



### **William Matheson (AGR-1, 1962-63)**

The departure of the USS Guardian AGR-1 from the CB Center, Davisville, R.I. on 16 October 1962 seemed very routine with the exception of having embarked with a young Air Force NCO who had exchanged duty stations with one of our Petty Officers for the duration of the cruise expected to last about three weeks. The young airman was stationed at one of the Communications Stations to which we reported our tracking information and had never been to sea before. We stood out to sea and began steaming for Picket Station 18, off the Virginia Cape.

On 17 October we relieved the USS Skywatcher AGR-3. On 19 October, the seas and wind had been building with the approach of Hurricane Ella. The seas were 25 feet and winds at 48 knots and the ship was rolling up to 30 degrees. Meals in the wardroom became gymnastic. Attempting to control glasses and china, the stewards wet down the table cloth to slow down the sliding dinnerware and served individual portions in the pantry. By dinner time very few were interested in eating and we were served sandwiches. The following day, we were feeling the full force of Ella. Seas had built to 40-45 feet. I was on watch in the pilot house observing the anemometer at the very instant that the wind carried away the gear as it passed 80 knots. The eye of the storm was clearly painted on the surface search radar passing 35 miles from our position. The wind continued to build. The massive air search radar antenna was locked down; the ship's rolling made tracking air contacts impossible. Sleeping was accomplished only by pushing one's back against the bulkhead and locking your legs against the opposite edge of the bunk. The maximum roll of the ship was recorded at 34 degrees. The rain flew horizontally and there was no defined line between wave, spray, and rain. The roar of the wind and the creaking of the ship was intense.

As the ocean returned to a more normal state over the next couple of days, the message traffic increased rapidly. The topic: Cuba and Russia. On 23 October we were ordered to steam south to Picket Station 20 which was not normally manned. There off Miami we positioned ourselves between what would be the route that Russian bombers would be on and the forming blockade of Cuba. US Navy vessels steamed by us to form up. I remember watching USS Boston CAG-1 steam by on the horizon and at that moment I felt a little like Mr. Roberts in the scene in which he watches the destroyer pass on its way to battle. Then I considered that, if the balloon does go up, we will be the early warning sentinel and would be the first to be blown out of the water with only two manually trained 3"50's for protection.

The activity was intense, as we were charged with reporting everything in the air, inbound and outbound. Other than the heavy workload, the greatest challenges were watching the same 8 movies over and over again and the deteriorating menu. The first ten days we had fresh milk, then recently thawed frozen milk, and finally powdered milk.

On 17 November, we steamed into Davisville, R.I. after 33 days at sea. The young Air Force NCO ran down the brow, kissed the pier, and vowed never to go to sea again.

**Do you have a good sea story that you would like to pass along?  
Send it in for possible publication in one of the YAGRGRAMS.**

