

The Cuban Missile Crisis

October 1962

1962 was a big year for Joan and me. I had gone home for a week vacation from Radio College of Canada, Toronto and she and I were married on September 7, 1961. Joan came back to Toronto with me via train. I had rented a small apartment near the New Mount Sinai Hospital and Joan had no trouble in getting a position on the nursing staff. The nurses on staff used to tease her for being the youngest nurse. I am ten months older than Joan. I had to study very hard and I would try and teach Joan what I had learned each day. It sure helped me pass the federal government examination and I received my federal radio licence in February 1962. Joan's father and my brother came up from Nova Scotia for the drive and drove us home. I was fortunate to obtain the position as Radio Officer in the square rigged sailing vessel BOUNTY. This vessel had been built in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, the first time a vessel was built simply to make a motion picture. BOUNTY spent 1961 filming the movie "Mutiny on the Bounty" around Tahiti. In October 1961 BOUNTY went alongside the Southwind Marina at Long Beach, California having finished the movie, paid the crew off and sent them home. In the spring of 1962 they decided to send BOUNTY on a publicity cruise to advertise this movie. They hired a crew for this publicity cruise and I was selected as the ship's radio officer. The rest of the crew came from Nova Scotia and many had been part of the crew during the filming, including the Captain.

We were flown from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Los Angeles, California to rejoin the ship on May 2nd. The first time I had flown in a jet aircraft. We flew in a Boeing 707 from Chicago to Los Angeles. We spent most of May getting BOUNTY ready for sea. We spent about five days visiting each port and visited Vancouver, Victoria, British Columbia, Seattle, Washington, San Francisco, California, Balboa, Panama Canal, New Orleans, Louisiana, Miami, Florida and Boston Massachusetts. From Boston we went direct to Calais, France, London, England and Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Canary Islands. This was the old sailing route, the North Atlantic going over and back along the southern route.

We radio officers worked two hours on, two hours off making up an eight hour day in two hour sections. We sailed from the Canary Islands to New York City for the premier of the movie on November 6th, 1962. I finished my last two hour shift at 10PM as we passed close to Cuba. It was rather warm and I went up on deck for some fresh air and visit with most of the crew. It is beautiful at night in that country. There are so many stars that one feels like they could reach up and get an armful. My eyes had not adjusted to the dark when I reached the upper deck. One of the seamen, Bob Savage was lying on the deck near the head of the ladder. Bob said "things are getting back to

normal Sparks". I simply said "how's that Bob"? He said "my radio is starting to speak English again." He was starting to hear the radio stations in the southern United States.

I do not believe I found a spot to sit and chat when all of a sudden it was instant daylight and a few seconds later some hot shot air engineer red lined four large aircraft engines. It is a wonder BOUNTY did not sail out from under some of us when we jumped. I had BOUNTY's signal lamp mounted on the rail on that side. I tried to practice Morse on the light with each ship we met. I think the aircraft got as big a shock as we did. You could almost hear them say "has that thing been out here two hundred years"? I grabbed the signal lamp and flashed BOUNTY real slow to the wheelhouse of the aircraft. The aircraft left its landing lights on and did a real slow circle. There were no hand held radios, very high frequency radios and the like back then. Strictly Morse although we had a small boat radio telephone but it was so poor a good megaphone was better. I transmitted BOUNTY twice real slow as the aircraft did two complete circles around us. Then I got mad as hell because no one stuck a signal lamp in the window of the aircraft and had a chat with me. By this time the Captain wanted to know what was going on.

Right after the aircraft left I ran to the radio room. There was nothing on 500 kilohertz the distress and calling frequency so I swung up to 512 kilohertz a frequency we used as an intercom between radio rooms. I must have arrived when two British ships started to chat. One was outbound with motor cars and was bringing home a cargo of sugar. The other was loaded with Russian equipment and had stopped waiting for orders. The British flag was one of the biggest flags of convenience at sea. This is all I had and passed it on to the others.

We did not learn what was going on until we arrived at New York City. It was as close as I want to get to World War III. John Boileau describes this best in his book "Halifax and the Royal Canadian Navy". Both the Canadian and United States Navy were on full alert. The Canadian Navy had everything they owned at sea and my old squadron the 9th was stationed on the Grand Banks. I had been a Radioman Special Rating and my former shipmates told me they had been keeping a close eye on the Russian Submarines and apparently President Kennedy phoned and told Nikita Khrushchev exactly where each of his submarines were and if he did not get out of Cuba those submarines would not be home for supper. Russia backed down then and thank God. The naval ratings were more scared than we were because they knew how close it was to war.

After the premier of the movie we sailed BOUNTY around to Jacobson's Shipyard in Oyster Bay, New York and left her there. We were paid off and flown home on December 5th, 1962 a very memorable year.

S. G. "Spud" Roscoe VE1BC

Radio Officer

M/S BOUNTY/VYFM

Thanks to the Sound Supervisor at MGM Franklyn Milton W6BZN he arranged a Collins KWM-1 for me and it was assigned VE0MO in BOUNTY. We made a lot of contacts with it mostly on 20-meters.

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