



## The Cathedral Caper

**T**he big kick-off for the invasion of Poland is about six weeks away. Everything is organised on the German side and Adolf Hitler and his close military cronies are out on Luneberg Heath having a look at an exercise on how to take major forts. They will have plenty of these to take after Poland is invested. Otto Skorzeny, a huge man is

directing things from a viewing tower near the mock-up fort. He comes down when Hitler's big staff car pulls up. He gives a stiff arm 'Heil Hitler' and stands to attention. Hitler knows Skorzeny.

"How's it all going, Otto?" he asks. "Will it work?" Skorzeny grins.

"Waste of fooking time, Mine Fuehrer," he says. "It'll work of course, but it's not needed."

"What's the alternative?" Hitler asks. He's intrigued.

"Oh, just a few smoke bombs to unsight their gunners and come back later – much later to take their surrender."

"Hmmm," says Hitler. "It was certainly Ludendorffs policy in the first one. Just bypass the strong points. I saw it in action in the big push. What else then have you got to justify the run out this afternoon?"

"Ah," says Otto, "can I interest you in a sure-fire plan to invade England?"

Hitler laughs. "Oh, that's a bit further down the track. I can just imagine what you've got. 402 close typed pages and maps with stickers on the outside saying 'Most Secret' and which also should have other stickers saying 'Can't Be Done', 'Better Not' and the classic excuse, 'We'll Be Ready For This In 3 Years'. What I need," Hitler continues, "is a plan that says 'This Is What Will Keep the Fleet Away From Our Invasion Fleet' and 'How To Keep the RAF On The Ground So That Our Troops Once Down, Won't Be Shot To Bits.'"

"I've got it down, chapter and verse," Otto replies, "but I can't tell it to you if you won't listen."

"Martin," Hitler says to Bormann, "set up a cup of coffee and some biscuits on what you have in the staff car boot and I'll give Otto 10 minutes for his dissertation on how the Third Reich can beat the rest."

They sit down and sip. "Fire away, Otto," he says.

"We'll duck the ships," Otto says, "put some of those marvellous blue beams up for radio direction, drop our troops and guns just after dark in the fields near Canterbury and Winchester and by daylight, we will have converted these two towns into flak villages and be ready for the RAF."

"Tanks?" Hitler asks.

"No need," says Otto.

"Their tanks?" Hitler asks.

"Every man dropped will carry a Panzerfaust and a Schmeisser and some hard rations. No troops in the open in daylight. The nooks and alleys and the big cathedrals will be our bunkers. We dig in, blast the planes and reinforce only at night."

"Transport?" Hitler asks.

“Volkswagen scout cars. We’ll use these to drag the .88mm guns into position with a bit of help from any tractors we can nobble. In short: flak villages to cover our troops, reinforce in set perimeters only at night and we foray into the countryside at night, again to extend our front. No trenches, just fortified villages.”

“And if it doesn’t work?” Hitler asks.

“We pass it off as purely an incursion by Commandoes,” Otto says. “And as in all Commando raids, it can be a fast in and out, but I believe it would work.”

“You’ll need to work up a staff plan,” Hitler says,

“No,” says Otto. “We want an expediter from the Wermacht and the Luftwaffe. This is a plan based on need, speed and daring. The last thing we need is the kiss of death staff planning.”

“Touché,” says Hitler. “Let me cogitate this. Don’t leave the Berlin area for a few days. I will need to consult Goering.”

The war in Poland coalesces into the battle for the rest of Western Europe and with the last of the survivors of Dunkirk on the water, Skorzeny’s task force assemble on a disparate number of air fields well north of Calais. They are now into June and the days are light very late. Thus the evening is well on when the Paratroopers start dropping into the farm lands around Canterbury and Winchester. They parachute two .88mm guns equally as good for ground or anti-aircraft application in sections. The scout cars, being very light, are easily parachuted and the troops form perimeters to allow the scout cars and guns to marry up and they head for the centre of town. The radio beams tell them where that is and they just take any road that will get them there.

It’s an awful lot of uncontested action and by daylight they have their guns under camouflage net, shells stacked up and well hidden patrols out from both towns. To allow them time to get organised, they put up smoke screens at the first hint of dawn and all the RAF can see when the dawn patrols fly over, is just that. They keep the smoke up until noon and then get ready to fight the over flyers. No British troops of any type have come up to accost them and they have warning posts well down the main roads watching for this. English speakers in Para uniform walk around the towns. They allow no one to leave. They find the Mayor and Town Clerk and tell them they are in the middle of a Commando operation and that they should carry on as usual. The pubs and shops remain open and the Paras have been issued with invasion money to spend in the shops. It’s all a bit holiday like and Otto puts a bit of pressure here and there to schedule a Saturday night dance.

Things spark up in the afternoon. No bombers come in, they can hardly set out to level the famous cathedrals or decimate the English population. Fighter sweeps take place, but not a cannon is fired. They simply don’t know who the targets are. Foot and motorbike patrols commandeer every tractor they can locate and they stash these in motor pools in readiness for the next drop of .88mm’s. At dark, the next wave of supplies and men come in. The system seems to work, so huge numbers are dropped to take over Cambridge, Tunbridge Wells and Peterborough.



On day two, a white flagged army car comes into Canterbury. Otto, who is fluent in English, steps out to meet them. It’s an army Colonel, red-faced and perplexed.

“What’s this?” he asks Otto. “Yet another phoney war?”

“Not at all, Colonel,” Otto replies. “This is just an exercise in seizing a few jumping off points in Great Britain.”

“But....you are holding our iconic cathedrals and indeed anyone who lives in the town to ransom.”

“Yes,” says Otto. “It seems a fairly peaceful solution.”

“What’s the next move,” the Colonel asks.

“Oh....capital ships will come in next with the invasion forces. This is just a pip-squeak holding operation.”

“But you’ve occupied Cambridge, our seat of learning.”

“Well, we have to have something to read,” Otto says.

Over the next ten nights, the weather holds and they occupy a town per night. They are now over as far as Wells in the west and among the places occupied is the Royal Estate of Sandringham. Under Otto’s direction German troops now move over to the coast travelling diverse routes to blast to smithereens the radar towers. This allows the very necessary Luftwaffe supply planes to fly to the towns occupied or to be occupied. The towers were also set up to be protected from air attack, but there is almost nothing to prevent land based infiltration. Within the occupied towns, now up to 35, the Paras work in with the established British Police to police the towns. The rule of law applies more or less and by and large, the death toll from any source is negligible.

They now step up things and occupy many centres from as far north as Edinburgh down to Salisbury. They leave anything really coastal, where big ship guns can be brought into play, quite alone. The RAF try and shoot down the night flyers, but without radar they can now approach their drop zones from any angle and direction. The gun count for the German .88mms must be astronomical. They are dug in just everywhere.

Otto continues to run things. The original visiting Colonel comes into Winchester every other day and they enjoy schnapps and cigars together. Otto says they are just marking time until the high command are ready to run their invasion barges over under the guns of Scharnhorst and Gneisenau to occupy Britain. Thus the Poms are dead alert at the sea ports, but tend to ignore the steady occupation of their country that grows every night.

The penny finally drops and bellicose old Winston is shuffled off to Canada and pacifist old Clement Atlee takes over, sort of. The Germans are now controlling the internal running of Great Britain. Hitler calls off the U-boats and they reopen the Atlantic to British food ships bringing in the bounty of the new world.

Apart from losing Sandringham, the King and court in unoccupied London continue to function and Otto is highly amused to see the negotiate Colonel, who he sees every other day, get a knighthood. He invites Otto, as the de facto chief of the de facto occupying power, to attend his investiture as a Knight of the Garter at Windsor Chapel. Otto consults with Hitler and gets the green light. Thus he walks into historic St George’s chapel, wearing a nice suit. He’s also



got a deal of well-armed back-up with him. The organ thunders out the sparkiest of old George Frederick Handel's processional efforts.

It's perhaps too loud. It wakes Hitler up from his enjoyable dream.

"What's up, love?" Eva Braun asks.

"Oh....nothing really," the haggard looking old Fuehrer replies. "Only, I wish I had had that dream before I invaded bloody Russia."