

DIY Prison Escape Tools and Weapons

Marc Steinmetz created this captivating photography series entitled "Prison Escape Tools."

From Steinmetz:

"Inmates have got lots of time on their hands. What better way to make use of this resource than doing handicrafts? Creativity pays, especially when it facilitates escape. These examples bear witness to man's love of freedom. "

All images and captions Mark Steinmetz Photography.



KNUCKLEDUSTER with padded handle, made from a rasp that was presumably stolen from a prison workshop. The weapon was found in a cell in the prison of Wolfenbüttel, Germany, sometime around 1993.



SHIV disguised as a wooden crucifix; found in an inmate's cell in Wolfenbüttel prison, Germany, sometime around 1994; intended for use in an escape or as a general weapon. At that time a lot of crucifixes were fashioned in prison woodshops until jailers finally figured out their true purpose.



TATTOOING NEEDLE made from a toothbrush handle, a ball pen and an electric motor; confiscated in 'Santa Fu' prison in Hamburg, Germany. Tattooing instruments are a popular and common source of income among inmates but are banned as 'illegal objects' due to the danger of infection (Aids, Hepatitis, etc.).



SHOTGUN made from iron bedposts; charge made of pieces of lead from curtain tape and match-heads, to be ignited by AA batteries and a broken light bulb. On May 21, 1984 two inmates of a prison in Celle, Germany, took a jailer as a hostage, showed off their fire power by letting go at a pane of bullet-proof glass, and escaped by car.



RADIO RECEIVER Sometime in the seventies an inmate of Ludwigsburg prison, Germany, built this radio on the sly and hid it inside an encyclopedia. It was probably commissioned by another inmate who had no electronic expertise himself.



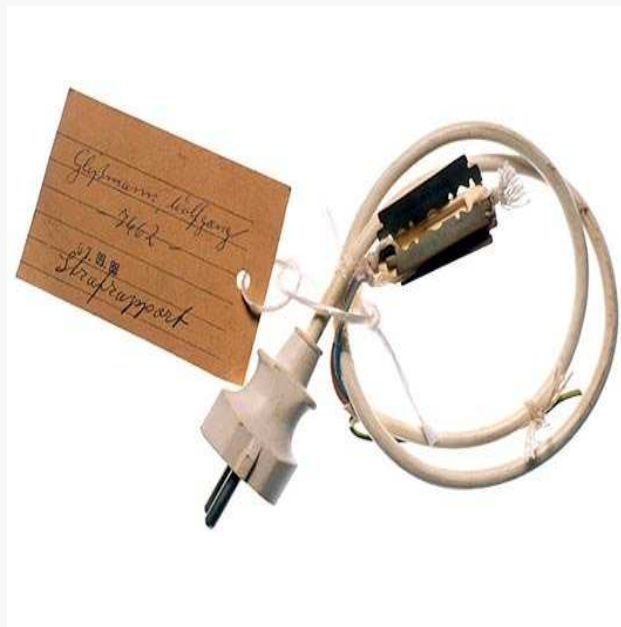
HASH PIPE fashioned from an empty horseradish tube; confiscated in ‘Santa Fu’ prison in Hamburg, Germany. Smoking implements are the most common illicit items in prisons. The range of materials they are made of mirrors the inmates’ great imagination.



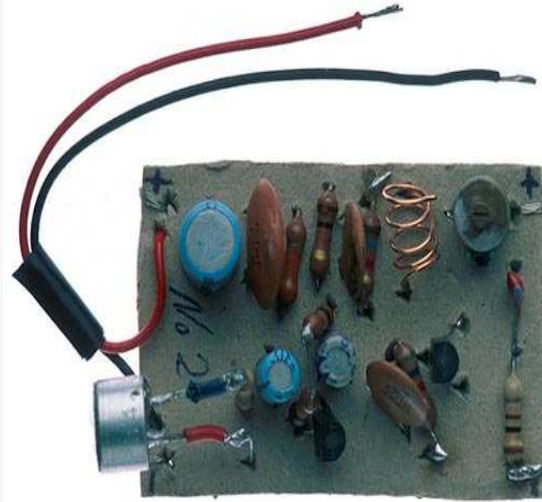
DOUBLE-BARRELED PISTOL This gun was found along with other homemade firearms in the cell of two Celle prison inmates on November 15, 1984. The weapons had been made in the prison’s metal workshop. They were loaded with pieces of steel and match-heads.



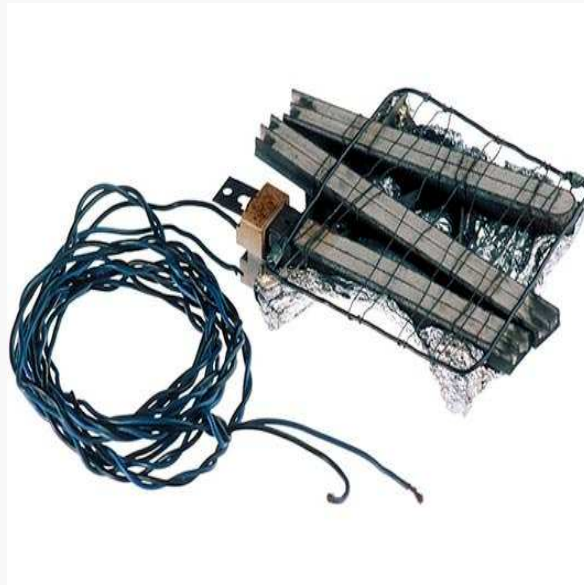
GRAPPLING HOOK with segmented extension rod (13 segments, overall length: 4.5 meters); rope made of leather and string. This cleverly conceived tool assisted two inmates in their escape from Ludwigsburg prison, Germany, on August 19, 1987. The attached rod enabled them to place and retrieve the hook and thus negotiate two prison walls in succession.



IMMERSION HEATER made from razor blades; found in a cell in 'Santa Fu' jail in Hamburg, Germany. Jailbirds use these tools to distil alcoholic beverages forbidden in prisons. Your typical inmate's moonshine still includes a plastic can containing fermented fruit mash or juice, an immersion coil of some sort, a rubber hose, and a plastic receptacle for the booze.



RADIO TRANSMITTER / BUG made of radio recorder parts by an inmate of Wolfenbüttel prison, Germany (battery is missing). Prisoners occasionally manage to install gizmos like this one in guard-rooms to be prepared for upcoming cell searches. Also suitable as a means of cell-to-cell communication among inmates. A standard radio serves as a receiver.



STOVE / GRILL / TOASTER An inmate of Ludwigsburg prison, Germany, botched together this multi-purpose tool from wire, a broken heating rod and some tin foil. It was found in his cell and confiscated sometime in the mid-eighties.



CLASSIC MAKESHIFT ROPE in the classic style, made from bedsheets and dish towels; length: 16 meters. On May 2, 1998 two inmates used it in a failed attempt to escape from the 6th floor of 'Santa Fu' jail in Hamburg, Germany. One of the men fell, the other made it to the roof of the main gate where he was spotted by a surveillance camera.



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DUMMY PISTOL

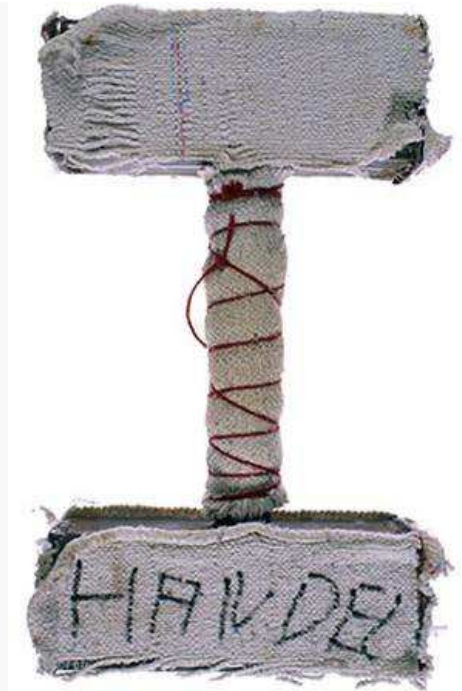
from blackened cardboard; found on June 23, 1988, in an inmate's cell in Stammheim prison, Germany, after a fellow prisoner tipped off the jailers. The dummy was hidden in an empty milk pack and was most probably intended to be used for taking hostages in an escape attempt.



GRAPPLING HOOK disguised as a wrought-iron candelabra, fashioned by an inmate around 1985 in a prison workshop in Wolfenbüttel, Germany, and confiscated in his cell. Before they were banned, candelabras like this one were quite popular among prisoners as they could also be used as grappling hooks in an escape attempt after bending open the legs and attaching a rope.



CATAPULT fashioned by an inmate in the metal workshop of Wolfenbüttel prison, Germany, presumably as a means for smuggling secret messages, drugs, or gun parts. Although the prisoner claimed it to be a piece of abstract art entitled 'Dackel' (= dachshund), it was confiscated in 1991.



DUMB-BELL fashioned by an unknown inmate of Stammheim prison, Germany, in the prison's metal workshop. In the late eighties, when this item was found hidden in a staircase, working out was still prohibited.



ROPE LADDER with wooden rungs disguised as chess pieces; found and confiscated in an inmate's cell in Wolfenbüttel prison, Germany, around 1993.



CATAPULT

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SAW

made from a wooden coathanger and a jigsaw blade.
The tool was confiscated in the
therapeutical section of
Hohenasperg prison, Germany.



WHIP

with razor blades. The grisly weapon was found around 1996 in 'Santa Fu' jail in Hamburg, Germany, in the cell of a drug addicted inmate after his failed attempt to extort a higher Methadone ration by threatening a female prison officer with a knife.



DOUBLE-BARRELED PISTOL

This gun was found along with other homemade firearms in the cell of two Celle prison inmates on November 15, 1984. The weapons had been made in the prison's metal workshop. They were loaded with pieces of steel and match-heads.



This Instrument was found in 1997 in the metal workshop of 'Santa Fu' prison in Hamburg, Germany, where an unknown inmate manufactured and hid it. It is either a weapon, or, attached to a pole, might have been designed to push away barbed wire from the top of a wall during an escape.



NARCOTICS CACHE
In a hollow space inside his artificial leg a prisoner in open detention frequently smuggled narcotics into 'Santa Fu' prison in Hamburg, Germany. Around 1984 his behaviour finally got the attention of the jailers who gave the prosthesis a check.



SAW

An inmate of 'Santa Fu' prison in Hamburg, Germany, fitted a wooden handle to a piece of saw blade for better handling. The tool was found in his cell and confiscated.

Confiscated Prison Weapons

18 Feb 2011, written by [Revelationo Comments](#)



I think everyone knows that weapons are not allowed in prisons, so how do these guys keep stabbing and beating people with sharp and blunt objects? Well if you were locked in a cage for the rest of your life and you

keep getting beat up every day, I think you are going to pull some heavy duty MacGyver type shit and make yourself a pretty little shank out of toilet paper rolls, which actually happens. Here are a bunch of creative confiscated prison weapons, some with back stories.



Materials: Stainless steel tablespoon; handle wrapped with upholstery.

Backstory: At its core here is a spoon, stolen from the staff dining room at Rahway, where, as in many federal penitentiaries, inmates were restricted to using plastic flatware. Stamped “State of NJ,” the spoon likely to have been sharpened on the cement floor or wall of a cell. The bowl of the spoon was filled with wax and then wrapped with upholstery thread (taken from the furniture shop, where it was used to re-stitch chair cushions) thereby forming a generously-scaled handle.

Many more disturbing, but creative and effective weapons below. Get Your Shank ON



Materials: Wood strip; five large razor blades glued into one side; six small razor blades glued into other and wrapped with boxing tape, rubylith and clear tape; handle wrapped with boxing tape.

Backstory: Lifted from the facility's metal sign shop, this shiv is wrapped in "rubylith" — a red, masking tape classically used in signmaking (and, before the digital revolution, commonly employed by graphic designers in the production of "mechanicals"). Eleven disposable razor blades, available for purchase from Rahway's commissary back in the 1980s, are carefully inserted down the sides.



Materials: Iron band from bed slat bent back and around to form handle.



Materials: Steel rod; handle wrapped with boxing tape.



Materials: Iron plate; handle wrapped with electrical tape.



Materials: Iron band from bed slat; handle wrapped with electrical tape over boxing tape.



Materials: Steel carpenter's square.

Backstory: A carpenter's square was shaved to a point using metal snips found in the prison sign shop, where many state highway and traffic signs are still made each year.



Materials: Shard of plexiglas; handle wrapped with electrical tape.



Materials: “Unbreakable” plastic comb; three single-edge razor blades inserted into teeth; wrapped with copper wire and shoelace.

Backstory: During the 1980s, a modest stipend of \$1.10 per day was deposited into each working prisoner’s personal account. The comb and shoelace used here were available from the prison commissary at that time. By completing an order form, prisoners could make purchases and tailor a shiv to their own design specifications.



Materials: Gardening glove with smaller glove inside; four steel upholstery tacks, each with three sharp points exposed, sewn between gloves.

Backstory: A pair of gardening gloves were issued to an inmate assigned to outdoor landscape detail. The sharp metal points beneath the cloth are actually the bottom sides of four inverted upholstery tacks, lifted from the furniture shop and stitched into the knuckles of the glove: the idea here is that the points become more pronounced when the user makes a fist.



Materials: Carriage return from typewriter; U-clamp attached to side; handle wrapped with boxing tape, string, upholstery thread and fragments of dried putty.

Backstory: By law, prisoners must be provided materials to have an opportunity to prepare their own legal defenses. In the 1980s, typewriters were made available for this purpose: the long, notched “spear” here is the carriage return from a prison-issued typewriter. The handle was wrapped with tape is likely to have been taken from Rahway’s boxing facility, where several world-class boxers trained, including Rubin “Hurricane” Carter.

Very true about the gun. Made from a plastic polymer that is just as hard and can be just as durable as a 'normal' gun. Also, new cuff keys that are plastic.....how soon til we start finding them on inmates?

Wow, that's some amazing sight and sound supervision on behalf of the German prison staff, letting inmates make all this crap.

I have seen a blowgun made out of paper and HIV infected darts. I have seen a prison made machete, innumerable shanks, and zip guns made out of radio aerials, using rubber bands and nails to pop a homemade cap. One thing inmates are not is stupid, and you play into their hands if you forget this.

We have been warned of a gun that can clear a metal detector, so don't rely too heavily on machinery to do your work. Trust your instincts, practice good hands on security, wear your vest, and watch your six. Complacency is your worst mistake.