

= Operation Copperhead =

Operation Copperhead was a small military deception operation run by the British during the Second World War . It formed part of Operation Bodyguard , the cover plan for the invasion of Normandy in 1944 , and was intended to mislead German intelligence as to the location of General Bernard Montgomery . The operation was conceived by Dudley Clarke in early 1944 after he watched the film Five Graves to Cairo . Following the war M. E. Clifton James wrote a book about the operation , I Was Monty 's Double . It was later adapted into a film , with James in the lead role .

The German high command expected Montgomery (one of the best @-@ known Allied commanders) to play a key role in any cross @-@ channel bridgehead . Clarke and the other deception planners reasoned that a high @-@ profile appearance outside the United Kingdom would suggest that an Allied invasion was not imminent . An appropriate look @-@ alike was found , M. E. Clifton James , who spent a short time with Montgomery to familiarise himself with the general 's mannerisms . On 26 May 1944 , James flew first to Gibraltar and then to Algiers , making appearances where the Allies knew German intelligence agents would spot him . He then flew secretly to Cairo and remained in hiding until Montgomery 's public appearance in Normandy following the invasion .

The operation did not appear to have any significant impact on German plans and was not reported high up the chain of command . It was executed some time before D @-@ Day , and in the midst of several other Allied deceptions . German intelligence might have suspected a trick , or not attributed much importance to the visit .

= = Background = =

In preparation for the 1944 invasion of Normandy , the Allied nations conducted a complex series of deceptions under the codename Bodyguard . The overall aim of the plan was to confuse the German high command as to the exact location and timing of the invasion . Significant time was spent constructing the First United States Army Group , a notional army to threaten Pas de Calais , along with political and visual deceptions to communicate a fictional Allied battle plan . Copperhead was a small portion of Bodyguard conceived by Dudley Clarke . Earlier in the war Clarke had pioneered the idea of strategic deception , forming a deception department in Cairo named ' A ' Force . Clarke and ' A ' Force were not officially in charge of Bodyguard planning (a role that fell to the London Controlling Section) , but because of the location of the deception the Cairo planners organised much of the operation .

On a visit to Naples in January 1944 Clarke had seen the film Five Graves to Cairo , in which actor Miles Mander makes a brief appearance as Bernard Montgomery . The film involves one character impersonating another and Clarke suggested attempting the same trick in real life . He proposed an operation to mislead German commanders as to Montgomery 's location in the days immediately before the Normandy landings (codenamed Operation Neptune) .

Montgomery was one of the most prominent Allied commanders and the German high command expected him to be present for any invasion of France . Clarke hoped Montgomery 's apparent presence in Gibraltar and Africa would lend support to the idea that the Allies might be planning landings in Southern France , as part of Operation Vendetta , rather than across the Channel . While in London , in February 1944 , Clarke , the London Controlling Section and Ops (B) drafted Copperhead in support of Vendetta .

= = Operation = =

Mander , the actor from Five Graves to Cairo , was located in Hollywood but found to be too tall in real life . Another look @-@ alike was identified but before he could be drafted into the operation he broke a leg in a motorbike accident . Eventually , Lieutenant @-@ Colonel J. V. B. Jervis @-@ Reid , head of Ops (B) , spotted a photograph of Meyrick Clifton James in the News Chronicle . James , an Australian , had spent 25 years as an actor before the war , and at the time was assigned to the

Royal Army Pay Corps . Colonel David Niven , a well @-@ known British actor , was asked to contact James and offer him a screen test for future army films . When he arrived at the meeting , James was told his true role .

James was not a perfect stand @-@ in for Montgomery . He had lost a finger during the First World War , so a prosthetic had to be made . He had also never flown before , so the London Controlling Section 's Dennis Wheatley took James up for a test flight to make sure he did not suffer from air sickness . Finally , James both drank heavily and smoked cigars , while Montgomery was a teetotaler and disliked smoking . The deception planners were worried that James might be spotted drinking , spoiling the performance . Despite these hitches , and with Montgomery 's approval , the plan went forward . To get into character , James spent some time with the general , posing as a journalist , to study his mannerisms .

Allied deceivers used their double agent network to circulate the idea that Montgomery would command ground forces during the invasion . Then , on 26 May 1944 , James flew overnight from RAF Northolt to Gibraltar , where the Germans maintained an observation post overlooking the airport from across the Spanish border . The plane had to circle for an hour before landing to allow James , who had smuggled a bottle of gin onto the flight , to sober up . He then attended breakfast with the British governor , Sir Ralph Eastwood , before departing again for the airfield . The Allies had arranged for Ignacio Molina Pérez , a Spanish envoy known to be a German spy , to visit Government House . After observing James 's departure , Pérez hurriedly crossed the border to place a call to his German handler .

James then flew to Algiers , where he was publicly paraded through the airport and driven to meet General Maitland Wilson , ostensibly for a meeting to discuss operations against the south of France . Instead , he was moved quietly to a remote villa by ' A ' Force 's Rex Hamer . Rumours suggest this was because James had been spotted smoking and staggering around Algiers , so the deceivers decided to cut his appearances short . Whatever the reason , the next day , out of character , James was flown to Cairo . He was to remain hidden there until the public disclosure of Montgomery 's presence in France . Meanwhile , double agents in North Africa were used to extend the masquerade for a few more days , by hinting Montgomery was still in the region .

= = Impact = =

The impact of Copperhead is unclear . The visit was reported up the German chain of command , and some double agents later received requests for information about Montgomery 's movements . There is no indication that Montgomery 's appearance affected German views of the imminent invasion threat . Writing in 2011 , historian Joshua Levine attributes this to the fact that the deception was carried out ten days before D @-@ Day , arguing that there would be no reason for a flying visit to North Africa to preclude an imminent invasion .

Another factor was that , in early May 1944 , an uncontrolled agent based in Spain (who sold fictional intelligence to the Germans) had passed on details of a meeting in Gibraltar between several high @-@ ranking Allied officers . Documents found after the war indicate that the Germans found this information suspect , and may have treated Montgomery 's appearance as equally so . Although double agents received several urgent requests from the Abwehr about his whereabouts it does not appear that this information was passed on to the German command in France . According to captured enemy generals , German intelligence believed that it was Montgomery , though they still guessed that it was a feint . The Bodyguard deception had confused the German command as to Allied intentions and the apparent arrival of Montgomery in Gibraltar added little to the picture .

James did not enjoy the experience . Although he received equivalent pay (£ 10 per day) to Montgomery during the operation , it had been a stressful assignment . Following Montgomery 's public appearance on the Normandy beachhead , James flew back to England and resumed his role within the Pay Corps and was warned not to discuss the operation . Dennis Wheatley , in his memoirs , commented that he felt James had been treated " shabbily " for his efforts .

= = Later depictions = =

In 1954 James wrote an account of the operation , entitled I Was Monty 's Double (published in the United States as The Counterfeit General) . The British government made no attempt to stop publication , and in 1958 the book was adapted into a film of the same name . James starred , both as himself and Montgomery , alongside John Mills as an intelligence agent .