

CAN THE BATTLESHIP TEXAS BE SAVED?

© AUGUST 2006 • Vol. 39/No. 8

DISPLAY UNTIL 9/30/06

SEA CLASSIC



Ballad of a Tin Can
USS HAWKINS

Cold War Curiosities
**TRIBAL-CLASS
FRIGATES**

Who Really Was
**JOHN PAUL
JONES?**

Debunking the Myth of
**THE DEVIL'S
TRIANGLE**

Those Rough-and-Ready
**GUNBOAT
MARINES**

"I Survived the
**MOUNT HOOD
Ammo Ship Explosion"**

The Perils of
**U-BOATS &
FRIENDLY
FIRE**

U.S. \$7.99 CANADA \$9.99



7 25274 02562 6

SOS

SAVE OUR SHIPS

SEA CLASSICS invites news contributions to this "Save Our Ships" column. Send to: SOS, 9509 Vassar Ave., Unit A Chatsworth, CA 91311-0883

The last of a distinguished breed of Naval workhorse, the former fleet tug Zuni (ATF-95) — now renamed the USCGC Tamaroa (WMEC-166) — is in dire need of your support as she continues her fight to remain afloat as a tribute to all former tugboat sailors

COAST GUARD

CUTTER/

ATF

Tamaroa

BY WILLIAM F. BRIDEN

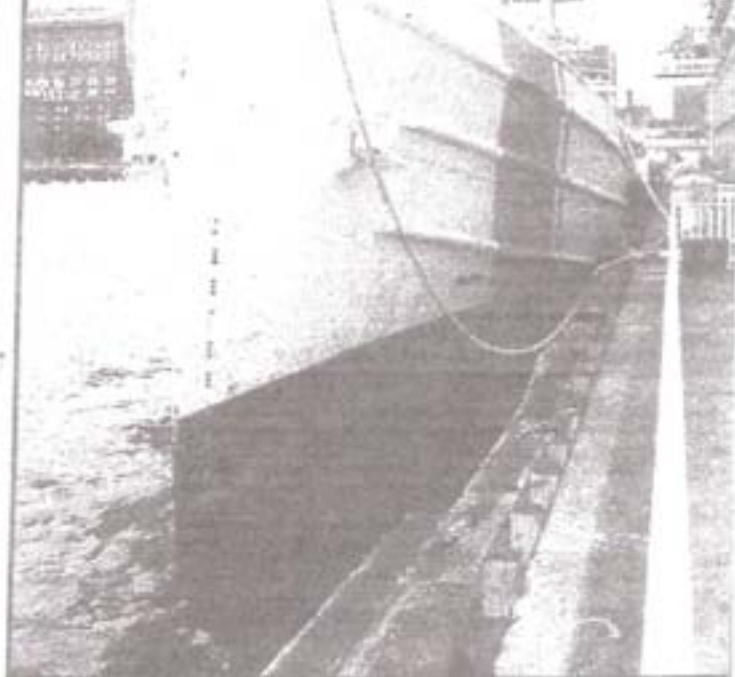
She's the last of her kind — an all-purpose ocean-going Fleet Tug that superbly fulfilled a dozen roles in war and peace and did each with a quiet nobility. Today best remembered as the retired US Coast Guard cutter *Tamaroa* (WMEC-166), WWII vets fondly recall her as the hard-steaming Fleet Tug USS *Zuni* (ATF-85).

TAMAROA STANDS ALONE

The US Navy built 67 Fleet Ocean Tugs during WWII, dubbed them ATFs and named them for American Indian tribes. The ATFs were so numerous and widely deployed that most any tugboat sailor worth his salt served aboard one sometime in his career. Big and

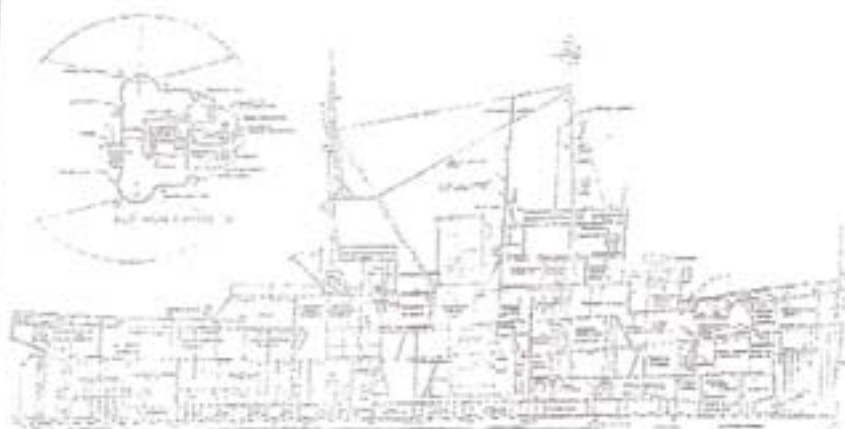
brawny 205-ft workhorses rated at 1235-tons, their muscular profile implied a bulldogish look of confident strength that well-reflected their ability to perform a variety of tasks with equal dexterity. As pushers and pullers, they knew no peer. As fireboats, they made a good showing against built-for-the-purpose specialty

Now being restored under the auspices of a new sponsor, it is intended to soon move *Zuni/Tamaroa* from her present home in Baltimore to a new berth in Virginia.





OUTBOARD PROFILE & TOP OF PILOTHOUSE



INBOARD PROFILE @ BRIDGE DECK



Transferred to the Coast Guard along with several sisters in June 1946, these former Naval Fleet Tugs were at first given WATF designators. During 1955, their designators became WMEC. In Coast Guard colors, they were known as the Avoyel-class.

Tamaroa on patrol off Greenland in the 1970s. Their armament was reduced to a single 3-in/50 DP gun on the bow, plus small arms for repel boarders drill and boarding party inspections. Multi-faceted workhorses, the powerful ex-ATFs were equally at home on Arctic ice patrol or wrestling errant navigational buoys back into operation.

vessels. As salvage ships, they repaired battleships, landing craft and minesweepers alike. When it came to a good fight, their lone 3-in/50, four 40mm Bofors and four 20mm Oerlikons gave good accounts of themselves — downing untold numbers of enemy planes.

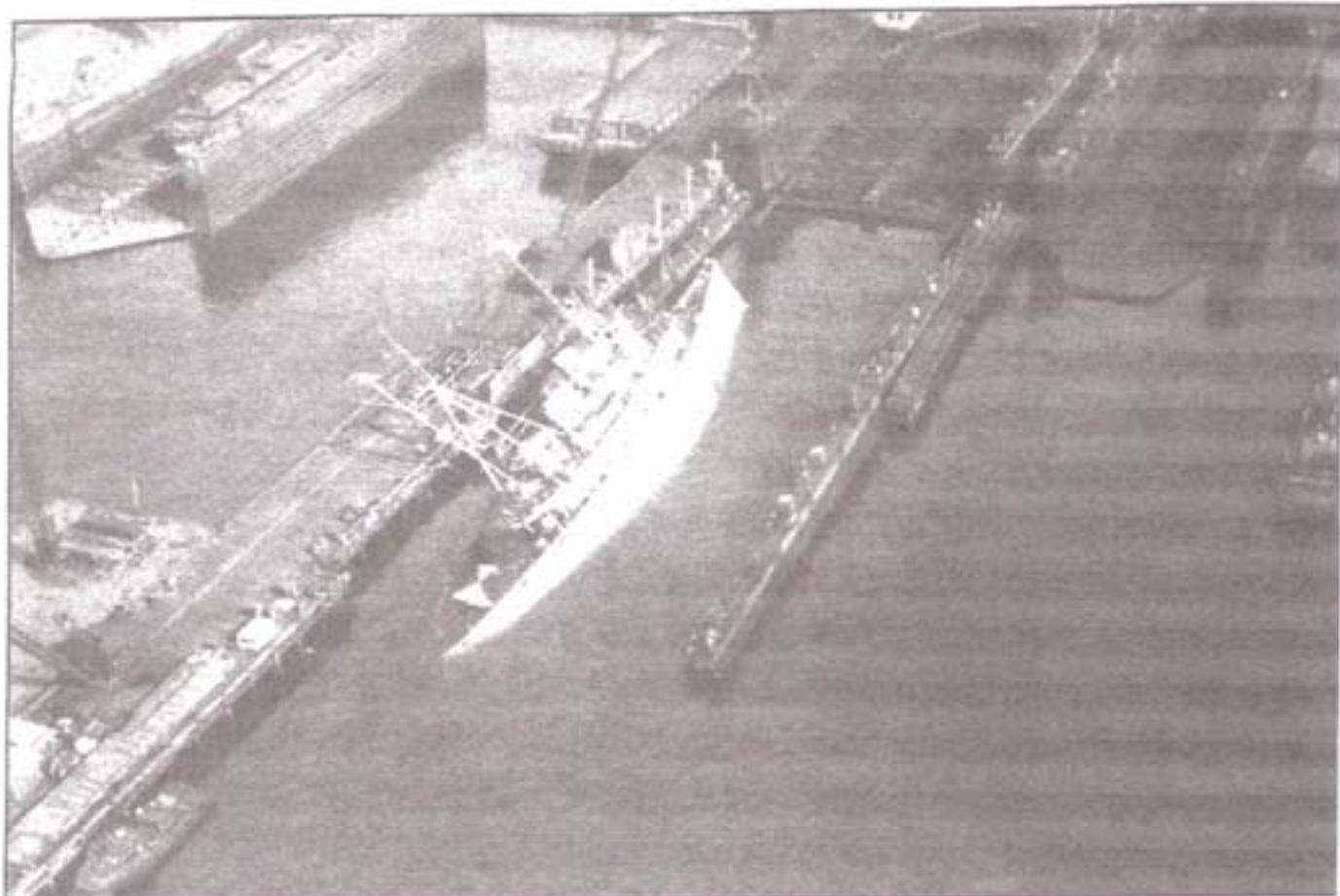
Frequently employed as tenders as well as survey ships, there were few sea-going assignments including sub-hunting and rescue chores that an ATF could not perform well.

HISTORY THAT SHOULD BE PRESERVED

The USS *Zuni* (AT-95) was commissioned on 9 October 1943, at the Commercial Iron Works in Portland, Oregon, one of 67 in her class. *Zuni* completed shakedown training late in October, and then departed Puget Sound for Kodiak, Alaska, resuming back to Seattle, Washington.

On 1 December, the tug departed Seattle for Oakland, California. After repairs at Oakland, the tug headed west on 27 December and arrived in Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides Islands at the end of January 1944. Early in February, the ship left Espiritu Santo for Hawaii and, on 17 February, arrived in Pearl Harbor. She performed routine missions for the next three months departing Pearl Harbor in mid-May for duty in the Central Pacific. Towing ARD-16, the tug arrived in Kwajalein atoll on 2 June. *Zuni* served as a utility tug there until mid-July when she again took ARD-16 in tow and departed for Saipan. She participated in the July assault on Tinian. In September, she towed ARD-17 to the Palau Islands providing support services to the Peleliu invasion.





As a result of a crewman's negligence in leaving a critical sea valve open, *Tamaroa* sank at her New Jersey berth in 1969. The accident prompts the question: Who saves the Coasties when one of their vessels is in trouble? At any rate, *Tamaroa* was quickly pumped out and refloated before too much havoc affected her machinery.

In late October, she received an emergency order to rendezvous with light cruiser *Houston* (CL-31), damaged by two torpedoes off Formosa. She relieved *Pawnee* (ATF-74) of the ship and towed her to Ulithi atoll on 27 October. On 4 November, another set of urgent orders sent her to the rescue of the light cruiser *Reno* (CL-96), damaged by a torpedo off the Philippines on 3 November. Though the cruiser nearly capsized, the ships' crews combined to meet the threat, the tug towing the cruiser 1500-mi back to Ulithi, arriving on 10 November.

The *Zuni* suffered underwater damage from the two ships pounding together during the salvage. She remained in Ulithi for the rest of November assisting in mooring both the *Houston* and *Reno* for dry docking. For the next two months, she did various mission assignments and then returned to Ulithi. On 22 February, she arrived off Iwo Jima, supporting the invasion and assisting in the recovery of stranded and damaged vessels for the next month.

On 23 March 1945, she broached on the beach as the result of a fouled anchor and propeller. She lost two crewmen and suffered a broken keel and holed sides.

She was pulled off the beach, temporarily repaired, and towed to Saipan for further temporary repairs. *Zuni* was towed to Pearl Harbor where she arrived at the end of May. After 14-weeks of repairs at Pearl Harbor, she resumed active duty on 15 September, during which time WWII ended. The tug served with the Pacific Fleet until the beginning of 1946. She then transferred to the Atlantic Fleet serving in the Gulf Coast area, assisting in the stockpiling the many vessels resumed to the US from around the world.

COAST GUARD HISTORY

The USS *Zuni* was transferred to the Coast Guard on 29 June 1946. The Coast Guard renamed her USCGC *Tamaroa* after a long succession of Coast Guard tugs of the same name.

She was home ported from her commissioning in 1946 to 1985 in New York; first on Staten Island and then on Governors Island. From there, she conducted numerous missions, including search and rescue, law enforcement patrols, international ice patrols, fisheries enforcement, also servicing the "Texas Towers" of the Cold War early warning system operated by the US Air Force, to name just a few. In July 1985, she moved to New Castle, New Hampshire, where she operated from until she was decommissioned in 1994.

Throughout her Coast Guard career the *Tamaroa* assisted many vessels in distress.

The most publicized rescues involving the *Tamaroa* took place in 1991 during the "No-Name" or "Halloween Storm" that was subsequently immortalized in Sebastian Junger's best-seller *The Perfect Storm*. The *Tamaroa* assisted in the rescue of the three crew members aboard the sailboat *Satori*, 75-mi off Nantucket Island. During the operation, seas built to

40-ft in height and the winds were over 80-mph.

No sooner had the crew relaxed, when the *Tamaroa* was battling the heavy seas again, this time in search of the crew of a downed Air National Guard helicopter that had been forced to ditch when it ran out of fuel on a rescue mission of its own. *Tamaroa* was able to rescue four of the five crewmen, an act which earned her crew many individual awards and the tug the Coast Guard Foundation Award.

A FLEET VANISHES

Following the end of WWII, the Navy gave 30 ATF's to foreign countries, and six to the US Coast Guard. During their careers, four were sunk and two are in California awaiting the scrapper's torch. Over the years, another 30 were either scrapped or sunk as targets,

including five of the USCG ships.

Today, only one remains: the ex-ATF *Zuni/USCGC Tamaroa* — winner of four WWII battle stars — now temporarily based in Baltimore but slated to soon move to Virginia. A ship well worth saving for posterity, she needs lots of help and financial support — a true SOS project already well underway. Initial efforts to save the *Zuni/Tamaroa* encountered the usual progression of fits and starts.

Decommissioned in 1994, the National Association of Fleet Tug Sailors put up the funding to have the ship towed from New Castle, New Hampshire, to New York City where she was long displayed at the Intrepid Air & Space Museum complex. However, plans for her complete preservation failed to materialize and, after six-years of wrangling, *Tamaroa* was sold at

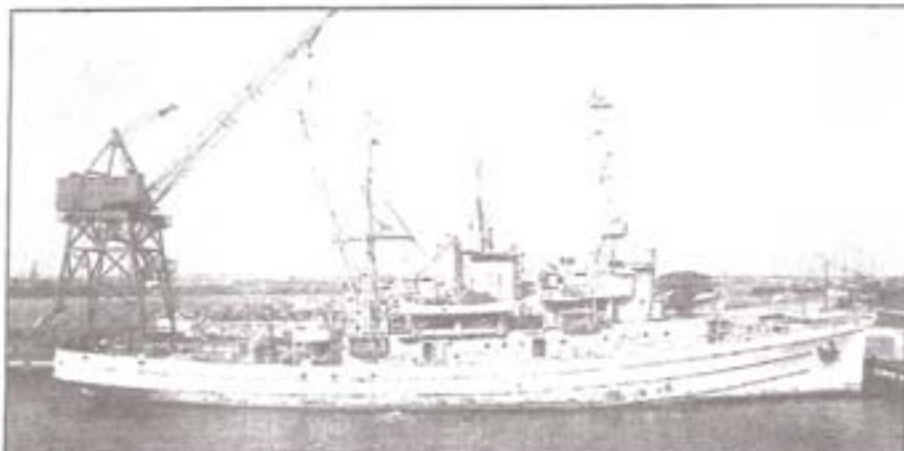
auction for her scrap value to a ship broker who planned to convert her into a commercial tug. Ultimately, this deal also fell through forcing her to sit neglected for another prolonged period.

In April 2002, the *Tamaroa* Maritime Foundation (TMF) was formed as a tax-exempt non-profit organization with the intent of restoring the tug to her original configuration. Composed of dedicated ex-sailors, maritime enthusiasts and businessmen who knew the full scope of such an ambitious undertaking, the TMF devised a valid business plan which identified several revenue sources to support the project.

During its extensive restorations, *Tamaroa* will be made available to civic and veterans' groups for tours and meetings. She will also become an educational platform for Navy League Sea Cadets, Sea Scouts and junior NROTC groups. An on-board museum and gift shop will be established and public visitations encouraged. But, even with all this activity, the *Tamaroa* project still needs all the help she can muster to meet her fiscal obligations. Through the valiant efforts of a small volunteer staff and a few dedicated former crewman, the ship is being fitted out with most of her mission material. The volunteers who live aboard eat and sleep where they live. Most are donors too, for the number of bills to be paid is never-ending. Ships are expensive commodities to maintain and money has to be continually generated to pay for fuel, utilities, sewage tank pump outs, insurance, mooring fees, and administrative costs like postage and printing.

The TMF is off to a very good start. It has applied for Federal and State aid and grants but, due to recent events such as the Hurricane Katrina tragedy, public funding is very difficult to acquire. The *Tamaroa* supporters need everyone's help for, if the project isn't successful, this last example of her kind will vanish forever... and that will compound the tragedy that has befallen all-too-many classic vessels.

For more information on how you can help, visit the TMF website at: www.tamaroa.org; call (804) 273-0247, or just send a check to The *Tamaroa* Maritime Foundation at P.O. Box 28042, Richmond, Virginia 23228. You'll be glad you did. **SC**



Zuni (ATF-95) begins her transition to Coast Guard service in 1946. Built as the very successful Cherokee-class Fleet Tugs of 1939/1940, by 1970, the Navy still had 28 ATF's in active service. *Zuni* originally carried four 40mm Bofors in two aft tube and a number of 20mm AA guns, all of which were shipped in her initial refit for USCG service.



For all their ruggedness and dependability, the ATF's were rough-riding in a heavy seaway and not particularly known for their posh appointments or crew comforts. Even with reduced crew sizes in Coast Guard service, their accommodations were not commodious.