

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

Interviewee: Alan Wigelsworth

Interviewer: Nick White

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File Name: AWHB001/AWHB002

TRACK ONE – AWHB001

[00:50] Overview of career; began aged 15 as office boy; became stevedore in Toxteth Dock; assistant 'counter-off', assistant ship's foreman; National Service '59-'61; returned to freight department; [02:31] amalgamation with Blue Funnel; responsible for operations of ships in port; ship sales and chartering; 2 years with UK-Jeddah Trade; [04:00] move towards containerisation, decline of West Africa trade; [05:15] recollections of offices in India Buildings; [06:00] chose to work for ED via teacher at secondary modern with connection to company; [07:15] Pay and conditions – 3 month probation period; salary 28 and 6 p/week, rising to 45 shillings; lots of incentives; [08:15] Paid into pension from beginning; no overtime; [09:20] Relations with management – positive; opportunities to succeed despite lack of college education; [12:00] management offices; [11:00] Training – little initial training, working in office; lots of female staff members; [12:10] later training and development – financial management, profitability; in-house courses – confidence-building, morale-building; helpful when dealing with industrial disputes; [13:30] particular care with money in ED, unlike Blue Funnel; [11:45] Most challenging role in ship sales department, option to sell or scrap; sold one ship to Cameroun Shipping Lines; [15:50] Time in West Africa – three month secondment to Lagos replacing office staff on leave; [16:50] Initial first impressions – humidity; [18:00] job quite challenging, hiring equipment out; running costs of 'S' and 'M' class ships; [19:10] personal challenges – unfamiliar food; tanks of filtered water; electricity only 5 of 7 days per week; recollection of steward to do laundry and cooking; [20:50] 50 office staff, majority Nigerian; some tensions but mostly conscientious hard workers; [22:00] responsibility to arrange berths to keep ships to schedule; 'M' class too large for berths; [23:10] changes with end of colonial rule – transfer of jobs to local people; experience of racism; expat workers in Lagos for various companies including Guinness; [24:50] UKWAL meetings; comparison of national lines with ED – ED much more efficient; other companies including Black Star [27:40] Industrial Relations – no union in India Buildings; dockers' strikes – mailboats still sailed on time with volunteers from office staff to load passenger bags; [29:40] No union trouble in Lagos; some national strikes; [30:40] anecdote re: caustic soda and sweat, irritating the skin; [31:10] other West African ports included Conakry in Guinea, carrying lube oil for Shell; flew down via Paris, arrested in Guinea – immigration problems re: visa; [33:10] Thieving problems on docks – felt sorry for African dockers as had very little; dockers had to wear armbands to denote employment; [34:10] brief period working in Ghana; comparison between Ghanaian and Nigerian workers; easy to work in Ghana; [35:40] Types of cargo – southbound mainly salt; also industrial equipment; also cement; [37:00] northbound cargo included cocoa from Ivory Coast and Cameroons; palm oil, groundnut oil from Lagos and Gambia; carrying copper from Lobito and Luanda; also timber; later bringing African foodstuffs homeward bound on mailboats such as yams for Birmingham and London markets; [39:30] no interactions with passengers on board; also loaded lettuce, tomatoes; [40:20] wickerwork and wines in Madeira; [41:00] Communications – cables or telex; also agent in Lagos advised re: cargo coordination; [42:00] illicit communication via radio in Lagos to Freetown and Luanda; codenames for radio; [42:50] chasm between office and seagoing staff due to lack of communication; improvement in communication and speed with better technology; [44:10] Containerisation at ED – some ships adapted, also ships

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chartered from other lines; [47:05] West African approach to unloading containers – solution-driven approach in WA; [48:30] Dealings with continental and US ports – trade divided between departments; continental cargoes included latex for Michelin factory in Le Havre; also groundnut oil for Rotterdam and Amsterdam; [50:10] meetings in Hamburg and Bremen; never visited Amsterdam; money made on southbound journeys, northbound just broke even; [52:30] Comparison of continental and UK ports – continental more efficient, better equipment, better design; no involvement with US trade.

END OF TRACK ONE

TRACK TWO – AWHB002

[00:20] End of ED – went to work for Delmas; late 1980s, amalgamation with UKWAL; Nigerians now working in office; take over by Delmas; redundancies; new measures introduced by Delmas; difference working for a shipping company and a shipping agent; [02:45] new management approach, change in office atmosphere; made redundant, sadly but glad to get out; [05:50] no Delmas ships to L'pool, end of major trade from mid-'80s; [06:30] collapse in basic trade to WA due to new trading arrangements there; [10:00] changed trading practices internationally; [12:00] Social life connected with ED – football, bowls; sports ground in Oxton, matches versus dockers; from 1980s more females in office, less interest in sport; previously had own sports ground in Mossley Hill; [15:05] Blue Funnel sports facilities by Aigburth Cricket Club; [15:45] changes in office structure re: gender – more females as cheaper to hire; female promotion in personnel side but never in freight or operations; [17:30] Abiding memory – happy in work, loved the job; pleased with accomplishing management status from ordinary schoolboy; [18:30] pleased to have worked in WA successfully; recollection of accommodation in compound in WA, tight security; [20:30] Anecdote re: sleeping guard in wheelbarrow outside compound; 'juju men' protecting house; [21:50] Anecdote re: dead body close to office, eventually ED agent paid for removal; [22:40] Kept in touch with former colleagues, many now deceased; attending annual and partners' dinner but diminishing numbers.

END OF INTERVIEW