

X G R S, Shanghai, China

by

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From 1939 to 1945, German station XGRS broadcast from what was known as the Shanghai International Settlement. Although China retained nominal sovereignty over the area of the settlement, and a Shanghai Municipal Council had some authority, the three “concessions” of the settlement functioned basically as colonial outposts of their masters—the British, the French and the Americans. The British were the most influential. In the 1930s a contiguous area outside the settlement came under Japanese control and became an informal fourth concession. By 1937 Japan was at war with China, and the expanding Japanese presence on the settlement’s borders and in eastern China generally served as a constant threat to the westerners. The Japanese, in many ways, increased pressure on the settlement, which was basically an indefensible island. On December 7, 1941, coincident with the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese moved into Shanghai and took over, meeting virtually no resistance (the British and the Americans had already withdrawn their troops).

Although the westerners had acceded to Japan’s establishment of a radio control office in 1938, and were willing to seek permission for new stations, the radio scene remained relatively open, even after the Japanese takeover. Many outlets, even pro-western ones, were able to continue operating, provided they behaved, which most did thanks to collaborationist westerners who were, at minimum, happy to avoid confrontations with the Japanese.

There was no German concession in Shanghai, but Germany had extensive interests in the city, and propaganda was one of them. Although in its final incarnation XGRS was clearly a propaganda station, fully in service to the Reich, it did not start out that way. Its roots lie in the broadcasting by the Shanghai German community of some English- and Chinese-language German news agency items four times a day over Shanghai station XHHB, an anti-British outlet on 740 kc. Following this, in 1940, the Shanghai Germans, seemingly operating without German government involvement, obtained approval for their own station from the Japanese. This led in June 1940 to the establishment of XGRS (“German Radio Station”) as a low power mediumwave station on 570 kc. (either 100 or 300



watts). It occupied four rooms on the third floor of the Kaiser Wilhelm School, which served as a kind of Nazi headquarters for the city.



In addition to having similar names, XGRS, which called itself the Far Eastern Broadcasting Station, and the post-war (late 1945) British Far Eastern Broadcasting Service station in Singapore (later renamed the BBC Far Eastern Station), shared another distinction: neither was operated by their country's national broadcasting entity, the Propaganda Ministry in the case of Germany, the BBC in the case of the U.K. Both were run instead by their country's foreign office. There was rivalry between the German Propaganda Ministry (Goebbels) and the Foreign Office (Ribbentrop) with regard to XGRS, but the Foreign Ministry won out, thanks largely to the work of 25-year old Erwin Wickert.

Although young, Wickert was already accomplished; he had studied under scholarship in the United States, and traveled the world, eventually finding himself staying in Shanghai with the German Consul General, who became

a mentor. In mid-September 1940, Wickert became the Foreign Office's first broadcasting attaché. He was assigned to the German embassy in Shanghai, and his first assignment was to find out what was going on at XGRS.

Wickert was ambitious, and it was his enthusiasm for the task that led to the conversion of XGRS from a locally-oriented station into one with an international reach and a strong Nazi propaganda line. He upgraded the programming. He added variety to the music programs, and paid close attention to the news broadcasts, improving the articulation of the English-language announcers and including news from Allied sources in order to add depth and project greater objectivity. Although one XGRS goal was to drive a wedge between the British and the Americans, Wickert felt a softer line would be more successful. Most important to DXers, late in 1940 he obtained permission to commence broadcasting on shortwave. The transmitter was understood to be 5 kw., but an early QSL for reception on January 4, 1941 (p. 4) said 500 watts. Perhaps there had been a power upgrade. (Or a printing error?)

Wickert did not lack critics in Shanghai's German embassy, however, one of whom was Siegfried Lahrmann, who was head of the Nazi party in China and did not approve of Wickert's somewhat tactless approach to his job and his dismissal of some radio veterans. He was also concerned that Wickert's reduction of the broadcast time allotted to the Italian embassy, which led to the Italians' complete withdrawal from their arrangement with XGRS, was bad politics. And he felt that Wickert's negotiations with the Japanese to authorize an increase in power to 10 kw. was de minimis (it is unclear if the station ever actually operated with 10 kw.). Lahrmann urged Wickert's dismissal to higher ups. Wickert was also under attack from members of the German community who had been active in the station's affairs early on and were now basically on the outside looking in.



MEDIUM-WAVE 570 KC-526.3 M
SHORT-WAVE 11.88 Mc-25.25 M

THE FAR EASTERN BROADCASTING STATION

THE VOICE OF EUROPE

SHANGHAI, October 14th, 1941.

3 GREAT WESTERN ROAD, APT. 5
TELEPHONE: 20026

Mr. Roger Legge, Jr.
20 Beethoven Street,
Binghamton, New York,
U. S. A.

Dear Mr. Legge:

We acknowledge receipt of your letter dated September 7th and herewith enclose our Verification-Card No.1.

We thank you for the excellent programme reports of our broadcasts on September 3rd, 4th and 6th, which we have checked with our log book and found to be correct.

Please note that we are at present broadcasting a special test programme for the U.S.A. at 2 p.m. Shanghai Standard Time, which is equal to 1 a.m. Eastern Standard Time. We should appreciate it very much to hear from you, how these test programmes are received by you and if so, whether you think them interesting. Enclosed please find 3 International Reply Coupons.

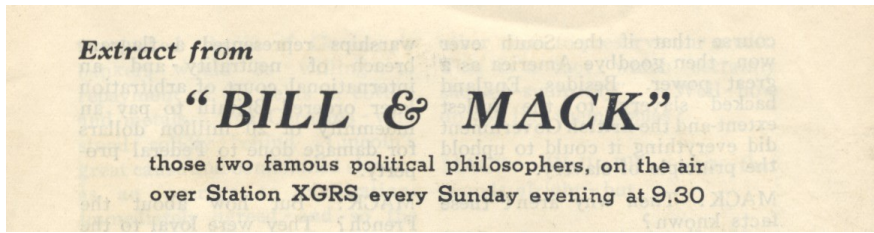
From the heading of your letter we notice that you are the editor of a magazine devoted to reception on the amateur bands. We are very much interested in receiving one or several such publications, and beg you to kindly let us have the current issue of your "Ama-Touring" with your rate for a year's subscription. If you should consider it advisable for us to also subscribe to some other magazines, we would thank you for giving us the names and addresses of the best publications available in your country.

Thanking you in anticipation, we remain,

yours very truly,
THE FAR EASTERN BROADCASTING STATION
~~SHANGHAI~~
A.G. Goldau
Manager.

AGG/HM.

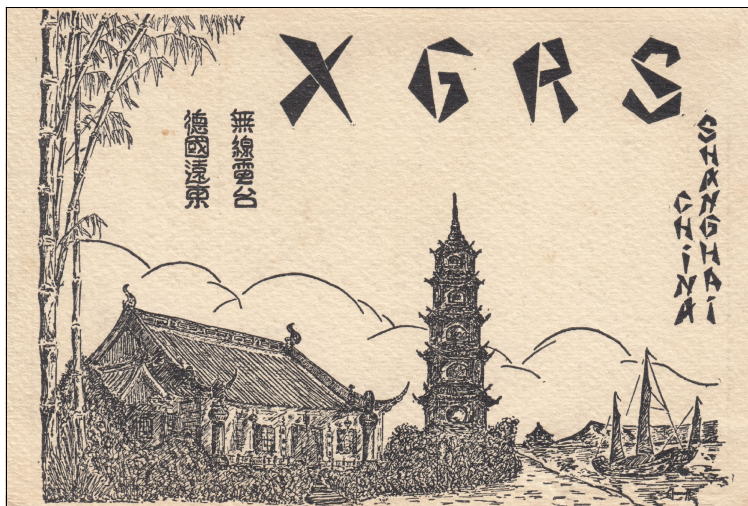
Another major Wickert antagonist was Carl Flick-Steger, who was born in Vienna but grew up in the United States and worked as a Hearst correspondent in Berlin and Vienna, and also saw war duty in Belgium and the Netherlands, and in Paris during the German occupation, before coming to Shanghai (and renouncing his American citizenship). The strong-willed Flick-Steger was known to have installed S.S. agents at the station and to be reporting to them on XGRS activities.



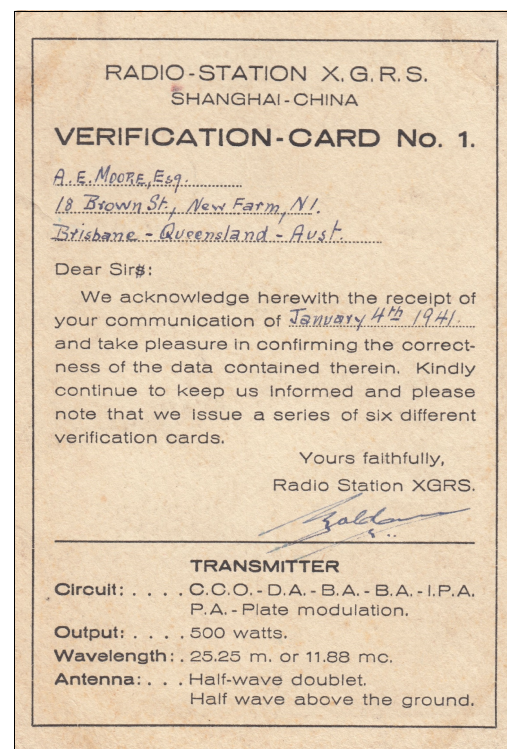
Eventually he took over the management of the station. He was also responsible for writing “Bill and Mack,” an ongoing barroom conversation that was the station’s most popular program.

One of Wickert’s successes had been the hiring of Herbert Erasmus Moy, a journalist and announcer who had been working for an American station, XMHC, 700 kc. Moy was born in the United States, grew up here and graduated from Columbia. His decision to move to XGRS was not entirely a professional one; he was supporting his father, who was an opium addict, and he needed the money.

Moy was well known in Shanghai because he wrote for the *Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury*, which owned XMHC. He also wrote for a German-owned, English-language propaganda sheet. He traded his American citizenship for Chinese citizenship around the start of the Pacific war. He was good on the air, and while he never achieved the popularity of Carroll Alcott of the British station (and major XGRS competitor) XMHA—whose in-your-face attitude toward the Japanese insured him a huge audience but also nearly cost him his life—the novel “cabaret” style of Nazi propaganda in which Moy participated at XGRS was by most measures a success.



Thanks to Sam Dellit for permission to reproduce this QSL-card from the Australian Radio DX Club’s QSL Collection (Ernie Moore QSLs), National Film & Sound Archive, Canberra, Australia.



However, Moy was a heavy drinker, which eventually contributed to his demise. At a station party held at the war's end, Moy, in a drunken state, supposedly slit his own throat and wrists, then jumped out a window. His mistress said he had been talking about suicide for several days.

XGRS started showing up in the DX press in April 1941. The frequency was 12040 kHz. at first, and, in line with its broadened ambitions, the station identified as the Voice of Europe. It was on the air from 7 a.m. to midnight Shanghai time, or 2300-1600 GMT, with frequent news. Much of the programming was in English, but there were Chinese, Russian, French, Italian, German and Hindustani segments as well.

The station often adjusted its frequency, but it was always in the 25 meter band. In October 1941, it was on 11980 kHz., then various channels between 12010 and 12075. In February 1942 it moved to the low end of 25 meters and was heard on frequencies between 11640 and 11695 kHz. The frequencies 11880 and 11920 kHz. were also reported; 11880 was the frequency that appeared on XGRS letterhead and documents. Signals were surprisingly good (maybe the station was using 10 kw. after all).

The XGRS address was given as 3 Great Western Road, "Apartment 5," Shanghai. The station invited reports, and many DXers reported receipt of QSLs, although few seem to have survived. One that did is on p. 4. It says it is one of six cards, no doubt an attempt to encourage reports, as was the station's practice of sending International Reply Coupons to listeners to cover the cost of postage, a novel twist on the usual practice. This is the only card I have ever seen from XGRS; however, an interesting letter QSL appears on p. 3.

Flick-Steger prepared the station's program booklet, "Shanghai Calling!," copies of which sometimes accompanied QSLs. Below are covers of the editions for [November 4](#), [November 25](#) and [December 23, 1941](#); click on these dates to see the full editions. They contain the daily schedule of XGRS, together with summary schedules for XIRS (Italian), XHHB, XGOA in Nanking (then under Japanese control), and Germany's big "Zeesen" station in Berlin. The booklets gave the German



slant on various wartime issues, information about music heard on the station, some columns connected with particular programs, etc. The column, "A Briton's Point of View," by "Reginald Hollingsworth," paralleled the program of that name. "Hollingsworth" was actually Peter Waldbauer, an Austrian who, according to Wickert, had lived in England so long that he could speak "in the purest, snootiest, excessively exaggerated Oxford English." "Shanghai Calling!" also contained some advertising.

In his book, *Secret War in Shanghai*, Bernard Wasserstein recounts in some detail the lives of a number of the on-air English-language personalities on XGRS. John Kenneth Gracie, a British citizen, was down and out when offered a job playing "Sergeant Allan McIntosh." He claimed that he just read what was given to him, but not everyone agreed. He was interned by the Japanese in 1942. Frank Johnston, also British, had served time in San Quentin, and before the war had worked at XMHA. At XGRS he took on the persona of "Pat Kelly." He was seized by the Japanese in 1942, freed upon the intercession of the Germans at XGRS, but later let go because of poor performance. After the war a British court in Hong Kong sentenced both Gracie and Johnston to ten years hard labor for assisting the enemy.

**XGRS, SHANGHAI
CHINA**

Frequency. 12,040kc. 24.92m.

Operating schedule. 9.15 a.m. till 11 a.m.,
7 p.m. till 10.30 p.m. or later.

Standard time. 2 hours behind E.A.S.T.

Distance from Sydney. Approximately
4300 miles.

Postal address. Far Eastern Broadcasting
Station XGRS, 3, Great Western Road,
Shanghai, China.

Identification. Announces in English and
uses 4 tone chime, American an-
nouncer gives news in English. Violently
anti-British and under German control.

Verification details. Verifies by letter
and promises to send card at later
date.

From Radio and Hobbies in Australia.

Before the war, Robert S. Lamb had founded a Shanghai political paper that was half owned by the press officer of the local Nazi party. He was a master of the self-serving, claiming, probably falsely, that during the war he had been rejected for British military service, but that he had done his duty for Britain by submitting to them certain confidential wartime information. At XGRS he wound up as the on-air character "Billy Bailey" until 1942, when he was fired for drunkenness and interned for the rest of the war. He was charged with Gracie and Johnston, but the charges were dropped.

Listen to Station

XGRS

The latest news,
The best commentators,
The finest music.

Long wave: *Short wave:*
570 Kc=526.3 m 11.88 Mc=25.25 m

There were also Australians at XGRS, and women had on-air roles as well. Hilda Edna Glatzel was born in China of British parents and adopted as an infant by a German man and his Peruvian wife. Hilda's German husband had been sent to Germany to fight, and boredom had led her to seek employment at XGRS. With her good looks and made-for-radio English she became XGRS's "Diana Hamilton," the guiding light of "Diana Hamilton's Advice to the Lovelorn," which followed the XGRS "American

Hour" (theme song: "Springtime in the Rockies"). Later she founded the "XGRS Playhouse of the Air." She settled in Australia after the war.

Among his other accomplishments, Wickert set up a monitoring station that “kept an ear” on stations in San Francisco, Honolulu, and throughout Asia. He also instituted some XGRS non-English programming. He was transferred to Tokyo toward the end of the war, and would have a long career as an author and diplomat. He had the last laugh on his XGRS adversaries when he returned to China in 1976 as Germany’s ambassador.

XGRS was probably the most widely heard Chinese station during the early war years, but it was much less frequently reported in 1943 and after. Whether this was due to the contraction of the DXing fraternity in those times, or reduced activity by the station, is not known.

Upon Germany’s surrender in May 1945, XGRS was handed over to the Japanese—for six bottles of whiskey, said Moy—and thereafter operated as XGOO, call letters it retained even after the Japanese surrender in September. Prisoner of war messages were heard from the station while it was under Japanese control. In November, when the Central Broadcasting Administration of the Chinese national government took over, the call sign was changed to XORA and the station became simply the Shanghai Broadcasting Station.

國 中

台電播廣海上處理管業事播廣央中



SHANGHAI
CHINA.

SHORT WAVE:-

11.690 Mg., IN
25 M. BAND

MEDIUM WAVE:-

570 Kc.
900 Kc.

THE SHANGHAI BROADCASTING STATION
X. O. R. A.
of the
CENTRAL BROADCASTING ADMINISTRATION.
7, Chung Cheng Road (Western)
SHANGHAI - CHINA.

Mr. Paul Kary,
153, Suppes Avenue,
Johnstown, Pa.,
United States of America.

Dear Sir(s):

We acknowledge herewith the receipt of your communication of March 17th 1947 and take pleasure in confirming the correctness of the data contained therein. We would be very grateful if you would kindly keep us informed on reception qualities of this station.

Yours faithfully,
The Shanghai Broadcasting Station
X. O. R. A.
S. P. Chen

"New Odor" In The East

By EARL ALBERT SELLE

When this war is over, there will be a reckoning with certain ladies and gents in the Far East, who, to all intent and purpose, are scribbling obscenities about us in the backroom while we are engaged elsewhere. After midnight, the Pacific airwaves, shortwave band, are choked with venom, spewed out from sundry points, but mainly Tokyo, Shanghai and Manila. The Japs, of course, can be expected to use the radio to spread lies and to hurl taunts. They do it with what approaches juvenile emotion and with reasoning at about the same age level.



SELLE

The Japs, however, are not the ones on whom the finger is put. The guilt of fraud or treason lies with a few turncoat Americans, Britishers and Filipinos who are selling their countries for the pleasure of Japanese society—a matter in which the duration is in no doubt. A disgusting example comes out of Shanghai each night, where radio station XGRS contributes its bit to the "co-prosperity sphere" and to Nazi ambitions in the Orient.

* * * * *

The ownership of XGRS is open to doubt, but the most likely possibility is that it is either owned or controlled by Klaus Mehnert, a former professor at the University of Hawaii. Prof. Mehnert is the gent over whom some of our better early appeasers went into spasms in his support two or three years ago, when some 'hard-hearted realists said that Mehnert was (1) a Nazi propagandist; (2) a Nazi spy, or (3) both and maybe a bit more. Mehnert denied the allegations with all the unctuousness of a Nazi, and proved it by removing himself and his wife to Shanghai, where he set himself up as Hitler's No. 1 propagandist in the Far East.

Mehnert publishes a magazine—"XXth Century"—which espouses Goebbels' underhanded plots. The "XXth Century" is sponsor of a number of daily programs over XGRS—a station under the management of Herbert Erasmus Moy, an American of Chinese ancestry, born in New York. In the years immediately before the war, Moy was known for his pro-Nazi sympathies, and his subsequent association with Mehnert has done nothing to better Moy's American ideals.

* * * * *

One of the features of XGRS is the reading of editorial comment from a daily newspaper, the Shanghai Times, which, for many years has been published by a Mr. Nottingham, a renegade, unprincipled Britisher who kept his poorly-edited newspaper alive through subsidies from the Yokohama Specie Bank at Shanghai. The Shanghai Times editorial comment often is more pro-Japanese than that which emanates from the Tokyo radio. Nottingham's paper extolls the virtues of the Jap fighter, his superiority in all lines of endeavor, and what a rotter the American is. Moy permits a flute-voiced Britisher to read this tripe, while he himself reads what he purports to be news, but what amounts to rank lies on fighting in the Pacific and in Europe and the Mediterranean. Another Britisher, a Sergeant Arthur McLane, is allowed long periods for attacks on the Christian church, particularly the Anglican church.

* * * * *

At Tokyo, American voices are heard now and then. On the anniversary of Japan's Navy Day, a woman named Frances Hopkins made a scurrilous attack on the prowess of our own navy, pointing out that it suffered defeat whenever it met the Japanese and that most of it is on the ocean's bottom.

* * * * *

What happens to the scalawags other than Americans does not matter. But for Americans, the day of judgment is coming.

XGRS could provoke strong opinions about turncoat broadcasters. This column is from the *Honolulu Advertiser* of July 6, 1943.

RESOURCES

Astrid Freyeisen “XGRS–Shanghai Calling,” in [Rundfunk und Geschichte](#), Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Germany, 29 Jahrgang Nr. 1/2, January-April 2003, p. 38.

Horst H. Geerken, *Hitler’s Asian Adventure* (Norderstedt, Germany: BukitCinta, 2015 [translated into English by Bill McCann]), pgs. 148-155.

Horst H. Geerken, DJ4SM, “Shanghai Calling,” *CQ DL* [Deutschen Amateur-Radio-Club], November 2016, p. 35-37 [the content of this article is substantially the same as *Hitler’s Asian Adventure*]

Ron Ratcliffe, *Shanghai Boy*. Ratcliffe was Hilda Glatzel’s son. He died in 2018, and his book was published posthumously by family members through Lulu.com.

Bernard Wasserstein, *Secret War in Shanghai* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

“*Shanghai Calling!*” weekly program booklet of XGRS (November 4, November 25, December 23, 1941).

[Shanghai - Counter-Espionage Summary](#), Office of Strategic Services, August 12, 1945.

[Shanghai Radio Dial](#), Radio Heritage Foundation, <https://www.radioheritage.net/Story129.asp>

Bulletins of the International DXers Alliance, International Short Wave Club, National Radio Club, and Newark News Radio Club; and these magazines: *Movie and Radio Guide*, *Radio and Hobbies in Australia*, *Radio Index (RADEX)*, and *Radio News*.

August 8, 2021