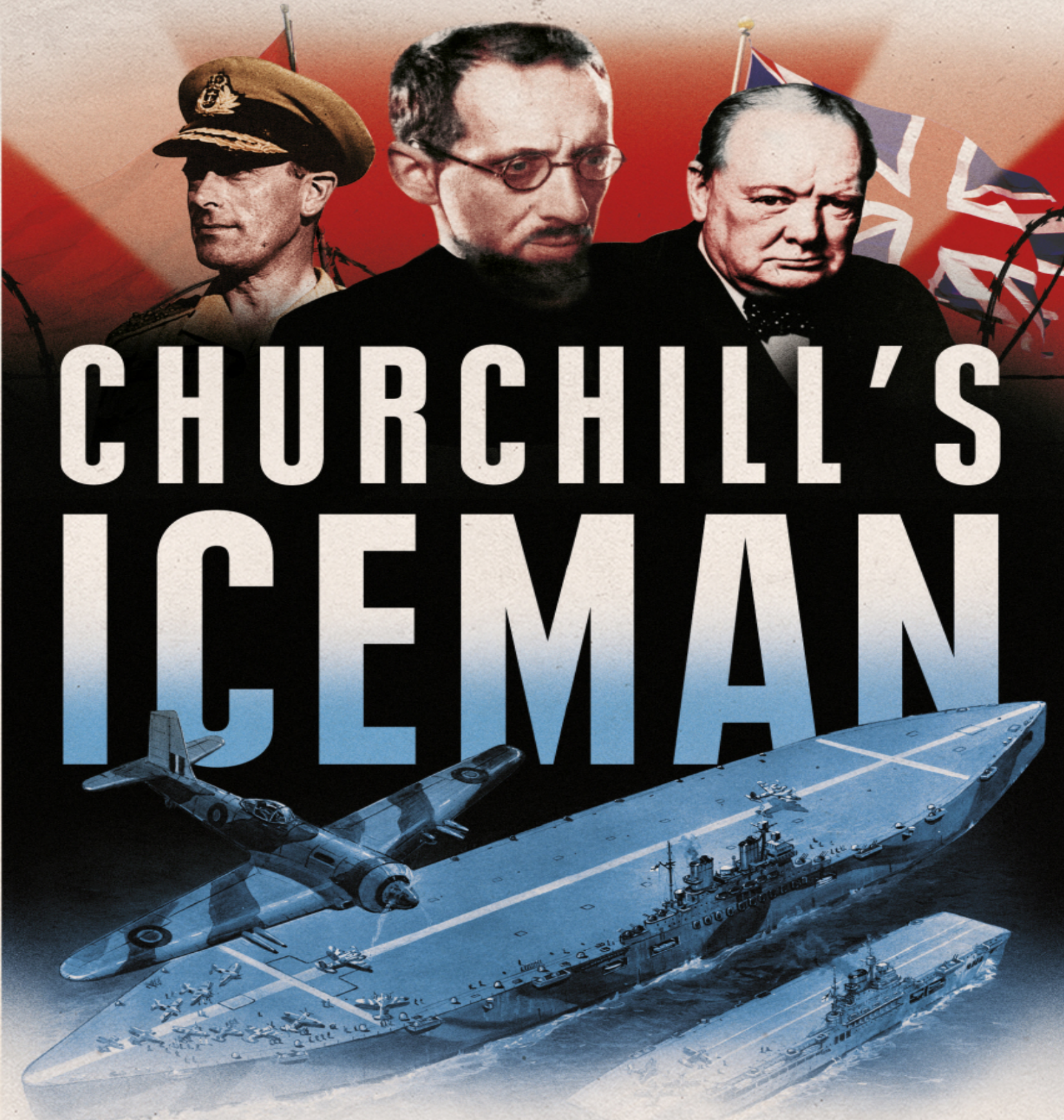


'It is as if Pyke had been invented by G. K. Chesterton and given posthumous fame by John le Carré ... an extraordinary accomplishment' MICHAEL HOLROYD



CHURCHILL'S ICEMAN

THE TRUE STORY OF GEOFFREY PYKE: GENIUS, FUGITIVE, SPY

HENRY HEMMING

CONTENTS

About the Book

About the Author

Also by Henry Hemming

Title Page

Dedication

Epigraph

Author's Note

Introduction

PART I

How to Become a War Correspondent

How to Escape

How to Become Invisible

Pyke Hunt, Part 1

How to Raise Your Child (and Pay for It)

PART II

How to Resolve an Epidemic of Anti-Semitism, a Royal
Scandal and the Threat of Fascism

How to Prevent a War

Pyke Hunt, Part 2

How to Defeat Nazism

Pyke Hunt, Part 3

How to Change the Military Mind

Pyke Hunt, Part 4

How to Succeed in America

Pyke Hunt, Part 5

How to Win the War with Ice

How to Survive

How to Live

Pyke Hunt, Part 6

Epilogue, or, How to Think Like a Genius

Notes

Select Bibliography

List of Illustrations

Acknowledgements

Index

Copyright

About the Book

There is no reason why you should have heard of Geoffrey Pyke. After his suicide in 1948 he was described as one of the great geniuses of his time, to rank alongside Einstein, yet he remains today, as *The Times* put it, 'one of the most original if unrecognised figures' of the twentieth century.

Inventor, escapee, campaigner, war correspondent, Pyke was an unlikely hero of both world wars and is seen today as the father of the U.S. Special Forces. He changed the landscape of British pre-school education, earned a fortune on the stock market, wrote a bestseller and in 1942 convinced Churchill and Lord Mountbatten to build an aircraft carrier out of reinforced ice. He gave birth to the Mass Observation movement, escaped from a German concentration camp, devised an ingenious plan to get ambulances and microscopes to the Spanish Republicans for free and launched a private attempt to avert the outbreak of the Second World War by sending into Nazi Germany a group of pollsters disguised as golfers. But there was another side to this man. Pyke, it seems, was a man with a secret.

In 2009 MI5 released a mass of material suggesting that Pyke was in fact a senior official in the Soviet Comintern. In 1951 papers relating to Pyke were found in the flat of 'Cambridge Spy' Guy Burgess after his defection to Moscow. MI5 had 'watchers' follow Pyke through the bombed-out streets of London, his letters were opened and listening devices picked up clues to his real identity. Convinced he was a Soviet agent codenamed 'Professor P', MI5 helped to bring his career to an end.

It is only now, more than sixty years after his death, that Geoffrey Pyke's astonishing story can be told in full. *Churchill's Iceman* is a many-faceted account of this enigmatic man's genius, and reveals him as one of the great innovators of the last century.

About the Author

Henry Hemming is the author of four previous books, including *Misadventure in the Middle East* which was shortlisted for the Dolman Travel Book Award. He has written for publications including *The Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *Financial Times*, *Washington Post* and *The Economist*. He lives in London with his wife and daughter.

Also by Henry Hemming

*Misadventure in the Middle East In Search of the English
Eccentric
Together
Abdulnasser Gharem*

Churchill's Iceman

The True Story of Geoffrey Pyke: Genius,
Fugitive, Spy

Henry Hemming



For BB

'The fact is, if I may put the point in a somewhat comical way, that I have been literally attached by God to our city, as if to a horse – a large thoroughbred, which is a bit sluggish because of its size and needs to be aroused by some sort of gadfly. Yes, in me, I believe, God has attached to our city just such a creature – the kind which is constantly alighting everywhere on you, all day long, arousing, cajoling, or reproaching each and every one of you. You will not easily acquire another such gadfly.'

*Socrates in Plato's The Defence of
Socrates*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

In what follows direct speech is taken verbatim from either contemporary accounts or memoirs.

INTRODUCTION

February 1948

Mrs Hopkins, the daily help, knew very little about the man who had taken rooms on the top floor, so she was unsure what to make of the note on his door. She could tell you that his name was Geoffrey Pyke. He was just over six feet tall, wore a battered Homburg over his balding pate and walked with the stoop of a man recovering from illness. He was bearded, middle-aged and lean. He had large feet, spoke with a deep and musical timbre and received an unusual amount of post from overseas. As far as she was aware, he was a good lodger, in the sense that he took in few guests, kept to himself and was never late with his rent. But like most of those who encountered this man or heard stories about him – from the fellow residents he passed on the stairs of this boarding house all the way to the King of England – Mrs Hopkins was never really sure who he was.

By the time Geoffrey Pyke had moved to Hampstead, shortly before the end of the Second World War, he had collected an unlikely set of lives. Over the past two decades he had been described as everything from eccentric genius to war correspondent, jailbreaker, bestselling author, educationalist, speculator, mass-observer, advertising copywriter, political activist, military inventor and scientist, while for those in MI5, the British Security Service, Pyke was thought to be an undercover Soviet agent who had gone quiet in recent years. In each of these descriptions there was, it would later emerge, at least an element of truth.

The note on his door was brief: 'Please do not wake me.'

Given the appalling weather outside this was not surprising. London was caked with snow and, with so many Londoners unable to get to work, Pyke's decision to sleep in was understandable. But Mrs Hopkins was confused by his curtains being drawn well into the day while his lights remained on, as they had been since her arrival that morning. Something was not right. At around midday she knocked on his door.

Nothing.

And again.

Perhaps she shouted his name before trying the handle, only to find that the door was unlocked.

As usual his room was a mess, a papery metropolis of maps and journals, newspapers, statistical compendiums, letters stamped with the words 'Most Secret' and heaps of notes, many of them on feathery paper topped with a tropical-blue government crest. His bed had been propped up at one end, an attempt to improve his circulation, and elsewhere Mrs Hopkins took in the familiar sight of tabletops, shelves and sections of floor buried beneath strata of sardine tins, biscuit packets, ashtrays, copies of *The Times* and the *Daily Worker*, an occasional dunning letter, cups of lapsang souchong, half-empty bottles and more of that notepaper cobwebbed with his spidery handwriting.

At last she saw him. He was stretched out in a chair by the window, arms loose by his side. His beard had gone and for once he looked indifferent to the world. Next to him there were three sealed letters and a sheet of paper bearing a message.

Outside, Hampstead remained blank with snow and nothing much moved. In the wider world soldiers were still returning from war while refugees tried to make their way home. Society was rearranging itself after six years of armed conflict, genocide and upheaval; it was starting to rebuild and reconfigure according to new indices of fear and

hope, but it would do so without this man. Late on Saturday, 21 February 1948, aged fifty-four, Geoffrey Pyke had taken his own life. As *Time* magazine put it the following week, 'it was the only unoriginal thing he had ever done.'

This is the story of a man described in his *Times* obituary as 'one of the most original if unrecognised figures of the present century'. Geoffrey Pyke was hailed by J. D. 'Sage' Bernal as not only a genius but 'one of the greatest [. . .] geniuses of his time'. Lancelot Law Whyte, who helped develop the jet engine, compared him to Einstein, adding that 'Pyke's genius was more intangible, perhaps because he produced not one, but an endless sequence of ideas'. A scientist who worked alongside him felt he 'stood out among his fellows like the North Face of the Eiger in the foothills of the Alps'. For another this was 'the sort of man who would have invented the wheel'. Everyone seemed to agree on the quality of his mind, yet few could understand why he had committed suicide. Fewer still had any inkling that he might have led a double life.

During the Second World War, without any military background or relevant qualifications, Geoffrey Pyke was appointed Director of Programmes at Combined Operations. As one of the 'right-hand men' of its buccaneering chief, Lord Louis Mountbatten, he was responsible for a stream of schemes, feints and military inventions including the idea, known as PLUTO, for an oil pipeline under the English Channel and another proposal whose advantages, for Prime Minister Winston Churchill, were 'so dazzling that they do not at the moment need to be discussed'. Of another plan Churchill wrote, 'Never in the history of human conflict will so few immobilise so many.' Both had at their heart an ingenious use of ice. It was also around this time that King George VI heard about Pyke and became known for his impersonation of Mountbatten's most colourful boffin, which

involved exaggerated strokes of the royal chin (at the time Pyke wore a goatee).

That he was the subject of lively stories told by Dickie Mountbatten to his cousin the King hints at a bright and unbuttoned personality. To look at, Pyke was certainly distinctive. Friends described his 'immense natural dignity'. One man compared him to 'a Russian princeling'. For the Nobel Prize-winning playwright Elias Canetti, he was 'like a figure on a Byzantine icon'. By the end of the war there was a rich folklore of stories about Pyke and his various wardrobe malfunctions – it might be his flies getting stuck open, his preference for no socks whatever the weather, or his use of a shoestring instead of a tie. He was capable of standing out in any setting, a fluorescent thread on a hessian sack no matter where he went, and in many ways he cultivated this image of himself as the odd man out. But these tales told to the King were built up around more than the way Pyke conducted himself or his sartorial idiosyncrasies. At their heart was his extravagant ability to solve almost any problem put to him. Stranger still, his solutions seemed to work.

Geoffrey Pyke had a genius for innovation. He was one of the great innovators of the twentieth century, both in the staggering range of his radical ideas and in his technique. He was involved in the birth of – to name just five – a revolutionary kindergarten based on Freudian psychoanalysis, the Mass Observation movement, a pioneering charity, the NHS and the 'Devil's Brigade' – the maverick American-Canadian Commando unit to which today's US and Canadian Special Forces trace their origin, and which provided the inspiration for Quentin Tarantino's 2009 film *Inglourious Basterds* about a band of Allied guerrillas wreaking havoc behind enemy lines. He brought into the world a galaxy of ideas without having any particular expertise or even a university degree. He relied instead on an intuitive and crystal-sharp understanding of

what mattered, why it mattered, and what he as a private citizen could do about it.

Throughout his life, Pyke arrived at the cutting edge of the great issues of the day and, as a consequence, his career – if career is the right word – can be seen as an alternative chronicle of the first half of the twentieth century, an age of extremes in which the possibilities of politics and science seemed to stretch further out to the horizon than ever before. Pyke lived according to the spirit of these times; indeed, he strove to embody within himself the bold idea that it was possible to rewire human society and to produce a world without war or want in which the future and everything it stood for would be embraced like an old friend.

Original, eccentric, ambitious, Pyke liked to get the measure of his audience by making them laugh. He was a gadfly: a perpetual outsider with a nose for what he called humbug. His response to solemnity was to look for the joke, and more often than not this was where he found the seeds of his solutions; or, as he put it, ‘It is the concealed truth that makes the jest.’ He could be infuriating as well as funny, and at times his company was sobering: indeed, the US Deputy Solicitor-General, Oscar Cox, likened Pyke to ‘the voice of Conscience in Spring’.

Although a man of supreme gifts, Pyke was not a household name at the time of his death and for many Britons today the first Pyke who comes to mind will be his cousin Magnus Pyke, the amiable 1970s scientific populariser. Geoffrey Pyke remains, as he was at his death, one of the most original yet unrecognised figures of the twentieth century. His genius was for coming up with radical ideas, not for seeing them through to completion. He had no interest in his legacy, hence there are many parts of his life that have remained unexplored since his suicide. Only now, following the release of previously classified documents by MI5, can this man’s extraordinary story be told in full.

In August 2009 most of MI5's material on Pyke entered the public domain. This hoard of documents offers an entirely new perspective on his life. MI5 suspected him of being a German spy in the First World War and, during the next war, while in the employ of Combined Operations, he was thought to have been a senior Comintern official working undercover for the Soviet Union. MI5 even discovered his Soviet code name - 'Professor P.' - and after his death found evidence of a connection between him and Soviet agents Guy Burgess and Anthony Blunt.

The case against him was detailed and substantial. It was based on intelligence drawn from MI5 informants, scraps of overheard conversations, intercepted letters and the results of Special Branch and MI5 observations of Pyke in which he was shadowed through the streets of London. His career in Combined Operations was curtailed, yet at no point did he understand the extent of MI5's suspicions, no charge was ever brought against him and until now the truth of these allegations and of Pyke's real identity have remained a mystery.

This book is as much about whether Geoffrey Pyke was a Soviet agent during his time working for the British government - and, if so, why, how and to what end - as it is an account of the way he thought. Only by combining these sometimes disparate strands of his life can we get a sense of his beguiling, self-destructive genius and the extent to which it was a product of the society that he inhabited. Here was a man who saw the world into which he had been born as a kaleidoscope of challenges, problems and questions, many of which had not yet been asked. For this reason, what follows is arranged around MI5's efforts to understand who he was as well as the great problems he took on during his lifetime, problems which obsessed him, motivated him and ultimately defined him.

In the throes of adolescence Pyke began to believe that he was capable not just of identifying the most urgent

problems faced by his generation but of finding solutions to them. Whether it was the design of a new motorcycle sidecar, how to make a fortune by trading copper futures or finding a way to avert the outbreak of war, Pyke was convinced that he could come up with an answer if he came at the question in the right way. It was an approach which he refined throughout his life, and one which he felt could be learnt by anyone. We can all think like geniuses, he insisted, but only if we are prepared to look foolish now and again.

His outlook was particular, bold and exacting and it was not without risks. One of the first problems he set out to solve very nearly led to his death. It was the summer of 1914. The world had gone to war. Geoffrey Pyke was a twenty-year-old Cambridge undergraduate who found himself drawn irresistibly to the impossible.

PART I

HOW TO BECOME A WAR CORRESPONDENT

ON 1 SEPTEMBER 1914 Geoffrey Pyke left the offices of one of the country's best-selling newspapers in something of a daze. What he had just suggested to the News Editor of the *Daily Chronicle* was so outlandish, so apparently silly, that he had given little thought to the possibility that it might be taken up. Now, as he made his way through the hurly-burly of Fleet Street, with bodies brushing past and the hum of horse manure buffeting up around him, he broke into a sweat. The thought jammed in his head was simple enough: that as a result of the conversation which had just finished he might be taken outside a foreign jail before the end of the month and shot. Gazing up at the soot-streaked palaces on either side of him, buildings which no longer impressed him as they had done earlier, Pyke wondered if he had made a terrible mistake.

It had begun two months earlier, in July 1914, soon after he had finished his second year at Cambridge where his 'abilities made him conspicuous' and he was thought to be 'extremely clever'. Pyke was taller than most and gangly, with a mat of dark hair set above a playful expression, someone who thrived under pressure and exuded the hard-won confidence of a boy who had been bullied at school before blossoming at university.

After the excesses of May Week – the dancing, the shows and the sunny evenings spent 'ragging' about – he had set off with a friend on a walking tour of Norway and Sweden. Like most of their contemporaries, neither one saw the

recent assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in distant Sarajevo as a reason to call off the trip.

His companion was fellow Cambridge undergraduate Philip Sargent Florence, breezy and broad-shouldered, who was three years older than him, half-American and had grown up in an eccentric household. Generally he was hardened to the quirks of others, yet at an early stage in their journey Sargent Florence detected a change in his friend. If some people become a more cautious version of themselves in a foreign setting, Pyke seemed to do the opposite, and in this case Sargent Florence was partly responsible.

They had come to know each other through meetings of the Cambridge Heretics, a debating society that Sargent Florence had co-founded several years earlier and which was famous by then for its lively, free-flowing discussions. Recent speakers included the poet Rupert Brooke and the author G. K. Chesterton, and over the past year Pyke had become an avid member. For him the open-minded rigour of the Heretics' discussions was a revelation, and was a lifetime away from his miserable experiences at Wellington College, the militaristic public school where he had spent two unhappy years before Cambridge. It was also a tonic against the sadness of his life at home where he was never really able to escape the ghost of his father or the all-too-real presence of his widowed mother Mary, who liked to tell her four children that if she could swap their lives for that of their late father she would.



Lionel Pyke QC

Pyke's father, Lionel, had been a precocious barrister who took silk at the age of thirty-eight before running unsuccessfully for Parliament as a Liberal candidate. He had become Leader of the Admiralty Bar before his unexpected death at the age of forty-four from a respiratory condition. Geoffrey, his eldest son, was five at the time. This was the defining trauma of Pyke's life. It left him reaching for father figures throughout his life, and at the same time it broadened the possibilities of his personality. He could fashion the memory of his father as he liked and even then he was not left with a rigid template of how to behave. The loss of his father seemed to produce in Pyke a Herculean drive: he latched on to new ideas with enthusiasm, and none more so than those outlined in a sensational talk he had heard in Cambridge just days before setting out for Norway.

The Cambridge Heretics had been addressed by the legendary founder of Futurism, Filippo Marinetti, in what was breathlessly described by the *Cambridge Magazine* as 'one of the most amazing meetings Cambridge has ever known'.

Pyke had been aware of the larger-than-life Marinetti. Only a fortnight earlier he had included the Futurist's onomatopoeic sound-poem 'Pont' in a special edition of *Mandragora*, the undergraduate magazine that he co-edited. But this was the first time he had seen and heard the Italian in full flight. The effect was like that of a baptism.



Mandragora, May Week 1914

Marinetti's speech to the 'spellbound' Heretics, delivered entirely in French, 'but with such fluency, energy and clarity that few failed to follow his every word', seemed to be a primal howl against convention, sentimentality and the dumb worship of tradition. These were the targets picked off each week by the Heretics. You might think he was preaching to the choir. What set his talk apart was Marinetti's underlying enjoinder to his audience to do more than attack the past: they should revel as well in the possibility of an electrified future defined by machines, speed and the limitless potential of human agency. Only

weeks later, in Scandinavia, Pyke launched himself at his new surroundings like a zealous disciple of Marinetti.

Sargant Florence would watch, bemused, as his friend ran up to farmers they passed and ask in puppyish German how a particular machine worked, why it was there, whether it could be improved, and, more often than not, if he could have a go. On one occasion, when the two hikers spied in the distance a team of Norwegian lumberjacks escorting logs downstream, Pyke jogged off to join in. Perhaps he felt there was a better way to move the logs, or maybe he wanted to improve his understanding of the lumberjacks' technique. In any event, he was soon hopping from trunk to trunk, 'caused a log jam, and was almost drowned'.

Pyke was, by his own account, 'very young, and a firm believer that everything was possible till proved the opposite by oneself, and that the madder the scheme, the better the chances of success'. The experience of being abroad for him seemed to slough off any vestiges of adolescent self-consciousness until there was nothing left but playful curiosity.

It was in this spirit, in the Swedish port of Malmo, soon after the lumberjack incident, that Pyke began to run at full tilt towards the end of a quay. Ahead of him was the ferry to Copenhagen. Sargant Florence was on board. Moments earlier it had begun to pull away. Still gathering speed, Geoffrey Pyke reached the edge of the quay and jumped.

It is a moment worth savouring. Suspended in mid-air is a bespectacled young man with a rucksack on his back. The sun angles down on his forehead and the air around him is spiced with the tang of diesel fumes. Passengers on the ferry stare, faces presumably blank as it is not yet clear where the parabola of his jump will take him.

Pyke's leap out over the harbour waters was a typically bold and bravura move, the kind of impulsive act that would have made Marinetti proud. Without any way of knowing how far to jump, or how high, Pyke had plunged himself into

this uncertainty, conscious that every second spent dithering would reduce his chances of landing on the ferry. He was not assured of success but the chance of it easily justified the small risk of drowning. Only when he had launched himself off the edge of the quay and begun to fly did he realise – could he realise – that the ferry was out of reach, and rather than land heroically on board he fell like a deadweight into the scum-topped waters of Malmo harbour.

Bobbing about, Pyke yelled at Sargent Florence over the din of the engine to wait for him in Copenhagen. He took the next ferry across the Öresund and arrived in the harbour area of Nyhavn, popular with sailors and prostitutes, where he found his friend amid the purplish shadows of another glorious summer evening. In ways that neither could have foreseen the complexion of their trip was about to change.

Waiting for them in Copenhagen was Sargent Florence's sister, Alix. Elfin, tall and dark, she too was a Cambridge Heretic and doubtless she spent the night bringing both men up to speed on what had been happening in the rest of Europe since their departure. There was Austria-Hungary's ultimatum to Serbia, the Kaiser's support for the Austrians, Russia's backing of Serbia, France's resolve to weigh in, Britain's refusal to rule herself out, and more recently – more ominously – the Kaiser's decision to cut short his own holiday in the Norwegian fjords.

Not long after, on 28 July, these three Cambridge Heretics heard that Austria-Hungary had declared war on Serbia. This was not an elaborate 'newspaper scare'. It was real. It had begun. There followed across Europe more than forty declarations of war and orders to mobilise. In Paris the word heard on every street corner was '*incroyable*'. 'The world is gone mad,' wrote Winston Churchill to his wife. There were drunken celebrations in Berlin, Paris and Vienna as youthful crowds bawled out patriotic songs late into the night. As young men began to be called up, thousands of rushed marriages took place over that sweltering weekend. In

Copenhagen, meanwhile, Philip and Alix Sargent Florence took a ship back to Britain. Pyke remained where he was.

Rather than return to London he chose to send a telegram to the head office of Reuters, news agency of the British Empire, offering his services as a correspondent. It was a reckless move: the longer he stayed in Denmark the harder it would be to find a ship back to Britain, and he was not even assured of a reply from Reuters, let alone a positive one.

Reuters, it turned out, was facing the worst crisis in its history. Its arrangement with the Berlin-based Wolff News Agency was on the brink of collapse, which would soon open up enormous gaps in its news-gathering service. Letter codes, whereby Reuters correspondents used code to reduce the length of their telegrams back to London, were soon to become illegal, which would force costs to soar, while the ill-conceived Reuters Bank was in dire straits now that its manager, a Hungarian, had been conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian Army. Shortly before the outbreak of war the company's senior management had decided that only a handful of war correspondents could be sent into the field. Otherwise they must rely on freelancers, known either as 'String' or 'Special' Correspondents.

Just days after making this decision, Reuters received an offer of correspondence from an unknown twenty-year-old in Copenhagen. He was English and appeared to be literate. In that strange hiatus between the outbreak of war and Britain's entry into it, with the shape of the war hanging in the balance, Reuters agreed to take on Pyke as a Special Correspondent.

Pyke would later refer to himself with pride as 'Reuters' special correspondent in Denmark at the time of the outbreak of war'. It was an audacious coup, born of little more than his being prepared to look foolish. But, as he

soon discovered, writing the telegram had been the easy part; finding some news was going to be more difficult.

Though Pyke once described Copenhagen as 'the Athens' to which Norwegians flocked 'when their own barren hills did not provide enough intellectual intercourse', his initial experience of Danish conversation was Spartan. 'Woe betide him who finds himself a correspondent on those silent shores,' he groaned. The people of Copenhagen seemed to have perfected the ability to 'answer the most pointed of questions with a discreet evasion, and the most subtle by ignorance'. Instead he looked beyond the city for news, where he learnt that four German warships and a handful of U-boats had been seen to the south. Now he had the material for his first Reuters dispatch. It would also be one of his last.

In London it was noted that: 'Four German destroyers were also reported off Hammerfest, apparently bound for the White Sea. Reuters' correspondent at Copenhagen stated that on the afternoon of August 5 three German submarines were sighted at the southern outlet of the sound. They appear to have taken up their position there as a sort of advance guard.'

This was first-rate news. In Reuters there must have been murmurs of congratulation for those who had given Pyke his opportunity. Now they wanted more.

In a confident and expansive mood, Pyke cast his net wider and over the coming days met Edward Lyell Fox, a young American with a high forehead who was later described by Special Branch as 'a rather seedy individual'. Fox was a twenty-six-year-old Special Correspondent with only a handful of pieces to his name, mostly travel and sports. As Pyke would later find out, he was not everything he appeared to be.

At one point in their conversation, no doubt to impress the young Englishman, Fox let on that he was able to smuggle uncensored material into and out of Germany. The

implications for Pyke were stunning. There were no British correspondents in Berlin and it was illegal for British, French or Russian nationals to enter the country. Editors on Fleet Street had given up all hope of getting uncensored correspondence out of Germany, and yet 'the desire to know the truth of what was going on at that time in the interior of Germany was intense,' wrote Pyke. 'The floodgates of news had clanged to, and not a word that could be prevented, or had not a purpose in it, was leaving Germany.' If Fox was to be believed, then Pyke had only to find willing correspondents in Germany who could pass their reports to Fox before he took them out to Copenhagen. Pyke would then courier this material to London. On Fleet Street the bidding war would be frenzied. All Pyke needed was a list of correspondents in Germany.

On 17 August, at a quarter to eight in the evening in Copenhagen, Pyke sent the following telegram to Reuters in London (the breaks were added by the censor, who let it pass): 'Have means of uncensored communication interior Germany | literary and telegraphically | send name address of trustworthy intelligent individuals | not press Bureaux | to act as correspondents there.'

If there was a reply he never saw it. By revealing the position of warships in his first Reuters dispatch Pyke had publicised sensitive German naval intelligence. After the publication of this report Germany's Minister to Denmark had made a formal complaint, which had by now percolated through various diplomatic channels. Pyke was told to pack his rucksack and leave. Crestfallen, he sailed to Greenock, Scotland, arriving during the last days of August.

It had been a fascinating adventure, but one which appeared to have run its course. At least, that was the impression Pyke gave for most of the journey home. Yet by the time he reached London his mood was transformed. He had come up with a new plan, one so outrageous that just the thought of it made him smile.

Pyke had spent most of his childhood, including the long and unhappy years after his father's death, in an elegant Kensington town house with a white stuccoed facade. It was from this house, several days after his return from Copenhagen, that he set out for Fleet Street. We may never know whether it was charm, luck, personal connections or a cocktail of all three which was responsible, but somehow he had secured an interview with Ernest Perris, News Editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, a newspaper with a circulation exceeding that of *The Times* and *Daily Telegraph* combined.

Like most editors, Perris was at that time in a state of sustained shock after the publication three days earlier of the 'Amiens Dispatches'. These were two frank assessments of the British Expeditionary Force's first engagements of the war – at Le Cateau and Mons – by veteran correspondent Arthur Moore for *The Times* and Hamilton Fyfe for the *Weekly Dispatch*. Ordinarily they would not have been published but both had been approved by the censor, F. E. Smith, later Lord Birkenhead, who even added lines about the urgent need for reinforcements.

The 'Amiens Dispatches' had sent shock waves rippling across the country, undermining some of the popular belief in a swift and easy victory for Britain and her allies. In Parliament the decision to publish these reports was slammed as defeatist. Churchill wrote a furious letter to the publisher of *The Times*. Yet the shock on Fleet Street was as much envious as it was outraged. The *Chronicle*, for one, had recently assured its readers that 'the censorship that we exercise over our news will not affect its value'. The Amiens Dispatches had shown that to be nonsense. Perris needed to strike back with vital news, to let his readers see the war as it really was. He was desperate for a scoop, which was why he was even prepared to meet this callow undergraduate.

'Yes, yes, what is it you want?' Perris began. 'Quickly, please, I've got no time to spare.'

As if to emphasise the point he picked up a pair of telephone receivers and dictated foreign telegrams into each. Next, as Pyke remembered, he 'rang a bell cunningly hid under the edge of the table, glanced about him in all directions at once, first at a row of large clock dials showing the hour in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Petrograd, Berne, Madrid, Belgrade, Antwerp, and Amsterdam, frowned, looked at the large wall map, gave instructions to a pallid, overworked clerk for yet another foreign cable to go, and repeated, "Yes, quickly, please, I'm busy."

Pyke's plan was ingenious and a little mad, and over the next ten minutes he did his best to explain it.

How to Get a Job as a War Correspondent (as an Inexperienced Twenty-Year-Old)

For many young men like Pyke, who had grown up in upper-middle-class Edwardian London and liked to read, the idea of being a war correspondent had a heroic and at times breathless appeal. In 1912 the journalist Philip Gibbs described it as 'the crown of journalistic ambition, and the heart of its adventure and romance'. The life of a war correspondent seemed to combine the most attractive elements of explorer, spy and best-selling author. Marinetti had been a war correspondent several years earlier in Libya, as had Churchill in South Africa, and by 1914 Pyke described himself as 'absolutely determined to be a correspondent somewhere'.

But where?

On his way back from Denmark Pyke had pored over a map of the world in the hope of finding a newsworthy spot which did not yet have a full complement of correspondents. Yet whenever he found a likely destination his ambition foundered on his almost complete lack of journalistic experience. Apart from a handful of Reuters dispatches, by