

*Hitler's Codebreakers: German Signals Intelligence in World War 2*

John Jackson, BookTowerPublishing, 2012, 228 pp.

John Jackson is a retired journalist and publisher and is a volunteer at Bletchley sometimes to be seen explaining and demonstrating the bombe. He has written, edited or transliterated more than half a dozen books on the work of Bletchley Park, all of which can be heartily recommended, in my view; some of them are genuine 'labours of love', for example, Frank Birch's *Official History of Signals Intelligence*, vols. 1 & 2. On this occasion he has edited the reports of the TICOM committee which are invaluable sources for discovering how German Sigint was organised and their successes and failures.

What was this organisation? TICOM (Target Intelligence Committee) was an Anglo-American organisation set up in October 1944 whose cover name disguised its real purposes, one of which was the seeking out of German Sigint staff for interrogation and to discover equipment that might be previously unknown. This was to be done in the immediate aftermath – in some instances, even before – of the war. There was another extremely important part of the mission: to discover what, if anything the Germans had discovered about Soviet Sigint which had been virtually ignored by both the Americans and British since 1938 and the rise of the Nazis.

The book is based on *European Axis Signal Intelligence in World War II as revealed by 'TICOM' Investigations and by other Prisoner of War Interrogations and Captured Material, Principally German*, and completed in May 1946. This is freely available on the National Security Agency website but what Jackson has done is to make it all readily available to serious students of Sigint. It is an excellent reference book on TICOM but, for me, loses much by ignoring the stories of those who took part, several of them being members of the Corps.

The wartime story of codebreaking has almost exclusively centred around Allied successes, particularly that of Bletchley Park. However, the Germans in particular were extremely active in codebreaking and had their successes. But it was not until after the war that the extent or otherwise of their triumphs could be gauged. With the war in Europe at an end, during April and May 1945 British and American codebreaking teams hunted for their German counterparts to find out just how good they had been. There were lessons to be learned for the post-war period for Western intelligence.

This fascinating insight into German cryptography shows how they understood that the Enigma cipher machine had weaknesses, but believed that time and expense would preclude any serious attempt to break it. They had various ingenious machines either developed or under development as the war drew to a close. The lack of resources and time put paid to any major operational deployment of this machinery, but underlines the fact that German ingenuity came close to developments that could have made Bletchley Park's task of breaking the machines almost impossible, leaving just 'traffic analysis' and direction finding as potentially the only sources of Intelligence. It is impossible to assess the potential damage that this would have caused the Allies, particularly once the conflict reached mainland Europe.

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