

CAROLINE TV

Extract from **Offshore Radio** by Gerry Bishop (Iceni Enterprises, 1975):

Transmissions were due to start at 6.00pm on 1st July 1970 on Channel 68 from a Super Constellation aircraft circling the North Sea at 20,000 feet. More than £1,000,000 were claimed to have been put into the project, and £650,000 of advertising booked. A champagne party was held in London to launch the new station, but when the time came for transmission to start, those waiting saw only a blank screen. There is doubt if the plane did take off, but it should be pointed out that it is possible to transmit from the air: the US forces in Vietnam received TV programmes via this method.

Contradicting this, Chapman Pincher, writing in the **Daily (or Sunday) Express**, wrote that Caroline TV had indeed been picked up on the Isle of Man. Apparently the plane flew in a figure-of-eight loop.

And now a quote from **25 years Radio Caroline Memories** edited by Hans Knot.

It was in December 1968 that we saw a most amazing story in the Daily Mirror: "Caroline organisation TV programmes from an airplane. Uncensored programmes will be transmitted from a Super Constellation flying across Great Britain and Ireland. From his London-based office Caroline director O'Rahilly declared that the plans will become reality in early 1969. There will be a possibility that programming will be in colour, using the 625 lines system. Total starting costs for this Caroline TV project should run to about £40 million." Two transmitters had been ordered and there had also been some meetings with future backers and advertisers. Advertising agencies in the USA and Canada would arrange international advertising for the project.

Ronan: "Already we've decided which airfield will be used but I'm still not allowed to say in which country it is situated. The director of this airfield doesn't want any publicity until broadcasting has started. There are no technical difficulties at all for transmitting TV programmes from an airplane. The Americans already proved that Constellations can stay in the air for 18 hours non-stop and the programmes can be

received by all TV owners in Great Britain and Ireland. Caroline will transmit everything that the viewer wants to see and there will be no censorship from our side. This we have already proved with Radio Caroline. Of course this will not mean that we will show so-called Blue Movies. I know that, for instance, the Irish people are afraid of hearing the word sex, but that is not what we mean by free of censorship. We shall buy our programmes all over the world but shall also transmit our own productions."

In the **Avro Bode**, the weekly magazine of the broadcasting organisation AVRO in Hilversum (Netherlands), O'Rahilly stated the organisation did a lot of research before going to the press with the Caroline TV plans. "Our lawyers had a good look at all the problems we could get but gave us a go-ahead for the project. We're outside territorial waters, we will not interfere with the normal aviation due to the fact we will be flying in higher regions and we will also not interfere with other television transmitters in Europe. On the subject of the channels we will use, I can't give any answer yet!"

In the first months of 1969 ... in the House of Lords questions were asked about the plans of radio Caroline to go on the air with a TV transmitter. GPO minister Stonehouse declared that the realisation of such a project was technically no problem at all but he also stated that he would try everything possible to prevent it. He had asked the technical department of the BBC about interference problems and they said to him that the Caroline TV programmes would cause a lot of interference to BBC and ITV programmes. Meanwhile the owners of Pye Electronics Ltd., a transmitter company, refused to deliver a transmitter to the Caroline organisation. Ronan O'Rahilly then went to the States to order the same kind of transmitter. At the end of June 1969 Ronan again visited Holland and was interviewed by a journalist of **de Telegraaf**.

"In Amsterdam we will have our head office and already five big international companies have bought airtime on CTV. Mainly the more serious pop programmes will be aired, we have bought a lot of movies and also we have plans to start a sort of Open University in the future. We need a transmitter of only 10 watts to reach a radius of 400 kilometres. In the future we would like to have a ground-based studio from where we could transmit the programming to the Constellation and from there back to the audience."

A spokesman for the Dutch government reacted on the plans and said that it wasn't possible to stop the project in Holland for they were not infringing any law. Of course, if CTV did cause interference to Dutch TV, then the organisation would be in trouble. The Dutch GPO (PTT) would keep an eye on the possibility of interference, the spokesman stated. In the Sunday Telegraph of July 31st 1969 you could read that Simon Dee, one of the first deejays for the Caroline project, way back in 1964, was approached by O'Rahilly to work for Caroline TV. Simon left Caroline after serious problems with the director.

Ronan: "We had a big disagreement, but Simon and I parted as friends. He is a very good presenter and as he was the first voice ever to be heard on Radio Caroline, I would love to have him as the first announcer on Caroline TV." Simon himself took the offer very seriously and was also very flattered. In the meantime Ronan had other ideas about the head office for he stated that this would be in New York, with other offices in Amsterdam, Switzerland and in the Bahamas - one of the co-backers of CTV lived in the Bahamas.

The whole Caroline TV project never became reality and I personally think that Ronan was only seeking publicity for his TV project, so he could work in silence towards the return of his radio station Caroline.

Here are a couple of newspaper clippings of the time, the dates and papers unfortunately not identified.

PIRATE TV IS STILL PIE IN THE SKY

Ronan O'Rahilly is unmoved by suggestions that his flying pirate TV station will never get off the ground. He is even amused by the widely-held doubts that his test flight ever took place. Or that he really does have wings on which to waft his illegal transmitter within broadcasting distance of Britain.

He insists he has a plane - but will not say what kind let alone where it is - and that it flew and put out a signal in July. "The technicians goofed then," he says, "I will not make the mistake of announcing the programmes until everything is working perfectly. If you do not believe that the plane exists, remember the Radio Caroline ship. That had an enormous aerial and was within a hundred miles of Britain. Yet we kept it hidden for weeks until the day we began broadcasting. I can't say where the plane is because the British government could exert pressure and maybe stop the project."

O'Rahilly has spent a lot of time in America recently. he claims to have totted up a million dollars' worth of advertising for Caroline TV if it ever takes off. [*Probably Daily Express, definitely 1970*]

FACTS

FACT: Caroline TV will be housed in two lavishly-decorated Constellation Super G aircraft. One has already been fitted out by American Naval experts (TV from aircraft has been tried with great success by America for the troops in Vietnam).

FACT: Caroline TV will have three complete air crews, one in the air, one ready to take over and a third on standby.

FACT: Caroline TV will be broadcast in colour on one of the nine available UHF (625 line) channels. It will be received by upwards of 75 per cent of the British Isles. Broadcasting hours will be 6 pm - midnight five nights a week, 6 pm - 2 am two nights a week. Daily pop show from 6 - 8 pm; 60-minute "chat" show to be titled "Out of Your Mind", also daily. Other programmes: feature films, documentaries, series, cartoons, home movies and news bulletins.

FACT: Each Caroline TV aircraft will house a small studio for news broadcasts and possibly live interviews.

FACT: The majority of Caroline TV viewers will need make no adjustment to their TV sets.