

SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
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Moored as before, starboard side to, Port of Rensselaer.



Anyone seen Sheedy?

The scene is the ice-cold bowels inside of a ship. The destroyer escort USS SLATER, sits ice bound alongside the pier in Rensselaer, New York. The limited heating system doesn't get down to the reefer deck and the tanks below. Gary Sheedy's reefer deck. They say it's been the coldest January in 27 years. Somebody said it was the third or fourth coldest since they had been keeping records. I won't bother to verify that because I hate to bog this little tabloid down with verified truth. Suffice to say that it's been a cold month. The water agitators that we hang between the ship and the pier to reduce ice pressure on the hull ran continuously from January 7th to February 8th. In this environment, a cluster of volunteers huddle together working on the restoration of the reefer decks.

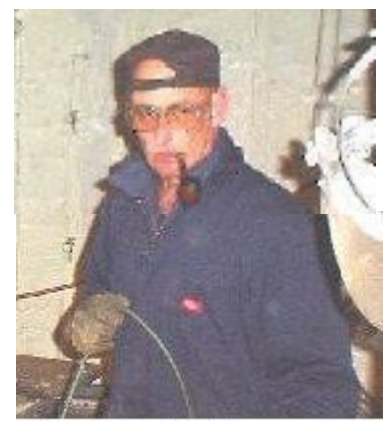
Gary Sheedy has been dreaming about the restoration of the reefer decks, ever since he reported aboard the SLATER six years ago. It is a space that we could have easily ignored and passed by.



The missing man, electrician Gary Sheedy.

Tucked below the forward crew's quarters, with only one access, there is no reason for anyone to go down there. It makes a good storeroom for electrical spare parts, but there is no need to restore it. Just keep the hatch dogged on tour days. But Gary was an "A" Gang electrician, and the reefers

were his space, and this is important to him, so we will restore it.



Benner wants to know where's Sheedy?

Now his shipmates tackle one of the most difficult parts of that restoration, the replacement of the wasted deck. The whole section against the aft bulkhead has been cut out and replaced working in the harshest conditions amid the acid smell of flashing welding rod and burned metal. The water in the fire watch bucket has frozen solid. As **Tim Benner** cap welds the plate from above, he wonders, "Where's Sheedy?" As Gene Jackey pounds on the adjacent deck plate with a needle scaler looking for more waste and pinholes, he too wonders amid the din, "Where's Sheedy?"

The replacement of the deck plate involves climbing through a tiny manhole to access the fuel oil tanks below. We have cleaned and ventilated them to make them safe for welding. From underneath in this tank, **Doug Tanner** back welds the deck plate, now the overhead from underneath. A red devil blower provides a flow of air, making it even colder. As another piece of hot molten metal arcs down the back of his neck, he grits his teeth and mutters, "Damn Sheedy."



Working in the tanks below the reefer deck, Tanner wants to know, where's Sheedy?



Fine dining on the SLATER. Witte wants to know, where's Sheedy?

Back aft on the messdecks, Electrician's Barry Witte, Mike Clark, Sean Gordon and Joe Breyer tackle the arduous task of removing a cut ten pair piece of armored cable that connects the Interior Communications Space below the messdecks to the radio room. In its place they pull a new replacement cable heavy, one-inch thick cable. The armor jacket frays as it is pulled along the wire ways up to the radiator room, tearing up the flesh and fingers of those snaking it through the overheads. All the rewiring on the messdecks must be completed by the end of the month so the space can be painted for spring. Time is running out as the electricians all wonder, "Where's Sheedy?"

Surprisingly, another unrelated group is dependent upon the missing electrician. The chippers, **Smitty, Fedden, Whitbeck, Yarbrough, and Hamilton** all depend on **Gary Sheedy**, the compressed air expert to maintain their needle scalers. These men have the most arduous job of all. They are scaling the messdecks overhead, holding the heavy needle scalers overhead, working in protective gear to accomplish their task. One after another their tools begin to fail, and they have to make do with jury-rigged repairs, they wonder in unison, "Where's Sheedy?"

It's lunchtime in the CPO mess. Upon hearing chow piped the crew piles into the fifty-degree warmth, to wolf down Doug's sausage and sauerkraut heated up on his old electric skillet.



Stan Murowski wonders, where's Sheedy?



Can YOU find Sheedy?

Each week, Doug buys the crew lunch fixin's out of his own pocket. It's not often you find a welder who can cook, or a cook who can weld. You never know how many volunteers are aboard until Doug pipes chow. Sometimes an astonishing number of people suddenly show up in the CPO mess. In keeping with tradition, the Radiomen get there first. The bread is left over from last week. Sometimes, there isn't enough to go around, and those working the hardest in the bowels of the ship, who travel the farthest, get there too late. By lunch the coffee is five hours

old, but who cares, it's hot. The ragged grubby crew shares the last plastic knife. The peanut butter is too cold to spread. Since there is no hot water so we clean the skillet with coffee. Today, there are enough hot dogs for everybody. There's even one for Sheedy. Where is he?

The scene is the deck of another ship. This one is plying the warm sea-lanes of the Caribbean, heading for the tropical paradise of St. Thomas. It is an amazingly clean and comfortable ship. It is Royal Caribbean's EXPLORER OF THE SEAS. On this ship, you don't have to worry about tripping over the air hoses or welding cables. You never hear the ear splitting drone of a needle scaler, only the faint refreshing sound of the calypso band.



Sheedy's new ship.

On this ship you never smell burned paint, hot metal or stale coffee. On this ship the coffee is always fresh, the beer cold, and the pina coladas brought to you on a silver tray by a smiling steward. Lunch is an elegant meal served on fine china in an opulent dining salon. You can choose filet mignon, rack of lamb, prime rib, lobster tails, shrimp cocktail, or escargot. Up on deck one couple chooses to skip lunch and spend the time sunning themselves in adjacent lounge chairs. They hold hands in of total warmth and relaxation that is unknown to anyone living in their hometown of Albany this time of year. In this ocean getaway, **Gary Sheedy** and his lovely wife **Sharon** have found paradise.



Don't worry, Gary. She'll be here when you return.

Not that Gary doesn't deserve a vacation. As a refrigeration technician, eighty-hour work weeks are almost the norm for him. What few Saturdays he does get off seems to be spent with us on the reefer deck. After six years he's getting so impatient with us that he's actually talking about chipping paint himself. It's all going according to plan. And not that Gary is the only one who has fled south. Several of our number have disappeared this month to warmer places. Not to worry. We'll hold their spots open until they return.

Barry Witte has brought a new element to the SLATER crew. An industrial arts teacher at Colonie High School, Barry has always made it a point of trying to entice his best and brightest students to come to volunteer aboard the SLATER. This winter, his crew has grown to three with the volunteer services of students **Sean Gordon, Corey Palmatier and Corey Reinhart**. They are learning a lot and are a great help to the crew on Saturdays. Barry's students have traditionally been some of our best workers, until they get their driver's licenses and girlfriends. Then the ole SLATER takes a back seat. Remember your youth? Another new volunteer is **David Hamilton**.

David is a retired FAA radar technician, and his father served on a DE. He said he'd be willing to work wherever he needed him, so to make the best use of his skill; we put him to work chipping paint on the messdecks. Fortunately, he comes on Fridays, and hasn't met the rest of the Communications Gang yet, so he doesn't know there's a softer berth available to him.

We had one of those nerve wrackers. During the worst of the cold snap **Tom Moore** made a routine inspection of the water tanks back aft and reported that there was about eight inches of water in portside tank C-14W under berthing space C-202L. We knew that these tanks had been used for ballast when the ship was towed from Greece. We also knew that Barry had pumped and dried them all a couple years ago, so water wasn't a good sign. There was a suspicious looking manhole bolted to the top of the stern tube. We considered the possibility that in the intense cold, with her light draft, the stern tube had frozen and the ice had buckled the plate. But then, why was the water clear and liquid? Doug went down with a chipping hammer to try and find the source, determined that if it wasn't leaking badly before, it would be when he finished. He couldn't find the leak. The focus now turned back to Barry, who explained, "Oh, I never bothered drying out that one. I didn't want to make the starboard list any worse, and besides, we're too light anyway. The whole thing seemed ultimately to go back to my faulty memory. "Don't you remember I told you?"



Tank work.

Because of the work on the reefer deck and in the aft crew's quarters, we've spent a lot of time in tanks this month. Some of us more time than others. But there is something significant about entering a tank, either for inspection or to do work. When you slither down through the manhole with a flashlight and a droplight, you are truly confronted with the essence of the ship. Void of all clutter, the environment is reduced to the essentials of naval architecture. The transverse frames spaced every 21", the longitudinal stringers, the tank drain and transfer piping, the fore and aft bulkheads, and the shell plating. You run your fingers along those jagged welds and wonder who did them? How much training did they have? How much care was taken? How well were they inspected? And what would those welders have thought if they knew that sixty years after the fact, their work would still be keeping us afloat. You look at the shell plating and wonder how big

an ice flow it would take to puncture that plate. Then you think about Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim, and the hold of the S.S. PATNA and realize claustrophobia is getting to you.

For you workaholics who really want to get involved but live too far away, it's time to start thinking about the Field Day Weeks. The Michigan Crew will be aboard the week of May 2-8. They can take up to thirty-five people, but this event is a male's only workweek. The spaces fill up quickly here, so if you're interested in joining them, the contact person is The Michigan Chapter Administrator **Ron Zarem**. Ron is a dinosaur when it comes to computers and he has no email. He does however have a telephone, and his number is 989-345-0237, if he's not out ice fishing. The Michigan Chapter Yeoman **Dick Walker** is a little more sophisticated than Ron, and does have email.

They are giving me a week to rest up, and then the USS HUSE crew will be with us the week of May 16-22. The coordinator is **George Amandola** and he can be reached at 610-789-5105, His backup is **Joe Collettie**. Joe lives in New Hyde Park. They haven't set a limit and their group is coed, so if you're wanting to work aboard, give them a call. We anticipate the spring projects being repainting the weather decks and flying bridge, continuation of work on the reefer decks and the anchor windlass room, and trying to clean out aft steering.

It's time for you tour guides to start thinking about spring. Nancy Buxton and Paul Czesak are planning their pre guide planning meeting day for Monday, 23 February the trailer at 1pm.
The

full meeting for all guides and trainees will be on the ship in Rensselaer on Sunday 7th at 1300 in the CPO mess. There has been much work going on behind the scenes this past month. Rosehn and Nancy have been working away on several grant requests for the mooring dolphins, dry-docking and other special projects. They are also getting out promotional mailings to school groups and our overnight camping program. And between her duties doing homeland security work as skipper of the patrol vessel PRIVATEER, **Beth Spain** and **Sam Saylor** have worked diligently to keep up with your contribution records and thank you letters.

Doris Fischer, Paul Czesak and Geoffrey and Thessaly Bullard are continuing to plan for their SLATER fundraiser on the third Saturday of June, DE Day. They are currently working on organizing the Distinguished Friends of the Slater under the unifying theme of Naval Service. Back in 1975 a Navy Doctor **Samuel Halpern** published his memoirs "West Pac ◆64" about serving with Destroyer Division 192 to fulfill his obligated military service. Dr. Halpern found himself aboard the USS MADDOX during the Tonkin Gulf Incident. He concluded



Chipping on the messdeck.

his book with the statement, "In the secret heart of almost every man who has served in his country's armed forces, no matter how much he may of loathed the experience, is the knowledge that he was there if all the other chips really went down. Every American should be responsible for the defense of America." It is a shame this book wasn't more widely promoted.

The days of required military service are long gone, and so is an important shared experience for fewer and fewer of our nation's youth. There was a time, not so long ago when the top college athletes fulfilled their service obligations becoming line officers, pilots or second lieutenants. A time when honor, ethic and commitment to country and family had real meaning to us, and helped us keep

wealth and celebrity in perspective. Though we may not have realized it at the time, out of that shared service experience came some of the best experiences of our lives. Experiences that helped us grow and mature to the successful individuals we have become. The experience, while harsh and dangerous at times, was also humorous and unifying. It is in this spirit that they are organizing the USS SLATER's first Navy Night at the Fort Orange Club.

In an addendum to last month's story about the capsized merchant ship STELLA MARE, a recent newspaper article said that Empire Marine had purchased the ship for \$125,000. The buyers are the same folks who donate towing the SLATER back and forth across the river every year. **Bart Brake** plays his cards pretty close to his vest, so the purchase has sparked a great deal of speculation in the Chief's Mess aboard the SLATER. The big money says that Bart will have the STELLAMARE ship up and running in six months. That speculation is making a lot of SLATER volunteers upset with his purchase. They've made it known to me that if they had known that Bart wanted a ship to fix up, they would have sold him SLATER for a fraction of what he paid for the STELLAMARE, fired me, and all gone to work for Bart, for the same pay! They figure he'd have the SLATER up and running in six months, whereas I've been spinning my wheels here for six years!

See you next month.



Moored as before, waiting for spring.