



# For the Right Reasons

**EDWARD EVANS**

## *Chapter 4*

You know, Clive, when I look back and think what we did and how we did it, it was a sort of achievement. The East Germans in the main had not seen an Englishman for fifty-five years and didn't know how to deal with one, especially me. Our chaperones were all Stasi and, despite their loyalty to the state, they were only interested in what they could get for themselves. We couldn't speak the language and had to rely on people who didn't speak good English either and who cheated us at every opportunity. So I suppose we didn't do too badly and at least it was exciting. Anyway where was I? Oh yes, I was going to the Embassy again.

The following day, as requested, we arrived at the British Embassy on Unter den Linden to meet Mr Baker.

'We saw your American friend twice,' I said before Baker could waste time on idle chat. 'Once, he was with a gypsy-looking prostitute, with whom, I believe, he went to his room, and the second time . . .' I motioned Francesca to continue. She gave a verbal photograph of a man he had met, even down to the Rolex on his wrist.

'And what have you been doing, if I may ask?' Baker asked, trying to show some interest but failing.

I told him exactly what we had done. 'And we've been invited to go hunting,' I added.

Baker's ears pricked up and he let forth a barrage of questions, none of which we could answer because we didn't know.

'I haven't come here to act as your lackey,' I interrupted. 'I am here in the hope of doing some business. Already I feel I'm having jeopardising that by visiting you here.'

Baker waved my concern away. 'As I explained, just tell them you are trying to sort out the best way to finance the projects, in view of the difficulties we have with the transfers of money to East Germany.'

'OK, that's our story . . . I am sorry, we have to go. We have a meeting with at eleven o'clock. We will try and see you before we return to England.'

'You *must*,' he replied, leaving us wondering whether he was insisting or just being polite.

'If we have time,' I emphasised. I was tired of being dictated to.

Roland was waiting for us and came directly over as we walked through the hotel door.

'Roland,' I said, pre-empting his introduction. 'This is Francesca and I'm Robert.' Roland held his hand out and I shook it. 'I hope you can speak English,' I added. 'Yes, I can understand, if you speak slowly,' he smiled, speaking with a strong German accent.

Roland was a very pleasant man, and I soon got the impression he hated the State and all it stood for, but work was work. Quite openly, he told us he was being punished for being somewhat outspoken and that they, the State, had taken his house from him and he was now having to live, separated from his wife, in a flat with ten other people.

'Ten other people?' I said in horror, repeating his every word, unable to believe what I was hearing.

'*Ja, es ist nicht so gut*,' he replied with more than a tinge of sadness.

'I hope things will get better soon.'

'Yes, soon,' he said.

We felt so sorry for Roland and during our sightseeing day we built up quite a friendship. He confided that he would love to escape to the West with his wife and start again. I believe

we gave him as good a day out as he gave us. We took in all the sights – the opera house, Brandenburg Gate, the Alexanderplatz TV tower, Checkpoint Charlie and, of course, the Wall. All the time I was aware of the ever-present tail. Roland gave us plenty of cultural leaflets. ‘Just to make sure they think I am doing my job properly.’ We had lunch in a Russian restaurant and drank tea in a variety of cafés, all of which made the day very pleasant, and what’s more with the rate of exchange so much in our favour, we spent less than twelve pounds. How could you spend more, when a cup of tea was the equivalent of ten pence?

We arrived back at the hotel and I gave Roland fifty Deutschmarks for his trouble and told him to take his wife out for a meal. He was very grateful and this little gesture was to prove an extremely valuable, though unintentional, investment. He gave me his card – he was another employee of Fortschritt Landmaschinen – and his home address, and left. Was this firm a cover for the State? If not, how could they afford to allow one of their employees to take us out for the day, when their firm was nothing to do with our projects?

We had been in the hotel for a few minutes when the ‘bellboy’ came across to tell me that Herr Eberhard Lurgit was on the phone and would like to speak to me.

‘Hello, Robert, how did you enjoy your day?’

‘Fine. How did you know I was back?’ I asked disingenuously.

Lurgit laughed. ‘I will be picking you up at eleven o’clock tomorrow morning to take you hunting. See you then.’

‘Pratt,’ I said to Francesca. ‘He put the bloody phone down on me before I could ask anything about tomorrow. There’s something fishy about him, I don’t trust him.’

‘I never have,’ replied Francesca.

We kept an eye open for our American friend, but there was nothing to report to our nose Embassy.

The following morning, at exactly eleven o’clock, Lurgit walked into the hotel.

'He makes me bloody sick, always on time,' I whispered to Francesca.

He asked us if we could follow him in the Range Rover, as he would not be staying with us. I agreed but was concerned that we would not have an interpreter. However, after his assurances, we went on our way, stopping at the Minol garage to fill up with petrol. I was flattered that the attendant remembered me, or perhaps it was the car or the Western money? Soon we were out in the city outskirts, passing a gigantic power station belching out a noxious black cloud full of sulphur; it would have been closed in Britain thirty years ago.

We followed Lurgit through the centre of Erkner, with its endless parades of dreary sixties flats, and turned left towards Furstenwalde and Grunheide. We were now in midst of the forests of Brandenburg to the east of Berlin and once, as we drove along yet another lonely potholed road, we had had to stop to allow a 'family' of eight wild boar to cross. It was a lovely sight: the lead boar was enormous and they did not seem to be any hurry; after all, it was their forest.

Shortly after, we turned off the road and arrived at a large late-nineteenth-century building on the edge of the forest; it was almost hidden from view behind a pair of massive iron gates. Lurgit signalled us to stop and wait. He walked over to the gate and rang a bell and within a minute or two a middle-aged woman came out and spoke to him. The gates opened for us, and we drove in; Lurgit, however, had obviously been instructed to stay outside. We parked up and the same woman came over, chattering in German, and motioned us through the grandiose house. I glanced back at Lurgit, who stood behind the gates looking on, rather enviously I think. Lurgit was clearly not being invited in. Quite the reverse: I actually suspected our hosts, whoever they were, were trying to get rid of him.

The building was clearly something special, some kind of very private hotel, and the foyer, where we sat and waited for our party, although small, was luxurious. Although no one spoke

English, I was able to make the receptionist understand that I would like to see the restaurant area, as that too looked sumptuous. It was! The crockery was exquisite, the cutlery was gold, the carpets were better than the best I had ever seen. We took a short stroll in the gardens and, despite it being winter, they were magnificent, the lawns rolling down to the lake where two speed boats and a very large cabin cruiser were berthed. In the grounds there were several chalets, perhaps used by the slightly less important clientele. All this was clearly for the DDR elite and I couldn't help remembering the famous Orwell quote about 'some being more equal than others'. On one level, the hypocrisy of it disgusted me; on another, I felt drawn to such sybaritic luxury.

We returned to the lobby and in the event we did not have long to wait. The door opened and a very tall, slim, elegant man strode over to us, hand outstretched.

'Hello, I'm Manfred Stratemeir. I'm your guide and interpreter for the day,' he said in the most perfect Oxford accent.

We shook hands. 'We've heard all about you,' he added.

'Only good, I hope,' I replied.

'Yes, of course,' smiled Stratemeir.

I commented on his accomplished accent and he told me that he had spent a lot of time in English-speaking countries at the embassies.

'Are you taking us on this trip?' I enquired.

'Why, yes,' he answered. 'Have you not been briefed?'

I told him that that the only thing we knew was that we had been invited to go hunting with some businesspeople who might be able to help us.

Stratemeir laughed. 'Yes, I think they may be able to pull a few strings. Your host is none other than President Henshall.'

'Good God!' Francesca and I said in unison.

'Why us?' I asked.

'Lurgit tells us that you have a few million pounds to invest in the DDR.'

'But that's not true!' I exclaimed. 'I have never given the

impression that I have millions to invest. I could probably arrange for loans for one or two million for the right project, but that would be the maximum.'

'Don't worry! *Any* money invested here is accepted with open hands.'

'Maybe so, but we do not want to create a false impression,'

'Well this little trip is a . . .'

'Bribe?' I said, interrupting. 'In order to get me to spend, eh?'

'It will be a good day out for all of us,' Stratemeir said, ignoring my comment.

There was excitement in reception as the party arrived. First there was a Mercedes station wagon with five heavily armed soldiers, followed by two long wheel based Range Rovers, then another station wagon, with a further five heavily armed troops and, finally, a Series 2 Land-Rover with every conceivable extra on it, including winches front and rear and another four heavily armed soldiers. They obviously did not want to take chances.

The President walked into the hotel, followed by his entourage. Stratemeir immediately introduced us, telling the President we were the English couple who were looking to invest in waste-disposal projects near Berlin and Brandenburg. It was evident that Lurgit had exaggerated our wealth and position in order to ingratiate himself with the hierarchy; Stratemeir turned and winked at us. The President shook hands with us and we were then introduced to Gunther Koch, who was something to do with agriculture, Willi Panz, the deputy to the President, and two others, whose names I can't remember.

With Stratemeir acting as an interpreter, the President asked us if we would like a drink. Of course, I asked for a cup of tea and Francesca requested the same, much to the amusement of the Germans. Then, to my utter amazement and indignation, for the next five minutes we were ridiculed.

'You English can't take your liquor,' bellowed Willy Panz.

I smiled through gritted teeth. 'You lot may have beaten us at football, but you won't beat me shooting.'

Stratemeir was reluctant to translate, but did so. There was silence. My first clanger: it was the bloody *West* Germans that had beaten us, not the East. At least we won the war, I thought to myself.

The President smiled. '*Bitte,*' he said, holding out his hand, as if to say, 'I forgive you.' He directed us out to the cars and climbed into the first Range Rover, followed by Willy Panz and the two others. Francesca and I were ushered into the second with Stratemeir and Gunther Koch. What a wonderful vehicle it was. For one thing, it was brand new, with only 187 miles on the clock and, for another, it was the tiptop height of luxury. The seats and carpets were white fur; there was a cocktail cabinet with a full range of drinks, a refrigerator with beer, and an extremely large picnic hamper full of food. When the hood folded back, there were gun positions on which to rest your rifle when you took aim.

The troops took up their positions in their respective vehicles and we set off along a narrow track that was little more than a fire break with a ditch on either side. It was a lovely crisp, cold day, with patches of blue showing through the clouds. Much care had been taken in the planting of this forest, as there were a good variety of conifer and deciduous trees. It gave a lovely feeling to the place, as the sun's rays found their way through all the different tree shapes and sizes to form a dappled tapestry on the forest floor.

We stopped on the track for a few minutes and were each issued with twelve-bore shotguns and two small boxes of cartridges. Francesca refused hers and said she would watch me win. We were then shown, as a matter of courtesy, how to load and unload the weapons, and then we continued on our way, in convoy, down the track. The place was teeming with wildlife: deer, wild boar, a form of goat with large twisted horns, and plenty of birds. I really don't know to this day what I was doing there as I couldn't kill an animal for sport to save my life, and yet there we were, with the President of East Germany, on a shoot.

'At least I can miss,' I whispered to Francesca. Stratemeir smiled.

We were moving very slowly when suddenly the President stood up in the car and signalled his driver to stop. I loaded the two barrels and waited. The President, it would appear, had to be the first to shoot. He was and he missed, I was pleased to say. He shouted something over to us, and the cars began to move on, deeper into the forest.

We were travelling at about five miles an hour when there was a loud 'crack', followed by a burst of automatic fire. The leading Mercedes suddenly careered off the track and turned on its side; the driver, we later learned, had been hit. The Mercedes was followed by the President's Range Rover, which followed the first into the ditch, fortunately with its front wheels only. A short volley of bullets sunk into our car; Gunther Koch slumped forward; he had been hit and was badly wounded.

There was pandemonium; two soldiers from the first vehicle clambered out of their upturned car and came running over to the prostrate President firing, as they went, at the invisible attackers. Stratemeir was the nearest to the door, which he opened, jumping out into the ditch, and pulling Francesca with him. I followed, grabbing Gunther in an attempt to pull him out of the car, only to find he was already dead. The three of us were now in the ditch, protected, to some degree, by the bank and the Range Rover. The soldiers had pulled the President out of the car, together with Panz, and they, too, were in the ditch.

Bullets were whistling everywhere; there was a dull thud as they hit the trees, a 'ping' as they glanced off the metal, a 'whoosh' as they flew past and a 'crack' as they hit the cars full on. It was terrifying. Suddenly, we heard a shot coming from behind us, a bullet missing Francesca by inches. I jumped over to cover her, lying at the bottom of the ditch. Stratemeir returned fire with his twelve-bore.

'Shoot in that direction,' he yelled at me. 'Just keep shooting.'

He threw his shotgun towards me, rolled over the ditch and disappeared into the forest. I plucked up courage and started to fire; Francesca followed suit. Fortunately, she had been listening when we had been given our shooting lesson earlier.

I caught a brief glimpse of Stratemeir crawling round; the beautifully spoken anglophile was suddenly like a member of the SAS. We just kept shooting for all our worth until the two boxes were used up; but what good was a shotgun against automatic weapons? The noise and the shouting were unbelievable as the soldiers returned fire and were shouting their instructions to each other.

A small group left us and attempted to outflank the gunmen, and it soon became obvious that the President's men were beginning to take control, advancing on the enemy position. The bullets raining in our direction ceased and we could hear the shooter turn his attention to the advancing soldiers. The guards who had remained by the cars now seized the opportunity to try to get the President out of harm's way. One jumped into the driver's seat of the President's Range Rover and began to reverse out of the ditch. However, in his panic and haste, he caused the car to slide and wheel-spin; the more he revved, the worse the situation became.

I ran over to the car, shouting, 'Stop, stop!' and, pulling the driver out of his seat, jumped into his place, slipped the vehicle into low range and reversed it out easily. I shouted at Francesca to run to the car and jump in. She did so, followed by Stratemeir, who had now re-emerged out of the trees, having dispatched, it seems, at least one of the gunmen. We sped along the track back to the main road and, without thinking, I stopped for someone to open the gates.

*'Halten Sie nicht! Fahren Sie weiter!'* shouted the President.

I got the message. The gate smashed open and we were back on the main road. There was now a very loud 'whirr' from helicopters overhead, making their way over the forest, and you could still hear the occasional burst of automatic fire. I turned

right and headed back towards Grunheide, followed by the Land Rover, which had also managed to turn around and was now only a short way behind.

I drove like a bat out of hell, but soon Stratemeir told me to turn right onto a small country lane, which descended, past some kind of a military building, with several military vehicles in front, to a large house that was even more magnificent than the hotel we had visited earlier. We were, it seems, expected. The heavy iron gates swung open immediately on our arrival, as a large group of soldiers saluted the President, or perhaps it was me, I don't know which!

Perhaps the house was in need of a coat of paint and a few repairs, but the grounds were beautiful. The tranquillity of the setting, however, contrasted with the frenetic activity of the personnel, as soldiers scurried out to greet the President. As I later learned, we had entered a place where no Westerner had ever been; for this was none other than the Stasi's and KGB's main training centre in East Germany, where mutually beneficial ideas and techniques were exchanged. The Stasi was, of course, the State's secret police.

We stopped at the front door and were greeted by four or five officers, who helped the President and Francesca out of the car. We were a sorry sight, covered in mud from head to foot, and obviously very shaken up. But Henshall, despite his age, had come out of this attempt on his life still very proud and upright. Stratemeir, too, though no longer the elegant gentleman, was clearly a very tough cookie.

Our voices were drowned out by the noise of several Russian-built helicopters circling round, looking, I presumed, for the attackers, or to see if there was any further danger. The bang, bang, bang of their engines, a familiar sound in the East, was making it impossible to hear oneself think.

We were guided into the entrance hall, where the introductions were made. The President, through Manfred, introduced first Francesca and then me as the 'brave little Englishman'.

'Little, maybe, but brave, certainly not!' I said to Stratemeir, which he duly translated, to the amusement of all present.

A helicopter landed on the lawn and waited to carry the President off, but he had already accepted the offer of a drink and we all proceeded to the officers' bar. The doors opened into a large hall. Facing us on the wall was a magnificent picture of Lenin addressing the mob. I was struck by its grandeur and I stood for a few seconds admiring it. I expressed my admiration to Manfred, who, in turn, explained what I had said to the President.

'You like it, Herr Conway?' Henshall said in broken English.

'I love it! It's . . . it's so powerful.'

'It's yours.' He addressed some bystanding officers in German.

Stratemeir told me that the President had given instructions for it to be parcelled up and sent to my hotel. I was flabbergasted, but, needless to say, I accepted.

The hall itself was very cold and imposing. Another two large Russian landscape paintings hung on the wall. I liked these too, but had not got the courage to say so, in case they thought I was after them as well. We went upstairs for our drink and entered a little 'café', which was 'done out' as a Russian kitchen, with a rounded oven and chimney in the left-hand corner. It was beautifully decorated in yellow and blue; the whole room was a picture.

President Henshall came over and chatted for a few minutes; he told us he had arranged for his car to collect us and take us wherever we wanted to go. He shook our hands, thanked us again before departing along with Panz, but not before I had asked if I could look over the place. He, of course, said yes and Stratemeir immediately made arrangements. The officers seemed concerned but complied. What trouble, after all, could a little Englishman cause when he couldn't speak, read, or write German?

Accompanied by a German officer, Francesca, Stratemeir and I set out on the tour. Stratemeir explained how the lakes of Berlin all ran into one another and that it was thus possible to sail into

the Baltic from any of them; for this reason, all State buildings sited near one of the lakes always kept a speed boat in case of trouble. We were shown the canteen, where there was another handsome Soviet picture, this one of a glowing peasant girl working in a field; the library, some storerooms and even the privies, and at last we came to the door of a lecture room. The officer seemed very reluctant to let us go in, but Stratemeir persuaded him.

The lecture room was empty but clearly a lecture had only just finished. Stratemeir seemed fascinated by the materials that, for the moment at least, had been left behind. On the wall was a map of West Germany, the River Rhine and its tributaries, where several industrial areas were circled in green. There were also aerial enlargements of several industrial plants, which by the look of them seemed to be petrochemical. Spread over a large central table were technical drawings and plans, for what looked like some kind of detonator. I wasn't interested as I didn't really understand their significance, but Stratemeir seemed fascinated. He was about to bend over to look at the plans more closely when the German officer hurriedly ushered us out.

Back in the main entrance, we were greeted by another, more senior officer, who immediately invited us have a meal with him at the officers' hotel and restaurant a little distance away from the main house. Our car, he told us, when it arrived, could wait for a while. The President was anxious, moreover, to show us his gratitude. The Commandant, as he turned out to be, was an old-fashioned man, round-faced with a moustache and somewhat portly; you could almost picture him as Bismarck. We were still very dirty and quite frankly tired; both of us just wanted to go back to our hotel and change, but nonetheless, we followed the Commandant and Stratemeir up the lane towards the hotel, accompanied by six armed soldiers. I looked quizzically at Stratemeir.

'They're not prepared to take chances,' he said.

As we reached the hotel, our car arrived, a fairly nondescript

black Volvo estate; I had hoped it would have been at least a grand Russian Zyl or Mercedes.

'Would you mind awfully if I freshened up a little,' Francesca asked through Stratemeir as we entered the hotel. The Commandant immediately summoned a receptionist and asked her to take Francesca up to an unused bedroom. We were shown into a small suite, with a bed, a small bathroom and a large mirror, and as we washed and neatened ourselves I had the uneasy feeling that we were being watched, so I deliberately talked about how brave the President had been. Francesca looked at me quizzically. I obviously needed to explain.

'Darling,' I said, 'come out here and look at this fantastic view.'

Francesca, the trooper, came out and joined me on the balcony overlooking the lake. I leaned over and whispered, 'Don't speak too loud, but I know we are being watched.'

'Where?' she asked.

'The mirror, I think it's two-way.'

'Your imagination is getting the better of you.'

'No, I'm positive. Just be careful what we say to each other.'

We walked back into the room and chatted inconsequentially for a while. Suddenly I was seized by a kind of madness. How dare they spy on us! I grabbed hold of Francesca, threw her onto the bed and kissed her passionately, whispering, 'I know there's someone next door behind that mirror. Let's give them something to think about!'

A few minutes later we left the room, knowing that, despite everything that had happened, they were still not prepared to trust us. On arriving at the table, we couldn't believe our eyes. Even Stratemeir was amazed: before us was a feast fit for an emperor, a banquet of truly extraordinary proportions with wine to match.

'It's not every day we have such a brave bunch of people in our midst,' the Commandant said, proposing a toast to us.

It was all very wonderful and we were made very welcome.

Night had fallen and we were now eager to return to Berlin.

As we got up from the table, the Commandant asked us if we would be returning to the DDR.

‘Within the next four weeks, I hope . . . As long as I can get another visa.’

‘I don’t think that will be a problem with your present credentials,’ interjected Stratemeir.

‘Next time you come, you will stay here as *my* guests,’ the Commandant said, clearly not taking no for answer.

‘That would be lovely,’ I replied. ‘It’s a date. I’ll pick up the picture then, too.’

‘You will come shooting with me,’ the Commandant went on. ‘I know places where the game is better than where you have been today. With me you won’t have any trouble!’ He laughed and offered us another drink. ‘One for the road!’ Stratemeir translated. We reluctantly accepted and were presented with two little glasses of schnapps.

Stratemeir brought over another officer to meet us.

‘This is Major Friedrich Willemer,’ Stratemeir announced. ‘He would like the honour of meeting you.’

‘Hello, Major,’ I replied.

‘No, no, Friedrich, please!’ he said in good English.

‘You speak English, then.’

He laughed and said something to Stratemeir.

‘No, that’s all he can say,’ Stratemeir said.

The Major continued with Stratemeir translating. ‘I would be very grateful if you would not mention anything about the incident today. It would be very useful if you told no one as it would only help our enemies.’

‘You have our word,’ I replied earnestly. ‘Though it’s a pity; it would make such a good story.’

‘I know it will be difficult,’ the officer continued. ‘You were very brave and I am sure you will have a good future in the DDR.’

‘You have no need to worry,’ I assured him.

‘Thank you, Herr Conway, Frau Conway.’ With a nod of his head he left.

‘Manfred, we must be going too,’ I said. ‘We’re returning to England tomorrow. By the way, I have left my car at the hotel and I’ve drunk too much to drive it now . . .’

Stratemeir had a solution for everything. The driver would take us back to Berlin that night and pick us up again in the morning and take us back to the hunting lodge. He himself would accompany us that evening, as a matter of courtesy.

Our return to the Metropol in an official-looking car followed by a Russian jeep and four armed soldiers must have created quite a stir. However, Stratemeir quickly dismissed the guard and invited us for a nightcap in a little café round the corner. Why not? we thought. It was out last night in Berlin.

‘Round the corner’ turned out to be quite a walk to the Charlottenhofstrasse and the ‘little café’ turned out to be a rather posh affair underneath the Charlottenhof Hotel. It was obviously something of a hotspot for the intelligentsia and as we entered there was a split second of shocked silence as the other customers took in our somewhat scruffy appearance. We sat down next to a window overlooking the street.

‘I can recommend the *Glühwein*,’ Stratemeir said as he called the waitress over. ‘It will warm us up and make sure you sleep well.’ Having given the order, he continued. He adopted a serious tone.

‘I cannot believe what you have done today; you’ve amazed me and certainly the President. There are not many people who can boast they have met the President, let alone had the adventure you two have had. Willemer was right: be careful and you will have a very good future over here. However, one word of warning: *do not trust Lurgit!* He is very dangerous, very ambitious and he will do anything to please his superiors. Don’t tell him about today. He will find out, but it mustn’t come from you.’

‘How do you know this?’ I asked.

‘Just leave it at that,’ Stratemeir replied and turned the conversation to lighter matters.

The following day, our return journey occurred without incident. One thing I do remember, however, was crossing the DDR–BRD border.

‘What have you been doing in the DDR?’ asked a small supercilious guard in not bad English.

‘I have been spending time with your President.’ I replied ironically, and somewhat proudly.

He laughed disbelievingly and repeated the question. ‘Really, what was your business?’

I explained quickly that I had been investigating sites for possible waste-disposal units. He didn’t, of course, understand a word I was saying and, rather than admit it, he simply said ‘*Gut*’ and stamped our passports and let us through.