

SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
By Timothy C. Rizzuto, Ship's Superintendent

Destroyer Escort Historical Museum
USS Slater DE-766
PO Box 1926
Albany, NY 12201-1926

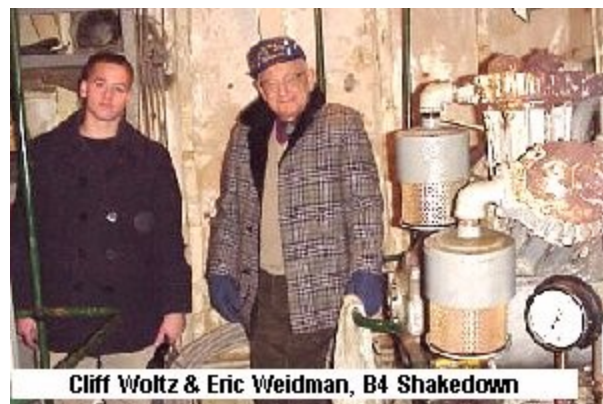
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Remember life in the shipyard. Your once beautiful ship torn to pieces by those damn yard birds. The gleaming brass and spotless decks replaced by dust, grime and filth. The noise of the air hammers. The smells of burnt metal and paint. Power leads, welding leads and air hoses snaking through all the passageways. The crew is thrilled not to have to be neat and clean for the tourists. Remember that and you get a mental picture of the SLATER in Rensselaer. Our four-month limited availability has begun.

It started simply enough. We sold our last ticket for the season on Sunday November 26th. We had planned to move to Rensselaer the following Tuesday, however, board member **Bob Cross** prevailed on us to stay on the Albany side until after the Pearl Harbor Memorial Service to make the ship more accessible. Seemed like a great idea, and there was no reason not to stay. We also had another commitment. The *History Channel* wanted to use SLATER as a setting for a "History's Mysteries" segment on the Philadelphia Experiment. You remember the rumored disappearing **USS ELDRIDGE DE-173**. Even the producer didn't think it really happened, but it's one of those legends that won't go away, and we'll be on TV because of it. Look for the segment in late March or April. The film crew shot scenes on the foc's'cle, pilothouse, radio room and below at the degaussing panel. It was odd to see the engineering spaces brightened up by Hollywood lights and populated by young actors wearing uniforms. When you see this, don't call us up and tell us that the uniforms they were wearing were not historically correct. We know it and we told the producer and got them to change what we could, but the movie folks were more concerned with the general look, not total accuracy. That's show biz. The filming took three days, and hopefully it will put us on the Hollywood roadmap with more will follow. **Deb Moore** got us some really great press out of it. We hope the *Times-Union* article will be reproduced in "Trim But Deadly" or *DESA News*.



Out of Town DEHF Board Members
Sam, OK; Ray, TX; Marty, LI; Johnson "Mac", NC



Cliff Woltz & Eric Weidman, B4 Shakedown

We were still at the Snow Dock for the arrival of our "out of town" DEHF Board of Directors and Trustees.



Director Earl Johnson

Repairing Pipes

This was convenient as it was a short morning walk in the cold from the Downtown-Ramada. We always enjoy the visits of Sam Saylor, Marty Davis, Ray Windle, Earl Johnson and Johnson McRorie as they give us lots of praise for our efforts and also helpful suggestions. We had a minor freeze-up over the unusually cold Thanksgiving weekend so put Earl right back in the After washroom repairing the pipes. Cliff Woltz who commissioned SLATER as Asst. Engineer also arrived from Houston, TX and amazed us with his recall of many SLATER details. He spent time with Eric Weidman down in the engine spaces explaining those systems and also met with crewmembers Don Norris & Ed Elze working on preparations for their 2001 Reunion in Albany.



Cliff Woltz B3 Inspection

December 7th dawned cold: fifteen degrees

Fahrenheit cold. We had a big day planned. The Pearl Harbor Memorial at 0745, have the crane down to pull the gangway at 0900, and be ready for the tugs to move the ship at noon. We got down to the ship at 0630 to begin setting up for the Memorial service. Folks began to arrive at 0700 and by 0715 there was a lively bull session going on down in the CPO quarters. By 0745 we had amassed a crowd of almost 100 people, who despite the cold, vowed not to forget.

Bosun Mike Muzio piped aboard our guests of honor, Pearl Harbor survivors **Bill Langston** and **Andrew Bovitz** of the **USS WEST VIRGINIA**, **Charles Eble** of the **USS CURTISS** and **Arthur Biskin** who was stationed at Wheeler Field. **County Executive Michael Breslin** opened the ceremony and introduced our honored guests. **Albany Mayor Jerry Jennings** commented on the significance of the day and the need for preparedness. The survivors laid a wreath to commemorate their lost comrades and the sound of taps reverberated through the rigging. **Frank Lasch** took the opportunity to thank the **SLATER** crew for the 24,000 man (& woman) hours they'd donated in 1999. Wait till you see the total for the year 2000! Our special thanks to **Dan Hornick** from the County Executive's office who handled the arrangements. The group adjourned to the pier for coffee and pastries and our crew went to work. About thirty **SLATER** volunteers "turned to" and prepared to get underway. Stations were assigned, wires brought in. The wires holding the camels to the ship were moved to shore. At 0900 sharp the *Albany Water Department* crane rolled into the parking lot. **Jimmy** set the crane in place to hoist the steel gangway, lowered the pads, and extended the boom. Then he went to rotate the boom and nothing happened. A quick cell phone call produced the *Water Department* maintenance truck. A few minutes later another cell phone call summoned the contract repairman. His quick assessment of the situation was frozen hydraulic lines. We quickly produced a power chord and kerosene heater from the ship. Hot air on the valve block fixed the problem in minutes.

We'd lost but an hour, but were ready to go. The rest of the wires came off. The aluminum gangway was rigged to be manhandled ashore. **Larry** and **Gary** prepared to cut the phones and power lines. At 1140 the announcement was made "Ship's electric power will be secured in ten minutes. All hands come topside". At that moment a pickup wheeled into the parking lot. Out stepped tug skipper **Bill Welch**, who said, "It's gusting up to forty down our way. I don't think we should go today." We didn't go. In our sheltered little cove at the Snow Dock the city blocks the wind, so it didn't seem that bad. But between them, Bart and Bill have been moving ships for longer than I've been on this planet. I've spent my whole career tied to the pier. I didn't argue. I just went down to the CPO mess where the guys were finishing lunch and said, "What's the worst thing I could tell you guys. Start putting the wires back on."

We rescheduled for Saturday the ninth. It was cold enough that there were patches of ice on the river. Again the crew was on hand by 0900, about thirty strong. **Gus Negus** showed up to work on the Diesel only to learn that he'd be working in the dark, but he was welcome to become a deck ape for a day. They had everything ready by ten, with just the soft lines, aluminum gangway, telephone and power left to be secured. Then it was time to wait. **Bill** told me that they had another ship to move at 1400 and that he would be with us around noon. To be on the safe side I told the guys to be ready for 1100. 1100 came and they waited. And they waited. And waited. Binoculars came out, searching down river. Grumbling began about "He's doing it to us again," and "That's okay, volunteers get double time on Saturday". "Tim walking the plank" and

"He wouldn't get away with this if Dick Smith were around." We waited. Just when it looked like the hostility was ready to peak, Bart's two tugs appeared up river.

Quicker than I've ever seen, the power and phones were disconnected, the gangway pulled ashore, and the tugs were cabled up. On shore **Les Beauchaine** began tossing off lines, from bow to stern. We let go one long blast on the whistle and shifted colors. Bart decided to turn her around, and the sight from shore was pretty majestic as the old girl swung into the channel. This was definitely a little more graceful than being pushed to Rensselaer stern first. We were off. The trip down river was brief and smooth. Bart and Bill turned her again off the Rensselaer pier so her bow faced north, and pushed us into the pier.

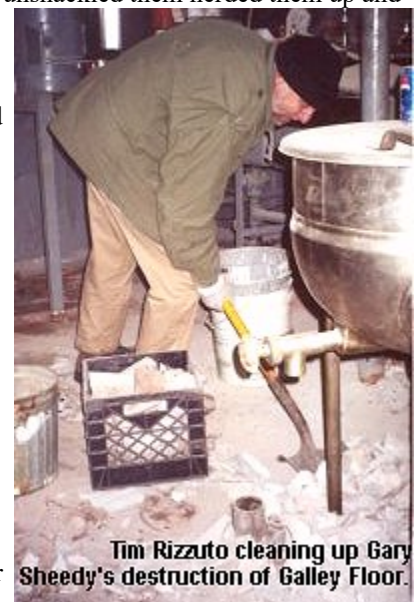
Bart had run the tugs alongside the pier to break up the ice on the way up, but it was still heavy enough so as the ice chunks compressed, they held us off about twenty feet from the pier. Lines went across, colors were shifted again and Bart maneuvered the **HERBERT** around to wheel-wash out the ice. Things were getting a little testy, the ice was moving slowly, Bart had another ship to meet and time was running out. It was at that moment, in true **SLATER** tradition, a happy female figure bounced out of her car and skipped over to Bart's tug and handed over to the pilothouse, what else, a basket of brownies. Needless to say Bart's first look at this strange women was a little incredulous, as this is not a normal event in marine operations. However, on **SLATER**, we all understand **Claire** and her need to provide for us, and we just were glad to know she had a basket for us too. Bart was reported to smile after the first brownie. Our apologies to you guys on the **EMPIRE** if the guys on the **HERBERT** didn't share. "Claire Brownies" are something to be savored, not shared. On shore our Webmaster, **Mike Stenzel** caught all the action and has posted pictures on our website.

It took about an hour to get her secured to the pier. We waved the tugs way as we doubled up and set the wires. Shore power was quickly reestablished, and many old hands were relieved to see the portajohn waiting for them as soon as the gangway was rigged. **Frank Lasch** provided the crew with beer and submarine sandwiches in the wardroom. However, it was cold enough that hot coffee was a lot more popular than the beer. **Chief Gunner Dave Floyd** was the last man in. He kept busy doubling up aft while everyone else rested. Our thanks to the folks at *Empire Marine* for the tow, the *Albany Water Department* for the lift, and last but not least **Frank** and **Mark** at the *Port of Albany* for giving us the pier space to weather another winter.

The following day, Sunday, six volunteers from the Albany Naval Reserve Center LST unit came down to help get the ship secure. HT2 Shawn Paradise, HT1 Gene Johnson, IC1 Matt Brady, BM2 Vic Disalvi, MM3 Gary Higgins and ABH3 Bholia braved a cold morning to rig the safety net under the gangway, tighten up the bow lines, add a couple springs and cover the three-inch gun mounts. The following Tuesday, **Larry, Bob, Bill** and **Ken** rigged the water circulators between the ship and the pier to hopefully keep the ice from putting so much pressure on the hull.

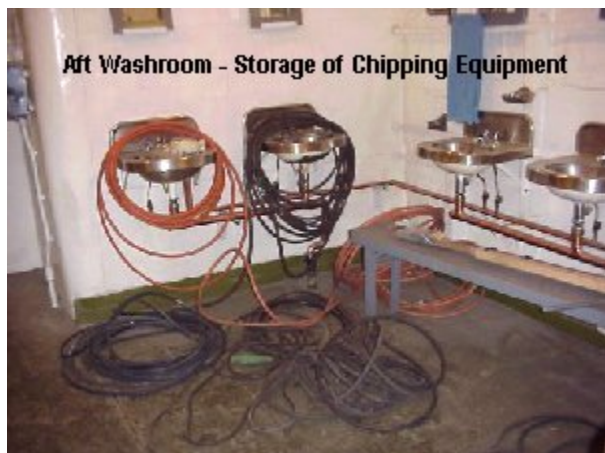
Monday was camel day. Remember the sixteen two-ton camels that we left on the Albany side. The temperature hit forty and the wind was calm. **Tom Moore** was on the Snow Dock at 0800. Again, **Bob Cross** provided the Water Department crane, this time with **Ricky** as the operator. The morning got off to an inauspicious start, with the crane blowing a hydraulic hose. Again cell phones played a role in getting help quickly, and by 1100, the good folks at *LB Smith* had the crane back in operation. We went to work. **Tom** and I went down on the floats. Tom unshackled them herded them up and I made the hook-ups. Up top, **Beth Spain, Gene Cellini, Les Beauchaine** and **Dick Smith** guided the crane, handled the tag lines and unhooked the lifting gear. We worked right through without lunch and by 1430 we had them all up and sent the crane away. We hauled all the tools, Jacob's ladder and shackles back to the ship and stowed the gear, and went inside for lunch.

I felt like I had stepped into a war zone. In our absence, months of pent up energy had been released to turn our once spic and span **SLATER** into an urban renewal demolition project. The time had come. The guys had been waiting weeks to be able to start the winter work program without the interruption of visitors. Officers Country was trashed, stripped and turned into an artifacts storage and cataloging center. The galley was trashed. **Gary Sheedy** had attacked the concrete deck with a jackhammer. The rubble made it look like London after the blitz. CIC was trashed. **Bob Dawson** started repairs to the plotting table and to restore the radar consoles. Radio central was trashed as **Jerry** and **Don** started installation a new operating position, scaling the coding room and moving the SA radar cabinet. The messdecks was trashed as tables were covered with dozens of electrical boxes and fixtures under restoration by **Ray** and **Rocky**. The aft head was trashed as it became the storage area for needle guns, air lines and air chisels to keep them from freezing. Air



Tim Rizzuto cleaning up Gary Sheedy's destruction of Galley Floor.

lines snaked through the aft passageway to the aft crew's quarters. And the girls are happy because they figure I won't make them clean off their desks until March 31st. Ha!



Down in the aft motor room Gus and Larry LaChance are rebuilding the emergency Diesel oil cooler, which had a slight leak into the bilge. Barry and Gary have checked out the emergency switchboard the generator and the voltage regulator and pronounced it ready to go. Just forward, in the aft engine room Larry, Bob and Ken are working with Bill Coyle to restore the lighting down there. Chippers Raf, Chris, Dick, Ed, Beth and Pat are going gangbusters in the aft crew's quarters. All they want to do is chip. Doug is repairing the steel gangway and making bases for the other four K-guns. Russ is tweaking the heating system. Dick Pavlovic is overhauling the receiver regulators and sights on gun three. And old friend Jock Staats donated two damage control pumps, a P-60 and a P-500. Classics! He's had them in his garage attic since 1952. Now we just need someone to put that P-500 back together, **BENNER!** Jock also volunteered to help Bart on move day on the *HERBERT*. Everybody is cranked up, because we only have four months to complete this overhaul.

The winter fund drive is going beyond our wildest expectations. To date we have received over \$8,000. from you, the faithful! On the endowment side, Frank Lasch is looking for a few good men to help him get that going. We are looking for one man from each *CORTDIV* to contact the reunion coordinators of the other six ships in their Division by phone or letter to get them aboard. We need your help on this one, as we can't do it without you.

Our best wishes go out to George Erwin who now rates a SLATER Purple Heart for throwing his back out cleaning out the muffler room. He says he was lying down, cleaning under the mufflers when he did it. Go figure how you can hurt yourself lying down.

Our prayers and best wishes go out to another group of sailors, twenty- nine LST veterans who left Gibraltar, December 12th sailing another Greek-American ex-patriot, LST 325, back from Greece under her own power. They expect to arrive in Mobile, AL in thirty days. Average age of the crew is 72. The saga of what they went through to get that ship underway is one of human endurance and faith. This is a case where wishing them fair winds, following seas and smooth running machinery has more significance than ever. Hopefully, by the time you get this, the 325 Crew will be safely tied to a pier, just like we are.

See you next year.



Erik Collin Scaling 1-57 Landing Force Equipment Locker A-101

USS LST MEMORIAL / MUSEUM SHIP



USS LST 325