

The Scuba Sports Club Captures Bronx's Fort Schuyler!

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On April 15, several members of The Scuba Sports Club (TSSC) sojourned to Fort Schuyler in the Bronx to visit the Maritime Museum. The Museum is located on the grounds of State University of New York / Maritime College. We had a great time, and the Museum is one of the best-kept secrets of New York City. This Museum is one of the world's leading maritime museums. Anyone with an interest in the sea services or maritime subjects is strongly encouraged to visit this Museum; allot at least three hours to enjoy the comprehensive exhibits in depth. Participants from TSSC included (L->R) Jack Kurz, Kenny Salstrom, Lada Simek, Denise Kurz, Dan Levin and Allan Rios (photo taken by Gary Lehman). Annemarie Mazzucco joined us after our tour for lunch at Leno's in New Rochelle!



The TSSC team on this mission were particularly fortunate to have not just *one*, but *two* experts to help us learn while on our visit: venerable TSSC members Lada Simek and Dan Levin were on



hand to provide *in situ* explanations, context, and background. They shared with us the benefit of their broad and far-ranging knowledge of the Museum exhibits and the Maritime College itself, which provides the home for the Museum. Lada's vast historical and maritime knowledge is legendary; Dan attended the Maritime College and navigated us through the labyrinthine byways, nooks and crannies of the Museum. By way of background, SUNY's Maritime



College offers undergraduate and graduate degrees combining legendary rigorous academics with hands-on learning about merchant ships and their systems, providing a powerful combination of academic and practical knowledge of maritime sciences - mechanical, electrical and marine engineering; naval architecture; logistics; and international trade (among other majors).



Three things grab visitors' attention upon arrival near the Museum. The first is the auspicious setting – the Throgs Neck Bridge connecting New York City's Bronx Borough with Queens Borough. The bridge roadway at center span is about 150' above the water (technically the upper East River, but for all practical purposes the southwestern terminus of Long Island Sound). The two towers are about 200 feet high, for a total height about 360' above the water. (My family lived right near the southern terminus of the Bridge, and I

remember watching it being built in 1959 - 1961).

The second eyecatcher is the 18' diameter bronze five-bladed propeller. It is one of four which propelled the *SS United States* passenger liner. *SS United States* was (and remains) the record-



holder for the fastest trans-Atlantic sprint of a passenger liner. It had two four-bladed and two five-bladed propellers, similar in configuration to the *USS Forrestal* aircraft carrier. The propeller configuration was a US Navy secret for decades! One of the other propellers is nearby, located at the Intrepid Sea Air Space Museum in Manhattan.

The third general impression of the overall site and location is how critical it would have been defending against any amphibious attack on New York City. Any enemy attack from the water directed against Queens, Bronx or Manhattan would have to traverse the narrow body of water

which Fort Schuyler commands from the north looking south. The reader will recall that in the War of 1812 - in which the fledgling United States of America was attacked by the British - the British were able to conduct raids through Chesapeake Bay and attacked Washington DC. The White House, many public building and the US Navy Yard HQ were burned to the ground. This humiliation no doubt weighed heavily on the US military command in the years following the War of 1812, and prompted the construction of Fort Schuyler to defend against an enemy attack against New York City and environs.



Similarly, Fort Totten (immediately across the upper East River and thus very close to Fort Schuyler) was built during the Civil War to provide supporting enfilading crossfire. Woe to any enemy ships caught in that hellish cauldron of shot and shell! (There are actually quite a few forts defending the greater NYC area from seaborne attack. These include Forts Tilden and Hamilton in Brooklyn with immediately-adjacent Fort Wadsworth across the Verrazano Narrows,

defending the approaches to Brooklyn, Staten Island and Manhattan; Fort Hancock in Sandy Hook New Jersey; Battery Park in Lower Manhattan and the fort on Governors Island defending lower Manhattan; and Fort Michie on Great Gull Island in Long Island Sound (along with many other fortresses on Long Island).

The first part of the fort we toured was right inside the entrance to the fort -- the interdenominational chapel. This is a uniquely spiritual sanctuary, with Christian, Jewish and Muslim devotional sections. The diverse brotherhood of mariners since time immemorial, with shared love of the oceans of the world and shared risks entailed plying the world's oceans comes together in this beautiful chapel. One could not help but be inspired - and recall the plaintive hymn by William Whiting imploring the eternal Force to grant protection from the perils listed in Psalm 107:

*Eternal Father strong to save
Whose arm has bound the restless wave
Who bids the mighty ocean deep
It's own appointed limits keep
O hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in Peril on the sea...*



The day was crisp, brisk and spring-like, complete with budding flowers and trees - making for a wonderful day by the sea!



The polygonal fort with underground ammunition storage is crafted from carefully cut granite. The workmanship all around is astounding. The granite is quite beautiful. Fort Schuyler's military architecture reflected the artillery technology prevalent in the mid-1800's – smooth-bore cannon (which were inherently short-range) and black powder as the propellant (creating clouds of blue/black smoke and fumes). 312 gun ports are provided for small-arms fire which would have protected the fort from infantry attack – had it ever actually been attacked!



The informational exhibits inside the Museum are too numerous to recount here in depth, but suffice it to say that all with an interest in maritime history in general and that of the Northeast and New York City will have hours-worth of substantial learning and fascinating displays to examine. Prominently featured are nautical artwork; maritime ways and means; technological advances such as containerization and radar; the role of commercial maritime trade in the growth of New York and of the United States; the role of the Navy in the emergence of the United States as a major world power exemplified by the Great White Fleet (President Theodore Roosevelt ordered 16 battleships and their escort vessels to circumnavigate the world from 1907 to 1909 to present the United States emergence as a transcontinental 'blue water' Navy and world super-power); the military aspects and role of the sea services; the contributions of the Merchant

Marine in the defeat of fascism in the Second World War, and the technology of the Liberty and Victory ships – these are all among the many subjects so ably chronicled in the Museum.

Interspersed with the Museum exhibits are a beautiful library, memorials to shipmates and sailors lost at sea and to those who were killed in the line of duty during the wars in which they defended our freedoms and protected our interests, classrooms, lecture halls, and laboratory facilities where students at the Maritime College have labored mightily in their studies. Our own Dan recalled many long, hard lectures - and the gut-wrenching exams administered in these very halls! We could all connect with the exhibit about the *Andrea Doria* along with the poignant arcana of shipboard life aboard the *Doria* on display; and I connected in particular with the display on Cunard Line's *RMS Queen Elizabeth* (launched 1938) – on which I was a passenger in August 1968 on one of her final (if not *the* final) trans-Atlantic voyages.

Warm round of thanks to Lada Simek for his leadership on our tour of Fort Schuyler, and 'present arms' to Dan for his successes at The Maritime College and for giving us insight into life at the College, and the rigors and rewards of the academics and seamanship skills there embarked!



