

SAVING OUR SHIPS



PROGRESS REPORT OCTOBER, 2023

Another eventful month has passed at the Buffalo Naval Park, and steady, even progress continues to be made.

Our primary goal for the coming weeks and months remains The Sullivans Survivability Program and preparing our three vessels afloat along with the PTF ashore for the expected rigors of winter. If the Farmer's Almanac is correct, we're in for another challenging frigid season.

Access to pledged funding remains a challenge as we work through the necessary administrative processes to get them released. We need these funds to conduct critical and time-sensitive work aboard The Sullivans, in particular to increase our odds of surviving the coming winter with minimizing the severity of the inevitable flooding incidents.

The maintenance team has been keeping up an aggressive pace, identifying areas we can improve and seeking opportunities to share spaces aboard and their historical and compelling stories.

PTF-17

Kudos to the hard-working group of volunteers who've taken PTF-17 from a badly degraded and decomposing state to her current impressive condition. Ryan has been leading the team in restoring the onboard weapons systems, lifelines, mast, rigging, and center console and more.

Next on the list of things we need to tackle is preparing her for another harsh Buffalo winter. This will include assessing all topside objects/artifacts to determine what will be too vulnerable to remain exposed. We will also be covering and sealing any topside vents that could allow belowdecks to be damaged in heavier than normal winds and precipitation.



THE SULLIVANS SURVIVABILITY PROGRAM PROGRESS

It's no secret that one of the biggest challenges in the museum ship community is obtaining sufficient funding to care for these irreplaceable icons of American Naval history. The Sullivans Survivability program is also working through these challenges.

We are fortunate and grateful to have designated funds to proceed with the Survivability program to conduct the critical work necessary to be ready to deal with the inevitable flooding events that will almost certainly occur in the days leading to drydocking. Restoring watertight integrity to transverse bulkheads, doors, hatches and scuttles, mitigating areas of significant hazardous materials, restoring enough safe, verified electrical power for the additional preservation systems we need to bring online, and ventilation for the safety of personnel - all critical components of the program that need to be addressed immediately. Unfortunately, there are administrative processes which are required before the funding can be released for use. These delays add increased risk to the ship as our window of opportunity to enhance our preparedness in time for the severe weather narrows.

Below: the ongoing work being led by Mario to safely restore and bring into use the ship's forward electrical distribution panel.



That said, we are using all resources at our immediate disposal to prepare the ship as best we can. Our first priority is to establish watertight integrity both vertically and laterally - bulkhead to bulkhead and deck to deck. We purchased another 500 linear feet of Navy-spec door, hatch, and scuttle gasket material and have been taking out the badly degraded gaskets, some of which may go back to her earliest days, and replacing them. We then chalk-test each door and record the results. For those that don't establish a good seal along the knife-edge, we mark it for additional work.

Our lead technical volunteer Mario continues to make very significant strides in the electrical distribution system restoration, which will allow for



Left: an example of the badly dry-rotted gasket material that has to be replaced throughout The Sullivans to reestablish the critical watertight integrity of the ship.

sufficient power to operate additional heaters, dehumidifiers, de-icing bubblers and ventilation systems necessary for the safety of personnel below decks.

Once the funding obstacles have been overcome, we will immediately engage the services of professional hazmat contractors to remove oil residues and other materials that inhibit our progress. It's a long, arduous process, but our commitment never wavers, knowing how important these ships and the crews that served aboard them are to our national and world history.



THE SULLIVANS

While The Survivability Program for The Sullivans remains priority number one, we continue to move forward with other projects consistent with our role as fully invested stewards and caretakers of the ship.

Mario continues to make great strides restoring the ship's electrical system and, this month, for the first time since the April 2022 incident, we've energized the ship's interior lights from midships all the way to the fore peak.

Even more exciting, the lighting panel containing all the fuses and circuitry for the aft engine spaces lighting was in extremely rough shape (below). The panel had suffered extended submersion in the oil-soaked space, followed by substantial corrosion.

The panel, and all its cleaned and tested circuitry, will be reattached in its original location on the lower-level starboard bulkhead in the aft engine room. New conduit will be run from there to its power supply source, allowing for the engine space lighting, recently updated to LED, to be reenergized.

Below: Mario enjoys a brief moment of respite in the Chief's Mess after successfully reenergizing the lighting circuit. Well done Mario!



BOB, THE GIANT CREEPY SPIDER

Bob, pictured here on the left in a moment of quiet reflection ... or maybe he wore himself out trying to free up all that twisted webbing visible in the vicinity of his posterior sending unit. It's tough to be sure, and frankly, we're afraid to ask him.

We'll miss Bob this winter, said no one ever.



THE SULLIVANS CONT'D

A very exciting development aboard ship was our ability to get Mount 52 to turn a full 180 degrees from the port beam to the starboard beam - something that hasn't been possible in the past. In addition, with some additional troubleshooting and maintenance, we're hoping to get all four of her 5" gun turrets to move to the same full range of motion. Since there isn't sufficient power (and even if there was, we wouldn't allocate such a large amount of amperage for a non-critical shipboard system at this time) to operate the gun's electric motor control system, we used the manual backup within the turret which, if you've never had the opportunity to try, is quite a workout for the arms and lungs!

When more critical work is completed, we'll give the interior of the guns a thorough going through and share them more fully with our visitors.



Above: Mount 52 trained to approximately 45 degrees to starboard after Buffalo Naval Park staff and volunteers performed safety inspections before attempting the move.

A very special space aboard The Sullivans is the Memorial Wardroom. In the past, it was covered in wood paneling and a drop ceiling and used to display some of the Sullivan family artifacts. After the partial sinking last year, we've gotten a good deal more aggressive in identifying areas of metal degradation and found that the bulkheads and support beams near the deck in that space were badly rotted and needed to be addressed. That work continues, and while we're there, we'll be restoring the space to include original wardroom elements while enhancing the use of the space to honor the five Sullivan brothers and their family. With lots of dedicated work and a little luck, we'll be able to unveil this completed space in the Spring of 2024.



Above: The demo of the Memorial Wardroom continues along with repairs as we find degraded areas along the way. The first coat of metal primer has been applied to the overhead.



LITTLE ROCK

Along with the myriad other tasks underway aboard all our vessels, extensive restoration work continues on Little Rock.

The original ship's store is being brought back to its original appearance, the HT shops have been extensively cleaned and repaired, the chaff launchers and deck have been preserved and repainted, the LED light upgrade program continues, winterization of the ship continues, bringing back the ship's original onboard radio station, complete with records and turntables, and so much more. The staff and volunteers have done an absolutely remarkable job and don't appear to have any intention of slowing down. Rather than try to describe each one of these significant undertakings in narrative form, we'll instead provide the updates through images and associated captions, as below:



Above left. the HT shop before and to the right, the HT shop after.



Above left. chaff launcher and deck before, and right, chaff launcher and deck after.



Above left. Weapons control before, and to the right, Weapons Control in progress.

LITTLE ROCK CONT'D

In VERY big news for the Buffalo Naval Park, and for the Little Rock in particular, we have just acquired one of the few remaining original Talos missiles that were carried by the ship during the course of her career.

Our plan for the missile is exciting and ambitious - to bring it aboard the Little Rock and place it within the missile house in a way that helps to tell the story of the missile and how it was maneuvered aboard a ship at sea.

In the first image below, the missile arrives from Indiana to the Bidco Marine Group yard in Buffalo. A section of the missile was received in its original, albeit rough crate.



Above, accompanying the missile booster and warhead were crates of additional components and related tools. Below, getting a first glimpse inside the missile's original shipping container.



Above, the booster section of the missile in its original paint. Before arriving aboard Little Rock, this section will be refurbished by staff and volunteers.





CROAKER

As we continue our negotiations for funding and drydocking, we are also trying to include the Croaker for major repairs at the same time as her sister The Sullivans.

We believe substantial savings could be realized if the ships depart the harbor for their repair destinations within the same time window.

First, because of our location at the confluence of the Buffalo River and Buffalo Ship Canal, considerable silt and river-borne debris settles around the three vessels, particularly each spring with the winter melt-off. It is likely that if The Sullivans were to leave in the fall of 2024, but not the Croaker, we would again have to dredge the areas surrounding the boat at considerable additional expense - millions of dollars in fact.

Second, because of the positioning of the ships, it may be required to remove one of the mooring towers embedded in the bedrock in order to safely hold the Little Rock at her station.



Getting the funding in time remains a major challenge for either vessel, but we are committed to getting them both to a repair facility at the first available opportunity.

Croaker has suffered considerable steel degradation throughout, including the splash zone areas of her ballast tanks, her hull structure surrounding both fore and aft torpedo tubes, and much of her superstructure above the pressure hull.



We have, as part of the marine survey of all three of our vessels afloat, the "Ship's Specifications Report" for Croaker, describing the full scope of repair work recommended once she makes the transit to drydock. We have not yet received the financial figures from the three facilities we've been in discussions with, but communications to that end will continue.

Croaker is a magnificent example of a hunter/killer boat of her era, and we are committed to making sure she'll be around for a good long time to come.



CURATOR'S CORNER

BY SHANE STEPHENSON

Fall is the time when visitors slow down and I can begin to shift focus from tours and visitor engagement to one of processing collections, photographs and 3D materials.

For 2023, I have accepted 38 donations so far, but have begun work on very few. This is the season to begin that processing of these donations. Most collections have a variety of artifacts, some 2D and some 3D. This means that there will be paper records or photographs, along with artifacts such as medals, ashtrays, uniforms, banners and books.

Each donation represents some part of the collector's life – things that were important to him or her. Once the artifacts are separated by media – paper with paper, photographs with photographs, et cetera, the accession (or intake number) is added to each artifact, so when the collection is separated for cataloging, it's known that they are part of a particular larger collection.

In traditional research libraries, people will want to research one particular collection, including 2D and 3D artifacts, assigning the accession number to each allows them to be located, even though they are stored in different areas.

As the curator, this job duty is one of the most fun. I learn so much about the collector's life, what was important to them, learn and organize those stories to impart them to future generations.



SOMETHING PRETTY SPECIAL

Last month, members of the Buffalo Naval Park staff attended the Historic Naval Ships Association (HNSA) Conference in Albany, New York, to participate in and learn from our fellow museum ships as well as ships' maintenance industry experts.

While there, we were thrilled to see our very own Shane Stephenson, Curator and Director of Museum Collections, and Mario Roy, Lead Technical Volunteer and active-duty Coast Guard Chief receive awards for their achievements in their respective areas of expertise. We were told it was an extraordinarily competitive year for these awards, and Shane and Mario were chosen as among the very best. You've done us proud, gentlemen. Well done.

Shane, pictured left, was awarded the Henry A. Vadnais, Jr. Award for particularly outstanding service rendered to his organization, particularly for his work in the areas of curatorship, collections management, and exhibits. With the monumental challenges presented to Shane after The Sullivans partial sinking, we believe the award is richly deserved.

Mario, pictured in the image below on the right, received the Historic Naval Ship Maintenance, Preservation, Exhibition Award, and after the nearly miraculous job he's done safely bringing power back throughout The Sullivans, and the incredible amount of work he's accomplished on all three vessels afloat, we couldn't imagine a more deserving person for this prestigious award.



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!



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

Email: info@buffalonaivalpark.org

Phone: 716-847-1773

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

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