

# SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers  
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Destroyer Escort Historical Museum

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Vol. 23 No. 7, July 2020



**What a month it's been.** The crew celebrated Independence Day by preparing for the big move to Caddell Dry Dock and Repair Company, on Staten Island. A hint of the excitement that our trip down river would bring occurred on June 30<sup>th</sup> when Poughkeepsie Rock Station WPDF posted on their website "Spectacular WWII Warship To Sail Down Hudson River This Weekend." Who knew we were spectacular? That story alone got over 2.1K hits on the WPDH Facebook page, and almost a thousand on our page when we reposted it. We took advantage of the surge in interest in the project to post a project history, with before and after pictures of our USS SLATER, that made it clear that this endeavor is supported by your donations, and not by the government, as many people assume.

**Thomas Scian led the effort to make SLATER shipshape for her trip down river, making sure all the decks got painted, and all those eyesores that show up in drone photography looked good.** Preparations for the departure began in earnest on the Fourth of July. Led by **Doug Tanner**, the full crew showed up to remove the mooring cables, rig the pilot ladder, stage the Dutch Apple crane, and prep the diesel generators. We even had **Ed Zajkowski** and **Blair Sandri** aboard, to cook for the crew and stow the food. We celebrated with a pizza party for chow.



*Does this drydock make my stern look big?*

Much to everyone's relief, the initial departure time of 0500 was moved back to 0700. That made it a lot better for the photographers riding the **Dutch Apple**, as she followed us down to Castleton to say farewell. At 0630, NYS Marine Highway's tugs SARAH D and NATHAN G tied up alongside. We started the emergency diesel, shifted to ship's power, pulled the shore tie cable aboard, and disconnected the communications cable and the water hose. **Danny Statile** lifted the gangway, and we cast off, as the tugs turned us to face south. We were underway.

It was a beautiful trip down river. We were escorted by multiple law enforcement agencies and a constant convoy of private yachts, and pleasure craft. Spectators lined the shore and bridges until dark. We used Facebook to give continual reports on our location, until our wifi overheated and we had to go offline with a final post, "Computer is too hot, shutting down." At that point, our fans took over and continued to use the post to update everyone on our progress. The key man on the trip down river was **Mike Dingmon**, our only regular diesel engineer. With **Barry Witte's** help blowing out the sea chest, Mike alternated between 3-cylinder and 8-cylinder gensets and kept power to the ship for the whole trip. The engine watches were the toughest in the heat.



*SLATER and her tugs head south!  
Photo by Michael Schuster.*

We arrived at Pier "G," at Caddell Dry Dock, at 0700 on Monday morning. The yard crew got us tied up and connected the water and shore power. Then three cars took the majority of the crew home, leaving the yard crew to supervise. At this point, it would be worthwhile to say a few words about these hardy souls who stayed with the ship.

Everyone would agree that the team leader was **Ed Zajkowski**. Ed had been the key man, working with shipyard Vice President, **Joe Eckhardt**, for over a year, to develop the work package and plan the overhaul. Loud to the point of belligerent, Ed had an opinion on everything, and kept us constantly entertained.



*Ed checks the rudders for leakage.*

However, the most important man in the crew was Blair Sandri. Brought in by Ed to cook for us, Blair turned out three squares a day for all of us, for five weeks. A former diner owner of incredible patience and good humor, his daughter referred to the galley as “Blair’s Happy Place.” To make himself even more indispensable, Blair sorted out all of our socket sets in the machine shop.

The third key man in the crew was Gary Sheedy. He spent four weeks restoring the running lights, measuring, and attaching the armored cable, so it would be the correct length for the electrical contractor that attached it to the cable supports on the mast. He was always on hand to help everyone else. His sense of humor added to making the whole experience enjoyable.



*Blair in his happy place.*

Thomas Scian traveled back and forth from Monticello every week to contribute to the effort. He undertook the restoration of the pilothouse as his special project. He was the “go to guy” for all the menial tasks no one was interested in. And his photographs documented the whole project. Thomas gained a lot of experience working with our two RPI Midshipmen, Jack Carbone and Brendan Lutz. The three of them became our eyes, donning safety



*Blair kept us well fed. Dinner in the wardroom.*

harnesses at the end of each day, and climbing the mast to report on what work had been done, and what work needed to be done. The rest of us were too old to make the climb. Brendan developed so much rapport with the yard workers, that they assumed he was the project manager. Both Jack and Brendan were supposed to be assigned to Navy ships for training this summer, but that was canceled due to Covid-19. However, their shipyard experience aboard USS SLATER, and their exposure to the ways of the old Navy vets, probably gave them a more well-rounded experience than they could have gotten anywhere else.

These regulars were joined at various times by **Bill Wetterau, George Gollas, George Amandola, Steve Klauck, and Barry Witte**. Bill worked on the longwire radio antennas. George Amandola chipped all the portside bits since these are usually wrapped with mooring lines. Steve did a complete restoration of the mast-mounted bullhorn. George Gollas worked on our IC systems, and Barry continued to monitor the progress of the restoration and mentored the midshipmen through nightly video chats. I can't thank these guys enough for the good humor they maintained, despite the absolutely oppressive heat, humidity, and long hours. They were an incredible team. Everyone was generally up by 0500. Blair had eggs to order, and everyone was usually fed by 0530. At 0545, Ed and I would head over to the administrative office for our morning meeting with Joe. Joe was always in good humor and the meetings became more a social event for us than a work necessity.



*Bill Wetterau straightening out the long wire antennas.*



*Gary Sheedy finishing up the IMC bullhorn.*

**On Tuesday, 7 July, the scaffolding subcontractor delivered the scaffold to the pier, and began erecting the scaffold around the foremast.** By the next day, the scaffold was complete up to the yardarm. The yard crew unbolted the yardarm, and Harry, the crane operator, gently lifted it onshore. That afternoon, the scaffold team completed the scaffold all the way to the air search antenna. The following morning, on Thursday, Harry was back on hand, as the air search antenna was unbolted and lifted onto the dock. On Friday, 10 July, the shipyard crew completed the scaffolding around the stack required for the stack repair, and **Ed Zajkowski** celebrated his 77<sup>th</sup> birthday by climbing to the top of the stack to make a video “Inspection” that he posted to his Facebook page.



*Jack, Brendan, and Thomas were our eyes and legs on the mast.*

*Thomas has also been painting the Pilot House.*

Week two began with “Demo Day.” Our Midshipmen **Brendan Lutz** and **Jack Carbone** spray painted red all the items on the mast that needed removal, to make the restoration authentic. On Monday, 13 July, **Hector Sousa’s** crew began cutting off the platforms, wiring, and equipment that had been added since the end of World War II. We soon had a sizeable pile of scrap on the pier. On Tuesday, 14 July, a major milestone occurred, when the first piece of newly fabricated equipment, the SL radar service platform, was welded in place on to the mast. By Wednesday, 15 July, shipyard day ten, the major components of the SL radar maintenance platform, the bullhorn mounting bracket, and the whistle platform had been hoisted to the mast and tacked in place. On Thursday, production welding continued on all the pieces that had been tacked into place by that point. By Friday, 17 July, the replacement gaff support was made, and was tacked into place. The blocks in dry dock 5 were positioned for us, and the yardarm was stripped, blasted, and primed. The yard brace and middle ladder support were also installed.



*Hydro blasting the mast.*

Week three started on Monday, 20 July. Many of the new items that were fabricated in Albany and planned for installation were sandblasted and returned to the ship. The yardarm was back on the pier for us to work on, the bed spring radar was being rebuilt, and the SA radar motor was back, repaired, and wired up. **Bill Wetterau** dyed 1800 feet of 3/8” nylon line to look like 1945 manila for the halyards. Most important, the high-pressure hydro-blasting of the mast started. On Tuesday, 21 July, which was shipyard day 16, work continued hydro blasting the mast, stack cap repairs, repairs to the longwire radio antennas, and the air search radar reassembly. **Gary Sheedy** successfully tested and rotated the air search radar antenna.

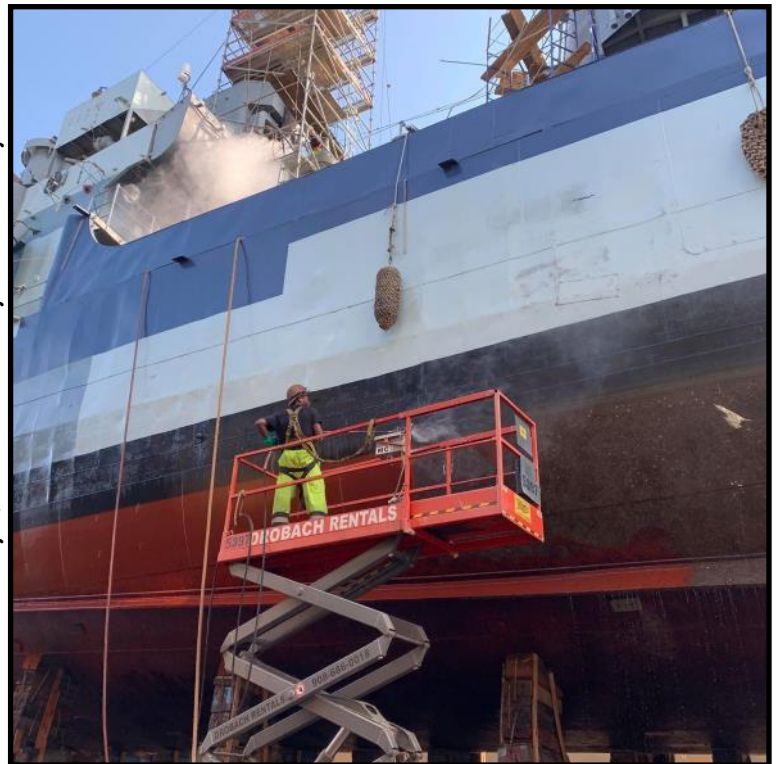


*Morning conference with Joe Eckhardt.*

On Wednesday, 22 July, we had our morning meeting with Joe Eckhardt, and he announced, “You’re going into dry dock tomorrow.” That came as a shock to both of us, and we took a “We’ll believe it when we see it” attitude. That day we had **Ryan Symanski** and **Alaina Noland**, from the Battleship NEW JERSEY, visit us. When they heard we were going into dry dock, they immediately made plans for a return visit the following day. More fittings were attached to the mast, the mast ladder was installed, the painters began priming the mast, and the air search radar was taken to the paint shop. The yardarm was outfitted with all the correct 1945 fittings, and the stack parts arrived from the fabrication shop, and an evening thunderstorm cooled things off. On Thursday, the Caddell welders started the installation of the SL radar waveguide. They had completed all the

metal mast jobs, except the SA radar platform handrails, a support for the center line ladder, and installation of the ship's whistle.

That Friday, the high tide was at noon, so we were told to expect to depart Pier “G” around 1100. The early part of the morning was spent bringing the yardarm aboard, and all the various parts we had scattered around the pier. Around 1000, the two Henry Towing tugs made up alongside, and we waited for word that it was time to move. In the meantime, the skies opened up and it began to pour rain. We started to wonder if they would move us in a downpour. As I explain this, keep in mind that all parties involved here are equipped with a multitude of communications device including cellphone, walkie talkies, and marine radios. Eleven hundred came and went, and nothing was happening until the figure of the top man at the yard, **Steve Kalil**, was seen walking towards the wharf in his raincoat and hard hat, in the pouring rain. Steve said something to the effect of “Are we going to get this thing moving, or what?” and he began throwing our lines off the bollards. It was a stellar performance. That got everybody moving.



*Pressure washing the hull.*

The tugs eased us away from the gangway that had been beating up our paint for two weeks, passed the Staten Island Ferry that was in Dry Dock 6, and into our new home, Dry Dock 5. It took a couple hours to get the dry dock pumped out, settle us on the blocks, and a new “Ladder from Hell” set into place. Power, water, and sewer were quickly connected. The blocks were set perfectly, and though there was the usual concern about the sonar dome, the blocks were set with room to spare and two feet under the sonar dome to the floor of the dry dock. The gang from Battleship NEW JERSEY was aboard and posted several videos of the process on to their website.



*Hauling the bullhorn bracket up.*

No work occurred over the weekend, but on Monday 27 July, work began in earnest with hydro-blasting the mast, and pressure washing the bottom. Steve Klauck completed the restoration of the 1MC mast-mounted bullhorn and departed. Metal work continued on the mast and stack simultaneously, with the hydro-blasting. That evening Brendan and Jack felt ambitious enough to haul the ship’s whistle up to the new whistle platform and begin its reassembly.

On Tuesday, they completed the hydro-blasting on the mast and pressure washing of the hull. The condition of the paint looked excellent! There was a question about the condition of the magnesium anodes. Brendan, Jack, and Thomas took off six, and we weighed them to get an assessment. It took a few days of research to determine that they were in much better condition than they looked.



*Let’s reinstall the whistle.*

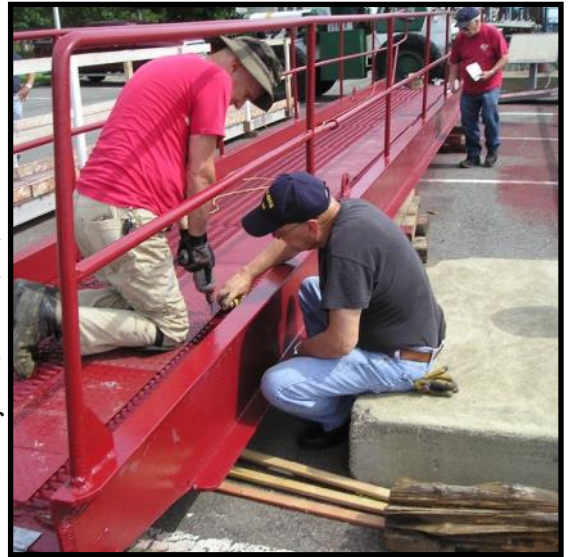
On Wednesday, the 29<sup>th</sup>, work continued on the mast wave guide assembly, the stack cap repair, and priming the stack. Thomas finished up repainting the pilothouse. And the month finished as the priming was completed on the mast. The stack cap repair and metalwork on the mast were completed, and preparations were made to begin sand sweeping the hull. On the last day of the month, things started coming back together. The SA air search radar was repainted, hoisted up, and bolted on the mast. The bullhorn was also hoisted into position. Preparations for sandblasting were completed.

While we were away, Albany was visited by a group of what I consider to be very brave, Russians. They constructed a replica 17th century ship, and sailed it across the Atlantic, and put into the Snow Dock for public visitation. Their ship, Pilgrim, was built in the city



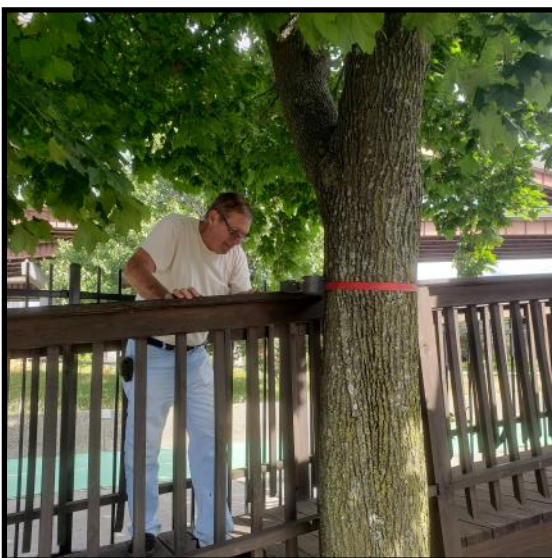
*Russian ship 'Pilgrim' came for a visit.*

of Petrozavodsk, in Russia's North. It is a kog, which is a White Sea vessel, dating from the 1500-1600s. These were the ice boats of their time. They sailed the White Sea, where they lived, worked, and wintered in the ice. In the 1500s and 1600s, these boats were commonly used for fishing and cargo. Pilgrim has begun a global goodwill circumnavigation, and we were proud to welcome her.



*Chuck and Warren finishing up the gangway.*

The team has not been idle in Albany. Doug Tanner has been working his crew two days a week, doing all the maintenance tasks that can only be done when the ship is away. Over the course of the month, **Earl Herchenroder, Dave Mardon, Danny Statile, Bill Wetterau, Warren Brozio, Chuck Teal, Kevin Sage, and Tim Benner** inspected the gangways and safety nets, and made all the necessary, repairs. They built containment for Kevin, so he could spray the aft gangway with long life PSX-700 paint. They kept the grass cut, took care of our Russian visitors, and kept Shanna and Jo Ann amused.



*Danny trying to straighten out the ramp, this tree is winning.*



*Chuck and Doug painted the stairs to the forward gangway.*



*Earl keeps the grass cut, and helps with every project.*





*SLATER in Drydock 5 at Caddell Drydock and Repair Company. Photo by Brian Culmone.*

**Speaking of Shanna and Jo Ann, they are in Albany keeping the office running.** Bills are being paid, merchandise being sold, donations being processed, thank you letters getting mailed, e-mails being answered, and plans being made for when the ship returns.

**We cannot thank the workers at Caddell Dry Dock enough for their hard work, commitment, integrity, and professionalism.** They perform the most physically demanding work under the most difficult conditions. They have our deepest respect. We are still \$200,000 short from fully funding this work, and we need your donations to complete this job. Please don't forget the donation button on our homepage, or the donation envelope you will be receiving in the most recent Trim But Deadly Newsletter. Hopefully, only two more weeks to go. So, thank you to the workers at Caddell Dry Dock and Repair Company, all you donors, and to the volunteers who have given so much.

**Remember, to send us your photos!** If you get some great shots of the ship make sure you send them to us. They may end up in our 2021 calendar!

*See you next month,*

*Tim*

**Don't forget the donate button on our homepage, [www.ussslater.org](http://www.ussslater.org) and to like us on Facebook for daily updates.**