

# Insult to our Navy heroes as Americans hijack history

## Movie about capture of war's greatest secret triggers fury

By Richard Price

THEIR brave capture of enemy submarines and ships culminated in the seizure of the Enigma code machine from German U-boat U-110.

It was described by King George VI as the single most important maritime event of the Second World War and helped the Allies to victory.

So the relatives of the Royal Navy men who risked - and in some cases sacrificed - their lives to help crack the Nazis' secrets are understandably furious at Hollywood's latest attempt to rewrite history.

The movie U-571, which is released on Friday, portrays the events of May 1941 being carried out by men wearing American uniforms.

Yet one of the greatest heroes of the code-cracking war was Captain Joe Baker-Cresswell. It was his decision to board U-110 - rather than just destroying her - that led to the discovery of the Enigma machine, the complicated cryptoper with which the German navy gave and received messages to keep track of British convoys.

Records show his calmness at the time was vital to the success of the mission.



**Capt  
Baker-Cresswell**

Captain Baker-Cresswell died in 1997 at his home in Northumberland, oblivious to the Hollywood revisionism which would soon be under way. His son, Charles, watched a special preview of the film on Monday.

He said: 'It will alert people to what the Royal Navy and Royal Canadian Navy did during the war. But it does not bear much resemblance to what my father did.'

On hearing about the American actors' involvement in the project, he said: 'It's just a bit of Tinseltown rubbish. It's always dangerous to distort - not just distort, but tell downright untruths - and pass it off as history. But that's our good friends and allies the Americans. You just have to laugh at them.'

Seven U-boats and eight German surface ships were captured during the war, yielding vital information about the previously impregnable Enigma codes.

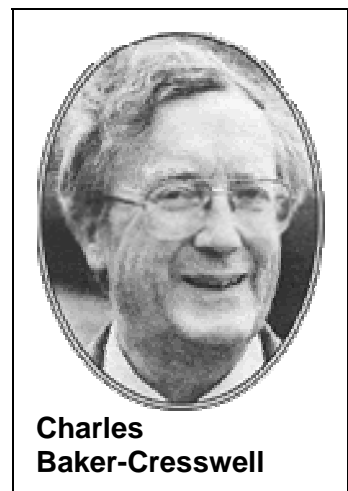
The cipher was decoded by a team of mathematicians, chess players and crossword experts at Bletchley Park in Buckinghamshire. A grateful Winston Churchill dubbed the Bletchley Park staff 'the geese that laid the golden eggs, and never cackled'. With the SS Enigma machine, they deciphered 18,000 messages a day from the German forces, work which helped with the invention of the modern computer.

The whole operation was so sensitive that it remained a secret until 1967. But Hollywood pays scant regard to the British heroes of the war.

U-571, which stars Harvey Keitel and Matthew McConaughey and has earned more than £ 37million in less than a month in America, instead tells of the U.S. Navy undertaking the vital mission which ultimately won the war for the Allies

Director Jonathan Mostow describes the film as an 'action adventure which does not attempt to depict a particular incident', but this

does not wash with families of some of the other British heroes of the code-cracking war.



**Charles  
Baker-Cresswell**

They include relatives and comrades of Able Seaman Colin Grazier, who was posthumously awarded the George Cross with Lieutenant Anthony Fasson for the immense bravery they displayed after boarding the U-599 in October 1942.

The men, who swam across from their own vessel, HMS Petard, had already managed to retrieve several code books and were still trying to detach the Enigma machine from the bulkhead when the U-boat suddenly sank, drowning them both.

Colleen Mason, Mr Grazier's niece, said: 'It is terrible that they have made a film which does not tell the true story but purports to be doing so.'

'My uncle was a real war hero, but he died and ended up being forgotten about. His wife was left a widow, and without a child.'

'Hollywood can tell a story any way they want - but now we want the world to know what happened.' Eric Ashley, 81, who was on HMS Petard with Mr Grazier on the day he died, said he would boycott the film.

He added: 'It is typical that the Americans should try to take the credit. But they were not there that day.'

In a twist worthy of Hollywood itself, Mr Grazier had married his wife just 48 hours before he died a hero's death at sea. But now his story, and that of thousands more brave British seamen, risks being lost in a sea of American schmaltz.

The British author and expert on the battle to crack Enigma, Robert Harris, described the truth in U-571 as 'a tiny pebble of British fact flung at an onrushing tidal wave of Yankee baloney'.

But more Hollywood revisionism is on the horizon.

Following the huge success of Saving Private Ryan, in which American troops appear to win the Normandy campaign single-handed, and now U-571, the next wartime legend being prepared for an overhaul is The Colditz Story.

The film is expected to be remade with a number of big-name U.S. actors. But no American ever escaped from Colditz castle, which by the end of the war contained just eight U.S. prisoners of war.

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