# SAVING OUR SHIPS

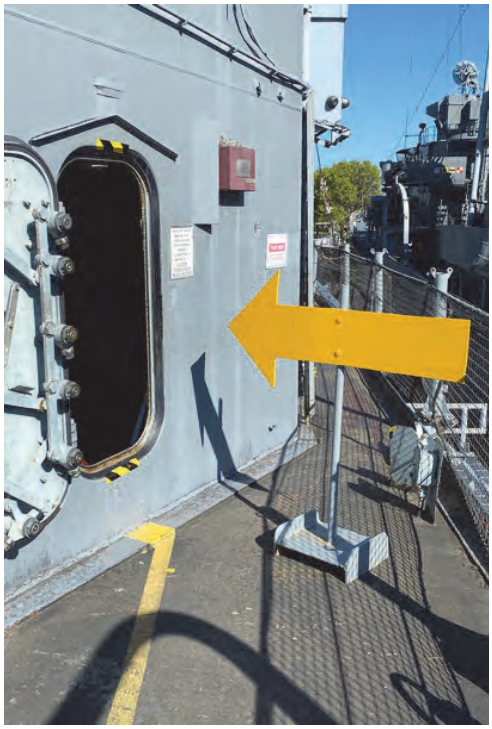
## MAJOR UPDATE

Some time has passed since the release of our last newsletter and much has happened in the interim. We'd been holding off in hopes of making this a celebratory issue with an announcement that The Sullivans and Croaker drydocking project is ready to move forward. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

As we've covered in previous editions, it's imperative we get The Sullivans and Croaker to drydock at the earliest opportunity. Due to administrative delays between the City of Buffalo and the marine management firm, it's not going to happen this year. After repeated serious flooding events aboard The Sullivans over the past several months, and new leaks aboard the Croaker, these delays come at a debilitating cost.

That aside, our exceptionally dedicated combined crew of staff and volunteers have continued to work tirelessly to save and improve our ships. Major progress has been made aboard all our vessels afloat. We've been keenly aware of the two areas we need to improve for our guests: ease of navigation and quality of experience, and as you read on, you'll learn how we're tackling those objectives head on.

We've got lots to cover, so let's get started!

A major challenge we've had aboard our ships is a lack of ease of navigation. The Little Rock in particular can be a dizzying maze to find your way through. Thanks to the good work by our caretaker Joe, we've got large yellow directional arrows strategically positioned on all three vessels, and the results are clear - problem solved!

# SAVING OUR SHIPS

## DRYDOCKING UPDATE

The target date for The Sullivans and Croaker to arrive safely at drydock for a decades-overdue repair had been October, 2025. That will not be possible due to administrative delays related to insurance and documentation letterhead. The earliest possible and exceedingly narrow window will now be October of 2026, which means we'll be facing another potentially severe and damaging winter.

Over the course of December, January and February just passed, The Sullivans and Croaker both suffered hull breaches, from controllable to the nearly catastrophic. The extreme cold, the rapid ice formations in the harbor, the severe wind conditions, and the increasingly fragile hulls of our ships led to a series of flooding events that, at times, required our maintenance team to stay through the night to manually operate pumps (the automatic float switches froze, so crew had to conduct hourly checks through the night and reach into the freezing cold water of the bilge to activate the pump) in the bilges to eject the incoming harbor water at a pace to keep up with the volume entering the ship. The extreme cold of this past winter caused the discharge piping from the newly installed bilge pumps to freeze solid. The crews repeatedly used heat guns on the iron piping to thaw them sufficiently to get the pumps operating again. Long lengths of low voltage heat tape were purchased and deployed around all the associated piping.

*Below, an image of harbor water shooting into the engineering space aboard The Sullivans in January of this year. The breach worsened and was estimated to be nearly an inch-and-a-half in size before repeated patching attempts resulted in stemming most of the incoming water.*

*Below, an array of patches applied to the interior spaces of the A section of The Sullivans, the area forward of the midships engineering spaces. These patches provide a temporary solution, as permanent repairs can only by conducted from the exterior of the ship by divers.*


# DRYDOCKING UPDATE CONT'D

Additionally, when large volumes of water enter a severely weakened hull, the cumulative, repeated hydrostatic pressures applied to interior support structures and deteriorated shell plating seams, which then cycle between freezing and thawing, her overall structural stability becomes more questionable.

Surviving an additional winter, particularly one that matches the last in severity, will take significant planning and as-yet unallocated financial and human resources. We're eagerly awaiting the signing of the agreement between the City and the marine management company so that their Naval architects and engineers can provide us with clear guidance on saving our ships through these frustrating delays.

Another administrative hurdle, following ongoing contract negotiations will be permitting. Estimates for length of time to receive a fully approved permit for the site preparation work, which requires soil testing around the ships and an environmental review process, range from 6 months to a year and more. Once completed, the necessary dredging can begin at the conclusion of the fish spawning period which ends July 1st. For a time-sensitive and complex project such as ours, delayed permits could be a serious problem.

With the need to survive yet another potentially severe winter on the horizon, we're using all our available resources to prepare us for that inevitability.

When the City of Buffalo and the marine management company finally agree to terms and sign the project contract, the first order of business will be assessing The Sullivans and Croaker for additional measures to be taken for their winter survivability.

In the case of The Sullivans, her most vulnerable hull section historically has been in engineering space B2 in the middle of the ship. The areas surrounding her bilge keels - the long fins that run along the hull for stability, are proving to be the most concerning with multiple hull breaches, including one very serious one occurring this past winter. This was the space that flooded, leading to her near sinking in 2022 from a 4-foot long gash on her starboard side. Due to a separate but equally serious flooding event that occurred the following August, a 20-foot concrete patch had to be applied to her port side bilge in the same space.

In the A section of the ship, or the area forward of the midships engineering spaces, we encountered flooding in several areas from breaches that had developed several feet below the waterline. The freezer spaces below the crew's mess decks had completely flooded, as had several spaces forward of the mess decks below crew berthing. All the breaches were addressed and the water pumped out, but the financial impact has been debilitating.

# SAVING OUR SHIPS

## THE SULLIVANS

In previous pages, we laid out some of our challenges, but we'd be remiss in not sharing in our victories too, of which The Sullivans has many.

First, through a generous grant provided by Erie County, we've been able to address major structural concerns in The Sullivans superstructure. With all the difficulties we experience with her hull, it would be easy to neglect areas above the main deck, which are deteriorating at the same rate as everything below it. The image below is the port side bulkhead in the Memorial Wardroom space. It's difficult to see, but that's daylight coming through what should actually be solid metal. Most concerningly, the beams you see in the image are missing the bottom 6 to 8 inches due to advanced decay - and they're holding up all the weight above!

In the image below, you'll see the same bulkhead with the repaired and restored beams in place.

Also in the Memorial Wardroom, the surgical and emergency lamps have been reinstalled, below:


# SAVING OUR SHIPS

## THE SULLIVANS CONT'D

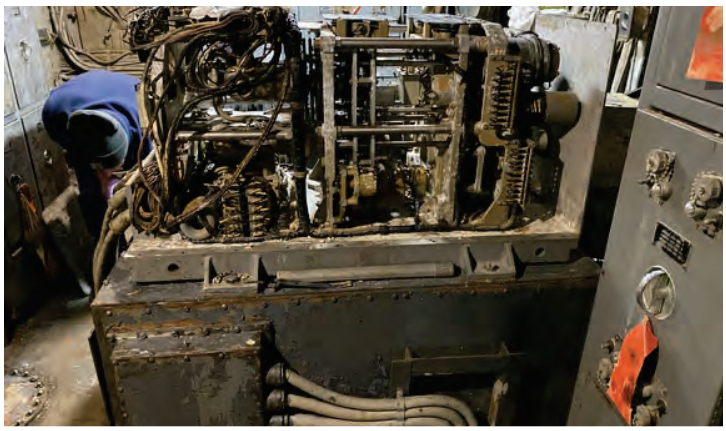
The crew's mess aboard The Sullivans with her lighting circuits safely functioning for the first time since her partial sinking in 2022, with restoration work soon to follow. Well done, Mario!

In the two images above, you'll see the MK 56 director with advanced degradation throughout. Below, you'll see the restored director awaiting new paint.

Below, The Sullivans new shamrock awning, providing shelter for our docents and guests - thank you Jess!


# THE SULLIVANS CONT'D

Concurrent with the repair of the MK 56 director was the restoration and reclamation of the MK 56 director room, a derelict and badly damaged space left largely untouched since the ship's partial sinking. Our dedicated and talented volunteer John changed all that. The images below are the space as he found it, and those to the right are what he's achieved to date. Amazing work, John!



Below, John's restoration work - what a difference!


# SAVING OUR SHIPS

## CROAKER

Croaker caretaker Ken has been working tirelessly on a number of fronts. His efforts in the restoration of the crew's berthing have been tremendous, as have his efforts in bringing in his fellow submariners to help and fully realize the potential of the boat.

This month, a collection of hard-working submarine veterans descended on the boat (in a good way) and began executing Ken's restoration plan. First order of business was the scuttle that passes through the pressure hull above crew's berthing. For many years the scuttle had leaked badly, resulting in water damage to the berthing deck below and contents of the space. The sub vets took up the flooring and set to work assessing the steel beneath. After considerable cleaning, it appears the deck, with one area excepted, is stable. The portion in question already has a solution worked out by the sub vet team, and a volunteer group of sheet metal workers can execute the plan.

*Above, looking down through the scuttle passing through the pressure hull into the crew berthing space below. You can see the badly corroded surface that allowed decades worth of damaging water into the space.*

As part of the crew berthing restoration, we want to make the sailor's individual lockers useable and much more presentable. The sub vet team even removed the locker handles and hardware for cleaning and repair. The pieces that were still in Navy shape were carefully taped so that the locker doors could be painted.

*In the image to the left, sub vets have taken up the badly corroded scuttle hatch to begin removing the deteriorated steel, clean the surfaces, then reseat the watertight - a tough job but very well done!.*


# CROAKER CONT'D

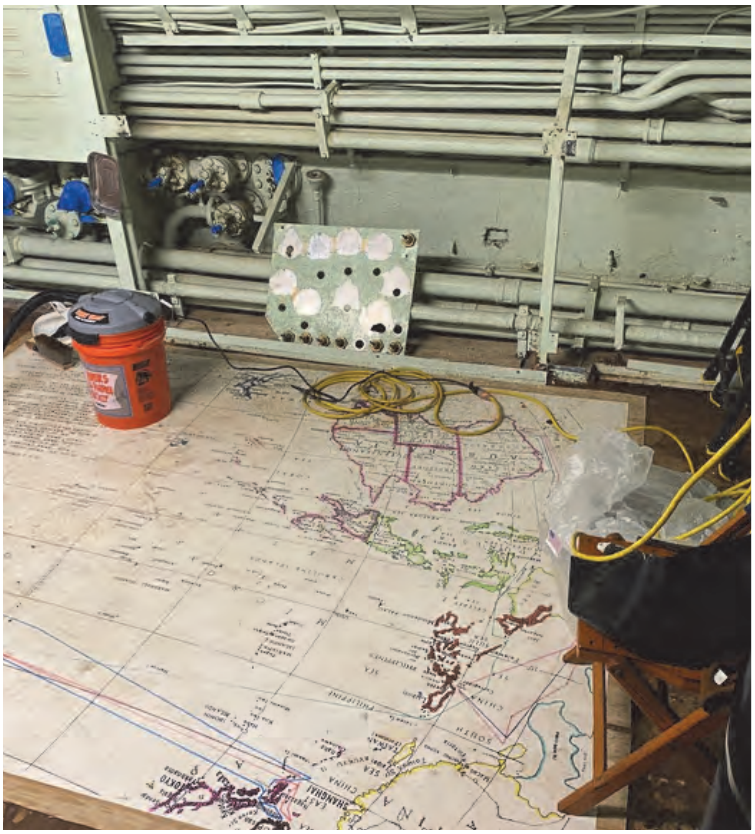
When this space is completed, we expect to have the sailors beds, or racks in Navy parlance back in place as well as the original red emergency lighting.

The linoleum material that had to be taken up came originally from the modern attack submarine, U.S.S. Buffalo, but due to the water damage from the leaking scuttle, it couldn't be salvaged. What the sub vets were able to do however, was cut out the expertly drawn chart of the Croaker's areas of service so that we can keep that as an important part of her story. Achieving that was no easy task - the surrounding linoleum had to be carefully cut away, then the map separated and stowed for future restoration.

Croaker veteran Lynn got to work on restoring the crew's head and shower area. Something we'd like to explore is the viability of expanding our Encampment sleepover program to the Croaker - something that's never been done here before. Several museum submarines have just such a program and from the feedback we're reading, it's highly successful.

There are more projects and more work that is continuing, but this year's Croaker working party was a huge success by any measure.

*Below, United States Navy submarine veterans work together to carefully remove the linoleum to expose the water-damaged deck below for assessment.*



Above, the carefully drawn and expertly detailed map of the Croaker's active service by none other than our senior docent Jess. By saving this piece of fine work, we'll be able to incorporate it into our restoration plan.

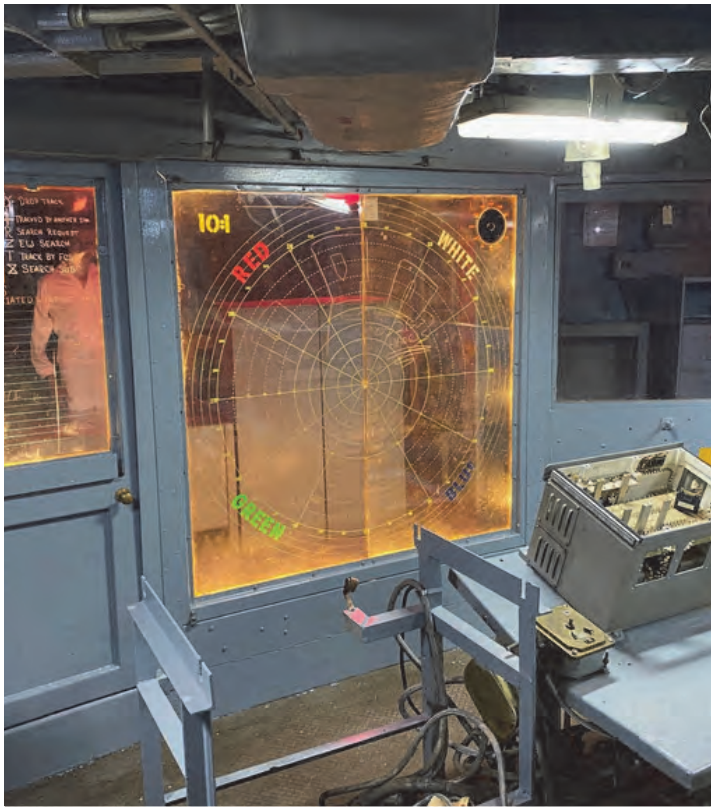
# SAVING OUR SHIPS

## LITTLE ROCK

Work in the Little Rock's CIC has been moving at an exciting space, and the plans we have for the finished product will make it, we believe, an absolute must see part of the Park experience.

Led by volunteer Ryan, CIC is experiencing a major restoration, including the reactivation of the status boards, lighting throughout the space, restoration of previously missing equipment, and most surprisingly, something of an archaeological exploration revealing hidden artifacts and personal effects of the sailors who served aboard this historic and very important ship in her years of service.

After considerable effort and expertise, Ryan and his team have restored a TV monitor in CIC. Based on what we've researched thus far, the monitor could have been used to observe the Talos Missile launcher, or other topside purposes. Just for fun, Ryan found a movie that had come out just a few years after Little Rock had been retired from Service, "Alien" and had it playing on the technologically-appropriate screen. In the image below, you'll one of the horifically defining moments in the film - see if you can which one it is.




# SAVING OUR SHIPS

## LITTLE ROCK

This month saw the return of the Little Rock sailors for their annual work week, and the numbers keep growing! We're thrilled to see the increasing participation in this important week, and in particular by the sailors who maintained and took this ship to sea.

Much was achieved, and some will increase the potential for education and enhancing the overall guest experience.

*Below, Little Rock veteran sailor and signalman Jim worked with veteran electricians to bring the ship's signal lamp back to life. We're working to restore the lamp on her starboard side next, so we'll be able to teach kids and adults alike how to communicate with The Sullivans via flashing light!*

Little Rock sailors also worked on restoring the Missile Battery Room (available through our menu of specialized tours) as well as important maintenance and restoration work throughout the ship.

The maintenance team at the Park joined them for an all-hands-on-deck effort. The ship's medical lab is an entirely restored and brand new exhibit space aboard ship as is the medical records office. Our crew and volunteers have also been working hard at restoring additional Admiral's staff spaces, which we're very much looking forward to sharing with our guests in the future. Some of the most spectacular and impactful areas of the ship have yet to be accessible by the public - they will be soon!


*Left, Signalman Jim flashes the Little Rock's call sign in morse with the newly restored flashing light. Above, the completely renovated Medical Lab.*

# SAVING OUR SHIPS

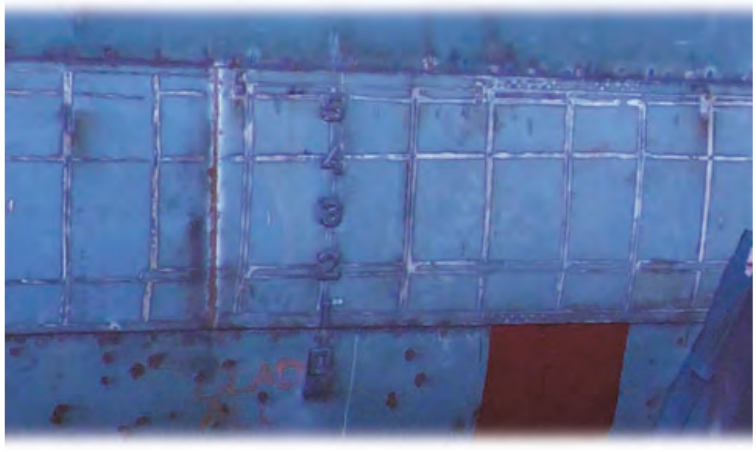
## CURATORS CORNER

### BY SHANE STEPHENSON

When facing a complex project such as a ship's maintenance period in dry dock, relying on organizations that have done it before is paramount.

In preparation for The Sullivans and Croaker going to dry dock, I have had the pleasure of recently visiting USS Kidd while she is in dry dock in Houma, Louisiana. This fact – finding mission afforded me the opportunity to learn a few things. Collating and bringing that information back to our staff, the goal is to lower the "uncertainty factor" for our vessels.

The Kidd and Sullivans were constructed at the same time, with the same building specs, and as such, suffered from similar structural and water incursion issues, though The Sullivans is worse for wear.



Most poignant to our needs was learning the ways the Thoma-Sea shipyard repaired Kidd's hull. The structural and engineering challenges it faced while successfully replacing much of the hull was my most important question.

USS Kidd developed three different plans for the hull's steel. These were Clad Welding, Crop and Renew, and full Plate Replacement. Clad welding was used for hull pitting that did not penetrate too far into the hull, and welds were used to fill those in and bring the new metal out to the hull surface. Crop and Renew was used in the "touch points" given Kidd's pilon and collar system while on display.

The cropped steel was cut, thicker plating was added while also adding more longitudinal and transverse frames to hold it in place. Plate Replacement was used in those areas where the steel was too wasted, necessitating the need to add plates of new steel. These three plans will ensure that Kidd survives another 80 years! I can't thank Parks, Tim, Molly, and Omar enough for their southern hospitality while having Ken from the History X channel visiting was an enjoyable surprise! We often say in the museum ship community – One Fleet! With this visit, it was so true!"

# SAVING OUR SHIPS

## VOLUNTEERS

2025 has already been a spectacular year for volunteers, both individually and part of our corporate partnership programs.

We've welcomed aboard administrative volunteers to help us manage our wide array of programs, events, and communications. We've now built a cadre of technically-savvy volunteers to help us improve our ships and our guest's experience through restoration efforts and technological enhancements. We're starting to add skilled tradespeople to our volunteer team who open up an exciting array of new possibilities in improving habitability, overnight guest comfort and safety.

Our hard-working gardens and grounds volunteer team is already busy building the most spectacular commemorative gardens in all of Western New York, and they're always looking for passionate gardeners to join them.

Without this increasing number of dedicated and impressive volunteers, we have little chance of becoming the world-class museum experience we know we can be. The Buffalo and Erie County Naval and Military Park is more than just a tourist attraction. It can be a life-enhancing experience.

The list of companies supporting volunteer events for the very first time this year include Amazon, National Fuel, New York State Electric and Gas, One Bridge, Navy & Coast Guard Chief's Association, Derrick Corporation, University of Buffalo Law School as well as our ongoing relationships and corporate partnerships with M&T Bank, National Grid, Moog, Key Bank

If you work for a company that's looking to contribute to the community in a powerful and lasting way, please consider joining us in a volunteer day of service. If you're an individual who would like to join an ongoing team of volunteers accomplishing extraordinary, we'd love to speak with you.

*Online volunteer form: www.buffalonavalpark.org/volunteer*
*Email: info@buffalonavalpark.org*
*Phone: 716-847-1773*
*Website: https://www.buffalonavalpark.org*
*Buffalo Naval Park Youtube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/@buffalonavalpark*

# OUR VOLUNTEERS MAKING BIG THINGS HAPPEN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