



## Operation Mincemeat: How a Dead Man and a Bizarre Plan Fooled the Nazis and Assured an Allied Victory

*Ben Macintyre*

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## **Operation Mincemeat: How a Dead Man and a Bizarre Plan Fooled the Nazis and Assured an Allied Victory** Ben Macintyre

In 1943, from a windowless London basement office, two intelligence officers conceived a plan that was both simple & complicated—Operation Mincemeat. Purpose? To deceive the Nazis into thinking the Allies were planning to attack Europe by way of Greece or Sardinia, rather than Sicily, as the Nazis had assumed & the Allies ultimately chose. Charles Cholmondeley of MI5 & the British naval intelligence officer Ewen Montagu were very different. Cholmondeley was a dreamer seeking adventure. Montagu was an aristocratic, detail-oriented barrister. A perfect team, they created an ingenious plan: equip a corpse with secret (but false) papers concerning the invasion, then drop it off the coast of Spain where German spies would hopefully take the bait. The idea was approved by British intelligence officials, including Ian Fleming (007's creator). Winston Churchill believed it might ring true to the Axis & help bring victory.

Filled with spies, double agents, rogues, heroes & a corpse, the story of Operation Mincemeat reads like an international thriller. Unveiling never-before-released material, Macintyre goes into the minds of intelligence officers, their moles & spies, & the German Abwehr agents who suffered the “twin frailties of wishfulness & yesmanship.” He weaves together the eccentric personalities of Cholmondeley & Montagu & their improbable feats into an adventure that saved thousands & paved the way for the conquest of Sicily.

## **Operation Mincemeat: How a Dead Man and a Bizarre Plan Fooled the Nazis and Assured an Allied Victory Details**

Date : Published 2010 by Bloomsbury

ISBN : 9780747598688

Author : Ben Macintyre

Format : 400 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, War, World War II, Spy Thriller, Espionage

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## From Reader Review Operation Mincemeat: How a Dead Man and a Bizarre Plan Fooled the Nazis and Assured an Allied Victory for online ebook

### Tony says

I like reading about espionage and World War II every once in a while, so based on some favorable review I read somewhere, I picked this up. Unfortunately, like all too many popular nonfiction books I seem to encounter these days (such as *The Tiger* and *In the Heart of the Sea*, to name the two most recent examples I read), the book is overstuffed with extraneous detail and (to my mind at least) vastly overstates the importance of the topic it covers. The title refers to a British intelligence operation designed to misdirect the German High Command into believing that the impending Allied invasion of southern Europe in 1943 would take place in Sardinia instead of Sicily, and thus lead the Germans to concentrate their forces in the wrong place. The scheme involved planting a corpse in the coast off of Spain with documents that could be interpreted to indicate the false invasion location so that the Spanish would pass the information along to the Germans.

While this was certainly a colorful ruse (so colorful indeed, that this is one of two books published this year about it: see also *Deathly Deception: The Real Story of Operation Mincemeat*), it's pretty well worn territory. You can learn about all you need to know from chapters in recent books such as *The Deceivers: Allied Military Deception in the Second World War* or *Deceiving Hitler: Double Cross and Deception in World War II*. Moreover, the plan's principal engineer, Ewen Montague, wrote his own self-aggrandizing account of the whole affair (*The Man Who Never Was*) some fifty years ago, which itself was turned into a passable film of the same title. I suppose this new book is best regarded as an updated and expanded look at the operation, but one that really seems all to intent on following every possible thread and injecting every single piece of research into the text. In short, it reads like a long magazine essay or book chapter inflated to book-length.

Of course, there's also the issue of just how important Mincemeat actually was. The author makes it out to be absolutely pivotal to all that followed and the eventual Allied victory, but other histories of the war place it as just a component in a much larger plan to misdirect the Germans over Sicily (I forget the codename for the larger plan, maybe *Barclay?*). Moreover, as the author recounts, it wasn't even that original -- a similar scheme had been tried before (which begs the question of why they thought a second attempt was a good idea). Indeed the whole premise of the operation's importance is somewhat confounded by the author's admission at the end that high-ranking anti-Nazi elements in German intelligence may well have seen through the ruse but chosen to look the other way in an attempt to speed up Hitler's downfall. On the whole, an interesting episode that certainly involved a lot of interesting people, but I'm not sure how many people will really find an entire book on it that fascinating.

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### Erik Graff says

Dad was involved in the occupation of N. Africa and in the landings at Gela on the south coast of Sicily. An army cryptanalyst attached to the U.S. navy, he and his colleagues maintained ship-to-shore communications during the successful invasion. Books relevant to his experiences there and in the Pacific have long attracted my attention.

This book is an account of how the British successfully misled the Germans and Italians into believing that

their European invasion plans were directed at Sardinia and Greece, not the island of Sicily, a deception that saved thousands of allied lives and expedited the overthrow of the Mussolini regime. Unlike previous books on the subject, this one appears to fill in the missing and hidden pieces.

Macintyre is an exceptionally good writer, his prose being fast-paced, his handling of details being often quite witty.

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### Jason Koivu says

When a dead man becomes a highly effective spy, fools the enemy and helps win a war with the world in the balance, well, that sounds like something James Bond writer Ian Fleming would concoct. Oh wait, he did.

To be specific (and more correct), Operation Mincemeat, a plan devised by Britain's intelligence agency MI5 to convince Germany that a southern attack on Europe via the Mediterranean by Allied forces, was signed off on by Fleming, one of many in Britain's spy ring.

Though Fleming may not have been top dog, he was what drove me to this bizarre tale. Certainly, there was an interest in the story itself, but I also wanted to hear about those familiar names of history, literature and even the culinary arts (even tv chef Julia Child did her bit for secret service during WWII) that had a hand - underhandedly - in taking down the Axis powers. Ben Macintyre provides plenty of background information on these shadows. With the declassification of files, writer's like Macintyre are able to cast light on the actions of agents for both sides, and some of it is as exciting as any fiction you'll ever read!

Those of you into WWII spy craft may be familiar with Macintyre's other relatively popular work on the subject, *Agent Zigzag*. As of the writing of this review, I haven't gotten around to reading that one yet, but if it's as competently and enticingly written as *Operation Mincement* I'll be on it like a tail that can't be shaken.

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### Mikey B. says

A marvellous story of intrigue of actual events during World War II. There are a host of wonderful and eclectic characters in England, Spain and Germany. The author presents all these in readable detail.

The sequence of events – and there are several – are well depicted and we are clearly presented with the logical construction of this set-up meant to deceive the Germans into believing that the Allies mean to launch a multi-pronged invasion in the Mediterranean – instead of just Sicily.

The author is careful to show all the nuances of the deception – how much embellishment do you do to preserve the initial lie? The author is also forthright to point out that “Mincemeat” was part of an overall package. The Germans in Spain pushed their find over-enthusiastically and many used it to reinforce their own preconceptions of an Allied invasion of Greece. As Mr. Macintyre demonstrates, if German Intelligence would have probed more in any direction (such as the ambiguous autopsy from the Spanish coroner) the ruse would have been exposed. Instead the clientele was an over-eager buyer.

It is with sadness at the end of the book when we are shown the tombstone of this “unknown civilian” – whose body was used in after-life to conjure this grand deception.

The paperback edition has some useful footnotes.

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This is just a really fabulous spy story with all the different layers exposed for us to marvel at.

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### **Bou says**

This book by Ben MacIntyre is a very interesting and most of all enjoyable read. It almost reads like a novel. Ben MacIntyre leaves no stone unturned. I particularly enjoyed his description of the German reception of the fake documents and the aftermath of it. Also, the final chapters describes the fate of all participants in this high suspense operation, which is very nice to know.

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### **Michael Flanagan says**

An enjoyable read about that takes you into the world of espionage during World War II and one of the most daring deceptions of the era. It was truly breathtaking reading about the lengths that was taken to execute Operation Mincemeat.

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### **Tony says**

OPERATION MINCEMEAT. (2010). Ben Macintyre. \*\*\*\*\*.

Using recently declassified files from the British Secret Service, the author has painstakingly pieced together the story of one of the most successful deceptions of the enemy utilized during wartime. In a nutshell, a body of a British officer was deposited in the sea off the coast of Spain, near a fairly well staffed German diplomatic office. A Spanish fisherman found the body and brought it to shore. It was turned over to the Spanish police and later shared with German officials. The body was identified as Major William Martin, RM from the ID material found on it. It was assumed that the dead man was the victim of a plane crash while traveling to North Africa. Documents on the body included personal letters and a cache of communications that Martin was supposed to deliver to key military personnel. These documents alluded to the upcoming plans for the Allies to invade Europe through Greece, using Sardinia and Sicily as diversionary points of attack. The author leads us through the meticulous planning used to find a suitable body and to plant just the right kinds of documents on it so that the Germans would believe them. Should the plan work, large forces of the German troops would then be diverted away from Sicily and Sardinia to Greece to repel the attack there. Surprisingly, it all worked. As a result, thousands of lives of our Allied troops were saved, since they were now facing reduced levels of German resistance. What makes this book so interesting is the vast array of 'characters' that we encounter – members of the espionage networks of both Britain and Germany. This is a collection of men and women that it is hard to believe could be collected into acting groups. When you think of British eccentricity, multiply it by ten to get the average working spymaster's personality. The body used actually belonged to a Welsh soldier, Glyn Michael, who had committed suicide by ingesting poison. The poison he took contained high levels of phosphorus, but not enough to kill him immediately. He later died of complications of several organs pushed over the edge by his dose of poison. Getting the body to the right place in the right condition was not trivial, and we are taken step-by-step through the whole process. Along the way we meet some very interesting people. One was Ian Fleming, the later author of the James Bond novels. Another character was code-named Garbo, a double agent upon whom Graham Greene based his novel, "Our Man in Havana." There is no end to the detail provided by the author in this book.

Recommended.

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## **F.R. says**

The fashion for World War Two films and novels these days is to play down the derring-do and instead concentrate on what exposure to all that battle and death does to a person's soul. (Alistair MacLean is not an author in vogue.) Exactly the same is true of the spy genre, where the duplicity these men (and, to a lesser degree, women) do whilst playing their great game eats away at their insides. And yet in Ben McIntyre's two non-fiction books detailing strange tales of espionage in the Second World War, there is undoubtedly an air of derring-do and indeed larks, even with the stakes as high as they were.

Essentially retelling the tale of 'The Man Who Wasn't There' (except without the redacted bits) McIntyre offers a potpourri of English eccentrics, failed (and successful) novelists, gung-ho soldiers, fanatical Nazis (as well as a Nazi spy chief who hated the cause and did everything he could to sabotage it), racing drivers, undertaker brothers and one dead Welsh tramp. It is Glyndwr Michael the story hinges on. An illiterate vagrant who died of (possibly self-administered) potassium poisoning in London, his body was preserved and then dressed in a military uniform and floated off the coast of Spain with a cache of fake documents attached to his wrist. Those papers made their way right to Hitler's desk and changed his thinking, making sure that Sicily was sparsely defended at the very moment the Allies invaded.

Whereas McIntyre's previous book 'Agent ZigZag' entertainingly followed one duplicitous spy, this one leaps around a huge cast of characters – moving from London to Spain to Germany and Italy, with diversions to Russia. As such it doesn't quite have the neat focus of the previous work, even if many of the those involved are genuinely interesting and really well drawn. I felt the chapter detailing the battle was something of a dull spot after all the deception (even though McIntyre tries his hardest with the tea drinking Major), but this is still a well researched and amusingly written slice of history, detailing a bizarre case which hasn't lost any of its interest.

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## **Caroline says**

It's a rare gem when history is unfolded for us in such a detailed and thrilling form. In 1943, Ewan Montagu of the British Naval Intelligence and Charles Cholmondeley of MI5 came together in collaboration of a complex plan of deception. The plan that was ultimately approved was to take a suitable corpse, dress it in a suitable military uniform, place certain well-planned personal items, attach to it a chained briefcase containing fake official documents and personal letters, and then drop it the ocean close to Huelva in Spain, where German agents and sympathizers were known to work. The objective? To deceive Hitler and his army that the Allies were going to use Sicily as a cover, but that they were going to attack Greece and Sardinia instead. If the plan was successful, Hitler would move his troops away from Sicily, thus leaving this underbelly of Italy vulnerable to the British armada and air attacks.

Sicily was identified as being the pivotal point at which a successful Allied attack could destroy Germany's hold over Italy. Secret agents and double agents were seemingly living cheek by jowl in Spain, and both Great Britain and Germany built an impressive network of spies in Spain.

What makes this a fascinating read is the attention to the cast of characters that had any part at all in this

particular secret operation, both on the British side as well as on the German side. The personalities of all characters, their background before, during and after the war, and the parts they played, both in the development, and the witting and unwitting execution of Operation Mincemeat are carefully detailed. And this includes the life of the person who took the central spotlight in this play - the corpse, who never in his living days thought he'd be serving his country in such a dramatic fashion.

The unfolding of Operation Mincemeat once the corpse was released into the water was a non-stop thrill. There were so many opportunities for the plan to go pear-shaped but the way in which the British spymasters manipulated their network was sheer genius and eventually led to the successful invasion of Sicily, wrenching away Germany's control and the toppling of Mussolini.

There is a reference to a similar outline of a plan to use a corpse by Ian Fleming, and indeed it could have given the duo the idea, but credit must be given to both Cholmondeley and Montagu for crafting and thinking of all angles to this plan and then being instrumental in executing it so successfully.

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## Nancy Oakes says

Briefly, I have to say that this is one of the most fascinating books of history I've read in a very long time. You don't even need to be a WWII buff to appreciate it -- I'm not -- but it's simply amazing. The basic story is this: it's 1943, and the Allies have plans to invade Sicily to get a foothold in Europe and defeat Hitler. But since Sicily is the most obvious place for an Allied landing, Ewen Montagu and Charles Cholmondeley (it's pronounced "Chumley") of the Naval Intelligence section of the Admiralty decide to dupe the Germans into thinking that Greece is the actual target -- and with the help of a fiction writer, a plan is born. The British Navy will ferry a dead body in the guise of a Navy officer carrying misleading documents to the coast of Spain, where the body would be found and the documents leaked to German spies there and hopefully believed. The idea is that the Germans will redeploy a large percentage of their military forces currently on Sicily elsewhere, saving countless Allied lives. How the plan was conceived and how it was put into action is an amazing story in itself, but MacIntyre does so much more -- he manages to infuse the story with a bit of suspense and delivers human portraits of all those involved, including the Germans, rounding out this remarkable story. The drawback to this one is that often the story gets bogged down with a little too much detail (like the description of an entertainer doing his show), breaking up the flow of the narrative, but otherwise it is definitely one of those stories you won't soon forget. Highly recommended.

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## David says

I feel I ought to have liked this book more than I did. Lord knows, the author did his research, in commendable detail. But did he really have to include everything he learned in the final book? At some point the level of detail provided went (for me) beyond interesting and started to become stultifying. MacIntyre is a decent writer, but I think he falls into the trap that bedevils many non-fiction authors -- all the time and energy spent doing the research causes him to lose perspective. The story is endlessly fascinating to him, but he forgets that some pruning of the details is needed in order to shape the narrative for the reader. But pruning is something that MacIntyre seems incapable of -- even the most peripheral actor in this tale gets at least two pages of backstory, which often does little to advance the real story.

Every chapter of the book is stuffed with irrelevant detail. Ewen Montagu, one of the main protagonists, came from an extremely wealthy family, a fact which is largely irrelevant to the story, but which nonetheless

gets about 8 pages of text as MacIntyre gushes on about the number of family servants, the decor in the family mansion, their glittering social contacts etc etc. Discussion of the difficulties in acquiring a cadaver that can be used to fool the Germans is expanded (bloated) by inclusion of completely irrelevant biographical information on everyone consulted in the process, what everyone ate or drank at any given meeting, the temperature of the sherry, the mood of Montagu's stepmother, a digression on the history of grave-robbing, and any other random tidbit that showed up in MacIntyre's notebooks apparently. This kind of thing will either charm you or drive you up the wall.

Operation Mincemeat was an important, and fascinating, episode from the second world war, but it surely could have been told in fewer than 400 pages. That said, the book is not a bad read, and the occasional lapses into grandiosity of the kind "*that single (hotel) register entry could have changed the course of World War II*" are mercifully rare.

My inner pedant finds it necessary to point out that the correct term for what MacIntyre refers to as "champagne de mousse" (the white froth around the mouth that is characteristic of drowning victims) is actually "champignon de mousse".

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### **Mahlon says**

You may not be familiar with the names Ewen Montagu or Charles Cholmondeley but you may have heard of Operation Mincemeat, The spectacularly successful in World War II deception that they masterminded. Mincemeat was a small part of operation Barclay the deception intended to cover the invasion of Italy. Mincemeat convinced The German High Command that the allies target would be Sardinia or Greece, rather than the actual target Sicily. The ruse was accomplished by convincing the Germans that they had intercepted important top secret documents which revealed Allied war plans, attached to a corpse which was deliberately engineered to wash ashore off the coast of Spain. Ben McIntyre ably guides the reader through the deception from the planning stages, to the meticulous selection and preparation of the body, and finally implementation and aftermath. he does a wonderful job of describing various personalities in both intelligence apparatuses, and also why the Germans fell so hard for this particular deception, as well as discussing it's strategic impact on the war as a whole.

One of the strongest books on World War II spycraft that I've read!

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### **Nick Davies says**

This thoroughly fascinating non-fiction about the British WWII plot to mislead the Axis forces (and hence allow decisive invasion of Sicily) by use of a corpse washed ashore in Spain, was well-written and made for a very interesting story. I'd heartily recommend people read this to learn more about the history of that time, especially if they have an interest in the part military intelligence forces play in the 'background' of war.

It was excellently researched and an absorbing read - I am looking forward to reading the other book by the same author ('Agent Zigzag') that I have. However, I somewhat harshly rate this only 4/5 because - having seen an hour-long documentary about the same subject recently - much of the content of the book was not new to me. Some of the other content of the book seemed slightly excessive too, very detailed and irrelevant in places. Nevertheless, excellent.

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## Manny says

The basic story is well known, but since the appearance of the first book, *The Man Who Never Was*, an extraordinary amount of new material has become available. Even if you've read *The Man Who Never Was* (I had), I can't recommend *Operation Mincemeat* highly enough. This is, quite simply, the most extraordinary book of its kind that I've ever come across. I couldn't put it down, and finished it in a little more than a day.

The plot in a nutshell, in case you aren't already familiar with it. It's early 1943, and the Allies have just pushed the Germans off North Africa. The next step is use that as a springboard to invade Southern Europe. But where? A quick look at a map shows there's only one sensible target: Sicily. Any sane strategist would be expecting an invasion of Sicily, and, indeed, it's just what the Allies were planning.

On the other hand... suppose they could confuse the Germans, and make them think they were really planning to strike elsewhere, say in Greece? It seemed impossible, but a few resourceful people in Counter-Intelligence thought they could see a way to do it. They would take a dead body, attach a briefcase to it containing some papers, let it wash up on a Spanish beach (Spain was neutral) and make it look like he was a courier whose plane had crashed while he was on the way to deliver a top-secret message. If it was done right, the Germans might just swallow the bait.

They did it, and it worked. In the earlier book, written by one of the people who masterminded the operation, it was made to look comparatively easy, and he glossed over all the really interesting details. Not his fault; he wasn't allowed to reveal them. Now, 67 years after the event, most of the story can finally be told, and what an exciting story it is! The plan was on a knife-edge the whole time: it was almost impossible to find a suitable body, there were obvious holes in the cover story that the Germans could easily have spotted, the Spanish nearly didn't hand over the briefcase to the Germans, and the operation's security was compromised from the beginning. Even though you know how it's going to end, it's a white-knuckle ride.

One of the most interesting aspects is the analysis of why the plan succeeded. The author argues, very plausibly, that great pieces of deception only work when people want to be deceived. If the Abwehr had been doing its job properly, they would have spotted the ruse. An organisation, however, is only as good as its people, and the people who made the individual judgements all turned out to have reasons for wanting to believe this apparent windfall. Some of them were nervous about their jobs, and hoped it would put them in better standing with their superiors; some were just lazy and incompetent; one key analyst may well have figured out what was really going on, and knowingly passed incorrect information to the German High Command.

The author never says one word about it, but I couldn't help thinking of the greatest intelligence failure of our own time. In 2003, why did the Americans believe that Saddam Hussein was concealing weapons of mass destruction? For all of the supposedly solid evidence presented to the UN Security Council, Saddam's WMDs turned out to be as illusory as the Allies' 1943 plan to invade Greece. I still haven't seen anything approaching an explanation of how people could get it so wrong. Perhaps, in 2070, we'll get to find out what really happened.

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## Amy says

You can't make this stuff up! Or more precisely, you *can* which is what makes this story of espionage and deception so much fun. It is almost hard to believe it is all true.

When I first began the book, I didn't think Ben Macintyre had enough material to make an interesting story. I

presumed he would be repetitive, or worse, insert his own personal 'journey' into the narrative. I was proved decidedly wrong in both cases. So many unique, colorful characters pepper the story of Operation Mincemeat that it might even have been longer. I laughed out loud on several occasions and thoroughly enjoyed each new person introduced. Macintyre explains a little at the beginning what inspired him to pursue writing about Mincemeat but he never returns to the subject. It actually left me wanting to know more about him as the author, something that rarely happens for me!

The only complaint I have with this book is with the audiobook I was listening to. It was actually a very good reading. However, the author has a British accent and can do a Russian accent, but that is about it. Every other nationality (German, Italian, etc.) sounded Russian. Even the American accent was a little wobbly.

An interesting, incredible book about the men and women who fooled the Germans with a dead body and some fake documents and helped save thousands of lives during the invasion of Italy.

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## Hannah says

### Rating Clarification: 4.5 Stars

From the book blurb:

*"In 1943, from a windowless basement office in London, two brilliant intelligence officers (Charles Cholmondeley of MI5 and the British naval intelligence officer Ewen Montagu) conceived a plan that was both simple and complicated— **Operation Mincemeat**. The purpose? To deceive the Nazis into thinking that Allied forces were planning to attack southern Europe by way of Greece or Sardinia, rather than Sicily, as the Nazis had assumed, and the Allies ultimately chose.*

*Their ingenious plan: Get a corpse, equip it with secret (but false and misleading) papers concerning the invasion, then drop it off the coast of Spain where German spies would, they hoped, take the bait. The idea was approved by British intelligence officials, including Ian Fleming (creator of James Bond). Winston Churchill believed it might ring true to the Axis and help bring victory to the Allies."*

The above is, once again, confirmation of why I love reading non-fiction. Because if it were fiction, I'd throw the book against the wall and scream: "that's improbable, crazy and impossible!" And yet Operation Mincemeat was so wildly improbable, so imaginatively crazy, so charged with failure at any given junction that the mere fact that the body in question made it to the attention of the Spanish & German authorities was a feat in itself. The cast of participants in this elaborate deception ranged from the pathetic: (the body of a down-trodden, mentally unstable Welshman whose sad, empty real life- and death- was replaced with a purpose-filled new "life"), to the romantic: (the dashing submarine commander), to the bizarre: (the cross-dressing British commanding officer) and finally to the brilliant: (the imaginations and talents of the counter-intelligence agents), who together pulled off this bold and audacious plan and fooled Hitler into swallowing a lie he already desperately wanted to believe.

Author Ben Macintyre lays out the operation from conception to completion, and shows how the coordinated efforts of people both larger-than-life as well as relatively obscure helped frame the most successful espionage operation of WWII. Great writing, page-turning suspense, humorous anecdotes, fully fleshed out true-life character studies, and a poignant ending make this a book that's hard to put down for the last 200 pages (and I didn't...)

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## Nigeyb says

Apparently, whilst writing *Agent Zigzag: A True Story of Nazi Espionage, Love, and Betrayal*, Ben Macintyre became aware of this strange tale of espionage and deception. I read, and really enjoyed, Ben Macintyre's *Agent Zigzag* in April 2013, and so didn't need much convincing to read this book too. It's not as entertaining and compelling as *Agent Zigzag*, however, whilst not quite as gripping, it is a story of huge significance to the way the Second World War played out. It saved lives, shortened the war's duration, and quite possibly changed the outcome. It's well worth reading

The book is full of fascinating facts about spying and deception. Using creativity, opportunity, imagination and wish-fulfilment, a cast of characters - many bizarre, idiosyncratic and eccentric - work up a fascinating tale which they hope will deceive the Nazis. It worked, and travelled from a bunker in London, to a submarine in Scotland, to the coast of Spain, and then on to Germany, finally arriving at Hitler's desk. There are many wonderful aspects to this book, highlights for me included the psychological second guessing; the shambolic nature of Germany's spying operations; the different factions at work in wartime Spain; the delicate subterfuge required by the British in the know, to convince the Germans the documents were important, whilst trying (not too hard) to retrieve them and allowing them the opportunity to get access.

The book contains some remarkable characters too, these include a British establishment Table Tennis-loving Soviet spy, explorers and adventurers, a cross-dressing Colonel, a Jewish Nazi, a German aristocrat deliberately misleading Hitler a pompous pathologist, a Welsh tramp, a racing driver, a submarine captain, and many many more. Were there more eccentrics in those days?

Ben Macintyre is a consummate story teller, and as with *Agent Zigzag*, he tells this tale with skill, verve, and wit, and really brings the story to life, by weaving together private documents, photographs, memories, letters, diaries, and most significantly newly released material from the intelligence files of MI5. The story of Operation Mincemeat has been told before however this version is unquestionably definitive.

I am now inspired to continue to read more of Ben Macintyre's work. If you have any interest in the Second World War, spying and espionage, and/or history, then you should get a lot out of this book.

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## Huw Rhys says

I do like the odd History book - and this was an odd history book - and I liked it!

Firstly, you get the sense that you've read this story before, and you know the outcome. Then you remember that you read "The Man Who Never Was", and saw the film (countless times) over the years. Because "Operation Mincemeat" is pretty much this same story all over again. So like "The Titanic", you know the main parts - and you know the end. But it's the detail in between that is so absorbing here.

Most historical books can become slightly dry because they a. seldom focus much on the characters involved, b. can become a list of factual events and c. don't do a whole lot of moralizing.

This book goes against all of these approaches. The author has ploughed through copious amounts of research material - almost 4 pages of bibliography, and over 40 pages of references to books, articles, documents and interviews. As such, he is able to build up pretty rounded character descriptions for most of the main protagonists. It also allows him to relay events in a more lyrical format, without deviating from the facts - and he also makes much of the moral dilemmas created by these events in Europe in the 1940's - many of which would pass an evolved society by 70 years later.

The nett result is a thoroughly enjoyable read, and a real insight into arguably one of the turning points of the Second World War.

If you like your history dry, then you probably won't enjoy this book very much. But if you like a cracking yarn, well written, thoroughly researched with a real insight into the inner psyche of the 1940's characters involved in this drama - then I guarantee that you'll really like this odd little book - just as I did!

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## Tal says

Seen the documentary from Ben Macintyre.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gh8D3...>

Highly recommended!!!

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## Dana Stabenow says

An almost picaresque story about Royal Marine Major William Martin, who was lost at sea in an aircraft accident carrying important dispatches about future Allied plans in the Mediterranean. His body washed ashore in Spain and by nefarious means the dispatches were copied and forwarded to Abwehr, German intelligence.

Except that that major was no major and those dispatches were fake. It was all an elaborate plot cooked up by British Intelligence to deceive the enemy, and which disinformation Abwehr and Hitler himself swallowed whole, to the extent that the Germans moved a vitally significant portion of their forces from Sicily, where as Macintyre puts it anyone with an atlas knew the Allies would invade, to Greece and Sardinia, where the British hoped to fool the Germans into thinking they would. Operation Mincemeat was, to put it mildly, successful.

*The British Eighth Army had expected some ten thousand casualties in the first week of the invasion; just one-seventh of that number were killed or wounded. the navy had anticipated the loss of up to three hundred ships in the first two days; barely a dozen were sunk...The Allies had expected it would take ninety days to conquer Sicily. The occupation was completed on August 17, thirty-eight days after the invasion began.*

Further, Operation Mincemeat began a cascade of other events, Mussolini's downfall, Italy's surrender, the abandonment of the German siege of Kursk and pretty much the beginning of the end of the European war. Macintyre writes

*The Third Reich never recovered from the failure of Operation Citadel, and from then until the end of the war, the German armies in the east would be on the defensive as the Red Army rolled, inexorably, toward Berlin.*

The cast of characters has to be read to be believed. There's the British Jewish nobleman (I didn't even know there was such a thing), his unbelievable brother (I won't spoil), the submarine driver with comprehensive powers of seduction (I'm thinking of the car with the doors that wouldn't open), the crazy commando who kept refusing promotion and went on to be portrayed in film by James Garner, the undertaking brothers, one in the front lines and the other not but still part of the story, and so many more. But! One of the things I particularly love is that at least three (possibly four, I lost count) of the men engaged in kerflummoxing the

Germans so completely were...writers.

A rollicking story, all the more exquisite because it's all true. Don't pick up this book until you've got a few days with nothing else to do because you won't be able to put it down. Highly recommended.

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