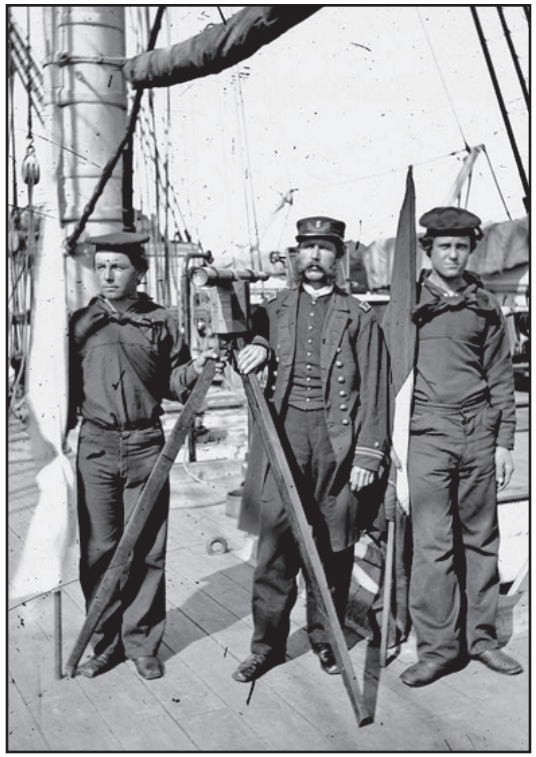
Secret Codes in the Civil War:

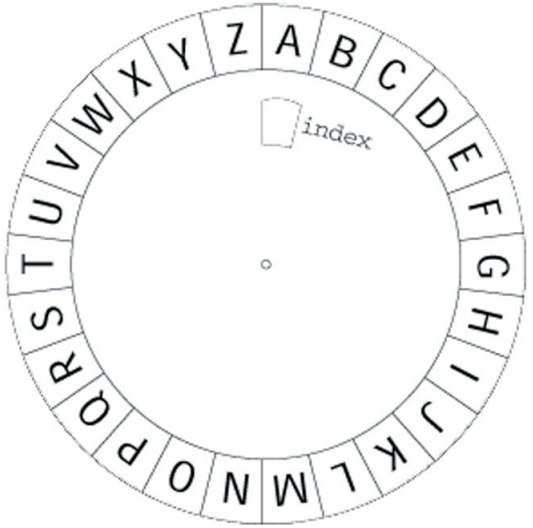
Being able to send messages to your forces and not have the enemy able to read them, if captured, has always been important. Attempts in messages hiding date back to at least 480 B.C. The first documented use of cryptography using substitution cipher was in Julius Caesar's "Gallic Wars." Caesar describes the use of letter substitution as a way to disguise messages. This same technology was used by the armies and navies of both the North and South during the American Civil War. In a substitution cipher the users agree before hand what letter will stand for another letter. Say E in the cipher is A in the plain text. At sea the navy used signal flags, flag hoists, light and sounds, along with ciphers, to communicate ship to ship or ship to shore. In the photograph there are two sailors with signal flags and an officer with a telescope ready to send or receive messages. The second photograph shows an actual coding device used by the Confederate States of America's Secret Service during the Civil War.

You can make a device for encoding and decoding messages by cutting out the two circles on the left of this sheet. The smaller circle goes on top and the larger circle goes on the bottom with a pin through the small dots on each circle. You also need to cut out the index window on the smaller circle. If you have a message to encode or decode and you know the right index number to use you will not have any problems. The index number is a number that you and the person you are communicating with have agreed on before hand. Don't use 1 as an index number because, as you will see, A = A, B=B, etc., so you will not create a secret message. This device will create 25 different codes from index numbers 2 to 26. Do not use any word spacing. When you have put you coding device together set the index number at 7 and decode the following message.

AYTGBGRRGTJOTMVGXZEOYNKXK-
ZUYZGE

This project has been created by the U.S. Naval Landing Party for your enjoyment. Visit us online at: www.USNLP.org





Above: Top of encoder/decoder

Below: Bottom of encoder/decoder