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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (Summer, 1981), pp. 261-277

Published by: [Wisconsin Historical Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4635547>

Accessed: 09/01/2012 11:55

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Eisenhower, the Intelligence Community, and the D-Day Invasion

By Stephen E. Ambrose

Provided we succeed in bringing our mechanized divisions into action in the very first few hours, then I am convinced that the enemy assault on our coast will be completely defeated on the very first day.

FIELD MARSHAL ERWIN ROMMEL¹
April 23, 1944

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER went into World War II knowing almost nothing about intelligence gathering, interpretation of information, security for operations, misleading the enemy about his intentions, the use of spies and double-agents, or the possibilities of covert actions on a wide scale behind enemy lines. He came out of the war a highly sophisticated and effective user of all these techniques. This impressive growth was typical of the man. In 1941 he had had no experience in international diplomacy; by 1945 he was universally regarded as one of America's most effective diplomats. When the war began, he had never commanded any unit larger than a small training camp; when the Germans surrendered, he commanded the greatest armed force in the Western world.

The entire British intelligence establishment was at Eisenhower's disposal, and it made a crucial contribution. A leading British role in intelligence was inevitable, given the late start of the Americans in the field. In the 1920's, the U.S. Army had been among the world's leaders in cryptanalytical work (the

so-called American Black Chamber under Herbert O. Yardley), its special triumph being the breaking of the Japanese diplomatic codes; but in 1929 Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson dissolved the Black Chamber on ethical grounds, remarking that "gentlemen don't read other people's mail."² From that point on, all American intelligence efforts floundered. Eisenhower was scathing in his judgment: he recalled that when he went to Washington in December, 1941, to work on the War Department General Staff, he found "a shocking deficiency" in the field of intelligence.

The U.S. Army, Eisenhower wrote, had made "one feeble gesture" in the direction of gathering and evaluating intelligence. That gesture was the maintenance of military attachés in foreign capitals. But the attachés had to be men of independent means, "estimable, socially acceptable gentlemen" who knew next to nothing about systematic intelligence work. Making matters worse, the custom was to make "long service as a military attaché, rather than ability, the essential qualification for appointment as head of the Intelligence Division (G-2) in the War Department." As a consequence, the results of the American effort were "almost completely negative." The chief of the Intelligence Division "could do little more

EDITORS' NOTE: In somewhat different form, this material was delivered by Professor Ambrose in his speech at the Founders Day meeting of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, February 11, 1981.

¹ Quoted in David Irving, *The Trail of the Fox* (New York, 1977), 344.

² David Kahn, *The Codebreakers: The Story of Secret Writing* (New York, 1973), 6.



National Archives 208-N-20998-FO

General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force in Great Britain and Commander in Chief of United States forces in the European Theater of Operations in May, 1944.

than come to the planning and operating sections of the [general] staff and in a rather pitiful way ask if there was anything he could do for us.”³

The British, meanwhile, had developed a superb intelligence community, capped by the now-famous Bletchley Park/Ultra system, which they made available to Eisenhower when in July, 1942, he took command of the Allied forces committed to Operation TORCH, the North African invasion.⁴

The so-called Ultra secret, which has finally been revealed after some thirty years’ classification by the British military authorities, was of course an intelligence coup of the first magnitude. Briefly stated, just after the outbreak of war in 1939 the British acquired from Polish sources a stolen German ciphering machine: Enigma. After painstaking trial and error at

their top-secret facility at Bletchley Park, the British were able, by about mid-1940, to decipher much of the intercepted German radio traffic throughout occupied Europe. The British (and their allies the Americans, with whom they shared the secret) took great pains to conceal this knowledge from the Germans, who remained convinced, right up to the end of the war, that their codes were secure.⁵

Over the course of the next three years the Americans improved their intelligence effort, but throughout the war Eisenhower relied primarily on the British for his information on the enemy’s strength, location, and intentions, for counter-intelligence work, for deception, for control of the activities of the French Resistance, for security and the myriad other functions that an intelligence system performs.

EISENHOWER’S chief spy, for most of the war, was Major General Sir Kenneth Strong, a blunt, hardy Scot who was thoroughly professional in his approach to intelligence. Strong’s memoirs, even though written before the Ultra secret had been revealed, are an excellent guide to the collection, analysis, and use of intelligence at Allied Force Headquarters and at SHAEF.

A major theme of Strong’s book is the outstanding rapport he had with his boss. He regarded Eisenhower as an almost perfect spy-master—in contrast to the almost nonexistent relationship that prevailed between the British commander, Field Marshal Montgomery, and the intelligence community.⁶ Bernard Law Montgomery lived in splendid isolation. He rarely met with his staff, leaving such mundane matters to his Chief of Staff, who would report to him the results of the staff’s labors. Montgomery would then study the reports and hand down his decision.

Eisenhower’s method was almost the exact opposite. He was in constant contact with the heads of his staff sections, meeting with them formally and informally, chatting, discussing, mulling over, considering this or that item. Strong was pleasantly surprised to discover

³ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (Garden City, New York, 1948), 32.

⁴ For the British effort in the early stages of the war, see F. H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations*, Volume I (Cambridge, England, 1979).

⁵ F. W. Winterbotham, *The Ultra Secret* (New York, 1975).

⁶ Kenneth Strong, *Intelligence at the Top* (Garden City, New York, 1969).

that "I had the right of direct access to Eisenhower and his Chief of Staff, and I could approach them whenever I wished." He was even more surprised to learn that "above all, under the American system I was a member of the 'inner circle,' where policy was decided and planning and other decisions taken. All my experience suggests that this status is vital to the efficient functioning of an intelligence machine."⁷ He emphasized that Eisenhower wanted all his reports verbally, so that he could interject questions. Finally, Strong appreciated the fact that Eisenhower, unlike Prime Minister Winston Churchill, never insisted on seeing the raw material on which intelligence was based.

THE most important intelligence work in war is determining the enemy order of battle. Where is the enemy? In what strength? What is his morale? His equipment situation? Who are his leaders? The enemy's intentions are also important to know, but less crucial, because he can change his plans, or be forced to change them, or be incapable of carrying them out. What he *cannot* do is bring nonexistent formations into the front lines. Every German radio message picked up by Ultra, decoded and translated at Bletchley Park, and rushed to Strong at SHAEF contributed to the total picture, especially by confirming information gathered elsewhere, whether by POW interrogation, items sent in by the various European resistance groups, reconnaissance by air, or other means.

Throughout the European campaign (though not in North Africa, Sicily, or Italy), Eisenhower had almost as good a grasp on the German order of battle as did Hitler. Sometimes Eisenhower's knowledge was better. Hitler lived in a fantasy world, creating divisions with the snap of a finger, restoring destroyed units with a wave of his hand.⁸

Certainly in the months leading up to June 6, 1944, Eisenhower had a better picture of the German forces he would face than Generals Gerd von Rundstedt and Erwin Rommel had of the Allied forces. The SHAEF estimates of the German order of battle reveal that Strong

had located almost every one of the fifty-five German divisions in France. The SHAEF appreciations of the German estimate of the Allied order of battle show, conversely, that the Germans credited Eisenhower with seventy-five divisions, when he in fact had fifty, and with far more landing craft than were actually available. This intelligence triumph, chiefly attributable to Kenneth Strong and the British Secret Service, as outlined below, was a central factor in the Allied victory. It gave Eisenhower, whose forces were badly outnumbered on the land, the decisive edge.

OPERATION OVERLORD proposed to put ashore in occupied Europe a force sufficient to secure a bridgehead, move

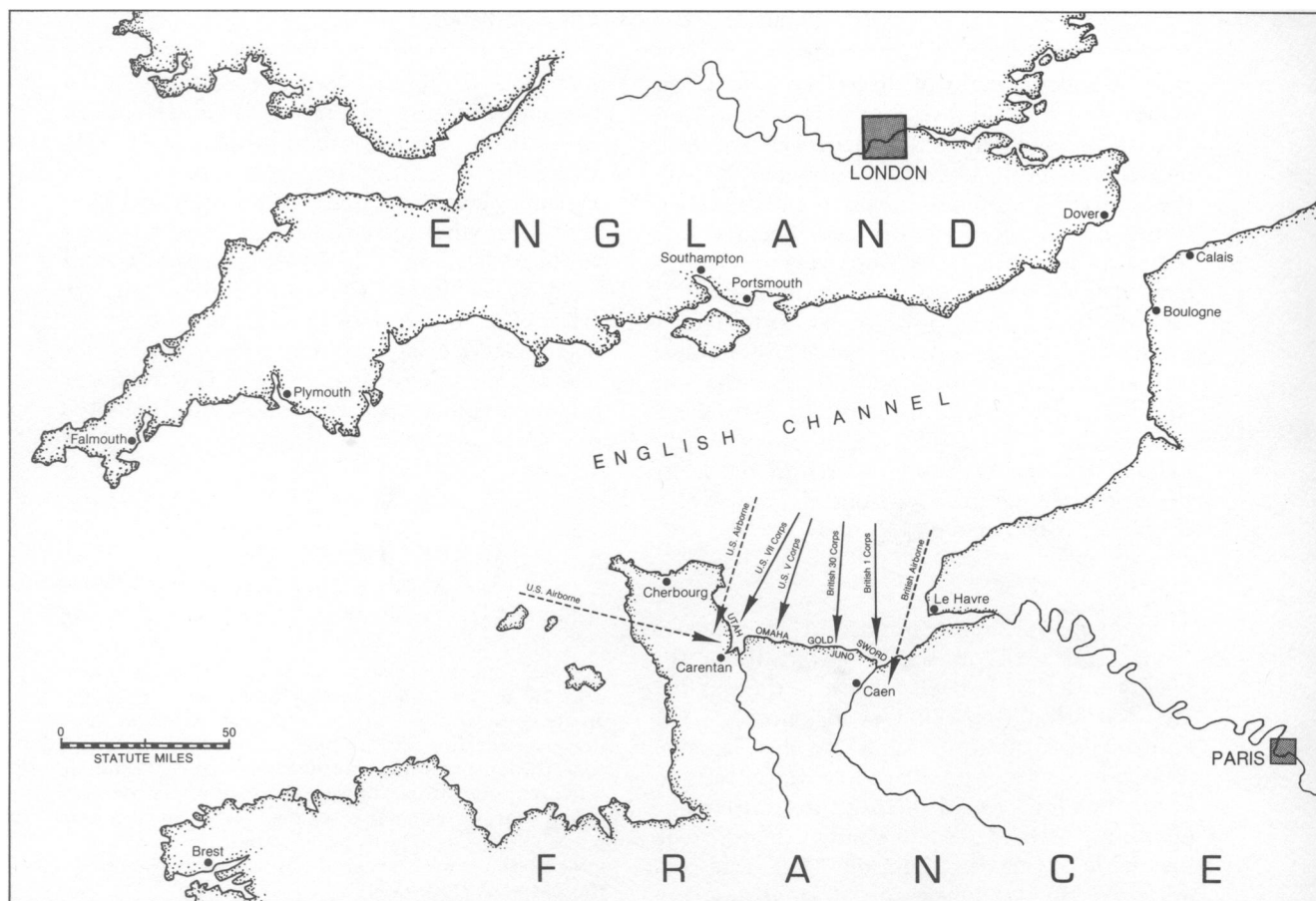
⁸ *Ibid.*, 245. Ironically, this was a principal reason that Hitler was able to surprise Eisenhower in the Battle of the Bulge in December, 1944. Ike knew how desperate the German situation was, and he concluded that the enemy could not mount a major counter-offensive. As Strong writes, "It should not be forgotten that our estimate of German capabilities at this stage of the war was basically sounder than the estimate of those who launched the Ardennes offensive—the Germans themselves."

Major General Kenneth Strong, Ike's intelligence chief.

Photo courtesy of author.



⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.



out from the bridgehead, and bring the power of the democracies—especially the United States—to bear against Germany. The essential problem was obvious: to get ashore.

To get ashore was no easy matter. The general in command of the operation, Dwight David Eisenhower, had a lift sufficient to put ashore on the first day of the operation, by means of aircraft and landing craft, the equivalent of five full divisions, or about 100,000 men, although not fully armored nor with their full complement of artillery. As against this, his German opposite numbers, Generals Von Rundstedt and Rommel, had in France upwards of fifty-five divisions, many of them veterans of the Eastern Front, many of them magnificently equipped, many of them panzer divisions. This was an eleven-to-one superiority for the side on the defensive.

Ike's problem was that his landing craft and aircraft were only sufficient to put ashore on D-Day a maximum of five divisions, with an extremely limited follow-up capacity. (Hit-

ler was not the only combatant who was stuck with a two-front war; the Allies were fighting in the Pacific, and the U.S. Navy in particular was making demands for landing craft, ships, and all the other matériel of amphibious warfare.) By D-Day plus ten, Ike could only hope to have ten divisions on the Continent. This against fifty-five German divisions—hopeless odds on the face of it. Hopeless, that is, unless Ike could do two basic things: first, attack where he was not expected, and second—and far more important—keep the Germans thinking that he was going to come ashore somewhere else even after his assault had been launched.

First Eisenhower had to select the place for the landing. There were very definite, logistical limitations. The attack had to come somewhere within the range of British-based fighter aircraft. That meant it had to be between Brest and Denmark. The whole top half of this possible landing zone could be eliminated for a number of reasons: it was

too easily defended by the enemy, the coast was too inundated, the coastline was too broken up, it did not lend itself to amphibious operations. So it had to come somewhere between Calais and Cherbourg. Going beyond Cherbourg down as far as Brest would mean putting the Allied forces quite far away from the seat of German power, and another requirement in picking the invasion site was its proximity to the heart of German industry. The farther away in France the Allies landed from the site of German industrial potential, in the Ruhr valley and on the Rhine, the farther they were going to have to fight to get at it.

Calais, some twenty miles from Dover, had all kinds of obvious advantages. The turnaround time would be very short. A landing craft running out of Dover could return in a matter of an hour and pick up another load and take it on back to Calais. The Allies could cut down on their requirements for landing craft considerably by using the shortest crossing. Also, Calais was the closest to the Rhineland, and to Germany's industrial heartland. Everything pointed to Calais as the target. Because that was so, and because the Germans could read a map as well as the Yanks could, the Germans had the Fifteenth Panzer Army stationed at Calais: their best army in France. In effect, they dared the Allies to come to Calais, the logical spot, and thus the most well-defended spot. For that reason, Ike chose Normandy instead.

Normandy made a nice compromise. It was not as far away from German industry as Brest would be, though not as close as Calais, of course. It had other advantages, of which by far the most important was that the Germans would not expect an attack there.⁹ The next most important factor was that the Cotentin Peninsula juts out into the English Channel and thus tends to modify storms coming in off the Atlantic, providing a bit of a lee shore.

Another advantage of Normandy was the Port of Cherbourg itself—not one of the world's biggest ports by any stretch of the imagination, but a good port that would pro-

vide an unloading capacity which would allow Ike to build up his armies. And finally, out of the Norman coastline there radiated a road net from Caen, the most important city in the region, leading directly toward Paris, which was, of course, a magnet for anyone fighting in France.

The next problem was to select the time for the invasion. When should it take place? Ike wanted it as early in the spring as possible in order to take advantage of the good campaigning weather, but late enough in the spring so that the roads would have dried out. May 1 was selected as the target date. That was pushed back to June 1 when it became clear that Admiral Ernest King's demands for landing craft in the Pacific were such that Ike's demands in Europe could not be met.

SO the target date was set at June 1, meaning that the invasion would go on the first suitable date after June 1. What was a suitable date? This got to be very complex. The Germans were, of course, aware that an invasion was coming. After recalling Rommel from Africa in 1943, Hitler had assigned him the task of building up the beach defenses, under the over-all command of the man that many regard as their best senior soldier, Von Rundstedt.

Rommel set to work making Fortress Europe into a reality rather than a bit of Hitlerian rhetoric. The Germans had been somewhat dilatory and inefficient in fortifying the French coast during three years of occupation, but Rommel now threw himself into his new assignment with energy and imagination. He wanted to defeat the Allies right at the water's edge. Guns of every caliber—from huge naval rifles to light anti-tank pieces—were sited in a wide variety of ferro-concrete bunkers and casemates covering the beaches. Slit trenches and barbed wire ringed the beach exits. Surplus French bombs and shells were converted to mines. Some four million German mines were sown on the beaches or affixed to tens of thousands of improvised underwater obstacles designed to rip the bottoms out of Allied landing craft. (Where no mines were laid, Rommel simply posted signs warning of mines, knowing that this ruse would slow enemy

⁹ However, Hitler—always looked down upon by the German General Staff as a rank amateur—correctly guessed that the Allies would invade in the region of Normandy/Brittany.



WHi (X3) 37367

Light tanks assembled in Swansea, Wales, ready to move out in preparation for the invasion of Europe.

movement.) Inland, large areas were flooded to deny access to troops and vehicles; in open fields, hundreds of thousands of stakes and posts ("Rommel's asparagus") were set in place to repel Allied gliders. By the spring of 1944, Hitler's vaunted West Wall was far from complete, but it was formidable, and—if backed up by a mobile armored reserve—it might well prove impregnable.

One way to overcome the German beach defenses on the Normandy coast was to land at dead low tide, because none of Rommel's obstacles extended beyond that point. By landing at dead low tide, the combat engineers—the bravest of the brave, to whom never enough credit is given—could move out ahead of the landing craft and dismantle or demolish the obstacles. Simultaneously, landing craft could be run right up on the shore, then lifted by the incoming tide and set afloat again to return for another load.

That meant that the landing had to come

at low tide. It also had to take place at first light, because a whole day was required to get ashore and get established. The Allies also had to land following a night that had some moonlight, but not a full moon. (The moonlight was necessary because to get ashore in Normandy you were going to need airborne troops—paratroopers and glider troops—and they had to have some light to jump by.) So it came down to this: Ike had to have a half moon on the day before a dead low tide at first light.

These conditions were met on June 5 and 6, 1944. They would not be met again until June 17 and 18. Ike therefore picked June 5 as the target date. Now the place, Normandy, had been selected. The time, dawn on June 5, had been selected. There remained the problem of selecting the generals to command the invasion forces.

On the British side, there was simply no question that the hero of El Alamein would

have to lead the British troops. Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery could not be denied his place in the sun. Whatever difficulties Ike had had with Montgomery in North Africa, and they were considerable, he was stuck with him, and his attitude was to make the best of a bad thing.

The choice of an American commander was a bit more difficult. In the opinion of the Germans, who had done an appreciation on American commanders after their experiences with them in North Africa and Sicily, the best general the Americans had was George S. Patton, Jr. It happened that George S. Patton, Jr., agreed with that judgment; but Dwight David Eisenhower did not. In his view, the best soldier the Allies had was Omar Bradley, who had been Patton's junior in North Africa and again in Sicily. Now Ike jumped Bradley over Patton and gave him command of the U.S. forces for Operation OVERLORD. And then—shrewdly, as it proved—he took full advantage of Patton's reputation with the Germans to give Patton a role that was crucial, even though Patton never relished it. (Indeed, one might almost say he hated it!) General Patton became a key link in a scheme of deception that rivals the Trojan horse both for the thoroughness of its planning and the decisiveness of its result. That deception had a name: FORTITUDE.

AS Operation OVERLORD was the crucial battle in the West, deception was the crucial factor in the battle. Through a variety of operations, all gathered together under the code name FORTITUDE, Eisenhower, and the Allied intelligence establishment, managed to convince the Germans, first, that the attack would come at the Pas de Calais, with a subsidiary attack on Norway; and second, that in the initial assault waves there would be ten or more divisions, with a follow-up capacity of another sixty-five divisions. These two basic errors in intelligence cost the Germans the battle in Normandy, and ultimately the war in the West.¹⁰

¹⁰ This story is told in loving, if not always careful, detail in Anthony Cave Brown, *Bodyguard of Lies* (New York, 1975), and therefore need only be summarized here.

As all deceptions must, FORTITUDE built upon German preconceptions and habits. The enemy assumed that the Pas de Calais would be the landing site because it was the choicest military objective. The Allies assumed that the Germans would defend Norway because of what Eisenhower called their "conqueror's mentality," meaning that they would not give up a scrap of occupied Europe without a fight. To convince the Germans to look north of the Seine for the landing, and even farther north to Norway, SHAEF created notional armies, "assembled" them at Dover and in Scotland, and prepared them to invade Norway and the Pas de Calais. This was done primarily by ten or a dozen skilled signal units transmitting radio messages—by filling the air with all the signals that would normally accompany the building of an army—carried on in a low-level, and thus easily broken, cipher. Supporting the radio deception was a variety of "movie set" visual deceptions: dummy tanks and vehicle parks, dummy landing barges and gliders, dummy gasoline dumps and barracks. Jeeps were driven around dragging chains to stir up dust; "cooking fires" were lit and laundry hung out to dry; moving lights suggested motor traffic after dark, and so on, all for the benefit of German reconnaissance planes. The principal gem in this crowning deception was at Dover, where an entire (notional) American army group gathered, supposedly under the command of George S. Patton, Jr.

The British Secret Service, meanwhile, had managed to locate and "turn" every German spy in England. This in and of itself was not unique—other intelligence agencies have done it before and since—but what *was* unique was that the British made the Germans believe that none of their spies had been caught. Moreover, that all of their spies were not only trustworthy but eminently so. They did this by showing very impressive British patience. They had turned all of these spies by 1940. They determined from the outset—"they" meaning Churchill and everyone else in the British Cabinet—that they would not squander this asset. They would not use it for some short-term gain; they would save it, and would spring with it only at the decisive moment, which would be when Britain and America hurled themselves back across the Channel.

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3RD JUNE, 1944

Circulated for the consideration of the Chiefs of Staff

WAR CABINET

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JOINT INTELLIGENCE SUB-COMMITTEE

GERMAN APPRECIATION OF ALLIED INTENTIONS REGARDING
"OVERLORD"

Report by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee

Area of Assault

There has been no intelligence, during the last week, to suggest that the enemy has accurately assessed the area in which our main assault is to be made. He appears to expect several landings between the Pas de Calais and Cherbourg.

2. Defensive sea minelaying has continued at approximately the same rate and has been carried out in areas from the Belgian coast, right round to the Gironde.

3. Preparations are being made for defensive minelaying by aircraft covering the whole north and west coast of France.

4. No special U-boat patrols for the western approaches to the Channel and the Bay of Biscay have yet been established.

Scale of Assault

5. There is evidence that the enemy overestimates the size of the Allied forces likely to be employed, not only in the first wave, but in the operations as a whole.

Timing

6. There is no further evidence to change our view that the enemy considers Allied preparations sufficiently advanced to permit of operations at any time now.

Subsidiary operations against France

7. The enemy is still reckoning with the possibility of diversionary operations in the Bay of Biscay and the probability of amphibious operations against Southern France or the Gulf of Genoa.

Diversionary attacks in other areas.

8. Diversionary operations are expected against the Norwegian coast.

(Signed) V. CAVENDISH-BENTINCK

Offices of the War Cabinet,
S.W.1.

E.G.N. RUSHBROOKE
F.F. INGLIS
R. PEAKE (for D.M.I.)

3rd June, 1944.

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So, all through 1940 and 1941 and 1942 and 1943, these German spies sent messages from London, from Edinburgh, from Liverpool, from Manchester, to their controllers in Hamburg containing authentic information, such as "General Eisenhower has arrived at Grosvenor's Square to take up his duties as commander of the Allied invasion forces." But this information was always passed through British intelligence. And it was always information rather like that of the news of Ike's arrival in London: news that would be titillating, newsworthy, that would make the spy look like he had entrée into the highest echelons of the British military establishment. But in the end, what could they do with it?

All of this came to be called the Double-Cross System. It was put into full play for Operation FORTITUDE. The German spies—all under British control now—reported very heavy train traffic across the Midlands, and no traffic at all north and south. In fact, all the train traffic in Britain in the spring of 1944 was coming from the north into the south as American goods rolled into the southern counties for the invasion buildup: an immense force of 175,000 men and all their equipment. The trains were rolling in day and night bringing in more landing craft, more weapons, more ammunition, more food, more mines, the works. But the spies reporting to Hamburg said all the train traffic was west to east: it was all going into Dover. The spies also reported, "Oh, I saw a new division patch on the street the other day. It was for the U.S. 108th Division." There wasn't any such U.S. division; it was a part of Patton's phony army group. On and on went these kinds of reports, all very meticulously done.

So the Double-Cross System was used one, to make the Germans think that Patton was going to lead the main attack from Dover to the Pas de Calais; and two, to very much exaggerate Ike's strength, especially with regard to divisions and landing craft. This was a tricky business, to fool one of the best intelligence services and finest military organizations in the world. There could be not one

slip-up. The British had built up a house of cards, and one good puff of wind could destroy the whole thing.

Now that other triumph of British intelligence came into play: Ultra. What did Ultra do? Ultra, for the purposes of Operation OVERLORD, provided that most essential piece of information, the enemy order of battle. Ken Strong of SHAEF knew, and, thanks to Strong, Ike knew, as soon as Rundstedt and Rommel knew, where the German divisions were. Thanks to Ultra, the Allies had a perfect reading on the German order of battle in the West. The Germans, in turn, thought they had a perfect reading on the Allies. In fact, they had given Ike credit for double the forces he actually had. (Years later, in an interview with the author about FORTITUDE and OVERLORD in general, the former supreme commander slapped his knee and let out that great big Eisenhower laugh. "We really fooled them, didn't we?" he said. "We really fooled them, didn't we?")

EISENHOWER did not personally direct these and the many other activities of the Double-Cross System, but he did exercise over-all supervision. He was the funnel through which everything passed, in intelligence as elsewhere. All the others—at SHAEF, at the British Secret Service, at the army group, army, corps, and division levels—were experts struggling with their specialties. They could study and analyze a problem and make recommendations, but they could not decide and act. The bureaucracy, of which the intelligence establishment was only a part, did very well what it was created to do, but its limitations were obvious. Someone had to give it direction; someone had to be able to take all the information the bureaucracy gathered, all the operations proposed, make sense out of them and impose order on them; someone had to decide; someone had to take the responsibility. It all came down to Eisenhower.¹¹

Eisenhower also took direct personal command of security for OVERLORD. Security—

Photo courtesy of author

Operation FORTITUDE clearly had fooled the Germans.

¹¹ Stephen E. Ambrose. *The Supreme Commander: The War Years of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (London, 1971), 392.



WHi (X2) 12247

Fruits of the "transportation plan," a smashed railroad bridge in France.

keeping the time and place and strength of the attack a secret—was as crucial as deception. If the Germans knew when and where the invasion was coming, they could surely muster the forces to throw it back into the sea. Eisenhower insisted on the strictest security measures among the SHAEF forces, writing all the directives and orders of the day on the subject himself. He sent home in disgrace an old friend and West Point classmate who had gotten drunk and talked in a barroom about some OVERLORD secrets.¹² He persuaded the Churchill government to take the extreme measure of evacuating all civilians out of the invasion buildup area in southeastern England.¹³ He also persuaded the British government, after some heated arguments with Churchill, to impose a ban on privileged diplomatic correspondence. It applied to every country except the United States and Russia, and caused a terrible row with the French, but Eisenhower insisted that it be continued, even weeks after D-Day.¹⁴

Eisenhower also insisted, in the face of terrific opposition not only from the Allied governments but from his own Air Force advisors, that some of the Allied airpower be directed

against targets inside France, principally the railway system that the Germans needed to switch reinforcements from one sector to another. Ike's deputy, a British air marshal named Arthur Tedder, convinced him that the best contribution the Allied air force could make to OVERLORD would be to slow the rate of German movement to the battlefield. (Tedder called it his "transportation plan," and he had got it from a British scientist named Solly Zuckerman.) The idea was to hit the railroads and bridges so the enemy couldn't move. They wanted to wipe out the whole French railway system. Churchill said that this was unthinkable, that he would have to live with the French after the war, that the civilian casualties would be enormous. (He had a point; for example, on April 24, 1944, more than 400 French people were killed in an Allied air raid on Rouen.) But in the end, Eisenhower prevailed, and the Allies diverted a substantial share of their tremendous aerial might to wrecking the French rail system.¹⁵

Eisenhower demanded that the whole FOR- TITUDE deception be continued after D-Day because it became clear that the Germans were accepting as real the various notional divisions

¹² *Ibid.*, 403.

¹³ *Eisenhower Papers*, 1746; Ambrose, *Supreme Commander*, 402.

¹⁴ *Eisenhower Papers*, 1814; Ambrose, *Supreme Commander*, 400-401.

¹⁵ In an interview with the author during the mid-1960's, Eisenhower stated that he thought his own greatest contribution to the success of OVERLORD was insisting on the "transportation plan" and putting his job on the line for it.

and armies in England, and were concentrating their defenses around the Pas de Calais and in Norway. The objective of FORTITUDE was correspondingly expanded. It became one of not only convincing the Germans that the Pas de Calais was the target, but also of convincing them after June 6 that the assault on Normandy was a feint. The main attack would still come at the Pas de Calais, led by Patton, whose absence from Normandy would thus be explained.

The Germans accepted this expanded version of FORTITUDE as completely as they had the original. Eisenhower did everything he could to maintain the fiction; indeed, much of his time during the first month of the Normandy campaign was devoted to keeping FORTITUDE alive.¹⁶ The Germans had fifty-five divisions in France. Their best army, the Fifteenth, was at the Pas de Calais, only a relatively short distance from Normandy. Eisenhower was invading with eight divisions, of which three were lightly armed airborne formations. If the Germans penetrated FORTITUDE and brought the Fifteenth Army down to Normandy, Eisenhower might well lose the battle of the buildup.

Of all the ploys used to fool the Germans into believing Normandy was a feint, the most brazen was a message transmitted from London on June 9—D-Day plus three—from a German agent named Garbo to his spymaster in Germany. (The Germans had great confidence in Garbo, who among other feats had told them of Eisenhower's appointment as SHAEF commander and—at midnight on June 5–6, too late to be of any value—exactly where and when and in what strength OVERLORD was coming.) Now Garbo reported: "The present operation, though a large-scale assault, is diversionary in character. Its object is to establish a strong bridgehead in order to draw the maximum of our reserves into the area of the assault and to retain them there so as to leave another area exposed where the enemy could then attack with some prospect of success." Garbo then pointed to the Pas de Calais as the real target, and offered convincing evidence, such as Patton's absence and the failure to commit any of the notional divisions

that appeared on the German appreciation of the Allied order of battle.¹⁷

Within half a day, Garbo's message was in Hitler's hands. On the basis of it, the Fuhrer made a momentous decision. Rundstedt had wanted to send his best division, the 1st SS Panzer Division, together with the crack 116th Panzer Division, to Normandy. They had started for Caen, but now Hitler ordered them back to Calais, to help the Fifteenth Army defend against the main invasion. (He also awarded an Iron Cross, Second Class, to Agent Garbo.)¹⁸

THE Double-Cross System was an immense help in sealing off the battlefield, keeping the Germans from moving fresh forces into Normandy at a time when Eisenhower's rate of buildup was excruciatingly slow. Another basic contribution was made by the French Resistance (the Maquis), acting in part in the role of an intelligence establishment's covert operations section, in part as a paramilitary guerrilla force. The British had established contact with the Resistance shortly after the fall of France in 1940; all Resistance activities were coordinated through the Special Operations Executive (SOE).¹⁹ The head of the American

¹⁷ J. C. Masterman, *The Double-Cross System in the War of 1939 to 1945* (New Haven, Connecticut, 1972), 156–157.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 157; Ronald Lewin, *Ultra Goes to War* (New York, 1978), 317.

¹⁹ The classic study is M. R. D. Foot, *SOE in France: An Account of the Work of the British Special Operations in France* (London, 1966).

He under stress during pre-invasion maneuvers.

UPI photo



¹⁶ See Ambrose, *Supreme Commander*, 398–407.

secret service, called the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), Colonel William Donovan, wanted an equal role for his organization. At his urging, Eisenhower air-dropped supplies, especially light machine guns, to the Maquis.²⁰ Donovan also insisted that the United States, not Britain, get the credit from the French for the supplies—a reflection of the profound mistrust that permeated Anglo/French/American relations.

How then to use the potential of the Maquis? The answer was three-man teams, called JEDs (from their training camp on the Jed River in Scotland), consisting of one Frenchman, one Englishman, and one American. Starting on D-Day, the JEDs parachuted into France, where they acted as liaison with the Resistance, armed and trained guerrilla forces, and coordinated sabotage activity with SHAEF. Altogether, between D-Day and the liberation of France, ninety-seven JED teams were parachuted into France.²¹ They were freed from their parent organizations and, at Eisenhower's insistence, reported directly to SHAEF.

The JEDs worked with the Maquis to cut telephone lines, blow bridges, derail trains, sabotage factories. They also engaged in hit-and-run assaults on German columns moving towards Normandy. Their most spectacular achievement was against the 2nd SS Panzer

Division, which left Toulouse for Normandy on D-Day plus one. Rommel expected the tanks in Normandy by D-Day plus three; the division actually arrived on D-Day plus seventeen. Of course, not all German columns moving towards the battle were so badly mauled, but SHAEF estimated that the over-all action of the Resistance delayed by an average of two days the arrival of all German units attempting to get to Normandy.²² And when, in August, the Germans began their retreat from Normandy, the Maquis ambushed the retreating columns, attacked isolated groups, protected bridges from destruction, and, as noted, became a primary and invaluable source of information.

What was the Resistance worth to Eisenhower? Five divisions? Ten? Eisenhower himself was unstinting in his praise. He told the JEDs, shortly after the war, that their activities "played a very considerable part in our final and complete victory."²³ And in his memoirs, published in 1948, he said that the French Resistance as a whole "had been of inestimable value."²⁴ Eisenhower was a careful writer who avoided exaggeration or hyperbole, and he meant exactly what he said of the Resistance.²⁵

So, on the eve of the great invasion, the Al-

²⁰ *Eisenhower Papers*, 1927, 1932.

²¹ R. Harris Smith, *OSS: The Secret History* (Berkeley, California, 1972), 175; Anthony Cave Brown, ed., *Secret War Report of the OSS* (New York, 1976), 403.

²² Foot, *SOE*, 398; Brown, *Secret War Report of the OSS*, 453, 459. Once the battle had been joined in Normandy, the Allies found the local residents an unexpectedly rich source of information about the enemy. Germany had conducted her occupation of Western Europe so as to antagonize nearly everyone. As a consequence, when an Allied tank column entered a French or Belgian village, the soldiers could depend upon the local populace to tell them the exact truth—when the Germans left, in what strength, in what direction, with what equipment, with details on the units involved, their commanders, and their headquarters. One reason that the offensive came to an abrupt halt in September, 1944, was that as soon as the Allies reached the German frontier, such local sources of information dried up. Similarly, once they had retreated within their own borders, the Germans possessed secure telephone lines and could dispense with the radio—which rendered Ultra useless and made the German counter-offensive in the Ardennes possible.

²³ Foot, *SOE*, 441-442.

²⁴ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (New York, 1948), 296. Foot writes: "It is impossible to overlook the contrast with Montgomery. Resistance is barely mentioned in either of the volumes in which Montgomery recounts the triumphs that, but for resistance, would not have been so easily won." *SOE*, 441-442.

²⁵ The great benefits SHAEF reaped from its close association with the French, Belgian, and Dutch Resistance movements highlight the failure to penetrate Germany itself in any significant way. In part this stemmed from the efficiency of the totalitarian state—Russia is equally difficult to penetrate today—but in part it was the result of one of the great follies of the war: the cold rejection the Allies gave to all overtures from the German Resistance. The Allies drew back from any involvement in the various plots to kill Hitler, not so much on moral grounds as because of the prevalent attitude that there were no "good" Germans. A potential wealth of intelligence from inside Germany was thereby forfeited, though Admiral Wilhelm Canaris of the German Abwehr did his best, in his own rather bumbling fashion, to feed information to the reluctant Allies. See Peter Hoffman, *The History of the German Resistance, 1933-1945* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1977, trans. by Richard Barry), and David Kahn, *Hitler's Spies: German Military Intelligence in World War II* (New York, 1978).



Photo courtesy of author

Ike and "La Grand Charles" (DeGaulle).

lies had deceived the Germans about their order of battle, about their combat leadership, about their chosen landing site. To a degree, the Allies had lowered the eleven-to-one odds they faced along the coast of Occupied France. But they were nevertheless setting out on a perilous adventure the issue of which would remain in doubt until well after D-Day. As in so many other such undertakings, the full weight of many agonizing decisions bore down upon the supreme commander.

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER was born in 1890, so he was fifty-four. He did not get much exercise; though he had done some horseback riding in North Africa, essentially he sat in an office. Nevertheless he still had the build of an athlete, which he had been in his youth. His health was excellent,

in the sense that he did not get colds, he did not get the flu, he did not succumb to whatever virus was sweeping through the office. He managed to stay on the job on the average eighteen hours a day, six and a half or seven days a week. He did not seem to be a nervous man. The only evidence of anxiety that one could see sometimes showed up in photographs taken at the time—there is one made at an invasion exercise about three weeks before D-Day where the lines are grimly etched in his face, and his concentration and tension are almost unbearable. He also showed that tension in his smoking. He always had been a fairly heavy smoker, a full pack a day. By 1944 he was smoking four packs of Camels a day.

The stress on Eisenhower was caused not only by the risks inherent in putting a hundred thousand brave young soldiers ashore in France. He also had to deal on a day-to-day basis with some of the most highly placed prima donnas in the world. Not only with Field Marshal Montgomery and General Patton and Tooey Spaatz the airman, but also with men like Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle. Churchill desperately wanted to accompany the British invasion forces on D-Day, and actually threatened to sign aboard a British destroyer as an ordinary seaman in order to have his way. With great difficulty, Ike managed to dissuade the Prime Minister from this folly.

Then it was "La Grand Charles," head of the Free French movement, president of the provisional French Republic, the very embodiment of French honor, who had been kept completely in the dark about OVERLORD because no one trusted the French (and for some very good reasons). Eisenhower had to listen for an hour and a half while De Gaulle lectured him, as if he were a student back at the Army War College, on where he ought to be invading, and what mistakes he had made.

On the third of June, after having dealt with Churchill and De Gaulle, Eisenhower encountered an even worse problem. His chief air commander, an RAF marshal named Trafford Leigh-Mallory, came to him and said, Ike, for God's sake, you've got to call off the airborne landings. Ultra had picked up the movement of the German 352nd Division into the areas where the paratroopers of the U.S.



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"... a lot of stars, a lot of power . . ." Seated left to right are: Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, General Sir Bernard Montgomery. Standing left to right are: Lt. General Omar N. Bradley, Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, and Lt. General Walter Bedell Smith.

101st Airborne were going to drop on the night of June 5–6. Ultra was also picking up indications that German anti-parachute regiments were moving into the drop zones of the U.S. 82nd Airborne. And there had been recent German movements of reinforcements coming up from the south of France into the area outside Caen where the British 2nd Airborne was going to drop. Bluntly, Leigh-Mallory warned Eisenhower that he would be sending the cream of the Allied troopers into a senseless slaughter. They were going to lose 75 per cent, maybe even 90 per cent of their men. It would be worse than the Somme, worse than Verdun; he had to call off the airborne assault.

Ike went to talk with his old friend Omar Bradley. The two generals went back a long time together. They had been plebes at West Point in 1911; they had played baseball to-

gether on the West Point team. They had been stationed together at various times in the 1920's and 1930's and had fought together in North Africa in 1942. Eisenhower told Bradley what Leigh-Mallory had told him, and asked for his advice. Bradley replied that if he called off the parachute and glider landings, he might as well call off the whole invasion. The men landing on the beaches were going to need the airborne troops to seize the beach exits, the key bridges, some of the German strongpoints. It was crucial that they do their jobs, even at terrible cost.

Ike went off by himself to think about it awhile. Then he made his decision. He informed Leigh-Mallory in a handwritten scrawl that the airborne attack was going in as scheduled, and he instructed him to take all the gloom off his face, to replace it with a cheery countenance. He wanted to see nothing but

smiles around headquarters, and he wanted the young men of the British and American airborne divisions to go into battle with their heads high and their hearts full of hope. He wanted Air Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory, especially, to convey these sentiments to the men.

So that decision was made. One would think that that was enough for any one man, but next day, the fourth of June, 1944, things got worse.

ALL through May, England had been covered by a high-pressure system that had brought the kind of weather that Shakespeare could write sonnets about. All through April and May Eisenhower had consulted on a daily basis with the SHAEF chief weatherman, a young Scotsman named James M. Stagg, a group captain in the Royal Air Force. Stagg was very good. A measure of how good he was at predicting the weather was something that happened early on June 4, when the American part of the invasion fleet had sailed out of Portsmouth. The invasion was actually getting under way; the paratroopers were ready to fly out that night; and then Group Captain Stagg came into a final meeting of the assembled brass and said, in effect, Hold it. There was a storm coming, a big one, blowing right in over Iceland, coming right down the Channel.

Ike sent out radio orders to the American fleet, which, displaying superb seamanship, turned around and came back into harbor to wait it out for a day and to hope for better weather on the morrow.

Now on the evening of June 4 another meeting was held in the same war room, at a place called Southwick House, outside Portsmouth, in southernmost England. It was an old English country estate, not terribly grand, but grand enough. (Today it is a training base for cadets for the British Navy. The war room is preserved exactly as it was on June 5, 1944.) They met there on the evening of June 4. The storm that Stagg had predicted was there. It was pouring rain at the rate of inches per hour. The wind was nearly hurricane proportions. And everyone was very relieved that they weren't trying to get ashore the next

morning on the Normandy coast.

Stagg reviewed the weather. Stagg was a young man: under thirty years old. Remember that he was a meteorologist in the days before satellites; they hadn't any data at all from up on high. Stagg had six different weather services reporting to him. The U.S. Army had its own weather service; the U.S. Army Air Force had its own; the U.S. Navy had its own; the British Navy, the British Army, the British Air Force, all had their own weather reporting stations. Stagg had six different predictions to choose from.

He made up his own forecast and he said, I see a break coming. I think there will be a break about midnight June 5-6. Ike said that they would meet there again at 3:00 in the morning. So they left Southwick House and went back to their various tents and trailers, to spend a fitful night. At 3:00 the next morning Ike dressed in the gloom, drove through a rain that was still coming down in horizontal streaks, through mud that came up to the hubcaps of his jeep, to this fairly elegant British mansion, into this very large room with its big, single oak table. Around that table sat a lot of stars, a lot of generals and a lot of admirals, a lot of power. They all sat down to wait for Captain Stagg.

Stagg came in and said that the break he had foreseen the night before was on its way. (The author heard this scene described just last year by the only man yet living who was there: Ken Strong, Ike's intelligence officer. Strong remembers that when Stagg said he saw that break, and it was still coming, a cheer went up. "You never heard middle-aged officers cheer so loudly in your lives," Strong said, "as when Stagg said there was going to be that break in the weather.")²⁶

Now, of course, that was just a *prediction*. Stagg made sure they understood that it was only his prediction, that others disagreed with him. He then left the room. He had done his job. Now it was up to the big shots to make their decision.

²⁶ See J. M. Stagg, *Forecast for Overlord: June 6, 1944* (New York, 1971). Stagg recalls in his memoir that General Walter Bedell Smith came up to him moments after he made his forecast for June 5-6 and said, "You've given us a helluva break, Stagg: hold on to it and then you can go off on a week's leave and get rid of those hollows under your eyes."

IKE put his hands behind his back, put his chin down on his chest, and started pacing up and down the room. He stopped, shot out his chin, and said, "Monty, what do you think?" Field Marshal Montgomery replied, "I should say, let's go." Ike nodded, and took that in, and paced some more. He shot out his head to Admiral Bertram Ramsay, the naval Commander in Chief, and said, "Ramsay, what do you think?" Admiral Ramsay replied that even if Stagg was right, the sea was going to be too heavy, the naval gunfire would be inaccurate, so best call it off. Ike nodded, and put his chin down on his chest again, and walked around some more. He said to Walter Bedell Smith, his Chief of Staff, "Beatle, what do you think?" General Smith thought the greater risk lay in postponement. Then it was Arthur Tedder's turn. Air Marshal Tedder thought it wouldn't be clear enough for the bombers to do their work the night before, so better to call it off.

Ike went all around the room, and it was fifty-fifty.

Ike then stood there for a period of time. (It is impossible to say for how long. The author has talked to a number of people who were in that room in Southwick House, including Ike himself, and it is clear only that no one really knows how much time elapsed. It was anywhere from three seconds to three minutes; my own guess is about thirty seconds.) Then Ike brought his chin up again, and he said, "OK, boys, let's go."

And Ken Strong recalls that a cheer went up that surpassed the previous cheer, and they all went dashing out of the room.

They all had their jobs to do now. Bradley had his job. Montgomery had his, and Tedder his, and Leigh-Mallory his. The Supreme Commander was left with nothing to do. Once he had made the decision to go, events were out of his control. The greenest lieutenant on Omaha Beach would now play more of a role

Ike talks to 101st Airborne troops on June 5, 1944, just before they were flown over northern France for the initial landings on June 6.

National Archives 208-N-28568-FA





National Archives 26-G-2402

U.S. assault troops crossing the Channel on their way to Normandy, June 6, 1944.

in the success or failure of Operation OVERLORD than would General Dwight David Eisenhower.

Ike spent the day talking to Churchill, who made another plea to be allowed to go on the invasion, and to De Gaulle, who again lectured him on why he was invading at the wrong place. Towards evening, Ike went out to an airfield north of Portsmouth where some of the paratroopers of the 101st Airborne were taking off. It made one of the memorable pictures of the war: the paratroopers with their faces all blackened up and Eisenhower talking to them, telling them not to worry, it was going to be serious business, to be sure, but they had the best arms and the best generals and they would prevail. And one of the paratroopers said, "Hell, don't tell us not to worry. Hitler's the one that ought to worry!"

When the 101st Airborne took off, Ike turned away, and a young reporter who was there at the time saw tears in the eyes of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force.

WITH the revelation in 1972 of the Double-Cross System,²⁷ followed two years later by the exposure of the Ultra secret,²⁸ and four years later by even more revelations about the triumphs of British intelligence over their German adversaries,²⁹ the question inevitably was asked: "Why didn't the Allies win the war sooner?" To which Harold Deutsch of the U.S. Army War College has provided the proper answer: "They *did* win the war sooner!"³⁰ Espionage,

code-breaking, deception, double-agency, sabotage, the Maquis—all played their parts in the web of military intelligence that was spun around Nazi Germany; all contributed materially to the Allied victory.

But it is true, as the former U.S. intelligence officer Adolph Rosengarten had written, "intelligence won neither the 'Crusade' nor World War II." He goes on to quote an unnamed American general who in 1941 held up in front of his officers a Springfield rifle with fixed bayonet and told them "Wars are won by guts on both ends of this."³¹

The Allies won World War II because of the courage, stamina, and fighting ability of their combat troops, backed by British brains and America's industrial brawn. The British intelligentsia were better than their German opponents, just as America's factories outproduced those in the Ruhr. Intelligence and deception were a great help; but the men who won the war, even after all the revelations about Ultra and the Double-Cross System, remain those men to whom Eisenhower dedicated *Crusade in Europe*: "The Allied Soldier, Sailor, and Airman of World War II."

²⁷ Masterman, *The Double-Cross System*.

²⁸ Winterbotham, *The Ultra Secret*.

²⁹ R. V. Jones, *Most Secret War*, published in the United States as *The Wizard War: British Scientific Intelligence, 1939-1945* (New York, 1978).

³⁰ Harold Deutsch, "The Influence of Ultra on World War II," in *Parameters: Journal of the U.S. Army War College*, VIII: 6 (December, 1978).

³¹ Adolph G. Rosengarten, Jr., "With Ultra from Omaha Beach to Weimar," in *Military Affairs*, XLII: 131 (October, 1978).