

MICHAEL, GLYNDWR ('Major William Martin, RN') (1909-1943), 'the man who never was'

Name: Glyndwr Michael
Pseudonym: 'major William Martin, Rn'
Date of birth: 1909
Date of death: 1943
Gender: Male
Occupation: 'the man who never was'
Area of activity: Military
Author: Brynley Francis Roberts

Glyndwr Michael was born 4 January 1909 at 136 Commercial Street, Aberbargoed, Monmouthshire. His mother was Sarah Ann Chadwick and his father, Thomas Michael, died 1925, was a colliery haulier. The family moved frequently, finally to Penygraig and Trealaw in the Rhondda valley. After his father's death, Glyndwr, himself a chronic invalid and emotionally unstable, lived with his mother (his sisters had married and were living elsewhere) until her death in 1940. By 1942 he had moved to London, destitute, lonely and essentially homeless, where he died of poisoning 28 January 1943.

During the previous months the British intelligence service had devised and were developing a daring deception: the body of a Royal Marine officer, Major William Martin, was to be washed up on a Spanish beach where German agents could be expected to be informed. The body would be carrying top secret documents, copies of which German agents would surely obtain, indicating that the planned Allied invasion of southern Europe would target Greece rather than the expected Sicily. In fact, William Martin was a fiction, the body would be given a bogus but convincing identity, complete with personal letters and photographs, the 'top secret' documents were intended to mislead. After much thought the body of Glyndwr Michael was selected and prepared for the role of Major Martin. The ruse worked brilliantly; German troops were deployed to Greece and the invasion of Sicily was more muted than had been expected. The plan influenced the course of World War 2.

'Major William Martin, 29 March 1907-24 April 1943, beloved son of John Glyndwyr [sic] Martin and Antonia Martin of Cardiff, Wales' was buried in Huelva cemetery, Spain. His true identity was not revealed until 1997 when a postscript was added to the grave epitaph, 'Glyndwr Michael served as Major William Martin RN.'

Author

Dr Brynley Francis Roberts

Sources

This account is based on Ben Macintyre's authoritative *Operation Mincemeat* (2010)

Further Reading

[The Man Who Never Was](#)

[Wikipedia Article: Glyndwr Michael](#)

Additional Links

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