when discussing plane crashes, van Riper shows convincingly how important a role live coverage has played in raising our awareness of aviation tragedies.

The same wish for deeper analysis stems from his intriguing discussion of plane crash movies. Van Riper rightfully suggests that the stereotype of the passenger saving the flight relates directly to our psychological wish to master our fates. The many films he lists throughout his book tend to confirm this, but only in the conclusion does he touch on the central draw of such material (without specifying it). What attracts spectators is in fact the clichéd train wreck phenomenon: a morbid fascination prevents us from looking away.

Overall then, van Riper's selection of materials from such a wide array of sources is excellent. There are occasional misspellings of proper nouns, which would confuse a lay reader wishing to learn more. The tools of analysis, including the placement of aviation within wider popular cultural frames (from song to political campaigning), are generally limited. Perhaps a somewhat tighter focus would have done a better job of conveying van Riper's factual information. Nonetheless, his final point about aviation being a symbol of power, whether real or imagined, suggests a valuable base from which to teach students the fascination with aviation's technological sublime, or even to pursue advanced inquiry into its many facets.

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The Reader of Gentlemen's Mail: Herbert O. Yardley and the Birth of American Codebreaking. By David Kahn. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-300-09846-4. Photographs. Illustrations. Figures. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. xxi, 318. $32.50.

It is perhaps fitting that the life of Herbert O. Yardley, an American pioneer in the secretive field of cryptology and the man who founded the United States's first permanent organization to intercept signals and break codes, has remained largely shrouded in mystery. Until now, Yardley has never had a biographer. Thanks to David Kahn, he will never need another. Just as Yardley revealed the secrets of American codebreaking in his 1931 bestseller *The American Black Chamber,* Kahn has laid bare the triumphs and failures of Yardley's life in this definitive biography of one of the most important figures in the history of American intelligence.

Kahn not only traces the fascinating arc of Yardley's life but also explains why it mattered. He argues that Yardley's principal contribution was to institutionalize codebreaking in the United States. As the leader of MI-8 in the War Department during World War I and of the Cipher Bureau jointly funded by the War and State Departments from 1919 to 1929, Yardley transformed cryptology from a black art into a science. In the process, he gave the United States a new source of intelligence that often provided information otherwise

unobtainable. Yardley's greatest triumph was the Cipher Bureau's reading of Japanese diplomatic codes during the 1921 Washington Conference on the Limitation of Armament. The decrypted telegrams revealed Japan's willingness to accept the tonnage ratio for capital ships proposed by the United States and Great Britain. Their resolve bolstered, the U.S. negotiators waited until Japan agreed to the figure they had suggested. The efforts of Yardley and his codebreakers helped their government save millions of dollars and ease tensions in the Pacific.

As one might expect from the author of *The Codebreakers* and a leading expert on cryptology, Kahn provides valuable insight into the process of codebreaking. He details how Yardley and his staff attacked the codes of their primary targets—Japan, Great Britain, Mexico, Germany, and the Soviet Union. Although success against British and German codes was limited and interest in Soviet codes waned, the Cipher Bureau repeatedly broke the codes of Mexico and other Latin American nations, as well as those of Japan. Even more interesting is Kahn's discussion of how codebreaking has evolved. He explains that Yardley's success was due to his administrative and management skills during an era when cryptanalysis shifted from artisanal piece work to mass production and that Yardley's career paralleled the rise of intelligence as a significant factor in international affairs.

The book is exhaustively researched; it is based on more than twenty-five interviews and material from over thirty archives in five different countries and six different languages. It is also remarkably evenhanded. Kahn examines Yardley's flaws as well as his successes. He points out that Yardley was a better executive than cryptanalyst. He also notes that Yardley's greed distracted him from taking the steps necessary to ensure the future of the Cipher Bureau, such as recruiting, training, and developing new codebreaking methods. Anyone interested in the history of codes and ciphers, intelligence, or twentieth-century international relations will find this biography of America's first official codebreaker worthwhile.

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Detachment W. By Derek Richardson. Lincolnshire, U.K.: Paul Mould Publishing, 2004. ISBN 1-58690-012-9. Maps. Illustrations. Index. Pp. 232. £12, postpaid, or $22. Available from the author, 16 Fairford Avenue, Luton, LU2 7ER, U.K. Orders in the United States may be placed with EEF LLC, 25 Murray Way, Blackwood NJ 08012 to overcome any difficulties of currency availability, or electronically through Amazon.com.

Detachment W takes its name from the Vichy French 15th Military District unit assigned after April 1941 to supervise interned Allied soldiers and airmen found in the Unoccupied Zone. With the capitulation of French armies and the withdrawal of British forces at Dunkirk, many Allied servicemen were left adrift. Where the Germans successfully rounded them up as