

Chapter 1

England was sweltering in a late summer heatwave and with temperatures up in the eighties many of the local workforce were spending their lunch break out in the park either sunbathing, or taking a leisurely stroll. The Serpentine looked cool and inviting as the noon day sun glinted on its surface and a small group of ducks slowly cruised around in the distance. The city gent, with bowler hat and pin-striped suit, looked a little overdressed for such a hot day as he, deep in conversation with another man, paused at the water's edge to feed the ducks. His companion, a tall distinguished gentleman with steel grey hair, looked a little less incongruous on such a hot day as he was dressed in an open necked short sleeved shirt and light grey trousers.

"Well Sir James, thank you for coming at such short notice," the city gent addressed his companion, "I do of course realise that this must be terribly inconvenient for you and I really appreciate you giving up your valuable time to talk to me." He paused, gave a little cough as if to clear his throat before continuing. "It's a rather ticklish situation I find myself in and I don't quite know where to begin. Of course the Government cannot be seen to be taking any active part in this and that is why I thought that someone of your standing may be able to help us in this matter." He threw the last piece of bread to the greedy ducks, emptied the bag of any crumbs then carefully folded it before placing it in his pocket. "Shall we walk Sir James?"

"If you wish to Mr Gilpin."

"Then after you Sir James."

Sir James nodded his acknowledgement and set off at a leisurely pace taking the path that circumnavigated the Serpentine in a clockwise direction. As they strolled gently along the bank of the Serpentine Gilpin looking flushed with the heat, removed his bowler hat and taking out a freshly ironed handkerchief proceeded to wipe the beads of sweat from his forehead.

"Phew, this temperature, I'm pleased we have air conditioning in the office otherwise it would certainly be unbearable. I assume your office is air conditioned Sir James?" He wiped the handkerchief around the headband inside the hat and then carefully repositioned it back on his head.

"Oh yes it certainly is Mr Gilpin, but I sense we are not here to discuss the ramifications of air conditioning, or to take an afternoon stroll in the park are we Mr Gilpin?" If Gilpin took exception to the mild admonishment he certainly didn't show it.

"Well the situation is Sir James that the PM is somewhat concerned about the escalation of losses that seem to be occurring in Ulster. The enemy seems to be constantly one jump ahead; it is as if they know our plans way before we do." He paused and cast a glance toward Sir James to reassure himself that what he had just said about the concern of the Prime Minister had not gone unnoticed, and then he continued. "There have been suggestions that there may be a mole operating within our Intelligence Service, but Ashford and Lisburn have both drawn a blank. Now you've met the Colonel at Ashford; huh, his name escapes me for the present..."

"Ash," interjected Sir James, "Colonel Ash."

"Ah yes that's the man Ash. Now Ash is adamant that his right hand man O'Rourke has had some of his best operatives working round the clock on this one and up until now they have been unable to find the leak." Again Gilpin looked toward Sir James for some reaction.

"Well Gilpin go on."

"Of course Sir James. Now where was I?"

"You were saying O'Rourke couldn't find..."

"Ah yes of course," he interrupted Sir James. "As I was saying, he couldn't find the leak and now O'Rourke is suggesting that the leak may be within the RUC. In fact he has suggested that information is being leaked from Special Branch, but of course Home Office is strongly denying such a thing and who could blame them? But O'Rourke is adamant that it is in their back yard so to speak. Of course, I've already spoken to Brigadier Townsend, incidentally have you ever met him?"

"Yes on one occasion, seemed a very capable man to me."

"Yes nice fellow. Anyway Townsend, he's now overall in charge of Military Intelligence in Ulster and Ash answers to him, has now gone to his Chief of Staff stating that the leak must be

either MI5 or Special Branch. He is strongly denying that the problem is at Ashford or Lisburn and the whole thing has now become a major embarrassment for the Government. What's more I'm told that Britain is now the laughing stock of the IRA." He glanced again at Sir James. "It does rather seem that the enemy have managed to penetrate our Intelligence network or else they are better at the game than we are! Neither way is acceptable Sir James and the problem now is if, and it is a big if, we have a leak then we need to find it urgently."

"So Mr Gilpin, why come to me?"

"Well, it's like this Sir James; whoever we use to trace this leak must not be traced back to the Government." Sir James raised one eyebrow questioning what Gilpin had just said.

"And why is that Mr Gilpin?"

"With respect Sir James, I would have thought that was obvious."

"No, not at all so please elucidate."

"Well Sir James, should anything go wrong..."

"Is it likely to?" Sir James interrupted Gilpin.

"Err no, but if it should..." Gilpin left the sentence unfinished.

Gilpin you are squirming. So to cover your backside and to make life easy you want to enlist my help to pull the red hot chestnuts out of the fire.

"So, let me get this straight Mr Gilpin, you have been asked, no instructed by Downing Street, to speak to me about a potential leak or mole within the Intelligence Service, why?"

"As I said Sir James, the PM is gravely concerned and has decided to handle this matter personally with strict instructions that whoever undertakes the task to trap this... err...mole should not be seen to be employed by Her Majesty's Government."

"But you haven't told me why my department should be involved; after all we have enough of our own problems, what with budgetary controls being talked about, cut-backs in expenditure and less funding being made available so why should the department take on other's work for which they are being duly paid to do?"

"Ah, a good point Sir James. All I can say is that your department may have the right kind of approach. In fact it is quite conceivable that you may personally know of someone who may consider undertaking such a task; of course should anything go wrong..." Once again Gilpin left the sentence unfinished.

"So are you suggesting that it's all right for me to be embarrassed as long as the PM's department is in the clear?"

"No, not at all. All I am saying is that perhaps you know of someone who could undertake such a project and is very, very discreet about it. After all neither of us wants to be embarrassed. Therefore whoever you or should I say we use cannot be seen to be employed by the Government. The fact of the matter is the Government cannot be seen to be linked with an investigation that is carried out through the back door."

I bet they can't and yet they expect me to carry out an investigation without so much as by your leave. I should coco!

"Supposing there is someone, then how do they get recompensed?" Gilpin didn't answer.

Huh, I bet you never considered that and I'm damned if I am financing it out of my budget.

They walked on in silence for a short distance.

"I had hoped you would see it as part of your brief Sir James and subsequently part of your funding."

"What! You are of course joking..."

"Hmm. In that case I suppose we could of course make a sum available..."

"I should hope you could Mr Gilpin," was the curt response from Sir James. "After all if we are to supply the manpower and run the risks to boot, then the very least the Government could do is to fund it."

"If we were to fund such a project Sir James, then it would be in the nature of a one-off payment into a non-traceable offshore bank account. Would you find that an acceptable compromise?"

“That sounds fine in principle, but it may pose certain problems. How about the Government making an extraordinary non-recurring payment into the department’s overseas account, now if that could be done then that would be better?”

“It is possible.”

“In that case I will give the project my undivided attention.”

“Thank you Sir James, after all there may be someone suitable who wouldn’t be linked back to the Government. May be someone who has had experience of this sort of work and has retired, or there may be someone who is ex-forces who could be trusted. I’ll wait to hear from you.” Sir James and Mr Gilpin shook hands and went their separate ways.

Later that afternoon Sir James went downstairs to the basement where they stored the archived files. He spoke briefly to the young lady in the Office and a few moments later she stepped out of the lift on the eighth floor and walked the short distance to Christine Delahey’s office. Christine Delahey had been PA to Sir James Johnstone, the head of the ‘circus’, for a number of years and had enjoyed every last minute of the job. There was a light tap on her door.

“Come in.” The door opened and a young twenty year old bounced into her room.

“Hi, I’ve been sent up to get some papers for Sir James.” Christine Delahey looked questioningly at the twenty year old.

“Sir James sent you up you said?”

“Yes, for these papers or documents or something.” She handed Christine the note that Sir James had scribbled out.

Strange, why send her up here with a note when he could have phoned up for them. Ah well not to worry.

She opened the folded sheet and looked at what he had scribbled shrugged her shoulders and opened one of the grey filing cabinets and started to thumb her way through the drawer packed full of buff manila files.

“Are you sure this is the correct file name?” she asked the twenty year old.

“Yeah, as far as I know.” She shrugged her shoulders, “he didn’t say much, just came in the office and asked for some paper and scribbled down what you have there, why do you ask?”

“Oh...no reason, just that they are not where he said they were. I wondered if he had got the project number wrong that’s all. I’m sorry, but this could take me a little while to sort out so why don’t you go and grab yourself a coffee from the canteen along the corridor.” She flashed a smile at the young lady.

“Are you sure that’ll be all right, I mean up here on the executive floor and all that, will they let me in?” Christine gave a little chuckle.

“Of course it’s all right, and yes, they will let you in. We’re no different up here you know. Go on go get yourself a coffee. Tell them I sent you and to book it to Sir James.”

“Well if you’re sure and thank you...err...may I call you Christine?”

“Of course you can. Now go. I’ll come and find you when I’ve found the files.” The twenty year old didn’t need a second invitation; she was out through the door and heading off down the corridor to the executive’s coffee lounge.

Now where on earth are these files?

Christine made her way through to the inner sanctum, as she called it, the office belonging to her boss and head of the ‘circus’ Sir James Johnstone. The first place she looked was on his desk but to no avail, then she moved to his cupboard and continued to hunt for the elusive documentation.

Sir James looked up in the archived records the reference number for a file headed *Operation Orpheus*. Armed with the number written on a piece of scrap paper Sir James walked unhurriedly along the never-ending rows of metal shelving. Each row held box files from floor to ceiling, each one having its own special reference number. He looked at the piece of paper in his hand that he had written the number on.

It must be around here somewhere. Ah there it is.

Reaching up he lifted down a dusty box file and carefully he blew off the excess dust from the top and opened it. Inside was a manila folder on the front of which was stamped TOP SECRET and the project name *Operation Orpheus*. Sir James removed the folder and thumbed through the pages to make sure it was all intact. Having satisfied himself everything he needed was there he carefully replaced the box file back on the shelf and returned to the Archive Office. Picking up the phone he dialled his office number and waited. He didn't have to wait too long before a female's voice answered.

"Christine Delahey speaking."

"Ah, Christine. Any luck with those papers?"

"Sorry Sir James, I haven't come across them yet. I'm blown if I know where to look next."

"Well leave it then. I'll sort it out later; I think I know where I can lay my hands on them," he said knowing full well he had them all the time. He had concealed the documents inside his newspaper that he had carried with him from his office down to the basement. He had done this on purpose in order to get some time alone in the Archive section whilst the young clerk was waiting for Christine to find the non-existent papers. Now all he needed to do was to photocopy some of the information held in the manila file that he had taken out of the box file, and that would only take a couple of minutes. He would be through in no time at all, photocopies done, papers back in the manila folder, the folder replaced in the box file and the box file back on the rack where it came from. All would be as it was by the time the young clerk returned and he would be back in his office.

Half an hour later Sir James was back in his office reading up on the background of a field operative whose codename was Ferryman.

This man had been good, bloody good.

This was quite true until something had gone wrong. Sir James continued to read through the information before him and was surprised to read that Ferryman had taken early retirement.

Strange, why did he take early retirement, usually if someone takes early retirement their record gives the reason but there's no reason given?

To say he was a little puzzled by the omission was an understatement so he carefully re-read the information searching for clues, any clues that would indicate what had really happened. It was whilst he was reading through the document for the second time he noticed a comment written in the margin. With the handwriting being so small and faded it was no wonder that he had missed it initially, but now with eyes straining he could just about make out an odd word or two. The names Dr Ferris, Woolwich and Richard James were just about discernible along with the word scapegoat.

How did this Dr Ferris fit in with Richard James and where was he from? Could it be that he was a scapegoat or was the note referring to Richard James being made a scapegoat? Was the person named Dr Ferris a medical practitioner or not and the name Woolwich, did this refer to the Arsenal or to the military hospital at Woolwich?

Sir James leaned back in his chair and stared up at the ceiling.

If only I could get some answers to these questions then that would shed some light on why such a good operator had retired early.

"I wonder," he said out loud. He picked up his phone and dialled a number and waited. There was a click as the phone at the other end was lifted and a man with an Irish accent answered.

"Irish Desk."

"James here. Come up to my office please."

"Certainly Sir James."

A minute or two later his white phone buzzed and the light against Christine's name flashed.

"Yes Christine."

"Jimmy from the Irish Desk is here to see you Sir James."

"Good send him in." There was a gentle tap on his door. "Come in," he called as he casually placed a copy of The Times newspaper over the documents he'd just been reading.

"You wanted to see me Sir James."

“Yes Jimmy come in and grab one of those chairs over by the table and bring it over here.” Sir James said indicating the two chairs placed either side of a small occasional table on the far side of his office. “You were in Lisburn back in the eighties weren’t you Jimmy?”

“Yes Sir.”

“Did you ever meet a guy called James, Richard James?”

“Richard James” Jimmy repeated the name “Yes of course Sir James, I remember Richard. I was his controller for a while.”

“So what do you know about Mr James?”

“Nice bloke Sir, but he was retired early through ill health.”

“Oh, that’s strange...”

“What’s strange Sir James?”

“That you say he retired early through ill health.”

“Well he did, and there was nobody more surprised than me when we were told about it.”

“Oh I’m sure that what you say is totally true, but there is no mention of his early retirement through ill health anywhere in his file.”

“Are you sure Sir James?”

“Oh I’m sure all right.”

“Is it possible that you may have overlooked it, or a page of his file has been misplaced?”

“I suppose I could have overlooked it and it’s always a possibility that a page may have been misplaced, but I don’t think so.”

“That’s odd. I know that minor things sometimes go unrecorded, but Richard was a top class operator and I would certainly have expected some mention of it in his records.”

“Well, I’ve been through his file a number of times and as far as I can make out there is no mention of his being ill, unless of course it’s as you say, a document or page is missing.”

So the plot thickens!

“What was wrong with him?” Sir James asked.

“Some sort of breakdown I believe, but you say it’s not recorded on his file Sir James?”

Something like that should have been recorded.

“Not that I recollect though I could be mistaken. A breakdown you say?”

There’s something not quite right about this.

“Yes Sir James, well that’s what we were told.”

“Tell me about this Richard James.”

“What do you want to know Sir James?”

“Well was he reliable, was he a good field man, that type of thing?”

“Well, he was one of the best, reliable and a stickler for detail, very thorough in everything he did. In the main he was a safe operator...”

“How do you mean ‘a safe operator’?” enquired Sir James.

“He didn’t take chances, he minimised the risks and maximised the gains. Whenever he took a risk he would always cater for it and any fall out from it. His risks were always calculated risks never a gamble. He played by the rules and where his team members were concerned safety was paramount. Then it happened...”

“What happened?” asked Sir James

“Well suddenly out of the blue the department was told that Richard had been invalided out, declared medically unfit. In fact when I was told that he’d had a breakdown, you could have knocked me over with a feather.”

“Why?”

“Because in my mind he was the last person ever to have a breakdown, he was an ex-Para and had gone through the SAS training. Basically, he was just so mentally together and physically fit I didn’t believe it, I couldn’t believe it. In fact when Sean O’Donald, a mate of his in the UDR bought it, he spent a lot of time over in Lisburn looking after Jean, Sean’s wife. Also, he was the one who got Austen out. On top of all that he then had the raid on ‘slab’ Riley’s place dumped at his feet, and that went pear shaped big time. What with one of the team getting killed and one badly shot, he

was lucky to get out of that unscathed. Then to cap it all, after they'd got clear, both he and Wyman became the target of the Provos whilst holed up in a so called safe house. The safe house was attacked and their car was blown up outside. All of this happened over a twenty-four hour period and boy was he angry."

"Angry hmm. Would you say he was pushed to his limit?"

"No way Sir James. Sure he was angry all right, he felt let down by us, but he was certainly not teetering on the edge and that's why I was surprised when they said he'd had a breakdown." Sir James mulled over what Jimmy had just said.

So, here is a man the pinnacle of fitness, mentally alert and a hardened operator who suddenly decides to up and leave the Service and yet according to 'Official' sources he had had a breakdown, now if that was the case then why wasn't it logged as such? It doesn't make sense, unless somebody had been careless and left the faintly scribbled note on the file in error, in which case the word 'scapegoat' referred to Richard James.

"That's very interesting, very interesting indeed. What do you reckon Jimmy? Do you think he was setup?" Jimmy looked puzzled.

Do you know something about this that we don't Sir James?

He took his time and thought carefully about his answer and decided that there was nothing to gain by lying.

"Yes, I'm convinced he was. I'm convinced someone somewhere high up wanted him out of the way." Sir James leaned back in his chair and stared thoughtfully at Jimmy through his half closed eyes.

"Why do you think that Jimmy?"

"May be he knew too much Sir." Sir James, remembering what he had seen scribbled in the margin of the file, took a moment or two to ponder.

"You know you may well have a point there Jimmy and what is more you could well be closer to the truth than you think. Thank you Jimmy that will be all."

"Thank you Sir James." Jimmy stood up and put the chair back where it belonged and was already on his way out when Sir James stopped him in his tracks with a strange request.

"Jimmy, I would prefer you not to mention anything about this meeting to anyone outside of this office. In fact I will go one stage further and say that this meeting never ever happened. I'm sure you understand." Sir James tapped his temple, smiled and gave a knowing wink.

"Of course Sir James," Jimmy smiled briefly. "What meeting?" he asked as he turned to go out the door. Sir James waited a few minutes, just long enough to allow Jimmy to get out of earshot before he picked up his telephone and called Mr Gilpin at the Ministry.

"Ah Gilpin, Sir James here. About our earlier discussion, I think I may have got a possible candidate."