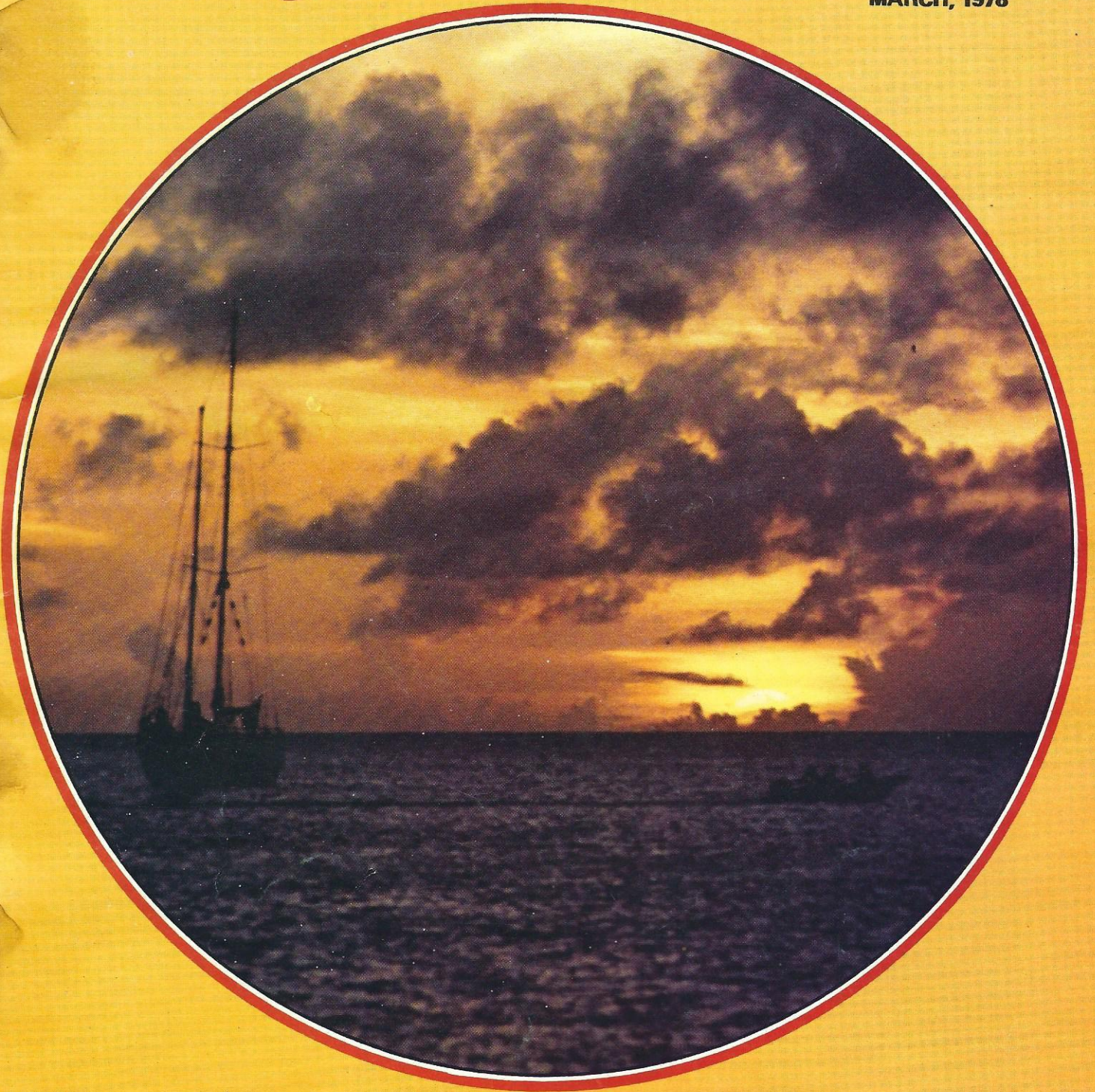


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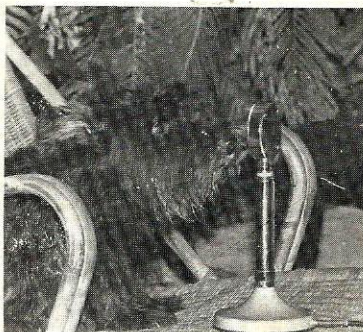
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Our Cover

The end of another beautiful day in the islands. Photo by Paul Backshall.

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maureen o'hara says...

Last month we had two anniversaries, and strangely enough they tied in with each other in the person of Bunny Olsen. Antilles Air Boats was 14 years old last month and Bunny flew on the first scheduled flight from St. Croix to St. Thomas. In all these years she has never forgotten Antilles Air Boats' birthday. She always presents us with a big birthday card and a bouquet to celebrate that eventful day.

Now, let me tell you about Bunny Olsen, a charming, vivacious and gracious 'Bermuda Onion'. Yes, that's what they call people born in Bermuda, which is referred to on the old maps as the 'Onion Patch'.

Bunny was the joy of her father's heart, a golden girl who could swim like a fish. He taught her to sail, to navigate, to cook, to sew sails and finally he bought her a boat.

She did outrageous things, like swimming underwater to explore secret caves with a home-made diving helmet stuck on her head, made out of a kerosine can with a glass window, an air hose attached to the top spout and rocks to weigh her down.

She did glamorous things like being the first to swim for the movies made in Bermuda. She doubled and did all the swimming for Joan Crawford in the movie *Strangers Meet* with Franchot Tone. She swam on the swimming team. She travelled far and wide and lived the gay and carefree life of a young Bermuda debutante.

During the war Bunny did war work and worked in the Canteen in Bermuda. She met and married a young U.S. Naval officer, Guy Reynolds, and gave birth to a son.

Then one cold New York day, Bunny found herself in the center of a plot, with three young Naval veterans, to sail to the Caribbean in search of adventure, excitement and business. The plan was to end up at the Mill Reef Club in Antigua, where Bunny intended to go into business.

Who were these plotters? They were Alan Pope, Navy veteran and son of Bayard Pope, Chairman of the Board of Marine Trust Company; Guy

Reynolds, retired Navy Commander, who had served aboard the carrier *Bon Homme Richard*, one of the largest aircraft carriers in the U.S. Navy during World War II; Bunny Reynolds, the instigator of the plot and the only woman aboard; and last but not least Ted Dale, ex-Naval combat pilot, with many Japanese planes to his credit, who served aboard the Carrier *Enterprise*. Ted was the son of Edward C. Dale, of Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, and great great grandson of Commodore Edward C. Dale, masters mate under

at 23rd Street in New York City. The young adventurers moved aboard to live and spent many evenings talking and planning every detail of their trip.

Two more, Christopher Cook and Thomas Hills, caught up with the idea and signed on as crew.

In late winter, the yacht sailed to Cape May, New Jersey to be hauled and prepared for the long voyage.

On January 14th, 1948, at approximately 5 p.m. the *Comanche* cleared Cape May. It was very cold. They even had some snow flurries but



Ted Dale (left), Bunny and Guy Reynolds the day they set sail.

John Paul Jones and an officer aboard the renowned original *Bonne Homme Richard*. Four U.S. Navy ships have been named 'Dale' in honor of the Commodore.

The vessel was to be skipper Ted Dale's *Comanche* which he had received as a gift from his father. The yacht was a 72 foot auxiliary yawl, designed by Arthur Binney and built by George Lawley & Son in 1902. The yacht, which could spread 2,400 feet of canvas, was Marconi-rigged, and equipped with radio-telephone. She could sleep 11 in luxury and comfort.

The *Comanche*, after Ted sailed her from Florida, was tied up at the dock at the old seaplane terminal

the winds were strong and favorable. After two days of fine sailing they were about 125 miles east of Cape Hatteras and were all looking forward to a fast passage to Bermuda. Once in the Gulf Stream, the winds died down completely and for the next 48 hours, they had to motor. "The monotonous humming of a ship's motor in a calm is strangely hypnotic," says Bunny. The distance across the Stream is usually a bugbear to small ships and they were all relieved when they crossed this barrier.

The winds went southerly and stayed there. The radio spouted out that the weather was "fairly decent." And then it happened all at once, a

radio message from a B.O.A.C. aircraft of a storm warning. The winds reached an estimated velocity of more than 60 knots.

Ted Dale ordered Bunny to her bunk. "I'm going to lash you in, for your own safety," he told her.

Tom Hills proved to be a poor sailor, and hated the near hurricane storm, and the tortuous leaping of the gallant yacht as she fought the wind and waves.

The next couple of days were spent cleaning up the boat. The crew relaxed after the harrowing storm. They were about 100 miles north west of the islands. Ted set his new balloon sail.

Suddenly from out of nowhere, and with no warning, the wind filled the balloon sail, and they were back into another hurricane like storm, worse than the earlier one.

The *Comanche* sprang a leak and, leaving the helm to one of the other men, Ted went down into the bilge, and worked for what seemed like hours to keep the boat afloat. The rest of the crew worked untiringly at pumping the bilge.

The leak fixed, a not too clean Ted took over his helm again. The brave yacht fought the storm like a tigress. Her canvas began to go, the

precious balloon sail went, and finally she lost all her jibs.

The crew was dog weary. The storm finally eased, and they watched and waited tensely for a Bermuda light.

Tom Hills swore that he would never get on another yacht, and that he was going to leave the venture when they got to Bermuda. "If we ever get there," he moaned. Soft hearted Bunny thought a drink might help but Ted had it all locked up. Bunny asked for the key. She poured Tom a stiff drink, and then headed up the stairs, to return the key. Half way up, she turned to look up at Tom Hills, as he lifted his glass, and tipped it to her. Ruefully, he said, "I've seen the light."

"The light, the light," yelled Ted from above. "I see the light."

Bunny's head snapped from one to the other. "It was an uncanny breathless moment," she said.

It was the light on St. David's Island. The moon came out, and the *Comanche* made an easy run into St. George's Harbor, and docked at the Market Wharf at 9 p.m., January 23rd.

The crew spent two weeks in Bermuda resting, and having repairs made to their vessel.

Tom Hills kept his vow and they all bid him farewell when he headed back to New York.

With one down, and five left, the *Comanche* cleared Bermuda's reefs, just before dark, February 6th, 1948. There was a light wind, north by north west, and it filled her canvas. Bunny watched her birthplace fade into the darkness, as they headed south to St. Thomas, their next port of call. St. Thomas lay about 1,000 miles due south. Before many days they would be in the Trade Winds, warm, fresh and dependable.

February 13th they dropped anchor in Great Harbour, Jost Van Dyke. They swapped some ship stores and some candy for a pig and a goat and enjoyed a fine dinner.

Next day they headed for St. Thomas, as they had letters of introduction to several people there. The harbor security for the visit of President Harry Truman persuaded them to leave, and head for St. John, its people and its powdery beaches. They received an offer to run Caneel Bay, which was then owned by John Hurst, but they all voted to keep going for Antigua, except Christopher Cook, who decided to stay.

With just four left, they set sail for St. Croix, and at 3:15 p.m., February 23rd, 1948, the *Comanche* dropped anchor in Christiansted Harbor.

The four remaining adventurers came ashore to find the tiny town with hardly a soul in it. They located a small restaurant, where the Bolero is located now. It was owned by a charming lady, Mrs. Brignoni, who kept chickens in a coop in the back. She chose a fine, plump chicken, rung its neck and started to pluck it. "Be back in an hour. Your dinner will be ready," she told them.

Later that night, after a delicious dinner, they sat on the deck of the *Comanche* enjoying the peace and quiet and the balmy air and trying to decide which was the brightest star in the velvety sky.

The next day they discovered the reason for the almost deserted Christiansted. Everyone had gone to Frederiksted to greet President Truman.

The days passed and the four stayed on. Bunny and Guy separated. Ted Dale bought an old house and called it the *Comanche* Club, which was to become famous. Bunny was to marry Ove Olsen and have another son.. Oh, but that's another story . . . that would fill a book, full of adventure, heartache, romance and laughter. (1)

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