



# SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers

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Destroyer Escort Historical Museum

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**I had a personal epiphany this summer.** It was a warm summer evening in June. I was sitting on the floor of the drydock with my back against the dock wall, looking at the ship in the twilight. It was just a couple of days before she was going into the water. The hull was freshly painted and all the anodes shiny and new. We had raised \$1.4 million, and had completed the overhaul without going into debt, and we still had the endowment intact with another \$1.5 million. All thanks to your support.

**I looked up at SLATER and asked her, “Why you?”** Out of the 563 war-built destroyer escorts, how did you get to be the chosen one, the recipient of so much love and affection?” There are so many ships with more significant histories; or, all those ships that were sunk as targets, or scrapped in mint condition with two years steaming time, and all their spare parts and paperwork aboard without a ding in the cabinetwork. They were kept under dehumidification until they were stricken from the list. And you, a beat up, stripped-out hulk with forty years of hard running, headed for the scrap heap in Crete. And then along came **Marty Davis, Sam Saylor, Art Filete** and several thousand others with a dream. To quote Marty, a dream that “had a snowball’s chance in hell of success.” And here you are, one of the most beautiful and completely restored ships in the historic fleet.



**I thought about the first time I saw the ship in October of 1993, when I did the initial survey for Marty and Sam to determine what parts they would need to restore her to 1945 configuration.** I’d never seen such a rust-bucket. The SOLDESA crew chipped an amazing amount of paint, but when I came to Albany in 1997 on a one-year leave of absence from USS KIDD, she was still a rust-bucket with \$5,000 in the bank. I thought the job was to restore the ship but, though I didn't realize it at the time, the real job was building a base of support. I had a simple business plan: make people love the ship and beg them for money. How to do that? Get a newsletter going and

communicate. Fortunately, here I had the roots of an organization in the form of DESA that I could draw on to build the museum membership.

**I was thinking about how amazing it was that so many people had come together for this ship, and donated so much money to make this drydocking happen.** And here's the epiphany. This didn't come naturally. It was all learned from an old Chief Boatswain's Mate, **J. M. "Boats" Newberry**. He was the founder of the P.T. Boat Museum and Library and my first boss in this business. Like most Chiefs, he was a hard taskmaster. He operated a steel tank fabrication business in West Memphis, Arkansas, and had served with Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron 9 in the Solomons in 1943, when we still weren't sure who was going to win. He had organized the P.T. Boat Veterans, and was raising money to preserve the boats in Fall River, Massachusetts.



**Kris Catherine took this beautiful image of USS SLATER that we used for our online Christmas greeting. The culmination of 20 years of work by thousands of people.**

**He hired me as an administrative assistant.** In our youth, we don't realize how much we are learning, or how much information we are soaking up while watching our elders. Everything I know about raising money and dealing with veterans was initially learned from "Boats" Newberry. "Boats" knew that Sailors and their families are first loyal to their ship, their class of ship, their type of ship, and then to the Navy in that order. He was the first to pass that understanding on to me. Thirty-five years and three ships later, it is this loyalty that Sailors and their families have for their ships that put USS SLATER into the shipyard.

**When I went to the JOSEPH. P. KENNEDY JR. DD-850 as her curator, I continued to learn more from Ed Ward and how he ran Tin Can Sailors.** But, everything Ed knew about running a veterans organization and raising money, he had also learned from "Boats" Newberry. So in a very real sense, "Boats" has had a big

hand in restoring KENNEDY, KIDD and SLATER. That's part of his legacy. I hadn't thought much about him in years, but looking up at SLATER, all shiny in her new camouflage paint, I realized the impact "Boats" Newberry had on me and the ship, and I wished he were around so I could thank him.

**It's been a most amazing year, and you all made it happen.** We finally feel secure that an ice flow isn't going to punch a hole in the hull. We continue our winter restoration projects. The shipfitters continue to work on the davit pedestal, which is nearing completion. They joked in July about dragging the project out to the middle of winter, which they have managed to do. But as I write, the last piece has been fitted into the spray shield, and the final welds should be done shortly after Christmas.

**Doug Tanner's next project will be working under gun three to replace the rotted deck in the crawlspace that is designated the "landing force equipment locker."** Gun three is now covered in canvas, but in the spring we'll get into replacing the gun mount stuffing tubes that are the root cause of the rainwater leaking into C-203-L. He's also got the wasted bulkhead in the aft cross passageway, and that needs to be repaired. In addition, he's got the rotted out deck over C-202L that is a result of the water getting in through the bulkhead. The shipfitters certainly have job security.



**Super Dave Mardon practices his vertical welding while Earl Herchenroder assists.**



**Even Clark Farnsworth got a few passes into the spray shield job.**

**Back in the steering motor room, Gary Sheedy has had more help chipping than he expected with Ron Prest, Bill Wetterau, and Ron Mazure all working together to bear a hand.** He's about 25% done with the chipping. There is nothing more miserable than holding a needle gun overhead, but these guys continue to do the most difficult of jobs. Using **Ed Zajkowski's** research and blueprints, and a beautiful photo of the steering engine room aboard USS CURRIER DE-700, Gary is planning to weld in missing stuffing tubes and put the wiring back to the way it was run originally.





**Mike Marko and Kenny Skaarup got the gun director covered.**



**Boats Haggart, Walt Stuart and the deck gang got all the circulators up and rigged over the side.**

**Boats Haggart and his gang handled all the winter preparations.** All the guns, searchlights and directors have been covered with canvas. **Angelo Bracco** made new covers for all the MK 14 gun sights and a beautiful new cover for the Mark 52 director. **Mike Marko** and **Kenny Skarrup** climbed up to “nosebleed country” to put that on. They lashed it down to withstand a typhoon. With the completion of the davit pedestal, the deck gang has been using the davit guys to rotate it and spread the grease around, which doesn’t spread very well in this cold. All fourteen Kasko circulators have been rigged over the side, and **Gary Sheedy** and **Larry Williams** made all the electrical hook ups. These should keep ice from forming around the hull, but it hasn’t yet gotten cold enough to need them. Let’s hope it stays that way.



**Jerry Jones and Joe Breyer musing over their TBL chirp issue.**



**Walt, Tommy Moore and Boats covering guns for the winter.**

Up in radio, we welcomed **Stan Levandowski** back after a long illness. He put the finishing touches on our "all-American-made," state-of-the-art, 100-watt ham station that we can put on the air rapidly and with no fuss. We achieved our initial goal - there are just two pushbutton power switches to turn on, and a "TUNE" button to push and that's it! We can instantly move to any HF ham band we want. His winter project is

restoring a WWII Vibroplex Morse code key, for future use on the ship. He is standing by whenever the radio gang needs a “signal evaluator” who is 100 miles away to give them feedback on the TBL's signal. Which leads us to **Jerry Jones, Mike Wyles, and Joe Breyer**, and their efforts to get the “chirp” out of the TBL signal. They have spent hours pouring over the schematics and taking voltage readings to see where the problem lies.



Students Evan Burgess and David Altman getting practical experience working on the fire main in B-3.

Down in B-3 the cooling for the 8-268A ship's service generator is complete and the snipes are now figuring out the best way of getting cooling water to the emergency diesel generator in B-4. This past weekend, Clarkson engineering senior **Erik Altman** was back on break and he and his younger brother David assisted Barry Witte in removing, cleaning and reinstalling one of the anode boxes in the firemain. That does not sound like much, but it took them all day. They have also reinstalled the last of the valve stems that **George Christophersen** made. **Tulsa Scott** helped with that job. **We remembered Pearl Harbor on**



Pearl Harbor Day at the Zaloga American Legion Post with the Slater Color Guard, Mayor Kathy Sheehan, and BJ Costello visiting with Mr and Mrs. Bill Langston.

**December 7<sup>th</sup> at the Joseph E. Zaloga American Legion Post.** Our only Pearl Harbor survivor was **Bill Langston** of USS WEST VIRGINIA and his wife. I remember when we had eight in attendance. And Christmas came a few days early aboard the SLATER. The messdeck was filled to capacity, as guides and maintenance crew gathered together for our annual party. Smitty prepared a steak dinner for volunteers and staff

with all the trimmings. Board President **Tony Esposito** underwrote the whole event as his Christmas gift to the crew. Wearing a “Santa hat” was optional, but encouraged. Tony loves to sing and led everyone in a round of familiar Christmas carols including “Away in a Manger” and “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” What was lacking in melody was more than made up for in spirit. Finally, it was a chance for everyone to say goodbye to our outgoing Interpretations Coordinator **Heather Maron**. Tony wished her the best of luck in the future, as she moves on to take a position in her father's company.





Chief Smith and Dick Walker man the chow line at our annual Christmas Party.



The party was a chance for everyone to say farewell to Heather Maron.

**The party was also an opportunity for the crew to meet her successor, Dave Pitlyk.** Dave is no stranger to the operation, having started with us as a guide intern in 2006. He's a certified New York State teacher, who's been subbing in area schools ever since his return from the West Coast in 2011. He enjoys teaching, and he's been our functioning Sunday Duty Officer for the past three years. So, he is familiar with all aspects of the operation and the crew. He and Heather are working together to ensure a smooth transition when she departs December 31.



Some things haven't changed since 1944, like winter.

**And, of course, all this leads to the point of why you are getting this newsletter in the mail with the accompanying return envelope, our annual Winter Fund Appeal.** Each year, when we sell our last ticket in November, our income stream ends. So, we're left with two choices. Spend our savings or ask you to donate once again. To the fiscally conservative, the choice is obvious. You can see that, in terms of accomplishments, this has been an amazing year. Each winter we cut back staff, turn down the heat, and dim the lights. But, we need your help to keep from dipping further into our working capital to get through the winter, and to continue to build the endowment.

**I want to thank all of you who have already contributed.** The donations have been coming in ever since October. I'll be making my own \$100 donation to the Winter Fund, and I hope all of you will join us in contributing what you can. For those of you who receive this newsletter online and don't get the return envelope, you can participate by downloading our donation form and simply marking it "winter fund." Place it in an envelope addressed to USS SLATER, PO Box 1926, Albany, NY 12201-1926. Or, you can click the "Donate" button on our website home page and contribute via PayPal. I might add, to those of you getting this newsletter for the first time, SLATER SIGNALS is available online.

**Please be as generous as you can, to help us keep the volunteers warm this winter.  
See you next month.**