

Review

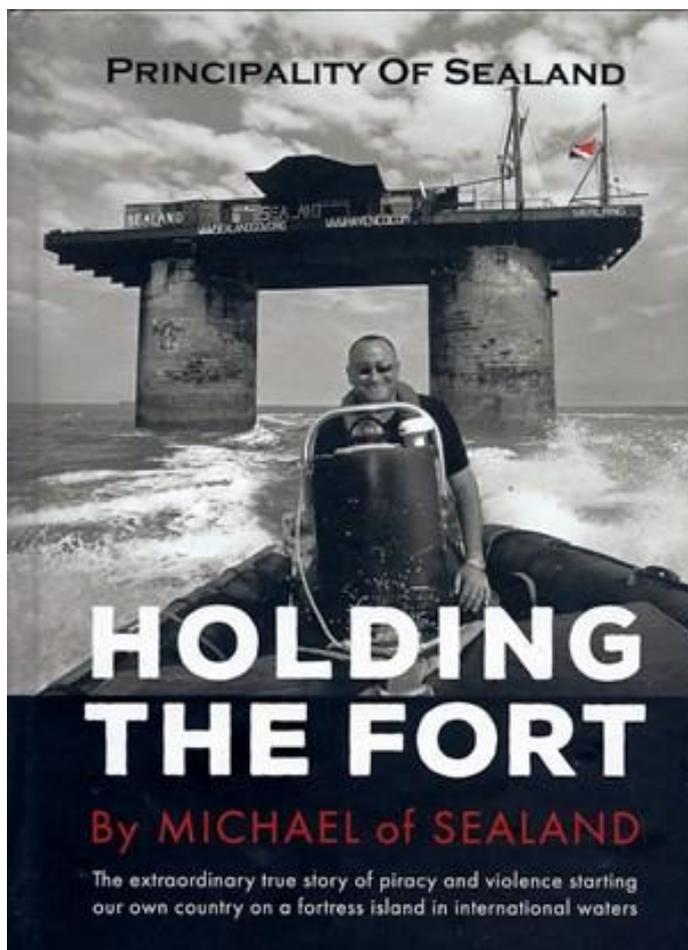
Holding The Fort, the extraordinary true story of piracy and violence starting our own country on a fortress island in international waters

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This book brings the true story about the Principality of Sealand, world's smallest independent country in the world situated in international waters on a 4500-ton Navy Fort. It was originally built during World War II for the defense of The Thames Estuary and which was occupied by the Bates family in 1967 and was headed by Prince Paddy Roy Bates, a title he had given himself. His son Michael

has written the book 'Holding the Fort' and starts with memories to his early childhood, in which it was not always very easy to have a father like his one.

Amazing is the story about what happened in January 1965 - Michael was only a chap of 12 years young - when his old man took him to one of the forts which wasn't occupied since the end of the war. Very detailed he tells what happened that day entering Knock John Fort and sailing on the *Mizzy Gell* to the coast again with a very silent Roy Bates. In his mind were already plans to be involved in the offshore radio soon.

However when climbing for the second time onto the fort people from Radio City were already there and he asked them to leave. Returning for the 3rd time the Knock John was occupied again and it took more than a friendly question to get them off the fort. As a result of 'his reputation as unstoppable nutter', as Michael described his father, Radio Essex on 222 metres started 24 hours a day.

What follows in the book 'Holding The Fort' is a detailed story about the history of the station as Michael remembers it. He describes the time he was himself on the fort during Christmas holiday from boarding school and comes with some excellent exclusives I hadn't heard before, including about Joshua, the ghost on Knock John.

Compared to the far more professional stations like Radio London, Radio Caroline and Radio England, Radio Essex was really run on very low budget. Even for those days the equipment used was very unprofessional and you couldn't say they had a professional studio. Essex, at one stage, had to close down due to the fact Roy Bates was prosecuted for broadcasting without a license as it was proved by the authorities that the Knock John towers were within the three miles limit.

Of course the renaming of the station into Britain's Better Music Station (BBMS) is mentioned. Even now, 50 years on, it's for me a pleasure to listen to the special programs from those two stations, however there are not too much around. As stated Michael Bates his memories are very good and great to read his own findings from that period, including a marvelous story about writing to the GPO about a suspected tapping of the phone at the Bates family house. It was Christmas day 1966 that, due to financial pressure and the continued treat of further fines, Roy Bates decided to end this radio project. Just a few days later the fort was dismantled and equipment brought to Roughs Tower.

Extremely interesting is the chapter in which Michael tells about the defending, with only one other person, the Roughs Tower during the Christmas period 1966. He was only 15 years of age but was spectacular handy. After the government brought in the MOA most stations off the British coast closed down August 14th 1967 - only the Caroline's were still on the air - and again Paddy Roy Bates made the headlines and many people thought that it would only be a short period before we would never hear from him again. But reality was totally different for Roy Bates and his family would make the headlines over and over again during the following decades.

Through these past decades several options have been there to make from the Principality a very good success but also the independent mini-state came into the press in a not too positive way, mostly due to action of others involved. I point for instant at the coup made by Mr. Achenbach who started to provoke in Dutch newspapers that he would soon be the leader of the nation stating: 'Sealand über alles'. Due to a coup one Dutch man, Hans van Loo, who was first with him on the coup tender and later came back to Sealand, after a recoup by the Bates family and friends, when he was taken hostage.

Due to publications in Dutch newspapers we already knew that there were plans for starting a radio station on the Roughs Towers and it

was Van Loo, brother in law of Willem van Kooten, who was first sent out to see what the possibilities and facilities could be for starting a radio station there. The second time he came out to the fort from the harbour of IJmuiden was when he wanted to try to get free his friend Evert Bos, who was imprisoned on Roughs Tower.

In those days I followed the happenings on 'Sealand' very intensely and when being informed on daily basis by radio friends in the UK I decided, when I heard that Van Loo was taken hostage, to inform Bert Voorthuysen journalist at the Dutch Telegraaf in Amsterdam, about the situation. After several days of negotiation Van Loo got his freedom back and was taken back to the UK and flown back with a KLM helicopter to the Netherlands.

Michael Bates describes in his book that he thought Van Loo as one of the intruders working for Achenbach, while instead of that he was sent out by Willem van Kooten to bring in the ideas to start a radiostation. Anyway more ideas starting a radiostation came in the last the nineties of last century, when Spangles Muldoon was involved.

Next to the chapters about the radio projects there are many other chapters of high interest to see what makes 'Holding the Fort' complete. Michael Bates 'of Sealand' tows you, as a reader, into the long life project of his family and keeps your attention sharp till the last pages. The book has also several color as well black and white photographs, from which a lot I hadn't seen before.

I think for everyone interested in radio as well as freedom a must to order, which is possible at <http://www.sealandgov.org/title-pack/holding-the-fort-by-michael-of-sealand>

Hans Knot, October 2015.

