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Two young British seamen lost their lives when they boarded the German U-boat depicted in this image: *U-559*. What Lt. Tony Fasson, Able Seaman Colin Grazier and Canteen Assistant Tommy Brown recovered from the sinking vessel helped Alan Turing and his colleagues at Bletchley Park to turn the tide of WWII against Hitler.

Even when Bletchley Park began to decipher encrypted Nazi messages, the U-boat version of Enigma proved much more difficult. Not until 1943, after British sailors drowned trying to recover current Enigma-code documents from a captured German vessel, were U-boat codes broken on a regular basis.

It wasn't an easy chase on October 30, 1942. HMS *Petard* and three other British destroyers were pursuing a Nazi sub in the Mediterranean Sea, not far from the Egyptian shore.

*U-559* was proving why U-boats were so dangerous. She was elusive. The chase lasted 16 hours before *U-559*'s commander decided to scuttle his damaged submarine about 70 miles north of the Nile Delta. (Follow this link to a map where *U-559* went down. Look in the lower right-hand corner.)

Demonstrating courage that is hard to comprehend, three young sailors swam from *Petard* to *U-559*. Lt. Tony Fasson, Able Seaman Colin Grazier and Canteen Assistant Tommy Brown descended into the sinking submarine. They wanted to retrieve the Enigma machine's current codes and the device itself.

They could not remove *U-559*'s Enigma from its mount. But with Brown at the top of the stairs, water streaming into the stricken vessel, Fasson and Grazier quickly passed the "Wetterkurzschlüssel" (short signal weather code) and the "Kurzsignalheft" (short signal code book) up to Brown who threw them into his whaleboat.

With death by drowning a near certainty if they didn't immediately leave the ship, Fasson and Grazier continued to gather Enigma documents, keypads and codes. Brown threw it all into the skiff.

Barely a blink of an eye after Brown had the priceless Nazi codes on his whaleboat, *U-559* went to the bottom, 70 miles from *Port Said*. Fasson and Grazier went down with her.

Tommy Brown, the Canteen Assistant, turned over one of the most important finds of WWII. He was 16 years old. Wanting to fight for his country, he had lied about his age.

Fasson and Grazier received Britain's second-highest honor for bravery, the *George Cross*. Brown received the *George Medal*. Two years later Brown was also dead. He died trying to rescue his two sisters from their burning slum tenement.

*U-559*'s soaked Enigma machine turned out to be an even-more astounding recovery than anyone could have known. It had been used to transmit the major German U-boat codes "*Shark and Triton*" - codes that Bletchley Park's teams had previously been unable to decipher.

Once the newly recovered machine was in the hands of Bletchley Park's code breakers, they realized the weather signals could be decoded with a four-rotor Enigma with the fourth wheel set on "A" (thus running in the Enigma equivalent of "idle"). That discovery allowed the team to reverse-engineer the wiring of the fourth wheel. THIS was the REAL achievement of the three valiant Englishmen.

No informed person disagrees: The heroism of *Fasson, Grazier and Brown* shortened the war. Without *their sacrifice*, "Shark" would not have been broken until much later, if at all. Because it was broken:

- The Allies were able to establish naval supremacy in the Atlantic much sooner.
- Naval supremacy meant an earlier D-Day.

- An earlier Normandy invasion meant the cost of human lives would be less catastrophic.

Near the time of the Normandy invasion, the Allies made one more important capture of a U-boat Enigma machine: *U-505*. This was an American mission.

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## Media Stream



### German Sub U-559

Image online courtesy the Russian website, [u-boote](#).

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### George Cross

Image online, courtesy Robert Prummel for Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY-SA 3.0.

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### Enigma Heroes - Fasson, Grazier and Brown

Image online, courtesy Bletchley Park.

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