

# Object Summary

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## Oral history of the Malta Dockyard: John

### Mifsud

#### Date

18 November 2021

#### Primary Maker

John Mifsud

null

#### Dimensions

39 minutes 37 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.AV0092

## 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. In 1965 John Mifsud commenced his apprenticeship and on completion he started working as a boilermaker, working on boiler repairs whilst advancing in his education through overseas courses. Following his graduation as a Marine Engineer, he managed the steelshops and was project manager on newbuilding work until his resignation in 1988.

## Transcript / Summary

(This summary is a work in progress. Timings are approximate.) (00:30) He attended secondary school at St. Joseph Secondary Technical School at Paola. After three years, in 1965 he sat for the drydocks exam, and he placed in the 40th place from 80 apprentices. He wanted to enter as electrician or engineering, but unfortunately, all places were taken up, so he ended up being a boilermaker. By time the name of his trade was changed to boilermaker steelworker. Education-Apprenticeship process (02:45) On 25th August 1965 he joined the dockyard and during the first three days he attended introductory lectures at No. 1 Dock area. The new apprentices were shown around the dockyard and then the following week they began attending the training centre. He spent a year at the training centre where they were given basic skills on each trade, example, bench fitting, lathe work, blacksmith, carpenter, pipeworker, engineer, boiler maker, etc. They were given full training and at the same time they still attended school. After the first year, he was sent to the boilershop. He was assigned to an instructor, who gave him the experience which pushed him forward. He then spent three months as a boilermaker afloat, he did not like the work afloat, but it was interesting to see the inside of a boiler, and other work onboard ships. (06:45) During the second

year, he attended a welding course, where they spent the whole days welding. Then after the second year, he received a letter that he was to attend at the Polytechnic on a fulltime course for an Ordinary Technician Diploma. During the summer holidays he attended the Dockyard to continue his apprenticeship. Eventually, he became a tradesman, but he still attended at the Polytechnic, on a shipbuilding course. Education-Interesting training and skills (11:00) When he became a tradesman as a boilermaker, new ships were being built at Malta Drydocks, at that time the ship lines were drawn full size in the 'mould-loft' , and he was sent there. He started making templates, which were sent to the plate shop for cutting or shaping. He spent around two to three years working there. (13:45) In 1975 he was on holiday and asked his friend to apply for him for a scholarship that was being issued. In fact, when he returned, he received a letter that he was chosen to attend a scholarship in Spain. (15:15) As steelworker he worked on ventilation trunking. At the boilershop, two tugboats for Chinese owners were built, and it was the first time that a tugboat was built in sections and was assembled at N.1 Dock. John, as a worker was responsible for this project. They used a method that at that time was basic, but quite advanced for the dockyard. Education-Employment pathways / local and foreign training opportunities (20:00) In 1975, he went to Spain with other colleagues. They spent 6 weeks in Madrid for a short language course, and then moved to South of Spain to start the course on Naval Architecture, which was for a duration of three years, full time. He also extended the course to Marine engineering. During summer holidays, they were doing training in the yard assigned with managers. When he came back in 1979, he was assigned with Mr. Tony Sammut, who was the steel complex manager. (21:30) Sometime later, Sammut was given a promotion, and Mifsud took his place. There he started his experience in management, as he was responsible of about 260 workers. One challenging work he was involved with was the Vistafjord, which required a new aluminium deck, which was very complex. Another work he remembers is when they had to repair the bottom of a tanker called Mostoles. Entering the dockyard-Swan Hunter / Bailey / changeovers (26:15) In 1984, the Maltese Government signed a major contract, to build 8 timber carriers for USSR, and the plan was to build these ships at the then new shipbuilding yard in Marsa. When the work started, he was moved to the shipbuilding yard as hull manager. It was a massive challenge for him. The shipbuilding workshop facilities were good, however

there was lack of qualified workers. During the 1989 election, a lot of personnel were being employed, albeit without any experience. This made the situation difficult. Safety-Accidents (30:00) When he first went to Marsa, they were building tugboats and the drydock did not have dockside cranes, but he was there when the first two dock side cranes were delivered to the facilities on a special vessel. Although he was not involved directly in the unloading of the cranes onto the jetty, he had two welders from his department assisting with the welding of some stoppers. While he was onboard following the unloading operation, the crew were concerned with some buckling on the vessel' s structure, and one of the crew asked John to call the welders from the work because the crane being unloaded was unstable. The crane crashed to the ground as John and the two welders were going down the gangway. Luckily for them there were no casualties. Even though there was someone seriously injured. (35:15) After this event he spent another four years in the shipbuilding yard, and then he decided to leave the drydocks. In 1988, he left and joined a company 'Petrochemical Engineering and Construction Limited' . They saw that he was experienced as he worked at the Dockyard, and he was chosen to join them and worked on steel work. Family and Social Life-Religion (35:45) John mentions his experience as a MUSEUM member. He remembers the first time he was going to the yard on the bus. He was noticing that he was the only one that was a member of the MUSEUM, he eventually met a friend Frans Scicluna, who was also at that time a member. He mentions that for a MUSEUM member, this situation was not so easy. However, in a way people respected him, and in John' s presence, most of the time they restricted their foul language.