

HALT, WHO GOES THERE

I was polishing the deck one day in the Senior Rates Mess when the President shouted that I was required in the Divisional Office. Switching off the rotary polisher and unplugging it, I doubled smartly away as Matelots always do on such occasions. Tapping on the door the easily recognisable and irritating voice of the Divisional Petty Officer bawled "Come in JR"!

Entering the 'inner sanctum' "What am I supposed to have done now, whatever it is I deny it"? I smiled pleasantly attempting good humour but failing miserably as the mournful sour face of PO Writer Digby Winter scowled back. Digby was affectionately known to the Junior Rates as 'Wigby Dinter' or 'Diggers'. Digby had never been known to smile, even on Pay Day. In reply to my question Diggers could only mutter "Knowing you Gawd only knows, go on in the old man is expecting you"! He muttered. "Cheer up Diggers old son it might never happen" I replied as Digby muttered under his breath.

Tapping gently on the Divisional Officer's door brought a quiet response "Come In" opening the door I came face to face with the legendary Lieutenant Commander 'Swordy' Wilkinson DSO and Bar himself. I saluted smartly and he smiled. "Sit down JR, don't worry you are not in any trouble for a change he chuckled making me very much more at ease. Taking off my cap and placing it under the chair I sat down facing 'The Legend' Swordy was indeed everyone's personification of the ideal Naval Officer. He had excelled himself in the last war particularly in the Battle of Britain, when together with a few more Fleet Air Arm Pilots had been seconded to RAF Squadrons in the South of England. He had also distinguished himself in the Bismark episode and the Battle of Taranto. Everyone adored 'Swordy' as he always came over as 'one of us' He was very much a man's man in every respect.

"Now then JR, it is JR isn't it"? He began. "Yes Sir" I answered. "Now I understand that you occasionally visit the RAF Camp at St Eval just down the road is that correct"? "Yes Sir, if you remember we Boxed and played Football there several times" Swordy paused for a moment suddenly recalling. "Yes of course, it must have slipped my mind. So you would have a pretty good idea of the layout of the place then would you say"? He enquired. "Well Sir, I suppose I could find my way around the place if I had to" I replied sounding puzzled. Swordy, sensing my curiosity smiled and replied. "I suppose you are wondering what all this is about eh"? "Well Sir, the thought had crossed my mind". I countered cautiously. "Well JR, in a nutshell, this is the situation. We will be taking part in some 'War Games' against the RAF. A sort of Passive Defence Exercise on their part in order to test their defences, security and of course vulnerability if you see what I mean"? Replied Swordy, stroking his chin as if in thought. "I understand Sir but where do I fit into all this"? I enquired politely. "Well JR it is essential that we have first hand knowledge and of course information regarding the layout of their Base without arousing suspicion". "May I ask Sir, when is all this taking place"? I enquired. "Ah! well now JR that is the question, as no one seems to know exactly when but our information is within 48 hours and then we all get a 'Code Word' and off we go!".

"I'm sorry to appear a little vague Sir but you didn't explain exactly how I fit into all this"? I countered, none the wiser. "Well JR, it seems that you know just about everyone worth knowing so perhaps you could find out something which might prove useful" Swordy answered cagily. "How about a Football Match or a Sports Fixture Sir"? I suggested. Swordy shook his head sadly. "I'm afraid not, their Sports Field is being re-turfed and in

any case that might quickly arouse suspicion” Replied Swordy. An idea suddenly occurred to me. “You just don’t happen to know offhand Sir, who is doing the turfing”? I enquired more in hope than anything else. “Well, as far as I am aware, it’s a local chap from Padstow who has an MOD contract for all that sort of thing” Replied Swordy, his turn to look puzzled seeing the grin on my face. “Could it be Charlie Bickerton by any chance Sir”? I asked. “Bickerton, Bickerton, yes, I do believe that is his name, why do you know him”? Enquired Swordy still mystified. “Indeed I do Sir, I know Charlie pretty well”. “For the life of me I still don’t know what that has to do with it at all” Said Swordy looking more puzzled than ever. “I promise you will Sir I will get onto it straight away” I replaced my cap, saluted smartly again leaving Swordy still shaking his head.

At 7.30pm on the dot Charlie ‘Bick’ or ‘Chas’ as his friends called him strolled into the Wheatsheaf Arms. “Evening Chas” I greeted him. Charlie’s usually smiling face had a rather sour look. “What’s up with you, you miserable bugger”? I said. “It’s all right for you” Moaned Chas with a face like an upturned spitkid. “I’ve had a right shitty day I have and no mistake” I liked old Chas who was usually cheerful and we delighted in leg pulls by talking like a couple of West Country Farmers with AAAA’s and OOOO’s much to the amusement and sometimes annoyance of the locals. The miserable fellow next to me was not our Chas at all. Turning to our rotund Landlord, ‘Nige’ Coulter I said. “Give him a pint of ‘Special’ Nige, that might cheer the old bugger up a bit”. Nige grinned as he reached underneath the bar where he kept a small barrel of 5X Barley Wine reserved for ‘special’ customers. Nige’s 5X was an absolutely lethal brew and was usually only served in half pint goblets. It would be true to say that Nige’s ‘Special Brew’ could just about see anyone off after 3 or 4 half pints providing they were stupid or cocky enough to drink it. I had to escort Chas home to his dear wife on several occasions after he had liberally imbibed Nige’s ‘Special Brew’ and I have to admit I could only manage a couple of glasses. Drinks in hand I led Chas over to a table by the window.

“Now, come on old mate this isn’t like you, what’s up”? I asked him. Chas had a long pull at his glass which almost emptied it and I motioned to Nige to bring a refill. “I’m really p....d off about today” Said Chas as he began to relate that he had undergone a right bust up with the Commanding Officer at the RAF Station. As Chas’s tale of woe began to unfold the glimmerings of an idea came to me. Feeling decidedly better after another pull at his ‘Special’ Chas continued. “It seems like the RAF have got some kind of ‘hush hush’ flap on and they won’t let me back on the base until it’s all over. I told the CO bloody straight that I had other contracts to honour and he was holding me up and I’d got workmen standing by doing sod all and I had to still pay em”. Chas said angrily. “What exactly are you doing over there then Chas”? I enquired innocently as he set about his third glass of ‘Special’ and I knowing the answer anyway.

“Actually I’m supposed to be returfing the whole Sports Field and if I ever get around to it, landscaping the gardens and shrubbery as well”. Replied Chas now looking decidedly more cheerful. Drawing my chair a little closer to Chas’s I whispered in his ear. “What I am about to tell you Chas must go no further and I must ask you to keep it under your hat if you get my drift”? I said to him. Chas’s face broadened into a wide grin. Tapping his nose and placing a finger on his lip. “Mum’s the word eh! You know you can rely on me”? Replied Chas. “Well Chas my DO has asked me to make some discreet enquiries. How would you like to play a little joke on the RAF boys”? I was fully aware that Chas was an Ex Wartime Small Ships Rating and such an opportunity was simply too good to pass up. “Why not”. Said Chas almost triumphantly. “Anything which will allow me to get back on their base and

finish my work, I will gladly go along with". He replied, banging a huge fist on the table making the glasses rattle and causing everyone to look round in their chairs.

"Are you perfectly sure that you want to help me and go along with it"? I enquired, knowing full well what his answer. "You betcha life just bring it on mate" Chas bellowed, sounding more like his old self now. Chas took another long pull at his drink. Wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. "We are going to need some sort of plan you know"? He answered solemnly. I grinned at him "You've already got a bloody plan haven't you"? He said rather sarcastically. "Yes Chas, now that I've spoken to you and I think it's rather good" I replied trying not to sound too confident at this stage. "You bugger", Chas grinned. "You are craftier than a shit house rat. I had that funny feeling that you were up to something all along" He exclaimed. Draining yet another glass as Nige, desperate to hear what we were talking about, brought us another round of drinks.

Waiting for Nige to make his exit I whispered again to Chas. "All I need for now is an idea of the Camp lay-out"? "Hah! is that all, I can do better than that". Exploded Chas triumphantly. "Just you wait a minute" He shouted over his shoulder as he disappeared from the Bar returning moments later. Picking up a large Rum which I had just ordered he devoured it in one gulp at the same time tossing a large roll of paper secured by elastic bands onto the table. He fixed me with his eyes and a large toothy grin which was not entirely due to the alcohol. "Go on, open it". He commanded. I removed the elastic bands and gently unrolled the paper and to my amazement saw a completely detailed set of plans for the entire RAF Base. "Bloody Hell Chas, where on earth did you get these, they are exactly what I need"? I whispered hardly daring to show my excitement. "Every Contractor gets copies, to show them where to dig and where not to dig, there's everything there, electrical, piping, drainage the lot" Chas lisped, now showing the obvious effects of the alcohol which he had already consumed. "Thank's a lot Chas, If I can borrow these I will return them to you tomorrow, I'm very grateful to you and the D.O. I know will be quite chuffed" I enthused. "Same time tomorrow then"? Burbled Chas..Looking round for someone else to converse with. A final glance and a warning finger over my lips to Chas as I made good my escape.

I could hardly wait to knock on Swordy's door early next morning and before that miserable old Admin P.O. Writer Digby Winter came to work. "Good morning JR" Beamed Swordy amiably. "I do hope you have some good news for me"? "I think I just may well have Sir" I replied as I unfolded Chas's plans of the RAF Base on his desk. "Good Lord JR, where on earth did you get hold of these, no, on second thought, don't tell me, I'd rather not know but they are exactly what we wanted". Replied a delighted Swordy as the miserable face of P.O. Digby appeared around the door. "Sorry Sir, I didn't realise that you were in" He replied, giving me his customary scowl. "Ah! Yes P.O. pop these over to the workshops and get half a dozen copies run off will you and bring us some coffee will you, there's a good chap"? Said Swordy cheerfully. "Very good Sir" Replied 'Diggers' with his usual dreariness and scowling at me as he did so. Settling himself into his chair Swordy enquired softly. "I don't suppose for one moment JR that you have also found a way for us to possibly sneak some men in have you"? There was a momentary pause before I replied. "As a matter of fact Sir, I think I have". Swordy looked up from his desk, adjusted his spectacles and gazed at me almost in disbelief. "What did you say JR"? A now almost incredulous Swordy enquired. "I have found a way Sir but as I have to finalise things I would rather leave the details until I have done so but it will be your 'Exclusive Battle Plan' I can promise you that after 'Stand Easy' all will be revealed to you. Saluting smartly I left Swordy to his morning coffee and his innermost thoughts until later.

After 'Stand Easy' as promised, I again knocked on Swordy's door. A usual polite "Come in JR" from Swordy as I entered. I whispered that we should not be overheard and Swordy, taking the hint sent old 'Diggers' on an errand to chase up the overdue plans. During the next 15 minutes or so I outlined my idea to him for gaining entry to the RAF Base. He listened intently after which his face took on an expression of incredulity and sheer delight which was a joy for me to see. "Do you know JR, that is absolutely brilliant and so simple and it just might work you know". Replied a now elated Swordy. "Of course Sir, you realise that you will have to convince the 'Powers That Be' that this was your idea in the first instance. It simply would not do for a Junior Rate to come up with such an idea now would it"? Swordy got up from his chair and began to pace the room, deep in thought for several moments before answering. "You are right JR. absolutely right of course but how are we going to finalise the details."? I smiled. "Just leave that to me and my contacts. All we need to know is when this 'Exercise' is going to happen and we will do the rest"? "Ah! Yes! now then, no one knows for certain but I have it on very good authority that it will begin the day after tomorrow (Thursday) from 0900 until Friday 0900 so that everyone in both camps can still have their Long Week End Leave if you see what I mean". "That will be perfect Sir. Leave everything to us and I will let you know when things are in place". I replied smiling and saluting. "Splendid JR, absolutely splendid" Said Swordy as we walked into 'Diggers' office where he handed me the Chas's original plans to the RAF Base.

Same time same place on the dot a this time much happier Chas greeted me in the 'Wheatsheaf' later that evening as I handed him back his plans. Drinks in hand we went over to our secluded corner table by the window as before. The Landlord Nige fixed us with that 'something is going on in my pub and I don't know what it is' kind of look. Now well out of earshot, I grabbed Chas's arm. "Now look Chas, how on earth do you expect the Royal Marine Commandos to attempt this kind of 'Operation' without the proper 'Reccies' first. Chas looked at me hard. "Bloody Bootneck Commandos this must be bloody important then" He countered with some surprise. Seizing my opportunity to add to and elaborate the most ridiculous proportions to the plan, I felt obliged to embellish the situation a little more. "You remember the D. Day Landings Chas, when these 'Bootnecks' were the 'Spearhead' of the attack don't you"? Chas spluttered. "Of course I f.....g well remember I was there. Remember the 'Small Ships' how do you think the bloody Bootnecks got there in the first place"? He thundered and his eyes almost misted over at the memory of it all those few short years ago. "Right, now then Chas, picture all those 'Booties' you know that they are always in training for this sort of thing, this is how they remain operational". Chas nodded vigorously in agreement. "Now then Chas, this is our chance to show those 'Pongo's' and 'Crabfats' a thing or two about the Senior Service so what about it"?

Chas nodded his head again. "OK, just what do you want me to do"? Drawing closer to avoid being overheard I carefully outlined the plan already discussed with Swordy. Chas's face broke into a broad grin and finally a loud belly laugh. "It's a piece of p..s nothing to it. Should be a doddle" He scoffed. In order to add a little more weight to the plan, I again felt obliged to resort to a little more subterfuge and the way that Chas was 'winding' into his 'Special' tonight, this presented no problem as Chas, Bless His Old Heart was almost in a mellow mood to say the least. Before he succumbed to the charms of Morpheus and alcohol I decide to reveal his part in the plan of action.

"Right Chas old son, this is the plan, listen carefully."? Chas now fully alert for the moment listened intently. "In order for this plan to succeed, I need you to telephone the

Station Commander at the RAF Base the day after tomorrow, which is Thursday". "I know what f.....g day it is ".Chas said irritably. "Just get on with it". "Right Chas, now switch on, I want you to ring him at exactly 0830 and tell him that you will be bringing a truckload of turves through the Main Gate together with 2 men to unload them. Actually Chas there will be 8 men hidden underneath a tarpaulin with the turves placed on top of them. You may well have to make a second trip before 0900. I will be in the first run. Tell him you are dumping the turves on the Sports Field ready for laying after the 'Exercise' and then you will bugger off is that OK so far"? Chas nodded. " As I said before, it is a piece of p...s" He replied. " Now look Chas!, there should be no problem. You already have clearance and every bugger knows you OK"? Chas nodded. "Don't worry, I told you already". I interrupted him "I know it will be a piece of p...s. You just make sure that it is" ! I admonished him. "It's OK I told you, now can we have a bloody pint in peace". Chas whined.

Wednesday evening came and as everyone had anticipated 'the Secret Code Word Signal' confirmed that the 'Exercise' was on for 0900 the following day. Chas had already informed me that he had prior permission to deliver the loads of turves at 0830 or thereabouts. It was the thereabouts that worried me a little but I decided to tell Swordy that 'Systems Were Go' and by 0815 the next morning myself and 8 'killick bombheads' were stuffed under a load of turves and a tarpaulin in a lorry driven by Mr Charles Bickerton approaching the Main Gate of the RAF Camp. Halting at the barrier an armed uniformed sentry approached the lorry. "Are you aware Sir that there is a Security Alert due at 0900"? True to form Chas stuck his head out of the lorry's window and bellowed whilst we all held our breath. " Look son, I don't give a f..k if Vesuvius is about to erupt I have to dump this load of f.....g turf on you Sports Field and then another one in 15 minutes time and if I don't I will personally guarantee that I will personally shag you and then your Station Commander in front of all hands. Now p..s of and let me do my job OK"? The astounded RAF 'erk' sentry almost leapt out of the way "Yes, Mr Bickerton Sir" as Chas's lorry and contents roared through the Main Gate. Once onto the Sports Field and the contents of the lorry disgorged and dispersed to secrete themselves in the Aircraft Gun Pits and Testing Area some 200 yards from the unguarded area surrounding the Sports Field.

As I was dressed in sports gear and not easily recognisable I made my way over to a Squadron Dispersal Area where I managed to purloin a set of RAF dungarees and a beret which had been conveniently left lying around in one of the hangars. By this time Chas and a second load of turves and 'visitors' had arrived and managed to pass a now very confused and upset Main Gate Sentry and had dispersed with a now quite formidable Main Force Attack Group already secreted in the 'Butts Area'. Making my way towards the Main Dining Area I found a pair of equally convenient Wellington boots outside the galley together with a bicycle lying unattended nearby. Glancing at my watch I saw that it was almost 0850. Pedalling furiously towards the main gate and with the poor unfortunate 'sentry' furiously waving me through and shouting "Hurry Up, Hurry Up, It's all about to start". How bloody right he was I said to myself as I pedalled through the Main Gate and up the road to Padstow and St Merryn.

The 'Exercise' I am glad to report was a bit of an anti climax and altogether a resounding success for 'Old Swordy' who was absolutely 'chuffed to bits' as was everyone involved. The technicalities of 'The Exercise' itself proved something of a debacle for the poor old RAF as the 'Officers', Senior Rates, Control Tower, Admin Block, CO's Quarters and all the 'Strategic Points' were captured by our invading forces within the hour. I am convinced that this small episode together with 6 months 'accelerated advancement' and a

'red recommend' from dear old 'Swordy' did much to speed me on my way to Lee-on-Solent a few short weeks later. When all the lads had gone home on leave and I was having a quiet pint in the 'Sheaf' with Chas on Saturday morning when he remarked. "By the way, thanks mate, we started work again today on the RAF Base and do you know I never even saw a bloody 'Bootneck' at all did you"?

WHICH ONLY GOES TO SHOW THAT 'BOOTIES' AND SUBMARINERS COME UNSEEN & IF YOU BELIEVE THAT YOU MUST BELIEVE IN FAIRIES

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