

CHRISTMAS IN MONTE CARLO by Hugh Smith

There is no way that I can compete with Ed Claxton's "Grace Kelly story", but I believe my Grace Kelly sea story is worth retelling.

After graduation, my first duty station was aboard the USS Massey (DD-778) as EMO. The Massey was in Norfolk having just completed a FRAM conversion. We headed to GTMO for refresher training followed by deployment to the Sixth Fleet in the MED. The ship's schedule called for a port visit to Monaco over Christmas. After spending several interesting evening ashore at the Casino Municipal de Cannes and the Palais de la Mediterranie, I was looking forward to trying my luck at the famous Casino de Monte Carlo.

In accordance with Naval tradition, the C.O. made his courtesy call to the Palace. Since Princess Grace was then Patroness of the local orphanage, he invited Princess Grace to visit our ship and bring a group of the orphans aboard our ship for a Christmas party including ice cream and cake and the distribution of Christmas presents. It was a gala party and much appreciated by the Princess.

It was Christmas Eve, and I was preparing to go ashore and visit the Casino de Monte Carlo when the Quarterdeck messenger enter my stateroom and announced the Captain wanted to see me right away. I was not sure what I had done to cross the C.O. this time, but I immediately had visions of spending Christmas "in hack". When I entered the Captain's In Port Cabin, his first question was "Smith, are you Catholic?". It seemed like a strange question and I answered in the affirmative. I still recall his next words. "Princess Grace has invited me to attend Midnight Mass at the Cathedral. I do a lot of things, but I do not do church. I want you to attend in my place". All I could say was "aye aye sir".

When I entered the church, they were expecting the Ship's Captain and the usher did not know the difference. Now I am one of those people who likes to sit in the back of the church so that I can make a speedy exit when the service is completed. Much to my chagrin, the usher paraded me up to the very front of the church and then continued up to the altar where he directed me to one of two high back chairs to the right of the altar. Shortly thereafter a Cardinal entered and took the seat to my right. Followed by the entrance of Prince Rainier and Princess Grace. They were seated at the two ornate chairs on the opposite side of the altar. During the entire

service I sat facing the Prince and Princess. Once the Mass was ended, I was anxious to be on my way. As I left the altar, I was approached by an attractive young lady who announced that she was Princess Grace's Lady-in-Waiting and said that the Princess wished my presence at a reception at the Palace. She then escorted me to the Palace. Upon entering the royal presence, I took my place in the receiving line. Upon being received by the Princess, I paid my respects and compliments. She mentioned her earlier visit to our ship and the beautiful Christmas lighting displayed on the ship. I mentioned to Princess Grace that the only other ship in the harbor that could compare was Aristotle Onassis yacht, the "Christina". It happened that Onassis was also at the palace reception along with his guest, the international known opera star, Maria Callas. When I mentioned the "Christina" the Princess motioned for Onassis to join us and asked that I repeat my comment to Onassis. When I did, the broad smile displayed by Onassis indicated to me that he was a member of our "brotherhood" for only a true sailor can have a "love affair" with a floating asset.