



## SPOTLIGHT FEATURE

# River relic

By KATIE WILSON

The South County Spotlight



**A DIFFERENT KIND OF PATROL** — The historical PT 658 moves up the Columbia River on a special tour June 6. The WWII torpedo boat, made up of found and salvaged parts, will visit St. Helens for the city's first Maritime Heritage Festival next month.

things: a narrowly avoided trip to Russia that led to a reassignment to California and an eventual sale to a private owner in 1958.

In 1994, she found her way to the current group, Save the PT Boat Inc., whose members descended on her like a hospital emergency room team and dedicated themselves to her restoration.

Since then, PT Boat Inc. has transformed the tired "war surplus" back into a sleek, efficient vessel. The guns can't really shoot, but you wouldn't know it from looking at them. The vessel is outfitted with gear PT crewman would have used during the war and her rescuers studied old drawings and photographs to match the new paint with the old, shade for shade. The captain's quarters appears much how it would have decades ago, down to the worn pin-up postcard on the wall.

"At the end of the war, I was glad to get off them,"

said PT veteran Frank Lesage about the PT boats. He was only 17 when he signed up for service in 1942 and has been an energetic participant in PT 658's restoration.

Now, "it's great to ride it again and feel the vibration," he said.

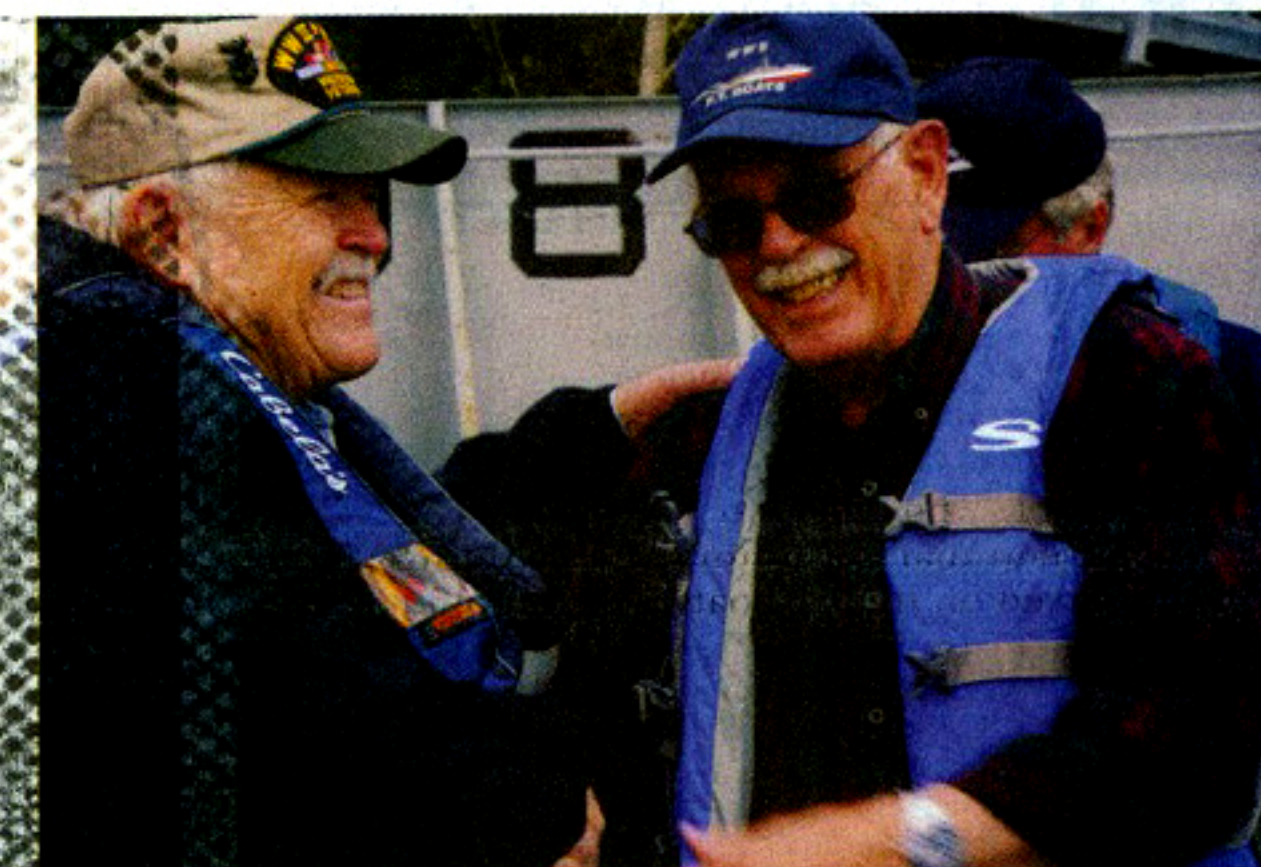
His first glimpse of a PT boat was when he was a kid in a dark theater watching the boats on a newsreel.

"Oh boy," he had thought. "That's for me."

Ship curator Bob Alton says PT 658 continues to thrill the people who encounter her.

It's important that her history and the history of the men who served on the PT boats isn't forgotten, he said. Having a working PT boat is key.

To walk on the deck, to sit at one of the guns, to peer down into the engine room, to hear the veterans tell their stories — that makes PT 658 unforgettable in a way a book or a brochure never could, he said.



## SHIPS VISIT ST. HELENS

PT 658 is coming to St. Helens as a part of the Maritime Heritage Festival in July, a celebration of the region's maritime history.

Joining PT 658, there will be vintage boats, including the Portland Sternwheeler, Native American and maritime exhibits and activities ranging from musical performances and sailing exhibitions to boat building and story telling.

The festival is free and open to the public. It runs from July 13 to 15 with events at the St. Helens City Docks, Columbia View Park and on Strand St. and First St. in Olde Towne St Helens.

For more information, visit [maritimeheritagecoalition.homestead.com/index.html](http://maritimeheritagecoalition.homestead.com/index.html) and click on "Maritime Heritage Festival."

**MEMORIES** — Jack Duncan shakes hands with fellow WWII PT boat veteran Frank Lesage during a Columbia River tour of PT 658 June 6.