

CONELRAD: Cold War Radio; Newly Relevant?

By Bart Lee, CHRS Archivist and Fellow, AWA Fellow

Tovarishch V. Putin, would-be Tzar of the would-be Russian Empire, now rattles nuclear sabers to keep NATO out of his war on the Ukraine. But as my old über-commander General Curtis E. LeMay used to write on his B-52 bombers: “Peace through Strength.” And, don’t worry now: If the Russian nuclear forces are as incompetent as the Russian Army has shown itself to be in the Ukraine, they’ll all be radioactive ash before we are... Yet it does remind me of the Cold War, and AM radio’s part in it — while we were all supposed to hide under our school desks ...

Even the smallest AM radios of the 1950s and 1960s had to show two dial markers for 640 KHz and 1240 KHz. Nearby is a picture of a mid-1960s Japanese miniature transistor radio, through a magnifying glass. On the tiny tuning dial one can see the two little Civil Defense triangles. The radio is a “Standard 7 Transistor” model SR-G433. It measures about 1&5/8" by 1&7/8" or in millimeters, about 46h x 42w x 21 deep.

Standard’s nearly identical and iconic and even more collectable “Microntic Ruby” (1965) is the earlier model number SR-G430.

Bart Lee collection

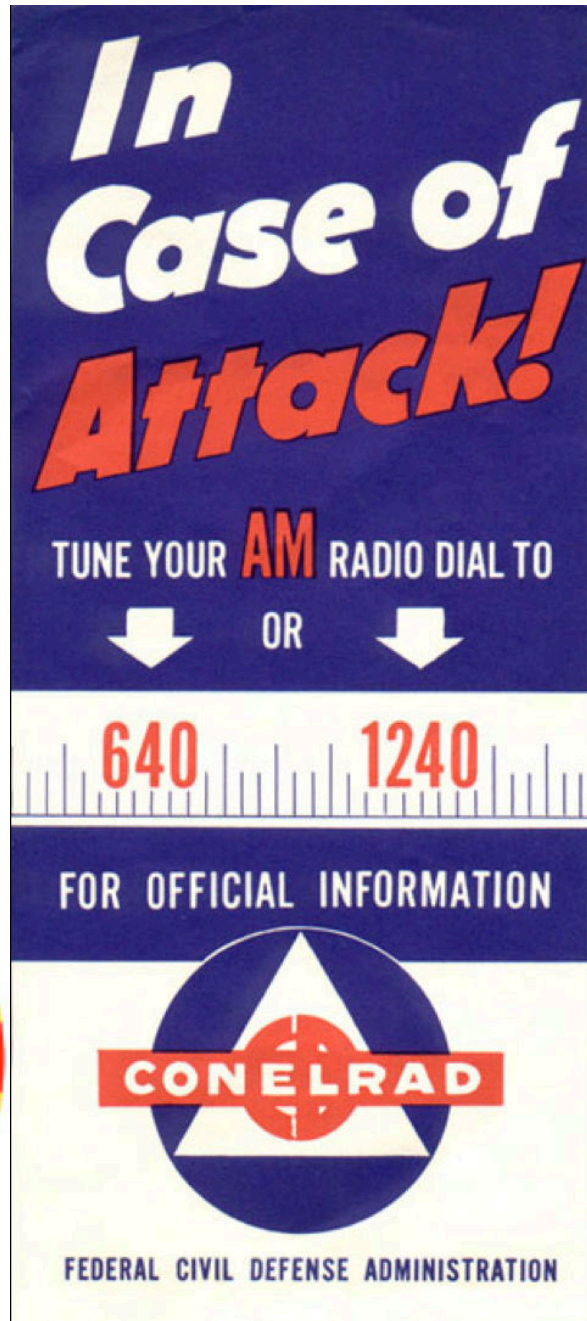


When nuclear war broke out, the Federal Communications Commission wanted everyone to tune to the CONELRAD stations. Exactly why was never clear — **TEOTWAWKI** with audio?

According to the Wiki, as of 1951 (see nearby official graphics, from Wikipedia):

“CONELRAD (Control of Electromagnetic Radiation) was a method of emergency broadcasting to the public of the United States in the event of enemy attack during the Cold War. It was intended to allow continuous broadcast of civil defense information to the public using radio or TV stations, while rapidly

switching the transmitter stations to make the broadcasts unsuitable for Soviet bombers that might attempt to home in on the signals (as was done during World War II, when German radio stations, based in or near cities, were used as beacons by pilots of bombers).”*



* [https:// en.wikipedia. org/wiki/ CONELRAD](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CONELRAD)

The FCC *on its own* required receivers to display Civil Defense markers for the CONELRAD frequencies, 640 KHz and 1240 KHz.



A typical CONELRAD marked dial on a Viscount radio;
photo Konrad Brinker on Radiomuseum.org

The law did not otherwise require this, because the CONELRAD system intended initially only to deprive the enemy aircraft of radio station navigational aids.

According to an article at RadioMuseum.org, the system was really complicated and never worked, and “... there had been an attempt to exercise the CONELRAD system during the Cuban

missile crisis and ... it was a fiasco, so the system was just abandoned ...” [in 1963].[†] A typical marked dial appears above.

In the S.F. Bay area, KCBS now plays the emergency information role.



And no doubt, in the event of an atomic attack, we'll all get a text too ...

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(Pax et Lux! de K6VK 30 VI '22, v.2) ##

[†] [http:// www.radiomuseum. org/forum/ conelrad_ radio _meets_ the_civil_ defense.html](http://www.radiomuseum.org/forum/conelrad_radio_meets_the_civil_defense.html)