

'STEADY AS SHE GOES'

Jeremiah O'Brien at Pier 35



Vol #91

Newsletter of the National Liberty Ship Memorial

Spring/Summer 2023

EVERY 5 YEARS THE JOB NEEDS TO GO TO DRY DOCK

Regulations dictate that all vessels must be certified by the ABS and Coast Guard.

Always a big deal, this year is no different. In 2017 after we finished drydock, it seemed like a very long time until we would have to visit the yard. But here we are again...

Our volunteers accomplish all the work that can be done while tied up to the pier, but some things can only be done at the shipyard.

If you would like to donate dollars, euros, pounds, pesos, whatever, please go to our website 'ssjeremiahobrien.org' and hit 'donate'. We appreciate your donations!

Also, 'volunteer@ssjeremiahobrien.org' will put you in touch with our recruiter and we will get back to you and share how you can be a part of this historic crew!

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EIGHTY YEARS OLD IN JUNE!

A few years ago, I remember showing a visitor around the ship. He was very astute, asked a lot of questions and seemed like a person who probably knew more about ships than I did. At the end of the tour, he bluntly asked me "how are you all going to keep this ship



going?"

That question took me aback, usually the more typical comments are "wow, thanks for the tour, what a great ship." Well, the answer just sprung from my lips. "We have kept this ship going for over 40 years, we're not about to stop now!"

Which is true.

The ship will soon turn 80 years old from her launch date, which was on June 19, 1943. The National Liberty Ship Memorial was formed in 1978, it is the non-profit created to operate the ship. It was dedicated to the preservation AND operation of the SS Jeremiah O'Brien. And indeed, 1979 was our first May commemorative cruise, loaded with passengers and crew and well-wishers!

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- Jon Eaton, Chief Engineer
- Tom Bernard
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Matt's Message



If you follow us on social media, you know we permanently moved the ship's home berth from Pier 45 to Pier 35N. It's not a large change in distance, but it is a big deal for us. Though Pier 45 was a great home for us, we've struggled with a host of issues after the fire. We are excited to announce we have a long-term lease with the Port of San Francisco for 10 years with an option to extend for another 5. This places the SS Jeremiah O'Brien directly off the Embarcadero next to Pier 39. We are busy making 35 our permanent home. We are open to the public for visitors and youth overnights at the new location.

We are scheduled for Dry Dock on May 1st at Mare Island. We are hoping to wrap up our 17th special survey, get a fresh coat of paint, inspect our tail shaft and do any preservation work needed and quickly get back to Pier 35.

This dry dock has been put off a few times due to dry dock availability, but we are excited to finally get it done.

Matt Lasher, Executive Director ❖



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It's not to say that it's been an easy road, the challenges just keep popping up. Things that are out of our control - like the only drydock left in the bay area is so busy that scheduling our ship to enter the Mare Island facility has been difficult. And of course, there was the covid closure, then the fire that burned down the Pier 45 shed. Life is full of challenges, but it's how, as a team we have met those challenges that makes the 'spirit of the Jeremiah O'Brien'.

I started volunteering in 1996, which was two years after the ship returned from the momentous 50th Anniversary of the Normandy Landing

voyage. I remember the original crew members, those people who made up the Greatest Generation. This ship was their passion, even at their age they worked long hours in our office and the decks and engines. Sadly one by one they left us, but we inherited their greatest gift to operate and maintain.

And so we have! We had no choice but to leave our fabulous location on Pier 45 because the fire had damaged the pier and burned down the shed that protected us from the wind - coming through the Golden Gate. Although we had (arguably) the best view in the city, we had to replace the mooring lines so often that it was crazy, and due to other problems, we had to leave Pier 45 to protect our ship.

With the leadership of our excellent staff and directors, we have found a new home at Pier 35. We're still at Fisherman's Wharf but about a 20 minute walk from our old location. And as a plus, we're tied up in clear view of Pier 39 which is a huge visitor attraction and next to the

Alcatraz ferry landing! So we have lots of foot traffic walking by our new pier now, and with the proper signage and exposure, we hope to capitalize on our new location.

As far as Drydock, we are on their schedule and hope to enter the yard soon. The other one factor that no one has control over is the weather. Here in northern California to say it's been WET and COLD is an understatement! We have been in drought conditions for the last three years. We have almost overcome that drought in about 3 months! And it's just April and we can expect more rain this year. So it's a blessing overall, but it hasn't helped with our visitor numbers.



Danson Brinkerhoff and Holden Rodgers tie up the ship at Pier 35. Photo by Dave Rauenbuehler

If there was only ONE WORD to describe our crew, it's DEDICATED. Our crew, past and present is the spirit behind the rusted metal and parted lines and oily parts that keep this ship alive! From our stewards department, who don't get the credit they deserve; to the deck and engine and docent departments who toil in the wind and cold and steamy heat of the engine room, to our thoroughly dedicated staff of professionals who keep this ship on an even keel.

So we have signed a new 10 year lease at Pier 35 and we are welcoming guests from all over the world - to visit San Francisco (a beautiful and amazing city) and the world famous Liberty ship, the SS Jeremiah O'Brien.

Full Steam Ahead & Steady As She Goes!

From the Editor ❖

Welcome New Volunteers

These are new recruits who have spent over 20 hours working on the ship. Recruits become full crew members with crew benefits after accumulating 100 work hours.

Richard Berndt - a master electrician and a welcome new addition to our Engine Department. Richard is from Minnesota and spends winters here in the Bay area. We appreciate the time he can work on the ship!



Danson Brinkerhoff (below, at wheel on right) - from the California Maritime Academy, Danson has joined our Deck Department and has worked in the Overnight program also. Welcome Danson!

From left Coleman Rosenberg, Bob Arakel and Danson



Holden Rodgers and Danson Brinkerhoff handling lines. Photos by Dave Rauenbuehler

Letters from our Readers

January 9, 2023

Nice to hear from the ship! Long time no send. I am well, although a widower now, but fortunately in excellent health. Yes, I live about 20 miles west of Eugene, OR, in the soggy foothills of the coast range. Not isolated by any means but enough elbow room to stay comfortable and great neighbors.

The last fund-raising letter I got had a picture of the lifeboat cover frames I built back in 1996 after we got back from our Pacific Northwest cruise. I sent Matt a detailed report of how that project came about. And I also sent Dave R, the photographer quite a few 11x17 photos I took on the Normandy trip. I guess Phil was going to put them somewhere, maybe the museum. Feel free to use the preventer and lifeboat cover stories anytime you like. Hope the storms aren't bothering you too much and Happy New Year! to you and yours. Great hearing from you!

From Greg Williams, Eugene, Oregon



As a life member of NLSM and as a FWT on the homeward leg of the 1994 Normandy voyage, Le Havre to San Francisco, I would like to join the sign up to the crew Facebook group.

I was also a FWT Pacific NW voyage in 1996. My home town is Sunderland, U.K, from whence the design of the Ocean class vessels, and their main engine, came, which morphed into the Liberty ship. Post war, installing diesels in many Sunderland built ships, I on occasion, met Mr Cyril Thompson, the hull designer of this famous class.

At age 91 I have lectured 66 times on the history of the Liberty, mainly to branches of the Institute of Marine Engineers. And many years ago met Victoria Drummond at an Institute meeting in London. David Aris, England



OCEAN NAVIGATION Circa 1943

By William Greig

In September of 1943 the JOB set sail from Jersey City, New Jersey, bound for Liverpool England. There were many challenges ahead



*A Chronometer formerly owned by
Captain Patrick Buttner*

for our Mighty Ship not the least of which was finding her way across the perilous North Atlantic Ocean as winter approached.

Back then, there were no Google maps! The Second Mate was the ship's official navigator, but the Master and the other Deck officers were equal partners in determining positions.

Harbor piloting, coastwise and ocean navigation all shared the same goals, but were very different skill sets. Then, as now, all the Deck officers were proficient in all methods. At sea, Celestial Navigation was the primary method used.

To determine the ship's position at sea, the O'Brien navigators used time honored methods and instruments.

First, was the Sextant. This was the personal property of the individual Mates and woe befell anyone who picked one up without permission. This device was used to measure the angle (take a sight) above the horizon of various celestial bodies. During the day, the sun, moon and Venus were often used to establish a position. At morning and evening twilight, the stars and other planets were used. Back then it was called 'getting a fix'. Now we call it establishing a position.

A Chronometer, was used to establish the exact time of the fix. Chronometers are very precise wind up clocks. Back in the day, when ships were in port they would compare the time on their chronometer with the 'Noon Gun' a cannon that was fired exactly at noon for this purpose. The Second Mate kept a log of these comparisons and how much the chronometer gained or lost each day, and that value was applied to the time of the sight.

Once the sight was taken and the time was established the Nautical Almanac, a book published annually used for calculating the geographic position of celestial bodies for every moment of the year, was used for the celestial body in question.

From there, it is a simple matter of using spherical trigonometry to calculate a line of position. There isn't a Navigator alive who doesn't wish they paid a little more attention in math class in High school. Fortunately, in 1802, Nathaniel Bowditch published his 'American Practical Navigator' which provides tabular methods of solving Nautical Trigonometry.

(Here is a fun fact, Mr. Bowditch lived in Kittery Maine, the

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hometown of our esteemed Chief Engineer, Jon Eaton). And, by the way, the American Practical Navigator is still the primary navigation text used at the Maritime Academies and Annapolis (although a slightly updated version).

Celestial Navigation requires skill and experience. Bad weather, cloudy skies, a rolling ship all contributed to the difficulty. Combine that with people shooting at you and

it became very difficult indeed. Celestial Navigation in 1943 required no batteries, no electricity and no internet.

Luckily, our Captain and Deck Officers are

all highly skilled Celestial Navigators. Come along on our Seaman's Memorial Cruise August 17 and our Fleet Week Cruises Oct. 7th and 8th and pigeon hole Captain LeSeur, or any of our Mates, Captains Conrady, Quan or Greig and we will be glad to talk about it at length. ❖



Meet Our New Head Docent

Brian Agron

Brian grew up in Napa California and after graduating from Napa High School spent 5 years at San Francisco State University obtaining a degree in Biology. During this time he discovered



his love of WWII and medieval history. Two more years at UCSF to become a radiologic technologist and became one of the first licensed diagnostic medical ultrasound technologists. While working at his first job, he then earned his commercial pilots license, and ultimately his flight instructor and instrument flight instructors certificates.

After retiring from Kaiser Hospital in Terra Linda, Rich Mantegani introduced him to the Jeremiah O'Brien and the rest is history. "Being a docent is the best retirement gig ever. Every day at the ship I get to walk in the shoes of the Greatest Generation and to teach their story to the younger generations. What could be better?"

Brian currently lives in Fairfax and has one daughter, two grandchildren, and a small very furry cat.

Thanks to Nancy and Steve Schwalen, our past docents for their leadership. They are leaving the Docent Department in good hands! ❖

Below: Keep that ego in check!

We share Pier 35 with Metro Cruises. One day, something big pulled in next to us. It blocked the sun and the sky, it was the 'Celebrity Solstice'. Appropriately named, we thought it was a total eclipse.

She stayed overnight and next day was gone, headed to Santa Barbara. And the sun came out again!



Photo by Dave Rauenbuehler

BE PART OF SOMETHING HISTORIC!

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF VOLUNTEERING!

TO OUR NEW VOLUNTEERS WE PLEDGE:

- ★ You will never have to worry about reporting (or forgetting to report) any type of income on your tax return.
- ★ If you show up late for work, you will NOT be fired!
- ★ Hate your boss? Join a different department.
- ★ Meet other volunteers who are interesting, smart, mostly likely retired and most likely senior citizens. (but not all, thank goodness!)
- ★ You get fed some pretty terrific meals by our Stewards Department. And you might have leftovers to eat for dinner as well. Don't worry about weight loss, it will not happen on the O'Brien!
- ★ You will get a wonderful newsletter, every so often.
- ★ All complaints will be handled by our Chief Compliance Office, go to Helen Waite.
- ★★ Really, we promise you fun, food, fulfillment and new friends when you join the crew of the SS Jeremiah O'Brien.
- ★★ Message us at 'volunteer@ssjeremiahobrien.org'



BECOME A MEMBER OF THE NLSM

Here's a way you can support the ship throughout the year and visit whenever you like - even if you live far away from the Bay area. Membership is one of the best ways to show your support and keep history alive by keeping the O'Brien sailing!

- ★ Student \$35 For a currently enrolled student;
- ★ Individual \$50 One year free admission and benefits for an individual;
- ★ Family \$100 One year free admission for one family - two adults and two children;
- ★ Contributor \$250 One year admission for one family and two visitors;
- ★ Sponsor \$500 One year's admission for one family and four visitors;
- ★ Admiral \$1,000; One year's admission for a family and up to a maximum group of six visitors per visit.
- ★ Normandy Life Membership \$1,500 per person includes same perks as Admiral Membership AND includes one year's Fleet Week Cruise tickets for two.
- ★ Contact us at NLSM, 45 Pier, Suite 4A, San Francisco, CA 94133 or visit 'ssjeremiahobrien.org' to join!



Steve Wright, Shipkeeper has a quick bite on a busy Saturday

Goings On Aboard the Ship

Improved Communications through Volgistics

We have a new online communications system - courtesy of Louise Booth and Volgistics. It's been a labor and information intense project to get the new messaging database up and running but now it's working and it has proven itself be a valuable communications tool.

For instance, when a crew member signs in and off of the ship, no longer are ID badges needed. Instead there is a coding system that you can enter into the reader and once you are checked out, it will calculate your accumulated work hours.

All active crew members can get a login to our Volgistics portal. There you will find a work calendar, essential information and dates. The calendar is an especially valuable addition as we now share our parking space with Metro Cruises. If you are an active crew member and not yet signed up, please send an email to Louise at **louisehb7@gmail.com** and she will verify your crew standing and set up your login at our website 'ssjeremiahobrien.org'. There is a wealth of information on the page that you don't want to miss!

Thanks to Louise Booth for her persistence and expertise in setting up this important aid to ship communications!



NATIONAL LIBERTY SHIP MEMORIAL

FAREWELL

JOHN KEITH HASSENPLUG

1947 - September 2022

John was a founding member of Admiral William A. Moffett Post 1921.

His military service consisted of 10 years active and 14 years reserve duty as a Supply Officer in the Navy.



John retired as a Captain (O-6). His active duty stations included a Fleet Ballistic Missile Submarine, an aircraft carrier and several shore stations including a tour in Portugal.

His civilian career included positions in accounting, purchasing and facilities management. He held a Bachelors Degree in Accounting, a Masters Degree in Management and an MBA in Accounting. After he retired, Jo Lawrence got him interested in volunteering on the SS Jeremiah O'Brien, a WW II Liberty Ship home ported in San Francisco.

He was the ship's Purser for many years, and ran the ship's store for several years. His ashes will be scattered from the O'Brien.

He was a member of Clan Donnachaidh and served as President. He is survived by his daughter Elizabeth.

Fair Winds and Following Seas, John. You will be greatly missed.



FAIR WINDS AND FOLLOWING SEAS

THEODORE 'TED' BACOCCINI

Engineer



pictured in the middle
1937 - 2022
Stockton, California

Tobey shared her love with all, and would like folks to visit and remember her at her bench on the Jeremiah O'Brien if they can. She and her family request no flowers, and instead of donations, she suggests that you take a friend out for coffee and good conversation in her memory.



BRUCE REILLY

1941 - December 2022

'Longest Commute of any Volunteer'



Bruce was born July 2, 1941 in Australia. In his youth, he attended Warramong and Port Kembla primary schools, and Wollongong Technical College, worked to become an officer in the school cadets, sea cadets and the Citizen Military Forces (CMF).

He followed in the footsteps of his grandfather, and became an incredibly experienced marine engineer. He was a proud Vietnam veteran. After his return from "deep sea and Tours of Ship Duty in Vietnam," he became an entrepreneur, having started his Truck Align business in 1977, where he held over 20 patents and design registrations in the USA, UK, Canada, Australia. He was a hardworking volunteer for the SS Jeremiah O'Brien, SS Red Oak Victory, Waratah (Sydney Heritage Fleet), and the SS Capella (T-AKR 293).

Bruce crossed the final bar on December 1, 2022 We had an anecdote that whenever a prospective recruit felt that the ship was too far to volunteer, Bruce's name always came up. It was noted that Bruce commuted 7,419 miles to get to the ship!

Fair Winds and Following Seas my friend!



TOBEY KLEIN

1929 - December 2022

Docent

Tobey was born in 1929 in Brooklyn to Harry and Lillian Schlossberg. She worked as a buyer in New York, and she and her beloved husband, Harvey owned and operated Douglas Personnel Associates, an executive search firm for more than 30 years. After moving to the Bay Area in 2002, she volunteered for the Jeremiah O'Brien Liberty ship, the International Women's Museum, Berkeley Marina, and Ashby Village, and advocated for numerous political and environmental causes. Tobey is survived by her loving family, children and their spouses Jonathan Klein and Susan Cohn, Andrew Klein and Liesbeth Ribbink, and Leslie and Douglas Frankel; by grandchildren Daniel and Amanda Klein, Amanda and Michael Lupoli, Allison, Isabel, Anna, Eva and Audrey Klein, and great grandchildren Alden and Ivy Klein.



Hannah Szenes wrote: "There are stars whose radiance is visible on Earth though they have long been extinct. There are people whose brilliance continues to light the world even though they are no longer among the living. These lights are particularly bright when the night is dark".

Action in the Pacific aboard the Liberty Ship 'SS CLARENCE DARROW'

From David Nolan, Past Chairman of the NLSM
 Dear Editor, I recently met with the daughter of a Merchant Mariner who sailed in WW2. Bob Melvin was an oiler aboard the SS Clarence Darrow, a Liberty ship on the front lines of the battles in Leyte Gulf and Guadalcanal. He kept a journal of each day during the landings of his activities in the gun tubs. They were in the heat of the battles with over 137 red alert alarms. There is a lot of information on-line about the heroics of the "Darrow" if you search.

The mariner, Robert Campbell Melvin, Jr. 'Bob' kept all of his documentation and certification records as well as many physical souvenirs from a walkie-talkie, ash trays made from the base plates of 3 inch shells, and live M1 Garand rounds! It would make an interesting article for our newsletter, 'Steady As She Goes'. Sincerely, Dave Nolan

have gotten 3 or 4 shots at him. It was just a little too dark and they couldn't get on him til he was right over us, right straight up, and then they only got one shot. There is quite a rivalry between the two three inch guns. The forward one has only fired 2 rounds and we have fired 19, all the action has been off the stern. All the 20 millimeters in the bay were firing at this plane, it was beautiful to watch them streak up toward him but disappointing to see him keep on going. He was such a perfect target but just outside effective range of the 20's. Two planes were shot down. There wasn't much to it.

11:55 am. I had been relieved and had just come up

The SS Clarence Darrow supported US Army forces and Filipino Guerrillas during the Battle of Leyte. The Darrow was anchored in Leyte Gulf from Oct.24,1944 to Nov. 12 1944. She destroyed two enemy planes, assisted in downing another and hit two others. The amphibious invasion of Leyte launched the Philippine Campaign of 1944-1945 for the recapture and liberation of the the Philippine Islands to end almost three years of Japanese invasion. The official history published by the Office of Naval Operations said "All in all, the battle for the Philippines was, from the standpoint of the Armed Guard, the most severe action in the Pacific and was fully as bad as the worst days on the North Russia run, the Salerno landings, or the awful struggle at Anzio. Once again, merchant ships would absorb the most vicious attacks the enemy could deliver and still come out victorious."

Please read on for a portion of the fascinating account of Oiler Bob Melvin aboard the 'SS Clarence Darrow'.

"It was all within easy seeing distance. Another oiler and I saw the rotating section for the gunners. There were several other planes around, but they stayed up near the clouds and just darted in and out.

4:21 PM Saw several planes but no shots. They dive bombed our potential airfield.

4:37 PM Saw more planes. Just as it was getting dark, an enemy plane passed directly over the ship from stern to stem. He would have been a dead duck if our 3" could

out of the engine room when it rang again so as usual, I dashed back to the gun. Nothing happened.

12:43 pm. This was a long one, it lasted til 3:15. I had just finished lunch when the bell rang. Here I go again, to the gun in high gear I am wearing the deck metal thin. I'll never forget this one, I saw my first plane knocked down, and our gun is credited with a hit on it. It made a long dive on a navy communications ship, I thought it would never fall out of the dive but it leveled out and ran across the bay Hell bent for election. Every ship in the bay was shooting at it. He kept going for quite a way



The heroic SS Clarence Darrow, here renamed 'White Cross' built by Calship; launched May 23, 1943. Operated by Matson Navigation; 1968 scrapped in Taiwan.

then, he caught fire from a hill. The fire went out momentarily, it was just a wisp of flame, then it showed again and again it went out, the suspense was awful. Then all of a sudden we hit him on the tail and he burst into flames, from nose to tail and crashed into the bay. He sure made a big splash when he hit, it would have been as high as the bridge of our ship. He strafed the navy ship on his way down. We got seven shots at him. In one of the other raids, another one did the same thing and only was off to the port side a little and higher. We got 7 shots at him but were way off. The sky was black with puffs but he just flew on and finally into a cloud. That is that for the raiders.

7:30, one of our planes crashed on the beach and set fire to what appeared to be a gasoline dump, it sure burned.

The natives were out on the ship today and we got some souvenirs, money, three roosters and a hen. Well I guess that covers today. More on the morrow.



Radio reports said the Jap fleet is headed for Leyte to engage us in the decisive battle, here's hoping. Radio Tokio (Tokyo) said "get out or take the consequences". SS Clarence Darrow hit on starboard side by wild 20 millimeter shot, no damage. Score to date, about 15 planes down.

Thursday, October 26, 1944

General Alarms - 11:20 pm Wednesday. I spoke too soon last night, after I got thru writing we had a raid, it only lasted 20 minutes and we didn't see any planes.

Doggone it I can't remember if there was firing or not. I think there was tho.

5:20 am I was rudely awakened by firing again this morning. Just a few anti-aircraft bursts. Saw nothing. Secured at 5:36. Went back to sleep on deck.

6:20 am. Was again rudely awakened. I sat up in my cot and saw a plane zooming low on our port side, a couple of thousand yards away. Every 20 mm. in the bay was on him I think. He went right over the hospital ship (it came in yesterday) and a tanker, then shrapnel started falling around me so I grabbed my tin hat and pants and got under the gun tub to dress. I saw it (enemy plane) get hit and start down but it hit the water behind a Liberty. It had sneaked in and was down over the ships before anyone had seen it, but he didn't sneak out. It was all over before I got into the gun tub. Secured at 7:17 am.

8:45 am. This was the big attack of the day. They always make the biggest one around this time, then a small one around noon and mid-afternoon, then a larger one just about dusk. This morning, one was more on the ships than any of the previous ones. A dive bomber straddled the Liberty behind us with a stick of bombs, and another one dropped a stick on our port side and a little aft of us. There were about 5 of them and they all got away. I was asleep in the engine room and when our guns opened up, they woke me up and I had sat up and put on a shoe before I knew what happened. We had gotten the chief engineer's permission to have one man on watch and the other one sleep. It helps a lot, I have had about 10 hours sleep since we got here Tuesday. I write these during the two hours of the watch that I am awake just to force my eyes open. The old Clarence Darrow was shaken up this one. Secure at 9:35.

10:10 am. Sneak raid, they sneaked in and were gone before much could be done. There was a little firing. Some how they found a hole in our radar system and came thru. It plugged now tho.

Secure at 11:45"



National Liberty Ship
Memorial
SS Jeremiah O'Brien
45 Pier, Suite 4A
San Francisco, California
94133

Attach postage stamp
here

TICKETS AVAILABLE ON [EVENTBRITE.COM](https://www.eventbrite.com)



The SS Jeremiah O'Brien was built in 1943 as part of a massive shipbuilding effort in WWII. The ship is a survivor of D-Day in 1944; she survived the Atlantic and Pacific theaters in WWII. Then she was saved from being scrapped in 1979; then survived a massive fire in 2020 which destroyed the shed at Pier 45. And thanks to her dedicated volunteer crew, she is still sailing!

2023 CRUISE SCHEDULE:

August 19	Saturday	80th Birthday Cruise
October 7	Saturday	Fleet Week Cruise
October 8	Sunday	Fleet Week Cruise