

SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
By Timothy C. Rizzuto, Executive Director

Destroyer Escort Historical Museum

USS Slater DE-766

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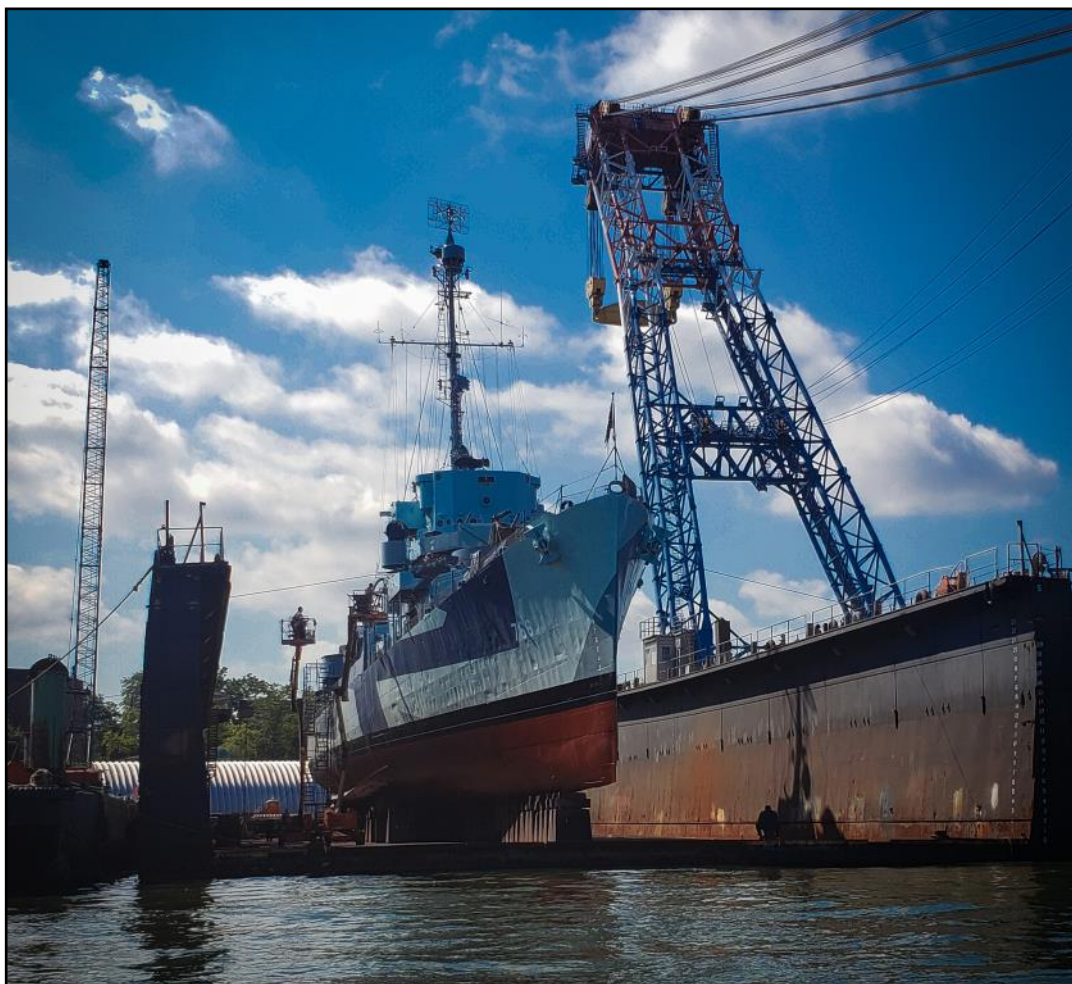
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Saturday 1 August 2020, found us resting on the keel blocks in Dry Dock Number 5, at the Caddell Dry Dock and Repair Company. That day, **Thomas Scian, Jack Carbone, and Gary Sheedy** accepted an invitation to visit Battleship NEW JERSEY. Meanwhile, **Ed Zajkowski, Brendan Lutz, and Barry Witte** had a very productive day. The biggest event for Ed and Barry was the installation of the battle gaff at the fore truck. They rigged the two halyards in place and planned to fly the ensign from there for the trip home. Work continued at two locations. Back in Albany, **Doug Tanner, Earl Herchenroder, Danny Statile, and Dave**

Mardon also worked, putting a new cover on our transformer box cover.



On Monday 3 August, sandblasting of the hull below the waterline began. Two blasters worked, one port, one starboard, doing a nice easy sweep blast, so as not to blow any holes in the bottom. Remember that statement as you keep reading. They were about 50% finished at the end of the day. Painters also top coated the yardarm, and the yard welders fabricated a ladder to access inside the stack cap.

USS SLATER in Drydock: Photo by Paul Lopez @popsignature.

August 4th was **Thomas Scian's 25th birthday**. He takes our photos and does any task asked of him. In the first few days of August, he has singlehandedly painted the decks of two berthing compartments and chief quarters. A quiet volunteer who gets stuff done. That day, the anticipated storm curtailed the sandblasting effort. But the yard made good use of the day, despite the rain and wind. Life raft number 1 was lowered to the main deck so that the straps that **Angelo Bracco** made over a year ago could be replaced. The sand blasters and painters, from **Union Maintenance Corp**, prepared to climb into the void under the steering gear compartment. The space experienced severe corrosion and was in desperate need of preservation. As cook Blair Sandri prepared to depart to cook for a wedding, **George Amandola** stepped in to take over in the galley, keeping us fed.



Thomas spent his birthday painting!

On Wednesday 5 August, the yard finished sandblasting. The electrical contractor, **General Marine Electrical**, started the electrical installation on the mast. They began installation of the aircraft warning lights and the breakdown lights. **Hector Sosa's** crew reassembled the sidelights with the brackets **Danny Statile** fabricated many months ago and fitted them into position.



Brandon worked on restoring life raft number 1.

Thursday 6 August, was the seventy-fifth anniversary of Hiroshima. It would have been a much longer war for USS SLATER if the bomb hadn't been dropped, and if she was lucky enough to survive the extended war. Flash forward 75 years, and I wonder if you can comprehend the feeling that comes from accomplishing restoration tasks that you always thought would never happen. The yard welders, **Josue and Edwin**, began the replacement of wasted metal on the port lookout station. They cut out all my Bondo, so lovingly applied 20 years ago, and replaced it with real steel. **Brandon Easley, George Amandola, and JC** worked on the restoration of life raft number 1, installing the

new straps and rigging. Union Maintenance got the first coat of red epoxy paint on the hull, with two more to follow. Work also continued in the voids, under the steering gear compartment. Back in Albany, **Earl Herchenroder** painted out the new transformer box cover, while **Chuck Teal** painted the mooring bollards.

Friday 7 August 2020, was the 78th anniversary of the invasion of Guadalcanal. We got the sense that they must want us out of there, because the yard worked overtime. Welders, **Josue** and **Edwin**, finished repairs to the lookout stations. **Matt Kelly's** painters finished painting the voids under the steering gear compartment. **Brandon Easley** finished painting raft #1, and **Ron Frankosky** touched up paint on the 02 level, as well as on the yardarm, until the rain caught up with him. The yard painters completed the first coat of epoxy on the hull, to the waterline. Painters, **Francisco** and **Adrian**, spent the afternoon painting the final coat on the mast.



Ron touching up paint.

On Saturday we didn't have much of a holiday routine. The yard took the day

off, but our volunteers kept working. We thought we were still looking at a return date of around 15 August. **Ron Frankosky** spent the day painting bits. **Jack Carbone**, **Mike Clark**, and **Barry Witte** spent the afternoon wiring up the aircraft warning lights at the top of the mast. **Mike Clark** also happens to be one of our Museum Trustees, on the Board of Directors. The grandson of former Board Chairman, **Frank Lasch**, Mike has been volunteering since he was fourteen. Up in Albany, the crew primed all the mooring bollards. **Danny** straightened out



The Albany crew on coffee break.

the handicap ramp rail. They patched hole in trailer roof that had leaked into gift shop, and they installed new anchor point cleat studs in the sea wall cap for the new safety net, as well as fabricating a safety net cleat. Board President, **Tony Esposito**, brought them donuts to keep them working.

Sunday was just as busy, everyone was working. Union Maintenance pressure washed both sides of the superstructure and painted out the second coat on the boot top. **Barry Witte** made sure the mast electrical light connections were right, and **Jack** and **Mike** worked on the side light connections.

It was Monday 10 August , when Ed Zajkowski celebrated his fortieth day aboard, and he was starting to act like a guy who really needed a liberty. The painters put the second coat of black epoxy paint on the hull. The fumes were pretty rough from the bottom spraying. Ed spent his 40th day aboard, painting radio antenna insulators. Red for transmitters. Blue for receivers. The painters began sanding the superstructure, following the pressure washing. Back in Albany, the crew painted the top coat on the bollards, painted the interpretative stand by the aft gangway, and painted the underside of forward gangway attachment on the sea wall. They also installed clips and fasteners on the forward gangway, for the communications cable. They wanted everything perfect for our return.



Ed painting radio antenna insulators.

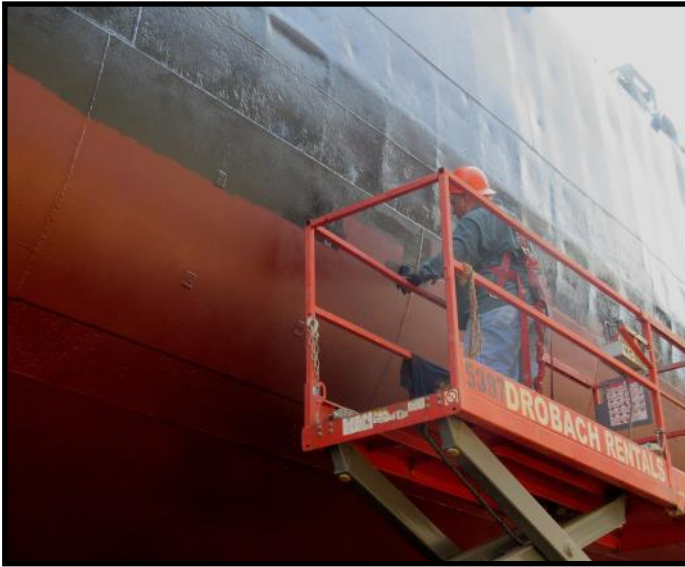
On Tuesday 11 August , the upper section of scaffold came down, and it was like watching the bandages being removed after cosmetic surgery. The air search antenna



Dave, Chuck, and Doug installing the safety nets.

was rotated again, following two years of being inoperative. The yard did more sanding and prep work on the forward superstructure. And the final coat of epoxy red was applied to the hull.

Wednesday was a big day because the yardarm went back up. The hangings could now continue. It was tough, sorting out the web of halyards and longwire radio antennas hanging from the yard, but we figured it out. The yard painted the boot top, and with the hull painting complete, they began reinstalling the magnesium anodes. They also began priming the superstructure. Back in Albany, **Doug Tanner** and his crew installed rubber isolation hoses on mooring cables, at the bollards. They started installing suspension lines on the safety nets. They had pretty much figured out the safety net rigging and had done as much as they could do before the ship returns.



The black, boot top was painting, and the flag bags were removed for restoration.

When Ed and I went in for our morning meeting with Joe Eckhardt, we got a shock. Joe announced that USS SLATER's departure date from Caddell Dry Dock on Staten Island had been changed to Friday 21 August, at 1030. That meant we'd be in Staten Island for a week longer than we expected. We went back to the ship, and Ed recorded my announcement to the crew on his cell phone. Ed consoled himself by going out and buying some expensive rib-eye steaks on the ship's credit card and grilling them up for the crew.

Back on the ship, boot top painting continued until the rain came. Anode attachment continued as well, since they were protected from the weather. The electricians, from General Marine Electrical, completed the wiring on the mast. Yard workers, **Sergio** and **JC**, completed the yardarm attachment and the wave guide reassembly, and **Jack Carbone** finished attaching the yard braces. Back in Albany, **Doug Tanner** got all the 3/4" line spliced for the new safety net and spliced one end for the suspension rope. Once the ship was back, they'd need to figure out the securing points on the ship and finish the ship side of the gangway safety nets.



Finishing the painting on the stack.

On Friday 14 August, Jon Cirimi led the scaffold contractors in disassembling the remaining mast scaffold, so the restored mast was revealed in all its glory. Jon's work aloft

was not for the faint of heart, as he disassembled all the safety rails section by section. That same day, we made the decision to replace the rotted metal in the flagbags, so the shipyard removed them and sent them to the fabrication shop for restoration. The painters also finished painting inside the stack top and completed the boot top.

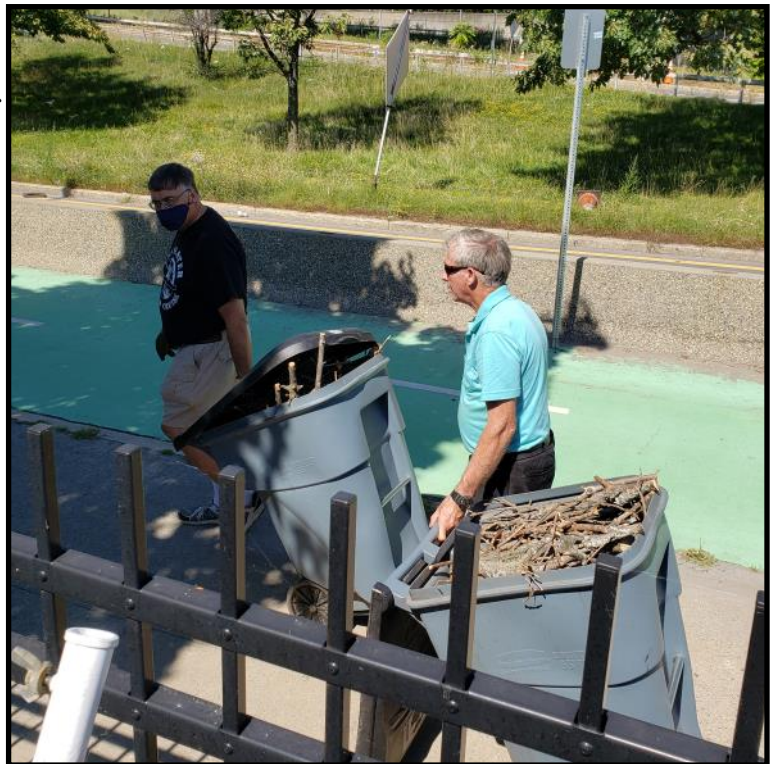


Fresh paint on the bridge.

On Saturday 15 August, the yard celebrated the 75th Anniversary of VJ-Day by working overtime to help us meet our Friday departure date. We had five painters topside, which seemed like a record. Yard workers, Sergio and Edwin, assisted Ed Zajkowski and Jack Carbone in rigging the vertical longwire radio antennas. Following that effort, Sergio climbed the mast and met Edwin, who arrived by crane basket. Together they connected the yardarm lift cables. The contract work on the mast was now complete. Brandon Easley, and his son Braden, spent the weekend helping clean up the ship. That night cook Blair Sandri turned out spaghetti and meat sauce for supper.

By Monday, the level of activity aboard seemed almost frantic, as the yard worked to have us ready for our Friday undocking and departure. The bridge level was to have been repainted pale gray, to more closely conform to our 32/3d camouflage pattern. I was somewhat disappointed in the paint color. In 2014 PPG matched the Federal Standard Color Numbers we gave them perfectly. But this time, the pale gray was too blue, and the haze gray had no blue in at all. Something that will haunt me forever, or until the next painting and a chance to make it right. Six painters worked all day, as the scaffold on the stack began to come down. Both repaired flagbags were hoisted back aboard and welded into place. Ed continued his new found passion for color coding radio antennas. Up north, the Albany crew took the opportunity of me being out of town to cut down the dead tree that has been annoying some people for years.

Things started to wind down on Tuesday. Painting continued, but shipyard equipment removal was the order of the day. John finished the stack, as the scaffold was broken down. Scaffold, planks, and pressure washers were all lifted ashore. The restored number 1 life raft was lifted into position. Yard workers Sergio, Edwin, and Joshua secured the raft. Blair finished out the day by serving us up a delicious pork chop dinner.



Bill and Gary haul off the remains of our departed tree.

With one working day left before departure, the weather wasn't very cooperative. We had showers most of the day, at a time when every painting minute counted. Our towing plan had been approved by the Coast Guard, and departure was still scheduled for 1030 Friday. The rain didn't bother John, who scrubbed away rust streaks on the hull. **Hector's** crew installed the large radio transmitted insulators aft of the radio room and rigged the port longwire antenna. Painting continued under the overhang of the superstructure. **Jack Carbone** restored the original 1944 compartment label tag for the gunfire control hut that he had been working on for several days. We're all about detail here at USS SLATER.



Jack restored the compartment label tag.

On Thursday 20 August, in a private ceremony, two old US NAVY veterans raised the first ever Ensign from the new battle gaff aboard USS SLATER. **Blair Sandri**, USS FORRESTAL CVA-59, and **Ed Zajkowski**, USS KEPPLER DD-765. The Kelly family, of **Union Maintenance Corporation**, donated ribs and hamburgers for the trip home. Memorial hull writing was in vogue, as many of the volunteers wrote family names and memorials on the underwater hull. The painting crew worked right up until quitting time.



Friday 21 August, was my bad day. It started perfectly, our departure day following six weeks in the ship yard. At 0800, **Chris Deeley** arrived to coordinate the tug hook up, the yard workers prepared to sink the dry dock, while the tugs SARAH D. and MARGOT were standing by. As the ship floated off of the dry dock, the volunteers checked all the interior tanks, voids and bilges for leaks. A serious leak was detected by **Steve Klauck** in the aft motor room, B-4. The shipyard management was contacted, and reluctantly the decision was made to put SLATER back in the dock to repair the leaks. Water continued to pour out of a quarter sized hole for about four hours. The yard planned to work over the weekend, with a departure date now scheduled for Tuesday 25 August, at 1400.

Quarter sized leak in the hull prevented us from returning on Friday.

The leak was a result of internal corrosion in an almost inaccessible section of bilge, under the generators. Moist scale and debris ate through the shell plating. Thomas Scian volunteered to bilge dive and cleaned it all out. We found the same condition in the forward motor room, but the debris was dry. Kudos to volunteer **Thomas Scian** for accessing the space. That evening, **Angus McCamy** treated the crew to a tour of a ferry that was undergoing overhaul, and the following day half the crew headed back to Albany until the repair could be completed. Following consultation with the yard and our Marine Surveyor **Rick Meyerrose**, it was decided to double the wasted area.



*Brendan, Thomas, Jack, and Ed.
What else can you do but smile?
The best place to have a leak is in the yard.*

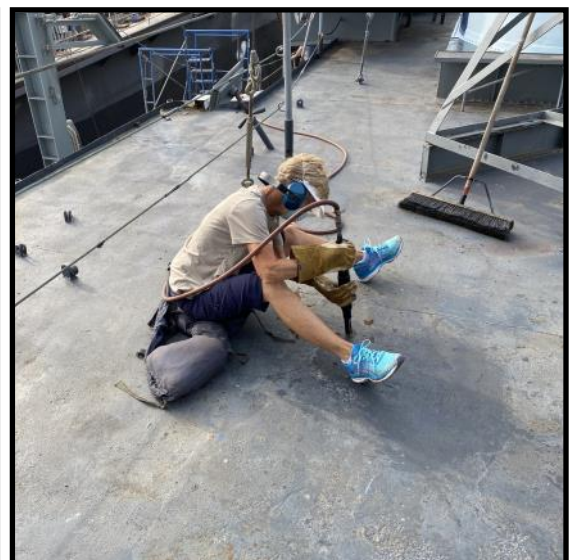
Saturday, the crane hoisted the plate into the dry dock first thing in the morning. Jacks were used to hold the plate into position for welding. Following welding, high pressure water was shot at the double from every direction, while we monitored from the inside, to insure there were no leaks. **Jan Schweiger** spent the weekend needle scaling on the 01 level and painting ladders, **Vince Montouri** spent the day painting the anchor chain, and **Jo Ann Mulligan** worked at putting the special collections space back together.



Thomas bilge diving!



Vince painting the anchor chain.

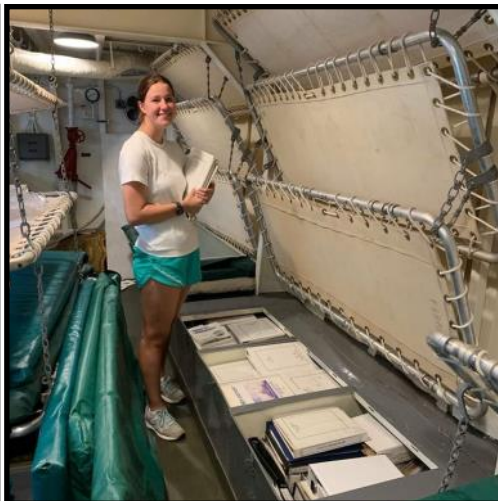


Jan needle scaling.



We've got a leak, we need a new game plan.

Sunday and Monday, work in the bilges continued. On Tuesday, we all had our fingers crossed. The Albany portion of the riding crew arrived back on board around 1000. **Bill Wetterau** carried the check for the final repairs to the bottom. The yard gave us a real break and only charged us for the actual repair. There was no charge for the redocking the ship or the additional laydays. Since Joe wasn't in his office, **Brendan, Jack, Thomas,** and **Jo Ann** handed the final check over to shipyard President **Steve Kalil**. The high tide was at 1400. Around 1230, they began flooding the dry dock. They let the ship rest on the blocks for about thirty minutes, while all hands checked every space for leaks. When none were found, the launching continued. Once afloat, the yard tug towed us into the stream, and SARAH D. and MARGO lashed to starboard and port respectively.



Grant found some soaked wood in the bilge where the leak was, Jo Ann started returning our research binders to their shelves, and Earl painted the new lid for the transmitter box.

We were privileged to have WNYT reporter, Jacquie Slater, aboard for the trip home, along with her cameraman, Matt Soriano. They broadcasted live updates and interviews with the volunteers while we were underway. One particularly moving interview was with Jan Schweiger, remembering her recently deceased friend and SLATER volunteer, Robin Lerner.

Barry Witte had prepared a watch bill that called for a bridge watch, sounding, and security and generator watch. The engineroom watch was the toughest, with temperatures over 100 degrees. Sounding and security continued to check all bilges, tanks, and voids for the duration of the trip. We were underway at 1415 and made way better time than expected. We had about a three-hour layover around the Hyde Park area. We got a third pilot around 0400 and started moving soon after.



Ed Zajkowski, our shipyard coordinator and friend.

It was sweltering hot when we left Staten Island, and rather cool by the time we got to Albany. The trip was made without incident, and the tug handling, when we made the approach to the snow dock, was superb. Heaving lines went over, followed by mooring lines that were soon doubled up. Barry got the power and water connected, and Danny Statile was on hand to set the temporary gangway. The tugs and pilot were released, and we were finally home.



We were ready to get off the ship once we tied up in Albany.

The following day, thanks to Doug Tanner and his contacts at Mullins Crane Service, a crane was on hand to set both permanent gangways in place. The aft gangway looks beautiful following the repair and repainting that Doug's crew did. This was the most important step before we would be able to open to the public, which will happen next Wednesday 2 September 2020, at 10 AM.

I could write an epistle as long as this, thanking everyone who needs to be thanked. All of you donors who made this possible. All of the yard workers, welders, painters, scaffold erectors, and electricians. And what doesn't come through these pages is the incredible and relentless heat and

humidity everyone suffered through, on our 1944 destroyer escort. The fact that these senior citizens voluntarily endured these conditions speaks volumes about their character and dedication.

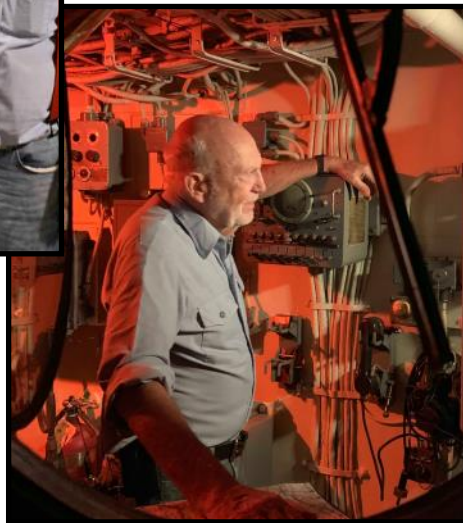
Ed Zajkowski deserves a great deal of his credit for years of planning, his monthly phone calls with Yard Vice President, **Joe Eckhardt**, the historic research he provided, and going the distance in the shipyard. It was **Barry Witte** who had the vision of restoring the mast, and coordinated the fabrication of all the parts needed, to bring the mast to its 1945 configuration. Midshipmen, **Jack Carbone** and **Brendan Lutz**, were our eyes and legs in the shipyard. Having participated in the mast planning since its inception, they were in position to advise and guide the shipyard workers as the project progressed, climbing the mast daily to report on progress.

Thomas Scian remained aboard several days a week, climbing with **Jack** and **Brendan**, and was always willing to do the little tasks that needed doing. That culminated in his volunteering to clean out the bilge spaces in B-4, in preparation for the leak repair. **Gary Sheedy** spent a month aboard, and in his Gary way, continued to organize everything he came in contact with.

But the highest tribute has to go to our cook Blair Sandri. Except for the week he had to take off for a wedding, he spent his whole summer in the hot galley, making sure we were well fed. His daughter referred to the galley as “My Dad’s happy place,” and that must be true, because at the end of six weeks, he said he was still ready to “Ship over.” In tribute, **Barry Witte** produced, and **Ed Zajkowski** presented Blair with the “Meals on Keels” plaque, with the whole crew present on the messdeck, just a few hours before we reached Albany. Well done Blair.



Blair is presented with the “Meals on Keels” award.



George Amendola is interviewed by Jaquie Slater.



Rich and Grant during the trek home.

Others who made the trek to Staten Island to help out included George Amandola, Brandon Easley, Mike Clark, Bill Wetterau, Mike Dingmon, George Gollas, Alex Titcomb, Grant Hack, Rich Wallace, Grant Eastman, and Steve Klauck. And in Albany, under Doug Tanner's direction, through the volunteer effort, great improvements were made to our shore facilities by Dave Mardon, Tim Benner, Earl Herchenroder, Bill Holt, Danny Statile, Warren Brozio, Chuck Teal, and others. And we must recognize Shanna Schuster, who spent the summer completely redesigning our website, and adding the long-awaited online gift shop. It is an amazing transformation, and you can see it at www.ussslater.org



Brendan, Jo Ann, Jack, and Thomas.

I'll close with a post Ed Zajkowski put on his Facebook page, as a tribute to our younger SLATER Volunteers. It bears repeating here. Ed wrote:

“With all the bad talk about the youth of America, I want to highlight 4 that I have had the incredible pleasure of working with. They range in age from 20 to 25. Jack is a NROTC midshipman who came close to matching my 56 days. He did the mast climbing, computer work, planning assistant, parts fabrication, etc. Thomas has been a dedicated Slater volunteer for years and is currently laid off from his casino job. He does the dirtiest of jobs on the ship and stayed up many nights while we were sleeping, painting. He is Tim's go to man when the chips are down. A great personality too. Brendan is the same as Jack, NROTC. He was my steady climber in the beginning. He also generated computer drawings as we needed new parts made and so much more. Thomas and Brendan spent 3/4 of the 56 days aboard. Our newbie, Jo Ann, has been a part time Slater employee doing accounting and admin work. She came down a week ago to ride the ship back and asked to stay when we leaked. She has asked to do every job we did, from galley helper to line handler. Full of energy. She helped remove and put back all the tank tops for leak inspection.

I respect and would want them on my team anytime. This is the youth of America many do not get to see. I call them “kids” but they are responsible adults.”

See you next month,

Tim

Don't forget the donate button on our homepage, www.ussslater.org and to like us on Facebook for daily updates.