

Object Summary



Oral history of the Malta Dockyard: George

Rizzo

Date

19 February 2021

Primary Maker

George Rizzo

null

Dimensions

38 minutes 53 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.AV0022

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 1949, as Electrical fitter apprentice. On completion of his apprenticeship, he was allocated with the electricians' afloat section. He became chargeman of electricians after 3 years. George lived the transition of the shipyard from naval to commercial. He retired as a chargeman after working 41 years in the dockyard.

Transcript / Summary

(This summary is a work in progress. Timings are approximate.) Education-Dockyard school (00:30) He joined the dockyard as an electrical apprentice in 1949. He spent a year at the EBT centre, and another four years at Dockyard school. After a year training at the EBT centre, where they learned how to use tools, work on motors, etc, they were sent to the electrical shop. (02:00) They were then allocated to different sections such as the winding section, they learned how to remove and refit motors, as well as working on the lathe. Following this, he was sent to the section near the radio shop, it was not a good experience as at that time there was an epidemic going on, and where he was sent at the gun mounting store that was near Senglea Point. They were also sent with the telephone section, and he was allocated at Bighi Hospital. (03:45) Then they started to go onboard the ships. The sanitary facilities were not good during Rizzo' s time, he describes how they used to wash themselves there, while stating that no showers were available. Education-Dockyard school (05:45) Rizzo remembers that they had apprentices with them for training. In fact, he states that three years after he had finished his own apprenticeship, he became a chargeman with the afloat section where he remained until 1990. He retired after working 41 years, and even remembers the

changes done through Bailey and Swan Hunter. (06:45) While working at the Dockyard he did several courses about management and others related to the radio section. He states that when he used to notice a good apprentice, he used to voluntarily show him his notes of his radio courses. However, Rizzo's manager used to tell him that these notes were now outdated. He mentions electrical work that they used to do onboard the ships. (11:15) He mentions that they used to go and assist / guide the workers at Marsa. He felt the difference between the ship building to the shiprepair. The shipbuilding, he states that there are less problems with fire hazards, but the same cannot be said for the dockyard as fire accident were quite frequent. He recalls various work on the passenger and other ships. A lot of work on generators. (15:00) He remembers his father used to work at Rinella, at the WT station. Once he was with his chargeman Austin, and sometimes they were allocated work at Manoel Island or Pieta. He had to remove and refit a big motor all by himself. He had a heating problem with the motor, and his father gave him hints how to solve the problem. (16:30) The chargeman of the fitters, used to comment to George that their trades contrasted in a way. The mechanical fitters looked for zero reading on their gauge for the work to be good, whereas by contrast, for the electrical fitters, a zero reading means that the work was not good. Entering the dockyard-Salaries, clocking in / out (20:30) Rizzo mentions that at that time they were already clocking in and out. In fact, he states that they were very strict on time, meaning that if they punch-in one minute late, they would have a deduction equivalent to half-an-hour. They had a clocking station, with a rack with their individual cards. On one side to punch in and then put their card on the other side to clock out. At that time the chargeman used to sign in (not punch in). There used to be a recorder or a clock minder, in charge of the punch clocks. (21:30) When Bailey came into picture, the situation was different. Rizzo always believed that he went there to work and nothing more, so he was always focused on the job. One thing that he did not like during Baileys management was that precious material like equipment and tools were being taken out of the dockyard and outside Malta. (23:30) Regarding the salary, when he was with the Admiralty as a fitter, he received £5/13s. A sweet memory he mentions, is that when he used to go for a walk, he used to write poems and dedicate his poems. The salary changed under Bailey. There were a lot of conflicts with Bailey on the salaries. (26:00) Once he remembers an accident when a man close to him slipped on a steel plate and injured

seriously his shin. He tried to help him, but once he saw blood he fainted. (27:30) As apprenticeship he remembers Ollie Vella who was his friend and was a foreman. He remembers also Charlie Scicluna who was also a chargeman like him. Mizzi worked with the yard machinery. They were 38 electrical apprentices in his entry. (29:15) They used to finish working from the dockyard at 16:30. And mentions that the break was 30 minutes long from 12:00 till 12:30. He also remembers the shift system, which involved the distribution of workers in smaller groups, which created discontinuity in the work. (33:45) He states that they used to make their own tools there at the training centre. Their personal tools required for their trade were not a lot, and they used to get tools from the store. He remembers that one of the problems for the electrical work was when they had to clean a switch board. They used to clean them during break time, because this required the switching off the electrical supply of the ship. Once there was one crew member, who was not aware of the work and on seeing the switch in the 'off' position, he turned it 'on'. This created a very dangerous situation, but luckily there was no accident. So, from then onwards, they spoke with the Union and requested to have a person monitoring the main switch for safety. Family and Social Life-Home life (38: 15) Rizzo mentions that there were certain times were Friday, Saturday and Sunday he did not return home because of the extra work they had at the Dockyard.