

DX-ing in the German Democratic Republic by DSWCI-3610 Eckhard Röscher, Dessau, Germany

I was born in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1957 and am now going to tell you about the difficulties in DX-ing during the communist regime until 1989.

I started the hobby in 1972 as a young boy at the age of 15 years. At that time I collected picture postcards from all over the world. A friend of mine had some cards and I wanted to exchange with him. He asked me if I had QSL- cards?

Never before have I heard this word, and I would like to know what is the meaning of these cards. Then he showed me his first cards from Radio Netherlands, Voice of Vietnam, Radio Bulgaria and so on. Immediately I was very interested to know how I can get such cards. He told me his experiences with reception reports, the SINPO- code and so on.

My parents had an old tube receiver named "Stradivari 3". This radio has three wavebands with short wave from 49-m-band up to 16-m-band. So I tried to catch my first radio stations, at first only in the German and English languages. After some weeks I received my first QSL- card from Radio Bulgaria. Other cards from Polonia, ORF, Radio Canada Int'l, Radio Moscow and so on followed.

Firstly, I had enough work listening to the short wave bands of my tube receiver. A first problem was receiving good information about the radio hobby. There were no DX- clubs with club bulletins. The only chance to get radio news was listening to DX- programmes from the various radio stations and discussions with my friend. But he did finish with the hobby shortly after and so I had only the DX- programmes. From Radio Sweden I got the printed version of their DX- programme "Sweden calling DX-ers" via snail mail. During this time I also got letters from our custom saying that they confiscated letters from Radio Sweden. That was another difficulty in DX- ing in the former GDR.

During the DX- programmes I heard a lot of information about radio stations in the tropical bands. Unfortunately, I couldn't receive such stations with my receiver. There was no possibility to get a radio with tropical bands in a public radio shop. I think in the early 80ies there were some portable radios from Russia which could be ordered in the shops. The quality of these radios wasn't really good. So I had difficulty in receiving the tropical bands.

In 1972 I also heard the programmes of the famous pirate station Radio Nordsee International. At this time it was my first and only pirate station. At the beginning of the 80ies I received Radio Nolan International, a pirate from the Netherlands. Then I found further pirate stations in the 48- and 41-m-band. Of course, I sent reception reports to pirates. Now I had the problem with the return postage. The GDR was a member of the Universal Postal Union, but you couldn't buy International Reply Coupons at the post office in the GDR. So you could send only stamps from the GDR or picture post cards. In many cases it wasn't enough to get the QSL- card from a pirate station or another station around the world.

In 1985 a man from the GDR security service, which was called "Stasi", visited me. At that time I had finished my studies and I worked as design engineer in one of the local companies. Before he came to me he had phoned me and asked when he could meet me because he wanted to make me an offer of work in my former university.

By the way, it wasn't usual to get such offers if you left the university for several years. So I was a little bit suspicious. He asked me, which are my special fields in DX-ing, for instance. My impression was that he had a lot of insider knowledge of DX-ing.

Another question was if I listen to programmes of Radio Canada International. Of course, I said to him. The reason was that GDR people could have holidays on Cuba. The flight to Cuba was combined with a stop in Canada. So you had perhaps a possibility to say "Good bye" to the communists.

Till the fall of the wall I didn't know what the man from the "Stasi" really wanted. So I took a look in my Stasi- papers when they were opened. Firstly I had to prove that I'm living. An office took a copy of my passport and signed and stamped it. Then I sent my application to the special office "Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik".

After 2 and ¼ year I received a letter to say that I was allowed to take a look in my „Stasi“ papers. I found documents with more than 100 papers about me. There were copies of my reception reports and copies of letters from radio stations. I also found lists showing when I wrote to various radio stations. This file was better organized than my own, I think. In 1985 I received a QSL- card from the Voice of America via the US Embassy in West Berlin. This was a reason for a member of the customs to ask the "Stasi" what should happen to me. Also this paper is part of my documents.

To the man who visited me in 1985 I said that I have no more time to carry out the hobby of DX-ing. For about 1 and ½ year from then I didn't write any reception reports. That was the reason that my "Stasi" documents were closed in 1987. The background of his visit was that they wanted me to engage as an unofficial member of the "Stasi". Fortunately this became only a dream of the "Stasi".

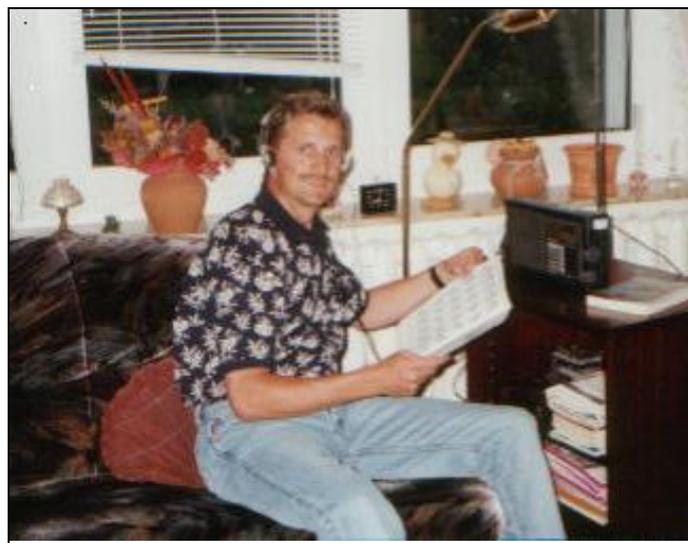
Another reason that I wanted to take a look in my documents was to find letters and QSL- cards from radio stations. But this original material wasn't in the same place. I had to wait 2 years again to get more information about this. I haven't tried it again.

In 1993 I bought a portable "Satellit 700" by Grundig and a new era began for me. Now I was able to listen to the tropical bands, I have the right money for return postage, and the majority of letters from radio stations reach me.

This is my little story about difficulties in DX-ing during GDR time.

73's

Eckhard



Eckhard Röscher sitting and listening to the radio, the Grundig "Satellit 700" with tropical bands in 1999.