

Magestic 2

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Part 2

Living in a hotel

With the hotel taking shape, and growing ever skyward, Jimmy inspected the large boarding house that Bill had commissioned. It offered forty rooms, many in motel style offshoots, a dining area and a small bar. And it was packed, any spare rooms going to shift workers engaged in the construction of the new hotel. Bill had also built five houses, all-wood designs and modest, single storey, and they were all rented out already. Jimmy agreed another ten houses only, conscious of the fact that those of the workers now building the hotel would disappear someday soon.

At the airfield, clear days were spent with Prototype Three taking to the skies and performing tests. It sought out mist clouds and rain clouds, and penetrated them at speed, noting any effect on performance. After one such cloud penetration the engine stalled, the pilot gliding into the airfield and hitting the grass with a thud. It was a good job the plane possessed a sturdy undercarriage, the pilot suffering a minor back injury.

Jimmy commissioned a control tower, and sent Bill's people out to find the best radios that they could find, such radios still crude in this day and age. The scientists had them for a week, and they were less crude, the engineers now fitting a basic air-to-ground radio to the prototype.

A week later, the pilot requested permission to take off over the radio.

'The pattern is clear,' crackled back, Mister Marconi thanked.

With the radios in the hands of the scientists, they remembered Jimmy's comments about the fridges, and suggested a commercial application.

'Yes,' Jimmy said. 'Small radios for aircraft, powered from a dynamo connected to the engine, good transmitters and receivers for towers, then better quality radios for families to listen to the local music stations in the years to come. But, you must use commonly available valves and resistors for now, although you can make your own resistors without attracting too much attention. And, they should look similar to those of the period - wooden casings. I'll ask Bill to create an offshoot company tomorrow.'

'Now, what I would really like for Christmas is a jeep, a military jeep. So, take a basic car engine, modify it, design a suspension suitable for desert and jungle - all weather, and a removable hood. You can find images of the standard US Army jeep of the era 1942

and use that as a model. The tractor factory will make them, and then ship them out to Africa.'

Jimmy gave Bill and Ted the news the next day, recruitment started for extra workers, the free bus service now five vehicles strong. Additional land was cleared, another factory commissioned as the weather turned cold.

The first few recruits to the Canadian Rifles had now been signed up, briefings and indoctrinations from the Canadian Army held in those buildings that were fit for use. Jimmy then addressed the Canadians officers and NCOs outside the main admin block.

'Gentlemen, I'm Jimmy Silo, and I'll be paying your wages for the next few years, or as long as you remain with this unit. If you perform well ... you'll be rewarded well. Now, my men are all veterans of dozens of conflicts in Africa, and in various parts of the world, and they've all served in the British Army in various conflicts. They have each killed hundreds of men, some with their bare hands. Compared to them, you are but novices.

'They're familiar with all of the world's weaponry, they're very fit – and very tough. And they'll be teaching you a thing or two about killing. Your job ... is the paperwork and the compliance with Army law – where we decide we wish to comply. Starting tomorrow you will all be inoculated for work in Africa, where we'll send you for short tours, and for training exercises. That then gives you the weekend to recover, because these inoculations make you sick for a few days.

'Starting Monday, my people will teach you about many weapons that you're not yet familiar with, and you'll spend a great deal of time on the ranges; we have no shortage of ammunition. You will also start exercising, and you'll take the attitude that you *will never* ask the men to do something that you wouldn't, or couldn't do, yourselves.

'But it's not all hard work. There will be a subsidised bar, and all of your meals are free in the base canteen. Nice quarters for officers and NCOs are being built, as well as a swimming pool and a sports hall, and you can attend my hotels and nightclubs, or make use of my hunting lodge. Your pay will be ten percent more than regular army pay, and overseas work comes with bonuses upon your return.

'Now, one of your jobs will be to teach the new recruits how to march as you wish them to; my men are not ones for marching. The rest of the training will be down to my men, under your careful guidance. And gentlemen, we aim to grow this unit towards four

thousand men, so there'll be room for some promotions amongst you.'

'Four thousand?' the Colonel queried.

'Yes, within five years. So, sharpen your pencils.' He gave them each a wad of Canadian dollars, the equivalent of three month's pay. 'That's beer money, and I won't be telling anyone about it ... if you don't.'

The first twenty recruits soon got used to their new uniforms, their new boots - and a few blisters, all of the men having been inoculated on day one. A time travelling spectator may have been forgiven for looking twice, as Canadian rookies in UK Army combats circa 1980 clambered over the assault course in the rain. The rookies enjoyed a newfound energy and fitness, quality food three times a day, and subsidised beer at night. At least they didn't need English lessons. They did, however, start with geography and world politics during week two, moaning at having to study in the evenings. They moaned louder when the mathematics lessons began.

A Christmas hotel

The hotel builders had done a good job, and made themselves a great deal of money through bonuses. On December 23rd the gang moved over to the hotel, all heading to the top floor, views peeked at, bathrooms tested; they had hot running water and indoor plumbing. No guests would be allowed till spring, not that many people would have wanted to visit the region this time of year. Jimmy did, however, allow a few engineers to take rooms at cheap long-term rates, and visiting salesman nominated by Bill and Ted were allowed in.

New Year's Eve saw a party in the ballroom, most of the engineers and their families invited along, some five hundred people in attendance. The food and booze was free, and Jimmy even laid on a free bus or two for drunken revellers. They toasted in 1923, the year in which they thought they might sell a Trophy Mark One aircraft.

After the toast, a local man asked one of our black scientists for a drink, calling him "boy". A white engineer, one of ours, floored the man. Progress was being made in race relations, if slowly, and in just this one isolated part of Canada.

And that progress was partly down to Jimmy, who encouraged the more religious white engineers to adopt the scientists. Our boys

were too polite to refuse, and so were invited to houses for supper on a regular basis, friendships formed. Our boys even started tutoring white kids and helping with homework. African blacks were teaching Latin and chemistry to spotty Canadian youths.

With New Year out of the way, Big Paul and many of the bodyguards concentrated on the Rifles, Mac and Handy also kept busy. The recruits had sampled many of the world's weapons, and Mac now presented them with the monster fifty calibre, the recruits soon hitting targets at eight hundred yards and beyond.

The gang remained at the hotel for the winter, all comfortable with their new surroundings, and Cookie and Sandra operated the canteen and bar on the top floor. Jimmy oversaw some two hundred new recruits absorbed into the Rifles, the base now alive with the sounds of boots on tarmac. Despite the weather, the Rifles took delivery of the first six operational half-tracks, detachable hoods fitted, and trips back and forth to the ranges were now both armoured and tracked, the recruits each learning to drive the noisy beasts.

The Rifles also received field radios, although they were as big as TVs and came in wooden boxes. To use them, a soldier had to operate a hand dynamo at a steady pace. Still, they worked well enough on the half-tracks, messages back to base given when a leg was broken or someone accidentally shot themselves in the foot. Still, it was progress.

Considering the black scientists, Jimmy arranged for them to travel to Vancouver on a Sunday morning and join a small church of black worshippers, suggesting they take wives if they wished to. Several were soon dating young ladies keen for a black man with some money and prospects, or any black man with some prospects. Our scientists informed the ladies that they were well paid, and that did the trick. Love was in the air.

Jimmy attended a quicky wedding just two weeks later, the lucky lady moving into the hotel. Jimmy was not happy with that, and so arranged a house nearby for the couple. Jimmy also spoke to the neighbours, who seemed a little put out at blacks living so close by. And the lucky bridegroom, he had a wife and four kids back on our world, something that he kept quiet.

Jimmy would sit in the top floor study most days, reading the world's newspapers, plotting and scheming, sending Sykes a message now and then; someone to be killed, a company to be bought into or wrecked.

The hidden facility to make molecular acid was now ready, the first innocuous grey paint tested; it stuck aluminium or its alloys like superglue on human flesh. Jimmy took the first tin into the plane factory and called people around.

‘This, gentlemen, is a type of very strong glue – so don’t get any on you, it burns. The fumes would also make you very sick.’ He held up an Aluminium joint. ‘This was glued together. Try and break it.’

They each tried, the pieces stuck fast.

‘Using this strong glue means that we don’t need rivets as much, so we can save on weight, but the surface areas need to be checked first, cleaned, and in some places made thicker. This stuff eats away at the metal, maybe one or two tenths of a millimetre.

‘Now, while we’re here, I would like more access panels designed for the aircraft, clip on and clip off. We rivet everything down, and now we can glue it down, but we need to be able to get inside every once in a while and check for damage and corrosion. So, more panels in the skin that can be opened with a key and removed. Now, where are we with reliable engines?’

‘We have a new batch that we think are better, lighter as well,’ an engineer informed Jimmy.

‘Make up a sled, bolt them to it, and run them hot and cold all night. Then we’ll see. And let’s make the engine coupling easier, to swap engines if need be. If the engine is damaged, but the airframe is good, then we keep the airframe. That goes for wings and tails. If a wing is damaged we swap it, we don’t scrap the damn plane. Now, what’s going to happen if I shoot holes in the latest prototype?’

‘We’ve put a metal plate behind the pilot’s seat, and around the edges,’ they explained. ‘That keeps the pilot alive longer, but it does add to the weight. The fuel is now in rubber sacks, and they close up when shot; that seems much better. And we’ve armoured the fuel lines and control wires.’

‘Good. That’s as much as we can do for now. How’s flight testing going?’

‘Stability and turns at high speed needs looking at, maybe a larger tail.’

‘Fine, experiment with it. And next ... I want twin fifty calibre machineguns in the wings. If we want to sell it to the army, it has to be able to shoot down an enemy plane. Mac will be working on those weapons, they’ll be ready soon, but they will add at least two hundred pounds to the plane. So, from today onwards I want two hundred pounds of lead weight added to the wings, and the flight

handling tested – weather permitting. What’s the maximum range?’

‘It stands at two hundred miles at a fast speed, three hundred at a steady cruise.’

‘I want that improved. I want you to load lead weight in and see how much the plane will take, increments of fifty pounds. Thank you, go to work, people.’

Someone raised a hand. ‘Mister Silo, sir. I attended all of the air shows this year, many down in the States, and ... I think our plane out-flies the lot of them.’ Others agreed, looks exchanged, nods given.

‘I’m not building it to impress the crowds; kids and women. It has to impress the hell out of a few army generals, who will want to know about dog fighting, how far it can fly, how fast and how high. And ... how reliable it is. I want to be able to take their breath away, not just get them mildly interested.’

‘Don’t be in a hurry, because I’m not. That plane is excellent, but if we send it off to fight in a war too soon we may regret it, and we’ll only have one chance to impress the world. You’ve all done an excellent job, but I’m the one that has to be pleased, not the kids at the air show. Besides, I have a few drawings for a second aircraft you’ll get soon enough. What I’m waiting for ... is for us to produce our own engines, ones that can fly for a month without failing. Then, when we have those engines, the aircraft is truly ours; we’re not dependent on anyone else.’

The next day he gave them the new design for a separate aircraft, looking like a four seat Cessna 172.

‘It’s a spotter plane for the army,’ Jimmy explained. ‘It flies slowly over the battlefield while the people in the plane look down and draw maps.’

After describing the plane to the engineers, he took Bill and Ted to one side. ‘This new plane: I think we could sell it here, locally, and in the States. If we make it simple to maintain, reliable, and not too expensive, then people can fly town to town in it. In fact, if we wanted to, we could offer to fly them, even Vancouver to Seattle and back. I could see a time when we’d have dozens of these planes flying paying passengers around Canada. Hell, it’s a lot quicker than driving through the damn mountains.’

They were keen, the new variant started. But that week the first Trophy Mark One crashed into the inlet, the pilot killed. The wreck was fished up, and the body, the plane examined in detail to see what had gone wrong. A bad fuel mix would eventually be blamed. It was a setback, the mood a bit off for a while.

In the weeks that followed, Jimmy made sure that the engineers concentrated on making the plane's various components detachable; after all, he wanted them shipped to Africa and re-assembled.

With the time considered to be just about right, Jimmy sent a note to Abdi, who then sent his men to train a resistance to the Italians in Libya, the Italians having invaded and held the Libyan coastline in 1923, although they had slowly crept into the country over many years. Abdi's men were soon integrating with local fighters, the Italians not knowing why so many of their men were disappearing.

With casualties mounting, the Italians sent in more men. So did Abdi, his men disguised as local Bedouins. In one month alone the Italian overlords lost a thousand men, and many of their administrators and citizens, European papers puzzled by the news, the British Government quietly amused at the Italians suffering in North Africa.

Italy had to save face, and hid the true figures, sending in even more troops, despite their recent exit from Somalia. Those troops had hardly got off the transport ships when they started tripping grenades, sniped at from six hundred yards. Most of the new arrivals wanted to get straight back on the boat. The Italians dug in, occupying houses near the ports, and were unable to venture out, a slow daily tally of wounded or killed accrued. It was embarrassing.

Abdi's men, not content to sit around, moved house to house with grenades, clearing them. No word came from Tripoli when the Italian Government sent Morse Code radio telegrams, the Italian infrastructure and business community devastated, their embassy burnt to the ground.

Dispatches from the area became rare, foreign correspondents often killed on sight. Jimmy read the foreign papers each day, a five week time delay at best, but the detail was thin on the ground. Jimmy then sent Rudd a telegram, and the details of the Italian losses were sent around the world via Cairo: four to five thousand men dead. Some elements of the Italian Government blamed the Turks, the previous colonial power ruling Libya, but no one really believed that. The Turks had never really gotten off the coastal strip either.

The League of Nations sent a delegation, with a suitably large white flag, Abdi's men long since departed back through Sudan and towards home in Somalia, leaving the Bedouin with basic bolt-action rifles and plenty of ammunition. As well as a few hundred grenades. Powerful Italian warships cruised offshore, but

there was little they could do. The Italians had been publicly humiliated, Jimmy not sure how they would react next. He was, however, sure that Abdi was doing a good job of training his men, some of whom had devastated Italian positions with AK47s. Ngomo would never live this down.

Timkins, Sykes and Jack had observed the crisis with interest, unsure that the Italians were suffering at Jimmy's hands till the details of the massacre came in. Then, bold as anything, Sykes and Jack walked into the British Colonial Office and made it clear what had happened, suggesting that Jimmy had paid a Somali warlord to attack the Italians. And ... they were welcome. The British Government were now aware of Jimmy, and damn glad that he was on their side in Africa.

Timkins was now a member of parliament, and seen to be learning the ropes, although he knew more than the rest. He was making friends and acquaintances on both sides of the house, often debating across the chamber with Tories that he would dine with later. It wasn't long before the Colonial Office came calling, a discreet chat about this Silo fella. They were amazed by the fact that Jimmy had built Nairobi General Hospital, and that he was laying track to the hinterland at his own expense. They had heard rumours from colonial staff in the area, but most sounded like tall tales after a beer. When they asked about the train track into the Congo, Timkins shocked them rigid.

'He knows where diamond mines and gold mines are to be found, and he's going to steal them out from under the Belgians and ... well, use the money to build up Kenya and his businesses, as well as to protect the interests of the empire. That campaign in Libya would have cost him a king's ransom in gold and diamonds.'

'It was a massacre...'

'He doesn't like Italians, or Germans, and most definitely does not want to see them get a foothold in Africa. Our naval vessels: he'll fuel them at half the going rate for us, off Zanzibar Island.'

'And does he have any interest ... in Somalia?'

'He assisted the local tribes to oust the Italians; he did not wish them close to his businesses in Kenya in case of future conflict. He aims to run rail track right up through Somalia and into Somaliland – at his own expense.'

'At his own expense?'

'Yes, and once completed, the track would be available to us.'

A week later, the labour Prime Minister called in the back-bencher that was Timkins, for a personal briefing on this Silo chap, amazed by the tale of the blood-brothers raised in the jungle by

tribesmen. The British Government feared any desire on Jimmy's part for independence for the colonies, but Timkins reassured them. He also pointed them towards Jack and Sykes, close personal associates of Jimmy.

Sykes was then called in. With a small rebellion going on in Sudan, could he *lend a hand*? A telegram was sent to Abdi, who then killed every last rebel, and their horses, dogs and camels – all done quietly, no bodies found. It was as if a giant hand had just wiped the rebels off the face of the earth, and it had not cost the British Government a penny. Timkins was called back by the sitting Prime Minister, this time for dinner and cigars, and talk of socialism in England. A junior appointment to the Foreign Office was offered, and taken. Timkins would advise on East Africa.

The League of Nations report into the Libyan massacre was inconclusive, but pointed towards Bedouin tribes uniting in their fight against the Italians, and that they may have been armed by “outsiders”.

Spring, 1923, saw a new plane on the tarmac at the airfield in Trophy, the workers competent these days at building airframes; they had made a Cessna 172 lookalike. Jimmy was pleased, the initial test flights positive. He arranged for it to be tested to destruction, ordering five prototypes in total. It held up well in the thermal room, and the pilots agreed that it was easy to handle. It was slow and ugly, but easy to handle.

Jimmy then built a grass strip at the Rifles barracks, and allowed people to fly back and forth, Mac given his own plane – but then made to share with Big Paul. Creating grass strips at three nearby towns, nearby in Canadian terms at eighty, a hundred, and two hundred miles, Jimmy started an airline, Columbia Airlines. When the weather permitted, passengers were flown cheaply back and forth, tickets subsidised at the moment. Calgary was a prime route, Edmonton a target for the years to come.

A logging company's rich boss then took a ride, and bought an early production Cessna; his operation was out of the way, and a pain by road. With permissions rushed through for cross-border flights, a service from Vancouver to Seattle was soon launched, subsidised to start with, but just the one plane. The next five production aircraft were ordered, pronto.

The factory workers were happy, many taking rides in their creation, and it took their minds off the Mark One fighter aircraft. That was still being improved and refined, its pilots now shooting up the inlet with twin fifty calibre machineguns. Those guns had

been aligned so that trajectories of the rounds fired crossed each other's path at five hundred yards, and the weapons came with clever dampening springs to protect the airframe. With that box ticked, Jimmy handed the scientists their next project: a rudimentary parachute.

A hangar was appropriated, silk and thread bought, the various strengths tested, the suppliers contacted about production levels. While that was going on, Jimmy ordered a dummy made, weighing two hundred and fifty pounds, and ordered that the next production aircraft came with a door missing.

A functioning basic parachute had taken the scientists little more than a week. With it ready, a static line release was fashioned, the dummy attached, a curious group of workers stood watching as the Cessna took off and climbed. At six hundred feet the dummy was pushed out, the parachute deploying as expected; it was not a great shock, since rudimentary chutes were available in 1923. The dummy drifted down and landed. Re-packed, it was thrown out a dozen more times without incident. It was then weighed down with extra lead, now three hundred pounds.

Day after day it drifted down, hitting the airfield, once damaging a parked car. Big Paul then said it was time. He strapped in without Jimmy's OK, and jumped, landing without incident.

When Jimmy found out about Big Paul's stunt he simply shrugged and made a face, commenting, 'It's his life.'

Big Paul made ten jumps before work started on a reserve shoot. Jumping over the inlet, Big Paul cut away his main shoot and pulled the reserve at five hundred feet. It opened, but he came down in an undignified horizontal position, the straps needing adjusting. Most of our bodyguards had a go, some of the Canadian Rifles officers observing – and horrified, Mac and Handy throwing themselves out as well.

With the static line chutes satisfactory, the gang needed a suitable free-fall chute for pilots abandoning a burning aircraft. A release was fashioned, the reserve checked, and one sunny day Big Paul leapt out at eight thousand feet, a crowd of engineers gathered below. He had no altimeter yet, but managed to pull the cord at two thousand feet, landing without incident. Combat parachuting was now on the cards for the Rifles.

Each pilot retained by Trophy Aircraft was duly required to complete ten static line jumps and, when they consider themselves ready, they jumped in tandem with Big Paul, counting to ten before pulling the cord. Each pilot made it down safely, now secure in the knowledge that they could escape a burning plane if need be.

Parachutes would now be worn during all test flights. The logging operator, the man with his own plane, then wanted a parachute for himself, a natural progression. He received lessons, completed ten static line jumps, and tried a free fall, loving it. They could hardly keep him away from the airfield after that.

It was another milestone, the fighter aircraft yet to be sold, or even to be shown to prospective buyers. That milestone was followed by another, that of drop-tanks. Two tanks of fuel were fitted to the wings of the fighter, released when empty. The aircraft's range had been greatly extended, thousands of hours logged, the company pilots now experts. But the engine was still a problem, Jimmy nudging the scientists to "accidentally" improve those engines that our factory workers were now building.

Late summer of 1923 saw sight of the first prototype engine, smaller and lighter than those commonly available, as well as more powerful. It was tuned to perfection, and its fuel had been modified. Its engine oil was advanced, its cooling system subtly changed. They slapped it into an airframe, fittings adjusted for its smaller size, and the fighter prototype took to the skies. It broke its own previous speed record, and now topped two hundred and sixty miles per hour straight and level fully fuelled. In a dive it topped three hundred and ten miles per hour, a fact kept secret.

Jimmy threw a party, and everyone received an extra day off that weekend, free beer delivered to many barbeques. He then adjusted the design a little, a more swept wing and tail. As requested, the scientists added a super-charger that had been planned for - a high-octane fuel would be used, and enlarged air intakes were fitted. The exhaust pipes were angled back and now enclosed. The undercarriage was already aerodynamic, but was streamlined, the next project being the means to retract them, advanced hydraulics to be employed.

With the various modifications made, but the undercarriage still immobile, the plane climbed at a much greater rate, the pilots warned to stay below three hundred mph for fear of breaking off the undercarriage. Normal flight-testing continued, the super-charger tested and refined as the best people worked on a retractable undercarriage and locking mechanism. Everyone complained that it would make the plane heavier, but also agreed it would be faster as well. Designs pencilled during the day were worked on at night by two shifts of forty workers, those experimental systems that were fitted overnight being tested the next day.

With a prototype suspended from the roof of a hangar, its engine was revved up, hydraulic pressure achieved, the undercarriage lifted up and down repeatedly. It jammed a great. The pressure was altered, leaks plugged, the approach refined. The scientists could have just designed the whole thing, but that was not allowed by Jimmy; they had to coax it out of the engineers themselves.

A major redesign was soon underway, the hydraulic system to be bled off the engine. A counter-balance and leverage system was then tried, oil pressure pushing on a piston. One way would be pushed for up, alternate direction for down, a simple switch controlling which piston received the pressure. It worked well enough. Then came a locking system, a click-into-place system adopted, pull release; if it failed, it failed with the undercarriage down. And, if the engine stalled, there was enough reserve pressure to get the wheels down. Just to be safe, a hand crank was fitted to the cockpit, a minute's pumping securing a locked undercarriage – assuming you had a minute with the ground rushing up.

With all of the best teams working on it, they had a working undercarriage by early October of 1923. The best pilot took the plane up, and in a dive topped four hundred and ten miles per hour. The RAF's Spitfire would later top four hundred and sixty in a dive in 1938. The engine still needed work, and the wings had not yet been swept back.

The milestone marked a sharp tightening of security, armed guards hired - many of them, fences checked and more laid, identity passes now to be shown. The poster in the canteen said, 'Don't let our competitors know what we have, safeguard your jobs!' Jimmy then reduced the number of people working on the fighter and gave them a drawing for a new aircraft. It looked like a Dash-7; high wing, twin props, supports struts. He called the senior men together.

'What I'm thinking with this new aircraft, is a passenger service over a longer distance, and carrying more people – starting with Edmonton. If we can make this plane take ... say eight or ten people, and have it fly five hundred miles, we can offer a service from Vancouver to Toronto, stopping to refuel along the way.'

They were keen, buoyed up and excited like schoolboys taking a ride in a plane. The Cessna lookalike was given a production target of just six a month, Jimmy ordering ten for Kenya, the main thrust now being the larger aircraft. But the Cessna lookalike soon received floats, and became popular around the bay and up the coast in Alaska. After some nagging, Jimmy increased production, and all were sold before being made, now eight a month.

One fateful day, a US Army General took a quick flight from Vancouver to Seattle in one of Jimmy's planes, most impressed by the Cessna look-a-like and enquiring after it. A month later he came and stayed at the hotel, turning up at the factory and keenly shown around by Bill. Jimmy was called over. After a half-hour chat, Jimmy offered the General two aircraft on assessment, with pilots, for a month. The General took the offer, and left without seeing the fighter. The planes were delivered a week later, and would be assessed for the potential use of aerial observation over the battlefield.

The US Army ran the planes for a month, every assessment made proving excellent, the planes very reliable. But no order came; Uncle Sam was a slow moving individual.

With six aircraft ready for export they were dispatched to Kenya by ship, with two pilots that fancied a year in "warm" Africa. The men were inoculated before they departed aboard the freighter. The planes eventually arrived at Mombasa docks, were shipped to a field made ready by Cosy, and put together from the instruction manual. Cosy was soon testing one, astounding the pilot with his knowledge.

Two aircraft were destined for Steffan, to spot ahead the jungle layout, the remaining four to be used as part of a new air service, Mombasa to Nairobi. Nairobi Airways had just been borne, three paying passengers at a time. The next four Aircraft were delivered to the British Army in Kenya for assessment, pilots on loan. Driving down to Nairobi one day, Skids almost crashed, halting and looking up and what he thought was a modern day Cessna flying past. He went and found Rudd, who laughed, explaining the aircraft.

Canadian Rifles

With winter coming on, and with the first batch of the Canadian Rifles considered now to be fit – as well as well trained, Jimmy received permission from the Canadian Prime Minister to send them to Kenya for practical training. Half the soldiers packed their gear, boarded a liner, and set off for Kenya aboard two large freighters owned by PO, a two week voyage. Their tutors went with them, the recruits studying each day on deck as the weather improved with latitude, the men keeping fit by running around the deck.

In Mombasa, the Canadians were met by the Kenyan Rifles Colonel and some of his senior staff. They boarded a train chartered just for them, and steamed up to Nairobi in the heat. They were billeted in barracks vacated by African Rifles working on the railway, the Canadians on a dusty live-firing range the next morning and being barked at by black NCOs. Some of the British guards had gone along, letting the pale Canadian recruits know just how good the Africans were – well in advance, save there being any racial problems. Still, three Canadians were badly beaten by Ngomo's men on the first day, the lesson learnt.

A week later the recruits found themselves up near Mawlini, trekking across the sand to the border with Ngomo and some of his men. They came across a large tented city, echoes of gunfire in the distance. Abdi stepped out to Ngomo, out of earshot of the recruits.

'I brought you some pale white Canadians to torture,' Ngomo said as they shook.

'Canadian? Jimmy created them?'

'Yes. When they are older they will fight in the Second World War.'

'Ah. Come, some tea. Let these whites cook in the sun a little.' They settled in a dark tent, tea arranged, sitting on a carpet. 'So, what news of the jungle?'

'We are in as far as Forward Base. Maybe ... six months to reach the gold.'

Abdi nodded. 'The new British Governor now adopts me as a long lost son.'

Ngomo laughed. 'They know it was you in Libya, and probably know it was you in Somalia as well.'

'They court me like a virgin before a wedding.'

'Don't bend over till you are married,' Ngomo laughed.

'And what of Mister Jimmy?'

'He is in cold windy Canada, making aeroplanes, tractors, half-tracks -'

'Half-tracks?'

'We have some.'

'You ... have some? I am the one in the desert!'

'I'll ask for the next batch to go to you, save you walking – *old man*. But what will your British father make of half-tracks?'

Abdi took a moment. 'He would wish the wedding sooner.'

'So maybe wise to hide them from him.'

Abdi nodded.

'And now we have small aeroplanes like the old Cessna, a small airline from Nairobi to Mombasa.'

'I will come and visit by ship; I miss the green jungle some times. And the rain!'

'We were attacked in the Congo by spears and arrows,' Ngomo reported with a smile.

'And the Belgians?'

'Are lied to ... like the British.'

'I met Mister Sykes and Miser Jack a few months ago. They play the spy on the Germans and Italians, but we will not fight the Germans for many years.'

'You killed every last Italian – and their dogs!'

'It is what Mister Jimmy wanted, to drive them all out and leave none alive.'

'In Nairobi now, Rudd has a very nice hotel, a tall hotel with a rooftop bar.'

'I will come and stay, since the British Empire is so fond of me. You live there?'

'No, I have a nice house in the base, many wives. All my men live there now.'

'When my tribal elders want my help they bring their daughters along. I find a new one each day.'

Ngomo laughed. 'Do the British bring daughters?'

'No, they offer pocket watches and clocks. I always know what time it is now!'

One of Abdi's men stepped in. 'Sir, there is a raiding party of a hundred Ethiopian men, twenty miles north.'

They stood. Ngomo said, 'Let's use the pale Canadians; see what they can do.'

Thirty Canadians were selected and armed with AK47s, just one magazine each allowed, two water cans, and the British bodyguards would go along for the "blooding". The Canadian officers were not sure about the exercise, but were overruled. The Canadian soldiers walked all day in the heat and the sand, reaching the raider's camp at nightfall, but hiding and sneaking closer inch by inch through the dark. At dawn they opened fire, killing all of the raiders with some very accurate fire, before marching back again.

'They did OK,' their instructors reported. 'And they brought ammo back.'

That week the Canadians received desert training, live firing exercises in the dust and the flies, and long distance navigation exercises. At night they would listen to tales of the Somali attack on the Italians, tales around the campfires, camels killed and eaten. Bidding their new Somali friends farewell, the Canadians hiked for five days to the train stop. After a month at the Kenya Rifles base,

getting an appreciation for sand, flies - and dodgy food that went straight through them, they jumped on a train and arrived in the Congo three days later, soon introduced to some nasty jungle – and its nasty inhabitants. Small unit patrols were sent out each day and each night, tactics practised, survival techniques learnt. Despite the men’s concerns, none fell ill, and the moist jungle was a welcome relief after the sand and dust.

They would return to Canada for March, having gained a great deal of experience for the future.

Jimmy, meanwhile, had advertised for more staff for the aircraft factory, and had hired three mathematicians, two young physicists, a chemist, and a guy who knew all about metal alloys. An office was set aside and labelled as “Research”. Jimmy addressed them after they had been shown where everything was.

‘Gentlemen, welcome to Trophy Aircraft. We make aircraft, engines for those aircraft, tractors, and military trucks. Oh, and munitions. You’ll touch upon each, lending your weight of expertise to the problems that the engineers face. Your job is partly to try and improve existing products, partly to sit down and think up new ones.

‘Where we have problems and issues at the moment is mostly around the engines. We need to make them lighter, more reliable, and we need to cool them down more efficiently. We need to see if eight cylinders are better than six, or are twelve better for performance. We need to experiment with the chemical make-up of the fuel to see if that helps.

‘But, most of all, we need to develop new metal alloys, alloys that are stronger, lighter, and more heat resistant. That ... is your key area of work. We also have a basic plastics moulding factory -’ He picked up a mould. -’ and I reckon this stuff is what the future holds. It’s light, strong enough, but it melts. So, maybe we can add some chemicals to the oil to make a plastic alloy that is better.

‘You will respond to requests from the engineering managers, and see if you can’t figure out things that they miss. You maths guys, you can help on stress and loading calculations, some of which are very complicated. Go through them, check them, and feel free to suggest improvements. Basically, we want to know how much force we can apply to a metal strut before it bends or breaks.

‘Feel free to work with other researchers around Canada and America, and scour the technical journals for new-fangled ideas and directions. And, welcome to the team.’

In little more than a month, the team had an alloy that was heat resistant, resistant to a much higher temperature than steel. It was incorporated into the engine exhausts and mountings, some talk of it now being moulded to make the cylinder heads themselves. The one young guy had taken to Mac, and worked out muzzle velocities, effective ranges, and he even improved a recoil mechanism slightly. The black scientists were a puzzle to the newcomers, not least because they were so smart, a little jealousy evident. As with the other engineers, the scientists dropped hints and directions – but slowly.

One evening, Jimmy called the scientists together after evening meal. ‘I want you to accidentally nudge the research guys towards tungsten and titanium, and advanced copper alloys. But slowly. Invent a stepped process whereby they’ll discover the benefits.’

‘Such metals would not be needed for a petrol engine,’ one man noted. They waited.

‘I’ll want a rudimentary jet engine to be started in a year or two. But, whilst we’re on that subject, something has been worrying me. Call the rest of the gang, please.’

With everyone assembled, Jimmy began, ‘The fighter ... is being delayed, because it’s developed much faster than I would have thought possible. The unknown factor in the mix is our clever scientists here. There are no particular wars that we could use those planes in yet, so there’s no need to get them ready in a hurry. The danger ... is that they’re seen and copied by the Germans or Japanese. The Jap Zero was designed to compete with what they knew of existing American aircraft. If American aircraft are better, the Japanese will just go back to the drawing board. Now, we have the question of developing aircraft in secret – and where?’

‘How about Kenya?’ Mac said.

‘It’s under British rule, and British prying eyes. Besides, there’s no skilled workforce. The Congo has the isolation, but not so much as running water or electricity; Canada had a good technical workforce. Canada, west Canada, also gives us sea lanes to Hong Kong and Kenya and, when the time comes, a direct flight path to Japan.’

‘Fly ... to Japan?’ Handy queried.

‘We will, in the future, develop aircraft capable of reaching there. The problem will come ... in the form of the Canadians not wanting us to start a war with Japan, hence the secret nature of things.’

‘If the aircraft are built here,’ Big Paul said. ‘Then they could be deployed elsewhere. An island maybe.’

‘That’s one idea. But who would get the blame for an attack on Japan?’

‘They’ll be the ones doing the attacking!’ Mac stated.

‘I may alter Pearl Harbour,’ Jimmy suggested. ‘So, at that date, the Japanese will have attacked the Chinese and the British.’

‘Could always stick RAF roundels on the side,’ Big Paul commented.

‘At thirty thousand feet, I doubt the Japs will see them!’ Jimmy pointed out.

A scientist raised his hand. ‘We are assuming ... that the various governments will not know who we really are, or our mission, at that date.’

‘If we told someone in 1960 they might accept it; space craft and UFOs aplenty. But now? 1920s Flash Gordon? No, they’d have a hard time with it; we may need to strike at Japan whilst still working in the shadows. The British won’t have a problem with us assisting to hit Germany after they’ve been attacked, but may not like the idea of carpet bombing to start with. I see no problem with us basing aircraft in the UK after 1940, but what of the Japanese invading China in 1937 and threatening Hong Kong?’

‘The British and Canadian Government are very close,’ a scientist pointed out. ‘The British King has many pictures on walls here and a civic function. Such an attack on British interests in Asia may see a Canadian response, especially with a little ... nudge.’

‘Canadian troops *were* in Hong Kong during the Second World War,’ Big Paul said. ‘When they’re attacked by the Japs, the Canadian public would be behind us.’

‘And we can work some propaganda,’ Mac suggested.

‘This location was always the best choice,’ Jimmy said. ‘Close to America, but not subject to its laws, and with a British influence – a direct flight path to Japan. But given that a war will drag in the Americans, they wouldn’t be too happy if we provoke Japan early.’

‘When they see us flatten Tokyo they’ll be nice as pie,’ Handy suggested, others agreeing. ‘As well as asking to buy a few fucking planes!’

‘I would make them aware of our capabilities before then,’ Jimmy explained.

A scientist asked, ‘What type of aircraft would strike at Japan?’

Jimmy took out a folded piece of paper and showed it around.

‘Fuck me,’ Mac said. ‘This’ll cause a stir in 1941. How the fuck we’d develop that without anyone noticing?’

‘With great difficulty,’ Jimmy sighed.

'How about a secret base in the interior,' Cookie suggested. 'There's nothing there but lonely moose!'

'That would seem like the best course of action,' Jimmy agreed. 'At least a testing ground there, far from prying eyes; we could test aircraft over the Arctic. But, testing it over the sea would be even better.'

'There's no way the fucking Germans of Japs could copy it!' Mac stated.

'The Germans, Mac, went from cloth-covered aircraft to ballistic missiles in six years. If they're desperate ... they're a resourceful people.'

'Still,' a scientist began, 'the research would take decades for an aircraft of this nature. They will never catch up in time.' Others agreed.

'OK, we'll look for a facility nearby to make them, then build a large airbase in the middle of nowhere. Start scouring the maps, people.'

'Area 51 available?' Mac asked with a smile, people laughing.

'We'll call it ... Moose Base 51,' Handy suggested. And the damn name stuck, for now.

Following the meeting, flat land in a valley was purchased, ten miles east of Trophy, the roads to reach the valley improved, new ground cut where the factory would be. A large double fence was erected, armed guards everywhere. Still, in this day and age the men were very cheap. Maps of Canada's interior were studied, an area of great isolation agreed upon, to be used in summer only. Unfortunately, it would need a train track. Thinking on, the planned Mouse Base 51 was moved closer to an existing spur, that of an old abandoned mining area. It would have to do.

The regional train company was duly asked to inspect the track and repair it, a nice little earner for them. They replaced sections and extended the line, the Canadian Government fully believing that the area would be use for munitions testing. Well, in a way it would be. They gave over the land for free, under license.

The spring thaw saw the first batch of hardy Canadian loggers venture into the new area by train. Their remit was a simple one: clear the trees and use the logs to make cabins, lots of cabins, all in neat rows not too far from the train spur. The busy little beavers were also tasked with imitating the native beavers, and asked to make a small water reservoir or two. Day after day the steam trains would chug in, dumping their load on the side of the track. After all, there was no one around for two hundred miles in any direction, so no one to pinch the goodies.

Once a week, ready-made wooden huts were lifted off the trains, placed in a row, the architects and builders moving in as the weather improved. They levelled the ground with bulldozers that had been brought in – and that would stay. Drainage ditches were dug, pipes laid, toilets fixed. A large cookhouse has erected next, the hungry builders eating in comfort. The first concrete was used to lay a basic road either side of the train track, the road leading towards the cabins and beyond, to what would be hangars and a control tower someday.

Jimmy then met with a Seattle company that produced concrete, and ordered more than they could produce in a year. But the problem for the secret airfield was that cold winters would be followed by warm summers, and the new runway would need regular maintenance. The scientists suggested additives to the concrete, and those additives would be mixed-in on-site.

The first batch of Canadian Rifles had now returned from Africa, all tanned, the second batch sent out and towards a similar training scenario; heat, dust, and flies. The first batch were now veterans, tough and keen, but their training continued on at a pace, now to include parachute training down in New Mexico. Groups of forty were dispatched through the winter, to a private airfield.

Two of our Cessna lookalikes had been flown down, a long old flight, and the local biplane owners were stunned to see people falling from planes, surprised when the parachutes opened. They soon wanted to have a go themselves. Jimmy had anticipated such a reaction, two-dozen parachutes sent down to be sold, instruction offered. The Canadian School of Parachuting had been borne, in New Mexico, the sign a puzzle to passing locals.

With more of the Cessnas being shipped to Kenya, a hundred parachutes were also dispatched, the Kenyan Rifles to receive training. When Abdi heard he was not a happy bunny, at all, sending down groups of thirty men at a time for training. And “could he have some planes, please?” Four Cessnas were duly directed towards Abdi, with spares, and loan pilots for six months. Most of Abdi’s men, those from the future, could handle a Cessna and a Huey, so conversion was a very quick process.

Unfortunately, the local British Governor was most put out to see “wogs” flying modern planes, when he himself had three old biplanes to call upon. Abdi did the surprising thing, and offered the Governor use of one for his private journeys and general scouting around, complete with a “wog” pilot.

Word then reached the Foreign Office of the simmering row of “wogs” in planes in East Africa, Timkins smiling when he read the note. He persuaded the Prime Minister to buy a dozen Cessnas for “East African diplomatic duties”. That became two-dozen by time all the various interested parties had complained. The next twenty-four aircraft were duly dispatched to Kenya, Somalia, and Somaliland for the British Diplomatic Corp to potter around in. Since the distances involved were vast, the postal service very slow, the planes would be a great benefit.

Jimmy then did an odd thing, and suggested to Timkins by telegram that he would accept land in the British Mandated Palestine in lieu of payment. Timkins sat in a quiet corner for an hour by himself, thinking, before passing on the message.

It's a big plane

Summer, 1924 saw the first prototype of the new aircraft, which the gang labelled “the Dash-7”. Production was quick, since it consisted of two of our standard engines, two of our fighter aircrafts wings at the ends, a new section in the middle, and a scaled up version of the Cessna body. The undercarriage was that of the fighter - since it was tough as old boots, but made fixed; there was no requirement for lifting the undercarriage. The plane had been cobbled together from existing parts, but well cobbled.

They stuck it in the wind tunnel and blew smoke past it, noting vortices. Then they stuck it in the thermal room for a day, and alternately baked it and froze it. Nothing broke, and the engines didn't fail; the teams knew their stuff these days. It was hoisted up with eight people inside, and dropped from two feet. They survived, the dampeners helping. Ten people were tried next, a bit of a jolt for the would-be test dummies. Twelve people cracked the undercarriage, so they had a limit. The Dash-7 would offer a ten person maximum, with pilot, for now.

With the broken undercarriage swapped - plenty of them lying around, the engineers powered the prototype up and down the runway, taking a first gentle hop on a fine July day. Jimmy gave the OK, and the pilot took off - with a parachute on, plus six heavy bags of sand in the rear. The aircraft lifted her nose, and she climbed steadily, a circuit made, flaps tested for effect. She handled well. The pilot landed, powered up, and took off again, completing six circuits. The final circuit involved a trip down the inlet to

Vancouver, just to show off, the citizens of the city glimpsing the new aircraft.

Jimmy threw a party, a barbeque on the grass in front of the hangars, everyone sent home early and given the next day off to go fishing, or to spend time with families.

Columbia Airlines now operated twelve aircraft, penetrating as far as six hundred miles east, and with the potential for passenger numbers growing they could see that they would soon cover the whole of Canada. The conquest of America would come next.

But odd news arrived, news of two planes being stolen, the sale price being forwarded to the company by the thieves. The buyers were having their planes, whether Jimmy said so or not, and were not happy to wait. Production was increased to twenty a month, and the fighter took a back seat to the commercial considerations of air transport.

'You know what,' Jimmy said to Bill and Ted. 'I reckon ... that if we had a four-engine plane, bigger again, with floats, it could go across the Pacific.'

Bill and Ted exchanged looks, their grey matter fired up.

Parachutes started to sell well, Uncle Sam finally on the case. Not for the Cessna, but for cheap and reliable parachutes for their biplane pilots. Jimmy sold almost a thousand, and reserve chutes, American pilots offered parachute training in New Mexico. The British Government, rather the Diplomatic Corp in Africa, had taken to throwing themselves out of perfectly serviceable aircraft on weekends. Word spread, and Timkins arranged a thousand parachutes for Britain and its flying service, the RAF. France followed suit and ordered parachutes, Jimmy refusing orders from Italy. The Canadian Air Force, what it was, received them free of charge.

With an air show in Seattle imminent, the Cessnas and the new Dash-7 prototype were dispatched, along with Big Paul and his mates, free-fall chutes taken for a display. The crowd peered up as four men jumped – they gasped – the men holding hands in formation. Breaking formation, they landed in the intended circle, amazing the crowds, as well as a few US Army officers.

The hot Canadian summer days provided good weather to test-fly the aircraft, but also for the Canadian Rifles to practice jumping around the region. Jimmy ordered the second prototype Dash-7 to have no seats for passengers and a large hole at the side, behind the undercarriage. That variant flew in late August, six Canadian Rifles

on board. They jumped at nine thousand feet without oxygen, now with crude altimeters fitted to wrists, but still with leather headgear and flying goggles from the First World War. They landed safely, hid their chutes, and pretended to survey an enemy stronghold in the hills. Airborne insertions had been borne.

The first week of September saw US Army officers paying the factory a visit. Big Paul strapped them into static line chutes and threw them out at two thousand feet, over a mown field. They landed without incident, an idea planted into their heads as to just how much fun this parachuting lark was. As well as how practical. Uncle Sam was now on the case, since spotter planes could be used to drop men into remote areas, twenty-four Cessnas and their parts ordered for advanced testing. They already had the parachutes, but a dozen were thrown in along with the planes.

Jimmy focused on Columbia Airlines for a while, putting most teams onto Dash-7 production. The first prototype was seeing just how high it could fly, and how fast, and – most importantly - how far. With a pilot and ten passengers it could climb to ten thousand feet and fly five hundred miles. Jimmy ordered the fuel tanks enlarged and improved, the aircraft soon taking eight passengers on an eight hundred mile journey. It was enough, more than enough.

In late September, the third and fourth production aircraft were handed to Columbia Airlines and used to transport passengers from Vancouver to Toronto, refuelling as they went. Jimmy now applied for permission to operate in America. He received permission from the State of Alaska almost straight away, planning on conquering the market there. Well, he planned on conquering the market everywhere, but Alaska was a close first step.

As the production of Cessnas and Dash-7s increased at a pace, Jimmy drew a picture of a four-engine seaplane. It didn't offer floats, it was the float; a boat with wings. And he may have pinched the idea. Bill and Ted were keen, keen to conquer the Pacific. Columbia Airlines was making good money for the time, and the sale of aircraft was starting to make money, at least to cover costs. Even the parachutes were making money.

Po, meanwhile, had long since received fridges from Kenya, and copied them - with a little help. He was selling them around Hong Kong and doing a roaring trade, also selling them via Han into China and Singapore. Reading the telegrams, and smiling, Jimmy asked the scientists to develop fridges here in Canada, and to conquer the American market, starting with Florida. A fridge

factory was planned in chilly old Vancouver. Rudd, by now, had conquered the East African fridge market and was making good money; every hotel had at least one.

The oil sales from Zanzibar were stable, but the train track was a drain on resources, most of the spare cash going towards it. The track transported paying passengers to Uganda and further to Goma, and through Tanzania to Rwanda, but they just about covered the cost of operating the train services. The track had reached what would be Forward Base and halted, that was as far as Jimmy wanted to go with that leg. The southern leg, through Tanzania and Rwanda, had been slowed by the building of numerous bridges, but now penetrated into the southern regions of the Eastern Congo, which was Belgian controlled, and pointed southwest towards the gold, only some three hundred miles of mosquito infested swamp and jungle to go.

Steffan had organised Doc Graham for inoculating workers, or he would have lost half of them to disease or insect bite. With the inoculations, productivity improved greatly. Still, it was hard going to cut through virgin jungle, across ridges and gorges, building bridges as you went. Steffan's spotter planes made life much easier, the lay of the land scouted weeks ahead of any planned track laying. Hard up against the Tanzanian border, the British Army built a base next to the track, a small town growing from nothing. Local missionaries, who knew nothing of the track, were delighted to stumble across it, the odd train flagged down on occasion.

The Belgians were still suspicious of the British, and could not believe that Jimmy would build a track right across Africa and towards what would become Angola. The cost would have been prohibitive to a government, let alone a businessman. Still, the British Army halted at the Tanzanian border and did not cross into Rwanda, which was under Belgian control. Month by month Rudd sold more diamonds, sending them to Europe and America, and the expensive track pushed ever onwards.

The British Empire then leant a hand, in a roundabout sort of way. The Admiralty diverted its ships to the new small Somaliland port that Rudd and Abdi had built, the location not far from where the future joint naval base would be, and not far from the British operated port of Aden in Yemen. The port offered a long concrete birth, just the one, and a resident oil tanker. Like a strange mating ritual, British warships would pull alongside the tanker, take on oil, and move off. Once every few weeks, another oil tanker would stop, and top-up its companion. The Admiralty now owed Jimmy a few quid.

Knowing about the train track – and probably its cost, the British Government diverted ready-made track lengths from several sources to the Mombasa Steam Company, the value of which was well over that of the oil. Jimmy smiled, understanding the message: push the track further in, and to hell with the Belgians!

Thinking about the future, Jimmy ordered a spur line from the Sudanese line, to snake across Chad and up past the rear of Libya, and towards Tunisia, right across the worst parts of the Sahara. He requested British engineering officers to assist in planning the line. The Foreign Office puzzled it, Timkins called in to see the Prime Minister.

Timkins began, ‘Prime Minister, we saw the Italians land in Libya. And, should they – or anyone else, land again – that track could place British East African soldiers into their rear, an area they would not expect to be attacked from.’

The British Government could now see the benefit, although they questioned the cost of such a speculative venture.

Sykes and Jack returned to Canada before the snows fell, the last leg of their journey west made in a Dash-7. They met Jimmy in the hotel’s top floor diner, drinks arranged.

‘Christ, Jimmy, those planes are great for this day and age,’ Sykes said as they met. ‘I sure as hell wouldn’t risk flying in anything else.’

‘I’m going to conquer the airline business, and the flying boat business, and ... well, a few others.’

‘Like fridges!’ Sykes noted. ‘We found them in Cairo and Alexandria. There’re even a couple in London, brought up from Kenya. And I saw some chap parachute from a biplane at a Biggin Hill air show in the UK. One of yours it was, probably from the batch you sold to the UK Government.’

‘I’m making flying safer ahead of time,’ Jimmy commented. ‘So, how’s our lad?’

‘He’s a Junior Minister in the Foreign Office still, and liking it. And he annoys his superiors because the PM asks *him* instead of *them*.’

Jimmy smiled. ‘Good.’

‘They’ve adopted Jack and myself as unofficial spymasters around the globe, that works well enough.’

‘The Italians?’

'Their government fell after the debacle in Libya, they'll think twice now. As we speak they're slightly less fascist in their policies; they just needed a good punch on the nose.'

'Germany?'

'Right on cue, Hitler about to leave prison.'

Jimmy nodded. 'Next year, when the Social Democrats rally, I'll arrange a little something for them.'

'Will that ... have an effect?'

'By a year or so,' Jimmy responded. 'I'm kind of hoping to synchronize them with Japan.'

'Any interest from the Americans?'

'Only for parachutes and planes. And the fighter we're developing - I've slowed that down in favour of conquering the airline business.'

'Why not sell the fighter to the British?'

'Too soon; the Germans may get ideas from it.'

Sykes eased back. 'But you'll make sure that the RAF is well equipped in 1939?'

Jimmy nodded. 'Over ... equipped. But ... but I'm hoping that some *shock and awe* will end the war in weeks. You see, I don't want the Russians attacked by the Germans. If Russia is left alone, well ... at the moment its army is crap; if they don't fight a war they'll not modernise it. The Russians grabbed the east European states as a buffer, as a result of the German war. If there's no war with the Germans, then the Russians should remain quiet.'

'But for how long?' Jack challenged.

'The Cold War Russian mentality was a direct result of the war with the Germans, and the losses they took. If they don't take the losses, then they'll display less of an aggressive attitude.'

Sykes nodded. 'But if the Germans invade Poland, Hitler will offer half of Poland to Russia. The Russians would need to be pushed out later.'

'That could be done by force ... or by threat,' Jimmy said. 'Even a little diplomacy.'

'And Palestine ... now that the UK Government has allocated you land there, quite a bit of land?' Sykes nudged.

'Part of me would like the Jews to stay out of Palestine, for that whole Middle East problem never to get started. But, some of that problem was down to the Russians arming Syria and Egypt and giving them a nudge. If Russia doesn't do that, then we may just get away with a begrudgingly-accepted Israel in the Middle East. But ... but the Germans *will* persecute the Jews, and we can't let

that happen given that we know about it. So, I'll buy some land in Palestine and move a few Palestinians out.'

'An enclave?' Jack asked.

'Is a distinct possibility,' Jimmy mentioned. 'But not ahead of time. I want you and Timkins to allow more Jewish refugees into Britain, and to nudge them on towards America. Use some money.'

'You in the stock markets here?' Jack asked.

Jimmy shook his head. 'I'll get involved after the 1929 crash, buying up a few bargains.'

'Will gold be out of the Congo by then?' Sykes asked.

'Some of it,' Jimmy answered. 'That'll be a long process.'

'And the reason for involving the UK Government so soon?' Sykes broached.

'Positioning and posturing for 1939; they have the largest navy right now, the farthest reach, and the most influence. What I introduce to the British system will spread far and wide - like fridges. So I need them sweet on me, and cooperative. And, when the Belgians are being distracted by Herr Hitler, we'll grab the Congo, and the British will have a role to play in its development. And, right now, Churchill is arguing in Parliament the need for greater defences of the empire.'

'We've listened to a few of his speeches from the public gallery,' Jack enthused. 'It's marvellous to see him in the flesh. And he and Timkins hit it off straight away, tales of Africa swapped.'

'We'll need Churchill on the team around 1935,' Jimmy told them.

'I've joined his club, and we meet often,' Sykes reported with a smile. 'We see eye to eye on most things, and I've started to provide him with intel on events around the world.'

'The current government may not like that; he's in opposition at the moment.'

'I'm discreet,' Sykes insisted.

'Not some sort of spy ... are you?' Jimmy teased. He showed the guys around the new hotel, Cookie making a meal that night and catching up on gossip, the gang drifting in and saying hello, each describing their projects.

The next day Sykes had a go in a Cessna, a quick circuit flown, a view over the inlet taken. He and Jack visited the Canadian Rifles and tried the half-tracks, firing a few weapons on the range. After a few days fishing, and a thorough briefing from Jimmy, they set sail again for Hong Kong, Kenya and Cairo.

The prodigal son returns

I stepped back through the portal covered in dust, dressed in my faded pink desert combats, a pistol on my hip. My skin was heavily tanned, a beard turning grey.

‘Welcome back, Mister Paul,’ a technician offered. ‘They are all waiting outside.’

‘Marvellous,’ I complained. ‘No chance of a quiet beer.’ I moved past the man, ignoring the other technicians, and into the sunshine, my men following behind. The control room would need a sweep afterwards.

Outside, I found a line of reporters, cameras rolling, beyond them a long line of tables laid out on the side of the runway, US Army officials sat awaiting their men, laptops ready to log them in. Beyond the tables stood a crowd, quite a crowd, Helen and the girls in view. I stepped up to the press, hoping to get this over with quickly.

‘Ladies and gentlemen ... of this world. We knocked back The Brotherhood, and the world that Jimmy started out in is now safe. Anti-radiation drugs are being used where needed, farms and houses rebuilt, hope restored.’

My men trailed past me and to the tables.

‘We landed a decoy unit in Senegal, and they diverted the attentions of The Brotherhood whilst we landed in South Africa. We fought our way through Africa, liberating Zimbabwe, where we raised an army of Rifles ... as well as fixing the farms and increasing crop yield. Those farms now feed Africa, and much of the liberated world.

‘We took the Congo and began to extract ore and oil, then recaptured Kenya, raising a Rifles regiment there. With the support of food from Zimbabwe, and oil from the Congo, we fought our way into North Africa, destroying The Brotherhood there. We then attacked and surrounded Mecca and Medina, knowing that it would bring out The Brotherhood. There we fought - and held the line - for many years, the deserts red with the blood of the enemy fighters.

‘The Brotherhood abandoned Europe and Africa, Russia and China, even Turkey, and tried to dislodge us from Saudi Arabia. That fight is still going on, but The Brotherhood *are* beaten, discredited, and they’ve lost face with their own people, large areas of that world now starting to rebuild. And the people of that world know that we’re time travellers, they know the story. An

international government of unity was set up, contact maintained by working satellites.'

I took a moment. 'Of the ten thousand men I took, six hundred were killed, mostly by indiscriminate nukes. Another five thousand have elected to remain and fight, many helping to rebuild America. It was their wish, and we will respect that wish. Now ... I need a cold beer, a bath, and a shave. Kindly give my men some peace for a while, they've earned a break.'

I walked through the reporters and hugged Helen.

'You do need a bath,' she whispered.

Shelly hugged me.

'I missed you more than I thought I would,' I said.

'Charming,' Shelly responded.

'Don't be like that, you know what I mean.' I greeted their husbands, and a few of the grandkids, Helen leading me towards the RF hotel, where she indicated I had a room booked. As well as a change of clothes waiting, Helen showing me the stuff laid out in my room.

'Listen,' I said. 'It's been a very long while and ... you could scrub my back.'

She cocked an eyebrow. 'I suppose I could.'

Later, in the bar, I greeted RF senior staff and old friends, accepting a cold beer. It had been a while for a cold beer as well. I downed several quickly, feeling a bit better, now a little more mellow, the death and dust washed out.

'So how was it?' Dr Hicks asked. 'Really?'

'Hell on earth.' I took a moment. 'Someday I may write the book, but I doubt it. I like building things, and we managed to get the Congo economic engine restarted, but ... it will take a long time for them to recover, there's no quick fix over there. The only bright spot is the international cooperation against The Brotherhood, and the new unity government.'

'You heard about Jimmy?'

I nodded. 'Back to 1920 someplace.'

'He caused a hell of a storm when he returned, helping with a gas cloud from space.'

'Gas cloud ... from space?' I lied. 'What the hell would he know about this time line?'

'Best theory is that a future *you* dragged him from time and gave him the answer.'

'I would have written on his forehead.'

'It was written on his hand.'

'Oh. Well, there you go, it could have been me.'

'He took back quite a team with him, and ten of the lab technicians jumped through before the portal powered down.'

'They what?' I frowned.

'They followed him.'

'They'll have a rough time - blacks in 1920,' I pointed out.

'Hal is here, he wants to see you. When he found out that Jimmy had gone he ... got drunk and ... tried to kill himself.'

'Shit... How's he been the last few years?'

'Retired, bored, hiding from the Press.'

'Ah.' I sipped my beer. 'Where is he now?'

'In one of the houses in the estate, under guard.'

'I can't leave him in that condition.' I headed straight out, security in tow, and found the house, guards posted outside. Inside I found Hacker. 'Been a while.'

'For you ... a long while.' We shook.

'How is he?'

'He's fine,' came a voice, Hal stepping into the lounge a moment later. 'He's ... also now a damn prisoner.'

'The people must think you're valuable,' I said.

'Fuck ... the people. They want to stuff me and put me in a glass case. And that trip Jimmy took, I should have been there. Second World War? Who knows more than I do about that?'

'Well, Jimmy ... Sykes ... Jack of course ... the technicians...'

'Fuck you as well,' Hal let out as he sat.

I sat opposite, Hacker easing down.

'Can you keep a secret?' I asked them. They exchanged a look. 'I'll be going to join Jimmy, in 1925. I'll be leaving just as soon as I get fed up with this place, which will be about a week. So ... know anyone who might want to come?'

'You'll take me?' Hal gasped.

'I'd go as well,' Hacker offered. 'Someone needs to keep an eye on the old man here.'

'Then you'd best get yourselves fit - I'll arrange injections. Hal, start jogging - *with* your posse of guards.'

The night before I was due to step back through the portal, the world still not aware of my intention, I was in the rooftop bar enjoying a beer when a bright light caught everyone's attention. We peered down as a portal opened on the runway, people rushing about.

My heart sank; he was back already. People stepped through the portal as we watched. I turned and ran downstairs, ready to thump

Jimmy. Ten minutes later I stood staring at the people who had come through, smiling like an idiot.

In the morning I walked into the control room with Hal and Hacker, packs on our backs full of food and water. 'Dial the frequency,' I ordered. A few of the technicians were unaware of the trip, and questioned it. My Kenyan bodyguards stuck pistols up their noses.

'We have it, sir,' came five minutes later. 'Radio signal ... Morse Code ... New Year 1925 celebrations.'

'Wind back a bit, say two months.'

'Calibrating. Ready, sir.'

The portal burst into life, a startled young camel running for its life, nothing else visible. We jumped through and ran forwards. With the portal off, I scanned the ground. 'There, a line of rocks. This is the right planet, and not one million years BC.'

'Thank fuck for that,' Hal let out, my four Pathfinder guards scanning the horizon.

'Is that ... a train I can hear?' I asked.

It was, and we hiked towards it, finding a track some two miles north of the portal. And we had just missed the train. Bummer. At least we had a track to walk down.

'OK, let's just start walking,' I encouraged.

Rudd did a double take, stopping dead in the street outside the new hotel. 'Paul? Hal?'

We shook and hugged. 'Let's get inside,' I encouraged, Rudd greeting Hal and Hacker before saying hello to the bodyguards, all of us in suitable period clothes. Inside, we claimed rooms before hitting the rooftop bar. Rudd fetched us beers as we sat at a table, a cool breeze blowing.

'So, what you all been up to?' I asked.

'We sold the diamonds and made money, CAR is formed and drilling oil in Zanzibar,' Rudd reported. 'Ngomo and his men are raising a Rifles regiment - there are one thousand of them now, a base thirty miles north of here, white officers.'

'White officers?' Hal queried.

'They have integrated well enough, the officers injected,' Rudd explained with a shrug. 'These white officers, they were selected by Jimmy and trained by Mac and Handy, so now they fight like Rifles. They protect the train lines into the Congo.'

'And Abdi?' I asked.

'He has bought many things in Mogadishu, raised a Rifles regiment of at least two thousand men – both regiments now with AK47s.'

'AK47s?' Hal queried.

'Made in Canada,' Rudd reported. 'Just for us.'

'Gives us an edge,' Hacker noted.

'And now aeroplanes,' Rudd explained. 'They look like old Cessna 172s, and they're quite reliable. We have a basic air service to Mombasa and back. Oh, and fridges.'

'Fridges?' Hal queried.

'The scientists invented them,' Rudd informed Hal. 'Oh, do you know about the scientists?'

I nodded. 'And Anna and Cosy?'

'They started Ebede a few years ago, some twelve hundred kids there now. I see them often. And Steffan works with the steam train company.'

We laughed. 'Should have known,' I quipped.

'They are pushing track into the Congo and a few places here, now talk of a track from the Mawlini area towards Tunisia. Oh, and Abdi's rifles massacred the Italian army in Libya, after they massacred them in Somalia.'

'The Italians were due to invade Libya a year or two back,' Hal noted.

Rudd nodded. 'They did, and ... well, he killed them all, five thousand they say.'

'Jesus,' I let out. 'How close are we to the gold in the Congo?'

'Maybe ... two hundred miles or more.'

'Ask Ngomo and his men to pop down,' I said.

'We can have a party here, I'll clear out the whites,' Rudd offered.

'I heard on the train down here about a large hospital,' I mentioned.

'Yes, Jimmy gave the money for it, for a lady he was involved with.'

'Jimmy ... involved with a lady?' I queried.

'Dr Helen Astor. She works there. Oh, she knows about time travel and us.'

'So why is she there ... and his holiness in Canada?' I probed.

Rudd shrugged. 'I never asked. Oh, Doc Graham is here, at that hospital. He's the boss.'

'Throw a party for tomorrow night, get the gang over,' I told Rudd.

'I'm celebrating the birth of my second son,' Rudd informed us.

'You didn't waste any time,' Hal noted.
'Ngomo has six wives.'
'Six!' we all said at the same time.
'They live at the base. Abdi has fifty, they say.'
'Fucking hell,' I let out. Facing Hal, I said, 'What happens in Vegas ... stays in Vegas.'
'Damn right,' he agreed.

'Can I help you,' Dr Astor asked me.
'No, I'm fit and well, as fit and well as ... Jimmy.'
She stared.
'I'm Paul, Jimmy's right hand man. I just arrived ... here.'
'Ah,' she realised.
'Nice to meet you,' I said as I shook her hand. 'I can see why Jimmy likes you.' She blushed a little. 'Doc Graham around?'
'One floor up.'
I knocked and entered Doc Graham's grand office.
'Paul!' he shouted as he stood. 'I wondered if you'd join this show.' We hugged.
'Better here ... than over there. And Hal and Hacker are with me.'

'Excellent.'
'Big party in the rooftop bar tomorrow night.'
'I think Anna and Cosy are in town, I'll check.'
'So...' I took in his office. 'Where do you plug the computer in?'
'Not for another eighty years! But I love it; it's simple.'
'You ... inject people?'
'Lots of them, all the time; we're doing a good job of making a healthy Kenyan population. So ... how was ... the other place?'
'Hell on earth, and best left as a memory.'
He nodded his understanding. 'Jimmy's planes are a step forwards, and fridges. Still, they're making a few quid. And Rudd, he thinks he's you - out to re-build Africa.'
'I'm off to Canada after New Year.'
'They're all coming here,' Doc Graham stated, but I already knew.

I nodded absently. 'I ... don't want to spend too long around Africa, not for a while.'
'Who could blame you, after what you went through. Cold beer?'
He pointed towards the fridge in the corner.
'Very ostentatious,' I quipped. 'For 1924.'
We cracked open beers, and caught up for an hour.

I wandered around Nairobi with two bodyguards, enjoying the old colonial feel to the place. I found police on the corners, the streets clean, oddly clean. I noticed the “Silo Clinic”, and a sign for “Silo Tractors”, a faded poster for “Silo Fridges”. It made me smile.

The following evening the gang assembled in the rooftop bar, Steffan and his guard up from Mombasa, Anna and Cosy coming across. The rooftop bar had been reserved for just us, no whites to wonder about the blacks in attendance. I gave Ngomo a telling off about the wives, threatening to include it in a book I was writing. But Anna surprised me even more, now pregnant. I enquired as to who the father was.

‘We’re here a long time,’ she said. ‘And I miss a child that is not smarter than I am.’

‘I know that feeling,’ I sighed. ‘When they answer you back in Latin you know you’ve lost them!’

‘We have over a thousand children now, the oldest about ten, the youngest just babies.’

‘At least they don’t have AIDS yet.’

‘No, most are well enough, but just the usual famine related illnesses. We collect them from all over the country, and Doc Graham has an orphanage here in Nairobi.’

‘You must have rubbed off on him. How’s their schooling?’

‘It’s a little slower than before, they start from nothing. In our time they spoke some English and watched TV. Some of these children can’t even talk, and they’re six years old.’

‘Teachers?’

‘We have some of the scientists with us, and we’ve hired many staff. The aim is to feed the Rifles some good officers before 1934, soldiers during that period, and hopefully plenty of nurses.’

‘Will you open an orphanage in the Congo soon?’

‘In a year or so, small to start with. There are not many orphans there, no built up towns or cities.’

‘You fly, I hear,’ Hal asked Cosy.

‘Yes, the Trophy Mark II. It looks like a Cessna 172, and it’s reliable. It’s made from bonded aluminium honeycomb.’

‘Christ, that’s advanced!’

‘No one has noticed,’ Cosy said with a shrug. ‘It’s just a plane like others. Well, it’s the first monoplane here, but there are other monoplanes around. I’ll show you tomorrow if you like.’

‘I would, thanks,’ Hal responded.

Skids turned up late, our wandering safari chief looking as tanned as me.

‘You having fun in the bush?’ I asked as we shook.

‘We now own several lodges, and a shit load of land,’ he informed me. ‘The estate makes money as well. But in this day and age they shoot and mount everything, and they like to shoot elephants.’ He shrugged. ‘You spent ... what, twelve years fighting The Brotherhood?’

I nodded. ‘No picnic. I’ll talk about it when I’m ready. What’s your role down here?’

‘To get the land and lodges ready for 1945 onwards.’

‘I though you’d want to train the Rifles.’

He made a face. ‘Had enough of soldiering for a while.’

‘I know that feeling.’

Steffan approached.

‘How’re the toy trains?’ I asked him.

‘Great, I love steam engines.’

‘Track going alright?’

‘It’s hard work where we are, all jungle and gullies. But there’s clear land ten miles on, so things should speed up.’

‘That clear land; could a team make a quick track and get to the gold?’

He nodded.

‘Send Ngomo’s men on and start that mine, clear the area. We’ll need the gold, and it’s two thousand feet down.’

‘We’ll have to deal with the Belgians first.’

‘That gold is close to the Zambian border, so ... alter a map a little, and practise lying.’

‘You seem to be up to speed on the plan,’ he noted.

‘I discussed it with Jimmy some time ago.’

‘Ah, I figured as much; gas cloud from space.’ He walked off smiling, and shaking his head.

Rudd received a telegram right in front of me. ‘Another thirty tractors have arrived.’

‘Call everyone together, get them seated,’ I asked.

With everyone seated, I began, ‘As some of you may know, Jimmy and I decided to come here long ago.’ A few were genuinely surprised. ‘The plan, this plan, is one that Jimmy and I discussed and came up with, at least the broad strokes. Now, we’ve just received another thirty tractors, and Steffan informs me that after the next ten miles of jungle there’s flat land towards Zambia and the gold mines.’

‘Ngomo, I want your men fully mobilised, and sat on those tractors. I want a road made to the mine, and I don’t care if it’s the same route as the train track. Steffan, bring up supplies and fuel for them. If anyone asks ... you’re scouting ahead for the track, then plead ignorance.

‘Rudd, buy mining gear ready, but keep it well hidden. Anyone asking questions about it disappears. Ngomo, make a trip to Mawlini, get some diamonds. Rudd, sell them, buy good mining equipment and get us some British mine engineers. Ngomo, when we find the mine we’ll stay there – for a hundred years. So make a camp, and make it comfortable.

‘OK, that road. When you find the mine, back up and create a road that heads down to Zambia. Then, in front on the mine, make side roads that lead nowhere, a few of them. If any Belgians take an interest ... let them get lost in the jungle. If they find the mine ... leave none alive to talk about it.

‘Now, since the mine is just thirty miles from the Zambian border, we can say that we’re mining in Zambia. Rudd, open a mine in Zambia with permission, just across the border, and dig a big hole. If they don’t find anything, move it a mile, just keep the Belgians guessing.

‘Ngomo, when the first gold is ready, start an insurrection in the north and the east of Congo; I want the Belgians to hate the region, and to be gone. The Congo is ours, and we’ll dig up the ore and oil – with the cooperation of the British. Rudd, Steffan, send telegrams, order those tractors moved by train into the Congo, and to the end of the track ready. Hal, Hacker, grab a plane or two, make airstrips in the Congo, and scout ahead. And Hal, don’t crash and get lost in the jungle!’

They laughed.

‘OK, Jimmy is here in a few weeks – in time for New Year, after which Hal and Hacker will come with me to Canada, a few planes to play with. Cosy, let’s make sure that we can move things from Mombasa without being noticed. Take an interest in any Belgians taking too much of an interest in those movements; put your spy hat back on for a while. You’ve had too much free time of late anyway, poor old Anna knocked up.’ They laughed.

The party dragged on, everyone given time to brief me on their operations, and I altered a few things.

I went out that day to the shops, finding no particular streets set aside for rows of shops as in our time, and many of the clothes shops looked like regular houses at first glance. Around here, clothes were made for you, not bought off the peg so much. The

guys had indicated the benefits of ladies silk knickers over men's woollen undergarments, and I bought a few shirts – no collars attached. Or cuffs attached for that matter.

Hats came next, and I bought a variety, the men in the shop surprised that I didn't know my hat size, or any brands of popular headwear. The shoes were not that dissimilar to those that you could find in 2047, albeit a little stiffer. There was no such thing as a soft shoe or training shoe, and most men wore ankle boots, even with a suit. I wondered how they danced at the local ball, and did the lady's shoes have steel toecaps, for when they were stepped on by the men?

I emerged in a new beige suit and straw hat, tan ankle boots, and started itching, soon cursing 1925's clothing manufacturing processes.

The next day I ventured up to the Rifles base in my itchy clothes and met the white officers, explaining that I was Jimmy's right hand man. I explained the big deployment to them, the men keen to be kept active. They informed me about the Canadian Rifles, the desert camp, and Abdi's attacks on the Italians. I fired an AK47 – pretending that I was interested, threw a grenade, but I was not in the mood for soldiering.

That following week I travelled down to Ebede, having a long look around and staying the night. I had a peek at the River View beach the next day, but it was overgrown with bushes, not much to see. Still, I bought the land and ordered up a hotel.

Mombasa was a hive of activity around the port, most of these current wooden houses gone in my time, replaced by ugly brick warehouses. Steffan showed me around the Mombasa Steam Company, and I met the co-directors, explaining that I had been in Hong Kong and other places.

Back in Nairobi, I risked a flight in one of the Cessnas and landed at the other River View, the one that had a river to view, staying the night with a bunch of colonial whites that I wanted to shoot and mount, or mount then shoot. Skids showed me around the area on horseback, and I opted for a long horse ride back towards the nearest rail line, a pleasant three-day trek. I slept to the roar of lonesome male lions. By the sound of it, they weren't getting much. In Nairobi, I kicked back and relaxed, often to be found sat in the rooftop bar and chatting to strangers, or helping Rudd to organise things.

Jimmy and the gang arrived on December 2nd, a few days spent in Mombasa before travelling up to Nairobi for Christmas and New

Year, the scientists having been asked to remain in Canada and to design a few things.

'You made it then,' Jimmy said to me. We didn't even bother to shake.

'Someone has to run this show properly.'

'So I can relax while you do some work, eh?' Jimmy quipped.

'Seen Dr Astor?'

'Not ... yet,' he carefully mouthed. 'Why?'

'She seems nice. And what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.'

'It's not in Vegas, it's in my head. Memories ... follow us around like taunting ghosts.'

I took a moment, looking away. 'That they do.'

'So, you've organised a big push for the gold I hear.'

'Yep, all in hand. Hal and Hacker helping out.'

'Did Hal really try and kill himself?'

I made a face. 'If he had ... he wouldn't be with us, so I guess it was half-hearted.'

'It won't be easy to meet him, I should have asked him.'

'Well, he is getting on, and not as fit as he should be,' I pointed out.

'Which was why I never considered him. You took Mecca on my old world?'

I nodded. 'After a year, there was a solid ten miles of bodies in every direction; they just kept coming. Must have been a million vultures thriving there.'

'Not pleasant.'

'We all wore masks. Plague broke out, and that killed *them* ... not us.'

'And Texas?'

'Took some persuading, so we ignored them.'

'Just as well. Shelly sent her assistant to spy on me, to act as my assistant.'

I laughed. 'That's my girl.'

'So I have him earmarked for a future British Prime Minister.'

'That'll piss her off.'

'She ... afforded the opportunity.' He took a moment. 'Did they hassle you about coming back?'

'I didn't tell them, I just came. They'll be hell to pay when I go back.'

'Fuck 'em.'

Abdi turned up the next day, his team welcomed into the hotel, few white guests around to be concerned about the "wogs", our hotel

having been block-booked – by us. He and Ngomo compared their men, and their wives, Mac taking the piss out of each in equal measure. Big Paul and his gang re-acquainted themselves with the bodyguards of Abdi and Ngomo, Cookie and Sandra greeting everyone, but not having to cook for a while.

Sykes and Jack turned up a day later, another round of drinks and chats, Timkins arriving the following day via a Royal Navy warship from London bound for Australia. People enquired about Churchill, and dreary old London.

It took a week for everyone to catch up with everyone else's gossip, Jimmy and Timkins talking a great deal, often late into the night. Jack and Sykes brought me up to speed on current world politics, and I scoured the English newspapers that the pair had brought with them. There were many small wars and rebellions going on about the globe, empires expanding or shrinking, but nothing major, and nothing that we wished to concern ourselves with.

Dr Helen Astor re-acquainted herself with Jimmy, and she made it clear that she had not seen anyone else, nor wished to. Jimmy asked her to get on with her life, and to get married. But I could see how fond of her he was. I offered to console her for him, getting a warning finger and one of his looks. She joined us for the Christmas celebrations and for New Year, spending many nights with Jimmy. We wanted to ask, but we didn't dare.

January 2nd saw us travel down to Mombasa together, those of us leaving, and we took separate ships at differing times; I travelled separately to Jimmy in case one of us met a watery death. I had two scientists with me, the men glad to be heading to Canada - and very glad to heading away from Abdi. That left two scientists with Anna, inventing things locally and building fridges, my two electing to try Canada after a few years in British Somaliland. My four black bodyguards readily joined Ngomo; they'd have stood out in Canada.

I stopped off in Hong Kong to meet Po and Yuri, a few days spent catching up, Jimmy having met with them on the way down to Kenya. I was spoilt rotten: food, booze and girls – all sampled in equal measure.

I hadn't had much female attention in the past twelve years, certainly no relationships. On Jimmy's old world, blowjobs could be had for a tin of meat in most places, and in Zimbabwe I picked up a nice young girl that stayed with me for a year or so. She spoke little English, but she cooked and cleaned for me with a cheery smile, and kept me warm at night.

Having enjoyed a bath with three pint-sized Chinese ladies at the same time, Po and Yuri showed me around their various hotels and clubs, around a few ships in the harbour, and finally their fridge factory - their very large fridge factory.

Han arrived back on the last day that I was there, our roving salesman greeting me warmly. We spent hours catching up. They waved me off the next day and I set off for Canada, heading after Jimmy. The crossing was rough in places, and we arrived in Vancouver on February 20th, 1925. It was cold as hell. Still, after my twelve years fighting in Africa it was most welcome, crisp and clean snow handled as if gold dust.

Mac met us at the dockside dressed like Al Capone, a few cars to transport us through the snow to the gang's hotel just outside Trophy. I liked the hotel straight away, and the view from my room. Jimmy brought me up to speed on the various facilities, a map laid out, and he pointed out the secret facility, and the secret airfield in the interior.

My first chore in Trophy was a little shopping, since I possessed mostly light-coloured suits suitable for Africa - and straw hats, and everyone around here was in a dark brown suit. I noticed hats on some of the working-class men that looked just like trucker caps from 2010, a variety of colours. Some men wore cloth caps, many wearing the typical rounded bowler hats, other hats in the classic Fedora style of the 1930s. I bought several suits off the peg - they fitted, but was duly measured for several more.

I finally figured out that Knickers was a type of long coat, a Derby was a rounded bowler hat, and that I needed detachable starched bibs of some sort for a function. I was also expected to change for dinner, and for work, and then I decided that they could all fuck off if they thought I was going to change three times a day. I bought shirts with and without collars, with cuffs this time, and the trousers seemed a little better than those available in Kenya. I even bought a few pairs of blue jeans and some high boots, expensive imports from the States.

The shops offered a wide variety of warm padded jackets and Canadian Parkas, which was just as well considering the weather of Canada. Wondering how I might get all of what I bought back to the hotel, they asked where to have it delivered. I fumbled with the Canadian money Jimmy had given me, which included oddly enough a twenty-five cent note from the Dominion of Canada, and a bunch of Twenty-Five Dollar bills. I explained to the perplexed, yet helpful man in the shop, that I was from Africa - and wore a loin cloth mostly.

When the weather improved slightly the next day, I ventured to the factories and met Ted and Bill, and their staff, Jimmy explaining to them that I would be heavily involved from now on – and that I had been in Africa. We took Hal and Hacker along, and grabbed all of the test pilots. Hell, they had nothing to do in the current weather.

‘Guys,’ Jimmy called. ‘This is Paul, my right hand man from Africa; you do whatever he asks. This is Hal, and this is Hacker, and they have more hours in aircraft than you ever will. They ... are our new chief test pilots and design consultants; they know a thing or two about aircraft. They’ll be teaching you a thing or two about flying, including dog fighting and ground attack. They’ll also buy the beers.’ He faced Hal and Hacker. ‘Stay here guys, get acquainted.’

Back at the hotel, when Hal and Hacker returned, we grabbed them. ‘Right,’ Jimmy began. ‘You have a long cold winter ahead of you. Get a piece of paper, a pencil, and design a flying bedstead.’

‘Forerunner to the helicopter,’ Hal noted.

‘Yes. Make it look ugly, and don’t make it too smart just yet. But come spring I won’t something that hops along and hovers. Get some work done, slackers.’

Moaning and cursing, they headed off.

With the weather holding, I checked out the Rifles base, a quick visit, then the airfield, finally a look at the fighter.

‘It’s a beauty,’ I agreed with Jimmy. ‘But you’re right, a bit too soon.’

Jimmy showed me the Dash-7, and I ran a professional eye over its rudimentary control displays. ‘We have twelve now, many of them flying paying passengers – weather permitting, and we’ve just received permission to operate an air license in the States. I’m going to run them down to Los Angeles.’

‘And then?’

‘And then ... everywhere. Come on.’ He led me to a very large hangar, where the skeleton of a flying boat was taking shape. ‘This will be easy to test: we just power it down the inlet till it lifts off.’

I glanced at the inside, finding bonded honeycomb layers. ‘Advanced ... metalwork,’ I noted. And waited.

‘If it gets out ... yes, a problem. But I aim to jump thirty years ahead in secret. After that, fuck knows. We either shorten the war, or we start an arms race.’

We checked in on Mac and Handy, testing some of the weapons, then wrapped up warm and looked around an empty factory, a secret factory, our footsteps echoing.

‘Keeping it a secret will be near impossible,’ I said, my words echoing, my breath misting. ‘And the *other* project?’ I faced him.

‘Will be started in the spring and ... will be tricky to keep quiet. I’ll rope in the British and Canadian Governments to help with secrecy. I have ... an idea.’

I spoke to all of the black scientists in turn, getting a brief on their individual project areas, as well as families. Many now had wives or girlfriends, and one had just become a father.

During those dark winter nights we read the international papers a great deal, or worked on the various projects, only venturing out when the weather allowed us. We paid for snow ploughs, and they helped to keep the workers in the factories, production planes soon nose to tail and ready to be shipped out – when the weather allowed. I sat down with the designs of the Dash-7 and made a few modifications, and increased its size a little, handing the designs to the scientists to hand into the factory.

And, when I needed a little lady company, Jimmy pointed me towards a hotel in Vancouver where a few nice ladies hung out, “broads” or “molls” as they were often referred to, several of them up from Seattle. I tried the “dances” on occasion, but found few ladies that I liked the look of. They tended to wear heavy make-up and lipstick, god-awful perfume, and dresses that typically made them look fat, as well as much older than they really were. They also attended the dances with their mothers in attendance, sometimes grandma as well.

I met one nice girl, but she turned out to be eighteen. Around here that wasn’t a problem, she was almost old enough to be “left on the shelf”, as she had commented. Girls going off to college were not common here and now, and this young lady worked as a waitress at a local diner. She was very impressed with my money, but hinted at a spring wedding. I hinted that it was time for me to go, and beat a hasty retreat.

Close to giving up on the idea of a lady, I ventured to Seattle to try their clubs, prohibition having an effect on attendance numbers – as well as the mood of the attendees. One night, feeling fed up, I was approached by a nice half-caste Chinese lady, tall for Chinese. She made several hints, clear hints. She was not a hooker, but looking for just the one steady customer; a sugar daddy we would have said in my day and age. I slipped her enough money to make her interested, and organised an apartment for her in Vancouver. Then, two or three times a week, I would visit, have a lengthy massage, sex, a long hot bath, another massage, more sex, and a

meal at the Chinese restaurant next door afterwards, the lady impressed with my stamina.

Those visits kept my mind away from looking for a steady woman, which I figured I would have to wait for, maybe till 1960!

I potted around the prototype seaplane monster when I could, contributing towards the layout and positioning of four-engine controls, making comments. One evening, I said to Jimmy, 'That seaplane will make long journeys, so it needs an auto-trim.'

'You mean ... an auto-pilot, gyro-stabilised.'

'In time, but an auto-trim would do for now. You'd have a gyro-system to stabilise the aircraft, electric servos, then you can alter heading and height with micro turns of a dial. That way you save the pilots on long journeys.'

'Scribble it down, discuss it with the scientists. We'd need a gyro model made up, and some fancy electric servos – which is a bit of a leap. Start by getting the engineers together and asking about long distance pilot fatigue.'

I went and got the relevant men together the next day. 'Guys, this flying boat will have the fuel for twelve hours, probably a lot more. That's a long time for any pilot, even for two. They'll get tired, make mistakes - and crash. How do we set a course, then lock the controls so that the pilot can take a rest?'

'Some sort of auto-trim one asked?'

'Yes, but how?' they asked each other.

'How about a pendulum of some sort,' I suggested. 'When it's straight down you're flying straight and level. What we need, is when it moves ... it alters the trim a small amount.'

'That could work,' some agreed.

'I want a team on it,' I said. 'Because that big bird will be hard to fly across long distances. But I like the pendulum idea: if the plane banks, the pendulum swings, and ... some controls move the trim a little. But could we make that trim electric or hydraulic?'

They thought they could, and they got to work. I was impressed by the team Jimmy had put together and, for 1925, they seemed a lot smarter than I would have figured. I was also surprised to find physicists and mathematicians in the mix, and now a room of professional draughtsmen with neat haircuts and sharp pencils.

After the evening meal, Jimmy gave Mac and Handy another project, an RPG. 'I want a basic model, then an anti-armour model. Once ready and tested, put it to one side. Then I want you to look at the jeeps we're making, and test them to destruction, especially in this weather. Give prototypes to the Rifles here, and test them.'

Then ... then a want a mounted 105mm recoilless rifle, anti-armour and anti-personnel shells.'

'That all,' they quipped.

'Get to work, slackers,' I told them. Facing Jimmy, I said, 'Germans had basic RPGs in the war.'

He nodded. 'And they understood shaped charges. Americans had the bazooka, a three pound projectile that was deadly accurate to six feet.'

I whiled away a wet March working on the four-engine seaplane - it was becoming a passion, and I helped with designing the pilot's controls. I pictured myself flying, and what I would reach for most, which controls would be accessed less often. I remembered my lessons from Tubby on the Dash-7, and now tried to pinch a few ideas. I insisted that there be a red light when flaps were down, green when up, next to a suitable symbol. The artificial horizon was made a little bigger, a compass heading overlaid onto it, a simple spinning disk.

In a break with tradition, I wanted all of the readouts that affected the auto-trim to be together; speed, altitude, rate of climb/descent, trim settings, auto-trim on or off shown as a light. I grouped engine readouts together, and duplicated and mirrored them for the co-pilot/navigator. The cockpit seats were made to recline, and were given headrests. I also made sure that they eased back far enough for lumbering pilots to step out without knocking controls. And the in-flight toilet was a must, as well as a first for any aircraft of this period. Flushed items would fall to earth, a good reservoir of water held.

Remembering long flights made in C130 Hercules, I had a food station made up, a hot water tank that used an electrical heater run off the engines. At the moment, the planned passenger seats were more your cinema and less luxury, so I ordered several variants made up, all reclining with headrests and arm rests. With suitable seats agreed upon, and the floor of the aircraft ready, we experimented. Those of us from the future knew what it was like to have cramped seats on cheap flights, so we made sure that there was legroom for Jimmy. If he fitted, we were happy.

We managed to get forty-four seats in comfortably - two rows of two abreast with a central isle, one seat set aside for a waitress. Thinking on, that waitress would need a food and drink store. We lost a row of seats in favour of a food store and a sink for people to wash in, a bin underneath. Luxury travel would need to be luxury travel.

Jimmy reminded me about taking the plane out of the water, for maintenance and painting. Seawater would take its toll. It was a major redesign, so I insisted we look at that on version two. Luggage space was built into the area under the seat flooring, hatches made-up.

Jimmy then said, 'Think ... safety.'

I sat, and I thought about the safety. We had basic rubber rafts with the other seaplanes, so I pinched a load from stores and decided to store them at the rear. Pinching an idea from the future, I placed life vests in racks under each seat. Sat in one of those seats, the sun was beating in. I spoke to the engineers and had simple curtains placed over the windows so that people could sleep.

'It's better in here than my house,' an engineer quipped.

'Paying passengers, VIP passengers,' I said. Standing, I suddenly wondered why I had not hit my head. 'Overhead racking.'

I soon had a rack running along the length of the seats, so now bags could be stowed overhead. Considering rough sea landings, and rough take-offs, I added a simple elastic net to it so that bags would not thump heads. Well, as far as the paying passengers were concerned, I figured we'd done enough, certainly for 1925.

'Think ... safety,' Jimmy said again. I went back to thinking

Taking out a seat, I set fire to it. Whoosh. I asked for the covering to be fire retardant, and got the scientists on it. I set fire to a life vest, and it also went whoosh, an acrid black smoke created. We sought alternatives. I installed fire extinguishers forward and aft, and in the cockpit. Sat in the seats, an engineer having a coffee with me, I said, 'If there were thirty-six or so people in here, how would they get out in a fire, or if the plane was sinking?'

There was one main door.

'Ah,' he said. 'Yes, I see what you mean.'

We had the side windows in the cockpit made larger, and detachable. In the front row, windows came with large clips, and could be prised out. At the last row, windows were also detachable, and big enough for most people to squeeze through. I then considered sinking, which was always a real possibility for a seaplane, and a hatch was duly cut into the ceiling at the rear, a large hatch. By standing on the seats you could easily clamber out.

Thinking more about sinking, I looked at the plans for the plane, suggesting that compartments be made in the lower level, air-tight, so that if one was holed by a log in the water the damn thing wouldn't fill with water and sink. They agreed. I also had the nose strengthened with lightweight honeycomb, making it airtight as well. The ends of the wings had sections sealed off with rubber, so

that they would assist with floating in an emergency. The tail was also modified.

There had been no cockpit door planned, so I added one with a rubber seal and a lock. If the cockpit hit something and was punctured, the water would not rush into the cabin. I was happy enough.

May the 1st saw the big beast rolled out on a sled and placed on the taxiway. With quite a crowd watching, she was powered up – all four engines, and was allowed to run for an hour. We'd never get her in the thermal room, so Hal simply powered her up and down all day, the engines not failing. A fuel leak was found overnight and worked on.

The next day, Hal powered her up and moved along on the sled, taxiing around the airfield before powering down the runway on the heavy sled. Overnight they found another fuel leak and a small crack in a main spar. That crack has been caused by a badly fitted section, and was swapped out, a twenty-four hour job. Hal then tried again, full power applied to the beast. She powered down the runway before slowing, turned and taxied around, growling as she went. A day of that produced no leaks and no cracks.

With a window of opportunity in the weather, we pushed her to the inlet, now a larger concrete ramp leading down into the water. She slid in and drifted, Hal powering her up, Hacker left seat, two engineers observing from the rear. Hal powered her down the inlet, the waves small today, and back up to us. Full power was selected, the peace of the local wildlife disturbed, the shoreline full of spectators. After what seemed an age she lifted her nose and bounced skywards, Hal flying in a straight line for a mile or so before landing, taxiing back to us on the surface – but at speed.

Engineers went aboard by boat and inspected the frames, inside and out. We had two sizeable cracks. The poor girl was nudged under power towards the sled in the water, hauled out damp and damaged. But it turned out that the cracks were in the skin, the frame solid; the skin had been sealed a bit too tight in a few places. We ordered her back into the water the next morning, the inlet calm. Hal powered down the inlet, lifted the nose and gracefully climbed, turning in a slow circle. We all held our breath and watched as she circled the field. Over the inlet, Hal banked both ways, climbed and descended, completing another circuit and landing smoothly. Jimmy ordered a party.

The beast was left in the water overnight, lights rigged up, two-dozen engineers inspecting everything. The inside of the float was a little damp, a small hole found and plugged, a bad join blamed.

In the morning, the tired engineers gave it a good bill of health. Hal and Hacker, and now four engineers, lifted off and climbed, two circuits made at around two thousand feet before they headed down the inlet and out of sight. Unknown to us, Hal flew the damn thing around Vancouver and down to Seattle, just to show off. Back on the inlet he landed smoothly, powering down and then back up, taking off again. An engine gave out. On three engines, he performed a circuit without difficulty, landing in one piece, the beast now in need of an engineer's gentle touch.

'I never used more than sixty percent power the whole time,' an ebullient Hal informed us. 'Loaded, she'll handle differently.'

'Next flight,' Jimmy began, 'make it just the two of you, and see how she climbs, what altitude she's comfortable with.'

With the engine fixed, Hal and Hacker took her up the next day, climbing on full power up to fifteen thousand feet without a problem – oxygen available if the partial pressure system failed. And they got three hundred and ten miles an hour from her in a dive. They banked and buffeted her, climbed and dived, even cut engines and tested the handling. With that phase complete, they loaded sandbags, more each subsequent flight.

With the equivalent of thirty passengers in weight now onboard the take-off run was longer, much longer, but she handled well enough once up. Her rate of climb was lousy fully loaded, but it didn't matter. They tried maximum weight, and heard a loud crack on landing. Our boys had cracked a main spar, a week's work to replace it.

Technically, it could not be replaced, but this was the prototype. A section was cut out, replaced, and made much stronger. They again loaded up the sandbags, and she again powered down the inlet over modest waves. Landing several times, the spar held, a redesign on the cards for the next prototype, which Jimmy ordered that day. His instructions to Hal were: 'Break it, and stay alive.'

Hal landed her deliberately heavy and bounced, several times. Two minor supports buckled, one cracked. None were critical, and seemed to be been fitted too tightly. With the damage un-repaired, he bounced her again. Noting a storm moving in, and high waves, he pounded the poor girl at full power into the waves, shaking the damn plane to pieces. Any paying passengers would be consulting their lawyers - after emptying the sick bag.

With the beast broken in many places, but still flying, she was retired, destined to be taken apart and examined in detail, the engines salvaged - as well as the nice seats. The second prototype

was planned, and Hal now had a slogan. The engineers would say: "we make 'em, you break 'em".

Still, they learned which parts would break first, and made modifications, a total of a hundred and six faults officially listed.

That May, the US Army ordered another dozen Cessnas, and a twin-engine Dash-7 on evaluation. The British ordered a total of sixty Cessnas, most destined for the far corners of the empire where the planes were great for carrying mail securely, or diplomatic papers; the planes were preferable to the roads in places like Africa. And we benefited from the order book entries for another thirty aircraft to be delivered around Canada. The aircraft factory was starting to turn a profit, Columbia Airlines doing very well and growing in reputation.

We expanded the airfield and took on another sixty staff, shift patterns still being worked. Meanwhile, the secret factory was receiving equipment, men selected from the main workforce and being assigned to it. They were offered extra money, as well as a bullet in the head if they spoke about the secrets within. They could report that they were working on a rocket plane, and that was it; anything else would cause them to lose their jobs. Even Bill and Ted did not fully understand the new aircraft that would soon be worked on. The physicists, mathematicians, and metallurgy guys were moved over, the best talent now on this project.

On day one, those new engineers found our scientists stood next to a six foot long engine, but with its propellers on the inside. They watched as it was started up, a deafening roar issued. It was a short first test, and any longer would have caused the engine to blow apart. The theory was given to the men, explained in detail, as well as the problems: it tended to fly apart and explode. Caution was needed.

The men pinched the best lathes from the factory, the best metals and alloys, and got to work, succeeding in blowing the engine apart every week. Good job we installed sandbags.

We could have made the engine better, but the fact was that we needed them to learn. And there was a big difference between this toy of an engine, and the real thing. Mr Frank Whittle was due to design the engine in around ten years in Britain, a few others having the idea at the same time, but we got in there early, and ours would advance by leaps and bounds.

The next ten years would see some of the most significant leaps in the planet's history as far as aircraft designs were concerned, with or without our help. Planes would go from the red Baron's bi-

plane, to aluminium monoplanes capable of four hundred and sixty miles per hour. It was the grand age of aviation invention, so we were not causing too much of a stir.

Seeing Mac working on RPGs, I said, 'I want some suitable to fit to the underside of the fighter.'

'Not rockets?'

'These will do the job; just lob them down at the troops and tanks below. Four on each outer wing, and they'd be quick to reload on the ground; just push in and click.'

A week later we had racks and tubes fitted to a fighter prototype. With Mac's crude warheads fitted, Hal took off and pounded a nearby hillside, the wildlife disturbed.

'Fine,' Hal reported. 'I blew up the area I was interested in. Against troops they'd be great. But make them aerodynamic and they'll keep their speed better; keep the weight at the front. With that plane and those RPGs ... I could make a mess of a train, a truck convoy, a building for sure. And if they were earthquake mortar standard I could dig up someone's runway and spoil their day.'

'Yeah, well the Italian fascists just grabbed power,' I informed Hal.

'Will we be getting a TV this year?' Hal joked.

'It starts this year doesn't it,' I realised. 'John Logie Baird. Still, just the one channel - and nothing worth watching. He'll turn in his grave when they start running adverts!'

I went and sat with Jimmy, getting pancakes and tea off Cookie. 'Should we be involved with television or radio?'

'Sure, but I was waiting for the 1929 crash. Right now stock prices are high, but after the crash they'll be a tenth of the price.'

'Fair enough.' I took a moment. 'Lindbergh.'

He lowered his paper, eyeing me with suspicion. 'Yes...?'

'We could load up a Cessna, definitely a Dash.'

Jimmy took a moment. 'I think his plane was - will be - just about three feet longer than our Cessna.'

'Well ... it would put us on the map, and would be good for aircraft sales.'

'If we had a thousand - we could probably sell them. Unlike our contemporaries, ours don't snap as you fly along.'

'I think we should do it.'

'You mean, you think *you* ... should do it.'

'Or one of our guys,' I said defensively.

‘We didn’t design our Cessna for that kind of flight. Have them convert a Dash, rip out the seats, extra fuel tanks, and see how far it goes. But use Hal or Hacker, since our other pilots may doze off.’

We made the conversion quickly, seats ripped out, extra fuel tanks rigged up. Some of those extra tanks sat in the wing space between the engines, some next to the pilot, the tanks well wrapped up so that they would not leak. They also came with a hand pump to top-up the main tanks; it was a flying petrol can. Our scientists adjusted engines and mixes, advice given on fuel conservation, but they figured it could fly for more than twenty-four hours easily enough. We moved the fuel tanks back and put a seat back in; it would have two pilots for safety.

Hal, plus a mortal pilot, took off at 5am one crisp and cold morning and headed for Toronto. They made it with plenty of fuel to spare, turned around after circling the city and came back, just over two thousand four hundred miles.

‘Easy,’ Hal reported. ‘And we still have plenty of fuel.’

A party was thrown, the press informed. Jimmy knew the production Dash-7 had the range, and now offered a non-stop Vancouver to Toronto ride, one less passenger allowed on. That would be followed by a non-stop Seattle/Vancouver to Los Angeles service.

Hal and his buddy then refuelled with regular gas, flying down to Los Angeles non-stop. There, they refuelled again, and headed across to New York. They made it to much fanfare. Without consulting with us, Hal refuelled again and set a course for Paris – alone. When he got there he sent us a telegram, and I felt a little deflated. This was the era of breaking records, of the pioneer spirit, and I had no wife or daughters to nag at me. I had Jimmy to nag at me, which was worse.

Hal refuelled, picking up a crazy British explorer in Paris – a Sir Winthrop something - giving the guy a lift to Nova Scotia. Well, it was someone to talk to. He then flew non-stop back to us alone after a night in a motel and a good meal. Everyone welcomed him back, the press out in force – the local press that was. Jimmy ordered the plane stripped and checked; it was a good test of its airframe.

Seeing the look on my face, Jimmy said, ‘Convert a Cessna, and test the range.’

I had a green light from “the wife”, soon ripping out any unnecessary junk and installing extra fuel tanks. I also had a new paint job done to my custom bird, our name all over it. Taking off one fine still dawn, I made it to Toronto without difficulty, staying

the night in a hotel, reversing the leg the next day and getting used to peeing in a milk bottle and then emptying it over pristine Canadian countryside. It had been a beautiful ride, just me alone with the elements, a great view of the Canada offered up from three thousand feet.

'Simple,' I said.

'They're still mechanical objects, subject to breakdowns, and not as reliable as in our day. And in our day pilots died every day. Try a four point square trip around the States next.'

I went and found the now quite famous Hal Becker and wound him up. I had been almost as far, single engine. 'Thought you wanted to avoid the publicity,' I teased.

'It's not like our day,' he grumbled. 'And I'm up here, well tucked away.'

'Jimmy wants you to fly down to Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, get the airline promoted.'

Hal sighed. 'That flight might not have been the brightest idea I've ever had.'

'Look on the bright side, you might get laid.'

'Fuck ... right ... off, sonny.'

Hal made his publicity flight, and our airline received the publicity. And poor old Lindbergh? Well, I guess no one would kidnap his kid now.

Our second four-engine seaplane was receiving the loving attention of almost four hundred workers in three shifts around the clock; each day I would marvel at how it had grown overnight. Since most of the spars and frames were made ready, it was a quick fix job. The hundred odd faults had all been fixed, things adjusted, other things made stronger. The original was on the side of the airfield covered by a large tarpaulin, and had been skinned alive. Engineers still visited it now and then to see how a certain section had fared after its rough treatment, parts being cannibalised.

One clear day, mounting a half-track with Mac, Handy and Big Paul, we drove around to a tight valley that was used as a shooting range, soon firing RPGs at trees in the distance. The 105mm recoilless was tested by attaching a long rope to the firing mechanism and ducking behind sandbags. It blew down trees, several times, the tube checked for cracks. Fired against an old truck it blew the truck to pieces, and enjoyed a range of at least eight hundred yards.

Back at base, we broke champagne bottles over the first few production jeeps, the vehicles reminiscent of those used by the US Army in the Second World War. The first batch of twenty jeeps were duly dispatched to Ngomo, a thousand more ordered. And we received a telegram from Rudd: "Ngomo at ground zero". It was cause for a minor celebration back at the hotel, the British Army turning up the next day after a long trip. They had, actually, been to see De Havilland, so we did not feel quite so special. And they had things to look at in the States.

They jumped aboard the jeeps and sped around, ordering four hundred straight away for African units, another hundred to the UK. At the moment they were fighting in China, but Jimmy would not get involved. Those British soldiers could have done with some decent air cover, but we kept the fighter under wraps. The "chaps" from the War Ministry ordered another sixty Cessnas for far off places, and twelve Dash-7s.

We then landed one of our best orders, the US Postal Service, the one that a certain young Lindbergh worked for. At least now he'd get a new plane, and a safe one. As part of a rolling programme, they ordered four hundred aircraft to be delivered over the next three years, the planes to be customised with a lockable metal box in the rear instead of seats. DHL had arrived early!

Summer saw the second seaplane tested at length, but gently, pilots swapping every six hours after refuelling. She was kept busy twenty-four hours a day for a week, nothing major breaking. I put twenty engineers in the back, and hired a lady to serve meals and tea. The plane took off, flew down to San Francisco and back with two reporters on board, all the while the passengers subject to coffee and cake. Those passengers used the toilet with a professional interest, washed their hands, eased back and closed their eyes. The pilots came back and chatted, using the toilet and getting a coffee and lunch. It was a success.

The next day we flew twenty reporters down to Los Angeles, an overnight stay arranged, our beast moored in a marina. It didn't need refuelling, and flew the hacks back up the following day. If we had a dozen we could have sold them there and then, a flood of enquiries generated by the trip.

Jimmy then sent it south again with Hal and Hacker aboard. Fuel topped up in Los Angeles, it set off for Hawaii at dawn the following day, two reporters on board. They made it to Honolulu, much fanfare on arrival, and brought back four wealthy individuals, each having paid a modest sum for the ride. The great age of

seaplanes was here, about six years early. Not satisfied with that stunt, Jimmy sent Hal a telegram. The plane returned to Hawaii with four reporters on board, plus the waitress, refuelled, then flew non-stop down to Auckland New Zealand, a hell of a reception waiting. Three nights were spent partying before the return leg, paying passengers allowed onboard, more taken on in Hawaii. Hal returned to even more fanfare, eventually bringing the bird back up to us. The workers threw a party at the hotel.

Jimmy grabbed Bill and Ted. 'You know what I'm going to say next.'

'Hire some more staff,' they grumbled, but with smiles.

'Gentlemen, we're going to offer seaplane transport right around the world. Columbia Airlines will touch every corner of the globe.'

'We've come a long way,' Ted admitted.

'Be sending people to the moon next,' I quipped.

Hal was enjoying his celebrity status, more than he admitted. Still, 1925 fame was controllable.

I completed my four-pointer leg of the States, and decided that it was hard work, and could not be arsed now with trying to cross the Atlantic. We inoculated our pilots for "overseas flying", and two weeks later one flew non-stop from New York to Paris, our name painted on the side of the aircraft and across its wings. That tick in the box made, the guy flew down to Cairo, then on to Nairobi. From there he headed to Goa, onto Singapore, but got caught in a tropical storm and was never seen again.

'You can't fly through storms,' we told people.

It did not deter our crazy pilots, and one volunteered to try again. He flew off in the opposite direction, and went right around the world in eleven days, a new record.

The Canadian Government now "popped-in" often, and granted us government land, as much as we wanted. A piece of land near the airstrip was handed over, doubling the size of the facility. They paid to have roads improved, and could not do enough for us.

The third and fourth seaplanes rolled out to a brass band, soon tested before entering service. The planes were flown down to Los Angeles, where they would fly back and forth to Hawaii. In an odd move, and considering safety, Jimmy had them fly together. If one went down then the other would be on hand for a rescue. Thirty paying passengers at a time were flown to the islands, mostly movie stars and studio bosses. And our trolley dollies? They gave safety lectures as the planes taxied out. 'The emergency exits are here, here ... and here.'

The fourth and fifth production models were sent to San Francisco, and would operate down to Los Angeles and back. At about the same time we expanded the Dash-7 fleet and flew Seattle to Alaska, Seattle to Los Angeles and onwards. There were not yet that many people who could afford the tickets, so we concentrated on the rich for now.

Seaplane number five was altered on the production line, a large door fitted to the rear, the seats ripped out and benches installed. With an invited audience of Canadian, British and American Army officers, forty Canadian Rifles parachuted down onto the airfield, released their chutes and ran across to us, weapons in hand – now folding stock AK47s, and their odd British combat clothing.

Jimmy faced the officers. ‘Gentlemen. If an ... island or outlying colony were to be seized by a hostile force, a rebellion organised, then these aircraft could fly right across an ocean and drop forty soldiers by parachute, their supplies also dropped by parachute. Within sixteen hours of the news of an insurrection ... you could have men on the ground, possibly to rescue your diplomats and citizens from ... whatever tribal rabble are threatening them. Now, lunch.’

The soldiers were thanked and dismissed, the officers taken to lunch at the hotel. An idea had been planted, firmly planted. In our world, the US Army had been one of the first to consider paratroopers, but the idea never got off the ground till war broke out, the Germans being the first to use airborne troops to invade another country.

With the officers gone, Jimmy called a meeting of all the military types in the gang. ‘OK, it’s just about time to re-organise the Canadian Rifles. Grab a paper and pen. I want a Special Air Service created, and a Special Boat Service.’ He pointed at one of our British guards, now working with the Rifles. ‘You were SBS, yes?’

The man nodded.

‘OK, you’re in charge for now – under the Canadians. Always make it look like it was their idea.’

‘The officers are a good bunch now, all tough as fuck,’ the man reported.

‘Good. So, I want a selection process, ten percent extra pay offered. I want two hundred men and NCOs in the SAS, same for the SBS. For the SBS I want canoes and boats used for recon’ and inserts, climbing and attacking. The SAS will be the senior service, long range attacks their forte, HALO inserts.

'I then want five hundred men made up into an Airborne Brigade. In essence, a recruit moves from grunt, to Airborne, to SAS or SBS. I then want an Arctic and Mountain Warfare Unit created within the Airborne – they spend time in the snow, and they parachute into the snow. Think – Norway, 1940. That unit should have only forty men.

'I then want a Long Range Desert Group, spending four months a year driving across the Sahara in custom jeeps and trucks, pink desert uniforms. Again, forty men will do. Then we need jungle fighters, call them The Chameleons, because they should be invisible in the jungle. They'll run our jungle warfare school and our survival training. Again, forty men will do. How many do we have toady?'

'Eleven hundred.'

'Fine, split them up over the coming months, create the bases and schools, then go to two thousand men. A year or two from now, British and Commonwealth soldiers will be on exchange tours with them. We will, after the 1929 crash, find plenty of willing recruits, and we'll create an American Volunteer Rifles, up here, for Yanks out of work – and they'll be millions of those. Start increasing the number of barracks, and start separating units by function. Create a base for the SBS up the inlet, and ask Rudd to create a base for the Rifles alongside Ngomo, as well as a base near Mawlini. The jungle training base will need to be in southwest Tanzania.'

'More jeeps?' Mac asked.

'You'll be getting more jeeps, more half-tracks – ship them to Kenya. And Mac, start on basic mortar tubes, nothing fancy for now. Every soldier must be familiar with every piece of kit, then we specialise. Oh, and a basic mortar to fire a grapple up a cliff.'

'D-Day!' I said.

'And I want all of the men to have sailing lessons. If they get stuck somewhere, they can steal a boat and sail off.'

'Like fucking Dunkirk,' I said.

'Like Dunkirk.'

'We're gearing up then,' Mac noted.

'We ... are setting a template, for which British and American soldiers will follow.'

'Should Ngomo's men be reorganised?' I asked.

'Rifles are Rifles,' Jimmy said. 'He knows what he's doing. Ours have a different function.'

That afternoon, I noticed a gentle hill near the town, a town that was growing rapidly. With more than two thousand well-paid jobs it was bound to. A few days later, I bought the land from the existing owner, and called in the builders.

‘Guys, I want a road spiralling up and around this hill. At the top I want a nice large house, eight bedrooms. Up the hill I want four-bedroom houses, two storeys - stone and wood, but I want each one to be slightly different, the outsides different. I don’t want people put-off because the houses all look alike. Go to work.’

I went and told Jimmy afterwards. ‘I just bought land and ordered up Spiral One.’

‘The houses will sell well enough,’ was his only comment, his head in a newspaper as usual.

Thinking on, I ordered up a bowling alley - with food and a bar, placing it at the edge of the main drag through town, somewhere for the guys to relax after toiling over our aircraft. Reading the papers, about this new fangled “sound” being added to films, I ordered up a good-sized cinema. Movietone Newsreels would be with us - in a few years; for now the locals would have to endure Chaplain, and an organ player in the corner.

Then we got the bad news. A telegram arrived from Timkins: Jack and Sykes had been in a car wreck, Jack now paralysed. The gang were horrified. Jimmy sent a telegram via the new Bell Atlantic phone cable: “I’m sending a plane. If necessary, I’ll send Jack back.”

I went and sat on my balcony for a while, upset by this turn of events; things had been going well. We grabbed a seaplane being tested, fuelled it, and sent Hal and Hacker across Canada; they’d land and fuel on an inlet in Nova Scotia, weather permitting. If the weather wasn’t permitting they’d land anyway. Fuelled, they set off for the UK, skirting close to Iceland and down over Scotland, no air traffic control these days. They landed on the Thames Estuary near Gravesend, met by the Royal Navy and a tug. Refuelled, Jack and Sykes aboard with two nurses, the aircraft powering off and set a reciprocal course.

Jimmy had grabbed the scientists. ‘Anyone medically qualified?’

‘I passed a medical degree, before switching,’ one offered.

‘Any surgical experience?’

‘A little, but not spinal.’

‘Study what the computer says, just in case we need you.’

‘Will an injection not fix him?’ I asked.

'Not in the spine, no,' Jimmy informed the gang. 'You need to extract cells, grow them, and replace them. But, if the gap between synapses is too great, you need to grow a synapse in a lab.'

'Fuck...' I let out. 'And the doctors here are still using leeches!'

'We could ask for a doctor, from our time,' Cookie said. 'We are close to the Canadian portal.'

'If necessary, I'll send Jack back.'

'That would end his life,' Cookie suggested. 'He came here with us because he was so miserable. You send him back, and paralysed, and he'll frigging top himself!'

'Could he not return to us afterwards?' someone asked.

'Unlikely they would let him,' Jimmy suggested.

'So we send for a doctor,' I said. 'One that would stay.'

'Stay?' Jimmy queried. 'Why?'

'We could do with one,' I suggested.

'We have Doc Graham -'

'Who hasn't operated at a professional standard for twenty years or more,' I countered. 'His surgical skills are as good as mine. And Anna is rusty too.' They agreed, Jimmy still reluctant. I said, 'Send a signal, and ask for a doctor who'll join us. You may get ... oh, ten or twenty thousand applying for the job.'

Everyone was in loud agreement.

'Fine, we send the signal,' Jimmy agreed. 'Guys, ready some cars, and a packed lunch; we have a drive to make.'

They set off as the sun set, heading east and towards Manson, a drive through the Canadian Rockies. They arrived just after dawn, breakfast enjoyed in a diner, the cars refuelled. Beyond Manson they found a small bridge over a stream and halted, Jimmy directing the cars into a field. No one was about, no houses for miles.

Jimmy got his bearings, taking his special satellite phone out of its plastic casing. He entered a message: "Urgent, send spinal surgeon who will stay". It was set on continuous transmit, placed on the damp grass as the guys stood around looking like a bunch of 1930s bootleggers. Jimmy waited in a car, the doors open. To Big Paul, he said, 'This field is engraved on my heart.'

'Been through it a few times, boss. You think they'll send someone?'

'President Gilchrist would have a hard time with the rest of the world if he doesn't.'

Two hours later a crack preceded a portal opening, a blue shimmering light soon penetrated by a ... women in white overalls carrying heavy bags. She turned and smiled at the people the other

side of the portal, the blue disc disappearing. She walked over lugging her kit.

'Mister Silo, sir, I'm Dr Susan Blake.' She appeared to be in her mid thirties, dark haired and very attractive, and with a tan.

'Good disguise you brought,' he quipped.

'Ah, sorry, sir, but it was done in a hurry.'

'Do the idiots on that side know anything about temporal mechanics? You could have taken a year to get ready!'

'They rushed.' She shrugged.

'Guys, grab her bags,' Jimmy ordered. 'And you, doctor, if anyone asks you're a ... pilot from an air show.'

'Oh.'

'Get in the car.' Pulling off, he asked, 'You sound British?'

'My parents were British originally, but I was raised in New Kinshasa.'

'You volunteered for this trip? No family?'

'No family, and yes – I volunteered, along with quite a few others, sir.'

'Where were your parents from?'

'Newport, sir.'

Jimmy snapped his head around. 'Newport?'

'You ... injected them on Christmas Day, 2013; they both had late stage SARS.'

'Ah.'

'I'm second generation blood, and autistic – although we say gifted.'

'So, bright *and* keen.'

'My first degree was in microbiology and immunology, my final thesis on my own blood make-up. My second was in general medicine, and my third was in robotics.'

'Robotics?'

'I developed artificial neural nets, and artificial replacements for spinal injuries. In my bag I have synthetic nerve tissue.'

'And surgical experience?'

'I pioneered a technique to replace damaged nerves, sir.'

'Good. Jack broke his back; they're flying him here now.'

'Flying? Goodness. In what?'

'In an advanced seaplane we built.'

'Oh, I see. I had images of a rickety old biplane.'

'There're still plenty of those around, but we've advanced aviation by ten years or so.'

'The people back on my world thought that maybe you or Paul had been injured. And I love these cars.'

'You sure you want to stay here?'

'If it helps the cause and saves lives, then yes, sir. I grew up in Compound II, West City.'

'Volunteers?'

'My parents sold up - and signed up - after you saved them, and I grew up Compound II. I was about six when you came in one day, everyone so excited, and my parents were so pleased when you took an interest in their work. I met Shelly and Helen, and as an eighteen year old I used to drink in Shelly's Marina.'

'Are your parents still there?'

'Yes, and a right pair of hippies,' she said with a smile. 'My father still works on biology projects, my mother on green energy.'

'How did the volunteers ... *change* after I left the first time?'

'Some saw it as the conclusion and drifted away, but Paul Holton rallied everyone to keep going.'

'And when I left *this time*?'

'Triage; help the people in most need. Our world was safe, this one in danger. They all understood that, no one was angry at you, sir.'

'You'll have to stop calling me *sir*.'

'It's odd being here with you, and in another world; I grew up learning prayers about you - and to you. As I youth I looked up at your statue in the main square, and your sayings are everywhere around Africa, required learning in the Middle East.'

'Middle East?'

'Some of the sayings are close to what the prophet Mohammed said, so they use them as a kind of *we told you so* text.'

'Bloody marvellous.'

'A young man cares for his family, an old man cares for his tribe, a great man cares for those who he has not yet met,' she cited.

'I shall have to shut my trap more often. Have you eaten?'

'I had a bite.'

'Big Paul, next roadside diner, please. And Big Paul, try and eat quietly in front of the nice lady, eh?'

Her white coveralls caused a few glances, and outside - after the breakfast, a local patrolman stopped the group.

'Where ya'll heading, fellas?'

'Don't you know who this is?' Big Paul shouted. 'This is Jimmy Silo, the owner of Trophy Aircraft and Columbia Airlines. He just flew non-stop around the world!'

'Jeez, sorry, Mister Silo, sir. Saw your planes flying over a few times.'

'Maybe someday you'll pilot one,' Jimmy commented.

'Love to do that, sure would. Ya'll have a nice drive.'

I greeted the gang outside the hotel, doing a double take at the lady in the white coveralls. A lady!

'Great to meet you again, Mister Holton,' she said, offering me a hand.

'Again?'

'I met you once in New Kinshasa. I was born there to a volunteer family.'

'In that case, you're most welcome. Come on in and ... we'll get you some less conspicuous clothes.'

The gang made her welcome, a thousand questions fired at her, Cookie rustling up some food; she had the blood, so she had an appetite. We allocated her a room, and showed her one converted to a temporary surgical ward. It would have to do.

After a bath, and now wearing Sandra's period clothes, she sat and chatted to the gang late into the night. 4am registered with a loud fly-by, Hal buzzing the hotel to let us know he was back. Half an hour later a line of cars pulled in, Sykes stepping down gingerly, not quite recovered, Jack carried out on a stretcher, two nurses in dark purple outfits and black capes following. Jack was given a room below the make-do operating theatre, his nurses in attendance.

'How is he?' I asked Sykes.

'Depressed, especially at the prospect of returning.'

'What happened?' I asked as I led Sykes to our lounge.

'Damn fool lorry with no brakes, Hyde Park Corner. Killed our cab driver.'

'It's 1925, mate,' I said with a sigh.

'Do you think you can fix Jack?'

'We have a doctor from the future, a specialist with a bag of tricks.'

'You sent a signal?'

I nodded. 'She'll extract a spinal fluid sample and culture the cells first. Then we'll see.'

'Was kind of hoping that just an injection from Jimmy might do it.'

I shook my head.

I caught up with Jack later, Jack pushed out in a wheelchair to greet the gang. They lifted his spirits, but we could all see the fear in his eyes.

'Damn glad of that plane, Jimmy,' Jack offered. 'Damn glad.'

'Good job we had them; a sea voyage would have taken a while,' Jimmy responded. 'This is the quack, Dr Susan Blake, and she's the best there is.'

'And I'm glad that *you're* here,' Jack said.

'I'll extract fluid whenever you're ready.'

'I'll check my busy social calendar. I think I'm free ... oh, in the morning.'

'I'll check my equipment,' Dr Blake said, excusing herself.

With just myself, Jimmy, Jack and Sykes remaining, Jimmy said, 'You remember when they *sent* Helen to us.' He waited.

'No...' I let out.

'Yes, so ... take one for the team.'

'She's a spy?' Sykes asked.

'Not a doctor?' Jack asked, suddenly worried.

'Oh, she's a doctor alright,' Jimmy said. 'But she made a mistake with her cover story, just a word. She said her mum had been injected by me in Newport. I injected three women, all ageing, and definitely not her mum; they were black. She also ate the local pie without questioning it, something any outsider to Canada would do – especially someone raised in Africa.'

'I did,' I agreed.

'And us,' Sykes added.

'So what's she after?' I asked.

'Probably ... to safeguard the future direction of the States, although I still don't understand why they don't trust me. She may want to make contact with them after the war, knowing my fondness for Russians, Chinese and Africans. If she can persuade the Americans to get into the Congo first...'

'They'd have the advantage,' Sykes realised.

Jimmy faced me. 'She will have been briefed to bed one of us. You're nominated.'

'I'll close my eyes and think of England,' I offered, but I needed no persuading; she was a dark-haired babe.

'Then search her room, at length. My satellite phone beeps near others of a similar nature, and they don't know that. When she's putting her cold gloved fingers up Jack's backside, have a look.'

'My ... backside?' Jack queried, looking worried and making us laugh.

'I could test her knowledge of the volunteer compound,' I offered. 'Just to be sure.'

'The Americans began sending spies into it not long after I started it,' Jimmy said. 'Her knowledge would be perfect. Bed her for the team, she's very nice.'

‘And she’s probably been ordered to keep one of you happy,’ Sykes pointed out.

‘You ever get the feeling that you’ve done something before?’ I asked Jimmy. Sykes laughed as Jimmy cocked an eyebrow.

The next morning our lady visitor extracted spinal fluid from Jack, and I waved Jimmy’s phone around her room. Beep!

‘Ah well, it’s for the team,’ I told my penis.

Jack was in a better mood now that Dr Blake, our spy, was studying things under a portable microscope from the future. Meanwhile, I had swapped the battery in her transmitter, a battery with a life of around thirty years if not switched on, with one that was almost dead. The scientists then made a slight adjustment to the device when she was clothes shopping in Vancouver. It would never send the right signal, even if she fashioned a new battery with the right power.

Jimmy then sat me down. ‘Always hide a big lie...’

‘Behind a small lie. That transmitter, we were supposed to find it.’

He nodded. ‘She must figure that she could steal mine, or yours, so tomorrow go and bury yours somewhere where only you know, I’ll do likewise. Dislodge the main chip first.’

‘She’s smart, she could make one.’

‘Not for around ... twenty-five years I reckon. Probably longer. By then she’ll be on the team, hopefully, and madly in love.’ I wagged a warning finger. Jimmy continued, ‘Oh, I’ve sent someone back to the restroom she used on the way here, to check the ladies cistern. And we’ve checked the cars. She had no other opportunity to hide it, but go around the hotel and outside with my phone and check. As a last resort, I hid an old transmitter in the field a while back. You’d find it ... eventually. It’s in front of the big tree stump.’

I nodded. ‘But there’s another problem, one we can’t fix. The portal operators are listening out for radio signals. If she organised a certain radio show in Canada, they’d come get her.’

‘That’s clever ... for you. We’ll buy up all the radio stations around Manson, and make sure that she never goes near them.’

‘She’ll probably check her transmitter in a few weeks,’ I suggested.

‘So ... you’ll need to take her on trip, far far away. If she’s nowhere near Manson, she won’t fiddle with it. Besides, it’s good for a quick test, which she probably did last night. But, if she’s any good, she won’t use it. She’ll bide her time, see what direction I’m going in, and then act. She’ll disappear and knock on the White House door.’ He raised a finger. ‘We’ll start sending J. Edgar

Hoover letters, from a Dr Susan Blake, with claims about the President being a time travelling alien.'

I smiled. 'Cruel bastard. If she turns up they'll throw her in the funny ward.'

'First thing the President would do, would be to ask Hoover to check her out.'

'We could just send her back - with a note.'

'Good doctors are always useful, as you pressed. But check her kit carefully for things that she could impress Hoover with. I've asked the scientists to invent bug-sweeping kit to modern standards, and Big Paul will check the hotel in case she's already dropped something small.'

'If they wanted to interfere, why not just send back something clever, like a tactical nuke?' I thought out loud.

'The portal in Canada is run by the International Space Administration. They thought she was on our side!'

'I suppose.'

'Besides, if Gilchrist was seen to be favouring America, the Russians and Chinese would kick up.'

We left her alone for a few days, to work her magic, and she reported that she had adapted a synthetic nerve. The next day would be the big day. While she was operating on Jack, Big Paul scanned the hotel, finding nothing, her room also bug free. Some of the equipment was a bit odd, but not known to be definitely for sending or receiving. We figured she would bide her time.

She reported the nerve in place, attached, and that electro-stimulus moved Jack's feet. She kept him sedated for two days, face down, then turned him over and sat him up. He wiggled his toes, but got an almighty erection.

'That's OK,' she said. 'A cross connection somewhere, which should sort itself out.'

'If I try and kick a football, will I get an erection every time?' Jack asked.

'You could always keep a football in bed,' she teased.

The next day he tried walking, but the urge to walk was followed by the strong urge to pee. That urge finally went on the fourth day; now Jack could hobble about without wanting the toilet. He still got erections at odd times, the nurses now used to that. A football appeared in the lounge, someone's idea of a joke.

A week later he was walking normally, albeit with a nurse holding his arm. I, meanwhile, had taken Susan shopping a few times and handed over a pile of dollars for her to use, buying her meals at the best restaurants. I hadn't tried anything romantic yet,

but she did look cute in a one-piece bathing suit in the swimming pool, a very nice figure. I thanked the spymasters of the world; they knew how to pick a bit of skirt.

Jack started swimming twice a day, and walking around the hotel every hour; he was soon back to normal. In the lounge one day, he asked his nurse to stay with him.

‘You’re staying in Canada?’ she puzzled.

‘No, stay with me ... wherever I go.’

‘Oh’, she blushed.

I kicked the football towards her. ‘And take that wherever you go.’

She gave me a look. Facing Jack, she said, ‘Is this a ... formal offer?’

‘It will be upon our return. What do you say?’

‘I ... say yes.’

‘I think a party is in order,’ I said.

Jimmy wandered in, and we broke the news. He took out a diamond, a large one, and handed it to Jack. ‘For the lady in your life.’ She almost fainted. Jimmy added, ‘My wedding gift will be nice house for you both. Chelsea maybe.’

The nurse, a pleasant faced twenty-five year old, had made a good choice in suitors.

‘Why don’t you both honeymoon in Kenya,’ I suggested. ‘But get your good woman one of those inoculations first.’

‘Kenya?’ she gasped. ‘My head is still spinning from that aeroplane. I’d never been in one before and ... what a luxury inside. And to fly all of the way here? My friends will never believe it when I get back.’

Jimmy faced Jack. ‘Plane will be ready when you are. Unless you want a train and a boat?’

‘No, plane is fine,’ Jack said. ‘Have some work to catch up on.’

The nurse said, ‘And fixing his back with just pressure points; that was marvellous what the lady doctor did. A twist and a turn and his disc was soon back in the right place.’

‘We were lucky,’ I said, knowing that Jack would display no scars. ‘No surgery needed.’

The gang threw a party that night, Sykes not a hundred percent on the marriage idea, but they would be in London for decades. Susan played the role and got into the spirit of things, a few questions about how she would help us in the future. Jimmy suggested that she would be most help in Africa, where she could help to train local surgeons with Doc Graham. I countered that by arguing that she should stay with the gang, since Hal or Hacker

would bend a plane soon enough and may need emergency surgery. Jimmy could see the logic and asked her to stay, but to get a set of instruments from this day and age.

We faked British medical degrees, and she spent time reading the current medical journals so that she would fit in, and in the evenings we dined out often, not yet lovers. I was not going to push it. A room was made up in the factory and now everyone knew we had a British lady doctor. She stitched up fingers - she even re-attached one, and got things out of eyes that should not be in eyes. It was real work, and she said that she was enjoying it, although her twelve dollars a week seemed a bit low.

Winter, 1926

Winter 1926 came on with a few nasty storms, but our factory now offered its staff walkways with covered roofs so they could move from section to section. Bad weather would not hold us up, our factories still with three shifts operating, and our ladies in the canteen were kept busy. Off duty, the men enjoyed the cinema and the bowling alley, most nights the places full of our staff. Well, ninety percent of the locals worked for us one way or another.

We weren't getting much flying done, but production was good, the birds stockpiled and covered in tarpaulin. Since the planes had aluminium skins, we were not worried about a light covering of snow. When a good few days appeared the staff rushed around like crazy ants, the planes started up and taxied out, flown for an hour and then fuelled for a delivery flight somewhere. With a clear three days we would launch forty aircraft, all heading off in different directions, but mostly south.

Los Angeles to Hawaii, and points beyond, was one of our principal routes, seaplanes now offering trips to New Zealand and onwards to Australia, Singapore or Hong Kong. The day our first plane landed in the colony we had the predictable telegram from Po, and so flew down four aircraft for him start his own airline. But we were being sneaky. Other airlines, other than Po, wanted to start up, and with our planes. We told them that the aircraft had all been pre-ordered for years and ... kindly fuck off. We were out to corner the market.

A version of our seaplane with wheels, retractable wheels, was now in production, and Jimmy had the first two used on the New York to Chicago run. We had set the standard, and toilets and food would be essential for anyone to compete with us. We also enjoyed

advanced dampeners around engine fittings and in the skin hollows, the vibrations reduced. Any regular traveller trying another aircraft would hear and feel the difference.

Then the commercial espionage started. US manufacturers of planes, crap planes, approached some of our staff with cash offers. The staff reported the fact to us, proud of their aircraft. We handed them small cash bonuses, and sent Big Paul and his mates south. The various company bosses fell blind, or met with accidents in their own crappy planes, the odd office catching fire. One plane company tried to copy our designs, but how the hell could they copy molecular glue and bonded honeycombs? Our techniques were so far ahead that they would never catch up or understand them.

Still, they tried. We sent the security lads down, and aircraft taking off from their airfields ploughed into the ground, or caught fire often, the company's reputation shot down in flames. In Canada, we cornered the market, taking business away from De Havilland - for now; Jimmy had plans for them. Our seaplanes became lake planes, stopping in the Great Lakes and others. East and West Canada became closer, now just a plane ride away, the Canadian Government frequent fliers - and subsidised by us.

Expanding east over the winter of 1926, we operated Toronto to London and New York to London. A weekly non-stop Quebec to Paris was very popular. Getting permission from the UK Government, which wasn't hard, we organised flights from Biggin Hill airport to all points south; Cairo, Nairobi, West Africa, Baghdad, Palestine. The flights were packed, and booked months ahead. Shipping more Dash-7s to Biggin Hill, we began flights to Paris and Marseille, Belfast and Edinburgh, Oslo and Sweden. They could only take eight passengers, but were still economical - and profitable for us.

In the UK, we formed British Airways Ltd, pinching the name from the future, and transferred existing aircraft to it. The UK government were pleased, a big Union Jack on the tail and wing. We were *flying the flag*. Heathrow was just a grass airstrip, yet to be brought up to speed, and Gatwick was a farmer's yard.

Very few people now worked on the fighter, so Jimmy suspended it, the project mothballed, the pilots allowed to muck about in them. All effort was now focused on the seaplanes, the beasts taking up some seventy percent of our staff. Our scientists had helped with mass production techniques, and drawings turned into aluminium struts very quickly. Gluing helped save a great deal of time, although we suffered a death from inhalation, a young lad. The other glue users learnt their lesson.

Love lessons

Six weeks after joining us, Susan had had enough. Well, she hadn't had any, and that seemed to be the problem. She knocked on my door one evening and kissed me. And that was that, we were an item; I was taking one for the team.

Out of her clothes she was gorgeous, the sex great. And I was an old man inside; I appreciated it more. She stayed in my room a few nights a week, till Jimmy gave me a nudge towards Spiral One. This all seemed familiar somehow, but I could not put my finger on why.

I bought the largest house, just after it was completed, and we moved in, a house warming party given. Down the hill lived our senior staff, Ted moving over from his old house. I had a view, a balcony, and an enclosed pool, chilly for nine tenths of the year. Still, it looked nice. I would sit in the lounge and look out over the inlet: our plane factory to the left, the tractors to the right, the hotel just about visible on a good day. I saw our planes take off and land, and had one of these new fangled telephones put in. It rang often, sometimes for the doctor of the house, some worker with a finger missing. Since we only slept four hours a night, and were half a mile from the factory, it was not a big issue. Still, I had a night doctor and a nurse hired for each factory. I was not about to have my breast-snuggle time interrupted.

Susan and I were not worried about her getting pregnant, she had a capsule under her skin that would prevent pregnancy till removed; modern technology. So when she told me that she was late we were both surprised. I suspected foul play and confronted Jimmy.

'Susan is ... late.' I waited.

'Often late, or just today?'

'Late ... maybe pregnant late.'

'Oh. It worked then.'

'What ... worked?'

'We had the scientists devise a neutralising agent to the birth control. Clever stuff, took a while. It's in your beer and wine at the house.'

'And ... the reason for this *intrusion* into our lives?' I mock complained.

'You're on a mission, and she's a spy. Get back on the clock, numb nuts.'

'You think ... a baby will turn her?'

'We can but hope that you melt her heart.'

'She may want an abortion.'

'Talk her around. And ... think Shelly.'

'A smart daughter or two?' I puzzled.

'She's autistic, and you produce smart daughters. That means they should be very bright – and on the team. And, in years to come, placed where they can do most good. Now, tell me you don't secretly long for another daughter.'

I looked away. 'I wanted a son.'

'No you didn't, you wanted a dependent daughter, have done for a long, long time.'

'You know me too well,' I sighed.

'I've known you for the better part of three hundred years.'

That evening Susan broached the issue, the issue of an abortion.

'Abort my child and you're off the team and on your own,' I told her.

'I didn't say I wanted to, just ... that it's a shock. I had hoped for a family when I chose, and where I chose.'

'It doesn't work that way.'

'No, obviously,' she sighed. 'And you don't know me well enough to know if we're suited for the long term.'

'True, but being on a mission helps; we have a focus elsewhere. Besides, I trust to random luck. People who make informed choices often get them wrong.'

'An almost ... spiritual view on things.'

'I've been around a lot longer than you, and been through more; I've learnt that the universe has a strange sense of humour. So unless you do something odd, I'd be happy to move forwards and assume that everything will be just fine. And, if you're unhappy, you and the kid could go back through the portal.'

'If they knew the child was yours, they'd never leave me alone.'

'There is that. This house OK?'

'This house ... is beautiful, so is the land here. And the people are very friendly; it won't be a burden living here.'

'Never forget the mission we're on. Someday, twenty-five years from now, our kid will start a job somewhere very important. Say ... the US Congress.'

'A future US President? The child would have to be born there.'

'I didn't say President; there are more powerful jobs. People always work around Presidents, and they're just there for a few years. Your child may set the future direction of this planet, as say ... President of the Congo.'

Her eyes widened, but she hid it.

We didn't make love that night, the mood a bit off, but she picked out a room for the baby the next day. Progress, I suppose.

The flying Chinaman

Po came to visit aboard his customised seaplane, the inside now a Chinaman's home from home, seats removed to make room for two beds. It was Wang Po One, not quite Air Force One. And we laughed at length. He inspected the factories, the jealousy evident; he wanted his own. Jimmy explained the years of research and training involved, and peed on Po's ideas.

Po stayed at the hotel for a few nights, catching up, and met Susan, my other half taking a keen interest in what Po and Yuri were up to, and what Han was up to of course. We promised Po more planes - when they were ready, our man in Hong Kong out to conquer the passenger markets in the region. He had already fitted a fridge to his fleet, his passengers now offered cold drinks.

Our man in Hong Kong did, however, bring some money for the cause, as well as diamonds that he had not needed to sell; business in Hong Kong was booming. Jimmy sent the diamonds down to New York to be sold slowly through our bank. With the extra money now sat there, Jimmy took on more engineers, these days the guys coming mostly from eastern Canada; all the good engineers in the west were already working for us. We had refused to take on Americans for the obvious reason; someday they'd go work in the States for a rival.

Jeep production was increasing, tractors decreasing bit by bit. And our engineers - they drove the jeeps home on weekends to "test" them, many to be seen around town. Two hundred had been shipped to Africa, fifty for Ngomo, fifty for Abdi, the rest for sale around Kenya - Rudd now to be seen tearing around in one, Dr Astor another. The Canadian Rifles now operated a fleet of a hundred muddy jeeps, and the British Army in Kenya now used them - although covered in sand and not mud. The next batch had been promised to the British Army, bound for Cairo and other parts of the distant empire. Uncle Sam had liked the jeeps, and now bought steadily, but not many.

With Po heading away from "the cold place" we returned to quotas, smart men taken off tractors and jeeps and placed on the planes, which we could not make fast enough. And if the staff were not busy enough already, Jimmy specified a four-engine sixty-seat

version. It was simple enough: bigger wing, longer body, and more powerful engines. A team was dragged together to work on a prototype.

In the secret factory, the jet engine still blew apart, but it blew apart at a greater and greater power output. They now had the jet engines mounted on a twelve tonne solid metal sled with sixteen wheels, springs attached to the wall behind it, an inlet air funnel and exhaust gas funnel made up. The engines powered up and pulled on the springs, the force measured before the thing blew apart, a few large holes in the roof patched up.

Fuel consumption was terrible, and parts melted together on a regular basis. The engineers knew that they needed a better alloy, and much time was spent on searching for it, helpful hints from the scientists coming where needed. The lubricant oil that the engine used also had to be something special. Still, they were making progress, in that the power output was ten times higher now before the damn engine blew apart.

They then hit upon the idea of bleed-air cooling the engine, and added a layer around the outside of the engine. The front fan blew cold air over other parts, and the darn thing increased power again – before duly exploding. They created strong skirts around the inner layer, making holes for air to pass through to cool it, and got the pressure up so high it broke the springs, and did so without exploding. We were summoned.

Jimmy said, ‘Make two of them, place them in pods under the wings of a seaplane – grab one – then when the seaplane is at six thousand feet knock off two engines and switch these on. See what happens. Use the seaplane as a flying test-bed.’

A month later Hal took off in a seaplane codenamed X1, and avoided the factories and population centres. At altitude he knocked off two of the propeller engines, and powered up the jet engines, but well below their maximum throttle. The seaplane’s speed increased, and the engines carried the seaplane for an hour, the engineers in the back monitoring temperature, pressure and turbine speed.

Hal then knocked off the final two props, the plane now on jet power. On fifty percent power the jets were keeping the bird up. He increased to seventy percent power and picked up speed, not daring to push the new engines any further. He landed on props, the jets shut down, and a party was arranged for the secretive jet engineering teams. It was 1926, and we possessed a basic jet engine.

Jimmy told the engineers. 'Don't hurry, do it properly, get the power up and the fuel consumption down. Keep testing and pushing, and keep experimenting. And keep it secret!'

They all received a cash bonus. And Boeing in Seattle, they were thinking of a three-engine passenger biplane, cloth covered. We had taken their postal service contract, and they puzzled how we made such great planes.

My home life got into a routine, and I tried not to take work home with me. Susan started to grow on me, not that there had been too much wrong with her in the first place, and I found that she was very bright – obviously, but also had a great sense of humour, and that she found everything about the 1920s to be fascinating. She always found “Main Street” humorous, the silent flicks to be great, and the town's diner just fabulous.

'It's like going back in time,' she'd joke.

The ladies clothes of the day she found a bit odd, and the undergarments itched a little – as did mine. There was no fast food yet, so we had to cook, a maid brought in after just a few days. The maid operated the dated stove, and typically left a cooked pie under brown paper. That lady made our evening meals at 6pm, leaving as we sat down to eat, back to clean the house around 2pm the next day.

We'd often stopped at the town's diner for a cooked breakfast in the mornings, some of the day-shift workers having the same idea. I liked the beef stew pie that the diner made, and had some delivered to the house most every day. I paid the deliveryman over the odds, and we had invented the lazy takeaway a few decades early.

That gave me an idea, and some of the worst elements of 21st century life were about to descend on the town. I gave the diner's owner a little money and he built a new shop, a pizza parlour. It would just make pizza. Hungry workers, the bachelors, flocked to it every night. The outlet also offered takeaways in boxes, so I could pick one up on the way home. When I introduced a subsidised delivery service it was an instant hit, bachelors at the boarding houses ordering pizza on the phone.

On a trip to Vancouver I persuaded a Chinese restaurant owner to open a restaurant in our town, and offered a great lease rate for a new building. We would end up with a Chinese take-away.

During the time I spent with Susan – the early days - I was secretly very happy, although I'd moan at Jimmy from time to time. Helen and I had broken up twenty years before I had gone back to fight The Brotherhood, and those twelve years fighting had been

hell – no cold beer, or women. So Susan was a catch, a real catch, and I was happy to be with her, very happy. I'd just never tell Jimmy that. The sex was great, and grew to be fantastic, the good doctor a bit shy to start, experimental later on. Life was good.

Plastic and gold

The aircraft factory had been experimenting with plastics for many years, simple moulds used for a few aircraft parts. The engineers had managed to make the plastic stronger, whilst a little less likely to burn and melt. The scientists had also made a type of Perspex. After demonstrating its benefits – it didn't shatter like glass – we started to use Perspex for aircraft windows. It was also lighter, and cheap to make.

Moving on from that, Jimmy opened a small factory in Vancouver to look at plastic products, including plastic bags, the bane of the 21st century. Our staff soon had plastic bags given to them to try, housewives to be seen carrying things around in them. I gave the Chinese restaurant bags for my take-away, then issued hundreds of them to local stores for free, informing them where the bags could be bought from.

We started making large plastic sheets, selling them at the local hardware store. People put them over cars, barbeque sets, all sorts. We put them over aircraft sat in the snow. The lumber mill boss – the guy who liked to parachute, bought huge sheets of blue plastic to cover sawn timber. Spurred on by that, I sent free samples to every lumberyard, receiving a good response. I then sent them to every hardware store in the province, as well as to any carpenters. Builders soon wanted them to cover part-finished houses.

That led us to open a shop in Seattle that sold plastic products, kitchen bowls snapped up by housewives. When I had plastic three-litre containers delivered to the local milk producer he almost kissed me. The screw tops were just about brilliant in his estimation; it would preserve the milk. We sent samples to every dairy outlet in California. And we bought our oil locally, since shipping it would be costly.

Susan would often ask delicate questions about our interference in the time line, to which I pointed at the Second World War, the Cold War and The Brotherhood – none of which had certain outcomes on this world. And ... we didn't care about this time line. I told her about some of the future leaders that Jimmy had

assassinated and she was shocked. I didn't tell her about the Americans we had killed, the grandfathers of certain future leaders.

Then, in the spring of 1926, with Susan now quite big, a telegram arrived from Rudd. 'Mine operating, smelting, first product shipped out.'

It was great news; the first bar of gold had been shipped out of Kenya to Europe. And our buyer was none other than the Bank of England itself. The bank would weigh the gold, check purity, work out a price and take twenty-percent for itself. The balance would be given as credit, the detail of that credit transferred to the national bank of Canada, who would pass on the credit to our local bank.

With that first credit, not much in real terms – but still good for 1926, I was dispatched to Seattle to buy land adjacent to the Boeing field; if they wanted to expand in the future they'd have to talk to us. I flew back in one of our own a Dash-7s, picking up a Chinese on the way home from Main Street; it was a Thursday. We sat and stuffed our faces, no TV for another thirty years or so, then read the papers as usual, or listened to some contemporary music – which was growing on us. We even learned the latest dances and laughed like teenagers at each other's movements.

We'd often drive down to the hotel of an evening, always a party atmosphere there, and would chat to the gang. I bowled with the lads once a week regularly, now part of a team. Susan still worked at the factory, trying to keep busy, and there were always fingers that needed stitches, or flecks in eyes. For entertainment, I borrowed a laptop from a scientist and we hid it in a locked safe. With no one around, curtains closed, we'd huddle up and watch an old movie. Well, a move from the forties, fifties or sixties – from our world, sometimes a nature documentary.

Then, one day, a burst of machinegun fire and screeched tyres woke up the town, bootleggers being chased by the local police. It was a shock, a shock that these arseholes were so close to my home. Everyone was talking about it the next day, our proximity to Seattle the problem.

Jimmy ordered a war council, members of the Canadian Rifles soon deployed to the border with the approval of the Province's Governor. We let it be known that a dead bootlegger would earn a soldier a good bonus, not that they needed the encouragement. The task was treated like a live-firing training exercise, squads of Rifles sneaking about at night. Where they found obvious crossing points, recently used, they'd set a trap and wait for days or weeks. Bootlegging dropped off sharply in our region.

Not content with that, Jimmy deployed the Rifles along a six hundred mile stretch of border, the Canadian Government fine with the move, local liquor manufacturers not so happy about it. A few disappeared. We were determined that our soldiers would not just sit in barracks, they would train hard – and with real bullets. They drove our jeeps across rough terrain, and I supplemented the patrols with two Cessnas that flew along the border with three keen spotters aboard. Seattle went dry.

The summer of 1926 was a good one, Susan and I walking and sailing often, despite her bump. She was concerned about the birth, wishing for a “C” Section, so I informed her that Doc Graham would be here for month seven onwards – Jimmy thinking ahead.

Doc Graham had been practising “C” Sections in Kenya for years, and Susan was reassured. She knew that the child would probably come to term during month seven, her friends had, friends that were autistic. Gifted. I’d been through it all before and reassured her, but for a doctor she was nervous. But this was about her, and not some nameless patient in a surgery.

We had found a café on the inlet that we liked, and often ate there with a bodyguard nearby, although we felt very safe here in Canada, a little less safe of late with bootleggers around. I popped in to see the developing jet engine often, making comments. One day I said, ‘How about bigger but shorter? It’s the volume of air pushed through that matters more than the speed of it.’

They were intrigued, and I was more interested in commercial jets as opposed to jet fighters. One day, just to be mischievous, I asked them to experiment with injecting fuel into the hot gas just beyond the burn chambers. A few days later they tried it, the engine test-bed breaking its moorings. Re-heat had just been invented.

‘It wastes a massive amount of fuel,’ they said.

‘Yeah, but maybe the pilot in a dog fight wants a quick burst of speed, just a few seconds to get out of trouble.’

They liked the idea, but Jimmy beat me around the head with a rolled up newspaper. It was too soon; I had just jumped ahead a few years. Jimmy then assembled the jet engineers.

‘Guys, how much jet power would be needed to push the prop fighter we made?’

‘A heck lot less than this engine produces!’ was the firm answer.

‘OK, make a smaller engine, with power for that fighter, then ... rip out the propeller engine, redesign the frame, and stick a jet inside. He made a sketch on a blackboard and asked for opinions, the sketched plane looking a little bit like an early Russian Mig. He

assigned extra engineers to it, to the funny plane with no propellers.

Taking a seaplane ride the next day – a seaplane with wheels, several of the gang journeyed out with me to the secret airfield in the interior, and we landed on a long concrete runway, a very long concrete runway; there was no end to it. Peering through the windows with keen interest, we taxied towards a control tower, the edges of the taxiway moss and peat, not grass. I knew that a platoon of Rifles was now in attendance, keeping strangers away. Well, strangers that could walk this far would be a welcome sight after nothing but moose and bears.

The area around the secret base was suitably flat, and we had passed over a large lake as we approached and descended. Now I stood on the tarmac and peered around, but could see nothing on the horizon apart from moss and heather. A hangar had already been built, another two under construction, one a real monster. Several brick buildings had been constructed behind the control tower, and it was all way ahead of itself.

Jimmy explained, ‘The fighter with a jet engine will come here to be tested, far from prying eyes.’

We inspected the tower - the building sat ready for some action, the offices empty, we even inspected the lonely hangars and empty cold tool sheds. I learnt that some of the base supplies came in by plane instead of train, the Rifles now based here using the airfield as a training ground, live fire ranges nearby. I could see jeeps with 105mm attached. Out here they could blast away to their heart’s content; no one to see, no one to hear. Seeing a sign for a tunnel, I asked about it.

Jimmy explained, ‘There are tunnels connecting all the main facilities; if there’s six feet of snow up top, people can still move around. There are tunnels to the cabins as well. They dug down six feet, put in concrete, put a roof over and covered it with dirt and moss.’

The soldiers showed us their latest mortar tubes, and then tried to hit a distant moose with lobbed shells. It would be cooked later. A single storey barrack room offered windows with two layers - to keep the men warm in the dead of winter; this was the Mountain and Arctic Warfare Cadre’s home from home, their jeeps painted white, their half-tracks painted white. White snow smocks hung from the walls, the soldiers weapons painted white with black stripes. All they needed was a little snow.

‘Any bootleggers up here?’ I asked their C.O.

'If there were we'd welcome them in and pat them on the back. It's a hundred miles to the nearest dirt track, another hundred to the nearest road, and a hell of a way to the nearest whore house!'

'How long do you spend up here?'

'Never more than eight weeks. We're flying in and out now, even in the winter, but we do have fun clearing the damn runway. Still, it keeps the men fit and active. Sometimes they just drop supplies by parachute!'

'Why'd you have a huge runway way out here?' they asked.

'New aeroplanes will be tested here, far from prying eyes,' Jimmy explained.

I said, 'We don't want people to copy them till we're ready. If they do we make less money, and you guys ... are out of a job.'

'No one up here *too* see them!'

'But plenty of people around Vancouver,' I pointed out.

We made our inspection of the airfield, Jimmy happy with it, and soon flew off southwest, back towards home. And it now felt like home; I had no wish to be anywhere else. The seaplane landed on the inlet, undercarriage up, and let us off next to the hotel, a boat coming out for us. Susan met us, a big hug for me. Well, as much of a hug as we could manage in her condition.

Jimmy dispatched extra builders to the remote airfield, wanting it completed this summer and ready for next spring. Aircraft engineers were sent out to the remote airfield to create stores ready, and to check the facilities. The airfield would not be used to manufacture aircraft, but the aircraft would be assembled and tested there, so lathes and welding sets were dispatched, aluminium glue and av-gas. The real work would begin in earnest next spring.

Radios

We had been working on radios for many years, each of our aircraft now fitted with one. They were getting smaller, sound quality was improving, and they broke less often. Now we ventured into making simple radios for housewives to tune into the local radio station. At the moment there were two stations in Vancouver, and that was about it. We started our own station in the town, each worker given a free radio set. The radios appeared in the town's diner, in shops, and soon everyone had a radio on in the background.

We played contemporary music, but interrupted with a five-minute news programme every four hours. Radios started to sell to

those who didn't work for us, the radios looking like large mantelpiece clocks with wooden surrounds. Inside, they were more advanced than the other sets available in the period.

Radio retailers were opened in Vancouver and Seattle, and trade was good, the sets soon shipped all around Canada. Our pilots were told to take a few on each trip, and to just give them out free; word of mouth advertising would do the rest. We had gone viral.

Four hundred sets were shipped out to Kenya, two hundred to Hong Kong, and a thousand were batched up for the UK - where they liked to sit in of a cold winter night and listen. With Jimmy asking for ten thousand sets this year alone, additional staff were hired at a facility in Vancouver, hundreds of them. In total, we now employed directly some eleven thousand people, making us the largest employer in the province.

Our fridges were doing well, and now benefited from glued-aluminium casing and plastic insides. I figured that people trying to copy us would have a hard time of it. The fridges were sent south by train to Los Angeles or Florida, where our sales staff would place them in hotels, sale or return, for a month. No one wanted to give them back at the end of the month. Lease terms were agreed, our sales staff enjoying a hundred percent success. That company, Columbia Frozen Fridges, now made a good profit. For the time period, it was a fantastic profit.

'How about ... cars?' I asked Jimmy one day as we sat in the hotel diner.

'We'd put US workers out of jobs.'

'This is all on a small scale at the moment,' I countered. 'So ... maybe top-end cars, glued-aluminium and plastic.'

'If you want to set up a small factory, then by all means. We could do with some decent cars for the gang.'

I went and asked a question of the engineers. 'Could an aircraft engine run a car?'

'It could ... if you was figuring on driving at a hundred miles an hour!'

'Funny you should say that...'

I left some very amused engineers thinking about racing cars, and bought a piece of land towards Vancouver, an old mill. I sent in the builders to do it up, and to erect a few large sheds. A fence was thrown up, guards hired, a team of twenty engineers allocated to me. They ordered the equipment they would need, hiring people from the city with the relevant skills - and there were not too many of those left.

They started with a basic jeep, taking it apart, and then considered a stronger chassis. The bodywork would be bonded aluminium honeycomb - great for safety if you hit something, and the windows would be Perspex.

A few of the scientists seemed a little jealous, and dropped hints. I allowed their input, many people interested in tinkering with the new car design on the weekends.

Babies

August saw two arrivals; Doc Graham, and a baby girl a week later. Everyone had a look, gifts bought, silly noises made. Susan recovered in a day or so, and now glowed with the baby in her arms. Jimmy may have been right; a kid can change your perspective.

We employed the maid full time, and she would work 8am to 6pm every day, another lady coming in at weekends. Both of the ladies were married to engineers, so security was less of a risk. Ted's wife popped in often and would baby-sit for us, Ted's eight year old daughter great with baby Mary, a name that Susan liked. I had used up quite a few girls names, and didn't argue.

Young Mary was a good sleeper, but Susan insisted that all the children of "gifted" parents had the blood. I spent hours just sat holding her, or just sat watching her sleep. Life was good.

But then one day a drive-by shooting occurred, a car of gangsters opening-up on our hotel in Vancouver. We could not decide if they were after someone inside, or after us. The bootleggers had been knocked back, and we figured that they knew we funded the Rifles, everyone around here did. A war council was convened. Since we could not be sure who it was, we had a word with the Seattle police and put together a list of likely suspects, as well as where they lived or hung out.

Big Paul put a team together: Rifles SAS, armed with AK47s, the men offered good bonuses. A few days later they flew across the border in our own planes, landing on a road at night and soon creeping through a forest to an estate owned by a gangster. They left no one alive, and blew the house to pieces with a timed charge, soon on the plane home.

Next they dressed in suits and flew in, pistols hidden as they snuck around the back of a gin joint after hours. Grenades went in first, followed by the soldiers, everyone inside shot dead, timed

explosives left behind. The building collapsed in on the bodies, our ghosts soon back across the border.

The next gangster on our list was now being cautious, so our people occupied a hill above his house, and waited with fifty-calibre sniper Rifles. As he drove home in convoy they hit his car engine, and then blew his head clean off his shoulders. RPGs rained down, the cars blown to pieces, no witnesses left to talk. Al Capone would have been proud of us.

Next came an old mill in the countryside where bootleg booze was being stored; the number of armed men around it gave it away. RPGs streaked into the mill, blowing it to bits, the hard booze burning. AK47 sniper variants then picked off the guards, plus any stragglers. So much explosive was placed in the mill that a hole some thirty yards across was left behind, people hearing the blast ten miles away.

One particular gangster on our list, now running scared, remained on the top floor of a hotel. A fifty calibre round hit him from six hundred yards away when he peered out of the window one morning, a hole in the man's chest big enough to put your arm through. Several of his lieutenants were picked off as they left the rear of the hotel, the remainder fleeing.

After four weeks of hard work, or "fun and games" as Big Paul put it, there was no one left worth shooting, and the bootlegging trade around our region died, the numbers of soldiers on the border reduced. The local action, however, led to the head of the Seattle police coming to see us. We welcomed him into the hotel, making him a coffee.

'Would I be right in assuming that you fellas had a hand in ... cleaning up my city?'

'No,' Jimmy said, holding a fixed stare.

The man took a moment. 'Well ... the fellas that did the damage, they move like ghosts. We don't have any descriptions of people or cars.'

'Is the city quieter now?' I asked.

'Much, but someone will come around and replace the others; they always do.'

Jimmy handed the man a modest diamond. 'When they do ... let us know, because we take an interest in these things. We reward those who help us, and those that let us down go for a plane ride ... being pushed out at a very great height.'

The police chief pocketed the diamond. 'I think we understand each other. But one of the men who died, his boss is in San Francisco, and that fella won't take it lying down.'

'Do you have his details?' I asked.

The police chief wrote them down. 'He has three hundred men, they say, an estate out of town with sixty men around it.'

'Then let's hope he chokes on a bread role,' I said.

With the police chief gone, we gave Big Paul the details. 'It smells of a trap,' Jimmy told him. 'This cop might be on the take from our friend. Be very careful, recon the place first.'

Whilst I was snug and warm in with the baby, Big Paul flew over an estate outside of San Francisco. He could see the guards below through his binoculars. Figuring he'd save some time, he flew back over a day later at 5am, dropping a bundle with a parachute. It floated down, those guards awake at this hour puzzling it. It landed in the courtyard, and they had a peek. The blast was so great that people in the city heard it. Scratch one more gangster.

The blast made the papers, rival gangsters blamed. No one had seen our plane, and our plane had flown in a roundabout way to get there - and to get back. Still, Jimmy was concerned. He had a fence thrown up around my estate, a guard put on with a barrier. The residents didn't mind, it gave them added peace of mind. The hotel now offered two armed men in roof windows, a man on the front door with a hidden pistol.

With the cooperation of the local authorities - who loved us, we put a barrier and guards on a bridge over a stream, the only way to reach us from Vancouver. Vehicles were stopped, directions given, smiles and waves given to locals. People leaving were not inconvenienced, and trucks were typically let straight through. A car with four men in would be stopped, day or night.

A week after the barrier had been raised, one particular group of new bootleggers simply took a wrong turn. They panicked when they saw the local police, and the soldiers, and tried to speed around the barrier, clipping it, their car racked by over a hundred rounds. Fortunately, the incident had occurred late at night.

I made sure that a picture of the men's car made it to the local newspaper, as well as down in Seattle. It looked like a Swiss cheese, the message a loud one.

Gold production in the Congo was now at a level that made me interested, the gold bars we produced being smuggled out under the noses of the Belgians. The Belgians were regular users of our trains, and they had ventured down the jungle road towards our jungle mine - a few dead ends inspected - their people reporting that the road led to Zambia. They had not found the mine, or its

smelting plant. And as for the gold bars, they were driven out by the Rifles, or more typically flown out aboard a Dash-7, a dirt strip having been cut into the jungle.

A second dirt strip had been cut into the jungle near our decoy mine across the Zambian border, and flights landed there first. Planes heading into the Congo were simply heading there – to anyone who asked. And how could the Belgians possibly know about the gold?

With extraction levels now good, Ngomo organised a rebellion around Goma, Belgians killed and fleeing. Their soldiers moved in, and were massacred, few bodies found. Belgians, and Europeans, soon feared the Congo, few venturing there.

Our train track then took a sharp left turn and ventured towards existing track near Zimbabwe, called Rhodesia at the moment. There it would join up, and people could take an oddly circular route from Salisbury, the colonial capital of Rhodesia, to Kenya.

Thinking of tin and copper, Jimmy sought permission from the Belgians to mine in the Congo, and we ordered up mines where we knew deposits would be found, the Mombasa Steam Company heavily involved, and soon to be involved in bringing ore back to Kenya. In addition to that new work, Steffan began to cut a line through Zambia and towards the Angolan coast, a lengthy project. At least the going would be easier than the Congo.

With the first two seaplanes dispatched to Africa, to internal Africa, we offered a service from Mombasa to Nairobi and onwards to Lake Victoria or down to Lake Tanganyika and Kigoma town. The flights were packed, and preferable to an overland route, many diplomats on each flight.

Our Dash-7s ventured further and further into the interior, kept busy in Egypt and North Africa by the British Empire's Diplomatic Corp. Sykes and Jack flew in the aircraft often, Jack's dear lady wife now pregnant. He must have kept a football in the bedroom.

Just a month after starting my new car project, they had cobbled together a strange looking vehicle, a real beast of a motor; it was all engine. It was larger than the typical car from my future era, its bodywork bonded honeycomb – and crash resistant. The seat offered a high back, and an aircraft pilot's harness. It looked like something which Batman might drive.

The engineers had been warned, on pain of death, not to drive it on the roads without my approval. Now it was ready, and I rushed down. Sitting in it, the engineers jealous as hell, I strapped in and started her up, a hell of a noise created. Revving her shook nearby

windows. I selected first gear and eased back off the clutch, a little gas and off I went, onto the road and into second. I tried the gas pedal, and was pinned back into the seat, smiling like an idiot.

At the hotel I stopped and revved it, the gang peering out of windows and then rushing down, all jealous as hell.

‘Where’s the baby seat?’ Jimmy dryly asked.

Mac squeezed in beside me and we took off, out through the barrier and to the highway, what it was. I opened her up, nought to sixty in four seconds. Well, a turbo-charged aircraft engine will do that for your ride. We passed a local police car on the side of the road, and he tried to follow. Turning around at a roadside diner, we headed back, halting next to the police car as it slowed.

‘Mister Paul,’ the officer called. ‘Should have known. She’s a beauty.’

‘No good trying to chase me, she does more than a hundred.’

‘A hundred? Jeez.’

I floored it and sped away. At the hotel I let Jimmy have a go, Hal sitting with him. Susan was waiting, her arms folded.

‘I didn’t go very fast,’ I told her, being stared at. ‘Honest.’ Mac’s laughter was not helping, and she gave me grief – all day. I pencilled the design for a family car, and told her that this was just a one-off.

In the weeks that followed, the engineers made a start on a more practical car. The turbo-charger was removed, and inhibitors fixed, maximum speed sixty-five. Plus a baby seat. I left the sports car to anyone who wanted to drive it, and allowed the engineers to make more in their spare time for races down in the States. That was their hobby, their real work to make family cars, safe family cars. Albeit damned powerful and fast family cars for the period.

When I dropped into the hotel one evening, Jimmy said to me, ‘We should give Abdi more to do, or he’ll find something to do – something we may not like.’

‘We could send him money to build up Mogadishu,’ I suggested.

Jimmy nodded. ‘To make it a civilised city, and to keep him busy.’

Rudd sent Abdi hundreds of fridges, many more jeeps – earmarked for private use and for sale, and we asked Abdi to build hotels and facilities with money credited by the Bank of England through the British Governor in Mogadishu. The train line to Baardheere would now be extended down to Mogadishu, and all of the way up to the Red Sea. Abdi was placed in charge of the rail project, working with Steffan. We added a seaplane to the Mombasa service

and it flew to Mogadishu and back twice a week, once a week up to Cairo and back.

We also asked Abdi to develop the local banana trade, and to open a few mines in the locations we gave him. The Somali industrial machine had been awoken, and may even someday develop a GDP to rival ... well, a very small and poor country. Still, we gave him focus and kept him busy.

FBI

That winter, Mac and Handy developed ground attack rockets for the fighter aircraft, unguided, and the scientists helped to develop warheads that made a big bang, others that exploded below ground and made a very large hole in someone's neatly laid grass airstrip. The fighters were dusted off, and when the weather allowed they took off and blew holes in hillsides, the local wildlife disturbed.

Then we received a visit from a senior FBI manager and some chums, the guys just turning up at the hotel one day. I was called down to the hotel, and met the man and his assistant in a quiet corner of the downstairs bar with Jimmy, drinks arranged.

'How can we help you gentlemen?' Jimmy began.

'We've been piecing together the deaths of well-known gangsters in Seattle in the past six months, and to tell you the truth – we're kinda baffled. But we have pieced together a few things. Some of these gangsters were put in the ground with half-inch bullets, rare bullets, but used by the Canadian Rifles. We found odd shell casings as well, again used by the Rifles Regiment, and I understand that these soldiers all learn to handle explosives real well.'

'What does that have to do with us?' I asked.

'You gentlemen are known to have founded the regiment for work in Africa, and these soldiers are policing the border around here – rumoured to have put a few bootleggers in the ground.'

'Does the demise of these bootleggers cause you any lost sleep?' Jimmy asked.

'Not really, but large explosions on US soil attract our interest.'

'The Canadian Rifles,' Jimmy began, 'are under the direct control of the Canadian Army and Government. If you were to accuse them of anything, you'd have to go through government channels.'

The man eased back. 'Which would take some time ... and get me nowhere.'

'Do you have a question?' Jimmy pressed.

'If someone threatened you guys, would you consider pursuing them south of the border?'

'If someone threatened us, I'd take a million dollars from the bank ... and hunt them down like dogs, wherever they were in the world,' Jimmy carefully stated.

'And such money would cause tight lips, as well as hire some determined people,' the FBI manager stated.

'I should hope so ... for that kind of money,' Jimmy told him.

'And if there was a fugitive hiding out up here that I wanted...?'

'I would do everything in my power to assist you.'

'And if we wanted to intercept bootleggers further east?' he risked.

'Again, as good citizens we'd do all we could to assist, affording you some spectacular successes; people caught in the act, a reporter with a camera to hand.'

The FBI manager thumbed towards his buddy. 'George here works out of the Seattle office. I'd like him to ... be a go-between.'

'Fine,' Jimmy said. 'Send us a list of people you're after, photographs if you have them, and let us know which parts of the border you're interested in.'

'Great lakes and east,' came straight back.

'Then I think we could move a few soldiers around,' Jimmy said with a false smile. 'When they find a bootlegger camp they'll let you know, and let you know when the convoys are heading to the border. Your success rate should ... be worthy of praise from Washington.'

'Sounds good, but what do you guys get out of it?'

'A friend to call upon in the years to come, should we have a problem south of the border.'

The man made a face, then stood. We followed him up.

'Paul, why don't you show these gentlemen your sports car.'

I led the men out, and down the road. When the engine started they jumped backwards. With the FBI manager sat beside me, I tore down the road and around the town, the wind his hair. 'She'll do over a hundred!' I shouted as we went.

'A hundred! God damn!'

With the FBI gone, I went and found Jimmy. 'Is this going to be a problem?' I asked. 'Them knowing about us?'

'They're not stupid. But if we help that guy to climb the ladder he'll help us in the future, and his agency gets the credit. Besides, it was the angle I was looking for to meet their power brokers.'

We called Big Paul. Jimmy told him, 'Have the Rifles deployed around the Great Lakes, hunting down bootlegger distilleries and warehouses. They don't go in, they report locations and movements to the new FBI guy, no shooting. And a few teams near Toronto. Take a few off the border here, and keep them busy.'

'How many men are there now?' I asked Big Paul.

'About two hundred in the SAS, about one hundred and fifty in the SBS, five hundred airborne, forty in the Mountain unit, and in total ... around two thousand.'

'They all get rotations to Africa?' I asked.

'Yeah, about four hundred over there at any one time.'

Jimmy said, 'Go deploy them, but make sure that they're camouflaged, stealthy, and quiet. This is *eyes on* - only shooting if discovered. When convoys of trucks head to the border I want the detail sent to the FBI in Seattle, George Banner the guy's called. Set it up.'

When that guy, George Banner, returned to us a week later, he brought a large file with him, mugshots and all. And what a handsome bunch they were. Three Finger Mo, Slasher Jack, Hatchet Mick; these gangster fellas liked their colourful labels. But then I said something without Jimmy's knowledge; he wasn't around at the time.

'George, our soldiers are very well trained, and our instructors have years of warfare under their belts around Africa and other places. If you sent a group of ... say fifty men, we could teach them how to get in and out quietly, and how to fight.'

He eased back, his grey matter firing up. 'A special unit ... for catching the bootleggers in woods. Hmmm. I'll send in a report.'

I didn't think any more about it, handing the file to Big Paul, who laughed at the mugshots and names, most of these handsome chaps sporting broken noses. Our guys got to work, and tip-offs started to flow, bootleggers caught with their trousers down. Well, after drinking all that beer they needed a pee at the roadside. The FBI's Chicago branch started to get a name for itself over the winter, our guys wrapped up like snowmen and hidden in snowdrifts.

But then George came back, well wrapped up himself. 'We liked your idea,' he told me and Jimmy.

'What idea?' Jimmy asked.

'About you training a small group of our men.'

Jimmy looked to me.

'My idea, I suggested a kind of ... counter-bootlegging team for the border.'

'Ah,' Jimmy let out. He took a moment, then faced George. 'It would give you all the credit yourselves.'

'We can have fifty men here April 1st.'

'We'll be ready,' Jimmy told him.

With George gone, Jimmy called a war council. 'Big Paul, Mac, create a hostage rescue group immediately. Give them the scenario of ... a rich industrialist kidnapped in Africa or somewhere. Close quarter battle, stun grenades, knock out gas, peephole lenses, the works. Then you're going to create a Guest Training Facility, separate barracks and canteen. Come 1st April, the FBI will be sending fifty men to us. They'll be trained to sneak about the border and ... do what our lads are doing, only on their side.

'I want them injected, on the pretext of ... bugs in the Canadian swamps, worked up and never given a moments rest. We should have them for six weeks or so, and I want them parachuting, sniping, sneaking about. They don't need platoon tactics, mortars, 105mm. They need pistols, grenades, close quarter battle and house storming, spy work, cold weather work - and jeep driving, since they'll be in the mud and the shit. Canoes - yes, swimming, and hand-to-hand fighting and silent killing.

'When they leave us, I want combats issued, snow smocks, and one of our 9mm pistols with plenty of ammo each. Give them a few fifty cal's, but no AK47s yet. And invite them back in a year for a refresher. Oh, and give them all some basic Cessna flying lessons, because when they leave they can take four with them for recon.'

'Fucking 'ell, boss,' Mac let out. 'Being very generous.'

'Yes, we are,' Jimmy emphasised. 'Because they're the FBI, part of the American Government.'

'Ah...' I let out.

'You have till April,' Jimmy told them. 'Go make some plans.'

I thought I'd be sneaky, and sent Timkins a telegram: American FBI having commando training from us.'

A formal request appeared a week later, from the Foreign Office, asking if two hundred British NCOs could attend airborne school, a one year assignment.'

Jimmy read the telegram, and ordered extra barracks built. His reply to Timkins was to have the men here by May 1st. Second six months in Africa, then home.

'I could have some input to the training,' I suggested. 'I did spend twelve fucking years fighting!'

'You can have ... as much input as you like, just don't step on Big Paul's toes.'

Back at the house, I felt that I should give Susan more to do. She looked bored. ‘Honey, could you help with a project?’

‘Sure. What is it?’

‘We need to have decent medical kits made up for the soldiers, something better than the crap they use now. Could you source supplies from far and wide, have the scientists make some stuff from steel and plastic?’

‘Oh, well ... yes, no problem. I’ll start planning a basic kit, field dressings, and then a larger kit for HQ triage tents. They’d need tourniquets, haemostats ... needle kits.’

‘Our instructors can then teach combat first aid. But could you teach some of their soldiers to be dedicated medics? Hire a few nurses and create a MASH unit?’

‘Does the Canadian Army have nurses?’

‘Well, they’re bound to. I’ll find out and grab some. At the moment the lads go to the Vancouver hospital if they’re hurt, so I’ll hire a base doctor who doesn’t mind roughing it.’

‘Those medics will notice the recovery rates.’

‘The soldiers have quarter blood; it leaves small scars.’

‘Oh, OK. I’ll make a start.’

‘And then, babes, a similar kit for aircraft pilots, since they may go down in far off places. And we’ll need a course for the pilots and waitresses.’

‘Are you trying to find things for me to do?’ she teased.

‘Yes, so get on it, slack draws.’

Jimmy was pleased with the first aid kits, especially for pilots. Our pilots would now have two days of courses when they rotated in and out, kits taken with them from now on, even in Cessnas. And our military first aid packs came in green watertight pouches in three differing sizes. Every soldier now carried a small pack of field dressings, a tourniquet, and needles for stitching. Medics benefited from a larger bag, other bags left in jeeps and half-tracks.

And we started a MASH unit, taking on board a doctor with some surgical experience, plus four nurses. We bought them all the latest kit, including large green tents that we had MASH written onto.

Flying bedstead

April 1st came around, and fifty FBI guys turned up with suitcases, most of the guys aged under thirty. I welcomed them at the barracks set aside for them.

‘Guys, welcome to the Canadian Rifles. You are here ... to learn how these soldiers do what they do ... so well. These soldiers and their instructors have spent years in Africa fighting in wars, and have each killed hundreds of people, some hand to hand or with a knife. They’re a very tough bunch, and they all run twenty miles before breakfast.

‘You’ll be pushed hard, fed well, and taught all day. When you close your eyes you’ll be thankful that no one is shouting at you, and that you can rest your poor weary bones. When you leave here you’ll stare death in the face ... and laugh. Now, you’ll be inoculated today for a few germs you’ll find in the Canadian swamps. That injection will make you sick for a day or two, so we won’t be pushing you that hard till Monday. Oh, and you will, however, all learn how to parachute during the course.’

‘Parachute?’ they queried.

‘Yes, from a plane; it’s required training. You’ll learn how to fire all of the world’s weapons, how to fight hand to hand, how to make bombs, and how to shoot someone at a thousand yards.’

‘A thousand yards?’

I asked for a fifty calibre with lens.

‘Jeez,’ they let out. ‘That for giants?’

‘That ... will kill a man at a thousand yards or more. You’ll spend a lot of time on the ranges, your daily ammunition allowance being around five hundred rounds per man. We’ll also be teaching you how to fly, and when you leave you’ll be given four aircraft to take with you.’

That stunned them.

‘Now, get the injection, get some food, your uniforms, and be tough; we don’t like slackers here.’

Big Paul and Mac lifted AK47s from behind the men and fired bursts into the air. The men dived down.

‘Get up!’ we roared. ‘What are you, afraid of dying? To the medical centre, on the double!’

Back at the hotel, I said to Jimmy, ‘We need a married quarters.’

He nodded absently. ‘Build one.’

‘Some of our Canadian lads are coming up for three years, promoted to Corporals and Sergeants, twelve to officers.’

‘We had more Indians than chiefs to start with, a better balance now. And some of the originals were already due a promotion. Still, it takes time to train men, and experience can’t be rushed.’

'Some of them look just like our old Rifles,' I mentioned.

'A few years of hard training will do that. And none have left us. Oh, have a look at the new bird.'

I drove down the next day, to the secret facility. There she sat, silver and gleaming, and looking a bit like an early MIG. I peered into the intake, seeing the fans. When the engineers approached, I asked, 'Is the frame strong enough?'

'We think so; we've strengthened a few places and insulated the engine from the frame.'

'If it flies fast, the force on the wings and tail will be much greater,' I pointed out.

'There's a new front spar in each, an alloy.'

'When will it be ready?'

'A few days, a few more tests. But there's not much *to* test, because we did all the work on the original fighter. We've fired her up and run the engine for hours without a problem.'

'Let me know when you're ready.'

Four days later they bolted the plane atop a seabird, people puzzling the odd piggyback arrangement, and flew the jet up to our secret base. We followed two days later, noticing the jet on the apron as we landed. We had a nose around it before they fired her up, Hal in the pilot's seat. When he waved, they ran over and pulled out a plug, closing a hatch, a basic electric engine starting the turbines. We headed over to the tower, Hal's radio now set on transmit.

'Internal power OK,' crackled from a speaker. 'Hydraulics OK, control surfaces ... fine. Brakes off ... power up ... moving ... picking up speed ... on taxiway ... powering up a little more ... a little bounce in the nose ... temperatures OK ... on runway – no moose today! OK ... lined up ... flaps twenty ... power at fifty percent ... rolling ... twenty ... thirty ... forty ... fifty ... sixty ... seventy ... eighty ... ninety – she wants to lift ... power down ... forty, end of runway ... turning ... lined up ... full power. Twenty ... thirty ... fifty ... seventy ... ninety – she wants to lift ... power down ... fifty ... forty ... no engine overheating, all in the amber zone. Turning ... lining up ... fifty percent power ... forty ... sixty ... eighty ... one hundred ... nose up ... ten feet ... twenty feet ... stable ... power down ... touchdown, bit of a wobble ... sixty ... forty ... twenty ... turning around ... lining up ... sixty percent power ... forty ... sixty ... eighty ... nose up ... climbing ... she's steady ... left bank ... coming around ... speed rising, now two hundred, easing power off, coming around ... lined up ... left bank, right bank ... nose up ... nose down ... tail slip left ... slip right ...

coming back around ... lined up, power down ... one forty ... on approach ... one twenty ... one hundred ... nose up ... ninety ... down, bit of a wobble ... power down ... sixty ... forty ... twenty ... turning ... lined up ... sixty percent power ... fifty ... seventy ... nose up ... gear up, how's it look?'

'Gear up, Hal.'

'Flaps up, climbing, two hundred ... two forty ... two sixty ... two thousand feet, levelling off ... two eighty ... three hundred ... three thirty ... three fifty ... three eighty ... four ten ... power to seventy-five percent ... four fifty ... four eighty ... easing her back ... three hundred ... two fifty ... coming around ... see you now ... coming around ... lined up ... flaps twenty ... one eighty ... one sixty ... one forty ... one twenty ... one hundred ... down, still a wobble ... power down, get the kettle on.'

'Four hundred and eighty miles an hour!' an engineer shouted. They hugged each other.

'And that wasn't at full power,' I noted.

Jimmy faced them. 'Take it apart, gentlemen, and test everything. I want the second and third prototypes here in six weeks, we'll have visitors.'

We greeted Hal on the apron. 'For 1927, that's a record,' I told him.

He nodded. '1938, Spitfire in a dive does four-sixty. This will do that in a climb on sixty percent power.'

We flew Hal back with us, leaving the engineers to take the plane apart and examine everything in detail; the local wildlife would now get some peace. Back at the plane factory they called me in, one of my ideas taking shape. They showed me tangle of metal connected to small control surfaces. I stared at it, my hands in my pockets.

'It's an auto-trim,' they explained.

'Ah,' I let out.

'When the plane moves from straight and level the mercury in this container moves, and completes electrical circuits that move the small secondary ailerons. The plane then moves back to level. The main aileron is shorter, the new surface slots in next to it, since we don't want to move the main aileron at speed. Same for the elevators.'

'And the compass heading?'

'We haven't cracked that yet. Pilots need something to do!'

'When will it be tested?' I asked.

'In a few weeks, we're fitting it to a Goose.'

'Goose?'

‘That’s what we call the seaplanes.’

‘Fine. Goose Mark ... Three?’

‘Five now, boss.’

‘I’d be interested to see it work. Let me know.’

Jimmy sent a telegram to Timkins, inviting the British Minister of War over to see the new jet. He also invited that man’s Canadian counterpart, Jimmy being oddly secretive.

I received my new family car that week, the prototype. It was big and bulky, lots of room inside, plush seats and room in the back for six. It still had a powerful engine, toned down, and it shifted. A large petrol tank meant that it could go for three or four hundred miles before stopping. I drove it home to incredulous looks from people, and grabbed Susan, the maid watching the baby, and took my good lady for a drive.

On the highway I opened her up, reaching sixty easily – but smoothly. This was quality *and* power. We headed around to the hotel and showed everyone, and everyone now wanted one; Jimmy ordering that the first twenty would be for us, the rest to be sold. The gears were manual, but positioned behind the wheel, and still with a clutch.

The next day Susan and I drove to Vancouver, being stared at. Compared to the cars of the day, this new saloon was sleek and sexy. That weekend I packed a hamper, the baby and the maid, and we went for a drive in the countryside, finding a viewpoint with tall pine trees. The day out was just great. Life in 1927 was not so bad if you had the money, and the weather.

But then Hal put a dampener on things. He called me down to the factory one morning, and I found a crowd of people stood watching what looked like a flying bedstead. Hal started the motor, Hacker swinging the rotors to get them started. Hal wound up the rotors as he sat on the outline of what looked like a gyrocopter, the tail rotor spinning.

With the rotors up to speed he bounced up off the ground and wobbled, climbing to around five feet, the engineers amazed. He turned slowly to face us, and then kept turning till he was facing the airfield. Nose down, he moved off across the grass and taxiway gaining speed. He came back down the field gaining altitude, and then flew off down the inlet.

Jimmy lowered his paper. ‘Cookie, is that daft sod flying a helicopter?’

Cookie looked out the window. ‘Like James Bond in Dr No.’

Hal circled the hotel at speed, people looking up and amazed at the flying bedstead. He flew over the aircraft factory again, engineers peering up, and then buzzed the town, people wondering just what the heck it was. He circled the tractor factory, the jeep factory, and then lost control, taking down a factory roof as he plummeted through it. He ended up wedged into the roof supports, glass raining down on people, and had to be rescued by ladder and rope, the bedstead lifted out on a crane. He suffered cuts and bruises, and a dented pride. He then faced Jimmy.

‘You’re on a mission, not a fucking jolly! We’re here for a long time, so try if you can to be here next year. You’re grounded till I say, and you *will* assist with the repair of my fucking roof that you demolished you overgrown kid!’

Hal went and sulked in his room; I found him there later. ‘What da *you* want?’ he asked me. ‘I’ve been spanked.’

‘Fucking hell, Hal, we need you in one piece.’

‘Yeah, well it’s all dangerous, every flight I take.’

‘The other aircraft are tested well before we put people in them, that fucking flying bedstead wasn’t. Hal, I gave you a second chance by bringing you along, don’t make me sorry. You have an opportunity here, a good one, so wind your neck in and test that fucking helo carefully first. Flying accidents are one thing, but avoidable accidents are another.’

He sulked in his room for a day, meals sent in by Cookie, then helped with the roof repairs. A week later he apologised to Jimmy and myself.

‘Test the damn thing carefully,’ Jimmy told him. ‘You’re over a hundred, not twenty-one!’

I spent time with the FBI team, watching as they stormed houses in covering positions, learning not to just spray it around. They held up bottles as their colleagues fired at them, and then commented on their colleagues’ stance and posture. They all now looked fit, and now wore the standard combats and boots.

I observed them on the assault course - that was also a live firing range, and they were coming along, working in pairs and teams.

“Moving, firing, ten o’clock – got him, watch the right, moving.”

I could see the soldiers of the future in them. They crawled and shot, ran and shot, hid and shot at targets, receiving lengthy sniper training. One group were now trying to punch the instructors and getting knocked about, taught hand-to-hand, another being taught basic principles of flight. Sitting with a group having coffee and corned beef, I asked how they were finding the training.

‘Never done so much in a short space of time,’ one said. ‘FBI basic training was interesting – so I thought at the time, but this is great. It’s hard work, but we’re enjoying it. And that fifty cal rifle ... Jeez.’

‘And those grenades. They’d make the bootleggers stop and take notice alright.’

‘We’ve never seen nothing like that AK47 neither,’ they said.

I put in, ‘The soldiers here have a year’s training compared to your six weeks, and harder.’

‘They’re a tough bunch alright, all built like circus strong men.’

‘I like the stories about Africa,’ one said. ‘That sounds like a hoot place to be soldiering.’

‘How’s your pistol work?’ I asked.

‘Never fired so many damn rounds,’ one said. ‘And I reckon now I could kill a man at seventy yards every damn time. And we wear pistols on our legs like old time gunslingers, fast on the draw.’

‘And camouflage?’

‘Jeez, but your boys pop up everywhere. We sit down for a sandwich in the woods and up they pop. Every time wees fail to spot ‘em it’s fifty push-ups for us all.’

‘Let’s hope you learn to be just as good, and give the bad guys hell.’

The British Army’s NCOs turned up a day late, and we found them rooms in the barracks. They were issued with two pairs of new boots and the strange combats on day one, their old berets to be kept and worn; their combats had Union Jack flags on them so that we knew who they were. They were all inoculated, fed well, and started on a fitness regime, even their accompanying officers, a right bunch of public school “Ruperts” who had never done a hard days work in their lives. That would change.

I told them, ‘If you’re not as good as your men, you’ll get no respect. If you’re not prepared to go where your men go, then you’re cowards unworthy of the uniform.’ I was popular – not. ‘And yes, you are all required to parachute, regardless.’

The British foot soldiers were all a bit thick, getting evening classes in English grammar, maths, and geography. Their fitness improved, and they surprised themselves, soon completing the assault course without being sick. Live firing came as a bit of a shock, as did the AK47s and the fifty cal, a hell of a shock.

The British Minister of War then turned up aboard a Goose. But I did a double take at the man next to him: Churchill, member of the

select committee for munitions procurement. Fuck! I shook their hands, greetings exchanged, and showed them towards the hotel.

‘A fine plane,’ Churchill let out, lighting a cigar. He noticed my car. ‘What in blazes is that?’

‘Come and have a look,’ I encouraged. He sat in as I started it up, and examined the interior as I pulled away at speed and headed down to the car factory.

‘This shiny box moves like a gazelle,’ he said.

‘You should take a look at my sports car.’

We halted inside the gate, and I asked for the beast to be brought out.

‘Try this,’ I said, Churchill sat next to me. I started her up, the beat roaring.

‘Dear god, man,’ he said.

I eased her out, then powered towards the highway. Once there, I slowed to a crawl. ‘Watch the speedometer.’ I floored it.

He screamed with delight, a hundred soon reached. ‘Capital, Mister Holton, capital.’

I dropped him back safely, escorting him into the hotel, our future wartime leader still smiling.

He shook Jimmy’s hand. ‘The famous Mister Silo, I presume.’

‘The even more famous Winston Churchill.’

‘Only in my club, only in my club,’ he said as we walked in. We fetched his party drinks in the hotel bar, Churchill talking of fast cars and his flight here. He could not shut up about the flight here: tea and food on the plane, a toilet, reclining seats, newspapers! Capital, just capital!

He tired quickly and headed off to his room, and we met them again after breakfast the next morning. A bus transported our party to the tractor factory first, to see the jeeps; Churchill trying one for ten minutes. At the plane factory, two of the visitors eased into a Cessna and viewed the inlet for a pleasant twenty minutes. Back on the airfield, six of them clambered into a Dash-7 and viewed Vancouver.

Back on terra firma, lunch ordered, we spoke of aircraft costs and production times, of Africa - and Churchill’s adventures there. That evening, sat around the bar with Jimmy and myself, he asked, ‘What motivates you, Mister Silo – if you don’t mind me asking?’

‘Motivates me ... in what area?’ Jimmy asked.

‘In helping poor dumb fools like me.’

‘You underestimate yourself. I have your speeches sent over, and read them all.’

'I wondered why you slept so soundly,' he joked. 'They send me off, even when I'm giving them!' We laughed. 'They say you never knew your real parents,' he broached. 'Yet you go to great lengths to assist the empire, to the point of grand larceny.'

'I firmly believe that my parents were British, and I grew up thinking so. As for the help I extend to your countrymen: I see the British Empire as ... umpires in a cricket match, allowing fair play. If there is fair play in various regions, then I can do business there. The British influence ... is one of roads, railways, and education. A foolish approach by you, but admirable nonetheless.'

'Foolish ... of us?'

'If you educate a man, he'll want his freedom. If he sees you drive a car, he'll want one. Rub shoulders with a poor man and you turn on a light, the light of ambition.'

'A very good point, Mister Silo, a very good point. And what do you see as the future of the British Empire?'

'If you're clever, you'll change your spots to stripes. You'll change from governors to business partners, letting the locals have the political power, whilst you own the majority stake in the businesses. Those businesses - hotels and railways - will always be more influential than old men in stuffy meeting rooms. Since you're in many countries to earn a crust from them, business is the way ... rather than political dominance. You need to dance with the girl ... and touch her when she's not looking, rather than approach her father.'

Churchill laughed, tipping his head back.

'Tomorrow we'll fly off early to see a new toy,' Jimmy said. 'Be up at 5am please.'

'A few whiskies will send me off; just knock hard in the morning.'

At 5.30am we boarded a Goose, soon heading northeast and towards the secret airfield, chatting as we went, coffee made. It was a one-hour flight, and we landed in good weather, a clear sky afforded our visitors today. On the apron sat two prop fighters.

Clear of the Goose, Churchill said, 'They look damned sporty.'

The pilots were already sat in the planes, starting them as we climbed to the tower roof. And the planes were armed. With cold drinks provided, flies and midges pestering us, the two planes took off in sequence, radio messages relayed via the loudspeaker.

'Coming back around ... slow fly past ...'

They flew past.

'That what you call slow?' Churchill asked.

'That's what we call ... crawling,' I said, getting a look.

‘Coming back around ... power up ... two hundred ... two fifty ... three hundred ... three fifty ... four hundred ... four fifty...’

They shot past at about two hundred feet.

‘Four hundred and fifty miles per hour,’ I said, our guests astonished, yet worried with it.

‘On attack run.’

‘Attack ... run?’

‘Watch the buildings over the airfield, where the red flag is,’ I said, pointing.

They peered across. Our two planes swooped in, modified RPGs fired down, the buildings blown to pieces. Our planes landed.

‘Most impressive,’ they said, but cautiously.

Churchill said, ‘These aircraft would be available to us to buy?’

‘They would,’ Jimmy confirmed. ‘If you were at war, attacked, or needed them. They would not be available to buy as toys, since playing with toys causes jealousy in others, and we don’t want other nations to know what toys we have to play with – till we stick them down their throats.’

Our guests exchanged looks.

The wine of jet engines starting could now be heard. ‘What in blazes is that?’ Churchill asked.

‘The planes you just saw would give any nation a shock if they met them on the battlefield. This next aircraft would ... finish them off.’

Now they could see the jet taxiing out.

‘That thing has no propeller,’ they noted.

‘The propeller ... is on the inside,’ Jimmy explained. ‘A clever bit of design.’

The roar increased as Hal taxied the jet down to the end of the runway.

‘Lined up,’ crackled from the loudspeaker. ‘Flaps twenty ... power up, sixty percent ... twenty ... forty ... sixty ... eighty ... nose up ... gear up.’

‘Gear up, Hal.’

‘Flaps up ... full power.’ He went vertical. ‘Two thousand feet ... four ... six ... nine ... twelve ... fifteen ... seventeen ... nineteen ... twenty thousand, levelling off.’

The visitors could see Hal’s vapour trail, all now craning their necks, hands over eyes.

‘He’s now at twenty thousand feet,’ Jimmy informed a stunned group.

'Nose down ... picking up speed ... three hundred ... three fifty ... four hundred ... five hundred ... six hundred ... seven hundred, supersonic ... seven fifty ... eight hundred ... eight fifty.'

The sonic booms hit us, people glancing around to see what was making the noise.

'Levelling out ... power down.'

'Nine hundred miles per hour,' Jimmy informed the group.

'Coming back around ... attack run ... lined up ... flaps twenty ... slowing.' He fired a burst at the ruins of the buildings across the airfield before levelling off. 'Power on ... picking up speed ... turning around ... lining up ... four hundred ... five hundred ... six hundred.' He burst past, just a blur, people snapping their heads around, hands over eyes.

'Dear god,' someone said. These guys were still flying biplanes made of cloth and wood.

Hal landed, and we nudged people down and towards the jet. With the engine off, Hal clambered down and met us.

'What does it feel like to ride that beast?' Churchill asked.

'Like having a rocket underneath you, sir.'

'You're an American?'

'Yes, sir.'

Churchill turned. 'And do the Americans know about these astonishing aircraft?'

'Not yet,' Jimmy said. 'And I *insist* ... that the details of these aircraft be kept very quiet. If *others* ... knew of them, then *others* would be working hard to copy them. And then, someday, maybe the Germans and Italians would have them – and we would not want that, would we.'

Churchill took a moment, lighting a cigar. 'They would be available to only us?'

'If Britain was in a war – not of its own choosing - then yes. If America was in a war – not of its own choosing - then yes. For keeping down the natives in Africa? No.'

'And the reason for this ... demonstration?' Churchill asked.

'To open your eyes to what is possible, and what is available, and to remind you that if you don't research better armaments that there are others out there who might. I did it, so maybe Germany could do so as well. And if they got there ahead of you it would be ... most unfortunate. I hereby formally request that the Canadian Government go to whatever lengths it can to keep this place - and these planes - secret, and that both of your nations send me liaison officers, and a few pilots that I can train in the use of these aircraft.'

That way, should you find yourself in a war, you'd have pilots trained ready.'

Churchill took a moment. 'Yet you would not release them ahead of time?'

'If they're here, and hidden, why would the Germans and others research better aircraft? They believe you to fly slow biplanes, and now crude and slow monoplanes. When playing poker, why show your hand, when deception is called for?'

'The plane I flew here in impressed me greatly,' Churchill stated. 'How foolish I was to be satisfied with the first gift box opened. And that plane? Could it drop bombs?'

'Yes, it could. It could fly at twenty-five thousand feet over Germany and drop bombs, or could fly from London to Cairo, drop bombs, and return without landing.'

'And the cost of these aircraft?' they asked.

'Would be whatever they cost us to make,' Jimmy responded. 'We don't aim to make a profit from you, but we may have a few favours to ask afterwards. The first of those favours, for allowing your people to study these planes, is to allow more Russian Jews to settle in Palestine, since they've fled the communists and are not welcome in Germany.'

'An odd ... arrangement,' Churchill noted.

'Humour me. Now, we have some other toys to show you.'

Churchill stood with an RPG on his shoulder, and checked the aim. Bang! A building in the distance disintegrated. 'Capital!'

He tried a fifty calibre, hitting a target a thousand yards out, firing a mortar tube next. Finally he tried an AK47, blasting away at a wooden barrel full off water. 'Capital! You make good toys, gentlemen.'

As we nudged them towards the waiting Goose it powered up, the tea soon on, our guests still a bit stunned. They spoke little on the way back, after all it was a propeller engine aircraft and still loud. I helped with the dispensing of tea and coffee, plus extra pillows. The guests stared down at the Canadian countryside, and I had to remind myself that passenger flying in this day and age was still rare.

Back at the hotel, we sat again with Churchill, the elderly War Minister off for a nap after the excitement. That War Minister was Churchill's boss technically, the procurement committee answering to him; Churchill was now in the opposition.

'You are a Zionist, Mister Silo?' he asked.

'No, a realist. The Jews are being expelled from Russia, or leaving of their own accord, and they're not welcome in Germany.'

Some will drift back to their ancestral homeland, and a trickle will become a flood - so there's no point in building a sandcastle of obstinacy when the tide is coming in. A great statesman moves with the tide, not against it.'

'And you'll twist our arms in a pleasant manner to get your way.'

'I will, yes.'

'I've been thinking about what you said at the airfield, and you're right. If those planes were shown off we'd start a competition, the outcome of which would be a more determined effort on the part of our enemies to catch up. I can see that now. If we have submarines, so must they, and so on and so on. But a war might require a great many aircraft...'

'We'd see a war coming a year or two ahead, and we'd be ready. Besides, you'd need few of these aircraft,' Jimmy suggested. 'We're also working on other weapons, the likes of which would require more than a few whiskies to get you off to sleep.'

'And why do you involve yourselves in these things?'

'We build aircraft to ferry passengers and make money, but we can also see the potential for abuse and misuse of the advancement of ideas and engineering. If we can see it ... so can others.'

'We've not long placed an order with de Havilland over here, whose aircraft now appear as is mere paper toys,' Churchill lamented.

'We'll be happy to supply you our basic aircraft at good rates,' I offered.

'Could they be made in Britain?'

'No, the process is very complex ... as well as our trade secret,' I explained. 'It's our one great advantage.'

'Advantage? How so?'

'It's damn hard to copy,' I said. 'Damned hard. So if our planes were taken apart by people like the Germans ... they'd spend a long time scratching their heads and getting nowhere. The key to our security ... is in the preparation of the metals used. Four hundred engineers and scientists working five years came up with it, and then it was damned hard.'

'So it would take another power at least that amount of time,' Churchill realised. 'If we possessed them a year before a conflict -'

Jimmy cut in with, 'My preferred approach ... would be surprise. If you had them, you may simply delay a potential conflict until such time as the enemy felt more confident. If you hit them hard on day one then the shock may just turn the tide of war. And our aircraft can fly from here to London in a day.'

‘A day?’ our guest scoffed.

‘A day,’ Jimmy insisted. ‘And should there be a wider conflict in China or the Far East, we’re well placed to get them to you in a day as well.’

‘Did you choose this place for its isolation?’

‘For its isolation, and its proximity to American markets for our aircraft,’ Jimmy explained.

Churchill lit up again, blowing out a fragrant grey pawl. ‘Given your *very colourful* tribal background – the stories of which I no longer doubt, not least about how rich you are – some see you as a threat to the stability of our African colonies.’

‘Was there a question in there?’ Jimmy nudged.

‘What are your views on our African colonies, given your sympathies for the blacks?’

‘Those blacks ... are not yet ready to govern themselves. If and when they are I will assist them to prise away your grip. The tide is coming in for African blacks, but has at least twenty years to go. At least.’

‘And then?’

‘And then it would be wise for you to become business partners with the blacks, not bed fellows.’

Churchill blew out another fragrant pawl. ‘They say you own half of Kenya already.’

‘And that half is geared towards British staff, British companies, and will always be the case. I may have said it before, but think about business for the future, and be my partner in Africa rather than a colonial power. I make fridges in Africa, and that employs blacks – which helps the local economy. I sell the fridges to hotels, who benefit their customers, improving life in Kenya. I make money, and can spend it on rail track. Do you see the synergy?’

‘Three birds with one stone, if not four,’ our guest admitted.

I said, ‘If you can’t see at least three angles to something we do, then you’re missing something.’

‘Young Peter Forsyth gets a great deal of leeway because of his close connection to you,’ our host thought he should mention.

‘We grew up together,’ Jimmy explained. ‘And should he cable me that he needs those planes early, I would probably comply.’

Our host studied Jimmy intently for a moment. ‘You mentioned that you often bored yourself to sleep with my speeches...’

‘I see you as someone with great potential, and a kindred spirit in attitude, although not towards the miner’s strike. I am more ... Labour than Tory. Still, you’re welcome here anytime, and you’ll always have my ear; telegram as often as you like. And when you

fly aboard my aircraft you will always fly free, anywhere in the world.'

'That's good of you, too good. I might be suspicious of your motives – if I actually held any cards. Since you hold all of the cards I shall play at being a good underling. You not only have the aircraft, you have the cars and munitions. As a member for the procurement committee, I could justify regular visits here.'

'We'll always have toys for you to play with when you arrive,' Jimmy said with a smile.

Churchill slowly nodded. 'Any chance of seeing that flying car again?'

I smiled. 'I'll have it brought around.'

With our guest in the car, we sat with the Canadians, who were a little bemused as to why they were in on the meeting at all.

'Gentlemen,' Jimmy began. 'We do not wish to involve ourselves in anything without your permission or kind co-operation. We'd also point out that we pay tax here, and employ a great many people. If we sell the British our armaments in the future then you will benefit greatly. You ... are our business partners.'

'Could we put a full-time liaison officer here?'

'Of course you can, whenever you're ready,' Jimmy offered them.

The British promised to house a procurement officer here as well, and to send us RAF pilots. Jimmy asked that the pilots be young, and that they receive at least five years experience with us. Saying our goodbyes outside the hotel, Hal flew by in the bedstead, the darn thing now a little more reliable. He hovered, waved, and flew off.

'How much whisky was in my coffee?' Churchill asked, making me smile.

The Canadian Government were allocated an office in the aircraft factory, three men to be sat in it permanently, and Canadian police officers and Mounties could now be seen in the area. The only track leading towards our secret airfield in the middle of nowhere received a sign: "Government property, landmine testing ground, no entry." Our secret factory received a few signs as well: "This is a restricted area by order of the government."

A few days later I was called down to the aircraft factory, to the pilots' office – but by Susan. There stood five pilots in smart new uniforms, and looking just like modern era British Airways pilots.

'Very nice,' I said, and our commercial pilots adopted the smart uniforms, turning the ladies' heads.

Over the past year our Los Angeles water-port had been growing in size, and in international stature. Even the US President took a flight, very impressed with the service. Hearing about it, I said to Jimmy, 'Air Force One?'

He shrugged, so I sent two seaplanes with wheels to the White House for the President's personal use, and for the use of his staff. They were delighted, especially with the paint job I had arranged, the Stars and Stripes on the tail. It made all the papers. Thinking on, I went and found Jimmy.

'Washington, centre of things to come. How about a seaplane port and airport?'

'It's a little ... ahead of time, by three or four years.'

'You know me, always ahead of the curve. C'mon, we can clean up.'

'We can't make them fast enough now.'

'I'll move some around, and get Washington on our side.' And off I went, buoyed up. I grabbed Ted and his wife and asked them to take a holiday in Washington, kind of right away. They'd find a suitable airfield and concrete it over, as well as making a start on developing a seaplane port. In the meantime, I sent across two additional seaplanes for general commercial use, and six Dash-7s to a grass strip – all repainted to Columbia Airlines.

Those aircraft were pressed into service straight away, Washington to New York, Chicago, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco. The Dash-7s handled the closer cities. And I arranged for our British Airways seaplanes from London to refuel in New York and fly on to Washington, reversing the course with passengers bound for London. Ted and his wife were presented to the President, talk of a US flag carrier.

Not wanting to upset the President, four planes bound for Hong Kong were grabbed, painted, and leased to a new company. We held the majority shares – that was part of the deal, but several US businessmen were now involved. American Airlines had been born. Actually, the American businessmen wanted to call it "State to state mail and passenger service", but I politely told them to fuck off.

Four Dash-7s were delivered straight away, with the new paint job, American pilots hired and trained quickly. Jimmy then insisted that those US pilots play co-pilot with us for six months at least – and gain overseas experience, first. For now, American Airlines would have Canadian pilots. The new pilot uniforms were altered to be blue instead of black, and a handsome bunch of pilots were created.

When those budding US pilots arrived they were taught first on a Cessna, and that was advanced for them; they had flown biplanes previously. With sixty hours on a Cessna, and sixty landings, they progressed to the twin engine Dash-7s, a hundred and twenty hours required, and forty landings. They were required to complete long distance navigation exercises over land and water, and to fly through cloud whilst still navigating. A non-stop flight to Toronto and back was required, as well as basic first aid, fire fighting, and maintenance.

Jimmy commented one day, watching them, 'They'll fly in the war.'

It dawned on me that we were training US pilots for 1939, and a good training they were getting. I then created a group of four Master Pilot Instructors, and devised a testing system with Hal. The men, better paid than regular pilots, then went off and co-piloted for other pilots whilst assessing them, each pilot tested once a year.

With the first production Super Goose now ready and tested, some ten feet wider across the wings and twenty feet longer than the previous version, I went for a ride. At fifteen thousand feet Hal knocked on the auto-trim and eased back. It worked. The mercury tilt switch moved small dedicated control surfaces and we adjusted attitude very slightly as we went. I immediately had four seats removed from one of the new Super Goose and created a new route, New York to Buenos Aires via Washington and Rio. It was booked solid for two months on day one, mostly by diplomats.

That led to the next logical step, a weather forecast service. We had been tinkering with radios for some time, and long distance short wave radio was available. Men were recruited, and sat in Rio and Buenos Aires peering out the windows whilst sending Morse Code updates to Washington. There they were telegraphed or phoned around, and pilots were briefed on a storm over Rio before they took off. The US Meteorological Service had arrived.

The same service was repeated for Hawaii and all points west, as well as around Canada. Flying to Toronto, the co-pilot could radio ahead and get a weather update from five stations on the route; we were being professional and thorough, Jimmy always concerned for passenger safety – as well as our safety record.

As I was busy concerning myself with airline passenger safety, a time portal crackled into life at Mawlini. A man stepped through. With the portal closed, he swung around a hand-held scanner, smiling at the readings he found. He pointed the scanner into the

distance, nodded, then placed one foot in front of the other, plodding through the sand.