

PoW radio # 10

Allied

Country of origin:

Far east



Boei Gloduk (Java) PoW camp book radio.

Hardback copy of Sinclair Lewis's popular book, 'Ann Vickers', this 1936 version published in Dutch in Amsterdam as a third edition. The last two thirds of the book were sewn together and its central portion cut out allowing a small radio to be installed inside the book.

DATA SUMMARY

Organisation: Allied PoWs interned in Japanese camps.

Year of Introduction: World War 2.

Purpose: Secret listening to Allied news.



General view of the book radio with associated clogs. The circuit was a single valve detector with reaction (cathode trapped type reaction -ECO type). A miniature bell transformer provided the filament supply. High tension voltage was obtained directly from the 110 volt mains supply through a VR92 miniature diode rectifier. Voltages could fluctuate anywhere between 70 and 130 volts. The single earphone was always kept apart from the receiver hidden in a hollowed clog.

Flying Officer H. W. Closter, RAF (Australia) was captured in early March 1942 by the Japanese at Garoet in Central Java. He was sent to Boei Glodok at Batavia where they were crowded with 2500 others into a space meant for 600. In discussions with senior officers, the need for a radio was identified, but, the Japanese had made it quite clear that operation of short wave radios would mean execution for all concerned. He alone would endeavour to accept full responsibility for the construction, operation and maintenance of a radio receiver which was proposed to be built.

The Japanese had organised PoW work parties to clear the Batavia waterfront. While clearing the Stokvis warehouse, they located suitable radio parts. Closter then set to work making the first version of his short wave radio. All work had to be done at night under a mosquito net and in poor light. Owing to the sweltering tropical conditions, it was nothing to lose a pound or two in weight after a long session under the net. Closter's hard work resulted in a reasonably bulky set, battery powered, which was concealed in a large tin trunk buried in one of the gardens, arranged so that when the lid was lifted, the entire camouflaging garden lifted as well. It was only operated in the evenings and in the early morning, with lookouts posted.

After being transferred to another camp late in 1943 a sudden increase in security and discipline almost forced the radio's destruction, but Closter felt he could reduce its size further. He simplified the design to the point where it would fit in a hollowed out book. At this time, the book was only taken out of its place of concealment for 15 minutes daily. Despite further moves and increased discipline, the set was never discovered. During 3½ years, the set was made and re-made many times, the design becoming progressively simpler and dimensions steadily shrinking.

Concealment included the receiver being installed in a flower garden, service water bottle, a shelf, a table, a stool and finally in a book with the addition of wooden clogs for transport from camp to camp. Clogs were chosen because they were so commonplace in PoW camps that the Japanese were unlikely to suspect them. Reception was excellent and far exceeded all expectations. Daily new bulletins were received from Australia, London, America and S.E.A.C.

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The radio was constructed from aluminium sheet and scavenged parts. Mounted at the front were five black Bakelite control knobs, an on/off switch and a single headphone jack. Located at the rear were terminals for aerial, earth and wires to the power source.

Shangi Gaol (Singapore) PoW camp secret radio.

Signalman Sydney Sim enlisted in March 1941 and was assigned to 8 Division Australian Corps of Signals. He became a PoW after the Japanese captured Singapore in February 1942. Whilst at Shangi PoW camp he constructed a radio receiver using scavenged components.

Once he had made this radio, news from the broadcasts he was able to receive were typed onto paper and circulated in secret to his fellow prisoners in Changi. His enterprise was risky, as PoWs found in possession of a radio by the Japanese were summarily executed.

Sidney Sim was awarded a British Empire Medal in 1946 for his 'valuable service and devotion' in operating the radio while in captivity.



Shangi Gaol (Singapore) PoW camp radio concealed in a teak beam.

Flying Officer Jeffrey Skinner (Royal Air Force) a prisoner of war in Changi Gaol (Singapore) constructed a radio concealed in a teak beam using 'liberated' parts scrounged by working parties of PoWs, and traded with Singaporean Chinese.

The radio was built into a teak beam at the head of Flying Officer Jeffrey Skinner's bunk in F3 Hut, Changi prisoner of war camp, Singapore from 1943 to 1945. The cleverly concealed radio was operated by Skinner, who occupied the top bunk, and Flying Officer Thomas Dudley Boyce, who occupied the bottom bunk. Skinner tuned and operated the radio by inserting screwdrivers into three small holes in the top of the beam and both listened through stethoscopes that were inserted into a fourth small hole in the front of the beam. When not in use, the holes were concealed with nail heads. Boyce wrote down the news that they received from London, Delhi and Melbourne on a glass slate. The news was spread throughout the camp by a carefully organised word-of-mouth distribution system. A glass slate was used because the text could be very quickly erased if necessary. The power for the radio was taken from a secret plug in an

electric clock and the aerial was disguised as a clothes line which, to avoid detection, was always hung with clothes.

The punishment for keeping radios was severe, resulting in death, so the radio was kept very secret and was used during most of the war.

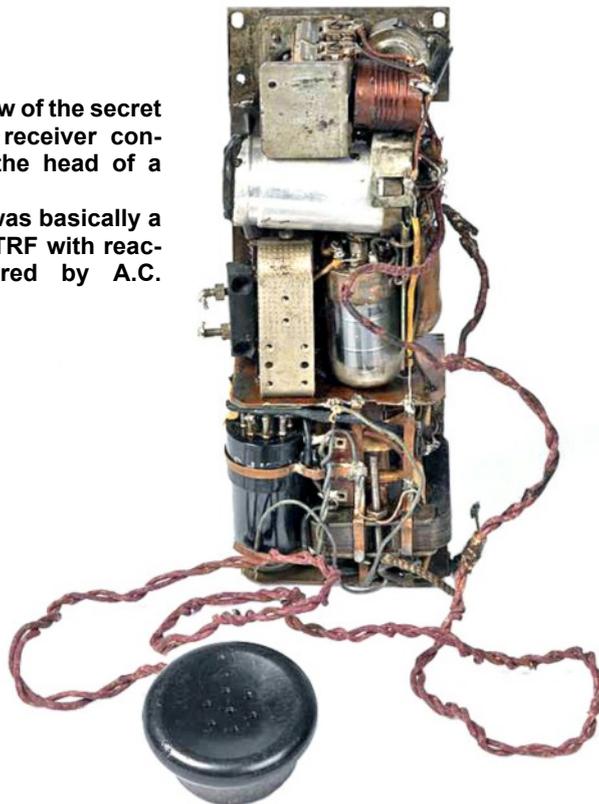
Only two other men in the sixteen man hut knew of the existence of the radio, together with perhaps one or two other men in the camp. News from home and information about the progress of the war was vital in maintaining the morale of the men in the camp. The radio allowed the prisoners to learn of the Japanese surrender long before the Japanese forces in Singapore did. After the war, Skinner and Boyce were both mentioned in dispatches and received letters of commendation from Lord Mountbatten, who inspected the radio during a visit to the Changi camp in 1945. Both also received certificates from the Dutch forces in Changi acknowledging their courage and self-sacrifice.



Shangi Gaol (Singapore) PoW camp radio hidden in the head of a broom.

Lieutenant Russell Francis Wright (8th Australian Division, Australian Army - 2nd Australian Imperial Force) was onboard the m/s 'Mati Hari' when she left Singapore on 12 February 1942. She was captured 10 miles south-east of Muntok by the Japanese. The captain surrendered because the passengers were mostly women, children and nurses. They were taken ashore at Muntok Pier on Banka Island. Wright was subsequently imprisoned at Palembang, Singapore (Changi), Thailand (Death Railway) and Singapore (Syme Road and Changi). His radio, operating on shortwave was constructed in 1944 at Changi Gaol from various pieces of equipment, hidden in a broom head. It was tuned by screwdrivers whilst listening to BBC, All India Radio, South East Asia Command and Radio Tokyo transmissions. Other Allied and Japanese transmissions provided further information, which provided a significant boost to morale. Lieutenant Wright was subsequently awarded the MBE for his conduct whilst a Far East PoW.

Internal view of the secret shortwave receiver concealed in the head of a broom. The radio was basically a one valve TRF with reaction powered by A.C. mains.



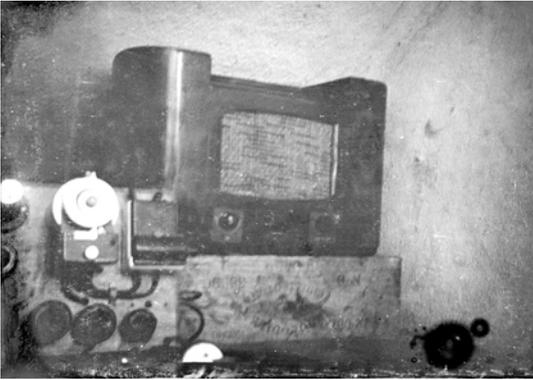
Lieut R.F. Wright, Australian Army Ordnance Corps 8th Aust Division showing his secret radio concealed in a broom which he built as a PoW. In spite of thorough searches of the camp and surrounding areas the radio was never discovered.



Constructed by Lieut R.F. Wright in Changi Gaol camp was another radio receiver installed in legs of a table (left).

References:

- <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/RELAWM34782>
- <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C284484>
- <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/30005461>
- <http://www.merkki.com/Secrets%20of%20the%20POWs.htm>
- <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C221793>



An AWA Radiola radio hidden in the water tank of a civilian house at Mount Pleasant 1942-43. The radio was operated by Australian prisoners of war. This negative features an image of 2 1/4 x 3 1/4 inches in size. It is one of 202 images relating to the service of Private George Aspinall from enlistment, his time as a prisoner of war during the Second World War to his return to Singapore and Thailand post war.

Shangi Gaol (Singapore) PoW camp AWA radio concealed in a water tank.

Pte Aspinall, a motor mechanic from Parramatta, NSW, embarked with 2/30 Battalion on 29 July 1941. A prisoner of the Japanese after the fall of Singapore in February 1942, he was initially interned at the PoW camp established at Changi Gaol. In April 1943 he was assigned to Japanese prisoner group 'F Force' to work on the Burma-Thailand Railway. Whilst a PoW, Pte Aspinall secretly photographed his experience with a folding Six-20 Kodak Brownie. Despite a strict ban against photography by PoWs, Pte Aspinall took photographs at great risk to himself and other prisoners. He kept his camera hidden from Japanese guards in the pocket of a kidney-belt he created while in Changi and developed the photographic negatives in secret. He returned to Changi from working on the railway in 1944. In early 1945, on orders from his Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Gallagher, Pte Aspinall hid his collection of negatives, along with other records, in a latrine bore-hole within the Gaol compound.

The AWA Fish Radiola 95 was produced from 1941 till 1946 with minor production changes. It covered medium wave and a number of short wave ranges, powered from A.C. Mains.



'Old Lady' radio and generator 'Ginnie' at Batu Lintang (Serawak) PoW



Leonard Beckett with the radio *the 'Old Lady'* and the generator 'Ginnie' (left).



Leonard Beckett showing the secret radio to Brigadier T. C. Eastick and A. W. Walsh on 11 September 1945 (right).

Warrant Officer Leonard A.T. Beckett and some 1150 other PoWs arrived at Batu Lintang on 13 October 1942 from Tanjung Priok camp in Java. News from the outside world was initially gathered from a variety of sources, such as from co-workers of the Batu Lintang work parties at Kuching docks. An invaluable boost to morale would be a radio which Beckett, an experienced radio engineer built, assisted in its construction, operation, and concealment by a core group of three other soldiers.

The radio was constructed from radio parts provided by a Chinese family and a few parts brought along with the men from Tanjung Priok, including items as diverse as a deaf aid, the steering damper of a Norton motorcycle, a Bakelite shaving soap container, an army mess tin, the backing of an old map case, pieces of glass, wire, mica and barbed wire, and parts stolen from Japanese-owned motor cars and motorcycles.

The radio was concealed during its construction in a large stewing-pot; once completed, its hiding place was in a biscuit tin buried under the bake house fire in the British other ranks' compound. It was operated in the stores where it had a temporary hiding place in a false-bottomed table. Elaborate security proceedings to protect the radio were put in place, including a network of look-outs.

The radio was initially used on the night of 24 February 1943, as

reception was better at that time of the day.

The radio at first ran off torch batteries: these soon ran out and so Beckett constructed a power unit to run off the camp electricity supply. Access to the camp powerhouse was gained by one of the PoWs who had been a professional burglar before the war.

In early March 1943 the provision of electric power for the lighting in the internees' compounds was halted. This was a serious blow as the radio was run off the power supply. Batteries were unavailable and so the only solution, again the idea of Russell, was to construct a generator.

Beckett was sure he could build the generator and British RAOC personnel were certain they could supply the necessary components though it would take three months to make the tools needed. To disguise the noise of the work, the enterprise was described as a "watch repairing factory" to the Japanese, who offered the use of various tools and other equipment.

The generator needed to turn at 3,000 revolutions a minute via a reduction gear, and so the fittest of the men involved in its construction were chosen to turn the wheel. They were given extra food rations to prepare for the task. The secret radio was never detected and used till the surrender of the Japanese.