

Kenneth Cooley (AGR-16, 1962-64)

I served on USS Watchman (AGR-16) as Engineering Officer for 2 years. On one of our Pacific patrols we were slowly steaming across our assigned station during some very nice sunny weather. It was noon and the off-watch officers were in the Wardroom eating lunch. On Watchman (and I think the same was true for all of the AGR's), the Wardroom table sat parallel with the forward bulkhead, which had uniformly spaced portholes, with curtains, facing the bow. Those of us sitting on the after side of the table faced the portholes (bow), the Captain, CDR Kent Lawson, sat at the head of the table and LT Jim Jefferis (XO and Navigator) sat at the Captain's right, with his back to the bow and portholes. The ship was on a generally northerly heading with LTJG Glen Krawiec serving as OOD.

As we were having lunch the sun began to shine through the portholes and, after a while, was enough to blind those of us sitting on the after side of the table facing the bow. The XO asked the Steward to pull the drapes to block the sunlight. Just as it dawned on him that the sun was shining over the bow and we were supposed to be heading north, the Messenger of the Watch entered the Wardroom and addressed the Captain with "Good afternoon sir, the Officer of the Watch sends his respects and would like to inform the Captain that the sun has just shifted 90 degrees." The timing and message was so funny that even the XO had to laugh as we all jumped up and headed for the

bridge. Once there we found that the 400 Cycle MG Set power to the Gyro had been lost, and as the Gyro slowed down, it started drifting. The Steersman followed the Gyro and slowly turned the ship over a period of time until it suddenly became apparent that the sun wasn't supposed to be shining from the North. I don't know what the Quartermaster of the Watch said to the XO, since he had been duly entering the Gyro vs Magnetic Compass headings into the Log each half hour, and they had not changed. The word "Gundecking" comes to mind.

I got my IC Man and we found that earlier in the morning the Quartermasters had been chipping the deck on the Flying Bridge just above the Controller connecting the MG Set to the Gyro. The vibration had caused the breaker to open, cutting power to the Gyro and allowing it to slow down and drift. We also found that the Gyro Alarm was hooked into the circuit between the generator and the MG Set on the assumption (I guess) that a loss of power from the generator was the normal problem that would cause a Gyro failure. Since there was no loss of power to the MG Set, the Gyro Alarm had not gone off. We corrected this by moving the alarm point to the Gyro side of the Controller. This apparently worked; as for the rest of the time I was on Watchman we never had another instance of the sun shifting 90 degrees during a watch.