

Midgets to Spies, Clandestine Radios

By Bart Lee, K6VK, CHRS Fellow in History

Ever since the earliest days of wireless, spies have used, and intercepted, radio signals. The “midget” radio technology of the 1930s lent itself to clandestine signals work. Here are some examples including WW II and The Simpsons.

Spy Radios in Popular Culture



The Simpsons, Season One, Episode 11; April 15, 1990

Bart Simpson is Sent to Albania for his Mischief, and an Albanian Exchange Student Comes to Live with the Simpsons, only to Spy on Homer's Work at the Atomic Power Plant!

The Albanian Kid's Midget Spy Radio!



A Classic 'Midget' Radio, Silvertone Pee Wee, 1939, with AM & Police Bands, AC Powered



A Very
Small
Radio

www.tuberadioland.com/silvertone6166_main.html compiled by "Paul" of Boston

Note that this Pre-War Midget tunes up to 4.5 MHz. Such compact Short Wave receiver technology could have other uses.

The "Low Radiation" Pee Wee: The Pee Wee and many midgets were compact tuned radio frequency (TRF) sets. TRF receiver operation in a clandestine context has the advantage of no telltale radiation from regeneration or from a local oscillator for a superheterodyne circuit.

The technology of several nations converged on similar compact configurations.

Detrola 1938 Chassis



German S108 Receiver Module



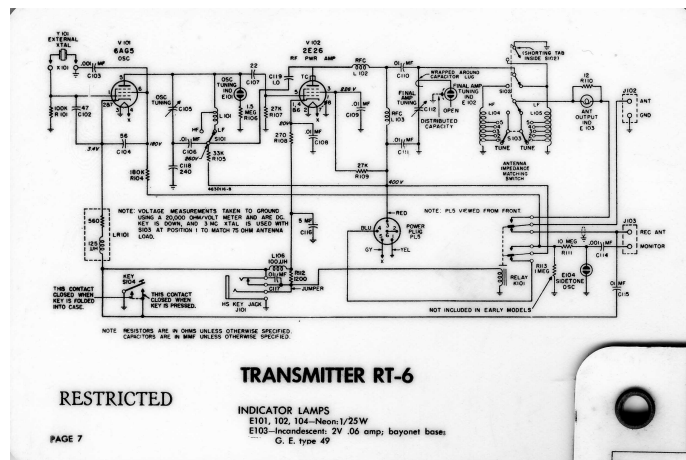
Compare to Detrola 1938 Midget Chassis

And of course, the technology of spy radios evolved.

RS-6, Subminiature Tubes, 1960s; Special Forces, CIA, SAC & ?? Did Special Forces Cache these Radios in Eastern Europe?



Peter McCollum
collection, his
photo

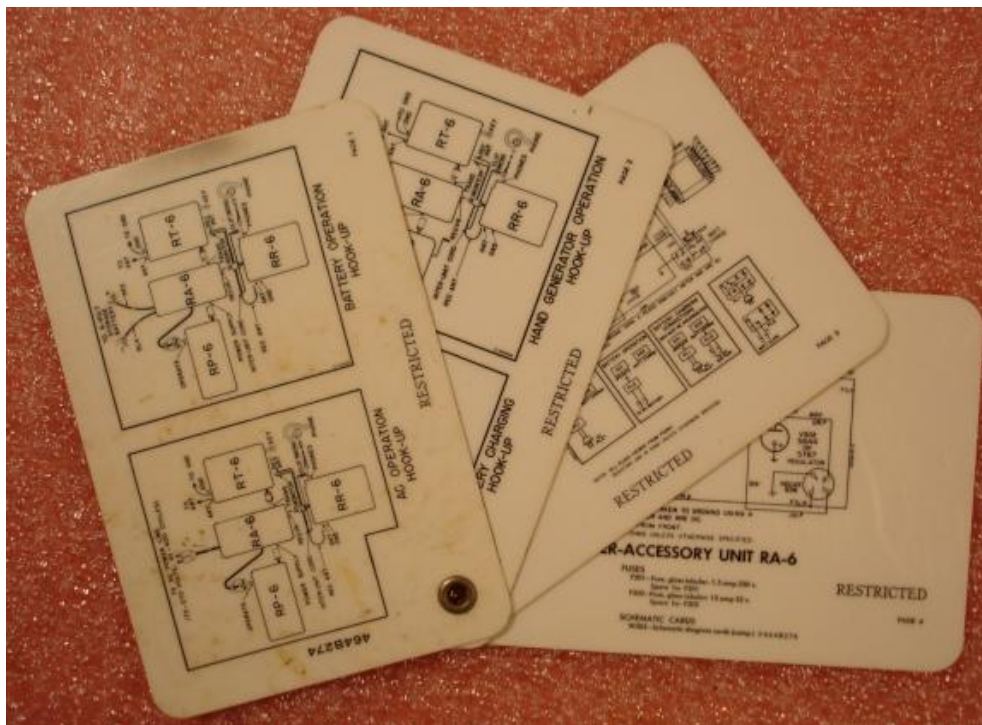


Bart Lee, K6VK collection.

RS-6 Receiver



Bart Lee collection, now at the CHRS Museum, photo and restoration by Dennis Monticelli



Bart Lee, K6VK collection.

Panasonic Transistor Short-Wave Receiver Used by Americans Acting as Spies for Cuba to Receive One-Time-Pad Encrypted 'Numbers' Broadcasts



Civilian Technology
Again put to
Espionage Use!

This modern Panasonic Short Wave radio was used by Cuban spies in the US in the latter part of the 20th Century. The radio and their one-time pads were much in the news as of December, 2014 for a spy swap. To this day one can hear Cuban “numbers” stations at Short Wave frequencies, now with accompanying digital bursts. (de K6VK)