

SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
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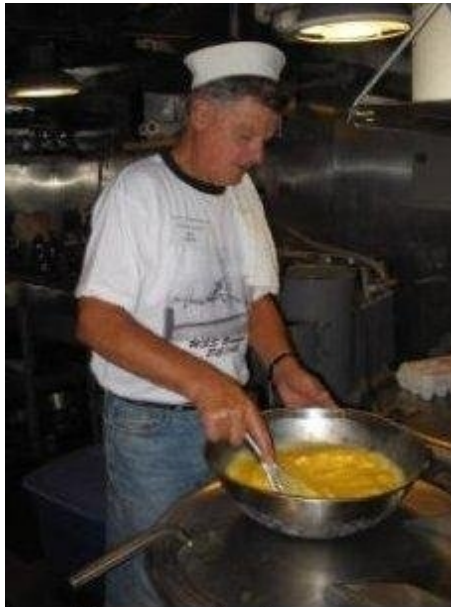
We'll it's over. The event we have been preparing for so many months is done and it was great. The 32nd Annual Convention of the Destroyer Escort Sailors Association was held here in Albany the first week of September, and for us it was like a big family reunion. It kind of felt like a big Greek wedding, stockholders meeting and admiral's inspection all rolled into one. This was our chance to show the folks who initially raised the money to bring the SLATER back from Greece what we have been doing with all those donations, and we think we did them proud.

By the final week before the Convention, Erik Collin had every deck painted with a fresh deck blue. He put out the word that he didn't want any grinding, cutting or chipping on his beautiful decks until after the convention. That put a real crimp into the activities of the chippers and the shipfitters, so coffee consumption doubled during the lull. Down in the engineroom **Gus, Karl and Gary** had all of their fresh red deck plates in place and all of their gauges shipped up. The weekday electricians, **Larry Williams, Ken Kaskoun, Bob Callender, Bill Coyle and Don Shattuck** had spent a month on the flying bridge getting that area cleaned up. The DESA advance party arrived the Friday before the convention. **Dori and Ed Glaser,** DESA webmaster **Pat Stephens, Phyllis Gruber** and her family, and all the board members. They began setting up the ship's store and the hospitality rooms for the onslaught that was to follow. **Ray Windle and Sam Saylor** invited me to lunch on Saturday, but with all the volunteer work going on I was too busy to break away.



The main deck starboard side awaiting inspection by our DESA visitors.

Monday the DESA members started drifting over to the ship in small groups, and everyone who stopped by got to meet and greet the Monday maintenance crew in action. Sam and Ray invited me to lunch, but there were too many DE vets aboard to share sea stories with, so I had to decline the invitation. Monday night was the early bird cocktail party at the hotel. My strongest recollection of the event was an encounter with DESA Board Member **Dean Hoover**, who quite gently and correctly reminded me that, "USS SLATER is not the last DE afloat in America." Let's take a minute and carefully examine that claim. We are very careful to use the "afloat" qualifier out of respect for **John McMichael** and his crew down on the USS STEWART, working so hard to restore her. We have to say "in America" because we still have McANN in Brazil, AHERTON in the Philippines, HURST in Mexico, and FORSTER in Vietnam. I think that's it, and I thought I had all my bases covered. What Dean reminded me was that the USS KNOX FF1052, and most importantly, formerly DE-1052, is still on donation hold in Bremerton. And to get technical, there are quite a few of the postwar Frigates that started life as DEs still serving foreign navies or sitting in backwaters. So, we now add the "World War II" qualifier, as we are the "Last WWII DE afloat in America." Rap my knuckles if I get it wrong again, because ultimately, it is these postwar DE sailors who served on the 1000 Class ships, alongside the children of the WWII sailors, who will inherit the stewardship of the SLATER for future generations. We've got to take care of these men.



Ron Zarem whipping up eggs. USS BROUGH ladies dining in the wardroom.

Tuesday morning, it was like we were back in Commission. Out of respect to one of our hardest working volunteers, **Ron Zarem**, we gave him special permission to feed his USS BROUGH shipmates breakfast out of the galley. They reported aboard at 0730 and prepared the traditional SOS for the crew. Their only minor disappointment was the substitution of chopped beef due to the unavailability of the more traditional chipped beef, but the result was delicious and much appreciated by the crew. My only complaint was somehow the crew managed to slip ashore before I could hold a muster and get them to commence ships work. Around noon, the gang came by and invited me out to lunch, but there were too many loose ends to deal with, so I had to decline. Tuesday night we held our semi-annual DEHM Board of Trustees meeting at the hotel, taking advantage of the fact that so many of our Trustees were in town for the DESA Convention. The discussion centered, as it always does, on

fundraising. Of note to our donors is the fact that the Trustees voted to initiate a Charitable Gift Annuity Program that will be administered by the Community Foundation of Albany. That will be explained in detail in the next issue of "Trim But Deadly."



DESA webmaster Pat Stephens and our volunteer curator Pat Perrella brought the late Anne McCarthy to the DESA Reunion in picture and sprit. Anne was one of the true and uncompromising experts on DE history.

Wednesday we hosted the crew of the USS COOLBAUGH aboard who held their reunion as part of the DESA event, but did a separate memorial service aboard to honor their shipmates. Once again a steady stream of DE visitors traveled between the hotel and the ship to reminisce and show their loved ones how they lived, fought, worked and played on these little ships. Preparations began for the big memorial service the following day. A large tent was erected in the parking lot, 100 extra chairs provided, and infamous port-a-johns arrived, all to handle the expected crowd. Decks and passageways were swept and swabbed, and the wheel polished one last time. SLATER was ready for inspection. Again, Ray and Sam invited me to lunch, but that evening we were due to give the SLATER Seminar to the DESA members at the hotel, so I had to prepare for that.

That evening I made my annual report to the DESA members on the progress we have made in the past year. I was ably assisted by **Barry Witte** and two of our Rensselaer Polytechnic Midshipmen volunteers, **John Camp** and **Ray Osborne**. John has been appointed Battalion Commander, based in part on his involvement and leadership as part of the SLATER's restoration volunteers. Barry addressed the group on preparing the next generation to take care of the SLATER, showing the membership that their love for the SLATER won't disappear when they are gone. A new generation is stepping up to the plate to take the watch. After the formal presentation, they remained in the meeting room to individually meet the DESA members, answer a variety of questions, and receive many thank yous from those in attendance. We can all be very proud of these midshipmen. It was obvious from their preparation, their professional dress, their articulate speaking and their mastery of the technical subject matter that these two represent the finest of the Navy's future - true and dedicated professionals in every sense of the word. We all want to convey our genuine thanks for the leadership of John, Ray, and all the midshipmen who help to preserve the spirit of the destroyer escort sailors through the preservation of the SLATER.

The following morning we arrived aboard at 0730 on Thursday, September 6th and made preparations for the big event. The weather was perfect, not too hot, not too cold, with a little overcast for the best pictures. Doors were opened, the colors went up, and we pulled out every chair we could lay our hands on.



One last minute change was due to the tide. We were at extreme low, making the maindeck podium difficult to see from shore. **Jerry Jones** quickly punted and rearranged the podium and sound system to the 01 Level between the 40mm gun mounts to give everyone a better view of the event.

Over 300 DESA members attended the memorial service aboard the SLATER.

The parking lot rapidly filled up, and **Ed Glaser** was volunteered for the thankless job of telling people the lot was full and directing the attendees to the parking lot across the street, without the baton and SP helmet we had promised him. Over three hundred attendees made it the largest memorial service we have ever held aboard the SLATER. At the appointed hour, two bells were struck and Master of Ceremonies **Paul Czesak** posted the SLATER color guard and DESA President **George Weidman** introduced the distinguished guests that included Albany County Executive **Mike Breslin**, Rensselaer County Executive **Kathy Jimino**, DESA Immediate Past President **Dick Ager**, Museum President **Frank Lasch**, Chairman **Sam Saylor**, Cdr. **Earle Flatt** USNR (Ret.), and President of the British Captain Class Frigate Assn. **Don Hitchcock**, who came all the way from England along with **Ralph Parks-Pheil** to be part of the event. **Bob Donlon** led the Pledge of Allegiance, Commander Flatt led the benediction, and **Dick Ager** sang the Star Spangled Banner, the first time we have ever had a live performance.



The Saratoga National Cemetery Honor Guard, CAPDESA members and the SLATER Gun Crew preparing for our largest memorial service ever.

DESA President George Weidman welcomed the crowd and Mike Breslin thanked all the DE vets for their service. Sam Saylor gave the keynote speech on the service DE sailors had given to the nation. Frank Lasch then read a letter from a Brit, **Graham Jones**, who wrote about how intolerable life had become for the British until the convoys started to get through, thanks to the efforts of the escorts. Frank also talked about the future of the Museum and thanked DESA for their efforts in writing Washington in support of our Save America's Treasures Grant request. **Tom Sawyer** and the **Saratoga National Cemetery Honor Guard** fired a 21 gun rifle salute followed by **Erik Collin's** gun crew firing the traditional three shot volley out of gun number three, which for many of the spectators ashore was the highlight of the ceremony. **Steve Stella** followed up with a beautiful rendition of TAPS, and **Reverend Flatt** closed the ceremony with the benediction.

At the conclusion of the ceremony the DESA members and guests swarmed aboard to get up close and personal aboard the type of ship they had once served on. They climbed to the flying bridge, cranked guns, spun the helm, cranked the engine order telegraph, adjusted the throttles, flashed the aldis lamps, keyed Morse code and climbed into bunks. I think DESA webmaster **Pat Stephens** summed it up best when she wrote of her visit, "I cannot begin to describe my fabulous time aboard SLATER. I think I touched every bulkhead, knob, rail, gun, you name it and I touched it. I do apologize for the trail of tears I left. I really was overcome with emotion the moment I stepped aboard. I had waited so long to be able to "walk in my father's shoes" and was not sure I would ever have the opportunity."



Tim Benner missed a Saturday, and it didn't take Doug Tanner long to find a replacement. After working with Midshipman Shayna Palesch, Doug told Benner to take the whole month off if he wanted.

When it was all over and the last car had left the lot, for the first time in a week, I found myself available for lunch. I had anticipated that this would be the day I could finally take the gang up on their invitation, and hadn't bothered to pack a lunch. The only problem was I'd neglected to tell them. As I came topside, I saw Ray's vehicle leaving the parking lot with a carload of people, heading to lunch. After a few minutes spent contemplating the situation, I resorted to rummaging through the galley refrigerator to see what my options were. All I found was a half loaf of bread and a bowl of **Ron Zarem's** SOS leftover from the BROUGH breakfast. Needless to say, I toasted a couple of pieces of bread and heated the SOS in the non-WWII era microwave. It was even better the second time around.

The only item we didn't have ready for the DESA group was the whaleboat. Lawrence "Rocky" Rockwood,

former sonarman of the USS COONER DE172 had hoped to have it back aboard, but he found additional rot under the bow and stern sections. We decided to address all these issues now. Rocky has spent the last nine months working on the boat down at Scarano's yard and reports that he has removed all the ceilings to expose the ribs. Ribs that were cracked, split or rotten were removed and, where needed, sister frames were installed. The ceilings were reinstalled and primed and painted. This was no easy task as almost all the screw heads were painted in or broken. Considering the need for future repairs, all new stainless steel screws were used.



The repairs on the SLATER's whaleboat are progressing well at Scarano's Boatyard



Engineers Karl Herchenroder, Gary Lubrano, Gus Negus and Bill Siebert going over the injectors on the aft ship's service generator

The bench seats in the forward section of the boat were completely rebuilt involving all new frames and marine plywood front sections. Most of the original bench structure was badly wasted. These have all been primed and painted. To access the bow section, the bulkhead was cut following the hatch openings. Bad ribs were removed, in part or whole, and replaced with sister ribs where necessary. Some soft wood was found on the surface section of the stem. The lifting eye was removed, the wood saturated with thinned epoxy, the seat of the lifting eye rebuilt with epoxy putty and the lifting eye reinstalled. All was then painted with a linseed oil mix and then primed. To get to the aft section, the deck had to be cut out and the bulkhead removed as well. The deck that was in place was bedded in Sikaflex, which is an adhesive as well as a caulking compound, and then it was screwed down. Rotted, broken or cracked ribs were removed and, where necessary, new ribs or sections were sistered in. All wood was painted with a linseed oil mix and then primed and the deck section painted. Styrofoam flotation will be installed under seats and in the forward and aft sections. The hull and keel have been checked for dry rot. Where needed, seams were caulked. The hull was faired,

sanded, primed and painted with two coats of marine enamel. As it is so late in the season, we will probably not bring the boat back this year, but leave it under cover until next spring, giving Rocky more time to go over it with a fine tooth comb. Again, as one of the last of 26,000 wooden whaleboats, we want to give Rocky all the time he needs to make her right.

In addition to the DESA Reunion and all the groups that come under their umbrella, we hosted reunions for the USS PETERSON DE152, USS PAUL G. BAKER DE642, USS ULVERT M. MOORE DE442, USS RICHARD M. ROWELL DE403, and USS LST1001 this month, and the USS HOLTON DE703 and USS GEORGE W. INGRAM DE62 are coming in early October. The crew has been beneficiary of a culinary competition that has resulted in some great chow. Stan Murawski is back with us cooking lunch for the Saturday crew as he recovers from cancer surgery. Not to be outdone, the Monday crew has enlisted the talents of Chief Bernie Smith who served rib-eye streaks last Monday. The competition is getting stiff and we're all gaining weight. Stan is making noise about countering with filet mignon.



As the final event of the month, the SLATER volunteers gathered with the Fall Michigan Crew and our NROTC midshipmen for our annual lasagna dinner.

Finally, I need to report on the loss of another one of our old time volunteers, George Erwin. Our sympathies go out to Barbara and his family. George had served on the USS GENERAL W. C. LANGFITT AP-151 and was on the decommissioning detail of the USS ALASKA CB-1. He stayed in the Reserves until 1987 and retired as a Chief Boatswain's Mate. George was a dedicated fireman who was Chief of the Colonie Fire Department for ten years and worked as purchasing agent for the town. Aboard SLATER George was the running mate of Bob Dawson. He served as Clark Farnsworth's steady helper for many years. His one act of rebellion was one day when Clark didn't have anything for George to do, and sent him to Bob Dawson, who suggested to George that he polish the brass in the wheelhouse. George promptly returned the rags and polish to Bob with the statement, "I'm a Chief Boatswain's Mate for Chrissakes. I don't do brass." But he did just about everything else. We'll miss him.



George Erwin handling lines during the winter 2002 move.

See you next month.