

CLANDESTINE CORNERTHE U.S. ARMY'S PSYCHOLOGICAL SOAP OPERA

The American armed forces operated certain clandestine radio stations in Europe during World War II, although they never gained the audiences of the more successful British operations. The U.S. "black" stations were rather late in entering the game.

One such outlet was Radio 1212, used by the psychological warfare unit of General Omar Bradley's 12th Army Group. This operated on medium wave from somewhere on the continent late in the war.

The other American "black" station was a short lived project under the auspices of a Colonel Powell of the "Sykewar" team of the 12th Army Group. Using one of the Radio Luxembourg transmitters, then recently captured by the U.S. forces, Powell's men, for a period of about two weeks, broadcast what was to all intents and purposes, a clandestine soap opera, the drama of a Rhineland town which had supposedly revolted against Hitler and the SS and was now appealing over an army radio to the Americans to come and rescue them.

The "burgomeister" of the town was the chief speaker on the station. Every evening he went on the air to tell his fellow citizens what they should do and give them his daily progress report of the town's desperate battle with the Nazis. The whole show was staged, complete with dialogue, sound effects and messengers dramatically interrupting with bits of late news.

Finally the city was "liberated" and in a moving final scene, the "burgomeister" thanked his GI rescuers. The British clandestine radio expert, Sefton Delmer felt that this rather spectacular operation was blemished by the fact that the supposed town was never identified, hence not giving its listeners the believable tale it could have been.

Several other Allied "black" radio stations operated late in the war. A British venture, known as Radio Livorno was a scheme designed to bring about the surrender of the Italian Navy. It pretended to be operating on behalf of the Italian resistance from the radio cabin of an Italian warship lying in the Livorno base. Night after night, Livorno called the Italian ships at Spezia, Genoa and other North Italian naval stations. In eloquent anti-German invective, the speaker, a Maltese officer of the British army, warned his comrades in the Italian Navy to be on guard for German attempts to board and seize their ships. The Livorno station ordered the Italian patriots in the Navy to make no move without orders. When at last the day came, September 10, 1943, Radio Livorno ordered the Italian fleet to sail for Malta. They did so and surrendered to the British admiral there. The announcer, Randolph Imozzi was credited with this venture, conducted almost single-handedly.

Another Italian-oriented station was the counterfeit of the real German-sponsored Radio of the Italian Fascist Republic. The real Fascist Republican station was operating from Munich on a transmitter placed at the disposal of Mussolini after he had set up a fascist government in Northern Italy, following the fall of the regime in Rome. The clandestine station in Britain simply relayed part of the genuine programming of the fascist station, then cut in and continued with its own programs. Italian listeners tuning for Il Duce's station would tune the false transmitter by mistake as often as they heard the real outlet.

Two other English clandestines were directing programs at the Balkan states. One prepared and repeatedly broadcast a series of 14 lessons in oil well sabotage to Rumanians, the other pretended to be a Bulgarian Nazi-sponsored freedom station and the phony counterpart set out to irk the Bulgarians by mimicking the real transmitter.

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