

SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
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Phone (518) 431-1943, Fax 432-1123 Vol.
17 No. 5, May 2014



There's something special about wandering into the galley at 0300 looking for midrats. The radio is tuned to WCBS oldies, so there's always good music. We never turn it off. The coffee is still on, so I always take a cup. Despite the fact that it's 22 hours old, it tastes pretty good. I usually settle for a piece of cheese, but if I'm really lucky I score a leftover piece of one of Eddie Z's peach or apple raisin pies. Then it's back to the captain's cabin, the space I occupy, though a steward has yet to bring me coffee or make my bunk. I can't even get the quartermaster to put up the absentee pennant when I go ashore.

This whole evolution has led to a lot of sleepless nights. One spending a lot of time hoping that we are spending this money as prudently and carefully as possible to ensure that this ship will continue to honor our veterans and educate the public for another 70 years. That leads to a lot of sitting topside and walking the decks, but that is actually a benefit of this experience. The warm nights are beautiful with the ship traffic in the channel, the Bayonne Bridge lit up red, white and blue, and the bright lights of the New York City skyline to the east.



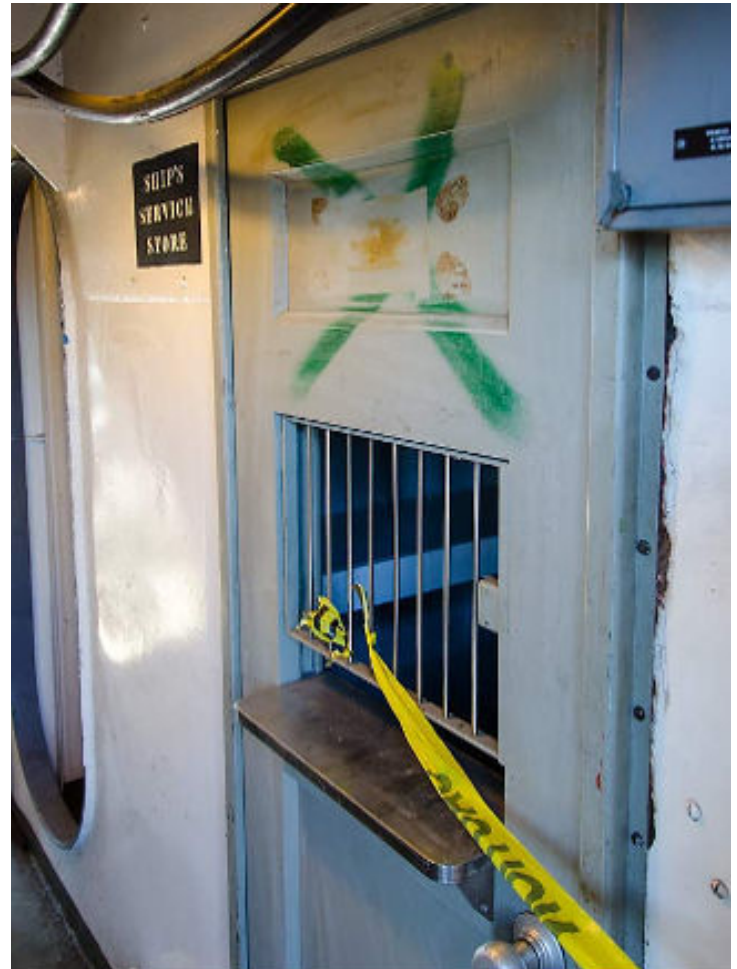
We can't thank you enough for your generosity in our last Hull Fund solicitation.

The success has enabled us to add several items to the work list that we were hesitant to add before. Included among them were scaling and preservation of eleven of the worst deteriorated skin tanks, magazines and voids, scaling and painting the chain locker, blasting and painting the anchor chain, replacing

two wasted chocks, pulling the capstan and sandblasting the inside of it, replacing the glass in eleven portholes, and purchasing 1,800 feet of new mooring line. Our mooring line is all 15 years old. The original budget for the project was \$1.2 million. When we add in the towing, bilge cleaning in Albany, and the incidentals, it will probably be \$1.3 million. The difference will be borrowed from the endowment.



"Boats" Haggart rigged the life raft.



New door on the ship's store.

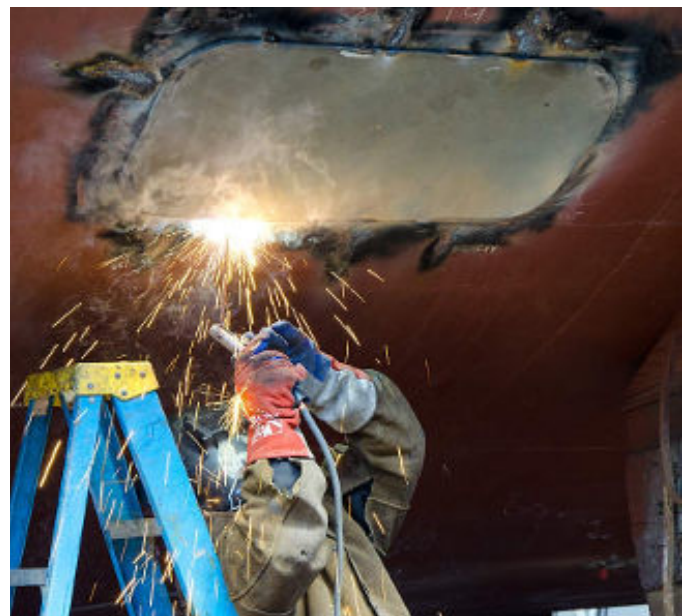
We measure time in weeks. As May slips into June we are in week 8 of our 9-week drydock period. But surprise! It won't be over in 9 weeks. That's 9 weeks in drydock plus 2-3 weeks of pierside completion work. A different crew every week but a fair amount of repeat volunteers. Week 5 found Gary Sheedy, Walt Forney, Wayne White, and **Ed Zajkowski** aboard. At this point we made the decision to try and have the yard rebuild three of our worst watertight doors, and replace the glass in eleven of our most battered portholes. A crane lifted the doors ashore and the crew hand-carried the portholes down the ladder. The shipyard machinists finished repacking the propeller shafts in the shaft alleys, so that item was checked off the list.

The most critical evolution of the week was re-establishing the waterline. This was critical to the placement of the top of the doublers as the line moved aft. In Albany, as an afterthought, I had **Erik Collin** measure the distance from the main deck to the waterline in ten spots down the length of the ship. And, **Barry Witte** asked our loyal RPI midshipmen to ride the paint float around the ship, marking the waterline with alternating orange and white spray paint marks. We had three photos showing the waterline at the bow and stern draft marks and the sonar dome.

These measures became critical in making sure the plate line ran straight and true. We marked the waterline after hours. The yard had Rogers Surveying verify our measurement so the project could progress without delay. In the end, the plate line looks perfect, but we won't know for sure until she is back afloat and we can see if the weight of the additional plate and anodes was equaled by the amount of waste oil and water that we pumped off the ship during tank cleaning.



Seal welding the waterline doubler.



Another doubler in a thin spot.



The flag flew at half staff for our WWII Engineering Officer and Trustee Emeritus Cliff Woltz.

Replacement of the old sea chest blanks continued as the pitted quarter-inch blanks were replaced by three-eighths plate and seal-welded by ABS certified welders. The volunteers continued cutting and stamping out neoprene gaskets for all of our fuel tank manhole covers. Thursday of that week Board Chairman BJ Costello organized a VIP tour consisting of himself, NY State Senator Diane Savino, and Assemblyman Michael Cusick, representatives for this area of Staten Island. The day was gray and rainy. Shipyard President Steve Kalil accompanied the group as we made the quarter-mile trek to the east yard. I assumed that Diane would take one look at the ship on the blocks and say, "That's nice, can we go home now?" but she surprised me and turned out to be a real trooper, asking to come aboard and take the full tour of SLATER at her worst. She even climbed into a bunk and asked great questions throughout the tour. All I can say is that as spunky and adventurous as she is, I'd like the opportunity to vote for her.

That week we also got the word that SLATER's wartime engineering officer and Trustee Emeritus Cliff Woltz passed away in Houston. A major force in all the SLATER reunions over the years, and a wealth of knowledge about life aboard SLATER during the war, Cliff was a presence who will be forever missed by our organization. The ensign flew at half-staff for a week in drydock in his honor. At the end of the week Barry Witte came down with two young helpers Eric Altman, a mechanical engineering student at Clarkson, and Midshipman Tulsa Scott, a nuke engineering sophomore at RPI. They cleaned the glass on the port and starboard sidelights and restored the electrical portions that have had no attention for a decade or more.

On a tip from Ed, they traced some piping and found out that the sea chest that we opened up to cool the ship's service generator will also feed a firepump, so there is no need to open up any others. This was confirmed in the CANNON Class piping book and a system tracing in the B3 bilge. Barry, Tulsa, Eric and Gary Sheedy traced out the power lines for the 20mm gunsight compressors on the 01 and 02 levels forward. This has been a mystery fuse box in the pilothouse for as long as we have had SLATER. They looked into restoring the light fixtures in the shaft alleys, which are severely corroded, but since the yard will not let us do any hotwork ourselves this will be an Albany project.

They left me with a Greek sea chest blank in the CO's cabin that was eaten clear through. There was evidence of water in many other sea chests, proof that the concern about freezing damage to these sea chests in Albany may not be warranted, since it is now obvious that many of the sea chests were subjected to very cold temps before we brought heat on to the ship in early 2000s. I kept the plate as a souvenir to show at the HNSA meeting. The bad news is that it proves that much of the pitting occurring in SLATER has happened since she came to the US. More concern about cathodic protection is a must.



Gary Sheedy and the shiniest urinal in the historic fleet.



Steve Klauck scaling the starboard 40mm spent shell cage.

Week 6 arrived with Ed Zajkowski, Gary Sheedy, Wayne White, Steve Klauck, Bill Wetterau, Ron Prest, and George Amandola aboard. Ed made his bi-monthly trip home to do his laundry so George covered for Ed in the galley and did quite well for himself. Bill Wetterau sanded and repainted raft number 1 and then painted out the ship's store. When he finished painting, he and Sheedy installed the new door on the ship's store. Sheedy then busied himself polishing urinals until bronchitis pretty well knocked him out of the picture. New volunteer **Steve Klauck** scaled and primed the starboard 40mm shell cage, an area that hasn't seen a paintbrush or needle scaler in 16 years. Though coming down with bronchitis himself, **Ron Prest** worked opposite Steve on the port 40mm shell cage and got that primed and painted. He then went to work doing more scaling in the depth charge magazine bilges.

The yard replaced the two forward most chocks with two new ones that were donated several years ago by Schoellhorn-Albrecht Company in St Louis. **Julio** and **Raphael** also replaced all the wasted metal under the port and starboard searchlight platforms, another eyesore that has bedeviled us ever since SLATER returned from Greece. They completed fabrication of the ensign battle gaff on the stack and hoisted the first flag on it. The yard workers also scaled under the ship's service generator tank in B-3 after the decision was made to add preservation and painting of that tank to the yard work list. They hydroblasted and primed waterways. The yard welders also welded on the first of the draft numbers that **Barry Witte** had his students **Marc Boyer, Devon Urbano** and **Jeremy Zhang** fabricate, over the doubler plates. The surprise of the week was a visit by Board President **Tony Esposito** who bought the whole crew lunch.





Wayne White and Ron Prest touching up primer.

Week 7 Found Ed Zajkowski, Gary Sheedy, and Wayne White continuing to hang tough and going the distance. They were joined by **Thomas Scian, Bill Haggart,** and our very special guest, Collections Manager **Heather Maron.** As week 7 progressed, our surveyor **Rick Meyerrose** laid out the placement of the anodes and the yard welded all the studs in place for the 100 magnesium anodes. Let's hope they stop the pitting. **Thomas Scian and Heather Maron** did a lot of scaling and priming topside. Thomas allowed himself to be talked into climbing through the four main engine sumps and photographing their condition. We also lowered the anchors and chain to the drydock floor using our own crew and the anchor windlass without any assistance from the yard crane. The anchor chains were hydroblasted on the dock floor in preparation for painting.

The gangway staging was moved aft to make way for the continuing march of the plating, and the yard completed restoration of the port spray shield following removal of the Greek davit supports. **Bill Haggart** completed rigging raft number 1, lashing in the gratings and the canvas bands around the raft. Heather went home midweek and took bronchitis patient Gary Sheedy with her. Ed and Wayne fabricated several main deck tank vent clamps used for holding fuel oil tank vent pipes. The yard removed both rudder drain plugs and the rudders were full of water. Leaks in rudders will be patched. They also took the galley vent apart for scaling and painting and put that back together.

Week 8 started with Memorial Day Monday, which the yard took off. There were only two volunteers aboard that week, Ed Zajkowski and Bill Haggart. Ed and Bill gave the ship a thorough topside washdown Sunday. Ed went home on Tuesday and as soon as he left, the yard set up to brush blast all the completed welds forward of frame 70. That completely covered the deck with sand grit again. The final plates were fitted and welded in on Wednesday and after that all the welders turned to production welding to complete the job.

As each section was completed the staging was rapidly disassembled so blasting and painting could continue as soon as possible. Thursday was the annual Caddell company picnic, which we were invited to and thoroughly enjoyed. The anchor chain received its first coat of paint prior to being turned over and then another coat was applied. The chain locker and the depth charge storage magazine were power washed, dried and primed. All the aft compartments are now ready for painting. Ballast tank C-10W is also ready for its first coat of primer. That Saturday, May 31, the last welds were completed on the doublers and all the staging was disassembled to make way for sandblasting of the new welds and hull painting.



Thomas Scian and the MK-52 Gun Director.



Austin Tryon and Erik Collin checking out mount 1.

My day begins with my 0600 visit with Joe Eckhardt, our estimator who made a point of reminding me that his job title is Vice President of Engineering, a title well-earned since he has forgotten more about naval architecture than most people will ever know. Old school and very knowledgeable, I look forward to these visits to soak up as much knowledge as I can. As the work has progressed I've tried to make an effort to get to know the yard workers. Our onsite supervisor **Hector Sosa** keeps pushing his crew and takes his responsibility very seriously. He's always there to rig a plate or to pull on a chain fall when an extra hand is needed. Laborer **Roy** is in more places at once than any person has a right to be. One of the most cheerful faces on the dock, the guy moves more weight for his size than should be possible. His brother-in-law, **Harry**, is the primary crane operator. He shares Roy's good humor and is most often found perched in the cab of "Big Betty", the huge floating crane that is married to Drydock 6. We complain about our climb up to SLATER's main deck, and none of us envy Harry's climb to the top of "Big Betty."



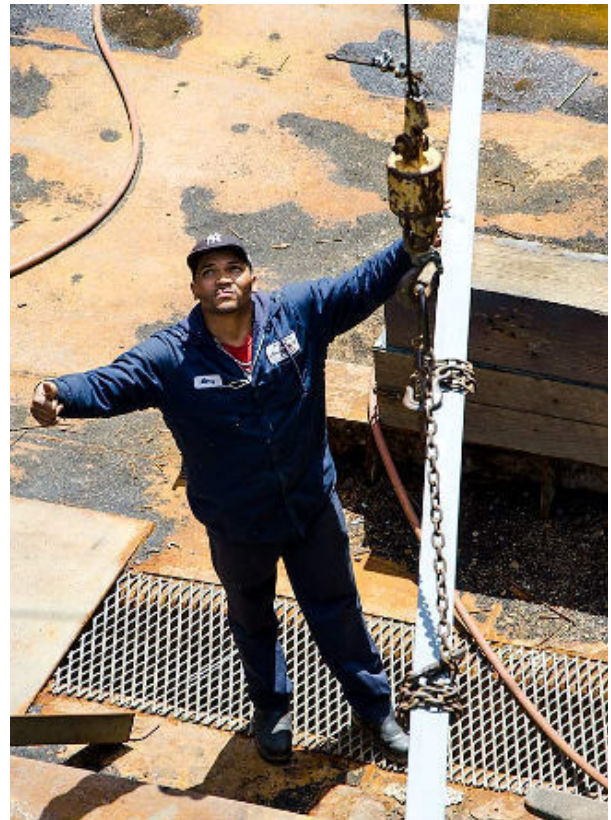
Shipyard welders Danny...



... and Fredrico.



Job superintendent Hector Sosa, on the right, has to keep track of a lot of comings and goings.



Crew Chief Hector Sosa

The welders, Vince, Luis, Fred, Paco, Julio, Danny, Rodriguez, and Lopus did a great job lifting, fitting and welding plate. The first welders I got to know were **Vince and Luis**, as they were working the section closest to the gangway. know Vincent as "The Hammer" because of the hours he spent wielding a big hammer as he and Luis formed the new plate to the contours of SLATER's battered original shell. Coming down on the port side were Frederico and Rodriguez. There were two Pacos. The younger Paco the welder was one of the most professional looking and focused people in the dock.



Laborer Roy is always moving something...



while Paco does hours of grinding.

There was something special about the way he carried himself and the pride he took in his appearance. He rarely joined with the antic of the rest of the crew. He just welded. The elder **Paco** was a laborer and spent hours grinding and cleaning up the welds. We got to know **Julio** and **Rafael** really well as Hector assigned them most of the jobs on the main deck and above. Ed developed a special relationship with Julio. Julio didn't understand much English and Ed doesn't speak a word of Spanish, yet Ed would point, Julio would nod, and do the job just the way Ed wanted.

The sub-contractor Union Maintenance's workers have their own personalities. They are the ones responsible for the cleaning, surface preparation and painting. I truly enjoy working with Matt Kelley, and his good nature. As I've said before, I have the utmost respect for the guys who crawl into the tanks and voids and do the dirty work no one else wants to do. After the tank cleaning described last month, Manny and Chris moved aboard to do the spray painting. **Manny** operates the sand blasting tanks and spray equipment and mixes all the paint. **Chris** is the one who goes into the tanks with an air supplied system and is another who has my utmost respect. I spray painted compartments in the days of alkyds and, as miserable as it was back then, I wouldn't want to be doing it with epoxy.



The Kelly twins learning the business from the bottom, with Big John from Trinidad.

It was the Tuesday after Memorial Day that a crew of three from the subcontractor Union Maintenance reported aboard to continue tank and bilge scaling. The crew leader was one of my favorite people, who I only know as “**Big John from Trinidad.**” I know this because I asked if his accent was Jamaican and was promptly corrected. He had two teenagers with him and I was skeptical. I climbed down a tank they were working in. Much to my surprise, John was in the tank scaling and I had no idea how he fit down the manhole, except perhaps, with a liberal application of Vaseline or some other grease.

The teens seemed to be holding their own which was surprising, but I took it in stride. There are exceptions to every stereotype. It wasn't until late in the day that I learned that these two kids were identical twins **Jared and Liam Kelly**, the sons of **Paul Kelly**, one of Union Maintenance owners. They were both studying management in college. Neither sounded too excited about making this a career, but this was their summer job for a couple years and they handled it like pros. I realized I truly had the “A-Team” cleaning our bilges.



Chief cook, back stop and my conscience on this project volunteer, Ed Zajkowski. He works weekends so the paid guy can go home. And, he doesn't let me forget it.

Barry Witte wrote that “**Ed Z needs to be recognized as the volunteer of the year.** I saw how he has basically taken ownership of the day-to-day operations of the drydocking, freeing you to manage the more “executive” type matters.” I'm not sure about the phrase “Executive Type Matters,” unless doing dishes and hauling trash counts. My role here must be akin to a father's role during the birth process. Watch, worry and wait. But I can't express how much Ed being here has meant to the process. This, in addition to his culinary skills and covering the ship for me every weekend. I get a lot of grief because the “Paid Guy” goes home on the weekend while the “Volunteer” is stuck on the ship.

Work progresses in Albany as Doug Tanner, Tim Benner and Super Dave are reinforcing the supports for the aft gangway. Erik Collin is painting the seawall, mooring bollards and the gangway, and all are engaged in recording and thanking the hundreds of you who have responded to our final Hull Fund solicitation. I don't envy Rosehn and Heather who spend a good part of their days explaining to irate visitors why SLATER is not at the dock and open for tours. Or, explaining to the guy who said, "Why can't you just fix it in Albany?" On May 5th, **Heather Maron** visited Beacon Pointe Memory Care in Clifton Park to give a presentation to the residents. In attendance were veterans as well as a former school teacher who had visited the ship on a field trip with her students several years ago. She enjoys the opportunity to encourage dialogue about WWII frontlines as well as homefront experiences. With the ship away, Heather also has been utilizing the time to tackle reworking aspects of the overnight program. Her goal is to incorporate more hands-on activities, and is always looking for suggestions and volunteers to help. If you've had a positive experience with an overnight event, either aboard SLATER or another historic ship, feel free to contact Heather to see how we can improve.



Nicole and her bike rack got more likes on Facebook than anything we did this month!

In addition to fabricating the draft numbers, one student at Colonie Central High School made another significant contribution. Welding student **Nicole** has put the finishing touches on a bike rack just for us. Last fall tech teacher **Chris Hanley** asked if there were any special projects that his students could work on in their spare time. We casually mentioned that there has been the need here for an appropriate compact bike rack. Nicole procured a worn-out rack from the Middle School and proceeded to downsize and refurbish it to meet our specifications. Then, going the xtra mile, she added her own version of SLATER's silhouette, complete with a wave. Thanks, Nicole! Now our visitors arriving by bicycle will have a secure place to park.

As it stands now, we should fleet SLATER around June 5, check for leaks, touch up the paint under the blocks, and be moved pierside on June 10. Then, we anticipate three weeks of topside and interior painting as well as the cleanup process before we return home. Finally, I also went into the experience figuring that if I could learn the names of the workers, I could also learn a new word in Spanish every day. That lasted about a week, and I learned about four words. I communicate through Hector and everything works well, though I'm still trying to figure out what "Loco Gringo" means.

See you next month, hopefully from Albany.