

Double Cross: The True Story of the D-Day Spies¹

Reviewed by Major Kevin D. Kornegay*

*In wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies.*²

I. Introduction

In January 1941, Juan Pujol García,³ a twenty-nine-year-old Spaniard with no experience in espionage, visited the British embassy in Madrid and offered to spy against the Germans. Pujol, who had tried and failed at numerous careers, had most recently run a poultry farm outside Barcelona. Now, motivated by an intense dislike of Nazism, he was determined to contribute to the Allied cause. Although the British rejected his offer of assistance,⁴ Pujol was undeterred. He offered his services as a spy to the Germans. Despite the fact that he spoke no English, he was recruited by the German military intelligence service responsible for espionage: the Abwehr. The Abwehr dispatched Pujol under the codename “Arabel” to Great Britain via neutral Portugal. Once in Lisbon, Pujol renewed his offer to the British, this time as a double agent, and was again rejected. At this point, he conceived a novel plan. On 19 July 1941, Pujol sent a message to his Abwehr handler, Major Karl-Erich Kuhlenthal, from Lisbon informing him of his arrival in Great Britain. Subsequently, using only information publicly available in Lisbon, Pujol began to fabricate elaborate intelligence reports. His reports, for which he invented a network of fictitious subagents, deluded the Germans so successfully that the British ultimately felt compelled in the winter of 1941 to recruit him as a double agent to ensure that his reports would not interfere with reports being carefully fed to the Germans by agents under their control. Codenamed “Garbo,” Pujol remained a British double agent until the end of the war and played a significant

role in *Operation Fortitude*, the Allied deception operation to conceal the location of the Normandy campaign.⁵

Juan Pujol Garcia is one of five British double agents profiled in Ben Macintyre’s *Double Cross: The True Story of the D-Day Spies*. All of the double agents have stories worthy of fiction. In addition to Pujol, Macintyre’s “D-Day spies” include “a bisexual Peruvian playgirl, a tiny Polish fighter pilot, a mercurial Frenchwoman, [and] a Serbian seducer”⁶ A columnist and associate editor at the *Times* (London), Macintyre⁷ is a talented storyteller; *Double-Cross* has all the ingredients of a spy thriller, including seduction, abduction, secret ink, and microdots. However, the story of *Operation Fortitude*, the Allied deception operation for the Normandy invasion, has been told many times before. In addition to the many general accounts of espionage and intelligence operations in the Second World War and innumerable books on D-Day that discuss *Operation Fortitude*, *Double Cross* joins other specific studies of the operation,⁸ as well as biographies,⁹ autobiographies, and memoirs¹⁰ of many of the main players. Macintyre’s goal with *Double Cross* is to tell the story of *Operation Fortitude*

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¹ BEN MACINTYRE, *DOUBLE CROSS: THE TRUE STORY OF THE D-DAY SPIES* (2012).

² Winston Churchill is said to have made this remark to Joseph Stalin at the Tehran Conference in November 1943. Stalin replied, “This is what we call military cunning.” MACINTYRE, *supra* note 1, at 3.

³ *Id.* at 21–24 (for a biographical sketch of Pujol). The basic outline of Juan Pujol García’s story is available in multiple sources, including a documentary film, in addition to the book under review: TOMAS HARRIS, *GARBO: THE SPY WHO SAVED D-DAY* (2004); NIGEL WEST & JUAN PUJOL GARCÍA, *OPERATION GARBO* (2011); “AGENT GARBO,” *THE SPY WHO LIED ABOUT D-DAY*; NPR *ALL THINGS CONSIDERED* (July 7, 2012), <http://www.npr.org/2012/07/07/156189716/agent-garbo-the-spy-who-lied-about-d-day>; *GARBO: THE SPY* (Centuria Films, S.L. 2009).

⁴ It is not surprising that Pujol was rejected. So-called “walk-ins,” individuals that voluntarily offer to conduct espionage, may be directed by another intelligence agency and are considered particularly vulnerable to compromise by counter-intelligence. U.S. ARMY EUR., REG. 381-22, PROCESSING WALK-INS para. 3b (22 May 2003) (defining “walk-in”).

⁵ In 1944, Pujol was awarded both an Iron Cross for his work as agent Arabel and appointed MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) by George VI for his work as agent Garbo on *Operation Fortitude*. MACINTYRE, *supra* note 1, at 335, 343.

⁶ *Id.* at 5. The individual spies alluded to in this quotation are Elvira de la Fuente Chaudoir (Military Intelligence, Section 5 (MI5) code name “Bronx”); Roman Czerniawski (“Brutus”); Lily Sergeev (“Treasure”); and Dusan “Dusko” Popov (“Tricycle”).

⁷ A brief biography of Macintyre is available on his publisher’s website at <http://www.bloomsbury.com/author/ben-macintyre> (last visited Apr. 7, 2014). *Double Cross* is Macintyre’s third book on spying and intelligence operations in the Second World War. His earlier books are *AGENT ZIGZAG: A TRUE STORY OF NAZI ESPIONAGE, LOVE AND BETRAYAL* (2007) and *OPERATION MINCEMEAT: HOW A DEAD MAN AND A BIZARRE PLAN FOOLED THE NAZIS AND ASSURED AN ALLIED VICTORY* (2010).

⁸ MARY K. BARBIER, *D-DAY DECEPTION: OPERATION FORTITUDE AND THE NORMANDY INVASION* (2009); ANTHONY CAVE BROWN, *BODYGUARD OF LIES* (1975); ROGER HESKETH, *FORTITUDE: THE D-DAY DECEPTION CAMPAIGN* (1999); JOSHUA LEVINE, *OPERATION FORTITUDE: THE STORY OF THE OPERATION THAT SAVED D-DAY* (2011).

⁹ GEOFFREY ELLIOT, *GENTLEMAN SPYMASTER: HOW LT. COL. TOMMY ‘TAR’ ROBERTSON DOUBLE-CROSSED THE NAZIS* (2011); HARRIS, *supra* note 3; RUSSELL MILLER, *CODENAME TRICYCLE: THE TRUE STORY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR’S MOST EXTRAORDINARY DOUBLE AGENT* (2005).

¹⁰ JOSE ANTONIO BARREIROS, *NATHALIE SERGUIES UMA AGENTE DUPLA EM LISBOA* (2006); ROMAN GABY-CZERNIAWSKI, *THE BIG NETWORK* (1961); JOHN C. MASTERMAN, *THE DOUBLE CROSS SYSTEM IN THE WAR 1939–1945* (1972); JOHN C. MASTERMAN, *ON THE CHARIOT WHEEL: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY* (1975); DUSKO POPOV, *SPY/COUNTERSPY* (1974); WEST & GARCÍA, *supra* note 3.

“for the first time”¹¹ from the perspective of the five double agents assigned to the operation and their Military Intelligence, Section 5 (MI5)¹² handlers. Accompanied by a companion one-hour BBC documentary of the same name,¹³ *Double Cross* is a work of popular history, without the style or the trappings of an academic text. However, Macintyre’s support of the claim that the Double Cross system and *Operation Fortitude* contributed significantly to the success of the Normandy invasion has been questioned both by academic historians and by intelligence specialists.¹⁴ For military professionals, *Double Cross* provides an opportunity to consider the relative risks and rewards of deception operations, as well as the challenges in judging their effectiveness.

II. The Double Cross System

Macintyre’s title refers to the Double Cross system, the British counter-espionage and deception operation to “turn” captured German agents, who as double agents were used to feed disinformation to the German high command.¹⁵ The system was overseen by the inter-agency Twenty Committee,¹⁶ which consisted of the directors of intelligence for the armed services and representatives from Military Intelligence, Section 5 (MI5) and Military Intelligence, Section 6 (MI6).¹⁷ The committee’s chairman was John Masterman,¹⁸ an Oxford University don,¹⁹ sportsman, and

¹¹ The writing on the back of the book claims, “[Operation Fortitude] has never before been told from the perspective of the key individuals in the Double Cross system, until now.” MACINTYRE, *supra* note 1, at jacket.

¹² The Security Service, commonly known as Military Intelligence, Section 5 (MI5), is the United Kingdom’s domestic counter-intelligence and security agency. Its counterpart, the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS or MI6), is focused on foreign threats. *Id.* at 78.

¹³ *Double Cross: The True Story of the D-Day Spies* (BBC2 2012). Information about the documentary and clips can be found on the BBC2 website at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01ktflc/presenters/ben-macintyre> (last visited Apr. 7, 2014).

¹⁴ BARBIER, *supra* note 8; Mary K. Barbier, *Deception and Planning of D-Day, in NORMANDY 1944: SIXTY YEARS ON* (John Buckley ed., 2006); A. V. Knobelspiesse, *Masterman Revisited*, in 18 *STUDIES IN INTELLIGENCE*, available at https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol18no1/html/v18i1a02p_0001.htm (last visited Apr. 7, 2014).

¹⁵ Macintyre’s focus on his five “D-Day” spies means that he does not discuss the process of turning other double agents in any detail. THE SPIES WHO FOOLED HITLER (BBC Timewatch 1999) (explaining the Double Cross system, including the process of “turning” captured German agents).

¹⁶ The committee’s name is a numerical pun referring to the Roman numerals for twenty, XX, hence, “double cross.” MACINTYRE, *supra* note 1, at 42.

¹⁷ Consisting of individuals disqualified from regular military service, the Home Guard was constituted as a secondary defense in the case of an Axis invasion of the British Isles.

¹⁸ For a more complete biography of Masterman, see Knobelspiesse, *supra* note 14. This article in the Central Intelligence Agency’s professional

occasional author. While Masterman and the Twenty Committee exercised strategic control of the Double Cross system, tactical operation of the double agents was overseen by Lt. Col. Thomas A. “Tar” Robertson, a Scottish former army officer, who joined MI5 in 1933. A case agent in Robertson’s MI5 section (German Counter-Intelligence) was assigned to handle each double agent successfully turned.²⁰

Initially, the Double Cross system was used exclusively for counter-intelligence purposes to convince the German high command that they had a large and efficient network of spies operating in the United Kingdom, when they had nothing of the sort. Through the double agents, the MI5 case agents fed their Abwehr counterparts intelligence reports consisting of “chicken-feed,”²¹ a mix of banal falsehoods and harmless truths. However, Robertson became more ambitious after realizing in June 1943 that every German agent in the United Kingdom was under his section’s control. Macintyre writes, “Robertson’s team of double agents could now begin feeding the Germans not just snippets of falsehood, but a gigantic, war-changing lie.”²² Consequently, Robertson advocated for more aggressive use of the Double Cross system in the planning for *Operation Bodyguard*, the overall Allied deception campaign for the Normandy invasion.

III. Operation Fortitude

Operation Fortitude was just one component of *Operation Bodyguard*.²³ *Fortitude* itself had two separate operational objectives. The aim of *Fortitude South* was to convince the Germans that the Allies would launch their long-anticipated invasion of occupied France through Pas de Calais. The aim of *Fortitude North* was to convince the Germans that the Allies were staging a secondary invasion of occupied Norway from Scotland. *Operation Fortitude* can be contrasted with *Operation Mincemeat*, which was the British deception campaign before the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943 and the subject of Macintyre’s *Operation*

journal is a testament to Masterman’s legacy and influence on deception operations.

¹⁹ A “don” is a fellow or tutor at one of the collegiate universities, such as Oxford or Cambridge. Before the war, Masterman was a tutor in Modern History at Christ Church, Oxford. *Id.*

²⁰ MACINTYRE, *supra* note 1, at 43; John P. Campbell, “Robertson, Thomas Argyll,” in *OXFORD DICTIONARY OF NATIONAL BIOGRAPHY*, available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/templates/article.jsp?articleid=55645&back=> (last visited Apr. 7, 2014) (for a more complete biography of Robertson).

²¹ MACINTYRE, *supra* note 1, at 67. Macintyre uses the term “chicken feed” throughout *Double Cross*, but does not indicate whether the term is his own or is derived from one of the primary sources. He gives no citation for his first use of the term.

²² *Id.* at 4.

²³ The operation’s name was a reference to Churchill’s famous statement, used as an epigraph for this review.

*Mincemeat: How a Dead Man and a Bizarre Plan Fooled the Nazis and Assured an Allied Victory.*²⁴ In *Operation Mincemeat*, in which the Double Cross system played a far smaller role, the aim of the deception was to convince the Germans that the Allies planned to launch their Italian campaign with an invasion of Sardinia and Greece, rather than Sicily, which was considered the obvious target by both the Germans and the Allies.²⁵ To accomplish this end, the British arranged for a corpse, disguised as a military courier and in possession of falsified military planning documents, to wash up on a beach in Spain, where the Allies were certain the documents would fall into the hands of German agents. The aim of *Operation Fortitude* was the reverse: to convince the Germans that the obvious target (Pas de Calais) was the real target.

Operation Fortitude employed multiple deception strategies. Shadow armies were invented. The fictitious First United States Army Group (FUSAG) was deployed in southeast England, while an equally fictitious British Fourth Army was deployed to Scotland. Dummy tanks, fighter aircraft, and landing craft were staged to give the impression of a large army preparing for an invasion. Wireless transmissions were increased in both southeast England and in Scotland to further give the impression of assembling forces. To bolster the impression that the Allies' main invasion force would deploy from southeast England to Pas de Calais, the British press reported that General George Patton was in command of FUSAG.²⁶ As D-Day approached, the Allies maintained an intensive bombing campaign in and around Pas de Calais to give the impression that they were "softening" the target in advance of an amphibious assault.

Because the British had cracked the Enigma code²⁷ and were reading intercepted German wireless traffic, MI5 was able to assess the value placed upon information passed by double agents by charting its course from the Abwehr to the German high command. Indeed, the decision to recruit Juan Pujol was based on intercepted transmissions that convinced MI5 of his influence on the Germans, in particular an incident in which the German Navy pursued a non-existent

convoy on the basis of one of Pujol's reports.²⁸ For *Operation Fortitude*, Robertson identified the five Double Cross agents that he deemed to be most reliable in German eyes: Brutus, Bronx, Treasure, Tricycle, and Garbo. In addition to their reliability, these five agents also had access to wireless transmitters: a significant fact because the postal system would be closed before the invasion. In the months and weeks preceding D-Day, these five agents and their handlers carefully laid clues in their transmissions that were designed to lead the German high command to the conclusion that an invasion of Pas de Calais was imminent. No such invasion ever came. On 6 June 1944, D-Day, *Operation Overlord* began with a massive amphibious assault directed at Normandy. Nearly three months later, on 30 August 1944, the Battle of Normandy concluded with the German retreat over the Seine.

IV. Assessment

Was *Operation Fortitude* a success and, if so, to what extent did the D-Day spies contribute to its success? As with all military operations, measurement of success depends on how success is defined. Macintyre quotes one MI5 case agent, Tommy Harris (Garbo's handler), as setting the bar for success quite low: in Harris's assessment, the deception would have been a success if it caused just "one division to hesitate 48 hours before proceeding to oppose our landing in the Cherbourg peninsula."²⁹ The assessment of the Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, was only slightly less modest. "'Just keep the Fifteenth Army out of my hair for the first two days,' he told the deception planners. 'That's all I ask.'"³⁰ In the conventional view, which Macintyre shares, *Operation Fortitude* was tremendously successful because the formidable German Fifteenth Army remained in the Pas de Calais throughout the Normandy landings, awaiting an invasion that would never come. This is seen as a direct consequence of *Operation Fortitude*, of which the Double Cross spies are seen as the key element. However, there is a contrary view.

Mary K. Barbier, a historian at Mississippi State University, has argued that *Operation Fortitude* did not contribute significantly to the success of the Normandy invasion. A reviewer of an essay by Barbier included in a recent volume on the 60th anniversary of D-Day summarized her revisionist argument:

Barbier reorients us to look not at the traditional process driven narrative of the Allied campaign to fool Germany, but instead at the concrete effects of this

²⁴ MACINTYRE, OPERATION MINCEMEAT, *supra* note 7.

²⁵ MACINTYRE, *supra* note 1, at 22.

²⁶ Patton was selected because it was believed that he was the Allied general most respected by Hitler. In reality, Patton was in command of the Third United States Army, which was quietly training for the upcoming invasion. Similarly, an Australian actor that resembled Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery, who was the Allied ground troops commander for the invasion, was trained and dispatched only days before D-Day to Gibraltar, where the British knew that a Spanish spy for the Germans would report his presence to the Abwehr. This was intended to sew further confusion regarding the imminence and location of the invasion. Macintyre devotes most of a chapter, "Monty's Double," to this part of the operation. *Id.* at 221.

²⁷ MACINTYRE, *supra* note 1, at 35.

²⁸ This incident is discussed in GARBO: THE SPY, *supra* note 3.

²⁹ MACINTYRE, *supra* note 1, at 257.

³⁰ *Id.* at 321.

deception. One finding of this very pragmatic reorientation is that the German 15th Army, firmly entrenched in the Pas de Calais throughout the battle, did not necessarily stay in place because of Allied deception operations—as long assumed by many historians—but instead stayed put because of a lack of transport to move through a heavily damaged French transportation network, and a further lack of “suitable equipment and armaments” and finally, because more than half of the infantry divisions in the 15th Army were static in nature (and training) and were thoroughly not ready for the job.³¹

Barbier argues that the myth surrounding *Operation Fortitude* has blinded historians to other more significant factors contributing to Allied success (or, framed differently, to German losses). Unfortunately, although Macintyre includes Barbier in his selected bibliography, there is not a single citation to her and the text does not indicate that he seriously engaged her argument, even if only to disagree.

If Barbier’s goal is to shift the focus of attention, Macintyre’s contribution represents a setback, not merely because it clearly elaborates the conventional, laudatory view, but also because his was written for a much wider audience. However, assuming *arguendo* that Barbier’s view is correct and that the work of the D-Day spies had limited effect, Macintyre’s book can be read not as a narrative of a brave and heroic operation that, against all odds, secured an Allied victory, but rather as an outrageously foolhardy operation that risked the entire operation for no good reason. Macintyre does not ignore the risks involved in *Operation Fortitude*; indeed, he highlights them because they give *Double Cross* its narrative tension. Agent Treasure, Lily Sergeyev, nursed a grievance against the British for the loss of her dog, Babs.³² Would she, in revenge, betray the British by using her “control signal”³³ in a message to her Abwehr handler? Johnny Jebsen, the Abwehr handler for Agent Tricycle, Dusko Popov, was an Allied sympathizer who knew that Popov was a double agent and had surmised the

extent of the Double Cross system.³⁴ When the Gestapo abducted Jebsen,³⁵ would he betray Popov and the Double Cross system under Gestapo torture? If either of these risks had come to pass, the German High Command would have had a significant strategic advantage over the Allies. Not only would they have known of the coming invasion, they would also have known that every one of their agents in Great Britain was under British control. The individual reader must decide whether the risk was worthwhile.

V. Conclusion

Double Cross is an engaging and well-written contribution to the field of narrative, popular history. For military professionals, this book provides an opportunity to consider the wisdom of deception and espionage operations through analysis of one of the most ambitious deception operations in military history. However, the serious reader will want to supplement *Double Cross* with Mary K. Barbier’s critical reassessment of the Double Cross system and *Operation Fortitude*.³⁶ Those seeking to learn from this historical precedent will need more than Macintyre’s paeans of praise.

³¹ Jeff Demers, *The Normandy Campaign: Sixty Years On*, 72 J. OF MIL. HIST. 607 (2008) (book review).

³² At the time of her recruitment by MI6, Sergeyev had insisted as a condition of her cooperation that Babs would be able to accompany her to Great Britain, in spite of strict British quarantine restrictions. It is not clear how firm the assurances given to Sergeyev were. Macintyre concludes that her MI6 contact “resorted to a very English sort of temporizing, a commitment to do what he could, when he planned to do very little and believed that nothing could be done.” MACINTYRE, *supra* note 1, at 160. What is clear is that Babs never made it to Britain and that Sergeyev blamed the British for the loss. *Id.* at 200.

³³ The agreed signal indicating that she was under the control of the British. Treasure’s control signal was the deliberate transmission of a “dash” before her call sign. *Id.* at 242.

³⁴ Popov and Jebsen became friends when they were both students at the University of Freiburg before the war. *Id.* at 7. After joining the Abwehr in 1940, Jebsen arranged for Popov’s recruitment. *Id.* at 10. Popov later claimed that Jebsen, an Anglophile with a dislike for Nazism, was aware from the beginning that Popov planned to operate as a double agent. *Id.* at 31. Subsequently, Popov persuaded the British to recruit Jebsen as agent “Artist” in 1943. *Id.* at 169. However, the British quickly came to see Jebsen as a liability because of the extent of his knowledge of the Double Cross system and because he had come under Gestapo suspicion for, among other things, improper financial transactions. *Id.* at 206.

³⁵ *Id.* at 273. Macintyre describes Jebsen, who is presumed to have died in custody, as a “hero” for his apparent failure to betray Popov when interrogated by the Gestapo. *Id.* at 358.

³⁶ MARY K. BARBIER, *D-DAY DECEPTION: OPERATION FORTITUDE AND THE NORMANDY INVASION* (2009).