

Ham Radio Enabled Hitler's Shortwave Radio Network

How did Hitler rapidly build his vast network of shortwave transmitting stations?

By the 1890s Marconi's wireless work was well known and hobbyists began building radios. Once built, they tinkered with the radios' insides to improve reception, particularly of foreign stations, which offered more light entertainment than state-controlled German broadcasting.

In Germany and other countries, radio hobby clubs thrived by 1928. Several hundred thousand Germans joined these groups, in part because commercial radios were very expensive, and clubs helped people build their own radio more economically. The clubs also threw great parties. See a typical ad pictured to the right.



Soon, what eventually became known as Ham Radio emerged as an official hobby but were labeled *experimenters*. These experimenters began building transmitters. This effort evolved and by 1930 Ham Radio was a booming hobby.

The Nazis knew that German hams had a history of illegal transmissions without licenses and were likely to have unsupervised radio contacts with foreigners, even those from the Soviet Union or France, Germany's former enemy in World War I.

In 1933, the Nazis took power in Germany. The Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I in November 1918, strictly limited how many people and weapons the German military could have. Therefore, Hitler needed a strategy to quickly rebuild his military beyond treaty limits.

Germany began a comprehensive and often violent process of making all Germans serve the Nazi Party. Groups as diverse as choirs, political parties, sports clubs and chambers of commerce were shut down or outright taken over and purged of Jews, socialists, outspoken democrats and other people the Nazis deemed "undesirables."

Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi minister of propaganda, (with a PHD in German Philology {Language}) brilliantly understood the value of psychological warfare. He moved quickly to take control of not only commercial broadcast radio stations but also the radio clubs and their members including the hams' national organization *The German Amateur Transmission and Reception Service*.

At the disgust of hams their equipment was confiscated and converted into shortwave propaganda broadcast stations.

Also, with the threat of hard labor camps and because hams possessed special talents, they were placed directly into the armed forces, the intelligence services and the communications service of the diplomatic corps. German amateur radio hobbyists was an important boost for the Nazis' secret military rebuilding effort. Those hams skilled at high-speed Morse code received special privileges.

Hams taught radio skills to active-duty soldiers and future recruits like the Hitler youth and men preparing to join the German Navy. Having amateur radio hobbyists do the training let the German military avoid tipping off Britain, France, Belgium or the United States that Germany was rearming on a large scale. All the new radiomen on the air could be explained as just simple hobbyists.

By 1938, shortwave German broadcasts were being transmitted 24 hours a day in twelve different languages.

Germans continued to secretly listen to foreign broadcast. By the first year of the war, Sep 1, 1939, 1,500 Germans were imprisoned for listening to London-based broadcasts.

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07/31/2019

[Source 1](#) [Source 2](#)