

CLANDESTINE CORNERI V A N T H E T E R R I B L E

One evening in late August 1941, Germans listening to a news broadcast from Berlin radio were astounded by an extraordinary interruption.

"Lies, lies!" cut in a strange voice in German.

The Nazi announcer continued, "The German armed forces have won new victories."

"Don't you believe it. The blitzkrieg has been stopped for nine weeks," the mysterious ghost voice countered. "The Luftwaffe shot down 109 Soviet planes," said the Berlin announcer. "And how many German planes were shot down," the ghost voice rejoined.

And so it went, the German announcer tried rattling off his lines at double speed but it was no use. The mystery voice was too quick for him. The German station dropped its newscast and hastily rushed a band into the studios. Though the horns blared, the ghost voice could still be heard in the background. The Nazis even resorted to weird sound effects to drown out the voice but only succeeded in driving away its audience by the bedlam of noise.

Later in the evening, in between musical selections, the German station tried again to squeeze in a newscast but the mystery voice popped up again from out of nowhere. Finally in desperation, Deutschlandssender went off the air and listeners were urged to tune to another German station.

The heckler who had performed this feat was eventually traced to Russia, to a giant transmitter, RWL, some 30 miles from Moscow.

The voice, described by himself as a "man of the people," was nicknamed "Ivan the Terrible" and "Mike, the Mad Russian," by the British monitors. Soviet officials in London "guessed" he might be the former Viennese journalist, Ernst Fischer, who had been working for Radio Moscow. They also hinted that Foreign Vice-Commissar Solomon Abramovich Lozovsky, who spoke flawless German, might have had a share in bedeviling the German stations. Lozovsky, incidentally, often acted as a spokesman for the Soviet government and often briefed Western newsmen at Moscow press conferences. After the war, he fell from grace and in a Stalinist purge in 1949 was shot.

Behind the ghost voice technique was a discovery by the Russian engineers that enabled them to synchronize their frequencies with those of the German stations, making it possible for "Ivan" to cut in whenever the German announcer paused for breath.

Sometimes the voice struck a serious note with his machinegun-like, pointed repartee, but the light touch was generally there, wrecking the German newscasts.

One night in December 1942, there was a similar lively battle of words between an announcer on Radio Roma and the ghost voice. Also harassed were Nazi transmissions from Sofia, Bulgaria. There were all traced to the whimsical "Ivan." Moscow used the technique throughout the war, careful not to overdo it and not to strike too often in the same place. One night after driving the Berlin transmitter off the air, the voice pinch hit for Nazi leaders and mimicked the voices of Hitler and Goebbels.

The Russian ghost voice led to retaliation. A German announcer butted into Moscow's programming, urging comrades to revolt. An English speaking ghost, whom the British dubbed "Harassing Harry," interrupted the BBC with pot shots at Churchill, the food ministry and the United States.

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(Digested from "The History of Clandestine Radio Operations," a DXRA publication)