World War One: The Battle for Communications

Wireless telegraph

The way of sending messages using radio waves and Morse code was known as the "wireless telegraph." Wireless messages had been used to try to save lives when the Titanic sank in 1912.

Wireless telegraph sets were used by soldiers in the trenches to communicate with generals in headquarters. Wireless sets were useful when telephone wires were broken but could be easily listened in to or intercepted by the enemy. Wireless sets were also heavy and could be unreliable and soldiers needed to know Morse code to send messages.

These were also problems for Royal Flying Corps pilots when they began to use wireless sets early in the war. In 1915, Royal Flying Corps pilots began to experiment with wireless to tell soldiers where to aim their large artillery guns. However, it was still a new technology and was difficult to use while flying an aeroplane. As with use in the trenches, wireless messages could also be intercepted by the enemy.

Artillery Observation - Be2c machines over Hooge ranging British guns by means of wireless telegraphy, 1915.

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Follow the instructions to try sending your own wireless message in Morse code.

Instructions:

Send a message using your wireless telegraph set.

You need a code for each letter. The most well-known telegraph code is Morse code.

Morse code is made up of dots (e) and dashes (-).

Dots are made by closing the switch and counting to one. Dashes are made by closing the switch and counting to three.

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