

A WAR-WINNING DEVICE .

By Robert Williamson.

Warplane Heritage Museum had an Enigma on its hands! No it was not a mystery, a puzzle or a conundrum as in the dictionary usage of the English language, but a secret coding device about the size and appearance of an old fashion type writer. It was on display until the end of September 2019 and it was hard to believe that this seemingly unremarkable device played a role in winning World War 2 or even had a genuine connection to Hamilton's military heritage. To understand that, you must recognize that military information sent by radio can be picked up by anyone with a listening device. Therefore secret messages must be sent in code that cannot be broken. That is what a German-invented Enigma machine, was designed to do and the effect it could have had on the course of the conflict was almost incalculable.

For the first 18 months of the war, submarine attacks on North Atlantic convoys meant Britain was facing a catastrophic shortfall of food, fuel and military supplies. Then in May 1941 a German U-boat captained by Julius Lemp was depth-charged to the surface near Iceland and its vital Enigma materials were captured. This allowed British Intelligence to break the notoriously unbreakable German Naval Enigma code and read daily submarine and surface warship reports that included their position. This enabled the British navy to track down and sink the formidable German battleship Bismark as well as divert convoys around submarine concentrations. Consequently there were few convoy sightings by submarines for the rest of 1941, a feat considered to be one of the decisive points in the war.

And what was the Hamilton connection? Julius Lemp was also the submarine captain who caused wide-spread horror on the first day of the war, September 3, 1939 by torpedoing the passenger ship *SS Athenia*. Fortunately he may have realized that he had made an error in judgement and did not press home his attack. *Athenia* took several hours to sink allowing the rescue of most of the passengers. But among the 112 victims was 10-year-old Margaret Hayworth of Hamilton. She became one of the Battle of the Atlantic's first Canadian casualties. Consequently the Canadian Parliament declared war on September 9 and two months later, the U.S. Congress revised their Neutrality Act (Cash and Carry) in our favor.

However, by February 1942 Admiral Donitz of the Kriegsmarine deduced that the lack of sinkings indicated that the Nazi Naval Enigma code had been broken and he ordered an updated version called the Shark Enigma code. The vital convoys were terribly vulnerable once again during this Shark Enigma blackout which lasted for the summer and fall of 1942 when 140 merchant ships were sunk.

The code breakers, working at the Bletchley Park decoding centre north of London, desperately needed a "pinch" or capture of a Shark Enigma. Lieutenant Commander Ian Fleming (future author of 007 James Bond books) working in the Naval Intelligence Division, was assigned the task. Knowing that the Kriegsmarine headquarters in the Port of Dieppe operated a Shark Enigma, he assigned 200 Royal Marine commandos to follow the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry ashore on the August 19, 1942 Dieppe raid to seize all the navy cipher machines and code books.



A portable Shark Enigma enciphering machine

Courtesy Bletchley Park, & Getty Images

Due to ineffective suppression of enemy opposition, the raid failed and it would be over two months before another opportunity to make a "pinch" presented itself. At the end of October 1942, U-559 was depth-charged by HMS Petard and forced to the surface in the eastern Mediterranean. The Royal Navy recovered enough Shark Enigma equipment and codes to put the British code breakers back in business. That information brought about the destruction of the battle cruiser Scharnhorst in Norway's Barents Sea on December 26, 1943 and the safe arrival of many supply convoys in preparation for the 1944 D-Day Invasion of Nazi Occupied Europe and final victory for the Allies.

