

HANS KNOT INTERNATIONAL RADIO REPORT EASTER 2011

Hi dear radio friends and welcome to the Easter edition of the report. This month the complete report is filled with the second part of Andy Archer's story regarding his time on International Waters. He will take you back to the days he worked for the Caroline organisation in the seventies. So relax and enjoy this very long edition of the report. Happy Easter to you all!



ARSHOLES AND ANORAKS

The Radio Caroline Years.

In the summer of 1972, I was spending a few days with Kate, the wife of Spangles Maldoon, at their home in Birmingham. One afternoon, we received a telephone call from Spangles, as ever, he got straight to the point. "I've left Radio Northsea International, Caroline will be back on the air this Saturday, get your arses out here straight away!" The next day, we caught the first available flight from Birmingham to Schiphol. Shortly after our arrival at the port of Scheveningen, we boarded a fishing boat to take us out to the Mi Amigo. As we left the harbour, we could clearly see the twin masted Norderney, the home of Radio Veronica to our left and the Radio Northsea International ship with its Mondrianesque livery to the right. Slap bang in the middle was the dear old Mi Amigo.

From a distance she looked exactly the same as when I had last seen her in a few years earlier, however, as we got closer, it was evident that she was no longer looking her best. After four years of neglect, she resembled little more than a floating rust bucket. Spangles, who from now on I will refer to as Chris Cary, was waiting on deck to welcome us on board. He was in great form and full of optimism. He introduced us to Gerard van Dam, the anorak who had been responsible for getting the Mi Amigo back out to sea. It was plain to see that Gerard was out of his depth and Chris had taken little time in skillfully assuming control of the day to day running of the station. The mostly Dutch crew was under the command of the flamboyant Captain Willem van der Kamp. They were being assisted by a bevy of anoraks who had managed to finagle themselves on board and were busily carrying out such menial tasks as cleaning the lavatories and chipping rust from the decks.



Mi Amigo in harbour Zaandam

Conditions on board could be best described as basic. Everything you touched was filthy and the nauseating stench of diesel fuel was stomach churning. The cabins however were more or less habitable after receiving rapid make-overs by the anoraks. The same could not be said of the blankets. I awoke the next morning covered in flea bites and spent the rest of the day scratching myself until a tender arrived with an urgently requested supply of anti louse spray and a consignment of brand new bedding. Ronan was also on board the tender for what turned out to be a day of unexpected activity on the North Sea. Whereas Thursday August 14th 1967 had gone down in the annals of anorak folklore has the most

miserable day in the history of pirate radio, today was to be the most gratifying.

At midday, Radio Veronica, after much publicity, appeared on a new frequency, at the same moment, Radio Northsea International popped up on Radio Veronica's old wavelength with a brand new English service RNI 2. Then came the moment anoraks all over Europe were waiting for. Radio Caroline loud and clear on 259 metres. Following the initial euphoria of being back on the air, it wasn't long before there were rumblings of discontent. Operating a radio station at sea was a costly business and some of the Dutch crew began to complain about the lack of a proper wage. They were married guys with families to support unlike the rest of us who had no such obligations and were happy enough to work for the love of it. What little money was available was spent on diesel oil to keep the generators running, food and water and the spiraling cost of tenders. We had done little to enhance our reputation with the fishing boat owners and ship's chandlers of Scheveningen by failing to pay our bills on time. After a succession of "bounced" cheques, they now insisted upon immediate payment of all outstanding bills. In future, all transactions had to be in cash and upfront. They told us if we failed to observe this, no fishing boat from Scheveningen would ever tender the Mi Amigo again.



Andy Archer on MV Mi Amigo

As none of us could afford to rent apartments on land, Spangles struck a deal with a small guesthouse on the Scheveningen seafront which he, Kate and their young daughter Louise had been using as their base. At the end of the summer season, they were told by the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Pleyter that the guesthouse was closing down for the unprofitable autumn and winter months and they would have to leave. Chris, who was never one to miss out on the prospect of getting something for nothing, suggested to the Pleyters that Radio Caroline be allowed to rent the two top floors of the guesthouse until the following spring.

It was the perfect location. The harbour was just a few minutes away by car and the Mi Amigo could be clearly seen from the front windows. The Pleyters, naively assuming this was a business opportunity too foolish to dismiss, hastily agreed and Radio Caroline moved in en masse. After a couple of weeks, and with no sign of the agreed rent being paid, Chris and Ronan were confronted by Mrs. Pleyter, a short stout woman with a wooden leg and her insignificant looking husband. They politely reminded them in faltering English that the rent was overdue, Mr. Pleyter adding that he used to be a financial consultant and was well aware of the law.

His remark was music to Ronan's ears. "A financial consultant? You could be just the person I am looking for!" Mr Pleyter's eyes lit up, Ronan was on a roll! He explained that Radio Caroline's Financial Director had been taken seriously ill and was in hospital which was the reason their account had not been settled. Noticing Mr Pleyter's sudden interest, Ronan asked him if we consider handling Radio Caroline's financial affairs until the present incumbent had recuperated. Without a second thought, Mr. Pleyter leapt to his feet and shook Ronan firmly by the hand. The matter of the outstanding rent was forgotten.....for the moment anyway!

Mr. Pleyter's reign as Radio Caroline's new Financial Director was short lived. None of us were aware of his questionable past when it came to fiscal matters. I can't remember the precise details of his alleged criminal activities other than it involved the evaporation of tens of thousands of guilders from a company he had been employed by. Late one afternoon, two police cars noisily screeched to a halt outside the guesthouse. Upstairs, we instantly assumed it was a raid and began to hide incriminating evidence such as our illegal short wave radio set which was used for communicating with

the ship. To our surprise and relief, it Mr. Pleyter they had come to see! Upon answering the front door, he was manhandled into the sitting room where for the best part of an hour he was questioned by the police officers about alleged pecuniary misdemeanors. The heated argument was clearly audible all over the house. Eventually the senior officer placed him under arrest. Mr Pleyter was handcuffed and led out to one of the police cars still pleading his innocence. It was at that moment the police got a surprise they weren't expecting. The Pleyter's teenage son Michael, riled by the police's treatment of his father, decided to even the score by causing the police a spot of unexpected inconvenience. While the officers were busily engaged with his father, Michael ran outside and mischievously deflated all eight tires on the police cars! It was sometime before they departed for the police station. We never saw Mr. Pleyter again.

Although Ronan was a master of the "blag", he did have a softer side. He was genuinely troubled by Mrs. Pleyter's plight and reassured her by promising he would do his best to help in anyway he could. Perhaps he was troubled by his own guilt too as he put his hand inside the breast pocket of his jacket and presented her with a bundle of cash. The key reason for the scarcity of money was our frustrating inability to stay on air long enough to attract a large enough audience to persuade potential advertisers to part with their money. The transmitters and studio equipment were unpredictable. Even Peter Chicago, who was the most gifted of radio engineers, could never guarantee their dependability due to the desperate lack of spares on board.



Transmitters Mi Amigo

Then disaster struck us November 1972. Captain Jaap Taal, a wily old seadog with forty years of maritime experience behind him, was getting concerned about the substantial rise in the barometric pressure. The sea was becoming increasingly violent and the Dutch Meteorological Office was predicting a severe storm in the North Sea. He ordered us to batten down the hatches and prepare ourselves for what could be a very unpleasant ride. Within hours, the severe storm had manifested itself into a force 12 hurricane, its frighteningly mountainous waves hitting us full on and causing chaos below decks. None of us had ever experienced such scary conditions and were justifiably fearful of an impending disaster. Noticing our distress, the ever composed father like figure of Captain Taal reassuringly pacified us and told us not to worry. Leaving the messroom to make his way up to the bridge, he paused at the door and brought about a wave of laughter by impersonating the bungling Corporal Jones in BBC Television's Dads Army. "Don't panic Mr. Mainwaring, don't panic!!!"

As the day progressed and the height of the storm having past us, the relentless battering from the waves began to decrease as the storm subsided. The worst was now behind us and the aging Mi Amigo had survived the ordeal with flying colours. Captain Taal with a large bottle of jenever in his hand and a twinkle in his eye suggested we all needed a drink after what we had gone through! Just when we thought our troubles were over, we were alerted by a deafening cracking noise on deck. We all raced outside to discover to our dismay that one by one, the guy-wires that gave our transmitting mast its stability were beginning to snap. The high tension causing them to crack like giant whips ferociously cutting through any obstacle in their way like a hot knife through butter. Minutes after returning to the shelter of the messroom, the predictable happened. With no means of support, a large section of the transmitting mast collapsed and was precariously hanging over the starboard side of the ship. With little or no thought for their own safety, Captain Taal, Peter van Dijken and other members of the crew courageously went out on deck to assess the situation. In the still tricky conditions, they somehow managed to free the buckled sections of the fallen mast from the ship's superstructure and attached it with ropes to the side of the ship. With the job completed, they returned to messroom to a round of well deserved applause. It took them little time in devouring Captain Taal's bottle of jenever then another!

The loss of the mast was a gigantic setback and gloom once more set in. Peter Chicago knew that building a new mast at sea, which had never been done before, was a nigh on impossible during the stormy winter months on the North Sea. The only answer he suggested was a smaller ready made option as a temporary measure until the weather improved in the spring. Fortunately, Chris Cary had met an Englishman, Barry Attersall-Smith a few weeks earlier. He was a director of a small company that manufactured radio antennas in the Dutch town 's-Hertogenbosch, in the south of Holland. Attersall-Smith, who was something of an "anorak" himself, was keen to help. Within a week, he had supervised the construction of what became known as the "Mickey Mouse" mast and transported it to Scheveningen. The new structure which resembled a none too sturdy domestic receiving appliance rather than a transmitting mast, was shipped out to the Mi Amigo at the first opportunity and was hurriedly installed.



Lion Keezer

Until it could be replaced by a more appropriate construction, we were restricted to our smaller 10 kilowatt transmitter and for a few months became a local radio station for The Hague and its environs. For those of us that remained on board the *Mi Amigo*, distanced, but mindful of some of the harebrained schemes being hatched up ashore by Ronan and Chris, we always looked forward with eager anticipation as to what was in store for us on the next tender! The early programmes from the ship, both Dutch and English, were quite slapdash and all over the place. Nobody seemed to know what sort of station Radio Caroline was to be. Chris wanted a resumption of where it had left off in 1968, Ronan wasn't quite sure what he wanted!

As a consequence, we were all doing our own thing. At the time, I was particularly interested in interviewing rock stars for a late night chat/music show. With the help of Lion Keezer, one of our Dutch disc jockeys, I recorded a series of interviews with Alice Cooper, Howard Kaylan and Mark Voorman, both founder members of Frank Zappa's *Mother's of Invention*, Barry Hay of *Golden Earring* and the Dutch musician Rick van der Linden.



Alice Cooper and Andy Archer

The financial "backers" that been recruited by Gerard van Dam, keen to take a look at what they had unwisely invested in were frequent visitors to the ship. Most of them looked as though they would never have been admitted into the local chamber of commerce and appeared as conspicuously "shady" characters. After three months of intermittent broadcasting, the recent loss of the transmitting mast and, most importantly for them, no income from advertising, they were becoming increasingly anxious...as were the Dutch crew. One of our two captains, Willem van der Kamp, had been lobbied by some of the more vociferous members of the crew who were angry at what they saw as penny pinching antics by Ronan and Chris. They wrongly implied the English disc jockeys were being paid and were now demanding recompense. Van der Kamp asked me to join him for a drink in his cabin and explained that the crew were anxious about the lack of wages and began to question me about Ronan, did he have any money, was the station going to be a success? The conniving van der Kamp then conceived a cunning plan.



Dutch navy vessel Limburg nearby Mi Amigo

My programme on December 28th. was interrupted by Crispian St John coming into the studio to tell me of an argument about money had turned into a fight between Peter Chicago and a couple of the crew. Van der Kamp then contacted the coastguards in Scheveningen accusing the British contingent on board of mutiny. Within an hour, a Dutch naval destroyer The Limburg was in attendance as was the Seanews launch, a press agency which covered news stories at sea. Van der Kamp refused point blank to allow us to use the ship to shore radio to alert Ronan and Chris. The only option left was for me to let them know what was happening over the air. Ronan immediately

dispatched Gerard van Dam to the ship with instructions to sack the entire crew and take them ashore. Van der Kamp remained on board holed up in his cabin on the bridge armed with a .22 rifle. The following day he unexpectedly left the ship leaving just Peter Chicago, Crispian St John and myself on board. Later that evening, after we had ceased broadcasting for the night, the disgruntled crew returned on a small fishing sloop. Armed with iron bars and Captain van der Kamp strutting around like a Nazi storm trooper with a loaded rifle and barking out orders. They quickly took control of the ship.



Captain van der Kamp on the right

We were in a helpless situation. Van der Kamp and the crew meant business. They were not going to let a couple of disc jockeys and a radio engineer disrupt their dastardly plan. Crispian St John, bravely if foolishly began to protest which resulted in him being on the receiving end of a painful blow on the shoulder from an iron bar wielded by one of the crew. Their intimidatory and menacing behaviour scared the shit out of us and we could do little more than admit defeat. In a short space of time, the anchor chain was cut and for the second time in its chequered history, the Mi Amigo was once again under tow. We were being towed by a small tug the Euro Trip. It was owned by Dick Roos, who had the contract to tender and supply Radio Northsea International. It didn't take us too long to work out who was financing this blatant case of piracy.



Gerard van Dam interviewed by Hugo van Rhijn Dutch NOS TV

When we reached Amsterdam, the captain of the tug assured the harbour master's office that the Trip Tender Company would pay any fees incurred and we were admitted into the Westhaven just behind the city's Central Station. Van der Kamp later boasted later of receiving a 50,000 guilder reward for his underhandedness from Erwin Meister and Edwin Bollier, the owners of Radio Northsea International. Ronan, upon hearing the news of the events that had taken place, immediately flew to Amsterdam to take control of affairs. If anyone could get us out of this predicament, he was the man to do it. He and Chris in connivance with of one of the Dutch "backers" who had quickly arrived on the scene dreamed up a bold yet risky strategy that might just work.



Mi Amigo on tow by Trip Tender

Tomorrow was New Year's Day, a public holiday. The chances were that staffing levels at the IJmuiden Port Authority would be minimal, it was worth a shot. Chris telephoned the boat owner in IJmuiden who had

originally towed the Mi Amigo out to sea a few months earlier and settled on a fee which he insisted should be in paid in cash when he reached the Westhaven. The repairs that the Dutch Shipping Inspectorate had insisted were necessary to make the Mi Amigo once again seaworthy were carried out overnight by Captain Taal and his crew. Early on New Years Day 1973, we began the slow return journey along the Noordzeekanaal to IJmuiden then, with a bit of luck, the open sea. The tension on board was nerve-wracking as we approached IJmuiden. To our consternation, we were instructed to "heave to" as we reached the port for an inspection by the shipping inspectorate. They were happy to allow us to continue if a leakage in the engine room was fixed and a hole in the aft section of the ship was repaired, adding the work must be carried out by qualified engineers.



Graham Gill, Alan Clark and Andy Archer

After a series of frantic telephone calls, Captain Taal persuaded a local welder and a marine engineer to come to the ship carry out the repairs. Their rate was 1,000 guilders each, take it or leave it! Our next problem was where to find the money. Being New Years Day, all of the banks were closed. Ronan, who could "smell" money if it was around, asked the "backer" who had remained on board, what was in the leather bag that he was clearly reluctant to let out of his sight. "There's nothing illegal in there I hope, we don't want any hassles with the police at this stage." He then unwisely made what turned out to be a costly remark. "No worries Ronan, its only yesterday's takings from my boutique in The Hague!" It goes without saying he was relieved of the cash in double quick time! The two workmen were paid in cash, and after being given a clean bill of health by the

inspectorate, we resumed our journey back out to sea after one final dramatic moment.

News of our progress was reported in a bulletin on Hilversum Three which had alerted Captain van der Kamp and his crew. After hurriedly obtaining a writ to prevent us from leaving port, they raced to IJmuiden arriving just as we were pulling away from the quayside. Chris, who had decided to make the journey on the boat that was towing us, told its skipper to keep going. The infuriated crew and van der Kamp, realizing they had been successfully hoodwinked, ran along the quayside shouting and screaming abuse and waving their fists in the air. In retaliation, some of us dropped our trousers and "mooned" them whilst others, including Ronan gave the more polite "V" for victory sign! Also on board as we made our way to the coast of Scheveningen were two new disc jockeys we had recruited. Robb Eden who had worked for RNI in 1970, and Norman Barrington whose skill as both a production whiz - kid and manufacturer of joints of gargantuan proportions was to become one of the station's greatest assets! Only Captain Taal, Peter van Dijken, Jaap de Haan and Michael Wall-Garland from the original crew now remained.



Back to see, in front Gerard van Dam and Captain Taal

We now needed a replacement for the disgraced Captain van der Kamp and to find a skilled engineer to repair the main engine which hadn't been started in years and to supervise the installation of a new generator. I suggested to Chris we contact the one man I knew who was capable of filling both roles: that was Dick Palmer. I was delighted when Dick decided to accept the offer to join us. We shared a mischievous sense of humour. I had inherited my impishness from an ancestor Sir Robert Yallop, a leading Jacobite and confidante of King Charles 2nd. When he was arrested for plotting against

King William who had succeeded to the throne, he was described by the then Dean of Norwich Cathedral as "the greatest knave in nature!" Whenever the opportunity arose, Dick and I could never distance ourselves for a spot of knavery which was as often as not to the shock and disbelief of some of the newer people on board who had clearly led very sheltered lives! Although he had no real experience as a ship's captain, Dick soon learned the ropes and became the most conscientious and best loved of all our skippers during the Mi Amigo's two year long stay off the coast of Scheveningen. He insisted the disc jockeys, rather than lazing around all day and listening to music should play their part in keeping the ship clean and tidy. One afternoon I was deliberately avoiding Dick as I didn't fancy painting the deck or whatever manual job he had in mind when he finally cornered me. "Ah your lordship.....", before he could finish the sentence I replied, "Can't stop Dick, I'm finalizing the sauce for tonight's dinner!" After that, he would always preface any instructions for me with "Your lordship, if you are not finalizing the sauce, could you..!"

On land, the madness in the Pleyter household was unrelenting. Word had got around that it was very cheap to advertise on Radio Caroline, one afternoon; a local businessman unexpectedly arrived and was shown upstairs to the office. The beds had been folded away and Kate was sitting at her desk typing. He was told to take a seat and wait for Mr. Cary who would be back soon. The door then opened and expecting to see Mr. Cary, the potential advertiser was thunderstruck by the completely naked body of one of our disc jockeys Graham Gill. Completely oblivious of the stranger, in his broad Australian accent he said "Good morning Kate, can you make me a cup of tea." Without batting an eyelid, Kate reached for the kettle and switched it on. Flabbergasted by the goings on, the businessman made his excuses and hastily departed never to return.



Crispian St.John, Tony Allen, Steve England and Peter Chicago

Mrs. Pleyter had permitted us to use an extension for the house telephone in the office on the strict condition calls were kept to a minimum. When a bill arrived through her letterbox for 8,000 guilders, she hit the roof! She hobbled up to the office and angrily presented it to Chris demanding payment on the spot. Chris promised it would be settled in the morning after he had been to the bank. With a look of cynicism in her eyes, she uttered something in Dutch none of us understood and left the room. After returning to the guesthouse following a few drinks at a nearby bar, we discovered to our alarm that we had been locked out. Luckily, Dick Palmer was with us. Dick was her favourite, he was forever charming and flattering her with sexually loaded compliments which normally went right over head. Dick suggested he went to the front door to engage her in conversation and manoeuvre her into the sitting room just inside the hallway. The plan worked a treat. "Good evening Mrs. Pleyter, how kind of you to wait up. Why don't we have a drink and then you can give me a blow job!" As they repaired into the sitting room, we tiptoed up to our rooms.



Angelique and Peter Chicago

Soon afterwards, there was a second raid on the guesthouse, this time by the PTT, the Dutch Post Office. Arriving in force, they ran up the stairs and burst into the office and asked Kate where the ship to shore radio was. She told them there was no ship to shore radio in the flat when suddenly to her embarrassment a voice appeared from a cupboard. "Mi Amigo to office, Mi Amigo to office. Are you there Kate?" Our short wave radio was duly confiscated! Until it could be replaced, a new system was introduced by Dick to advise Chris of what spares and equipment was needed on board ship. It took the form of a nightly shopping list broadcast live at 6.30 each evening which became cult "anorak" listening. Kate would sit in the office with a pen and paper and take shorthand notes. The list usually comprised mechanical items, tools and the occasional coded luxury item. Dick's "special tea" for example was a euphemism for marijuana! There was once an occasion when we were in the fortunate position of having all we required on board, but felt obliged for continuity's sake and sheer devilment to permit one of the more susceptible English "anoraks" on board to read out the shopping list. In cahoots with Peter van Dijken, Dick drew up a shopping list in Dutch and wrote it down phonetically on a piece of paper. It contained the most preposterous requests imaginable: handcuffs, whips, a selection of sex toys, and pornographic magazines. It was read out live to the accompaniment of uproarious laughter from those in the messroom who were let in on the act!



Ronan with the money suitcase?

We were continually amazed by the number of extraordinary people who came out to the ship that had managed to inveigle Ronan with promises of money and expertise. The most mystifying being an East European gypsy named Vassiel wearing a long fur coat, dark glasses and a most unconvincing chestnut brown wig that fooled non-one. He was introduced to us by Ronan as a new director of Radio Caroline. Within minutes of getting on board, Ronan took Vassiel to the studio and asked Norman Barrington to show Vassiel how it worked. Little did we know what we were in for! Ronan whispered to me when I asked him exactly who he was, "He's a fucking nutter, but he's got plenty of dosh, he owns a chain of nightclubs, make a fuss of him!" After Norman had explained the workings of the studio, Vassiel went on the air with an hour long programme of gypsy music which he brought with him in a small suitcase. "Go baby" screamed Ronan over the din which was blasting out of the studio speakers at full volume, "that's my boy" and turning to me said "Would you believe it, he's got three wives!" When they all returned to Scheveningen later, Vassiel invited Ronan and Chris to dinner and arranged to meet at his favourite restaurant later that evening. Out to impress, Vassiel arrived in a white tuxedo and bow tie. As they were being shown to their table, a fellow diner mistook Vassiel for a member of staff and asked him for the wine list! Vassiel's cover was finally blown when Chris Cary and Dick Palmer went out for a drink to a seafront disco in Scheveningen a couple of nights later. Resplendent in a sombrero and poncho, Vassiel turned out to be the club's disc jockey, not the owner.

For the next few months, Radio Caroline survived by "ducking and diving" thanks largely to Chris and his "wunderkind" Dennis King. Dennis arrived on

the scene from Berlin, he spoke perfect Dutch and English and soon established himself as Radio Caroline's arch "scrounger". Much like Flt. Lt. Henley the James Garner character in the film "The Great Escape", there was nothing he couldn't blag. His capacity to spin the implausible put him almost on a par with Ronan. You could always rely on Dennis to come up with the unexpected, none more so when he arrived at the office one afternoon and announced he had found a new advertiser. He had met Peter Muller, the publisher of "Candy", a raunchy sex magazine who was interested in paying us huge sums of money in return for broadcasting "The Candy Sex Show" once a week on Radio Caroline.



Promotional photos for Candy with Peer Muller right

Chris immediately said "yes, let's do it." The first (and only) programme was produced by one of our Dutch disc jockeys Will van der Steen and delivered to the office for us to listen to. The hour long programme, in Dutch and English featured interviews with prostitutes, advertisements for call girls and the scandalous confessions of a horny police chief from Antwerp! When the publisher issued a press release announcing the launch of the show, the Dutch newspapers reacted with damaging headlines and editorials calling for the government to intervene and put a stop to such potentially salacious programmes being given airtime. It was then Ronan had second thoughts. He quite rightly was of the opinion that such a programme could deter other businesses from advertising on the station and the idea was duly scrapped.



Will van der Steen

Things had gone from bad to worse at the guesthouse and we were finally received our marching orders from Mrs. Pleyter. Chris and Kate went in search of new premises. Not long afterwards, we moved into a three storey unfurnished building in van Hogendorpstraat, a short walk from Hollands Spoor station in The Hague. The first floor had a large open plan office area with a small kitchen. On the second level there were two rooms which were later converted into studios. Although Ronan was always prepared to fly over to Holland at the drop of hat should his presence be needed, he preferred to remain in London at the end of a telephone. At the time, he was living in an unpretentious one bed roomed flat in Paultons Square off the Kings Road. For one so self-assured, he was incredibly paranoid. His heart always missed a beat whenever the front doorbell was rung. He would leap to his feet and walk over to the window and peek through the net curtains. If he couldn't see who was there, he reached for the entry phone and in the voice of an eccentric old English dowager would ask, "Hello, whose there?" If it was someone he didn't want to see, which was more often the case than not, he replied "there's no Mr. Ronan living here, you must have the wrong address. Goodbye!"

Living on the floor above him at Paultons Square was the celebrated interior designer David Hicks and his wife Lady Pamela Mountbatten, a cousin of The Queen. Ronan was always quietly amused when her ladyship's famous cousin arrived for afternoon tea or a supper party. In advance of the Queen arriving, two uniformed policemen were posted on the front door step. When her limousine pulled up outside, she would make her way up the stairs and a couple of armed royalty protection officers would hang around in the hallway

right outside of Ronan's door. On one such occasion he laughingly said to me, "Do you think they know there's this Irish lunatic whose grandfather fought and died at the hands of the British is sitting right underneath her?" Our London "office" was conveniently just across the Kings Road from Paultons Square. It was the long table next to the kitchen at the far end of The Caserole, one of the trendiest bistros in Chelsea designed by Nicky Haslam. It was run by a colourful Dutchman, Dickie Kreis, probably the only restrauteur in London who would give Ronan credit!

Those meetings with Ronan to discuss whatever needed to be discussed were lengthy boozy affairs lasting several hours until Dickie, after many attempts, ordered us to leave so that he and his staff could prepare the bistro for the evening service. As often as not, we would be joined by others. Ronan had the most absorbing and fascinating collection of friends who seemed to spend as much time there as he did. George Harrison, his old friend Christopher Moore, the very bizarre Amanda Lear, a lover of the surrealist painter Salvador Dali, John Cale of The Velvet Underground, the photographer Lucinda Lambton and the rock band manager Tony Secunda. Ronan was becoming quite concerned about the lack of money. Only the Dutch crew were being paid a regular wage. Our only income at the time was a few hundred pounds a week in the form of membership fees to the Caroline Club, a money-spinning scam that Chris Cary had dreamt up. In return for £10, members would receive photographs of the disc jockeys, a car sticker, badge and a guaranteed mention on the "Caroline Request Show."

Ronan summoned Chris to come over to London to hustle the record companies for money in return for giving airtime to their latest releases. He spent several days, without success meeting record company executives. Whist they were happy to supply us with much needed new albums, they were reluctant to pay for the privilege of having them played. During this visit, Chris received a call from the office in The Hague. Chicago urgently needed some spare parts for the transmitter. Chris decided to fly to Holland the following morning with the parts and return to London later that evening. After a longer than planned stay on the Mi Amigo, he realized, as the tender pulled into Scheveningen harbour that he would miss his return flight from Schiphol. He decided to go to Amsterdam for the night with Kate and spend the night with Graeme Gill who had worked briefly for Radio Caroline before joining Radio Northsea International. With no change of clothing with him,

Chris borrowed my brand new suede jacket and a clean shirt. Later that evening, the three of them went out to dinner to a Chinese restaurant on the Prinsengracht. Chris, who something of an aficionado of oriental cuisine had cause to complain about the quality of the food they had been served. In his customary forthright manner he told the waiter in no uncertain terms that the food was "fucking crap" adding "I'm not paying for this shit!"



Spangles and Andy on air

The restaurant manager had different ideas. Locking the front door, he demanded payment. Unabashed, Chris got to his feet shouting, "Either you unlock the fucking door or I'll get out through that fucking window!" The manager translated Chris's ultimatum which brought about howls of laughter from them. This was too much for Chris to take. He ran to the window, turning his back at the last moment and crashed through the window shattering the glass into the street. The waiters were dumbstruck by his bravado. They were further amazed when Kate tottered over to the gaping hole in her high heeled shoes and inelegantly climbed through screaming "Wait for me Chris, I'm fucking coming as well!" They both ran down the street leaving the submissive Graham in the restaurant who was more concerned about finishing his meal than the kerfuffle that was going on around him. Hot in pursuit, the Chinese waiters, one of them clutching a machete, chased after them. Chris, never the fittest of men, soon ran out of steam. Although he could handle himself, he didn't really fancy his chances against three irate Chinamen. Realising he was in for a beating, he decided his only path of escape was to jump into the canal with no regard for my suede jacket!!! The waiters continued their tirade as Chris swam across the canal only dispersing and returning defeated to the restaurant when Kate took off one of her stiletto healed shoes and attacked them like a

madwoman accompanied by a rant of expletives. Unbeknown to Chris and Kate, the escapade was seen by a couple of very camp gay men who lived in a flat overlooking the canal. As Chris climbed out of the canal onto a small jetty, they walked over and invited them to their flat to dry his clothes. There was an amusing finale to the episode which Kate explained to me the next day. "Well" she said, "you would have screamed. Chris didn't want to take his trousers off because he was wearing a pair of my frilly knickers. Andy, you should have seen the boy's faces when they saw them!"



Veronica ship stranded

On April 2nd 1973, the Dutch coast experienced a second hurricane within the space of five months. The Mi Amigo and the Radio Northsea International ship The Mebo 2 both survived the onslaught of the storm, The Norderney, which housed Radio Veronica, was not so lucky. Her anchor chain snapped, and after an hour or so, she came to rest on the beach at Scheveningen. This was a devastating blow for them. The Dutch government were hell bent on closing down the pirate stations operating off their coast. Radio Veronica had a major rally planned against the government the following week and needed to be on the air to promote it. When the news reached him, Ronan called Chris from London. "Listen, get on the fucking phone right now to Rob Out at Veronica and offer them the Mi Amigo until they can re-float their ship. I'll get over later today to sort out a deal."

Chris explained that things on board the Mi Amigo were bad. They had suffered some storm damage, the main generator wasn't working and the studio equipment wasn't functioning. "Never mind that" replied Ronan, "they won't know. Just get on to Rob Out then get out to the ship and sort things out!"



Tom Collins, Dennis King and Freek Simon on their way to the Mi Amigo

Rob Out, Veronica's programme director, told Ronan they had to be back on the air in a couple of days. It could take a week or two to get the Norderney re-floated. He was assured that the Mi Amigo would be ready. A figure of 50,000 guilders for each week they used the ship was agreed and Radio Veronica would supply the necessary studio equipment to make it happen. On his arrival onboard the Mi Amigo, Chris saw for himself the carnage caused by the hurricane. Working around the clock, Chris, Norman Barrington, Peter van Dijken and a few anoraks who were still onboard cleaned up the ship making it shipshape before the arrival of the Radio Veronica team. Peter Chicago worked wonders with the transmitter while Dick Palmer and our marine engineer Jaap de Haan repaired the main generator. On April 11th Radio Veronica's pre-recorded programmes took to the air from the Mi Amigo. Their own ship, the Norderney was successfully re-floated a week later. The Mi Amigo relayed their programmes for a further seven days as part of the deal Ronan had struck with Rob Out. We now had a healthy bank balance and the studio equipment Radio Veronica had left behind. Radio Veronica's rally attracted over a quarter of a million people on the streets of The Hague, the biggest demonstration the country had ever seen.



Andy and Dick Palmer

Ronan, Chris, Dick and myself drove to the Binnenhof, the seat of the Dutch government, to listen to the final reading of the bill in the second chamber. As we arrived in a car driven by Dick, Ronan, with his flock of long grey hair was instantly recognized by the press corps who surrounded us in the car park and began to bombard him with questions. Ronan cooperatively climbed out of the car and began to answer their questions. But the impromptu press conference was brought to an abrupt end with the arrival of a battered old van with a large antenna and speaker on the roof heading straight for our car. Emblazoned on its side was "Radio King Report Wagon." At the wheel was an hysterical Vassiel who had a score to settle. Clutching a microphone connected to the speaker on the van's roof, he launched into an outburst against Ronan in perfect English to the flabbergasted journalists. Pointing a finger to Ronan, he screamed "You should print the truth about O'Rahilly and his friends. They are all drug addicts, liars, cheats and are robbing the Dutch people!" It was the only occasion that I have ever seen Ronan run. "Time to split" he shouted as he headed for the sanctuary of the government buildings closely followed in hot pursuit by Chris, Dick and me.



Jaap de Haan and Peter van Dijken 2004

It wasn't the last we were to see of Vassiel. The next day, he arrived at the office in Van Hogendorpstraat waving a pistol and shouting from the street when he discovered the door was locked. "O'Rahilly has cheated me, he made promises he hasn't kept. I want the typewriter back I bought. If you don't give it to me, I'll break down the door." Kate calmly opened the window, she then unplugged the large IBM golf ball typewriter on her desk. "Alright, you can have your fucking typewriter back" and hurled it it from the first floor onto the pavement below. Rubbing her hands in satisfaction, she added, "Now fuck off otherwise I will call the police!" Ronan and Chris decided to invest some the money obtained from Radio Veronica on a new antenna. Together with Chicago, they drew up ambitious plans for an aerial sytem that would accommodate two separate frequencies. One for the Dutch programmes, the other for a brand new all-day English service. Before the new mast could be fitted, we needed to acquire three very expensive and very large ceramic insulators to place at its base. Chicago discovered the only company that made the models he required were based in Weiden in Bavaria.



Archer at office desk

A new challenge for our arch German blagger Dennis King! He telephoned the factory to place an order and was told they would be ready for collection in three days. Dennis traveled by rail for the 750 kilometres journey to Weiden arriving in the middle of the night and booked himself into a small hotel close to the factory. Later that morning, after a few hours sleep, he presented himself to the head of production and regaled him with romantic stories of life on board the Radio Caroline ship. As all of the money from Radio Veronica had been spent on the new mast, there was nothing left to pay for the insulators. Dennis was understandably taken aback when the factory sales director agreed to send the bill to van Hogendorpstraat!

After a guided tour of the factory, Dennis was told the insulators had been loaded onto a lorry which would take them to the railway station where they were carefully placed in the freight compartment at the rear of the train. All was going well for Dennis until the train reached the German/Dutch border when two customs officials boarded the train. He was reminded that all broadcast equipment entering Holland from another country required the appropriate documentation. He should produce the paperwork when he arrived in The Hague. A customs official was waiting for Dennis at Hollands Spoor station. As the insulators were being unloaded onto the platform, Dennis told him he would phone the office and get someone to bring the necessary documentation over. The phone was answered by Lion Keezer of the Radio Caroline Dutch service. "Lion, get your arse over to Hollands Spoor, we need to get these fucking insulators out of here before the customs impound them!" Seated in the office waiting for Lion to arrive, a new shift of customs officers came on duty. When one of them asked who Dennis was, he was told that he was just awaiting the arrival of some

paperwork. Assuming the new shift had no idea why he was really there, Dennis got to his feet, walked over to a desk and brazenly shook the hand of one of the customs official and profusely thanked them for their kind co-operation and hospitality and walked out. They loaded the insulators onto a barrow and pushed it to Lion's Alfa Romeo where they were whisked away at high speed to the harbour and out to the ship by nightfall.



Dennis King

With our brand new 55 metre antenna in place, Chris's ambition to launch an all day slick top forty style English service was at long last fulfilled. The English language programmes would be transmitted on 389 metres and the Dutch service on 259. We had strong line-ups on both stations. Johnnie Jason, Roger Day, Chris, Paul Alexander, Norman Barrington, Steve England and myself were the main disc jockeys on the English service, while Bert Bennett, Will van der Steen, Joop Verhoof, Peter van Dam and newsreaders Henk Meeuwis and Leo de Later looked after the Dutch service. Practical joking played a major part on board, it was usually the newcomers who were the targets. If I came up with an idea, I would always go to Dick and ask "Permission to jape sir?" Dick would carefully listen to the proposal and grant the go-ahead if he didn't think it was going too-far.



One of the walls in Caroline's office

One of our new disc jockeys was Paul Alexander, a likeable, but very anoraky individual. He let it slip one day that his real hero was a Canadian disc jockey called Don Allen who worked on RNI. After receiving "clearance" from Dick, I told Paul he was in luck if he really wanted to meet him. "If you get into the lifeboat at exactly 11 o'clock, today's tide will take you right alongside the Mebo 2. You can tie up and go on board and meet Don." Hardly containing his excitement, he went out on deck to help launch the lifeboat. Peter Chicago, who was in on the joke told Paul that he would go with him. Once in the water, the idea was for Paul to feed out a line of rope for about 50 metres until they were in a position to leave for the Mebo 2. Paul wasn't aware that at that point, we planned to haul the lifeboat back to the Mi Amigo. As the lifeboat moved away from the ship, Paul was slowly feeding the rope out. "Come on Paul" shouted Peter, "let it out!" Completely misunderstanding the instruction, Paul threw the remaining rope into the sea and the lifeboat began floating away from us. In desperation, both Peter and Paul began to furiously paddle with their hands until they were close enough to the stern of the Mi Amigo for Dick to throw a line to them. Chicago climbed on board leaving Paul in the lifeboat as a punishment for his misdemeanor! There was never any malice meant with any of the practical jokes, Paul had been initiated and soon became a regular practitioner himself!

Unbeknown to us, Ronan had made contact with Terry Bate the advertising guru who had been Radio Caroline's saviour in the 1960s. He had persuaded him to "up sticks" and move to Amsterdam to set up a Radio Caroline sales office. Knowing Terry was no fool, Ronan took out a lease on a large

apartment in the Brouwersgracht, one of the smartest and most expensive areas in the city to show he meant business. The day after Terry Bate and Anthony Melhuish arrived in Amsterdam, Ronan asked Peter Chicago and I to go with him to meet them. We were under strict instructions from Ronan to tell them the equipment on board the Mi Amigo was in tip-top condition and that we had a team of well known professional Dutch disc jockeys. Dressed in lounge suits and ties, Peter and I faced some tough questioning from Bate, but with Ronan's assistance, we managed to answer them to his apparent satisfaction. After a couple of hours, Ronan suggested we continued the discussion over dinner. As we were getting ready to leave the apartment, Peter Chicago's girlfriend Ellen, never one to mince her words, who had been sitting quietly in a corner throughout the meeting decided to lighten the atmosphere with an unintentional malapropism. In a loud voice during a moments silence she told Bate, "Peter Chicago is a great engineer, but he's no good in bed. Every time he fucks me, I just lie there with my legs in the air, I don't even get an organism!"

Despite Ellen's lack of discretion, Bate surprisingly wasn't put off and over dinner became mildly excited by this new challenge. For the next couple of weeks, Bate and Melhuish canvassed every advertising agency in Holland to drum up business for Radio Caroline. All of the agencies wanted evidence of audience figures which Bate was unable to supply. It soon became apparent that they were only interested in spending their client's money on the more established Radio Veronica and RNI. Admitting defeat, Bate and his team returned to London. Running two separate stations on one small ship was a complicated and over ambitious affair. In a comparatively short time, the English service built up a large following in Britain, but it was never going to be a practical arrangement and it was only a matter of time before Ronan pulled the plug. It was of little consequence that our audience was growing steadily by the day. Independent commercial radio stations were about to be launched in London and it was unlikely that we would attract the necessary advertising revenue to prolong what Ronan now considered an extravagance. Radio Northsea International's English service was being subsidized by their Dutch service, we would have to do the same. The Mi Amigo was soon to become the home of two new stations.

A deal was struck with a Belgian businessman, Adriaan van Landschoot who rented our transmitters for thirteen hours a day. He named his station

Radio Atlantis. In London, Ronan asked me to meet him at The Casserole, Tony Secunda was there too. He had co-founded Radio Geronimo in 1970, a progressive, alternative rock station that had rented airtime from Radio Monte Carlo at weekends. Ronan suggested the time was ripe for Radio Caroline to become the vanguard for the rock generation as nobody else was playing the kind of music the younger generation was now into. They began to bicker about the Radio Caroline brand. Secunda argued it was very 1960s and Ronan should consider renaming the station. We began throwing around all manner of nautical sounding words that failed to hit the spot when suddenly, an American sitting at the next table who had been eavesdropping on our conversation leant over and said "What about Seagull?"

We needed at least a couple more disc jockeys to launch Radio Seagull. Only Dick Palmer, Norman Barrington, Johnnie Jason and myself were happy playing rock music, the other guys on board favoured top forty personality radio. Tony Secunda recommended Barry Everett and Hugh Nolan, two stalwarts of the experimental Radio Geronimo. A few days later they both arrived at Paultons Square and soon agreed to join us promising also to supply the necessary music the station would need. Word had already reached van Hogendorpstraat of Ronan's latest whim to the disquiet of Chris who wasn't best pleased at the proposed change of musical direction. When I arrived at the office with Barry and Hugh and their vast record collection in tow, we received a very chilly reception from Chris and our new assistant radio engineer Bob Noakes who had replaced Robin Adcroft. Barry and Hugh were two of the most well-informed people in the rock music business. I felt slightly awkward at the lack of respect shown to them.

Neither Barry nor Hugh were quite sure of what to expect when they climbed on the tender in Scheveningen harbour for the forty minute journey to the Mi Amigo. However, they soon acclimatized themselves to living and working on a ship and became great influences to us all with their unrivalled knowledge of music. Radio Seagull was the only station in Europe playing exclusively album tracks and it wasn't long before we were receiving hundreds of letters of appreciation each week from our new found listeners. Barry and Hugh's eclectic record collection was introducing not just us, but our ever increasing audience to the most amazing music imaginable. We found ourselves in the enviable position of being allowed to play whatever we wanted, be it the whole side of a Frank Zappa album, recordings of freeform

jazz by the likes of Chick Corea and Sun Ra or the ramblings of the sixties beat Lord Buckley. One of the most requested songs we played was Mike Absalom's "Hector the Dope Sniffing Hound". It was played so often, it almost became the station's theme tune!

"Hector the dope sniffing hound,
Used to be seen around town,
With inspectors and pigs, he was one of the bigs,
A bark from that nark sent you down.
One night they were casing a joint,
On point duty Hector did point,
At the small herbal fag, then he took a sly drag,
Saying bow wow wow what's the point?
Now among the butterflies and flies he flies
Closing his eyes,
Ladybirds and beetles passing him by,
Lazy days and summer ways, skies cornflower blue,
Hector defector, frolicking in the dew.
Hector the dope sniffing hound,
Was out through the door in a bound,
Now he wanders at large, shouting "What's the charge?"
Afghan black or Mongolian brown?
Hector the dope sniffing hound,
The most dogmatic dog in the pound,
But now he's a drop out, his eyes nearly pop out
Going round, and around and around
His number was PC K-9,
But now he's smashed all the time,
Under floorboards and mats, he goes chasing cats
Instead of unearthing cocaine
Hector the dope sniffing hound,
Has recently gone underground,
He's the only coyote whose dropped pure peyote,
Hector the dope sniffing how - wow -wo - wow hound!"

Ronan quickly became Radio Seagull's greatest fan and it became the topic of conversation with his friends in The Casserole. An article in the prestigious Sunday Times "Calling the Tune" named Radio Seagull as the best popular

music station currently broadcasting. Convinced that Radio Seagull could achieve what Radio Caroline had accomplished in the 1960s, he commissioned a costly survey which would establish just how many people were tuning in each day. When it was completed, a representative of the company arrived at Paultons Square with the findings and to collect his fee. He rang the doorbell and was told through the entry phone "Mr. Ronan is not in, hold on, I'll come to the door." Ronan then attached the security chain and opened the door a few inches. Seeing the folio containing the survey results, Ronan thrust his arm through the gap, grabbed it and slammed the door!

Chris Cary very rapidly began to lose interest in what was happening on the Mi Amigo. His all day English service had been scuppered by Ronan and he detested the concept of Radio Seagull which he referred to as "a load of self-indulgent hippies out of their heads playing a load of crap!" After an almighty row on the telephone with Ronan about the direction of Radio Seagull, Chris decided to quit and returned to England. Dick Palmer sadly left at the same time, though for an entirely different reason. Dick had been one of the stars of Radio Seagull. His programme "The Night Trip" was a joy to listen to and be part of. Every night there was always a gathering of whoever was still up in the studio with him smoking endless joints, listening to his incredible stories of life on board Radio Essex in the 1960's and giggling at his ineptitude with the studio equipment as the night wore on! Dick was finding it hard to unwind because of the unrelenting problems he was experiencing with his architect and his builders at his house in Kent. While happy enough to work for a minimal wage, he had to face reality and get a job more financially rewarding. We were all devastated when we learned of his tribulations and it was with a heavy heart that he finally departed.

With Chris and Kate now gone, Ronan made Charlotte Ribbelink the new station manager. Charlotte, had been working as Chris's secretary for a couple of months and had quickly learned the ropes. A very intelligent woman who spoke impeccable English and who wasn't prone to tantrums nor making snap ill thought out decisions which had been the hallmark of the office before she took charge. Her appointment brought a much needed calm to Caroline House. Although things on land had taken a turn for the better, we were still blighted by the continual transmitter breakdowns which Adriaan van Landschoot was getting very pissed off about. It was always sod's law

that this seemed to happen when Peter Chicago was on shore leave. His assistant Bob Noakes lacked the necessary experience and as often as not, Charlotte would have to track Peter down and send him back to the ship to put things right.



Michael Lindsay, Buster Pearson, Ronan, Andy and Charlotte

During one such breakdown which lasted for three or four days, Norman Barrington and I decided to practice our culinary skills and bake a "space cake." We consulted our new cook Mickey Mercer to determine the necessary ingredients and the cooking time. Neither of us had made one before, as a consequence we were over generous with the amount of cannabis resin we added to the cake mix. When the cake had cooked and allowed to cook down, we proudly placed it on a platter and proudly took it into the messroom where Barry Everett and our librarian Elija van den Berg were eagerly waiting to sample it. Just as the four of us began to tuck into our creation, Captain Meyer, who had replaced Dick Palmer as skipper walked in with Peter van Dijken and Jaap de Haan for their afternoon tea break. "Ah, chocolate cake, lekker!" remarked the Captain, as usual in his odd combination of English and Dutch. Norman and I immediately panicked and began to make feeble apologies for our lack of skill in cake making. We told him that it wasn't very good and that we should throw it overboard for the seagulls! "Nee" replied Captain Meyer, "ik will try one stokje!" I looked at Peter and Jaap and winked. They immediately shrugged their shoulders, smiled and reached for a slice themselves! The extreme ratio of cannabis to cake mixture soon became apparent. Little was done for the rest of the day aside from laughing, giggling and falling around like demented kids. Captain Meyer said nothing, he was so stoned he couldn't move from his chair at the

head of the table and remained there until the early hours with a look of pure contentment in his face!



Norman Barrington

Mickey Mercer was a very welcome addition to the crew. He was the archetypical hippy with a mass of shoulder length black hair. Mickey lived in the Hopstraat in Delft with his wife Sue and son Lance. His arrival brought about a radical change in our diet. Greasy meatballs, pork chops, chips and watery cabbage were replaced by thoughtfully created more palatable dishes, mostly containing a liberal sprinkling of dope. It wasn't long before some members of the crew began to gently complain about some of the more curious dishes that Mickey was serving up. Their main gripe was that after a hard days work on deck or in the engine room, they wanted more than just a vegetarian curry or an Asian rice dish followed by a fresh fruit salad. We persuaded Charlotte to hang on to Mickey who then became the "night shift" cook and she hired a second cook to look after the more substantial needs of the crew.

Both Barry and Hugh had excellent contacts with the London based record companies who generously gave them stacks of new albums to bring out to the ship. One night, Barry invited me to join him at Dingwalls in Camden Town, the home of "pub rock." We were there for the recording of the live album "Greasy Truckers Live at Dingwalls" which featured his friends The Global Village Trucking Company. They were an amazing band who were led by The Hon. James Lascelles a son of the Earl of Harwood and was 43rd in line to the British throne! The recording went on late into the night and we left

just before dawn to grab a few hours sleep before heading off to Heathrow Airport on an errand for Ronan. Ronan had asked us to fly over to Switzerland to collect "something" from Zurich airport and take it to Charlotte in The Hague. We didn't ask what the "something" was but guessed it was probably money as he let it slip that the man we were meeting would be traveling from Liechtenstein. As our taxi pulled up at Terminal 3, Barry remembered he had a large lump of dope in his pocket. Reluctant to throw it away, he said: "There's only one thing for it." He broke it in half adding "lets eat it!" By the time we had checked in, cleared customs and boarded the Swiss Air jet, we were absolutely out of our heads and spent the entire flight giggling and laughing much to the annoyance of the passengers in our immediate vicinity. Upon our arrival in Zurich, we made our way to the meeting point where an impeccably dressed official from the Liechtensteinische Landesbank in Vaduz was waiting. Somewhat bewildered by our incessant laughing and childish antics, he handed over a briefcase after I had signed the receipt using the name Ronan O'Rahilly!

It was at this time, the 1973 oil crisis was causing great concern to the Dutch government. The nations that comprised OAPEC, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Companies announced they would no longer supply shipping oil to any country that had supported Israel in the Yom Kippur War against Egypt and Syria. In desperation, the government introduced petrol rationing and barred all motor vehicle use on Sundays in order to preserve stocks. The fuel shortage was an impending worry for us too. Without our regular deliveries to the ship we would be unable to remain on air. Then Charlotte made an amazing discovery. There was a booming black market! Armed with the cash that Barry and I had brought over from Switzerland, she brokered a deal with the black marketeers. In great secrecy and under cover of darkness, one of our tender captains Hein Snoek, himself under great threat of prosecution if caught, delivered enough oil to the Mi Amigo to last us for months.

On October 18th 1973, there was a recrudescence of that fateful day in November of the previous year when our transmitting mast unexpectedly collapsed and fell into the sea. Before quitting the station, Dick Palmer would conscientiously inspect the mast every day looking for any structural problem or deterioration. Following his departure, this essential part of housekeeping was overlooked with disastrous consequences. Ever the

consummate professional, Peter Chicago quickly designed a temporary antenna system and soon the Radio Atlantis programmes were back on the air but with very reduced power. The signal, which before the loss of the mast covered most of Holland and Belgium was now barely audible in their target area. This was all too much for Adriaan van Landschoot, who exasperated by this latest catastrophe, terminated his agreement with Ronan and Radio Atlantis was closed down.

Soon after van Landschoot's departure was made public, a couple of representatives of a second Belgian entrepreneur arrived at Caroline House with a proposition. Charlotte Ribbelink listened carefully to their pitch before telephoning Ronan in London. Charlotte was of the opinion that these people were in a different league to the more run of the mill "loonies" who were constantly bombarding Ronan with offers to rent our transmitters. She suggested it might be a good idea to have them checked out. Ronan agreed. A private investigator was hired who soon confirmed the substantial financial status of the individual concerned. On hearing this, Ronan instructed Charlotte to set up a meeting....pronto! Sylvan Tack was the son of a baker who had made his fortune manufacturing a sickening confectionary called "Suzy Waffels." He also had interests in the Belgian music and entertainment industry owning a recording studio, managing several singers and bands and was the publisher of "Joepie", a fortnightly music magazine. He was now eager to expand his business empire by owning his own radio station.

The meeting between Ronan and Tack with Charlotte acting as interpreter took place in the sumptuous Ciel Bleu restaurant of the Okura Hotel on the Ferdinand Bolstraat in Amsterdam. The negotiations lasted all afternoon before Tack finally agreed to Ronan's demands which included an initial deposit of 2,000,000 Belgian francs to be lodged in an account at the AMRO Bank at Schiphol Airport. As the meeting concluded, they shook hands before Tack landed a bombshell. Unaware of the episode with the transmitting mast, he announced to Ronan's utter consternation, "Tomorrow I shall hire a light aircraft and take a look at the ship!" As quick as a flash, Ronan responded with an answer only he alone could concoct. Charlotte struggled not to laugh as she translated. "You can't do that, it would be far too dangerous. If you fly a small plane anywhere near the ship, the radiation would act like a powerful magnet. It would be pulled into the ship killing you

and the pilot and probably all of the people on board!" To Ronan's astonishment, Tack believed him. He now not only had one of Belgium's wealthiest men in his pocket, he had a gullible one too!



Peter Chicago, Ronan, Leunis and Koos

Ronan now needed to act fast and immediately brought in a team of professionals. Leunis Troost and Koos van Duin were hired to take control of ship to shore operations. Troost was a former captain of the Mebo 2 and van Duin had been the Chief Engineer on both the Mebo 2 and the Radio London ship in the 1960s. They brought with them a previously unseen professionalism. Their brief was to organize a regular tender service, supply food, oil and water to the ship, and most importantly, oversee the construction of a new transmitting mast. By luck, they learned of a telescopic mast which had been made for Adriaan van Landschot, the owner of Radio Atlantis. It was now lying unwanted in a factory in IJmuiden. With Charlotte, they raced to the factory where a cash deal was struck on the spot. Within a fortnight, it was transported to the harbour at Scheveningen then taken out to the Mi Amigo along with a team of riggers and stevedores. By late November, five sections had been erected before the weather turned which made further progress too dangerous.



Christmas 1972 on the Mi Amigo

A few days before Christmas, the weather improved enough for the team to complete what had been a pretty precarious operation. After a few weeks of dexterous delaying tactics by Ronan, Tack was finally taken by tender out to the ship to inspect his latest business venture. With the ship now in a position to begin the transmitting of programmes for his new station Radio Mi Amigo, the time had arrived for Tack to hand over the balance of money agreed at their meeting at the Okura Hotel. Tack suggested they met at his office in Buizingen. On his arrival, Ronan was given a guided tour by Tack of the waffle factory when the moment he was dreading finally arrived. "He wants you to try a waffle" Charlotte translated. As he was about to relieve Tack of 38,000,000 Belgian francs, Ronan decided for the interim to suspend his strict macrobiotic diet. Taking the greasy waffle, he reluctantly took a bite and chewed on it for as few seconds. "This is delicious, absolutely wonderful, I've never tasted anything quite like it before!"

Tack beamed. When Ronan and Charlotte returned to Caroline House that evening he told me about the waffle tasting. "It was the most fucking disgusting thing I've ever eaten, I nearly threw up! If it were Hollywood I would have been given an Oscar!" Ronan suggested to Tack that I should be made Radio Mi Amigo's "temporary" programme controller for a few weeks until the station was up and running. My management skills then (and now) leave much to be desired, but I did manage to hire a team of the best disc jockeys available. Bert Bennett, Joop Verhoof, Will van der Steen and Mike

Moorkens were the first four obvious choices, all having worked for Radio Atlantis. I then gave jobs to Ad Roland, a former Hilversum Three disc jockey and Secco Vermaat who worked in the Boko Bar in Den Haag.

The final member of the team was engaged by Tack himself, this was Norbert, a well known Belgian broadcaster and entertainer who would present the mid-morning show. We asked Steve England, who had worked as a disc jockey on the short lived Radio Caroline English service, to produce a jingle package at Tack's studios in Buizingen. With the sudden influx of cash, Caroline House swiftly became a hive of activity. Charlotte, her assistant Rene van der Snoek and Elija van den Berg, found themselves working alongside the Radio Mi Amigo general manager Eddie de Boeck.



Steve England

Eddie was a strange choice for this role. He was a very likeable guy, but didn't have much of an idea about the machinations of running a radio station. Every Monday morning he would arrive at Caroline House from his home in Belgium with a bag full of cash which, without fail, he managed to squander by the end of the week. Suddenly we were all living the high life. Each evening Eddie wined and dined us at the top restaurants in The Hague and whatever we needed for our own comforts, he would hand over the cash without question. One evening, a few of us were lounging around in the main office smoking a joint which Elija van der Berg, our record librarian, had just rolled when unexpectedly, Eddie arrived. He had clearly led a secluded life and certainly had not tried dope before. Assuming this was what rock and roll radio was all about; he sat down and joined in. It wasn't long before he was as stoned as we were and was having a great time. When the time

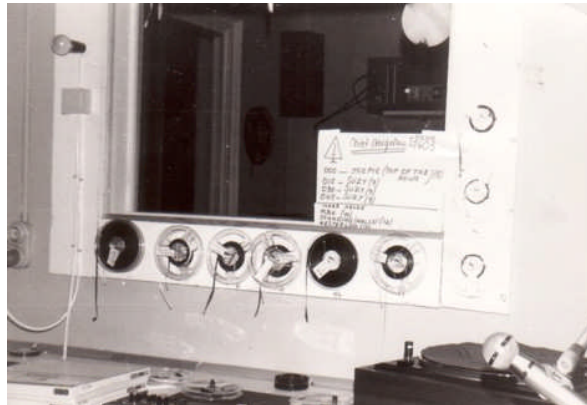
arrived for us to leave, he handed Elija a wad of cash asking her to buy some for his personal use and for a stash to be sent out to the ship!

In my capacity "temporary" programme controller, I received an invitation from Polydor Records to attend the launch of a new album by The Osmonds on behalf of Radio Mi Amigo at the Amsterdam Hilton. As we didn't have a portable tape recorder in the office, I asked Eddie if he could buy one. "Sure, what type do you want?" Having a good idea that Eddie didn't know one tape recorder from another, I suggested a Nagra, the best on the market. "No problem, I'll get you one!" he replied. I recorded an interview with the band, then asked them if they would voice some "drop ins" which they willingly did: "Hi, this is Little Jimmy Osmond, you're listening to Radio Mi Amigo" etc. When I eventually got to speak with Donny who was attracting all of the attention of the journalists and radio presenters, I cheekily asked him to record a "name check" for one of our female disc jockeys who was his greatest fan. "Sure, what's her name?" I replied, "Suzy Waffels!" When he heard the recording, Tack was in raptures, the world's number one teeny bopper idol had unknowingly endorsed his filthy, sickly waffels!

On Christmas Eve 1973, Charlotte decided to organize a surprise for the guys on board the Mi Amigo. With Peter van Dijken's brother Koos, who had been employed as our driver, she drove to a supermarket and filled the van with Christmas goodies. A massive turkey, a Christmas tree, cakes and every bottle of champagne she could lay her hands on. On the way out to the ship from Scheveningen harbour, Charlotte asked our tender captain to divert to the Mebo 2. As we approached the Radio Northsea International ship at its stern, the disc jockeys and crew came out on deck. To their astonishment, we all began to sing "We wish you a Merry Christmas." Charlotte then threw a bouquet of flowers on board and we continued our journey to the Mi Amigo.

It was the first time any of us had set eyes on the new mast. It looked fantastic. Peter Chicago was up-beat and assured everyone that the station could begin test transmissions the next day. With just a few days to go before Radio Mi Amigo was due to be launched, their disc jockeys were working day and night in our two studios in Caroline House and at other locations to get a backlog of pre-recorded programmes ready for transmission from January 1st 1974. The launch of Radio Mi Amigo went

entirely to plan without the customary hiccups we were used to. To celebrate, Eddie de Boeck decided a party was in order. He asked Charlotte, Rene, Elija and me to organize it, with no expense spared! We invited all the Radio Mi Amigo disc jockeys, Koos van Duin, Leunis Troost, Captain Mayer and his crew who were on shore leave, their wives and girlfriends and the singers Bolland and Bolland who lived in The Hague.



Studio Van Hoogendorpstreet

As party's go, this turned out to be a riot with every guest getting pissed out of their heads. It went on well into the night until the police unexpectedly arrived at the request of our irate neighbours, who had complained about the excess noise and rowdiness emanating from number 16, Security was still a major issue at Van Hogendorpstraat. We were continually being hassled and threatened by creditors that Ronan still owed money to from the early days. As a precaution, Charlotte bought a ferocious Doberman Pincher named Brundt. On the morning after the party, I arrived at the office to help clean up the detritus. Through the glass partition, I spotted Tony Allan, who had just returned to Radio Caroline following a stint on the Peace Ship. He was sitting at a desk looking petrified. He shouted "Get this fucking brute away from me, he won't let me get up to go to the loo, I'm dying for a piss!" I chanced my luck and gingerly crept into the office. The dog leapt to his feet and began to snarl before galloping over to me and began to snap at my ankles. As I lowered my left arm in a feeble attempt to fight him off, his razor sharp teeth took a small chunk of flesh out of it. At that very moment, Charlotte opened the door and shouted his name which instantly pacified him. Tony ran to the lavatory, I was sent to see a doctor for a tetanus jab and Brundt was taken to a vet, never to return!



Anoraks at front door Caroline office Van Hogendorpstreet

With just a few days before Radio Seagull was due to recommence broadcasting, we realized we were short of disc jockeys when to our joy we learned from Ronan that Johnnie Jason had decided to return to the fold. During the short period he worked on the English service of Radio Caroline the previous year, his positive attitude to life and sense of humour had endeared him to everyone on board. Johnnie's excellent taste in music had played a major role in the station's success. His shameless plugging of previously unheard of bands in Britain such as The Doobie Brothers and Steely Dan had brought them to the attention of millions. Perhaps the most influential disc jockey to join us was a very laid back American called Mike Hagler who arrived at Van Hogendorpstraat one afternoon looking for a job. Mike had worked on KRLA and KABC in Los Angeles and had a far greater knowledge of rock radio than any of us. After an initial chat with him, I phoned Ronan to ask if I could hire him, he replied, "Let me have a word with him." For the next hour and a half, Ronan engaged Mike in deep conversation. Ronan explained his concept of "Loving Awareness", his far-eastern inspired idea of promoting "love and peace" on air. He had had a hard job convincing the more cynical of us of its importance, Mike however, was enthralled. When their conversation ended Mike handed the phone back to me. Ronan said "Andy, take this guy out for a meal and offer 1,800 guilders a month, he's exactly what we need!" Ronan was quite right, Mike was a fantastic find. Over the next few months, he engaged himself in some very imaginative writing and really creative programming.

In early February, the Radio Mi Amigo operation moved out of Van Hogendorpstraat. They had quickly established themselves as a very popular station, particularly in Belgium and the two small studios in Caroline House were hopelessly inadequate. They relocated to a studio complex in the town of Breda. I was now free to return to the ship instead of sending out pre-recorded programmes to the ship which I was never happy with. It was at this time for some inexplicable reason Ronan ordered that Radio Seagull should revert back to its original name of Radio Caroline. In a very short time we had journeyed from rags to riches. Money was plentiful and Radio Caroline entered a period of stability it hadn't enjoyed since the 1960s. Everyone employed was now being paid a decent wage which resulted in fewer arguments and disagreements. Peter Chicago had performed wonders with the out of date radio equipment and our signal outperformed our rivals Radio Veronica and Radio Northsea International. In fact our signal was so strong in The Netherlands, it resulted in a squabble with the Dutch state radio station Hilversum Three. In a live link-up with the Mi Amigo, their presenter Ton van Duinhoven asked Peter Chicago: "Peter baby, listen. We've only got ten kilowatts, so what are you trying to do, kill us? Our listeners are asking how can a signal from the Mi Amigo be so much stronger than yours and asking us to turn it up a bit. We can't because we've got this fucking ten kilowatts, you know what I mean?" Peter was sympathetic but diplomatically pointed out that their listeners had the advantage of listening on FM adding that he was sorry if they had a problem with their AM frequency being so close to ours!

Ronan quite rightly considered Peter important to the success of the operation, and was allowed the luxury of having his girlfriend stay on board with him. Of all the weird and wonderful characters that had spent time on the Mi Amigo since September 1972, Peter's girlfriend Ellen was the most bizarre. She was completely free of inhibitions, regaling us daily with lurid tales of her sex life! She first came out to the ship for a few days in the summer of 1973. A few days that caused quite a stir. A tender had just arrived and the messroom was heaving with visitors. Ellen entered the room and brazenly announced at the top of her voice "I've just sucked off Chris Cary down in the record library!" Ellen was unaware that Chris's wife Kate was also on the tender and was in the messroom to hear her proclamation! "The dirty fucking bastard!" she screamed as she strutted out of the

messroom and made her way below decks. The ensuing altercation was audible to all on board. After a while, Chris eventually plucked up the courage to return to the messroom in his now blood stained tee shirt and laughed the matter off. "Women, they are all the fucking same!"

One night, we asked Ellen if she would like to present a programme. She jumped at the opportunity and said "I shall call myself Samantha Dubois!" Although she was Dutch, her English was perfect having spent some of her childhood in New Zealand. Samantha, as she was now known has the distinction of being the first ever Radio Caroline disc jockey to deliberately use expletives on air. It was common practice to try to make other disc jockeys "corpse" when they were on the air, usually by doing something ridiculous when the microphone was live. Samantha became the number one target. On one occasion, one of the crew crept into the studio, as she began to speak into the microphone he gently fondled her breasts. She paused mid-sentence, looked behind her then turned to the microphone and completed her link, "Why don't you fuck off, I could get cancer of the fucking breast!"

In late February, Ronan invited Charlotte and me over to London for a few days. He met us at Heathrow Airport in a chauffeur driven Daimler limousine which took us to the Hilton Hotel in Park Lane. The receptionist looked a little perplexed when Ronan asked if Princess Charlotte and Lord Archer's suites were ready. Charlotte and I looked at each other and began to giggle. "I am afraid we don't have a booking for er, the Princess or his lordship" she replied. Ronan mendaciously explained that the booking was telexed from the Amsterdam Hilton earlier that morning. The duty manager was summoned who apologized profusely. "I'm afraid the hotel is fully booked, however I can arrange for your guests to stay at our new hotel in Holland Park Road."



Charlotte Ribbelink and Andy Archer

The next day I met up with Johnnie Jason and we spent hours trailing around the record companies collecting the latest albums to take back to the ship. In the evening, flush with cash from Eddie de Boeck, we took three of his friends out for dinner at a particularly plush restaurant in Notting Hill Gate. It was full of diners in lounge suits and haute couture dresses. Our waiter was visibly taken aback by our long hair, tee shirts and jeans as he showed us to our table. After ordering our food, a pompous sommelier arrived with the wine list. "Will you be taking wine with dinner?" Johnnie took an instant dislike to him. Picking the most expensive wine from the list he barked "Mouton Rothschild, five bottles and open them immediately, one each!" As the sommelier made his way to the wine cellar, Johnnie said "That'll show him we mean business!"

February 28th was Election Day in Britain. Ronan had never forgiven Harold Wilson for the introducing the Marine Offences Act. He asked Charlotte and I to arrange a small party in the Kensington Hilton which he hoped would be to celebrate a victory for the conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath. The party was held in Charlotte's suite. Ronan arrived with a half a dozen friends from the Casserole; Robb Eden who was on shore leave from Radio Northsea International also joined us. Johnnie and I took charge of refreshments ordering copious quantities of Bollinger RD and platters of smoked salmon sandwiches. Charlotte and I were due to check out of the hotel the following morning. Neither of us had anywhere near the amount of money to pay for our accommodation, let alone the party. Charlotte telephoned Ronan whose immediate response was "Do a runner!" We telephoned Johnnie Jason who lived nearby who within a half an hour had

pulled up outside in his father's Range Rover and was revving the engine up for a quick getaway! As Charlotte and I cautiously approached the exit with our bags, the concierge politely enquired if we had settled our account. We had been rumbled! After a frantic telephone call from Charlotte who insisted he came to the hotel straight way, Ronan finally arrived. He winced when he discovered the bill was £600 and reluctantly began laying out his cash onto the reception desk.

Michael Lindsay, who had been a disc jockey on RNI in 1970 was now working for Deep Purple's record company. Michael was very supportive of Radio Caroline and willingly took on the role of obtaining the latest album releases for us. Most of the record companies would send their latest releases to his office in Newman Street and Michael would send them out to the ship. In return for his labour, we gladly gave airtime to all of latest albums released by Purple Records. One afternoon Michael telephoned our office in The Hague saying that he had obtained a new mixing desk for us which Ronan was bringing over that afternoon. He also told us that he had hidden a little present for us inside it. When Ronan arrived and placed the parcel on a desk, to his astonishment we eagerly rushed over and frantically began to search for Michael's present. It was Tony Allan who discovered the large lump of dope which Michael had carefully cello taped to its inside. Ronan went ballistic! "If I had been caught with that I would have had my fucking American visa confiscated." I had never seen him so annoyed. But after a while, when he had cooled down, Tony jokingly said "Come on Ronan, show us how you used to roll them!" Ronan took up the challenge and gave us a masterclass in how he used to make huge cone shaped joints with the Kings Road set back in the early 1960s.

Most of us would take a stash of dope with us when we were going out to the ship for a fortnight. We always gave it to Mickey Mercer who was the sanest person on board who would ration it for the duration of the shift. Mickey shared a cabin with Norman Barrington, it was affectionately known as "The Hippy Hilton." Like Carl Mitchell's "Bag of Nails" cabin in the 1960s, it attracted anyone who wanted to get stoned and chill out and listen to Mickey and Norman's amazing selection of music. I recall on one occasion getting very stoned with Johnny Jason and a few others in their cabin when we all got the munchies, J.J. volunteered to raid the kitchen. On his way back to the "Hippy Hilton" with several cartons of "Vla", a vanilla custard under his

arm, he bumped into Captain Meyer who asked him what he was doing with so much vla. Johnny replied, "Oh! I'm very hungry!" and continued to the cabin. Moments later, the captain poked his head around the door, took a large sniff and said "Ah! Stuff rokers!"



Andy Archer, Ronan O'Rahilly and Johnny Jason 2004

There was never a shortage of Suzy Waffles on board which Tack regularly sent to us under the illusion that we actually liked them. Little did he know that as soon as they arrived they were ceremoniously fed to the scavenging seagulls which knowingly gathered in their hundreds around the ship, whenever a tender arrived. Johnnie Jason and I had the reputation of being the ship's gourmets. Whenever we returned from shore leave, we would arrive laden with all sorts of epicurean goodies. If we were returning via Harwich to the Hook of Holland we would usually stock up at Guntons of Colchester, a delightfully old fashioned grocers who stocked an amazing selection of teas, coffees, cheeses and luxury foods. Whenever I was Colchester staying with my old friends John and Marion, I found the time to present a couple of rock shows on URE, the internal radio station on the University of Essex campus. At the time, URE was relaying Radio Caroline's programmes throughout the night. In the early 70s, the university was a hotbed of radicalism and to my relief, there was no shortage of practical jokers either! It wasn't long before I was joining in on the japes, usually at the expense of the much maligned security guards who were the preferred target when the students wanted to let off steam.

A couple of the URE disc jockeys lived on the 13th floor of Eddington Tower which was the breeding ground for practical jokers. The security staff who had been on the receiving end of showers of flour and water bombs were well aware of the tower's reputation and considered it a no-go area. To get them anywhere near the building, we had to dream up some very convincing stories. One night on my URE programme, I mischievously offered a Radio Caroline tee-shirt to the first person to bring a security guard's peaked cap to the studio! A couple of the students in Eddington Tower dreamt up a cunning plan to win the prize. They telephoned the guard's office to complain about excessive noise coming from one of the rooms. They claimed it was keeping them awake and that they had important exams the following morning. As the guard was making his way over to Eddington, one of the students concealed himself behind a bush a few yards from the front door of the tower, the other was waiting in the lift on the ground floor. The moment the guard passed the bush, the student leapt from behind it, removed the cap from his head and sprinted into the waiting lift which then whizzed up to the 13th floor. Not long afterwards, a smug looking student arrived at the studio, cap in hand, to claim his prize!

An album we were giving lots of airtime to on the ship in early 1974 was "Everyone is Everybody Else" by my old friends Barclay James Harvest. Polydor Records had arranged for Wooly Wolstenholme to be at their office in Stratford Place in London to record an interview with me. Brevity was never Wooly's nor my middle name and we rambled on for over an hour about the new album and the wacky times we had spent together in the late sixties. When we had finally finished the interview, I called Mike Baker, an engineer at Capital Radio and asked if would be possible to come around to edit and mix the interview with music in one of their studios. I arrived at Euston Tower just off the Tottenham Court Road after the management and most of the staff had left for the night and Mike and I secretly spent the evening putting an hour long Barclay James Harvest programme together using the ultra hi-tech equipment of Capital Radio. It was the first time that I had been into one of the new commercial radio stations. I watched in almost disbelief as their late night presenter Sean Kelly presented his programme from the adjoining studio. Because of the needle time restrictions imposed by the musician's union, Sean was allowed to play only six records an hour, the remainder of the music was provided by a musician sitting in the corner playing a piano!

On days when the sea was calm, we would occasionally pay a visit to the Radio Veronica ship where we always received a warm welcome. One of their newsreaders, Arend Langenberg was a fascinating man who resembled an upper class English gentleman. Arend would regale us for hours with tales of his escapades in London during the sixties. He is the only person I have ever met who successfully bluffed his way into one of the Queen's Garden parties at Buckingham Palace! Mike Hagler and Norman Barrington had been sent some information about a free festival which was taking place at Stonehenge on Midsummer Day. They thought we should get involved and organise a "Loving Awareness" festival to run alongside it. Their idea was to invite our listeners to along for the day and bring musical instruments, picnics and whatever else they needed for a pleasurable day in the spirit of Loving Awareness. Some of us were unconvinced it would be a success when the plan was first mooted, but as the day of the festival got closer and closer, everyone on board became wildly passionate about it and continually talked it up. I'm glad we did. The festival was not only a great success, but a really enlightening experience. It remains the most attended event ever organised by Radio Caroline.



John B Maier and Bob Noakes 2004

On the morning of the festival, Mike Hagler hired a car at Heathrow Airport, he and I drove to Cheyne Walk to pick up a friend of his who Keith Richard's personal assistant. We left London taking the A303 to Stonehenge and arrived in the early afternoon where we were met by Norman Barrington. Mike and I were both flabbergasted at the thousands of people that had gathered there. The police estimated that over 10,000 had congregated around the stones and the surrounding fields. Within hours, a small town had

been created, tents, teepees and makeshift shelters. Some people were playing guitars and assorted musical instruments and later in the day, Britain's first all synthesizer band Zorch arrived in a battered up green van and played a set through a very dodgy sound system.

We met some really interesting and fascinating people, none more so than Yogi Surya Premanda and Howie Phillips, a brilliant singer songwriter. We recorded a couple of songs of his to play on the air. One of them, "Let the Music Roll" became Radio Caroline's anthem for a while. Ronan graced us with an appearance arriving in a limousine which seemed a little out of place in the surroundings and suffering from hay fever. He spent his entire visit sitting in the back seat of the limo holding court and drinking orange juice before announcing "Country life ain't for me" and returned to London. We stayed up all night chatting to listeners and listening to music. The most magical moment being around 4.30 when Mickey Mercer played Bach's Tocatta and Fugue from the ship as the sun began to rise over the stones.

We were forever on the look out for new disc jockeys and Graham Gill of Radio Northsea International decided to jump ship and rejoin us and become our programme director. Robb Eden also made a most welcome return and John B. Mair, a delightful guy from Aberdeen with a passion for country rock. On July 14th a spot of unanticipated excitement and intrigue came into our lives. It began with Captain Mayer who discovered the ship-to-shore radio was out of order.



Graham Gill

He asked Chicago's assistant Bob Noakes to fix it.

Noakes, who had been acting in an even shiftier manner than usual told the captain he would see to it. Captain Mayer was anxious not just for the safety of the ship but for his own medical condition. He was suffering severe abdominal pains caused by gall stones and was feeling unwell. Charlotte had been in regular contact with him on the walkie-talkie which was hidden in Rene's Volkswagen Beetle from the Zwartepad car park, the highest point in Scheveningen. She had been passing on advice from Dr. Sharma in London, Ronan's homeopathic physician.



John B Maier

The reason the ship-to-shore radio wasn't working soon became quite clear when Mike Hagler beckoned me into his cabin. Mike asked me if I was aware of a plot to take over the ship the next day. He had just been told of it by Bob Noakes who admitted to being one of the perpetrators along with Chris Cary and Dick Palmer. According to Mike, their plan was to arrive alongside the Mi Amigo in a tender with familiar faces on board which wouldn't arouse suspicion. Captain Mayer would be taken off and replaced by Dick. The ship would immediately up-anchor and sail to a new anchorage off the coast of Belgium which would be to the advantage of Radio Mi Amigo's coverage. They would also launch an all-day English service on a separate frequency. Noakes was their insider. He had busied himself by carrying out an inventory of supplies, fuel and equipment and sneakily eavesdropping on conversations and reported his findings back to Chris.



Mi Amigo July 1973

Both Mike and I were very pro-Ronan, we decided our best course of action was first to have a discreet word with Captain Meyer. The captain listened carefully to what Mike had to say. He told us that he was under instructions never to hand over command to an unfamiliar captain unless he was accompanied by either Leunis Troost or Koos van Duin. As the ship-to-shore radio was unlikely to be repaired by Noakes, the only way we could alert Ronan was over the airwaves. I knew that Roland Pearson, an old friend of mine, was always listening to the station's output which was chronicled in his free radio magazine "Monitor". I suggested we record a message for him and play it over the air at double speed. After listening to it at the correct speed, he would then contact Ronan and hopefully our troubles would be over. Luckily for us, Buster deciphered the message and contacted Ronan who in turn telephoned Koos van Duin and Leunis Troost. They were in Spain finalizing a deal with a shipping company who would supply the Mi Amigo after the Dutch government's anti pirate radio bill became law. Early the next morning, Koos van Dijken arrived on a small fishing boat from Scheveningen. He told us that Leunis and Koos were flying back to Holland and would be coming out to the ship later with Captain Taal and a new transmitter engineer to replace the disgraced Noakes.



Captain Taal in 2004

Mike and I went on shore leave a few days later. Ronan was waiting in the office to thank us for what we had done. It had been a hard decision for me to make. Chris and Dick were both old friends of mine, Noakes had not entered the equation. In the end, we did what we thought proper. As an unexpected reward, Ronan gave Mike the necessary cash to carry out some essential repairs to his houseboat in Amsterdam. Charlotte booked me into The Caransa Hotel in the city and gave me a bonus of 1,000 guilders and told me to have a great weekend. Mike and Pam Hagler lived on the *Avontuur*, a houseboat on the Dijksgrecht, a ten minute walk from Amsterdam Central Station. Their boat and the *Liquenda* where Elija van der Berg's boy friend George Georgson lived became "homes from homes" for many of us when we were on shore leave. In the summer months, the greater part of the railway embankment which ran parallel with the Dijksgrecht was covered in marijuana plants from the seeds that had been thrown onto it during the springtime. It was an oasis of calm from the hustle and bustle of the city which was only a few minutes away. It was the perfect location for stimulating conversations and amazingly weird programme ideas were dreamt up by the mostly eccentric residents of the Dijksgrecht.



John B Maier and Brian Anderson 2004

Elija van der Berg's boyfriend George Georgson was a theatre and film director and a part time drugs dealer. He had a wonderfully dry sense of humour and was highly bemused by the Radio Caroline set-up. He had written the musical "Welcome to Transylvania" which had a successful run at the Fontein Theatre in Spuistraat and had recently directed a film about whirling dervishes! Ramses Shaffy, the Dutch singer/songwriter lived on the next boat to George and Elija. In the 1960s he became a huge star in Holland with a number of hits including "Sammy" and "Zing, vecht, huil, bid, lach, werk and bewonder." He launched the careers of Thijs van Leer (Focus) and the singer Liesbeth List who were both members of his backing band. Ramses, who drank at least two bottles of vodka a day was never short of suggestions for Radio Caroline programmes, however his ideas never made any sense - not even to us!

The most extraordinary person living on the Dijkgracht at the time was Henk who never socialized with anyone. He lived an almost stone age existence in a shabby old Volkswagen camper van at the end of the street. He spent most days pedaling a clapped out bromfiets (moped) with a hood made from a sheet of polythene up and down the Dijkgracht collecting whatever rubbish he could find which was then stacked in piles around his van as extra insulation. As far as we could gather, his only form of heating was a wood fire which was lit inside the van. Henk never washed and stank to high heaven, but there was method in his madness. Whenever he needed food, he would walk into a local supermarket where the assistants would run around the store filling up bags and give them to him just to get him outside. One day, Henk disappeared. A couple of days later his body was

recovered by police frogmen. He had attached a heavy piece of concrete to himself and toppled unnoticed into the canal.

Opposite the houseboats on the other side of the canal was the Kattenburg Marine Base. One afternoon we were sitting on the top deck of Mike's boat watching the cadets play football when Mike, in the interest of neighbourliness, suggested the non-existent Radio Caroline/Dijksgracht X1 should challenge them to a game. Much to our surprise they accepted the challenge and a date was set. On the day of the match, the Radio Caroline/Dijksgracht team and its cheerleaders assembled on the marine's immaculately prepared sports pitch for a few pre-match joints. Peter van Dijken and a couple of other members of the crew had arrived to give their support along with Tony Allan, Elija van den Berg, George Georgeson, Mike and Pam Hagler and a few Dijksgracht residents. The marine's X1 ran onto the pitch from their dressing room in full kit. Our team were attired in a mish mash of outfits, tee-shirts, jeans, shorts and an eccentric assortment of footwear. The match began in good humour with the home team taking it easy and entering the spirit of the occasion. They thought the result was a forgone conclusion, but they hadn't taken into account our "secret weapon", a West African whose name I can't remember who had played semi-professionally in Nigeria. Playing barefoot and entirely through his own efforts, he scored two goals in the first half which gave the Radio Caroline/Dijksgracht X1 an unexpected 2-0 lead at half time! During the interval, the Marine's X1 huddled together drinking orange juice and discussing tactics. As the referee blew his whistle to start the second half, the marines became more assertive and employed a few dirty tactics resulting in a few minor injuries. They were determined not to be embarrassed by a group of long haired hippies and one decent player. Our Nigerian completed his 'hat-trick' in the second half and the marines scored a couple of goals. This was the only occasion the Radio Caroline/Dijksgracht X1 ever played a competitive game of football and the victory celebrations went on late into the night.



Norman Barrington 2004

When the Dutch government announced their Marine Offences Act would come into force at the end of August, Radio Veronica immediately informed the press that they would comply with the law and close down on August 31st. Radio Northsea International's plan was to sail the Mebo 2 to the Mediterranean and change its name to Radio Nova. Ronan and Tack were determined to continue come hell or high water. They both came out to the Mi Amigo and told us of their plan. The ship would be towed over to the North Sea to a new position off the English coast and the Radio Mi Amigo programmes would be recorded in Spain. We all knew that things would never be the same again and we had some difficult decisions to make, not least the thought of tender journeys from Spain which would take anything up to three days during the winter months. Having experienced at first hand the time it took in the 1960s to get from IJmuiden over to the English coast and the isolation of going it alone, I decided I would leave at the end of August to try to get a job on one of the new commercial radio stations in Britain. Michael Hagler was of the same opinion. He wanted to find new horizons and adventures but was keen to continue his association by pre-recording a weekly magazine type programme looking at life in Amsterdam and other European capital cities. Graham Gill, Robb Eden, Norman Barrington, Captain Meyer and Jaap de Haan also announced they too would be leaving. Johnnie Jason, Tony Allan, Mickey Mercer, John Mair, Peter Chicago, Peter van Dijken and Captain Taal all decided to stay.

With little more than three weeks to go before we were outlawed by the Dutch government, we did not let the prospect dampen our spirits. One night, Peter Chicago, Robb Eden and myself were having a drink in the

messroom when, out of the blue, Robb suggested we go to have a drink with the guys on RNI which was anchored about two kilometers away. Captain Meyer and the crew had gone to their bunks, so we went out onto the deck and quietly inflated the rubber dinghy and launched it into the sea. When we were about 50 metres away from the ship, Chicago started the engine and we headed in the direction of the Mebo 2 which we could clearly see lit up in the distance. As we reached the half way mark, the dinghy began to sag in the middle and we started to take on water. It was very dark and we had no emergency flares or life jackets with us. Then to our horror, the engine gave up. Robb and I began baling out the water with our hands while Chicago worked on the engine. All three of us were beginning to panic, then we had two strokes of luck. Chicago somehow managed to re-start the outboard motor and we made our way very slowly to the Mebo 2 with Robb and I still furiously baling water from the bottom of the dinghy. By the time we reached the Mebo 2, we were up to our knees in water and the engine was coughing and spluttering from the sea water that had got into its works. Our second stroke of luck was the ship's crew had forgotten to haul in the ladder over the side of the ship and we were able to tie up alongside and clamber on board.



Andy, Samantha, Robb and Peter

We all knew the lay out of the Mebo well and made our way through the deserted messroom and down the corridor to the on-air studio. Robin Adcroft was on the air, he looked around and said "Hi Robb", then remembering that Robb had left Radio Northsea International a couple of months previously, he added "What the fuck are you doing here?" When he then saw Chicago and me, he screamed! The four of us spent the night in the messroom drinking and reminiscing until the captain came up for breakfast.

He was not a happy bunny. Unlike Radio Veronica, Radio Northsea International had a strict policy never to allow personnel from other radio stations on board. He immediately called for a tender from Scheveningen to return us and our dinghy to the Mi Amigo. Upon our arrival, we were welcomed with a severe bollicking from Captain Mayer who thought we were all crazy and should be locked away!

Later that day, we were surprised to see Radio Northsea International's little dinghy approaching the ship. Their senior disc jockey Brian McKenzie was on board. Brian told me that Edwin Bollier, one of the owners of RNI wanted me to record a piece for their final hour. Following the phenomenal success of the Stonehenge Festival, we were keen stage one final event as a "thank you" for our thousands of dedicated listeners in Holland. One night we were throwing around a few ideas in the "Hippy Hilton" while listening to Tony Allan's programme on the cabin speaker, he was playing a Laura Nyro song: "There'll be trains of blossom, there'll be trains of music, there'll be trains of trust, there'll be trains of gold dust, come along, surry on trains of thought, surry on down to a stoned soul picnic." As quick as a flash, Mike said, "That's it, lets have a big picnic in the Vondel Park in Amsterdam!"

We all agreed it was a great idea. The Vondel Park was the perfect location and almost in the centre of the city. In the 1960's and 1970's it was known as Amsterdam's "Hippy Haven" where young people from all over the world would congregate to take advantage of Holland's liberal drugs laws and chill. We set a date of August 4th and invited our listeners to join us for an afternoon of "Peace, Love and Music." On what was to be the last ever Radio Caroline public event in Holland, several hundred of our listeners gathered in the park with Mike Hagler, Mickey Mercer and his family, Elija van den Berg, Tony Allan and Graham Gill.



Nikki Eden, Dennis King, Wil van der Steen and Lion Keezer 2004

Despite the protests of hundreds of tens thousands of people, the Dutch government finally passed legislation to outlaw the radio ships operating off their coastline. It was to come into force at the end of August. On August 29th 1974 the Mi Amigo was towed from its mooring off Scheveningen by Captain Koos van Laar's ship The Dolfijn. The next day the Mi Amigo dropped anchor eighteen miles off the Essex coast, near the Kentish Knock lightship for the beginning of yet another adventure for the most famous radio station in the world.



Small reunion with Robb Eden, Johnny Jason, Elijah van den Berg, Andy Archer and Robin Banks 2003

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