The Mysterious Radio Euzkadi
40 Years Of Deception!  BY DON JENSEN

Port of Bermeo in Basque province of Vizcaya. (Photo courtesy of Spanish National Tourist Office)

The Oak of Guernica, showing the Cosa de Juntas. (Photo courtesy of Spanish National Tourist Office)

What and where was Radio Euzkadi? And why did it broadcast — off and on for 40 years — as the secret station of an invisible government of a non-existent nation?

Radio Euzkadi, until it closed down in 1977, was one of the most persistent of the clandestine stations that seem to flourish on the shortwave bands whenever and wherever there is political turmoil. The mysterious station had shortwave listeners baffled for years. And when the truth was finally known, it was a fascinating tale of intrigue and deception, with a million-dollar twist and, at least peripherally, involved kidnapping, torture, and murder.

Radio Euzkadi operated from at least three locations during its long history, including an old fishing boat in a French harbor. In its first years, it pretended to operate from the mountains of northern Spain, while it was actually on another continent 5,000 miles away.

Radio Euzkadi broadcast to the Basques, a strange people with an even stranger language, whose traditional homeland straddles the Spanish-French frontier. Some people claim the 2.5 million Basques are descendants of the last survivors of the prehistoric Atlanteans. Most scholars, however, believe their distant ancestors were a Bronze Age people who migrated westward from Asia Minor some 6,000 years ago.

The origins of their language, mostly X's, Y's, and Z's, are also uncertain. It is probably the oldest language still spoken by man. There are those who claim it was spoken by Adam and Eve, and was the only language to escape the Tower of Babel.

During the reign of Julius Caesar, the Basques settled in the green valleys and in the Pyrenees Mountains of northern Spain. For a thousand years, they fiercely fought off waves of invaders — Phoenicians, Visigoths, Arabs, and the armies of Charles the Sixth. In time, they accepted the sovereignty of the Spanish kings, but only in return for solemn pledges, regularly given before the sacred oak of Guernica, to respect their rights of self-government.

But a little more than a century ago, the Basques chose the wrong side of an internal Spanish squabble and their ancient laws and privileges were suspended. Since then, they have struggled with a succession of governments, trying to regain semi-autonomy.

In 1936, they were briefly successful. In a bid for Basque loyalty in the Spanish Civil War, the Republican government restored self-government. Under Guernica's tree, a young lawyer, Jose Antonio de Aguirre y Lezube, was sworn in as Basque president.

But ten months later, the short-lived republic was crushed by the armies of Franco and his German and Italian allies. It was during that embattled period that Radio Euzkadi first went on the air. Little is known about its early operations, except that it was located in Bilbao, near Spain's northern coast. When Bilbao was captured by the fascists, the station was silenced for the first time.

Aguirre and his cabinet fled first to Paris, then to London, and finally to Moscow, where the exiled president took a university teaching post. After the war, the Basque government-in-exile returned to Paris, although a number of the members of the shadow government settled in the French fishing port of Bayonne, and its neighboring town of Ste. Jean-de-Luz, not far from the Spanish border.

In December 1946, a reborn Radio Euzkadi began broadcasting clandestinely from an old, weather-beaten fishing trawler tied up in Bayonne's harbor. Its signals apparently were not regular nor strong enough to be heard in the U.S., but some European SWLs caught a few shortwave transmissions on 6,300 and 7,000 kHz. Most of the broadcasts, however, were aired by a medium wave station just powerful enough to be heard by the Basque audience across the line in Spain.

The French government must have known of Euzkadi's broadcasts, for a clandestine station cannot operate without at least the tacit consent of its host country. The French seemed willing to look the other way as long as the station didn't spark an international incident. In the early 1950s, though, two such incidents struck spurs, which ignited a diplomatic "4-11" blast.

The first incident involved a Basque priest named Onatilda who was hired by the official Radio Diffusion Television Francaise to broadcast during a daily 45-minute Euro- pean Service transmission in Spanish. The priest's talks were more theological than political, but they did point up the problems of the Basque minority and that Madrid was not alone in the campaign to render the Basques moribund.

More provocative was an incident involving a Spanish medium wave radio station in the northern city of San Sebastian. One night, the Basque underground, operating from French soil, somehow managed to cut the electric power circuit to station EAJR. For half an hour, the silenced Spanish station was replaced on its usual 1068 kHz frequency by Radio Euzkadi. That broadcast was heard throughout the Basque provinces and embarrassed the Franco regime.

Under diplomatic pressure, France cracked down on the Basque exiles. Father Onatilda was tried and, in August 1954, Radio Euzkadi was silenced.
Euzkadi was shut down for the second time. Its medium wave transmitter was dismantled and shipped to the exile government's headquarters in Paris, where it was stored for at least two decades in the basement.

In those days, the Basque government operated a "chilly, baronal mission" in the French capital, according to a prominent visitor, author Irving Wallace. Within a few years, however, the headquarters was moved to the ground floor of a modern glass and stone apartment building at 48 rue Singer in the pleasant Passy District of Paris' 16th Arrondissement. Led by Aguirre and, after his death in 1960, by Jesus Maria de Leitaola, the aging band of exiles kept the torch of hope aglow.

In the summer of 1964, Radio Euzkadi began its third and longest period of operation, beaming a message of resistance into Basque Spain. A few years earlier, however, another Basque organization, ETA (Euzkadi a Euskal Herria), had begun to challenge the old men of the exile government in Paris. Soon ETA would become the mainline of a campaign of terror and assassination in Spain, overshadowing the old guard's more passive approach.

Still, through the new Radio Euzkadi, the exile government spoke to the Basques and to the world. In the 1960s and '70s, the station, with two moderately powerful short-wave transmitters (the station claimed they were 80 kilowatts each), broadcast three times daily, half-hour repeated programs in the Basque language, Euskara, Spanish, and English. To dodge the Spanish jamming stations, its frequencies varied, but generally it could be found near 12,100 and 13,250 kHz (billion 15,100 kHz)

Probably because of past experiences, the Basques were tight-lipped about the station's location, though they implied it operated from within Spain itself. When I got too inquisitive about the whereabouts of its transmitters, a touchy exile official snapped: "If the word clandestine means secret, why should you be the exception?"


The station was devoted to Spanish. Each program opened with a description of the background of the mountainous Basque region, and included an excerpt from a Basque folk song. The station broadcast all day, from dawn to dusk.

In reality, though, the station broadcast from Venezuela, not far from Caracas. According to an interview given to Radio Euzkadi, it was not in Europe, but along the northern coast of South America. There were no Basques there, no Basque heads were shown. The station was tolerable to the Venezuelan government, which was aware of its existence, and was supported by a large and active group of Basque immigrants living in Caracas.

Some SWLs assumed, incorrectly, that Radio Euzkadi was another Red clandestine, like the Soviet-based longtime Radio Espaá Nacional Independiente. But most Basques, devout Roman Catholics, are staunchly anti-communist.

"Radio Euzkadi does not harm any true democracy," a Basque speaker was told me. Other listeners suspected the behind-the-scenes string-pulling of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. But there was no evidence of that either.

Then how did the Basques do it? Equipping and operating a major clandestine broadcaster takes money!

A clue to the mystery was suggested by an incident that began in Manhattan on the night of March 12, 1956, involving Dr. Jesus de Galindo, a 42-year-old professor of Spanish-American civilization at Columbia University. He had also happened to be the Basque exile government's chief fund raiser in the U.S. Shortly before 10 p.m., a student gave the professor a ride to the subway station at 57th Street and 7th Avenue. Galindo walked down the steps to the platform and disappeared.

There was another side to the professor's life. Also a Basque exile, he had fled Spain and found his way to the Dominican Republic, where he took a job with the dictatorship of the late Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. But he was soon shot down by the Caribbean strongman's mercenary forces. And in 1966, left for New York. There he met a fellow instructor at Columbia University, Basque president Aguirre. When Aguirre returned to Paris, he named Galindo the official Basque representative in the U.S.

Galindo had to fight against the oppressive Dominican regime as well, and at the time of his disappearance had completed a book manuscript that painted a highly flattering portrait of the dictator Trujillo, who was then trying to lure American tourists to his island country. Rumors that the book would contain personal slurs on his main ally were too much for the fiery strongman to endure.

Eventually, evidence was unearthed indicating Professor Galindo was kidnapped by Trujillo agents, drugged, and smuggled onto a charter plane. He was flown to the Dominican Republic and, presumably, tortured and killed.

When the hushed American pilot, who thought his passenger was only an invalid, began asking too many questions, he was pushed into the shark-infested sea behind a Civil Trujillo slushr.ower.

Trujillo himself was assassinated a few years later during a coup d'état allegedly encouraged by the U.S. government. The grisly story bears on the Radio Euzkadi mystery because of newspaper articles published shortly after Galindo disappeared. They told of reports the professor had fled, as a foreign agent, with the U.S. Department of Justice. The reports showed he had collected $1,023,000 over several years, but the newspapers said only half that amount had found its way into the coffers of the Basque government in exile.

President Aquiarte denied any wrongdoing, insisting "every cent was accounted for."

But, as Time magazine put it, how could an "obscure exile...pass the hat for a non-recognized government of a nonexistent country—and take in a cool million?"

The money, in fact, came from a voluntary five percent of Basques living outside of Spain, most of them in the western hemisphere. Each year, these emigrants contributed to the exile government as a show of solidarity with their compatriots back home, and to maintain a "citizenship" in the Basque "nation.

Overseas Basques were reminded annually to renew their "citizenship card" by sending in their contributions.

There was ample money to finance the clandestine station. Its programs were produced in studios in Caracas, although its daily "News of Spain and the World" were cut, in part, from newspapers in the Paris headquarters and scripts were supplied by the government.

The Spanish answer to Radio Euzkadi was jamming and more jamming. The technique was to blanket the station's frequency with a stream of noise, continuous and continuous.

Because of the jamming, the station was heard with relative ease in the Basque provinces.

This went on until 1975, when Spanish Franco, Spain's longtime foe of Basque autonomy, died. It was Franco who had, since Spanish Civil War days, considered the Basques traitors and treated the northern provinces accordingly.

A more liberal, democratic regime followed. In early 1977, the political association law was reformed and most political parties were legalized. The way was open for a return to democracy.

The Basques were promised their own justice system, taxation, education, and police force. They were to have a local parliament and be permitted to speak their ancient language and fly the red, white, and green Basque flag. But much of the old autonomy was restored. There no longer was a need for a clandestine radio "voice of the Basque people."

After four decades, Radio Euzkadi announced it was shutting down. At 2200 GMT, April 30, 1977, the station signed off for the last time, saying: "Since the Basque national flag is once again flying proudly from all mastheads in the Basque country, Radio Euzkadi can withdraw from the air with honor!"

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