

Smashing, bashing all in a day's work

By JOHN MILGRIM
Staff Writer

Coast Guardsman Jon Frederick gets to "hit stuff and not get in trouble."
"Basically in the Coast Guard you're on vessels and they tell you not to hit things," says chief boatswains mate Ray Reiter. "Then they put you on this and say, 'Hit it!'"

With no mercy, they aim for the big stuff and pulverize it. Ice, that is.

It's all in a winter day's work for the men aboard the Coast Guard cutter Penobscot Bay.

Tagged the P-Bay, the ice-breaking tug has spent daylight hours the last week on the Hudson River clearing icy fields for barges and freighters.

As long as a 14-story building, the 1.3-million-pound icebreaking tug's primary mission is to smash through ice in inland waterways. She'll crumble ice more than 3 feet thick to clear paths for shipping goods.

"This job in particular is phenomenal," said Lt. Chris Kmiecik, commander of the cutter. "It's just so fulfilling. The crew knows if it wasn't for us, these people would be going nowhere."

The Penobscot Bay lurches haphazardly through the ice, giving crew members the sensation of being in an airliner in moderate turbulence. Still, when sheets of ice pack into 4-foot slabs, the weight of the tug and its rounded bottom can snap through with a startle.

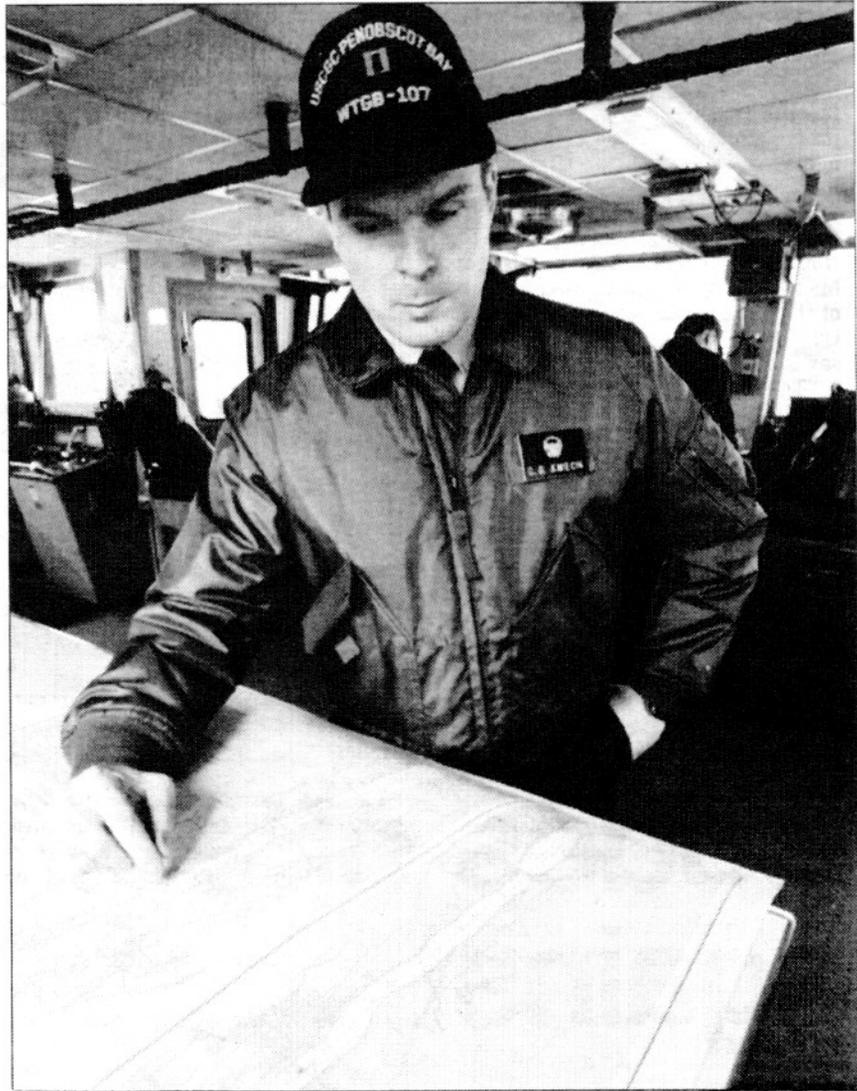
When the waters thaw and begin to roll, the Penobscot Bay and her sister ship, the Sturgeon Bay, patrol Long Island Sound and parts of New Jersey inspecting fishing vessels and enforcing maritime laws.

The Penobscot Bay was the command ship June 6 when a Chinese cargo ship, the Golden Venture, beached off Far Rockaway and 300 immigrants scurried onto land; several died.

In the last two weeks, at least 45 assists of ice-locked vessels were logged. For the 1992-93 winter, there were 37. The year before that it was 28.

The busy season has given the crew more chances to visit some popular ports of call.

"The Catskill Motor Lodge has Karaoke every night from 10 to 2,"



ERIC KRIEGER/The Record

Lt. Chris Kmiecik of the Penobscot Bay plots a course on the Hudson River near Kingston.

said Frederick, the tug's quartermaster. "It breaks up the monotony."

The owner of Mike's restaurant and bar monitors the Coast Guard radio frequency and is sure to have something hot on the grill when they arrive. If the restaurant is closed, he'll open it.

"We have a public phone and the first thing they want is to call their wives and girlfriends," said William Doolan, the restaurant's owner. "We need them up here and somebody needs to put out a hand for them."

They eat well, said the ship's cook,

Alan McClain. Lobster tails and T-bone steaks are common fare.

Crew members alternate weeks with the Sturgeon Bay clearing the Hudson. Sometimes they have only two days off a month. This week, because of the severe ice, both ships have been on the Hudson.

Kmiecik, for one, is hoping for a miracle in timing. In a few weeks, his wife will give birth to their third child.

He's hoping the baby comes on an off week.