

Before They Had Radar

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In World War I, the world's armies began using large sound amplifiers to detect approaching aircraft. This practice continued in the 1920s and 1930s. Above, a US Army technician in 1921 tests a pair of "horn" sound locators at Bolling Field in Washington, D.C. Behind him, visible northward across the Anacostia River, is Roosevelt Hall at Fort Leslie McNair, which then housed the Army War College. Passive acoustic detectors picked up the noise of approaching aircraft engines. The concept, however, was crude and rendered obsolete by radar, first used to great effect in the 1940 Battle of Britain. At right, Denise Miley, a radar operator with the RAF's Women's Auxiliary Air Force at RAF Bawdsey, UK, tracks aircraft.

