



Press Release

The myth surrounding the World War II cipher machine Enigma: An endless story

Zurich, June 18, 2008 (DL) – Even today, more than 60 years after the end of World War II, the story of the German cipher machine Enigma and its decryption by the British during the war fascinates professionals as well as the general public. A new publication „Mythos Enigma – die Chiffriermaschine als Sammler- und Medienobjekt“ by Swiss media specialist Dominik Landwehr explores this fascination and also looks into the Swiss aspect of this story.

The story of the German cipher machine Enigma is often presented as one of the great mysteries of World War II. England successfully kept the fact that the machine had been deciphered a secret until 1974. Before this date there is really no literature available on the subject apart from some technical descriptions, not a word on this great operation of the British Secret Service involving at times up to 10'000 people, among them such brilliant minds as renowned mathematician Alan Turing.

Switzerland also used Enigma machines

Mythos Enigma illustrates on the basis of previously unpublished documents that Switzerland used the Enigma cipher machine during World War II. Luckily for the country there were not many real secrets that had to be transmitted. Swiss radio messages were not only read by the Germans, who had sold the machines to the Swiss, but also by the British and Americans!

Scientists – Contemporary witnesses – Collectors

Mythos Enigma is not really a historical but rather an ethnographic study in very different environments. Apart from scientists – especially historians and mathematicians - contemporary witnesses play a decisive role. Amazingly they all adhered to the decreed secrecy and only began to talk after 1974 – with the permission of the British government. And only after this date the Enigma cipher machine became an interesting collector's item. The collectors constitute the third important social group to uphold the myth of the Enigma.

Books, films, computer simulations

Just as varied as the social impact of Enigma are the traces left in various media by this machine: not unexpectedly a layperson involved in the deciphering operation, F. W. Winterbotham, and not a scientist was the first person to break the officially ordered silence. It is difficult to keep track of the flood of publications that have appeared since and it is not surprising that the bestselling novel *Enigma* by Robert Harris was also turned into a movie.





Museum, Simulation, Re-Enactment

It follows that museums are also increasingly interested in the subject. Some of the most interesting effects documented in the book are computer simulations of Enigma ciphering and deciphering operations. A special type of simulation are the re-enactments by some people in living history presentations of the story of the Enigma. In these living history re-enactments, which are especially popular in anglo-saxon countries, it is important to use mostly original props. Bletchley Park, where the Enigma was deciphered during the war, has been turned into a museum and it may happen that on a weekend a visitor will encounter a band of German Wehrmacht soldiers operating an Enigma machine in a dugout.

A modern myth

The motives of scientists, collectors and contemporary witnesses may differ, yet their efforts seem to mysteriously reconvene in the end. Something similar can be said of fiction and films that deal with the subject. There are many reasons why the Enigma story has developed such a strong impact. One reason is the fact that Enigma played an important role in the history of the computer.

The author

Dominik Landwehr (born 1958) studied German literature and ethnology in Zurich. He worked as radio journalist and delegate for the International Committee of the Red Cross. Since 1998 he is head of the pop music and new media department of the Migros cultural percentage in Zurich. The book „Mythos Enigma“ was accepted as doctoral thesis in 2007 by the *Faculty of Philosophy and History Fakultät* of Basle University.

Book orders

Can be placed directly with the publisher transcript-Verlag in Bielefeld, Germany.
www.transcript-verlag.de - presse@transcript-verlag.de. – Tel. +49 (0)521 39 37 97 52

Enigma-Day in Basle

On Saturday, November 8, a big Enigma-Day will take place in the Basle Medienkunstforum [plug.in] as part of the lecture series digitalbrainstorming organized by the Migros cultural percentage. In addition to the Enigma, the Swiss cipher machine Nema as well as a Russian Fialka will be displayed. The guest speaker - Swiss mystery and thriller author Peter Zeindler – will talk about cipher machines from the point of view of the novelist.

Information on the Enigma-Day in Basle:

www.digitalbrainstorming.ch/programm/mythosenigma

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Further information

www.mythos-enigma.ch – photos in high resolution for download and publication.

