

SAVING OUR SHIPS



PROGRESS REPORT SEPTEMBER 2023

As the summer season begins to wind down, we turn our attention to the autumn and impending winter, and what will be required to best prepare our ships for the increasing harshness of the weather. While we've made truly extraordinary strides forward, we still have considerable distance yet to travel to be prepared.

Staff is working hard on the Survivability Program taskings within their capacity, and park leadership

continues to work on the funding to address areas of the program that cannot be completed by our personnel. As mentioned in previous issues, The Sullivans Survivability Program is designed to take all measures possible to beef up the material condition of the ship to prevent another potentially catastrophic flooding event from occurring.

While The Sullivans work continues, we're also making major headway with our other vessels afloat, along with PTF-17 on permanent display ashore. Flood alarm systems, mitigation, restoration of spaces - it all continues at a steady, even pace.

PTF-17

Our industrious volunteers continue to make progress aboard our Vietnam veteran warboat, getting the lifelines installed and painting the aft 40mm weapon. We look forward to being able to share their extraordinary efforts with the public in the 2024 season - stay tuned!



KEEPING THE WEATHER OUTSIDE WHERE IT BELONGS

Staff member Mark has done a tremendous job restoring the starboard forward hatch on Little Rock (left). This area of the ship

has suffered substantial corrosion, particularly where the bulkhead meets the deck. That corrosion has allowed water to penetrate into the interior of the ship resulting in a cascading effect of increasing water damage. We've found a steel epoxy material that has worked well where steel replacement isn't possible, and Mark has led the way, becoming the Naval Park's resident expert on it's use and application - great job, Mark!

THE SULLIVANS SURVIVABILITY PROGRAM

The Sullivans Survivability Program is well underway. We've made significant strides forward with the restoration of the ship's inherent electrical systems - critical for providing power for heat, dehumidification, deicing bubblers, emergency pumps, etc. We've also restored a number of the ship's ventilation units, which push clean air below decks and exhausts stagnant air to the outside. Our maintenance team members Joe and Mike have been working steadily at replacing door, scuttle and hatch gaskets, some of which appear to be original to the ship. Without this essential work, we can't establish watertight integrity within the interior of the ship. And without watertight integrity, everything else is for naught.

Over the last 8 weeks or so, we've been working closely with contractors to define the scope of work and develop the associated costs. We're closely examining what can be handled by staff and what exceeds their capacity in order to keep costs to an absolute minimum without compromising the critical end result.

The biggest challenge we've encountered thus far is, ironically, process-related. The funding was redirected from the initial long-term repair project to the Survivability Project due to its being emergency in nature. Emergency naturally infers a need for expediency. Because of the source for the funding, there are layers and expanses of process that must be followed in order for the money to be released. Since winter waits for no one, we are understandably anxious to put our plan into action. The contractors have provided time-to-completion estimates, and the bottom line is there's very little of it to waste.

That being said, we're very fortunate to have such committed and hard-working staff and volunteers to carry the ball forward. There is no one standing still while we wait for the financial support.

Below. National Grid volunteers hard at work on the restoration of The Sullivans shore power panel and cabling.





THE SULLIVANS

Our lead technical volunteer Mario has almost single-handedly restored the electrical distribution system aboard The Sullivans, following the initial monumental efforts supported by our friends from the Slater in Albany.



Our lead technical volunteer Mario just after successfully energizing shore power. Based on his superior level of cognitive processes, we suspect he might be part alien.

Mario's technical prowess, work ethic, and commitment to attaining the otherwise unobtainable has led to some truly remarkable accomplishments. Among them is the restoration of the original shore power cable to the main electrical distribution panel, adding in additional safety features to the system.

Working with and leading a group of volunteers from National Grid, Mario worked out the restoration plan for the shore power and oversaw its successful execution.

Speaking of the National Grid team of volunteers, their willingness to help us tackle major challenges has been nothing short of inspirational. Shore power was one major hurdle, and replacing a large section of cable that ran from the forward distribution panel to its associated bank of transformers deep in forward engineering was another - and they made it look easy.

The National Grid volunteer team returned to join us for a Day of Service on 9/11, joined by volunteers from Highmark and the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus. We'd been working together for weeks to plan an aggressive but attainable scope of projects and were still blown away by the amount of challenging tasks they were able to successfully complete.

In addition to much-needed electrical work, we tackled some carpentry, lots of painting and general housekeeping, and even had a crew join us in our gasket replacement work. And that's really saying something since gasket replacement is about as much fun as a root canal, but they understand the critical nature of the work and were ready to jump into the project with us to get it done.



Mario and the terrific group of National Grid volunteers just after reenergizing the shore power panel for The Sullivans. It's astonishing what can be accomplished with such a talented and passionate group of go-getters.



THE SULLIVANS CONT'D

In addition to the Survivability Project workload, Naval Park staff has been working on The Sullivans Memorial Wardroom space. We needed to address a number of areas of substantial decay, and the correct way to attack the problem and expose its full extent was to gut the space. We removed paneling, the water-stained drop-ceiling, and flooring - all having been installed after arriving in Buffalo, in order to assess the extent of the damage and develop a solution to restore the space.



Upon removal of the forward paneling, a rich, mahogany veneer was discovered covering the bulkhead (image above). We had no record of this feature, and as we move forward with the restoration we're researching ways to faithfully recreate it, as the original is too damaged to salvage.

Also, for the first time since the ship opened to the public in 1979, the original portholes are visible, illuminating the space with natural light.

Once metal stabilization is complete, we'll prime all the steel components, seal and test any suspect areas from potential exterior leaks, and begin a full restoration.

After removing the old post-service wall paneling, we then stripped out all the original and much compromised insulation, and new, higher-efficiency insulation will replace it without sacrificing the original look and feel of the space. The objective moving forward will be a more faithful representation of the wardroom while in active service yet maintain its dignity and service as the memorial space in honor of the Sullivans brothers and their family.



The natural light of the sun passing through The Sullivans Memorial Wardroom portholes for the first time since President Jimmy Carter occupied the Oval Office.



LITTLE ROCK

FORMER SECRETARY OF THE NAVY AND LITTLE ROCK CREW MEMBER RAY MABUS VISIT



Above, former Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus and his lovely wife Lynne on the port weather bridge wing aboard Little Rock, where Secretary Mabus had served as a young Lieutenant JG from 1970 to 1972.

stateroom the Secretary had occupied to the newly renovated Admiral's quarters where we paused to enjoy a delicious lunch provided by the Liberty Hound restaurant. We then provided a presentation detailing the vast projects recently completed aboard ship, with lots of before and after images.

After lunch, we continued touring the ship, enjoying so many of the Secretary's first-hand accounts of life and experiences aboard the Little Rock. We visited Radio Central where we heard about and gained a feel for the sounds and sometimes high-stress communications that were received in that space. Our understanding of conditions aboard is much improved and we thank the Secretary and his wife for the generosity of their time.



Secretary Mabus taking the wheel aboard the navigation bridge of the Little Rock, while Mrs. Mabus examines the plotting table.

We started the visit with a tour of the ship, from the

RADIO - II

LITTLE ROCK CONT'D

The LED light upgrades aboard the Little Rock continue at full steam. The original intent of the program was to reduce the load on the ship's aging electrical distribution system, circuitry, and fixtures while at the same time substantially reducing costs in terms of fluorescent bulb replacement, starters, man hours in their upkeep, and disposal. While all this is being realized, unforeseen benefits are manifesting themselves as well.

Many spaces aboard ship have remained entirely unlit, and mostly unvisited since the ship's arrival many decades ago. As we systematically move through the ship to upgrade the lighting systems, we are now seeing spaces in a way that wasn't possible before. While that might seem obvious, seeing the space in its entirety as the sailors who served aboard the ship saw it when in service has entirely changed the feel and sense of the space. It also reveals possibilities for restoration as we see the banks of remaining equipment, the stenciled markings on bulkheads and ducting, and even unique pieces of sailor art (with the full range of subjects as you might imagine!)

It tends to be, as is said at times in the military, 'a self-licking ice cream cone' - the more we upgrade, the more we find, the more we find, the more excited we become, fueling an inspired desire to upgrade more in order to continue finding these treasures.

Our most recent LED upgrade was on the 02



Above and left: original equipment left in Radio II aboard the Little Rock, seen in its full context in the newly-lit space.



level in Radio II. Little Rock Caretaker Brendan took on the project and saw it through to completion. Now, with the space abundantly lit, we turn things over to our curator Shane to determine next steps, to sift through our records for historical reference, and ultimately to consider the best means of sharing this space and its accompanying stories with our guests. We're excited about adding this space to one of our future tours.

CROAKER

After revising the original installation plans, we're now ready to move forward with the Croaker's flood alarm system. Sensors, or 'water bugs' will be strategically placed throughout watertight sections of the boat's pressure hull, which will transmit a signal to a central panel connected to a cellular antenna, notifying designated members of staff and our Emergency Flooding Response contractor of a flooding event at the earliest possible moment.

We were very excited to have a large group of volunteers led by National Grid aboard on 9/11 for a day of service. The group consisted largely of electricians, and we'd had ongoing discussions about what we'd like to get done. On the agenda for that day was converting the existing light fixtures to direct wire LED, which would allow for areas of the boat that have remained dark for many years to be relit again. In addition, we'd purchased a number of additional LED fixtures to add light to and accentuate areas of the boat that go unnoticed during the course of a typical tour.

The plan for installation included additional underlighting for the torpedo tubes fore and aft - as is the case with the engineering spaces, much of the interesting and historic detail is lost because it remains outside of visual range due to lack of suitable lighting. We've remedied that with 48" LED lighting fixtures where appropriate and 24" lighting fixtures.

We again thank the hard-working and generous people at National Grid for sharing their expertise and resources with us. It would be far harder and take considerably longer for us to tackle these goals without this extraordinary day of caring.

Stay tuned - lots of images coming in our next edition!

Below is a photo of the forward engine space below the main deck - an area few ever see and even fewer realize exists. The photo is actually deceptive in that the single bulb is not nearly as bright as it appears here. With additional LED lighting, a fuller sense of the space will be possible, and better opportunities for maintenance.





CURATOR'S CORNER

BY SHANE STEPHENSON

This month brought a former Secretary of the Navy (SecNav) back to visit his old ship, USS Little Rock CLG4, which he served on 1970 - 1972.

Ray Mabus, was the 75th SecNav and served under President Obama from 2009 - 2017. It was the culmination of a career that included being elected Governor of Mississippi (1988 - 1992), and service as Ambassador to Saudi Arabia (1994 - 1996).

I met SecNav Mabus shortly after I was hired, and I was interested in accepting as donations some of his memorabilia he collected over his years as a public servant. Thankfully, he did donate some items that I had the honor of processing into our collections. These items included his LT (Junior grade) uniforms and uniforms from his father, Lt. Raymond E Mabus, who served in the Navy from 1941 - 1944. Also included was his "blueberry" Captains shirt when he played CO of the USS Ronald Reagan in the movie, Battleship, and paperwork and orders from his time aboard USS Little Rock.

For archives and collections, it is important to have a wide scope of historical documents, photos and 3D objects. The Buffalo Naval Park archives and records hold the key to the "many pasts" that are experienced by crew and officers alike. The records and experiences of an EI are as important to our story as a Lt (Junior Grade) Communications Officer, who went on to become the 75th United States Secretary of the Navy.



LTJG Ray Mabus while serving aboard USS Little Rock, CLG-4 from 1970-1972.



Secretary Mabus during his service as Secretary of the Navy from 2009-2017.

JOIN US

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!



Grounds and gardens volunteers hard at work on our famously beautiful flower beds.



Online volunteer form: <https://www.buffalonaivalpark.wufoo.com/forms/z1jxfxjq1uqolw0/>

Email: info@buffalonaivalpark.org

Phone: 716-847-1773

Website: <https://www.buffalonaivalpark.org>

Buffalo Naval Park Youtube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@buffalonaivalpark>