

SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers

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Jerry Jones and Mike Wyles on watch in the radio room.

The month of June started with the radio gang committing an act of treason; at least it would have been an act of treason if it were still 1944. On Saturday June 2nd as part of annual Historic Ships Radio Weekend, Jerry Jones, Mike Wyles and Joe Breyer manned our radio room. Over the course of the weekend, they made contact with 88 stations, four on CW and the rest on single side band voice. The part that would have been treasonous in a different time is that they made contact with a station in Germany! Five other ships were contacted, including the submarine LING in Hackensack, NJ, the destroyer JOSEPH P. KENNEDY JR. in Fall River, LST-325 in Evansville IN, and battleship USS NEW JERSEY in Camden. This was probably the best radio event for SLATER so far in that they worked half the states in the lower 48 and also stations in Ontario, Nova Scotia and Germany.

A local ham, Jack Norrey KC2ZDC, asked on the air if we needed help and then drove down to the ship to help with the pile-ups and brought soda and cookies. We are still using modern transmitters, but also using vintage receivers and antennas. We hope to have the TBL on line next year. Several stations thanked us for putting the ship on the air and "GO NAVY" was heard several times. Some of the hams didn't know there was a ship in Albany and would visit the ship. Finally, they found out that the left over pasta and meatballs from the previous overnight were still great after a week in the galley fridge.

Regarding the TBL, progress has been slow. We have the new armature aboard, but don't have the funds to have it professionally checked out and reinsulated. Jerry is on his own, and I think he's scared to death that if something goes wrong with this precious piece of gear, he'll never be able to forgive himself. He has slowly baked the moisture out of the unit with an electric light bulb and is now working to obtain Glyptol to recoat the armature. In the meantime, Tom Horsfall out in California has located a pristine RBC-1 radio receiver for us. We have one aboard that is postwar gray that came off the cruiser DES MOINES, but always the purist, Tom located a black unit that is more typical of what SLATER would have carried and is in much better condition. Tom is presently working on the unit to bring it up to his exacting standards.



The next big event was on Tuesday June 5th. Trooper **Tim Hard** of the New York State Police had arranged to bring thirty State Police Divers down to SLATER for an annual exercise in which the divers suited up and went into the water in pairs to try and locate objects under the hull. The group spent the whole day aboard and we even managed to run sixty school kids through the ship during the exercise. It's always great to see the ship used for this kind of training. It had real benefit to us because as part of the exercise, the divers brought up both parts of the extension ladder we lost overboard last fall, and the grappling hook we lost trying to get the extension ladder. Trooper Hard was so grateful that he made the mistake of saying, "If you guys ever lose anything else overboard, don't hesitate to call us." Don't forget that offer.

New York State Police divers recovered "Benner's Ladder" as part of their training exercise.



...and our dignitaries during the DE Day commemoration.

Our fifteenth annual DE Day commemoration was observed on a beautiful Saturday, June 16. We had a special guest of honor in the form of DE veteran **Ernie Blanchett**. We found Ernie quite by accident. The previous week, during the news coverage of the Troy Flag Day Parade, they interviewed their guest of honor, the oldest World War II veteran in Rensselaer, Ernie Blanchett. He turned ninety-nine years old this June. As part of the TV interview he held up a picture of his ship, and it was **Barry Witte** who immediately identified it as a destroyer escort. We'd never had contact with Ernie so, working through the Rensselaer County Executive **Kathy Jimino's** office, we found Ernie and invited him to our DE Day commemoration. Kathy offered to pick Ernie up, but Ernie said he'd drive his own car because he wanted to bring his nephew down. Turns out Ernie served as the barber aboard USS BIVIN DE536, and he was carrying the picture of his beloved ship with him. We won't lose track of Ernie now.



The ceremony itself went off beautifully. Acting CAPDESA president **Bill Scharoun** organized a great turnout of DE sailors to lay the carnations for each of the DEs that was lost in U.S. service, and all the good men that went down with them. Our regular crew performed their duties to perfection, with **Steve Long** acting as master of ceremonies, **Jerry Jones** handling the sound, and **John Thompson** resplendent in his Marine dress blues tolling the bell. My only concern was the color guard when it looked like a majority said they'd be out of town. But the pull of DE Day turned out to be too great and all the "I can't make it" turned into bodies in dress whites, so we had more than enough people. **Bill Kraus** was aboard to read Governor Cuomo's proclamation, and we were happily surprised by the arrival of Congressman **Paul Tonko**, as well as the expected dignitaries, Albany County Executive **Dan McCoy**, Rensselaer County Executive **Kathy Jimino** and former Albany County Executive **Mike Breslin**. It was a moving event when the names of the ships were read, the bell tolled, and each carnation dropped overboard with a salute followed by **Steve Stella's** rendition of TAPS and the Navy Hymn. We will not forget our lost shipmates.



Erik Collin's gun crew on DE Day.



Walt Stuart caught the best shot of gunfire we've ever had.

Tour guides have been busy. Paul Guarnieri, Vince Knuth, Jamie Brinkman, Nic Soares, Stretch McLaughlin, Grant Hack and Matt Wong are all assisting with overnights, which have been almost every weekend since the season started, even as we reached the warmer temperatures. We're slowing down for the summer but are already booking for the fall. We have a new volunteer intern, **Joey Price**, joining us; he attends Union College and is from Maryland, originally. He is a public history student and doing this internship for credit, giving tours and helping with research. Jim Kuba had an interesting experience. Before starting tours, Jim and his wife walk a three-mile loop through Albany. They recently ran across Downtown Albany BID's 2012 Sculpture in the Streets exhibit.- We were pleasantly surprised that SLATER was included on one of the clogs. This Dutch shoe was by local artist Tony Iadicicco, who wrote "...We wanted this piece to carry education, hence paralleling the concept from our Dutch history to our beautiful Hudson River depicted through a painting of the USS Slater."



Thursday tour guides Joe Burke and Bill Scharoun.



Jim Kuba found SLATER was featured in the Downtown Albany BID's "Sole of Albany."

We had a huge Father's Day, one of the busiest days of the year. Tour guide and former Coastie **Grant Hack** said he was amazed at the accolades the visitors paid the condition of the ship. It was kind of special for me. **Frank Lasch's** daughter **Kathleen McNamee** contacted me about the efforts to make the day special for her father. As part of his special day they wanted to bring him down to the ship he has given so much to so we could have coffee together. I always felt that one of the most significant contributions I made to the project was not scaring Frank away on that first day he came aboard. After **Bill Bantz** introduced us, I took Frank down to the port for a tour though the "Rust bucket." A lesser man would have turned and run, but Frank signed on for the long haul and was there when we needed leadership the most. My own Dad is long gone so I was happy to have Frank as a surrogate on Father's Day and honored to be a part of his day.



**You can tell by the shiny head that it's Ben-
ner welding a patch on the flying bridge.**

Up above, on the flying bridge, after fifteen years, Doug Tanner and Tim Benner are making a serious attempt to stop the leaks that ultimately end up in my office. Of course, the problem has turned out to be wasted stuffing tubes that were rotted out at the base. The correct fix is removing and replacing a whole lot of armored cable, cutting out the wasted stuffing tubes and welding in new ones, and then running new cable through them and rewiring everything, including some systems that have 25 pairs of cable. The cheap and easy solution is to pour concrete around the base of the stuffing tubes to seal the holes, which was done aboard SLATER during the last years of her service life. In the words of naval architect **Stretch Morss**, “Concrete is just a big hard sponge,” the result being that now the deck is rotted out around the tubes. Of course the correct fix there is to crop and renew the deck. The problem is that this deck just happens to be the overhead of the pilothouse, the most popular spot on the tour route. That kind of negates cropping and renewing the steel in the middle of summer, and you really can’t work up there in the winter. So, this is one of the few spots I’ve authorized the use of doubler plates.

Barry Witte and Gary Sheedy are going through and identifying the most critical cables for replacements. For some of the slightly damaged larger stuffing tubes that contain the most complex wiring such as fire control gear and the gyro repeater, we’ll probably use liquid steel. But about twelve stuffing tubes will be cut out completely and replaced on top of a doubler plate. What is it they say, that the most basic step in ship preservation is to keep water from coming in and dripping on the executive director’s computer. By the way, Gary recently retired, but like so many, says he should have kept working because he had more time to do what he wanted when he had a job.



The restoration work continues as Barry Witte traces electrical cable in the lower level of B-4.

One Saturday when all the regular shipfitters were AWOL, Colonie High Graduates Eric Altman and Mike FitzGibbon (both now engineering students in college) stood in and cropped a particularly difficult piece of wasted metal low on the bulkhead separating the sonar shack from the flying bridge. With that task complete, they fabricated a replacement plate of metal and began to weld it in. When Tim Benner showed up the following Monday, he asked if Tanner had come in after all. Chris Dennis has also been back welding for us, and Chris even talked his father into pressure washing the observation deck. Barry also used his students to move a low pressure air compressor from the gun shack on the 01 level to the pump room on the second deck. Maybe the next generation holds hope yet.

We've got a new crop of four engineers from the Nuclear Power Training Center, MM Chou, Cassidy Overby, Alex Garcia and Nate Gerrish. They've now started pulling deck plates and scaling the bilge section in B-4 in front of and under the main motors. They have a month before their classes start, so we're hoping to get that strake cleaned and preserved before they move on. I owe a special debt of gratitude to **Ron Prest, Paul Guarnieri, Don Miller** and **Earl Herchenroder**. These four gentlemen agreed to go into the shaft alleys to put on the final coat of Corroseal. **Ron Prest** DE1035 came over for DE Day and made the mistake of bringing his work clothes. Ron is relatively young and agile by our standards, and he agreed to go down to the port shaft alley and put on the second coat of Corroseal, with **Paul Guarnieri** who is one of the most agreeable guys in the crew. **Bob Scian** played runner and safety man for them.



Don Miller and Earl Herchenroder got the "Best Effort Award" for their work in the shaft alley.



Nelson Potter and Chris Fedden rigging the new cargo net over the side.



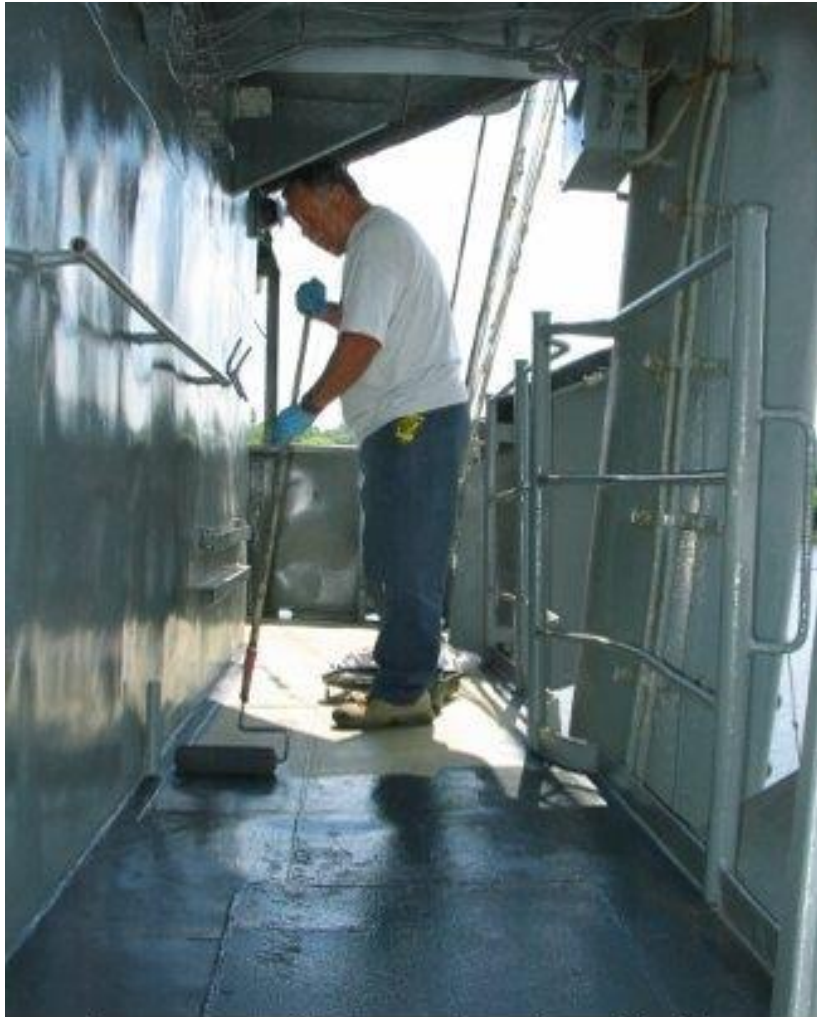
Barry Witte and his crew relocate the forward LP Air Compressor.

That left second-coating the starboard shaft alley. By that time all I had left were senior citizens, so I was really feeling guilty about whom I could send down there. I don't remember how this all transpired, but since **Earl Herchenroder** was ex-Army and doesn't know any better, he probably agreed to go first. That left his running mate **Don Miller**, a former storekeeper who usually does know better, with no choice but to follow his buddy into the bowels of the beast. I think **Don Shattuck** kept an eye on them and between them, they wrapped up that project.



The new depth charge release mechanism fabricated by George Christophersen.

We've got an awesome project going on over in Connecticut. Tin Can Sailor **George Christophersen** is an old school machinist who served aboard BEATTY DD756. He and his son own a machine shop and he came to us in the spring looking for a project that would make a significant contribution to the ship. **Erik Collin** got the idea of having him fabricate all the release gear for the port depth charge rack that **Hal Hatfield** fabricated in 2008. Erik provided George with all the plans, and George went to work fabricating all the parts. Many of the pieces were originally castings, and George didn't have that capability, so he made up the replicas to be welded together. That got **Barry Witte** involved, who agreed to weld up all the pieces with his students at South Colonie High School. I've seen the pieces as they were on their way back to Connecticut for final machining. I'm in awe of anyone who can take raw stock and turn in into a machined part. But then the crew will be quick to tell you that I'm a liberal arts major with no useful skill.



Walt Stuart rolling out the signal bridge deck.

Bosun Walt Stuart, Bill Wetterau and Erik have been painting decks. They got the main deck painted port and starboard, and also did that touch up on the fantail where the Rensselaer gangway tore up the paint. Bill also brought his daughter **Alyssa** back and they have been sandblasting and restoring electrical box covers in B-4. **Angelo Bracco** has been fabricating more flameproof mattress covers for the bunks aft. **Boats Haggart** and his crew have been replacing lifelines with new turnbuckles from the last trip to the James River. **Nelson Potter** finished his cargo net and we hung it over the side so tourists can see how DEs used to rescue survivors from all those ships that were lost.

With regards to the Hull Preservation Fund, we are holding at about \$750,000. We have identified some additional local potential major donors. The State has also announced the next round of Consolidated Funding Grants which **Heather Maron** has been slaving away on. We have had several good conversations with **John Gallagher** of Tognum America Inc (Formerly MTU Detroit Diesel) regarding shipyard practices, and we've established a working committee of **Tony Esposito, Doug Tanner, Greg Krawczyk** and **Barry Witte**. We're in the process of developing the work package while the fund raising progresses. At this point I don't see moving on the project until the winter of 2013-2014.

Regarding Paul Czesak, our Admiral, was transferred from Ellis Hospital to St. Clair's Hospital on June 28th for some rehabilitation. From talking with him he has trouble walking now, too. Most likely from the drain of the Lyme Disease and all the weakness from the surgeries and dialysis. He still will be doing the dialysis at St. Clair's along with the rehab. He quite tired, but still having good thoughts of getting back on his feet and coming back to do his normal work and interventions. He says, "Hello to everyone."

Finally, every Monday we try to take the whale boat out to exercise it. Larry “The Legend” Williams is usually our boat Coxswain, Ken Kaskoun the bow hook and Gus Negus, Karl Herchenroder and Mike Dingmon the engineers. As part of our authentic practices to keep the boat looking original when it is alongside, we have the New York State registration sticker and numbers on detachable boards that we rig when we get underway. At the end of last Monday’s run, one of our illustrious boat crew who will remain nameless came to me sheepishly holding the port number board and said, “I have bad news about the other board. I dropped it and it’s at the bottom of the river.”



Troopers Steve Posada, Tim Hard, and Al Garcia-Cabrera saved me a lot of time when they rescued the whaleboat registration board.

I began to imagine the nightmare series of hoops I would have to go through with the NYS Motor Vehicle Department to get a replacement registration sticker when I had a revelation; I knew a diver who said, “If you ever drop anything overboard, call me.” I sent an email to Trooper **Tim Hard, and he was down and suited up the next day. I gave him the remaining number board and said, “This is what you’re looking for.” He took it skeptically, went down the accommodation ladder and came back with the pronouncement, “It floats.” That pretty much ruined my day, but since he was suited up he went into the water anyway. Amazingly, it wasn’t a few minutes later he was back with the missing registration board in hand. The one that had been dropped was sheet metal, while the one we had in hand was wood. It’s nice to have friends.**

See you next month