



YAGRGRAM #93 - WINTER 2024/25

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THIS IS THE LAST ISSUE OF THE YAGRGRAM TO BE PUBLISHED

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MINUTES OF YAGRS ASSOCIATION BUSINESS MEETING - September 19, 2024

Lee Doyel called the meeting to order and welcomed the group.

He commented that 13 of the 16 ships were represented at the reunion. Also that was the same number at the very first reunion. The USS Tracer AGR-15 had the most with 13, then the USS VIGIL AGR-12 with 11 and USS Guardian AGR-1 with 9. AGR-7, 8 and 13 were not represented.

Mel Harder, Secretary was not present but there will be a LAST YAGRGRAM with the business meeting minutes, reunion pictures, amount given to the battleship, official report to IRS that we no longer exist.

Ray Ostrowski, Treasurer, gave a detailed report of expenses and noted there were some additional expenses to be paid like hospitality room costs and other reunion expenses. He estimated that the final money to be given to the battleship would be approximately \$24,000 but the exact figure will be in the last YAGRGRAM. Some unease was expressed as to how the ship would spend the money. So it was agreed that some restrictions might or should be applied to the money in order for it to be utilized judiciously. Roland Cote would oversee the expenditures. Lee Doyel would research the IRS and money restriction areas and the results will be in the last YAGRGRAM.

Roland Cote, Museum Keeper, reported that the YAGRS exhibit was in good shape and could be viewed after the decommissioning ceremony on the battleship. Lee noted he had given Roland a box containing discs of all the graphics, movies, pictures given by members, etc for storage at the exhibit.

Frank Pulaski, Webmaster, reported that we get enough hits on the site for it to come up at the head of the list. The site has approximately 6 or 7 years left on its lease. He plans to increase this to 10 years (the maximum time) and another after that 10 if he is alive at that time. He will take down the ships store segment on his return home from the reunion.

Lee reported he had 2 YAGRS books left and was put on the table with the free miscellaneous paraphernalia left over from the ships store. He also noted the book with corrections was on a CD which he had and was also in the box of CDs he gave Roland.

The ships store will be dissolved and the site removed from the web site. The left over items like the ships hat pins, reunion hat pins, patches, etc. will be given to the battleship for sale in their gift shop.

Lee comment that the decommissioning ceremony would have to be held inside and not on the fan tail due to weather conditions. He note that founder Harry Miller envisioned the YAGRS to be for 10 yrs. However he guided it for 14 yrs and Lee did 13 yrs for a total of 27 reunions.

A final act was a motion to disband the Association and give any remaining monies the USS Massachusetts BB-59 by December 31, 2024. Motion was seconded and approved by the group.

A final act of the group was a standing ovation for Lee in recognition of his 13 yrs of leadership of the Association.

INVOCATION

Lord I ask your blessing on this ceremony and thank you for this gathering today in this endeavor. Lord, we thank you for preserving us alive, sustaining us, and bringing us together to renew old friendships and in unison to honor and remember our shipmates and those we worked along side of who are unable to be here or are no longer with us. We pray that our departed shipmates will rest in peace and have glory in eternal life. Grant that we never forget them.

We served during a unique time in history. One of world tension, when a series of blips on our radar scopes could mean the start of a nuclear war. We had no heroic battles except for the powerful forces of nature or mechanical failures. But our purpose was very clear; to protect our country from attack. Apparently we were successful as no war was initiated while we were watching.

The names of our ships said it all: Guardian, Lookout, Skywatcher, Searcher, Scanner, Locator, Picket, Interceptor, Investigator, Outpost, Protector, Vigil, Interdictor, Interpreter, Tracer, Watchman. But the ships are gone now. But we remain and are grateful that an association was formed to establish and preserve what we did through our exhibit aboard this famous battleship. And for bringing us

YAGR HISTORY/LEGACY

Again I welcome you to this gathering. This is our 27th reunion and the third time in the Rhode Island/Massachusetts area. And the third time for a function on this ship. I see there are some guests present that are not members of the YAGRS association. Welcome, glad you could attend.

I want to take a few minutes to recognize individuals in the Association that have been an immeasurable benefit in the running of YAGRS. It could not have been done without them. Please stand as I call out your name.

First, Armond Lamarche, Treasurer, Then Ray Ostrowski who succeeded him. And Mel Harder, Secretary, who puts out the YAGRGRAM newsletter. Frank Pulaski who designed and maintained the Association's web site. Roland Cote who oversees the museum onboard this ship. Suzanne Attig who takes all those reunion pictures. Also John King who is 96 and a WWII veteran. Last but not least, Brian Forrester who was indispensable in assisting with the contract negotiations with hotels and tour agencies. As several of you present know, he also takes care of hotel registration problems for members.

Also of note there are 3 members here that were at the first reunion held in 1996 in nearby Newport. They are Fred Ackerman, (stand up), David Batt, & George Wirt. Any

together annually to share the very special comraderie of being a YAGR sailor.

Now Lord be with us as we come to our final days of this mutual association of friends and ship mates. We thank you for all that you have done with the group over the years and ask that you continue be with us individually as we depart from one another.

Amen.



Lee Doyel lead the YAGRE decommissioning ceremony aboard the battleship USS Massachusetts

others here that were at the first one.? David was also at the second reunion in Baltimore which was my first one. Since I was the only one from my ship he graciously invited me to be photographed with him as an interloper in his ships reunion picture. As previously stated many are not here but their surviving spouses are. I want thank all those wives that endured all those trials and tribulations their men went through with their careers. Whatever the career was. Particularly if it was a Navy career. I know my wife had a great deal in my career and my making Captain. She wore a T shirt that said "Navy wife. The toughest job in the Navy" No truer words were ever spoken. I want to note that long time member Jan Murray who planned to be here but passed away recently. His wife has continued to carry on and is present today. Eileen, please stand.

While planning this reunion I kept thinking of the time we spent in the Navy and our various duties onboard the ships. I know that during past reunions we re-lived, talked, articulated, discussed, big-mouthed, various experiences we had while aboard the ships. Some of the events related boggled the imagination and when retold at a succeeding reunions seemed to grow in stature and size. So I decided to try and put the situation in perspective and relate the background and history of our ships and the YAGRS Association. A lot of what I will say will not be new or unknown to most present here today. However I feel we

should be reminded of what we were and where we came from.

The time period from the end of WWII in 1945 to the dissolution in 1991 of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, ie Russia, is generally known as the Cold War. The USSR possessed an aggressive and supremacy oriented agenda which threatened the free world. It fell to the US and its allies to deploy defenses against the Russian agenda. The ships of YAGRS Association were part of this effort. In the late 1940s and early 50s the Navy was assigned the task of extending the Distant Early Warning line seaward. DERs from WWII were initially used, but it soon became evident that a larger and more stable platform was needed.

The Navy looked for a ship that would offer a stable platform with space for all the electronics and radar that needed to be carried aboard. The World War II Liberty Ship was decided on as the best type.

In 1954 the conversions of these ships started. The new class of ship was called the Guardian Class and classified as YAGR.

I looked up YAGR in an old copy of the Blue Jacket Manual



Harry Miller - founder of YAGR'S Association
YAGR'S 8th Reunion - 2003
Pensacola Florida

photo by Mel Harder

and it was listed as "radar". In other places it was listed as Auxiliary, Miscellaneous, Radar. I also heard of another unverified version. I emphasize unverified. However it is a version sailors like to pass around. Congress sets the number of capital ships like carriers, cruisers, frigates, etc. Large hulled ships. Liberty ships are large hull and putting them into active service would have exceed the authorized number of ships. In an effort to get around this, there is always a way in the Navy to get around a restriction, they used the designation YAGR with the Y standing for yard craft which did not have a limited number. Some yard craft! Can't you just see a 450 foot craft puttering around the

harbor among small service craft & boats. The Y was dropped in 1958 and all 16 picket ships were designated AGR.

At the end of the conversions there were 8 ships home-ported at Davisville, Rhode Island and 8 ships home ported at Treasure Island, San Francisco Bay California. After the conversions, the ships did not change their outward appearance much, except for their distinct radars. Special radars and electronics were designed for these ships. Even the capital ships like carriers, cruisers, frigates, etc did not have as good equipment. Not only did these ships extend radar coverage seaward, they also tracked and directed aircraft and reported weather conditions. They took on numerous other collateral duties including transmitting fishing reports and launched oceanographic drift bottles.

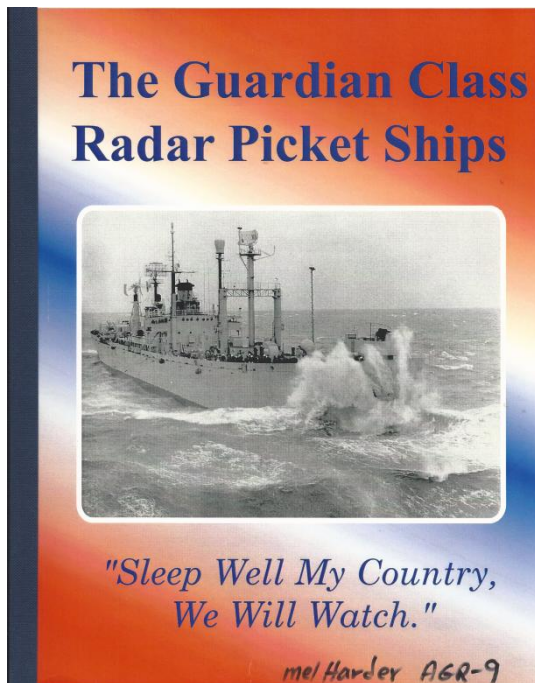
Because these ships spent so much time at sea, usually 60 to 70% of each year. 220 to 250 days, habitability was a prime concern. Living conditions were not like any other ship. The officers had their own private staterooms. Chief Peter Officers shared a stateroom with another. First Class Petty Officers shared a stateroom with 4 men. The crew had chief Petty Officer type bunks and mattresses. The mess decks were similar to a civilian restaurant and the food rivaled shore base galleys. They were decorated in cheerful colors and doubled as unofficial crews lounge. To avoid boredom on the long patrols, each ship came up with ingenious ways to entertain themselves. There were fishing tournaments, theater plays, skeet shooting, swim call, topside barbecues. All ships had a movie theater in one of the cargo holds. Other cargo holds held hobby shops, basketball courts, archery ranges, weight lifting rooms, libraries, wood working shops, volleyball courts. One ship even had a small swimming pool topside on number 3 hatch.

Although the ships were Navy and manned by Navy personnel, they were under the operational control of North American Air Defense Command more commonly known as NORAD. The ships reported to NORAD using their procedures and requirements.

That presented some interesting situations on occasions when the ship wanted or needed something, each service pointed to the other, stating that was their responsibility. Through out their tenure the ships performed well and were outstanding in their duties. In 1961 my ship, the Tracer, won the Pacific Fleet trophy for weather accuracy. It also won the Ney award in 1964 for the best mess afloat for its class. Other ships received various awards in the performance of their duties. Most notable were the East coast ships response to the Cuban Missile crises.

When I graduated from OCS I was given orders to the USS TRACER AGR15 at Treasurer Island in San Francisco Bay. I asked around as to what kind of ship it was. No one seemed to know. I was assigned as relief for the

Engineering Officer and was to go to Engineering School in San Diego before reporting to the ship. While there the Tracer's Engineering Officer sent me the ship's engineering book. I showed it to the class instructor and he didn't know what to make of it and said there was nothing like it in the Navy. This was the beginning of a long effort of dealing with supply and parts acquisition and repair efforts on something no one knew anything about. The class I was in was teaching 600 and 1,200 psi steam turbine engines which was the power plants for Navy ships. Well when I got to the ship and I took a look in the engine room. I then went to my state room and threw all my class notes out the port hole. The power plant was a 220 psi triple expansion reciprocating steam engine which limited the ship's speed to 10 knots. The movie Titanic shows what type of engines that were on our ships.



During WWII Liberty Ships were built cheaply, approximately one million dollars a ship, and considered to be expendable. If they made more than one trip it was considered a success. Speaking of being expendable, in reality and retrospect the AGRs were also expendable. We were on point and would be the first to know the start of any hostilities. Out there on those lonely patrols and endless night watches, you could do some serious thinking. When it came down to it, I think deep down most of us knew we were expendable. You realized how vulnerable you were when on a mid watch, a surface radar contact would come close aboard and couldn't be seen and then disappear. You soon learned that those mysterious contacts were probably submarine snorkels, whose we never knew. The saying on my ship was "if we disappeared, you knew the war was on." In retrospect you always wonder if you really had much effect in the big picture. Ours was in what was termed the Cold War although there were hot areas like the Cuban Missile Crisis. Recon planes shot down, ships and aircraft harassed, etc. Some have listed that the Cold War was a time of "violent peace." How significance

were we in keeping the Cold War cold? Who knows.? Perhaps in the future as the Russian archives become more open and available we will learn exactly where we were on their priority list. Because we were early warning, I suspect it was near the top. I would like to think we were a big deterrent at the time. Anyway we can claim it. To my knowledge no Russian aircraft got through undetected.

Since the AGR radar picket ships were virtually unknown through out the Navy and military history in general, Hull Technician Chief (HTC) Harry Miller USNR (ret) formed the YAGRS Association in 1995. He initiated the process of locating and contacting former crew members of the 16 ships. The first reunion was held in May 1996 in Newport, Rhode Island with 42 former crew members and their guests and spouses. 13 of the 16 ships were represented. Ironically 13 ships of the 16 are also represented at this last reunion. It was organized for the sailors and officers who were in these commands to enjoy shared experiences, memories and comradeship they had during those long and lonely vigils on the Atlantic and Pacific Barriers. It was also organized to preserve the history of our organization and to inform the public of our place in it. We owe a great deal of gratitude to Harry for not only conceiving of the organization but implementing it so successfully. The latest figures show we have located over 2,500 former crew members. Over the next few years Harry with membership help was able to build an exhibit/museum about our ships onboard this battleship. With the help of crew members he also compiled a 140 page multi colored book about our picket ships, their mission, operations, electronics, equipment, etc. That book has been sent to the Library of congress, Navy Heritage Museum, Cold War Museum, Liberty Ship Museum and other similar organizations. History has shown that documents frequently outlast the structures they were housed in.

I think it is appropriate that the exhibit be on a battleship. A battleship is at the other end of the spectrum from a cargo ship and as such, the exhibit will be exposed to more people. It will acquaint and inform the public of the importance of the picket ships during their 10 years of history and their place in winning the Cold War. In fact I just recently received an email from a Navy LT who had recently toured the Massachusetts and discovered our exhibit. He was amazed at it and was unaware of that part of the Navy, He then related how on 9/11 how his ship along with several others were ordered out to sea to act as radar picket ships until the situation could be sorted out. This shows that forward radar interceptions and early warning will always be necessary. Even with over the horizon radar and satellite coverage, "boots on the ground" will always be needed.

As the years passed attendance at reunions grew into the hundreds. Over that time we established new friendships and lasting attachments. Also as time went on, time took its

toll as it does on all things. Attendance dropped due to deaths, medical and personal circumstances. Attendance has now dwindled to the point it is no longer feasible to

continue reunions. Therefore the reason for this ceremony. I now ask Quincy, Frank and Steve to take their positions for the final act of this ceremony.

BENEDICTION

Eternal father, strong to save, whose arm doth calm the restless wave please be with us as we come to the end of this ceremony. Lord we thank you for all that you have done for us over the years and ask that as we formally dissolve this association that you continue to bless us individually and ask for long and happy lives for all of us

here today. We pray that we have kept the faith and that this association of sailors deserves a, Bravo Zulu, a well done thou good and faithful servant. Now as we dismiss and our bodies take substance, we ask that you bless the food to the nourishment of our bodies and us to thy service.
Amen

**YAGRS
ASSOCIATION**



Decommissioning Ceremonies

Onboard USS Massachusetts BB-59

September 19, 2024

ORDER OF SERVICE

Pledge of Allegiance Leader	Guests Ed Carlin
Invocation	Ray Ostrowski
Opening remarks	Capt Lee Doyel
Wreath Casting Bagpiper	Daniel Norton Paul Langenus Steve Phelps
Rifle Salute	USMC Reserves
YAGRS History/Legacy	Capt Lee Doyel
Flag Folding Taps	Quincy Ellis Frank Pulaski Steve Mierzejewski
Benediction	Brian Forrester
Dismissal	Capt Lee Doyel

Lunch in the Wardroom

HISTORY OF THE BUGLE

The bugle being used in this ceremony by Quincy Ellis is from the USS Guardian AGR-1 and has been in his possession for the past 59 years. During those years he has played at numerous funerals, patriotic ceremonies, graduation events, etc.

The uniform he wears at the ceremonies is that of an infantryman in the late 1800s. The prussion blue piping denotes infantry. Red piping denotes artillery, orange is for dragoons, and green is for mounted rifle.

The bugle will be encased with a "letter from the bugle" and displayed in the YAGRS museum along with other artifacts.

The three shot volley represents
Duty, Honor, Sacrifice

FOLDS OF THE FLAG

First -	Stands for LIBERTY
Second -	Represents UNITY
Third -	Stands for JUSTICE
Fourth -	Symbolizes PERSEVERANCE
Fifth -	Represents HARDINESS
Sixth -	Stands for VALOR
Seventh -	Symbolizes PURITY
Eighth -	Represents INNOCENCE
Ninth -	Signifies SACRIFICE
Tenth -	Stands for HONOR
Eleventh -	Symbolizes INDEPENDENCE
Twelfth -	Represents TRUTH
Thirteenth -	Represents the 13 COLONIES

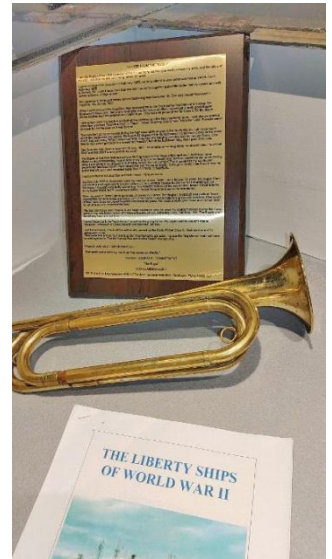
The triangle shape of the flag represents the three corner hat worn by the revolutionary soldiers.

Received from ROLAND R COTE

All memorabilia have found their permanent homes aboard BB-59.



Roland Cote, YAGRE coordinator with the battleship USS Massachusetts



Reunion photos (by Suzanne Attig)



Lee and Brian Forrester, YAGR reunion coordinator



Lee with Frank Pulaski, YAGR website administrator



More reunion photos from Suzzane Attig



Memo from Lee Doyel

As per the Associations bylaws, the money remaining in the treasury is to be given to the USS Massachusetts BB-59 for our exhibit/museum spaces. The exact amount at this publishing is unknown as the YAGRGRAM printing and mailing expenses are unknown. However, I will promulgate the exact amount via the Ships Coordinators when determined. For those of you not on the coordinators list, it will be in the area of \$22,500.

