

Veterans Wary Of Tug's Fate

Historical vessel auctioned

By Samuel Bruchey

STAFF WRITER

A 55-year-old tugboat used by the Navy during World War II and by the Coast Guard on ocean rescue missions, including plucking sailors from the Atlantic during the "Perfect Storm," has been sold at auction to an Alabama maritime resale company.

The 205-foot *Tamaroa* was purchased by Maritime Equipment & Sale Inc. of Peterson, Ala., for \$60,075 in an online public auction that ended Friday, government officials announced yesterday.

After an illustrious history that included landing on the beach at Iwo Jima, many former sailors worried about the future of the *Tamaroa*, fearing that the auction would end with the squat and heavy but reliable tug being scrapped or sold for parts.

The Alabama company said that would not happen, but its promise did not erase the sailors' concerns.

"This worries me," said Bill Dehority, a former Coast Guard sailor from West Haverstraw in Rockland County. "A boat with such a remarkable history deserves a better future."

After the boat was decommissioned by the Coast Guard in 1994, talk of turning it into a floating museum scattered as the boat rested idly in New York Harbor.

Dehority sent word to fellow sailors about the auction, hoping to raise enough money to secure the *Tamaroa*'s future. They raised several thousand dollars, but came up well short, Dehority said.

"We wanted to make the public aware of the role of work boats," said Dehority.

A spokesman for the Alabama company said yesterday that the *Tamaroa* would be transported to Green Cove, Fla., where it would be refurbished and made seaworthy, then resold.

"It's not going to be cut up for scrap," said L.L. Stewart. "It's going to be a pretty vessel again."

Stewart said the boat was in terrible condition and that refurbishing it would take three to six months and cost several hundred thousand dollars.

"There's always a market for a sturdy vessel," said Stewart.

Former Coast Guard sailor Thomas Kuefner of Commack remembers seeing the chunky tug with the black hull often during the 1960s when it was stationed at Station Island.

"I can see how men become attached to boats," said Kuefner. "A lot of sailors are kids when they come on board. They make friends, become men. The boat becomes the backdrop for that time in their life."

John Spillane, a former six national guardsman, was



Photo by Robert Mason

The *Tamaroa* sits moored at Pier 49 in Manhattan.

aboard a helicopter sent out to save three people on a sailboat during the infamous "No-Name Storm" in October, 1991, off the East Coast. The helicopter ran out of fuel and plunged into the ocean and the five men on board needed rescuing themselves.

Spillane, of Shoreham, still thanks the *Tamaroa*'s wide frame and single propeller engine for saving his life.

When he first saw the green and red lights of the *Tamaroa* glittering off the dark and turbulent Atlantic, he recalled Monday, he didn't believe the boat could possibly save him.

But its bulky frame prevented it from capsizing in the 80-foot waves. And the single propeller, which could be cut off and restarted instantaneously without turning off the diesel engine, allowed it to be positioned close enough to the men to save them.

Spillane and three other guardsmen were saved by the ship. A fifth was lost.