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# The Round Tablette

*Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)*

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**Welcome to the November session of the Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.** Tonight's speaker is David Kahn, author of *The Codebreakers* and *Seizing Enigma*, who is talking about the amazing achievement of the cracking of the German war codes.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with this annual even, a word of explanation. It was the custom of Dr. Deutsch to speak on a topic of his choosing at the November meeting. These lectures were always well attended due to his reputation. His knowledge on virtually any World War II topic was second to none. Many of his former students from the University of Minnesota came to this lecture. With his death, it was decided to remember him not only with this Round Table, but also a lecture series named after him. This is an academic lecture for the most part, without a panel of veterans.

The biggest secret of the Second World War may have been the atomic bomb, but the best kept one was ULTRA. This was the code name for the encrypted messages from the German Enigma machine. ULTRA's secrets were kept by thousands of people for almost thirty years until the publication of British Group Captain F.W. Winterbotham's book *The Ultra Secret* in 1974. (The overall American term for breaking the \ Japanese codes was MAGIC. Its usage expanded, so that ULTRA became subsumed under MAGIC.)

During the war, Winterbotham distributed the messages from the British Government Code and Cipher School at Bletchley Park but had very little to do with the success of the organization. The real genius of the organization and its triumph over the German signals intelligence was Alan Turing, who is known as the father of the modern computer. He took what his Polish predecessors invented, what they called a "bombe" and improved upon it. The "bombe" was an electromechanical device that solved the Enigma messages by rapidly testing texts against intercepts to find the correct setting of the machines tumblers from the millions of possibilities. Turing's improvements made the de-ciphering of the crypts faster, so the information could be used in military

operations.

Why didn't the Germans ever catch on to the reality that their ENIGMA machine codes were being read? A simple answer could be one that afflicts most nation-states, over-confidence. The German High Command could not conceive of the notion that ENIGMA could be broken. They did have a hint that it could be vulnerable if the message was over three hundred letters, which, in the case of naval traffic, was often true, or if the British devoted an enormous amount of time and effort to cryptanalysis. The Germans took neither of these notions seriously. They could not conceive of an organization of thousands of people and machines all dedicated to deciphering signals intelligence. Then again, maybe the Germans resisted the possibility that the British created a way to read the ENIGMA ciphers. They would have to admit their mistakes, create a new system of communication, test it, train people, and implement it all in secrecy. All this would have to be done without incurring the wrath of the Fuehrer.

The secrecy that surrounded ULTRA in the post-war years affected the reputations of several army commanders. General Erwin Rommel's success in North Africa is all the more profound because the British were reading his ENIGMA traffic. He often disobeyed his superiors in the Italian and German High commands, frustrating the analysts. On the Allied side, General George S. Patton, frequently used ULTRA intelligence to gain the advantage in his operations, while his rival British General Bernard Montgomery ignored it. History has been deservedly kind to Patton, but not so for Montgomery.

When the war ended, the British, with American cooperation, covered up ULTRA's impact on the war effort for two reasons. First, it was thought it would be best to keep the secret from any new enemies. The Soviet Union had already started to turn from its status of an ally. Second there was the idea to keep the attention away from cryptanalysis so that other countries would not develop new systems. The Japanese government continued to use their diplomatic codes until 1947 when they learned that the Americans had broken them years earlier. The British and the Americans wished to maintain their intelligence advantage.

Winterbotham's book became a bestseller in the United States and shook the staid world of

**If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)**

academic history to its core. Were all the historical works on World War II useless? These included multi-volume texts such as *The United States Army in World War II* and Winston Churchill's *The Second World War*, which mention nothing on signals intelligence. Most major commanders used all available information, including that from MAGIC, though a few did not. Thus, readers must amend the historical analyses to include the results of code breaking. The efforts at Bletchley Park made an indelible impact on the Allied Victory in Europe.

**Further Readings:**

David Kahn, *The Codebreakers* (New York: Scribners, 1996).  
 David Kahn, *Seizing Enigma* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2009).  
 F.W. Winterbotham, *The Ultra Secret* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).  
 Gordon Welchman, *The Hut Six Story* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974).  
 Ronal Lewin, *Ultra Goes to War* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978).  
 Ronald Lewin, *The American Magic* (NY: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982)  
 F.H. Hinsley & Alan Stripp, *Code Breakers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1993).  
 Hervie Haufler, *Codebreakers' Victory* (NY: New American Library, 2003),  
 Huge Sebag-Montefiore, *Enigma: the Battle for the Code* (NY: Wiley, 2000).  
 Jim DeBrosse and Colin Burke, *The Secret in Building 26: the Untold story of America's Ultra War Against the U-Boat Enigma Codes* (New York, NY: Random House, 2004).  
 Colin Burke, *Information and Secrecy: Vannevar Bush, Ultra, and the Other Memex* (Metuchen, NJ, The Scarecrow Press, 1994, out of print).

**Announcements:**

**Twin Cities Civil War Round Table** -  
 Nov. 19, 2013 – Confederate Supply System -  
[www.tccwrt.com](http://www.tccwrt.com) - info@tccwrt.com  
**St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table** - Nov. 25, 2013 – Gen. Herman Haupt, M. Mackner - 715-386-1268 – [rossandhaines@comcast.net](mailto:rossandhaines@comcast.net)  
**Rochester WWII History Round Table** –507-280-9970; [www.ww2roundtable-rochester.org](http://www.ww2roundtable-rochester.org)  
**Minnesota Military Museum**, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>  
**Air Show - Eden Prairie** - July 19-20, 2014; <http://www.airexpo-mn.org/> - 952-746-6100  
**Honor Flight** - Jerry Kyser - [crazyjerry45@hotmail](mailto:crazyjerry45@hotmail.com) - 651-338-2717  
**CAF - Commemorative Air Force** - [www.cafmn.org](http://www.cafmn.org) 651-455-6942  
**Minnesota Air Guard Museum** - [www.mnangmuseum.org](http://www.mnangmuseum.org) 612-713-2523  
**Friends of Ft. Snelling**, [www.fortsnelling.org](http://www.fortsnelling.org)

**Fagen Fighters WWII Museum**, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644, <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.

**Round Table Schedule 2013-2014**

12 Dec. Pearl Harbor  
 9 Jan. Eastern Front  
 13 Feb. Encounters with WW2 Leaders  
 13 Mar. Operation COBRA and Falaise  
 27 Mar. World War II in China  
 10 Apr. Rabaul and the SW Pacific  
 8 May Landing on Omaha Beach  
 10-27 May Tour of Normandy

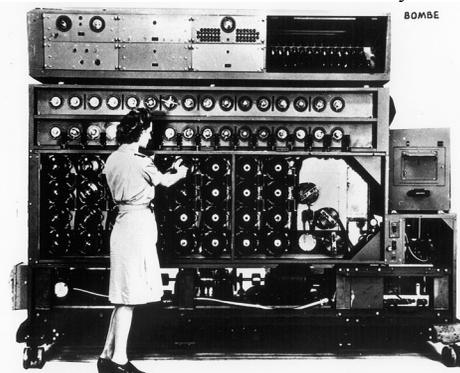
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Guderian using an ENIGMA machine on the Eastern Front, '41



The Bletchley bombe, restored



US Navy ENIGMA 4 rotor emulator "bombe"