

# SLATER SIGNALS

## The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers

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Vol. 1 no. 7 July, 1998

Shift Colors! On Thursday, July 8 the USS SLATER shifted her berth from the Port of Albany to the Snow Dock. The evolution went off without a hitch. Shifting berths is normally a rather routine occurrence. However, in the case of SLATER, there was an amazing spirit of cooperation between a dozen different groups of people to make it happen.

The wheels started turning when Frank Lasch called the Thruway Authority to see if the NYS Barge Canal Corporation could donate the services of their tugs to move the ship. They said sure, but we had to move it before the tenth, because the tug GRAND ERIE had another commitment upstate, and they would not have two tugs available again until July 23. That gave us less than two weeks to get ready. We went to work.

We developed a pretty ambitious schedule. We knew we needed help beyond the abilities of our own volunteers. Bill Ring and Frank Keane of the port provided a fork lift, operator, the big crane and operator. Bob Cross and John Kosa of the Albany Water Department provided their mobile crane again. John King and Jeff Murray of the Canal Corps provided the two tugs, but were short on manpower. We went to Walt Kippen and Dave Clements at Department of Transportation for help. We said we needed a little manpower a little younger than our crew to help assemble the camels and moor them. They went up the chain and came back with a crew from the bridge maintenance section led by Gene Krott. Talk about a bunch of can do guys.

Things started to happen on the first. Volunteer Harold Van Schoick got us a fire department ladder truck. Tom Beeler went up with the operator. They got all the work on the pierside done just fine, but the bucket couldn't reach the starboard side, so we had a large Irish pennant in the form of a dangling footrope hanging from the starboard yard. More on that later.

The next part of the story belongs to Marty Davis. Hal Hatfield had a flatbed truck going to New York to make a steel delivery. He arranged for Marty to meet the truck and pick up the six camels that we needed. No camels, no move. Marty couldn't make phone contact with the owner of the camels beforehand. He met the truck, led it to Elizabeth, gave instructions to the yard crew, and got the camels loaded. We're still not sure if he ever got permission from the owner of the camels. He then led the eighteen wheeler over to Staten Island and picked up a 35' steel gangway and a large coil of mooring line from Elkoff Marine. The line and gangway must have come off a battleship. Anyway, by Thursday night, all the material was safely in Albany, and Marty still hasn't been arrested.

Saturday, Sunday and Monday the crew kept at the needle guns right up to sundown. Tuesday, the real work started. The tugs tied up alongside, Gene's DOT crew arrived, Jim rode

up in the Water Department Crane, and an eighteen wheeler backed into position. Buddy and some of the other longshoremen gave us a few pointers, and we put our first camel into the water. It floated. We dropped in the second camel, and it didn't float quite as well. But we got it shackled to the first and it held its own. Before long we were dropping a camel into the water every two minutes. We had originally planned to do eight in the morning and the other eight after lunch. Both rafts were made up before we took a lunch break. In the afternoon we lifted a bunch of restoration material back aboard that we will need later this year. The gear included four "K" guns, the Hobart dough mixer and three pallets of radio and radar gear.

Wednesday dawned rainy, and it just got worse. That was the day we planned to set the radar in place. The first evolution was shifting the ship. Such an evolution also provides an excellent opportunity to stress test your mooring lines. Two of ours failed.

Leo Charbonneau and Tom Beeler weren't all that crazy about going up the mast in the rain. So when two of the DOT bridge maintenance guys volunteered to go up and bolt down the air search antenna Leo and Tom didn't fight them all that hard for the job. It was a dramatic moment when the crane set the USS GAGE'S (APA168) antenna on our masthead. Like the cherry on top of the sundae We also took the portable generator off the ship and wired it in on the pier.

While all this was going on former phone company line man Tom Pollock put on his safety harness and went out on the starboard yardarm to drop that ratty footrope we were talking about earlier, shackle in Tom's new footrope, and run a new halyard. In the rain. The ship looked a lot more shipshape going down river thanks to his efforts.

And, while all that was going on, the tugs GRAND ERIE and GOVERNOR CLEVELAND were taking the camels to the Snow Dock, a day ahead of schedule. Gene's bridge crew did a terrific job of getting them into place. However everyone would agree that one volunteer deserves special mention. When Roy Gunther said, "I don't mind going down on the camels if you need help," we're sure he didn't expect to spend two full days down there, in the rain. That's the way it worked out. Kind of gives you new respect for former supply corps officers. Roy was due for special mention for the fine cabinet restoration he's been doing for us, but this was above and beyond the call of duty. By the end of the day, the camels were in position and we were ready to move a day ahead of schedule.

Thursday dawned a beautiful day. We started arriving aboard at 0800. Beeler, Charbonneau, Ed Wakeman and Norm Wason took advantage of the previous days experience to make up heaving lines and measure and lay out all the mooring lines. Leo and Barry Witte went up the mast, and by 0900, the SA antenna was rotating. Barry had stopped in to complete that job on his way down to Newport News for naval weekend reserve drill. By 1015 we had all wire off, all line singled up, and we cut ship's power. Right on schedule, and 1030 we cast off the last line. Norm Wason's Sea Cadet unit shifted colors. We broke a 48 star Ensign that had flown off the USS BAILEY during WWII from the truck, and we were underway. The one mile trip took about an hour. It was uneventful, as you want such a trip to be. The tug skippers set us right into position at the Snow Dock with the precision of anyone who is used to parallel parking in Albany. We had learned a lot from the day before. Heaving lines went across, followed by mooring lines. Within thirty minutes a gangway was rigged, and the visitors rushed ashore. Probably in search of bathrooms. But it was a flawless exercise. Before we even had a chance to say thank you and well done, the tugs were gone and headed up to Waterford.

The generator, dumpster, portajohn and phone have all been moved to the Snow Dock. Thus far, the mooring seems fine. We're watching to see how the ship behaves in various wind

conditions. We have ten lines out and four wires. The DOT bridge crew will be with us for another week rigging the steel gangway. It is a beautiful location for the point of view of public visibility.

In our new location we will try to keep the ship open on a Thursday to Sunday schedule from 10-4. If you are interested in tour guiding on any of these days please contact Nancy at 434-1412, ext. 131. We will be doing maintenance work Monday through Wednesday, and Saturdays. There is still much to do. We are working to complete the topside painting and will repaint the weather decks. We are hoping our State grant comes through to repaint the sides this fall. A note about parking. We are asking all volunteers and staff (staff?) to park across the street from the Snow Dock under the Route 787 overpass. We'll show you where it is. We need to save the spaces close to the ship for the paying customers.

Albany County Commissioner Mike Breslin's office really came through for us with a \$19,000 Business Improvement Grant. This grant will enable us to purchase lifeline snaking, wire and fittings, complete the shipboard fire and flood alarm systems, purchase a heating boiler and utilize a contractor to complete painting the forward superstructure so we can focus on the decks. We are indebted to Mr. Breslin, Mike Perrin, Lyn Dolan Taylor, and all the other folks who worked hard to help us obtain this much needed grant.

Frank and Pat Perrella also made a \$4,000 donation to help us purchase new needle guns, paint equipment and to do some more welding work around the ship. It was much needed. If you are in a position to make such a donation, it is much needed right now. There is much to do, and money is very scarce. If you really want to know what's going on around here you need to e-mail Pat at - [ perrella at citlink . net ]. She has a current collection of photos she will share with you.

One of our best men is on the binnacle list. Volunteer Roger Oesterreich suffered a mild stroke but is recovering well. We sent Roger flowers, and we understand his response was typical Roger. Claire told us he said, "They should have used the money to buy paint." Our best wishes go out to them both for a speedy recovery for Roger.

Finally, we end with a question. Does anyone know how camels got their name. There have been a lot of pauses in phone conversations before we explain, "You know, wooden floats that serve as spacers between ships and docks." Most people don't and neither do we. One hump or two?

