

SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
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Boy, it's great to have friends. The folks at the Port who give us the pier space all winter, the volunteers who have worked in the cold all winter, all the winter fund donors, and the "Kid" who plows the parking lot. On Wednesday, February 14th, we got the first big snow. Happy Valentines Day. Our normal procedure is that if Albany Schools are closed, we're closed. I came in that Thursday to try and figure out how I was going to get the parking lot dug out. You can't imagine the relief I felt when I got to the gate and there was the giant front-end loader from **Gary Grimmel's** scrap yard clearing out an access for the cars and parking space. I shoveled the gate open by hand, drove in, and climbed up on the loader to offer my profuse thanks to the "kid" who was driving it. It still took another forty-five minutes to dig my way across the gangway and up the starboard side to get inside the ship. Friday, I went over to the office to thank them and drop off some newsletters. I found out that my benefactor on the huge front-end loader is named **David Jeffers**. The only time I see this guy is when we're buried in snow. Remind me I need to give him a hat and sweatshirt.



Barry Witte clears away some of the gift left by the latest winter storm.



While Doug Tanner is below preparing a hot breakfast for the crew.

February is a weird month. Some days, this place bustles with activity and volunteers are tripping over each other. All the work described last month continues unabated. Today, a Monday, we have 11 guys chipping, cutting and working on machinery. Saturday we had twenty. It's amazing how fast the four months of winter go by, and how quickly opening day is coming. Boy, this place is torn apart. Boy, we've got a lot of work to do. Am I worried? We always seem to get through it. But then there are days when it is very quiet and Erik Collin and I have the ship to ourselves. Days like that I feel like we'll never be ready to open. Nothing to report. I've said it all before. Moored as before, starboard side to, to the old lumber dock in Rensselaer. Eight lines doubled, with four wires out. Plant is cold iron, taking all services from shore, telephone and electric. No provision for running water until spring comes. Nothing is on fire and there's no water coming in. Days like that there's too much time to think. Board member **Paul Czesak** thinks I need more time to think. I think I have too much time to think. This is the first year I haven't picked up a needle gun all winter. I used to give myself the luxury of one day a week of paint chipping so at the end of the week I'd have the satisfaction of actually accomplishing something that was concrete and tangible. But after nine years I've gotten so I actually believe that if I'm chipping paint, I'm not doing my job, however you define it. And I start to think.



Joe Breyer prepares to weld a new cable bracket to the washroom overhead.



Further aft, new cable goes in to replace worn and corroded cable.

I recently attended a conference on generational differences. I learned to put a label on everyone. As a "Boomer" taking care of a ship that was built and manned by "Traditionalists," I have to figure out what will make "Generation X" and "Generation Y" appreciate and want to care for this ship as much as we do. The future of the Destroyer Escort Historical Museum and the SLATER isn't with the old sailors. It's with their kids and grandkids, and a lot of people who may not know what Pearl Harbor was about or even who the Nazis were and what evil Hitler represented. So I got to thinking we have to start from scratch. The future of the SLATER is winning the hearts and minds of the Albany community.



RPI Midshipmen are spending a lot of time cleaning sludge out of the bilge pump system.



New stuffing tube, old stuffing tube. Note the difference!

Maybe the story should go like this. Today we are fighting the War on Terror. Sixty years ago, the terrorists were Fascists, who at least had the courtesy to wear uniforms, so we could tell them from the rest of the world. But they were every bit as ruthless as today's terrorist, bent on enslaving the whole world and exterminating everyone they felt was their inferior. Remember a tragedy called the "Holocaust?" The only way to fight these terrorists was to send our army across the ocean to do battle with them. And a whole generation understood that need, and interrupted their lives for the greater good to defeat this enemy. That enemy had submarines. Lots of them. And they weren't afraid to use them to sink our ships carrying our soldiers and supplies. So to protect those ships, we built destroyer escorts to sink the submarines. And it worked. We defeated their submarines so our Army could go overseas and end the terror. And we did. For a while. And that was the war that was called World War II. This ship exists today to honor the men and women who built and sailed these ships, and to help teach us the lessons that should have been learned from that war so we don't have to repeat them. And so here we are today. It takes money to preserve this ship, but preserving this ship is a way of honoring your parents or grandparents. Think about it.



While Tim Benner cuts some wasted metal out of the aft head...



Shawn Bevins welds in a new piece in the midship cross passageway.

Time is the most precious variable. One of the disadvantages of not having a boss standing over you telling you what to do is trying to figure out what the most productive use of time is. At the most basic level, the answer is "Find money for the ship." The how part gets a little more complicated. There are endless approaches to take, most of which won't bear any fruit. Like buying lotto tickets. I start the day thinking, "Which of the thousand fundraising approaches that probably won't work should I spend my valuable time on today." That money can come from many sources. We have a joke around here about volunteers. One in fifty comes through. For fifty people who visit the ship and say, "This looks great. I want to volunteer!" one actually pans out. With private fund raising, I think it's about one in two hundred and fifty. **The DE sailors have been wonderful about supporting the SLATER.** If you're reading this, you probably have been wonderful. It's convincing the rest of the world that takes a little more effort.



Doug Tanner checks the fit of the aft passageway starboard side patch.

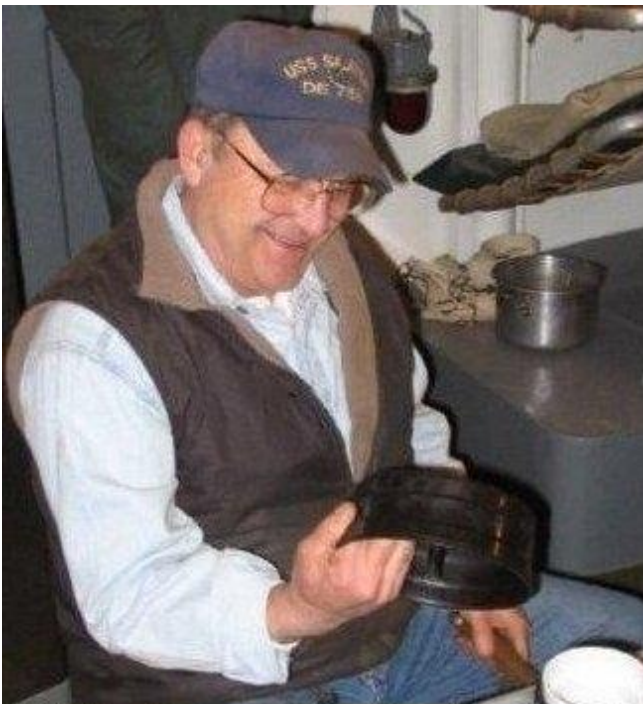


Erik Collin sits next to his CIC automation contraption.

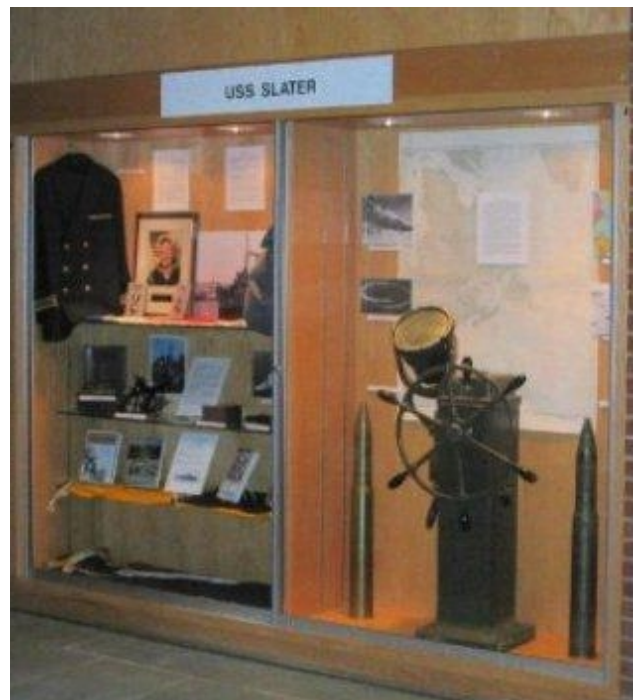
Don Montrym is one of our most special volunteers. Don was a Navy ET and served in naval aviation during the Korean War, 48-52. Don lives in Massachusetts and has never picked up a chipping hammer, but **Don** has taken on the task of researching private foundations as his personal mission. He is one of our advisors and he keeps me focused on fundraising. Don's brother served on the SWEARER DE186, and Don has made it his personal mission to help us raise funds. As part of his effort, he has latched on to two ideas. First, look towards all the corporations that have supported other naval historical fundraising efforts. Focus on them. His second idea is that we have to find a pitch that will appeal to a "Generation X" corporate executive. Not to slight the war in the Pacific, but Don sees the Battle of the Atlantic as our strongest pitch. He sees it as a forgotten battle. While the lessons of events such as Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima and D-Day remain strong in America's public psyche, Don feels the lessons of the Battle of the Atlantic are largely being forgotten. This struggle against the Nazi U-boat effort to starve England was the longest running battle of World War II. This campaign lasted 68 months and saw 2,742 Allied ships sunk resulting in over 30,000 casualties. This vessel is one of the few reminders of the U-boat war, the campaign of which Winston Churchill said, "Everything elsewhere on land, sea and air depended ultimately on the outcome of this battle." In keeping this history alive, students of all ages leave SLATER with a better appreciation of the sacrifices of the "Greatest Generation" and the technology they used to keep us free.

Don does a lot more than research grant possibilities. Did I mention I hate telephones and that nothing is more distasteful to me than cold calling a prospective client? It amazes me that I've been allowed to progress this far in this business with these limitations. Why am I telling you this? Because Don loves telephones. He goes way beyond being another "Idea man." Don does the research and then he calls the prospects for us. Inevitably, he gets the "Well, your museum doesn't really fall within our education guidelines" speech. But Don doesn't give up. He patiently explains our mission and how much we have accomplished with so little. And they start to warm up a little. And the conversation usually ends with, "Well, send me your proposal and I'll get it into the right hands."

So we're in the process of grinding out two to four corporate proposals a week. We are asking for pledges from \$25,000 to \$100,000 towards our goal. When we have the required pledges to commence work we will ask donors to make the actual contribution and we will provide an accounting of how the funds were spent when the work is complete. As part of this effort, we're writing two magazine articles. Working with a former GE manager **Bill Hickman** who lives in Virginia, we are developing an article about how important GE was to DE production, and how important GE volunteers have been to the SLATER. Hope I'm not being too blatant here, but maybe this will warm them to our efforts. Hopefully another article will be focused on the marine industry and the surplus DE parts Gibson and Cushman Dredging donated to the ship.



While Gus Negus is a pretty good engineer, he is an excellent coffee machine basket cleaner!



The "Battle of the Atlantic" display put together by Eric Rivet.

This goes hand and hand with our continued search for Government grants. Once again, we are working with Mayor Jennings and have applied to our local Congressman Mike McNulty for a \$950,000 grant towards dry-docking. Once again, over the course of the year, we will have four major grant opportunities, the Department of the Interior's Save America's Treasures Program, The NYS Department of State's Transportation Enhancement Program, The NYS Office of Parks Recreation and Historic Preservation grants, and The NYS Department of State's Waterfront Development Grants. We will make applications for all these funds, as we have ever since the SLATER came to Albany. We are also working with Mayor Jennings to develop a local fundraising effort to build the permanent mooring facility here in Albany. Maybe this can be the year things finally come together. The big money continues to elude us. On the small scale we do pretty well. We have in the works a Tin Can Sailors project grant to bring in a contractor to scaffold the mast so we can install the SL radar antenna on the platform that Doug Tanner and Clark Farnsworth fabricated. As long as we have to scaffold the mast, it makes all the sense in the world to paint it at the same time. We asked the DESA Board for a \$5,000 grant to paint the mast and they replied "Affirmative." I suspect we'll be crossing the river with a shrouded mast in the spring, but it should look great for the DESA convention in September.

While the volunteers contend with the cold to get the ship ready for opening day, and the Board works to find that "Pot of Gold at the end of the rainbow," our education department continues to fulfill our primary mission of teaching the public what DEs were all about. Eric Rivet and Tom McLaughlin visited Eagle Point Elementary School in Albany on Wednesday, 7 February. They presented an outreach program on communication at sea to



Gun 3 (the salute firing gun) sits warm and snug in its winter blanket.

Lynn Willigan's 5th graders. The program focused on signal flags, semaphore and Morse code, and how sailors during World War II used them to communicate. Eric demonstrated each type of signal and explained their history to the class. Tom then told the students about his experiences on the USS SALEM CA139 and USS MIDWAY CVB41 during the 1950s. This is the second time the SLATER's education staff has visited Mrs. Willigan's class, and we hope to make it an annual event. In other education news, Paul Czesak secured two display cases at the Guilderland Public Library to house a display about the SLATER. Paul and Eric have put together a small exhibit on the SLATER and the Battle of the Atlantic using artifacts from the ship. The display will be up throughout the month of March. The time has come once again for refreshing our guides on the finer points of leading people through the SLATER and training new seasonal guides for the job. Refresher training will be held mid-March, and if you know anyone who's interested in spending their summers sweating on a steel ship, send them Eric's way.

As many of you know, DEHM Board Member Robert Cross presently is working on his new book telling the stories of sailors who served aboard destroyer escorts in World War II. You may recall that Bob, a trustee of the USS SLATER, also authored the presidential biography, *Sailor in the White House: the Seafaring Life of FDR*, published by the Naval Institute Press in fall 2003. Over the last two years, Bob has been collecting war diaries, photographs, and other memorabilia, and also has been interviewing DE veterans for the new book. He has begun writing some early chapters while he continues interviewing veterans. If you already have sent material to Bob, he will be contacting you. If you haven't sent him your recollections, there is still time. If you want to talk to Bob and be part of his new book, please send your information and telephone number to Robert F. Cross, Destroyer Escort Historical Museum, P.O. Box 1926, Albany, New York 12201. Bob also plans to be available during the DESA convention next September to meet with as many of you as possible who may wish to speak personally with him. In the meantime, drop Bob a line so you can be included in the book. Do it today!

Finally, we are considering opening the ship to anyone who wants to work and sleep aboard the last weekend in March, March 23-26. This will be the big clean up. We would hope that this would develop into a late March field day, to help get the ship ready for opening and do all the last minute work. It will be rough. You'll be sharing the same Port-a-John the crew has used all winter. The usual rules apply; long hours, hard work and no pay. If you're interested, call us at 518-431-1943 or drop me an email at tim@usslater.org. We'll see if there is enough interest to put this together.

See you next month.