



Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity

The Friends of Gibraltar Oral History Project (1930 to 1970)

Claude Baldachino interviewed in Gibraltar by Mary Ingoldby on 12th July 2013

Track 1

Introduction; family: Father was Gibraltarian, Grandfather from Malta; family were shipwrights; Mother was Spanish, originally from Malaga. CB is the eldest; he has a sister six years younger.

CB born 21st February 1931; eight years old when the war.

CB – *Everyone knew we were going to be evacuated but nobody knew where – never told where, everybody thought we were going to England.*

Evacuated to Morocco first, brought back to Gibraltar
They put us on a cargo ship, all mainly women and children; the only men were old; father not allowed to go; took 17 days to avoid German submarines – sometimes I used to up the ladder and look, and I saw in front well ahead a Destroyer or something smaller and that was the only escort that we had, I went back a second time and ship wasn't there, no escort.

Arrived in Jamaica

Everybody thought that we were in England – didn't see any white people, I went down below and said Mummy I don't think we are in England and she said no we are in England.

We disembarked and got into buses, still thought we were in England, I said to the driver what part of England are we going to, you are not in England, no you are in Jamaica so I said to everyone in the bus we we're in Jamaica, at the beginning nobody knew where Jamaica was.

Evacuees were taken to a camp called Gibraltar camp – there was a similar camp for the Maltese but they never came.

It was very hot, I remember the grass used to grow really high, we used to play in the grass and nobody could see us; saw a lot of scorpions; we were quite happy but we didn't know where we were, we knew we were in Jamaica but we didn't know how far away it was

They lived in large huts, there were rooms and a big corridor, shared with other families; ***we found out that we were in Jamaica.***

I remember the weather was completely different to what we were used to – we used to enjoy the rain, sometimes when it rained and it rained practically every day in the summer....

CB speaks about rain being really localised you could play football in the dry and then move to another nearby spot when the rain came.

The earthquakes we had heard about these, all of sudden at the beginning we were playing football, the whole thing moved, we were very frightened we didn't know what to do, and everybody ran to tell our mothers ...then we got used to it, there were so many, practically two or three earthquakes every week – you could see the whole thing moving.

We went to school, there was a church and a big restaurant where we ate every day; the teachers were mainly American nuns; very nice teachers, they also took a few young Gibraltarians assist in teaching; there was a convent there

CB was very friendly with the nuns and sometimes they used to take him to the convent; they used to play cards; CB tells anecdote about seeing one of the younger nuns, a beautiful young woman, with her hair down.

CB joined the scouts, remembers a man who was employed as security to look after them.

We were told that he was a heavy weight boxing champion from Cuba, a huge man very fit; he used to take the children on Saturdays to the river he used to look after us. He used to speak Spanish, a very nice man; we knew we were in good safe hands with him. Always laughing and playing jokes one day – one day he lifted a bar with ten children hanging on it.

CB speaks about being warned about the hurricanes. There were two or three buildings in the camp that were made of concrete and they were instructed to go to these buildings in a hurricane; the huts were all wood.

They say the Gibraltarians are blessed, all the other hurricanes that go along Jamaica you only seem to be getting the tail end which is not very strong, but if it is strong you have to run to these buildings

At this particular time it was a bit stronger so we all ran to the church my mother my sister and myself, but I wanted to see , I opened the window and looked – I could see the trees were bending and all of a sudden one of these huts the roof was of wood, about eighteen metres long, the roof blew completely like a piece of paper in the wind and I could see it flying, I told my mother and everyone wanted to see

And I remember there was one particular tree and there used to be a cow chained to the tree chained through the nose, I saw it every day on the way to school and on this particular time that tree was blown and I saw the poor cow jumping all over the place – the wind was very very very strong, you could hear the river, the flow of the river, because it was raining at the same time, a hell of a current, even though it was far away you could listen

We went two days later to the river and it was about four times its former size going at a hell of a speed.

Track 2

MI speaks about link to University of West Indies photo archive

I remember that every time we ate we used to go to a big restaurant for everybody; we didn't have kitchens inside our own huts.

CB speaks about the security in the camp

We had police officers to look after us and nobody was allowed in or out, if we left we had to report on the way out and the way in – everything was within the camp.

I went to Kingston once or twice, the capital, we used to go on Saturdays some times to a small village and they used to sell a lot of fruits, it was about 20 mins on the bus from the camp.

I found all the Jamaicans to be very nice people.; we were always well guarded by the Cuban man – Jamaica was a British Colony then

Many Gibraltarians have been back to Jamaica but CB hasn't, and they say that things are not the same.

CB speaks about the beauty of the country, particularly a place called Hope Garden which was full of flowers; CB always liked flowers and animals; speaks about digging a pond and putting fish in it. Flowers and vegetables flourished in the climate; CB remembers planting tomatoes outside his hut.

MI: *How many years were you there?*

About four years

MI: *How did you get news of Gibraltar?*

My father and mother used to write to each other, we knew very little about the outside world

MI: *Was your mother worried?*

Yes I would think so, I think everyone was a bit worried – we used to hear about it, how bad it was in London, people used to say it's a good thing we've been brought to Jamaica and not London. And the teachers didn't tell us anything

MI: *How did you hear you were going to come home?*

We heard rumours and it never happened and never happened and then one day we were told we've got to be ready, we are going next week.

The ship home a better ship than the one they went in, had to pull in to one of the islands and had to stay there about three days; and the word got round that it was because there was a submarine waiting for us; we weren't allowed to get off the ship;

And then back to Gibraltar

My father was there, everybody, the ship was full of women and children

MI: *Births and deaths?*

Because many of the evacuees were elderly quite a lot of them died at the camp and are buried in a cemetery in Jamaica. Some Gibraltarians have been back; CB has been told that his camp is a University now.

CB Speaks about his father, a shipwright in the dockyard – putting a boom across the harbour to stop the submarines.

MI: *You still had your house when you came back?*

CB and family were placed in a school for about a year after they came back until a new house was built for them; CB speaks about coming back later than other evacuees, all evacuees from London returned before those from Jamaica. CB speaks about going to the Sacred Heart School and then getting in to The Grammar School.

After school CB took and passed (came second) an exam to become an apprentice in the dockyard; he trained as an electrical fitter; after this he went into the police force.

CB very successful career in the police force; sent to England for three months training; CB promoted to sergeant, station sergeant then inspector and then chief inspector, used to go to England for courses and finished up as chief superintendent; did 31 years with them and then retired, had to retire at 55 – otherwise could have carried on and become a commissioner

After retirement from the police force CB worked for fifteen years as manager for an insurance company.

Track 3

CB speaks about being an honorary ADC for two Governors. He was good at his job and worked as an ADC for nine years; very much enjoyed it, following protocol; diplomacy; meeting VIPs

MI: *When you started in the police force – what sort of crime in Gibraltar?*

There were thousands of servicemen, they used to misbehave one would start a fight and everyone joined in – hundreds of them in one fight, We used to get on well with navy/army/RAF patrols.

MI: *What happened after a fight?*

At the beginning we would arrest them and take them to the police station and depending on what they had done, just hand them over to the naval patrol – used to be dealt by captain of ship – if they caused a lot of damage we would have to wait until the next morning and take them to court – the ship would have to stay until the next day – as soon as we can get somebody to say how much the damage would cost, the ship would pay the damage

MI: *What other sort of crime?*

More crime now because people coming from everywhere you don't know who they are, in those days crime not very much, mainly causing damage – we had a couple of murders and we managed to solve them, had a record for 100% - there was a naval chap who killed somebody but we managed to trace him, he was taken to England and tried there

MI: *Why tried in England?*

Sometimes we used to try them here, but otherwise, if the punishment was so many years then they would be transferred to prison in England

MI speaks about the two people who were hung in Gibraltar during the war for planting a bomb. Pierrepont arriving in Gibraltar and nobody looking at him

Celia Baldachino comments:

Pierrepont story: it was the last hanging we had, the hanging I think was done in the prison itself, he came for the two men who had been spies –during the war, early, actually if you go up to the Moorish castle they are buried there but there is plaque on the wall – it is in the ground but they don't know where

Celia Baldachino speaks about MI5/I6

It has been recorded that the biggest number of M15 and M16 was in Gibraltar because the Germans had made their way down to Algeciras but the fact is the Germans were ready to come down with their troops in trains through Spain but the reason they didn't is that the grid would not take the wheels of the German trains – apparently the movement of troops wasn't done because of that

MI Spies in Gibraltar?

It is a fact that it was the biggest contingent – a lot of them were around incognito because the obvious ones were in the Rock Hotel and the Spaniards knew it and it was so easy to keep an eye on Gibraltar from Algeciras - ship movement aircraft and everything but because so much going on with German spies, Spanish, British everything the best place to meet to discuss these things were in the brothels in La Linea.

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