

## **BMC – Leyland Australia Heritage Group**

### **ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**INTERVIEWEE :** Spiro Aretoulis

**TAPE NUMBERS :**

**INTERVIEWER :** Jennifer Cornwall.

**BMCLA JC 21 & 22**

**INTERVIEW DATE :** 19<sup>th</sup> August 2002.

**NUMBER OF TAPES :** 2.

**RESTRICTION ON USE :** (as stated in Release Form)

### **INTERVIEW TAPE LOG**

This interview took place at: Spiro Aretoulis's home in Earlwood  
on 19<sup>th</sup> August 2002.

This log was prepared using a Philips AS 340 recorder by Kim Wilcox

This interview is part of the Oral History Project of the BMC – Leyland Australia Heritage Group.

**Tape Log SPIRO ARETOULIS**

<b>Tape : BMCLA : JC 21, Side A</b>		
<b>COUNT</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>NAMES &amp; KEYWORDS</b>
0m-0sec	(Tape incorrectly quoted as Tape 19 by interviewer). Spiro born of Greek parents on 8 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1937 in Alexandria, Egypt. Emigrated by ship to Australia in 1956 at age 19 because of poor job prospects in Egypt for those not having Egyptian citizenship. No assisted passage, mother scrimped to find full fare. Sponsored by friends who had emigrated to Victoria and advised job prospects were good. Mother and sister emigrated later in 1960. On arrival, Spiro, for personal reasons, did not stay in Victoria but chose to pay extra fare and come to Sydney.	Spiro Aretoulis. Education in Egypt.
5m-0sec	Made some friends on the boat who invited him to stay with them in Sydney. Was offered opportunity to work with Immigration as he had good English and on the boat acted as interpreter, for which he was paid. Picked BMC however at suggestion of a friend he was boarding with, who previously worked there, and because of better money than Immigration Dept. Only had £10 (Aust) when he arrived.	Choice of workplace in Aust.. BMC.
8m-0sec	Started work 5 <sup>th</sup> November 1956, as assembler in Unit Plant, on Austin A55 Rear Axle line. Digresses back to life in Egypt. Father Chief Inspector with Caltex. Family enjoyed good standard of living. Could have done Engineering in Europe. Greek Primary and High Schools. Multi-lingual, spoke English, Greek, Arabic, Italian, Spanish, German, and Portuguese. Egyptian High School Certificate not recognised in Aust. Reasonably happy working on assembly line.	Unit Plant A55 Rear Axle Assembly Line.
12m-15s	After 6 months, was loaned to Quality Control for testing noise level of differentials for 3 to 4 months. Describes soundproof room and test rig with its big flywheel and electric motor. Ron Bitmead asked if he would stay with Q.C. as a Junior Inspector (first ever because of young age). Worked in View Room in Unit Plant. Describes view room as nerve centre of Q.C. for approving first-off samples of all bought-in and made-in-house components for Unit Plant. Ralph Warren was in charge of View Room and taught Spiro everything. Describes Metrology Equipment and Processes and his problems having to adapt to everything being measured in inches instead of mm he was accustomed to. Got Ralph Warren's job when he left. Filled in when inspectors were absent in the Unit Plant. Promoted to Leading Hand. Tells of some degree of being resented because of his young age and being a non-Australian. Explains role of Q.C. in assisting Production in fixing problems.	Quality Control. Noisy Differentials. Ron Bitmead. Unit Plant View Room Ralph Warren. Metrology.
20m-10s	Talks about working atmosphere and culture conflicts. Communication problems caused by poor English. Often helped Personnel by acting as interpreter. Describes social life outside work and comments on limitations of social contacts. Tells of meeting his German wife. When mother came out, shared house. Found Aust. food OK, but missed mother's cooking. English people coming out under contract had more incentives. Generally satisfied in achieving status of Leading Hand Inspector at early age of 23.	Workplace cultural aspects. Social life. Job satisfaction.
31m-0sec	End of Tape JC 21, Side A. (contd. JC 21 Side B.)	

<b>Tape : BMCLA : JC 21, Side B</b>		
<b>COUNT</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>NAMES &amp; KEYWORDS</b>
0m-0sec	(continued from Tape JC 21, Side A.) Felt he did better than average and benefited from his experience with BMC. His good English was an advantage. Again expresses satisfaction with job and good pay conditions.	
3m-0sec	Appointed Quality Control Foreman for Unit Plant in 1972. Describes work on B Series Crankshaft, its importance and the gauging of the part. Also the B Series Gearbox Forks, which were a problem, requiring 100% gauging. The B Series engine was a good engine with only a few problems. The E Series engine for Nomad however had many problems.	B Series Engine. B Series Gearbox. E Series Engine
6m-30s	The P76 Engine was really good, but on the body side there were many problems, for example, door-seal water leaks. Boot was ugly, but it was a better handling car than GM and Ford. Was "Wheels" car of the year. Spiro is a member of Aust. Historic Motor Club and owns a 1937 Morris 8 tourer. Previously owned a Riley and a Wolseley.	P76. Interest in "old" BMC cars.
10m-30s	Again expressed view that BMC was a good place to work. He found it friendly and was treated well, which he attributes to his good English. Biggest hurdle for migrants was language, those with poor English got bad jobs. At last days of Zetland, sacking was sudden and people escorted off premises.	Last days of Zetland.
13m-30s	Was picked to go to Enfield. At first he felt all at sea because there was no machine shop, it was all assembly. He was in charge of a lot of inspectors yet was not experienced. Some animosity shown to people from Unit Plant by the people from Pressed Metal Corp. and those from the Zetland Assembly Shop. Eventually he grew to like the job at Enfield.	Enfield Plant. Jim Dodson.
15m-15s	Only heard about the closure of Zetland on the car radio on the way to work. Safety provisions in Unit Plant were sometimes an issue. Tells of cases of loss of fingers, thumbs and even a foot on Transfer machines. The First Aid Room very good. Nurse Carmen was also transferred to Enfield. BMC sent Spiro to Tech, where he did Metrology. Also sent to Supervision course and obtained Certificate that helped in getting later job. Doesn't go to reunions because they are mainly organised by Engineering and Service. Worst thing was lack of superannuation. Regrets in some ways not taking job with Immigration Dept. which would have paid superannuation.	Safety issues. Educational courses. Reunions. Superannuation .
27m-0sec	Tells of his guitar playing and forming of a band. Initially played just for the enjoyment, later for payment. Reminiscid about various Coffee Lounges around Kings Cross and Darlinghurst and popularity of Latin music, that his band played.	Private Social Life. Music interests.
30m-45s	End of Tape JC 21, Side B. (contd. JC 22 Side A.)	

<b>Tape : BMCLA : JC 22, Side A.</b>		
<b>COUNT</b>	<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>NAMES &amp; KEYWORDS</b>
0m-0sec	(continued from Tape JC 21, Side B.) Further reminiscing of the night clubs, Greek and Italian Restaurants in Kings Cross. Joined a Greek band and started playing at night clubs, weddings, country towns, mainly in weekends. Stopped playing about 1990	Private Social Life. Music interests.
6m-30s	After Enfield, had a break from work for about a year. Next, got a job with Smiths Industries as an inspector, later becoming Q.C. Foreman. Work was easy compared with BMC as they only made instruments, car heaters and air conditioning. As a foreman, was not on staff and had to belong to Union. When downturn came Union insisted on "last to come first to go." Lost job but re-employed by Smiths as a Production Manager, also in charge of Production Stores and Maintenance. Needed more help, but company would not provide this, so left.	Smiths Industries
10m-0m	Took job with radiator manufacturer NATRA and was in line for Q.C. Foreman, when the company closed down. Applied for job at Astra Engineering, but was turned down as he was too old at 54. Recalls at the time of Enfield closure when he was 47, being told by person from CES that it would be hard to get a job at his age. Expresses disappointment that all the knowledge and experience he had gained from BMC over those years was being lost.	NATRA
12m-40s	Reverts to description of work at Zetland. Felt that Apprentice School was very good, giving 300 apprentices a year a thorough training in many different departments. Recalled the man who ran apprentice school as "really knowing how to train them" but could not recall his name. (Tom Jessop). Describes the Olivetti Numerically Controlled Measuring Machine and its operation. He was one of the few people who could use it. Laments at the wastage, that this machine just finished up outside in a paddock when Zetland closed, because there was no need for it at Enfield.	Zetland Apprentice Training. N.C.Measuring M/C.
15m-40s	Recalls being a member of the Fire Squad, putting out grass fires and a fire in the Engine Room. Still has a "Pride in Performance Award" he won in April 1966. Recounts receiving incentive points for running section well. Very sad when Zetland closed.	Fire Squad at Zetland. Awards and Incentives.
19m-30s	End of Tape JC 22, Side A / End of Interview	