



# THE CIVIL WAR ROUND-TABLE

P. O. BOX 5028, CLEVELAND, OHIO 44101

---

MARCH 1968

Vol. 11 No. 6

---

---

## 92nd Meeting

---

DATE: TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 1968  
SPEAKER: JAMES E. CHAPMAN  
SUBJECT: "THE BLOCKADE or HOW THE NAVY WON THE WAR"  
PLACE: HERMIT CLUB, DODGE COURT  
PRELIMINARIES: 6 PM DINNER 7 PM

---

### JAMES E. CHAPMAN

Jim is a recent member of our roundtable. It is always rewarding when one of our own speaks before the group. Jim is an attorney with Baker Hostetler. Born, raised and educated a Buckeye, Jim graduated from college and law school at that noble institution, sometimes referred to by its seasonal nickname "3 yards and a cloud of dust," better known as Ohio State University. Jim completed law school there in 1954.

Jim says his major interest in the Civil War centers around the Navy. Most probably this fascination for the Navy was due to his three years of service in the ARMY from 1945 to 1947. As a final note on his interest in the Civil War came while stationed at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. Here he had to argue (this means to discuss logically and unemotionally) with some Mississippians and Georgians who were still under the impression that the Yankees lost the war.

As an integral part of Jim's talk, INSTRUCTIONS FROM FLAG OFFICER GOLDSBOROUGH TO OFFICERS COMMANDING BLOCKADING VESSELS, has been reprinted on page two of this newsletter. Jim asks that you thoroughly familiarize yourselves with these instructions.

### THE CAIRO

It is rare in a man's life that he actually lives his dreams. The odds are astronomical that this would occur. However, at our February meeting we were treated to such a happening. It is nearly indescribable the emotion registered by Edwin Bearss as he described the raising of the Federal Gunboat Cairo. Those of you who will hear friend Ed in the future please do yourself a favor and tape record it for those who couldn't make the meeting and your own subsequent enjoyment later.

INSTRUCTIONS FROM FLAG-OFFICER GOLDSBOROUGH  
TO OFFICERS COMMANDING BLOCKADING VESSELS

All officers commanding vessels employed on blockading service belonging to the squadron under my command, are to be governed by the following general directions in the discharge of their duties:

1. Duly notify neutrals of the declaration of the blockade, and give to it otherwise all the publicity in your power.
2. The blockade must be strict and absolute, and only public armed vessels of foreign powers are to be permitted to enter the ports which are placed in a state of blockade.
3. Protect our commerce from the depreciations of privateers, and, as a matter of course, capture them and all other vessels of the enemy whenever you can do so without being seduced away from your station.
4. A lawful maritime blockade requires the actual presence of an adequate force stationed at the entrance of the port, sufficiently near to prevent communication. The only exception to this rule arises out of the occasional temporary absence of the blockading vessels, produced by accident, as in the case of a storm, which does not suspend the legal operation of a blockade, and to take advantage of such an accidental absence is a fraudulent attempt to break the blockade, and will justify the application of penalties.
5. A neutral or foreign vessel, proceeding toward the entrance of a blockaded port, is not to be captured or detained if she shall not have received previously from one of the blockading squadron a special notification of the existence of the blockade. This notification must be inserted in writing on the register and muster-roll of the neutral vessel by the cruiser which meets her, and it should contain the announcement, together with statements of the day and the latitude and longitude in which it was made.
6. Until the ports are closed by proclamation (that is, declared to be no longer ports of entry) the warning just mentioned is to be continued to vessels instead of capturing at once, as will be the case when they come to be so closed.
7. Vessels leaving guarded insurgent ports without legal clearances are to be seized and sent in for adjudication. If it be claimed that there is not an effective blockade, and therefore that they are entitled to depart, still they must not disregard our municipal laws and the requirements of the National Government.
8. On the coast of North Carolina more particularly, there is an extensive scheme of deliberately concerted measures to evade our vigilance and disregard our laws. This must be broken up, and every effort is to be made to accomplish the purpose effectually.
9. Vessels with contraband goods on board, approaching any of the blockaded ports, or vessels that may have cleared for any of these ports or be found, with a due warning on their papers, hovering about any of them, are all to be seized and sent in for adjudication.

L.M. Goldsborough  
Flag-Officer.

September 28, 1861

THE COURIER  
of  
THE CIVIL WAR RONDTABLE OF CLEVELAND, OHIO  
FOUNDED FEBRUARY 19, 1957

PRESIDENT . . . . . FRANK A. MORAN  
VICE PRESIDENT. . . . . DONALD A. HECKAMAN  
SECRETARY . . . . . GUY DI CARLO JR.  
TREASURER . . . . . FRANK SCHUHLE JR.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

TERMS EXPIRING 1968: JOHN W. CULLEN  
FRANK SAXTON  
1969: WILLIAM VICTORY  
PAUL GUENTHER

EDITOR, NEWSLETTER. . GUY DI CARLO JR. . BOX 5028, CLEVELAND, O.

---

CODES, CIPHERS & THE MILITARY TELEGRAPH

There have been many books and articles on the Military Telegraph but a virtual dearth of information available on the subject of Codes and Ciphers used during the Civil War.

Therefore, after a brief history of the organization of the Military Telegraph and the War Department Telegraph Office, the balance of this newsletter will be devoted to Codes and Ciphers, their use, the actual Code names, the successes, the failures, the anecdotic happenings as experienced by both Union and Confederates.

THE MILITARY TELEGRAPH

There was no government telegraph organization before the Civil War. In the month of April, 1861, the American Telegraph Company whose lines reached Washington from the North, extended its wires to the War Department, Navy Yard, Arsenal, Chain-Bridge, and other outlying points. There was no appropriation to meet the expenses of a government telegraph service, and for six months or more Edward S. Sanford, President of the American Telegraph Company, paid all the bills, aggregating thousands of dollars, for poles, wires, instruments, salaries of the operators, etc. This was a generous and patriotic act on the part of Sanford, which was gratefully acknowledged by the President and Secretary Cameron and by the latter's successor, Stanton. The American Telegraph Company was, of course, reimbursed later through an appropriation by Congress.

In the month of April, 1861, just after Sumter's fall, Simon Cameron, then Secretary of War, requested President Thomson of the Pennsylvania Railroad to spare Vice-President Thomas A. Scott for a time, to get the railroad and telegraph service under proper control. Colonel Scott asked that Andrew Carnegie, then superintendent of the Pittsburg Division, should accompany and assist him. President Thomson acquiesced. This was just before the Sixth Massachusetts, on April 19, 1861, was assaulted while passing through the streets of Baltimore en route to the capital.

Andrew Carnegie was then in Washington bringing with him a drafted force from his railroad division, the nucleus of a strong railroad force so that the Government would be able at once to take possession of and operate the railroads about Washington. This force consisted of con-

ductors, trainmen, trackmen, road-supervisors, bridge-builders, etc.

Carnegie remained at the capital until November. With the strong help of men such as R.F. Morley, the first military railroad superintendent and David Strouse, the first military telegraph superintendent (both men literally worked themselves to death each dying before the year was out), Carnegie continued his work of organizing and perfecting the military railroad and telegraph service, which by that time had been placed on such a firm basis that he could be spared to return to his former duties at Pittsburg, which post had become of prime importance because of the increasing demands of the Government in the matter of transporting troops and supplies for McClelland's army.

Four young operators, David Strouse, Samuel Brown, Richard O'Brien and David Bates, formed the nucleus of the United States Military Telegraph, which later, at its maximum strength, contained over fifteen hundred members. It is interesting to note that the United States Military Telegraph Corps was a special organization, and its members were not considered an integral part of the army (excepting only ten or twelve holding commissions, to enable them officially to receive and disburse funds and property), nor were they under military control proper. Their orders coming directly from the Secretary of War. Efforts were made to have Congress pass an act giving them officially what they always claimed to be their real status in the United States Army. Finally on January 26, 1897, President Cleveland approved an act authorizing and directing the Secretary of War to issue certificates of honorable service to all members of the United States Military Telegraph Corps, or to the representatives of deceased members. The act was carefully drawn, however, to exclude them from receiving pensions.

Because of Strouse's poor health and subsequent death, James Gilmore succeeded, and he in turn was succeeded by Thomas T. Eckert, Gilmore having resigned in favor of active duty with the 126th Pennsylvania Volunteers. Eckert was later commissioned as a Major.

Amasa Stone of Cleveland, Ohio, whose daughter afterward became the wife of John Hay, was a director and large holder of stock in the Western Union Telegraph Company, of which Anson Stager was general superintendent. Stone recommended Stager to Secretary of War Cameron as a suitable person to take general charge of military telegraph matters. Meantime Stager had voluntarily cooperated with General McClellan in Ohio and Western Virginia, in the operation of telegraph-lines required for military purposes. In accordance with Stone's suggestion Cameron telegraphed Stager to come to Washington, which he did at once. Upon his arrival, he submitted a brief but comprehensive plan for a military telegraph service which was referred by Thomas A. Scott, Assistant Secretary of War, to the President, who returned it on the same day with this indorsement:

Washington, D.C. Oct. 28, 1861.

I have not sufficient time to study and mature an opinion on this plan. If the Secretary of War has confidence in it and is satisfied to adopt it, I have no objections.

A. Lincoln.

The Secretary of War formally approved the plan, and on November 11, 1861, Stager was appointed captain and assistant-quartermaster, and on November 25, 1861 was assigned in Special Orders 313 to duty as gene-

ral manager of military telegraph-lines. Stager was commissioned colonel in the army on February 26, 1862, and brevet brigadier-general March 13, 1865, for meritorious service. Special Orders 313 must have been lost in the hurry and excitement of war preparations, for on February 25, 1862, Stager was appointed "Military superintendent of all telegraph-lines and offices in the United States," and on April 8, 1862, we find that General Order 38 appoints him assistant quartermaster and military superintendent of telegraph-lines throughout the United States. Each of these orders placed all lines and employees under the control of the Secretary of War, and required commanding officers to "furnish rations and give all necessary aid to Colonel Stager and his assistants in the construction, repair, and protection of military telegraph-lines.

Stager from time to time appointed assistants, who were also given commissions in the Quartermaster's Department, to enable them to handle government property and cash. Major Eckert was Colonel Stager's principal assistant, in immediate charge of telegraph operations at Washington and in the Department of the Potomac. Colonel Stager visited Washington occasionally, but resided in Cleveland, and after October, 1863, he made that place his permanent headquarters and from that point directed the operations of the corps generally, giving particular attention to matters in the West and Southwest, his principal assistant in that section being Colonel Robert C. Clowry, who was stationed first at Little Rock and afterward at St. Louis. On March 13, 1865, along with his superior Anson Stager, Clowry was appointed brevet lieutenant-colonel for "meritorious service and devoted application to duty," a characterization that all who knew him consider well bestowed. He was later president of the Western Union Telegraph Company.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### WAR DEPARTMENT TELEGRAPH OFFICE

After several location changes the final one was made soon after the MONITOR-MERRIMAC fight in March, 1862, when Secretary Stanton directed the office to be located in the old library room, on the second floor front, adjoining his own quarters. It was in this old library that operator David Bates discovered a copy of Roget's "Thesaurus," to which all the operators made frequent reference, especially during the time when Mr. Charles A. Dana, Assistant Secretary of War, was at Grant's and Rosecrans's headquarters, from each of which he sent long cipher-despatches containing words with meanings new and obscure to the telegraph boys. These quarters were to be used until after the close of the war.

From January, 1862, when Stanton entered the cabinet, until the war ended, the telegraphic reins of the Government were held by a firm and skillful hand. Nicolay and Hay, in their "Abraham Lincoln," say that Stanton "centered the telegraph in the War Department, where the publication of military news, which might prematurely reach the enemy, could be supervised, and, if necessary, delayed,".

The War Department telegraph office was the scene of many vitally important conferences between Lincoln and members of his cabinet, leading generals, congressmen and others, who soon learned that when the President was not at the White House he could most likely be found in the telegraph office. Lincoln almost lived in the telegraph office when a battle was in progress, and on other occasions would drop in, as he sometimes jocosely remarked, to get rid of the pestering crowd of office seekers.

The staff of the War Department telegraph office consisted at first of a few operators only. Manager William B. Wilson had opened on April 17, 1861, in Pennsylvania's Governor Curtin's office, the first military telegraph office on the continent. Wilson served as manager from May, 1861 to March, 1862, resigning to go active duty.

David Homer Bates succeeded Wilson as manager holding this position until August, 1866. Also scheduled into Bates' work was that of cipher-operator along with Charles A. Tinker, Albert B. Chandler, George W. Baldwin, and Frank Stewart. As the telegraphic work increased the staff was enlarged until at one time there were ten or twelve day operators, and, as needs required, two or three night operators.

All military telegraph despatches from or to Washington of necessity passed through the War Department office. The operators were fully occupied in the work of transmitting and receiving these messages over the wires, and the cipher-operators in translating the more important ones into and out of cipher. Albert E.H. Johnson was in charge of filing the many messages away in a careful and precise fashion. Johnson before the war was a clerk in Stanton's law office and came with him to the War Department as his private secretary in January, 1862. He remained in that capacity, and as custodian of military telegrams, until Stanton left the cabinet in 1868. The Government was fortunate in having Major Johnson for such an important duty, and historians of the Civil War for all time will have cause to be grateful for his conscientious work toward the great array of volumes of the "Official Records" which contain thousands of military telegrams all carefully filed by him

\* \* \* \* \*

#### CIPHER-CODES AND MESSAGES

Anson Stager was the author of the first Federal ciphers, which he devised for General McClellan's use in West Virginia, in the summer of 1861, before McClellan came to Washington. They were very simple, consisting merely of cards, about three inches by five, on which was printed a series of key-words and arbitraries, the former indicating the number of lines and columns and the route or order in which the messages might be written, the arbitrary words being used to represent names of places and persons. When an important despatch was intrusted to a cipher-operator for transmission, he first rewrote it carefully in five six, or seven columns, as the case might be, adding extra or blind words on the last line, if it was not full. A key-word was then selected to indicate the number of columns and lines and the order in which the words of the message were to be copied for transmission by wire.

For instance, a certain key-word would represent the combination of seven columns and eleven lines, and the route would be up the sixth column, down the third, up the fifth, down the seventh, up the first, down the fourth, down the second. At the end of each column a blind word would be inserted, provided the code so directed, and at the end of the despatch one or more blind words might be added at the discretion of the cipher-operator, for the purpose of increasing the difficulty of translation by unauthorized persons. The key-word and the blind words would be discarded by the cipher-operator when translating the despatch into English. The total number of words in a cipher-message in the above mentioned combination would be  $7 \times 12$  plus 1 equal 85, provided no extra words were added at the end, as above indicated.

This somewhat crude but really effective method was improved upon from time to time by the War Department staff of cipher-operators. Mr. William R. Plum, in his history, "The Military Telegraph," Vol. I, page 60, says:

"The Cipher System, originated by Anson Stager, and developed mainly by him, but in no small degree by others, more particularly T.T. Edkert, A.D. Chandler, D. Homer Bates and Charles A. Tinker, was eminently successful. Copies of cipher messages quite often reached the enemy, and some were published in their newspapers, with a general request for translation, but all to no purpose. To the statement that in no case did an enemy ever succeed in deciphering such messages, let us add that neither did any Federal cipher-operator ever prove recreant to his sacred trust, and we have, in a sentence, two facts that reflect infinite credit upon the corps."

### RESUME OF THE FEDERAL CIPHERS

From time to time the War Department staff issued successive printed editions of their cipher-code, numbering twelve in all, in pocketbook size, containing at first sixteen printed pages, and in the last edition forty-eight pages. The front part was taken up with key-words, in different order and various combinations. The remainder of the book contained a series of printed arbitrary words opposite which, in each case, respectively, the operator wrote the name of a person, place, or short phrase most likely to be used in military dispatches. To the President, cabinet officers, and leading generals two, three, and in some cases half a dozen arbitrary words were assigned, so that in any dispatch prepared for transmission it would not be necessary to use a given word more than once. This precaution was also followed in the key-word section, several different words being set apart to represent each separate combination. Arbitrary words were also used to indicate the month, day, and hour of each cipher message when ready for transmission.

### CIPHERS NO. 6 & 7

These ciphers were introduced early in the war, and were first held by a select few, and subsequently held by a much larger number of men. Gen. Buell's early operations in Kentucky and Tennessee, and also Halleck's up to the occupation of Corinth, were telegraphed in these ciphers. In the East, department ciphers were used which were modeled after the general plan of these, but differed mainly in routes and arbitraries.

Cipher No. 6 may be said to be merely an elaboration of the first one. Its column routes and general order of arrangement were the same. Its commencement words, however, were those which indicated the number of words in the message, instead of lines; thus, Mail meant six; May, twelve, August, eighteen words, etc., and in case the message fell short of the words indicated, others without significance were added after the signature, to complete the cipher.

In No. 7, which was very like No. 6 in most respects, the commencement words indicated the number of lines, and there were key words for as many as twenty lines. These ciphers contained many new arbitraries. When Gen John H. Morgan captured operator Brooks and his cipher copy, at Gallatin, Tennessee, in August 1862, these keys were abandoned.

### CIPHER NO. 12

This one was a great improvement on the former. It was adopted some time in 1862, and continued in use until August 1864. Being the first of a new series, numbered 12, 9, and 10, it will particularly describe it. It contained arbitraries for every hour and half hour of the day and two others each--either of which were used--for the names of all prominent officers, civil, military, naval and Confederate; also



for all important rivers and places likely to be named in cipher messages, besides others for all the States and for words and even phrases in common use in war dispatches. Eight pages were devoted to column and line indicators and routes. The commencement words indicated the number of lines in a message or division of a telegram, and the respective routes in which the telegram or partial message was prepared. The first page of the key was devoted to messages or sections thereof, containing four lines. We find there the commencement words, army, Anson and action each of which indicated that the message was five columns. Three other words on that page indicated four columns, and others six. Each column had a distinct route. The other seven pages were alike in general character, but indicated a greater number of lines. The eight page route was not by columns, but by number, i.e., each square made by the column lines was numbered, and the words were placed therein according to their key number, counting from the beginning.

Stephen L. Robinson, cipher operator, accompanied General A.J. Smith on his march against Forrest, and was captured by guerrillas, while returning, when number 12 cipher key was taken from him. This was in July, 1864, and in consequence the key was very soon after discarded.

#### CIPHER NO. 9

In January, 1863, it was, for prudential reasons purely, deemed advisable to substitute at the chief points and head-quarters in the Western Department at least, a new cipher key for No. 12, and therefore No. 9 was arranged and delivered. Thus No. 12 was left in general use, No. 9 being the particular cipher No. 10 followed a few months later. S.H. Beckwith, Gen. Grant's cipherer while at Memphis, succeeded, by the use of different colored inks, in making one key-book exhibit all three systems. This was not difficult, as the printed key and arbitrary words were alike (but with different meanings), and by using red ink all through for No. 10, blue for No. 9, and black for No. 12, the distinction was always evident; thus, "Asia" or "Adam" which in red ink meant "Gen McClellan," in black meant "Gen Halleck," and in blue "President Lincoln." In this shape, several copies of these ciphers were subsequently issued by the chief of the Telegraph Corps.

#### CIPHERS NOS. 1 & 2

No. 1 cipher supplanted No. 9, and it is probable that more important telegrams were sent in it, than any other. It was made in 1862, but did not come into general use until February 1864. September 24, 1864, when operators Pettit and Ludwig were captured at Athens, Alabama, Confederate General Forrest obtained a copy, after which this number was discarded. It consisted of twenty-five pages of the usual size, i.e. about the size of a bank book. One page was filled with time arbitraries; six with line indicators and column routes. Each page contained nine words, either indicating the same number of columns and the one route on such page, but there were duplicate sets of line indicators on each page; thus, on one page, "dunce" and "snuff" meant one line; "charge" and "gold" ten lines, etc. Besides the column and route indicator, two words were added to show the number of lines; hence, if a message was fifty-five words long, the key terms might be "army", (meaning five columns and indicating also the route,) "Snuff, gold," i.e. five columns of eleven lines, or instead of "snuff, gold," any other two, which added equalled eleven, could be used; or some word indicating more columns, with two other words meaning fewer lines. In this cipher there were nearly nine hundred arbitrary words. For example, "Adam" meant Maine, "Arno" Arkansas, etc.; "Apple" Fort Sumter, "Animal" Fort Monroe, etc.; "Berlin" Red River, "Attica" Potomac, etc.; "Bologna", and seven other words meant the President, "Bruno" and five others the Sect of War, etc.; "Black" or "Blubber" City Point, "Empress" or "Embrace" Nashville, etc.;



"Hosanna" or "Husband" Jeff Davis, "Hunter" or "Happy" General Lee, etc; "Juno" and five others General Grant, "Lady" and three others General George Thomas, etc. There were, also, arbitraries for arms, brig-gen, by the way of, cavalry, defeat-ed-ing, movement, surprise, regiment, troops, encountered the enemy in strong force, etc., etc., and finally for numerals. Any extra blind or check word was added at the end of each column.

No. 2 cipher was arranged on precisely the same principle, differing only in the significance of arbitraries, key-words and line indicators. This was not, however, so generally held as No. 1.

### CIPHERS NOS. 3, 4 & 5

No. 3 was the first of a series of three ciphers, numbered 3, 4 & 5. Quite a number of arbitrary words and their signification used in No. 3 were suggested by S.H. Beckwith, who had carefully noted down many important words and expressions not then represented by arbitraries. In selecting these words, Beckwith was careful to choose those least likely to be mis-sent. Although this matter had not been entirely overlooked, it will be observed that it was of great consequence, in as much as telegraphic characters are composed of dots, as in "p" . . . dashes, as in "t" "l" & "C" and spaces, as in "o" . . contra-distinguished from "i" . . Sometimes the sounder would "stick" on letters, making dashes where dots should appear; thus "pacific" was received at War Department, as "fairfye". The letter "p" sounded "f", and the receiving operator misconceived most of the other letters. The cipherer in Washington being himself an operator, discovered the mistake, which none but a telegraphist would have done. Although such errors were uncommon, the annoyed translator has been vexed many times by them.

Cipher No. 3 was first introduced on December 25, 1864, and was intended for use at General Grant's Sherman's, Thomas's, Sheridan's and Camby's headquarters at least, but it is believed it never reached the West, and was, in fact, little used, if at all, after March 23, 1865, when No. 4 was adopted.

No. 4 was the last key used in the war. March 23, 1865, it was sent to Capt W.G. Fuller, at headquarters, Military Department West of the Mississippi; to S.H. Beckwith, at Grant's; C.G. Eddy at Sherman's, and W.R. Plum at Thomas' headquarters; one other copy being retained at the War Department.

As shown elsewhere, when the sword was returned to its scabbard, the Federal Government reconstructed and operated the Southern lines; but ere long surrendered them to their owners, retaining, however, in its service certain chosen telegraphers, at a salary of twenty-five dollars per month (where the operators were employed by a telegraph company), and June 20, 1865, No. 4 and all other ciphers were discarded and No. 5 was sent to the operators and retained until they were discharged.

There were in No. 4, arbitrary words representing the time of day, dates, days, months, year, numerals, punctuation marks, chief officers of the government and of the Federal and Rebel armies, military names and common expressions, as, "I have ordered," "I think it advisable," states, rivers, places, etc.; in all, numbering sixteen hundred and eight arbitraries, exclusive of key words. The key proper, was composed of twelve pages, each differing in the words used and the route employed. There were no directions in the book for the use of the cipher, which if captured, would greatly puzzle the possessor.

### RESUME ADDENDUM

Besides the cipher keys above described, there were others called "department ciphers." These were used more extensively in the Department of Missouri than any other. They were nearly as simple as the old

six column" cipher, as the first was sometimes called, and were handled by officers and operators. Tony Walsh lost one of these keys with his pocketbook, and Brig General McNeil lost another.

With an occasional exception, the War Department ciphers were manipulated by operators. In the latter years there were no exceptions. This occasioned bitter jealousies on the part of many staff officers, usually the captains and lieutenants. The thought that a non-commissioned man--a mere citizen--perhaps a boy, at that, should be so closely associated with the commanding officer; that the greatest secrets of the general should be communicated to his superior through such a medium, and the staffing remain in utter ignorance of those vital facts, was indeed galling, and consequently provoked numerous embarrassments for the operator. It often happened that these under officers chafed at the refusal of the operator to inform them even in a general way what was transpiring.

The personal staff officer was likely, except during a campaign, to have many idle hours to spend, and however important his services were in the field, he could not but feel much unrest while located in towns and cities, pending preparations for active operations. Wherefore, he sighed for such employment as became his position, and none was so tempting as that which would make him the medium of confidential communications of great military consequence between his general and others.

For some time after the outbreak of the war, army ciphers were put up to some extent by staff officers. General Lander while in West Virginia under General McClellan, and Capts Thoms and Thompson at Nashville under Rosecrans, in the winter of 1862-3, manipulated the cipher key then in use. In November 1862, Generals Grant & Hamilton, it is related, were in close consultation at LaGrange, Tennessee. Immediately after, Hamilton went to the front, where he received a cipher telegram from General Grant, but after studying it for half an hour, Hamilton required operator Low Spellman to repeat it, which being done, the repetition accorded with the first transmission. Hamilton could not translate it, and Grant insisted it was correct. Grant soon abandoned the business to his cipher operators. But in December, 1863, the General Grant went to Knoxville, Tennessee without taking his cipherer, Beckwith. En route, Grant received many Washington dispatches, which were to him, certainly no plainer than the hieroglyphs of Egypt or Mexico. Consequently, on his return to Nashville, he directed Beckwith to give a copy of the key to Lt. Colonel Comstock, of his (Grant's) staff. Obedience to this order, brought about an interesting correspondence between Colonel Stager and General Halleck, and Halleck and Grant, ending in the cipher being restored to Beckwith, and forever settling the question as to who should handle the important cipher keys, in favor of telegraph operators.

From Charles Dana's "Recollections of the Civil War" comes this story: "The only message sent by this cipher to be translated by an outsider on the route, so far as I know, was that one of 4 P.M., September 20, 1863, in which I reported the Union defeat at Chickamauga. Gen R.S. Granger, who was then at Nashville, was at the telegraph office waiting for news when my dispatch passed through. The operator guessed out the dispatch, as he afterward confessed, and it was passed around Nashville. The agent of the Associated Press at Louisville sent out a private printed circular quoting me as an authority for reporting the battle as a total defeat, and in Cincinnati Horace Maynard repeated, the same day of the battle, the entire second sentence of the dispatch, "Chickamauga is as fatal a name in our history as Bull Run."

This premature disclosure to the public of what was only the truth, well known at the front, caused a great deal of trouble. I immediately set on foot an investigation to discover who had penetrated our cipher code, and soon arrived at a satisfactory understanding of the matter, of which Mr. Stanton was duly informed. No blame could attach to me, as was manifest upon the inquiry; nevertheless, the sensation resulted in considerable annoyance all along the line from Chattanooga to Washington. I suggested to Mr. Stanton the advisability of concocting a new and more difficult cipher, but it was never changed, so far as I now remember."

\*\*\*\*\*

### STAGER'S CIPHER

McClellan's campaign in West Virginia, Anderson's early operations in Kentucky, and Fremont's, farther west, were arranged and conducted largely by the use of this cipher, which is so short that it is printed below in full, precisely as found on the back of a small business card, on which Col. J.J.S. Wilson carried it.

The words in the first column indicated the number of lines in the message, and preceded all others in the telegrams as transmitted. Those in the second column are check words, one of which was thrown in at the end of every sixth word. The others are selected words to represent the certain officers, places, etc. It must be remembered that the following is all that was ever written: the routes, columns and names of holders being verbally communicated.

#### COMMENCEMENT WORDS

#### ARBITRARY WORDS

##### CIPHER WORDS

#1	#2	#3	#4	#3	#4
1. Mail	check	Scott	Bagdad	Denison	London
2. May	Charge	McClellan	Mocca	Curtin	Vienna
3. August	Change	Steedman	Bremen	Private	Star
4. March	Cheap	Kelly	Berlin	Bird's Pt	Uncle
5. June	Church	Yates	Dublin	Columbus, Ky	Danube
6. April	Caps	Dates	Turin	Memphis	Darien
7. July	Show	Morris	Venice	Paducah	Darby
8. Telegraph	Sharp	Cox	Brussels	Moundcity	Geneva
9. Marine	Shave	Washington	Nimrod	Navy Yard	Mexico
10. Board	Shut	Parkersburg	Cain	Pillow	Brazil
11. Account	Ship	Cornwallis	Abel	D.M'Cullough	
12. Director	Shields	Smithton	Kane		Grenada
13. President	Poles	Clarksburg	Noah	Fremont	Paris
14. Central	Tools	Grafton	Lot	Hunter	Moscow
15. January	Glass	Cumberland	Jonah	Grant	Arabia
16. Buffalo	Pet	Wheeling	Peter	Gen Smith	Baltic
17. Pittsburg	Vile	Fairmount	Paul	Gen Payne	Britain
18. Cleveland	Base	Horner's Ferry	Judas	McClellan	Egypt
19. Rochester	Miscrant	Cumberland	Job	Gen Allen	Negro
20. Audit	Scoundrel	Martinsburg	Joe		
21. Company	Scamp	Richmond	Frank		
22. Station	Thief	Cairo	Sam		
23. Report	Puppy	St. Louis	Ham		
24. December	Gentleman	Marietta	Shem		
25. Boston	Nobleman	Frontiss	Mary		
26. Balance	Just	Lynon	France		
27. Refund		Elair	Rome		
28. Debtor		Pope	Niagara		
29. Creditor		Morton	Peru		
30. Abstract					
31. United					
32. Annual					
33. Duplicate					
No. lines					

(NEW ARBITRARIES WERE ADDED AS MILITARY OPERATIONS SEEMED TO REQUIRE)

# EXAMPLE OF STAGER'S CIPHER

Parkersburg, Va., June 1, 1861

To Maj Gen G.W. McClellan, Cincinnati, Ohio:

Telegraph the have be not I hands profane right hired held must start my cowardly to an responsible Crittenden to at polite ascertain engine for Colonel desiring demands curse the to success by not reputation nasty state go of superceded Crittenden past kind of up this being Colonel my just the road division since advance sir kill.

F.W. Lander

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR DECIPHERING MESSAGE ABOVE:

To decipher this, take a sheet of paper and make six columns starting left to right. Make a seventh column remembering that each seventh word is a "blind" or "check" word not relating to the message. The first word always indicates the number of lines in the message. Consult the cipher key for the proper number of lines in the message. To add spice to the deciphering of this message you will not be given the column route. This you must figure out for yourself. You actually have much more to go on that the Confederates' cipher-breakers.

NOTE: SEE BOTTOM OF PAGE FOR THE TEXT OF LANDER'S MESSAGE

\* \* \* \* \*

## SUMMARY

During the American Civil War, the Union used a combination code-cipher which was more successful than it should have been. This was most evident in the relatively futile attempts of the Confederate cipher-breakers. Even going to the extreme of publishing the messages in their newspapers asking anyone to help break the code.

It is a fact without benefit of saying it that the complete story of the Federal Cipher System has not been presented in this newsletter. The subject of the Confederate Cipher System could not be touched because of this same space limitation. With your permission and by command decision, an attempt will be made to complete what has become a most pleasurable experience in research and writing (mostly editing).

\* \* \* \* \*

## LANDER'S MESSAGE

READ OUT

Parkersburg, Va., June 1, 1861

To Maj Gen G.W. McClellan, Cincinnati, Ohio:

Sir, my past reputation demands at my hands the right to ascertain the state of the advance. Colonel Crittenden not desiring to start. I have hired an engine to go up road. Since being superseded by Colonel Crittenden, must not be held responsible for success of this division.

F.W. Lander

To translate the above dispatch of Lander's which, instead of being first written in the ordinary way, from left to right, was placed in columns, read it by columns, up the sixth, down the first, up the fifth, down the second, up the fourth and down the third.