



SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
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The struggle to preserve the SLATER takes many forms. Sometimes it takes the form of large groups of volunteers working together towards a common goal, like moving the ship, hauling the camels and hoisting the whaleboat. It takes the form of all of you who took the time to write all those checks to support the ship this winter. Other times it's a battle of a lone individual, trying to make progress against overwhelming odds to accomplish a personal goal.

Such is the case of Gary Sheedy on the reefer deck. A Google search of "Slater Signals," "Sheedy" and "Reefer Deck" shows us that Gary started the project back in January of 2001. Now for most of us, this would be a six-month project but, given Gary's high standard of restoration, it didn't look like he would ever finish. But this year, as autumn drew to a close, Gary felt like he was turning the corner and the end was finally in sight. All the bulkheads have been chipped and painted white. The deck has been chipped and painted red. All the pipe insulation has been repaired and painted white. The compressor bases are chipped and painted metallic silver gray and have been remounted. The first compressor has been restored to like new condition and remounted. Missing parts and valves were obtained from the

LSM-45. All the gauges, instrumentation and piping have been cleaned, restored and shined and are in Gary's home shop awaiting installation.



Sheedy bagging wet insulation.

He's finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel after almost nine years.

The place will be a showpiece and there won't be any place on the SLATER that can compare to Gary's exquisite restoration job. And he's even making plans to restore the reefers. He's spent the last nine years collecting period looking vegetable crates, fruit crates and boxes for his reefer display. One section will be his display space, one cooler will continue to house Rosehn's financial records, and one cooler will be Gary's personal tool room.

There was just one little problem, an annoying little stream of water that would occasionally appear from pinholes in the bulkhead between the coolers and the machinery flat. That, coupled with the fact that the coolers always seemed a little damp, didn't seem like a big deal. A lesser man

would have ignored it. But **Gary Sheedy** isn't a lesser man, and **Gary Sheedy** couldn't ignore it. He just had to find out where that water was coming from.

So with the end in sight and the restoration of the reefer decks coming down to remounting the gages, polishing the copper and hanging the pinups, Gary went into the starboard cooler and started ripping out the false decking. Carefully of course, so it could be replaced. Carefully drilling out one pop rivet at a time. When he had enough of the decking out to slip his hand in there, what he felt wasn't encouraging. The false deck contained about six inches of fiberglass insulation. Very wet fiberglass insulation.

Gary, the perfectionist who has been working on this project for nine years, dutifully removed all the sheet metal decking in the starboard cooler and began pulling out the sodden fiberglass by hand. It was all bagged and hauled ashore to the dumpster, sack full after sack full. The corrosion revealed under that fiberglass was a bit unnerving to say the least. The ship lays with about a one degree list to starboard because the Greeks removed the donkey boilers and the evaporator, all located on the portside in B-2. Thus the heaviest amounts of water had been lying against the starboard shell plating in the reefer, right below the waterline, with the fiberglass acting as a big damp sponge. That shell plating was only a quarter-inch original build. The idea that the damp fiberglass had eaten through the shell plating at the waterline seemed like a very real possibility.

Thus, it was with great trepidation that Gary rigged a dehumidifier and waited for the results. Over the course of the following week the compartment slowly dried out, and the water did not return. It looks like we have been spared for now. Gary enlisted **Chris Fedden** and **Ron Mazure** to help him needle gun the deck, with instructions not to go at the side shell plating with anything heavier than a putty knife. After some severe beating with a needle gun, the deck turned out to be solid, with no holes. No such pressure was applied to the side plating. A coat of Corroseal, then primer, and then Gary will reinstall the false deck. While the scaling was going on in the starboard cooler, Gary set about to tackle the forward centerline cooler. The crew hauled twenty boxes of **Rosehn's** financial records up to the berthing space, and in the process found our Christmas tree, which we set up and decorated on the



George and Gary party in the reefer.

messdecks. Gary set about removing the false decking there, following the same process of removing, bagging and disposing of the fiberglass, and then drying the space out. It wasn't as sodden as the starboard cooler, but it was far from dry. After a week under dehumidification the space was bone dry.

Now that the worst case scenario, pin holes at the waterline, has been proven unfounded, there remain a couple of theories as to where the water came from. One is that it's a result of storing our winter drinking water in the bunk lockers in the CPO mess. Occasionally the jugs would leak, flooding the bunk lockers. The water then found its way to the magazine below, and then through pinholes in the

bulkhead to the adjacent reefer deck aft, saturating the fiberglass. **Erik Collin** partially solved the problem a couple years ago when he put flat pans in the lockers to hold the water jugs, but several gallons had leaked through over the previous ten years. Then there's the possibility that most of the water was a result of fighting the fire in 2006. A lot of water flooded the starboard side lockers in the berthing space above and there's a good chance that some of it found its way down to the reefers. Maybe condensation from the years she was in service? And who knows what else may have happened when she was in Greek service.

The net result for Gary is that his completion date for the reefers has been pushed back several more months. He will go through the same process on the port side cooler and the centerline entry way, neither of which borders on shell plating. Once again the fine film of rust dust that results from needle scaling has coated all of Gary's polished piping and paint work. A lesser man might have difficulty accepting the setback, but **Gary Sheedy** is not a lesser man



Flag raising in Rensselaer.



Heading downstream... backwards.

As for the rest of the crew, it's the same old dull routine. Did I mention the move? Yeah, we completed out 12th season on Tuesday, December 8th, which was coincidentally, my birthday. The weather was as perfect as it can get for this time of the year. About forty degrees, calm and partly cloudy. The crew mustered at 0800 and began making all preparations for getting underway. The sewer and water lines had been previously disconnected. The wires were taken off, the lines singled up, and at ten o'clock promptly, the tugs showed up. We only had two small problems. First, I got a report that they couldn't start the emergency diesel because the batteries were dead. No big deal. We've crossed cold and dark before. Then I got a report that the crane we had lined up wouldn't be there because the batteries were dead. Now that was kind of a big deal because I had two donated tugs standing by and no way to lift the gangways. I'm thinking that I'm about to have to call the whole thing off, when out from the phone booth, doing his best George Reeves imitation, steps **SUPER TANNER**. Faster than a speeding bullet, able to leap tall buildings and crawl into septic tanks in a single bound, with more contacts than Donald Trump. He grabs a phone and calls **Marty Mullins**, who happens to be the proprietor of **Mullin's Crane and Rigging Service**. It seems that Marty is so overworked and short-handed that he's heading out to a job on a crane himself. Two minutes later and he would have been on the road. But for **Doug Tanner**, Marty postpones the paying job, and swings by the SLATER with one of those massive rigs that looks like it would lift the SLATER. Twenty minutes after Doug's call, the gangways are up, and Marty is on his way to a make some money with that rig. I don't know why people love Tanner the way they do. He's definitely got that something extra.

As for our other little problem, our gang ran an extension cord from shore to the battery chargers and stoked up the ship's batteries enough for one more shot. Gus tried some newer starting fluid and they got the old Cleveland to fire up. Thus, Gus was able to blame bad starting fluid and not lack of battery maintenance.

Chris Gardella was aboard with his crew and the trip downriver was uneventful, stern first, no fancy turns. Off the Rensselaer wharf, the EMPIRE held us in mid-stream while the CROW shifted from starboard to port, and they eased us into the berth, with a perfect line up. Heaving lines went across, the line up was adjusted, lines were doubled, fenders rigged, the gangway rigged, wires rigged, power rigged, and we're back in Rensselaer for another season. Again, our thanks to **Chris, the tug crews and Arnold and John Witte of Donjon Marine** for being our most critical donors. And it's a good thing we did it Tuesday, because that night we got a foot of snow. Wednesday the place looked like a winter wonderland.



I hope this is the last time.



Super Tanner and his hook.

That Friday, we hauled camels. Temps were in the low twenties, and the process went slower than usual because the camels were covered with snow and ice that locked in all the debris. Once we got the rhythm going, all went smoothly. However, over half of them are so waterlogged that they won't support the weight of a person without sinking. The trick was to have the guys on the wall hold up the camels with the taglines while we made the crane hookups. By 1400 we had them all out.

I hate to be an optimist, but maybe this will be the last time we will use the camels to hold the ship off the seawall. On December 15th we opened the bids to build the breasting pilings and fendering that will take the place of the camels. C. D. Perry and Sons of Troy, NY, came in as the low bidder at \$307,000 and change. By the time you read this we will have awarded the contract. We hope to do construction in March so that the new monopiles will be in place when the SLATER comes across in April. I am cautiously optimistic. In the mean time, anybody have a home for sixteen waterlogged camels?



RPI Midshipmen cover gun 1.



Some mids get more excited about covering guns than others.

Every December we remember Pearl Harbor, and this year was no exception, a day before move day. This year's Pearl Harbor observance, sponsored by County Executive **Mike Breslin**, Albany Mayor **Gerald Jennings**, and the USS SLATER, took place at the J.E. Zaloga American Legion Post at 0900. Following Presenting the Colors by the SLATER Color Guard, and the playing of the National Anthem by ET1 **Jerry Jones**, Albany County Veterans Bureau Director **Joe Pollicino** began the program with the County "Honor a Veteran Ceremony" which honored the 2403 servicemen killed in action during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Gold Star Mother Rev. **Charlene Robbins** gave the Invocation. Customarily, Congressman **Paul Tonko** presents a flag which has been flown over the Nation's Capitol to a family member during the ceremony. The Honor a Veteran Committee decided that on this occasion the flag should be given to the USS SLATER. Congressman Tonko presented it to **Paul Czesak**, and the flag was flown from the SLATER during the month of December. Also present were Rensselaer County Executive **Kathleen Jimino** and Town of Colonie Supervisor **Paula Mahan**.



It was 20 degrees when Barry cleaned the switchboard.



Super Dave trying to be a machinist.

The program was then turned over to SM2 Steve Long, and the four attending Pearl Harbor survivors were introduced. Seaman 1st Class **Charlie Ebel** was aboard the seaplane tender USS CURTIS, Carpenters Mate 1st Class **Robert Grimm** was on the destroyer USS CUMMINGS, Fireman **Bill Langston** served aboard the Battleship USS WEST VIRGINIA, and Sergeant **John Sloboda** was with the 18th Fighter Group at Wheeler Field. The **Zaloga Post Rifle Squad** fired the rifle salute and CDR **Steve Stella** played Taps. ET1 Jones then played the Navy Hymn, and CDR **Earle Flatt** gave the Benediction. **Mark Blank**, Post Commander, concluded the event with an invitation for the attendees to enjoy a traditional Navy breakfast prepared by Post Chef **Pat Connoly**, his wife **Carol**, and Zaloga kitchen staff. The menu included the two types of S.O.S., scrambled eggs, toast, beans, coffee and juice. We must not forget the faithful SLATER Color Guard, lead by **Ken Kaskoun**, including **Andy DeSorbo**, **Clark Farnsworth**, **Dave Mardon** and **Bernard (Smitty) Smith**.

I would be totally remiss if I didn't mention the overwhelming response we are getting to our **Winter Fund solicitation**. Every day when I enter the ship's office, Erik Collin has a stack of new thank you letters ready for me to sign. Your response and the kind appreciative notes so many of you have sent are what really make this all worthwhile for all of us aboard. We've been posting your letters on the bulletin board in the CPO mess so the volunteers understand how much you all appreciate their efforts.

Finally we were saddened by the loss of two old friends. Captain **Ken Hannan**, former CO of USS SWEARER DE186 was a strong supporter of SLATER. Ken was in the Atlantic on a corvette in the dark days of the Battle of the Atlantic before DEs came on the scene. I'll always remember his as a friend, and the guy who preferred to walk back to the hotel rather than ride during his last reunion here several years ago. He was ninety-four at the time.

And we mourn the loss of a great volunteer, friend and shipmate, John Bartko from Livonia, Michigan. John first came to the SLATER as part of the Michigan Field Day crew in May of 1999. A former motormac who served aboard the O'REILLY DE330, John was a graduate of Saunders Trades and Technology High School, Yonkers, and had just retired after a 51-year career with Ford, ending up as a Primary and Instrument Panel Designer in the Engineering Department. I really didn't have a need for an instrument panel designer, so I hired him to work in the aft head chipping paint. My recollection is that he worked with **Charlie Markham**. That was a tough time for us, going into our second year, before we had the endowment, grants and all you members supporting us. We didn't have two nickels



John Bartko in service.

to rub together. It was at this point that as I passed John in the machine shop, he pulled me aside and said, "I want to make a donation." He pushed some tools out of the way, pulled out his checkbook, and began writing a check on the grimy machine shop work bench. The check was for five thousand dollars. I believe when he handed it to me his words were, "Maybe next year I can get a better job." I was so overwhelmed I asked **Dick Briel** if he thought it was okay for me to cash the check. It was.

John did get better jobs and John continued to donate. Each year thereafter he made a \$5,000 donation to the endowment fund. His efforts over the years made him the largest individual donor to the project, and placed his beloved O'REILLY at the head of the "Top Fifty" list of cumulative totals for ships. Always jovial and just "one of the guys," John continued to attend field days until just a couple of years ago. His chapter mates used to accuse me of catering to John, bringing him coffee, making sure he had a wardroom chair to sit on when he was painting or chipping, letting him sleep in officers country, and giving him days off to go visit his sister Mildred in Yonkers, who he always spent time with when he came east. Okay, maybe I did

make concessions to John that I wouldn't have made for the average motormac third. Live with it. I should have been bringing him breakfast in bed.

John ended up in a long term care facility and Dick Briel and his chapter mates used to visit him on a regular basis. John died after a long illness on November 30th. We flew the ensign at half staff in his honor when we learned of his passing. We thought we would hear no more from John, but when he passed away, he wasn't through with us. A couple weeks later we received a notification that John had named the museum as the beneficiary of an annuity valued at \$123,000.

The Trustees of the Museum have agreed that \$100,000 of this bequest should go into the hull fund for the long-term preservation of the ship John cared so much about. The remainder will go into the restoration fund to pay for the ongoing preservation of the SLATER. The SLATER crew, in the number two position, was slowly creeping up on the O'REILLY with continued individual donations. But now it looks like **John Bartko's** O'REILLY will be at the head of the list for a long time to come.

See you next Month.



John Bartko