



Submitted by Gordon L. Broome, ETR2, USS Searcher (AGR-4)

While serving aboard the USS Searcher (ARG-4) as an ET in 1962, my Chief Warrant Officer, John H. Swanson, discovered that we both had Amateur Radio Licenses. Mine was only a novice license at the time. I had gotten interested in it back in 1954, when I [redacted]

W9HXP/MM



U. S. S. SEARCHER - AGR - 4
USS SEARCHER is a member of the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD). Its mission is to detect and track all aircraft flying across the Atlantic Ocean toward the United States.

We did a lot of communications like that on Sundays. When I was discharged that same year I kept in contact with John at sea until he retired to his home in Annapolis, MD where he set up his own ham shack with his wife Bernice. We kept in contact until he moved to a retirement home in Arizona and passed away years later. Your webmaster Frank Pulaski (ham call WT1B) and I tried to contact him while he was still alive to say we were having these great YAGR reunions but were unsuccessful. Attached is a QSL card,

RADIO W8TLW CONFIRMING
OUR 2245 MC A-3 20W
OF June 11
GMT 1043 19 62
UR SIGS QSA 5 S 9
XMTR. Johnson "Liberator"
RX Drake-2B
A good shd 950. Had
back to you on College Station.
After a fine good 1st. John
JOHN H. SWANSON, JR.
CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER
UNITED STATES NAVY
U.S.S. SEARCHER, AGR-1
5th FLEET POST OFFICE
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

which is exchanged to verify that two hams made contact, of a contact I had with John aboard the Searcher in 1962. (notice the 3 cent stamp). Hope to see you guys in 2021.

A Navy Bugler by Joseph Walsh

I was aboard the *Searcher* from '60-'62. There were many stories I could relate. This is only one of them.

When I graduated from Officers Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island, I requested duty on a carrier or cruiser out of San Diego or a destroyer home-ported in Hawaii. Did I get any of my requests? Negative, negative. I was assigned to a ship home-ported in Davisville, Rhode Island, just across the Narragansett Bay from OCS. It was an old Liberty ship built in 1945 to carry war materiel from our East Coast to wherever they were needed. It is not clear if that particular ship ever made war cruises, but it was in mothballs when the Navy acquired it in 1954, gave it the mysterious name *Searcher*, and assigned it to picket duty in the North Atlantic as part of the Distant Early Warning Line, designed to detect Soviet bombers during the Cold War. It was fitted with sophisticated electronic search and tracking equipment used to locate, track and report enemy aircraft (bogies) and direct high-speed interceptor aircraft in event of enemy attack. That is what the book said anyway. Sailors aboard her described the duty as boring, numbing, and tedious. There was an occasional run into a hurricane to add a bit of adventure. *Searcher* was 441 feet by fifty-six feet



and 133 enlisted men. As the Junior Officer and lowest level commissioned officer on board, Navy tradition made me the SLDO, *shitty-little-duty officer*. No naval training is needed to know its meaning. The Commanding Officer of the vessel was Lieutenant commander R.T. Bailey, a graduate of the Naval Academy who was the embodiment of all the bad captains you have read about in books and seen in movies. He was short and slight, bandy legged with a voice that sounded like a cast reel spinning. "WEEELL, Mr. Walsh, I trust your duty here will be successful and result in no bad marks on your Fitness Report. Communications is very important duty aboard this ship. I don't know but would find out. Later that week, I was summoned to the Captain's quarters. On my way up the ladder, I wondered if my radioman had screwed up, or perhaps it was just me again! I was relieved when the Captain indicated he wanted me to get ahold of a bugle for QM Bates. He had noticed that I had taken an interest in Bates' advancement. He didn't like it when I inquired what a bugle had to do with the QM3 exam. "WEEELL, Mr. Walsh, if you knew anything at all about early Naval history, you would not have needed to ask that questions That's the problem with you OCS officers. Check NAVPERS 10137B." I went to the ship's office and asked for the document. The First Class in charge murmured, "That's funny, Mr. Engine Room and summoned a welder to his quarters. The next time I was on the bridge, I noted that a combination safe had been welded to the bulkhead near the Quartermasters' table. The *Searcher* returned to Davisville with no bugle reveille and no bugle rendering of honors. Before the ship had been secured to the dock, the Captain came over the loudspeaker: "After the unfortunate incident with the ship's bugle, a safe has been welded to the bulkhead on the bridge. It will have a *twenty-four* hour watch while in port! Ensigns Walsh and Baldwin will be responsible for purchasing another bugle. Should that bugle suffer an unfortunate disappearance, the ensigns will be placed in hack for their remaining tours on the *Searcher*!" As we were disembarking, Quartermaster Bates gave us \$12.50 that he had collected for the *Billy-Boy* fund. Baldwin and I reported to the *Sailors' Arms* to plan our next move. A few Virginia-Gentleman bourbons would assist our creativity. The lieutenant at the Salvation Army was not as sympathetic as she had been previously. She suggested we buy a bugle at the going rate. Baldwin tried his charm and negotiated diligently, but she would not budge. It cost us fifty bucks, a long way from the amount in the *Billy Boy* fund. Upon departing Davisville, the Captain did not order the bugle used to render honors. However, Billy had to play *Reveille* each morning we were steaming to get on station. *Searcher's* speed was stately. We were doing ten knots and our station was six-hundred miles from port. During the next GQ, Billy play well. Practice was perfecting! Then he came to us in fresh panic. He had placed the bugle in the safe, but had failed to spin the lock. After GQ was secured, he found the bugle safe in the safe, but the *mouthpiece* was missing. The Captain called for an immediate all-officers meeting. Technically, the bugle was *not* missing, and he had not mentioned the mouthpiece. The XO and all other officers agreed. The Captain *had* to sign off on QM Bates request for the third-class test. Subsequently, Bates passed his exam, made QM3 and ultimately was transferred to a carrier on the West Coast. The Captain made Commander, received a transfer, and was given a Destroyer out of Newport. On his first exercise in the North Atlantic, Bailey ran his ship up the rear of a Carrier during General Quarters. Ensign Baldwin made Lieutenant Junior Grade, stayed aboard the *Searcher* and was on her when she lost her single screw during a gale, 450 miles ESE of Cape Cod. A US Navy tug had to take her in tow. Me? I also made LTJG and was

transferred to the *Greenwich Bay*.