

HANS KNOT INTERNATIONAL RADIO REPORT SPECIAL CHRISTMAS EDITION 2010

Welcome all to the special edition of the Hans Knot International Report and I'm delighted that I can bring as an exclusive the first two parts of the Andy Archer memoir, from whom I got the international rights to publish them. More parts will be published in 2011. May I wish you, also in name of Andy Archer, a lot of pleasure with reading this very interesting story?

"Arseholes and Anoracks" A Radio Caroline memoir by Andy Archer.

"The former pirate radio disc jockey Andy Archer has been credited with inventing the term "anorack", to describe an enthusiastic, if slightly obsessive, fan. It dates from 1973 or 1974 when four boat loads of listeners went out on an excursion to visit the three radio ships then anchored off the Dutch coast. On Radio Caroline it was decided that they would mark the occasion by presenting a programme not from inside the studio, as normal, but from out on the deck to give the fans something to see. It was a chilly day and the visitors had sensibly wrapped up warm against the elements. The listeners heard Andy say that he was delighted that so many anoracks had come out to see the ship. From this one, off-the-cuff, remark, thousands of enthusiasts across Europe came to be known as anoracks and a new example of modern English usage was born." (The Guardian).

On Monday December 3rd 2007, Ronan O'Rahilly, the founding father of Radio Caroline, made a rare public appearance at an awards ceremony at the Park Plaza on the Albert Embankment in London. It was an event organized by The Radio Academy, a charitable organization dedicated to the promotion of excellence in British broadcasting.



Andy Archer, Ronan O'Rahilly and Johnny Jason 2004

Despite his "A" list status in the world of music radio, Ronan has always been reluctant to flaunt his celebrity, much preferring the role of "éminence grise". Quietly sipping his glass of mineral water at a table at the back of the hotel's function room, Ronan was blissfully unaware of what had been planned. It came as a bolt from the blue when Ronan was called to the podium. To a rapturous ovation from the hundreds of people present, Ronan nervously made his way to the stage. For his outstanding contribution to the radio industry, Ronan had been inducted into the Hall of Fame as a Fellow of the Radio Academy. He courteously accepted the accolade with the briefest of speeches and returned to his table to even greater applause.

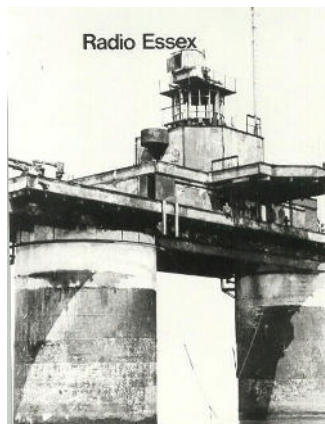
It had taken the radio establishment over 40 years to publicly recognize his significant role in the history of British broadcasting. Had it not have been for Ronan's sheer determination in 1963 when he initially had the idea to start an offshore radio station, myself and hundreds, if not thousands of us would be leading very different lives today.

My first encounter with Ronan was in October 1967. The British government's *Marine Offences Act* had just kicked in, only *Radio Caroline* remained on the air. The south ship was anchored about 5 kilometres off Frinton on Sea and the north ship was operating from Ramsey Bay off the coast of the Isle of Man.

I had discovered from friends at The Free Radio Association in Rayleigh, Essex, a campaigning group for independent radio, that Ronan had an office in London. With what little money I had left of my severance pay from the Royal Air Force, I took the train from Rayleigh to London and made my way to his office in Royalty House in Dean Street. With fingers crossed, I was hoping it would be a more gratifying experience than the previous encounter I had had with another owner of a "pirate" radio station some eighteen months earlier.

It all started with a rather groveling letter I had written to Major Roy Bates of Radio Essex. In it, I congratulated Bates on his station's excellent programmes and enquired if there was a vacancy for disc jockey. To my utter surprise, I received a reply a few days later inviting me to their head office for an audition.

Aside from knowing that Radio Essex was based on the Knock John Fort, a derelict world war two anti-aircraft tower in the Thames Estuary, I knew very little about the station. Despite my flattering letter, I had never actually listened to it. The station was completely inaudible in London, and not much better I hasten to add in Southend, just 25 kilometres from its transmitter! I decided it might be a good idea to go to Southend where I spent the night in a small seafront hotel familiarising myself with the station's output.



One of the Radio Essex QSL Cards

Radio Essex was a surprisingly interesting station to listen to. Compared with the bigger, glitzier stations, it had a more individual sound with its wide

selection of programmes. Unusually, it was on the air 24 hours a day whereas the other "pirate" stations closed down in the early evening or midnight at the very latest.

The following day I arrived at Westcliffe-on-Sea railway station from Southend and walked the short distance to 33 Avenue Road. It turned out to be a rather run down Edwardian house which had seen better days and had been divided into two flats. The "Mad Major" and his family lived on the first floor; I climbed the rusty iron staircase with apprehension. Having spotted me from the kitchen window, Bates, ruddy faced and attired in a well worn fisherman's smock opened the door and greeted me on the landing. I have never been the best judge of character, but instantly recognized him as a man who didn't suffer fools gladly.

We shook hands and I was invited in whereupon he immediately began barking out orders to his wife Joan to make a pot of tea and to Dick Palmer to get the tape recorder ready for my audition. Dick was one of the best known Radio Essex disc jockeys, who also "doubled" as fort captain. I took to him straight away, a very friendly and unpretentious guy who had just returned to land after a few weeks on the fort. He seemed genuinely thrilled when I told him that I had listened to his programme the previous evening and had enjoyed the diversity of his music.



Roy and Joan Bates 1968

His daily show "The Essex Beat Club" was one of the more innovative and intelligent programmes on pirate radio at the time. He concentrated on the "edgier" pop and rhythm and blues of the day, The Rolling Stones, The Who, The Yardbirds, Georgie Fame and The Blue Flames as well as blues singers like John Lee Hooker and Muddy Waters whose material had never previously been exposed to British radio audiences. Had Dick have worked for one of the bigger stations, and more importantly, been given the freedom to play the music he was into, he would unquestionably achieved the cult status later afforded to John Peel of Radio London and Mike Raven of Radio 390.

The "Mad Major" on the other hand was a completely different kettle of fish. A large, grandiloquent figure of a man, with an exceedingly high opinion of himself. He thrust a couple of sheets of paper with typewritten scripts for commercials into my hand. In his very matter of fact manner he boomed "Read through these then we'll record you" adding "and I don't want to hear a bloody mid - Atlantic accent, we're a BRITISH radio station and proud of it!"

Naively, I had thought I would have been put into a studio with a couple of turntables and jingle machines to record a demonstration programme; not a bit of it. The "studio" where I was about to be auditioned was their grubby kitchen, the sink overflowing with grimy pots and pans and Joan Bates clattering around in search of clean tea cups effing and blinding and frequently dropping her "h's." Not the most conducive environment I thought for my audition.

Dick switched on the tape recorder, a battered old Ferrograph and handed me the microphone. My hands were shaking as I began to read the scripts with Bate's watching over me like a bird of prey about to swoop on its quarry. After a couple of false starts, I had completed the task and handed the microphone back to Dick. Looking distinctly unimpressed, Bates said "Thank you for coming, I'll be in touch" and with that, ushered me to the door adding a curt "goodbye!"

I never did hear from Bates again. A few years later, when Dick and I were both working for Radio Caroline off the Dutch coast, I asked him if he remembered the day when I was summoned to 33 Avenue Road by the Bates.

He remembered it well. Unbeknown to me at the time, he hated Bates with a vengeance. "He's a thieving bastard, conman and a fucking liar!"

It turned out that the reason he had not given me a job was down to a sartorial matter. When Dick suggested I be hired for a trial period, Bates said: "Certainly not. Did you see what he was wearing? He was wearing a pink shirt. I can't have someone like that out there; he must be a fucking queer!"

The receptionist at Royalty House, who I suspected could spot an anorack at fifty paces, picked up the telephone. After the briefest of conversations, she replaced the receiver. "Ronan is tied up in a business meeting at the moment; he says if you drop by tomorrow he'll see you."

At 10 o'clock the next day, I returned to Royalty House. The receptionist gave me a welcoming smile and told me that Ronan was in the office, "But you may have a bit of a wait." The "wait" lasted considerably longer than I or the receptionist expected. I spent the entire day lounging on an oversized leather sofa reading over and over again "Time Life", "The Tatler" and the myriad of glossy magazines that littered the reception area. Occasionally I would chat with the receptionist. When I told her I was hoping to get a job on Radio Caroline, she replied "You must be keen, most people that come here can't stand the wait and just leave without seeing him!" Waiting for Ronan was something I would become very familiar with over the next few years.



Ronan O'Rahilly

Late in the afternoon, I heard someone running down the staircase. I looked up, and there was Ronan, his grey hair flowing with a pile of papers under his

arm and clearly in a hurry. I got to my feet and before I could utter little more than "Good afternoon Mr O'Rah....." he replied, without stopping, "Come back tomorrow, in the afternoon, I'll see you then" With that, he disappeared out of the front door into a waiting car.

Anxiously hoping the adage "persistence pays", I returned the next day. The now familiar receptionist said "Good afternoon Andy, meet Howie, he's here to see Ronan as well." Sitting on the sofa where I had spent so many hours the previous couple of days was Howie Castlebury. We shook hands and struck up an instant rapport, spending the next couple of hours enthusiastically "anoracking" about pirate radio.

Much like the would be entrepreneurs of the BBC's reality television programme "The Apprentice" as they anxiously wait to be summoned to appear before Lord Alan Sugar, our conversation was interrupted by the receptionist. "Ronan will see you now."

He was sitting behind a large desk in his first floor office. He got straight to the point. "So, I'm presuming you want to go out to the ship?" gesticulating us to take a seat, "what experience have you had?" Howie's credentials were impressive, my curriculum vitae was less so, I didn't hold out much hope.

But despite of my lack of experience, it turned out to be a lucky day for the two of us. Ronan told us that that most of the ex-pirate disc jockeys from the pre-Marine Offences Act didn't want to blot their copybook with Radio One by working for Radio Caroline. Fortuitously for us, we were in the right place at the right time. There was a shortage of disc jockeys on the south ship and we were hired on the spot for the princely sum of £10 a week! I think we would have probably agreed to work for nothing.



Our first meeting with Ronan had lasted all of ten minutes. He instructed us to go to an address in New Oxford Street, where Joan Thirkettle would be waiting for us. Neither Howie nor I had any idea who the mysterious Joan Thirkettle was as we arrived at the head office of Major Minor Records.

We were shown up to her office on the first floor which was littered with records. She was printing off the latest playlists for the two ships on a noisy Gestetner machine. Joan's chief role was to generate income from record companies. With advertising banned, "payola" provided the station's only revenue. It was a strategy first introduced the previous year when Philip Solomon, the owner of Major Minor Records, became joint managing director of Radio Caroline with Ronan. His sizeable investment which had saved Radio Caroline from certain closure, was given on the understanding that he would oversee the programme output. Ronan, nor the board were in a position to oppose his demands. Solomon immediately notified all of the record companies and music publishers in London that from now on, it would cost £100 a week for each of their new releases to be played on Radio Caroline.

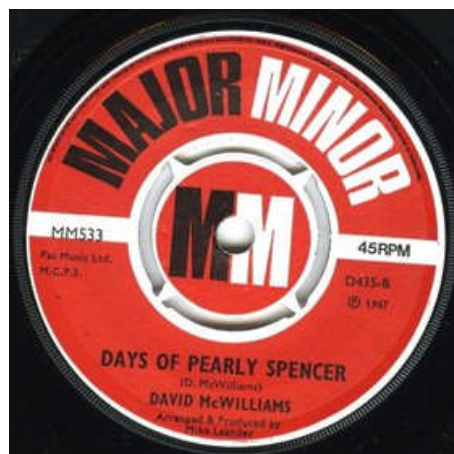
Solomon's edict caused quite a stir in the national newspapers. They were quick to expose the practise with headlines such as "Radio Caroline Payola Scandal" emblazoned on the front pages. To distance themselves from the scandal, Caroline's main competitor, Radio London, superciliously issued an urgent press release announcing they would never entertain such antics.



Philip Solomon

But they too were cashing in on the lucrative business of record sales by way of a less obvious scam. Radio London owned a music publishing company, Pall Mall Music run by Harold Shampan in New Bond Street. Whenever a record was released which Pall Mall owned the publishing rights, it was heavily featured in their programmes, often appearing in the Radio London "Fab 40" chart despite the lack of sales to warrant such notoriety.

Solomon and Ronan were the most unlikely bed partners imaginable. Solomon was a hard nosed businessman who knew the music business inside out and wasn't averse to taking advantage of up and coming singers and bands who were seeking fame and fortune in show business. With his wife Dorothy, his father Louis and brother Mervyn, Solomon managed some of the biggest names in Irish music, all signed to his record company Major Minor.



Solomon had little respect for Ronan who he considered a "dreamer" with great ideas but little or no sense of business acumen. His opinion was perfectly illustrated on the occasion, in Radio Caroline's early days when Ronan took a call from the Pepsi Cola Company enquiring if one of their directors could meet him to talk about a marketing campaign they had in mind. The director was none other than the Hollywood legend Joan Crawford, who's late husband Alfred Steele had been Pepsi's chairman.

She was kept waiting in the reception area of Caroline House in Chesterfield Gardens for almost two hours looking conspicuously out of place in the company of stoned rock stars, scantily clad groupies and an assortment of hangers on. Eventually, and in her opinion, not before time, she was escorted up the imposing Georgian staircase and into Ronan's huge "L" shape office on the first floor. As she entered the room, Ronan gestured to the large bronze bust of President John F Kennedy on his desk. A drinking straw was in Kennedy's mouth, the other end was in a bottle of cola. Clapping his hands he exclaimed "That's the scene baby, that's the scene!"

Carelessly, Ronan had used a bottle of COCA COLA as his prop. An aghast Miss Crawford, already fuming from being kept waiting for so long screamed "That's it, I've had enough!" and ceremoniously stormed out of the building. A few weeks later, "The Pepsi Cola Fab 40 Half Hour" appeared on the Radio London programme schedule!



Joan Thirkettle was a delightful person, very friendly and keen to find out more about the station's two new disc jockeys. She then asked us how much

money Ronan had offered us. To her astonishment, Howie and I replied in unison, "£10 a week!" To our astonishment, she doubled it to £20 a week! She then booked two air tickets for us and told us to report to Nan Richardson at an address in Amsterdam.

The next afternoon, Howie and I collected our tickets from the West London terminal on the Cromwell Road and flew to Amsterdam. Over dinner that night, Howie and I spent the evening "anoracking" and debating the on-air names we would use. Joan had recommended we changed our real names which would lighten the risk of us being arrested whenever we returned to England. Although Howie as an American wasn't directly affected by the Marine Offences Bill, he decided to become "Bud Ballou". I was keen to keep my first name and decided to use "Archer" as my surname. At the time, there were two popular soap operas running on BBC Radio Four, "The Archers" and "Mrs Dale's Diary." As Radio Caroline already had a "Dale" with its chief disc jockey Robbie Dale, I thought, why not an "Archer" as well?



Bud Ballou in studio MV Mi Amigo

After breakfast the next morning in the small hotel where we spent the night, Howie and I arrived at the Radio Caroline office, the upper ground floor of Singel 160. We climbed the steps with our luggage, rang the doorbell, only to discover that no one was in. Once more we would play the waiting game. We sat on the steps in the late autumn sun.

Just before 10 o'clock, we spotted a matronly like figure wearing a Burberry raincoat and tweed skirt rummaging through a large battered leather handbag. She looked like the kind of woman you would expect to run into at a

smart hotel in the Cotswolds. At the foot of the steps, and after finding the bunch of keys she had been searching for, she gave us a guarded look. Assuming we were just another couple of "anoracks" on a pirate radio pilgrimage to Amsterdam, she barked "And who the fuck are you?"

Somewhat taken aback by the expletive used by such a respectable looking middle aged woman, we rather timidly explained that we had been hired by Ronan to go out to the south ship as disc jockeys. She replied, "Well nobody has told me about it, typical of that lot in London, they never tell me a bloody thing, you had better wait here!"

After Joan Thirkettle had confirmed our story over the telephone, Nan invited us in, apologizing for the inhospitable welcome. We both warmed to her. Under her frumpy, rather bossy image was a warm hearted and generous woman and the most frightful gossip imaginable! As we drank coffee, Nan explained that we would be leaving from IJmuiden in the late afternoon, and then asked us to help her sort out the enormous amount of letters and parcels which had been sent by the listeners.



Nan and Don Richardson

The mail had been crammed into the smaller of the two rooms in the office which resembled a GPO sorting office in miniature. It was at that point we both realized just how popular Radio Caroline remained and it was very clear

that Johnnie Walker played the starring role. For every ten letters and parcels that arrived for each disc jockey, Johnnie received a hundred. As we were bagging them up, Nan joked "Johnnie gets about ten thousand letters a month, he'll be having his own tender soon!"

When Johnnie took delivery of his mail on board, it was dragged by the sack load to the record library on the lower deck. Each evening just before his programme, he would grab a handful of letters to take to the studio and read them out. Most of them remained unopened, that is until he discovered a £5 note which one of his listeners had generously sent him. After unearthing the cash, Johnnie made the effort to open every letter he received!

By late afternoon we had finished packing the mail, newspapers and magazines. Nan, Howie and I packed them into her battered old Citroen van and drove to the port of IJmuiden. Waiting for us on the quay where the tender was tied up was Robbie Dale with his partner Stella, the breakfast show disc jockey Roger "Twiggy" Day and the Dutch crew that were to take over from the one on board the Mi Amigo. Nan introduced us to Robbie, the senior disc jockey, who didn't seem particularly interested in us. Roger, on the other hand, was far more gregarious and invited us to join him for a beer in a nearby bar where Howie and I bombarded him with questions about our impending journey across the North Sea in what looked to us, a diminutive fishing boat. "Eat plenty of bread lads before you get onboard if you don't want to throw your guts up!" was his advice, "it can get a bit rough at times." It proved to be an understatement.

That first crossing of the North Sea in our tender Offshore One has to go down as the most insufferable journeys I have ever made. As we left the comparative shelter of the harbour, we were hit head on by the force seven gale, blowing from the northwest which made our progress painfully slow. After a couple of hours battling against the waves, we could still clearly see the lights on the shore.



Tender offshore 1

To my great embarrassment, and much to the amusement of Roger, I was the first to succumb to the conditions. At his suggestion, I'd eaten a couple of bread rolls with a bowl of soup in the café and was feeling relatively okay until the cook on board the tender decided to prepare a huge frying pan of "Hollandse gehaktballen" (Dutch meatballs). Within minutes, the acrid aroma of burning margarine coupled with the pungent smell of diesel oil proved a cocktail too much for me. Scampering upstairs with one hand over my mouth, I clung on to a piece of rope for dear life while depositing the contents of my stomach over the side of the ship into the raging North Sea. It was eighteen hours later when we eventually spotted the Mi Amigo with its giant transmitting mast in the distance.

The arrival of the tender "Offshore One" was the highlight of the week for those on board the ship. Since the passing of the government's Bill, it was the only contact the crew had with the outside world.

The Mi Amigo was much smaller than I had imagined. She was painted red with a row of car tyres, hanging from the side of the ship which acted as a buffer as we crashed into them in the still choppy sea. Getting on board the Mi Amigo in bad weather proved to be quite risky too. We had to wait until

the tender rose above the Mi Amigo's deck level, then jump and hope someone would grab hold of you before you landed flat on your face. Once we were all safely onboard, the supplies were unloaded by the crew and fresh water and oil pipes were connected to the tanks on the ship.



Tender alongside Mi Amigo

Despite being knackered from the journey across the North Sea, I spent my first few hours on board excitedly exploring the ship then unpacking in the cabin which had been allotted to Howie and me. Robbie suggested we went to the studio to watch Spangles Maldoon, who was on the air.

Spangles was a fascinating character, a loveable rogue if there ever was one who I am sure would have sold his grandmother for a couple of quid if offered! But I couldn't have wished for a better teacher. After a couple of hours I was reasonably familiar with the studio equipment, when I walked Robbie. "Spangles old son, you can have an hour off tonight. Andy, you take over at 8 o'clock before Johnnie comes on at 9..... Good luck!"

Nobody had bothered to explain to me about the system for playing the "payola" discs. For the first ten minutes or so, I was happily playing the chart hits of the day when suddenly the studio door flew open. It was Robbie, and not looking very happy either, I knew something was wrong. "What the fuck is going on? You haven't played any of the fucking plug records!" He had a way with words!! I immediately thought my time was up. Robbie had a pretty fiery temper and had the power to dismiss anyone for such a serious transgression of the format. It was his responsibility as senior disc jockey to brief me of the procedure before I went on air, which

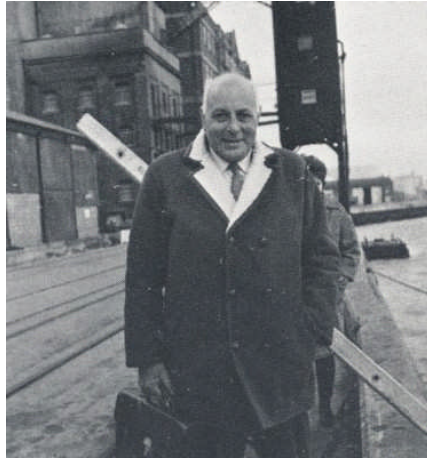
I tactfully decided not to remind him. Red faced, I mumbled a feeble apology. He replied, "Well don't let it happen again..... Cunt!"



Robbie Dale in open air

After I handed over to Johnnie at 9 o'clock, I uneasily made my way to the messroom where Robbie and the others were sitting around the table having a drink. I was greeted with a round of applause! That first programme hardly warranted such flattery but it did work wonders for my confidence. Robbie then took me to one side and apologized for losing his rag and most generously spent an hour or so giving me some very useful tips on presentation technique.

Aside from the weekly tender, the only guaranteed contact we had with land was our daily radio link up on the bridge of the ship with "Uncle" Bill Scaddon. Bill was a retired police officer who lived in a seafront bungalow at Frinton-on-Sea. Every morning at 9.30 on the dot he would contact the ship and pass on any messages or instructions from Ronan or Joan Thirkettle. It was no secret in Frinton on Sea what Bill was up to. The local constabulary, Customs and Excise and the regulars in the saloon bar of the Maplin Hotel on the Esplanade all knew of Bill's connection with Radio Caroline. It remains a mystery to this day as to how he got away with it!



Bill Scadden

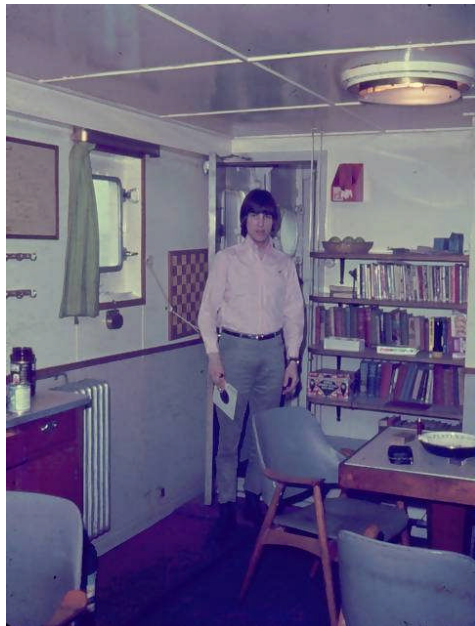
Three years later when I was working for Radio Northsea International, Bill was hired to do the same job. I smuggled some spare radio parts through customs for his transmitter which to my astonishment was hidden in a wardrobe behind his wife Jean's fur coat!

There was however, one member of the Radio Caroline crew who was sending daily radio messages to his wife which none of us on board was aware of at the time. One shore leave, I was sitting in the office in Amsterdam with Nan I was relating the scurrilous tale of an event that had taken place on the ship. To my surprise she said, "Oh I know all about that, I heard about it earlier this morning!" When I enquired how she knew, she replied, "Don and I are telepathic, I always know what's going on out there."

A couple of years later when I went to visit them on the island of Guernsey where they had retired to, Don and Nan finally confessed all. At around half past two every morning, Don would go to the studio, switch on the microphone and recount the days events on board to Nan who was listening in their flat in Amsterdam. It must have been absorbing listening for anyone who inadvertently tuned in at that time of the night!

I was enjoying life as a Radio Caroline disc jockey, certainly not one of the best they had ever had by a long chalk, but I was learning the tricks of the trade and was beginning to feel quite at home in the studio.

However, the one aspect of being on-air which was becoming progressively more depressing was the inordinate number of "plug" records we were forced to play. Up to fourteen of them were listed every hour which left very little space for the chart music that was being popularized by Radio One. With the exception of Robbie, we all persistently searched for ways to avoid playing the likes of Freddy "Parrot Face" Davies and the countless dreary Irish country and western ballads which littered the playlist. The chief rebels on board were Roger and Johnnie who effectively managed to circumvent the system. Roger cunningly asked Robbie if he could start his breakfast show a half an hour earlier at 5.30. There was method in his madness. He had calculated that he could play most of his allotted "plug" records during the first 90 minutes of his programme which meant the final two hours would comprise current hits, album tracks and the better "plug" records. Johnnie had a less subtle approach!



Johnnie Walker

One evening I was walking on deck when all of a sudden I saw flashes of phosphorescence in the sea which was calm as a mill pond. I then spotted black frisbee like objects flying out of the studio window that were causing the disturbance in the water. As I reached the open studio window, Johnnie's head appeared. "That's it, I've got rid of the fucking lot of them!"

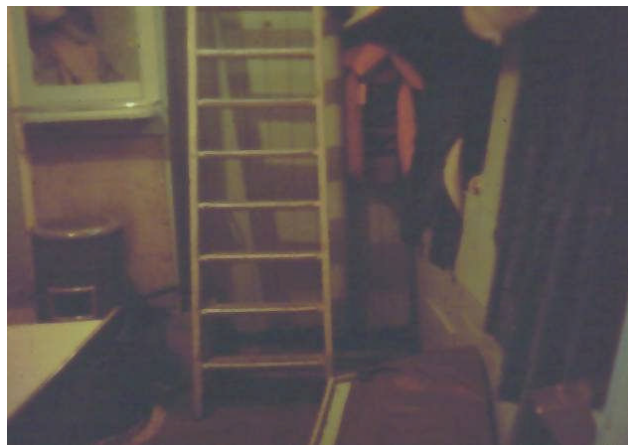
In one foul swoop, Johnnie had successfully de-cluttered the ship of every "plug" record on board!

The following morning, Joan Thirkettle's telephone was hot with irate calls from record companies demanding to know why their records weren't being played. It wasn't long before "Uncle" Bill contacted the ship to find out what was going on.

In his autobiography, Johnnie wrote of how this incident had landed him in "huge trouble." I don't know exactly what was said to him, I but I do remember that the rest of us were eternally grateful for his bravado. It meant, for a few days at least, we had the freedom to play whatever we wanted until a new batch of replacement "plug" records arrived on the next tender. Johnnie was our greatest asset, a fact Philip Solomon was well aware of. I suspect if one of us lesser mortals had been foolhardy enough to take the same action we would have been ceremoniously keelhauled.

When we were not presenting programmes, most of our spare time was taken up by reading the thousands of fan letters that arrived on board each week or lounging around in the record library listening to the songs we weren't allowed to play and drinking copious amounts of Heineken beer.

The most tranquil place to be found on the ship was Carl Mitchell's cabin which was tucked away in the fo'c's'le next door to the chain locker. It was known as "The Bag o' Nails" after the Soho nightclub which was the haunt of the "A" list celebrities of the day.



Corridor to "The Bag o' Nails"

The cabin walls were painted a deep magenta, the lighting subdued and Moroccan rugs with Moorish patterns covered the floor. Carl, who was known as the "Weird Beard" was an American disc-jockey who had escaped his native New York in order to dodge the Vietnam draft. He always had an abundant supply of top grade marijuana stashed away in "The Bag" which he generously shared with those of us who frequently went there to chill out and listen to his amazing collection of American west coast rock.

The shift pattern was supposedly two weeks on board and two weeks off, but it didn't always work out that way. The weather off the coast of Essex in November and December of 1967 was horrendous and not many days passed without us experiencing gale force winds. As a consequence, the tender was unable to set sail, as often as not, we would only see it once a fortnight. This was particularly frustrating for those on board who were due shore leave. Although life on board was mostly great fun, after a fortnight or three weeks with no direct contact with friends and loved ones, some would become markedly moody and irritable.

When Offshore One was eventually sighted, a wave of excitement would spread throughout the ship. Those due to take a break would hurriedly pack their bags while the rest of the disc jockeys helped the crew clean the messroom, kitchen and generally tart up the ship. Only Robbie and Carl lived in Amsterdam, the rest of us would always return to England after spending a night or two in Amsterdam. Robbie's partner Stella Regina, who owned one of the city's trendiest fashion boutiques in Oude Leliestraat, could always be relied upon to be waiting for us at the quayside in IJmuiden with her Mercedes to drive us into Amsterdam.

Those of us, who spent our first night of shore leave in Amsterdam, would usually stay at the Hotel Suisse in the Kalverstraat, which was Roger's favourite. After a few weeks "roughing it" on the ship, it was a relief to take advantage of the hotel's home comforts. Its only shortcoming was the rude awakening very early on a Sunday morning after a late night out on the town by the bells of the nearby church of St Peter and St Paul.



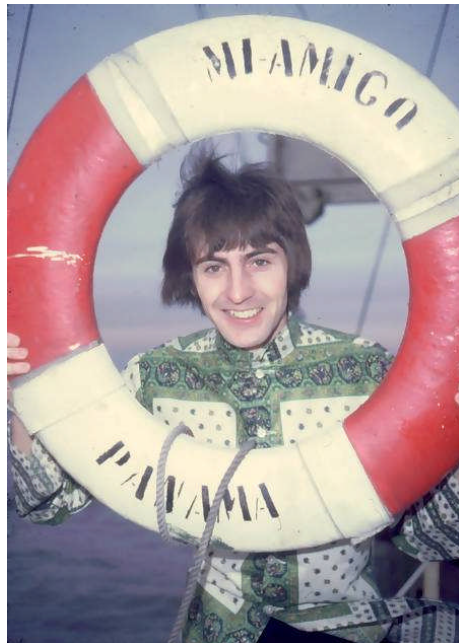
Carl Mitchell in Amsterdam

My opening stint on the Mi Amigo lasted a month and my first shore leave was a bit of an eye-opener. I had flown from Amsterdam to London with Johnnie Walker, who later that evening took me the first nightclub I had ever set foot in. It was The Speakeasy in Margaret Street which to my amazement was packed to the gunnels with rock stars including Keith Moon of The Who, Eric Burdon of The Animals, Ray Davies of The Kinks and Robin Gibb of The Bee Gees.

Jan Martin, who worked for Polydor Records, had booked our table and was already seated when we arrived. Jan and the staff at the record company were great supporters of the station and would always wine and dine us when we were on shore leave. Taking into consideration the quantity of scotch and cokes we drank that night, my recollection is somewhat blurred, but I do remember the drunken chorus of the clubbers singing along to "The Night has a thousand eyes" and "Run to Him" as a by now balding, slightly overweight Bobby Vee performed all of his hits on the club's tiny stage. One of my earliest "records of the week", or "Caroline sure-shots" as they were known was "Pictures of Matchstick Men" by Status Quo, which became a top ten hit thanks largely to the relentless plugging on Radio Caroline. Joan

Thirkettle told me that the band would like to take me out to lunch as a "thank you" in the Londonderry House Hotel in Park Lane. All members of the band turned up with their manager Pat Barlow, who must have spent a small fortune on countless bottles of Dom Perignon. Thirty years later I met Francis again in Norwich, when the band was headlining a concert at the football ground in Carrow Road. To my amazement, he remembered the drunken meeting at the Londonderry House Hotel three decades earlier and spoke in great length of the significant role Radio Caroline had played in the achievements of Status Quo over the years.

After a week or so of decadence in London, I was always keen to get back to the action on the ship, particularly if Roger Day was on the same shift. Like me, Roger could be extremely mischievous at times and was an arch practical joker and fellow prankster. He had devised nicknames for all of the disc jockeys: Stevie Merike was known as "Marjorie", Johnnie was "Joanna", Carl was "Carla" and I became "Ada!" On one occasion, his mischievousness got a little out of hand.



Roger Day

I was scheduled to read the afternoon news which we always plagiarized from the BBC World Service. The shift involved recording the BBC bulletin,

re-writing it, and reading it an hour later. Roger, who was "sitting in" for Stevie Merike, played the news introduction jingle then said, "It's 5 o'clock, with the latest Radio Caroline International News", he paused, then added "here's Ada Camp!" I began to read the headlines, then realizing a few seconds later what he had said, began to cough and splutter. Somehow I managed to get through the greater part of the first story before the giggles got the better of me. I looked through the glass which separated the studios and could see and hear Roger (he had left his microphone on) weeping uncontrollably with laughter. After I don't know how long, I composed myself enough to say something like "I think it's best if we return to Roger Day and I'll be back with the news at 5.30." I then looked up through the glass and to my horror; he was nowhere to be seen. All I could hear was a muffled chuckling. I stood up to get a better view; Roger was curled up on the floor in the foetal position with his fist in his mouth and wriggling around like a demented stick insect. It must have been a good minute or so before Roger finally managed to get into his seat to continue his show. In the messroom afterwards, we both thought we would get fired but as luck would have it, Robbie wasn't on board and obviously wasn't listening in, so we managed to get away with it.



Stevie Merike

A few days before Christmas 1967, Offshore One came out to the ship with supplies of goodies for the festive season. The messroom was decorated with bunting and a large Christmas tree with presents from the management underneath it.

On Christmas Eve, the Dutch crew organized a party which got completely out of hand. Most of us were absolutely out of our heads after consuming countless glasses of a lethal Jenever based cocktail concocted by Tex the cook. As the time signal sounded midnight, it seemed like a fitting moment to invade the studio and hijack Carl Mitchell's programme. The moment Carl opened the microphone we all fell into the studio and drunkenly launched into a selection of Christmas carols, which were followed by a round of jumbled and mostly inaudible messages to our families and friends wishing them a Happy Christmas.



Andy Archer Christmas 1967

To everyone's surprise, Tex, who had been the life and soul of the party and the main protagonist, had recovered sufficiently enough to prepare a splendid Christmas dinner, the centerpiece being a roast turkey with all of the trimmings. After dinner, we all eagerly opened the Christmas presents which had been sent out by Philip Solomon. We had each been sent an ill fitting and foul smelling Arran sweater which we all paraded around in before consigning them to the dustbin!

The big event none of us wanted to miss on Boxing Day was the long awaited screening of the Beatles film "The Magical Mystery Tour" on BBC 2. I had drawn the short straw and had to go on the air just as the film was starting. As the messroom which housed the television was next door to the studio, I did manage to catch most of it by playing very long tracks like the album version of "Nights in White Satin" by The Moody Blues and Bob Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone."

Perfect television reception on board the Mi Amigo was spasmodic due to the interference from our transmitter and the fact that the ship turned twice each day with the tides. As reception worsened, the television antenna on the roof of the messroom had to be manually re-directed. This involved the most junior member of the crew, usually Bud or me, climbing up the ladder and onto the roof in all weathers to turn the shaft. A shriek from the messroom port hole was the signal that the picture on the television set was watchable again.

Every evening at 6.30 we religiously tuned into our local station Anglia Television to catch the all important weather forecast. It was presented by Michael Hunt. Michael was a retired RAF Squadron Leader with a military moustache. He always wore a perfectly hand tied bow tie and delivered the forecast in a very upper class plummy accent. Johnnie in particular was captivated by his delightfully old-fashioned image and went to great lengths to "big him up" to Caroline's listeners. It resulted in Michael becoming a cult figure in the eastern region of England receiving hundreds of fan letters. He was clearly thrilled by his newly found status and sent us a large parcel containing a selection of weather charts and meteorological gadgetry with a letter of thanks for the attention Anglia Television's weather service was given in our programmes. Legend has it that Michael always insisted the Anglia Television continuity announcers never shortened his name to "Mike" - for obvious reasons!

Whenever Johnnie Walker was on shore-leave, I always covered his programme which was a scary experience; it was the most listened to show on the station and its highlight was "Frinton Flashing." At a given time, we would encourage listeners to park their cars on the seafront at Frinton-on-Sea and point their headlights in the direction of the Mi Amigo. After a car had been chosen, we gave them the code, two flashes for "yes", one flash for

"no." By the process of elimination and the benefit of a notebook that contained hundreds of first names and place names, we could establish who they were and where they were from. On one particularly wintry night, I was out on deck with a roving microphone conducting the "flashing" session in the bitterly cold weather with our engineer Maurice Brown when he suggested I might like a glass of his beloved Martel Cordon Bleu to keep out the cold. In the near Arctic conditions, Maurice and I successfully managed to polish off most of the bottle. When I finally returned to the warm studio having consumed almost half a bottle of brandy, I collapsed into a helpless heap on the floor. Incapable of continuing the programme, I was rather unceremoniously carted off to my bunk by a couple of the crew and Carl who had been looking after things in the studio finished the programme for me!



Robbie Dale on air

By early 1968, the atmosphere on board was slowly beginning to deteriorate. Robbie and Johnnie had become particularly moody. They both had enjoyed the luxury of short tender journeys and streams of visitors to the ship in the pre Marine Offences Act days. Only very occasionally did a fishing boat take the risk of coming alongside, usually to give us some fresh fish and newspapers in return for a few bottles of Jenever or a couple of cartons of duty free cigarettes. Roger retained his cheerful demeanor, Carl was usually too stoned to let things get him down and Spangles was Spangles! Bud and I who had never experienced the "good old days" remained sanguine about it all.

Robbie and Johnnie's wrath was mainly against the tender company and the infrequent visits. However, none of us were aware at the time of the deepening financial rift between our management and the tender company in IJmuiden. Most evenings, one of us would spend a few hours on the bridge on "tender watch" desperately scanning the horizon in the hope of sighting the red and green mast lights of Offshore One. Whenever a similar sized vessel was spotted heading in our direction, a wave of excitement and anticipation quickly spread through the ship. As often as not it was just a fishing boat returning to harbour.

The closure of Radio Caroline in March 1968 was both swift and unexpected. I presented the last programme on the station "sitting in" for Carl Mitchell who was on shore leave. His show was the only one on the station which was at the cutting edge of the music of the day with no requirement to play plug records. It was a joy to be given the freedom to play the likes of Vanilla Fudge, Buffalo Springfield, The Doors, Velvet Underground and Tim Hardin. After the show, I drank a couple of beers with Johnnie in the messroom before going to bed.



Mi Amigo studio desk

Just after five o'clock, an ocean going tug, The Titan, tied up alongside of the Mi Amigo. Its captain, accompanied by three heavily built no-nonsense Dutch sailors, leapt on board and handed Captain Perdok a letter from Mr Eissenloeffel of the Wijsmuller Tug Company. They were under orders to

tow the *Mi Amigo* to Amsterdam for what the letter described as "essential repairs and a full inspection of the ship's hull to establish seaworthiness."

The Titan's captain had obviously been well briefed on the layout of the ship. After a brief conversation with our captain, he went to both studios and clumsily removed the microphones. Roger, who was in the studio preparing his breakfast show was given a few minutes to clear the studio of any personal effects before the door was padlocked. The duty radio engineer Ray Glennister was then ordered to switch off the transmitter.

With the exception of Roger, the rest of the disc jockeys were fast asleep in our bunks unaware of what was going on above. It was Tex the cook who woke us all up and told us to make our way to the messroom. Half asleep, my initial thoughts were that there must be some sort of emergency. Little did I realize the gravity of it.

We were told in no uncertain terms that we were to remain in the messroom or our cabins below deck until we arrived in Amsterdam. Just after 7 o'clock, an engineer on board The Titan severed our anchor chain using an oxyacetylene torch. Within minutes we were being towed away from our mooring in the direction of the Dutch coast. It was a very misty morning and visibility was down to about a couple of hundred metres which made it impossible for "Uncle" Bill or anyone else on land noticing what had happened and raise the alarm. The perfect conditions for a hijacking.



MV Titan

We discussed the possibility of one of us creeping up to the bridge out of sight of the two "heavies" that had remained on board and alert "Uncle" Bill on the ship to shore radio. Although sympathetic, Captain Perdok reminded us that he was under direct orders to make sure we remained indoors. Throughout the voyage across the North Sea, we all took turns monitoring the BBC's radio stations and Hilversum 3 to find out if our departure had made the news bulletins. We had no inkling at the time that the Wijsmuller's had efficiently achieved a double-whammy. Our sister ship the Fredericia had succumbed to the same fate. Radio Caroline North was also undertow and she too was heading for an uncertain future.

It was only when we arrived at the port of IJmuiden in the early evening and continued our journey along the Noordzeekanaal into Amsterdam to the amazement of passers by that the news was finally broken. When we came to a halt in the Houthaven, we were boarded by police officers and customs officials who examined and stamped our passports. Upon hearing the news, Robbie Dale, Stella and Nan had raced from the office to be on hand for our arrival. Robbie then explained the reasoning behind it all. He had just spoken on the telephone with Arthur Wijsmuller. To our surprise, we learned of colossal unpaid bills amounting to over £30,000 to the tender company, which had simply been ignored by Ronan and Solomon.

The British government under Harold Wilson had done everything within their powers to silence Radio Caroline and had failed. It was sadly ironic that it should be finally silenced as a result of our management's bad business practice.

Those five exciting and stimulating months I spent on the Mi Amigo made me even more determined to pursue a career in radio. As a somewhat inexperienced disc jockey with little talent in comparison with the likes of Johnnie, Robbie and Roger, I count myself very fortunate to have served such a rewarding apprenticeship with such legendary radio pioneers.

Following the unforeseen closure of Radio Caroline in March 1968, I found myself back in London staying with Robin Adcroft, an old friend from The Free Radio Association. Robin and his partner rented a large first floor flat in Addison Gardens, Shepherds Bush. It wasn't too long before it became a

refuge for pirate radio waifs and strays. Spangles Maldoon and his wife Kate moved in as did Bud Ballou, Stevie Merike, Ray Glennister and Michael Lindsay, a young electronics genius.



Spangles Maldoon

We were all out of work, broke and surviving mostly by our wits and the occasional handout of cash from Ronan who had asked us to stay in contact with him. He was resolute in his determination to revive Radio Caroline and wanted us all to be a part of it once again. With money being so tight, we were forced to resort to all manner of dastardly doings to keep the wolf from the door. Even Spangles, who was well versed in the art of wheeler-dealing was at his wits end as to how we would survive. I was called upon to do my bit when we finally ran out of excuses to Robin's landlord over the huge rent arrears. Mr. Younghusband, the exasperatingly pompous owner of the flat telephoned, "Now listen, I want no more of your excuses, I shall be coming around this afternoon to collect the rent, and if you don't pay up, you'll be evicted and that's final."

It was Sue Brinham, a girl living in the flat next door, who like us was having trouble finding the rent too who came up with a stunt to delay things for a while. Mr. Younghusband had always been reluctant to spend any money on the upkeep of the flats; as a consequence, they were all in a run down state. Sue said, "It's a pity my mother isn't here, she'd give him what for!" With that, it was unanimously decided, despite my protests, that I would become Sue's mother and set about Younghusband when he arrived. Sitting at Sue's dressing table, I was fitted with a wig which was "greyed" by pouring talcum powder over it. Copious amounts of make-up were applied to my face along

with lipstick, eye liner and dollops of rouge on my cheeks. After being fitted into one of her dresses which had been stuffed with socks to give me a more than ample cleavage, I wriggled into a pair of tights, splitting the gusset in the process and finally stepped into a pair of ill fitting high heel shoes. The make-over was complete and I was looking like a cross between Tony Curtis in "Some Like it Hot" and a backstreet prostitute.

Mr. Youngusband arrived at Addison Gardens shortly after lunch and our plan went into action. When he reached the first floor landing, I charged out of Sue's bedroom waving a folded umbrella in the air. Before he could utter a word I screamed in a couple of octaves higher than my normal voice, "How dare you! How dare you demand money from my daughter and those nice boys next door? These flats are a disgrace; you should be ashamed of yourself!" Youngusband backed off, "But, but." I interrupted with "Theres no bloody buts about it" threatening him with the umbrella. I could clearly hear the giggling of Robin and the others behind the door to the flat as I told him he should leave at once. To my astonishment, he turned on his heels and began to scamper down the stairs. I immediately chased after him shouting "And don't you dare come back and demand rent until you have cleaned up this filthy, rat infested hole!" I followed him through the hall and out of the front door and down the path to the gate. I was still hurling abuse when a young policeman who was walking up the street stopped. "Can I help you madam?" With Youngusband now out of sight, I tore off my wig and said something like "Constable, I'm afraid I am no madam, goodbye!" and ran back into the house to loud applause and cheers.

With little or no chance of getting one of the Radio Caroline ships out of Amsterdam, Ronan turned his attention to a former radio ship which was moored in one of the becks of the River Esk near Whitby. It was a converted Dutch lugger "Oceaan 7" which had been used by Radio 270 off the North Yorkshire coast before the Marine Offecnces Act became law. Ronan put his close friend and confidante Jimmy Houlihan in charge of the operation. Jimmy was a giant of a man, a former boxer, nightclub bouncer and a rent collector for the unscrupulous London landlord Peter Rachmann in the early 1960s.

Despite his somewhat crooked past, Jimmy was now a gentle soul and the only person in London I think Ronan really trusted.

In the spring of 1968, Don Allen and Roger Scott who had been disc jockeys on Caroline North, Mark West (later Mark Wesley of Radio Northsea International and Radio Luxembourg) Ray Glennister, a radio engineer on the Mi Amigo and myself met Jimmy Houlihan in a pub near his flat in Bayswater. He told us that Ronan had made a deal with the owners of the Ocean 7.



Ocean 7 near Whitby

Geoffrey Pearl, the eccentric chairman of the Free Radio Association had promised to provide the money required to buy it. The plan was to sail the ship out of Whitby and proceed south to the Mi Amigo's old position off Frinton-on-Sea.

A few days later, we all drove up to North Yorkshire in a couple of cars and booked in at The Hayburn Wyke Hotel near Scarborough which we used as our base. The Ocean 7 was lying on its side on the muddy bank with its mast extending over a hedgerow and into a neighbouring field. We had to wait until the tide turned and she righted herself before we could climb aboard. With the exception of Mark West who had previously worked for Radio 270, we were all surprised by its size - not much bigger than Radio Caroline's tender Offshore One.

Mark took us on a guided tour, which didn't take very long. The living quarters for the disc jockeys and crew was situated in just one large room. There was a long table with benches either side and about a dozen bunks which lined the walls, two tiny studios, a galley, the transmitter and engine room and that was that. Ronan was in continual telephone contact with Jimmy. He was keen to get the ship out to sea as soon as possible before the authorities got wind of our plans.

Jimmy gave us some cash to buy a record collection. To the amazement of the staff at Headlams record shop in the town, we bought two or three hundred singles and albums which would be enough to get us started. Jimmy meanwhile went to the harbour in search of a crew to sail the ship out to sea. I recall one of us asking him how we would get the ship past the famous Whitby swing bridge, in jest he replied, "Well if they won't open it, I know where I can lay my hands on a few sticks of gelignite!!"

In such a tight knit fishing community, tongues soon began to wag. Speculation was rife in the town about the return of Radio 270 and it wasn't long before our cover was blown. The police arrived en masse at the Hayburn Wyke Hotel one evening and we were forced to make a hasty exit on foot into the countryside before returning to collect our belongings and heading back to London. With the benefit of hindsight, it was probably just as well our plans were scuppered. The Ocean 7 was far too small to survive the winter gales of the North Sea. Before the Marine Offences Act, the Ocean 7 would up anchor and sail into port during particularly bad weather, returning to sea when the conditions improved. That option would have never been open to us.

Dear Sir,

Re: Ocean VII - Radio 270

Thank you for your letter of the 22nd May.

In noting the contents, I can categorically inform you that Mr. Ronan O' Rahilly has not bought Ocean VII. It is quite true that negotiations have taken place with Mr. Ronan O' Rahilly but these did not reach fruition owing to the legal difficulties concerning selling the Ship for Marine Broadcasting off the coast of Gt. Britain. This difficulty, of course, does not stop us selling it to someone in a country which has not signed the European Marine Broadcasting Bill of Geneva, Switzerland.

Naturally, as soon as we have sold the Ship, we will acquaint you.

Concerning the matter of disposing of records, as far as I am aware, the Company is not prepared to dispose of records separately. The record library has not been kept up to date, but that would present no problem to somebody commencing a broadcasting station, as all the record companies would be only too pleased to supply records free gratis.

Yours faithfully,

Dictated by *Denys Tuckley*
BUT NOT SEEN
Loanl. bant SECRETARY
Denys Tuckley.

An even more bizarre attempt to relaunch Radio Caroline was attempted a few months later, this time on the Knock John fort in the Thames Estuary. Despite its location inside territorial waters, Ronan decided to go-ahead with the plan and tough it out in the courts if we were hassled by the authorities. Once again, Jimmy Houlihan was in charge of operations. He asked Michael Lindsey and me to go out to the fort to make it habitable. It had been badly plundered after Radio Essex had vacated it and was in a bit of a mess. Jimmy, a couple of sailors, Michael and I left Southend-on-Sea aboard a small fishing boat loaded with food, water, a gas cooker, cleaning materials and studio equipment which Michael would install. For a week, we slaved away cleaning and painting the accommodation units on the forts, not knowing when the next tender would be arriving.



Knock John Fort

One afternoon, Michael and I were lounging around on the fort's main deck after a morning's work when we spotted a small fishing boat heading in for the fort. Assuming it was our tender, we started enthusiastically waving in its direction. As it got closer, we were horrified to spot a cameraman at the bow of the ship filming their approach. They asked if they could come on board to film a piece for Southern Television about the return of Radio Caroline! How they ever knew about our plans remains a mystery to this day. Michael and I panicked, what were we to do? We quickly concocted a story. We would tell the journalist we were a couple of poets needing the isolation of being at sea to give us the inspiration for a volume of poems we were writing. With the limited time available, we could think of nothing else more convincing.

Not wanting them to see the radio equipment on board, we clambered down the rickety wooden contraption attached to one end of the fort which had originally been used as a landing platform. With the camera rolling, the journalist began by asking us questions about Radio Caroline. In a none too convincing way, we managed to bluff our way through the interview. As the film crew headed back to Margate, we both agreed the journalist couldn't have possibly been that gullible and most likely didn't believe a word we said. As with the previous attempt to relaunch Radio Caroline on the Ocean 7, it all came to nothing. Within days, Jimmy sent out a boat to collect us and the equipment and return to land.

Fed up with living such a hand to mouth existence, I decided to get a job. Spangles had connections in the Midlands and arranged for me to become the resident disc jockey at The Oasis Club in Wolverhampton. A few months later, I moved to the newly opened Club Lafayette in the town. Working at the Lafayette was a wonderful experience, particularly because of the quality of the live bands and singers that performed on the tiny stage. During my time there, I introduced Scott Walker and The Ronnie Scott Orchestra, Roy Harper, blues legends John Lee Hooker, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee and Freddie King. One night, Stevie Wonder unexpectedly arrived. He was in town as part of the Ray Charles Show at the Theatre Royal. I interviewed him on stage before he delighted the packed house by playing harmonica with the band Black Cat Bones who were appearing at the club that evening.

Robert Plant and John Bonham of Led Zeppelin were regular visitors to the club and I got to know them well. On one occasion, John told me he was renting the club for a night to throw a party for his wife Pat's birthday and asked if I would play the music. Without hesitation I said yes, he replied, "Will fifty quid be alright?" I didn't tell him that £50 was twice the weekly wage I was being paid by the club!

It was whilst working at the Lafayette I became the first post Marine Offences Act Radio Caroline disc jockey to be employed by the BBC as an interviewer on Radio One. Later that year, Johnnie Walker deservedly became the first of our small band of rebels to be given a regular show on Saturday afternoons. Once or twice a month, for the princely sum of eight guineas, I was engaged by the Beeb to appear on the Radio One Club, a two

hour outside broadcast, from night clubs or dance halls in Wolverhampton, Stoke-on-Trent, Hanley and Birmingham.

Radio One's frontline disc jockeys, Dave Lee Travis, Emperor Rosko, David Symonds, Stuart Henry and Ed Stewart took turns to present the programme, my role was to interview the guest pop stars or celebrities and chat to the Radio One fans who had turned up for the broadcast. Working for the BBC for certainly an eye-opener for me. There appeared to be more people working on the Radio One Club programme than the entire staff of Radio Caroline! The show's producer was Johnny Beerling who had been a great fan of the pirate stations. He generously gave me lots of tips and advice on interview technique, an area of radio I was unfamiliar with. I recall one occasion when he took me to one side just before a broadcast from Wolverhampton. "Now Andy, under no circumstances are you mention Dusty Springfield today." When I asked why not, he explained that on the previous day's edition of the programme from Bristol, my south western counterpart had been interviewing fans when one of them asked him live on air if there was any truth in the rumour that Dusty Springfield was really a lesbian!"

I was beginning to warm to the Beeb. They were the complete antithesis of the image I had of them when I was working on the Mi Amigo. Derek Chinnery, a senior producer at the BBC one day called me out of the blue. In his gentlemanly, slightly old fashioned manner asked if I could spare the time to come to see him in London. We met in his office at Broadcasting House. He told me in strictest confidence that Radio One were soon planning a few programme changes and asked if would I be interested in presenting an afternoon show for a three month trial period. I returned to Wolverhampton elated.

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