Beat: Lifestyle

WWII code-breaker Alan Turing granted royal pardon for gay sex conviction

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USPA News - Alan Turing, the renowned World War II code-breaker who committed suicide nearly six decades ago after being prosecuted for homosexuality and forced to choose chemical castration to avoid prison, was granted a rare royal pardon on Tuesday. Turing, who is widely considered to be the father of modern computing, is credited with saving thousands of lives by shortening World War II through his code breaking skills that helped accelerate Allied efforts to read German Naval messages enciphered with the Enigma machine.

Historians believe these efforts shortened the world`s deadliest conflict in history by up to two years. But the mathematician was later arrested and convicted of `gross indecency` in 1952 after admitting he had a sexual relationship with a 19-year-old man he had reported to police for stealing from his home. Turing faced being sentenced to jail but was offered probation if he agreed to undergo chemical castration, which made him impotent and caused him to develop breasts. The conviction, which overshadowed his later life, led to the removal of his security clearance and meant he was no longer able to work for British intelligence agency GCHQ where he had continued to work following his service during World War II. Turing eventually killed himself in 1954 by eating an apple laced with cyanide. Following years of campaigning and a request from Justice Secretary Chris Grayling, Queen Elizabeth II on Tuesday granted a posthumous pardon to Turing under the Royal Prerogative of Mercy. It follows an official government apology from then-British Prime Minister Gordon Brown in September 2009. "[Turing`s] later life was overshadowed by his conviction for homosexual activity, a sentence we would now consider unjust and discriminatory and which has now been repealed," Grayling said after Tuesday`s pardon. "Dr. Turing deserves to be remembered and recognized for his fantastic contribution to the war effort and his legacy to science. A pardon from the Queen is a fitting tribute to an exceptional man." Prime Minister David Cameron also welcomed the pardon, calling Turing a "remarkable man" who played a key role in saving the country in World War II. "His action saved countless lives. He also left a remarkable national legacy through his substantial scientific achievements," he said. The royal pardon was issued even though Turing`s case did not meet the official requirements, which require the person to be innocent of the offense and a request from someone with a vested interest such as a close relative. "Uniquely on this occasion a pardon has been issued without either requirement being met, reflecting the exceptional nature of Alan Turing`s achievements," the Justice Ministry noted in a statement. In the government`s public apology in September 2009, Brown said the result of World War II could "well have been very different" if it had not been for Turing`s contributions. "He truly was one of those individuals we can point to whose unique contribution helped to turn the tide of war," he said at the time. Brown added: "The debt of gratitude he is owed makes it all the more horrifying, therefore, that he was treated so inhumanely. In 1952, he was convicted of `gross indecency` - in effect, tried for being gay. His sentence - and he was faced with the miserable choice of this or prison - was chemical castration by a series of injections of female hormones. He took his own life just two years later." The then-prime minister also recognized that thousands of other gay men were treated "terribly" under the homophobic laws, causing millions more to live in fear of conviction. "I am proud that those days are gone and that in the last 12 years this government has done so much to make life fairer and more equal for our LGBT community," he added.

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