The Psychology of Western Military Codes

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Abstract

Codes have been used for thousands of years. While "codes" is a general term that is acceptable to describe all kinds of hidden meanings, really there are two important concepts to know. A cipher mixes the letters themselves, while a code mixes up the message on a word level. Although codes were originally developed for military purposes, civilians have borrowed encoding techniques for a wide variety of purposes including love letters and computer languages.
The Psychology of Western Military Codes

Throughout world history, military codes have been used by nearly all civilizations. This paper will explore some of the psychology behind codes used by the west’s militaries and how they aided in warfare.

The ability to decipher the code of the enemy enabled the allies to get the upper hand in WWII. American historian Thomas Powers (2001) wrote the following:

The American ability to read Japanese cables, code-named Magic, was one of the small advantages that helped the Allies win time and then the war. Another was the British ability to read the German military communications enciphered with the Enigma machine, code-named Ultra. (p. 2)

If it had not been for this secret coding, perhaps the outcome of the second World War would have been dramatically different. Yet it

Since the information unveiled was so critical, the cryptoanalysts literally saved the day.

In Victorian England, strict parents made it hard for lovers to communicate with each other. “Lovers would have to invent their own ciphers, which they used to publish notes in newspapers” (Wilson, 1987, p. 115).

Charles Babbage’s Contribution

Charles Babbage loved to read the paper and try to solve the codes. Once, he saw a message from a student inviting his girlfriend to elope. Babbage wrote in their code and advised them not to act so rashly. The girl soon wrote and asked her boyfriend not to write again because their code had been discovered (cited in Frank & Frank, 2001).

Considering Babbage’s contribution to the development of the
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(T. T. Williams, personal communication, April 14, 2002)

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