It's been 40 years since the SS Jeremiah O'Brien left the Reserve Fleet and headed for her new life on San Francisco Bay.

An ambitious goal was made in 1978 - to restore a Liberty ship that had been laid up for 33 years in the Mothball Fleet and preserve that ship as a floating museum. Through a series of lucky events, the JOB was selected by Admiral Patterson out of the numerous old, rusted Liberty ships that were awaiting scrapping. And then the incredible effort of a volunteer crew started to make that dream a reality.

In 1979 while the ship was moored in Suisun Bay, a group of merchant seamen engineers worked in the dark to get the steam engine going. Once that momentous task was accomplished, the

Continued on page 3.... 'Forty Years Ago'
From Our Captain

Cevan LeSieur...

Fleet Week has always been a special time for those involved with the Jeremiah O’Brien. We have the opportunity to take our wonderful ship out into the bay for an exceptional air show two days in a row. Saturday dawned this year with the best bay weather for a cruise I have experienced in my time with our ship. I think the maritime gods were paying us back for the cold, overcast, and rainy Memorial Cruise we had in May. A near capacity crowd enjoyed the usual stunning air show. While Sunday was a bit more breezy and cooler, we had another great day on the water.

Once again, I was impressed with the outstanding job done by our volunteer crew and paid staff to get the job done. Simply without them our national treasure does not leave the dock.

As fall and winter descends on the Bay Area, maintenance of the Jeremiah O’Brien will continue unstoppered. We have some great ideas for 1 or 2 additional cruises next year. As Captain, I want to once again thank all those that support the ship during the year.
Continued from page 1…. ‘Forty Years Ago’

newly formed National Liberty Ship Memorial, a California non-profit, went even a step further. Tickets were sold and the ship was loaded with passengers at the Reserve Fleet. Through a series of rigged ladders, passengers boarded and then steamed - the ship’s own power - to San Francisco Bay! This could never happen today.

May 1980, just seven months later, after a massive restoration project, the first Seaman’s Memorial Cruise took place. That cruise was the first of many, now it is a tradition on San Francisco Bay and this year will be the 40th!

The Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet of obsolete ships is usually the last, sad stop on the way to the breakers. But the O’Brien was different - she has always been different - she is the ‘Lucky’ O’Brien!

Even in her wartime service, in the most dangerous waters of WWII, convoys across the U-Boat infested Atlantic Ocean, eleven runs to the beaches of Normandy during D-Day, and the war in the Pacific, she was a ‘lucky’ ship.

Now we are celebrating 40 years of continuous operation as a working ship and a popular attraction in San Francisco, done with volunteers and our hard-working staff. Every single volunteer and staff member should feel gratified that in the last 40 years, numerous companies have gone out of business - and yet we’re still here - 7 days a week - 52 weeks a year.

We are open to the public to share this authentic experience. And we don’t just stay tied to the dock either, we are a fully certified Coast Guard vessel that sails, just as this ship was designed to do during WWII.

It is gratifying to our organization that we have the support of the Fisherman’s Wharf Association, many maritime agencies and especially the Port of San Francisco. They have provided us with our berthing at Pier 45 in the heart of Fisherman’s Wharf. That cooperation is one of the many factors that have contributed to the success of this museum ship. We are here to host visitors from around California, the U.S. and every country in the world!

There is so much more to this story. If you would like to read the full tale of the Jeremiah O’Brien, pick up a copy of ‘SS Jeremiah O’Brien’ by the ship’s historian Capt. Walter Jaffee.

❖

Photos from ‘SS Jeremiah O’Brien’ by Capt. Walter
The Amazing Story of the Fastest Liberty Ship Ever Built

‘SS Robert E. Peary’

Liberty ship trivia enthusiasts all know that the fastest Liberty ship ever built was the ‘SS Robert E. Peary’ built in the Kaiser Shipyard in Richmond California. But how did that contest come about and which shipyards were involved in the contest? What happened to the Peary after that? The rest of the details aren’t as well known, and as the story has been told over the years, many embellishments have been added. So it’s time to shed light on that famous ship’s history.

The Peary was built in 4 days, 15 hours and 29 minutes in the Kaiser Richmond Yard, she was launched on September 12, 1942 in San Francisco Bay. To compare the speed of construction, the first ever Liberty, ‘SS Patrick Henry’ was constructed almost exactly a year earlier. It was built in Baltimore at the Bethlehem-Fairfield yard and launched in Sept. 27, 1941. That ship, it has been reported, was constructed in 150 days.

Henry J. Kaiser, a titan of American industry took up his country’s challenge of building ships in 1939. He perfected mass production assembly methods learned from the auto industry, and applied it to shipbuilding. His largest shipyard was in the Northwest - the Oregon Shipbuilding Company located on the Willamette River northwest of Portland, Oregon. Opening in 1941, ’Oregonship’ initially built merchant ships for the British government, which had suffered heavy losses from German U-boat missile attacks. Soon the yard produced ships for the U.S. Maritime Commission too.

Kaiser went on to build other shipyards mostly in the west - one in Sausalito, called Marinships; Kaiser Shipyard in Vancouver, Washington; Permanente Metals (later called the Richmond Shipyards #1, #2, #3 and #4 and the Swan Island Shipyard in Portland Oregon. He managed the California Shipyard CALSHIP in Los Angeles also.

At the start of the Liberty ship program in 1941, taking all shipyards into account, ships took an average of 230 days to build, but by 1943, well into the program, the figure had come to an average of 42 days! *

Each yard was different but normally, the Permanente (where the Peary was built) yard took an average of about 50 days to build a Liberty ship. The extreme rapidity of the Robert E. Peary’s construction illustrated how successfully US shipyards had adopted methods of mass production.

Continued on page 11
Comments and Letters from the Crew

Comments on the 1994 Normandy Voyage Crew

Editor,

When you look at the photo of the ship coming into the English Channel, do you see that little white speck on the bow? That’s Jimmie Farras. Jimmie was a classically-trained chef who worked at Boz Skaggs’s restaurant. He was the 2nd Cook & Baker on paper but in reality was the Chief Cook.

The Chief Cook was listed as Al Martino, 62, a retired San Rafael firefighter who had considerable experience in meat cutting. Eddie Pubill was 3rd Cook and did prep work, dishwashing, and cleanup. Al and Jimmie planned the meals and sat at the forward end of the forward table in the Gunner’s Messroom.

Russ Mossholder, from San Leandro, was the Chief Steward. He was WWII Navy vet who had experience running restaurants. Jimmie Farras ran the show and we ate like kings the whole time.

Greg Williams, Noti Oregon ❖

Welcome back to Frenchie Pouthron who was away from the ship for a few months. It was good seeing you on the Saturday Fleet Week Cruise!

❖

Get well to Mike McDevitt, who has been out for awhile for a knee replacement. Miyoko has been absent too, so we hope to see you both back soon.

❖

Good to see Jim Galardo (below), long-time docent, who was along for the Saturday Cruise. Jim served in WWII in the Army and saw service in the Pacific.

What Visitors Are Saying About Our Ship

September 2018, Trip Advisor

It's important, I believe, for everyone no matter what age to explore any of our military ships all across the country. It's in excellent condition as it is still in use but exploring it and understanding history is worth the trip.

Visitor from Henderson, Nevada
There is a small but significant ‘error’ about the Dodge WC53 truck we have on display in cargo hold #1, our D-Day museum. This beautifully restored and preserved Dodge WC53 (as labeled) is not a WC53 at all, but in fact a Dodge WC62, a 1 1/2 ton 6x6 truck. This discrepancy that has been pointed out to us several times in the past few years by knowledgeable WW2 vehicle historians and restoration experts. How did this come about and why does the error persist?

In April of 2005 the truck was donated to the O’Brien by Mrs. Noelle Laberthoniere after its restoration in France by many volunteers who also paid for it to be shipped to San Francisco. This was mentioned in the #29 winter of 2005 edition of SASG. During the truck’s restoration, the sign mis-identifying the truck as a Dodge WC53 was permanently glued to the front windshield, as the story goes, and removing it would be quite

The Dodge WC62 was specifically designed to be able to tow a 57mm anti-tank gun and the gun’s 8 man crew through the harsh and often muddy terrain.
Following is a complete list of crew who made all or any part of the 1994 Normandy trip.


Meet Our Newest Board Member

Forrest Booth

We are pleased to welcome Forrest Booth to our board. Originally from Massachusetts, Forrest moved to California in 1977. He is an Admiralty lawyer and has worked with the San Francisco Bar Pilots as well as many other maritime interests.
Marianne Brannon

By Francis McCall

“Marianne was born in 1927 in Germany, and died in the second week of August 2019. She was married to Chief Engineer Richard Brannon for 37 years, until his death in the late 1990’s. They met when they both served on the Hospital ship Hope.

Her mother and father were German Jews. Her father was a successful factory owner making rugs with 100 employees. They had a fine home in Potsdam, and as a little girl she was driven to school in the family car by the chauffeur. Then Hitler came into power in 1932 and the madness began. By 1936, her mother started to slip profits into a Switzerland Bank account.

Come 1939, the family left Germany and made their way to England. Then her uncle (on her mother’s side) in New York, arranged for the family of four to sail to the United States and enter the country legally. To stay in Germany would have doomed this family.

Fast forward, they lived in New York where she earned a degree as a nurse. She worked several hospitals in New York before she went to sea on the Hope.

Marianne joined the JOB as a docent shortly after her husband died. We both worked a Thursday shift; me as a deck hand, and she as a docent. She was a fine lady, a good ship-mate, and I loved her spunk.”

More on Marianne, An Interesting Lady…

By Linda Greig

Marianne’s family had to get out of Germany after her father was imprisoned in a concentration camp. Thankfully, the family was able to pay for his release. They applied for and got Visas to the U.S. and on 1938 Marianne and her parents sailed aboard the SS Orinoco, a German ocean liner bound for Cuba. She said she was seasick the entire time - but the family arrived in Cuba and they waited for their Visas. In 1939 the family arrived in Boston, where Marianne graduated high school and got her nurses’ credentials. After working at the Massachusets State Prison Hospital, where she developed her “patient and understanding’ bedside manner, Marianne went to New York and worked at Sloan Kettering Health Center for 6 years; then she became a traveling nurse where she visited patient’s homes in Harlem.

Marianne became intrigued with the hospital ship ‘Hope’ which was slated to leave San Francisco for Indonesia and Viet Nam. She signed up and left from San Francisco in 1961. Aboard, she met First Asst. Engineer Dick Brannon who was working for APL and they...
carried on a "torrid seagoing romance" in her words. They later married in Las Vegas, moved to San Diego and each kept their own careers. He went back to sea as an Engineer and she as a Nurse on cruise ships, they would meet at various spots around the world. They later moved to Pacifica and Dick was instrumental in restoring the JOB engine in the Reserve Fleet and making the maiden voyage after a 33 year layup.

After Dick passed away, Marianne decided to join the ship’s crew and she was Head Docent for years.

Marianne was a member of the Greatest Generation. We all have our 'Marianne' stories, but ultimately Marianne was hardest on herself. She worked at the ship til knee problems prevented her from getting up the gangway.

As I write this, I feel like she is looking over my shoulder and saying, 'Greig, don't write anything sappy." But Marianne, you represented the best of us. You never let anything get in your way and we will miss you.

Herbie Kaplan, Docent

Dr. Herbert Kaplan, known to friends and family as "Herbie," passed away on July 22, 2019, at the age of 85, surrounded by loved ones. He was preceded in death by his wife, the love of his life, Ellen Olander Kaplan. He was a native of Philadelphia, born to Harry and Sylvia. Herbie served our nation during the Korean War in the United States Army. He later attended Ohio State School of Dentistry and continued to complete his Doctor of Dental Surgery from the University Of Detroit Mercy School Of Dentistry in orthodontics. Herbie practiced orthodontics in the Richmond area until his retirement and served as a part-time faculty member in the VCU/VCV Department of Orthodontics for 25 years. He retired to San Francisco where he enjoyed the low humidity and no bugs. There, he remained involved in the music community and volunteered for the merchant marines, servicing the SS Jeremiah. His life’s work, hobbies and pastimes were all centered around one thing, putting a smile on your face. Whether it was perfecting your bite, cracking a joke or playing his horn, Herbie wanted nothing more than to bring a smile to your face. He leaves sons Josh, Andy and Vladimir; and four grandsons, Alex, Justin, Igor and Nikita.

Patrick McCafferty

September 1, 1944 to September 27, 2019

Patrick was a fun-loving guy who was devoted to the ship for all the years that he worked aboard. He joined the crew in 1994 in time for the Normandy Voyage and was the last surviving member who made the entire round-trip. At the time, Pat was one of the youngest crew members. Saloon Messman. One of his notable achievements on that trip while in
Portsmouth is that he secured an invitation to visit the Queen’s yacht ‘The Brittanica’. No one is sure how he did it. Pat also worked in the Stewards department while on the O’Brien.

Pat was born in Los Angeles but evidently his family moved around a bit. His father was an entrepreneur and took the family with him as he criss-crossed the U.S.

He had throat cancer back about 20 years ago and had his larynx removed but he soon mastered the art of the ‘stage whisper’. He made himself known and was such a good friend to so many that the ship named the bar ‘McCaffertys’ in his honor. And he often served as bartender at ship events, such as the Christmas party.

Pat never would say ‘can’t’ instead he would say ‘Why Not?” He loved to dance and he could be counted on to make any event fun.

Pat summed it up in ‘Appointment In Normandy’ by Capt. Walter Jaffee: "the nostalgia of it, the adventure, the challenge, plus - this is difficult for me to put into words - but I kinda have this idea that our whole nation needs more volunteers, roll-up-your-sleeves and get things done attitude and this ship represents a lot of that to me. “

The 2019 Cruise Season is Over

We will soon be announcing our 2020 Cruise schedule and we hope you will join us once again to cruise the bay on the O’Brien!

Here are a few photos of last weekend’s Fleet Week Cruises. You can alway keep up with the ship on our webpage ‘ssjeremiahobrien.org’ or our Facebook page ‘SS Jeremiah O’Brien’.

Photos of Fleet Week by Jim Hafft, below. The Blue Angels in formation and below crew member Charlie Howell.
With all the shipyards turning out Liberty ships, Henry Kaiser devised a plan to speed up production even further. He announced a contest between his shipyards to see which yard could build a Liberty ship in the least amount of time. This was a PR stunt, and could only have been achieved once because the quantity of labor and materials needed to complete the ship in such a short time were not usually available. But the publicity of a Liberty ship built in less than 5 days was enough to wake up our adversaries - and make them realize that their war efforts were being matched by a relentless supply of American ships, materials and men.

The keel of the Robert E. Peary was laid on Nov. 8, 1942 and on November 12th she was launched. And contrary to some tall tales, the ship went on to a very distinguished career. Here’s her story.

The SS Robert E. Peary was operated by the Weyerhauser Steamship Company and after the final fitting out, she went to war on November 22, 1942 carrying 17 U.S. Naval Armed Guard and 43 Merchant Mariners. Her voyages included: food and war supplies from San Francisco to New Caledonia; Guadalcanal, Suva, Antofagasta, Chile, Canal Zone, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and arriving in Savannah on April 3, 1943.

During this voyage the SS Robert E. Peary saved American soldiers trapped near the beach of a Pacific island held by the Japanese. While under enemy fire, the Peary maneuvered close to shore and shot a line ashore from her Lykes gun, over which she supplied the troops with ammunition and food until they defeated the attack!

On May 7, 1943, she left New York, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Liverpool England and returned to New York on July 15, 1943. The ship transported POW’s from Casablanca to Norfolk; then continued on to Jacksonville; New York; Loch Ewe, Scotland; Boston; Halifax; and Liverpool. She then transported men and equipment from Cardiff Wales to Omaha Beach on June 7, 1944, under constant attack during the D-Day invasion!

The ship returned to England and headed for Normandy again on June 13. Continued "shuttle" service to Normandy until September 18, when she sailed for New York for repairs.

The SS Robert E. Peary made a few more trans-Atlantic crossings during 1945. Her final voyage, without her Armed Guard crew, took her from Boston to Yokohama to Colon Panama.

The valiant SS Robert E. Peary was scrapped in June 1963 in Baltimore, Maryland.

Sources:
US Merchant Marine At War website'; www.usm-m.org/peary.htm'
'Wiki2.org'; SS Robert E. Peary ❖

Continued from page 7 Normandy Crew

Photos from Fleet Week 2019

Below, the view looking up from beneath the Golden Gate Bridge.

Below, thank you to Yvonne and Jim Hurson, onboard vintners who provided our passengers with their delicious ‘Spirit of Normandy Collection’ wines from their Valiance Vineyards.

Photos by Dave Rauenbuehler