

WEATHER STATION KURT



Soldiers from the Weather Squadron use maps, data, radio, and teletype to assemble and send forecasts. (*The National WWII Museum, 2002.337.042*)

Episode One (1977): A Canadian geomorphologist, mapping the coast of Labrador (the breed of dogs is named after this spot) finds something strange in this remote location—a large cement structure with radio and scientific equipment inside. Making the assumption that it belongs to the Canadian military, he marks it on a map with the label “Martin Bay 7.”

Episode Two (1981): A retired electrical engineer from Germany, while studying as a hobby the company he worked for—Siemens—finds in the company’s archival records descriptions of weather stations that were made for the military in World War II. In those papers are records of the locations of German weather conditions. One of the locations is on the northeast coast of Canada. The engineer contacts the Canadian Department of National Defense who send a team out to scout the area. Once there, the team discovers that some of the parts were removed and damaged, but that the weather station—named “Kurt” in the Siemens documents—is still there. The station is transferred to the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

Those two curious people in the above scenarios uncovered important parts of history. German historical documents show that Weather Station Kurt was installed in 1943. On October 27 of that year, a U-boat carrying a meteorologist working for Siemens anchored off Labrador, and a crew of 10 went on shore to install the station. To camouflage the structure, they spread American litter around the site and labeled the station “Canadian Meteor Service.” After working all night and being at the site for only 28 hours, the crew made sure before they left that the

weather tools were functioning and that the radio was broadcasting. This operation was the only time in World War II that armed German military went ashore in North America.

The reason the Germans risked so much and traveled all the way across the Atlantic just to install a weather station is that weather is extremely important for military planning. Without knowing weather conditions, it is hard to plan maneuvers and to predict what an opponent will be doing.

In order to predict future weather, monitoring of today’s weather is a necessity. Weather Station Kurt was installed on the Atlantic coast of Canada because weather systems in the Northern Hemisphere usually move from



A Coast Guard cutter, with a plane on the stern deck, in Greenland. It was destroying German weather stations there. (*The National WWII Museum, 2011.102.497*)



Coast Guard searching for German weather stations in Greenland.
(*The National WWII Museum, 2011.102.499*)

west to east. The Germans needed to monitor weather to the west of Europe.

The Allies had an advantage over the Germans because the Allies had weather stations all over North America, Greenland, Iceland, and across the North Atlantic. The Germans got weather reports from their ships in the Atlantic, but they didn't have all the data they needed to make reliable predictions.

The German military contracted Siemens to make weather stations and install them across the North Atlantic to make better weather predictions. The stations, which could run on batteries for six months, sent data on conditions every few hours by radio waves. The Germans installed 14 stations in the Arctic and five in the Barents Sea. Germany planned to install two stations in North America. Weather Station Kurt was successfully installed, but the other one was sent on a U-Boat that was sunk in September 1944 off the coast of Norway.

Why did the Germans take the risk of placing a weather station in North America?

With today's technology, is it as important to have weather stations spread all over the planet? Explain your reasoning.