

HOMeward BOUND – A LIVERPOOL-WEST AFRICA MARITIME HERITAGE

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Barry Fowler

Interviewer: Nick White

Date: 13/05/2016

File Name: BFHB001-BFHB002

[00:55] Career outline: Joined King Henry the Seventh Nautical College, London May 1952; 4 years as an apprentice; served as Chief Officer until 1972; Marine Superintendent until 1976; further voyage as Master on *Dunkwa*; [2:30] Reason for choosing EDs: range of companies during pre-sea training; wanted to go into Royal Navy, failed medical; chose Merchant Navy; no seafaring tradition; [3:50] Pay & Conditions £7.50 p/m as apprentice, other details [see attached photo of indentures]; [4:50] once qualified, changed conditions up to Chief Officer £105 p/m; [5:45] Overtime/benefits: compulsory superannuation scheme; [6:30] Leave Arrangements: fixed rates, differed as leave and pay increased; eventually up to 3 months p/a; as apprentice, leave depended on company – usually 2-3 weeks; short notice to go back as an apprentice – anecdote re: short notice known as a ‘A Pier Head Jump’; [8:20] Relations with management: India Buildings known as ‘the wigwam’; formality – always went to office in uniform; good relations, company proud of officers; [9:30] anecdote re: company looking after employees, wife’s stillborn birth, company flew wife out to join ship; always very helpful [10:15] Training: at college for 3 months, details of study and subjects for tickets; [11:10] correspondence course while at sea; [11:25] training onboard ship – bridge experience, double watches – learning on the job; [12:55] Most challenging job: Anecdote re: voyage on *New Texas*, 17 years old – stitching a body into white canvas; [14:50] Family life: met wife as apprenticeship, support from wife at home; [16:10] Keeping in touch: letters waiting at ports; also ‘Marconigrams’ for urgent contact; later on shore radio; [17:20] Early voyages – never seasick; first voyage round the Continent; [18:15] Details of voyage on *New Texas*, 2nd voyage, joined in L’pool; [19:15] Anecdote re: first inspection, also washing arrangements, salt water in taps; lighting cigarette in ashtray; [22:00] Bunkers loaded in Birkenhead: details of coal storage and transportation; work of the trimmers, assisted as cadets; v hot and dirty [23:45] Bath arrangements – salt water or an old-fashioned portable bath; [24:30] Life on board: social life, bingo nights, cards, films, fish and chips in newspapers; [26:00] Going ashore: every night ashore on the continent, occasionally in Africa; lifeboat to the beach with cold beer; also up the creeks to Sapele and Burutu to the mango swamps on the lifeboats; [27:15] Previous knowledge of West Africa: all colonies originally, no problems whilst under British rule; in Bathurst at coronation, special parade held by Governor of Gambia; all dressed in Number 10s – description of Number 10s; drinks afterwards with Governor of Gambia [28:30] First impressions of West Africa: quite impressive, very backward; dockers cadging – anecdote of African dockers asking for cigarettes; [29:30] clothes from charities, sad in some respects; [30:00] Anecdote re: unloading and cargo, Africans pilfering; also L’pool dockers pilfered; felt sorry for Africans as they were lowest paid; [31:00] Interracial relationships: some ships part European crew, other crews totally African; firemen, trimmers from Sierra Leone; stewards from Nigeria; [31:50] First port at Freetown or Takoradi, took on ‘Kroo boys’: 80 on board, living in tents on hatches; unloaded cargo down the coast; head man had a bunk in a block locker; ‘Dhobi man’ and two assistants, washed ship’s linen and whites; cook and crew galley for ‘Kroo boys’; also a sweeper known as ‘cappi caca’ [33:50] Anecdote re: role as 2nd mate, looking after medical locker - African crew constipation; [34:40] Favourite West African country: Luanda and Lobito in Angola, run by Portuguese; recollection of similarity to Portugal [35:50] Post Independence West Africa – Anecdote re: Head man of log loading in Takoradi, after Kwame Nkrumah came to power; awareness amongst locals of

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corruption [37:20] Working on NNL and Black Star Line – worked on NNL as 2nd mate; use of EDs materials, i.e. tally books; [38:20] Anecdote re: apprentices on NNL in Monrovia, situation with knife; otherwise normal ship, NNL crew and ED officers [39:30] Cargo – general cargo, beer, cotton, salt, cement, steel, cars, buses, train engines, iron ore trucks, dried fish [40:30] Dried cod, called ‘solly olly’ in L’pool; [41:10] high value cargo – currency and coin in a specie room; also carried mail – EDs carriers for post office; Coin loaded in L’pool and unloaded in W.A. with high security; [42:20] Homeward Bound cargo – groundnut, palm kernels, coffee, cotton, cocoa, hides, sawn timber and logs [43:00] Difficult cargo - difficulty of loading logs into hatch, difficult to arrange [43:50] Description of loading logs in Takoradi; anecdote re: headman sent from Takoradi to L’pool to unload a stuck log [44:55] Containers – only experienced on deck, had come ashore before containers arrived [45:45] Effect of containerisation; changes in company – tankers and bulk carriers; link of containerisation to the company’s downfall [47:25] Passengers – ‘S’ boats, experiences on *Aureol* and *Accra*; enjoyed passenger ships; description of children’s area known as ‘The Tiger Cage’; Anecdote re: rounds at midnight, discovery of captain and female passenger in nursery [49:35] Passengers en route to Takoradi included miners, workers for UAC, Levers, John Holts; very few passengers travelling on their own account; after independence, more African passengers; President Tubman from Monrovia travelled by sea regularly; [50:30] mixing with passengers, social events; anecdote re: swimming pool and greasy pole game.

END OF TRACK ONE – BFHB001

TRACK TWO – BFHB002

00:15 Continental ports – more efficient, more equipment; in W.A. stevedoring was manual, in Europe forklifts, cranes made a big difference to speed; contracts with stevedoring companies [2:15] Bunkers in *New Texas* in Port Harcourt, coal in railway wagons on quay, description of Africans loading coal in bowls on heads; very time-consuming; [03:20] USA ports – Philadelphia, New York, Canada; cargo to USA included animals; monkeys for medical experiments; Anecdote re: looking after animals, including chimpanzees, snakes; bonuses for delivering them alive; [5:50] Canaries – Las Palmas for bunkers; some cargo, tomatoes coming back – difficulty transporting tomatoes and bananas; Madeira, loaded willows for wicker baskets, took up great deal of space; [7:50] Time working ashore – 1972 in India Buildings; description of work with Dept. of Trade; [9:40] Work as Marine Superintendent; later training with Shell on tankers and bulk carriers, time spent in Japan [11:00] Comparison of working ashore to being at sea – 10% drop in salary automatically [11:40] time in Singapore, MD of OIL Asia, a joint venture between Ocean and Inchcape [12:20] description of role, complete change to previous role; running supply vessels, maintenance vessels, off-shore oil rigs, training crane drivers; [13:00] base in Singapore, worked in Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia with various oil companies [14:00] came back to L’pool, looked after stevedoring until redundancy; [14:30] Working in India Buildings – description of office layout, got on well with bosses, some difficult jobs [15:10] Anecdote re: trip to US re: carrying fruit to Far East for Mexican govt.; sent out to investigate fraudulent claims; allegations re: US Mafia; [18:20] retired from EDs at 58; worked with Shell then full retirement at 60; [18:45] End of Elders – long time coming, no cargo in L’pool, lay off of dockers; [19:30] OCL container ships in Far East, no access to Far East for EDs [20:45] Abiding memory – good company, sticklers for protocol; comparison with Blue Funnel, reference to course lines on shipping charts; [22:45] Re: cargoes – palm oil, groundnut oil [22:45] One voyage as Master – regulation that Marine Superintendent had to do one voyage as Master; *Dunkwa* joined in Rotterdam, problem with engines; Anecdote describing situation with failing engine from Rotterdam to Bremen; fire in bulkhead; damaged cargo and general average [30:20] Company promoted responsibility and initiative; [31:30] Contact with other ED

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pensioners – attend lunches; former Chairman of Masters and Chief Engineers; also Ocean Nestorians;
Chairman for 2 years of Elders of Elders, attending coffee mornings.

END OF INTERVIEW