

SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
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Vol. 7 no. 12 December 2004

We lost another one of our biggest boosters this month, Herbert "Bart" Brake, the owner of Empire Marine and Port Terminal Services. Kevin Shufelt introduced me to Bart back in 1999, as someone who could help us out getting the ship moved in a timely manner. Bart was the founder of Empire Marine and Port Terminal Services, a small independent shipping outfit just south of the Port. Along with his partner **Bill Welch**, he owned and operated several tugs. We wanted to get back to the Snow Dock for April, and the Canal Corps Tugs weren't available until the Federal Lock between here and Waterford opened in May. We met over lunch, and Bart said he could move us for \$1,500. The move was timely, easy and successful. Bart himself piloted the pusher tug he had built himself out of scrap metal, the HERBERT P. BRAKE. They used the little EMPIRE as the assist tug. He must have taken pity on those "Old Timers" handling the lines aboard the SLATER. He never did send me a bill for that \$1,500. I felt bad enough about not being charged that I gave him another chance and called on him again that fall to move us back to Rensselaer. Again, he never sent a bill. Thus we entered into an informal agreement where he moved us to and from the Snow Dock each year and never charged for the services of the two tugs. I liked working with Bart. He was always sensitive about the weather, and would not try and move us in periods of high wind.



On meeting him initially, the phrase "tough guy with a heart of gold" is the first thing that comes to mind.

Ruggedly built with a gravelly voice, he was an intimidating character on first introduction. He was a true entrepreneur, but he obviously hated office work more than I do, because he never got a personal email address, and most of the time when I went by looking for him, he was out running a front-end loader or a backhoe. He loved hard work, all things mechanical, taking risks, making deals and making money. I came to appreciate what it took in this day of rules and regulations to carve out an undeveloped marsh along the Hudson into a thriving marine terminal. My wife and I used to see him at the Riverfront Bar and Grill where we'd stop after work. His big project at that point was restoring the freighter STELLAMARE which had capsized January 2003. Bart and Bill had bought her for scrap value, and then set about

Bart Brake at the Helm of the tug he built himself, the Herbert P. Brake.

making her seaworthy again. Bart growled at me, "I just want to be able to sail her down river to say that I did it!"

I was fortunate to get a rare glimpse of him a couple years ago when he invited me to ride to Kingston with him to see a tug that he had in dry-dock down there

and meet Tom Feeney, the owner of Feeny shipyard. Bart knew that eventually the SLATER will need the services of a shipyard, and wanted me to meet the Feeney's so I would be aware of their operation. During the hour-long trip down, he began to reveal a little of himself. He told me of his battle with polio at thirteen, being told he probably would never walk again, the ridicule and fights at school because of his leg braces, and dropping out of school at fifteen to become a mechanic. After rebuilding his life after the polio, he got smacked down by a car while on his Harley, and had to recover all over again. He didn't mention that his future wife Betsy was on the back of the bike with him at the time. She stuck with him anyway, for forty-five years. We walked around the dry-dock floor as he proudly showed me the repairs he was making to the tug, and through the interior as he detailed the plans for her restoration. All I could think was "How can I suck this guy into the SLATER's restoration," because if anyone had the drive, knowledge and resources to make the SLATER move under her own power, it would be Bart. All I could think was that if this guy ever retires, I've got to figure out how to get first dibs on his time. I now am just grateful that I got to spend that little bit of time with him that day in Kingston.



The Herbert and the Crow moving us downriver.

About mid November we heard that Bart had cancer and that it was serious. We all assumed he had several months. **Richard and Catherine Andrian** put together a thank you card from the SLATER crew to thank him for all he had done for us over the years. His tugs moved us right on schedule on Monday November 28th. The card was still down in the CPO mess collecting signatures on Monday December 13th when we learned that he had slipped the hook the previous Saturday. The Andrian's happened by the ship and we took the card and a large print of his tugs moving the SLATER down to his office. Bill called to thank us a couple hours later. **Frank Lasch, Stan Murawski, Tim Benner, Paul Czesak** and myself made it up to the wake in Saratoga Springs. The following day I rode up with **The Walkers, Dick Smith** and **Reverend Hempel** to the memorial

service at Pine Knolls Alliance Church in South Glens Falls. Reverend Hempel spoke for all of us who knew him through his work at the Port, paying homage to a man who had touched so many lives.

Words like "An American Original" and "They just don't make 'em like that anymore" come to mind when looking for words to describe Bart. The STELLAMARE was sold just before Bart died. He never did get to sail her down river, just as I never did get him into our engine rooms. At sixty-four, there's always the feeling that he should have had a lot more time. But he didn't, and his loss is our loss. He never did say why he towed us for free. He left Bill Welch to say that for him.

"Tell those guys they paid the bill years ago with their service to this country." He was a man who appreciated what you veterans did for him.



Arrival in Rensselaer.



Frank Beeler and Bob Lawrence direct covering the three inch mounts for the winter.

So the season has closed for us and Bart. The end of season seven came on a rainy Sunday here in Albany, November 27th. The following day Bart and Bill had the tugs alongside for 1000. It was a perfect day for the move with temperatures in the forties and no wind to speak of. Things just went like clockwork. It was the first time we didn't bother to rig a temporary gangway. **Bob Cross** had the Water Department bring the crane in the previous week, so on move day, we just cut the water, disconnected the power and communications cables, took off the wire ropes, piped all ashore, and lifted the gangways. One last activity was the new ranges. We had the two new ranges in storage at

the Water Department, and they were trucked down and set on the quarterdeck with the crane just before we moved.

The move went without a hitch. All except for the engineers. **Gus Negus** and **Karl Herchenroder** routinely test the emergency diesel generator all summer. This day, it started fine, they shifted the load, and then lost oil pressure and had to shut the engine down. They're still working on the cause and it looks like they're getting ready to pull the oil cooler. So the trip was made "cold and dark," but fortunately it wasn't a long trip. We pulled the camels the following Wednesday, December 1. That morning was forty and a fairly heavy rain was falling. Most people assumed I would use good judgment and call it off. I figured that as long as it wasn't cold and ice, it was a good day. The crew mustered a little late, and we didn't get started until nine. **Tommy Moore, Doug Tanner, Chris Fedden, Gene Jackey, Andy Desorbo, Tom McLaughlin, Stan Murawski, Paul Czesak, Ed Whitbeck, Bill Coyle, Joe Breyer, and Jim Gelston** all braved the weather to work the most arduous task this project has to offer. It turned out not to be a bad call. The rain let up around ten, and the work went smoothly without incident. By 1230 we had all sixteen camels on the Snow Dock. Tommy marked the ones needing more flotation foam to be worked on in the spring. We secured the crane, Rickey drove off and we were done for another season.

We're now bedded down for the winter here in Rensselaer.

Here, we are inside the jurisdiction of the Port of Albany and fall under the shadow of the new Maritime Security Act. We are required to keep the gate locked at all times except for a brief period in the mornings and afternoons when the



The engineers aren't happy as they try and diagnose the diesel problem.

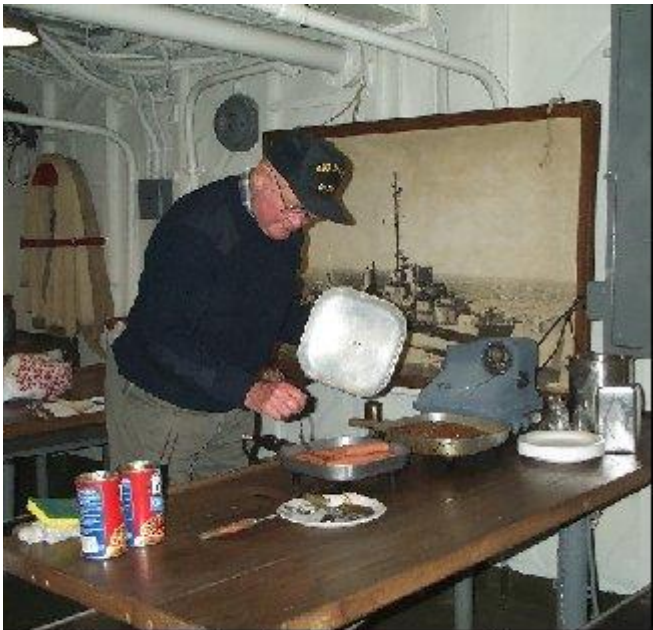


The newly painted out Anchor Windlass Room is a show stopper.

volunteers are coming and going. Access to the ship is very limited, but we can be reached on board through the direct line to the ship at 518-463-0140. If you're bringing non-working visitors in to see the ship this winter, please have them sign the guest logbook in the Chief's Mess. We're trying to get a handle on just how many visitors we have during the winter months. This is important for our annual attendance figures. These numbers are reported to various tourism and granting agencies. You may want to mention to any guests to call when they arrive at the gate so we can let them in.

Despite the security issues, the regular volunteers continue to show up in force, and are making great progress. We have almost completed repainting the anchor windlass room, and it is a showstopper. Gary Sheedy pointed out that this is the first space we've done where time wasn't an issue, since it's not on the regular tour route. We were able to take our time

and really do it right and it shows. The chippers are now working to finish up the reefer deck, and when they complete that project we will move aft into the laundry. Three other big projects this winter are taking place. Thanks to two major donations by Alan Goldberg and George McNamee we have purchased two new range ovens for the galley. We ripped out the old Greek ranges and the fry kettle and are preparing to install the new ranges and make a lot of electrical improvements in there. After that, the shipfitters will tackle installing a new septic tank in compartment C-201L that will keep the sewerage away from the skin of the ship and the resulting corrosive problems. Finally, we are reworking the classroom in the trailer to enlarge the space by sacrificing some office space and the storage closet. That will help us better serve the larger school groups and overnight campers.



Paul Czesak making lunch for the crew. No easy feat with no galley or running water.



The destruction of the Galley by Breyer, Tanner, Benner and Teal.

We worked in conjunction with the Mayor's Office and Albany County to remember Pearl Harbor. This year's ceremony was held in the City Hall Council Chamber, a much drier and more comfortable alternative to the quarterdeck of the SLATER in December. Our neighbor, Lou Renna of the Albany Aquaducks, donated the use of the DUCK to carry the participants of the ceremony from the Snow Dock Parking Lot to City Hall, alleviating a lot of downtown parking headaches. Sixty-three years ago, just before 8:00 a.m., Japanese airplanes and submarines attacked the United States fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Air raid alarms were sounded, but it was too late. Torpedoes were already hitting the battleships Oklahoma, California, Nevada, Arizona and West Virginia. The United States was at war. Six men who lived through the horrific experience that fateful day joined Iban County Executive Mike Breslin, Rensselaer County Executive Kathy Jimino and Albany Mayor Gerald Jennings at City Hall to honor the men and women who served and remember the 2,403 victims killed in the attack.



We paid homage to six men and their comrades who served with them, and also to ensure that all who defend our country, including those serving today, are always remembered. The six survivors honored at the ceremony were: **Charlie Ebel** of Westmere, a seaman on the USS Curtiss, which was hit twice during the attack; **Arthur Biskin** of Albany, an aviation mechanic in the Army Air Corps at nearby Wheeler Field, which was hit repeatedly during the attack; **John Sloboda** of Cohoes, a personnel sergeant also stationed at Wheeler Field;

Bill Langston of Cohoes, a fireman on the USS West Virginia, which was almost sunk by six torpedoes and two bombs; **Robert Grimm** of Albany, a carpenter's mate on the USS Cummings; and **Nick Elacqua** of Albany, a shipfitter on the USS Conyngham. Sadly we lost Andy Bovitz of the WEST VIRGINIA during the past year. The ceremony included the parading of the colors by **Ken Kaskoun, Dick Walker, Andy Desorbo, Larry Williams, Jerry Jones** and **Don Shattuck**, who make up the USS Slater color guard, and taps played by **Steve Stella**, retired commander of the Albany Police Department. **Art Dott, Adrian Daniels** and the members of the Capital District Chief Petty Officers Association put on a reception after the memorial service on board the USS Slater. Despite the inclement weather, over sixty people returned to the ship for the reception. The most common comment overheard was, "Boy, it's a good thing we didn't try to have the ceremony on deck with all the rain and cold. We'd kill the guys we're trying to honor."



Dick and Mary Smith finally received Dick's hard earned Historic Naval Ship's Preservation Award at the Pearl Harbor Day reception.





The SLATER Christmas tree.

This year we again entered a Christmas tree in the Albany Institute's annual "Festival of Trees." Rosehn Gipe, Richard and Catherine Andrian, and assorted elves but together what we considered a magnificent tree featuring ornaments of all our volunteers when they were young service men and women in uniform. It also featured red white and blue ribbon and various rate badges. As you recall, last year's effort the "Mister Roberts" palm tree made the final cut, and was one of the twenty-five trees chosen to remain over the whole holiday season. This year however, we didn't make the top ten, so the tree was taken down in early December. The good news is that the ornaments make wonderful key rings and were saved as keepsakes for the volunteers who lent us their pictures. Thanks to all of you who participated.

With regard to the winter fund drive, it has been an astounding success. Since October 1, the unofficial start of the 2004 drive, we have raised over thirty thousand dollars. Ron Zarem of the Michigan chapter was so moved that he sent in a tear stained tissue in addition to his hundred bucks. Keep in mind that even shut down, it takes \$20,000 a month to sustain this ship, but it looks like thanks to your efforts and the Los Angeles Chapter Raffle, we have a good

start on making it through this winter without going into savings. The only complainers are the shipfitters, who continue having to dive into scrap metal dumpsters looking for scrap metal to make ship parts out of. They keep complaining that they aren't seeing their share of the pie. And way to go GE employees & retirees! We've exceeded our goal of 10 donors giving a total of \$1000. We've had 13 register their gifts so far for a total of \$1965. GE matches are on a dollar-for-dollar basis. You have until January 31 to register any contributions made in 2004.

Now that we're closed for the season, the sale of the dog tags at Crossgates Mall becomes our major source of revenue. To this end Les and Annette Beauchaine have been invaluable to us for the past six years, punching out dog tags, promoting the project and increasing public awareness of our efforts. This year they have been joined by Jack "PT Boats won the war" Madden, Al VanDerzee, Eileen Parfrey, Bill Sheldon and Penny Welbourn. We have been trying to maximize our effort and covering Crossgates on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Their effort has always been appreciated, though that has never been expressed enough. Finally, in an effort to keep track of what articles appear in print about us, we would normally use a clipping service, but they are expensive, therefore we don't use one. These are the guys who go through newspapers and magazines looking for articles and publicity for your organization. Also, we don't subscribe to any newspapers here. All this is leading up to the thought that if you come across any publicity in your local papers related to SLATER, please send it to us for our files. It's best if you can send the entire page so we get the name of the paper and the date it was published.

Happy New Year