

Object Summary



Oral history of the Malta Dockyard: Leli

Buttigieg

Date

4 February 2021

Primary Maker

Leli Buttigieg

null

Dimensions

38 minutes 12 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.AV0014

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. Manuel entered the dockyard in 1959 as an engine-fitter apprentice. His first work afloat was on a submarine, that was sent to shipyard by the Admiralty to assist the new yard Owners 'Bailey' . From engine-fitter he moved to various technical departments. Then as shiprepair manager he was involved in the refurbishment of various passenger ships. He retired in 2005 when he was occupying the post of infrastructure manager.

Transcript / Summary

(This summary is a work in progress. Timings are approximate.) (00:30) He remembers sitting for the apprenticeship exam amongst 1,000 other students and they all participated in the 'intelligence test' . From this exam a few were qualified to pass and those who passed were further tested on their general knowledge on certain subjects including Maths and English. The apprenticeship lasted for six years and he started his apprenticeship as an engine fitter at the training centre. For his first task he was given a bar with a 2-inch diameter and he had to transform it such that it would fit in a square at any angle. He spent 2 years at the training centre. The first year was dedicated to bench fitting while the second year focused on machinery. However, the demand for engine fitter was high and after the first year at the training centre he was put to work at the ship fitting shop where he was trained by an instructor. He constantly shifted from shop to shop until he went to the afloat section. (05:00) The first time he went afloat was on a submarine called the Totem which was sent to shipyard by the Admiralty (ammiraljat) to assist the new yard Owners 'Bailey' (This was the time when the dockyard was transferred from the Admiralty to Bailey). He used to

work a lot of overtime because during the weekend he was assigned work on commercial vessels. This process went on until he finished his apprenticeship in the 1965. (06:30) The first school he attended was Admiralty Dockyard school and later on transferred to MCAST where he obtained a higher certificate in mechanical engineering. MCAST was originally located at Senglea, and then transferred to Msida. (08:15) He only spent a year working as a fitter afloat as he moved on to higher positions of an assistant worksite engineer, then upgraded to the position of a planner, then he held various managerial positions with the last position being the infrastructure manager. His work experience ended in 2005 at the age of 61. Entering the dockyard-Swan Hunter / Bailey / changeovers(09:00) He recalls the changeover from the Admiralty to Bailey. Those workers that were allocated to Bailey, were very concerned and looked at this as a disaster, because Bailey was considered as a fragile company. However, when work increased, the workers that remained started to earn a lot of money due to a lot of overtime. Bailey made a lot of development in the shipyards such as the extension of the No.4 and 5 docks. Entering the dockyard-Swan Hunter / Bailey / changeovers (13:00) He recalls Bailey having financial problems with the English government and in turn Swan Hunter stepped in to help the Maltese government. However, there were too many disputes with Swan Hunter for them to work as they wished. He recalls that during his apprenticeship he worked abroad for 2 months in England at Swan Hunter. (16:45) He notes that during his apprenticeship years there was a lot of work and this continued on during his years when he held a managerial position. He particularly remembers that at that time Greece used to buy 'freedom vessels' and this contributed a major workload. However, he retains that there was lack of safety measures and further precautions should have been taken as this would have avoided many accidents. He remembers the ship named Esso Peru which had brought in a major workload for the dockyard. (20:00) Contrastingly, he remembers when the dockyard suffered from lack of work during the 70s when the price of fuel increased. This led to ships adapting to a change from steam to diesel. This was also due to improvements in products such as paint which resulted in ships coming in less frequently than before. Education-Projects(22:15) The first important project he worked on as a shiprepair manager was the Vistafjord. He worked on this project with his co-worker who focused on the engine room while he focused on the rest of the ship. This was the first time they

used SPC paint. The Vistafjord required major aluminium alterations apart from the works in the engine room and they managed to finish in 40 days. However, some equipment was delayed in its arrival to Malta from Norway and along with his manager, they went with a team of 60 people and travelled all the way to Florida with the Vistafjord while finishing the delayed work. Education-Projects (26:30) He recalls the Cunard Countess which was a passenger ship serving as a troop ship during the war of the Falklands. When the war ended, this ship gave rise to many political conflicts in England and yet ended up on the Maltese shores. An accident occurred on this ship when a fire started due to chemicals being absorbed by the spent-grit on the dock floor. In order to put out this fire they had to flood the dock when put out the fire. This accident caused damage to the bottom of the ship, specifically to a critical job of the generators. However, they still managed to finish in time. (29:15) He remembers, that there were times, when ships had to have various modifications or new installations, due to revision of regulations. Work such as variation in freeboard, sewage treatment plants, inert gas systems, more meticulous inspections for cracks or structural defects. These types of work were very good for the dockyard. He remembers the first ship in the No.6 dry dock. This was not the official opening. (31:45) He recalls the change in work practices when No.6 dock started operation. Namely due to the size of the ships. It required much more effort. Safety-Health and Safety procedures (35:30) He lost his brother due to an accident at the dockyard and he recalls that there were many instances where he was at risk of dying. He recalls that during his time as plant manager, he was part of a committee with the safety manager as chairman, whereby they introduced in their rules the 4th rating of the British safety standard. This was a prominent measure. (36:45) After he retired from the dockyard, he spent 12 additional years working and recalls meeting ex-dockyard workers who were successful in their work, regardless of what it was.