

D-Day: June 6, 1944

A Seventy-fifth Anniversary Retrospective

Memorial Day 2019

INTRODUCTION

Today we begin a special in commemoration of the most decisive combat offensive of the Second World War, at least as far as the European theater of operations is concerned. It has many names: **Operation Overlord** was its official title; the **Normandy Invasion** refers to the overall campaign, but the first day of the first battle has always been known as **D-Day**—June 6, 1944. The Allied forces of American, British, and Canadian military personnel secretly assaulted the Normandy coast of France in the middle of a seasonal storm in the English Channel. Next week, on June 6, 2019, will mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of this historic battle.

Over the next few days, we will learn about the circumstances leading up to the invasion, the plan which was named Operation Overlord, the subterfuge designed to mislead the German general command, and the initial assault with emphasis on the American forces who disembarked onto Utah Beach and what became known as Bloody Omaha.

ESTIMATE OF THE SITUATION

Sun Tzu: Warfare is the art of deceit. Therefore, when able, seem to be unable; when ready, seem unready. If the enemy seeks some advantage, entice him with it. If he is in disorder, attack him and take him. If he is formidable, prepare against him. Attack where he is not prepared; go by way of places where it would never occur to him you would go.¹

On 9 May 1940, Adolf Hitler initiated a major offensive through the Ardennes (är-dén) Forest: “Wooded plateau region, east of the Meus River covering most of Belgian province of Luxembourg and part of Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and occupying the Meuse Valley of French Ardennes.”²

¹ Sun-Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, trans. Roger T. Ames (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 95–96.

² *Merriam-Webster’s Geographical Dictionary*, 3d ed. (2007), s.v. “Ardennes.”



This initial Ardennes Offensive, called Plan Yellow, introduced a new tactic called *blitzkrieg* into the lexicon of land warfare. Literally, “lightning war,” a blitzkrieg involves a violent surprise offensive by massed air forces and mechanized ground forces moving with great speed. The key element on the ground were the panzer tanks. The inventor of the blitzkrieg concept was General Heinz Guderian (gu-dé-ri-án), who commanded the land phase of the offensive.

This operation enabled the Germans to occupy portions of Belgium, France, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, and Norway until driven out by Allied forces following the Normandy invasion some four years later.

By late 1943, Germany had long been expecting some sort of Allied invasion of northern France, but they had no idea from where the assault would come. Karl von Rundstedt (rúnt-shtdt) and Erwin Rómmel were given the task of determining where this offensive would happen and to stop it on the beaches.

The expected invasion point was at Calais (ka-lā'). The shortest route across the English Channel was the Strait of Dover. Between the British port of Dover and the French city of Calais was only about 22 miles of water. Between Portsmouth and the Normandy beaches, it was over 90 miles.

Since allied intelligence revealed that the Germans expected the attack to occur at Calais, it was to their advantage to play off that notion. And thus, a major objective of Operation Overlord was to convince the Germans that Calais was the intended target for Allied invasion.

Subterfuge: Operation Fortitude³

Sun Tzu: The location where we will engage the enemy must not become known to them. If it is not known, then the positions they must prepare to defend will be numerous. If the positions the enemy prepares to defend are numerous, then the forces we will engage will be few.⁴

Subterfuge is “deception by artifice or stratagem in order to conceal, escape, or evade.”⁵

Ruse stresses an attempt to mislead by a false impression.

³ Source: Daniel Wyatt, “Operation Fortitude Succeeded in Convincing the Germans that the Allies Were Coming to Calais,” *World War II*, May 1994, 8.

⁴ Sun-Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph D. Sawyer (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1994), 123.

⁵ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th ed. (2014), s.v. “subterfuge.”



Stratagem implies a ruse used to entrap, outwit, circumvent or surprise an opponent or enemy.

Artifice implies ingenious contrivance or invention. **Feint** implies a diversion or distraction of attention away from one's real intent.

These tactics have been used throughout history of warfare. We have quoted Sun Tzu and his recommendation to employ subterfuge in order to deceive the enemy: "Make him think your objective is one place and then suddenly attack another."

Subterfuge is an age-old tactic and was never used so effectively as by the Allies in preparation for Operation Overlord. Great pains were taken to convince the German high command that the Allied assault would occur at Calais.

The plan was named **Operation Fortitude**. Through every imaginable means, its mission was to produce as much disinformation as possible regarding an assault on Calais. Yet its distribution had to be handled in such a way that the Germans would think they had either happened on the information or intercepted it.

Thus, Operation Fortitude was treated as a real operation. Engineers and construction workers erected a giant oil storage depot and docking area near Dover on the English Channel.

The facility included pipelines, storage tanks, truck bays, troop barracks, and anti-aircraft guns. British press reported that General Bernard Montgomery and King George VI had made an on-site inspection themselves.

Simultaneously, to the north of Dover, somewhere in farming country of Suffolk County, American Army engineers were inflating huge piles of rubber with compressed air. As if by magic, they were transfigured into M-4 Sherman tanks.

General George S. Patton was well-known, even to the Germans, as a man who had a problem keeping his mouth shut at times. Rumors were heavy both among experts of the Allies as well as Nazi Germany that Patton was mobilizing an Army Group to invade the European continent. In a crowded hotel lobby, the general bid farewell to his shocked fellow officers by bellowing, "See you in Calais."

Allied agents in the neutral countries of Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, and Ireland bought up every map that featured the Calais region. German agents were forced to take notice.

What did all these incidents have in common? They were meticulously planned and methodically carried out to mislead the Germans. Patton was not heading up an Army Group, there was no real oil depot at Dover, and there was never any intention of assaulting Calais.

Why the subterfuge? The Allies understood the principles known to Sun Tzu and Israeli armies:



Sun Tzu: Warfare is the way of deception. Thus, although you are capable, display incapability to them. When committed to employing your forces, feign inactivity. When your objective is nearby, make it appear as if distant; when far away, create the illusion of being nearby. Thus, the army is established by deceit, moves for advantage, and changes through segmenting and reuniting.⁶

Just after David was anointed king of Israel, the Philistine army challenged him by making two raids on the Valley of Rephaim (Réf-a-im). The Lord instructs David to use evasive tactics in order to win the second battle of Rephaim.

1 Chronicles 14:14 And David inquired again of God, and God said to him, “You shall not go up after them; circle around behind them and come at them in front of the balsam trees.

When an enemy is greater and stronger than yours and fortified for combat, then that enemy must be circumvented if at all possible. The Allies sought to deceive the Germans, otherwise they would have been unable to invade the European continent.

German divisions—100 strong—spanned Western Europe from the tip of Norway down to southern France. By contrast, the Allies had one-third the strength of its enemy’s. Germany had recently fortified both Calais and Normandy and thus General Eisenhower’s objective was to make the Germans believe the assault would come at Calais hopefully causing Hitler to keep his best divisions there.

The mission of Operation Overlord was to execute a flanking movement—an end run—and the initial assault would occur at Normandy sometime during the first week of June.

But this was only the first part of the ruse. Once Normandy was taken, Operation Fortitude then had a second objective: make the Germans think that Normandy was the real diversion and that the real assault was to occur at Calais.

Secrecy was the ultimate weapon. If the Germans found out, tens of thousands of men’s lives could be lost.

There were several reasons the Germans believed Calais was the primary attack point: **(1)** it was an excellent seaport, **(2)** it was the shortest distance from England, **(3)** it had an easily accessible airport, and **(4)** it was on a direct path to the hub of German industry in the Ruhr (rür) Valley.

⁶ Sun-Tzu, 136.



Operation Fortitude was also divided into two sections, north and south. The north section was called, “Syke,” and consisted of a fictitious British Fourth Army in Scotland. Those assigned to this paper “army” were to create the impression by means of fake radio transmissions that they were ordering items necessary to support an invasion of Norway. Items requested include such things as snow equipment and ski boot bindings.

German monitors intercepted these messages and Hitler interpreted them as authentic. As a result, he kept 27 divisions in Norway in anticipation of an amphibious North Sea crossing from Scotland.

The South sector was called “Quicksilver,” and it too consisted of a paper army. This was the one Patton was to command, called the First Army Group. Cursing was about to be turned into blessing for “Old Blood and Guts.”

Patton was on the outs with Eisenhower, at least publicly, all as a result of having slapped two American soldiers following the North Africa and Sicily campaign. Patton accused them of cowardice upon finding them in sick bay claiming they suffered from “shell shock.” The American and European press turned the issue into a cause célèbre causing President Franklin Roosevelt to order Eisenhower to discipline him. Patton had thus been removed from command since January 1.

Intelligence sources had discovered that the Germans respected Patton more than any other Allied general. As a result, he became the perfect man to head up a fake Army Group with designs on attacking Calais.

Patton was brought under great secrecy to England where he was informed of his new assignment. At first disappointed he would not be involved at Normandy, but later encouraged to learn that he would be assigned a new army one month after the invasion, Patton more enthusiastically took on his new duties.

Understanding the need for secrecy to camouflage Overlord, Patton appreciated the importance of the mission. Always ready to ham it up, the general played his role as the new commander of the First Army Group to the hilt.

His army was to be mustered in two counties of east England—Suffolk and Norfolk—an area called East Anglia. Patton publicly toured the area holding press conferences.

There was more to the deception than the fake port and oil depot at Dover and the rubber Sherman tanks. A London production company, Sheperton Film Studios, which designed the rubber tanks, also constructed phony landing craft that were assembled and moored on the Thames. It also constructed fake ammunition dumps, hospitals, and troop camps for use in East Anglia. To top it all off, they developed life-sized model airplanes.



Hundreds of bombers, fighters, and gliders were made from wood and canvas which became the “Ninth Air Force,” purported to be the air cover for Patton’s First Army Group.

German spy planes were constantly flying over East Anglia taking photos of the goings-on below. To the Germans, all of this subterfuge looked from high altitude like a huge invasion force. Hitler’s general staff named it Army Group Patton and were convinced its target was the city of Calais just over twenty miles across the Channel.

Had the spy planes come lower their photographs probably would have detected the ruse. But any plane flying too low was shot down. Those flying above 30,000 feet were fired upon but only under the order, “Don’t hit them. Just get close enough.”

The best intelligence organization going was that of the British. Known as MI-5, it had a special operations branch called the XX Committee, or Double Cross. The Germans were constantly sending spies into England and all were compromised within days. Prisoners were given two choices: cooperate or hang.

Cooperation meant to send back to Germany phony wireless information speaking of huge armies mobilizing in Scotland and East Anglia. Over 100 German spies elected to work for MI-5, the rest were executed.

The French underground did a marvelous job of feeding information to Eisenhower on German troop and armor movements. Through them the Allies learned that in late May the powerful German 15th army, composed of three panzer divisions, was still situated around Calais.

Three Frenchmen also provided the Allies with a complete set of photos, notes, and drawings of the fortified Atlantic Wall. Eisenhower had in his hands a detailed map of this 125-mile front before the Normandy invasion began.

The subterfuge continued with the addition of aerial bombing at the end of May. Simulating a prelude to invasion, for every bomb dropped on Normandy, two fell on Calais.

The Weather angels even contributed to the delusion. Fair weather in May turned to storms in early June. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel took what appeared to him to be a safe period to visit Hitler and spend some time with his wife who was celebrating her birthday on June 6.

Other high-ranking German officers took the time to do other things, such as conducting war games in Rennes (rén), France.



In the predawn hours of June 6, paratroopers were dropped behind Normandy's lines to secure bridges, roads, and the flanks of the landing zone. Disguising this action, waves of bombers began an assault on Calais. In the midst of all this, two small groups of balloon-carrying motor launches headed toward Calais. Each boat towed two 30-foot reflectors that together produced a radar image resembling that of a 10,000-ton troop transport. This was augmented by Royal Air Force bombers dropping aluminum strips to disrupt German radar signals. All this helped create the illusion that a massive invasion force was forming off the coast of Dover.

As the Germans waited for the blow to hit Calais, to the southwest D-Day had arrived. The liberation of Europe was about to begin. H-hour was set for 6:30 A.M.

The Plan⁷

Sun Tzu: The army is established by deceit, moves for advantage, and changes through segmenting and reuniting. Thus, its speed is like the wind, its slowness like the forest; its invasion and plunder like a fire.⁸

Luke 14:31 What king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand?
(NASB)

General Dwight David Eisenhower, commander in chief of allied forces in western Europe, left the United States on January 13, 1944 to undertake the organization of the mightiest fighting force that the two Western Allies could muster.

Immediate subordinates included **Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur William Tedder**, deputy commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force; **General Omar Nelson Bradley**, commander of the 12th Army Group; **General Sir Bernard Law Montgomery**, commander of the British-Canadian 21st Army Group; **Lieutenant General Carl "Tooy" Spaatz**, chief U.S. bombing force, Germany; **Admiral Sir Bertram Home Ramsey**, naval commander in chief for Operation Overlord; and **Air Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory** commander in chief of the Allied Expeditionary Air Forces for Operation Overlord.

⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Planning Overlord," in *Crusade in Europe* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1948), 220–52).

⁸ Sun-Tzu, 111.



With German forces poised on the Atlantic front from Norway to Spain, the only hope the Allies had left was to somehow establish a theater of operations in western Europe. Failure would mean certain fatal consequences at the hands of Nazism.

One of the prime targets of Allied air strikes was the German oil industry. General Spaatz believed that once Germany's oil reserves were expended it would have profound effects upon the outcome of the war.

The directive issued to the Allied officers was simple and brief: “You will enter the continent of Europe and, in conjunction with the other Allied nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces.”

The heart of western Germany was the Ruhr,⁹ the center of its wartime munitions industry. The second most important industrial area in western Germany was the Saar River basin. Between these two, lay much of Germany's war-making power. The Ruhr Valley included many major industrial cities: Éssen, Bochum (bó-kum), Duisburg (düz'-berk), Gelsenkirchen (gel-zen-kír-ken), Dortmund (dórt-munt)—all bombed severely and continuously from 1942–45.

There were several feasible avenues for crossing the Rhine River with large forces, but the one which was best was north of the Ruhr River. Once across the Rhine, it was a short distance to cut off the Ruhr region and its war industries from the rest of Germany. Further, it had perfect terrain for offensive action.

Yet, getting there was the problem. It required destroying German armed forces in the field. To do this required a concentrated effort throwing all Allied strength at the enemy. The main drive would be across Belgium in order to gain use of their enormously important ports.

Eisenhower summed up the objective in this way:

We reasoned that the Ruhr, which we expected to be defended by the strongest forces the enemy could provide, would be best reduced by a double envelopment. To achieve it we planned to make the northern attack as strong as the lines of communication would sustain, and the Frankfurt attack as strong as remaining resources would permit. We believed further that once these two attacks had joined in the vicinity of Kassel (käs'-el), east of the Ruhr, there would be no hope, in the military sense, remaining to Germany . In any event we believed that, once established in the Kassel region, we could easily thrust out offensively on our flanks. This would mean the end of the war in Europe.

⁹ “Ruhr (rür), river and major industrial region along its course. It is geographically defined as extending from the left bank of the Rhine east of Hamm and from the Ruhr River north to the Lippe [lí-pä]; a wider definition would include the Rhine River cities of Krefeld [kra-felt] and Düsseldorf and the urban belt extending eastward from Düsseldorf through Wuppertal [vú-per-täl] to Hagan [há'-gan]. This is Germany's most densely populated region” (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, 15th ed. [Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2010], 10:236).

