

PT 658 GETS A ROOT CANAL by Don Cameron



Above: Jack Coulter (left) and Don Cameron (right) were part of the bow restoration project.

When we haul the PT Boat out of the water, we have several goals. The first is to do a complete inspection of the hull. We check for any soft wood or cracks and investigate any leakage that was noticed during the boat's normal operation. I was tasked with repairing

a leak that the PT crew had observed in the bow. In the locker chamber, a small creek would form when the boat was underway. We surmised that the leak was probably coming from the front tow eye, which protrudes from the boat at the bow just above the waterline.

Upon inspection, we did indeed find soft wood and rot all around the front tow eye (Photo 1), necessitating the removal and replacement of the damaged wood in the affected area. It's just like what a dentist does to repair your teeth -- the PT Boat needed a "root canal" job.

The bow stem of PT 658 is comprised of three solid mahogany beams that are about 18 inches wide and 12 inches thick, fastened together to form the shape of the bow (Photos 2 & 3). Using a 3" Forstner bit, we drilled out all the rot. This left a gaping hole about 30" long and up to 8" deep. To rebuild where the wood was removed, we used Sapele, a hardwood similar to mahogany. We installed multiple pieces of Sapele with epoxy to fill the deepest void (Photo 4). The new wood was then belt sanded to line up with the leading edges of

the hull planks to re-form the bow's shape. The next step was to further build up the triangular point of the bow, by cutting and bending multiple pieces of planks (Photo 5).

Sapele wood does not bend easily. Using wood screws and epoxy to fasten half-inch-thick planks, we found we were able to bend the wood enough to form the radius of the bow. It took eight planks; each cut a little smaller than the next to create the bow's final shape. Once the epoxy cured on each plank, its screws were removed, and the next piece was set in place. After all the pieces were set and the epoxy fully cured, the rough edges were shaped and sanded smooth (Photo 6). Finally, we applied bottom paint under the waterline, and primer and finish paints above the waterline (Photo 7).

Soon the towing eye will be put into place and cutwater trim pieces installed. At that point, the job will be complete, after about two months of volunteer efforts. It's great to finish a project in such a way that it looks just like the original.

