

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

Interviewee: Vincent Scriven

Interviewer: Nick White

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File Name: VSHB001/VSHB002

## TRACK ONE – VSHB001

[00:30] Description of role as pantryman – three voyages on *Apapa* in 1968; details of responsibilities – diary, salads, cold meats, room service; worked on *QE2* and for Canadian Pacific also; [01:50] short term contracts, moved from ship to ship; reputation of certain ships as good to work on; role of Shipping Federation in securing work; only able to refuse two ships offered and had to take the third; brother had also worked on *Apapa*; not permanent employee of any company; [04:05] ED in comparison with other companies – employees mixed together, no barriers unlike bigger ships ie on Canadian Pacific where you rarely mixed with officers; more sociable on *Apapa*; [05:05] Pay and Conditions – 12 hour day; particular shifts for catering staff; unclear memory of rate of wages, approx. £47 -£52 per month; starting wage of £17 with Canadian Pacific; [07:00] collecting pay, dues to union; [07:55] started working age 16 in 1964 as a cook's boy on *Empress of England*; became assistant pantryman, moved to Cunard; [09:00] description of 'rating' – certificates and courses undertaken; on-going training; [10:30] attended Catering College – mostly seafarers; [12:20] had to pay for courses oneself, some sponsored by Canadian Pacific; [12:45] nature of casual labour, no training from ED; [13:25] process of picking a ship and attending for interview with certs and discharge books; also vaccination records from doctor at the Shipping Federation; [15:45] description of building where the Shipping Federation was located; [17:50] Seamen's Strike, received £30 per week while on strike; [18:10] Book of certificates, including fire-fighting cert; [20:30] Pension scheme – contribution to Merchant Navy Fund; superannuation fund; companies now gone and confusion over where money paid out went; [24:15] variety of food at sea; first class fare on *Apapa*; anecdote re: kitchen hand named Danny; [25:30] most challenging job – had experience doing it all before; specific expectations at each company, ie ED and butter dishes; [27:00] Image of galley staff; also of staff gathered in bar; souvenir of *Apapa*; [28:50] Family tradition of seafaring – father, brother, cousins all worked on ships; three brothers at sea; local community of seafarers, recognisable by Merchant Navy badge; from Dingle into North Liverpool were all merchant seaman; [31:40] First voyage on *Empress of England*, 17 day trip; well looked after as was under 18; head chefs all from local area of Dingle; [33:20] worked for Cunard as kitchen porter; [34:05] sailed to Australia as deckhand; served as steward on *Doric*; followed the work, plenty of work available in those days; [35:50] Keeping in touch via cards and letters, buying stamps in each port; recollection of celebrating 19<sup>th</sup> birthday in Australia; sending telegram for brother's wedding; [37:10] relatively short trips, 4/5 weeks on West African trip; reluctant to go ashore as Biafran War was on at the time; [37:45] tribal conflict, body went missing on *Apapa*; [38:15] private clubs in Lagos for British people, contact with family friend; [39:00] seaman's missions as places of refuge, helping with everything; still use missions in different places; [39:50] Impressions of West Africa as primitive; living on hatches on deck; stories in bar about children dying at sea; [41:00] picture of Takoradi, impression of nothing there other than the port; didn't really go ashore in West Africa; socialised in crew bar on board; [42:50] system of paying in the bar – chits if you hadn't money; [42:50] family changes while at sea – moved house; [44:00] lots of Liverpool staff on the *QE2*; bar tab; socialising on deck in crew bar; change to rules now, blood tests before going to sea; [47:10] Mix of ethnicities at ED; separate accommodation for African crew; [49:30] No real experience of West

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African food; didn't prep crew meals; as catering staff, could eat anything; [52:15] Weather – no bad experiences, Bay of Biscay was calm; [53:00] experienced Hurricane Gloria on the *QE2* in 1985; [53:50] bunkering in Las Palmas on West Africa run; buying all sorts of items tax free; purchasing stools and furniture in West Africa; also shopping in New York, especially records and clothes; [56:20] No mixing with passengers; anecdote re: gate-crashing a fancy dress party dressed in uniform as chef; [58:30] Mostly European passengers on *Apapa*; Sailed on Lamport and Holt ship *Devis* – cargo ship, carried both passengers and livestock; trouble on South American runs; [1:00:45] *Apapa* remembered as a friendly ship; no involvement with cargo; [1:02:05] passengers living down the hatches once cargo was discharged; [1:04:10] long career, also experienced containerisation; sailed on Blue Star's *Colorado Star*, one of first containerised ships, dropped refrigerated containers to San Francisco; [1:06:10] different as much smaller crew, no passengers, much more modern; [1:08:00] reflection on changes in Liverpool and in seafaring life; Liverpool had bars and missions with seamen; [1:10:30] later ships were scrapped, companies amalgamated, ships disappearing from the docks; [1:11:30] closure of Shipping Federation in 1987/88, but ships going by the 1970s; [1:14:50] not many Liverpoolians left on the ships; way of life in Liverpool – as a kid, went down the docks to carry bags; [1:15:30] changes in code of practice; fun and games went out of life at sea.

TRACK TWO VSHB002 – Discussion of miscellaneous items, including photos and certificates.

END OF INTERVIEW