

A FORTNIGHT WITH ROBIN HOOD

by

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Memory, which acts to preserve and freeze indelible moments in our lives, is a powerful stimulant. Today, some four decades after the event, I can physically recall how tired I was the first time I met Robin Hood. I was a serving career officer on a U.S. Navy cruiser stationed in the Mediterranean. The ship had just completed a strenuous three weeks of joint naval maneuvers with the Italian Navy. As one of only five qualified Officer's of the Deck at sea it meant that I had very little rest. Now we were finally in port for a well deserved respite and time to recharge personal batteries.

The ship was lying at anchor off the port of Palmas de Mallorca in the Balearic Islands and rolling lightly to a gentle swell. All about me I could hear the normal activities of the crew as they conducted fresh water wash-downs of the topsides, paint chipping, stores loading, machinery running, etc. I was taking the opportunity to relax, drink some coffee, and catch up on paperwork when through the other sounds I could discern my roommate's voice calling my name as he was making his way down the passageway outside. Suddenly, the cabin door burst open to reveal Bill out of breath, smiling from ear to ear, and framed by the doorway making an entrance that could be a carbon copy of a Kramer entrance on the Seinfeld show--except that this was 1959.

I looked up to see the eyes of the cat that had just swallowed the canary. In quick order I was told to change into civilian clothes and then we were going ashore so Bill could introduce me to his "new friend". This was not so much a request as it was an order. There was no thought or consideration as to what I might be engaged in at the moment but it was clear that it would have made little difference. Bill was as excited as a kid who had just been told he could go to Disney Land.

My roommate was the definition of the Renaissance Man and it was probably for that reason he was assigned the job of Public Affairs Officer for the command as one of his many collateral duties. Whenever the ship would arrive in port he was normally the first man over the side to make an exploratory visit and meet the local populace so that he could act as an effective bridge between the Navy and the people who lived in the port. Invariably, he would readily make friends within the span of a few hours and later these friends would show us their town over the course of the next several days as only a local person could.

"Well," I began to muse. "I doubt that the local mayor could cause such excitement so it must be Friar Tuck." To this day I have no idea why I said that but the response sent me reeling.

"No, not Friar Tuck, but how about Robin Hood? I just spent an hour with Errol Flynn and he wants to meet you right away." Bill wore a smile from ear to ear and without a doubt he was very pleased with himself. I must admit that this last pronouncement definitely got my attention, he knew the hook was in and I had good reason not to doubt his word. Several weeks prior to this event, while the ship was in Rhodes, we had gone through a scene similar to this when Bill casually invited me to lunch at the local hotel, a world renown sun drenched edifice, all in pink. At lunch I was first introduced to our lunch partners, Mitzi Gaynor and Yul Brynner, who just happened to be in Rhodes making a film. Not only did Bill get us a luncheon date but he managed to persuade both stars to return to the ship with us after lunch for a visit, much to the delight of the crew.

As the liberty boat made its way to shore, I remembered that Bill had mentioned that Errol Flynn particularly wanted to meet with me. Aside from being one of a legion of Errol Flynn fans and having gone to see most of his movies, I am an absolute unknown to the likes of Errol Flynn or any other movie star. My curiosity was piqued and so I had to ask why anyone in their right mind would want to meet with me, especially Robin Hood.

After a couple of chuckles Bill put his hand on my shoulder and solemnly intoned, "Because my friend, it seems that you are the man of the hour. While I was talking to Errol (already an old and dear friend), he informed me that he wanted to take his boat, the *Zaca*, out for a sail but his captain had just quit after a quarrel. The *Zaca* is a U.S. registry vessel and he needs a captain with a USCG license."

At that point my roommate suddenly wore an expression of great apprehension as if he were terrified of the next words he would hear. "You still have that 100 ton and under license don't you?"

So that was it, I thought. Who knows what kind of deal this crazy Irishman struck with that other crazy who was waiting in the bar. For all I knew I was going to become an indentured servant or worse. The thought of what I was about to face did not make me a happy camper. As I was weighing the possible answers from a simple yes or no to maybe Bill added, almost as an afterthought, that I was to be paid for my services. The thought of being paid for services rendered had marvelous way of assuaging all the nagging doubts.

However, there were still some major bumps in the road ahead. At this moment, awaiting me in one of the hotels in Palmas was my young spouse of one year. Prior to the ship deploying on this cruise a group of fifteen of the younger members of the wardroom decided to have a farewell dinner with our spouses in Boston. The conversation was lively and full of energy but the central theme focused on the upcoming ship's deployment for seven months to the Mediterranean and how each person planned to cope with the long period of separation. Then, from somewhere in the bowels of that amorphous crowd came the suggestion that it would be fun for the wives to follow the

ship from port to port during the entire length of the deployment. As this thought moved from one to the other it was painted in increasingly brighter colors with all of the fun things that awaited and how great an adventure it would be, until the very idea took on a life of its own. The *Adventure*, as it was now termed, was suddenly transformed into a living breathing thing that demanded everyone's participation. Then in a scene that had to be reminiscent of something from *The Three Musketeers*, the ten couples joined hands to pledge their everlasting commitment to *The Adventure*.

It was a giddy feeling, and as I surveyed the group I realized that none of us had any children yet and there really wasn't anything to tie us down, so why not. In the cold light of morning, however, we all had a sobering reality when starting to compute the cost of *The Adventure* and how to pay for it. As young Naval Officers our enthusiasm was a lot greater than the funds available to support that enthusiasm. Unfortunately, this hard reality caused three of the original members of the group to drop out. Fate stepped in for me at that moment in a fortuitous turn.

Logan airport in Boston was undergoing one of its many expansions at the time and I recalled reading an article in the newspaper that there was a requirement for laying cables from the mainland, as I termed it, under the Charles river and out to the airport. Since I was a qualified deep sea salvage diver I took a gamble and presented my credentials to the company doing the work. They were ecstatic and gave me as much work as my time would allow. The company even offered to employ as many of my shipmates as I could find with the same qualifications. Now there would be enough time for me to build a nice little nest egg before we deployed. As I look back now, my memory of those three months were as being a time when I was totally exhausted but happy as a pig in whatever.

As the liberty boat closed on the shore in Palmas, the big hotels, the buildings and an ancient and imposing cathedral all came into clearer view. Palmas is one of the most beautiful ports that I have ever enjoyed. I can really relish that idea now after a full 24 year career in the Navy but even at that tender age, and having only been in Palmas once before, I felt that it was the jewel in the crown of the Mediterranean.

At this time the ship had completed half of its deployment and the wives had developed a very civilized routine. While the ship was at sea with their husbands they would travel to the next scheduled port of call but while doing so they would take the time to stop and explore all of the quaint towns and people in between. Then the day that the ship would return to port, each of the women would arrange for hotel rooms and then the wives would be at the pier to meet us with exciting stories about what, and who they had seen while we were at sea. It was really a great time and the fun of it all made the time pass swiftly. We were actually going to be sorry to see the deployment end.

If I took on this job, and by now I convinced myself that I was 85% sure that I would, I still had to tell my bride that after being gone for several weeks that I was about to go out again immediately for another two weeks. Then, upon my return I would be heading back to sea immediately on my ship for at least another three weeks. I started to marshal

all of the supporting arguments in my mind. For one thing, my wife had always suffered from a severe case of motion sickness and therefore she would not be a good candidate for a sail in the Mediterranean. Secondly, she had adopted the philosophy that she did not know when, if ever, she would have such an opportunity as this trip to the Mediterranean, therefore, **if** she saw something unique, she bought it. It was a good idea but that philosophy requires money. Despite the fact that I had marshaled a nice little nest egg prior to the cruise, we were spending it faster than I had anticipated, which would make the funds from Errol Flynn welcome indeed. There were a host of reasons contra to me going out but at the moment I didn't even want to entertain a one of them. Besides I reasoned, the position hadn't yet been offered and I hadn't yet decided to accept it **if** it were.

The liberty boat bumped the pier once and we were on our way walking up one of Palmas' s many hills. Palmas has a spacious waterfront roadway called the Paseo Maritima. As one looked down the length of the quay alongside the roadway, you could see hundreds of yachts in varying sizes, states of readiness and enough nationalities to create a reincarnation of the tower of Babel. Each of the ships were in the traditional Mediterranean moor, stem-to-the-pier held off with one or two anchors, depending on the captain's mood and sitting neatly side by side with the next ship. As we steadfastly made our way up the hill the economic life of the city moved by us in the form of automobiles, motorbikes, bicycles, tour buses and scooters. Over our shoulder, now looking down at the harbor below us, there were cruise ships, ferryboats and hydrofoils madly dashing about their daily business but still at the same time life about seemed calm and slow-paced.

We were now walking past the cathedral that stands out so clearly when first watching the headlands come into view, while approaching from the sea. This is an enormous 15th century gothic cathedral that would compare favorably with Chartres or Notre Dame. I am not a fanatic about visiting cathedrals but as an engineer I am most appreciative of good architecture and the many pointed arches and flying buttresses of the cathedral were impressive. Like many of the great cathedrals in Europe, they are more than places of worship, but rather they become the focal point of the town and serve as vital social centers.

Finally, we rounded the corner from the cathedral and at the end of the street there stood a non-descript little bar that was hardly different than many of the others we had passed. It was dark and somewhat gloomy inside but as I adjusted my eyes to the dim light I saw and heard him in the corner at a table surrounded by his court. It was Robin Hood and his merry men. The sight was bit startling. Even allowing for the bad light in the bar, at age fifty the sharp chiseled features that had dazzled audiences around the world were now lost in a sea of bloat. The eyes were no longer crystal clear and piercing as they had been **in so many movies. But there was no mistaking the voice or the mannerisms. It was Errol Flynn in person.**

I had rehearsed in my mind many times on the walk here what I would finally say when I was introduced. I would tell him how much pleasure I always got from watching him on the screen, that I could recite the parts from Robin Hood almost by heart, how I sweated with him in the jungles of Panama in the Sea Hawk or how glad I was to see Captain Blood, alias Dr. Peter Blood best the evils so wrongly heaped upon him by an uncaring English society. Now that the moment was here, I was frozen to the spot. I was ever so grateful when he finally looked up with a warm and open smile.

He had spied us as we came in and waved us over to the table, indicating that we were to take a seat, all in one sweeping motion. We did as we were told and were soon engaged in some very direct conversation. Flynn was the epitome of the trusting, hail fellow, well met type of person, a characteristic that had caused him untold grief during his lifetime and would continue after his untimely death. However, just beneath that veneer was a very sharp and discerning mind. He knew what he wanted and how to get it. This was to be the first of my many surprises as I got to know the man.

After the pleasantries were done Flynn quizzed me on when I got my license, how much time I had at sea, what sailboats I had commanded before, how much blue water sailing I had done, and he even questioned me at length on my qualifications as a ship handler in the Navy. As he questioned me he looked over to Bill who was nodding his assurances and who even intoned to the last question that I was capable of parking a ship on a dime. I would have said a quarter! It was an intense interview and one that left me a little flustered. Finally, after approximately an hour of this type of interrogation he softened, looked at me and broke into a beaming smile. Satisfied with himself he said that the job was mine if I wanted it and it would pay \$1500 for two weeks. I struggled to contain myself and not jump up and shake his hand. That was a lot of money in 1959 but I found enough control to say that I had some questions before I could make a decision. Flynn told me to ask away and with that a round of vodka and tonics magically appeared on the table before us. He had the staff of this place well trained and they knew him as a customer from long standing.

Primarily, I needed a description of the ship, the crew and equipment on board. Were there any peculiarities that I should know about from either the ship or the crew. The answers that I got were a little worrisome. The ship was called the *Zaca* and she was a 110' gaff rigged schooner. That little piece of news sent a slight shiver up my back. One of the first memories that I have of a gaff rigged schooner is the John Alden series of *Malabars*. As a youngster growing up in Brooklyn, New York I happened to have been invited to the New York Yacht Club, for reasons I can no longer recall, when I was about ten years old. The one thing that will always stand out in my mind from that day is a photo of *Malabar X* with foresail, main, main topsail, and fisherman staysail flying. I have never seen a more lovely sight. Years later when I got to actually sail a gaff rigged schooner, I remembered the admonition of Don Street who said, "To take advantage of these virtues a man should have a wife who loves to sail and three big, teen-age sons...." The man definitely knew what he was talking about.

This made the questions about the type of crew even more vital-the response set the hair on my back straight and alarm bells were banging in my head. The crew would be a pick-up crew made up of sailors from Palmas. I looked around at the group at the table and went limp. Unless there were talents hidden here that I couldn't see, I wouldn't sail with this group in a bathtub while wearing a life-vest! The silence was broken by a deep, hearty laugh that I was to hear again many more times.

"No", he said reading my mind. "These are drinking buddies, not sailors. We will pick up a crew from some of the ships down on the quay or you can even invite some of your people from the ship". I felt relieved and gave a quiet sigh. With that Flynn rose to his feet and suggested that we go down to the dock and look over the *Zaca*. Another surprise. I stand six feet but he seemed to tower over me. Flynn was 6'2" and when he stood up to his full height you could still see the strong traces of a proficient boxer and athlete.

With Robin Hood leading the way we moved briskly down the hill, retracing the route we had taken here, and to the Paseo Maritima. Looking closely now at the variety of boats moored to the quay you could see how some were spotless while others were rotting away, damaged or just plain falling apart. These boats ranged across the entire spectrum of sailing rigs from the standard to rigs that clearly had to be forms of convenience known only to the captain of that vessel.

As we strolled I outlined a brief cruise that would follow the Costa Blanca of Spain, which was rife with affordable cruising areas, pristine beaches, exquisite scenery and generally good weather. Some of the places I proposed to visit was Cartagena with its natural harbor, the ancient Carthaginian port of Alicante and some picturesque towns such as Altea. That way we would never have to sail for any long stretches of time and would be in port most evenings but Robin would have none of it. He wanted to sail from one end of the Mediterranean and back. There would be only one stop between Palmas and our return, Port Said in Egypt. The scope of the plan took my breath away. This was an ambitious undertaking for a seasoned crew and everyone familiar with the ship, but for a pick-up crew, on a gaff rigged schooner, that had never worked as a team before, it was just plain foolhardy. We would have to pass through the Straits of Messina, one of the busiest and narrow waterways of the world.

The Mediterranean climate is on the whole extremely pleasant with few storms interrupting the long summer. However, the summer months in the eastern Mediterranean has a strong *Meltemi* which blows steadily from the north that can exceed 40 knots. On a schooner such as *Zaca* it would give you a ride like going downhill, however, it would be a bear on the return trip requiring lots of tacking back and forth and in the Straits of Messina that would not be fun. Besides, even without a chart in front of me, a quick mental calculation based upon prior experience showed the distance to be at least 1800 miles one way and probably more. To get to Port Said and back to Palmas in the two weeks allotted would require *Zaca* to achieve in excess of 300 miles each and every day, a physical impossibility. Besides I had to give myself a safety margin to

allow for the unexpected since I could not afford to miss the sailing of my ship. If I would do such a thing, my career in the Navy would sail with it and I wasn't about to let that happen.

When I explained my problems to Flynn he simply nodded his understanding and said I could set up a sail plan that would keep us in the Western Mediterranean for the whole time. We suddenly stopped walking. I looked up to see the *Zaca* riding quietly to her Med moor at the quay. Her dark hull reflected the sun as the water slapped playfully at her sides. The topsides showed tender care that had been slipping slightly. Lines were flemeshed, sails neatly made up and covered, no loose items on deck, a dinghy secured on the cabin top, and the most exquisite wooden helm I had ever seen. Since there were so many first class marinas in Palmas, I inquired why he would have the *Zaca* at the Paseo Maritima. Flynn told me that he abhorred the phony theatrics of the typical marina where the owners and their vessels seldom left the dock. Whatever reservations or objections I had been harboring about this venture now melted away. I was in love with this lady and I would sail her. Flynn and I shook hands to seal the deal and we walked on board.

As Flynn began the tour he explained to me that the name *Zaca* was supposedly the Samoan word for peace. I learned some years later that there is no Z or C in the Samoan language so the name had no meaning or origin in Samoan. However, the former owner of *Zaca* was one Templeton Crocker who said in an article in *Harper* in 1933 that *Zaca* was an Indian word for peace and I have reason to believe that Templeton was correct. Below decks it was a very comfortable layout. The owner's cabin was spacious and ran the full width of the ship with a queen sized bunk. There were nice dressing and writing areas with ample closet space throughout. When I looked at the head I was surprised to find a full tub and a shower combination. He was years ahead of his time and it was one of Flynn's personal touches that he put in when redoing the ship.

There was a comfortable pilot berth near a well-equipped navigation station, which was where I would reside for the next two weeks, whenever circumstances and time would allow. The salon and galley were open and airy with easy access to the companionway. Forward, there was a single head shared by two staterooms for two persons each. There were extra fold-out berths in the main salon if needed. The joinery throughout showed the skill and care of the craftsmen that usually built custom yachts in the 1930's. Just two more obstacles to clear and we could get underway.

I made my way back to the hotel where my wife was anxiously waiting for me. We went out to the terrace to enjoy a nice lunch under the Mediterranean sun while I told her all that had happened to me since arriving in port. She only interrupted me once and when I had finished my tale we ate in silence for what seemed like an eternity. My salad tasted like I was eating rocks. Finally, she said that maybe it wouldn't be so bad. She would like to go but

knew she would be unhappy and there were plenty of wives, and now the husbands, to keep her company and watch over her in my absence. Besides, there were many wonderful things yet to purchase and the money would be helpful. She then wanted to know how much time we had and I explained that Robin Hood would like to get underway the next morning. Also, I still had to get permission from my captain to take leave in Palmas and that could be an insurmountable hurdle. This was after all the era of the cold war, which always seemed ready to turn hot during those years.

After lunch I took my bride to the *Zaca* where I introduced her to Flynn. I then left my wife in his care, for which I received interminable ribbing from my shipmates, while I went to the ship to apply for leave. When I explained to the skipper why I wanted leave he was graciously obliging, but not before warning me of the hazards of missing movement. Armed with official leave papers, I packed some clothes and returned to *Zaca* where I found my bride and Robin Hood having a marvelous time. He had been his most charming self and she was absolutely enthralled while Flynn was clearly smitten with her. You would think they had known each other for years. Physically, my bride was an exceptionally beautiful woman but she also possessed an inner warmth and genuineness that drew people to her, and she now had Robin Hood hanging on her every word. In turn we both found Flynn to be a delightful and charming human being possessed of a great sense of humor.

That evening was spent loading stores, checking charts, equipment, etc. in preparation for the morning. When I found *Zaca*'s chart inventory lacking I borrowed some extra charts from my ship temporarily. All of us then proceeded to the hotel, where my wife and I were going to stay, for a savory and relaxed dinner. The weather was so pleasant that we dined on the patio, which happened to overlook the Paseo Maritima and offered a good view of the *Zaca* below. The next morning I met my crew for the first time. They were four guys that Flynn had gathered from some of the ships near us by asking if they wanted to go sailing for a few days. It turned out that two of the four were fairly decent sailors but the other two couldn't find their butts with both hands, on a moonlit night with radar, and a ten-man search party helping. It was too late to turn back now but it was certainly going to be interesting.

We proceeded to walk in the anchor and I elected to go out on just a working jib until we were well clear of the harbor and the traffic. It made sense to me to conduct a 'short' sail to shake out the ship and the crew so I set a course west towards the Spanish mainland and the port of Alicante. I had never actually entered this port before but I had seen it many times in my passages on board Navy ships.

Once clear of the harbor I had the main set and substituted the staysail for the working jib. Then I broke out the genny and as the sail was being set you could literally feel the ship thundering beneath your feet. Almost instantaneously *Zaca* had a bone in her teeth as she smashed through each wave splattering a fine layer of spray across the bow. This lady was a thoroughbred and was not to be denied her time at sea. It was clearly a happy time for *Zaca* and she would make the most of it.

At best, gaffs are difficult to hoist because of their mass and in a boat the size of *Zaca* the gaff could actually be heavier than the person trying to hoist it into position. To compound the difficulties on *Zaca* she had few winches, rope halyards instead of wire

and hoops as opposed to tracks. After a full day of this stuff one doesn't need to go to the gym for a workout. When making out the watch list and working assignments I paired one of the experienced seamen with the less experienced hands. This turned out to be a good choice, however, after getting underway there were some sail handling problems forward and I wanted to get up there to supervise but I was on the helm.

Then I received another of my pleasant surprises as a quiet, firm voice behind me said, "I'll take it". I turned to see Flynn behind me and the eyes were sharp and glistening. He sensed the situation and moved in to help. When he took the wheel from me it was clear that he had done this many times before and I soon learned that he was a masterful and knowledgeable seaman. This was Flynn's first and only true love having sailed extensively while growing up in New Zealand. In his younger days he was a member of the coastal patrol, our equivalent of the Coast Guard, for some period of time that I never really understood. Prior to owning the *Zaca* Flynn had a 60 foot boat called the *Sirocco*. He had purchased that boat in Boston and sailed it for many years. As I made my way forward I looked back over my shoulder and I could see a confident, younger, capable and extremely happy mariner manning the helm, checking his wind and holding the given course. Great, I thought, now I have three able bodied seamen on board.

After a few minutes of clarification the problems forward were resolved and we all began to settle into a pleasant underway routine. Flynn asked to be included in the watch rotation and I was only too happy to comply. The first watches were set with the newer sailors taking the day watches under the watchful eye of a rotating cadre from the more seasoned sailors, now including Flynn in the latter group. The trip to Alicante from Palmas is only 200 miles as the crow flies, however, a dog-leg course is necessary because Ibiza, the smallest of the Balearics is in the way of a direct line course. The extra distance would only add a few miles and it would allow us to arrive during mid-day, which suited my plans perfectly.

When I made my way back to the helm, Flynn asked me the plans for the next few days. I told him that after we had arrived in Alicante I planned to have a meeting of all hands to discuss any problems that might have arisen and what we should do to make sure that it didn't happen again. After topping off in Alicante I intended to head straight out to the island of San Pietro, off the southwestern tip of Sardinia. This would be a straight sail of some 500 miles in a relatively quiet area of the Mediterranean. I explained that I did not want to get into a coastal cape-hopping routine because of the active freight traffic that normally follows that route. It would be much easier on all the watch-standers to do long offshore passages in quiet areas. Flynn smiled his approval and easily went about his job on the helm. I had given each of the crew a series of tasks, such as making sure that everything below decks was secure in case an errant *Mistral* should suddenly attack us and sent them off. Then I eased into a cockpit seat near the helm.

Although Robin Hood was physically holding onto the helm, checking his compass and watching the set of his sails with the wind, it was clear that he was some place else far away and I would not intrude on his thoughts. We just sat there together in the cockpit while he steered,

scanning the horizon and allowing the feel of the ship moving through the water to soothe and wash away the cares of being ashore. The silence was broken only once when he briefly announced that he could do this forever. I nodded and he lapsed back into the world of thought and silence. Finally, I excused myself to check on our navigation below decks. I certainly didn't have to watch him--Flynn knew what he was doing. The truth of the matter is that he didn't need me if he just wanted to go out and sail since he was fully capable of handling his own boat. This was the Mediterranean and no one would make note of it if he went out without a licensed captain. But I found out that despite the tales told about him, Flynn was really quite scrupulous about obeying the rules.

I had set a course that would take us approximately 20 miles from the channel between Ibiza and Formentera. Then I would bring Zaca around the southern tip of Formentera. We should reach that imaginary point sometime in the middle of the night from where I would set a new course due west to Alicante. I prepared a set of night orders for the watch giving them information on what lights to expect, their timing sequences, etc. and returned to the cockpit where I placed the night orders under a cushion. When I came back up Flynn gave me a warm welcome and was more animated. He had returned from that far away place. He told me about the times he spent at sea and the good times he had on his old boat the *Sirocco*. One minute he was laughing and the next he was pensive. Then, just as suddenly as he began, he stopped and took on a very pained look, which was enough to have me ask him if he was okay.

"Yeah, I'm okay now but I was just thinking of one night in particular on *Sirocco*". He stopped again like the next thing was so painful to recall that he couldn't even think about it let alone mention it out loud. "We lost Arno over the side one night and never found him no matter how hard we searched". Even now this was still a painful memory for Flynn and he filled up as he told the story that Arno had probably made his way up topside when no one noticed. Then when people were distracted he evidently went over the side and no one heard the noise. Everybody felt terrible about the incident he said and his personal grief was clear. I asked if there were a police report filed because I never remember seeing anything about it in the press. Flynn then roared with laughter and said, "Oh, there was a report alright. That smartass Jimmy Fidler made a nasty remark about it in his newspaper column. One night I ran into him at the Mocambo Club and punched him in the mouth". He thought about it for a minute, the obvious satisfaction radiating all over his face as he recalled the fight. Then in that matter of fact way which was his trademark he said, "By the way, Arno was my pet Schnauzer, but I really loved that dog". I roared with laughter at this newest pronouncement and damn near wet myself. We carried on so much that it brought the rest of the crew up on deck to see what was happening.

Later that evening the watch informed me that the group-occulting light I had been looking for on Formentera had been sighted and confirmed by stop-watch. It seemed that we were all in the cockpit at that time and that no one could sleep. When reasonably past my safety bearings I gave the order to head due west for Alicante. From the moment we cracked on sail leaving Palmas, Zaca had picked up her skirts and was really moving.

This latest sighting meant that we were well ahead of our estimated track and would now arrive in Alicante shortly after 8:00 AM. I made a mental note that if we continued to make this kind of progress that I would put a single reef in the main sail with the working jib just to slow *Zaca* down and keep us comfortably within our sailing area.

True to our planned route Alicante began to come into view soon after the sun came up the next morning. As we drew closer the hotels overlooking the harbor gleamed as the sun reflected off their white sides. Inside the port were magnificent pier facilities and a large number of dockside cranes but for all of its capacity there was something not quite right. Originally, we planned to stop long enough to top off the water tanks and maybe pick up a few vegetables. I figured we could get the vegetables while laying alongside the fueling piers. As we moved alongside the fueling dock I realized what I had missed--there was no activity. We didn't see people moving about, or vehicles or ships being unloaded. I thought that maybe we had come in during a siesta break but that wouldn't explain the total lack of other commerce. The whole thing reminded me of a scene from the movie *On The Beach*, where a major portion of the earth's surface is made unlivable by an atomic war between the super powers. A submarine is sent to investigate a possible source of life in San Francisco and as the sub pulls into San Francisco bay you see all of the city in its glory rising out of the headlands but nothing is moving and there are no people. Alicante was eerie and I couldn't wait to get back underway.

From Alicante we headed almost due east for the island of San Pietro off the coast of Sardinia. Life on board soon settled into a monotonous routine of watches and although we didn't know it at the time, we were to be blessed with pleasant weather for the entire cruise, for which I am eternally grateful. During this passage, Flynn and I would sit in the cockpit during his watch or sometimes in his stateroom and just chat about anything that came into his mind. I rarely probed, even though I wanted to, and just let him talk about whatever subject he wanted to or nothing at all if that is what pleased him. Silence never bothered me as I was never afraid to be alone with my private thoughts. One time when we were sitting in his stateroom enjoying a vodka and soda I did remark on how beautiful the pictures of his children were. There was one boy and three girls in photos around his desk.

Flynn expressed great love for his children and was very proud of them and I have no doubt his genuineness. His great pride was for his son Sean, who was the first born and was a product of the marriage to Lily Damita. Years later I read an article about Sean, who had become a photo-journalist, and was lost with a group of other journalists while covering the war in Cambodia. I remember the photos that appeared in the newspapers at the time and thinking how much more handsome Sean was than his father. The thought that crossed my mind at the time was that I was glad Errol did not live to suffer the tragedy of that loss. But right now that was all in some distant future, and sitting there on *Zaca* enjoying a vodka in Flynn's stateroom was strictly a time of reflection and pride.

It was during one of these many sessions that I noticed what appeared to be a manuscript in the corner of his desk. In answer to my query I was informed that this was the original

manuscript of his book, *My Wicked, Wicked Ways*, which was done in collaboration with Earl Conrad. I came to discover that Flynn had always aspired to be a writer, even as early as 1931 when his first articles began to appear in the Australian newspapers. It was during dinner, which was taken in the cockpit more often than the salon, that Flynn would generally open up after a drink and regale us with stories from his memorable life. These were not just blurred memories of great times past but remembrances replete in every detail that included the good as well as the bad. In his lifetime Flynn did all those things that other men can only dream of, he was wild, reckless but without question he was an original.

It was during one of these dinners that he told about the time he got bona-fide reporter credentials from Photoplay and was off to Spain to cover the war in 1937. WWII was also beginning to rear its ugly head at that time and he was going to do a story from the French point of view. When he said it I understood his motivations, because in a previous private conversation in his stateroom he told me that his mother, who was a tremendous influence in his life, had spent most of her life in Paris. Flynn worked hard at perfecting his skills as a writer. He explained how he used to sit at his desk in the den of his home at Mulholland in Laurel Canyon and would write stories and novels while looking out over his pool. The house in Mulholland was built from scratch after his divorce from Lily Damita and when he spoke of it he had that same reverence and fondness in his voice as he did when describing any of the ships he had ever owned.

The weather continued to be idyllic and soon we were making our approach to Carlo Forte on the island of San Pietro. Carlo Forte was a typical Mediterranean small town on the east side of the island that provided good shelter and places to either drop the anchor or tie up to a long quay. This was not a place on the regular tour for the large yachts that continually ply the Mediterranean, but yet there was an ever changing parade of boats that came and went every day. We decided to take advantage of the empty quay and tied up.

Carlo Forte had the terra cotta and pastel structures with cobblestone streets that remained untouched by traditional cruise ships and pleasure yachts. A pleasant routine soon developed where we would breakfast at the local outdoor cafe, enjoying fresh rolls and coffee with hot milk, while the warm sun beat on your back. The crew was enjoying themselves too and they turned out to be a nice group of young men. Those who were novice sailors were hard working and able pupils. They used to do shopping for fresh foodstuffs in the afternoons and take care of maintenance chores on board in the morning. Their attitude made me very glad that I had said yes to the cruise.

After breakfast Flynn liked to wander through the town viewing the many houses with their balconies and ornamental ironwork, which seemed to abound in Carlo Forte. Sometimes he and I would join the men of the town as they sat on one of the many benches that were placed under the shade trees in the town center. I knew enough Italian for us to communicate on a rudimentary level but it made no difference to the men of Carlo Forte or to Flynn. The local people made us feel welcome and that message was clear to all of us. Flynn was a happy man and he really savored the anonymity of the

moment. Here was one of the most famous faces of the time able to stroll freely wherever he wished without anyone pursuing him. Only once did I notice some of the men motion to him and then begin to chatter excitedly but if they did recognize Robin Hood they never let him know it and continued to respect his anonymity.

Flynn was having such a good time that he elected to remain in Carlo Forte for five days. When we finally got underway again there were only a few days left and he asked me to set a course that kept us at sea until our actual return to Palmas. Considering how lucky we had been with the weather in general, and wind in particular, I thought I would gamble one more time with the steady northwest wind. I set a course that beat up towards Corsica and then at some chosen point I would turn south of Nice and fly down to Palmas. My luck continued to hold and the plan went off as designed.

After we made the turn and started to head south Flynn's mood was noticeably changing and he grew quieter each day. There were no more stories at dinner and he rarely joined in the fun. On what would be our last night at sea I had the helm and was taking a series of sights on the light on Isla del Aire, located on the southeast corner of Menorca, the second largest of the Balearic Islands and directly northeast of the main island of Mallorca. In the morning if all went well we would be back in Palmas. I had the rest of the crew busy with preparations to enter port and they were excited about getting back despite the fact that the cruise was absolutely ideal from start to finish.

The crew was below decks busy in carrying out their assignments while I sat quietly at the helm. In the light of the moon I could see Robin Hood walking from one section of the *Zaca* to another. He would pause here and there while gently stroking different parts of the ship. He was completely oblivious to my presence and frankly I don't think he cared. All at once, in a sudden rush of emotion, it hit me. I was being privy to watching someone say a fond farewell to a loved one and with that realization I filled up and had to turn away. Even today as I write about those events of so long ago I get very filled up.

The next morning we arrived back in Palmas and Med moored in the same spot we had left ten days before. I invited Flynn to join my wife and I for dinner that night ashore and he said that he preferred to spend a quiet evening on board. I didn't press the issue as I thought about the scene from the previous evening. After paying off the crew Flynn thanked me profusely for the time we had spent at sea. He did not say anything about visiting with him in California when we had occasion to be there or even to join him on *Zaca* when my ship returned to Palmas.

My wife and I managed to get a few days together before I had to go back to sea and I think they were made sweeter because of the added separation. We chatted endlessly for days as I told and retold the events of the last two weeks. It seemed like she could listen to it as many times as I cared to tell the story. Some four months later my ship was in port in Cannes where I took my wife to dinner at the rooftop restaurant of the hotel across the street from the Casino in Monte Carlo. This restaurant had sliding roof that could be opened to the stars on a nice evening which was a romantic touch. We engaged our

waiter in conversation and my wife loved to tell the waiter how I had just finished sailing with Errol Flynn some four months earlier and did he know that Errol was actually married in this very room some years ago? The waiter then asked if I had seen the latest newspapers and when I said no, he informed me that Robin Hood had just suffered a major heart attack while in Vancouver, Canada and died. I remember feeling as if I had just been slammed in the chest. The world had lost an original and I had lost a real friend.

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