PROGRESS REPORT  
JULY, 2023

Our objective following the findings in this year’s marine survey was to get The Sullivans to the closest available drydock facility for major repairs. Due to significant funding shortfalls, that goal will necessarily have to be pushed into next year.

Knowing this, we are now focusing on a winter survivability plan. The Sullivans hull is in an advanced state of deterioration, and we are determined to employ all available resources to improve her chances of getting through the winter and successfully completing a transit to drydock next year. In this issue, we’ll go into those details.

This issue of Saving Our Ships marks the one year anniversary of its introduction, and as we look back over previous issues, what a year it’s been!

There’s big news for the Little Rock and Croaker as well, and some exciting possibilities ahead. We may have fallen short on our timeline goals, but we haven’t slowed down in our aggressive efforts to maintain, repair and improve our ships.

PTF-17

Volunteers continue their progress in bringing the PTF-17 to the fullest possible level of restoration. The Buffalo Naval Park is also exploring accessibility solutions to allow the public to visit and experience the boat. We’re hoping she’ll be available at some level in the 2024 season – more on that on page 7.

LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING

The Buffalo Naval Park and specifically the Little Rock was happy to host a multi-agency law-enforcement training event. Federal and local tactical teams converged on the site to conduct complex and challenging training scenarios including tactical approaches from the harbor and vessel boardings.

The training was conducted over a two-day period and provided invaluable experience to these highly skilled SWAT operators.

We look forward to hosting additional training events in the future.
PLAN OF ATTACK

It appears we have to wait longer to get The Sullivans to drydock than we would like, so we’re wasting no time in getting our survivability plan into action. The work is already well underway, and here it is in a nutshell:

- **Transverse bulkheads:** In order to contain a flooding incident to the space in which it occurs, we have to inspect and repair the transverse bulkheads, or walls that run from the bottom of the ship up to the main deck to make sure they’re watertight. We’ve completed those inspections and are in the process of addressing the weaknesses we’ve identified.

- **Electrical distribution system:** In order to be ready for the upcoming winter weather challenges, we need to add additional heaters, dehumidifiers, deicing bubblers and other critical equipment to preserve the ship. The current temporary power panels are insufficient for these additional needs, so we’re continuing to bring more and more of the ship’s inherent electrical distribution system and individual circuits online after extensive refurbishing and safety checks.

- **Watertight doors, hatches and scuttles:** If we were to face another flooding event, we’d contain it by keeping all possible watertight hatches, doors and scuttles closed and dogged. We’re inspecting all the gaskets and hardware to ensure their functionality.

- **Open piping:** When the Navy decommissioned the ship, they removed some machinery but left the open piping that supported it. We’ll need to get them capped as soon as possible.

- **Heat:** Until the winter of 2022/2023, no heat was available within the skin of the ship. Due to trapped moisture in spaces throughout the hull, large formations of ice and thick coatings of frost could be observed throughout. A combination of heat, dehumidifiers, and air movers were deployed successfully last winter, and we’ll be expanding on that program for the upcoming winter.

- **Deicing bubblers:** Due to the rapid formation of thick ice on the surface of the harbor early in the winter season, a more robust deicing bubbler system is required to prevent the ice from developing and coming in direct contact with The Sullivans fragile hull. We added more bubblers leading up to last winter and will substantially supplement that number this year.
• **Material condition policy:** Material condition, as it pertains to warships, is very basically which doors, hatches and scuttles need to be closed and when. We’re working on a policy that will enhance to the greatest degree possible her watertight integrity.

• **Flood alarms and cameras:** Thanks to a generous grant, we’re installing a state-of-the-art flood alarm system with 39 sensor units spread throughout key spaces within the hull below the waterline. This array of devices will transmit a signal via cellular antenna to smartphones of designated personnel including members of the emergency response team. The alarm system will also have cameras positioned in key spaces to activate when a flood alarm is triggered.

We’ll continue to review our readiness plan and look for opportunities to improve the ship’s overall survivability until she can be safely transported to a repair facility.

Once we have her home following a drydock repair, the ship will be floating on new steel and we can then ramp up our restoration work, especially below decks. Those spaces have had to remain off the tour route for safety reasons, so once those issues are rectified, we’re eager to have guests see more of how our sailors worked and lived aboard.

Above, a preliminary map of proposed flood sensor locations in the engineering spaces of The Sullivans.

• **Emergency response:** Currently, there is an active Emergency Flooding Response contract with Bidco Marine Group to provide expert and timely response to a potentially catastrophic flooding incident aboard ship.

• **Ventilation:** Because we need to set the ship’s material condition to reflect her enhanced damage control stance, air quality below decks could be compromised. To keep the air quality safe for staff and contractors, we’ll be working on bringing the ship’s inherent ventilation system up and running to push fresh air into spaces below and pull stale air out through topside vents.
As mentioned previously, The Sullivans is in the process of having a new, state-of-the-art flood alarm system installed. An array of 39 sensors spread throughout key spaces within the hull will be placed and connected to a cellular antenna, which will then send an alert to designated recipients' smartphones. We believe this cutting-edge technology will play a critical role in saving the ship, should another major flooding event occur. It will also enhance the safety of personnel, negating the need to open scuttles and hatches daily that could unknowingly be flooded.

Through the exceptional efforts of our volunteer Mario, the forward electrical distribution panel, located in the forward engine room, has been revived. You might remember the extraordinary efforts we wrote about in previous issues of this newsletter, describing the disassembly, cleaning and testing of the aft distribution panel, which had suffered complete submersion. We’re fortunate to have a dedicated group of volunteers who spent days on that effort in the sweltering heat below decks. Testing and safety checks on each individual circuit will continue, but we’re very near to a total revival of the ship’s inherent electrical system. Mario and our friends from the Slater in Albany, led by the brilliant Barry Witte, are responsible for this minor miracle – well done!

Concurrent with this project, ship caretaker Andrew has been trained in updating the ship’s fluorescent lighting to LED, a project that will dramatically reduce the electrical strain on her aging systems. The quality of light will also improve, and the need for frequent bulb and starter changes should be at an end. We’ve been fortunate to work with the good people at National Grid to assist us with this enormous undertaking.

Another area we’re excited about, once we get the electrical distribution system in safe operation, is working to get the interior lights in the 5” main batteries energized. Visitors will be able to see more of the operating components of these weapons systems and how challenging it must’ve been for our sailors to operate in them while in rough seas. Add to that the sweltering heat of the South Pacific, a determined enemy, and you won’t be able to help but come away with a greater appreciation for their service.

These past 12 months have seen significant changes aboard ship, as we worked to recover from the near catastrophic incident of April, 2022. Challenges can also bring opportunity, and that’s where we’ve kept our focus. What can we do better, and what can we learn from the past to ensure these irreplaceable vessels remain accessible for future generations – continually asking those questions helps to guide us.
We are very excited to announce that our grant request for flood alarm systems to be installed aboard the Little Rock was successful and the funding is now in place. This system will be identical to the state-of-the-art array currently being installed aboard The Sullivans, with the same cellular communication antenna and smartphone notifications. We’re in the planning phase for sensor location and the specifics of the installation, but we anticipate work starting as soon as our vendor obtains the necessary parts and equipment.

Among the long list of projects we’ve undertaken aboard the Little Rock is S5 berthing, the area where the supply personnel and Marine NCOs called home while underway.

We’ve mentioned it in previous issues of this newsletter, but the LED light upgrade program aboard our ships is going full steam ahead. Large swaths of the Little Rock have been converted with this energy-saving program, adding to the benefit of reducing the power strain on an aging electrical distribution and transformer system. We’re working with National Grid to produce the best possible outcomes for the longevity of these vessels.

We had a major pump failure in our forward CHT (sewer) system aboard ship, with the electric motor that powers the pump completely seizing. Fortunately, we have a new pump motor on order (the original was unsalvageable) that will be installed along with a duplex switch, allowing the two installed pumps to work automatically in tandem.

Another unforeseen challenge we’ve faced this past month was the failure of one onboard AC units, with both the compressor and fan unit breaking. After inspection, the cheaper path forward is to replace the entire unit, which we hope to have the funds available to do as soon as possible. This unit was responsible for cooling sections of the forward part of the ship, including the Admiral’s spaces.

Never wanting to close out our reporting on the Little Rock on a low note, we’re also very excited about the progress we’ve made in other spaces across the ship, including the main supply issue space, the machine shop, forward warrant officers’ staterooms, and weapons control. Each one of these areas played a major role in the service of the ship and the life of the sailors who served aboard her. We’ll continue to make steady, even progress and look forward to making these spaces and more available for our guests to see and experience. Our objectives are ambitious, but our staff is skilled and committed to making it happen. Stay tuned.

Above: we’re making substantial headway in S5 berthing aboard the Little Rock, and intend to have it fully completed, including a full compliment of racks and lockers.
Along with her bigger sister in the Buffalo Naval Park fleet, the Little Rock, the Croaker will also be getting an independent, state-of-the-art flood alarm system installed in the near future. Thanks to the proceeds provided through a grant we applied for late last year, we’re now ready to add this substantial safety improvement. The Croaker and her two sister ships afloat will all be protected with similar systems. As funding becomes available, we’re also looking into adding advanced fire and intrusion alarms that will operate within the same technical infrastructure, with all alarm notifications being sent to the same smartphone app.

Our super-talented volunteers Mario and Karl have been busy aboard Croaker, adding lighting in the motor room below control space.

Sadly, due to a disturbing uptick in park-wide acts of thoughtless, shameful vandalism and destructive acts specifically aboard the Croaker, we’ve had to add a plexiglass barrier to block off the boat’s galley, but which will keep it visible to our guests. We always look for opportunities to make as many areas as possible accessible to our guests, but we must take all measures necessary to preserve them as the irreplaceable artifacts they are.

The generational winter storm of 2022 badly damaged the Croaker’s shore power cable system. The extreme movements of the boat at her moorings put unforeseen stresses on the cable and its supporting structure such that it needed to be replaced. Working with the good people at CIR Electric, we redesigned the system in a way that provides more flexibility and better anticipates harsh weather conditions.
A grossly underreported part of our American maritime history on display here in Buffalo is our Vietnam veteran boat, PTF-17. This magnificent vessel was built by the shipyard of John Trumpy & Sons of Annapolis, Maryland in 1968 and was immediately forward deployed to Vietnam, serving in the Mekong Delta and Da Nang. She and her sister boats fought against Viet Cong insurgents throughout the delta, at times engaging in pitched firefights with the enemy. Her combat career ended in 1972 when she returned for training duty in the Great Lakes.

The years of harsh northeast winter weather took its toll on the boat. We're happy to report that a team of skilled and dedicated volunteers have reversed the damaging effects of time and Mother Nature and have brought the boat back to ship-shape condition.

Our next challenge is to find ways to share this amazing warboat with the public in a way that won't degrade her structural integrity but will provide for a full viewing and experience. We're looking at a possible catwalk system which would surround a portion of the boat and allow visitors to see her impressive array of weapons systems. Our curator Shane Stephenson is working on a specialized tour that would allow for small groups to access the boat and learn more about her honorable history in service to our nation.
I am happy to report that the Appraisal Loss Report for artifacts from USS The Sullivans has been submitted and accepted by our insurance company.

It was a long report detailing the losses of the artifacts, along with the estimated value of the losses. In total, I claimed our losses at $45,000 worth of artifacts. That amount was accepted and the full reimbursement has arrived. Having this money allows me to begin working with local companies to get the mattresses and canvas for the pipe racks remade using new fire and water resistant materials. It also allows me to fill in the historical fabric of the ship when she is back from dry dock. Parts and equipment that make up the historical fabric of the ship can now be refabricated as needed, especially in the mess decks where most of the benches and seats were lost as well.

While no artifacts or donations will be going back onto the ship when she comes back from dry dock, having this money will allow me to be flexible when considering purchasing items that should be on board.

The report took more than a year to compile and it is another victory for the preservation of the ship – to ensure she can tell her story for the next 80 years.
DOCENTS/TOUR GUIDES: Our uniformed, trained cadre of docents are the guides and storytellers aboard our ships afloat. They know the histories, battles, sailors, and personal anecdotes related to these ships. If you’re interested in becoming a docent, we’d love to hear from you!

MAINTENANCE: If you enjoy working with your hands and have an interest in restoring rare artifacts so essential to American history, we’ve got an abundance of opportunities! We’re especially interested in having skilled metal workers, electricians, plumbers and carpenters volunteer with us, but all, regardless of skill level are welcome.

COLLECTIONS: Caring for and cataloging our unique artifacts takes a great deal of time, patience, and dedication. Under the direction of our curator, you could help preserve these precious objects so they’ll be available for future generations.

GARDENS AND GROUNDS: If you’ve visited the park, you’ve no doubt seen the immaculately maintained grounds enjoyed by so many. If you enjoy gardening and wish to be a part of this dedicated team, please let us know – we’d love to have you join us!

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