

midnight – our time that is. The Germans launched air raids against key targets in the Soviet controlled sector of Poland. Soon after that their land forces crossed the border. Hard to be too precise at the moment, but everything we're picking up seems to indicate that this is a major invasion. Some reports say that over one hundred German divisions are involved. Other reports say it could be nearer to one hundred and fifty.'

'Reliable sources?'

'Bletchley say they can barely cope with all the radio traffic: noisiest night of the war, they say. Plenty of good stuff coming through Helsinki too. The Finns are pretty much in bed with the Germans now as you know; wouldn't be surprised to see them joining the party. They're also well plugged into all kinds of sources in Russia, close proximity and all that. Stockholm station is sending broadly the same message. Morgan sent three messages from

Lisbon last night saying he thought it was imminent – two different sources apparently, one particularly good one in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.’

Edgar showed no reaction, as if nothing that he was being told was news to him. He felt in his pockets and realised he had forgotten to bring any cigarettes.

‘What does the front look like?’

Christopher Porter pointed to an enormous map of Europe opposite them. ‘Starting up there in the north – where that red diamond is – they’ve certainly crossed into Latvia. Probably the Fourth Panzer Group, we know they were in that area. Then all the way down the border, as far south as the Ukraine. Looks like the Romanians may be involved there, possibly the Hungarians too. See Brest on the map... there? That is where the main thrust may well be though it is a bit early to say for sure. Between there and Lublin: north and south of the Pripet

Marshes.’

‘Quite some front.’

‘Well, if they really have attacked from the Baltic to the Black Sea then that’s well over a thousand miles. Extraordinary if they manage to pull that off.’

Edgar stared at the map for a good five minutes. ‘He is crazy, isn’t he?’

‘Who is?’

Edgar looked down at Porter, surprised that he didn’t seem to know who he was talking about. ‘Hitler. He’s left it far too late. Look how far they are from Moscow, over six hundred miles. Talking of which, much noise coming out of Moscow?’

‘Nothing official. Apparently there is talk of their High Command having sent out some kind of alert about an invasion some three hours before the Germans attacked, but we can’t confirm that. Obviously didn’t have any effect. Certainly there was a very noticeable increase

in radio traffic in and out of Moscow last night, but then we know that the Soviets are prone to getting quite noisy every so often. All in all, it looks like they were caught by surprise.'

'Well' said Edgar, removing his jacket, 'it was not as if we didn't warn them.'

Chapter 1

Croydon Airport, London August 1939

A shade after one thirty on the afternoon of Monday 14th August twenty people emerged from the terminal building at Croydon Airport and were shepherded across a runway still damp from heavy overnight rain.

They were a somewhat disparate group, as international travellers tend to be. Some were British, some foreign; a few women, mostly men; the majority smartly dressed. One of the passengers was a man of average height and mildly chubby build. A closer look would show bright green eyes that darted around, eager to take everything in and a nose that was bent