

They were young lovers, caught up in World War II. She took part in codebreaking efforts. He fought in Poland and France. The three main characters are fictitious. However, most of the novel is based on historical events.

The Last Good War: A Novel

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# **THE LAST GOOD WAR**

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With the exception of the historical figures mentioned in Chapter 25, the characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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Enigma machine at National Cryptologic Museum, Ft. Meade, Maryland

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**THE  
LAST  
GOOD  
WAR**

**A Novel**

**Paul Wonnacott**

# 1

## Enigma

**26 January, 1929. 17:47. Post Office Central, Warsaw.**

**M**aczek had never considered himself anything but a simple postal clerk. He had never met a senior military officer. Certainly never a senior German officer, and certainly never one so flustered and out of breath.

"I'm the military attaché of the German Republic," said Streicher, sucking in his stomach, standing on his toes and stretching to make himself look taller than his pudgy five foot, five inches. "I'm here for a package which came in today, addressed to the embassy. This wide." He held out his hands, about two feet apart.

Strange. Most diplomatic mail, Maczek knew, was carried by courier; it never got near a post office. What could possibly be so important? He looked impassively at the portly but authoritarian figure dressed in the impeccable uniform of—what was he, a major or colonel? This, he thought, is the time to play strictly by the book.

"Sorry, sir, but deliveries must be made directly to the address on the label, or picked up by authorized personnel."

Col. Streicher slid his identification card through the wicket.

"Sorry, sir," said Maczek, checking his list. "Only two people are authorized to pick up mail from the embassy's postal box—Schultz and Nagel."

"But *they're* only clerks," Streicher huffed. "*I'm* their boss."

"I'm certain you are, sir. But you can understand. We can't release mail without the signature of one of them." Maczek continued deferentially; the German's temper was rising, and Maczek wanted to avoid an outburst. "We can't allow even a very senior person, such as you, sir, to pick up mail that may be intended for the ambassador."

"I insist on seeing your supervisor.... And I need to use a phone."

"Of course, sir," said Maczek, pointing to a phone in the corner and disappearing into the back room. Maczek and his supervisor, Klimecki, soon found the package. With it were a few letters.

The package was heavy, wrapped in brown paper, sealed with glue and twine. Klimecki shook it gingerly; it didn't rattle. Carrying it carefully, he retreated to his office. Through the open door, Maczek saw him cross the room to his phone and turn the crank.

As Maczek trailed his boss back into the main lobby, Streicher was berating a young man. Maczek recognized him as one of the two clerks authorized to pick up the mail. Maczek knew enough German to understand the clerk's meek reply: he had already been on his way to the post office, for the regular, final pickup of the day, just before closing.

As he spotted the two Poles, Streicher quickly faded into the background, nodding to his clerk, who approached the wicket. Maczek handed over the letters, asking the German to sign.

When he saw only the thin letters, Streicher was suddenly back at the wicket, loudly insisting that the Poles produce the package.

Klimecki took over from Maczek. "I'm sorry sir, but it's not here."

"It *must* be. It was on the train that arrived in Warsaw at 2:00 p.m."

"That's possible sir, but it still isn't here. Sometimes packages are handled separately from letters; they're sorted later."

"You mean it may be in your back room, among the unsorted mail?"

"Perhaps, sir, or it could still be at the train station."

"Then I insist you look for it among your unsorted mail."

"Sorry sir, but we can't do that. It's already past closing time."

"But I insist." The pink in Streicher's face was turning to red; he was clearly struggling, with only partial success, not to shout at the cool, unhelpful clerk. "You want a diplomatic incident? I'll give it to you. *I'm* a friend of the postmaster general."

"Very well, sir, we'll see if we can find it." Klimecki tried to suppress a grin; the postmaster general had died eight months ago, and his replacement had not yet been chosen. As Streicher's anger rose, Klimecki became more certain that he had made the right decision, to hold the package and call Polish military intelligence. He

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and Maczek retreated to the back room, where they broke out a new deck of cards and Maczek dealt. Klimecki sat impassively, hiding his joy at the three aces in the corner of his hand. Perhaps this would indeed be his lucky day.

The two began to speculate casually on what might be inside the wrapper. Secret war plans? Unlikely. New electronic equipment to intercept Polish radio communications? A new set of burglar tools, to break into government offices? Anything like that, and intelligence should know.

After thirty minutes, Klimecki returned to inform the Germans: After a diligent search, they could assure the Colonel that they simply did not have the package. Undoubtedly it would arrive Monday. Would the Colonel like to have it sent by special messenger to his embassy?

As Streicher stormed out the front door, intelligence officers were already coming in through the rear. The package was indeed important. In it was a coding machine, with ENIGMA stenciled on its cover. Working nonstop from Saturday evening until the early hours of Monday, they carefully disassembled it, taking numerous pictures of the three rotors at the top, and making detailed notes. Then they meticulously reassembled and resealed it, exactly the way it had come. A pristine package, ready for delivery on Monday.

**8 November, 1931. The *Grand Hotel*. Verviers, Belgium.**

**H**ans Thilo Schmidt sat on the side of his bed. Beads of sweat were forming on his brow, in spite of the chill in the room. He snuggled his briefcase close to his hip, occasionally reaching inside to reassure himself that the manuals were still there.

He could still go back. But it would have to be within the next fifteen minutes. Then it would be too late. He would be in the clutches of the *Deuxième Bureau* for life. Or death.

His panic gave way to anger. That stupid woman. He was hopelessly in love with her. But it wasn't just her; he simply loved women. Why couldn't she realize, even a married man must have his flirtations, his little games? He could understand her shock, the first time she stumbled across him with the maid. But why did she insist on

such a quick succession of maids, each uglier than the last? He had patiently tried to explain. Her little scheme wouldn't work; the uglier the maids, the more eagerly they fell into his arms.

Finally, her nagging had driven him to look elsewhere, to his cozy little nest in Berlin. But that was expensive. How was he supposed to afford it on his paltry salary at the Cipher Office? If only his father had been something more than that dull, pathetic professor of history. If only his father had restored the family fortune. If only....

It came. Three knocks on his door; then four. He rose, shuffled into the bathroom, and splashed water on his face. He was dismayed by his bloodshot eyes. If only he hadn't had quite so much to drink last night. But they wouldn't get the better of him. He'd drive a hard bargain. What he was offering – pure gold.

He quickly dried his face, slapping it three times – hard – and stepped purposefully from his room. He was quickly up the stairs to the third floor, cautiously opening the door and glancing into the hall. Nobody. Good. Two doors down to Room 34. He gently knocked three times. The door slowly opened.

Gustave Bertrand was ecstatic. Rudolphe Lemoine of the Deuxième Bureau had a promising contact. A mid-level manager in the Cipher Office, no less. Perhaps he would enable them to listen in on communications between Berlin and the German armed forces.

But, said Lemoine, they had to be careful. Schmidt could possibly be an *agent provocateur*, sent by Berlin to lead them into a trap. More likely, he was puffing up his importance; he might have very little to offer. But it was a risk worth taking.

As Schmidt entered the room, he was obviously nervous. He stumbled over the edge of the carpet; he fidgeted with his collar; he kept clearing his throat. Bertrand tried hard not to stare. He had never seen a real, flesh-and-blood traitor before; his work with French intelligence had been confined to a detailed study of foreign codes. Lemoine, in contrast, was an old hand, and tried two small jokes to put Schmidt at ease. No success. Schmidt sat down, all business.

“I offer these samples to overcome your skepticism, to prove that I have access to information of the utmost importance,” he said,



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drawing three manuals from the briefcase. "As agreed, you will make an offer as to what they are worth."

Schmidt placed the manuals on the coffee table. Bertrand could scarcely believe his eyes. They gave the detailed operating procedures for the new Enigma machine. He struggled not to show his pleasure; he didn't want the price to go through the roof.

"This, I should emphasize, is just a sample," Schmidt continued. "I also have access to the current settings of the Enigma—our coding machine. And I will be able to obtain future settings. Provided, of course, that we can come to a satisfactory financial arrangement."

There was a hush, broken only by the faint sounds of Bertrand turning the pages. Schmidt seemed scarcely to be breathing. After ten minutes, Lemoine began to put on his show of *sangfroid*. He leaned over the coffee table, glancing through a magazine to find the newest fashions in bathing suits. He stared out the window at the tennis game below. Shortly thereafter, Bertrand looked up.

"Yes, these may be of interest to us. Perhaps M. Lemoine and I could have a moment or two together." He nodded toward the bathroom door.

The two Frenchmen retreated to the bathroom, leaving the door open so they could block Schmidt's escape if he suddenly changed his mind and tried to bolt. They turned on the taps to hide the sound of their voices.

"This is beyond my wildest dreams," Bertrand began. "If he can provide the settings, we may have an open window on German plans."

"How much should we offer?"

"Something big. Perhaps as much as 5,000 marks."

Bertrand was concerned that he might have trouble with such a large figure; it was coming out of Lemoine's budget. Lemoine surprised him, dropping his pretense that he had not a care in the world. "We've got this fish on the line. Let's reel him in. How about 10,000?" More than a year's salary.

"Fine. Excellent."

"The question is, do we give it to him outright, or do we let him have the satisfaction of bargaining us up?"

"That's your department."

They returned, smiling.

Lemoine got right to the point. "We are willing to make a very generous offer for your material, say 5,000 marks... with more to come for future information."

Schmidt paused. Bertrand was uncertain whether he was dissatisfied with the 5,000 marks, or whether he was thinking how he might provide a continuing flow of information. Schmidt scowled. Bertrand could feel the tension rise; he blurted out:

"We might do even better. We might get authorization for 10,000 marks."

"*Might* get authorization?" Schmidt retorted. "You were supposed to come with a serious, firm offer." He leaned forward, pressing his hands down on the armrests; he was about to rise.

"I can authorize that figure," Lemoine said smoothly. "In fact, I can pay that amount now, in cash. With another 10,000 when you provide the current settings."

Schmidt smiled and held out his hand to Lemoine. They shook; they had a deal. Lemoine thereupon reached in his briefcase, pulled out a stack of bills, and began to count out 10,000 marks. Bertrand retired to the bedroom to photograph the manuals.

He was glad that Lemoine had sealed the deal. If it had been him, he might have detoured to the bathroom to wash his hand. Lemoine was less squeamish; it was all in a day's work.

A very good day's work. Now they had their hooks into Schmidt. They would play him like a puppet.

**Bertrand** was overjoyed. Then came months of frustration.

French cryptographers saw little value in the manuals, which explained how to encipher a message, not how to read one. British intelligence gave a similar negative response. Even with the manuals, the Enigma machine simply couldn't be broken.

He came back for another round with his French superiors. Lemoine drew him aside with a word of caution. Schmidt was indeed a gold mine. But in more ways than one. The Deuxième Bureau wanted to exploit his other contacts; his brother was a general with

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access to German military plans. This source was too valuable to risk; codebreaking was a sideshow.

In frustration, Bertrand turned to his last hope. He got permission to share Schmidt's information with Poland.

He was off to Warsaw, to offer his wares to young mathematicians at the Cipher Bureau – Marian Rejewski and Henryk Zygalski. They were delighted.

The trouble was, they were missing a critical piece of the puzzle. They had the manuals, telling how Enigma was used to encode a message. Schmidt also had provided the rotor settings for several months. They had their own extensive library of intercepted, undeciphered German messages. They knew the general design of the Enigma, from the package opened at the Warsaw Post Office. Indeed, they had a complete early version of the machine, which they had had the foresight to buy when it was still available on the commercial market. But in the German military version, the internal wiring of the rotors was different.

Rejewski had been working on a mathematical model of the Enigma. He retired to his office with the undeciphered messages, the wheel settings, and the manuals. Within a brief span of three months, he figured out the internal wiring of the Enigma's three wheels.

With the settings provided by Schmidt, they could now read some German communications. Most were deadly dull – instructions on troop movements, quartermaster complaints, bookkeeping details, and seemingly endless propaganda screeds for the motivation of the troops. But they nevertheless provided a picture of the stirring, rising giant of the German military under the aggressive and determined new Führer.

They were fascinated by one intercept – a very short one:

FROM: HIMMLER, SS HEADQUARTERS  
TO: ALL AIRPORTS  
30 JUNE, 1934  
SECRET

ERNST RÖHM ABLIEFERN TOT ODER LEBEND.

*Paul Wonnacott*

(ERNST RÖHM TO BE DELIVERED DEAD OR ALIVE.)

The brief message gave only a faint hint of the bloody act to follow – the “Night of the Long Knives.” The leader of the Brownshirts – street brawlers who had terrorized Hitler's opponents during his rise to power – was about to be eliminated. Röhm wanted a second revolution, aimed at putting “socialism” into National Socialism and crushing the power of right-wing industrialists and generals. He wanted his Brownshirts to become a “People's Army,” replacing the regular army. But, for his coming wars, Hitler needed a hardened, disciplined army, not a rabble. Röhm – the only associate close enough for Hitler to call by the familiar *du* – was dragged from his bed and shot, together with dozens of his comrades.

As the *Deuxième Bureau* milked Schmidt for other, unrelated secrets, information on Enigma dried up. Decryptions of messages became sporadic. But then, in 1936, Hitler's troops marched into the Rhineland, showing just how eager the Führer was to upset the order established by the Treaty of Versailles. The Polish codebreaking operation moved into high gear; they would need more people.

## 25

### Epilogue

#### History, Fiction, and Lies

*... mostly a true book, with some stretchers.*

*Huckleberry Finn,  
describing Mr. Twain's  
earlier work, The  
Adventures of Tom  
Sawyer*

**T**he classical Greek word *plasma* means fiction. It also means forgery or “lies.” We may cringe at the word “lies.” But there is no denying: much of this book is not exactly true. Five of the main characters—Kaz, Anna, Ryk, Yvonne, and Jan—are fictional; they never existed.

Nevertheless, the main story is historically accurate. World War II was precipitated by Hitler's invasion of Poland, and by the decision of Britain and France to honor their commitment to Poland by declaring war on Germany. Yet Poland was beyond salvation, caught between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union.

In addition, the fictional five participated in many real, historical events—the defense of Warsaw, the massacre in Katyn Forest, the exodus of the Polish army to North Africa, the significant role of Poles in the Battle of Britain, and, most of all, the early and indispensable Polish contributions to codebreaking.

A whole list of characters were real people, from the Polish codebreakers Marian Rejewski, Henryk Zygalski and Jerzy Rozycki to the main British characters at Bletchley Park—Alan Turing, Alastair Denniston, Alan Welchman, Harry Hinsley—to most of the German protagonists in France: von Kluge, Sepp Dietrich, von Stülpnagel, and

Hofacker. They did approximately what they are reported to have done in this novel.

“Approximately.” There's the snag. How is the reader to know what is fact, and what is fiction? Interested readers may find footnote information at [www.lastgoodwar.com](http://www.lastgoodwar.com). For the more casual reader, this epilogue will provide some guidance, some help in separating history from “lies.”

First, the flesh-and-blood *dramatis personae* should be identified, in addition to those listed above. Among the Poles, only Sikorski should be added to the real historical figures; the rest are fictional, although some of Anna's relatives are *very* loosely based on Polish diplomats of the 1930s. Bertrand, Lemoine, and Schmidt are real historical figures; they did meet in Verviers, Belgium, where Schmidt gave Enigma secrets to Bertrand.

At Bletchley Park, Yvonne joins Anna as a fictional character, but Mavis Lever was very real indeed. She did notice the strange absence of the letter L in an early Italian naval message; the result was the breaking of the Italian code and the British triumph off Cape Matapan. Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham was indeed the victor in that naval engagement. When he came to BP to offer his thanks, he was backed into a newly whitewashed wall by Mavis and other vivacious, mischievous young women.

The two Americans at Bletchley Park, Bill Bundy and Lewis Powell, were also real people, although their role has been fictionalized. In later life, Bundy went on to become a senior official of the State Department, while Powell was elevated to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In the Battle of Britain, the characters are fictional, with the notable exception of Sgt. Josef Frantisek. He was a Czech ace, who, in the words of Len Deighton (*Fighter*) “had flying and air-fighting skills in abundance but he lacked any kind of air discipline. Once in the air, he simply chased Germans. More than once this conduct endangered the men who flew with him. He was repeatedly reprimanded until finally the Poles decided to let him be a 'guest of the squadron.'” He did decline to fly with his fellow Czechs, and he was credited with shooting down seventeen German aircraft before flying off, never to be seen again. His seventeen victims put Frantisek at the head of the list

of allied aces at the time of his death, and the Polish 303 Squadron did shoot down more than twice as many German planes as the average RAF fighter squadron.

Among the Germans, most of the characters—apart from those mentioned above and well known individuals such as Hitler, Göring, Rommel, Himmler, and Dönitz—are fictional. Thus, Kurt Dietrich did not exist, even though his uncle, Sepp Dietrich, was indeed the commander of the Fifth Panzer Army and a favorite of Hitler. He did in fact stretch his orders to escape the Falaise pocket in spite of his closeness to the Führer; or perhaps *because of* his closeness to Hitler, which may have given him an extra degree of freedom. Nevertheless, when senior officers asked him to inform Hitler of the desperate situation in the Falaise Pocket, he did retort that such rashness was a good way to get himself shot. Likewise, Jeschonnek really was the Luftwaffe Chief of Staff, whose concern over a relative on the *Bismarck* betrayed the battleship to the codebreakers of Bletchley Park. Incidentally, Anna's wish—that Jeschonnek never find out that his message had betrayed the *Bismarck*—came true, although not, perhaps, in the way she might have hoped. Under the crushing strain of allied air raids, he committed suicide on the night the allies bombed the rocket development station at Peenemünde.

People are not the only problem, but also events. In this book, real people do fictional things, and fictional people do real things. For example:

- The characters in the Warsaw Post Office are fictional, but their activities are real: the Poles did intercept and open a package with the Enigma machine.
- Churchill really was First Lord of the Admiralty during the First World War, and then again before he became Prime Minister in 1940. He could hardly have intervened in Anna's security clearance, however, as she is a fictional character.
- In this novel, Kaz plays a key role in the demise of German tank commander Wittmann. This is obviously untrue, since Kaz is a fictitious character. The Polish Armored Division was, however, attached to the Canadian Army, and the Poles played an important role in closing the Falaise gap. But they were not

present at Wittmann's final, fatal encounter; he was trapped by five Canadian Sherman tanks.

–Anna's role in codebreaking is exaggerated, which is scarcely surprising, as she didn't exist and therefore played no role whatsoever. To fit the story, the work on Enigma has been greatly simplified. For example, the steckerboard was introduced at a much earlier date than this novel suggests, although the Germans did begin to use it much more heavily in 1938-39, and in this sense, the account in Chapter 6 is *very* loosely consistent with the facts.

In spite of the liberties taken to simplify the Enigma story, an attempt has been made to retain the flavor of how codebreaking actually worked: the meticulous, painstaking building of one small block upon another—interspersed with flashes of insight that unlocked parts of the code, and with windfalls from German misuse of the machine or from captured equipment or codebooks

Of course, real people also do real things in this novel. For example, Marian Rejewski did figure out the internal wiring of Enigma wheels in a brief period of several months in late 1932, aided by information provided by Schmidt and passed by French Intelligence officer Bertrand. Rejewski did repeat his feat by reconstructing the wiring of the fourth and fifth wheels in a more difficult setting, an achievement that Gordon Welchman “found hard to believe.” And Welchman himself was a mathematician.

The codebreakers did live with the nagging worry that the enemy would suspect that their messages were being deciphered. Observation planes were sent out, with the objective of being observed. But there were lapses. At one point, late in the war, the Allies used decryptions to sink two tenders that were scheduled to meet U-boats at obscure locations in the Indian Ocean. The Germans came to the conclusion that Allies must have known about the rendezvous points, either from a breaking of Enigma or from a traitor. Dönitz issued an emergency order. Rather than setting the rotors from their codebooks, U-boats were to use the initials of their radio operators. Unfortunately for Dönitz, this provided little protection. By



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then—March 1944—allied machines were so powerful and so numerous that they continued to break Shark.

The tales of the First World War are factual: the Zimmerman Telegram, which is described in fascinating detail in Barbara Tuchman's book with that title, and the story of the drunken German commander in the Middle East who sent out season's greetings in a number of different ciphers. The term "snookered santa" is, however, invented. Other codebreaking terms, such as "kisses," are not.

The story of the real Polish codebreakers after the outbreak of the war is also factual. Rejewski, Zygalski, and Rozycki did flee to Romania, where they offered their services to the British embassy, only to be rebuffed; they could come back in several days. The Poles thereupon went to the French embassy, where they were cordially welcomed. When the Germans occupied Vichy, Rejewski and Zygalski escaped to Britain—Rozycki having lost his life when his boat went down between Algeria and Vichy France, perhaps as a result of a mine. In Britain, the talents of the two survivors were in fact wasted; they were given low-level decryption tasks.

Their sad history did not end there. At the end of the war, Rejewski and Zygalski were finally promoted to the elevated rank of Lieutenant. Rejewski joined the trickle of Poles returning from Britain to Communist Poland, where he searched without success for a position teaching mathematics at a high school. Having lived in England, he was considered untrustworthy. For decades he was ignored until, in a tardy act of contrition, a Polish University offered him an honorary degree in 1978. By then, just two years before his death, he was not interested. Zygalski's story had a happier ending: he stayed in England and became a college teacher in London.

The hopeless situation of the Polish people, trapped between Hitler and Stalin, was one of the great tragedies of the war. The barbarism of Hitler is well known, particularly the horrors of his extermination camps. Perhaps less well known is the ruthlessness of Stalin. The murders at Katyn Forest may have made some sort of perverted sense, as they helped clear the way for a Communist regime in postwar Poland. But Stalin was equally ruthless with fellow Communists. As

mentioned in the novel, most of the leaders of the Polish Communist Party were shot during the purges of 1938.

Wladyslaw Gomulka was a notable exception; he had the good fortune to reside in a Polish prison, thus escaping Stalin's purges. When he was released in the early months of the war, he moved from the Soviet-occupied sector of Poland to the German one. Why, is not clear. Perhaps he wanted to build a Communist resistance to Hitler; perhaps he preferred to take his chances with Hitler's storm troopers rather than his treacherous Soviet "comrade." It was only later that he came to an uneasy, unstable truce with Stalin—a truce that was scarcely reinforced by Gomulka's sad postwar observation: "The masses do not regard us as Polish Communists at all, but just as the most despicable agents of the NKVD" (an earlier incarnation of the KGB). From the Soviet viewpoint, he had misplaced loyalties; he looked on Polish Communism as a shield against Soviet imperialism. He went on, after Stalin's death in 1953, to head the Government of Poland. Soon, it was threatened by a Soviet invasion. In a tense confrontation, Gomulka stared down Nikita Khrushchev.

The list of enigma seizures by the British Navy is accurate, although not exhaustive. Some details have been embroidered. *HMS Gleaner*, under the command of Lt. Cmdr. Price, did sink the U-33, but the rest of the yarn is fictional, particularly Price's interview of the U-boat captain. Liberties have also been taken with the encounter between *HMS Petard* and U-559 in the eastern Mediterranean, although in this case, the story is closer to the truth. Three British naval men did swim to the foundering U-boat, and two of them—Fasson and Grazier—died as the submarine slipped below the waves. They were awarded the George Cross for their heroism. The Honours and Awards Committee judged that their "gallantry was up to the Victoria Cross standards," but they were not granted that highest of British awards because their heroic acts were not, as required, "in the face of the Enemy."

The stories of the bizarre characters at Bletchley Park are based on fact, except when they are interacting with fictional characters like Anna. Josh Cooper did jump up and say "Heil Hitler," returning the salute of a German pilot. Turing was an eccentric genius who wore a gas mask as protection against asthma, he did bury silver bars as a

hedge against inflation, and he was said to have chained his coffee cup to a radiator. Frankly, there is reason to doubt that last story. A teacup, perhaps, but it is hard to believe that anyone would cherish a cup from which he would drink the horrid British coffee of that era.

Lt. Commander Ian Fleming did propose to ditch a captured plane near a German rescue ship in order to seize Enigma codebooks. The plan—*Operation Ruthless*—was taken seriously, in spite of Anna's skepticism, and an airworthy German plane was procured. But Anna's reservations soon turned out to be correct; after a month of preparation, the navy concluded that *Operation Ruthless* was impractical. The fictitious Anna was also right on another score. With Fleming's overcharged imagination, he had missed his calling; his talent lay in spy novels. He went on to invent 007—James Bond.

Strangely enough, Yvonne's note—about the plan to blind submarines by training seagulls to poop on periscopes—is based on fact; the British did consider such a scheme during WWI. Wartime spawns a strange eagerness to pursue crackpot ideas, and not just for comic relief. In his book, *Roosevelt's Secret War*, Joseph Persico reports one of the “madcap schemes” of Wild Bill Donovan, the head of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS, the predecessor of the CIA). He hatched a plot to put female hormones in Hitler's food to raise his voice, make his mustache fall out, and enlarge his breasts. Quite apart from the medical implausibility—female hormones in an adult male would not cause a higher voice or the shedding of facial hair—the scheme does raise an obvious question. If you have access to the Führer's food, why not just poison him? But, according to Persico, this cockeyed caper “did not offend, but seemed to excite the President's own imagination.”

Then there are parts of the story where the historical record is unclear. In the early chapters, the Poles have an Enigma machine bought on the commercial market, prior to the German adoption of the machine for their military services. This account is true, according to most of the recent sources. According to others, the Poles stole German machines just before the Second World War. This lack of agreement runs throughout the Enigma story because so much of the original record was destroyed, both accidentally and intentionally, and

participants were forbidden to write about their experiences for decades, until their memories had been subjected to the tricks of time.

Likewise, it is uncertain whether the Polish Government in exile definitely knew of the massacre at Katyn forest at an early stage, although they certainly had strong suspicions. Relatives of prisoners stopped getting letters after April 1940. The Poles did raise the question of the missing officers with Stalin in December of 1941 and got the ludicrous response, that the missing men had run off to Manchuria. But there was no Kaz and no Jan; as far as I know, the government in exile had no first-hand information. There apparently was a single escapee from the massacre, but his whereabouts thereafter are vague.

By the time the thread is picked up, in April 1943, the government-in-exile undoubtedly knew what happened at Katyn. This part of the story is accurate: the Polish request for a Red Cross investigation; the simultaneous request by the Germans; and the Soviet breaking of diplomatic relations.

The simultaneous request by the Germans indicates that they somehow got information from the government-in-exile, and therefore, that somebody in the Polish offices was a spy for some country. But there is no readily available record on this point; the story of the spy is invented.

Most of the story of the Normandy invasion is accurate, with the exception of incidents involving the fictional characters, notably Kaz and Kurt Dietrich. The Poles did lead the spearhead that closed the Falaise Pocket from the North. One of their columns did get lost at a critical time because their guide misunderstood their heavily accented French, delivering them to Champeaux rather than Chambois. A Polish column was waved through a German checkpoint, apparently by a quick-thinking German soldier who decided he wanted to live. And Germans in a castle did surrender, unwilling to provoke a possibly-vindictive Polish force.

Likewise, the story of the temporary American withdrawal near St. Lô is accurate; the American Air Force constantly worried that it might bomb friendly troops. Though cautious, the American forces were not cautious enough. In spite of the withdrawal, bombs still fell on

advanced units, killing over a hundred American servicemen, including Lt. Gen. Leslie J. McNair, the highest ranking American officer killed in battle during the Second World War. Unfortunately, casualties from “friendly fire” were far from uncommon. The 30th U.S. Division suffered so many losses that their commander adopted a simple rule. Whenever he was given an order to attack, he flatly refused the support of heavy bombers. And the brilliant colors on the wings of allied aircraft on D-Day—broad, bright blue stripes alternating with wide white stripes—were the opposite of camouflage. Their purpose was to announce the presence of allied aircraft, to prevent a repeat of the Sicilian invasion when numerous aircraft fell to friendly fire from the ground.

In contrast to the military operations, almost all of the messages have been made up, even where they are based closely on historical events. There are two exceptions. The report to von Kluge from the division facing St. Lô—“Not a single man is leaving his post! Not one! Because they're all dead. Dead!”—is an abbreviation of a real report. And the intercepted order to deliver Röhm “dead or alive” is the actual message. The Poles had advance warning of the Night of the Long Knives, an early demonstration of Nazi barbarism.

Likewise, almost all the dialogue is fiction. Again, there are several exceptions, where conversations might reasonably escape classification as *plasma*. Stalin's curt responses to Sikorski's queries about the prisoners at Katyn—“They have run away,” and “Well, to Manchuria”—were reported in Dmitri Volkogonov's *Autopsy for an Empire*. According to Bradley, in *A Soldier's Story*, Patton did threaten to close the Falaise gap and “drive the British back into the sea for another Dunkirk.”

In addition, the interchange among von Kluge, von Stülpnagel, and their associates on the evening of the attempt on the Führer's life is quite close to what actually happened that surrealistic and haunting night; it is based largely on the account by Samuel Mitcham in *Hitler's Field Marshals*. Incidentally, Graf von Stülpnagel was a patrician supporter of Hitler even before the Nazi leader came to power, but he soured on the Führer by 1944.

In light of the success of the codebreakers of Bletchley Park, an interesting puzzle arises. How did the Germans take the Allies so completely by surprise in the final December of the war, in the Battle of the Bulge?

One reason lies in the radio silence observed by German forces prior to the attack. There is also a second, less reassuring explanation. It is one thing to intercept information; it is quite another to use it. Decrypted messages pointed toward a major German counterattack in the Ardennes. Jim Rose and Alan Pryce-Jones – military advisers from Bletchley Park – flew to the Supreme Headquarters of Allied Forces in Paris in November to brief British General Kenneth Strong, Eisenhower's chief of intelligence. Rose recalled their frustrating encounter:

Strong said, "This is the way we read it. The Germans are losing a division a day and this can't be maintained. They're bound to crack." Alan Pryce-Jones was just a major. He just sort of sat on the corner of the desk and said to Strong: "My dear sir, if you believe that you'll believe anything."

Three weeks later, the Germans launched their Ardennes offensive.

Almost without exception, I have relied on secondary sources in this novel; it is not a serious historical work. It is, however, perhaps worth noting that I did not make up the story of Patton's generals calling him "Georgie," or the tendency of his already-high voice, on occasion, to rise into the "squeaky" range. I got these anecdotes from the widow of one of Patton's generals. Sorry, Hollywood. Sorry, George C. Scott. But I did like your movie.

The accidental bombing of London by a single German plane on the night of Aug. 24-25, 1940, which led to the retaliatory attack on Berlin the next night and then to the Blitz, is based on the accounts by Sir John Keegan (*The Second World War*) and Len Deighton (*Fighter*). One important detail has been changed. The German plane was not attacked by a Spitfire, but was simply lost. There is, however, an even more fundamental problem with this story. Respected historians do not universally agree; according to another account, the August 24 raid was by a large number of German planes, and was no accident.

*The Last Good War*

This is a matter of some significance in attributing blame for one of the more ghastly practices of the Second World War—namely, the indiscriminate bombing of civilian populations—although Germany had obviously committed the first offense by attacking cities in Poland, Holland, and other countries that were in no position to return the insult. (Even earlier, German bombers had practiced their techniques on defenseless cities during the Spanish Civil War, Mussolini had bombed Ethiopia, and Japan had bombed Chinese cities.) I am inclined to go with Keegan's account, not only because I am swayed by his remarkable writing style, but because of his reputation for accuracy. Furthermore, circumstantial evidence supports the lost aircraft version. The bombing of London did not begin in earnest until Sept. 7. If Hitler had really intended to demolish London, it would have been out of character for him to wait two weeks between the initial attack of Aug. 24 and the full-scale blitz.

Bombing is a sobering illustration of how quickly the veneer of civilization can chip and crack in wartime; truth is not the only casualty. During the first months of the war, Bomber Command attacked German naval ships, including those in harbor, but avoided civilian populations. British planes flew over the heart of Germany only to drop leaflets, urging the German people to overthrow their tyrannical Führer. At least, that apparently is what the leaflets said. The facts are not altogether clear, as Harold Nicolson, a noted writer and Member of Parliament, reported in his diary. When the American correspondent, John Gunther, asked the “duds” at the Ministry of Information for the text of a leaflet, the request was refused.

He asked why. The answer was, “We are not allowed to disclose information which might be of value to the enemy.” When Gunther pointed out that two million of these leaflets had been dropped over Germany, the man blinked and said, “Yes, something must be wrong there.”

In spite of their bombing of cities in Poland and Holland in 1939 and 1940, Germans also showed restraint in the initial stages of combat with Britain. On occasion, German bomber crews returned to base with their bombs if they were unable to identify a military target, and

*Paul Wonnacott*

at least one German pilot was reprimanded for attacking an “unmilitary” target—a train. On the British side, Air Minister Sir Kingsley Wood was shocked by a proposal to set German forests on fire with incendiary bombs. “Are you aware,” he said in disbelief, “that they are private property? Why, you will be asking me to bomb Essen next.”

Then came the Blitz of London, the bombing of Coventry, and the thousand-bomber allied raids on the cities of the Ruhr—including Essen. By the final months of the war, allied bombs were raining on the beautiful, historic city of Dresden, long after it could possibly play any significant military role.

There is no good war.

And yet.... Hitler had to be stopped.

Perhaps, then, after all – and in spite of it all – it *was* a good war.



They were young lovers, caught up in World War II. She took part in codebreaking efforts. He fought in Poland and France. The three main characters are fictitious. However, most of the novel is based on historical events.

The Last Good War: A Novel

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