

HOMeward BOUND – A LIVERPOOL-WEST AFRICA MARITIME HERITAGE

INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Denis Kelly

Interviewer: Nick White

Date: 27/07/2016

File Name: DKHB001

[00:50:00] Description of career; analysed freight carryings, earnings etc; produced pictures of trends for reports; explanation of freight equalisation scheme job on 'planning desk'; [03:15] competition in business post-war, led to 'Canvassing Dept', later became 'Marketing Dept'; Holland – West Africa line taking business from Elder Dempster; also Hoegh Line offering discounted rates; freight war eventually led to UKWAL; [07:10] Marketing Dept, company car shared between two employees; description of what the role involved – visiting high commissions, embassies; hosting annual cocktail party; [09:40] death of father suddenly in West Africa; [10:10] Liberian ambassador visit to UK, attended reception at the Mansion House; [11:50] emphasis on cargo not passengers; produced advertising material; £75,000 budget to advertise West African trade; account of advertising tactics and magazines; [14:30] description of advertising campaigns including an ice scraper with slogan 'we cut more ice'; [15:30] 'sailing cards' and various campaigns; [17:30] Family history of seafaring - father was a Purser on the Accra; recollection of father at sea a lot while a child; father's death in 1952; [18:40] joined ED through family connections; anecdote re: phone call; [19:50] Sense of ED as a family growing up; anecdote re: stint on the coast in West Africa to replace WA coast staff; description of first experiences in WA; use of pidgin English; [22:45] six months in WA in 1962; wages, comparison with Nigerian stewards' wages; [24:10] accommodation standards, basic; [28:00] Expat community – dinner parties, business relationships; [25:50] impressions of West Africa – difficulty asking directions; heat, smells of wood smoke and sewage; [26:30] occasional Sundays off; description of boys with huge trays on their heads selling drinks on beach; [28:00] Only visited Nigeria on first trip; later visited elsewhere for meetings but mainly Nigeria; [29:10] Pay and Conditions – a daily rate while in W.A.; social aspects of working for ED – football teams, theatre group; [30:40] description of ED theatre group – 2 shows per year; also tennis team; [32:00] Compulsory pension scheme; [32:30] relations with management, mainly good; generous management, illustrated by management attending theatre show; [37:30] Ocean takeover in 1965 – main change was 5 day week, no more Saturday mornings; list of ship commands were combined, pushing some ED Masters down the line; [39:30] Training Courses – lots of on-the-job learning; anecdote re: stress in West Africa; [43:00] autonomy and own initiative essential; [44:30] containerisation and customers' impressions in early days; containers in Lagos; [47:10] benefits of containerisation, no pilfering; [48:30] cargoes – salt; soap; motorcars; steelwork; locomotives; regular deliveries [50:40] competition from Hoegh Line; [53:30] consistent cargoes into 1980s; bags for flour and salt turned into clothing for children in WA; [55:30] Homeward bound cargo mostly groundnuts, whole and oil; also 'EPODS' empty palm oil drums; [57:30] Dangerous cargo – explosives – description of special magazine built to contain explosives; also coin to various countries; [59:30] no dealing with passenger trade; separate passenger office; [1:02:20] airlines signalled end for passenger ships; [1:04:00] trip on Las Palmas journey, special ED price of £10 instead of £100; [1:05:20] sailed to WA on *Aureol* and came home in *Accra* – other passengers included missionaries, govt. people; [1:07:00] social activities on board; excellent food – slogan '4,000 miles of sunshine and every meal a banquet'; [1:09:30] visited multiple ports en route and down the coast; [1:11:40] trip ashore at Monrovia; hospital visit in Freetown; extreme heat and stomach problems; [1:14:00] brief Takoradi visit; [1:15:40] Lunch in Lomé while working for UKWAL – retirement present of large clock; whiskey trade in Lomé;

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[1:18:40] Cigarettes to Ghana encased in waterproof packaging and hard salt – explanation of salt melting and pack floating to top; [1:20:30] Dealings with French agents (CFAO) in WA; [1:23:45] worked for UKWAL – dealings with Black Star and Nigerian National Shipping Lines; transition to independence and effects; [1:24:00] Nigerian Boss was an ED trainee, later formed Nigerian Green Line; [1:25:00] UKWAL multi-party meetings in international locations with interpreters; objective to raise the freight rate; [1:28:40] meeting in hotel outside Apapa, presence of military with rifles; power went out; [1:29:00] end of shipping due to cost, containerisation; old trade vanished; [1:31:45] sadness at end – changes in ships themselves, not same level of affection as for the old ships; [1:33:00] experience of staying on container ship in Lagos, setting off smoke alarm; [1:34:15] description of piano in lobby of Presidential hotel in Port Harcourt, still in wrapping two years later; [1:35:00] stayed on Nigerian container ship – nice but impersonal; [1:36:10] contact with colleagues through annual lunch; also group of people involved in WA trade, unique experience; [1:38:10] sense of wide horizons; [1:38:40] Abiding memory/ethos of the company – ‘Elder Gangster’ – big reputation in WA, image of ED as ‘we are West Africa’, instrumental in forming the expat community.

END OF INTERVIEW