

# 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. 4, April 2014



High and dry at Caddell's ship yard in Staten Island.



View from the wing wall.

**It's Tuesday night aboard USS SLATER at the shipyard in Staten Island. 2100.** Everyone is asleep but me. The ship seems unusually quiet after the bedlam of the day's activity. By now everyone reading this should have received my latest and hopefully last solicitation for hull fund donations. Nothing is truer than the statement that on a daily basis, critical decisions are made based on the available funding. The way it goes is, prior to the overhaul, you tell the yard what you want done and they give you a fixed price based on your list. Then when you get there, the surprises begin; problems you hadn't anticipated, things you forgot, and things that you realize will never get done in Albany. When Rosehn tells me that another big donation came in, I go straight to the yard and say, "You know that add-on job we were talking about? Do it."

**There is only one word that can describe this experience at this point. Gritty.** With four blasting nozzles going full-bore seven hours a day, despite our best efforts to keep everything buttoned up, there is a fine dust coating on every horizontal surface. The yard set me up with an office about 500 yards from the ship, right near the gate to the east yard. The office has Internet, the ship didn't. From the office it's about a 400-yard walk to the drydock gangway, across the gangway to a vertical ladder. If the tide is high you step right on to Drydock Number 6.

If the tide is low you climb down the ladder, take a few more steps down and you're on the drydock floor. You hang a right along the back end of the drydock, right again to go past the rudders and screws, and climb a scaffold stairway up 26 feet to the maindeck, just forward of the starboard "K" guns. I've made the climb more times than I can count, and will make it many more.



Kevin checking the hull.



Tony the chemist.

“Just in time” would be a good way to describe this drydocking. When we last left you, our loyal readers, we were safely on the blocks and the 4,000 psi pressure wash had punched three holes in the hull. Things weren't looking good for old SLATER. The following day, in conference with estimator **Joe Eckhardt** and our surveyor **Rick Meyerrose**, my original spec for an SPCC commercial blast went out the window. They both agreed that a “very light” sweep blast was in order or we wouldn't have any hull left. A brush blast as they called it. The blasters went to work on the hull below the waterline. They have discovered about ten small holes that will have to be repaired, but after blasting everyone agrees that the hull is in better shape than first thought. However, the blank caps on the sea chests must be carefully examined. At the very least they need to be cap welded, but most will need to be replaced. These are all unforeseen cost add-ons. Both Joe and Rick and everyone else who have looked at SLATER have agreed that for service as a dockside attraction in fresh water, cropping and renewing is an expensive waste of money and that doublers will ensure the well being of SLATER well into the future

**While the blasting began, the tank cleaning crew began to clean and gas free all our fuel oil tanks.** We had originally planned to clean these tanks in Albany, but Mother Nature intervened and froze our fresh water line. So, the work fell back on the shipyard. This work normally would have been done pier side with a short run from the ship to the vacuum truck on shore however, now that we are in drydock, the hose runs are much longer and the process goes more slowly. The forward tanks were cleaned in two days without difficulty.

**The tank cleaning crew started on the aft tanks under C-201L when they decided that they needed to shift to the engine rooms because one of the holes they blew in the washdown was the day tank under the forward ship's service generator.** That's when the cost began to escalate. When we got the yard estimate for tank cleaning we didn't figure in the four main engine sumps and the two generator day tanks. All of these are skin tanks, and to avoid the possibility of punching a hole into them and dropping any oil, they had to be cleaned. Since lube oil is much heavier than diesel fuel, the lube oil tanks are harder to clean. Thus three weeks into it, the crew is now almost done in B-3, and will return to the aft diesel tanks shortly. Then it's the voids back aft under the magazines and the steering engine room. But, the addition of the six engine sumps was a time-consuming, and thus expensive, add-on. The work they are doing cleaning the aft voids goes way beyond my expectations.



**I have to express the deepest admiration for the tank cleaning crew.** And, I've learned that you do not want to be the smallest man in the crew. When you've seen a man crawl into a 24" manhole and then hear the sound of the scraper cleaning the inside of the tank, and see the buckets of black oily muck that come out, you have to ask "Where do we find such men to do this work day after day?" The same goes for Tony Mathews, our marine chemist, who entered each tank and void to certify it safe for hot work.

**The sandblasting of the hull and freeboard is well underway.** One more day and the hull will be finished. The yard crew is hanging angle iron supports in a line just below the waterline so they can snap a straight line for the ice band doublers. The steel has started to arrive and the first plates are being installed. The first load of paint appeared on the dock by the gangway and the hull is being primed the same day it is blasted, to prevent new rust from rain. I really wasn't prepared for the mess that sandblasting makes inside the ship, despite our best effort to seal up the doors and ventilators. I spent the first week throwing sheets over furniture, tightening porthole dogs and taping up around doors.



Now that the hull number is gone she really is every DE to every DE Sailor.

**Dirt is everywhere.** Take a couple barefoot steps down any passageway and your feet are black. Barry Witte warned me but I didn't get it. I should have sensed something a few weeks ago before the move when Jerry Jones began wrapping all his precious radios in plastic. He'd been through a yard overhaul. I never have. It's a painful process. For our part, we have kept four volunteers aboard every week.

Our goal was to do a cosmetic cleaning and repainting of all the storerooms and magazines that were now empty of junk due to the requirement that the interior of the ship be available for fire watch. The first week Gary Sheedy and Ed Zajkowski stayed aboard and started work. The second week it was Guy Huse, Ron Prest, Gary and Ed again. The third week it was Ed, Gary Dieckman and Wayne White. The fourth week Gary left but George Amandola and Bill Wetterau joined the crew with Ed and Wayne.



Week four crew.

They've been prepping and painting the storerooms forward before we fill them back up again with all our "junk." **Eddie Z made a significant discovery.** One of the design characteristics of WWII DEs is that the bilges in the aft magazines are decked over and the false deck is welded in place. There is no way to maintain the bilge below. Our guys started cutting into it, and the condition of the bilge below was a disaster. A couple frames were rotted right out. We knew we had to address this in the yard, because it would be most unfortunate to put an air chisel through the bottom back in Albany. So we instructed the yard to cut away the false decking, clean and preserve the bilge, and install a removable lightweight fiberglass decking. Another expensive add-on. That project is well underway.



**Burning off old blanks.**



**Finishing the 40mm cage.**

**Thus, we have an add-on list of things that must be done in the shipyard that looks like this:**

Repair hull as needed, grind out and re-weld 25 sea chests. Replace blanks as necessary. Clean up and re-pack outside stern tube shafts. Install valves on shaft alley packing glands. Weld on draft marks over doubler, open one sea chest for the aft ship's service generator and place steaming out connection. Repair scuppers as needed, cut out the false decking in aft-most magazines and clean and preserve 10 voids under aft magazines. When the new valves were fitted on the shaft glands, we a hose to a large shop vac and blew air through each shaft tunnel for several hooked up days to try and dry them out, and thus stabilize them without pulling the shafts.

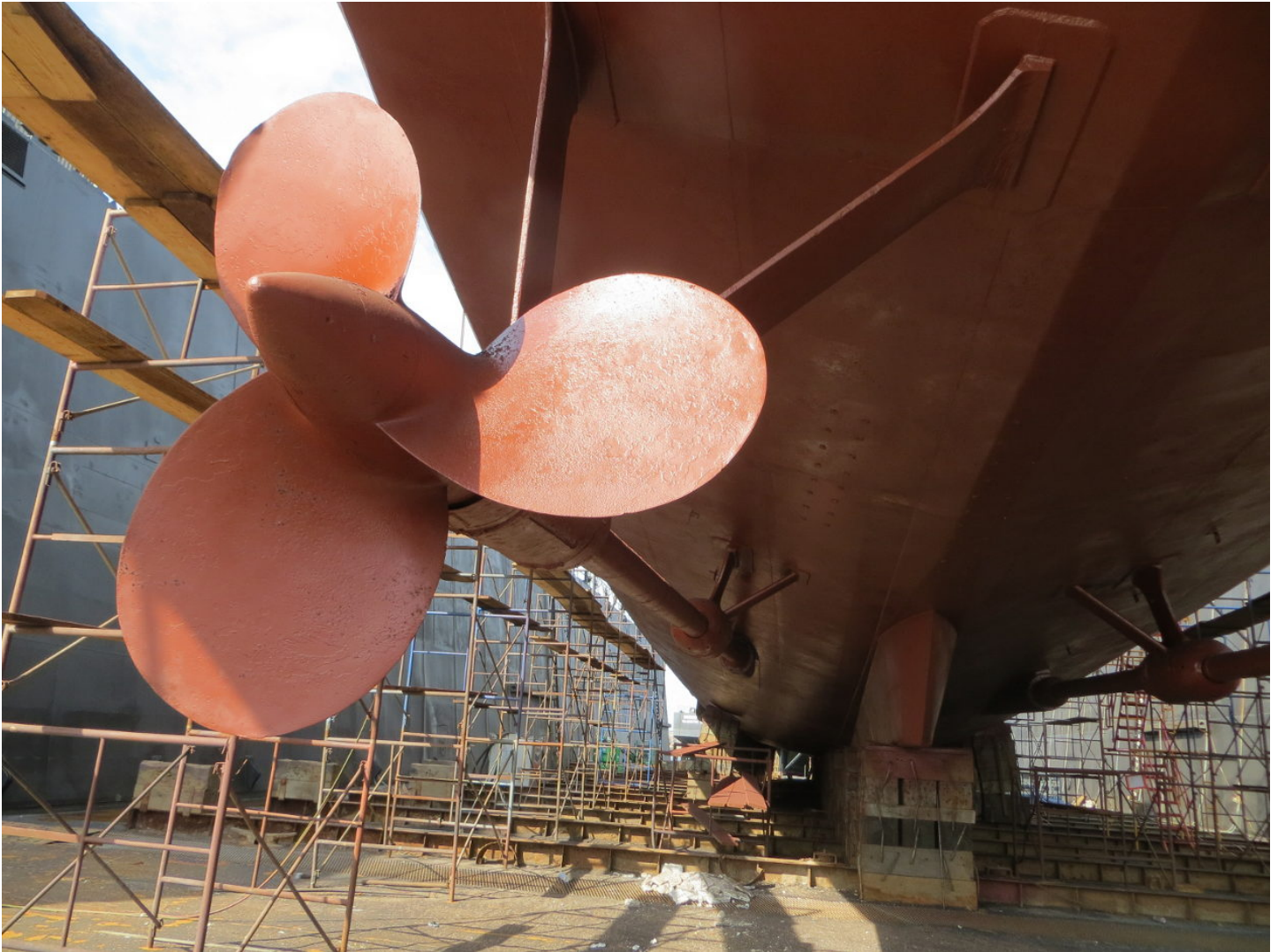
There are several more items that are more convenient to do in shipyard. Included are to scarf off accommodation ladder supports, open up a port for pumping forward, open up port for sand blast cabinet exhaust, finish welding on port 40mm shell cage, since it's right by our gangway, install missing section of mast ladder, grit blast waterways and snaking tie down bar, grease the shrouds, spot blast main deck aft, move the practice loading machine to original position, repair some rot in stack cap, repair the wasted steel under the searchlight platforms, fabricate gaff on stack for the battle ensign, and repair the dent in the port bulwark, including removal of the Greek davit pedestals. There are also three water tight doors that need replacing but it looks like the final tally will be \$1.5 million, so we'll be dipping into the endowment.



**Formal dining in the Ward Room.**

It's kind of crazy here. There are times when it seems everyone wants me at once, and then it all settles down and I'm not sure what to do with myself.

The yard has been great to work with and the people most accommodating and friendly. Our on-site supervisor Hector's answer to almost everything is "No problem." Marine surveyor Rick Meyerrose, who did the initial survey of the SLATER to tow her to Albany in 1997, makes it a point to stop by whenever he is nearby doing another survey, to offer his guidance and set up the hull gauging. We need to know how much metal is left in those pits. And special mention to "my old friend" Ed Zajkowski who has taken on the duties of chief commissary steward, ship's cook and even did my laundry for me. Ed and his blueprints have signed on for the duration. He calls it, "My last big adventure." We both keep reminding each other that this isn't a weekend sprint. This one is a marathon.



**Vice President of Engineering and Chief Estimator Joe Eckhardt deserves special mention for his patience in dealing with us and our 0600 drop-in meetings as our primary administrative contact.** Each day I try to get an estimate of how much we have spent. I first dealt with Joe when he was working for GMD at the old Brooklyn Navy Yard back in 2000. I sent RFPs to all the regional shipyards because I thought the big grant was just around the corner. Joe was the only one who responded to my initial RFP. Little did I know that fourteen years later I would be doing the project with private money that we raised ourselves.

**Joe is an Army vet who did occupation duty in Korea.** In 1960 he was returning home aboard the troopship GENERAL WILLIAM MITCHELL AP-114. As the MITCHELL headed into the channel, she put her bow into the passenger liner SUSQUEHANNA. The MITCHELL was drydocked for repairs and a new bow in Yokosuka, and Joe was held in limbo watching the repairs.

**As the new bow was fabricated and set into position, Joe decided that this shipyard stuff was pretty interesting.** Upon his return to the States he got a job at the Bethlehem Steel shipyard in Hoboken and worked his way up becoming a member of the Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers (SNAME). His experience and advice has been a great asset to us during this overhaul, as has been the support of our Marine Surveyor on the project, Rick Meyerrose. Rick went over the hull inch by inch with audio gauger Kevin Desousa of ABC Testing. They pinpointed all the thin spots and Rick is writing up a report detailing the recommended repairs. In essence, the hull is in much better shape than we thought after we blew those three holes through with the initial pressure wash. Rick identified 15 areas of thin plating for deteriorated welds that need to be



**Ed Z. and Hector Sosa.**



**"You don't want to be the smallest guy in the tank" cleaning crew.**

As for the yard crew, they couldn't be more helpful. Anyone who has a problem with Latin immigration needs to spend a month at this shipyard. English is a second language here, but the phrase I hear most often is "No problem." I'm seeing the American dream the way it was meant to be. Immigrants come here, work hard doing the dirty jobs, stay loyal to the company, work their way up, and put their kids through college so their children will have a better life. I haven't figured out who has the toughest job here. The tank cleaning crew certainly has it tough, especially Herman Padillia, who is the smallest guy in the crew and has to get in the worst places. The job they are doing cleaning out tanks and voids goes way beyond my expectations. The burners and welders are up high in the stack or down in smoke-filled bilges cutting out wasted metal. And, the guys on those sandblast nozzles spend hours at a time on a man-lift blasting away. It's hard work for everyone involved. Whether they work for the yard or the subcontractor they have my utmost respect. The crew leaders on the job, **Hector Sosa** and **Matt Kelly** have been a pleasure to deal with.

**Meanwhile, all has not stopped in Albany.** **Doug Tanner** and his shipfitters are making repairs to the gangways and the crew is making repairs to the shoreside structure, aka trailer. A lot of carpentry skills not normally needed aboard SLATER. On April 7th **BJ Costello** and **Heather Maron** gave a presentation to the men's group at the Terrace at Beverwyck in Slingerlands. They were warmly welcomed by **Paul Woods**, who not only coordinated the talk but, more importantly, had facilitated our provisional charter in the early days of the Museum. .



**Heather has been enjoying the opportunities to schedule these presentations, which often bring the ship to audiences that might not otherwise know about it or be able to visit. She is also taking advantage of the ship's absence to complete much needed organizational projects related to our archival material and collections**



**BJ Costello and Rosehn were delighted to visit the Albany Times Union headquarters to accept the “Capital Region Gives” prizes. TU Publisher George Hearst and Community Relations Coordinator Charmaine Ushkow presented the \$5,000 check. In addition, the Museum received credit for \$5000 worth of advertising in Times Union publications. Thanks to everyone who voted for SLATER in the contest! Heather, Rosehn, Erik, and BJ Costello were proudly in attendance at the 2014 Albany County Executive's Volunteer Awards; a big congratulations to our Richard "Dick" Walker, who was honored as an award recipient!**



**BJ, Albany County Executive Dan McCoy, Berne Town Supervisor Kevin Crosier, and Albany County Sheriff Craig Apples surround volunteer Dick Walker.**

**Thankfully, BJ took my place in introducing Dick, outlining the invaluable contributions he has made to the ship. Heather, Rosehn, and Erik went out of their way to attend the ceremony as well, to show their appreciation for someone who is always looking for ways to help. To illustrate how much he does for us, we had a hard time finding a picture of him to provide to the ceremony coordinators, because he is always on the go working**

**Our “Drydock Crew” t-shirt fundraiser on Bonfire Funds ended April 28th.** Over \$2000 was raised for the Hull Fund. We really appreciate everyone who participated and we hope to see some of you wearing your new attire when you visit SLATER.

**On May 1 we celebrate 70 years since USS SLATER was commissioned.** The anniversary will go uncelebrated as we are in a drydock far from home. But, that’s where we’re at four weeks into the overhaul. We believe we couldn’t give her a better birthday gift than this. I still can’t believe that over four years we raised a million dollars and managed to pull this project off. It’s an incredible accomplishment and a tribute to all you members. But, we still need your support to keep from dipping into the endowment. If it stays on track we have six weeks to go. In addition to my other activities, I try to post daily updates to Facebook, but Internet access here is sometimes sketchy so don’t worry if you don’t get an update. We’re still here. Thank you all for getting us this far. Let’s make this the most productive overhaul possible. We’ll do everything we can to make sure your donations are well spent.

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

