

Trabing

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Mostly about People

By Wally Trabing

Aboard the dredge Vagabond — Ahoy, y'all.

I am taking this cruise out here on the shimmering mucky waters of the Twin Lakes yacht harbor at the request of Charles O. Mueller, an ardent sidewalk superintendent of 50 Fifth street.

Who is fit to be fettered with curiosity about this sturdy, little unluxury liner dredging the bottom of the harbor like a Hoover with over active thyroids.

The superintendent and his buddies must view her from a distance; watch her swing back and forth on a pivot like a horizontal metronome shaft, feeling for the bottom with the methodical heaviness of a drunk looking for a lost collar stud.

They wonder about this strange nondescript creature, with its half-mile tail of pipe that meanders across the lake, carrying watery mud to the ocean.

They get all wetty-eyed—these superintendents do—when the light strikes the Vagabond just right, or when a breeze whips Old Glory which flies from her blocky deckhouse.

I was brought out here by a motor boat but was not piped aboard — the pipes being very occupied at the time.

This dredge, one of the smaller sizes, will spend the next four months without sleep, deepening the harbor so that even at low tide, there will be about 11 feet of water for entry and exit of sailing boats.

The Vagabond is very noisy. There are five, 275 horsepower Diesel engines, all very mad at each other.

All through the interview with Captain Chester Lyons I had to yell, and I was still yelling when I got home to my wife that night, and so that made five engines and one wife very mad.

Lyons was not inclined to be chatty. He is a tall, weathered man in his 50's, lean of face and words. His official title is leverman, which is a good title because he stands before 11 waist high levers which do his talking for him.

He has been wedded to this 100

ton mud sucker for 11 years, followed it from place to place; guiding it through its monotonous slow motion dance which seldom ceases during its three crew rotation.

By means of a considerable amount of yelling, I gather this is the way it works. Protruding out in front of the dredge, and seldom seen above water is a steel truck with a revolving screw. Behind the screw is a suction pipe which catches the mud and muck loosened by the drill.

Four Diesel engines supply the pressure necessary to push this material a half mile back to be disposed of in the ocean.

With all this tremendous power, the barge cannot move itself about. Long cables are afixed to some object ashore on either side, and run across the front of the dredge, enabling it to pull itself through its half-circle sweeps back and forth across the face of a mud bank.

The tall pipes in the back are rammed down (one at a time) into the mud and serve as the dredge's pivot or as "duck" legs on which to waddle forward.

Lyons said that in 24 hours the Vagabond can suck through about 92 feet of mud, 18 feet deep.

She can work down 90 feet with special attachments, 23 feet with the rig she's using now.

As you stand up in the deck house, the dredge humps and rolls clumsily like a grumbling mastodon walking through some prehistoric bog on sore feet.

But she works with "vigah." Lyons yelled that her engines never stop—except when they break down.

Her engine food is hauled from shore, and they have ravenous appetite—80 gallons of diesel oil an hour.

And that's about all, Mr. Mueller.

After a swim in the first class deck pool, dinner with the captain, and a game of shuffleboard, I caught a motor boat to shore—back to the work-a-day realities of life.