

Sea silences original pirate radio station

By Craig Seton

Radio Caroline, the original pirate radio ship, sank off the Essex coast yesterday, silenced by the heavy seas that were the only serious threat to its existence since it was outlawed by the British and Dutch governments in the late 1960s.

The station's ship, the MV Mi Amigo, an aging Dutch coaster, was overwhelmed by waves 13 miles off the coast in the early morning shortly after a lifeboat had rescued its crew of four, including two British disc jockeys.

The Mi Amigo had been in difficulty all night after breaking away from her mooring near Southend in a gale and drifting into a sandbank.

The four were taken by lifeboat to Sheerness where, after being treated to tea and warmth at the police station they were released. They were told, however, that they would be reported to the Director of Public Prosecutions under the Marine Broadcasting (Offences) Act 1967, the legislation originally intended to silence Caroline and other pirate stations.

None of the crew was injured. They were named as Nigel Latko, of Bournemouth, Timothy Lewis of Snape, Suffolk, Nigel Tibbles of Rayleigh, Essex and Ton Lathoower from Amsterdam.

Mr Tibbles said after the rescue that those on board had worked the pumps until coastguards insisted they left the ship. After they left a big wave lifted the ship and she sunk to the bottom quickly in 25ft of water.

Mr Charles Bowry, coxwain of the lifeboat, said: "The operation to get the crew off took 12 hours. It was the hairiest rescue I have ever done."

Caroline's owners and backers in Spain and Holland indicated yesterday that broadcasts would be resumed as soon as possible, probably in a new vessel, to serve its estimated 500,000 listeners in Britain and on the Continent.

Caroline's contribution to modern pop culture is well established. The station began broadcasting at Easter, 1964, and for many years, stationed off the British coast, attracted an audience of millions listening to a 24-hour output of pop music.

The station's popularity aroused the BBC to establish Radio One, its own pop music station, to cater for the new, young audience. With other legally-established commercial pop stations, it gradually and substantially eroded Radio Caroline's audience.

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