

Canadian Women of Valour Challenge:

NANCE WRIGHT and MADGE TRULL, Codebreakers

With the release of the 2014 Hollywood Blockbuster *The Imitation Game*, the complex German coding system from the Second World War was introduced to popular culture. The intricate coding device used to produce these encryptions was called the Enigma machine, meaning “the riddle”, and has had several variations. It has since become an iconic symbol of the mid-20th century intelligence sectors.

Although the four-rotor Enigma machine or **Wehrmacht** Enigma, was widely used in all areas of the German military, it was the Navy that implemented it most effectively. The German Navy used this machine to coordinate the wolf pack tactics employed by their **U-boat** fleets during the Battle of the Atlantic.



Nance Wright (left) and Madge Trull (right), both of whom worked at Bletchley Park.
(Credit: Unknown)

It took a team of highly intelligent Polish and British scientists to create counter machines, called **Bombes**. These Bombes would decipher the coded message back to their original German to be translated by the Allied intelligence staff. However, what most people are unaware of, is the Canadian presence during these events. In fact, two women with ties to Canada were present at varying stages of the Enigma breakthrough at Bletchley, England, where the codebreaking took place.

Nance Wright, who spent the early years of her life in Ontario, immigrated back to Britain just before the outbreak of the Second World War. It was then that Wright became actively involved in the intelligence sector of the war effort. Throughout the war, Wright worked at Bletchley decoding intercepted messages and later worked specifically with the decoded Enigma messages.



A rebuilt Bombe at the Bletchley Park Museum.

(Credit: [Tom Yates via WikiCommons](#))

The other influence was Madge Trull (née Janes), whose connection to our country came after the Second World War when she moved to Canada with her husband Flight Lieutenant John C. Trull. In her younger years Ms. Janes was trained as a **cryptologist**. Soon thereafter she was sent to work at Bletchley. Here, Trull would toil alongside the Bombes to decode intercepted German communications.



Women at work in the decoding room at Bletchley Park.

(Credit: [Bletchley Park](#))

It has been theorized by historians, that by **deciphering** the Enigma machine the Allies were able to shorten the Second World War by at least three years.

To learn more about Madge Trull, visit the [Memory Project](#). For Nance Wright's In Memoriam, see [Legacy](#).

[CryptoMuseum](#) gives a good introduction to the Bombe and how it works.

Key Vocabulary:

Wehrmacht: the armed forces of WWI and WWII Germany. This is a German word (said 'vair-mahkt').

U-boat: a German submarine. U-boat is short form for the German word, unterseeboot, aka under sea boat

Bombes: an electro-mechanical code-breaking device designed and built in the United Kingdom by Alan Turing

Cryptologist: a person who works with secret messages, especially those involving codes and ciphers

Decipher: to decode or discover the meaning of something difficult to understand