

A SINKING FEELING

By Diane Altona

Back in the 1980s, when television stations broadcast graphic documentaries of salvage divers' recovery of some highly publicized treasure from the Italian ship *Andrea Doria*, I focused, fascinated with the action on the TV screen. As most of the public knows, on a foggy night in 1956 the *Andrea Doria* collided with the *MV Stockholm* and met her tragic death on the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean.¹

However, my interest in the sinking of the *Andrea Doria* off the eastern coast of the United States, and the recovery of that treasure, was beyond mere fascination. I know a part of the story that is not public knowledge; it has a family connection.

Back in 1955, when my kid brother "Bus" was a survival-training instructor at Stead Air Force Base outside Reno, Nevada, he needed a typewriter for his own personal use. (If you'd ever seen his handwriting, the need would have been graphically obvious.) However, typical of him, he decided it couldn't be just any typewriter. It had to be one with a custom keyboard that incorporated Spanish symbols and diacritical marks, so he could correspond in correct grammatical Spanish with a pretty señorita he'd met in Mexico.

Not only that but he wanted the "Mercedes Benz" of typewriters at that time, the pricey Olivetti. The stores in Reno did not stock such a keyboard; it had to be ordered from the Olivetti parent company in Italy, prepaid. Bus parted with the money from his rather slim Air Force paycheck and waited for delivery. And waited some more. Calls to the store only brought the reply that the typewriter was still on order.

Finally, after months had gone by, he received a letter from Olivetti. They were very sorry, but his typewriter had sunk with the ill-fated *Andrea Doria*.

Eventually Bus received an Olivetti, albeit not the original, and it was everything he'd dreamed of. We chuckled over the whole thing and pretty much forgot about it.

Then, on TV I saw the divers haul objects from the sunken ship and as I watched each treasure come dripping up from the deep, I wondered if Bus' original typewriter would be part of the recovered cargo. I never found out.

Bus met an early death in a car crash in Donner Pass in 1958, but if he were still alive today, I imagine he'd be corresponding with his señorita by email. I also suspect he, too would be wondering if his original Olivetti, diacritical marks and all, still lay on the bottom of the Atlantic somewhere inside the now crumbling hull of the *Andrea Doria*.

¹ The Andrea Doria sinking; History and sinking of the Italian luxury liner the Andrea Doria.

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