Fleet Week 2019 marked the end of another successful cruising season for the S.S. Jeremiah O’Brien. As the deck gang made her fast to the pier, the engineers cooled the plant, the stewards secured the Galley, the gunners dismounted their weapons, the docents took a breather - after two days keeping the passengers safe - the future was bright. The ship was in good shape. There was a plan in place to replace the 76 year old boiler tubes. Visitors continued to flock to the gangway, drawn by the national treasure that is one of only two surviving WW2 Liberty ships.

All was well until a world wide pandemic struck. The docents were the first to notice as the number of visitors decreased and some tourists showed up wearing masks. At first management developed protocols to keep visitors and crew safe but soon it was mandated to shut down the ship to all activity - except for the most essential.

As the storm clouds of the pandemic gathered on the horizon the Board of Directors put in place extreme measures to ensure the ship's financial future. It is expensive to maintain a 77 year old ship in fully operating condition, especially as income from visitors dropped to zero.

Despite this, all remained optimistic until early morning May 23, 2020 when "FIRE AT SAN FRANCISCO PIER 45" covered the airwaves and headlines and social media.

Thanks to the Engine and Ladder companies of the Sf Fire Department and especially the SFFD Fireboats Phoenix and St. Francis, the O’Brien was saved. Once again she lived up to her nickname the ‘LUCKY O’Brien’.

The O’Brien was safe but the future was grim. The ship suffered heat damage to portholes, canvas, paint, mooring lines and all of the cargo gear. Pier 45 was no longer safe and she would have to move.

Just as the day was darkest the Port of San Francisco, Metro Cruises and the ILWU made Pier 35 North available. Even this opportunity provided challenges as such a move does not come without great expense. The ‘LUCKY O’Brien’ is not

Continued on p.12
Friends, Volunteers & Donors,
2020 was a hard year for almost everyone - and we appreciate having you here with us as we open with what feels like the next chapter.

The SS Jeremiah O’Brien has struggled this year, having to make cuts due to the lack of tourism, damage from the shed fire and dealing with being displaced from Pier 45 for most of last year. It’s been hard, but we want to reassure you and everyone in our community that we are reemerging strong as ever and have started off this year by completing two amazingly complicated, time intensive and expensive projects: the boiler re-tubing and the rigging replacement. This work will ensure the ship sails into the future.

Our Board of Directors have been hard at work finding resources, budgeting, and building a strategic plan that will take us forward beyond the pandemic. This last year has hurt, but we plan on opening soon, scheduling cruises this year and continuing to educate about the Liberty Ship, Merchant Marine and USN Armed Guard. We hope you will join us.

Matt Lasher

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From the Chief:

“STAND BY FOR STEAM”

As many may know, our fine ship has been experiencing boiler tube failures the last several years. The failures increased in number until it became apparent that tube renewals were necessary.

In years past we had already renewed the 4 inch diameter “screening” tubes. When this type of tube fails it is impossible to plug and carry on, it must be renewed. These 4” tubes play a critical roll protecting the 2” generating tubes from direct exposure to the radiant heat of the furnace. These renewals were done in house with additional help from T. Somers of Canada and a local boilermaker. There were 43 of this type of tube renewed and took six weeks to accomplish.

During 2020 the engine gang was quietly attempting to keep the boilers in “class”, in other words ready to be fired. By October after numerous attempts at attaining a working hydrostatic test and failing to do so, the decision was made to attempt to renew the 2” tube generating bank in its entirety. Miraculously, our executive director, Matt Lasher secured funding for this operation.

During the May 23, 2020 fire at Pier 45, we lost 130 two inch tubes and importantly 2 forklifts. The ship shifted to Pier 35 where it was very secure though limited our ability to lift heavy loads such as 1,225 two inch tubes. Ongoing at this time was a survey of the ship’s cargo gear that was damaged by the fire. Options were narrowing for the tubes coming aboard. As the ship shifted back to Pier 45 it was felt that the tubes would finally be loaded aboard with a shore crane. Our contracted boiler crew, Morton Locomotive, was working on removing tubes during this time. New tubes were needed to hold gas baffles in place and of course were not available. Finally, a barge crane was able to land the needed tubes into No. 3 lower hold and work proceeded a great clip. Access to the fireroom was provided by the crew cutting a 4” hole into the bulkhead with a metal cutting hole saw. This will be closed up properly when all the boiler work is finished.

Our volunteer crew has done an outstanding job assisting with all aspects of the boiler repairs. This is not just the engine crew but the steward’s department provided hotel support and members of the deck force were there passing tubes into the fireroom and helping with debris coming out. Our shipkeepers were essential to the smooth completion of the work.

As of the second week in June both boilers have been successfully hydro-statically tested to 1-1/2 maximum allowable working pressure in the presence of the U.S.C.G. and ABS surveyors. The starboard boiler has been "boiled out" (a cleaning process for "new" boilers or in this case boilers with major renewals). The port boiler will undergo a similar process. Following this, the boilers will be completely re-assembled and readied in all aspects for service. The safety valves will then be tested for the regulating authorities.

Chief Jon Eaton ❖
WOULD YOU LIKE TO VOLUNTEER ON THE JEREMIAH O’BRIEN?

There is a place for you in our crew!

From the working steam engine, to the Steward’s Department, our Deck Crew to our helpful Docents and many other skills in between. No maritime experience is required, but welcome.

Please call at 415-544-0100 or fill out the application form at:

https://www.ssjeremiahobrien.org/pages/volunteer

SHIP REOPENING

Pat Dupes-Matsumoto

Stay Tuned for more information…
…On the ship’s reopening! We’re still finishing major projects, clearing and cleaning and getting ready. Our target date is 4th of July weekend. Follow us on Facebook, go to our website, SSJeremiahobrien.org or sign up for our email updates for more announcements. We’ll be glad to be back and we’re looking forward to seeing you aboard! ❖

STILL TIME TO DONATE TO OUR DOGHOUSE FUND

Our doghouse (ticket booth) almost burned down in the fire on Pier 45 and actually even though it was still standing the structure was condemned.

If you would like to send in a donation for a new doghouse, any amount will be appreciated! Thank you.

ssjeremiahobrien.org - DONATE
CARGO GEAR RESTORATION PROJECT

By Bill Greig  (pictured below right)

The cargo gear on JOB was obsolete when the ship was built in 1943. Our country needed ships and needed them fast and this gear could be built quickly and in pieces all around the US. The design is directly descended from the square rigged sailing ships of old. Simply put, a boom was supported by a mast; a rope with a hook was led through the end of the boom and the cargo was picked up out of the ships hold and slung a shore.

Liberty ship gear evolved from there. Booms were stepped at the base of a mast and rigged in the “Yard and Stay” system. One boom would be spotted over the ships hold and the other boom would be spotted over the pier. The cargo hooks are married together. The cargo would be picked up by one boom, slung over to the other boom and lowered from there. This system was not as efficient as on other WW2 cargo ships but the beauty was that it could be installed with a marlinspike, spud wrench, a nine pound hammer, a sharp knife and lots of strong backs with determined minds.

The cargo gear aboard the JOB is basically the same as when she was launched in 1943. Some of the fittings, such as the Crosby shackles, were original to the ship.

After the fire, the deck gang dropped all ten booms (2 per hatch), and took apart all components for inspection. A though inspection was held by the National Cargo Bureau who recommended that all of the running rigging be replaced. The running rigging is any wire rope component that moves, as opposed to standing rigging which are stationary wire ropes that support the masts.

It was a huge undertaking. A professional rigging company did the high wire work aloft while our deck gang did everything that could be reached from the main deck. Just like 1943, the job required strong backs and determination and our gang supplied them all. It took about a month of work days but we got it done.

Just like in 1943, all the wire rope, steel shackles, poured sockets, fiber rope and wood blocks were “Made in the USA”. ❖
Following are things we take for granted on the JO'B:
1. the main deck is cold and windy in the afternoon.
2. there’s never enough grey paint - or money...
3. Paul Diehn can FIX anything!

Known as our 'Ship’s MacGyver', a nickname given to him by Chief Eaton, Paul is a guy who solves all the perplexing mechanical, physical and engineering problems on the ship. A member of the Engine department, he goes wherever the challenge takes him and he can put his engineering talents to good use - not just in the engine room but anywhere on the ship.

Nothing comes easy on a 77-year-old operating museum ship, specifically the logistics of loading a thousand plus new tubes onto the ship and getting them into the engine room. And disposing of the old tubes from the engine room.

At first a crane couldn’t be used to lower the tubes into lower #3. Each tube had to be hand carried up the gangway to the engine room fidley - just aft of the main house. Then each tube had to be lowered into the Engine Room. Paul came up with the ‘Sling’ which was simply a rope attached to a larger tube - the 2” tube fit securely inside the front end piece. Then the pulley action would tighten on the tube as the rope was lowered it to the engine room. Simple physics but totally effective! (this was still slow work, so luckily we were able to soon use a crane to do the job.)

Then picture this, 1,200+ tubes that were in #3 had to be moved to the engine room. Paul McGyvered another solution. This was to cut a hole in the metal bulkhead between #3 and the engine room and rig up a ‘flume’ type of wooden ramp. The flume had a dual purpose - removing the old rusted tubes and bringing the new ones to the engine room. Paul and Phil O’Mara with Kevin Welsh designed and built it.

Phil and Kevin two also built a wooden platform at the bottom of #3 for the tubes - but that’s another story...but sometime soon please look for the opening of the #3 disco...

Another pressing need was to clean all the handholds that had accumulated years of goop and crud on them. (A handhold is the...
cover plate on each tube opening, meaning there were more than 1,000 handholds to clean.) The old gaskets had to come off each handhold. When Paul saw the laborious, awkward method of cleaning each handhold, he came up with the idea of cutting an imprint of the handhold into a square block of aluminum. Each handhold fit neatly in the block to facilitate cleaning. Then with the use of an electrical charge and some wire rotary brushes that he reverse engineered, he made the cleaning process much easier, the answer to another challenging problem.

This is only a small sampling of Paul's inventiveness, he's been at it over the years - the bearings replacement, a huge job made easier by his Bearings Bolt Depression Block - and very importantly, numerous hooks and pulleys made to lift and rescue anyone who might need a lift out of the engine room. Due to Paul's 'scrounging' ability and his good equipment contacts, he found and brought the big air compressor aboard, although he says it's too noisy. He's also scrounged some bunker oil, fork lift repair parts and other essential parts from the Reserve Fleet.

When asked about his previous life, Paul says he is a 'sailor who never sailed'. Originally from Kansas, he says in 1966 he moved west till he "ran out of land". He learned about the O'Brien about 12 years ago when the ship acquired a Caterpillar 100kw generator. He was a technical advisor at Peterson Tractor at the time, a Caterpillar dealer where he was a main shop foreman - having a field service mechanic's truck. For about ten years, he serviced all types of Caterpillar equipment. His friend Jim Kyser, an engine crew member, thought that with all his mechanical skills, Paul was a good match for the O'Brien.

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Letters to the NLSM…

Dear Editor,

As I am sure you know, the design of the Liberty ship hull was conceived in the drawing office of the Thompson Shipyard in Sunderland, England. The yard has long gone and the site redeveloped to build the campus of Sunderland University and also the National Glass Museum. (Sunderland was very big in glass as well as shipbuilding, coal mining and marine engineering)

The redevelopment entailed a short new road for access and this was named LIBERTY WAY in memory….. this is the road nameplate.

Regards David Aris

And closer to home, below is the Machine Shop on Liberty Ship Way in Sausalito. Now abandoned, it was part of Marinship, a yard that produced 15 Liberties. There are plans to restore it.

It’s near the Bay Model, an accurate scale replica of SF Bay which is open to visitors.

Crossed the Final Bar

Carmela Saitz Nilan

March 23, 1926 - March 26, 2021

Three days after her 95th birthday, Carmela Nilan passed away.

Wife of 62 years to the late Cliff Nilan, she leaves children Mary Rose Stasko and Gina Connors, a brother Bob and 13 grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

A native San Franciscan, she was a 1943 graduate of ICA and received her RN from St. Mary's College of Nursing. Carmela was a lifelong member of Epiphany Parish where she met her husband Cliff.

They traveled to every corner of the world and volunteered their time generously on the SS Jeremiah O’Brien and the Martin De Porres House of Hospitality.
The Last Word on the Normandy Voyage?

By Jim Conwell AB - San Francisco to Le Havre, France segment

Being a deck watch (8-12) stander, my days at sea were predictable to almost the minute.

0630 Get up, dressed, make bed, and clean deck for sanitary worker (ordinary seaman) who sweeps and mops

0730 Breakfast

0800 Report to Bosun for work assignment (scraping, painting, etc.)

0900 Quit deck work to get ready for wheel trick (steering). Got out of coveralls to look presentable on the bridge, hit the head, and got coffee for the mate. Relieved lead AB on wheel. Get course.

1030 Relieved on wheel by watch ordinary seaman (OS), giving him course to steer. Report back to Bosun for additional deck work.

1130 Lunch

1200 Mark noon location on chart by crew mess (always of interest to crew). Resume deck work

1400 Shave, shower, sack time

1630 Beer call (only one)

1700 Dinner

1930 Get ready for lookout on the bow (binoculars and jacket)

2000 Relieve lead AB from 4-8 watch at the bow. Use bell to notify bridge of unusual sightings

2110 Relieved as lookout by OS. Change for wheel trick, hit the head, and get coffee for the mate.

2120 Relieve lead AB on wheel.

2240 Relieved on wheel by OS. Go to crew mess with radio and standby 2325

Wake up 0000 - 0400 watch

2350 Relieved as standby

0030 Go to sleep

My turn steering went uneventfully on the leg from San Francisco to Panama. What impressed me the most was my evening turn at the wheel which was 2120 -2240 hours (9:20 PM to 10:40 PM). At that time in the wheelhouse the crew who would stop by to hangout had left and there was just Walt Jaffee, the Watch Mate, and I. During my period steering, Walt would occasionally leave the wheelhouse for a few minutes to check our location in the Chart Room. So I would be alone steering. It made me repeatedly recognize the importance of what I was doing, keeping the ship on course. For those few minutes I was “in charge”

Panama, and particularly the Canal, was of particular interest to me. I spent my career as a Civil Engineer working on Federal water projects such as Shasta Dam in California. So seeing the Canal was on my bucket list, however, not only seeing it, but having a role in a ship transiting the canal was a unique experience. It was also special to the 4 Senior Canal Pilots to be on a Liberty Ship when we left Balboa for the first lock. However, only one gave me steering commands.

We arrived that night at Cristobal on the Atlantic (Caribbean) side of the canal. We were in need of fuel. We had enough to get to England, but needed more for ballast. When I heard that, I went down on the dock to see if any of the rudder could be seen. Seemed to me about two feet were out of the water due to fuel burn so far. There were rumors that we would get fuel somewhere in the Caribbean, but that didn’t happen. So away we went.

❖
EXPLOSION OF BLOSSOM ROCK

By Brian Agron

If you look out over the port side of the O’Brien looking toward Treasure Island, extend your arm and raise your thumb. Place the right edge of your thumb on the very edge of Treasure Island then on the left side of your thumb, you should see a little orange dot about 1,000 yards from the ship. That is a buoy that marks the location of Blossom Rock, now about 30 feet below the surface at low mean tide.

In 1826, the ship HMS Blossom, an 18 gun Cormorant Class sloop-of-war which had been converted into a survey ship that was commanded by Frederick William Beechey, entered San Francisco Bay to conduct a survey of the bay. He discovered an uncharted 130 x 75 foot rock laying just 5 feet below the surface which he named after his ship. Blossom Rock was a serious hazard to navigation.

Captain Beechey determined the location of one’s ship in relation to Blossom Rock could be calculated by referencing two prominent redwood trees high in the Oakland hills and Yerba Buena Island. This was a system that worked well until sometime in the late 1850s when loggers cut the trees down. Various attempts to note the location of Blossom Rock were made by attaching a buoy which proved unsuccessful due to the strong tides carrying the buoy away. Plans were drawn up in 1867 to use explosives to remove the rock but initial blasting tests determined surface blasting to be impractical to remove the 1,000 cubic yards of hard sandstone necessary to lower the level down to 25 feet.

Another plan was developed to build a coffer dam on the surface of the rock and then remove the water inside so that workmen could tunnel down into the rock to place explosive charges inside, instead of on top of the rock.
This was carried out and then on April 23, 1870 the engineers set off the largest submarine explosion in history up to that time. The 22 tons of explosives were detonated and a column 300 feet in diameter arose throwing chunks of rock up to 1,000 feet away and the top of Blossom Rock was 'blown to glory', much to the amusement of the approximately 50,000 spectators who had gathered to watch the event.

Then in 1903, the Army Corps of Engineers used surface blasting to lower the level to 30 feet below low mean tide, where it exists today. Though the original 'navigation trees' are gone, from the stumps new trees have grown up. A Bronze plaque notes their location next to the Bay Vista Picnic Area in the Redwood Regional Park, 11500 Skyline Blvd, Oakland, California.

References:
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Paul Diehn, continued from page 7

Paul says time goes by quickly when working on machinery. And there are plenty of mechanical challenges on the O'Brien. He comes in every Thursday - for a time he even helped out on the Pampanito! But his love of machinery has squarely placed him as a 'heavy-duty mechanic' on the O'Brien;

it is a huge challenge! When asked how he sees the ship in 10 years, he says "the O'Brien must be kept running". He's glad that there are some new younger dedicated crew members.

He says a day never goes by when he doesn't leave the ship without a smile on his face - and oily grunge on his hands.

Thank you Paul, for all you do for the O'Brien!
without friends. Matson donated beautiful new Samson Mooring lines; Chevron and Foss provided tug service, SF Bar Pilots provided pilotage service. Chevron employees volunteered labor to cast off and make fast the mooring lines, and of course O’Brien volunteers, staff and directors pitched in.

The move to Pier 35 was a ray of Golden State sunshine peaking through the dark clouds. Challenges still existed. A lot of them - and difficult ones.

Department lines blurred as all the engineers installed new, electric, water, sewer and communication lines.

All of the cargo gear had to be lowered and inspected for damage.

The stewards department had to provide meals under strict covid protocols.

Necessary work continued but because of quarantine only a few dedicated individuals could work - and work they did! The booms which spend their lives unreachable were scaled and painted. The decks in the messes and salon were refinished. Repairs were made to safety gear.

As the New Year dawned in 2021 the horizon started to clear. Fundraising had helped for the ship’s immediate future to be secure and in an astounding move of generosity, we were able to provide for the ambitious boiler tube replacement project. A beneficial insurance settlement form Travelers Insurance and a most generous donation of shackles from The Crosby Group allowed for the replacement of all of the running rigging in the cargo gear to be replaced.

At last, in March of 2021, Pier 45 was ready for our return. Again, thanks to the generosity of Chevron, Foss and the SF Bar Pilots she was able to return to Pier 45 at no cost.

As the skies cleared there were still some squalls passing through. The boiler tubes arrived but we were unable to accept a generous donation of crane time from Sheedy Crane due to structural issues. As the deck cargo gear had not yet been repaired there was no way to get the boiler tubes aboard. To the rescue came Captain Ron Greger of Greger Pacific Marine. He brought his crew and floating crane barge to pier 45 and loaded all 43,000 pounds of boiler tubes first from the pier to the barge then the barge to the ship. Our deck gang ship keepers with the help from docents and engineers safely stowed all 1,200 boiler tubes in Lower #3 hold.

Captain Greger donated his barge, tug and crew at absolutely no cost!

As the boiler work went on, the cargo gear replacement got underway. The wire rope and fittings came from Cablemoore of Oakland and the high rigging was performed by SDV Services of Alameda. Necessary crane services came from Power Engineering of Oakland. The rest of the rigging was done by the deck department under the supervision of the shipkeeper and bosun with support form others. Our ship's photographers and deck officers documented the entire rigging process for posterity.

During the repairs, the stewards department with help from docents prepared three meals for ninety days! That's more time than it would take the ship to make two round trips to Normandy!

Just as in 1943, all of the materials in the boiler and rigging projects were “Made in the USA”!

The skies are clear now. The docents are ready to man the gangway as the ship plans to open for visitors July 2nd!
FIREWORKS SHOW 2021

JULY 4TH - WATCH THE FIREWORKS FROM THE MAIN DECK
AND SUPPORT THE O’BRIEN.

To reserve and find out more:

Call 415-544-0100 for more information and tickets

Photo by Dave Rauenbuehler