

Sandy Carter's new project, including a book, will save the story of PT boat veterans

'A crew of souls'

By **CLIFF NEWELL**
Staff Reporter

Writer Sandy Carter doesn't just preserve history. She rescues it.

That is what she now is doing with her PT boat veterans project — reaching the aging vets in time to record their rich experiences.

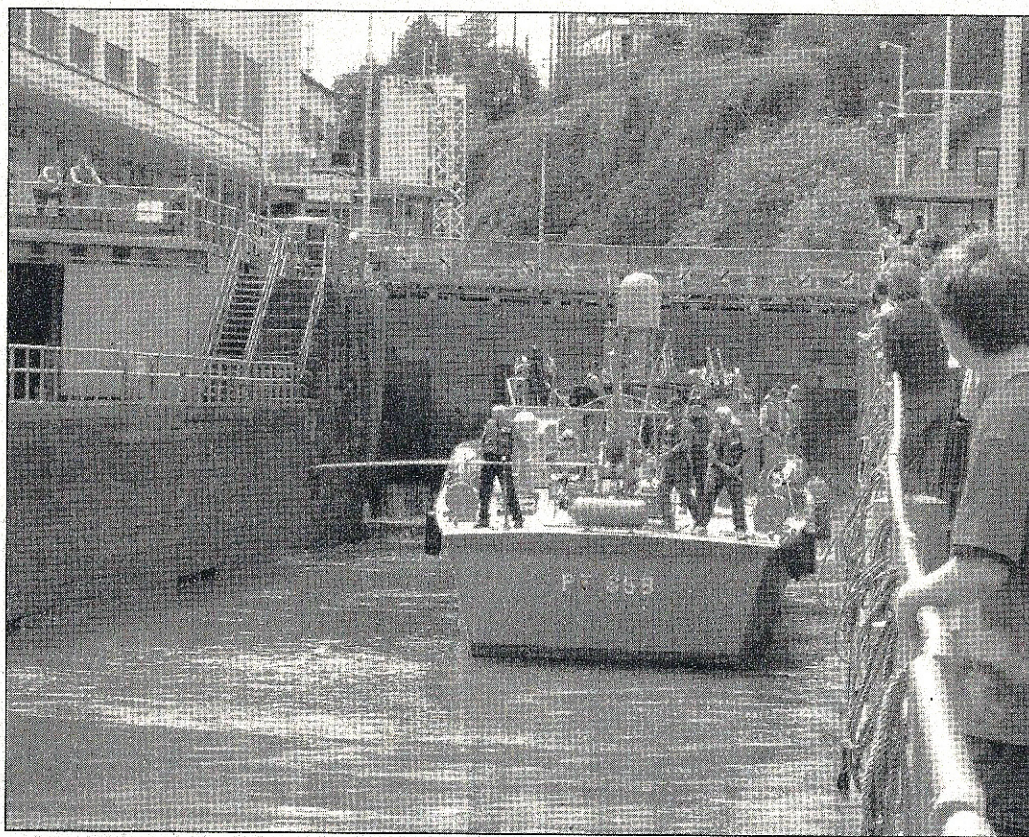
"These vets were 18 or 19 in World War II; now, they're 90-ish," Carter said. "Within days of meeting with the Save The PT Boat board, two of the veterans died. That was a huge wake-up call for me. There was no time to be lost."

Carter is the perfect person to do such a project. In January of this year, she completed her oral history of the workers of Crown Zellerbach — a saga of American industry — and her book impressed a lot of people. Especially Bob Alton.

"I called Bob in April, and he said, 'Remember, I worked there,'" Carter said. "I sent him a book.

"When I heard back from him, he said, 'We need a book for our Save The PT Boat (project).' He'd been working on that project for 15 years. Now I'm doing a history of 10 PT boat veterans and the men who worked on the project."

For Carter, collecting history is something like prospecting for gold. Sometimes she comes up empty, but other times she strikes pay dirt.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The PT 658 backs out of the Willamette Falls Locks during Lock Fest 2005. The patrol torpedo boat now looks different, with a new paint job, but several members of the crew from that day will be featured in a new book by Sandy Carter.

"Sometimes it was very difficult for veterans to express themselves," Carter said. "I'm sure some of them had PTSD, but they didn't know what it was back then. They were all kinds of guys. Some were scamps. Some were straight arrows.

"They had funny stuff and grim stuff. They had some very moving stories, which is why I do this work."

One of the most action-packed stories came from

Richard Lowe. One day on PT patrol, a Japanese Kamikaze plane smashed right into the middle of the 70-foot-long wooden boat, causing it to suddenly collapse and jack-knife into a giant V, catapulting Lowe high into the air. His young life passed before his eyes.

"He said, 'I was thinking my mom would get a \$10,000 worth of insurance,'" Carter said.

When Lowe landed, he

was still alive, and alive he remains today.

But the last memory of PT boat veterans at the conclusion of World War II is a sad one. All of their equipment was thrown into the ocean, and their boats were lined up on the beach and burned.

However, thanks to Carter and Alton, their story will

See CREW, page A7

SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Right: Phaen Sayre, chief radiographer in the Philippine Islands, 1943.



Below: Sandy Carter's new PT boat project will tell the story of a group of veterans, pictured here in a collage. Some of the veterans are now deceased, but Carter was able to capture their histories through previously recorded interviews.



Crew: New book on WWII PT boat veterans

Continued from page A6

live on. The surviving vets joined Save The PT Boat, and together they beautifully restored PT 658. In Lake Oswego in August, a huge crowd thronged the dock at Foothills Park's dock to welcome the historic craft. It was a thrilling scene.

"It was a most moving thing for them when they heard those motors come to life again," Carter said.

"It was one of the highlights of their lives. They have a commitment to the boat and a love for each other.

"None of these veterans had served together, but somehow they all found their

way to Portland to preserve this boat. They're a crew of the soul."

The big question Carter is always asked is "Why? Why is it so important to preserve the history of the PT veterans and their boat?" Carter has a passionate answer.

"It was a most moving thing for them when they heard those motors come to life again."

-- Sandy Carter

"So many from the World War II generation will soon be gone. It's important we don't forget them. If we don't get their stories they will be lost, and it will be like having an amnesiac life with no meaningful context.

"I love meeting these people."

For more information go to www.savetheptboatinc.com.