

# Implications

## *Rob Davis*

Dr Shelley Smith, Professor of Forensic Pathology at Imperial College, surveyed the aircraft's remains, identified as from a Short Sunderland Flying-Boat, reported as missing over the North Atlantic in the early stages of the Second World War. The underground facility where she was working had been sealed off by Army soldiers, and the scene within resembled a science fiction movie.

The Sunderland would never have been discovered had not a substantial portion of the Polar ice cap become detached. Exploration teams had landed but been removed, with the papers reporting that the huge iceberg was a serious hazard to shipping.

Only seven of the aircraft's occupants had been recovered, astonishingly well preserved after almost 80 years entombed in the ice. These now reposed in a set of cryogenic tanks. Shelley had just taken DNA samples, the vials containing these were labelled and placed on her desk.

The first of the casualties was a tall man dressed as a very senior Naval Officer. The lady in the next chamber, presumed to be his wife, was shorter in stature and more round in shape. Two girls, assumed to be their daughters, were in their early teens. Three more men, all in Royal Air Force flying-kit, were in adjacent frozen chambers. A call to her head office had resulted in the underground facility quickly being taken into a state of maximum security.

A soldier ushered in a pleasant-looking man dressed in a smart suit and carrying a briefcase. "My name is Howard Preston," he declared, showing an identification card. Shelley gestured to a chair across from her desk, and Preston sat down.

Shelley had been expecting someone like this. "I can guess who you work for."

"Yes, that's right, And these," he indicated the vials, "are the necessary samples. Have you labelled them, as instructed?"

"Yes. Older man, older woman, girl one, girl two, officers one, two, and three."

"Did you recognise any of them?"

Shelley maintained a straight face. "Officers one, two and three, no, I didn't."

Preston smiled. "No, of course you couldn't possibly know these RAF men. But, in the case of the family?"

"I couldn't believe what I was seeing."

"I would like to view them myself. The DNA samples will speak for themselves, but all the same, as they say, seeing is believing." He stood up.

"They are all here, in the order I was told to use. Left to right, as directed."

Each chamber had a clear inspection panel through which the body's head was visible; Preston made careful examinations. "Back to your desk, I think. I have further instructions." He

withdrew documents from his briefcase. "This is the Official Secrets Act. If you would sign on the line?"

Shelley leaned forward, and signed.

"Now," he said, relaxing, "let us look backwards in time. To be accurate, mid-summer 1940. Had we lost the Battle of Britain - or perhaps more accurately, had the Nazis won it - Hitler would have invaded this country in late summer 1940. If we regress a little further to the early-mid 1930s, the Nazis were gaining power and becoming quite a threat. This was clearly seen by the Government of the day and some advance plans were being put into effect. One exceptionally bright Army Intelligence officer dreamed up an ambitious plan, designed to protect the Royal Family from harm in the event of enemy action. The King at that time was?"

"His Majesty George the Sixth," Shelley replied, aware that the question was a test.

"Precisely. His wife?"

"Known to my generation as the Queen Mother."

"Yes. And the two young girls."

"Margaret and Elizabeth, the Princesses."

"The latter is now your sovereign, her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II".

Shelley nodded. "And this scheme was to remove them from harm's way in the event of an invasion?"

"No. The King had declared that he would never leave the country, despite an offer from the Canadian Government to take in the entire Royal Family. But he knew that his place was with his people."

"Quite right, too. So the scheme was never put into effect?"

"Yes, it was. The intelligence officer - now deceased, but appropriately decorated for undisclosed services to the Crown - fashioned the plan to recruit doubles for the King, the Queen, and the two Princesses. He faced formidable difficulties. All these doubles were extremely unsuited, as you might say, socially, for their intended roles, except that they were dead ringers for the originals. It took over a year to train them. Have you heard the expression 'Fifth Columnist'?"

Shelley shook her head. "No."

"It refers to a group of people who are infiltrated into a society and briefed to carry out acts of harm. As war became imminent, fifth columnists were perceived as a huge threat, especially against public figures."

Shelley leaned forward. "And if your public figures are not quite where they seem to be, the real ones are safe from any such attack or act of violence."

"You have it in a nutshell. A likely target can be presented in public at one place when the genuine article is, in fact, perfectly safe elsewhere."

"Decoys, to save the real thing. Did they know what they were for, these people, the impersonators?"

"Not exactly. Just that they were stand-ins, to confuse Fifth Columnists."

Shelley grimaced. "And they were perfect targets for an assassin, whilst the real McCoys are snug at home. Yes, it makes sense. And so, here they are. But why the secrecy? Plenty of wartime events have been declassified in the last years. How did these unfortunate lookalikes come to end their lives on the ice cap?"

"The aircraft was en route from Scotland to Canada when it crash landed or was otherwise forced down onto the ice cap. We don't know what went wrong. Mechanical failure possibly, unless it was brought about by a Fifth Columnist saboteur. The people inside perished from lack of provisions and the Arctic cold, before a rescue could be organised."

"So the poor impersonators ended up here."

"No. They didn't." Preston suddenly moved forward and scooping up the DNA sample vials, put them into his briefcase. He held Shelley's gaze, and saw the shock in her eyes.

"We now have but one question left."

Shelley stammered, "And - that - is? What to do with them?"

"No. Professor Smith, the only question left is what to do about you." He paused. "I can see from the look on your face that you have realised the truth of the situation, as well as its implications."

Shelley nodded, her face drained of colour.

"Yes, implications," Preston continued. "as the DNA samples would undoubtedly show. If, that is, I was not to destroy them, as I am directed to do immediately I leave you."

"Then they are from - from -"

"Yes." Preston rose and walked unhurriedly towards the exit. At the door, he turned back. "Professor Smith, I was never here. And this," he added, gesturing at the wreckage and the body chambers, "never happened." Raising his briefcase as a farewell salute, he was gone.

Already soldiers were streaming in to remove everything.