

# FULL STEAM AHEAD!

THE SS JOHN W. BROWN STEAM SCHOOL OFFERS AN INSIDE LOOK AT HOW A LIBERTY SHIP FUNCTIONS. THERE IS TIME TO SIGN UP FOR THE NEXT COURSE

BY DICK STERNE



The SS *John W. Brown* sets forth on one of its regular outings.



has become a three-day immersive experience in steam engineering along with Liberty Ship operation and history. Our guests have come from all corners of the nation and even Canada. Some of them have

relatives who sailed on wartime merchant vessels, and they want to see for themselves a little bit of shipboard



The SS *John W. Brown* being launched. The Liberty Ship is heading towards its 81st birthday this coming September. The vessel was ordered as an ECS-S-C1 Maritime Commission Emergency Cargo Ship, hull number 312 on 1 May 1941.

life, others are lifelong history buffs or self-described steam nuts. One of our biggest surprises was the number of participants from other museum ships without an operating steam engine who want to experience our triple expansion steam engine in operation, so they can better

relate to the plant on their own ship.

At the end of April, Project Liberty Ship conducted our seventh session of Steam School aboard the fully operational WWII Liberty Ship SS *John W. Brown* for a dozen eager guests from around the country. Guests come aboard on Friday morning and are assigned a berth in one of the original crew quarters, most are surprised to find the mint on their pillow, but that's not their last surprise. All meals during the session are prepared by volunteer crew members from our Stewards' department. As one of our long-time volunteers likes to say, "She doesn't pay much but she's a good feeder." High praise for any merchant vessel and we haven't had many complaints! After lunch, the program commences with a mixture of classroom lectures and hand-on programs. By the afternoon of

The mid watch is more than half over, but the twilight of dawn is still hours away and the convoy is in that dangerous stretch of the Greenland Air Gap beyond the range of Allied patrol planes, all hands have been tense for days. The sharp report of not-so-distant depth charges drum against the hull, distressingly distinct over the familiar rhythmic thumping of the engine and feed pump as the black gang tries not to think about the thin 5/8th-inch steel which is the only thing between them and the icy North Atlantic, or the four steep ladders that are their only way out.

Have you ever wondered what it was like to work in the engine room on a World War II ship? Steam School aboard the World War II Liberty Ship SS *John W. Brown* was conceived during a lunchtime conversation among volunteer crew members in the engineer's messroom and has grown into something that we couldn't quite imagine back then.

We were sure that steam would be the big draw, and that's a big part of it, but the program has grown far beyond our original conception. It