

# OLD NEWS

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## British Light Brigade Charges Russian Guns In Epic Blunder

*By Paul Chrastina*

When the Crimean War began in 1854, Lieutenant Colonel George Wynell Mayow was serving as a staff officer in the British Army's Light Cavalry Brigade. He was second-in-command of the brigade, which consisted of five regiments totaling nearly seven hundred mounted cavalrymen.

The Crimean War was the first major European war since the Napoleonic Wars had ended in 1815: It pitted Great Britain, France, and the Ottoman Empire against Russia. In September of 1854, Colonel Mayow was part of a British expeditionary force that landed on the Crimean Peninsula of the southern Ukraine to capture Russia's Black Sea naval port of Sevastopol. Mayow, forty-six years old, was a childless widower who had risen through the ranks by his own effort and skill, and devoted his life

to military service. The men under his command looked up to him as a competent and fair-minded officer and soldier, but they saw his superior officers as spectacularly amateurish and unqualified.

The commander of the Light Brigade, fifty-seven-year-old Lieutenant General James Brudenell, 7th Earl of Cardigan, had inherited vast sums of money, some of which he had used to buy his command in the British cavalry. Cardigan had never attended a military academy, and he had never seen combat before the Crimean War, but the British Army had a tradition of selling officers' commissions to any rich man who desired to lead infantry or cavalry units. Cardigan had reportedly paid £35,000 for a colonel's commission before being promoted to the rank of lieutenant general through his friendships with powerful politicians.

Unfortunately for the men under his command, Cardigan appeared to lack any talent for military leadership. He loved to ride horses, wear stylish uniforms, and lead parades through the streets of London, but he was relatively uninterested in the everyday aspects of a British cavalryman's life or the gritty realities of war. He normally spent only a few weeks per year with his troops. Cardigan's most detrimental flaw as a leader was his explosive, irrational nature: he seemed to be constantly embroiled in quarrels with other officers. Within the Light Brigade, many of Cardigan's subordinates, from Lieutenant Colonel Mayow on down, quietly resented Cardigan's smug air of aristocratic contempt for them.

Lord Cardigan's immediate superior was fifty-five-year-old Lieutenant General George Charles Bingham, 3rd Earl of Lucan, the overall commander of British cavalry in Crimea.



*George Wynell Mayow.*



*James Thomas Brudenell, 7th Earl of Cardigan.*

In addition to the nimble Light Brigade, Lucan also led the sturdier Heavy Brigade, which fielded larger men and horses. Like Cardigan, Lord Lucan had also used his wealth to rise through the ranks. He had been retired from the army for seventeen years before being recalled to duty,



*George Charles Bingham, 3rd Earl of Lucan.*

and had never commanded a regiment in battle.

Lords Lucan and Cardigan were brothers-in-law, but they disliked one another immensely and could hardly stand to be in the same room together, which made life difficult for the senior British commander-in-chief, sixty-six year-old Field Marshal FitzRoy James Henry Somerset, 1st Baron Raglan. A veteran of the Napoleonic Wars and former secretary to the Duke of Wellington, Raglan had distinguished himself early in his military career, but age and inactivity had sapped his leadership abilities. He often confusedly referred to the Russian enemy as “the French.”

Lieutenant Colonel Mayow, like most British officers in the Crimea, was initially confident that the war would result in a swift allied victory and be over by Christmas. This optimism was reinforced a week after landing in the Crimea, when allied infantrymen defeated the Russians at the Battle of the Alma River. The

Russian army retreated to Sevastopol, and then withdrew further to the north of the port. It left the city’s defenses in the hands of the Russian Imperial Navy, which removed the guns from its warships and mounted them in fortifications around Sevastopol.

Mayow was stationed with the Light Brigade on a plain outside Balaclava with little to do but look out for possible Russian preemptive attacks, while waiting for the siege operations to begin. As the days passed, the cavalymen, who had not participated in the victory at the Alma River, grew frustrated with their inactivity and asked permission to mount patrols in search of the Russian army. These requests were denied by Lord Lucan, who issued an order stating: “The chief duties of the Light Brigade are to ensure the safety of the Army from all surprises. It is not their duty needlessly, without authority, to engage the enemy, and on no account should any party attack or pursue, unless specially instructed to do so.”

Lucan’s insistence that the cavalry remain idle exasperated the men of the Light Brigade, who gave him the nickname “Lord Look-On.” They were even more irritated by the behavior of Lord Cardigan. While the men of the Light Brigade were forced to camp with few tents and short rations on the cold, windy plain above Balaclava, Cardigan had arranged for his personal yacht to be anchored offshore. Each night he retired to its relative comfort, and each morning he took his time to have a leisurely breakfast before coming back to the cavalry encampment, leaving Mayow and other staff officers to see to daily inspections, training drills, and provisioning. Like Lucan, Cardigan was given a mocking nickname—“The Noble Yachtsman.”

On October 17 allied siege guns opened fire on Sevastopol. For the next week, the bombardment continued, but the British and French gun crews were stunned each morning to find that the city’s Russian defenders had always managed to rebuild fortifications thought to have been demolished the day before.



*The 17th Lancers Regiment of the Light Brigade advances at full gallop toward the Russian guns.*



*FitzRoy James Henry Somerset, 1st Baron Raglan.*



*A distant view of the charge of the Light Brigade shows how the cavalymen exposed themselves to enemy cannon fire from three sides. Observing the charge from a spot near this vantage point, French General Pierre Bosquet exclaimed: “It is magnificent, but it is not war. It is madness.”*

Conditions at the Balaclava encampment deteriorated as poor sanitation led to recurring outbreaks of dysentery among the men there. Along with nearly two hundred others, Mayow fell ill during the early days of the siege and was confined to his tent, but at dawn on October 25, he was awakened by news that the Russian army had marched south during the night and was attacking a line of allied gun emplacements on the Causeway Heights, a narrow ridge north of Balaclava.

Leaving his sickbed, Mayow took charge of the 17th Lancers in lieu of Lord Cardigan, who was still aboard his yacht in the harbor. By the time Cardigan arrived at 7:45 a.m., the Russians had captured the guns on the Heights, and then turned them on the British forces in the valley below. Cardigan received an order from Lord Raglan to fall back to the junction of two valleys below the Heights, anticipating an imminent assault by Russian Cossacks. A sergeant with the Light Brigade later wrote: "We took up a position facing the opening at the top of the valley, through which it was thought the enemy cavalry would come. We were out of sight of the enemy, but expected every moment to see them."

At 9:15 a.m. the attack came in two waves of Russian cavalry that bypassed the position of the Light Brigade by cutting over the top of the Heights, taking a course directly toward the British base at Balaclava. Fortunately, they were intercepted and repulsed, the first group by a company of Scottish infantry, and the second by a regiment of heavy cavalry, supported by a mobile artillery unit.

Mayow and the other men of the Light Brigade stood by their horses about a quarter-mile away and watched the failed attacks. As the

Russians retreated in disorder up the valley, one of the officers suggested to Lord Cardigan that they ought to pursue them.

Cardigan replied: "No, We have orders to remain here."

The officer persisted, saying: "But my Lord, it is our positive duty to follow up this advantage."

Cardigan said: "No, we must remain here."

For the next forty-five minutes, the Light Brigade watched as the Russians retreated about a mile and a quarter back up the valley, where a line of Russian cannon was being dragged into position. "We were now dismounted," a private with the 13th Dragoons later recalled. "Soon we could see [that] the enemy had placed a number of guns across the lower part of the valley. At the same time a [Russian] field battery ascended the hill on our left front, where it was placed in a position facing us. They also placed a field battery on the slope on our right."

At 10:00 a.m. a messenger delivered an order to Lucan from Raglan, who was observing the battlefield from a hilltop near Balaclava:

Cavalry [is] to advance and take advantage of any opportunity to recover the Heights. They will be supported by infantry which have been ordered. Advance on two fronts.

Unsure of Raglan's exact meaning, Lucan decided to wait for the infantry units to arrive before advancing the Light Brigade, unintentionally giving the Russians enough time to finish setting up their cannon. Meanwhile, Raglan, who had wanted the cavalry to immediately move up the valley and onto the Heights, became concerned that the Russians would use the delay to drag away the heavy cannon from

the redoubts they had captured there earlier that morning. At 11:00 a.m., with no sign of the promised infantry units, another messenger rode up to Lucan with a new order:

Lord Raglan wishes the Cavalry to advance rapidly to the front. Follow the enemy and try to prevent the enemy from carrying away the guns. Troop horse artillery may accompany. French cavalry is on your left. Immediate.

Lucan was visibly puzzled by these vague instructions. Raglan wanted him to "follow the enemy," but the Russians had already taken shelter behind their guns at the far end of the valley. From his vantage point on the valley floor, he was unable to see the guns on the Heights that Raglan was worried about, and he incorrectly guessed that this order somehow superseded the one that had come before it. Adding to the confusion, the messenger informed him: "Lord Raglan's orders are that the cavalry should attack immediately."

"Attack, sir! Attack what?" Lucan asked. "What guns, sir? Where, and what to do?"

The messenger, equally uncertain of Raglan's intentions but caught up in the frenzy of the moment, pointed down the valley to the distant Russian artillery line. "There, my Lord! There is your enemy! There are your guns!"

Lucan rode up to Cardigan and relayed the order to him.

"Lord Cardigan, you will attack the Russians in the valley."

"Certainly, my Lord," Cardigan replied. "But allow me to point out to you that there is a battery in front, a battery on each flank, and the ground is covered with Russian riflemen."

"I cannot help that," Lucan said. "It is Lord Raglan's positive order that the Light Brigade is to attack the enemy."

Within minutes the cavalymen obediently mounted their horses and fell into formation. Mayow took his spot behind Cardigan at the head of the 17th Lancers, who would lead the charge armed with nine-foot-long wooden lances tipped with slender steel blades.



The 17th Lancers approach the Russian cannons.

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Behind and to each side of the Lancers rode the Light Dragoon and Hussar regiments armed with sabers. Behind them, Lucan would follow with an additional five regiments of the Heavy Brigade. Finally, to the far left of the British brigades, a regiment of French cavalry was drawn up to guard their flank.

The effectiveness of a cavalry charge depended on the impetus of the massed riders simultaneously striking the enemy at full gallop. Standard tactics called for cavalry to be pitted against opposing cavalry or infantry troops—not against entrenched cannon emplacements. “Every private soldier could see what a mistake was being made,” a member of 11th Hussars later wrote. “But all we had to do was obey orders.”

At 11:10 a.m. the 673 men of the Light Brigade began heading down

the valley at a brisk trot. Seven minutes later, less than half that number reached the Russian line after being devastated by enemy cannon and rifle fire from the left, right, and front. Mayow, who survived the charge uninjured, later recalled: “As the line approached the Russian artillery, the smoke became so dense that we could see little except the flashes of the guns, and I then lost sight of Lord Cardigan.”

Peering through the haze of gun smoke, Mayow spotted isolated groups of British troops fighting with Russian gun crews and infantrymen. Then he noticed a regiment of at least two hundred Russian Cossacks lined up a hundred yards beyond the guns, and realized that he and his men “would presently be closed in upon and cut to pieces.” Hoping that Lucan and the Heavy Brigade—which had

been supposed to follow the Light Brigade down the valley—would arrive soon, and in the absence of Cardigan, Mayow decided that it was better to press the attack than to be attacked, and began shouting to the remaining members of his regiment, “Seventeenth! This way!”

Mayow rallied about twenty-seven lancers and dragoons to charge the Russian cavalry. Miraculously, the Russians panicked at the sight of the seemingly unstoppable British horsemen. “It was chaos,” a Russian soldier later recalled. “Our cavalry outnumbered the enemy five times over, and yet it fell back in total disorder . . . with the English coming hotly forward.” The Cossacks wheeled and retreated for a quarter mile until they reached a river, on the other side of which Mayow saw still more Russian troops.

Mayow decided that his luck had almost run out when, from behind him, a group of fifty men of the 8th Hussars under the command of Colonel Frederick Shewell emerged from the wall of smoke that still billowed around the Russian cannon. The two groups joined forces. Shewell asked Mayow: “Where is Lord Cardigan?” Mayow said he didn’t know, and Shewell, who outranked Mayow, made the decision to retreat. Turning to head back down the valley, the bloodied survivors were shocked to find that Lucan’s Heavy Brigade was nowhere in sight, and that a troop of Russian lancers had ridden down from the surrounding hills to cut off their escape. Digging in their spurs, the British troops charged the Russians and managed to fight their way through, only to be pursued by the Russians and then fired upon by Russian gunners on the Causeway Heights. The only relief for which the retreating survivors could be thankful was that the guns on the other side of the valley had been silenced by the French cavalry regiment that had ridden with them.



*The 17th Lancers among the Russian guns.*

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Twenty minutes after having begun their charge, 195 officers and men of the Light Brigade returned to the spot from which they had set out. Four hundred and seventy-eight had been killed, wounded or captured by the Russians.

As Mayow approached the safety of the British lines, he was surprised to see the Heavy Brigade waiting there, and in front of them, Lords Lucan and Cardigan. The Heavy Brigade had been turned back by Lucan when he realized that the Light Brigade was essentially doomed, and Cardigan had retreated prematurely from the Russian battery before the fighting was over. Nevertheless, the "Heavies" raised a cheer, and Cardigan rode out to meet the survivors and escort them back. According to one of the men present:

The moment Cardigan's back was [turned], Colonel Mayow pointed toward him, shook his head, and made signs to the officers on the left of the Heavies, as much as to say: "See him, he has taken care of himself." Men in the ranks of the 8th also pointed and made signs to the troopers of the Heavies. . . . Cardigan did not know that he was being thus ridiculed and disparaged, while he was smiling and raising his sword to the cheers of the Heavies and the gunners.

Reports of the carnage reached England three weeks later, where they inspired the British poet laureate, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, to write a poem called "The Charge of the Light Brigade." Published only six weeks after the event, the poem criticized the imprudence of the commanding officers by stating, "The soldiers knew someone had blundered." The poem also celebrated the valor of the enlisted men who had dutifully carried out their orders: "Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do and die."

The poem was instantly popular, and it helped to spark a debate in the United Kingdom about the wisdom of allowing officers to purchase their commissions, instead of earning them. The government formed a "Commission on Purchase" to study the issue. In 1855 it recommended that the sale of commissions ought to be abolished. Many Conservative politicians opposed any innovation that would make it difficult for titled aristocrats to run the army. These politicians feared that an officer class based entirely on merit might contain radicals whose loyalty to the monarchy would be suspect. Liberal politicians were less worried about that possibility, and after the Liberals took power, the purchase of officer commissions in the British Army was abolished on November 1, 1871.

There is no evidence that Lieutenant Colonel Mayow ever voiced an opinion on the question of the sale of commissions. He served in Crimea until Sevastopol fell in September of 1855, nearly a year after the allied armies had first arrived in the Crimea. The following March, Russia surrendered and agreed to permanently withdraw

its military and naval presence from the Black Sea.

On his return home to the village of Clipston, England, Mayow received a hero's welcome. According to the *Northampton Herald*, he was "literally brought home on the shoulders of the men of the village. A sumptuous dinner was held on the green. The tables extended along the main road, and to this dinner every villager was invited." Asked to give a speech, Mayow tactfully omitted any mention of the stunning ineptitude of his commanders, merely saying, "All did their best." He concluded by telling the crowd:

No old soldier would wish  
for war with the worst horrors

of it so recently before his eyes, but should the services of the army again be required, I have no doubt it would be found valiantly performing its duty.

For his distinguished military service Mayow received medals from the King of Sardinia and Sultan of Turkey, and was inducted into the French *Légion d'honneur* and the British Order of Bath. In 1867 he was appointed Deputy Quartermaster-General to the Forces serving in Ireland, and in 1872 he was promoted to the rank of Major General. On January 1, 1873, he died of a heart attack while fox hunting, at the age of sixty-four.

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# Tennyson's Poem

The charge of the Light Brigade is remembered mainly because it inspired a poem by Britain's poet laureate Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

According to the poet's grandson, Tennyson wrote the poem in a flash of inspiration just a few minutes after reading a newspaper account of the charge on December 9, 1854.

The poem juxtaposes a series of apparently contradictory ideas about the heroism of British soldiers, the calamity of their sacrifice, and the brutality of war—all knit together by an unflinching rhythm that evokes the hoofbeats of galloping horses.

## *The Charge of the Light Brigade*

*By Alfred, Lord Tennyson*

1.  
Half a league, half a league,  
Half a league onward,  
All in the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.  
"Forward, the Light Brigade!  
"Charge for the guns!" he said:  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.

2.  
"Forward, the Light Brigade!"  
Was there a man dismay'd?  
Not tho' the soldier knew  
Someone had blunder'd:  
Theirs not to make reply,  
Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do and die:  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.

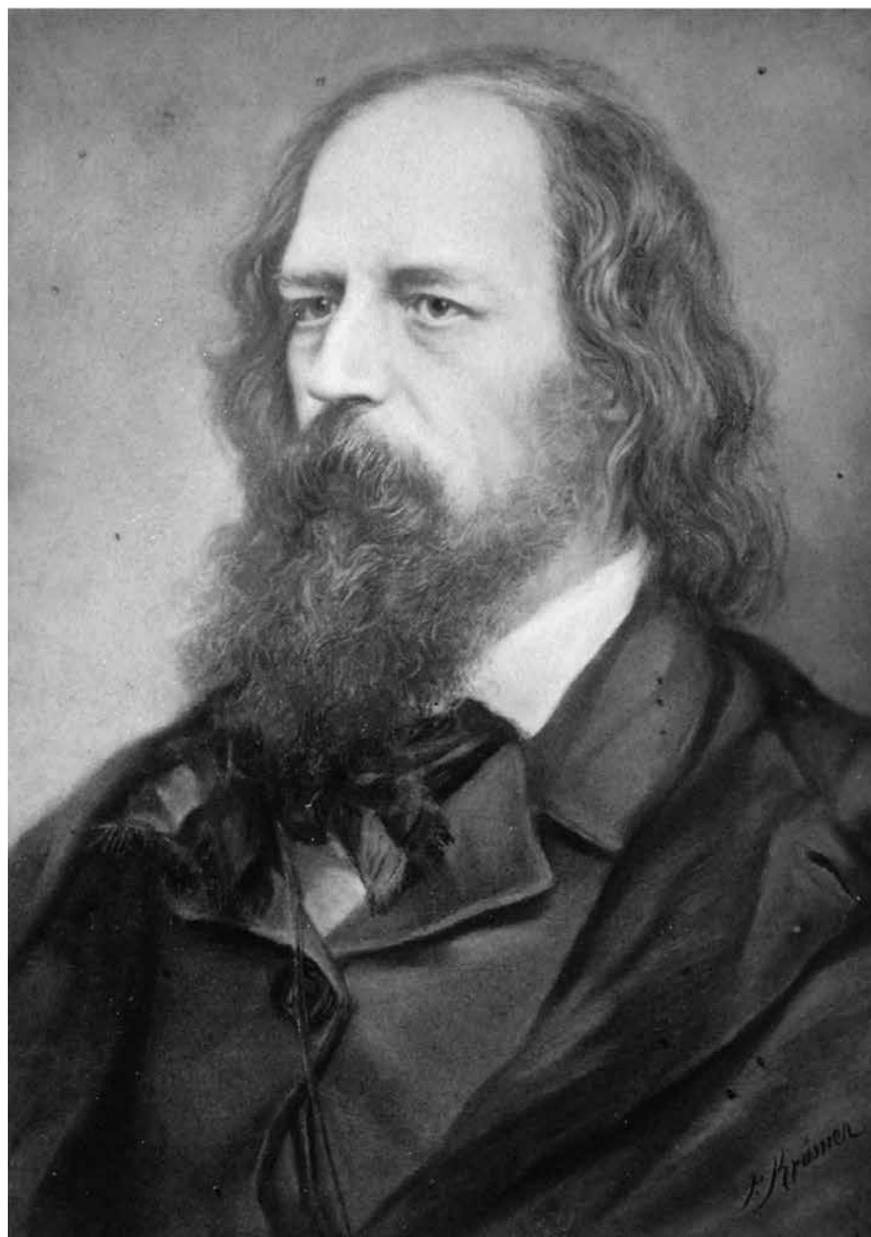
3.  
Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon in front of them  
Volley'd and thunder'd;  
Storm'd at with shot and shell,  
Boldly they rode and well,  
Into the jaws of Death,  
Into the mouth of Hell  
Rode the six hundred.

4.  
Flash'd all their sabres bare,  
Flash'd as they turn'd in air,  
Sabring the gunners there,  
Charging an army, while  
All the world wonder'd:  
Plunged in the battery-smoke  
Right thro' the line they broke;  
Cossack and Russian  
Reel'd from the sabre stroke  
Shatter'd and sunder'd.  
Then they rode back, but not  
Not the six hundred.

5.  
Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,

Cannon behind them  
Volley'd and thunder'd;  
Storm'd at with shot and shell,  
While horse and hero fell,  
They that had fought so well  
Came thro' the jaws of Death  
Back from the mouth of Hell,  
All that was left of them,  
Left of six hundred.

6.  
When can their glory fade?  
O the wild charge they made!  
All the world wondered.  
Honor the charge they made,  
Honor the Light Brigade,  
Noble six hundred.



*Alfred, Lord Tennyson.*

# Pulp Magazine Sales Soar

By Matthew Surridge

Frank A. Munsey was an ambitious young man who became interested in politics while managing a Western Union telegraph office in Augusta, Maine. During the early 1880s, Munsey attempted to launch a career as a Republican Party politician but was frustrated by widespread nepotism and cronyism within the party. He recalled in his autobiography: "I chafed bitterly under the limited possibilities of my environment, where ambition, and energy, and aspiration counted for little. My very soul cried out for an opportunity

to carve out for myself a bigger life."

After giving up on politics, Munsey began to think about entering the publishing business. Both fiction and journalism interested him. Although he claimed to have no artistic ambitions, he wrote that publishing appeared to have "an element of romance and picturesqueness" that appealed to him.

He decided to found a periodical that he planned to call *The Golden Argosy*, an illustrated weekly for children that would publish both fiction and non-fiction. This magazine would be similar to many others then on the market, but Munsey believed that the audience of young magazine

readers was large enough to support another such magazine.

He solicited and bought several manuscripts with his savings, including one story from the well-known writer Horatio Alger, Jr. When Munsey had all the content he needed for the first issue of his magazine, he sought investors. He found a stockbroker in Augusta who promised him \$2,500 in start-up money, while an acquaintance in New York City promised him another \$1,000. Based on what he had learned about the publishing industry, he calculated that this sum, along with \$500 he had saved from his salary, would be enough to establish himself in New York, the center of America's publishing industry.

Munsey quit his job, and then moved to New York in September of 1882. He had only forty dollars in cash, having spent the rest of his savings acquiring manuscripts, but he was counting on support from his acquaintances.

Munsey soon found the costs of publishing were greater than he had anticipated. He designed a cheaper format for his magazine, dropping expensive elements that he had originally planned, such as lithographed covers and interior illustrations.

Munsey began preparing his first issue, and wrote to the stockbroker in Augusta for the \$2,500 the man had promised him. No answer came. When Munsey persisted, the man denied all knowledge of the deal he had made with Munsey. Munsey guessed that other people in Augusta had convinced the man that Munsey's business was destined to fail: "[He] had evidently taken fright at what everybody said would happen to me and my enterprise. . . . Without this twenty-five hundred, the thousand dollars of my friend here in New York meant nothing, so we dissolved our fleeting partnership, and he kept his savings."

Unwilling to give up, Munsey began approaching printers with his manuscripts and plans, hoping to find someone who would publish

the magazine while keeping him as editor.

He found a printer and publisher, E.G. Rideout, who agreed to put out his planned magazine. The first issue of *The Golden Argosy* appeared on December 2, 1882. It was the size of a newspaper, eight pages thick, and cost five cents. It followed the general format of a type of magazine common at the time called a "story-paper." The story-papers contained a mix of fiction and nonfiction, and were aimed mainly at a younger audience. Like the other story-papers, *The Golden Argosy* cost more than the popular penny-a-copy newspapers, but less than most magazines. Munsey worked on the weekly installments of the magazine eighteen hours a day, living on as little money as he could, drawing from Rideout what cash he needed to survive out of the magazine's revenues. After five months, Rideout went bankrupt, owing Munsey a thousand dollars of unpaid salary.

The magazine, along with the rest of Rideout's business, went into receivership. Munsey eventually gave up his claim on Rideout's debt to him in exchange for ownership of the business. He now owned the *Golden Argosy* free and clear—but he had no capital.

Munsey found that no one in New York was prepared to give him credit. He managed to borrow \$300 from another friend in Maine, and kept the magazine afloat. When he was unable to pay a writer for a story he had published, he hired the man as an editor, paying him less money up front in exchange for a guaranteed salary. As no copyright agreement existed between the United States and England, Munsey pirated stories from English magazines. When he could find no usable story in the English magazines, he wrote a serial himself. "I was everything from editor and publisher down to office-boy," he recalled in his autobiography. "The main thought with me was keeping the paper alive, for so long as there was life there were possibilities, and in possibilities there was to me a kind of sustaining hope."

For over a year, he struggled to keep the *Golden Argosy* alive. Then in 1884 the Republican Party nominated United States Senator James G. Blaine of Maine as their candidate for president of the United States. Munsey had become acquainted with Blaine in Augusta. He approached the candidate and proposed to publish a weekly magazine to support his presidential campaign. Blaine agreed, and nine days later *Munsey's Illustrated Weekly* debuted.

The backing of the Republican Party gave Munsey access to more credit, which he used to launch the new magazine. Since he was able to carry an account forward with paper suppliers and distributors, he didn't have to worry about having cash available every week.



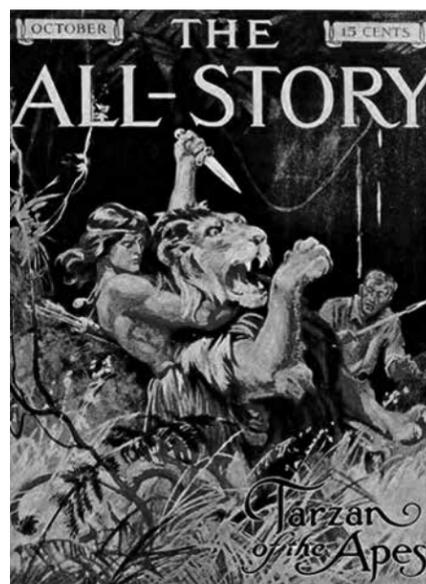
Frank A. Munsey in 1910.



An 1887 issue of the *Golden Argosy*, Munsey's magazine for children.



The fictional character Zorro made his debut in a story by Johnston McCulley in this 1919 issue of *Munsey's All-Story Weekly*.



*Tarzan of the Apes*, a novel by Edgar Rice Burroughs, was first published in its entirety in the October, 1912 edition of *The All-Story*.

The *Weekly* did not immediately make money, but Munsey viewed it as an investment in the future. Munsey hoped that if the Republicans won the election, it would open the way for him to continue to receive political patronage. When Blaine lost the election, Munsey canceled the *Illustrated Weekly*, folding it back into the *Golden Argosy*. As a result of expenses incurred by the *Weekly*, Munsey had fallen eight thousand dollars into debt.

Paradoxically, Munsey found that his indebtedness encouraged his creditors to extend him further credit in the hope that he would be able to turn a profit eventually. In turn, rather than scramble to ensure he had enough cash on hand to meet each bill as it came due, Munsey could now rely on his credit so long as he was able to continue to pay the interest. In the long run, he believed this added flexibility would help him to become profitable. “No man ever guarded credit more sacredly than did I,” he later wrote. “I had waited a long time for it. It was capital at last, and with this capital I began improving *The Argosy* and reaching out for a wider circulation.”

In 1886 he began writing a novel, *Afloat in a Great City*, which he planned to publish as a serial in *The Golden Argosy*. Believing that his novel was exceptionally rich in “elements of dramatic interest that would get a grip on the reader,” Munsey decided to heavily promote the new serial. He printed a hundred thousand sample copies of the issue with the first installment, and distributed it free to homes in New York and Brooklyn. The expense left him over \$15,000 dollars in debt.

His risky move soon paid off in subscriptions and circulation. This helped *The Golden Argosy* in two ways: the new readers bought more copies, and the increased circulation made the magazine more popular with advertisers, allowing Munsey to increase his ad rates. Whereas previously the magazine had varied considerably in its weekly revenues, usually turning a profit but not always by a significant amount, Munsey now found himself regularly making a net profit of one hundred dollars a week (roughly \$2,500 in 2014 dollars). He was not paying off his mounting debt, but he was able to keep his creditors satisfied by paying the interest.

Munsey then planned an even larger promotional campaign across the United States. This campaign would promote a new size for the magazine: it grew from eight pages to sixteen, while the price rose from five to six cents an issue. Late in 1886 Munsey began printing hundreds of thousands of extra copies of each issue. This would bring a considerable amount of added debt, but Munsey knew that he could continue to cover the cost of interest. Over five months, he printed 11.5 million copies of the magazine, incurring \$95,000 of debt.

By May of 1887, *The Golden Argosy* had a circulation of 115,000 readers, and Munsey was making \$1,500 per week net profit. But his circulation began to decline over the course of the year. He tried various

format changes with little result.

Munsey came to believe that *The Argosy's* problem was its focus on a juvenile audience. His readers would eventually grow too old for the material he published, meaning that he would constantly struggle to replace them with younger readers—who would grow out of the magazine within a few years.

In the spring of 1889, he therefore launched his first magazine for adults, *Munsey's Weekly*, which he soon changed to a monthly called *Munsey's Magazine*. It struggled, and so did *The Argosy*. Then in 1893 an economic panic led to a depression. Magazine circulations plummeted nationwide. Munsey, feeling pressure from his creditors due to his massive debt, realized that he would have to do something to keep his magazines alive.

*Munsey's Magazine* had 120 pages or more in each issue and, like most magazines its size, it cost twenty-five cents. Only a few magazines sold for as low as fifteen cents. Munsey calculated that new printing and paper-making technology would allow him to charge only ten cents per issue, while including halftone photoengravings as illustrations. If the circulation rose as he hoped, he would be able to offset the loss of revenue from the low cost of the magazine by increasing his advertising rates. He decided to slash the price of *Munsey's Magazine*, starting with the October 1893 issue, and also to change its approach to match his vision for a new type of publication that would be “a magazine of the people and for the people, with pictures and art and good cheer and human interest throughout.”

But the company that distributed magazines nationally, American News Company, objected to his plan, claiming that the price of the magazine was so low they would be unable to turn a profit on it. As Munsey said, “The manager of the news company insisted that the condition of trade, and the customs of trade, were all against it. In a word, he considered it an impracticable and impossible scheme.”

Munsey decided to go directly to newsstand owners and distribute the magazine himself to regional wholesalers. He sent out ten thousand circulars to the newsstand owners, telling them of his magazine's new size, frequency, and philosophy. The advertisement stressed that retailers should order directly from him and not through the American News Company. No response came.

Munsey printed twenty thousand copies of the upcoming issue and took out newspaper ads promoting his magazine and his self-distribution scheme. He went further into debt, to a total of \$150,000. When he visited his paper supplier to arrange a purchase of paper for the next issue, the supplier cut him off.

But over the next week, the newspaper ads began to work. Orders reached him that covered his initial twenty-thousand-copy print run, allowing him to give a payment to his paper supplier. Then orders came for another ten thousand copies, then orders for more. Munsey eventually

sold a total of sixty thousand copies of his first issue of the ten-cent magazine.

The next month, the circulation held at sixty thousand copies. Then it rose to one hundred thousand copies, and increased with each issue until he was selling seven hundred thousand copies per month of his magazine. In 1894 he changed *The Argosy* to resemble *Munsey's*, making it 112 pages for ten cents and removing its focus on a juvenile audience. Its circulation rose from nine thousand to forty thousand, where it held steady.

Munsey had the impression that sensational fiction appealed to a bigger audience than any other type of writing. Lurid sex, violence, crime, horror, and supernatural events appeared to be the topics that interested the average person—but the average person could not afford to pay the twenty-five-cent price of most monthly magazines. The monthly magazines therefore featured serious writing aimed at genteel readers who could afford to buy a pricey magazine.

Munsey felt that a magazine full of lurid fiction, priced at only ten cents per issue, might attract a large number of readers. In 1896 he decided to change *Argosy* again — it would be the first all-fiction magazine, and to keep the production costs down, it would be printed entirely on cheap pulp paper. Like *Munsey's*, *The Argosy* would concentrate on reaching a broad audience. Its fiction would therefore be fast-paced and relatively simple in its sentiments and vocabulary. The magazine's circulation doubled to eighty thousand at once. For several years it remained at that plateau, and

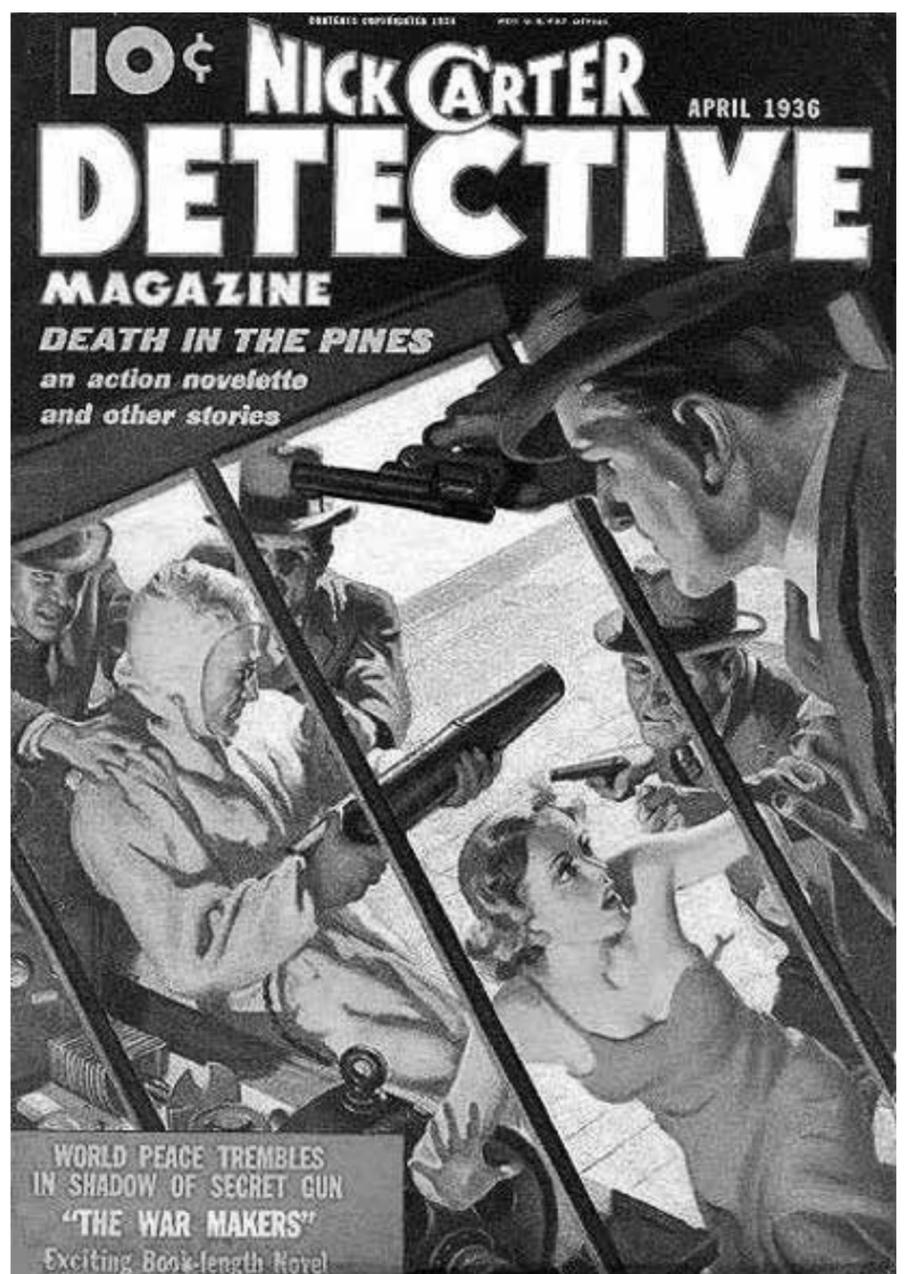
then rapidly increased, reaching a readership of three hundred thousand by 1902, and five hundred thousand by 1907.

*The Argosy* became so popular that rival publishers created their own magazines to imitate Munsey's successful formula. Collectively, these magazines created a new kind of literature called “pulp fiction” that has remained popular ever since.

In its 1896 incarnation, *The Argosy* is considered to be the first “pulp magazine” ever published. Violent adventure stories—including detective stories, science fiction, and westerns—were staples of *The Argosy*, along with horror stories and titillating romance stories.



This 1928 edition of *Amazing Stories* featured a hero called Anthony Rogers, who evolved into Buck Rogers, the protagonist of a popular comic strip.



The rival publisher Street & Street launched a series of detective magazines inspired by Munsey's pulps. This issue appeared in 1936.

Competing pulp magazines included *Amazing Stories*, *Black Mask*, *Dime Detective*, *Love Story Magazine*, *Weird Tales*, and *Western Story Magazine*. Even Munsey himself published imitative magazines, such as his *All-Story Magazine*, which he debuted in 1905.

“The pulps,” in contrast to the “slick” magazines, paid writers very little per word—but the pulps bought a lot of words. As the pulp marketplace exploded, it became possible for more writers to make a living at their craft. The fiction that the pulps published was typically written as quickly as possible, usually featuring simple diction and direct action. One writer, Frederick Faust, routinely wrote fifteen thousand words per day, and totaled over thirty million words in a twenty-seven-year career—the equivalent of roughly 375 novels of average length. While much pulp fiction was of poor literary quality, several skilled writers, such as Upton

Sinclair, Zane Grey, and Edgar Rice Burroughs, wrote for Munsey’s pulps. Writers for other pulps in the first half of the twentieth century included Jack London, Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammet, Robert E. Howard, and H.P. Lovecraft. The dramatic and direct style of the pulps influenced many later writers, and still fascinate many readers today.

The pulps introduced the world to serial novels about men with superhuman abilities—the prototypes of later comic book superheroes. Fictional characters invented for pulp serials included Zorro, Tarzan, The Shadow, Hopalong Cassidy, Fu Manchu, Doctor Death, Doc Savage, The Continental Op, Conan the Barbarian, Captain Future, Buck Rodgers, and The Avenger.

The success of *The Argosy* gave Munsey the financial success that he had always wanted, and allowed him to quickly pay off his massive debts.

In 1895 he made over \$170,000, and then almost \$250,000 the year after that.

Munsey bought out and founded magazines for much of the rest of his life; he also entered the daily newspaper business in 1901. His annual revenues continued to increase, and by 1905 he was making over a million dollars a year from magazine publishing. As a result of his friendship with Theodore Roosevelt, he became one of the main supporters of Roosevelt’s failed third-party presidential bid in 1912.

Munsey died in 1925 of a burst appendix. His wealth at that time was estimated at \$40 million, or over \$500 million in today’s money. *The Argosy* continued to be published, under a variety of names, until 1978.

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# French Jewish Girl Infiltrates Nazi Germany

By Dorothy Patricia Brewster

Marthe Hoffnung was born in 1920 in Alsace-Lorraine, which had been occupied at different times by France and Germany. Both nations claimed the region as their own, but France had held control since 1918.

Like many people of the region, Marthe grew up to be fluently bilingual. She spoke German with her parents, but French with her siblings and friends.

Her Jewish family distrusted the anti-Semitic Nazi government that

took over Germany in the 1930s. When it appeared that war was inevitable in 1939, the Hoffnungs left their home in the city of Metz and moved to Poitiers, in west-central France.

At first Marthe tried to lead a normal life, and she studied nursing. During the next few years, her family’s situation steadily worsened as the Nazis increased their persecution of Jews in France. In 1942 Marthe’s sister Stéphanie was arrested by the German Security Services for helping other Jews to escape into unoccupied France. She was imprisoned and later sent to Auschwitz. She never returned.

The rest of the family would have been arrested and deported to Nazi death camps eventually if they had not been saved by one of Marthe’s

co-workers—a quiet clerk who unexpectedly volunteered to provide her and her family with fake identity papers identifying them as non-Jewish citizens of France. The clerk, who was not Jewish, risked his life to provide the forged papers and refused any payment.

With these papers, the Hoffnungs fled from German-occupied France to the Vichy sector, where nobody knew that they were Jews. Marthe had blonde hair and resembled the fair “Aryans” that Hitler promoted. She led an outwardly normal life, but she was emotionally devastated by the deportation of her sister, and later by the death of her beloved fiancé, Jacques Delaunay, a Resistance fighter who was captured, tortured, and then shot by the Germans.

Marthe Hoffnung tried to join the Resistance, but she could not win the trust of the Resistance fighters.



Marthe Hoffnung as a young woman.



Stéphanie Hoffnung shortly before she was arrested by the Nazis.



Jacques Delaunay was Marthe Hoffnung’s beloved fiancé.

She appeared to be a mere slip of a girl, less than five feet tall.

On August 25, 1944, when the Allies liberated Paris, Hoffnung was working there as a nurse. She immediately tried to enlist in the Free French Army, which was fighting alongside the Allies, but she was unable to submit the required documents. Her identity papers were forged, and she could not obtain a birth certificate from Metz, which was not yet liberated.

Hoffnung finally managed to join the army when her late fiancé's mother vouched for her. Both of Madame Delaunay's sons, her only children, had been killed in the service of the Resistance. When asked by the Resistance chiefs if there was anything they could do for her, Madame Delaunay replied: "Yes. You can help Mademoiselle Hoffnung join one of your army units. She was my son Jacques's fiancée, her credentials are impeccable, and she has my full and complete endorsement."

With this recommendation, Hoffnung was accepted into the Free French army. She was assigned to the 151st Infantry Regiment, a former Resistance unit stationed in Alsace.

Shortly after her arrival in Alsace, when the regiment's commanding officer discovered that she spoke German fluently, he remarked, "We've been desperately looking for army personnel who speak German. We particularly need women because they're far less likely to attract attention in a country where the men have all been called up. Would you be willing to do intelligence work?" Without hesitation she said, "Yes, sir, I would."

Her training started almost immediately. Her preparation included memorization of German equipment, insignia, and uniforms, including details such as buttons and collar patches. She became skillful in reading maps, signaling in Morse code, interpreting codes, and learning about the whole German military organization. She was also taught to shoot weapons, including pistols, Tommy guns, and heavy machine guns.

Hoffnung was asked by her handlers to devise a story about herself, in case anybody questioned her. She decided to pretend to be a German nurse, who was desperately searching for her fiancé, a German soldier serving somewhere in a front-line unit of the

German army. The Allies had killed her parents in a bombing raid, and he was the only person in the world she had left.

Her handlers liked this story. They located a German prisoner of war named Hans who was incarcerated in a French camp, and they coerced him into writing a series of fictitious love letters to "Martha Ulrich," her new *nom de guerre*. He also dedicated to her a photograph of himself wearing a German uniform. After that, the unfortunate Hans was placed in solitary confinement for the duration of the war, to ensure that he could not expose Hoffnung's false identity.

During January and February of 1945, Hoffnung made thirteen attempts to infiltrate territory under German control, but she never succeeded due to constantly changing conditions and unreliable intelligence reports.

Finally an arrangement was made to smuggle her into Germany through Swiss territory. Although Switzerland was officially neutral, the Swiss Customs Intelligence Service of Basel, at the request of one of Hoffnung's handlers, agreed to help her. Georges Lemaire, a Swiss intelligence officer, escorted her to Schaffhausen, Switzerland. From there she was to make her way to Singen, a strategically important German border town.

As Lemaire drove her towards the Swiss-German border, Hoffnung carried no weapons, just a small suitcase of necessities, including German coupons for food and clothing, plus a photo and letters from Hans.

After a long drive, her guide halted his car at the edge of a forest bordered by a huge field; at the northern edge of the field was a narrow country road unprotected by any fence. The road was controlled by two German armed military sentinels who, starting from the two edges of the field, were constantly marching back and forth, meeting at a central point. Lemaire explained to Hoffnung that towards nightfall, after the sentinels had met and were both marching towards the edges of the field, she must crawl across the field and hide behind some bushes near the central point.

After the sentinels had met and separated, turning their backs to where Hoffnung was lying, she was to stand up and walk east on the road until the sentinel noticed her and asked to see her identity papers. "Just smile and do

as he asks," Lemaire instructed her. "The main thing is to get past him and on your way before he meets up with the other guard." (The other guard would know that Hoffnung had not passed him on the road in Germany, and that she was therefore an infiltrator from Switzerland.)

While waiting in the forest, Hoffnung was puzzled by a constant, muffled grinding sound. Lemaire explained that there were huge underground factories, manned by forced labor, making ball bearings for the Third Reich.

At dusk Lemaire told her, "Now!" It took her twenty minutes to crawl through the field to a point near where the guards met. After crouching behind the bushes, her courage completely failed her. She lay there for a very long time, paralyzed by fear. At last she forced herself up. The border guards were already halfway to their turning point. Reaching the road, she headed towards Singen. As if she had been walking along the road, she strolled toward the approaching guard, raising her right arm and greeting him with "Heil Hitler." Asked for her papers and an explanation of where she was going, she replied that she was off to Singen to visit some friends. The guard studied her papers for a long time in the fading light before sending her on her way. She hurried off as fast as she dared, and managed to be out of sight before the guards met each other again.

On the way to Singen, Hoffnung worried about serious holes in her cover story, which had been expanded to include employment in the German city of Konstanz with Dr. Christophe Mueller, an Alsatian physician. Dr. Mueller was a real person who had been drafted into the German army after the German conquest of Alsace-Lorraine. After being wounded at the Russian front, Dr. Mueller had been demobilized and permitted to open a medical clinic in Konstanz. Mueller was secretly anti-Nazi, and when Alsace was liberated he had stealthily defected to France.

Mueller, who had never met Hoffnung, had given her handlers the names of German friends, former patients of his in Konstanz, who were now living in Singen and Freiburg. Those friends believed that Mueller was still working in Konstanz, and they would probably receive Hoffnung hospitably if she presented herself to them as his German nurse from that city. Hoffnung had learned a great deal about Dr. Mueller, and she could convincingly pretend to be his employee, but it suddenly occurred to her that she knew nothing about the city of Konstanz.

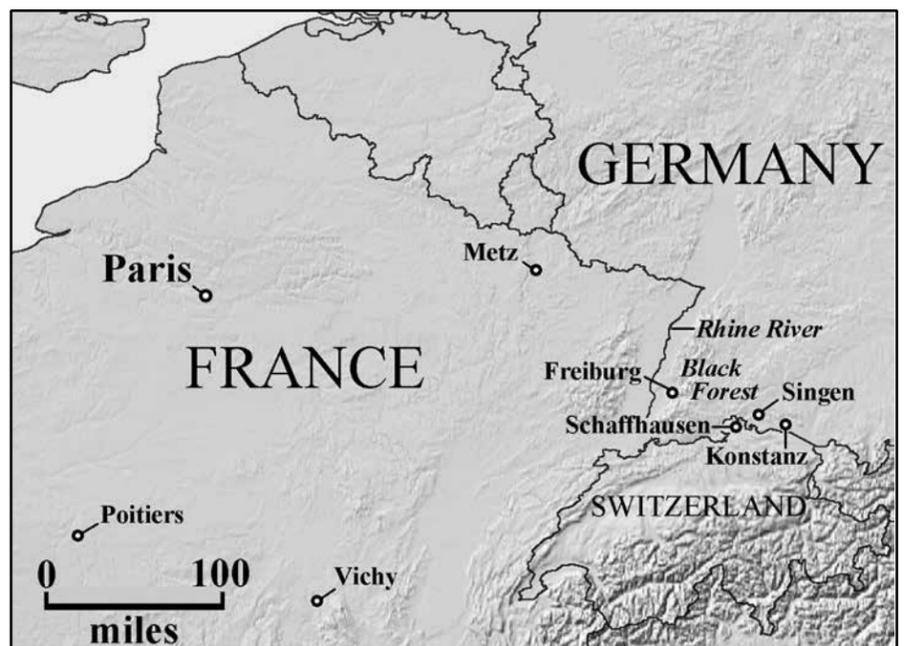
In Singen, Hoffnung visited one of Mueller's contacts, a young woman named Ilse Schmidt. When Hoffnung explained that she was a nurse working for Dr. Mueller, she was welcomed, and given food and a place to sleep. However, the next morning Ilse confronted Hoffnung about her torn silk stockings. "We've been warned time and again to watch out for strangers, and I've been thinking about it all night." She then added, "We hear frequent reports of enemy agents being arrested in and around Singen, because we're so close to the border." Finally she demanded: "Tell me, *fräulein*, are you a spy?" Hoffnung laughed, stretched out her arms, and said, "Look at me. Do I look like a spy?" "No, no you don't," Ilse said. The crisis was over, and Hoffnung was treated very kindly for the rest of her two-day stay. Ilse even helped Hoffnung, who was ignorant of how to proceed, to use her coupon to buy a train ticket to Freiburg to search for her Hans.



Concrete "dragon's teeth" tank barriers at the Westwall.



A bunker on Germany's Westwall defensive line.



Hoffnung grew up in Metz, in the province of Lorraine. The city lies west of the Rhine River, which forms the border between France and Germany on this recent map. Hoffnung spied on the German fortifications called the "Westwall," or "Siegfried Line," on the east side of the river.

The train journey to Freiburg through the Black Forest was nerve-racking, crowded, and smoke-filled, with frequent halts at sidings when Allied planes flew over, and worst of all, many document checks by heavily armed military police. Hoffnung resolved never to take the train again.

Once in Freiberg, she went to the address she had been given. At the mention of Dr. Mueller's name, she was welcomed by Gertrud Schröder, who allowed her to stay in her home for several days. One afternoon, one of Gertrud's friends came to visit. She started to question Hoffnung about Konstanz. "Tell me, what's the name of the clinic where you work?" she asked. Having no idea, Hoffnung blurted out, "Bodensee Klinik." The friend became suspicious. "That sounds like a hotel," she said. Hoffnung quickly replied that it used to be a hotel but became a clinic during the war. When Hoffnung's hostess sensed that her guest found the questioning uncomfortable, she stopped her friend by changing the subject.

The city of Freiburg was swarming with German soldiers and police. Swallowing her fear, Hoffnung set out to gather information. At a street corner, she encountered two young women whispering in French. After hearing that as Alsations they had been forcibly enlisted in the German army, she revealed she was with French intelligence. They were only too glad to draw a map in the dirt and tell her about troop movements in the area and their unit. They agreed to meet the next day and give her further information. Later, Hoffnung received important information from French prisoners of war working on farms, and French citizens forcibly brought into Germany and put to work. In this way, she was able to establish a network of informants.

Hoffnung was especially eager to gather intelligence about the Westwall, or "Siegfried Line," a line of defensive fortifications on the east side of the Rhine River that was designed to protect Germany against invasion from France. On her way to visit a contact who lived near the Westwall, Hoffnung fell in with a group walking in that direction. A German non-commissioned SS officer, recently released from the hospital, collapsed by the side of the road, and Hoffnung

took care of him, accompanying him to the Westwall entrance. When Sergeant Major Helmut Werner recovered consciousness, he was very grateful and invited her to come back and visit him in the near future. Eager to learn all she could about the fortification, Hoffnung agreed to return. Before leaving, she surveyed the area, observing many scattered pillboxes and a surprising number of German soldiers.

Anxious to report her findings, Hoffnung in late afternoon hitched a ride on a military truck crammed with soldiers and civilians. The driver dropped them off at a crossroads to catch their next ride. Exhausted and cold, she fell asleep.

One of her companions roughly roused her from her sleep when Allied bombers were approaching. Hoffnung sleepily mumbled, "Pourquoi? Que se passe-t-il?" In the silence that followed, she realized she'd inadvertently spoken in French. Convinced that she was about to be arrested, she grabbed her suitcase, smiled, and said in German that she had to go relieve herself. From the bushes she glimpsed a milk cart on a nearby road. She frantically ran to it and hitched a ride to the next town.

The milkman dropped her off at a town that had just been bombed. Afterwards, Hoffnung took a bus to the outskirts of the city, and then set off on her two-day walk through the Black Forest to the border to meet her third contact, a family living on a farm at Laufenburg, Germany, who acted as secret couriers. They were devout Catholics who opposed Hitler for religious reasons. Hoffnung had been told that she could give her report to the farmer's wife. The woman would take it to the Swiss border, and then pass it to her husband, a French intelligence agent who always remained on the Swiss side of the border.

As she traveled through the Black Forest on her way to Laufenburg, Hoffnung descended a hill and was astonished to see a vast military encampment in the valley below. She memorized important landmarks so that she could relay this strategic information correctly. Anxious to alert the Allies, Hoffnung pushed on. She wrote later: "As well as the military encampment, I'd memorized infantry units, numbers, strengths, and positions. I had details of train times from Singen, defense posts in and around Freiburg, and the exact location of the best entrances to the Westwall." She prepared her report that night, writing in code, and the next morning the young farmer's wife took it with her when she went to the border to meet her husband.

Hoffnung returned to Freiburg, where she heard on German radio that French troops were very close.

She then decided to assess the military strength of the Westwall by paying a visit to Helmut Werner, the

SS noncommissioned officer whom she had helped previously, after his collapse on the road. When she arrived at the Westwall, she was surprised to see only a few soldiers. She stopped two young soldiers and asked them where to find Helmut Werner. They told her that only a few stragglers were around as they had received orders to abandon the Westwall. She returned rapidly to Freiburg. When she reached the main boulevard, she waited until she saw a tank bearing a French flag coming towards her. Standing in the middle of the road, she made the "V" sign with her hand (the Victory Sign made famous by Winston Churchill). The tank stopped, and she asked to talk to the officer in charge and, declaring she had extremely secret military information, she demanded to be taken immediately to the army headquarters.

At the headquarters of the First French Army, Commandant Petit of the Second Zouave Battalion asked her, "Why on earth should I believe you?" when she told him what she had learned. "This could be a trap." She gave him the phone number of Army Intelligence, and he then called them. Having confirmed her identity, the commandant put down the phone and confided in her: "Our biggest headache is the Siegfried Line. Our entire purpose has been to avoid it around Freiburg, but if what you say is true, then this is incredible." The patrol he sent to check reported that this region of the Westwall was indeed empty of troops.

This intelligence delighted the French commanders. The absence of troops at the Westwall would allow the Free French Army to advance rapidly into Germany and thus shorten the war.

Commandant Petit invited Hoffnung to join him and his staff for dinner and to spend the night at the headquarters. At breakfast, he offered to return her to her intelligence unit. Hoffnung responded that the war and her mission had not yet ended; she wanted to cross the front south of Freiburg and continue her work. Reluctantly accepting her decision, the commandant asked her what she needed. She replied immediately, "A bicycle."

In the ensuing days, Hoffnung continued her mission on bicycle. Riding down from a Black Forest summit, she came across a group of German military ambulances. Hoffnung told the physician in charge that she had escaped from Freiburg as she was terrified by the great number of colonial black African and Arab soldiers in the French Army. She also showed him the picture and letters from Hans. Considering Hoffnung to be a loyal German, the doctor shared a secret. He told her the exact location where the remnant of the German Army was lying in ambush in the Black Forest.

Eager to pass this information to the Allies, Hoffnung rode back to the farmhouse near the Swiss border, where she found that she would have to wait two days to send her message across the border by the usual method. Instead of waiting, Hoffnung decided to deliver the message herself. She

stayed up all night writing her report. The next morning she crawled under the wire at the border, and then handed a sealed envelope containing the report to the Swiss customs officer, requesting that it be delivered to the chief of the Basel Customs Intelligence Service. She then immediately returned to Germany, where she continued her work along the border until Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945, less than a month after her twenty-fifth birthday.

When the war was over, Hoffnung served in the intelligence service of the French Military Government of Lindau in Bavaria until January of 1946, when she volunteered as a nurse for the French Far East Expeditionary Corps. When offered the opportunity for more intelligence work in Vietnam, she turned it down, saying: "No thank you. My days as a spy are over. I'm a nurse now. It's what I do best."

In January of 1958, Hoffnung married Major Lloyd Cohn, an American physician, and raised a family in the United States. As this publication went to press, she was still a California resident, 103 years old.

In July of 2000, she received France's highest military honor, the *Medaille Militaire*, for her "exceptional courage" while on "special missions" in the Black Forest in April of 1945. In 2005 President Jacques Chirac of France awarded her the title of *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur*.

In 2019 a film about her life, *Chichinette: The Accidental Spy*, was made by writer-director Nicola Alice Hens,

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Marthe Hoffnung Cohn on Mother's Day of 2006.

# Guglielmo Marconi Invents Wireless Telegraph

By David Vachon

Guglielmo Marconi was born in 1874, and grew up on his wealthy parents' estate near Bologna, Italy. Unlike his older brother, Alfonso, who was at ease with people, Guglielmo was a shy boy who preferred to spend his time alone. He liked to take things apart, figure out how they worked, and then adapt them to new uses. He used parts of a sewing machine to operate a turnspit; he made tubes and kettles into a still. In outbuildings on the estate he found old machinery from which he scavenged parts for inventions.

While Marconi's father was Italian, his mother was Irish, and she spoke to her children in English. She doted on Marconi, encouraging him to pursue his interests. He learned to read English and Italian with the aid of a tutor, and he found plenty of interesting books to read in his father's extensive library.

Marconi started regular school at the age of twelve. He was uncomfortable with other children, and they singled him out as a misfit. After years of speaking to his mother in English, his command of Italian was poor, and when the schoolmaster corrected his speech, Marconi's classmates roared with laughter.

Marconi wanted to quit school and return to being tutored at home, but his father would not permit it. He told his son to start playing with other boys instead of spending so much time alone, tinkering with mechanical devices.

Marconi's reaction to this advice was to avoid his father whenever possible.

When Marconi was thirteen, he read a book about Benjamin Franklin's experiments with electricity. Itching to create his own electrical experiments, he set up a series of his parents' dinner plates in a long row by the steep edge of a stream. He propped up the plates on their sides by an elaborate series of wet strings. Inspired by Franklin's use of a kite string to conduct electricity from lightning, Marconi used a small crank-operated friction generator to send a surge of high-voltage electricity along the strings. When the strings broke, the plates went crashing down onto rocks in the stream bed below.

Marconi's father was angry at the thoughtless waste of good dinner plates. He told his son that he must stop conducting such "experiments," and that he was too old to be wasting his time with such foolish games.

Marconi went to his mother to be consoled. He easily convinced her to conspire with him to hide future experiments from his father's view.

At the age of sixteen, Marconi enrolled at the Livorno Technical

Institute, where he took courses in physics and chemistry. For the first time, he was studying subjects that he enjoyed, and he couldn't get enough.

Although Marconi learned a great deal at the Livorno Technical Institute, he didn't bother to complete all the subjects needed to graduate. By the time he was twenty, he was still not qualified to enter a university.

Marconi's father pointed out to him that without a degree and a profession, he would never make any money: He would never have a villa of his own, and he would end up living off his father's estate.

Marconi did not argue with his father, but he could not see the value of getting a university degree. The only reason that he wanted to attend university was to learn more about physics and, specifically, about electricity. He persuaded his mother to ask a neighbor who was a university professor for permission for Marconi to audit some of the teacher's courses. Professor Augusto Righi agreed to allow Marconi to attend his lectures on electromagnetism and to use the university library for his research.

During the summer of 1894, Marconi was leafing through a scientific journal when he came across an article by the same Professor Righi about Heinrich Rudolf Hertz's work with electromagnetic waves. Hertz had recently died, and the article described his lifetime accomplishments.

Marconi was very interested in a particular discovery Hertz had made. Hertz had found that when he caused a spark to jump a quarter-inch gap in a coil of copper wire, the electrical energy did not simply leap through air to return to copper. Some of that energy radiated through space in all directions. Hertz knew this was so because he had placed a second coil of wire on another table six feet away.

Hertz had observed that when he sent an electrical charge through the first coil (a transmitter), causing a spark to leap the gap, a much smaller spark simultaneously leapt the gap on the second coil (a receiver). The explanation was that some of the electrical energy from the first coil had radiated in the form of electromagnetic waves across the room to the second coil. Hertz also noted that the waves moved at the speed of light, and that they could be made stronger by adding metal reflectors to direct and focus their energy.

Marconi was astounded by this finding. He immediately saw a practical application for Hertz's discovery—a wireless telegraph system. If electromagnetic waves could be transmitted and received at the speed of light, they could carry coded telegraph messages through

the air, without the wires and poles of a conventional telegraph system. Marconi later wrote, "The idea obsessed me more and more."

Marconi decided to duplicate Hertz's experiments. He presented his mother with a shopping list of equipment that he wanted: copper wire, induction coils, sheets of zinc, glass jars and tubes, sheets of copper, batteries, and a voltmeter. Marconi knew that his father would not approve of new experiments, but as long as his mother was his protector, he believed that his father would not stop him.

Marconi and his mother set aside two large rooms in the attic of the villa as a workshop. Marconi set up his equipment and duplicated Hertz's first experiments, transmitting and detecting the waves as Hertz had done.

Convinced that he could develop a new system of communications, Marconi decided to seek Professor Righi's support. He rode his donkey over a small bridge across the Reno River, and went to visit Professor Righi at his villa. Marconi animatedly described to the professor his plan to establish wireless telegraphy using the so-called "Hertzian waves."

Righi responded that he had already experimented with the waves, but there was no way to generate enough power to create waves that could be sent any great distance. After a few feet, the waves were too weak to be detected. Besides, Righi cautioned, Marconi should not expect to make any substantial scientific advances until he had earned a degree in theoretical physics.

As Marconi rode his donkey back to his parents' villa, he felt disappointed, but not discouraged, by Righi's rebuke. He was accustomed to working on projects that other people thought were a waste of time. He was actually pleased to realize that no one else thought that the waves could be used to send wireless messages. He would therefore be the first person to prove that they could be. "The idea," he later wrote, "was so simple in logic that it seemed difficult to believe no one else had thought of putting it into practice."

During the winter of 1894-1895, Marconi worked in the two attic rooms of his parents' villa. Professor

Righi, despite his initial skepticism, loaned him a transmitter that was an improvement on the one Hertz had used. Righi's transmitter had the same coil of copper wire with a gap for a spark to jump, but it had a curved metal reflector behind it that directed the waves to the receiver.

Marconi read in a scientific journal that, following Hertz's experiments, a French scientist, Édouard Branly, had invented a mechanism called a coherer that was a better receiver than Hertz's. It was a glass tube with an electrical contact at each end. Inside the glass tube was a gap between the contacts and a small pile of metal filings that lay dormant on the bottom of the tube until an electromagnetic signal was received. The signal magnetized the contacts, and the metal filings were drawn into the gap, filling it, and thus making a complete circuit between the contacts.

Marconi realized that the coherer could be rigged to ring a bell or press a Morse key whenever it received a signal from the transmitter. He built his own coherer, but he was disappointed in its performance. Sometimes it would respond to a signal, and at other times it would not.



Guglielmo Marconi.



Marconi's coherer.

The theoretical reasons why coherers work are poorly understood even today, but Marconi did not worry much about theory. He tinkered with the device to discover what changes might improve it. He found that when he narrowed the gap between the contacts to a small fraction of an inch, it responded more often. When he reduced the size of the glass tube from three inches to under an inch in length and replaced the coarse metal filings with filings as fine as dust, he got even better results.

He experimented with different combinations of metals for the filings, settling on ninety-five percent nickel to five percent silver. Next, he created a partial vacuum in the tube that made the metal filings much more responsive to the transmitted signal.

By late September of 1894, Marconi could flip a switch at one end of the attic and make a bell ring at the other end. Soon afterward he was sending signals from the top floor that were strong enough to ring a bell on the ground floor. His improved coherer was working well, but there was still a problem. The metal filings stayed clumped together after each transmission. He found it inconvenient to walk over and tap the coherer tube after every transmission so that it could receive another signal. To save himself the walk, he installed a mechanical tapper that gently struck the glass tube after each transmission, so that the metal dust particles were shaken apart and the apparatus was ready to receive another signal.

This allowed Marconi to send short, separate signals one after the other. He attached a telegrapher's key to the transmitter and clicked out the letter S in Morse Code: dot, dot, dot.

He had the makings of a communication system.

Emboldened by his success, Marconi realized that he was ready to take his experiments outdoors, onto the grounds of the villa, to see how far he could send and receive signals. He wanted to build a larger sending apparatus and experiment with different materials to be used as reflectors. All of this would be expensive and highly visible to his father. He would no longer be able to work alone in the attic rooms without his father's interference, and if he was going to continue his work, he would need financial help from his father.

With his mother as intermediary, Marconi approached his father. He said he wanted to show him what it was he had been working on over the past months. He demonstrated ringing the bell and sending telegraphic messages. He explained to his father that even though he had only been able to send and receive signals at a distance of thirty feet, his goal was to send signals around the world. Once he had improved his system, he said, ships at sea could use it to communicate with their home ports, and people in remote locations where there were no telegraph wires could send messages back to civilization.

Marconi predicted that his invention would be very valuable, and that it would make him rich. But to develop his system further, he needed money to buy expensive materials.

Marconi's father answered that there was no guarantee that the invention would prove to be a practical success and work over any great distance. If Guglielmo was asking for a large sum of money as a business investment, the answer was, "No." It would be reckless to take a large risk on an invention at such an early stage of development. "But," his father added, "I'll pay for the things you need to continue your work on condition that you keep me informed about whatever progress you make."

Marconi felt a great weight lifted from his shoulders, and he leapt back into his research. Moving outdoors with his experiments, he was inspired by the larger scale on which he could work. He wrote, "I considered increasing the dimensions of the transmitter to get waves longer than any that had been used up to that time—waves thirty or forty meters long." Marconi cut apart an old oil tank and used the sheet-iron sides as reflectors to enhance the strength of the transmitted signal. He sent his brother, Alfonso, out in a field with a detector and a white flag on a stick. Marconi would transmit a signal from the vicinity of the family villa, and if Alfonso received it, he would raise the flag.

Marconi tried repositioning the reflectors and the transmitter. He later wrote, "By chance I held one of the metal slabs at a considerable height above the ground and set the other on the earth." There was an immediate increase in the distance at which the waves were detected. Marconi became more daring. "Next I thought of substituting copper wires for the slab I had suspended in the air. These I separated from one another by wooden spokes." He found that wires transmitted the signal even better than a solid chunk of metal. "Then I replaced the slab on the ground with a piece of copper buried in the earth." That served to ground the signal. He was ready for another test.

With his father watching from a second-story window, Marconi sent Alfonso over the hill behind the villa with the receiver. He told him to walk for a mile, up the steep hill and down the other side. He later wrote, "I knew my invention would have no importance unless it could make communication possible across natural obstacles like hills and mountains." Marconi gave Alfonso a hunting rifle. He told him to shoot the rifle when he received the telegraphic signal.

Marconi watched Alfonso walk up the long hill and then disappear over the top. After twenty

minutes, Marconi calculated that Alfonso would be a mile away. It was time to send a signal in Morse Code. Marconi tapped at the key and, immediately, a rifle shot rang out from over the hill. Marconi looked up at his father in the window of the villa. His father was nodding his approval, as if to say, "Now you have discovered something important."

At the suggestion of his parish priest, Marconi sent a letter offering to demonstrate the invention to the Italian government. A few weeks later, Marconi received a reply: The Italian government was not interested in his invention.

When Marconi told his mother that he did not know what to do next, she suggested that he try to sell his invention to the British government. Surely Britain, the greatest maritime nation in the world, would show some interest in a system of wireless communication that would allow ships at sea to communicate with each other. His mother offered to accompany Marconi to England, where they could stay with her relatives while he tried to sell his invention to the British government.

In February of 1896, Marconi and his mother set sail for England. With the help and financial backing of his mother's British relatives, Marconi spent the ensuing months with attorneys, preparing the patent papers that would describe what he had invented. "I had to protect my invention against every possible counterfeit," he later wrote.

Once the patent papers were deposited in June of 1896, Marconi approached the Chief Engineer of the Post Office, William Henry Preece, for assistance. Preece expressed an immediate interest in the invention, and offered his help. Marconi asked for a team of men and many supplies. He wanted to extend the range of his communication system. With the assistance of British army, navy, and post office personnel, Marconi tested his system on Salisbury Plain, extending its range to nine miles.

Press reports of the success of Marconi's invention brought offers to purchase his patents from all over Europe.

Marconi's father sent him a letter with the news that a bank in Milan had offered 300,000 lire for all rights to the invention. Marconi's father urged him to accept this offer. He advised his son to take the money and buy the villa next to his own. He described the livestock that would come with the place, and the joy that he would feel at having his son settled in his hometown.

Marconi declined the offer. He told his father that he still intended to send signals around the world, and that he wouldn't stop experimenting until he had succeeded.

In 1899 Marconi established a wireless station at South Foreland, England, that allowed two British battleships to exchange messages at a distance of seventy-five miles.

Over the following years, Marconi continued to extend the range of wireless telegraphy throughout Europe. In 1901 he sent a signal across the Atlantic Ocean from Cornwall, England, to Newfoundland (now part of Canada) proving that wireless communication could be extended world-wide.

As Marconi had expected, his invention made him a wealthy man. It also won him the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1909.

He died in Rome, Italy, on July 20, 1937.

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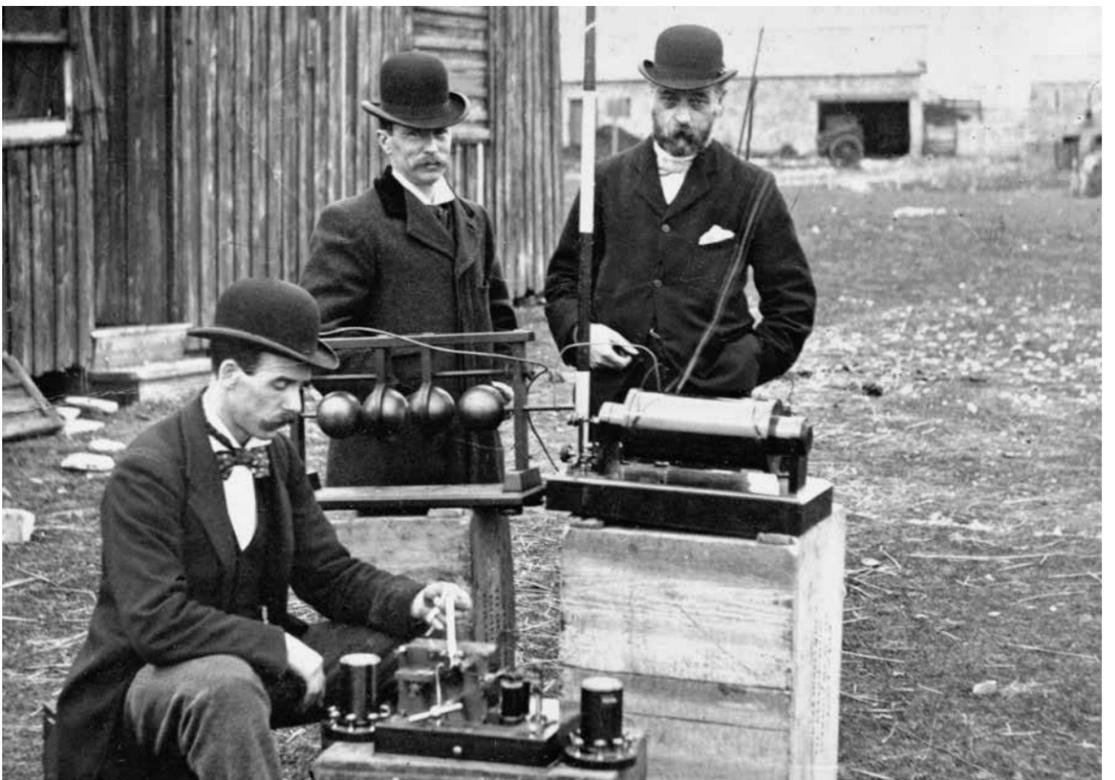
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*British Post Office engineers inspect Guglielmo Marconi's wireless telegraphy equipment during a demonstration on Flat Holm island in May of 1897. This was the world's first demonstration of the transmission of radio signals over open sea. The equipment sent a message three miles.*