

## HOMeward BOUND – A LIVERPOOL-WEST AFRICA MARITIME HERITAGE INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: John Edge

Interviewer: Nick White

Date: 02/06/2016

File Name: JEHB001/JEHB002/JEHB003

[00:40] Training and history of joining company ; pre-sea training aboard HMS Conway, failed eye-test; training as purser; attended Wallasey Commercial School for bookkeeping; [2:10] voyage on *Shonga*, joined in London; seasickness en route to West Africa; description of journey and ports; [5:00] shore trips in West Africa, experience of colour bar in Matadi; difference to British colonies; [6:20] Angola – cargo of copper ingots; [7:10] no family history of seafaring; [7:30] Training – on the job; variety of responsibilities as purser – passengers, ports, cargo papers, stowage plans; [8:50] Pay, conditions and pensions - £16 per month, increased over time; comparable with other companies; [10:45] Relations with management – head office known as ‘the Kremlin’; as purser, worked in office between voyages; also attended end of voyage meetings; [11:45] anecdote re: *Egori* in port in Ivory Coast; [13:00] Relations with masters; discussion of ideal masters’ characteristics; loneliness of the master’s role; [14:50] Passengers – difficulty managing passengers at times; anecdote re: 2<sup>nd</sup> voyage on *Aureol* – time spent in Freetown at City Hotel, where Graham Greene had stayed; [17:30] Prior knowledge of West Africa through an interest in geography; [18:30] recollections of Dakar; also Freetown, ‘Kroo boys’; description of registering the ‘Kroo boys’, funny names; ‘Kroo boys’ involved in cargo and maintenance; [20:25] Anecdote re: Port Harcourt, ‘Kroo boy’ accompanying a deck officer in the dark for safety; [21:20] Most challenging job – pressure preparing stowage plans before departure from West Africa; [22:15] Pressure of crew wanting money; European crew far worse than African crew; giving blood in USA for money [23:20] Ethnic relations, mostly good, dependent on officers and crew; [24:45] Family life – letters; [25:50] Favourite West African country – Sierra Leone and Ghana; Nigerians were ‘bolshie’ types, Igbos known as ‘the Jews of Africa’; role of Britain and English language in uniting Nigeria; [27:00] changes in Nigeria, less safe post-independence; discussion of Nigeria after independence [29:20] no dealings with Nigerian National Lines; [29:40] Angola under Portuguese rule, negative impression; [31:00] Douala, Cameroon – comparison of French and German rule; relative merits of French colonial rule; anecdote re: nightclub in Abidjan, Ivory Coast; rural neglect but urban prosperity in French colonies; [33:45] Cargoes – southbound, general cargo – salt from Liverpool in brown hessian bags and white cotton bags; bags later used as sails in West Africa so had to be clean on discharge; [35:00] description of pre-sailing in Toxteth Docks with tally clerks; [35:50] anecdote re: loading cases; special cargo of whiskey – dockers’ technique of breaking a bottle and straining the whiskey through their caps [37:00] Guinness – popular in West Africa , 18,000 cases for Port Harcourt; also stockfish, penicillin, railway engines; [38:30] Cargo homeward bound – groundnuts, cocoa, timber; [40:00] pilfering on docks in West Africa and Liverpool; [40:15] unusual and difficult cargoes – rabbits for Gambia; large boar for Ghana; livestock difficult to manage; [41:50] Deck Passengers – tents over hatches travelling down the coast; [43:00] Tomatoes in the Canaries; [44:00] Bulk Wheat from Halifax; [45:10] Passengers – deck and non-deck passengers; mostly missionaries, passengers visiting relations; [47:00] Mailboats – first class government people, gold mine workers; cabin class all African and missionaries; [49:00] favourite ships *Calabar* and *Winneba*; [51:00] anecdote re: birthday party for passenger.

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END OF TRACK JEHB001

TRACK JEHB002

[00:20] Continental ports – first visit '55/'56, after the war; submarine pens; Hamburg night life; [2:25] anecdote re: beer halls, international crowd; [4:20] Rotterdam and Bremen – evidence of destruction during the war; reference to 'note protest' – captain's visit ashore to warn of potential cargo damage due to bad weather; [6:33] *Dunkwa* in Guinea, southbound, berthed next to Soviet ship – swapping of films; [08:00] voyage to Leningrad, Jan 1963 – extremely bad weather, led by icebreaker; needed ballast to ensure propeller was under water after unloading; [11:25] anecdote re: interactions with Russian customs officers; [13:30] visit to Poland; intelligence agency officials boarding ship; selling personal items on black market; [14:15] Visit to Baltimore, USA; also Philadelphia; also New York ; [16:20] connection with soldier in New Jersey from WWII, when family relocated to North Wales; [17:40] Montreal; Christmas in Halifax, poor weather delaying cargo loading; Christmas tree on ship's mast; [19:50] Alcohol regulations; [20:30] Transition to office career – probation period in Management Audit Dept; computerisation; [23:00] first office computers; payroll computerised; [26:40] Working in Personnel Dept; [29:00] keeping in touch via newsletters of ED, Ocean Nestorians, William Cory; [29:25] return to Lagos to organise jobs and salary structure; [30:30] Changes in Lagos post-independence; travel to Port Harcourt by ship; description of atmosphere on board; [32:00] no involvement with containerisation; [32:20] retired in 1993; retirement package after 39 ½ years working for EDs and Ocean Group; [33:25] Demise of ED – common saying in the office: 'a ship is a hole you pour money down'; [35:00] retained contact with former colleagues; anecdote re: shipmate in Halifax and Beatles song request on WINS New York radio station; [38:00] many abiding memories; comparison with Blue Funnel – ED much more relaxed; [40:10] Passengers on board, mostly government employees; leave arrangements for govt. employees allowed for travel by sea initially; trip to Canaries for honeymoon; [41:40] social evenings on *Aureol* in Liverpool.

END OF TRACK JEHB002

TRACK JEHB003

Informal discussion and description of miscellaneous photographed items – letters to home, postcards, contract details, passenger tickets, menus, events program.

END OF INTERVIEW