

RE more re role of telegraph in start of WWI
From: Clay T. Whitehead
Sent: Friday, February 16, 2007 3:30 PM
To: Susan Burgess
Subject: RE: more re role of telegraph in start of WWI

There is something specific on the diplomatic traffic before WW I , and I would like to track it down. Maybe we should discuss. Let's keep it open as a research item, but not time urgent.

-----Original Message-----

From: Susan Burgess
Sent: Friday, February 16, 2007 12:02 PM
To: tom@cwv.com
Subject: more re role of telegraph in start of WWI

Tom,

I finished reviewing our relevant books and didn't find any information showing that Germans and Austria-Hungary communicated by telegraph and got out of sync.

I did find, however, a few statements about the weaknesses of wireless and telegraph communications during the war and include them below. I also include another book's statement about how the Brits' interception of a significant German telegram to Mexico spurred the U.S. to join the war:

". . . American telegraph operators could scarcely believe it when they saw French telegraphers still receiving by watching the Morse Dots and dashes on a paper strip, instead of by ear." Alvin F. Harlow, *Old Wires and New Waves* at 491.

"When the United States entered the European war, certain nations over there had some eye-opening lessons in, for example, up-to-date telephony. Before our troops had begun to go across, French military authorities assured the American embassy in Paris that the French communications systems would be ample for the use of the American Army. . . . But when an American General at St. Nazaire in the summer of 1917 wished to call General Pershing in Paris, and learned that, what with European methods, plus the war emergency, it would be four hours before he could get a call through, he stormed, "Cancel the call! String four wires on the French poles from here to Paris!" and soon demands came back across the sea that telephone equipment be rushed to France." Alvin F. Harlow, *Old Wires and New Waves* at 488.

"It is said that the Battle of Jutland brought out in full the strength and weakness of wireless telegraphy. Wireless was of tremendous value to the commander of an embattled squadron while messages could be gotten to ships of the fleet, but interference inevitably blanketed radio transmission and turned everything into chaos." Gleason Archer, *History of Radio to 1926* at 128.

German wireless broadcasts were "always in code which British agents could readily decipher--world-wide intrigues that did much to align neutral nations against her. It was, for example, a decoded wireless message to the government of Mexico seeking to inflame her against the United States and thus to induce her to enter the war on the side of Germany that did much to swerve public opinion in the United States in favor of war with Germany." Gleason Archer, *History of Radio to 1926* at 128.

Let me know if you'd like me to look into this question in other sources -- i.e., online, other books -- otherwise, I'll move on to another research question.

Susan

RE more re role of telegraph in start of WWI

-----Original Message-----

From: Susan Burgess
Sent: Wednesday, February 14, 2007 5:58 PM
To: Clay T. Whitehead
Subject: role of telegraph in start of WWI

Tom,

You asked me to look into the role of the telegraph in the start of world war I. You believed that one of our books may have recounted how the Germans and Austria-Hungary communicated by telegraph and got out of sync.

I've reviewed five of our books, but so far haven't found anything on that specific issue. I'll check the remaining relevant books when I'm back in the office Friday.

Meanwhile, you may be interested to know that the Brits' interception of a significant German telegram to Mexico was one factor that spurred the U.S. to join the war:

"Germany lacked secure channels of its own for military and diplomatic messages and needed to originate cables from such officially neutral countries as Sweden, exposing them to British interception. In 1917, in one of the war's greatest intelligence coups, the British decoded a telegram from German Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmermann to the president of Mexico offering the return of Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico if Mexico would enter the war on Germany's side. Disclosure of the Zimmermann telegram in March 1917 helped to bring the United States into the war against Germany the next month." See Paul Starr, "The Creation of the Media" at 224.

Susan