

SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers
By Timothy C. Rizzuto, Executive Director

Destroyer Escort Historical Museum
USS Slater DE-766
PO Box 1926
Albany, NY 12201-1926

Phone (518) 431-1943, Fax 432-1123
Vol. 17 No. 3, March 2014

Normally, we would have the ship all cleaned up and would have opened to the public last Wednesday, but this is not going to be a normal season. I swore I wasn't going to write this edition of SIGNALS until I was actually in the shipyard. It's Saturday afternoon, April 5th. **I'm sitting here in the ship's office.** The gangways have been lifted, the wire cables taken off, and I believe we're ready to get underway. We're scheduled to depart at 0600 tomorrow morning. What was going to be a quiet departure kind of turned into a media event. It seems someone over at the Times Union actually reads SLATER SIGNALS and put a reporter on the story about our shipyard overhaul being held up by the ice. I can't believe that professional journalists would actually read my tripe, but strange things happen. Anyway, that resulted in a front page photo and story in our local paper, which was picked up by Associated Press, USA Today and several local papers. Between that and our Facebook posts, all of a sudden our quiet journey to the shipyard became big news. We were inundated with calls about our departure time, and our planned quiet departure to the shipyard was history.



It is now evening, Monday April 7th. My last night's sleep was the night of the 4th. My plans to make this SIGNALS a travel log of our voyage down river fell apart due to the lack of electrical power for the desktop. I guess I could have used a pencil. But, to put the end of the story at the beginning, we are now safely moored starboard side to at the shipyard, expecting to go into the At this point it would be relevant to talk about the recent Times Union "Capital Region Gives" Contest. Thanks to several of you who wrote letters on our behalf, USS SLATER became a finalist in the Arts and Culture category of this contest that rates the popularity of local not-for-profits. In the final round we were pitted against the food pantry, an animal shelter, an actors guild, a medical research group, and a homeless shelter. I went into it thinking we didn't have a chance, but would give it our best shot.

We posted it on our Facebook page and sent it out to our 3,000 online members. Over the five days of the contest, we posted a variety of current and historic pictures exhorting our supporters to vote for and share their love of SLATER. An incredible 80,000 total votes were cast, compared to much fewer last year. USS SLATER ran neck-and-neck with the Food Pantry for the Capital District throughout the contest finally garnering 30,325 votes and winning the contest by a mere 29 votes. The announcement of the \$10,000 prize will be April 10th, a date that should find our SLATER on the blocks in the shipyard. There was a certain amount of survivors guilt in winning over so many other worthy causes, and in our victory announcement we urged our supporters to consider a donation to the organization they would have supported if USS SLATER were not in the contest.

Tuesday morning. It kind of went like this. I spent my last days in the office writing up fundraising letters based on the fact that we still don't have the anticipated \$1.2 million needed to cover the costs of the overhaul. A more forward-thinking extraverted executive director would have used the phone. I am not an extravert. I write letters. The whole plea is based on the fact that we will be making daily decisions on the drydock floor based on the amount of cash that has come into the hull fund and we need everyone's help to bring SLATER back in the best possible shaped. Then, when I realized that our departure had become a media event, I pinned a desperate pleading post to our Facebook page begging for cash, and changed the website homepage to reflect the same need. Then, I went to bed and imagined everything that could go wrong.



Cruising down the river on a beautiful day. Photo by Carolyn Odell Photography.

Gordon Lattey really came through with food for the trip. He donated enough food to feed 100 including military MREs, bottled water, snacks, and a box of Spam so we could “walk the walk.” I stayed on the ship the night of Saturday April 6th. All preparations were made. Doug Tanner even presented “Super Dave” Mardon with a box of “Depends” for the trip. The tugs were due at 0600 on the 7th, the 72nd anniversary of the Guadalcanal invasion for those history nerds. Of which we are included. A lot of people wanted to make the trip, but the riding crew was limited to eight volunteers, engineers Mike Dingmon and Gary Lubrano, electricians Barry Witte and Gary Sheedy, boatswain Bill Haggart, and deck seamen Paul Guarnieri, Thomas Scian, and Dave Mardon. There were several volunteers I deeply regretted leaving behind. Erik Collin and I went along for the ride.

There was a lot of discussion about electrical power. I was concerned about running the emergency diesel generator because of the fire hazard. We decided to keep it as a backup should we have to drop an anchor, or do emergency pumping. We picked up a gas powered 6,000 watt generator loaned from Hal Hatfield to keep some lighting forward and the refrigerator running. We started, warmed up and saved the emergency generator for emergencies. The NYS Marine Highway tugs MARGOT and BENJAMIN ELLIOT didn’t show up until about 0730 as the MARGOT had made the trip all the way up from NYC for the job.

Rob Goldman was on the scene to help make the tugs up. The MARGOT made up to the starboard quarter and the ELLIOT to the starboard bow. Wires were cast loose and lines singled. The most hairy part of the job from my perspective is always hauling the gangway ashore. Here, Doug Tanner saved us again, as he has done so many times in the past, by reminding me that I forgot to pull the handrail stanchions and the gangway wouldn’t slide with them attached.



We removed the stanchions, and **Bill Wetterau** used his truck to haul the gangway ashore. From the flying bridge, Hudson River pilot **Paul Capel** orchestrated a perfect 180 degree to the south. The BENJAMIN ELLIOT moved to the port quarter and we were on our way.

You couldn't have picked a more perfect day. Sunny, calm and about 40 degrees the whole way down. The crew was organized into two-hour sounding and security watches for the whole trip and no issues came up. All along the way people waved at us from shore. The most heartening moment was the Poughkeepsie walkway bridge, crowded with well-wishers and where Russ Padden was flying a 48-star flag. Our Facebook page went crazy and we thank all the people who posted so many extraordinary photographs of SLATER underway, albeit by tugs. Apparently, we disappeared off the Maritime Vessel tracking site for about two hours which created a buzz of concern on our Facebook page. But you can't appreciate the beauty of the Hudson until you see it from this perspective. We ran into an old friend in the form of Tim Ivory, the engineer of the MARGOT. Tim knew us from his time helping the fireboat JOHN J HARVEY, which recently had completed an overhaul at our shipyard. An extremely knowledgeable diesel engineer Tim Ivory shared willingly his experiences.

When darkness fell we were off West Point and it's a shame that it was dark by the time we traveled through the most populated areas. So many people wanted to see us. There was a lot of discussion as it got colder about how glad we all were that we didn't do this in February. I considered the wisest move I'd made that weekend was going back into my closet and putting on my long johns. I went to the flying bridge and allowed myself the privilege of sitting in the starboard captain's chair for about thirty minutes and watched the approach to the Tappan Zee Bridge realizing what a unique historical perspective I had from that vantage point.



I finally got too cold and decided to try to get some sleep but couldn't. I saw the undersides of the Bear Mountain Bridge, Tappan Zee Bridge, and George Washington Bridge lying in a bunk looking out a porthole. Finally at about 0100 I heard the tug captain say over my radio, "We're approaching the Battery. Warn those ferries to stay clear of us and keep their wakes down." I thought, we're almost there. I got up and dressed and went on deck. I forgot how big New York Harbor is at eight knots. I got up and roamed the decks, cold, but awed by the lights of Manhattan, Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty at night.



Erik and Paul sightseeing on the fo'c'sle at dusk.

I woke the crew up at about 0330. The tugs approached the shipyard off the north shore of Staten Island and turned the ship around to be starboard side to. The amount of tug, barge and ship traffic in the Arthur Kill at 0400 was incredible. We made up to the pier with no difficulty, bid the tugs bon voyage and they sailed away. It was obvious that they had instructed us to dock right next to drydock number 6, so they could just slip is in stern first. .

With the exception of the watch, we all got a couple hours sleep. The yard comes to life at 0730, so we were up with them asking questions like, “Where’s the shore head and the dumpster?” “Can we get an electrical hookup?” “When to we go into the drydock?” And, “Why isn’t my internet working?” Faced with the question of whether I should go introduce myself or let them find me, I chose the former and five of us went over to the administrative office.



Finally moved into the drydock - though it's not dry yet.

We had an early morning meeting with estimator Joe Eckhardt, who just lost his wife Gloria suddenly to an unexpected aneurysm a few weeks ago. Joe is a real trooper who has done a great deal to allay our fears about the upcoming process. He answered all our questions thereafter, workers seemed to pour on the ship. The paint crew came aboard and began covering sensitive equipment such as the roller loaders, K guns and depth charge racks. The tank cleaning crew came aboard to scope out their work. If you recall, we had planned to do the tank cleaning in Albany, but as our shore water was frozen until April 5th that was a non-starter. And the electricians came in and hooked us up to 480 volts so we had full use of our equipment for the first time since we left Albany.

Board President Tony Esposito rented a van and made the run to Staten Island to pick up the volunteers who couldn't stay the week. I can say I've never seen a group of people who seemed so happy to get off a ship. You'd think they had been at sea six months. "Boats" Haggart, Gary Sheedy, Super Dave Mardon and I remained aboard as well as "My Friend" Ed Zajkowski. Conditions were primitive the first night in the yard. No running water and a shore head 200 yards away. When I was a child I shared a room with my grandfather and one of my responsibilities was to empty his chamber pot in the morning. I doubt many of you are wondering why this is relevant and our younger readers are wondering what a chamber pot is. However, under these circumstances, with a crew whose average age was 75, "chamber pots" in various forms came back into fashion. And I, as the youngest at age 62 and the only paid crew member aboard was voted the best person to take care of the chamber pots, a task that I, as "Captain" respectfully declined.



A day has slipped by since my last effort and now it's 2030 on Tuesday

April 8th. We're already into April and since this is the March edition, I'm overstepping my bounds here, but I don't think I can leave the readership hanging on the edge of the drydocking with the traditional "See you next month." The yard workers arrived at 0800 and began making measurements alongside the ship with a long tape measure. There was continued concern about the sonar dome, but it was decided that the blocking was sufficiently spaced to protect the dome. The morning was misty and flat calm.

At about 1000 lines were passed from the stern of SLATER to winches on the drydock. With the assistance of the yard tug L. W. Caddell, USS SLATER began to move into drydock number six. The whole process took about two hours and when the dock was pumped out SLATER sat perfectly on the blocks. There was plenty of space for the sonar dome because each layer of involvement from the yard office to the guy placing the blocks added an additional safety factor. All the time this was taking place, I was cut off from the world as my internet connection wasn't working. After lunch the work began. The tank cleaning and paint crews came aboard and under the ship another crew began pressure washing the hull. It was amazing how the wind blew up just after we were on the blocks, and kicked up all afternoon howling through the dock walls. Someone is looking out for us.

I may have mentioned in the past that one of the driving forces in my psyche is self-doubt, and I'm constantly asking myself if I am doing the right thing. In this case, "Is this million dollar expenditure really necessary?" That question was answered at about three in the afternoon of the first day on the blocks. In the process of doing the low pressure wash, the workers blew two holes in the hull along weld seams below the waterline. My first thought was "This is going to be expensive." My second thought, "I'm glad we found this here and not in the middle of winter in Albany." This drydock needed to happen now. We caught it just in time. Lord knows what we'll find after sandblasting. And that is why we need you. If there was ever a time to donate to this project it is now. Over the next nine weeks, decisions will be made daily based on the amount of cash we have in the Hull Fund.

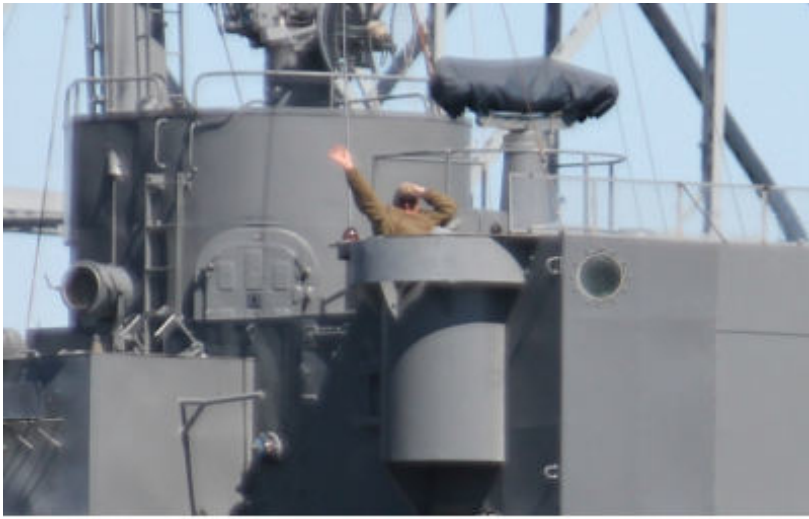




Now you know how big the screws are! Photo by William Van Dorp

So, in case you are new to following us on Signals, here's some information to get you caught up. Drydocking is the periodic maintenance necessary to maintain the part of the USS SLATER's hull that is under water. We are being proactive. Many other ship organizations have found themselves in dire situations by not dealing with maintenance issues in a timely manner. It's been over 20 years since the ship has been in drydock, so this project is due. The last drydock maintenance was done in Greece in 1993. This project is funded by private individuals and foundations. No government funding is being used for this project. In fact, the Museum receives no regular Federal, State, or local government funding. The government money that the Museum has received in the past has been through competitive grant awards for special projects. USS SLATER is owned, maintained, and operated by the Destroyer Escort Historical Museum, a non-profit, charitable organization. USS SLATER is a National Historic Landmark but, like many Landmarks, is not funded by the Federal government. The budget for this project is \$1.2 million. To date, the Museum has raised just over \$1 million specifically for this project. We are still hoping to receive additional foundation funds and individual donations to reach our goal so that we will be able to accomplish everything on our "wish list." Now that the ship is in Staten Island we expect the entire project to take approximately 9 weeks, round trip. The countdown has begun. We are hoping to be open to the public in Albany by Memorial Day.

The hull will be cleaned. A reinforcing band of steel will be welded around the ship at the waterline. The entire hull will be primed and painted. Donations to the Museum are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. Donations may be mailed to DEHM, PO Box 1926, Albany, NY 12201. Visit the website at www.ussslater.org and click on participate to make donations online. USS SLATER has been a part of the Capital Region since 1997.



Super Dave spent most of his time in the captain's chair on the flying bridge.

Erik Collin will be coordinating the volunteer effort from Albany. I have to emphasize that conditions are tough; the shore head is down a 30' pipe scaffold, 25' ladder, out of the drydock, across the gangway and a 200 yard walk. This is only for those in good physical condition. We will support the yard with whatever they need, and our primary task is repainting the empty storerooms and magazines before we get back to Albany and fill them up again. There is no general visitation permitted at the yard. Please do not contact the shipyard asking to visit the ship.

Memorial Day will give us time to reflect on some of the great members and volunteers we have lost recently. In addition to losing our founding Chairman Sam Saylor last month we just lost USS SLATER's wartime Executive Officer **Harold Poulsen** who went on to command USS FESSENDEN. And, we lost longtime volunteer and historian of the USS DAY **Jim Larner**. Jim and his daughter **Robin Larner** were regulars at the SLATER with the HUSE Crew work weeks. Because Jim, along with Robin, have become closely associated with the HUSE Crew as well as having given their time and energy to the SLATER we wanted to recognize Jim in Signals.



New York Harbor. Photo by Thomas Scian.

Tonight I went over to the office and called my wife. I had wanted to try out this new found technology called "Skype" with her, but I'd left my glasses on the ship and couldn't see to log in. On the way back to the ship's office I took the steep ladder up to the drydock wall and looked over the ship. Then I climbed back down to the drydock floor and walked around under SLATER looking over her hull in the twilight quiet. Water dripped from the sonar dome. I got a little teary-eyed thinking about all the people who donated to make this happen and all the people who didn't live to see it happen, foremost among them **Sam Saylor**. I remember what they had told **Marty Davis** back in 1993 when he proposed bringing SLATER back from Greece, that this project didn't have a snowball's chance in hell of succeeding. And, I thought about all the people cheering us on the Poughkeepsie Bridge last Sunday. I don't know how we've come this far, but we have. And we owe it all to you.

See you next month, from Staten Island in Drydock Number Six.