

SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
By Timothy C. Rizzuto, Executive Director

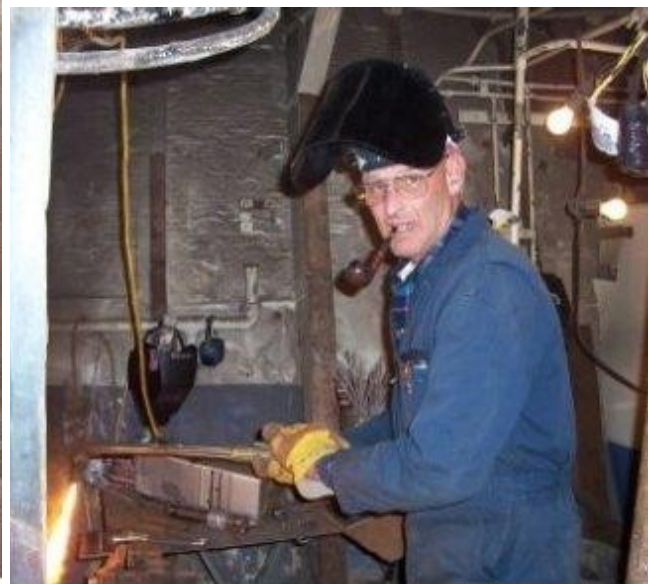
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Motivation in the middle of winter. On the bulkhead in the ship's office, I have a picture of the USS HULBERT DD342, taken on her builder's trials. It's a large 11x14 image in a large frame, a gift from volunteers **Dick and Maralyn Walker** several years ago. A picture of a fourpiper taken in 1919, one of 272 ships. There are no more. They are all gone. It's a simple reminder of why we must succeed. SLATER is a survivor of a class of 563 ships, of which maybe five survive worldwide. We can't let the destroyer escorts end up like the fourpipers.



Another unsung hero, radioman Joe Breyer, sucked into the welding crew.



Tim "How come I never get my picture in the newsletter" Benner fitting replacement metal in the forward crews head.

If that picture isn't enough, those of you who are familiar with our winter berth in Rensselaer know that immediately south of us is Gary Grimmel's scrap yard, Rensselaer Iron and Steel. It is a large and impressive operation where cars, trucks, bulldozers and large pieces of structural steel are chopped up, shredded, and reduced to mountains of scrap, which are loaded onto large merchantmen by giant claws and shipped to steel mills in Turkey and Mexico. Every morning a line of trucks wait to be unloaded at the pier. One morning, recently, as I was unlocking the gate, a truck driver stopped, rolled down his window and said, "Beautiful ship! I hope they aren't getting ready to cut it up for

scrap!" My response was something like, "Over my dead body! I've got ten years of my life invested in that tub!" The constant sights and sounds of a scrap yard operating in the background are a constant reminder of how hard we need to work to keep from becoming another pile of "recycled material."

Every fall I start eagerly anticipating the coming winter for one reason. Restoration. I love to see the restoration progress, and in the fall as we plan our winter work, I am filled with anticipation and can't wait to get started on whatever the big winter project is. This year it's the forward crew's head. By February, I'm fed up with restoration and can't wait to get the ship open to the public. Why? Because the restoration is a brutal process that trashes our pristine ship. Like going into the hospital for surgery. Now dust and grit fill the whole forward portion of the ship and get tracked everywhere. And we haven't even started to run the sewer line through the restored compartments to the pump station aft. Imagine what a mess that will make. There are now big holes in the decks and bulkheads forward where steel used to be if you can still call what was cut out steel. There is a large pile of scrap on the pier forward. I know we're counting pretty heavily on Erik's cleaning ability in the spring. I can't wait till this restoration work is over so we can get the ship cleaned up, get her open to the public, and so then I can start to anxiously await restoration next winter.

So the work is progressing. Up in the forward crew's head, pieces are starting to go back in. Most of the metal that has been cut out has now been replaced. Tanner and Benner once again failed to make good on their threat to head down to Florida for a couple months in the sun right after the rip out had been complete. With the help of **Joe Breyer, Clark Farnsworth, Chuck Teal and Nelson Potter**, they have removed about 500 pounds of wasted metal and equipment and are now putting the area back together. We expect that the area will not be ready for opening day and that the work will continue into the spring. But the restoration of the forward head and passageway has made me think about the process of building these ships. It must have been filthy work. Considering the process of grinding all those pieces to fit, then welding, and then grinding all the welds smooth, I'm amazed they ever got all that grit cleaned up. It must have taken years.



New volunteer Greg Skochko showed a lot of initiative. He looked around the ship and saw that we were lacking a decent Mig welder. He talked with Doug about what the best machine to acquire would be and then contacted **Dale Kapuscinski**, a Lincoln Electric representative. To our amazement, about four emails and a week later, a truck drove up and delivered a brand new welding machine to the gangway at Rensselaer. All they want in return is a digital picture of the shipfitters welding with it. Considering all

"I know how Benner feels.' Ken Kaskoun grinding and scaling in the crew's head.

the welding we're looking at in the forward head and passageway, this machine couldn't have come at a better time. And with Greg's initiative, there's some rumblings down in the Chief's mess that maybe he's the one who should be writing the grants.



Clark Farnsworth and his gangway are keeping the crew a lot safer on icy days.

Someone else who is showing a lot of initiative is Clark Farnsworth. And I'm going to have to stop throwing in the qualifier "for a guy who is 86 years old." Clark shows a lot of initiative for a man of any age. He took it upon himself to build a beautiful wooden ramp on the shore side of the gangway to give the old timers a little more stability coming aboard. And if that isn't enough, he took one look at the new welding machine and decided it was time he taught himself how to wire weld with a Mig machine. Nothing keeps you young like learning a new skill.

Working around some youngsters is also keeping Clark young. The RPI Midshipmen continue to show up in

considerable numbers. **Ray Osbourne** has been leading the group as of late as these "kids" work alongside the veteran sailors to "learn the ropes." The welding gang, and Clark in particular, have been enjoying the assistance of Midshipmen **Shayna Palesch** and **Kelli Gardner**. They are turning into respectable shipfitters. Of course, generational communications problems do occasionally creep up. A case in point being when one of the old salts asked Kelli to "Give me a hickey," defined by all of us as a half "C" clamp tacked on to steel plate to line up a seam before it's welded. We don't know what Kelli was confused about.



Remember the phrase, "This man's Navy?" Those days are over. Midshipmen Kelly Gardner and Shayna Palesch pulling armored cable outside the radio room.

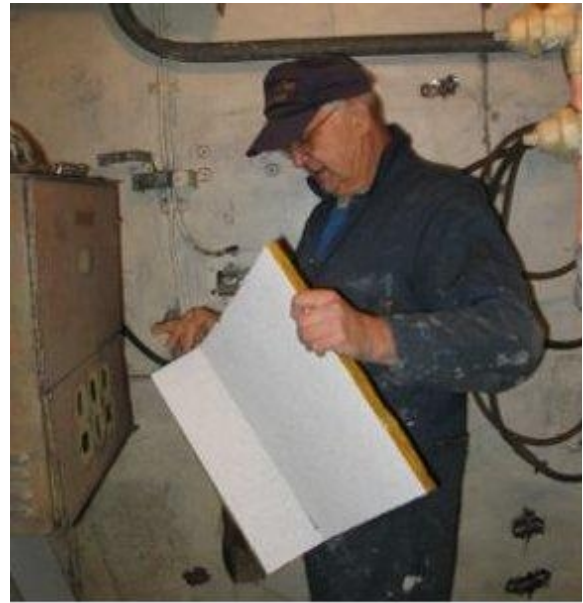
Elsewhere aboard, the engineers are mad at me again. I passed through the machine shop last Wednesday and saw Enginemen **Gus Negus** and **Karl Herchenroder** working on some kind of gear and shaft on the hydraulic press. Naively, I asked what they were doing. Wrong question. Gus snarled, "Working on another one of your *%#*@# Guns!" When **John Whalen** completed the disassembly of the train gear on three-inch gun number one, he turned to the "experts" to get the bearings and the gearbox back together. Hey, it's a lot warmer in the machine shop than the engineroom, so they should be grateful.

Down below in the reefer deck, Gary Sheedy has been doing the final needle gunning and sandblasting in preparation for painting the space in the spring. Stan Murawski has joined him doing insulation work down there. Stan is working the job around his other responsibility as ship's cook on Saturdays. We keep conning Stan and he keeps falling for it. We keep telling him we need him to fire watch, an easy job for a man recovering from chemo. But every time he gets here, there are so many people tripping over each other in the forward head, he has no choice but to go bust his butt with Sheedy on the reefer deck. You think he'd learn.

With regards to fundraising, we put four applications for a Federal Appropriation in with the New York State Congressional Delegation for funding to get into the shipyard. This is the fourth consecutive year we have gone this route. To be blunt, we're looking for our share of the pork. I have a sense that our odds would be better if we bought lottery tickets, but to have a chance, you gotta get in the game. But New Yorkers, be on the lookout for information to contact our Senators and local Representatives to encourage submission of our request to the committees involved as the process progresses. We also received a \$10,000 grant from the **Wright Family Foundation** in Schenectady to support the ongoing work in the forward crew's head. The funds will be used to purchase equipment, run the sewer line through the ship and for contract painting of the area.



**How many more years can you milk this job?
Gary Sheedy scaling on the reefer deck.**



Stan Murawski insulating down on the reefer deck.

In the same vain, we finally may have a little professional help coming our way. Saturday at coffee break in the Chief's mess, **Karl Herchenroder** mentioned that he met a grant writer in a bar call the Shamrock. Of course we all sat around waiting for the punch line assuming it was the start of a joke. I was particularly intrigued because I've been writing grants with no formal training and limited success for ten years, and the Shamrock is about a five-minute walk from my house! No drinking and driving issues here. I've been wondering where the grant writers hang out. Karl indicated that this particular grant writer might be willing to get involved with us, and gave me his card. Armed with that information, I extended an invitation to this fundraiser to come aboard, look us over and see if he was interested in volunteering to help out. My particular interest was for someone to review the material we have been sending out from a professional prospective. He accepted the invitation and came down the following Saturday to see the crew in action. We spent about an hour discussing the background on the project and kicking around ideas. He works primarily doing grants for secondary schools, but said he has time in the summer and would be glad to help us out. We'll definitely be keeping him in the loop. And if my wife buys it, I may definitely be spending some time at the Shamrock in the process, "working on grants." That's my story and I'm sticking to it.



Progress in the aft motor room. The aft electrical board being restored by George Gollas and Barry Witte.

More good news is that the Board of Directors of DESA has agreed to make a \$10,000 contribution to complete the restoration of the whaleboat. As you regular readers are aware, Larry "Rocky" Rockwood, a former DE sonarman who served aboard USS COONER DE 172, has cared for the boat over the past ten years. Rocky spent most of his life on the Maine coast and had worked in boatyards, building and maintaining wooden boats. Rocky oversaw the initial restoration of the boat with Roy Gunther in 2002-2004. Since Roy moved to Florida, Rocky has been the primary caretaker of the whaleboat. In surveying the boat during the 2006 season, Rocky discovered additional dry rot in

several frames that had not been discovered during the initial restoration. While we had no funding budgeted for the whaleboat, we made the decision that it was essential to get the boat back into Scarano's Boatyard so the dry rot could be addressed before it spread to other healthy members of the boat. We felt it was important to address the needs of the whaleboat while Rocky was available to oversee and participate in the restoration. We hope to have it back, bobbing off the port quarter, in the spring.



Volunteers from the USS Theodore Roosevelt CVN-71 bringing parts down the accommodation ladder of the GAGE.



Rigging out a motor generator set for removal from the GAGE.

From a distance, Capt. Greg Krawczyk has continued his support of the SLATER. He organized two trips to the James River Reserve Fleet for the Baltimore Maritime Museum and included the SLATER. Bill Siebert and Will Donzelli went down on our behalf. Since the USS GAGE is a dead ship, it was one of the few chances to obtain electrical fittings such as fuse boxes and light fixtures. Time is running out for the GAGE, a ship that has been a source of parts for the Historic Fleet since 1990. We won't be surprised if she isn't a reef by the end of the year.



Roosevelt crewman pulling light fixture.



The end of a long hard day.

Greg's most recent foray included a group of six sailors from the engineering department of the **USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT**, thanks to their Chief Engineer **Larry Scugg**. All hands did a great job. The Navy crew in particular worked hard all morning getting a motor generator set and other heavy items moved to the fantail for a crane lift off the ship later in March so the old guys didn't have to do it. Greg then took them on a tour of the ship and pointed out smaller items for them to remove to take back to the **SLATER** and Lightship Chesapeake. Greg tried to make it as interesting and memorable as possible and relate some of the history of the ship, the Reserve Fleet, details of the older 450-pound engineering plant and historic ship restoration in general. The sailors really enjoyed themselves and most seemed very motivated to do it again, and maybe they will end up volunteering aboard a historic naval ship in the future.



The **SLATER** Saturday regulars break for lunch cooked by Stan Murawski.

And finally, it's time for all you tour guides to start thinking about spring. We're currently hiring new guides for the new season, and we're looking forward to welcoming back our old guides. We also want to wish good luck to last season's student guides, some of whom are moving on this year. **Robert DeRanieri** is moving back home to Brooklyn to become a teacher, while **David**

Pitlyk is currently doing his student teaching here in Albany. **Mike Collins** is planning on starting graduate school soon, and tour guide/curatorial intern Kelly Lassonde will be heading down to Virginia in the coming months to do an internship aboard the **USS WISCONSIN**. As always, these student guides and our dedicated volunteers make the **SLATER** come alive for everyone who tours her. In our continuing efforts to make the **SLATER** and her guides the best in the historic fleet, **Eric Rivet** is scheduling our annual tour guide refresher training for March 29th and 30th, so mark your calendars. Where did the winter go?

See you next month.