

SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
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One of my favorite literary passages is Arnold Lott's description of USS AARON WARD's Chief Boatswain's Mate Carl Shelley. In Lott's classic, *Brave Ship, Brave Men*, Lott writes, "Shelley was an old time chief, bronzed, salty, tough on the outside, but gentle on the inside. He never lost his temper, never got excited, never lost control of the situation; he took complete charge of whatever he was given to do, did it efficiently and quietly. After his kids had sailed across a quarter of a million miles of salt water, helped half a dozen officers start up the long haul from junior division officer to captain, taught several hundred kids of their own to be snappy deck apes and hot shot boatswain's mates, had learned to spit to windward and rig a towing hawser on a dark night in a heaving sea, why, then, they could hope to be the same kind of man Shelley was."

In our current politically correct environment, one of the phrases that has disappeared is the phrase "a man's man." For our younger readers who may not have heard the phrase before, a man's man is a natural leader, the kind of guy you would blindly follow into hell, because you know he will get you back. These are the guys who take control of any situation without orders, always seem to know what to do, and are the one's you want alongside you when everything starts going to hell. In today's culture, they are generally considered to be in need of sensitivity training. If they smoke, they smoke cigars, can't fathom the concept of decorum, and drink their coffee black.

In the Navy, these kinds of men usually end up in rates that involve moving heavy objects, making loud noises, playing with fire, hand to hand combat, or aerial dog fighting. Don't get me wrong. They are not universally admired. Sailors of the more refined rates such as yeomen, storekeepers and electronics types consider their macho shipmates uncouth Neanderthals, totally lacking in finesse and social graces, rather like the proverbial bull in the china shop. That is until the wind rises above force 8, water starts pouring in or the shooting starts.



Doug Tanner in his element.

For those of you who have been following the SLATER saga for any period of time now, one concept should be crystal clear. Doug Tanner is a man's man. Doug is a former Coast Guard damage controlman, turned GE maintenance supervisor, turned level three welding inspector, now a pressure vessel inspector and a SLATER Trustee. Doug is also a church-going, devoted family man, and the day he arrived aboard SLATER so many years ago marked a turning point in our restoration effort. He is equally at ease working at the top of the mast or cleaning out the septic tank, and he's done both on many occasions.

But, every man has an occasional bad day, and Doug was the having a bad day. Under a lot of pressure to get the galley completed for opening day, Doug was having a lot of problems as the galley neared completion. The expansion joint leaked on the port side so all the bolts needed to be retightened. And, the sink drains were giving him fits because they weren't going back together the way he had planned because silver solder wasn't taking to the alloy. As he has been known to do, he showed up two hours early on a Tuesday so he could have some time to think things through without having anyone kibitzing over his shoulder.

His first move is always to go into the Chief's Quarters to make coffee. But he couldn't find any coffee. That was not a good start to his day. When he finally located half a can of old open coffee, he'd wasted about 20 minutes, but he scooped a heaping pile of grounds into the basket, poured in the water and went back to work while it perked. Anxiously looking forward to that first cup of coffee, he returned to the Chief's quarters but something didn't smell right. He poured himself a cup, took a deep swallow and almost gagged. It was hazelnut, lousy hazelnut. Alone in the mess, the air probably turned blue as Doug expressed his thoughts on hazelnut coffee and angrily dumped the pot out. He saw "Hazelnut" written on top of the can in small faint letters, but restrained himself from throwing it over the side. . Another search finally revealed an unopened can of Folgers. Once the second pot was perking, he went back to the galley to continue his struggle with the sinks. When he finally smelled the aroma of decent real coffee drifting through the passageway, he returned to the CPO Mess for a cup of steaming, black Joe.



Gary Sheedy enjoying his hazelnut latte.

This might have marked the end of the coffee story, but the next man to arrive on the scene was Gary Sheedy. Gary came into the chief's mess, poured a cup of coffee, added cream and sugar and sat down across from Doug. Doug proceeded to relate to Gary his frustration with not noticing the can of hazelnut that had not been adequately marked and how he'd dumped that stuff overboard. To which our favorite electrician's mate exclaimed, "Whaddya do that for. I love hazelnut. The high point of my week is when I stop at Stewart's and buy myself a hazelnut coffee on Saturday morning." Well, as far as Doug was concerned, that statement made Sheedy a marked man for life. What next? Latte and quiche? More on that later. The sink drain continued to give Doug problems all morning, only, now that the whole crew was aboard, he had a large audience looking over his shoulder asking the perennial,

"How's it going Doug?" As noon rolled around, Doug escaped the galley into another one of his passions, cooking. Doug is a good cook. There is nothing Doug enjoys more than cooking

for the crew. He always makes breakfast for us, and never charges for the food. Just don't make the mistake I did and call his delicious scrambled egg recipe a quiche. And, there is nothing Doug likes more than the challenge of going into the pantry without a plan and coming up with a meal simply with the items he finds on hand. On this day he found several packets of prefab macaroni and cheese. He heated the water, began to boil the macaroni and added the cheese, and continued to stir the mixture on the hotplate. About half an hour later, **Heather** wandered through the messdeck as Doug continued to stir. She looked over his shoulder and asked, "What are you making Doug?" Doug replied, "Macaroni and cheese I found in the pantry, but it seems awful thin." Heather looked at the mixture and asked, "Did you pour the water off the macaroni before you put the cheese in?" If any of us had asked the same question we probably would have been wearing the macaroni, but because of her status aboard, Heather gets considerations the rest of us can only dream of. But at that point Heather joined Sheedy on Doug's list of antagonists.



The rehabbed starboard reefer.



The galley gang, Mardon, Miller, Herchenroder, Farnsworth and Jackey.

However, that battle lines are now drawn between the hazelnut coffee drinkers and the black coffee drinkers. Not surprisingly, electronics technician **Jerry Jones** immediately sided with Sheedy on the hazelnut team, accusing the deck apes of buying the cheapest coffee available, using twice as many grounds as recommended, and boiling it all morning before they were satisfied with the taste. Surprisingly, Heather sided with the straight black coffee drinkers. But then I guess that should be no surprise considering she's not phased by the port-a-john, subfreezing temperatures, and knocks opponents around a roller rink for sport. Next she'll probably want to learn to use an acetylene torch.



The reefer deck.



Even Heather got involved in loading scrap metal. Kevin Sage spraying out the ET shop.

Amid the coffee controversy, the work to get the ship ready to move and open continued to progress. The galley welding, the sink drains and the expansion joint were all completed. The engineers repaired the cooling leaking on the emergency diesel generator and test fired the engine. The RPI Midshipmen uncovered all the guns and stowed the canvas. The bridge deck grating was pulled out up the upper sound shack and put in place. The radiomen got the TBL motor generator put back together and the radio room is starting to look like a radio room again instead of a motor rewind shop. Joe Breyer completed his repairs to the SA Radar “A” scope simulation. “Boats” got all his heaving lines and fenders prepared for the move.



Our new Coast Guard friends with the USCGC Katherine Walker alongside.

We received a great and much needed boost from the US Coast Guard. If you recall, last fall we provided a berth for the buoy tender USCGC KATHERINE WALKER when she was at the northern end of her buoy maintenance run. The crew really appreciated our location close to the downtown restaurants and clubs. We put the CO Lieutenant Adam Leggett on our mailing list. Now I don’t know if it was because we impressed him so with our restoration effort, or that Albany was such a great liberty port, but what ever the reason, he was motivated to ask sector for permission to have his 24-man crew do a volunteer work day aboard SLATER. His timing couldn’t have been better for us,

because we needed all the help we could get to clean up for opening day. But for them, not so much. They planned their arrival for Wednesday March 27th, two days before our move. That put them

alongside side of us in Rensselaer, at a rather remote and desolate wharf, and not easy or cheap way to get to the bright lights and big city.



Helping Rocky on the whaleboat.

They made the best of it, and our Wednesday work day was a great experience for all of us. The day started with **Erik Collin** and me splitting the crew and taking them on a full tour of SLATER. We then split them into several sections. One group spent the day in B-4 cleaning, vacuuming, stowing gear and wiping down so the space will be presentable for visitors. Another group went bilge diving in B-3, removed another 20 gallons of bilge rust and grime, and got some primer on some of the longitudinals. Lt Leggett put four people in the galley and they polished all the stainless steel and cleaned the ovens. Then, they assisted Smitty locating all his galley gear that was scattered around the ship and putting the place back together. Four more Coasties went to work on the whaleboat. They uncovered the boat, stowed the canvas, and then power-

sanded the whole bottom for Rocky. Their damage controlman reorganized our shoring chest and cleaned and reset the display in the aft repair locker. And **“Boats” Haggart** immediately latched on to their Chief Boatswain and they worked together teaching our “Boats” how to splice braided line. Another group turned to in the aft berthing spaces and stripped all the bunks, took the bedding over to the Tender, laundered it, brought it back clean and remade the bunks.

The turning point was when they invited our volunteers aboard for lunch and gave them a tour of their ship. Immediately upon entering their messdeck, which was conveniently located on the main deck, our gang thought they had died and gone to old Sailor's heaven. The first thing in the chow line was the selection of several choices of desserts that included apple turnovers, which Super Dave swept up. The quality and selection of food was amazing. And the drink selection rivaled a 7/11 convenience store. Everything but beer. Then there was the wide-screen TV, drop ceiling and soft fluorescent lighting. And the coffee creamer selection included French Vanilla, Hazelnut, and Chocolate Mocha coffee creamers. The grumbling about working conditions aboard SLATER started immediately and grew louder as the crew saw more and more of the ship. And **Bill Siebert** hasn't been helping the situation by leaving his copies of the Seafarer's International Union newsletters lying around. Anyway, I warned LT Leggett that he'd better check for stowaways before he departed, because my crew knows a better deal when they taste one.

Our Chief Commissaryman Smitty was thrilled when he found the Coasties had left him a full bag of rags in the galley.



Chief Smith got his galley back.

Heather realized that it was the last load of fart sacks and pillow cases that were still in the dryer when the crew knocked off for the day. Local Coast Guard reservist Dennis McGraw did his best to make up for the isolation of the Rensselaer wharf. He arranged to open the bar at the Albany Yacht Club (Located in Rensselaer) about a half mile up the road and walking distance from the SLATER. Apparently they had

a pretty decent time Wednesday night, and everybody made it back for departure at 0745 Thursday morning. We all hope they come back.

Doug Tanner has me walking on eggshells, because he pointed out that I probably doomed USS SLATER last month when I made the statement, "In a month of maritime problems SLATER seems to be surviving unscathed." Not that I'm superstitious, but I've always figured that the only reason all the clocks on the ship were mounted on wood bases was so that Sailors could "Knock on Wood" when they realized they had said something that might temp fate. So with that in mind, I was more than a little concerned when Rob Goldman called me and said that he had arranged for his tugs and a pilot to move us on Good Friday, March 29th. All old shellbacks are familiar with the superstition that it is bad luck to sail on Friday. Then I got word that Doug was going to be in Kansas with his family when we moved, so now I really started to worry.

I had told the crew to muster at 0730

the morning of the 29th. Rob was planning a 0900 departure. I arrived aboard around 0630 to put the coffee on. About 0700 the crew started to arrive. When I confirmed with Rob that we were a go, we started pulling wires off. The engineers cranked up the emergency diesel and she handled the load fine. Gary Sheedy handled the electrical side of things disconnecting and reconnecting the shore power. "Boats" Haggart handled the lines on the fantail and Erik handled the fo'c'sle. It was a sunny day with a light breeze when the tugs showed up at 0830. Rob Goldman again donated the tug service and his time. Rob handled the BENJAMIN ELLIOT on the bow and

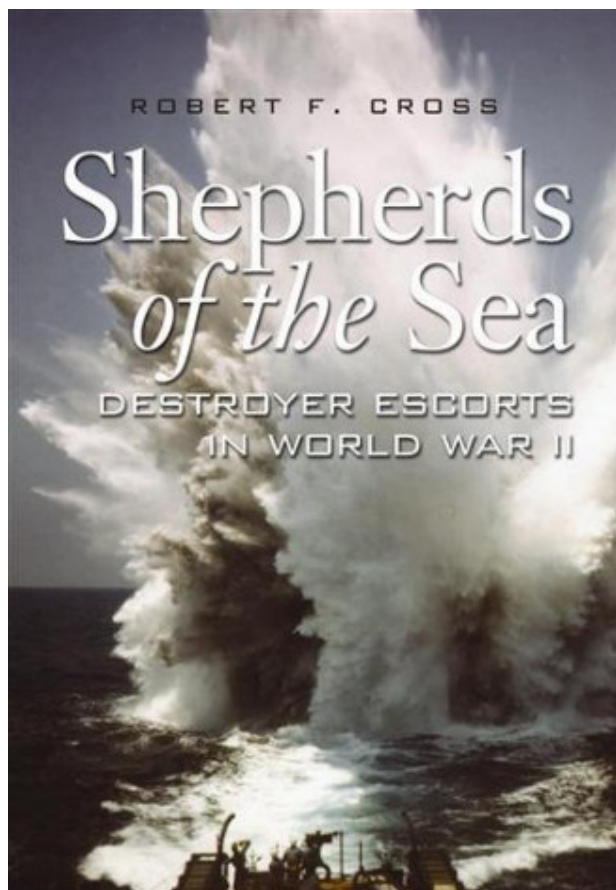


Coming home.

Dennis Wasiewski handled the MARGOT on the stern. Once again, Hudson River Pilots Association President Paul Capel donated his services. The trip across was uneventful as all trips should be. Paul guided us into a perfect gentle landing against the dolphins, with an almost perfect gangway line up. Bob Cross had the crane waiting for us with Butch at the controls. I think Butch really missed Doug's clear signaling, but we managed to get both gangways set without incident, the shore power, water and wires all hooked up by the end of the day. We spent the end of the month doing the hundred odd jobs it

takes to get the place ready to open to the public. Chaffing gear went back on, the accommodation ladder got rigged, the entire ship got a thorough cleaning from top to bottom, trash got dumped, gear got stowed, brass got polished and electronics got tested. We were ready for our planned April 3rd opening.

In preparation for our opening we also started to ramp up our promotional efforts. Heather held her first tour guide meeting and was present at the annual Boy Scout Pow Wow to present information about our youth group overnight camping program. Reservations and deposits are already coming in. We also had a presence at the Hannaford Kidz Expo on Saturday, March 2nd. **Katie Beltramo** and **Debra Ross** of Albany Kids Out and About (albany.kidsoutandabout.com) volunteered to distribute information for us. They reported that people were taking our brochures and were happy and excited to have a chance to win a family admission. They chatted us up as much as they could, and some people just took the brochures away with them, because with kids tugging on their arms and so much activity, it was easier for them to grab information and look at it later. So hopefully we'll get a great response once everyone's recovered. Katie related that the event is fun but also very over stimulating. We're looking forward to a great Season 16.



Now available online and in soft cover.

For those looking for some in-depth reading to complement the story that USS SLATER tells, Trustee Bob Cross's acclaimed *Shepherds of the Sea, Destroyer Escorts in World War II* has been reprinted in soft cover. The collection of the reflections of DE veterans is now available on a new e-Book edition available on Amazon for Kindle and Barnes & Noble for Nook. Both stores also stock the new soft cover edition as well, as does the Naval Institute Press. And, we still have a few autographed, out-of-print hard cover copies available in our Ship's Store. More information is available from Bob's website.

It all came together on Wednesday April 3rd -- opening day. We had a terrific first day as school was out and the weather was sunny. Despite the lingering chill, we had crowds moving through the ship all day. Our first visitor was Andrew Sober, a photographer and blogger for the Albany County Convention and Visitors Bureau. As **Alan Fox** took him through the ship, he took a series of photos that truly capture the fruit of our winter labors.

Enjoy them and see you next month.