Damon Staub

Title: “The Origins of Modern Intelligence: Room 40 and Codebreaking During World War I”
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Deborah Bauer
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Damon Staub is a senior majoring in History. He will be graduating with his bachelor’s degree after completion of this spring semester. Prior to his time at IPFW he spent two years of his college experience as an electrical and computer engineering technology student at Purdue University. After a couple years stressing over theoretical physics and equations he concluded he was not in the field he loved. History was something passed onto him by his grandparents and he decided to give it a try by taking a course while still at Purdue. Almost instantly he knew it was what he wanted to do. He plans to continue his education by pursuing a master’s degree in Library Services or History. While he is still deciding which direction to take, he plans to obtain a teaching certificate and find a job teaching history to future generations.

Abstract

War and fighting have existed since the earliest days of man. With it comes violence, destruction, territorial changes and mass amounts of casualties. However, there is another aspect of war that is not discussed as much—the ways in which countries try to avoid war and the violence that accompanies it. Behind the scenes there are operations and procedures that go into avoiding the destruction and bloodshed that war brings. Espionage and intelligence-gathering have long been the tools government bodies use to weaken enemy advantages, while trying to avoid as many casualties as possible. An example of this effort to shorten the duration of war by discovering enemy secrets and tactics can be found during the First World War with Great Britain’s creation of Room 40.

The goal of Room 40 was to intercept as many German messages as possible, and to decipher whatever it was the Germans were saying. The British and Room 40 dismantled German plans through discoveries like the Zimmerman Telegram, a major reason The United States joined the war on the side of Britain. Remnants of Room 40 can be seen throughout history as well. According to author and historian David Boyle, Room 40 was in many ways the precursor to Bletchley Park, the British codebreaking institute responsible for dismantling Nazi plans. Without the successes and new methods of Room 40 during WWI, WWII might not have gone the direction that it did. Room 40 established a national desire for a permanent system of intelligence gathering. It successfully bested the German enemy through innovative means like the use of signal intelligence—ultimately laying the groundwork for a new era of espionage in which codebreaking organizations and institutes, such as Bletchley Park, heavily influence the outcomes of war.
Bibliographical Note

I shaped my argument after familiarizing myself with Room 40 using secondary sources. The sources were the works of several historians specializing in the early 20th century, Western European conflicts, and WWI. Author David Boyle is a professional journalist that writes solely about history and the economy. In his book *Before Enigma: The Room 40 Codebreakers of the First World War* he details exactly what Room 40 was and how it led to code breaking during WWII with the creation of Bletchley Park. Professor Michael Heffernan works at the University of Nottingham and specializes in Historical Geography. In an article he published in the *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Heffernan details why Room 40 came into existence; his argument is that Room 40 was to counter the rise in German naval technology. American historian Dr. Barbara Tuchman specialized in 19th and early 20th-century American history. Her work is highly informative and influential and she was twice awarded the Pulitzer Prize. In her book *The Zimmerman Telegram*, she gives detailed information as to how Room 40 shifted the tide of war by uncovering the Zimmerman Telegram. Once the background information as to what Room 40 was and how it impacted history was found, I then looked for primary sources that supported the idea that Room 40 was a turning point in espionage. What I discovered was writings by Admiral Sir William Reginald Hall, the founder of Room 40. His writings came years after the events of Room 40, but was his attempt at creating a memoir of his time served. These works help in understanding what the mindset was at the time, and what options Great Britain and Hall had in stopping the German forces. Another primary source used was from Admiral Sir William James, an officer affiliated with Room 40. He gives a first-hand account as to what Room 40 was, and who was working there.