



U S MILITARY TELEGRAPH

The telegraph was invented in 1844 and by the time of the Civil War, telegraph lines crisscrossed the nation.

Both armies were quick to embrace the telegraph to communicate swiftly and accurately. No longer did commanders at all levels have to rely on runners, dispatch riders and carrier pigeons to get their messages through.



At the beginning of the war, the War Department was using commercial telegraph services and a War Department clerk would have to stand in line at the Washington D. C. central station like everyone else. In short order, a telegraph center was installed at the War Department building, across the street from the White House. The U S Military Telegraph Corps was set up to handle this telegraph traffic. President Lincoln would frequently walk across the street to visit the telegraph office, as all war dispatches came through the center.

Lincoln would often communicate directly with his commanders in the field and suggest strategy via the War Department telegraph. During crucial campaigns, Lincoln would stay at the telegraph office and often sleep there on a cot that had been installed for him. During the course of the war, Lincoln adopted the habit of visiting the telegraph center every night to read the days wire traffic. During his presidency, Lincoln sent over 1,000 telegrams.



The war saw the implementation of portable telegraph machines and specially equipped telegraph wagons. A field telegraph could be set up anywhere a wire could be run. Over the course of the war, the Military Telegraph Corps strung over 15,000 miles of telegraph cable and employed over 1,200 telegraph operators.

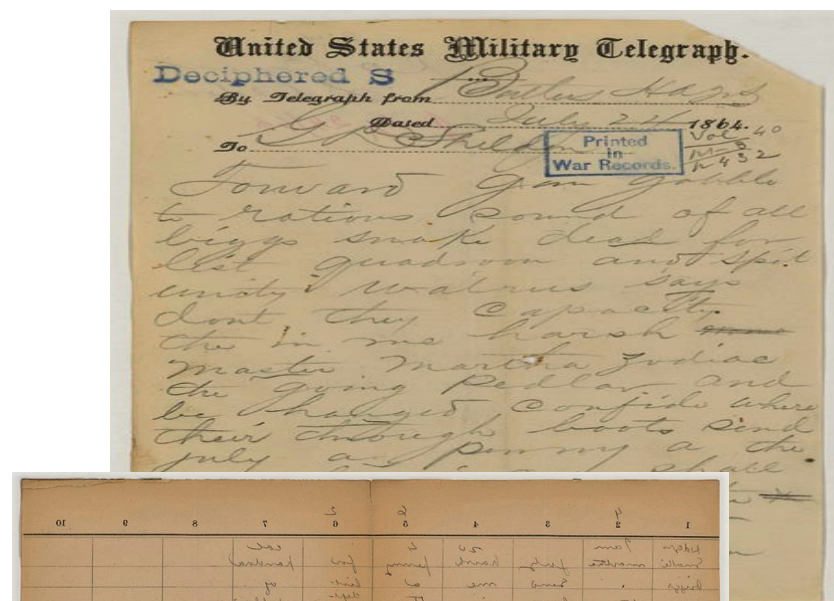
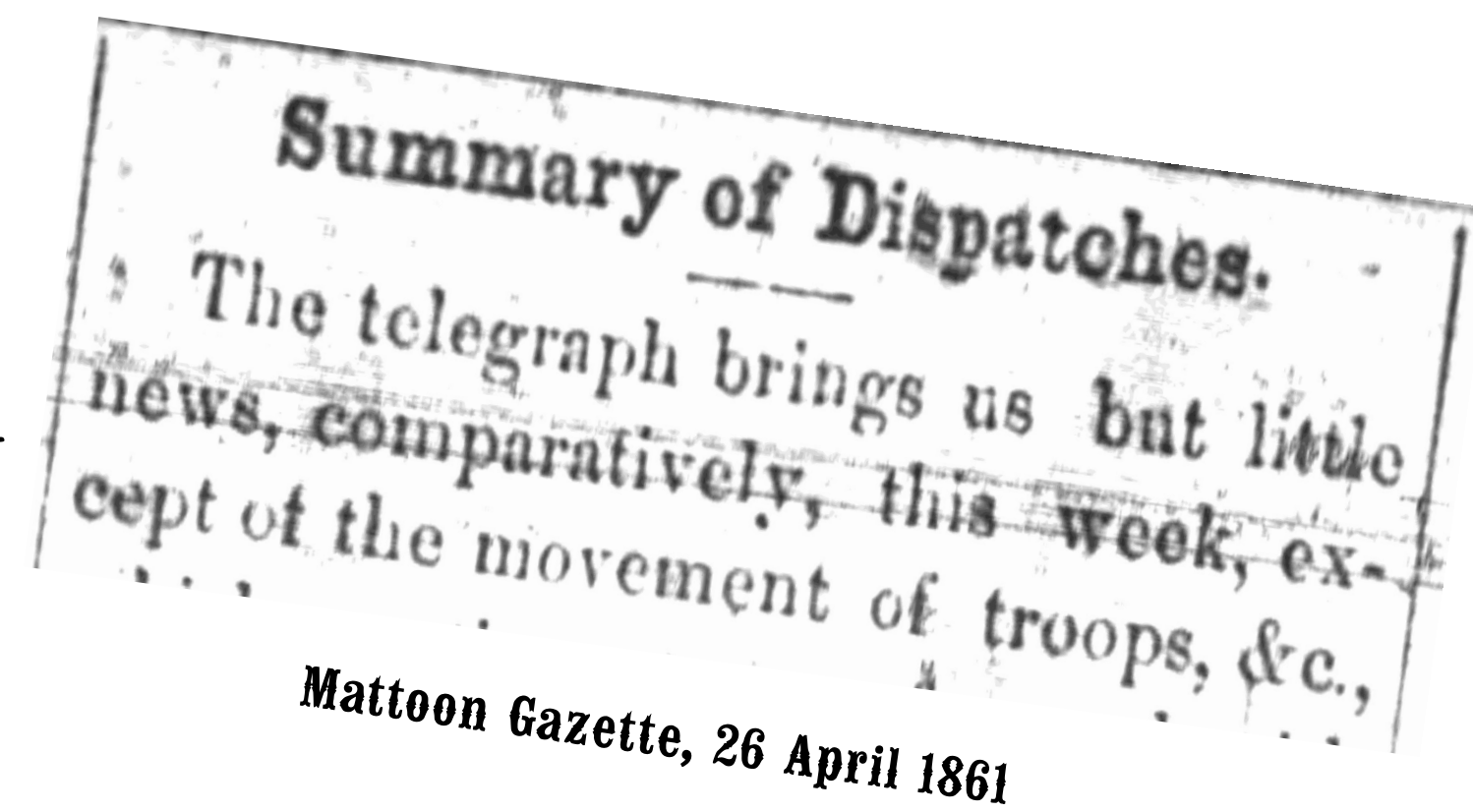


Because of the susceptibility of telegrams to being intercepted, both sides developed and used ciphers to transmit critical information.

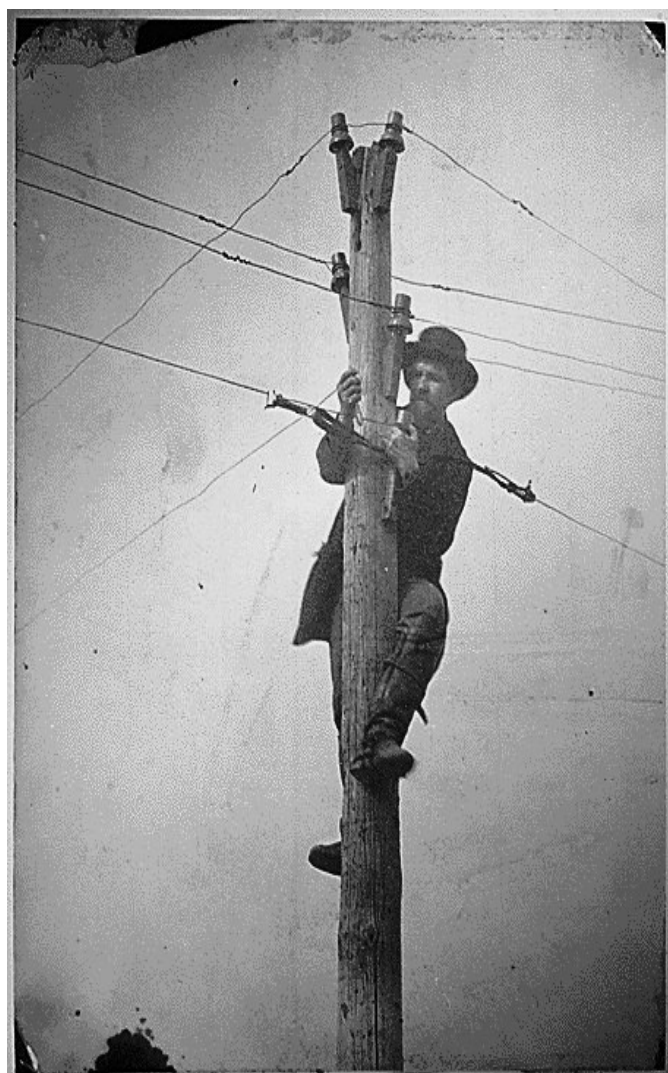
Telegraph lines, like railroads, became the target of raiding cavalry units from both armies as they sought to cripple the enemy's ability to communicate.

In response, both armies detailed cavalry units to patrol and protect the telegraph lines

The telegraph also changed the face of news reporting as reporters in the field could file stories by telegraph and most newspapers devoted large amounts of space and type to news from the battle front. For the first time in history, the local populace had access to war news within a day or two, not weeks and months as in previous times.



Cipher decoding sheet and deciphered telegram.



Union soldier cutting Confederate telegraph lines.

Other than developments in weapons and ammunition, the Telegraph and the Railroads were the two most significant factors in the way the Civil War was fought.