

Object Summary



Oral history of the Malta Dockyard: John Coleiro

Date

14 October 2021

Primary Maker

John Coleiro

Dimensions

30 minutes 06 seconds

Extent

1 digital audio recording (WAV)

Object Type

Oral history

Collection

Malta Dockyard Oral History project

Museum

Malta Maritime Museum

Registration Number

MMM.AV0083

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. John Coleiro joined the yard in 1980 as a shipwright working on a number of shiprepair and new building projects before changing his trade completely as a motor winder at the electrical complex from where he retired in 2008 during the process of closing-down.

Transcript / Summary

(This summary is a work in progress. Timings are approximate.) (00:30) He entered the Dockyard in 1980. He wanted to become an electrician, however there were no spaces left, so he ended up choosing the trade of a shipwright. He did the apprenticeship at the training centre, and then when it was completed, he was sent to the boilershop. From then he moved to the new building section and began working on a project of a 'riser' (Tazerka base?), and then he worked on the Russian ships. When he got his first pay, he went working afloat, and his first chargeman was Joe Carabott. With the afloat section, he spent 10 years, and then they needed workers to volunteer to work on the Russian ships. He worked on those Russian ships from Hulls 167-173. They always worked on the same parts of the ships, including the funnel, double bottoms etc. When work was finished, he was sent back with the afloat section. Safety-Um El Faroud (05:

00) When the accident of the Um El Faroud took place, he was there at the Drydocks and was one of the first to arrive on the ship. This accident affected him a lot and tried to find other jobs outside the shipyard. The work opportunities he found did not offer better wages than the yard. (05:30) Once he went to the electrical complex, and was talking with one of the motor-winders, and began talking about what he knows about motor winding, and he was told that presently there was a lack on motor-winders, so he went to talk to the manager of the electricians and showed him his certificates and he was accepted and sent 6 months on training. He spent his last 8 years at the Dockyard working with the winders. Then in 2008, he found another job and left, as the Drydocks was closing down. (08:15) His apprenticeship period was based on three years. The first year he spent it at the training centre, the next year at the boilershop and then a year with the new building section. (09:00) Robert E Lee was an American ship that they worked on, and it is said that it grounded on the sand, and in fact, Coleiro confirms that its keel was a total loss. He even worked on the Lampas. Safety-Um El Faroud (12:30) Once he was working in Dock 2, and when they were onboard, there was this foreman 'Gejtu' who asked Joe to pull a welding wire that was stuck, and he did. But suddenly when Gejtu left from near them they heard a huge explosion. Then Gejtu called them on the radio telling them that the ship of No.3 dock exploded, which was the Um El Faroud. He was one of the first to arrive on site, and he describes his first impressions of the scene. Coleiro mentions that he remembers accident taking place, including when the dock arm collapsed, when Buttigieg died from an electric shock, Gianni tar-Rabat died when a steel plate (pjanca) fell on him, etc. He once even fell while working on a ship and broke his ribs and spent 6 months not working until recovery. Education-Apprenticeship process (24:30) The exam for the drydocks was done at Evans Building. The exam was done not only for the dockyard, but also for the shipbuilding, Air Malta and EneMalta. Then according to their order of merit, they chose where to go and what trade they want. The exam was a mental aptitude examination. He chose the Dockyard as his father worked there already. He was at the Umberto Colosso Trade School. On completion of the apprenticeship, they used to do the trade test to achieve the journeyman certificate.