

THE OTHER LIBERTY SHIPS



For several years I had thought that we were the only Liberty Ships the Navy had in commission at the time.

However several years ago a computer repairman I had working on my computer stated he was retired Navy and

was on an AGTR which was a liberty ship and he was

stationed off Vietnam. Research disclosed these ships were stationed around the world at various times for communication intercepts and intelligence gathering. Apparently the Navy discovered with our ships that they were stable platforms and economical to operate. They were in commission from 1963 to 1970. There were 5 AGTR ships with 3 being Liberty and 2 were Victory. AGTR 1, 2, & 3 were Liberties. AGTR 4 & 5 were Victories. You may recall the USS Liberty (ATGR-5) was attacked by Israel in the Mediterranean Sea.

Sea Stories

email your sea stories to mel.harder@snet.net

submitted by Don Judy, BM3, USS Skywatcher, 1959-62

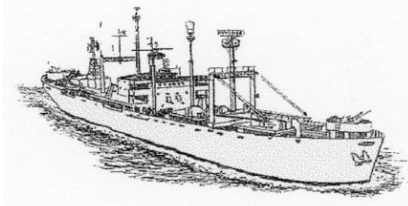
Mel asked that I recall the time when myself and 4 others were washed overboard at sea while attempting to transfer critical engine parts to a disabled freighter. Keep in mind that it has been nearly fifty five years since the incident. Others may remember it differently.

The freighter could barely make headway in a powerful storm. There was great fear that she could founder in the high seas and sink. The U.S.S. Skywatcher had attempted two separate highlines during the early morning darkness. Both attempts proved futile in the heavy seas. After the second highline failure the Captain called several of us to the bridge and asked if we thought we could launch the motor whale boat in these heavy seas. It required a five man crew in the whaler and multiple men on deck. I stood with those men because of training I had received in Key West where I learned the operation of motor whale boats. I was unofficially designated the ships motor whale boat coxswain from the time I came aboard.



There was debate on the bridge whether to go or not, right up until the time of launch. The seas remained heavy at

about ten to fifteen feet with an occasional twenty foot swell. You could tell how big the high ones were because the water would come just below the scuppers at the gunwale. We talked amongst ourselves about lowering the whaler. Keeping the bow high so it would ride the front side of the swells seemed the only way. We would lower until the whaler could hold itself off of the blocks and release. BM3 Tate was in control of the deck crew.



The wind was blowing so hard you could yell at the top of your voice but only see lips move. We had to rely on hand signals. That became our downfall, because in the rolling seas and the heavy wind the communication somehow failed between the deck and the boat. As we climbed aboard and settled into the whaler we knew we were about to go on one hell of a ride. I don't remember if I waved to the deck crew or if the whaler's officer began lowering us, but it became clear almost immediately that they were lowering us in a level position. This is where it all started to come apart. I began waving frantically to the deck crew to hold the bow up high as we were being lowered. The first swell hit us pushing the boat back to a sudden stop at the end of the blocks. Everything and everyone was slammed back- making a terrible commotion. The full force of the water hit the whaler and ripped steel boat hooks and all from the ship.

I was pushed deep underwater. I felt the barnacles on the side of the ship and began using them to pull myself up. I opened my eyes. Thousands of bubbles surrounded me. My fingers scraped the side of the ship as I pulled myself upward. My lungs burned as never before in my life. When I broke the surface I was amazed that I was alive. I was looking at the side of the ship. I also remember a strange vibration and a heavy thump that shook my entire body. I rode the swell back up. Low and behold, there was a man standing there on deck at the gunnel. I reached out to him. I knew he could reach me, but he was totally dumbfounded. He stared at me. His mouth dropped. His hands gripped the gunnel. Suddenly, I dropped to the bottom and awaited the next swell. Again I felt the bone shaking thump, thump, thump and turned to look at the fantail. The blades of the prop were hitting the water and causing the terrifying vibration. I knew that I had been saved from drowning only to be crushed in the blades of the prop. I curled my hands behind my head and pulled my knees up to my chest, tightening into a ball, and waited for the blow. I trembled inside and braced myself, but soon realized that the ship had passed. My eyes opened and I

was looking at the fantail of the Skywatcher as it disappeared into the waves. I knew there was no way for them to turn in this weather to take me back aboard .

I don't know how much time passed. Suddenly something jabbed my backside. "Shark! Shark!", my mind screamed! I frantically moved to get away. Terrified, I slipped back into the sea only to find I had been attacked by a seven foot splintered half of a boat hook that had been broken by the prop. It woke me right up. I began to look for the other sailors. I had made it, so some of them must have also. Each time I would rise to the top of swell I would try to spin 360 and try to see as far as I could in all directions. The white caps made it almost impossible. I decided I was alone. I don't know how much time went by, but all of a sudden I saw a black spot on top of a swell a long way off. I began to swim toward whatever was floating out there. Suddenly I could tell it was a man! I began to whistle and wave. He began to swim toward me. It seemed it took forever to come together. Although I knew there was little or no hope, for a little bit as we neared each other, it seemed like we were rescued.

I looked at my new best friend who sported a bad shiner. I smiled as I recalled how he had gotten it. We had been involved in a spat over a girl in port only a few days earlier. My cheek bone still sported a sting. It's funny how life just follows you around. He was the engineman on the whaler. We spoke of many things- none of which amounted to much. We spoke of God a couple of times. He was able to quote a verse or two, but mainly we made jokes. Thirst began to settle in pretty hard. The joke of the day became, "You know how they told us in boot camp that you could drink urine in a bad situation?"

Our May West jackets began to fill with water after about eight or nine hours. We took them off and tied them to the boat hook, which seemed to give us better flotation. We decided to try the trick they teach you in training- you know, to take your pants off and tie a knot in each leg. All you have to do is throw them over your shoulders to capture air. We were too exhausted to lift them. We found though, that one guy could hold the pant legs on the boat hook and the other could drop under and exhale a couple of times. It would fill them up pretty good and add a little more flotation. We both knew we would not live through the night. We did not really speak of it. I guess we thought it would just come silently.

Some time later, we saw a light way off on the horizon. We could tell it was a ship! It looked to be far, far away but we yelled and waved our arms with everything we had. We waved until we could not raise our arms any longer. As the great grey ship came at us, we realized that it was going to run us over. We swam with all

the strength we had to get out of its way. As we came around, it pulled up to us and stopped. Suddenly a sailor looked over the side and waved at us. Several more came, but no one was looking like they were going to help us. Finally an officer appeared but just stood looking at us. I yelled up at him, "Throw us a line you dumb S.O.B!" He turned out to be the X.O. WOOPS...

I found out later that they had not seen us at all. They had spotted the half sunken motor whale boat. It was floating only one hundred and fifty yards off of their fantail with three sailors perched on top. They had lowered a motor whale boat to rescue them and discovered the two of us in the process. Finally a Jacob's Ladder came over the side. I reached for the ladder, but my hand would not close. I asked them to come down to help. They replied that they could not. I asked them to drop a line down. I began to yell again. The X.O. said very calmly, "Take it easy son. We're doing best we can." Finally the rope arrived. They dropped it down but I could not tie a loop. They pulled it back up and tied a noose in it. We managed to get it around my buddy. Then he got one of his legs into the ladder and away he went- ladder and all. I waited. The ladder and rope came back down and I set myself up to be rescued.

I came over the bulwark into the arms of several sailors. I could not move my arms or legs. Someone sat me up. It was the ships corpsman. He reached into a little box and pulled out a mini bottle of whiskey. He pushed it to my face and said drink this. I said, "I do not drink." He said, "DO IT!" I drank it down. He handed me another, and another, until five had gone down in quick succession. Then it began. I started to upchuck with projectile force. Over and over again, each time I that I thought was finished it would start again. I must have had two gallons of salt water in me. I know I never drank a drop, yet there it was. They carried me to sick bay.

A little over twenty four hours later, someone woke me up. It was the ship's mailman. "Is your name Judy?" he asked. "I have a letter for you. It came aboard with the mail about a month ago. I thought you might have been transferred to the U.S.S Lookout so I hung on to it. "Well, this is one hell of a way to pick up your mail." I thought.

I apologize but over the years my memory has failed me. I can remember events, but I can not remember names. I would be very grateful if someone could tell me the names of the other four sailors that were washed overboard so many years ago. Someone emailed me last year (I cannot find the email) . He said we all grew up a lot on that ship. Boy, is that true! The positive effects of the discipline and the work ethic that I learned from my shipmates, aboard the Skywatcher, have lasted me a lifetime.

Don Judy B M 3
U. S. S. Skywatcher AGR 3, 1959-1962

The women truly showed their love for the Veterans. A total of \$765 in cash, checks and gift cards as well as clothing items, reading glasses, etc. were collected. Tears were in her eyes as she addressed the crowd. BRAVO LADIES!!!

Lourdes St Mark of the GUARDIAN volunteered to head up the Penny Auction in 2016. Thank you Lourdes, and thank you to everyone who helped at the Charleston Ladies Breakfast.

Lee Doyel approved our choices of another Veterans cause in Branson as the charity in 2016 and the choice of a Country Western theme for the contest in 2016. (More on this later.)

Remember we ladies have a FACEBOOK page now. It is Yagr's Ladies. Suzanne Attig has graciously agreed to post breakfast pictures there. My email address is PAREICHLING@aol.com

21st Annual YAGR's Reunion - 2016 - Branson MO

The 2016 reunion will be at the Radisson Hotel Branson, 120 South Wildwood Dr., Branson, MO 65616. Phone: 417-335-5767 and 888-566-5290. Web: radison.com/bransonmo. The dates are Thursday May 19 - Saturday May 21. The pre-reunion tours will be Tuesday May 17 and Wednesday May 18. The YAGR rate is \$100/night plus 11.6% room tax. The particular tours/shows for Branson have not been decided on yet. Open to suggestions. Email Lee directly or through your ship's coordinator.



(NY14-NOV.14)BURNING NAVY RADAR SHIP--Smoke pours from ventilating stacks as rescue boat approaches the burning "avy radar picket ship, the Searcher, yesterday after explosion ripped the craft southeast of New York City. Most of the blaze appeared confined to ship's engine room section. The Searcher is one of a number of surface craft spotted off the coast to signal the approach of unidentified planes. This picture was made by Coast Guard Warrant Officer W.H. Becker of the cutter Ingham which removed three sailors from the Searcher. (U.S. Coast Guard Photo via AP Wirephoto) (see story) (pr/hrm20810uscg)1955

case of the USS Searcher (YAGR-4)

Chronological list of events from the records of the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Ingham (WPG-35) concerning assistance rendered to the USS Searcher, a Navy radar guard vessel, on fire at sea in position about 120 miles east of Cape May, NJ., on Sunday, 13 November, 1955. All times plus 5 (EST).

0000-0630	INGHAM enroute to ocean station DELTA via Argentia, Nfld. One day out Of Norfolk, VA., in 3 rd CG District (New York) area.
0624	COMEASTAREA asked for our position
0629	COMEASTAREA directed INGHAM to proceed to assist USS SEARCHER which had reported explosion in engine room.
0630	Changed course and increased to full speed proceeding towards position of SEARCHER, some 25 miles distant.
0700	CG Aircraft advised COMEASTAREA that SEARCHER was abandoning ship. This information was passed to Navy commands and CGC TAMARORA, a seagoing tug type vessel, was directed to proceed.
0804	Arrived on the scene. Heavy black smoke and flames billowing from amidships of the SEARCHER. Much debris in the water—a lifeboat overturned, empty foam cans which looked like men in lifejackets. Small boats along side the SEARCHER with portable fire pumps playing water on the sides of the ship. A small merchant vessel was standing by and at least two aircraft circling. INGHAM had maintained direct radio communications with the SEARCHER up to this time when they were forced to abandon the station due to heat and smoke. The situation was known to be critical. Vessel not under command with oil fires in the engineroom and fireroom area and danger of diesel oil tanks exploding. Abandoning ship was contemplated but not as yet ordered. Three known serious casualties and two others trapped in fireroom. INGHAM assumed ON SCENE command.
0805	INGHAM dispatches two motor boats with fire and rescue parties. At this time a motor launch from the SEARCHER came close aboard with the three serious casualties. Boat and all were hoisted aboard. On examination of casualties by Hospital Corpsman, all cases were classified as critical, one with 80% of body burned. The CG Aircraft, circling overhead, had a doctor on board and volunteered to land. The INGHAM stood clear of the debris in the vicinity and began running in a circle at full speed to assist plane in landing. Weather was nearly perfect; only light wind and slight sea.
0830	Plane landed after dumping extra fuel. Time seemed to drag waiting for the plane to land and knowing that the ship needed more assistance in fighting the fire. A Coast Guard Helicopter arrived on the scene at this time which proved to be of great value.
0840	Commander 3 rd CG District designated OPCON.
0853	INGHAM designated ON SCENE COMMANDER.
0909	A situation report sent by INGHAM to COMEASTAREA summarized the situation at this time. “Helicopter on scene X CGC TAMARORA reporting to assist at 0930 X SEARCHER reports secondary explosion in engineroom X Expect fire to spread to diesel tanks X CG Aircraft landed successfully X Transferring doctor aboard this vessel”
0914	Helicopter completed transfer of doctor from plane to INGHAM. Ship then proceeded to SEARCHER.
0930	INGHAM tied up bow to stern of SEARCHER. Passed fire hoses—4 separate fire hoses which seemed hundreds of feet long to reach the fires---and began pumping water. Passed all foam supplies available. Supply of gasoline to run portable fire pump began running short. INGHAM’s supply exhausted.
0935	CGC TAMARORA arrived on the scene and prepared to go alongside the SEARCHER. The USS JOYCE (DER-317) reported she was 4 miles to south and was preparing to furnish damage control parties and equipment. She was informed of the need for gasoline and foam fire fighting equipment. The USS CAPRICORNUS (AKA-57) reported her estimated arrival as 1100.
1003	Situation report to C3CGD indicates the situation was improving, “Fire under control on 01 and 02 decks X 8 ft. of water in engineroom X Two hours fuel remain for emergency pumps X Relying mainly on all portable fire pumps available”. Helicopter was released because of low fuel supply.
1018	Commenced transfer of the three casualties to the CG Aircraft which had remained on the water in the vicinity. First boat trip to plane carried two casualties. The third was in bad shape and required more treatment by the doctor. He was transferred separately. Again time seemed to drag getting the patients to the plane. It is no easy job and the boat’s crew deserves credit. The CGC TAMARORA was assigned to assist the plane in take off.
1050	USS JOYCE on the scene.
1115	USS CAPRICORNUS on the scene.
1132	The CG Aircraft took off with the patients. A beautiful JATO take off. The TAMARORA was now able to return alongside the SEARCHER and run hoses and pumps. The situation report to C3CGD at this time sounds encouraging. “USS CAPRICORNUS arrived X SEARCHER reports fire out X Investigating damage and possible flare ups X SEARCHER main propulsion totally crippled X CG Aircraft departed with injured personnel X One casualty very critical.” The INGHAM continues to maintain fire main pressure to the SEARCHER. More men and equipment is passed directly over the bow. The galley forces comes up with boxes of ham sandwiches and pots of coffee. Much of this is passed over to the crew of the SEARCHER. Food and drink were mighty welcome items as the situation began to improve.
1228	The situation report to C3CGD indicates the job is still touch and go. “Flare up in SEARCHER starboard diesel tank X TAMARORA and INGHAM alongside SEARCHER fighting fire X DER 317 and AKA 57 standing by assisting with fire parties X Situation under control X No additional assistance required at present.”
1241	Navy UF919 aircraft reported. Several other aircraft in the area.
1248	CG aircraft arrived at CGAS Brooklyn at 1230 with the three patients which were transferred by helicopter to St. Albans Naval Hospital.
1255	COMEASTSEAFRON assigned the USS CAPRICORNUS duty as Scene of Action Commander. HAILEY (DD 556) expected to arrive at 1400. NIPMUC (ATF 157) expected to arrive at 1430 to assist tow SEARCHER to New York.
1319	Situation report to C3CGD. “SEARCHER fire out X Continuing investigation of damage and dewatering”.
1333	INGHAM informed C3CGD of relief of Scene of Action command by USS CAPRICORNUS. Both INGHAM and TAMARORA continued to assist SEARCHER.
1400	Transferred the doctor to the SEARCHER. The USS CAPRICORNUS came alongside the SEARCHER and took charge of the situation.
1415	Stop pumping. Disconnected and took aboard fire hoses from the SEARCHER. Cast off mooring lines and drifted close aboard. INGHAM’s fire and rescue parties remaining on board the SEARCHER.
1645	INGHAM’s fire and rescue parties returned on board. CGC TAMARORA departed the scene.
1707	USS CAPRICORNUS requested concurrence of COMEASTSEAFRON to release INGHAM.
1743	Released and proceeded on duty assigned. INGHAM sustained no personnel casualties. The uniforms—dungarees, shoes, shirts, etc. — of a few men in the fire and rescue parties were a total loss. Damage to the vessel was minor. Some bent plates at the bow. Boat #4, the motor self-bailer, broke her rudder. The clutch in boat #3, motor Launch, was slipping badly and will have to be replaced. Renewed our supply of gasoline from the CAPRICORNUS but completely out of foam. Very few canisters for oxygen breathing apparatus remain. The cleaning up and stowage of fire fighting equipment is a job yet to be done.
2000	In spite of the hectic day many attended the movie “Moulin Rouge” in the Wardroom.

Monday, 14 November, 1955

At 1333 INGHAM received this message from Commander, 3rd Coast Guard District:

”From D X District Commander notes with pleasure the efficient performance of duty of each unit participating in the recent incident involving USS SEARCHER and extends a very well done to all hands.”

[Data on this page submitted by Jim Bruder Ltjg – USS Searcher Plankowner](#)



OCEAN GOING RADAR PICKET SHIPS DISTANT EARLY WARNING NETWORK - NORAD 1955-1965



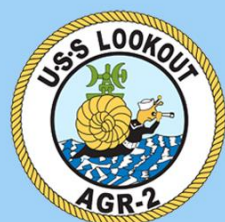
USS GUARDIAN AGR-1
Erv Thomure



USS LOOKOUT AGR-2



USS SKYWATCHER AGR-3



USS SEARCHER AGR-4



USS SCANNER AGR-5



USS LOCATOR AGR-6



USS PICKET AGR-7



USS INTERCEPTOR AGR-8



USS INVESTIGATOR AGR-9



USS OUTPOST AGR-10



USS PROTECTOR AGR-11



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



USS INTERDICTOR AGR-13



USS INTERPRETER AGR-14



USS TRACER AGR-15



USS WATCHMAN AGR-16



YAGR'S AT DANVILLE, IN NOTE AREA OUTLINED WAS ADDED TO THE YR TO ACCOMMODATE RADARON TWO AND HIS STAFF.

