

# THE BOY SPY

A SUBSTANTIALLY TRUE RECORD OF SECRET SERVICE DURING THE WAR  
OF THE REBELLION. A CORRECT ACCOUNT OF EVENTS  
WITNESSED BY A SOLDIER ATTACHED TO  
HEADQUARTERS

THE ONLY PRACTICAL HISTORY OF WAR TELEGRAPHERS IN THE FIELD—A  
FULL ACCOUNT OF THE MYSTERIES OF SIGNALLING BY FLAGS,  
TORCHES, AND ROCKETS—THRILLING SCENES OF  
BATTLES, CAPTURES AND ESCAPES

BY

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straight in the eye, as he said: "Now, my young friend, what is it that you propose?"

As briefly as I could put it I explained, what my plan was—to open telegraph communication from the town of Fredericksburg, inside the Rebel lines, direct with his headquarters telegraph operators. This at the first glance may seem to be a wild, visionary scheme, but that it was entirely feasible I soon satisfied General Burnside.

Those who were in the Army of the Potomac will remember the Signal Telegraph Corps. I do not mean the Military or Morse Corps, but the *Signal* Telegraph Corps. There were two distinct organizations doing practically the same character of work in the Army of the Potomac. As a natural consequence, these two army telegraph corps were in a state of active, bitter warfare against each other all the time. The Morse Telegraph Corps was a civilian or non-military affair under Mr. Eckert, who was located at the War Office. Through this fact, and the sinister influence of these jealous Washington telegraphers, they were successful in securing Mr. Stanton's hostility to the Army Signal Telegraph Corps.

Every old army man will remember the signal telegraph lines that were constructed, as if by magic, on the little ten-foot poles, which were stretched along the roads like miniature telegraphs, always taking the shortest cuts through the camps.

I presume that every Corps Headquarters was in immediate telegraphic connection with the General Headquarters, and that the little poles and gum-insulated wire extended to all the important outposts. This telegraph line was used in connection with the flag-and-torch system. For instance, from some elevated position on the outskirts of our lines, probably a tree-top or a distant hill, always overlooking the enemy's country (which was just over the river), would be located a signal station. Here would be found a signal officer and his squad of trained flag swingers. These stations were equipped with the very best field-glasses and telescopes that were obtainable in this country and in Europe.

The telescope, being the larger glass, would always be found supported on a platform or tripod, and usually leveled so as to sweep the enemy's country. Each of these stations covered a designated field, equal in extent to five or ten miles. A number of these sta-

tions were arranged so that the entire front, as well as the rear, if possible, and both flanks of the enemy, were being minutely inspected every hour of the day, and any unusual movement of men or teams were at once noted and immediately reported to headquarters.

The telegraph lines were generally used while in permanent camps to convey these reports back from the front. But in case of their being disarranged or on the march, when telegraphs could not be operated, the flag-and-torch system was used.

Those who have seen these temporary wires will remember that they were apparently about the thickness of a lead-pencil, but an examination would show that a gum or rubber casing inclosed a very thin copper wire. For purpose of insulation the best quality of rubber was used, while the wire was of the purest copper. It was made in Europe to order, and, as it was expected that the wires would receive some pretty hard usage, great care was taken in its manipulation.

The wire, though as thick as a pencil, was as flexible as a piece of rope of the same thickness. It could be looped, tied and twisted into any sort of shape in the roughest, shortest manner, and be undone without damaging it. It will be understood without further explanation from me, that the purpose in having this army signal wire made in this way was to secure perfect insulation for the electric current. It was expected that, in certain emergencies, the wire could be rapidly reeled off the hose-carriage-looking vehicle that carried it on to the ground, even during a battle, and signal communication kept up through it even while it lay on the ground or in the water. A corps of men with wagons arranged to carry cords of their little circus-tent telegraph poles would run along after the reel, like a hook-and-ladder company, and were drilled to rapidly pick up the wire and suspend it overhead, where it was not liable to be injured by men or horses coming against it.

I didn't have to tell him all of this, because he already knew all about it. The telegraph and the wire were both in his sight continually. I merely said to him: "General, I will take some of that insulated wire, submerge it as a cable under the Rappahannock, and go over there myself and telegraph your headquarters every hour, if necessary, from inside the Rebel lines."

While lying there all alone thinking this over carefully, and the exuberance of my feelings over a personal and pleasant interview with the General had subsided, I began to realize the dangerous position in which I might be placed.

The character of the decoy messages, and the manner of conveying them, the General had discreetly kept from me until the time for action. I was satisfied that I could easily get through to the Rebel headquarters and perhaps see General Lee personally. My "sympathizer"—Old Capitol story—would, no doubt, take well, especially in Fredericksburg.

The first danger that I should encounter would be a chance recognition of my "former services," but this was only equal to about one in a thousand. The only matter that I feared at all was going into the Rebel headquarters as the bearer of any important apers; they might, notwithstanding my friends in Fredericksburg, become suspicious and, perhaps, be induced to keep a watch over me as a sort of hostage for their fulfillment. If the intelligence I had taken to them had misled and caused disaster to their army, I would have to suffer.

The only way to circumvent this was to get out of the way before it was too late. Geno was over on that side, and the prospect of once more seeing her settled in my young impulsive heart the question. I determined that I would go, and go, too, as soon as possible; and with this thought fixed in my mind, I at last went off into a sound sleep, to dream of the happy hour when I should again take her hand in mine and tell her of the difficulties and the dangers I had met and so persistently overcome, that I might once more enjoy the happiness of being near her.

All the different headquarters were in direct communication with each other and the General Headquarters, as well as the Signal Station, from their points of observation, by means of this wirp signal telegraph, which I have described.

This field telegraph was operated on the "induction" principle, which is the basis of the telephone patent. In the field telegraph, instead of vibrations, the induced current causes the deflection of a sensitive needle, which noisily points to letters of the alphabet on a dial synchronously with the transmitting apparatus.

Compared with the Morse system, it was a little tedious, and, at

times, as uncertain as a telephone. It had the advantage, however, of simplicity. We called these "coffee-mill telegraphs." Since the war the "coffee-mill," or English system, has been greatly improved—the same principle operating the Atlantic cables. Instead of a needle revolving on the face of a dial, it is made by a wave of electricity, to simply dip or deflect, as desired, either to the right or the left of a zero point.

In this way the two simplest of all known characters are formed; *i. e.*, the "dot" and the "dash" of the American Morse system.

This principle has an important bearing, not only in the action of this narrative, but it is the basis of a system of signals first applied to use in war by myself, as developing the practicability of signaling from even the inside of an enemy's line into headquarters of his opponent. Since our war developed its uses, it has been adopted by nearly all the Governments of the earth.

It was designed by myself that, instead of being burdened by the attempt to lay a cable under the water and concealed in the earth, through which it was hoped to signal, that I should go over to Fredericksburg and, once safely in Geno's home, I could, by visual signals, communicate directly with an accomplished signal officer to be located at the Lacey House.

This was entirely practicable. Captain Wells' house was barely discernable from the Lacey House. I was to take a position at a certain window in the Wells' House and, when alone, signal directly over the water and through the air to a window in the Lacey House, by the simple use of this dot and dash system.

Those who have seen the signal-flags and torches will remember that there were but two simple motions, one to the left and the other to the right of a perpendicular—the stroke down, or in front, merely signifies a stop—the dot (or No. 2) is represented by a quick motion *to the right*; a dash (or No. 1) by a motion to the left of a sender.

At the end of each word, abbreviation, conventional or pre-arranged signal, a "front" motion is made.

I put in the cold days and long nights in studying up signals and in arranging with my "pard" for their exchange. He entered heartily into the scheme, believing, as we all did, that I, of all others, was just the person to undertake the business, because I would be recognized as a Rebel in that town.

From an up-stairs window of the Lacey House we discovered that two windows of Captain Wells' house were plainly visible. There was also, a single "dormer" window in the roof, which the bombardment had seriously damaged.

These up stairs windows were visible over the top of another house that stood between it and the river.

There was no other point on our side of the river from which signals could be quietly made that would not attract the attention of the watchful Rebels. Even from an obscure window of the Lacey House we feared it would be risky to attempt any demonstration in the way of signals. It was on this account settled upon that very few, if any, signals should be made to me.

There would be only some common recognition of my presence. We arranged that when one shutter of the Lacey House window was open it would signify to me in the Rebel lines that my man had his telescope leveled at my window, of which I was to open one shutter to signify my presence in that room.

Now, the telescopes used in the United States Signal Service were of the very best character. It will seem to many to be an exaggerated statement when I assert that I have distinctly and clearly read flag-signals a distance of twenty-five miles, and these at the rate of fifteen to twenty words a minute, too. At night torch-signals may be distinctly read by this method. It is only necessary that the exact point or bearings of the distant signal station be known. For this purpose a first-class pocket compass was furnished each signal officer.

In this case it was not necessary to see the compass to find the window, but we located with the telescope and compass certain other points miles to the rear of Marye's Heights and the Rebel Army, which I was to find in case the window was not available.

The window was altogether the best point, provided I could get use of it, because I could sit back in the shadow, and out of view of any person outside, and be seen by the use of the telescope, especially at night.

With my hand, or with a wand or a fan, I was supposed to seat myself in that room, my feet cocked up on a window-sill, smoking a cigar and nonchalantly signal or spell out this one-two alphabet by the waves of a fan. The objection to that was that it was winter-