Object Summary

Oral history of the Malta Dockyard: Vince Cassar

Date

15 March 2022

Primary Maker

Vince Cassar

null

Dimensions

27 minutes 32 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.AV0106

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 joined the Malta Shipbuilding in 1985 as a welder-burner apprentice of the extended-training scheme that at that time was carried out at the Malta Drydocks. On completion of his apprenticeship, he started as a pipe welder at the shipbuilding yard. He eventually applied with the Quality Control department as quality controller on the hull side. When the Malta Shipbuilding and Malta Drydocks were amalgamated, he was moved to the shiprepair side. He worked on various project up to the day of the yard closure in 2010.

Transcript / Summary

(This summary is a work in progress. Timings are approximate.) (00:30) Vince Cassar was born on the 9th of January 1967 and entered Malta Shipbuilding on the 5th of March 1985 as an apprentice through the Extended Skill Training Scheme as a welder/burner. He did the 3-year apprenticeship at the Malta Drydocks at the Pipeworkers Section, so he specialized as a pipe welder. After the apprenticeship he went back to Malta Shipbuilding as a pipe welder. (01: 30) He used to be somehow annoyed, because although in his last months as an apprentice, he used to weld for x-ray, but the weld was recorded on another welder, as mentioned before he was still an apprentice. (01:45) On one particular occasion, during his 4-year period as a pipe welder- after which he was promoted as a Quality Controller - he had the task to weld one hundred pipes of an inch diameter, using the TIG (Tungsten Inert Gas) system. Welding such small pipes is a rather difficult job. His manager told him that he must be ashamed of himself because twenty pipes failed the test. Vince answered back telling him that he never expected this comment, it would have been a

fairer comment that eighty pipes passed the test, rather than that twenty failed. (03:00) After some time, Vince was promoted to the post of Quality Controller. For the position of a Quality Controller, Vince came second in the interview. There were three vacancies. His manager Michael Cassar told him that he was not going to release him, unless he gave training to four welders in TIG welding, as they were two and if the other will be on leave or sick leave, there will be no one to do the job. Vince spent 15 days training these four. At first, they didn't show much interest, but when they realized that they will benefit monetary, due to overtime requested for such jobs. Out of four, three passed. (04:15) Then Vince started in his new role as a Quality Controller, first as a dimensional quality controller. The job was to follow quality assurance and quality control - QAQC - right from the start of the project. This includes that the plates being cut had the certification requested, the items are cut according to the drawings. Then check that the items cut are fitted on the unit in their right positions and measurements. (05:30) A project very close to the heart of Vince was the building of Stavtank, a small oil tanker. He was the leading quality controller with regards to the hull fabrication. He worked closely with the Drawing Office as sometimes anomalies were found in the drawings and they had to be revised and issued again accordingly. (07:00) Vince worked as a welder on the two ships built for China. (07:30) One anecdote that he remembers is when as an apprentice welder at the Malta Drydocks, he was assigned with another established welder to work on the aft reels of the mentioned Chinese vessels. The welder asked Vince to show him his capabilities in welding. At first, he was a little bit afraid, but he built-up courage to weld to his best ability. The welder approved his welding and told him to continue welding as he has to make a phone call. He also told him not to stop and if he hears someone shouting it means that you are being seen as not working! He remembers that he continuously welded for 2 or 3 hours. Then the foreman came and asked for the welder. After lunch the foreman told the other welder to continue by himself and told Vince to go and have a look around the docks. He remembers he went to the dock were the Vistafjord was docked and spent the afternoon there looking around. This was his first experience at Malta Drydocks. (09:00) Another experience Vince had been when Mr. Paul Cardona Jnr. a newly appointed class surveyor, surveyed a forepeak section of one of the ships built for the Gozo Channel. He noticed that some of the brackets were mis-aligned and he started to panic.

Vince explained that the mis-alignment was within limits and the surveyor was relieved to hear that. (10:15) Another particular case that Vince remembers is when they were fabricating a unit for m/v Gaudos. The units were fabricated on the flat side, so the drawings had to be read upside down. Usually the port and starboard of a unit is identical but at the Fore and Aft peak they may be different. On this unit the chain locker was fabricated on the wrong side and had to be dis-assembled to rectify the mistake. (11:45) For Vince, the ships for the Gozo Channel were the last project he worked on at the Malta Shipbuilding. He was transferred back to Malta Drydocks. (12:45) He remembers once during night shift, he had to inspect a shipside at No. 6 Dock. As he finished, heavy rain fell and erased all his chalk markings. In the morning the Project Manager, John Galea, reported him for not doing the job. The next night, returning to work, Sergio Grech his manager was angrily waiting for him, to have an explanation of what happened. It was a big misunderstanding. (13:45) Another project was the m/t Didon. A flame tower was fabricated at the fore peak. The vessel was like a moving floating oil refinery. The vessel was old and was in the limits to be scrapped. But somehow the DNV surveyors certified the works being done and the owners were grateful that Vince had done a good job and the vessel can operate. (14:45) Other works, now as Malta Shipyards, the pipework for the barge at the Power Station and some small jobs on the cranes for the Freeport. It was the time of uncertainty for the shipyards. The last projects were the Fjord and the Fjel. Vince was one of the last 50 workers when the Shipyards were closed in 2010. (15:45) Tolerances were according to the Classification Society of the project as DNV, Lloyds etc. had their own standards. Usually it was British Standards. There was a period of time when Malta Drydocks were aiming for ISO 9001, a very important classification, but unfortunately it was never completed. (17:15) Welding inspection was added to dimensional control to Vince, as he had experience in welding. In fact, at Malta Drydocks, he was a welding inspector not a dimensional controller. One of the tasks was the testing of tanks. This was done by filling the tank with air to a pressure of 2 psi. Then soap and water applied to the welding from the other side of the tank. Small bubbles will be noticed were there was a leak. It was a test that Vince didn’ t like very much to do. Malta Drydocks was totally different with Malta Shipbuilding, the forman for repair and later for new building, their standards were different. It was difficult to keep the high standards in ship repair, even the Class Surveyors acknowledged this. He

felt more satisfied at Malta Shipbuilding, seeing plates turned to units. At the Drydocks it was more laborious, going up ladders and going down in holds and double bottoms to inspect a small insert. (21:45) The welding inspector work hand-in-hand with the ship representative and the Class Surveyor. Vince worked mostly with DNV, with Spiro Capello as head of DNV in Malta. It is important that you gain trust from these persons, because if you lose that trust it is difficult to gain it back. The inspection had to be done carefully covering all items. As a dimensional control, one has to go by the drawings and see that all is accordingly, and the fairing of plates. (23:45) Mentioning fairing, Vince likes to mention one instance, when with Mr. Cardona they were inspecting a fresh water tank of m/v Ta Pinu. He remembers that there was a plate that was severely buckled to be rectify, it had to be cut again, but there was not enough time to do that. Vince stood all the time on this plate, while the surveyor inspected the tank to prevent the Surveyor noticing this plate. (24:45) The welding inspector worked between the Class Surveyor and the Malta Drydocks. It was difficult to please them both. Usually the inspector took the surveyors side, but sometimes in certain circumstances he took the Drydocks side. So, to find that balance, one had to do his job properly, and point out the welds that are not to standard, but be reasonably when these welds are in awkward position. Vince experience at Malta Shipyards helped him to adapt to the different standards at Malta Drydocks. Some of his colleagues found it very difficult to cope, and even one left the job.