The History of the Twentieth Century
Episode 423
"Bodyguard of Lies"
Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

"In wartime, truth is so precious she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies."

Winston Churchill, speaking to Joseph Stalin at the Teheran Conference.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 423. Bodyguard of Lies.

I've been telling you for a while now about Winston Churchill and his seeming aversion to Operation Overlord, the planned Allied invasion of France in May 1944. At the Québec Conference in August 1943, Franklin Roosevelt got from Churchill a commitment to make Overlord the Western Allies' top priority. Or so he thought. But at the Teheran Conference, Churchill seemed to waffle on that commitment, giving on only after both the Soviets and the Americans pressed him on it.

Churchill kept talking up his proposal to invade the island of Rhodes and his plan to invade the Balkans, rather than France.

So what was going on in Churchill's mind?

There are a couple of obvious concerns he might have had, and both of them were based on his experience in the last war. One of those experiences was Gallipoli, the failed invasion he had proposed in that war that had done much damage to his reputation. Churchill may have feared that Overlord would play out as Gallipoli had, with the invasion force pinned down on the beaches and suffering heavy losses before it was at last forced to withdraw. You can understand why that would worry him.

Additionally, even in this war, the British had felt the painful experiences of Dunkirk and Dieppe. The British Army just couldn't seem to win one on the Channel coast of France, and now the Americans were pushing for another go. It made British leaders uneasy, and not only

Churchill. Many of the top American commanders in the months leading up to the invasion commented on the prevalence of pessimism among their British counterparts.

On the other hand, the last war had ultimately been won when an Allied force landed at Salonika, in Greece, and then advanced north through the Balkans. The Central Powers hadn't had enough reserves to cover that front, in addition to the other fronts it was fighting on. Churchill may have believed that another advance through the Balkans would be likely to produce a similar outcome.

The other concern has to do with the balance of power between the three principal Allied powers: the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union. By 1944, all the major combatants in the European theater were short on reserves. Germany, certainly, but even the Soviet Union. Long time listeners will recall how in the early part of the century, the Soviet Union's predecessor state, the Russian Empire, was viewed across Europe as a nation with an inexhaustible supply of soldiers potentially capable of sweeping across the continent and overwhelming every other nation by sheer force of numbers.

The last war had demonstrated that Russia's capabilities were nowhere near what the pre-war alarmists feared. Though its performance in this war was dismal at first, the Red Army and its commanders had learned from their mistakes and Lend-Lease aid from the US and the UK gave them an edge in weapons and vehicles. But those early mistakes had been costly to the Red Army in numbers of soldiers killed, wounded, or taken prisoner, numbers exacerbated by the casual attitude taken by its commanders, up to and including Stalin, toward casualties on their own side.

It was only a matter of time before even the USSR would start running out of available recruits to replace its losses, and by 1944, that time had come.

The only major power that still had ample numbers of potential recruits to draw on was the United States. You may recall that the same was true during the latter days of the last war, in 1918. By November of that year, two million American soldiers were fighting on the Western Front, and millions more preparing to join them, had the war continued into 1919. These facts played a crucial role in ending the war early. Woodrow Wilson wanted an armistice; British and French leaders wanted to fight on, confident that Berlin would fall in 1919, or 1920 at the latest.

But this wasn't a decision France and Britain could make on their own. The United States was now shouldering a significant part of the burden of fighting Germany, and the views of its President had to be taken into account. And the longer the war went on, the larger America's share of the war effort would become, and the greater American clout would be in the decision to end the war and in shaping the peace deal that came afterward. Resisting America's wishes today would only make it harder to resist America's wishes tomorrow, so the Allies concluded that the wisest move would be to concede graciously to Wilson's desire for an armistice.

You remember that, right? It's a safe bet Winston Churchill remembered it, too. So far, Britain and America have been equal partners, but if the coming campaign in the West was going to be the sort of slugfest the Americans wanted, they would be doing most of the fighting, and they would have most of the say in shaping postwar Europe. Churchill's vision for the postwar world was one in which the peace would be kept by three equal superpowers, the UK, the US, and the USSR. To make that vision a reality, it was crucial that the UK maintain parity of status with the US, and that would be much more difficult if the Americans dominated the Western Front.

By February 1944, however, Churchill was resigned to the inevitable. The Anzio invasion, which had been his idea, had failed, and it had become obvious that the road to Berlin did not run through Italy. To Churchill's credit, once he accepted this reality, he embraced Operation Overlord with his characteristic boundless enthusiasm.

By that time, staff officers had already spent months drawing up plans in a working group known by the acronym COSSAC: Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander. Whatever planning they had done, though, would be subject to the approval of the Supreme Allied Commander, once that person was designated and came to England to take up the command. That person would be Dwight Eisenhower. The Allied ground forces that would carry out the initial landing in France were organized as the 21st Army Group, commanded by Bernard Montgomery.

Eisenhower and Montgomery had both been involved in the Mediterranean campaigns; both had overseen Allied forces in Italy, and both had been transferred to England in late 1943 to take up their new commands for Overlord. When they first examined the invasion plans COSSAC had presented, they had the same reaction. The plan called for three divisions to land on D-Day, and both commanders agreed, based on their experiences in Italy, that three divisions simply wasn't enough of a first punch. More units would need to land at more beaches; the Allies would need to overwhelm the German defenders and make it impossible to counterattack every landing site.

Overlord had already been postponed a few times, partly because of British foot-dragging, mostly because of a shortage of landing craft and cargo ships. The Americans grumbled about British reluctance; the British grumbled about all the resources the Americans were devoting to the Pacific War. Didn't you blokes promise us "Germany first?" To give one recent example: the long-awaited new American B-29 heavy bomber, developed as a successor to the B-17. The B-29 could carry a heavier load farther and faster than a B-17, yet the first B-29s off the assembly lines were sent straight to the Pacific, while the US Eighth Air Force in Britain was still flying their aging B-17s.

The shortage of landing craft forced Eisenhower to postpone Operation Anvil, which was the Allied plan to invade France's Mediterranean coast. Anvil was originally envisioned to be executed simultaneously with Overlord, which would force the Germans to make difficult decisions about where and how to defend on two separate fronts. The United States had invested

heavily in equipping French Army units in North Africa and Eisenhower wanted to get those French forces onto French soil as quickly as possible.

It couldn't be done, because of the shortage of landing craft, not without scaling back Overlord, which to Eisenhower was the worse of two bad options. Anvil would have to be delayed. Winston Churchill bears some of the responsibility for this delay, as the author of the Anzio invasion.

Operation Overlord would become the largest amphibious operation in history. The first day of the invasion would involve 5,000 ships and 8,000 aircraft from a dozen different nations. The landing force would consist of eight divisions, made up of more than 150,000 soldiers.

The Operation Husky landings in Sicily in July 1943 actually involved slightly more soldiers during the initial landing, but unlike that invasion, this time the Germans had seventy divisions stationed in France, organized into two army groups, totaling around 850,000 soldiers.

Clearly, those eight divisions landing on the first day couldn't be the whole of the Allied force in France. Their job was to secure a beachhead along the coast of Normandy. Behind them were two million more Allied soldiers who would be shipped to France as reinforcements.

Overlord would not succeed unless the Allies could secure that beachhead on the first day, then send over reinforcements, and send them faster than the Germans could transport their forces in France to oppose them.

Consider these numbers: By June 1944, the Americans had nearly three million uniformed service personnel stationed in Britain. Two million of them were Army soldiers, the rest were sailors and air force personnel. Most American soldiers were stationed in the southwest of England. The British had over a million soldiers. There were also three divisions of some 200,000 Canadians in Britain, the largest armed force from the Commonwealth ever stationed on British soil.

If you think about the relatively simple process of getting all these soldiers transported from their bases across southern England to ports on the coast in a timely and organized fashion, and then scheduling transports to the coast to pick them up and ferry them across the Channel, and making all this happen as rapidly as possible, because you know the Germans will be sending in their soldiers as rapidly as possible—this aspect of the campaign alone will require detailed schedules and timetables that will have to be worked out months in advance. Then those timetables will have to be printed up and distributed to the units concerned.

And transporting the soldiers to the beach is only one relatively minor aspect of the operation.

The senior officers of the 3rd Canadian Division were amazed when they received their orders, stacked into piles of hundreds of pages. They began calling it "Operation Overboard."

That's one half of the equation: getting soldiers into France as fast as possible. The other half of the equation is hindering the Germans from sending reinforcements to the invasion site. How would that be done? Principally by bombing.

The person in charge of the aerial component of Overlord was British Air Chief Marshal Arthur Tedder, who was made deputy to Eisenhower in January 1944. Tedder was all in on the plan to bomb transportation routes in France, but when Air Marshal Arthur Harris of Bomber Command, and General Carl Spaatz of the Eighth Air Force received word that their strategic bombing forces were to be diverted from bombing German cities and factories and assigned transportation targets in France, they objected. Loudly. They both believed that the strategic bombers under their commands were best used just the way they were using them right now.

Harris and Spaatz had opinions about the efficacy of strategic bombing that were wildly optimistic, but they had other objections that were sounder. High-altitude strategic bombers were not the ideal weapon for pinpoint attacks on targets like roads or rail junctions, and inaccuracy would mean bombs falling on French civilians, who were supposed to be our allies. That was unlikely to win the British or Americans any friends in France. They contended that low-level tactical bombers like the British Mosquito or the American B-26 Marauder, were far better suited to these kinds of attacks. And they had a point.

Harris appealed to Air Chief Marshal Charles Portal, who was Chief of the Air Staff and the senior commander of the RAF, but Portal was with Tedder. In March 1944, Eisenhower met with Harris and Spaatz and dismissed their objections. Their bomber forces were going to be a part of Overlord. End of discussion.

But it wasn't the end of the discussion. Spaatz appealed directly to Roosevelt and Harris to Churchill. Spaatz emphasized how heavy bombing in France would alienate the French populace and damage the alliance. Roosevelt replied that he was not going to second-guess the decisions of the Supreme Commander and his staff from the opposite shore of the Atlantic.

Harris had better luck with Churchill. The prime minister accepted Harris's arguments; it seems Churchill doubted that Allied strategic bombers could strike transportation lines in France with sufficient accuracy to have any meaningful effect on the movement of German Army units. He had a point there too, and I will also come back to that in a minute. Tedder became frustrated with the Bomber Mafia and their resistance that bordered on insubordination. At last, he told Eisenhower something had to be done, or he would have to resign. Eisenhower told Churchill and Harris that he would have no choice but to appeal to President Roosevelt if they refused to give way. They gave way.

Spaatz and Churchill lost the argument, but they each raised important points. In order to prevent, or at least slow, German reinforcements from reaching the invasion site, what would you bomb? Roads and railroads, obviously—that's how you move soldiers and equipment—and the bridges that carried them across rivers and valleys. But if you think back to our episodes on

strategic bombing, you'll recall that accuracy was a huge problem. "Precision bombing" proved to be an oxymoron. The British had given up on it altogether and were concentrating their bombing campaign on destroying housing stock. The Americans stuck to the idea of precision bombing, but it proved much harder to execute in practice than it looked on paper.

A railroad track is a slender target when you're flying 30,000 feet above it. Railway stations and especially their marshalling yards were much easier to hit and therefore made for better targets, but stations and train yards are typically located in cities. Roads were also hard to hit; I told you in episode 411 that the Americans had devised a bombing strategy called "putting the city in the street." This meant bombing cities and towns so that the rubble of collapsed buildings spilled out into the streets and made them impassible.

Keep in mind that these were the days before motorways and interstates. In our time, the most heavily trafficked roads take detours around cities, but in those days even the busiest roads ran right through the center of town. Usually they were Main Street, and the bigger the town, the more likely it was the junction of two or three or more important routes. Blocking the streets with rubble meant not only that residents of the city couldn't get around, it meant that blocking those major intercity roads.

It comes down to this: if your goal is to interrupt traffic on French roads and railroads, you achieve that goal by bombing French cities and towns. General Spaatz was not wrong when he noted that Britons and Americans bombing French cities was not going to sit well at all with the French.

But the top military leaders, up to and including Eisenhower, judged that delaying the German response to the Overlord invasion was a higher priority than placating French opinion, and so the bombing proceeded. Many French people were killed. Churchill at one point suggested they set a cap of 10,000 French civilian deaths; no such cap was ever set.

Many crewmembers aboard Allied bombers died, too. By 1944, both the British and the Americans were experienced strategic bombers, but it remained a dangerous assignment. What's more, the Allies couldn't concentrate their bombing campaign on roads, railroads, and bridges leading to Normandy; that would telegraph the location of the invasion. The Allies had to camouflage the Normandy raids with bombing campaigns on similar targets across France and the Low Countries to keep the Germans guessing.

Relations with the French were a problem for reasons that went beyond the bombings. That's a topic I will come back to in a future episode.

[music: Elgar, *Enigma Variations*.]

On the subject of keeping the Germans guessing:

At the Quebec Conference in August 1943, Churchill and Roosevelt had given final approval for Operation Overlord, including the choice of landing site: Normandy. Sites across the northern coast from Brittany to Belgium had been considered, because it was crucial during the early stages that the invasion force could rely on air cover from England. Other potential sites were rejected for various reasons. The peninsulas of Brittany and Cotentin were ruled out because a peninsula gives the defending Germans opportunity to bottle up the invasion force at the neck of the peninsula.

The shortest and therefore most attractive invasion route would have been at the point where the English Channel is narrowest: the Strait of Dover, the English call it. The French call it the Pas-de-Calais, or the Strait of Calais. The Germans well knew it was the most likely choice, which is why they made it the most heavily defended.

At Normandy, the terrain is a little friendlier, and an attacking force would have more options. A landing at the Pas-de-Calais would put the invasion force closer to Germany, which sounds like an advantage, but consider that it also means the Germans could more easily move troops and supplies to the invasion site directly from Germany. Normandy would be harder for the Germans to reach, and an invasion force in Normandy would have multiple options for advance. It might go south, into central France, or east, toward Paris and Germany beyond, or west and take Brittany and the Atlantic coast of France, the center of German U-boat operations.

By contrast, an invasion force landing at the Pas-de-Calais would find a German force quickly building on its eastern flank, and pushing eastward would be the only practical option.

Okay, so Normandy it is. Once that decision was made, British intelligence set to work in an effort to convince the Germans the invasion would be somewhere else.

You'll recall our episodes on the Eastern Front, we discussed the Russian doctrine of *maskirovka*. The Russian word literally means masking or camouflaging, but as a military doctrine the meaning is much more expansive. It refers to efforts to mislead an enemy regarding the deployment and intentions of one's own forces.

The Red Army used *maskirovka* techniques effectively in the Battles of Stalingrad and Kursk. At the Teheran conference in November 1943, Roosevelt and Churchill asked Stalin to begin an offensive on the Eastern Front, timed to coincide with Overlord, and Stalin agreed. It would be called Operation Bagration, and of course I will tell you all about it when the time comes. Its purpose was to make it impossible, or at least difficult, to redeploy units from the Eastern Front to France.

For now, I'll just note that the German forces on the Eastern Front were not in good shape following a series of Soviet offensives in spring of 1944 against what used to be called Army Group South. The Red Army had pushed the southern part of the front past the 1939 Soviet border and into Romania and what used to be eastern Poland. Most German strategists believed

that the 1944 Soviet summer offensive would also begin in this region, where the advanced Soviet front line was like a knife poised to carve into the Balkans, Germany's soft underbelly you might call it, with apologies to Winston Churchill.

Will Operation Bagration strike where the Germans expect? You'll find out, just know for now that the Soviets were employing *maskirovka* in the spring of 1944 to confuse the picture and disguise Red Army deployments.

You have to concede that the British were pretty good at *maskirovka* themselves. In 1943, British intelligence had done an expert job of misleading the Germans and Italians into expecting invasions at either Sardinia or Greece and distracting them from Sicily, the true invasion site.

As soon as Roosevelt and Churchill settled on Normandy as the place and May 1944 as the time, British intelligence set to work on another set of operations intended to lead the Germans to believe the invasion force would land somewhere other than Normandy. When the final plan was approved in December 1943, it was named Operation Bodyguard. The name was inspired by Winston Churchill's remark about truth requiring a "bodyguard of lies," which I quoted at the top of the episode.

The British had a couple of big advantages in running such an operation. The first was Project ULTRA, the decryption of German messages encoded by their Enigma machines. By 1944, Bletchley Park was quickly and routinely decrypting practically all of Germany's coded radio messages, giving the Allies valuable insight into what the Germans were expecting and planning for.

The other advantage was the masterful British counterespionage operation. The Abwehr, German military intelligence, spent 1940 and 1941 attempting to infiltrate German agents, most of whom were Eastern Europeans, into Britain, either by parachute or by submarine, or by the simpler method of securing for them neutral nation passports and sending them into the UK by commercial ship or airplane.

More than a hundred German agents were able to make their way into Britain, but that's about all you can say for them. Britain's Security Service, commonly known as MI5, was keeping an eye out for foreigners entering Britain, especially those from continental Europe, and the agents the Germans sent were often poorly trained and quickly gave themselves away.

Some of these agents wanted to be caught. They had agreed to spy for Germany only for the sake of the trip to Britain. Once they arrived, they promptly turned themselves in.

Then there was the strange case of a Spaniard named Juan Pujol García. The experience of living through the Spanish Civil War left him hostile to both Communist and fascist ideologies. In 1940, at the age of 28, Pujol contacted the British embassy in Madrid and offered to serve as a

spy. Embassy officials turned him down and doubtless had a good laugh about it afterward over glasses of sherry.

But Juan Pujol García was not one to give up easily. He next contacted the Germans, posing as a Nazi sympathizer, and offered to spy for them. They agreed and told him to go to Britain and develop an intelligence network. Instead, he moved to Lisbon and made a living for himself and his family by taking German payments in exchange for bogus intelligence reports. He developed a network of imaginary agents supposedly working under him and got paid for them as well. Pujol's intelligence reports contained information about goings-on in Britain based on what he read in newspapers and magazines and such. When some bit of information he sent the Germans proved false, he explained it away by blaming it on one of his imaginary subordinate agents.

German intelligence trusted Pujol and believed him to be a valuable asset. By 1942, he had convinced MI6 he was onto something, so they moved him and his family to Britain, where he spent the rest of the war sending to German intelligence information created for him by British intelligence.

By 1944, the Germans had discontinued their efforts to place spies in Britain, because they believed they already had a sufficient number. In reality, MI6 had turned so many of them into double agents, it had become a simple matter to monitor the messages they received from Germany and use that information to identify and arrest other German agents operating in Britain.

While this could not be confirmed until after the war, MI5 had identified every single German agent planted in Britain.

At first, the British used their double agents primarily as a means to track down the other spies, though it didn't take long for MI6 to realize that these double agents could also be used to send misleading information to their handlers in Germany.

And that brings us to Operation Bodyguard. Bodyguard included a number of subsidiary operations, each one meant to confuse the Germans as to the time and place of the Overlord invasion.

The various plans ranged from simple to complex. An Australian-born English actor named Clifton James bore a close resemblance to Bernard Montgomery, so they dressed him up like Montgomery, beret and all, and sent him on a tour of Gibraltar and various locations in North Africa, which suggested something was in the works in the Mediterranean. Another operation created phony radio traffic in Egypt meant to suggest a large British force was gathering to invade Crete.

The Allies were also at work in Sweden, where British, American, and Soviet diplomats were all pressing the Swedish government to agree not to permit Germany to use Swedish territory to

send reinforcements to Norway after the Allied invasion of that country. There was no planned Allied invasion of Norway, but it was thought that if the Swedish government could be convinced one was coming, news of the anticipated invasion would make it back to Germany.

British intelligence also had their Enigma intercepts, which could help them assess whether their deceptions were working and even suggest new ones. When Bletchley Park discovered that the Germans anticipated an invasion of the Atlantic coast of France, possibly launched directly from the United States, as had been done in North Africa, the British used their double agents to "confirm" that an invasion in that region was part of the Allied plan.

You already know that Hitler greatly feared an invasion of Norway and insisted on garrisoning the country with a large occupation force. The British knew it too, and created a fictitious British Fourth Army, supposedly stationed in and around Glasgow, Scotland. Again, as in Egypt, teams were sent to Scotland to begin broadcasting simulated radio traffic that would confirm the presence of large numbers of soldiers, and information was sent via the double agents that apparently confirmed the presence of these soldiers, part of the imaginary British Fourth Army.

This effort was part of a larger operation meant to convince the Germans that the Allies intended a simultaneous invasion of Norway and France, with the latter invasion to strike at the Pas-de-Calais. In truth, most of the invasion force was stationed in the southwest of England; MI6 therefore created another fake military force, the US First Army Group, supposedly commanded by George Patton, stationed in the southeast of England, and preparing to invade at the Pas-de-Calais. Again, intelligence agents created fake radio traffic meant to convince the Germans that a huge military formation was assembling in the southeast of England and Britain's stable of double agents were tapped to report sightings of large numbers of American soldiers and vehicles in the region.

Additionally, hundreds of decoy trucks, planes, and tanks were set up in Kent so that Luftwaffe reconnaissance flights would confirm the story, although there weren't really all that many of these decoy vehicles, because by 1944, there weren't really all that many Luftwaffe reconnaissance flights over Britain anymore. It had become too dangerous.

The British also hoped to convince the Germans that the Allied force in Britain was much larger than it was, so that even after the Normandy invasion began, they might conclude that landing was merely a diversion. There were about 50 Allied divisions in Britain at the time; the Germans were led to believe the number was more like 75.

The cherry on top of the deception sundae was Juan Pujol García, who was told to contact Germany at 3AM on the morning of June 6 and warn them that the Normandy landing was coming. The purpose here was to enhance Pujol's credibility by having him transmit an accurate report on the pending invasion, but sending it too late for the Germans to make any use of it.

As luck would have it, German radio operators did not pick up Pujol's transmission until 8AM, which gave him the opportunity to chastise his handlers for causing a critical delay in the transmission of this crucial report. A few days later, Pujol sent another report, warning that the Normandy landing was only a diversion and a much larger invasion force commanded by George Patton was about to land at the Pas-de-Calais.

German military leaders regarded Patton as the Western Allies' best commander, especially Rommel, who had faced him in Tunisia. Hitler and the OKW had already been primed to believe that Patton would lead the invasion force, and this report from what the Germans believed to be their most able and trustworthy agent in Britain appeared to confirm it. For weeks after the Normandy landing, the German Army kept a reserve force of some 20 divisions at the Pas-de-Calais, waiting for the "real" invasion.

We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening and I'd like to thank Christopher for his kind donation, and thank you to Max for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Christopher and Max help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone always, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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And I hope you'll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we turn our attention back to the Pacific and look at how Japanese leaders respond to the latest American advances. From Z to A, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. On the subject of Winston Churchill and his endless outpouring of ideas, some of which were good and many of which were…not, I'd like to mention two of them related to Operation Overlord. The first involved organizing a fleet of private ships and boats to ferry soldiers across the Channel to reinforce the Normandy beachhead. This would have helped get more Allied soldiers onto French soil faster, and at least in Churchill's mind boost morale, because you see, it would be like Dunkirk, only the other way around. He figured it would arouse that same "Dunkirk spirit" while also helping to erase the painful memory of Britain's ignominious retreat from the Continent four years earlier.

That idea was quickly dropped because no one thought it was a good one except Churchill. The second one was harder to talk him out of. He wanted to go ashore in Normandy on D-Day. And because he was prime minister, he could do what he jolly well liked. He justified this plan on the

basis that he was not only PM, but minister of defense as well, and therefore overseeing the invasion was part of his duties.

The commander of Allied naval forces on D-Day was British, Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, so Churchill simply ordered him to make the necessary arrangements. Churchill would board the Royal Navy cruiser HMS *Belfast*, one of the many ships that would be providing naval bombardment of German positions during the landings, and watch the invasion unfold from there. Later in the day, after the beachheads had been secured, he would transfer to a smaller ship and make a landing himself and take a brief tour.

Nobody, and I mean nobody, in the Allied military command wanted their forces to have to take on the added burden of transporting and protecting the British prime minister, when they would have quite enough to worry about already. Only one person in the world had any hope of dissuading Churchill, and on May 31, King George sent his prime minister a letter asking him to reconsider. When that failed, the King tried again in a second letter dated June 2. He pointed out that should Churchill go, he would see very little of the action, but run a considerable risk to himself. His Majesty pointed out the heavy responsibility Churchill would be laying on the Royal Navy. The King also wrote this:

Please consider my own position. I am a younger man than you, I am a sailor, and as King I am head of all the services. There is nothing I would like better than to go to sea, but I have agreed to stay at home; is it fair that you should then do exactly what I should have liked to do myself?

Churchill replied in a letter in which he deferred to "Your Majesty's wishes, and indeed commands…" but was sufficiently miffed to tell the King that "as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, I ought to be allowed to go where I consider it necessary to the discharge of my duty…"

[music: Closing War Theme]