

# Sunday Mirror

Telephone: (STD code 01)—353 0246

Sunday, October 15, 1967

**T**HERE was a big question mark last night over the future of the last of the pop pirates, Radio Caroline

Rumours were circulating that Caroline, which has two pirate ships—one off the Isle of Man and the other off Frinton, Essex—was going off the air.

It is known that many commercials are not paid for.

And on Friday Philip Solomon, the pop tycoon who manages the Bachelors and the Dubliners, had paid a flying visit to Amsterdam, Radio Caroline's H.Q. The rumour said he was discussing winding things up.

## Sad Music

They were strengthened when listeners heard sad music. Then they were told that the Frinton ship had lifted anchor and moved a mile further offshore. The northern ship was off the air an hour and a half because of gale damage to equipment.

But Robbie Dale, 27-year-old bearded disc jockey who claims he controls the Frinton station denied strongly that it was going off the air.

At the headquarters of Radio Caroline International, overlooking the Singel Canal in Amsterdam, he said: "Sure, we are losing thousands by staying on the air.

"But we have enough money and resources to keep us going for a year. And I reckon we

will be cutting even in three months' time."

He knocked down the rumours one by one.

On the non-payment of commercials he said: "We maybe only get payment for one out of three at the moment but we will be getting full payment soon."

On Mr. Solomon's visit. "He came here because we are friends. He certainly didn't come for final talks. He

couldn't — he has no longer any financial interest in Radio Caroline."

On the move of the Frinton ship: "We moved because a few days ago we were blown off position by a Force 10 gale."

And on the sad music: "That would be put out at the discretion of the D.J. Maybe he was just feeling homesick."

Mr. Dale said the station was living off money made before August 15—the date on which an Act came into force outlawing pirate radios and making it an offence in Britain to

help them. This Act put off the air all the pirates except Radio Caroline.

## Loss

Mr. Dale agreed that Caroline had lost millions of listeners to the BBC's new pop channel, Radio 1, but said they were now coming back.

Mr. Ronan O'Rahilly, the 26-year-old Dubliner who launched Radio Caroline, was equally firm. He said: "There is no question of Caroline closing down. We don't in-

tend giving up that easily.

"People have been telling us for four years we can't last but we are still on the air and intend remaining that way until they find some other way of cutting us off."

The speculation about Caroline North was caused by the temporary silence and doubt over its supplies.

The 40-ton Dutch cargo vessel Offshore III which delivers to the ship from Ireland has not been called on for nearly a month.

But Mr. O'Rahilly said: "Caroline North is well stocked at present. When supplies run low we will have more sent out."

# THE GREAT CAROLINE MYSTERY

Sunday Mirror Reporters







RONAN O'RAHILLY

# WHY CAROLINE SWITCHED OFF

**A** SLIP of paper may finally silence Radio Caroline, the pirate station which survived the Government's Marine Broadcasting (Offences) Act.

The paper is an insurance cover note which the two Caroline ships will get only if they are seaworthy.

This is the real reason for the abrupt disappearance of Caroline from the airwaves last week.

Within the next fortnight dry-dock tests will be carried out in Holland on the two Caroline ships. When the company's 28-year-old chief, Ronan O'Rahilly gets the reports he will decide about Caroline's future.

He is determined to do everything possible to refloat the transmitter ships, but admits the cost of repairs may be so high it might not be worth renewing the insurance.

Since the anti-pirate Act came into force last August, insurance on the ships has been renewed twice, on both occasions by foreign brokers.

The insurance runs out again this weekend. The brokers demanded this time, however, that both Caroline ships be towed into a Dutch harbour for seaworthiness inspections.

The two ships—736 tons and 470 tons—were at sea off the Essex coast and the Isle of Man.

The larger has been without overhaul for five years and the smaller for three years.

For every month they are off

the air it is estimated Caroline will lose £5,000.

Normally the cost of running the entire outfit, including a staff of 60, amounts to £20,000 a month.

O'Rahilly says he can keep going indefinitely even though the ships are not broadcasting.

"Money is the least of my problems," he insists. "I have been able to raise cash at times of greater crisis than this."

Even so, a number of the crew and disc-jockeys have been laid off while the survey is being carried out and have been given the option of finding new jobs if they wish.

If repair costs are prohibitive Caroline have been offered "a ship in first-class condition, either on a contract basis or to buy, at a very reasonable price," O'Rahilly revealed.

"We are seriously considering the option in the light of the present situation."

**A**FTER a disastrous month following the Government's Act in which they lost 90 per cent. of their advertising, Caroline have pulled themselves up to almost break-even point.

In eight months they have increased their advertising by 40 per cent. Had he been able to continue broadcasting O'Rahilly claims he would shortly have been making a profit again for the first time since the August Act.

While there is doubt about Caroline's future, there is inevitable speculation about what O'Rahilly himself will do next.

It is indisputable that without his resilience, Caroline would have been scuttled along with the other pirates last summer.

The effort since then of rebuilding virtually from nothing has taken its toll.

He is tired, physically and mentally and his insistence that somehow he will re-start Caroline has itself led to suggestions that he will shortly give up the fight.

One intriguing theory is that he will be invited to run Manx Radio.

He does not deny this.

In January this year the Isle of Man Government bought Manx Radio, Britain's only commercial network, for £50,000.

The purchase was a challenge to Whitehall, since it presented the possibility of the station increasing its power to cover the whole of Britain.

By boosting their present pocket-sized 1½ kilowatt transmitter by something like 100 kilowatts the station could get an estimated £6,000,000 in advertising revenue and compete with Radio Luxembourg.

Constitutionally, the issue raises innumerable questions because of the island's complex relationship with Westminster.

Talks are currently being held between the Manx Government and the Home Office on the subject, but it is generally felt that since the island now owns the station and is autonomous in all internal matters, nothing could stop them cashing in on this money-spinner.

The Post Office view the prospect of Manx Radio extending their coverage to Britain with some apprehension.

"Originally, their licence was granted exclusively for transmission on the island," they say.

"As the wavelength is an extension of one of the BBC's an expansion could possibly disrupt frequencies."

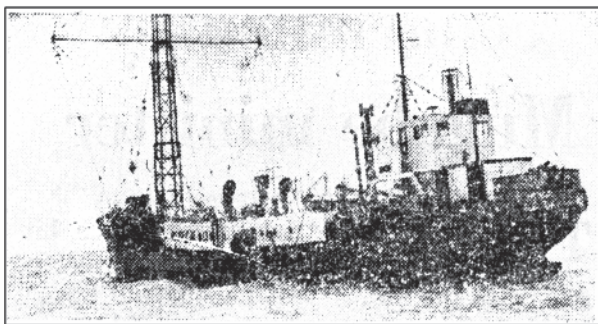
**TREVOR DANKER**



RADIO CAROLINE SOUTH



## *Police reception for rescued crew*



The pop pirate ship Mi Amigo before she went off the air.

# RADIO CAROLINE GOES DOWN IN FORCE 9 GALE

By ANTHONY HOPKINS

**R**ADIO CAROLINE, the pirate radio station which has been broadcasting illegally off the coast of Clacton for 16 years, sank in 25 feet of water in a Force 9 gale yesterday.

After a hazardous rescue operation, the crew of four were brought ashore at Sheerness, into the waiting arms of police, who wanted them for questioning under the 1949 Wireless and Telegraphy Act.

All four were later released.

The ship on which Radio Caroline was based, the Mi Amigo, 274 tons, built in 1921, put out a distress signal as it drifted from its moorings in the Thames Estuary on Wednesday evening.

Early yesterday she had lodged on a sandbank 30 miles south of Clacton and in a vicious gale began to be swamped by huge waves.

The four crewmen—and a pet canary—were rescued by the Sheerness lifeboat whose Coxswain, Mr Charles Bowry, said that the operation had been the “most hazardous I have ever undertaken.”

### 20-ft waves

He said: “By the time we arrived it was shortly before midnight. The ship had begun to take 'on water. The waves were up to 20 feet.

“We had to get the crew off in three stages. On one occasion we made 12 approaches to the ship to pick the moment exactly before we could safely make a pick-up.”

A helicopter from RAF Manston hovered above the stricken ship as the crew were taken on board the lifeboat.

In the grey light of early morning yesterday only part of the 100-ft radio mast still protruded above the water. The Dover Coastguard said it was unlikely that the Mi Amigo had been holed — “It was just overwhelmed by the size of the waves.”

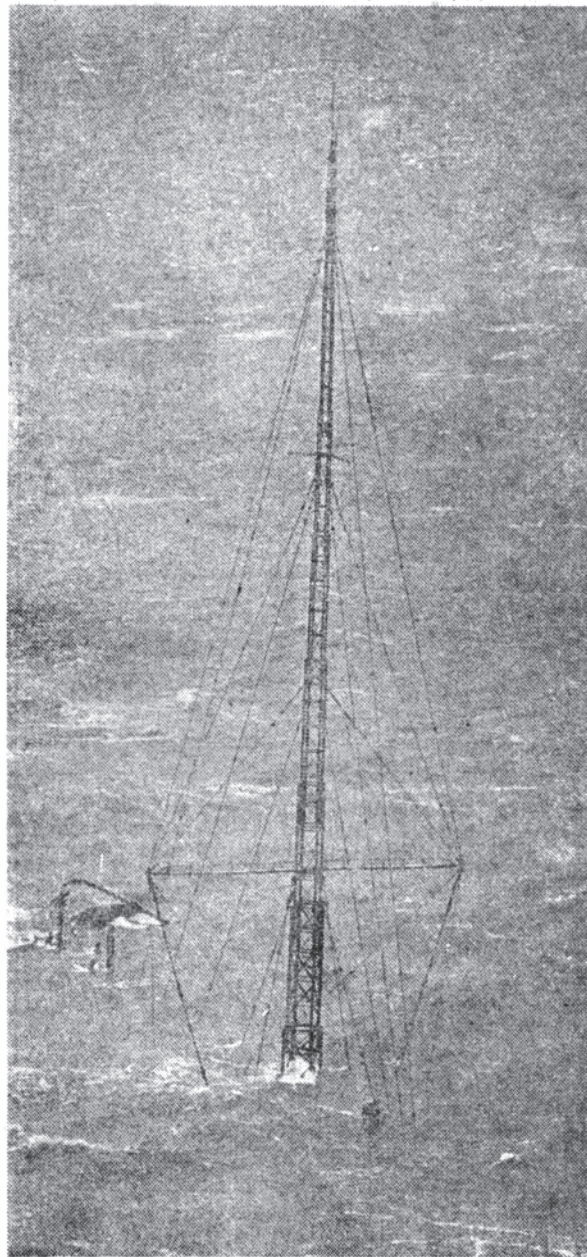
### Too late

One of the crew, Mr Nigel Tibbles, 23, of Rayleigh, Essex, said they had not realised that the Mi Amigo had broken away from her moorings until she was almost aground.

They dropped the emergency anchor, but it was too late. There was nothing else they could do because the ship did not have engine power, he said.

The other three members of the crew were Mr Nigel Latko, of Bournemouth, Mr Timothy Lewis, of Snape, Suffolk, and Mr Ton Lathower, of Amsterdam. The rescue was the second in 18 months.

Yesterday the future of Radio Caroline was not known. The prospects of salvaging the Mi Amigo, whose owners are in Amsterdam, were being investigated.



The top of the Mi Amigo's 100ft radio mast jutting forlornly above the waves marks the grave of Radio Caroline on a Thames sandbank after 16 years of pop piracy.



THE GUARDIAN Friday March 21 1980

# Caroline, last of the pop pirates sinks into silence

Gareth Parry salutes the end of an era as storms succeed

where Parliament failed in scuttling the pop pirates

RADIO Caroline, the first and last of the big pop pirates of the airwaves gurgled into silence yesterday 13 miles off Clacton-on-Sea. The ship *Mi Amigo*, from which Caroline operated, was scuppered by gales, having defied for 13 years the Marine Broadcasting (Offences) Act laid to defend the BBC monopoly.

The four-man crew of disc jockey/engineers played their signature-tune Caroline, by the Fortunes, packed the ship's canary, Wilson II, in a box (Mr Wilson's Government brought in the 1967 Act), and boarded the Sheerness lifeboat.

The three Britons and one Dutchman, met by the Kent Constabulary when they

reached land for the first time in two months, were politely asked to help police inquiries. They were questioned for two and a quarter hours and police said later that the four would be reported for illegal broadcasting.

The 274-ton *Mi Amigo* snapped her moorings 20 miles off Frinton, Essex, during Wednesday night and was taking in water. She radioed her distress to the lifeboatmen who stood by her most of the night and finally took the crew off just after midnight. The ship sank in 25 feet of water on a sandbank, overwhelmed by the waves. Only her mast and superstructure were visible yesterday.

Kent police named the crew as Nigel Latko, aged 30,

of Gladdis Road, Bourne-mouth; Timothy Lewis, aged 27, of Priory Lane, Snape, Suffolk; Nigel Tibbles, aged 23, of King George's Close, Rayleigh, Essex, and Ton Lathouwer, aged 21, of Oppenheim Straat, Amsterdam.

Mr Latko, known as Stevie Gordon to the estimated 500,000 regular east coast and east London listeners, said yesterday: "We put out taped programmes throughout the evening because we were too busy running around trying to save the ship from sinking. At midnight we put on the Caroline theme and I came on air and said that because the ship was taking in water, we would have to leave. But we hope to be back soon."

"We have several Amer-

ican advertisers who have booked time to broadcast religious programmes. One of them has already expressed interest in funding a new ship."

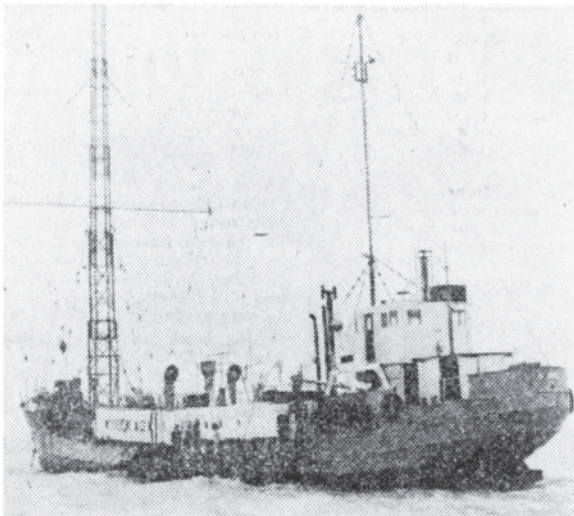
Mr Tibbles, better known as disc jockey Nick Richards, said: "The weather was terrible and water was coming in everywhere. We tried to pump her out but mountainous waves were crashing over the ship."

At the height of the station's popularity opinion polls indicated a listenership of 5 million. But just over a year ago the *Mi Amigo* suffered one of her many encounters with winter gales and the power had to be reduced from 50 to 10 kilowatts, drastically reducing the strength and range of the signal.

Since Radio Caroline began broadcasting pop music 16 years ago the crew have twice been rescued by lifeboat. The station has been prosecuted and fined on numerous occasions under the Marine Broadcasting (Offences) Act.

The Act's stern legislation also produced regular fines for such offences as selling Caroline T-shirts and lapel buttons. Last year magistrates in Southend fined one man £150 for taking letters and newspapers to the lonely crew, who were rowed out for one or two month stints and paid by the Caroline organisation from Rosas, near Gerona, in Spain.

The *Mi Amigo*, Radio Carolines base 13 miles off the Essex coast.





# One more time for Caroline

RADIO listeners in Southern England who explore the airwaves around noon today may find John Lennon's *Imagine* cutting through the static on 310 metres. On the other hand, maybe they won't.

*Imagine* is scheduled to be the first track of a test broadcast by Radio Caroline, the successor to the celebrated pirate ship which in the Sixties and Seventies gave headaches to the Home Office and pleasure to millions of listeners who revelled in its illegal broadcasts of round-the-clock music.

Huge waves dashed Caroline's original vessel against the Essex shoreline in 1980. Since then, financial and legal troubles have stopped the station from re-surfacing. And many competitors predict that they are far from over.

Nevertheless, the station's founder, an unsinkable Irish optimist named Ronan O'Rahilly, has anchored a replacement vessel 20 miles off Margate. It is a sturdy Icelandic trawler, renamed MV *Imagine*, worth some £1.5 million. O'Rahilly thinks John Lennon was Britain's only true rocker.

Before he could re-float Caroline, O'Rahilly first had to repel a take-over bid from his ship by some American former backers. His vessel was impounded by Spanish authorities for two years while legal battles raged in the United States, Canada, and Europe between O'Rahilly and his ex-partners. O'Rahilly even received threatening telephone calls, but, finally, he raised enough cash to have MV *Imagine* released.

John Leonard, the New York lawyer for Caroline Communications, says: "It was a classic saga of idealism versus greed. For once, the good guys won."

O'Rahilly had wanted to broadcast Caroline from New York by satellite, bouncing the beam down to Britain via a relay ship in the Channel. Instead, he had to settle for broadcasts straight from the MV *Imagine*, using its 300ft radio mast, the largest of its kind in the world.

O'Rahilly claims that Caroline will win over listeners from competitors Capital Radio and the BBC's Radio One. "That kind of radio is so computerised that you feel the musicians are appealing to computers instead of people," he says. Once Caroline sails on to the airwaves, O'Rahilly intends to broadcast also on shortwave and on AM in stereo.

O'Rahilly insists that Radio Caroline is perfectly legal, but he cannot resist firing a broadside at his former Home Office adversaries. He has timed Radio Caroline's comeback to coincide with the anniversary of the Marine Broadcasting Offences Act 1967, which managed to kill off all the offshore radio pirates but O'Rahilly. The law tries to starve out the pirates by making it illegal for anyone in Britain to assist them with food, supplies, or funds - including advertising. So this time O'Rahilly has simply decided to supply Caroline from Spain, one of the few European countries to permit offshore broadcasting.

O'Rahilly was a sprightly



The Sixties' O'Rahilly and his original Caroline

freckle-face of 24 when he launched Caroline in 1964 against odds he claimed were "a thousand to one." Today he still has freckles, but his long hair is whiter than Captain Ahab's. Sitting at a restaurant table, in a crisp summer sports jacket, he looks like a respectable businessman. Then he stands, and you see he is wearing old blue jeans.

His own musical tastes are grooved into the Sixties and early Seventies. But Radio Caroline (named after the daughter of the late President, whom O'Rahilly admires even more than Lennon) will play album tracks from the latest rock bands in long, uninterrupted doses. Tired of babbling disc jockeys, O'Rahilly has hired a singing DJ named Bertie: "He can't be any worse."

For a rock entrepreneur, O'Rahilly has a strange aversion to publicity. In recent years, he has become a recluse. He has no office, and refuses to have a telephone in his Chelsea flat. Business associates and friends reach him at his favourite restaurants.

As well as privateering, O'Rahilly has directed several films. His obsession, though, has always been Radio Caroline. "Only Fidel Castro and the Queen have been around longer," he says.

The fun about Caroline in the early Sixties was that it established a thrilling conspiracy between the lonely teenage listener and the seasick buccaneers of the airwaves. Pop songs acquired the urgency of a ship's distress calls.

But the new Caroline must compete with at least 50 land-based pirate radio stations, which beam out programmes on everything from reggae to music hall melodies. One station, Radio Sovereign, based in Twickenham, had even planned to expand into North Sea broadcasting by buying its own pirate ship. Before a millionaire backer pulled out of the

venture, Radio Sovereign's owner, John Kenning, had signed a deal with Philip Morris, the American tobacco conglomerate, worth £2 million in advertising revenue.

Radio Caroline's rivals claim that O'Rahilly may not have netted enough advertising to keep his ship afloat for long. The major American and Canadian advertisers, who originally wanted to cash in on its comeback, lost interest once the new vessel was docked by O'Rahilly's financial tussles.

But help came, from a Los Angeles-based DJ named "Wolf-man" Jack, who starred in the film *American Graffiti*. "Wolf-man's" manager, Don Kelly, agreed to help O'Rahilly with promotion and advertising. Several large multinational firms, O'Rahilly insists, have signed up, enticed by Radio Caroline's ability to reach 8.5 million listeners in Britain, and on the continent.

One of those listeners, tuning in hopefully today, will be Buster Pearson, a 40-year-old haemophiliac. Cloistered in his home in South Benfleet, Essex, Radio Caroline and its fan magazine were his only contact with the outside world. Now, however, Pearson is well enough to be flown in a small aircraft to see the new Radio Caroline. On the way, the plane passed over the wreck of the station's vessel. "The mast was sticking out the water like a hand," recalls Pearson. "It seemed to be waving good luck."

**Tim McGirk**

## Pirate king returns to the radio waves

THE PIRATE radio station Radio Caroline is due to be launched again this weekend.

Its operator, Ronan O'Rahilly, aged 47, hopes to make the comeback from a converted Icelandic trawler anchored in international waters 20 miles off Margate.

Equipped with a new 15,000-watt transmitter and a 300-foot aerial claimed to be the highest ship's antenna ever constructed, Radio Caroline's diet of non-stop music and advertising should be heard clearly in London and the Home Counties on 319 metres medium wave (930kHz).

The Department of Trade and industry's radio regula-

tory division confirmed yesterday that test transmissions from Radio Caroline had been picked up last weekend. The Department spokesman said that the pirate's radio wavelength was now being continuously monitored.

The heyday of off-shore radio ended in the late sixties with the passing of the Marine Broadcasting Offences Act in 1967. Under the Act it became illegal to supply, repair, install or advertise with pirate broadcasters transmitting from international waters.

How the Government will react to this challenge on the airwaves is not clear, though the Trade Department still

has the jamming transmitter it used against the pirates — including Radio Caroline — before the law was passed. This time the ship will avoid problems by being supplied from Spain.

Anyone in Britain who tunes into the Radio Caroline could fall foul of the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 which only permits the reception of authorised transmission. Offenders risk a £400 fine or three months' imprisonment.

But the Department of Trade's spokesman admitted: "It would be extremely difficult for us to police this or enforce the law on this aspect, so listeners would be

unlikely to be prosecuted for doing so".

One of the Government's complaints in the sixties against the pirates was of interference with other radio transmissions. If Radio Caroline's transmitter becomes slightly mistuned while broadcasting on her new wavelength ships in the vicinity could well suffer interference in trying to make ship to shore radio telephone contact via British Telecom coast stations.

The nearest BBC station serving the locality is Radio Kent, with its transmitters in Chatham transmitting on 290 metres (1035 kHz).

## Imagine, Caroline's back!

RADIO CAROLINE, a floating shrine to one man's dream, tossed defiantly on the North Sea yesterday and prepared to level a broadside of music at Britain's broadcasting industry.

Exactly 16 years after Harold Wilson's Labour Government declared it an outlaw, the pop pirate which smashed the BBC radio monopoly and revolutionised the airwaves is back.

### Signal

And for Ronan O'Rahilly, the man who launched Radio Caroline in 1964, the dream is about to become reality again as the station prepares to spin its first discs after a silence of more than three years.

The Daily Mail was the first visitor to the ship

which will ride out its exile off the Essex coast. On board, DJs and crew were working feverishly to get ready for the big switch-on next week sending out an immense signal that will cover almost all of the UK and much of Western Europe on 319 metres medium wave.

Senior disc jockey Andy Archer, a Caroline veteran who recently rejoined the ship said: "This station was innovative in the Sixties and the Seventies. Now it is our job to see it sets the pace in the Eighties."

It has taken Ronan and his team more than three years to revive the station that put the swing in the Sixties. Radio Caroline transmitted from aboard the 274-ton *Mi Amigo*, which foundered in a gale in 1980.

Now with U.S. backing to the tune of over £1 million, Ronan has converted the 978-ton former Icelandic trawler *Ross Revenge* into the new station and renamed it *Imagine* as a tribute to John Lennon.

While all the crew aboard are old sea-hands the disc jockeys are mainly new recruits to radio. But they all share the hope that they may one day become household names like the buccaners before them.

### Magic

DJ Dixie Pearl, a 26-year-old West Indian, said: "It has to be the most exciting thing ever to work for Radio Caroline. Everyone knows what it has done before, and I can hardly believe I have got my chance to get in at this new beginning."

And Andy Archer echoed the team's feelings: "There is a special magic about working on Radio Caroline. It has a romance, a mystique, all of its own which could never be captured by any other station."