



Royal Navy Codes and Ciphers in the Napoleonic Wars

Harvey G. Cragon

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Between 1775 and 1800 the navies of England, France and the young United States undertook major improvements in their methods of message signaling. This booklet examines the work of Royal Navy officers that resulted in a first rate code book and a method of superencipherment. Fortunately for the British, this new tool was available for use in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.

A simple superencipherment was used not to protect messages from an enemy but to keep messages private between an admiral and his captains. Admiral Sir Home Popham was the author of the series of code books adopted by the Royal Navy. Selected pages from his code books are reproduced here.

There is disagreement on which flags were flown in Lord Nelson's famous message, "England expects every man to do his duty". Which code book was used? Was this message superenciphered? These questions are examined.

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