

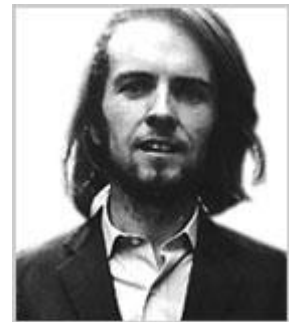
On March 27, 1964, the offshore station Radio Caroline started its transmissions from the former MV Fredericia. In 2004, forty years later, Hans Knot opened up a series of memories of the station's wet and wild history.

The wet and wild history of Radio Caroline - 40 Years of Radio Caroline

By Hans Knot

Introduction

On March 27, 1964, the offshore station Radio Caroline started its transmissions from the former MV Fredericia. Nowadays, the station still can be heard by way of internet and satellite. The forty year history of Radio Caroline is characterized by countless ups and downs, each worth memorising — as will be done on these pages. Here Hans Knot introduces this coming series, inviting everyone to contribute by sending him his/her memories of Radio Caroline.



Now forty years ago, the offshore station Radio Caroline came on the air for the very first time. The programs were aired from the MV Fredericia, renamed into the MV Caroline. Nowadays, the programs transmitted in the very first weeks — from Eastern, March 27th 1964, on — may seem as dull as most contemporary programs on the usual land-based British and Dutch radio stations. At the time, however, the avid listeners to the station didn't notice that at all, as Radio Caroline aired a lot of music that was completely new to them. At that time the station was playing mostly Top 50 records, while giving special attention to unknown artists and new record companies. During hours when housewives were a major part of the audience, light music was also played. There also was more chatting and conversation going on than people used to hear on other stations. The deejays enjoyed the freedom to pick their own choice of music. For these reasons, Radio Caroline seemed fresh and new. Only later I did learn that in those early days a considerable part of the program had been taped at an earlier date.



Soon after the first transmissions, the MV Caroline was joined by a second ship — the MV Mi Amigo, a ship that was used before by the Swedish station Radio Nord — to start pop radio, Radio Atlanta.



Atlanta hit the airwaves on May 9. However, though the ships were initially rivals, there was much to link them — particularly the fact that they had both been equipped at the port of Greenore in Southern Ireland. Behind the scenes talks were going on to make the links stronger. In fact, a merger took place in July of the same year, and a little while later the MV Caroline steamed off to the Isle of Man, 3.5 miles off Ramsey, to tap an as yet untouched audience as Caroline North. The MV Mi Amigo, now housing Radio Caroline South, stayed at its place at 3.5 miles off Frinton, Essex. Together both stations reached a large audience: for Caroline North it was Ireland and the larger parts of Scotland and Northern England; for Caroline South, next to Southern England it was the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Eastern Germany and even large parts of France, Spain and Portugal.

Led by the charismatic and idealistic Ronan O'Rahilly, Radio Caroline continued for four long years, till the station was forced to close down in March 1968 because of financial problems. Surprising even its most loyal fans, in September 1972 the station returned for a second time, now airing its programs from the Mi Amigo. The format turned towards impressive high energy radio and, just as the LP was becoming the main medium for pop and rock music, good FM-music.



The sinking of this ship in March 1980 meant the end of the second period of the station. Radio Caroline, however, came back for yet another period. Between August 9, 1983, and November 24, 1987, the station could be heard by the very strong transmitters of the MV Ross Revenge. When, due to bad weather, the mast collapsed into the North Sea, it seemed the end had finally come. Still, the crew

succeeded in repairing the areals and the programs continued till August 19, 1989, when Dutch and British authorities boarded the vessel and stripped it of all equipment. Yet, driven by sweat and enthusiasm, for a short period, till November 6, 1990, the programs continued under names like Caroline 319/963, Caroline 576, Caroline 585, Caroline 558, Caroline 819, Jamming 963, Viewpoint 963/819, Caroline Overdrive and The 819 Overnight Alternative. On November

19, 1991, due to a heavy storm the Ross Revenge grounded on the Goodwin Sands.

During these second and third periods Radio Caroline was helped by a host of fans, organized in the Caroline Organisation. For one thing, the organisation succeeded in recuperating the miraculously salvaged Ross Revenge. After a real odyssey — the ship went from Dover to places like Kent and Essex — the vessel now lies in Rochester. During the 1990s the organisation again helped Peter Moore, station manager since 1987, to run several 28-day transmissions by way of a RSL, a Restricted Service Licence. That is what I've once called Radio Caroline's fourth period. In the meantime we even have entered a fifth episode. Since 1998 the UK organisation is transmitting programs by way of satellite. In the Netherlands, Radio Caroline returned on January 26, 2002, with programs distributed on the cable networks of Essent and Cogas in the Northern parts of the country. The station had to stop its transmissions on February 18, 2003 due to financial problems. However, up till this day the UK branch of the Caroline organization is still airing its programs by way of internet and satellite.



In all those forty years many things happened to the station and its ships. Lots of things have been written down through the years about Radio Caroline and Offshore Radio in general, but many more still wait for the patient hand that will describe them. I'm proud that I've contributed by writing more than 35 books on the subject, featuring a lot of the stations. I was lucky to be allowed to write for a lot of magazines who were willing to publish my articles over the past decades. Therefore I want to give a big thank to all the editors who gave me the chance to publish my pieces all those years. As a result, I now have written thousands of pages and I thought it would be good to return to some of those: memories I did or didn't share up till now about Radio Caroline. This series will start with an article I did write way back in 1989, when Caroline was 25 years of age, telling about the start of the station's second period.



Indeed, this will become a series. There's more to come and at the end of the year the whole series will be packaged as a book, celebrating the fact Radio Caroline was born forty years ago. And, I hope that I'm not the only one to contribute. I welcome everyone to send me their Caroline memories. Especially, I would like to ask all the former Caroline people to write down some pages

for this special publication. And, last but not least, and before taking you back to September 1972 in the first issue of the Caroline series, I want to say a big "thank you" to Peter Moore. Not only for the long evenings we had together drinking some fine red wine and a few good beers, but also for the work he and his fellow people have done since he came in charge of the Caroline organization.

Part 1

A memorable Saturday: September 30, 1972

Almost nobody heard the very short test transmission in the late evening of September 29, 1972, on 1187 kHz. The next day, however, instead of two offshore radio stations, Veronica and RNI, there suddenly were four stations transmitting from the High Seas: Radio Veronica on 538 metres, RNI 1 on 220 meters, RNI 2 on 192 meters, and next to that test transmissions with non-stop music on 257.2 meters continued, coming directly from the MV Mi Amigo. Indeed, Radio Caroline was back on the air and due to bring some impressive high energy radio over the ensuing years. Here Hans Knot tells us all there is to know about that illustrious Saturday, September 30, 1972.

A new frequency for Veronica

"Sensational" is the word I want to use, thinking back of that illustrious day at the end of September 1972. First of all, in the afternoon, Radio Veronica changed frequency. Interference problems with a high power transmitter in Beromünster, Switzerland, were the reason to switch the frequency to the other end of the medium wave-band. From 192 meters it went to 538, bringing a clearer signal to most parts of the Netherlands and the Eastern regions of Britain. A huge amount of money was spent by the Veronica organization, ran by the Verweij brothers, to achieve this. Throughout two weeks all the big daily newspapers in the Netherlands published daily advertisements in which prominent Dutchmen asked the readers to join Veronica to her new wavelength on September 30, 1972. The Veronica organisation had damaged its own reputation by a bomb attack on the radio ship of its competitor RNI. Now, it hoped to better its luck by reaching out to a larger audience.



About 11.30 CET, on September 30, one could hear Veronica's deejay Tineke asking everyone for the last time to change frequency with Radio Veronica. After thanking the listeners for all their support, she said she hoped to see them all back in thirty minutes time at the other end of the medium waveband. The next thing to happen was the close-down of the 10 kW

transmitter onboard the Veronica vessel MV "Norderney" by technician José van Groningen. Preparations on board had made it possible to change to 557 kHz in only thirty minutes time. But, just as many listeners were about to retune their radio sets to search for the new wavelength, a new sound was heard on the 192 meters. A strong signal came in just after the close-down of the Veronica transmitter. The voice of Tony Allan made itself heard, thanking Radio Veronica for all the many years of pleasure on the 192 meters and wishing every listener a warm welcome to the new sound of "RNI 2".

2 The return of Radio Caroline. Indeed, RNI was playing a joke on Radio Veronica. On board of the radio ship MEBO II, the technicians had retuned one of their two spare transmitters to the 192 meters. They used it to surprise the Veronica listeners with a temporary new station, meant to captivate them for the remainder of the day with the sounds of Radio North Sea International. The particular transmitter was once used for Radio 390. That same afternoon, however, more was happening on the beloved medium wave. On 1187 kHz a modulation test could be heard — this time coming from a transmitter on board of the MV Mi Amigo. After four-and-a-half years of silence, there was again music emanating from one of the former Radio Caroline ships. It was only non-stop music, but nevertheless it signalled the return of Radio Caroline.

In March 1968, both Caroline vessels — the MV Fredericia and the MV Mi Amigo, had been taken into harbour by the tugs of the Wijsmuller Company due to the fact that this company owed a large sum of money from the Caroline organization for delivering supplies to the ships. Both vessels were taken to the Amsterdam Houthaven where they were locked up. Lying next to the Amsterdam Central station, both ships drew a lot of visitors, mostly Radio Caroline fans or Anoraks. It didn't take long before most of the equipment and tapes were stolen from the ships. Even former deejay Spangles Muldoon was seen there, in the company of former RNI technician Peter Chicago, taking away a lot of equipment. However, as things would turn out in the end, all of the latter could be found on the ship again in 1972 again! Clearly, already at that time, some people were planning for the future.

New owners

At that stage, it seemed as if the owners didn't want the ships anymore, so nobody here in Holland believed the many rumours that kept running over the next years that Radio Caroline would come back on the air again. Finally, at an auction in May 1972, both vessels were sold. The Fredericia was sold to the "NV Handels- en Ingenieursbureau" from Amsterdam which resold the ship to shipbroker Van de Marel in Ouwerkerk aan de IJssel for the price of 20,000 Dutch Guilders. The ship remained at the broker's yard for many years and was finally broken up in early 1980. Only one part remained: many years later the ship's bell still could be found in the office of Mr. van de Marel in Ouwerkerk, where the final work on the Fredericia was done. Clearly Van de Marel became attached to the bell. When he moved to Africa, he took the thing with him. Just lately I did learn he came back to live in Holland and took the bell back. On the yard, nowadays, his son runs a maritime museum, hosting a large quantity of unique material collected by his father. However, I don't know if the bell is at display there.

Lucky enough, the *Mi Amigo* was not bought by a shipbroker. The ship was bought by two persons: Rob Vermaat and Gerard van Dam. Van Dam told journalists that he, as a true Anorak, would rebuild the *MV Mi Amigo* into an offshore museum. First, he said, the ship would be towed to Zaandam harbour for repairs. Only a week later Caroline fans in Holland and Great Britain got a nice letter in which Van Dam announced that it was possible to visit the ship, which would be transformed into a museum. Guests could also stay aboard for a few days to entertain themselves in the cabins of all the former stars. It would even be possible, the brochure declared, to produce their own Caroline show in the studios on the *MV Mi Amigo*. In an interview on VPRO Radio, Gerard van Dam even claimed that he had plans to tow the vessel to the British coast, because the British Anoraks loved the station even more than the Dutch.

A new anchorage

After the maintenance had taken place in Zaandam, the ship suddenly disappeared out of the harbour. About September 1, 1982, a tug from the Iskes Company from Zaandam towed the *MV Mi Amigo* into IJmuiden harbour. Finally, after passing the customs, the ship was anchored around 4 miles north of IJmuiden harbour. Nobody knew what would happen next. Even the captain of the tug, skipper Iskes, was in the dark. In a radio interview, he said that one of the crewmembers of the *Mi Amigo* had told him that the ship would lie at anchor

to wait for a towing vessel. This tug was due to arrive in a few hours from an English harbour and would tow the ship to the British coast. Iskes added, that he'd warned the people on the MV Mi Amigo that it was too dangerous to go out with such an unstable ship and that it would be a big danger for other ships during darkness. However, during the night of September 2/3, a tug arrived from Scheveningen harbour to tow the Mi Amigo to a new anchorage off the Scheveningen coast, half a mile away from both the MV Norderney and the MV MEBO II, the radio ships of Radio Veronica and Radio Northsea International.



In his program "Skyline," Tony Allan, was the first to announce the arrival of the MV Mi Amigo. He did so, while telling a little white lie: "On the former Radio Caroline ship there are no transmitters at all." Addressing the Mi Amigo technician, he added: "Peter Chicago, you haven't got a hope. We're bigger than you are, we're better than you are and we've got more money than you have." But Allan clearly knew more than he was saying, because just a few weeks later he had left RNI and was himself on board of the Mi Amigo. The next day the arrival of the new radio ship was mentioned several times in the Radio Veronica news broadcasts and the next Sunday it was on the "NOS Journaal," the Dutch TV news service, which showed some shots taken from an airplane. The reporter told that the MV Mi Amigo had no security lights. This was reason enough for the Dutch navy to go out to the ship and ask the crew to put on their lights during the hours of darkness. When this didn't happen, the navy officer called for the assistance of the Dutch water police, who gave a penalty to the captain of the Mi Amigo for not having the security lights on.

A big hoax

By now the real plans of Vermaat en Van Dam became clear. The newspapers awoke to the possibility that Caroline could be returning to the airwaves, but still could not get the matter right. On September 4, 1972, the biggest newspaper of the Netherlands, the "Telegraaf" brought the news on the front page that the MV Mi Amigo now officially was the property of the "Bell Broadcasting Company." In the article a spokesman of this company announced that a new station, called Radio Caroline 73, would start broadcasting by the end of 1972 with two separate transmissions, one on 270 and the other on 259 meters medium wave. The power of the new transmitters would be 50 and 100 kW ERP. Reading this, many Anoraks in the Netherlands suddenly started having doubts. Was it really possible to use two such high-powered transmitters on

both these wavelengths on just one ship? Impossible, the wavelengths were far too close to each other!

Rutger van den Berg, the newspaper added, was the name of the commercial director of *Caroline 73*. That was all the information given. A few days later, after some other newspapers had taken over the story, it all appeared to be a big hoax. The two people who were really behind the "Bell Broadcasting Company" stepped forward to tell the true story. Roel Koenders and Henk Meeuwis, two boys from Amsterdam who were dedicated radio freaks, confessed that they'd launched the misinformation to *Telegraaf* to have some fun at the paper, because this it so often forgot to check its information. Both boys, by the way, finally ended up in radio. Henk Meeuwis became a newsreader and deejay on the Dutch service of Radio Caroline in 1973 and Roel Koenders made his career as a producer at VARA radio in Hilversum and later worked as an announcer on VARA television.

No less than four offshore stations

The "*Telegraaf*" was slow to learn. On September 15, 1972, the newspaper again had a headline story on the front page and again it did get things wrong. The article stated that the *MV Mi Amigo* would not be used as a radio ship, but as a casino ship, a place where people could play all kind of gambling games that at that time were illegal in the Netherlands



Holland — roulette, bingo etcetera. This time the joke was played by one of the biggest liars of the Dutch Radio scene, Anton Rabeljee, who had his own land based pirate station at the end of 1970 by the name of "*RNI Groningen*" for which Dutch GPO raided him twice. He phoned Bert Voorthuyzen, one time star reporter at the *Telegraaf*, and told him that he had worked for the offshore stations Radio Veronica as well as RNI. Now, he added, he was working for the new casino organization. With his own eyes, he had seen, so he told, that the transmitters were completely stripped of the ship in Zaandam harbour. Voorthuyzen later admitted

he forgot to check the story — he should have called me, he confessed. Some five years later, Rabeljee, still living on allowances, would make the headlines again, but that is another story.

Meanwhile a few people were giving somewhat better hints at what really was going on. Some days in September 1972 Spangles Muldoon, for instance,

announced in his show that he was going to trade Radio Northsea International for another station in the same street. For the benefit of those who didn't understand him, he conveyed that they had to add 39 to 220 (259 meters). For all the free radio fans in Holland, Belgium and Great Britain, this was the first official sign that something would be happening soon on the 259 spot. Despite this early warning, almost nobody heard that very short test transmission in the late evening of September 29 on 1187 kHz. The next day, however, it all became clear. Instead of two offshore radio stations — Veronica and RNI — there suddenly were no less than four stations transmitting from the High Seas: Radio Veronica on 538 metres, RNI I on 220 meters, RNI 2 on 192 meters and, yes, test transmissions with non-stop music on the 257.2 meters, coming directly from the MV Mi Amigo. Radio Caroline was back and due to bring us gigantic high energy radio and album music over the ensuing years, and next to that, many happenings for all the free radio fans to enjoy.

Part 2

Looking back at Caroline with Mike and Tom



2004 is the year the most written about radio station in the world will celebrate the fact the station came on the air, from international waters, for the very first time. Eastern 1964 was the moment we could hear not only Simon Dee and his friends for the very first time but also the Caroline bell. From that point on Radio Caroline got a massive audience and thousands of her first listeners are still following the station. I will try to get as much as memories from listeners in the forthcoming months as well as the memories from the deejays who worked for the most loved radio station in the world. So all the readers, who were connected to the stations and still love it.... Sit down at your computer desk and write down your own memories. At the end of the year

it will be edited together in a book, which will be published by the Foundation for Media Communication and 50% of the profit of the book will go to the Caroline organization. This as Caroline is not only the most famous but presumably also the poorest station in the world.

In the first chapter I share with you the story which I wrote way back in 1989, already 15 years ago. A year earlier it was my good friend Robert Chapman who met two former Caroline deejays to share memories with each other. Strange enough I met them too. Tommy Lodge on a few occasions including on the same occasion with Mike Ahearn during the Caroline Revival transmissions at the London Dockyards in 1997. Let's go way back to 1988 and share some of the memories Rob Chapman brought back in this interview.



Robert Chapman: How did you get involved with Caroline North, Mike?

Mike Ahearn: I got involved with Caroline North by writing them a letter, to Caroline House in London, and they wrote back and said "Forget it." Actually I was surprised to get a reply. And when they wrote back, saying: "Forget it," I rang up Chris Moore. I didn't know who Chris Moore was then, and said: "Listen, if you don't give me a job, you going to miss the best disk-jockey in Northern England." So Moore said: "If you're so good you'd better come down to Chesterfield Gardens and do a tape." I'd never been to London except as a small boy and I got totally lost. In the end I found Chesterfield Gardens, went down to the basement and all I did — because I had listened to Tom Lodge and Jerry Leighton — was sound exactly the way they did. You know, Radio Caroline 199. Just copied them. After I did this tape they said: "Thank you very much, we'll let you know." Three weeks went by, and four weeks, and I called. It was a big deal to call London because I just had the phone at my mother's house. They said: "Haven't you got any letter from us?" I said that I hadn't received a word. Chris Moore said to me to come down to London as they wanted to see me.



So I went back to London again and had another chat in that office with those big black chairs — it was Ronan O'Rahilly's office with the big picture of the Fredericia on the wall. Anyway, I was very nervous and after a little talk they said: "Thank you, it was good to see you." Again it was nothing for a couple of weeks and I called again and said: "Listen and ..." And Chris Moore said: "Oh, Mike, I'm so

glad you called, can you please be at Liverpool Airport? You'll start on the ship next Monday, which is the changeover day." Anyway, I met this guy at the airport, a big Irish guy called Jimmy, who was Ronan's agent there. That was the start. I went on the ship and I remember I went out with this guy Naddy or whatever his name was. Also Tom was on, and Jerry. I was shit-scared, as you can imagine.

Tom, who was the chief presenter, was very calm and said: "Look, what we'll do is record your first show." The first thing I said was: "This is Radio Caroline with Mike Ahearn. Tell me, what kind of Christmas you're going to have?" Elvis was next, singing: "I'll have a Blue Christmas." This was because I started in November 1964. I sat downstairs and listened to myself on the radio and then the same night I went to the studio while Tom and Jerry were doing the request program and somehow it clicked. At the end of my first stint, Tom said to me: "Listen, we've kind of a problem, somebody hasn't come back ... can you stay on for an extra week?" So I said: "Sure," and the program I had to do was the "Women's 9 to 12". And I did it from that time on, forever.

Tom Lodge: You sounded really good on that, it obviously suited you.

Robert Chapman: Did you have that kind of style immediately that appeals to the housewives audience as well as to the kids?

Mike Ahearn: I suspect I did, I had no idea why, but it was the figures were just through the roof; and we had men and housewives there. At one point we had 4, 5, 6 million.



Robert Chapman: Did you have a rivalry then, with the jocks on Caroline North being so very separate from Caroline South?

Mike Ahearn: I don't think there was rivalry ... but, yes, we always wanted to be ourselves. We thought the South ship was more broadcasting to London and we were kind of forgotten in the North of England and our audience wasn't that big

and we wanted it to be better. Sure, when the Mi Amigo ran aground in 1966, there was great jubilation on the MV Fredericia.

Tom Lodge: I was aboard when it ran aground. I'd gone South then, and that was quite an experience.

Mike Ahearn: I remember a photo in a newspaper with Ronan standing on the beach next to a policeman, while they were trying to drag the Caroline ship.



Tom Lodge: They took us off with a Breeches Buoy and I had this picture of my girlfriend, a huge picture. I came off holding this and made the front page with it, a great picture of this disk-jockey coming off the ship in this howling gale and in his hand this huge picture of his girl

friend.

Mike Ahearn: Actually, you were the only guy who was ever allowed to have a lady on the ship. We always said: "Well it's great for Tom," but we were all waiting mostly 12 days ... I remember the way we used to doll ourselves up when we used to go off the ship, the after-shave had come out, a shower for the first time — of course not quite true. Oh, do you remember the mad captain who used to keep chickens?

Tom Lodge: It was on Caroline North.

Mike Ahearn: He had a rooster and three chickens in the place where later the new studios were built. Most afternoons you'd get bored shitless, there was nothing to do. So, I used to go up and tease the chickens. Anyway, this bloody chicken got out. The seaman was crazy. He treated his chickens like they were children. This chicken got out and took off over the deck. I tried to catch it but it had gone straight over the rail and landed in the Irish Sea. The sea was calm but you've never seen such a dumb, frightened chicken in your life. I went: "Chuck, chuck, come back," and "What I'm going to do?" The chicken, however, disappeared towards England. So I went to the captain and said: "Listen, one of the chickens has gone overboard." And this really scared the seaman, for this man was crazy. Some of the Dutch were really crazy. I said that I had opened the door because I had heard a funny noise; I was just too scared to tell the truth.

Robert Chapman: At that time the South ship was still very much kind of, what as I describe as a Hit Radio 2. You had a lot of the original Kings Road crowd playing very middle-of-the-road music on the South ship. There were people like Gary Kemp and Keith Skues. The North ship was much more a pop-oriented station.



Tom Lodge: We had a very simple policy and that was: "Play what you like." You would choose your selection by taking what you might like and putting it all around you on the floor. You had your Top 40 in a box, your new releases. Remember, we used to sit down and listen to the new releases and pick out the one we liked? You chose your selection as you went along. So you had a very spontaneous show. I mean, it was a much better programmed than if it was planned. And then, on South, they had to play certain of Crawford's Publishing Labels and so on. I don't think this was so good, because when I went down to the MV Mi Amigo, I introduced the same kind of format and our ratings just soared. By August 1966 we had 24 million listeners.

Robert Chapman: I remember when you guys went onto the South Ship the staff thing changed over night. All these Keith Skues people went.

Mike Ahearn: Caroline South was being hammered by Radio London.

Tom Lodge: They had first one listener to Radio London's ten. That's why Alan Crawford lost, I presume, because he didn't get any change. So Ronan took it over and told me to do the same sort of thing we were doing on North. My policy-was totally to pick people who had the right state of mind, enjoyed the music that was happening, were in touch with what the audience was doing, and therefore picked the right music.

Mike Ahearn: We were responsible for making a lot of artists. I said to Tom Jones recently, during an interview: "Do you understand, Tom, that you may not have had a career if we'd had no Caroline North starting to play "It's Not Unusual"?" The reason we picked this song was because of its duration: it was only 1 minute and 59 seconds. It was short and it was a good one, up to news. We were pretty good about getting the news on in time, even in those days. Another one that we broke was the Fortunes "You've Got Your Troubles", the Rolling Stones certainly, The Who, and a lot of bands just would not be as big as they are now without Caroline. Tom Jones said to me that he hadn't realized that, but I said to him "It's true." I remember what we did. We went to the library where a record player was. I remember saying it to Jerry and you guys were not so



keen on it but you said: "Michael, if you want to play it, play it."

Tom Lodge: I had the same kind of reaction with the early records of the Who. I don't think anyone liked them at first, so I started playing "Anyway, Anyhow", as their first one.

Mike Ahearn: And the BBC was still like the BBC Light Program — they couldn't understand why they had no listeners. We were "rockin'

and rollin'." The unfortunate thing was that we had problems. Our medium wave transmissions on the 199 meters at night would go under. I mean, you could get us in Blackpool, but it was a really scratchy reception. We had the same problem on 259 meters on the ship with Radio Moscow. We used to go over the top of Moscow and we had then a lot of kids listening to Radio Moscow to get Radio Caroline! There we actually got official complaints from the Foreign Office about radio Caroline from Moscow. They had a big audience from kids who had never been listening to Radio Moscow.

Robert Chapman: You had this Jack Spector on, this syndicated program from the States. You must have liked him because he used to have a go at you in his programmes.

Mike Ahearn: I'm glad that you remember it. I don't quite know what happened. He must have picked up my name, maybe because it sounded more Irish or American. He found out when I was coming back on the ship. He'd say things like: "Mike Ahearn is back, all the rats have left or comments like that and this built in quite a thing to find out what Jack Spector was going to say about me and I was always shit scared to find out what he was going to say. I could not get back at him. I flew one day to New York and met him and he was the most charming guy and one of the hot shots of WMCA. He took me to his house in Brooklyn, introduced me to his wife and kids, took me to some high school dances, which he was doing, and it was excellent.



When I went to Australia, I got night-time, so guess what I did? I came on the radio: "This is your leader, raise your right hand and repeat after me." And I just ripped off Jack's style, doing it of course in my way and it blew them apart in Australia. They didn't have anything like that. What I did then ... we used to go on relay on a couple of stations, and I just picked up on a guy in the same way as Jack was doing to me. So, Jack Spector had an enormous influence on me. He

was big in New York. His style of broadcasting was just something like we'd never heard. I don't know what happened to him. I don't hear him anymore in New York.

Robert Chapman: What was the Caroline House like in those days?

Tom Lodge: Unique and luxurious. Blue carpet, big staircase.

Mike Ahearn: Frances van Staden, the publicity officer. A huge office upstairs. Big photograph of the Fredericia on the wall.

Robert Chapman: Some people told me that the Moody Blues had an office there, and that it wasn't just Caroline.

Mike Ahearn: Georgie Fame was there too.

Robert Chapman: When you do think back, was it well run?

Mike Ahearn: When you look back ... I mean, none of us had had any experience in that quarters. First of all how do you set up a traffic department, how do you get your commercials on a ship at sea when the tender would come out three times a week? We had this log, on which was when we had to play the commercials. It worked fine. I think from a point of view of being organized, yes, the schedules came in time, the music came and I always thought that Van Staden, the publicity officer, did a marvellous job. She was excellent. Another interesting thing about Caroline, both North and South, was that we had never any people on the ships who were gay like they did on the ship of Radio London.

Robert Chapman: I was recently talking to Tim Blackmore and he said there were several levels on Radio London. There was everything from the people who where obviously gay, the ones who were chronic alcoholics, you got Kenny Everett spaced out of his mind at the time, and there was always "behind the scene's stuff."

Mike Ahearn: We had no drugs, two Heineken beers a day. The only drug you had was smoking a cigarette. Of course, we sometimes brought ourselves a bottle of Bacardi onto the ship, which would last a fortnight.



Tom Lodge: When we had to revamp the South station because we had to compete with Radio London, we became the best station around. We just had to be, and we enjoyed it. I insisted that every jock listened to his own program. You see this in Canada and the States. You go into the studio and there's a jock and the record is playing and he turns it off. He won't listen to it. With us it was: "You're into the music, you feel what this music is about, you win the audience, who're also listening, the record comes to an end and you're going to speak and behave relative to that music." Now, you listen to North American Radio, you can tell that they're not listening. They're not into the program.

Mike Ahearn: I remember Rosko, who had a bird called Alfie. One day he went off the ship and asked me because we shared the same cabin, to look after Alfie. He was going to France for a gig at Luxembourg. What we did was make a loop tape and play it to the bird: "Rosko is a bastard ..." We played it for a week. When Rosko came back, for the next week the bird didn't say "Rosko is a bastard" once. Anyway I went ashore and came back and he went ashore. After he came back next time he said: "You swine!" I said "What happened?" Well, he used to go to the Royal Garden Hotel and had taken the bloody bird in and had put it on the window ledge and got this girl in his room and they were just about to make love, when suddenly Alfie cried: "Rosko is a bastard."

Robert Chapman: Was there much communication between yourselves and Radio London?



Mike Ahearn: We visited them and had a beer. Kenny and I went to school together. We came from the same area, so we knew each other. Some years later I was doing this

special broadcast between Brisbane and Capital Radio in London with Kenny on the other end. At the time he was already doing television programmes and this Captain Kremmand thing. I just didn't realize that he was so big, a star. I said: "Hi Kenny, how are you?" He just looked at me like I had never existed and I thought "Well, if this is what stardom does, I don't need any stardom." But, there was a lot of communication between the Mi Amigo and the Galaxy. Not so much probably between us and Radio England, because they were a bit further away. But there was certainly a fair amount between us and London. In fact we used to switch on the radio in the morning to see how sober Tony Windsor was going to be, if he would make it with the program.

Tom Lodge: Were you on board, Mike, the day that Ronan O'Rahilly came out with the tender, because somebody had hijacked his Tower ... the Roughs Tower? He had taken over this tower with the object of making it into his own country. The purpose of that was to show the ridiculousness of nationalism because if he could make a country, anyone could. So, Roy Bates hijacked this tower from O'Rahilly. Ronan came out on the tender to Caroline South and called me saying that we were going out to the Tower to take it back. So I jumped on the tender and off we went out to the tower. I was a very huge tower. We came along with our tender to climb up, all on the ladder to the top, and we got splattered with machinegun bullets. So Ronan said: "Let's go." So we went back to the radio ship. From then on the tower became Roy Bates' property and was renamed "Sealand." By the way, Mike, were you on board when I fired the captain?

Mike Ahearn: I don't know, but yes, I once had a riot with the captain.

Tom Lodge: Well, I think it was on South then. This is what happened. We had the show going all night and the guy who was doing the all-night show, maybe about 2.00 or 3.00 in the morning, would put on a long-play record and would go down to the galley and have a bacon sandwich or something, because he was hungry.

Mike Ahearn: Oh yes, I remember now, I'll give you the story!

Tom Lodge: It was you?

Mike Ahearn: Right, and it certainly was Caroline North. The story is that there was the guy called Mark Sloane, who was a newsreader. We got this particular captain and we had this habit that around eleven o'clock or something like that Mark and I would make a bacon sandwich and a couple of hot chocolates. One day this guy came in and asked what we were doing. When I told him, he said: "This





is not a 24-hour café; you'll have to put it back and go to your cabin as well!" He said to me the classic words: "Mister Ahearn, you'll leave the ship immediately," and he called the tender out. The tender came out and he put me on, and I went back to Felixstowe. There I called O'Rahilly in London and he said: "What the fuck are you

doing off the ship?" I said that I'd been sent off and he asked me why and I told him the story. Ronan came down and we went back to the ship. Next to the Mi Amigo, he said: "Get on," and this captain said "Get off." I had one foot on the Mi Amigo and one foot on the tender.

Tom Lodge: I said then, that we had to fire the captain and so O'Rahilly went back ashore and I presume he got in touch with Holland, because the next thing was that a boat came alongside with another captain on it and this one had new working orders and the crew stood with their mouth open because you don't fire a captain. From then on we were king. That was really a legal mutiny.

Part 3

Some Radio Caroline cut-outs

Radio Caroline sure was prone to headlines. In this third instalment of our Radio Caroline series, Hans Knot takes us back to what the newspapers wrote about the offshore station, adding a few of his personal memories.

Delving in my archives. Thinking over the four decades of Radio Caroline's history, a lot of memories are coming back to my mind. During those years, I enjoyed many hours of listening pleasure — mostly during the first two decades — and I also had the luck of meeting a lot of the deejays, crew members and technicians. My writings on offshore radio gave me the chance of meeting a lot of these guys on countless occasions. Over the last eight years I was even invited to the reunion parties of the former offshore people. In this third installment of our Radio Caroline series, I want to take you back to a few of their and my personal memories that I did write down in my radio logs in the 1960s. Yes, at that time I already was collecting all that I could find about pop

radio — just like others were collecting the stamps of Tonga or Barbados. In these days the newspapers had a lot to write about Radio Caroline and I collected a load of cut-outs for my archive. Here, I present some of it, just grabbing around in this massive pile of paper.



Predicting the future. Looking at the date, the very first newspaper cut-out I found, comes out of a Dutch regional newspaper and was published late April 1964. Describing the ship, the reporter stated that the MV Fredericia had a crew of fifteen people coming from Scandinavia as well as from Holland. Only the captain, fifty year old George MacKay, came from Manchester in England. Next to that, it was mentioned that the Postmaster General, Mr. Bevins, had made it impossible for the people on the radio ship to be in contact with the shore by telephone. The piece suggested that Bevins would put a ban on people sending letters and cards to the station, asking for requests. A few days before Bevins already had declared on Dutch television — probably an item taken from the BBC — that the British Government would declare full war against the offshore station and that all other attempts to start such stations would prove in vain.

The unknown journalist took his predictions even further: "Things will be made very difficult for Radio Caroline and the station will probably close down in a few months. It is to be expected that the British advertisers won't buy any airtime on the station. The British spokesman for the station, 23 years old Ronan O'Rahilly, told us yesterday that there are talks going on with big international advertisers and that he is not allowed to tell the names of the backers of the project, who have put 2.5 million of Pounds into Planet Productions, as the organisation behind the station is registered. Already the Caroline organisation is in a very difficult situation as the Panamanian government has withdrawn the registration and thus also the flag, which was flying on the ship. This has been done after a request of the British Government to their colleagues in Panama City."

As the Panamanian government had signed the international treaty covering the rules for Telegraphy and Radio Telephony, they were, in the context of the British government, not allowed to give a registration to the illegal radio ship. Also that same day the news came in that the British Performing Rights Society had announced that the Radio Caroline organisation was not allowed to play music originating from records, as they didn't pay any fee to the society. Obviously the reporter hadn't done any proper research, as was shown by his next line: "Radio Caroline is now on the air from 6.00 in the morning till 6.00 in the evening. It is expected that soon commercials — not more than three minutes per hour —

will be transmitted. Compared with the costs of those commercials on Radio Luxembourg, this will bring in proximally 30.000 Dutch guilders a day. The programs are now presented by a 28 year old Canadian deejay. In the future there are plans to be on the air for 24 hours each day." Well, twelve hours of programs each day presented by only one single Canadian deejay?

Philip Solomon. Strange enough, when looking back in the publications regarding the history of Radio Caroline, they always mentioned that by the end of 1966 Philip Solomon did take over from Ronan O'Rahilly as the big share holder in Planet Productions, the company that was behind Caroline in the 1960s. In my archive I even found a note, dating back to February 1966, in which I wrote down that that the impresario Philip Solomon paid 200.000 Pounds to become the biggest single shareholder within Planet Productions, the shore-based company responsible for programming and airtime sales on Radio Caroline. Solomon, who at that time had acquired 20% of the shares, announced that he wanted to make some changes in the Caroline format.

Who was Solomon? The man sure was a riddle, as he didn't place himself in the foreground as Ronan O'Rahilly used to do. Let's go to some notes, I found back in my archive from 1966: "Two of the biggest acts from Ireland come from Belfast and that's the Rhythm and Blues group Them and the Bachelors. And, it is of relevance that both groups were discovered by the same brotherly team: Philip and Mervyn Solomon." So, Solomon was in the music business together with his brother, but they were not alone as their father Louis was also named as one of the three owners of the Solomon and Perez Distributing Company.

Father Louis Solomon organised the work of the company from Dublin, while son Mervyn did the same from Dublin. In 1966 an office was also opened in West End, London. Mervyn told Record Retailer in March 1966 about their three offices: "Between us, we manage to have stakes in most aspects of the Irish show business world, as far as records and recording artists are concerned." In London Philip Solomon got his headquarters, from where he not only paid attention to the industry of their Irish artists and other bookings, but also acquired his shares in Planet Productions. In respect to Radio Caroline, mostly Philip Solomon is mentioned. I found the name of Mervyn only twice. However, in fact they bought the shares together.

Who was Solomon. A big question as he didn't place himself on the foreground as Ronan uses to do. Let's go to some notes I did find back in my archive from 1966: 'Two of the biggest acts from Ireland come from Belfast and that's the Rhythm and Blues Group Them and the Bachelors. And it is significant that both groups were discovered by the same brotherly team: Philip and Mervyn Solomon.' So he was in the music business together with his brother, but they were not

alone as their father Louis was also named as one of the three owners of the Solomon and Perez Distributing Company. Father Louis organised work from Dublin, while Mervyn did the same from Dublin and in 1966 also offices were opened in West End, London. Melvin told Record Retailer in March 1966 about their three offices: 'Between us we manage to have stakes in most aspects of the Irish show business world, as far as records and recording artists are concerned.' In London Philip got his headquarter, from where he not only paid attention to the industry of their Irish Artist and other bookings, but also sold the shares in Planet Productions. Mostly Philip is mentioned when talking about taking over the shares but Mervyn is never mentioned, but twice. Indeed they bought the shares together.

Major Minor. In respect to Mervyn Solomon, I found another note in my archive dating back to March 1966. Here Mervyn told a journalist about his buying of the shares and the resulting co-partnership with his fellow Irishman Ronan O'Rahilly: "Radio Caroline North at present only broadcasts to Belfast and Northern Ireland with weak signals reaching the Dublin area. But, we plan to increase the power of the northern transmitter by 10 kW within the next week or so, and boost it further in April, by 50 kW. This should ensure coverage of the whole of Ireland." At the time, the record company of the Solomon's was called "Emerald Label," but not much later they initiated a new label that would bring in more money, called "Major Minor."

Most Caroline devotees still think that Ronan O'Rahilly was and is the boss of the Caroline organisation. They don't realise that, when Philip Solomon did take over more shares, he in fact became the main shareholder. He also had a big influence on the programming, though not everyone was as happy about that. Moreover, he was slow in paying the bills, even to the point at not paying them at all. For that reason both Caroline ships, the MV Mi Amigo and the MV Fredericia, were finally taken away from international waters on early March 1968 by the Wijsmuller Company. Philip Solomon, however, would also leave us some nice memories. Don't forget, if the man hadn't been into the Caroline business, we would have missed all those awful long commercials for the albums which were released by his record company "Major Minor."



Well, I must admit that personally I'm very thankful for many of the releases he made possible. Of course, from the stories of the deejays I know that they threw a lot of those records straight into the international waters as soon as they arrived on the ship. But, there were sure some nice ones too among them. By way of the "Major Minor" label the Irish Dubliners, for instance, made it big all over Europe, and so did Raymond Lévefre and his Orchestra. Above all, without Philip Solomon I wouldn't have bought the double cd with all the early seventies material of the late David McWilliams. Through the ever lasting instant reply of those marvellous commercials for Major Minor MMLP number 1 and so on, I would never have heard the voice of that brilliant talent David McWilliams. So from my point of view I'm still thankful to Philip for taking over from Ronan, though I realise this will never be confirmed by Mr. O'Rahilly himself.

Some other names. Of course, all the avid listeners to the station in the 1960s know the name of Philip Solomon. There were many more people, though, working for the organization whose names are still unknown by most of them. Take, for instance, Michael Parkin. I found out, that in February 1966 Parkin did something within the organization. He was one of the persons who helped out the set-on of the Independent Commercial Television stations, "Channel Television," way back in 1960 as a Sales controller. From there on he became General Manager. A few years later he became Sales director for Radio Caroline. Early 1966 he got his own company Caroline films, producing commercials. In the meantime he remained a consultant for the Caroline organization.

About the time, Parkin started the Caroline film branch, some other things did change. For this, let's go to an item I cut out from the Television Mail, dated February 25, 1966. It contains the message, that the Caroline Organisation got a new Sales Director in the person of Brian Scudder. The appointment coincides with the complete reorganisation of the Caroline Sales Department. They wanted a fresh approach to the media world and Scudder replaced Anthony Welch. But the later wasn't out of working as he could join Radio Scotland. Brian Scudder already had been in the advertising world for more than fifteen years and Ronan O'Rahilly and the Caroline Squad expected a lot from him.



Next to the names of Parkin, Welch and Scudder, in my archive I also found the name of a curious organisation in a cut-out, dating back to late April, 1964. It tells the story of a few girls in a barber shop in a little town in Kent which had founded the Radio Caroline Defence Union. Everyone could become a member and the tasks of the members included to protest at the BBC transmitter plant in Wrexham, as it was suspected that from this plant a jamming transmitter would be on the air to get Radio Caroline off the air as soon as possible. Jamming by the British authorities, though, didn't happen until 1970, when Radio Northsea was transmitting from the MEBO II.

L'Arnaughte. The Television Mail of February 24, 1967, told us about a special form of tendering by using a helicopter: "It was announced this week that Radio Caroline has concluded a deal with aviation specialist L'Arnaughte Limited. This may mean that the offshore station has plans to supply its two ships — North and South — by helicopter after the passage of the Marine Offences Bill, which has received its second reading in Parliament last week. L'Arnaughte will be aviation consultants to Radio Caroline and to Ronan O'Rahilly, a director of the company, personally. A statement from Radio Caroline says is "to provide helicopter and fixed wing support for exploitation and servicing of Radio Caroline. L'Arnaughte has access to a fleet of 275 aircraft from vintage aeroplanes through balloons, to the latest DH 125 executive jet. They are best known as consultants to the feature film industry; David Kaye is managing director."



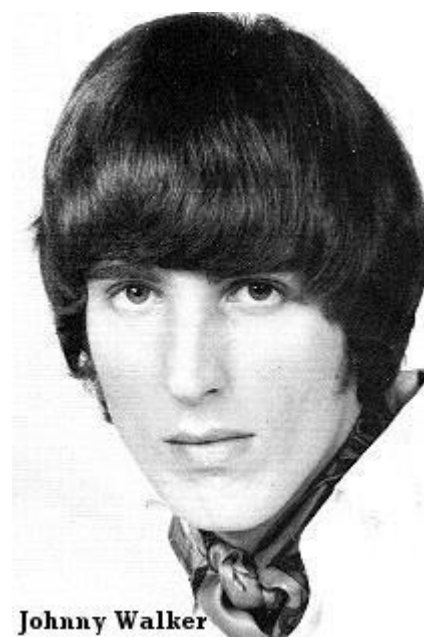
By now, we know of course that O'Rahilly himself never used a plane to tender the radio ships. Yes, it was done in the 1970s when the weather was so bad that a plane had to be used to drop the program cassettes nearby the MV Mi Amigo. Probably the news had been mixed up a little bit. In fact a contract has been signed by O'Rahilly for the use of a plane for the making of the movie "A Girl on a Motorcycle," featuring Marianne Faithfull and Alain Delon. The movie was shot in France and England during 1967 and early 1968. The soundtrack was composed by Les Reed. Ronan O'Rahilly was co-director of the movie and "Girl on a motorcycle" can nowadays be found in the category "cult movies."



Other names, worth mentioning are those of Don and Nan Richardson. Some time ago Andy Archer told me a nice story about these two: "Back in 1967, I remember coming off the tender in IJmuiden and taking the train to Amsterdam and walking down to the office at the Singel 160. The woman who looked after the office was a formidable lady named Nan

Richardson, who was a real sweetheart. She was married to one of our transmitter engineers Don Richardson. On this occasion, she was telling me about some of the happenings on board the Mi Amigo, things that would not have been broadcast by the deejays. I asked her how she knew these things and she replied: "Through telepathy with Don, and I communicate every night." When I got back to ship, I told the guys on board who were all amazed — that is until Johnnie Walker got up in the middle of the night to go to the lavatory! He noticed that the red light outside the studio was on, so he went out to investigate. He stood outside the door, which wasn't soundproof, and could hear the voice of Don giving an account of what happened on the ship today. It seems that Don wouldn't switch off the transmitter, all 50 kW of it until after he had spoken to Nan at the pre-arranged time of 3.00 o'clock in the morning. No one had the heart to tell them they had been rumbled! I wonder if Don and Nan are still around or if anyone knows what happened to them."

Some figures. And, finally, to conclude this chapter, I will give you some facts and figures from the pages of the Television Mail of May 19, 1967. That particular issue offered a rundown of facts and figures under the heading "Caroline gets 4 m entries." The message continued: "The other morning 180.00 letters poured into Caroline House. On May the 5th, the 4.000.000th entry to Cash Casino was delivered. Whilst it was eleven weeks before the 1.000.000th was received, the following 16 weeks another 3.000.000 poured in. The response to a contest has been described as outstanding. It represents an income in excess of 67.000 Pound for the Post Office in 4d postage alone, and many people used registered and special recorded mail delivery services. The latest NOP Audience Survey Figures show



that Radio Caroline has an audience in Great Britain in excess of any other radio station with 19% aged 16 and over, whilst Radio London did have 12%. In the South East England new standard regions 4 and 5 Radio Caroline has 27% whilst Radio London has 24%."

Though, it does say something about Caroline reputation, we don't have to take figures like these very serious. In my archive, I have many articles from newspapers, official reports from the stations or advertising agencies about the listening figures of both these offshore stations and I can tell you that most of the time, when you put the all figures of the same period next to each other, they're always deviating completely. In those days, one didn't bother about getting the right figures. People only wanted hear that they were magnificent and so they did.

Part 4

New Year and no nicotine ...

by Frits Koning

From August 9, 1983, till November 6, 1990, Radio Caroline would be airing its programmes from the MV Ross Revenge. Over a three year period — from 16th December 1984 to 24th November 1987 — the "Lady" shared her ship with Radio Monique, airing its programs from a separate 50kW transmitter at 319



meters / 963kHz between 5.00 AM and 7.00 PM. Frits Koning was one of the guys who worked for Radio Monique. Here he shares his memories of his first Christmas and New Year aboard the Ross Revenge.

My first time on the Ross Revenge. I vividly remember arriving on December 1st 1984, allowing me to be present at the official opening of the Dutch station Radio Monique on the illustrious radio ship MV Ross Revenge. The schedule for the deejays would be: four weeks on, two weeks off. So, I would celebrate Christmas on the ship and be at home on New Year's Eve. But things turned out to be a little different. On the ship, for Radio Monique, there were already Ad

Roberts and Maarten de Jong. The last one, so was promised him, would return home before Christmas. For some reason, I cannot recall, he was not allowed to go home for the festive season. As result of that he was a little bit depressed, when Christmas approached. Chris Rea's "Driving Home For Christmas" wasn't out yet, but if it were, we would probably not have played it ... Nevertheless, I remember having celebrated a very cheerful Christmas on the ship, accompanied by good food, fancy cake and we did play lots of games. I think we even had a darts competition.

But then, the bad weather came and the tender boat could not reach the ship. So there we were, stuck on the Ross Revenge. The lack of supply was frustrating, not so much because there was little food. I don't remember we had a serious lack of that to the point of starving, but what we did lack were ... cigarettes! Tobacco addicts as both Maarten and I were at the time — I still am, don't know about him — and that posed a serious problem. But, we still had a supply of cigarette paper. So, we searched the whole ship, looking for cigarette butts. And if I mention the whole ship, I mean the whole ship. We searched in the living quarters, on the deck, in the toilets, in the store room, in the generator and transmission rooms, literally everywhere. As most disc-jockeys are heavy smokers — does anybody know why? — we found a lot of those butts, helping us through at least a couple of days.

A beautiful sight. There was one guy on the ship who had his private storage of cigarettes, of which we of course were very jealous. It was Jay Jackson, who had worked before under the name of Chrispian St. John for other offshore radio stations. He would allow us to get one of his only once a day. Well, maybe it's understandable if



you're addicted to tobacco and afraid of running out of your own supply. Anyway, at one point Maarten and I were so desperate for a smoke that we tried rolling crushed peanut shells into cigarette paper. Maybe, we hoped, it would give us just the feeling of smoking a real cigarette. It didn't ...

On top of that there was a gale force 12 storm hitting the ship in the early days of January 1985. The Ross Revenge had no sophisticated positioning equipment, but with our own eyes we could see that the MV Communicator, the Laser 558 ship, was approaching the Ross Revenge. So, the captain decided to call them on the wireless warning them, that their anchor may have been broken. The answer came quickly and decisive: "No, we're quite sure that your anchor has broken!" Right! My first time on a radio ship and we were adrift! Everybody was called on deck to make sure that no one would fall overboard, while Johnny — "Morning Lad!" — Lewis and some others tried to unwind the old and very rusty emergency



Jay Jackson painting the MV Ross Revenge.
(photo: Leen Vingerling)

anchor. I still have a vivid memory of me standing at the rail on a rolling ship in the middle of the night, wild waves and a foaming sea around me. Despite the critical situation, I wasn't frightened at all. I know it sounds strange, but instead I thought: "What a beautiful sight, I have to remember this!" Well, almost twenty years later I still do and I think I'll never forget the images in my mind. Miraculously, the men working at the anchor succeeded in getting the emergency thing down. We didn't really trust the rusty chain but for the time being it should be sufficient.

Laser helps out. The day after, the old problem was more pressing than being on an emergency anchor: no cigarettes! As now everybody on the ship dearly missed his

daily tobacco shot — by now even Jay Jackson, I think — it was decided to pay the people at Laser 558 a visit to see if they could borrow us some. The ships were now closer anyway ... Three or four people got into the rubber boat and challenged the still quite heavy swell. A few hours later they returned. And, with a load of cigarettes! To everybody's joy of course and we all sat in the living room to smoke, one cigarette after the other. As the door was always open, it was a good ventilated room. Otherwise we might have suffocated in our own smoke!

After his time on the international waters Frits Koning did more experience in radio with the very first cable radio station in the Netherlands, the ill fated Cable One. After that he worked for stations like: Radio M and Business News Radio. Just last year he decided that it would be time to look for other work. He became a free lance journalist working from Cambodia.

Part 6

THE TIME IN BETWEEN MARCH 1968 AND SEPTEMBER 1972

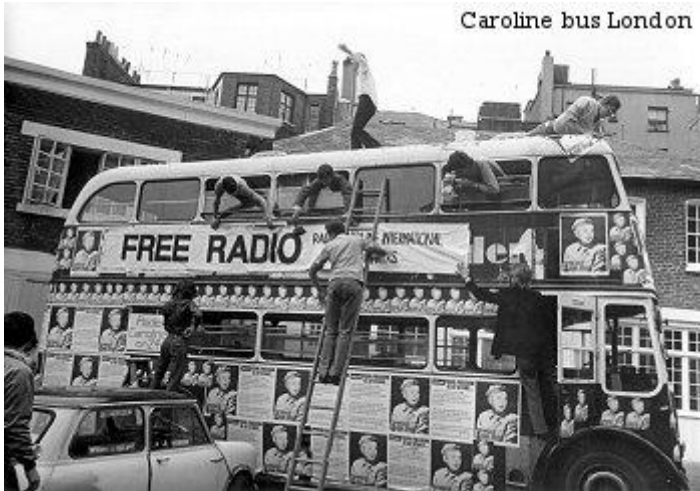
Next to thousands of newspaper cut-outs, in his archive Hans Knot fosters an impressive amount of diary notes about the state of offshore radio that he started to write down since 1964. In this contribution to our series on the forty-year history of Radio Caroline, he takes us through some of his notes scribbled down in the years between 1968 and 1972 – a period in which Radio Caroline was not on the air from her own ships.



Radio Caroline meets Radio Andorra. In March 1968, because of financial problems, Radio Caroline was forced to close-down. It would take four years before the station would return to the airwaves. In the meantime the "Sound of the Nation" could only be heard twice. The occasion was a one-hour show on a foreign radio station, Radio Andorra. The second time was during the British elections in 1970, when the station was using the transmitters of the MEBO II in its campaign to back the Conservatives. In this case, in fact, there was only a name-change from RNI into Radio Caroline, as the name of the latter station was more familiar to the British public. Here's what I wrote in my radio diary in March 1969 about Radio Caroline's one-time visit to Radio Andorra:

The Caroline Revival Hour was transmitted on Radio Andorra on 428 meters, which is 701 kHz. It happened on March 2nd from midnight up till 10 minutes past one. The program was a commemoration for Radio Caroline, that went off the air a year ago, when both ships were towed away from international waters by tugs which had been hired by the tender company Wijsmüller. Reason was that the station owners didn't pay their bills for tendering the Fredericia anchored off the West Coast of England as well as the MV Mi Amigo off the Eastern Coast. I've also heard that the program was a test for eventual further programmes as such. It was first announced in Spanish and later the microphone was taken over by Caroline deejays. I heard the voices of Don Allen, Bob Stewart, Bud Bullou, Bobby Dee and Stevie Merike. The reception was very poor during the first 20 minutes in the Netherlands. There was interference from a German radio station, but afterwards the reception became better. The deejays led us back to the earlier days of Radio Caroline and many well known records of those years were played. Also an air-check of the August 15th broadcast from Radio Caroline South was played. I heard some adverts for the Free Radio Association and music papers. I read in Disc and Music Echoes that this kind of

programs can be expected soon between midnight and four in the morning soon on Radio Andorra.



Caroline bus London

It didn't happen and it would take some other years before Radio Caroline came back. Strange to see my own writing back, it looked like the station had already a long history. Of course they were on the air for almost four years, in which happened a lot. But this period was only 10% of the period we're now talking about as the station is 40 years of age in 2004.

In the diary from the month April 1969 I do rewrite the next item: The Sunday Telegraph announced that there's a plan for a Beatles plane. John Lennon and Yoko Ono have agreed to appear in a colour programme for a television station which will be broadcasting to Britain from an aircraft over the Irish Sea. Mr. Ronan O'Rahilly is the initiator and the station will be called Radio Caroline Television. A lot of show business people have agreed to take part, when the station gets on the air. And strange enough the station won't break any law. The broadcasts will be between 6 in the evening and 3 in the night the following day and Ronan has bought two Super Constellations, which will be transmitting in turn. I did read in the newspaper that the organisation is discussing with a number of agency people about large contracts for advertising. Most of it will be bought and paid for outside Great Britain. Three countries have agreed to let the airplanes take off and land. The station's policy will be mainly light entertainment with the accent on old films. There will be also a serious program with reporters interviewing people in the streets. Swear words will not be censored.

At the moment I'm writing this part of this chapter it s December 29th 2003 and Simon Dee makes his return to television today at Channel Four. And I do read back in my personal notes from September 1969: I am extremely flattered about the invitation to do a program on Caroline TV and will consider joining Caroline TV very



seriously. At the end of the year I will be a completely free agent. If Caroline TV has a normal, mature format, I see no reason why we should not be involved. I ve heard it will be financed by overseas advertisements and the nerve centre will be in New York. But also offices will be opened in Switzerland and Holland. In the Bahamas is a co backer, called George Drummond, who is only 26 years of age. Ronan told me that the prices for advertisements will be 300 Pounds for 30 seconds compared to the 5500 Pound on ITV.

We re now 35 years later and I ve written some articles on this ill fated projects through the years in some magazines. And of course we know by know that all the plans for this television project was just one of the many dreams our Irishman had and made up to stay in publicity.



Going back to my diary in 1969 I did found some lines in the agenda from September of that year: The Caroline ships Mi Amigo and Fredericia are still in Amsterdam and have been plundered by thieves and corrode from the influence of water and weather. Four tape machines and a television set have disappeared. The water police, so I did read in a newspaper, is now guarding the ships. It was stated that the owners of the ships are Kernan Corporation and Tesman Investments Inc. from Panama with an address too in

Liechtenstein. This company do not react on this. It has been reported in the

newspaper that Ronan has visited the ships in Amsterdam at least three times and rumours are going that he want to bring at least one of the two on the air again with Dutch and English programs. It has also been told that Mr. Nathan could buy the complete equipment of the MV Mi Amigo for 450.000 dollars, but the Peace ship left for New York, without the equipment.

Abe, in the meantime had already bought his own ship, the MV Cito, which was lying along the quayside of the Oosterhamrikkade, in Groningen. Just away 150 meters from my home at that time. With help from volunteers the ship was partly repainted in Groningen and later in Amsterdam. With help of inhabitants of the Netherlands who bought shares from the Peace company, the ship set sail to New York. What has happened to the VOP is another story, where many Caroline people including Bob Noakes, Tony Allan en Chrispian St. John were involved too.

But going back to my agenda from 1969, when I was 21 years of age, there must have been a strong believe in Ronan s power as I wrote down at the end of December: On December 25th there should have been a testtransmissions of twenty minutes duration form Caroline Television on the UHF channel 25-30. Regular programs will commence during spring 1970 at some 20.000 feet altitude above the North Sea.

In the meantime it became 1970 and two people from Switzerland, the then 33 year old Edwin Bollier and 32 year young Erwin Meister, both from Switzerland, had brought their own radio ship on the North sea. Much has been written about this station through the past two years in the section RNI memories , including the Caroline participation, on the online Journal for Media and Music Culture www.soundscape.info

After the period RNI was renamed into Radio Caroline it took a long time before I did use my diary again for writing down the word Caroline. It was on December 18th 1970 that I found back the following: The formerly Radio Caroline radio ship MV Mi Amigo, now in Amsterdam Houthaven (wood harbour), was sinking today as a result of sabotage. A tap in the engine room was open and the ship listed. Crewmembers of a tug of the Amsterdam port authority saved the famous pirate by getting some pumps aboard.



The British guard on the MV Mi Amigo, Dave Fletcher told me a few days later that Ronan O Rahilly had come to Amsterdam to see if the ships were still suitable for broadcasting. He also told me that Ronan has plans to restart Radio Caroline when the rumours, that RNI will come on the air again, are true. RNI closed down at the end of September 1970 to come back on the air in February next year. It would however take up till September 1972 before Ronan did it again, or should I write Chicago and Spangles did it again?

In the last week of May 1972 I've written some lines again on both Caroline ships: The two Caroline vessels which were in Holland since March 1968 have been sold.

To go into detail I can tell that the Monday afternoon May 29th it was the shipbroker Frank Rijdsdijk, from Hendrik Ido Ambacht, who bought the Caroline vessel, we all know as the MV Fredericia for an amount of 26.500 Dutch guilders. This amount was not only paid for the ship but also for what had left of the inventory of the Fredericia. The MV Mi Amigo was bought by ships agency Hofman for an amount of 20.000 guilders. He could not tell for whom he did buy the former Caroline South ship. The paid money was only a small fraction of what the ships and their inventory were worth, when entering Holland way back in 1968.



Spangles Muldoon
and Gerard van Dam 1972

About the MV Fredericia I can be very short. Frank Rijdsdijk resold the ship to Rinus van der Marel in Ouwerkerk in the province of Zeeland and so her final destination would be the broker in a small place near Zierikzee. The arial mast was already taken down in Amsterdam harbour and on own power the Fredericia made her way through the canals of the Netherlands to a sand-bank near Ouwerkerk, called Het Keeten . The 1350 pk motor seemed to be in good condition. During the month of July the Fredericia was still at the mud flat and the new owner had to wait until a period of very high tide would come so the ship could be going into one of the small channels near the broker s place. Early August 1972 the

first work on the Fredericia had been done by breaking down the upper decks of the ship, were once the studio s were situated. It soon came out that it would be a heavy work to breakdown the Fredericia as it has been a very strong built ship.

It was formerly used as a ferry in Scandinavia, where during wintertime there is a lot of ice.

After the upper deck had gone the people decided, as they had seen that everywhere in the ship insulation material could be found, to set the ship on fire to get rid of the materials. What Van Marel didn't know by then, was that on this ship as ballast heavy anchor chains were used. Strange enough the work on the ship stopped after it had been set on fire and through the many years, that followed, Ouwerkerk became a new pilgrimage place for Anoraks who wanted to make photos of the former radio ship. I must admit I did too.

I did take some visits to Ouwerkerk and on one occasion the owner showed the bell from the MV Fredericia. Rinus van der Marel was very proud he had this hanging in his office. It would take up till late 1980 that the Fredericia had been completely broken up. Later we heard the bell went to an African country as the old man had decided to emigrate from Holland. Since a couple of years he's back, as well as the bell. On the place where formerly the broker was nowadays a museum on the history of ships can be found. Lucky enough the Mi Amigo got another destiny and soon after the auction it came out in the small world of Anoraks, a word which wasn't used in those days yet, that it was Gerard van Dam and a certain Rob Vermaat, who had asked Hofman Shipping Agency to buy the Mi Amigo.

Gerard van Dam was already known from his other activities: While Radio Veronica was busy distributing and collecting postcards for the "Veronica stays ..." campaign in 1971, some Dutch offshore radio fans were trying to organize the fan base. Mobilise all Dutch and Belgian Free Radio fans, was the idea of a young lad from The Hague in 1971. To this end, he formed the ISFRA, the International Society for the Promotion of Free Radio. Together with Hans Verbaan, who in those days lived in nearby Scheveningen and who was the chairman of the Dutch FRA and FRC branches, he wanted to make a front. By a written protest to the government, they wanted to make clear, that the ratification of the Treaty of Strasbourg would make it almost



impossible for the Dutch offshore radio stations to continue their programming. This young man was also the driver of the car that in those days picked up the people of the RNI at their Naarden studio to bring them to the tender in Scheveningen harbour. He told a journalist: We simply have to try to get more members. At the moment, we've 1,000 members in Holland. In Germany and Belgium, we now have around 10,000 members and we hope that this all eventually leads to a total of 250,000 members. That would be fine."

It is clear, that just like the spokesman for the FRA in England this guy not really had a good sense for numbers, though, he certainly had a good sense for drama. In the interview he said that the FRA stood for answering just this one question about Free Radio: "Going on or not going on as legal stations." The journalist and this young guy next discussed the fact that the Dutch national pop station Hilversum 3 in the meantime, according to the results of recent polls, had recruited more listeners than Radio Veronica. These facts, though, didn't impress him at all. He even made some critical comments about the fact that the programmes of Hilversum 3 were not interrupted by commercials, by saying that commercials were an essential part of the attractiveness of any radio program. This man, who was the RNI driver and front man of the ISFRA, I can now reveal, was no other than Gerard van Dam, also known as Gerard van der Zee. Moreover, in many ways he proved successful in his love for Free Radio. He worked for Ronan O'Rahilly, bringing back the MV Mi Amigo to sea in 1972, next for Radio 199, Radio Caroline and Radio Atlantis. For his own station Radio Delmare, he brought several ships to sea in the late seventies of last century.



Transmitter Mi Amigo 1968

Gerard van Dam made a remarkable appearance in the press in July 1971, just after the MV Fredericia and the MV Mi Amigo were sold. The buyer of MV Amigo was Van Dam himself, and he successfully tried to fool the press. Together with the Hans Verbaan, he did send out a leaflet, revealing their plans

with the ship as a temporary resort for nostalgic anoraks: After long talks with the owners of the former Radio Caroline South ship, the MV Mi Amigo, we have succeeded in making an agreement. For a short period of time, the ship will be kept away from the ship breakers yard. During the next few months, everyone will be enabled to visit the ship for as short a time as one day, or for as long a stay as is required. Food and accommodation on the ship are being arranged.

Original studio guidance will come from a well-known deejay. In case the costs of ship are not being covered by the profits for next few months, the owner will carry out his original plans and scrap the ship. This fate has already befallen Radio Caroline North. So, make the most of this unique offer and use what possibly is your last chance to visit the first and last outpost of the golden age of British Pirate Radio.

This evocative appeal was followed by an extensive price list, stating the costs of different arrangements for stays on the Mi Amigo. The leaflet was taken serious by several newspapers, which uncritically brought the news. The VPRO radio also made a nice small documentary about Van Dam's plans with the former radio ship. In fact, the leaflet contained an error. The MV Fredericia, the ship of Radio Caroline North, was not yet scrapped. It would be on dry land for a long time at the Van Marel Ship Brokery in Ouwerkerk, before the bell was taken away and the rest would be broken up. More important, though, was that Gerard van Dam was not really on the lookout for any paid visitors for his museum ship at all. Instead, the ship was towed into international waters. Equipment, stolen earlier from the ship in Amsterdam by Peter C. and Spangles M., were brought back on board.

Unexpected on Friday afternoon, September 1st 1972, the MV Mi Amigo was towed by a tug of the Iskes Company from Amsterdam through the Noordzeekanaal (North Sea Canal) to the harbour of IJmuiden and after passing the locks of the harbour the Mi Amigo was towed to a position 4 miles northwest of the Northern



Pier. By returning to the harbour the skipper of the towing vessel told to a journalist that he thought it very strange that the guys wanted to go out with the Mi Amigo as it was so unstable. And still the same afternoon it was Gerard van Dam in a newspaper telling everyone that the ship would go to England to be a pirate museum. During the night from 2nd to 3rd of September it was the towing vessel from Koos van Laar which towed the Mi Amigo to a new position. The next morning people on the MEBO II off the coast of Scheveningen suddenly saw the Mi Amigo anchored on a position 500 metres on the north side of the RNI vessel.

It was in the Sky Line program the next evening on RNI that Tony Allan told the

listeners that another ship was anchored near the MEBO II whereby he told that the ship was empty and had no transmitters onboard. Also mentioning the radio ship was on the news reports on Sunday afternoon on Radio Veronica and the Dutch NOS Journaal (News on the Public Broadcasters). The camera crew had taken a skipper with them to the Mi Amigo and this guy told that the people on the MV Mi Amigo were big amateurs and that the ship was anchored in the wrong way whereby drifting could be expected. Also the Mi Amigo had no position lights on. An official warning was brought out to the captain by a vessel of the Dutch Navy, the same afternoon a pilot boat came out and brought a penalty to the captain. Some lights were brought on the vessel the same afternoon.

Confusion started with an article in the biggest newspaper of the Netherlands, Telegraaf, on September 4th 1972. They wrote that the Bell Broadcasting Company Ltd had bought the MV Mi Amigo and that a radio station would start at the end of that year or early 1973. The 259 as well as the 270 kHz were mentioned as well the power of the two transmitters (50 and 100 kW). The 259 spot was planned for an international edition for Radio Caroline and the 270 spot for a Dutch language version. Only the international service should carry commercials. It was Rutger van den Berg who came forward as spokesman for the BBC Ltd in another newspaper. He mentioned that the station would start on September 6th, which was a totally different date than earlier mentioned in the Telegraaf. Soon after the second publication it came out that the Journalist of the Telegraaf was trapped by two practical jokers, Roel Koenders and Henk Meeuwis. Both from Amsterdam and radio addicted. Later on Roel Koenders became a well known producer at VARA Radio and Henk Meeuwis became news reader for Radio Caroline on the MV Mi Amigo.



Strange enough it was Gerard van Dam who came, in the second week of September 1972, with the news in the *Algemeen Dagblad*, that the *Mi Amigo* would become again a radio ship. He couldn't mention a name for the station or a frequency to be used in the then future. But more confusion came in when Dutch *Telegraaf* brought a big article on the front page on September 15th. Three days earlier they brought a photo on the front page on which the reader could see that the *Mi Amigo* was tendered by the *MV Dolfijn*, a tender from the Jacques Vrolijk tender company from Scheveningen. The strange ship off the coast of Scheveningen, according to the article on

September 15th, would not become a radio ship but an illegal casino. People visiting the ship could go ahead with gambling as it was planned in international waters and no action could be taken by Dutch authorities. A spokesman for the Casino company who told that he had already worked as a technician for Radio Veronica and RNI was Anton Rabeljee from Groningen city. He told to the journalist of the *Telegraaf* Bert Voorthuijzen that all the transmitter equipment and other technical gear was taken off the *MV Mi Amigo* when it was still in Zaandam harbour. That this was not true would become known very soon afterwards.

Some days later, on September 18th 1972, it was RNI deejay Spangles Muldoon who mentioned in his program that he would soon leave the station to cross the street to another ship. And for those who didn't understand he told on RNI: Just count 39 and 220 (the RNI spot) together. We then knew that from the *MV Mi Amigo* the transmitter would be used on 259 metres medium wave. And so it was on September 29th 1972 in the late evening that for the very first time since March 1968 a signal could be heard from a transmitter on the *MV Mi Amigo*; this time on 252.7 metres (1187 kHz) with non stop music.

Subsequently, the *MV Mi Amigo* would host a whole range of stations like Radio 199, Radio Caroline, Radio Caroline 1 and 2, Radio Atlantis, Radio Seagull, Radio Joepie and Radio *Mi Amigo*. Those stations were all active somewhere between 1972 and 1980, the year in which the ship finally sank down beneath the waves.

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Photos: SMC, Jelle Boonstra, Martin Stevens, Theo Dencker and Hans Knot.

Part 7

BRITAIN'S BUCCANEER BROADCASTERS - MY STORY OF RADIO CAROLINE



Steve Young began his broadcasting career in 1963 when he put on his cowboy hat and spurs to ride the controls at radio station CHAT in Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada. He went to visit England in 1965, put a patch over his left eye and became a pirate, joining Radio

Caroline South in 1966 to do overnight and daytime relief shifts. He's still having trouble adjusting to a regular routine and he can't catch any decent zzz's unless someone rocks him to sleep at night. In 1968 he returned to Canada and

resumed a normal [sic!] life working in the radio and television biz at CKOV Kelowna, CFRN Edmonton, CKIQ Kelowna, CJVI Victoria and CHEK-TV Victoria. He lapsed into a state of semi-retirement in 1998 and has since been masquerading as a voiceover artist, freelance writer and broadcast media producer. Here are some of the many memories Steve Young has to the high days on international waters.

'A gale force wind was blowing in the North Sea off the East Coast of England one night during the winter of 1966. I was "spinning the discs" on the midnight-six a.m. shift aboard Great Britain's infamous, but dearly beloved, "Pirate" Radio Station, Caroline South. The 650-ton coastal freighter *Mi Amigo*, flying a Panamanian Flag, registered in Panama, carrying a Dutch crew and a staff of English speaking deejays, technicians and news readers, was the home of the Radio Caroline operation, and tonight she was under siege. The boat was rockin' in more ways than one as I turned-up the monitor speakers in the cramped studio to full volume, blasting out the music of the Rolling Stones in a vain attempt to drown out the sounds of the storm that was raging outside.

Waves pounded the side of the ship and she lurched violently each time they slammed into her. The shrieking winds howled through the stays that secured the giant 160-foot transmitting antenna to the foredeck. Chains and metal plates clanked and creaked as the vessel swung into

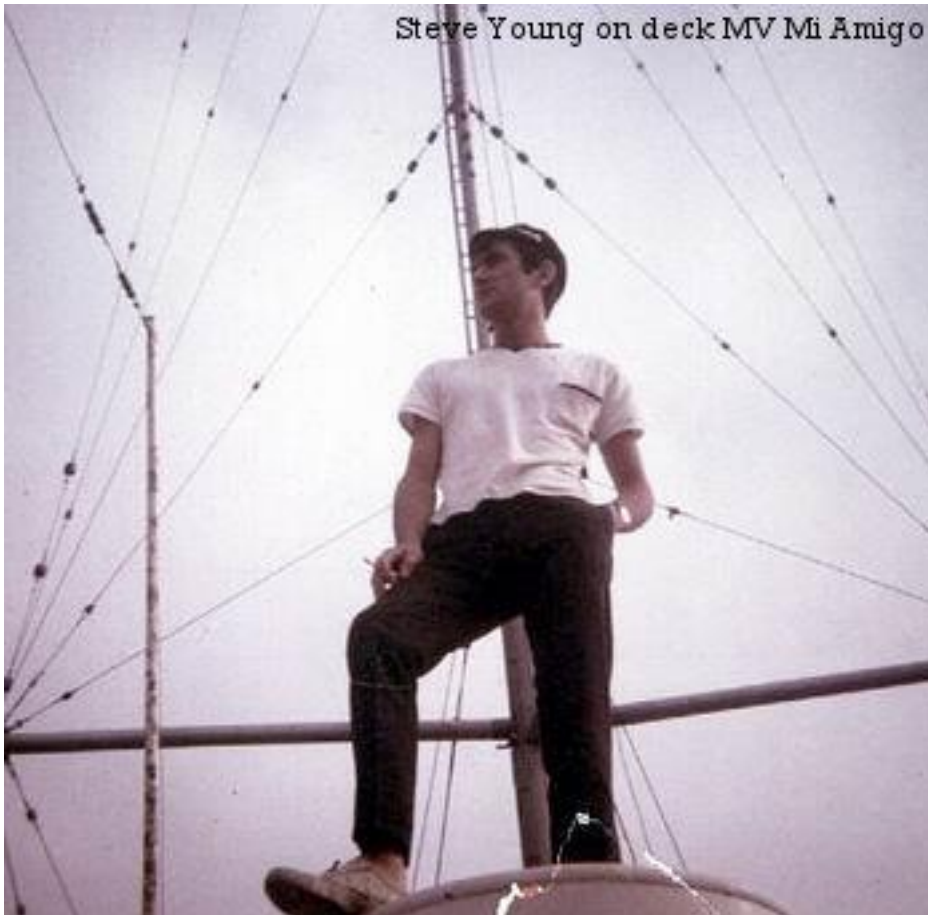


the storm, held only by her forward anchor, and the whole ship shuddered violently as she tugged at the forward anchor chain. I held on to the edge of the mixing console as the boat rose violently, up and down in the heavy swells. The music played on, turntable arms weighted down with heavy English pennies, which were scotch taped to them in an effort to prevent them from skipping off the

surface of the 45rpm records. I turned on the microphone, did some kind of ad-lib when, just as I introduced the next record and turned off the microphone, the door crashed open and a member of the Dutch crew lurched into the studio holding a life jacket. "You'd better put this on" he shouted "If this storm gets any worse the anchor isn't going to hold and we'll have to abandon the ship". I struggled into the life jacket and said a silent prayer.

For the next 5 hours the storm raged while the *Mi Amigo*, and the music, rocked-on in the stormy North Sea. Luckily for me this would be a time when the storm would subside and life would resume its normal routine, with the 50kw transmitter broadcasting music, news, contests and trivia 24 hours a day to listeners across the British Isles and deep into Continental Europe. A few months earlier, in January of 1966, the disc jockeys and crew had not been so lucky when, during another vicious winter storm, the anchor chain broke and the *Mi Amigo* was blown ashore and beached at Clacton-on-Sea, Essex. Luckily everyone aboard was rescued safely, but it would not be the last time that Radio Caroline and her crew would suffer the ravages of the stormy North Sea.

To understand how such a broadcasting operation could come into being let's flashback in time, to the early 1960's, when a different kind of radio service ruled the airwaves. The British Broadcasting Corporation ("Auntie" as she was affectionately called by some) was just about the only game in town up until early 1964. The BBC Home Service and the Light Programme, as they were called, had changed their program offerings very little over the years. Shows were presented in block format and were usually a mixture of light or serious classical music, radio dramas, comedy shows and news, down at the bottom of the list was the occasional "pop music" show. To be fair to Auntie BBC she did her best to be "all things to all people" and, being funded by government revenues derived from license fees paid by the listeners, she was at the mercy of bureaucrats and politicians.



So, what were the young people of England to do? Some of them, late at night with their crystal sets hidden under their pillows, tuned into the faint and unreliable signal of Radio Luxembourg "The Fab 208" which broadcast from the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, targeting the British market

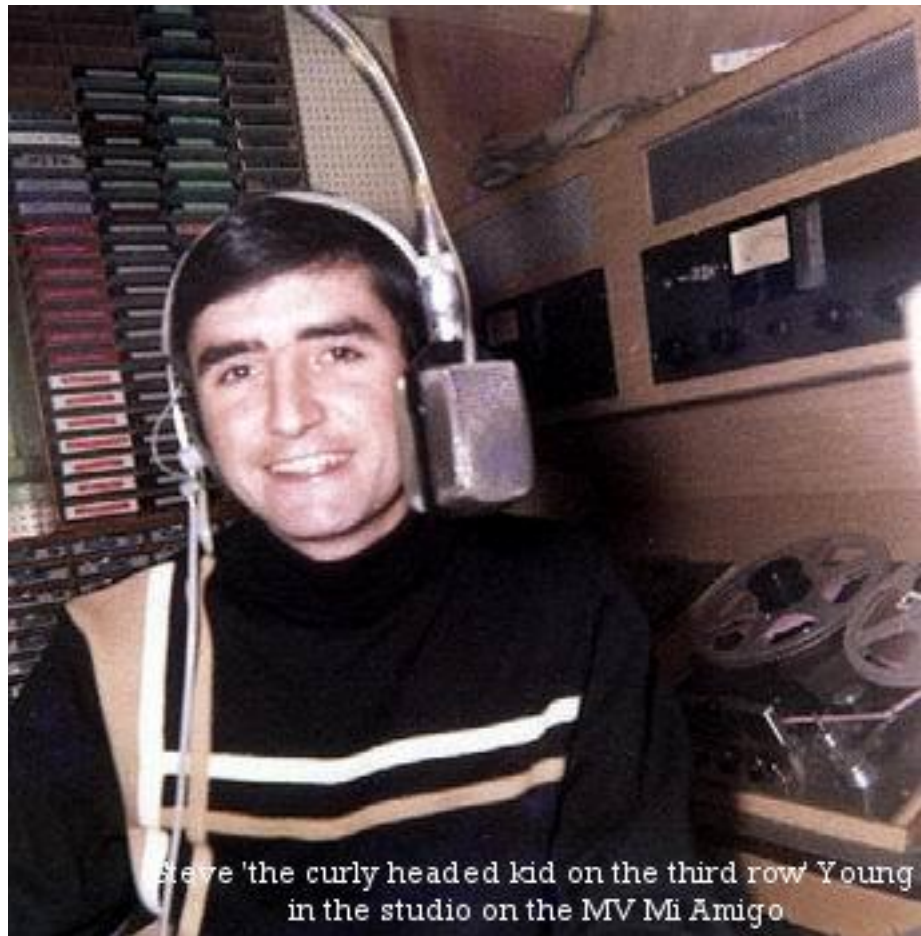
with popular music and sponsored programs. It was the only alternate source that was available in those days, but for one young listener named Ronan O'Rahilly, this was not enough!

I first met Ronan O'Rahilly at Caroline House, the headquarters of the Radio Caroline Empire, in London. I'd just been hired and, before I was to head out to the ship, Ronan took the opportunity to talk to me. He was a soft-spoken young Irishman, with prematurely gray hair and penetrating blue eyes. He emanated a spiritual quality as he talked about Radio Caroline and his vision of "Free Radio" in Britain.

Surprisingly, profiting from his Pirate venture was not at the top of Ronan's list of priorities. He was more interested in providing British listeners with an alternative to the monopolistic programming practices of the BBC. Ronan had been to North America and had listened to "Top 40" radio, with its rock 'n roll music, jingles and slick, fast-talking disc jockeys. He had been subjected to the constant barrage of commercials, which filled the American airwaves, and he knew this could be a way to support his vision. But, more than anything, the free spirit of American radio inspired him, and he returned to England wondering why

British audiences couldn't have access to such a form of entertainment.

But Ronan also had another reason to seek an alternative to the BBC. In 1964 he was managing a young singer/musician named Georgie Fame and had been trying to persuade the BBC to give his records some airplay. The BBC wasn't interested, claiming that they were only interested in "established" artists. Ronan was not the kind of



person to say "no" to and it only made him more determined to gain access to the radio airwaves and to offer listeners a real alternative to "Auntie BBC".

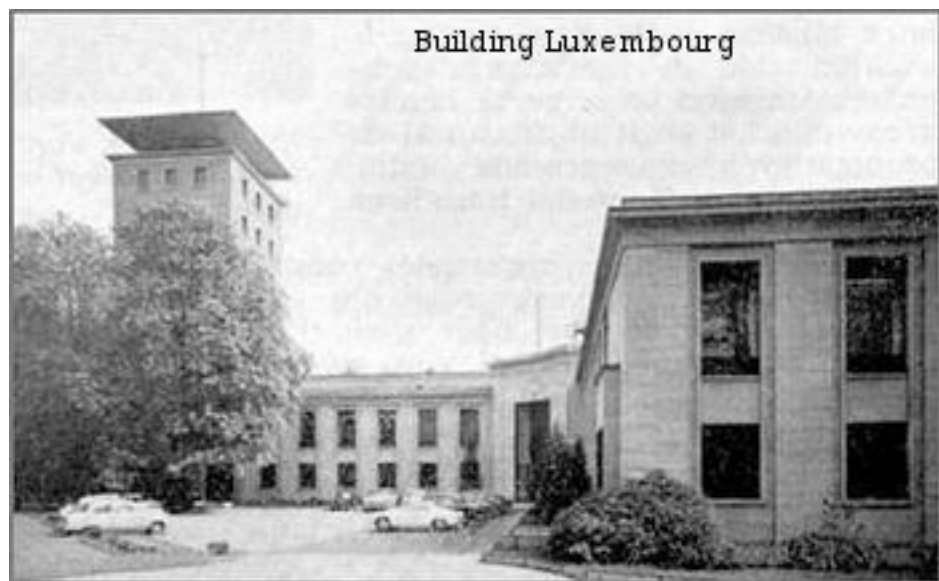
Ronan had heard about a new radio station called "Radio Veronica" broadcasting to Dutch listeners from a ship anchored off the coast of Holland and, at last, he knew what he could do to make his radio fantasies come true. After summoning all of his resources and convincing investors that this was "an idea whose time had come" Ronan purchased his first ship, the MV Frederica which he then began equipping with all the necessary gear to begin transmitting. Soon, with the studio equipment, transmitter and huge transmitting antenna all in place, Frederica sailed from her dock in Ireland and took up her position in international waters three miles out to sea and 12 miles from the nearest port of entry, Harwich, on the East Coast of England. Then, on March 28th, 1964 at 12 noon, with Canadian Simon Dee at the microphone, Radio Caroline turned on her 10kw transmitter and began her tumultuous life, broadcasting over a frequency of 199 meters on the medium wave band to a listening audience whose ears were hungry for a steady diet of non-stop rock 'n roll music.



Little did Ronan O'Rahilly know that, when he launched Radio Caroline, he was opening up a Pandora's box of aspiring Pirate Radio operators. Some of them, like Radio Caroline and Radio London, went on to become huge successes, while others signed-

on and signed-off as fast as the fortunes of their owners rose and fell in the stormy waters of the North Sea. Even Radio Caroline suffered many, many setbacks but, unlike the others, she always managed to recover her dignity and continue her broadcasting tradition as "The Smallest Boat to Rock the Nation".

After operating for just a few months Caroline merged with an upstart rival station, Radio Atlanta, which was broadcasting from the motor vessel *Mi Amigo*. The *MV Frederica*, home of the original Caroline, then



set sail around the Southern tip of England and up the West coast to take up her position off the Isle of Man where she became Radio Caroline "North", broadcasting to audiences in Ireland and the North and West of England. Meanwhile the *MV Mi Amigo*, home of the former Radio Atlanta, became Radio Caroline "South" and continued to target audiences in London and the Southern and Eastern counties of England. During the night the station also reached well into Continental Europe as the 50 kW signal, picking up amplification over the waters of the North Sea and the English Channel, boomed deep into Holland, France, Sweden and Germany.

For the next couple of years things proceeded smoothly and the Caroline's began building vast and loyal audiences, numbering in the millions, throughout the British Isles and across the European Continent. But then a series of events took place that were to make the lives of Radio Caroline, her disk jockeys and crew and Ronan O'Rahilly as stormy and turbulent as the seas upon which they floated their feisty little station.

It all began on January 20th, 1966 when a violent North Sea storm snapped the forward anchor chain of the Mi Amigo and, in the dark and rain swept seas, she began drifting towards the shore. As the vessel drifted out of control the deejay on duty that night began broadcasting a "May Day" message to any vessels in the area which might be close enough to come to their rescue. Simultaneously the ship's Captain transmitted a similar message over the maritime frequencies, a desperate call for help in a time of distress. But it was too late to save the drifting ship and a few hours later the Mi Amigo crunched up on the eastern shores of England near Clacton-on-Sea. The lifeboat crew from nearby Harwich was quickly on the scene and set up a breeches buoy to begin lifting the disc jockeys and crewmen off the stricken vessel and onto the shore.



It was a distressful time for all involved, including the huge audience of loyal listeners, who were now deprived of "their Caroline". But, like Ronan O'Rahilly, Radio Caroline was not to be deterred by this little setback and less than a month later she was back in business with studio and transmitting equipment rescued from the Mi Amigo and re-installed on another vessel, the MV Cheetah 2, loaned to Ronan O'Rahilly by a generous benefactor. It was not to be long before the Mi Amigo was back in the water either. This time with new studio equipment, a new 50kw transmitter, a new 160 foot transmitting antenna and a new frequency of 259 meters in the

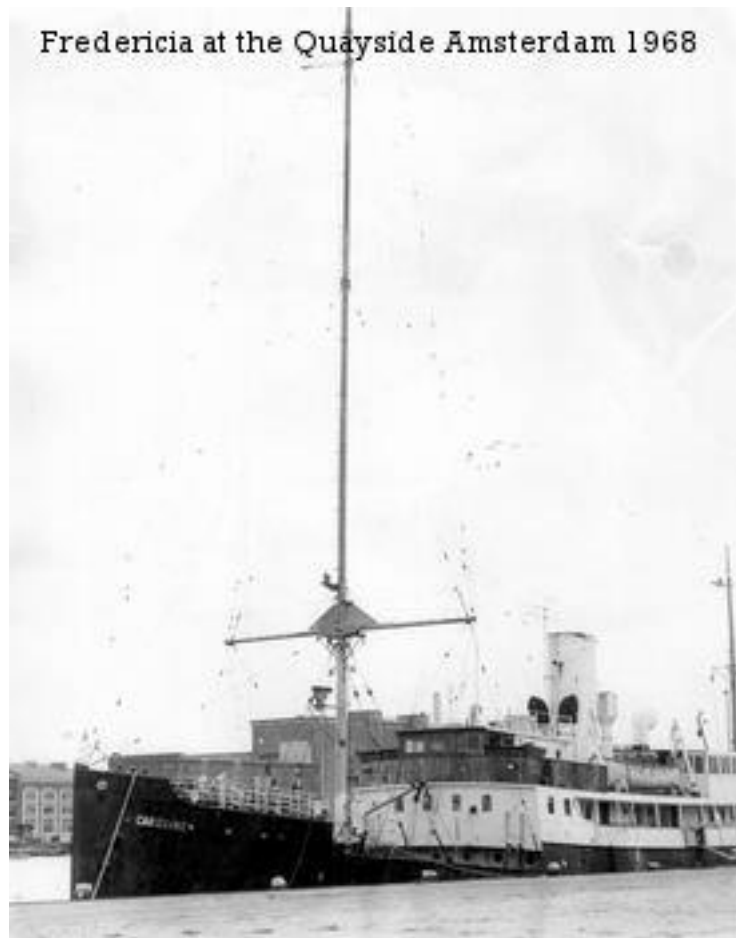
medium wave band she was back in her old anchorage pumping out the music and entertainment that listeners wanted to hear. In August of that year I joined the station and so began, what was to become, the most memorable period of my 30-year career in broadcasting.

In the summer of 1966 "Swinging England" was the place to be. The British

"musical invasion" of America was at it's height and music was everywhere as bands and musicians consolidated their ever-strengthening position in an ever burgeoning music industry. The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Jim Hendrix, The Kinks, Peter and Gordon, The Hollies, Cat Stevens, Dusty Springfield, Gerry and the Pacemakers were just a few of the acts that had jump-started the musical revolution of the mid-sixties. Chelsea, Kings Road and Carnaby Street were the places to be, and the sweet smell of success (and marijuana) was everywhere.

The Pirate Radio Stations were reflecting the mood of the day filling the airwaves with popular music, both British and North American. These were heady times for the Pirates, who were not only satisfying the musical taste of their audiences, but were also helping to set musical trends by introducing new and upcoming artists. Having worked at a small radio station in Canada I was enthralled when I arrived in England and began listening to these pirates of the airwaves as they shared their shipboard adventures with their listeners. Little was I to know that I would soon be joining them at sea.

It was the spring of 1966 when my friend, Keith Hampshire (another Canadian), who had signed on with Radio Caroline just a few weeks earlier, called me. He suggested that I get in touch with Caroline's Production Manager Tom Lodge who wished to hire an overnight guy to work on Radio Caroline South. Tom listened to my demo, talked to me on the phone and then hired me. I packed my bags and headed up to Harwich, Essex where I boarded the tender that would take me out to sea and my first taste of life aboard Radio Caroline.



When I set out into the early morning fog on the supply tender that first day I really had no idea what I would find anchored out there. A gleaming white cruise ship perhaps? I was in for a rude awakening. The tender plied a daily route, carrying mail and passengers to

several of the offshore radio stations anchored off the East Coast of England, stopping at Radio England/Britain Radio, Radio London and, finally, at Radio Caroline. Our first stop was at *Swingin' Radio England* which shared quarters with her sister station *Britain Radio* aboard the *MV Laissez Faire* a ship that, reportedly, had at one time transported the corpses of American GI's, casualties of the Vietnam War, back to America. The *Laissez Faire* was a gloomy vessel and life aboard was said to be Spartan. The disk jockeys quarters were on the lower decks where they "camped out" in sleeping bags and there were few amenities. "*Swingin' Radio England*" and *Britain Radio* were owned by an American consortium which had directly transposed a slick, tightly-formatted, Top-40 radio format, complete with American deejays, onto the British airwaves. It was a format that was, ultimately, to prove unsuccessful. British listeners just weren't ready for that kind of "high energy" radio, preferring a more laid-back and "chatty" communication.

Next stop was *Radio London*, "The Big L", housed aboard the *MV Galaxy* a vessel that was once a Navy mine sweeper. The ship still bore the utilitarian gray color of a military vessel, with streaks of rust accenting the hull. Against the gray sky and gloomy green seas that morning she looked grim and foreboding. She certainly wasn't a visual representation of the "Wonderful *Radio London*" image that was portrayed in the jingles and deejay patter that interspersed the music on *The Big L*. But living conditions on the *Galaxy* were a lot better than those aboard the *Laissez Faire* and the deejays and crew were friendly and welcoming.



Finally, about a mile further out to sea, we reached our ultimate destination, Radio Caroline. As we drew near, the stern of the 650-ton coastal freighter MV Mi Amigo loomed out of the fog like a forgotten shipwreck. Its rusting hulk rose up and down in the swell of the North Sea and my stomach rose up and down with it as I prepared to set foot on deck for my first taste of life as a Pirate on the high seas.

As we drew alongside the Mi Amigo a deckhand caught the lines thrown from the tender and secured the two vessels together. I waited until the ocean swell lifted the tender level with the deck of the Mi Amigo and, without looking down at the heaving seas between the two

ships, leapt aboard.

Once safely on deck I looked up and saw a group of longhaired, unshaven, half-dressed, disheveled-looking figures approaching me. They looked like escaped prisoners and I wondered if I had I been dropped off on a convict ship by mistake? They were in fact several of the eight or nine deejays, newsreaders and technicians who were working their fourteen-day shift aboard Radio Caroline. Some were departing for a week-long shore leave as their replacements arrived. The on-air crew was comprised mostly of Brits, Canucks, Yanks, Aussies and Kiwis, all of whom came from varied backgrounds and who all impressed me, at that time, as being somewhat larger than life. Most importantly though, they were all cheerful and friendly and were soon to become some of my best friends.

One of the first people I got to know was Mike Ahern, a young man from Liverpool who had once appeared on stage with the Beatles at the Cave nightclub in Liverpool. Mike is still one of the best on-air communicators I've ever heard. Years later, after leaving Radio Caroline, he went on to host the #1 rated morning show in Brisbane Australia, then returned to London where he worked at Capital Gold before heading into semi-retirement some years ago but he came

back to Britain to do programs on Country 1035 and nowadays he can be heard on Northern Norfolk Radio, where he works together with Andy Archer.

The Emperor Rosko (Mike Pasternak, son of Hollywood movie mogul Joe Pasternak) was the hip, jive-talkin' Yank who did his show with his side-kick Charlie the Mynah bird perched on his shoulder. Rosko went on to be the darling of the French Airwaves on French Radio Luxembourg. Today he produces syndicated radio shows out of his own production studios in Beverly Hills.



Dave Lee Travis was a big, bearded bear of a man from Lancashire, with a heart as big as his ego. Full of fun and practical jokes DLT hosted the lunchtime show on Caroline South. Dave was recently featured on the television program "This Is Your Life" and continues his broadcasting career with the BBC, where he left in 1994. Since then he worked on several stations and nowadays he can be heard on GWR's Classic Gold with a syndicated program, Garrison Radio - the Army's in house radio and on BBC Three Counties Radio.

Johnny Walker came over to Caroline South from Swingin' Radio England. He would later go down in the annals of Pirate Radio history as the lone Caroline deejay to remain aboard the Mi Amigo after the British Government officially banned the offshore stations. Today Johnny is employed at BBC Radio.

Tommy (TV on radio) Vance, a former deejay at KOL Seattle and KHJ Los Angeles, was Caroline's "Mr. Cool" and one of her most popular guys. He's done a lot in radio like Radio Monte Carlo, Virgin Radio and Total Rock Radio. Also Tommy did a lot of television work. Nowadays he lives in Spain.

Keith (Keefers) Hampshire was "one happy guy" and kept us all feeling good, even when times seemed bleak. After leaving Caroline Keith returned to Toronto where he worked at CKFH, put out a couple of records (he's a terrific singer) and freelanced as a voiceover artist. Keith now lives in a semi-retired state of bliss and raises quarter horses north of Toronto.

Graham (Spider) Webb was Radio Caroline's News Director. Graham returned to

his home in Australia where he became a key personality at the Australian Broadcasting Company. Graham then went on to own several of his own radio stations until personal misfortunes beset him in later years.

Mark Sloane, newsreader extraordinaire, moved to the Caribbean where he worked briefly at a station in Montserrat. Today Mark is back in England where he owns a successful Advertising Agency.



Tom Lodge, Radio Caroline's Senior DeeJay and Production Manager. After Caroline daze Tom returned to live and work in Canada. In the mid nineties he was back in England running a record company in London, as well as being involved in a movement to "Bring Back Radio Caroline". Worked on one of the many Caroline Restricted Licenses in the nineties and wrote a book on his career some years ago. Nowadays he's living in America.

Robbie "The Admiral" Dale was a former member of the British Armed Forces who worked for Radio Veronica in the late sixties. From that point on he went to TROS Radio and Television and stepped out of the radio world to heading cleaning company, whereby his company even cleaned the Capital Radio Studios. Then he was back in radio in Ireland running the successful Sunshine Radio. Robbie nowadays is living on , was the Canary Islands where he runs a holiday park together with his wife Stella. .

Tom "Tatty" Edwards, a former "Radio City" deeJay who joined Caroline South in 1967, went on to become a well-known Television Presenter on BBC East, moved to Los Angeles and is now the "Voice" of the Bob Monkhouse daily gameshow "Wipeout".

Ian MacRae, an Aussie deeJay who is now back in Australia working at station 2SM in Sydney.

Rick "The Great" Dane, a smooth-voiced, good-looking deejay who seems to have dropped off the edge of the planet.

There were others too, whose names I've forgotten or who have completely dropped out of sight, but all of them share with me a little bit of radio history (and a lot of radio fantasy) that none of us will ever forget.



Keith Hampshire

Once aboard I soon got to know my way around the Mi Amigo which, compared to the other vessels I'd seen, was extremely habitable. A amidships superstructure housed the main studio, a small production studio/news booth, dining room/lounge, galley, heads and shower. Below decks were four sleeping cabins each with two bunks, a small seating area, a desk and two lockers. In a larger cabin, slightly forward, was the record library, filled with 33rpm albums and 45rpm single records. It also contained a listening area and comfortable seating on chairs and couches. All of

these areas were the principle domain of the on-air staff and studio technicians. The ships Captain and his Dutch crew (deckhands, engineers, cook and stewards) all lived in quarters housed below the bridge at the stern of the vessel.

Topside, secured firmly to the forward deck (although on several occasions it would prove to be not quite firmly enough), was the huge 160 foot transmitting antenna. Just below decks was a cabin housing the 50kw Continental transmitter and a standby 10kw transmitter. The studios were moderately well equipped with Spot master cart machines, three turntables, a couple of Ampex reel-reel tape machines, fold back monitors and a mixing console above which was housed the famous Caroline ships clock. At the back of the studio was a porthole that could

be kept open when the weather was warm, it was also handy for checking out the local weather conditions for the South East coast of England. Outward appearances aside the MV Mi Amigo was actually quite well equipped and maintained, something for which I was grateful as she was to be my second home over the next year and a half.

Life on board was filled with short bursts of intense activity and long stretches of dull routine, which could become very boring. Since most shifts were only 3 hours in length there was a lot of time to fill. During the summer months life was pretty good, we would idle away the hours fishing, swimming (when the tides weren't running) or simply lazing on the upper deck, drinking beer and reading mail. Winter was more difficult to cope with as the bitter winds and violent storms forced us to remain inside. A lot of time was spent watching TV, reading, sleeping and playing cards or answering fan mail from the thousands of letters we received every day!

The live-aboard amenities were quite adequate. The dining room/lounge area contained a large galley table where the cook and steward served our main meals, there was a fridge containing soft drinks, beer and snacks and a lounging area with a 14" black and white television. The meals were hearty and included plenty of Dutch-Indonesian food, for which I soon acquired a fondness. Each of the deejays, newsreaders and technicians was given a weekly allocation of beer and cigarettes, accommodations were provided, earnings were tax-free and there were many other perks. For most of us it was a career move that we were glad we had made.

However there was a downside to life on board. While members of the opposite sex often came out to visit the ship they were permitted to stay aboard only as long as the tender was alongside. So, with no women stationed on board there was little need to be on our best behavior and, boys will be boys, so there were lots of pranks and mischievous antics that took place when we got bored. There were also some serious occurrences that led to violent confrontations between individuals and more than one member of the English and Dutch crews became the subject of police files when things got out of hand.

There were other goings on too, that were out of our control and we were soon to discover that bigger battles were being fought, which were to affect the tranquility of our lives, and our safety, at sea.

9. A Band of Scurvy Knaves

In January 1967 a dispute erupted over "squatters rights" on an abandoned wartime defense fort, constructed on stilts and located several miles out to sea. A number of Pirate Radio operators had occupied several of these forts in the hope of starting their own radio stations. One of them, known as Rough Towers, situated six miles off the coast of Felixstowe, Suffolk became the object of a bitter struggle between the Caroline organization and a rival company.

Ronan O'Rahilly had put two men on the Rough Towers fort in order to establish occupancy rights. Meanwhile an individual by the name of Roy Bates the 45-year-old owner of Radio Essex which, like Radio Caroline, broadcast from a vessel carrying the Dutch flag, had his sights set on the same piece of property. Bates sent four men out to "get rid" of the other two, triggering a war, which we were to become caught in the middle of.

One morning I awoke to the sound of a vessel circling the Mi Amigo. I watched as it sailed around and around us, maintaining a distance of several hundred feet. Aboard the boat was a small group of men who were shouting threats at us. They



Dave Lee Travis promotion photo
in early days

were also carrying firearms which they aimed at us, although no shots were fired, and eventually the boat sped away. Later that day another vessel drew alongside and a number of "heavies" clambered aboard the Mi Amigo. They were on "our side" and were stopping by to lick their wounds after having been firebombed during an unsuccessful raid on the Rough Towers fort by the opposing forces. Luckily nobody was seriously hurt and, after receiving medical attention they were soon on their way. So the monotony of daily life on Radio Caroline was, at times, broken by events such as these but, as a rule, the two-week stints on board the Mi Amigo were tedious and our weekly shore-leaves couldn't come soon enough.

When the tender arrived to take me back to shore for my first week of leave I was not prepared for the overwhelming popularity and listener adoration that awaited me and the other Radio Caroline deejays. The novelty of the Pirate stations, the mystique of the deejays who played music on the high seas and the burgeoning British music scene all contributed to a kind of mass hysteria that made the Pirate Radio deejays "rock stars" in their own right.



Everywhere we went doors were opened to us. The press made a fuss over us with never ending articles about life aboard the ships; the popular nightclubs and discos provided us with free memberships and admissions and record companies vied for our attention, trying to get airplay for their artists. Payola was not unknown in the industry and many deejays boosted their earnings with supplemental cash incentives surreptitiously handed to them by record execs.

Other opportunities awaited us too, as emcees for rock concerts and other musical events. I was privileged to work on stage with the likes of Jimi Hendrix, The Kinks, The Turtles, Cat Stevens, Peter & Gordon and many other established or up-and-coming artists. The money was good too, sometimes paid as a flat fee by the company but, more often than not, as a

percentage of the gate receipts. After a busy week ashore some of us would return to the ship each with enough cash to fill a small suitcase. But we lived

high on the hog too, and we all suffered from a certain degree of megalomania! We partied hard and generally acted like kids in a candy store. It was a high time for all of us! But more powerful forces were at work and these were soon to precipitate a number of events that would see the end of Pirate Radio, as we knew it at that time.

The British Government had never been pleased with the upstart attitude of the Pirate radio stations but, because they were located more than three miles out to sea, beyond the territorial limit of the British Isles in International waters, there was nothing that could be done to stop them. All that was to change when, in January of 1967, the Government under Prime Minister Harold Wilson took the first step towards outlawing the Pirate Radio stations by introducing Parliamentary legislation known as "The Marine Broadcasting Offences Act."

There was a great deal of debate in Parliament. Conservative M.P.'s fought in support of the "Free Radio Movement" while the Labour Party proposed to make it a crime for anyone to supply, work on, or be in any way involved with the Pirate stations. Outraged listeners flooded government departments with petitions. "We Want Our Caroline" became a popular slogan that was taken up by Caroline fans everywhere. A group recorded a song called "We Love the Pirate Stations" which, naturally shot to the top of the charts. The Press, too, featured frequent articles in support of the Pirates. Almost everywhere people were ready to support us in our fight to stay on the air. But it was not enough and, in August 1967, the British Government passed the Marine Broadcasting Offences Act into law. Those who defied the new law could face severe penalties so, on August 14th, 1967 we did our last shows and said goodbye to our listeners. Then we packed our bags and boarded the supply tender for the trip back to shore. As we pulled away from the *Mi Amigo* we looked back silently at her rusting hulk slowly disappearing into the early morning mists and all of us felt a deep sadness and loss for the place that, for so long, had been our home away from home.

Many of the Pirate deejays were offered positions at the newly created BBC Radio 1, introduced by the Government as a means of placating the millions of listeners who had become accustomed to 24 hour-a-day music and news. Subsequently a call went out for license applications for the first of the many new "commercial" radio stations that were soon to go on the air. These stations too, became home to many of the former Pirate deejays. Meanwhile the rest of us returned to our various countries to pursue careers in more stable, albeit somewhat less exciting, jobs.

But, as we went quietly about our lives, the memories stayed with us. The cold winter storms, the summer sunsets over the North Sea, the cry of the gulls, the

hum of the generators, the smell of diesel fuel mixed with sea air, the clanking of the anchor chains. These, and the ever-present music that introduced a new era in broadcasting all over Britain, would always be a part of our lives. For us they are still the memories that were Radio Caroline, "The Smallest Boat To Rock the Nation".'

Although the Marine Broadcasting Offences Act effectively closed down most of the British offshore radio stations Radio Caroline was not to be silenced for many years to come. When the Act became law one deejay, Johnny Walker, stayed aboard and continued broadcasting. Supplies continued to be shipped in from Holland but, since it had become illegal for British companies to even advertise on Radio Caroline, the positive cash flow was starting to reverse itself. In March of 1968 the company that operated the supply tender was owed money and they seized the Radio Caroline ships. In May of 1972 the *Mi Amigo* was sold at auction. But it was resold to the Caroline organization, which can be read more about in another chapter.

Photos courtesy of: Steve Young, Rob Olthof, Hans Knot and Freewave Media Magazine Archive.

Part 8

'They wanted us to sound slick, pacy and fast'



There are not many things you can tell Roger Day about British offshore radio, he does not know yet himself. He was there for almost a full five years, working for no less than three different stations at the height of the offshore radio boom, from 1966 till the end of 1970. Born March 29th, 1945, in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, Day started his career in 1966 on the *MV Laissez Faire* as a deejay with *Swinging Radio England* - a.k.a. *BOSS Radio* - and stuck it out to the end with that station.

Right after that, in November 1966, he went to work for Radio Caroline on the *MV Mi Amigo*, where he became known as

Roger "Twiggy" Day, "your thinner record spinner." He left Caroline just ahead of the Marine Offences Act of 14th August 1967, but changed his mind and returned to the station where he worked along with Ross Brown, Robbie Dale, Carl Mitchell and Johnny Walker. He was on board the final day of March 3rd, 1968, when the ship was towed away by the Dutch Wijismuller company which had not been paid for its services of tendering the ship.

Next Roger Day worked for Radio Luxembourg before returning to the water to work on the MEBO II with Radio Northsea International at the start of 1970. There he headed the line-up of deejays like Andy Archer, Carl Mitchell, Johnny Scott and Alan West. Within a month after the first transmissions the Swiss owners decided that the MEBO II should leave the Dutch coast in favour for a position off the Clacton on Sea shoreline. Day was fired that same year right after RNI had changed the station's name into Radio Caroline to give support to the Conservatives in the British elections of June 1970. Since then he has been heard on a number of local British stations. He is one of the few deejays of the former British offshore radio stations who never did any work for the BBC. Nowadays he operates "Roger Day Broadcast Services", brings his radio knowledge to younger people and does occasional show in the satellite radio station Radio Caroline.

Jelle Boonstra and Hans Knot spoke to him in Amsterdam in 2001 and as he has such a long career in radio it's decided as an honour to Roger to republish this interview, including the things which happened to him next to the things on Radio Caroline.

You were there at so many turning points in the history of British offshore radio, that we have as many questions. We will start, however, with the most conventional one: how did you become interested in radio?



What got me going was listening to Radio Veronica. I didn't know what it was and I didn't even know it was on a boat. I used to live in south-east England and Radio Veronica used to bounce in. There were no English stations apart from Radio Luxembourg, and Radio Veronica was playing music and it was great. I only found out later that it was on a boat when I started working for the stations themselves. At school I was known as Juke Box Joe because I was so besotted with the radio.

Radio Luxembourg and Radio Veronica did deviate from what you heard on

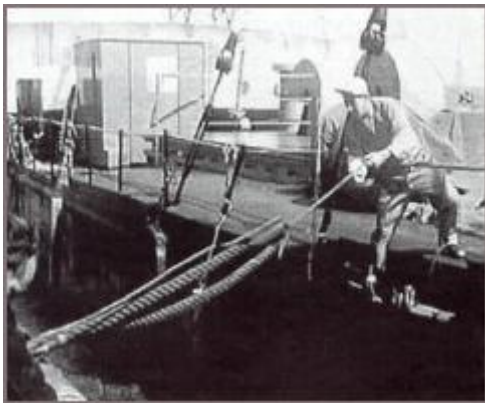
British radio in those days?

Well, in England it was two record shows a week and when I listened to Radio Luxembourg I thought that I'd like that job because I love music and I really did want to play it. I guess I was about 13 and I had no idea of how you went about it. I practised with a tape recorder in my bedroom. Sad person, really!

When the pirates came along, did you think that one day you would be working there?

I first heard Caroline in 1964 on my birthday as I was walking along Margate sea-front where I used to live. I'd read in the paper about the station so it was the best birthday present I'd ever had! Little did I know that one day I'd be working for them. I just thought about it.

In 1966 a group of British, American and Canadian businessmen started two radio stations on the MV Laissez Faire: Swinging Radio England and Britain Radio. How did you get involved with them?



I had sent some audition tapes to Radio Caroline and Radio London and, like everyone else, I was rejected. I met Dave Cash, who worked for Radio London and I asked him whether there was any chance of a job on the boat. He said that it was unlikely because I had no experience but there was a new station starting up run by Americans who'd just flown in that day and were staying at the Hilton Hotel in Mayfair and why didn't I go and see

them. So with my girlfriend, we went to see them and they asked me what I wanted. I told them that I wanted a job and because I was the first English person they'd had, they said I could have one. They didn't know whether I was good, bad or indifferent!

Some of the other guys on Britain Radio were Brian Tilney and Colin Nicol. I heard, that Brian Tilney also hadn't done any radio before ...

No, Brian was a bingo caller! Good qualification! I used to be an accountant and Johnny Walker was a car salesman and, apparently, that's why they picked us because they didn't want us sounding like the other English deejays who they thought were bad. They wanted us to sound slick, pacy and fast like the Americans and they wanted to teach us how to sell like they do and I'm very

grateful because I never got into the bad British habits.

American style radio was introduced to Britain by Radio London. Swinging Radio England was meant to go even beyond that. Did you have to listen to tapes just like the Radio London jocks did to learn the trade the American way?

Yes, we listened to tapes from WFUN in Miami and I'd never heard American radio until then and I thought it was superb and they wanted to sound like that. Swinging Radio England is still one of the best stations there's ever been.

Swinging Radio England and Britain Radio were created by some of the Texan backers who had broken away from Radio London. Among them was Don Pierson. So Pierson had also been involved with Radio London. Was that fact known to the staff of the station?

Well, I didn't know and it was only later on that I found out that he'd set it up and they'd done the dirty on him.

The ship was owned by Pier-Vick Ltd, which consisted of Don Pierson, Bill Vick, general manager Jack Curtis and programme director Ron O'Quinn. Did Don Pierson or Bill Vick often visit the ship?

Bill Vick not so much, but Don Pierson was always on. He'd come on with his wife and every time he came on, he'd ask to play "The Yellow Rose Of Texas" which was hardly the sort of music we played. Well, Britain Radio did! They were fabulous characters, just like you see in Dallas, if they wanted it, they bought it.



How big was the cultural gap between the British and the American deejays?

They didn't understand us, but I don't think we understood them either. It used to really annoy the American deejays, who used to work for really professional Top Forty radio for years. They were better deejays than Johnny, Brian and all the other guys, including myself. But who was getting all the mail? We were! Simply because we were English and the English are always strange about foreigners.

How were the conditions on the MV Laissez Faire when you first went on board?



It wasn't really ready when they came over and the first place I slept was in the mess room. There used to be a big refrigerator and it had been a body boat from the Vietnam war. When the G.I.s were shot, they sent them back on this boat. We were convinced there were ghosts on board. Friendly ones, though. I slept in the toilet, the bathroom and I think just before I left, they built the cabins.

Your made your programmes for Swinging Radio England. Did you also do any programmes on Britain Radio, as the station was airing from the same ship?

Yes, I did. But I don't think any tapes exist, thank God! I was a rock 'n' roll fan and I didn't like doing the "Hello, This is Britain Radio" in a posh voice.

Much has been said about the concept of BOSS Radio. They didn't understand Europe very well, though, did they?

Not really. They heard Radio Caroline and Radio London and they thought those were crap and that they could do it better. I have to agree. Compared to what we were doing, these other stations were boring. We moved, we were pacy. I think, we were too early. The station was at least ten years before Britain was ready for it, and that's why we didn't pull in a great audience. They made some wrong decisions with frequencies but, even to this day, it was still a great radio station.



The ship was equipped with a Carousel unit. Was it difficult to use?

Well, this was one of the first stations to have automation. I mean, you have it now, but we had it in 1966! I used to sit in the studio, at night and watch this thing go round with announcements that "This Is Britain Radio", etcetera.

Apparently the Swinging Radio England organisation hired an advertising agency that, before that time, had only sold advertising in cinemas?

And they weren't very successful for us. That was another bad decision. They made a lot of bad decisions. They had new ideas but they didn't come off.

The Radio England broadcasters were expected to read the news on their sister station Britain Radio and vice versa. Was it difficult for you to read the news?



Yes, I fun with the news! I still do. We had to read the news over this jingle backing and trying to read as fast as the music. The weather one was the fun because it used to have a countdown in it so by the time it got to 1, there was a big explosion and off into some music. I used to be so nervous doing it that I read it that fast that I'd finished by 8!

The types of music aired by the offshore stations were different. What can you tell about the music of Swinging Radio England?

We used to play things a lot earlier. A lot of stuff was American and we were always the first with Motown Records. A lot of the young people liked us for that. We played a lot of Beach Boys too, which was great, and we were way in front of everyone else. The trouble was, we used to drop things before they were released in England. Musically, we used to be very quick and had a prediction chart like Radio London, but we were way ahead of them.

How was the BOSS Radio Top 50 compiled?

Sometimes by me! I thought that a record was good so I put it in. Never mind research. Research is the biggest enemy of radio.

You all shared the same tender with Radio London? How did you all get on with each other?

Well, on-air we were rivals but off-air we were all friends. We would get stuck in Harwich so we'd have a few beers. The first time I met Tony Blackburn was when we went out on the tender. Now this is a man I listened to and he was a God to me.

There was some rivalry , though, as the jingles of Radio Swinging England were stolen by Radio Caroline and Radio London?

We were the first radio station to have our jingles custom made whereas Radio

London had their jingles doctored so that sounded like they were Radio London's but they weren't. They put Radio London over the top of them. We had two great packages, which for a radio station that was only on the air for six months was amazing. When we used the first package we were so naive that we played the jingles on air without talking over them and Radio Caroline and Radio London recorded them and they were on-air before we used them. Stupid, or what?

Gary Stevens, who worked for one of the top stations in New York City (WMCA), was sending taped shows across the Atlantic to go out on Swinging Radio England. Was there any contact between him and the guys on the ship?

No, I never met him. We used to run a tape which he used to start with "Hi everybody, it's whatever day it was" except one day we put the wrong tape on the wrong day so it might have be a Sunday but it was Tuesday.

One of the guys on board was Graham Gill, who came from Australia?

Yes, he was a great guy. He was a little bit more reserved than the rest of us and he didn't take part into many of the jokes that we played on each other.

One of the American deejays who worked for Swinging Radio England, was known as "Boom-Boom Brannigan". What about him?



A total idiot. Apparently, he was shot in America. They thought he was a gangster. He was just outrageous.

There are many stories of offshore stations which were bad in paying wages. Were you being paid all the time?

Yes. I hear these horror stories about people not being paid by the owners. Only RNI owes me money but actually Caroline - and I worked for the biggest crook going, Ronan O'Rahilly himself! - always paid me. Even Radio England paid me. I must have been ugly so they paid me because they were scared of me.



At the end of the year the owners decided that Swinging Radio England was to become a Dutch station. On 3 November 1966 Radio England closed down and some days later, on 14 November the new station Radio Dolfijn went on air, aimed at the Dutch public. How did you react on that?

The way we found out was absolutely awful. The tender came along and we were on the deck and Johnny Walker was reading the paper and he said that we were going to be a Dutch station. And that's how we found out.

Literally Johnny said that he was off and he jumped on the tender there and then and went back. I wished I had joined him at the time. He got on *Caroline* before I did, the swine!

Next you went over to Radio *Caroline*. Did you apply for a job there or did they ask you?

No, I didn't apply. I stuck it out to the end with Radio England and then I went back to work in the clubs. About June, 1967, a lot of so-called superstars got cold feet and I knew the guys at Radio *Caroline* and they knew me. I got home one day and my Dad told me that Terry Bate from *Caroline* had rang and wanted me to call him. Terry didn't say that basically they were hard up and being mean to me. It was just that they were desperate for anyone who'd had radio experience and he asked me when I could start and I said tomorrow. So I told my disco "Bye, I'm off to the boat." Now I hadn't actually been on the *MV Mi Amigo*. We'd been alongside on the tender but weren't allowed on board. As I came alongside I thought: "Jesus, I'm going to work for the world's greatest radio station!" and I still think that. It was a magical feeling going on board. It lasted until the day I left. There was something about the place. It had this magic aura about it. I never took drugs but I knew what the feeling was. It was in the air and you couldn't describe it.

You were with the group which went on after the *Marine Offences Act* came into effect in August 1967. Was there any difference in the way the ship was tendered before and afterwards?

Obviously, we had daily tender from England and after it was twice a week on a week, one from Scheveningen and the other from IJmuiden which was bigger, the *Offshore I*, which is now the Trip boat *Offshore II*, which was also a boat from Scheveningen and now the Eurotrip. I preferred the *Offshore 1*, which was a nicer ride especially in a Force 10 gale. We would occasionally run out of water

and the nice things that make life a lot more bearable at sea. You had less contact with land.

Up until March, 1968, did you often go home to England?

Not at first, because we were very scared and wondered what they would do to us. Just before Christmas, nobody had been back except for Spangles Muldoon, who took a rowing boat back but came out on a fishing boat. He just appeared on deck and we asked who he was and he told us that he was our new disc jockey and we thought that he had better stay but he had no passport or anything. Anyway, none of us had been back and I thought: It's Christmas, I want to see my folks. I'm going home." I didn't tell anybody. I packed my bags and I set off from Schiphol Airport to fly to Heathrow and I took a lot of mail addressed to me at the Dutch office of the station in Amsterdam.

I had long hair in those days and I was always getting stopped by Customs and I'd never taken a drug in my life, but in those days I looked like junkie, furry coats and everything. I went through Customs and they said: "You here." So I went over and so I came over and they opened the case and all the letters cascaded out with Roger Day, Radio Caroline, etcetera all over them and he said: "What's all this then?" "Letters from friends," I said. And he looked at me and said: "I wish I had as many friends as you!" And they shut the case and marked it and I asked whether that that was it. They said: "Yeah, we're not interested in arresting a pirate deejay. Play us a record next time on the ship."

As the stations financial problems increased, so did Radio Caroline director Philip Solomon's influence. Solomon also controlled Major Minor records, an Irish label with bands like the Dubliners, the Bachelors, Raymond Lévèfre and his Orchestra, and singer David McWilliams. The deejays were obliged to plug their recordings with some very irritating and long commercials for the label. Was it difficult for you not to fall asleep during these commercials?

Very! Let's be honest, they had some crap. When Radio One started I thought that we didn't stand a chance so I used to play all the Major Minor stuff before 7.00 a.m. to get it out of the way so we would stand up to them rocking and rolling. To have Caroline, you had to have this rubbish as well, so we did our best to put it out of the way. They had some good stuff too, like Tommy James and the Shondells with "Mony Mony". I didn't like The Dubliners much. We had to play the plug records, including all the stuff from Andrew "Loog" Oldham's Immediate-label - the Small Faces, who had their second



album on that label, supported the station. Johnny Walker always used to throw those records over the side and he used to get bollocked for that.

It has often been said, that Ronan O'Rahilly lost control of the radio station in 1967 ...

Phil Solomon, he was the man behind the awful music that kept it going. We never really liked him because he did ruin the spirit of it. Ronan is the spirit of Radio Caroline and always will be. I love the guy, I still do. He's my hero because he changed radio for Europe. Rival geniuses are always given a dark side. George Best, great footballer, but a bloody idiot. Ronan is not an idiot but he can't handle money, which is a pity because Ronan is Caroline. He might not have the money, but he has the desire to keep it going. You can't give people desire. You see, radio is a business now, and I appreciate that, but it's not got a heart and that's wrong.

Do you think it is still possible to have a station like Radio Caroline, I mean with that same spirit, again?

If we can get the station going on the Isle of Man, we will kick some radio arse! They say it's not possible. It bloody well is. I don't know what Dutch radio is like, and I don't swear a lot, but British Radio is shit! It's so bad I don't listen any more. I don't like the Top 300 songs that they play. I like the Corrs, I like Robbie Williams but not all bloody day, thank you very much. I want some surprises on the radio but you don't get them any more. I've probably ruined my career in Britain, but who cares?!

It was a remarkable day, March 3rd, 1968, when the ship was towed away by Wijsmuller because the company had not been paid for its services ...



I did the Breakfast Show, as you know, and I played continuous music until 6.00 a.m. to warm the transmitter up. I don't know why, it was warm anyway. I went and had a shave and shower because living on a boat I felt better if I had done those things. All of a sudden there was a boat alongside us and it was one of the big Wijsmuller tugs. Now there was nothing unusual in that because Wijsmuller used to supply us with Offshore I and II and with fuel. They used to have tugs in every ocean because they made their money from listening to the SOS frequencies and salvaging ships that were in trouble on the high seas because they were there first. They came alongside if they were in the area and have a chat with the Dutch crew.

Now the Dutch have a great sense of humour. There was a guy on board called Harry and I asked him what was going on. He said: "Englishman, we are towing you to Japan!" and I told him that he must be joking and he laughed. So I went into the studio to get ready for my show and the captain of the MV Mi Amigo came in along with the captain of the tug and he said that I had five minutes to get out of the studio. Now this is probably where I made the biggest mistake of my life. So many times since I have known what I should have done and I didn't. I should have actually got them out of there and told them that they weren't taking me out of there, but I didn't realise how serious it was. I should have just flung open the mike and said that we needed help and get somebody out here now! That's what I should have done. Easy to say now, but I didn't. I just left the studio and they locked it and that was it!

Do you think it would have made any difference?

There was a guy in Frinton on Sea who used to monitor our broadcasts and I think he could have got some contacts and stopped them doing what they were doing because it took them a while to cut the anchor chain. So maybe help could have come and I could have helped to change the face of British radio, so blame me. Eventually we knew this was serious. They hadn't been paying any bills. If they had, I think it might have been there today. We were being towed and there's nothing worse than being towed on a boat with the generator off because everything is dead.

We arrived in one of the locks that go up in stages that take you into the main port in Amsterdam. This lock keeper came out to let us in and it was dark so he didn't know what he had in there. He had his big torch and the beam from his torch started going up the mast and it kept going and going until it got to the top and he was totally amazed. When we arrived in Amsterdam a guy came across and asked when we would coming back on air. We said: "Oh when we've paid the bills." I don't think we actually believed that. We knew that once we were in port, the British Government would put pressure on and we wouldn't get out, no matter what we did. So we got our air-fares home and went back to England, the end of a dream.

The story goes, that when the Wijsmuller tugs came to tow in the Caroline ships into Amsterdam in 1968, you had a Canadian passport ...

No, I still had the old British one with the ugly photo in it. We didn't get a chance to test it in coming back to England. But we came back to Holland, which was great, a 21-year-old, not married, no commitments. That was a good place to

come as a single I can tell you. We loved it there.

It did not take long before you was back on the air, now on Luxembourg?

Well, Radio Luxembourg realised they were losing audience when Radio One started and they hired me from the South boat and Tony Prince from the North boat and they wanted it to be hip and more swinging. That's what they thought they wanted but they wouldn't let us do it. They kept telling us how to do it and after the freedom of Caroline, even with those awful records, I left pretty quickly and when somebody said: "Do you want to go and compare the Beach Boys show?" I was off like a shot! Probably a stupid decision because I would have probably gone to Radio One if I had stayed, but I wasn't bothered about that.

And then in 1970, you were heard on RNI. Were the test programmes recorded in Switzerland or were they made on the ship?

Definitely from the ship. I have a copy of the advert at home, which appeared in Record Mirror, which says: "Disc-jockeys wanted for European Radio Station." I thought I know what that is. So I applied and I got this letter back from Radio North Sea owners, Meister and Bollier. They said that they knew all about me. They were starting a radio station. Now you have to realise that I have been approached by people saying that they were bringing Radio Caroline back, and so on, and it cost me a lot of money, so I became a bit blasé. So they said come and see us in Holland. I told them that if they sent me an air ticket then I would come and see them. A couple of days later, a ticket arrived so I thought that was a good start. I kissed my wife goodbye, came to Holland and went to the Grand Hotel in Scheveningen, which I believe has now been demolished. They said that they had a ship happening, they'd put a transmitter on it. "Oh yeah, I've heard that one before."



They said that they would take me out to see it the next day. We went down to Scheveningen harbour and I still didn't believe it as it was a misty day and you couldn't see anything outside the harbour. We got on this boat and passed the REM island with the big TV tower on it, past Veronica which was nice because I'd listened to it long enough and out of the mist came this psychedelic vision, I've seen all the pictures and it was like that in reality, and I remember saying to myself: "Bugger me, the silly bastards have gone and done it!" When I got on

board and saw all the equipment and they wanted me to set it all up. They had some German deejays on board and they wanted me to set up the English side. I went back to England once again, said goodbye to all my contacts and said that I was off to sea again.

How were things between the German and the English deejays? Another culture clash?

Absolutely, more so than between the Americans and the English. I'm the sort of guy that will get on with anybody. They were fine. I couldn't understand a thing that Hannibal said and he couldn't understand me either. We tolerated each other. It was an odd mixture and it didn't last very long but people wanted English voices.

Last year, there were again some phoney stories about espionage on board of the MEBO II. Did you pick up any signs while you were on board, that the Swiss owners of RNI, Meister and Bollier, were involved with that kind of activities?

I've been phoned many times by journalists, even up to a couple of years ago, and I could have made a lot of money, but I have to say, there wasn't. I know they came from a very dodgy background and they've certainly been involved in things I don't approve of. If the things they say about them are true then they want locking up. But I have no evidence of there being any espionage on that boat. People say there were locked rooms. If they say that, then they are lying. There were no locked rooms on the MEBO II. I've been in every room on that boat even with the short-wave equipment. If there was, I would have said so.

In 1970 the ship moved to England, changing the location for the Dutch coast for a position off the Clacton on Sea shoreline. What did you think of this change of position?

Stupid. I advised them against it but I was outnumbered. Andy Archer and the rest wanted to go to England for old times sake. I told them I don't like the Government but they let us get on with it here. If we go to England, it's like sticking two fingers up, and asking what were they going to do about it? They didn't want to do something about it, but they had to and they did. I don't think they did it whilst I was there. I was staying in Margate at the time and I thought it was silly and that it would lead to trouble and it did.

Some time later RNI changed its name into "Radio Caroline" and started to support the Conservatives in the British elections of June 1970. How did Ronan O'Rahilly get involved with the election campaign?



Well, they started jamming us, which was very undemocratic. It has never been done except in wartime and that was outrageous. More outrageous than the Marine Offences Act which, to me, was one of the most undemocratic pieces of legislation there's ever been - trying to stop music being played on the radio. How offensive is that? The jamming got

worse and with the election campaign coming up, we had to get the people to vote Conservative. So Ronan came on board, changed the name to Radio Caroline and pushed all the right buttons. Also this was the first election in which 18-year-olds could vote. They didn't give a toss about the economy, they knew that this Government had taken away their radio station. So we needed to remind people about that. Nobody's ever admitted it, but we changed the course of that election because the opinion polls said that they would get back. In the end, however, we saw the marginal seats in the south east of England swing the other way.

How did you celebrate it?

I got rat-arsed! I got so drunk and the tender came to take us off the next day and that was my last act on the boat because I went on holiday to Spain and when I came back, I was fired.

Why were you fired?

Politics mainly. We had a new programme controller called Larry Tremaine, who was an American as well as an idiot. I've already said that I'm honest and I don't hold back. If you're an idiot, then I'll tell you. I made a mistake of telling him that before I went on holiday and I think he sussed that I knew that he wasn't any good. So he had to get rid of me. When I got back from Spain, I went down and asked him when I was going back and he said never.

In the Lockerbie Bomb Trial, Bollier has been associated with the terrorist attack which made "Flight 103" crash on to the town of Lockerbie in December 1988. Are you surprised that Bollier's name was mentioned in this case?

I'm surprised that anybody can do anything like that to anybody. I don't know if Bollier was involved in that. If he is, may he rot in hell. Nothing surprises me

anymore.

What do you think about automated radio?

I think that's done. I like live-personality radio. Stuff computers, they're OK if they're used right. They're not the enemy. The enemy is the people who programme them. What the big boys have done to radio in Britain, well, they should be taken outside and shot!

Is there any chance that we will hear you in the near future on the long-wave radio station from the Isle of Man?

I bloody well hope so. The thought of getting on a radio station and broadcasting to Europe again is better than sex! When you opened that mike on the Mi Amigo you had the feeling of a lot of power. As soon as you turned on that mike you felt that bond with the listener. I don't know many people that have a bond because they don't say anything. They're not real people. If you listen to Walker and Blackburn, you know what sort of music they like. I listen to people now and they say: "I'm going to play five in a row." What the hell is that to anybody? Nothing. I'm 55 years old and I've still got the same principles now as when I started and I'm still a rebel.

The Roger Day interview was earlier published by Soundscapes on line Journal 2002 and Freewave Media Magazine 2002.