

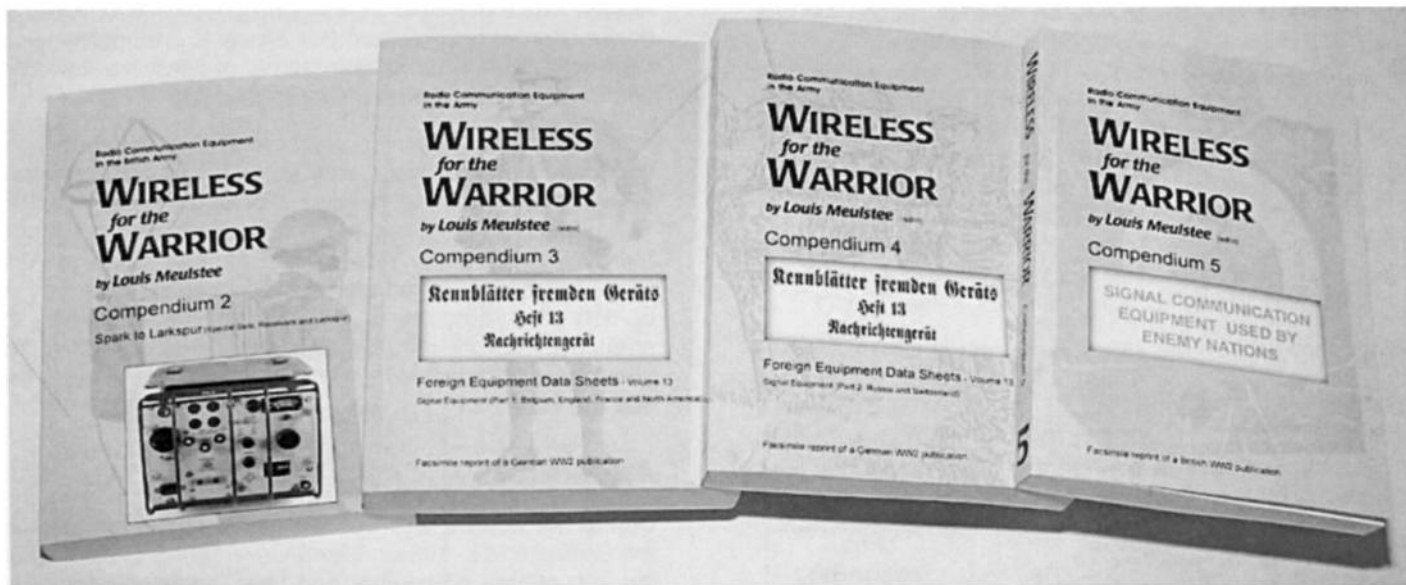
Book Reviews

Wireless for the Warrior: recent additions to the Compendium Series

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Members will almost certainly know about the *Wireless for the Warrior* (WftW) series of publications and the associated website. The owner of the title, Louis Meulstee PA0PCR, is himself a member of VMARS. This Book Review looks at the most recent additions to the range



Towards the end of August 2012, Louis Meulstee added a further three books to the "Compendium" series, covering two broad themes. A fifth compendium was released in mid-October.

Compendium 2 carries on from where *Compendium 1* ended and completes the thread of from "Spark to Larkspur" covering Special Sets, Receivers and Larkspur. In fact it covers rather more than that as it includes a range of Commonwealth equipment, DF Sets, 'local pattern' equipment and much more. Of the nearly 450 pages between a third and a half are devoted to Larkspur equipment which is covered in considerable detail, including much information about the developmental dead ends that arose from time to time.

It is generously illustrated with drawings and photographs; the reproduction of the photographs is to a noticeably higher standard than was the case in *Compendium 1*. For those wishing an overview of how British and Commonwealth equipment developed in the post-War years, this book is essential reading.

In wartime, every effort must be made to assess one's enemy's strengths and weakness and his *capabilities* and *intentions*. Part of that assessment includes a study of his communications capabilities; how does he communicate? On what frequencies? Can I jam them? Can I learn anything by listening to them? By listening can I determine any of his intentions? It may not be possible to

determine his political and strategic intentions, but his immediate intentions on the battlefield may be revealed. In fact, assessing one's enemy's capabilities and intentions is so important that it must even be carried out in time of peace, before it is even known that war may be a possibility. This leads to the next compendia in the series.

Compendium 3 and **Compendium 4** have to be looked at together. They are reprints of part of the wartime German document *Kennblätter fremden Geräts* (Foreign Equipment Data Sheets). With this publication, the German Army in the field was able to identify and possibly make use of any Allied equipment that it encountered. *Heft 13* (Booklet or Volume 13) covered *Nachrichtengerät* (Signal Equipment).

The total size of the original was too great for it to be reprinted as a single A5 book so **Compendium 3** covers Belgian, British, French, and North American equipment while **Compendium 4** covers that from Russia and Switzerland.

As is to be expected, the information contained in these two compendia is in German; to complicate things further the original documents used an *Altdeutsch* Fraktur font, which is very Gothic in appearance. Potential readers should not be put off by either of these factors; Louis has provided a basic German-English glossary in each book, listing salient words in a modern Fraktur font that very

closely resembles the original *and* in conventional Latin characters. As a further aid to understanding, a two-page *Breaking the Fraktur Code* can be obtained from the downloads page of the Wireless for the Warrior website at http://www.wftw.nl/downloads/code_fraktur%20v8.pdf. This guidance note helps the reader to translate the original text, possibly a bit slowly at first (for the record, this reviewer has no command of the German Language but can still work out what most of the entries mean).

Compendium 5 – Signal Communication Equipment Used By Enemy Nations, again a reprint of original wartime material, shows the results of SRDE's study of German, Italian and Japanese radio equipment, work that was carried out in collaboration with MI8, which was a cover name for the Radio Security Service (RSS). The original was dated 1944, which seems to be rather later than that of *Heft 13: Nachrichtengerät*, and may have been rather too late to be of much tactical assistance. Again, the underlying intention was that of enabling equipment captured on the battlefield to be better understood and, where appropriate, reused against its creators. Although a notional equivalent of *Heft 13: Nachrichtengerät*, it went into far more detail about the equipment it covered than its Axis counterpart, although the range of equipment covered is rather smaller. It is clear that SRDE was very keen that any captured equipment should be returned intact to the UK (*i.e.*, without 'souvenirs' being removed) for detailed examination. SRDE included quite detailed glossaries in German, Italian and Japanese. If copies of the original ever found their way to the Forgotten Fourteenth, it is not difficult to imagine that, when faced with a few pages of Japanese *Kanji* and *Kana*, they decided that there were more pressing matters that required their attention. The German–English glossary will be of further help to those reading Compendia 3 and 4.

These compendia (3, 4 and 5) are reprints, not rewrites, and the overall quality partially reflects the age and condition of the source material, albeit modified by 'cleaning up'. This provides an authentic feel; what the modern reader sees is what the original wartime reader saw.

The source material that Louis has reissued in these books is understood to be extremely rare, and those interested in the history of military radio equipment owe him a debt of gratitude for ensuring that it remains available for study.

During the preparation of Compendium 2, it was realised that a change of circumstances made conventional printing no longer practicable. With a lot of effort having been expended up to that point, and being anxious to conclude *Spark to Larkspur*, Louis decided to take the big step to 'print on demand'. This technology enables a book to be printed only when individual orders are received; the time from order to delivery is surprisingly short and, with printing and dispatch taking place at the plant closest to the customer, postal costs are minimised. Print on demand also offers other advantages; the author becomes the publisher, thus providing a much greater degree of control over the finished product and allowing last-minute alterations to be made; even errors identified by readers can be corrected so that later buyers get a slightly different but more accurate version. With Compendium 2 having been the test-bed for this approach, completing Compendia 3, 4 and 5 was relatively straightforward so it was possible to make them available much sooner than would otherwise have been the case.

Print on demand is very much a child of the internet; to visit the WftW Bookshop and place an order visit <http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/wftw>. This technology offers significant cost savings and, at about £12.50 per Compendium, it is clear that the purchaser benefits. It must be noted that Compendia 2 to 5 are only available from the LuLu website.

WftW Volumes 1–4 and Compendium 1 continue to be available from Wimbourne Publishing.

What may not be generally known is that the WftW series has, for all practical purposes, been a labour of love. Without this commitment by Louis Meulstee, those of us with an interest in military radio equipment and its development would have been much the poorer.