



## SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers  
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**It's warm in the ship's office.** The crew gives me a lot of "Heat" about the ship's office being right next to the forward fan room heating coil. The heating system has been working great. No problems since **Doug Tanner** last cleaned the burner and the residual gunk out of the fuel pump. We had our second oil delivery of the season two weeks ago, and we still have half a tank. We'll top off Monday. I also have a little electric space heater here in the ship's office. But it's also a nice day outside. Going up to 35 degrees. The sun is shining and melting some of the ice off the decks. The parking lot was a skating rink this morning. The sounds I hear are about what you'd expect. The blower running in the passageway isn't quite loud enough to drown out the static of the voice radio coming from the new ham radio donated by **Pat Latty** that used to belong to her father. I can hear the grinding and chipping going on down below decks forward as the crew works in the forward passageway and the head. The smell, which brings back so many memories, carries all the way up into the superstructure. Burnt metal, paint, coffee and lunch in the galley.

**I started calling Chris Gardella at Port Albany Ventures around the middle of the month to get ready for the move.** I hoped to get across as soon as we could after the Thanksgiving weekend, before the weather turned really crappy and we'd have ice to deal with. As they have continued the tradition of moving us for free, I hate to put any pressure on Chris and let it happen at their convenience. We started the prep work on Monday the 28<sup>th</sup> of November. We stayed open through Thanksgiving weekend and had a couple of pretty good days to end the season. That Monday **Bob Cross** sent **Ricky** down with the crane to lift the gangways, and we had both of them off by nine a.m. The Monday crew took down the awning outside the gift shop and stowed it for the winter. They also got the three-inch guns covered to protect them for the foul weather ahead. We had the guys on standby to move but it turned out the tugs weren't available, so we arranged to be on standby again Tuesday morning.



Education Coordinator Eric Rivet Learns the meaning of "Any additional duties that may be required," in his job description.



The indispensable Tommy Moore.

**Long time readers by now know one thing about move day.** We can deal with cold, snow, rain and sleet. We just don't like wind. There's a lot of sail area on this ship and we'd hate to end up as somebody's riverfront lawn ornament. The winds were forecast out of the south at ten to fifteen, nothing we couldn't handle. The temperature was a balmy forty, not like the snow and ice we've dealt with in the past. I called **Chris** at 0730 to confirm the tugs, and when he called back I put out the email that we were a go for that morning. We expected the tugs around ten. When I came here eight years ago, I never believed we'd be moving the SLATER back across the river for the sixteenth trip. The permanent mooring at the Snow Dock was right around the corner and I expected we'd have a permanent home year round. But things don't always go as expected, and here we were, pulling off wires and singling up the lines. After sixteen trips, it's gotten to be pretty routine, unless there's a lot of wind.



Hooking up a sinker.



Camel Parking Only.

**Rosehn had taken care of all the prep work.** The contact with the Port for the temporary mooring was in the works and the required insurance was in place. The electrical power had been turned on in Rensselaer. The dumpster and the Port-a-John had been delivered, and the Rensselaer phone line was active. One of the best parts of the trip was the diesel. This was the big test for **Gus Negus** and **Karl Herchenroder** after their months of work on the emergency diesel. They warmed up the engine, and shifted the load. We cut the shore tie and were up and running generating our own power. They ran the engine for about five hours that day, until we hooked up the power in Rensselaer, and the engine performed flawlessly. We went about the now familiar routine. **Erik Collin** disconnected the multi-purpose communications cable that handles phones, public address system and Internet between the ship and shore. He was very careful to make sure the 45-pin plug would stay dry this winter, hanging under the wood deck on shore. We split the crew forward and aft, with Doug in charge on the fantail and Erik in charge of the fo'c's'le. We took the safety net off the steel gangway to use in Rensselaer. We moved the camel wires that were clamped to the ship to the seawall, and then took off all six mooring wires and hauled them aboard. The water line had been secured two weeks earlier, so we didn't have to deal with that.



Standing off Albany.



Doug makes the gangway hookup.



You guys weren't expecting to go ashore tonight?

The only problem was that as we went about our duties, the whole time the wind was picking up perceptibly. My rule of thumb is if there are whitecaps on the river, it's probably too windy. By ten o'clock, there were lots of whitecaps. My hat blew off, so I threw it behind an engine room hatch until we finished the move. **Les Beauchaine** had put up our signal flags for the move, and by ten o'clock the "Yoke" flag was in shreds. It was windy. I was really expecting a call from Chris to let me know that they had decided that the prudent thing to do was cancel. But at about 1030 we saw the first tug heading up river, the **CHEYENNE**, with **Denny Donovan** aboard. Let's talk about the tugs. Port Albany Ventures has the four tugs that they bought when Bart Brake died. Bart liked to use the twin screw **HERBERT BRAKE** as a pusher on the **SLATER**'s stern, and the little 350 hp **EMPIRE** as a pusher up on the bow to get us in and out of the dock. Bart's other two boats were big old single screw Bushy tugs, the **CROW** and **CHEYENNE**, built back in the fifties. Much more powerful, harder to maneuver and less responsive, he was hesitant about using them because he was well aware of how susceptible the **SLATER**'s thin skin was to dents. But things have been going pretty well for Port Albany, and the tugs have been really busy. The dependable twin screw **HERBERT** was working down in Louisiana, and the only boats available were the **CROW** and **CHEYENNE**, heading up the river for us. The **CHEYENNE** tied up on the starboard bow to await the arrival of the **CROW**. I yelled at Denny, "You worried about this wind?" and he yelled back, "No problem." That was good enough for me.



The approach to Rensselaer.

**While Larry, Ken and Bob were cutting the shore power and Doug and Ricky were lifting the gangway, Denny's crew came aboard to look around and enjoy some of Stan Murawski's chili lunch with our crew while they were waiting.** We waited about thirty minutes for the CROW, and when she was in sight, Denny's crew climbed aboard and we took our stations on the fo'c's'le and fantail and singled up the soft lines. Denny's plan was to have the CROW lashed to the starboard bow, facing aft, and pull us off the wall. Then the CHEYENNE would come around to the portside and with both tugs pointed to our stern, push us down river with no turn around. The move away from the wall went off without a hitch. The only problem was one of the mooring lines snagged the aft camels as they were pulling it aboard, but Chris jumped down off the wall before our guys could react and freed it up. Working from aft to forward, all the lines came off the wall and we were underway. As always, the actual move went without a hitch. The tug skippers have an amazing ability to charge up to you, and just when you expect to feel impact, they cut their speed, and you don't even feel them touch the hull. They were very gentle with our old girl. About twenty minutes later we were off the wall in Rensselaer. This was where we missed having the HERBERT lashed to our stern, because making the precise adjustment for the gangway line up took a little longer. As we were tying up the Port-a-John blew over, to emphasize the point that it was windy. It took about another twenty minutes to get the line up right, and we waved off the tugs so they could get back to the paying customers. It took the rest of the afternoon to double up, rig the mooring wires, the gangway, shore power and the phone line. With the new fenders we'll get through the winter with a lot fewer scuffs on the hull.

**That night I sent out an email to the crew that we'd be mustering on the Snow Dock at 0800 the following morning to pull out the camels.**

Wednesday was warmer and not nearly as windy. Weather wise, it was one of the best camel days we ever had. The crew started to show up, and Ricky started up the crane and got it ready for lifting. The tide was ebbing until ten, and then it would start to flood again, so we really wanted to get the north camels down by the lift point before the tide turned. We moved them as a group without too much problem. Tommy Moore, Eric Rivet and I donned life jackets and hardhats and went down on the camels, with the rest of the crew swinging, stacking and unhooking. Doug Tanner was back with us for the third day in a row to supervise, and signal Ricky. The process is really pretty simple. Unshackle a camel from the raft, float it around under the crane's lift point, tie it to the raft, attach the taglines, grab the crane hook as it comes down, shackle the chains to the lifting eyes, step off the camel as it starts going up and get the next one ready. Nothing to it, except the camels are slimy and covered with trash, they've lost so much buoyancy over



The Crowe and the Cheyenne push us down river.

the years that if two people step on the same camel, you will be submerged to your knees before you know, the shackles bind together and almost never come apart easily, and usually when your weight is on the corner of the camel while you're undoing the shackle, the camel will start to go under and you're trying to get the shackles apart underwater. That's why we prefer a relatively warm day, when the camels aren't covered with ice. Been there, done that, too. We really didn't miss a beat. Every time the crane hook came back down over the wall, we had another camel in position ready to lift. It only took us about three and half hours to break up the whole mooring and get all the camels out for the winter. The crane drove off, we left sixteen stinky camels drying on the seawall, and season eight was over. To all of you who helped with the move and the camels, my heartfelt thanks.

**As forecast, the following day, Thursday, the temperature plummeted down into the teens.** We were glad to have the move and the camels behind us. The next event on the calendar was our annual Pearl Harbor Day Memorial Service. This event was traditionally held on the SLATER's fantail until last year when we decided that with the advanced age of the veterans we were honoring, it was best to try and find a more climate-friendly indoor location. The Mayor's office graciously offered the City Council Chambers in City Hall and this year we filled the room to capacity. The

ceremony began at 11:00 on Wednesday, December 7<sup>th</sup>. **Mayor Jennings** volunteered as Master of Ceremonies, and the SLATER color guard, **Dick Walker, Andy Desorbo, Don Shattuck, Ken Kaskoun** and **Larry Williams**, resplendent in dress uniforms, performed their final duty of the year. **Mayor Jennings**, Albany County Executive **Mike Breslin**, Rensselaer County Executive **Kathy Jimino**, and Assemblyman **Bob Reilly**, remembered the day and praised the sacrifices of the veterans. 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: **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; **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, and **Nick Elacqua** of Albany, a shipfitter on the USS Conyngham.



**Shifting colors in Rensselaer.**

**Jerry Jones provided digital music in the form of the Navy Hymn and Steve Stella brought his bugle to play taps that echoed through the entire City Hall.** Following the ceremony the members of the Capital District Chief Petty Officers Association, including regular volunteers **Art Dott, Bernie Smith and Adrian Daniels**, put on a reception after the memorial service on board the USS SLATER. Almost all the participants returned to the ship for a hearty lunch. It was a wonderful event and we are especially indebted to **Tony Esposito and Carmen Basille of the Capital District Transportation Authority** who provided busses to move all the participants from the Snow Dock to City Hall. The only down side was while heading up a ladder, Art Dott forgot his years of shipboard experience and failed to lean forward. The result was sixteen stitches in his forehead where he impacted the lip of the hatchway. Jerry Jones actually left a plate full of food to take to his shipmate in the emergency room. This is above and beyond the call of duty for Jerry, who loves food more than any other individual I have ever met.

**The SLATER is now moored safely in Rensselaer and the camels are out of the water.** Our normal winter workdays are Monday to Wednesday and Friday and Saturday. We are aboard from 0800-1630 on those days. The direct phone number to the ship is 518-463-0140. Bear with us, because we have two computers, email and only one phone line. It gets pretty busy. Last year, Rosehn started using the trick of emailing me to get off the Internet and call her for breaking news. We are focused on the primary winter project, restoration of the second deck passageway aft of the anchor windlass room, the forward heads, the reefer decks and the continuing work in the machinery spaces. Thanks to all you tour guides who did such a great job guiding people around the ship this year, and all the maintenance crew who kept the ship looking so good. I wish there was enough space here to list everyone. Recently, I came across an article about the Sub Museum in Groton and how next season they would be providing the "human touch" with volunteer guides. We've always understood that having a real, live person guide visitors through the SLATER is the best way to experience the ship. Seems others are beginning to agree. We are extremely lucky to have such a dedicated group of volunteers. You make us the envy of all the other historic ships. Once again, our attendance was up over the previous year. This is in large part due to an increased number of school groups and summer day camps. And, we hosted about twenty ship reunions this year. Thanks for making it such a successful season.



**Letting go in Albany...**



**and tying up in Rensselaer.**

**Thanks also to all our Winter Fund contributors.** The contributions are coming in daily, and I'll have a more complete report when I write next month. I'll also tell the story of a donation by the National Association of Sonarmen of a World War II era QJB sonar set that was carried aboard the USS LOESER. And our best wishes go to a few of our shipmates who are on the binnacle list. Al Van Derzee was hospitalized at St. Peters over Christmas with colon issues and Jack Madden was briefly hospitalized with prostate issues. Annette Beauchaine took a bad fall and is healing a broken nose. We wish them all a speedy recovery. And our thoughts are with chipper Jim Gelston is fighting bone marrow cancer, and was aboard this morning for coffee. Our thoughts are also with the family of Clem Vaughan, a member of the USS HUSE group. Clem passed away in December, but he loved the SLATER and was an example of one of those guys for whom the ship played a major part in his life, despite that fact he could only be aboard for a week a year. We're glad we could be here for him. **See you next month.**



**Safe and sound.**