

## OFF L.I., A PIRATE RADIO STATION DEFIES F.C.C.

The New York Times

July 27, 1987, Monday, Late City Final Edition

Copyright 1987 The New York Times Company

**Section:** Section A; Page 1, Column 1; Metropolitan Desk

**Length:** 845 words

**Byline:** By JOSEPH BERGER

### **Body**

---

Protesting what they called the stagnant state of rock-and-roll radio in New York City, a group of gadfly radio enthusiasts took to the airwaves last week from a rusty old freighter anchored five miles off Long Island's South Shore.

The Federal Government was not amused, and Saturday, after two nights of broadcasts, it sent a boarding party out to head off the pirates.

Two agents of the Federal Communications Commission, accompanied by a Customs Service officer and an Immigration and Naturalization Service officer, sailed on a Coast Guard cutter to the 200-foot freighter, moored south of Long Beach and flying a Honduran flag.

They told the two radio operators aboard the freighter - newly christened Sarah after the girlfriends of some of the operators - that they were apparently violating Federal rules requiring broadcasters to be licensed.

Late yesterday, Randi Steele of Queens, a leader of the group that put together the seaborne station, expressed defiance of the F.C.C.'s action. He said the station planned to continue broadcasting since it was outside what he said was the three-mile territorial limit of the F.C.C. The station was on again last night.

"We're basically doing this as a flare, a warning signal that New York City radio that is directed at youth is very stale and stagnant," said Mr. Steele, who is 30 years old and is a disc jockey for a show, "The Steele Ship," on the pirate station.

A figure at the center of the enterprise was Alan Weiner of Monticello, Me., a former owner of radio stations who has battled with the F.C.C. before, in Maine and in Yonkers, over its powers to regulate the airwaves. Mr. Weiner has boasted in the past of his ability to uncover loopholes in Federal broadcasting regulations.

Sally Lawrence, a spokeswoman for the F.C.C., said yesterday that Mr. Weiner, who was aboard the freighter on Saturday night, had operated a legal station in Presque Isle, Me., but had his license revoked in April 1985 because he was broadcasting on unassigned frequencies.

According to Mr. Steele, Mr. Weiner is part of a group of about 20 "radio enthusiasts," some of whom have worked as engineers and on-air personalities in the radio industry.

The group calls itself Radio NewYork International, or R.N.I. The group, Mr. Steele said, feels that F.C.C. regulations requiring stations to set guidelines for what their disk jockeys can play have made it difficult to put a personal stamp on the music and talk that gets aired. Its members, he added, also share a "pacifist" political philosophy.

## OFF L.I., A PIRATE RADIO STATION DEFIES F.C.C.

They also plan to begin broadcasting full time in August and to sell commercials.

## A Honduran Registry

In a telephone interview, Mr. Steele said the group pooled \$100,000 of savings to buy the vessel - described by the Coast Guard as "very rusty" -and outfit her with five transmitters, including a 110-foot radio tower. The group obtained a Honduran registry on July 3, Mr. Steele said, because an American flag would have made the ship subject to American radio regulations.

The ship has been rechristened the Sarah, Mr. Steele said, because "a number of us have had girlfriends named Sarah and there are a couple of rock songs named Sarah so it seemed the logical thing to do."

The Sarah sailed from a Boston dock with a crew of six and anchored off Long Beach. Using less than 20 percent of her transmitting power, she broadcast for six hours Thursday night and six hours Friday night over 1620 AM, 103.1 FM and shortwave and long wave frequencies.

Mr. Steele said the music ranged from tunes from the 1960's to contemporary rock hits. To illustrate the kind of antiwar message that he argued was not available on licensed radio stations, Mr. Steele said the station played John Lennon's "Give Peace a Chance" with Country Joe and the Fish's "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die" and Bruce Cockburn's "If I Had a Rocket Launcher."

The broadcasts, Mr. Steele said, were heard by his friends all over the New York area and as far away as Boston. And F.C.C. officials said the Friday night broadcast was picked up much farther away - at its monitoring station in Allegan, Mich.

## Broadcast Was Illegal

Using direction-finding equipment, officials traced the source of the transmission to a point at sea off Long Island and called in the Coast Guard. Immigration and Customs officials joined the boarding party to make sure their agency's regulations were not being breached.

Richard Elliott, chief quartermaster of the 1st Coast Guard District based in Boston, said the rusty white-hulled Sarah was a converted Japanese fishing vessel, formerly known as the L Lopez II, whose owner was listed as International Ship Owner of Sarasota Avenue in Yonkers, N.Y.

Ms. Lawrence said no matter how far out at sea the ship was, it was illegal to broadcast without a license on an unassigned frequency.

Moreover, F.C.C. officials said 103.1 FM has been assigned to New York stations in Oneonta, Carthage and Newburgh and that the Sarah's transmission threatened to interfere with those signals.

## Classification

---

**Language:** ENGLISH

**Subject:** US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (90%); BROADCASTING REGULATION (89%); INTERVIEWS (78%); POP & ROCK (78%); CITIZENSHIP (77%); IMMIGRATION (76%); POLITICAL SCIENCE (72%); COMMUNICATIONS LAW (71%); EXCISE & CUSTOMS (71%); ENERGY & UTILITY LAW (71%); LICENSES & PERMITS (68%)

**Company:** FCC CO LTD (90%); FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (FCC); CUSTOMS SERVICE; IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE (US); RADIO NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FCC CO LTD

## OFF L.I., A PIRATE RADIO STATION DEFIES F.C.C.

(90%); CUSTOMS SERVICE; IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE (US); **RADIO** NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FCC CO LTD (90%); IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE (US); **RADIO** NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FCC CO LTD (90%); **RADIO** NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FCC CO LTD (90%); FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (94%); FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (94%)

**Organization:** FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (94%); FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (94%); FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (FCC); CUSTOMS SERVICE; IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE (US); **RADIO** NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (94%); CUSTOMS SERVICE; IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE (US); **RADIO** NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (94%); IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE (US); **RADIO** NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (94%); **RADIO** NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (94%); FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (94%)

**Industry:** **RADIO** BROADCAST INDUSTRY (89%); BROADCASTING INDUSTRY (89%); BROADCASTING REGULATION (89%); COMMUNICATIONS REGULATION & POLICY (78%); ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS (73%); MILITARY VESSELS (72%); COMMUNICATIONS LAW (71%); ENERGY & UTILITY LAW (71%)

**Geographic:** NEW YORK, NY, USA (88%); NEW YORK, USA (91%); MAINE, USA (79%)