



SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
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Vol. 8 no. 4 April 2005

When we left off last month, the ice had cleared off the Hudson, and it looked like a safe bet for getting the camels in on time and getting the ship back to Albany for our April First opening. I was half right. The end of March looked perfect for the move. The snowmelt was nice and slow, the river was running nice and slow, the ice had cleared out of the river and it looked like making the Snow Dock for opening day on April first would be a breeze. We planned camel day for Monday, March 28th. The forecast was for rain, but we went on with it. We had about twelve volunteers including the indispensable **Tommy Moore, Hack Charbonneau and Doug Tanner** all on the same day. **Gene Jackey, Stan Murawski, Andy Desorbo, Ed Whitbeck, Don Shattuck, Jim Gelston, Chris Fedden** and **Eric Rivet** backed them up. It always amazes me that we can turn out so many people for a miserable operation on a miserable day. As always, the **Mayor** and **Bob Cross** provided the Albany Water Department crane with **Ricky** as the operator. We didn't get started until nine, but had them all in place by 1230. Moving the ship before Friday April 1st seemed like a sure bet. Glad I didn't take it.



The rain that started Monday created a high fast-running river that put moving out of the question until

Friday. But we couldn't get tugs. And then it rained all weekend. By Monday April 4th the river in Albany was six feet higher than usual, and way faster than we considered safe to move in. Tuesday, it had dropped six feet but was still running fast. The good news was that the camels were holding their position well, albeit with a good strain on the upriver wires, patiently awaiting our return. The bad news was that we were looking at two more days of rain that week. The good news was, as any Albanian knows, "At least it wasn't snow." The bad news was that we couldn't open to the public in Rensselaer, because of the Maritime Security Act restrictions. The good news was that, with the

extra six feet of freeboard sticking above the pier, **Erik Collin** was able to do a great job touching up the side paint on the hull.



The HERBERT mating up to the SLATER.



We actually had a bow wave during the move.

We missed the April first opening. It continued to rain that weekend. I checked on the camels, and no word of a lie, the water was so high, I could have stepped down to them from the seawall. Monday it was still running fast. I looked at the River and thought of **Bart** and **Ralph Carpino**, and thought, "They'd never move under these conditions." We held off. Tuesday, things were looking better and the forecast for Wednesday was for calm winds and

no rain. I got the call from **Chris Gardella** at Port Albany Ventures, the successor corporation to Bart's Empire Marine. He set the time for 1100 Wednesday, April 6th, 2005. We sent the word out to the move crew.



Erik Collin's Crew on the Focs'c'le.

For destroyer sailors, April 6th is kind of an ominous day. That's sixty years after one of the worst Kamikaze attacks at Okinawa. The day BUSH, and COLHOUN were sunk and NEWCOMB, LEUTZE, MULLANY, HOWORTH, HYMAN, MORRIS, HARRISON, HAYNESWORTH, and FIEBERLING, were damaged. Not a good day sixty years ago. But for SLATER in 2005, it was a very good day. The weather was perfect, the river had calmed down, and the HERBERT BRAKE and the CROW were right on time. Denny Donovan handled the HERBERT, as he has done several times before with his crew of **Ian Caristi** and **Drew Shoemaker**. The CROW was the assist tug, with **Bob Durlan**, **Les Brown** and **Ed McKinley** aboard. We cast off the wires first, disconnected the waterline, undid the phone and shore power, and when everything was set, singled up and then cast off the nylon. This year **Erik Collin** was in charge on

the focs'c'le and **Doug Tanner** handled the fantail. We had about thirty in the crew including the shore party. We were back in Albany by noon, got the lines across, doubled up and started putting on the wires. The line handling seemed to go very smoothly this year. **Bob Cross** had **Ricky** and the crane waiting for us when we arrived, so both gangways were in place by 1300. It was a great day.

After we were all secure, Frank Lasch and I went down to thank the new owner, John Witte and Warren Jennings. John Witte explained that he had a little destroyer escort experience. It seems that back in the sixties, his father owned a scrapyard on Staten Island. At one point he bought a DE for scrap. Since the scrap yard was ten-year-old John's playground, John went aboard his new toy, and found that the guns still trained and elevated. Young John spent a happy day aiming at the tugs and barges passing their Staten Island scrap yard. John's day of fun on the guns was finally interrupted when his father came out to the DE escorted by two Coast Guardsmen. It seems the tug men didn't take too kindly to being used for target practice, play or otherwise, and young John received a stiff reprimand. Anyway there was a lot of doubt in our minds as to whether or not we would continue to receive the free towing with Bart's passing, but John Witte made it clear that Port Albany Ventures, LLC, remains committed to the SLATER.



Doug Tanner taking care of the crew in the restored galley.

Jerry Jones did an amazing job replacing the plug in a 40 pin connection plug that we use to connect all the communications circuits between the ship and shore facility. We finally had our first day open to the public on Friday April 8th, so we missed one week of visitation. However, thanks to **Rosehn Gipe's** promotional efforts, some decent weather, and an early start to the overnight camping program, by April 20th we'd surpassed our April 2004 attendance. We'll see where we end up by the end of the month. The guide force is back in full swing. The maintenance crew is in the process of wrapping up the interior projects and moving outside. The chippers have finished up the bosun's storeroom just forward of the anchor windlass, and it is now awaiting paint. **Erik Collin** cleaned and painted the deck in the anchor windlass room so that it would look sharp for the arrival of the SLATER former crewmembers on May 6th. **Rocky's** back to working on the whaleboat. He's got the whole portside sanded, caulked and painted. He will be fabricating a new rudder with **Roy Gunther** as soon as Roy gets back from Florida. **Gary Sheedy's** still locked in the confines of the reefer deck reassembling all the shelving he took out to repaint the place. **Stan Murawski** is insulating back in the laundry. **Tanner** and **Benner** are working on the new sewer tank. **Clark** is recovering from a knee replacement at age 83. We figure that will make him good for another twenty years. And **Gus Negus** and **Karl Herchenroder**. Well they're down in B-4, and it's a long story.



The James River Crew, Day 4. Breyer, Murawski, Rizzuto, Witte, Herchenroder, Czesak and Negus.

Remember that little problem with the emergency diesel generator we've been talking about? Well, it seems that it shook itself apart on the front end. Trashed the blower, gears shafting, frame, the works. Gus and Karl spent several weekends tearing the whole thing down to the broken studs in the front end of the block. In order to get the parts to repair the engine, we called the Maritime Commission James River Reserve Fleet and asked permission to strip the emergency diesel on the old Submarine Rescue ship SUNBIRD, which is the same model we have. They granted us permission to remove parts from three ships, the ASR's SUNBIRD (Joe Breyer's old ship) KITTIWAKE, and the ARS USS PRESERVER. The folks at the Maritime Administration were most accommodating, especially considering the pressure these folks are under from every direction. Between the environmentalists who

want the ships to disappear, to the preservationists who want the ships to stay forever, to the ornithologists who want the ships to stay through hatching season, to the Pentagon who wants the ships to be ready for use, to GSA who just wants to make sure every piece is accounted for, it's amazing these people have any patience for us. Special thanks

to Fleet Superintendent **Fred Hoffman** who approved our visit, Administrator **Vicki Kinkade** who took time out of an especially hectic Friday afternoon to confirm our visit, and escorts **Gary Owens, Bill Thompson, Tyrone** and especially **Noel Gerace** who secured a needed Sawzall for us. More about that later.

To accomplish this task, we assembled a formidable team. Enginemen **Gus Negus** and **Karl Herchenroder**, with **Joe Breyer, Paul Czesak, Barry Witte, Ed Zajkowski, and Stan Murawski**. We were joined for a day by foundation member **Bill Hickman** and Midshipman **Matt Colehour**. The original plan had been to remove the parts from SUNBIRD since we'd taken the pumps off on our previous visit. But a quick assessment showed we had electrical power on KITTIWAKE and none on SUNBIRD, so we started over on KITTIWAKE. The first day things went great. We pulled the blower off the engine, and rigged that and a spare blower and heat exchanger that were bulkhead mounted out of the compartment. Barry handled all the rigging. We got the starter of the engine as a spare. The pile on the fantail of KITTIWAKE began to grow. Among the pieces was a beautiful big pressure gauge that I assumed came from the engine. I took care to set it aside so that it wouldn't be damaged.



The Beautiful Big Pressure Gauge.

The second day, everyone was dragging. If we were able to make the kind of progress we had made the first day, we would have been finished by 1430, but three stubborn bolts on the salt water-cooling pump resisted impact wrenches, box wrenches, cold chisels and hacksaw blades. If we couldn't get them, we couldn't get the parts we needed. It was **Ed Zajkowski** who suggested asking our escort to call onto the landing and see if they would loan us an electric sawzall. I had never tried to borrow tools before. I assumed if you didn't bring it with you, you were SOL. But we asked, an hour later a boat brought out the saw we needed, and Barry cut through the copper pipe that held the pump in place and we were back in business. While that work was going on, we were also removing needed electrical switches, IC gear and light fixtures from the dead ships SUNBIRD and PRESERVER. We also pulled the injectors off the diesel on SUNBIRD. Prior to leaving for the evening I pulled that beautiful big pressure gauge out from under a pile of diesel parts so the glass wouldn't get broken.



Stan Murawski aboard the USS Kittiwake Day Four.

The third day, Gus and Karl completed the disassembly of the diesel including the heads and the pistons. Their crane barge came by around 1100 and dropped off a mesh basket on to KITTIWAKE's fantail for us to load our gear on to. I don't know how many of you remember what a MARY ANN is, but that was the old navy term for a seaplane wrecking crane barge, or a YSD. The Maritime Commission has a beautiful example, a historic naval ship in her own right. None of the MARAD guys I talked to had ever heard the term MARY ANN, a phrase that has faded with time. The crew asked us if we wanted a second basket. I was skeptical about the need, but I said okay. They asked me if I wanted a third basket, and I said no. I should have said yes. We started piling the stuff into the baskets. We used the crane to sling the 300-pound blowers in so we wouldn't have to lift them, but hefted everything else ourselves. By the end of the day all the critical gear was loaded including our tools. The baskets were close to overflowing, but we figured we'd be okay. The last

thing I noticed before I left was that that beautiful big pressure gauge was under an IC electrical panel with a sharp edge against the glass. I unpacked the basket down to the pressure gauge and repacked it so it would be safe. That afternoon we picked up a U-Haul trailer capable of hauling the load and hooked it up to **Stan Murawski's SUV**.

Thursday, all that remained to be done was lift the baskets off the ship, barge them ashore, and load all the gear onto the trailer and head for home. We had hoped for the crane around ten but it was scheduled for noon. That gave us a few extra hours to remember the parts we'd forgotten. Gus and Karl worked on getting the studs out of the engine block to replace the broken ones on the SLATER. I found the windshield wiper boxes that were a standard part of every DE outfit, in the pilothouse of KITTIWAKE. We made sure that we had all our gear off the ships, cleaned up in the engineroom where we had been working, and made sure all the doors and hatches were closed on all the ships in the nest. I gathered up a bunch of our tools and chain falls that had been dumped on top of the beautiful big pressure gauge and rearranged them so it wouldn't get broken. At noon the MARY ANN motored aft and lifted off our two baskets, and then moved around to the accommodation ladder of the MAINE STATE to gather us up, and we boarded the MARY ANN.

We had a pleasant trip into to pier. The crane lifted both baskets onto the dock, and we set about unloading, sorting, and reloading our haul for the trip home. It was at this point that Superintendent **Fred Hoffman** came out onto the pier to look over our haul. A word about Superintendent Hoffman. Fred is a no BS former Navy BTC who came up the hard way, through the hawse pipe as they used to say. Superintendent Hoffman strolled around our pile of equipment and stopped at the beautiful big pressure gauge. "What are you doing with a submarine depth gauge?" he commanded. "They didn't have those on DEs." Up to that moment, I hadn't a clue about what the beautiful big pressure gauge did or who had taken it. I meekly replied, "That must be Gus. He's a submariner." That didn't impress Superintendent Hoffman. This stuff is supposed to be going to the SLATER. Not somebody's rec room." I recognized that this is serious business. Misappropriation of government property has cost people their jobs in the Maritime Commission. Despite the reputation I have within the Historic Naval Ship Community, I have,

over the past 25 years, managed to develop fair level of credibility with the Navy and Maritime Commission precisely because all the material I take gets to a ship. Gus immediately denied taking the beautiful big pressure gauge, as did everyone in the group who was present. That left the ones who had left the group early as suspects, Bill, Barry, Paul, and Matt. As we were loading the trailer, each of the crew sidled up to me in and asked in hushed tones, "Are we in trouble?" It was established that the gauge must have come from the decompression chambers from the KITTIWAKE. Having no decompression chambers on the SLATER, I offered to leave the beautiful big pressure gauge behind, but Superintendent Hoffman said, "It's on the list. Take it. **Just make sure it stays on the SLATER.**"

The trailer loaded, we signed the property transfer list that included the beautiful big pressure gauge, and we headed out about 1430. We made a dinner stop and had the best crab cakes in Maryland, and didn't drop the trailer off into the SLATER parking lot until 0500. **Stan Murawski** drove the whole fourteen hours. Quite a driver. Now all we have to do is unload it, return the trailer and await the arrival of the Michigan Crew next week to begin reassembly.



Tearing down the front end of the emergency diesel on the KITTIWAKE.

See you next month.