

Sir Francis Harry Hinsley

A brief biography based on that formerly displayed in the 'Hall of Fame' in Bletchley Park mansion.

Francis Harry Hinsley was born in Walsall on 26 November 1918, the son of a wagoner. He went to Queen Mary's Grammar School, Walsall and won a scholarship to St John's College, Cambridge. Because of his recruitment by Government Code and Cypher School he never completed his history degree. He arrived at Bletchley Park in October 1939, aged 20, and began by working on naval Traffic Analysis.

On 7 June 1940 Hinsley warned the Admiralty that German battle cruisers were about to emerge from the Baltic. His advice was ignored, and on 8 June Scharnhorst sank the carrier HMS Glorious.

Later, however, Hinsley became the trusted interface and interpreter between Bletchley Park and the Admiralty. The relations were close and harmonious; reportedly, an enquiry from the Home Fleet to the Admiralty: 'What is your source?' received the simple answer: 'Hinsley'!

When it became apparent that captured material would be needed before the Atlantic Enigma key, Dolphin, could be broken, Hinsley remembered that German weather trawlers in the North Atlantic were using Enigma. This led to the capture of the München on 7 May and the Lauenburg on 28 June 1941, enabling the Hut 8 cryptographers to break Dolphin virtually every day.

After the Germans adopted a separate key and the four-code wheel Enigma for their U-boats in February 1942, Hut 8 could not break that key for nine long months. Hinsley received relentless pressure from the Admiralty until the memorable day on 13 December 1942 when Bletchley Park was able to inform the Admiralty Operational Intelligence Centre that the 'Shark' Enigma cipher had at last been broken, giving the positions of 13 U-boats. Hinsley surveyed the hundreds of signals a day that went from Bletchley Park to the Admiralty, spotting significant changes in German behaviour.

On 1 October 1942, Edward Travis, Director of Bletchley Park, signed an agreement on co-operation with US naval cryptographers, leaving the 23-year-old Hinsley to settle the details.

He was now regularly involved in the co-operation discussions with Washington, an experience that was to determine his main field of historical study for a lifetime. In May 1945 he was appointed private secretary to Travis.

Hinsley returned to Cambridge in June 1946, as a research fellow of St John's, rising to Professor of the History of International Relations in 1969. He served as Master of his college from 1979 to 1989, and as Vice-Chancellor of the university from 1981 to 1983. A vivid teacher and most effective administrator, he established a research school in the history of International Relations, and published several books in the field.

Somehow he found time between 1979 and 1988 to be editor-in-chief of *British Intelligence in the Second World War*. He also contributed to, and co-edited with Alan Stripp, a set of personal accounts of the work of Bletchley Park – *Codebreakers: The Inside Story of Bletchley Park*. He was appointed OBE in 1946, and knighted in 1985. He married Hilary Brett Brett-Smith, who had joined Bletchley Park in 1940, in 1946, and they had three children. He never really retired, dying in Cambridge on 16 February 1998.