



HISTORY OF SIGNALLING IN 100 OBJECTS MARCONI WT SET NUMBER 1 “THE STIRLING SPARK SET”



Tactical radio communications were first tried during the Boer War following trials on Salisbury Plain in 1899. The War Office had purchased a set for use in South Africa, but this set proved to be a failure. There remained the communicating challenge for Artillery to provide timely and accurate fire support for the Infantry. As mentioned in a previous article, telegraph over line had been used successfully in South Africa, but this was not to prove satisfactory during the First World War. The Royal Flying Corps that had formed from the Royal Engineers developed a key role in carrying out observation of enemy lines from 1914 to 1915. Marconi developed the Stirling Spark set to communicate between a spotter aircraft and a Battery Command Post (CP) on the ground. The Stirling Spark set (shown above) was fitted inside the aircraft and the antenna was hung down beneath the aircraft weighed down by a lead weight at the end of it. The communications were only one way, so the observer would have to send his message in Morse code to the operator in the Battery CP. This information would then be relayed onto the gun positions so that they could adjust their fire accordingly. The picture on the right is from a print shown in the Museum by the artist E. Verpilleux. The message was received by a crystal receiver Mark 3. Artillery observation remained a major role for the Royal Flying Corps throughout WW1. However, by 1917 this whole process had been stream-lined. The Stirling Spark set was replaced by a radio like the Telephone Wireless Set Mark 2, which was made by the General Electric Company USA. This set could transmit and receive speech messages between the aircraft and the command post on the ground. The downside of this was that it was much easier to intercept these messages.

