



IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE ALLIED 21ST ARMY GROUP D-DAY, 6 JUNE 1944

THE GREATEST SEABORNE INVASION THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN

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PART FOUR – SECURITY AND DECEPTION

Selecting the right invasion area and concealing its location from the Germans was fundamental to Operation OVERLORD's success. The Pas-de-Calais was the obvious choice with its narrow sea crossing, direct access to the German heartland and proximity to the airfields of Britain. It was, however, also the most obvious location to the Germans, and they set about building their most formidable defences in this area.

Before the war, British intelligence had succeeded in breaking Germany's secret cypher, used by their Armed Forces to transmit high-level communications, and in 1939 they set up the 'Ultra' project at Bletchley Park. Its purpose was to intercept the German 'Enigma' signals and control the distribution of the resulting secret intelligence.

This project was of the highest secrecy and strict rules were established to restrict the number of people who knew of its existence to ensure that the Germans were not alerted to the fact that the British could obtain knowledge of their plans. Its existence remained secret until 1974, some 29 years after the war ended and the ban was lifted, when Frederick Winterbotham, a key participant in the project, published his book 'The Ultra Secret'.



Bletchley Park.

Ultra and their ability to decipher Enigma gave the Allies a clear picture of German defences and dispositions in Northwest Europe, including their counterattack forces, which proved invaluable in planning the invasion.



A German Military Enigma machine.

In September 1943 the Allies put into place an elaborate and wide-ranging deception plan, Operation BODYGUARD, which set out the strategy under which all deception planners would operate. Operation FORTITUDE was part of

Operation BODYGUARD and intended to mislead the German high command about where the invasion would come ashore. This was divided into two sub-plans, FORTITUDE North and FORTITUDE South.

FORTITUDE North, the northern sub-plan, was designed to make the Germans believe that a force based in Edinburgh would land in Norway, and FORTITUDE South, the southern sub-plan, was designed to enhance the belief of the Germans that the invasion would come in the Pas-de-Calais. FORTITUDE South was not only designed to create the element of surprise but also designed to make the Germans think that when the troops landed in Normandy it was only a diversionary assault intended to draw their forces away from the Pas-de-Calais area before the main invasion came in.

An intelligence war was also employed to conceal the invasion location from the Germans. The Allies had broken the German intelligence network in Britain and had executed, interned, turned, or planted double agents and even bogus ones in their place. These were used to pass false information and reinforce the deception that the invasion would come in the Pas-de-Calais area. In addition, fake news and spurious intelligence were leaked to neutral diplomats and journalists in Britain to augment these deception efforts.

Given the sheer size of the naval, land, and air forces being massed in Britain for the invasion, the truth was hard to conceal. German air reconnaissance could hardly fail to detect the build-up of troops and where these forces were being gathered. To help conceal where the invasion would land these forces were dispersed across the whole of Southern England.

A major part of FORTITUDE South was a sub-operation codenamed QUICKSILVER I. This was the creation of a fictitious army, the First United States Army Group [FUSAG] under the command of Lieutenant General George S Patton Jr, in the southeast of England.



Lieutenant General George S Patton Jr

The bogus FUSAG consisted of dummy tanks and vehicles made from scaffolding tubes, wood, canvas, and rubber. Skilled labour, often drawn from the prop departments and film set designers of the British Film Industry, carried out much of this work.



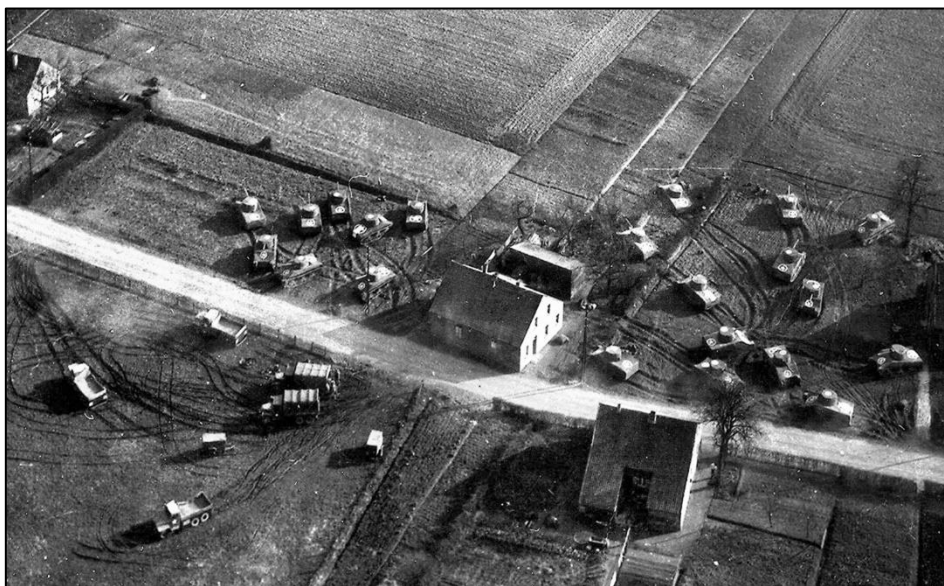
A dummy Sherman Tank was deployed as part of the deception plan. [IWM H 42531]

These facsimiles were created to reinforce the idea that Lieutenant General Patton's FUSAG would be the major assault, as he was considered the foremost Allied field commander by the Germans, and that FUSAG would assault France in the Pas-de-Calais area. Large numbers of these dummy tanks and vehicles were deployed in groups all over southeast England, to simulate an army preparing to move. General Eisenhower, General Bradley, and Lieutenant General Pattern were often seen visiting these locations and their visits were well-publicised.



Lieutenant General George S. Patton Jr., General Dwight D. Eisenhower, and General Omar Bradley in England before the invasion.

The tracks of armoured vehicles were also artificially created in the fields where the dummy tanks and vehicles were located, and in the sand of nearby beaches, which were often the target of German reconnaissance sorties.



Operation FORTITUDE - Dummy tanks and vehicles in a field in England with tracks made by real tanks and vehicles to add realism.

To strengthen the illusion of FUSAG preparing to embark, dummy landing craft were made from scaffolding tubes, wood, canvas and empty 40-gallon barrels. These were very convincing when viewed from the air and at a distance, and they were assembled and deployed in harbours and estuaries around the southeast coast, centred on Dover.



Dummy landing craft in the southeast of England before D-Day. [IWM H 42527]

At the same time, a huge volume of fake radio traffic was transmitted and received by fixed and mobile units across southeast England. This was supported by the double agents' frequent but careful 'leaks' about the make-up and

position of FUSAG units. Even after the invasion of Normandy, this was kept up throughout June and into early July to make the Germans believe that a second and larger invasion would come in the Pas-de-Calais area.

In early 1944 the 1st Canadian Army's 2nd Canadian Corps was stationed in Kent and the southeast to augment the deception. Signallers from these Canadian forces and their British counterparts operated from several locations to send the mass of dummy signals traffic. This had to be kept at the same level in the southeast as in the southwest so the density of traffic alone, would not give the Germans any clue as to where the invasion would come from. One of the locations was the underground tunnels of Dover Castle that had housed the command centre for the evacuation of Dunkirk, Operation DYNAMO, in 1940. This was codenamed Q DOVER and handled much of the additional telephone, teleprinter and radio traffic.



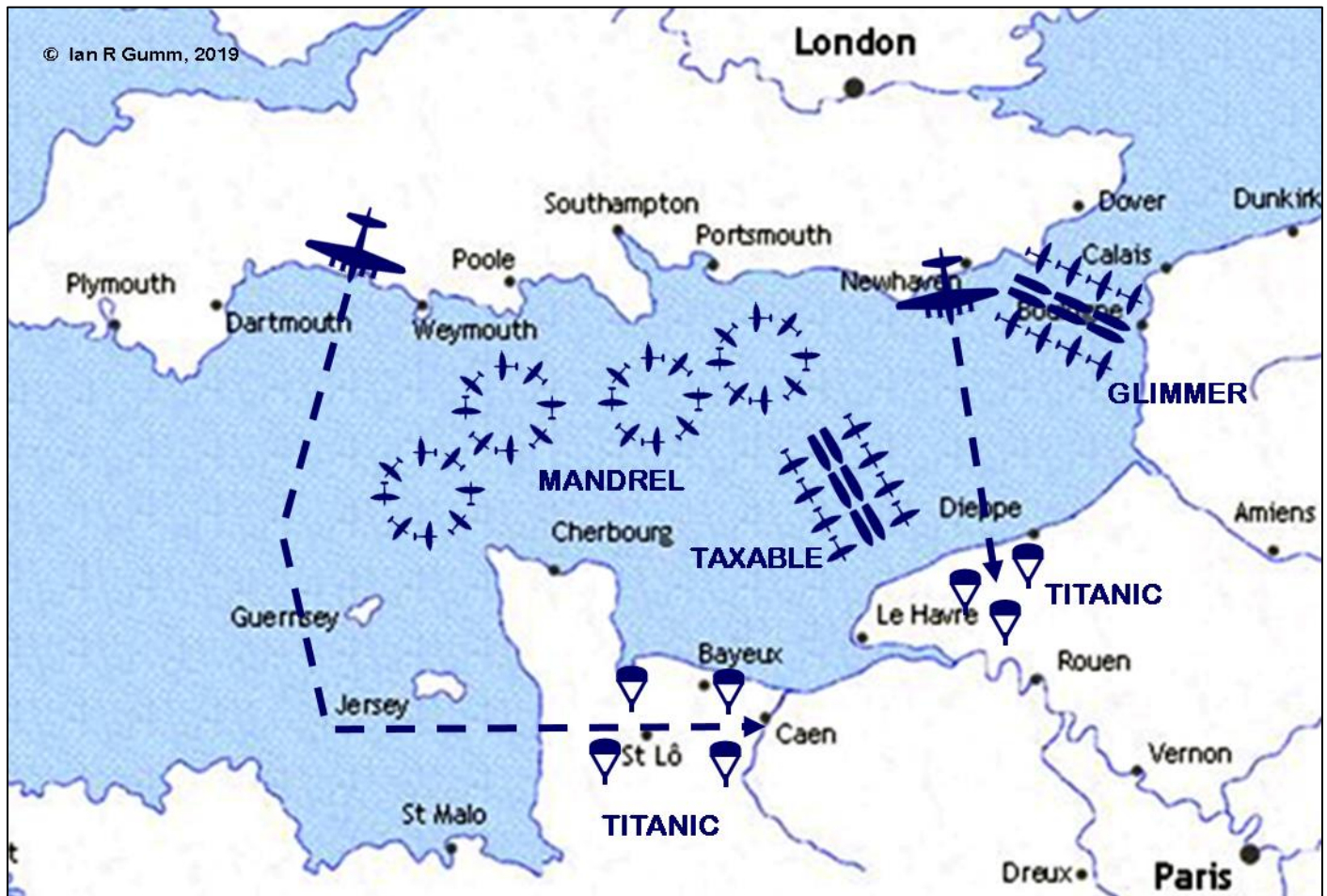
The reconstructed repeater station in the tunnels beneath Dover Castle.

In the spring of 1944, British and Canadian units worked in the tunnels around the clock, sending coded fake radio messages all over Britain to simulate the communications of FUSAG. It was all encoded, and the signallers had no idea what they were sending. They knew it was important, because the work continued around the clock for weeks on end in relentless eight-hour shifts, seven days a week, up to the D-Day landings and several weeks beyond.

The air campaign leading up to the invasion also had an element designed to deceive the Germans into believing that the invasion would come in the Pas-de-Calais area. Two-thirds of all the bombs dropped leading up to the invasion were dropped outside the Calvados Coast area and a great deal of this effort was concentrated in the Pas-de-Calais region. The operations of the Allied Navy also had an element within them to reinforce this deception. In the months leading up to D-Day, the Royal Navy secured supremacy in the English Channel through vigorous patrolling and patrols were carried out with equal intensity in the waters of the Pas-de-Calais as they were in the waters of the Calvados Coast of Normandy.

In May 1944 a double of General Montgomery arrived in Gibraltar and received an ostentatious welcome. This gave credibility to the idea that an invasion was planned for Southern France or even through Spain and was quickly passed to Berlin by the German intelligence network.

To cover the invasion, the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force carried out four operations on the night of 5/6 June 1944: Operation TAXABLE, Operation GLIMMER, Operation MANDREL, and Operation TITANIC.



The Allied deception plan to cover the invasion. [© Ian R Gumm, 2019]

In the night of 5 June and the early hours of 6 June 1944, whilst the invasion fleet was approaching Normandy, the RN, RAF, and Radio Counter Measures [RCM] Section were carrying out Operation TAXABLE and Operation GLIMMER. Operation TAXABLE simulated an invasion force approaching Cap d'Antifer and Operation GLIMMER simulated the same for the Pas-de-Calais. By dropping chaff in progressive patterns, RAF bombers created the illusion of a large fleet on coastal radar screens. Beneath the chaff, small boats towed radar reflector balloons and simulated the radio traffic expected of a large fleet.

Operation TAXABLE was the larger of the two operations. It was carried out by the 18 small boats of Special Task Force A. These were a mix of Harbour Defence Motor Launches [HDML] and RAF Pinnaces (motor launches of the RAF's Marine Branch). The Lancaster bombers, of No 617 (Dam Busters) Squadron RAF [617 Sqn RAF] commanded by Wing Commander Geoffrey Leonard Cheshire VC, were modified by cutting a hole in the nose to drop the bags of the

aluminium tinsel, known as chaff, and their crew was increased to up to 14. On 7 May 1944, 617 Sqn RAF began training for the operation and, although they knew what they were doing, they did not know where their final target would be or when the mission would take place.



Wing Commander Geoffrey Leonard Cheshire VC RAF. [IWM CH 12667]

The 18 small boats of Special Task Force A left port on the evening of 5 June 1944. They struggled in the heavy seas of the English Channel which affected their equipment and ability to converge on their meeting point. By 00:37 hrs on 6 June, the lead boats reached the muster point of the Cap d'Antifer east of Le Havre on schedule. Between 02:00 hrs and 04:00 hrs, the ships operated radar and radio equipment as they headed toward a point 7 miles (11 kilometres) offshore. Once in place, they began simulating an attempted landing, under cover of smoke, by running in fast to within 2 miles (3.2 kilometres) of the beach, turning and returning to the 7-mile marker, to repeat the system all over again. Shortly after 05:00 hrs the operation ended and Special Task Force A laid some mines before heading toward Newhaven, which they reached around midday on the 6th.

The RAF component for Operation TAXABLE required precise timing and coordination. The Lancaster bombers were arranged in bands 2 miles (3.2 kilometres) apart and parallel to the French coast. For each chaffing run, they would fly towards the coast for two and a half minutes dropping chaff at fifteen-second intervals. At the end of the run, the bombers would turn about and fly away from the coast for two minutes and ten seconds. They repeated the process 30 times before commencing the second phase. A ninety-second overlap ensured no gaps occurred and the operation went without a hitch. By this method, the chaff cloud edged slowly toward the coast, just like a real invasion fleet. The reaction of the Germans was small, and their only response observed to Operation TAXABLE was searchlights and intermittent gunfire.

Operation GLIMMER was conducted by 12 HDMLs equipped with jamming gear, radios, and radar-reflecting balloons. This force was designated Special Task Force B and was commanded by Lieutenant Commander W M Rankin. Special Task Force B began their jamming operations at approximately 01:00 hrs on 6 June 1944 followed by radio chatter around an hour later. After completing its task Special Task Force B returned to port arriving around 13:00 hrs on the 6th.

The air component was carried out by the Short Stirling heavy bombers of No 218 (Gold Coast) Squadron RAF [218 Sqn RAF], carrying G-H radio navigation equipment, under the command of Wing Commander R M Fenwick-Wilson. Their operation was directed by a civilian physicist, Sebastian Pease, of the Operational Research Section of RAF Bomber Command, to ensure the deception was as realistic as possible. In the event the effort was so convincing that German shore batteries opened fire on the 'phantom' fleet created by No 218 Sqn RAF and Generalleutnant Heinrich Freiherr von Lüttwitz's 2nd Panzer Division [GE 2 PZ Div] and Generalleutnant Gerhard Graf von Schwerin's 116th Panzer Division [GE 116 PZ Div] were kept in the Pas de Calais for at least 14 days after the real Allied landings of Operation OVERLORD in Normandy.

Intelligence intercepts suggested that the German forces in the Pas de Calais area reported an invasion fleet. In addition, there were reports of the decoys being engaged by the shore batteries of the area. Intercepted despatches from Hiroshi Oshima, the Japanese ambassador to Germany, referred to the naval deceptions.

Operation MANDREL was an electronic countermeasures mission aimed at jamming the enemy's coastal radar systems. It was carried out by No 199 Squadron RAF [199 Sqn RAF], which was part of Number 100 (Bomber Support) Group RAF [100 Bomb Gp RAF] which flew over two areas of the English Channel, one due south of Littlehampton and the other due south of Portland Bill. Twenty Short Stirling heavy bombers fitted with Mandrel EW radar jammers designed to disrupt the German 'Freya' and 'Würzburg' radar systems took part. The aim was to hide the invasion fleet from the enemy's radar systems positioned along the northern French coastline and the German electronic defences were almost completely nullified.

Operation TITANIC was a deception operation in which dummy paratroopers were dropped. It was carried out by four squadrons from Number 3 Group RAF [3 Gp RAF] and six Special Air Service [SAS] men during the night of 5/6 June 1944. The RAF squadrons were: No 138 Squadron RAF [138 Sqn RAF] flying the Handley Page Halifax; No 161 Squadron RAF [161 Sqn RAF] flying the Handley Page Halifax and Lockheed Hudson; No 90 Squadron RAF [90 Sqn RAF] flying Short Stirling heavy bombers; and No 149 Squadron RAF [149 Sqn RAF] also flying Short Stirling heavy bombers. The twelve men of the SAS came from the 2nd Special Air Service Regiment [2 SAS].

Operation TITANIC was divided into four parts, I to IV, that consisted of various combinations of dummy paratroopers (Ruperts), noisemakers (Pintails), chaff, and SAS personnel. The Pintails were attached to each Rupert to simulate rifle fire, as was a small explosive charge timed to go off just after landing to give the appearance that the paratrooper was burning his parachute.

TITANIC I, involved the dropping of 200 Ruperts to simulate the drop of an airborne division north of the Seine River; near Yvetot, Yerville, Doudeville in the Seine-Maritime region and Fauville in the Eure region. TITANIC II would have involved dropping fifty Ruperts east of the River Dives to draw German reserves to the eastern side of that river. However, this part of Operation TITANIC was cancelled just before it was due to take place. TITANIC III involved dropping fifty Ruperts in the Calvados region near Maltot and the woods north of Baron-sur-Odon to draw German reserves away west of Caen. TITANIC IV involved two hundred Ruperts dropped near Marigny in the Manche to simulate the dropping of another airborne division. Operation TITANIC went according to plan. Only two Short Stirling aircraft and their crews from 149 Sqn RAF were lost.

As part of Operation TITANIC, a six-man SAS team commanded by Captain Frederick James Fowles and Lieutenant Norman Harry Poole were dropped by parachute near Saint-Lô. Lieutenant Poole was the first to land at 00:11 hrs on 6 June 1944 and he is credited with being the first British parachutist to land in occupied France as part of the D-Day landings. Once on the ground they split into two three-man teams and began playing 30 minutes of pre-recorded sounds of men shouting and weapons firing, including mortars. They also set off explosive charges in their attempt to deceive the Germans into thinking there was a large parachute landing in progress. After completing their mission, the SAS men remained in the area to cause as much disruption as possible and report on German troop movements using carrier pigeons. The group became the subject of an intensive manhunt by the Germans and was finally surrounded on 17 July 1944 in a barn. The six SAS men were: Captain Fowles, Lieutenant Poole, Troopers Dawson, Hurst, Merryweather and Saunders. In the firefight that ensued, two German stick grenades were thrown into the barn wounding four of the six men inside. Luckily, they were captured by German paratroopers and treated relatively well; had they been caught by the SS they may well have been executed. After being captured, Troopers Merryweather and Hurst were sent to a military hospital and were liberated by the Allies in August 1944, the remainder spent the rest of the war as POWs.

Look Forward

In Part Five of D-Day, 6 June 1944 – The Greatest Seaborne Invasion The World Has Ever Known, I will discuss The Allied Navy and its part in the build-up to the invasion.

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