



SLATER SIGNALS

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

Destroyer Escort Historical Museum
USS Slater DE-766
PO Box 1926
Albany, NY 12201-1926

Phone (518) 431-1943, Fax 432-1123
Vol. 16 No. 8, August 2013

Anyone who is in the Museum business will tell you that the real front line of historic preservation is at the front desk and the cash register. This is where visitors are greeted and get their first impression and look to get their questions answered and their problems solved. In my position and with my location in the ship's office aboard the SLATER, I'm somewhat insulated from the front, protected by **Rosehn** and **Heather** who greet the visitors, field the questions and answer the phones. I don't think I realized what a sheltered life I lead until on Wednesday this month when Rosehn had jury duty and Heather, not realizing Rosehn was out, called in sick. I'm sure if she had known she would have dragged herself in. That left me in charge. Not that I'm not normally in charge, but now I was really in charge. This is where you learn the subtle difference between being in charge and being responsible.

First thing was to look at the schedule and see who was coming in. I had **Dave Pitlyk**, our normal Sunday cashier who was used to running the register and assigning tours without supervision. That was good, but with Dave behind the register, that was one less guide. I had **Floyd Hunt** who was good to go the distance, **Erik Collin** who had to leave at 1500 for a doctor's appointment and **Alan Fox** who had to leave at noon. And I had our high school volunteer intern **Griffin**, who had never given a solo tour, our ninety-year-old lady Marine **Ruth Leeson** who had never given a solo tour, and our curatorial intern **John Abeel** who had never given a tour at all. That's when panic started to set in. Erik and I opened the ship and as soon as Dave came in he started make phone calls to get some reinforcement. Running down the list, the only positive response was good old dependable **Tom McLaughlin** who said he could be in by noon. That was the only positive response. Dave told me that **Julianne Madsen** was home, but had no transportation. I said, "I'll run home and pick her up," not knowing that she was home home with her parents in Westchester.

At the opening bell visitors started massing on the quarterdeck. We sent Alan out first with Griffin and John following for training purposes. Floyd went next, both with large oversize groups. Tom McLaughlin showed up in time for the third tour and he went out with a large group. By that time Griffin was back and we sent him out on his solo tour. Then it was Erik's turn. When Ruth got back from her tour with Alan, she agreed to take her first solo tour so we sent her out. At one point we had five large tours on the ship. Just when there was no place to turn, **Matt Zembo** showed up to show his two young children around, more proof that the right person always shows up at the right time for SLATER. Now, you have to have been reading SIGNALS a long time to remember **Matt Zembo**. He

was one of our early tour guides, but hadn't given a tour for eight years. He is a history professor at Hudson Valley Community College, and regularly assigns his students to visit the ship as his way of continuing to support us. Being the opportunistic SOB that I am, I reappeared in the store with a chambray shirt and I offered Matt to save himself the cost of the tickets in return for leading the group. Matt insisted on paying anyway, and with a little persuasion, agreed to take the group. I put a SLATER hat on his head which he also insisted on paying for. It worked out well because he had his two kids, and there were many other kids in the group. We sent Matt on his way with his large group and that was the last I saw of him for an hour.

The afternoon wore on and we kept up with the pace. I had to respond to the son of a WWII radarman off ULVERT M MOORE who was visiting all the way from Texas. He was looking for a flag that he thought his father had donated years back, but could find no record of the donation, always an awkward situation. I took a group of German tour bus operators on a FAM tour arranged by our Convention and Visitors Bureau. Showing **Thomas Woerle** and **Jens and Michael Kummerfeldt** around made for an interesting experience, as I made sure to describe the enemy that SLATER was designed to fight as Nazis, to keep that from being another awkward situation. Through it all, Dave remained cool, selling tickets and souvenirs, answering the phone and drinking black coffee. He said it was just like a typical Sunday for him, except no one brought him coffee on Sundays.

Rosehn arrived from Jury Duty around 1500 and relieved Dave on the cash register. Dave's reward for a hard days work was to be sent immediately out on tour. Matt completed his tour and said he enjoyed it and only wished he had more time to give us. He departed with the same two children he came in with plus a hat and shirt so he's ready to go the next time. The day totaled out with no complaints, almost a thousand dollars, and a new appreciation for Dave, Heather and Rosehn. It was a relief to get back to being abused by Tanner, Benner and Super Dave. Give me a needle gun.



Our color guard standing by.



Honoring our Coast Guard volunteers.

On Sunday August 4th we celebrated the U.S. Coast Guard's 223rd birthday. Dick Walker organized the event which garnered us both some good publicity and good will among our Coast Guard volunteers and the service itself. Emcee **Steve Long** welcomed regular volunteers and visitors, the USS SLATER color guard presented the colors, SLATER Chaplain CWO Walker gave a brief history of the Coast Guard-manned destroyer escorts in World War II, and recognized the Coast Guard

veterans, affectionately referred to as “Coasties,” **Nelson Potter, Grant Hack, Doug Tanner, Charlie Poltenson and Gene Jackey**, who put in countless volunteer hours maintaining the ship and conducting tours for visitors. Our gun crew gave a gun salute and the Coast Guard marching song, “Semper Paratus,” was played as the colors were retired. The picture perfect weather afforded the ideal backdrop as veterans of all the armed forces gathered to socialize, share memories and enjoy a piece of birthday cake decorated with photographs of the Coast Guard DEs.



The ghost ships.

We sent another team to the James River Reserve Fleet this month. Barry Witte and Eric Altman joined Trustee **Greg Krawczyk** for a few days there. At their own expense, the team brought back several thousand dollars worth of consumables and equipment that we need to continue operating the ship as a museum open to the public. While the reserve fleets disposed of the WWII-era ships several years ago, we still find items ranging from simple brooms and mooring lines to fire extinguishers, signal flags and storage cabinets. For everything we obtain in this manner, it allows the Museum to avoid the outright purchase of these

mundane, but very necessary items.

I should make a point to publicly thank The Reserve Fleet Superintendent, Martin Walker, and his highly capable staff for their assistance over the years. SLATER has been sending teams to the James River Reserve fleet since 1998. In the earlier years, ships like WILLIAM C. LAWE DD763, GAGE APA168, SPHINX ARL 24, and HOWARD F GILMORE AS16 provided authentic WWII parts that were absolutely essential to the SLATER’s restoration. Back then we were missing so many original items, many displaced by more modern equipment, and the “ghost fleet” was the only source of authentic parts on the planet. More recently, SLATER’s outfitting has been nearly completely restored to her original WWII configuration, with notable exceptions of the “donkey” boiler and evaporator missing from B-2. Much of the replaced equipment came from the James River Reserve Fleet and a similar facility in Philadelphia.

Now, the Reserve Fleet allows us to take items from ships about to be scrapped that are not WWII authentic. Nevertheless, these items are essential to our operation as a museum. We owe a great deal of appreciation to **Martin Walker** and his staff. Barry told me that in each of the past two years, the fleet’s riggers worked above and beyond expectation. For those unfamiliar with the fleet’s situation, the obsolete ships are moored about a mile offshore in a very wide bend of the James River, just north of Newport News, Va. It is not so simple to just go on a ship and remove an item. Every item must be manually brought up to the main deck, and then transferred to a work boat and brought ashore. Once ashore, the items must be unloaded from the workboat and loaded into a rental truck and secured for the 550-mile trip back to Albany. Most items are handled by our own people, but the

heaviest items, such as a 200 pound coil of mooring line, require the assistance of the riggers and boatmen.

I'll conclude this section with this; in a very measurable way, we could not have made the SLATER the success she is without the enthusiastic cooperation of the entire James River Reserve Fleet staff. If any JRRF staff member is reading this, please know that we truly recognize your contribution to our effort, and you are greatly appreciated. A large "Thank You" card will be in the chief's mess for a few weeks. For our locals, please sign it and maybe add a brief note. I'll be mailing it to Martin in a couple of weeks so he can let his staff know how we feel.

We had Seaway Divers of Waterford, New York come down this month to make an assessment of the condition of the zincs under the hull. We've been taking readings on the electrical difference of potential in the water and the effect on hull corrosion, and the readings were less than satisfactory. It was suggested that the zincs might be slimed over with marine growth, so we asked **Tim Joslyn** at Seaway to have his crew clean them. **Dom Carlino, Jason O'Donnell** and diver **Jason Sterling** came down by boat and not only cleaned the zincs but took about fifty ultrasonic readings with a nifty device that reads right through the paint. They had a great rig that digitally recorded everything the diver was seeing through his helmet camera while we watched on a flat screen monitor in real time. There is some excessive pitting just below the waterline on the portside along the machinery spaces, but other than that, everything looked very good for a nearly 70-year-old ship. They were very efficient and all their equipment worked perfectly. The fact that the two Jasons were both former Marines may have something to do with that.



New Chiefs at morning muster.

We had fifty Navy Chief Petty Officers and CPO Selects from NPTU Ballston Spa aboard over the night of August 24th doing their annual volunteer work weekend. MMC **Michael Murphy** coordinated the event as the CPOs supervised the Selects as they tested our electric submersible pumps, continued the bilge preservation in the aft machinery spaces, and replaced a bad armored electrical cable in B-3. I don't know where it's all coming from but they hauled another five pails of rust out of the bilges. We thank them all for all their help and look forward to having them aboard again.

Throughout the month we had almost perfect weather. The crew was preoccupied with getting everything shipshape for the upcoming DESA National Convention in September. The only problem was that on the last two Mondays and Tuesdays before the Convention, the most critical paint days, it rained, so several items didn't get attended to.



Earl Herchenroder and Don Miller-- Watch out for the edge of the bench.



RM1 Joe Breyer checking out the RBC.

We did finish the waterways on the port side and the decks forward. **Don Miller** went above and beyond the call of duty. He was painting the port waterways with Earl Herchenroder. All was going very well for Don, but just as I was coming out of the galley, Don sat down on the end of the mess bench we have inside the breakwater. At the very end. The opposite end of the bench popped up, Don went down on his butt, sprawled out on deck. How he missed hitting his head on the breakwater door sill I still don't know. But, somehow he caught himself while going down and yelled, "Grab the paint." Through the entire fall he managed to keep his paint can upright with one hand and didn't spill a drop.

The gang in radio has continued to make progress. Jerry Jones, Joe Breyer, Mike Wyles and Stan Levandowski just finished the shelving for the RBC and TCS that we plan to operate. Our authentic museum display requirement needs to display only the RAK / RAL receivers in positions Local operating position 1 and 2, as these are visible to tours from the radio room door. The RAL-7 receiver is fully operational in LOP 2 and can work together with the TBL and the LM Frequency Meter, Jerry says that even though that combination of equipment can work when you are sitting on one preset military 'net' frequency, it isn't even nearly practical to use it on the modern 'ham' bands which require

frequency agility and precise readout. Therefore they are creating a similar but slightly non-authentic LOP 3, out of sight and around the corner, with that very nice RBC/ TBL combination, plus, a hopefully working TCS transmitter / receiver combination. The RBC that **Stan Byrn** in New Mexico donated and then sent to **Tom Horsfall** has been installed in LOP 3 and operates beautifully.



Remove the cover before attempting an engine start.



Enginemen grinning over the thought of getting on of the mains running.

Down in engineering, **Karl Herchenroder, Gus Negus, Ken Myrick, Gary Lubrano and Mike Dingmon** had dreams of firing up number four main during the DESA convention. A couple of cracked cylinder liners dashed those hopes. They contented themselves with cleaning and polishing to beautify their spaces for the convention. Engineering Student **Eric Altman** spent one last day aboard with **Barry Witte** to complete the reassembly of the number four main motor lubricating pump in B-4. We lose Eric as he heads back to school. **Gus Negus, Rocky** and the engineers put their heads together to solve the fuel pump problem in the whaleboat. My understanding is that it was a bad check valve. The boat has operated several times without incident this month.



George Christophersen's 20mm shoulder rests installed.



Sheedy's awesome reefer space.

The shipfitters completed welding up the starboard side chock adjacent to the hedgehog projector, and are now working on that annoying leak under the hedgehog projector and dealing with the corrosion inside the pedestal of the aft whaleboat davit. Erik Collin, with the help of **George Christophersen**, has been working on 20mm gun maintenance. Erik has been disassembling and repainting all the magazines. He has had George rebuilding the metallic parts of all the shoulder rests. I don't know if you remember, but a couple years ago, **Jack Bertsch** of USS WISEMAN made

new rubber shoulder rests for all the guns. When we went to install them we found that the steel backing plates were all rotted out. Now a project that was started back in 2010 may be nearing completion. And there are no words to describe the work **Gary Sheedy** has done on the reefer deck. Suffice to say, it is the most perfectly restored space aboard SLATER, and probably any historic naval ship.

Don't forget about the upcoming fall work week October 6-11. If you're available to lend a hand for that week, or any portion of it, email the coordinator Michigan Dick Walker. We've got a berth and a paint brush with your name on it.

The two most often asked questions right now are "Where are we going this winter?" and "What's up with the drydocking?" In answer to the first, with the wharf renovation going on in Rensselaer, and the likelihood that it will be leased to a commercial operator, we have lost our traditional winter home. We are presently exploring the possibility with NYS DOT of staying in Albany through the winter, or the possibility of mooring at the wharf adjacent to Shed One at the Port of Albany. With regard to the second question, we have provided the shipyard with a work list and all the documents they requested. We are indebted to **Ed Zajkowski** for his work gathering up the needed blueprints and **Mike Hatfield** for scanning them. We've been in touch with our tug company and our underwriter about the costs for tow and insurance. We are awaiting word back from the shipyard as to our initial estimate and we'll know if we've raised enough to proceed. We'll keep you posted.

Finally, if you appreciate what all these good folks are doing, please support the Destroyer Escort Historical Museum by becoming a member and making a donation. You'll get free admission throughout the season and the quarterly newsletter "Trim But Deadly," as well as invitations to special events. Just hit the "Donate" button on the website home page or there's a membership application on the website.

See you next month.

