EDITOR'S NOTE:

One year ago on January 72 the Portuguese ship, Santa Maria, was hijacked on the high seas. Among the 360 passengers on board was Dr. Irene Dunne who consented to write a first-hand account of what occurred.
December 27, 1961

Mrs. Katherine S. O'Shaughnessy
Corresponding Secretary
The Syracuse Medical Alumni Association, Inc.
766 Irving Avenue
Syracuse 10, New York

Dear Mrs. O'Shaughnessy:

It is quite flattering to think that I am still news-worthy. To me, of course, the incident of the Santa Maria will always be a thrilling memory.

Saturday, January 21, 1961, we spent at Willemstad, Curacao. Many passengers had landed at Caracas on Friday and one American family, Dr. and Mrs. Floyd Preston and their four small boys of the University of Kansas had come on board. At Curacao, a group of Dutch families, who were Shell Oil Co. employees, had embarked, bound for Holland. Of the 42 First Class passengers, 22 were Americans. Our next stop was to be Miami.

Sunday morning, after an unusual and very sketchy breakfast, we were asked to meet in the lounge at 9 a.m. as a serious situation had developed. On our way to the meeting, we met several men attired in khaki, wearing berets and a red and green arm band and carrying firearms of various kinds.

Once in the lounge, rumors were rampant but no one knew exactly what to expect. We learned that "passengers" had taken over the bridge during the previous night, killed one of the ship's officers and wounded several others, one seriously.
One of the two ships Doctors aboard the ship was among the wounded. After a long harangue in Portuguese and another in Spanish, our ship's Captain spoke to us, over the loud speaker from his quarters, in a quavering voice and halting English and told us he was no longer in command. We would not land in Miami on Tuesday but would be landed in four or five days at some friendly port. A successful revolution had occurred in Portugal and Spain and the two countries were united with the name Iberia. We would be allowed to communicate with our families in a few days and, in the meantime, we were to enjoy the extra days at sea.

Service on the ship was almost normal but the menus were cut drastically, as to choice, not in quantity. Bathing water was turned off except for an hour or so about three times a day and all night. Laundry service and beauty parlor service was also stopped.

We all thought it was a lark, at first. One of the Dutch had a powerful radio but could get no news of a revolution, just the Kennedy inaugural and football items. A little American girl developed measles. Next morning, after racing at top speed all night, we stopped at a tiny island. A life boat, holding an injured man and several attendants, was lowered and we sped off again. It was noticed that the covers of all the life boats had been removed and a rumor spread that we were to be put off in them, near some port. We began to get apprehensive. The ship slowed its speed and was completely blacked out at night. Some cabins were searched for guns but nothing was disturbed.
The man with the radio would sneak it upon deck at night and we would all huddle around in the dark, to get some news. All we could get was that we were missing and the Caribbean was being combed. Meanwhile, we were going East, Northeast or Southeast. Where to was a matter of constant specualion.

At tea time, on the fourth day, some one yelled out, over the music of the orchestra, "There's a plane!" We rushed out to wave and scream ourselves hoarse. It was a U. S. Navy patrol bomber and it circled the ship blinking messages in International Code, which no one could read, for the rest of the night. What a relief to know we had been found. We had all worried about our families. It would be a relief to them, also.

On the sixth day, one of the passengers was allowed to talk to the pilot of the plane by radiophone. He was anxious to know if we were O.K. and told us that U. S. destroyers were near and everything possible was being done to free us. The U. S. government had asked Mr. Galvao to land us in Puerto Rico but he insisted that he be given "protection" instead of "escort", but this was refused.

Next day, the planes failed to appear and we were all very worried. "Captain" Galvao called another meeting and said he was trying to find a frindly port and that there was enough fuel and water for 14 days. He had said he would answer all questions but was completely evasive as to where he might go and what would happen if no friendly port was found.
A loudspeaker was going continually, in the Third Class area. The language was Portuguese, which no one understood, but a few crew members who could speak English, very few said Galvao was trying to win over recruits to his cause but with no success.

Our ship would slow almost to a standstill and then start up rapidly again and we were constantly changing course, back and forth across the Equator. One night we could see the North Star the next the Southern Cross. Except for the presence of the armed guards who were very polite to us, the no-choice meals, water restriction and the nightly blackout, life went on quite normally. The boat deck, with the swimming pool and children's play center became out of bounds, after a few days, but we had deck games, cards, repeat movies, dancing and other activities to amuse us. Mostly we were on the alert for news.

On the eighth and ninth days, there were many rumors. The Voice of America said we were to be landed at Recife, Brazil after the inauguration of the new Brazilian President. Our passports were taken up and we packed, but there was no land in sight. We were going round and round.

About 8 a.m. on the tenth day, the U. S. Destroyer #831 and an escort ship appeared and Admiral Smith with sailors, soldiers and Marines came to the Santa Maria in a small boat. The ladder was let down and they came up, unarmed, and were greeted by the "Pistoleros" fully armed. A Marine lieutenant later said they were shocked at such a reception. However, the passengers made up for it. We just went wild.
Admiral Smith, Galvao and staffs talked in the library for about an hour and, at the conclusion, Admiral Smith asked all the Americans to talk with him. He had accomplished nothing as Galvao still insisted that, if he allowed us to land, he must be given fuel and supplies and allowed to leave. The new Brazilian Government would not allow that. We were quite discouraged. The Admiral assured us that the ships would stay with us and we would be taken off even if it meant the extremely hazardous transfer at sea. Where he would put us was quite a question, as there were already 66 newsmen on the destroyer and they occupied the deck.

The American Consul, Mr. Guadarano, in the Admiral's party, questioned each of us as to condition of health and other pressing problems. He said the hotels in Recife were crowded with newsmen from all over the world and he was trying to arrange accommodations for us with the few American families living there.

Many small planes were circling us, now, taking pictures, etc. We could see no land but we understood that we were about fifty miles off shore. From one of the planes, a "frogman" parachuted and was hauled up onto the ship. He was a French newsmen. A LIFE and a TIME man came out at night in a small fishing boat and were allowed to board. How they accomplished that is a wonder as the boat was bobbing so in the sea that it crashed the ladder.

Next morning the crew was told that Galvao had agreed to let the passengers off and that some of the crew could
also leave, but the engine men, mechanics, cooks and nurses would have to stay. There was a terrific uproar at this. Everyone yelled, "Todos, all of us!" The "pistoleros," as we called them, charged with guns and then some one began talking to the crew in Portuguese and finally order was restored but it was dinner time before our cabins were made up. On the morning of the twelfth day, a Brazilian official and his staff came aboard and it was a signal for all the Third Class passengers, mostly men, to rush up to the lounge. A guard, at one place, was pushed through a heavy glass door. The "pistoleros" came en masse, this time with tear gas, guns and machetes and there was a wild melee. It was the first time I was frightened.

The Brazilian official came out of his conference with Galvão and said that, although he had no authority and it might cost him his job, he would guarantee that everyone would be taken off and that he had given Galvão orders to go into the harbor and that we should all be on shore by three p.m. We would be allowed to take only what we could carry easily as we would not dock but would be transferred by tug. Our passports would be given to us before lunch.

As the ship began to move, the city of Recife came into view and we noticed that several warships had come up behind us, also a submarine. Galvão could take us nowhere except to the harbor. It was a thrilling sight.
Luncheon was served and we were not quite finished when a cry went up that a tug was alongside ready to take us off. We grabbed what we could carry and descended that long ladder to the tug. A plank had been put out from the ladder to the tug and strong, willing arms helped us across. When the tug could hold no more, we started for the pier and could see it packed solidly with welcomers. Before docking, however, the shore patrol came out and pushed the people back and stood facing them with their bayonets. It sent prickles up and down our spines.

As we stepped onto the pier we were greeted by the Brazilian and Recife officials and the U. S. Consular staff and escorted to a waiting bus. I hope I never have to have as wild a ride as that one. We careened at break-neck speed through the throngs of cheering and waving people. I believe all 180,000 inhabitants of Recife were there.

We were taken to a large, beautiful country club where the Americans were separated from the rest and were given refreshments of every sort. Soon Mrs. James Haynes, our hostess, came to take us to her home and away from the hundreds of reporters.

To me, the rest of the story is almost as thrilling as the beginning. Mr. Haynes is the Research Director of the Point 4 Program of Agricultural Aid in Northeast Brazil. Their home is a charming bungalow on the beautiful beach. We had a lovely room overlooking the ocean and, after a wonderful American dinner, people came to call. We noticed that, before the houseboy would go to the door, we would hear clapping of hands outside. We were told that no one could enter a yard until they had attracted attention by clapping. The houseboy
was armed and would shoot anyone who entered the yard without permission.

As we prepared for bed, we were told we could leave the heavy inside shutters open, as an extra armed guard had been posted. Ordinarily, one guard patrolled the front and back yards all night, but an additional guard had been hired so both yards could be guarded simultaneously.

Well, we were on land but thousands of miles from home and all our luggage was on the ship several miles off shore. Now, we had to get home. Mr. Guadarano, the U. S. Consul, and his assistant had contacted the Shipping board which agreed that it was morally responsible for getting us to Miami. But how?

There are telephones in Recife but no one uses them. It is more certain to send the house boy with a note, no matter how far or how many bus changes it involves. So, next day, house boys were running through the American Colony and, finally, we were told that a meeting would be held that evening at the American school. Airline representatives were there to tell us what the meager facilities were and they agreed to hold seats on the through plane from Rio to Miami for us at Belem. To get to Belem was another matter to be worked out.

It was wonderful to loll in the huge Brazilian hammocks on the broad porch with the trade winds keeping the temperature just right. But we wanted to get home.

On the fourth day, word came that we could get our baggage from the ship that afternoon. Since the navy gig was the only means of getting to the ship and women were not allowed on them,
some of our fellow passengers kindly brought ours. Then we had to go through Brazilian Customs and have our passports checked by the Brazilian Maritime Police.

On the next day, Sunday, a young American Consular couple came and took us to Mass. There we were treated to a sermon in English, in our honor. Later word came that we were to be at the airport at 1:30 p.m. Then just as we were leaving, the flight was postponed until 5:00 p.m. At last, about 7:30 p.m. we took off. About every two hours we landed at some small airport, but we finally arrived at Belem at 4:30 a.m. where ancient buses took us to the "best" hotel and more newsmen.

We slept until 8:00 a.m., when we were told that, as soon as we breakfasted, we were to go to the Real Airlâne office and arrange for transportation to Miami. Off we went down the cobblestone streets to the Airlâne Office where we could speak no Portuguese and they, no English. After that we had to use a lot of sign language to find the Maritime Police who had to clear our passports.

After lunch and more newsmen and photographers, we saw our baggage loaded into a truck for the airport. We knew that we would follow it eventually but word didn't come until 4:30 p.m. We then boarded the ancient buses and went to the airport where we found that the plane had not yet arrived. About 8:00 p.m. we finally took off. Seats hadn't been reserved for us so we crowded in as best we could. Coming down at 1:00 a.m. at Caracas, we all had to get out were sent into a small enclosure while an armed guard patrolled outside. An hour later, we again took off, landing at Maâmê at 6:00 a.m. No one had slept, so we were a very weary group that faced the throngs of newsmen and photographers, but we were in the U.S.A.
Perhaps, by the time this article is in print, I may be off again in search of another adventure but, I hope, a more amusing one. I leave February 21, 1962 on the Constitution for a Mediterranean and Adriatic Cruise and I leave it April 7th at Lisbon, for a month or so in Europe.

Since three of my twelve grandchildren are graduating, I want to be home early in June, but I may have time for a few days in Syracuse.

I am sorry not to have a better picture for you, but this seems to be the best one I have.

Sincerely,

June McDunn

P.S. This should be graded D— for performance and A+ for effort. I have been away for the holidays so it had to be done very hastily. Please feel free to edit it as you see fit.

(Nota: Dr. Dunn is not easily derailed. She wrote the Constitution for a Mediterranean cruise with all the glitz and glamour, by a train of Europe. Maybe she will have some adventures to tell us about.)
(Note: Dr. Dunn is not easily daunted. On February 21, 1962, she boards the Constitution for a Mediterranean and Adriatic cruise followed by a tour of Europe. Maybe she will have more adventures to tell us about.)