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Transcript of a sound recording in MS 608, WLBZ Radio Station Records, Bangor, Maine, 1931-1973

Title: Webber Oil Company's Ocean Terminal and Docking of the ESSO Bridgeport

Date: November 19, 1949

Recording number: D 16.3; CD 1, track 4

Length of recording: 15:14

[transcript begins]

IRVING HUNTER: This is your ESSO Reporter, Irving Hunter, broadcasting from aboard the towboat Walter Ross heading down the Penobscot River and we're meeting the T2 tanker ESSO Bridgeport which will dock at Bucksport to discharge ESSO range oil near the new six million gallon storage tank of the Webber Oil Company. This will be the first tanker to discharge oil into the huge ocean terminal which reflects the Webber Oil Company's policy of constant building for better service. Right now I'm speaking to you from the pilot house of the Walter Ross and we're going to take a moment to talk with the captain, Harold Spurling, and we're right up here beside him. He's running the big wheel here guiding the boat down the river, into the channel, and we're going to take a moment to talk with Captain Spurling. First of all, sir, would you tell us just what this operation consists of? We're going down to meet the tanker and for what purpose is that?

SPURLING: That's to assist from here into Bucksport to the docks

HUNTER: I see, and uh, in other words, when we pick her up, we're going to go alongside and help the docking of the big tanker when we get back to Bucksport

SPURLING: Yes, that's right, and also, [inaudible] the pilot aboard down here, Captain Abbot.

HUNTER: Oh, yes, that's the other gentleman who we have aboard here, Captain Merle Abbot, and he's the official pilot who we're going to put aboard a little later so I'm going to move across the pilot house to where Captain Abbot is sitting here, and how about you sir? When you go aboard, you're going to assist in getting the tanker up the river? What do your duties consist of, sir?

ABBOT: Well, when I go aboard, I kind of take over and take her up the river and dock her...

HUNTER: I understand...

ABBOT: ...with the assistance of the towboat.

HUNTER: With the assistance of the towboat, I see. I understand that your son is also a pilot and that he is aboard the tanker, or went aboard at Monhegan. You want to tell us a little bit about that?

ABBOT: Yes, he's aboard, he got aboard this morning around 7 o'clock. I guess he had quite a rough time down there because it was a stormy morning, but he got aboard all right, I heard from him.

HUNTER: Oh, you heard from him? How did you hear from him?

ABBOT: Well, I called up the man what set him aboard, and he come into shore, and he got him aboard at 7 o'clock all right and they was on their way up, so we are quite sure we're going to meet him all right.

HUNTER: Rather a stormy morning. It's still pretty gray, and raining outside. Will that make any difference in docking the tanker?

ABBOT: No, not a whole lot. We don't, a tanker, a loaded tanker is so heavy and down in the water, the wind don't have much effect on them. The tide has a good deal more to do than the wind with a loaded ship. A light ship, of course the wind is, has a lot to do with it, too.

HUNTER: The ESSO tanker Bridgeport, is that coming from Texas?

ABBOT: Yes, she's coming from Texas, I believe.

HUNTER: I see.

ABBOT: Right straight up from Gulf Port.

HUNTER: Well, thank you very much, and that's all from this point at this time.

We're speaking to you now from the forward deck of the towboat Walter Ross as we come alongside the tanker ESSO Bridgeport. The towboat is getting ready to assist the tanker up the Penobscot River to the dock at Bucksport. Right now we're just below the Waldo-Hancock Bridge, a very beautiful sight there ahead of us, and two boats have come alongside, a rope has been thrown over, the men are working now getting things all in readiness for the finale of their trip up the Penobscot River and to the dock at Bucksport. Now we get a chance to look back and some gentlemen have just gone aboard. The pilot has been put aboard, that we told you about a little earlier, Captain Merle Abbot, he has just gone aboard to assist in the docking of this tremendously large tanker and estimates of the length have been made and we figure she's about 600 feet long. And that brings up another point, the cargo that she carries is about five-and-a-half to six-million gallons of oil. Now that's considerable oil and will give you some idea of the ship, 600 feet long and it draws somewhere in the vicinity of 30 feet of water. We can see the 31 foot water mark as we came alongside the ESSO Bridgeport just a few moments ago, and as you watch the boat come up, a very majestic sight coming up the river, we quite often think of a tanker as a work boat, and not very glamorous looking, but this type of tanker, a T2 tanker, is pretty much a big vessel and more glamorous than the ordinary tanker you see on the river here. This one is black, the lower section, the hull, and the upper part is all white. A tremendously large bridge, that of course is all white, two big masts on her, and from one of the masts we see the familiar ESSO sign up there, the blue oval with the red letters, E-S-S-O.

And right now I'm traveling down the length of the Walter Ross, the boat where we're broadcasting from, and I'm going to get down at the stern. We were broadcasting from the bow, but now as I go to the stern I can get a better look at the ESSO Bridgeport. Right now I'm at the stern of the Walter Ross

and that is just a little bit ahead of the bridge of the ESSO Bridgeport, that will give you an idea of the comparative sizes of these two boats. A tug, as you get aboard it, is a much bigger boat than you think by seeing it from land, but beside this huge T-2 tanker it is a small boat by comparison

The two boats have been fastened together and we're now making headway up the river toward Bucksport and approaching the Waldo-Hancock Bridge. Rather a gray November day. Earlier it was raining, but the rain has stopped. It's not too cold, the temperature is rather pleasant out here. We're dressed very warmly for the occasion, not telling what we might run into for weather. And incidentally, this docking, of course, is very new to me and it seems to be running along very smoothly so far. The actual docking will come a little later and I guess that takes quite a bit of time. The boats are in very good hands. The towboat Walter Ross is captained by Harold Spurling, whom we talked to earlier, and I understand that he's been on the river here for about 40 years, something over 40 years, so he knows this river like you probably know your own back yard, and also Captain Merle Abbot has been on the river for over 40 years. He has been a pilot for the last 20 years, and he is the gentleman who went aboard to assist in the docking at Bucksport. His son already had been aboard as we mentioned earlier, he went aboard at Monhegan to assist in bringing the tanker ESSO Bridgeport up the river and into Bucksport.

We're broadcasting from the deck of the towboat Walter Ross out of Bangor and I believe you can hear the motor in the background here, the machinery, on this towboat, a very tremendous amount of power here. We're surging, with the propellers pushing away on side of the tanker ESSO Bridgeport helping it to dock at Bucksport. I wonder if I might possibly move along the deck of the boat here and get up to deck of the pilot house. I think I'll do that as long as we have the roving microphone. You hear some signaling now. I don't know just what that means but I think that I might be able to find out as I walk up here.

Well, they're beginning to pull ropes around here on the Walter Ross, pulling away some lines. I'm going to go up near the pilot house. Captain Spurling is giving a signal on the whistle there, and of course I don't know exactly what it means over there on the ESSO Bridgeport they get the signal and they know what it's all about. And the docking proceeds very smoothly.

Captain Spurling, have they docked yet completely?

SPURLING: Not completely, no.

HUNTER: Not completely. I guess they have a line or two over there, and it's surprising to see what a tremendous amount of work is involved in docking a tanker of this size. It took very little time coming up the river, but once we got here at the ocean terminal of the Webber Oil Company a lot of work's been going on and everything moves very slowly. With our roving microphone we can climb up the stairs to the pilot house of the Walter Ross and I believe you could hear Captain Spurling when he said we weren't completely docked. He's up a little higher than I am looking out the window. The crew is working over there on the ESSO Bridgeport, maneuvering with various lines and it is a very complicated procedure, this docking here at Bucksport. Much more than I had imagined it would be. Some of the crew here on the Walter Ross are pulling off the rope there from the ESSO Bridgeport and we have just

pulled free and we're backing slowly away from the tanker now and I don't know just what this is going to mean at this point. We might just as well find out what is going to happen. I don't know whether our part of the work is done or not. I don't want to bother Captain Spurling right now because he is very busy guiding this boat back away from the tanker. I'm going to come down from the bridge now and I think that I can find someone here and maybe ask one of the crew members what's going on.

There's a signal from above, and we have swung completely around now and I believe we're going to head toward the stern of the ESSO tanker. I'm going up, forward now, away from the boiler room and that section of the ship and someone up here might be able to give me a little information, in fact I'm crawling over some ropes here now, and here is Captain Spurling's son, whom I spoke to you about a little earlier, explaining that as he was, as he described himself, the cook and general handy man, he's been working with these ropes in the forward end. What's the story, now? We've pulled away from the tanker and now we're heading back. What's going on?

SON: Push the stern of him in.

HUNTER: We're going to push the stern in, I see. You have to do it piecemeal, is that the idea?

SON: That's right. So long, you have to do it one end at a time.

HUNTER: One end at a time. Will this finish up, or will we try it again?

SON: No, this will be the last of it.

HUNTER: This will be the last of it. Well, we're almost up so I'm going to get back out of the way because there's work to be done and I can't be right up in there where all those ropes are and where the men are going to start heaving them around to fasten on.

[A few seconds of silence.]

And there they go into action now, the nose of the Walter Ross comes up to the side of the ESSO Bridgeport, they throw over this huge rope and one of the crew members jumps onto the ESSO Bridgeport, throws the line over a place to fasten there and now it's fastened on this end and we're hauling away on the stern of the ESSO Bridgeport. And the docking is going along smoothly and according to schedule. The bow, apparently, of the ESSO Bridgeport is all set up there, that's fastened to the dock but the stern end has to shove and hauled around until that part of the boat is in. I'm walking back down now toward the middle section of the Walter Ross and taking a look in here at the engine room. All is quiet now. Apparently they've shut off the power. There's a signal from above and power is applied, and I think that you can hear here in just a moment... now we're getting some action. The motors are turning over and chugging away there. Propellers are spinning, water is churning around and I'm moving back to the stern of the Walter Ross to see what's going on at this point of the docking procedure.

Well, we're pushing now on the stern of the ESSO Bridgeport and the power is being applied full force. The water is churning out from behind the Walter Ross here and the tanker moves slowly, slowly, it's a

huge bulk, but it's moving over toward the dock. Chances are you can hear that water churning over behind the stern of the Walter Ross here as the tugboat pushes against the big tanker and moves it slowly but surely into the dock here at the new ocean terminal of the Webber Oil Company.

Sounds like breakers down at the beach. Well, we're going to move up forward again now to see just what is happening at this end of the towboat, making our way along the deck, the rain has stopped, rather a showery day, it rains a while and then it stops, and I guess the docking is almost done, so I believe that there they have the tanker in at the dock now, both ends. The stern has been made fast, and so the docking is complete. And that is the job that we set out to do, to tell you about the docking of the tanker ESSO Bridgeport assisted by the tug Walter Ross.

[transcript ends]

For more information about this transcript, audio recording, or other materials in Special Collections at the University of Maine, contact:

Fogler Special Collections
5729 Raymond H. Fogler Library
Orono, ME 04469-5729
207.581.1686
um.library.spc @ maine.edu