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The Journal of Ingenious things

By Jasper Owens

My name is Richard Bates and I am going to change the world, for you see, I am “An Ideas man”, I have ideas about almost everything. For instance, some may look at a wireless and think “well that’s a wireless, nothing harmless”. However, I would think “this would be perfect to tap into enemy frequencies”. Why just the other day I thought about turning my night lamp into a missile. These are just some of the reasons why I am going to be MI5’s best agent, their best hope at beating the Jerrys. The only problem is that I work in the finance department.

I started life believing I was going to be a soldier, I would fight on the front line and if I died I would die with a gun in my hand and would go down fighting. However, when I was older I realised all the losses Britain had faced and decided I was not ready to lay down my life and die on the battlefield. So from then on I decided that if the next war came I would be behind the scenes and when it was over, I would be given a knighthood and go down in history.

It all started on September 1st 1939, I was working in the Bank of London. It wasn't a great job but it paid well, well enough anyway. Everyone was rushing around the office. I only heard snippets of conversations, they were saying something about Poland and Germany and then it hit me, Hitler had done it. Him and his boys had done what we all knew they would. Invaded. The Germans had Poland and it was only a matter of time before Britain were involved too. There were a lot of emotions that day, some were sad, others were scared, I however was grinning inside. This was a chance to prove myself a hero, a chance to be acknowledged, a chance to be remembered!

The day my brother came for me was an odd one, it was a few days later and the previous days had been hectic. Pictures of the Nazis in sharp black uniforms marching through the streets of an innocent city had been seen by all and the war had truly begun. Most at work were already leaving ready to fight “the war to end wars.” but then James came to the bank and offered to take me for lunch. I knew the moment he offered, that he wanted to use me for his benefit. James was a few years older than me and had always been the favourite, the Oxford graduate secret service nincompoop. He took me to an expensive restaurant around the corner. It felt odd. We were so early in the war and yet menus were getting more expensive when the quality of the food went down. I had veal but it was tough and measly. However, I ate all of it. I didn’t want to seem ungrateful. “So Richard, how have you been?” My brother said to me, He had a way of speaking that made one feel so ignorant. “Fine,” I mumbled. “Very good, very good. I heard Mother got her piano tuned the other day.” This was classic James, small talk, after small talk until he decided to drop the subtle hint that he wanted a favour. “Why did you come, James?” I snapped at him. “Look, you know how I work for the secret service.” He said in a hushed tone. “Yes James, you mention it every time we meet.” “Well, our boys in the accountancy department are all going off to fight and I know how much you hate to get your hands dirty. So I thought, why not come work with me, I know you adore a good ledger”.

Amazing how my brother could make a relatively exciting thing sound so incredibly boring. However, this would get me on the inside. I would have the job I had always dreamed of. Maybe if I played my cards right I could become one of the top men in the business. "Alright then, I'll do it. When shall I start?"

"Fantastic! I'll give you a call tomorrow and you can come with me to work. I'll go and tell Mr Fowler the news". He put his coat on and said "Pip pip brother. You're about to be the finest accountant in Britain". I sat in the restaurant on my own, I wasn't just going to be an accountant, I was ready to be an agent!

My days at MI5 started quickly, I never had to put in an application. I just turned up and they already had me working on the ledgers and making tea. As a matter of fact, making tea was most of my job but I'm told the tea made its way to very important people. My boss Mr Fowler was the head of our branch which was "Naval intelligence", this was where my brother worked however, he was one of the top agents in misinformation not one of the top tea makers in accounting. Mr. Fowler was a stern man, he had balding grey hair and staring eyes. He didn't come down to our department much, but when he did, the whole room went cold. I sometimes spotted James and his serious friends heading to meetings and discussing things, like how they would and I quote "Win the war with this plan!" I longed to be part of his world. I wished to be in on the secrets, if only I could be given a chance to prove myself.

Days passed, turning into weeks which turned into months. I spent my days sitting in a dark office making tea and watching a rather interesting crack in the wall. The only thing that kept me occupied was my journal. This was where I decided to collect all my ideas, ideas that would win the war. I did this in the hope that one day I could share them and Mr Fowler would praise me and tell me what a wonderful job I had done. I would be an agent, a war hero! The journal was set out as a rough plan for different missions and gadgets that would aid the war and I called it "the journal of ingenious things." My best was a miniature missile so tiny it was shot from a pencil. It is full of poison bullets that when they make contact with the skin, can barely be felt, ten minutes later, the target is on the floor making chicken noises. Now, we all know the story of the Trojan horse, but how about an actual horse that we send into German Trenches as a peace offering. We would train it to take enemy documents and then run back to us. In no time we will have German files and a Super-horse. I have designed a pair of exploding socks. These would secretly be put in Hitler's sock drawer and as a man of method, he has days assigned for each pair. This means I can calculate exactly when to activate them. But all these ideas meant nothing. I was just the assistant, the man in the background, but this would all change.

We were a year into the war now, we hid in shelters at night dreading the thought of being hit by any kind of bomb or weapon. London started to feel like a ghost town shops closed due to lack of materials and workforce, I ate cold wet meals before writing down more and more ideas that would never be listened to never be heard. At Least that's what I thought because the next day was the day I met William Booth. I had just delivered 3 cups of tea to my brother's meeting room. I was just walking back to my room when a stressed looking man bombarded me, sending me onto the floor with my journal flying out of my pocket and into his hand."Sorry old chap. "He bumbled at me. "It's quite alright," I reassured him, getting up and patting myself down. "You don't happen to be James Bates do you, it's a matter of urgency. "Before I answered he was flicking through my journal with his eyes wide, almost amazed."These writings are brilliant. Exploding socks, genius. Absolutely genius. "He put out his hand for me to shake it."William Booth."

I stuck my hand out and said "James Bates, now what was it you wanted to discuss with me?" "Well as a matter of fact I have been sent down here from the top spot in MI5 to scout a young ideas man who is of course yourself. Come, we have much to discuss." This was perfect. I was being recognised for my work of course I was under my brother's name but a couple of hours off being him couldn't hurt.

He took me to a room I had never been to before. It was clean and it smelt of flowers. We discussed my finest ideas and then at the end of our talk, he offered me a job to work alongside him and the other MI5 brains. In a different scenario this would be brilliant. I had my dream job but I wasn't living my life. I was just keeping my brother's life warm for him.

That night I received a call from James and I knew he wasn't happy he wasn't using his condescending tone, this time he sounded angry. "Apparently I had a meeting with William Booth this morning, apparently I gave him all my wonderful ideas and he offered me a job. Only I couldn't have met with him because I was in a meeting all day. And apparently you weren't seen for a good hour after you went to deliver tea to me."

"Are you accusing me of something James?" I asked, trying to add a suspicious tone to my voice. "As a matter of fact I am. Did you or did you not impersonate me in front of Mr Booth solely for your benefit?"

"I will have you know it was not for my own benefit, I got you a job did I not?" I said this in a stern tone but not so stern that I pushed my luck.

"That's not the bloody point! Impersonation is a serious offence." I did not answer this as soon as I succeeded. He was jealous, yes that was it he was just a jealous cold fish.

"Look, I've heard your ideas and quite frantically they are brilliant you're a very clever man Richard and I would like to work with you." Now this was surprising but hang on, when did my brother turn so nice? There had to be a catch. "Go on," I prompted.

"My plan is to take the job, they will provide me with a flat a bit more central to London. I was wondering if you would like to come with me. I would attend all the meetings, do all the necessary paperwork and you would stay at home and brew up some ideas. You're a very clever man Richard, a mind like yours should not be wasted. However if you decline my offer I will be forced to report you for impersonation." My mouth dropped, my own brother was blackmailing me. This was a way to benefit himself whilst doing no work himself but how could I say no. I had to play this game right or risk everything that I had built for myself. "Okay James I'll come with you."

"Excellent," he hissed, the game had begun, a war of my own had started.

James came to get me the next day. I brought a small box of possessions along with my journal. We caught a train that led to near the Thames which was where the new flat was. James was jolly on the journey almost as if our conversation the previous night had never happened. He talked of our future as if it was a partnership, he had me tell him off my ideas familiarising himself with them before using them as his own. When we arrived at the flat we were greeted by Mr Fowler who seemed surprised to see me but then focused on James as if I were not there. Twenty minutes later, James was released from Mr Fowler's gaze, he informed me that he had to leave and go to a welcome meeting at the headquarters, when Mr Fowler stopped watching James pulled me towards him and whispered "I need a rough plan that will defend Britain in an expected attack from the Germans." And this was when my finest hour would come and I wasn't ready for someone else to take my work from me.

That night, James came home and he looked tired and stressed. "Hitler is planning to invade Britain, the fight is expected to be fought in the sky. "Why Richard, In a few days time, our London skyline will be bombarded with a barrage of bombs, if we don't defend our country our men will be massacred." Goodness, now we are getting serious. If I did not follow through with my end of the deal then I was responsible for the deaths of thousands of soldiers, I didn't like being in charge as much as I thought I would . "Alright, we'll need a clear system of intercoms that link from the Headquarters to the sky, we'll have to send our men up in tight groups that will be able to penetrate the German forces." While I said this I pointed out different parts of a plan I drew up earlier. "This better work, brother or it's both off our heads on the chopping block."

"I know," I said, solemnly.

The next day James took the plan to MI5, it was a day of apprehensive waiting for me but when he arrived back at the flat he assured me that it was approved and that he had been asked to lead the mission. Now this surprised me, my brother barely understood the plan he could by no shadow of a doubt lead it, I couldn't let this happen, I didn't like my brother but I didn't hate him enough to let him fail so miserably. The next morning I woke and realised it was the day my plan would come to life but I still had the problem of my brother. I crept to his room in our flat and wedged a broom from the kitchen under the handle. I would let him out tonight but I couldn't risk the fate of the mission. I grabbed my journal and fled out of the flat and into the sunrise.

I arrived at the Headquarters by the Thames just in time, I was greeted by a man called Hugh Dowding who was going to be in charge of the technology and that it all runs smoothly, there were a couple of other men who I didn't catch the names off. One a scientist and the other an engineer, of course I introduced myself as James, we looked relatively similar and the ones who had already met James didn't know him well enough to tell between us. Luckily, there was no sign of Fowler who would have ruined my plan entirely. I was lead into a large room with lots of technology and maps, I was shown the planes we would be working with, I sorted the men into groups and instructed them when to go and what formation they should fly in."We are expecting the first German attack at nine hundred hours, ten minutes from now." said Dowding calmly, this was it the moment I had been waiting for, I was about to take on Hitler and his boys and I was ready. All of a sudden, a machine started beeping and I knew what this meant. Swiftly, I shouted into the microphone, "Alright boys! The first plane has entered London, group one, get ready!" And this was how it went one for hours, Dowding was a good man to work with, together we made quite the team. Throughout the time we heard bangs and crashes, we had reports come off our planes coming down and the German planes coming down. But after a total of twelve hours fighting, we got a surrender call from a Nazi officer and the Battle of Britain had been won!

The room exploded at this point, there was cheering and clapping. I shook many peoples hands. Every other word I heard was congratulations, we had done it. But then the door flew open and in came my Brother and Mr Fowler."Do you know how irresponsible you are!" screamed Fowler in my ear, we were in his office now. "You are an untrained officer working on a job of massive scale. if I hear no explanation you will both be losing any chance at MI5 in the future. This was when my brother said something I really didn't expect, "Sir, don't drag Richard into this he's a really clever man and I think you should think about hiring him in the future, it's me you should fire , I pressured him into giving me ideas. It's my fault sir, I'm sorry."

"Very well then, Richard, you will be given training to work for the secret service and James, you will not lose your job but I think you should stick to something a bit more simple from now on. Perhaps,

accounting.” Mr Fowler chuckled when he said this. “Thanks, James and sorry.” I said to him when we left Fowler's office.

“No problem, you deserve this job more than me.” he smiled when he said that the problems between me and James were solved and the future looked good.

And that was how I, Richard Bates became the secret services top agent in misinformation and worked on the war's most intelligent plans. My brother worked in accounting but couldn't stand it, so he went into manufacturing tanks which is a job that he is convinced is made for him. After years of fighting the war ended and the bloodshed stopped and when it had finished I was awarded a Victoria Cross, a symbol of my efforts. Because even though we work in the background we are the masterminds behind the operation and even though it may seem this way, we are never forgotten because no one ever is.