

Object Summary



Oral history of the Malta Dockyard: Vince

Micallef

Date

6 May 2021

Primary Maker

Vince Micallef

null

Dimensions

43 minutes 21 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.AV0034

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. Vince entered the dockyard in 1972 as a shipwright apprentice. In 1976 he completed his apprenticeship and after some time as a shipwright he became a shipwright liner. He then progressed through the ranks up to the position of Production manager. It was then that he was involved directly to project manage important projects such as the USS La Salle on two occasions and the new building of the Barge 8 that was constructed and outfitted at the Marsa site. He left the yard in 2010 when it closed down.

Transcript / Summary

(This summary is a work in progress. Timings are approximate.) (00:30) At the age of 15 he sat for the Dockyard apprenticeship exam and joined the Malta Drydocks on 7th September 1972. He spent four years apprenticeship where he learned several trades which were all new to him. (01:15) His background was more academic as he focused on school and languages. He learned the basic of the trades, from blacksmith (haddied) to woodwork (xoghol fuq l-injam), etc. His trade was steelwork (xoghol fuq l-azzar), known as shipwright, today better known as 'steel worker'. The four-year apprenticeship was divided into two terms. The first term focused on theory while the last 2 years were aimed to gain experience in the workshops and onboard ships. After the four years he graduated with the journeyman certificate and achieved an adequate pay. Although he graduated, he still continued with his studies which concerned naval architecture. (03:45) During his former years as a shipwright, he had an instructor to guide him with his work and how to take all the necessary precautions as required on the job. However, his journey as a shipwright didn't last long as an opportunity arose for the position of shipwright liner (the

assistant of the foreman of a project/s). All work was done manually as technology was not available. Such manual work included reports to the foreman showing the steelwork to be carried out, and eventual final work-done report for the steelwork to the accounts department for the compilation of the final invoice to the client. He mainly used to work alone unless there was a risk of danger whereby in such case, he would work with someone else. (06:00) He recalls an important project on the Ocean Tide which was an oil rig converted into a jack-up rig with cantilever beams allowing the drilling rig to extend further than the existing structure. His responsibilities as a shipwright liner included follow-up and interpretation of certain drawings and point out work that needs to be done and provide instructions for such work. Education-Projects(07:30) He recalls one of the first projects on cruise liners the Vistafjord. This ship was built in Ireland and belonged to the Norwegian American Cruises. This was his first experience in a foreign country as he had to travel to Egypt to board the ship so that by the time Vistafjord arrived in Malta there would be a good idea of all the work to be done. This was a challenging project which had a duration of 8 days, yet proved to be successful at the end. (08:30) He then changed roles to a managerial position as a foreman during the important project of 'Ya Mawlaya'. He noted that the main works of a shipwright included work on steel damages, which showed the abilities of the workers. He maintained his position as a foreman for about four years which led him further to higher managerial positions. He made his start a steel department manager, and then took the post of the assistant of the Hull division manager. The Hull division was that section responsible, for all work related to steel structures, etc. Included steel shops. Entering the dockyard-Dockyard layout (11:00) The dockyard was divided into three divisions, these included the engineering section, the Hull division, and the maintenance division. These divisions, along with the commercial section, were all managed by their Heads which reported back directly to the general manager. Daily meetings were carried out between the various divisions where the yard projects were discussed. This was done for the purpose of ensuring co-ordination between the different departments. Safety-Um El Faroud(12:45) At that stage of his career, was when the Um El Faroud accident happened, which was a really big shock for him, to be in that position when lives are lost. He remembers well that night, he tried to remove those scenes from his mind, but he couldn't. This left a bad impression, which increased

his awareness on the danger of the yard work. (15:00) He notes that the work duties change with the various roles but this was a positive aspect as one keeps gaining experience in different work sections. (15:30) He kept his position as Hull manager for a relatively long period of time until changes were being made to the re-organization of sections and he found himself as the production manager of the company. This re-organization involved the recruitment of foreign executives including Barry Johnson who came from Scotland to fulfil the role of Hull division, with whom Vince built up a very good working relation. Along with Barry Johnson came Peter Moore who had duties relating to the commercial sector. Eventually, Barry Johnson had to leave the yard and Peter Moore took over as the CEO. (17:30) He then became directly involved in the project management (managing one project only) and his first project was the USS La Salle. He had the right to choose his management team yet encountered political problems at that time which made working difficult. He recalls the dockyard workers rising to the occasion and finishing successfully the work required on the USS La Salle. This was an important experience for him as it made people aware of the abilities of the dockyard workers. (20:15) He was then given the opportunity to work as the project manager on a new build which transferred him from the dockyard in Bormla to that in Marsa. This project is known as the Barge 8 which can be described as a power station built on a barge (barkun) and this was aimed to be the main powerplant of the offshore hub being developed in the Caspian Sea for the extraction of natural gas from the below the seabed. This project lasted for about 2 years. The first year was dedicated to the steel construction (xoghol tal-azzar) while the second year was dedicated outfitting (ghall-outfit tat-turbini, makinarju, switch gear u cables tad-dawl). This project faced various challenges and complications which Vince together with his co-workers worked through together with their client. After this project he returned back to the dockyard located in Bormla. Life after the Dockyard-Memories of last day(24:00) He remained at his position until the very last moment in March 2010 and he remembers workers being fired one by one according to certain criteria and necessities until the dockyard was taken over by foreigners. He recalls new work still entering the dockyard even as workers were being reduced and thus, they had to work with limitations. He still considers this time as satisfactory as although they were fewer in numbers, they were still successful in their work.