

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

Interviewee: Peter Woods

Interviewer: Nick White

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[00:40] Employed as 1st Apprentice & cadet officer; duty to learn the job of a seaman; navigation, watch-keeping; other duties included rigging wires, chipping decks, stowing logs, emptying cargo holds – learning all the tasks on board. [1:41] Chose to work for EDs – uncle worked at Blue Funnel; joined Sea Cadets at Liverpool; before O Levels, went to Blue Funnel for an interview, unsuccessful; later accepted by Elder Dempster; [1:50] Conditions of pay – reference to indentures, £120 first year; long hours as cadets; leave – first leave curtailed due to correspondence course, sometimes full month leave; [3:55] no overtime, just salary; [4:15] Relations with management – Basil Millard at India Buildings, post-voyage meeting for cadets; relations on ships with managements varied, some supportive masters, others kept to themselves; [6:00] Training – sailed on the *Degema* in 1959, waiting for first voyage, spend a week in rigging loft in Brunswick Dock, where ex-seafarers were employed to make slings, wire ropes -cadets spent a week training; Correspondence course took training all the way through, annual exams on board; also lifeboatman certificate; sailed on *Fourah Bay's* maiden voyage; mostly training on the job; [7:40] Most challenging job was loading logs in Sapele – cadets on log rafts loading logs, identifying floaters and sinkers, some logs expensive; anecdote re: retrieving a head of a stevedore decapitated at work; [9:10] Labour troubles, cadets had to do the work; [9:25] Family life while at sea, contact via airmail letters, postcards; Grandfather had been at sea and family was accustomed to people at sea, seafaring as a way of life in the community; [10:20] Experience of going to sea prior to first voyage as sea cadet on the coast; also Liverpool Pilots Service, big offshore cutters – went to sea with them; also on trips on coasters on Coastline, British & Continental Steamships; [11:04] Sealegs – *Degema* first voyage, Glasgow – Liverpool; *Cotterell*, accommodation was not bad; sailed from Tilbury into storm in Bay of Biscay; feeling ill, Captain gave a cup of tea consisting of half Brasso, half tea – learned projectile vomiting; Voyage to West Africa - slow, leisurely, lots of time in port; ended in Apapa; carried Friesian bull and three heifers to Lagos – cadets responsible for mucking out the cattle; [13:20] Prior knowledge of West Africa – interest in geography and history; visit to Cape Coast Castle (Ghana); later visit to Fort James in the Gambia; [14:50] Changing impressions of West Africa, towards the end, in Lagos at independence – special ceremonies with Nigerian flag; slip towards corruption in 1963, before that everything was running extremely well, albeit under colonial rule; in the Congo during Kinshassa problem, brought white UN trucks on the *Donga* up to Matadi, met by soldiers with machine guns on the gangway; Some colonies unchanged for centuries, for example Fernando Po, Spanish colony; [16:35] no plan for many colonies post-independence; some smooth takeovers in Ghana and Nigeria; [17:15] Race relations on ships – officers all white, white Bosun, Lamp Trimmer and Chief and Second Stewards; seafarers from Sierra Leone or Nigeria; stewards from Ghana; Distinctions within tribes; mostly got along quite well; [18:35] Autonomy on ship in those days, cables to send occasionally; Captain had full autonomy working with agencies down the coast; cadets responsible for daily tasks and later running sections of the crew, company idea of developing leadership; sent to Outward Bound School at Abu Dhabi for one month for leadership qualities; [20:00] Social Life – busy with correspondence course; occasional days out in the lifeboats – Fort James, up the creeks, finding sailing ships from the 1890s, ashore to visit old

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residents' house and the ghost of Roger Casement; cadets were encouraged to go ashore; not allowed to drink or smoke until 18; [21:40] Anecdote of French lady sunbathing in Ivory Coast; tried to bring home souvenirs from each port as a cadet; [22:50] Enjoyed the creeks in Nigeria – Sapele and Burutu – Burutu a microcosm of England; also liked Ghana; didn't like Guinea, becoming Marxist at that time; the botanical gardens in Cameroon, fantastic Victorian design; [24:00] Some ports didn't want seafarers coming off ships, especially Guinea; French colonies were always welcoming; [24:40] Portuguese and Spanish colonies after independence – Spanish just walked out; Portuguese didn't want to leave; tensions in Angola in 1963; [25:30] Cargo – leaving port, all general cargo; Brunswick, Herculeaneum, Toxteth docks; complex cargo plans, cadets not involved with loading; homeward bound, mostly logs and sawn timber; different lots of sawn timber in the hold, cadet colour coded logs and kept cargo plan up to date; also Palm Oil in heated tanks; Latex in hot wax tanks; Cocoa; erecting scaffolding, putting separation boards in to divide cargo; [28:20] Outward bound – anything at all – cooking pots, toilets, locomotives, vehicles, a magazine, explosives; [29:30] Compared with cargos on other lines – experienced beginning of containerisation; two years carrying bananas and fruits for Elders and Fyffes; after containerisation, never experienced general cargo again aside from a period of transporting mobile homes; [30:40] work pattern changes with containerisation – biggest change was time spent in port – much reduced; also reduction in number of ports; change of cargo also, development of local industry; Guinness cargo to breweries in Nigeria, large tanks; [32:10] Mailboat – transferred to Apapa in Lagos and sailed home; one trip on Oriel; [33:00] Passengers – mostly missionaries, people working in West Africa for Barclays, the Colonial Service – no flights at these times; often families and children; on mailboats not much contact with passengers as cadets; [34:00] lots of mixing with passengers on 12 passenger ships, encouraged to mix, good experience for passengers; [34:40] Continental ports – on *Swedru*, description of double- or triple-header trips; first trip in 1960 to New York, visited New York World Fair; berthed under the Brooklyn Bridge; [35:50] More efficient than British ports; American stevedores more frightening, like *On The Waterfront*; worse than Liverpool; [36:40] EU ports, Rotterdam, Hamburg on *Fourah Bay*, again more efficient than Liverpool; resistance in Liverpool to container revolution; [37:30] Containerisation – facilities in Hamburg; description of abysmal dockers' facilities in Liverpool [38:30] regular runs to Canaries – bunkered in Las Palmas, usually southbound; flamenco dancers visited mailboats, purchased Spanish mantilla for mother with loan from chief officer; [40:00] Social life onboard – 'crossing the line' ceremony, horseracing evenings, library facilities, daytrips on lifeboats; [41:25] ED compared to other companies – tradition of lifelong working for company; traditional approach - personal experience of lack of promotion prospects; became master at 30 in Canadian Pacific, not possible in ED; variety of experience in other companies; [43:30] Paternalism in shipping companies in 50s and 60s; company looked after workers for entire lives, pensions provided; ED very involved with staff; takeover by Blue Funnel marked the end; [45:00] Pay and conditions far better in every other company; people were afraid to leave; [46:00] not part of pension scheme as a cadet; [46:30] Remained interested in Elders, Liverpool seafaring community; [47:00] end of ED in 1989; anecdote re: ED ship stuck in ice in St Lawrence; refusal to accept assistance; [48:50] end of an era with end of ED and decline of merchant navy; shipping companies like family in Liverpool; lack of awareness of shipping and merchant navy in Liverpool now; recollection as a sea cadet visiting the docks and offices; [50:20] Change in Liverpool culture and society, career path no longer available; [51:30] Abiding memory of ED – first journey mucking out cattle; anecdote re: altercation with lamp trimmer on first journey; [53:20] contact with Fourah Bay Association, reunions, dinners; colleagues in John Moores University; effort to keep in touch; maiden voyage of *Fourah Bay* '59-'63; [54:45] *Fourah Bay* – designed to bring 20 cadets, 2 senior cadets to run the ship; cadets did all seafarers' work; description of painting; uniform of white t-shirts with blue trim; visits to Lagos; description of raids on other ships, painting funnels; [57:20]

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Cocktail party in Freetown; Federal New Zealand Shipping and Blue Funnel also had a cadet ship; classroom on board ship; [58:40] Memberships of Master Mariners Association; Royal Navy Reserve, joined at 18 and became a commodore; ED cap, also Royal Navy badge. [END OF INTERVIEW]

[1:00:00 – 1:18:00] Discussion of photographs and memorabilia included in interview file.]