

SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
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I remember Monday, September 10th because it was a great workday. We had the full crew of Monday guys, about fifteen strong, cutting, welding, wiring, chipping, painting and cleaning. Everywhere I went I heard laughter. The whole crew working together as a team with that spirit and pride that this ship seems to bring out in people. Since nothing really unusual or spectacular was happening this month, I was kind of stumped as to what to write about in this month's SIGNALS. It occurred to me that I could write the story of a typical workday aboard the SLATER, with those little anecdotes about what all these guys were doing that day. **Russ Ferrer** was particularly humorous. He would periodically drop into my office with progress reports, and end with, "I'm beat. I'm going home." He said that five times between noon and 1600. The best part of the day was when **Roy Gunther** rounded up the whole crew to heave on the boat davits. The aft davit is really stiff from rust and the over the hill gang pulled back and forth on the davit guys for half an hour to try to free it. The writing creative juices began to flow, and I got it about half done Monday night.



Bell from USS GENTRY, DE-349 ?

Tuesday Morning I planned to tie up three loose ends. One was a question about the ship's bell that we received from the Naval Historical Center. That's the one that hangs on the mast on the 01 level by the whaleboat. The shipping document indicated that it came from "DE-349" which would be the USS GENTRY. In our last annual report to the Naval Historical Center, we indicated it was the GENTRY bell. Mr. Pickenpugh from NHC had written back and said that their records indicated that the GENTRY bell was on loan to a university alumni association. So I had a mystery to solve. The second issue was that I wanted to make my airline reservations to go to the Historical Naval Ships Conference at the Battleship NORTH CAROLINA at the end of October. Mark Peckham from the Parks and Recreation Preservation Office had gotten a rate so cheap from US Air that you couldn't drive there for that price unless you were

hitchhiking. I figured I'd better get on the ball and make my reservation. I also planned to call **Erik Collin** regarding getting prices on a digital camera we need to buy for cataloging the artifacts.

I wanted to wrap this up because my father had died in San Diego from a stroke that followed a long illness. He was out there living with my youngest sister. My other sister had already flown out, and I was scheduled to fly out Thursday. I wanted to tie up these loose ends before I left. So a little after nine, I called my buddy Frank Thompson who is a curator at the Naval Historical Center. Frank and I go way back, and he being an old southerner never misses a chance to harass me about my New York roots. Surprisingly I didn't get his machine, he picked up the phone. "*Curator's Office, Frank Thompson speaking.*" He didn't sound too chipper for a Tuesday morning. "*Hey Frank. This is Tim on the SLATER. A*

question came up about our ships bell and I wondered if you could help me out before I talk to Mr. Pickenpaugh?" Frank responded with, "Did you hear that two planes just flew into the World Trade Center? One into each tower."

If he had said one plane into one tower, I might have believed him. Two was too far fetched. Had to be more of that rebel black humor. *"Sure Frank. Whatever you say. I've got a problem. I thought I had the bell from the **USS GENTRY**, and they say it can't be from the GENTRY because it's on loan to somebody else." Can you search that in the computer before I call Mr. Pickenpaugh back?" "You don't believe me. Both towers got hit." "Sure Frank. Could you check on the bell and see what your records say?" He was a little curt saying, "I gotta go. I'll get back to you."*

My next call was to Erik Collin about the digital camera. *"Morning Erik, How you doing?"* He replied with, *"We're here watching TV. Two airliners just flew into the World Trade Center. One into each tower."* That made it sink in. This was real. Deliberate. I imagined ten to twenty thousand people in the towers. The death toll at Pearl Harbor would pale in comparison to this disaster. I responded with, *"I gotta call a friend of mine back."* I didn't believe him. I dialed Frank back. He was still at his desk. *"I'll never doubt you again."* Frank didn't have much to say except, *"Something's happening over at the Pentagon. I gotta go. I'll talk to you later."*

I left the office and began giving the crew the news. Beth Spain was working in the radio room entering endowment contributions into the computer and preparing thank you letters. She turned on radio news broadcast so we could keep up with events. This is such an authentic restoration that there is no TV aboard, so getting our news from CNN was out of the question.

About ten o'clock at occurred to me to put the Ensign and the jack at half-mast. I went aft, but someone had already done it. I thought about booking my airline flight, but it seemed like a bad time to make a reservation.

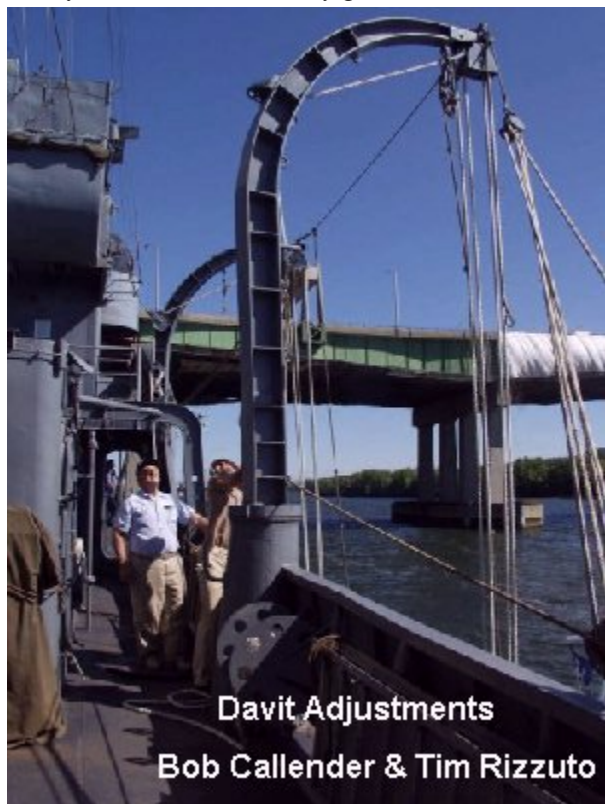
The rest of the day was pretty somber. There were very few visitors. Several of the volunteers dropped by to discuss the day's events and speculate on what it would mean. Nobody could. The ship seemed to be kind of a rallying point for people. We tried, but nobody got much done the rest of the day. We just seemed to drift around in kind of a fog. At the end of the day, when I was alone locking up the ship, I noticed **John Dzurba**, one of our college student tour guides, on the shore. He was on the other side of the fence looking sadly at the ship. I waved and called to him. He waved back and I went across the gangway and unlocked the side gate. John came in. He said that classes had let out, and not knowing what to do he had wandered down to the river. That's about a forty five-minute wander. He expressed the thought that man never seemed to learn from the past, and maybe studying history was a waste of time, as it didn't seem to get anyone anywhere. He was thinking about transferring to architecture. Designing new buildings low and flat. We talked until my wife came to pick me up, and we gave John a ride home before setting ourselves in front of the television to try to find out what was going on in the world. We would learn the next day that the **Earl and Eleanor Gillette's** son, **Evan** was missing in the attack. Now, it became personal.

Life seemed to go on for the rest of the week at a slower more subdued pace. We had two Reunion groups cancel out, the **BRONSTEIN** group and the **JACOB JONES**, but they hope to reschedule for the spring. However, most of the groups have continued to show up in force. In September we've hosted the **ELDEN, ULVERT M. MOORE, ACREE, WEBER, OTTER, BATES, PAVLIC, MANLOVE, STRAUB, LOESER, SNOWDEN, and KEY**. The **MANLOVE** reunion was aboard with sixty people.

The crew continues to progress and the ship gets better. We had two special workdays aboard. The folks at **Key Bank** did their annual volunteer's afternoon. Eight volunteers showed up to paint, but fear of rain turned it into a cleaning day. They gave the pilothouse, CIC, passageways; galley and the CPO mess a thorough scrub down. The following weekend our local **Sea Cadet** Unit spent a Saturday with us cleaning watertight door gaskets and sanding on the starboard 24" searchlight. I had a visit from my old friend from Baton Rouge, Tim NesSmith. He spent a week volunteering with us. As the **KIDD's** administrative assistant, he was adamant that he would do anything we wanted so long as it didn't involve telephones or computers. He sounded a bit like Erik Collin. Anyway he spent most of his time chipping paint in the aft crew's quarters, so we were all happy.

On Saturday, September 1, we lowered the whaleboat into the water. Rocky and Roy wanted to give the seams a chance to swell up, so we let her hang in the falls for a few days. The following Wednesday, **Clark** brought the "SS Minnow" down from Schenectady with **Chuck Ray** and **Don Shattuck**. In the face of a strong north wind and whitecaps, they lashed the whaleboat alongside and towed it down to **Scarano's Boatyard** for the engine installation. They may keep it over the winter.

Rocky has been down there ever since, painting and sanding. **Doug Tanner** has fabricated two new stainless steel diesel fuel tanks for the boat. The only rub was the trip back to Schenectady. We thought it would be nice to give Tim NesSmith a view of the scenic Hudson-Mohawk Valley. So he crewed with Clark and Chuck for the trip up. Clark cast off and the boat drifted down river, until they dropped an anchor. I had just seen the Sheriff's Department patrol boat go by, so I called their communications center and suggested that they might want to check on the 1912 cabin cruiser anchored just down river from us. They were there in fifteen minutes. They towed Clark over to the Albany Yacht Club, where they got his transmission lever straightened out, and they were off within an hour.



The engineers have had a big month. Last Saturday **Gus Negus** and **Barry Witte** started up the Diesel, shifted from shore power to ship's power, and ran the engine under load for about four hours. She ran a little warm with the air cooling, but it was acceptable. We're using the engine room supply fan to cool the radiator; sucking the warm air into the space, so it got to be about a hundred degrees down there. Just like a real ship. Next door **Larry LaChance** and **Chuck Longshore** completed hydro testing and reassembling the starting air flasks. **Bill Siebert**, **Ed Luther** and **Russ Ferrer** got back together to reassemble the h.p. air compressor. The only hold up on that is Russ is making new rings for it, and Barry and **Gary Sheedy** are overhauling the motor controller. Finally, Gary, Doug and Russ have the heating system all put back together and it's been tested so that we are ready for winter.

Topside **Erik Collin** is painting the 24" searchlight and he primed the 01 level forward. **Gene Cellini** topcoated the area around gun two. **Bill Hoeth** got the focs'c'le painted out. **Rich Pavlovik** and **Peter Jez** have continued the detailed restoration around gun three, while **Dave Floyd** and **Andy Desorbo** have been pecking away at gun 1. And **Dick Smith**, **Ed Whitbeck** and **Pat Cancilla** are still chipping away back aft in the crew's quarters. They'll have help soon. The **Michigan chapter of DESA** arrives an estimated 16 strong the first week of October, and that will be their big project.

Up in the office, we have been backlogged with endowment thank-you letters to write. **Deb** and **Beth** were batching them out in-groups of fifty, and it was looking like we wouldn't get caught up until November. That's a hell of a long time for someone to wait for a thank -you. **Frank Lasch** appealed to the folks in his law firm for help, and four crackerjack ladies volunteered, **Marilyn St. Clair**, **Dianne Matthews**, **Karen Boiko** and **Nancy Marucci** as well as one of his partners **Glen Doherty**. Frank took them on a tour of the ship and then Deb made a visit up there and set them up with all they needed to do the work in their offices. Within two weeks, they had us all caught up. If you haven't gotten your thank -you for your endowment contribution by now, let us hear from you.

We got rejected for our "Save America's Treasures Grant" from the Interior Department. As you may recall, we had asked for four hundred thousand dollars to support plate replacement work during the anticipated dry-docking. Back to the drawing board, but my grant batting average is getting worse and worse.

The big event for the month was the Change of Command Ceremony for the Albany Naval Reserve Center. Our old friend and supporter, now **Captain Greg Krawczyk** was relieved by **Commander Donald McKnight**. A true sailor, Greg had wanted to hold this, his last official function, aboard the **SLATER**. So on Sunday, September 16th, **SLATER** was again alive with real U.S. Navy Sailors as the Ceremony got underway at 1030. It was a beautiful, crowded, colorful event that really brought the old girl back to life. It all seems worthwhile when you can host an event like that and watch the ship sparkle in the morning sun. So Greg, thanks for everything. Fair winds and following seas. We're counting on your return.



Anyway, to close, after a delay, I did make it out to San Diego to be with my two sisters. I was finally able to get a Southwest flight out the Saturday after the attack, and all the connections coming and going were fine. The only problem I had was when they confiscated my tweezers during the scan of my toilet bag in Albany. The flight out went through Baltimore, so we flew south along the Hudson, and since I was on the port side of the plane in a window seat I had a good look at the devastation in Manhattan. I also made my reservations for the Historic Naval Ships conference, but to hear the airlines talking, I hope they'll still be flying by then. It appears our little SLATER is more financially solvent than most major airlines. And, I still don't know whether our ship's bell came from the USS GENTRY or not.

But I do know one thing. We are learning from our history and progressing. I can't say that about the whole world, but I can say that about our nation. For two reasons. First, I see it in what we haven't done. We haven't lashed out in anger at our own Muslim population or indiscriminately bombed foreign land. We have worked to separate this group of extremist terrorists from the whole of the Muslim community. The President visited a mosque and warned us of not making the difference. Our rage is controlled, tempered, thought out and being carefully directed. In an earlier time, I'm not sure this would have been the case. The second thing is that we've learned how to put our differences aside and come together as one. Growing up through the Vietnam years, I wasn't sure we still had the ability to do that, the way we did in 1941. We still have that spirit.

See you next month.