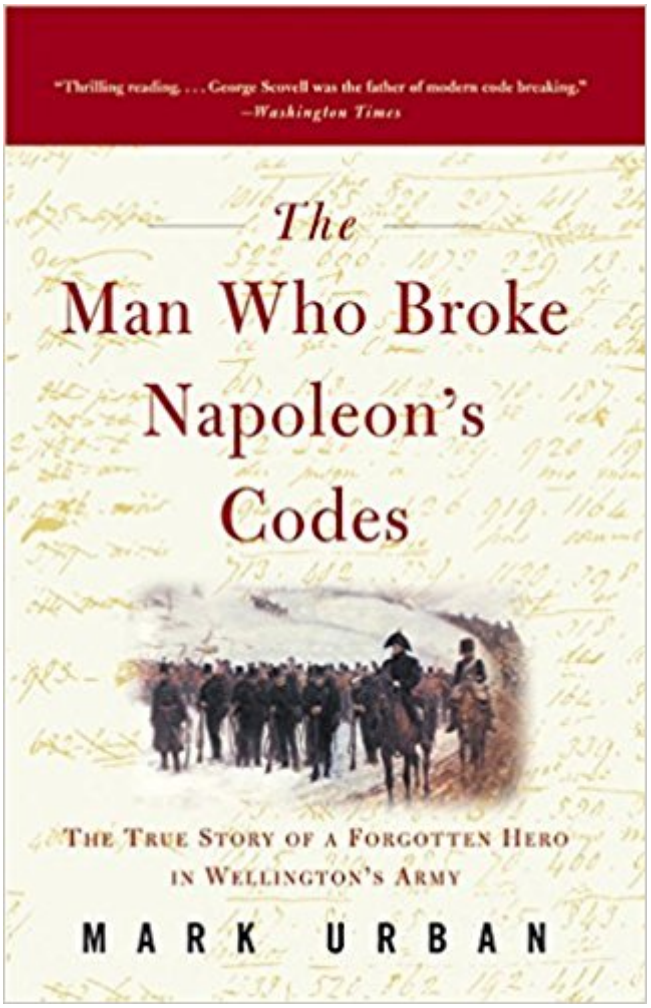
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The Man Who Broke Napoleon's Codes



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Synopsis

Spanning the battle of Corunna in 1809 to the 1815 victory at Waterloo, this is the dramatic true-life tale of an unsung hero in Wellington’s army.Common-born George Scovell -- an engraver’s apprentice -- joins the British Army during the Napoleonic Wars and becomes a commissioned officer. As Bonaparte’s juggernaut marches across Europe, Scovell soon proves himself a linguistic genius and begins to crack the basic codes used in French dispatches, giving General Wellington advance knowledge of French plans. But as the enemy changes from simple ciphers to baffling "next to impossible" encoded messages, Scovell finds himself racing against time to break the legendary "Great Paris Cipher" and save the British Army.The thrill of clashing armies, challenging puzzles, and the personal struggle of a long-forgotten hero make The Man Who Broke Napoleon’s Codes a gripping -- and brain-teasing -- adventure.

Book Information

Paperback: 384 pages

Publisher: Harper Perennial (February 18, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0060934557

ISBN-13: 978-0060934552

Product Dimensions: 5.6 x 0.9 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 60 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #879,786 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #177 inÃ Â Books > History > Military > Napoleonic Wars #1728 inÃ Â Books > History > Military > Strategy #5633 inÃ Â Books > History > Europe > Great Britain

Customer Reviews

"I am making haste to pass on the contents to 25. 13. 8. 9. 38. . . . who has ordered me to open communications with you." So reads a French dispatch captured by the British in the Peninsular Campaign against Napoleon’s armies, causing the Duke of Wellington to comment, "The devil is in the French for numbers"--and occasioning Mark Urban’s intriguing study of code making and code breaking. The early 19th-century British army was hidebound by tradition, writes Urban; elegant and well-placed gentlemen gained command, while more deserving but lower-born men languished in the ranks. Against that army, in Spain and Portugal, stood Napoleon’s forces, "the mightiest armament since the legions of ancient Rome." Thanks to one common-born officer, George Scovell,

a linguistic genius and adept solver of puzzles, Wellington's forces avoided disaster by learning of the superior enemy's plans--though, after the war, Wellington dismissed Scovell's contributions and took credit for himself and his favorite staff officers. A fine chapter in the history of intelligence and cryptography, Urban's book provides a fascinating aside to the well-documented Napoleonic Wars. --Gregory McNamee --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Alan Turing wasn't the only Brit with a genius for code cracking. The Man Who Broke Napoleon's Codes introduces readers to George Scovell, an engraver's apprentice who stumbled into a job as the Duke of Wellington's decoder and managed to unravel Bonaparte's legendary Great Paris Cipher, which contained 1,400 coded elements. Mark Urban, a BBC correspondent, chronicles Wellington's campaigns against the French from the battle of Corunna in 1809 to the 1815 victory at Waterloo, showing how Scovell's decoding of enemy communiqu s was pivotal to Napoleon's defeat. (Mar.) Copyright 2002 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Written in a narrative style, this book chronicles the secret war behind the Napoleonic campaigns in Spain from the time of the evacuation from Corunna through the final victories which sent Wellington's armies over the Pyrenees, chasing Napoleon I's supposedly invincible forces home. That Wellington was a superior general there is no doubt, but he did have his flaws -- a disdain for the common man which cost him on more than one occasion. Scovell, the man of the title, is a commoner, but without his breaking first the simpler cyphers initially used, and finally, the extraordinarily complex cypher which handed the British orders and plans, disclosed the internecine arguments between Napoleon's generals, as well as the incompetence of Bonaparte's brother Joseph, nominally the King of Spain, Britain could not have succeeded. Reading this book explained why some of the sites of specific battles were as important as they were. This is highly recommended to anyone with an interest in the Napoleonic campaigns, in espionage, or in cyphering. Just one note -- the maps are VERY hard to see on a Kindle! I had to pull them up on my computer to figure out what they said -- clearly, the graphics were not optimized for smaller screens!

Not near as much code breaking as I anticipated, in fact I would say none in first third of book. However, it does say it is about the man who did it and I suppose it was and needed to start as early as it did. The book started with a horrible awful scene of killing horses during a retreat that seemed a good way to get folk to stop reading, just brutal. The rest went on with a nice casual style that was

very easy to read. Engaging, but not as code driven as I expected

Should have been titled something along the lines of _Spain in the Napoleonic Wars_ or _Wellington in Spain_, since Napoleon has no presence in Spain and almost none in the book, and the partial breaking of the French codes seems to play no more part in the war than the reports of spies and scouts. The British general Wellington plays a larger part in the book (appropriately) than the codebreaker Scovell. It is an interesting account of the Peninsular War but if you're expecting a story about codebreaking you will be disappointed.

Interesting history at the beginning of modern military (and later commercial) organization. In the late 1700's, Napoleon began to use Line and Staff organizations. The British were forced to follow suit in the Portuguese and Spanish campaigns to defeat him. Gen. Arthur Wellesley (later the Duke of Wellington) was a follower of aristocratic tradition, but eventually had to empower his commoner staff officers.This book looks at George Scoville, one of Wellesley's Assistant Quartermasters, who specialized in what today would be Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence (C3I). The modern equivalent would be a G2 officer. With the support of his small group of couriers and the cooperation of Portuguese and Spanish guerrillas, he began to read Napoleon's mail. It's a good tale of military history, with a lot of focus on British elitism and class consciousness. Many of the problems faced in 1813 are the same ones large organizations face today.

Interesting insight into primitive state of use of codes at the time. Also interesting insight into the Peninsular Wars, the personalities and the nature of Armies a t the time. Nothing spectacular, but solid enough. Worth the sale price.

Clearly written, this book sheds light on an aspect of warfare of the time that I had not paid attention to in all my 40+ years of studying military history of the Napoleonic period. Besides the main topic, I also picked up nuances about the British officer corps, the makeup of Wellington's staff, and the campaigns in Spain. This is a fascinating book for serious students of war. The casual reader will not get much out of it, as it assumes an elevated background in military studies. However, the code and code-breaking sections were written so that a reader sites not need a technical background to understand them.

I'm well read on the subject, and this was an amazing journey. What an advantage being able to

read enemy dispatches. I knew the Spanish armies were useless but learned how effective the guerrilla warfare was in keeping the French in the dark. And the Portuguese army was almost more disciplined than the British. Discovering how self centered and focused on conservatism, power mongering and anti the attempts by nonnobles to improve the army Wellington was - not much of a shock, a hero he wasn't, just sad. It's not just the ranks he let starve. He let down his officers as well. The details of the ciphers was great fun, and Scovell was a worthy vehicle for the overall story. Highly recommended.

I really didn't know much about the Napoleonic Wars, much less the Iberian campaigns or the codes, so I enjoyed finding out about those things. I think the author does a good job of conveying how the cracking was managed, and introducing the main characters to the history on both sides, their personalities and motivations, and how those things played out over the campaigns, and the crucial role of the code cracking. Fascinating how important it was that so many of the English officers had a pretty darned good fluency in French, and how essential that was. Makes you wish more English speakers were interested in really learning other languages now, especially here in the US.

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