



SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers

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Remembering Admiral Czesak at the September Honor-a-Vet.

September began with a great Labor Day on Monday. We were open to the public and our year of breaking attendance records continued.

The following Tuesday we welcomed Albany County Executive Dan McCoy, who hosted their monthly Honor-a-Vet program aboard USS SLATER.

This month was special to us, as the honoree was our own RADM Paul Czesak, NYNM (Ret), who passed away in December 2012.

It was a fitting tribute to one of our heroes. Admiral Czesak served in the US Navy from 1953-56 aboard the USS Kearsarge. He then served in the US Naval Reserves from 1956-83, and the NY Naval Militia from 1983-96. During his military service, the Admiral was presented the National Defense Medal, the United Nations Service Medal, the Korean Service Medal, and the China Service Medal. In addition, Admiral Czesak began volunteering aboard USS SLATER back in 1999, and his service included everything from chipping paint to serving as a Trustee. Most notably, he served as our protocol officer and organized all our ceremonies. His passing was a great loss to our project. Family and dignitaries who attended included his widow Anne, his Daughter Jodi, County Executive Dan McCoy, Congressman Paul Tonko, former Albany Mayor Jerry Jennings, and Assemblywoman Pat Fahy. My special thanks to Glenn Harrison and Charles Burkes who helped coordinate the event.



Earl Herchenroder gets some help from the Chief Selects.

On September 6th we hosted the Chief Petty Officers and CPO Selects from the Navy Nuclear Training center in Ballston Spa.

About 60 CPOs and Selects reported for a day of volunteer work aboard the ship. The main project was carpentry--building some additional shelving in the lower level of B-2, so we can get all that gear that was in the PODs organized. Secondary projects included cleaning the bilges in B-3, the deckplates in B-4, and assisting with the grinding and

welding on the davit pedestal repair project. In addition, the Selects stood a quarterdeck watch in dress whites, which was a really nice touch. We almost felt like we were back in commission. Special thanks to Chiefs **Bernie Smith** and **Art Dott**, who made a lasagna dinner for the Chiefs, in addition to their regular duties of making lunch for our volunteers. It was a particularly hot, muggy Saturday, giving the CPOs an appreciation of the hardships faced by the old sailors, and a new appreciation of their air-conditioned ships.



The 2014 USS HUSE Crew.

The USS HUSE annual work party was held from September 7th to September 12th.

Their usual time frame for the SLATER work party was in May; however, the drydocking of the ship prevented this from happening and necessitated the change to September. The weather during their week on board was outstanding, with comfortable days and cool evenings.

Coordinator **George Amandola** brought in a total of eighteen volunteers during the week, and

accomplished a number of tasks that needed to be addressed. The volunteers consisted of 15 men and 3 ladies. The ladies were housed in Officers Country, and the guys in the

aft crew's quarters. One of the ladies remarked on how comfortable the officer's bunks are. That elicited several quiet comments from the guys sleeping in crew bunks.



John Malvasio and John Nicotra kept the HUSE Crew well-fed.

The chow prepared by the USS HUSE gourmet cooks, John Malvasio and John Nicotra, was plentiful and tasty. One of the desserts they prepared was a pineapple upside down cake that was outstanding. However, we did not get any bear claws or cinnamon buns. Bear claws can be expensive but I was told cinnamon buns would make it to the menu next year. **Ernie Aeschilman** and **Anthony Amandola** worked in the engine room, the port and starboard shaft alleys, rewiring light and installing new lights. In addition, they worked on securing

the fire extinguishers in a number of locations. **Walter Bringslid** worked the mess deck, and ensured it was set up for each meal and cleaned up afterwards. In addition, while off duty from the mess deck, he assisted in a number of other projects when additional hands were needed. **Joe Delfoe** spent his time chipping and painting the superstructure overhang on the 01 deck. Joe also participated in a number of other projects that required extra hands. Joe's running mate, **Brandon Easley**, helped with chipping and painting and doing a lot of the heavy lifting. **Brandon** also worked on the boat davits on the starboard side, burning away some wasted metal. He had help from Walter and Joe as needed.





Brandon and Wally hanging out.



Robin and Paul priming the forties.



Sharon and Pete painting the floats.



Ernie and Anthony replacing a light fixture.

Gail Esker, whose Dad is Pete Maylone, an Air Force vet, Sharon Roberts, and Robin Larner spent a lot of hours emptying, repairing, painting, and reinstalling life rope floater nets. When that was completed, they worked in the after steering compartment, trying to clean up an indescribable mess that had been stored there. This is the start of a program to refinish after steering. **Bill Mehan**, who was at his usual post in charge of the paint locker, was also recruited and participated in these projects. **Paul Suzdak and his Dad, Marc Suzdak**, were tasked with chipping and painting the 40mm guns and mounts. This carried on the tradition of the late Stan Suzdak, Marc's father, who spent so many years caring for those mounts. This required them to crawl under the guns mounts and chip, scrape, Corroseal, prime, and paint the undersides, as well as the platforms and guns. **Guy Huse and Stan Dickstein** worked in B-4, continuing the restoration of the aft fire and flushing pump. The 2015 USS HUSE work party has been scheduled for May 17th to May 22nd.

We hosted two reunions this month. The destroyer USS ENGLISH DD-696 came aboard Friday September 12th, with about 50 former crewmembers and families. Their Sailors ranged from World War II vets to Vietnam-era veterans. Our guides enjoyed the experience of taking these Tin Can Sailors around the ship and learning from their experiences. Tour guide Vince Knuth wrote on Facebook “As a tour guide, this was one of my best experiences!” On the 17th, our own Larry Williams brought his USS SNOWDEN crew aboard. We’ll always be indebted to those guys for their support of the Hull Fund Drive. Larry mustered 21 former crewmembers and guests for a tour and memorial service. Everyone enjoyed the ship tour. Larry feels especially indebted to, and would like to thank **Rosehn Gipe, Erik Collin, and Ken Kaskoun, for overseeing the ceremony and the color guard.**

On Saturday September 13th, we hosted our own Volunteer Appreciation Night, an annual event put on for the volunteers by the volunteers and staff. We expressed our appreciation for all the work they have done over the course of the past year. It’s also a chance for spouses and significant others to see first-hand what the crew has been doing, when they should be home doing their chores. Again, **Chief Smith and Art Dott** produced lasagna for 60, and we had a delicious meal. Board President **Tony Esposito** presided, thanking the crew for all they had done to get the SLATER through the yard overhaul, putting her in the wonderful condition she is in today. Trustee Gary **Dieckman** created and donated 25 recognition plaques to honor those who volunteered their time while SLATER was in the shipyard, and helped get everything ready for her return. Though it threatened rain all day, the weather cooperated and the drizzle stopped long enough for us to thank the crew, do presentations on the observation deck, and take a group photo. As has become tradition, chow was served both on the messdecks and in the briefing room, for those who had difficulty with the ladders. The meal was delicious and the company was grand. Again, let me express our appreciation to all the volunteers who have made USS SLATER what she is today.

The Monday after the volunteer appreciation night, I was on the road for my two annual conferences. This year the Destroyer Escort Sailors Association Convention was held in Warwick, Rhode Island. I took the train to Penn Station, which was a familiar journey that I made about eight times while USS SLATER was in the shipyard. From there it was the train to Providence, and then the MTA to the airport, where the hotel shuttle was waiting to take me to the convention. It was great to see so many old friends, among them Dori and Ed Glaser, Phyllis Gruber and her daughter Eva Fox, Mary Desantis, John and Elaine Adriani, Steve and Vicky Hoback and so many others. We had prepared a PowerPoint presentation consisting of 140 images documenting the shipyard preparations and the overhaul. I practiced on the USS HUSE group, and presented it to DESA on their men’s liberty night under the working title “Here’s how I spent \$1.3 million. I must have done a good job because at the conclusion there was only applause, none of the pointed questions I anticipated. Unfortunately, I missed the annual DESA banquet and dance because I had to depart Wednesday morning for the Historic Naval Ships conference, held at Nauticus and the Battleship WISCONSIN in Norfolk, Virginia.

I caught the shuttle from the hotel to the airport and while I was checking in heard another passenger check in for Norfolk. I asked if he was heading to the conference and he introduced himself as Kurt Voss. He is another maritime preservation legend who cut his teeth on the sailing Barque ELISSA in Galveston. Kurt then moved to the AMERICAN VICTORY in Tampa, and just completed working with the restoration of the whaling ship CHARLES W. MORGAN in Mystic. He had actually been with the ELISSA when she made her famous 1987 visit to Baton Rouge, and though our paths had not actually crossed at that point in time, it was fun comparing notes on an evolution we'd shared together, as well as all the other highs and lows that go along with the business of preserving these ships.

Upon our arrival in Norfolk, I was met by none other than “my old friend” Ed Zajkowski. We had planned to give our presentation on the drydocking together and were scheduled to give the talk that Friday afternoon. As this was a joint conference between the Historic Naval Ships Association and the Maritime side of the house, all aspects of maritime history were included, ranging from lighthouses to wooden ship construction. There was a wide variety of seminars to attend. The topics I chose favored steel ship construction and included an update of the restoration of the Battleship TEXAS, the restoration of a 40mm gun, a seminar on the Battle of the Atlantic, and two seminars dealing with a backlog of artifacts. The best attended seminar of the conference, Jason Hall's “Sex Sells,” was the adult after-hours tour of the Battleship New Jersey. It wasn't near as racy as the promo.

As with most such conferences, a key component was the after-hours networking at the bar with old friends. Among them, Rich Pekelney from the submarine PAMPANITO, Paul Farace from USS COD (who is still holding the USS PILLSBURY wardroom dishware hostage in Cleveland waiting for me to visit), and my favorite Australian Lindsay Shaw (who kept me out of trouble). Other old friends that I caught up with were Barbara Vulgaris (who helped arrange so many donations from MARAD), Mary Habstritt from the USCGC LILAC (the only visitor to the SLATER in the shipyard who was stopped by security), Paul Cora and Ryan Szimanski from the USCGC TANEY, and Frank Thompson from Naval Historical Center.

Among the people I was most glad to see was Tim NesSmith, who I knew from final couple of years on USS KIDD in Baton Rouge. Now the ship's superintendent, Tim had the misfortune of losing three fingers while doing a 5” gun salute a couple years ago. His recovery, dedication and spirit are remarkable, and he remains one of the most promising members of the next generation of shipkeepers. I also had the pleasure of meeting KIDD's new executive director Alejandra Juan, and caught up on the happenings on my last ship. It was great to have the opportunity to get an update on the progress of my old ship and share with Alex my experiences, as we worked to make her the only FLETCHER restored to her WWII rig. I left with the feel the KIDD is in great hands.

Again delving back into my past, it was most rewarding to see a historic ship's preservation award given to one of the KIDD's longtime volunteers, Garrett Lynch. He is one of my heroes. I depended heavily on Garrett during my years in Baton Rouge, 1983-97. Garrett enlisted in the Navy right after Pearl Harbor. Assigned to the old USS O'BRIEN DD-415, he was TAD at Pearl Harbor, assisting in the battleship salvage and recovery of bodies. When he returned to the O'BRIEN, she went to Guadalcanal. Garrett was in a forward 5" handling room when the ship was hit by a torpedo just forward of his compartment. It was the famous spread fired by Japanese submarine I-15 on September 15 that also caught the battleship NORTH CAROLINA, and sank the carrier USS WASP. O'BRIEN later broke up and sank off Samoa on the way home for permanent repairs. Garrett caught the last line hanging from the oiler CIMARRON. If he'd missed it he would have been sucked into her screws. Reassigned to the USS FULLAM as she was completing in Boston, it was back to the Pacific. Garrett spent the rest of the war on her as leading seaman, and saw more action than a Sailor should see. Called up for Korea, he was rated Chief Boatswain's mate, and liked to remind me on a regular basis "I made Chief before you were born." Here's to you Garrett, and to all our friends who have gone before, Eddie Davis, Tom Varnado, Bill Pellagrin, Dick Findlay and so many more. Let your work on KIDD be your legacy.

The presentation Ed and I gave, "Extreme Makeover: USS SLATER Shipyard Edition," was well received. Folks are amazed at what we have accomplished. We were on the road the next morning for the drive to Ed's house, where I got to see his collection of blueprints, and the computer from which he generated all those emails that were so important to our successful overhaul. Then, Sunday morning it was another drive into Philly to catch AMTRAK to Rensselaer, where my wife was waiting.

In my absence, the crew did fine. Apparently, according to Facebook, Oswald Dumbrowski had no problem covering for me and keeping the crew in line. According to them, things went much more smoothly than when I'm here. They crew continued to make progress. Doug Tanner and the shipfitters are nearing completion of the davit pedestal repair project. They are confident they will have it wrapped up by the time cold weather sets in. Barry Witte and his NROTC volunteers continue to make progress on the firemain system in B-3. Our own engineers are making modifications to the diesel cooling system that will allow them to operate the ship's service generator off the firemain, and discharge it overboard above the waterline. Boats Haggart and the deck force have been preparing the davit rigging for the return of the whaleboat, and touching up paint topside. The radio gang has been struggling with problems with their new Elecraft K2 transmitter. That effort would go a lot quicker if Jerry Jones weren't spending so much time at car shows. And Gary Sheedy has made a real start on the restoration of aft steering, which one day will look as good as the reefer deck. And as for the tour guides, a visit to www.tripadvisor.com will show you what an outstanding job they are doing. The comments we receive about our guides are a testament to their dedication and knowledge.

We have several upcoming events. The Michigan Fall Work Week is October 5-10. On Monday October 13th, the Capital District Chief Petty Officer's Assn will celebrate the Navy Birthday aboard, and honor their 2014 USS SLATER volunteer, Gary Sheedy. We will also be open to the public that day. On October 28th, we will remember our forty years of service in the Greek Navy by celebrating Ohi Day, an event that is celebrated throughout Greece, Cyprus, and the Greek communities around the world each year. This commemorates the rejection by Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas of the ultimatum made by Italian dictator Benito Mussolini on October 28, 1940. Our USS Slater night at the Fort Orange Club will be held on Saturday, November 8th. Invitations will be going out soon. And, we will commemorate Veterans Day on Tuesday, November 11th.

Finally, our flag flew at half-staff three times this month. Once for Patriot's Day, and twice more as we lost two of our old friends. One of the last of the original Michigan 8 who came for that first Field Day in 1999, **Charlie Markham**, died after a prolonged illness. Charlie was a WWII vet who served aboard USS SAMUEL S. MILES DE-183. His daughter Nancy wrote that he was wearing his "USS SLATER Drydock Crew" shirt when he died peacefully. My favorite Charlie Markham story was the year Ron Zarem assigned Charlie "Captain of the head," duties. Charlie made the place shine and then roped off all the sinks but one so it would stay clean. And long time volunteer **Dick Smith**, WWII storekeeper from USS EVARTS DE-6, passed away this month. Dick started with us back in early March of 1998, when things were a mess. The first day he reported aboard, not knowing what to do with a storekeeper, we offered Dick a chipping hammer. He chipped paint every Monday and Wednesday for the following six years.

Dick counted everyone in the crew as a friend, but he was particularly close to fellow chippers. He was close to Dutch Hannman, because they'd made the same convoy runs, frequented the same bars in Mers El Kabir, and probably got chased by the same shore patrolmen. It was a difficult time for all of us when we lost Dutch to leukemia in 1999, and it's hard to believe so much time has gone by. Dick was also close to fellow chippers Chris Fedden, Ed Whitbeck, and fellow teamster Frank Beeler. The chippers carry on, however, as there aren't a lot of people stepping forward to join their ranks. Everyone aboard who admires the SLATER's restoration owes these guys an exceptional debt of gratitude. There would be no quality restoration without people willing to do the work of holding a needle gun for several hours a day. First with the SOLDESA guys in Manhattan, and continuing here in Albany, these guys have scaled the whole ship. Our hats are off to everyone who picks up a needle gun.

Watch us on Facebook and see you next month.