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REPORT FROM PARADISE

by Don Moore

On the weekend of January 28-30, I had the opportunity to visit El Paraiso Department in Eastern Honduras, along the Nicaraguan border. El Paraiso is Spanish for Paradise. In this coffee-growing center the towns of Danlí (14,000) and El Paraiso (4,000) are located. The area is rather interesting in that three of its six AM stations operate on split frequencies, and all three have been legged by Dars in North America. All six stations use the same program format, as is common in Honduras. That is a station will play different types of music, e.g., ranchera, romantic, pop, etc., at different times of the day, usually in two-hour long blocks. Normally this means ranchera music in the mornings when the rural people are getting up, and ending the day with pop music, as teenagers in town tend to stay up later. Throughout the day are program blocks of other types of music, as well as more pop and ranchera, and maybe even a novela (radio soap opera).

Danlí is a very pretty, well kept up & clean town, with many modern conveniences, e.g., movie theatres & small supermarkets, but still has a lot of the traditional in places like the central park & open air market. Irregularly laying amount pine covered hills it certainly comes close to being a paradise. Two blocks off of its Parque Central is Radio Danlí, HRTV. There I had a long and interesting discussion with director Wilberto Ruiz Molina. Now eight years old, Radio Danlí broadcasts on 1365 kHz with 1.5 kw. The split frequency is due to an incorrectly ground crystal, and a new one for 1370 is said to be on order in Miami. They plan to raise power to 5 kw in the near future. The station is on the air from 1130 to 0400 daily GMT, with a half hour of ranchera music to start off. During the period they are more likely to be heard in North America; they program as follows: 2300-0100 variety (a sort of DJ's choices); 0100-0200 "El Amor en la Canción" a program of romantic music; and from 0200-0400 "Discolor" a program of English language pop hits. On Saturday and Sunday the station also carries six VoAmerica transcription programs. During the course of programming the station carries ads & social service, but it does not carry any religious, political, or news programming, except for the VoAmerica stuff. Some sample ad rates, converted to US Dollars: 30 sec spot for 306/60 sec spot for 456/ ten 30 sec spots daily Mon-Sat 875/ same but twenty-five a day for 4130. That's for a month.

Senior Ruiz had a lot to say about the problems & responsibilities of running a small station. One of the main problems is advertising revenues. Honduras has two major networks: Amsonas Unidas which owns HRN, Tegucigalpa, with its nine repeaters, as well as thirteen other stations in Honduras; four largest cities; and Audio Video which runs Radio America with its repeaters, as well as several other stations around the country. Companies with products to be advertised nationwide tend to deal only with these networks, leaving the small independent stations with only local advertising.

A responsibility of any radio station is to promote & preserve national culture. Despite this Honduran folk music is not heard on Honduran radio stations. Senior Ruiz explained they once had a program of Honduran music, but had to end it for two reasons. First it was not all that popular and did not bring in much advertising revenues. Secondly, recordings of Honduran folk music are hard to come by & expensive. As the program produced little revenue it was difficult to justify spending money on developing a record library for it. The station tried to get help from the Ministry of Tourism & Culture, but it was not forthcoming & the program was dropped. Basically the same story was also told to me by the manager of La Voz de Atlántida in La Ceiba.

The musical programming which brings in the most revenue is ranchera. But, if Senior Ruiz could, he would throw it all out. As ranchera is very popular in the rural areas, the rural people are picking up a lot of Mexican words and phrases and speech habits. This is destroying a lot of Honduran own manner of speaking Spanish, as it is becoming Mexicanized. Meanwhile English language pop music has captivated the younger generation and the country loses its own music and way of speaking.

All-in-all, Radio Danlí is quite professional. Its studios are organized & well maintained. It is a small, but efficient operation.

At Radio Sonora I was able only to speak to a pair of DJs. This is the smallest station in the area. They broadcast 1100-0400 daily on 800 kHz with 860 watts. As a member of the Audio Video network they relay Radio America news direct off the air from Tegucigalpa. Danlí is slated to get a Radio America repeater in a few months.

The other two stations in Danlí are owned Radio Cadena HR04, 1120 kHz with 1.5 kw & radio Latina, HRIC, 1255 kHz, 1kw. Radio Oriental broadcasts 1100-0400 M.Sat & 1300-0300 Sundays. Radio Latina is on the air from 1200-0400 M.Sat & 1300-0100 Sundays.

Also covered with these two is Radio Paraiso in El Paraiso, the town. This is a rather typical medium size Honduran town, with dusty dirt streets that surely turn into muddy quagmires during the rainy season, & cement or adobe buildings ranging from new to very decayed. Tranquil, but its not Paradise!

For does the word paradise accurately describe Radio Paraiso, 1163 kHz with 1 kw. This station also calls itself La Voz de Café. It is located at the end of a narrow unit hallway in two dim & dirty cement floored rooms. Cardboard egg trays have been glued to the walls for sound insulation. Some are falling off. My visit to this station lasted about a half hour, during which I was able to witness several social service announcements. In a country where phones are an uncommon luxury, the social service announcement is an important part of a station's business. At Radio Paraiso, for one Lempra (500US) you can have any announcement you want (well - almost any), read over the air three times, or you can read it yourself once. Actually this is quite humorous watching the DJ stumble through someone's poor handwriting lit on the air.

But, how does this work? Maybe mom's planning to take the kids on the rickety old minibus out to Innaca to visit Aunt Maria Saturday morning. Mom doesn't want to surprise the dear old lady, so she gives little Antonio a Lempra and sends him over to Radio Paraiso with a written message to be read. If Aunt Maria doesn't hear it, no problem, one of the neighbors will tell her. Or maybe Don Carlos wants to send a message to the workmen out on his coffee farms, but doesn't have time to drive out. Well he just trucks on over to Radio Paraiso. Its sort of like the old party line - everyone knows what's going on.

The other station in El Paraiso is Radio Guaymas, HR2-5, the newest addition to the local scene, having just started on April 25, 1981. Guaymas, or correctly Guaymas, is from a local Indian dialect and means "wide dense se escudo las aguas" or where the waters are hidden. The manager is Miguel Antonio Elvir, quite intelligent, and if the station seems to have much history, he sure does. During almost thirty years of broadcasting he has worked in nine different Latin American countries. During the Nicaraguan Revolution he worked in Chinandega with the Radio Tic Tac-554/ Radio Tegucigalpa-777/Radio Conquistador-1970 again. When the latter two were closed down Radio Tic Tac became Radio 19 de Julio. He lost his job and went back home to El Paraiso. There Dr. Manuel Antonio Ovarín Gallardo (Radio Guaymas' owner) was buying up equipment to start the new station, so he snapped up Miguel's talents.

Radio Guaymas broadcasts on 1370 kHz with 3kw from 1100 to 0300 daily. They also have a mobile unit with 10 watts on 162.142 MHz for remote transmissions. The next year they hope to open a new FM station, Radio Campeste.

In this area as a whole Radio Danlí & Radio Guaymas are the most modern & somewhat older, are not far behind. Radio Sonora is underdeveloped & rather unprofessional, but it is not anything like Radio Paraiso, which, although better equipped - a little - is just plain the pits.

My plan for visiting the area was not to visit stations, but rather to check out the Nicaraguan scene from a border site. The rest of my trip thing about DJing Nicaragua from this area was not the Nicaraguans that were heard, but rather the many that were not heard. The 1981 WRFF listed 39 stations, percent article in a Honduran newspaper mentions 34 are active, and the 1983 WRFF lists only 27. The August 7, 1987 Monitor reprinted via Audio Radio Club a rundown of Nicaraguans from George Weed's visit there some time ago. At my Danlí location, considering distance and interference factors a lot of Nicaraguans that should have been heard weren't. Apparently a large number of Nicaraguans are still off, I wonder if for good.