

Enigma B207 - Hitler's Cipher Machine at the National Cryptologic Museum

A very special version of the Army Enigma is seen in the B-series of machines. Only twenty-four of these were made, serial numbers running from B201 to B224. These Enigmas have wheel and plugboard markings in red (as distinct from the normal Service Enigma where such markings are in black). The internal wiring of B207 has been determined to be very different to that of a standard, run-of-the-mill army machine. The senior Engineer of the original manufacturer, Heimsoeth and Rinke, said during an interview with a US Army interrogation team [in 1945?] that it was his belief that these special Enigmas were used by the various locations of Adolf Hitler's Headquarters. Hitler had a mobile communications unit that accompanied him on his special train and this unit may well have used some of these machines. To date only one B-series machine is known to have survived the war: this machine with the serial number B207, manufactured in 1937, is now in the collection of the National Cryptologic Museum at Fort George G. Meade adjacent to the headquarters of the National Security Agency in Maryland.

B207's 1937 manufacturing date is interesting. It suggests that these particular machines were in use early, long before Hitler established his various headquarters. However, the deployment fits with the date for the extensions to and modification of Hitler's home in the Bavarian Alps, the *Berghof*, which was finished in 1936. As Hitler began to use this location more frequently it is likely that a more secure communications channel - one that could not be intercepted and read by regular army units - was established. Another clue to the use of this machine can be found in a letter from Army Headquarters dated 11 May 1942. It concerns the urgent repair of Enigma machine B201 assigned to the cipher office of the German High Command.

The mystery deepens with a Top Secret and very urgent order for two B-series machines in 1943. On 15 May H&R received a letter from the German High Command with an order for two cipher machines for an unspecified but very special communications purpose. For the two machines with the serial numbers B222 and B223 changes were required that were subject to exceptional secrecy. The changes could only be made in the presence of an official from the Army's High Command. Furthermore, the acceptance tests of the machines had to be performed with the standard Army wheels and reflector installed, the special wheels could not be left with H&R after they had been wired. This level of secrecy was indeed exceptional. What happened in May/June 1943 that brought about such a special, private and secure communications link?

That question is still open.