

JOHN OREN

Admiral, USCG

Sam: I'm visiting Johnny Oren at his home in Arlington, Virginia and Johnny why don't you just take over and tell us what you want about your long career in the Coast Guard.

John: When I got your letter, I thought of a few stories and things that occurred throughout my career that I thought might be rather interesting, some stories related to cadet days. During that time I felt I was pretty good at speaking Spanish, that was one of my stronger points and I enjoyed the language. As a result, on one of our cadet cruises we went to South America I had the privilege of acting as interpreter for the staff of the Sabago, primarily Captain Gordon Finley. I can recall one time to my embarrassment, when we visited the port of Bage, the first Brazilian port that we stopped at, and we expected to render honors there. The gun crews were all ready and a boat came out with an officer on it with a lot of gold on. He came aboard, was escorted back to the cabin to meet the commanding officer and I was asked to come back to interpret because he didn't speak any English. He began to speak and I discovered to my horror that he was speaking Portuguese and I didn't have any knowledge of Portuguese and yet I was afraid to admit it to Captain Finley that I didn't understand what he was saying. I asked if he could speak any French and he said he could speak a few words, so between a few words in French and Spanish, we managed to get some kind of courtesies exchanged. Captain Finley asked if the admiral would be coming out and I asked the officer and we misunderstood each other. As he began to leave the ship, presumably to report to his admiral, I informed Captain Finley that now was the time to fire the salute. The poor guy didn't get more than a hundred yards away from the ship when bang, the salute was let off and he was standing up in his boat, very red faced and saluting. Finley turned to me and said he guessed it wouldn't create an international

incident and when the admiral came back, we'd salute him too. That was one of the early boo-boos I made a cadet.

Sam: How did you know about the Coast Guard?

John: As a young man during the Depression, I joined the Navy and was sent off to San Diego. While I was there, I made friends with another sailor who was interested in going to the Naval Academy. At that time it was known as the Naval Academy preparatory class. So we both joined and after six or eight months of study, we took the examination and were selected for the Naval Academy under what was called "presidential appointment." The President could appoint two hundred, one hundred from East Coast and the same from the West Coast. I went to the Naval Academy under that appointment system.

To back up, when I joined the Navy, I had not graduated from high school so I didn't really have a very good foundation for going to the Naval Academy, but I had learned enough at the preparatory school to get me in the academy. While I was there, the courses were very stiff and my weakness was in the field of mathematics. I did very well in all my other subjects. So consequently, in February of 1930, the Secretary of the Navy issued orders for the Naval Academy to tighten up and dismiss all cadets who didn't have a 3.0 average and since I had a 2.9 and the Navy was looking for ways to save money during the Depression, I along with several others were released from the Navy.

My parents were very understanding. They lived in Chicago, so I went back there and I knew I couldn't spend my time there doing nothing, so I took some courses in math and while doing so I heard about the Coast Guard Academy. They were giving the test for the academy up at Fort Sheridan, which is just north of Chicago. I decided to take the exams, and especially since I didn't have to know any politicians, I would take the exam and just see if I passed. I went up there with about 25 other people waiting to take the exam, most of them were soldiers from Fort Sheridan who'd gone through the Army prep school. About eight took the

Coast Guard Academy exam and after it was over, I checked with the rest about answers to various questions and all those that had to do with math, I got different answers from everybody else. I thought here it goes again.

I went home, and about two weeks later, I got a letter and ~~my dad~~ came into my room and told me there was a letter from the Treasury Department . I opened it and, lo and behold, they ~~said~~ I'd passed the exam and I was accepted. So I had to go back to Fort Sheridan and find a recruiter and at that time was sworn in. ~~From~~ the 15th of July, I went to the Coast Guard Academy and started my career in the Coast Guard.

There's only one other person at that time who had had any previous military experience and was an enlisted man and that was Bill Childress, so he and I were roommates and our third roommate was George Holzman. George had never been away from home in his life, I think, because he was not prepared for the rash treatment that we got when the upper classmen came back and he was forced to sleep with Miss Springfield and take cold showers and other things. But Bill Childress and I, having been exposed to some teasing by superiors, were able to do okay and console George that he shouldn't quit right away. So that was my introduction to the Coast Guard Academy.

Incidentally, after graduating from the Academy, I had been assigned to a destroyer, the Hunt, and one of our first missions was to go down to Cuba and help maintain order for the dictator that was in charge, by the name of Batista. It was very interesting tour of duty and after that I came back to New London and told Jenny that I was being transferred to the West Coast on the Calypso and was going to San Diego so we should get married.

Arrangements were made and we were married within six hours, which required quite a bit of rush and flurry in New London to get everybody squared away, but we managed to do it. Fortunately, I had several people on destroyers there at the base and some in the radio school, so I could get a pretty good wedding party of my classmates and we were married and had about 200 people at the wedding.

When the Calypso sailed for the West Coast, Ned Sprow was the other junior officer with me and we went around through the Panama Canal and a couple of weeks later, Jenny came around through the Panama Canal on an army transport.

Sam: Who was your commanding officer?

John: The commanding officer of the Calypso at the time was Artie Moore. There were five patrol boats going out there in company of the nymph class, I guess you might call it. They were the Calypso, the Perseus, the Aurora, the Areadne and the Triton. It was a very good trip, educational in more ways than one. We started south in March of 1934 from New York and in early April made the trip through the Canal. I can remember we almost ran out of fuel as the ships were not that long-legged to jump off from the Canal and try to arrive at San Diego. So we decided if we saw that we actually weren't going to make it due to weather, what we would do was let the Daphne, which was the senior ship under command of Frank Meles, tow all four of us. We'd all put our fuel aboard one.

However, that didn't come to pass, the weather was good and was to our advantage to remain separate, particularly when we got as far north as Acapulco where we thought it would be nice to do a little fishing. We had a little outboard motor and a skiff aboard the Calypso, so a machinist named Artie Morrow and Ned Sprow and myself got in the skiff going into the bay in Acapulco to do some fishing and the machinist got something on his line. It was pulling awfully hard and we didn't know what it could be and pretty soon two great big arms came up over the side of the boat and it turned out to be a giant ray. So we started the motor up and went back to the ship.

Then a couple of people on the ship decided to go on shore and take a look around, see what the town was like and do a little exploring. They saw this place up on the hill and it looked like a monastery. They proceeded to go on up and look around and when they came back to the ship, they told us where they'd been.

We had one public health officer on the ship with us and he said that was a leper colony. I never saw such scrubbing before.

When we arrived, Babs Sprow and Ertha Meles and Jenny arrived at San Francisco and had to fly down to San Diego. They had made arrangements to come down on a United aircraft plane. Now remember, this was 1934. They were a little late getting to the plane and something happened that would never happen these days- the plane waited for them. They flew down to San Diego and Ned and I went to meet them. Ertha Meles had gotten off at Long Beach. We met our brides and I guess our first news to them was- welcome to San Diego but we're going ten days on patrol, starting tomorrow. So our honeymoon had to be postponed a little longer.

While on the Calypso we had Bering sea patrol. We picked up a sealed order off the coast of California and followed it all the way up to the Pribilof Islands. When we got up to Dutch Harbor, in Unalaska I guess it was, we'd stay there for awhile. The other cutters were in there, the Chelan and the Tahoe. Our job was to continue on up to the Pribilofs and visit the islands throughout the Aleutian chain, see what was going on. The Navy was very much interested in the Japanese activity on those islands at that time. Our job was to proceed up the entire Aleutian chain as far as Attu and to go into many of the harbors where larger ships couldn't get in. We went into all the smaller harbors and found traces of Japs having been there. At that time Kiska was called a closed port- the Navy had five throughout the world. Nothing was supposed to go in there except Coast Guard and Navy, but we knew that the Japs had been in there so we kept pretty close tabs on that.

The following year on the Hamilton we were sent up there to go on Bering Sea patrol for the whole year. Our skipper was Gordon Finley again. We had aboard the ship the head of the division of physical anthropology from the Smithsonian Institute, Doctor Horleshka. He was a Chek and his name means swallow. He was well known throughout the scientific world for his writing and studying the Indians. What he wanted to do was investigate the Aleutian Islands and the possibility of the Indians not coming

across the Bering Sea Strait, but coming along the Aleutian Chain. He explained to us the currents and what was known as the black stream which flowed along the northern coast of Japan, came down on the southern side of the Aleutian Chain and then followed across the Gulf of Alaska, down the west coast of the US and clear down into South America. This was his theory, and in order to support it, he had the idea if he visited some of these sites where he thought the Indians may have had villages, we could discover remains. We went to Kagamele and the Island of Four Mountains, areas which he spotted from a plane. We had O2 U2 plane aboard the ship. He could look down and see a certain kind of wild grass growing and a different kind over here, showing that it was cultivated and people must have been there at one time. We picked up quite a few mummies from different caves throughout the Aleutian Chain. Brought them back and they were sent down to the Smithsonian.

I asked him one day how he was so sure that he could establish a link between the people coming from Japan and Asia, that they were the wanderers coming from the Asian continent. He said that his strongest evidence were child's dolls. That they didn't change the dolls clear down as far as Patagonia and this was quite a revelation. He was quite an interesting man.

Sam: He was always called hard liquor or grave robber.

John: One time he wanted to go to Kiska. This was a year when we were on the Shoshone and he had a little skiff. We went into Kiska Harbor and it wasn't very good weather. He had five college students from the University of Washington and Oregon who were going to assist him in exploring Kiska Island, which he intended to circumnavigate. We told him not to do that because he wasn't prepared to deal with the situation if the fog closed in. He didn't listen and we put him ashore with his equipment and the five assistants and we said we'd be back to pick them up in two weeks.

When it came time to go back and get them, we couldn't find them. He had decided to do a little navigating and went over

to a nearby island called Little Kiska. In the meantime, the fog had closed in and they were afraid to get back in the boat because the current ran between the two islands pretty strong and this was one horsepower outboard motor. So for about a week, they lived on Little Kiska, the students prying mussels off the rocks and trying to survive. The old man was pretty strong; he thought it was routine stuff for archeologists. But it wasn't routine for those college kids- when they got back aboard ship, they piled their plates with food as though they hadn't eaten for years and took long hot showers. They earned their degree in archaeology that year.

When I was up in the Bering Sea one time, I was charged with making a census of Kodiak, Alaska. At that time we estimated there were about three or four hundred people there. It was nothing but a fishing village, there were no piers of any size, no other activity. The biggest thrill used to be going down to the dump to see a Kodiak bear- a big one. I was equipped with two or three people to help and we'd go to the houses, knock on the doors, had a form to fill out.

That was fine in the outskirts of town, but as we got closer to the center of town and the houses were closer together, we'd knock and ask about the family. The kids would be peeking out looking at us. We went from house to house with this procedure, counting the kids. After we'd been to six or seven houses, we realized we were counting the same kids every time. They ran from one house to another, out the back door as we came to the front. I think the population turned out to be about five hundred.

On the Shoshone , Freddie Wilde was in the intelligence business and there was a ship off the coast of Ensanada Mexico called the Mogul, Canadian registered but full of booze. They expected to land their cargo in Ensanada but something had gone awry and they couldn't land there, so the speed boats would come alongside the Mogul, load up, and try to run the liquor up to San Diego. So Freddie Wilde had an intelligence boat and they knew the liquor was coming up that way but also knew that they were bringing in Orientals.

They finally decided they were coming in by plane which would land outside of Glendale. The plane would fly right out over the ocean about a hundred miles to Bishop rock and then set course for Glendale. It called for a considerable amount of radio traffic. Freddie Wilde was in a station between Bishop rock and was to spot the plane and alert the people ashore. A lot of this traffic was known as cipher c- which consisted of a cipher with disks mounted on a long rod and you adjusted the codes depending on the day of the week. Each day was one disk about the size of a half dollar. They were arranged on the rod in a certain way and if differently, it didn't make any sense at all.

I was the communications officer on the Shoshone and we had a lot of traffic to send back and forth to the ships that were going to take part in stopping this importation of Orientals and liquor. Freddie sent a message to the ship and I got it. It was on code and I assembled the cipher c and read the message very clearly. Not long after that, I began to hear a lot of radio traffic from other ships and they didn't understand the message at all; couldn't break the code. What happened was Freddie had put the disks on the spindle backwards and so had I, so we had no trouble communicating, but anybody else who had done it right were out in left field. Case of two minuses making a plus.

Sam: Did they get their plane?

John: I wasn't in on this, but the customs and immigration people and Coast Guard surrounded the field and when the plane came in to land and went up to the hangar, the scheme was someone would fire a flare pistol and everybody would close in on the hangar. Somebody got a little antsy and fired the pistol as the plane was rolling toward the hangar and the pilot saw it go off, went inside the hangar, revved it up, spun the plane around, came out full blast and went back to Mexico.

During the war, after I graduated from MIT, I went to the Spencer, relieved George Fanimiller, a super guy and skipper. We made numerous crossings with convoys. They say war is ninety per

cent boredom and ten percent action, and that was the case. There's nothing so boring as being on a convoy escort with a hundred ships and going along trying to be alert for submarines.

On one convoy a submarine did succeed in penetrating and we were fortunate enough to bring that submarine to the surface, engage it in action and bring the survivors aboard the Spencer and some aboard the Duayne. Those we were able to fish out of the water and bring aboard were all Germans and made no attempt to speak any English, although many understood it quite well. It was in April and the water was cold so when we got them aboard, the first thing we did was make them strip and wrapped them in blankets. That turned out to be a mistake, because when we did that, we no longer knew the officers from enlisted men. We weren't experienced investigators, and they wouldn't tell us.

One man had a wedding ring on, so after we took them down in the mess deck and they wouldn't talk, I told the master to bring him to my state room. I was acting as exec and chief engineer of the ship. We had no regular exec because the skipper was Captain Fritchie and he was transferred ashore, so the exec was now the commander and that left the exec position open.

I knew this German could understand English and I told him I wanted his wedding ring. He didn't want to give it to me. I said if he didn't give it to me, he'd go to solitary confinement in the front of the ship and that was a pretty rough place to be in the North Atlantic. He thought a while and gave me his ring. I looked at it and asked if he wanted it back. He did. I told him there was one way- if he told me who were the officers and enlisted men. He did. We put officers on one side and enlisted men on the other. There were about 22 of them.

Things worked out pretty well. We went on to Scotland, off loaded them and the British sent down a couple of platoons of Scotsmen, kilts and all. They marched down with rifles on their shoulders and bayonets. For each German, four Scotsmen marched him away, prodding them now and then with the bayonets. We found out the Germans were very disappointed that we were turning them over to the British, because they all wanted to go to

Florida to pick oranges. When the last officer went off, he turned to Capain Bedine and thanked him very much for his courtesy and hospitality, all in perfect English.

Sam: Which year was this incident?

John: 1943, April. After a few crossings on the Spencer, we began to settle our intention on the convoys that were going to be able to get into Europe to support the Russians. At that time President Roosevelt had a grand strategy that they would take ice breakers and support Russia by going across the top of the Asian Continent. The Russians had done this for years, but not in very large vessels. They called the route the northern ocean seas. This would be one way that the US and Canada could supply Russia. If the Germans were successful, the Russians would have to retreat farther and farther north and would need supplies. The Germans had effectively shut down convoy routes going into Vermansk from around Iceland and Greenland and going up through Norway, but we knew they couldn't do much about going across the top.

However, before that became a necessity as a supply route, they had to have additional ships. There was a lend-lease program going at the time and the Russians had people on the West Coast as members of this program. One day a man by the name of Kenyesin was driving through Long Beach and happened to look over at the ship that was being built at the Western Pipe and Steelyard. He recognized it as an ice breaker. This man had owned a small shipyard up near Leningrad and was forced to abandon it and move all of his machinery back of the Ural mountains with the advancement of the Germans. So he became an agent for lend- lease and one of the senior ones on the West Coast. He spotted this ice breaker being built, it happened to be the Eastwind, so his job, as he saw it, was to notify the people in Washington and find out as much as he could about the ship and get some Russians naval architects and engineers to take a look at it. In the meantime, Admiral King had decided that if the Russians

had these ships, they could man them and subsequently run the whole operation themselves.

So they summoned these Russians to meet at the steelyard. They were very competent people, some diesel, some electrical, some naval architects. A different group was aboard, also officers, but members of the Polit Bureau. The problem was they learned all about the ship, came into my office daily wanting more blueprints. Headquarters was not willing to give them blueprints, but they had to give them the necessary ones. The welding techniques, etc.

After months of being built, they had a crew, part of which were women. The women in Long Beach were not allowed to go ashore. They put them in the top floor of a hotel, and they couldn't leave while the ship was being built. I don't think they were deprived of anything, except company. The men could go ashore.

When the ship was completed, one of the biggest problems we had was changing all the signs to Russian. I was the senior officer for the ice breaker detail, for all the ships, as far as the construction was concerned and the liaison between Coast Guard and the supervisor of shipbuilding in the yard, that was Jeff Fairbank. Jeff turned everything over to me and whenever there was a problem, it was up to me to figure it out. So I we had change all the signs on the ship into Russian.

We knew there was a Russian colony, they were called White Russians, in Hollywood, so we went over and interviewed several people. We could find all kinds of people who could ask for ham and eggs in Russian and could carry on a general conversation about the weather, but we couldn't find anybody who could say "circuit breaker triplatch switch." So we explained to the engineers that they had them what a particular switch did using the ship's diagrams and blueprints and then they would decide what to label the switch. Then we had the shipyard make up the nameplate. It was Russian on one side and American on the other.

When the ship got ready to sail from Long Beach, going up to Seattle to turn it over to the Russians, I had a crew of about thirty Coast Guardsmen and the Russians were going to sail the ship and

the Guardsmen were the people in the engine room. Those ships had six diesel engines and they had to be synchronized and running properly. We had drilled the Russians for some time on the way things operated, but they had different concepts of operating. For example, we say this engine has to operate at 180 degrees, they didn't have anything like that in Russia at that time, there's were about 70 degrees. They wanted to cool it down, but they couldn't do that because it was a Fairbanks Morris engine, high temperature, high pressure for that time. We would set the engines running and the Russians would come around and take a look at the thermometer and, I think they may have been mixed up with centigrade and fahrenheit, so they would immediately open the valves and cool the engine down. We had to have somebody behind them to unscrew the valves again.

One thing they wanted to before leaving Long Beach was to mount the big motorsailer we had aboard so that it was athwart ships rather than fore and aft. We argued against it but we were overruled and did what the Russians wanted. Lo and behold, they filled the whole damn boat up with cabbage. Anybody who's ever been on an icebreaker knows that they're notorious for rolling. They can roll 20-25 degrees, so it didn't take very long for this boat that was loaded with cabbage to find itself halfway over the side of the ship. We thought that boat would break, so Lieutenant Jimmy Stonesifer said he'd get up there and run the crane and put it back on the ship and lash it down, which we did. The Russians had been willing to throw it away, but it was a rather expensive piece of equipment.

Things went pretty well until we got up to the Straits of Juan de Fuca, San Juan Islands, and a radio message came through from some Russian source, and was translated into English or to be read in Russian. It went to us both at the same time. It said they had evidences of Japanese submarines operating somewhere in the Gulf of Alaska and perhaps waiting for these ships to make their way to Blatavascow. This didn't exactly thrill the Russians. The crews aboard these icebreakers were not military men, they were primarily Russian merchant marines.

And we had the women aboard who were the housekeepers and had their own quarters, except the navigator and secretary for the chief of engineers. They were very competent in their duties. The woman in the office of the engineers always used an abacus to figure everything out. The rest of us used the adding machine. She said the abacus was faster, so we challenged her on it and lo and behold it was. She could flip those beads much faster than we could punch and pull the lever. The other woman was also very capable. In fact all of the officers were and some made flag later on.

We were going into Port Angeles and all six engines were on the line and the Russians reported trouble in one engine, so took it off the line and we had only four engines left. Before we got to Seattle, two more engines went off the line, so we finally came chugging into Seattle and dropped anchor. We went down into engine room and couldn't find anything wrong with the engines. Apparently, the Russians just weren't anxious to sail back out in a hurry, but our crew wanted to turn the ship over to them and leave. We went over everything on the ship again, explaining everything and after a couple of days, the officers were satisfied. They started out and the Coast Guard crew was still aboard.

On the way out, we had engine trouble, got Coast Guard people down there right away and got it back on the line. By the time we got to Port Angeles, all six engines were running. I told the Coast Guard people to have all their gear ready because when the 82 footer came up, I wanted everybody off the ship as quickly as possible. Finally the boat came and everybody got off except myself and one other officer. We said all six engines were running fine, the ship was in good shape and we got off.

The ship did make it to Russia, but in about eight months she was back in the States. She came back for the purpose of adjustments and the same group of officers came back, so the first thing we asked was what happened to the navigator. The captain said she got a little bit pregnant.

They ran those ships, used them really hard but they didn't run them the way they should be run nor repair them correctly.

Many years later when they towed them back to the Coast Guard, the Westwind came into the yard and I got a chance to go aboard and see. Some of their repairs were pretty crude, just enough to keep it operating. The first one was the Northwind then the Eastwind, the Westwind and the Southwind. The Navy replaced those ships with new ships that had the same names. They were for peacetime duty and went to the Antarctic many times.

One of the interesting things was the way the Russians fed us. They ate six times a day and it was mostly borsch- I guess that's why they had the boat full of cabbage. We had an electrician who was sick and tired of borsch, everybody was. The way they served was, the wardroom had several tables, about ten people at the table. The senior man would dip into borsch, dig deep and get cabbage and the junior man got mostly water. So the electrician was fed up and said he wanted an egg and toast for breakfast. He didn't speak Russian and the women didn't speak English. So he drew a picture of an egg and colored it yellow and gave it to her. She disappeared. He said to the rest of us that we didn't know how to do it. Soon she came back, all smiles, she had a piece of bread burned to a crisp and a lemon on the plate.

After the icebreaker detail, I was assigned to the Breckenridge which I picked up in Carney, New Jersey. Here again Berdine was the skipper. She was an AP 176, a troop transport, could carry about 7000 at one time. Our job was to haul troops to various parts of Europe as well as bring them back from Europe to the US. The war was beginning to wind down so we didn't have to run in convoy. We'd bring troops back from La Havre, France and make a dash for New York.

One time, we had a bunch to pick up in Marseilles and took them to the Philippines. These were troops that were being transferred from the European to the Pacific theater. George Holtzman was the exec, I was the chief engineer, and Berdine was the skipper. They were armored troops, some of Patton's people. They had been in a staging area somewhere in France, so they came down in all kinds of armored vehicles, about 7000 of them. Most preferred to be on top side. They had constant crap games

going along the length of the ship. As long as they were happy, we weren't going to make a fuss. We had a detachment of Marines aboard, but so long as their weren't any fights or one guy cleaning up, it was fine. We had no problems.

Sam: Did you go through the Suez?

John: No, we came down through the Panama Canal and went across the Pacific to the Philippines.

We also had two detachments of aviators also and the colonel in charge had been used to living like a king and the armored people had been used to living in the mud. But aboard ship, the armored people were spit and polished right down to their shoes, while the aviators came to the wardroom in their bathrobes for breakfast. We didn't accept that. So we stationed Marines outside the wardroom, and if the guy wasn't properly dressed, he didn't come in for breakfast.

After the armored people were aboard, there was a Mercedes Benz touring car left on the dock. I asked the Colonel about it. He said we should leave it. I asked why and he said they took it from some French chateau and the Germans had it before them. George and I looked at each other and we swung the bow around, picked that Mercedes up and put it in the hold. We thought we'd need a car in the Philippines.

We sailed with the car aboard and then the motormax came to me and said everything on the car was metric thread so they couldn't even put spark plugs in it. I said clean it up, put it back together and we'll use it in Manila. We found every vehicle there had to have a license issued by the MPs. This vehicle had no license and if you were caught, it was assumed to be stolen and you could get in trouble. Our intention was to be able to run to an R&R camp back in the hills outside of Manila. We had a guy who ran the laundry on the ship and he had been in Joliet Prison and one of the reasons was because he made fake license plates for the state of Illinois, I guess for Al Capone or somebody. We got

some pictures of license plates on jeeps, he looked them over and said I can do it. He did and they looked great.

The first batch of officers were going up to R&R camp. It was up about 5000 feet where it was cool. We soon discovered that this car had been adjusted for sea level operations, it had about two mouse power. We got about halfway up and had to leave it alongside the road, walk up to camp and hope it was there when we got back. After that we just used it around town.

On the return trip, we had a load of army nurses, and were told that we shouldn't bring the car back to the States but leave it for the next ship. We debated about taking it out to sea and dumping it but thought that wouldn't look too good in front of 7000 troops, somebody would get in trouble. So we left it on the dock and sailed for San Francisco with our load of nurses.

A year and a half later, when I was on duty in New Orleans, Jaka was chief of staff and I was district engineer. I'd met him in the Philippines, but we didn't have a great deal to do with each other. Back in New Orleans we were at a party and I was telling him the story I just related. He said- you SOB- do you know the problem you caused me? After that ship sailed, he was the captain of the port, and the army was all over him to know how a Coast Guard transport got there, had army license tabs on it, and was left on the dock for anybody to pilfer. He didn't even know where it came from.

Back to the transport with the nurses aboard... the senior engineer came to me and said we would have some problems unless we started water rationing. If all our evaporators were working full capacity, we could keep up with demand, but the problem was the nurses were using all the water up for their showers. That wasn't going to work. So we called in the Marines. We stationed some outside the entrance to the shower rooms and closed off one completely. That's what we did and the Marines kept tab on it.

There was one nurse who went around visiting in the fantail of the ship. A Marine captain came around and said it was a problem and they knew who the nurses were. We told them they

shouldn't go back there and one nurse said- who do you think is taking the risk- them or us? We decided to let them go back there if they wanted.

After the war was over, I was sent as resident inspector to DeFoe shipyard where they were building a flagship and my daughter Joan was selected to be one of the christeners. The other girl was Jimmy Hirshfield's daughter. Joan had trouble breaking the bottle over the bow but finally managed to smash it so that the ship could sail and not have bad luck. I didn't move the family out to Michigan.

After that we went to New Orleans. The area included everything from Florida to the Mexican border. That was a good assignment, although we did have some rough times with the people down there because the city of New Orleans was trying to reclaim everything that the military had taken away during the war. This included land that the army used for training camps, dock areas which Navy and Coast Guard had used, and part of an airfield. There was quite a bit of friction.

While I was there, I had a call from Jimmy Algier asking if I would like to be his deputy in the office of engineering. I said I would so I was transferred to headquarters. He was flag officer at that time, 1962. Jimmy left the office and Ted Favey relieved him. Ted's wife became ill, so I ran the office so he could have as much time off as possible. Then I was detached from there and ordered back to New Orleans to be chief of staff relieving Ernie Casini.

On the way down there, I planned to stop and visit my mother who lived in Florida at the time. In the meantime headquarters called my mother to see if I was there. She said I was gone to New Orleans and I was going to retire. They were trying to tell me I was selected for flag.

I didn't know it and when I arrived at New Orleans. I was looking for a place to live and found a nice apartment with a swimming pool and garden. I called the district office to let them know where I was. The moving truck was there. The manager came out and said- admiral- you've got a call. I picked up phone and

Ernie called me an admiral again. He told me I'd been selected for flag. He read me the dispatch. I went out to truck where they were unloading a big box and I knew what was in it. I told them to set it in the middle of the room and called Jenny, then I opened it and there was a bottle of Jim Beam. We had a toast.

In New Orleans, I helped Jimmy Craig help these people get their land and property back. I was chief of staff. I was down there for eight or nine months and then was ordered back to Washington. They didn't tell me what capacity. I'd just gotten back there and got in touch with Ted Faulk who I was relieving. He was going to Honolulu. This was 1964. I asked Bruce Henderson to come in and be my deputy.

When I first got back to headquarters as an admiral, I was told that I was to go overseas to an international welding conference. With the job of being chief of the office of engineering was vice president of the international welding committee. Not only was I not an expert welder, but I hadn't attended an international conference. I asked Ted about it and he said just go.

So I went to New York and met a couple people there- senior welding people. They knew their stuff and I made my lack of knowledge known and they said they'd back me up. Most of the welding people in this country operated on standards that were very old and Europeans were moving quickly ahead on welding techniques. The purpose of the conference was to come together, plus the introduction of some new techniques developed during the war.

It was a very successful conference, I thought. Many of the people I met over there wanted to correspond with expert welding people over here, but didn't know how to go about it. That was one of my challenges. I wrote to people at Todd shipyard and oil companies, telling them that these people wanted to establish a liaison and were they willing to do it. Most were willing to share back and forth.

One of the first things I wanted to do was make a rather broad inspection, from an engineering point of view, of most places within the continental limits of the US and Alaska. Dutch Housma

was going to accompany me because it had to do with boats and piers and that sort of thing that had been neglected during the war. I wanted to set up some procedures for getting to the problems. He thought we could do a great deal if we marshaled resources in the right places, so I told him to do it. He lined up a trip for us to make going to all these stations from Corpus Christi, all along the Atlantic side. Whenever I'd land in a place, in a Coast Guard plane, there would be a helicopter or car waiting to transport us to a station. This worked very well, we were able to make copious notes about what should be done and go about it in a systematic manner. When we got back to headquarters, we could make recommendations according to the available budget.

One trip was going out to light station off Eastern Bay. A helicopter was assigned and I took off to a certain light station. The machine buzzed over the helipad and all of a sudden we came down with a bang. I told the pilot it was a hard landing and he said- don't worry, admiral, we're going to survey this plane next week. Not very reassuring.

One of my trips was to fly down to San Juan, so I flew to Miami, had a little chat with Butch Sayer, and he made arrangements for me to fly to San Juan. At that time my son was stationed there in the Coast Guard, although that wasn't the reason why I was going.

A commanding officer there thought they should assign my son as the pilot to fly me around to different places. I thought fine. I got aboard the plane and came to San Salvador. The plane flew over and went back up in the air. I thought- the damn fool forgot to put his wheels down. He did it again and landed. The crew was all outside and saluting and my son was out there. I said to him- forget to put your wheels down? He said: we always do that to scare the goats off the runway. I think he did it to give me a little extra show.

One time we were up in New London for a summer vacation when he was about ten years old, we went to a place and rented a rowboat. He and his sister sat in back, Jenny in bow. I said he could row and he got the oars all mixed up. I offered to show him

and he had to go sit with his sister. I grabbed the oars, took a mighty row, the oar broke, and I went back with my feet up in the air. He roared.

Those inspection trips were very educational- working fun, if you know what I mean. I made one up and down the West Coast . There was an 82 footer stationed in there and a couple of 40 footers in Depot Bay on the Oregon coast. I worked on one of the small boats. There was a chief down there looking around this boat. He had to find the loose nuts and bolts and fix things up. I asked him how he could see in there. He said he didn't have any problem. I asked how he could see under the dashboard. He said he took his glasses off and put them on upside down. Our enlisted men have a lot of ingenuity when it comes to getting things going. I very seldom ran across a man who didn't know what he was doing. The best thing that any flag officer could do was watch him do it. That was a philosophy of mine.

Sam: You mentioned Dutch Housma and he has appeared before this camera. The transport that he was on had lost all power. The commanding officer was an old time engineer, Roger Himer and he wanted to make sure everything was going right so he went down in the engine room where Dutch was busy getting things running and started asking questions. Dutch said for the first time he said to a senior officer: if you'd just get out of my engine room and leave me alone, I'll get this SOB running. Roger left him alone.

John: One good thing about most of the skippers I had, they didn't bother the engineers. As a matter of fact, I can remember when we got ready to turn the Breckenridge back to the Navy, our crew had that ship looking like a showpiece. All the brass was shiny, stainless steel cleaned up. When the Navy came aboard to take over the ship, the chief leading them down to the engine room came down the ladder and told his guys to look the ship over carefully because it was too clean. That was their attitude- there's something wrong if it's clean.

Same thing in Norfolk. A Navy pilot was sent in to bring the ship in and off load stuff. He looked confused. The engineer told him some things about the engines and he said he knew how to do it. The pilot wasn't doing it the way Berdine wanted and he said he'd relieve him. This is a 20,000 ton transport and he put it right alongside the dock and then thanked the chief. Berdine was an excellent shiphand, a prince of a man all the way around.

He and I used to go ashore quite a bit together, particularly over in Londonderry. One night we went ashore during the war and there were a lot of British all over the island. We'd been invited out to the British commanders home. Berdine had met him at submarine school and they'd become good friends. He had a house about a mile and a half from the docks so he said just walk up to the house. We're going up the road about half a mile from his house. It's dark. All of sudden we hear- halt- a who goes there? We said friend. The voice came back - advance, friend, to be identified.. So I took one step and Berdine took one step. The voice said- I said advance one. Berdine said he'd better go. So he did, and made our identification known. The commander sent an orderly down to pick us up. They weren't fooling around.

I guess that's the end of my sea stories. On different occasions, my children and grandchildren have heard them and my wife has heard them all. I thank you for the opportunity to rely them again and maybe they'll be of interest to somebody else.

Sam: I want to thank you for sharing your memories.