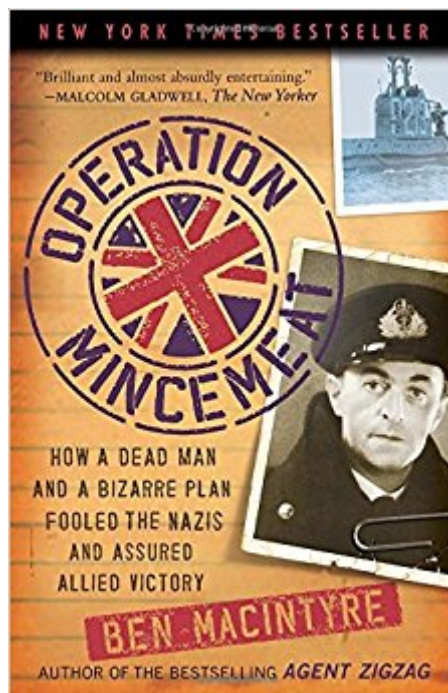




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Operation Mincemeat: How A Dead Man And A Bizarre Plan Fooled The Nazis And Assured An Allied Victor



Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF A SPY AMONG FRIENDS
In 1943, from a windowless basement office in London, two brilliant intelligence officers conceived a plan that was both simple and complicated—Operation Mincemeat. The purpose? To deceive the Nazis into thinking that Allied forces were planning to attack southern Europe by way of Greece or Sardinia, rather than Sicily, as the Nazis had assumed, and the Allies ultimately chose. Charles Cholmondeley of MI5 and the British naval intelligence officer Ewen Montagu could not have been more different. Cholmondeley was a dreamer seeking adventure. Montagu was an aristocratic, detail-oriented barrister. But together they were the perfect team. They created an ingenious plan: Get a corpse, equip it with secret (but false and misleading) papers concerning the invasion, then drop it off the coast of Spain where German spies would, they hoped, take the bait. The idea was approved by British intelligence officials, including Ian Fleming (creator of James Bond). Winston Churchill believed it might ring true to the Axis and help bring victory to the Allies. Filled with spies, double agents, rogues, fearless heroes, and one very important corpse, the story of Operation Mincemeat reads like an international thriller. Unveiling never-before-released material, Ben Macintyre brings the reader right into the minds of intelligence officers, their moles and spies, and the German Abwehr agents who suffered the “twin frailties of wishfulness and yesmanship.” He weaves together the eccentric personalities of Cholmondeley and Montagu and their near-impossible feats into a riveting adventure that not only saved thousands of lives but paved the way for a pivotal battle in Sicily and, ultimately, Allied success in the war.

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Exclusive Essay: When Spycraft Is Not Crafty Enough by Ben Macintyre Click on Thumbnail to Enlarge

Soon after Operation Mincemeat was launched, Britain's spymasters realized they had made a glaring mistake. They tried to correct it and, in the process, made it much worse. In Chapter Seven of Operation Mincemeat, I identified various "hostages to fortune" left by the planners of the deception--most importantly, the fake, dated letter from Bill Martin's "father," handwritten on the writing paper of a Welsh Hotel. "The plot would never have stood up to scrutiny if German spies in Britain had made even the most cursory checks on it," I wrote. "A glance at the hotel register for the Black Lion Hotel would have showed that no J. C. Martin had stayed there on the night of April 13." Two weeks after Operation Mincemeat was published, I received a telephone call at The Times, of the sort that non-fiction writers both welcome--and dread. "I happen to have the hotel register for the Black Lion," said the Welsh voice on the other end. "And if you look at the page for April, 1943, you will clearly see the name J. C. Martin." I was flabbergasted, and my respect for the planners of Operation Mincemeat rose another notch. They had thought of everything: they had even dispatched someone to Mold, in North Wales, to stay at the hotel and pose as the fictional father of a fictional officer, simply to ensure that the hotel register looked correct if anyone came snooping afterwards. That was true spycraft. When the caller sent me a photograph of the page from the register, I studied it carefully. The handwriting was that of Charles Cholmondeley, the originator and co-creator of Operation Mincemeat. The false address given for "J. C. Martin" was Scotts House, Eynsham, in Oxfordshire (now a daycare center). The faked letter in Major Martin's pocket clearly indicated that "Father" had been staying at the hotel for some time ("the only alternative to imposing myself once more on your aunt"). The register indicated that he had arrived at the hotel on April 9th, and checked out on the 20th, in time for the fake meeting with his son in London. So far, so convincing. But closer examination revealed something very odd. The name and signature of J. C. Martin did not appear in the correct date sequence, but was added in the space at the bottom of the page. It was clearly an afterthought, written in sometime afterwards. To even the most casual investigator this would have set off loud alarm bells: so far from covering up the mistake, Cholmondeley had compounded it, by drawing attention to the fact that there was something distinctly out of the ordinary about John Martin and his sojourn at the Black Lion. One can speculate about what must have happened. As Mincemeat got underway, the planners began to realize that it was working far more effectively than they had dared to hope. They began to wonder and worry about possible loose ends. The coroner, Bentley Purchase, was contacted again and quizzed over whether, if the Germans exhumed the body and carried out

another post mortem, they would be able to tell that Martin had died of poisoning, rather than drowning. (He was confident they would not.) They also, I suspect, took another look at the letters, and sent Cholmondeley to Mold. The result was not a cover-up, but a giveaway. A register without the name J.C. Martin would merely have presented a mystery; a register with the name so obviously added in was patently a botched attempt to deceive. In the end, it did not matter. There is no evidence that the Germans ever carried out any checking of the Bill Martin backstory. Had they attempted to do so, this would almost certainly have been picked up by British intelligence since the entire German espionage system in the U.K. was effectively controlled by MI5. Once the lie was embedded in German strategic thinking, no effort was made to disprove it. Still, it is sobering thought, that if a single German agent had traveled to Mold and examined the register of the Black Lion, he would surely have spotted the obvious addition of "J.C. Martin", recognized there was something fishy going on, and warned the Germans before the invasion of Sicily. The island might then have been reinforced, and countless lives might have been lost with incalculable consequences. That single register entry could have changed the course of World War II. One of the great pleasures of writing about this period, is the way that history never stands still. The register of the Black Lion is only one of many fragments that have appeared, since the book was published, to enlarge and complete the story of Operation Mincemeat. The moral for spy-craftsmen? If it ain't broke, don't fix it. And if it cannot be fixed without giving the game away, don't touch it.

Questions for Ben Macintyre on Operation Mincemeat

Q: What inspired you to write about this little-known story from World War II? A: I first came across the story while researching my last book, *Agent Zigzag*, about the British criminal and double agent Eddie Chapman. One of his case officers, Ewen Montagu, was the mastermind behind Operation Mincemeat. The more I dug, the more information emerged about this true story, for so long shrouded in myth and mystery.

Q: Was it difficult to make contact with Ewen Montagu's family, and were they helpful in your research? A: The members of the Montagu family were easy to find and hugely helpful; indeed, this book could not have been written without them. After the war, Ewen Montagu retained most of the official papers relating to Operation Mincemeat. After he died, they were put in a wooden trunk, and almost forgotten. In 2007, the family gave me full access to the papers, including the official records, but also memos, letters, photographs, and a 200-page memoir written by Montagu himself.

Q: What was the most interesting/surprising detail that you uncovered as you were gathering information for Operation Mincemeat? A: The most extraordinary aspect of Operation Mincemeat, to my mind, is the way that the organizers approached this elaborate, many-layered deception operation as if they were writing a novel, imagining a version of

reality and then luring the truth towards it. Indeed, the talents required for espionage and fiction-writing are not so very different. At the center of the plot was the fictional figure of William Martin: he was equipped with not only false papers but an entirely false personality and past, including a fiancée, complete with love letters. Q: There are a number of fascinating figures in Operation Mincemeat. Which person were you most intrigued by, and why? A: I was particularly fascinated by Charles Cholmondeley, the RAF officer seconded to MI5 who first dreamed up the plan to use a dead body to plant false information on the Germans. Cholmondeley had a long, waxed, air-force mustache, a shy personality, and a very strange mind, but he was a genius at deception work, and the unsung hero of Operation Mincemeat. Unlike other participants, he was modest about the achievement, never told anyone what he had done during the war, and ended up selling lawn mowers in a small town in rural England. Q: Where did you conduct most of your research, and did you encounter any difficulties or roadblocks along the way? A: This book took me to Spain, France, and the U.S., but most of the research was conducted in British archives and interviewing survivors from that time. Despite Britain's draconian Official Secrecy Act, rather than hindering or obstructing my research, MI5 and MI6 (the security service and secret intelligence service) were extraordinarily helpful. Perhaps the main impediment was time: the events described in the book are now on the furthest tip of living memory, most of the participants are now dead, and in some ways the research was a race to capture the memories of the living before they, too, are gone. Q: In the book, you hint that Ewen Montagu (playing Bill) and Jean Leslie (playing Pam) may have taken their roles as "lovers" too seriously. What is your belief about their relationship? A: Whether the imagined courtship between "Bill" and "Pam" was ever more than merely flirtatious banter is unknown, and likely to remain that way. Certainly Ewen was smitten with Jean (her word), and they both played along with their allotted roles. Wartime Britain was filled with fear and danger, but for those in the spying game, it was also a time of great excitement and romance. If the imagined love affair overlapped with reality, that would fit with the story, in which the framers invented a deception so real they began to believe it themselves. Q: Did you have the opportunity to visit the gravestone of Glyndwr Michael/Major William Martin in Huelva? How do you think his family would have felt if they had known the unexpected and important role their son played in the outcome of World War II? A: I did visit the grave in Huelva: it is a most atmospheric and tranquil place, looking down over the port and the shoreline where the body of "William Martin" was found in 1943. Glyndwr Michael's family was a troubled one, crushed by poverty and with a history of mental illness. I think they would have been astonished and delighted in equal measure that Glyndwr played such a crucial role in history,

albeit posthumously, and through no choice of his own. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

London Times writer-at-large Macintyre (Agent Zigzag) offers a solid and entertaining updating of WWII's best-known human intelligence operation. In 1943, British intelligence conceived a spectacular con trick to draw German attention away from the Allies' obvious next objective, Sicily. The bait was a briefcase full of carefully forged documents attached to the wrist of Major William Martin, Royal Marines—•a fictitious identity given to a body floated ashore in neutral Spain. Making the deception plausible was the task given to two highly unconventional officers: Lt. Comdr. Ewen Montagu and Squadron Leader Charles Cholmondeley. Macintyre recounts their adventures and misadventures with panache. The body was that of a derelict. Its costuming included the underwear of a deceased Oxford don. An attractive secretary provided the photo of an imaginary fiancée. The carefully constructed documents setting up the bogus operation against Greece and Sardinia convinced even Hitler himself. The Sicily landings were achieved as almost a complete surprise. And the man who never was entered the history and folklore of WWII. Photos. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

So I'm biased, or more properly hooked on Macintyre! His writing captures the essence of everything to come within the early paragraphs in almost every one of his books I have read. Mincemeat is no exception. You get the idea very soon which way this story is going to go but you cannot anticipate very far ahead because there is always a new character or some unexpected wrinkle proving "the best laid plans of mice and men..." Even with the twists and quirks, the scheme has a happy ending unless you were rooting for the Third Reich. It's a great story told by a great storyteller.

Macintyre does a good job putting the reader right into the action. I was reminded while reading this book that non-fiction can differ from fiction in the number of characters the reader must keep straight. I commend Macintyre's efforts to help in that task by often using the real name alongside the alias. Nevertheless, it could still get a little confusing especially when double agents were involved. That said, I must add how much I enjoyed reading a bit of history that gets swept under the broad-brush treatment we normally get in viewing world events. It brings to mind the saying of the stage: there's no such thing as small parts, only small actors. Macintyre admits that the Sicily

invasion could have been done without this one piece of deception and that no one can prove it had an impact. However, he makes a very strong case for the importance of it. I found how detailed they were in faking their ruse very fascinating. Watching how committed the Germans were to believing the ruse simply because they wanted to surpass the work that went into creating the lie. Operation Mincemeat was like reading a mystery that let you know the who the perpetrator was at the beginning and let you accompany him as he developed the intrigue and misleading clues. It's entertaining, astounding, and enlightening. I am now wondering where to go to get to the truth of what is happening in world, national, and even local events.

Operation Mincemeat by Ben Macintyre (Harmony Books, New York: 2010) is an interesting story told brilliantly. Indeed, this is a great book and the way history should be written. It is well researched--Macintyre spent three years reviewing documents and conducting interviews but the writing is anything but dry, Macintyre tells the tale with relish. It works on several levels. While focused on but one intelligence operation during World War II--a misdirection of invasion plans served up to the Nazi war machine, the book really captures the essence of war time espionage and intelligence activity more generally because Macintyre follows all the leads and provides insights beyond the mere operation that is the subject of his book. This is must reading for the intelligence practitioner --and the policymaker alike. One of the obvious lessons is the potential for intelligence collectors, analysts, and policymakers to be had. I am not giving anything away by providing the gist of the plot which was the subject of a much earlier book and film (both treated in the Mincemeat)--a dead body with bogus letters discussing a military invasion (away from the actual landing in Sicily) is positioned in the sea so as to fall into German hands. In intelligence parlance the acquisition of the letters by the German Defense Intelligence Service amounted to "documentary material," rather than quoting a living HUMINT source. And accordingly, the analytical mechanism focused on the documents rather than conducting a full analysis of the provenance of the materials. Now the letters were not crafted in a vacuum--the British knew well the potential for self-deception within the Nazi war machine because independent thought that might question the Nazi leaders perceptions was a risky business. Indeed, while reading this it was eerily familiar: in the run-up to the Iraq war there was a similar potential for self-deception within the analytical and policymaking apparatus--the President's advisors and the President himself were determined to remove Saddam Hussein through military action, intelligence that was not corroborated was seized upon as the rationale for the invasion. The inclination to be supportive of the policy goals, to be team players, was counter to the equal need to be skeptical of uncorroborated information upon which important decisions will be

made. In the intelligence collection activity, there is a constant tension among all involved in the process in terms evaluating the bone fides of the intelligence acquired while still being supportive to all involved in the mission--and while being responsive to policy needs. The tension is necessary and helpful to the process and it can save lives and embarrassment--the opposite is true when the process is corrupted. Another key factor jumped out to me in the reading of this fine book. You could have the most ingenious intelligence plan in the world but it boils down to execution by people--and while there were certainly a cast of characters involved in Operation Mincemeat--the success of the mission was the result of the performance of just a handful of people, quality people. All of the key factors of the intelligence craft are on display in Operation Mincemeat: the personal antagonisms, petty arguments and disagreements within bureaucracies (even the wonderfully small ones that the British had then and still do) , the unpredictability of human behavior, the long hours of work, the requirement for secrecy as well as the need for the occasional "white lie" to protect sources and methods, the potential for self-delusion as I have indicated earlier, as well as the potential to achieve significant goals on the cheap.

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