

# A Moving Piece of History

The only operational WWII PT boat restored with help from Colorado A & M graduate

By Beth Etter, '03

Tom Brokaw, former NBC news anchor and author, calls them the greatest generation: the men and women who lived through the Great

Depression and WWII, and who built America as we know it. They were military heroes, community leaders, and ordinary men and women who were united by values such as duty, honor, courage, service, and love of country.

When Hostetter joined the group in 1999, he became the official photographer, taking more than 2,000 photos to document the project. In addition to photography, Hostetter offered his woodworking knowledge. He worked from stem to stern, keel to deck, and gunwale to gunwale, replacing much of the dilapidated and rotting wood. The group replaced the old mahogany deck with two layers of Douglas-fir plywood (with a water prevention layer between them), the interior decks, the stern, rub rails, and half of the planking.

Once the deck and hull of the boat were restored, the group prepared to install the weapons for the boat: torpedoes, depth charges, and machine guns. To secure the weapons, Hostetter and his group reinforced the deck, built twin gun tubs, and bolted racks to the boat for the weapons. The PT boat was, for its size, the most heavily armed vessel in the Navy.

After nine years and thousands of hours of labor, a setback occurred: an electrical fire in the officers' quarters. It took six months for the veterans to repair the damage to the chart house, deck, beams, walls, and paint, but they continued unabated.

Toward the end of restoration, the group installed three 1,500-horsepower Packard-Marine V12 engines, located port side, starboard side, and center. These engines each weigh 3,100 pounds, are water-cooled, and burn 100-octane aviation gasoline.

On June 7, 2004, nearly 12 years after acquiring the boat, the group launched the PT 658 in the Willamette River at Swan Island. For its dedication on June 6, 2005, Hostetter skippered

Higgins Industries of New Orleans built PT 658 in 1945. It was not used during WWII, but was used for towing practice and bombing targets off the southern California coast until the U.S. Navy sold it as surplus to a private marina operator.



## In service to CSU

Hostetter contributes to alma mater

Bob Hostetter has never lived a quiet life. As a student at Colorado A & M, Hostetter was the Collegian business manager, president of the Independent Students Association, and active in several other campus organizations. During his senior year, he was selected as one of nine Pacemakers, an honor given to students who excel academically and contribute significantly to the campus.

After graduation, Hostetter worked as a WWII Naval officer, ranger, farm planner, logging camp clerk, researcher and photographer, in several capacities for the Society of American Foresters, as a forestry professor at Oregon State University, and as an official of the Bureau of Land Management for 31 years. He has lived in 72 places long enough to get a mailing address and has visited all 50 states.

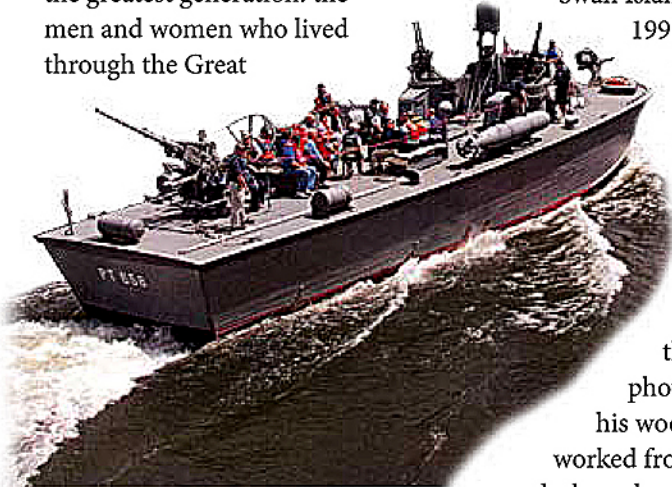
Besides his legacy as a WWII vet and refurbisher of a historic PT boat, Bob Hostetter has two CSU claims to fame:

While serving on a PT boat in the South Pacific in 1945, Hostetter responded to a contest to create a motto for Colorado A & M. His suggestion, "Education at a Mile High Level," won the contest and the motto was used for many years as part of a stamp-machine postage mark.

In the summer of 1974, Hostetter read a Denver newspaper article that said CSU intended to adopt a Merino sheep from Wyoming as the official CAM the Ram mascot. Hostetter wrote the Alumni Association with the suggestion of a Rocky Mountain bighorn, which would better represent Colorado. "Bighorns are native to Colorado. They are stalwart animals that enjoy the rigors of life in the mountain state. They don't hesitate to assert their rights, but generally they are peace loving," says Hostetter.

The University took Hostetter's suggestion and the Rocky Mountain bighorn has graced our University and its paraphernalia ever since.

Hostetter and his wife, May (Stiles), also a Colorado A & M grad, now are focusing on other challenges. While battling his fifth type of cancer in 25 years, Hostetter is helping plan his 70th high school reunion to be held on May 26, 2007. "I didn't realize that I was to hold my office as class president indefinitely," he says happily.



Save the PT Boat, Inc. crew on PT 658

John F. Kennedy helped make PT boats famous. Lt. Kennedy commanded the PT 109 in the Pacific during World War II. On August 2, 1943, after an attack by the Japanese in which his PT boat was destroyed, Kennedy led the survivors to safety by swimming to the deserted Plum Pudding Island some 3.5 miles away.

Depression and WWII, and who built America as we know it. They were military heroes, community leaders, and ordinary men and women who were united by values such as duty, honor, courage, service, and love of country.

Bob Hostetter, class of 1941, is a member of the greatest generation. Eight years ago he joined Save the PT Boat, Inc., a group of PT boat veterans dedicated to creating a living history display of the PT boat.

The group began their journey of restoration in 1992 in California, where they acquired a 78-foot Higgins PT boat, USS PT 658. They had the boat moved to Portland and placed on a

## PT Facts

- PT stands for patrol torpedo. PT boats were small, fast vessels and PT boat squadrons were nicknamed "the mosquito fleet."
- The Chinese called PT boats *Wind Thunder Boats*.
- The Japanese called PT boats *Devil boats* and *Monster that roars, flaps its wings, and fires torpedoes*.
- PT boats could operate in heavy seas and were consistently involved in more close combat with enemy forces than any other Naval units.
- PT boat crews suffered a high casualty rate and were among the most decorated sailors in the U.S. Navy.
- The Navy regarded PTs as expendable. They were sent on missions deemed too risky for bigger warships. They disrupted enemy supply lines, landed and picked up scouts behind enemy lines, shot down enemy planes, rescued downed U.S. pilots, and were occasionally used to draw enemy fire, exposing gun positions to fire from large U.S. ships.
- PT vital statistics:
  - Length: 70'-80'
  - Beam: 19.5'-20.75'
  - Draft: 5'-6'
  - Weight: 40 to 60 tons
  - Fuel: 3000 gallons (100 octane AV gas)
  - Speed: 40+ knots (40 + miles per hour)

PT facts from Save the PT Boat, Inc., P.O. Box 13422, Portland, OR 97213



Save the PT Boat, Inc. Crew

the boat from the Naval Reserve station to a crowd of more than 100 at a dock near the east end of the Hawthorne Bridge.

Since then, the boat has been shown at the Portland harbor during the Rose Festival, at the Antique and Classic Wooden Boat Show, at Pacific Northwest PT Boaters Bull Sessions, and on other occasions.

Now the group is constructing a boathouse to protect the boat from the weather.

Hostetter and the other PT veterans and volunteers have succeeded in creating a living history display—the only operational PT boat in the world—that carries on their legacy and achievements as the greatest generation.

