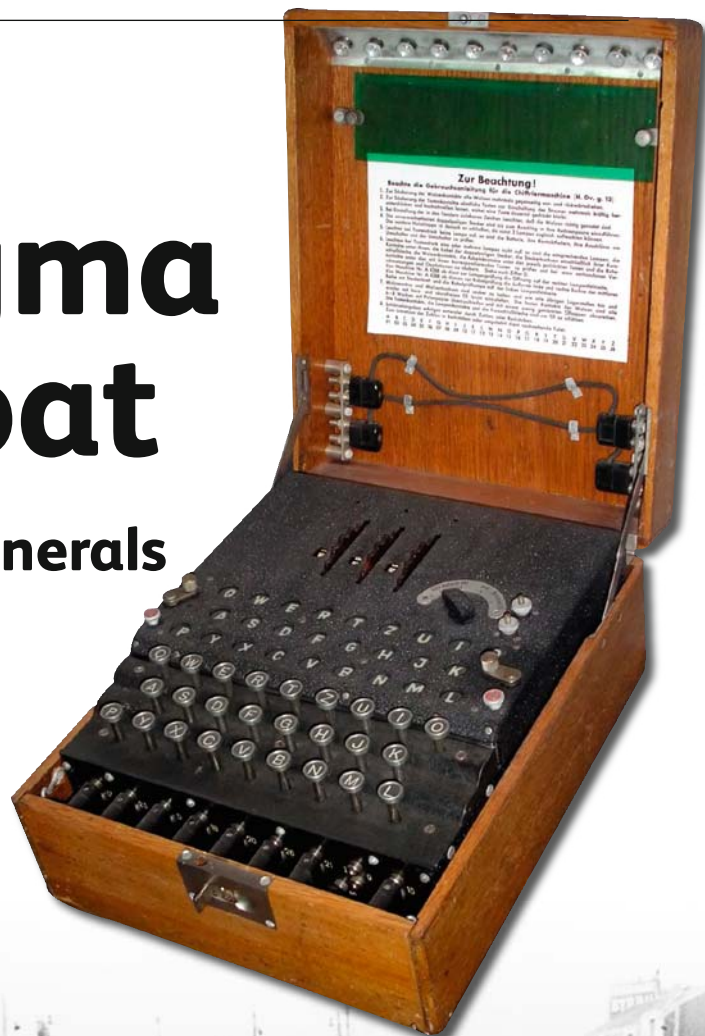


Don't let a clerical enigma sink your boat

David Hall, Vintage Lorry Funerals



During 2010 there were a number of interesting TV programmes on WW1 and some key factors that brought an end to Hitler's Third Reich. A lot of emphasis on how Britain won the war surrounds the ability to read confidential messages, sent by all levels of the German hierarchy, from Hitler down to an Unteroffizier, communicating from his dugout in embattled Stalingrad.

Germany communicated by the use of an Enigma coding machine, made up of a series of tooth-edged rotor wheels, capable of being set in many positions, that transcribed a message typed onto a keyboard into an unreadable ciphered format, unless it was received by a similar Enigma machine with the rotor wheels set in the precisely same positions. The Enigma machines with three rotor wheels had a potential of 16,900 different possible combinations for every individual letter key, when it was depressed.

The existence of the Enigma machines was verified by Captain Joe Baker-Cresswell of HMS Bulldog, a B Class Destroyer, which intercepted the U-Boat U110 south of Greenland on May 9th 1941. The crew abandoned U110 but Kapitanzursee Lemp jumped from the life-raft into the water and attempted to swim back to the stricken vessel, obviously to destroy sensitive information. He was shot in the water and one of Bulldog's crew entered the U-boat to find an Enigma machine, along with the current code books, which he covertly removed from the sinking submarine. The Nazis had assumed that the machine and its code books had gone down with the ship, however, they were on route to Bletchley Park, and specifically to Hut 8 of the Code-Breaking Team, occupied by Alan Turing and his colleagues, who were a mixture of Mathematicians and Puzzle Solvers.

The team worked on the transcripts, looking for a pattern to help them break the code and their postulations were processed using the world's first computer, which was the brainchild of Alan Turing.

Alan Turing's contribution to cracking the code is often lauded as the key factor that won



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WW11, however, in my opinion, although this is in part true, he was assisted by the Germanic obsession with communication, both in volume and structure. In order to break the code, the occupants of Hut 8 were looking for trends and one bright individual spotted that U-Boats often communicated the same message, which was correctly guessed as 'Convoy Spotted', and similar to solving a crossword, this was the first step.

Cracking the code was one thing, but the results were solely down to the Nazi need for communication in general but specifically for administration, typified by Admiral Doenitz, head of the U-Boats. Apparently Doenitz needed to know where each of his U-Boats, over 200 at that stage, were each night so the Kapitanzursee had to use their Enigma systems to communicate to a clerk, who would stick Swastika flags in vast stretches of ocean on a giant wall map. This enabled the Allies to also know precisely where each U-Boat was each night, and cut off their supply ships,

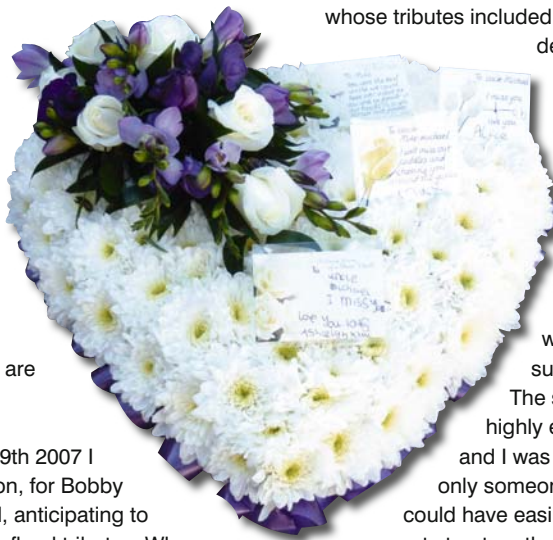
bringing fuel and provisions. They were also able to attack the U-Boats either with depth charges or an aerial bombardment scheduled to occur as the supply ship was replenishing the U-Boat on the surface. If Doenitz had simply given his U-Boats 20 torpedoes, sent them to the air gap in the mid Atlantic, and, in the parlance of a 1950s transport manager, told them to come back when they were empty, nur wurden wir Deutsch sprechen (we would now be speaking German).

My postulation is supported by the fact that at the end of the war when German forces counter-attacked, during the Battle of the Bulge, Hitler sensed the Allies had somehow cracked the Enigma system and insisted on radio silence. The Nazis caught the American Forces by surprise and it was only the shortage of fuel and clearing skies, allowing the Allies, with more superior airpower, to attack the troops, which stopped the Tiger Panzers reaching Antwerp and splitting the Allies.



Just how needless administration was the cause of the Nazi downfall, it occurred to me that administration undertaken by certain funeral directors can cause me a lot of grief. Some funeral directors don't document the floral tributes I load, however, a lot compile lists of the tributes, detailing who they are from, and some even stick red dots on the cards to clarify that the tribute has been logged and can now be loaded. Initially I was oblivious to this system and had loaded flowers before they had been documented, causing mayhem. It amazes me how diligently funeral directors stick religiously to this task, no matter what circumstances prevail, and below are two examples:

1. On November 19th 2007 I was in Carshalton, for Bobby Dudley's funeral, anticipating to load eight family floral tributes. When I arrived at Gillmans' location, it was as if a tsunami of flowers had hit the shop as there were flowers everywhere, on desks, on chairs, and you couldn't see the colour of the carpet on the floor. It was covered in flowers, through the arranging rooms, along the passageway, right out to the door. George Hards was in the process of documenting over 66 tributes, when a florist arrived and put some flowers in the wrong spot and this caused George a major



problem. At the end George had filled out three sides of A4 paper, whilst I had worn out a pair of shoes transferring the tributes onto the Leyland Beaver. George, once he had done his administration, and the Gillman team, when they arrived, were a great help to me on the day.

2. On June 23rd 2008 Doves in Orpington booked me for a funeral of a 44 year-old man who had died from Alzheimer's, whose tributes included some exquisite designs created by the florist from scratch, without the assistance of Val Spicer or Smithers Oasis. A stock-car had been designed that was very life-like, but the plastic wheels would not support the weight. The shop owner was highly embarrassed and I was livid because if only someone had rung me, I could have easily made a wooden support-structure that would have been out of sight under the car, leaving the wheels appearing to take the weight. The florist's staff were getting very emotional and normally I'm a man with a plan, but at that precise moment I was struggling. Hazell Pender, Doves funeral arranger, was totally oblivious to the problem as she was documenting the tributes with her cheery unflappable demeanour that was reminiscent of Delia Smith. However, to be fair, I think it was Hazell who suggested



the use of bricks, which luckily I had in my back-box, and this saved the day. I carry bricks with me, normally to hold down my tarpaulin when I am re-sheeting in a cemetery, on my own, with plenty of people around me but no-one able to help.

The ultimate in floral tribute documentation came when I did a funeral for Fred Stevens in Nailsworth, when James Baker told me that, not only do they document the flowers, but they actually photograph them and their cards. Sensing a conflict of interest, cognisant that I was going to be loading 'HUSBAND', I offered to be James' photographer. With a seven lettered word, such as 'GRANDAD' it is always best to load it straight onto the lorry as it takes three people to load it, me on the deck holding one end, and two people on the ground gradually moving it towards me, before placing their end of the tribute into the wooden buttress, whilst I perform a similar task at my end. Often funeral directors don't have more than one person present until the coffin is due to load, so when a large tribute arrives it is best not to document it, but load it immediately, using the florist's delivery man as the third man and then to document it. My philosophy is - please always put administration in its appropriate place and learn from Admiral Doenitz, don't let administration interfere with the operation.