

AN APPEAL FOR A WORLD WAR II VETERAN

One of America's shames is the way that it has ignored its female World War II veterans. This is our appeal for one such old lady now in the greatest of need.

She is in dire straits for an expensive operation, yet no one has offered to pay for such treatment. She was disowned by her uncle, all but abandoned on the waterfront of San Francisco Bay. She had wandered there after being rescued from the decks of a ship bound for Russia as World War II ended suddenly with the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan.

Originally from New Orleans, she left there as an infant never to return. Like a bauble, she was bought with good intent, but she was a high-maintenance lady, so she languished in inactivity for decades. Cast aside by all, she as a last resort, was offered rehabilitation by a group of twelve fellow World War II vets who combined to salvage what was left of her life before she ended up dead.

These twelve old guys, the Twelve, recognized her for what she had been in the prime glory, those war years, when she was trim, vigorous, beautiful and capable of keeping up with her squadron. She was old, now, like her benefactors-to-be. Faded, disheveled, much of her vitality and organs stripped from her once-gorgeous body, she was deemed by some to be a hopeless case, ready for euthanasia or the trash heap of life. Still the Twelve fell in love with what they remembered. They wanted to see her once again as they remembered this gallant gal as she was -- already on her way to fight the dreaded Axis.

The Twelve are only Five now with seven having gone on their last patrol since their project began. And the old lady veteran of World War II, the only one of her kind still able to function as designed needs a major operation. Her bottom is wearing out and she is in sore need of a new bottom to be able to run with the wind as she once did.

Without a major sponsor and with sheer determination, the Twelve with much wheedling, begging, demanding, got her moved to Portland where they could pamper her, breathing life and beauty back into her 78-foot body. Borrowing a spot near the Navy base, they began her rehab. The Twelve aging vets gave her a new deck. She literally needed to be stripped to her bare essentials and put back together again. The Twelve wanted the world to remember what a beauty she was, how her kind helped subdue Japan and Germany, what her kind meant to twelve old vets back in their youth.

Missing vital parts, she was given besides a new deck; three newly-restored 1850hp Packard Motor Car Company engines; new guns including a 40mm Bofors; two 20mm Oerlikons; two twin-.50cal Browning machine guns; and four ancient Mk 13 torpedoes. The Twelve fabricated two new turrets, much of her hull was replaced, two Mk 6 depth charges were found and the Higgins PT boat, PT658, was once again totally rebuilt better than when she issued forth from the Higgins Shipyard in 1945.

We perhaps should not ask how all this was accomplished -- especially the ordnance. Nevertheless, the old Higgins PT (for Patrol Torpedo), one of some 700 motor torpedo boats that served in all the theaters of World War II survives; thanks to the Twelve ancient mariners who wanted to relive

their youth. And we can't forget the dozens of other craftsmen who were recruited for their skills to breathe life back into this one-time beauty.

And, now a whole new crew, a more youthful crew, has stepped forth to volunteer to assist this old lady, her life renewed. These unpaid crewmen and women fell in love not only for her beauty of today, but for what she represents -- the last of her kind, the legacy of the "Mosquito Boats," the "Plywood Navy," the dreaded "Green Dragons" to the Imperial Japanese Navy. Most of her 700 sisters were stripped and burned at Samar in the Philippines, almost eclipsing the legacy of the men who manned these high-speed boats of war.

Two of her sisters reside at Battleship Cove in Massachusetts on static display inside a museum building. Another rests in an indoor diorama in Fredericksburg, Texas. There are no others with their original equipment operating as designed.

Like the Twelve, I was one of those whose first overseas tour in World War II was as a crewman, the torpedoman on the PT103 of Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron 5. We battled our way from Tulagi and Guadalcanal -- Iron Bottom Sound -- all the way through the Pacific south of the Equator from the now-nation of the Solomon Islands to Indonesia, then known as the Dutch East Indies. My old Elco 80-footer, the PT103 with a new crew went on to fight in the Philippines after being reassigned to MTB Squadron 18.

During Fleet Week in June, 2011, of the Portland Rose Festival, I was invited with my family, wife, daughter, son and grandson to come drive and ride the PT658. What an offer! Like the Lone Ranger "to relive those thrilling days of yesteryear" as for five days the PT658 with me aboard describing life as a crewman to the modern military and civilian VIPs she carried up and down the Willamette River. Admirals up to and including those with three-stars marveled at the privations that today's sailors would find appalling that we accepted as normal.

So, where do you fit in; what does all of this have to do with you? That operation for the old lady veteran of World War II, her new bottom, will cost about \$250,000 to keep her up and running. My family and I have been invited back once again to Portland and the 2012 Fleet Week and the PT658. This exciting time will coincide with my 87th birthday celebration and mark the 70th anniversary of my Navy enlistment in 1942.

If everyone reading this will ante up just the price of a couple of beers, it will contribute to keeping this lovely old lady, this last of her kind, as a living monument to WW II veterans everywhere. Please Google www.savetheptboatinc.com to view the trials and tribulations this old lady has experienced, including her resurrection, then you will understand where you fit. We are not asking for lot; just that you contribute what history means to you as you bring up the donation form on her Website. \$5, \$10, a Benjamin or the whole \$250,000, whatever one-time donation or better, a continuing contribution, you can give is tax-deductible and the Foundation is a 501-c-3 historical educational entity.

Remember, quite unlike her aircraft compadres of WW II, she is the sole WW II PT still afloat and operating equipped and looking just like she did in 1945, even to her new green camouflage paint job.

She is and has been a platform for training and community projects for the Boy Scouts and the Sea Cadets. She brings history to life as she consumes AvGas at a prodigious rate through her three big Holley carburetors feeding her trio of 12-cylinder Packard engines. Her all-volunteer crew love her intently and we want you to fall in love with her too.

In conclusion, the current and active members of the Foundation keeping this old female veteran proud, are unaware that this appeal is going out. My family is already contributing and we are sure that you might want to also; even if it's only a couple of beers worth. The Twelve gave the last few remaining years of their lives to her, can't you honor their labors, wheelings, dealings and fortitude?

Master Chief Gunner's Mate (SEAL) Jack Duncan, USNR ret.

Lake Havasu City, Arizona

(928) 854-1438

dryfrog@npgcable.com