

SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers

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Destroyer Escort Historical Museum

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A serene winter morning aboard
USS SLATER.

It was eight degrees above zero when I came in on Wednesday. Surprisingly, the river had not frozen over, due to the high winds we've experienced over the previous few days. We were just starting to get some sheet ice between ship and shore, so I turned on the circulators to nip it in the bud.

Then, following my routine, I went down to the Chief's Mess and put fresh coffee on, so it would be ready when Bob Callender arrived to total up the volunteer hours. While I was down there, eating my breakfast and waiting for the coffee, I heard continual thumping on the portside just outside the hull. I thought it might be ice hitting the side of the ship, but it was too regular. I had a bad feeling about that sound. I put on my coat and went topside.

My suspicions turned out to be correct. The forward most circulator had become fouled, and was oscillating in the water, banging against the hull. The lines had become twisted, and then ice had formed around them. There was nothing to do but haul it aboard. The fun stuff always seems to happen when I'm alone.



To get this picture, I called the crew to chow, and then told Smitty not feed them until they posed for a picture.

No gloves, but you can't work light line with gloves anyway. As I was hauling it aboard, I had the image of the lifeline breaking, and wondered where they'd find my body. So, I put a stanchion between the water and myself as I pulled. I got the whole mass over the top lifeline and onto the deck. Then it was aft to the machine shop for a

chipping hammer. I broke up the ice, so I had three separate lines. Then it was a matter of untying and untwisting the rat's nest, and lowering it all back into the river, without going overboard. Did I mention it was eight degrees? This is where my friends from Michigan are rolling their eyes thinking, "What a wuss. Eight degrees is borderline tropical."

The exercise served to kill enough time. By the time I got back to the CPO quarters, the coffee had perked, and I could enjoy my cup of Joe without the incessant banging interrupting my tranquil morning routine.



The shipfitters continue to make progress on the flying bridge repairs.

unheated area, through the worst months of our Albany winter. At this point, all the leaks have been patched. All that remains to be done is reassembly of the CIC vent motor and ductwork, reassembly of the depth charge release levers, and installation of a couple low point deck drains. Our resident IC electrician, **Steve Klauck**, has been up there, pulling cables from wasted stuffing tubes, so they can be replaced.

Opening is now four weeks away. I think our winter projects are well in hand. Up on the flying bridge, the shipfitters got the last of the holes plated over. **Andy Sheffer, Dave Wasson, Danny Statile, Check Teal, Dave Mardon, Tim Benner, Gene Jackey, Earl Herchenroder, and Doug Tanner** deserve kudos for their tenacity in sticking through this project, in an



Steve Klauck pulling wires on the flying bridge prior to replacement of stuffing tubes.

Much as it was in the Old West, the lure of the frontier continues to attract men who are determined to civilize it. The forward engineroom, or B-1, is



Twin brothers Karl and Earl Herchenroder have started the forward engineroom restoration.

one of the last unrestored spaces on the ship. That doesn't sit well with **Karl Herchenroder**, a former engineman, who served in USS OTTERSTETTER DER-244. Karl is determined to clean up and restore B-1. Over the winter, he enlisted the help of his brother, **Earl**, and volunteers **Gary Lubrano** and **Mike Dingmon**, to begin work on the space. They have spent the last two months hauling down all the stage planks we have, and decking over the open areas on the upper level over the

diesels. They have created a work platform, so they can set up ladders and begin to scale the overhead. The plan is to work from the top down over the next two years, and get the space looking as good as the aft machinery spaces. Just showing that their ambition has not diminished with age.



Progress on the prototype recognition light assembly.

The recognition light project continues to progress. Over his winter break, **Barry Witte** coordinated all the welding on the stainless steel light boxes. Working with **Hal Hatfield** and **Mike Arnold**, Barry loaded all the precut stainless steel pieces into his car and drove them up to Hal's fabrication shop in Waterford. **Doug Dillenbeck** was enlisted to weld together the six housings for the lights. Barry is now in the process of priming

them with special stainless steel primer. As the lowest set is located on the 02 level by the flagbags, he's taking measurements for the brackets and planning to install the first set this summer.



Welding, insulating, and wiring, all going on simultaneously.

Aft in C-201-L, **Ron Prest** and **Rich Mouzakes** have spent the month scaling. Rich is doing the lockers, and Ron is doing the overhead, so Ron definitely got the raw end of the deal. **Bill Holt**, **Warren Brozio**, **Paul Guarnieri**, and **Carl Camurati** have been doing insulation repairs in the overhead and caulking seams. **Barry Witte**, **Gary Sheedy**, **Thomas Scian**, and **Andy Sheffer** have been fabricating

and installing missing cable and ductwork supports. Barry's helpers, **Ken Powers**, **Jack Carbone**, and **Vince Montouri**, have been running new armored cable and straightening out the overhead wire ways. Gary is also replacing the beat up door frame for the sickbay door. We plan to have Kevin Sage come in during the last week of the month to spray it out.



Tim Benner watches as Guy and Alex work to free the gun 33 sight assembly yoke.

Elsewhere around the ship, **Bill Holt** and **Tommy Moore** have also been working in forward berthing, to repair cracks in the overhead fiberglass insulation. **Guy Huse** and **Alex Titcomb** have been having considerable luck with the Gun 33 sight assembly. They got the 200-pound sight assembly yoke mounted in a temporary frame by the machine shop. They have actually gotten the pivot bearing to move

with a combination of lubricants, heat, and jacking. They are in the process of removing the bearing. **George**

Christophersen fabricated two 20mm magazine ratchets, used to take the tension off of the spring when loading the drum. Now that we have three, we should feel comfortable putting one on display. **Cathy Wheat** continues her weekly cleaning, so getting ready for opening day won't be the massive cleanup that it has been in past years. **Smitty** continues to cook, **Jim Gelston** keeps the clocks on time, and **Bob Callender** keeps a tally of all the hours everyone contributes.



20mm magazine drum loading ratchets fabricated from scratch by George Christophersen.



Jody Treadway has joined our archival team.

with the archival work. **Gary Sheedy** and **Thomas Scian** replaced all the Maritime Commission light fixtures with standard WWII-era Navy overhead light fixtures. A small detail, but there is a difference. Gary is installing shades to help with the lighting in the space, as well as the rest of the laundry list Shanna has asked him to help with.

Shanna is finding time for her other

winter tasks as well. She is now accepting applications for new interns for this season. Interviews will start in early March. She's updated the training materials, started restocking merchandise for the Ship's Store, sent out postcards to scout groups to remind them to book their tours and overnights, and emailed teachers reminding them how great a tour would be for their students. She also sent information to area libraries about our Museum Pass Program, Oral Presentations, and Artifact Displays. The pressure is on, and Shanna says her "To-Do List" is two pages long. Time to wrap up those projects!

On the 24th, Art Dott gave a presentation on "Saving Slater" to patrons at the Voorheesville Library. And on the 27th, Shanna attended a Heritage Tourism Meeting with other Albany attractions, fostering a relationship with them and working to collaborate on future projects.



Seventy-five years ago this month, Nora Slater christened the ship named for her son.

Work continues in the Research and Collections Space, in aft berthing C-203-L. The footlocker displays are coming along nicely. All the displays are started. They just need some fine-tuning. The light bulbs are in, and **Shanna** and **Austin** cleaned up the glass covers for the lockers. Displays on top of the racks are the focus now. They've been joined by **Paul Czesak's** daughter **Jody Treadway**, who is assisting



Gary and Thomas replaced all the light fixtures in berthing space C-203-L.

We've been commemorating 75th anniversaries on Facebook, and we had a couple significant events this month. On February 13th, we remembered the 75th anniversary of USS SLATER's christening and launch by Tampa Shipbuilding. She was christened by **Frank Slater's** mother, **Nora Slater**, with many family members present. The US launched 563 destroyer escorts during World War II, mostly named for men who were killed in action during the first year of the war. More often than not, they were christened by the mothers of these young heroes. There are a lot of stories like Nora Slater's. This ship represents them all. The post on Facebook drew a big response from Frank Slater's family. We hope they will all gather in Albany, for a Slater family reunion one day in the not too distant future.

Did you know that 1944 was a leap year? At a time when we're doing 75th year anniversaries, one group almost gets left out. The destroyer escorts did not take 29 February off. In January 1944, Task Group (TG) 21.16. was formed as an antisubmarine hunter-killer group. The group centered around the escort carrier BLOCK ISLAND (CVE-21), with the destroyer CORRY (DD-463), and destroyer escorts BRONSTEIN (DE-189) THOMAS (DE-102), BREEMAN (DE-104), and BOSTWICK (DE-103). On 16 February, the group left Norfolk for patrol in the North Atlantic.



USS BRONSTEIN DE-189, one of the participants in the February 29th operation.

On the evening of 29 February, THOMAS made a surface radar contact, and BOSTWICK joined her in the search to identify the contact. Meanwhile, BLOCK ISLAND detached BRONSTEIN, under the command of Sheldon Kinney, to search for a second suspected U-boat.

At 2208, while the destroyer escort hunted the new enemy, one of her star shells revealed U-709 on the surface, preparing to attack THOMAS and BOSTWICK. BRONSTEIN opened fire, and her guns registered several hits. The submarine went deep to escape, and the three destroyer escorts attacked her with hedgehogs and depth charges. The action continued until 0324 on 1 March, when THOMAS finally sank U-709 with a deep pattern of depth charges.

While this action was going on, a second U-boat stealthily maneuvered to attack BLOCK ISLAND. BRONSTEIN made sonar contact on her at



Sixty-eight years ago, the Greek flag was hoisted as USS SLATER became A/T AETOS.

0137, and immediately began dropping depth charges. At 0155, BRONSTEIN fired the fatal pattern. After only an hour's work, the warship's crew received the reward of a tremendous explosion. Taking no chances, BRONSTEIN fired a final 18-charge pattern at 0236. That was the end of the submarine, later identified as U-603.

Sixty-eight years ago, on 1 March 1951, USS SLATER was transferred and commissioned into the Greek Navy as A/T AETOS D01. Cdr. Athanassios Athanassiou took command of the ship in a ceremony at the Charlestown Navy Yard in Boston. She would serve the Hellenic Navy for

forty years.

Finally, we have sad news to pass along. Maralyn Walker, wife of our dedicated Tuesday Storekeeper, Dick Walker, USCG, crossed the bar on Monday, February 25th, following a long illness.

Prior to her health issues, Maralyn worked alongside Dick as one of our most dedicated volunteers. Upon graduation from Eldora High School in Iowa in 1958, Maralyn went on to receive a bachelor's degree in religion from Valparaiso University. Maralyn worked for the Social Security

Administration from 1966 to until her retirement in 1998. She was an active volunteer at many entities, including Albany Maritime Ministry, Albany Medical Center, St. Peter's Hospital, and the USS Slater. Our condolences go out to Dick and Maralyn's family.



Dick and Maralyn Walker handling lines for USS SLATER's winter move to Rensselaer in 2002.

Don't forget the donate button on our homepage www.ussslater.org and to like us on Facebook for daily updates.

See you next month!