

## A GOOD CUP OF COFFEE

### Early Start

'I really *love* a good cup of coffee', Bob thought to himself as he gently closed the lower drawer of his desk, now that his coffee machine had cooled. He was alone in the big, open plan, office. It was peaceful and quiet. He had arrived, 45 minutes early... as always. It worked for *him*. Leave home well before the bathroom rush, lighter traffic, no stress.... and plenty of time for a *good* cup of coffee.

He had joined the MoD straight from university and had relished the prospect of a long, exciting, career 'Serving his Country' and being involved with important, military work. As he looked back, he knew that he had achieved just one of his aims. His career had been long. But what had happened to the exciting bit? In the early days there had been glimmers, but now there was not even a glow. The job had become all 'Ministry' and no 'Defense'.

He was ready for retirement! He envied his friends who had taken their early retirement packages from their private sector jobs. They had all told him how great retirement was. They all described the start to their retirement days in pretty much the same way... A nice, relaxed start. Sitting in the sun. Breathing in the fresh air. Enjoying the view... their landscaped garden or the sea-view from their holiday home balcony. And... enjoying a *really good* cup of coffee.

Bob knew his career was running down. The move from Whitehall, with its heritage and prestige, to the anonymous office block in Sidcup had been the final straw. But the Civil Service is not the place for early retirements. So... he plodded on.

The only good thing about his job now, was the 'Official Secrets Act'. It was a God-send! His wife was, of course, delighted that she didn't have to listen to *anything* about his work and Bob enjoyed its usefulness too. At the golf club, he knew that when a new member asked him the inevitably question, 'What do you do, old chap?' he would be able to easily match anyone's job status with the answer 'MoD actually. Sorry can't say anymore, Official Secrets Act.' Then, he would add, apologetically and, he hoped, a bit mysteriously – 'You know how it is'.

But at work there was actually, no mystery. And *certainly* no excitement. Today was starting like all the others. He was just quietly preparing for the office to fill... and for the action to start. Well, the appearance of action, anyway.

### Early visitor

Something made Bob look up. The main door to the office was opening. The Director was coming in... Early! Bob had never even *seen* him in the office before. The Director paused at the door and scanned the area. He sniffed the air. Then he saw Bob and he started walking purposefully toward him.

Questions raced through Bob's mind. 'Why is he in so early? 'Why is he coming over to me? Am I OK sitting here idly at my desk with nothing on it but a cup of coffee? We'll soon find out!'

'Good Morning, Jones.' Bob was impressed; the Director must have read his nameplate from *way* off, he hadn't lowered his gaze once.

'Good Morning, sir'. He always felt a bit like a naughty schoolboy when he came face-to-face with the Director. The Director was an imposing character. And this time, he thought, as he glanced down at his cup of coffee, 'I probably *am* that naughty schoolboy'.

The Director looked steadily at Bob, 'You did get the latest OPOP memorandum, Jones?' The 'Open Plan Office Protocol'. Bob had got it, like everyone else. But he hadn't read it. He did remember though that Liz had dropped into his 'In Tray' a marked-up copy with a big ring around the section titled 'Personal Electrical Equipment'

### Mid Morning

The phone rang on Bob's desk. It was Liz. 'Well, you've certainly raised *your* profile! The Director wants to see you in his office at 12 o'clock.

'High Noon, Eh! What's it about?'

'Very funny! Don't pretend you don't know. It's your bloody coffee machine, you idiot! I've been busy all morning. The Director has had me filling in forms for all your misdemeanors. OPOP, of course – blatant contravention. But also, Electrical Engineering – equipment compliance. Safety and Maintenance – fire hazard. Telecoms – security systems interference. And, of course, Health and Safety – hot liquids... and they probably wouldn't like the idea of you washing up your cup in the Gents Toilet either... yuk!

'But there's something else. More important. Can't say anything now. Meet me at the vending machine in the corridor... you know, where the ordinary people get their coffee – now!'

There was a queue at the machine. Liz took Bob aside. 'You know that MoD has agreed to close Idminston. No issues with 'Official Secrets', it's been in the papers. Great coup for the new Minister with his drive to reduce the Civil Service... Ha ha! But what's *not* in the papers, is that *all* of the work, and *all* the people doing it, are being absorbed by other existing departments. The Director has made his grab and will be increasing his Domain here quite significantly. I hear there will be a good deal of 'coming and going', so there might be some opportunity for you. Think about it'. She walked off before too many people saw them together.

## 11.55

Liz met Bob in the corridor outside her anti-room office. 'I know you Bob... don't say *anything*.' She paused to let it sink in. 'He's pissed off with you enough already, don't risk making it worse'. She ushered Bob into her office.

## High Noon

Liz tapped respectfully on the Directors office door and opened it partially. 'Jones for you sir'

She nodded for Bob to go in. Out of sight of the Director she put a finger to her lips and gave Bob a stern look. Then a reassuring smile. Then a Good Luck wink. They had known each other a long time.

As she was closing the door, Liz heard... 'Jones, you blithering idiot, you just don't fit in here, you can't follow any rules, we need to get you...' The door closed.

## Six months later

As Bob sat enjoying his first-of-the-day cup of coffee, he remembered his friend's shared description of their retirement days.

A nice, relaxed start. 'Tick for that one alright', he thought.

Sitting in the sun. 'Tick that too.' The glaring sun sat low on the horizon, as it would all day, and all night.

Breathing in the fresh air. 'Tick again. Fresh air does *not* come any fresher than this.' he thought.

Bob was loving his new role with the Antarctic International Science and Exploration Team. He knew that there was *some* Scientific work going on. No exploration. But... a hell of a lot of exciting MoD work.

As he sat, squinting across the dazzling snow plain into the low sun, he thought to himself,

'Final tick... And I *really love* a good cup of coffee!'