

**When is a spy radio not a spy radio? by Tony Helm G4BCX**

This question sprang to mind recently when reading about Howard Aspinall's forthcoming treatise on Silent Keys and their kit disposal, the very high cost of spy radios and some other conversations ranging around prices. I don't think that my XYL would be very happy at me paying some of the prices being bandied about. Therefore should we not carefully allocate designations and purposes to these so-called spy radios before putting them on the market? This would put some realism back into price-setting and help families when the collector marches on to higher things.

Partly the problem is the history of these radios. After the war, B2's and a few A Mk3's were re-parcelled and issued to military units, SAS and others, most of it finding it's way to the Far East. They thus became special purpose forces radios. MCR1 receivers were rigged to work with B2 transmitters, thereby confusing the picture even more. Spies in the post-war period tended to use equipment readily available or the civilian equipment rather than signature equipment, although some Mk 122's were used as the Baltic States, such as Mk122 etc.

There again, perhaps we must look at the term "SPY", I would have thought that we can look at covert communications activities falling within three categories.

1. The Spy (German, *der Spion*). A civilian government employee who goes into a foreign country to see what the Government is up to. During WW2 they used civilian specially-made radios for the job. Paraset, A Mk3, B2, BP3, AP5 etc., Soviet Sewer.

2. An Agent (German *der Agent*) A person who is very much a part-timer initially, and may do nothing until immediately prior to war being declared. He/she is far more likely to have a radio buried somewhere in the middle of nowhere, for example the R350 found buried in a field in Wales some years ago. Here the radios could be Mk.119, Mk.121, Mk.122 or Mk.123, R350 (especially made for English speakers), R354, GR109, RS6 etc.

3. Special Purpose Forces, who might wear any uniform (Willi Saenger) or even civvies on occasion (Spitsnaz) who are actively engaged in fighting a foreign power. They may use agent radios or standard army radios, appropriate to role i.e. the SAS units Mk119 bolted into a Series 2A Mk9 SWB Landrover for intruder duties in NW Europe, and Pink Panthers in the Gulf (not as pink as they used to be) with PRC353 bolted on.

Interestingly, it was the Staasi/KGB/GRU (which one?) who helped to prompt my thinking. My R250M2 (Russian Racal) was made available to

me under advantageous circumstances having served the Warsaw Pact as WP Base in a remote location east of Berlin. It was in a building also containing a Soviet R118 high-power transmitter, and the floor was well covered with the remains of a heavy smoking and drinking session. Also on the floor were some American GRC109's and RSE's immersed in battery acid thanks to the efforts of some electronic hooligan, (extremely idle behaviour). Questions; Why the American equipment of very low power, the sensitive Rx and the HP Tx? Agent radios spring to mind.

To support the above, if we look at the German language, they have the words *Der Spion*, the spy, and *Der Agent*, the agent (of whatever organisation), and we have *Agentfunk*, the "Agentradio". And R350, R353 and R354 are referred to in MVA books as *Agentfunks*, and the British and American equipment can follow suit. The closest German reference to a spy radio is "*Geheime meldendienst*", the secret reporting service that controlled spy communication. No references to agents there.

My reason for going into all this is my fear that special force radios of one sort or another are going to rise in price so much that the poorer person is going to be priced right out of the market, and that these equipments will rise to the rank of "Rolls Royce of communications" which they most definitely are not. For ready reckoning of who used what, may I suggest the following table.

	SPY	AGENT	DIPLOMATIC SERVICE	S.P.F	CONVENTION -AL FORCES
Paraset	√				
A Mk.3	√				
B2	√		?	√	
Mk.119			√	√	
Mk.121, 122	√		√	√	
Mk.128, 123				√	
Soviet Sewer	√				
Soviet R350		√		√	
Soviet R353		√			
Soviet R354				√	√
A16/PRC 316					√
RS1		√		√	
RS6		√		√	
GRC109		√		√	

Some people might like to complete this table. I have only written about what I am pretty sure is the truth. Eyebrows will be raised at seeing the A16/PRC 316 included in the list, but, having seen a reference to them in Anthony Wedgwood's article on the Mk.128, I must beg to differ about the Mk.128 being logically succeeded by the A16, but he introduces a very sound point. The SAS and others went from the B2 (originally a SPY set) to the Mk.122 to the Mk.123 (Special Forces radio) to the PRC316 (A16) in Borneo to the PRC320 (definitely a bog-standard soldier's radio) as technology brought together lightness in weight, miniaturisation and

compactness, and gave a wide range of facilities at the same time, enabling the soldier to carry more kit at the same time, than when I was once graciously uniformed.

I've left out the PRC319 as it is a special two purpose SPF set, rather than a patrol radio, as is the PRC 316/320.

I therefore suggest, based on the above, that we re-appraise the value of radios left in the above categories so that we keep our financial feet firmly on the floor, and give our families a chance of recouping money at a sensible level when they are landed with the job of selling off our collections.

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