

# Object Summary

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## Oral history of the Malta Dockyard:

### Francesco (Frans) Farrugia

#### Date

2 March 2021

#### Primary Maker

Francesco (Frans) Farrugia

null

#### Dimensions

28 minutes 58 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.AV0028

## **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. Frans entered the yard in 1972 as a boilermaker apprentice, and completed his apprenticeship in 1976. He worked for 5 years as a boilermaker afloat and then moved to the data processing department, a position that opened when the dockyard was updating its computer systems. He left the yard in 1985 to join a private company. Even though he changed his career and is now retired, he still remembers, to this day, the skills he gained from the dockyard.

## **Transcript / Summary**

(This summary is a work in progress. Timings are approximate.) (00:30) As apprentices, they were a group of 60 people, probably that was the last year that there was such a big group that entered the yard as apprentices. The apprenticeship period was four years, where the first and a half year were done in the training centre workshops, learning the basics of the main trades of the dockyard such as welding, sheet metal work, wood work, etc. (02:00) Even though he changed his career and is now retired, he still remembers, to this day, the skills he gained from the dockyard. (02:30) As part of his apprenticeship, they used to spend time within the main workshops related to his trade as boilermaker. Workshops such as the boilershop, plate shop, and boat house with the joiners. Since he was training as a boiler maker, welding was one of the main skills he had to learn well. (03:15) Apart from the trade itself, since he worked with a lot of different people with different characters. This helped him to learn to work and deal with the different types of people. (03:45) He started working as a boilermaker afloat, with the gang with Gino as chargeman, and workers amongst them were George, John Iles, Nenu. This was a small team but worked together

very well. As a boilermaker, working on board was a difficult job. They had to work in confined spaces and in dirty conditions contaminated with oil or sometimes coal. The work difficulty also depended on the type of boiler.

Working in the boiler drums, laying down, holding these pneumatic tools, in confined spaces. (05:45) The boilermakers' trade also used to be involved with other trades such as the engine fitters, where they assisted them in the removal of gratings and other structure such as ladders (skalapizi) around machinery. They also assisted the pipe workers, in the removal of pipe brackets. (06:15) Going back to his apprenticeship, during his time training in the different workshops, he remembers that in the boilershop they worked on specific metal work which involved more skill and required extra attention due to the final quality of work that was involved. (07:30) There were different types of boilers. He remembers the Babcock and Wilcox, D-type boilers and Scotch boilers. The Scotch boiler consisted of a large tank (drum) that was filled with water, with a lot of tubes passing inside the tank from one end to the other. On one side of the tank there was a burner that supply heated air that passed through the pipes, heating the water inside the tank. The heated air goes out of the boiler through the exhaust. Their job was to clean the drum and the pipes from the inside. They were also assisted by the ladders, who removed and renewed the insulation on the boiler. They also carried out retubing, where they would replace old tubes. These tubes were not welded but flared tightly in place. (09:30) The D-type boilers are big in size; they had a large water drum at the bottom part and another large steam drum at the top part. There are some types that had another drum for super-heated steam. These drums were connected together with a large number of tubes, so that the water was running inside the drums and the tubes. The boiler if heated up with burners which heat the tubes and the water inside that circulates through the drums and the tubes. When these boilers need retubing, they had to access the steam drum and water drum, through a manhole, in a very confined space with restricted movement. Using pneumatic tools to remove them and clean them with a small hand tool known as de-soother. At the boilershop, they would make the new tubes which were then fitted in the boiler. Once the tubes were fitted, the boiler was tested, first with water under pressure and then tested with steam. (14:45) The Babcock and Wilcox boiler had lots of small portholes in a part called the spreader. Frans does not remember the details of the type of boiler, however he still gave a general

description of this type of boiler. (18:30) The ships visiting the yard that were turbine driven by steam generated by the boiler. The loss of power usually indicated a fault in the boiler. This could come from a leakage in the boiler.

There were various methods of checking the boiler condition. (19:15) The Uganda was a school ship that entered the dockyard every year. This ship had about five Babcock and Wilcox boilers for servicing and retubing. This work had to be done in a short period of time since the vessel is on a tight schedule. He remembers this vessel very clearly because it came to the dockyard regularly. Family and Social Life-Friendships between workers (20:30) The gang was made up of around eight to ten people of different ages who worked well together as a team, helping each other with the work they had. Especially when they were working on board in dangerous conditions where they had to take care of each other. (23:30) He completed his apprenticeship, worked for five years as a boilermaker afloat, and then moved to the data processing department. The position opened when they were updating the computer systems. There were a lot of applications for these positions. He made a very short and quick aptitude test at the No. 1 dock canteen. Ten persons were selected from amongst 200 applicants. When he started with the IT department, there was a period when they had to study by themselves and get experience from their colleagues, even though they were still working with the old systems. Then, when the new computing system arrived, they were given the necessary training in operations and/or software development. He was part of the software development team and they started converting the systems from the old to the new system. He worked there for around five years and then moved to a private company-SGS. Looking back-Skills gained(27:00) Overall his experience in the dockyard was a good one, especially since the skills he learned from working there, he still finds useful to this day. There were times when the work was hard and they had to take a lot of risks due to the nature of the job. Even when he switched his position and started working in the I.T. sector which opened new opportunities for him, where he even got the opportunity to work abroad in Singapore. It helped him grow, build his character, and gave him the reason to continue studying and achieve qualifications.