



21st century collaboration makes World War II codebreakers' work publicly available in the cloud

Preserving the wartime intelligence archives of Bletchley Park has all the elements of a major Hollywood blockbuster: A global network. Leading-edge technology. Enemy secrets discovered while eavesdropping during World War II (WWII). But, rather than coming soon to a theater near you, the work of Britain's celebrated codebreakers will be digitally housed in the cloud for all to see.

The significance of the work done at Bletchley Park is beyond question, foreshadowing the birth of the Information Age. During WWII, it was home to the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS), which developed technology to decipher the Axis Nations' military codes. Even now, the encryption techniques used throughout information technology are modern versions of those developed by this elite group of codebreakers. (The security measures when one makes an online purchase, for example.) And, thanks to the GC&CS, the Allied Forces learned vital information about military operations and movements, directly contributing to the defeat of their enemy.

However, the true extent of the material contained in the Bletchley Park archive collections is unknown. People can visit the archive, but access is limited due to the lack of a complete catalog. And, without a proper catalog of the content, which is diverse, unique and of considerable size, researching the archive is difficult.

Working in partnership with Hyland, creator of OnBase, and Hewlett Packard, the Bletchley Park Trust plans to change all that.

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Access for all

The secrecy surrounding all the activities at Bletchley Park during WWII was of vital importance to British national security and, ultimately, the Allied victory. The classified work of GC&CS staff continued at the end of the war in a new organization, known to this day as Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ). The intelligence-gathering facility continues to have a special relationship with America, the genesis of which began with the collaboration at Bletchley Park and grew during the Cold War. Until fairly recently, Bletchley Park remained one of Britain's best kept secrets – the Official Secrets Act even prevented Bletchley Park veterans from discussing their experiences until the mid-1970s.

The OnBase Cloud enterprise content management (ECM) system will securely store, manage and facilitate web-based access to the Bletchley Park archives. The organizational structure and sophisticated search capabilities OnBase provides will make the content more accessible to the public. The virtually unlimited storage capacity of OnBase inspired Bletchley Park to augment the project, adding audio and video interviews with surviving service members. In addition to the archival materials, their first-hand accounts of the work performed at Bletchley Park will be stored and managed in OnBase and available to the public through the Bletchley Park website. Initial content will be available online starting in 2015 but the project will continue behind the scenes for many years.

Operation upload

The most time- and labor-intensive phase of the three-year project began in 2013. Onsite at Bletchley Park, volunteer staff started scanning the hundreds of thousands of transcripts, communiqués, memoranda and photographs collected by GC&CS into OnBase. To complete this first phase, Bletchley Park embraced a collaborative spirit very similar to their wartime efforts. The organization recruited a small army of remote volunteers to index the massive amount of data – about 30 terabytes – so that each piece of content will be searchable.

Engaging a corps of volunteers keeps costs down and provides a level of scalability and accuracy that would otherwise be unachievable onsite. The OnBase Cloud allows each volunteer to connect to the system remotely, from anywhere. Multiple users access the system, at any point in time, numerous remote users may be cataloging important historical artifacts. This simultaneous access speeds indexing tasks, while OnBase business process tools ensure accuracy. Once one volunteer indexes a piece of content, OnBase automatically routes it to two additional volunteers to look over. Should any inconsistencies occur, the item routes to an archival specialist to preserve and protect the real story of Bletchley Park.

United for a common goal

Reminiscent of the common goal that united American and British interests during WWII, the Bletchley Park archiving project is bringing the organizations involved closer together. The highly technical work of archiving the content in the Bletchley Park collection is much like the work done by the GC&CS during WWII. Performed by dedicated individuals who are deeply passionate about what they do, this Bletchley Park endeavor, too, is focused on finding the best and quickest way to interpret and disseminate information.

Learn more at OnBase.com/Cloud »

“By choosing OnBase, we have a tailor-made archiving system that will enable the public to interact with the historic records. For the first time ever, we will be revealing a holistic, 360-degree view of the information.”

– Iain Standen, chief executive,
Bletchley Park Trust

OnBase[®]
by Hyland