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World War II Navy veteran gets PT boat 'duty'

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Joe Doyon tours PT-658 70 years after applying to serve on one



BARBARA SHERMAN - Joe Doyon, who served in the Navy during WWII, gets the feel of a Browning twin 50-caliber machine gun while Cheryl Ausmann-Mareno looks on.

While Joe Doyon was serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II, he applied to serve on a Motor Torpedo Boat, but his request was denied.

On June 27, the Summerfield resident, 93, got the chance to climb aboard PT-658, one of only three restored PT boats in the country now docked in a boathouse at the Swan Island Industrial Park; but after clambering down into the hold to check out the cramped crew's quarters, he was just as glad that he didn't get assigned PT duty.

Still, he enjoyed climbing all over the boat and checking out the weapons and afterwards said of the experience, "It was just marvelous."

PT-658 is a PT-625-class Higgins 78-foot boat in the last group of four boats delivered from a 36-boat contract in October 1944 that is a prime example of the U.S. Navy Motor Torpedo Boat development during WWII, according to Save the PT Boat Inc., a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization formed by a group of PT veterans that worked from 1995 to 2005 to restore PT-658 to her original 1945 configuration.

About a dozen people, mostly members of the Portland Skyliners Tall Club, took the June tour led by volunteers Bob Day and Jim Mitchell, who is a member of the Skyliners, both of whom have worked to restore PT-658, which is the only PT boat that is operational today.

PT-658 was delivered and accepted July 31, 1945, and was state of the art for its time, outfitted with all of the latest armaments and design modifications as a result of lessons learned from previous contracts and experiences. She was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on Sept. 4, 2012.

Having been constructed late in the war, she was originally intended to be transferred to the USSR under a lend-lease program, but after the transfer was cancelled, PT-658 and three other PT boats were transported from a New Orleans boat-building factory on the deck of LST-375 to Bremerton, Wash.

PT-658 was then stationed at Port Hueneme, Calif., where on Aug. 27, 1946, she was reclassified as a Small Boat and renumbered to serve as a missile range patrol boat. On Dec. 3, 1948, she was reclassified as Floating Equipment and transferred to Naval Air Station Point Mugu, reclassified and used for patrolling the station's missile test range. During that time, PT-658 also served as a high-speed transport carrying men and supplies to the USAF D.E.W. Radar Station on Santa Rose Island.

A private party in the Bay Area purchased PT-658 on June 30, 1958, and while he renamed her Porpoise, he changed very little of her structure. In 1993, the late owner's estate donated PT-658 to Save the PT Boat Inc., of Portland, and she was transported to Portland in May 1994.

PT-658's restoration included a full armament of four Mark 13 torpedoes; twin .50-caliber Browning M2 machine guns; a 40-mm Bofors cannon; two 20-mm Oerlikon cannons; two eight-cell Mark 50 spin-stabilized five-inch rocket launchers; and two Mark 6 300-pound TNT depth charges.



BARBARA SHERMAN - While Joe Doyon (center) listens, Jim Mitchell (left), one of the volunteers who has worked to restore PT-658, tells Dave Lukens (foreground) and his dad Luke about the project.

According to Mitchell, everything is as authentic and original as possible, but a few of the parts that were not available were substituted with similar ones, and Mitchell built the wood bases for some of the armaments based on photographs.

PT-658, which has three working 1,850-hp Packard Model 5-M-2500 V12 gasoline engines, takes paying guests out for rides on the river. Due to the high-cost of the aircraft fuel she uses, guests are usually asked to pay \$150 for a one-hour ride. Up to 12 passengers can be accommodated at one time, and a minimum crew of seven to eight people also is needed.

Save the PT Boat Inc. volunteers opened the PT-658 Heritage Museum at Pier 307 of Vigor Industrial Shipyard in October 2013, which is open to the public Monday, Thursday and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Pier 307 is located at 5555 N. Basin Ave., Portland.

The non-profit group continues to raise money for ongoing restoration projects, and money also is being raised for more improvements to the boathouse to turn it into a heritage and education center. Currently, along a walkway around the lower level of the boat are hundreds of photos, newspaper clippings and other mementos related to PT-658 and other PT boats.

For more information, visit www.savetheptboatinc.com.