Episode 1: USS SLATER

Hello everyone and welcome to *DE Classified* a podcast showcasing the history of Destroyer Escorts. Each month a member of the USS SLATER's education crew will highlight a specific Destroyer Escort and share the stories of the sailors who served aboard these Trim But Deadly ships. I'm Shanna Schuster, the visitor engagement and program manager at USS SLATER and today we are going to DE classify USS SLATER.

The first episode of this podcast is going to set you up to understand the mission of Destroyer Escorts, why this new type of ship was built for WWII, and why these ships were built with different methods of propulsion. After we get the origins down, we'll move on to the history of USS SLATER. As I sit inside her supply office currently recording this episode, its important to understand that this museum is meant to honor every destroyer escort and every sailor who served aboard a one. We work daily to preserve their place in history. So, lets dive in.

So, what is a DE? Well, it's a naval ship. Now, unless you well seasoned in naval knowledge, many of you are probably picturing an Aircraft Carrier (a little hard to hear what you say here), like the MIDWAY in San Diego, or a Battleship, like the ARIZONA that you see in all the Pearl Harbor footage. Those ships are so much bigger than Destroyer Escort. ARIZONA is 600 feet long and 97 feet wide, she had a crew of over 1000 sailors. MIDWAY is 1000 long, 238 feet wide and had a crew of 4000 people. DEs are just over 300 feet long, 35 feet wide, and they have a crew of about 200. So, most battleships are twice the length of DEs and Aircraft Carriers are more than 3 times the length. Destroyer Escorts are just about the smallest ship that the Navy would allow out into the open ocean.

Some people call them mini-destroyers. That's not wrong, but having a close relationship with these ships, they are so much more than that. In appearances and armament, sure, think mini-destroyer. But in spirit, they are a beast all their own. These "tin cans" as they are affectionately called, were made as cheap and quickly as possible with whatever materials were available at the time. Their outer hull is not armored and measures 5/8ths of an inch thick. That's right, not even an inch of steel separates you from the cold waters of the North Atlantic, while U-Boats are hunting you.

Destroyer Escorts owe their origins to The Battle of the Atlantic, the longest sustained battle of WWII. This was a grueling, six-year struggle, to keep the sea-lanes between North America and Europe free of German submarines. England is an island nation, dependent upon ships to bring her food, fuel and raw materials. When she stood alone against Nazi Germany in 1940 and 1941, it was the United States that committed itself to be the "Arsenal of Democracy." The US was

determined to keep England supplied, so she could fight on. Nazi's used U-boats to sink ships heading to and from England carrying provisions. The convoys of ships sailing across the Atlantic in all seasons, not only had to do battle with German submarines and aircraft, but they also had to contend with some of the worst weather known to mariners. Old destroyers, corvettes, and trawlers were used, prior to the arrival of the destroyer escorts in 1943. The Navy sent out a press release in December 1943, pulling no punches in its description of the conditions faced by the sailors who fought the U-boats. The release read in part:

"On the destroyers, half the men watch and work, while the other half sleeps. The guns are manned. The fires are lit under all the boilers-the cooks and bakers work to feed the men who are awake and hungry. Night is the same as day, for there is never any real sleep without the fear of the submarine or the pounding of your body against the bunk chains, or thinking of someone ashore, or being in pain, or waiting for the time to go on watch again, or praying, or wishing you'd get killed all of a sudden when it happened, watching the bursting of the ash can."

The release continues: "The lifeline to England, Russia, and Africa is a herd of rusty hulls, prodded along by battered destroyers. How do the hulls hold out after years of neglect-of oxidizing, stripping, and sagging? How can they go and return...go and return, and go again when their obsolescence is a waterfront joke, and even the insurance companies shake their heads? What of the United Nations, when the seams split and the rivets shear and the shafts burn out...when the sea smashes the bulwarks and hatches ...when the oil is foul with salt water...when the coal is wet with the sea? How can they go on? Look to the men. Look to the men who can endure the wet and the cold and the sickness, and the fear and the work with no rest."

This statement summed up the weariness and fear that resulted from the seemingly endless struggle the convoys faced, battling the U-boats and the Atlantic itself in old worn out ships. The destroyer escort owe their existence to the desperate times created by the Nazi U-Boat menace. In the dark days of 1940 and 1941, when that island nation stood alone against fascism, the British Admiralty recognized the need for a small maneuverable vessel to escort the convoys, and protect the merchant ships and their valuable cargos from U-Boats. With their own shipyards too busy to design and build the required ships, they turned to America, the "Arsenal of Democracy," for help. The end result was the destroyer escort.

Many of the destroyer escort's design features came from British experience, gained from submarine engagements during 1939-1941. They were the direct descendants of the British HUNT class destroyers. The HUNT was an economically scaled-down destroyer that served successfully as a convoy escort. The British requested that fifty similar vessels be built under the Lend Lease Program. The American design firm of Gibbs and Cox was contracted to design the ships, which incorporated many of the British features. On January 20, 1943, the first destroyer escort, the USS BRENNAN, was commissioned. Five hundred and sixty-two sisters would follow her into service in World War II. The US Navy was so impressed with the design and performance of these ships that only 78 ended up being transferred to England and France. The remainder served in the US Navy throughout the war.

Destroyer Escorts the small, yet proud ships honored the sailors that gave their lives protecting their nation. Smaller than the typical destroyer, each ship was manned by a crew of teenagers and commanded by officers only a few years older. At roughly half the displacement of a destroyer, destroyer escorts carried a much smaller crew and armament. However, thanks to the mass civilian mobilization into the defense industry and their smaller size, destroyer escorts had a faster construction period of about 3 ½ months, compared to the more than 6 months for a destroyer. USS FIEBERLING (DE-640) was the fastest to be built and commissioned at 23 and a third days.

The rapid mass-production of so many ships in such a short period of time was matched by the incredible feat of training the crews to man these ships. The DE crews were drawn from Navy and Coast Guard reservists. Most of the ships were placed in service with ninety-five percent of the crew having never been to sea before. They learned “on the job” and were united into efficient, smoothly operating units. The bond they formed with their ships has continued to for the rest of their lives.

DEs were built in shipyards all across America, and the shipbuilders used whatever surplus materials they have on hand. So some DEs get 5 inch guns and some get 3 inch. Some classes have boilers and some run on diesel. And the men that make up their crews; most are 17 or 18 years old (some were younger and lied their way into enlistment). Most of them had never been to sea before, most of them had never had indoor plumbing before. Let that sink in for a minute. For some of them growing up during the Great Depression, this might be the first time they had indoor plumbing, this might be the first time they are

offered 3 meals a day. The officers of these ships were not much older. They had probably been to sea before, but never held command.

Because DEs were such small ships they went without many amenities that other ships were privy to. Light heartedly, we like to point out ice cream machines as an example of this. Most Navy ships in the US fleet had ice cream makers on board, it makes for a welcome treat in the heat of the Pacific. DEs did not have them. There was one DE that did, and it just happened to be the one commanded by President Roosevelt's son, the USS ULVERT M. MOORE (DE-442). I guess there are some perks to being the president's son and I'm sure he'd list ice cream at the top of that list. On a more serious note, DEs were not large enough to warrant their own trained doctor. We had Pharmacists Mates, who had very little training at all. SLATER crew member Earl Laber had this to share with us: *EARL LABER. " I remember I used to get very sea sick, I was in the engine room and I was laying down below the hatch and I heard things shifting around and I though, maybe I aught to get out of here. And I just stood up enough, and hail came down through cutting my head open. So I went to the sick bay and I remember him open up a book and taking a picture he had and started to wrap my head up from the picture. First aid by the book.*

This was all the pharmacist mates could do. They followed directions out of the manual and did the best they could. If an injury was more than they could handle we had to either bring a more qualified doctor aboard from another, bigger ship, or get our patient transferred to that other ship. We've heard stories of Pharmacist mates performing appendectomies while having an assistant read the procedure to them out of the book.

The 563 destroyer escorts built during World War II were divided into six classes. Four of the six classes mounted 3"/50 guns, while the last two classes mounted the larger 5"/38 gun. The various destroyer escort classes also mounted different types of propulsion, depending primarily upon what type of engine was available due to the high demands of new construction.

The **EVARTS** class was the first type of destroyer escort to enter service in early 1943. These ships, commonly referred to as the short hull destroyer escort, were 290 feet long, sixteen feet shorter than the other five destroyer escort classes. They mounted three 3"/50 guns, a variety of anti-aircraft guns, depth charges and a hedgehog for anti-submarine combat. The EVARTS class was the only destroyer escort type that did not carry torpedo tubes as built. In all, ninety-seven EVARTS class destroyer escorts were built in American shipyards. Thirty-two of these were given to the British Navy, while the rest remained in US service. Although the

EVARTS class proved the concept of the mass-produced destroyer escort, their relatively short range and poor sea keeping characteristics made them an unpopular design.

Many of the shortcomings of the EVARTS class were rectified with the second class of destroyer escorts, the BUCKLEY class. The **BUCKLEY** class featured a longer hull that improved sea keeping and increased range. These ships carried a similar armament to the EVARTS class, but they were the first destroyer escort type to carry torpedoes onboard. The BUCKLEY's carried a turbo-electric propulsion plant, which gave it more speed and better range than the EVARTS class. Numerically, the BUCKLEY class was by far the largest destroyer escort class. By the war's end, 154 BUCKLEYs destroyer escorts had been produced. Forty-three of these ships went to the British Navy.

The **CANNON** class was the third destroyer escort type to enter service. This was one of the smallest classes produced during the war with seventy-two completed by 1945, including the USS SLATER. The CANNON class was very similar in design to the BUCKLEY class, the primary difference being a diesel-electric power plant instead of the BUCKLEY class's turbo-electric design. The fuel efficient diesel electric plant greatly improved the range of the CANNON class, but at the cost of speed. Eight CANNON class destroyer escorts were given to the Brazilian Navy during World War II, while six more were given to the Free French Navy.

Except for the propulsion, the **EDSALL** class was nearly identical to the CANNON class in every respect. This fourth class of destroyer escort mounted a direct drive diesel configuration that proved to be extremely reliable. Eighty-five EDSALL class destroyer escorts were built during World War II. Thirty-seven of the EDSALL class ships have the distinction of being the only destroyer escort class manned by United States Coast Guard personnel during the war. Many of the EDSALL class ships were converted after World War II into long range radar picket ships. These ships, known as DERs, were some of the last DE's to be taken out of service in the late 1960s.

The fifth destroyer escort class, the **RUDDEROW**, represented a major departure from the original design. This was the first class to mount 5"/38 guns instead of the

usual 3"/50. The RUDDEROW class also featured a completely redesigned, much lower superstructure than that found on the earlier DE's. Seventy-two RUDDEROW class destroyer escorts were built between 1944 and 1945. Most of these ships were converted into high speed transports known as APDs. Only twenty-one of the RUDDEROW class ended the war in their original configuration.

The final class of destroyer escorts produced during the war was the **JOHN C. BUTLER class**. These ships were outwardly identical to the RUDDEROW class, but they mounted the steam driven turbine propulsion plant that was common to most ships in the United States Navy at that time. The BUTLER class represented the peak of destroyer escort design. They combined many of the characteristics of the earlier classes with the weapons and propulsion plants that the other classes lacked due to limited American industrial capacity when the destroyer escort project began. Eighty-three BUTLER class destroyer escorts were built during the war, and many of them remained active in the Navy long after World War II ended.

In the postwar period the Navy recognized that due to the massive soviet submarine build up the need still existed for lower end escort ships, such as a the DE. With this in mind, the lower end class of ships began with the **DEALEY** Class single screw DEs. Though built in relatively small numbers, the idea behind them was to be able to produce large numbers quickly should an emergency arise.

These were followed by the diesel powered and experimental **CLAUD JONES** Class. Soon to be followed by the more sophisticated **BRONSTIEN GARCIA, and KNOX** Class, and then the **OLIVER PERRY** Class Frigates, which were increasingly larger and sophisticated, but remained single screw. The Knox and Perry Class ships were built in a large number and served as the mainstay low end escort vessels into the 90s. In 1975, all DEs were reclassified as Frigates to keep the US Navy in line with NATO designations.

Over fifty DEs were transferred to foreign Navies, under the Military Defense

Assistance Programs. These destroyer escorts served the U.S. and Allied Navies very effectively during World War II and continued to serve through the Cold War years, including active service during Korea and Vietnam. The last of these ships was retired from U.S. Naval service in 1972.

Meanwhile, a few sister ships soldiered on in diminishing numbers in Foreign Service, into the nineties. As of 2019, six are known to exist, worldwide. Two in the United States, USS SLATER and USS STEWART, USS RUCHAMKIN (DE-228/APD-89) in Columbia, USS HEMMINGER (DE-746) in Thailand, still active in the Thai Royal Navy, USS MCANN (DE-179) a museum ship in Brazil, and USS ATHERTON (DE-169) in the Philippines.

Destroyer escorts were the modern warships that replaced the old destroyers and corvettes. They had borne the brunt of fighting since the war had begun. Rear Admiral Sheldon Kinney, who commanded several destroyer escorts, wrote of these new ships and their crews:

"The DE legacy is a story of an astonishingly able, mass-produced vessel, that made a critical difference in the successful war at sea in World War II. Importantly, it is the story of the Navy and Coast Guard men who served in these ships, men heroic in combat, long-suffering in endless watches, capable of enduring cruel seas, cold, heat, boredom, while waiting, watching, then suddenly rising to amazing capability in crisis."

I want to finish this history of Destroyer Escort's with the words of famous War Correspondent Ernie Pyle, and his poem titled "Short Cruise on a Destroyer Escort"

"They are rough and tumble little ships,

Their after decks are laden with depth charges.

They can turn in half the space of a destroyer.

Their forward guns can seldom be used because waves are breaking over them.

They roll and they plunge.

They buck and they twist.

They shudder and they fall through space.

Their sailors say they should have both flight pay and sub pay both…

They're in the air half the time and under water half the time.

Their men are accustomed to being wet and think nothing of it."

Now that you know what a DE is, let's talk more about my favorite one, USS SLATER. I might be a little bit bias, but since she is keeping me out of the Hudson River right now, I think she can safely hold on to that title.

In the U. S. Navy, destroyers and destroyer escorts were named for individuals who had served with distinction and gave their lives in service of their country. USS SLATER is named in honor of Frank O. Slater. Frank was born in Fyffe, Alabama, on 19 December 1920. He enlisted in the United States Naval Reserve on 10 February 1942.

Upon completion of basic training, Frank was transferred to the Receiving Station, in Pearl Harbor, for reassignment. He served aboard the heavy cruiser, USS SAN FRANCISCO, from 4 April-12 November 1942. It was on the 12th when he was killed in action at his battle station, during an air attack at the Battle of Guadalcanal. He was awarded the Navy Cross for gallantry in action, posthumously, for continuing to fire his anti-aircraft gun, while a Japanese aircraft crashed directly into his gun battery. The rest of his gun crew also have destroyer escorts named in their honor. Frank was buried at sea and has a grave marker at Arlington National Cemetery.

USS SLATER (DE-766) was laid down on 9 March 1943, by the Tampa Shipbuilding Company, in Tampa, Florida. She was launched on 13 February 1944, and was sponsored by Frank's mother, Mrs. Nora L. Slater. This ceremony was the first time that many members of Frank's family had left the county they were born in. The Frank family showed up in force to the christening, they piled into two cars that they had to borrow from neighbors to make the drive to Tampa. Frank's brother Elam would go on to serve aboard the ship named after his brother and man a 40mm gun.

The Frank family were sharecroppers and the money earned by Frank's life insurance literally bought the farm, and now they owned the land they had farmed for so long. The bottle Mrs. Slater used to christen the ship was not filled with

customary champagne, but water from the farm's well.

The ship was commissioned into Naval service on 1 May 1944, with Lieutenant Commander Marcel J. Blancq in command. Her initial outfit included three 3-inch fifty caliber guns, one MK 4 twin 40mm Bofors gun, 10 single 20mm Oerlikon guns, and one 24 spigot MK10 hedgehog projector. She was also equipped with two fantail depth charge tracks, eight MK 6 depth charge projectors, and a triple torpedo tube launcher. At that time, she was painted out in a camouflage pattern which the Navy called "measure 22" which was mostly grey in color.

SLATER is three hundred and six feet in length. With a crew of 216, officers and men, the SLATER embodied the latest anti-submarine warfare (ASW) equipment including SONAR, an echo ranging system providing distance and position information of underwater targets. Two radar systems were in operation. The surface search radar was dedicated to detecting surface targets, which was critical in locating submarines at night while they were using their radios and charging their batteries. The air search radar gave early warning of approaching enemy aircraft. The primary antisubmarine weapons were the "depth charges" and the "hedgehog" antisubmarine mortars.

SLATER has a light load displacement of 1240 tons, and a full load displacement of 2000 tons. USS SLATER's power system is diesel-electric in design. She has four General Motors 16-cylinder diesel engines, located in the forward and aft engine rooms. These engines power four Westinghouse direct current main propulsion generators. The generators, in turn, power four direct current DC motors that are coupled to the two propeller shafts, with two motors in tandem on each shaft. The two shafts turn the two six-foot diameter propellers. USS SLATER can develop 600 shaft horsepower, for a top speed of 21 knots. Usual cruising speed is 15 knots. Because SLATER has two rudders, she was very maneuverable.

On 17 May 1944, while still in Tampa, a fire broke out in the B-3 ships service generator. Machinist Mate, Ed Lavin was injured trying to put the fire out. We talked to Ed many years ago and this is what he had to say:

ED LAVIN: I can still hear Rosie say look out what ever your doing, and you know I went down and the next thing I know the whole thing was you know. I took a couple CO2 bottles, well first of all, I tried to get the engines to stop. The 268A was a straight eight ship service generator engine and it was very temperamental if

they got any amount of lube oil, fumes in the crank case, that thing would take off like crazy and the only way we could really stop it quickly would be to open the down around and relief the pressure and it would stop. So I had gotten two of them open, maybe three I don't know but anyway the fire was, this time, went bang and I can still see the skin peeling off my arm. So I took the CO2 bottle and stuck it under the intake and I think that was just about the last thing I remember because I kept trying to breathe and I couldn't breathe and it was burning and to this day I have very poor taste. But I mean that was the of it, the next thing I know I wound up McDougal field burn unit.

That was the last that Ed saw of the SLATER until he visited in the late 90s and sat down for that interview with us. After the fire was taken care of SLATER sailed for Bermuda to complete her shakedown cruise. A shakedown cruise is when ships and crews take time to train and ensure all equipment is operational. Basically they are going to work out all the kinks before they go out on an actually mission. SLATER's shakedown was unusually eventful.

In June 1944 she was ordered to make a speed run to Solomon, Maryland, carrying a torpedo for analysis. The torpedo had been recovered from the U.S. Navy's capture of a German U-boat, U-505. A very interesting story in and of itself, the capture of U-505 was also carried out by Destroyer Escorts and will most certainly be the star of a future episode of DE Classified. Furthermore U-505 is now on display at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago. This was a huge deal, that this sub was captured. German submariners tried everything they could do to never allow allied powers to gain control of a U-Boat and now the U.S. had a vessel to study and learn from. Who knows what kind of secrets they could uncover?

After dropping off the torpedo, SLATER sailed to Boston. During this period, she went into the yard and had her torpedo tubes removed, and replaced with four single barrel army style 40mm guns. During this overhaul, the large chartroom behind the pilothouse was converted to a combat information center or CIC, and the adjacent captain's sea cabin was converted to a small chartroom.

She then, sailed for Key West, Florida on 11 July, where she acted as a target ship for torpedo bomber squadrons, and as a sonar school ship. So planes are firing dummy torpedoes at us for practice, and we are training with our SONAR equipment to track those torpedoes. But, the torpedoes they were firing weren't actually supposed to hit us. SLATER took 5 hits from these dummy torpedoes,

some of that damage is still visible on the ship over 75 years later.

SLATER departed Florida for New York on 15 September. While enroute, many crew members report that a torpedo was fired at the ship. Electricians mate EARL LABER says: *On the way to New York, the story goes, we were almost torpedoed. But the sound gate didn't work so we couldn't locate the sub.*

Whereas Executive Officer on the SLATER Harold Poulson reports*: If you listen to some of these boys out here talking about torpedoes, it's a lot of crap*. *I never saw a sub, I never saw a torpedo but they'll tell you about the torpedoes.* The crew may be divided, on whether torpedoes were fired at SLATER or not. The log book makes no mention of a torpedo, but the ship went to General Quarters, or their Battle stations at 1236 AM and at 0112 two depth charges were dropped. I guess we'll never know for sure if it was fired at a submarine or not.

After all that action during shakedown, SLATER is finally available for duty. She began her escort duty by protecting two convoys to England during the remaining months of 1944. These convoys could be made up of up to 150 ships. DEs were responsible, as we learned, for protecting the convoy from U-Boat threats. On 4 December SLATER made a sound contact, fired 2 hedgehog salvos, and a depth charge pattern, but no evidence of a hit sub ever surfaced. To SLATER's credit and her sister ships, no ships were harmed during any of the crossings.

In early 1945, SLATER was again overhauled. She received the MK 52 gun director with gun fire control radar for her three-inch guns, and the associated gun fire control radar room on the flying bridge. She emerged from this overhaul painted in "measure 32/3d dazzle" camouflage. Which is the exciting paint scheme you can see her in today. Its very unique for a museum ship.

From January to May 1945, she escorted three convoys to Wales. During that time she depth charged several suspected submarine contacts with no confirmed results. She also suffered storm damage when the gun shield of the number one 3-inch gun was torn away by waves, resulting in flooding of the Chief Petty Officer's mess.

In May and June of 1945, she was overhauled again at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Based on the recent experience that the Navy had gained from battling kamikaze aircraft in the Pacific, SLATER's antiaircraft armament was considerably augmented for her anticipated participation in the invasion of Japan. Two Navy style MK 4 twin 40mm mounts replaced her single barrel army style 40mm guns.

All her single 20mm guns were replaced with twin mountings, and the 20mm gun tubs were cut down in height, so that the guns could be depressed to fire at the expected Japanese suicide boats. She left the yard in solid Navy blue "measure 21". On 8 June, she sailed from New York for San Diego, via Guantanamo Bay and Panama. She transited the Panama Canal on 28 June and arrived in San Diego on 6 July. Three days later, the ship sailed for Pearl Harbor.

From Pearl, she was routed via Eniwetok to the Philippine Islands. SLATER Supply Officer, JOHN AGNEW said this: *uh, yeah, we were going to be operating in the Pacific, the element plan being that we would be one of the Pickett ships involved in setting up the invasion of Japan. Fortunately, that didn't happen. We stopped in Pearl Harbor, I mentioned that. We picked up more crew and dropped off some crew. We were in Eniwetok, Atoll when the first atomic bomb was dropped. And here were hundreds of US ships and not all of them were destroyers, some of them were destroyer escorts, some destroyers, some troop transports, all kinds of things. And you would not believe it sounded like 400 stadiums cheering after one touchdown when we got the word that the atomic bomb had been dropped. And of course, the second atomic bomb was dropped a few days later.*

Following the cessation of hostilities with Japan, on 5 September escorted a convoy to Yokohama, Japan. In October SLATER found herself inside a Typhoon or a hurricane for people on this side of the world. EARL LABER was trying to continue working inside the engine room and had some difficulties…. *I remember that night real bad, I had to tie myself against the engine room to one of the supports to even be able to stand, I doubt I could even touch the switchboard. And we were told to put on our life vests and knives and I doubted we'd even be able to get out of the ship. But when the storm let up we were off the China coast somewhere. I never served above the deck so I didn't really know what was going on but this was more or less what was told to me when I was down in the engine room.*

SLATER escorted convoys to Japan, The Netherlands, East Indies and to the Caroline Islands. In November Captain Blanq was relieved by Lt. William Martin as commander of the ship. SLATER operated in the Philippine Islands until 31 January 1946, when she sailed back for the United States.

SLATER arrived at San Pedro, California, on 24 February 1946, and received orders routing her to Norfolk, Virginia, via the Panama Canal for deactivation. She

arrived there on 26 March and prepared for decommissioning. A month later, she sailed for Green Cove Springs, Florida to continue the deactivation process. In May she was placed in reserve and out of Commission, as part of the large mothball fleet that was located in the St. Johns River, just two years after she was launched into commission.

Don't count SLATER out yet. In 1947 President Harry Truman enacted the Truman Doctrine. This doctrine stated that the U.S. would do whatever it could to help stop the spread of Communism. Even going as far as giving away their war materials. Under the Truman Doctrine, within the Military Defense Assistance Program USS SLATER was struck from the US Navy and was transferred to Greece on 1 March 1951. Under this program it was expected that if the Communist bloc invaded Western Europe, escort vessels of our NATO allies such as SLATER would be available to assist in convoy escort and antisubmarine warfare.

USS SLATER was renamed AETOS, which translates to Eagle, in the Hellenic Navy. Three other DEs joined her in Greece at this time. USS ELDRIDGE (DE-173) renamed LEON (Lion), USS GARFIELD THOMAS (DE-193) renamed PANTHIR (Panther), and USS EBERT (DE-768) renamed IERAX (Hawk). This class of ships was affectionately called the "beasts" in Greece and to this day we hear stories from sailors who trained aboard these ships. They loved their time aboard and were grateful for the might of these ships.

SLATER began her Greek service in July 1951, for the next forty years she completed 3,223 voyages for cadet training, patrols, exercises and independent missions. She sailed 617,000 nautical miles. These missions involved NATO maneuvers, naval academy voyages, and trips to ports within the Mediterranean, Africa, Scotland, the North Sea, and South American ports, under fifty-five commanding officers.

She was active during the Cold War and was featured in a number of films, including "The Guns of Navarone" and "Alice in the Navy." By the late 80's the need for her services had diminished and she was deactivated on July 5, 1991 - just two days short of forty years from the date of her arrival in Greece. She was stricken in Crete, and stripped of all useable gear and equipment. She was awaiting disposal in Souda Bay, Crete when she, once again was saved for another mission.

The third mission in SLATER's timeline is obviously where we are today in the

historic fleet, as a museum ship. The preservation of USS SLATER has its roots in the creation of the Destroyer Escort Sailor's Association or DESA. This organization is made up of the men and women who built DEs, and the sailors that manned them who left behind a legacy of pride in their service in their nation's time of need. As these young sailors aged, their pride in their service grew and a sense of cohesiveness developed. That bond became the nucleus of the Destroyer Escort Sailors Association, and spurred the effort to save one of their ships. The group was founded in the seventies, as a veteran's association for the men who manned the 563 destroyer escorts, built during World War II. In the late eighties, the 15,000 members of DESA began a search to find and then to save a destroyer escort for posterity. A worldwide effort revealed that only a handful of destroyer escorts remained available for preservation. After five years, and several attempts to preserve other DE's, USS SLATER was located in Greece.

When the Greek Government decommissioned SLATER in 1991, the veterans set about trying to save her from the scrap heap. At that time, she was the most historically accurate and complete ship of this class left. While her interior had been extensively gutted and cannibalized, she still had most of her World War II armament intact. The Greek Government agreed to donate the ship to the veterans, and arrangements were made for the transfer of the vessel through the US State Department.

At the time, DESA was an aging organization, whose enrollment was exclusive to DE veterans. It was decided to create a new organization, the Destroyer Escort Historical Foundation, to obtain and care for SLATER. This would eventually be renamed Destroyer Escort Historical Museum Created which is what SLATER is today. The foundation was created in 1993, as a private not-for-profit educational corporation, and its goal was to restore USS SLATER for the general public as a museum, educational center, and tourism destination. The DE veterans raised $290,000 to have USS SLATER towed back to the United States. Plans were made to temporarily berth her at the Intrepid Sea, Air, and Space Museum in New York City.

When she arrived in New York City in August 1993, her condition was appalling. Remember the Greeks thought she was trash, Volunteers still talk about the holes in the deck, rust covered guns, and ladders with missing rungs, but she was the last floating Destroyer Escort in this country, and the dedicated volunteers of the Statue

of Liberty Chapter of DESA set about trying to raise the funds and do the work necessary to restore her.

Five years later, in 1997, in a decision to downsize their fleet, several of the ships that were berthed at the Intrepid were asked to find new homes. SLATER was among them. It was at this point that the city administrators in Albany, New York, recognizing the historic significance of SLATER, reached out to DESA and invited her to take shelter in their Hudson River waterway.

The ship arrived in Albany, in October of 1997. A new group of volunteers rose to the challenge of restoring the ship. Donating an average of 15,000 hours a year, the volunteers have been working diligently working to turn her into a first-class historic Naval ship.

The volunteers have succeeded. The ship is no longer the rusty hulk that arrived to New York. The volunteers have brought new life to SLATER and she has become the center of a world-class Naval preservation effort. The radars and plotting tables now glow in CIC. World War II transmitters spark in Radio Central, as antennas carry Morse code to other historic Naval ships. All her guns train and elevate and the bright work is polished and oiled weekly. Her whaleboat has been fully restored and is operational. It is raised and lowered in the davits, just as it was over seventy-five years ago. Meals are again cooked in her galley and served on the mess decks. Decks are swept and swabbed. Weather decks are washed down weekly. Her new paintwork makes her look fit for sea duty. Her radar rotates, signal flags flutter, ventilators hum, and fresh water again flows through her plumbing. The colors are raised every morning and lowered every evening. All of the missing equipment has been located and back fitted. She has been painstakingly restored to her 1945 configuration, she’s a genuine time capsule of the period.

The culmination of the restoration effort was the 2014 and 2020 dry-docking of the ship in Staten Island, for a much needed hull repair below the waterline and a complete refit of the mast. Our supporters, to fund these projects, raised over 2 million dollars privately. Dozens of preservation and restoration projects were completed, including repainting the ship in her World War II dazzle camouflage.

Throughout her career as a museum ship, SLATER is proud to host many DE ship reunions. We are always amazed and gratified by the former sailor's reaction to the ship and her restoration. We have noticed a new and heartening

trend, more and more young people are visiting the ship. They are the sons and daughters of the DE veterans, and their sons and daughters.

As with other famous American ships, like the CONSTITUTION in Boston, the MIDWAY in San Diego, and Battleships from coast to coast, the interest in historic ships does not wane, it only increases. The main purpose of the Museum is to keep alive the history created by DE's and their crews during their time of service to our nation. Through educational and cultural programs, the Museum preserves and passes on the proud history of these "*Trim But Deadly*" warships to the families of those who served aboard them, and to the generations of the future. All generations will be able to honor the Navy and Coast Guard Sailors who manned them.

SLATER was officially designated a National Historic Landmark by the United States Department of the Interior in March of 2012. The vessel is often cited by our visitors as one of the most authentically detailed warship museums in the nation.

The primary mission of the Destroyer Escort Historical Museum is to utilize the SLATER as an educational platform to teach visitors about contributions of destroyer escorts in World War II and the postwar Navy. This keeps alive the history, spirit, and technology of these vessels and the men and women who built and manned them. The result becomes a better understanding of the significance of The Second World War and the Cold War years and their impact on today's world. To accomplish this, we collect, maintain, display and interpret artifacts and documents relating to the role of the destroyer escorts in the United States Navy. These artifacts are now on display at USS SLATER and can be viewed by thousands of visitors. Currently, over four thousand items are accessioned, including photographs, books, logs, personal items, enemy battle remnants and various types of memorabilia. The collection is on display in the after berthing compartment C-203L and is available to visitors to view. Additional items can be seen throughout the ship to reveal how the ship was equipped when she was at sea. SLATER has become what we intended, a virtual time capsule of Navy life in the 1940's, carrying visitors back into history.

Our primary emphasis is the authentic restoration and display of the ship herself in her 1945 configuration with all the equipment and artifacts she would have carried at that time. Our volunteers work to achieve this goal constantly. Their dedication

and attention to detail is the backbone of this project and we wouldn't be here without them.

Our maintenance team is amazing, and you can see their work on display and measure their progress in our daily Facebook posts. Something less tangible to measure is the impact our education team has on our community. Not only does this team serve as tour guides, showing over 15,000 visitors around the ship per year, they also run overnight programs, teach lessons in school classrooms, and travel to American Legion clubs, libraries, and senior centers to give oral presentations pertaining to DE history. We set up artifact displays, research and write historic articles, and produced an introductory video shown to visitors before their tour begins. We also produce an electronic newsletter, SLATER Signals, a quarterly print newsletter, Trim But Deadly, we are now releasing monthly podcast episodes here at DE Classified.

Our radio gang operates an amateur radio station using World War II vintage equipment and antennas, WW2DEM is their call. Their busiest weekend is Museum Ships Radio Weekend the first weekend in June. We speak with museum ships from all around the world.

I'll leave you with some last words from Earl Laber, our electrician getting tossed around in the engine room, when asked what he wants people to remember from his time aboard SLATER he said this. *I guess tell them you look favorable towards the ship that took you through a lot, although the ship certainly didn't see a lot of action. Hopefully we protected a lot of convoys but it was the rough seas that we went through that one particular night I remember that they sounded general quarters and they notified us that a man had fallen overboard from another ship. I remember looking out in that black sea and huge wave and thinking that some poor guy is out there and it will be impossible to ever find the guy. And another case that happened in the daytime, a fella on another ship went sleeping in a whaleboat and waves caught the whaleboat and tore it off the side and he went into the ocean, here again were these mountainous waves and another ship and ours closed up to him to throw over life buoys to him so they could haul him aboard. They did get him but the other ship got him, we didn't but we were there. I think it was a ship that was made really well to stand the abuse that it took on the North Atlantic. I've talked to people about how rough the seas got in the North Atlantic, I wonder how many of them actually believe me but, it's all true.*

If you are looking for even more information destroyer escorts, or you want to hear the Oral Histories I've used today in their entirety, head to our website at www.ussslater.org It is one of the most complete sources of Destroyer Escort information in existence and contains links to other DE-related websites.

Thank you for listening to DE Classified. This podcast is brought to you by the Destroyer Escort Historical Museum aboard USS SLATER. You can find a transcript of this episode, accompanying photos, and a bibliography at USSslater.org/DE Classified. I'm Shanna Shuster and I hope you join us next month to DE Classify USS Mitchell.