mid-March 2026, I finally disembarked in Kotka, Finland, and headed to the airport with our Chief Engineer, whose contract had also ended. I am grateful to WES GESA not only for the knowledge I gained but also for the people on this vessel. They made life at sea so positive that just a few weeks after finishing my contract, I already feel like I would love to go back.

