

NEWS RELEASE

War veterans reunited with Enigma code breaker

World's only Bombe machine at Bletchley Park honoured with heritage award

19 March 2009

War heroes will be reunited with the engineering masterpiece that played a crucial part in cracking the Nazi Enigma codes and ultimately saved the lives of thousands. They will watch the Bombe machine at Bletchley Park, Milton Keynes, receive a special Engineering Heritage Award on **Tuesday 24 March at the park in Milton Keynes at 12 noon.**

This will be the 48th such award given by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMEchE). All 210 original machines, built by engineering masterminds at the British Tabulator Machine Company at Letchworth, were destroyed after the war but blueprints found at Bletchley back in 1970s started a mammoth mission to recreate a replica Bombe. It took a staggering 13 years, and funding from a host of groups such as the British Computer Society, to finish the project. Volunteer John Harper, led the rebuild team.

It was the Enigma Code film, starring Kate Winslet, which brought the magical story alive of the code breakers. Thought up by genius mathematical genius' Alan Turing and Gordon Welchman the concept was then passed onto BTM who developed and built them. Bombes were manufactured at the rate of one a week and its 99.9% accuracy was vital in the decoding process which sometimes meant up to 5,000 messages a day could be broken!

The electro-mechanical devices were deployed across a handful of secret army establishments in Britain where scores of mostly young women would work on cracking and deciphering cryptic messages sent over the air by the Germans – who defiantly believed their intelligence and engineering machinery was far superior to Britain's. In fact, they didn't even know Bletchley existed or that some of the country's most intelligent and brave young men and women – mostly handpicked from universities or debutante families – were decoding vital messages. Initially the odds of cracking the codes were a staggering 158,000,000,000,000,000 to 1 (that's a 158 million, million, million to one!!). But succeed they did.

A live demonstration of the Bombe in action will take place at the award ceremony at noon.

It is now widely acknowledged that the Bombe indeed cut the War short by two years and thus saved the lives of thousands.

Simon Greenish, CEO of the Bletchley Park Trust, said: "The Bombe is just one of a number of incredible historic pieces we are proud to hold. Unfortunately, many of our iconic buildings at the park are now so dilapidated that within two years they could be lost. By raising awareness of projects like the Bombe we are highlighting how important the Park is and remembering just how indebted we are to the brilliant minds of the men and women who worked here. We are delighted that we can reunite some of those people with the Bombe."

The Park will need a further £4million to renovate its buildings and donations are urgently being sought.

ENDS

Notes to Editors/Background

- Journalists are invited to film/interview at the photocall via the IMechE Press Office on 020 7304 6877/07730644134 or email media@imeche.org . For more information on donating funds to Bletchley Park please visit www.bletchleypark.org.uk Pictures available upon request.
- The IMechE first established its EHS (Engineering Heritage Scheme) back in 1984 in recognition of objects/artefacts/locations of significant mechanical engineering importance. To win an award the object must be industrially innovative; be associated with a person or event, which has made a significant contribution to society and/or mechanical engineering, or possess a unique feature, by being a prototype or only surviving example. The award is in recognition of the original Bombe and how its 'ultra' intelligence meant that all had to be destroyed on security grounds. It was only in the 1970s, decades after the War ended, that the Bombe was revealed.
- The Enigma machine was used by the Germans during WWII to encipher messages within the Army, Navy and Luftwaffe. It worked by using a series of cross-wired wheels to convert each letter into a cipher. After each letter the wheel position changed. The Bombe worked by testing every combination of wheel settings until a match occurred.

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