

CLANDESTINE CORNERRADIO LIBERTAD ON ANDROS?

An article in the November issue of Popular Electronics carried an article entitled, "Clandestine Broadcasters." In it the author, one Thomas Kent, warns, "Much 'information' about such stations is usually no more than rumor and the SWL must analyze each piece of evidence to learn the real facts." Though obviously not intended to apply to the PE article itself, this bit of advice is most appropriate for readers of the article. It is filled with misinformation, outdated material and the like. Kent's name is unknown to serious students of clandestine broadcasting, and it is possible that the name is merely a pseudonym for one of the better known DX authors, or is perhaps a fictional identity for a PE staffer who gathered bits and pieces from here and there without a real understanding of his topic.

While we could comment extensively on a number of items contained in the article, and we'd warn readers in general to follow Kent's own advice, quoted in the first paragraph on this page, his remarks about the mysterious Radio Libertad warrant close attention here.

Probably the strangest bit of information included in Kent's story is his assumption that Radio Libertad is located on Andros Island, one of the Bahamas group.

He states that, "...many DX'ers have long believed that the transmitter is on Andros Island..." While there has been some rumor to this effect, stemming mostly from an article published in Electronics Illustrated a few months back, authored by Thomas Kneitel, which vaguely suggested a Bahamian location, this view is hardly widespread among knowledgeable DXers or serious clandestine fans.

Does Kent offer any evidence to support his theory? Not really! He states he contacted the manager of station ZNS in the Bahamas and asked him if Radio Libertad operates from Bahamian territory. The manager's reply was that the Libertad MW frequency, nominally 1400 kc/s., was monitored three days and no signal was heard. Later requests that ZNS monitor Libertad's shortwave frequencies, Kent reports, went unanswered. Kent believes this incident is somehow significant and hints that the ZNS manager is withholding information which could prove Radio Libertad on Andros Is.

But for more than a year, experienced MW listeners in Jamaica, Trinidad, Bonaire, Dominican Republic and Haiti, to say nothing of Florida, but a few score miles from Andros, have monitored the channel and surrounding frequencies, seeking without success the Radio Libertad medium wave signal. So why is it so surprising that the ZNS monitors, trying on only three dates, failed to hear it. In fact, the only reports of reception of the Radio Libertad medium wave channel were from a single listener in Puerto Rico. He has reported the station on 1406 kc/s. several times about two years ago or so, and once this past summer. If these reports are correct, the obvious conclusion is that Radio Libertad uses medium wave only on rare occasions now. Admittedly there are unanswered questions about the supposed medium wave transmitter of Libertad, but there is no apparent significance, such as Kent suggests, to the fact that ZNS staffers failed to hear the station after just three tries.

Kent says there supposedly are U.S. military bases in the Bahamas, which is probably true. He suggests a station could be hidden in the "jungle" on Andros. We could split hairs over his terminology in using the word "jungle," but this is not particularly germane to our issue.

Kent implies that Andros is a spot on which it would be easy to hide a secret station.

Actually, though, while Andros Island is the largest of the Bahamas group, being about 110 miles long and about 45 miles wide at its broadest point (closer to 20 miles wide for most of the island), it is not exactly isolated. It is close by the popular resort of Nassau on New Providence Island. Yachtsmen visit the Andros Yacht Club, hunters, seeking teal, pigeons and boar prefer Camp Bang Bang on Pot Cay and there is a stylish 50-room Lighthouse Club (a modern, two-story, pillared and porched beauty) at Andros Town that charges up to \$32 a day for a double room. The island is frequented

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RADIO LIBERTAD ON ANDROS? (Continued)

sportsmen and tourists.

Now one would think that a serious researcher, before he presented a manuscript to his publisher, would check out his data more thoroughly than Kent did.

For example, it is a relatively simple thing to check out published sources and learn that Andros Island has twice daily air service. Planes overfly and land at Andros each day. Visitors arriving by air would have a good view of the island below and one wonders how a station location could long remain secret. With air service, antenna towers would have to be properly lighted for safety and other indications of a station would have to be present and viewable from the air.

A researcher would, it seems, try to establish contact with a non-governmental source on Andros itself, a source that knows the island well and could state whether an unexplained broadcasting operation was present.

NASWA did this. A reply was received within a week and read, in part, "We are in receipt of your letter of October 21st regarding broadcasting stations located on Andros Island. There are no such stations on the Island, with the two closest stations being situated on the Island of New Providence." These stations mentioned, of course as any standard reference will show, are ZNS1 (1540 kc/s.) and ZNS2 (1240 kc/s.) at Nassau, New Providence, Bahamas.

Since any enterprising researcher could have turned up the same information in a short period of time, we wonder why Kent apparently did not even try.

He cites direction finding tests which "indicate that the Radio Libertad transmitter is in the general vicinity of Andros Island." It is too bad that Kent did not mention details as to the spot from which the direction finding bearing was made, the type of equipment used and the bearing reading itself. As we've previously reported in Frenex, the results of DF experiments conducted by Gordon Nelson of the National Radio Club, show the Radio Libertad transmitter to be considerably eastward and would rule out entirely a Bahamian transmitter site. Based on our knowledge of Nelson's work, we would bank our roll on the validity of his findings!

Kent also repeats the apparently erroneous tale that Radio Libertad operates on the former Radio Americas frequency of 6,000 kc/s. As reported in a recent American SWL Club bulletin, this report apparently originated with a logging error by a west coast listener, who in all honesty believed he heard Radio Americas on the Radio Libertad frequency of 15,050 kc/s. This supposedly was followed by some conclusion jumping by a nationally known author who thought the west coast listener heard Radio Libertad on the Americas ex-channel of 6,000 kc/s. This, according to ASWLC, was how the story began that Radio Libertad operated on 6,000 kc/s. ASWLC believes that this frequency is not used by Radio Libertad. We concur with the ASWLC position on this matter.

Finally, Kent in the Popular Electronics article, states "QSL's are obviously not available" from Radio Libertad. While as a general rule this is so, there have been a few that have trickled out. While the announced post office box numbers in Miami Beach and Caracas may simply be "drops", from which mail is forwarded to the actual Radio Libertad location (though this seems not to be the case with the Caracas address, which is probably located near the headquarters), both postal numbers are not "false" as Kent states.

Though our report of several months ago, published in Frenex, concerning Radio Libertad was designated an "interim" study for lack of conclusive proof that Radio Libertad is located on Venezuelan soil, we still believe this to be the case. We will study with open mind any serious flaws in the "interim" report that may be pointed out to us. However, we do not feel that Kent's article in PE either refutes the tentative theory that Radio Libertad transmits from Venezuelan territory or supports his contention that its location is Andros Island in the Bahamas.

Frankly, we'd like to see a bit more solid research by some authors before they widely announce that they have THE ANSWER to some of these clandestine riddles!

...Don Jensen