

CLANDESTINE CORNER

ATLANTIКСENDER AND SOLDATENSENDER CALAIS



The British undercover Special Operations One organization began planning in December 1942 for two other stations which became known as Deutscher Kurzwellensender Atlantik and the medium wave Soldatensender Calais, (German Shortwave Radio Atlantic and Soldiers' Radio Calais, respectively).

The former was part of a plan to increase the psychological warfare attack on the German navy, particularly the submarine crews, with the assumption that if the U-boat men cracked, it was bound to spread to the other service arms.

The second was to single out the German army as a target. Its programming key was to be "black" news, mixing truth and calculated fiction. These two stations, which became the most famous of the wartime clandestines, were preceded by a shortlived experiment known as Wehrmachtsender Nord, beamed to German troops.

SO-1 decided to use a huge 600 kilowatt transmitter built at Crowborough, and studios constructed at Milton Bryan, in England, for the new operations. Originally, the powerful transmitter had been designed and constructed to drown the voice of the enemy stations and impose its own programming on them by superior strength. It had never been used for that purpose. Temporarily it was in the hands of the BBC. While negotiations were going on to get this transmitter back from the BBC's jealous control, plans went ahead for the shortwave outlet, Deutscher Kurzwellensender Atlantik, which became known to the Germans eventually as Atlantiksender.

Wehrmachtsender Nord was abandoned after a few weeks of operation because it "didn't sound right." To sound like a genuine radio news station it had to broadcast live and until the powerful transmitter was obtained, SO-1 had to prerecord all its programs for later transmission.

Atlantiksender initially broadcast six half hour program segments each evening which originated from studios at Milton Bryan in a neat, functional two-story brick building.

From the outside, it looked like any of the new factories and workshops then being built in the area, except for a 12 foot high, wire fence around it and a squad of special constables armed with tommy guns and rifles guarding it.

On February 5, 1943, after three weeks of dry runs, the Atlantiksender opened its first broadcast with a shrieking pipe melody as a tuning signal. It had been recorded on a Hammond organ by one of the radio engineers at the station.

The station first broadcast on 6,220 and 9,800 kilocycles. In 1944, U.S. listeners also reported hearing it on 7,020 kilocycles. The station was heard in the United States as early as 2145 GMT, until signoff at 0700 GMT. The German monitors were on their toes, and by the third half-hourly transmission that first night, the jammers were right on it.

The news style of the station was "punchy", using short, easily understood colloquial German, differing from the formal style of the BBC and the official German radio. Music of the latest type enjoyed by German servicemen was selected for the station. Latest German hits were specially flown to Britain from neutral Sweden by mosquito bomber. Other records were specially made for Atlantiksender by Henry Zeisel's band which had been captured by the Eighth Army in North Africa while it was there entertaining Rommel's troops. Even stars like Marlene Dietrich made recording for this service, albeit unaware that they would be broadcast on "black" radio.

Programs for the Luftwaffe were also aired, in addition to those beamed to the Navy men. To provide cover to the operation, so as to make it seem to the servicemen listeners that the station was really German, Goebbels' and Hitler's speeches from the Sports Palace in Berlin were picked up from the German network, from time to time, and relayed over Atlantiksender.

Carefully mixed in the programming, however, were items referred to by the SO-1 staff as "dirt", those items which they hoped would make the listeners think and act along lines displeasing to the Nazi regime.

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Sefton Delmer, journalist turned head of the British clandestine operations, said, "It was amazing, however, how many Germans were genuinely taken in, and did, in fact, believe the station to be a German forces radio."

The powerful medium wave Soldatensender Calais took to the air for the first time at 1800 GMT on the evening of October 24, 1943.

With a crash of drums and a blare of trumpets, a jubilantly boisterous German march began. A voice in German announced, "Here is the Soldiers Radio Calais, broadcasting on wave bands 360 meters, 410 and 492 meters. Coupled with it the German Shortwave Radio Atlantic, on wave bands 30.7 and 48.3. We bring music and news for comrades in the command areas West and Norway. We shall now play dance music."

This station used the 600 kilowatt transmitting center which had been nicknamed, "Aspidistra." It was also linked cleverly to a small 500 watt mobile transmitter which had been trucked to a spot on the coast near Dover where it was directly opposite Calais in France. Just a little touch for the benefit of those trying to get a fix.

It soon became evident from reports reaching SO-1 that the German public in general accepted its candid and outspoken news reports as the real thing; evidence that the Reich propaganda men had to tell many truths to the Wehrmacht which they kept from the German civilian public. Soldatensender soon became, according to internal German sources, one of the three most listened to stations, along with Belgrade and one called Luftnot-Sender Laibach. Because it used a frequency close to the official Munich station's transmitter, it was relatively difficult to jam effectively without also reducing the effectiveness of the real German station.

On June 6, 1944, at 4:50 a.m., the first news of the allied landing in Normandy was broadcast to the world by Soldatensender Calais. The station's dance music was interrupted by a flash to report which was heard in Germany and in the neutral countries. Apparent scoops such as this tended to give much credibility to the mixed "black" and "white" newscasts of Soldatensender Calais and Atlantiksender.

(Digested from "The History of Clandestine Radio Operations," A DXplorer Radio Assn. publication)