

Rising Telephone Use Encyclopedia Article

Rising Telephone Use

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Rising Telephone Use

During the war years only about one-half of American homes had telephones. Before the war residents and civilian businesses rarely made long-distance calls. Long-distance calling did not become common until U.S. military personnel were separated from their loved ones during World War II. The number of long-distance calls placed in the United States tripled between 1939 and 1945. There was no direct dial; all calls went through a live long-distance operator who connected callers to the numbers they requested. Government and military calls had priority over all others.

Bell Telephone, later known as AT&T, employed 171,439 long-distance operators during the war. Approximately 600,000 long-distance calls were placed every day in 1945.