

Operation Fortitude South



Dummy Allied tank (Credit: Barcroft Media via Getty Images)

D-Day was one of the largest land invasions in military history, but it was preceded by an equally elaborate campaign of subterfuge known as Operation Fortitude South. Spearheaded by the British, Fortitude South was a ruse designed to deceive the Germans into thinking the Allies would make landfall in France at the Pas de Calais instead of Normandy. To help sell the con, the Allies created a fictitious invasion force known as the “First U.S. Army Group” and fed the Germans phony intelligence suggesting the phantom army would lead a charge on the Pas de Calais. Operatives used inflatable tanks, wooden airplanes and dummy fuel depots to trick reconnaissance pilots into believing that the First U.S. Army Group was assembled in Kent, England—the most likely staging ground for an attack on the Pas de Calais. To top it all off, they even placed the much-feared General George Patton in charge of the fake army to lend it an additional air of authenticity.

Operation Fortitude South continued even after the Allies launched their invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944. Aircraft focused many of their bombing runs on the Pas de Calais instead of Normandy, and double agents worked to convince the Germans that the D-Day invasion was merely a feint designed to screen a second, larger offensive from the south. The swarm of contradictory reports, bluffs and misdirects ultimately had their intended effect. When the Allies stormed the beaches at Normandy, the Germans had a large concentration of troops languishing at the Pas de Calais, waiting for an assault that never came.