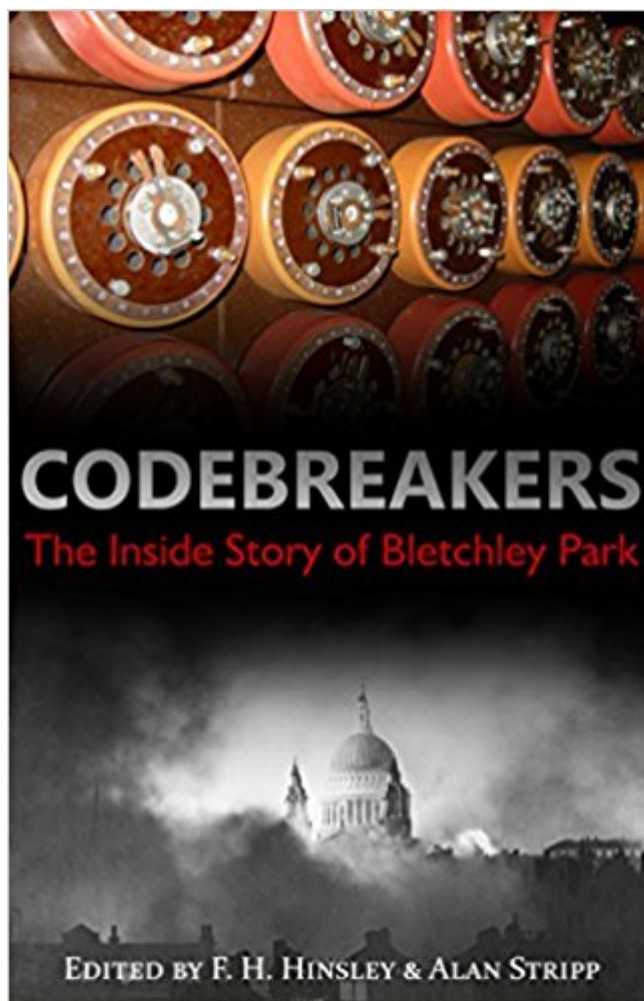


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Codebreakers: The Inside Story Of Bletchley Park



Synopsis

It is an exciting story they have to tell. (Tom Greenwell, Yorkshire Post) Because of its intense secrecy, the work of the men and women at Bletchley received no public recognition for many years after the war, and many of those who made important contributions are no longer alive. This volume of personal recollections by some 30 of the survivors is ... especially welcome. Conditions of life and work at Bletchley, and its principal achievements, are faithfully sampled in Codebreakers, which is worth reading both for its historical interest and for the sidelights it throws on the problems encountered in the rapid assembly and organization of one of the greatest collections of talent that has ever occurred in Western civilization. (Nature) This unique volume will be of great interest to cryptologists in particular, and intelligence buffs in general. (Surveillant) While some of the chapters are so technical that Stella Rimmington would struggle to unscramble them, one still gets a strong sense of the excitement and frustrations of a war fought on the airwaves. (Daily Telegraph) The anecdotal material is fascinating in the insight it gives into everyday life at the institution. (Sunday Times) Hinsley and Stripp have assembled 30 reminiscers - most geniuses, a few slaves, all highly informative. (Robin Blake, Independent on Sunday) It is a remarkable tribute to the men and women who worked to crack the Germans' Enigma code. (David Hall, Oxford Times) The most interesting thing about this collection of essays is the light it throws on the personalities concerned. (Times Higher Education Supplement) These essays on the diverse activities at Bletchley Park (which remained secret until the 1970s) are enthralling. (The Observer) What makes Codebreakers so absorbing is that it has been written by the men and women who worked at Bletchley Park, all of whom were forbidden to talk about their work at the time. Codebreakers gives a fascinating insight into their daily lives. (Madeleine Burton, Hitchin Gazette) One gets a strong sense of the excitement and frustrations of a war fought on the airwaves. (Daily Telegraph) Interesting stuff. (The Marine Society) This book has been put together from the personal memories of people none of whom would now be under 65. That they are so readable attests to the skill of the editors, who were themselves part of the Bletchley operation. Above all, it highlights the painstaking effort that intelligence work demands; but, as this volume shows, intelligence is useless there is force and a willingness to take advantage of it. (Canberra Times) This is a colourful and authentic account of daily life and work at Government Communications Headquarters, Bletchley Park, the most successful intelligence agency in history. By 1942 the codebreakers of Bletchley Park and its out-stations were breaking some 4,000 German signals a day, and almost as many from Italy and Japan, eavesdropping on enemy communications up to the highest levels of command. Their colleagues used these decrypts to produce Ultra intelligence which gave a detailed, accurate, and

up-to-date picture of enemy strengths, weaknesses, and intentions. The codebreakers' contribution to the war effort was invaluable: Churchill described them as the 'secret weapon' that 'won the war'. For the first time a group of the men and women who worked on this top-secret enterprise have combined to write their story in full. Here, they vividly describe their recruitment and training, their feelings and activities, and recall in detail their successes and failures.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I chose 3 because the information on code breaking was way above my head. I am sure people who are more technically inclined would give this a higher rating. These are first hand accounts so obviously this is very authentic information. I would have liked a more readable style and although these are personal accounts - there is very little that is 'personal' in here and yet, I do get the secrecy under which these amazing people worked. One is left to grab bits and pieces of writings from the various contributors to try and understand how bleeps and buzzes (or even words) are snatched from a maze of air noise on radio transmitters and then eventually are deciphered to be

the game plan of German forces to aid Allied armies in their battle. I think one has to be a mathematician to get the whole story of decoding. For me, the info on decoding was just too staggering to understand.

This book is a set of essays by people who actually worked at Bletchley Park during World War II, and describes in some detail what they did. Much of it is dry reading. That's because real cryptology is mostly dry work; months of boredom interrupted by moments of joy or chagrin. For those who care about World War II cryptology this is a "must read," but read either the 1967 or the 1996 edition of David Kahn's "The Codebreakers" first; otherwise, some of this book won't make much sense, for lack of context. Some of the most interesting work done at Bletchley Park, and some of the most valuable people who worked there, are not mentioned at all in this book; not even a hint. I assume this is because of two problems: the British Official Secrets Act presumably still applies to a good deal of what happened at Bletchley Park, and the topics of inquiry that involved both British and American personnel could hardly be described in detail without the agreement of NSA, which might be hard to come by in some cases. I wish that two friends of mine who worked at Bletchley Park had been able to write memoirs of their work and their interactions with colleagues. But that didn't happen. However, we can hope that the remaining veil of official silence will be lifted some day.

This book consists of 30 essays divided into four sections: "The Production of Ultra Intelligence, Enigma, Fish (the German Lorenz machine), and Field Ciphers and Tactical Codes. These essays were written by the men and women who worked at Bletchley Park deciphering German, Italian and Japanese codes and ciphers. Their stories range from the human elements of their work (how they were recruited, working and living conditions, etc.) to technical aspects of how they went about their deciphering efforts. Some of the book is technical, but for the most part the book is completely accessible to someone without any deciphering experience or even a desire to delve deeply into the details to this field. I recommend this book to people interested in learning more about what went on at Bletchley Park, as told by the people who worked there.

A fascinating look behind the scenes of the "ultra secret" and the breaking of the German codes which helped end World War II.

A good adjunct to Robert Harris's historical novel Enigma, this collection comprises about twenty first-person reminiscences of work at Bletchley Park. Most of them start with how the person was

recruited - these usually involve a secret talk by an old friend or professor, since nothing could be divulged about Bletchley Park until the person actually agreed to join. One of the most interesting features of the collection is the wide range of characters who show up. Some were mathematicians. Some were naval officers. Some were classicists. Some were chess players. Yet all were loyal, all helped protect Britain. A few of the notable passages I can remember follow. Stuart Milner-Barry's is one of the more accessible essays (many of them focus on various technical aspects of cryptanalysis or of translation). His essay begins "When the war broke out in 1939 I was in the Argentine, playing chess for the British team in the Olympiad. My great friend and rival, C.H.O'D. Alexander, was another member, as was Harry Golombek, late chess correspondent of The Time." All these folks wound up being recruited into Bletchley Park, and Milner-Barry focuses on the personalities rather than the technical side. Perhaps the most memorable and the most moving essay in the book was by Walter Eytan, who worked on translating decrypted traffic in Hut 4. Eytan was one of the few Jews at Bletchley Park, and his essay concludes: "I may be the only one who will recall a peculiarly poignant moment when in late 1943 or early 1944 we intercepted a signal from a small German-commissioned vessel in the Aegean, reporting for Piraeus zur Endloesung ('for the final solution'). I had never seen or heard this expression before, but instinctively I knew what it must mean, and I have never forgotten that moment." There is much else worthwhile in the book, and it helps paint a fuller picture of Bletchley Park than some of the narrower accounts I have seen.

Good!

Interesting topic. The book consists of various first person accounts of what it was like to work at Bletchley park during the war. Each chapter is self a contained recollection, and the experiences of working in different areas, including German and Italian navy, army codes etc. brings the immediacy and importance of the work alive. Easy vacation reading. Pick up- put down, read and repeat.

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