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DAILY ENTERPRISE



(U) HISTORY TODAY - 18 November 2014

Run Date(s): 11/18/2014



(U) On **November 14, 2014**, *History Today* examined the cryptologic urban myth about the WWII bombing of Coventry. This mistaken belief claims that British prime minister Winston Churchill had advance warning from decrypts that the Germans intended to bomb the city of Coventry but did nothing out of the ordinary to evacuate the city or provide extra air defense measures because such actions would reveal to the Germans the extent to which Britain could read their encrypted communications.

(U) The damage to Coventry Cathedral and other historic sites has been iconic in testifying to the horrors of World War II.

(U) The Coventry story was for years believed to be true. It was even used in training within the U.S. intelligence community to show how important the secret of Allied COMINT was in World War II, and, by inference, the need to protect current secrets at all costs.

 HISTORY TODAY - 18 Nov. 2014 (Frederick Winterbotham's unauthorized book, *The ULTRA Secret* and Sir Harry Hinsley's *British Intelligence in the Second World War*.)

(U) The Coventry story first entered popular culture with the publication in 1974 of Frederick Winterbotham's unauthorized book, *The ULTRA Secret*. The author, who had been involved in distributing ULTRA decrypts during the war, wrote the book against the wishes of the UK government and without access to any documents.

Working strictly from his memory, Winterbotham included several myths in his book, including the Coventry story.

(U) Later, document-based histories, including Sir Harry Hinsley's multivolume *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, which cited documents to refute the Coventry myth, did not have the wide readership that Winterbotham's book did. Their accurate refutation of the Coventry myth simply didn't get around the way the myth circulated.

(U) Worse, two popular television programs have perpetuated the Coventry myth.

(U) In 1995, in an episode of the science fiction series *Babylon 5* ("In the Shadow of Z'ha'dum"), the space station commander, Captain John Sheridan, needs to explain the worth of keeping a secret. To do this, he repeats the Coventry story as fact.

(U) In an episode of the British TV series *Sherlock* ("A Scandal in Belgravia"), a re-imagining of the Arthur Conan Doyle stories, Holmes also repeats the Coventry story to his friend, Dr. Watson. He says that it probably isn't true, but this disclaimer is said under his breath and given much less emphasis than the myth itself.

(U) These programs are being re-run on broadcast channels, and are available on DVD. As long as this is the case, which may well extend into eternity, it will be nigh impossible to suppress the Coventry Myth.

Approved for Release by NSA on 04-12-2019, FOIA Case # 84783

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

Doc ID: 6660632

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Information Owner
Page Publisher
Last Modified: November 18, 2014
Last Reviewed: November 18, 2014

~~DERIVED FROM: NSA/CSSM 1-52, DATED: 20180110, DECLASSIFY ON: 20430110~~
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