

In No Man's Land

25 entries from *The "Mohawk" Code* (1918)

this group means nothing

seven entries from the *Front Line Code* (1918)

being two sequences of

trench code derivations

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These derivations first appeared at
asfaltics.tumblr.com
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The afterword is edited for this print version.

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this group means nothing 30

afterword 38

In No Man's Land

2506	-ou
2512	-qu
2527	Fog
2529	Body
2571	Small
2572	Still
2573	Pair
2581	Our
2582	Liquid fire

2602 Present
2609 Far

2651 Losses
2654 In writing

2656 -er
2657 -re

2659 All clear
2697 In conjunction with

2763 Desire
2764 Ration

2773 Night passed quietly

2781 Light signal
2789 Question mark

2791 Premature
2793 Message received

2828	-nd	2906	East
2834	(null)	2907	Moving up
2842	-en	2914	Decimal point
2845	-ent	2919	Nothing
2846	Along	2941	Probable
2847	67	2950	But
2848	Entanglements	2959	Listen
2868	Several	2967	Hold
2879	Lines	2982	Creeping barrage
2897	At once	2991	Released

3002 Cast iron
3005 Down

3007 (Null)
3008 Bad (ly)

3009 8
3013 Intend

3014 In code
3053 -ed

3062 Leave behind
3074 -ing

3113 Our front
3114 Quiet day

3123 Happen
3124 Has stopped

3126 Intercept
3127 -ary

3128 Everything
3144 Gone

3145 Few
3146 Further

3149 Since
3154 All is well

3166 Parallel
3167 Ready

—

3170 Comma
3171 33

3172 Hour
3173 90

3174 Must have
3176 Has not

3177 Are you
3191 Is not

3192 Exact range
3193 Raise

3194 Evening
3195 Cover

3206	Much movement	3313	-ness
3213	Best	3315	Altogether
3218	Or	3317	Into
3220	Away	3318	Steady
3230	During the night	3327	Digging
3236	Restored	3328	Our wire
3259	Communication	3330	Could be
3260	In general	3347	Essential
3261	Being	3348	Act
3269	Intact	3350	Having
		3351	Midnight
		3352	Approximately
		3355	Began
		3356	Necessity
		3357	-el
		3393	Step
		3394	As soon as
		3395	-ea
		3396	S
		3397	-ent

3433	Everywhere	3501	Weather
3434	Fight	3505	Half
3445	Space	3508	Most of
3446	Tear	3509	Road
3447	Star	3510	(Null)
3448	Rescue	3511	In
3449	Continue	3512	On the left
3450	Coming	3514	Unable to
3458	Passed quietly	3515	(Null)
3493	Possible (ly)	3516	Late
3494	(Null)	3553	Our wire is cut
3495	Fresh	3584	Exact
3496	Night	3585	Storm
3497	As far as	3597	In No Man's Land

3614	Our first line	3703	Lachrymatory
3624	Out of range	3727	Cloud
3625	Too short	3728	Cross road
3626	Turn	3776	No change
3647	Withdraw	3777	Or
3687	Loss	3778	No Man's Land
3688	Wood		—
3689	Line	3782	Code lost
3692	On both sides	3784	Quiet
3697	Whether	3786	Better
		3794	Depth

3800	Aim	3901	From the
3801	High	3911	Tree
3802	Surprise	3912	Least
3807	Doubt	3918	Undecipherable
3809	Sunday	3937	Locality
3810	Heliograph	3940	Something
3820	23	3943	Nothing
3823	Entanglements	3946	Night passed quietly
3832	Wind favorable	3959	Too early
3842	Today	3972	Last night
3853	Your position	3975	(Null)
3854	Everything	3978	(Null)
		3980	Again

4005 Rain
4006 Quiet

4052 Parole
4053 Useless

4055 In the direction of
4065 Less

4088 Slow
4089 West

4099 Wireless out of commission

4105 Zero hour
4128 Where

4130 There
4134 That

4147 This
4141 Why

4156 Under fire
4165 (Null)

4171 What is the situation
4172 (Null)

4179 (Null)
4183 Also

4185 Always
4187 Hyphen

4188 None
4189 (Null)

4203	Evening	4328	No
4208	No answer	4329	Lines of communication
4209	Of the	4338	Nothing to report
4223	Captive balloon	4343	Moving
4228	In our hands	4345	Without
4231	We are held up	4355	During the night
4238	Wet		—
4239	Trenches	4373	Error
4247	Secret	4376	Most
4248	Evening	4383	Going
	—	4394	Together
4252	In clear	4395	Over the top
4253	We hold the line		
4254	Map		
4277	Written		
4282	Possession		
4294	Too		
4295	Definite		
4299	Would be		

4413	Dark	4501	All right
4416	Passed quietly	4533	Cipher
4418	Serious	4534	About to advance
4419	Clearing	4536	Mass
4422	Nest	4537	Lost
4428	Down	4543	Zero hour
4448	Nothing to report	4586	Invisible
4471	Time	4592	How
4472	When	4594	Writing
4490	The same	4595	Will take place
4499	When		

4606	Morning	4703	On this side
4625	In place	4723	Wire entanglements
4631	This evening	4729	Irregular
4635	Comma	4742	Mud
4638	Wireless	4744	Was not
4645	Behind the lines	4745	Weather
4681	What is the parole	4749	On the way
4685	Velocity of wind	4754	Wide
4690	Entanglements	4768	Wave
4699	Tomorrow	4769	True
		4784	Field

4808 Urgent
4811 All your messages received

4847 On the
4858 Unchanged

4865 (Null)
4866 Inform

4869 Adjust
4876 Keep in touch

4888 Advise
4892 Acknowledge

4897 You will be relieved
4898 Barbed wire

4899 May be

4904 By
4905 Now

4944 Too much
4946 Know

4950 Disorder
4954 Surrounded

4980 Among
4987 Under

4995 With
4998 Near

this group means nothing

AW	After
AY	All
AZ	(This group means nothing)
BA	All right
BC	Am (A. M.)
BD	Ammunition

—

BH	And
BI	Answer
BK	Any
BL	Are
BM	Arrive (d)

EB	Crater (s)
EC	Cross
ED	Cut
EF	D
EG	Daily
EH	(This group means nothing)
EI	Daily report
EK	Daily supplies have not arrived
EL	Danger (ous)
EM	Day (s)
EN	Decrease (d)
EO	Destroy (ed)
EP	Details

IR	Is
IS	J
IT	Just
IU	Just gone up
IV	K
IW	Killed
IY	L
IZ	Large
KA	Last
KB	(This group means nothing)
KC	Left
KD	Lengthen range, we are going to advance

LU	N
LV	Need
LW	Needed
LY	Night
LZ	Night passed quietly
MA	Nine
MB	Nineteen
MC	Ninety
MD	No
ME	No Man's Land
MF	No patrols to be out after
MG	No patrols to be out before
MH	No relief tonight. Await further instructions
MI	Noon
MK	North

TV	That
TW	The
TY	These
TZ	They
UA	Thick
UB	Thicken Barrage
UH	This
UI	Those
UK	Thousand
UL	Time
UM	To
UN	Today
UO	Tomorrow
UP	Tonight
UR	Top

VR	Visual
VS	Wait
VW	Wait (ing) until it gets darker
WC	Water
WD	Wave (s)
WG	What
WH	What is the parole?
WI	When
WK	When will we be relieved
WL	Where
WM	Where do the green rockets come from?

WR	(This group means nothing)
WS	Wind
WU	Wire (s)
WV	Wire entanglements
YE	X
YF	Y
YS	Z
YT	Zero
YU	Zero hour
YV	Zero hour has been postponed

TRENCH CODES WERE COMPILED during the war of 1914-1918 for use in front-line areas, by telephone or telegraph (including visual/panel telegraphy). They concerned the business of fighting, in mud, with gas and flames and machine guns and mortars. They were frequently changed. Kahn discusses French and German trench codes in *The Codebreakers* (1996) : 314-17.

The "Mohawk" Code and the *Front Line Code* were both issued in 1918 by the American Expeditionary Forces. For these derivations, I used scans provided by my colleague Fred Brandes; it is hoped that these will become available online.

In *The "Mohawk" Code*, phrases are arranged in two sections, for encoding and decoding. In the first, the word and phrase vocabulary is arranged in alphabetical order, with some expressions having multiple four-figure codewords. The second section arranges them numerically; no order alphabetical or other is found here. My texts are derived from that second "decoding" section, numbered 2500 through 4999, one hundred entries per page. I have limited each section to phrases taken from a single page, and only in their original order (which, phrase-wise, is randomized by design).

The *Front Line Code* is arranged in a single section, codewords AB through ZZ, 50 words or phrases on each of pages 3-12, yielding 500 vocabulary terms (less 25 blanks at end, for 475 total).

My "method" for both texts is to trawl back and forth through the vocabularies, watching for phrases that alone, or together with nearby other phrases, have a tone, or emotional sense, or semantic or musical assonance or consonance or dissonance, that I feel I can work with. I build sequences backwards and forwards, adding and subtracting. At first my emphasis is on local/separate sequences; once printed out (multiple times), transitions from section to section become more important. The process goes where it goes, until the thing is done and/or ready to be abandoned.

My selections tend to exclude explicitly military vocabulary; some residue remains. The sequences are uneven, nor do they build to any sort of shape or conclusion. Here and there, significance or the hint of meaning surface, perhaps evolve, then submerge. Any number of alternative poetic sequences might be derived from these respective controlled vocabularies.

It is thus a form of erasure writing, a form of compromised

reading too.

One imagined scenario : a shell-shocked signal officer/poet, courage and inventive powers depleted, comrades dead and dying in the mud around, finds comfort in mis-reading the only text at hand, *The “Mohawk” Code*. These could be his scribbblings.

The sequences can be found at asfaltics, via these URL’s —
<http://asfaltics.tumblr.com/tagged/in-no-man's-land>
<http://asfaltics.tumblr.com/tagged/this-group-means-nothing>

ANALOGUES

The composer Yannis Kyriakides made different use of some of the same material, in his *trench code* / 3 interactive video scores, which was performed in May 2015 and is described at his website —
<http://www.kyriakides.com/trench-code.html>

Kyriakides used telegraphic codes as source material in some earlier pieces, including *simplex* (2005) and *the queen is the supreme power in the realm* (2007).

Others have derived poetry from signal and telegraphic codes. See Hannah Weiner (1928-97) her *Code Poems* (1982) —
<http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/weiner/>.

Jackson Mac Low (1922-2004, in a review of books by Weiner and Laura Moriarty) describes some experiments he was doing ca. 1963, in which he applied 5-digit random numbers to a 5-letter code. Gertrude Stein’s *Short Sentences* (1932) operates much like (and even takes the form of) a telegraphic code. But does this matter.