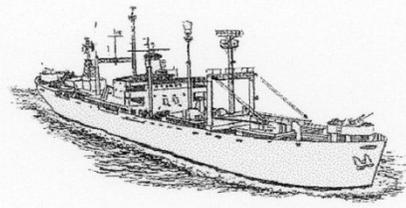


YAGRGRAM #61 - Fall 2011



Sea Stories

Pete Bowman, AGR-11 (Protector) 1960-62, EM2

I have been thinking about writing some sea stories for some time. A combination of procrastination and something like the phrase from Mark Twain “the older I get the more things I remember never happened” has kept me from giving it a whirl. I think I have a few sea stories in my head someplace. The fact that the last YAGRGRAM had no sea stories and that my CO Guy Noble on the USS Protector, AGR 11 had two stories in the #56 YAGRGRAM has finally put me over the edge. I joined the Protector in early 1960. I was an 18 year old FA with an electrician rating. I grew up on Long Island Sound and thought of myself as a boating person. In other words I already felt like “an old salt.” We left the dock in Davisville and started to steam toward the Atlantic. I was stationed in the aft emergency generator room. As we sat around talking, I started to feel a little funny. So I asked the real old salt in the room if it was always this rough. He laughed and said “kid, go outside and see where we are.” We were still in the harbor steaming past Newport. The swells were causing the ship to roll up and down and I was definitely going south fast. Soon I was sick as a dog. My shipmates were very thoughtful. They hung my ditty bag on the end of my bunk so I could see it sway back and forth. They also talked about dinner and told me it was oysters on a string so if I didn’t like them, they could be pulled back out. For the next two days I prayed for death.

Alas I survived and we steamed to our picket station off Nova Scotia. Here is where I hope my memory has not created a fantasy or that this memory was really from my first picket. My recollection is that we hit a terrible storm. The ship



sustained some serious damage and opened up an 80 foot hole from the 1st hold into the 2nd. It took us

something like several days or a week to steam back to Davisville. We had to strap ourselves into our bunks with life jackets to sleep. I have a vague memory of a DE that was in our area losing its forward gun mount. Welcome to the NAVY at sea ☺ My next stories will involve Strafford Morse, my engineering officer (referred to as Stretch Morse by Guy Noble’s story) who participated in one of my 10 most significant life events, and the experience of secretly steaming to Key West and beyond during the Bay of Pigs event if it is proper to write about this.

Ray Germany, AGR-12 (Vigil) 1958-60

I spent a couple of months on the deck gang, then deck yeoman, and also helped in the personnel office for about 8 months, then the rest of the time striking for Radioman in the Radio Shack.

Once I hitchhiked from Davisville RI to Waco, TX. I caught a ride on a P2V Neptune from Quonset Pt. to Jacksonville, FL. Got to ride in the bubble up at the front of the plane. That was neat. Hitchhiked to Pensacola FL, and caught a ride on a Beechcraft going to Tucson, AZ. It stopped for refueling in Abilene, TX, and I got off and hitchhiked to Waco.

The second time I hitchhiked from Davisville to Waco via land. The longest ride I got was from Harrisburg, PA to Knoxville, TN, about 500 miles.

That's a good ride. Another interesting thing on that particular trip was I caught a ride with a drunk at Chattanooga, TN going south up Lookout Mountain. He dropped me off at Ft. Payne, GA on top of Lookout Mountain at 3 am on a Sunday morning, and I was stuck there till 6:30 am when I caught my next ride. He had a dilemma. His girl wouldn't marry him until he stopped drinking, and he wasn't going to stop drinking until his girl married him. I've often wondered how that turned out. Not good likely.

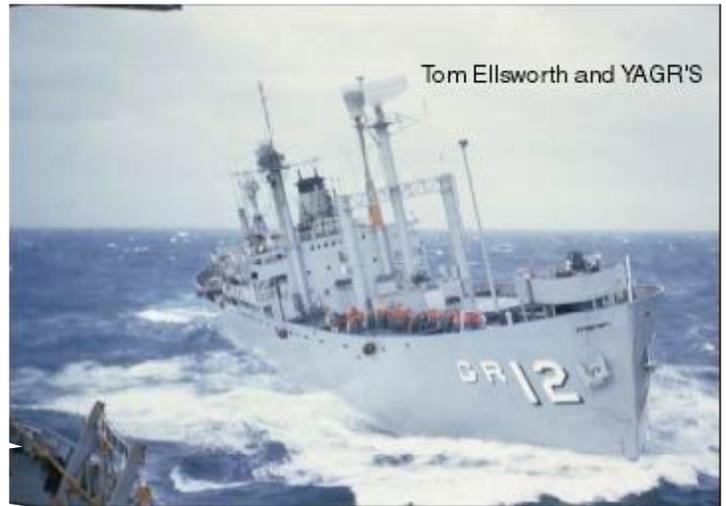
During that same (second) trip, I was hitchhiking across the top of MS on what's now US 20, I would see this lady pass me by, catch a short ride, see this lady pass me by again, catch another short ride, etc. Finally the lady picked me up. Turned out she was married to the son of the older couple that lived across the street from me in Waco. Now that's unusual!

Once when we were leaving Station 12, the northern most station, and were on the way back to Davisville after being relieved, I was forward lookout. I was on the mid-watch, and the sea was like glass. The stars were out. It was a beautiful night. With little imagination it seemed as if I was suspended in space with stars all above me, and stars all below me. I never will forget the peacefulness of that moment.

Once when a hurricane passed over our station (we were too late, and too slow to move out of the way) I went (below decks) to the back of the ship, and went up to the weather deck (closed at that time), then when the ship leveled out, ran a short distance forward to the shack where I worked as Deck Yeoman. It had a porthole, and I could stand

in the shack and watch the waves. They were 45 ft. high, and looking between them was like looking down a valley between two mountains. Never will forget that either.

Once during a storm on one of the northern stations about 3 am, the Bosun mate woke us up; told us the motor whale boat had come loose, was tearing itself up, and we had to bring it in. Up on deck it was snowing, and the deck was slippery. I happened to be the first in line pulling on the after line of the motor whale boat. I took a heave and my feet slipped out from under me. All of a sudden



USS Vigil (AGR-12) Coming along side the USS Protector (AGR-11)

I was on the deck on my back headed for the edge. The only thing that stopped me from going over was that 2 or 3 inch strip of metal sticking up at the edge. I don't know what the bosun thought (OMG!!!), but he screamed at me to get my butt back in line and help.

Saw the YAGR Exhibit on the USS Massachusetts a few weeks ago. Beautiful!