



Diversion and Deception: Dudley Clarke's "A" Force and Allied Operations in World War II by Whitney T. Bendeck.

Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2021. Pp. xii, 288. ISBN 978-0-8061-6846-3.

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In *Diversion and Deception*,¹ international affairs specialist Whitney Bendeck (Florida State Univ.) offers a meticulous history of "A" Force—the first British organization to practice both tactical and strategic deception in the field. She concentrates on its command structure, operations, and successes and failures in 1943–45. Under the leadership of Brig. Dudley Clarke, "A" Force conducted highly complex deceptions with the aim of creating notional threats across the southern perimeter of Europe.

The book's eight chapters proceed chronologically. After a chapter on the beginning of "A" Force and some biographical details about Dudley Clarke, chap. 2 takes up the strategic planning for the 1943 campaign in Europe. It gives context for the rest of the book and provides a deeper understanding of Allied grand strategy in the Mediterranean.

Chapter 3 treats Operation Barclay, the overall deception plan for 1943 and its facilitation of Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily. "If a newcomer on deception were to seek a short road towards initiation into its secrets of success and failure [I] would recommend him to study the story of the 'Barclay' plan" (76).

Chapter 4 centers on operations in Italy in 1943. The year marked a turning point for the organization: "A" Force's role and the nature of deception began to change once the war shifted to European soil:

With the notable exception of Operation Overlord, it was difficult to plan and maintain long-term strategic cover and deception plan.... With regard to the Italian campaign, "A" Force began developing strategic deception on short notice to support the tactical plans developed at Tac HQ, and tactical deception took a much larger and consistent role than it had previously. (91)

Chapter 5 concerns tactical maneuvering and strategic planning in 1944, a time when "The position of the Mediterranean theater was changing. It was no longer the center of gravity for Allied military operations.... In its new reality, the Mediterranean was to play the essential role of diversion" (112). The goal of "A" Force operations shifted to preventing the movement of German forces (ca. 21 divisions in Italy and 31 in the Balkans) from threatening "Overlord." Bendeck also discusses "Bodyguard," of course, but also lesser known plans or sub-plans like "Foynes," which concealed from the Germans the weakening of Allied forces in Italy after their redeployment of divisions and landing craft to England for "Overlord."

Chapter 6 covers plan "Zeppelin," "the Mediterranean component of Bodyguard ..., the most extensive and exhaustive deception effort undertaken by 'A' Force during the entirety of World War II" (139). "Zeppelin" relied heavily on "Wantage," a plan dedicated to creating a notional or-

1. The sequel to *"A" Force: The Origins of British Deception during the Second World War* (Annapolis: Naval Inst Pr, 2013), which concerns the development of the organization up to the "victory in the desert" (Feb. 1943).

der of battle in the Mediterranean (Feb. 1944–May 1945). The goal was to lead the Germans to think there were sufficient Allied reserves in both the eastern and western Mediterranean to undertake large-scale operations in southern Europe. The objective—largely achieved—was to exaggerate Allied land strength in the Mediterranean by 33 percent.

Before a final chapter on “A” Force’s last tactical operations in Italy, such as “Dragoon” and “Olive,” chap. 7 details the climax of “Zeppelin”: specifically “Vendetta” and “Turpitude.” “Vendetta” aimed to activate a threat to southern France in late April with a target date in May. “Turpitude” was the eastern element of “Zeppelin,” a supposed landing at Salonika, and thrust up the Struma Valley to link with Russian forces. The author perfectly captures the Allies’ struggle “to provide adequate resources and manpower to meet the dual demands of the genuine campaign in Italy and the deceptive threats across the Mediterranean” (165)—a classic dilemma during the planning of a deception operation.

As Bendeck rightly and repeatedly points out, the success of a deception is always difficult to assess. However,

for the cross-channel invasion, there can be little doubt that deception made a significant contribution to the Allied success. Of the sixty German divisions spread across the Mediterranean theater, thirty-five divisions in southern France and the Balkans were held in check almost exclusively by deception threats and twenty-five divisions were positioned in Italy to defend against the Allied drive up the peninsula. But even in Italy the threat to the German was augmented by deception efforts, forcing the enemy to maintain adequate reinforcements in order to defend against notional threats. (197)

Bendeck succeeds in her aim to write a history of “A” Force and its dedication to strategic and tactical deception (if we include the first of her two volumes on the subject). That said, two subjects deserved fuller discussion: (a) the enemy’s perspective (perhaps by tapping more German or Italian archives) and (b) concise biographies of “A” Force personnel to clarify the psychology and competencies of good deceptionists.

Whitney Bendeck’s painstakingly research (esp. in Britain’s National Archives and the Imperial War Museum) enables her to convey the intricacies of the deception operations she considers: no less than fifty-three items are associated with “Vendetta.” In short, *Deception and Diversion* is a most salutary addition to the ever-growing bibliography of deception operations. It is must reading for all students of deception during World War II.