# COLONEL PARKER HITT
# US Army, Retired (Deceased)

COL Parker Hitt studied Civil Engineering at Purdue University prior to enlisting in the Army in 1898. Initially a Sergeant in the 2nd US Volunteer Engineers, he briefly served in Cuba. In late 1899 he was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the 22nd Infantry and served in the Philippines (twice), California, and Alaska. He attended the Army Signal Corps School at Fort Leavenworth in 1911-1912. His final paper on electrical batteries led to the construction of a new field telephone switchboard.

Upon graduation, Hitt was asked by the Commandant to stay on as an Instructor, which he did for the next three years, teaching courses on codes and ciphers, care and repair of Signal Corps instruments, and radio theory. He questioned outmoded Army cipher practices and proposed new cipher devices. While at the school, he completed his seminal *Manual for the Solution of Military Ciphers,* which was published in 1916 by the Army Service Schools at Fort Leavenworth. The first practical work published on the topic in the United States, the book solidified Hitt's reputation as one of the Army's top cipher experts. It also proved essential for training the American cryptologists of World War I and inspired others, such as William Friedman (HOF 1988) and his wife Elisabeth, to study cryptanalysis.

Hitt's experience in cryptology was more than theory; it was based in practical military application. During GEN John Pershing's Punitive Expedition to Mexico, CPT Hitt and his wife Genevieve were among the handful of amateur cryptologists called upon by the Army to solve intercepted Mexican government communications. He did so in the evenings, first at Leavenworth, and then at Fort Sill where he was teaching machine-gunning at the School of Musketry.

In 1914, knowing that the official US Army field cipher was insecure, Hitt proposed that the Army adopt a system he had developed that could employ either a sliding strip or a cylinder to generate cipher text. In 1917, another code and cipher expert, then 1LT Joseph Mauborgne (HOF 1988), adapted Hitt's cylindrical device, and in 1922 the Army issued it as the M-94. It remained in service for the better part of three decades and was also used by the Navy. In the 1930s, the Army used Hitt's original sliding device to develop the M-138-A, which was also used by the State Department and the Navy.

In 1917, COL Hitt went to France with Pershing's staff as Assistant to the Chief Signal Officer. He was immediately put in charge of coding and decoding all American Expeditionary Force (AEF) messages, which he did until the AEF headquarters was set

up in Paris. In 1918, GEN Pershing, realizing the importance of secure communications on vulnerable transatlantic cables, appointed Hitt to a Board of Officers to look at the security of cable codes and ciphers and recommend measures to be taken to increase the efficiency and secrecy of the present code and cipher communication with the United States. Hitt assigned the task of decoding a message prepared in the existing American trench code to a novice cryptologist; it was decoded within 24 hours. Shortly thereafter, the trench code was replaced by the famous “Rivers” and “Lakes” series of codes.

Hitt was appointed Chief Signal Officer of the Army in July 1918. He was promoted to Colonel in September 1918. During this time he supervised the preparation of a “Radio Service Code,” which was issued to all units using radio down to regimental level. He was instrumental in the employment of bilingual (French and English) American female telephone operators, sometimes referred to as “Hello Girls,” to run the First Army switchboard. He would later attribute much of the communications success of the First Army to his competent staff of women operators.

Upon his return to the US in July 1919, COL Hitt was assigned to the War College. There he taught that the World War experience showed conclusively that Signal Officers of major units must be Soldiers first and technicians afterward. In 1928, at his own request, COL Hitt retired.

After retirement, while working for the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation in 1931, Hitt invented the teletypewriter cipher machine. He was recalled to active duty in 1940 and served as the Signal Officer, Fifth Corps Area at Fort Hayes, Ohio, until his re-retirement in 1944. COL Hitt passed away in March 1971 at the age of 92.

COL Hitt was inducted into the Military Intelligence Corps Hall of Fame in 1988, and in 1995, Hitt Hall at Fort Huachuca was named in his honor.

**COL Hitt being decorated by GEN John Pershing**

**COL Hitt (right) and his wife, Genevieve (left) at home in Virginia. Their daughter, Mary Lueise, is in the center.**