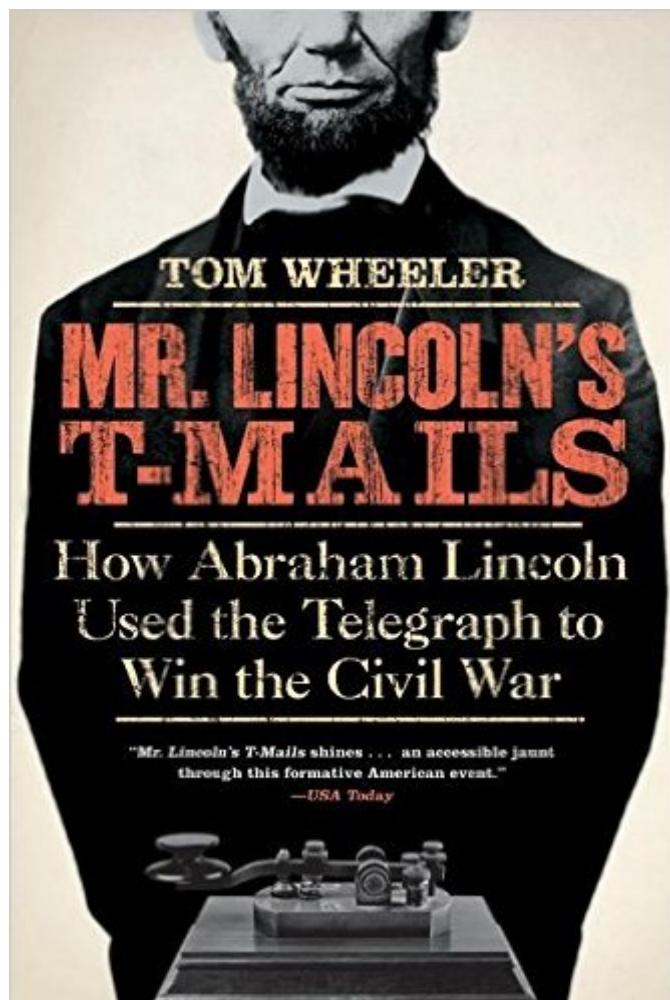


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Mr. Lincoln's T-Mails: How Abraham Lincoln Used The Telegraph To Win The Civil War



Synopsis

Abraham Lincoln's two great legacies to history—“his extraordinary power as a writer and his leadership during the Civil War”—come together in this close study of the President's use of the telegraph. Invented less than two decades before he entered office, the telegraph came into its own during the Civil War. In a jewel—“box of historical writing, Wheeler captures Lincoln as he adapted his folksy rhetorical style to the telegraph, creating an intimate bond with his generals that would ultimately help win the war.

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Customer Reviews

This easy to read book shows how the telegraph's ability to provide high-speed communications shaped the course of the Civil War. As the author points out, the Union clearly had an advantage in its ability to utilize this technology. Was it as decisive in the Union's ultimate victory, as suggested by the subtitle? The author tries to make that argument, but it seems that it would be more accurate to say that the Telegraph enabled Lincoln to prevent his incompetent generals from losing the war until he finally find the men who could win the war. However, it is clear that Lincoln embraced a new technology and developed a new type of executive leadership to take advantage of it. In doing so, he layed the groundwork for the evolution of communications as a tool to project leadership and authority. Overall, this is an interesting book that is easy to read, and provides a fresh perspective on Lincoln's role in the Civil War.[This review is based on a pre-publication Uncorrected Proof copy]

A truly exciting book. It shows President Lincoln stretching his communication powers to the utmost, to prod timid generals and to support energetic commanders like Grant. Lincoln refused to accept defeat. He was confident in the justice of the union cause, and confident that right would prevail ... if only they did not lose heart. He used the new technology of the telegraph to put iron in the backs of his commanders. Some presidents (Carter and Johnson, in particular) have used modern communications to micromanage and undermine their subordinates. Lincoln, with his excellent judgment, somehow avoided this trap, using the telegraph to both guide and empower his generals. Wheeler shows how Lincoln's use of the telegraph trickled down to his subordinates. General Grant used the telegraph to operate as General-In-Chief while traveling with the armies, rather than managing at a distance from Washington D.C. There is no doubt that this dramatically improved Grant's ability to quickly improvise, based upon changing battlefield conditions. And, in Wheeler's vivid language: "His decision to operate from the field would not have been possible but for the army's central nervous system running over telegraph wires." Tom Wheeler is the perfect author for this trailblazing study of Lincoln's instant communications. He combines first-hand knowledge of modern communications and leadership with a contagious enthusiasm for President Lincoln and the Civil War.

As a commander of a Army Signal Company in Vietnam in the 1960's, I found this book to be a "must read" for me. After I read the first chapter "on-line" I immediately purchased it. Lincoln's use of the "new" telegraph to communicate in "real" time with his generals is fascinating. To view his handwritten messages that were telegraphed brings this book to life. The "bite" to many of his messages must have been painful to the generals who received them. My favorite was the telegram to a field commander in which Lincoln asked what had happened in the last 25 minutes to an action in which the field commander was engaged miles away! The messages bring to life the urgency of Civil War engagements and of Lincoln's active, on-going involvement. His frequent visits to the close-by telegraph office to read, personally, the latest telegrams from the field is inspiring. Great leaders understand unique opportunities and take advantage of them. The inability of Army headquarters' staff to grasp the opportunity to communicate was unbelievable. The parallels of Lincoln's t-mail with today's e-mail provides us with a small insight of just how important Lincoln's use of this means of communication truly was in managing the War.

'Mr. Lincoln's T-Mails: The Untold Story of How Abraham Lincoln Used the Telegraph to Win the Civil War' by Tom Wheeler provides an insightful perspective on how Lincoln's desire to be a hands

on commander in chief led him to actively monitor the wires, including corresponding with his field generals and, reading up on the communications between his battle commanders. Making a point that the Federalist won the war due to the three reasons; the first two commonly accepted - the use of the rail system and the overabundance of men, it is in the third reason presented by author Tom Wheeler: Lincoln's use of the telegraph that adds new insight into the war and Lincoln himself. What is true is the fact that Lincoln did spend a great, great deal of time in the Wire Room, to a point that he was obsessed with sending or reading communications to his commanders. In the ongoing frequency of Lincoln's visits to the telegraph room, the reader 'feels' the confinement the war had on Lincoln, as well as his ability as a hands-on president to become involved with his troops and the war itself on a real-time basis. Was the Telegraph one of the reasons why the Federalist were able to keep the Union in tact? It very well might have been. Wheeler provides a very interesting perspective on Lincoln and the war. He also, cleverly brings the story 'current' by juxtaposing in content the use of today's email. The material presented was easy to read and very informative. Highly recommended.

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