

## Chapter 1

You could have been forgiven for thinking that the farm was derelict. The outbuildings alone gave the impression of having been abandoned long ago. The roof of one of the outbuildings had collapsed completely reinforcing the image of dereliction. Add to this the lack of livestock and the illusion was complete. Closer inspection would have revealed otherwise.

Inside the large barn, careful construction work had been carried out. The exterior had been completely untouched, unless of course you saw the aerial array carefully camouflaged within a small copse nearby. In fact the aerial array was a clue to the real identity of the barn and what it housed. It wasn't a barn at all, but it was one of the most advanced electronic centres outside of GCHQ!

The front door of the farmhouse opened spilling light onto the shingle drive. One by one five men emerged and stood chatting in the pool of yellow light. It was evident by the white powdery deposit on the leaves of the bushes that the night had seen a heavy frost. Dawn was fast approaching and fingers of light, from the east, clawed their way across the dark sky. Birds in the trees started to chirp and in the distance the unmistakable throb of a helicopter's engine could be heard. One of the men looked towards the north, nodded.

'Sounds like your transport's approaching Sir.'

'Yes. I think you maybe right J'. He also glanced northwards, before turning to address the other three men. 'Well gentlemen have a safe journey all of you, and Richard, welcome to the Circus. Whatever you do, don't forget what I said about keeping in touch with Control. At least once a week without fail. More if possible.'

'Colonel.' A Sergeant emerged from inside the house. 'The chopper is en route for you.'

'Thank you Sergeant I'll be...' the rest of his sentence was drowned out by the sudden deafening noise of a Lynx helicopter as it circled overhead then quickly dropped in below the roof line. The Colonel turned, raised his hand. 'Gentleman, 'till the next time.' He walked back into the house followed by Major O'Rourke.

'Richard good luck.' Sean O'Donald, a man over six feet tall, extended a large hand towards his friend. 'Don't forget now, like the old man said, keep in touch. Should you ever need anything, well you know what's what. Just keep in touch that's all.' He turned his attention to the other guy, a slightly built individual, a quietly spoken Irishman. 'Eamonn keep him out of trouble and I'll see you around.'

'See you S...' the roar of the helicopter engine drowned Eamonn's words as it suddenly appeared above the rooftop. It banked to the right and climbed rapidly away heading Northeast. The three men watched in silence until it became a mere spec in the cold light of dawn.

Sean had already started the engine of his car as Eamonn and I made our way over to the blue Volvo parked nearby. Within minutes we had gone our separate ways and the illusion of what appeared to be a deserted and run-down farm was once again complete. Yes you could be forgiven for thinking it was just another derelict farm!

## Chapter 2

It seemed only yesterday since that night in the Safe House in Ulster, but in fact it was several months ago. Since then I had spent many weeks in training. I attended centres in Gosport, Hereford, Ashford, Borough High Street and even one in Suffolk. The first hurdle was over. I along with about thirty to forty others had passed the selection process. Having got to this point we were all invited to change our Christian names to one of our choice, but because commissioned ranks were the exception, I was fortunately able to retain 'Richard'. Our training was now to start in earnest.

'This weekend is yours to enjoy, but remember that on Monday you will be met at the station at 20:00 hours. You will be transported by coach to what will become your new home for the next few weeks and whilst at your new home you will be taught many new skills. Some of you will pass but others will fall by the wayside. As you pass each stage you will move on to the next location. As we operate on a "need-to-know" policy you will never ever be told the exact location. As of now you will not communicate with any member of your family, friends, wives or lovers anything that you hear, see or learn. Good luck to you all and enjoy.'

I left the selection on a high with those immortal words 'Good luck' ringing in my ears. My mood was buoyant as I made my way home to Kent.

The first training stint was at Fort Monkton near Gosport. We were met at the mainline railway station by coach and travelled through the dark to a camp situated in the middle of nowhere. Once we had all dumped our gear in the accommodation block we were given a brief guided tour around our new home. Armed MoD police patrolled the area backed-up with passive infrared and closed circuit television cameras. Everywhere was geared to security and at no point was the camp visible from the road.

Tuesday morning saw our group lined up in front of a number of different cars whilst a small group of instructors stood nearby. Each instructor called out three individuals by name and with their trainees walked over to one of the vehicles. Eventually it was me and two other guys named Jason and Ed. We were joined by our instructor with a Saab 'Right lads my name's Mick and my job is to teach you how to drive our way. I am your instructor in advanced driving. From time to time you will be taught by other instructors, that way we will all have a chance to view your driving technique. Whilst here you will be taught the skill of driving at high speed but safely. You will all be tested and should you fail the test or I deem you unsafe to take it then I'm afraid you are of little use to us. Technique is important at all times, concentrate on that for now. Although we call the course "advanced driving" it isn't quite the same as Joe public learns for his or her advanced driving test. Any questions?' Mick looked around at the three of us and we all shook our heads. 'Good, then lets get started.'

He started the engine and we moved off down the camp road heading towards the main gate. At the gate Mick checked for traffic in both directions and pulled out onto the road. He gently accelerated away until we settled down to a gentle cruising speed of about fifty.

'Now remember, the best position for your hands should be the ten to two position. As you turn the wheel always feed it through from one hand to the next by pushing with one and pulling with the other.' As we cruised along at a steady fifty I thought to myself this is basic stuff. We slowed to forty as we came up behind a heavy truck, which had entered into a double bend with us behind it. As we entered the bend I watched Mick to see if he followed his own doctrine and kept his hands at ten to two and fed the wheel through. We went into the left hander and the Saab started to drift off to the right. We were now heading round the bend on the wrong side of the road!

'Of course you can always come out and take a good look ahead – but make sure you've left yourself enough room to dive back in should something be coming.' Sure enough, right at that moment a red sports car was heading towards us a great speed, Mick moved the wheel quickly and dabbed the brake tucking us back in again behind the truck. We all grabbed hold of something and waited for the collision that never was. As the sports car drew alongside us, Mick was already checking his rear-view mirror and before it had fully passed us he swung the Saab out into the right hand lane, changed down into second and with the engine revs increasing we could see the road straightening out. Coming towards us at a reasonable closing speed was a stream of traffic. The obvious option was to brake and tuck back in behind the truck but that was not Mick's choice. Instead he floored the accelerator and with full power of the engine the Saab surged forward taking the needle of the rev counter into the red section.

Mick shouted over the roar of the engine. 'Always take it to maximum revs when overtaking otherwise you're not fast enough, also make certain by taking a really good look before you commit to a move, if you're uncertain, don't!' I was convinced we were going to hit head-on the lead vehicle of the fast approaching stream of traffic, but as we continued to accelerate towards them. Mick changed up into

third. The car surged forward again, at the very last second we slipped in front of the truck and effortlessly drew away as our speed neared ninety-five. I expelled the breath I had sub-consciously been holding onto through my pursed lips. "Phew! That was too close for comfort."

Mick carried on talking to us as if a near miss such as that was common to everyday life. 'Notice how I only briefly touch the gear stick. That enables me to keep both hands on the wheel for the maximum time. Never take your hand from the wheel until the very second you are going to change gear. Read the road ahead, as far ahead as you can see. Use markers to guide you, the hedgerows, telegraph poles and the trees to give you a clue as to which direction the road is going in next. Don't brake too soon or you waste power. Power is speed – wasted speed is time. Use your brakes to reduce speed not your gears – once your speed is right for the bend, change down, then on the apex, power out.'

We continued with the lesson travelling at high speed through the countryside, all the time Mick talking us through the manoeuvres. Each manoeuvre was as second nature to him. We entered the town and slowed our pace, but Mick still kept up his commentary. He showed us how to chop in and out of traffic overtaking sometimes on the inside, but always aware of where the dangers were and of the pedestrians. After travelling through the town we were again out on the open road with our speed now up above a hundred. Not once did Mick let up on his monologue as we hurtled into chicanes, right then left-hand bends, up hills and passed cars, trucks and coaches.

After a few minutes of driving at breakneck speed, Mick swung off the road and into the training area of our camp. We continued along a tarmac road then off onto a dirt track through the woods, 'Of course there is always the situation where the car goes into a skid. This can happen for a variety of reasons, whether by accident or by design. Sometimes you may wish to use a skid to your advantage, for instance the handbrake turn. Brace yourselves and I'll demonstrate.' Without further warning Mick slammed the palm of his hand flat on the centre of the bottom of the wheel and spun it hard on full lock. The front dipped down dramatically, the tyres screeched, and the tail end swung violently out. My natural instinct was to brace myself, Jason was slung against my side and Ed held on for dear life, as Mick pulled on the handbrake. We were now travelling backwards with tyres screaming, Mick commentating as we continued 'We have now turned completely in the opposite direction. The back has travelled through 180 degrees. I'm going into first gear, foot hard down on the throttle...handbrake released now...clutch released now...As the wheelspin stops and the wheels bite, you can feel the car accelerating. Don't worry about all the blue smoke. The front wheel drive is doing its job and is now pulling forward in a straight line.'

'That was a handbrake turn where you use the skid to your advantage. It has enabled me to travel at fifty miles an hour in one direction and in less than ten seconds I have changed direction completely and we are now travelling at fifty miles an hour in the opposite direction. Very useful manoeuvre, especially if you're being chased! Now lads it's your turn!'

We continued being evaluated, instructed, pushed and coerced for two weeks. Each day we learnt something new until at the end of the two weeks, hard and fast driving was second nature to us. At the end of two weeks, secure in the knowledge that we were now competent drivers, we were able to execute all the manoeuvres both safely and at speed.

The following morning we were directed to a small group of buildings on the other side of the camp. Two guys met us outside the entrance to one of the buildings, a tall wiry looking individual called James and a short stocky person who introduced himself as Will. Both men were from the Royal Observer Corps. Will, the Sergeant, unlocked the main door and ushered the group in. Inside the building was a photographer's dream come true. There were video cameras of all shapes and sizes, tiny specialist cameras, the old style 'two and a quarter by two and a quarter' and the modern 35mm Single Lens Reflex cameras (SLR). Within the darkrooms there was everything needed to process any type of films plus some equipment that I didn't recognise!

'Ok everyone, let me have your attention.' Gradually the talking subsided and the group fell silent. 'Thank you. Now, your next couple of weeks will be spent on learning all about photography, like everything else you have and will learn in the future, this will become second nature to you. In your operations it will, at times, be necessary to take photographs. Each time will be different. There will be a different set of circumstances and different environments that you will work in. However, regardless of where you are, or the circumstances, one thing will never alter and that is time. You can always guarantee that the time available is limited. To carry out a detailed observation on somebody, or place takes time. That is why we use photography. A good photographer can capture the merest detail in a

split second. Photographs can be 'shot' in rapid succession, they can be shot from a distance using telephoto lenses without the target's knowledge, they can be 'shot' from a moving vehicle with high-speed film. The advantage of all of this is that once the photographs, or video, of the target have been processed then the result can be examined at your leisure and details that you would otherwise have missed, are in fact caught in the frame. You will learn about shutter speeds, apertures, f-stops film speeds, and focal lengths. If you are in an observation post you will need to know how to get the best shots of your target; know about depth of field, when to use broad depth of field and when not to. We will teach you about IR film and IR flash. You may remember what you were taught in science whilst at school. Infra-red is the wavelength beyond visible red so is invisible to us, but black and white IR film used with IR flash will pick up an image at night just as an ordinary black and white film with flash will see an image. The major difference between the two is that with ordinary flash at night the target would be aware of it, whereas with IR flash the subject is unaware of the photograph being shot. Imagine how useful this is in your line of work. Let me show you an example of what I mean'

He then picked up an ordinary flash unit and placed a dark gel over its lens. Then he dimmed the lights until everywhere blacked out. 'Now watch carefully.' He fired the flash several times without a glimmer being seen. 'You see, or rather you don't see, any sign of light, but you can be certain that each time the flash was operated the room was flooded by infrared. The reason is that the gel blocks out any white light and only allows infrared to pass through. Now come with me.' We all crowded into the biggest of the darkrooms. 'Now as you will notice we have two light sources in here. One is the normal white light – this we only use when all processing has been completed. Once the prints have been passed through developer, hypo and water, it is safe to turn on the white light. Because photographic paper is light sensitive to white light, the same as films, we have to be careful when we switch the light on. Our second light source is a low wattage red light. Now ordinary photographic paper is not affected by the red wavelength within the spectrum so we illuminate the area with red light, that way we can see what we are doing without fear of 'fogging' our photographs. But beware, IR film is affected by ordinary red light so you are going to have to get used to loading and unloading your cameras in total darkness.' For two weeks we studied all aspects of photography to such an extent that using a camera, like using a firearm, became second nature to us all, and like the Browning 9.00mm, the camera became a tool of our trade.

Our final week was spent learning techniques used in sabotage such as, the vulnerable points in a sub-station where a small amount of explosive would cause maximum disruption. The use of timers for small explosive charges to cause fires. Remote control devices and when and where to use them. How to maximise the explosive power available to blow open doors etc, where and when to use stun grenades, in fact we were taught how to use anything that would cause havoc to the enemy! After five weeks in camp it was time for our group to go our separate ways. We said our farewells and moved on to the next stage in our training. Mine was to be Borough High Street in London, a centre operated by MI5.

'Good morning lads and lasses, whilst here with us you will learn about surveillance,' said Andrew in a soft Edinburgh accent. He moved over to a flip chart and continued. 'Today we'll start with the basic follow technique where we usually refer to the main target as Bravo 1.' Andrew wrote the letter B in red on the flip chart. 'We refer to the main target as Bravo 1 because B stands for body. Now our target lives here.' He wrote a capital A on the chart in brown. 'His abode is known as Alpha 1. We know he drives a car and we use the first letter C to identify this.' He wrote a blue letter C on the flip chart. 'This vehicle is now known as Charlie 1, where the C denotes car. We want to find out what Bravo 1 is up to, so we stake out his home, or his place of work, or club. In fact anywhere we know where he is, or will be at any given time. We then wait until he moves from there and follow him. In order to do this task successfully you will require tools for the job and in this case your tools are two radios, one for in your vehicle and the other on your body. Now you need to use the tools correctly; by as such I mean the language used in communicating your information to your buddy or back-up team located in a vehicle or a control room. The language used must be in code and spoken rapidly to minimise the risk of a third party being able to make sense of what you are saying. Ok everyone?' At this point Andrew passed out maps of town centres for us to look at.

'You'll notice that each street has been coloured according to a key. Now should our target live on the street marked in Orange and he walks along the street towards the High Street, we could in this case colour it in Red then our commentary would run along the lines of, Bravo 1 is foxtrot on Orange towards Red. Get the idea? There was a general murmur from the group that Andrew took as a 'yes'.

'Good in which case I would like you all to look at these packs,' he passed out a number of plastic wallets each containing a full set of Ordnance Survey Maps and Town Centre plans all with the same colour coding. 'By the way you will need to learn all the numbers, colours and locations before the end of the course.'

A noticeable groan went up from the group and someone actually voiced what we were all thinking, 'What! There must be at least fifty or more?'

Andrew grinned, 'That's right, but you've got a couple of weeks, there's no rush! So folks I'll see you tomorrow.'

On the day of our first mobile surveillance I was paired up with Jan, a slim dark haired girl in her twenties with a slight trace of an accent, which sounded as if she may have come from up country. We were given a grid reference of the target building and were told where our target lived. We were also told that he used the 'Rising Sun' and given a further grid reference. We were allocated a vehicle fitted with a covert radio. We were shown how to use the radio before leaving the garage at Borough High Street on our first assignment. Another two teams along with Jan and I had been set the task of staking out the 'Rising Sun' car park which we found to be off the Old Kent Road. We did not have to wait long before the target appeared, got into his car and moved off. The task of following the target in traffic and continually passing an accurate commentary on his precise location proved much harder than I thought. Add to this that, in order to avoid detection, we had to constantly change pursuit vehicles with those who were not involved in the actual tail. It was whilst doing this I suddenly realised that all the driving skills I had recently acquired were needed. We constantly had to drive like the devil and in such a way as not to draw attention to ourselves. We were always trying parallel routes to stop our quarry from escaping. Also we had to drive at high speed, constantly watching for pedestrians and passing traffic either by overtaking on the right or if needs be on the inside, but at all times safely. This was the only way we could stay close enough to take over the tail at any time. By the time I had left Borough High Street and Andrew our instructor I knew how to dress so I blended in with my surroundings, how to use effective disguise and how to carry out a successful mobile surveillance.

It was raining when I arrived at Bradbury Lines at Hereford. It was here that I spent my time learning about weaponry and how to use my developed skill accurately. Here we were schooled in all aspects of target practice. How to break down your weapon in double quick time and how to clear a jam, but more importantly to be able to recognise who was 'friend' or 'foe' this was vital in a hot theatre. It was whilst at Hereford that I was introduced to the 'Killing House' a three-story construction where as a group we were instructed in hostage rescue and rapid entry techniques. We were also taught about Close Quarter Battle otherwise known as CQB for short, using the 'Killing House' for our role play. What this meant was that every single one of us was taught how to enter defended buildings from the ground level and from the roof. Inside the building there was always a room set aside, as it would be in the real world, in which hostages might be held. Inside this room, live 'hostages' – SAS men in reality – would be indiscriminately dispersed among 'terrorist' dummies. Invariably the set would be in darkness and the rescue team was expected to burst into the room, in less than a blink of an eye and be able to distinguish friend from foe and shoot the enemy. Even whilst training we used 'live' ammunition so that the stress factor would be similar to a real life scenario. Add to this that no role play scenario was ever the same twice, and it is no wonder that we soon developed very fast and accurate reactions – we had to otherwise we could end up killing our colleagues who were acting as hostages! What this course did for us was that it made us very proficient in marksmanship, speed and accuracy. Upon completion of our time in the 'Killing House' and our basic course in marksmanship each and every one of the team could unleash a full clip of thirteen bullets from a Browning 9mm automatic pistol in under three seconds. That is approximately four times the rate of fire claimed by the manufacturer. These sorts of figures alone are quite an achievement, but add to them the fact that every shot fired had to be precisely placed, then you have some idea of the high level of competency the team achieved. This sort of level was necessary because once operational in the Republic of Ireland capture was always close to hand and for that reason our instructors showed us valuable pointers on escape and evasion techniques. Also, I could be part of a rescue bid to free one of our people being held hostage at any time. It was easy to see how all the basics could also be applied to an operation where the team was going to act as a 'snatch' unit. For example if it was necessary to snatch a target from the safety of their surroundings, whether their home or some other building they felt secure in. In the latter situation surveillance and detailed planning at all times was the key. During our second week at Bradbury Lines, we were introduced to unarmed combat. It was felt that in our theatre an in depth knowledge of unarmed combat was as much a tool of our trade as carrying a Browning 9mm. The seriousness of our

situation was underscored when Alan - a lanky fair-haired instructor – lined us all up one evening at the start of one of our PT sessions.

‘This evening, we’re going to look at some basic unarmed combat’, he said as he walked up and down in front of us. ‘Imagine that you are on your own and the other lot has sussed you. You’ve been pinged by the opposition as to what you are, so one of them strolls over to you and suddenly you are staring at a pistol and he tells you to put your hands up. What are you going to do? Here Jack.’ Alan called over to one of the lads to join him. Alan then produced a Browning pistol, slid back the top cover to indicate it was unloaded and then passed it to Jack. ‘Stand close in Jack and cover me with your weapon.’

Jack held the gun pointing it directly at Alan.

‘If he squeezes the trigger he will hit me at this range – that’s obvious. But notice where he is pointing it, he is pointing it at my side, so it’s not rocket science for you to realise that he does not intend to kill you where you stand. Therefore you have breathing space. In fact it’s long enough for you to do something ...’

In a flash, Alan grabbed the body of the pistol and twisted it outwards away from his body. He brought his other hand up and raked it down Jack’s face momentarily blocking his view and distracting him. In that split second he had taken Jack completely off guard.

‘See how I gripped tightly the body of the weapon. Because the Browning is a semi-automatic you will cause it to jam after the first shot simply by applying a hard downward pressure on the working parts. Had it been a revolver then I would have gripped it around the chamber and in that case he could not even fire one shot. Another method would have been for me to have grabbed further along the body and stick my thumb in front of the hammer, which would have prevented it from hitting the first round that was in the chamber to begin with. Also notice that as I reached forward I turned sideways to the threat so reducing the possible target area offered. Then as I dragged my hand and fingers down his face I would have used my nails to scratch his eyes and face. This action would certainly have blinded him momentarily. Another method would have been to push my fingers and thumb as hard as I could into the eye sockets. Both methods would work equally as well. Now in pairs I want you to practice the first move over and over again until you are proficient at it and can do it at speed without even thinking. Now move!’

Ashford was an interesting course for it was here that everything I had learned was effectively put together. It was at Ashford that the group was taught about psychological and physical torture and how to block out pain. One very effective way of breaking a prisoner’s resistance to interrogation was by using self-inflicted pain. This was achieved by making the individual stand, legs apart, away from the wall so that the only way they could touch it was by leaning forward until they were supported by their fingertips for long periods of time. If this method was used in conjunction with hoodings, temperature variations from hot to cold, sleep deprivation and continuous white noise the process of breakdown could be greatly accelerated. Also we were instructed in the use of LSD known as ‘sensory deprivation’ as practised by the CIA. In fact I was no stranger to the latter having already spent a short time in Suffolk on a joint training program run by the CIA. Also whilst at Ashford I was taught fast response techniques and how to manufacture explosives. Using everyday products, readily obtained from the local shops, it is possible to manufacture home-made bombs. If you were involved in agriculture, as I was, HME explosive could easily be made from diesel and nitrogen fertiliser. By producing home-made explosives in the field the risk of detection by the opposition was greatly reduced. At the end of all this raining I became a fully paid up member of the Circus. I was now one of the Operators and it wasn’t long before I was called upon to carry out my first duty.