

USS Slater (DE-766)

by Tim Rizzuto

Only one destroyer escort afloat is left in this country, out of the 563 that were originally built to defeat the German U-boats in World War II. It only makes sense to do everything possible to ensure the long-term survival of such a rare artifact. Over the past ten years, the members of the Destroyer Escort Historical Museum have been doing just that, as a lasting memorial to the 150,000 sailors and marines who served on these heroic little ships. In that time, these individuals have put more than a million dollars of their own money and 200,000 volunteer hours into a ship that they have come to love. The destroyer's restoration work is done largely by a group of men and women—average age is seventy-five. With their labor, time, and money, they have taken a rusty hulk and transformed it into one of the premier historic naval ships in the country.

In the late 1980s, a movement began within the Destroyer Escort Sailors Association to secure a destroyer escort for posterity—before it was too late. By that time, the only available DEs were in Foreign Service. After several attempts, DESA found the ex-USS *Slater* DE 766, which was serving the Greek Navy as HNS AETOS F01. Following a year-long series of negotiations through the State Department, the Greek Navy agreed to donate the ship to DESA, and the veterans raised from their membership the \$290,000 needed to pay for the expense of bringing the ship to New York City. Initially, she was berthed as part of the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum from 1993 to 1997. When the Intrepid Museum's management decided to downsize, *Slater* had to find a new home. The City of Albany offered a safe haven, donated pier space, and an enthusiastic corps of volunteers and supporters.

From a visitor's viewpoint, USS *Slater's* cosmetic restoration is 100% complete, and the ship looks ready in all respects to get underway. Having accomplished this feat, the museum now is searching for funds to accomplish the one task the volunteers cannot accomplish on their own, shipyard dry-docking of ship. The Destroyer Escort Historical Museum is seeking twelve pledges of \$100,000 each from major sponsors as part of the effort to raise the \$1.2 million needed for the overhaul. The shipyard work on her hull is essential for her long-time survival. It will enable USS *Slater* to continue carrying out her primary mission as an educational platform, teaching our youth and visitors the lessons of the history, spirit, and technology of these vessels and the men and women who built and sailed them.

Slater's volunteers have brought the ship back to life and each day keep that mission alive. A near-disaster last January



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DESTROYER ESCORT HISTORICAL MUSEUM

USS Slater volunteers muster on moving day, when the ship moved back to Port Albany from her winter berth in Rensselaer, New York, on the other side of the Hudson River.

could not discourage our crew from their task. Fire broke out in a forward compartment when stray sparks from a welding project ignited a *fire-retardant* canvas that had been rigged to protect the adjoining area from dust and dirt. Thankfully, the damage was contained to that compartment and insurance covered most of the repair costs. The repairs have been completed and the undaunted crew of volunteers once again rose to the challenge of cleaning and preparing the ship in time for her annual spring opening day to the public in April.

Our educational programs include guided tours, youth group overnight camping, school outreach programs, and the development of books, and video presentations. An average of 15,000 visitors each year have visited and learned from this ship. The museum staff and volunteers eagerly anticipate many more in the years to come.

USS *Slater* measures 306 ft. long, 38 ft. beam, and 1,200 tons light displacement. Any party interested in helping to fund (or provide) the shipyard dry-dock work is urged to contact: Tim Rizzuto, Executive Director, Destroyer Escort Historical Museum, USS *Slater* (DE-766), 141 Broadway, Albany, NY 12202; Ph. 518 431-1943; e-mail: shipsde766@aol.com; web site: www.ussslater.org. ⚓

