



# SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers

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**Solid ice across the river. No tugs are breaking it up this year.**

**Saturday, 31 January. Before I leave the house, I turn on the computer and log in to check the temperature.**

Remember when we used to look at the outdoor thermometer? Those days are over. It's one degree above zero. I look at the ten-day forecast and Monday night we're supposed to see  $-10^{\circ}$ . With a  $-5^{\circ}$  and a  $-7^{\circ}$  thrown in next week for good measure.

**I look at the date and it's 31 January.**

Time to write SIGNALS. And, as the kids say these days, "I've got nothing." Reminds me of a "Seinfeld" episode I saw a long time ago.

**I pack up my lunch, along with the breakfast fixings, load the car, and head off for the ship. The roads aren't bad.** One accident on a ramp due to black ice. I'm the first one there, so I get to unlock the gate. The lock is frozen. This is what **Erik Collin** deals with most mornings. He keeps a propane torch in his car. I've learned to put my gloves on and hold the lock for a couple minutes. Body heat will thaw it. In the gate, Erik is right behind me. He uses his propane torch to open the lock on the gangway gate. It's cold enough that the furnace is making smoke come out of the stack. That's good news, because it means the heat is working okay. Looks like we're ready to get underway too.

**A quick check of things shows the ship riding well.** Draft marks are fine. Totally iced-in, except the areas around the Kasko circulators, which run 24 hours a day now. The ship has developed a slight list to starboard as a result of ice building up under the stern. She rides that high out of the water. There's a lot of strain on the spring lines leading forward, because of the ice pressure on the bow. Also, the fenders have frozen to the monopiles, and no longer float with the tide. That's adding to the strain.



I don't remember signing up for the Russian front.

The lock on the quarterdeck door isn't frozen. That's a nice surprise. Then it's straight to the galley. The only part of the ship we heat during the winter is forward, and the galley isn't ducted into that system. So I go to the messdecks for a couple gallons of water, put on one pot for cooking, and one pot for cleaning. Erik works his way through the ship, and turns on the electric heaters in the aft machinery spaces and the steering engine room, so those spaces will be warm when the volunteers come in. In an unusual turn of events, Erik puts the coffee on.

Doug Tanner used to be our breakfast cook, but he smartened up and doesn't come in until 0900. Then, for a while Erik was doing blueberry pancakes, but that died. Now, it's on me. I pull out the electric skillet, chop up some sausage with scissors, and start cooking. Thomas Scian is next aboard. I task him with chopping up the onions and green peppers, while I beat a dozen eggs. Salt, pepper, and onion powder. The breakfast bunch staggers in. First **Sheedy**, then **Boats Haggart**, followed by **Super Dave**.



Time to move indoors. Gene Jackey working on locker tops in C-202-L.



Paul Guarnieri priming the new scuttle for the gun three tub project.

**Everything comes together around 0800, and we all carry our paper plates down to the Chief's mess. Earl Herchenroder** is aboard by now, but he never eats. The next item on the agenda is 45 minutes of insults and verbal abuse for everyone who walks through the door. When I've had enough, I head back up to the galley to clean up. Got to leave the place in good shape for **Chief Smith**. Smitty arrives around 0830, and brings all his lunch fixin's aboard into the galley that's now nice and warm. Today it's sweet and sour beef over rice. Following the breakfast clean up, I make my Saturday call to "my **friend Ed Zajkowski**," to give him the weekly sitrep. I explain my dilemma about SIGNALS. His advice, "Don't write about the weather again. People are sick of it."



Three birthdays this month. Doug Tanner, Super Dave Mardon and Clark Farnsworth, who turned 93.

They continue to stray in. Karl Herchenroder, Paul Guarnieri, Barry Witte, Bill Wetterau, Tulsa Scott, Ken Powers, Jerry Jones, and Joe Breyer. They slowly break into teams. Because Sheedy has an electric heater in the steering motor room, suddenly his project becomes the place where everyone wants to work. Barry, Tulsa, Ken, and Karl head down to B-3 and the firemain project. Boats, who is just recovering from walking pneumonia, elects to sew on the wardroom sofa cushions in the CPO mess.

Super Dave goes to work on the scuttle project in the machine shop. Erik and Paul are scaling the messdecks hatch. Just about the time everyone finally turns to, Tanner arrives and pipes “Coffee break in the CPO mess!”

Seeing as it’s too cold to do anything else, Doug, Sheedy and Super Dave elect to try and repair the massive plasma cutter that’s been taking up space in the machine shop for the last ten years. After two hours of head scratching and tracing schematics, they decide the thing is a basket case. They strip it of all useable parts, pull out the copper coils and put it on the scrap heap. Then they set about making repairs to the long-neglected welding leads.



We had a couple of days when the weather moderated enough to weld outside.



Barry Witte and his students continue their efforts to cool the emergency diesel generator off the firemain.

The only place aboard SLATER warmer than my office is the radio shack. Up in that warmth, Jerry Jones, Mike Wyles, Joe Breyer, Stan Levandowski, and now Rich Guthrie are trying to put us on a regular broadcast schedule every Saturday. This day it’s Jerry and Joe aboard. They spend the morning talking to HAMS in Europe, using Morse code with the modern K-2 transceiver on the ship’s longwire antennas. Signal strength was reported as excellent. They must have made it onto the ‘European cluster’, because DM5KW gave them a 579 RST signal report, and Jerry heard a station in Hungary and then Joe worked some stations

in France with good signal reports. So they know WW2DEM is putting a good signal into Europe. Jerry made contact with a guy named Klaus, in Germany. The way Jerry related it, when he told Klaus he was talking to a “U-boat killer,” Klaus, the DM5, suddenly couldn’t speak English anymore.



Early in the month we finally finished the welding on the davit pedestal project, but painting will have to wait for spring.



More inside work as Ron Mazure and Thomas Scian scaled under the gun three tub in preparation for welding.

**They spent the afternoon trying to get the “chirp” out of the TBL. Joe winces every time they key the transmitter.** They put three zener diodes into the TBL oscillator, and regulated the screen/plate voltage nicely to 315 volts, but it doesn’t seem to affect the ‘chirp’ and instability. The current thinking is that we likely have a/some arcing/sparking/ corrosion/dirty contacts somewhere in the oscillator. Like a variable capacitor wiping ground contact, or one/some of the many oscillator drawer ‘plug-in’ contacts, or component switching contacts. So their next plan of attack is to methodically clean all of the inside components. The shipyard dust probably didn’t help. Jerry is now convinced that ‘chirp’ sounds a little like the ‘ghost sounds’ of the dozens of sea gulls. The transmitter the guys are working on came off of USS CLAMP, which was in the Suisun Reserve fleet. It sat open to the elements for four decades, and sea gulls nested on it. Later, USS CLAMP’s transmitter was miraculously restored to operating condition by **Tom Horsfal**, A6OPE, in San Francisco.



**Dave Pitlyk getting his collections storage organized in the depth charge magazine.**



**Claire Oesterreich and Walt Stuart putting "fart-sacks" back on the mattresses.**

**Back aft, our new interpretations coordinator, Dave Pitlyk, continued taking inventory of our artifacts. He has taken to collections like a duck to water.** His involvement with SLATER goes back to 2006, when he began working as an intern while studying history and education at SUNY Albany. He spent most of the years since graduation as a substitute teacher. He now has the challenge of reorganizing the artifacts in our Special Collections, following the disaster we made of the space during the shipyard overhaul. Drydocking took its toll, as most items needed to be removed from the ship. Add to that the fact maintenance and restoration projects under gun three, and in aft steering, that impact his display spaces in C203-L. He won't really be able to clean up and get settled in until that work is done. His first week was spent unpacking the collections office, putting back together the display cases, making sense of the storage in the depth charge magazine, and taking stock of uniforms. Then he inventoried the navigation instruments, and is now unpacking and inventorying all the boxes that were hurriedly packed ashore last winter. Soon it will be time to begin intern interviews, and guide training for the upcoming season.

**Speaking of research, USS *Slater* Trustee Robert Cross, author of *Shepherds of the Sea: Destroyer Escorts in World War II* and *Sailor in the White House: the Seafaring Life of FDR*, is working on a new book exploring activities in and around East Coast seaports during World War II.** And he is looking for a little help from our readers to locate individuals who would like to be interviewed for his new book. Specifically, he is looking for people with recollections of activities along Albany's waterfront during the war years. If you have memories of those years in the Capital District, including activities at the Port of Albany, Bob would be interested in speaking with you. You can contact him through his web page, [www.robertfcross.com](http://www.robertfcross.com), by e-mail at [robertfcross@hotmail.com](mailto:robertfcross@hotmail.com), or by sending your contact information to us here at SLATER.



There won't ever be anyone to take the place of Don Miller in our ranks.

**This month we bid farewell to a great shipmate, Don Miller.** Don crossed the bar on Friday, January 2nd, following a long illness. Don first showed up to volunteer with his buddy **Earl Herchenroder**, in the fall of 2005. He hardly missed a Monday since, and made every river crossing. Don had been a storekeeper aboard the Fletcher class can, USS HICKOX DD-673, in the fifties. He was 83 when he passed away, and one of those guys who would do any job you needed. Born and raised in Albany, he was a true native son. He graduated from Albany High School, and then went on to Hudson Valley Community College before starting his career with the State of New York. There he worked as a mechanical estimator, from which he retired in 1994, after 28 years of service. He leaves a hole in our crew that will never be filled.

**This time of year, a lot of our energy goes into thanking you for your support in getting us through the winter.** Each morning, **Rosehn Gipe** makes the run to the post office and opens up another stack of donation envelopes. She passes them on to **Erik Collin**, who enters each donation into the computer under the donor's name. Then Erik generates the thank-you letters, and passes them on to me for signing. It's one of the most rewarding things I do. As has been the case since USS SLATER arrived in Albany, your response to our 2015 Winter Fund solicitation has been overwhelming. Since the drive began in October we have reached over \$40,000 in donated support. But it's not just about the money. The letters and notes we get with your donations make this one of the most satisfying undertakings you can imagine.

**I want to thank all of you who have already contributed.** If you haven't donated we need your support. For those of you who receive this newsletter online, and don't get the return envelope, you can participate by downloading our donation form and simply marking it "winter fund." Place it in an envelope addressed to USS SLATER, PO Box 1926, Albany, NY 12201-1926. Or, you can click the "Donate" button on our website home page [and contribute via PayPal](#)

**As I sign the "Thank you" letters, I can't help but feel encouraged by the number of your kids and grandkids that are now sending donations.** They are the future of the Museum and USS SLATER. Many of their parents have passed on, but they had the opportunity to share a sliver of their Naval experience. Passing on to your kids why the SLATER is part of your life, and why you continue to support us, may be the single most significant thing you can do for this ship. We can't all work in the bilges or aloft anymore, but we would if we could. Tell your family and friends how much you value USS SLATER. This ship has become your legacy, and part of the legacy of your family. Let your kids know that. It could be the most important thing you can do for USS SLATER.

**See you next month.**