

C u r t a i n - R a i s e r :  
A W h i f f o f t h e  
F i r i n g - S q u a d

It was quite early in my career as a Soviet intelligence official that I first ran into serious trouble, escaping, almost literally, by the skin of my teeth. It was in April, 1937, when my headquarters were at Seville, in the south of Spain. My immediate assignment was to get first-hand information on all aspects of the Fascist war effort. The arrangement was that I should transmit the bulk of my information by hand to Soviet contacts in France or, more occasionally, in England. But for urgent communications, I had been provided with a code and a number of cover-addresses outside Spain.

Before I left England, instructions in the use of the code were committed to a tiny piece of a substance resembling rice-paper, which I habitually kept in the ticket-pocket of my trousers. It was this tiny object that nearly brought me face to face with the firing squad.

After a few busy weeks in Seville and the surround-

ing countryside, my eye fell on a poster advertising a bull-fight to be held on the following Sunday in Cordoba. The front line then ran just twenty-five miles east of Cordoba, between Montoro and Andujar, and the chance of seeing a bull-fight so close to a front which I had not yet visited seemed too good to be missed. I decided to spend a long weekend at Córdoba, including attendance at the Sunday *corrida*. I went to the *Capitania*, the military headquarters in Seville, to get the necessary pass, but a friendly major waved me away. A pass was not required for Cordoba, he said. All I had to do was get on the train and go.

On the Friday before the bull-fight, I boarded the morning train at Seville, sharing a compartment with a group of Italian infantry officers. Always on the job, as the saying goes, I asked them to have dinner with me in Cordoba, but they explained courteously that they would not have time. They would be too busy in the brothels before moving up to the front next day. I took a room in the Hotel del Gran Capitan, enjoyed a solitary meal, and walked the scented streets in a happy daze until about midnight when I returned to the hotel and went to bed.

I was roused from a deep sleep by thunderous hammering on the door. When I opened, two Civil Guards stamped into the room. They told me to pack my bag and accompany them to headquarters. To my question why, the senior of the two, a corporal, answered simply "*ordenes*"

I slept heavily in those days. Besides, I was at the disadvantage of confronting in my pyjamas two heavily booted men with rifles and revolvers. Half

asleep and half scared, my brain reacted with less than the speed of light. I was conscious that something might have to be done about the tell-tale paper tucked away in my trousers; but how to get rid of it? My mind moved vaguely in the direction of bathrooms, but I had taken a room without bath. By the time I had dressed and packed, and the Civil Guards had turned over my bed-clothes, I had got no further than a sluggish resolve to get rid of my scrap of paper somehow on the way from the hotel to Civil Guard headquarters.

When we got into the street, I found that it was not going to be easy. I had only one free hand; the other gripped my suitcase. My escort, evidently well trained, kept a steady pace behind me all the way, watching me, for all I knew, like hawks. So the incriminating material was still on me when I was shown into an office lit by a single bright naked bulb shining on a large, well-polished table. Opposite me stood an undersized major of the Civil Guard, elderly, bald and sour. With eyes fixed to the table, he listened perfunctorily to the report of the corporal who had brought me in.

The major examined my passport at length. "Where," he asked me, "is your permission to visit Cordoba?" I repeated what I had been told at the *Capitania* in Seville, but he brushed my words aside. Impossible, he said flatly; everyone knew that a permit was necessary for Cordoba. Why had I come to Córdoba? To see the bull-fight? Where was my ticket? I hadn't got one? I had only just arrived and was going to buy one in the morning? A likely story! And so on. With every

fresh outburst of scepticism, I became aware, with growing unease, that my interrogator was a confirmed Anglophobe. There were plenty of Anglophobes in those days in Spain, on both sides of the line. But by this time my brain was beginning to work normally, and I began to see possibilities in that wide expanse of gleaming table.

With an air of utter disbelief, the major and the two men who had arrested me turned to my suitcase. With unexpected delicacy, they drew on gloves and unpacked it item by item, probing each article with their fingers and holding it up to the light. Finding nothing suspicious in my change of underwear, they next examined the suitcase, tapping its surface carefully and measuring its inner and outer dimensions. There was a sigh when its innocence was established beyond doubt. For a second, I hoped that that would be the end of it, and that I would simply be told to get out of town by the first available train—but only for a second.

"And now\* said the major nastily, "what about you?"

He asked me to turn out my pockets. I could no longer postpone action. Taking first my wallet, I threw it down on that fine table, giving it at the last moment a flick of the wrist which sent it spinning towards the far end. As I had hoped, all three men made a dive at it, spreadeagling themselves across the table. Confronted by three pairs of buttocks, I scooped the scrap of paper out of my trousers, a crunch and a swallow, and it was gone. I emptied my remaining pockets with a light heart, and the major fortunately

spared me the intimacies of a rigorous body-search. He gave me instead a dry little lecture on the Communists dominating the British Government, and ordered me to get out of Córdoba next day. I was paying my hotel bill in the morning, when my two friends of the Civil Guard emerged from a recess in the lounge and asked if they might share my taxi to the station. As I boarded the Seville-bound coach, I gave them a packet of English cigarettes, and they waved to me happily as the train pulled out.

It was not a heroic episode. Even if my coding instructions had been found, my British passport would probably have saved me from the death sentence. But in subsequent years I have often had occasion to reflect that the really risky operation is not usually the one which brings most danger, since real risks can be assessed in advance and precautions taken to obviate them. It is the almost meaningless incident, like the one described above, that often puts one to mortal hazard.

New York. He used to take me to Abwehr headquarters in the Convento de las Esclavas, in Burgos, and explain his large wall maps dotted with the usual coloured pins. He dined and wined me in desultory fashion for a year or so, and it proved a useful contact as far as it went. It emerged in due course that his real interest in me was to get an introduction to a lady of my acquaintance. When I obliged him, he propositioned her forthwith, both espionage-wise and otherwise. She turned him down indignantly on both counts, and his manner to me became distant.

When the World War broke out, *The Times* sent me to Arras as their correspondent accredited to the Headquarters of the British Army. By June, 1940, I was back in England, having been evacuated twice, from Boulogne and from Brest. In London, I had written two or three pieces for *The Times*, winding up the campaign and pointing its various morals. I have no idea what I wrote and, having just read the pungent comments on the campaign in Liddell-Hart's memoirs, I am grateful for the lapse of memory.<sup>1</sup> I must have produced dreadful rubbish. The main point was that by the end of June I was at a loose end. *The Times* showed no disposition to get rid of me or to overload me with work. Thus I had ample leisure to plot my future, if only I could make a good guess at the nature of the background I had to plot it against.

I decided early to leave *The Times*, considerate though they had always been to me. Army field cen-

<sup>1</sup> Basil Liddell-Hart, *Liddell-Hart Memoirs*, 2 vols. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons), 1965.

1 1  
T a k e n O n b y t h e  
S e c r e t S e r v i c e

It was in the summer of 1940, to the best of my knowledge, that I first made contact with the British secret service. It was a subject that had interested me for some years. In Nazi Germany and later in Spain, where I served as correspondent for *The Times* with General Franco's forces, I had half expected an approach. I was confident that I would recognise my man the moment he made his first cautious soundings. He would be lean and bronzed, of course, with a clipped moustache, clipped accents and, most probably, a clipped mind. He would ask me to stick my neck out for my country and frown austerely if I mentioned pay. But no, nothing happened. If anybody did size me up during that time, he found me wanting. The only intelligence officer who took the slightest interest in me during my Spanish days was German, a certain Major von der Osten, alias Don Julio, who died early in the World War in a motor accident in

ensorship had killed my interest in war correspondence. Try writing a war report without mentioning a single place-name or designating a single unit and you will see what I mean.<sup>2</sup> Besides, the idea of waiting endlessly about the morale of the British Army at home appalled me. But, in deciding to leave *The Times*, I had to remember that my call-up was fast approaching. I had no intention of losing all control of my fate through conscription into the army. It was therefore with increasing concern that I watched various irons I had put in the fire, nudging one or other of them as they appeared to hot up. I had one promising interview, arranged by a mutual friend, with Frank Birch, a leading light in the Government Code & Cypher School, a cryptanalytical establishment which cracked enemy (and friendly) codes. He finally turned me down on the infuriating ground that he could not offer me enough money to make it worth my while. Disconsolately, I went to Holloway for my medical.

A few days later, Ralph Deakin, then Foreign News Editor of *The Times*, summoned me to his office. He bulged his eyes at me, puffed out his cheeks and creased his forehead, habits of his when upset. A certain Captain Leslie Sheridan, of the War Office, had telephoned to ask whether I was "available for war work." Sheridan had not impressed Deakin. He had claimed to be a journalist on the grounds of a previous association with *The Daily Mirror*. In short,

<sup>2</sup> British army censorship relaxed as the war went on. During the phony war period, its mutton-headed restrictiveness compared unfavourably with the much-criticised practice of General Franco's censors.

Deakin wanted no part of the affair, and pressed me to let the matter drop. I was sorry to disappoint him. Although I had never heard of Sheridan, I strongly suspected that one of my irons was glowing bright. I decided to strike before it cooled, and immediately followed up the enquiry.

Soon afterwards I found myself in the forecourt of the St. Ermin's Hotel, near St. James's Park station, talking to Miss Marjorie Maxse. She was an intensely likeable elderly lady (then almost as old as I am now). I had no idea then, as I have no idea now, what her precise position in government was. But she spoke with authority, and was evidently in a position at least to recommend me for "interesting" employment. At an early stage of our talk, she turned the subject to the possibilities of political work against the Germans in Europe. For ten years, I had taken a serious interest in international politics; I had wandered about Europe in a wide arc from Portugal to Greece; I had already formed some less than half-baked ideas on the subversion of the Nazi regime. So I was reasonably well equipped to talk to Miss Maxse. I was helped by the fact that very few people in England at that early date had given serious thought to the subject. Miss Maxse's own ideas had been in the oven very little longer than mine.

I passed this first examination. As we parted, Miss Maxse asked me to meet her again at the same place a few days later. At our second meeting, she turned up accompanied by Guy Burgess, whom I knew well. I was put through my paces again. Encouraged by Guy's presence, I began to show off, name-dropping

shamelessly, as one does at interviews. From time to time, my interlocutors exchanged glances; Guy would nod gravely and approvingly. It turned out that I was wasting my time, since a decision had already been taken. Before we parted, Miss Maxse informed me that, if I agreed, I should sever my connection with *The Times* and report for duty to Guy Burgess at an address in Caxton Street, in the same block as the St. Ermin's Hotel.

*The Times* gave me little difficulty. Deakin huffed and sighed a little, but he had nothing spectacular to offer me. So I left Printing House Square without fanfare, in a manner wholly appropriate to the new, secret and important career for which I imagined myself heading. I decided that it was my duty to profit from the experiences of the only secret service man of my acquaintance. So I spent the weekend drinking with Guy Burgess. On the following Monday, I reported to him formally. We both had slight headaches.

The organisation to which I became attached called itself the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). It was also widely known as MI5, while to the innocent public at large it was simply the secret service. The ease of my entry surprised me. It appeared later that the only enquiry made into my past was a routine reference to MI5, who passed my name through their records and came back with the laconic statement: Nothing Recorded Against. Today, every new spy scandal in Britain produces a flurry of judicial statements on the subject of "positive vetting." But in that happier Eden positive vetting had never been heard of. Sometimes, in the early weeks, I felt that perhaps

I had not made the grade after all. It seemed that somewhere, lurking in deep shadow, there must be another service, really secret and really powerful, capable of backstairs machination on such a scale as to justify the perennial suspicions of, say, the French.<sup>3</sup> But it soon became clear that such was not the case. It was the death of an illusion. Its passing caused me no pain.

Guy first took me to the office that had been assigned to me. It was a small room with a table, a chair and a telephone, and nothing else. With a snort of annoyance, Guy disappeared down the corridor and came back with a sheaf of foolscap which he laid on the table. Satisfied that I was now fully equipped for my duties, he told me that my salary would be the same as his: £600 per annum, paid monthly in cash and no nonsense from the Inland Revenue. No snooping after a single secret shilling! In fact, the secrecy of Pay-Scales concealed gross inequalities. Each contract was theoretically a private, secret one between the Chief and his subordinate. And if the Chief could get A cheaper than B, whatever their respective merits, he would be silly not to do so. However, I was quite happy with the arrangement, and I was then taken off to be introduced to some of my future colleagues. As they play no substantial part in my story, I shall not embarrass them by mentioning their names.

The section of SIS in which I found myself was

<sup>3</sup> This thought was put into my head by my Soviet contact. My first factual reports on the secret service inclined him seriously to the view that I had got into the wrong organisation.

known as Section D (for Destruction). I never saw its charter—if it had one. From talks with my colleagues, I gathered that the object of the section was to help defeat the enemy by stirring up active, resistance to his domination and destroying, by non-military means, the sources of his power. The head of the section was Colonel Laurence Grand, to whom I was introduced a few days after joining his staff. Tall and lean, he looked startlingly like the dream-figure who should have approached me in Germany or Spain. The difference was that his mind was certainly not clipped. It ranged free and handsome over the whole field of his awesome responsibilities, never shrinking from an idea, however big or wild.

Much attention was focussed at that time on attacking the Iron Gates of the Danube, to interrupt the supply of Rumanian oil to the Germans. I had seen the Iron Gates, and was duly impressed by the nerve of colleagues who spoke of "blowing them up," as if it were a question of destroying the pintle of a lock-gate in the Regent's Canal. Such an attempt was hopelessly out of keeping with the slender resources of Section D in 1940. When it was finally made, it was discovered and nipped in the bud by the Yugoslav police, causing the British Government some embarrassment. The same disparity between ends and means appeared in suggestions that Hitler's oil supply could be seriously interrupted by "putting the Baku oilfields out of action." I have since seen the Baku oilfields, and amused myself mildly by wondering how I would launch such an enterprise, assuming that I started from a base in Cairo. Even in 1940, I would

have dismissed such talk as fantasy, if I had not attended a press conference in Arras given by General Pownall, then Chief of Staff to Lord Gort, in which he said that, given the strength of the Siegfried Line, better prospects might be offered by an attack through the Caucasus. If successful, such an attack would open "Germany's weak eastern defences" to Anglo-French assault.

Grand never had the resources to cam' out his ideas, though they were given freely to his successors. His London staff could fit easily into a large drawing-room. We regularly did so on Sundays at his headquarters in the country, where plans, plans, plans were the inexhaustible topics of discussion. In the field, he had little more than bits and scraps. His efforts to get a larger slice of the secret cake were frowned on by the older and more firmly based intelligence-gathering side of the service. Starting from the valid premiss that sabotage and subversion are inherently insecure (the authors of bangs are liable to detection), the intelligence people rushed happily to the invalid conclusion that bangs were a waste of time and money, diverting resources from the silent spy. Thus Grand's demands on the Treasury and on the armed services were often blocked within the service. At best, they were given lukewarm support.

On the side of political subversion, the difficulties were even more serious, because they involved fundamental aspects of British policy. By and large, the British Government had accustomed itself to supporting the monarchs and oligarchs of Europe. Such men were strongly averse to any form of subversion. The

only people likely to oppose any sort of resistance to Hitler were the Left-wing movements: the peasant parties, the Social-Democrats, and the Communists. Only they were likely to risk their lives by continuing resistance after the Germans had engulfed their countries. Yet they were extremely unlikely to stir for the sake of a British Government which insisted on playing footsie with the King Carols and the Prince Pauls who had systematically persecuted them between the wars. Thus the ideologues of subversion in Britain started out under a heavy handicap imposed by the Foreign Office which failed to see until much too late that, whatever the outcome of the war, the sun of its favourite puppets had set for ever. Small wonder that, when the crunch came, the resistance movements leant so heavily towards the Soviet Union, and that the balance was only restored in France, Italy and Greece by a massive Anglo-American military presence.

For reasons of security and convenience, all SIS officers are given symbols which are used in correspondence and conversation. Grand was naturally D. His sub-section heads were known as DA, DB and so on; and their assistants were distinguished by the addition of numerals, e.g., DA-1. Guy was DU. According to normal practice, therefore, I should have been DU-1. But Guy explained, with heavy delicacy, that the symbol DU-1 might have implied some subordination of myself to him; he wanted us to be regarded as equals. He solved the dilemma by giving me a third letter instead of a final numeral, and he chose the letter D. Thus he launched me on my secret service career branded with the symbol DUD.

DU was not the ideal starting point for what I had in mind. I wanted to find my own place in the service; for that it was necessary to find out how it was organised and what it was doing. But Guy, following his own predilections, had turned DU into a sort of ideas factory. He regarded himself as a wheel, throwing off ideas like sparks as it revolved. Where the sparks fell he did not seem to care. He spent a lot of time in other people's offices, propounding his ideas. As he warmed to his themes, shouts of raucous laughter would drift down the corridor to my office where I sat thinking or reading the newspapers. After a hard morning's talking, Guy would return to my office, chortling and dimpling, and suggest going out for a drink.

One day in July, Guy came into my office bringing some papers for a change. They were pages of a memorandum written by himself. Grand had given general approval to its contents, and had asked for further study and elaboration of the subject. For that Guy needed my help. I was excessively pleased. From long experience, I knew that "helping" Guy meant taking all the donkey work off his hands. But as I had done literally nothing for two weeks, I would have been glad of any work. I took the papers and Guy sat down on my table to watch my face for signs of appreciation.

It was a characteristic production: lots of good sense embedded to the point of concealment in florid epigram and shaky quotation. (Guy had quotations to meet almost any emergency, but he never bothered to verify them.) What he proposed was the establish-



ment of a school for training agents in the techniques of underground work. It was an astonishing proposal, not because it was made, but because it had not been made before. No such school existed. Guy argued the case for its necessity, obvious now but new then. He outlined the subjects of a syllabus. At the end, he suggested that such a college should be named the "Guy Fawkes College" to commemorate an unsuccessful conspirator "who had been foiled by the vigilance of the Elizabethan SIS." It was a neat touch. He could hardly have proposed "Guy Burgess College."

At last, I had got my teeth into something. I broke the subject up into its component parts: syllabus, selection of trainees, security, accommodation and so on, and produced a memorandum on each. I have forgotten most of what I wrote and, in view of the huge training establishment that gradually developed, I hope that my first modest papers on the subject no longer exist. Having deposited his shower of sparks into my lap, Guy seemed to lose interest in a fresh riot of ideas. But it was not so. He saw that Grand read my papers, and arranged committees to discuss them. I did not take to committee work then, and have never taken to it since. Ever)' committee has a bugbear. My bugbear on the training committee was a certain Colonel Chidson. He had played an astute part in rescuing a lot of industrial diamonds from Hitler in Holland, but to me he was a pain in the neck. He had visions of anarchy stalking Europe, and resisted bitterly the whole idea of letting a lot of thugs loose on the continent. One day, I spotted him coming towards me on Lower Regent's Street. A moment

later, he saw me and froze in his tracks. In a swift recovery, he turned up his coat collar and dove into a side-street. Our training school had evidently become very necessary.

Guy's refrain at the time was "the idea must be made to catch on"; and somehow it did. In due course, I learnt to my surprise that Brickendonbury Hall, a former school building standing in spacious grounds near Hertford, had been acquired for training purposes.<sup>4</sup> I was introduced to a Commander Peters, R.N., who had been seconded to us to act as commandant of the school. He often took Guy and me to dinner at the Hungaria, to listen to our views on the new project. He had faraway naval eyes and a gentle smile of great charm. Against all the odds, he took a great and immediate fancy to Guy, who ruthlessly swiped the cigarettes off his desk. As will be seen, his connection with us was brief. He was later awarded a posthumous V.C. for what was probably unnecessarily gallant behaviour in Oran harbour. When I heard of the award, I felt a pang that he should never have known about it. He was the type of strong sentimentalist who would have wept at such honour. Our trainees came to adore him.

There were other additions to the training staff. There was jolly George Hill who had written books about his secret exploits in Soviet Russia. He was one of the few living Englishmen who had actually put

<sup>4</sup> In his excellent *Baker Street Irregular*, Mr. Sweet-Escott erroneously locates the first training school at Aston House. Aston was an explosives depot run by a Commander Langley, R.N.

sand in axle-boxes. Immensely paunchy, he looked rather like Soglow's king with a bald pate instead of a crown. He was later appointed head of the SOE Mission<sup>5</sup> in Moscow, where the Russians hailed him with delight. They knew all about him. A very belated security check of his conference room in Moscow revealed a fearsome number of sources of leakage. Then there was an explosives expert named Clark, with a rumbustious sense of humour. Asked to arrange a demonstration for the Czech DMI<sup>6</sup> and his staff, he planted booby-traps in a copse through which they had to walk to his training-ground. He had assumed that they would go through the wood in Indian file like ducks. Instead, they walked abreast, and the officers at each end of the line suffered nasty shocks. It was a fluke that no one was hurt.

Then there was a melancholy Czech printer, who was recommended as having run an underground press in Prague. He was pale and podgy; after one look at him, the Commander decided that he must mess with the students. Another sad figure was an Austrian Social-Democrat who called himself Werner. He was being groomed to bear-lead any Austrian trainees we might get. No such recruits ever appeared and, as he spoke only German, I had to spend a lot of time holding his hand. He finally resigned, and was earmarked for other employment. He was killed when

<sup>5</sup> Special Operations Executive, formed under Churchill's orders in 1940 to assume all responsibility for undercover action against the Axis, especially sabotage and subversion. See Chapter 2.—*Eds.*

<sup>6</sup> Director of Military Intelligence.—*Eds.*

a submarine taking him to Egypt was sunk by dive-bombers in the Mediterranean.

Our outstanding personality, however, was undoubtedly Tommy Harris, an art-dealer of great distinction. He was taken on, at Guys suggestion, as a sort of glorified house-keeper, largely because he and his wife were inspired cooks. He was the only one of us who acquired, in those first few weeks, any sort of personal contact with the trainees. The work was altogether unworthy of his untaught but brilliantly intuitive mind. He was soon snapped up by MI5 where he was to conceive and guide one of the most creative intelligence operations of all time. It will be seen that those days at Brickendonbury were days of almost unrelieved gloom, as far as I was concerned. They were illumined only by the beginning of a close and most highly prized friendship with Tommy Harris.

A few trainees were tossed our way: two small groups of Belgians and Norwegians, and a somewhat larger group of Spaniards. In all, there were about twenty-five of them. Perhaps they picked up some useful tips at Brickendonbury, but I doubt it. We had no idea what tasks they were supposed to perform, and neither Guy nor I had any success in digging the necessary information out of London headquarters. Otherwise, we had little to do, except talk to the Commander and help him draft memoranda for headquarters which seldom vouchsafed a reply. One thing only was clear. We had little to teach the Spaniards, most of whom were *ex-dinamiteros* from Asturias. "All instructors are the same," remarked one—a boy of about eighteen. "They tell you to cut off so much

fuse. We double it to be quite safe. That is why we are still alive."

We might have learnt a useful lesson in security procedure if we had but known it. The truth did not emerge for some years. As we proposed to deal with agents to be sent to enemy territory where they were likely to be captured, it was decided that the identities of officers on the training staff should be protected by aliases. Peters became Thornley, Hill became Dale and so on. Guy, indulging his schoolboyish sense of fun, persuaded the Commander to impose on me behind my back a name so inappropriate that I refuse to divulge it. The only exception was Tommy Harris who, for reasons which escape me, was allowed to retain his own name. Sometime after the war, Tommy ran into the head of our Belgian group, a nasty man of carefully obtruded aristocratic origin, and repaired to a teashop with him. While reminiscing about Brickendonbury, the Belgian remarked that the trainees had penetrated all our abases save one. Tommy tested him and found that he did indeed know all our names, and asked him who the exception was. "Actually it was you," replied the Belgian.

Guy Burgess will soon disappear temporarily from these pages, so I may perhaps be forgiven a story which brings out his love of innocent mischief. Night had just fallen after a fine summer day. The Commander was in bed, nursing a sharp attack of eczema, to hide which he was growing a beard. A visiting instructor, masquerading under the name of Hazlitt, was at his bedside sipping a glass of port. There was a sudden shout from the garden, which was taken up

by a Babel in five languages. Trainees poured into the house, claiming to have seen one, three, ten, any number of parachutes falling in the vicinity. On hearing the news, the Commander ordered the Belgians to get into uniform and mount a machine-gun in the French windows. It commanded a nice field of fire, right across the school playing grounds. I do not know what would have happened if the enemy had come in by the front door. "If the Germans have invaded," the Commander told Hazlitt, "I shall get up."

He then made a disastrous mistake. He instructed Guy to ascertain the exact facts of the case, and telephone the result to the Duty Officer in London. Guy went about the business with wicked conscientiousness. I heard snatches of his subsequent telephone report. "No, I cannot add to what I have said. . . . You wouldn't want me to falsify evidence, would you? Shall I repeat? . . . Parachutes have been seen dropping in the neighbourhood of Hertford in numbers varying from eighty to none. . . . No, I cannot differentiate between the credibility of the various witnesses. Eighty to none. Have you got that? I will call you again if necessary. Goodbye." He went to report in triumph. "I don't know what I shall do if I do get up," said the Commander, "but I shall certainly take command."

An hour or two passed, and nothing more happened. The Belgians sadly took apart their Lewis gun, and we all went to bed. Next morning, Guy spent a lot of time on the telephone, and periodically spread gleeful tidings. The Duty Officer had alerted his Chief, who had communicated with the War Office.

Eastern Command had been pulled out of bed, its armour grinding to action stations in the small hours. Guy made several happy guesses at the cost of the operation, upping it by leaps and bounds throughout the day. I should add that the nil estimate given him the night before was my own; the eighty, I should think, came from Guy himself. Both of us were wrong. One parachute had fallen. Attached to a land-mine, it had draped itself harmlessly round a tree.

As the summer weeks went by without any clear directives from London, the Commander's aspect changed for the worse. He became more than usually taciturn and withdrawn. At first, I thought that his eczema was bothering him more than he cared to admit. But then I began to hear from the grapevine things which had never been told us officially. Section D had been detached from SIS and reformed under the aegis of Dr. Dalton, the Minister of Economic Warfare. Grand had gone, his place taken by Frank Nelson, a humourless businessman whose capacity I never had an opportunity to gauge. After a visit to Brickendonbury from Colin Gubbins and a posse of fresh-faced officers, who barked at each other and at us, the Commander fell into a deep depression. He minded not being told. It was no surprise when he summoned Guy and myself one morning and told us that he had spent the previous evening composing his letter of resignation. He spoke sadly, as if conscious of failure and neglect. Then he cheered up and the charming smile came back, for the first time in many days. He was clearly happy to be going back

to his little ships after his brief baptism of political fire.

The Commander's resignation was accepted without difficulty. Listlessly, we set about disbanding our establishment. The steps taken to this end are no more than a blur in my memory. We must have stashed the trainees away somewhere for future use, as I heard later that, in addition to Werner, at least two of them were dead. One, a nice Norwegian wireless operator, had been caught by the Germans and shot soon after his return to Norway. The other, the best of the Belgian group, had been flown to a dropping place in Belgium. But his parachute had somehow caught on the under-carriage of the aircraft, and he had been hurtled at mercifully high speed to unconsciousness and death. The Spaniards I was to see again.

Tommy Harris left us in pretty high dudgeon and soon found his true level as a valued officer of MI5. Guy and I reported to the new headquarters of Special Operations at 64 Baker Street which afterwards became famous (or notorious, according to the point of view) as plain "Baker Street." An awful lot of office furniture was being moved in and around; every time we visited the place, partitions seemed to be going up or coming down. Below us, the staff of Marks & Spencer watched and wondered. There were many new faces confronted with new jobs. Banking, big business, and the law had been combed for recruits. There was also a distressing dearth of old colleagues. Nelson's purge had been thorough-going. He had been gleefully assisted by some senior officers on the in-

telligence side of SIS, notably Claude Dansey and David Boyle, of whom more will be heard. They were determined not only to "get Grand," but to get all his closest henchmen as well.

The purge was to come yet nearer before it was called off. One evening, Guy dropped in for a drink in an unusually tongue-tied condition. Finally it came out; he had fallen "victim to a bureaucratic intrigue," by which I understood that he had been sacked. I assumed that my own days, if not hours, were numbered, and Guy obviously looked forward to having me as a companion in distress. But next month, and the month after that, my pay envelope still contained ten £5 notes. Special Operations, it seemed, had need of me; or perhaps I was too insignificant to merit dismissal. Guy was nothing if not resilient. He soon found a desirable niche in the Ministry of Information, which gave him a wide range of cultivable contacts. He began to refer contemptuously to my continued association with "Slop and Offal."