



SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
By Timothy C. Rizzuto, Ship's Superintendent

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

Phone (518) 431-1943, Fax 432-1123
Vol. 7 no. 3 March 2004

Tuesday the ninth of March was a pretty crappy day for me. On that date, at about 1030 in the morning, **Dick Smith** dropped by the office to announce his retirement. After six years of holding a needle gun overhead two days a week, he was starting to worry that his vision was getting so bad that he was worried about making the hour long run to and from his home in Fort Edward. Dick was looking for his discharge.

A former storekeeper on USS EVARTS DE5, Dick and I go way back. 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 put him in the ship's store, working with **Michele Vennard**, getting the space cleaned out to receive gift shop stock. Dick liked working his old rate, liked working with Michele, and figured he had a pretty good deal. Dick came back the following week, no doubt expecting to do storekeeper work with Michele. But Michele wasn't there and there was no storekeeper work to be done, so we offered Dick a chipping hammer. He chipped paint every Monday and Wednesday for the following six years.



Dick Smith USS EVARTS DE5.

Dick probably figured that he could avoid an emotional scene with his shipmates by coming in on a Tuesday and cleaning out his locker when nobody's around. Well, you figured wrong, buddy, because we'll have that scene right here now. A former teamster, who is sure that Jimmy Hoffa never got out of Michigan, Dick hated driving in traffic. He got up at 0430 to make the hour trip from Fort Edward, hit the Riverside Truck Plaza, and was aboard by 0600. He always packed it in and left the ship around two to avoid the afternoon traffic. Always concerned about the welfare of his shipmates,

he quickly took on the position of shop steward for the crew, assuring every new volunteer that, "If you have any problems with management, you come talk to me and we'll straighten them out." It was Dick who negotiated the use of needle guns instead of chipping hammers, the thirty-minute lunch break, and the afternoon nap for all volunteers over seventy. Some of the crew have always felt that the basic terms of the contract, "Long hours, hard work, and no pay", tended to favor management, but Dick always felt that the needs of the crew had to be balanced with the needs of the ship. Despite continuing threats, the six years of his tenure have passed with no strikes, picket lines or production slowdowns.

Dick's retirement leaves a hole in my life. And coming in on Monday just won't be as much fun knowing Dick won't be aboard to torment me. There was something very reassuring about coming aboard at 0730 and finding the gate open, Dick's van in the parking lot, the air compressor running and hearing the drone of a needle gun coming from within the ship. We were making progress. His concentration was intense as he worked, so I used to delight in sneaking up behind him, grabbing his butt to see how high I could make him jump. Of course his game was to spot me coming, but wearing all that safety gear, ear protection, eye protection and respiratory protection meant he was at a distinct sensory disadvantage, so I usually had the upper hand. I'm surprised I never got hit over the head with the needle scaler, teamster style. Over the course of the day, he paid me back in spades. His greatest continuing threat always came during coffee breaks and at lunch. Dick is a child of the Great Depression, as are most of our crew. Whenever I got whiny about how miserable my life was because my computer only has a Pentium two processor, Dick would threaten to lock me in the CPO mess with them and make me listen to a couple hours of Great Depression stories. You know, about the days of outdoor plumbing, wood stoves and milking cows by hand as the cow tail covered with cow dung kept swatting you in the face.

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 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 is 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.

So to Dick, all I can say is thanks for giving us so much of yourself these past six years. And to **Mary**, all I can say is what I always say to SLATER wives. Thanks for letting him come play with us. Thanks for sharing him with us. **Chris Fedden, Ed Whitbeck, Dave Floyd, Andy Desorbo, Raf Suarez, and now Dave Hamilton** continue to carry on. We've spent the last seven years too busy working to set up any formal volunteer recognition program. We've never even tallied up the hours in the volunteer book by individual donor. No plaques, trophies, or bronzed chipping hammers. I hate to pick favorites in a crew of favorites, but a word to all of you in the Michigan crew who are always in competition to be "Tim's Favorite." This year, the best any of you can hope to achieve is "Tim's second favorite."



Chris Fedden cleaning up the CPO Passageway.



Paul Czesak sweeping up.



Ken Kaskoun stowing drop cloths.

Barry Witte aside, most people are extremely happy with the way the messdecks came out. We even got the supply cage and the foul weather gear locker on the port side scaled and painted. All the work has really enhanced the wooden tables **Dennis Nagi** installed last year. **Stan Murowski** has a major factor in the work he has learned the trade of laying up fiberglass insulation board which greatly improves the appearance of every compartment we work on. And in his role of oil king, he has restored all the messdeck's fuel oil overflows vents and sounding tubes to the point where these pieces of gear, that no one ever noticed are now works of brass art. The question still remains; why the hell didn't the original designers extend the overflows to the main deck? Were they in that much of a hurry? An overflow on a DE must have been a lousy experience for all hands.



Tim Benner working on the mount for the messdecks scuttlebutt.

The shipfitters completed their work on schedule. Clark Farnsworth, Doug Tanner, Tim Benner, Gene Jackey and Chuck Teal completed repairs to the wasted deck in the wardroom pantry and got the reefer reinstalled. They burned off a lot of projections and did a lot of grinding of old welds on the messdeck (not enough according to Barry and Gary) got the bunks rehung, and mounted a shelf for showing movies in the forward locker on the messdeck. This will greatly enhance the overnight camping program. **Tommy Moore** replaced several "Greek" joiner doors in officer's country and replaced them with USN standard joiner doors. Now that that work is done, it's back to the chocks and the reefer deck.

The electricians, Barry Witte, Gary Sheedy, Mike Clark, and students Sean Gordon, Corey Palmatier and Corey

Reinhart worked straightening out cable runs and eliminating unused cables on the messdecks and in the wardroom. Down below in B-2 **Bob Calender, Ken Kaskoun and Bill Coyle** have

been replacing fluorescent fittings with incandescent. Throughout the winter they have been supported by "Rocky" Rockwood, who has been restoring and painting the junction boxes, light fixtures, fans and electrical fittings that have come off all the spaces under restoration. To support this work Barry persuaded me to purchase a sandblasting cabinet, so that we can start blasting the small piece parts as opposed to soaking them in paint remover as we have been doing. The cabinet is in the process of being installed in a storeroom forward, and we'll let you know how it works.



Gene Jackey cleaning out the scullery

The lighting in B-2 isn't the only work that has been going on below. Gus Negus, Larry Lachance, Adam Van Horn, and new volunteer Karl Herchenroder have gotten back to working on the eight-cylinder 200KW ship's service generator in B-3. The plan is to cool it with water in an internal tank. In support of this project the members of Michigan DESA have been raising money to buy them fresh lube oil, because they know I'm too cheap to spring for it. My reputation as a deck man is well know. Money's no object for paint, but the engineers have to hold bake sales and car washes when they need supplies. Also in support of this project, Barry moved the electrical gang below to clean the generator side of the aft switchboard. Of course this led to howls from the shipfitters when he cut off the lighting to the machine shop and said, "Run a drop light from the galley if the light coming in the porthole isn't sufficient." Whiners.

Of course the heart and soul of the spring clean up is Erik Collin. As in years past, he has spent the two weeks before opening vacuuming up the mess we made all winter, swabbing decks, scrubbing bulkheads, touching up the paint throughout the ship, and repainting all the interior decks. In this work he is supported by **Kevin Sage**, a contract painter we bring aboard every spring to speed up the painting process, as spray painting is the one job so miserable we can't find volunteers to do it. Kevin does a great job for us, and has had a major hand in making the portside aft head, amidships passageway, wardroom pantry and messdecks look so good for opening day. All hands have played a role in the big clean up, but the outstanding contributors include dependable **Paul Czesak, Al Vanderzee, Gordon Lattey**, and of course **Frank and Pat Perrella** getting the museum space all back together and ready for inspection. Thank God, we haven't lost them completely to that LST, yet!

Gordon Lattey and Chris and Trudy Fedden have taken on their annual role cleaning all the mattress covers and pillowcases. Nancy Buxton got her guide force together to help out coming in the two Sundays before opening day to strip mattress covers and clean.

Nancy held her first guide meeting on Sunday March seventh. The returning crew were treated to a refresher course and **Paul Czesak** provided pizza as an incentive to attend. It worked as returnees included **Gordon Lattey, Al Vanderzee, Ed Sakac, Alan Guard, Chuck Lossi, Dan Goldstein, Bob Bull, Tom McLaughlin, Bill Schroun, Bob Whitney, Chris Soulia, Alan Fox, Jim Kuba, Dennis Morrissey, Jack Madden, Bob Dawson, George Erwin, Mike Millian, Eileen Parfrey, Eric Weidman, Chuck Marshall, Chuck Longshore, Floyd Hunt, Russ Ferrer and Les Beauchaine.**



The returning Guides pose for the photo.



Y111 Floyd Hunt won the award for most nautically

Doris Fischer reports that "Slater Night at the Fort Orange Club" is moving ahead swimmingly. She, Paul, and **Geoffrey & Thessaly Bullard** are pulling together the "Distinguished Friends" and planning a unique evening in support of our project. The theme that appears to be emerging for the "Friends" dinner is one that highlights and emphasizes the issue of personal sacrifice. This, as it relates to military service in general, as well as its association with the original DE sailors, and is being carried forward by Slater volunteers who have and are giving so open-handedly to an effort that is bigger than they themselves. This is not just a "hook," in the case of Slater volunteers, it is really true. People need to hear that message and appreciate its value.

Of course, now everyone wants to know when we're moving. I hate to put a guy under pressure, but right now it's all in the hands of **Tommy Moore**. He's in the process of putting Styrofoam in the three most waterlogged camels. Every time he schedules a workday, it snows. Ah, spring in Albany. As soon as that task is accomplished, we'll make arrangements with **Bob Cross** for the crane to put the camels in, and then move the ship as soon as **Bart Brake** and **Bill Welch** can provide us with a tug. Right now we anticipate opening on the Rensselaer side and moving the ship the week of April 12th. Until then, we're open in Rensselaer.

We got some additional support from Bob Reiter of the Rensselaer County Veterans affairs commission. Working through Jack Madden, Bob got us permission to go through his collection of surplus military clothing and take what we needed for the crew. We were able to obtain a truckload of chambray work shirts, bell-bottom dungarees, blue raincoats for the color guard, blankets and olive drab jump suites so we can all dress like, guess who? Barry Witte! This made a pile of work for storekeeper Dick Walker who had to figure out where to stow the stuff. He and Dennis Nagi set up a clothing shelf and racks in the portside forward three-inch magazine and are turning into a GSK. They sorted everything by size and made short work of that problem. Speaking of thanks, we owe our continued debt to Les and Annette Beauchaine who persevered at Crossgates Mall this winter through a couple of less than desirable locations for our dogtag booth. One was right next to the door through one of the coldest winters in Albany history. Sales were disappointing. However, things are now looking up as they have a new location and new signage, and sales are beginning to climb again. I should also report on the binnacle list. Bob Lawrence and Ray Lammers are both recovering well. Bob has been back to visit and I've spoken with Ray on the phone. Our best wishes go out to Jerry Jones who is being treated for heart problems. We hope to have you all back aboard soon.



We even had help from the Naval Reserve to clean up.



Naval Reservists from the Albany Reserve Center stowing at water agitators for the season.



Roy Lustenader and his son stand next to the rangefinder pedestal back in February of 2002.

And we lost another volunteer this month. I first met Roy Lustenader in the summer of 2001 when I was sitting in the Captain's cabin and Roy wandered in alone, late in the day, and started to chat. He told me of his experiences when the USS STORMES was hit by a Kamikaze. Unable to help physically with the restoration work, Roy wanted to help the SLATER any way he could. He immediately got involved in our efforts to install the rangefinder and managed to get a rangefinder pedestal fabricated. He spent many days on the ship taking measurements and prepared a beautiful set of working drawings that we will use to fabricate the roller loaders the near future. When you look at the SLATER, look at the rangefinder pedestal. Roy Lustenader's spirit is there.

Our favorite author, Bob Cross, trustee of the USS SLATER and author of the recently-released Naval Institute Press book, SAILOR IN THE WHITE HOUSE: THE SEAFARING LIFE OF FDR, has embarked on a new project. He has started research and interviews for a new book telling the stories of the DE sailors in World War II. If you have stories or other information you would like to share with Bob, please send it to Robert F. Cross, c/o of the Destroyer Escort Historical Museum, P.O. Box 1926, Albany, New York 12201. Please be sure to include your telephone number so Bob can contact you to discuss your recollections of your days at sea.

It's getting to be that the most dangerous hazardous material issue on the ship is the abundance of high cholesterol food. Maybe that and the lack of sanitation in the winter. As you know, the girls have spent the winter on the Albany side in the relative comfort of the trailer, so aboard the ship we have been men living as men were meant to live. Rosehn came over one afternoon with bills to pay and checks to sign and came down to the CPO mess for a cup of tea. She opened the refrigerator door and I thought she was going to wretch. I think it was the fact that it was Friday, and we were still microwaving the pizza left over from the previous Sunday, despite the fact that it had lived uncovered, unboxed in our happy fridge for five days. The other problem is that competition among cooks is getting so out of control that we have to schedule who's providing lunch on what Saturday so we don't end up with multiple meals on the same day.

Doug always does Saturday breakfast with eggs, sausage, hash and French toast. Joe Breyer brings his wife's wonderful lasagna, competing with Sharon Sheedy. Paul Czesak and Stan Murowksi specialize in Polish dishes, Rosehn brings apple strudel, Erik always brings donuts, and now Claire Oesterreich is back bringing her world famous brownies. Saturday lunch continues to be quite an event.

The net result of all this can be summed up by an experience Gary Sheedy recently had. Between that and over indulgence on the cruise we told you about last month, apparently Sharon has decided Gary should start thinking about an exercise program. To make her point, she patted him on the stomach. Gary responded, "Well, what do you expect. I've had two kids." We should all be able to think that fast. **See you next month.**