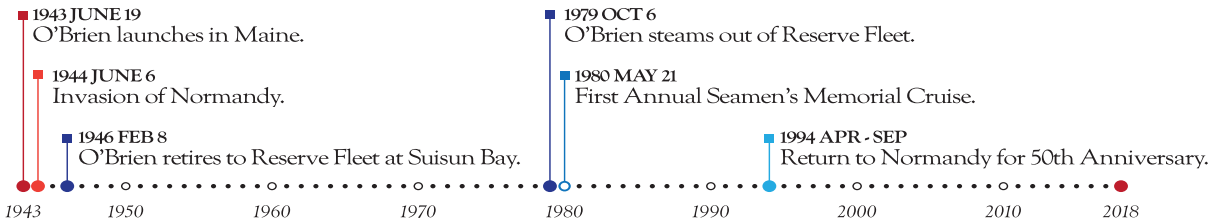




Members, Donors, Crew and Friends,

We hope everyone is enjoying spring. This newsletter gives me a chance to update you on what is happening aboard the SS *Jeremiah O'Brien* since our return from dry dock. I want to focus on this year's events and our goals that we have on the horizon.



◆ **75th Anniversary**

This year marks the 75th year of the *O'Brien's* Launch on June 19th 1943 from Portland, Maine. We are planning a party on June 23rd exclusively for crew, members and donors. Later this year we will be putting on a larger celebration with the USS *Pampanito* at Pier 45 for the San Francisco community.

◆ **2018 Cruise Schedule**

We will have our traditional Memorial Cruise coming up on May 19th. This cruise has been a tradition for the SS *Jeremiah O'Brien* since she was removed from the moth ball fleet. This cruise honors the sacrifice and service of those that made the harrowing voyages during the war. Please come out and support this important tradition. We also have the San Francisco Fleet Week Cruises coming up on October 6 and 7, for an exciting day on the bay enjoying the Blue Angels air show.

◆ **Boiler Tube Replacement**

We ordered and have received 64 newly forged boiler screen tubes. Our plan is to replace our port boiler tubes this spring and complete the Starboard in the fall. This is a big step towards the long term sustainment of the *O'Brien's* power plant.

◆ **Restoration Project in Tween Decks 4 & 5**

Work is underway to clean, paint and restore these decks. These areas contain our wood and machine shops. Our equipment ranges from WWII to modern era.

◆ **Replacement of Condemned Hand Rails**

Over the next few weeks we will be replacing and coating railings around the ship in order to enhance appearance and improve visitor safety throughout.

◆ **Tanks and Void Spaces**

Our engineers have identified key spaces that need special attention to ensure the long term health of the ship. These include the many fuel, water and storage tanks that are located throughout the bottom of the ship. Such spaces are difficult to reach to maintain and most haven't had attention since the ship was launched 75 years ago. It is our goal over the next five years to address the remainder of these spaces and solidify the SS *Jeremiah O'Brien's* position as a historical asset for future generations of Americans and San Franciscans.

Please see page 3 for details and consider supporting the work. Those that donate will receive a limited edition patch commemorating this important milestone for the ship. Thank you! Matt Lasher

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Crossed the Final Bar

Editor's note: It is with great sadness that we note the passing of volunteer Ed Von der Porten. He was present for the 1994 Return to Normandy (working as storekeeper), created displays in our museum, and helped design the display panels at the pierhead space at the entrance to Pier 45. Carl Nolte has generously agreed to let us reprint the obituary he wrote about Ed for the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Photo Credit: *San Francisco Chronicle*



Edward Von der Porten

Edward Von der Porten, expert on Drake's visit to California, dies at 84

By Carl Nolte, *San Francisco Chronicle*

Edward Von der Porten, a renowned maritime scholar who was an expert on Sir Francis Drake's 16th century visit to California, died Sunday after complications from surgery in San Francisco. He was 84.

Von der Porten was a teacher, an author and a historian, but he was best known as a leading authority on Drake's Pacific voyage in 1579 and his landing near Point Reyes in Marin County.

Drake's voyage was one of the first European contacts with what is now California. The English captain, a favorite of Queen Elizabeth I, was looking for a place of refuge after attacking Spanish outposts in South and Central America. When he landed on the unexplored West Coast, he nailed a brass plate to a post and claimed the country for England.

For years, scholars argued about the site of Drake's landing. Some thought Drake had come ashore in San Francisco Bay, while others claimed dozens of other sites, even as far north as Oregon.

But Von der Porten and associates, in a group called the Drake Navigators Guild, made a convincing case for a small cove near Drakes Bay on the Point Reyes National Seashore. The federal government agreed three years ago and designated the site as an official landmark.

Von der Porten delighted taking reporters and other interested parties to the place, a wild and windswept corner of the seashore, and talking about Drake and other seafarers.

Ships and exploration fascinated him. He also spent many years conducting research in Baja California, where beachcombers found wreckage of what Von der Porten determined was the Spanish sailing ship *San Juanillo*, one of the famous Manila galleons that sailed every year for 250 years from the Philippines to Mexico, carrying trade goods and treasures from China.

The ship had a disastrous voyage from Manila as fierce storms battered the ship and disease decimated the crew. Von der Porten believed the crew was in desperate condition when the ship ran aground on the uncharted Mexican coast in 1578. Its wreckage was scattered by hurricanes and remained buried for nearly

(continued on page 7)

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Tanks And Void Spaces

The tanks of a Liberty Ship were built as bare steel tanks with a spray-in concrete coating. The design was inexpensive and meant for a short service life.

We have been assessing these spaces to come up with a preservation plan for each. Modern tank coatings are epoxy systems meant to last a very long time. With these modern systems we can provide these tanks with a long term solution.

The Fore and Aft Peak Tanks: These are the ship's water tanks and have suffered the worst exposure to oxidation over her 75-year life. They are our highest priority. Restoration and coating work is expected to cost \$200,000.

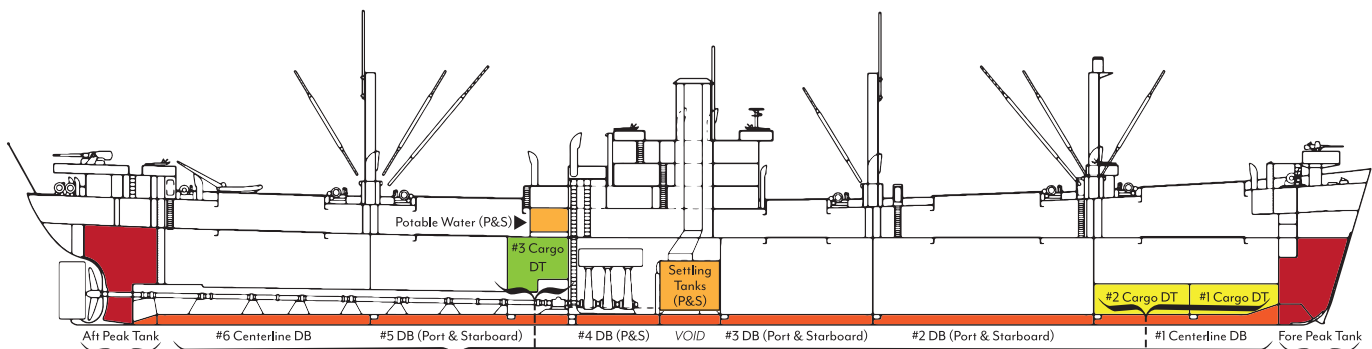
Centerline and Double Bottom Tanks: These tanks are for the storage of extra fuel. To coat them properly they need to be cleaned which is an expensive process. We are expecting cleaning and coating to cost \$50,000 per tank or \$500,000 for all centerline and double bottom tanks.

Feed Water, Potable, and Engine Room Voids:

These tanks are for the storage of fresh water for the engine and for crew usage. The engine room voids are located under the engine platform and are sometimes referred to as the engine room bilge. Restoration and coating of these areas are expected to cost \$100,000.

Cargo Deep Tanks: This is our lowest priority. These tanks were used to transport liquid or fine cargo during the war. Molasses, sugar or fuel were typical cargoes. Cleaning and coating are expected to be \$100,000.

We hope to raise over \$900,000 during the next five years to handle these issues. The good news is we have already raised \$200,000 from an anonymous San Francisco couple looking to help keep the O'Brien sailing.

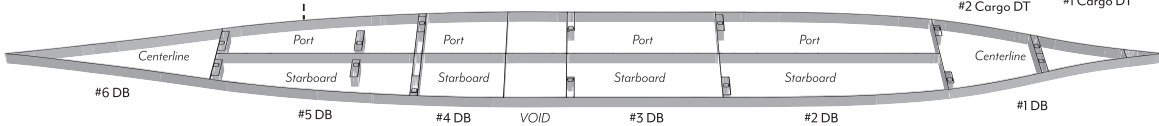
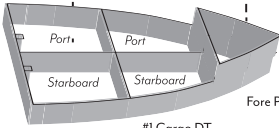


Aft Peak Tank
 The aft peak tank is the after-most tank in the main hull structure. It is normally used for the storage of fresh water or ballast and provides a degree of protection to all spaces forward of the aft peak bulkhead.

Double Bottom Tanks (DB)
 A double bottom is a ship hull design and construction method where the bottom of the ship has two complete layers of watertight hull surface: one outer layer forming the normal hull of the ship, and a second inner hull which is somewhat higher in the ship, perhaps a few feet, which forms a second barrier to seawater in case the outer hull is damaged and leaks.

Cargo Deep Tanks (DT)
 These tanks were meant to hold various materials, both liquid and solid.

Fore Peak Tank
 The fore peak tank is the fore-most tank on the main hull structure. It is normally used for the storage of fresh water or ballast and provides a degree of protection to all spaces aft of the fore peak bulkhead.



The Chief's Corner

No. 3 – The Continuing Saga of the SS *Frantic*



Jon Eaton,
Chief Engineer

If you've been following my column, I've been telling the story of an oil tanker I worked on that was headed for the Persian Gulf. That ship was the *Frantic* a 140,000-ton tanker launched in July of 1972. The ship was built by Sun Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, based in Chester, Pennsylvania. As the years passed, more tankers of this size and nature were built by Sun and the engineers

that sailed them referred to them as "suffering Suns." Those are other men's words; however, I cannot disagree with the moniker.

Sun Shipbuilding was a very productive yard that pumped out hundreds of ships, primarily tankers and cargo ships, during its existence. The company built for Sun Oil, private parties, other oil companies, and, particularly during World War II, the U.S. Maritime Commission. I personally sailed on some of these ships.

However, in the 1970's quality control began to fail and the *Frantic* was an unfortunate victim.

I was one of the very first of my company's ship engineers to attend the building of the *Frantic*. I witnessed the launching of the bow section of the ship, which was too large to build in one piece. The fore section was welded to the stern at about amidships(?) in a floating dry-dock. The dry-dock had to be augmented by a floating barge on the bow of the *Frantic* to further support that section so it could be assembled. There may have been 12 ships of this kind being built at one time. These were large, medium-speed, roll-on roll-off (LMSR) cargo ships. I spent eight years sailing on them. They were comfortable to ride in but could be very difficult to maintain.

The *Frantic* was my first and only new build. I was twenty-three-years-old and wide-eyed at the new building scene.

I was exposed to many firsts that lasted a lifetime. I got to walk on the keel of the "Glomar Explorer" (the clandestine vessel that purportedly raised a portion of a sunken Russian submarine). During the final phase of construction I was able to attend many different educational courses offered on the machinery being installed. Some of those courses were: General Electric central operating system, a state of the art marine sanitation device (which included a centrifuge and carbon filters), Lungstrom air preheaters and Aqua Chem for distillers (unheard of at the time, the ship had one water system and it was all potable which meant that most of the time we flushed with distilled water! If performing optimally they could all together generate 140 tons of distilled water a day).

I also went on the builder's sea trials. At this point, the vessel was being securely operated by the builder.

Engineers from the operating company were allowed onboard to observe only. All operations seemed to work flawlessly. There was a complement from the shipyard of about 100 men. The trials lasted overnight. It was not until the company that I worked for officially took possession that we discovered a lot of automatic features the engine room had were being manually manipulated.

On christening day in July, the very first mishap to occur after the *Frantic* became "our" ship was the personnel elevator became stuck midway to the engine room. The Chief Engineer had invited friends and dignitaries to visit his pristine machinery palace. There were ladies in finery and gentlemen dressed for the occasion in that elevator. This was July 22nd, a very warm and muggy day. It took over an hour to bring the elevator to a level where the very bedraggled and perspiring people could exit.

Operating the *Frantic* only got worse after that. On our way to the Persian Gulf we had many engine room emergencies. So many that on the way back our definition of an "emergency" rose to the level of a blacked out plant. Slow downs, failed systems, boiler shutdowns no longer counted as emergencies. The watch was expected to handle those events themselves.

As I noted in my last article, when we left port, we were expecting to be routed to Venezuela for a "shakedown" cruise. Instead our destination was the Persian Gulf with two stops there, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. This round trip would turn out to be 97 days with no time ashore.

My job on that first trip was to be the Lube Oil King. I cleaned the high pressure lube oil strainers twice a watch and that was the minimum: the lube oil was very dirty caused by engine casings being open for long periods with little concern for dirt entering the main engine in particular. It was so hot doing this work that I could pour perspiration from my boots at the end of the watch. While we were at sea on the way to Kuwait, I discovered that we had just three changes of filters for the main engine coalescing cartridge. This was very alarming; by the third day of operation I had consumed all of our spares. Eventually this led to couplings in the main engine plugging up with dirt which prevented their proper motion. This in turn led to the high pressure turbine first reduction pinion to develop 27 fractures in the teeth. An engine of that size needed a lube oil purifier especially when going offshore for a long trip. Coalescing filters were making a splash because they were relatively inexpensive to install and maintain. It simply did not work on that vessel. Ultimately a purifier was installed, but damage had been done.

So, by this part of the saga the ship is on its way to Cape Town, still a long way to go.

J. A. Eaton
Chief Engineer

The Other O'Briens By Brian Agron

Though the S.S. *Jeremiah O'Brien* is the only civilian merchant ship so named, there were in fact five U.S. Navy ships that were named the *O'Brien* after Jeremiah and his brothers Gideon, John, William, Dennis and Joseph. This article is a review of these ships, one of which has a small and rather poignant connection to the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

The first ship named the *O'Brien* was a torpedo boat, TB-30 built by the Lewis Nixon shipyard in Elizabethtown New Jersey. Her keel was laid on December 29, 1896 and was launched on September 24 of 1900. She was launched by Mira O'Brien who was the great-great granddaughter of Joseph O'Brien. The vessel was struck from the Navy List on March 3 1909 and subsequently used as a target.

The second was the USS *O'Brien* (DD-51) built in Philadelphia in September 1913 and was the first of the *O'Brien* class of destroyers. During her career she helped rescue the survivors from the German submarine *U-53* and was later sent overseas to patrol along the Irish coast. Decommissioned on June 5, 1922, she was struck from the Naval Vessel Register in March of 1935 and sold for scrap.

The third was the USS *O'Brien* (DD-415) a Sims class destroyer built in the Boston Navy Yard. Her keel was laid down on May 31, 1938 and launched on February 20, 1939 and sponsored by Josephine O'Brien-Campbell who was the great-great-great granddaughter of Gideon O'Brien. She arrived in San Francisco on February 4, 1942 and after sailing for the Western Pacific, had to return to Mare Island for repairs from damage caused by a collision with the destroyer USS *Case*. Later in the war while she was escorting troop transports en route to Guadalcanal with the combined Task Forces 17 and 18, she was torpedoed by the Japanese submarine *I-19* along with the aircraft carrier *Wasp* and the battleship *North Carolina*. The explosion did serious structural damage to the framework and in spite of several 'temporary' repairs, while sailing back to San Francisco she began to take on large amounts of sea water. Her bottom split apart and both ends of the *O'Brien* began to operate independently and she sank on October 19, 1942 with the all hands surviving.

The fourth USS *O'Brien* was DD-725, a Sumner class destroyer built by the Bath Iron Works in Bath Maine and also sponsored by Josephine O'Brien, was laid down on July 12, 1943 (one week before the S.S. *Jeremiah O'Brien* was launched) and commissioned on February 25, 1944 and participated in the invasion of Normandy. She returned to the Boston Naval Shipyard and was extensively reworked before being sent into the Pacific to escort the aircraft carrier *Ticonderoga*. On March 27 off of Kerala Retto she was attacked by Japanese aircraft. The *O'Brien* splashed one aircraft but another carrying a 500 pound bomb



USS *O'Brien* (TB 30) launched September 24, 1900

crashed into the port side amid ships and exploded a magazine.

Fifty of her crew were killed or missing and another seventy-six wounded. She survived the attack and was repaired at Mare Island and ultimately survived the war and was decommissioned on October 4, 1947.

In the early dawn hours of December 7, 1941, while on submarine patrol outside of Pearl Harbor, the destroyer USS *Ward*

spotted a periscope of a midget submarine. The first shot missed but the second put a neat three inch hole at the base of the conning tower, sinking the submarine. The commander of the USS *Ward* at that time was William Outerbridge. Three years to the day, December 7, 1944, a Japanese kamikaze attacked the USS *Ward*, severely damaging her and setting her ablaze. The USS *O'Brien* was ordered to sink the *Ward* and the commander of the *O'Brien* at that time who carried out the order was none other than the same William Outerbridge who commanded the *Ward* when she sunk the Japanese midget submarine.

Recommissioned in 1950, USS *O'Brien* served during the Korean and Vietnam wars, both in anti-submarine warfare and shore bombardment duties. Ultimately age began to catch up with her and she was decommissioned for the second time February 18, 1972 and on July 13, 1972 was towed out to sea and used for target practice and sunk.

Photo credit: Vallejo Naval and Historical Museum



USS *O'Brien* (DD725) entering San Francisco Bay, date unknown.

The final USS *O'Brien* was a Spruance class destroyer (DD975), laid down on May 9, 1975 and launched on 8 July the next year. She served in the Pacific and on her fifth deployment as part of the Middle East Force. She was part of three-ship action group that helped sink the Iranian guided missile frigate *Sahand*.

She was decommissioned on September 24, 2004 and sunk as a result of target practice on February 9, 2006.

My research for this article uncovered yet another '*Jeremiah O'Brien*' but it was not capable of floating. The Bangor and Aroostook railroad in the state of Maine had a railroad engine, # 1776 which they named Jeremiah O'Brien. Fate of this engine is unknown at this time.

(continued on page 7)

Just Who Was Jeremiah O'Brien? By Walter W. Jaffee

A Scots-Irish lumberjack from Machias, in the "Province of Main," *Jeremiah O'Brien* was the offspring of a family that settled in the area in 1765. For ten years the O'Briens peacefully made their living logging the pine forests of the northeast, providing lumber for the local colonists.

In 1775, long-festering problems with the British Crown reached the breaking point. That spring a shipment of Machias pine was loaded into two sloops belonging to Ichabod Jones. Normally, the lumber would be sold in Boston for the account of the townspeople of Machias, but being firmly pro-colonist and unsure of the situation in Boston, they instructed Jones to sell the lumber along the coast. Captain Jones, however, had another agenda. His family lived in Boston. Anxious to move them out of harm's way, he ignored the instructions and sailed directly into Boston Harbor. There he sold the cargo and made a deal with the British. In exchange for the promise that he would return with another load of lumber to build barracks for British troops, he was allowed to move his family.

Loading his sloops with badly needed supplies for Machias, Captain Jones sailed for Maine. Admiral Graves of the British Navy, wanting to be sure the colonist kept his word, instructed the armed schooner *Margaretta*, under command of Captain Moore, to escort Jones' ships.

On June 2, 1775, the people of Machias were angered to see the *Margaretta* enter their harbor escorting the two sloops, *Polly* and *Unity*. Captain Jones tried to talk the townspeople into supplying lumber in exchange for food. The good people of Machias had a mere three weeks' rations left, but they knew the lumber was for Boston, which had recently fallen to the British, and they wanted no part of the deal.

Refusing to be bullied, the townspeople erected a Liberty Pole as a symbol of their defiance. When Captain Moore saw it he was incensed. Moving his ship into position to fire on the village, he ordered the Liberty Pole taken down and demanded that trade begin immediately. A few of Machias' more influential (and cautious) townsfolk agreed to the trade and the sloops' cargo was discharged and loading began. Others were less fearful and more determined. On June 11, while the commander of the British schooner was ashore attending Protestant services in the local church, they decided the timing was right to put the British bully in his place. As he looked out the window of the church, the commander of the schooner saw several colonists swimming toward the *Margaretta* on logs. Quickly returning to his vessel, he weighed anchor and sailed farther downstream, threatening again to burn the town if anyone interfered with the loading of the sloops. Firm in their resolve, the men of Machias located the schooner at its new anchorage. They began a small arms fire from a bluff whose elevation was too high for the ship's cannon to reach. The ship was forced to up anchor again and

look for safety still farther downstream. In the haste of departing, with musket fire raining down from above, the ship's main boom snapped, seriously crippling her.

The following day the *Unity* was commandeered at anchor and brought alongside the town dock. Rapidly loading the ship with arms and ammunition (there was no time to remove the cargo of lumber) the ship sailed with the idea of capturing the *Margaretta* anchored downstream. Jeremiah O'Brien, a man of thirty-one was chosen as captain. His crew of thirty-five included five brothers. For victuals they carried one loaf of bread, a few pieces of pork and a barrel of water. Their weaponry consisted of twenty shotguns with three rounds of ball and powder each, a small cannon, a few axes and swords and some thirty pitchforks. What they lacked in provisions and arms they more than made up for in conviction. As the *Unity* rapidly gained on the *Margaretta*, which had weighed anchor and was now running slowly toward the safety of the open sea, Jeremiah O'Brien shouted, "Now, my brave fellows ... our first business will be to get alongside of the schooner yonder; and the first man to board her shall be entitled to the palm of honor."

Ordering the cargo of lumber to be placed as a breastworks around the vessel for protection, O'Brien quickly gained hailing distance.

"In America's name, I demand you surrender," he shouted.

The British answered with a volley from the stern gun that killed two men. A backwoods moosehunter by the name of Knight manned the *Unity's* gun and picked off the British helmsman. This cleared that vessel's quarterdeck, leaving the ship wallowing out of control and caused her to broach. As the two ships crashed into each other, Capt. O'Brien lashed them together.

John O'Brien, younger brother of Jeremiah, with 49-year-old Joseph Getchell, was the first to set foot on the *Margaretta*. They were met with heavy small arms fire from the British captain and crew. Leading a select group of twenty pitchforkmen, they boarded the British vessel and fought hand to hand for a full hour. At the end, Jeremiah O'Brien personally hauled down the British Ensign, winning the first naval battle of the Revolutionary War. Following the battle, Jeremiah became known as Colonel O'Brien.

Subsequently, the *Unity* was outfitted with the armament from the *Margaretta* and became the armed cruiser *Machias Liberty*, the first American armed cruiser of the Revolution (and, in a sense, the first true Liberty ship).

In mid-July 1776, Colonel O'Brien, in command of the *Machias Liberty*, with the aid of Capt. Benjamin Foster on the *Falmouth Packet*, captured the British vessels *Diligent* and *Tapnaquish*, both of which had been sent for the express purpose of bringing "... the obstreperous Irish Yankee in for trial."

(continued on page 7)

Just Who Was Jeremiah O'Brien?

(CONTINUED from pg. 6)

Following this success, Jeremiah O'Brien, patrolled the North Atlantic in the *Machias Liberty*. Later, he commanded the privateers *Little Vincent*, *Cyrus* and *Tiger*. After a year-and-a-half he was given command of *Hannibal*, mounting twenty guns and manned by one hundred and thirty men and brought many prizes into Machias.

Two years later the *Hannibal* fell in with an English fleet of merchantmen off New York, sailing in convoy. She was immediately chased by two British frigates and, after a forty-eight hour running battle, was taken. Jeremiah O'Brien was captured.

Following detainment in the infamous guard ship *Jersey*, O'Brien was transferred to Mill Prison in England. His brother John, in a memoir written several years later, recounted what happened next:

He purposely neglected dress and whole personal appearance for a month. The afternoon before making his escape he shaved and dressed in decent clothes, so as to alter very much his personal appearance, and walked out with the other prisoners in the jail yard. Having secreted himself under a platform in the yard, and thus escaping the notice of the keepers at the evening round up, he was left out of the cells after they were locked for the night. He escaped from the yard by passing through the principal keeper's house in the dusk of evening. Although he made a little stay in the barroom of the house, he was not detected, being taken for a British soldier. In company with a Captain Lyon and another American who also had escaped from the prison and were concealed in the vicinity, he crossed the English Channel to France in a boat and thence came to America, just about the time the hostilities ceased.

During the War of 1812, when the British again threatened to take Machias, Colonel Jeremiah O'Brien, still dauntless despite his advanced years, defiantly brandished the same sword he so capably used in the Revolutionary War.

With the same spirit as her namesake, the S.S. *Jeremiah O'Brien* lives, honoring her illustrious 18th century namesake well into the 21st century – a name – and a ship – for all time.

Edward Von der Porten

(CONTINUED from pg. 2)

450 years. Von der Porten was able to identify it from shards of Chinese Ming Dynasty porcelain carried in its cargo and discovered under the beach sand. He had nearly completed a book on the galleon when he died. The book will be published next year.

Edward Von der Porten was born in New York City in 1933, the son of German immigrants. He moved to San Francisco after high school and graduated from what was then San Francisco State College in 1955. He received a master's degree in history from the college in 1965.

Von der Porten was a high school teacher for many years in Fremont and Santa Rosa, and also taught at Santa Rosa Junior College. During school vacations, he traveled in Europe and did research on World War II naval affairs. He wrote two books on the German Navy and nearly 100 scholarly articles on maritime affairs — everything from Henry VIII's flagship to the modern battleship *Iowa*.

He also served as director of the Navy and Marine Corps Museum on Treasure Island from 1985 until it closed in 1992. He then designed the onboard museum on the Liberty Ship *Jeremiah O'Brien* berthed at Pier 45 in San Francisco.

Von der Porten is survived by his son, Michael, of Santa Rosa; four grandchildren; and one great-grandchild. His wife, Saryl, who he married in 1954, died in 2011. A son, Eric Von der Porten, died in 2008.

Plans for a memorial service are pending.

Photo Credit: San Francisco Chronicle



Von der Porten and guests near Drakes Bay, Point Reyes

The Other O'Briens

(CONTINUED from pg. 5)

So as of this moment in history, there is but one *Jeremiah O'Brien* in existence, but given the flow of history, perhaps there is a future DD to carry this proud name.

References: wikipedia.com

<http://www.ussobriendd725.org/index.htm>

<http://www.american-rails.com/bangor-and-arostook.html>

WELCOME NEW VOLUNTEERS!



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May 19 Veterans Memorial Cruise

Our Veterans Memorial Cruise is an annual tradition for the SS *Jeremiah O'Brien*. It commemorates the gallantry of all veterans who have served in defense of America's freedom. Just outside the Golden Gate Bridge a wreath-laying ceremony is conducted complete with Color Guard.

October 6 and 7 Fleet Week Cruises

Bring the family for an all-day cruise on the bay! Explore the *O'Brien's* galley, crew quarters, guns and gun mounts, exhibits, and the triple-expansion steam engine. Enjoy live music, a continental breakfast, lunch, spectacular bay views, and front row seats to the U.S. Navy Blue Angels Air Show.

