How were you involved with Singapore’s marine industry when you first joined JTC?

I was the Base Manager for the petroleum supply base in the Jurong Marine Base, a port facility under JTC, serving the needs of oil and gas exploration, development and production. This was back in the early 1980s. Singapore was a booming hub for oil and gas industries at the time, and the Jurong Marine Base offered the various oil and gas companies a comprehensive suite of services. What I wasn’t aware of at the time was how our work in JTC was building up quite an international reputation, and that this reputation was to have a great impact on my personal journey in JTC.

When China was looking to set up an offshore petroleum supply base in Shenzhen, it went on a global search for partners. Singapore emerged from that search as the partner they wished to work together with on the development of an offshore petroleum supply base in China. JTC’s petroleum supply base experience was exactly what they wanted as it provided a comprehensive and integrated service such that it was effectively a ‘supermarket’ of all the oil field services necessary.

A consortium was thus formed with JTC as a key partner to provide our expertise, and I was very privileged to be one of the JTC staff selected to go to China to lead and get the base up and running.
How did it feel to be one of the potential pioneers to export JTC’s expertise?

As a young officer, it was a tremendous honour to be entrusted with so great a responsibility. Over the many visits and meetings with China, we got to share and plan, in consultation with the Chinese counterparts, how their marine base would take shape and operate. I became more and more committed to the project.

As we grew closer to finalising the partnership however, it became clear to me that they had earmarked me to be seconded to Shenzhen to see the planning and implementation through. That I was not keen on.

I was married with a young son and a daughter on the way. The thought of being away from my family was not one I relished. My mother too could see how torn I was at the prospect. She knew how passionate I was about the project and how hard I had been working on it, and that if I let go of the project, I would feel very disappointed. So she just told me, “to go would be difficult, but not to go would be even more difficult for you.” She was right. I was very keen to see this project through. I wanted to see it succeed.

It all worked out well though. Following discussions with my superiors and the Chinese partners, arrangements were made for me to be based in China, but with regularly scheduled visits to Singapore to be with my family. I spent over five years there, and I have to say, those years gave me some of my best memories. I learnt so much and gained far more exposure than I would have had I not taken the plunge. Furthermore, many of the people I worked with there have become my close friends even up to today, more than three decades on.

What benefits did the partnership bring to home shores?

On the larger scale of things, this partnership was beneficial for Singapore to build relations and to create inroads into the China economy. For example, it could facilitate how businesses and customers in our network would have further business opportunities overseas, for everything from rig-building expertise to the servicing of vessels and oil-field equipment. Besides spearheading the physical development of the supply base and the various services, JTC also served as a conduit to open up more opportunities for businesses from Singapore.

I feel this is what sets JTC apart. We are always willing to share our expertise and looking for ways to help our industrialists grow. This in turn helps us to push boundaries even further. It was the way even from back then, and it continues to form part of the JTC DNA today.