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Webber Oil Company's Redgate Ocean Terminal Opening, Part 1

WLBZ Radio

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

Title: Webber Oil Co.'s Redgate Ocean Terminal: Irving Hunter broadcasting opening of Terminal

Date: November 21, 1949

Recording number: 16.36; CD 6, track 37

Length of recording: 14:53

[transcript begins]

MR. HUNTER: This is your SO reporter Irving Hunter broadcasting from aboard the towboat *Walter Ross* heading down the Penobscot River, and we are meeting the T2 tanker *SO Bridgeport*, which will dock at Bucksport to discharge SO range oil at the new 6-million-gallon storage tank of the Webber Oil Co. 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 are going to take a moment to talk with the Captain Harold Sperling and we are right up here beside him. He's running the [inaudible] were you her guiding the boat down the channel and take a moment to talk with Captain Sperling. First of all, sir, would you tell us just what this operation consists of; we are going down to meet the tanker and for what purpose is that?

CAPTAIN SPERLING: Well that's for assisting her from here into Bucksport and to the dock.

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

CAPTAIN SPERLING: Yeah, that's right, and also, we are supposed to land the pilot aboard down there and [inaudible]

MR. HUNTER: Oh yes, that's the other gentleman who we have aboard here, Captain Merl Abbott, and he's the official pilot who we are going to put aboard a little later and so I am going to move across the Pilot House to where Captain Abbott is sitting here. How about you sir, when you go aboard, are you going to assist in getting the tanker up the river? What do your duties consist of sir?

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

MR. HUNTER: I understand.

CAPTAIN ABBOTT: With the assistance of the towboat.

MR. 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. Do you want to tell us a little about that?

CAPTAIN ABBOTT: Yes sir, he is aboard, got aboard around 7 o'clock. I guess he had quite a rough time down there because it was a stormy morning but he got aboard alright. I heard from him.

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

CAPTAIN ABBOTT: Well I called-up the man who sent him aboard when he come-in ashore, and he said he got him aboard at 7 o'clock alright and they was on their way-up so we are quite sure we are going to meet him alright.

MR HUNTER: A rather stormy morning, it's still pretty gray and raining outside. Will that make any difference in docking the tanker?

CAPTAIN ABBOTT: 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 effects on them. The tide has more to do than the wind with a loaded ship. A light ship - of course the wind has a lot to do with them too.

MR. HUNER: The tanker *SO Bridgeport*, is that coming from Texas?

CAPTAIN ABBOTT: Yes, right straight from Gulfport.

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

MR. HUNTER: We are speaking to you now from the forward deck of the towboat *Walter Ross*, as we come alongside the tanker *SO Bridgeport*. Towboat is getting ready to assist the tanker up the Penobscot River to the dock at Bucksport. Right now we are just below the Waldo Hancock Bridge, very beautiful sight there up ahead of us, and the 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, which we told you about a little earlier, Captain Merl Abbott; he has just gone aboard to assist in the docking of this tremendously large tanker. Estimates of the length have been made and we figure she is about 600 feet long. That brings-up another point, the cargo that she carries is about 5.5 to 6.0 million gallons of oil. 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 *SO Bridgeport* just a few moments ago. As you watch the boat come-up, a very majestic sight coming-up the river, quite often you 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 SO sign up there; the blue oval, with the red letters ESSO.

Right now, I am traveling down the length of the *Walter Ross*, the boat where we are broadcasting from, and I am 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 *SO Bridgeport*. Right now I am at the stern of the *Walter Ross* and that is just a little bit ahead of the bridge of the *SO Bridgeport*. That will give you an idea of the comparative sizes of these two boats. A tug is as you get aboard it, is a much bigger boat than you think by seeing it from land, but beside this huge T2 tanker, it is a small boat by comparison. The two boats have been fastened together and we're now making headway up the river towards 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 are dressed very warmly for the occasion, not knowing 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 it takes quite a bit of time.

The boats are in very good hands. The towboat *Walter Ross* is Captained by Harold Sperling, whom we talked to earlier, and I understand that he has been on the river here for about 40 years, something over 40 years. So he knows this river like you probably know your own backyard. And also, Captain Merl Abbott 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 has already been aboard, as we mentioned earlier; he went aboard at Monhegan to assist in bringing the tanker *SO Bridgeport* up the river and into Bucksport.

We are broadcasting from the deck of the towboat *Walter Ross* out of Bangor, and I believe you can hear the motor in the background there. The machinery on this towboat, very tremendous amount of power here. We are surging with the propellers pushing away on the side of the tanker *SO 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 the pilothouse. 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 are beginning to throw ropes around here on the *Walter Ross* pulling away some lines. I'm going to go up near the pilothouse. Captain Sperling is giving a signal on the whistle there, and of course, I don't know exactly what it means, but over there on the *SO Bridgeport* they get the signal and they know what it is all about. And the docking proceeds very smoothly.

MR. HUNTER: Captain Sperling, have they docked yet completely?

CAPTAIN SPERLING: Not completely, no.

MR. HUNTER: Not completely. I guess they have a line or two over there, and it is 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 has been going on and everything moves very slowly.

With our roving microphone, we climbed-up the stairs to the pilothouse of the *Walter Ross*, and I believe you could hear Captain Sperling when he said we were not completely docked. He is up a little higher than I am looking out the window. The crew is working over there on the *SO Bridgeport*, maneuvering with various lines, and it appears 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 a rope there from the *SO Bridgeport*, and we have just pulled free. And we are backing slowly away from the tanker now. And I don't know just what it is going to mean at this point. 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 Sperling right now, because he is very busy guiding this boat back away from the tanker.

So I am going to come down from the bridge now. I think that I can find someone here maybe to ask one of the crew members what is going-on. We have swung completely around now, and I believe we are going to head toward the stern of the *SO* tanker. I am 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 am crawling over some ropes here now and here is Captain Sperling's son, whom I spoke to you about a little earlier, explaining that he was, as he described himself, the cook and general handyman. He has been working with these ropes in the forward end.

MR. HUNTER: What's the story now? We have pulled away from the tanker and now we are heading back. What's going on?

CAPTAIN SPERLING'S SON: Push the stern in.

MR. HUNTER: Push the stern in. I see. You have to do it piecemeal, is that the idea?

CAPTAIN SPERLING'S SON: That's right. One end at a time.

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

CAPTAIN SPERLING'S SON: This will be the last of it.

MR. HUNTER: This will be the last of it. Well we are almost up there so I am going to get back out of the way, because there is 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. And there they go into action now, the nose of the *Walter Ross* comes up to the side of the *SO Bridgeport*, they throw over this huge rope,

and one of the crew members jumps onto the *SO Bridgeport*, throws the line over a place to fasten there and now it's fastened on this end, and we are hauling away on the stern of the *SO Bridgeport*.

And the docking is going along smoothly and according to schedule. The bow apparently of the *SO Bridgeport* is all set up there, that's fastened to the dock, but the stern end has to be shoved 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 have shut off the power. There is a signal from above, and power is applied, and I think you can hear it here in just a moment. Now we are getting some action. The motors are turning over, chugging away there, the propellers are spinning, water is churning around, and I am moving back to the stern of the *Walter Ross* to see what is going on at this point of the docking procedure.

Well we are pushing now on the stern of the *SO 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 is a huge bulk, but it is moving toward the dock. Chances are you can hear that water churning over behind the stern of the *Walter Ross* here as the tug boat 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 are going to move up forward again now to see what is happening up at this end of the towboat. Making our way along the deck, the rain has stopped. A rather showery day, it rains awhile, then it stops, and I guess that 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 *SO 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:

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