

1943 - 1944

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QUICKSILVER IV

AIR SUPPORT

BIGOT G-3

Overview



QUICKSILVER IV & AIR SUPPORT

Operation Fortitude was a major piece of Operation Bodyguard. It was a deception plan aimed at misleading the German high command about the Overlord invasion. One of several Fortitude sub-plans was codenamed Quicksilver, which was also broken into six sub-plans. Quicksilver IV dealt with the need for an air plan.

The Nazi enemy knew that prior to the real invasion, the Allies would need to run training flights and practice air-sea rescue missions. Therefore, this is exactly what Quicksilver IV set out to provide. One tactic of air deception was to have fighter aircraft do training drills out of bases near Dover, England, because those airfields would be the most obvious if the invasion was to be at Pas de Calais. The Allies knew that Nazi spies would be watching and reporting. For example, on May 29, 1944, sixty-six squadrons took part in an exercise, landing on airfields in Kent and Sussex to rearm and refuel. German aircraft were “allowed” to venture close enough to observe the operation, and Double-Cross agent “Donny” reported his observations of the operation to Abwehr.

Additionally, tactical bombing missions were carried out that disrupted the railways, bridges, and beaches of the Calais area. The basic Overlord air plan stressed disruption of facilities that supported the Nazi forces, and interception of the Seine River bridges, and therefore no adjustment was needed for Quicksilver IV. Bombing of these sites served both the deception plan and the real plan. However, for every bombing that was done of the coastal defenses and radar stations at

Normandy, two were dropped on the Pas de Calais area.

Attacks on railway junctions were focused entirely on the area near Pas de Calais. These targets had been chosen by Allied railway experts as the best means of bringing the French rail network to a standstill.

It should be noted that Pas-de-Calais was also a launching site of the Nazi’s V-weapons (long-range artillery) towards England. Therefore, those were legitimate sites for the Allies to bomb, regardless of it helping the Fortitude deception plan. Hitler knew this also made Calais an obvious target, and stated in his Fuhrer Directive No. 51 of November 3, 1943, that he had decided to reinforce the defenses, “particularly those places from which the long-range bombardment of England will begin. For it is here that the enemy must and will attack, and it is here—unless all indications are misleading—that the decisive battle against the landing forces will be fought.”

In April 1944, Eisenhower was given control of all air operations and SHAEF initiated the Transportation Plan, using bombers to destroy rail centers and bridges serving northwestern France. Through the month of April, the Ninth (tactical) Army Air Force in England dropped 33,000 tons of bombs on French and Belgium railway targets. During May 1944, transportation attacks were greatly intensified by all air forces and cunningly focused on routes which led into Normandy while seemingly concentrated on those serving Calais.