

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

Part 9



Next to Radio Caroline there have been a lot of radio stations, transmitting from the international waters. Of course we all know the big ones like Radio Caroline, Radio London, Radio Veronica and Radio Northsea International - to mention a few of them. Next to the big ones, where all the 'stars' could be heard on our transistor radio's, there were many more radio stations which

didn't get the attention as the big brothers.

In my view a pity as they were - in their own category - also good stations. From the sixties I do remember a few examples of minor radio stations which really

felt good in my listening ears. First Radio 355, a very good middle of the road music station, which was only a couple of months on the air in 1966.

Then there was Radio 390, which was a very easy listening station. The station did close down in

1967 and now - 37 years later - it's still great fun to listen to the most relaxing sound Offshore Radio ever had. The last one I like to mention is Radio City, the Tower of Power. Transmitting on '299' the station came in the news as it's director - Reginald Calvert - had been shot down by a co-director of a competitive station.



Lucky enough recorded myself enough hours to listen to Radio City, when I want to listen to good old memories. In 1978 I met Bob LeRoi, originating from Whitstable in Kent, for the very first time at the very first Radio Day at Noordwijkerhout. It was him who worked, as a 17 years old chap, for a few stints on the Shivering Sands Forts. But Bob LeRoi has also good memories to Radio Caroline. Here are some of his memories:

'My first introduction to Radio Caroline was at the suggestion of John Birch. Birch was at a later stage not only a taxi driver but also an avid Caroline supporter who had his own informative magazine on the radio station. I'd been to visit John & his wife Anita in Greys in the county Essex on a couple of occasions and it was John

he did promise to put my name forward to people within the Caroline organisation.

But there was more as one day I suddenly had a call from a girl, called Jenny, from the office who sent me a simple letter; she was more concerned about astrological birth signs than expertise! This was in early 1968 and I hope to go out to the Caroline ship which was off the east coast of Britain. But I was to miss going out to the MV Mi-Amigo, as both the Caroline ships were dragged away by the Wijsmuller Salvage Company tugs. This as the bills for tendering were not properly paid and so the ships disappeared into Amsterdam harbour for some years



I crossed paths again with the Caroline Organisation through Robb Eden who I'd met at the Caroline Road-shows in the seventies. He worked in the early seventies on the MEBO II for Radio Northsea International but soon after Radio Caroline came back on the air from the MV Mi Amigo he crossed ships and was to be heard on Radio Caroline. Robb asked me if I'd make some filler tapes. And so I did, which was in 1979. Andy Oldfield produced the shows that found there way out to the ship with one of the many tenders, to be used on an ad hock basis in their programming.



In the late 70's I'd got involved with local BBC Radio, working freelance at BBC Radio Medway and by 1983 I was under full contract to them. But never the less became involved with supplying the new Radio Caroline ship, the MV Ross

Revenge, with Graham on the "Henrietta". The bosses at the BBC didn't seem worried with numerous redundant bits of kit, records & carts being given to me to "pass" to the radio ship.

In 1985 we ran the Euro siege blockade, which was the most memorable period. It was the period that the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) put out a permanent watch on all activities in the Thames Estuary regarding the movements from ships in the neighbourhood of the MV Ross Revenge and the MV Communicator, which was at that stage the radio ship for Laser 558. Graham and I usually take precaution to weight the obvious radio related cartons with concrete to ditch overboard should we have been intercepted. Many times we found ourselves being chased all over the Thames Estuary. It was on one occasion we were told to hold off or be rammed. We often chose periods when we knew anorak boats were around so that the 'Dioptric Surveyor' -



which was the most important 'spy ship' from the DTI - efforts became diluted. They did though soon recognise the "Henrietta", making life difficult for both Graham and me on shore, when enquiries revealed I was at the BBC and Graham was a local port officer.

We thought the game was up when a guy called Cosmic arrived at 4 am one morning with a van loaded with supplies, records and deejay Tom Anderson. We loaded the "Henrietta" to the gunwales. Whilst Tom made himself scarce below, we had an impromptu visit from the local authorities, who after a cursory inspection from the quayside wished us happy fishing! This was around the time that John Tyler suggested I try the Overdrive studio. Next it was John Dwyer to set things up for me to record a programme, which I understand was transmitted later that night on Radio Caroline after my BBC programme went out on another frequency!



The "Henrietta" was a lovely little boat and during the worst weathers I recall clinging to the foredeck ankle deep in heavy swells as we tied up to the ship. I'd made provision for a three month break from shore, Mike Barrington, Kevin Turner, Johnny Lewis and others were keen for me to do a stint, but Peter Philips was uncomfortable for me to appear on air whilst under contract to the BBC. We operated from 1983 - 1987 taking in a just a couple South Falls Head excursions.

Later following working many years in ILR and whilst running my own station, Peter Moore - the Caroline station manager since 1987- called out of the blue to invite me to come aboard the radio station. So in 1999 I was heard regularly on satellite. I had many ideas and was keen to increase Radio Caroline's profile. I'd commissioned the first new sung jingle package since the sixties, looked at ways the station might become profitable and at other transmission platforms.

By the new Millennium having organised and hosted the Caroline Convention 2000

things came to a head. We'd got BBC 1 Television to cover the event. They even came out to the ship the following day and a substantial piece was produced much to the annoyance of factions within the highly political Caroline organisation.



That wasn't to be the end, Sietse Brouwer of Radio Caroline Nederland asked me to start making programmes for the Dutch service. I'd worked in Holland during the 70's, love the Country and it's people so it seemed a nice way of giving something back. I'd met Sietse and his pal Adrian Hondema on many occasions and soon warmed to their team, so working with them was a delight. Like so many of these things I found that producing regular programmes demanded time I simply didn't have, so with great regret my last programme was transmitted in March 2003.

Part 10

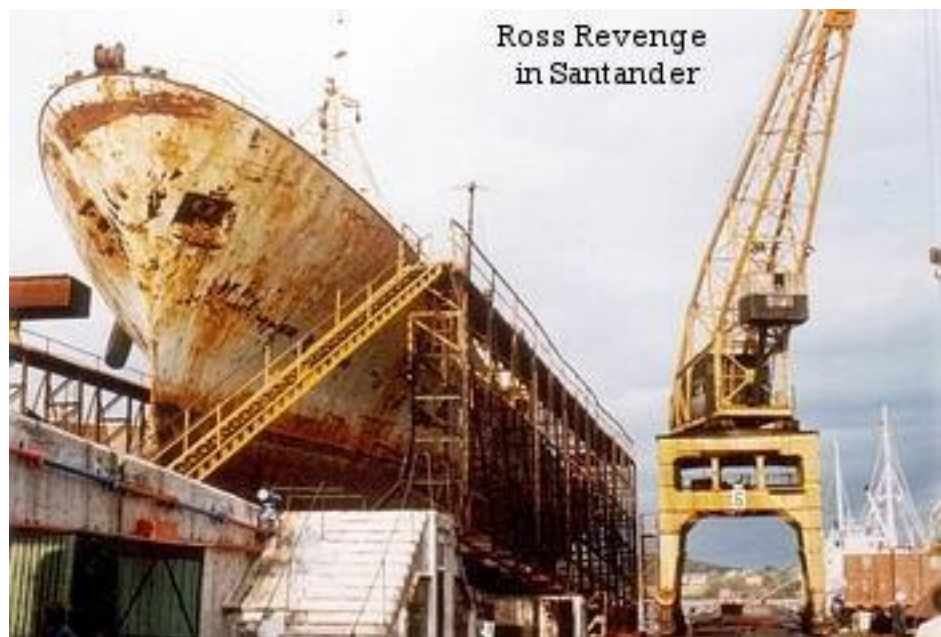
THE RADIO CAROLINE FORMAT HAS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY



Another complete book could be written about all the things which were happening within the Caroline organisation and against the organisation when Ronan O'Rahilly and other persons tried to bring back the radio station on the air in the early eighties. In March 1980 the MV Mi Amigo sunk and from that point on it was specialist John Wendale (Tom de Munck) who followed all the tracks from Ronan, his financial partners, his former financial partners, the FBI in the case 'fraud on Caroline', the MV Imagine - which wasn't there at all - and the MV Ross Revenge. This last one came to be the new Radio Caroline ship in August 1983. A former Icelandic trawler which was rebuilt into a radio ship in the harbour of Santander. When Tom

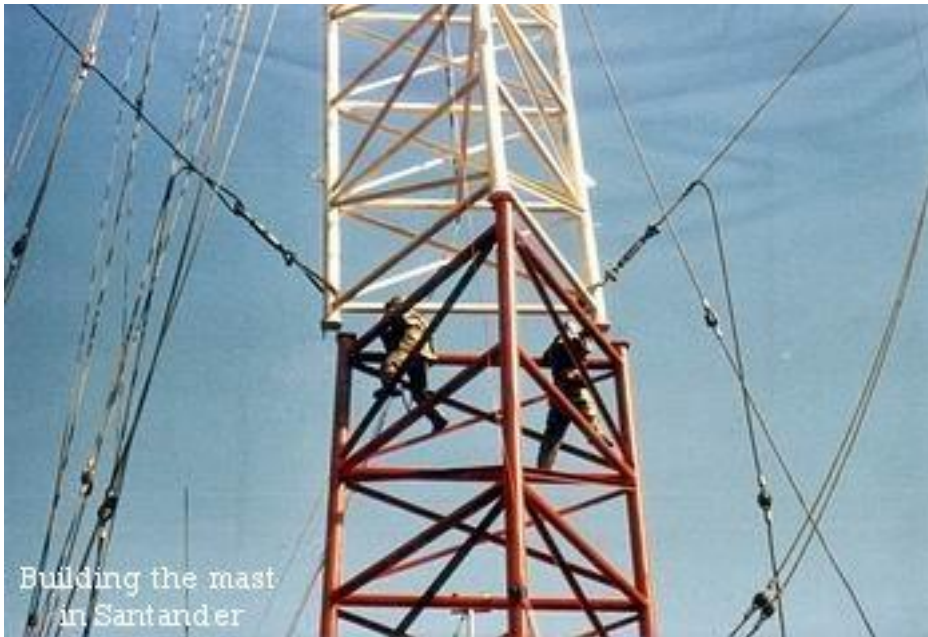
showed me the first photographs from the ship in Spain I told him I couldn't believe this would ever come on the air from international waters. On deck of the MV Ross Revenge porta cabins had been placed and the technicians - so the photo's showed us - were building studio's. But before the ship left Santander harbour in July 1983 the porta cabins had gone and the studio's were then planned inside the ship. On July 28th I got - so my diary tells me - a phone call that the new radio ship was on its way to international waters off the coast of Frinton-on-Sea in the Thames Estuary. During the period before the ship went out several amounts of money were mentioned - when insiders were talking about the cost for the rebirth of Radio Caroline. The highest I heard was 3,25 million dollars.

Let's follow some facts from 1983 in this chapter as I have heard very soon after July 28th, from another contact person, that the MV Ross Revenge was still in Santander, near Bilbao in Northern Spain. It left the



harbour at two o'clock in the afternoon of August 4th. Two days earlier several of the regional television news programs in Great Britain had already brought the news of the return from Radio Caroline, using the 978 ton MV Imagine. Still the name of the ship was used, which had been dropped months and months ago. In Holland already a long time it was known that the name should be the MV Ross Revenge. Originally the departure from Santander was set 24 hours earlier but the harbour authorities wouldn't sign the papers as they felt that one of the lifeboats on board the Ross Revenge wasn't suitable as it was too big. Also the inflatable life rafts were not good enough and so the authorities ordered the people on the radio ship to buy some new ones.

Of course it took some days before the radio ship would be near the British coast and August the 8th 1983 has gone into the history books as the date the red painted ship had arrived near Beachy Head on the South Coast of Britain in the early morning hours. It was guarded by a Spanish tug - the Aznar José Luis -

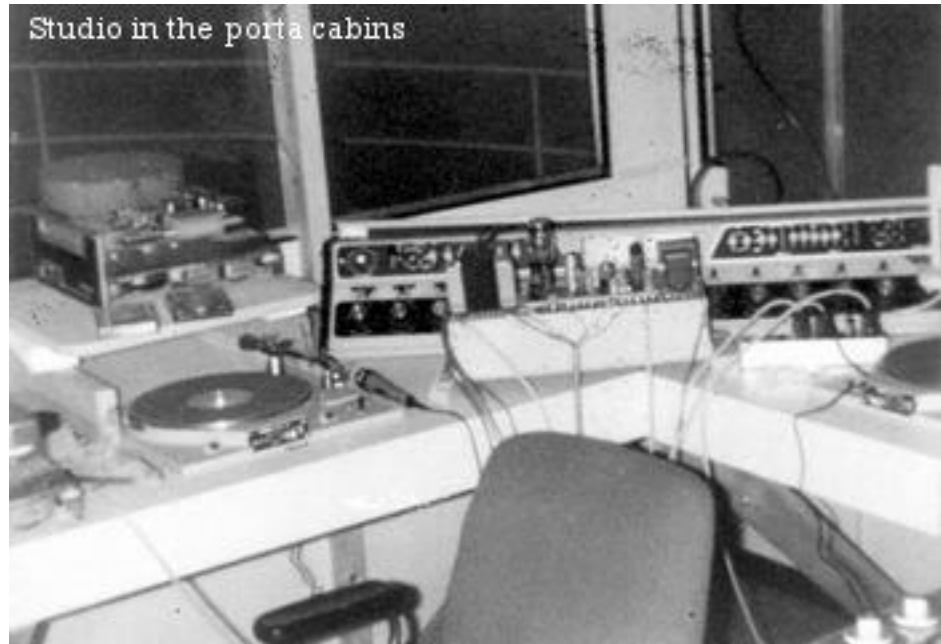


although the ship's engines were, at that stage, in very good condition. It would take some hours before the ship reached her anchorage. It was 18.30 CET that the small anchor was lowered at a position of 51

degrees 40.7' North and 01 degree 34' East. In the days to come a heavy anchor was brought onboard. Lady Caroline had come home, as it was almost the same anchorage were the MV Mi Amigo had been during the last years of her life. Well almost? Just twelve miles away from the mast of the MV Mi Amigo, which was still visible on the spot where the former Caroline ship sunk in March 1980.

The media machine began to work and I have found back in my agenda that on the same day I was already phoned by 7 several journalist from newspapers in Holland, including the three big ones - Telegraaf, Volkskrant and Algemeen Dagblad. Not so strange as I had very good contacts with Bert Voorthuyzen, Henk Langerak and Peter van den Berg. Those three wrote a lot about offshore radio in those years. Another call came from a young lad at the VOO (Veronica Broadcasting Society). If I could bring them in contact with Ronan O'Rahilly as they wanted to interview him in the media program 'Grote Verwarring' (Big Confusion). Just a few phone calls to radio friends in England was enough to trace down where Ronan would drink his 'water' the same afternoon in Chelsea. If the VOO paid for the drinks is not known but we know for sure the grey fox

didn't. Anyway he was interviewed and told the listeners some news: 'The Radio Caroline format has changed dramatically and it's going to be album track format which will have much appeal for the Dutch and Belgian



audiences'. Further Ronan told us that the Ross Revenge had a mast of 300 feet! It would be the largest in the history on offshore radio. He wanted to tell also something about the income for the organisation in the then future: "We're canvassing advertising, mainly in North America. We've got an office in Los Angeles run by the Don Kelly organisation. Next to that there will be an office in New York with links to companies in Spain, New Zealand and Australia."

In those days I had been writing for some time for the Monitor Magazine from Benfleet in Essex and stayed in contact with the editorial team with Buster (Ronald C) Pearson and Penopole Page by spoken letters on cassettes and incidentally by phone. Expensive in those days but on August 10th I was in contact again and I have written down on that day, way back in 1983, that Buster had for the first time tuned in to the transmissions of the new Radio Caroline at 0.30 CET that morning. Buster told me that there was only a test-tone to be heard and that no music had been played but that we could expect a very good signal in the future. I didn't make a long phone call as I was with the family in a very small village called 'Grootte Keeten' in the North of Northern Holland, a holiday resort where only one telephone cell could be found. But in the phone call, early that morning, Buster was excited as he would go out together with a friend, Don, to the radio ship - using a small airplane.

Late in the evening of August 10th the transmitter was on and off again with test tones. I did put the little tranny on, with a small headphone and even after four in the night it was a clear test tone coming into my ears. An unbelievable strong signal, I never had heard before from an offshore radio station during the then past two decades. This could be the start of something new! There was an official press conference onboard the MV Ross Revenge, where the deejay

team was presented to the journalist on deck the new radio ship, which formerly had her home base in Grimsby harbour. Even from Radio Netherlands a journalist was sent out in the person of Casper van Iersel. He had done, under the name of Kas Collins, a lot of programs on the Voice of Peace off the coast of Israel and was free lancing in those days at Radio Netherlands as well as TROS public radio in the Netherlands.



Kas van Iersel interviewing Andy Archer

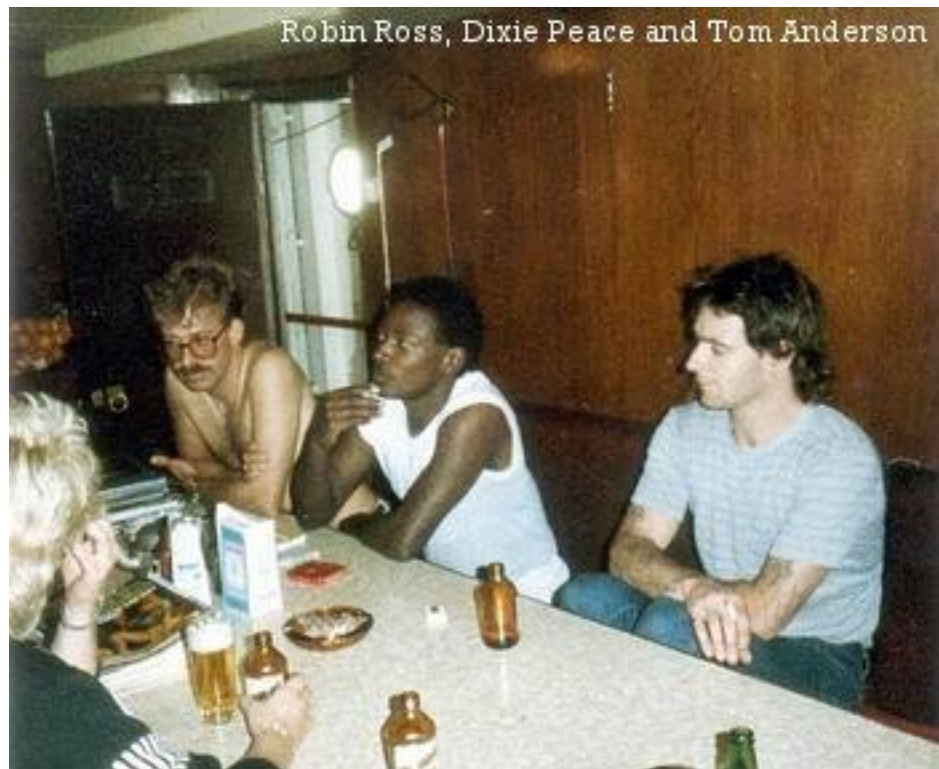
The big surprise was to hear that Andy Archer was onboard the new Radio Caroline, as he worked for the Independent Local Radio station Centre Radio in Leicester at that time. It seemed that he had announced, hours before leaving to the MV Ross Revenge, to his bosses that he wouldn't come back to the station as he wanted to go back to Radio Caroline, which he had left way back in 1974. Next to Andy there were some known and some unknown names in the team onboard the radio ship. Tom Anderson was there and the avid listener knew him from the late seventies. But the four other names mentioned on the radio interviews and in several newspaper articles in Great

Britain and Holland those days, were not familiar at all.

Robin Ross, for instant, I hadn't heard of. Tony Gareth came from Ireland and had some experiences in land based pirate radio in his native country. Then there was Dixie Peace. He originated from the West Indies and was a former musician from London. Oh, how I loved his later programs. Wild and exciting, an brand new experience how he presented his programs. And the last one to mention was also a new guy called Dave Simmons. He was still there on August 13th but with the next tender he went back ashore and never presented a program on the strong '963 kHz' or the 319 metres. The reason was that he was very active in discriminating his team-mate Dixie Peace. Unheard off and so a single ticket was there for him, way back home again!

August 13th and yet some more days to wait for Radio Caroline to come back on the air, but also for me to take some well earned holiday feelings. But I couldn't resist to have the transistor on '963' and have an occasional phone call to my radio friends. Did I hear it correctly that there were only test-tones as the studios were not ready yet? Indeed I heard afterwards that the earlier mentioned porta cabins had only be removed from the deck of the MV Ross Revenge days before leaving Santander port. The crew just had time to paint the deck in green colour and painting also the logo Caroline 963 - 319 metres. So, during the trip to the British coast and the days afterwards the technicians had been working very hard to get all the equipment in good order in the studios and to make all connections to the transmitter room, to make it to a professional radio station. Just one minute to eleven, late in the evening, suddenly a signal was heard again and just ten minutes later it had gone again. As I was staying with the family at the west coast of Holland I thought that the signal was only so strong due to the fact we were only 150 metres away from the western shore line of the Dutch coast.

Only days later, after being back in Groningen, I found a copy of a newspaper in my postal box in which an interview could be read with Ronan O'Rahilly. Reading it back I have now the same nasty feeling which I had in those days. Why? We have to go back in time. In 1978



when the MV Mi Amigo was still in international waters and the income came partly from religious organisations and partly from the sister station Radio Mi Amigo, Ronan thought it would become time to make a new partner. Sylvain Tack - who had been hiring transmission time since October 1973 although his station RadioMi Amigo was not on the air earlier than December of that year - was put aside to get a new partner as well as a partner in profit. October 1978 should have brought the brand new sound of Radio Hollandia, a Dutch language station

on 319 metres with deejays like Will Luikinga, Jan van Veen, Joost den Draayer and Tony Berk - all four of them from famous RNI and Veronica days. The deal with a certain Gert Jan Smit - as one of the four told once - was that he would bring them a contract with O'Rahilly and that they had to pay a big amount of money on forehand, whereby he could sell airtime in the evening hours to religious organisations in the USA.

Weeks went by and the promised programs, which were recorded in a studio in Hilversum, didn't arrive and therefore weren't aired on the MV Mi Amigo at all. At one stage Gert Jan Smit was invited by some of the people of the Radio Hollandia team as the promised programs were not aired. Gert Jan went to Hilversum and arriving at the office he was asked to close the doors. The people of Hollandia, who were at the office, caught him and pulled all the money (approximately 6000 guilders) out of his pocket. And as this was only a part of the money they gave him on forehand they didn't allow him to leave the room and ordered him to phone the ever strange Ronan O'Rahilly. As the story goes he - Gert Jan Smit - had to ask for the rest of the paid money. Ronan got very angry and asked for Willem van Kooten, aka Joost den Draayer - on the phone. He then warned the Radio Hollandia people that he was originally from Ireland and had very good friends within the IRA.



Yet again, one of the many stories surrounding Ronan O'Rahilly. The last time I have met him was in August 2002. It was at a reunion in London where former offshore deejays from the sixties got together and there he saw Graham Gill for the very first time since 1974. Almost 28 years later than the last time and the only thing Ronan could do, during an hour, was talking to Graham to get a better live by eating and drinking lesser and lesser alcohol but more and more water.

But I would go back to the interview with Ronan from August 1983, which I found in my post from a friend in England. Ronan told the journalist: "The beauty of Caroline is its total

relationship between the station and the audience; the audience is the absolute decision maker. When the audience doesn't want to listen to us, if they don't want to tune in, then there's no ball game. But we never had that problem. I think we're going to have an enormous audience. There's an enormous amount of international advertisers who are very enthusiastic about using us. We will supply from Spain and we have international advertising. The station is run in strict compliance with all of the legal local legalisations in the various European countries.'

Again many people would believe Ronan as he had brought them and us many nice spiritual interviews before. But I had already my thoughts. A year later I was, together with Rob Olthof - the head of the Dutch publishing company for my book '20 Years Radio Caroline', for a promotional tour to Great Britain. One of the trip to London we discussed the various things which had happened in the - then - passed 12 months and gambled for some beers if we would or wouldn't meet up with the Irish guru. Yes, we did try to make contact with him through various sources and 'yes' we finally went to Sloane Square in Chelsea. Not only

to meet Keith Skues at a wonderful exhibition on the subject BFBS, but also to bring a 'first' copy of the book to Ronan. At his address we pushed the bell and believe it or not, there was a most gorgeous woman saying 'hello' to me and when I asked her that I would like to talk to Ronan, including the wish to give him the 'first' copy of the book, she simply answered: 'I've never heard of this guy'. Some discussion went on and finally, although I still didn't believe her, she closed the door. Rob and I went into the park, near his home with a wonderful sight at his high class house. I put the book in an envelope and made some personal notes and decided to walk to his house again. Next thing was putting the envelope halfway to his box and waiting for a reaction.

Within a minute the envelope was taken out and... at the first floor someone was watching us behind the curtains - which could have had a wash I thought. It was the grey old fox who was looking if we were still there. But those are mere memories, which were coming into my



head when writing about all those promises he made at the after deck on the MV Ross Revenge on August 13th 1983, more than 20 years ago.

More was happening in those days and many expected that on August 14th the big signal would come on the air as this was the same day that the British offshore radio stations, excluding Radio Caroline, left the air in 1967 as a result of the MOB becoming MOA a day later. But I switched on the transistor several times and in my agenda 'nothing heard today on 963' can be found back. Late in the evening I heard that some modulation tests were done for some minutes. I was asleep already, tired of waiting for Caroline.

August 15th 1983 brought again some short tests and on the 16th I didn't notice anything. A short interview with Ronan O'Rahilly and Andy Archer was

brought on television in which Archer told the public: 'We will be keeping a low profile. The music is a most important thing, combined with educated chat from the disc jockeys when necessary. There will be none of the incessant gabble of Radio 1'.

It was early in the morning, half past six Dutch time August 19th, that the transistor radio almost jumped from the table next to the bed. A very hard signal suddenly awoke the whole family when for the first time music could be heard on 963 kHz. A better tune couldn't have been chosen. Bob Dylan came into our holiday house with 'Knocking on heaven's door'. From that point on I decided to get out of bed and take a walk along the beach, accompanied by my transistor. The family happily felt asleep again. It was almost two hours later that the first announcement was made on the MV Ross Revenge: 'You're listening to a test transmission from Radio Caroline on 319 metres, that's 963 kHz; our programmes will start tomorrow at 12 noon.' This was repeated from then on several times during the tests.

Holiday was almost over and so the family had to pack the bags on that Friday. Endless album tracks accompanied the packing and the holiday house had to be cleaned too. This is always the most terrible day of a two week holiday period but that time, way back in August 1983, Radio Caroline brought a glance to that day. What would be happening the next day, when the official opening would be there for Radio Caroline and all their ever enthusiastic listeners? A comeback after a silence of almost 3,5 years? In my mind I thought that probably I would be not the only anorak who couldn't tape the official opening that afternoon, due to the fact I was still on my way back home from the holiday.

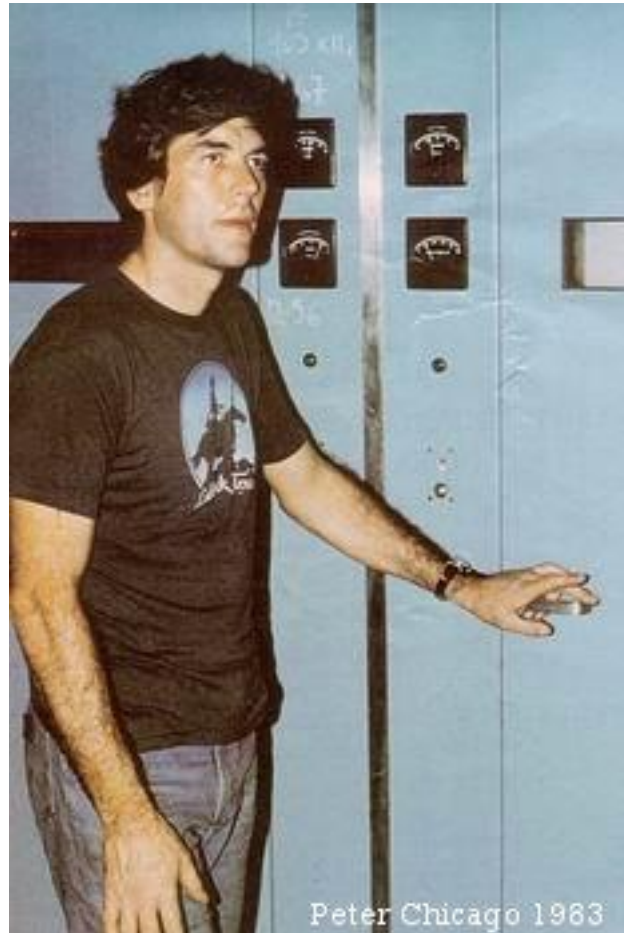


One of the others who couldn't make a tape recording himself was my very good friend, since 1970, Paul Jan de Haan. Originating from Groningen too he had listened to

the same radio stations as I had done in the sixties: Radio Caroline, Radio London, the stations from the MV Laissez Faire and the fine sound of Radio 390. When all were off air, March 1968, Paul has visited a few times the MV Mi Amigo as well as the MV Fredericia in Amsterdam harbour. It was there that he

'rescued' some unique things from the past. A pile of 't-shirt' posters from Caroline North and the big poster which had been in the studio from Caroline South for many years. He took it to his house in Groningen and donated it in the late seventies for my Offshore Archive. Just late November last year we showed it to other big friends within Offshore Radio World.

As I told you it was Paul Jan who also couldn't make it to record the official opening on Saturday August 20th 1983 as he had promised to get me and my family from the holiday resort in Grootte Keeten - some 2,5 hours from home. As a non-driver I'm still thankful to him bringing us sometimes to our holiday place and getting us back in Groningen. I really remember very well that Paul Jan was parking his car that very morning around 10.45 near the resort and his car radio was sounding very loud so everyone could here he was listening: 'to a test programme on 963 kHz'.



The final pot filled with coffee was ready and we decided to leave Grootte Keeten just before 11.30 so we must have been some 35 kilometres east when it was 12 o'clock. Who would be on and what would the opening be like? Excitement all the way? The official Caroline tune by the Fortunes was heard and after that 'Imagine' from John Lennon and much more music. It took more than a quarter of an hour that someone - it was deejay Tom Anderson - opened the microphone, to make the official announcement of the reopening of the world famous Radio Caroline: 'Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen and welcome to Radio Caroline on 319 metres, 963 kHz. I'm Tom and for the next hour or so I'd like to take you on a couple of musical journeys through the past decades. We're going to start with the Zombies and 'She's not there' and follow that with the Yardbirds with 'Heart full of soul'. Caroline on three one nine'.

The official opening was one of a cool statement from one of the former Caroline deejays who had worked on the MV Mi Amigo in the late seventies. He was in those days fun to listen too but in 1983 we were totally dissatisfied with

the way he opened the station and next to that how the new Caroline format was brought to us. Now, 21 years later, I still believe that during the first few weeks Radio Caroline has lost thousands of listeners who thought that their beloved station would come on air again. It was a total disaster and even Tom Anderson, so I heard last year, has asked friends not to be reminded again of that 'memorable day' way back in August 1983.

Photos: Rob Olthof, Tom de Munck, Theo Dencker, Chris Payne, Jelle Boonstra & Hans Knot

Part 12

JUST SOME FACTS AND FIGURES FROM SOME MONTHS IN 1978

In July 1978 we saw the birth of a new media magazine in Holland called 'Freewave Media Magazine'. It's 26 years later and still this magazine is published every month. In the beginning a lot of 'now' well known people worked together to get



Hans Knot 1978
(photo: Jelle Knot)

the magazine filled. The Freewave Media Magazine was baptized at the convention 'Zeezenders 20' as it was in 1978 20 Years ago that the first commercial offshore Radio station did start in Europe. A large crowd of Offshore Radio Fans gathered together at the Leeuwenhorst Congress Centre in little place at the west coast of the Netherlands, called Noordwijkerhout. There it was that all the people attending got the first copy of the magazine for free.

Final Editor of the magazine and responsible for the lay out and administration as well as the 'Radio Log' (together with Dirk de Pauw) was Ton van Draanen. Nowadays he's working for AVRO public broadcaster in Holland. The Editor Belgium was Freddy Jorus - already decades active within the radio industry in Antwerp. But there were more people writing for the Magazine. Ingo Paternoster from Germany, who also became big in radio in Bavaria. From the offshore radio world there were also some surprises as writing in the very first editions were people like Rob Hudson and Paul de Wit. Just two guys who had yet to make it into the world of radio and television. Rob is better known now under his own name Ruud Hendriks and belongs to the people who have become very rich in the world of media. Paul is no one else than Erik de Zwart, nowadays working for Talpa International but also many years on the paying list of Veronica and Radio 538 in the Netherlands. Both started their career on the MV Mi Amigo in the late seventies and early eighties. The editor of the magazine in 1978 was and still is in 2004 yours truly Hans Knot.



Ton van Draanen 1978
(photo: Jelle Knot)

I want to go back with you to that magazine and see what we had been writing on the subject offshore radio in that very first issue. In the 'Radio Log' I just saw back the name of Leon Keezer. He did on June 1st the Pop News twice on TROS Radio in the very first edition of the TROS top 50. This public broadcaster started in 1965 and was the follow up to the Radio and TV Noordzee, which started from the REM island in international waters, off the Dutch coast, in 1964. But Lion had a relationship with Caroline as he worked for Radio 199 as well as Radio Caroline in 1972/1973. Another thing. Do you remember which Caroline deejays were on the ship on June the 4th? With thanks to the famous Radio Log I can now tell you

that there were four on the ship at the time, including Stuart Russell, Tom Hardy, Martin Fisher and Mike Stevens.

Next to the earlier mentioned 'famous' people also some of the Caroline deejays

had their regular column in those days. Remember it's 26 years ago and so they were much younger than today. One of them was Stuart Russell, also known as Nigel Harris but was born under another name - which I won't tell you.

Nowadays Nigel does a lot of hard and good work arranging the programming side of the satellite station Radio Caroline as well doing other serious work on Sundays, when he's playing the organ in his local church. Way back in July 1978 he wrote in the very first edition of the Freewave Media Magazine: 'Hello, Stuart Russell here from Radio Caroline. For a change a few words from one of the English people on board the MV Mi Amigo. If you listen to Caroline regularly, than you know that it is an album station, which gives up far more scope when doing programmes than on a Top 40 station. Artists these days put all their work into making albums, and then select singles from it, so there are usually a number of single tracks taken from albums, and so Radio Caroline is way ahead with its music.'

Life on board is generally good. There's plenty to eat and we have a good cook in the person of Kees Borrell, although he is a bit of a nutcase. One of the bad things is being stuck out here for months and months on end. Last time I was onboard with Roger Matthews we were on for four months. And there's nothing you can do, if no replacements arrive for you. Then you either go off the ship or you stay and keep it on the air. But that last time was exceptional. Last time I was on land I got a new girlfriend and although she likes me to work on Caroline, she does like the day I've got to go back home again. And this is vice versa. I miss her when I'm out here. People often wonder how the Dutch and English get on out here. Well, the ones out here at the moment are really great boys and we all have a lot of fun together. With Radio Caroline only on the air at night now, it seems our working day starts at 6.30 in the evening and finished at 5 the next morning. So we have to sleep during the day, which you get used to. But I would prefer it the other way round. It's been like that since the daytime service of Radio Caroline was suspended last year. Now summer is here and I'm looking forward to getting a nice suntan to show of when I got to land. Anyway must go now, I have to help throw Johan Visser into the sea.'

A long time has gone since Stuart wrote those lines. A lot has changed, also in his life, but he didn't make it another four months as on the day the very first story of him was published in the very first edition of the Freewave Media Magazine, he was there - together with his lovely girlfriend - at the convention in Noordwijkerhout, where I did meet him for the very first time. One of his ship mates from those days was co-organiser at Zeezenders 20, Marc Jacobs. He couldn't join us at Zeezenders 20 as he had to leave for the Mi Amigo some days earlier.

Going back to the facts in the first issue I did read back that in an interview, earlier published in the 'Zondag' (Sunday newspaper) Sylvain Tack announced that he wants to go

on with his radio station Mi Amigo, but that he has decided for himself that there should be an end for his activities in radio in 1980. In October 1978 it was done with Tack and his part in the Radio Mi Amigo history, transmitting from the Caroline vessel MV Mi Amigo. This vessel, by the way, sunk in March 1980.

In the second issue of the Freewave Media Magazine an article could be found on the 'Zeezenders 20' Convention held in July 1978. The reporter wrote that he found it a big problem that 80% of the speakers came with their stories in the English language, which was - following his words - really a problem for the main visitor of the three days happening. He doubted that if such a happening - a radio meeting - would be held again the following year. Lucky enough the radio days are still organised by one of the people who did organise it way back in 1978, your editor Hans Knot. A year later accompanied by Rob Olthof of the Foundation for Media Communication, the both of them still go on with the now annual event. And above all - lucky for him - Richard Havelaar or should we say Rob Hudson aka Ruud Hendriks, became bigger than writing his column in the Freewave Media Magazine.





Leeuwenhorst congress centre 1978

But how did the radio sound in those days, especially the stations transmitting from international waters off the Dutch and British coast? On July 28th, already the first people came to

Noordwijkerhout as they had booked for a three day instead of a two day arrangement, some sad faces could be seen. I was already there and being at the information desk I did asked the entering people if they were unhappy to come to Noordwijkerhout. Seeing there faces bad weather could expected. What the real reason was is that, being at the west coast of Holland they really hoped to listen to Radio Mi Amigo with a very good signal that afternoon. In stead of that they told me that Marc Jacobs did announce in his program on Radio Mi Amigo that the transmitters onboard the MV Mi Amigo needed some adjustments and so there was no more Radio Mi Amigo and no Radio Caroline later that day. A bad thing for all those Anoraks who did came early to Leeuwenhorst Centre.

On the Saturday afternoon on the parking place there were several people tuning in to their car radio or their transistor. They thought the signals hadn't come through there sleeping rooms. But that was not the case as neither Radio Caroline nor Radio Mi Amigo were on the air. It would take more than another day that both stations could be heard again on the same frequency. It was Marc Jacobs who told the listeners that they were very sorry not being on the air on this special weekend. The next day it seemed that a tender had been out to the ship as Johan Visser, who was on the Convention on Saturday, was back on the Old Lady again.

The same month it was announced by the management of Radio Caroline that the Caroline Promotion bus as well as the Caroline Road Show would tour Western Europe too in the future. Till then only Great Britain was on the list for places to attract more listeners, but Holland, Belgium, France and other countries would be a target. Robb Eden, Roger Mathews and Mr. Rabbit did it in Britain. Patrick Valain and Alan West would do it on the continent and also the name of Serge Haderman was mentioned. He would be - at a later stage - 'world famous in

Belgium' as Serge van Gisteren. And at the same time the 'press man' from the organisation mentioned that Radio Caroline had 5 million listeners each day!

Then just a short note I wrote down - way back in July 1978 - 'Mi Amigo FM'. It can tell you that my diaries and agendas are full of memories, lies (from others) and fantasy. In some newspapers and gloss's in Belgium there was a mentioning of the fact that there were plans to start an FM service for Mi Amigo, the sister station at that time for Radio Caroline. It would become a - yes you read it correctly - a 10 Watt transmitter that would be useful to reach all the holiday people on the west coast of Great Britain. Now look, the Scottish and English people are always joking at each other, the Belgium and Dutch ones too. But this wasn't for joking but for crying. 10 Watt for the whole length of the East Coast of



Britain? In the second edition of the Freewave Media Magazine I did write on this newsflash that we didn't believe nothing of this nonsense message. And why? Well in the press report was a mentioning that the transmissions would only go on if space was to be found on the MV Mi Amigo for the FM arial.

And this one is especially for a certain PM. from Highgate who told me some time ago that it would be probably a book about 'Herman told me that...' Well Peter, here's one for you: On August 16th 1978 it was Roger Thompson who did present his very first program on Radio Caroline. Later that month, much airtime was given to the Caroline Fun Bus, a combination of a publicity team and a Caroline Road Show on Tour in England.

September 1978 did start with generator problems on the MV Mi Amigo and so the transmitter was switched off too. It did take technicians onboard 5,5 hours to get the thing working again. It wouldn't be the last time during those months that there were technical problems and conditions on the good old lady were getting worse with each day. On September 7th for instant the Caroline studio

had to be used during daytime. Normally the '319' frequency was used by sister station Radio Mi Amigo so the Caroline studio was only used for production work. That afternoon one of the record players in the studio from Radio Mi Amigo broke down. In those days no help from cd players, md recorders or DAT recorders, which could be used next to the record players. Marc Jacobs, who did present the program 'Baken 16', decided to go into the Caroline studio and presenting from there and playing the records too. But still the Mi Amigo studio was used as the commercials and jingles where played from there by Ferry Eden.



And as in those days the money to pay the Caroline bills had to come from overseas (in this case from Belgium) the people within the organisation were really shocked when they heard that once again the police in Belgium were taking action against all kinds of people connected to the sister station Radio Mi Amigo. On September 16th almost 50 different houses, shops and offices were searched to look for evidence and most of the buildings did belong to advertisers on the station. Already in the early sixties the Belgian government decided to bring in a law whereby it was forbidden to work for an offshore radio station, to provide them with food - water and oil as well as advertise on such a station. The station had a massive fan club in those days and the office of the Mi Amigo Fan Club (MAF) was also searched.

Police took 5000 addresses from the members of MAF. A day later 39 people, who had planned to go for a holiday to Playa de Aro to have some rest and also to visit the land based studio's of Radio Mi Amigo, were searched by the authorities, but finally were allowed to leave for Spain. Owner of the travel organisation, Mr. Gossey, decided to make an official complaint against the authorities and wrote a long letter to the Belgium government and never heard anything back from them.

As a follow up to all the actions taken by the authorities a few days later a lot of letters were published in several newspapers in Belgium. It's quite easy to

read that the main population of Belgium was pro Radio Mi Amigo and wanted a future for their Free Radio Station to operate together with Radio Caroline from the same ship. From October 1978 it was forbidden to make advertising time for tobacco products on Dutch national radio stations and so on September 26th in Flemish newspapers could be read that part time owner of the radio ship, Sylvain Tack, mentioned from Spain that a big new future would start for the stations Caroline and Mi Amigo as a lot of tobacco companies would come in to get their airtime on both stations.

And then, suddenly in the late morning of October 20th 1978, Radio Mi Amigo went off the air due to generator problems. It was Marc Jacobs who did announce the technical problems and then the station went off the air.



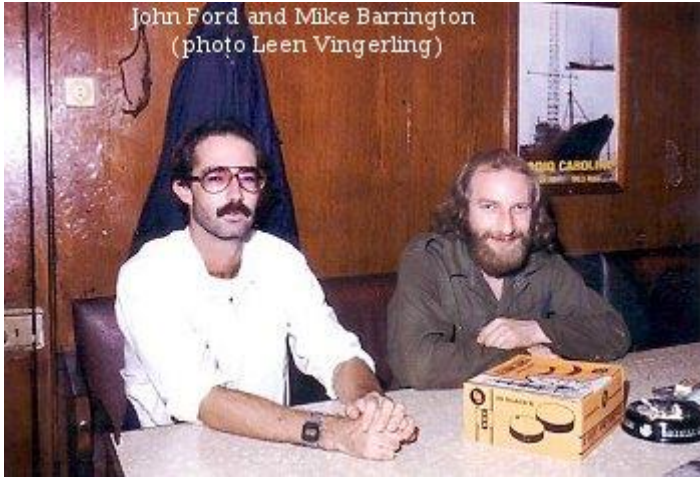
During the evening hours Radio Caroline was on the air for just a short moment. One of the deejays mentioned the numbers for the office and then it was silence up till Eastern 1979.

It was deejay Rob Hudson who wrote a column in the early November edition of the Freewave Media Magazine, way back in 1978, and he still thought Radio Mi Amigo was on the air as he did write: 'It was a little dreadful having Mi Amigo off the air for a few weeks after it closed down on October 20th. But as this edition comes from the printers your and our station will be probably on the air again. It will be sending it's sounds again all over Holland but in those days of silence you realise what it means that Radio Mi Amigo is the last one and also the best one on the air.'

All kind of rumours were going round at the time that Radio Caroline would get a new sister station but the only true thing for the last two months of 1978 was that we couldn't receive any signal from the transmitters onboard the good old lady.

Part 14

AN AMERICAN IN EUROPE



John Ford and Mike Barrington
(photo Leen Vingerling)

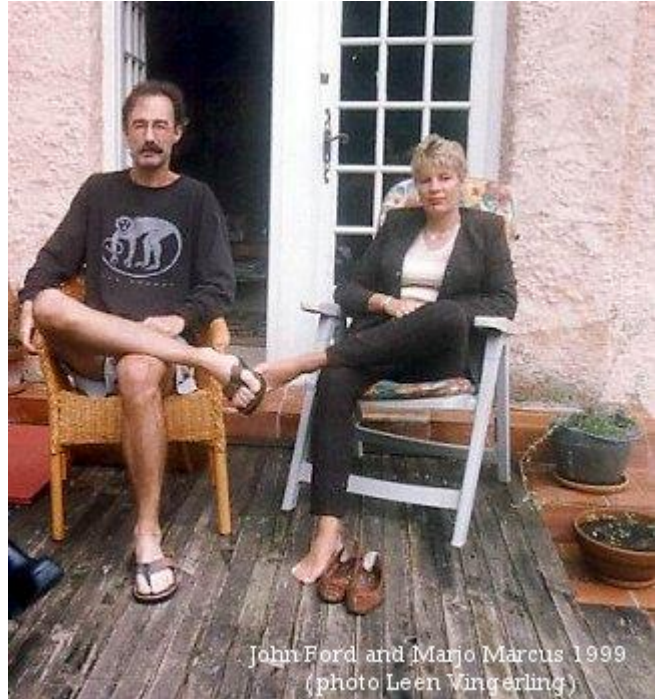
During the past four decades not only English deejays played our favourite tunes on the station but also a lot of English language guys from other countries including Scotland, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the USA. In the mid eighties it was John Ford who took a flight to Heathrow to become another American in Europe to doing radio programs

from international waters. Almost 20 years later he did write in, after I requested a lot of former Caroline people to write down their memories:

'Here is a quick biography of me and my remembrances of The Ross Revenge, Radio Caroline and the people meeting there on the ship and ashore. Before I went to Europe I spent seven years working for radio stations in the USA, including WSLT, WAYV, WKGR, WKCS, WIBG, (AM and FM's). It was in 1984 that I was working in Florida at WKGR when I had read about Laser Radio in Forbes Business Magazine. The story was so interested that I decided to have a go on making radio in Europe.

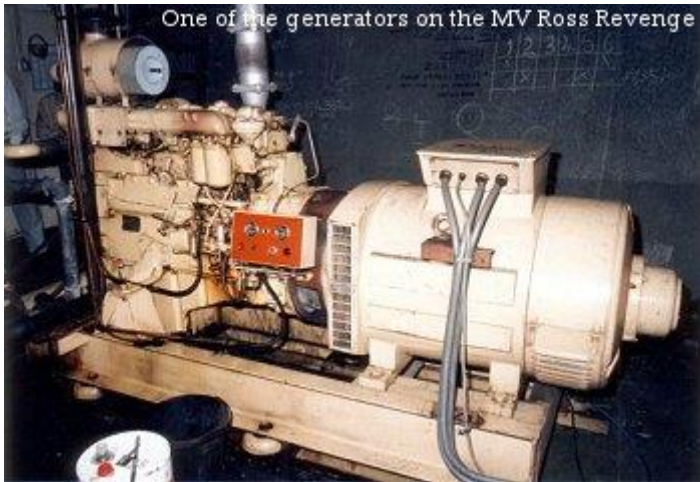
So I did originally sent my c/v to the Radio Laser Group with their head office in New York. After some time I did get an answer from Laser and I was considered, but told I was 'too tall' for living on the ship. John Catlett, the Program Manager at the time, was afraid of people injuring themselves on the low hatchways. About a month later former Caroline Deejay Alec Neumann was back in Florida and passed my info on to Mike Mango and Tom Anderson in London. From my music tastes, they felt I would work out well on the MV Ross Revenge, the wonderful house of Radio Caroline..

I came to Europe in the summer of 1985. I do remember the names of some of the deejays onboard at that time, which were Johnny Lewis, Peter Philips, Fergie McNeal, Susan Charles, Dave Andrews, and Cozmic. Ad Roberts was morning drive deejay on Caroline's sister station Radio Monique. He was there along with Maarten, Ferry and Leendert Vingerling to name a few. Kiwi Grahame Vega did the news on Radio Caroline and Mike Barrington was ship assistant engineer and John 'B' the TX engineer.



It seemed like everyday that summer lots of people were coming and going, until about early September, when the DTI blockade ship, the Dioptric Surveyor appeared. With this ship the British Authorities tried to blockade the tendering of the MV Ross Revenge and the MV Communicator, the radio ship from Laser 558. After the well documented 'Blockade' started, there were less and less visitors and even less supplies. Some of the people working aboard put stockings over their heads so as not to be identified by the DTI when working on deck. We did not admit it on the airwaves, but food did become very scarce at times. The many supplies that Kate Web and the Dutch team of Leen and Marjo had stockpiled aboard were soon dwindling. At its worst, we drank manifold water and ate a lot of marmite...

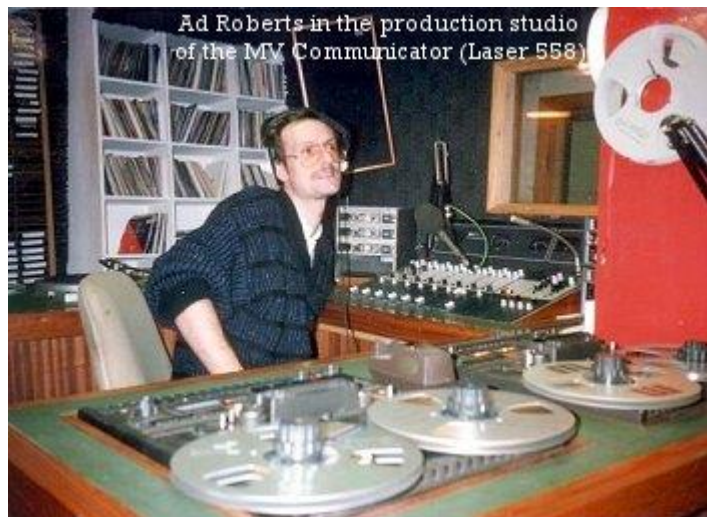
Marmite was something new to me being American. After some time I started liking it. I think we did continue to brew batches of ale from the manifold water and it came out fairly well. The Blockade made life difficult. I remember when the tobacco was rationed and finally ran out. A lot of people (smokers) were driven to their limits. Sharing a found chocolate bar with Wim van de Valk made for a good day, after not having had any chocolate in a few weeks.



Power on board the radio ship was kept low on the generators to keep from running out of diesel and they were shut off periodically. Howard Beal would occasionally run the gauntlet with his fast boat and bring some supplies. Also I remember John Birch brought a boat load of food from Essex. Humane society all for mascot Raffles.

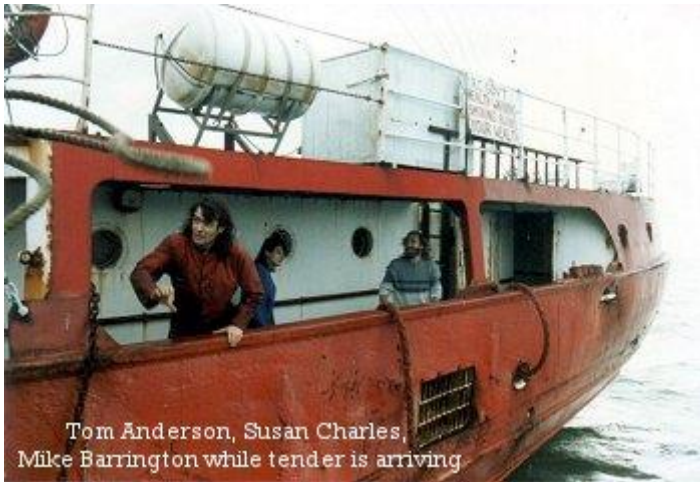
Raffles ate very well, and so did

we. One night Peter Chicago and Dick Palmer arrived to drop off supplies and do some transmitter maintenance and they wound up staying on for a couple of weeks. No return tender. It turned out they liked Country Music and so did Ad Roberts, so we all put a Country Show together for the evenings after the God hours. It seemed to be well received by the listeners.



It was very interesting trying to play darts on the Ross.

Americans don't play darts like the English. Trying to hit a dart board at all in rough seas was a challenge especially after imbibing in the "GBH" homebrew ale. One day the MV Communicator upped anchor and moved off into the distance. The Idea was that the one DTI ship would have difficulty tracking two radio ships that far apart. That idea was correct. Unfortunately for the Laser crew, the DTI kept up the pressure on them, (as most of the on air taunts came from Laser to begin with, the 'heat' directed to them from the DTI was more personal). This made it easier for us to slip a supply tender through to the Ross Revenge from time to time before the Guardline Tracker (DTI boat) could up anchor and chase back to our position.



Tom Anderson, Susan Charles,
Mike Barrington while tender is arriving

With the tender back now and again, some new people came aboard. Some will have to remain anonymous, at least that is still best for now. Tom Anderson came aboard and brought a whole lot of great new records. Tom and Fergie brought 'Overdrive' to its debut that early December. Everybody enjoyed that show immensely.

Reggae was played and caught on

quite well, as Radio Caroline was the only station in the area to showcase Reggae at that time. Deejays Susan Charles, Jenny MacKenzie and I added some Jazz to our play lists and had some fun with that in afternoons. Letters showed good listener response especially from the Continent.

Johnny Lewis kept up a great Breakfast show. With Peter Phillips as program director keeping things somewhat uniform. As always Radio Caroline took the initiative to airplay new artists. Some of the new Artists introduced in 1985-86 that I remember were: The Hooters; Kate Bush; Big Audio Dynamite; George Winston;

Cocktoe Twins, Larry Carlton; Stevie Ray Vaughn; Fela Kuti; - just to name a few.



The biggest mast even on a radioship
which came down in late 1987

Boxing day 1985 brought a terrible storm. The Ross Revenge was still anchored in the Knock Deep Channel and took a severe beating. The 300 foot mast had been weakened. I was not aboard when the mast fell down about two months later but I was very sorry to hear about that.



The Ross Revenge looks very small without the big mast

At this time the Arabian Sands Resort in Tanger Morocco had been one of our sponsors. All the deejays had a chance to go to Morocco and work there (being paid back in UK or NL after return). I found it a fascinating place and went back many times.

Radio Caroline started to go through one of its 'bad patches' after the tower came down. The blockade had expended recourses, and I had to get back to a job in radio in the States in order to survive. Luckily, I got my old slot back at WKGR in West Palm Beach. The sea bug bit me pretty hard though, so after awhile I signed in to do ship to shore communications with the American merchant marine. This is what I do to this day, occasionally doing adverts or canned music shows to keep my hand in the business, which with MP3's and home edit suites is constantly changing. I stay in touch with a core group of friends from that era of Caroline, and I still occasionally do a show or two for Radio Caroline and help out from time to time.

Part 15

MY EXPERIENCE AS A LISTENER



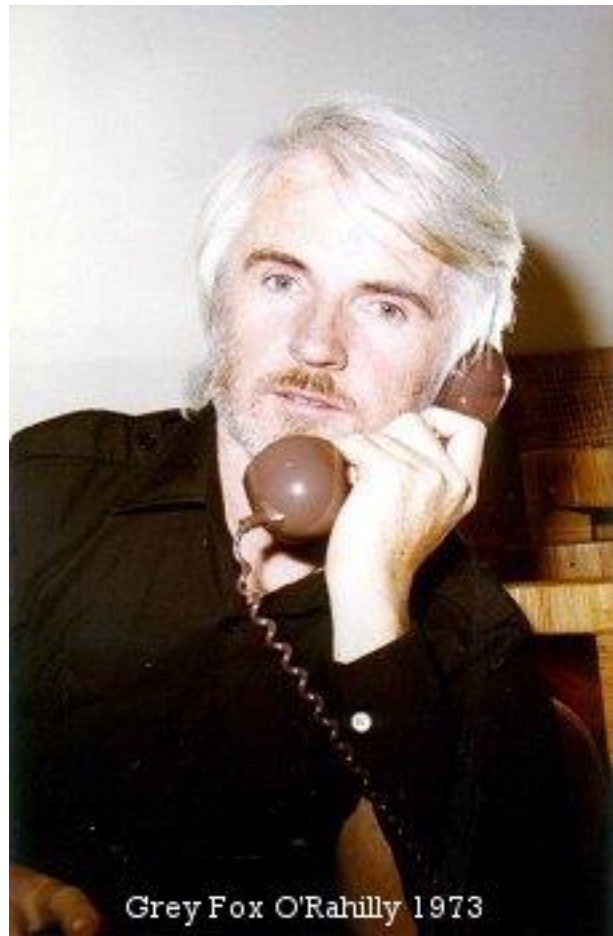
Since the day Radio Caroline was born, way back in March 1964, I've been a dedicated follower of fashion. Like the fashion has changed through the past four decades, so did my favourite station. Radio Caroline had never pursued a continuing music policy, because the management, or I prefer to say the lack of it, trusted the personnel on board to play what ever they liked to play. That's the reason that some categories of listeners enjoyed a special part in the life of Radio Caroline and some disliked some other parts. Only the die-hards enjoyed all periods. Yes, I must admit that some of the last group are floating away from their once favourite station, as in their eyes and ears Radio Caroline isn't anymore the free radio station it

once was.

Personally I do think that you can divide the past five decades for the Radio Caroline organisation in the next periods: First of all the years after 1964. In March 1964 Radio Caroline did start it's programming, became one organisation with then competitor Radio Atlanta and when an American competitor called Radio London joined the offshore radio ballgame, Radio Caroline became a Top 40 station. I did like it more than the slickly sound of Wonderful Radio London, which for the most people in the radio world is better known as Big L. Radio Caroline became, after Radio London started, the station with extremely good deejays, which partly still can be heard nowadays on different British as well as American and Australian radio stations. Just go for your favourite deejay from the past on internet versus search machines and you'll find out yourself that they've made a marvellous career and above that they do remind themselves that, without the help of the grey fox from Chelsea, better known as Ronan

O'Rahilly, their world would be empty without success.

As everybody knows it became very difficult for the Caroline organisation to obtain advertisers and plug records when the Marine Offences Bill became act in Great Britain, notwithstanding that it was an enormous stupidity of Ronan and his colleagues to stay in international waters off the British coast instead of going in the direction to the Dutch coast. We must not forget that in time between the ships were seized in March 1968 by the tendering company, more 'new' music was played on Radio Caroline, including in long commercials. Still, when hearing artists like the Dubliners, Raymond Lévèfre, David McWilliams and more, those long commercials are coming back in my mind: 'New on Major Minor'. But it was only the music Philip Solomon - the then new backer - gave us. With Ronan O'Rahilly in the back he was the one who was responsible that the Caroline ships were towed away. He simply forgot that paying bills is an important thing in live. Instead of hiring a good debt collector one of the Wijsmuller brothers decided to raise ancrees of both radio ships.



Secondly I want to mention the period, which started in May 1972 when both Caroline ships, the MV Mi Amigo and MV Fredericia (what a long time this name was misspelled in books and articles) were sold by auction in Amsterdam. The MV Fredericia went to a ships broker and the MV Mi Amigo went, by some sideways, back to the Caroline organisation. I will call this 'The Gerard van Dam Period'. He was purchasing the radio ship and with a team of volunteers repairing the MV Mi Amigo. We must not forget to mention that a lot of equipment, which were on both ships in Amsterdam and at a later stage in Zaandam harbour, was already saved by Peter Chicago and Spangles Muldoon. On several occasions they went to the ships to get material free of charge.



September 1972 there were test transmissions on '259'. Gerard had mentioned, on several occasions, that the MV Mi Amigo would become an hotel annex museum for Caroline fans, who could also make their own program. Of course some money had to be paid for that. When the ship left IJmuiden harbour at one day, still the museum story was used. That time it would be going to a harbour in England. Not far away from IJmuiden, in international waters, the anchor was set out and the old lady was back where she belonged. Soon after that the mast, which had been on the ship since 1964, broke

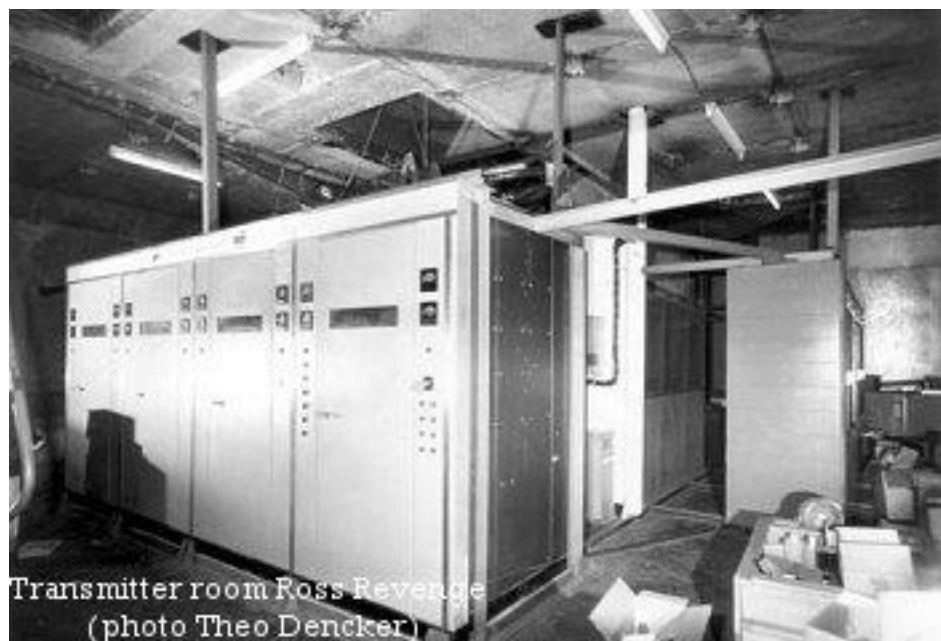
down. A new, temporary, mast was built and '199' was the next spot for Gerard and his friends to make test programmes. This with moderate to bad deejays, but enthusiasm radiated to the listeners: "We are back".

Also that time Ronan was, in my opinion, stupid and irresponsible by not having a dockyard treatment. My ex colleague Jacques Soudan, who earlier worked for Radio 227 on the MV Laissez Faire, did visit the Mi Amigo on several occasions - when it was in the harbours in the Netherlands. He told me that the ship was not seaworthy anymore. Needless to say that the not too trustworthy Ronan did not pay the tugboat which brought the Mi Amigo to international waters off the Dutch coast. But we were happy, there was action again. Even a part of the crewmembers - who weren't paid sufficient - thought it became time to get into action. The MV Mi Amigo was towed into harbour again and chained up. With the grey fox in Holland again all kind of smart steps were made to influence harbour authorities and before everybody knew, the ship once again was back in international waters. One person decided to leave the organisation: Gerard van Dam.

The third period is, in my opinion, a very long one, say from January 1973 up till March 1980. Radio Caroline first tried Dutch and English language programs with

an office at the Zeekant in Scheveningen and later with studios in the Van Hoogendorpstreet in The Hague. Next they helped Radio Veronica by renting their ship to Radio Veronica in April 1973. They needed new equipment and money as the Veronica organisation needed desperate a radio ship, as their own one was on the beach of Scheveningen due to a heavy storm. It were the days before the famous 'April 18th 1973' the day the biggest demonstration ever held, until that day, came into the history books in Holland. Some 150.000 people demonstrated pro the offshore stations and against the Dutch government, which had plans to close down the offshore stations. This had to be promoted on a transmitter and so Dennis King came with the idea and when Ronan agreed, he could get a lot of free publicity again as 'The good grey God of radio'.

With new generator and studio equipment on the MV Mi Amigo, so dearly paid by Radio Veronica, Ronan and his friends were saved and so 'the album format' was born, including the heavy Loving Awareness Campaign, in



which everyone - except me - seemed to believe in the beginning. Next to that it was very nice and interesting period, because also the Flemish stations Radio Atlantis and later on Radio Mi Amigo came on the air during daytime, so that Radio Caroline could broadcast at night. Even at one stage Radio Caroline and Radio Mi Amigo were on the air at the same time on two different frequencies. With a lot of thanks to the Offshore Radio Technician of the century: Peter Chicago. After Radio Mi Amigo ended her connections with Radio Caroline in October 1978, there were rumours Radio Delmare would become their new partner. Problems within the Delmare organisation brought one of the people involved, Fred Bolland, to the idea to get a new Radio Caroline on the air. Before that, early 1979, the MV Mi Amigo almost sunk, but Eastern 1979 brought us Radio Caroline in English and Dutch. It was almost completely financed by the many religious programs, which went out and came mainly from the USA and partly from Holland. One thing is certain, the guy who did organise these religious broadcasters, did earn a lot of money in those days. And what about

the commercials from those days? Well partly it was paid for but also there were arrangements. For instant a chicken restaurant got free airplay for filling the freezers onboard the MV Mi Amigo. Then one of the Flemish people involved in the organisation, was in need for a good car: free commercial on the station. He needed also some body entertainment, which he could get at a so called sex farm and 'yes' there was a certain commercial played for the company on the Dutch service of Radio Caroline in those days. It all ended with this period when the MV Mi Amigo went down at the Knock Deep Channel after a long pretty fight to offend the authorities in Great Britain and Holland.



After a few years of waiting and many promises, Ronan O'Rahilly - who had played with a lot of backers from Canada and the USA - finally made his words come truth. A new radio ship came from Spain, where the MV Ross Revenge was rebuilt into a radio station in the harbour of Santander. Again with many thanks to Peter Chicago who even saved a dog in Santander and brought 'Raffles' into international waters to become a radio dog hero. August 1989 is going to be the in my memory the fourth period of importance. It all ended with the 'raid' in August 1989. Not a very interesting time if you look to the choice of music, a little bit of this and that. Every deejay played, at on stage, his own choice, as there was no music policy anymore. In the beginning there

were too less announcements and I always felt asleep when listening.

A lot of names are coming in to my mind. Some very good deejays with Andy Archer, J Jackson and Simon Barrett to name a few of them. But the rest of the rest were moderate to bad deejays. In the beginning the '963' signal was extremely good. Owing to the Dutch contribution 'Radio Monique' and again many religious organisations, Radio Caroline could stay on the air. The Dutch also looked after the ship in cleaning and painting; the English deejays always went to bed after their programmes. When the mast came down it went down with the organisation too. Sister station Radio Monique left the scene and Radio 819 and

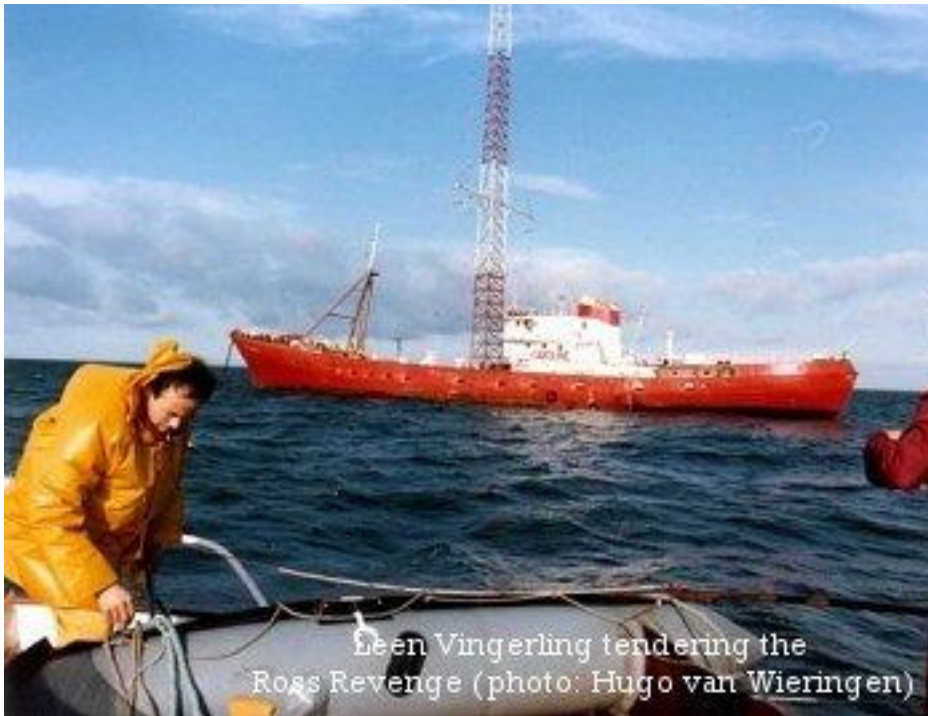
Radio 558 became Dutch providers of money for Ronan and his friends. Peter Moore came around the corner and is still there. But in 1989 the Dutch authorities thought to bring forever an end to the broadcasts. Entering the ship and taking the equipment and records to a store house in Holland was legal - so they thought.

August 19th 1989 was a new black day in the history of Free Radio and the editor of this book announced late that evening in the program 'Met het Oog op Morgen' (with the eyes on



tomorrow) on Dutch NOS Radio, that the Dutch authorities had made a case of piracy by raiding the MV Ross Revenge in International Waters. At first the authorities thought they had done right. Two years later, at a radio day in Haarlem, the people from the OCD, the Dutch authority involved in the raid and attending the radio day, were confused that Caroline's Peter Moore was there too and admitted they had done wrong by entering the ship without permission. All the raided equipment was given back from Blijswijk stores to the Caroline organisation. A Van was rented, with the money of the Foundation of Media Communication in Amsterdam (the money which they got by the production of the CD 'The legend lives on' with Hans Knot as producer and Marc Jacobs as narrator). It was brought back on the Ross Revenge in Dover harbour.

From then on several, so called, RSL's were held on different locations from the ship, simply to get the name 'Caroline' on the radio map again and again. But our feeling for Radio Caroline became less important. What must we do with recordings which are made by listening to a radio station with only a few Watts of power?



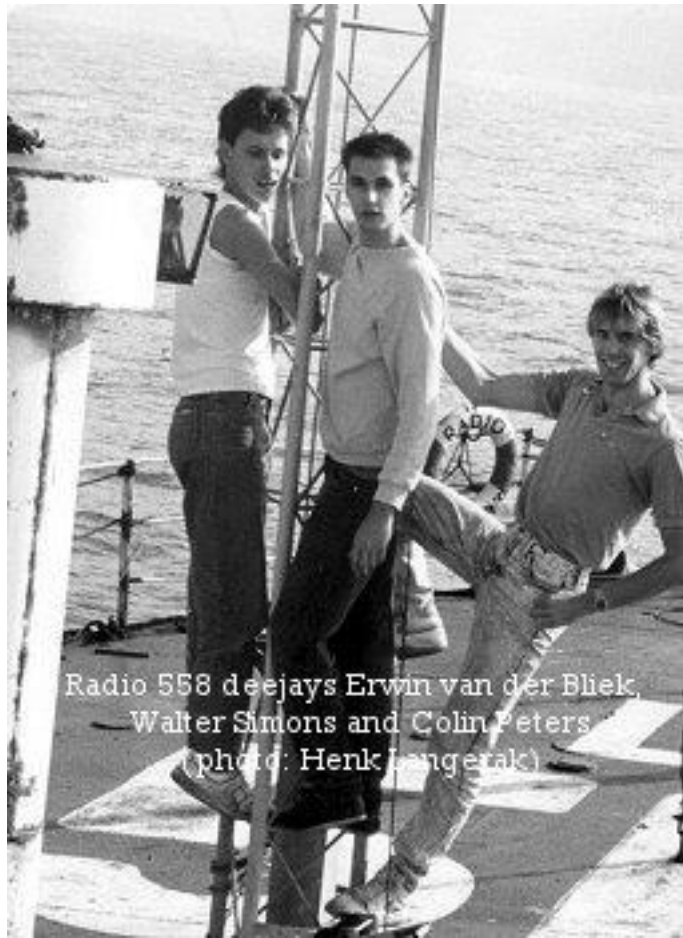
Deen Vingerling tendering the Ross Revenge (photo: Hugo van Wieringen)

Several other attempts were made, I think with starting Satellite programs in the USA, followed by many more. I do call it the fifth period, the so called 'satellite period'. What more to say about those five periods? If I want to judge Radio Caroline

than I give a 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ for their programmes through the satellite period. Some deejays are wonderful, like Nigel Harris, Roger Day and John Lewis. But, be honest, if you tune in on a Sunday morning to the satellite station (this at the end of 2003), than you hear a female deejay presenting the most obscure records. We, Hans Knot and I, discussed this problem, with Peter Moore and he agreed with us that she was worse than the rest of the team, but he would not replace her because there is nobody else to take her place. Imagine: Sunday morning, prime time, a terrible deejay. No one want to buy airtime. However this subject is mentioned too in another chapter in this book.

The only thing Peter Moore did, was sending a letter to all Caroline fans begging for money. The reason he did so was that he would not have to chase after commercials again and so he can spend some time a day in the pub drinking glasses of wine. A couple of months ago he pointed out to a number of German listeners who donated 1000 pounds sterling, that this was a donation but not enough to keep the station going. Shame on you Peter Moore!!! The charm but also the lack of management is the handicap of the station called Radio Caroline!

As a listener and music lover I come to the conclusion that for me the first and the third period were the nicest, when thinking back of four decades Radio Caroline. The enthusiasm of the deejays, the boat trips from Scheveningen, organised by SMC in the seventies and also the boat trips to the MV Ross Revenge, organised by SMC's tour manager Leen Vingerling and me, were a great success. The last period also gave Caroline a new breath of living as all the Anoraks paid a lot of money to have the opportunity to visit their beloved radio ship. The money they paid was used for paying the skipper of the tender and all the water, food, drinks and fuel to the radio ship in the second part of the eighties. It's



Radio 558 deejays Erwin van der Blik, Walter Simons and Colin Peters (photo: Henk Jangerak)

time Moore gets awake and does realise that Ronan and Moore hadn't Radio Caroline on the air without the help of the Dutch and Flemish organisations as well as the listeners who wanted to have a visit to the Sound of Loving Awareness, although I think DA also came around many times.

But, going back to the person Leen Vingerling, I've to say that the tour manager took enormous risks: suppose that someone fell between the tender and the radio ship. There is no doctor, no ambulance at present in international waters. And the risks 'Haagsche Harrie' (Harry from The Hague) took when he climbed in the radio mast for a repair or two. Suppose he fell down on the deck...dead.

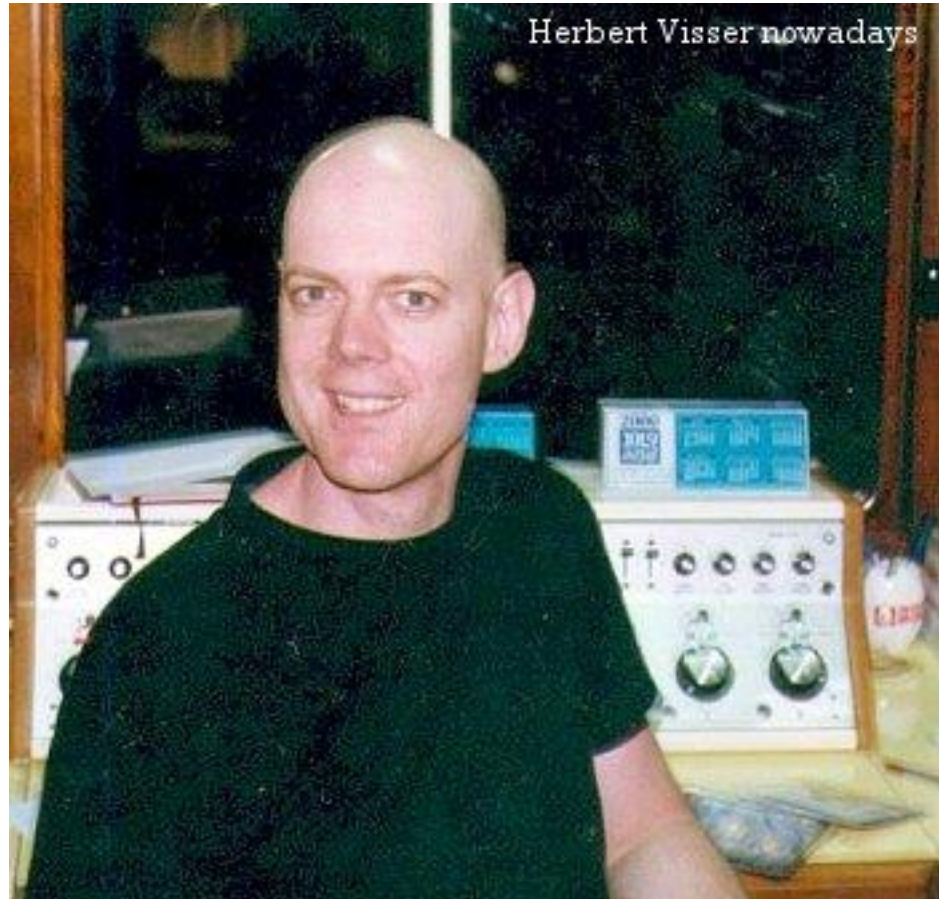
Conclusion: from the point of view of the listener Rob Olthof Radio Caroline was very varying. From the point of view of the deejays I can say that the management was very irresponsible, sometime less food or gasoline on board, no drinking water, no repairs on the ship (especially when I do talk about the MV Mi Amigo, a floating coffin) and bad payment or no payment at all for whoever was involved.

ROB OLTHOF

Part 16

RADIO DETECTION SQUAD

In this chapter it's time for Herbert Visser's memories. Up to now he is the only one of the authors in this book who hasn't reached the age of 40, which Radio Caroline has this year. He worked in Holland on illegal radio stations, the so-called pirates, and in the second part of the eighties he joined Radio Monique, one of



the many sister stations the Caroline organization has had through the past four decades. If it wasn't for these sister stations, we wouldn't be celebrating this year the fact that - after four full decades - Radio Caroline is still on the air.

Like most others reading this book, I have vivid memories of Radio Caroline as an ordinary listener. When Radio Caroline started broadcasting in 1964, I wasn't even born. That would change a year later, but it would be at least some 10 years after the launch of the station that I became aware of it. In my childhood years, when I was around 8/9 years old, I'd been a fanatic listener to Radio Northsea International. Or rather, since I didn't understand any English at all at that time (plus: the English service came on only after I was put to bed by my parents, around 8pm), to the Dutch daytime service Radio Noordzee Internationaal. Being a child, I didn't have any clues about the upcoming Dutch Marine Offences Act in 1974. You see, for me as a child, offshore radio was a very simple thing. There were radio stations broadcasting from land and radio stations emanating from ships at sea. And the ones at sea were much more fun

to listen to because they were on a boat. Sounds logical, doesn't it? But I remember very well what happened on that black day of August 31st 1974.

As usual, I was listening to RNI when my mother entered my room, telling me that "tonight Noordzee has to be gone, just like Veronica. The Government wants them off the air". Those words made a big impression on me. That day, I didn't leave my room anymore and tried to listen as intensively as possible to RNI. Sometimes when they'd play a song I didn't like, I turned the dial to Radio Veronica to hear what they'd be doing, only to return to RNI a few minutes later. I just thought it was horrible that 'the Government' (whoever they were, I didn't get it) wanted to take my most precious source of entertainment away. At 6PM I heard Veronica going off the air, and retuned to RNI for the very last time. I heard Ferry Maat welcoming the listeners, but quickly thereafter reception deteriorated. I grew up near the German border and got into this so-called skip-zone. So it was bye bye RNI, well before the actual closedown at 8PM. At night I saw video footage of the Veronica and RNI closedown on the Dutch television-news. Seemed pretty final, right?

But, the next morning I simply couldn't believe that my favourite station had gone. I tuned the radio back to 220 meters in the hope that RNI had continued after all. The actual spot on the radio dial that was blasting out the best music the previous day, was silent. But very close by on that tiny radio dial I did hear a strong signal with music. A station I'd never heard before. It happened to be Radio Mi Amigo. And that night at 7PM it was the first time I heard Radio Caroline. I didn't understand anything, but immediately loved the semi-commercial sound of that station. I got hooked instantly. And from that moment on, it became a wish to one day become part of that vibe called Radio Caroline. A spirit, and it was something much more than just an ordinary radio station. Caroline quickly became my companion throughout my youth.

I closely followed the events happening around Caroline. As this is supposed to be a personal story, I kindly would like to refer to the many history books about Caroline's legacy if you'd like to hear more about that. But on March 19th 1980 I noticed there was some trouble on board the MV Mi-Amigo. Each hour, numbers were being mentioned with additions like "urgent in 3 hours". Instead of the regular programming, non-stop tapes were being played, although they contained one of the best selections of music I'd ever heard. I remember myself thinking: "well, if this is what they play when they're in trouble, I don't mind them being in trouble more often". I kept on listening till late that evening and eventually fell asleep. The next morning, there was only silence on Caroline's frequency. No cause for alarm though, because it wouldn't be the first time the station was off the air. But it all changed when I heard on the news that the MV

Mi Amigo that night had sunk. On the evening news, I saw footage of the mast sticking out above the water. And I realized that it was all over now. It wasn't to be. After 3,5 years of silence, Radio Caroline returned from the biggest ship ever used for offshore radio broadcasting, the Ross Revenge. The mast was the tallest mast ever built on a ship. And the signal emanating from the Ross Revenge in Western Europe was splendid. The station kept on going for some time, but despite the strong signal, wasn't financially successful. On December 1st 1984, Radio Caroline got a Dutch sister station, which from now on would rent airtime in exchange for supplies for the cash-strapped Radio Caroline organisation. This station, Radio Monique, would later give me the opportunity to climb on board the Ross Revenge and experience myself what it was to be an offshore radio pirate.

But that would only happen 1,5 years later. At the time I was heavily involved with the very successful regional FM pirate station Delta Radio. From Nijmegen in the Netherlands we covered a significant part of the east of the Netherlands. It sometimes felt that all radios in the area were tuned to us, and advertisers were lining up in droves. Every single day we had to turn potential advertisers away because we were fully booked. And, my personal opinion at that time was that Delta Radio was a much better radio station than Radio Monique. Delta played all the hits all the time. A large portion of the airtime of Monique consisted of songs that needed a plug, but in fact were a "turn-off" for many listeners. You can cover the entire country, but even when you're the only radio station people can pick up, if you don't play what a large audience likes, you won't get to many listeners. So, I had no plans to leave Delta.

But, when after a while I experienced my personal 16th raid on Delta (Delta had been taken off the air often before, but then I wasn't around) and being held responsible for illegal broadcasting. I was faced with a dilemma. Either continue with Delta and be assured that you'll be thrown in jail for 6 months or so, or quit. In the summer of 1986 I had just been sentenced to a suspended imprisonment of a month with a 2 years probation time. If the authorities ever caught me again, I'd be placed behind bars. And that idea didn't look very tempting to me.

In the Netherlands, suspended imprisonment can only be imposed for a crime you've already committed before. And land based pirate radio and offshore pirate radio were dealt with by two different laws. Therefore, the Dutch courts could never impose that month of suspended imprisonment if they caught me working on the Ross Revenge. The decision was made rather quickly. In order to continue with making radio, I simply had to end up on the Caroline boat.

I knew that a guy from The Hague, Fred Bolland, was acting as a sort of 'Executive Director' of the radio station. I had his number, gave him a call, and told him that I wouldn't mind working for Radio Monique. And only two or three weeks later or so, I got picked up from The Hague Central Station, was driven to Ostend in Belgium and late at night picked up by the tender Windy. Early September 1986, I set foot on the Caroline ship for the first time.

You now may think: "Ok, now we're going to get the stories"...Well, actually not. I worked on board the vessel during a relatively good time. Both Radio Caroline and Radio Monique had quite a few listeners all over Western Europe. Almost every week the Windy would show up with fresh supplies, and the atmosphere on board was, in general, good. We weren't deprived of anything out there. I enjoyed the many hours I spent with mainly my English colleagues talking about 'radio'. When it comes to the quality of the programs, 1986/1987



must have been one of the best times in the history of Radio Caroline. Real good music, most of the DJ's were highly professional, and hundreds of thousands of listeners surely appreciated it. I certainly did not experience any of the dramatic events in the history of Radio Caroline. I'm actually quite happy that I was there at a time when the stations were providing continuous entertainment and be a true radio station. The only 'dramatic event' I experienced somewhere early 1987 was when some colleagues on board the Ross Revenge started a strike. They wanted to be taken off the vessel and go home and were mad that no one came to pick them up. At the same time, some colleagues and I were on the tender Windy in the harbour of Dunkirk, waiting for the heavy wind to go down so that we could go out.

The Windy was a relatively small boat, and any trip in winds higher than force 6

would be highly uncomfortable. The strike on Radio Monique (while Radio Caroline continued as normal) lasted about two weeks. By that time everyone got so desperate that we were leaving anyway. And with a packed Windy, with enough people on board to replace almost the entire crew of the Ross Revenge, we went out. The wind was Force 8 and indeed, it became a very choppy ride. Almost everyone got seasick, also people who'd been with Caroline for over a decade and had experienced many very heavy North Sea storms.

What I can also tell you is that I didn't think that, with my past as a land-based pirate, it would make much sense taking a fake-name as a DJ/news-presenter, as all my other colleagues did. An alias would make it more difficult for the authorities to find you. But I had already met almost every single employee of the Dutch Radio Authorities in person. I realized that it only would take them hearing one sentence from me on Radio Monique, and they would know whom they were dealing with. So I became the first and only person after the introduction of the anti-offshore radio laws in 1974, who used his very own name for programmes emanating live from an offshore radio vessel. Strangely enough, this never got me into trouble.

People working for Radio Caroline hardly got paid at all. The Dutch people working for Radio Monique got a little more, but also for them/us it wasn't anything special. The very low salary was something I had calculated on before joining, but such a situation can't last too long. In today's currency, I got offered 22 euros a day. But I didn't get even that. When the organisation owed me some 1400 tax-free euros (at the time much more money than today) and I could honestly say that I had experienced what it was to work for an offshore pirate, I called it a day. Less than a year after joining Radio Monique, I left the station. It proved to be good timing, because not so very long thereafter the very tall mast on board the vessel collapsed after one of the heaviest storms on the North Sea in decades, and Radio Monique would disappear forever.

But the people from Caroline built another mast and returned to the airwaves. After I left the station, I decided to stay in touch with some Caroline friends I'd made while working on the vessel. Sometimes I would get requests to sort something out in the Netherlands, sometimes I would visit the then highly secret Caroline office in North London, or stay at engineer Mike Watts' place in Brighton. I also made another friend with whom I'd been staying in London a lot, David Lee Stone of the infamous Caroline neighbour, Laser 558. And even got the opportunity to send DJ's out to the ship, like Judy Murphy/Jody Scott. Although no longer actually working on board the vessel, I still felt very connected with Radio Caroline.

And then the notorious August 19th 1989 came. A while earlier, besides spreading signals on medium wave, the Ross Revenge also started broadcasting programs on shortwave, and in particular on a frequency of 6215 kHz. This frequency however at that time was internationally registered as a marine emergency frequency. Since the religious programming on this frequency was organized by a person in the Netherlands, the Dutch authorities were flooded with official complaints from other countries and decided to do something about it. Until this moment the authorities had constantly been investigating everything, but not taken any real action because the vessel was beyond their jurisdiction, in international waters. Now, the status of the flag was checked. And when it appeared that the Ross Revenge was no longer registered in Panama and in effect stateless, the decision was made by the Dutch authorities to silence the ship.

Dutch police raided the Ross Revenge, took away all the broadcasting gear and took the Dutch people back with them to the Netherlands. A few days before that, all the Dutch people who at that time were actively involved running the station, had already been arrested. However, even now Caroline managed to come back. Chief Engineer Peter Chicago assembled a transmitter with whatever still could be found on board. The 'home-made transmitter' came to life on October 1st 1989, and already very soon reception was quite OK everywhere. But the overwhelming majority of the equipment was gone. It was simply taken away by the Dutch authorities.



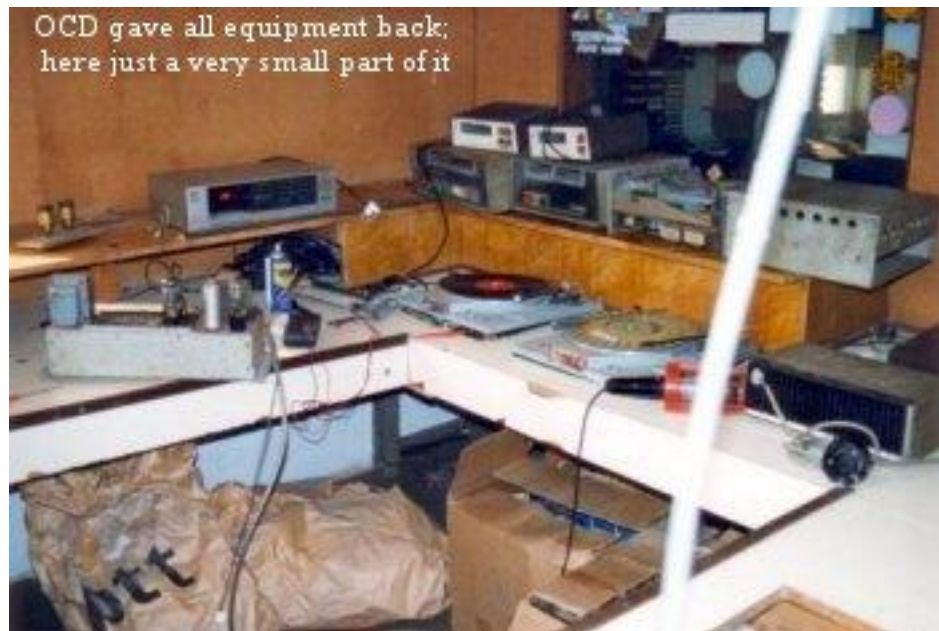
In the spring of 1990, rumours were spreading that the Dutch Government were about to return the confiscated equipment to Radio Caroline. I got a call from Peter Chicago asking me whether I could find out whether these rumours

were true. I decided to call the Dutch department that had been directly responsible for the raid, and got Mart Roumen on the phone. He appeared to have been 'the Mastermind' of the raid on the Ross Revenge. Mart told me at

that stage that there was no possible way the confiscated equipment could be returned. But we did have a lengthy conversation about the legality of the raid on the Ross and a number of other issues. All in all it was a constructive conversation and we decided to stay in touch.

Roughly half a year later, Mart told me that he had spoken to the responsible Prosecuting Officer and that, yes, maybe there could be a possibility that the equipment could be returned to Radio Caroline. The reason? No owner had claimed the equipment and the case was still pending. The Caroline equipment took up quite some space at a Governments storage centre of confiscated equipment, and the Dutch Government wanted to close the matter once and for all and use the space for other items that would have been more valuable. But you can't destroy equipment just like that. So it had to be kept in storage for a long time, till someone stepped forward to claim the gear. Radio Caroline was still on the air from the North Sea at that moment. The British Government didn't have any intention to silence Radio Caroline at that stage, and for the Dutch Government there was no reason to act, since there were no longer programmes in Dutch emanating from that vessel, nor were there any Dutch people on board. But returning the equipment with Caroline still on the air was another matter. Thus, the return, so it was decided, could only happen if Radio Caroline would voluntarily closed down. Well, you may understand that for Radio Caroline this would hardly be an option. I did pass the message on to Caroline manager Peter Moore, but we had a good laugh about it.

With no income, things deteriorated rapidly on board the Ross Revenge. And by the end of 1990, money had run out, fuel had run out, and Radio Caroline was forced to close down. Unknown to the crew at that time, but on



November 5th 1990 the last Caroline programmes from the North Sea had just been aired. The ship was to remain at sea however, 'keeping the dream alive'. And the Dutch Government did have no intention of returning the confiscated

gear to a vessel that could be brought back to life instantly. Only when the ship came into port, with assurances that Radio Caroline never would return to the airwaves as an offshore pirate, could the equipment be returned, as Mart Roumen told me over and over again.

At Easter 1991 Radio Caroline was still off the air and still at sea. My opinion was that the station should at least make a presence on the airwaves. At the time I had this reasonable powerful shortwave-transmitter in my apartment in Amsterdam and offered to switch it on at Easter. Peter Moore asked Nigel Harris to pre-record a couple of hours of programming, and at Easter Radio Caroline was at least back on shortwave, albeit for only a short time. Since the broadcast was pre-announced on the several Caroline outlets (like a premium phone line), the British Authorities were aware of the upcoming broadcast and wanted to find out whether the programmes were really emanating from the Ross Revenge. Soon they discovered that the signal was coming from somewhere in or around Amsterdam.

A Dutch detection van was sent out and tracked the signal coming straight from my apartment. Instead of the Dutch authorities immediately bursting into my place (well, at least I'd had quite some experience of that), Mart Roumen got a call, and was informed that 'Radio Caroline' this time was broadcasting from Herbert Vissers' place in Amsterdam. Mart asked them not to take action immediately. Only if I stayed on the air much longer could they raid the equipment. Coincidentally, it later appeared, the programme ended some 15 minutes later and I switched off the transmitter. That same evening, former Caroline DJ Richard Jackson arrived at my place to stay for a few days.



The next day, radio detection squad officer Mart Roumen gave me a call. "Herbie, what were you doing yesterday-afternoon?" I realized immediately that it wouldn't make sense to play hide and seek, so I instantly answered: "I was relaying Radio Caroline programs on my shortwave transmitter in my kitchen". "Yeah", Mart said, "reception in London at the DTI's office was quite strong, but I'm afraid that this week I'll have to come and confiscate that transmitter". We made an appointment and so Mart arrived with a colleague (Ben van Duyvenvoorde, who now happens to be the head of the radio licensing department) a

few days later and confiscated that transmitter. Nevertheless, it was worth the fun!

A heavy storm on November 19th 1991 broke the anchor chain of the *Ross Revenge*, and the vessel drifted to the Goodwin Sands where it grounded. A few days later, tugboats managed to free the vessel and it was towed into Dover. 'The Ross Revenge Support Group', closely linked to Radio Caroline, managed to get the vessel in its custody. But being unseaworthy and with a lot of other problems, it soon was clear that the *Ross Revenge* wouldn't be capable of ever going back to international waters.

Now, Radio Caroline was not only off the air but the vessel was lined up in Dover harbour, and thus there was no longer an imminent 'danger' that Radio Caroline would return to the airwaves, I called Mart Roumen again. I explained to him that all reasons for not returning the confiscated equipment to the Ross Revenge were no longer valid. He took the matter up with the responsible Prosecuting Officer again, and to my great surprise, the decision was made to return the equipment to Radio Caroline as well as dropping all charges against the Dutch people who got arrested in the process.



The only thing was that an official representative of Radio Caroline would have to make a statement about a few issues and indemnify the Dutch Government against eventual future claims. So, negotiations were started again with Peter Moore, who represented Radio Caroline, in association with the official owner of Radio Caroline, the Panamanian company Grotham Steamship. I constantly acted as an intermediary, translating the words from Mart into English for Peter Moore, and vice-versa. And this time things moved rather quickly. A few months later, early 1992, a tightly selected group of representatives were able to pick up the confiscated equipment from the Dutch Governmental storage space in Rijswijk, near The Hague. Only the Dutch officials, like Mart Roumen, and the direct representatives of Radio Caroline were allowed access to the premises. And I, having been the intermediary during this deal, was also allowed on the premises. After the Caroline van drove away with all the gear and the many records, Mart Roumen awarded me with a plaque, on behalf of the Dutch radio detection squad, for the help I'd given them. This plaque is still hanging in my living room to this day.

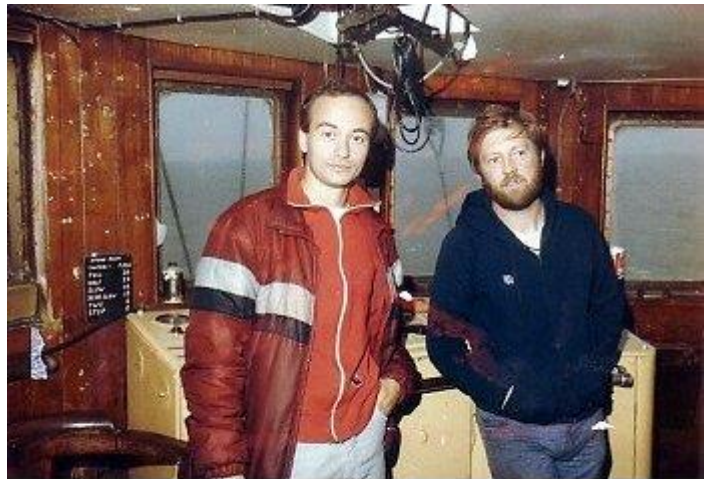
Part 17

NEVER EVER EXCEPT A CHEQUE!

In the late seventies of last century a young guy from Naaldwijk worked a lot for the Radio Delmare organisation. Or shouldn't we just say disorganisation? It was Leen Vingerling who was not only deejay Jan Olienoot but was often seen under dangerous circumstances supplying one of the former Delmare vessels. Even he put a lot of his own money into the tendering so that the station could go on transmitting her programs. In the eighties his love for radio had even grown bigger and he started, together with his lady Marjo, providing the ship with the highest radio mast ever, the MV Ross Revenge. And again money played an important role:

Naaldwijk (Holland) October 1984.

'Leen..., someone on the phone from England who sounds very strange' ' A moment.., I'm on my way' . I asked a colleague to take over my work. In those days I worked at my father's bookshop. I left my clients and went to answer the phone in the storage room. No one could listen in or even hear me there. 'Leen, this is Mike.' 'Hi Mike.' ' Leen eh sorry... I forgot why I rang you, but I will call back very soon.'



Leendert Vingerling and Danny the skipper at the wheelhouse of one of the tenders

It wasn't the first time that day that Mike Person, the big chief of the Radio Caroline office rang me. It started around midday and every time he rang he had lost the plot, apologised and promised to ring me back. He did phone back, but this was already the sixth time.

Why was Mike so scatterbrained? Was there a crises going on? It wouldn't surprise me at all. The Caroline organisation had huge financial problems. The money from the advertisers was often not enough to buy even a loaf of bread. The last time I supplied the ship with fuel the generators could run for only one more week. That week had gone by, but Radio Caroline was still on the air. Ship's engineer Mike Barrington prediction was wrong. But fortunately 'The Lady in Red' was still broadcasting. Had Barrington 'the hermit' wrongly calculated the

fuel that was left over?

Very soon after the relaunch in August 1983 there were problems with raising funds and getting advertisers. In July 1984 on one of the tender trips to the Ross Revenge a friend of mine paid for some fuel. The Caroline organisation had become a bottomless pit. Were their days numbered? All kinds of unanswered questions occupied my thinking.

I walked back from the storage room into the shop. The phone rang several times more that day, but not an 'incoherent' sounding personality from England. At six o' clock I locked the shop and went home. Time to relax, prepare dinner and watch television.

In the middle of our dinner the phone rang. We were having lasagne, one of my favourite meals. Which 'idiot' was ringing us at this time in the evening, while we were enjoying our food and wine? Marjo, my other half, answered the phone and passed it on to me. Our friend from England, again.... This time Mike sounded more down to earth. 'Leen could you bring another full load of that black stuff..., you know...,tomorrow ?' I told Mike that without the money I wasn't willing to go. Last time Danny the skipper and I had to wait on the Ross for our money for half a day. Grant Benson came from shore in a rubber dinghy to bring the cash. We were lucky, because the wind had started to pick up and we had already pumped the fuel. But it made us realise that we couldn't rely on the word from 'the office' anymore.



Marjo and Mike Person

Mike became desperate. I was the only one that could bring fuel, and without 'the black stuff' the transmissions would have to abort. On top of this, the weather looked good for the next day. A storm front with gusty winds was forecasted for later that week. The conversation took nearly an hour. In the end, Mike guaranteed that there would be a cheque waiting for us on board. That cheque was in the name of a company that belonged to him and his brother.

Poor old Mike had put his own money into Radio Caroline. I trusted him and said that by the next day 'de Zeemeeuw' would leave the harbour of Nieuwpoort in Belgium to

sail to the Ross Revenge. Marjo wasn't happy with the deal at all. How do you know that the cheque will be covered? I said to her: 'I trust him and if the worst comes to the worst I, I..... '

The next day was very cold, but the sea was very calm. It seems ideal weather for tendering. We arrived in the early hours of the morning. Radio Caroline was still on the air, but fuel was running very low. Barrington smiled upon our arrival. He managed to give the wrong figures about the fuel situation, but did this on purpose. He always kept some fuel in case of an emergency. But this time he would have been forced to go off air if the tender didn't come with supplies and luckily we were there.

The Zeemeeuw tied alongside the Ross Revenge and started pumping the magic liquid. After the job was finished it was time for bacon and eggs and a cup of coffee. So far we hadn't received the promised cheque. There was a slight problem. Mike Person had not yet arrived on a little tender from the UK. I lost my appetite immediately and Danny's face turned whiter by the minute. He muttered 'Bastards... don't you dare not to pay us'.

The situation became very unpleasant. We had to wait again for our money. Danny was fuming and decided that if Mike Person didn't turn up he would cut the anchor chain. He was a professional diver and had all the tools on his boat. He was serious. The Caroline staff believed him.

And I had to act as an intermediary. Talking, chatting, and running to the galley to make some more coffee for Danny. We were now both standing in the wheelhouse of the Ross. We were only disturbed by the noise of the generator. But that generator was running on 'our' fuel. We felt betrayed, misled and annoyed. I felt responsible for the whole situation. Why had I trusted Person? I remembered Marjo's critical remarks about the cheque? How foolish of me not to have listened to her? Did I lose sight of reality?

Suddenly we saw some action on the horizon. Was it Mike and his cheque, or an ordinary fisherman? It turned out to be Mike. He was the man who discovered Latin Quarter. Mike and his brother were in the record industry. They had obviously more knowledge of records than of running Radio Caroline. With a thousand excuses he handed over the long awaited cheque. With a view to a long trip back to Belgium we decided to leave. I felt relieved. I opened a bottle of Jupiter beer and saw the huge mast of the Ross becoming smaller and smaller.



Leendert Vingerling and Marjo Marcus

Back home in Holland I went to my local bank. We will honour it for the moment but we will have to check with England, said the employee at the counter. Within a couple of days the money was transferred. I immediately phoned Danny, because it was money due to him. We were all happy. I went to the bank again to get the cash and delivered it to Belgium.

Two weeks later, I received an envelope in the mail. The cheque was refused by the bank in the UK. There was not enough cash in the account. To make life ever more miserable, the whole amount was deducted again from Marjo's account. With the result that she went into the red!! Marjo was not amused at all. We had recently bought a house with a high mortgage. We couldn't survive on her income alone...

I felt betrayed and was furious. I rang Mike. He assured me that there was enough in his account and that there must have been a mistake. He told me that I could go to the bank again and cash the cheque. A week passed by and still no money in my account. I asked the bank to keep me informed. Two days later they rang to tell me that the cheque was definitely not accepted by the UK bank. There was no money in the account of the company of Mike's brother. I used all my Dutch swearwords and went out for a walk.



The fuel situation on the MV Ross Revenge became critical again. Suddenly I received a call from Kate Webb, Tom Anderson's girlfriend. She had resigned from her job at Marks and Spencer to work for the Radio Caroline office.

Kate was an attractive blond girl and had a certain talent to better organise things in the office. She asked me to supply the fuel again. I explained the whole situation about the cheque and told her that I was only willing to go if I had the money. By this time it was the end of November. No problem darling, she said. She booked an expensive business class flight from London and arrived within a day at Schiphol Airport.

I picked her up and drove her down to my place. Out of her handbag came plenty of colourful Dutch banknotes. That was very thoughtful of her. She had already changed the money. Later it turned out that Fred Bolland had paid a deposit to Ronan to start up radio Monique. Whoever paid for it, I got my money and I learnt an important lesson in life: never ever accept a cheque....

Part 18

THE EMPEROR ROSKO, THOUGHTS AND MEMORIES



Michael on USS Carol Sea

During the four years Radio Caroline was on the air in the sixties, a lot of deejays came and went. From all over the world they did join in as they heard on the radio, from other deejays or read in the newspapers of the enormous success of pop radio - that was blasted with transmitters from radio ships into the countries where commercial radio was still forbidden by their governments.

From Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Bermuda, South Africa en the USA they flew into England to see if they could go for a job on one of the radio stations on the North Sea. In the rich

surroundings of Mayfair - near the Hyde Park in the British metropole, were the offices of stations like Wonderful Radio London and Radio Caroline. One of the people who surely have visited the Caroline offices at Chesterfield gardens was Michael Pasternak. This year Michael will be 62 on Boxing Day. It seems like the big ones we have to find at Christmas as good old great Kenny Everett was born on Christmas Day. Michael was the son of the famous producer, the late Joe Pasternak and his radio career went under the name of 'the Emperor Rosko'. Let's see what Rosko has to say to us in his 'thoughts and memories'.

'Hi all out there. Thinking back to the good, good old days I must have been around nine or ten years young when I did had the idea that I would spent a great part of my life in the role of a radio deejay. Of course I did tune in, in those early fifties, into the radio dial and when I first heard people like Bill Mercer on one of the many radio stations in Los Angeles, called KRLA, he got me very excited in doing the same in the 'then' future.

Like most of the guys at my aged who loved the radio, which was totally different compared to a few years earlier, I started collecting music from the day 'rock around the clock' by Bill Haley and his Comets was released. I did have already a lot of language experience as I had lived, together with my family, in Los Angeles, France and Switzerland. Next to Bill Mercer I did like other deejays: Johnny Hayes, Emperor Hudson and the world famous 'Wolfman Jack'. After school I did complete my military service in the US Navy aboard a so called aircraft carrier. However I thought that my aim during the military service would be to broadcast and so I persuaded my superiors that I had to be replaced and the next step was joining the floating radio station KCVA, aboard the USS Coral Sea CVA 43. It was a trip which brought deep into Asia and the Vietnam zone. After coming back into civilian live I decided to complete a broadcasting course, which I did in San Francisco. So KCVA was for me my first experience on an offshore radio station.

My first deejay name was Michael London and then, in honor of another Roscoe, I became The President and The Emperor Rosko. I must confess that radio was my passion and I played it louder that the most. As I mentioned earlier I liked Bill Mercer and this was as he followed a style and patter from deejay called Bosko



Rosko in 1966 on Caroline

and another called Socko and we all did a style called 'Rhythm and Rhyme', which today is called 'rap'. You could say that I'm a fusion of many styles: I am funky

and rocky and sexy and poppy. And again thanks to Tom Donahue at KYA, Bob Mitchell at KYA, Wolfman Jack at XERB en Monahue in Chicago. They were for me the front line there were many the others would take the book deal!

It was in 1966 that I did join the offshore radio fleet in Europe making my first steps into European radio as well on the MV Mi Amigo, working for Radio Caroline South. I met up with my fellow pirates like Tony Blackburn, Mike Ahearn, Tom Lodge, Dave Lee Travis, Graham Dean and many more. We were the lads in those days and still in 2004 I'm friends with most of all British deejays from those years. And although we don't chat on the phone every day, we all natter when at a gig or function.

When talking about my career people do ask me what my most exciting moment was and I must tell you that this is a very hard question. There have been hundreds over the 38 years in broadcasting. Well maybe the launching of the million watt show on the French Service of Radio Luxembourg. This was pretty exciting to do and from that moment on I became also 'Le Président Rosko'. The show was called Mini Max in 1967 and it would become a totally new style for radio in France



Rosko on Caroline South (photo Martin Stevens)

Another great memory was introducing The Wembly Rock and Roll Show with 80 K fans; it was a pretty hot thing to do. Of course I must not forget to mention the day, way back in 1966; I started doing my job on Radio Caroline. This one ranks up pretty high. More questions are asked to me during the years and one of them is: 'Who did I meet amongst the stars?' Folks that would be a complete

book, as I hosted the BBC Round Table Show for three years. That is $52 \times 3 = 159$ famous artists. Thus, too many too list, I will say. I had the most fun with Little Richard, while Don McLean was the biggest pain in my ass. The late Wilson Pickett was on the back of my motorcycle and this was the most scared one. The most fun I did had during the Stax Tour with Otis Redding.

I also do remember Stevie Wonder. He left me on stage for 25 minutes to fill, whilst he played with his piano. That were the roughest 25 minutes I ever had. I must admit that I don't do jokes or shtick so I had to improvise that day. Wow, talking about sweating! In the end I managed.

Just as for the deejay that was my idols? Well we have to go back to the rock

and roll radio in the USA. All the ones I earlier mentioned were icons till they died. I am becoming one of those as we speak. A deejay must do other things like voice over work, record producing; gigs etc. to round out his career. Tony Blackburn sang and became king of the jungle. Dave Lee Travis had his 'Convoy' record and there was Top of the Pops. My thing was: 'do all that you can and be the best that you can be'. Then from records to television: I did some television work and record producing (no hits) as a producer, but sold $\frac{1}{2}$ million over my lifetime as a singing jock. I acted in a few movies: 'World War 3', with Rock Hudson, 'Life of Elvis' (he was dead), I was with Neil Diamond in 'The Jazz Singer'

Well let us go back as I am often quoted to set the record straight. I was second as only DLT was ahead of me with his disco shows, but I took it quickly to the next level with added players and dancers and light shows etc. It changed when it morphed to spinning the public exchanged personality and participation for seamless music and the spinner was born. Not my cup of tea. When I started we could spin but we did it by moving frequencies and utilizing natural breaks etc. Today's jock has all the tolls and this makes his life a bit easier. Hell, when I started with my work in the clubs with my bib mobile rig, we had so much bass rumble that we hung the decks off the ceiling with bungee cords to keep the harmonic bass frequencies from vibrating the decks!

As of this writing I am heard weekly now on Classic Gold in the UK on 40 different stations, the Sky satellite. More info you can find on www.emperorrosko.com I do also mobile work once a week to keep it fresh. I'm also asked 'Will I write another book?' Let me say this: 'This article for Hans Knot is a book!' Just kidding, my second book will be a DVD. I would not have thought after all these years I would still be doing stuff. But yes, the Emperor Rosko is, I am on the air around the world via the Internet+ in parties and working on a movie. It will be about Pirate Radio and my life. And a DVD on recollections will be out one day. And if I could say one thing to those of you who put up with me weekly± Thanks for being a fan!



It was Chris Edwards, Final Editor from Offshore Echos in Hanwell England who did have eight years ago, an interview with the Emperor Rosko when he was over in England for a promotional tour. In this interview they were also looking back at the days when the Emperor was rocking the international waters on Radio Caroline.

Born in Los Angeles, California on 26 December 1942 as Michael Pasternak, the son of Hollywood film producer Joe Pasternak, Emperor Rosko's first experience was ship borne - on an US aircraft carrier. From KCVA

aboard the USS 'Coral Sea', Rosko moved to France and next to the UK, arriving in 1965. He worked as disk-jockey for Radio Caroline, Radio Luxembourg and, later on, for Radio One. Nowadays Rosko still can be heard on the radio in several parts of the world. For instance, from October 2001 on, he is presenting a programme on Classic Gold, a digital radio station transmitting over Great Britain. In 1996 Chris Edwards met him, while he was in London, and interviewed him about his past and present involvement in the world of rock radio.

Chris: How did you get the name Emperor Rosko?

Rosko: The majority of DJ's have idols on the radio. Most of the time you had more than one and I used to listen to a guy called Roscoe, who used to listen to a guy called Boscoe and the double-syllable name ending in "o" was synonymous with rhythm and rhyme which was a precursor to rap, I also used to listen to several other people like Wolfman, Tom Donahue, etcetera. So I took a little bit of everybody and became Emperor Rosko to distinguish myself from all the others. In a way it's a kind of tribute to those who have gone on ahead of us who are now in the great jukebox in the sky. What happens over the years is that you start to lose what you have nicked and it mutates and forms into your own style and guiding light which is then passed on to someone who is younger who maybe listens to Rosko and somebody else and the whole process happens again.

Chris: At the time you sounded very much like Wolfman Jack. It seemed you were very much influenced by him?

Rosko: Well, with Wolfman at one time there was probably a lot more influence than there is now. Then again it depends on the format I'm doing. When I'm in Hot-FM, Tom Donahue predominates. Breeze AM wants to have a shouting, roaring sixties sound and maybe Wolfman will come back a little bit more. It just depends and that personality seems to dominate a little bit more but it still has changed over the years.



Rosko on Cheetah 2

Chris: How did you get involved with Radio Caroline?

Rosko: I was in Paris and I was with Eddy Barclay doing all the French radio shows and a guy called Henry Hendroid was on the tour with Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs. I think I was introducing the show at the Olympia and we got to talking and the question came up, did I know anything about pirate radio and Caroline? I told I knew it existed and that was it, but it sounded very exciting. So he told me to make him a tape, saying "I'm a friend of Ronan O'Rahilly and I'll take it over and play it for him." Within a week I was on my way to the ship.

Chris: What did you think when you saw the ship?

Rosko: Well, I had done four years in the navy so I wasn't too frightened. It looked like a tugboat! Small! I was used to American ships. Even a destroyer would have made that thing look like a sailboat. Actually going out in the trawler was far more revolting than the ship. Everybody was getting sick except me. But all the problems and the crap disappeared at the thought of crusading for rock 'n' roll in the United Kingdom and freedom of radio.

Chris: What was your job on the ship?

Rosko: My job was to be on air whenever they wanted me on. Sometimes you did two four-hour shifts, depending on who was sick. Sometimes you did one. There were no actual jobs because everybody wanted to do everything. If we had to do a promo everybody pitched in and did it because it was for the good of the ship, etcetera. It was a spirit that you'll never find in today's radio stations.

Chris: Who else was there at the time?

Rosko: Jaded memory. My suspicion is Tony Blackburn, Dave Lee Travis, Mike Ahern, Tom Lodge, Graham Webb and Rick Dane, the Great Dane. He was so

good looking and I thought I am going to hang around this guy because he used to attract girls like nobody's business! He'd just walk and all the heads would turn! And I used to say: "By the way, I'm his friend!" As a broadcaster there was nothing.



Rosko and Alfie

Chris: How did you get on with Ronan, Radio Caroline's boss?

Rosko: I haven't seen Ronan since I left and I keep making repeated attempts but he's either not around or impossible to find, etcetera. Ronan is one of those characters that you'll never forget. He's a very special guy and he had the insight and the tenacity to stick a transmitter on a boat and gamble a lot of money.

Chris: When you were off the ship on land, what were you doing then?

Rosko: Unprintable! I hung out with Tony Prince and the Great Dane. Most of the DJ's and a lot of the bands stayed in Queensway, off Bayswater Road at a hotel and it was a riot house! But this hotel rocked and rolled twenty hours a day. There was always something going on, always lots of ladies and Tony the Prince was an absolute monster! I was interested in other things as well, but he had only one thing going and none of us could ever get in the room. He was always doing the business and we all shared these big suites. We'd come off the ships and there would always be two or three guys. We stopped sharing a room with him because we couldn't get in it! I remember him doing his impression of Tarzan and hauling naked off the balcony of the hotel! So other than looking after Tony Prince, see London and have a good time, get crazy. In those days we didn't think about anything except having fun and music. We used to hang out at the Ad Lib Club, the Revolution, and the Marquee. All I remember was going back to the ship with a hangover on a Monday morning and cursing the British for liking kippers, because when you've a hangover and someone is eating kippers next to you, it is the most revolting thing. I still shudder at the thought of it. Of course, when we got back to the ship, they would be glad to see us because they were coming off as we were coming on.

Chris: You had a mynah bird one time?

Rosko: That's true, Alfie. It always struck me that something that would work on radio was to have a parrot. Instead I got a mynah bird; something that would add a bit of spice when you least expect it, which is really a microcosm of what you want, not the whole programme. Which is the opposite of what you are

getting on Virgin, which is very stale and monolithic and nothing happens. Whereas if you have a parrot screaming "Rock 'n' Roll" and exciting things when you're doing things, then it adds to the mayhem. I suppose it was a precursor to the Zoo-format. Whereas they have a few more people, I just had a parrot! I had a budget as well, I couldn't afford other things. I never dreamed that I was the first one to do that. I left Tony Prince in charge of my mynah bird for a week or two, because I had to go somewhere and he spent the entire time with an endless loop of tape teaching the bird to swear. The bird ended up saying a few nasty words and he didn't tell me any of this! I just came back, and mynah birds are very astute and it came up with some good "Fuck you's" at the wrong time! Luckily he didn't remember that one too much, because I encouraged "Sounds fine, it's Caroline" and "Rock 'n' Roll", which were his two favorites. Poor Alfie met his demise in France through my own stupidity. I didn't leave the window open enough in the vehicle he was traveling in, and he had a heat stroke. No doubt I shall pay for it one day when my karma is tested.

Chris: At one time you pirated some jingles from Radio England while they were testing?

Rosko: Oh yes! It was all part of the spirit of things. We had got the word that a new ship had sailed in and there were these rich Texans, who had spent tons of money. They had a 50-kW transmitter which would blow everybody out of the water and it was called Radio England. So sure enough they pulled in and you could see them with the binoculars about five miles away and we were all sitting there on the boat, gnashing our teeth and wondering what was going to happen. They started test transmitting and we noticed that when they tested they would be very clever because they were transmitting only their jingles! No music! So I thought that these were really neat jingles and we had these ropey old things with assorted British soul singers of the period, Julie Driscoll, Madeleine Bell, etcetera, which we paid 50 quid for. They've got these jingles they paid five thousand dollars for and they were slick. The test transmissions kept going so we ran a 15-ips tape recorder and as we were only five minutes away we got perfect quality. We taped all their jingles and then chopped them all up overnight because this all happened basically over 24 hours. We laid beds in there and did voice-overs and put "Radio Caroline" in the middle of them. I think Tony Prince or Mike Ahern went on the air with them next morning and we had them on for the whole day, doing nothing but using their jingles with our "Caroline" in them.

I understand that the Radio England office went berserk in London and they went charging over to Caroline House with a platoon of lawyers waving writs shouting "You can't do this" and Ronan said: "We're pirates!!" He then sent a note out to the ship asking us to desist from using them. We had a good time

with them, Ronan wrote, and it was time to turn it loose. But for forty-eight hours they must have been sick over at the other station, must have been ill. It was great, a lovely coup!

Chris: You also used to play some of Major Minor's plug records.

Rosko: Well, I never really knew Phil Solomon's, right off the bat. I heard he was a villain from Ireland and he bought 30 or 40 per cent of the operation and being a smart businessman he realized that if he was making records, he had a ship to play them on, he could sell records, etcetera. So he thought, if he would send out them out with the tender, every week there would be a stack of Phil Solomon's specials!

Load of crap! I was probably the rebel and I really didn't care as I could go back to Paris if it really didn't work out. I listened to all of these records and I thought that if we played this we were going to lose audience. If we lose audience we're wasting our time, so I threw them right out of the window. And every week they came, I listened and I threw them away! Phil, of course, was going berserk, asking why his records weren't being played! Each week we would give an excuse, like we didn't see them, or they were warped by the sun, etcetera, etcetera. By the end of the third week it was Rosko who threw them out of the porthole. So Phil told me I was fired. I could go to London to say goodbye to all the girls in the office and go over to Ronan to tell him that I was fired and leaving. But Ronan asked what I was talking about and I told him that Phil Solomon had fired me. He told me that I was hired again and said me to get back to the boat. That happened two or three times and Phil was absolutely mad about it. But after a while we actually did become friends. After that I didn't throw the records all out, only selected copies. In the end Phil even hired me to produce records on Major Minor and I never had any hits either.



Rosko and Sandie Shaw

Chris: Why did you finally leave Radio Caroline?

Rosko: Ronan O'Rahilly did a deal with French Radio Luxembourg in Paris which was a long-wave multimillion watt station. The head of one of the big newspaper magazine dynasties in France bought a controlling share in French Radio Luxembourg and they wondered how to make it work because it was the least popular of the three big stations. They came up with the idea of starting off with having a pirate radio within the station because on Europe No. 1, "Salut Les Copains" was the number one show for the last hundred years for kids. So they decided that they would have a pirate radio show and they made changes all over

the station. But the big change was "How do we make a pirate radio station if we didn't have any pirates." So they got in touch with Caroline and asked them if they could do something.

Ronan being, I'm sure, the clever person that he is, did some massive financial deal. I heard later on that we were being rented out for quite a bit of money and I was paid much more than I was making on Caroline. Ronan asked me whether I would like to represent them in Paris. So I went and checked in with the station and we talked strategies and they told me that they wanted to do this show, which was fine by me. When I asked where, they said here, but there was no studio. I told them that we played our own records on pirate radio along with doing the production, the American way. It had never been done before in France and this was mind-boggling to them, but in the end they did agree.

Chris: How did it work out?

Rosko: I told them that I would design the studio and they said: "What do you mean? Tapes and cartridges? What are you talking about?" So I explained what they were and they went out and bought cartridge machines and put the studio together. In the meantime, we asked: "What are you going to do for jingles?" They said: "What are jingles?" It was just one thing after another. So we got a famous French singing group that was currently unemployed and contacted PAMS jingles in Texas. We went to Dallas after picking the ones we liked and had them done again in French, which took about a week, and flew back to Paris. By then the studio was ready and all the engineers in France were going to go on strike, because I was going to sit in the studio and play records! We made the press again and in the end we paid this bloke to sit in the studio with a newspaper! So we started pirate radio and it was called "Minimax" - minimum blah-blah, maximum music - and we made all the press. For twelve months they made appointments to come and photograph and talk about it and in that time we became the number one kid's programme. In those days "playing a record first" was very important, whereas nowadays you wouldn't know the difference unless it's Chris Evans screaming "I didn't get Céline Dion as an exclusive!" But back then it was quite important, especially if you were dealing with the Beatles or the Stones, because people were much more into it. And there were a lot less stations so those that existed were a lot more important. Now we knew that our colleagues of "Salut Les Copains" were after this Rolling Stones record and we had our spies at work. It was on tape and they would listen to it first and we managed to filch it and grab hold of it. In the centre of the song we inserted a political message from the Emperor Rosko and then let them steal it. So they thought that they had it first and they played it and it went out live and we could hear them shouting: "Yeah, another first for Salut Les Copains!" And suddenly up popped: "This is Le President Rosko. Viva Minimax!" and did a big

number on it and then the Stones started up again! I understand they went apoplectic and spittle was flying everywhere. But that was the kind of fun things that you did in radio in the old days, like setting the newsreader's papers on fire to see if he could retain his cool.



Rosko at French Radio Luxembourg

Chris: From there you went to Radio One. How did that come about?
Rosko: Boo, hiss, boo! Derek Chinnery from the BBC came over to see me to ask whether I wanted to be on the new BBC pop station to which I agreed. So I did a pilot for them and they liked it and we started sending them taped shows. If you remember the first show on Midday Spin when I was going "Oooby-dooby-dooby" and "Rock and Roll" etcetera and we went

up to die news and all the Press quoted the newsreader for that show in a very British accent: "And now the news in English" which just broke me up too, I must confess! I stayed in France until the revolution in 1968, when I disagreed with policy and told them to get stuffed, and came over to live in England and joined Radio One live.

The next ten years are history and I started the first mobile discotheque. Dave Lee Travis, even though I'd never seen him operate it, showed me this contraption with turntables on it and he told me that he took this out and did parties. Don't forget Caroline did do Night Outs, but I would call that a primitive outside broadcast rather than a mobile disco. They were great nights and the crowds were fanatics. They would have all the local pop groups that they would blackmail into appearing if we played their record. The DJ's would come out to introduce them and everybody would get drunk and get laid which was just immoral, nobody should have that much fun! So when Dave showed me this and I thought that if Caroline can do this, why can't a DJ do this on his own ... so much money coming in! In Paris, I started a mobile disco which was probably the first very active mobile, but I have to give Dave credit. I don't know if he was doing it as much, but I was really doing it. When I came to England I brought it back with me and started doing the Rosko International Road show which between that and all the BBC shows was a pretty interesting time until 1976 when I went to the States.

Chris: About that time you wrote your DJ book?

Rosko: I left the legacy and ran.

Chris: You also did quite a few records as well?

Rosko: Al Capone, Grabbit the Rabbit, The Customs Men, I was always a frustrated pop star, but I never had a voice to sing and I can't carry a tune. I worked with Lee Holliday and guys like Mick Jones of Foreigner and famous bass players who were all on the sessions. Then there were other records like the Rosko Shows on



Rosko in Los Angeles home studio

Atlantic, which will probably be reissued soon on CD soon. They lost the masters and they asked me to do them all again so they should be out soon. Also there was the "Sound of the Sixties" with Tight Fit and that was the only record I took a payment on rather than a royalty.

Chris: What have you been doing since then?

Rosko: In 1976 I went to the States, then I came back and did the BBC for three or four years in the summer. Then I started doing World DJ tours going out to exotic countries, a terrible life! In the meantime I was sending out taped shows to Luxembourg and assorted FM stations as they came to be in the UK and that continued until the start of Virgin Radio when I came over for the launch. So I left all the FM stations and went on to the big AM. I also did some movies in Hollywood, "World War III" with Rock Hudson - I was his CIA man - "The Jazz Singer" with Neil Diamond, I was the comedian in white on stage, Slade in "Flame", all these bit parts of course because I have no memory and I also did a lot of pop TV in France. Nowadays times are a bit tough. The Rosko Road show is alive and well in California and goes around and does things. Also I do voice-overs and commercials which all DJ's do, but I do less than most and I choose to live a stress free life so I don't go out and hustle and I don't get nearly the work I should get. I make a concerted effort when I come to the UK to try and grab as much as I can. In some years you can get lucky and you do a minimum of hustle and get the maximum results and other times like last year I had all kind of great things happen, then all the radio stations bought and sold each other and that was a lousy year. I've come over to repair the damage and hopefully we're back in action.

Chris: Are these programmes on tape?

Rosko: Everything's live! When you listen you think it's live, so it's live! If you live near the main arteries of the country and you can hear Classic Gold, then you can hear the Emperor Rosko on weekends, so we stay active.

Chris: What's your most memorable moment?

Rosko: I think there are different kinds of memories. Profound memories will always be Radio Caroline because it was the heart and soul, and the birth of so much of what is today. In this country there is a certain spirit, and we've been working on a movie script forever and ever to tell the story, as have many others. So whoever gets the backing first, is going to make the first movie. I just hope I'm alive to do the cameo part so in terms of spirit, terrific. In terms of professional gratification, ten years at Radio One left a lot of memories, so that would be quite meaningful. Great Britain is one of my favorite countries. Between France, England and the United States I would be hard put to choose. I don't mind, I can live in any of them at any time at the drop of a hat for the right situation. There are memorable things, but those are probably the most memorable. You were asking about moments, but moments don't exist. It's just blocks of time really.

Part 19

THE GREAT HURRICANE WHICH CAUSES SO MASSIVE DESTRUCTION

October 16th 1987 was the day of the 'Great Hurricane', which caused massive destruction to property across the southern half of the UK and some people lost their life. But not only the people on land were in problems but also those onboard the radio ship MV Ross Revenge, which was anchored at the Falls Head, some 18 miles East - North East from Ramsgate in Kent. At that stage the ship still had her original 300 foot broadcast mast, and was putting out the signals of Radio Caroline (558 kHz) and Radio Monique on 963 kHz. On the MV Ross Revenge at the time Peter Philips, Chris Kennedy, Dave West, Steve Conway, Tim Allen and engineer Mike Watts for Radio Caroline and a team of three deejays from Radio Monique, led by the long-time presenter Dick Verheul. In this chapter Steve Conway looks back at those hectic moments:

Steve Conway
(Photo: Chris Edwards)



The morning of October 16th 1987 started just after 5am, with the usual banging on my cabin door from Peter Phillips. He was by this stage already on-air with the breakfast show, which ran from 5am. I was the fulltime newsreader, and would need to have travel and weather prepared for shortly after 6, and would be reading the first headlines on air at 6.30, so it was important for me to be up by 5.30 at the latest. Unknown to any of us at this stage, the whole of South East England was being devastated by hurricane

force winds, with immense destruction to property, injury and loss of life. Thousands of trees were being uprooted, roofs torn off, electricity cables and TV transmitter masts felled, ships were being blown aground high onto beaches - and we were 18 miles out at sea, unaware that all shipping had headed for safe ports, and we were the only ones still out there. "Good Morning to You Steve" Peter Phillips called out as he banged on my cabin door "time to get up - oh and by the way - its a trifle rough this morning"

It was still dark as I got up and made my way to the galley for a first cup of tea, feeling the ship moving roughly beneath me, and hearing an incredible moaning from the tower, louder than I had ever heard before. Tea in hand I made my way up the two flights of stairs onto the bridge, and an unbelievable sight met my eyes. Everything was white. Flying foam filled the air higher than the top of the ships bridge, and through every window all you could see was white foam, flying through the air at more than a hundred miles an hour. Visibility was about three yards. We couldn't even see the tower from the bridge, just blue flashes through the white as the foam caused the thousands of watts of broadcast power to arc and flash with the unexpected wetness. The tower was only a few feet from the bridge window, but if it hadn't been for those flashes you wouldn't even have known it was there.

Incredibly, both Caroline on 558 and Monique on 963 were on the air as usual, as the arcing didn't seem to be doing any damage to the equipment. Going into the newsroom to start my shift, I turned on the TV to get the first reports of the



day from the teletext. Nothing but static on all channels. Never for one moment assuming that all of Kent's TV transmitters had been forced off the air, I assumed that our own TV reception aerial on the roof of the bridge had been torn away by the storm, and turned to the radio. The dial was very silent, I couldn't seem to pick up any of the nearest UK local stations on FM, but I finally got BBC's Radio 4, and listened with amazement to what they described as an emergency forecast from the Met office. The weatherman was explaining that they were only on air thanks to emergency generators, as all power supplies in London were disrupted. He described the hurricane force winds from the South West, and this was followed by the travel news, which was basically a warning from the police not to travel. All trains were cancelled, all roads to London were blocked, hundreds of minor roads in Kent were blocked, and the police were advising everyone to stay indoors. Then followed a news bulletin about the devastation, including that fact that several ships had got into trouble before they could reach the shelter of port, and a Sealink Ferry had been blown up onto a beach near Folkestone.

I was stunned, because although the foam and lack of visibility was unprecedented, the Ross Revenge was behaving no more badly than it had in the last storm, and in fact was not rolling too much at all. The fact that the winds were South Westerly helped, as there was land on that side of us, the only direction that we had any protection from. I typed up the weather and travel news (basically 'police advice everyone to stay at home'), and took it down to Peter in the studio. "Hmm . . .are you sure about this?" he asked me, not believing that things could be that bad. "It's all word for word off the BBC" I assured him, so he went ahead and read it. Gradually, as dawn came, we were able to see a little way through the foam that filled the air around us, and saw

waves the like of which we had never seen before. Huge towering waves rolling majestically past us, but leaving us relatively unscathed. Mike Watts pointed out that the wind was so fierce that it was actually holding the ship face into it, thus preventing us from turning to catch the waves broadside, which would have been disastrous. The ship was even leaning slightly with the force of the wind moaning in the tower, and Mike reckoned that the strain on our aerial, mast and superstructure must be enormous.

"Something will go soon - you mark my words" he said, on hearing the latest from Radio 4, that winds in our area were now greater than 110mph. The breakfast show that morning was great fun, if a little difficult, knowing that we were one of very few radio stations which had managed to stay on air during the big storm. The storm itself was the major news item, of course, I managed to get a few other stories from Radio 4, and Peter made great play on air of just how rough things were out at the Falls Head, at one stage describing the scene outside the studio porthole as "a seething cauldron of saline hostility" Caroline's studio, studio 1, was the best to be in during a storm, as it was on the centreline of the ship, with the equipment on the inside wall, basically at the centre of gravity whatever way the ship was moving. The Dutch next door in Studio 2 were having a hard time of it however, as their records and equipment flew all over the place. The Dutch DJ on their breakfast show that day was Dick - known onboard as "Dick Trousers", looking more than a little morose. He sat there playing continuous music as the studio fell to pieces on top of him, but over on Caroline 558 it was business as usual.



Just before I was due to read the 7:30 news headlines, something caught my eye through the newsroom porthole. I looked out, and saw with horror part of our aerial feeder system had come loose from the mast,

and was swinging back and forth past the porthole, with spectacular flashes of power whenever it touched the metal mast or stays. This was serious. I left the newsroom and dashed around the ship looking for Mike. Once I found him I

explained what I had seen, and then ran back upstairs to arrive panting in the newsroom just as Peter opened the news-mike for me to read the headlines. I grabbed my piece of paper and read them, and Peter asked on-air if I had been running a marathon, not prepared for the answer I was about to give him. I told him and the listeners that I'd been running around the ship frantically trying to locate our engineer, as we seemed to have a problem with our aerial. "Ah.....Lets hope its not too serious" Peter said, before announcing the next record. Barely had it started however when he broke in over it, and announced that our engineer had told him we had an aerial problem, and that we were shutting down immediately. As soon as he said that, the station went off air, Mike obviously having rushed down to the transmitter room to wait for the announcement.

There was a general sound of running footsteps as people arrived on the bridge to assess the situation. Mike arrived back from the transmitter room, and explained that not only had one of the thick metal stays on the mast snapped, but that it had ripped away some old disused aerial feeder cable with it, and these two 300 foot long pieces of metal were now flailing about through the sky as the ship moved, wrapping themselves around everything else, shorting out the power from the transmitter, and in danger of snagging the main aerial feeder cables. Something had to be done straight away, or the damage caused would get progressively worse. We looked out of the windows. The sea was mountainous, the spray was still flying thick through the air. It was virtual suicide to attempt any maintenance work on the mast in the middle of this hurricane - but it had to be done, otherwise the damage could get far worse as the loose stay whipped around and it could put us off the air for days. Peter Phillips, who moments before had been safely ensconced in a warm studio, lost no time in acting to save the situation. "OK - I think it would be madness to try and climb the tower in this weather, but perhaps I can reach the those wires and catch them from the top of the bridge, and then tie them back so they do no more damage - are you with me Mike?"

Mike looked at the swirling maelstrom outside, and shrugged: "OK lets do it - at least if we're successful we'll be back on the air when most other stations are still off - yes, I'm with you". All the rest of us could do was help kit the two in waterproof gear, and organise some hot soup for when they returned. When they opened the bridge doors to go outside, the howling of the wind increased tenfold, and we could almost taste the white spray hurling past. They went out, and within seconds were lost from sight. We could hear them moving around on the bridge roof, and waited anxiously as the minutes ticked by, and it became apparent that they were having trouble catching the swinging metal. Eventually however they managed it, and returned indoors when it had been safely tied back, looking like two Arctic explorers who had been lost for months. We

pressed hot soup into their waiting hands, but instead of wanting to rest after their ordeal, Mike went straight down to the transmitter room to switch us back on, and Peter to the studio to resume the breakfast show.

We were on air again at 8:20 - incredibly having been off for less than an hour despite having had to do mast repairs in the middle of a ferocious storm. To have gone outside in such conditions at all was extremely dangerous, let alone climb onto the roof and attempt repairs, but somehow nothing seemed too much effort to keep Radio Caroline on the air. Peter coped admirably with the rest of his breakfast show, despite the fact that he was still in his waterproof gear, and dripping everywhere, and at 10am, Chris came on to relieve him. Peter decided to go back to bed at this stage, and I can't say I blame him. At 10:30 another stay snapped on the mast, and urgent work was needed again to remedy the situation. I didn't think that it was fair to wake Peter up again, so this time I volunteered to go outside with Mike. Now it was my turn to be dressed up in waterproofs and protective gear, and brave the teeth of the hurricane. This time there was an added complication - the station was staying on air, as Mike had had difficulty firing up the transmitter after the last break, due to the continual arcing and wind-stress on the aerial pushing its preset trips close to their safety limit.



Peter Philips
(Photo: OEM)

As long as we were on the air, it would stay on, but if it was turned off again, Mike was afraid that we would be off until the storm was over and adjustments were made. So we left it on, meaning that we would have to be extra careful up

on the roof not to get too close to live aerial cables, and not to touch the stay we were trying to catch when it touched off the aerial and became live with 50 kilowatts of power. Nothing could prepare me for the outside - it was a screaming nightmare of wind and spray, taking the breath away as soon as you stepped out of the shelter of the bridge. Climbing up the ladder onto the roof was terrifying, as the ship bucked and rolled in the sea, as if trying to shake us

off. Looking down at the frenzied sea around us, I knew that one slip would mean that we would be hurled into the icy waters, and lost forever. I held on tightly, and made it to the roof, where I was exposed to the full force of the 100 mile an hour winds. Mike Watts and I clung onto each other, and wedged ourselves up against some railing near the funnel, so that the wind was pressing us up against something solid.

It took ages for us to catch the rogue stay, which was swinging back and forwards through the air with considerable force, occasionally contacting the aerial and crackling with deadly power. We were almost blinded by spray, unable to breath properly, and constantly in danger of being tipped over the side into the sea, 30 feet below. In the end we had to climb onto the safety railings at the front of the bridge roof in an attempt to reach it. Finally we managed to catch it as it came past, though the force of it almost sent us crashing backwards into the tower with its live cables. We clung onto it for dear life to steady ourselves, and then quickly tied it back against the ship's superstructure using some metal wire, which would hold it for the time being at least.

When we had finished, we looked up, at the gigantic mast towering above us. Spray had been carried by the wind hundreds of feet up in the air, almost to the top, and dozens of the porcelain insulators used on the metal stays were glowing and crackling blue as the water and salt encrusted them, and shorted out our broadcast power. "We're going to have more than just a few broken stays to deal with after this" Mike yelled at me through the wind "that whole lot is going to have to be checked out inch by inch - its a miracle we're still on the air at all". Eventually we made it back indoors, and down to the galley for a welcome cup of hot tea and a chance to dry off. Even down in the messroom, the moaning of the wind in the tower was quite loud, almost drowning out the sound of Caroline coming from the speaker on the wall.

"Chris is doing all right," said Mike "he's all right, your brother". I agreed, and we speculated on weather Tim Allen would be able to withstand the rough conditions, knowing that Dave West probably wouldn't be able to. "Well, it looks like it's you and me back on the evening slot today" I remarked to Mike. "Yes - I'd better go and get some sleep - I've been up since dinnertime yesterday" he replied "Keep an eye on things, will you, and tell me if anything goes wrong - I think the wind is beginning to die down now, so we should be through the worst of it" With that he went off to bed, leaving the ship to just myself, Chris on air on 558, and Dick Trousers who was still hanging on for dear life in the Monique studios. Everyone else was either still asleep, or being quietly sick in their cabins.

Towards lunchtime I wandered back up to the newsroom, observing that the wind was indeed very slowly going down, and the spray was beginning to clear from the air. I put the radio on to start



to gather news, then flicked the TV on, although I was sure we had lost our rooftop antenna. To my surprise, on one of the channels, I got a clear picture, with a test card. Obviously it had been all the TV stations that were at off, and this only made me marvel further at our success in keeping Caroline on the air through it all. I get plenty of details from teletext for my 1 o'clock news, and after I had read it, I settled down to watch the TV news, with its pictures of the devastation across the whole of Southern UK. I was particularly interested to see the shots of the ferry on the beach - if our anchor had not been able to take the strain, that could well have been us.

After a while, I was disturbed by a strange grinding noise, which seemed to occur at irregular intervals, and seemed to come from above my head. I listened for ages, trying to figure out what it could be, and noticed that whenever it occurred, the TV picture broke up as well. I finally placed it as outside and above me - it must be the tower. Dashing outside, I braved the wind once more to climb up onto the bridge roof, and hung on as best I could, waiting to see if I could spot what was wrong. The stays we had tied back earlier were still secure, and nothing else seemed to be loose. Just then, I heard the noise again, a crackling grinding noise, and saw a shower of blue sparks coming off the mast, about a third of the way up. I watched again, and then saw it happen - a single high-voltage cable had come loose, and as the ship rolled in the swell, would make contact with the metal tower and make the whole structure live. When this happened the whole of our broadcast signal would be shorting away, so it must sound to listeners on land as if we were constantly going off the air for a few seconds, then coming on again. I hastened down to the engineers cabin, and woke Mike.

He took one look at it, and decided that we would have to switch off completely, and stay off until the weather was calmer and the whole aerial had been inspected. Just as we came back into the bridge, the emergency radio-link from Peter Chicago's house sprang into life. Chicago told us that our signal on land was now breaking up and totally distorted, but said that the main reason he had called was to check that we were all OK after the hurricane. He told us that Margate was a scene of devastation, and that his house had suffered quite a bit of damage. We closed down straight away, and got Peter Philips out of bed to survey the situation. The storm had died down considerably by now, but it was still quite rough, so it was decided that we would clean up on deck for a couple of hours before attempting to climb the tower.

The whole deck of the Ross Revenge was littered with seaweed and chunks of wood and other debris, which normally floated by on the sea, but which had been hurled at us by the wind. Apparently nothing like this had ever occurred before. It took six of us 2 hours just to clear the seaweed and flotsam from the various outside decks of the ship, by which time the winds had died down to virtually nothing, the sea had become just moderate, and a weak sun was shining in the sky. Peter and Mike donned their climbing gear, and set off up the tower, Mike concentrating on repairs to the lower sections, Peter climbing the full 300 feet to the top, and working his way down. It must have been terrifying for Peter, 300 feet up in the air at the top of that mast, as the ship was still moving from side to side, so he must have been describing quite an arc through the air at the top. We could barely see him as a little blob way above us.



Steve Conway
(Photo: Boudewijn Dom)

It took 8 hours of repair work, 7 of which Peter spent up the mast, before all the damage was repaired. He and Mike put new stays on to replace the broken ones, replaced some insulators which had burned through, and repaired some damage to the

aerial at the top, where it had become tangled. Even so, by the time they came down, only the most basic repair work had been done. Mike sent a message to land via Chicago's emergency system, saying that the mast had been tremendously stressed by the hurricane, and that it was essential that a team of riggers and welders visited us as soon as possible to inspect for metal fatigue or cracks. Finally, at 11:30pm, we came back on the air, with a short broadcast from Peter reassuring the listeners that the ship had survived the big storm in one piece, and that the station would be on the air the following morning as normal. They then turned the transmitters off for some further work, so although it was Friday night, I got to sleep the entire night for once. The next day the ship got back into a sort of shattered normality, things going much as usual, but everybody still tired and drained from the exertions of the previous day.

The weather stayed a little lumpy over the weekend, but by Tuesday morning it was calm and fine, and we started looking forward to our promised tender again. Tuesday lunchtime arrived, and I had just finished watching 'Neighbours', and was walking out of the messroom to go to the Galley, when the tender bell rang just as I was passing right under it, causing me to jump out of my skin. There was an English fishing boat on our starboard side, chock full of people, goodies, and news from shore. Relief was at hand . . . or so we thought.

Little did we know that what happened during the next 20 minutes would play a key role in our next major crisis a month later. But that, as they say, is another story!