NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Motor Torpedo Boat PT 617
other names/site number "Big Red Cock," Dragon Lady

2. Location

street & number Battleship Cove ☐ not for publication
city, town Fall River ☐ vicinity
state Massachusetts code 025 county Bristol code 005 zip code 02721

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
☐ private	☐ building(s)		buildings
☐ public-local	☐ district		sites
☒ public-State	☐ site	1	structures
☐ public-Federal	☒ structure		objects
	☐ object		Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☐ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official — Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official — Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register. ☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
☐ removed from the National Register.
☐ other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper — Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Government (Naval)

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)
N/A

Materials (enter categories from instructions)
foundation N/A
walls N/A
roof N/A
other N/A

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Electric Boat Company (Elco), PT-103 class, 80-foot motor torpedo boat PT 617, "Big Red Cock," is a museum vessel displayed at Battleship Cove in Fall River, Massachusetts. Displayed in a specially constructed building ("Newberry Hall") that protects the boat, PT 617 rests on a steel frame set on a white gravel bed and is surrounded by a concrete walkway that leads to an elevated wooden platform on the starboard side; view ports in the starboard side of the hull provide visual access to the boat's interior. PT 617 may be boarded only by museum staff, PT boat veterans, and their families.

PT 617 As Built

As built in 1945, PT 617 is a PT-103 class, 80-foot Elco motor torpedo boat. It is constructed with two layers of mahogany planking laid diagonally over laminated spruce, white oak, and mahogany frames, and reinforced with longitudinal battens, secondary transverse frames, and clamps. [1] "A layer of airplane fabric, impregnated with marine glue, was ironed on between the two layers of planking. The result was a light, strong hull, resilient enough to stand up in heavy seas." [2] Navy specifications called for a "hard chine stepless bottom... with lines formed with a view to minimizing stress on the hull .... The lines shall also be formed to insure easy manuevering of the boat and a small turning circle at full speed.... The sides shall flare outward from chine to gunwale." [3] Constructed to the standard dimensions of the Elco-type PT boat, 617 is 80 feet long, with a 20-foot beam and a 5.6-foot draft. When fully loaded PT 617 displaced 55 tons. [4]

Below decks, PT 617 is divided into several compartments. Farthest aft is the lazarette, used for stowing spare engine parts and 5 gallon cans of oil. Next is the engineroom, followed by the crew's day room, which holds two bunks. The boat's gas tanks are below the day room. Forward of the day room are two officers' cabins to port, separated by a head. In the same space, to starboard, are the wardroom, armory, and galley. Forward of these compartments are the crew's quarters, which also

[X] See continuation sheet

served as the crew's mess, with bunks, lockers, and table. Forward of the crew's quarters is a small compartment that serves as a passage to the crew's head and the forepeak. This passage was used to stow lifejackets and other gear. A ladder from the wardroom leads to the charthouse, which houses the radio room and radarscope. The ladder continues to the cockpit on deck. [5]

PT 617 is powered by three Packard 4M-2500 Marine engines specially designed for PT boat use. The 4M-2500 "is a liquid cooled, supercharged, 12 cylinder...engine operating on a 4 stroke cycle. It is normally furnished as a complete marine power plant with a direct connected reverse gear in which is embodied a double cone type clutch and positive forward drive." [6] The engines each drove a single screw to develop a maximum horsepower of 4,050. The boat carried 3,000 gallons (9 tons) of high octane (100) aviation fuel in the tanks that gave it a maximum cruising radius of 500 miles. The maximum speed of the boat was rated at 40 knots, though most PTs, hampered by difficult maintenance and fouled hulls, often operated below 30 knots. The engines were equipped with mufflers that exhausted into the water to permit a quiet approach on enemy vessels or positions.

PT boats were designed as fast attack craft that provided a platform primarily for torpedoes but also for other weapons. Typical of late World War II Elcos, 617 was capable of mounting Mark XIII torpedoes, short range weapons that ran at 45 knots and carried a 600-lb. warhead. PT 617 also represents the late war development of the PT as a heavily armed gunboat, carrying a 37MM rapid-fire and two 20MM machine guns at the bow, two twin .50 caliber machine gun mounts on both sides of the cockpit, and a 40MM gun at the stern. The weapons were employed for antiaircraft defense and for shooting up Japanese barges, transports, and other small craft, as well as beach positions. The 40MM "was the best antibarge gun the boats ever had, and eventually became standard on all boats. It was accurate, automatic, and sufficiently powerful to blast holes in the heaviest armored barge." [7] PT 617 also carried two depth charge racks at the stern, each carrying one charge of 300 lbs. of TNT per can, should a PT "cross the path of a submerging submarine." [8] The depth charges were also used against pursuing destroyers. Also aft was an Elco smoke generator, a

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steel bottle filled with titanium tetrachloride which formed fog when mixed with moisture in the air, used to mask the boat with a smoke screen. [9] Two Mark 50 rocket launchers and a 60MM mortar were also installed on the Elco boats in 1945. [10] Small arms were also carried. Each crewmember was issued a .45 caliber pistol, and the boat carried a BAR, U.S. Rifles, Cal. .30, Model 1903, Thompson submachine guns, 3-inch rockets, and grenades.

Present Appearance and Condition of PT-617

When found by the museum, PT 617 was a stripped hulk employed as a diving barge in Florida. Fully restored to wartime appearance and condition, PT 617 was repaired with in-kind replacement of wood and other materials and equipment. The restoration included the installation of authentic engines and equipment, including most of the armament. 617 mounts 4 torpedo tubes, two depth charge racks, one 37MM at the bow, a single 20MM, the two twin .50 caliber machine guns, a single 40MM and a smoke generator aft. The .50 caliber mounts and the 40MM have tubular guards installed; these prevented the gunners from firing into their own boat. [11] Also on deck is the radar mast, which connects to the radar equipment in the charthouse.

The interior spaces on PT 617 were carefully restored and furnished. The original bulkheads, wardroom benches, crew's quarters lockers, and heads were retained. The vessel appears combat ready and is fully outfitted. The boat is painted in a camouflage scheme found in the Southwest Pacific and the Philippines during the war; the grey hull gives way to a mottled blue-green superstructure that blended with the jungle shores of the islands. Meticulously restored and well-maintained, PT 617 possesses remarkable integrity as befits the boat's role as sole survivor of the predominant type of the PT class of warship.

NOTES

1
United States Navy, Motor Torpedo Boat Manual. Washington, D.C.: Navy Department, February 1845. p. 367.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

2
Robert J. Bulkley, Jr., At Close Quarters: PT Boats in the United States Navy (Washington, DC: Naval History Division, 1962), p. 33.

3
Ibid., p. 57.

4
United States Navy, Division of Naval Intelligence, ONI 222-US (Standard reference manual on United States men-of-war) Confidential release of 1 September 1945, p. 135. Hereafter cited as ONI 222-US

5
"Contract Plan, Motor Torpedo Boat, PT 565-624," Navy Department, Bureau of Ships, No. PT 565, S0101H, 408117, ALT.0, February 15, 1944. Original plans on file, Battleship Cove, Fall River, Massachusetts.

6
Packard Motor Company, Operating Manual, Packard Marine Engine 4M-2500, Types W8 Through W17 (Detroit: Packard Motor Company, Inc., 1944), p. 101. Also see J.G. Vincent, Development of the Packard Marine Engine During World War II (September 1938-April 1945) (Detroit: Packard Motor Car Co., 1945) p. 10.

7
Bulkley, op.cit., p. 35.

8
Ibid., p. 38.

9
Robert Ferrell, The United States Mosquito Fleet (Memphis: PT Boat Museum and Library, 1977) pp. 23-24.

10
ONI 222-US

11
Mark Newton, Description of PT 617, (1988), manuscript on file, Battleship Cove.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
[X] nationally [ ] statewide [ ] locally

Applicable National Register Criteria [X] A [ ] B [X] C [ ] D NHL CRITERIA 1,4

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) [ ] A [ ] B [ ] C [ ] D [ ] E [ ] F [ ] G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)	Period of Significance	Significant Dates
Architecture (Naval)	1945	1945
Military	1945	1945
NHL VIII-B: World War II: The War in the Pacific		

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Person
N/A

Architect/Builder
Electric Boat Co., Bayonne, New Jersey

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Though an early 20th century development of the Royal Navy, the motor torpedo boat gained international fame following its adaption and use by the United States Navy during the Second World War. The PT boats were highly effective craft built in large numbers to interdict enemy supply lines and harass shore installations and landings on the various islands and atolls of the South Pacific. PT boats were credited with sinking numerous enemy ships, shooting up landing barges, rescuing downed flyers, landing partisans, and attacking remote outposts on isolated islands. PT boats and their daring crews early captured public attention and admiration, helping shoot down attacking planes at Pearl Harbor and providing the means of Douglas MacArthur's escape from Corregidor. The PTs were involved in nearly every Pacific campaign, even extending their operations into the Aleutians, the English Channel, and the Mediterranean theaters of war. The PT boats were vital partners in the United States victory over Japan. PT boats gained additional fame after the war following the successful political career of John F. Kennedy, skipper of the famous Elco PT 109.

Early in the war, the United States Navy standardized the design and construction of the PT boat. During the war two basic and distinctly different types of PT boat were built for combat use--the predominant PT, the 80-foot "Elco" boat and the 78-foot "Higgins" boat. Most of these vessels were destroyed at war's end or were sold abroad; today only four World War II PT boats

[X] See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

PLEASE SEE FOOTNOTES IN TEXT.

☐ See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):
- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:
- ☐ State historic preservation office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other

Specify repository:
PT Boats, Inc., Memphis, TN

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property .1 acre

UTM References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	19	320180	4919020
B			
C			
D			

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

All that area encompassed within the extreme length, beam, and draft of the vessel, incorporating the entire area of PT 617 as she rests in her dry berth.

☐ See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary incorporates the entire area of the vessel.

☐ See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title James P. Delgado, Maritime Historian
organization National Park Service (418) date June 28, 1989
street & number P.O. Box 37127 telephone (202) 343-9528
city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20013-7127

are known to survive in the United States. Three are "Higgins" boats, of which one, PT 796, is a restored vessel designated as a National Historic Landmark. The other is PT 617, the sole surviving "Elco," which, as restored and with original wartime issue equipment and armament, alone represents the nation's most heavily used, highly favored, and combat tested PT boat type in World War II.

The preceding statement of significance is based on the more detailed discussion that follows.

The Role of the PT Boat in the Second World War

The concept of small attack craft commenced with the use of spar mounted torpedoes carried by steam launches during the American Civil War, and by the 1880s, fast steam powered craft were developed that carried automobile torpedoes and served to attack capital ships. They proved so dangerous that another, larger type of vessel, the torpedo boat destroyer, was designed to combat them. These vessels were the prototypes of the modern destroyer. The invention of the internal combustion engine and its refinement led to increased interest in small, fast attack craft. British experiments led to the development of small, fast attack craft to challenge the line of battle as early as 1905, but the United States took little interest in the motor torpedo boat. The Royal Navy successfully used motor torpedo boats in World War I, and sank the Russian cruiser Oleg by MTB in the brief post-war struggle in the Baltic against the Bolsheviks. Yet, as historian William Breuer noted, curiously enough Prohibition and rum-running sparked initial American interest in the PT boat. "Rum runners...brought a few British versions of the PT boat into the United States and were using them to smuggle liquor from Canada.... In military fashion, the smugglers carried out experiments to improve...performance...including the addition of more powerful engines. They developed operational procedures --such as stalking along the coast at night--that would be put in practice years later at Guadalcanal, New Guinea, New Britain, the Philippines, and elsewhere in the Pacific." [1] Yet while the United States Navy avoided development of PT boats between the two world wars, it was involved in the development of fast boats, and "when the PT's time came, the U.S. Navy had much of the technological base needed for its design." [2]

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Following the repeal of Prohibition, American naval officers took a more serious view of the PT boat. In 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, former assistant secretary of the Navy, successfully lobbied Congress for a $15 million appropriation for PT boat development. The work began at a slow pace, and when war commenced in Europe in 1939, only eight boats being built to British plans were under construction. The first operational boat was not delivered to the Navy until June 17, 1940, and soon a small number of the new craft were shipped out to the Pacific. Four PTs went to the Philippines while others were readied for shipment. Tests of various boats and designs included open sea "Plywood Derbies" that ran craft submitted by Fisher Boat Works, the Electric Boat Company (Elco), the Miami Shipbuilding Company, Higgins Industries, and the Philadelphia Navy Yard through rugged full speed tests. These tests narrowed the field to a modified Higgins design and an Elco design for American combat vessels. [3]

PT boat parameters were set in the fall of 1941. The Navy insisted on wooden craft longer than 75 feet but no greater than 82 feet in length, powered by three Packard engines equipped with mufflers to mask their approach, capable of making 40 knots. Initial contracts for construction of the standard boats were awarded to two firms, Higgins and Huckins, but following the entry of the United States into the Second World War, Elco was awarded a contract for 36 boats and was the first company to put the new boats in service. Huckins built only 18 boats, none of which were placed in combat. For the remainder of the war, PT boats were built either by Higgins or Elco. [4] The Elco boats were preferred by the Navy, being "the most economical...its range exceeding that of the Huckins by 75 nautical miles and the Higgins by 150. Both the Higgins and Huckins showed materially larger silhouettes.... The Elco also had a much better internal arrangement; watertight doors in the bulkheads provided access throughout." [5] The two types of PTs were also distinctly different in their deck arrangement, and to a certain extent, their hulls. The need for a large number of PTs and the existing contracts from both companies, cinched the Navy's decision to continue with both types, though the numbers produced indicate the preference for the Elco. Of the 511 PTs built during the war for the U.S. Navy, 296 were Elcos as compared to 146 Higgins boats. [6] The numbers of PTs actually assigned to combat also reflects this; 218 Elcos versus 135 Higgins. [7]

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PT boats gained fame when Gen. Douglas MacArthur escaped from Corregidor on PT 41, running through enemy-infested waters some 600 miles to Mindanao. The exploits of the PT boat squadron in the Philippines included forays into Manila harbor to attack Japanese shipping, MacArthur's escape, and desperate holding actions against the rapidly advancing Japanese. These exploits accomplished in spite of sabotage, lack of supplies and equipment to properly maintain or repair the boats, were made famous along with their commander, Lt. John D. Bulkeley, when the news was released to the American public. The wartime publication of They Were Expendable, and the film of the same name, starring John Wayne, which recounted the exploits, indelibly etched the PT boat in the American consciousness. [8]

As the war spread through the islands of the South Pacific, far-flung Japanese garrisons depended upon a lifeline of supplies, ammunition, and replacements brought thousands of miles by sea. Nicknamed the "Tokyo Express," Japanese shipping to the Solomons was attacked by American submarines and PT boats, which for the most part were effective interdiction until the United States fleet recovered from the war's opening blows. In the Pacific for the early part of the war the Pacific fleet's battleships lay on the bottom of Pearl Harbor and the four nonexpendable carriers were carefully husbanded. The PT boats, with increasing success, began to interdict Japanese supply lines, multiplying as more 12-boat squadrons were commissioned and sent into action. One of these Elcos was PT 109, commanded by then future President John F. Kennedy and attached to Squadron 5. More than 212 boats, most of them Elcos, were built and sent into combat during the Second World War. American PT boats were used in combat alongside British MTBs and MGBs in the English Channel, including action off Normandy on D-Day, and in the Mediterranean. In the Pacific, however, they gained their greatest fame.

PTs were effectively used in the Solomons, New Guinea, and the Philippines. Armed with torpedoes to sink enemy ships, PTs were also equipped with machine guns, small arms, and rifles to attack smaller Japanese surface vessels, particularly troop transport barges running between the islands. The PTs made deadly gunboats, particularly when 40MM antiaircraft guns were turned on the lightly armored barges and shore installations. Because of their speed and small size, PTs also landed parties of scouts,

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supplies for partisans, and made rescues of downed fliers, even under the guns of Japanese ships and troops, and scouted for approaching enemy vessels. The most famous PT scouting expedition flushed out an attacking Japanese task force, scoring torpedo hits as the Japanese ran into the guns of the American fleet at the Battle of Surigao Strait in October 1944. [9] Used hard and aggressively, the PT boats sustained a high casualty rate; some 300 PT boaters were killed in action.

The daring exploits of the PT boats and their crews were consistently reported in the press throughout the war years. After the war, several PT boaters' successful careers again spotlighted the boats, but it was the election of John F. Kennedy as President of the United States that once again catapulted the PT boat into the national consciousness. Kennedy's heroic efforts to save his crew when PT 109 was cut in half in the Central Solomons by the Japanese destroyer Amagiri on August 2, 1943, were memorialized by book and motion picture. [10] PT 796, painted as the lost 109 (even though 796 was a Higgins and not an Elco, as was 109), was towed down Pennsylvania Avenue during Kennedy's inaugural parade, and the President was joined by his former crew as well as the crew from PT 157, the boat that rescued Kennedy and his men from behind Japanese lines.

Unfortunately, while the PT boats did much to win the war in the Pacific and inspired a number of offshoots, including Japanese "Shinyo" suicide craft, and the hydrofoil missile ships and numerous inshore patrol craft used by many navies in the 1980s, most of the boats did not survive the war's end. Battered, many badly damaged, and too expensive to take home, most PTs were stripped, hauled ashore at Samar in the Philippines, doused with gasoline, and burned. Only a handful of PT boats, and none that saw combat, survived into the 1980s. A stencilled notation on all PT boats bluntly stated, "Do Not Return to the U.S.," and thus no PT that saw wartime service ever returned home.

History and Career of PT 617

PT 617, an Elco boat, was built at Bayonne, New Jersey, in 1945. Laid down on March 29, 1945, the boat was launched July 28 of the same year and completed on September 21 when, nicknamed "Big Red Cock," it was placed in service on September 21, 1945, as part of

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Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron (Ron) 42. Squadron 42 was the only squadron commissioned after the cessation of hostilities. [11] Assigned to the Pacific fleet, it never reached the Pacific. PT 617 and her crew, were sent on a War Bond drive by the Navy, journeying as far as Florida before decommissioning. PT 617 was placed out of service on January 28, 1946, and was subsequently sold by the Navy on October 23, 1947. Named Dragon Lady after Milton Caniff's sultry cartoon character of the same name in the comic strip, "Terry and the Pirates," the boat remained in private hands for nearly four decades. PT 617, the only surviving Elco PT, was found in Florida by PT Boats, Inc., where the boat was being used as a diving platform. Brought to Melville, Rhode Island, which had served as the major PT training base during the war, PT 617 was meticulously restored and was moved to Battleship Cove at Fall River, Massachusetts, on June 25, 1985, site of the PT Boat Museum and location of the only other restored PT Boat, the Higgins-built PT 796, designated an NHL in 1986. [8] The two PTs are displayed there, survivors and representatives of the two types of an expendable yet vital craft that assisted America's victory in the Pacific.

NOTES

1
William Breuer, Devil Boats: The PT War Against Japan (New York: Berkely Publishing Group, 1988) p. 3.

2
Norman Friedman, U.S. Small Combatants, Including PT-Boats, Subchasers, and the Brown Water Navy: An Illustrated Design History (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1987) p. 97.

3
Breuer, p. 3 and Robert J. Bulkley Jr., At Close Quarters: PT Boats in the United States Navy (Washington, DC: Naval History Division, 1962) pp. 47-50.

4
Bulkley, pp. 56-58.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

5
Friedman, U.S. Small Combatants, p. 141.

6
Robert Ferrell, The United States Mosquito Fleet (Memphis: PT Boat Museum and Library, 1977), p. 44.

7
Friedman, Op. cit., p. 157.

8
W.L. White, They Were Expendable (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942)

9
Breuer, Devil Boats, pp. 174-182.

10
Ibid., pp. 102-106, and Robert J. Donovan, PT 109: John F. Kennedy in World War II. (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1961)

11
Bulkley, At Close Quarters, p. 482, Friedman, U.S. Small Combatants, p. 500, and Ferrell, Mosquito Fleet, p. 56.

12
Mark Newton, Description of PT 617 (1988), manuscript, Battleship Cove, p. 2, and Battleship Massachusetts Newsletter, Vol. 13, No. 2 (December 1985) p. 3.

MOTOR TORPEDO BOAT PT 617, Fall River, MA

UTM COORDINATES: Zone 19

3 20 180 ~~49 19 020~~ 4618955