

Although Samuel Morse is credited with inventing "Morse Code," there's really more to the story than meets the eye. His idea of creating a code, for every word, became too cumbersome. Alfred Vail, another inventor and associate of Morse, came up with a simpler idea: [a code for every letter](#).

From a wealthy family, Vail asked his father to fund the code project, although the patent is in Morse's name. According to the *Fiber Optics Illustrated Dictionary* (and its Alfred Vail entry):

*In 1837 Vail made an agreement with Morse to turn over the rights for his inventions in return for a share of the commercial rights. (Fiber Optics Illustrated Dictionary, by Julie K. Petersen, page 975.)*

The following year - on January 6, 1838 - Morse successfully tested the electrical telegraph (with the [help of Alfred Vail](#)).

On the 24th of May, 1844 - after years of working on the code itself - Samuel Morse sent his [first telegraphic message](#). The Library of Congress has [the original paper](#), signed by Morse, to signify what it was:

*What hath God wrought?*

The Library of Congress [tells us more](#) about that choice of words:

*On May 24, 1844, Samuel F. B. Morse dispatched the first telegraphic message over an experimental line from Washington, D.C., to Baltimore. The message, taken from the Bible, Numbers 23:23 and recorded on a paper tape, had been suggested to Morse by Annie Ellsworth, the young daughter of a friend.*

Vail, whose input had transformed an idea into a famous code, ultimately profited little (if at all) from his work:

*In 1848, due to the mounting workload, and the lack of sufficient appreciation and compensation, Vail decided to terminate his relationship with Morse. Morse code may be one of Vail's biggest contributions. (Fiber Optics Illustrated Dictionary, by Julie K. Petersen, page 975.)*

Now ... you know the rest of the story about the Code itself.

But ... do you also know the story about a POW who used his eyes to [blink a Morse Code message](#) letting the world know that he and other POWs were being tortured?

Credits:

Clip about Samuel Morse and Alfred Vail, containing historical footage, online courtesy [The History Channel](#).

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Samuel-Morse-and-Alfred-Vail-Morse-Code>

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## Media Stream

### Morse Code - First Transmission

Image online, courtesy U.S. Library of Congress.

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