7. Communications

How did Americans keep up with the news of the war? For the average American reader during the WWI era, newspapers were the best and most reliable option for up-to-date information. And, although nothing was completely safe from factual error, and they didn't have much choice in terms of how they got their news, many people saw their newspapers as being the most trustworthy way to stay informed.

Other options for news were few and far between but could include newsreels, word-of-mouth, and letters from loved ones once America joined the war. However, newsreels focused more on entertainment than on serious news. There were some British newsreels during the pre-war era that showed the christening of ships, but newsreels primarily served as a popular way to disperse propaganda. Word-of-mouth information had reliability problems, and letters from the soldiers were censored. Newspapers were seen as the best and most reliable source for journalism and current news on the happenings of the world, the war, and the war effort.

Another aspect of print journalism at the time that gave newspapers an edge was the fact that newsrooms had the advantage of being some of the first to get 'hot off the press' type news. Other sources either weren't available yet or took longer to reach people. For example, waiting for word-of- mouth to circulate was both tedious and likely inaccurate, and waiting for mail could be slow, thus newspapers were most frequent, producing at least one edition a day. Many newspapers, however, also had both a morning and evening edition, meaning those who had papers delivered or bought both editions were able to get a double dose of news for the day. When headlines came rolling in, they would likely hear some additional news later in the day rather than have to wait until the next morning.

INSTRUCTION.

Women Can Fly

They are Flying Now

You should learn. If you can run an automobile, you can fly.

We will teach you airplane mechanics, which every flier must know, and you can keep your plane in perfect condition.

West Side Y.M.C.A.
Airplane Mechanics School

The United States Government airplane mail service is now operating, and after the war it will be extended widely. *Be prepared for opportunities.*

The airplane factories are demanding the deftness and carefulness of women for bench work and inspection. Our school is the largest, next to the Government's, and is perfectly equipped.

We have already graduated 2000 students.

Phone, call or mail coupon today

WEST SIDE Y. M. C. A. Women's Department W. 57th Street

Name.........

Address.........

As newsworthy as the war was, newspapers did not focus only on the war. They continued to produce other content, even the most seemingly mundane topics like the Kaiser's horoscope, this YMCA ad encouraging women to learn how to fly, discussions of daylight savings time or using more of the metric system in our dealings with countries abroad, and ads discussing the latest ball. As we have seen, the newspapers also dispensed news about the Spanish Flu. Because newspapers were popular, they were reasonably priced. A copy of a paper like the *New York Times* would have cost a buyer two cents per issue. It is estimated that there were roughly at least 73 different newspapers being published in the early 20th century, probably more if you include small town newspapers and German newspapers. Bloomington, for example, had access to three locally published newspapers plus ones from the outlying larger cities.

Newspapers surprisingly had a life outside of the civilian realm, too. Soldiers of World War I were the authors and publishers. It was a practice that was more prevalent for European soldiers, particularly French and German troops, as they spent more time on the front lines and away from home than American soldiers did. The purpose of these papers was to give the soldiers an outlet in a time where there wasn't one otherwise. Topics covered everything from making fun of their jobs in the trenches and the absurdity of their day-to-day life in between days of fighting, to humor and women. Interestingly, many of the papers didn't sling mud at their enemies, often treating them humorously. The American version of this genre of newspapers was titled *The Stars and Stripes*. It was called the soldiers' newspaper and only ran as it is featured here from 1918-1919. After the war ended in 1918, these newspapers often found a home in the scrapbooks of soldiers and nurses who had been in the war theater and in the scrapbooks of their loved ones who waited for them at home.

The Stars and Stripes

214 CHRISTMAS WAR ORPHANS TAKEN; THREE MONTHS' GOAL IN FIVE WEEKS

INTRODUCING "YANKS: A BOOK OF A.E.F. VERSE"

All these camp newspapers like *The Stars and Stripes*, *Afloat and Ashore* and *The Service Record*, kept soldiers informed about the home front, political questions of the day - including those relating to the war itself - progress of their training, and the conducting of the war abroad. Also, they carried articles on what it was like to leave home by both recruits and draftees, the initial excitement of training, the drudgery of camp life, attitudes toward officers and fellow soldiers, the clash of arms, and news about the enemy. Camp personnel, places, and events are described with a richness that brings new credibility and perspective to scholarly research. Camp newspapers also included non-war related advertisements, poetry, short stories, memoirs, jokes, and cartoons. Photographs and sketches portrayed life in the various camps, on the home front, and at the battlefront.

This interesting photo shows library facilities made available to Canadian troops in a YMCA Tent. Most camp newspapers were published under the auspices of the National War Work Council of the Y.M.C.A., and were distributed beyond the actual camp areas to the local communities that supported the camps. Others were published by unit information officers and soldiers who had been employed previously in the newspaper and print trades.

LETTERS HOME

How did 12 million letters reach WW1 soldiers each week?

The most effective weapon used during World War I wasn't the shell or the tank, it was morale. Early in the war the British Army believed that it was crucial to an allied victory that there should be regular communication between the soldiers and their loved ones. It looked to the Post Office for help.

The delivery of the mail was vital for two reasons. First, receiving well wishes and gifts from home was one of the few comforts a soldier had on the Western Front. The majority of the soldiers spent more time fighting boredom than they did the enemy, and writing was one of the few hobbies available to them. For some, it was a welcome distraction from the horrors of the trenches. Second, letters served a propaganda purpose. Everything that soldiers sent back was subject to censorship. The Army claimed this was to prevent the enemy finding out secret information, but really it was to prevent bad news from reaching the home front. Letters from serving soldiers had a powerful role, not just in keeping families informed of the well-being of their loved ones, but also helping to sustain popular support for the war.

A Letter from the Trenches

TASK: to complete your letter home about life in the trenches in WW1

You could write about;

- No Man's Land
- Barbed wire
- Mud
- Machine Gun
- Lice
- Rats
- Smell
- Gas and Gas mask
- Rifle
- Soldier
- Rations
- Bombing
- Trench foot

What would be censored in a Letter from the Trenches?

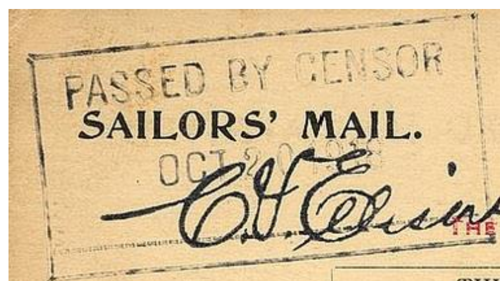
- Where you were stationed
- How many soldiers were there
- Names of any soldiers or officers
- What weapons you had
- Details of planned attacks
- Soldiers who were injured
- Soldiers who had died
- Bad conditions

With American entry into World War I in April 1917, the country's postal service underwent a number of changes. To accommodate the heavy costs of waging war, the price of a stamp for domestic mail was raised from 2¢ to 3¢, effective November 2, 1917, until July 1, 1919, when the stamps returned to their pre-war rate. Likewise, the rate for postcards was raised from 1¢ to 2¢ during the same time period. World War I also saw the popular rise of picture postcards printed with white borders, thus enabling companies to save money by using less ink.

Changes also came in the carrying of mail during the war, particularly in American cities. Prior to World War I, women had served as mail carriers in some rural communities, but none served in cities. However, with so many American men entering the armed forces during the war, the Post Office Department experimented with appointing women as mail carriers to replace the men. The "experiment" began in December 1917 in eight cities with the largest post offices—by the war's end, several other cities had also appointed women mail carriers. Most of these women gave up their positions to returning veterans once the war was over.

The postal service also experimented with airmail during the Great War. On May 15, 1918, the first airmail service between New York and Washington, D.C., began. The airlines lent their planes and pilots for the airmail service, recognizing the valuable flying experience that its pilots would gain.

World War I brought other changes to the distribution of mail in the United States. Under the provisions of the Espionage Act of 1917, the Postmaster General could block the distribution of materials in the mail that he felt interfered with the military and/or supported U.S. enemies. In October 1917 the Censorship Board, comprised of the Post Office Department, Departments of Navy and War, the War Trade Board, and the Committee on Public Information, was formed to regulate mail, cable, radio, telegraph, and telephone communications between the United States and foreign nations. Under this board, the Postmaster General was responsible for the regulation and censorship of mail. Items that passed censorship were stamped to indicate so.



World War I also saw the beginnings of the U.S. Army Post Office (APO), which operated independently of the Post Office Department. The establishment of the APO stemmed from the

War Department’s reluctance to share the locations of military units with the Post Office Department, which understandably made the department’s job extremely difficult. Additionally, Congress granted Americans serving in the armed forces the right to send personal correspondence free of charge. These items were designated with postal franks—in this case, markings—such as "Nurse's mail," "Officer's mail," and "Soldier's mail."

RADIO

What was the role of the radio during the war?

Around the time that I was born in 1891, inventors in several countries were experimenting with Hertzian electromagnetic waves to transmit sound. Over several years starting in 1894 the Italian inventor Guglielmo Marconi built the first complete, commercially successful wireless telegraphy system based on airborne Hertzian waves (radio transmission). Marconi demonstrated application of radio in military and marine communications and started a company for the development and propagation of radio communication services and equipment. In June 1912 Marconi opened the world's first purpose-built radio factory at New Street Works in Chelmsford, England. The onset of the First World War significantly changed the development of the radio, in a number of ways.

The introduction of vacuum-tube equipment promised to revolutionize radio. However, all amateur and commercial use of radio came to an abrupt halt on April 7, 1917 when, with the entrance of the United States into World War One, most private U.S. radio stations were ordered by the President to either shut down or be taken over by the government, and for the duration of the war it became illegal for private U.S. citizens to even have an operational radio transmitter or receiver -- in fact, it was *Treason to Possess Wireless Stations* according to one zealous city manager, reported on the front page of the April 23, 1917 *San Jose Evening News*. (In contrast, seven years later the *Springfield Republican* would declare: "It is the patriotic duty of all our citizens to have a radio." according to *Voice May Alter Destiny of Nation)*. Radio in the U.S. had become a government monopoly, reserved for the war effort. Amateur radio operators were particularly hard hit by the restrictions. Before the ban, amateurs read the monthly issues of *The Electrical Experimenter* in order to find out about the latest improvements in equipment design, but now that magazine was featuring articles like How the Government Seals Radio Apparatus, which appeared in July, 1917. The American Radio Relay League's July 1917 *QST* magazine brought Arthur C. Young's report of What Happened at Buffalo When Closing Orders Were Received. *QST* also began carrying monthly reports from former amateurs who were now enlisted in the U.S. Navy, and in September, 1917, in its final issue before suspending publication for the duration of the war, mused about the uncertain

future of amateur radio in *Another Season Opens.* Guglielmo Marconi, in the September 1917 *Wireless Age*, asked that the United States "Send the Wireless Men Abroad Immediately". The war was an opportunity for some to advance beyond standard peacetime restrictions. In this heavily segregated era there were a limited number of jobs open to African-American. In the May, 1918 issue of the same magazine, Negroes for Army Signalmen announced that radio operator training was being established in Richmond, Virginia. So while civilian radio activities were suspended during the war as the radio industry was taken over by the government, numerous military applications were developed, including direct communication with airplanes. The war also exposed thousands of service personnel to the on-going advances in radio technology, and even saw a few experiments with broadcasting entertainment to the troops. Civilian radio restrictions were lifted in 1919.

The restrictions and logistics of early military equipment and maneuvers dictated the physical forms of radio equipment. Radio communication played a vital role for all combatants during the war, although, in the era before mechanization, army transportation still largely depended on mules and horses. In the 1906 *Manual of Wireless Telegraphy* by A. Frederick Collins, the Clark Portable Army Set sections reviewed "apparatus as compact and portable as possible so that it may be transported on the backs of mules", and in the 1911 edition of *Drill Regulations for Field Companies of the Signal Corps (Provisional)*, the two main radio field units were the Pack Set, carried by a "section normally composed of 10 mounted men and 4 pack mules", and the Wagon Set, whose "section is normally composed of 18 mounted men, the wagoner and engineer, who ride on the wagon, and one wagon wireless set, drawn by 4 mules". In the November, 1911 *Sunset Magazine*, Louis J. Stellmann's *War as a Modern Science* reviewed the use of an early radiotelephone system by the Coast Artillery Corps of the California National Guard, operating at the Presidio in San Francisco. The October, 1916 edition of the United States Signal Corps' Radiotelegraphy manual reviewed advances in Pack and Wagon Set designs, including the adoption of quenched spark transmitters, and the reduction, by one, of the number of mules needed to carry a Field Pack set. Also included was a short section on the beginnings of mechanization, with development of transmitters carried by automobiles, plus information on an early form of spread spectrum transmission. After the entrance of the United States into the war, U.S. Signal Corps Radio Outfit in France, from the September, 1918 *Electrical Experimenter*, reported on field units deployed on the battlefield.

The U.S. Signal Corps came to play a key role in wartime communications on the Western Front. In the 1916 *New York Times Current History*, René Milan told how merchant ship sailors in European waters who had access to radio receivers were able to obtain relatively complete and timely war

news, based on announcements transmitted by the high-powered radio stations operated by the major powers, "while the rest of the world must be content with the meagre, delayed communications authorized by the censorship." Radiotelegraph operations at the British front lines, where operators with portable transmitters could almost instantly communicate emergencies, proved invaluable, for "If a gas attack is coming, it is he who sends the warning to the men behind to put their gas helmets on." During the war, the Germans used radio transmissions to help airships navigate to their bombing run targets, as reported in *How the Zeppelin Raiders Are Guided by Radio Signals*, which appeared in the April, 1918 *Popular Science Monthly*. However, the French would employ counter measures, as an article in the November, 1919 *Electrical Experimenter* reported how a special station had been used to confuse a group of enemy airships by transmitting phony signals, which put "another dent in Fritz's wild war dream" when *Seven Zeppelins Were Lured to Death by Radio*.

While radio remained off-limits for the general public during the war, there were occasional hints of what lay ahead. Wireless Music for Wounded Soldiers from the April 1918 *The Wireless Age* reviewed a short-range electrostatic induction system that could be used to entertain hospitalized soldiers with music and news. And between the cessation of hostilities in November, 1918, and the end of the civilian radio restrictions in 1919, there were scattered reports of military personnel firing up transmitters in order to broadcast entertainment to the troops -- for example, the January 10, 1919 *Springfield Republican* reported that Ensign Sanford Lawton Had Christmas at Sea, and in his letter to his parents noted that, as part of the festivities, "All of the latest music from the states was played over the wireless." A short time later Lieut. R. C. Roberts, of the Rockwell field radio department, transmitted a "Moonlight Wireless Dance", featuring "an abundance of entertainment for all", from the Battleship Marblehead, off the coast of San Diego, California, to dancers in Hanger Number 4, as reported in *Wireless Phone to Transmit Music for Dance* from the February 1, 1919, *San Diego Evening Tribune*, and *Music by Wireless*, in the March, 1919 issue of *Telephone Engineer*. In addition, the May 7, 1919 *Dallas Morning News* reported that *U.S.S. George Washington*, during its transatlantic crossing, had employed its radio transmitter to provide nightly a *Concert by Wireless for Vessels at Sea*.

The first radio news program was broadcast August 31, 1920 by station 8MK in Detroit, Michigan, which survives today as all-news format station WWJ under ownership of the CBS network. The first college radio station began broadcasting on October 14, 1920 from Union College, Schenectady, New York under the personal call letters of Wendell King, an African-American student at the school.

So while there was no radio news or programming during my lifetime, there was a development that interested me: the fact that women could serve vital roles in the working world outside the home, other than the traditional ones of nurse or teacher or secretary. Women started to enter the workforce seriously in the 1890s, but mostly in cities. It was not too common when I was growing up. I was particularly interested in one role, the Hello Girls. Several weeks before President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany, the United States became the world's first modern nation to enlist women in its armed forces. It was a measure of how desperate the country was for soldiers and personnel to assist with operations stateside, and American women seized the opportunity to prove their patriotism.

Initially, they worked as clerks and journalists. But by late 1917, General John Pershing declared he needed women on the frontlines for an even more crucial role: to operate the switchboards that linked up telephones across the front. The women would work for the Signal Corps and came to be known as the "Hello Girls." Telephones were the only military technology in which the United States enjoyed clear superiority, and women were by far the best operators. At the start of the 20th century, 80 percent of all telephone operators were women, and they could generally connect five calls in the time it took a man to do one.

The story of the Hello Girls is the story of how America's first women soldiers helped win World War I, earned the vote, and fought for the U.S. Army. In 1918, the U.S. Army Signal Corps sent 223 women to France. They were masters of the latest technology: the telephone switchboard.

When the United States declared war, the Signal Corps had only 11 officers and 10 men in its Washington office, and an additional 1,570 enlisted men around the country. The Army needed more operators, bilingual ones especially, and it needed them quickly. Fortunately, women were quick to respond. In the first week of December 1918, before the War Department even had the chance to print out applications, they received 7,600 letters from women enquiring about the first 100 positions in the Signal Corps. Eventually 223 American women were sent across the ocean to work at Army switchboards across Europe. A daughter of a member of that Signal Corps told her mother's story:

Three hundred women were sworn into the U.S. Army as volunteers in response to General Pershing's emergency call for bilingual (French-English) long-distance operators to run the switchboards in the first effort in the history of warfare to connect the foot-soldiers in the trenches to their generals behind the lines. These 300 women were selected for their fulfillment of the requirements, which included the minimum age of 25 -- they were to be given the equivalent to the men's rank of lieutenant, "same as Army Nurses," which gave them the 'privilege' of buying their own uniforms, unlike the enlisted men. They were addressed as "soldier," subject to Court-Martial

and to all U.S. Army regulations plus ten more that preserved the virtue of women. They also received their mail in the same way as all soldiers and were hospitalized with them when ill. Several of them were under 25 -- these exceptions having been made because so few were fluent in French. My mother was, I believe the youngest as I recall from the roster, accepted when she volunteered because she was the only one who both spoke French and had had three years' Bell-Telephone experience for training long-distance operators. She has yet another unrecognized contribution that qualified her for the first one. She had been given the only supervisorial position open to women at that time, when she graduated from high school at sixteen.

Of the 300 selected and trained in New Jersey for "self-defense" in case their behind-the-lines position were over-run, five contingents totaling 223 women were dispatched to Chaumont, when the astonishing news of Victory arrived on November 11, 1918. Although these women were sworn into the Army (my mother twice, the first time beside her brother in Detroit) before leaving New Jersey to set sail in March and June 1918, and although ten of them actually received a commendation "In Grateful Recognition" from Congress, when they returned they were told they could NOT have been sworn into the Army because only men were allowed to be sworn in according to Army regulations.

When these women finally took a bill into Congress in 1930, they suffered from the worst of all timing -- the Federal Government (it is still kept a secret) was on the verge of bankruptcy. The stock-market bust and one-third unemployment had forced a show-down with the men veterans camped on the lawns before Congress asking only for a fifty-dollar bonus. For Congress, it was unthinkable to add 223 women who had served overseas to the men they had ordered to be brutally dispersed by mounted police with billy-clubs. Therefore these women had to be lying about their experience, as were the male officers who had sworn them in! Even the affidavits of all their commanding officers, including Pershing's emergency-call itself, were conveniently lost and they were told they had been "contract-employees" although the Army was never able to produce a single contract.

It took sixty years for these fighting women to be recognized as veterans, but it was not retroactive in the sense of their always having been veterans -- they only "became" veterans as a condescension in 1978. When one of the buildings, in which these ten women were installed, was set on-fire, GHQ ordered them to leave and the women refused because the calls were pouring in from the trenches and communications could not be interrupted for their personal safety at the height of the battle because of the order issued in consideration of their sex. The fire was put out, or they would have been the first women casualties in combat in the U.S. Army.

In 1978 Congress finally passed a bill to recognize the 223 women as veterans, albeit NOT retroactive. The story, consequently that made the papers across the country, was that this was a benevolent concession on the part of the Congress that had previously issued its certificate of gratitude to the ten women who had risked their lives in the combat-zone. Of course, that certificate was not mentioned in announcing passage of the recognition bill. Only 70 women were still alive. A general came to my parents' home in Michigan and gave my mother her discharge papers. She joked that she should sue for back-pay. No laughs from the general and his aides, who shifted uneasily and glanced at the local reporter in my parents' living-room.

So twenty years after they were finally recognized by Congress as the veterans they had been for sixty years, the first women in the U.S. Army Signal Corps, - the only military women not nurses - to serve

overseas during World War One, are still unheard of in the history books and on the world wide web. Despite their exemplary service for the military, the military establishment generally refused to honor the returning Signal Corps Hello Girls. The Hello Girls risked their lives to run military communications yet were denied recognition when they returned home.

The telephone quickly replaced the telegraph as a preferred communication tool in the war. Telegraphs operated on Morse code and were a slower process. You could not talk to somebody directly. The radios were similar. To get a radio field unit required three mules to carry it. The other problem with radios was that there wasn't any way to disguise the transmission, so they weren't secure forms yet. The signal could be plucked out of the air and you could trace where it came from. Telephones were secure and immediate; they became the primary way men communicated during WWI. Telephones then were called candlestick phones. You lifted up the speaker tube and you would tell the operator who you wanted to talk to, and then every call had to be connected manually. In these photos we see Hello Girls Raymonde and Louise Breton in the Signal Corps barracks at Neufchateau, left, and Grace Banker on the right, who was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for her work in the Signal Corps.

To these and all brave Signal Corps Hello Girls, modern women owe a debt of gratitude, because it was their courage in wartime service that finally convinced people that women should be allowed to vote. A long-time argument against suffrage had been that if you are a full citizen, you are prepared to defend the republic, that the vote should only be given to people who are willing to give their lives if necessary, to the cause of democracy. Once it was demonstrated that women indeed were ready to defend the republic and pay the consequences, then women could say, "How can you deny us the vote if we're willing to lay down our lives?"