

SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
By Timothy C. Rizzuto, Executive Director

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

Phone (518) 431-1943, Fax 432-1123
Vol. 12 No. 3, March 2009

I have called Ed Zajkowski my friend since 1978. I first met Ed when I became the caretaker of the USS JOSEPH P. KENNEDY JR. Ed was a charter member of the Tin Can Sailors that had been founded the previous year and was home ported on the KENNEDY. Ed had served as an electrician's mate on the USS KEPLER DD765 back during the early sixties, and since KEPLER was a GEARING and KENNEDY was a GEARING, he had a true affinity for the ship. He was working as a machinist with Philadelphia Electric Company at the time and regularly traveled over seven hours each way to become one of our most dedicated volunteers.

My friend Ed Zajkowski is a true destroyer aficionado, and has become one of the world's authorities on destroyer history. Back in the seventies, when all the truly historic Cans were being disposed of for scrap or targets, in Philadelphia Ed and his compatriots were regularly given access to the old ships in the inactive basin and were hauling off loads of priceless World War II era documentation, which would have been lost forever if not for their efforts. Now, if I need some technical documentation for a CANNON class DE that we don't have, the first call I make is to my friend Ed Zajkowski, who can usually come up with it in a couple of days. From the blueprint for the SL radar platform to how to handle a whaleboat, my friend Ed has it squirreled away somewhere.



My friend Ed Zajkowski.

Following my five years on the KENNEDY, my friend Ed Zajkowski and I kept in touch. He came to Baton Rouge to volunteer on the KIDD and provided a lot of technical support for that project. When I came to Albany, my friend Ed began making regular trips here. He is a familiar participant at our field day weeks, usually tackling some of the toughest jobs, from scaling the shaft alleys to pulling ventilation fans.

My friend Ed Zajkowski is now retired from Philadelphia Electric. Though he is occasionally called back to supervise diesel overhauls, he has a lot of time on his hands. Maybe too much time. My friend Ed recently called

me up, and in the course of our conversation and planning for the spring field day week, Ed mentioned SLATER SIGNALS. My friend Ed said, "Hey, I was at your website and saw where you have all ten year's worth of SLATER SIGNALS posted online. Have you ever sat down and read through all the issues in one sitting?" I replied something to the effect that no, I don't have that kind of time. My friend Ed replied, "Well you should some time. When you read them all, they're really repetitious and boring."

When I regained my composure, my thoughts went back to my bible, Arnold Lott's "Brave Ship Brave Men." In it, Lott wrote, "The drills over, men went about their routine work again; cleaning guns, repairing telephones, chipping rust, painting--the hundred monotonous bits of work which would be done a thousand times over before they left the ship for some other of the Navy's ten thousand ships where they would do it all over again. There was probably nothing a man could do on a ship which needed doing only once, unless it was jumping overboard on some dark night." In my case, substitute "pushed" for "jumping."

The life of a sailor is repetition. That's a sign that everything is going smoothly. After twelve years, it is not easy to try to write it up every month and make it sound fresh, but we do our best. Put the camels in, take the camels out; move the ship to Albany, move the ship to Rensselaer; lower the whaleboat, raise the whaleboat; fire a gun salute, clean the gun after the salute; freeze in the winter, bake in the summer. After a while the years start to blend together. For the average swabbie, it was two years on a ship. Five years was homesteading. For some of us on SLATER, we're starting our twelfth year together. Even in the real Navy, with ships that actually move with their own engines, it's repetitious. I mean, even Med cruises get repetitious. Do two or three and they all start to blend together. Four on, eight off. Unreps, special sea detail, mail call, chow call, restricted men's muster. After a while even the beaches and the bars blend together. You'd rather not have the excitement of the occasional collision or grounding.

Repetition is good. How do I know this? Let's examine some occurrences that were not repetitious. The fire for example. That certainly broke up the monotony and **made for exciting reading, but I could certainly live without another fire.** Or **Larry Williams's** heart attack during the spring 2002 move. It made for interesting reading, but I, for one, and I know Larry, for two, could do without that kind of drama. I guess the only way for me to make the SIGNALS more interesting is to create more human drama among the crew. Stir up some more hate and discontent. Then I have something to write about. Wait a minute. They say I've been doing that for years. I'll just have to try and get more creative.



Camels come out, camels go in.



Another boring day assembling the mooring.



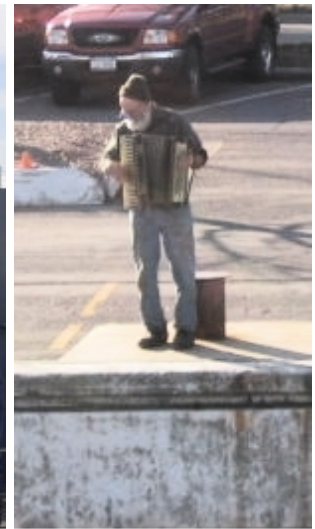
Followed by another routine move day, trip number 23.

So here we are. Not much to write about that hasn't happened before. Going into season twelve. We haven't gone into season twelve before. On Monday, March 23rd we put all the camels in and reassembled the mooring. Nobody got killed or maimed, so there's no big news there. As always, I owe a great debt of gratitude to Tommy Moore for his work on the camels, Doug Tanner for his control of the job, Tim Benner for showing up, and the whole crew for their participation in a relatively thankless task on what turned out to be a perfect day. The following Wednesday we moved the ship. Didn't hit anything and nobody had a heart attack, so no big deal there. It's just nice that we were able to get across earlier in the season than usual. See, normally I'd take two pages to write about that, but I certainly don't want to bore anybody. See how easy my friend Ed is making this for me?

I would be remiss if I did not thank Chris Gardella and our friends from Port Albany Ventures who once again donated the towing services for the move. The high tide was late in the day, so we didn't get away from the wall in Rensselaer until 1630. The crossing took about thirty minutes. The mooring went great, the gangway lineup was perfect and we had her secure by 1930. The unique part of the arrival was having Tommy Moore meeting us on the pier playing his new used accordion. Surprisingly, he's pretty good. Other than that, it was all routine.



The crew on move day.



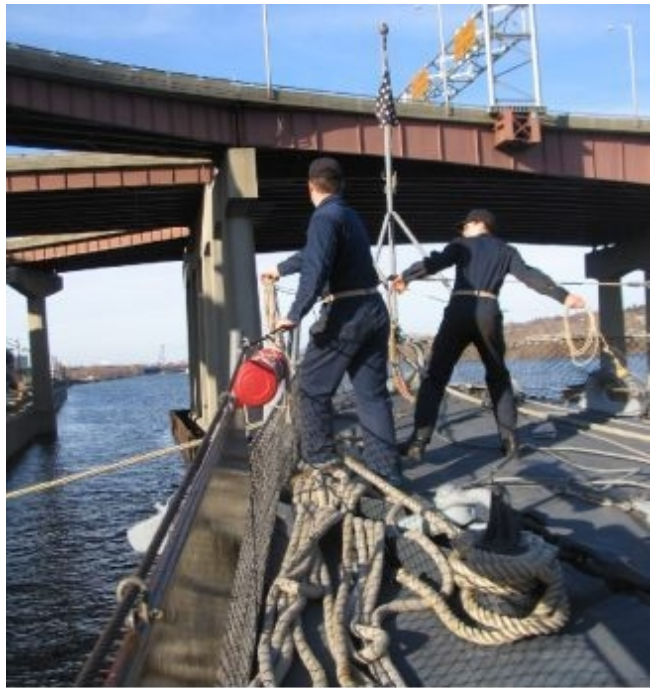
Tommy Moore and his accordion.

Once nice note about the move that really wasn't routine was the contribution of electrician **George Gollas**. The week prior to the move, the emergency diesel generator had been acting up. Despite replacing the cooling input, the engine was still overheating. **Gus Negus, Karl Herchenroder, Mike and Gary Lubrano** put in long hours to get the engine back on line. But on move day there were no experienced electricians aboard who had been checked out on shifting the load, so it looked like all that mechanics' work would be for naught. We'd have a nice sounding engine and diesel exhaust, but the ship would be cold and dark. Here's where George stepped up to the plate. He reviewed all the written instructions on shifting the load, picked the brains of all the engineers for their knowledge, and had several phone conversations with **Barry Witte** while Barry was between classes at school. At 1615 when the tugs were in sight, George cut the shore tie and successfully shifted the load. The emergency diesel performed perfectly for the trip across, but that's just more boring repetitious news. And once again, Barry was waiting on the Albany side and the electricians tried to get the shore tie made up before the mooring lines went across. There is such a thing as being too efficient.





Nelson Potter throws a heaving line at the ship...



... and the Midshipmen throw one back.

One other aspect of the move worthy of note was the line handling assignments. Erik Collin handled the fo'c's'le and Doug Tanner handled the fantail. All volunteers under forty went forward. All volunteers over forty went aft. In other words, Erik had youth and Doug had experience. In other words, Erik had a crew that pretty much did it his way; Doug had a crew with a lot of opinions. We'll leave it at that.



Letting go forward.



Navy Lt. Dave Latta assisting on the fo'c's'le.

The most critical aspect of getting the ship ready for opening day is the clean up. After four months of continuous restoration work, this can be a daunting task but Erik Collin is up to the challenge. He is leading the crew in the process of vacuuming, swabbing, dusting piping and duct work, painting decks and touching up ladder wells to make sure the public sees the SLATER at her best. "Boats" Haggart and Nelson Potter have their deck work cut out for them. Safety netting has to be installed on the gangways, lines have to be stowed, snaking has to be repaired, chaffing gear rigged, rat guards installed and cables stowed. Even that is now routine.



Paul Guarnieri by the fathometer he restored in CIC.



And I got my office repainted this winter.

So what's the crew doing? The same old dull routine. After he got the ship tied up and the fresh water system reactivated, **Doug Tanner** took his shipfitters, **Chuck Teal**, **Tim Benner**, **Clark Farnsworth** and **Super Dave Mardon** back down to the forward head, where they are continuing to work on the forward septic tank and grinder pump. **Stan Murawski**, **Don Miller** and **Earl Herchenroder** are continuing their work insulating the forward crew's head. All those previously mentioned engineers, with **Gene Jackey** and **Bill Siebert**, have been working away at the repairs to the walkways in B-3. **Chris Fedden** and **Rocky** have been chipping on the main motors in B-4, and Rocky did a beautiful restoration job on the quarterdeck log desk. **Erik**, **Glenn Harrison** and **Paul Guarnieri** have been doing some beautiful restoration in the CIC. And there has been a change in the reefer space as **Gary Sheedy** has been listening to ABBA instead of Elvis.

Again, I want to put out a reminder about the Field Day Schedule for 2009. The HUSE Crew will be aboard April 26th to May 1 and they have space available. If you'd like to "Turn to" with them, contact **George Amandola** at Gamand@aol.com. The Michigan crew is full up this spring. If you plan further ahead than I do, the dates for the fall field day week will be September 27th to October 2nd, so be thinking about that. If you're interested in the fall, contact me directly at tim@usslater.org. The big projects will be finishing the forty millimeter gun mounts, repainting the depth charge projectors and roller loaders, and the continuing restoration of the aft machinery spaces.

The tour guides are just about to settle into their old routine, too. Our opening day is scheduled for Saturday, April 4th, the earliest opening we've had in years. The regular volunteer guides are getting ready to start their routine tours. The new student guides, **Ron Bailey**, **Peter Woznack**, **Heather Maron** and **Natasha Herchenroder** are working hard to learn the tour route so that they, too, can settle into the routine.



Super Dave Mardon and Tim Benner working in the passageway outside the forward head.



Eric Rivet and the new tour guide crew.

We have a new Ship's Store manager this year, Katie Kuhl. She started working last year on a part-time basis to take over **Pat Perrella's** role as collections manager. This year she will split her time between the Ship's Store and the museum. Any readers who are thinking of donating objects to the museum be warned: talk to Katie first! Finally, **Eric Rivet** is also settling into the new season's routine with his favorite project: updating the donor boards. It involves removing all the old signs, making spaces for new ones, and then reattaching all the signs in alphabetical order, all while bent over a table for several hours. Fortunately, he's still a young man, so I'll probably be retired and gone before his back hurts him enough to come complaining to me.

Reading about the death of member and former DECO member Alvin P. Chester motivated me to sit down and read his memoir "A Sailor's Odyssey." Though I had never met him, over the years of my association with SLATER I had talked to him a couple of times. A graduate of New York State Maritime College in 1936, Al Chester sailed merchant ships through the late thirties and went on to command EDWARD C. DALY and COFER in World War II. In reading his book, I regret that I did not find the time to know him better. His closing paragraph is a real vindication of everything we are working to accomplish on SLATER. Al wrote, "Although I have strong feelings for every ship in which I served and for my shipmates, something special about the inanimate piece of steel called a destroyer escort still captures me. So small, so trim but deadly, it sailed in many seas. It was an experience few had in the past or will have in the future. For this ethereal adventure I am most grateful. I realize now it was the climax of my life."

I wish I had known Alvin Chester better.

See you next month