

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

Interviewee: Captain Brian Simon McManus

Interviewer: Nick White

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[04:15] Advantage of being married; [5:48] how he joined ED, union advised ED was a good employer – Holts were even better, Julian Holt; [6:55] 1951 joined as 2nd officer, Bibby wanted to demote so he moved on, 1965 became master, 2nd officer role – in emergency the navigator – in charge of the after-deck, promotion to chief officer in 1956; [8:55] no seafaring experience in his family, influenced by Sir Arthur Rostron's *Home from the Sea*, opportunity to travel; [10:00] end of service, felt Bibby was more gentlemen and ED more workers, Bibby very strict on uniform, but ED had some tremendous masters, not all, Clifford O'Sullivan, food same on Bibby and ED – too much food; [12:54] Blue Funnel and ED good relations with management, every voyage Glazer would interview all officers and at Blue Funnel they interviewed the engineers too; [14:26] training, no cadets on Bibby, ambition to Captain Queen Mary, joined Cunard in 1944 and served time – terrible conditions and treatment – didn't have the liaison that ED had; [16:31] arrival at Freetown coast most challenging, working all the time, pursers essential and they worked very hard on the coast in pretty appalling conditions; [17:22] family life – sailor's wives were exceptional people, difficulties of contact by post – post might be delayed – ships might be delayed, contact by phone sometimes, use of radio was privileged – late 1960s radio telephone very good from English Channel; [19:55] first voyage with ED – quite primitive conditions – no running water; [20:40] West African food – ground nut stew, nice palm oil chop in Lagos; [21:30] no incentive to go ashore – very few masters had restrictions on the bar – when sailing up the creeks in Nigeria you drank until midnight – sailors didn't abuse it; [22:40] master's life - very isolated, cases when you only saw people if something went wrong, lonely – may form a relationship with chief engineer, Brian took up writing when stranded in Suez looking after 2 ships, had 3 or 4 articles published *The Daily Telegraph* and letters in *Lloyd's Lists*; [28:00] looked after 2 vessels in the Bitter Lakes at Suez, he'd requested the job and was lucky to get it; [26:55] why he did more work with ED – agents in Far East all graduates, agents in ED not highly educated but looked down their noses at seafarers; [28:00] nature of crew – different ethnic groups, African stewards and in engine room sometimes deck crew were British, no one wanted to sail to West Africa so didn't always get the best crew, some good regular sailors, married men, Tilbury 'dregs', bosun on contract but many Liverpool men just signed on casually; [30:00] favourite crew members as master, some sailors pretty regular and knew them quite well; [31:51] no conflict on ships, decks and engineers got on well – met in bar for a beer and a chat; [32:30] impressions of Africa – primitive, hard workers – working from 7 until midnight sometime, hard to load heavy bags of palm kernels; [34:30] favourite ports – Portuguese ports in Angola but didn't bother going ashore much, Grand Hotel Lagos, Dresler Bar for ratings not officers, didn't compare with Singapore or Hong Kong, Apapa Club for curry lunch occasionally though not to be recommended; [37:00] Denholm Bermuda, Antwerp, Montreal visited best restaurants, no knowledge of prices at the time, African pilots phenomenal knowledge of creeks; [40:00] Nigerian National Line, voyage of super cargo – same as being with ED; [40:50] Cargo from Liverpool, salt bags later used for clothing as the salt label had washed out, Guinness for power and in Africa that equalled virility, pilferage 1 case by dockers and many cases in West Africa though not a major problem; [43:00] cargo from West Africa - palm kernels, cocoa, coffee, palm oil, launch difficulties, Africans working on

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logs; [44:22] experimentation with containerisation; [45:20] passengers – some carried around 12 passengers though little social contact, priest, some Africans though later on removed passengers and filled up with more cargo as more economical; [47:20] American run unpopular – away 5 months whereas African run was 2 months and exchange rate poor, visited Norfolk Virginia, Chesapeake Bay, Delaware, Philadelphia, New York, ashore in the United States; [48:40] bars visited, shows and ‘big band’ and jazz bars; [49:35] Hamburg a favourite, beer, took wife and daughter, occasional visit to a ‘girlie bar’ but prices were sky high, Rotterdam – Heineken, Antwerp not so popular due to a long trip down river, but Rotterdam was an easy tram journey into the city; [51:50] European ports were years ahead with palletised cargo years before Liverpool got a fork-lift truck; [52:20] Canaries liked as sellers came aboard and limited intake of cargo, Scandi’s carried tons of refrigerated cargo – EDs carried them on deck; [12:45] wife never travelled with him to Africa, working for Denholm after 1972, good though terrible compared with ED, tramp company compared poorly with liners, enjoyed Denholm Bermuda – especially club Chez Paris, took wife to 1 such club and wife admitted the girls were gorgeous; [57:41] comparison of tramp line with ED; [58:38] EDs history followed through personal friendships; [1:00:00] very sad that politicians of both sides have let the shipping industry go, shame that masters of British ships are no longer British nationals; [16:30] summation – attitude to personnel was schoolboyish, Denholm’s stood no nonsense from the ratings, EDs would back down to the ratings – Julian Holt; [1:03:39] fondest memories – *Owerri*, Jim Pearson, Freetown deck crew.

END OF INTERVIEW