

Nightmare on the



Delbert Smith, wife Janie, and daughter Deborah beam after their ordeal.

An American housewife tells how she, her husband, and daughter lived through one of the most terrifying voyages in modern sea history

By Mrs. JANIE SMITH as told to Bob Driscoll

I AWOKE sometime in the predawn hours on Sunday, Jan. 22, vaguely disturbed by some change aboard the cruise ship *Santa Maria*. In the dim moonlight filtering through the window of our first-class cabin, I could make out the slumbering figures of my husband Del and our seven-year-old daughter Debbie. Reassured, I tried to drift back to sleep.

Since the ship's air-conditioning system had failed outside of La Guaira, Venezuela, our cabin on the leeward or windless side of the ship had been stiflingly hot as we ploughed northward through the Caribbean on the final leg of our 15-day cruise from Lisbon, Portugal, to Port Everglades, Fla. We were less than two days out now, and, as lovely as the cruise had been, we looked forward to a reunion with our families in Johnstown, Pa.

Sleep wouldn't come; I couldn't get over the feeling that something was different. Then I heard a faint rustling noise and noticed that our window curtains were swirling in a freshening breeze. Suddenly, I was aware of the ship's turbines pounding fiercely. The *Santa Maria* was scudding over a choppy ocean at terrific speed!

The breeze must mean we're running into a storm, I thought, and Captain Maia is trying to beat it to port. Satisfied with this explanation and gladdened by the breeze, I fell back to sleep.

Sleep would never have come that morning if I had known the real reason for that welcome breeze. A life-and-death drama had been enacted on the bridge several hours before; a ship's officer we had numbered among our friends was shot to death; another friend, the ship's doctor, was severely wounded; several others in the ship's crew were at that very moment being treated for gunshot wounds; and Capt. Mario Sinoes Maia was under arrest on his own ship. If I had known of the nightmare that was to haunt us for the next 11 days, I would never have been able to sleep.

Still ill-at-ease, we woke early that Sunday morning. Del dressed and said he was going to take a prebreakfast stroll on deck. Debbie hadn't been feeling well and already had had a shot of penicillin for what the doctor thought might be tonsillitis, so I decided to stay with her.

When Del came back, I noticed his grave manner and knew something was wrong. "Don't be scared, honey," he said directly, "but armed men have taken over the ship. Captain Maia is a prisoner. We're all to meet in the lounge at 9 a.m."

It's difficult to describe how I felt then—I'm really not sure myself. I worried mostly about little Debbie.

As the minutes ticked off toward 9 o'clock, my apprehension increased, and just before we left for the meeting, I said firmly: "Debbie is coming with us. I don't know who these pirates are, but from now on she stays with us!"

We joined the other first- and second-class passengers in the first-class lounge. The insurrectionists stood outside glass doors, hands on holstered gun butts. From time to time, I would steal a frightened glance at them, but it didn't appear as if they would molest us.

We Learn What's Happening

At 9:20, a static crackle came over the ship's public-address system. In a moment, a voice began a long haranguing speech, first in Portuguese, then in Spanish. Joan Harborsen, a young lady who with her husband had gone sight-seeing with us at several ports, understood enough Spanish and Portuguese to tell us: "He says that this seizure coincides with revolts in Portugal and Spain and that Capt. Henrique Galvao is in charge."

As she was about to elaborate, the voice said in labored English: "You will not be sailing to Port Everglades. Your Captain Maia cannot talk to you. You will be at sea for five days."

What will our parents back in Johnstown think?

I wondered. And what will happen to us?

Boarding the ship at Lisbon seemed a distant memory. We were coming home from Holland after two years abroad and had decided to take a southern route to avoid bad weather. We had never heard of the *Santa Maria* until a travel agent suggested her. She had been a blind choice, so to speak, but she looked a true queen of the seas. This would be a dream cruise, we thought.

The first incident to mar the dream was the air-conditioning breakdown. Then Debbie complained that she didn't feel well. But we were getting closer to home, we reassured ourselves.

Lulled by the pleasantness of the cruise, even some strange new passengers boarding at La Guaira didn't seem particularly ominous to me. As I watched them struggling with heavy hand baggage, I remarked to Del: "They don't look very much like tourists, do they? They look a little bit sinister."

I commented on a funeral procession, too. Mourners in black accompanied a coffin to the ship. The coffin was sealed in a cabin, and I thought little more about it until we were finally getting off the ship. Then I noticed that the seal to the cabin had been broken and the cabin itself was empty. Did the pirates bring their heavier arms and dynamite aboard inside a coffin?

That first morning, we were too terrified to think much about anything like that, however. Our apprehension mounted as we saw the mutineers, for no apparent reason, tear down a beautiful green sun awning over the passenger deck. Next they ripped off the canvas lifeboat coverings. It was some time before any of us put our fears into words: did they intend to cast us adrift?

While we discussed the mutiny, Debbie stayed in bed with a rapidly blossoming rash. At first, we thought it might be just heat rash, but after a time the rash added character, and we knew what it was: measles!

Santa Maria!



Aboard ship, U. S. Navy Adm. Allen E. Smith (left) talks with rebel leader Henrique Galvao through woman interpreter. Below, their tense "pleasure cruise" ended, the Smiths prepare for another trip—this time home to Johnstown, Pa.



In retrospect, Debbie's measles were a blessing in disguise, because while she was confined to our cabin, we were able to prepare her for the horror she would have to face later.

Soon Galvao told us that we could send cables but that their contents would have to be personally cleared by him. We prepared our cable to Johnstown and took it to Galvao's cabin for clearance; it was our first meeting with him.

I expected a smart, neatly groomed military officer. It's an understatement to say that I was in for a letdown. Standing before us was an unimposing, lifeless-looking little man draped in a filthy maroon bathrobe with an even dirtier scarf tucked in around his neck.

He glanced at the brief cablegram, approved it with a nod, and said to us: "I'm not good at English. I'm sorry for the inconvenience." Then he delivered a political speech which he cut short when he realized that he couldn't win us over.

Our Random Cruise Begins

After the ship's initial wild flight, she settled down to aimless wandering. We speculated that Galvao had no plan other than to avoid capture until the presidential changeover in Brazil.

On Thursday, the fifth day after the ship's seizure, we heard the roar of airplane motors overhead. When we saw U.S. stars on the wings, many of us wept unashamedly. We waved frantically when the pilot revved his motors and flew off over the horizon.

We heard that Rear Adm. Allen E. Smith of the U.S. Navy had contacted Galvao and arranged to board the ship to nego-

tiate for the release of passengers. It was this hope that kept our spirits alive in the agonizing days that followed.

Whenever the passengers became restless, Galvao would assure them that Admiral Smith would be arriving soon. But day after day, we were disappointed.

All through Sunday we scanned the horizon for signs of Admiral Smith's destroyer. There was nothing. Our skepticism of Galvao's promises mounted, and we nicknamed the *Santa Maria* the *Santa Mañana*. Ironically, Galvao had renamed the ship the *Santa Libertade*!

Meanwhile, there was ample evidence that we were preparing for a long voyage. Galvao enforced strict water rationing, and as the days passed, it became stricter. More than once, I was caught with shampoo in my hair when the water went off.

Near the end of the first week, Debbie began to feel better, and we had to let her out of our cabin. She walked bravely up to the first pistol-carrying revolutionary she saw and said: "You're a cowboy, aren't you? Well, why don't you shoot me?" When he didn't answer, she said somewhat disappointedly: "Well, if you won't shoot me, give me your gun, and I'll shoot you."

A supposed highpoint of our enforced cruise was a "farewell dinner" given by Galvao. He titled it, "Captain Galvao Sails for Liberty," which seemed particularly inappropriate since we were being held at gunpoint. Galvao tried to pattern it after the "farewell dinner" given by Captain Maia before docking at La Guaira. Maia's was a delight; Galvao's a fiasco.

On Monday night, just before Admiral Smith made his long-promised appearance

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