



# 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. 4, April 2002

I think I've stated before that I have never considered myself a particularly religious individual. However, since getting involved with the SLATER I always pray twice a year. It's always the night before move day, and the prayer is always the same, that there be no wind on move day. **Jerry Jones** made a wonderful video of the move. And when I watched the video for the first time, the thing that made the most impression on me wasn't what I saw. It was what I heard. It was the sound of wind roaring into the microphone on **Jerry's** video camera.

**In a perfect world, we want to have the SLATER in place at the Albany Snow Dock and ready to open for visitors on the first Wednesday in April.** This year, that was April third. However, move day can't happen until after camel day. You remember those camels, those sixteen, waterlogged, two ton, six by six by ten floats that have to be hoisted into the river and rafted together to hold us off the sea wall into deep water. This year we scheduled camel day for Wednesday, March 13<sup>th</sup>. They have been getting pretty logy, so **Tom Moore** put a lot of effort in obtaining closed cell Styrofoam packing and spent two days packing more foam into the eight most waterlogged camels. The water department crane



The crew ready to shift berths.



Team work. Hauling in the gangway.

arrived at 0800. The temp was in the thirties, and it was a generally delightful day except for the sleet and rain that started coming down just about the time that we went to work. At about 0830, we had the crane rigged and we lowered our first camel into the river. We tied that one to the south end of the quay to use a work platform, and Tom and I climbed down on the jacobs ladder. They then proceeded to begin lowering camels. The plan was to assemble the north raft first, drag it up into position, and then assemble the south raft. On the pier, getting colder and soggier by the minute were **Beth Spain, Dick Smith, Roy Gunther, Bill Siebert, Hack Charbonneau, Frank Beeler, Gus Negus, and Rafael Suarez**. Our old friend **Jimmy** the Water Department crane operator has retired, so **Ricky** is now with us in the cab. Our signals to him were initially a little fuzzy because **Hack** got hung up in traffic, but once he got there, things started to go like clockwork despite the weather. When we had the eight camels in the forward raft shackled together, I took half the crew, and they pulled me into position on the north end of the quay. As we moved north, **Tommy** got the rest of the camels on the south raft into the water and shackled up. We had everything thing in the water and **Ricky** out of there by 1030.

**On the north end, we had all the mooring wires clamped on and the camels secured by 1045.** I looked south where **Tommy** had been working with the other half of the crew expecting to see similar progress. Nothing was happening and **Tommy** was nowhere to be seen. It seems his precious aluminum rowboat had gotten adrift and was rapidly being blown to the other side



Casting Off.



Shift Colors!

of the river. Keep in mind that he found this boat on a junk pile. He was desperate to swim after it, but the crew prevailed on him to exercise some common sense. He needn't have worried about the little boat. **Nancy** spotted it where it had run ashore on the Rensselaer side, while driving over the bridge. She got Tom's wife, **Debbie** and the two of them trampled through the brush to try to tie it up. Meanwhile, **Roy Gunther** drove Tom across the bridge to Rensselaer where **Tom** recovered his treasure and rowed it back to Albany. The girls never did find the boat, but in the process of looking, met a nice man at the Albany Yacht Club, who told them he had heard a report that the SLATER had come lose and was drifting in the river.



Heading for home.

**Next came move day.** **Bart** had promised to get us early in the week, so by Tuesday afternoon I gave him a call as early in the week was rapidly becoming later in the week. He called back with the news, "Be ready at 8am tomorrow." My jaw dropped. Getting this crew out of bed and having everything ready to go for 0800 looked like a tough proposition. That night I called a few key people and **Dick Walker** called the rest. Almost to a man, the response was the same. "0800! Is he nuts! Okay, I'll be there." I left a message with **Bart**, we'd be ready.



Beth Spain in the heaving line challenge.

**As soon as I woke up the next morning, I looked out the window at the tree branches.** They were still. I arrived aboard at 0700. A number of the crew had arrived ahead of me and were hard at work taking off the wires. The wind had picked up a little, but nothing to worry about. **Richard and Catherine Andrian**, our official photographers, showed up

at 0730 and we all posed for a group picture by gun three, about 25 of us. The wind had picked up a little more. The flags were straight out. A little after eight, I was starting to worry that they might call it off. We had just disconnected shore power, taken in the gangway netting, and broken down the gangway handrails. I got word the tugs were heading our way. Portside amidships, I ran into **Larry Williams**. He didn't look good. As our leading electrician, **Larry** is a key player in the whole operation. He said he just needed to sit down for a minute. Now **Larry** is a wiry little guy, best know for sneaking up behind his shipmates, putting them in a half nelson, and threatening, "I could take you!" At least that's what he does to me. Health wise, **Larry does everything right**. His wife **Rosemary** won't let him get away with anything. I said, "Larry, what's wrong?" He said he had chest pains, and was a little dizzy. I told him he needed to get to a hospital and get checked out. We'd manage without him. **Bill Coyle** was standing right there and said, "I'll drive him over to the emergency room." We decided Albany Med was the best place, and they headed out. Later, I saw **Jerry Jone's** video, which had a close up of **Larry** taken minutes before, and you can see this is a guy who is having problems.

**The tugs arrived shortly there after.** As usual, the HERBERT BRAKE made up to the stern, with **Bart** himself at the helm. **Bill Welch** climbed aboard as pilot, and we went up to the bridge. The EMPIRE made up to the bow with a towline to pull us off the wall. By now the wind was blowing out of the west, just below whatever force it takes to make whitecaps, whatever that is on the Beaufort scale. We probably should have canceled, but Bart is a compassionate enough guy to recognize that I had 25 angry old men, a few angry not so old men, and four angry young women (whose ages we never discuss) none of whom liked the idea of getting out of bed before six am. Collectively, they probably would have beat the crap out of me for getting them up so early, if we didn't move. Without going into detail, Bart and Bill did a great job getting us off the wall.

**Once we got in the lee of the Albany hills, things calmed down, and the approach to the Snow Dock was a piece of cake.** As always, the annual spring heaving line contest was something to behold. Video evidence seems to point to Dick Walker and Ken Kaskoun as our best throwers. We got her secured and waved the tugs away. Bob Cross had the crane down at 1400 to hoist the steel gangway into position. Ken Kaskoun and Bob Callender did a great job hooking up the power in Larry's absence. By 1500 all the wires were back on and we were ready for another season.

**Once in position, we spent the days leading up to the opening in a last rush of cleaning and painting inside the ship.** Erik Collin even took a week of vacation to repaint interior decks and do touch up work. Nancy had her guides trained, Deb sent out her press releases, and Wednesday, April 3rd, we opened to the public. Opening on a cold mid weekday is never guaranteed to draw a big crowd, but you have to start somewhere. All cleaned up and time to relax, right? Not aboard the good ship SLATER.

**Frank Lasch went to England for a convention of British Sailors who sailed in the Lend Lease BUCKLEY and EVARTS DE's that we gave them.** That's another story that will be recorded in more detail in Frank's column in the next TRIM BUT DEADLY. Frank always pays his own way, but he made the trip for our benefit. He knew that forty American DE sailors were going to England. Frank used the fundraisers logic that if forty American DE sailors could afford to fly to England for a reunion, these are forty American DE sailors he needed to make friends. His mind never stops.



Our future gift shop.

Anyway, of more concern to our narrative is the fact that just before he left for England, Frank made a phone call to Bob Cross. Frank believes that now that we are an educational facility, we need a classroom. So, he called Bob to see if the City had any of those temporary classrooms available. Bob Cross wears many hats. He is Commissioner of the Albany Water Department, Chairman of the Port Commission, an author writing a book on Franklin D. Roosevelt, and most important to us, a great friend of the SLATER project. Bob offered Frank a sixty-foot mobile home that the Port was getting rid of. Frank and I went down to look at it. It is big, and ugly, and a definite fixer upper, but it is also serviceable and free. Considering we've been selling our souvenirs and tickets from under a donated tent for the last four years, the trailer actually started looking better and better. We decided we needed it, so I called Bob and said, "We'll take it." Frank went to England.

I guess when a water main breaks, you really have to move fast. Bob and his people seem to approach every project with that kind of urgency. The Monday after Frank left Bob had his right hand man John Kosa were down here with a ruler asking, "Where do you want it?" I laid out my best guess, parallel to the ship on midway between the ship and the seawall. Right on the middle of everything. On Tuesday, crews were prepping the site. We agreed that our fence had to be moved a hundred feet north so the trailer could go on the grass. I figured that would slow the project down a couple of weeks. By Wednesday, down at the Port, the skirting had been removed from the trailer, the tires had been repaired, and it was off the blocks and ready to role. I decided to take Thursday off since nothing was scheduled to happen. Thursday, the fence people showed up and starting tearing our fence down. The girls got two calls. One was from Bob saying that they were moving the trailer on Monday at 0800. Another was from the trucking company hauling seven tons of MK 9 depth charges in from the Naval Ammunition Depot in Hawthorne Nevada saying that they would arrive on Monday at 0800. They would need a crew to unload them. Nothing like a nice relaxing day off. I went in on Friday to tie up loose ends. My wife picked me up at then end of the day, and asked, "Now, where were you going to put that trailer?" I laid out my plan, and she said, "If you put it in the middle of everything you're going to regret it for the rest of your days, because the ship is beautiful, and you're going to ruin that view. You need to put it close the fence the minimize its visual impact." Immediately, I could see that she was right. But I thought it was too late to make a change.

I



Thank You DESA! They paid the freight to get these shipped from Nevada.



Roll Seven! Unloading Depth Charges.

**fretted about that all weekend.** Monday morning, I got aboard the ship at 0730 and there was no trailer and no truckload of depth charges. The crew began to arrive and we posted lookouts. The first phone message was a panic call from **Sam Saylor** in Oklahoma. The depth charge truck driver had called him from Pittsburgh at 0400. He was running late and wanted to know it would be okay to bring the depth charges on at 0800 on Tuesday. What are you supposed to say? "If you can't make it on schedule, just take them back to Hawthorne?" Actually, that was the best news I could have gotten. No sign of the trailer, so I went down for a cup of coffee. In the time it took me to pour a cup, add the sugar and cream, and stir it, somebody called down and said, "There's a really big ugly trailer trying to moor along our portside. I ran topside, and the games began. **John's** crew eased the trailer into the position I had laid out, and the view was as jarring as my wife had predicted. With my utmost tact I suggested to the guys that maybe I had made a mistake and that it would function and look a lot better against the fence, which meant pulling it out and backing it in again. The crew looked at each other, **John** called **Bob**, and they said okay and pulled it out and moved it again. That time it ended up too close to the fence, so we made a third attempt, and it landed perfectly. **John's** guys set about leveling it, and blocking it up. When they were all finished, there was real proof of what many of the crew had suspected all along, I am truly "trailer trash". The fun is just beginning, as now we have to deal with tie downs, skirting, siding, painting, running electrical, and all the things necessary to turn an old trailer in to an attractive, functioning Gift Shop, Classroom and Office combo. That was Monday.

**That night I called the guys who missed out on Monday and asked them to show up Tuesday for the Depth Charge unload.** Ultimately, **Hack Charbonneau, Dick Smith, Dick Walker, Ed Whitbeck, Les Beauchaine, Paul Czesak, Chris Fedden and Rich Pavlovic** all showed up. **Richard Andrian** was on hand to document the event. The truck arrived at 0700. **Dick Smith** was first on the scene, and the depth charges were beautiful. Like new, complete with flanges and cover plates, all plaster loaded to 350 pounds each to simulate the real thing. The driver's first reaction was "Where's the forklift?" Forklift? This is the SLATER. We don't need no stinkin' forklift. We got men! My plan was simple. Do the same thing we did on the KIDD in '89. Cut the bands strapping them on the pallets and roll them out the back of the truck on to mattresses. Once we rolled them off, we then set them against the seawall as a safety barrier until we're ready to take them aboard. As I anticipated, they were strapped four to a pallet, but I made one miscalculation. Each depth charge was individually and carefully crated, so the job was a lot harder and time consuming than I figured. The truck was unloaded by 0930, and by 1000, all the charges were neatly lined up against the sea wall. No sweat. And we even took a coffee break. My thanks to the offload crew, the driver, and all you folks in

DESA whose donation made this acquisition possible. **Hack Charbonneau** in particular deserves special thanks. A former drilling superintendent, and a great rigger, he's the sailor I seem to call on for every dirty job that requires calm intelligence, common sense and strong back. He's always there for us.



Our Kids Who Care Award Receptant Mike Clark.

**A few quick random notes about other happenings.** Our youngest volunteer electrician, **Mike Clark** got a special award from **TV Channel Thirteen**. Each year they sponsor a special "**Thirteen Kids Who Care**" contest. **Barry Witte**, **Mike's** onboard supervisor, nominated **Mike** for the award. You may recall, **Barry** is an Annapolis graduate, Navy Commander, and Rickover trained nuclear engineer. Politely put, he tends to be an exacting soul, but **Mike's** work seems to be able to satisfy him. Well, **Mike** got the award! **Channel Thirteen** came down and filmed **Mike**, his proud granddad **Frank Lasch**, and **Mike's** proud parents for a TV segment. We got some great press as a result of the award. **Mike** will also get five hundred dollars to donate to the charity of his choice, and we certainly hope we know what charity it will be! **Mike's** mom made the comment on TV that since he's learned so much about electricity on the ship, he is now doing wiring at home. She can probably expect a

visit from the city electrical inspector next week.

**Not to leave everybody else out, but the big bit of restoration news is that the engineers roller Main Diesel number three made two complete revolutions on air.** They got the HP air compressor and starting air system hydro tested and working. They got oil in the sump. They jacked the engine by hand, and opened all the cylinder cocks. They built 450 pounds on the starting air cylinders and let her turn. They were hesitant to go further because they were concerned that the generator bearings weren't getting any lubrication. But, another step forward. The big problem now is to find some funding for their project so they can have a source of parts, as they get deeper into the overhaul. Other than that, the crew is finishing up the interior work prior to moving outside. The painters are repainting all the interior decks. **Claire Osterreich** has been coming in every Saturday and cleaning. The shipfitters are overhauling hatches. **Doug Tanner** has a bone to pick with me. The fantail hatch is pretty well rotted out so he removed it to rebuild it. Rather than put a piece of plywood over it, it told him to take the interior hatch to the messdecks off and move it aft. That hatch is in good shape and never gets closed anyway. But the phrase that got me in trouble was, "**Don't worry Doug, they're all the same size.**" Needless to say, after lugging the 200-pound hatch aft, it was two inches too narrow for the hatch opening. We chained it from the inside and covered it with canvas until he gets the other one repaired. But it's his own fault. Nobody else on this bucket takes my word for anything. They all would have measured for themselves.



Engineer Bill Siebert waiting for word to test roll main engine number 3.

**A continuation of last month's story. Gary Sheedy** has been working out of town in New Hampshire all month, but we understand that wife **Sharon** has taken him back on weekends on a trial basis. He doesn't complain about anyone's cooking anymore. **Finally, Larry Williams is fine.** He did in fact have a heart attack that Wednesday. He was released from Albany Med that Saturday, because we heard that he had so many visitors they sent him home for a rest. He came to visit us on the ship the following Monday, and was back with tools the following Wednesday, but he took it easy. The following Monday, he grabbed me in the Chief Quarters, put a half nelson on me and said, "I can still take you!"

**See you next month**