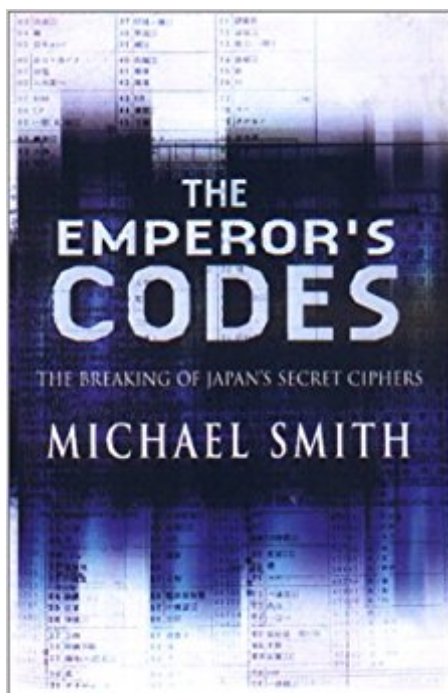


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The Emperor's Codes: The Breaking Of Japan's Secret Ciphers



Synopsis

From Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, whose devastating loss was due in large measure to our inability to decode messages about the forthcoming attack, to the Battle of Midway, code-breaking played a key role in the Pacific war. Moving across the world from Bletchley Park outside London to Pearl Harbor, from Singapore to Colombo, from Mombassa to Melbourne, *The Emperor's Code* reveals how the Japanese codes - of which there were several - were broken, and we discover in detail who were the (often quirky) geniuses behind the desperate effort. Unlike the German codes, where similarities of language made decrypting at least possible, the vast differences between English and Japanese made this far more daunting.

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Customer Reviews

During World War II, British and American cryptographers labored in tight security at Bletchley Park and elsewhere, poring over thousands of intercepted Japanese and German military messages. This fascinating story has been told and retold over the past 15 years as more new information emerges. Smith, a British journalist and author of *Station X: Decoding Nazi Secrets*, has now expanded on the subject with this well-written account of how the Americans with a great deal of help from British codebreakers cracked the Japanese codes. Smith portrays the sometimes bitter competition between American naval and British military personnel and insists that the British deserve a greater share of the credit than the Americans have been willing to grant. All in all, it makes a great story and one of importance, since many historians believe that through their codebreaking efforts the Allies were able to shorten the war by as much as two years. Libraries

should add Smith's book to other recent works, including Stephen Budiansky's *Battle of Wits* (LJ 9/15/00) and Leo Marks's *Between Silk and Cyanide* (LJ 4/15/99). Recommended for most collections. Ed Goedeken, Iowa State Univ. Lib., Ames Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The Allied efforts that led to the breaking of Germany's Enigma code have been well publicized. Less well known but equally critical to the war effort was the combined British-American success at breaking the various Japanese codes. Smith, a journalist who has worked for the *London Sunday Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*, writes a real-life thriller that unfolds like a classic spy story. The heroes here are not dashing secret agents; instead, they are seemingly fanatically dedicated and patient plodders who pore over the myriad possibilities involved in code breaking. Smith shows how the failure to fully understand Japanese cable traffic led to the disaster at Pearl Harbor. He proceeds to illustrate the manner in which Allied cooperation in code breaking led to future successes in the Pacific, including the critical Battle of Midway. This is an engrossing and exciting recounting of an obscure but important facet of World War II. Jay Freeman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Very factual and easy reading. Some of the facts tell what was going on how it was done and who did what and the results of this action.

Much has been written, filmed, and broadcast about the codebreaking exploits of Bletchley Park, the personalities involved (Alan Turing being the preeminent example) and the technological products that followed from Bletchley theoretical and practical work. By comparison, little has been written about the codebreaking exploits of those in the Pacific Theater of Operations. The only mention in the arts that comes to mind is the 1976 movie *Midway*, in which Hal Holbrook has a brief appearance as Cmdr. Joseph Rochefort, head of US cryptoanalysis. And yet codebreaking in the Pacific was every bit as important to Allied success as was the breaking of German codes. Perhaps more so, as the success of the Battle of Midway, the pivotal battle of the Pacific war, hinged on Allied forces having advance knowledge of Japanese intentions. Michael Smith has done a good deal to remedy that lack of attention with this book. He covers the political and the stretch aspects of codebreaking in the Pacific, as well as the strategic and tactical use and effects of successful codebreaking. There's a fair amount of detailed history regarding the implementation of listening stations around the Pacific as well as the development of codebreaking in that theater. First r the

technical and mathematically oriented there's a nice section that shows, in a general way, how a codebreaker might go about decoding a Japanese message. It's interesting reading as well as informative, and a good addition to the bookshelf of anyone interested in histories of both the Second World War and of codes and codebreaking.

I am very interested in the build-up to Pearl Harbor and the first year of the war. This book makes a real contribution to this area and to allied SIGINT efforts against the Japanese in general. It covers the British, Australian, US and even New Zealand efforts against the target. It describes in some detail how the early Japanese victories negatively affected the allied efforts. It then takes about the regrouping of the allies and the all-around that helped them continue during the bad times and set the stage for supporting the advances that came starting in 1942. One of the interesting portions of the book deals with inter and intra allied frictions that plagued the allies throughout the war. It is a worthy addition to the bookshelf of WW II books on intelligence and the war.

As a young schoolboy during WWII growing up in Sydney, Australia I lived not far from a huge army barracks set up by the US Army. I was aware of the possibility of invasion by the Japanese, happy to see so many American GIs nearby and of course totally unaware of all those amazing people at Bletchley Park in the UK and the US equivalent the one in Melbourne and also in Colombo not to mention India. All of whom were at that time working so hard to bring the war to an end. Just amazing stuff to learn what they achieved and the undoubted affect their hard work achieved just with the big US naval battles in the Pacific. These days of course there is NSA in Maryland, USA. I have read a good deal about the NSA and am pleased there is such an agency helping to keep us as safe as possible. Trying to equate the capacity the NSA has now with what the cryptographers had to do in WWII the mind boggles. If only they could have seen what was to follow them. The Emperor's Codes is a good book and certainly one I will return to for a second read.

This is an interesting and journalistic account of Allied efforts to break Japanese codes during WWII. There has been a great deal published about Allied, mainly British, success in deciphering German codes but little on the corresponding effort aimed at Japan. Smith provides a broad outline of the Allied effort to attack Japanese codes. He is especially interested in documenting the British role in this effort. This emphasis occurs for two reasons. First, he is especially concerned with dispelling the notion that American cryptographers completely dominated this effort. Second, most of his sources are British, due partly to the greater availability of relevant British and Australian sources.

The book does an adequate job of covering the major efforts in cryptography, discusses the major figures, and some of the problems inherent in this collaboration between the allies. The American Navy appears as having a poor record of interservice and inter-Ally cooperation. This book has some deficiencies. It is not really detailed or systematic enough. While Smith's emphasis on the British is understandable, I don't think there is enough material on American efforts to give a truly balanced picture. Much of the material is presented in an anecdotal manner, punctuated with interviews of participants. These excerpts are interesting, well chosen, and entertaining but there is not much corresponding analysis. For example, there is enough in the book on details of cryptography to make the reader confused but not enough to make the subject readily understandable. Smith also deals poorly with the scope of Allied efforts. Implicit in the book is the growth of cryptography and signal intelligence from a rudimentary prewar effort to a major and very well organized enterprise. Yet, there is no systematic accounting of the growth and organization of these complex efforts. This subject really deserves a more systematic and detailed treatment.

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