

UNCLASSIFIED

DAILY ENTERPRISE



(U) HISTORY TODAY - 9 April 2015

Run Date(s): 04/09/2015



(U) On April 9, 1862, General P. G. T. Beauregard, then in Corinth, Mississippi, sent an encrypted telegram to General Samuel Cooper, the Confederate Army's adjutant general in Richmond. Beauregard noted that the Union Army was about to move against him with at least 85,000 men; to fight them he had only about 35,000. Since defeat would mean the loss of the Mississippi Valley, Beauregard strongly urged the dispatch of reinforcements.

(U) Less than a week later, Beauregard's encrypted telegram appeared in full in plain text in the *New York Herald*. The newspaper article, datelined Nashville, Tennessee, said that the telegram had been "intercepted by General Mitchel."

(U) General Ormsby Mitchel was a graduate of the Military Academy at West Point -- in the same class as Robert E. Lee -- and remained after graduation as an assistant professor of mathematics. He was keenly interested in astronomy and began publication of the first American magazine on the subject. As a result of his work in astronomy, an area of Mars is named after him.

(U) His prompt and courageous actions in several campaigns in the Civil War led to his promotion to major general. Unfortunately, however, shortly after the promotion he died of yellow fever.

(U) General Beauregard (Left) and General Mitchel (Right)

(U) General Beauregard is pictured on the left; General Mitchel on the right.

(U) The original recipient of Beauregard's telegram, General Samuel Cooper, saw the newspaper article and reported the situation to Robert E. Lee. Cooper explained that the only copy made from Beauregard's original had been forwarded to Lee in cipher. Cooper could only conclude that "the telegraph communicated from Nashville must have been obtained somewhere in that quarter." Cooper recommended that Lee inform Beauregard and suggest he change his cipher.

(U) Lee, who was then the senior military advisor to the Confederate president, did just that. He asked whether Beauregard had sent two copies of the telegram, and if one of them was in plain English. He also urged that Beauregard change his cipher or adopt an entirely new version. The intercept had likely happened in Huntsville, Alabama (then the location of General Mitchel).

(U) Beauregard responded on April 29 with comments from his unit telegrapher questioning the loyalty of telegraph personnel in Huntsville, whom he believed were "Lincolmites and Yankees" working with "many other parasites there." He cited an example in which one or more of these people had passed along other, unencrypted information they had learned by monitoring the telegraph line.

(U) None of the exchanges between these senior generals addressed the question of who had deciphered the telegram or how it had been deciphered. The answer has been lost to history -- many people of the time had knowledge of cryptology, and there was a trio of telegraph operators in the War Department in Washington who were experienced in cryptanalysis. Since knowledge of Morse code also was widespread, many local commanders conducted telegraph intercept on their own; there was no central direction of collection.

Doc ID: 6660617

(U) Read more about the "Sacred Three" at the War Department in a *History Today* from [April 2007](#).

(U) Click [here for larger view of image](#).

(U) Share historical topics with interesting folks. Visit the Center for Cryptologic History's blog, [History Rocks](#) ("go history rocks").

(U) Have a question or comment on *History Today*? Email us at "DL cch" or

Information Owner
Page Publisher
Last Modified: April 8, 2015
Last Reviewed: April 8, 2015

~~DERIVED FROM: NSA/CSSM 1-52, DATED: 20180110, DECLASSIFY ON: 20430110~~
UNCLASSIFIED

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

10/26/2018