

name and he picked Thomas out of the hat. After the end of the war he went to work for the Control Commission in Germany.”

During his years back in Germany Thomas senior helped set up the free German press.

And keeping up with the army tradition Julian Thomas chose to complete his national service in the German army. “I did it partly because I thought it was my duty,” explained Thomas, “and also to improve my German.”

Thomas had just graduated, in 1982, in modern languages (including Portuguese) from Oxford University and then put in a two-year stint in the German army.

Outside of work and his family, Thomas has a passion for classic cars and motorcycles and of course bow ties, an interest in which was initiated when he “inherited a batch of them” from his father.

He owns a Bentley S3 and two BMW motorcycles, including an R100R(1,000 cc).

He is even planning to go touring on it so one day we might see something like the Motorcycle Diaries of Ernesto “Che” Guevara (who travelled around South America on a Norton while a medical student) or a latter-day version such as Ewan McGregor, the actor, completed. Maybe even with a special bow tie under the leather attire!

To keep fit Thomas likes to go jogging and is also partial to the odd stint of mountain biking, mostly near his “mountain retreat pad” which is in the mountainous state of Minas Gerais, close to the fashionable mountain resort of Campos do Jordao.

As a footnote in trying to decide whether Thomas feels more German or English, or even Brazilian, I asked him who he supports when it comes to football.

He said he usually supports England over Germany, but sometimes when in England he supports Germany, and he is not sure why.

“And then something very interesting happened in that area the other year during the World Cup,” explained Thomas. “It was England v Brazil and all my family were supporting Brazil so I began by supporting England, but then when England went ahead I began supporting Brazil, as it didn’t seem right that Brazil should lose.

“I guess it means that my loyalties are obviously very divided. I guess it means too that I am not that nationalistic, I have been around for too long and lived in so many different places.”

..... and bought so many bow ties along the roads!

## GLENN MURPHY

*Director, Irish Maritime Development Office*

**“You have got to look for the positives and while all the companies have cut back – lo-lo operators for instance have had to take 25-29% of capacity out of the market last year and 20% in the last six months of 2008 – all the operators who have been in the Irish market over the last ten years are still in business”**

It is refreshing to come across a government official (or in this case an official from a government quango) who actually knows what he is talking about. Glenn Murphy has spent the last nine years as a Director of the influential Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO) but believes his 14 years as a ship broker beforehand, prepared him well for what is not a job where targets are set on an hourly or indeed, daily basis.

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According to its website, the Irish Maritime Development Office (IMDO) is Ireland’s first national dedicated development, promotional and marketing agency for the shipping services sector. Use of the ‘quango’ soubriquet is possibly misplaced as the IMDO is part of the Marine Institute, which is a state agency responsible for researching the potential of Ireland’s vast marine resources. But in its Director’s words,



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the IMDO acts as a crucial conduit between industry and government – promoting the Irish domestic and international shipping industry where possible and assisting the development of Irish shipping and the Irish shipping services and seafarer training. It has a legislative mandate to advise the Minister for Transport on the development and the co-ordination of policy in the shipping and shipping services sectors, in order as to protect and create employment. It is also charged with advising the government on development and co-ordination of policy relating to the Ports and Ports services sector.

And according to Glenn Murphy, the job facing the Irish government and the IMDO following over 15 years of near double digit growth is immense. The Irish economy is an open economy, he told *SMI*, and so is dependent on what happens globally – whether intra-European or Asian or the US, an important market for Irish exports.

“We have two shipping company segments in Ireland –coastal companies who are involved in the day-to-day movement of goods into and out of the Irish economy – the direct service providers – and we have a second cluster of companies involved in international trade. But they have both been hit by the current crisis. From a national perspective, companies that have been dealing with the Irish economy have had a very severe contraction in volumes across all sectors whether it is ro-ro or lo-lo or bulk and that comes against a backdrop of nearly 15 years of year-on-year growth sometimes double digit year on year,” he said.

But third quarter shipping and port statistics recently published by the Irish Maritime Development Office suggest that the rate and pace of the decline in shipping traffic volume continued to ease. But despite this, the sector has recorded its 7th consecutive quarter of traffic volume decline. Lift-on/lift-off (lo/lo) traffic fell by 20% in the third quarter to 268,357teu which resulted in more than 50,000 fewer laden units being carried over this quarter compared to the same period in 2008. Two thirds of laden volumes were previously made up of imports, in particular from Asia. Lo/lo container volumes slumped over the past 18

Liquids to Value

months due to an abrupt correction in consumer demand and slowdown in the domestic construction sector. Seasonal factors related to Christmas demand resulted in a slight rise in imports, by 5% in September from August. Exports were also up 22% month on month between September and August. These seasonal factors were absent in 2008 when volumes continued to fall at an accelerated rate of decline from the middle of the year. The IMDO has since forecast a total decline of 23% in lo/lo volumes to the year end.

Roll-on/roll-off (ro/ro) traffic, which is largely weighted towards shipping services to and from the UK, fell by 8% between July and September with 385,259 units being handled. Volumes on the direct continental ro/ro routes increased by 64% to 8,044 units in the third quarter of 2009. Overall in the ro/ro sector, 35,000 less freight units were carried on all routes when compared to same quarter in 2008, with a total of 152,000 units less for the first nine months of the year. As far as the dry sector was concerned, dry bulk volumes declined by 34% in quarter three 2009. The dry bulk markets have seen heavy volume erosion since the volume peaks recorded in mid 2007. Since this point there is now 4 million tons less of dry bulk cargoes being shipped through Irish Ports. However there has been some notable volume recovery during the period July to September. Improved global demand for alumina and ores has boosted volume throughput during the last quarter, this was also helped by modest domestic increases in agricultural fertilizers and grains. The breakbulk sector that is predominantly weighted in transport of construction related materials remained subdued with a further 45% decline in volumes during the 3rd quarter. Tanker volumes declined by 22% in the third quarter 2009 when compared to the same period in 2008.

According to the IMDO, the main shipping routes have continued to make short run adjustments to the supply of shipping capacity in 2009 while there has also been some notable structural route consolidation in the market by some operators. IMDO estimates that total available capacity has been reduced by a further 13% in the third quarter, which has been implemented by a reduction of frequency on certain routes and reduction in vessel sizes.

While being realistic about the financial situation, Glenn Murphy is optimistic about the way ahead: "You have got to look for the positives and while all the companies have cut back – lo-lo operators for instance have had to take 25%-29% of capacity out of the market last year and 20% in the last six months of 2008 – all the operators who have been in the Irish market over the last ten years are still in business. The fundamentals of the companies still operating in the sector are still the same, so from a cost overhead point of view, the companies have got themselves well positioned to deal with slower or thinner volumes in 2010 and are probably in a good position to ride out the downturn. We expect the economy will come out of technical recession in 2010 but we are unlikely to see any real volume growth till 2011 and 2012 – so we are a number of years away from those peaks again," he added.

**“We expect the economy will come out of technical recession in 2010 but we are unlikely to see any real volume growth till 2011 and 2012 – so we are a number of years away from those peaks”**

"Those companies trading internationally have been in business a long time and are still family businesses, and we did not see many of them overstretch themselves during that period of growth in the same way as in other parts of Europe. So in terms of tonnage overcapacity sitting on the books of Irish companies, that will not be such a major problem. The downside will be that they will be competing in markets that will be suffering from too much capacity," he stressed. ■



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