

MURDOCH UNIVERSITY
AND THE
FISHING INDUSTRY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

verbatim transcript of an interview with

FRANCISCO CORREIA

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN

FISHING INDUSTRY

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INTRODUCTION

JD This is an interview with Mr Francisco Correia of Bicton, Western Australia. The interview was conducted by Jack Darcey for Murdoch University's oral history of the Australian Fishing Industry. It was conducted in Mr Correia's home on the 22nd November 1989.

Mr Correia is a very prominent member of the Portuguese community in Western Australia. He had a great deal to do with the migration of many Portuguese people to this country and with establishment in the fishing industry in Fremantle and north to Carnarvon, as well as their involvement in the banana growing industry in Carnarvon.

Mr Correia was a leading figure in the epic voyage of the fishing boat North Cape from Cape Town to Fremantle in 1952. On this voyage (which took 75 days) he brought with him 23 Portuguese people, most of whom entered the rock lobster fishing industry in Western Australia, and in which they and their compatriots now operate some 40 boats.

Mr Correia was active in establishing the Portuguese Club in Fremantle and was its first President. The Club has played an important part in the social and cultural life of the Portuguese people in this part of Australia. Since his retirement Mr Correia has resumed the role of President of the Club and still occupies that position, which is an important one for Australians of Portuguese background living in Western Australia.

There is one Tape, and the interview starts at 023 on the rev counter.

VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

JD Mr Correia, would you please record your full name?

CORREIA My name is Francisco, [pronounced Francisquay].

JD And when were you born?

CORREIA I was born 1914 in Portugal Madeira.

JD That's the island of Madeira was it?

CORREIA [Unclear - very strong accent hard to translate from tape].

JD Were you a fisherman there, before you left?

CORREIA No, I never was fisherman. I was a farmer.

JD A farmer!

CORREIA My father was [a] farmer and I worked on the farm. A banana farm - a banana plantation.

JD Oh right! And why did you leave?

CORREIA Well, I leave because I see the French because of the Suez specially [unclear] and Africa so near. It goes well to make good money in the outside world so I go too.

JD Yes, and when was that?

CORREIA This was 1939.

JD How did you get to South Africa?

CORREIA Well I get my permission to come to the Portuguese Angola [unclear], but from there I want to go to Cape Town. Well, I tried to get.... what do you call? I buy a passage to go like leave the country, I pay for a passage. I get to Lourenco Marques and they never let me to go ashore because I never get the visa from the Government. I have to back to Angola.

Well, all my money be spent, I say, "Well I can't go back to Angola now, you got to jail me because [unclear] I have a right to be on board." The Captain this ship say, "Well this man you can't put in jail him, to be free on board." And they put one of the mans on board. I can go anywhere, but I can't go to the shore. I told myself, I have to go to shore when the ship be there for a while. And I keep see which way I can get away from the ship. But the Captain he put one man of the crew. I can go anywhere, the money goes behind me all the time, see.

I tell myself the night time, before the ship is supposed to go somewhere, I was in the front of the ship. The mans watch me coming back to talk to the man, "Where are we going now?" I jump over the ship, from the ship to the shore. I had few friends there say, "Well he jumped the ship." I come to this place, he give me address, got friends there. Go to see these friends there and I stop there.

And from there I stay Lourenco Marques. I want to go to South Africa. Well I find a way to go to South Africa, because there I have the brothers-in-law in South Africa - he want me there, and I go to see him there. I be four years there without permission to be there. After four years I find all complete.

JD And then you decided to come to Australia?

CORREIA Well, after twelve years I want start in the crayfishing business, but South Africa I can get to the fish but I can't export. I want to catch and export myself because the money [is] in exporting; because South Africa pay readily to many catch of the fish. And export the fish if you want to make the money.

And then I hear this place we catch crayfish, while second place was Australia - Western Australia. Well I came here to see which way it was [to] catch of the fish, what quantities you catch. Well I got this information [unclear]. I stop here, but after a time I go back to Surwat [?] We have a boat, fishing boat, there in South Africa and the crew here not too much, because the fishing boat here was foreign sands working. Was very great fishermans. I told myself, well we got some cousins and things in Portugal, better to bring them here.

I got the permit from Government here; I go back to South Africa, South Africa to Portugal. I engage all these people and brings them to South Africa. From there we come down by boat to Australia.

JD Were they fishermen in Portugal?

CORREIA Yes, all fishermen.

JD All fishermen?

CORREIA Well some one of them not fishermen but become like a fisherman. I bring most of relations.

JD And what boat was that that you brought over?

CORREIA North Cape.

JD North Cape! Could you tell us about that vessel, what size it was?

JD Boat was 75 foot long and that was a good sea boat, it was more trawl [unclear]. The trawl at the back, the front is very weak. The weather was very untoward but anyway we arrive here - it take 75 days to get here.

JD Seventy-five! And when did you leave?

CORREIA When....?

JD From South Africa. When did you set sail?

CORREIA We leave South Africa. First I come here to see in 1951, and I go back. When I come with the ship - 1952.

JD And did you sail, or did you have engines?

JD Both! And how many people were on board?

CORREIA We have on board 23 peoples on board.

JD Were they all men, or men and women?

CORREIA There was one woman and a little boy, a boy from one of the mans comes on board.

JD And what was the accommodation on the ship like?

CORREIA Well accommodation - none was too good and none too bad, just....
[Laughs]. Just tries best to....

JD Did you have bad weather on the voyage?

CORREIA Yes, we be a lot of time stop in port because we can't get through because the weather was bad. We had to wait for good weather. And then keep moving.

JD Where did you actually leave from in South Africa?

CORREIA Leave from Cape Town.

JD Cape Town! And then you went up the east coast?

CORREIA And then we come to Mauritius. From Mauritius to Rodriguez Island, and Rodriguez Island straight to Western Australia.

JD And did you have plenty of stores on board?

CORREIA Yes, we carry quite a lot of stores but not there to control - I let the people use what they like. [Laughs].

JD What about water?

CORREIA Yes water we used to carry.

JD You had plenty of water?

CORREIA We never had short anything because everything we have control, we control.

JD And did you have any trouble with the boat on the way over?

CORREIA No, we never have much trouble because have two good mechanics on board. We had enough rain. Everything comes.

JD Did you have radio?

CORREIA Yes, I have a radio.

JD Did the South African authorities know you were leaving?

CORREIA Well they knew, because one I bring all these people to [unclear] up there. They be cleaning, the boat had been there about.... I can't remember. But the men finished the boat and then come back.

JD And they didn't try and stop you at all?

CORREIA Oh no, no, no, no. I had permission already from here.

JD Did the Australian authorities know you were sailing the boat across?

CORREIA Yes, they know because I tell them what I going to do. Because when I come here I ask for permission to bring this 15 fishermans. I never say how many crew be with the boat, and to bring the boat here. And they give me a letter - yes, you go to Australia and bringing your men and your boat.

JD And where was the boat built?

CORREIA Well, this boat was quite old boat. It was built in South Africa quite very old. It was built I don't know.

JD You bought it in South Africa?

CORREIA We bought it in South Africa.

JD Was it a single mast, or double mast, or....?

CORREIA Single mast. It was like a trawler - trawling.

JD Oh yeah, right! And were they one engined or twin engined?

CORREIA One engine.

JD Diesel?

CORREIA Diesel engine.

JD And it performed alright?

CORREIA It performed quite good. We had two good canvas on board and it make everything go.

JD Did you pass many other vessels on the journey?

CORREIA Well, we never see many of the other vessels.

JD It would be a pretty lonely sort of a trip!

CORREIA When I put my foot here, he give me Australia to do another trip, I don't think I would. [Laughter].

JD No, I bet not. And did you ever get lost at all?

CORREIA No, I never got lost.

JD You knew exactly where you were all the time?

CORREIA I came the boat because I want to show the boys the canvas in the boat. I came in him to make him [unclear - sounds like scuffelto]. Because see world, busy sea world - we should be alright. Like I never come with hims, I think with the route.

JD Were you the captain of the boat?

CORREIA No, no. We have a captain.

JD Can you remember the names of any of the other people on board?

CORREIA Oooh.... I can't remember the names now.

JD No, no. I thought that many of them would still be in Western Australia.

CORREIA Oh yes, a lot of them still in Western Australia. But the names - I no remember.

JD Right. And whereabouts on the West Australian coast did you come to?

CORREIA Fremantle.

JD You came straight to Fremantle?

CORREIA Straight to Fremantle. And from that time in Fremantle, I stop in Fremantle, stay in Fremantle.

JD You've always been in Fremantle?

CORREIA Always in Fremantle.

JD Right. And you went fishing then?

CORREIA Yes, for a start I be fishing.

JD And what happened to the boat eventually?

CORREIA Well, we had the bad luck with the boat. The first year the boat caught fire. We got that boat, and then we got another - buy another - two catcher boats, because this was a big boat, a big freezer. And we got two small catcher boats to catch for the other. This big boat caught fire and sink. And then we keep the other two boats.

JD You were fishing out of Fremantle?

CORREIA Out of Fremantle.

JD North, or....?

CORREIA North.

JD What, up Lancelin way?

CORREIA We started in Lancelin and at that time the crayfish industry was open up in Lancelin. From Lancelin north, nobody knew anything about. And then we go to Lancelin, and from Lancelin we go to Jurien Bay. We were the first ones to go to Jurien Bay. And then keep going north and north.

JD Right! To come back to the voyage, were there any illnesses on board?

CORREIA Well, one man he got very sick - got seasick. I see, and thought he going to die. But he was alright. He was only one who was very [sick]. [A third person entered the interview at this stage, speaking Portuguese].

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON

He don't like the weather. He's still alive.

JD How did the people keep themselves occupied on such a long voyage on a small ship.

CORREIA Well keep looking to the sea, and keep steering the boat, and each one he got his time to steer the boat.

JD And work around the place?

CORREIA Work around the place, yes - cooking and cleaning, always something to do. Otherwise in pray. [Laughter].

JD Were the people frightened at all on that voyage?

CORREIA Well sometimes it make you frightened, to tell you truth. Because we was lucky, we could get the very strong weather - wind - but it was before we got wind from the back. It was from the front, I don't think we can make it. From the back it be pushing the boat.

JD Did you go well south or did you come straight across?

CORREIA Well, from Mauritius we come to Port Rodriguez and straight to here. Straight to Fremantle.

JD Would you remember what latitude you were about?

CORREIA Well I forgot what it was.

JD No, OK. Anything else you'd like to say about the voyage, first of all?

CORREIA Well, I don't think I've got much to say because most of it been forgotten. [Laughs].

JD Can't think of anything else that was important? What were your main worries on board?

CORREIA Well main worries - everything come right. And I got weathers to....

JD Were you happy when you got here? I bet you were!

CORREIA Oh yes, it be alright.

JD Were the people pleased that they'd made it?

CORREIA They be pleased to be here.

JD So what did they do when they got here into Fremantle?

CORREIA Well, when we got here we start to fix the boat properly because the season, the crayfish season, was full at that time. I forgot I meant to arrive here and the season was closed. In June, July.... about July.

JD That's about the worst time of the year, isn't it?

CORREIA Yes. We prepare the boat, clean. We never took a preparation of the boat, we make the preparation here. And then waiting for the November month to open for start of [the season].

JD Where did the people live? Did they come ashore?

CORREIA I have house here in Fremantle, everyone live in the house.

JD Was it in the Beaconsfield area that you and your people lived?

CORREIA No, it was north Buckland Hill, [unclear] we bought a house there.

JD Did they all go fishing? They wouldn't all have gone fishing, surely?

CORREIA All start fishing. But after the boat sink we never have place for everybody that all had been involved crayfish, went find a job somewhere else. You can find a job, just keep quiet, rest and look for some other jobs.

JD One of your brothers came with you, but you had six brothers and they have all ended up in Western Australia.

CORREIA Yes, all ended up in other thing. One who start fishing. I have a brother - the one who come from Venezuela here - he no like the sea, he got the seasick. Well I told myself, what you going to do for him? It was no good putting him in waves. Where we come from we have a plantation, a banana plantation. We see bananas in the shops and say, well, where these bananas come from? From Carnarvon! Where's Carnarvon? Oh, 600 miles north.

I tell the brother, we go see how they grow bananas there. I bring my car, on the boat I bring my own car. Well we go to Carnarvon. At that time the roads was very bad, they say you can't make it in one day. It take two days to get to Carnarvon. We look all plantations, see prices [of] plantations. I ask him - this you like? Oh yes, I like to own this. So we see a plantation, we bought a plantation.

JD Oh! And there's quite a community of Portuguese people in Carnarvon?

CORREIA At that time there was not one.

JD No, but afterwards?

CORREIA After we got the plantation we take seven Portuguese people there to work, and then we bought another one, and another one - 'til we have three plantations there.

JD Are they still up in the Carnarvon area?

CORREIA We still got two plantations there. We sell one because the brother is now retired.

JD Yes, there seems to be two communities of Portuguese people - one in the Fremantle area and one in Portu.... [correction] in Carnarvon.

CORREIA All in [unclear].

JD And then there was another sizeable community in Sydney, I think.

CORREIA Yes, Sydney. The people now in Portugal say well, Mr Correia, he goes to Australia but this and that. He told us Australia just a small place. There's people now going to Australia who come to Fremantle thinking it is a small place. When they come they find themselves in Sydney. We in Western Australia. Someone of them ring - aye, all my friends, I got Marie coming, I got my sister here, and some keep stopping there. One stop there, he bring his friends there and that's why they split.

JD Were the people in Sydney, were they from Madeira too?

CORREIA Yes, from Madeira; and also from the mainland. It was when I get all those peoples from Portugal to Australia, Australia they never even heard of it. The name of Australia never before. [Laughter].

JD Did you get any assistance from the Australian Government?

CORREIA No, no assistance at all.

JD And how did you find Australian people? Were they different, or....?

CORREIA Oh, all good peoples. No complaints at all.

JD Could any of your people speak English when they came?

CORREIA No, not one speak English.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON

I think my niece speak a little bit.... [lapsed into Portuguese].
No, very little.

JD Did I hear, years ago, that there was a Priest on board?

CORREIA No. Not true.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON

Not true.

JD Anything else you'd like to tell us, either about the voyage or about your time in Australia?

CORREIA Well, I like Australia. I never change Australia for anything else.

JD You're glad you came?

CORREIA I was alright in South Africa, too, but Australia just the same.

JD And is the Portuguese community thriving, is it going along alright?

CORREIA Yes, all going alright. [Another lapse into Portuguese with a third person]. All these peoples are bringing.... see Zonda here [unclear] brings all his wives, and some others - Marie bring the girlfriends. We got Marie, all start of them.

JD Are there still a lot of the Portuguese people in the fishing industry out here?

CORREIA Yes, still quite a lot. Of course a lot of them they buy their own boats, too. We got about thirty-five Portuguese boats here; [unclear] and fish is on board.

JD About thirty-five boats!

CORREIA About thirty-five, maybe forty.

JD Gee! Mostly fishing from Fremantle?

CORREIA From Fremantle. We've got few prawning also. Carnarvon.

JD And they would be mostly relatives of the people who came with you originally, would they?

CORREIA Yes, we start off all from relatives, and then comes friends and....

JD Sure! It's a great story. It's a good story.

CORREIA And after we got plantations we got peoples to work on plantation.

JD Did many of the people who came out go back to Portugal?

CORREIA I don't think. Some of them that makes his mind to go to Abrolhos, they there for few months....

JD Then come back again!

CORREIA They come back again! [Laughter].

JD Right. Anything else then that you'd like to say about anything.

CORREIA Well, I don't think I've got much to say because I've forgotten all.

JD Tell me, what would you say is the main problem that faces people coming to this country, as you came?

CORREIA Well....

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON

We don't speak English.

CORREIA No, to come to Australia you have to pass so many points, and for these points in these parts somebody [? unclear], because if one does not [? unclear] they don't pass the points.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON

.... people from Portugal better have now.

JD Yes indeed. Well, thank you very much, that was very, very interesting.

CORREIA Well, thank you for the job.

JD I'm glad we got it on tape. Thank you.

That is the end of this interview with Mr Francisco Correia. The interview was conducted at his home in Bicton by Jack Darcey on the 22nd November 1989.

END OF INTERVIEW

END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A