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Archives to Unveil Secret World War II Cryptology Work at Winthrop

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Archives to Unveil Secret World War II Cryptology Work at Winthrop

Quick Facts

- Winthrop College offered a special course in cryptology in 1943-45 to answer the demand during World War II.
- The course was never officially listed, and much other information is unknown.
- Archives will unveil some findings, including oral history interviews with those related to the course, this fall.

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA — The United States Army Signal Corps issued the call; Winthrop University answered.

As Germany devastated much of the Soviet Union and France at the height of World War II in 1942, the curriculum committee at the then-Winthrop College received a proposal for a class in **cryptology**. Described as a national defense training course, the class would be offered to seniors with hopes they would be "useful" to the Signal Corps after graduation.

In 1943, 34 students enrolled in the course, taught by **Dr. Ruth Stokes**, to learn coding, decoding and the standard type of cycles associated with cryptology. Winthrop offered the course until spring of 1945.

Of those 34 women, 33 were offered employment with the Signal Corps.

Unfortunately, not much other information exists: the class was never officially listed; there was no class roll; and the total number of women who took the course is unknown. Winthrop was one of the few institutions to teach cryptology, and many of its graduates never spoke of the work they did for the war effort.

The Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections will lift some of the secrecy of the cryptology course this fall, showcasing oral history interviews from those who were involved as well as other findings. Archives benefactor and namesake Louise Pettus '46 originally proposed the project, and work commenced in 2015.

This fall represents only the first phase of Archives' findings. If you have more information to add or would like to help fund the next phase, contact **Director of Archives Gina White** at 803/323-2334 or whitegp@winthrop.edu.

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