

## The Harbor Tug with more lives than a Cat Pt. 2



The orders dated 4-1-1971 said authorized to wear civilian clothes enroute to Conus. But wearing civvies, and carrying a 100 pound green sea bag, wasn't going to be much of a disguise landing in San Francisco. Most people just looked at you, and then turned away, others would continue to stare until you glared back at them, and some even appeared offended. You would run into someone in uniform, and get the obligatory nod, or somebody wearing a hat saying World War II, or Korean War veteran, they would give you the hi sign, or the a wink of an eye, because they knew where you were coming from.

I remember as the plane lifted off the runway, the yells, screams, and the excitement of finally leaving that tropical paradise in South East Asia, the sounds and smell of Nam were gone for now, and while we didn't know each other personally, we all shook hands, and congratulated each other for surviving, and now we were all going home together.

The long plane ride gives one time to reflect, my thoughts quickly drifted to the 785, the crew. I also thought back to my first days in country, the three days at the Annapolis BEQ in Saigon awaiting orders, and then being sent off to Cu Chi with four other Navy types. We didn't even have greens yet, dungarees and white sailor hats, talk about being the new guys. We were the laughing stock of the base, and many even made comments like, boy Charlie can sight in his AK-47 on those white hats even in the dark, or these FNG'S won't even make the day. I had been in the Navy for just over a year, but it didn't take me long to realize that I had the uncanny ability to irritate Navy Brass, from thousands of miles away. E3's always got the dirty jobs, I was used to it by now, but burning excrement eight hours a day, for the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry in Cu Chi, was not the Navy my local recruiter told me about. I joined the Navy, because I didn't like sleeping in foxhole's, and eating rations from a can, so I could only imagine who's behind I had chapped, to get this duty. While I didn't know a whole lot about the Navy, I knew even less about the Army. I thought of those four long sleepless days in Cu Chi, before somebody finally came to their senses, and cut me orders to Nha Be.

While the Navy had plenty of dirty jobs, we did have three squares day, clean bunks, showers and toilets with plumbing, and if you had something you didn't need any longer and nobody was looking, one could simply just toss it over the side. I was just one on the short list that spent almost their whole tour aboard the Winnemucca, so I felt comfortable calling her home. But all that didn't matter now,

home was just six hours away, and there would be no mid-watch or concussion grenades banging on the hull tonight.

We always joked about the answer to the question: “How you gonna act when you get back to the real world” most times the reply was like a Mother F\*%^\$@\* Animal, and the comment “It don’t mean nothing” would never carry the same weight at home as it did in the Nam. After a year here, could one just flip the switch back to normal? And what today, was considered normal? I was already wondering about the 785. Would she be lost to Vietnamization? Would I ever see any of the crew again? Out of a constantly revolving crew of 12, chances were very slim, but there were a few guys in my neck of the woods, Smitty in New Hampshire, Grooms in Ohio, so I guess there was always the chance. My ears popped, as we were beginning our descent into Boston, Vietnam would fade away for now, as family, friends and some good old Italian home cooking were on my mind.

The homecoming was quiet, one didn’t broadcast you were just home from the Nam, but as the word spread, family and friends began stopping by to say welcome home. Later in the week my folks had a welcome home party, it was similar to the one they had when I left for Vietnam, except that one, seemed more like a living funeral. People came by to shake your hand, and wish you luck, but many didn’t know if they would ever see you again. The celebrations finally stopped, and it was time to move on with life. I paid very close attention to how the war was going, and I often wondered about the 785, her crew, and our mascot Rivets. I knew the crew would continue to watch out for him, Stew Burner Swenson always made sure he ate as good as the Craft Master. He liked his steak rare with a touch of garlic, took his screwdrivers without ice, could out steam many of the crew, and even with four wobbly legs, never failed to get the crew back to the boat.

I figured the Navy probably had turned the 785 over to the South Vietnamese by the time Saigon had fallen, but I still wondered if even the VC had gotten their hands on her at the end. As the years passed I found myself thinking less, and less of the place I called home for almost year.

In 1998 I decided to try and locate any crew members that served on the 785. I posted on Kent Hawley’s The Brown Water Navy in Vietnam website, and Don Blankenship’s RiverVet, there were many others, and I tried to post in all of them in the hope of finding somebody I served with, but no luck. I was able to navigate the Govt. website to get some information on the YTB-785, and found it to be in the mothball fleet in Benecia, California. I was happy she was still floating, but saddened by the poor condition she was in. In 2000 DOD Department of Defense records showed her status changed, to be scrapped or dismantled. That bothered me a great deal, but most of the other tugs in her class had already disappeared, so while I didn’t know what the life expectancy of a YTB was back then, I thought 36 years was a pretty good average.

Later in 2001 my posting was seen by FN Martin Grooms from Ohio. I called him snipe from day one, ironically we had the same mental deficiencies, so we got along great, had liberty on the same days, and we spent a fair amount of time getting our laundry cleaned at the Green Door, in the village of Nha Be. We spoke on the phone for a couple of hours one night, and then settled in by emailing. We vowed to work together and try to locate others on the boat. It wasn’t long after finding the snipe, I heard from Craft Master Bill Posey, he saw the same posting on the internet, was still living in Tennessee, and must be a celebrity of sorts, because they even named a road (Posey Hollow Road) after him.

**It was early August of 2002, when I received an email from a Ron Ihle, a tug boat owner from California. He was trying to save the YTB-785 from the scrap heap, and was working with an Admiral, and a Senator, trying to convince the Navy to donate the 785 to him. His organization wanted to make an operational museum out of her, dedicated to Navy tug boat sailors. I forwarded him some photos, her Vietnam history, awards, and campaigns she participated in, as he thought it might carry more weight in his favor. Unfortunately, I never heard from Ron again, so I guess the Navy didn't look favorably on his proposal.**

**In mid November 2002, I heard from another crew member FN Leland Baker from Missouri. We were now sharing emails between the four of us, and talk soon emerged about trying to have a reunion of the crew. Most of us were still working fulltime jobs, and with the professions we had, it was hard to get everybody together at one time, so the reunion was put on the back burner for the time being.**

**I continued to check the status of the 785 on the DOD website, and found it had changed once again in January of 2003, as the 785 was now going to be sold to China under the Defense Reutilization Marketing Service (DRMS) for reuse or conversion. Once again, my skivvies got a little bunched up thinking she might be under the control of another country. In the meantime, I had written letters to the Archives in Washington D.C., trying to get copies of deck, or muster logs from the 785, in the hope of locating more of the crew, but they didn't archive the records of service craft, so that didn't provide me with much help.**

**While surfing the web one day, I noticed that LMW investments Inc. had just purchased the YTB-785 from the Defense Reutilization Marketing Service (DRMS). I couldn't believe my eyes, and immediately went to the DOD website to see if her status had changed. The 785 was stricken from the Navy Ships listing on December 22, 2003, and on January 21, 2004 was sold to LMW Investments Inc. of Chula Vista, California for \$67,822 dollars, they planned to put her into civilian use in the Los Angeles area. I was excited that she was going to continue doing what she was built for, but mostly because she was staying in the States, and not being sold to China.**

**Shortly after the sale, I received an email from EM2 Bob Lord of Nevada, he saw my post on Kent Hawley's website, remembered Rivets the dog, and even my nickname "Vanuci". Bob came aboard just before I left Vietnam, so I didn't remember him at first, but after swapping some photos, we both agreed, we were much better looking back in 1971. Bob stayed aboard until December of 1971, and provided much of her history from April to December of 1971.**

**The Navy had spent a considerable amount of money on the 785's main engine before she was put into mothballs, so on paper it seemed that LMW got a pretty good deal. The tug worked the Los Angeles area for close to a year, but had a myriad of problems with its rudder control. By now the new owners were just about at the breaking point and wanted out of the tug boat business. Along came a young man named Ron Greger, owner of Greger Leasing, of Napa Valley, Ca. Ron being pretty savvy in the marine Industry, made LMW an offer they couldn't refuse, \$10,000 dollars cash, and a used sand barge.**

**LMW jumped at the offer, and in October of 2005 Ron became the new owner of the YTB-785 U.S.S. Winnemucca. He had her towed from Los Angeles, to Alameda, and after further investigation, located the problem with her rudder control, as the Navy had installed stop clamps on the shafts of the**

rams, to prevent the rudder from moving around while in mothballs. These were preventing the rudder from reaching its full travel, and thus causing the rudder control to continually trip its breaker. So in just under four hours, Ron had the problem fixed, and was driving his new toy around in San Francisco Bay with a big smile on his face. Now it seems, Mr. Greger got the sweeter of the two deals.

Young Mr. Greger became very interested in her history, and began searching the internet for any information he could find about her. It was November of 2005, when he saw my posting on the Brown Water Navy's website, and contacted me by email. He sent me some photos of the remodeling of the wheelhouse, asked for her history, and any old photos. The wheelhouse was trimmed out in oak paneling, the old five foot haze gray steel wheel was replaced by a very nautical two foot Oak version, and two large Captain's chairs were added for the pilot & navigator. (Pretty tough duty) the real Navy made their helmsman stand. With all the wartime components removed the 785 looked like a completely different boat, Ron even changed her name from Winnemucca YTB-785 to Noelani (his daughters name) and it means "Mist of Heaven". While her outward appearance had been changed by all the new improvements, and electronic gadgetry, I could still see the old 785 behind that fresh coat of paint.

A complete remodel of the navigation, and communications system, brought the wheelhouse, into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Two new towing winches were added, to replace the old capstan drives used back in Vietnam. He explained he was planning to add a 450 H.P. retractable Z axis drive, and a bow thruster to help make her more competitive in today's market. So it appeared Mr. Greger was very serious about giving her a more powerful image, and even shared his plans to add an upper pilot house, with a 42 foot height of eye off the water for much better visibility.

Ron began working towing lumber barges from the Columbia River, down to Long Beach. He was very happy with the way all the new improvements came out, and said if you're ever out in the San Francisco area, to let him know as he would enjoy meeting me. I replied well, maybe that is something that could be arranged. I also told him about the other crew members I had located, and he said Hell, that's even better bring the whole crew with you, and we can take her out in the bay for the day, or night, even the whole weekend.

So at Ron's suggestion, I shared the photos of a newly remodeled wheel house with the crew, and asked if they knew what it was. Capt Bill said it looked like a tug boat, but didn't know which one. When I told them it was the old 785, now the Noelani, they couldn't believe it. I shared the other pictures Ron sent me, and told them about Ron inviting us all out to San Francisco for a reunion on the boat.

It was November of 2006, and Ron was continuing to work the boat from Oregon to Long Beach, we tried to agree on a time, when he would be down for a few days, and all of us could meet in the San Francisco area. I shared Ron's email with the crew, and shared the names of the crew with Ron, so we could all stay connected. It wasn't long before the name list was exchanged, that Ron asked me about EM2 Bob Lord, he said his half brother Mark knows a Bob Lord from Nevada. Small world Eh?

It wasn't long after Bob Lord explained his connection to the Greger family. After Bob was born, his parents divorced, and his mother June married Ron's father Cliff Greger, they had two children Lisa

**& Mark. Cliff and June later divorced, Cliff Greger remarried and had a son Ron, the new owner of the Noelani. All this was getting pretty confusing, but it was certainly going to be a reunion to remember, the half brothers of the Lord and Greger families gathering, along with four members of the 785's old crew. The story of how Ron Greger ends up owing a former Navy tug boat that served in Vietnam, and 37 years later his half brother Mark's half brother, Bob Lord who actually served on her in Vietnam in 1971, all meet again on the same boat? Hollywood couldn't script this one, as it's even too bizarre to try and make up.**

**We finally agreed on February 15<sup>th</sup> through February 18<sup>th</sup>, Ron said he would have the boat down in Alameda. All the flights were set for us easterners, Vanuci from Boston, Bill Posey from Tennessee, the snipe from Ohio, and Bob was driving from Nevada. It was just after New Years and the crew was planning on having a plaque made to present to Ron, for inviting us all out on the boat for the weekend. In the meantime Bob emails me and says he was checking websites the other day, and came across the name of a guy named Sanders, who mentioned many of our names in his posting. I said yes I remember him, he was a BM3, we called him Sandy, and when he left Vietnam he went to Japan.**

**I said where did you see that posting? Bob said he would try to find the site again, but was unsuccessful. We eventually used Bob's website history to locate the website that BM3 Sanders then, now Lt. Sanders ret. posted on and we contacted him. It just so happened that Lt. Sanders was living in Oakley, Ca. just a short distance away, and while he visited the YTB-785, and her crew when she was working Treasure Island in 1982, he had no idea she was still afloat. He jumped at the opportunity to join us all in Oakland in February.**

**Now even the best laid plans have their problems, and this reunion would be no exception, it was just two weeks before we were all scheduled to meet in Oakland, when Ron called me with the bad news. The Noelani had a massive engine room fire while she was in Coos Bay, Oregon, they almost lost her in the bay, but luckily they were able to make it back to the pier, where they could use the shipyards fire fighting equipment to extinguish the fire. She was pretty beat up, and it would be months before she would cast off her lines again. We were all sad about the news, but decided to continue with our plans, sans boat visit, and just enjoy the weekend together.**

**True to form on February 14, 2007 the east coast experienced the biggest snowstorm of the year, my flight was at 7:10 a.m. on the 15<sup>th</sup>, and was the only flight that got off that day before they closed the whole airport down, later this in turn would shut down the whole east coast for several days. People were stuck on planes on the runway for 8 to 12 hours, and this storm was the reason many airline regulations have been changed regarding wait times on airplanes. I was stuck in Long Beach for three hours without a crew to fly the plane to Oakland, and while it reduced my time with my crew members, I felt very lucky that I even got out of Logan that day.**

**Now because some of the crew had never met before, YTB-785 placards were made to distinguish our abnormalities from the others. I arrived in Oakland slightly more than just fashionably late, and the whole crew was waiting for me. After many handshakes, and pats on the back, we made our way to the Best Western Hotel in Jack London square. After settling in we began sharing the stories we remembered from 38 years ago.**

The next morning just before we went to breakfast, I had a few chores to perform; the first was a request from Jim Swenson the cook aboard the 785 in late 70 early 71.

It was finally to inform BM1 ret. Bill Posey that when he returned to the boat from a night of hard drinking in Nha be, back in 1971, that pate looking meat in the dish in the galley that he was spreading on crackers was actually food for Rivets the dog. At the time Rivets kind of just stared at Bill, but Jim & Bob just sat in the galley and remained quiet, silence certainly won out over valor that day.

Second when BM3 Sanders left the boat to go to Japan in October of 1970, he gave me his case jackknife, and said that I would need it to splice up the tow lines, etc. I used that knife until I left Vietnam, and I have used that knife hundreds of times since, I always thought, someday I'm going to find that Sanders and give this back to him. What better time than now? So I cleaned it up, sharpened, and oiled it, so that I could return it to him. And under ceremonial skies by the pool, I asked him if he remembered it, and he said vaguely, but he was speechless when I gave it back to him. He said, you actually remember that I gave this to you almost 37 years ago? I said, you bet, I was just waiting for a day like this to give it back to you. So the knife is now back with its original owner, Lt. David Sanders ret.

The next day Ron sent a Limo to pick us up, and take us to Pt. Richmond, where we spent the evening on the Robert Gray, a boat owned by Ron's friend Curt Lind. After everybody had arrived, and all the half brothers had met, Ron's friends wined & dined us with steaks, chicken, grilled vegetables and an endless supply of "Two Buck Chuck" Italians just love wine.

Later in the evening, Lt. Sanders presented Ron with a plaque from the crew thanking him for keeping the old 785 afloat, and while the fire dampened our spirits, and plans of going aboard her after 38 years, we all had the pleasure of finally meeting him, and his brother Mark. Ron made a commitment that evening to repair the boat, and he hoped we could all return at a later date, and finally get to go aboard as planned.

We spent some time at the pool the next day trying to magnify name tags, and put names to faces. It wasn't long before somebody got thirsty, (I think it was the Lt., and none of us wanting to ignore a direct order from an officer) doubled-timed it over to the Fat Lady Bar on Washington St. within 5 minutes the whole place was aware of our reunion, and drinks were coming from both ends of the bar. Many inquired of how this all came about after 38 years, and we took a lot of pictures. We met Patricia the owner, and a rather colorful character Larry the bartender, who had an endless supply of one-liners. Later we shared dinner with Ron and Mark, more crew stories were shared, where everybody seemed to have a slightly different version, and nose's seemed to grow by the minute. Ron had some early business in Oregon on Monday and had to get a head start, so we said our goodbyes, and vowed to meet once again after the repairs to the Noelani were completed.

We all returned home with a renewed sense of camaraderie, it was great to get together, and reminisce even for just a few days. It was about April of 2007, when Fed-Ex delivered a large box from California. It was a framed 24 x 30 picture of the YTB-785 that Ron had sent to each of us that went to Oakland. How cool of this young man, who by the way wasn't even born when we served on his boat, to be treating a few very old sailors with such respect? One doesn't just walk into an Army Navy store

to learn this, and I can only guess his dad a former Navy man instilled this respect in him at a very young age.

Come June of 2007 and the old 785 was still in Oregon being repaired when our own Mike Harris went to visit her and took some pictures of the progress. Mike met with Ron, did a walkthrough of the galley and saw all the pictures, and memorabilia the crew members had sent to Ron. Ron also explained the connection of his half brother Mark, and his half brother Bob Lord who served on the 785 back in 1971. Mike thought it would make a great story line, and even made note of it on the MRFA website.

It was August of 2007 when I saw a posting, and contacted GMG2 Mike Brophy who lived in Norfolk Va. Mike had been aboard for a very short time, just before I left in April of 1971. We shared a few emails, but contact with Mike was lost before we could get a phone number, or a mailing address, we continue to try and search for him. Later that same month we were able to locate EN2 Rick Dupont, who was the chief engineer aboard when the 785 was towed to Singapore to repair the main engine. Rick was able to define more on the 785's condition when she was towed to Singapore, and how she was later prepared for the moving of Seafloat.

The crew began to make suggestions for a boat plaque, and Bob's friend from the Sparks, Nevada Rotary would handle the details. We finally decided that as we locate new members of the crew, we should make a separate name plate that could easily be removed from the main plaque, and we could add new names later.

Ron was sparing no expense to get the Noelani back in shape again, and pulled out all the stops to get her running in short order. Early in the month of August, we located another crew member CS3 Sam Lockington from New Jersey, Sam was aboard the 785 when she went to Singapore in 1969 for repairs, and served the same time as EN2 Rick DuPont, and BM3 Dave Sanders.

Late in September of 2007, Bob Lord was in contact with the Honorable Diane Putnam, the Mayor of Winnemucca Nevada. The city was celebrating the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their history, Bob had explained the history of the 785 to her, and made a small bound presentation for her perusal. She and other members of the city council were completely dumfounded about the existence of such a ship. Both the 785 and the city were named after the Winnemucca Indian tribe, in honor of Chief Winnemucca the tribal leader. After emailing with the crew members, we all agreed to have Bob contact his friend that made the boat plaque for us, and have him make another one, especially for the City of Winnemucca.



**On December 11, 2007, Bob and Lt. Sanders went to Winnemucca, and presented the Mayor and the City Council with the plaque and other memorabilia, hats, and boat pins, etc. The Mayor and other Vietnam veterans were on hand for the presentation, all unaware of the U.S.S. Winnemucca, and a special place was made in the foyer where all her history would be displayed.**

**Ron finally got the Noelani back in the water about June of 2008, and said let's try for another reunion next year in 2009. So I went to work on the crew, and Ron just plain went to work, he had contracted to tow three older YTB's (the same size boat as the Noelani) from Oahu, Hawaii, down to Panama where they would be put to work on the canal. With all the miles they had to cover, they stripped down all the tows, and filled all their tanks with fuel. The Noelani was like a mother duck, with all her chicks in tow behind her in daisy chain fashion. Later when the Noelani used all her fuel, she would just make up alongside one of the tows, and offload fuel over to the Noelani and then continue on. They only averaged between 5 to 6 knots an hour, so if you wanted to be alone with your thoughts for a while, this was the trip to be on. They finally made it to San Diego, where they took on more fuel and supplies, and then continued on down to Panama.**

**While Ron was paying the bills, the crew was busy planning to return to California. We eliminated the weather factor this time, by choosing May 7<sup>th</sup> through the 10<sup>th</sup> for this gathering. This time we had seven crew members attending, BM1 Bill Posey ret., Lt. David Sanders ret. EM2 Bob Lord, EN2 Rick Dupont, EN2 Martin Grooms, CS3 Sam Lockington, SN Matty (Vanuci) Veneziano. Capt. Bill arrived at 2:00 p.m. in full regalia complete with a very nautical Captains hat, befitting a retired Navy Craft Master. His wife Bobby, and daughter Becky accompanied him, just to be sure old Bill didn't revert back to his old BM3 Navy ways, and he adhered to a responsible schedule.**

**We returned to the Waterfront Hotel in Jack London Square, very close to the scene of the crime back in 2007. It didn't take long before somebody suggested a libation, and something to eat at the Fat Lady Bar, over on Washington St. (I know it was Lt. Sanders) remarkably, the same owner Patricia, and Larry the bartender were still on duty, and they both remembered when we were there just two years earlier. Again we shared our reunion story with some of the patrons, but with a different twist this year as the Noelani was just across the harbor.**

**The next morning, we had breakfast, and went back to the hotel to watch a video that Rick had made from old 8mm movies, that he had taken back in 69-70. The photo books emerged again, and we were**



able to come up with a few more names of possible crew members. We had a free day, and the girls went to do some shopping, while the crew headed off to spend some time aboard the carrier U.S.S. Hornet. Massive in size compared to the 785, there were times one felt lost in one of her passageways. One could tell right away this was a very special ship, it was eerie and humbling, to know we were walking where some pretty brave men walked over 60 years earlier. In just a few hours, we learned quite a bit about the much publicized Hornet, her battles, her planes, and the men that served aboard her. Tomorrow, we will reunite aboard a ship less than 1/10 her size, many of her stories have never been told, let alone publicized, and I think many of us got some of those same feelings.

We made plans to meet with Ron, and his family, and go aboard the Noelani the next day about 10:00 a.m. We could see the flying bridge well before the rest of the boat, but as we got closer, even with the name changed, it was still the old 785. After descending a ten foot ladder, we all finally got aboard and began to scrutinize what we remembered to be missing, to what was new and improved. Other than the addition of two new towing winches fore, and aft, the biggest noticeable change for me was the new Z axis drive added in the berthing compartment. The area where 8 members of the crew bunked, was turned into a storage area that now included the new 450 H.P. retractable Z axis drive, and a bow thruster. But there were considerable improvements made all over the boat, and the camera clicked constantly. I remember how getting down a ladder was as simple, as holding on to the railing, picking up your feet, and basically just sliding down the railing. I almost lost my head and gave it a try, but realized I was only 160 pounds when I did it back in 1970. I wasn't sure if the age of the tugs hull, along with the added weight I was carrying now, would punch a hole in her bottom, and I didn't want Ron to blame me for sinking her, after spending all this time and money, so I just sauntered down step by step.

Ron gave us the full 50 cent tour, and explained all the new equipment on the main deck. The snipes went below to check out the power plant, generators, etc. deck hands headed for the 01 level to see the new electronics in the wheelhouse. I even made my way up to the flying bridge, to take some photos, but quickly returned to the 01 level and wondered why anybody would want to vomit from that high up. Ron lite off the engine, some of us acted as competent deckhands by casting off the lines, and soon Capt Bill was back behind the wheel taking us up into San Francisco Bay. I called the snipe up to the wheelhouse, told him to stand forward of the wheelhouse, where the 50 cal. starboard mount used to be, I stood where the port 50 was located and suddenly, it felt like we were back in 1970 all over again. We were like kids in a candy store, questions, questions, questions, Ron what's this, what's that do, etc. I remember walking over to the stack where the patch where the B-40 rocket passed through. Many times I had gun-decked over it, and as I ran my fingers over it, even after almost forty years, it was still an eerie feeling.

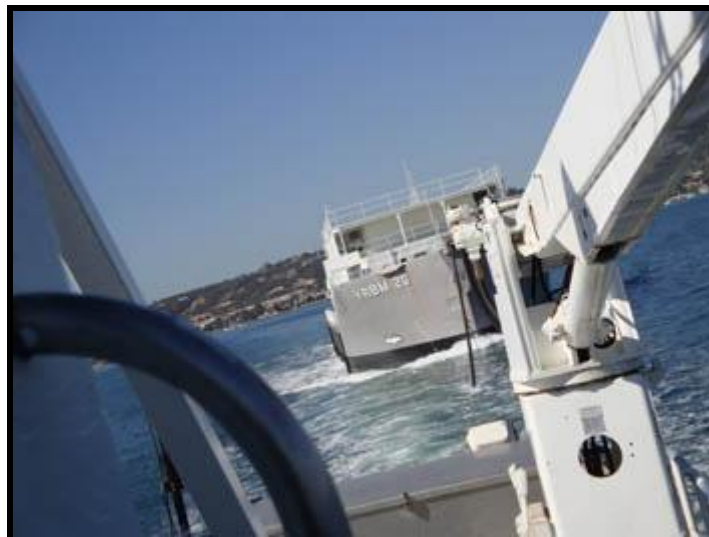
Ron tried his best to answer all our questions, and then Lt. Sanders took the helm for a while and took us up under the Golden Gate Bridge. It was a beautiful day out in the bay, and once we hit open water, Ron even gave old Vanuci a turn at the helm. I was pretty excited, as Chief Falardeau wasn't always excited with my skills on the helm, and banned me back in 1970. I guess Ron never got the memo.

We cruised all over the bay, and finally tied up at the pier over by Candlestick Ballpark to have a nice dinner that Ron's wife had prepared for us, and to watch the fireworks. It was truly a perfect ending, to a perfect day. Later that evening Ron took us back to Alameda, where many of us disembarked the

old 785 for the last time. We thanked Ron and his family for providing us such a special day, and memories we will never forget.

I had an early flight the next day, so the guys brought me to the airport first, and after I took off, as the plane banked to the right, and as the wing dipped, I looked out the window and there she was, the old YTB-785, still tied up on the other side of the estuary in Alameda, I waved goodbye, one last time.

Since 2009 Ron and the former members of the 785, have remained in contact, by email, and phone. His efforts to improve the Noelani with a new main engine, and generators, are keeping her competitive in today's marine trade. He continues to work the Oregon to California circuit, by recently towing some very old ships like the APL 4, and the YRBM 20 to the scrap yard. We hoped we could meet every other year, and bolster our ranks, but unfortunately health issues have prevented that from becoming a reality. With the loss of Chief Falardeau in 1992, and Jim Swenson in 2010, along with the lost contact of gunner Brophy, our ranks are diminishing faster than we can supplement them with new crew members. Now as the years creep up on us all, were finding that the Agent Orange that was once used to defoliate many of the river banks of South Vietnam for our protection, has returned in another form to cause us many of the health issues we experience today.





Through this article I have tried to document some of what the last forty something years, has thrown at this little tug boat, first during a war, and later into civilian life. The unglamorous duty of being attached to the YTB-785 during a contentious time in our nation's history. While she has been nicked, and scraped in battle, she has performed well above any expectation the Navy may have had for her at the time she was built.

In the first part I tried to document her many encounters viewed as a third party, calling on crew members aboard at the time, for their help in telling her story. It's hard to document her history, and not mention some of the men, and their moments aboard when they served on her. I have tried to provide a few of the more memorable one's.

The second part of this story contains more I's in it, than I would like, but I am just the assembler of facts. The numerous I's, is in no way meant to diminish the contributions of all her crew members, and her new owner Ron Greger. As I was just the first crew member to post information on the 785, it was inevitable that I became the point man for correspondence concerning her. At that time I was a pack rat for saving information (not so much now) but even with all the notes I have accumulated, I continue to confirm the story with her crew, just to be sure we are being as factual as possible.

Her story is one I think will resonate with many of the M.R.F. members, who may have seen, or passed her on a narrow river in South East Asia. From a military point of view, she has achieved all she was designed to do, but by her longevity now in the civilian sector, she continues to put smiles on some very old sailor's faces even today.

Through the generosity of her new owner Ron Greger, the Noelani is nearing her 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and her marine journey continues. As she lives on, the memories of all those that have served aboard her, continues to live on. While she has defied the odds, and escaped rocket attacks, a few mining attempts, and even the scrap heap by our own Government. Our hope is she will continue to prosper for many more years to come, and in the end, her demise may come by the only test she hasn't completely passed yet, *father time*, because.

**“THIS LITTLE TUG BOAT JUST REFUSES TO DIE”.**



**The above mentioned recollections were all provided by crew members of the YTB-785, and the new owner of the Noelani Ron Greger, at the times presented in the article. Crew members; EN2 Richard Dupont, EN2 Martin Grooms, Craft Master BM1 Bill Posey Ret., EM2 Robert Lord deceased, Lt. David Sanders Ret, CS3 Sam Lockington, SN Matty (Vanuci) Veneziano, not pictured, but a contributor, CS2 James Swenson deceased.**

**I have assembled them all into the best factual timeline we could all agree upon after 49 years.**

**Matty (Vanuci) Veneziano**