



SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
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Vol. 9 no. 7, July 2006

Did I mention that it's rained a lot this year? It started in May. It seemed that almost every Saturday was a washout. It seemed to continue into June. The week of June 26th it started early in the week and rained all week. Did anyone happen to hear about flooding in the northeast? I left the ship on Wednesday, and it was still raining, but all conditions were normal. It rained all night. I came into work on Thursday morning, expecting business as usual. As I took the exit off 787 and came down to the river I noticed that the river was exceptionally high and flowing faster than I'd ever seen it. My gut told me it wasn't going to be a good day.



The forward camel submerged in the muddy Hudson.

When I got to the Snow Dock the SLATER was riding higher than I'd ever seen her. The river was about six feet from the parking lot. I've seen it higher in the spring when the Snow Melts, but I've never seen it that high when we were on the Albany side in the summer. Both gangways were angled so high they were almost three feet off the deck. The force of the water had pushed the ship downstream about four feet, so she was just about at the gangway stops with the gangways resting against the roller bearings. Someone had shackled the lifeline chain to the forward aluminum gangway in lieu of the rubber tie downs we use. I should have noticed that, but I hadn't. That had torqued the gangway aft and broken the cast iron bearing housing on the shore side. Appearance wise, the worst problem seemed to be that the forward camels had accorded and the bow had come in around six feet. The mooring lines were all fine, but one spring wire had all the tension, and I figured if that had let go we would have bounced back another three feet before the mooring lines caught us, which would have been really ugly for the gangways. Since I was the only one there I did what any prudent seaman would have done. Having assessed the situation I went below and made coffee.



Albany Yacht Club boats tie up alongside.

Tommy Moore, Eric Rivet, Nick Larkin and Chuck Teal dropped in first and others straggled in. We shifted another aft spring wire forward and tightened up on the turnbuckle to even the load. We tied safety lines on to the shore side of the aluminum gangway, so if it let go, we wouldn't lose it. And we ran the aft lines on the camels forward, so they'd have a back in case the forward wires let go. Then there was nothing to do but wait it out. Whatever we were going through was nothing compared to what was happening across the river at the Albany Yacht Club. **Lou Renna and Rich Hendricks** asked me early on if we could take some of their boats alongside because there was danger that their docks would break loose. I was concerned about the stress we already had on the wires, but said we could take eight boats on the starboard side, four big ones alongside and four smaller ones outboard of the big ones. They had contracted with **Port Albany Ventures** for tug assistance, and our old friend the EMPIRE hauled the first boat over to us. We tied the boat off, and as the EMPIRE was heading back, we watched as most of the floating docks at the yacht club broke loose and headed down river en masse

with all the attached yachts. Fortunately everyone made it ashore. The EMPIRE kicked in flank speed and caught up with the dock and spent the next half hour pushing the strays into the turning basin south of the Rensselaer dock. By the end of the morning there were boats tied off all down the east shore. As owners found their boats and headed back up river, we ended up taking six alongside and held them there through the weekend. **Lou Renna** had almost that many, thanks to the protection we afforded the DUTCH APPLE. We welcomed aboard several new donors as a result. The brief experience I had at being a marina operator convinced me that this is not a career I want to pursue further.

Bob Cross sent some of his Water Department crew down to check on us and see if we needed the crane. I thought we'd be able to make the gangway repairs without it. Needless to say, we ended up closing that Thursday because of the high water and the damage to the gangway. We turned away a fair number of visitors. We kept a watch aboard all night, and by next morning the river appeared to be falling. The situation hadn't gotten any worse, which I interpreted as "Stabilized" so we opened to the public and had a decent tour day. The river was still running with a fair amount of force and continued to fall slowly. The lines were all taking an even strain. The big question was the forward camels. Everyone asked how I planned to deal with them. My reply was that I'd just hope that they popped back into position when the river slowed down and we got a west wind to push us out. If that didn't work, I'd have to beg or hire a tug to pull the bow back out. If that didn't work, there's no problem that can't be solved with a consultant and a lot of money.

Saturday Doug Tanner was back from Massachusetts and he, Tim Benner and Chuck Teal set about replacing the broken bearing on the forward gangway.

There's an aluminum scaffold hanging off the seawall under the gangway that has

been there ever since we did the initial installation. I think that's like three years ago. I keep meaning to take it out of there. Well, if you procrastinate long enough, you need everything again, so Doug had a ready made platform to work off of. Of course the bearing wasn't available, so he fabricated a replacement and by the end of the day, after more than the usual muttering and gnashing of teeth, pronounced the gangway fit for human occupancy once again. That Sunday morning I got the call from Eric Rivet that when he came in the forward camels had popped back into position. This project may yet make a believer out of me, or at least in the abilities of **Tommy Moore**.



Tim Benner and Doug Tanner repair the gangway under close supervision.

Monday, all was back to normal. The Monday crew got the task of rerunning the wires all back to their original positions, a task no one enjoys. Remember these guys are twidgets and storekeepers, **Ken Kaskoun, Bob Calendar, Clark Farnsworth, Dick Walker, Bill Coyle and Larry Williams**. Then it was back to windshield wipers and sound powered phones. By Monday, most of our yachts had departed our side. We provided a temporary mooring to the replica sloop of war PROVIDENCE, John Paul Jones' most successful command. They were heading west through the canal to Buffalo for a Great Lakes regatta. However flooding had closed the canal and they had tied up at Scarano's Boatyard. But now Rick and John needed to clear their docks to handle all the damaged yachts, so we took the PROVIDENCE. They stayed with us until Saturday, when it became apparent that because of damage to lock ten on the canal they would be stuck in Albany for a couple months, so they headed south for home.



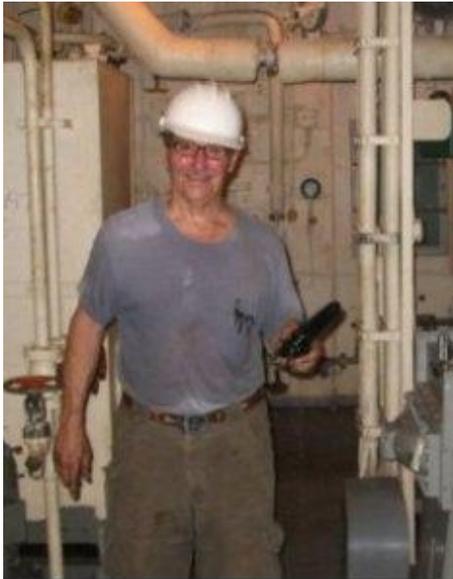
USS DES MOINES CA-134 awaiting the scrapper's torch.

While all this excitement was going on in Albany, we had two other little projects going on. Out on the West Coast our friends from the submarine Pampanito, including **Jim Adams, Rich Pekelney, and Aaron Washington**, were back aboard the old USS CLAMP. Jim had gotten permission to climb the mast (with proper safety gear) and cut off all the SL radar wave-guide. They also took the coding room safe for the

crypto machine for us. They are also going back for some more electrical switchboxes, since CLAMP is a dead ship and it's safe to remove this kind of gear.

At the same time we had another little project going on down in Philadelphia. For ten years the Navy has had the heavy cruiser USS DES MOINES CA-134 on donation hold for anyone who wanted to save

her as a museum. This spring her time ran out, and the Navy agreed to open her up to the remainder of the historic fleet for parts stripping for two weeks, before they bid her out for scrapping. Each ship was allowed to send a maximum of five "strippers." Because of dropouts and drop-ins, we managed to put together a scratch team built around **Barry Witte, Joe Breyer** and **Greg Krawczyk**. With them, over the course of the week we had **Art Dott, Gordon Lattey, Stan Murawski,** and **Joseph Choiniere**, one of Barry Witte's students recruited from Colonie High School, to round out the team. I've stripped enough ships that I planned to sit this one out.



Salvage expert Joe Breyer.



Some of the DES MOINES treasure on display next to the salvage crew.

They arrived in Philly that Monday morning June 26th, as one of about twenty groups who had sent in crews. They were greeted by Sue Morrell of Global who laid the law down to them before turning them loose. My understanding is that there was a mad dash for the communications spaces, and they pretty much had the rest of the ship to themselves. The weather was miserably hot and humid on a dead ship with no ventilation, if the photos of sweat-covered shirts are any indication. The crew worked all week. By Friday, they had staged about two tons of gear in one of the ship's offices. Attempts to rent a one-way truck without a reservation proved futile, and I understand I was widely cursed for my lack of foresight. What else is new? They loaded the most critical items into Gordon's van and Barry's car and headed north. I met them aboard about 1700 and we offloaded everything into the museum space. The following Saturday, we managed to make everything disappear and get it stowed before Pat Perrella could see how we'd trashed her museum space. All that went on while the shipfitters were repairing the gangway following the flood damage. That left a ton and a half of scarce WWII era gear still in Philadelphia that had to come home.



Jim Gelston smothers the flames at Fire Training.



Larry Williams shows the flames who's boss.

I figured that nobody would want to go back after the beating they took that Monday, so my initial plan was to rent a truck round trip and head out and make the round trip in a day. However, I soon found I had a full crew ready to go back. **Barry, Gordon, Stan and Greg Buck** were all hot to go again. We headed out Thursday night in two vehicles. Friday morning Barry headed straight to the shipyard while Gordon, Stan and I headed over to a U-Haul dealer to rent the truck I had prudently reserved. Then it was over to the shipyard for a briefing by Sue and by 0900 we were on the DES MOINES. While we were still fresh we spent the first two hours hauling the gear up from the ship's office on the second deck down the gangway into the truck. The haul was considerable and valuable. It included interior and exterior 1MC Speakers, WWII steel battle lanterns, compartment fans, old style sound powered telephone headsets and jack boxes, two target bearing indicators, several battle helmets and liners, blue-gray kapok life jackets to replace the ones we burned up last winter, vent diffusers, mess trays, a lot of spare parts for the GM 278A engines, two portable examination tables for the battle dressing stations, and two of the old style typewriter desks. And that is just a partial listing.



Guide Joe Burke tours the ship with Sisters from the Convent of the Daughters of Mary, Mother of Our Savior.

Once we got the truck loaded we spent the rest of the day looking for items we had overlooked. I took a thorough tour of the ship and found five things.

They were the brass bar for the chart table, replacement seats from the 3" gun mounts, lifeline turnbuckles, some old copies of "Notice to Mariners," and a chart table light. The one thing I couldn't find was any of the old magazine temperature thermometers, so if any of you beat me to them, how about sparing a couple for an old friend. Late afternoon, I noted a couple dozen lifelines stowed in a rack on the main deck. Normally, removing lifelines is absolutely verboten, as a safety violation. It would have been impossible to get them and the shore power cables that lay on top of them. However, with a pair of cable cutters or a sawzall, all the turnbuckles were there for the taking.

In desperation I cut a deal with Chris Nardi and Brown Beezer of the Battleship MASSACHUSETTS. If they'd loan Stan their battery-powered sawzall to cut off some turnbuckles, I in turn would give them my precious body for an hour to help load their truck. Considering they had three guys and a 24' truck to fill, they accepted my offer. So while Stan cut, I hauled. After an hour and a half of loading they agreed that my debt had been paid. I'm also indebted to Ed Zajkowski and Greg Krawczyk who went back the following week to get a few more lifeline fittings.

It's been a long time since I used the word magnificent to describe a ship, but there is no other word for DES MOINES. She was a reminder of a time in which sailors expressed their pride in their ships and their Navy in a way that is different from today's Navy. Spaces like pump and compressor rooms, the steering engine rooms, the plotting rooms, CIC, and the gun mount were maintained to standards you could only call "Museum quality." They were immaculate. The weaponry, compartmentation, and the way things had been mothballed all said one thing, "This ship had been built to fight." To strip such a ship seemed like a criminal act. It's heartbreaking to think that in a few months she will be gone. Having seen her, I realize how important it is for our last surviving heavy cruiser memorial, the USS SALEM CA-139, to survive and prosper.

My understanding is that the Navy is allowing the DES MOINES former crewmembers association to be present on the pier when she is towed out for the last time. I think all of our sentiments were echoed by Barry Witte who emailed the former crewmembers: **"Speaking on behalf of the SLATER's restoration crew, please share with your crew the fact that parts of DES MOINES will live on indefinitely on the USS SLATER and the other museum ships.** In particular, two desks from the commissary office were obtained. These will be cleaned up and installed in our ship's office. Any of your crew who may be sentimental about fire hoses will be pleased to know that we removed about 20 of the 1.5 inch white canvas hoses, all of which will be displayed to the public on Slater. The Philly folks were indeed watchful on what we took, even though we all know the breaker's torch awaits. I do not know how they will handle the truly unique items.



The local falcon knows a good perch when he sees it!



One final thought: When you see the ship, you will notice that the forward, uppermost main battery director is positioned 45 degrees to port. I did this. I was amazed that after all these years of inactivity, the manual train mechanism was free to turn. It is an intentional, symbolic "eyes left" gesture awaiting your crew as they stand on the pier. Your ship will be looking back at you." See you next month!