



Chapter 1

Again the major looked at his watch.

'Can't be long now', ventured the squadron Intelligence Officer, 'he'll be down to his last five gallons'.

As he spoke, twin engines broke the flat silence and a Mosquito in the sky-blue camouflage of Photo Reconnaissance materialized over the end of the airstrip. It landed fast and taxied towards them with intent.

'He doesn't like to waste time', said the IO, grinning at the major's flash of concern. At the last moment the aircraft slewed broadside. Airmen were removing film magazines before the propellers had stopped turning.

As his van tore off towards the developing shed, the IO shouted in the direction of the aircraft. 'That chap has orders for you, Smith. The CO says you're to go with him.'

Flight lieutenant Jonathon Smith lowered himself stiffly through the floor hatch. At thirty he was getting a little old to be sitting for hours in a metal bucket, but no-one was better at avoiding the German jet fighters that could still make life miserable for reconnaissance pilots in that spring of 1945. He pulled off his helmet and goggles to reveal blood-shot eyes and sandy, thinning hair.

'You look awful', said the major.

'You're no oil painting yourself. How are you, Mac? Long time, no see'.

'Something's come up. The Assistant Chief wants to have a chat.'

They drove in silence along the back roads of Buckinghamshire. The masked lights of the little Austin provided the merest glimpse of the way ahead and Smith thought it best not to distract Angus Macalister, an unconfident driver at the best of times. The Scot breathed a sigh of relief as he turned onto the more familiar pavement of the A40, and almost became communicative. 'He's reactivated P6(c)'.

'But he used to call us Hocus-Pocus Section. Thought it was all nonsense. What's he about?'

'You'll see', said Macalister gloomily, but would not be drawn further.

They were passing through Knightsbridge, all quiet, when a huge explosion rent the air not half a mile away. Macalister braked violently, stalled the engine, and sat shaking. 'Bloody V-2s. I can't get used to the lack of warning. It's stupid, I know, but I preferred the buzz bombs.'

Smith knew what he meant. 'It's not as though there's any better chance of getting out of the way, but you know you've got ten seconds to make your



peace with whoever. Your trouble, old son, is that you've been relying on the ten seconds to find out if there is a whoever.'

The war had not been kind to the nondescript Victorian pile that housed the Secret Intelligence Service. The Broadway Buildings were even grimmer and more dilapidated than Smith remembered them. Macalister got him an escorted pass and left him in an outer office. Three secretaries were hammering at typewriters amidst clouds of paper, pausing only to answer insistent telephones. 'You're late', said the head dragon, motioning him towards the inner sanctum. Smith opened the padded door and walked into the calm. As usual, the Assistant Chief's desk was bare except for a single thin folder, a chess set and an ashtray that no-one was allowed to use. The chess set served him as a situation board for the war. Smith vividly recalled the briefing he had given the German section in 1940. Black, intact, was well into white's half of the board. Both white bishops (Poland and France - he was not fond of Catholics) had already been removed, as had many of the white pawns. Most of what was left was huddled in a defensive posture around the white king, with little room for manoeuvre.

'Ah, Smith', the Assistant Chief said, as though they had last seen each other yesterday, 'you won't have met Colonel Gallagher. He's on Eisenhower's staff. They want us to find out something for them'. A tall American uncoiled himself from one of the understuffed armchairs and without ceremony advanced to the chart that covered most of one wall. He laid two large hands over the upper Rhine and spoke with the air of one who has been asked to present the same brief once too often. 'Patton and Patch have moving east from here as fast as their supply columns will let them. The Germans are unable to maintain a coherent front but SHAEF has intelligence that they may intend making a last stand in the Bavarian Alps and the Austrian Tyrol. In that terrain they would be difficult to blast out. It could extend the war for months. Our Office of Strategic Services has parachuted teams into the area but so far they have come up empty. We need to know the German intentions, and pretty damn quick.'

Only in the war for three years, thought Smith, but anxious to get home. 'Thank you, Colonel, we'll be in touch', said ACSS, and the American withdrew.

The Assistant Chief was a small man with a small moustache and wire-rimmed spectacles. Smith had once thought that he looked like Himmler



out of uniform, until he came to reflect that Himmler out of uniform was nothing more than a small moustache and wire-rimmed spectacles. Behind his back subordinates called him Dancer, an obvious but apt pun on his name, for it was only by fancy footwork that he had achieved his present eminence.

'I daresay that you're wondering why you're here', Dancer said.

'As far as photo reconnaissance is concerned the Yanks are barking up the wrong tree,' replied Smith, 'I've been as far as the Tyrol twice in the past week and I've seen nothing except field fortifications. They're not even pouring concrete. If there's anything going on there, it's underground'.

'You may speak better than you know. A new station called Radio Werewolf has begun broadcasting appeals for resistance behind our lines. But no, that's not the sort of reconnaissance I have in mind.' Dancer paused, and opened the folder. 'A few months ago an article appeared in a Norwegian newspaper. Its heading was *The Revelations of a Swedish Fortune Teller, Gruenberg*'. Smith frowned. 'Just so', said Dancer, 'Greenmount, your codename during Operation *Horn*.'

Smith's mind raced back four years to the most promising British intelligence operation of the entire war. He had recruited Rudolph Hess's favorite astrologer, an old Romany woman with no love for Nazism. She had persuaded the Deputy Fuehrer that it was his destiny to reconcile Britain and Germany, but Smith had miscalculated. Hess was not interested in being a mere agent of influence in Berlin; he had seized his historical mission and flown to Scotland, in the process converting himself from an intelligence asset of the highest importance into a diplomatic embarrassment. In the damage control panic that had ensued Smith had been packed off to the real war and the Gestapo had no less promptly rolled up the *Horn* network, consigning an assortment of seers, prophets and innocents to the concentration camps. They had suspected that British intelligence was involved but looked in the wrong place, among Hess's staff. The old gypsy had disappeared, and Hess had been quietly tucked away in a hospital in Wales.

Dancer was still speaking. 'The article predicted that there would be a period of much bitterness and disappointment for Germany but that 1948 would be Hitler's greatest year, when the Western powers and Germany would unite against Bolshevism. Typewritten copies of this nonsense began circulating in Germany shortly thereafter and were observed to have some effect on public morale. We suspected the fine Italian hand of



Dr. Goebbels and let the matter rest...until a couple of days ago'. He pushed across the folder. 'This is a copy of Frau Hess's reply to her husband's last letter, which was full of the usual rubbish about horoscopes, his and Germany's. The relevant passage is underlined'. Smith read six words. 'Gruenberg knows. The time will come'. 'That last sentence', said Dancer. 'Your rendezvous signal in Hamburg, I believe'.

Smith nodded. '2am the following Monday, at Teufelsbrücke'.

'Tomorrow night. Then we shall have to get our skates on'.

'But it's a trap', protested Smith.

'Of course it's a trap. But whose, and why this late in the game? Goebbels is the only member of the original gang who is still close to Hitler. Is this his agenda, or is this the Fuehrer himself trying to make contact with us? And to answer your all-too-obvious scepticism, yes, it does matter. Hitler is not a spent force.' He gestured towards his chess set. 'The pawns have all been sacrificed, the knights are in disarray, the castles are toppling and the allies of the regime are finished - except Japan - but Hitler is still the focus of the board. He has lost the power of the queen, but he still has the authority of the king. The game is not over until he has been neutralized. I remind you that every man jack in the Wehrmacht has sworn a personal oath of loyalty to him. Wherever he is, the war goes on. If he stays in Berlin, the war ends with its fall, and soon. If he removes to this so-called National Redoubt in the Alps, it could go on for months and our Russian allies might insist on helping us winkle him out. Now, Russians on the Elbe is one thing, but Russians on the Rhine is quite another. The most annoying thing is that if that fool Roosevelt had not insisted on unconditional surrender, we would have had peace in the west by now and the Germans would be fighting the Russians for us'.

Smith found himself standing and speaking very loudly. 'And what are you going to tell the poor sod you send? "The only reception committee we can arrange is the Gestapo, there's no support and and no possibility of extraction, but the best of British luck to you!"'

'Sit down, Flight Lieutenant, you're being insubordinate'. Dancer paused for effect. 'Actually, we were hoping you'd go.'

'Why?'

'Because you seem to understand this astrology nonsense, you know the game, and you know the territory.'

'No, I mean why do you think I'd be mad enough to go?'



'Have you given any thought to what you'll do after the war? There'll be something of a glut of pilots, I fancy, but I daresay we might be able to find you something here.'

Poor Dancer, thought Smith, reduced to bribery. His favorite incentives, coercion and blackmail (which were no strain on his budget) were unavailable here. It would not have occurred to him that there might be other ways of soliciting co-operation. But if he was buying...

'I'd sooner starve, thanks all the same', said Smith pleasantly, 'but meet my price and I'll go. He took a piece of paper from his pocket. 'I want two bona fide British passports, these names, these particulars. No questions, no enquiries. Take it or leave it.'

A look of horror passed over Dancer's face. Smith was quite pleased.

'Such things can't be done overnight', blurted Dancer. 'If they're to be used to establish residency I'll have to speak to the Home Department.'

'Then I daresay you'll have it all arranged by the time I get back.'

Dancer ignored the sarcasm. 'Macalister is your desk officer and your control. Good day.' The interview was over.

Smith left. After the door had closed, Dancer read the piece of paper again, then crumpled it and threw it into his ashtray.

Macalister was incredulous. 'You've agreed to go', he groaned, 'what possessed you, man?'

'You remember the old gypsy?'

'Aye, *and* her grand-daughter. Damned unprofessional of you.'

Smith ignored the rebuke. 'They gave up their own chance to escape in '41 so that I could get away.'

'And you're thinking you can find them, now? You are mad!'

'Could be. But when you turned up at the airfield I wasn't surprised. What do you make of that?'

Macalister became very serious. 'Listen laddie, here in Hocus-Pocus we brew moonshine; we try not to drink the stuff. What's our motto?'

Smith grinned. They chanted in unison. "All belief is weakness, and you can do more with superstition than most".

'And don't you forget it', the Scot grinned back. 'Go and get your hair cut. Have a talk to the Prof, see Personnel, and by the time you've finished I should be able to brief.'

The Prof was a charming old fraud who had once taught linguistics at a German provincial university. As the barber styled Smith's thinning hair into something that might best be described as wartime cosmopolitan, the



Prof engaged the pilot in conversation that ranged from the Nietzschean concept of the superman to the effects of bombing on Reichsbahn timetables. Finally, he rose to leave. 'Your ear is very good, but you use too many Romance words for a Berliner. On the other hand you followed easily when I slipped into Rhineland. One or the other, please, but not both'.

The Personnel Officer was one of the boorish ex-colonial policemen for whom Dancer had such a fondness. He read from a file. 'Son of an official at our Berlin consulate between the wars. Schooling in Germany, then Cambridge, then here.' He looked at the back of the page. 'Not an honest day's work in sight. Parents killed in the Blitz. Next of kin and only close relative: an uncle in Australia. I can see why they've picked you. Is there anyone else we should know about. No? Then initial your will to indicate that it's up to date.'

Macalister's gloom had returned by the time Smith got back. 'Bomber Command is raiding the U-boat yards in Hamburg tonight. We'll get the specialists of 161 Squadron to drop you in during the confusion. It's even-money that the Germans will pick you up straight away and the only protection we can give you is natural cover. You'll be you - absolutely standard RAF kit. You were flying second dickey in a Halifax that was hit. The skipper ordered you to jump. You have no idea what happened to the rest of the crew or the aircraft. Leave speculation to the Gestapo. Name, rank and serial number, all genuine, is all you'll tell them. I've had you assigned to a Halifax squadron and you'll be posted missing as soon as the raid returns. If by some miracle the rendezvous is genuine, you'll have to rely on the contact for clothes, papers etc. The mission is simplicity itself, ha bloody ha: discover Hitler's intended movements.' 'Communication?'

Macalister open a drawer of his desk and placed a walkie-talkie on his desk. 'Our American colonel has lent us this gizmo. It's a variant of their field radio, with a coned signal that can be received by an aircraft circling overhead. It's insecure, of course, but practically impossible to locate by direction-finding.' He put the instrument back in its drawer. 'But if you were to be picked up with that on you, you'd be shot out of hand, so I'm afraid it's back to the message stick. You'll place an In Memoriam advertisement in a national daily. It will commemorate Adolf Grimm - don't smile, he's real, or was, killed in Russia a year ago. You will give,



as his former place of residence, Berlin, or Innsbruck, or wherever you find Hitler intends to go. We'll see it the next day.'

'Extraction?'

'Do-it-yourself. Make your way as far west as you can and then wait to be over-run by our advance. But whatever you do, make sure you're west of the Elbe.' Macalister looked up bleakly. 'I know it's pathetic, but after you jump we'll have no way of knowing where you are.' An alarming thought struck him. 'Good God, when did you last jump.'

'Jump? In the days when I used to do this sort of thing, Mac,' said Smith, 'we caught the train, remember?'

The Scot thought briefly, and reached for his phone. 'You're in luck, of sorts. There's a Parachute Regiment chap on secondment here.'

Smith found him in the basement. He was not happy to be there, and not much happier to see Smith.

'Static line, is it?'

'I suppose so,' said Smith.

'Righto. Bend your knees and roll sideways when you hit.' There was a long pause.

'Is that it?'

'Listen, I understand that they push you Johnnies out at four hundred feet. You'll have to be thinking at the speed of light to remember even that.'

'Thanks.'

'My pleasure.'

The dusk was closing in by the time Macalister drove them west through the London suburbs. 'You know that no-one will think the worse of you if you don't go?'

'I can think of two who would. Thanks anyway, sport.'

Macalister reached into his battle dress tunic and took out a service revolver. 'You forgot this.'

'No I didn't.'

'Look, I know you don't like them, but it's standard kit.'

'For me, they've always been bad luck. As you said, if the Gestapo rumbled me it'll be for things I have that I shouldn't; it won't be for things that I don't have but should.'

Macalister let it go at that. Before the war, there had been no room for luck in Smith's world. Rational analysis plus allowance for unknowns equalled predictable outcomes. The war got to them all in the end, one way or another. The longer one stayed alive, in spite of the odds mounting against it, the more imperative it became to explain this



statistical aberration, so that it could be extended. The longer the odds, the more outrageous the explanation.

Past Hounslow the car turned through the gates of RAF Heston and headed for a remote corner of the station. A Lockheed Hudson was running up. The dumpy little airliner-turned-bomber looked hopelessly amateurish for desperate enterprise. Six years of war, and we're still improvising, thought Smith. He nodded to Macalister and climbed the steps. By the time the door had closed the aircraft was already bumping across the grass.