

HOW CLOSE DID D-DAY COME TO FAILURE?

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT – IF THE GERMANS HAD FOUND OUT

[Presented by General Sir Richard Dannatt, former head of the British Army]

German defences along the coast of north-western Europe were formidable. The Nazi general in charge of the so-called Atlantic Wall, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, had made sure that there was artillery, concrete pillboxes for machine gunners, miles of barbed wire, anti-tank devices and minefields.

But most of the Germans' real firepower was concentrated in the Pas de Calais, where the English Channel is at its narrowest. This is where the Germans could see the English coast and where they expected the Allied invasion to come from.

And that is exactly what the Allies wanted. The weaker the defences in Normandy, the fewer Allied losses that there would be. And the further away German reinforcements were, the harder it would be for them to make a counter-attack.

So the Allies ran a complex deception plan to disguise where they intended to land. Double agents, and fake wireless transmissions, helped to convince Hitler and his commanders that a large force was being prepared in south-east England, ready to attack the Pas de Calais. The preparations even included inflatable tanks and landing craft.

But about a month before D-Day, one of Rommel's commanders did propose that some armoured divisions and anti-aircraft divisions should be moved to Normandy. But that did not take place.

If the Germans had been forewarned then those divisions would be here and with greater firepower in place, perhaps Rommel would have prevented the Allies getting the beachheads that they needed.

The D-Day plan would have been compromised.

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