

## London Calling P.O.Ws.

**T**HIS is the story, sometimes thrilling, sometimes funny, and always heart warming, of how ingenious and cheerful British P.O.Ws. defeated all efforts of the Germans to stop them getting day-by-day news on secret radios—as told by Sergeant M. N. McKibbin in the British Army magazine “Soldier.”

# Not Even the Gestapo Could Find The Secret Radios

**T**HE night of D Day. The whole world holding its breath—and, in a tight-packed hut in Stalag 383, Hohenfels, Bavaria, a veteran company sergeant major reading some slips of paper to a tense, silent crowd of fellow P.O.Ws.

He finishes abruptly, puts the flame of his lighter to the slips, stamps out the small blaze on the floor and picks up a battered mug from the table:

“Gentlemen, I give you a toast: the lads on the job! A happy landing—God bless 'em.”

His audience responds fervently to this heartfelt toast. Then, as the cracked cups and home-made mugs are raised on high, the door opens swiftly and a Hun steps in. “Mr. Moto” we call him, Kingpin of Nazi snoops.

He takes one quick glance round the room; a gleam of triumph enters his strange, slanting eyes; he pulls forward a form, stands on it, and with his hand wrapped cautiously in a handkerchief removes an extra light we have fitted in the roof.

“Verboten,” he croaks.

Then he slithers from the hut clutching the globe closely. His

Then he slithers from the hut clutching the globe closely. His exit is followed by a short, bewildered silence, which is relieved by a great burst of laughter.

For Moto's master-move is a typical misfire. He's bagged a bulb which will take a few minutes and a few fags to replace, and he's missed a haul which Himmler himself would have hailed.

**T**HOSE slips of paper held the B.B.C. news, picked up on a secret radio and printed on a hand-made duplicator.

Those battered mugs hold forbidden “hooch” from secret stills—and, tucked away inside the stove is a battery set all ready to supply late news when the stalag lights go off.

Strange that “hooch” parties

**Strange that "hooch" parties could be held in a prison camp. Stranger still that for two and a half years a regular radio news service could be maintained in a stalag swarming with Nazi snoops.**

The story begins in a drum. A valve set purchased piece by piece, from German civilians for English cigarettes, was concealed in a side drum and smuggled into the camp by the first arrival in September, 1942.

It went into immediate action against the dope-sheets Goebbels printed for prisoners. B.B.C. bulletins were taken down in shorthand, transcribed, and distributed to company commanders, who appointed special "confidence men" to read out the news in the 300-odd huts which comprised the camp.

**I**N spite of all warnings, some fellows would discuss the "griff" in latrines or in bunks at night, with the result that Nazi noses were soon to the ground and hut-to-hut searches were organised.

Yet—though with hairbreadth escapes—the set survived.

Volunteer counter-snoops kept watch for the searchers, and a "special cigarette fund" was prepared in a case of need.

By the time the snoops had done their work, so had the cigarettes. Triumphant Huns carted off the first set to the commandant's office, but four or five new radios were ready in reserve.

They had come "through the wire" via racketeering sentries. A few thousand cigarettes reached the Berlin black market—and the news of Allied victories reached the British P.O.Ws.

For 30 months a ceaseless fight went on. Never did the Nazis cease to search, and many were the hauls they made—but they couldn't stop the "daily dose of truth."

By means of jelly squares and copying ink from indelible pencils, a duplicator was made to print the

copying ink from indelible pencils, a duplicator was made to print the bulletin and facilitate distribution of the news.

Reports reached Nazi higher-ups, and the commandant was worried. Racketeering sentries were threat-

ened with dire penalties; renewed searches were made for secret sets; more snoops were called in to probe the camp. And still the news service went on.

**T**WO squareheads entered the hut where a specially valued valve set was in use. Immediately a Briton grabbed for a suitcase, dived between the Huns, and vanished through the door.

Bellowing fiercely, the Huns gave chase. They caught the Briton in the compound and pounced on his case. By the time they discovered it was empty, the radio had been whisked through the window to a place of safety.

Next came the Gestapo—a different proposition altogether. But when they rolled up in cars, whole squads of big, brutal fellows with padded shoulders, green trilbys and flashy shoes, it was no surprise to us. All the surprises were reserved for them.

To begin with, the camp itself, always a quagmire, was on that January day at its muddy foulest. We were turfed out of our huts to find what shelter we could from the drizzling rain in latrines or washhouses.

**A**ND we enjoyed ourselves thoroughly! For the grim, ghoulish Gestapo boys were funnier than Keystone coppers. They lost their tempers in the knee-deep slush and, while we laughed ourselves sick from a distance, they vented their Hunnish wrath on each other, or on the normal stalag guards who accompanied them.

The trouble was that their chief ordered them to search beneath the hut floors. Now, as the huts were raised on piles from the

the hut floors. Now, as the huts were raised on piles from the ground, the only way to search between the double floors was to crawl on hands, knees, and belly beneath the buildings.

To see a fat-necked, broad-beamed Hun in his Sunday suit crawling under a mud-bogged hut was pleasing. To see him emerge, purple faced, mud plastered, and hoarse with cursing was better still.

But to see one stick his podgy hand between the board, "find" some discarded razor blades, and, bleeding and squealing like a stuck

pig, aim a kick at the nearest Wehrmacht guard, who hadn't even laughed, was worth a Red Cross parcel.

The Gestapo drew a blank. Even the set they were meant to find—an old two-valve affair, carefully planted in an obviously false-bottomed packing-case armchair—they managed to miss.

The prisoner-of-war hut leader, ordered to stop in this hut while the search was on, was turned out of the armchair by the Gestapo director of operations, who plonked his own posterior in the seat while his underlings pulled up the floorboards, dismantled the stove, stripped the 14 beds.

A new security officer was added to the staff, keener, more cunning snoops were spared from outside duties—and a new drive began against the "Voice of Britain." Nor was the Hun without his triumphs.

**A** CERTAIN bombardier, for instance, brought out his valve set one day from its rabbit-hutch hiding place, and settled down snugly on his bunk, ear-phones on his head.

"Was ist das?" came a guttural voice behind him.

"Sshh!" frowned the bombardier, wagging a finger.

"Was ist das, Engländer?" came the voice a bit louder.

"Shut up, can't you! . . . I've got London and . . ."

The bombardier's voice trailed

LONDON AND . . .

The bombardier's voice trailed off as the field-grey uniform came into view.

"Well, thank Gawd the buzzard didn't get the other pair of headphones!" was the bombardier's remark as, radio under arm, the Jerry reached the door.

The Hun turned back. "So, my friend! You have still got more forbidden articles, eh?" he said in perfect English, and from a crest-fallen bombardier he completed a useful haul.

**I**F was not long before fellows grasped that several of the new snoops had been chosen for their knowledge of English—an accomplishment which at first they tried to conceal.

There followed some good clean fun in testing these crafty Nazis. A snoop had to be very poker-



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and vanished through the door."***

faced indeed who could stand a hutful of prisoners of war discussing his horrible appearance, dubious parentage, and probable fate without exploding into Hunnish hysterics.

A queer experience with an English-speaking snoop befell our particular hut. Unknown even to our neighbors we were, for some time, in possession of a unique set obtained in a unique manner, which I cannot reveal.

which I cannot reveal.

An all-electric set, equipped with four miniature valves and a single glass earphone which plugged into the ear, this tiny set was kept in a book, the inner pages of which had been cut out to form a sort of box.

It was operated by Sgt. Bill Spink, of the "phantom" unit, who occupied a top bunk near the hut door. He would sit up on his bunk

door. He would sit up on his bunk apparently absorbed in the book on his knees, and thanks to a clever arrangement of wires, nothing could be seen connecting him with the radio set.

Bill, having left our hut for a supposedly safe one, enjoyed a few months' listening without any real alarm.

When a routine search was made he would just pick up his fake book together with some real ones, and walk off to the stalag school for a little quiet study.

Since reading was a common accomplishment among N.C.Os., Bill's bookishness was not likely to excite comment.

One doleful day then, judge of his surprise—his indignation almost—when, outside listening hours, a Hun walked into the hut, went right up to the home-made bookshelves where a score of books were kept, put his hands straight on to the "radio volume," and walked out smiling.