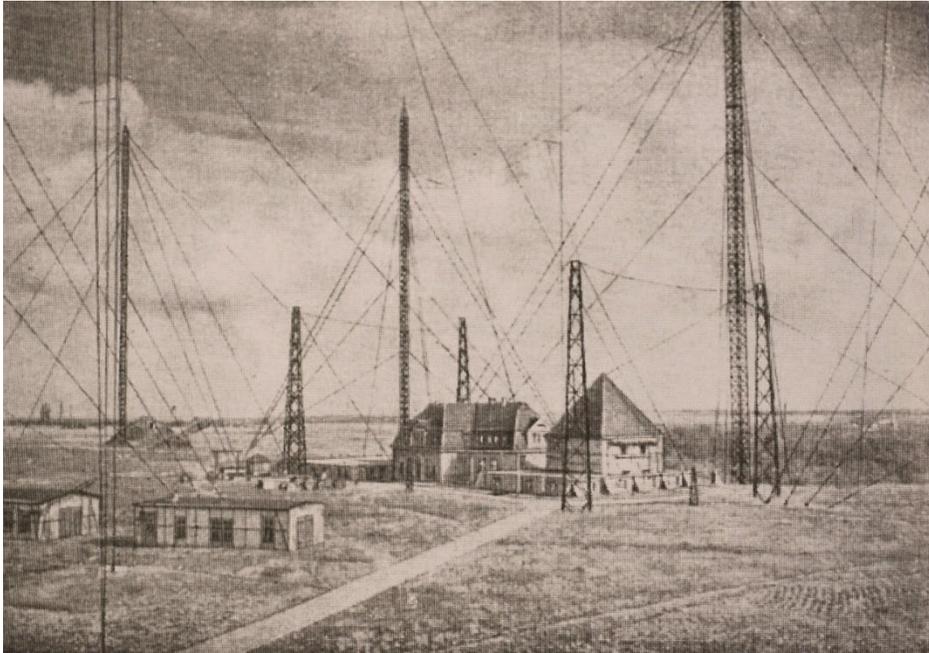


One hundred years ago today, on December 20, 1920, at the large former WW-I military transmitting site at Königs Wusterhausen, located just south of Berlin, a group of "de-mobbed" military wireless personnel collected their musical instruments to play Christmas music into a microphone. This event has been called the birth of the German radio broadcasting. The frequency was in the longwave region, and it could probably have been copied as far away as Paris, if anyone there was listening.



*Königs Wusterhausen WW-I German military transmission station, 1916*

Virtually no one in Germany was listening, because they couldn't. No companies had yet manufactured receiving sets because legislation in the early Weimar Republic didn't exist to permit the public to listen to the airwaves or even to build radio sets.

But a tiny few, notably in the Berlin region, must have been listening and would have heard the tinny sounding music using primitive detector sets. There were likely four groups of listeners: teenagers - virtually all boys - still too young in 1918 to have been drafted into the military; a radio "spark" or two who had served time in the trenches and survived; former military staff at wireless sites in Germany who as yet had received no operational directives from the new Reichspost and who were likely just sitting around; and finally, international receiving stations, always alert, at embassies and other governmental units in Europe. No records exist to indicate what was heard or who heard it.



*Königs Wusterhausen radio site - original transmission site, today a museum*

The radio broadcast phenomenon took off, although modestly, in 1923, and by 1925, thousands were building their own sets or could purchase primitive receivers from Telefunken, Loewe, or any number of bootleg manufacturers, all attempting to circumvent Telefunken's patent restrictions. Telefunken imagined itself owning the product rights to every facet of German radio as well as all rights to the medium: the ether hovering over Germany. Berlin was the hub for experimentation of wireless and product engineering. Outliers could be found in Hamburg and Cologne.

Telefunken built its sets in the thousands, but the budding Loewe Company stole the show with its new 3NF and 2HF multi-functional radio tubes, designed to circumvent patent restrictions. Loewe soon had a production site in England.

German radio broadcasting came of age in the 1920s. The staple first consisted of classical music from recordings and long-winded lectures, some lasting 45 minutes. Marketing hadn't yet touched the radio community.

By the end of the 20s, superheterodyne radio technology was overtaking the tuned-radio-frequency (TRF) architecture. Listeners still had to pay an annual fee to the government to tune in. Ironically, it also gave them the right to listen to broadcast sites in other countries and even ships at sea. Airwaves surfers heard voice broadcasts and a lot of Morse code.



*Königs Wusterhausen "Funkenberg" (Radio Mountain) Museum; one room featuring a final tuning RF section of one transmitter in the exhibit halls*

In 1933, with the rise of the Nazi Party, Josef Goebbels, Hitler's new Propaganda Minister, turned the radio airwaves into an arm of fake news. At first, only military march music and Nazi propaganda was broadcast. Early on, the listening public didn't buy it, so programming went back to *Unterhaltung* - entertainment - however this time laced with political indoctrination.

Today, Sunday, December 20, 2020, the German domestic public broadcast network, *Deutschlandfunk*, produced a mid-day newsclip on the anniversary. A number of centrally located FM transmitters nationwide broadcast the interview, and it could be heard worldwide via the Internet, at [deutschlandfunk.de](https://www.deutschlandfunk.de) (just click on "LIVE").

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