



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

Ben Macintyre

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D-Day, 6 June 1944, was a victory of arms. But it was also a triumph for a different kind of operation: one of deceit, aimed at convincing the Nazis that Calais and Norway, not Normandy, were the targets of the 150,000-strong invasion force.

The deception involved every branch of Allied wartime intelligence, but at its heart was a team of five double agents, one of the oddest military units ever assembled: a bisexual Peruvian playgirl, a Polish fighter pilot, a Serbian seducer, a Spaniard with a diploma in chicken farming, and a Frenchwoman whose love for her pet dog nearly wrecked the entire operation.

These were not conventional warriors, but their masterpiece of deceit saved countless lives, and *Double Cross* is their story.

Double Cross: The True Story of the D-Day Spies Details

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Author : Ben Macintyre

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From Reader Review Double Cross: The True Story of the D-Day Spies for online ebook

Hannah says

The least entertaining and successful of Macintyre's WWII spy books IMO, probably because the cast of characters was too numerous and nothing interesting really happened until the final 100 pages.

Nonetheless, fans of non-fiction espionage should find some wheat amongst the chaff in this revelation of the part spies and deception played in the successful allied invasion of Normandy (otherwise known as D-Day).

Macintyre knows his material, and gives the reader a full complement of material available on the spies, their handlers, the tactics and the run up and completion of the operation. How Hitler and Co. were fooled and re-directed in where the allied troops would launch their invasion is almost too unbelievable for words. If it were a book of fiction, you'd shake your head in sheer disbelief at the credulity of the bad guys to fall for such a plot. But this is not fiction, and the broad axe tactics employed by allied counter-intelligence and a motley crew of spies no doubt saved thousand of lives on D-Day.

Paul says

D Day. The beginning of the end of the Second World War. But for this massive operation to succeed the Allies had to do every trick in the book to convince the Nazis that the invasion was going to take place in a different location.

So was conceived Operation Fortitude, an audacious plan of lies, deception and misinformation to persuade the military that the invasion was going to take place in Norway and Calais. This team of double agents, Bronx, Brutus, Treasure, Tricycle and Garbo fed back to their German masters this picture of troop movements and build of arms and materiel. Even though there were some doubters in the German echelons, this story dreamt up by a team in London was swallowed hook line and sinker.

But it so nearly wasn't. Macintyre brings alive the tension as the web of deceit was spun, from the near misses as agents were arrested, to the appalling handling of agent Treasure, over petty amounts of money. He describes their character, flaws and ultimately courage of the job that they performed. Macintyre must have sifted through hundreds of secret documents to shine a light on these people, and their handlers, who probably saved thousands of lives on both sides as the allies got a foothold in France.

As will all of his history books he reveals the lives of those who lived in the shadows and smoke of the espionage game, people who most would have never heard of, and the key roles they played in changing European and World history. Well written as usual, there are points where it reads like a spy thriller, even though it was really life.

John Frazier says

I doubt I'll live long enough to fully appreciate the innumerable stories that continue to publish almost 70 years after the end of World War II, and this is just one more example of what makes most of them so engaging, so captivating, so essential. You don't get labeled as a "World War" without involving a good portion of the globe and, although it involves perhaps the most chronicled event of the war in D-Day and the Normandy Invasion, "Double Cross" is the riveting story of a handful of behind-the-lines soldiers who never engaged in traditional combat but who had as much influence, if not more, over the outcome as any pilot, sailor or soldier.

"The True Story of the D-Day Spies" is about five men and women who for reasons as varied as their backgrounds ultimately pledge their allegiance to the Allied cause and MI-5 and MI-6, two branches of Britain's more covert operations subsequently made (more) famous by the likes of Ian Fleming and 007, James Bond himself. While few were rewarded with any monies nearly commensurate with their responsibilities and risks, none of them did what they did for fame, which is the last thing any double agent wants or needs. Were it not for public information acts that made public their involvement years after the fact, author Ben Macintyre would've had to file this one under "fiction," in which case much of this would simply not be believed.

Playboys, loyalists and people whose lives had otherwise been irreversibly impacted by the spreading German occupancy eventually found themselves as members of a team whose primary responsibility was to lead the Nazi leadership into thinking that the D-Day assault would take place in any number of places other than Normandy, whose proximity to Britain's coastline made it an obvious choice. Among the misdirected targets were the Mediterranean, Norway and the northern coast of France.

While Macintyre adroitly focuses on the day-to-day machinations of this band of seeming misfits, what makes them even more fascinating is the personal life each leads in secret. A couple are bon vivants who seem tailor-made for lives of espionage; another is a middle-age woman whose attachment to her dog threatens to unravel her cover and story at virtually every turn. These, as we learn, are exactly the kind of people whom the rest of us least suspect of gleaning and transmitting secrets that could impact and affect the course of wars. All seem at one point capable of turning from a double spy to a triple spy (or even a quadruple spy), yet ultimately each makes the decisions and takes the actions required to mislead the Germans on June 6, 1944, and none should be viewed as anything less than heroic, their contributions impossible to overestimate.

Their work didn't end then. That their duplicity was required and, in fact, extended well beyond that date is testament to just how effective they were.

Well-researched and well-written, "Double Cross" moves along at a very brisk pace and, in the end, is well worth your time.

Mary says

One of the greatest stories ever pieced together! Really. Macintyre assembles a complex, nearly incomprehensible story into an amusing Mercedes Benz of a book. Truth is indeed stranger than fiction. He transforms a clearly tremendous effort of preparation on his part into a suspenseful, informative spy story. I

love “his” mostly disparate “characters:” The whole lot of double crossers, their German and British handlers and everybody else at MI5 and 6. This is a helluvan example of a British-lead triumph when we all worked together to beat the bad guys using our brains, dedication and imagination. No drones for these guys! The British should set up something along the lines of the XX Committee to help ISIS devour itself. It seems like the only way to mostly get rid of our contemporary bad guys. There is a current commentator and author in the US who writes under his name and the XX Committee name who, I believe, has suggested the same. Get ISIS to self-immolate by nudging along a paranoid, hysterical bloodbath! ISIS demonstrates over and over that they want to kill and die. Let’s get it done.

Macintyre also refers to the idea the British tried to run and agent “in an obviously bogus fashion” so the Germans would think them incompetent and also distract them from bigger fish. This is a theory presented by others about Ed Snowden. This theory should have legs but most don’t seem to care or they like Ed.

How good was the XX Committee? Every German agent in the UK during WWII was a double and these spies were financed by the Nazis themselves! Yay! The tricked Germans mostly died thinking they dominated the wartime intel coming from the UK. Those that figured out the truth claimed, bogusly, that they knew their spies were doubles all along. The Double Cross reports got into Hitler’s brain and prevented many, many deaths. The double agents even received Nazi military honors, including the Iron Cross. Hahaha....

Another twist: The Cambridge 5 provided Stalin with the whole true story of Double Cross in real time. Moscow was suspicious of the intel cuz they couldn’t believe the British were dumb enough to let former CP members into their government!

“The Double Cross idea had always been based on lateral thinking without boundaries, a willingness to contemplate plans that others would dismiss as unworkable or, frankly, barmy. Flights of fancy were integral to the system....” Yes! This! Now!

Wasteful, dangerous inter-service rivalries were present between MI5 and 6 just like between my country’s CIA and FBI before 9/11. I hope we’ve fixed that. Things seem better.

After studying the issue, how do I feel about interrogation? “‘Violence is taboo.’ Not only does it produce answers to please, but it lowers the standard of information.’ A person in terror and pain will often tell their torturers what they imagine they want to hear....” Get Trump on the phone for me!

“The invasion of Normandy was a military sucker punch.” Delicious!

Hitler accepts the fake intel from the double crossers “with the sort of blind enthusiasm ideologues usually display on being told what they already believe.”

The “main thrust” of Operation Fortitude “was an undisputed, unalloyed, world-changing triumph.” Hip, hip, hurray! “Seven weeks after the first landings, four divisions were finally released from the Fifteenth (German) Army to head south, far too late.”

Being a successful, living, breathing spy is a really, really hard job.

K.J. Charles says

I am apparently on a WW2 spy kick. Another fascinating story of unlikely heroism dragged out of the depths of some very dodgy people, as a set of playboys and playgirls, weirdos, cheats and chicken farmers become double agents in the teeth of Nazi Germany, culminating in the grand Operation Bodyguard that allowed Overlord, the D-Day landings, to succeed.

Possibly "ordinary people stepping up to the plate in the teeth of fascism" is why I'm reading all these, in fact. A great story anyway, and one that deserves telling, in part because of how much of the war apparently was made up of shattering incompetence and pointless interdepartmental bickering.

Carly says

This book. Is. Amazing.

Do you know how many uncaptured German spies were operating in Britain during WWII?

Zero.

That's right.

Every single German spy was either captured or became part of MI5's XX System, aka "Double-Cross." And each one of them was... a character. As McIntyre puts it:

"They included a bisexual Peruvian playgirl, a tiny Polish fighter pilot, a mercurial Frenchwoman a Serbian seducer, and a deeply eccentric Spaniard with a diploma in chicken farming. Together, under Robertson's guidance, they delivered all of the little lies that together made up the big lie.

[...]

The Double Cross spies were, variously, courageous, treacherous, capricious, greedy, and inspired. They were not obvious heroes, and their organization was betrayed from within by a Soviet spy. One was so obsessed with her pet dog that she came close to derailing the entire invasion. All were, to some extent, fantasists, for that is the very essence of espionage. Two were of dubious moral character. One was a triple, and possibly a quadruple, agent."

The story of the Double Cross spies reads like a British farce, up to and including the fact that all of the spies were given punny names. One of the handlers thought of the entire war in times of cricket. One agent, codenamed Garbo, created an entirely imaginary network of sub-spies that comprised 27 hallucinated agents. Another nearly drove MI5 to send a warship to bring her dog over and avoid the sacrosanct quarantine laws. Yet another began his career in Portugal, making up fake reports for the Germans about Liverpudlians hanging out in wine bars and naval exercises in what turned out to be landlocked lakes. No matter how easily the British managed to defeat the Germans in the spying game, the Soviets' Cambridge Five had just as successfully infiltrated them. Yet the Cambridge Five were, if anything, too successful: knowing from their spies about Double Cross, the Soviets were convinced their own agents had also been doubled. Oh, the perils of paranoia.

Double Cross is occasionally poignant-- it is, after all, about WWII-- and often incredible, but above all, it is hands-down *funny*. My favourite quote:

One evening, in his safe house in Hinxton, near Cambridge, Caroli crept up behind his minder while he was playing solitaire and tried to throttle him with a piece of rope. When this failed, he apologized, tied the man to a chair, and ran off with a can of sardines, a pineapple, and a large canvas shoe. He then stole a motorcycle and motored, very slowly, toward the coast with the canoe balanced on his head. He intended to paddle to Holland. A roadman reported to police that a man with a canoe had fallen off his motorcycle on Pamisford road, and he had helped the man throw the canoe over a hedge.'

If you're looking for a crazy fun nonfiction book to read, then *Double Cross* is it.

Fran says

I have always loved real life survival stories, especially when dealing with WWII. This is a story about the Double Cross spies, upon whom the survival of many in WWII was depended. Their misinformation was known to have made it way to top Nazi eyes and ears, and the resulting success of the Normandy Invasion is evidence that the ruses employed was successful.

I read this book just after reading "In the Garden of Beasts.", second in my trilogy of WWII stories recently read. In this book, you know the ending is a little better. It focuses on the spies involved in misleading the Germans as to where the D-Day invasion would occur. It worked. How much the double agents information was critical to the success of the operation may never be fully known...such is the nature of espionage...but the evidence shows it worked well, better even than the British had hoped it would, in some cases.

There are 5 spies in particular on which this book focuses: Tricycle, Garbo, Treasure, Brutus, and Bronx. Other such as Artist, Gelatine, Freak, and Giraffe are mentioned as well. I also enjoyed the little side stories of other spy's escapades, such as the wretched actor who made a magnificent double for Monty, the pigeon fanatic's efforts to infest German carrier pigeons with traitor pigeons, and an frustrated but nevertheless blustering Patton marching around touting his command of military units that did not exist. One slip, just one slip, one betrayal, one triple agent, could have blown the whole works, and perhaps cost the lives of tens of thousands more. And it nearly happened when the British spy handlers miscalculated the love of a the spy called Treasure for her little dog, and the bitterness she harbored when they broke their word to her regarding her beloved Frisson.

This book is a story of incredible bravery, astounding excesses, betrayal, psychology, strategy, and a look into the minds of those who masterminded the greatest deception in WWII. I was riveted.

Melanie Fraser says

The elaborate plans of the British with the help of their double agents from several countries made possible the D Day landings in Normandy in World War II, duped the Germans into sending their main armies to other venues and thus the Allies won the war.

Ben Macintyre writes this historical series of events with humour and drama for Double Cross was a magnificent and ingeniously stage managed inspiration by Tar Robertson and others in MI5 and M16 that

could so easily have gone horribly wrong. That none for the many double agents and others who knew about the deception betrayed them to the Germans was remarkable.

This story tells of the fake armies amassed at fake destinations. An actor posed as Montgomery to fool the enemy into thinking he was on his way to North Africa. Double agent pigeons (with messages soldered to their legs) among them, the RAF homing pigeon, Gustav, whose message reported enemy aircraft traffic whereabouts on his return to Portsmouth. There is much to discover in this extraordinary book. If it were fiction one would assume it was too far-fetched but it is all true. Highly recommended and entertaining reading.

Tony says

DOUBLE CROSS. (2012). Ben Macintyr. ****.

Mr. Macintyr introduces us to a group of individuals who played a silent and secret role for the Allied during World War II. They managed to convince the Germans that the attack from England onto the Continent that occurred on June 6, 1944, would be launched against the region around Calais, not Normandy. This forced the Nazi high command to maintain a strong presence of troops in that area away from the actual target, thereby ultimately saving thousands of lives of our troops. What makes this a fascinating story is that the group that did this was the least likely to be successful to do so. I've never seen a more inept group of individuals in my life. They were: Dusan "Dusko" Popov, Code name Tricycle or Skoot; Roman Czerniawski, code names Brutus, Armand, or Walenty; Lily Sergeyev, code name treasure; Juan Pujol Garcia, code name Garbo or Bovril; and, Elvira de la Fuente Chaudoir, code names Bronx and Cyril. All of these individuals worked for both the British MI5 and the German Abwehr. On the British side, they were part of the British organization known as the Twenty Committee, so named because the number twenty in Roman numerals, XX, forms a double cross. Each of these individuals formed their own network of intelligence members – mostly turned German spies – and fed the Germans information that they wanted to hear. This is a fascinating history of a little-known group of misfits that had a significant impact on the outcome on the war effort. Recommended.

happy says

With this narrative Mr. Macintyre once again proves he is a master of telling the stories of British Intelligence. This book is more than the story of Operation Fortitude, the Allies attempt to convince the Germans that the invasion of France was going to be somewhere other than Normandy. The author tells the story of how British Intelligence - MI 6 completely penetrated the German spy network in Great Britain and used that control to tell the Germans exactly what the Allies wanted them to hear and to a great extent what the Germans themselves wanted to believe. According to the author, every agent Germany attempted to insert into Great Britain was captured. Most were imprisoned, a few executed and some became double agents

The author does a good job of describing the covert intel war on the Iberian Peninsula. It seems it became the central theater in the war between MI 6 and German Intelligence - the Abwehr. Especially in the early war, most of the German controllers were based in either Spain or Portugal. In telling the story of the Abwehr's attempts to get agents into Britain, Mr. Macintyre does an excellent job to discussing the weaknesses and

frankly the gullibility in the German agents controlling their British Spy ring.

He looks at how both sides recruited agents, controlled them, their methods of communications and how the British used the time delay for getting information from Britain to Spain to their advantage. Sometimes this was done in letting agents give the Germans actual operational details, but timed in such a way that they would arrive too late to be of any use.

When he starts telling of the story of Operation Fortitude, he looks at just how the information the agents were giving the Germans reinforced their preconceived notions of when and where they invasions would take place – the area around the Pas de Calais in northern France and closest part of France to Britain. He also tells of how they inflated the Allied Order of Battle to such an extent that even after the troops landed on D-Day the Germans believed that there was still enough strength in Britain to conduct another landing.

In addition to the double agents, the author does look at some of the other methods the Allies used to reinforce what they were sending their German controllers. This includes the famous rubber vehicles and planes, false radio traffic, using General Patton as a decoy etc.

The author also looks at the American attempts to get into the intel game how it almost cost MI 6 one of their better agents. It seems that in the attempt to be good partners, MI 6 let the FBI/OSS run one of the agents who had moved to the US. The attempt failed because Herbert Hoover, the head of the FBI, did not believe in or trust double agents and wouldn't allow the agent to be given anything at all believable or of any use to the Germans. After about six months the agent reverted to British control and according to the author left a bad taste all around and a rather large hotel bill for the Americans to pay.

Finally, in telling the stories of the agents he really does look at their motivations. The men and women's reasons ran the gamut - from patriotism, one was a Polish Fighter pilot who despised the Germans, to greed, a couple of them were looking for someone to bankroll their lifestyles, to boredom with life and the thought that spying would be "exciting". The author includes an epilogue that tells what happened to the main characters after the war that I found extremely interesting.

I found this a very informational and gripping read. It is definitely a 4+ star read. I rounded down for GR.

A.L. Sowards says

I'm so glad I listened to this audiobook. I've had several of Mr. Macintyre's books on my to-read list for a while, and this one didn't disappoint! I've read multiple books on British WWII intelligence and D-day deception schemes (my first novel was about D-day deception schemes, so I did a fair amount of research), but I still learned something new. This book will now be my go-to recommendation for readers wanting a nonfiction account of D-day spies. Great bit of history told with skilled writing. My favorite kind of narrative history.

J.C. says

I ran out of gas around page 65. I don't know why I keep picking up spy non fiction books when I know that

there is nothing exciting about the life of a real spy. Only James Bond, that Bourne guy and Sterling Archer have exciting lives in espionage and they are fictitious characters; and that Bourne guy wasn't even a spy technically, he was just a crazy assassin who lost his marbles.

Joan says

This book was absolutely hilarious. It is proof of the old adage that truth is stranger than fiction. I don't think any fiction authors could invent the wacky people in this book because they wouldn't have been believed. I quote a few sentences from the book to prove my point (p.5-6):

"For the D-Day spies were, without question, one of the oddest military units ever assembled. They included a bisexual Peruvian playgirl, a tiny Polish fighter pilot, a mercurial Frenchwoman a Serbian seducer, and a deeply eccentric Spaniard with a diploma in chicken farming....the Double Cross spies were, variously, courageous, treacherous, capricious, greedy and inspired....One was so obsessed with her pet dog that she came close to derailing the entire invasion. All were, to some extent fantasists, for that is the very essence of espionage. Two were of dubious moral character. One was a triple, and possibly a quadruple, agent."

The author is quite aware of how funny his material can be in places but in typical British understated style, simply presents the information knowing that readers would find this funnier for it not being labeled as such. However, before anyone gets the idea that the writer is simply having a great time with this material, the last few pages are a tribute to one spy in particular who likely died in a concentration camp although no one really knows his fate. He also makes it clear throughout the book how essential this effort was. The misinformation fed to the Germans meant that they refused to move additional troops to Normandy when D-Day happened. This kept the casualties much lower than they would have otherwise and possibly kept the end of the war from being a few years later. In many ways, James Bond would have been unable to keep up with these people, at least intellectually. Physically, of course, 007 would have outstripped them easily. These people were warriors with words, not your typical warriors. Many of the actual warriors survived the war thanks to the outrageous lies these people fed their German handlers. However, the success of the entire unit belonged to the supervisors of these people. They had to baby, cajole, humor, lie, carouse, and threaten these people, never being completely sure that a few of them weren't actually working for the other side and deceiving the Brits.

The author notes that this story wouldn't have been able to be written at all if the British secret services hadn't fairly recently decided to open up the files for this time period. The spies themselves pretty much expected that their stories would never be known.

To sum up, this book is serious history written with a keen eye for the absurd. Highly recommended. I plan on rereading it again some day when my to read pile isn't so ridiculous.

Jill Mackin says

A great story about the misinformation fed to German intelligence by a group of spies and double agents working for MI5 during WW2 culminating in a successful D-Day landing at Normandy.

Dick Reynolds says

It's the summer of 1943 and Germany's forces have taken over much of Europe. Tar Robertson of the British Security Service (aka MI5) is putting the finishing touches on a weapon that will tell a huge lie to Hitler. Robertson has collected a small and most unusual group of agents, characters who've established fake allegiance to Hitler and will act as British spies feeding false information back to Hitler's own intelligence officers.

The Double Cross team members concocted their own sub-agents and spun a web of false information sprinkled with "chicken feed," trivial but true information, that was relayed back to their German handlers in Spain, Portugal and Germany. The aim of this concerted effort was to deceive the Germans into believing the Allied invasion would take place at the Pas de Calais instead of the Normandy area. Even homing pigeons are enlisted in this effort, birds that carry false messages back to their lofts in Germany.

The entire scheme almost becomes unraveled when one of the British agents, a French woman named Lily, is transported to England but must leave her pet dog in Gibraltar due to British quarantine rules. Lily puts her feelings of revenge aside and soldiers on, continuing to hide her double agent status from the Germans.

Author Ben Macintyre tells a fascinating story with a brisk pace so you don't get bogged down in a lot of detail. Hitler and his intelligence staff swallow the phony information whole and realize only too late that the main Allied invasion at Normandy is the overpowering single blow. The details of this key bit of British counterespionage were kept secret for many years to protect the identities of those double agents who saw the evils of Nazism and committed their lives to combat it by helping England and the Allies defeat Hitler.

Ruth says

This is an astonishingly good, absolutely riveting account of a disparate group of individuals whose exploits during WW2 went largely unsung. It was provided to me by netgalley and is well written with humor, empathy and clarity. It brings in accounts of other operations and the bigger picture to provide context, but never moves away from the double agents themselves.

I honestly had no idea that such an infuriating, temperamental, intelligent and diverse a group of people played such an important role in the success of the D Day landings, or in assisting the work of the codebreakers at Bletchley Park. They all did the work for a variety of reasons from greed to boredom to fierce hatred of the Nazis, but there is no doubting the courage of any of them, nor the complete ignorance in the Nazis in trusting in them so blindly.

I found the comparisons between the German and British intelligent organizations fascinating. After all, the individuals running them and operating in them were essentially equally capable, equally intelligent and equally well-resourced. So why did the British succeed where the Nazis didn't, and not only succeed, but succeed with such panache?

This was a wonderful read. I loved reading some of the bonkers messages the agents sent to their German case officers, and hearing about their various exploits.

I particularly enjoyed the epilogue, which beautifully and concisely described what happened to the double agents, their case officers (from both sides) and associates after the war, but ends exactly where it should,

paying tribute to the agent who was possibly most flawed, most dodgy, least brave, and yet, most courageous when faced with Nazi torture. He ultimately gave his life to save thousands of allied soldiers landing in Normandy.

Just read it. 5 stars.

Moira says

A book about the spymasters and double agents assisting the Allies' real and fake plans to invade Nazi-held France in WW2. Overall I give this book 3 stars, but it's mixed. The beginning is 5 stars, the middle is 1 star and the last 75 pages are 4 stars. I started out enjoying this book immensely. Halfway through I was puzzled that I wasn't enjoying it more: it's a true WW2 spy story, for goodness sake! The midsection just drags on and on — I got tired of the details and started skimming. The last 75 pages are much more interesting. (Perhaps I should have read it straight through so I didn't have to re-orient to all the different characters each time I picked it up. And I can see that I've fallen into the bad habit of expecting stories that are neatly packaged by Hollywood to be short, punchy and non-stop thrills - for those with limited attention spans. Real life is usually more complicated and requires some actual brain work.)

Sometimes the author tries to make the characters come to life a bit too much for my taste. Sometimes his explanations are almost incomprehensible, but when one is describing how they created quadruple crosses with multiple agents in wartime, well...it just *is* confusing.

Most of the book is taken up with how each agent came into the fold and was developed, their idiosyncracies and quirks, and how the British spymaster team moved from simply supplying wrong information (or correct information too late), to distributing information that was methodically misleading and potentially destructive, culminating in Operation Fortitude: the fictitious invasion of Calais, which tied up the mighty German 15th army division and kept them away from the real invasion at Normandy on D-Day. "What had begun with the ad hoc interception and turning of enemy agents was developing into a genuine system in which the misleading information from one double agent could be bolstered by all the others, an intricate self-reinforcing structure that could 'fill the German files with what we want.' From the summer of 1942, [they] began trying to influence overall German strategy, to burrow into Hitler's thoughts in a way that could cause the Germans massive, and perhaps critical, damage."

The first part of the book just trips along and is fascinating. I was impressed by the sheer fantastical nerve of the schemes dreamed up by the British spymasters and some of the spies themselves. One British double agent creates a fictional network of 27 subagents across Britain, and, year after year, writes messages for each of them — in character — to send back to his German spymaster. And never gets found out.

The insight into the character of British and Germans is fascinating. Working for the British, the German-born Gisela Ashley "urged the team to...never underestimate the literalness of the German mind. 'What may appeal to an Englishman, even an Englishman engaged in double-crossing, as absurd, unlikely or naïve, may be the very thing that a typical Nazi would swallow and do'."

I think I'll read it again, now that I know all the characters and can focus more on the intricacies of the story. But first I'll read the first 2 books in the series: Agent Zigzag and Operation Mincemeat.

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Tal says

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Susan says

Anyone who has read anything by Ben Macintyre before will know that they are in for a treat. He is a wonderful storyteller and, in this book, he is on territory he seems to understand brilliantly and relish. The Allied military planners were working on the the great assault on Nazi Occupied Europe - the D-Day invasion would decide the outcome of the war. In order to convince the Germans that the invasion was coming where it was not actually coming, and not coming in the place where it was actually coming, a huge amount of effort was expended. There were dummy planes, tanks and even dummy armies in place to fool the Germans. There were even pigeons masquerading as German carrier pigeons (lots more on pigeons in the book - they play a larger part than you might imagine!). There were impersonators to convince the Germans that military leaders were elsewhere. Counterfeit generals led non-existent armies. Radio operators created a barrage of fake signals. Finally, there were spies. The Allies had a harder task than it appears in hindsight, knowing that it succeeded, as the target range for a cross-Channel invasion was small. There were only a handful of suitable spots for a massed landing and it was important that the entire might of the German forces were not waiting when the Allies landed.

Tar Robertson created a bodyguard of liars - the "Double Cross System" coordinated by the Twenty (XX) Committee. They specialised in turning German spies into double agents. Every single German agent in Britain was under his control, enabling huge and co-ordinated lies to be told. The task of Operation Fortitude was to bottle up German troops in the Pas de Calais and keep them there - this ability depended on Robertson's spies. These included a bisexual Peruvian playgirl, a tiny Polish fighter pilot, a mercurial Frenchwoman who adored her dog, a Serbian seducer and an eccentric Spaniard with marital problems. These spies never met, but together they created false trails, gave false information and often created totally false networks of sub-spies, including a group of entirely fictional Welsh fascists - all of which the Germans swallowed completely. In some cases, very extensive lies were not even noticed by the Germans, whereas the Allies had much confidential information (courtesy of Bletchly Park) even before the Germans themselves were aware of it. It is astounding to realise the control the Allies had over information sent to the Germans and the inventive ways to which this was put to use.

This then is a great book of subterfuge, downright lies, great ingenuity and often, great courage, for no reward other than a belief in freedom. Many of these individuals had families threatened by the Germans, at least one person connected to the group was arrested, and there was always the risk of being discovered which would undoubtedly led to many more deaths of Allied troops when D-Day arrived. Nobody could tell this story as Ben Macintyre does, with dry humour, great understatement and a great deal of respect for his subjects.
