



SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers

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Thought it was bad last month. So, once again it's the end of the month, and I find myself staring at this computer screen. **Jerry Jones** walks in. I say in my most commanding voice, "Jonz, it's February 28. You have six hours to make some dramatic progress in the radio room so I have something to write about." Jones turns around and walks out.



The Coast Guard Cutter USCGC WIRE came to our assistance to try to take some of the strain off the spring wires.

Lately, we've been amusing ourselves by making daily checks on the weather in Moscow and Murmansk, where it has been considerably warmer than Albany. Night after night the temps have fallen well below zero. Except for the areas around the circulators, the ship is iced in solid. There hasn't been a ship or a tug up the Hudson this far since February 10, when the 65' Coast Guard icebreaking tug USCGC HAWSER came to try to clear the ice ahead of SLATER to take the strain off the spring wires.

It worked for a day and then refroze. The pressure of the ice causes a daily two-degree change in list as the seven-foot tide rises and falls. The first time it happened, it was a bit of a worry and we went about checking all the starboard tanks and voids for leakage. But, as the day progressed, she came back on an even keel, and we realized that until the river thaws this is a daily cyclical event.

The smart members of the crew are all in Florida. Walt Stuart, Larry Williams, and Angelo Bracco all track us on Facebook, and comment periodically about how much they miss us. **Gary Sheedy** took off on a two-week cruise and arrived back home for some of the coldest weather I've ever experienced in my 17 years here. So, work continues, albeit inside and slowly. The Facebook posts seem to get repetitious and there almost isn't much need to take new pictures as the volunteer days pass. Just recycle the old ones.



Under Sheedy's direction, the slow process of needle scaling back aft continues, despite moisture in the airlines and air tools freezing them up. The project has been expanded to include the chemical warfare stowage locker and the shipfitters shop. **Bill Wetterau** remains the lead chipper, with **Gary, Thomas Scian,** and **Earl Herchenroder** assisting.



"Super" Dave Mardon learned a lesson in fire prevention.

In Doug Tanner's absence, welders **"Super" Dave Mardon** and **Tim Benner** have gravitated back aft to lend Sheedy a hand in aft steering. Probably because it's the warmest place on the ship, aside from my office and the Chief's mess. It got even warmer the day Dave set fire to his jacket and tapped Sheedy on his shoulder and asked, "Do you smell something burning?" The upshot of the whole event was summed up in a notice posted on the Chief's Quarters bulletin board that read, "USS SLATER continuing series: **Gary Sheedy** is presenting a seminar on "How to tell if you are on fire and what, if anything, to do about it."

He will be assisted by "Super" Dave Mardon and the discussion topics will include: a. Am I on fire or does something just smell funny, b. Why does my shoulder, hand, hair, or other body part suddenly feel extra warm, and c. Should I investigate or just keep working. Flammable clothing is recommended for those wishing to participate in this session to give a more true-to-life experience."



Rigging in the radio room.



Mike Wyles cleaning the shipyard grit out of the TBL.

Up in Radio, Jerry Jones, Joe Breyer, and Mike Wyles continue to thoroughly clean the drydock residue from the TBL oscillator stage and diagnose the cause of the chirp in the TBLs CW signal. A chirp means the Morse code note, when transmitted, changes frequency and sounds more like a drawn-out “whoop.” This project has taken on a sense of urgency, because the radio gang would like to use the TBL transmitter and the RBC receiver during the 2015 Museum Ships Weekend scheduled for 6 June through 7 June. **Stan Levandowski** has already registered and is organizing us with the Battleship New Jersey, which sponsors this annual event. During Museum Ships Weekend, museum ships from every corner of the globe put their vintage equipment on the air, as well as their more modern equipment, and give amateur radio operators the opportunity to contact both military as well as civilian ships that represent the maritime history of the world. Because of the TBLs age, and limitations in today’s environment, the radio gang will also use SLATER’s state-of-the-art K2 transceiver. **Rich Guthrie**, the newest member of the crew, has been keeping the K2 busy as often as possible, given the winter weather. Rich was a CT/3c, stationed in Todenhorf, Germany, as a cryptographic specialist. Visitors to the USS SLATER during the weekend of 6-7 June will be able to observe the Museum Ships Weekend activities. Both CW (Morse) and SSB (voice) will be used.



Adjusting the mooring wires.

Things are progressing in the education and collections department. Dave Pitlyk is working to get the special collections space back in good order, though his efforts are somewhat hampered by the continuing work in aft steering, and the anticipated work to the overhead under gun three. Older artifacts are becoming more organized and recent accessions have been added. We bought some replacement glass panes. In order to save on the labor, **David Pitlyk** and **Erik Collin** began installing them.

To get some of the items in our collections and archives out to a wider audience, and to build awareness for the ship in general, we have expanded our internet presence. You can now follow SLATER on Twitter (@usslaterde766), and on Youtube (USS Slater). You can expect new content to appear on a regular basis. Finally, while many interns and volunteers will be returning to give tours this year, a few will be leaving us. So, interviews have been held for adding some new interns to serve as guides. The field of candidates looks promising and we hope to make some new additions to the crew for 2015. Guide refresher training has tentatively been scheduled for March 21, and we hope to see both strikers and old hands alike. **Smitty** is unavailable to prepare the chow, so hope that David is a decent cook.

Rosehn Gipe undertook an ambitious project. Many years ago we came into possession of about 50 boxes of rate badges, about 15,000 all together. They had languished in a forward storeroom, until removed from the ship before we went into the shipyard. They were brought back aboard this summer and came to Rosehn's attention. This winter we moved them into the store for sorting. She went through the entire collection, sorted them by rate, tagged them, and grouped them. The traditional deck rates that would have been found on a DE are being kept for future. Over half the rate badges had no relevance to us, being aviation, construction, or postwar rates. She is working to find homes for these badges in appropriate museums, thus clearing up another material backlog.



Fabrication of our new life rafts at Adirondack Studios.

Several projects are happening off site. The fabrication of the new life rafts is underway at Adirondack Studios in Argyle thanks to **Cohoes Savings Foundation, The Troy Savings Bank Charitable Foundation, Rhodes Memorial Fund, Roger Hannay, Adirondack Studios, IASTE Local 524 and private donations.** We had obtained four authentic 25-man rafts, salvaged from the James River Reserve Fleet in 1999. The originals were constructed of canvas-covered balsa wood.

Three of these rafts lasted about five years before the balsa wood began to rot and they had to be destroyed. The fourth had been fiberglassed over the canvas and remains in good condition today. The other three were replaced by commercial rafts that were vinyl-covered Styrofoam, thanks to a grant from **Tin Can Sailors.** After ten years, these three have deteriorated to the point of needing replacement. Thus, we have decided to go with fiberglass-covered Styrofoam, as it has proved to be the most durable construction. Adirondack Studios has completed the mold, and is presently fabricating three rafts filled with 2 lb foam, joined, seamed, and wrapped on the outside with 10 ounce cloth to simulate canvas. Once we get the raft bodies, they will be turned over to **“Boats” Haggart** for lashing in the gratings and rigging.



A practice BT drop in calm waters on the USS BRENNAN DE-13 in 1944.

Ed Zajkowski and Barry Witte have managed to locate and donate two bathythermograph probes. These were used by the sonarmen to locate thermal layers in the water that subs can hide under. They found these on Ebay, bought them, and donated them to the ship. We have the BT boom and winch, and all that was needed was the probe to make our display complete. We'll hang Barry's BT from the boom this summer for public display. Ed's is very complete, so it will be placed on inside display. He posted the pics over on the "Destroyers: Greyhounds of the Sea" page, and he's created quite a discussion. This bathythermograph, which was used by the sonarmen, is an amazing tool. It also came in a very expensive custom built aluminum case. The case held everything needed, from slides to eyepiece magnifier, tow links, and reader slide with scale, etc. I had always thought being a sonarman was a warm dry occupation, but when I found out one of their duties was taking BT readings in heavy seas in the Arctic, I developed a new respect for the rate.



Ed Zajkowski's mint condition BT probe.



Work continues as RPI Midshipmen removed another section of firemain.



Valve work in the machine shop.

Barry Witte got us some great publicity thanks to the work his students have been doing over at **Colonie Central High School**. **Times Union** reporter **Tim O'Brien** did a feature article on their efforts, noting that:

The USS SLATER is a chance for students to learn about welding, sheet metal work, and mechanics. The students in teacher **Christopher Hanley's** auto body and welding classes spend some of their time fixing parts of the ship. They have restored and cleaned out piping, replicated the depth-charge racks, and have restored phone booths used to shield callers from the noise of the engines. The school and the ship were connected by **Barry Witte**, who is an engineering teacher at **Colonie Central**. The school has only one car at a time that students can work on in its body shop, so getting to work on parts of the **SLATER** provides another chance to learn. It helps make the connection that the skills they used to repair that are the same you use in repairing sheet metal on a car.



Times-Union photo by Skip Dickstein

Sophomore Nick Langlois has replaced the mesh and welded washers on a cover for the ship's exhaust system. He fixed a crack, and got the cover back into shape. Other students have restored piping that is corroded and filled with coral. The students' next project is to replace a phone booth aboard the ship. The booths with the slogan "Hear Here" over them, were in the ship's engine and motor rooms and gave sailors a place to block out the noise during their conversations. Instead of making something and then throwing it out,



Times-Union photo by Skip Dickstein

they are making something that is actually useful and will be used by the museum.

The students like working on SLATER. While they spend some class time on the work, some also show up during free time, lunch period, and after school. Senior **Anthony Snyder** said he is glad to know the work is helping preserve the World War II ship. "This is history we're working on here," he said. "This is more than an honor. I've enjoyed every second I've been in this room." Freshman **Albert Torres** said he looks forward to learning more. "Since I've been here, I have learned how to take apart an engine," he said.

It's great to see these youngsters helping out our older volunteers, most of who are in their 70s and 80s. It makes us feel good to have these young kids breathe some fresh life into this, and let us know it's going to be around a while.



Pitting revealed in drydock after sandblasting.

Another important off site project that has been going on is the research Ed Zajkowski, Barry Witte and Doug Tanner are doing into the effect of shipboard welding on hull corrosion.

While the ship was sitting in drydock, we noted that there was corrosion and pitting everywhere, most pronounced in the amidships area below the waterline. What caused this pitting has been the subject of a lot of conjecture. While at the Fall HNSA meeting, Ed befriended a person vending hull protection coatings. They talked in depth about static ships and their welding machines.

The traditional way we all operate is with centrally-located welding machine with the ground cable attached to something metal next to it, then we drag the weld cable to the job. This could be anywhere from 10' to 150'. The US Coast Guard's own lengthy, official procedure for welding aboard steel vessels states that "When practicable, the welding return current cable connection shall be no farther than 10 feet from the work.

This ensures that welding current does not flow through bearings, threaded joints, and other areas where arcing could occur.” And that, “When systems such as piping, pressure vessels, or machinery are being welded, a single return current cable connection should be located as close to the work as possible.”

Thus the question has been raised as to whether or not our own welding practices are contributing to the pitting. It’s not possible to drag a 400 lb. welding machine around the ship to ensure a ground cable length of less than 10' or to drag 200' of ground cable to every job. The answer may lie in an expenditure for one or two very portable and powerful lightweight stick welding machines. Something that is light enough that it can be carried by one or two people with no problem. Ideally, one machine each for forward and aft. Anyone care to donate two? You may be helping to protect our \$1.4 million drydock investment for years to come.

The workweek dates have been set up for 2015. The Michigan Chapter of DESA will be aboard the week of May 3-8. The point of contact if you want to join them is **Ron Zarem**. The USS HUSE group will be aboard May 17-22. The point of contact for that group is **George Amandola**, And finally, the fall work week is scheduled for October 4-9. The contact for that one is “Michigan” **Dick Walker**. Save the dates, and if you want to help maintain SLATER, these are the folks to contact.



Taking a break 70 years ago...



...taking a break in February. We're all ready for it to be over.

Finally, we can't thank all of you Winter Fund donors enough, as the checks are still coming in. The Fourth Quarter 2014 Trim But Deadly newsletter went into the mail the second week of February, so it should be on your kitchen table by now.

Thank you all for what you've done to get us through the winter. See you next month.