

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

Interviewee: Graham Austin

Interviewer: Nick White

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[00:49] Role of a ship's printer, on Aureol 107—1974; main job printing the menus, also the program of events and ship's stationary for different departments; [1:14] Working for ED – had served a six year apprenticeship, few job opportunities, poor working conditions; July 1970, met union secretary on bus, offered a seagoing job; India Buildings meeting with Mr McNamara, crew manager; underwent medical, given discharge book at American Marine Office, over to Dale St for photographs, medical centre at Hatton Garden for injections – yellow fever, cholera, smallpox; Monday the Aureol arrived, previous printer had died homeward bound at Monrovia; [5:11] Down to printer's station, in a terrible mess; set sail 18th September, working eighteen hours a day; Christmas voyage next; fifth voyage, everything cleared and then on plain sailing; [6:35] Pay and conditions – signed on voyage to voyage, no pension scheme; did get overtime; twelve hours work a day and double time Saturdays and Sundays; far better rate of pay than ashore; [07:30] Management relations – welcomed right away, respectful, everyone got along; [7:55] Not much training, just thrown in; one man job, worked for all the departments – pursers, catering, deck, bridge; [9:10] Most challenging job was first voyage; Christmas voyage, extra menus to be printed, special Christmas cruise in Lagos for three days, lots of extra work, different programs; [10:00] Family life, kept in touch by letters, away for six weeks; in urgent cases, could send ship to shore telegram; [10:35] No family background in seafaring at all; [10:50] got sealegs straight away, never suffered from seasickness; [11:09] Social life aboard, crew made own entertainment; board games, dart boards, rec rooms, musical instruments; [11:50] Race relations – crew was mostly Nigerian, laundry staff from Sierra Leone; treated like an African chief, come to me with problems – most of the African crew were illiterate, would come with letters to read for them and to write back; [13:21] got on very well with them, used bring me food, looked awful but tasted very nice; [13:40] Social life aboard, reading, music, play piano; ashore in Lagos, five days ashore, pool available for one day only, then emptied; ship's cinema with latest releases; seaman's mission, outdoor cinema; company yacht at Lagos Yacht Club called the 'Forerunner'; [15:30] First impressions of West Africa – humidity, smell, different ways of life; poverty in Sierra Leone, shanty towns; nice breeze in Ghana, less humidity and clean and tidy; Lagos was very rough, never go out alone at night; [16:55] Nightlife in Lagos, quiet; [17:15] Ghana was favourite West African country due to climate and people; [17:30] completely different way of life to home [18:15] Cargoes on the Aureol – salt loaded in Liverpool; cocoa beans from Ghana; [19:35] Passengers in '70s – outward bound, Africans returning, nuns, missionaries, high commission people, construction company reps; homeward bound, mostly white ship coming back, black ship going out; Africans who had been studying returning home; [20:50] Social life with passengers – crew vs passenger cricket matches and games; [21:35] Passenger accommodation, every cabin had a porthole; all interior space was for engines and cargo; [22:40] Class distinctions – saloon was first class, cabin class was missionaries and Africans; [23:30] Anecdote re: piano in crew recreation room, piano destroyed and committed to the deep; used to play the piano in first class lounge, also for church service at sea; use the pool while passengers at dinner; [25:05] Las Palmas, Canaries, bunkers of oil, at port for eight hours, would go ashore, visit bazaars to buy whiskey and watches for cheap; passengers bus tours; nice climate; [26:20] round trip passengers – ship to Lagos, stay in hotel, come back on return voyage; [27:05] 400 passengers, always full outward bound,

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homeward bound only about 60; no cabin class northward; [27:30] EDs was very good company; special Christmas party for the crew members' families; [28:30] Left ED when the ship was withdrawn from service; ship transferred to Southampton, four days leave instead of eleven; fuel crisis of 1974, didn't get home for six months; [29:50] Was looking forward to getting back to friends and family, found it hard, hit rock bottom; kept on pay by the company until found a job onshore; requested to purchase the printing equipment when ship was withdrawn from service; drove to Southampton to collect three tonnes of printing equipment; [32:30] one month and a half on pay while looking for work, no jobs in Liverpool; missed the comradery of the sea; job as letterpress printer in St Helens, then Pilkingtons, good company like ED; [34:30] Pay not as good as ED but better than trade union minimum; [35:11] End of Elders – read it in shipping magazines; decline of industry in Liverpool; [36:20] containerisation, containers on deck, sunbathing on top of the containers; [37:00] Abiding memory, the difference from working ashore; did forty voyages in total; [38:15] Holidays - eleven days in Liverpool; five days in Lagos; later four days in Southampton; on six month articles; [38:45] Kept in touch with other ex-ED staff, member of Elders of Elders, met Mike Ingham on a cruise and discovered his website; memory of the Aureol as the flagship.

[END OF INTERVIEW – subsequent recording talking about photographed items]