

Soldatensender Calais and D-Day



D-Day Landing (U.S. Army photo)

The complete broadcast day for D-Day, June 6, 1944, was recorded by both [CBS](#) and [NBC](#). One detail that I always found interesting was the following wire report, which was also carried in print by the AP in the D-Day afternoon papers:

Music for Invasion Forces

About the same time the German controlled Calais radio station came on the air with the following announcement in English:

“This is D day. We shall now bring music for the invasion forces.”

The whole Nazi controlled French radio network went off the air at 7:25 a.m. in the middle of a physical training broadcast.

[Milwaukee Journal, June 6, 1944.](#)

I’ve never seen any explanation of this curious statement, although the impression was that the French personnel of the station had taken advantage of the chaos and taken over the station.

The truth, however, appears to be even more interesting. It seems likely that the “German controlled Calais radio station” was actually [Soldatensender Calais](#), a German-language station operated not by the Nazis, but by the [Political Warfare Executive](#) of the British Foreign Office. *Soldatensender Calais* (Soldier’s Station Calais) was broadcasting not from Calais, but from the village of Milton

Bryan, Bedfordshire, England, with a massive 500 kilowatt mediumwave transmitter. It broadcast on 612 kHz, 714 kHz, and 833 kHz, frequencies shared by Radio Deutschland.

Joseph Goebbels himself lamented in his diary in 1943:

In the evening the so-called "Calais Soldiers Broadcast" which evidently originates in England and uses the same wavelength as Radio Station Deutschland when the latter is cut out during air raids, gave us something to worry about. The station does a very clever job of propaganda and from what is put on the air one can gather that the English know exactly what they have destroyed and what not.

The transmitter had originally been ordered by [WJZ](#) in Newark, New Jersey (now WABC, with its city of license New York), in hopes that the FCC would authorize the high power to match the superpower signal of [WLV](#) in Cincinnati which had in use on and off from 1934 to 1939. But when the FCC insisted on maintaining the 50 kW limit for standard broadcast stations, the station was eager to sell the transmitter to the British government for £165,000. At the time, the station was the world's most powerful mediumwave station. It had the code name of [Aspidistra](#), and remained in use by the BBC until 1982.

It was able to successfully spoof Nazi broadcasts to the point that it was regarded as a reputable source of information. When real German stations went off the air during air raids, the powerful British station would rebroadcast the signals of other German network stations still on the air, thus giving the impression that it was part of the German network. The superpower transmitter could blanket the continent, thus allowing it to join the Nazi broadcast network seamlessly. But into those programs, it could subtly insert misinformation. For example, it could be used to issue false evacuation orders to send civilians to clog the roads during German military movements. Captured German POW's, even those who were aware of the station's source, commended the British on the station's plausible deniability. If a German officer walked in while the men were tuned to the station, they could plausibly claim that they thought it to be an ordinary German station.

The station's creator, [Sefton Delmer](#), described its programming as "cover, cover, dirt, cover, dirt." Most of its programming mimicked the official German stations. But when needed, disinformation could be inserted. The Germans eventually figured out what was going on, and they preceded official instructions with the following announcement:

The enemy is broadcasting counterfeit instructions on our frequencies. Do not be misled by them. Here is an official announcement of the Reich authority.

Of course, the English station then began its messages with the same announcement!

The only reference I could find to *Soldatensender Calais* with respect to the invasion was that when Calais later fell to the Canadians, the station was renamed Soldatensender West. I haven't been able to find any explanation as to why the station made its English broadcasts on D-Day. But it seems to me that the intention was probably to demonstrate that Calais had already fallen in the early morning hours of June 6, and that the French staff of the fictitious station had taken matters into their own hands to start broadcasting music for the benefit of the invading Allied armies.

And since the American press apparently fell for it and reported the activities of the "German controlled Calais radio," this tactic seems to have worked.