

# HOMeward BOUND – A LIVERPOOL-WEST AFRICA MARITIME HERITAGE

## INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Derek Bailey

Interviewer: Nick White

Date: Wednesday 10th February 2016

File Name: DBHB001

[00:35] Role of the Engineer – watchkeeping in engine room, also maintenance, repairs of machinery; [1:17] Reasons for joining EDs: began in 1957, had just completed apprenticeship, interested in going to sea, wrote to several companies and attended EDs for interview; [1:55] Family history of seafaring, father worked at sea during the war; maternal grandfather had been at sea; [2:30] Working conditions, slightly above-average pay for the industry, reflecting poor voyages to West Africa rather than ‘hotspots’ of Australia and Far East pension scheme; no overtime pay, set monthly salary; [3:30] Relationship with management, had very little to do with management in early days; [4:25] Amalgamation of Blue Funnel and EDs, fraught relationship with new managers; [5:05] Learning on the job – as junior engineer, working on watch with senior engineer and learning from them; [5:50] Most challenging jobs – had to cope with anything that came along; breakdowns on ships; Anecdote re: breakdown on the Eboe, replacing a camshaft; [7:20] Family life – unmarried initially, family were happy; later as married, difficulties leaving wife and young children at home, absences of two or three months; [8:40] Communication with family via letters; sailing list left with family, letters reached ports eventually [9:35] First voyage, never known heat like it, challenge of working watches – shifts of 12-4am and noon til 4pm, eventually became a routine; [10:15] Sealegs, never seasick; [10:30] Life on board regulated by work, some social life but circumscribed by work and shifts; [11:10] Independence on the ship, controlled by the needs of the ship, but relatively free to do as you wished; [12:30] Relationships between different nationalities, quite good, certain amount of ‘us’ and ‘them’; they weren’t browbeaten, they were fellow workers, literally ‘all in the same boat’; [13:20] Social life ashore, maintenance while in port; free time to go ashore or stay on the ship; [14:05] Comparison with other shipping companies, very different, skeleton crew, no socialising, either working or sleeping; working on the tankers for Dublin Shipping; [15:20] Knew nothing about West Africa before travelling there, found it interesting to go there and see different ports; most ED people didn’t explore all the possibilities of West Africa, more interested in what was going on in the port; first impressions, hot and wet; foreignness of it; [16:50] impressions didn’t change much, didn’t see much more than the port area, friends with expats; [17:30] Favourite W.A. country, Ghana – friendly, climate not as oppressive as Nigerian creeks; always regarded as a bit of a penance going down there; no one particularly like going up the creeks but was a big part of the commerce; Creek ports of Sapele, Barutu, Warri; 80 miles from the sea up to Sapele, hot, sticky, no breeze; everything seemed to work at half speed; ten-fourteen days in the creeks; [19:45] No real changes with independence, Nigeria independence in 1960, interesting politics; Sailing on Nigerian National Line ship when Nigeria gained independence; in Rotterdam on the day, Nigerian crew put a show on in the Seaman’s Mission; [21:30] Working for Nigerian Lines – ED and Palm Line had a stake in NNL, agreement to man the ships until NNL had trained native staff; first ship ‘Oduduwa’ was a former Geordie ship, needed a lot of work to bring it up to ED standards; sociable ship, best crowd of officers; First African ship on the coast, lots of celebrations at every port; [24:00] Came to an end when National Service regulations were breached by merchant navy sailing under a foreign flag; was transferred back to British owned ships. [25:40] Cargo – outward bound, general cargo; anything from railway engines down to toiletries; Homeward

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

bound, African produce – 20 ton logs, timber, palm kernels; latex and palm oil carried in deep tanks in bulk, had to be kept at correct temperature; occasional heavy lifts such as excavators, railway engines, buses; deck department responsible for lifting gear; [28:15] Difficult cargoes – didn't have a great deal to do with cargoes as engineer; [29:10] ED containerisation, not during career; [29:30] Continental Ports visited including Hamburg, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Bremen, some French ports; outward trade predominantly; Took a lot of timber to Rotterdam; Social life to go ashore and explore the famous watering holes; [30:40] Similar to UK ports; [31:04] Never experienced any labour troubles; Seamen's strike in '60s, was on leave throughout; [31:35] North American ports, Eastern seaboard, Halifax, Nova Scotia, down to Jacksonville, including New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia; Luck of the draw if you were in West Africa and an American cargo was offered; popular for some, very unpopular for others, journey could be 12 months, if on a double header; only three times in career; [33:10] exciting to go to New York for the first time; [33:35] Visited Canaries, for bunkers and water, not much cargo; [34:25] Most abiding memory, not on an ED ship; when EDs were taking over Paddy Henderson's, Henderson's had an agreement with Canadian Saguanay to charter a bulk carrier; was 2<sup>nd</sup> engineer on the Sunjarv; picked up ship in Malta, broke down repeatedly crossing the Atlantic; reached Georgetown in Guyana; picked up aluminium and brought it back to North America; twelve month voyage, runs included Mackenzie, Trinidad, Norway, Gulf of Mexico, Panama, British Columbia; very poor ship structurally; later ship sank off American coast; lots of repairs but not frightening [38:50] made redundant in 1978, was angry at ED for way things were being run; changes to traditional shipping, crew were angry as didn't know what was coming down the line; was happy to be made redundant, but later realised what was left behind - security of employment, pension schemes; [40:50] felt ED was running itself uneconomically, particularly in Liverpool as main turnaround port; doubling up on different things; economical ethos of the company had vanished in employees' eyes; repairs at Odyssey Works in Birkenhead, not to required standard; [42:50] Saw end of EDs in the press, no great deal of interest; [42:50] Subsequent career in tankers; decline of British merchant navy; training regime, shortage of officers; lower standard of trainees; [44:45] shipyard training in old days, engineer cadets later concentrated on academic work rather than hands on experience; [45:40] came across ED Pensioners Association by accident, attended annual lunch in New Brighton in Hotel Victoria, met many old friends and acquaintances; started going to meetings, reduced in numbers now as is the nature of pensioners' associations; [46:50] Running the newsletter, took over from Harry Wright in January 2000; involves collating work, finding out info, letters, stories; plenty material; not member of Merchant Navy Association [49:50] Passengers on cargo ships, 12 passengers, missionaries both ways – young and eager outward bound, older and disillusioned homeward bound; surveyors, civil servants, ED staff; one voyage on mailboats but didn't like it, too many people; [52:00] Mixing with expats ashore, friends in Lagos and Takoradi; expats later replaced by Nigerian staff, dwindling expat populations; [52:45] Experience as seafarer ashore, some expat communities very insular; European club in ports, seafarers not welcome on premises; football matches against European club but not welcome in the bar afterwards; [54:00] attended the missions; Takoradi club welcoming, Sapele not welcoming; [55:04] Explanation of camshaft chain breakage.

END OF INTERVIEW