

## HOMEWARD BOUND: A Liverpool West Africa Maritime Heritage

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<b>Discharge Book Number:</b>	<i>R 692072</i>
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<b>Period of Employment:</b>	<i>1963 - 1972</i>

<b>Interviewer's Full Name:</b>	<i>Stephen New</i>
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<b>Archive Folder &amp; File/Index:</b>	<b>HB01 Q&amp;A <i>John Goble</i></b>
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### **HB01 General Questions: 'Personal Memories'** **(All ex Elder Dempster Staff)**

<b>01.001a</b>	<b>Q: Can you share with me some details of your career with Elder Dempster lines? ---/--- Where did you live while you were with EDs?</b>
	I spent just over 9 years with Elder Dempsters, between 1963 and 1972. However, in 1968, with the formation of Ocean Fleets, I was transferred to the Far East operations of the Blue Funnel and Glen Lines. I lived in Liverpool throughout the period, initially with my parents and then in both rented and mortgaged homes with my wife.
<b>01.001b</b>	<b>Q: When did you start? ---/--- What jobs did you do? ---/--- What positions did you hold?</b>
	I joined Elder Dempsters in February 1963 as Third Mate. I had completed my 4-year apprenticeship with The New Zealand Shipping Co.Ltd. the previous year and gained my Second Mate's 'ticket' in the autumn. I had then sailed as Third Mate in another Liverpool company, Ellerman & Papayanni Lines for a few months. My first voyage in Elder Dempsters was as an additional Third Mate in, I suppose, a probationary capacity. I was eventually promoted to Second Mate in 1965, to Senior Second Mate in 1968 and, finally, to First Mate in 1972, a few months before my departure from ED's.
<b>01.001c</b>	<b>Q: Why and when did you finish working for EDs?</b>
	I left Ocean Fleets (as Elder Dempsters had then become) in 1972 since by then it was apparent that any prospects of my further advancement beyond Mate were very distant and there was an equally disappointing chance of being selected for redundancy.

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01.002a	<p><b>Q: What caused you choose to work for EDs? ---/--- Did you have any previous knowledge of the sea? ---/--- Had you experience of working with other shipping companies?</b></p>
	<p>There was a family connection with Elder Dempsters in that my father's cousin was a Master and my younger brother was an indentured Apprentice Marine Engineer in the company. A more significant factor was a desire to have shorter voyages. During my apprenticeship I was at home for four weeks or less in every year. After passing for Second Mate I did spend a short period with a company that traded to ports in the Mediterranean but the pay rates were poor. Finding a berth with Elder Dempsters therefore appeared to have satisfied two objectives : shorter voyages and better pay.</p>
01.002b	<p><b>Q: Tell me about your pay conditions, ---/--- such as rates of pay, hours of work, overtime and leave arrangements?</b></p>
	<p>Fortunately, I've been able to discover some data about my earnings whilst in Elders. My starting salary in 1963 as Third Mate was £78.16.0 a month which was about £25 a month more than I was earning in Ellerman &amp; Papayanni's. The following year I remember being extremely pleased that I was then earning more than a thousand pounds a year ! As far as I can recall, I was never given any formal contract of employment which might have specified leave and hours of work. As with other companies at that time, you kept your sea watches of 8 hours a day plus a certain amount of extra duties and in port you worked as directed by the Mate. The only extras to which you were entitled were 'Night on Board' allowances paid in U.K.ports only, about a pound to thirty shillings. Leave was granted on return to the U.K. or near Continent and was variable. If you were expecting to return for the next voyage, it would be between 14 and 28 days. If, like me, you seemed to be often moving on between ships, it could be over a month before your absence from a berth was noticed by the Marine Personnel Department.</p>
01.002c	<p><b>Q: Tell me about any pension scheme, and other benefits?</b></p>
	<p>I must admit that I never took any notice of my pension arrangements until I left Ocean Fleets. I then received a note to the effect that my contributions to the 'Nestor' Pension Scheme were being transferred to my account with the MNOFP. The sum was, to my recollection, around £500 or so. At the time, recently married, I might have liked to have got my paws on the money. With hindsight, as a satisfied beneficiary of Merchant Navy Pensions Fund, I'm very glad that the pensions regulations prevented that act.</p>
01.002d	<p><b>Q: How did the pay and conditions in EDs compare with other shipping companies?</b></p>
	<p>As I've noted already, joining Elders gave me a substantial pay rise and I remained under the impression that their salaries were probably only bettered by the tanker companies. I certainly enjoyed a moderate pay increase when I joined Denholm Ship Management after leaving Elders but the employment conditions there were worse.</p>
01.002e	<p><b>Q: Did you have much direct contact with EDs management? ---/--- What were relations with EDs management like?.</b></p>
	<p>The only contact with management for junior officers like myself was with the Marine Superintendents every day in port in either Liverpool or Tilbury. A Director usually led the pre-voyage inspection on board in Liverpool. A visit to India Buildings to meet someone in the Marine Personnel department was rare, most contact would be by telephone or letter. Relations with all these shore managers were quite cordial although I do recall being required to attend two interviews with the company's legal advisers that were both extremely frosty. These related to an incident of extreme cargo damage due to a storm in Biscay and to a personal injury claim by a stevedore in</p>

Philadelphia. Despite being a junior witness to both incidents and therefore being probably more lightly treated than my seniors, they were far from comfortable events.

<b>01.003</b>	<b>Q: How did you learn your job? ---/--- What training was available?</b>
	I liked to think that I'd learnt the essentials of my trade through my apprenticeship with The New Zealand Shipping Co. and my previous junior officer experiences both there and in Ellerman & Papayanni's. I'd spent two and a half years on a cadet ship where I learnt a seaman's work from the bottom up and then over a year as an uncertificated officer on a tanker sailing world-wide. I soon realised that sailing to West Africa was something completely new. My experience of long ocean passages, taking either dry or liquid cargo between countries with a proper port infrastructure to handle those cargoes was of little value in preparing me for a job in Elder Dempsters. Although I appreciated the generosity of the Company in paying for a correspondence course to prepare me for my next professional examination (for First Mate) the only training programme was for me to keep my eyes open, my sense of shock concealed and my determination to master the 'Coast' intact. Thanks to my shipmates, I did just that.
<b>01.004</b>	<b>Q: What was the most challenging job you had to do? ---/--- Which period of your office or sea-faring career was that? ---/--- What made it particularly challenging?</b>
	In some respects, every day on the West African coast was a challenge. Learning to look out for a number of potential problems was an essential daily policy. Was the cargo working gear being safely used? Was the security of the cargo being breached or at risk of being so? Was the cargo being correctly handled in terms of being free of avoidable damage? Were we at risk of breaching some petty port regulation that would require a substantial bribe to an official? Where could I have a smoke in peace around the deck without being accosted for a cigarette by all and sundry?
<b>01.005</b>	<b>Q: Please tell me how working for EDs, whether working at sea or working overseas affected your family life?</b>
	That early romance that had ignited my desire for shorter voyages had expired before I had my only long voyage with Elder Dempsters. My mother was very pleased that she could see her elder son rather more frequently than had been the case. Soon after I married, I was sailing to the Far East so that was an opportunity to take my wife with me a couple of times. She was also able to share some trips with me on the Continent on an Elder Dempster ship. On a sadder note, being with Elder Dempsters did allow me to be in the country when both my parents died not long after I was married.

**HB01 General Questions: 'Personal Memories'**  
**(All Seagoing Staff)**

<b>01.006</b>	<b>Q: Why did you join the Merchant Navy? Who in your family had gone to sea?</b>
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My father worked ashore for a shipping company (it was the 'other Elders', Elders & Fyffes) and I had a number of seafaring relatives or ancestors. I think that another important influence on my career choice was the fact that for four years, from the age of nine, I was a daily traveller along the whole length of Liverpool's famous Overhead Railway. My mother encouraged me to consider a career in the Royal Navy but I broke my leg playing rugby a week before my final interview at Dartmouth. I was encouraged to travel there once I was capable but I'd lost both academic ground and my interest in staying on at school before I was fit to do so. My father insisted that I go to a shipping company that offered a proper training scheme and so it was that I was indentured to The New Zealand Shipping Company Ltd. and joined their cadet ship RAKAIA.

<b>01.007a</b>	<b>Q: What was your first voyage like? ---/--- How soon did you settle-in and get your sea legs?</b>
	<p>Not nearly as daunting as it might have been for someone whose sea experience only derived from the Royal Navy section of his school's Combined Cadet Force. We spent nearly a month visiting a number of British ports before sailing for New Zealand. This period enabled me to adjust to working life fairly comfortably although the idea of being on call for 24 hours a day required the most adaptation. I joined the ship as one of a group of eight (we're all still regularly in contact over 57 years later) and I was one of the three boys who had come directly from school rather than via a pre-sea training establishment. As for sea legs, well I was almost the last of our group to succumb to Biscay, only losing it when a more senior apprentice chose to recycle his breakfast into my bucket as I was manfully scrubbing the deck in an accommodation alleyway.</p>
<b>01.007b</b>	<b>Q: What was life on board generally like on your further voyages?</b>
	<p>There were welcome opportunities to visit relatives in both Australia and New Zealand. I was even allowed a week of 'local leave' to stay in a small town in the centre of New Zealand's North Island. This sense of unrestricted travel, I'd been around the world before my 17<sup>th</sup>.birthday, continued but that pleasure was tempered by some shipboard restraints that I found increasingly irksome. That caused my transfer to the company's first tanker to complete my apprenticeship. Now I visited so many other destinations but the price of that was a last voyage of over three hundred days away from home.</p>
<b>01.008a</b>	<b>Q: How much autonomy did the <u>crew</u> of your ship(s) have? ---/--- As an <u>officer</u> how much autonomy did you have in your own job?</b>

On a cadet training ship like the RAKAIA the crew were the apprentices, 32 of us in all. All bar the most senior members were in 3-berth cabins which certainly encouraged good habits regarding cleanliness and tidiness. We were allocated deck work by the Bosun and our academic studies were directed by the Education Officer in formal classes. Individual freedom, if that means autonomy, was therefore severely curtailed but the ship's activities outwith its navigation and cargo care were always provided with the apprentices' interests paramount. Sports and social occasions were very enjoyable and therefore sorely missed when my transfer saw me, the sole apprentice (even as an uncertificated junior officer), relegated to the bottom of another ship's social hierarchy. As an officer in Elder Dempsters I gradually moved higher within that shipboard pyramid and it was a comfortable transition for me on the whole. I never had to serve under any senior officers who were disagreeable and I also found that my juniors were equally efficient and co-operative. As a shipboard community we had little direction from outside. Our cargoes were allocated to us by the Ocean Traffic Control in Lagos and there were some frustrations when these were arbitrarily changed but we decided the stowages, we stated what spaces we had remaining on board and the cargo, once fully loaded, was deservedly felt to be our pride and joy in a job well done.

<b>01.008b</b>	<b>Q: How did this compare with other lines you might have worked for?</b>
	It took several years of hindsight for me to realise how fortunate I was in having most of my apprenticeship experiences. I never worked on another training ship and never had more than three or four apprentices with me on a ship, often just a solitary person. In Elder Dempsters they would have had some cadet-ship training but the majority of shipping companies left their apprentices without much personal support either on board or ashore. Their commercial imperative appeared to be to avoid a training levy.
<b>01.008c</b>	<b>Q: What interests, pastimes or activities did you follow when you were not working, that is either on board ship or ashore?</b>

In these days of instant communications it's easy to forget how much free time had to be devoted to letter writing. A long sea passage provided ample opportunity for this but a West African voyage was a very different matter. The women in my life (my mother, some of my girlfriends and finally, my wife) were all conscientious correspondents and the pleasure, at some minor port, of being one of the very few who received a letter or even an aerogramme certainly warranted an equally reliable response. That wasn't always easy in such an intense trade of short calls at so many ports.

The concept of a ship's bar did not arrive in Elder Dempster's until the mid-1960s so small groups would gather in cabins with a case of beer in the evening to set the world to rights. The world of the ship and of sport, that is, since we'd very sensibly avoid both politics and religion. If you needed involvement in arguments about those subjects, then your own choice of the books that you took to sea could provide that. The estimable libraries that were put on board by the Seafarers Education Service supplied an impressive range of both fiction and non-fiction titles and of course the weekly film night was another popular shipboard institution.

Going ashore in West Africa offered a much more limited choice than that to be found in other trades. The local beer, however, was palatable and a few bottles were enough to encourage joining some of the ladies in the better nightspots for some exertions on the floor to the accompaniment of 'high life' music. An enjoyable evening followed, whether or not it led on to an assignation that ended with a scramble in a taxi back to the ship soon after dawn. Many people knew British expatriates who were working ashore, mainly in Nigeria, and this produced invitations to homes or the local Club. In return, some ships would host barbecues or 'race meetings' on board in order to repay some of this hospitality. An excursion in one of the ship's lifeboats to Tarkwa Beach in Lagos was always popular whilst in Pointe Noire an archetypal tropical beach of blue sea and white sand was easily accessible on foot, albeit via the manganese ore heaps.

<b>01.008d</b>	<b>Q: How did you find that relationships between different nationalities were like?</b>
	<p>On an Elder Dempster ship it was normal to have three nationalities on board and each had their own Articles of Agreement, albeit virtually identical in content. The officers and petty officers were British, the catering complement were almost always Nigerian whilst the sailors and engine-room ratings were invariably Sierra Leonian. A British crew of sailors was unusual and never seen in the other two departments. By and large, the fact of a person's nationality was unimportant since, like all merchant ships, the society on board was strictly hierarchical. Senior officers were unlikely to share the off-duty pleasures of their juniors although a few of the latter might join British sailors for a run ashore. The arrival of the Kroomen at Freetown inserted a new lowest level to the social pyramid. Individual British crew members might show preferential behaviour to a Freetown sailor or cleaner rather than to a Nigerian steward or could ignore a Krooman socially but true racism was extremely rare.</p>
<b>01.009a</b>	<b>Q: How much did you know about the UK when you started?</b>
	Not applicable
<b>01.009b</b>	<b>Q: What were your first impressions like, and did those impressions change as you saw more of the UK?</b>
	Not applicable
<b>01.009c</b>	<b>Q: Which was your favourite overseas country and why?</b>

Not applicable
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<b>01.009d</b>	<b>Q: How did you find other West African countries, and how did these compare with your own country?</b>
	Not applicable

**HB01 General Questions: 'Personal Memories'**  
**(British & European Seafarers)**

<b>01.009e</b>	<b>Q: How much did you know about West Africa when you started?</b>
	I had already visited three ports in West Africa whilst I was on a tanker : Dakar, Lagos and Bonny and I also knew something of the Coast from my uncle's tales of sailing through the creeks of the Niger Delta or working cargo in the surf ports such as Accra.

<b>01.009f</b>	<b>Q: What were your first impressions like, and did those impressions change as you saw more of West Africa?</b>
	My first port of call when working with Elder Dempsters was Freetown. It reminded me of some small ports that I'd visited in the West Indies. I was certainly impressed with the creek passage up to Sapele and with glimpses of Cameroon Mountain and the peak of Fernando Pó later in the voyage. West Africa was yet to lose the innocence of its first years of independence so, although the constant importuning for 'dash' from all and sundry could become a major annoyance, a stroll ashore at any time felt secure and not without a good deal of interest. There were still a few surf ports in existence and visiting these and sailing up the Congo to Matadi were also valuable experiences. Of course, as the economies of these countries declined and the threat of violence both afloat and ashore increased, any attractiveness of West Africa either disappeared or was much diminished. Nevertheless there were still a very few ports where it was both safe and possible to go ashore from the ship to enjoy some 'touristy' experiences.

<b>01.009g</b>	<b>Q: Which was your favourite West African country and why?</b>
	In those first years of visiting West Africa, I looked forward to calling at ports in Angola, especially Lobito, where going ashore might well have been in metropolitan Portugal. It was all too easy to overlook the cruelties and petty discriminations that supported this sunny situation. The one country in West Africa that was consistently a pleasure to visit was Ghana. It was the first British colony to gain independence and the only one that certainly appeared free of those tribal or racial tensions that would soon spoil so many of its neighbours. It was not, however, spared the extravagant and ill-judged economic policies of a succession of autocratic leaders. The stoicism of its citizens in coping with the consequences was admirable. Ships calling there were plagued by the usual petty thefts but there was a total absence of any threat of violence if it was curbed. The inevitable diaspora of many of them also meant that the most helpful person found in the later chaos in other West African countries turned out to be an exiled Ghanaian !

**HB01 General Questions: 'Personal Memories'**

**(All Seagoing Staff)**

<b>01.010a</b>	<b>Q: Did you experience West Africa both under colonial rule and following independence? ---/--- What changes appeared to make the greatest differences to the job?</b>
	Only The Gambia remained as a British Colony when I first visited West Africa. It gained independence a couple of years later with minimal effect on our visits.
<b>01.010b</b>	<b>Q: Did you experience many social changes?</b>
	The consequences of economic mismanagement and the appearance of kleptocracies in so many West African countries had an inevitable impact on our experience of working in all West African ports. The effectiveness of those operations ashore that supported the ship's cargo work and the access to its other requirements deteriorated dramatically after the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-70. I was absent from the coast during that period and the threat of armed violence became something that I only heard about. However this unwelcome new factor, increasingly affecting the lives of seafarers both whilst aboard and ashore, became my own experience when I revisited West Africa in 1973-4 whilst working for Nigerian National . I also witnessed the vicious reality of armed attacks at so many more West African ports when I was working for Palm Line in the later 1970s and early 1980s. By that time, the poverty and desperation of the peoples of almost every West African country rendered shore visits impossible and it made a very gloomy epitaph to all those sunny hopes of the early 1960s.
<b>01.010c</b>	<b>Q: Do you think the end of empire changed things significantly?</b>
	The British West African colonial possessions were fortunate in that there was no 'white settler' legacy to affect the process of their gaining independence although Nigeria was not really suited to becoming a unitary state. In fact there was even a general sleepiness and a marked sense of boredom along the whole West African coast that made those violent events that began in Nigeria appear to be a welcome distraction. That was a response that was very soon both dispelled and regretted.
<b>01.011a</b>	<b>Q: How did the cargoes that were carried on your ED voyages compare with the types of cargoes carried with other lines you worked for?</b>
	Outward cargoes differed little from any of those being exported by the U.K although they were definitely much wider in nature than those to, say, the United States or to either Australasia and the Far East. Homeward cargoes were certainly very different. A variety of edible oils, bagged produce and timber that was not replicated in any other trade. Most notably, the very large tropical logs had no equivalent elsewhere.
<b>01.011b</b>	<b>Q: Were some cargoes (outward or homeward) more problematic than others? ---/--- How did you cope with the difficult cargoes?</b>

Both outward and homeward cargoes were susceptible to the special nature of trading to West Africa. That voyage was atypical in that the passage from tropical to temperate climates occurred over a relatively short period of time. It might only take just over a week to travel from a freezing winter day in Rotterdam to the humidity of even a dry season Freetown. On that particular passage would be large consignments of tins of evaporated milk which, when the hatches were opened, might very soon turn into a pile of tiny unlabelled tins that fell all too easily out of a soggy cardboard carton. The conventional wisdom was that if the hatch ventilation was closed down then the warming sea would gently raise the ambient hold temperature. Unfortunately this didn't take account of the fact that the ocean currents in the eastern North Atlantic are of cold water heading south, like the ship. I don't know who had the enterprising idea of stowing as much milk as possible in the deep tanks which could be very gently heated using the integral steam coils but it was very effective in preventing this 'sweat' damage. The effect of temperature change on homeward cargoes was, of course, the reverse. How could we evacuate all that humid African air and replace it by using the product of bracing Atlantic breezes ? It was only possible on the older ships by using conventional ventilators (hence their very noticeable presence on all those vessels) and (when the sea state permitted) the opening up of the hatch corners. It was the introduction of powerful electric fans (inside the mast houses) that permitted a crucial improvement to the ventilation process. It was still essential, however, to see that good airways were built into stows of bags and that the usual protective mats were laid up against any exposed steelwork. Bales of rubber were very prone to mildew and these therefore were never stowed in the same compartment as wet logs. Security against pilferage was naturally a constant concern with southbound cargoes and Elder Dempster ships were provided with a large number of compartments that allowed safe storage. Some of those spaces that kept thieves out were also used for northbound cargoes such as bones and hides that needed to have their insect infestations kept in !

**01.011c Q: How did things change with containerisation? ---/--- Did you experience these changes?**

The West African trade was the last major ocean route to be effectively containerised. Whereas gearless container ships were being introduced to many routes from the late 1960s, the only shipping containers regularly used to West Africa at that time were the small '318' types (about an 8-foot cube). There was still very little shore infrastructure available when 20-foot ISO containers began to appear in numbers in the mid-1970s. The French West African shipping companies were well in advance of any British adoption of containers. The problem of using these containers for Northbound cargoes remained so even a decade later. Containers were certainly a welcome development since they naturally increased cargo security but the thieves soon realised that, unless containers were stowed door to door, they were still vulnerable to attack. This was a very expensive annoyance if the container was one that was carrying a payload of malted barley in bulk which then cascaded out in a stream that rendered it worthless.

**01.012a Q: Did you ever visit continental European ports? ---/--- How did these compare with UK and West African ports? ---/--- What were your experiences like there?**

Elder Dempster ships that were turned around in North European ports always had their European personnel relieved on arrival. A chartered aircraft from Liverpool Airport was used and the flight attendants and pilots used to enjoy a lunch on board before the return trip. The normal rotation was Rotterdam – Hamburg – Bremen – Antwerpen and return to Rotterdam. Up to a week might be spent in Hamburg, which was always a popular destination because of its night life and at least a couple of days in the other ports. In summer this was a very attractive proposition but less so in the winter months. Long river passages up the Elbe and Weser and interminable waits outside the locks at the Belgian port almost made West Africa seem like paradise. There was much more involvement with the cargo work than was required in British ports although it was usual to have the services of a supercargo from the Rotterdam agency to help.

**01.012b Q: Did you ever visit North American & Canadian ports? ---/--- How did these compare with UK and West African ports? ---/--- What were your experiences like there?**

A voyage from West Africa to North America and return to West Africa was termed a 'double-header' since it inserted an extra voyage into the usual format of 'out & back'. The consequence of that was a period of at least six months away from home which was not welcomed by the married officers on the ship but it was seen as an enjoyable alternative for many. The usual port rotation was New York – Norfolk – Baltimore – Philadelphia –New York – Halifax although Fall River in Connecticut would be a destination if latex was being carried. My only experience of this was on a Henderson Line 'K' boat which, although only a few years old, was equipped with steam winches of museum quality powered by a Scotch boiler which actually had a brass plate on it bearing the legend 'Property of the City of Glasgow Art Galleries and Museums'. These winches attracted continuous criticism from the longshoremen at every port we visited whilst the boiler itself eventually collapsed in our last port of call in West Africa and delayed our voyage home for over a week. In New York the stevedores were all Italian-Americans, complained bitterly about the logs on deck and systematically looted much of our return cargo, a practice that the agency's Port Captain termed a 'custom' of the port. Apart from Halifax, the ship was serviced by African-Americans, much less prone to complain and much more law-abiding. It was, however, instructive to see how some friendly approaches by our Freetown crew were often none too politely rebuffed. This was more evidence for my belief formed in other ports and other trades that racism, or to be generous, xenophobia is a normal human trait. It just has to be corrected by knowledge and self-discipline. As with our calls to European ports, the control of the cargo was very much more the responsibility of the officers. Fortunately a return cargo to West Africa was far from a full load due to United States restrictions on foreign sea carriers. Our turnaround port and main inward destination was Philadelphia where a stay of several days allowed us to enjoy the very sociable relationships that several of our ships had long established with the girls of a community centre in the suburb of Germantown. We also enjoyed going ashore in New York but that was a lot more one-sided since our invitations to visit the ship in the fairly seedy surrounds of Pier One in Brooklyn were always declined. Our stay in Baltimore allowed for an outing to the tourist attractions of Washington, however neither Norfolk nor Halifax provided much incentive to go ashore.

**01.012c Q: Did you ever visit the Canaries? ---/--- How did these compare with UK and West African ports? ---/--- What were your experiences like there?**

Both Las Palmas on Gran Canaria and Puerto de la Cruz on Tenerife were principally bunkering ports although small amounts of cargo were sometimes on offer there for West Africa. On many occasions our visits of just a few hours were in the middle of the night but that didn't prevent one or two pedlars setting up shop on the quay. Japanese cameras and binoculars were popular purchases at attractive prices. A beautifully embroidered tablecloth or bedspread often proved on later inspection to be a recycled item of bed or table linen from a Union-Castle or Royal Mail passenger ship. The two cases of Spanish champagne that I bought for our wedding reception were definitely a bargain, however. Funchal on Madeira was a more attractive Atlantic Islands call as there was cargo to be unloaded and a more extended stay in port was possible. A taxi ride up to a restaurant above the port for a good lunch followed by a hair-raising descent into the centre of town on a wooden sledge was a memorable experience.

<b>01.016a</b>	<b>Q: What was the life of an Elder Dempster wife or fiancé like?</b>
	I know that my wife enjoyed the fact that I was home reasonably frequently although she managed all our household affairs in my absence both ably and without complaint. As a nurse she sometimes would remain at work whilst I was home on leave but she then changed to a more variable employment so that we could both enjoy more of these leave periods together. Whilst apart we both proved to be effective letter writers although she was very grateful during the extended postal strike of 1971 that she was able to both hand in and receive letters at Elder Dempster's office in India Buildings.

<b>01.016b</b>	<b>Q: Did you ever accompany your Husband overseas or want to? How did you find that experience? <i>(answered by the Husband)</i></b>
	We returned from our honeymoon in Austria to find that I was required to join a Blue Funnel ship the following week. The landlord agreed to lapse the rental of Anne's flat and so she was able to join me on a memorable voyage around the world, out via Panama and then home via the Cape. It was a new environment for both of us and I cannot say that I really enjoyed the Blue Funnel experience. Fortunately Anne was taken under the wing of the Radio Officer's wife, an old Far East hand, and we were both able to enjoy several shore excursions. The next year we had a much happier time on a Glen Line voyage where the Master appreciated Anne's expertise at both bridge and Scrabble and we both had the memorable experience of attending a Chinese wedding celebration in Hong Kong. Anne was very involved in the care of my mother in her last weeks and so a riotously sociable coasting around the North Continent on an Elder Dempster ship that covered both Christmas and New Year was a welcome antidote to what had been a very stressful time for both of us.

**HB01 General Questions: 'Personal Memories'**  
**(All EDL Staff)**

<b>01.017a</b>	<b>Q: EDs seemed to have a vibrant social life attached to the company, both at sea and on land – do you have any recollections specifically of that? <i>{See also Question 01.008c for seafarers}</i></b>
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Personally, I'd not describe Elder Dempsters as having a particularly vibrant social life but then I only sailed on the 'secondary' passenger services, not the three 'mailboats'. It bore no comparison, both in terms of its depth and variety, with that of a trade that I already knew, that to Australasia. The social life aboard greatly improved when proper bar facilities were introduced and noticeably diminished when a video recorder was put on board in place of cinema films. Officers from other Elders ships might come aboard for a joint session from time to time and there were at least a couple of football matches ashore with other ships' teams. In some ports it was feasible to use one of the ship's lifeboats to arrange a trip to a nearby beach but that wasn't possible on a working day and, as we all knew, our trade was well-named 'Every Day Labour'. The Mission to Seamen's facility, Tugwell House, in Apapa had a good swimming pool and it also offered the opportunity for an inevitably expensive telephone home if required.

**01.017b Q: EDs seemed to have a vibrant social life attached to the company in the UK, how did that present its self in contact with the West African Colonial society? Do you have any recollections specifically of that?**

There were some of us who had contacts in the expatriate community, principally in either Lagos and Port Harcourt. These were fortunately ports in which we could expect to stay for a few days. Invitations to the weekend 'palm oil chop' lunches at the Apapa Club were particularly prized as they had also had an excellent swimming pool. It was therefore nice to be able to return that hospitality. That became easier when we had a bar on board but, in the later years, bringing a few otherwise unobtainable 'treats' from the UK was considered to be a more than equal recompense for any entertainment that was provided ashore. It was a special treat if your contacts ashore had the use of a power boat for a weekend afternoon trip to Tarkwa Beach. I'm afraid that some of the expatriate community could be a bit sniffy if we chugged in there aboard our smoky motor lifeboat with its recycled onion nets hanging overside crammed with beercans keeping cool ! In Port Harcourt we always had a very popular Race Night to which very many European expatriates were invited. This was on the EBANI which not only had a Master but also a Purser and Chief Steward who were all dedicated 'party animals'. It also had some very elegant passenger accommodation which was ideal for a large social event. The ship's Turf Accountant (a.k.a the Purser) made sure that the cost of the evening to the ship's officers was more than covered by his course profit, just as well as I don't recall there being any return invitations to the Port Harcourt Club.

**01.018a Q: How did you feel about the end of Elder Dempster lines in 1989 as a British and Liverpool-based firm?**

In 1989 I was in my final year as an undergraduate reading Economic History at the University of Liverpool. I had been fortunate enough to be accepted to study there following the demise in 1986 of another British company, Palm Line, that also traded to West Africa. Its name and trading rights had passed to Elder Dempsters so it really came as no great surprise that both companies would now just be 'brass plates' on the Paris head office of the French West African shipping company of Delmas-Vieljeux.

**01.018b Q: How did you feel about the reduction of the size of the British Merchant Navy generally?**

It was a matter of considerable personal regret that the industry that had employed me for nearly thirty years appeared to be on the verge of total disappearance. However that regret was tempered by my feeling that the life of a seafarer had been losing most of its attractiveness for some time before my own redundancy. At the same time I had been able to place this decline in its historical significance as a result of my University degree studies. Since 1989, of course, further significant changes have occurred. The Red Ensign now still flies from a substantial fleet that includes some of the world's largest ships. Unfortunately the sad reality is that so many of those ships no longer include any British nationals at all in their manning.

<b>01.019</b>	<b>Q: What is your most abiding memory connected with working for EDs?</b>
	Hard work. (EDL = 'Every Day Labour' was a true enough acronym). However it was always performed alongside good shipmates and with being reasonably well rewarded for it. In addition, my sadness at seeing the bright hopes of the immediate post-independence years fading because of a number of factors. This was compounded by the fact that I was working alongside many of those West Africans who were most affected by the greed and incompetence of those who should have served them better.
<b>01.020a</b>	<b>Q: How far have you kept in touch with former colleagues?</b>
	At first, I had no contact with any of my Elder Dempster colleagues, save one, after I left in 1972. I did meet one or two whilst I was working for the Nigerian National Shipping Company in 1973-74 and then a few encounters with others during my years, 1977-86, with Palm Line. Just before I retired in 2002, however, I became much more involved, with invitations to not only attend the biennial dinners of the FOURAH BAY Association in Liverpool but also the annual summer gathering of former Elder Dempster and Palm Line officers that is now co-ordinated on successive days in June.
<b>01.020b</b>	<b>Q: Are you a member of the Elder Dempster Pensioners Association or the Merchant Navy Association? ---/--- If not, why/not?</b>
	I'm a member now of the Elder Dempsters Pensioners Association (I 'inherited' my Uncle's membership !). I'm not involved with the Merchant Navy Association but I am a member of both of the Associations of former Apprentices of Elder Dempsters and The New Zealand Shipping Co.