

Galene

Tug of the Month: the history of the *Galene* and the “Miki” tugs of the US Army Transportation Corps

By Les Eldridge,
For Olympia Harbor Days Tugboat Races and Festival

The *Galene* is one of only a few surviving tugs from the 61 “Miki” class tugs of the US Army Transportation Corps, a Large Tug (LT). Fifty-one Miki class tugs were built at many west coast and local yards, including Grays Harbor, Washington. *Galene*, originally LT 464, and her four sisters were built in 1943 at Northeast Shipbuilding Company of Quincy, Massachusetts. Ten of the wooden Miki-class boats were built in eastern US shipyards. Only three tugs of the class are operational today.



Photo Courtesy Linda Evans

LT 464 towed targets for the Navy in WW II, accompanied convoys in the Atlantic as a rescue tug, and left government service in 1954. Her 1200 horsepower (HP) Superior Diesel engine drives her 400 tons powerfully through the seas. She is 127 feet in length. She is one large tug!



Courtesy Karla Flower



Courtesy Linda Evans

“Miki” in the Hawaiian language means “quick, active, prompt, fast and efficient in work.” To double such a noun/verb, as in “miki-miki,” means “very quick, very active,” which is also slang for a twin engine “Miki.”

Her lineage is remarkable. The WW II Army Transportation Department is the direct descendant of the Union Army’s Quartermaster Corps in our Civil War. In that war, the Union Navy grew to 700 vessels, the Confederate Navy to 500, but the Army’s Quartermaster Corps numbered more than 2000 vessels. It was the Army’s navy. The Corps’ ships transported food, horses, forage for the cavalry, ammunition, heavy ordinance, everything needed for the Army to fight among the thousands of river miles and winding inlets of eastern America, from the Atlantic coast and the Gulf of Mexico to the Mississippi River and the land beyond its western banks. Many Corps gunboats guarded their transports and were sunk or damaged in combat. That is a part of the Miki boats’ legacy!

Owners Skip and Marty Suttmeier found *Galene* in Portland, Oregon in 2007 and purchased her. Almost two years later, they had replaced, repaired or rebuilt almost everything aboard, and in August 2009, took her through a severe storm from Portland to Seattle, having engine trouble on the way. After some repairs, they travelled to Olympia in September for the 2009 Harbor Days races and placed second in the Large Tug event to the 1500 HP *Judy M.* They have been regular entrants at Olympia Harbor Days (OHD) ever since.



Galene was named the OHD logo boat for the 2013 races. She won her race that year and on just one day of festival visitors, logged 2000 people coming aboard. She won with a nonagenarian former crewmember on deck, Stan Wood, who had sailed as a 19-year-old deck hand during her Army days. The Suttmeiers had flown Wood out for the occasion from Belfair, Maine.

The Suttmeiers then reached out to a sister vessel, the 124-year-old *Arthur Foss*, to aid in “big tug” training for new crewmembers. On the way back from the races, *Galene* stopped in Tacoma to bring aboard five Northwest Seaport Foundation trainees who would later serve aboard the Seaport’s iconic Foss tug. Wood regaled them with tales of the old days aboard *Galene* as they trained as deck hands and engine crew on their way to Seattle.



2016 Race Awards

Galene won her OHD race in 2015 and 2016, as well. Her after deck is usually the scene of the pre-race skippers meetings for race instructions on rules and heats, and always the scene of lively banter among the dozens of skippers who gather there. She is a treasured participant at OHD.

Sources: NW Seaport.org, Tug Galene/About Galene, Civil War Navies by Silverstone. Graphics courtesy of OHD, Karla Fowler, and Linda Evans.

About Les Eldridge: Les is president of South Sound Maritime Heritage Association and author of a number of maritime histories and novels of the American Civil War at sea. He lectures frequently ashore and afloat, and narrates the OHD races each year. For more, see EldridgeSeaSaga.com.

Tug of the Month is sponsored by Olympia Harbor Days Tugboat Races and Festival, an Olympia Kiwanis Club event. The free community event takes place every Labor Day weekend on the Olympia waterfront. It is in its 44th year. For attendance info see www.HarborDays.com or on Facebook @OlympiaHarborDays. Questions to the Executive Director at info@HarborDays.com.