Countless historians have attempted to explain the Allied success in World War II deception operations as due primarily to the sheer brilliance of Allied strategy and operations. Though the implicit compliment is well deserved, its explanatory power is limited. It can only be an appraisal of the facts which takes into consideration the inherent contests between intelligence and security, counterintelligence and security, and between rival intelligence organizations that can be truly be sound. Understanding this most basic underlying principle, then, it is possible to view Allied success as the triumph of counterintelligence and security over Germany’s corresponding efforts. Contrary to popular conceptions, it was not the case that the Allied victory in this regard was absolute; it was equally significant that German counterintelligence failed to operate. Allied success was the result of exceedingly effective operations in conjunction with German failure to rise to the challenge.

Comparison of British and German wartime bureaucratic structures as well as operations provides some insight into why the Germans failed to compete and how the British system’s successes, in particular, took advantage of these failures. Retrospective summary demonstrates how Germany’s intelligence lifeline of agents and radio signals traffic was entirely controlled by the British deception network from 1940 to 1944. With just these facts at hand, it might be tempting to conclude, prematurely, that there was nothing the Germans could have done given this decisive hobbling. This conclusion would, of course, be in error. Germany nailed its own coffin shut by its repeated failure to do such things as conduct aerial reconnaissance of England after 1941, more thoroughly vet its agents, or cross- corroborate intelligence received by agents with radio traffic and data from reconnaissance missions. Instead, one double agent was used to
certify another double agent, and Allied-controlled radio traffic was in turn used to certify controlled agent bona fides. Sound measures were not observed by the Germans, hence, impeccable British planning and operations found ripe ground for deception to succeed.

**German Organization and Operations**

It is useful to consider the structures and preconceptions which led the German system to malfunction. David Kahn's seminal work, *Hitler's Spies*, offers expert and comprehensive analysis of the German intelligence services. His work is especially useful for its examination of the structure and organization of Abwehr's operations, as well as the fundamental expectations and preconceptions which governed their activities. Both structure and belief were critical elements in the German wartime failure.

Although German's intelligence organizations were dominated by the strict personal control of Adolf Hitler, Abwehr organization was surprisingly decentralized. Moreover, it was governed by the belief system of a dictator whom few subordinates were willing to challenge. Hitler's own views regarding the superiority of German military forces and the racial inferiority of his foes (the Slavs, for example), translated into a slothful approach to the collection of intelligence. Moreover, the centrality of authority coupled with the decentralization of organization and the spoils system which resulted poisoned the pool of Abwehr agents. J.C. Masterman concluded in his report, *The Double Cross System*, that "Almost always when a real blunder was made by the Germans it was traceable to the fact that the Abwehr official implicated was governed by personal considerations; he was making money out of the agent or gaining prestige by him or even only making his post in some comfortable neutral haven secure, and in
consequence would not judge the agent's work, dispassionately or even honestly.”¹ Inevitably this served to be a weak link with devastating consequences.

By virtue of these complacent elements in the Abwehr, even imperfect Allied running of the double agent network managed to be sufficiently damaging. Though Allied double agentry was operated with a high degree of skill, it was particularly fortunate to have met with a competitor who failed to be vigilant. At essence, the specific organization and procedures for the recruiting and handling agents was to blame. By vesting authority for recruiting agents indiscriminately within the service, and offering inducements for recruitments without qualification, the quality and dependability of agents were casualties of poor procedure. Masterman emphasizes that this resulted in Abwehr officials who overlooked inconsistencies, preferring a bad agent who brings profit to no profit:

“It appeared that the only quality which the German spy-master demanded was that he should himself have discovered the agent and launched him on his career... any member could start and control an agent. Not unnaturally the prestige, and presumably the income, of many Abwehr personalities depended upon the reputation of their own particular agents.

If then the reliability of a double agent was questioned by the enemy, his chief defender always turned out to be his own spy-master, who would go to almost any lengths to protect him against the doubt and criticisms of rival persons or of Berlin.”²

Consider also the case of SCRUFFY, the Belgian seamen whose traffic was run in an obviously bogus fashion with the deliberate purpose of convincing the Germans that the Allies were poor at double agentry and also to cover the other agents. That he was so obviously controlled seemed to escape German notice. The case was dropped. Further examples in which Abwehr officers simply ignored suspicious evidence abound.

² Masterman, 18.
Undoubtedly, this organizational arrangement frustrated the workings of German intelligence, counterintelligence and security; parochial and personal interests managed to completely thwart effective operations. The British system, alternately, controlled all agents centrally and had significantly different rules governing their recruitment and handling. Structural and organizational problems, however, were only half of the affliction which ailed the German intelligence services.

The Abwehr was defeated in its half of the contest owing to its failure to cross-corroborate their intelligence, and their failure to tap all the sources for intelligence available. As a result, there was heavy dependence on the German agent network and radio signals—both of which were controlled by the Allies. From the period after the fall of France in 1940, when Britain was cut off from the continent, up through the return of the British armies to France in 1944, the Allies entirely controlled their network of agents. Allied control of the German intelligence system depended on Britain’s isolation from the continent. German intelligence was ‘lazy’ in the sense that it did little to remedy or mitigate these circumstances. One would assume that aerial reconnaissance would be the natural step by a Germany eager to maintain the integrity of its communications and access to information. Strangely, no such effort was made.

Even minimal German aerial reconnaissance could have uncovered Allied deception operations. For instance, Fortitude South’s security along the coast of England was quite imperfect: The ten-mile strip from Land’s End to The Wash was closed from 1 April 1944, however so many exceptions were made for entry (weddings, funerals, business purposes, visits to infirmed elderly persons, etc.) that a German agent could have easily slipped through. Had even one agent entered the zone, he or she would have quickly deduced that the feint preparations in the east were fiction, and would have called German attention to the deception.
Such a move would likely have compromised the Allied landing operation. No such efforts were made.

More significant was the fact that Germany conducted no significant aerial reconnaissance of England after 1941. Charles Cruickshank points out in *Deception in World War II* that ample opportunity existed for Germany to see through the Allied visual deception measures constructed in preparation for the D-Day invasion. He observed:

"It is interesting to speculate what would have happened if the enemy had taken a close look at the south-east corner of England. It might have confirmed that a major assault force was being prepared there, making the German High Command even more convinced that the Pas de Calais was the Allies’ principal objective; or it might have revealed the shambles in which many of the canvas and string dummy landing-craft found themselves, and thereby dissipated the threat at the eastern end of the Channel. The latter seems much more likely. That the Luftwaffe did not carry out even minimal reconnaissance of the east coast must rank as a miracle of the same dimensions as the destruction of the Armada in 1588."  

The cases of Allied efforts at deception, whose targets were these aircraft, did not so much triumph on their own merits in many instances, but as a result of the failures of German overhead surveillance. Further failures stemmed from Abwehr intelligence complacency.

It appears to be a truism that intelligence services must not depend too heavily on one particular source for gathering information, yet the Abwehr suffered this very vulnerability by its exceeding reliance on its network of spies. Bogus troop locations were leaked to the Germans through Allied controlled agents. This human intelligence, along with radio traffic, provided the most significant sources for German military decision making. History records the extraordinary manipulation which coloured German perception of wartime events. It is interesting to see how Allied-controlled radio traffic and the Allied-controlled network of German spies operated to

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cross-pollinate each other's credibility as well as mislead Germany regarding Allied strength, intentions, and activities. Examples abound.

Fake military craft and notional formations were used to misdirect German attention and create the perception that the brunt of the D-Day invasion was due to occur at Pas de Calais rather than at Normandy, and to propagate the belief that Normandy was merely a feint. In most cases the intelligence from German (Allied loyal) agents was corroborated by controlled radio traffic-- but would have been exposed as fraud had aerial reconnaissance been conducted. Consider two examples.

On 15 May 1944 'A good Abwehr source' provided intelligence which gave the Allied XXth and the 4th Armoured division cover for their departure for Normandy as well as erroneous locations for the VIIth Corps and the 28th Division. These locations were then confirmed by false radio traffic and additional corroborating details by other agents. Visual deception measures, however, were incomplete, and vulnerable to detection by overhead surveillance. Surveillance, fortunately, was never conducted.

To disguise the movement of FUSAG division transfers to France after D-Day and keep German focus on Pas de Calais, notional formations were created to take their place. From 16 June 1944 to 26 August 1944, these notional divisions were substituted until almost all of the FUSAG divisions were fictitious. Double agents leaked the identities of the supposed commanders and their subordinate officers. Had the Germans been conducting aerial reconnaissance, this fiction might not have been successful. Instead, the Germans relied almost exclusively on human intelligence and radio traffic. Interestingly enough, what Germany failed to see from overhead, it failed to discover because it was blinded by what it felt confident it knew.
The German command’s preconceptions provided ripe opportunity for Allies to present what the Abwehr expected to see. German prejudices and predispositions were also responsible for Hitler’s desire to keep major forces in Norway--not the Allied deception campaign. Despite concerted Allied efforts at radio deception and other means to convince the Germans that they were planning a Norway invasion, the Germans did not hear or heed this intelligence; they were busy in Finland listening to the Russians. Hitler chose not to withdraw his forces because he believed that Norway was his “zone of destiny” in the war: it was critical for the defense of Finnish nickel ore, the German army’s northern flank, and German U-boat departures. If anything, Allied success insofar as the Norway aspect of their deception efforts is concerned, lies more in working within the parameters of German constructs rather than against them. Hitler, it should be noted, cast his own die in not committing these forces to counter the main assault.  

David Kahn observed:

“If the raw intelligence and the evaluations made from it [regarding the location of the Allied invasion of Europe] did not point to a single spot for the invasion, they at least did not contradict the preconceptions of Rommel, Rundstedt, and Hitler. All continued to believe that the main assault would come in the Pas de Calais: They never shifted any divisions out of the area.”

Hubris allowed Germany to sustain the belief that she did not need intelligence; sheer superiority of the German military machine, they were confident, would be enough. Hubris, it seems, was not enough. Germany failed to predict the North African invasion, misconstrued a Sicilian landing in the Balkans, and thoroughly bought into the D-Day deception. Its beliefs in the racial inferiority of the Slavic peoples allowed it to ignore the intelligence available to it and underestimate the magnitude and duration of challenge it would face at Stalingrad. On the other

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4 Kahn, 483.
hand, the Allies overestimated the German intelligence network and acted with extreme vigor
and caution in conducting operations to defeat what was imagined to be a formidable intelligence
foe.
Allied Organization and Operations

Allied success in their half of the war-time contest between intelligence services was as much due to the structures and organization of intelligence, counterintelligence, and security (acting jointly in deception operations) as to the actual quality of the strategy and operations themselves. It is useful to examine how organization can be a keen instrument of warfare.

England’s contribution to Allied success can be viewed in terms of the organizational structures and coordination mechanisms which were instrumental in the success of wartime deception operations. The centralization of authority and operations in the Double Cross Committee was a fortunate arrangement, all things considered. The Twenty Committee, a technically a subcommittee of the W. Board, was established in January 1941 without much consideration of internal powers or duties—and yet it worked remarkably well. On its first meeting, the Committee included representatives from the War Office, G.H.Q. Home Forces, Home Defense Executive, Air Ministry Intelligence, N.I.D., MI6, Colonel Turner’s Department of the Air Ministry, and MI5 which provided the chairman and secretary. Meeting weekly (226 times) until May 1945, the Committee was tasked with deciding what information could be passed to the Germans by the agents who were, in turn, handled by the MI5 and MI6 depending on their geographic sphere of activity involved. Running double agents necessarily demands the close cooperation of multiple departments as well as an over-arching body to supervise their use on a strategic level. The Twenty Committee provided this management, and in so doing mediated the natural tendencies of both the MI5 and MI6 to either be ‘led astray by the dazzling prizes offered by deception’ or consumed entirely by ‘the admirable opportunities for obtaining

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6 ‘Twenty’ deriving from the reading of XX (Double Cross) as Roman numerals.
intelligence information’ respectively. Furthermore, the micromanagement of agents was extremely successful for reasons which can also be used to generalize about the Allied operation.

The management of individual double agents were handled in a way which reflected the wartime government’s willingness to allocate priority, resources, and authority to deception operations on a large scale. Case officers were assigned to supervise one, at most two, important agents on a full-time basis. This degree of focus allowed for optimal insight into the agent’s activities, and consistency in the handling of these cases. Moreover, a massive support structure of persons (housekeepers, secretaries, minders, etc.) tasked with providing for each of these agents buttressed operations. Considering the some thirty-five volumes in agent SNOW’s file, or the fifty-odd files in agent GARBO’s file alone, there was a great quantity of data to be managed and mastered with some one hundred twenty agents in all. Meticulous attention to detail was possible, perhaps exclusively, in this system which allowed heightened one-to-one focus of case officers on the most important agents. Higher authority or dispersed attention in the case of a single officer managing five to ten agents, for example, is unlikely to provide the detailed knowledge to avoid discrepancies and contradictions, or to achieve the strategic aims of the operation.

Finding the golden mean of personnel which allowed for both individual agent management and the restricted number of parties involved in the operation on operational and supervisory levels seemed to be a mix of serendipity and excellent planning. Masterman writes: “It cannot be denied that in many way the organizations set up for the control of the double agent system was institutionally unsound, and questions of responsibility were never properly
decided.” He gives the examples of the Twenty Committee’s chairman whose actual position, authority, responsibilities, etc. were never established. On paper actual contradictions existed regarding the overriding authority of concerned parties. Fortunately for the Allied cause, questions of responsibility were not raised; the large number of different services and different departments managed to work together without internecine bureaucratic battles so characteristic of peace-time operations. Some have speculated that this unusually smooth record of inter- and intra-departmental cooperation was due to the special pressures of wartime which made it possible to sustain such activities as would have been either difficult or impossible during peacetime day-to-day operations. It was this same ‘specialness’ of purpose to which Masterman attributes the government’s willingness to prioritize the Double Cross System’s operations.

Whether considered in the case of the Twenty Committee and the Normandy Landing or the JIC during the North Africa Landings, the ‘special’ nature of deception during World War II offered opportunities for enabling military coups de grace which justified their expense and allocation of resources. Masterman noted,

“This glittering possibility was always the bait used when other authorities had to be persuaded to help us. It served to maintain belief in the system and was a more attractive selling point than the day-to-day counterespionage advantages which we could secure. But if the agents were ever to have their big day in the future, they had to be built up and maintained, or alternatively new agents had to be acquired to act in their place, so that at the right moment we could be sure that we had a team of trusted agents who would be ready when called upon.”

This promise stood as the bureaucratic justification of mission which garnered the authority, resources, and organizational independence which proved so smashingly successful.

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7 Masterman, 64.
8 Masterman, 71.
A small, efficient organization untroubled by bureaucratic turf-wars, empowered by the government with substantial resources made possible not only the effective operations which were conducted, but also allowed for the tight security necessary for success. Press controls as well as internal leaks were managed remarkably well, perhaps owing to the shared appreciation of the stakes involved. Further, it was the government’s commitment to the patient investment of resources and time into the building up of agents which allowed the Allies to thoroughly vet their double agents and establish, with the most confidence possible, the true nature of their loyalties. It also made these agents more credible and a source of intelligence dependence for Germany. This starkly contrasted with Abwehr policies in this regard. Whereas the Allies were willing to tolerate the principle that “for the period of his novice [a double agent] is not an asset but a liability.”\footnote{Masterman, 9} The Allies were willing to make the investment to build their agents over time and reject the short term gains which would have blown agents in favor of the long term (long in coming) ‘final’ deceptions at Normandy. Perhaps it was the German war machine’s unwillingness to make the same long term investment that led to the increasing tendency of Abwehr officers to actively and passively ignore agents who brought them immediate profit, but who had suspicious loyalties.

On the same note, the authority and latitude which Allied deception efforts commanded was due in no small part to the importance of their task. Since the military significance of such things as the Allied invasion of Europe and the North Africa invasion was of such high degree, those tasked with creating and implementing the deception operations were appropriated the necessary resources-- a happy but unusual case in so many peace-time government operations. Deception operations succeeded in large part due to the thoroughness of the preparations which
would not otherwise have been sanctioned. Consider, for example, that from 1940 to 1945, approximately 85,000 pounds sterling was provided to the German double agents by the British alone for maintenance of their operations. Needless to say, it would have been extremely difficult to gain acceptance for a proposal of this sort had the circumstances and powers of the Twenty Committee been otherwise.

Beyond the organizational structures and circumstances which were so important to the success of Allied deception operations is the question of the actual operations which were produced for this purpose. No matter how it is qualified, there is no diminishing the extraordinary coup achieved with the control of the entire German espionage network in Britain from roughly 1940 to 1944. Further, the development of a powerful feedback mechanism with the control of the spy net, in addition to controlled radio communications and deception (particularly in the absence of aerial reconnaissance), allowed the Allies to know what questions Germans were asking, what their intentions and expectations were, what Abwehr actually believed (the success of deception efforts), and how to tailor information and deception in the future to play into German expectations for Allied gain. Masterman observes:

“[Y]ou cannot ...deny all information and keep all activities, preparations, and undertakings secret. On the other hand you can control one of the enemy’s main sources of information, and thus know what his information is, and to go a step further, you can pervert his information, misinform him, and, eventually, deceive him as to your intentions.”

Deception efforts took advantage of German reliance on its spy network as well as on radio communications to control information in precisely these ways. Consider how radio deception fortified the controlled espionage net and vice versa.

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10 Masterman, 7.
The Quicksilver II aspect of the Fortitude South Operation was tremendously important given the German reliance on radio intelligence. Although the degree of German dependence on radio intelligence was not appreciated at the time, the clever and careful activities of Quicksilver II played a terribly significant role in the success of the deception operation. Both the actual and the fictitious FUSAG divisions poised to land in Normandy generated controlled radio traffic for the benefit of eavesdropping German signals officers. The conduct of these operations was first-rate. The U.S. 3103rd Signals Service Battalion was careful to first make a study of the genuine traffic between the American units already stationed in Britain so as to weave a seamless fiction of bogus signals. These signals supported the deception that a cross-Channel assault in the east was imminent. Communication of bogus brigade and divisional exercises (allowing for suitable intervals due to the effects of weather) enhanced the credibility of the fake signals. Extensive radio networks supported the fiction with, at the peak, 22 fake formations contributing to the fiction of FUSAG’s existence. Further, these transmissions were carried out in close proximity to the enemy to improve the ease of German eavesdropping. As Charles Cruickshank commented in Deception in World War II, “There is little doubt that the simulated radio traffic...was - after the contribution of the double agents - the most important factor in the overall deception.”

Here one of the cardinal principles of deception was exploited. Fiction which is crafted and allowed to reach the enemy, seemingly by accident or by the enemy’s own efforts, appears more genuine and credible. This is what the Allied forces were able to achieve by virtue of a complex, overlapping, and calculated redundancy of visual and radio deception, along with the reports of double agents controlled by the Allies.

11 Cruickshank, 182.
It is of great importance that the Allied security be evaluated in order that both its success and imperfections be understood. It is of the utmost importance to note that, although Allied security was excellent, it could have been defeated by the Germans had they been paying adequate attention. Enough mistakes were made by the Allies for the Germans to have been able to unravel the most critical deception plans. Consider the Double Cross System’s deception plans for misdirecting the Germans regarding the Normandy invasion. Allied plans relied on perfect security, even minimal German effort in this regard could have foiled the attempt. Gaps in security frequently opened and closed windows of opportunity for Germany to discover the deception. Numerous cases offer examples.

The calculated display of dummy landing-craft around the east and south-east coasts of England, intended to demonstrate the means for transporting FUSAG assault divisions to Pas de Calais can be considered “an elaborate failure”. This operation, Quicksilver III, replaced the real craft, intended for the Normandy landing, with decoys so as not to tip off the Germans by what would have been their suspicious departure. These inflatable decoys, ‘Bigbobs’, however, fell hostage to even the lightest wind and tended to be eerily levitated to shore, or smashed entirely. Numerous Bigbobs dragged their 1.5 ton concrete moorings ashore and ended up utterly, and most inconveniently, demolished. This case provides an excellent example of one of the many opportunities German intelligence had for puncturing the deception. As Charles Cruickshank noted, “If the enemy had had even a brief look at this trail of disaster it would have been abundantly clear that Quicksilver III was a purely deceptive operation.” Had German reconnaissance been vigilant, it would have observed the charade (as Allied craft had to their dismay on 1 June) and realized that bogus craft were part of the larger fiction of the cross-
Channel assault. Despite General Montgomery's efforts to repair the transparency of this particular fiction, little progress was made. It was, then, sheer luck that German aircraft, for whom the deception was created, never saw it.

Moreover, the 65 deceptive lighting schemes intended to mimic large concentrations along England's South Coast also never had their go at deception, for the German aircraft never conducted aerial reconnaissance missions after 1941; the decoys and elaborate lighting schemes may as well have never existed. Deception could have been confined solely to radio deception and the use of double agents. Certainly the Allies could not have known this at the time, but this serves to further emphasize the significance of Germany's failure to actively pursue intelligence beyond the narrowest scope of activities.

On 5 June 1944, the eve of the Normandy landings, General von Rundstedt had been successfully convinced that the invasion was not imminent. Instead, he concluded that the increase in aerial attacks meant that the Allies were poised to make the Channel crossing. The FUSAG deception had succeeded, and the German High Command believed that the main Allied attack was scheduled to occur further east. Records indicate that three full weeks after D-Day, von Rundstedt dispatched a report indicating his view that the Allies had still not committed the American army group assembled in south-east England. The threat to Pas de Calais was still imminent, he confidently opined. German intelligence was over-estimating the Allied forces in Britain by 200%. These false estimations prevented the Germans from committing thousands of troops to Normandy which may well have changed the course of the Allied offensive.

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12 Cruickshank, 183.
13 Cruickshank, 189.
Concluding Remarks

The conduct of counterintelligence and security during wartime offers opportunities of unparalleled magnitude for belligerents to change the tide of events in decisive ways. Large-scale deception, as in the case of D-Day, is difficult to design and even more difficult yet to sustain over time. That it was possible for the Allies to accomplish this and other daring feats of deception is incredible---and no uncomplicated matter to explain. What can be claimed with reasonable certainty is that the respective organizational structures and corresponding vigilance of the engaged parties in large part determined the success of the deception which the Allies conducted.