

Use of Amateur Radio in History and War

Aired by KD5BJ

From articles from the L A Times, the New York Times, and CTV News

We know the use of Amateur Radio as a hobby. The recreational use of wireless radios, which transmit and receive messages via electromagnetic signals, became popular in the early 20th century, starting in the U.S. Since the federal government began issuing licenses in 1912, the number of noncommercial radio operators in the country is, as of July 8, 2023, 759,998, according to the ARRL.

The technology proved useful during World Wars I and II, when countries such as the U.S. and Britain limited civilian airwave activity but enlisted skilled hobbyists to help send and intercept covert messages. Shortwave changed the way spies communicate, sending cryptic messages on so-called number stations which were traced to governments all over the world. Shortwave became more widespread in the Cold War era, when the U.S. and the Soviet Union were highly invested in hearing each other's secret communications and hiding their own.

Dr. Andrew Hammond, curator and historian at Washington, D.C.'s International Spy Museum, told CTV National News once that the shortwave radio "is a classic tool that was used for espionage ... because you can transmit information over huge distances."

Those frequencies, all in the higher HF band in AM and FM modes, are a lot harder to block, are less complicated than other communication avenues, and travel further than TV or cell phones.

After Russia attacked communication towers in Ukraine, the BBC went old school, broadcasting their news service on the shortwave frequency to counter Russian propaganda about the war. Ham radio operators were also able to listen in and interrupt communications among Russian soldiers. To hear examples of ham radio interference in the Russian war, please check out training section on our website and look for this training. I have a link posted there.

Another less known example of the use of ham radio in preparation for a possible war comes from Taiwan.

Taiwan, the self-governing island, about 100 miles east of China, is weighing wartime scenarios in the face of growing military aggression from its vastly more powerful neighbor. If cell towers are down and internet cables have been cut, the ability of shortwave radio frequencies to transmit long-distance messages could become crucial for civilians and officials alike.

Taiwan was not an early adopter. Under the Kuomintang, or Nationalist Party — whose leaders fled to the island in 1949 after losing to Mao Zedong's Communist Party in China's civil war — civilian use of amateur radio was all but banned by a government that remained wary of mainland spies. The first licensing exams weren't offered until 1984. But today, with the threat of cross-strait conflict making headlines, Taiwan has about 25,000 licensed amateur radio operators, according to the National Communications Commission.

Shoichi Chou, 45, a ham radio operator in Taoyuan, keeps a radio in his emergency bag, along with spare batteries, water and a hard hat.

“I feel like it’s incredibly important,” said Chou, the owner of a laptop customization studio. “If just a few bases don’t have electricity, you won’t have any way to use your phone.”

“Ham radio has been proven to be [a] reliable communication channel in several world wars, and the Ukraine-Russia conflict as well,” Schee said. In Taiwan, amateur operators have helped train military personnel and assisted in emergency communications for events including deadly natural disasters and the annual New Year’s Eve festivities in downtown Taipei.

In 1981 a handful of ham operator illegally built and transmit identifying themselves with name such as Ghost, Apple, Snoopy, Frog, Mazda, Bandit, Chicken Leg, Spare Rib. A few years before Taiwan began to loosen restrictions, these hams were raided by the authorities. Their radios were confiscated, and they had to sign pledges to not use them again.

This is training for tonight, this is KD5BJ back to net.

Ukraine transmission:

<https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/europe/100000008266864/russia-army-radio-makariv.html>

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/sci-tech/how-shortwave-radio-is-resurfacing-as-a-tool-in-ukraine-1.5894366>

<https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2022-10-27/taiwan-ham-radio-amateurs-civil-defense>