



# SLATER SIGNALS

The Newsletter of the USS SLATER's Volunteers  
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**The start of the New Year.** Hunkered down in Rensselaer. Hasn't been a bad winter so far. I made that observation last year around this time and we really got clobbered. But the river hasn't frozen yet. Very few nights in the teens. It's been good working weather.

**The big news was a recent trip to the James River Reserve Fleet.** Chris Nardi from the Battleship Massachusetts called me and said that the scrapper who had bid on the troop transport GENERAL NELSON M WALKER had defaulted on the pickup, and the ship was once again available for scrapping. She is one of the few vessels in the reserve fleet that still has the old style bunks and mattresses aboard. Chris made the following offer: If I wanted to send down three guys with his crew and split the cost of the rental truck, he'd make sure all the gear we collected got off-loaded from the ship. He'd deliver it to Albany to boot. It sounded like a good deal, so good, in fact, that I decided to go myself. I grabbed the first four people I ran into and asked if they wanted to go. **Dick Smith** was the first choice, because I always need brownie points with our teamster shop steward. He declined. He was afraid that if it snowed, whose driveways he plows. **Larry Williams** was next because he's been there before and he has a really nice brand new van. Larry agreed to take his brand new van if we split the driving.

**Chris Fedden** was next because he's been down there before, and he's big. He agreed too. I had my three-man crew. That was on Monday Wednesday the 2<sup>nd</sup> and we planned to leave on Sunday the 6<sup>th</sup>.

**That Thursday, I was in the CPO mess working out the 2002 budget with treasurer Roy Gunther.** I got a call down there that Larry Williams was on the phone. He was down sick and couldn't go. No driver. Time to finish the budget and regroup. The person most irritated of about not being invited was BM2 **Beth Spain**. She really had the urge to do something macho. I asked her if she would consider taking her van. She said her husband **Mark** would never consider letting her drive his van so far without him. But if we asked him to go, he might agree to drive. She asked. Mark agreed. Mom said she'd watch the kids. **Thus began Beth and Mark's romantic Virginia getaway together.**

**The romantic getaway actually began when we met on the Snow Dock Sunday morning at 0730.** It was the perfect setting for a hectic married couple to get a little quality time alone together. The only problem was the presence of Chris and me in the back seat. **Mark got in the drivers seat and said, "Next stop, Virginia."** He just about meant it. In just nine hours, one bathroom stop (which I think he timed) and a drive-through lunch, we were there. We got some rain south of DC, but it was a pleasant trip. Just a tip: when you ride with **Mark Spain**, be sure to bring a coffee can.

**Chris Nardi, Rich Angelini and Rich's dad, Mike, got in around eleven.** We hooked up, and at zero dark thirty the next morning we were passing through the checkpoint at Ft. Eustis. Chris breezed right through security. But, he must



Back in Rensselaer

he'd let down all the widows

have said the guys behind looked suspicious, because they pulled us over and inspected the vehicle. The M-boat took our tools and us out to the fleet and by 0800 we were climbing the gangway to the ships in row seven. WALKER was the forth ship in the row, so it was a hike with the tools and lunches. The ship was in nice shape and, best of all, she still had power. The plan was for the crane to lift all our material off the fantail on Friday, so everything had to be staged back there. Our escort took us to one of the after berthing spaces on the second deck where all the bunks had already been disassembled. It was a short hop up the ladder to the companionway and out to the fantail. By noon we had 46 bunks and 60 mattresses, and 80 bunk chains on the fantail, tied up, taped up and ready to go. The only setback was the fact that it was drizzling, and when I unrolled my big black plastic tarp to cover the mattresses, and it turned out to be, not a tarp, but a roll of trash bags. We had to scramble around the nest looking for old canvas.

**Lunch for our lucky couple was an elegant affair consisting of bologna sandwiches served on the bitts on the WALKER'S fantail.**

The primary mission accomplished, we spent the rest of the day checking out the lower holds and seeking targets of opportunity. The next day Beth and Mark enjoyed more delightful time together removing compartment fans from the WALKER. Chris and I went over to the repair ship, VULCAN, next door and began removing diffusers and inspection covers for the SLATER'S ventilation system. We stopped work at 1300 and packed up everything on the fantail. Our final box score was 46 Bunk Frames and canvases, 60 Mattresses, 85 fart sacks, 80 Bunk Chains, 8 office chairs, 13 Vent Diffuser Covers, 8 Vent Inspection covers, 5 Glass Light Globes, 1 DRT Bug, 4 Fans, 1 Battle Lantern, 8 Lampshades, 1 Rolling Pin, 1 Radio desk Lamp, 25 Life Jackets, 2 Dust Pans, 2 Anchor Balls, 1 Line Gun Reminder, 50 Whistles, 20 Bunk Straps, and 1 Weighted Bag for the radio guys in case we're about to be captured and we have to throw our confidential pubs overboard.



**Beth & Mark Spain on their romantic get-away**



**The crew in the Aft Berthing compartment following the James River Trip offload.**

**We left our pile of treasures for the MASSACHUSETTS guys to offload and by 1600 we were on the road again.** The trip north was fine. We were home by one a.m. When we hit Albany we found out what we missed. In our two-day absence, Albany had been smacked with the deepest single day snowfall in, like 200 years, the beginning of recorded time, or something like that. **Beth and Mark** dropped me off at home so they could enjoy the ride home alone. I took **Chris** to the Snow Dock (which was living up to its name) where we dug out his van. I believe we were all back home in bed by 0230 Wednesday morning. Beth says she can't wait to go back. So far we haven't heard from husband Mark on the subject.

**Chris Nardi and the Angelinis' departed James River on Friday.** They filled a 24-foot-long Hertz truck and arrived in Albany at 1830 Saturday. We had a good crew on hand to greet them and off-load the truck. Everything was set down into the aft

crew compartment. We treated the gang to pizza and a tour of the ship. We showed them a lot of parts we'll never use, and that they might have use for. They were soon on their way, and we were all secure by 2030. **Chris Fedden stripped all the bedding to take home to Trudy to launder.** He says when she gets through this pile, he may give her second-class laundryman. There is the question of whether or not we should unleash all the canvases from the frames to scrub the canvases and paint the frames. If we do that, they'll all have to be restrung before the bunks are hung. That may depend on **Bosun Mike's** disposition.



**Dennis Morrissey chipping paint on the Reefer Deck**



**Helping the Radio Guys. Moving the Motor Generator Set into the Radio Room.**

**Other work continues.** There is a possibility that there may be some movie filming done aboard ship in March. In anticipation of that possibility, we are concentrating our restoration effort forward, since that area will need to be finished by the end of February. Accordingly, **Ed Whitbeck, Dennis Morrissey and Rich Pavlovick** have been chipping down on the reefer deck. **Rafael Saurez and Erik Collin** have been chipping out the IC passageway and **Chris Fedden** has been working in the pilothouse. **Dick Smith** continues back aft outside the laundry. **Don and Jerry**, the radio guys, have a big project going. They're in the process of installing a big motor generator set for the transmitter in the radioroom. That should keep some poor ship fitter tied up for weeks. **Tom Moore** continues insulation work in C-203L. **Paul Czesak** is working on the supply office, which is destined to be our future library. **Roy and Dick and Maralyn Walker** keep trying to keep us all organized.



**Remember the old shipyard slogan, "If you want Kill time try Working it to Death."  
Tim Brenner working on the Watertight Door.**



**Mike Clark and Barry Witte overhauling the new Galley Breaker Panel.**

The weekday electricians, **Larry Williams, Bob Callendar and Ken Kaskoun** have completed the locker lights in the new display space, C-203L. The weekend electricians, **Gary Sheedy, Barry Witte and Mike Clark** are working on the new power panel for the galley. The engineers, including **Russ Ferrer, Gus Negus, Larry Lachance, and Chuck Longshore** have been working to get the 600-pound HP air compressor back together. Chuck brought his wife and three daughters aboard for a fun filled day of sorting signal flags. He is working on making new canvas covers for the flag bags. **Clark Farnsworth and Bob Lawrence** have been working on bunks in the aft crews quarters. The ship fitters, **Doug Tanner** and disciples **Tim Benner and Chuck Teal**, have been burning a lot of paint back in 202L installing the watertight door and patching holes in the deck. That door installation has dragged on forever. **The reason some of the routine work is taking so long is that the crew has their own priorities.**

The big project has been the fifty-caliber machine gun. Several years ago **Ray Windle** donated two replica fifties to the ship. These were originally propane operated to make a lot of noise. One had a broken barrel and the numerous smaller problems. **Erik Collin** got it in his head, that with a little help, he could get

one working. He made contact with Ray and then they contacted the company that built them. **Ray** agreed to fund the restoration of the guns, and so **Erik** purchased the parts to restore them. Then it was a small matter of repairing the aluminum replicas. The gun in the best condition was the one with the broken barrel. It was pinned back together. Doug agreed to weld it up and Erik assured him that the old pipe sleeve inserted in the barrel to hold it on would keep the barrel lined up while he tig welded it.

**The whole crew seemed to watch intently as Doug welded.** It took the better part of two Saturdays, but even Russ said Doug did a good job. All work stopped as they hooked up the oxygen, propane, and spark igniter to the gun. With the whole crew gathered amidships, they pulled the trigger. After much head scratching, discussion and examination of the possibilities, it was determined that the pipe sleeve holding the barrel to the receiver was, in fact, a piece of round stock, and that the barrel was plugged. Doug, normally one of the most civil members of the crew, taught everyone some new words that day. He even came up with a few expressions Bosun Mike doesn't know. Then, Doug cut his beautiful weld and started over.

**Since that Saturday, countless valuable man-hours have been devoted to this project.** It is at the point where it almost sounds like a machine gun. The crew continues diligently tweaking our first line of defense. Erik is already making plans to hijack the ship's labor force to restore the second gun. I mean, who wants to fix a watertight door gasket or run a needle gun when you can be working on a machine gun!

**We received a wonderful donation and a visit from the family of Jim Mansfield.** Jim was a WWII SLATER signalman who died a couple of years ago. When he left the ship he took a 48 star steaming ensign as a memento. His son **Steve** with brothers and grandsons brought us the flag for our SLATER collection. Steve told a wonderful story about his father. It seems Jim paid a visit to the INTREPID Sea Air space museum in the early nineties. He saw a rusty DE with Greek numbers that was the same class as his ship. Of course he was shocked to find out that it was his ship. We only wish he were alive today to see the progress that we have made.

**Erik Collin has given us another wonderful present.** In his effort to help convey to people the conditions that the old sailors served under, he and a friend developed a small website that contrasts conditions on the SLATER to the newest freshman dorm built on the campus at RPI in Troy. **We have firmed up the field day workweeks for 2002.** The Michigan Chapter of DESA will be aboard working aboard the week of April 28<sup>th</sup> to May 4<sup>th</sup>. The contact person is Ron Zarem at (989) 345-0237. Their spring field day fills up fast, but you can still contact Ron about reserving a spot with them in October. The following week the Northern Illinois Chapter will be aboard the week of May 4<sup>th</sup> through May 11<sup>th</sup>. They still have open slots. The contact person for that one is Bud Ried (and that's not a typo) at (847) 272-7938. They usually have some extra slots, so if you want to do some work on this old girl, give one of them a call.



**Top Priority for the Crew. Getting Ray Windle's dummy Machine Gun to fire.**



**Hoisting Jim Mansfield's Ensign**



**We received an absolutely unexpected and amazing award. The Albany County Convention and Visitors Bureau** honored us with a hospitality award as the Albany Attraction of the year. Those of you who know and work with me and are familiar with my miserable disposition realize how unexpected any hospitality award would be. Tourism? This

is the restoration business. Just keep those chippers going! It just goes to show how a highly motivated group of staff and volunteers can overcome the shortcomings of their Superintendent. Seriously, we are honored that **Michele Vennard** and our friends over at the Bureau would give us this kind of recognition after only four short years in the tourism business in Albany. We thank you all

**Financially, we ended the year a little down from 2001, despite increased promotion and advertising.** I'll leave it to you to try and figure out if it's because of the economic downturn, or the sentiments expressed in the preceding paragraph. Based on our preliminary reports, our total operating expenses for the year were \$300,168 Our operating income and contributions totaled \$192,066 down about \$7,000 from 2000. **The only area that showed an increase was the dog tag sales at Crossgates Mall, were Annette and Les Beauchaine made \$8,407.08 more this year than last year.** I'm starting to think maybe **Annette** should be next in line for my job. The operating deficit was offset by \$131,483 in grants, and money carried over from 2000. However, don't forget that this year our Endowment fund contributions were \$216,869. We also have three grant applications totaling about \$200,000. But no grant application can be counted on, as our grant application success rate is only about 25%. **A small contribution, not to be overlooked is the fact that in 2001 our volunteer man- (and woman) hours in the logbook totaled 23,525 hours.**

**Finally, SLATER lost another friend this month. Ralph Carpino died January 6<sup>th</sup>.** Those longtime SIGNALS readers remember **Ralph** as the longtime skipper of the tug FRANCES TURECAMO, moored here at the Port of Albany. Early on, Ralph came to our rescue a couple of times, for which we were always grateful. A former Navy Armed Guard Veteran Gunner's mate, and a master tug handler, Ralph was an institution on the River here in Albany. He will be missed by all who knew him.

