

SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
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Not many people go aft of the amidships passageway in the winter. We don't ever run the heat back there, so it's pretty inhospitable. Oh, on occasion **Doug Tanner** may need to get something out of the shipfitters shop or **Erik Collin** may check the shaft alleys for leakage after the January thaw, but generally it's pretty desolate back there. All the activity is forward. The machine shop is heated and humming. The furnace and heating blowers keep the forward section comfortable for the crew working in the forward head area. Another electric heater warms B-3. The smell of lunch permeates the messdeck, and the coffee is always on in the CPO mess. But aft of frame 113 it's cold, dark and desolate.



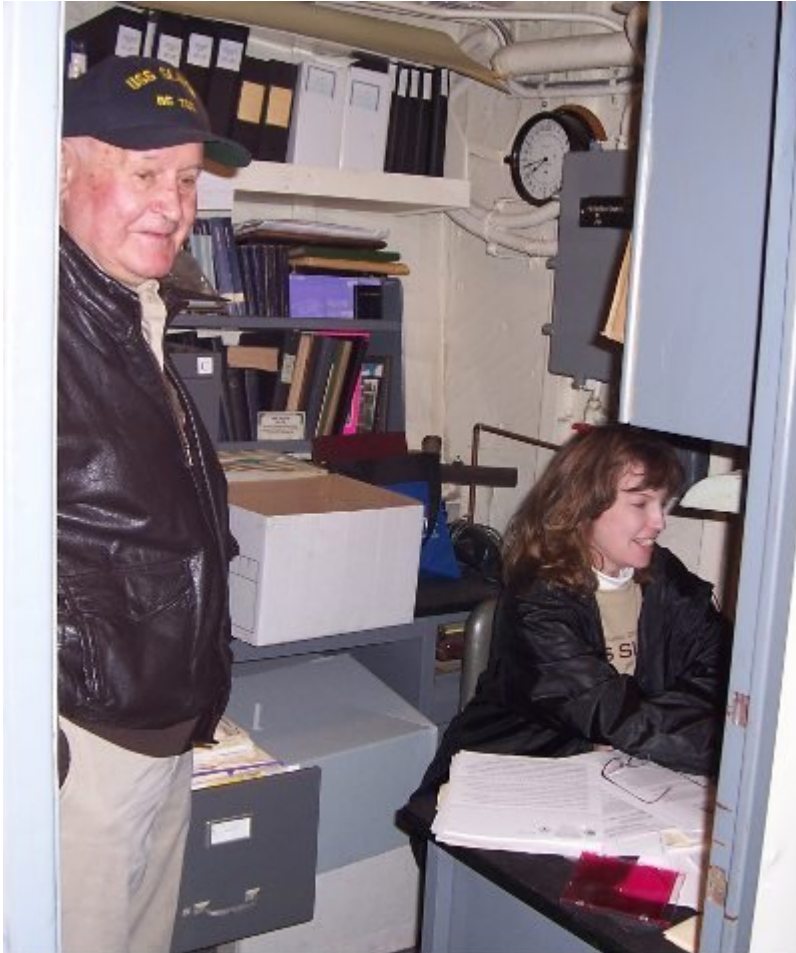
Collections manager Katie Kuhl and intern Sarah Worden, in their collections workshop, about as far aft as you can go on the SLATER and still be on the ship. The door leads to aft steering.

I should say, it was until this winter. If you walk aft and go down the ladder into berthing space C-202L, turn right and then left and continue walking aft between the portside rows of bunks, being careful not to trip over the tank top manholes, then through a water tight door into C-203L, the museum space. Now, veer left to the center of the compartment and continue aft on the centerline, past the ladder up to the fantail, the depth charge magazine hatch and the supply office. You come to a closed watertight door. Be sure to knock before you open the door. If you throw the door open without knocking, it scares her and really makes her angry. Knock, and then slowly open the door. There you will find our collections manager, **Katie Kuhl**, in the curatorial workshop she has carved out of the passageway between the laundry and the aft officers' stateroom.

Our formal corporate name, the one that appears on our tax returns and state charter is "Destroyer Escort Historical Museum." Yes, we are a museum, and as hard as it may be for some of us to comprehend, not a Navy ship anymore. I'd venture to say that for over half of us, we identify with being a ship undergoing a continual overhaul, rather than with being a Museum, governed by the professional standards of the American Association of Museums. Within the historic ship community, there has always been a "Them" and "Us" mentality between the curators and the restorers. But as the

museum ships move away from being "tourist attractions" and work to gain respectability, it is the museum professionals who will get us there.

In our case that is Katie Kuhl. Much like Gary Sheedy on the reefer deck, Katie is a girl with a mission. Katie is a trained museum professional who was previously employed by the New York State Museum, a very prestigious and professional institution. But, our Katherine did not fare particularly well within the confines of state bureaucracy. However, in SLATER she saw a mission, a manageable mission. That was to catalogue the collection according the standards of her profession.



Trustee Emeritus Paul Czesak and volunteer Archivist Kathleen Dunsavage in the supply office.

Building on Pat Perrella's great work, Katie set about moving the collection information from Excel to a museum database called "Past Perfect." In her little passageway office she has two electric heaters, a table, a computer, Internet access, digital camera, and a worktable for her artifacts. In this little space she enters and acknowledges new donations, moves duplicate artifacts into the education collection, deaccessions artifacts that don't relate to our mission or are too damaged to retain, and then carefully wraps and stores all artifacts that can't presently be displayed in special acid free paper and boxes. As we have collected way more artifacts than we can display at one time or even store, we has rented a climate-controlled storage space in the U-Haul building adjacent to the ship's Albany dock. To date, 300 objects have been fully accessioned and moved to the U-Haul storage facility. Aft officers' quarters has been nearly cleaned out. Her next step will be to work through the individual lockers in the museum cataloguing, organizing, and rehousing the objects on display. She also has

plans to return many of the uniform pieces to display in the museum space by rigging dowels through the bunk supports, creating racks on which they may be hung to display as many as possible.

Collections managers always get short-changed on a historic naval ship. In a normal shoreside museum, you have a building that houses the collection which is relatively low maintenance, and then the collection of artifacts. On a historic naval ship, the collection is housed with the ship, the primary artifact, and that artifact is very expensive to maintain. We call that maintenance and restoration. Maybe if we called maintenance of the primary artifact conservation, our museum professionals wouldn't feel so short-changed about the pittance they end up with for their collections management, but then I doubt they would trust us to be conservators of the primary artifact either. I mean, we are barbarian shipfitters, not trained artifact conservators. Goodness me, am I taking sides here?

It may be that this is the reason Katie is taking a cue from the engineers. Way back when **Gus Negus** and **Karl Herchenroder** didn't feel like I was paying enough attention to the machinery spaces, they warned me that, "Some day we'll be a force to be reckoned with," and set about recruiting some



Senior volunteer archivist Franklin Peter in the logroom.

more muscle, **Gary Lubrano, Mike Dingmon, Ken Kaskoun, and Bill Siebert** recognizing there is strength in numbers.

And so it has been with Katie as she has been actively recruiting interns to help her manage the collection so she is not alone in her endeavors. She has an ally in **Frank Peter** who maintains the classroom library collection and has recently taken on organizing Marty Davis' vast collection of documents related to finding and obtaining the SLATER from Greece. She recruited **Kathleen Dunsavage** who continues her work on developing a finding aid for the ship reference files. **Rebecca Ralph** is still plucking away at organizing the audio-visual material in the collection. A new addition to Katie's gang is **Sarah Worden**, a history student from SUNY Albany who will be interning at the SLATER for the spring semester. She will be getting a hands-on education

into museum work as she assists Katie with the collections inventory and joins the tour guide roster in a few months. And it seems to be working. Not that being female has anything to do with it, but when Katie calls for help, Tanner's projects become old news, and you can almost see the bow come out of the water and the stern settle as the crew rushes aft to help her out.



Jerry Jones on the chow line.



Benner killing time.



Coastie Gene Jackey working on the depth charge reload davits.



Bosun Walt Stewart Corrosecaling Sheedy's reefer deck.

The rest of the crew continues as before. Up in the head, Tanner's gang of shipfitters is putting the finishing touches on the CPO head on the starboard side, replacing wasted metal, completing the ventilation duct work and getting ready to wrap up a project that has been ongoing since the fall of 2005. Back in B-3 the engineers are completing work on the upper level with the installation of the missing soundproof phone station, and are moving to restoration of the lower level. **Barry Witte** and his crew are continuing detailed restoration of the aft switchboard, and **Hal Hatfield** is fabricating deck plates that were missing from B-3. He's making them out of material scrounged from the LSM-45. **Boats Haggart** and **Rocky** have been repainting and restoring the wooden and steel blocks. Down on the reefer deck they finished chipping the centerline and starboard reefer deck and we had one day that was actually warm enough that **Don Miller** and **Walt Stuart** got to Corrosecal the section. Now all we have to do is wait for it to get warm enough again to paint.



Gangway adjustment.



Brian Goodman, EE student at WPI , installing a circuit breaker in the forward switchboard to better serve power directly to a welding machine. The breaker Brian is installing is one of the ones he retrieved from LSM-45 in May 2009. The LSM lives on in the form of parts on Slater.



We are starting to wonder what payoff Super Dave is giving web layout guy Erik Collin to get his picture in the Signals every month.

We have the sad news to report that Education Coordinator Eric Rivet is leaving our employment. Sad for us, but not necessarily for him. He is moving on to a curatorial position with the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, a much better funded operation than we are. Being from Baton Rouge, it gets him out of the cold and closer to his folks, something we can all understand. I'll let him address his departure in his own words from the latest "Trim But Deadly";

"I recently accepted a position as a curator at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, Louisiana. So, for this issue, instead of me trying to teach you about destroyer escorts and the men who manned them, please allow me to reflect on what one destroyer escort and her crew have taught me.

I've learned that being old only means something if you let it. Let's face it. World War II veterans aren't young anymore. For that matter, neither are the Korean War, Cold War and Vietnam vets. And yet, to see the SLATER volunteers



We bid farewell to Education Coordinator Eric Rivet as he heads back down south.

at work, you'd never know it. These men, many of whom are in their 70s and 80s, show up to work everyday and jump right into their projects. The dedication that the SLATER volunteers bring to the project is truly amazing. It doesn't seem like anything can stop them from coming back. Not bad knees or bad backs. Not cancer. Not a broken neck. Not even hordes of screaming school children. It is a humbling experience to see some of the volunteers showing up to work despite medical conditions that should keep them home. I only hope that when I'm their age I can do half of what they can. I hope I reach their age.

When I first saw the SLATER in February of 2005, she was at the Rensselaer dock.

Although the ship was a mess because of the winter work projects, I was impressed by how clean the ship was and how well-maintained she looked. Nothing could have prepared me for how incredible the ship looked just two months later when she opened to the public. The SLATER's level of restoration is unmatched by any ship I have ever seen, and it is all due to the dedication of her restoration staff and volunteers. The work these men and women have put into the ship's various compartments is obvious to any visitor who has ever taken the tour, but just as much work goes into compartments that aren't on the route. From the epic restoration of the reefer deck to the miracles that have been performed in B-3 and B-4, the chippers, painters, welders, engineers and electricians have transformed the SLATER from a rusted hulk to the envy of the historic fleet. I'm proud of each and every one of the restoration volunteers, and I regret that I contributed almost nothing to that restoration.

It has been my privilege over the past five years to lead a group of about fifty men and women whose job it is to make the SLATER make sense. Not just the guns and the radar and the engines, but the idea of why the world needed the SLATER and the other destroyer escorts in the first place. This is no small task considering most of our visitors were not in the Navy and many of them have a rudimentary knowledge of World War II, at best. Our guides are, in my biased opinion, the best in the business. Although my job description told me to teach these wonderful men and women, I spent most of the past five years learning from them. I'm grateful to all of them, and I will truly miss the wood deck bull sessions.

So as I count the days until I move, I find myself in a philosophical mindset. Although I was never in the Navy myself, I've spent nearly half of my life on Navy ships. And while these ships never left the dock, I feel a certain kinship with Navy veterans, however artificial it may be. I can't help but wonder how you felt before you left your ships for the last time, many of you were probably unsure as to what your next step in life would be. I imagine many of you were just happy to get off the ship, though you probably knew you'd miss the camaraderie you shared with your shipmates. But how many of you appreciated at that time how much your time aboard ship had shaped who you were and who you were going to be?

As I leave my ship for what I truly hope isn't the last time, I am keenly aware of how my time on the SLATER has shaped me. It has redefined my idea of aging and shown me what hard work and dedication can accomplish. It has taught me that "The Greatest Generation" is more than just a catch phrase. It has also made me realize that the following generations have no small share of greatness themselves. The World War II veterans saved the world, but every veteran since has kept that world safe for the rest of us.

Fortunately, I'll be able to take what I've learned to my new job. I'm happy to have the opportunity to continue teaching people about World War II, though I won't be working directly with the public as much as I have at the SLATER. The World War II Museum is a very different environment than what I'm used to, but I believe the last five years on this ship with this crew have prepared me for it. I owe the SLATER, her staff and her volunteers a debt that I can never repay. I consider it an honor and a privilege to have

worked on the SLATER. I am leaving behind the best ship and the greatest group of people I've ever had the pleasure of working with. I am truly blessed to have been able to get up and go to work with my heroes every day for the past five years"

We have begun the search for his replacement and received nearly 70 applications. When we followed up and sent out Eric's job description, we had over 40 respond and say they were still interested. We have formed a search committee and hope to have the new hire aboard by the middle of March.

Work is coming along with the breasting dolphins. Doug Tanner has agreed to function as project manager and the steel has been ordered and survey work is going on. We anticipate doing actual construction in March. I'm keeping my fingers and toes crossed that we won't have to put the camels in this spring.

This month we're occupied with getting the requests for State and Federal Funding out. Again, we are applying to our entire legislative delegation in search of funds to send the SLATER to the shipyard.

Finally, I put this letter in the latest "Trim But Deadly," but it deserves posting here. I don't know how all of you feel about receiving my tear-stained letters, but I do know how I feel about sending them out. I know I find it personally embarrassing to always have my hand out. Maybe I should resort to a more honorable way of raising money for the project, like piracy. "My good friend **Ed Zajkowski**" received his Winter Fund donation request, and generously sent his check with it, but it was accompanied with the following note,

"Each day I receive a notice to contribute to a Slater Fund. As I sit down to write a check, another notice arrives! They come via mail, e-mail, verbal, newsletter, etc. So far none have arrived by hand or Goodyear blimp. To cover the multitude of Slater funds, I decided to donate somewhat fairly in order to satisfy your fund needs and drive you crazy. You are indeed the "Fund Fanatic!" Besides the winter fund, Endowment fund, Drydock fund, Coffee fund, Fuel fund, I am donating to all the other less advertised funds.

Keep the volunteers warm fund \$1.00, Keep the volunteers fed fund \$1.00, Keep the volunteers happy fund \$1.00 (Even the Democrats don't have enough money for that!!!!), Stamp fund \$1.00, Sugar fund \$1.00, Trash bag fund \$1.00, Galley usage fund \$1.00, Parking lot broom fund \$1.00, Electric bill recovery fund \$1.00. Paper towel fund \$1.00, Phone bill fund \$1.00, Ball point pen fund \$1.00, Printer ink fund \$1.00, Register artifacts fund \$1.00, Toilet paper fund \$1.00, Paint fund \$1.00, Paint chip disposal fund \$1.00, Diesel fund \$1.00, Snow removal fund \$1.00, Needle gun fund \$1.00, Vacuum cleaner bag fund \$1.00, Dumpster fund \$1.00, Blueprint fund \$1.00, Whaleboat fund \$1.00, Air compressor oil fund \$1.00, Empty gallon jug fund \$1.00, Whaleboat fund \$1.00 (twice!), Newsletter fund \$1.00, Search light fund \$1.00, Canvas fund \$1.00, Soap fund \$1.00, Perpetual reefer deck job fund \$1.00, Bilge chipping fund \$1.00, Port-a-potty fund \$1.00, Crying towels for Tim fund \$3.00, Sugar fund \$1.00, Styrofoam cup fund \$1.00, Strip ship fund \$1.00, Cat-O-Nine tails fund \$2.00 (for Tim to beat more work from the volunteers), Keel haul Tim fund \$5.00, Hang Tim from the yardarm fund \$7.00

On that note I want to thank all of you who have been so generous to us this winter. However, I also have a reputation to live down to. Remember that if you haven't contributed to our Winter Fund Campaign, you can still do so by going to our home page at www.ussslater.org and click the "Click here to donate" button. We still need you if you haven't joined up.

Thank you for all your support and see you next month.