

Object Summary



Oral history of the Malta Dockyard: Vince

Meli

Date

18 May 2023

Primary Maker

Vince Meli

null

Dimensions

56 minutes 22 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.AV0119

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 yard in 1948 as engine fitter. After 6 years apprenticeship, he became a journeyman working both onboard ships and the machine shop, up to 1963 when he was called to join the training centre as instructor and eventually moving up to the position of training supervisor, where he remained p to his retirement in 1989.

Transcript / Summary

(This summary is a work in progress. Timings are approximate.) (00:30) He was a student at the Stella Maris, however since he was the elder of 5 children, his father asked him to consider studying for the dockyard examination, so he joined St. Michael' s school that had classes preparing students for the dockyard examination. He passed the dockyard examination in 1948. They were due to enter the dockyard in September, however their entrance was delayed due to the Paralysis decease that was found in Malta at that time. (02:30) The duration of the apprenticeship was 6 years; As engine fitters that time they used to have 2 years in the training centre, two years onboard ships and the final 2 years in the workshops. (03:15) On completion of his apprenticeship in 1954, he started as a journeyman working onboard various naval ships. He spent there up to 1963. During that period, he has some pressure to become chargeman, however he was reluctant to take the post. (06:15) One day he was called by Mr. Adams, who was the Training Officer at that time. He asked him if he was interested to become a training instructor with the training department. (08:15) He remembers the time during the Admiralty - Bailey transition. He recalls that changed a lot of things that the Union did not approve. There were rumours that Bailey had more

personal interest than that in the Malta Dockyard. That time the workers were confused as what was good for them: that is staying with the Admiralty with an established job, but in the process of leaving Malta; or on the other hand joining Bailey, that was a private company without a stable job guarantee. (10:15) When Swan Hunter took over the yard from Bailey, it was a better company with a more professional management. During that time the No 4 and 5 docks were modified and extended. Eventually Swan Hunter left and the yard change and developed to take larger ship with No. 6 Drydock. The training centre at that time was moved from the underground spaces to the canteen, a beautiful building that regretfully was demolished to make space for the No 6 dock. (13:00) In 1963, with Mr Adams as training supervisor, who wanted to turn the dockyard training centre into a college. The apprentices had a lot of activities such as summer camps, abroad training and courses with Tanker companies. The apprentices even had a uniform. He remembers that once they also participated with three apprentices in an international exhibition in Japan. He describes this event in some detail. (16:45) He refers to the apprentices that in general were good young men, who from time to time misbehaved, but one has to consider the age. But he says that the University students sometimes are naughtier than the apprentices. (19:30) He describes the process of the apprentice's examination, and the way the apprentices used to choose their trade. (21:30) There were different school courses that the apprentices used to attend. Some of the apprentices used to have diplomas, and were in demand from other private companies in Malta to work with them as engineers. (27:30) Vince left the yard when he was 56 years old with an early retirement scheme. It was not a good scheme, except that he retired at a younger age before the age of 60. (28:45) The number of M.U.S.E.U.M. affiliates in the dockyard were quite high. Vince mentions various of them that were involved in religious lectures and other activities, The environment in the yard especially on ships. They had to adjust to the different types of people. Being religious, the environment onboard and in the box-racks was not easy. However, there were a lot of people who were very serious. On certain occasions, they used to organise mass during the break-time in the workshops. In a way they also were doing missionary work. Vince does not remember Eugenio (who succeeded Dun Gorg), because when Vince entered the yard, he had already left, however he remembers that Eugenio's "comba" (a tag that they used when coming in / going out from the dockyard) was collected by Zaver

Aquilina (patternmaker). (41:15) Vince remembers some major accidents. The work, especially on tankers, was very rough. He used to work with the outstation section. He recounts some work that they used to carry out outside the dockyard. One interesting work was that in an ice-cream factory machinery, that was not working well. (47:45) The repair work, especially on tankers, the superintendents were very strict on quality, which made the worker do his job in a good and accurate work. (51:30) Vince mentions that one of the main hazards in the dockyard was asbestos. He remembers a friend of his that died of asbestos. They had no idea that asbestos was hazardous. The passenger ships for repair at that time used to have a lot of sheets made of asbestos used as insulation.