



Remembering the Cold War through Parks on the Air

While in Germany, this Italian ham used a small portable station to activate two historical landmarks.

Andrea Borgnino, IWØHK

During the last week of October 2023, I found myself in Berlin, Germany, for work. I had some time off, so I wanted to combine two of my great passions: radio and the history of the Cold War.

The signs of this historical period are most visible and profound in Berlin, primarily due to the presence of the famous 155-kilometer-long wall that practically divided it in two from August 13, 1961, until November 9, 1989. During my stay, I chose two historical sites that are included in the Parks on the Air® (POTA) program to activate using my low-power portable radio.

Antennas Atop a Mountain of Rubble

The first Berlin location I chose was a park located 1 kilometer away from the headquarters of Rund-

funk Berlin-Brandenburg, the public radio-television of Berlin and Brandenburg. Teufelsberg, or Devil's Mountain, is a hill created from the rubble that resulted from bombings during World War II. Today, it's completely covered with splendid oak trees within Grunewald Forest (POTA reference DA-0218).

The Teufelsberg listening station of the American National Security Agency in Berlin sits atop this 120-meter-high hill. Established in 1950, the station intercepted radio signals from East Germany during the Cold War. The station's base had dozens of antennas pointing eastward to intercept radio traffic on various frequencies ranging from shortwave to microwave. It was dismantled in 1992, but even today, remnants of the base and the antenna radomes that made the radio interception systems invisible can still be seen.

I activated the park that originated around the abandoned base and was thrilled to transmit my low-power Morse code signals in this historically significant location. I used a QRP Labs QMX multi-mode transceiver, a jewel that's active on FT8 and CW modes on the 80-, 60-, 40-, 30-, and 20-meter bands. This radio, designed by Hans Summers, GØUPL, is sold online as a kit or pre-assembled. It can be connected directly to a PC for digital activity on FT8 and FT4, or it can be used in CW telegraphy with a power output of 4 W. I used a 20-meter wire antenna connected to a 49:1 end-fed HF balun pulled up over a tree. Amid families flying kites, I called out my POTA signal with the call sign DL/IWØHK, and I made 15 CW contacts quite quickly (see the lead photo).



Andrea Borgnino, IWØHK, used his small POTA kit (a QMX transceiver, a 20-meter end-fed half-wave antenna, and an XTPower XT-16000QC3 power bank) for the first time during his Berlin activations, which were a success.

An Airport Laden with History

I made my second POTA activation at another symbol of the Cold War — directly on the runway of the former Tempelhof Airport. Among fog and frost, I was able to transmit low-power CW using the same QMX transceiver. This airport, situated in the south-

ern part of the central Tempelhof-Schöneberg district in Berlin, was operational from 1923 to 2008. It's particularly famous for hosting the base of the Berlin Airlift during the Cold War when the United States and their allies in Western Europe transported food and other necessities by plane to West Berlin, which was being blocked by the Soviet Union.

From June 1948 to September 1949, more than 270,000 flights transported 2 million tons of food and other supplies, including 1.5 million tons of coal for heating and power generation, resulting in the largest humanitarian airlift in history. At the peak of the operation, 1,398 flights were landing in Berlin every 24 hours. The Tempelhof Airport also hosted massive gatherings of military personnel and civilians during the Nazi era, and it served as a base for American Aviation until 1993. The airport has since closed, and its two runways and their surrounding lawns have become the Tempelhofer Feld provincial recreation area (POTA reference DA-0169), an enormous park used for various outdoor activities.



Despite the overcast weather, Andrea Borgnino, IWØHK, was able to activate the former Tempelhof Airport for POTA by making 11 contacts.

“After ending my transmissions, I walked through the immense park, imagining its past use and appreciating how often my passion for amateur radio manages to take me to incredible places.”

I activated the park early in the morning on a cold, gray day, but I still managed to install my end-fed half-wave antenna practically on the runway. Once again, I operated only CW, and in a short time, I made 11 contacts. I ended this activation early due to the cold, but the activation remains valid. After ending my transmissions, I walked through the immense park, imagining its past use and appreciating how often my passion for amateur radio manages to take me to incredible places.

The Joys of POTA

These two activations in Berlin were my first trial runs using my small POTA kit, which includes a QMX transceiver, a 20-meter end-fed half-wave antenna, and an XTPower XT-16000QC3 power bank — I'd say they were a success. This is an excellent little radio that I want to use again and carry with me on every work trip.

Moreover, the POTA program continually brings me to incredible places, in terms of nature and history. The magic of this activity lies in adapting one's portable station for every new situation, from city parks to large national parks among the mountains, and thus adjusting antennas and transmission modes to always be heard using low power. For me, it often involves using Morse code in CW.

These two activations in Berlin were special; transmitting my signals on shortwave from these locations reminded me of when, during the Cold War, these frequencies were used for all sorts of communication. Using this small kit today, reminiscent of the CW radio stations from the 1950s, seems like a unique way to remember those past times.

All photos by the author.

Andrea Borgnino, IW0HK, obtained his Class B operator license in Torino, Italy, in 1991, and upgraded to his current call sign in 2002. He mostly operates CW and digital modes on the HF bands. Andrea runs a QRSS-QRP beacon on the 10-meter band and a QRPP WSPR CW beacon on the 30-meter band. He's active in POTA and Summits on the Air (SOTA) and is the SOTA Association Manager for Italy. Andrea can be reached at a.borgnino@gmail.com.

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