

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
DALE O. BENDER  
Engineer, Navy, World War II.

2007

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**Bender, Dale O.**, (1921- ). Oral History Interview, April 2007.

User Copy: 3 sound cassettes (ca. 100 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 3 sound cassettes (ca. 100 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Dale O. Bender discusses his service in the Navy during World War II aboard LST-901, including his experiences during the post-war occupation of Truk. Bender touches on the assemblage of the crew, the ship production lines at Dravo Ship Yards where his LST was built, and sailing the new ship downriver with the assistance of a Coast Guard crew. He comments on the ship's use of ballast, riding rough seas in a flat bottomed ship, and the shakedown cruise at Panama Beach (Florida). Bender addresses the inexperience of the officers, the ship's armaments, and passing through the Panama Canal. He tells of stopping in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico because someone forgot to refill the oil in the daily service tank. As an engineering officer, he details running fire drills at nearly every port, making repairs, censoring mail, and earning a good reputation among the crew. During his return to the States, Bender recalls a near-disaster after the captain forgot to set a special sea detail and the throttle got stuck. He tells of supervising the ship's fog generator at Okinawa, constantly having to repair the laundry machines, and causing a commotion after conveying some women nurses to shore. Bender relates how the crew hoarded empty Coke bottles, turned them in for over 200 dollars after returning to the States, and had a big party. He mentions developing and printing photographs aboard ship and making a photo album for the crew. Bender discusses shooting at kamikaze planes and not being allowed to shoot into restricted zones. He characterizes the stores officer who served as captain and a mustang officer named Patrick Henry Sullivan, who was in charge of overseeing the ship's yard overhaul. Bender tells of being made captain of the ship after the other officers with seniority were discharged and getting put in charge of the flotilla headed to Portland (Oregon) for decommissioning. He reflects on breaking regulations such as no liquor or photograph-taking, as well as bribing a port commander with food so the ship could tie up at a pier rather than hit the beach. He talks about dating a nurse in Portland. Bender speaks of taking a probationary commission in the Navy in 1941, having difficulty finding his birth certificate, working at Allis-Chalmers after graduating college in 1943, and not being called up right away because the Navy had lost his orders. He mentions his indoctrination at the University of Arizona and attending diesel school in Flint (Michigan). After the war, Bender details being part of the pre-occupation force at Truk: escorting Marines and a general to shore on an LCVP, being the first American to set foot on the island, seeing the damage at the airfield from American bombardment, and interacting with Japanese soldiers. He talks about being a mother ship for small mine sweepers, receiving a huge number of eggs by accident, and trading cigarettes to the Japanese for souvenir swords and pornography. Bender describes refueling a Japanese destroyer and receiving a bottle of Suntory scotch

as thanks. He reflects on the positive reactions he encountered from the Japanese on Truk.

**Biographical Sketch:**

Bender (b. 1921), served in the Navy aboard LST 901 and achieved the rank of captain. He was discharged from active duty in 1946, spent 22 years working in intelligence in the Navy Reserve, and settled in Madison, Wis. He served for a time on the board of directors of the Great Lakes Naval Memorial & Museum.

Interviewed by John Weingandt, April 3, 2007  
Transcription by John P. Danish, 2008  
Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011  
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

**Interview Transcript:**

John: It's 2007 and we're here with Dale Bender, and we're going to relate some of the experiences he's had on LST-901 during the Second World War. Dale, we've got quite a bit of other stuff on you, so why don't you start where you'd like to be on this?

Bender: Well, basically, in World War II they were putting so many LSTs in commission, what they did is they would assemble the whole crew and that meant the quartermasters came in from the Quartermaster School, the diesel guys came in from the Diesel School.

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: The officers came in together; you were basically a whole crew and trained as a whole crew. In the meantime the ship is being built. And as you know, the ships were built inland. Ours happened to be built in Pittsburgh by Dravo, that's D-R-A-V-O, and I think Dravo built bridges. They were also built in Evansville, Indiana and a couple of other spaces; they called them "prairie shipyards" [both laugh] and they were set up almost like a production line, and they were bashing 'em out. From the time they laid the keel 'til they launched 'em, started out three months, then they got down, I guess, even to less: thirty, thirty-five days.

John: To build the entire ship and it's ready to go?

Bender: Yeah. And when we picked it up in Pittsburgh, I mean it's all set. The linens are in there, all our spare parts are in there, our tools are in there for the engineer, and really in good shape. And incidentally, different shipyards got different reputations; Dravo built very good ships. There were some, I guess, that had a few problems. They used to rivet ships but these were welded together, so you wanted a good weld.

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: Ah basically, as I said, we picked it up; we went down the Ohio.

John: Wait a minute; you've never run this ship before—just before you go on, Dale, you've never run this ship, you're brand new to it and you're in fresh water, thousands of miles from the ocean, and you've gotta go down a river that's not especially wide?

Bender: I should tell you there were special Coast Guard crews; they would come up to the shipyard and they would pick up the ship.

John: So you were passengers?

Bender: Well, yeah, but all our men were helping. For example, all my—

John: So it was a training-type thing?

Bender: Yeah, and they just had a senior petty officer down in the engine room, a senior one at the wheel, and so on. No, they didn't trust us [laughs], and let me tell you, we went down during a melt. Actually, we left Pittsburgh, by the way, on January 2<sup>nd</sup>. But we went down and it was pretty much high water. The mast, of course, is down because you wouldn't clear bridges; as a matter of fact, we went down and I can remember standing on the con, that's the top, literally sticking my hand up and almost touching the bottom of the bridge. And they, of course, went down right at the center of the river where the bridge is the highest. So it was interesting. And after we got down to New Orleans, I presume the Coast Guard crew got a couple days off and then they went back up to Pittsburgh, bring down another one which was ready, probably, by that time. But we took it over after we got to New Orleans. Then they put the mast in, then we took on food, ammunition.

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: Fuel. Since it was a brand new clean ship, they filled the ballast tanks with fuel to take over, so we were almost like a fuel ship.

John: Yeah.

Bender: Incidentally, an LST, we used to say, was part submarine and that's how they could land on the beach. When you're at sea, and especially in bad weather, you want it sitting low in the water, so you'd fill all your ballast tanks, but when you got ready to hit the beach, you'd blow all the water out of the ballast tanks so you would—and the difference at the bow was, um, about six feet difference. I mean, we could hit the beach with only drawing three feet forward, but out at sea where you wanted to be in deep, we'd draw, I think, eight feet.

John: Essentially a flat bottom?

Bender: Flat bottom.

John: I won't say boat; ship, right?

Bender: Yeah. I don't know if I told you this during the last talk, but in rough weather she would go over sort of one way, then it would come down [crack!] flat.

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: Three hundred twenty-seven feet long, fifty feet wide, and [crack!] it hits the bottom [laughs], and if you were sleeping in your sack [John laughs] you literally rose out of the sack, you know. It was something.

John: Yeah, I do know enough about ships that a flat bottom is not a good ride.

Bender: But the interesting thing—for example, later on we were in a typhoon off of Okinawa and a couple destroyers capsized in that and we rode it out.

John: Hmm.

Bender: Though I can tell you—and this is interesting. Up in the wheelhouse there's a little thing that shows you how much of a roll you have.

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: And we knew it could take a certain amount, certain degree of roll, and I can't remember what this was. Let's say it could take a seventeen and a half degree roll; I stood up in the wheelhouse and watched that indicator go up to about eighteen and stay there. [John laughs] I swear, you know, you thought it stayed there for minutes; it probably stayed there for ten seconds before it finally came back slowly, and then, of course, it went all the way up the other side.

John: Sure.

Bender: But we rode it out. I'll admit, we didn't have any hot food for about three days because you couldn't—

John: You probably didn't want any?

Bender: —you couldn't keep anything on the stove, so it was coffee and sandwiches.

John: Hmm.

Bender: And you needed the coffee 'cause just about everybody was up all the time. [laughs] But after we came in with no damages—I'm sure we had some minor damages topside.

John: What year was the ship commissioned? I know it was January.

Bender: It was January of '45.

John: '45, okay. So the war is starting to wind down a little bit, isn't it?

Bender: Yup, yup.

John: So you are out in the Gulf of Mexico now and you're doing maybe a shakedown with the LST?

Bender: That's what they called it, a shakedown.

John: Yeah.

Bender: Shakedown was in Panama Beach, Florida.

John: Yeah, the panhandle.

Bender: And they had a bunch of old sea dogs there and they came and they put you through the loops; I mean, they gave you the toughest time you have ever—which is good, 'cause if there was any problem, you wanted it to happen right then and there.

John: Tell me an example of what kind of things they might put you through. What was your duty on the ship, first of all?

Bender: I was the engineering officer.

John: Alright, then. Now these old sea dogs, what would they put you through?

Bender: Oh, typically we would actually take on fuel from a fuel, from a tanker.

John: Yeah.

Bender: And that is tricky job, you know, 'cause you've got this hose stretched from one to another and you don't want to get too far apart.

John: Of course, yeah.

Bender: 'Cause you'll break the hose and you don't want to get too close, 'cause you're gonna bash into each other. They would do that, then they had us land, do practice landings and pull off. You know, an LST, when it went into the beach dropped a *big* anchor about three hundred feet out, so when you got ready to retract from the beach, you put your engines in reverse.

John: Pulling?

Bender: But then you took a strain on that anchor and—

John: I understand, yeah.

Bender: —and that, the motor on that anchor was so big that if you were going to use it you had to put another generator on the line because it literally required all the power from one of the three generators we had.

John: Hmm.

Bender: Normally you operated with maybe one, but this one you wanted all three on the line because, ah, God! You know the lights would dim and everything else whenever you took a strain on there.

John: So these sea dogs ran you through these exercises. They were in charge of the ship, you guys were the students, if you would?

Bender: Well, no, they were the teachers; they were giving you the test.

John: Okay.

Bender: They stood there.

John: Oh, okay, see if you could handle it?

Bender: See if you could handle it. And the poor captain, of course, now he had been to sea before and he was brought back in to take over the ship.

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: And I think we had one other officer, no two other officers that had been at sea, but the rest of the officers were green as grass. They all knew their specialty; the gunnery officer knew guns and I knew the engines and so on, down the line.

John: What kind of armament does an LST have? Are there antiaircraft guns?

Bender: Ours had only antiaircraft guns, 20 mm and 40 mm.

John: Okay.

Bender: They had tried putting a, what's called a three-inch-fifty on it, but they found that really that wasn't much good for antiaircraft, and every time they fired it all the china in the galley would shake. [both laugh] So they took it off and they put a twin-forty, that's a double forty. We could throw a lot of antiaircraft stuff. Of course now it would be useless because planes now are so much faster, but in those days it was effective, and especially if



you had ten LSTs, for example, shooting up, you wondered how a damn Jap could get through that. That's something.

John: Well, let's find out about that. You've had your shakedown cruise now and now you're on your own. Do you have orders, you're going to report someplace?

Bender: We come back to New Orleans.

John: Um-hmm.

Bender: Top-off, a few minor repairs that showed up and so on. And then there's still Germans in the Gulf of Mexico and they're no longer sending the LSTs from New Orleans to the Panama Canal in convoy, they send you out by yourself. Which is interesting. And here's a minor sea story: You have a man who's called the oil king and it is his job to check all the tanks, not only fuel but water, and when you're traveling on shakedown, for example, you come into port each night, so—the fluid, the diesel has to be cleaned before you use it and you take it from your big tank, run it through the centrifuge, clean it, and put it in the daily service tank.

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: Well, the first day out, of course, we were running for twenty-four hours and he sort of forgets that. And I'm sleeping and all of a sudden I'm aware that the engines have stopped, you know, and I get down to the engine room just about the time the captain is calling down there, "What the hell has happened?" He forgot to run enough fuel into the daily service tank and so we had emptied those, so there's a little problem. An officer has privileges but an officer has responsibility; somebody has to make a decision. I make the decision to draw fuel right from the regular tanks, to hell with the centrifuge; get those engines running.

John: Okay.

Bender: And we do, and no problem. But that is the—

John: Why are you running the diesel through a centrifuge? I know you're trying to clean it, but are there contaminants in there?

Bender: There's probably water in most.

John: Okay.

Bender: Not too much dirt, but the water will always get into that and water does not burn very easily.

John: No. It's a condensation process.

Bender: Right.

John: Okay.

Bender: So we get going and no problem, except my oil king loses a day of liberty when we get back into Panama. We went through the canal and we stopped at Coco Sola, which is on the eastern side of the Panama Canal.

John: What's the name again?

Bender: Coco, C-O-C-O, new word, S-O-L-A.

John: Okay. This is a small port at the beginning of the canal? I've been through the canal, I just don't remember that.

Bender: Well, you probably—I can't remember, but I think it's a little bit off to one side, it's not in the direct path but it's, anyway—but on the way down, of course, the main engine begins to vibrate like all hell, like you wouldn't believe it. So since we get there, I put in a work order to check it and the crew comes aboard and they look at it and they do a batch of things and they say, "No, it's alright." [laughs] So we go through the canal, which is an interesting trip by the way, and we head up the coast towards San Francisco—no, San Diego.

John: San Diego is a big base, yeah.

Bender: Yeah. But—I forgot what I was going to say there. Anyway, oh, I should have brought; I had—one of my men, he was married and he was probably into his forties and he was a beautiful poet. I should I brought it—or did I bring that poem in? It's—I think you got it somewhere.

John: I think I do.

Bender: I know how it starts; it says *Down in the engine room we have a gear that is causing Mr. Bender a lot of fear* [laughs], and then so on, it goes on and he ends up and he says *I hope it goes to hell, because then we can get more Stateside liberty.*

John: [laughs] Maybe a little water in the fuel would help?

Bender: No, but—

John: I don't want to accuse you of doing that on purpose.

Bender: The engine lasted all through the war, there was no problem. And then, you know—

John: I'm not sure we have that poetry, but you had a book with you last time.

Bender: Okay, I will check and get that sent.

John: I have a note here that back in May of '05 we talked about the poetry and his diaries.

Bender: Yeah.

John: I don't think you brought them in though.

Bender: I did the first time. I've got copies here, and then maybe you can have them run off and we'll get to those in a couple of minutes.

John: Okay.

Bender: One of the things I wrote in my diary, it was, I said, "Sunny California, hell. I'm up here on the con wearing a fur-lined jacket."

John: This is San Diego?

Bender: This is on the way to San Diego from the canal, and it is cold.

John: You're in tropical waters.

Bender: [laughs] Yeah.

John: Supposedly.

Bender: But we did pull into 'Frisco, or into San Diego. Every time you pulled in two things happened: you'd get minor repairs, and everywhere you went we had fire drills aboard ship.

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: Fire is something you don't want, especially when you're carrying a couple of hundred thousand gallons of fuel, or later we carried aviation gas in barrels in fifty-five gallon drums.

John: Fire is not good.

Bender: Fire is not good. As soon as you get into a port, you'd come ashore, especially the engineering gang, and go through a fire drill. And, I mean, we would fight fires. I got more Goddamn singed eyebrows. [John laughs] I was very idealistic: okay, I'm the engineering officer, I'm gonna be the guy in front; and I was. When you fight a fuel fire, by the way, you have two hoses; one is the one you've got fighting the fire and the other is the one that's spraying you to keep you from—

John: So you could be close to it?

Bender: Yeah.

John: Okay.

Bender: And as I said, being young and idealistic, I'm up there in front getting' my eyebrows singed and probably my pants singed [John laughs] and everything else. But I felt this was necessary then. The men are gonna obey my orders, and it shows up, incidentally, the first time something goes wrong, and incidentally, there is so much new, not only the main engines and the auxiliaries, but every God-dang thing on that ship. I mean, I had a four-drawer file and all it's got in it is manuals on how to service it. [John laughs] And I remember the first thing that happens—oh, everything always happens at 2 o'clock in the morning, and my phone rings upstairs, up topside, and it's my man down in the main engine room and he says, "We can't maintain pressure on the number two compressor" and we need that, of course, because the clutch is an air-driven clutch on the main engine. So I come down and luckily I had just been reading the manual the day before.

John: That made you an expert compared to everybody else, right?

Bender: Actually, they probably—my senior chief probably knew—I don't know what the problem is but something has to be done immediately. I do know that there's two compressors and you can cross connect them. So immediately I say connect it to the other compressor and that compressor will run both clutches, and we do and we're on our way with no problem. But that's important because the word gets out, you know, that young punk up there—

John: [laughs] He's not so bad after all?

Bender: He knows what he's doing, yeah.

John: Yeah.

Bender: And so you feel better. The other thing that shows up, too, is the officers had to censor mail; you censored it with a scissors, took it and cut it out. And I know that some of the other officers were referred to by the men as “scissors happy.” [John laughs] But some of my older men, especially, they would come up just before port and they would say, “Mr. Bender I would prefer that you censor my mail.” And they would leave the mail with me and I would censor it and it goes into the pack, ‘cause their wives were writing back saying, “Censor number five is scissors happy,” and I knew who five was, it was our navigator, for example. But the word gets out and this ship is a hundred and fifty men and ten officers. Anyway, I was lucky, let’s put it that way. And I had a good crew and after a while, literally, I could—had been up on top sun-bathing, something had happened and my senior chief would come up about two hours later and he’d say, “Mr. Bender, we had a little problem,” and he’d tell me what it was and I said, “Oh,” and I’d start to get up and he’d say, “Naw, it’s all fixed.” They would just fix it and let me know afterwards; they didn’t bother with me most of the time.

John: Hey, that’s great.

Bender: It was; it makes you feel good. Ah, we were gonna do sea stories.

John: Yeah.

Bender: I did tell you, I think, the favorite one, or the first one I wrote is *A special sea detail*. Normally—because at sea, you know, you run twenty-four hours a day, so you’ve got four hours on, eight hours off and then you repeat. But when you come into harbor or anything like that, you want more men in each spot, at the wheel, wheelhouse, down the engine room and so on.

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: And you want your best men there. The captain wants his best man especially at the wheel. [both laugh] But anyway, when we came back to the States we had ran that engine wide open all the way from Pearl Harbor right into Seattle; we hadn’t even stopped for the pilot, we just sort of slowed down and he climbed aboard. And the captain did not set the special sea detail and we were in Seattle harbor—I don’t even know about this; I’m down, somewhere down on the tank deck and I’m not even sure what I’m doing. And as I note in the anecdote, all of a sudden the PA blurbs out; it says, “Mr. Bender lay down to the engine room on the double! [John laughs] On the double!”

John: Uh-huh.

- Bender: And that means get the hell down there! Well, with a good crew—and I did have a good crew—they figure if he’s needed, maybe we’d better go down; so you’re pouring down the ladder. Now incidentally, there’s a ladder, but if you’re in a hurry, you don’t use the steps; you slide down with the edge of the ladder in front of your heel.
- John: Uh-huh.
- Bender: And you can do four decks in [snap of fingers] like that and then get the hell out of the way ‘cause there’s another guy coming.
- John: Somebody else coming right back of you, yeah.
- Bender: And I come into the engine room and it’s just a normal cruising watch and here’s the poor petty officer pulling on the throttle ‘cause the captain has said “reverse” and it won’t reverse. [laughs] Yeah, so, well, we’d done this drill by hand fifty times. I grab a couple of men and my senior chief grabs a couple men and we go back and we reverse it by hand.
- John: How do you do that?
- Bender: You just, you pull the plug. [both laugh] It connects it and you just, actually, flick it back and so on, and as I said, we had done that drill fifty times, so it was a matter of seconds after we got there. If the petty officer had remembered he could have done it, too, probably, but then you get a little excited. Especially—I think he’d just made petty officer and I’d just put him in charge of steaming watch.
- John: Help me with this. Now, the captain is up on the bridge.
- Bender: Yeah.
- John: He’s signaling with, what you call the control?
- Bender: Well, he actually says “Full Reverse.” There’s a man down in the wheelhouse.
- John: So he does it by intercom?
- Bender: Yeah. It’s called an enunciator.
- John: Alright. So, he’s hollering “Reverse!” and nothing is happening.
- Bender: Nothing’s happening. And it—actually, we do have a pilot, luckily, but when you throw it in reverse and then when you, when you reverse the engines on an LST, especially if it’s moving forward, the ship is moving

forward, five thousand tons, and here's that prop pulling backwards; oh, the whole ship shakes and shutters and [laughs] and it, it—we did it fast enough and the pilot kept us, otherwise we'd been in downtown Seattle right on [John laughs] the main drag, and then the captain would have been court marshaled for failure to set a special—anyway, we did it and so on. The pilot put us alongside the pier and the captain was eligible for discharge, by the way, and by the time I got topside he'd gotten his papers and he was gone.

John: [laughs] So if there was an inquiry, he wasn't around?

Bender: Incidentally, it was 12 o'clock noon on December 24<sup>th</sup>.

John: '45?

Bender: Yup.

John: So the war is over?

Bender: Yup. That's why we came back.

John: Okay.

Bender: Otherwise we'd have been in on the invasion of Japan. But here we are. We had gone wide open and a little extra; I fudged the governor. An LST wide open, you have full speed and then you have what's called flank speed and, ah, I had upped it a little bit over flank speed.

John: Wow. How fast would an LST normally go at full speed?

Bender: Full speed, just about ten knots or so.

John: Not very fast.

Bender: No, no.

John: But the war is over; you want to get home. What did you juice it up to?

Bender: I think, 10.7, almost ten percent.

John: Yeah.

Bender: And we had ran wide open. I mean, just tied it to the floor so to speak, only slowed down when we came into—so it had never been stopped. Here again, water—when you shift with compressed air, there's always water in compressed air.

John: Hmm.

Bender: And that can clog reversing openings, plug 'em with water.

John: Is that what happened when the ship didn't shift into reverse mechanically?

Bender: That's what happened. It couldn't do it because there was water in the compressed air.

John: Okay. You hadn't used reverse since you left Pearl Harbor?

Bender: Yeah. And that's a long distance.

John: Yeah.

Bender: A couple weeks, almost.

John: Wow.

Bender: Eleven, twelve days.

John: Tell us about Okinawa.

Bender: Hmm?

John: Tell us about Okinawa.

Bender: Well, one of the sea stories concerns the—it's titled *The Engineering Officer was in a Fog*.

John: Okay.

Bender: An LST had a fog generator on the stern. Now I'm sure you have seen pictures of destroyers laying down—

John: Smoke screen?

Bender: —smoke screen to protect the—

John: Whatever's back of it?

Bender: Whatever's back of it.

John: Yeah.



- Bender: But we made fog while at anchor. When you're at anchor, of course, your bow was into the wind and the fog generator is on the stern.
- John: Uh-huh.
- Bender: So everybody downwind of you is in good shape, but you're sticking out three hundred and some feet into the thing.
- John: So you don't want to be the windward LST laying smoke, right?
- Bender: Right. And depending on the wind, sometimes we laid smoke, sometimes somebody at the other end laid smoke, but that damn thing would never work right; it would belch flames like you wouldn't see. [John laughs] And the captain didn't like that. He said, you know, all those flames, the kamikaze can see that. Of course he could see the damn ship sticking out besides. So anyway, he made sure, he pulled me out of the engine room and I supervised this fog generator.
- John: How does that work, Dale?
- Bender: The fog is a mixture of oil and steam.
- John: Okay.
- Bender: And what it is, is the steam has—[End Tape One – Side A]—because it's fog, has oil in it, doesn't dissipate as easily. [pause in tape]
- John: —the fog.
- Bender: I'll repeat that; the fog generator, the fog is a mixture of oil and water.
- John: Right.
- Bender: And it stays together, but what it does, of course, is the crew that's on the fog generator is coated with oil.
- John: Well, first of all, the water is not going to burn of course; it turns to steam.
- Bender: You're generating steam. It is basically a small steam generator, generates steam and mixes it with oil so that what comes out of it and covers the water is what they call fog, but it's really a mixture of steam and oil.
- John: Okay. Well I didn't know that, okay.

- Bender: Anyway, so every time after you laid smoke, you'd go in, you wash your hair and change your clothes. [John laughs] And at Okinawa sometimes we'd average three air raids a day. [laughs] We're still at anchor; we ain't goin' anywhere. So if we would lay fog three times a day, we would wash our hair three times a day, and so on. But that is one of the sea stories that I'll leave with you. And that sort of ties in, and I wrote a sea story about—I called it *The Soap Opera*.
- John: Okay.
- Bender: And what I mentioned was the fact that we had a laundry aboard ship and some of the married guys in their time off would work in the laundry, and they were paid for that.
- John: Uh-huh.
- Bender: The enlisted men didn't have to pay but officers paid for having their laundry done and then the ship store paid the guys for doing the rest of the laundry. But that damn, the machine—the washer and the dryer weren't designed to be running constantly and they were always breaking down and I always had to send an engineer up there to repair it. And it was interesting. They did a good job; oh, the soap was strong.
- John: Yeah. [chuckles] I mean, it's gotta be to get this oil and this fog mixture out.
- Bender: And they would starch the pants. I mean, you could take your khakis, your chinos, and you could stand 'em in the corner. [John laughs] As a matter of fact, you couldn't get them, put them away because they was too damn stiff. But then you're down in the tropics and it's gonna rain anyway, so about fifteen minutes after you left the ship in your nice pressed khakis [raspberries] [John laughs] that's all gone.
- John: Ah ha.
- Bender: So that's another one of the sea stories. But it was—another sea story, and this one's entitled *Good Clean Living Pays Off*. In a harbor the bigger ships, you know, the ones with a senior officer in charge, they get the nice anchorage and an LST is way the hell in \_\_\_\_\_. But we got these nice small boats and it is also customary to take anybody else that's near you, and we're on our way from our anchorage in the harbor and here's an Army hospital ship flying a flag: "We have personnel to go to shore." So we pull up to the gangway, and what comes down the gangway but three nurses, and by that time we hadn't seen a woman in nine months.
- John: Oh, lord!

Bender: [both laughing] So we get ‘em a nice dry spot and take them in. Oh, and then on the way in I see a small carrier, what they call an escort carrier, and a friend of mine from Milwaukee is on there. So we pull up and I run up and ask for my friend, Sid, and it turns out he’s ashore. So we take, we go on in, we drop the nurses, and later on I meet Sid and—matter of fact, I go back with him and have dinner on the carrier. As soon as we walk onto the carrier, guys keep coming up to Sid and saying, “Sid, some officer with three nurses was looking for you. If you need a third man, I’m it.”  
[both laugh]

John: I’m it, huh?

Bender: And we had about ten guys offer to join us. Of course these nurses were going out with the Air Force guys and we took them in to them.

John: [laughs] You were just the conveyors, right?

Bender: We were just the conveyors. But I wrote that up. Sid, by the way, just came back and went to school again and then taught out in San Francisco and he died while scuba diving. Very, very unusual. He and his wife had been down and they came up and they said, “Well, let’s go in.” So she took off and he was following her and she got into the shallows, turned around, he ain’t there. Never found him, never knew what happened or anything, which has nothing to do with the sea story, except—

John: No, that’s—

Bender: But very unusual.

John: Odd.

Bender: The last of the sea stories, it’s called *The Great Coke Deposit*. I don’t know if they—I don’t think they bottled the Coke and sent it out, but I think they set up bottling plants and the joke was “As soon as the bottling plant is set up, you know the island is secure.” [John laughs] But anyway, our stores officer could always get Coke.

John: Yeah.

Bender: But they charged him for the bottles. But then when he went to take the bottles in, they wouldn’t accept the empty bottles. Well, he’s not—oh, they charged him two cents at that time for the bottle. So we’re basically a cargo ship so he just takes one of the empty holds and starts putting empty Coke bottles in it. And this goes on for months because we have a little ship’s store about the size of your blackboard [laughs] behind you and if

we're not, oh, at general quarters, you know, or special sea detail, this ship's store is open and you could buy a nice cool Coke, which came out of the regular refrigerator, or a candy bar or even a toothbrush; the store is not as big as that blackboard; it's as big as the map on the wall. [laughs]

John: Whoever's writing this up can't see the map; but the map, for the record, is about four feet high and three feet wide; [both laugh] that's tiny.

Bender: Yeah. But it had toothpaste, toothbrush, and razor blades, and—

John: Sure.

Bender: Anyway. So we accumulate empty Coke bottles; after all, there's a crew of a hundred and fifty guys.

John: You're in the tropics.

Bender: Yeah. And it's nice and cool, usually. Anyway, when we get ready to come back, the war is over, really low-point men are assigned to another ship that needs an officer and there goes our stores officer. Anyway, they say, "Dale, why don't you take over as ship stores officer 'til we get back to the States?" So I do. He's got a guy trained and all you gotta do as officer is sign everything. So we come back to the States, matter of fact, we're back for a while, moored in San Francisco, and I call up Coca Cola and I said, "Can you use some empty Coke bottles?" He said, "Oh, yeah, yeah." He said, "I'll send a pickup over for them." He says, "How many you got?" I said, "Ten thousand."

John: [laughs] What?

Bender: Well, that isn't many. I mean, you divide that by—

John: How many men on board?

Bender: Yeah.

John: And how many days at sea?

Bender: Yeah. One hundred-fifty men on board and you been out at sea for over a year by then.

John: Okay. Well, ten thousand sounds reasonable.

Bender: Yeah.

John: This is the old Coke bottle, shaped like—

Bender: Yeah. Bulges. Ya know, the guy, you can hear him gasp.

John: Ten thousand?

Bender: Instead of a pick-up he sends a flatbed semi over the next day, and it's what you called an all-hands evolution; we unloaded Coke bottles.

John: Are they loose?

Bender: They're in cardboard cartons.

John: Okay.

Bender: And we get, I think, something over two hundred bucks at two cents a piece, and this is 1946.

John: Talk about some serious change here.

Bender: Yeah, that's like two thousand, three thousand bucks now.

John: Sure.

Bender: And we really threw a bang-up party with that. But it was so funny because when I tell him ten thousand he says, "Whoop!" [both laugh] And this whole thing, the numbers add up. I had taken pictures at sea. Our chief commissary steward and I had bought trays and a tank for developing and printing before we left the States, so we did our own developing and printing down in one of the holds.

John: Oh, you needed an enlarger, too?

Bender: No, we didn't have an enlarger then, just the developing and printing.

John: So you just did contact work.

Bender: And it was his idea because he'd been to sea before; he said, "Look, this is a good idea." So I said, "You are right." And what we did is, before we left 'Frisco I had met an Army nurse and she would supply us with film that she could get at the Army Exchange, but we never could get good developer or hypo.

John: Right.

Bender: We would have to mooch it off the signal corps, and the good stuff they kept and they would give us this stuff, it's called ninety-second developer.

It takes only a minute and a half at seventy degrees and unfortunately we're at about ninety-five degrees, so you pour it into the tank, give it a couple of swishes and [laughs] hope, and it usually worked. Except we are down in basically in a room off the tank deck and because it's below water it has a water-tight door, so we close the door. It's dark except for a little red light and it is hot as hell. We are standing there in shorts and the sweat is running off of us, and always, the roll of film gets stuck halfway in. [John laughs] So you're standing there in the dark trying to get it the rest of the way in, but we did developing and printing. But anyway, we're back to the States and we have a new captain and he says, "Dale," he says, "Let's put out an album of pictures for the men." So I checked, and there were a lot of the men who had taken pictures, too. I forget if we either did a hundred copies of fifty pictures or fifty copies of a hundred pictures. Anyway, five thousand prints and, you know, I go into a place and they laugh at me. "Five thousand prints," the guy says, "I'm having trouble getting enough to do my daily bit." Except then I went in to a guy who did picture postcards and he sets up, pushes a button and it goes through, you know, bing, bing, bing.

John: This is in San Francisco?

Bender: Yeah.

John: Okay.

Bender: And it's probably March or April of '46. He says come back tomorrow for your prints. So that solved it. But here again, you get these, you're laughed at, you know for that because—

John: You mentioned that in Okinawa you had sometimes as many as three air raids?

Bender: Yeah.

John: What would an air raid cost you? Would that be usually a solo kamikaze in the area?

Bender: Yeah.

John: Okay.

Bender: And he never—occasionally, I guess, they did maybe sink a couple LSTs. But, they went after—

John: The bigger stuff?

Bender: Bigger stuff.

John: Sure.

Bender: And they particularly seemed to like destroyers because it was the destroyers that were protecting the carriers and so on. Incidentally, in Okinawa we had so many ships, depending on where you were, you could only shoot in one direction; if you were on the north side, you could only shoot north.

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: You didn't want to shoot south because they had fifty ships south of you. So you were restricted, depending on where you were, where you could shoot.

John: I've often wondered that. I know these convoys were huge.

Bender: Yeah.

John: Did you have restricted areas, is that what you're saying, that you could not shoot?

Bender: Basically, yeah.

John: You could be tracking a plane but all of a sudden he's in a restricted area, you stop firing?

Bender: Literally, otherwise the shrapnel would fall on one of our own ships.

John: Yeah.

Bender: No, they're the gunnery officers.

John: Who coordinates all that, you might have?

Bender: Somebody ashore is doing it and then the gunnery officer aboard ship is saying—

John: So they're in contact with him? They set up zones? Okay.

Bender: It was sort of complicated. You know the convoys were something else again.

John: This is all a precursor for invading Japan. At the time you thought that was your next move, right?

- Bender: Oh, yeah. That's why we were carrying a hundred and fifty men and eleven officers when we only needed seven to nine officers and maybe a hundred and forty men.
- John: Um-hmm.
- Bender: And the code[?] was this is to allow for losses in the invasion of Japan, either from your own ship or to replace somebody that was killed or hurt, at least, on another ship, so you had extra personnel in training.
- John: Huh.
- Bender: But those were basically my sea stories.
- John: Okay.
- Bender: Ah, pictures: engine, fog, cleaning.
- John: Okay. The war is over and it's, what? You're still on active duty?
- Bender: Right. I'm a bachelor, I came in a little on the late side, so yes, I am still in the Navy. And what happens, of course, after we came back to the States, we lost our captain. As a matter of fact—
- John: He was the first guy off the ship, as I recall your story of docking in Seattle.
- Bender: Right. And basically our stores officer, who was an older guy but still needed a few points, took over as captain; he was a good captain. He was the kind of guy who could sell refrigerators to Eskimos. [John laughs] And when we were at Guam or Saipan, he'd go ashore and, for example, he came back with the old, the Marine boots, for example, for everybody aboard whole ship, which was nice. If you're swimming on coral, you don't want to walk on it; it cuts. We used to go swimming with these GI boots on. [both laugh]
- John: Just to protect your feet.
- Bender: To protect your feet.
- John: Wow.
- Bender: And they'd get wet, of course, but they'd dry out. And he would get all kinds of stuff. He was a good captain. But by the time—we landed at Seattle and by the time we got we got back to 'Frisco, well then we were



assigned a yard overhaul. The idea was they would decommission the ship, but if they ever needed it again they wanted it in good shape. So it went in and it got anything that needed to be repaired was repaired. But by that time we had lost our original officer and we had a mustang; a mustang is a term for an officer who came up through the ranks. And this mustang's name was Patrick Henry Sullivan.

John: [laughs] A little bit Irish?

Bender: A little bit of the Irish. And anyway, he was captain then when we went in for the yard overhaul, which was a thirty day overhaul. And the captain came aboard the first day with a case, twenty-four bottles, of bourbon; and every afternoon after the yard gang went off, about 5 o'clock, we'd gather in the captain's cabin and we would all have a drink and moan and groan about whatever problems—the yard people were stealing us blind. We had to put a guy in charge of watching the tools, for example.

John: Huh.

Bender: And of course, they were trying to get by cheaply as it was, and the captain, Patrick Henry Sullivan, would say, "Mr. Bender, is that job done satisfactorily?" And I'd say, "No." He'd say, "I won't sign for it!" And the yard guy would scream, "Nobody else has ever complained!" "Maybe you did it right before." Anyway, he would make them do it the way it was contracted for and they would scream they were going to lose money. But he was—and it was interesting; he left because he was assigned to the A-bomb test in Bikini. And I particularly remember because I met him downtown about the day before he left and we stopped for a drink and he said he was leaving, they were going to fly him out to Bikini Islands. He said, "They're allowing me forty pounds of luggage," and he said, "I have thirty-six pounds of bourbon."

John: [laughs] Why am I not surprised?

Bender: And two clean shirts. [both laugh] So that was Patrick Henry Sullivan.

John: Is he still with us, do you know?

Bender: Probably not. But he was a real character. [John laughs]

John: Well, how did you become captain?

Bender: Up the ranks. Of course, he was regular Navy and had been an enlisted man and a chief and so on.

John: But you're the equivalent to a 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant in the Army, lieutenant JG?

Bender: Yeah, right; ensign is the lowest.

John: Right. I mean, you're right next to the—

Bender: Yeah. And he is—

John: You must have been losing officers like crazy to—

Bender: Oh, yeah. Anybody with any seniority left.

John: Yeah.

Bender: But anyway, then we get another officer, another captain, and he lasts maybe three, four weeks and then he leaves.

John: When you say he leaves, is—

Bender: Discharged.

John: Discharged from the Navy?

Bender: Yeah.

John: Okay. How come you're not discharged?

Bender: Because I'm a Goddamn bachelor; I mean, I have no children, no wife.

John: I don't remember how that happened.

Bender: You got points for children, you got points for marriage.

John: Ah.

Bender: You got points for each month you served and so on.

John: Okay. So you're pretty far down the pecking order?

Bender: I'm pretty far down.

John: They could only process so many at a time?

Bender: Right.

John: Okay, now I got it.

- Bender: But anyway, we finally get up to 'Frisco after the yard overhaul and I am called in and they say, "Mr. Bender, you're now the captain of the ship." [laughs] And then you are! But then the interesting thing is, we and a batch of others are told to go up to Portland, Oregon for decommissioning and these captains of all ten ships are there and the admiral looks at his slate and says, "Mr. Bender, you're the senior of the lieutenant junior grades, [John laughs] the senior of the captains; you are the officer in tactical command of this flotilla." So I'm not only captain but I have everybody strung out behind me, following me up, and I am responsible.
- John: You are what age?
- Bender: Let's see, it's '46? I'm twenty-five. [John laughs] Probably not even twenty-five yet; I'm twenty-four and eight, nine months.
- John: Okay. Pretty big responsibility though?
- Bender: Yeah, it is interesting. And we hardly clear San Francisco harbor and one of the LCIs really wants us to stay and they signal they cannot maintain speed.
- John: Which is, what? All of eight, nine miles an hour?
- Bender: Yeah. So, I signal one of the other LSTs: Please take that ship in tow.
- John: Huh.
- Bender: Which is nice, because if I had not been senior, we would have ended up towing because he had to tow them all the way up to Portland.
- John: Hmm.
- Bender: And then what happens, one of the LSTs has trouble making—so I make the decision we cut back speed and so on. And it's interesting. Oh! We get to Seattle or Portland and break up; every ship goes to its—we're told beach over such and such and I'm up in the con and all my men say, "We don't want to go on the beach, tie up to the pier." So I tell the pilot to tie us up alongside that LST, even though they have signaled us to beach. We are no longer—we are no sooner tied up and up comes one of the chiefs who was sort of port commander and he said, "Didn't you get my message to beach?" And I said, "Can't do it. We just came out of a yard overhaul and had the bottom painted; we're not supposed to hit the beach." And I said, "Chief, I have butter and steak." He said, "I could use a few." I told my yeoman, "Go down and get a couple steaks and a couple pounds of butter, maybe a little bit of coffee, too." And before the chief leaves, of course, I give it to him, and we stay there [John laughs] as long I'm

aboard. I don't know what happened afterwards, but ships came in after us and left after us but we stayed there; we never hit the beach. And, matter of fact, the chief would come over for a drink 'cause I always had a bottle of bourbon. If anything was really illegal, I did it probably.

John: [laughs] I can assure you the statute of limitations has well run out though.

Bender: You weren't supposed to have liquor aboard, I had liquor aboard; you weren't even supposed to take pictures and I not only took pictures but I developed them and printed them. What the hell else did we do?

John: Well, I know about the three women.

Bender: Anyway, we were in, we get to Seattle, or get to Portland and we're tied up there and I had a technique wherever we were and even when I was in the Navy before or going to school, if I wanted a date, I would look up a nurses' dorm and call, and whoever answered I'd date. I got some tremendous dates and usually they would want somebody else, so I'd bring another officer. And in Portland this other officer and I met these two tremendous student nurses. They were in the last year of their training and the chief would loan me his Jeep and we would drive over to the hospital and we would pick them up and so on. And what we did, we'd get back to the ship, by the way, and we'd go up in the con, and you know the signal search light?

John: Yeah.

Bender: We would aim it at the nurses' dorm [John laughs] and flick 'em a couple times to let 'em know we're back, and they would turn their window lights on and off. And the newspaper caught hold of that and mentioned it, and I guess the gal in charge of the nurses' dorm [laughs] didn't know who was doing it but let the word out that this has got to stop. But it was interesting. And we also then decided to use up that money that I mentioned.

John: For the Coke bottles?

Bender: Yeah, and we threw a party for the men and they brought dates and so on.

John: It sounds like more bourbon?

Bender: Hmm?

John: More bourbon?

Bender: Oh, yeah. Well, yeah, but interesting—by the way, Portland was a bring your own bottle type thing; you had to bring it to the bar, the bar did not

have—they would charge you the same price, but what they did is give you a glass of ice and a mix, but you had to bring your own bourbon bottle.

John: Huh.

Bender: Or whatever you drank, rum or something. But anyway—and that was pretty much it. The ship was finally decommissioned.

John: When were you discharged?

Bender: I left Portland, Oregon July 4<sup>th</sup>, which was, incidentally, three days after my birthday, so I was then twenty-five.

John: So you entered the service on the 1<sup>st</sup> of the year in 1945?

Bender: Well, I took the ship—

John: Took the ship?

Bender: —but I was in the Navy about a year and a half, 1944.

John: Okay.

Bender: Actually, did I tell you, I was actually sworn into the Navy while I was still in school?

John: You did not.

Bender: The Navy wanted to get a lot of engineers, so even before Pearl Harbor they had contacted all junior and senior engineering students and offered them a probationary commission and they would be sworn into the Navy. The Army could not draft 'em and the Navy would have a nice steady supply. And you stayed in and paid your own way. Anyway, that was fall of '41.

John: Okay.

Bender: Came December 7<sup>th</sup>, KA-BOOM!

John: Yeah.

Bender: They had a medical examining team back checking us all out physically right after Christmas vacation and I passed with no strain. But you hadda get proof of citizenship, so I sent to Kokomo, Indiana and asked for my

birth certificate, and back comes the word, “Sorry, we don’t have any Dale Bender listed, born July 1, 1921.”

Bender: Oh! They say, “However, we have a Wilford Bender born then. The mother is not Johanna, but the mother is Cohanna with a “C”.

John: Oh now, come on. [laughs]

Bender: Yeah. What happened is the doctor who had been present when my mother gave birth had filled out the birth certificate, and boy, did he foul me up. It took me another two months before I could get that straightened out. So all my pals went in; I waited two months later before I finally got in the Navy, but then I was sworn in as a probationary ensign.

John: You hadn’t gone through an ROTC program but you were still a commissioned ensign?

Bender: No, no, just a—

John: They just wanted a warm body that had an engineering degree?

Bender: Right.

John: Okay.

Bender: When I finally get out of the school I got a—**[End of Tape One -Side B]**—couple months, I think.

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: And so I go to work for—oh, it was a big company down in Milwaukee, and I start working there. Again, anybody could [pause in tape]

John: Well, let’s see, it’s now 1946 and you’re about ready to—

Bender: No. Actually, we covered that and I was just covering—

John: Oh, you’re getting back to Milwaukee?

Bender: I had finished the university.

John: There you go.

Bender: And I figure I may have some time, so I went out to Allis-Chalmers and hell, they hired me and I start working. And I mention to the guys I’m working with that—and they said, “What are you doing here?” And I say,

“I’m waiting to be called in the Navy.” I said, “I’m already sworn in.”  
And that’s nice and so I start working.

John: No, wait; this is 1941?

Bender: Actually no; it’s ’43 then ‘cause I was a junior in ’41.

John: I hear ya. So you went through college.

Bender: Junior and senior years, yeah.

John: The Navy’s given you a pass, so to speak?

Bender: Yeah. Anyway, I start working; nothing happens. [John laughs] And it begins to get a little embarrassing. I mean, I’m healthy and I’ve been telling everybody I’m going in the Navy and here I am, I forget how long, and then at Allis-Chalmers. And finally I’m saying, “This ain’t”—so I call up the Navy office in downtown Milwaukee and I said, “I’m so and so and I’m sworn in the Navy and I thought I’d be called.” Well, they check and, of course, they had lost my orders; I would have spent the rest of war at Allis-Chalmers, literally. As soon as I called up: BING!

John: Yeah, [both laugh] warm body.

Bender: Ten days later I had my orders and a month after I’d made that call, I’m going through Navy indoctrination [laughs] and they didn’t waste any time getting me in then. But that was sort of funny, because, as I said—

John: System? You’d just dropped out of the system, right?

Bender: Yeah, nobody knew where—I mean, I don’t know what happened there, except I hadn’t heard from them.

John: Well, you know today people hear your story they’d say you were nuts to even go to downtown Milwaukee, but that was the last popular war. You wanted to be on active duty, I’m sure.

Bender: And the interesting thing, of course, is you know where Allis-Chalmers is in Milwaukee?

John: Right.

Bender: Way south and way west.

John: Right. At that time it was practically, well, it’s out of—

- Bender: I'm living way east and way north.
- John: Uh-huh.
- Bender: To get from there and be there— 'cause they're running three shifts a day, I had to be there by 7. I mean, I would leave our house at before 6 or so, even before that, I think. It took about an hour and a half to get there and an hour and a half to get back. There's no work, really, on the northeast side of Milwaukee; all the plants are south and west. But anyway, I finally got in and I—incidentally, they sent—where does the Navy send me? University of Arizona in Tucson [John laughs]. There ain't any water within miles, but that's—they took—whatever.
- John: Why were you sent there? I'm curious.
- Bender: It was called naval indoctrination. You know ninety-day wonders? Well, we were sixty-day wonders.
- John: Okay. So this was a training facility?
- Bender: Yeah.
- John: In the middle of the desert?
- Bender: Right [John laughs] At the University of Arizona.
- John: I won't ask.
- Bender: All the bunks were set up in the gym; we slept in the gym. And two months there and then I left for, my next assignment was the naval training station, experimental station, at Annapolis. So I could say I went to Annapolis, except I was only there a week or ten days and I got a change of orders and they sent me to Flint, Michigan. And then I went through diesel school.
- John: Does that get us up to Pittsburgh?
- Bender: Well, no. After diesel school I went to Norfolk for training in LSTs.
- John: Okay. This would be in 1944?
- Bender: Yup.
- John: And then from there to Dravo in Pittsburgh?
- Bender: Yeah.



John: Pick up your LST, and that's kind of where we started this morning?

Bender: Yeah. That was it.

John: Okay. [laughs] Well, Dale, thank you very, very much for your time; it was very interesting.

Bender: I'm sure that whoever types it— [tape ends abruptly]--**[End of Tape Two – Side A; no side B]**

John: Made on Tuesday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April, 2007. Dale Bender is our guest, and we're going to be talking about the end of the Second World War in the Pacific. Okay, Dale, we're now in 1946; the war is over, right?

Bender: Correct, yeah.

John: You're in Guam?

Bender: We were in Guam, yeah.

John: And you get a strange assignment?

Bender: Right. Everybody else that we know is being assigned to the occupation of Japan.

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: And they're sailing up to Tokyo and the other—

John: Southern ports, sure.

Bender: Yeah. And we get this order and it says “you are to go down to the island of Truk as part of the pre-invasion, pre—“

John: Occupation?

Bender: Pre-occupation. Not the occupation force, but the *pre*-occupation force.

John: [both laugh] I see. You're preliminary to the preliminary?

Bender: The pre-occupation force—

John: That means nobody's been there yet?

Bender: That's right.

John: Okay.

Bender: —consists of the LST-901 and the Battle Cruiser Columbia.

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: So we go down together; no, actually we start out 'cause we're so much slower and they join us.

John: Is it just one LST?

Bender: One LST.

John: Okay.

Bender: The battle cruiser stays about eight or ten miles out because that's the range of their guns, and it's also the range of the land guns. But we go in slowly 'cause it hasn't been swept for mines.

John: The war ended in April of '45, or is it later?

Bender: It was later.

John: Later; how much after the end of the war are you going in there?

Bender: Didn't the war end in August and we went in September, very soon after.

John: Now, big question: Do the Japanese occupy Truk and it's been their mandate since the First World War; do they know the war is over?

Bender: Supposedly they have been informed.

John: You don't know that though?

Bender: But we don't really know.

John: Okay, I think that's important.

Bender: That's why the cruiser Columbia ain't comin' any closer and it's—the photographs I've got, and what's her name has got those, they had big guns so camouflaged you could almost go sit on 'em and you couldn't see 'em, literally.

John: They being the Japanese?

- Bender: Yeah, and they also retracted so—oh, Truk was bombed, by the way, regularly, but was never occupied; it was bypassed. You know, what they called island-hopping.
- John: Uh-huh.
- Bender: Anyway, we go in very slowly [laughs] and it—
- John: Are you flying a white flag or anything?
- Bender: No, no.
- John: So as far as you're concerned, you could have combat?
- Bender: We are manned, let's put it that way, but we would have been useless. I mean, the biggest thing we had was a 40 mm. But the cruiser Columbia, as I say, is standing out there but nothing happens. We drop anchor and there was a Marine general who was to head the occupation force and he's aboard the cruiser, but the cruiser is going to use our small boats, the LCVPs, so early in the morn—oh, I should tell you, our captain was a worry-wart.
- John: I think he's entitled in this case.
- Bender: [both laugh] Well, no, on everything.
- John: Okay.
- Bender: So who's the small boat officer? The engineering officer who is to supposedly make sure that nothing mechanically develops, and that's me. [laughs]
- John: Yeah.
- Bender: And we get off very early with both LCVPs, go out to the cruiser Columbia. They lower a Jeep, a radio-equipped Jeep, into our LCVP and a bunch of Marines gets on with the Marine general and the other one. And I should tell you these Marines were hand-picked; there wasn't a one that was under six-foot-two and [laughs] under two hundred-fifty pounds. Big, you know, the biggest batch. Anyway, we go in and it starts to rain right away; LCVPs, you know, are just completely open.
- John: Right.
- Bender: It pours. We are being led by a Japanese boat, a nice covered thing, and it is just pouring rain. After everybody is pretty well soaked, they do take the

Marine general aboard, but us in the LCVP, we follow. [laughs] And we come into the island of Truk, we put the radio-equipped Jeep ashore and the Marine general with his Marines. Maybe we had two; it seems to me we had six or eight bodyguards with them. And anyway, they take off and by agreement they are to contact us in the LCVP in the harbor every hour on the hour, and then we will come around on the other side of the island to pick him up, which they do.

John: What was the general's mission, now?

Bender: He was to see, get some idea of what's gonna be needed by the occupation force and to make contact with the officer in charge of Truk.

John: Japanese officer?

Bender: Right.

John: Okay.

Bender: So they would be starting the negotiations.

John: I would guess that their guns are loaded?

Bender: Huh?

John: I would guess their guns to be loaded?

Bender: You better believe their guns are loaded.

John: So they had really no idea what was going to happen. Before you go on, Dale, you said a Japanese boat had the general on board?

Bender: Halfway in they took him aboard to get him out of the rain.

John: [laughs] Okay.

Bender: And if you look at the photos that I gave to what's her name, you'll see me soakin' wet, you know; everything is plastered down on ya and you're just drippin'. You know, your shoes go squish, squish—

John: Yeah.

Bender: —'cause they're so full of water. But anyway, we are there and we are in contact with him and we'd sort of talk a little bit with the Japanese soldiers. And there's another photograph showing me in the Japanese

equivalent of a Jeep, which I drove, by the way, just around the area. It's sort of interesting.

John: There must be a language problem here, Dale.

Bender: Oh, there was, there was. Oh, I started to tell you my sole claim to fame: I'm the first American to set foot on Truk.

John: Hey, alright.

Bender: 'Cause we came in, I jumped ashore and I helped the Marine general ashore [John laughs] and then we put the photography crew with motion picture film ashore and then we went out again and they got a shot of us coming into the island of Truk and coming ashore and the Marine general stepping ashore.

John: I got it.

Bender: And I—gonna make myself a note here to—some years ago I went to the Navy Archives and I got a copy of that film and if I can find it—you know, ever since we moved [laughs] I haven't found—if I can find it—

John: Everything's in a box, right?

Bender: I'm gonna give it to Gayle. It is not a very good film but it's—

John: 16 mm?

Bender: Ah, might have been 16; I thought it was probably.

John: Yeah, I think that's what they shot.

Bender: And then, when I went and got that—that was in the '70s—by that time it was twenty-five years old, but now, of course, it's fifty years old, sixty years old.

John: Well, they know what to do with these things up there.

Bender: Yeah. But anyway, that is my claim to fame. The Marine general pretty much did most of that business the first day. We took him back to the battle cruiser and then we went back to our LST and then we took him in on the second day also. Since things had been going smoothly, I only had to go in one day. Incidentally, all the officers wanted that assignment.

John: Be the first on shore?

- Bender: Yeah, but knowing the captain, no way.
- John: You were there because you were the engineer and he was worried something was going to break down?
- Bender: Right.
- John: Okay. It worked to your advantage.
- Bender: Anyway, we were there a second day and then the cruiser, the battle cruiser Columbia, took off to return him to Guam and we—the Japanese led us through the mine field in much closer to the island itself. When I say Truk, I'm really talking about the biggest of the Truk atoll because there was several islands and this was the biggest island with the best harbor and so on.
- John: Did it have an airfield?
- Bender: Yes, yes. Oh, incidentally, we got to the airfield and all there was was a bunch of bombed-up Japanese planes; there wasn't one that was flyable because Truk had been bombarded on a regular basis all through the war even though they never tried to occupy it, but every now and then they'd come in and bomb the hell out of it. [laughs]
- John: How big a garrison was on Truk, Japanese?
- Bender: Good question and I don't know, but I'm gonna guess it was fairly large.
- John: Several thousand?
- Bender: Oh, yeah. I'm not sure it was as large as Iwo Jima, but it could well have been.
- John: Strikes me you're rather under-manned?
- Bender: [laughs] Oh, yeah!
- John: If there was going to be a problem, I mean.
- Bender: We had to rely on—
- John: Especially the general; he's bopping around in a Jeep.
- Bender: Yeah. That's why he was so careful; if he hadn't answered us every hour from his radio Jeep—

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: I'm guessing, trying to remember, but I'm guessing our orders were, "Get the hell out of there!" [laughs] Not that we could have done anything.

John: Yeah, you were way under-manned.

Bender: Well, we were—see we were in contact also with the cruiser Columbia.

John: Right.

Bender: Because the radios in the Jeeps—remember the old handi-jobs?

John: Walkie Talkie?

Bender: Walkie Talkies, they only had a ten mile range, but the radio we had in the LCVP was—we could communicate with the cruiser.

John: Columbia?

Bender: Yeah.

John: Or Guam? Or that was up to Columbia?

Bender: That was up to the Columbia.

John: Okay.

Bender: But, anyway, nothing happened and the second day nothing happened and then—

John: Well, you've got thousands of Japanese soldiers who up until a month or so before this were ready to die for the emperor.

Bender: Yup.

John: Tell me about their attitude; now you're great big galoots. [laughs]

Bender: It was interesting, as I said, they were—

John: They lost, right?

Bender: They were friendly; they even let me drive that Jap Jeep. We had, we were carrying the Army meals that you took with you; I forget what they were called.

John: "K-Rations."

Bender: K-Rations, right! K-Rations. Anyway, we were carrying those and we ate them and we gave—they tried out one and so on and it was really quite nice. But then we stayed down there and the cruiser Columbia took off and within about two, three days a whole batch of small wooden mine sweeps came down and we stayed there; we were to be the mother ship for these little wooden mine sweeps who were going to sweep the mines on the way in.

John: You touched on that earlier that the harbor itself was heavily mined.

Bender: Yeah. You just had a certain path through it, you know, a zigzag.

John: Did you say you had a Japanese navigator or guide that was helpful?

Bender: We had this other Japanese boat that led us through the mine field.

John: And it was wood?

Bender: Hmm?

John: The Japanese boat was wood?

Bender: Wood, oh, yeah.

John: But you're not?

Bender: Oh, actually the LCVPs except for the engine and the armor-plating were all wood.

John: They are wood. Okay.

Bender: They're plywood, yeah.

John: Are those the so-called "Higgins boats?"

Bender: Yeah.

John: Okay, came out of New Orleans? I know what they are then.

Bender: We call them "small boats." They were thirty-two feet long and they weighed twenty thousand pounds.

John: That's a big boat to me. [laughs]



- Bender: They had a bus engine for power.
- John: Hmm.
- Bender: A bus engine converted.
- John: Diesel?
- Bender: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Anyway, so there we are anchored. We had a bow anchor and a stern anchor and the mine sweeps come in and they tie up to us. They would sweep and then every evening they would tie up. We would give them fuel. An LST had tremendous fuel capacity; it's a small tanker. We can fuel and water, and we had more refrigerator space, of course, than they did because we were designed to carry troops, too. And we gave them food, except everything was going to the occupation of Japan, so we were running sort of low on—the day before the supply ship came in I think we had three kinds of beans and rice. [both laugh] And the supply ship came in, this is so funny, somebody fouled up the order and it was refrigerated and I forget, maybe we were supposed to get six crates of eggs, or maybe more, but anyway, there was an extra zero, so here we're down five degrees above the tropics, we got eggs, fresh eggs, refrigerated, coming out our ears, you know. [John laughs] And we hadn't had a lot of fresh eggs, let me tell you, so for about a week—
- John: You had all the eggs you could eat, huh?
- Bender: Every way you could think of: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. But as I say, we mother-shipped the mine sweeps and they did a good job of sweeping. Matter of fact, getting in real close they used our LCVs, our small boats, because they drew even less than the mine sweeps. And they had some extra gear which they would attach to a small boat and they would go in, cut the cables to the mine. A mine-sweep cuts the cable and when the mine comes up—
- John: Pops up?
- Bender: —then they shoot it. They explode it. Well, they don't want that floating around.
- John: Oh, no, of course not. They aren't going to bother picking it up, so they shoot it until it explodes. Okay.
- Bender: It's interesting because we're maybe a mile or two away and you could hear it go "Ka-Boom!" [laughs] from the ship.
- John: Sure. Did you intermingle with the Japanese soldiers at all?

- Bender: Only when we were ashore. Actually, they came aboard and, as I said, they sold us stuff.
- John: Okay.
- Bender: I told you, just before we started here, they didn't want cash; what they wanted was American cigarettes. They loved them.
- John: It's a barter? You're bartering, in other words?
- Bender: Yeah. And in those days, once you got beyond the three mile limit in the United States, the cigarettes were tax-free; they were a nickel a pack, a dollar a carton. [laughs] And you know what they are now? [laughs] Anyway, we bartered. I gave Gayle a ceremonial sword, and I can't remember what it cost me, maybe a carton. I also had a Samurai sword, which unfortunately I mailed home and it never got home. And then I had a pornographic statuette that I negotiated with one of the—and I will be giving that to the museum. Now all I can do is tell you that the Japanese soldiers were quite pornographic [John laughs]; they did a tremendous business with—basically they were like silk handkerchiefs but with pornographic pictures on them, sort of silk-screened on. And those are much cheaper than the statuettes.
- John: Or the swords?
- Bender: Or the swords, yeah.
- John: Did Truk, at that time, have a local population as well as the occupying Japanese?
- Bender: The island had been owned, or mandated, to Germany, after World War I, or no.
- John: It was German until World War I?
- Bender: German until World War I and then it was mandated to the Japs. And it was interesting because we had an elderly native come aboard ship and he spoke German, and of course I had just a little knowledge of German; he spoke better German than I did. Some of the natives—I think it was the, not the commanding general, the port director or somebody; he sent us fresh bananas aboard, which we thought was quite nice.
- John: I'm getting a sense that the accident of time, a month or so, the war has ended, there's a complete transformation of the attitude of the occupying Japanese?

Bender: If I could only find my diaries, which somehow I have lost, I could tell you exactly when it was. But I'm guessing now that it, we were down there within two, three weeks after the peace was signed, and this was maybe a month afterwards and we were down there as mother-ship to the mine sweeps for about three weeks, so it would be about—let's see, the war ended, I think, in August; we started back for the United States from Guam in late October or November, so September, October after the war.

John: Yeah.

Bender: What was interesting, also—I made a note here—while we were there we got a message; we were instructed to give a Japanese destroyer enough diesel fuel to get back to Japan. The idea—

John: It was at Truk?

Bender: —well, I don't know if it was at Truk or if it came into Truk for fuel. The idea being we had enough prisoners to worry about, let them get back on their own; all they needed was fuel. So they came alongside—of course, all their plumbing fittings are metric and ours are all inch [John laughs] so we solved that; we just took the cover off the fuel tank, ran our hose and pumped it directly into the fuel tank.

John: Did they burn the same fuel that you did?

Bender: Yeah, diesel fuel.

John: Okay.

Bender: And it was interesting.

John: But I remember from an earlier interview, you said your fuel couldn't be used the way it was; you had to—

Bender: We cleaned it.

John: Clean it; centrifuge it.

Bender: Yeah, centrifuged it.

John: If you didn't there was sometimes a serious problem?

Bender: You could clog the injectors that shoot the fuel in.

John: Question then: Did the Japanese burn the clean fuel?

Bender: I don't know; my guess is they had centrifuges, same as us.

John: Okay.

Bender: Probably the same design, which they probably copied. [laughs] So, anyway, we—

John: That feels strange, being docked next to and putting fuel on board a Japanese destroyer which only a month before that you would have wanted to sink.

Bender: Yeah, or vice-versa.

John: Or vice-versa, yeah.

Bender: And the captain, by way of thanking us and since I'm the officer in charge of this group, gave me a bottle of what is Japanese scotch, except you can't call it scotch because it doesn't come from Scotland. Anyway, he gave me—oh! And is that good scotch! Aye!

John: Well, I'm curious, I'm a scotch drinker. [laughs] Is it a single malt type of scotch, or do you know?

Bender: No, it was a blend.

John: Blend, okay.

Bender: And the name is Suntory.

John: Suntory; is that still available?

Bender: Yes.

John: What do you call it?

Bender: I was over in Japan—actually we were in China and Japan in the late '70s—no, no, '84, '84—and sort of looked for it.

John: What's it called?

Bender: Suntory, S-U-N-T-O-R-Y. Anyway, we're at the airport, getting ready to take off for Hawaii, and what do I run into in the store there; there is Suntory scotch.

John: Suntory.

Bender: So I immediately bought three or—this is 1984.

John: Sure.

Bender: I bought three or four bottles. But my only problem is the suitcases. By that time, you know, they were sort of overflowing anyway, but we managed to get the four bottles in.

John: Have you ever seen it in a store here, Dale?

Bender: Not here, but I seen it here in the US, and of course, whenever I see it I buy a lot because it is made with rice, I would think. But it is the, I'm going to say a similar formula, even though it is not scotch 'cause it ain't from Scotland, but if you're a scotch drinker like you and I—

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: —it is smooth! It is smooth. It's a sipping whiskey.

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: I mean, don't, for god's sakes, put anything in it except maybe a little water and an ice cube.

John: Ice cube, yeah. That's only the way I do it anyway. I shouldn't walk into Woodman's expecting to see it though, huh?

Bender: No. I've inquired at Steve's Liquor store here, and so on.

John: They just look at you?

Bender: Yeah. He hasn't seen it in years.

John: Well, the thing to do then is to go online and see if you can find it.

Bender: There's an idea. Yeah. Actually, though, you know, a single malt scotch is good, too.

John: Yeah, we're kind of off the subject here, get two scotch drinkers together.

Bender: [laughs] I'm looking at my notes, which I wrote down so I wouldn't forget anything.

John: Okay.

- Bender: The Japanese, before the war at least, were known for the immaculate way they kept their ships. But when that destroyer tied up to us, it was *filthy*. It just was filthy. I don't know, maybe they just couldn't get—
- John: Well, by then they were losing the war and maybe it wasn't that important to them anymore.
- Bender: Well, yeah, but—no, it was rusty and it needed paint and had some areas where—we didn't get way down into the ship. I mean, we got into the ward room and into the deck to open up to the fuel tanks, but—
- John: Otherwise, it was pretty much the same as one of our destroyers?
- Bender: It was a small thing; we would have called it a destroyer escort.
- John: Okay. So, it's definitely not a Fletcher-class?
- Bender: No, not a Fletcher-class destroyer; I don't know what the small ones were called. But that is why I came in because we had not covered Truk when you and I talked before.
- John: Exactly; I'm glad you did.
- Bender: And I don't think you're gonna get comments, 'cause there weren't too many people that went down to Truk and especially went down as early as we did.
- John: I'm fascinated by the fact that the Japanese were very, very accommodating, almost glad to see you.
- Bender: Yeah.
- John: Is that an exaggeration to say they were almost glad to see you?
- Bender: I guess they were; they were.
- John: It's finally over.
- Bender: Truk had been blockaded so nothing had really gotten in.
- John: They must have been very low on supplies?
- Bender: They were very low on supplies.
- John: I think what's interesting about this interview is the fact that the Japanese were literally glad to see you.

- Bender: Yeah and they didn't—they were not harmful to us.
- John: Well, we're used to hearing stories about Okinawa and fight to the last man, fight for the Emperor, etc., and all of a sudden this has changed. How much of that do you think is because the war's over, or how much they've been cut off, isolated and really out of the war for probably several years?
- Bender: The Japanese military is very, very, strict; discipline was very tough.
- John: Uh-huh.
- Bender: And if the commanding general said, "You treat them right!" boy, nobody dared do anything else. One other little anecdote: We're tied up to a pier on Truk and I walk out and we're maybe in eight feet of water, beautiful clear water, and I look down and there right alongside the pier about six foot in diameter is a mine. [both laugh] And I'm standing about three feet above it. Jesus. I mean, I go tearing in [John laughs]—we must have had a mine officer that had come down with us or something. And I—you know, I tell him, signal to him, take up the—he looks, he said, "Don't worry; all the knobs that trigger it—"
- John: The detonators?
- Bender: —"detonators are off. And it's open so all the dynamite and so on has been washed out."
- John: And it's sunk.
- Bender: So what you've got there is just an empty shell, which was very [John laughs] silly to me.
- John: You wanted to hear it from him though?
- Bender: Yeah. Because I didn't know that; that is my first contact with a mine. And incidentally, those wooden mine sweeps, I admire those guys because mines, you know, can be triggered by contact, they can be triggered by a mechanism, they can be triggered by sound. So the ship is wooden, the engine is aluminum, and I'm sure they're very quiet, especially when they're sweeping, and we didn't, didn't lose any of the sweeps, at least not while we were there. [laughs] I forget. I think we had four or six mine sweeps.
- John: And you're saying these guys are shooting craps with destiny every time they go out?

Bender: Yeah.

John: Because something in their ship could set it off just contact, right?

Bender: Yeah, you don't have to bump it. And of course, the thing that cuts the mine loose, you've got this long cable. I don't know; I have no idea—

John: Somewhat like a trolley, a fishing boat?

Bender: Five hundred feet behind.

John: Yeah.

Bender: So when it cuts and it bobs to the surface at least it's a block away or so. And then you shoot it.

John: Uh-huh.

Bender: Except when they used our LCVP.

John: Well, you wouldn't, but [laughs] you're not trained for this sort of thing.

Bender: And "A" — [interview ends abruptly]

**[End of Interview]**