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# DAILY ENTERPRISE



## (U) HISTORY TODAY - 1 Sept 2015 - The Imitation Game

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(U) One of the principal characters in the movie *The Imitation Game* is Peter Hilton, pictured, a young codebreaker who is part of the team, including Alan Turing, Hugh Alexander, John Cairncross, and Joan Clarke, that is trying to find a way to solve the German ENIGMA machine.



(U) SPOILER, IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN THE MOVIE --- Once the team has solved the ENIGMA, Turing decides to withhold information they have found in a decrypt about a German submarine attack on a British convoy. Turing does this to prevent the enemy from figuring out that the British have broken the ENIGMA; a few lives had to be sacrificed to protect a secret source that will make a major difference over time in the war and save even more lives. However, Peter Hilton realizes that his brother is on the convoy, and that withholding a warning will mean his brother's death. This causes him to rail at Turing, and later commit physical harassment.

(U) We'll get back to that in a moment.

(U) Hilton began his studies at Queen's College, Oxford, in 1940, and knew that he would be called up to active duty in the artillery in August 1942. He later wrote that, based on his military training experiences at Oxford, he knew that "if I was conscripted into the Royal Artillery, I would almost certainly die young -- of sheer boredom!" He wanted something intellectually challenging.

(U) Hilton's tutor at Oxford learned that a team of government recruiters were visiting, looking for mathematicians who knew "modern European languages" (read, German). He recommended that Hilton interview with the team; Hilton did and was accepted, although he was not told the nature of the work he would be doing. His assignment came through -- to Bletchley Park.

(U) One of the first people he met at Bletchley was Alan Turing, who asked Hilton if he played chess. With an affirmative answer, Turing recruited Hilton to help him solve a difficult chess problem. They became friends, and stayed friends to the end of Turing's life.

(U) Hilton was assigned to the German Navy ENIGMA problem, working against "Offizier" messages, which were double encrypted. Later in his time at Bletchley, Hilton worked against German messages enciphered on the TUNNY machine, a sophisticated device used to encrypt the communications of high-level German commanders.

(U) One of the people he worked with at Bletchley Park was Professor Henry Whitehead, a mathematics don from Oxford. At the end of the war, Whitehead recruited Hilton to become his doctoral student, studying algebraic topology. When Hilton asked him what that was, Whitehead replied, "Don't worry, Peter. You'll love it!"

(U) Hilton did love it. He earned his D.Phil from Oxford in 1949. He held teaching positions in both the UK and the U.S.: University of Birmingham, the University of Washington, Case Western Reserve University, and Binghamton University. He was author or co-author of many books and articles on topology.

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

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(U) Peter Hilton passed away in 2010.

(U) Hilton is also author of [one of the longest palindromes around](#).

(U) Returning to *The Imitation Game*. First, Peter Hilton had a brother, a lawyer, but there is no indication he was ever on a convoy in danger from German U-boats.

(U) Two other points. First, the analysts at Bletchley Park had absolutely no role in determining the distribution of their decrypts. The movie is flat wrong when it has Turing and a few colleagues "playing God" by selectively releasing decrypts so that the Germans would not get suspicious by Allied successes in eluding their submarine attacks.

(U) More importantly, there is no evidence that intelligence was withheld from those who needed it. Let me shout this out: THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT ANYBODY PERISHED BECAUSE SIGINT WAS WITHHELD. Yes, there are several cryptologic urban legends to the contrary, sometimes repeated by people who seem to be in a position to know the truth, but these stories are not true.

(U) [Read about these urban legends here](#).

(U) Decision makers who had access to inside information on the enemy through decrypts, whether from UK or U.S. sources, were required to take deceptive actions to hide their source of intelligence. This often took the form of aggressive reconnaissance or patrolling, but might also consist of other cover stories.

(U) Thousands of people lived, not died, because of decrypts in World War II.

(U) To discuss historical topics with interesting folks, visit the Center for Cryptologic History's blog, [History Rocks](#) ("go history rocks").

(U) Have a question or comment on *History Today*? Contact us at [DL cch](#) or

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