



Spectacular Stories for Curious Kids

Smallest Country in the World



Helicopter Battles and Kidnappings in the Smallest Country in the World

The year was 1965. This was the heyday of pirate radio. What the heck is that? A pirate radio station is one that broadcasts whatever they want...without a license. So, they were basically rebels who did their thing beyond government control. This is the story of one such rebel.



But this story actually begins a little earlier in World War II. Great Britain had invested in the construction of lots of sea forts. The purpose of these forts was to protect the country from sneak attacks from Germany. Once the war was over, these forts were abandoned.



Paddy Roy Bates had spent a lot of time as a major in England's army. He was not a fan of state-sponsored radio and had started his own station and really enjoyed it. The British government made it harder for him to broadcast, so he moved out to an abandoned outpost just beyond England's reach.



There was actually a pirate radio station already broadcasting from the old fort. But that didn't matter to Bates. He kicked the pirate out somehow and took it for himself. And even though he had taken all of his radio equipment out there, he never broadcasted any radio from the fort. He decided that he was the leader of a new country, and that was much more exciting to him than being a radio broadcaster.



The fort was known as Fort Rough's Tower. It was located 7 miles off of England's eastern coast. Bates renamed the fort, "Sealand". Then, he presented it as a Christmas gift for his wife, Joan. Most people may not have been too excited about such a gift, much less actually moving out to a sea fort. But Joan was apparently a pretty good sport about the whole thing.

Sealand



Eventually, she brought the couple's 14 year old son and 17 year old daughter and moved to what her husband was calling the smallest country in the world.



The “Principality of Sealand”, as Bates was now calling it, was basically a large platform supported by two large round columns rising out of the sea from a sandbar, without any views of land. After a year of hearing about this family living on this ocean fort calling it a country, the British government had had enough.



They were not willing to allow a new tiny independent country to spring up just off its coast. So the army was called in.



Here's where things start to get really exciting. Military boats and helicopters were sent on a mission to retake the little island for England. Explosives were dropped all around the platform, making large explosions everywhere. Sailors from the army boat yelled at the family that, they were next! "Prince"" Michael. Who was 15 at the time, fired several warning shots at the menacing helicopters and the army retreated.



Both, Bates and his son, Michael, were summoned with arrest warrants, but a judge ruled that the British government had no authority to tell the family what to do or move them off the fort, so they were released. As more years passed, over 50 people had moved out to the little micronation.



They had electricity from a generator powered by the constant wind, with 10 rooms including a kitchen, a chapel and a living room. Much of this was in the hollow support columns holding up the entire structure.



Ten years after the Bates family had moved to Sea, more high-sea adventures would befall them. A former resident of the fort from Germany claimed that he was the true ruler of Sealand and while Paddy Roy Bates was away, he and his heavily armed mercenaries raided the fort with a helicopter and speedboats. Prince Michael had escaped and was able to get weapons the family had hidden at the fort.



Along with his father's counterattack, the Bates family retook their country from the mercenaries without anyone getting injured. They kept the main instigator as a hostage and Germany sent their ambassador to negotiate his release.



Over the years, Sealand has printed its own money and issued its own passports. The state flag of Sealand was even once placed on top of Mt. Everest. Michael Bates continued to live on the fort for many years but wanted his children to go to regular schools back in England. The “country” still exists today. Michael now lives in England with his large family but still claims Sealand is its own country even though it still isn’t officially recognised.



The man behind this whole story, Paddy Roy Bates, is a real example of a rebel. He is known for saying, "I might die young or I might die old, but I will never die of boredom." By that standard, he was certainly successful and led a most interesting and exciting life!





THINK

DIGITAL ACADEMY

