

One

Time to finish what we
started...



The impenetrable darkness, the dank, overpowering smell of rotting undergrowth and the icy rain dripping off the trees above his head, created a chilling sense of utter isolation.

He had become separated from the rest of his group when they had plunged into the forest, rapidly moving ever deeper to escape their pursuers. Hoarse, urgently shouted commands followed by purposeful, stealthy rushes of movement, confirmed that those looking for Tremayne and his party of saboteurs were already into the forest, close behind them.

Never before had he felt so completely alone and afraid. Despite the cold and the chilling downpour, he was drenched in sweat and could feel droplets of perspiration running down his face and mingling with the rain dripping off the end of his nose. His sweat-soaked shirt stuck to his back as he shifted his body, pressing himself even closer to the sodden ground.

For several seconds he lay still, his mouth dry and his heart pounding, as he took stock of the situation, listening and straining to try to identify the number and whereabouts of those now closing in on him and his companions. At odds with the adrenaline rush and the overwhelming tension he was experiencing, was his sudden, detached recall of his instructor's words during battle training on Tresco in the Isles of Scilly more than eighteen months ago: "When you're listening, sir, and all is dead quiet – especially at night – keep your mouth open, sir, and you'll hear more."

The incessant patter of rain on leaves and branches frustratingly muffled the noise of more deliberate and cautious movement, but it was only too obvious that those stalking the saboteurs were closing in – too quickly for comfort. Instinctively, he checked that the short, ugly 'pig-sticker' bayonet was firmly fixed to the muzzle lug of his sub-machine gun. With his left hand, he made sure that the fifty-round magazine was firmly locked home in its brass housing – unique among modern British weapons – located to the rear of the Lanchester's well-ventilated steel barrel. Tremayne twisted his

body round to ensure his webbing ammunition pouches were open and that the remaining full magazines were within quick, easy reach.

As he wriggled, soaking wet, into a comfortable firing position, silently clearing the undergrowth away from his gun muzzle to give himself sufficient arc of fire, a sudden, stifled oath confirmed that at least one of the Germans was only a matter of thirty yards or so away, directly to his front and heading right for him.

Controlling rising panic, his paramount concern at that moment was that he had no plan of action or means of coordinating the immediate defence and continuing escape of his team of six specialists. In a matter of seconds, the strictly timed and tightly organised operation had become fragmented as the group had scattered and raced for the nearby forest, following the successful destruction of the target and the unexpectedly rapid appearance on the scene of German troops.

Continued stealthy, measured rustling of wet undergrowth ahead of him – this time closer – gave immediacy to his need for survival. The leading pursuers were so near that he could hear frequent muffled grunts as they struggled to clear a way through.

An escape plan rapidly forming in his mind – born of desperation – was suddenly cut short by the distinctive metallic clunk of a Thompson gun being cocked about, he guessed, two yards or so to his left. The welcome, familiar sound prompted

an urgently whispered password from Tremayne – ‘Braiden’. The equally quiet, but clear response was instantaneous – ‘Rock’.

With a sense of sheer relief, and checking that his gun’s safety catch was on, Tremayne crawled noiselessly through the sodden vegetation, snaking his way on his elbows towards the speaker, his Lanchester cradled across the crook of each arm.

As he closed in, conscious in the dark of someone’s presence, the calm, measured voice whispered again. “It’s me, sir – Sergeant Kane. Corporal Cotterell and Marine Weaver are a few yards away to the left of us. I’m not sure, sir, where Major West, Mr Quilghini and Able Seaman Harberer are, but I think they may be way over to our left and possibly behind us, sir.”

“Thanks, Sar’nt. Together, the four of us can probably put down enough hot metal and hold up the Germans to enable the others to make it back to the RV. Jerry will try to outflank us, so you take the left flank with Weaver and I’ll look after the right with Corporal Cotterell.” Tremayne paused to bring his Lanchester round to bear on their pursuers’ line of advance, hugging the ground as he silently eased his way into a new firing position.

“Major West’s escape is critical, Sar’nt. We *have* to get him back to SIS in London, as quickly as possible.”

Still maintaining hushed tones, Sergeant Kane responded: “Understood, sir.” He then added, “Each time we fire a short burst, we must immediately roll away, right or left. In the dark,

return fire will be aimed at the point of our muzzle flashes. Our flash eliminators don't really work that well, sir."

"Sounds a bloody good idea – I'm all for self-preservation, Sar'nt!" whispered Tremayne.

"In about twenty seconds, sir, we should each lob two grenades, with a five-second interval between each volley. Corporal Cotterell and Weaver will do this automatically, on my command – it's a well-rehearsed drill with us, sir. Jerry will respond and give away some of his positions." Kane paused to lay two '36 grenades on the ground, immediately to his front.

"The command for the first volley of grenades will be a double hoot from an owl bird call – a training exchange souvenir that the Royals picked up from the Finnish army just before the war. The second volley follows automatically after five seconds, sir."

"Agreed. True to commando tradition, eh Sar'nt? When in doubt – use a grenade! It's now ten seconds to go – and counting," confirmed Tremayne, checking the luminous hands of his watch.

Right on time, Kane's bird call added an authentic, if somewhat eerie and melancholic, sound to the rain-drenched forest, with its hushed air of collective fear and tension.

In near unison, four arms went up and over and, seconds later, four Mills grenades exploded across a front of some forty yards breadth. For a brief moment, the flashes lit up the forest, revealing close to twenty hunched, well-deployed figures moving

slowly and menacingly through the trees, the first of them now advancing less than twenty yards from Tremayne's group. Sickening screaming and an unearthly moaning followed the explosions, as Tremayne and the three marines poured in a sustained burst of automatic fire.

Recovering quickly, the Germans began to return fire with rifles and automatic weapons. With disciplined fire and movement, they aggressively used the ensuing blackness to begin to surge forward once more, closer towards the Franco-British party. Tremayne realised that close-quarter battle with such determined troops would be no pushover.

Then the second volley of grenades exploded amongst them, creating more bloody carnage and screaming as men fell dead or wounded.

This time the German response seemed to be more driven by sheer fury and a desire for revenge. In the depths of the darkened forest, the noise of the exchanges of fire was deafening at such close quarters and the acrid smell of cordite hung in the damp night air. A withering fire wildly swept the area occupied by Tremayne's group. Incoming rounds zipped and tore viciously through the trees, shredding branches and bark, immediately above their heads. Keeping low, Tremayne and the three marines replied coolly and selectively, pinpointing and firing at muzzle flashes, while rapidly shifting position, following each burst from their own weapons.

As they withdrew, beyond Kane's left flank position, Major West and the two French sailors were also desperately putting down a lot of hot metal over the advancing Germans, but were clearly following orders to reach safety as rapidly as possible.

Cries of both pain and shock told Tremayne and the marines that their disciplined, controlled shooting was hitting home and causing further casualties. Despite their mounting losses, the Germans continued to press forward. Laboured breathing and muttered obscenities confirmed that the leading ranks of the enemy were now only a few yards away, struggling to push through the increasingly dense, wet undergrowth. Firing two long, deliberately sprayed bursts from his Lanchester to keep heads down, Tremayne rolled over first to Cotterell and then to Kane, to tell them to throw their remaining two grenades, this time with only two seconds between volleys.

"Jerry is so close that we run the risk of being killed by our own grenades, so hit the deck and pray as soon as you've lobbed the bloody things," whispered Tremayne. Two short bursts of fire from him, separated by a gap of two seconds, would be the signal to throw. Kane rapidly slid away snake-like to the left, to inform Marine Weaver of the plan. Tremayne quickly fitted a new fifty-round magazine to the Lanchester, pushing it home with the palm of his hand, and squeezed off two bursts, each of five rounds.

As before, four grenades were lobbed at the advancing pursuers. Before they recovered sufficiently to resume hitting Tremayne's group with return fire, the second volley exploded amongst them. Tremayne and the three marines, with devastating, concentrated firing, emptied their weapons, hosepipe fashion, in the Germans' direction. Then, abandoning caution and cover, they raced back, deeper into the forest, crashing painfully into wet, clinging branches and plunging through the tangle of undergrowth, changing magazines as they ran.

The Germans reacted quickly, but not fast enough, and this time their return fire was neither controlled nor accurate. The RV, to which Tremayne and the marines now headed, was a small airfield some three hundred yards clear of the forest and behind a long row of poplar trees. Already waiting for them was their transport, a Lockheed Hudson bomber of RAF Coastal Command.

Tremayne stopped, briefly, at the edge of the forest.

"Right, lads – another couple of bursts to delay them, then split arse for the runway. We'll stop again beyond that line of poplar trees and give them a magazine-full if they come into range as they exit the forest."

He paused to check his magazine. "Thank God *they* didn't use grenades back there."

After two sustained bursts to keep the Germans' heads down, the group ran flat out, zigzagging across the open ground. Ahead of them, briefly flashed green lights – the agreed pick-

up recognition signal – indicated that Major West and the smaller group were already at the line of poplars. At that point, the Hudson’s twin Wright ‘Cyclone’ engines burst into life with a spluttering roar. With unsighted, unaimed rounds buzzing around them, they made it as a group to the shelter of the poplars. With their pursuers still not visible in the darkness and effectively out of the range of their sub-machine guns, Tremayne issued fresh orders: “Into the plane, everyone. Lively does it, lads!”

The group dashed through the line of poplar trees to the Hudson, scrambled up the short ladder, in through the open fuselage door and immediately joined Major West and the two French sailors, sitting inside on primitive, makeshift seating in the cramped area behind the pilot and navigator. The instantaneous high noise level of animated conversation reflected both the relief of escape and sense of triumph about what had turned out to be the group’s biggest and toughest sabotage assignment yet.

After congratulating the group on what had been a highly successful raid into Brittany, with the major objective having been completely achieved, Tremayne quickly moved up to the cockpit to talk to the pilot.

“As we take off, we’ll come into range of German rifle fire from our left. It would therefore be –”

The young RAF pilot smiled as he gently interrupted the begrimed, sweat-soaked naval officer. “Thank you, sir. Any

moment now, as we clear the trees, our port beam and dorsal turret twin Brownings will open fire and start chamfering up the bastards. We'll thoroughly lace any area where we see muzzle flashes. You've done your share. We'll take over now, sir. Relax and enjoy the trip."

Just under two hours later, the Hudson touched down at an RAF airstrip in Wiltshire where Major West would be collected by car to take the intelligence gathered, together with his report on the raid, to British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) headquarters in London. After quick but warm farewells to Major West, Tremayne and the rest of the party transferred aircraft and scrambled aboard an RAF Avro Anson transport, whose twin Armstrong-Siddeley 'Cheetah' engines were already revving as they arrived at the airstrip.

Within minutes, the Anson was heading west for the airfield on St Mary's in the Isles of Scilly. How different this raid had been, reflected Tremayne, from the similar, but abortive one, sixteen months earlier on the Ile d'Ouessant. Then, they had set out to investigate and destroy what was believed to be the Germans' main radio transmission – and intercept – station, covering the Western Approaches. The station was understood to be the principal source of radio communication, in the coordination of the deadly U-boat 'wolf packs' and their Luftwaffe counterparts, which were exacting an alarming toll of British and Allied shipping losses off the south of Ireland and the western

entrance to the English Channel. It was also believed to be a key German listening post, in the monitoring of radio traffic for both intelligence and counter-intelligence operations in the area.

On that earlier raid, Major West and a colleague, who were both specialists in radio warfare, had, to their complete surprise, discovered that the set-up, which they had gone to destroy, was a very clever and elaborate ruse. Consisting of realistic but dummy radio aerials, it had been designed to divert the Allies' attention from the location of the real radio warfare station. The genuine article, Resistance intelligence had confirmed, was situated deep in a wooded area of outstanding natural beauty on the mainland, a few miles in from the coast and more difficult to access.

What Tremayne and his saboteurs had managed to achieve on that first, otherwise largely disappointing raid, was to seize, in an act of cool daring, one of the then latest German high-speed E-boats. Keeping camouflage finishes, flotilla insignia and pennant numbers up to date with current German Schnellboot practices, the captured E-boat had proved to be an invaluable addition to the Tresco flotilla's collection of boats for clandestine operations.

With the subsequent help of the forces of the Confrérie Bonaparte, the new and most effective of the French Resistance groups operating in Brittany, Tremayne's Naval Special

Forces flotilla, operating out of Tresco island in the Scillies, had managed to locate – and now destroy – the Germans' real major radio transmission and reception centre.

Formed under two years previously and largely in response to Churchill's exhortation to 'set Europe ablaze', the covert flotilla operating out of HMS Godolphin, Tresco, was one of several such Naval Coastal Forces units based along the southern coast of England. With the appointment of Admiral Louis Mountbatten as Chief of Combined Operations, such 'maverick' flotillas had now begun to acquire the status and standing – even within some of the more staid Admiralty circles – that traditional, conventional thinking had, until recently, rejected out of hand.

Tremayne, as a young lieutenant, had established his reputation as the flotilla's leading boat captain and, subsequently, as the acting flotilla commander. In the latter role, he had been awarded the DSC for his leadership and gallantry in action. More recently, he had been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Commander, RNVR.

Tresco flotilla's clandestine operations centred primarily on Brittany and their principal task was to keep open the sea lanes between the UK and France, in order to insert and extract secret agents – and military intelligence – and to maintain safe escape routes for downed Allied aircrews evading capture.

With its comparative remoteness and sheltered waters, Tresco provided an ideal base from which relatively shallow-draught

boats could operate. Equally, because of its very small population, it was comparatively easy to maintain the degree of secrecy necessary for such covert operations to have any chance of success. Indeed, the rather bland cover adopted for the base was that of a small, typical coastal forces unit whose task was the routine patrolling of the waters around the Isles of Scilly.

The Tresco flotilla consisted of three very authentically disguised 'Breton' fishing boats, with powerful engines and cleverly reworked hulls, capable of over thirty knots. These were regularly repainted and numbered, in accordance with the prevailing fishermen's tastes and changing German regulations, according to the adopted Breton port of origin they purported to come from. To give the new paintwork a weathered and less-than-fresh look, iron filings were mixed in with the paint. To the islanders, these were universally known as 'the mystery boats'.

HMS Godolphin's flotilla also boasted a collection of three British Fairmile 'C' and one Camper & Nicholson motor gunboats, plus the ex-German E-boat. On neighbouring St Mary's island – generally referred to by the ship's company as the islands' 'Metrollops' – was an airfield with a squadron of Hawker Hurricanes. Frequently, these provided much-needed air cover for the Tresco boats travelling to and from Brittany. When needed, longer-range air cover was provided by a squadron of Beaufighters, based at Bolt Head in South Devon.

The principal anchorage for the Tresco flotilla was off Braiden Rock, in New Grimsby Sound, on Tresco's western coast, opposite Hangman's Island, a rocky adjunct of the neighbouring island of Bryher. Its name had served as the operation's password.

Lieutenant Commander Richard Tremayne, who had recently celebrated his twenty-eighth birthday, reported to the station commander, the newly appointed Captain Hugo MacPherson. His other critical relationship – a close and well-established one – was with Commander John Enever, Godolphin's donnish, but highly capable senior intelligence officer.

As yet, Captain MacPherson was largely an unknown quantity, but he had already shown himself to be an austere, unapproachable disciplinarian, with not even the glimmer of a sense of humour. By contrast, John Enever was a sensitive, highly perceptive man, who concentrated far more on managing his relationships with people, than on trying to manage his people. As a consequence, he got far more out of his team than any other naval officer that Tremayne had ever encountered. What is more, he commanded their respect and willing loyalty, as well as their undoubted affection. Something of a scholarly eccentric, Commander Enever was often seen with an unlit pipe firmly clenched between his teeth. Much to everyone's amusement, except Captain MacPherson's, Enever would frequently return salutes with his left hand if his right arm happened to be full of confidential files – which it usually was.

The Avro Anson bringing in Tremayne and his party

approached the Scillies in the clear light of a bright, early December morning. The still somewhat watery sun cast its gentle, diffuse light on the shallow turquoise waters around the islands and the many stretches of near-white sand that were seen to advantage from the air.

Although he had been stationed on Tresco for almost two years, the Scillies had lost none of the beauty and magic that had captivated him from the outset. Tremayne had known both the pain of personal tragedy and the joy of a new love here on the islands – especially on Tresco – and, as a consequence, they continued to touch his emotions, as well as his senses, deeply.

After landing on St Mary's, the party was quickly transferred by naval motor launch to HMS Godolphin, two miles away across a stretch of windswept sea known as The Road, dotted with countless scattered rocks and the uninhabited, twin-humped island of Samson lying off their port beam.

Typical of his thoughtfulness, Commander Enever had organised breakfast for the six, followed by an order to 'get heads down and get some sleep' and then to attend an operational debriefing at a very civilised 14.00 hours.

Tremayne took the opportunity to telephone Emma, his wife, who was serving as a Wren officer in the Naval Section of SIS in London, but who had previously been a member of Enever's Intelligence team at Godolphin. The relief in her voice at his safe return was only too apparent, but quickly the warmth and laughter so typical of their close relationship took over

from anxiety. Tremayne recognised just how deep his love for Emma had become and how central to his life she now was. They had been married a little over a year ago in St Nicholas, the parish church of Tresco.

He returned to his tiny quarters, to be greeted ecstatically by Bertie, his young black labrador, who was regularly looked after, in Tremayne's frequent absences, by the Oylers – the couple who ran the nearby New Inn. Within seconds, an exhausted Tremayne fell into a deep, untroubled sleep.

Just before 14.00 hours, Tremayne and Lieutenant Quilghini, the Breton-speaking French naval officer, joined John Enever in Hut 101, the 'Intelligence Centre', for the operation's debriefing. Hut 101 had more the appearance of a university professor's common room with its stacked-up papers and files and liberally covered notice boards screwed to the walls. Cupboards and other furniture had, at first sight, little in common with each other and clearly had been 'acquired', one way or another, from many different sources. The real unifying thread was one of old, well-worn quality, which reinforced the impression of 'Oxbridge' threadbare gentility.

The news of the complete destruction of the radio warfare station had already been signalled to Enever by SIS in London, who had given him a more or less chapter and verse account of the successful operation, based upon Major West's verbal report and feedback.

“Gentlemen, my warmest congratulations! Yours has been a major success and undoubtedly has set back Jerry in the clandestine war of intelligence. Of course, as I speak, they will no doubt be creating a new transmission and receiving station, but the collection of codes and other confidential material that West brought back has been of enormous value to Naval Intelligence.” He paused, to remove the unlit pipe from between his teeth, and place it in the cut-off, highly polished base of a German 5.9 inch brass ship’s cannon shell case on his desk.

“It has demonstrated to both the Germans – and, probably just as important, to our lords and masters of the Admiralty in Queen Anne’s Mansions – that we can now hit Jerry, almost at will, and come off best!”

At that point, one of his Wren assistants appeared with mugs of tea and set them down on his leather-topped, ancient walnut desk.

“Many thanks, Jane. A lifesaver!” Gesturing to the mugs, Enever added, “Gentlemen, do help yourselves.”

Tremayne and Quilghini gave their accounts of the operation, including the desperate firefight in the forest. Both officers were quick to give praise to the contributions of the men who had fought so effectively, with courage and professionalism, at their sides. Tremayne made special mention of Sergeant Kane’s cool, disciplined leadership of his marines and his consummate competence in stamping his presence

on the firefight in the forest. “Sergeant Kane gained us the fire initiative – and kept it, in extreme circumstances.”

Nodding, he added, “And Pierre, here, along with Able Seaman Harberer, conducted an impressive, tactical withdrawal, with aggressive covering fire, so enabling us to extricate Major West safely with his vital intelligence intact.”

Enever smiled and looked towards the young French sub-lieutenant.

“Well done, Sub. Getting Major West back to England in one piece was a most essential part of this whole operation. Please pass on my appreciation to Able Seaman Harberer and let him know that I am aware of the part he played too.”

Enever paused for a moment, to take a drink of tea.

“Tell me about the demolition of the masts and destruction of the radio station, gentlemen. What happened, exactly?”

Tremayne began by describing the strangely deserted appearance of the station, with relatively few guards on duty – except at obvious points, such as the main entrance to the barbed-wire surrounded compound – and the absence of roaming guard dogs.

“We gained access to the side of the main building. Major West isolated and neutralised the electrics, without triggering the alarm, and Sergeant Kane’s Royals cut out a section of the perimeter wire. That did take some time. The wire was complex and substantial and was obviously intended to deter all but the most serious attempts at infiltration. We posted a

well-concealed Corporal Cotterell, complete with a Thompson gun and grenades, close to the entrance we'd created, to cover our return."

Enever could barely control his enthusiasm and need to ask more questions, but confined himself to asking, "How on earth, Richard, did you get around the place without being spotted?"

Tremayne continued: "The patrolling sentries each had comparatively large distances to cover and, at times, all were out of sight of us. It was, therefore, relatively easy for us to rush up to the main building and gain access through a back door. Pierre, Able Seaman Harberer and I each carried our single shot CO2 pistols and these, for once, proved a real blessing. We disposed of the first guards we came across inside the building silently and even had time to reload our weapons."

Enever cut in, smiling, "So despite the usual criticism of this somewhat bizarre SOE invention as being a useless tactical weapon, it worked well for you on this occasion?"

"Exactly so, sir. Provided that you *can* get close enough, it will put somebody down permanently. Major West, Sergeant Kane and Marine Weaver formed the demolition party and secured charges with timer mechanisms to each of the radio masts, synchronised to detonate in twenty minutes."

"What happened then?"

"Unfortunately, one of the guards, deciding to grab a quick cigarette, suddenly appeared from round the corner of the

stores and maintenance building and, quite literally, walked into Major West's party. He collided with Marine Weaver who despatched him silently, on the spot, with his fighting knife. Major West's group then joined us in the main building. We had to shoot three more guards with the CO2 pistols, and fire SMG bursts over a few heads, before we herded the radio operators, some Abwehr officers and the remaining guards away from the compound and through the main entrance, now obligingly opened for us by Jerry.

"The explosives group placed more synchronised, timed charges to destroy the cipher machines, radio transmitters and receivers and then grabbed as much intelligence information as possible. Major West, who speaks excellent German, clearly knew what he was looking for, found it and grabbed it."

Enever removed his spectacles, breathed exaggeratedly on the lenses, and then polished them with the end of his tie, much to Quilghini's ill-disguised amusement. "Almost a textbook operation, dear boy, apart from the unfortunate fellow going for what he thought was to be a quiet drag!"

"In general, it was sir. Harberer and Weaver collected all the guards' weapons and placed them close to the explosives in the main building, to make sure that they were destroyed. Corporal Cotterell rejoined us and, pretty well bang on time – if you'll forgive the pun, sir – masts and the radio station went up in a rapid succession of explosions. Thanks to Major

West, the base was completely destroyed – and with no casualties on our part.”

“It sounds most impressive and clearly was very professionally executed. My heartiest congratulations to you both, gentlemen. I will call Sergeant Kane in and thank him personally. Tell me, how did you then get away?”

“Sergeant Kane ordered all the prisoners to turn around, so they were not facing us, and then made them lie down – encouraging them with a couple of close overhead bursts from his Thompson to speed up compliance. To keep them down and terrified, we opened up with sustained bursts immediately over their heads – and I think that many believed a mass execution was under way. We then hightailed it, as fast as we could, into the surrounding forest, about a hundred yards distant. We assume, sir, that it was a group of Germans on routine patrol nearby who obviously reacted to the explosions and came after us so quickly.”

“Richard, Pierre, thank you both. It’s quite a story – and well done gentlemen.”

After the debriefing, Enever then confirmed the emerging changing role of Godolphin, as the need arose to gather more intelligence, aimed at preparing for what was now the inevitable invasion of France and the opening of the anticipated ‘second front’.

“The British and Americans are under enormous political pressure from the Russians to open a second front, to support

the recent successes of the Red Army who have begun to turn the tide and roll the Germans westwards. Morally and politically, as well as militarily, we need to take some of the load off their shoulders – and add to Jerry’s burden,” added Enever.

“The new Confrérie Bonaparte would appear to be somewhat more secure than our previous contacts in the Resistance and, as far as we can tell, this group has not been infiltrated by either the Germans or their local stooges. So, gentlemen, it seems that we have a reliable source of up-to-date intelligence, in Brittany and as far east as Cherbourg and the Cotentin Peninsula.”

Retrieving his as yet unlit pipe from the ashtray – which came courtesy of the old German Imperial High Seas Fleet – Enever continued, “Our role remains that of inserting and extracting agents along the Brittany coast, and ensuring that the Confrérie is supplied with weapons, ammunition and explosives to enable them to raise their game, as and whenever.”

Getting up from his ancient ‘captain’s’ swivel chair, Enever walked over to the wall behind him and released the rolled-up map of Brittany and western Normandy.

With a long wooden pointer in his hand, he continued, “What we are now also charged with, gentlemen, is the task of finding out exactly what Jerry’s coastal defence systems are along these areas here –” as his ‘magic wand’, as he termed it, traced patterns around the north-west French coast.

“We need to know, especially, what underwater obstacles

are in place, where the locations and likely fields of fire of weapons emplacements are, and the extent of barbed wire, minefields and other hazards on the beaches themselves. In just over two weeks' time, gentlemen, it will be 1944 and if things go according to plan, my guess is that the invasion of France will take place some time next summer. That, by the way, is *not* for discussion outside this office."

As Enever paused briefly to finish drinking his tea, Tremayne asked, "Do we have access to COPPs teams to help us with this job, sir?" Quilghini's puzzled expression and quizzical, raised eyebrows, provided the cues for Enever to step in and clarify.

"What Richard is talking about, Pierre, are the Combined Operations Pilotage Parties. These guys are trained swimmer-canoeists, who wear waterproof suits, swim fins or rope-soled boots and buoyancy aids – but no oxygen breathing apparatus. They are dropped, or inserted, near to an enemy coast by a variety of means and then swim close inshore to observe, reconnoitre and bring back intelligence of the layout and location of enemy defences – and anything else that seems relevant to the preparation of a seaborne assault. Normally, they don't operate underwater, at least not for very long," he added with a wry grin.

"Back to your question, dear boy. We will be having attached to us, pretty soon, a couple of 'COPPists', courtesy of the Royal Marines, but the plan is for some of our people to be trained so that we fully understand the COPP role and know how best to give it support, whenever push comes to shove, in the invasion."

The kindly grey eyes twinkled behind the half-moon spectacles. “We shall shortly be calling for volunteers, Richard!”

“I already have two webbed feet, sir. If I grow flippers as well, Emma and I will be in danger of producing tadpoles,” replied Tremayne.

Enever returned, laughing, to his chair, before continuing: “Though, undoubtedly, we shall be involved in more ‘thud and blunder’ across the Channel, one of our new tasks is to train up the members of the new Confrérie into becoming a highly effective guerrilla force who can harass the Germans and carry out diversionary attacks, once the invasion of France takes place. Before that, they will carry out well-planned acts of sabotage, away from the coast to divert German forces’ attention from the proposed landing areas – wherever they are to be.”

After handling questions from Tremayne and Quilghini, Enever called the debriefing to a close, but asked Tremayne to stay for a moment.

“Richard, a brief word, please.” Enever retrieved his pipe and studied it closely for a moment, closing the door after Quilghini had left. “Grab a pew, Richard, we’re off parade now. Other than very briefly, I believe, you have not properly met Captain MacPherson yet?” Tremayne took a seat to face Enever, detecting a thinly veiled note of warning in his voice.

“No, not really, John, although that brief contact does rather confirm the reputation that he brings with him to Godolphin.”

Enever smiled. “I know what you mean. We – and you, especially, Richard – have major, complex challenges facing us and it is vital that we meet those with the utmost professionalism. Such tasks, however, as we both well know, demand levels of initiative, adaptability and versatility that are way beyond conventional wisdom and quite outside naval standard operating procedures. From what I have already learned about our new commanding officer, he is a stickler for rules, regulations and keeping to the book. AFOs are his bible.”

“And he’s something of a zealot?” asked Tremayne with a grin.

“Absolutely, dear boy. Context and nuance don’t exist for him. Everything is either ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, ‘certain’ and ‘simple’. He has what he *knows* is the solution, before we’ve even decided exactly what the problem is. To make matters worse, the most excruciating detail and minutiae just don’t escape his personal radar screen.”

Enever paused and looked straight at Tremayne. “He *is* our skipper and his four gold rings must have our respect. But the demands of operational effectiveness and the intended outcomes of our role must remain the paramount arbiter of our, at times, very unconventional methods and activities. On that score, we have the wholehearted support of Rear Admiral Hembury. Thank God he too – as you well know – is a maverick operator. Tactically – and strategically – Admiral Hembury

is our boss and mentor. If anything, Captain MacPherson is likely to be our *tormentor!*”

Enever placed his pipe back in the brass ashtray. “I will do all that I can to act as a buffer between you, your boat crews and Captain MacPherson’s restrictive red tape, to enable you to continue the vital work that you and your men have done so impressively over the last eighteen months or so.”

“Thank you, John. I appreciate that. Stifling bureaucracy and becoming a hostage to set procedures simply run counter to the spirit, intent – and whole ethos – of special operations.”

Tremayne was glad to see that he had Enever’s undivided attention.

“Working strictly according to the book would tie our hands to the point where our operational effectiveness would be severely limited. In any case, John, the definitive book, detailing Special Forces’ activities in *absolute* terms, hasn’t been written yet – and, I believe, never will be. While, inevitably, we *do* depend for success upon disciplined thinking and sound procedures – arrived at by direct experience – these are the bedrock, *not* the sole determinant, of our methods and actions.”

Enever paused, reflectively, for a moment before responding to Tremayne.

“I agree, Richard. As I see it, we are likely to be involved in constant battles between what Captain MacPherson sees as regulatory ‘efficiency’ and what we consider to be *effective*

practice and the achievement of necessary results. Make no mistake, he *is* intelligent – but in the channelled, excluding way of someone who has unquestioning self-belief and who believes in the divine right of rank and position. If ever there were an example of hubris out of control, then he is it.

“His approach appears to be driven by some narcissistic illusion of perfection – ‘do it my way and you’ll get it right’. The more he is convinced that he *is* right, the more he sees others as being wrong. Sad to say, he appears to gain much personal triumph from spotting flaws in others’ efforts and rarely, if ever, does he give praise. Much of the time, he sees himself as the only one in step around here!”

Enever pointed with his pipe to three files, each marked ‘Top Secret’, that were lying on his desk and looked intently at Tremayne. “Critical intelligence such as that contained in these files is landing on my desk virtually every day now, Richard.

“We have a vital job to do and I’m bloody determined that we *will* do it – and do it well. Too many people – in France, as well as here – are depending upon us. Planning the intended invasion of France is already at an advanced stage and we will have a crucial part to play in both the preliminaries and the execution. Far too much, in both the immediate future *and* in the longer term, depends upon what our efforts – and those of others like us – achieve over the next twelve months. That – and *essentially* that – Richard, is our mandate.”