

Object Summary



Oral history of the Malta Dockyard: George Cardona

Date

29 January 2021

Primary Maker

George Cardona

null

Dimensions

27 minutes 20 seconds

null

Extent

1 digital audio recording (WAV)

Object Type

Oral history

null

null

Collection

Malta Dockyard Oral History project

Museum

Malta Maritime Museum

Registration Number

MMM.AV0012

Description

This recorded interview was made as part of the Malta Dockyard Oral History project by the Digitisation Unit, Heritage Malta, under the direction of Joe Meli. George entered the dockyard in 1959 as an engine-fitter apprentice. He was one of the first group of apprentices to enter the yard after the take-over by Bailey. In 1977, he joined the Production and Planning Department, where he became leading planner, and subsequently Deputy Planning Manager up to his retirement in 2005.

Transcript / Summary

(This summary is a work in progress. Timings are approximate.) (00:30) They were the first group of apprentices to enter dockyard after the change from the Admiralty to Baileys. (01:45) He went to the St. Michael's school in Fleur De Lys and then afterward sat for the exam for the dockyard apprenticeship. At the time when he sat for the exam, there was a change of system, and instead of an exam on different subjects such as English, which was lucky for George as he was not good in English, they were given an intelligence test, where he got an excellent result. He was also good in Maths. He got good grades and passed on his first try, considering the fact that only 50 people were chosen as apprentices at the time. (03:00) He joined the yard as an engine fitter apprentice. They frequented a drydocks college, near Senglea (Isla), This was an ex-Admiralty college. They spent almost a year there. Then, in the 1960, they moved to the Industrial Training Centre, which was the first training centre for those who wanted to learn a trade. After a year or so, they went to MCAST in Msida, where now there is the Junior College, which was opened in the same period hence they were the first students to attend that college. In the beginning, the lecturers were foreigners who specialized in their trade until workers from the dockyard were sent to study, in England, and who

were eligible to teach there. In his time, he had three lecturers who were ex-dockyard workers. The apprenticeship was six years. Education-Employment pathways / local and foreign training opportunities (05:15) Afterwards, Bailey left and Swan Hunter took over management. In 1965-since they were still studying at the MCAST, to gain the Higher Certificate in Mechanical Engineering-they were sent for a month to a Newcastle-upon-Tyne shipyard to gain experience in how a shiprepair yard works. Furthermore, there was also a shipbuilding site, which was not present in Malta at that time. There were also manufacturers of engines, boilers, and turbines, which exposed them to a lot of experience. (06:30) After the experience and the certificates he had obtained, he wanted to change positions (Continues later on...) (06:45) After the six years of apprenticeship passed, they became engine fitters, on full pay. Then in 1977, he left the afloat section and was promoted to a post in the Production Control and Planning Office. At that time, Swan Hunter had already left the yard and was now Malta Drydocks. (07:15) Then, in 1990 he was promoted to a section leader, moving on to 2004/5 where he became Deputy Production Control and Planning office. There he was given an allowance since he was also doing the job of the manager, who had retired. (07:45) When the reshuffle happened, where 900 employees were relocated, the remaining employees were not relocated and were given a new Malta Drydocks ID Card, which had to be shown on entering the dockyard, to certify that they still worked there. He was kept at the dockyard to help and train another manager to take his place. (09:45) He had attended a course, for which he had applied through the government gazette, on middle management. This took a year and was organized by the Chamber of Commerce. (10:30) The dockyard went through a lot of changes: from Bailey to Swan Hunter to Malta Drydocks and then the shipbuilding yard became a part of the Malta Drydocks, when the name changed to Malta Shipyards. (10:45) Strikes - The first one they had, happened just one month after they started the apprenticeship. There was a lot of commotion, where the workers protested and threw a fire-engine in the dock. Then again, since they were still apprentices, their instructors did not allow them to go out of the training centre. (11:45) Most of the strikes they did, such as sit-in strikes and overtime bans, were for pay revisions and allowances. (12:15) Accident: the one he recalls most is the accident of the dock arm in No.6 dock, which collapsed, due to wear or something else and the workers that were working on it fell as well, resulting in a fatal accident. He

also remembers the Esso Peru in No.4 Dock, where one of the tanks caught fire and a worker died. Another accident he recalls from when he worked afloat. This was on one of the large buoys, that were used to load and unload tankers in Libya. This one was brought to the dockyard for cleaning and repairs and caught fire, where three people died in the dock. The Um El Faroud accident was the worst one he remembers. (15:00) As for accidents that he was in, he recalls that they were on back-force working and it was a bit dark, and he fell in the manhole, thankfully he got stuck but hurt his ribcage. Another time he was in the boiler room when it caught fire and they ran out as fast as they could. Another incident was when he was working on a tug boat, changing some flexible pipes and one of them snapped and almost hit him in the eye. (17:30) When a diesel vessel enters the dock, the procedure is to take the crank deflection of the main engine, to check the main bearings, using a micrometer to take the readings, for the chief engineer to check the condition of the bearings. To carry out this work, they had to wear an oil skin (a boiler suit, suitable for oil) and when they helped him up from there, he had to sit down because wearing that oil skin plus the environment he was in, was too hot and he could not breathe properly. Entering the dockyard-Trades (From approval to the departure of a vessel)(20:30) When he switched to an office job, the Cunard vessels entered the yard with a lot of work and for the production control office, they used to receive the detailed work specification from the estimating department. The work of the planners, was to take the work specification and list down the trades and the man-hour loading of the vessel, in line with the ETA (Estimated Time of Arrival). This way they would know the number of workers per trade that were necessary per month. In a nutshell, the production control office worked with the production departments, the estimating and the shiprepair accounts departments, to assess and list the requirements for the work to be done on the ship including the number of people and the time required to finish the work on each individual job. The production control had to fill a daily distribution sheet, listing the people who will be working on the vessel and if necessary, make a Gantt chart (which is a planning chart) with the distribution and duration of each item of work, till the completion date. It was then handed to the engine and hull divisional managers to give the go-ahead or discuss changes before it is officially released. (23:30) The USS La Salle was an American naval vessel that had a lot of work. A lot of naval superintendents from different trades and their chief,

arrived with the vessel and they required a working space just for them, including computers and printers. In fact, they had to do a production meeting with these people, every 2 weeks. They required the production team to prepare a worksheet for each job, giving details by trade and other details. (25:45) Apart from the above-mentioned Gantt chart, they also had to prepare a defect list. This was based on the quotation, which is detailed by items in line with the Owner's specification. The planners had to classify the items in the different main trades for hull, engine, pipe workers, electricians, and painters. This was done because the job numbers were coded in line with a standard code group. The worst situation is when confirmation of a definite stem (award of contract) is very near to the ETA of the vessel. This meant that they had to do all the work in a short period of time. In addition, once they finish the specifications, they had to go to the typing pool, to type it out and distribute it to the concerned foremen.