



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

Phone (518) 431-1943, Fax 432-1123
Vol. 5 no. 12, December 2002

It was my worst nightmare. I was strapped to the wardroom table preparing to under go an emergency appendectomy. Up in the pilothouse gunner's **Sam Saylor** and **Chief Floyd** tried desperately to keep the convoy in sight and keep the SLATER as steady as possible as the ship pounded through the worst gale they could remember in fifty years at sea. As Pharmacist mate **Steve Hurley** helped the surgeon scrub up and suit up, I heard angry voices yelling up from the CPO mess forward. **Gene Cellini** was refereeing a heated argument between **Beth Spain, Nancy, Raf** and **Mike Muzio** about which of them was most qualified to take command when I died. It sounded like **Muzio** was winning. From aft I heard the sound of the bench grinder in the machine shop as **Ray Lammers** sharpened the knives and scalpels for the doctor. The ship shuddered as she crashed down into a trough, and then trembled as she rose to another crest shaking off tons of cold salt water. Down in B-4 **Cliff Woltz** and **Gus Negus** fought to keep the emergency diesel from cutting out. As the salt water cascaded in through the ventilators, **Gary Sheedy** kept trying to cram **Larry Williams** into the vent duct in a valiant attempt to keep the switchboard from shorting out.



Two weeks out of surgery. If my wife saw this even Dr. Thomas wouldn't be able to patch me up.

The wardroom surgical lights flicked off and on several times. I was sure we were losing power, but it was **Barry Witte** flicking the switch. He was explaining to a group of tourists that the only reason we were able to perform this kind of delicate surgery was thanks to the work the SLATER electricians had done in rewiring the surgical lights with perfect parallel cable runs. More angry voices. Up in the radio room **Jerry Jones** and **Don Bulger** were pleading with **Claire Oesterreich** not to break radio silence. The biggest concentration of U-Boats the Germans had amassed since the start of the war was lying to ambush the convoy between here and Liverpool. If we broke radio

silence, they'd be on us like a pack of wolves! **Claire** snapped back, "Dammit **Jones**, if we don't notify his primary care provider immediately, he'll have a lot bigger problems than a pack of U-boats! Send that message NOW!" or you'll spend the rest of your SLATER career back chipping with **Smith, Fedden and Whitbeck!**

As "**Doc**" Miner began to administer the anesthesia, the surgeon loomed over me. He ripped off his surgical mask and said, "I can't work in this crap!" As the cold steel blade pressed against my abdomen his face came into focus, a balding bespectacled face, **Dr. Martin Davis! Marty!** I tried to scream out; "**His PhD is in history not medicine!**" but my cries were muffled in the mask. The last words I remember were "Don't worry kid. I saw this in a movie once."

When I came to I was, in fact, in St. Peter's hospital in Albany. The deck was not pitching, and my wife was at my side. I was, in fact, one appendix lighter. The surgery had been performed by **Dr. Keith Thomas**, the kind of guy whose competence renewed this skeptic's faith in medicine. From my bed I realized that whatever happened on the SLATER the first two weeks of December would be happening without me.



The 61st Anniversary of the Attack on Pearl Harbor was remembered aboard the SLATER.

This has been the coldest December the crew has experienced aboard SLATER. Fortunately, we have heat aboard. The average daily temperatures for the first week of the month have been twenty degrees below what they were last year. The big issues facing the crew were preparing the ship for the move and the Pearl Harbor Day ceremony. **Paul Czesak and Ed Hurley had been prepping for the Pearl Harbor Memorial for a month.** They had every detail under control including a few extras nobody thought of. The only thing he couldn't control was the weather. On the morning of the sixty-

first anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack the weather was sunny but a blustery twenty-four degrees with a biting wind blowing out of the south. With a tear in their eyes and sadness in their hearts; about 150 veterans, dignitaries, SLATER Volunteers, CAP-DESA & CAP-DESA Auxiliary, and guests, gathered at a solemn ceremony at the Snow Dock in Albany on Saturday December 7, 2002 aboard the fantail of our 58 year old warship. A Fly-over of Blackhawk helicopters piloted by **CW4 Jungbult** and **CW5 Borgef**, Co-pilots **CPT. Spencer** and **LTC. Burke** of the New York Army Aviation National Guard started the memorial service at 1100 hours. The USS Slater's PA system announced with a haunting actual recording, "We interrupt this broadcast to bring you an important news bulletin. At 7:55 a.m. this morning, Hawaiian time, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor...."

The Pearl Harbor Survivors present were Andy Bovitz, 83, of Albany, a seaman first class on the Battleship WEST VIRGINIA; Bill Langston, 81, of Colonie, a fireman, also stationed on the WEST VIRGINIA; Charles Harley Ebel, 83, of Westmere, a BM2 on the Seaplane Tender USS CURTISS; Nick Elaoqua, of Albany, a ship fitter on the destroyer USS CONYNGHAM; Arthur Biskin, 85, of Albany an aviation mechanic in the Army Air Corps at nearby Wheeler Field and John Sloboda, of Cohoes, a personnel sergeant 18th Fighter Group stationed at Wheeler Field.



Art Dott and his shipmates from the Chief's Association served up chow on Pearl Harbor Day.

The ceremony aboard the USS SLATER featured the Welcome by **RADM Paul Czesak NYNM RET.**, the Presentation of Colors by the **Naval Reserve Center Albany Color Guard**; the National Anthem, Lowering of Flag to half-mast by Sea Cadets of the **Nicholas DiSalvo Unit**, and the Invocation by **Rev. William Hempel**. We were honored to have the Introduction of Pearl Harbor Survivors and Commemorations by **Mayor Jerry Jennings**, **Albany County Executive Michael Breslin** and **Rensselaer County Executive Cathy Jimino**. **Captain Steve Stella** of the Albany Police Department played taps as the six Pearl Harbor Survivors gently flung a flowered wreath into the Hudson River to pay tribute to those Americans who died in the Japanese Attack on Pearl Harbor 61 years ago.

The wreath casting was followed by "Amazing Grace" performed by **Albany Police Pipers' Lori McAllister** and **Laura Soldani**. A three-volley rifle salute was rendered by **Tom Sawyer** and the **Saratoga National Cemetery Rifle Squad Association**. The benediction was by **Reverend Hempel**. The closing remarks were by our own **DEHM President Frank Lasch**. A special THANKS to all VIP's & guests for braving the cold to pay their respects. Following the ceremony **Art Dott and the Capital Area Chief Petty Officer's Association** served up a "Brunch" of assorted cold cuts, cheeses & condiments, coffee, cookies, cupcakes, rolls, Pasta, scrambled eggs/ham and scrambled eggs with cheese to try to warm everybody up. Special thanks go to the **CAP-DESA Auxiliary** for their presentation of a check after the ceremonies in the amount of \$300 by **Helen Andersen**. Not to be

forgotten is the small donation made by West Point graduate **Mike Breslin** in the form of lost wagers on the Army/ Navy game held later in the day. Go Navy!

By the time move day came around, I had accustomed myself to the idea that they would be probably moving the ship without me this year. In fact, I was getting so I almost enjoyed the idea. I couldn't do anything about it, so why worry. No stress. But Tuesday evening came, **Dr. Thomas** said I was okay to go back to work, and the ship was still in Albany. It was my problem again. **Bart's** crew was loading a Chinese scrap ship, and his tugs were out on jobs, and he was moving salt like there was no tomorrow. Tuesday he left me a message that the move would probably be later in the week. Most likely Friday. If you've been following the weather here in Albany it's been one storm after another. When I came in Wednesday, the river was full of ice. Wednesday night we had a snowstorm that was bad enough to close schools the following day. Thursday, **Dick Walker** put out the word that the move was on. I got to the ship at 0800 Friday, called Bart and he said to expect the tugs between 1030 and 1100. We had thirty-five volunteers show up to help with the move. It was damp cold, around thirty, but it was calm. **Larry Williams** and **Bob Calender** went over to the Rensselaer side to open the gate and check it out at 0830 and they reported no ice off the dock.



The crew on move day.



Coming in through the ice.

We spent the morning taking our time getting ready and pulling the wires aboard. The only disappointment for us was the diesel generator. We had hoped to operate it for the trip across, but in two test runs the prior week the diesel kept overheating, so we haven't got all the bugs ironed out of it yet. The only real disappointment for **Jim and Robin Larner** was missing the whole thing. They had flown into Albany Monday to ride the ship. They spent the week doing the year-end inventory of the gift shop stock to keep busy. They had to fly back home to Illinois Thursday, so they missed it by a day. But getting that inventory done was a great help to us.

Bart's boats arrived about 1045. As soon as we saw them coming up stream we brought all hands topside, killed shore power and hauled the shore power cable aboard. At the same time another gang rigged lines to the gangway from gun 43 tub, and they hauled it ashore and placed it on the deck. The HERBERT made up to the fantail and **Bill Welch** came aboard as pilot. **Danny Donovan** was at the helm of the HERBERT. The little EMPIRE made up to the starboard bow. The only one missing was **Bart** himself, who was probably back at his yard running a front end loader loading salt, to free up enough of his guys to move us.



Gus and Larry starting the emergency diesel.

We singled up, and the EMPIRE began pulling us into the stream as we let go everything from aft to forward. When the bow line came off, colors were shifted and we were underway again. The trip down stream was quiet as usual. Too quiet for those who want to hear the roar of GM engines again. When we arrived off the Rensselaer dock we were a little dismayed to find the whole place had iced in since 0900 as flows had drifted down river. **Bill** used the EMPIRE to push the ice out from between the ship and the dock, but still it took him

about thirty minutes to gently ease us in as he is very conscious of our thin shell plating. We let the tugs go with our thanks as the crew set about tying her up for the winter. The Electrical gang had power back up in about thirty minutes. The move was well documented by the **Andrian's, Jerry Jones** and **Erik Collin**. The big event of the day was when the Portajohn arrived about an hour after the ship. By 1500, we had her secure, **Nancy** was pecking away at her computer again, and we called it a day. There were several shipmates who complained about sore backs and arms the next day. Worse was coming.

We scheduled camel day for Monday. This event involves pulling the sixteen waterlogged camels, each weighing in at two tons, out of the river. We use the Water Department crane and stack them on the Snow Dock. Again, this job has none of the glamour of moving the ship and is about five times more strenuous. I wasn't sure it was going to happen at all, as it was snowing like a bandit Monday morning and when I got to the Snow dock, the only two there were **Dick Smith**, who was sick, and **Tom Moore**, who is never sick. We checked with the Water Department and they said **Ricky** the crane operator was on the way. **Bob Lawrence** showed up, then **Raf Suarez, Ed Whitbeck, Larry LaChance, Les Beauchaine, Gene Jackey, and Jerry Jones**. The camels were covered with snow and ice, but at least the temperature was just above freezing, so the shackle pins weren't frozen. And the wind was gentle.

To the uninitiated, there are two types of old camels; floaters and sinkers. Thanks to the dedicated work of **Tom Moore** who spends his winters searching for closed cell Styrofoam and packing the

sinkers with it, we have a lot fewer sinkers than we used to. The tell tale mark of a sinker is that when you step on it, you and the camel start to sink, a bad feeling in the Hudson in December. After five years we've learned to lift the sinkers out first. You always want your last camel to be a floater, not a sinker. We learned that the hard way, too. We positioned the crane, moved the forward camels south and went to work. When we're at our best we've been known to have them all out in two hours. This Monday, fighting the weather, it took us until 1230, but we got the job done. I don't know about the rest of the guys, but I know I broke just about every promise I made to **Dr. Thomas** and my wife about taking it easy during my recovery period. In overcoming this adversity, the crew had one unified wish that all the people who keep rejecting our grant applications for an improved mooring system could see first hand what we go through to make this project work. As with Pearl Harbor Day, the payoff was hot food. This time it was homemade vegetable soup, made by **Bob Lawrence** from scratch. When we finally got back to the Chief's Quarters about 1300, believe me, nothing ever tasted better.



Dick Smith unhooking the chains.



Making another lift.



The camel crew in the snow.

Now, snug against the pier in Rensselaer, the crew is tackling their winter projects. We have pulled all the bunks out of forward berthing as we prepare to completely renovate that space. The chippers are working back aft in sickbay, after officer's country and the laundry. The gunners are restoring the gun shack on the 01 level forward behind gun 2. The engineers are troubleshooting the emergency diesel generator and continuing work on the ship's service generator in B-3.

The shipfitters are continuing the restoration of the weatherdeck chocks and working on the rangefinder platform when the weather is decent. The electricians are preparing to rework all the alarm system wiring forward to make it conform to navy specs, in perfect parallel cable runs.

The Los Angeles Chapter of DESA is giving us a big boost. They wanted to help the SLATER, so they ran a raffle with all the proceeds going to the ship. **Earl Johnson** and his crew are still counting, but it couldn't come at a better time for the SLATER. Also, as this goes to press, the Winter Fund s Drive donations are just starting to roll in and thanks to you, I won't have to dip into our savings to get through the end of this year. We'll give you a more complete accounting of both projects in the January issue. We thank you all for your generosity.

Relocating the SLATER twice a year is a big undertaking, and we owe a great debt to all those people who donate time and equipment to make it happen. First of all thanks to **Mayor Jerry Jennings and the City of Albany** for their support, to **Bob Cross and John Kosa** of the **Albany Water Department** for loaning us **Ricky** and the crane to lift the gangway and get the camels out; to **Frank Keene and Mark Bruno** of the **Albany Port District Commission** for the free pier space all winter; To **Terry** and the gang over at **DOT Bridge Maintenance** who keep **Gene Krott's** memory alive by loaning us the waders and lifting slings every year; and to **Bart and Bill** of **Empire Marine** who make the time in their busy schedule to donate the tow back and forth across the river. To all the volunteers who brave the cold to fight with the mooring hawsers and wire cables. You make it happen. And finally, I can't dream all this stuff up myself. To the guy who gave me the inspiration for that opening dream sequence. Can anyone guess who it was? And you all thought **Barry Witte** has no sense of humor. **See you next month.**



Tanner cutting out wasted metal under a chock.