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The Codebreakers of Bletchley Park: The Secret Intelligence Station That Helped Defeat the Nazis by John Dermot Turing.

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There are now dozens, if not hundreds, of books on Bletchley Park, the secret country house where British codebreakers worked during World War II. Alongside the biographies of the famous—Alan Turing, for example—there are many memoirs by those who labored there. For readers with a mathematical or technical bent, there are also studies of machines developed for codebreaking that helped give birth to digital computers. The voluminous official history of *British Intelligence in the Second World War*[1] devotes hundreds of dull pages to the achievements of what was called "BP" and, after the war, the Government Communications Headquarters GCHQ), the UK equivalent of the United States' National Security Agency (NSA). Now Dermot Turing, Alan's nephew, has written a brisk, highly readable account of BP and the men and women who worked there.

Turing, a retired barrister, has published a biography of his uncle[2] as well as a fine book on the Polish mathematicians who first broke into the German Enigma cypher machine.[3] In *The Codebreakers of Bletchley Park*, he tells the story of British codebreaking by surveying individuals associated with BP and its work. Its ten chapters begin with British successes in cracking German codes in World War I and end with GCHQ's 2019 announcement of plans for additional revelations.

The story proceeds chronologically, punctuated by fifty-five brief biographies, printed in boldface. One of the longest of these (two pages) concerns Brig. John Tiltman, a brilliant cryptologist who spent sixty years at BP and then the NSA. Turing discusses Tiltman's humble origins (he was admitted to Oxford at thirteen, but was too poor to enter), his crucial development of simple but effective British codes, and his attempt to decipher the notorious Voynich Manuscript. Only Alan Turing himself receives this much attention in the book.

In such a short work, the author has chosen to stress a handful of topics, while ignoring others. He is good on the role of women, detailing the discrimination they faced at BP, be they among the few top codebreakers or the thousands who performed drudge jobs with no clue as to what they were doing, or why. Another topic handled well is the signals traffic that the British code-named "Fish." The Germans created a teleprinter attachment for sending long, high-level messages throughout the Reich; it was far more mechanically and mathematically sophisticated than the Enigma machine. Turing explains how it worked and how BP broke it. Atypically in a book on BP, he takes the story of Fish up to and past the end of the war. As the Third Reich was crumbling in spring 1945, British and American experts tracked down and seized German code-

1. Subtitle: *Its Influence on Strategy and Operations*, 5 vols., ed. F. H. Hinsle et al. (London: HMSO, 1979–1990).

2. *Prof: Alan Turing Decoded: A Biography* (Stroud, UK: History Pr, 2015).

3. *X, Y & Z: The Real Story of How Enigma Was Broken* (id., 2018), with my review at *MiWSR* 2019-094.

breakers and code-makers, their equipment, and their files. *Codebreakers* includes a photo of German POWs crating a Fish teleprinter for transport to BP for analysis.

Another unusual topic in a book about BP is the fate of the vast array of electro-mechanical equipment produced to decrypt both Enigma and Fish messages. Max Newman, who led the attack on Fish, realized the value of what had become war-surplus computers:

> Newman was equally interested to get his hands on redundant equipment. The Colossus machines were, on one view, as irrelevant as the bombes, and he put in a bid for the valves and other useful parts as a starter kit for his computing machine project at Manchester University, where he had just been appointed Fielden Professor of Mathematics. On 8 August 1945, Newman wrote to Nigel de Grey, saying "After going round the equipment … the proper request for us to make is for the material of two complete Colossi, and in addition a few thousand miscellaneous resistances and condensers off other machines." Three months later, the shipment was on its way, a total of 7 tons of old kit. This provided the starter for Newman's computing project, which developed the "Manchester Baby" computer, believed to be the first ever stored-program electronic computer to run a routine, in the autumn of 1948. (218)

Because all the BP alumni are now safely dead, Turing can not only chronicle their lives, but offer sometimes cheeky comments.

> When Commander Travis appointed Eric Jones to be head of Hut 3, it was something of a gamble. Jones was an industry manager who had joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve in 1940, so he was not regular air force intelligence, nor a professor, nor a codebreaker. But it was management skills that were needed.... After the war, Jones stayed on rather than returning to industry. He became deputy director of GCHQ in 1950 and succeeded Sir Edward Travis as head of the organization in 1952. He stepped down in 1960; his entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* says "some found him ponderous or pompous. Perhaps for this reason, through a lack of empathy between Whitehall mandarins and a man from a quite different background, he was not given further government employment." Jones turned to growing carnations. (224)

Naturally, many things are missing from *Codebreakers*. For instance, the exciting back-and-forth cryptological duel between the German B-Dienst (observation service) and BP during the Battle of the Atlantic, and the details of how poor cipher discipline, especially in the Luftwaffe, helped British codebreakers. But all those things are easily found elsewhere.[4] There is also a list of fifteen books for Further Reading at the end of *Codebreakers*. Dermot Turing's new book provides an appealing and lucid introduction to the Bletchley Park story based on the personalities involved.

4. E.g., in Ralph Erskine and Michael Smith, eds., *Action This Day* (NY: Bantam, 2001).