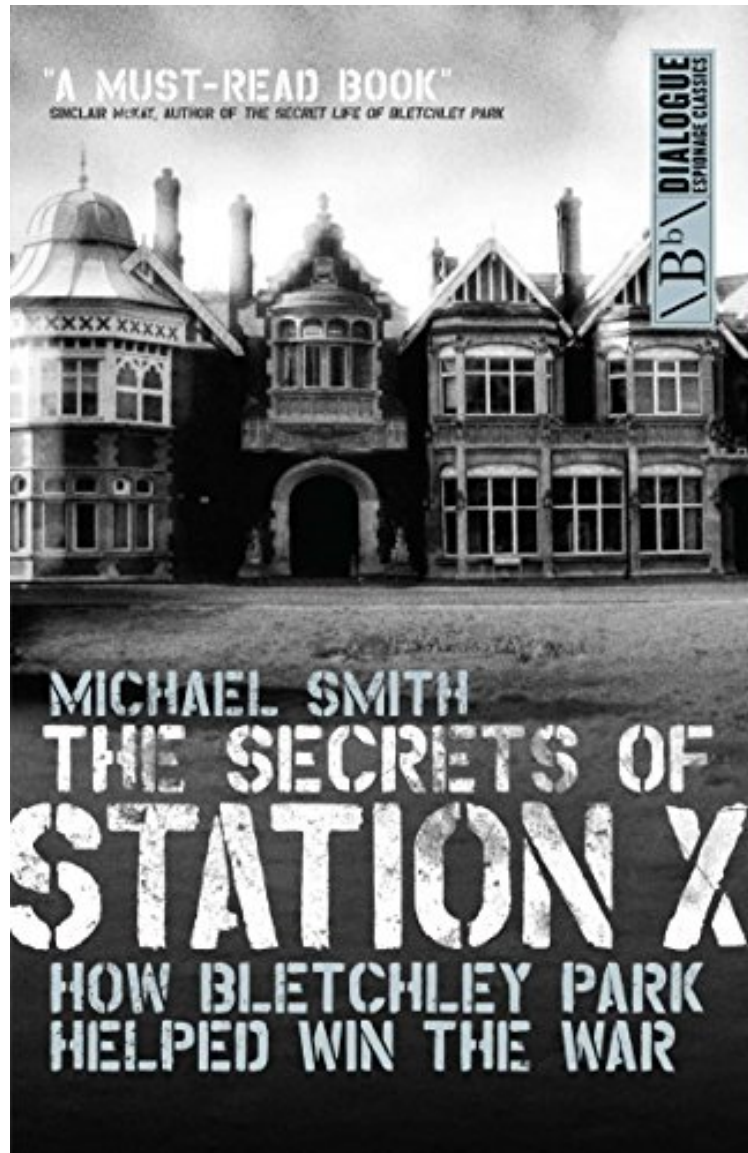


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## The Secrets of Station X: The Fight to Break the Enigma Cypher (Dialogue Espionage Classics)

Michael Smith

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**Michael Smith : The Secrets of Station X: The Fight to Break the Enigma Cypher (Dialogue Espionage Classics)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Secrets of Station X: The Fight to Break the Enigma Cypher (Dialogue Espionage Classics):

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Cryptography, Cryptanalysis, Computer Engineering and

IntelligenceBy Arthur LampertStation X a history of the British effort to decrypt the secret foreign military and diplomatic traffic of the Germans, Russians and Japanese. As a history, it begins with the roots of this effort during World War I and the inter-war period. My interest in this topic is due to my interest in computer security, and the story of Bletchley Park ("Station X") is a nexus of events in cryptography, cryptanalysis and computer engineering. And of course of the craft of intelligence. The book makes clear that the encryption implemented by Enigma was or would have been practically unbreakable, were it not for the mistakes that the Germans made in implementation. The substitutions were not truly random. Letter and letter pair frequency in German were not completely randomized. The codes were vulnerable to known plain text attacks: Standard message texts were used repeatedly. Messages were sometimes sent in weaker ciphers that had already been broken, providing further known plain texts. This book provides real-life examples for students of cryptography about to strengthen ciphers and how to attack them. The Bletchley park code breakers were also assisted by German faults in key initialization and propagation. Soldiers in the field used non-random, guessable initialization sequences. And eventually, code books with random keys were captured. All of these factors made what was certainly a monumentally challenging task of code breaking possible. No one should underestimate the manual work that went into the cryptanalysis, to reverse engineer each modification to the Enigma engines, to identify the daily keys based on partial texts and garbled interceptions. The code breakers were hard working geniuses, worthy of respect from generations of cryptologists. Another important achievement of the Bletchley group and their supporters was the introduction of machinery to speed up the trial and error matching of the possible substitution and scrambling sequences. Some were designed by memorable names such as Turing, but others were invented by engineers at the Postal Service. The Bletchley code breakers built on a history of prior achievement. The talent and skills of the British began with the Foreign Office code breaking efforts during World War I. And the first to decipher Enigma codes were Polish scientists who shared their understanding and methods with the British during the run-up to World War II. I enjoyed the level of detail and biography in the book, and the flow of history it depicts. I would have appreciated more description on the manual methods used to break the codes, before the machines came into use, and that were required on a daily basis to determine the keys as they were changed. There is a 4 part BBC documentary from 1999 also called Station X. Many of the same people were interviewed for the documentary and for the book, and many of the quotes are identical. Nevertheless, the visual presentation of the documentary and the detail of the book are complementary. The documentary is available on YouTube. I recommend both.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Awful boringBy E. NelsonI was betrayed by the folks who gave this book 5 stars....this book is horrendously dry and boring. If I read a good book in bed at night, I will stay up all night reading because I am interested. This book, by contrast, put me to sleep in about 30 seconds every time I tried reading it. The book basically talks about the people who worked at Bletchely park and their personalities. Very little about the enigma machine or how the code was broken. It reads like a soap opera, very touchy feely with lots of focus on the emotions of the people at Bletchley park. In addition, almost every single page has a long one paragraph first person quotation which completely breaks up the flow of the book. Would have been much better to simply paraphrase. I tried for several weeks and gave up; just could not read more than 3-4 pages at a time without being bored out of my mind.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Station X and Ultra A microcosm of the highest intellectual lifeBy HawkeyeIn preparation to a trip to Bletchley Park (BP) this year I obtained this book to provide background and to understand more about this aspect of WW II. To my surprise this was the underling factor that contributed to winning the war. Michael Smith does an extraordinary job of compiling many interviews, diaries, correspondence and records of BP and chronologically organizes the material into a story that is easily followed. I was especially interested in the Bismarck, Operation Barbarossa, Dieppe, U Boat North Atlantic War, Sword Operation of North Africa, Overlord, and Double Cross which BP played decisive and significant parts in each. Reading the Nazi mail allowed the Allies to play them like a fiddle! By way of attrition then at Normandy siege warfare the Allies were able to overcome the Nazi advantage in short time, all through Ultra. Although I have read a great deal about the Enigma machine and still do not totally comprehend its working, the chapter on Colossus, the first computer, developed at BP provides more understanding. This book does provide the importance of Station X and the individuals who interacted there. It appears from this account the UK Nerds won WW II.

When the British military commandeered Bletchley Park in 1939 no one would have guessed that by 1945 its inmates would have contributed decisively to the Allied war effort. A melting pot of Oxbridge dons and maverick oddballs worked night and day at Station X to decode the Enigma cypher used by the Germans for high-level communications. That they succeeded, changing the course of the war, is testament to an indomitable spirit that wrenched British intelligence into the modern age, as World War II segued into the Cold War.

About the AuthorMichael Smith is a former military intelligence officer and award-winning journalist and author. He is the author of many books, including most recently, Six: A history of Britain's secret intelligence services.