The Royal Australian Navy in 15 Objects

Object 8
The Coastwatchers'
AWA Teleradio 3B

The Coastwatching organization was established in the inter-war period by the Royal Australian Navy in northern Australia and Papua New Guinea employing expatriates to report on suspicious naval and other activities. It was later extended to the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides. The exploits of the Coastwatchers are legendary and the Teleradio 3B was critical to their success.

Amalgamated Wireless of Australasia (AWA) produced the Teleradio and the Government of Papua established a network through their territory. A more limited network existed in New Guinea. In all thirty-three sets had potential to be used by Coastwatchers. Critically, the Teleradio 3B was robust, its component parts could be carried to a new location with the help of about a dozen native carriers and it could have a discrete frequency crystal for Coastwatcher transmissions. In addition, a code system that was within the ability of the coastwatchers to use could be provided. The RAN had devised a code called the Playfair system based on key words and the leader of the Coastwatchers, Lieutenant Commander Eric Feldt had further modified it largely based on suggestions from Naval College class mate Lieutenant Commander Jack Newman into the 'Feldt' method to make it more suitable.

An additional eighteen radios were delivered to extend the network into New Guinea, the Solomons and New Hebrides. The need for more radios had been anticipated by Navy Office as had a teleradio crystal with the unique coastwatcher frequency (X frequency). Because of the range of the Teleradio 3B a hub and spoke network was established. The hubs being at Port Moresby, Rabaul, Tulagi and Thursday Island where listening watch was kept on X Frequency. Eric Feldt's civilian radio expert David Laws would then visit the new coastwatchers to provide the radios and instructions on it and the Playfair system.

Location: The Australian War Memorial.