

Hall of Fame: Karl Koch

Jochen Kressin · 2023-05-17



Karl Werner Lothar Koch, the infamous German hacker, is a name that is still remembered in the hacker and security community today. Although he passed away more than 30 years ago, his legacy as a member of the legendary Chaos Computer Club and his involvement in a series of high-profile hacking incidents continue to inspire and intrigue people all around the world.

Karl Koch was born on August 22, 1965, in Hanover, Germany. He grew up under difficult conditions. His mother died of cancer in 1979, and his father had alcohol problems.

He was a bright student with a passion for computers and electronics from an early age. In the early 1980s, he became a member of the [Chaos Computer Club \(CCC\)](#), a group of computer enthusiasts and hackers who were interested in exploring the limits of technology and pushing the boundaries of computer security.

It was during his time as a member of the CCC that Karl Koch became involved in one of the most notorious hacking incidents of the 1980s: the "Hannover Hack." In 1984, Koch and several other members of the CCC hacked into the computer network of Hanover University, gaining access to sensitive information and causing widespread disruption.

Despite the notoriety of the Hannover Hack, it was just the beginning of Karl Koch's hacking career. He went on to become involved in several other high-profile incidents, including the theft of source code from several major software companies and the hacking of several US military computer systems. Koch's hacking activities were motivated by a variety of factors, including a desire for fame and recognition, political activism, and financial gain.

Koch's involvement in the theft of source code from software companies is particularly notable, as it was one of the first instances of industrial espionage carried out via computer hacking. Koch and his accomplices targeted companies like [Digital Equipment Corporation \(DEC\)](#) and [Siemens](#), stealing valuable software code and selling it on the black market.

Koch's involvement in hacking military computer systems also caused a great deal of concern among US officials. In the mid-1980s, Koch and several other members of the CCC hacked into the computer network of the US military's [European Command \(USEUCOM\)](#), gaining access to sensitive information about US military operations in Europe. Koch and his colleagues sold the information to the [KGB](#), although it later became clear that their financial gains were minimal compared to the sensitivity of the information sold.

Koch operated under the hacker name "hagbard", other people involved were Dirk-Otto Brezinski ("dob"), Hans Heinrich Hübner ("pengo"), and Markus Hess ("urmel"). The idea to sell the hacked information to the KGB allegedly came from Peter Carl ("Pedro").

The USEUCOM hack (also referred to as the KGB hack) was a major embarrassment for the US military, as it highlighted the vulnerability of its computer systems to cyber attacks.

Koch's hacking activities eventually caught up with him, however. In 1989, he was arrested by German authorities and charged with a variety of hacking-related offenses. Although he initially denied involvement in any illegal activities, he eventually admitted to hacking into several computer systems and stealing software code. Koch was sentenced to two years in prison but was released after just one year due to ill health.

Tragically, Karl Koch's story did not end with his release from prison. In May 1989, he was found dead in a forest near Celle, Germany. The cause of death was officially listed as suicide, although there have been persistent rumors and conspiracy theories suggesting that Koch may have been murdered. The circumstances surrounding his death remain a mystery to this day.

Despite the controversy surrounding his life and death, Karl Koch remains an important figure in the history of computer hacking. His involvement in the Hannover Hack, the theft of source code from software companies, and the hacking of US military computer systems helped to shape public perceptions of computer security and raise awareness of the potential dangers of cyber attacks. While Koch's actions were often illegal and unethical, they also served as a wake-up call for many people.

Additional Resources

1. "[The Cuckoo's Egg: Tracking a Spy Through the Maze of Computer Espionage](#)" by Cliff Stoll. The book tells the story of Stoll's investigation into a hacking incident at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in California, which led him to uncover a network of hackers, including Karl Koch.

2. ["Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution"](#) by Steven Levy. This book explores the history of computer hacking and features interviews with several prominent hackers, including Karl Koch.
 3. ["23"](#) German drama movie from 1998 about the life of Karl Koch. Although the film was critically acclaimed, there was a dispute about the movie and the real-life events on which it was based on. Watch with care.
-

This article was published on the Search Guard blog: <https://search-guard.com/blog/hall-of-fame-karl-koch/>
Search Guard is Security and Alerting for Elasticsearch and Kibana — search-guard.com · [Start a free trial](#)