

Andrew Gilbrook
is

An Ordinary Guy
An Unknown Spy

**How to start, be smart, and end your
career in MI6**

An Unknown Spy, An Ordinary Guy

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1. The End

I squint against the morning sunlight as I stagger out into the fresh air after days in the dark interrogation room, my hands bound behind me, my legs struggling to support me. One of the three black men guarding me shoves me in the back to keep me moving. He shouts something in Chokwe, the local language in the province of Moxico, the eastern extremity of Angola. Another shove forces me to the right. After days of brutal beatings, I am covered with bruises, but their blows no longer hurt. I'm in a bad way.

I had identified the head interrogator as a Russian foreign operations and intelligence professional, probably SVR or GRU, but he hadn't cracked me. I had stuck to my story as being a member of the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM) team, which, while technically true, served only as a cover to my real mission. Somehow, though, he knew my real identity as an officer of the UK's Intelligence Service, MI6. But how did he know? I'm not going to find out – in a few minutes I will be dead.

I'm being marched into the woods nearby, far enough in so that the smell of my rotting body won't offend the occupants of this camp. I am to be shot and left for the animals to squabble over for breakfast. These human animals won't bother digging a grave; this country is too uncivilised for that. They are laughing, still drunk and high after a night of drinking Cuca beer and chewing khat. I keep walking toward my death.

Four hundred yards from the camp, we reach a small clearing. A hand grabs my filthy bloodstained shirt collar

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and yanks me to a halt. One of the men shoves me around to face them and pushes me backward, against a tree. I stand, looking at them enjoying their cigarettes, I hope they can shoot straight and make my end quick. I settle back against the tree as my thirty-three years on this earth flash before my eyes.

I don't want to die here. My daughter is only a year old. I want to see her grow up. I want to see my wife Julie again. I lean into the tree, my bound wrists press against the rough bark. Almost immediately, a stinging ant bites the base of my thumb. Fuck it! Is there anything in this country that doesn't cause pain and discomfort? Even though I'm about to die, I shake my hands to rid myself of this biting nuisance.

Cigarettes finished, the three begin to prepare their weapons, pulling back the bolts of their AK47s.

This is it. I'm going to die in just a few seconds, no rescue, no help.

Go on. Do it! Do it NOW!

2. Early Days

My childhood was quite normal I think. I was born in London 23rd October 1955. My first real memories are of the day my parents and brother Steven, two years older than myself, moved home in 1959. We got lost on the way to Maple Cross near Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire. I couldn't believe my Dad didn't remember where our new house was. Once we did find our street and house our furniture and belongings didn't arrive until the next day. A neighbour was kind enough to lend us some blankets and we all slept on the floor in our new home, a three bedroom semi-detached house, with a nice large 100 feet long garden. Maple Cross was built to accommodate an overflow population from London, most people either commuted or found new jobs when they moved there. Now it is just inside the M25 circular road around London.

I loved living in the countryside, I spent most of my days playing in the fields and woods, and in those days there was little traffic so the kids of the village could quite safely play in the streets. With my friends we would build tree houses, come autumn we'd make castles in the fields from the straw bales, light fires and make camps in the woods nearby. One friend and I used to spend hours, if not days teaching ourselves how to follow animal tracks, working out how to move silently through the trees so as not to scare the birds and animals away. All good stuff that would pay dividends later, once I became an intelligence officer, where being the invisible man was often an essential skill.

My parents didn't ever have a lot of money to spare. My father at that time worked for the Royal Insurance Group in Acton, and my mother was a housewife, but soon my Dad would start his own business when the Royal Insurance moved to Liverpool, my Dad didn't want us to live in a big city.

By the time I left school, I'd never been to a restaurant or knew how to write a cheque and pay bills. Most times I was shipped off to my grandparents when Mum and Dad went away on holidays, so I never travelled. All my friends seemed to have the latest toys, I rarely did. In the summer my friends would go on day trips to the coast in a big neighbourhood group, we never joined them. On those occasions I'd just take myself off to the woods alone, moving quietly, to get close to the multitude of birds and animals one could never normally get near. I remember one time I managed to get within 30 feet of a large stag deer, before it saw me. It stood staring at me for a bit before walking away without alarm or panic. I'd learn how to snare birds, prepare and cook them on a small fire rather than walk all the way home for lunch. I spent many hours teaching myself how to shoot air-rifles, fixing and zeroing the telephoto sight. I think I became quite expert, I could hit an ice lolly stick at 60 feet with a .22 rifle.

Many weekends and school holidays were spent finding and cutting off pram wheels and making what we called trolleys, charging down our street with bows and arrows that we had made ourselves, firing at each other playing Cowboys and Indians. I wouldn't say we were feral kids, but we did do a little vandalism, for no real reason other than we could, and always get away with it. In those days

many sheds and garages had roofs of asbestos corrugated sheeting. We discovered if you threw pieces onto a bonfire in a short while it would explode. I'm sure that would be a practice well and truly frowned upon these days.

I learnt the difference between rich and poor, as just a few miles away was the stockbroker belt of Chorleywood and private estates such as Loudwater and Heronsgate. The big houses and posh new cars in those areas let me know there was always people much better off than our family and that those types rarely mixed with the likes of us living in the council estates at Maple Cross. My street though, the houses were mostly owned and mortgaged properties with a few at the bottom of the street privately rented.

I did complete my childhood without breaking any bones falling out of trees or drowning in the gravel pits that stretch for miles from Rickmansworth to Denham. In those days before they all became private fishing lakes, we could witness Pike taking ducklings, grass snakes, and catch sticklebacks or nine eyes in the streams that fed the watercress beds in West Hyde.

3. Schools Days

I started my education at West Hyde School but then soon moved when it closed, into the newly built Maple Cross JMI at the end of my street. I didn't like it much, I hated being stuck indoors. I did occasionally become spelling king or won gold stars in the weekly maths tests. My best times though were when I was in Miss Willox's class. She was a large formidable woman, and very strict. When she sat at her desk at the front of the class, she always sat legs open and one could see her knee-length bloomers - not a pretty sight. I realise now, that despite her slaps and "chivvies" as she called them, she was actually a very good teacher. She was a keen ornithologist too. There were a few of us that could visit her home in Heronsgate at weekends even, to watch and learn all the birds in her garden. Around Maple Cross, we could see some quite rare birds, Tree-creepers, Bee-Eaters, even a Ring Ouzel to name just a few.

The Headmaster Mr. Naylor or "Naggy" Naylor, as we called him, was also a good man and teacher. He wrote plays for school productions. I can still remember the words and story-lines of a few even now. One year I invented a new Christmas decoration made by bending two coloured paper straws into triangles, tying them together with cotton so that they formed a six-pointed star, He was so impressed he got the entire school to make one each and hang them on the school Christmas tree. I think I was always more practically minded than academic, although I didn't really struggle with maths or English. We weren't taught languages at junior school, something I found to be a disadvantage later in secondary

school. In sport, I was the only boy that could stand on his head. Parent's days were often entertained by my gymnastic demonstration. One year I stood on my head with my legs apart, while other kids dived between my open legs, landing with a somersault on the mat behind. Something my mother later said caused her to break into a sweat watching. At the time I didn't understand why, I think I do now.

One year we had an exchange teacher from New Zealand, Mr. Gundy. He knew nothing about maths, we spent the entire year learning everything New Zealand. He was a great guy and made a lasting impression on me, I think I can still sing "Pokarekare Ana" or "Now is the Hour" in Maori some fifty-five years later.

Because of my birth date, I and a few others had to stay in the top class for two years, as the cut-off date for moving up to secondary school was September. This meant we became more like school prefects and having to learn things twice meant we did well in exams to grade us for next school. In the end, I was offered the option of taking the eleven plus exam, I passed and I was told my next school would be Rickmansworth Grammar School. I didn't want to go there at all. I knew I wouldn't do well there, plus all my best friends were going to William Penn Secondary School, Mill End. I wanted to be with my friends. A few other kids were also going to "Ricky" Grammar, but I hardly knew them.

September 1967 I started my life as a "Grammar Grub". My parents couldn't afford the school uniform. In a second-hand shop mum found a green blazer for me. It was a lighter green to the correct uniform, so I stood out as different right from the start. I certainly felt different.

By now I had a reputation for being a bit of a fighter, word had got around to the other kids, so no one ever tried to bully me for being different. Realistically, I didn't fight anyone just for the sake of it. I hated bullies, still do, and would never take any nonsense from them. In fact, my reputation grew while at Junior School, anyone being bullied seem to come to me, point out the bully and I would sort them out street style. Once the bully knew I was looking out for the poor kid being harassed by them they tended to leave them alone. I certainly knew I couldn't win every fight, but I would make sure the bully would feel some pain before I'd get whooped myself. I just never showed fear and they knew I'd get stuck into them. I had a big fight one day with the toughest kid in school. I couldn't beat him, but he couldn't get me to surrender either. Despite getting hurt myself, I had hurt him enough to admit to others I was a tough cookie. From then on they gave me respect and my word alone was enough to stop any other kids getting bullied if they asked for my help.

I remember one rainy day our P.E. lesson had to be in the gym. Our teacher Mr. Barret, a short man as wide as he was tall and muscles everywhere, decided we would have a wrestling competition. Two boys would enter a circle of mats, the first to get pushed or thrown out of the circle lost the match. Each boy was partnered with another about the same size and weight - except me. I was partnered with the tallest and fittest boy in our year, Ralph Carpenter. Apparently, my fighting reputation had reached even the staff at this school. Mr. Barret was obviously expecting big things of me. On the whistle, I ran straight at Ralph, who grabbed me by my rugby shirt

collar, spun me around a couple of times, let go and I flew out of the ring. Mr. Barret looked less disappointed when I stood up laughing after my flight and crash landing. I think my reputation dropped a couple of points but I survived.

I enjoyed P.E., but I seemed to have stopped growing, which put me at a disadvantage in rugby. We weren't permitted to play football as Mr. Barret thought the game was for wimps, which may be true. So I alternated between rugby and hockey playing in either team at away games just to make up numbers it seemed to me. Even though I played in most home and away games, I was never awarded a cap. The cap system was never explained to me and to this day I don't know what I had to do to be awarded one. Lads that I had played alongside in the same team all filed up to the stage in assembly to be applauded and awarded a cap, yet I was always left out. I don't understand why, what didn't I do?

We never won any inter-school sports, simply because for some reason we always played the year above us, so in the second year, we played another school's third year. None of us could understand why, and we became quite despondent about it. So instead of trying to win, as a team, we would pick out someone from the opposing team that we didn't like the look of, and, each of us did our best to have a go at ripping the shirt off the lads back. Some of our victims ended the game with almost no shirt left. It was the only way we could get any pleasure from our losses with scores such as 84-12, quite humiliating.

Sports days in the summer, I was quite good at athletics, I seemed to be good at sprints and long distance running. One year I even won the triple jump by one centimetre

from the favourite boy. I was also pretty good at javelin, but gave it up after a practice session, when I did my usual run-up, as I concentrated on hitting the mark for the throw, I lost control of the javelin which had turned ninety degrees and as I put all effort into the launch throw, it hit me with a huge whack on the back of my head, pretty much knocking me unconscious, I executed a perfect face-plant into the ground and the spear landed point down, still in my hand about half an inch from my ear. I never threw another one ever again.

As for cricket, forget it.

In my second year at "Ricky" School, we were placed in Maths forms according to our grade after the end of year exams. I was in the bottom grade, yet because the teacher was so good and I liked her, I did quite well. Unlike other maths teachers, she took time to help individuals that struggled with certain aspects of the subject. My favourite subject was Physics because it is mostly practical logical stuff. In chemistry, I just couldn't grasp chemical formulae at all, I didn't get it and no one bothered to help. Biology was ok, the teacher was hateful, but she was quite young and always wore very short skirts. In languages, it was compulsory to learn French. I didn't like French, mainly because I never saw the point and the teacher was quite hateful. He could clearly see I was not trying, so his tactic seemed to be to do anything to humiliate me and make me feel useless. He didn't have to try hard. I was, however keen to learn German. I had an uncle, an ex-para that I liked, he lived in Germany, and while stationed there he had met and married a German girl. Quite something in those days, so many people still had strong memories of the war, his parents, my grandparents were

firmly against it. Anyhow, I liked Uncle Peter and his wife at the time Ziggy. I always thought one day I would like to visit them in Bünde, so I wanted to make some effort to learn the language. I asked the school language department head if I could give up French and learn German instead. The answer I got was, "As I was rubbish at French I would be rubbish at German too and they didn't want to waste time with me". Always encouraging my teachers! So I bought some books of my own and taught myself. I did get to visit Peter and Ziggy in Germany. I travelled over with Peter by car and came back all the way from Bielefeld by bus alone, at 14 years old and never having travelled abroad before. I was put on the bus with no food or water for a 24-hour journey, to be met in London starving hungry and dehydrated by Mum and Dad, who showed little concern for my plight. But the German language I picked up in those two weeks have stuck with me, and I was quite capable of helping my two daughters when they were at school with their German homework.

The third year at secondary school is always the year kids get naughty and a little cocky, the year most pupils either get caned or expelled. I think only one pupil in my year was expelled, after being caned. I recall that he was caught smoking, with quite possibly not 100% tobacco in his cigarette, he was that type. A nice guy, a bit rough around the edges, but popular, and I remember several girls crying after hearing the news. This year was also the year I started to play up too. I realised I stood no chance of ever getting good grades in any exams. My parents had the attitude that university was a waste of time and that

everyone should get to work to earn money. So I felt I had nothing to aim for.

Because of the distance I lived from school, I had to catch a bus at about 6am, as the next one would arrive with about ten minutes to spare before the start of classes. If the bus was late, so would I be, and the detention for that was never appreciated, as I felt it wasn't my fault. Jo Franek and I came up with a plan. A classmate and very good friend, who lived in Chorleywood in a huge house had the same problem. He had to catch a train first to Rickmansworth with all the commuters on the Metropolitan line, then catch a bus to the school. So we decided to arrive early to avoid these problems. This meant we got to school about 7am a little uncomfortable on cold wet days. So, before we left school the day before, we would leave a window in our ground floor classroom slightly ajar. We could then climb in and sit in the warm doing our homework. We never did anything wrong or bad, we just wanted shelter and spent the time productively. Jo was way better than me at school work. So he did his work and I would copy. After a while, the prefects patrolling inside the school would catch us in our classroom, which was a big no no before 9am. We would get caught and thrown out into the cold and rain. So we took to hiding in the classroom cupboard. This was quite large, there was even a desk and chair in there so that during the day sixth formers could sit and do extra studies. Our classroom was in the French department, so I assume these sixth formers were studying French. Eventually, the school caught on that we were leaving the window ajar, and the janitor would come after we left at the end of the day and close the window. We thought we

could outwit him by leaving a window open on the first floor, in the geography department. We'd climb a drainpipe to a flat roof above some cloakrooms, then another drainpipe up to the window. Here we'd have to do a leap of faith from the drainpipe and grab the window frame. Once we had a good grip let go with one hand, with the other open the window fully and climb in. From here after closing the window, creep downstairs and into our classroom and into the cupboard. Because the downstairs window was being locked, the janitor had no idea of our new route in. Until, one day, Jo, after doing the leap of faith, hauled himself too enthusiastically up into the not quite so open window, and cracked his head on the window frame, causing him to fall. He had a severe cut on his head, with no one around yet, there wasn't anyone I could call for help. In those days mobile phones hadn't been invented yet so Jo lay on the cold floor a long time bleeding before help did arrive. Later that day, I was interrogated by my form teacher as to what we were doing. He didn't seem to understand we were just cold, wet, did no damage or harm and simply got on with some work each morning. We didn't get into trouble for it though. It was deemed Jo had suffered enough, but it had to stop.

April Fool's Day that year was hilarious. All five classes in my year got up to such funny tricks, all harmless and well planned. I think the teachers got it, and some even managed to laugh along. I remember the class next to mine, the boys removed all the screws from the door hinges, so they fell in when the teacher opened them. In my class, most of the kids were more of the nerdy type and weren't quite so bothered. But I didn't let the class

down. I asked one of my classmates a few days earlier to help. He was particularly good at chemistry. On the day, he produced, as requested, an amount of 2,4 dinitrophenylhydrazine or 2,4-DNPH a yellowy red chemical. This is a chemical often used in school A-level practicals, some schools stocked it. It's used to identify organic carbon-based compounds called aldehydes and ketones. Dry 2,4-DNPH is friction and shock sensitive. For this reason, it's supplied damp or 'wetted' when a school purchases it from a chemical supplier. It's important that it's kept wet, so the storage advice is to keep it in a sealed container, which is itself kept in an outer container filled with a small amount of liquid. If the chemical is allowed to dry out, there is a risk of a small fire or explosion. Johnathon brought it to school in a jar inside a jar. The jar inside suspended by elastic bands so that it wouldn't bump and the inner jar was filled with a fluid to keep the chemical wet. I thought it was a very clever homemade design. Johnathon gave me the jars and wanted nothing more to do with the caper. Just before our English lesson and before the others entered, I got into the classroom opened the jars and spread the chemical around the classroom, some on the window sills and quite a bit around the teacher's desk and floor. Mr. Daykin our English teacher, began the class. As the grains dried, the window sill first as it was in the sunlight, started to explode. In small amounts it sounded like cap guns going off with a crack. I could see Mr. Daykin becoming more and more annoyed and agitated by the noises. Eventually, he shouted "All right, who's got the cap gun". Everyone looked around at each other as only I knew what it was. Crack! Another went off. Everyone was puzzled. "Alright