



SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
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This month is all about the movies. One movie in particular, "Orion in Midsummer." If you have been tracking this saga, back in December, **David McComb** of the Destroyer History Trust introduced Japanese producer **Shohei Kotaki** to the SLATER. She came to Albany with **Shin Fukumori** to interview some of our World War II vets for an upcoming movie he was producing about a Japanese submarine and an American destroyer

engagement at the end of World War II. She scouted several locations, but ultimately, because of his close association with New York-based producer **Masashi Miyama**, the dedication of the SLATER's volunteers and the quality of our restoration, he chose to film the American portions of the film here in Albany.

In the movie, SLATER portrays the USS PERCIVAL DE766, under the command of CDR Michael Stewart, portrayed by David Winning, and LT Joseph Flynn as the Exec, portrayed by Joe Rayome. Their fictional ship has had a very successful career, having sunk nine Japanese submarines at the start of the movie. The eve of VJ Day finds PERVICAL stalking her final quarry, I-77. The name was derived from a FLETCHER class destroyer, DD452, a ship designed with experimental machinery that was never built. The decision to keep our "766" hull number was made in the hope that if the film is big in Japan, the number association might boost our tourism.

Actual production began on Friday, August 15th with location scouting.

On Saturday the equipment arrived in force as a trailer arrived in the parking lot for the wardrobe and make up departments. A larger generator arrived so the production wouldn't be dependent on the vagaries of SLATER power, along with port-a-johns for the crew, and 24-ft. panel trucks, one each for the electrical crew, art department, special effects and props. The classroom was turned into a production room with extra phone lines and computer terminals. And tents appeared for the extras and food service. Always thinking of our stomachs, we made sure we were included in the catered meals.



Sunday the 17th was the first day of actual filming. With all the extras, there were over fifty people on site. This was my first film experience, and I'm not sure why anyone would want to seek this as a career choice. The days are long, the nights are longer, and when you're all done, you're never sure where your next gig is coming from. On top of that, there is an incredible amount of waiting around standing by, just like the old Navy days. To the uninitiated, it takes an incredible amount of equipment and an awful lot of people to make a movie. I wonder if the producers feel the same way, since they are paying for it.

The plan was to get the most difficult scenes shot first, namely all the exterior shots that required good weather, special effects and lots of extras. First came the depth charge scenes. **Lou Renna's Dutch Apple Cruises** provided two pontoon boats, one as a camera boat and



one as a depth charge retriever. We rolled a lot of depth charges with our fully operational starboard rack and the newly built port track. The special effects crew fired a specially made "K" gun with compressed air several times, and we filmed a rescue scene with survivors coming up a cargo net while being drenched with water.

After three days of day filming, fourteen hours a day, we went to night work. We had to be aboard at 1600 for setup, and as soon as it was dark the filming began. For three nights, extras clad in kapoks and helmets manned the guns and performed damage control after "PERCIVAL" was hit by a torpedo. The effect of fire was created by special effect lighting and smoke from a fog machine. This was the one scary scene from a liability point of view as the fog mixed with dew to make the decks slippery for the extras hauling damage control gear around the ship in response to the "torpedo hit." It was when all those extras were killing time between takes in their dungarees, helmets and life jackets that they really looked just like you guys did back in the day.

With all the lights, the camera boom, a high lift for the lighting, and cable strung all over the ship, it looked more like we were in the middle of a shipyard overhaul than back in commission. But the effect looked very real when you saw what the camera was seeing through monitors, and you could almost believe that we had stepped back in time. It was with a great deal of relief that we finished the night shoots and had a Saturday off to transition back to days.



Sunday, the 24th, we were back at it, filming scenes in CIC, the aft motor room and the sonar compartment with the working SQS-4 sonar that our volunteers had worked so hard on for so long. That's probably the one place that will look more real than the WHITEHURST did in "The Enemy

Below." One thing the film will have in common with "The Enemy Below" will be all the DE vets who will view the picture yelling at CDR Stewart, "Use your damn hedgehog!"

Throughout the production the Japanese actively sought out our advice on how to keep the film as accurate as possible. However, **Mr. Kotaki** did feel the need to remind me that they were not making a documentary, so that we wouldn't be disappointed when not all of our suggestions were taken. Occasionally authenticity has to take a back seat to drama. Director **Shunji Okada** was extremely patient and gently firm with my efforts to insert myself into the script writing process. I started obsessing over Stewart's character development. Also, I have to apologize that I was inadvertently undermining Shunji by continually suggesting that the principal cast members carefully watch "The Enemy Below," while Shunji was telling them not to watch the film so that they would have a fresh perspective and not do a stale Robert Mitchum imitation. My one piece of advice for any of my historic ship friends who find themselves in this situation would be to take some time with the extras and have them watch some documentary or feature film footage to get a better historical perspective. We didn't think to do this until late into the production.



During the process of filming they wanted a photo of a sailor to be used in the movie to depict CDR Stewart's younger brother, who had been killed in action. I suggested they use an old image of one of our volunteers taken in their youth. They studied about fifty old photos of our volunteers in a "beauty pageant" of sorts. We could have guessed the outcome. Their selection was none other than our tour guide extraordinaire Dr.

Alfred Van Derzee. Like his ego needed that. He was a handsome devil in his youth. For the historical record, the runners up were **Frank Perrella** and **Bob Bull.** Sorry guys. Al didn't hesitate one bit at signing the release. And despite my best efforts to get our volunteers cast as extras, I had very little success. Most were considered too old or overweight to pass for twenty years old. For some reason, the only one selected to appear on camera was **Jerry Jones.** Jerry has probably convinced himself that he was afforded this unique opportunity because of his handsome profile, boyish good looks and masculine physique, but we all know it was really because he was the only one available who knew enough Morse code to send a signal light message. And besides, it was a night scene.

One of the more interesting aspects of the filming was the business aspect. Sho had originally hoped to tow the SLATER out into the river for underway scenes.

This would have been difficult, but feasible. However, the complications of insuring this part of the production, as well as budget constraints, forced the decision to limit the filming to pierside, with many of the shots being filmed from the DUTCH APPLE moored next door. We developed what many would term a "simplified" contract to insure that the ship would not be damaged and a fee schedule that gave them exclusive use of the ship for two weeks.



Movie star Jerry Jones prepares for his action scene.

The fee we set was one hundred thousand dollars, in three payments: the first in May when the contract was signed, the second payment at the start of production on August 15th, and at that time the final payment and damage deposit were placed in escrow until the completion of shooting.



Following the completion of the contract, we learned that Sho's company Destiny Productions, Miyama's company Marcom Visual Creations, Inc. of New York, and Kanjiro Sakura's company Crossmedia of Tokyo were jointly producing the movie with nothing more than a production agreement, trust and a handshake between them. It made us envious of the days when that kind of trust

existed in this country and a man's word was his bond. It became apparent early on that these were men of honor who treated us and our ship with the greatest respect and courtesy. I would welcome the chance to work with them again. They definitely left the campsite in better shape than they found it in. They donated all the uniforms that were worn by the cast to the Museum. And Producer Kotaki proved

himself to be an excellent chef when turned loose in our galley. He prepared meals for the whole crew on several occasions and his clam chowders and chicken curry were exquisite.

Watching the ship come alive with the extras manning their battle stations brought back a special

nostalgia. The filming of the night scenes was especially thrilling to watch, though there were long waits between takes. On those days there were three hours of setup before beginning filming at twilight. Filming stopped as soon as the sky began to show the first light of dawn. With the two hours it took to stow gear, it was

0700 by the time we got home. I can personally attest to the fact that Orion does rise in the summer sky at 0400. Watching the stars and hearing the Japanese voices mixed with Americans, all working in unison toward a common goal, I was reminded of one of my favorite passages from Arnold Lott's book "Brave Ship, Brave Men:"



"There is a first time for ships to go to sea, a first time for men to go to sea. There is a first time to shed a tear on leaving home, a first time to be sick, a first time to be cold, wet and sleepy. And there is a first time for them to look above the masthead at the night-time sky and know that above all sailors the stars will shed their everlasting glory. There they are, the same stars that shone on Sidon and Tyre when the first sailors steered

from Phoenicia down to Egyptland, the same stars seen by Copernicus and Galileo, the same stars which guided Magellan across the Pacific and Marco Polo home from Cipango. There is an infinite fitness about the scheme of things, that the navigator steering his ship by the light of Vega always finds the star in the same place right ascension eighteen degrees and thirty-four minutes, declination thirty-eight degrees forty-four minutes north whether he comes from Hamburg, Houston or Hiroshima."

There were a few disappointments. We had hoped that the flying bridge would be featured, but that was not the case since most of the bridge scenes were filmed in the pilothouse to compress the action. We didn't get to use the whaleboat or fire the guns. There were no scenes filmed in the radio room, galley or berthing spaces. We had to remind ourselves that this was a Japanese submarine movie and not an American destroyer escort movie. Producer Kotaki and Director Okada did accommodate us by including one scene that was not in the original script: a scene of the crew answering bells in the aft motor room as a tribute to all the work that had been done in that space. And, on the plus side, I've never seen such a long run of cool, dry weather in August.

As a result of the movie, the ship is much more complete than it was before the event.

The movie has driven restoration for the past six months, and as a result, we completed the restoration of the aft motor room upper level, completed restoration of the starboard "K" Gun battery with all the roller loaders, and completed the missing port depth charge rack. The floater net baskets now have simulated floater nets. The crew worked out



some great special effects for the movie, including getting the starboard depth charge release gear operational, getting the engine order telegraph operational so we can simulate responding to bells, getting the tachometers to work on the main shafts so it looks like we're making flank speed, and getting the gyro repeaters to move in response to steering orders.



You will note an absence of individual names of volunteers in this month's journal. Several of the crew put in long hours during the production, and while it was very profitable for the museum, none of the volunteers or staff profited by the event. It all goes back into the organization. A lot of volunteers worked very hard on the production set. A lot of people worked very hard to prepare the ship for the production. And many more people have been working very hard since the SLATER first arrived in New York in 1993 to prepare for this event. In a sense, the choice of the SLATER for filming and the

appearance of reality that the filmmakers were able to create aboard SLATER is the culmination of almost fifteen years of work by over a thousand dedicated volunteers. We don't know if the movie will be released in America or not at this time, but when the film is released, those authentic looking destroyer scenes will be a testament to all the love, donations and devotion that you have poured into this little ship since we brought her home in 1993. Thank you for being a part of that.

(Photo credit: © Orion In Midsummer Film Partners)

(Jerry Jones photo by Barry Witte)

See you next month.



The tanker rescue scene.