

SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers

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Destroyer Escort Historical Museum

USS Slater DE-766

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The fall work week crew.

The month of October began with our annual Fall work week. Much like the USS Huse group, labeling this workweek the “Michigan” work week is now a misnomer. Though it had its origins with the Michigan Chapter of DESA, participants now come from all over the country. This year the 15 participants came from Michigan, Montana, Washington, Pennsylvania, New York, Massachusetts and Florida. Once again, “Michigan” Dick Walker was the prime mover in organizing the event that happened the week of October 5th. Chief **Bernard Smith** once again volunteered to cook for the crew, and he was assisted by **Roy Brandon** and **Jim Ray**. Incidentally, this is Jim’s third work week since he announced, “I’m getting too old for this, so I won’t be back.”

Shipfitter Laird Confer, with Butch Warrender and Jim Parker, took on the task of assisting Doug Tanner with our davit project. In addition, they did several odd jobs, including making ventilation fittings for the crawl space under number three gun and replacing a broken stanchion. **Ron Prest** spent the week in the B-3 bilges with an assist from **Gary Dieckman**. **Barry Witte** had removed the strainer for the B-3 fire and bilge pump, permitting access to a section of bilge that probably hadn’t been painted since the ship was built, and that now looks shipyard fresh. **Guy Huse** continued work on the B-4 fire and bilge pump, as well as changing brushes on the main motors.



Gary Dieckman painting the underside of the deck plates.



Ron Prest in the bilges.

Dick Walker went back to his old haunt on the flying bridge, this year ably assisted by retired Chief Fire controlman, **Mike Marko**. They lifted the stands around the MK-52, and sanded and primed the deck underneath. They also secured the area for the winter by removing the binoculars and bearing circles from the lookout chairs. **Ron Mazure**, who'd rather use a needle gun than eat, spent the week on the foc's'cle scaling, painting, and priming. A new volunteer, **Jim Rogers**, whose father was a sonarman on USS OSWALD DE-767, came all the way from Montana to help **Gary Sheedy** chip paint in aft steering. The man is an animal on a needle gun, barely taking a break.

John Meeker and **Joe Stourt** came all the way from Seattle to help out. John's father served in USS INCH DE-146, while his buddy Joe served aboard USS MADDOX DD-731 in Vietnam. Both of them spent the week sanding and painting bunk frames on the fantail. And finally, **John Yocum** came in all the way from Florida. John is a Coastie who served aboard USCGC DAUNTLESS WMEC-624. John spent the week scaling and masking the 40mm guns, which had been started by the HUSE crew. We ultimately got all three forties sprayed out by **Kevin Sage** the last Tuesday in October, which was probably the last warm sunny day of the season. That was cutting it close.



Congratulations to Volunteer of the Year Gary Sheedy, part of the Navy Birthday celebration.



Ken Kaskoun at the head of the Navy Birthday chow line.

The next big event was the Capital District Chief Petty Officers Association celebration of the Navy Birthday on Columbus Day. Each year, the Chiefs recognize a SLATER volunteer who has performed extraordinary service in the past 12 months. This year they bestowed the honor on **Gary Sheedy**.

This was not only for the seven weeks aboard SLATER in the shipyard, but also for his painstaking restoration of the refrigeration machinery space over the past fourteen years. In his citation they said:

“Gary, we are very impressed with your efforts in providing electrical support maintenance for USS SLATER over the last twelve years. Since your retirement from your civilian employment two years ago, you have been averaging four days a week working aboard SLATER. This past spring you spent seven weeks living aboard USS SLATER in the shipyard in New York City, doing whatever needed to be done and helping wherever needed. Of particular note is your restoration of the ship’s original “reefer deck,” a project that was over a decade in the making. Your consistent efforts have been an inspiration to your fellow volunteers and your dedication and meticulous attention to detail have provided the opportunity for many generations of visitors to witness the role that USS SLATER has played in our history.”

Our thanks to Art Dott, ETC Brian LaPlante, YNCS Sean Robbins, and EMCM Jack Ryan, and CDR Thomas Riley for their efforts in putting on the event. Gary has now undertaken the restoration of the steering machinery room. He wants us to put the word out, asking that any of you who have photographs of DE steering engine rooms to please scan them and send them to us. We have every expectation that it will meet or exceed the quality of the work he did on the reefer deck.



RM1 Joe Breyer making our first contacts with the TBL radio transmitter.

The radio gang reached a true milestone this month on the bumpy road to 1945 ‘operational readiness’ for Slater’s TBL HF transmitter. After 5 years of installation and frustration, **Mike Wyles, KE2EE**, made the actual first radio contact and exchange of signal reports on the 40-meter ham band. He used SLATER’S current call sign **WW2DEM**. The final steps of getting the TBL to respond to remote control from local operating position three through the transmitter control patch panel, and tuning the TBL for the 40 meter ‘ham band’ using the portside longwire antenna, were completed after a lot of trial and error.

All the equipment used was 70 year-old US Navy radio equipment. This included our TBL Transmitter, RBC Receiver, and LM-12 Frequency Meter. It also included our Navy earphones, Navy transmitter remote control, and CW key, transmitting with the original ship’s longwire horizontal antenna and receiving with the forward vertical wire antenna on the port side. Mike contacted AB3AP near Lancaster, PA. He reported our CW signal as “perfectly readable, strongest possible”. He did say that our signal sounded ‘like a vintage transmitter’ and we personally kind of like that. Also, consider that on our end we used around 1900 pounds of equipment. AB3AP’s entire station is about half the size of a carton of cigarettes and weighs about a pound. How times have changed.

Unfortunately, our first contact was not with our own Stan Levandowski WB2LQF, as we intended. But the following weekend, RM1 **Joe Breyer** took over and spent most of Saturday on the air making several more contacts. We have been operating on or near 7.062 Mc (CW), using all original authentic Navy equipment right down to Joe's original Navy earphones and speed key. The whole saga goes back to 2006 when we identified and removed the TBL from the USS CLAMP ARS-33 in the Suisun Bay Reserve Fleet, under the direction of Fleet superintendent **Joe Pecoraro**. We couldn't have gotten it and the motor generator off without the assistance of the crew of USS PAMPANITO, namely **Rich Pekelney, Jim Adams, Tom Horsfall, Len Vaden, Aron Washington, and Will Donzelli**. Once safely ashore, **Tom Horsfall** spent a year restoring the TBL to operating condition.

It was September 2010 when we shipped the restored transmitter east, and Tom Horsfall journeyed from California to oversee the initial installation. When they cranked it up for the first time, it lasted about ten minutes before a winding opened up in the motor generator. It took four years to get the generator problem straightened out. In the meantime, **Stan Byrn** donated a beautiful RBC receiver to operate in conjunction with our TBL, and Tom restored that for us, too. It's been a long road, and we are indebted to a lot of people who helped keep this history alive.

Doug Tanner, Tim Benner, and Super Dave Mardon are progressing well on the davit pedestal. All the pieces have been fabricated and fitted. All that is needed now is the final welding and replacement of the bolts. They even set up 92-year-old **Clark Farnsworth** with a chair, so he could put a pass on the inboard weld. **Clark** is still producing for us! **Doug Tanner** has been investigating an annoying leak into the aft crews' quarters. Water has been leaking down through the gun stuffing tubes into the crawlspace, where it's rotted out the deck and then leaking into compartment C-203L. Stopping the leaking and repairing the deck will be the shipfitters next project. They've also installed ventilation, so the space now has a chance to dry out.



Paul Guarnieri and Thomas Scian working the crawl space under gun three.

We're also addressing the crawlspace under gun three. All the chippers are given a choice. Work in aft steering with **Gary Sheedy**, or work in the crawlspace under gun three. Most pick aft steering. Gary has been ably assisted by **Ron Prest, Bill Wetterau, Erik Collin, Earl Herchenroder, and Ray Gallows**. However, **Thomas Scian, Paul Guarnieri**, and new volunteer **Justin Endriss** have been working on the crawlspace, and they have done a great job scaling and vacuuming the place. We're hoping to get the place painted out with Corro Seal rust converter before it gets too cold.

The engineers are undertaking a major effort. Mike Dingmon, Gary Lubrano, Karl Herchenroder, and Ken Myrick have become big-time plumbers. Now that they have an open sea chest as a source of cooling water for the ship's service generator, they are repiping the four-inch discharge line to a hull opening above the waterline. This is in addition to the weekly exercising of the whaleboat, and keeping that diesel maintained.



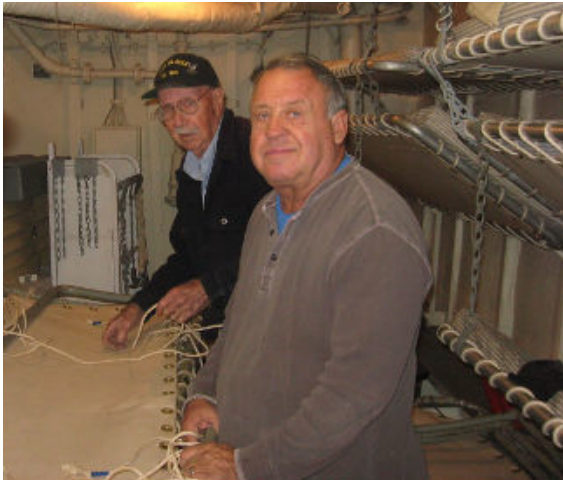
RPI Midshipmen overhaul the B-3 strainer.



Engineers Mike Dingmon, Karl Herchenroder and Ken Myrick.

Barry Witte, and his cadre of students and RPI midshipmen, continue their work on the fire and flushing pump in B-3, as well as overhauling applicable firemain valves. We are indebted to Midshipmen First Class **Troy Violette**, who organizes the weeks' volunteers. He also has been assisting the welders, including the fabrication of the scaffold that they all use to sit over the side of the ship on the davit project. Second Class Mid **Tulsa Scott** is the leader of the midshipman team that is providing the manpower to help make the B-3 cooling and fire main project possible. **David Altman** has become the gasket guy, using the ship's gasket cutter to make gaskets on demand, and **Zach Flagler** has become the valve overhaul specialist.

George Christophersen continues to volunteer his extraordinary machinist skills. Significant contributions include manufacturing new valve stems to replace bent ones from stock recovered from James River Reserve Fleet years ago. Without this we could not operate key system valves. He also machined a special left-hand-thread nut used inside the fire pump. Although this nut will never be seen by any visitors, it is an essential part of the system, without which the entire project would not be possible. This, in addition to all the 20mm shoulder rests he fabricated for the guns.



Bosun's Mates Bill Haggart and Walt Stuart relashing bunks.



Our resident sailmaker Angelo Bracco.

Around the ship a host of other volunteers do all the odd jobs necessary to maintain our old girl. **Chris Fedden** keeps the storeroom organized. Coastie **Dick Walker** runs the errands, **Jim Gelston** keeps the clocks wound, **Smitty** keeps the crew fed, **Angelo Bracco** is sewing new covers for the flying bridge equipment, **Claire Oesterreich** keeps the silver polished and tries to make order out of our collections, Larry Williams skips the whaleboat, and Boat's Haggart and Walt Stuart have been sanding, painting and lashing bunk frames and canvases.

As the colder weather approaches, the general public tours have only slightly slowed, just as overnights and school field trips have increased. It's not uncommon to see groups of forty to sixty students returning to their buses from the ship, only to be replaced by another large group. Similarly, Friday and Saturday nights have been filled with scouts enjoying our overnight programming. We're indebted to our volunteer docents **Dennis Nagi, Mike Marko, Alan Fox, Bob Dawson, Ken Kaskoun, Don Cushman, Jack Madden, Nelson Potter, Paul Guarnieri, Art Dott, Grant Hack, Tom Cline, and Jim Kuba** who continue to get us great reviews on tripadvisor.com! We need to pay tribute to **Tom McLaughlin** for his service with the overnight campers for so many years. This former radarman on MIDWAY and SALEM has "retired" from overnight work. Thanks Tom, for so many years of dedicated service.



Cleaning gun three after the Navy Birthday salute.

Our interns this season, Vincent Knuth, Julianne Madsen, Dan Kastanis, Jonathan Palmer, Andrew Smith, Claire Burgon, and Heinz Granderath have gone above and beyond to make sure the ship is presentable and ready for tours, while also lending a hand to fill any holes in the schedule. We have been hearing nothing but positive feedback about our overnights; which now include a signal flag related scavenger hunt. This evening activity takes place aboard the ship and encourages scouts to work together. The campers are given six clues to locate hidden signal flags, and then use a Bluejackets Manual to decode the found message. While the schedule for the overnights has remained relatively similar over the past few years, we constantly update the programming to keep our honorary overnight crew engaged and eager to return.

In the “Why didn’t we think of this years ago?” department was our very first OXI Day Commemoration. The event helped us celebrate SLATER’s forty years in the Hellenic Navy as A/T AETOS. USS SLATER has a special connection to the people of Greece. In 1951, the ship, along with three sister ships, was transferred to the Hellenic Navy and renamed AETOS, meaning eagle. She completed hundreds of reconnaissance missions and training cruises for Naval Cadets over a forty-year career. After her decommissioning in 1991, a group of destroyer escort sailors negotiated SLATER’s return to the U.S. as a museum ship in 1993.

Each October 28th, millions of Greeks around the world commemorate OXI Day or “No” Day, a day honoring Greece’s courageous resistance against the Italians during World War II. In 1940, Mussolini delivered an ultimatum to Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas, demanding the entry of the Italian army and the occupation of Greek territory. The Prime Minister refused, and the response was quickly echoed by the people of Athens as “Oxi,” meaning “No.” The Italian forces entered Greece through the teep Pindos Mountains. There they met fierce and unexpected resistance. Hitler was forced to delay the invasion of Russia, and extend their campaign into the winter in order to subdue the Greeks after the Italians failed in their efforts.

This fatal diversion proved to be a great advantage for the Allied forces. Winston Churchill paid homage to the Greek resistance by claiming, "...until now we would say that the Greeks fight like heroes. From now on we will say that heroes fight like Greeks."



Our OXI Day color guard was a little more colorful than usual.



Flying the flag of Greece on OXI Day.

We commemorated the day with a ceremony. It included playing the National Anthem of Greece, flying a Greek flag from the battle gaff, and reading a history of OXI Day, and how the Greek resistance changed the course of World War II. Our Facebook page was full of appreciation from the Greek community around the world and it will now become an annual event for us. Our thanks go to Father **Dennis Nagi** and Father **Patrick Legato** of **St. Sophia Greek Orthodox Church** for their encouragement and participation.

We're trying something new. We have received a lot of requests for color photos of the ship in her dazzle camouflage. With that in mind, we are producing a 12-month full-color calendar for 2015 that documents our shipyard odyssey and highlights the return trip to Albany. A limited number of calendars will be produced based on orders. Calendars will be shipped in time for the holiday season.

We have two on the binnacle list. Our thoughts and prayers go out to volunteers Bob Callender and Don Miller. Bob is home from the hospital recovering from pneumonia. And Don has been in St. Peter's Hospital for five weeks. He has been suffering for months with severe fluid retention trouble that have resulted in kidney and heart problems. The underlying cause is still unknown. We wish them both speedy recoveries.



Our St. Nikolas icon has been watching over us.

Finally, in connection with our Greek heritage, one of the objects we found aboard the ship when it came to Albany was this image of St. Nikolas. The note attached said it was "located in the ship's chapel." We asked on Facebook if anyone who had served on AETOS could give us some details about this. **Leonidas Blaveris** wrote on our Facebook page that St. Nickolas is the "Protective Saint" of the Hellenic Navy, Hellenic Merchant Marine, and Hellenic Coast Guard. He is celebrated each year by all Greek Marine communities on the 6th of December, according to Greek Orthodox Church traditions. Because of this, in all Greek flagged ships there is always at least one St. Nikolas' "icon" to protect the ship and sailors. On small ships it was usually on the bridge, but larger ships might have a dedicated Chapel. Now we know who's been watching over us the last 20 years. **See you next month.**