



TO CATCH A SPY

Words by **HERBIE BRENNAN**

Robert Philip Hanssen joined America's Federal Bureau of Investigation in the 1970s. Everybody thought he was a promising young agent. Unfortunately, so did the KGB, Russia's main security agency, who recruited him as a spy around 1985.

In the movies, a spy wouldn't last long in the FBI, but in real life it took them some years to suspect they had a mole in their operation. But once they did, they acted quickly to set up a special task force assigned to root out the traitor ... and put the investigation under the charge of Robert P. Hanssen.

Needless to say, the task force didn't get very far. Spying activities continued. An embassy was broken into, Federal agents had their computers hacked, but Hanssen continued to divert suspicion away from himself. He did such a good job of it that the agency tried to promote him. Hanssen refused the offer. Promotion would have involved a routine lie-detector test and he knew he would never pass it.

It couldn't last forever, of course – Hanssen was too incompetent a spy for that. He behaved so suspiciously that some of his fellow agents actually reported they thought he was the spy they were looking for. But their superiors at the agency didn't believe them and more time went by before he was seriously investigated. The first thing they found was a password-cracking application on his computer – real evidence at last that he was up to something. But Hanssen claimed he needed the application in order to connect his computer to a colour printer and the FBI believed him!

Eventually, they decided to have a look on his mobile phone. And there for all to see were the messages he'd been sending to the Russians. With this proof, they followed him and caught him red-handed delivering a garbage-bag full of secret documents to the Russians.

'What took you so long?' Hanssen asked as they arrested him.

It was a good question and one that might also have been asked of MI5, Britain's Secret Service, about one of their own agents named Michael Bettaney. Bettaney was recruited in 1974 and was quickly noted for his habit of singing Nazi songs while at work and loudly announcing his fondness for Adolf Hitler. One evening he got so drunk in a public place that he was taken in by the police ... and hauled away shouting, 'You can't arrest me: I'm a spy!'

MI5 responded to this peculiar behaviour by promoting him to the vitally important and highly sensitive Soviet desk. There he started taking photographs of secret documents to sell to the Russians. After twenty years in the job, he decided he had enough to make some serious money and arranged a meeting with KGB agents in Austria. He applied for holiday leave and booked a flight to Vienna.

But twenty-four hours before he was due to leave London, the KGB concluded that anybody who sang Nazi songs and professed a love of Hitler had to be a double agent and tipped off MI5 about the meeting. Bettaney was subsequently jailed for fourteen years.

Weird or what? ②