

COMPLETE 63-PAGE ACTION STORY

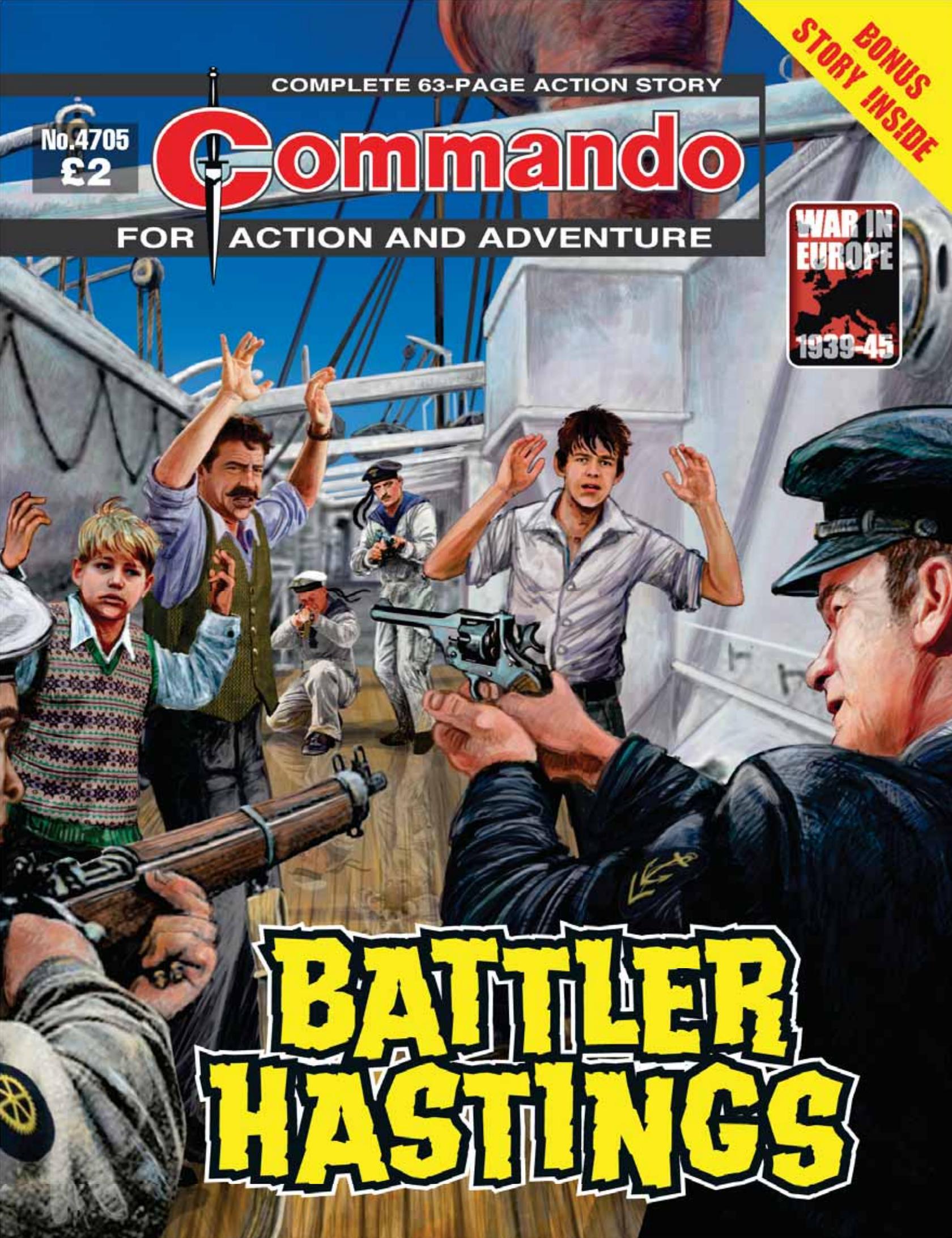
No.4705
£2

Commando

FOR ACTION AND ADVENTURE

BONUS
STORY INSIDE

WAR IN
EUROPE
1939-45



BATTLER HASTINGS

V FOR VENGEANCE

1942... France, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Greece, Yugoslavia... great nations now in German hands... and terrorised by their feared and detested state secret police, the Gestapo. But the people of Europe were fighting back. A British agent masquerading as a Gestapo Colonel, Von Reich, led a group of desperate men intent on revenge against Germany... he led the Deathless Men.

Captain Sebastian Muller looked bored. He leaned back in his chair and listened without interest to the voice on the telephone.

"What happened to the art treasures?" the voice demanded. "They were to be delivered to me here in Paris for safekeeping until they went to Berlin."

Muller tried to keep the boredom out of his voice. Clearly Colonel Von Reich was a man of influence — anyone in the Gestapo had influence — but, equally clearly, he was not going to be an obstacle in Muller's path.

"I am so sorry, Colonel," Muller said, impressed by how sincere he sounded. "The artwork was in a lorry escorted by motorcycle outriders and several armed soldiers. When the convoy failed to check in, I ordered an immediate investigation. We found the lorry in a neighbouring province, the motorcycles and several of my men dead. Of the artwork, there was no sign." He paused briefly, waiting before offering his misdirection. "Of course," he continued. "There have been several acts of terrorism in that province." He didn't mention his men had been responsible for many of them.

Von Reich didn't answer. "Are you," he said finally, "accusing Colonel Schaudi of being inept?"

"No, Herr Colonel," Muller sounded innocent. "But it is known that the locals in his province have been trouble. Perhaps if he took a stronger hand..."

"Perhaps," Von Reich said thoughtfully. "It does not do to be soft with these locals. I shall contact Colonel Schaudi immediately to find out what he is doing to bring the people under control... and if he needs Gestapo assistance."

"I will be happy to offer any assistance that I can," Muller said smoothly. "We had considerable trouble here until I shot twenty men each day for a week. The locals soon became docile."

"I'm sure they did," Von Reich replied. Pleasantries were exchanged and the call ended. Looking across his desk at a neat little man in an expensively tailored suit, Muller grinned wolfishly.

"So, Herr Friedrich," he said. "Now that the Gestapo are blaming Colonel Schaudi for the artwork theft, shall you and I discuss how it should really be disposed of?"

In his Paris office, Colonel Von Reich — or Alfred Gregson as a select few in British Intelligence knew him to really be — looked at his telephone for a moment. He quickly wrote a short note in a code understood only by his Allied contacts. Minutes later the message was being carried by a trusted member of his household staff to a small garage on the Bois de Boulogne. From there the order would be issued for one of his feared Deathless Men to deal with Captain Muller. That Muller had ordered the murder of countless innocents was enough to merit his own death. That he had stolen the missing artwork and was trying to implicate Schaudi, and perhaps roll the Colonel's territory into his own, simply made the execution all the more deserved.

Muller's car sped along, moving faster than was legal, but it was of little matter — he was above the law in his little kingdom. A fact he pointed out to Herr Friedrich, seated beside him. The little man laughed as he knew he must. He was there to do business and part of that business was massaging Muller's ego.

"Who would dare stop you?" he asked. Muller nodded. "Who indeed?" He eyed Friedrich. The man had a Swiss passport but spoke with a Bavarian accent. He knew Friedrich came from an old German family who had moved to Switzerland for financial reasons. Clearly people with no allegiance to a flag, whose loyalty was to money. Muller could do business with people like that.

The car turned on to a rough track, the smooth sound of the wheels on tarmac suddenly replaced by the rough crunching of dirt and stones.

"Not far," Muller assured the businessman. Five minutes later, the car pulled up at abandoned mine workings. Until a few months earlier they had been a thriving business employing a large number of locals. Muller led Friedrich through a small door set into the large metal gates across the front of the mine workings.

Five minutes passed and Muller's driver got out of the car. He needed to stretch his legs. He might even get away with a quick smoke. He reached inside his pocket for his cigarette case and felt a sudden pain in his back. Or was it his chest? As his knees buckled and he dropped to the ground, the last thing he saw was a man dressed in a shabby grey coat and trousers with a grey hat and a grey scarf covering most of his face. He wondered briefly why the boot of the car was open but beyond that there was only blackness.

BATTILER HASTINGS

NESTLING DEEP IN THE HEART OF THE SO-CALLED "SURREY STOCKBROKER BELT" - WHERE PRIVILEGED CITY PROFESSIONALS WHO USUALLY LIVED IN MOCK TUDOR HOUSES AND COMMUTED TO LONDON BY TRAIN - ST. SEBASTIAN'S SCHOOL HAD LONG BEEN REGARDED AS THE PERFECT ESTABLISHMENT FOR THE SONS OF SERVING OFFICERS, EVEN MORE SO IN THE SPRING OF 1940 WITH BRITAIN AT WAR.

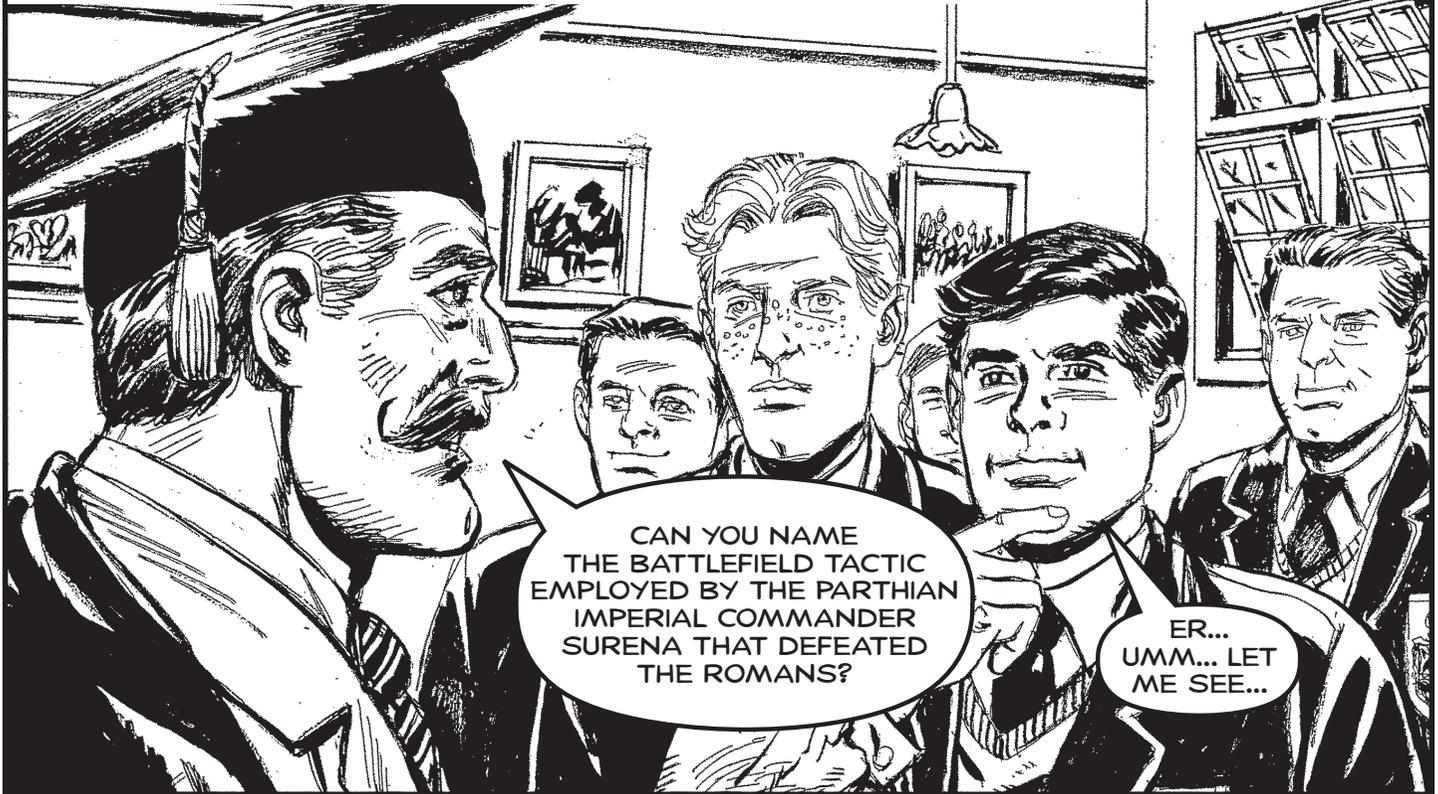
DID YOU HEAR THE QUESTION, CRAWFORD, OR WERE YOU TOO BUSY GAZING OUT OF THE WINDOW?

ER, YES, HEADMASTER ...I MEAN NO, HEADMASTER. C...COULD YOU REPEAT IT PLEASE?

STORY
ALAN
HEBDEN
ART
REZZONICO
COVER
JANEK
MATYSIAK

St. SEBASTIAN
SCHOOL FOR THE SONS
OF SERVING OFFICERS
DR. A.H. PLANTAGENET-
HASTINGS
DIRECTOR

AUGUSTUS HORACE PLANTAGENET-HASTINGS HAD BEEN ITS HEADMASTER SINCE THE END OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR, TEACHING A WHOLE GENERATION OF SERVING OFFICERS' SONS, MOST OF WHOM HAD GONE ON TO BECOME SERVING OFFICERS THEMSELVES.



LUCKILY FOR CRAWFORD HE WAS SAVED BY THE BELL MARKING THE END OF THE PERIOD. AS THE CLASS BROKE UP THE DEPUTY HEADMASTER, MISTER HAROLD BLENKINSOP, CALLED FROM THE DOOR.



CLEM CRAWFORD KNEW HE HAD BEEN FORTUNATE. THE HEADMASTER, UNIVERSALLY KNOWN BEHIND HIS BACK AS "GUS", WASN'T NORMALLY SO FORGIVING.



I'M SICK OF GUS'S PREHISTORIC BATTLES. IT'S ALL HE EVER TEACHES, ANCIENT GREEK AND ROMAN WARS. WHAT'S THE POINT?

THE POINT, CLEM, IS THAT THE MEN WHO FOUGHT THEM SHARED VALUES OF COURAGE AND COWARDICE, INGENUITY AND STUPIDITY THAT HAVEN'T CHANGED SINCE. WE CAN LEARN SOMETHING FROM THAT.

CHRIS MORAN WAS THE SCHOOL'S OUTSIDER, HIS INSIGHTFUL INTELLIGENCE AND ATHLETIC PROWESS MAKING BOTH RESPECTED AND A LITTLE FEARED BY MANY, THOUGH NOT CLEM.



GUS BANGS ON ABOUT WARS AND BATTLES BUT AS FAR AS ANYONE KNOWS HE'S NEVER TAKEN PART IN ONE HIMSELF.

THERE ARE STORIES HE DID SECRET WORK DURING THE LAST WAR.

CLEM GAVE A SNORT. HE'D HEARD THOSE STORIES.



PROBABLY PUT ABOUT BY GUS HIMSELF. WHAT IS IT THEY SAY? 'THOSE WHO CAN, DO! THOSE WHO CAN'T, TEACH!'

HE'S GOT A POINT. NOBODY SEEMS TO KNOW WHAT GUS DID DURING THAT WAR.

THE REASON GUS HAD BEEN SO LENIENT WITH CLEM WAS THAT HE'D BEEN WORRYING ABOUT AN IMPENDING VISIT FROM THE AIR MINISTRY. AS IT TURNED OUT, HE HAD GOOD REASON TO BE.



FIGHTER COMMAND NEEDS A NEW SECTOR HEADQUARTERS, HEADMASTER. ST. SEBASTIAN'S WILL BE DULY REQUISITIONED UNDER THE EMERGENCY POWERS ACT. ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION WILL BE PROVIDED.

EVEN AS GUS ABSORBED THE FIRST BODY BLOW, THE SECOND ONE HIT HIM FOR SIX.



A SCHOOL CLOSED LAST YEAR IN ST. JOHN'S AND THE NEWFOUNDLAND GOVERNMENT HAS KINDLY MADE IT AVAILABLE TO US. NEEDLESS TO SAY, YOUR TRANSPORT WILL BE ARRANGED.

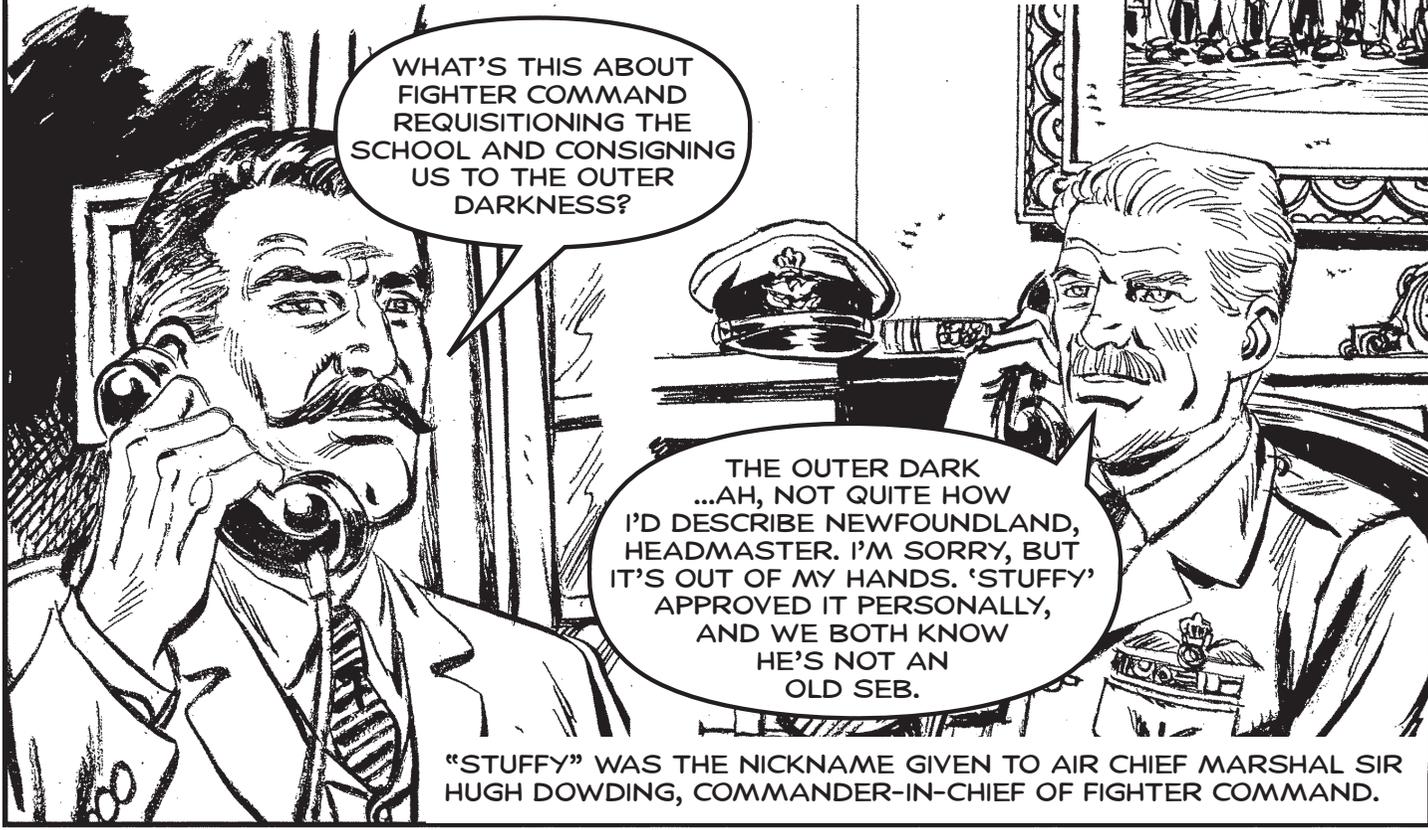
ST JOHN'S? NEWFOUNDLAND? IS THIS A JOKE?

AS BLENKINSOP SHOWED THE MAN FROM THE MINISTRY OUT, GUS SNATCHED UP THE PHONE.



AIR MINISTRY? PUT ME THROUGH TO AIR VICE-MARSHAL BAXTER RIGHT AWAY. WHAT? OH, JUST TELL HIM IT'S THE HEADMASTER CALLING!

AIR VICE-MARSHAL CYRIL BAXTER HAD A SON AT THE SCHOOL AND WAS HIMSELF AN OLD SEB, AS THE SCHOOL'S OLD BOYS WERE KNOWN. AS SOON AS HE HEARD WHO WAS CALLING HE HAD HIM PUT THROUGH.



WHAT'S THIS ABOUT FIGHTER COMMAND REQUISITIONING THE SCHOOL AND CONSIGNING US TO THE OUTER DARKNESS?

THE OUTER DARK ...AH, NOT QUITE HOW I'D DESCRIBE NEWFOUNDLAND, HEADMASTER. I'M SORRY, BUT IT'S OUT OF MY HANDS. 'STUFFY' APPROVED IT PERSONALLY, AND WE BOTH KNOW HE'S NOT AN OLD SEB.

"STUFFY" WAS THE NICKNAME GIVEN TO AIR CHIEF MARSHAL SIR HUGH DOWDING, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF FIGHTER COMMAND.

NO MATTER HOW MANY STRINGS GUS PULLED HE COULDN'T GET THE DECISION CHANGED. A WEEK LATER HE WATCHED GRIMLY AS THE EXCITED BOYS BOARDED LOCAL TRAINS TO TAKE THEM TO LONDON, THE FIRST STAGE OF THEIR JOURNEY TO NEWFOUNDLAND.



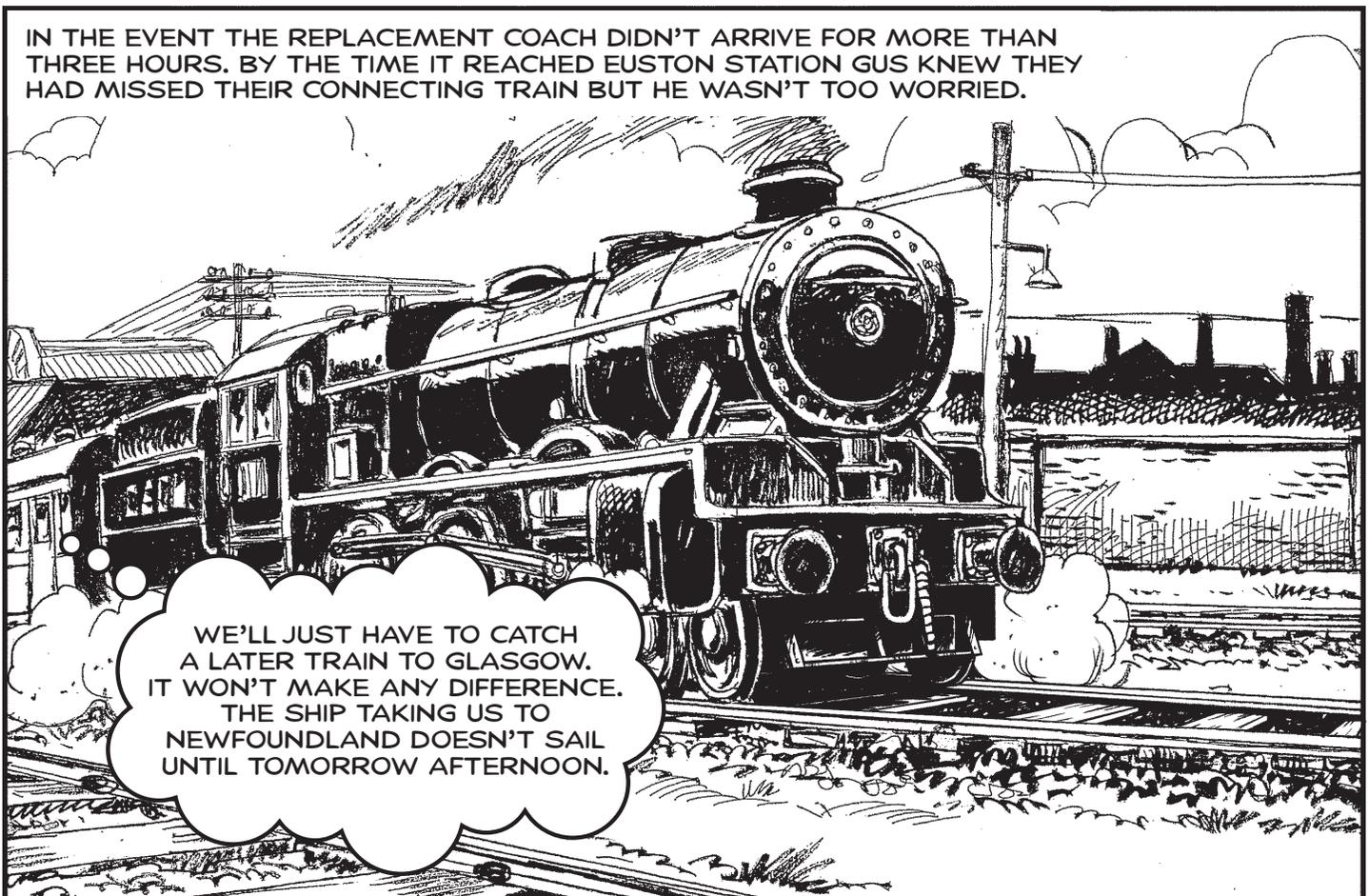
IT ISN'T THE END OF THE WORLD, HEADMASTER. IN FACT MOST OF THE PARENTS ARE DELIGHTED TO SEE THEIR BOYS SAFELY AWAY ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ATLANTIC.

IN SPITE OF MY BEST EFFORTS, BLENKINSOP, I DO NOT SHARE THEIR DELIGHT!

IT SOON BECAME APPARENT THAT THERE WEREN'T SUFFICIENT TRAIN CARRIAGES FOR THE WHOLE SCHOOL.



IN THE EVENT THE REPLACEMENT COACH DIDN'T ARRIVE FOR MORE THAN THREE HOURS. BY THE TIME IT REACHED EUSTON STATION GUS KNEW THEY HAD MISSED THEIR CONNECTING TRAIN BUT HE WASN'T TOO WORRIED.



GUS'S BLITHE ASSUMPTION THAT THEY COULD TAKE A LATER TRAIN WAS QUICKLY DASHED BY PETTY OFFICIALDOM.

MOST OF THE NEXT TRAIN TO GLASGOW HAS BEEN COMMANDEERED FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL AND ALL REMAINING SEATS HAVE BEEN TAKEN. THERE IS A WAR ON, YOU KNOW!

OFFICIOUS LITTLE HITLER. WHAT AM I GOING TO DO?

AS THEY TURNED BACK GUS SPOTTED A SIGN ON AN OFFICE DOOR AND FROWNEED THOUGHTFULLY.

BRAITHWAITE? COULD IT BE...?

CAPT. M. BRAITHWAITE



WITHOUT A MOMENT'S HESITATION GUS BARGED INSIDE. THE YOUNG CAPTAIN BEHIND THE DESK WAS ABOUT TO OBJECT WHEN HE SAW WITH AMAZEMENT WHO IT WAS.



HOW DARE YOU BARGE IN WITHOUT...CRIKEY! HE...HEADMASTER!

AH, IT IS YOU, YOUNG MONTY BRAITHWAITE. YOUR OLD HEADMASTER COULD DO WITH A BIT OF HELP FROM AN OLD SEB.

WHEN THE HEADMASTER OF ST. SEBASTIAN'S ASKED FOR HELP THERE WASN'T AN OLD SEB ALIVE WHO WOULDN'T JUMP TO IT. WITH COMMENDABLE ALACRITY YOUNG BRAITHWAITE ORDERED AN ADDITIONAL CARRIAGE TO BE ATTACHED TO THE GLASGOW TRAIN.



THERE YOU ARE, HEADMASTER, YOUR VERY OWN CARRIAGE.

SPLENDID WORK, YOUNG BRAITHWAITE.

COR, AND IT'S FIRST CLASS AS WELL.

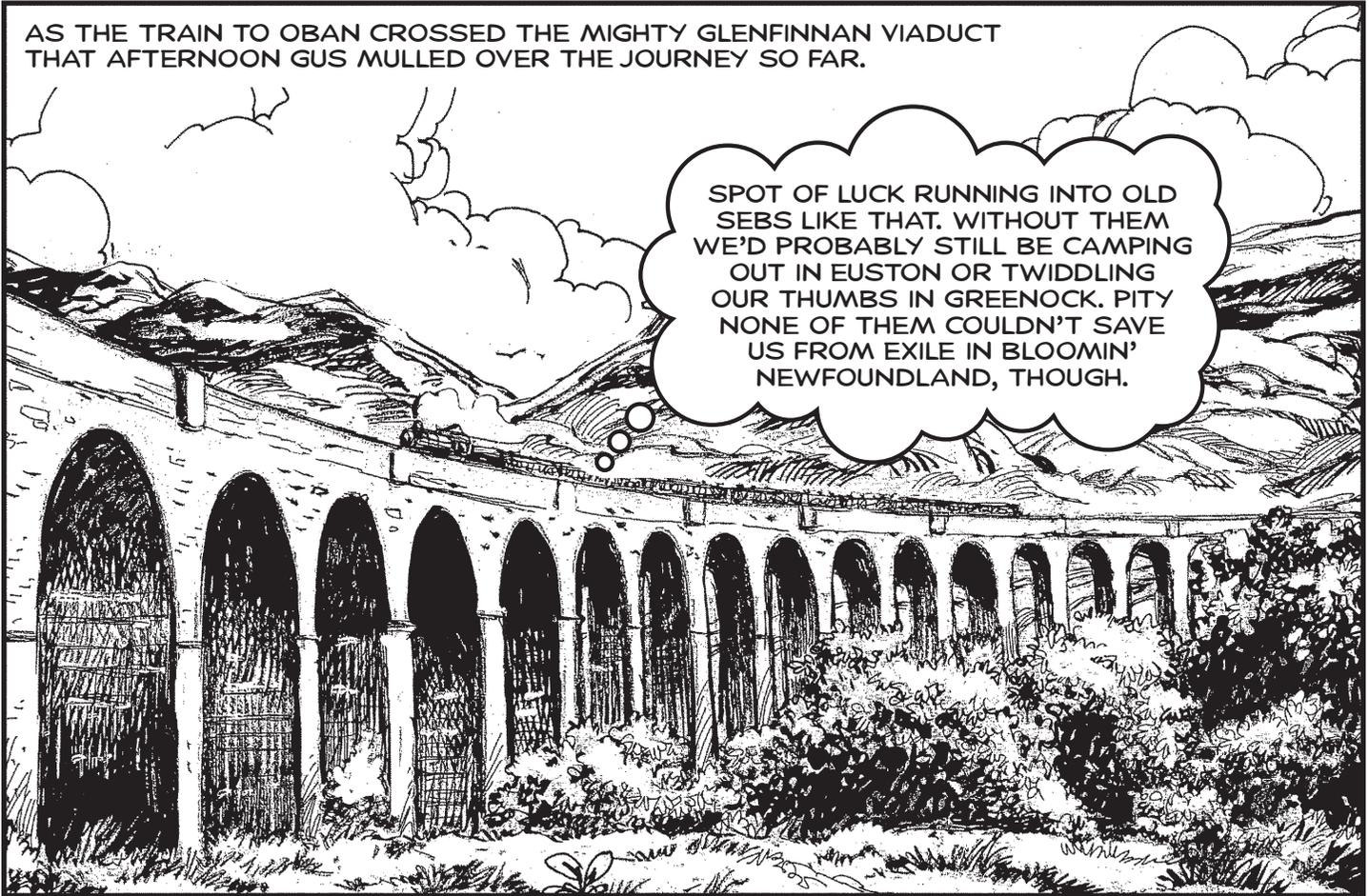
BUT WHEN THEY REACHED GREENOCK THE FOLLOWING MORNING THERE WAS ANOTHER SHOCK WAITING.



CHRIS WAS RIGHT. "TOPPO" FROBISHER WAS INDEED ANOTHER OLD SEB, ONE WHO COULD EXPLAIN WHAT HAD GONE WRONG. THEIR SHIP HAD BEEN ORDERED TO SAIL EARLY TO JOIN A FAST CONVOY FROM LIVERPOOL. MISTER BLENKINSOP AND THE REST OF THE SCHOOL HAD JUST MADE IT ON BOARD IN TIME.



AS THE TRAIN TO OBAN CROSSED THE MIGHTY GLENFINNAN VIADUCT THAT AFTERNOON GUS MULLED OVER THE JOURNEY SO FAR.



SPOT OF LUCK RUNNING INTO OLD SEBS LIKE THAT. WITHOUT THEM WE'D PROBABLY STILL BE CAMPING OUT IN EUSTON OR TWIDDLING OUR THUMBS IN GREENOCK. PITY NONE OF THEM COULDN'T SAVE US FROM EXILE IN BLOOMIN' NEWFOUNDLAND, THOUGH.

ARRIVING AT OBAN THEIR FIRST SIGHT OF THE S.S. MONTCRIEFF CAME AS A PLEASANT SURPRISE.



'PON MY WORD, SHE CERTAINLY LOOKS SHIP-SHAPE AND SEAWORTHY.

AS THEY WENT ABOARD CHRIS SPOTTED SOMETHING FIXED TO THE STEEL HULL.



LOOK AT THAT, SIR!

HERGESTELLT IN DEUTSCHLAND

I CAN EXPLAIN, HEADMASTER.

'HERGESTELLT IN DEUTSCHLAND'? BUT...BUT THAT'S GERMAN FOR 'MADE IN GERMANY'!

AS HE SHOWED THEM THEIR CABINS THE PURSER EXPLAINED THAT THE MONTCRIEFF WAS FORMERLY A GERMAN NORTH SEA FERRY - THE M.V. LUNEBERG OUT OF CUXHAVEN.



SHE WAS STUCK IN HARWICH WITH ENGINE TROUBLE WHEN THE WAR STARTED AND WAS SEIZED BY THE ROYAL NAVY. A FINE SHIP, SHE'LL GET YOU TO NEWFOUNDLAND IN NO TIME.

BAH, JUST WHEN I'D BEEN HOPING FOR AN OLD TUB THAT WOULDN'T GET PAST IRELAND BEFORE BREAKING DOWN AND BEING TOWED BACK.

AFTER SETTLING IN, GUS AND HIS PUPILS WENT UP ON DECK TO WATCH THE SHIP'S DEPARTURE. AT THE LAST MINUTE HALF A DOZEN ARMY LORRIES DROVE ON TO THE QUAYSIDE.



TO THEIR ASTONISHMENT THE LORRIES DISGORGED A GROUP OF GERMAN NAVY P.O.W.s WHO WERE ESCORTED ON BOARD BY A DETACHMENT OF ARMED MARINES.

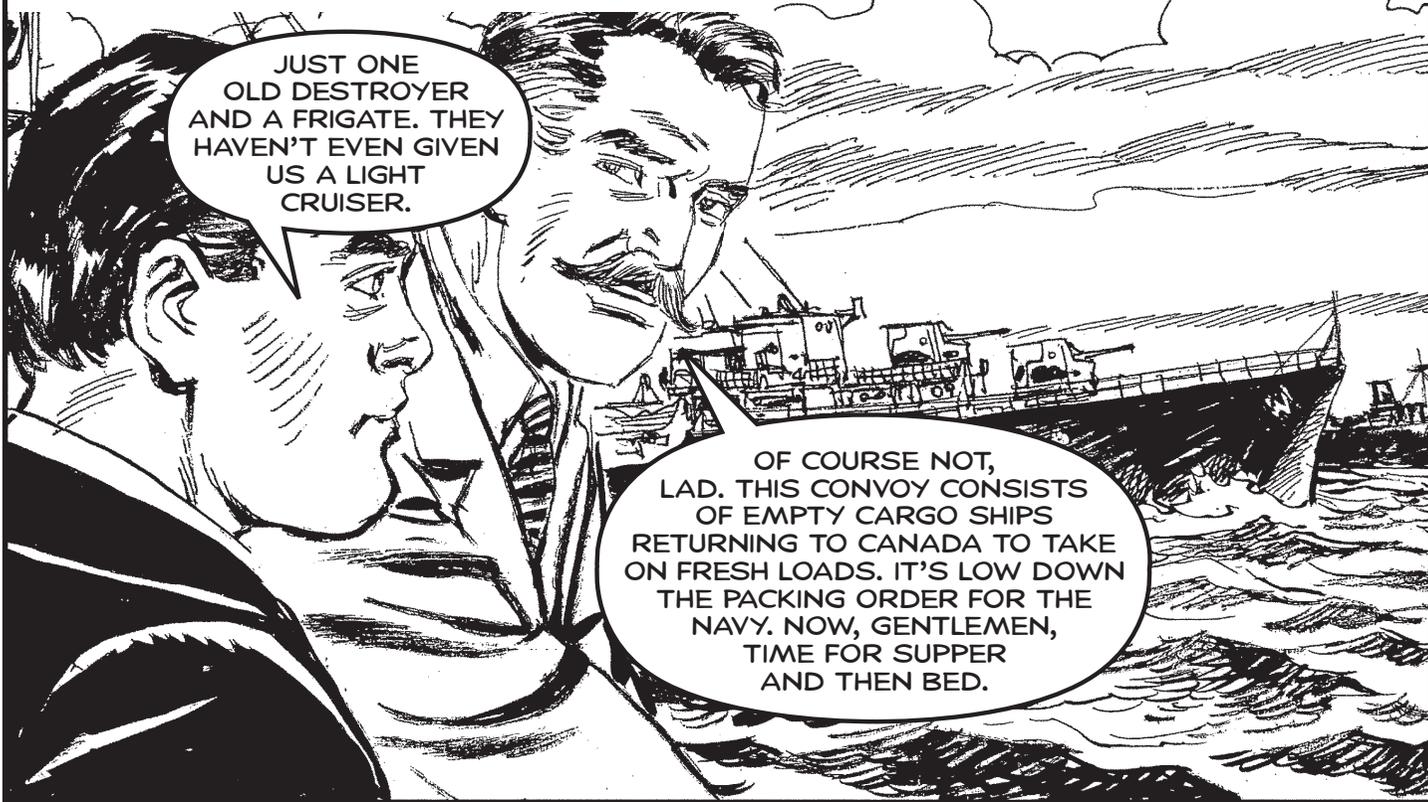


ONE OF THE P.O.W.s, A NAVY COMMANDER BY THE NAME OF JURGEN BRUNNER, SMILED AT THE WATCHING BOYS, BUT HIS THOUGHTS WERE ELSEWHERE.



WELL, WELL, IF IT ISN'T THE OLD LUNEBERG. THIS REALLY IS A STROKE OF LUCK.

THE MONTCRIEFF SET SAIL AND A COUPLE OF HOURS LATER JOINED THE MAIN CONVOY FROM BELFAST. CLEM WAS DISAPPOINTED BY THE APPARENT PAUCITY OF THEIR NAVY ESCORT.



JUST ONE OLD DESTROYER AND A FRIGATE. THEY HAVEN'T EVEN GIVEN US A LIGHT CRUISER.

OF COURSE NOT, LAD. THIS CONVOY CONSISTS OF EMPTY CARGO SHIPS RETURNING TO CANADA TO TAKE ON FRESH LOADS. IT'S LOW DOWN THE PACKING ORDER FOR THE NAVY. NOW, GENTLEMEN, TIME FOR SUPPER AND THEN BED.

IN THE BRIG THE GERMAN COMMANDER, JURGEN BRUNNER, WHO HAD BEEN SO SURPRISED TO SEE WHICH SHIP THEY WERE SAILING IN, GATHERED THE OTHER PRISONERS AROUND HIM.



I WAS THIS VESSEL'S FIRST OFFICER UNTIL SHORTLY BEFORE WAR BROKE OUT, WHEN I WAS CALLED UP BY THE NAVAL RESERVE. THERE MAY BE A WAY OUT OF HERE THAT WILL ALLOW US TO OVERPOWER THE BRITISH AND SEIZE CONTROL!

BRUNNER EXPLAINED THAT A FEW MONTHS BEFORE HE LEFT THE SHIP AN OLD VENTILATION SHAFT FROM THE CARGO HOLD HAD BEEN BLOCKED OFF WHEN A MORE MODERN VENTILATION SYSTEM WAS INSTALLED. IT DIDN'T TAKE THE PRISONERS LONG TO UNCOVER IT.



I WAS RIGHT. THE BRITISHERS DIDN'T KNOW IT WAS HERE OR THEY'D HAVE WELDED IT SHUT. THE SHAFT JOINS THE OLD LOWER DECK VENTILATION SYSTEM OUTLETS. LATER TONIGHT WE SHALL RECLAIM THE LUNEBERG FOR GERMANY!

AS FATE WOULD HAVE IT A SAVAGE LATE WINTER STORM
CAME RAGING OUT OF THE ARCTIC JUST AS NIGHT FELL.



BATTEN DOWN
THE HATCHES,
NUMBER ONE.
IT'S GOING TO BE A
ROUGH OLD
NIGHT.

AYE, AYE,
SKIPPER.

MEANWHILE SOME OF THE GERMANS HAD MADE
THEIR WAY THROUGH THE VENTILATION SHAFTS AND HAD
REACHED ONE OF THE OUTLETS ABOVE A PASSAGEWAY.



ALL CLEAR.
LET'S OPEN
THAT GRILLE.

REMOVING THE GRILLE THEY GOT READY TO LOWER THEMSELVES DOWN. BRUNNER LED THE WAY.



THAT THE BRITISH HAD INDEED PUT THE OLD ARMOURY TO THE SAME USE WAS MADE CLEAR BY THE PRESENCE OF AN ARMED SENTRY OUTSIDE.



THE NOISY CLATTER OF THE SPOON FALLING ON TO THE FLOOR STARTLED THE SENTRY OUT OF HIS REVERIE.



THE SENTRY RUSHED ROUND THE CORNER AND SCARCELY HAD TIME TO KNOW WHAT HAD HIT HIM AS THE WAITING GERMANS POUNCED.



AS SOON AS THE MEN HAD ARMED THEMSELVES, BRUNNER LED THEM BACK TOWARDS THE SWING DOORS MARKING THE ENTRANCE TO ONE OF THE SHIP'S FORMER LOUNGES.



THE REASON BRUNNER WAS PLEASED WAS BECAUSE THE SWING DOORS ALLOWED THE GERMANS TO BURST IN EN MASSE, CATCHING MOST OF THE GUARDS AT THEIR MESS TABLE.



TWO OF THE SAILORS TRYING TO GET THEIR GUNS WERE INSTANTLY SHOT.



AT THE SAME MOMENT CHRIS WAS ON HIS WAY TO THE WASHROOM, CLOSE ENOUGH TO THE LOUNGE TO HEAR THE SHOTS.



SECONDS LATER THE SWING DOORS WERE FLUNG OPEN AND CHRIS WAS HORRIFIED TO SEE ARMED GERMANS EMERGE. INSTINCTIVELY, HE TOOK OFF LIKE AN OLYMPIC SPRINTER.

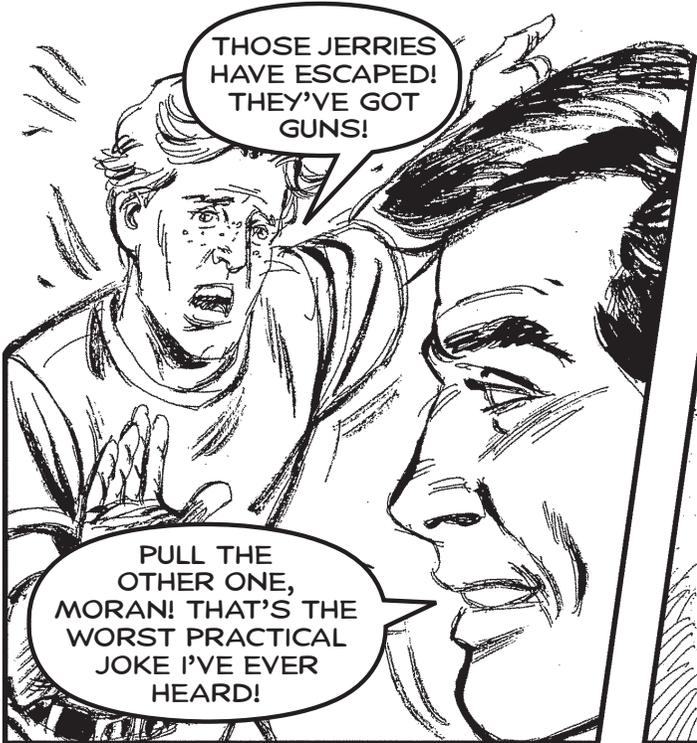


HALT!

THE PRISONERS ARE ON THE LOOSE, AND ARMED.

THE PUPIL RACED TO THE UPPER DECK TO THE LOUNGE THE REST OF THE UPPER FOURTH WERE USING, BUT HIS WARNING WASN'T TAKEN SERIOUSLY.

WITH CLEM'S SCORN RINGING IN HIS EARS, CHRIS WASTED NO MORE TIME.



THOSE JERRIES HAVE ESCAPED! THEY'VE GOT GUNS!

PULL THE OTHER ONE, MORAN! THAT'S THE WORST PRACTICAL JOKE I'VE EVER HEARD!



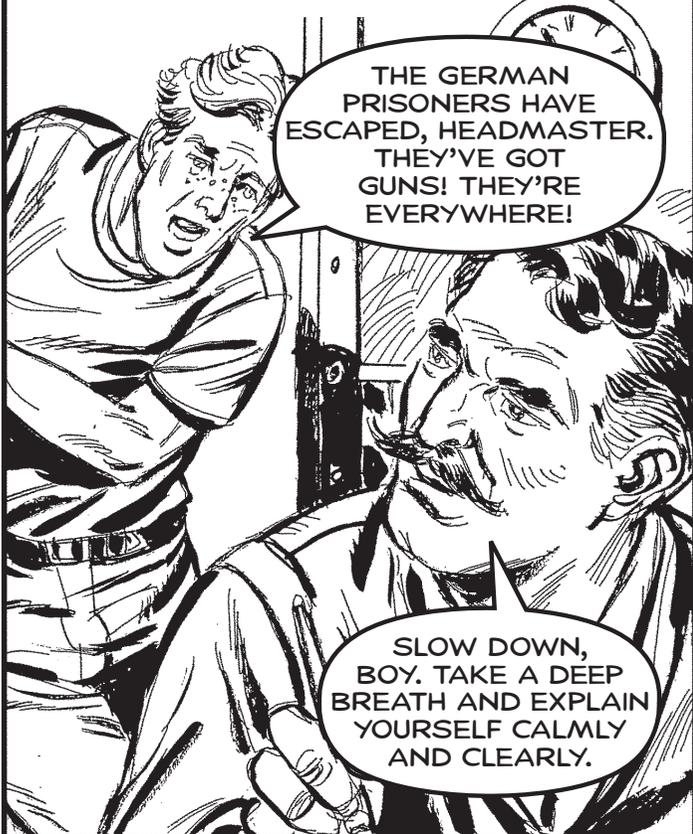
HEY, MORAN, HAVE YOU HEARD THE ONE ABOUT A SCHOOLBOY CALLED...

CLEM CRAWFORD, THE BIGGEST TWERP IN CLASS! YES, I'VE HEARD IT! I'LL LET THE HEADMASTER KNOW.

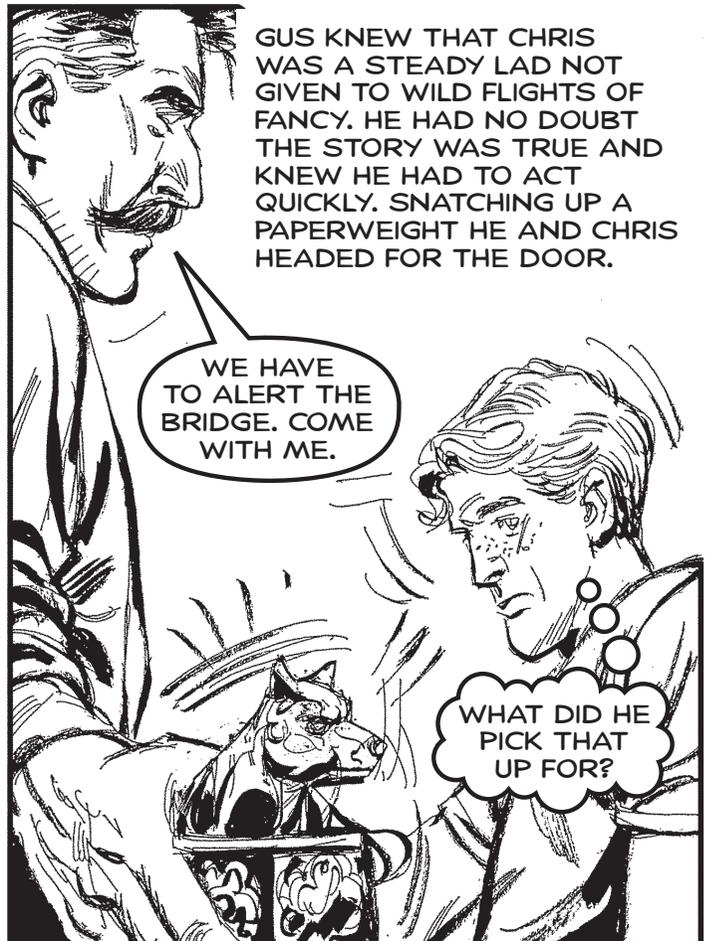
HARDLY HAD CHRIS DISAPPEARED BEFORE SHOCKING CONFIRMATION OF HIS WARNING ARRIVED IN THE SHAPE OF ARMED GERMANS.



MEANWHILE CHRIS BURST INTO GUS'S CABIN, GIVING THE HEADMASTER A START.



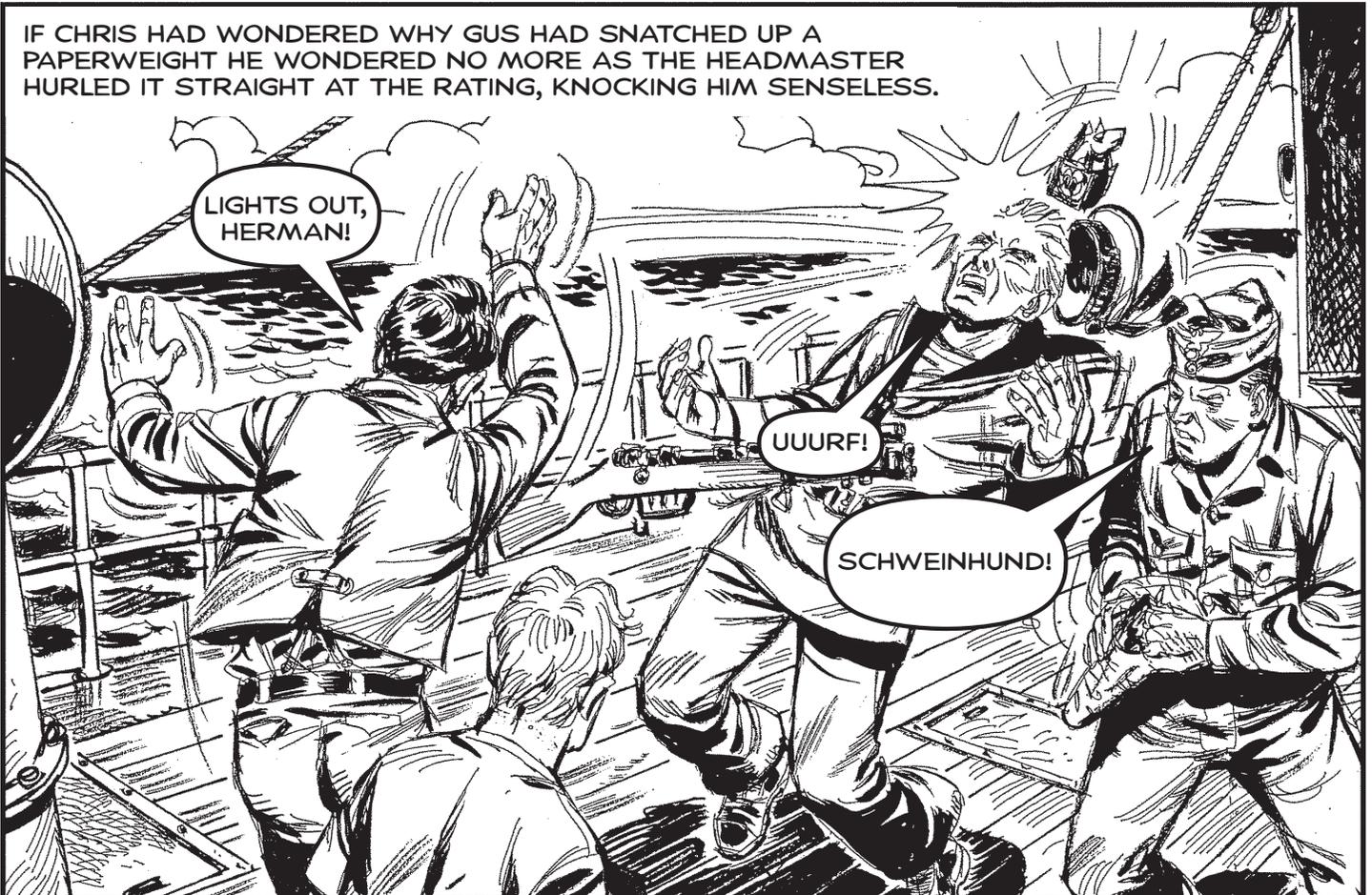
GUS KNEW THAT CHRIS WAS A STEADY LAD NOT GIVEN TO WILD FLIGHTS OF FANCY. HE HAD NO DOUBT THE STORY WAS TRUE AND KNEW HE HAD TO ACT QUICKLY. SNATCHING UP A PAPERWEIGHT HE AND CHRIS HEADED FOR THE DOOR.



BUT IT WAS TOO LATE. AS THEY STEPPED INTO THE CORRIDOR THEY RAN STRAIGHT INTO A PAIR OF GERMANS, A NAVAL RATING AND A FIGHT-SCARRED BOSUN.



IF CHRIS HAD WONDERED WHY GUS HAD SNATCHED UP A PAPERWEIGHT HE WONDERED NO MORE AS THE HEADMASTER HURLED IT STRAIGHT AT THE RATING, KNOCKING HIM SENSELESS.



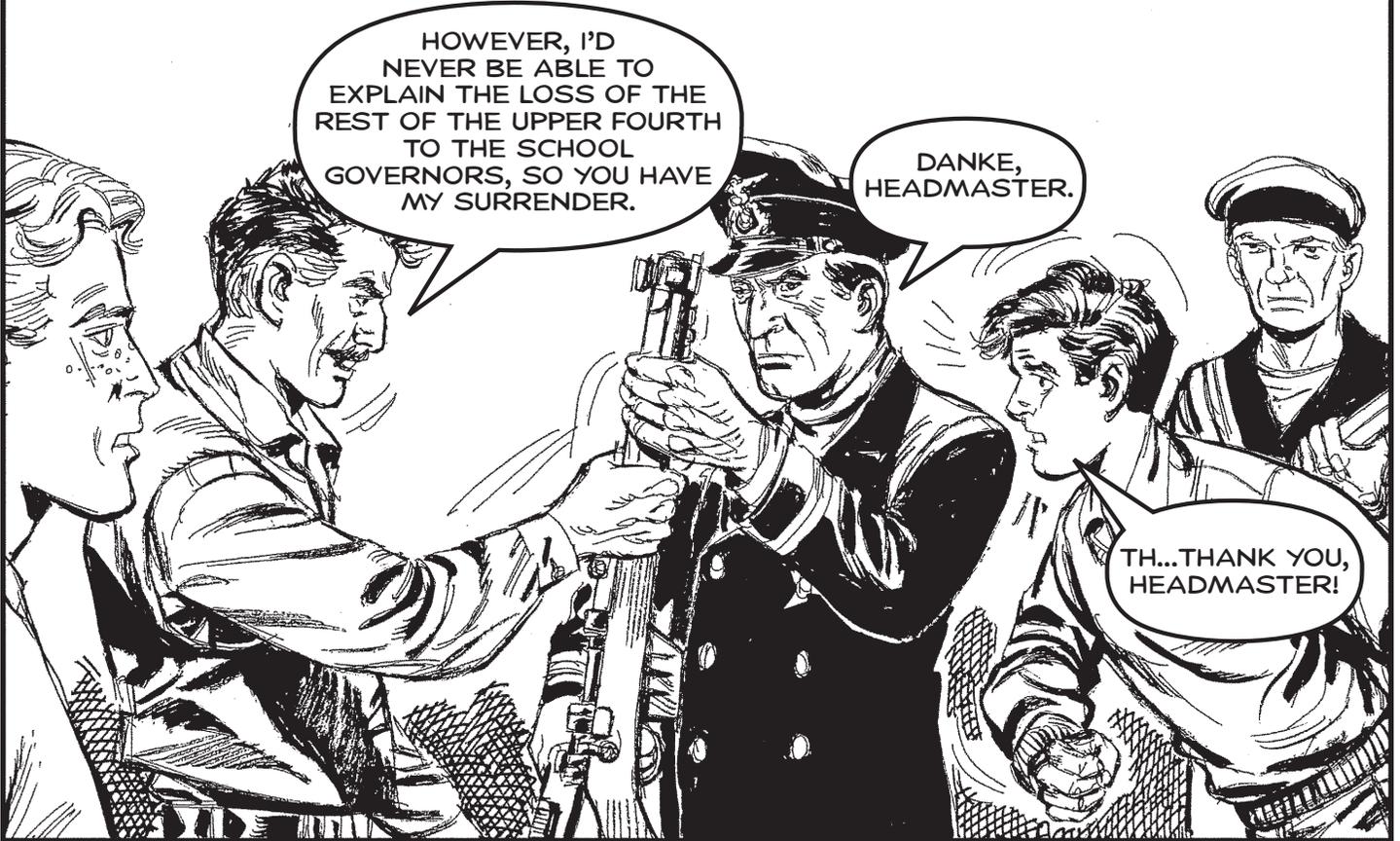
BEFORE CHRIS HAD TIME TO BLINK GUS SNATCHED UP THE FALLEN RATING'S GUN BY THE BARREL AND SWUNG THE BUTT INTO THE BOSUN'S JAW WITH THE FORCE OF A SLEDGEHAMMER.



THEY RESUMED THEIR TRIP TO THE BRIDGE TO RAISE THE ALARM BUT GOT NO FURTHER THAN THE NEXT CORNER, WHERE THEY RAN STRAIGHT INTO BRUNNER AND A MORTALLY FRIGHTENED CLEM.



WITH A SIGH GUS HANDED OVER HIS GUN.



HOWEVER, I'D NEVER BE ABLE TO EXPLAIN THE LOSS OF THE REST OF THE UPPER FOURTH TO THE SCHOOL GOVERNORS, SO YOU HAVE MY SURRENDER.

DANKE, HEADMASTER.

TH...THANK YOU, HEADMASTER!

AS THEY WERE TAKEN AWAY GUS GROWLED QUIETLY AT THE MORTIFIED CLEM.

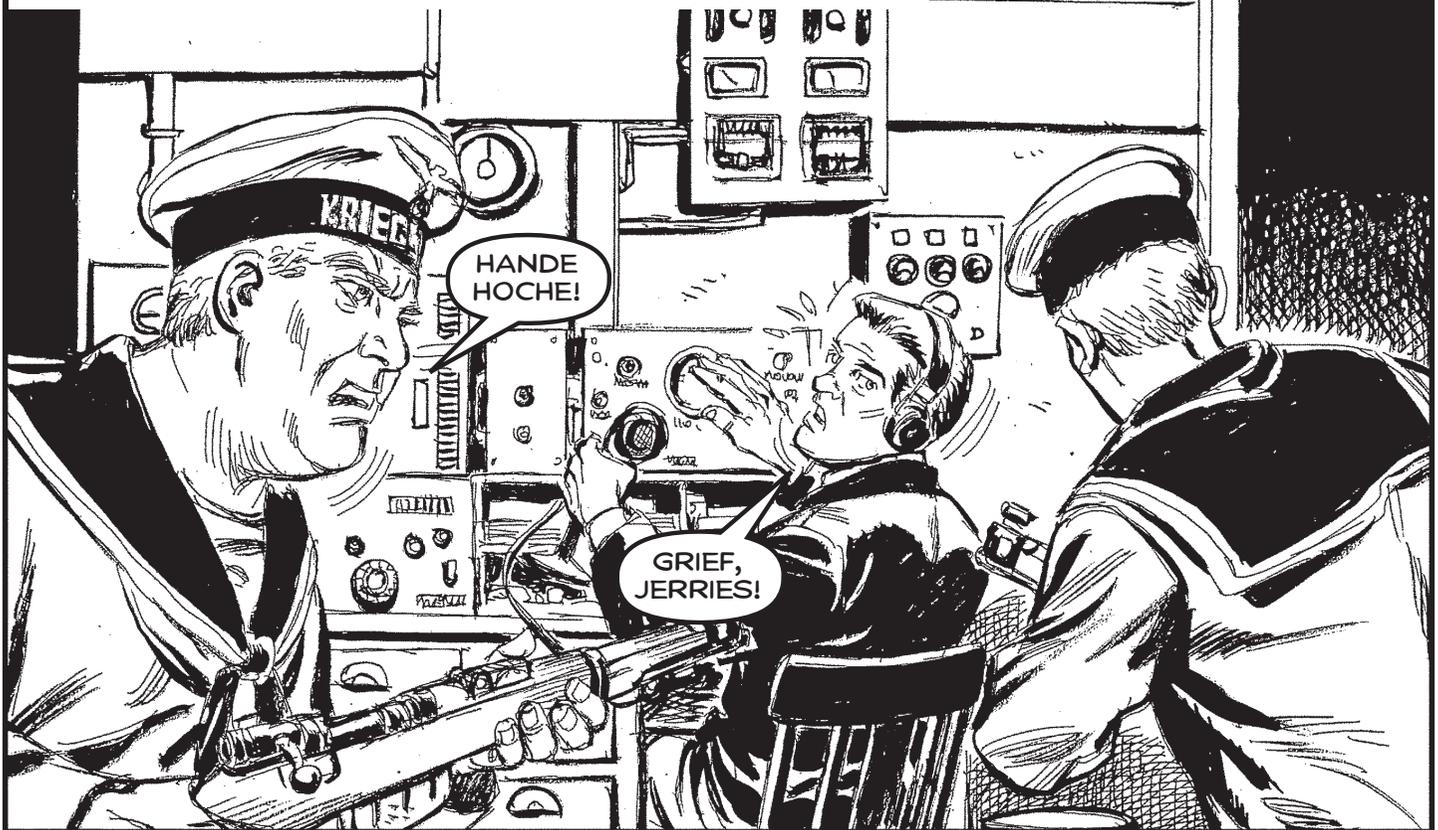


NEXT TIME SOMEONE TELLS YOU JERRIES ARE ON THE WARPATH DO NOT TREAT IT AS A LEG-PULL. UNDERSTOOD?

UN...UNDERSTOOD, HEADMASTER.

THAT'LL TEACH HIM.

UNDER BRUNNER'S FIRM COMMAND THE GERMANS SWEEPED THROUGH THE SHIP, MAKING A POINT OF TAKING THE RADIO ROOM FIRST TO PREVENT ANY ALARM BEING BROADCAST.



WITH SURPRISE ON THEIR SIDE THE GERMANS SWIFTLY SEIZED THE ENTIRE SHIP, TURNING THE BRITISH CREW INTO PRISONERS INSTEAD. BEFORE LOCKING THEM UP IN THE SAME BRIG BRUNNER TOOK THE PRECAUTION OF HAVING THE ACCESS TO THE OLD VENTILATION SHAFT WELDED SHUT.



WE NEVER EVEN KNEW THAT OLD VENTILATION SHAFT EXISTED.

THAT'S THE TROUBLE WITH SEIZING OTHER PEOPLE'S PROPERTY.

DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE STOPPED YOUR LOT DOING JUST THAT IN POLAND!

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE ARCTIC STORM, BRUNNER SLIPPED AWAY FROM THE CONVOY WITHOUT BEING NOTICED. HE KNEW EXACTLY WHERE HE WAS GOING. THEY WOULD SAIL THROUGH THE DENMARK STRAIT BETWEEN ICELAND AND GREENLAND AND INTO THE NORWEGIAN SEA, THEN HUG THE NORWEGIAN AND DANISH COASTS.



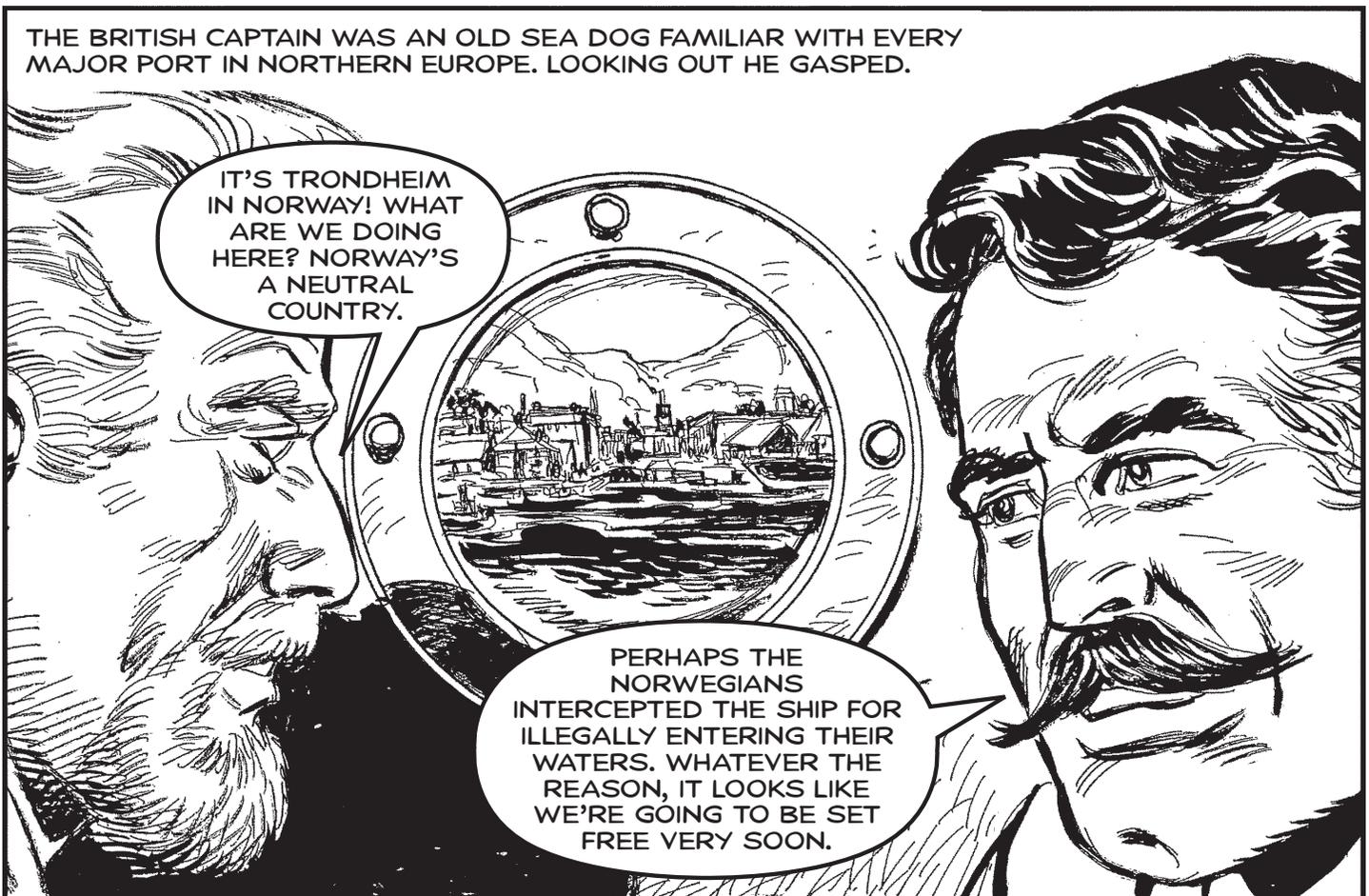
FOR ALL HIS CONFIDENT WORDS, BRUNNER KNEW THERE WAS A GOOD CHANCE OF BEING INTERCEPTED BY THE ROYAL NAVY, ESPECIALLY CLOSE TO NORWAY, BUT THE FOLLOWING DAY HE WAS SUMMONED URGENTLY TO THE RADIO ROOM.



THE PRISONERS WERE ALLOWED THE USE OF A SMALL GALLEY ABOVE THE HOLD TO PREPARE THEIR MEALS. IT HAD A SMALL PORTHOLE WITH A LIMITED VIEW OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD. A COUPLE OF DAYS LATER AS THE ENGINES CHANGED TO SLOW AHEAD GUS PEERED OUT.



THE BRITISH CAPTAIN WAS AN OLD SEA DOG FAMILIAR WITH EVERY MAJOR PORT IN NORTHERN EUROPE. LOOKING OUT HE GASPED.



IT CAME AS SOMETHING OF A SHOCK WHEN THEY WERE LED ON DECK TO DISCOVER THAT THE PORT AND TOWN WERE FIRMLY IN GERMAN HANDS. WITH A CHUCKLE BRUNNER EXPLAINED.



THE FUHRER, IN HIS WISDOM, LAUNCHED AN INVASION OF NORWAY A FEW DAYS AGO, WHICH IS WHY WE WERE ABLE TO DOCK HERE INSTEAD OF SAILING ALL THE WAY TO GERMANY.

WELL, BETTER HERE THAN THE FATHERLAND I SUPPOSE.

GUS AND THE BOYS WERE SEPARATED FROM THE REST OF THE PRISONERS AND TAKEN TO A FORMER ARMY CAMP OUTSIDE TRONDHEIM. GUS TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY OF EXCHANGING WORDS WITH A NORWEGIAN DRIVER DELIVERING SUPPLIES.



ALL IS NOT LOST, BOYS. ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCES HAVE LANDED AT SEVERAL SMALLER PORTS BOTH NORTH AND SOUTH OF HERE, THE ROYAL NAVY HAS INFLICTED HEAVY LOSSES ON THE GERMANS AND THE R.A.F. IS IN ACTION.

SO ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS WAIT. SOUNDS GREAT!

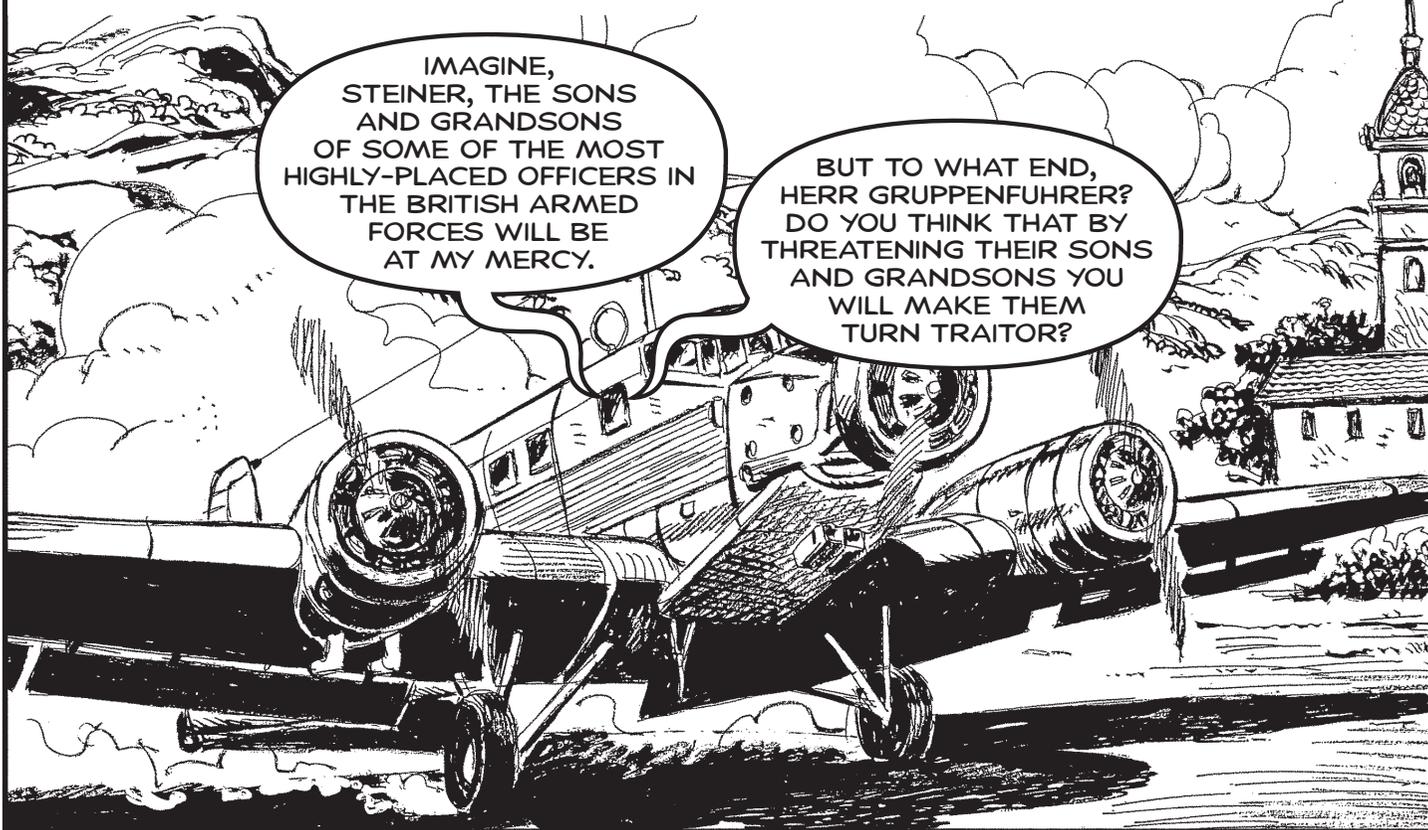
GUS'S NEXT WORDS QUICKLY WIPED THE GRIN FROM CLEM'S FACE.



ANY HOPES THAT THE BRITISH AND FRENCH EXPEDITIONARY FORCES COULD TURN THE TABLES PROVED WILDLY OPTIMISTIC. THE GERMAN SEIZURE OF MAJOR AIRFIELDS ENABLED THE LUFTWAFFE TO OPERATE WITH VIRTUAL IMPUNITY. THIS WAS NOT A CAMPAIGN THE ALLIES WERE GOING TO WIN.



THE FOLLOWING WEEK SAW THE ARRIVAL AT TRONDHEIM OF A SPECIAL TRANSPORT FLIGHT, ONE THAT BODED ILL FOR GUS AND THE BOYS OF THE UPPER FOURTH OF ST. SEBASTIAN'S.



IMAGINE, STEINER, THE SONS AND GRANDSONS OF SOME OF THE MOST HIGHLY-PLACED OFFICERS IN THE BRITISH ARMED FORCES WILL BE AT MY MERCY.

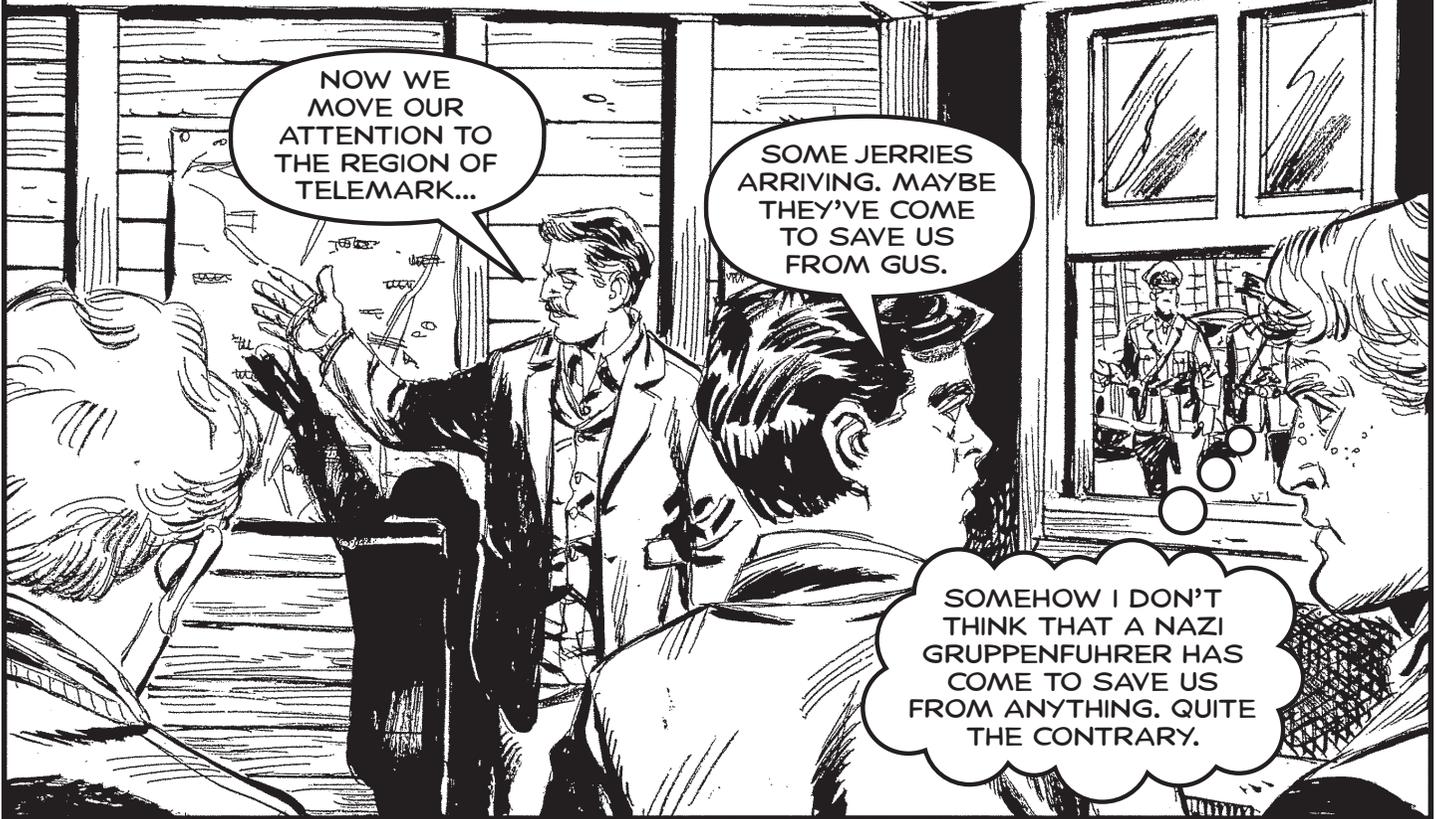
BUT TO WHAT END, HERR GRUPPENFUHRER? DO YOU THINK THAT BY THREATENING THEIR SONS AND GRANDSONS YOU WILL MAKE THEM TURN TRAITOR?

GESTAPO CHIEF ERNST BITTERFELD ANSWERED CAPTAIN OTTO STEINER, CHUCKLING AT HIS AIDE'S NAIVETY.



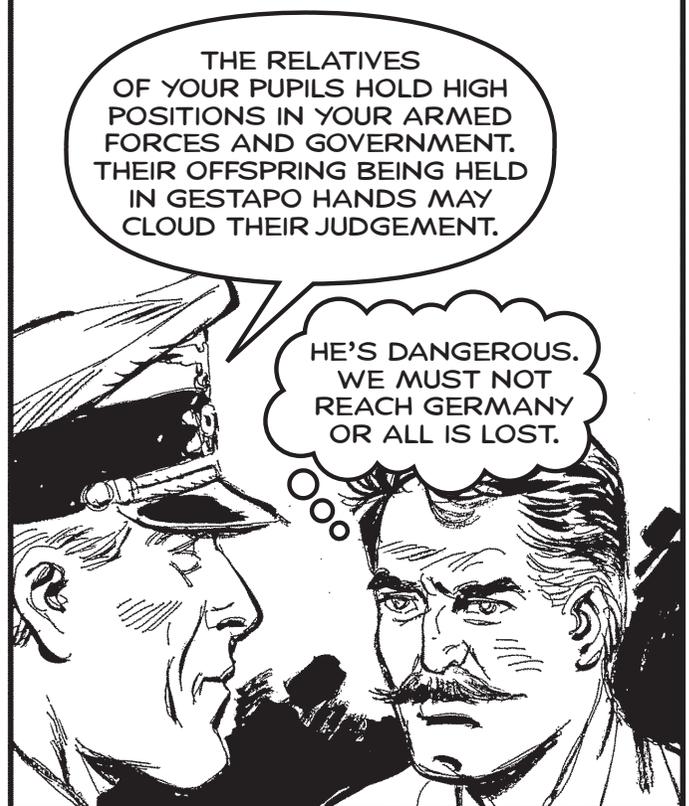
THEY ONLY NEED TO BELIEVE THAT THEIR ACTIONS MAY HAVE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE HOSTAGES. IT WILL PREY ON THEIR MINDS, BLUNT THEIR USUAL DECISIVENESS AND LEAD THEM INTO MAKING MISTAKES, PERHAPS CATASTROPHIC ONES. THIS IS TRUE PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE, STEINER.

AT THE FORMER ARMY CAMP, GUS WAS CONTINUING WITH LESSONS, THIS ONE BEING ON NORWEGIAN GEOGRAPHY. BORED TO TEARS CLEM PERKED UP AS BITTERFELD'S STAFF CAR ARRIVED OUTSIDE.



THE GERMANS MARCHED INTO THE CLASSROOM AND BROUGHT THE LESSON TO AN ABRUPT END.

WITH A WOLFISH SMILE BITTERFELD TOOK GUS ASIDE FOR A QUIET WORD, ONE THAT FILLED THE HEADMASTER WITH DREAD.

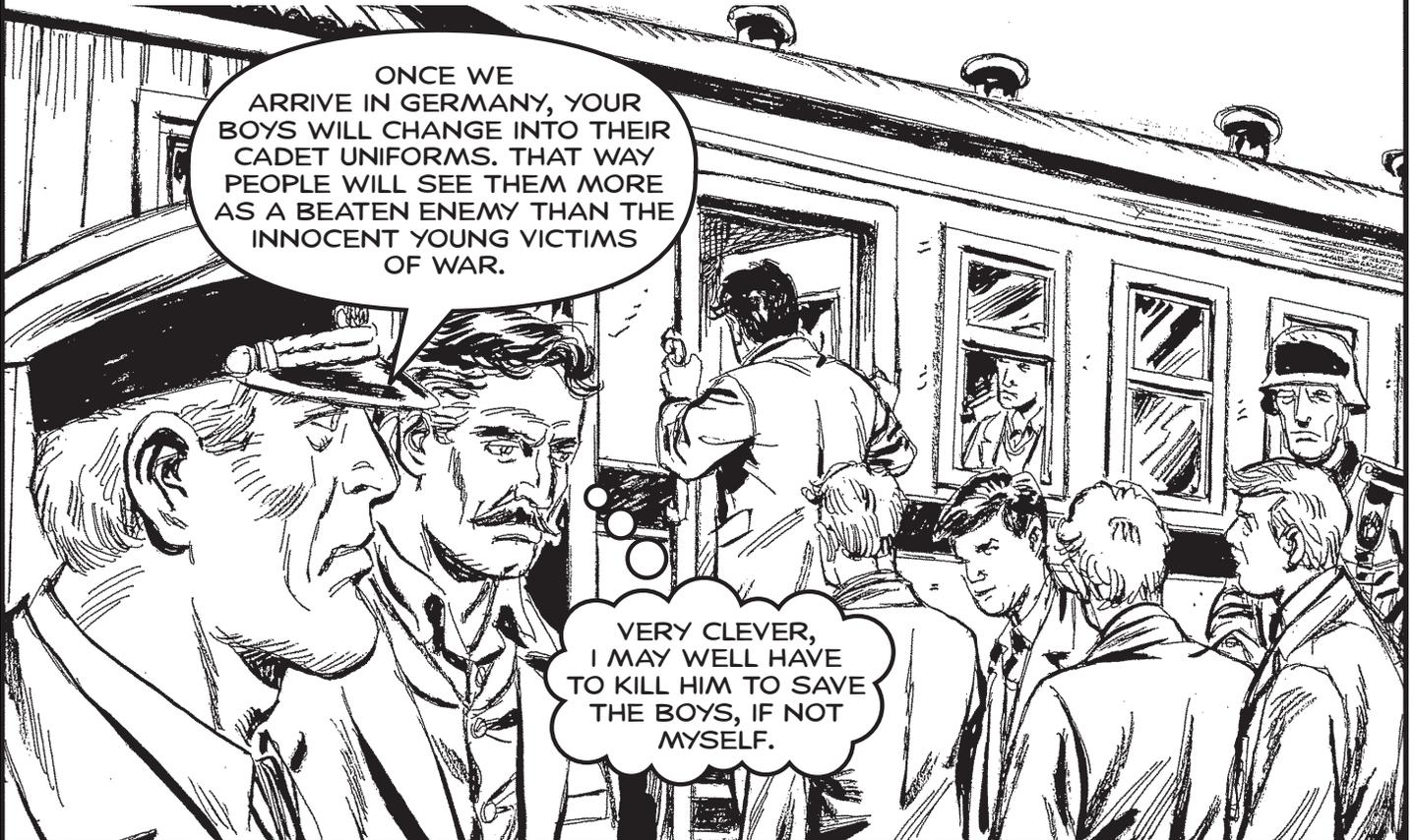


THE BOYS' LUGGAGE HAD BEEN BROUGHT ASHORE AT TRONDHEIM. AS THEY MADE READY TO LEAVE, CHRIS HAPPENED TO SPOT GUS REMOVING A SLIM LEATHER POUCH FROM A SECRET COMPARTMENT IN HIS STEAMER TRUNK.

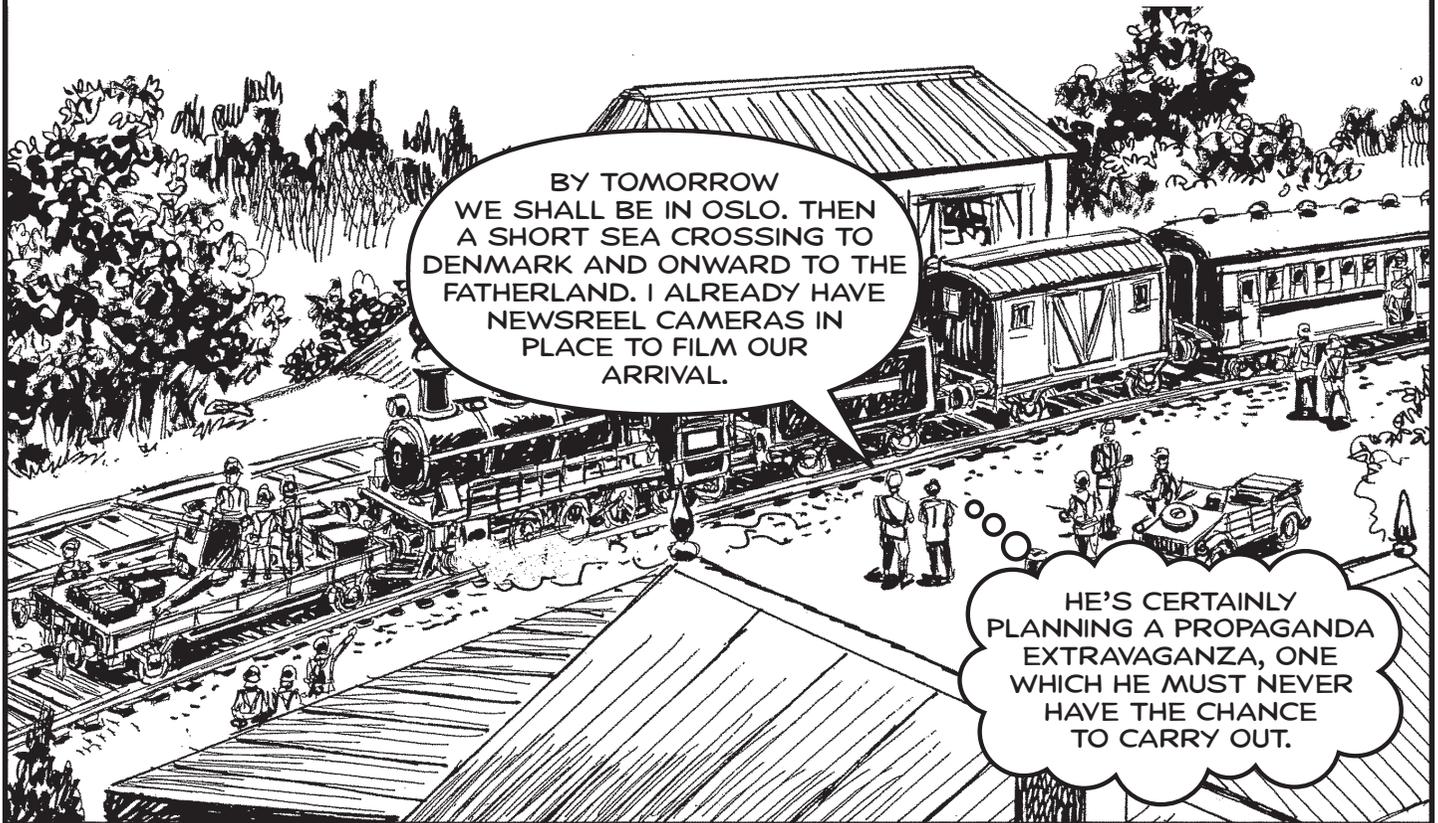


UNAWARE HE'D BEEN SEEN, GUS SLIPPED THE POUCH INTO HIS JACKET.

AS THE BOYS PREPARED TO BOARD A WAITING TRAIN COACH BITTERFELD REVEALED MORE OF HIS DARKER SIDE TO GUS.



AS ONE OF THE TWO RAILWAY ROUTES FROM TRONDHEIM TO OSLO WAS NOW FULLY IN GERMAN HANDS BITTERFELD HAD ARRANGED FOR A FIRST CLASS CARRIAGE TO BE ATTACHED TO THE END OF A SOUTHBOUND SUPPLY TRAIN.



AFTER A COUPLE OF HOURS CHRIS NOTICED THAT GUS SEEMED DEEP IN THOUGHT. HE WONDERED WHAT HE WAS THINKING ABOUT, AND WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY SURPRISED IF HE'D KNOWN.



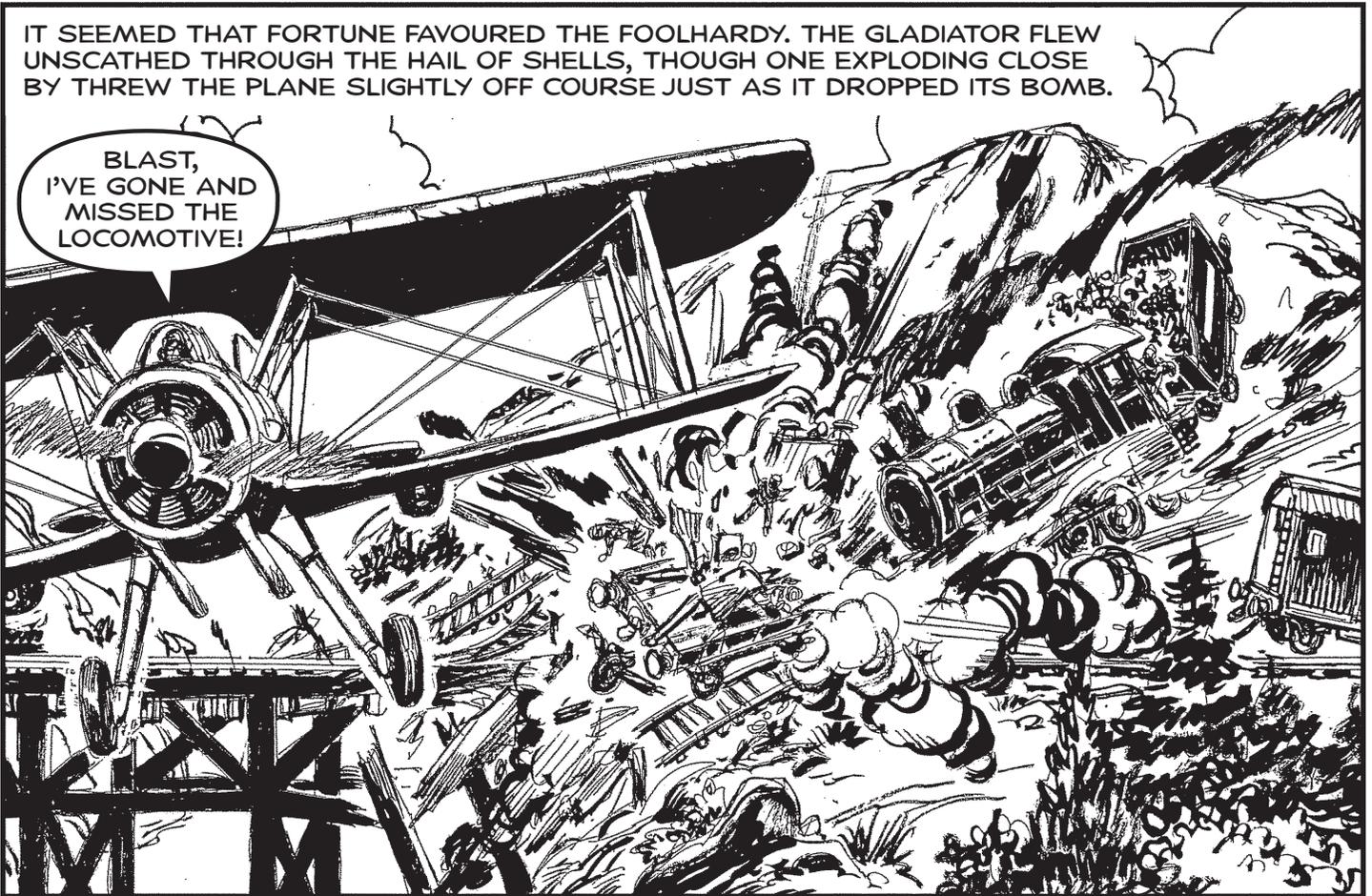
TO THEIR AMAZEMENT A LONE R.A.F. GLADIATOR WAS FLYING IN TO ATTACK THE TRAIN. ITS PILOT SEEMED OBLIVIOUS TO THE BARRAGE OF A.A. FIRE DIRECTED AT HIM.

THE MAN'S A LUNATIC. HE'S FLYING RIGHT INTO THE TEETH OF THOSE GUNS.



IT SEEMED THAT FORTUNE FAVOURED THE FOOLHARDY. THE GLADIATOR FLEW UNSCATHED THROUGH THE HAIL OF SHELLS, THOUGH ONE EXPLODING CLOSE BY THREW THE PLANE SLIGHTLY OFF COURSE JUST AS IT DROPPED ITS BOMB.

BLAST, I'VE GONE AND MISSED THE LOCOMOTIVE!



FIND
MORE
FREE
MAGAZINES

FREEMAGS.CC

LADY LUCK SMILED AGAIN ON THE RECKLESS PILOT, THE BOMB SCORING A DIRECT HIT ON THE A.A. GUNS' AMMO STORE RESULTING IN A VIOLENT EXPLOSION THAT SEVERELY DAMAGED THE BRIDGE IT WAS TRAVELLING OVER.



THE WEIGHT OF THE ENGINE IMMEDIATELY BEHIND THE FLATCAR COMPLETED THE DESTRUCTION, WHILE BEHIND IT THE REST OF THE TRAIN EITHER FOLLOWED IT INTO THE RIVER OR WAS DRAGGED OFF THE RAILS, AS WAS THE FATE OF THE CARRIAGE AT THE REAR.



THOUGH THE CARRIAGE STAYED UPRIGHT THE VICIOUS JOLTING IT ENDURED COMING OFF THE RAILS HAD THROWN EVERYONE TO THE FLOOR. GUS AND ONE OF THE GUARDS WERE FIRST TO RECOVER.



WITHOUT A MOMENT'S HESITATION GUS PIVOTED ON ONE LEG AND USED HIS OTHER ONE TO DELIVER A DEVASTATING KICK INTO THE SIDE OF THE GUARD'S FACE.



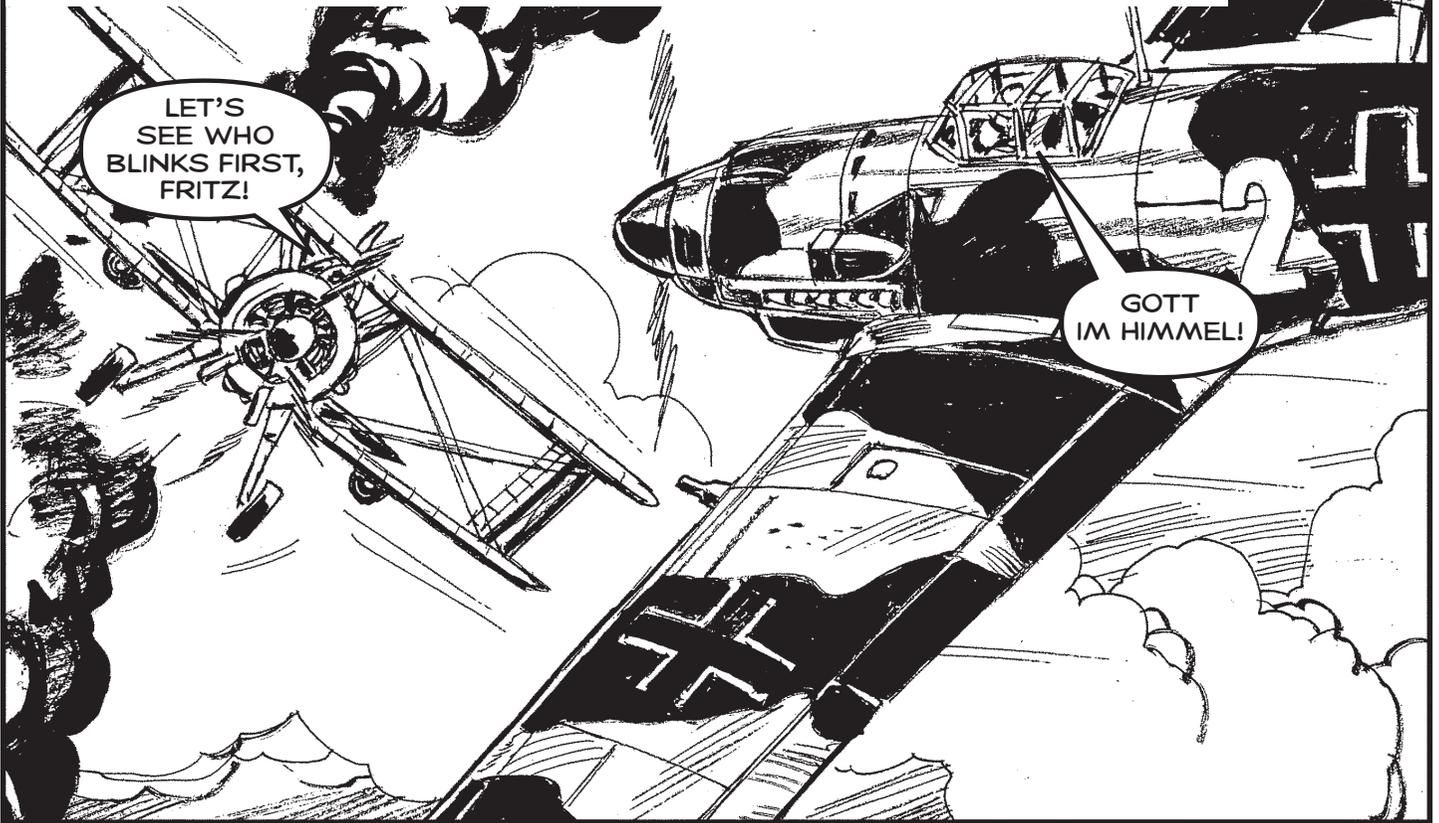
GUS SNATCHED UP THE GUARD'S FALLEN SCHMEISSER. HANDLING IT LIKE AN EXPERT HE TURNED IT ON THE REMAINING THREE GUARDS AND CUT THEM DOWN WHILE, IN NEAR PANIC, BITTERFELD AND STEINER SCRAMBLED TO GET AWAY.



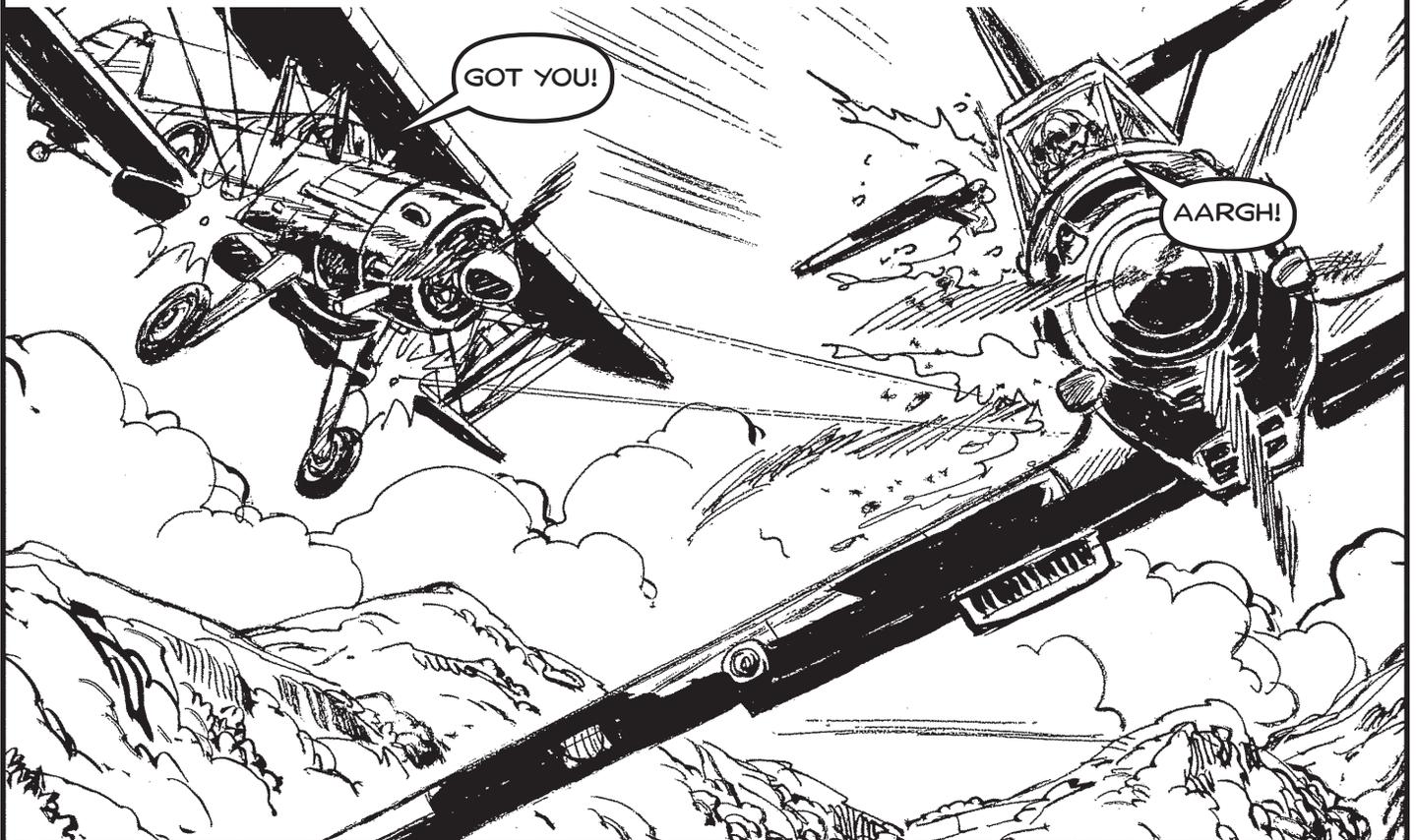
BY THE TIME GUS AND THE BOYS GOT OUT, THE TWO GERMANS WERE WELL AWAY. MEANWHILE THE GLADIATOR FLEW OVER ONCE MORE, ITS PILOT PEERING DOWN IN ASTONISHMENT.



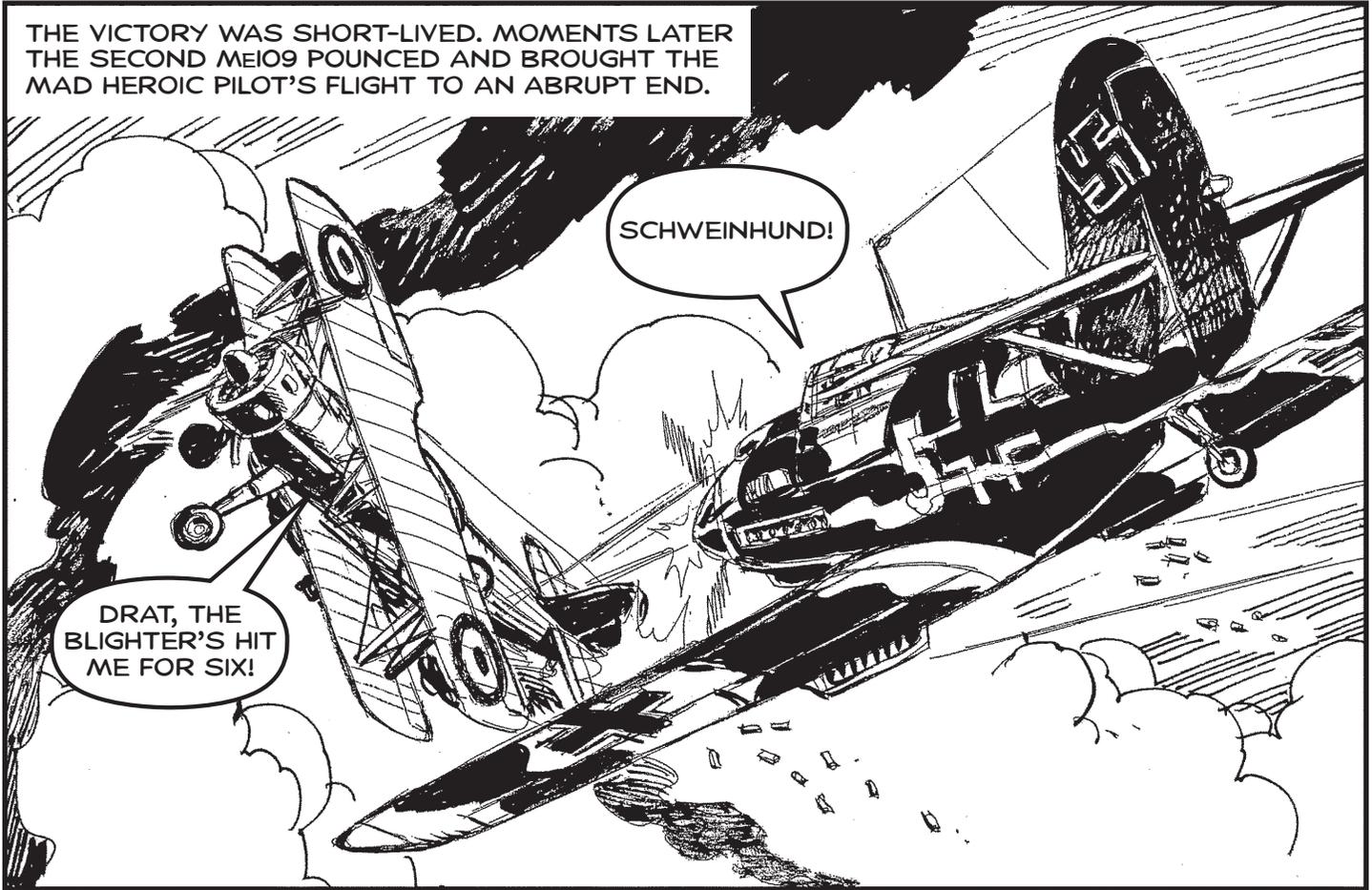
DISPLAYING THE SAME MAD BRAVERY HE'D SHOWN ATTACKING THE TRAIN, THE PILOT THREW THE BIPLANE INTO AN INCREDIBLY TIGHT TURN THAT BROUGHT HIM OUT ON A HEAD-ON COLLISION COURSE WITH THE FIRST OF HIS ATTACKERS.



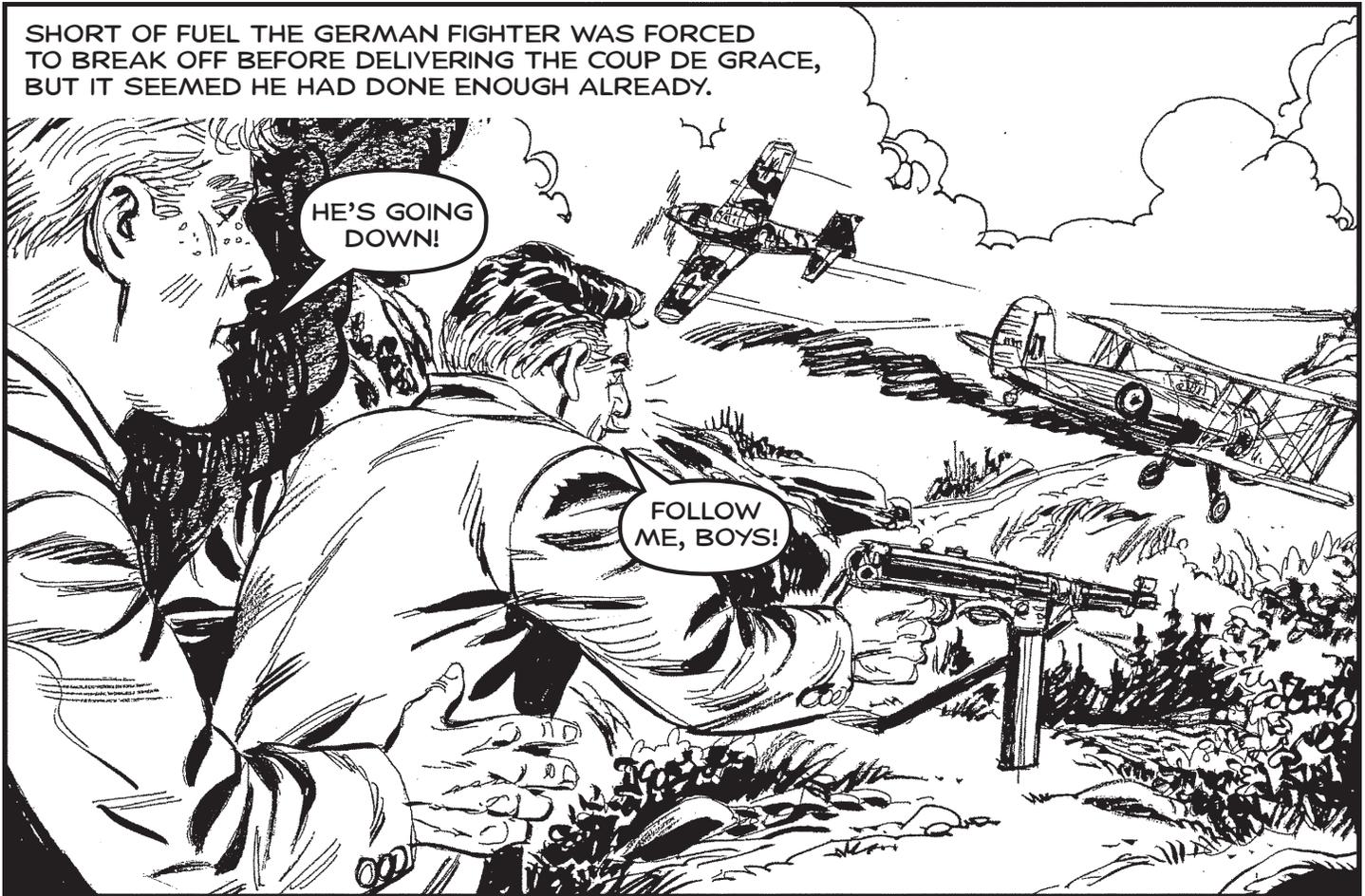
THE GERMAN PILOT'S NERVE CRACKED FIRST. AS HE TRIED TO PULL AWAY HE WAS BLASTED BY THE GLADIATOR'S FOUR BROWNING .303 MACHINE GUNS.



THE VICTORY WAS SHORT-LIVED. MOMENTS LATER THE SECOND ME109 POUNCED AND BROUGHT THE MAD HEROIC PILOT'S FLIGHT TO AN ABRUPT END.



SHORT OF FUEL THE GERMAN FIGHTER WAS FORCED TO BREAK OFF BEFORE DELIVERING THE COUP DE GRACE, BUT IT SEEMED HE HAD DONE ENOUGH ALREADY.



ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BRIDGE THE GLADIATOR HAD CRASHED INTO A SHALLOW MELT-WATER POOL. THE PILOT WAS FLOUNDERING THROUGH THE ICY WATER TOWARDS THE SHORE, WAVING HIS PISTOL MENACINGLY.



GUS TOOK A BREATH AND BELLOWED IN HIS BEST HEADMASTER FASHION.



SHAWCROSS MINOR WAS, OF COURSE, YET ANOTHER OLD SEB. GUS SPOTTED A SHEPHERD'S HUT WHERE THEY COULD TAKE SHELTER AND LIGHT A FIRE AS HE BRUSHED OFF HIS FORMER PUPIL'S BABBLED APOLOGIES WITH A BARKING LAUGH.



IF...IF I'D KNOWN YOU WERE ON THAT... THAT TRAIN ALONG WITH THE...THE UPPER FOURTH FROM...FROM ST SEBASTIAN'S I...I WOULD NEVER HAVE ATTACKED IT, HEADMASTER!

HA, THEN IT'S A JOLLY GOOD THING YOU DIDN'T OR WE'D STILL BE ON OUR WAY TO A GESTAPO PRISON!

SHAWCROSS EXPLAINED THAT TWENTY MILES WEST WAS ROVANGER JUNCTION ON THE MAIN LINE BETWEEN OSLO AND TRONDHEIM. THE ARMY HAD USED IT TO ADVANCE SOUTH TOWARDS OSLO BUT THE GERMANS WERE TOO STRONG FOR THEM AND THEY WERE WITHDRAWING ALONG A BRANCH LINE LEADING TO A SMALL PORT.



THE NAVY WILL EVACUATE US IF WE CAN REACH THE JUNCTION.

THEY SET OFF WITHOUT DELAY, THOUGH THE PILOT WAS STILL MYSTIFIED ABOUT ONE THING. NOT THAT GUS'S REPLY ENLIGHTENED HIM AT ALL.



BY THE WAY, HEADMASTER, WHAT WERE YOU DOING ON A GERMAN TRAIN IN NORWAY WITH SEB'S UPPER FOURTH?

TAKING THE SCENIC ROUTE TO NEWFOUNDLAND, OF COURSE!

CHRIS TOLD THE OLD SEB THE WHOLE STORY.

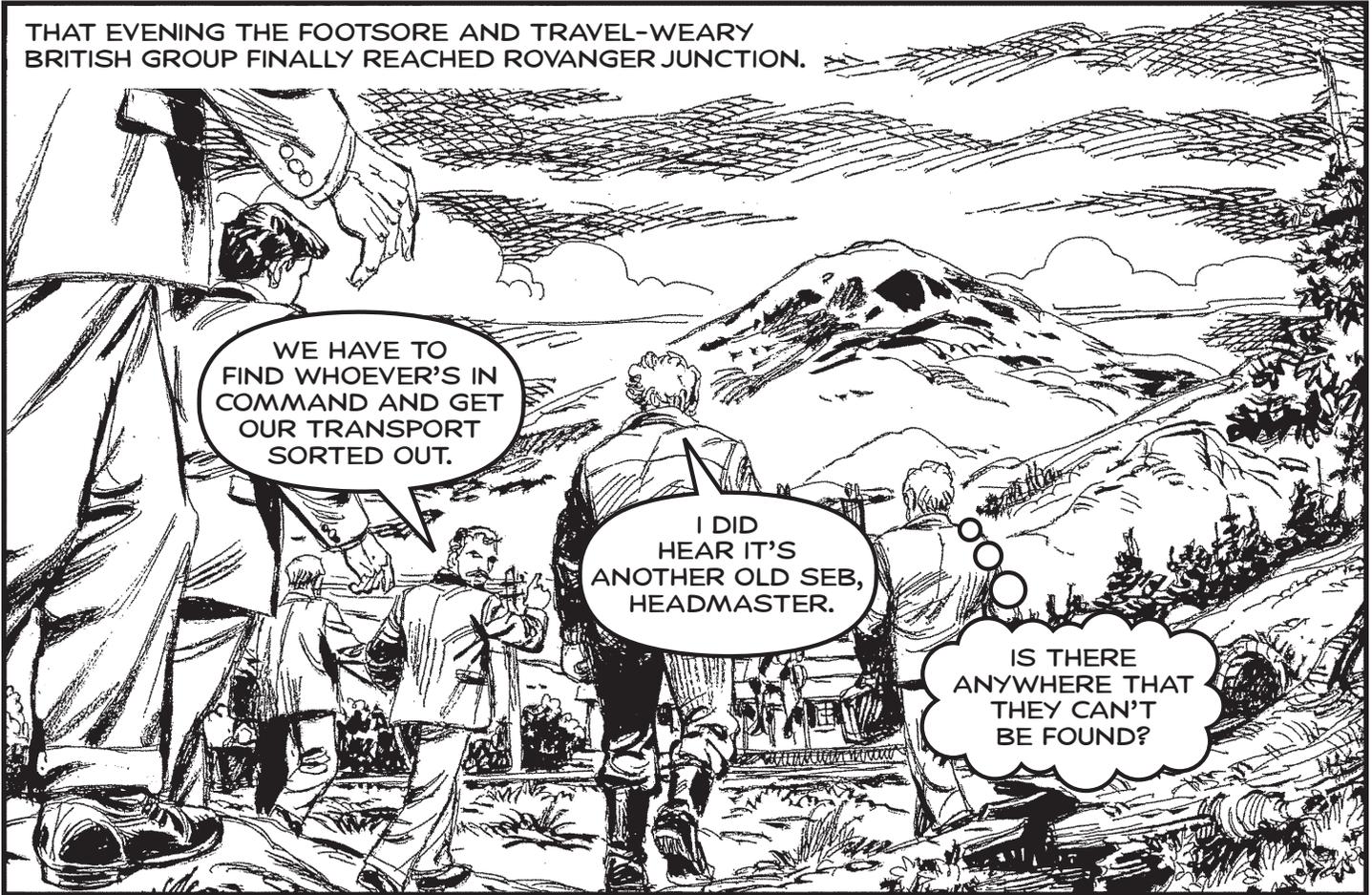
MEANWHILE BITTERFELD HAD REACHED A ROAD CLOSE TO THE RAILWAY AND WAVED DOWN AN ARMY COLUMN TRAVELLING TO TRONDHEIM. HE ASKED FOR A MAP AND PORED OVER IT.



BITTERFELD USED THE RADIO TO CONTACT H.Q. WHAT HE WAS TOLD BROUGHT A SMILE TO HIS LIPS.



THAT EVENING THE FOOTSORE AND TRAVEL-WEARY BRITISH GROUP FINALLY REACHED ROVANGER JUNCTION.



WE HAVE TO FIND WHOEVER'S IN COMMAND AND GET OUR TRANSPORT SORTED OUT.

I DID HEAR IT'S ANOTHER OLD SEB, HEADMASTER.

IS THERE ANYWHERE THAT THEY CAN'T BE FOUND?

AS IT HAPPENED THE TRANSPORT OFFICER IN CHARGE WAS NONE OTHER THAN MONTY BRAITHWAITE WHO'D BEEN SECONDED TO THE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE. TO SAY HE WAS SURPRISED TO SEE GUS AND THE BOYS WAS SOMETHING OF AN UNDERSTATEMENT.

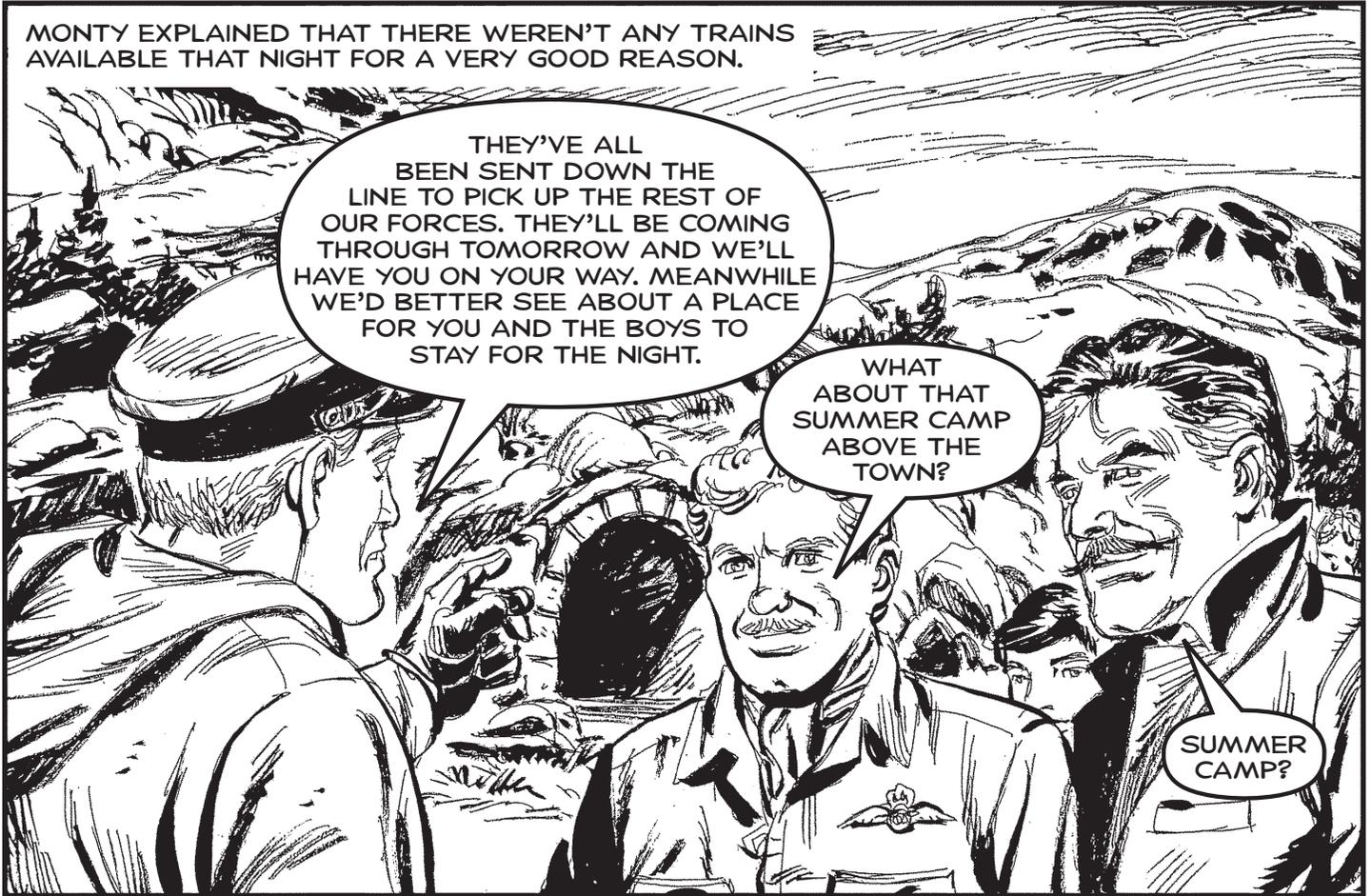


GOOD LORD, HEADMASTER, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? LAST TIME WE MET YOU WERE ON YOUR WAY TO GLASGOW TO CATCH A SHIP FOR NEWFOUNDLAND.

IT'S A LONG STORY.

BUT IT WAS AN ENTERTAINING ONE, WHICH SHAWCROSS PROCEEDED TO TELL TO HIS FELLOW OLD SEB. GUS THEN ASKED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF FIXING A RIDE TO THE EVACUATION PORT.

MONTY EXPLAINED THAT THERE WEREN'T ANY TRAINS AVAILABLE THAT NIGHT FOR A VERY GOOD REASON.



THEY'VE ALL BEEN SENT DOWN THE LINE TO PICK UP THE REST OF OUR FORCES. THEY'LL BE COMING THROUGH TOMORROW AND WE'LL HAVE YOU ON YOUR WAY. MEANWHILE WE'D BETTER SEE ABOUT A PLACE FOR YOU AND THE BOYS TO STAY FOR THE NIGHT.

WHAT ABOUT THAT SUMMER CAMP ABOVE THE TOWN?

SUMMER CAMP?

MONTY RUSTLED UP SOME FOOD AND BEDDING ALONG WITH A COUPLE OF LORRIES TO CARRY THEM UP TO THE EMPTY SUMMER CAMP A FEW HUNDRED FEET ABOVE THE JUNCTION.



HERE WE ARE, HEADMASTER. THE CABINS ARE BASIC BUT CLEAN, AND ONE HAS A WOOD-FIRED STOVE FOR COOKING AND HOT WATER.

SOUNDS ALMOST AS GOOD AS SAINT SEBASTIAN'S.

SOUNDS A JOLLY SIGHT BETTER IF YOU ASK ME.

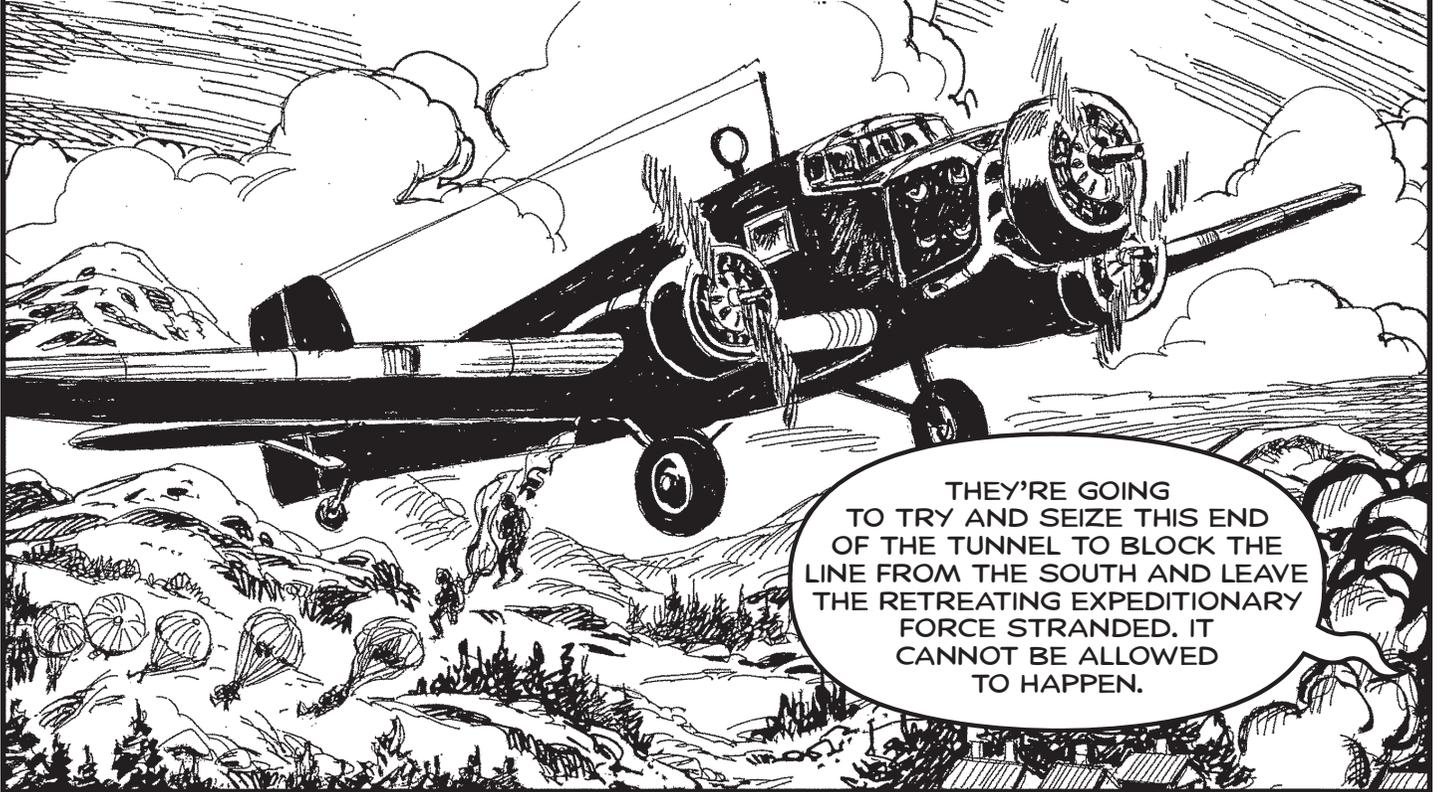
AFTER A WARMING MEAL THEY SETTLED DOWN FOR THE NIGHT ONLY TO BE RUDELY AWAKENED AT DAYBREAK BY A SERIES OF HUGE EXPLOSIONS.



THE CAUSE OF THE EXPLOSIONS WAS OBVIOUS ENOUGH. STUKAS WERE DIVE-BOMBING THE JUNCTION.



COMING FROM THE NORTH A SQUADRON OF JU52 TRANSPORTS BEGAN THE PROCESS OF DELIVERING A BATTALION-SIZED FORCE OF PARATROOPS. GUS REALISED IMMEDIATELY WHAT THEIR OBJECTIVE MUST BE.



THEY'RE GOING TO TRY AND SEIZE THIS END OF THE TUNNEL TO BLOCK THE LINE FROM THE SOUTH AND LEAVE THE RETREATING EXPEDITIONARY FORCE STRANDED. IT CANNOT BE ALLOWED TO HAPPEN.

WITHOUT FURTHER ADO GUS PULLED ON HIS JACKET AND SET OFF URGENTLY, TELLING THE BOYS WHAT TO DO AS HE LEFT.



I'M GOING TO THE JUNCTION. TAKE COVER IN THE WOODS, BOYS.

WHAT'S THAT FALLING OUT OF HIS JACKET POCKET?

IT WAS THE SAME LEATHER POUCH THAT GUS HAD KEPT HIDDEN IN HIS STEAMER TRUNK. CHRIS DARTED FORWARD AND SCOOPED IT UP, CALLING OUT TO THE RETREATING FIGURE.



WAIT, HEADMASTER, YOU'VE DROPPED...

LOOK OUT!

ONE OF THE STUKAS HAD BEEN HIT BY BRITISH A.A. FIRE FROM THE JUNCTION AND CRASHED RIGHT NEXT TO THE CABINS, EXPLODING ON IMPACT.



AS THE DUST SETTLED THEY SAW THAT THE SIDE OF A LOCKED HUT HAD BEEN RIPPED AWAY BY THE BLAST, REVEALING A STORE OF RIFLES INSIDE.



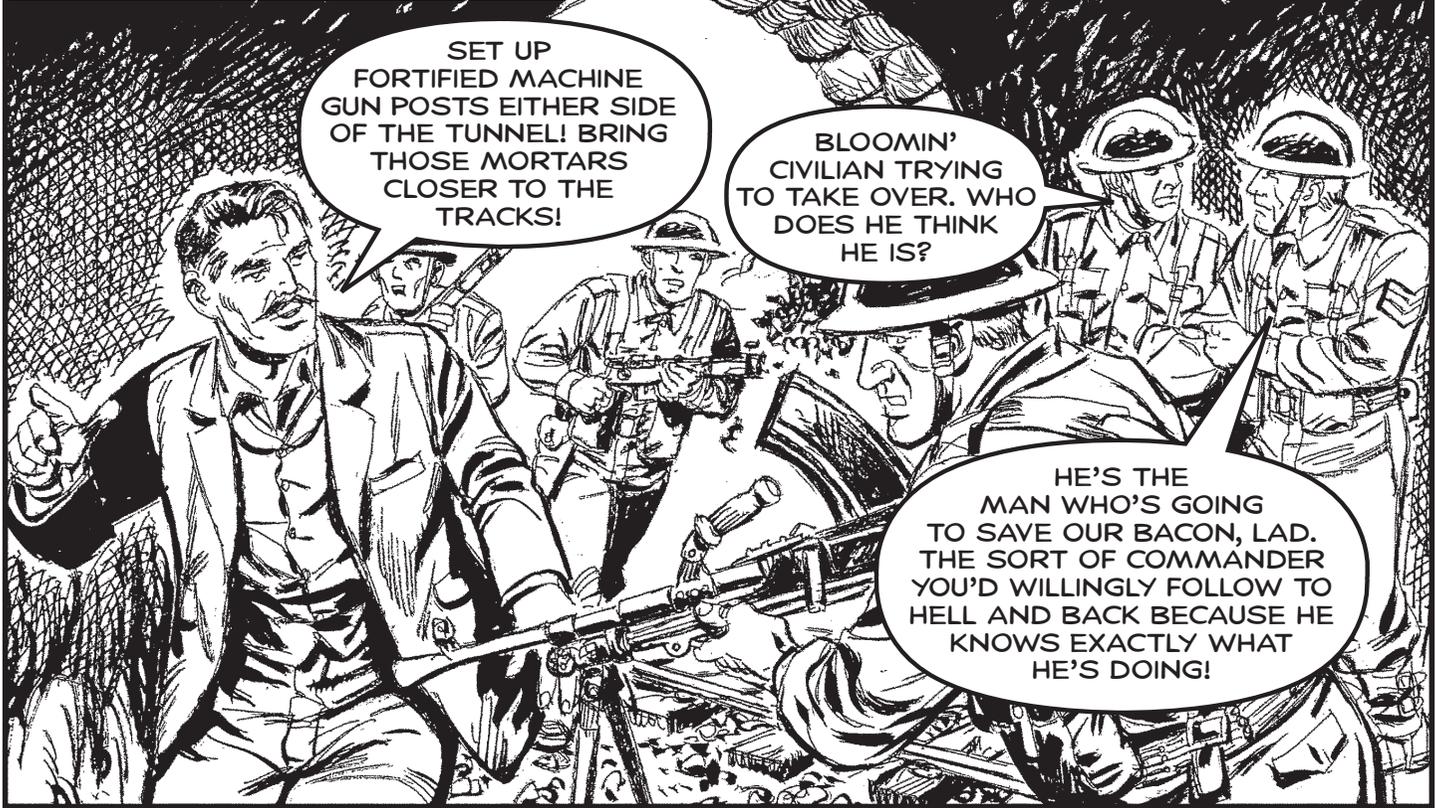
THEY WERE FAMILIAR WITH RIFLES FROM THEIR CADET TRAINING AND WERE SOON HEADING FOR THE WOODS WITH THEIR BOOTY. CHRIS GLANCED DOWN THE HILL BUT THERE WAS NO SIGN OF GUS.



GUS REACHED THE JUNCTION TO FIND IT IN CHAOS. MONTY BRAITHWAITE WAS A COMPETENT TRANSPORT OFFICER, BUT IN A PERILOUS SITUATION LIKE THIS HE WAS COMPLETELY OUT OF HIS DEPTH, AS WAS ABUNDANTLY CLEAR TO HIS OLD HEADMASTER.



GUS STRODE AROUND BARKING ORDERS. AT LEAST ONE SOLDIER DIDN'T LIKE IT, BUT HIS LONG-SERVING SERGEANT KNEW BETTER, RECOGNISING THE FIRM VOICE OF COMMAND.



SET UP FORTIFIED MACHINE GUN POSTS EITHER SIDE OF THE TUNNEL! BRING THOSE MORTARS CLOSER TO THE TRACKS!

BLOOMIN' CIVILIAN TRYING TO TAKE OVER. WHO DOES HE THINK HE IS?

HE'S THE MAN WHO'S GOING TO SAVE OUR BACON, LAD. THE SORT OF COMMANDER YOU'D WILLINGLY FOLLOW TO HELL AND BACK BECAUSE HE KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT HE'S DOING!

MEANWHILE THE GERMAN PARATROOPS HAD LINKED UP. WASTING NO MORE TIME THEY SWEEPED THROUGH THE SMALL TOWN TOWARDS THE JUNCTION AND THE ALL-IMPORTANT TUNNEL.



DRIVE THE BRITISHERS OUT!

FOR A FEW MINUTES IT LOOKED AS IF THEY WERE GOING TO SWEEP ALL BEFORE THEM, BUT THEN THEY RAN INTO THE BRICK WALL OF GUS'S DEFENSIVE CONCENTRATION. ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS, MACHINE GUNS AND MORTARS BROUGHT THE ONSLAUGHT TO A SHUDDERING HALT.



CHOOSE YOUR TARGETS. DON'T WASTE AMMO!

AARGH!

TURN BACK! THEY'RE TOO STRONG FOR US.

THE GERMAN COMMANDER HAD HOPED TO REACH THE TUNNEL WITHOUT DELAY, BUT THE SPEED AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE BRITISH DEFENCE FORCED HIM TO PAUSE AND REGROUP.



THIS IS GOING TO BE A TOUGHER THAN EXPECTED NUT TO CRACK BUT WE'VE GOT TO SEIZE THAT TUNNEL ENTRANCE BEFORE BRITISH REINFORCEMENTS ARRIVE FROM THE SOUTH, WHATEVER THE COST.

MEANWHILE A NEW PLAYER WAS ARRIVING ON THE SCENE. HAVING DRIVEN THROUGH THE NIGHT FROM TRONHEIM, BITTERFELD AND A SQUAD OF S.S. TROOPS CAME IN SIGHT OF ROVANGER.



THEY STOPPED FOR A BETTER LOOK. STEINER SCANNED THE WHOLE SCENE CAREFULLY AND REACHED A LOGICAL CONCLUSION.



BITTERFELD TURNED HIS BINOCULARS ON THE CAMP, DISAPPOINTED TO SEE THAT IT WAS DESERTED. HE WAS ABOUT TO ACCEPT THAT STEINER WAS RIGHT ABOUT THE BOYS BEING IN THE TUNNEL WHEN CLEM BRIEFLY STEPPED CLEAR OF THE WOODS BEYOND.



AT THE EDGE OF THE WOODS CHRIS GRABBED CLEM AND HAULED HIM BACK UNDER COVER.



MUCH AS HE WANTED TO DEFEND GUS CHRIS HAD TO ADMIT THAT CLEM WAS PROBABLY RIGHT. PUTTING HIS HAND IN HIS POCKET HE SUDDENLY REMEMBERED THAT HE STILL HAD GUS'S POUCH. CLEM WANTED TO KNOW WHAT IT WAS.



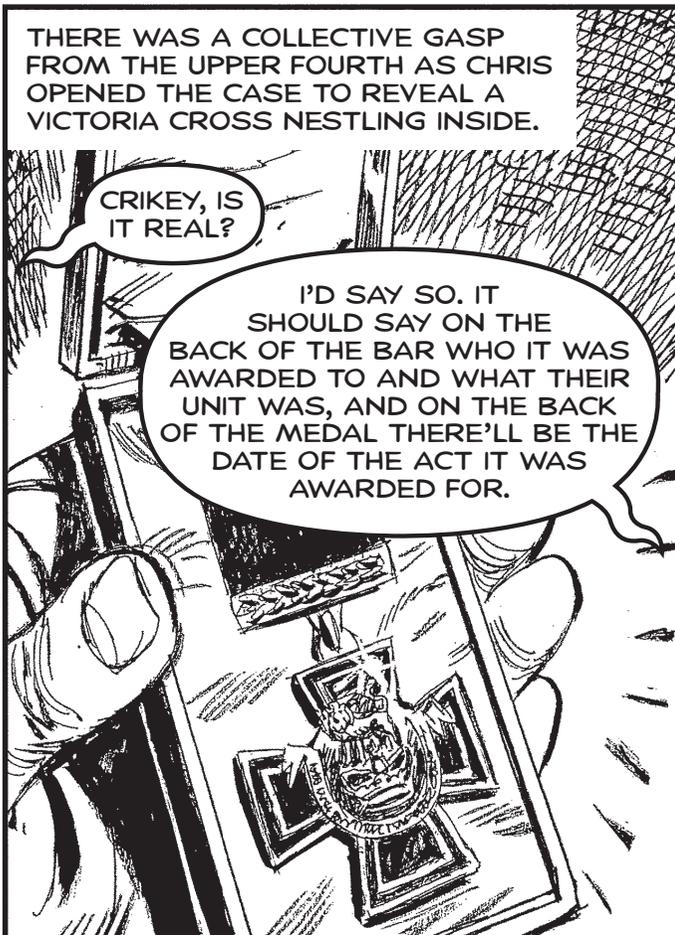
SOMEWHAT RELUCTANTLY CHRIS PULLED A SMALL CASE FROM THE POUCH. CLEM RECOGNISED WHAT IT WAS IMMEDIATELY.



IT'S A MEDAL CASE. MY UNCLE PERCY'S GOT ONE LIKE IT FOR HIS MILITARY CROSS. BUT WHAT'S GUS DOING WITH ONE?

I SUPPOSE I'D BETTER OPEN IT AND SEE.

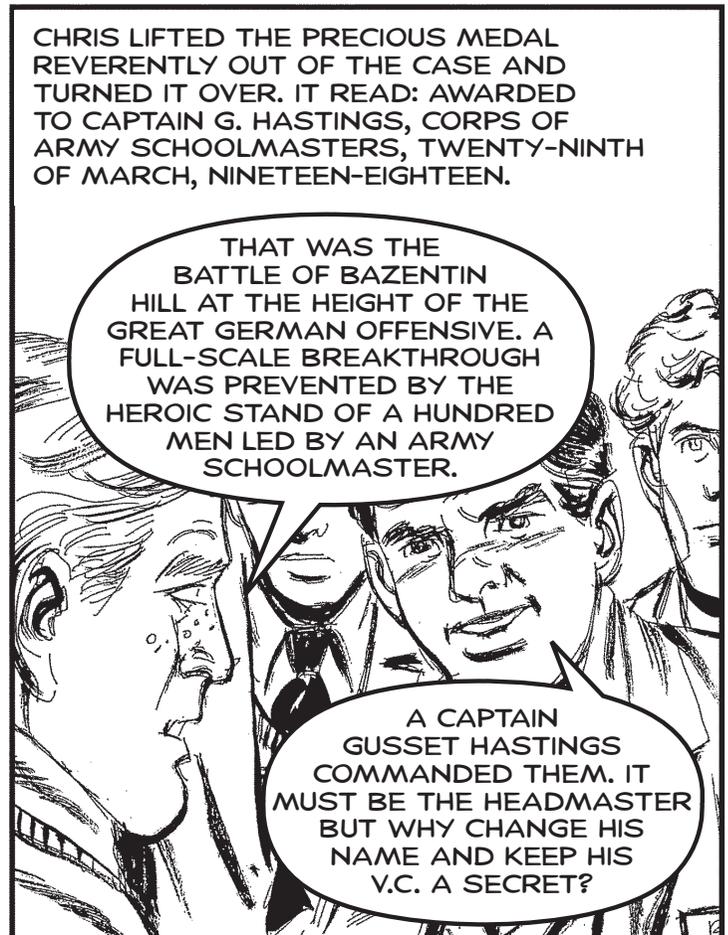
THERE WAS A COLLECTIVE GASP FROM THE UPPER FOURTH AS CHRIS OPENED THE CASE TO REVEAL A VICTORIA CROSS NESTLING INSIDE.



CRUIKEY, IS IT REAL?

I'D SAY SO. IT SHOULD SAY ON THE BACK OF THE BAR WHO IT WAS AWARDED TO AND WHAT THEIR UNIT WAS, AND ON THE BACK OF THE MEDAL THERE'LL BE THE DATE OF THE ACT IT WAS AWARDED FOR.

CHRIS LIFTED THE PRECIOUS MEDAL REVERENTLY OUT OF THE CASE AND TURNED IT OVER. IT READ: AWARDED TO CAPTAIN G. HASTINGS, CORPS OF ARMY SCHOOLMASTERS, TWENTY-NINTH OF MARCH, NINETEEN-EIGHTEEN.



THAT WAS THE BATTLE OF BAZENTIN HILL AT THE HEIGHT OF THE GREAT GERMAN OFFENSIVE. A FULL-SCALE BREAKTHROUGH WAS PREVENTED BY THE HEROIC STAND OF A HUNDRED MEN LED BY AN ARMY SCHOOLMASTER.

A CAPTAIN GUSSET HASTINGS COMMANDED THEM. IT MUST BE THE HEADMASTER BUT WHY CHANGE HIS NAME AND KEEP HIS V.C. A SECRET?

AT THAT MOMENT BITTERFELD AND HIS SQUAD APPEARED, SPEEDING PAST THE CAMP TOWARDS THE WOOD.



DO NOT HARM THEM. THEY ARE MUCH TOO VALUABLE AS HOSTAGES OF WAR.

HECK, IT'S BITTERFELD, AND HE KNOWS WHERE WE ARE.

IF WE STICK TO THE WOODS AND CLIMB THE HILLSIDE THEY'LL HAVE TO COME AFTER US ON FOOT, AND I BET WE'RE FASTER THAN THEM.

AS THEY CLIMBED HIGHER THEY HAD A GRANDSTAND VIEW OF THE BATTLE RAGING BELOW.



GUS IS COMMANDING THE DEFENCE LIKE HE DID AT BAZENTIN HILL, BUT THE GERMANS ARE GETTING CLOSER.

THEY'RE AN ELITE FORCE. THE GARRISON AT THE JUNCTION'S MADE UP OF RAILWAY TROOPS WHO HAVEN'T HAD ANY EXPERIENCE OF THAT SORT OF FIGHTING. WE'VE GOT TO TRY AND HELP THEM.

CHRIS THEN ASKED CLEM IF HE'D EVER BOTHERED TO READ UP ABOUT THE PARTHIAN COMMANDER SURENA AND THE TACTIC HE USED TO DEFEAT THE ROMANS.

YOU MUST BE JOKING! THAT WAS BEFORE ALL THIS STARTED. I'D COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN ABOUT IT. WHY?

BECAUSE HIS TACTIC WAS CALLED THE PARTHIAN SHOT. HIS RIDERS PRETENDED TO RETREAT BUT THEN THEY ROTATED IN THEIR SADDLES TO FIRE BACK AT THE ROMANS AND THEY WON THE BATTLE. MAYBE WE CAN TRY A VARIANT ON IT.

IT WAS ALREADY CLEAR THEIR PURSUERS WERE OUT TO RECAPTURE THEM AND NOT KILL THEM, WHICH CHRIS KNEW COULD BE TURNED TO THE UPPER FOURTH'S ADVANTAGE. ON HIS SHOUT THEY SCATTERED IN ALL DIRECTIONS.

JUST KEEP CLIMBING. THEY'RE TOO BIG AND HEAVY-FOOTED TO KEEP UP!

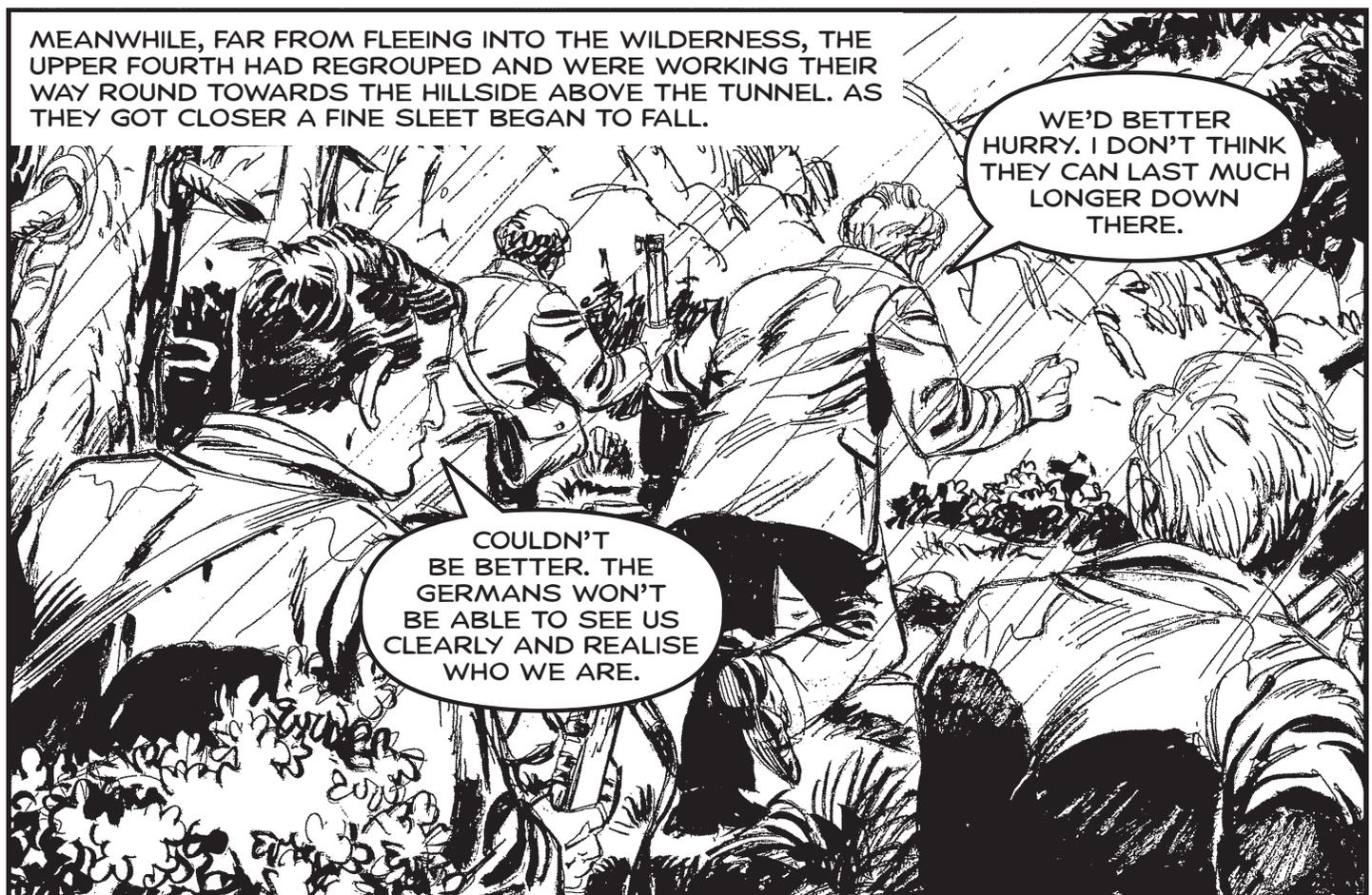


CHRIS WAS RIGHT. WITHOUT SHOOTING, THEIR PURSUERS COULDN'T KEEP UP, AND TRIGGERING A ROCKFALL OR TWO SLOWED THEM DOWN EVEN MORE.



EVENTUALLY BITTERFELD REALISED HE WASN'T GOING TO CATCH THEM AND RECALLED HIS MEN. HE WAS FRUSTRATED BUT NOT TOO DOWN-HEARTED.





CLEM WAS RIGHT. EVEN GUS COULD SEE THE WRITING WAS ON THE WALL, BUT HE REFUSED TO GIVE UP.



THE FIRST TRAIN'S DUE IN TEN MINUTES, BUT I DOUBT WE'LL KEEP THEM AT BAY FOR THAT LONG. A MIRACLE'S WHAT'S NEEDED BUT THEY RARELY HAPPEN WHEN YOU NEED THEM.

THEN A VOLLEY OF SHOTS CAME FROM THE HILLSIDE ABOVE. THROUGH THE HAZE OF SLEET GUS COULD MAKE OUT SCHOOL UNIFORMS.



IT REALLY IS A MIRACLE! WHERE DID THEY COME FROM?

LIKE GUS, AT FIRST BITTERFELD COULDN'T MAKE OUT ANY DETAILS OF THE NEWCOMERS, BUT THE STEADY SHOOTING WAS UNMISTAKABLE.



IT MUST BE MORE BRITISHERS. THIS IS A DISASTER!

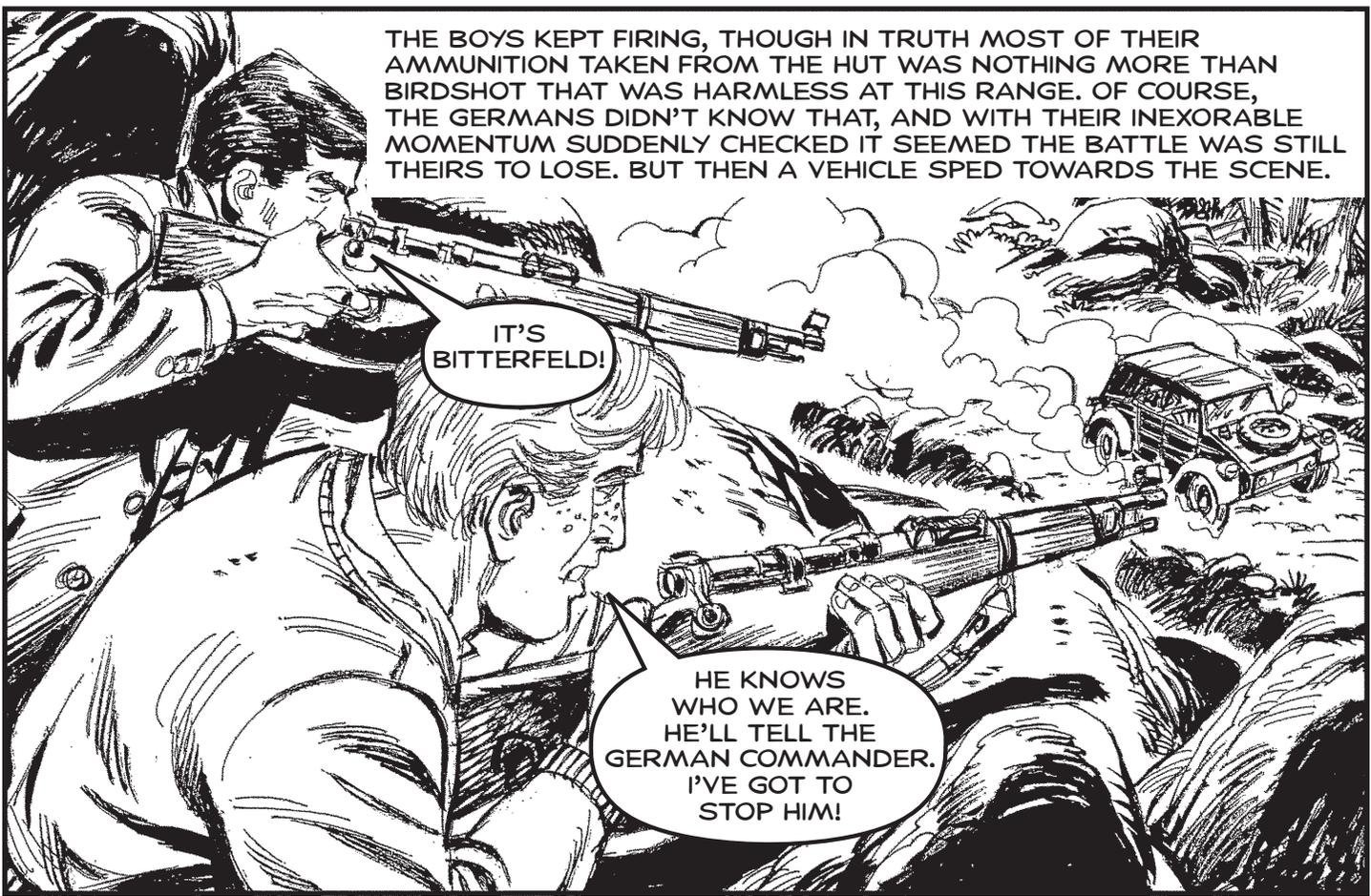
THE APPARENT ARRIVAL OF BRITISH REINFORCEMENTS BROUGHT THE CONFUSED GERMANS TO A HALT. GUS INSTANTLY TOOK ADVANTAGE TO LAUNCH A SURPRISE COUNTER-ATTACK.



CHARGE!

TEUFEL... UURGH!

THE BOYS KEPT FIRING, THOUGH IN TRUTH MOST OF THEIR AMMUNITION TAKEN FROM THE HUT WAS NOTHING MORE THAN BIRDSHOT THAT WAS HARMLESS AT THIS RANGE. OF COURSE, THE GERMANS DIDN'T KNOW THAT, AND WITH THEIR INEXORABLE MOMENTUM SUDDENLY CHECKED IT SEEMED THE BATTLE WAS STILL THEIRS TO LOSE. BUT THEN A VEHICLE SPED TOWARDS THE SCENE.



IT'S BITTERFELD!

HE KNOWS WHO WE ARE. HE'LL TELL THE GERMAN COMMANDER. I'VE GOT TO STOP HIM!

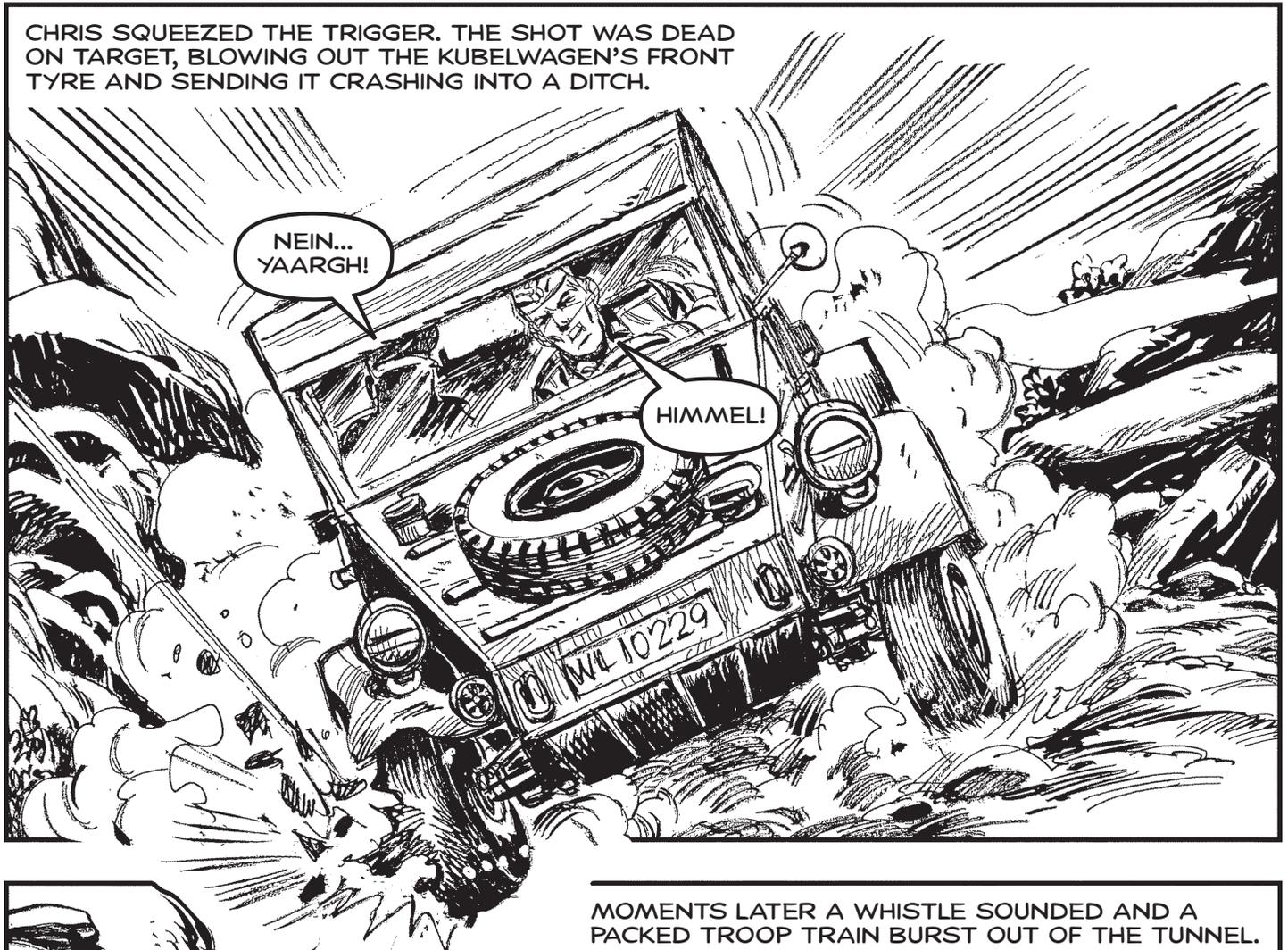
THEY HAD A FEW REAL BULLETS FROM THE HUT, CHRIS QUICKLY LOADED HIS RIFLE WITH SOME AND TOOK CAREFUL AIM.



HERE GOES NOTHING!

YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN THE BEST SHOT IN THE SCHOOL FIRING RANGE. YOU WON'T MISS.

CHRIS SQUEEZED THE TRIGGER. THE SHOT WAS DEAD ON TARGET, BLOWING OUT THE KUBELWAGEN'S FRONT TYRE AND SENDING IT CRASHING INTO A DITCH.



MOMENTS LATER A WHISTLE SOUNDED AND A PACKED TROOP TRAIN BURST OUT OF THE TUNNEL.



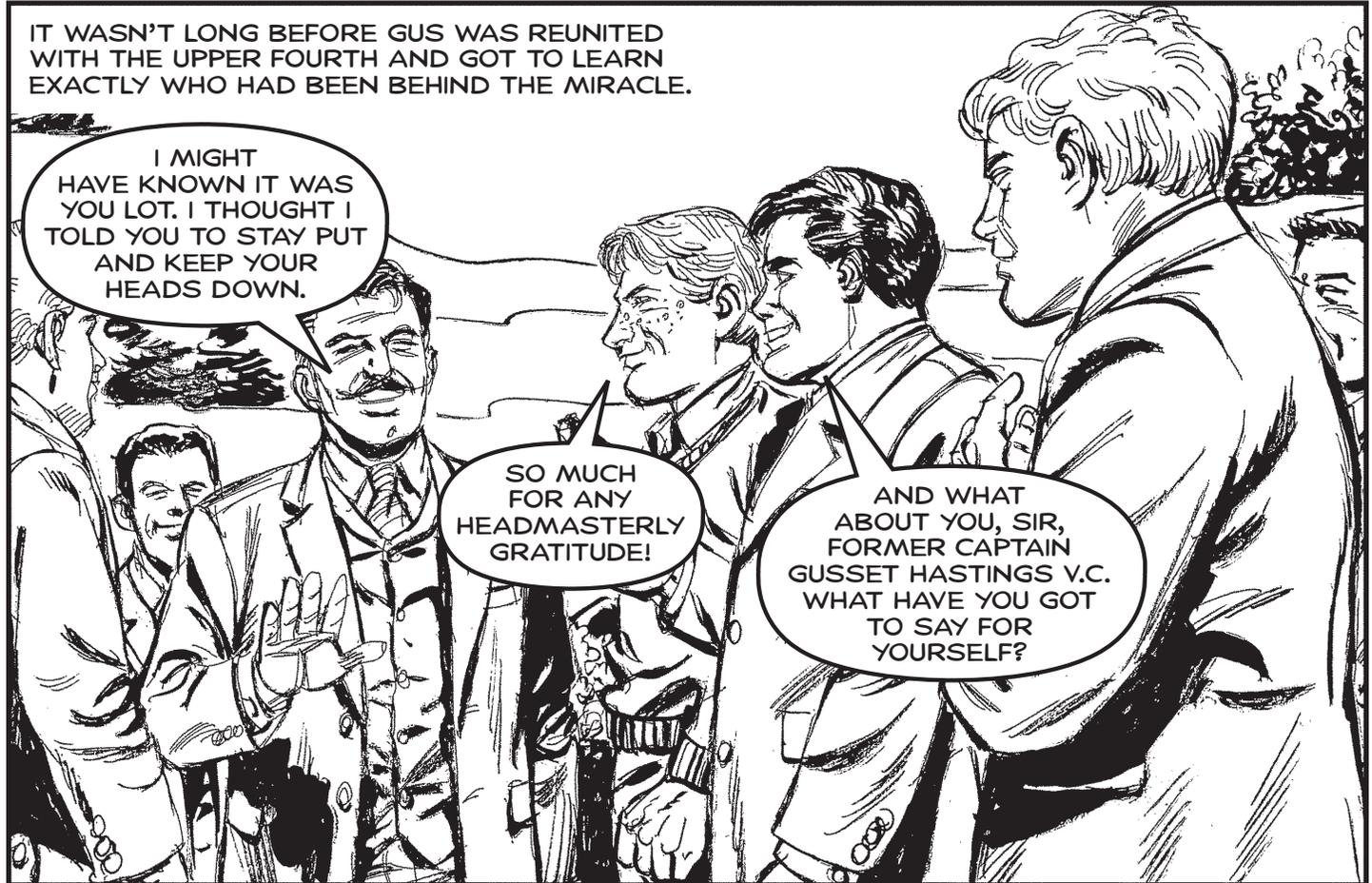
IN MOMENTS THE TABLES WERE TURNED COMPLETELY AS SCORES OF TROOPS LEAPT OFF THE TRAIN TO JOIN IN THE CHASE. HOWEVER, NOT EVERY GERMAN WAS FLEEING.



FROM THE SMOKE OF BATTLE GUS EMERGED, A GUN IN HIS HAND AND A SMILE ON HIS FACE.



IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE GUS WAS REUNITED WITH THE UPPER FOURTH AND GOT TO LEARN EXACTLY WHO HAD BEEN BEHIND THE MIRACLE.



I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN IT WAS YOU LOT. I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU TO STAY PUT AND KEEP YOUR HEADS DOWN.

SO MUCH FOR ANY HEADMASTERLY GRATITUDE!

AND WHAT ABOUT YOU, SIR, FORMER CAPTAIN GUSSET HASTINGS V.C. WHAT HAVE YOU GOT TO SAY FOR YOURSELF?

ONLY WHEN CHRIS HANDED IT BACK DID GUS REALISE HE'D LOST HIS V.C. IT WAS, HE ADMITTED, A MEDAL HE FELT HE DIDN'T DESERVE, OR NO MORE THAN ANY OF THE OTHER MEN WHO'D FOUGHT AND DIED HOLDING BAZENTIN HILL IN 1918. HE EXPLAINED HE WAS A TEACHER WHO HAD BECOME AN INADVERTENT HERO WHEN THE GERMAN ADVANCE OVERWHELMED HIS QUIET LITTLE BACKWATER.



I WENT BACK TO TEACHING BUT ALTERED MY NAME BECAUSE GUSSET HASTINGS WAS TOO WELL KNOWN.

WELL, YOU'D BETTER LOOK OUT, HEADMASTER. AFTER THIS SHOW THEY'LL PROBABLY WANT TO GIVE YOU A SECOND V.C.

WOULDN'T THAT BE GREAT?

THEY DISCOVERED ONE FINAL IRONY WHEN THEY RETURNED HOME A WEEK LATER.

SO AFTER ALL THAT FIGHTER COMMAND DECIDED THEY DIDN'T NEED SAINT SEBASTIAN'S.

A REAL STROKE OF LUCK. IT MEANS YOU'LL HAVE PLENTY OF TIME TO CATCH UP ON MISSED LESSONS BEFORE THE REST OF THE SCHOOL GETS BACK FROM NEWFOUNDLAND!

I KNEW IT WAS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE!



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The grey man retrieved his knife from his victim's back and dumped the driver's body into the boot before hurrying to the mine workings. The small door was still open.

Muller's arrogance was astonishing.

The figure in grey, the Deathless Man sent by Von Reich, slipped inside and followed the tunnel. He moved surprisingly lightly given that he had a slight limp. His feet made little noise on the loose sand and rocks covering the tunnel floor. After about fifty yards, the tunnel branched in two directions. The left artery was dark and dipped down but the right was lit by dim bulbs showing an upwards gradient. He followed the lit path. Ahead a German soldier stood on duty. He looked bored. The Deathless Man stuck to the side shadows creeping closer to the lone sentry. The German's mouth opened wide in a yawn. And his eyes opened in silent shock as three shots from a silenced pistol tore into his chest.

The Deathless Man moved on, hearing voices.

"It is an extraordinary collection," Friedrich was saying. He sounded genuinely impressed.

The grey assassin could see into a more brightly lit cave filled with statues, paintings, furniture... every type of precious object that could be looted.

"We have been busy," Muller nodded. "A soldier's pay does not go far. We must prepare our own pensions in these times."

Friedrich chuckled. "I agree with you, Captain. I am sure you will find our offer very reasonable."

"I'm sure I will," Muller said, an edge in his voice.

If Friedrich was intimidated by Muller's veiled threat, he didn't show it. "You will make a profit, we will make a profit and our clients will receive the articles for which they are willing to pay handsomely. Everyone is content and all are happy to do business again."

That seemed to placate Muller. "There is only the question of how these objects will be transported through France to the Swiss border?"

"Do not worry about that," Friedrich said smoothly. "We are experienced in this business. We have friends who provide permits, other friends who look the other way when asked. However, we may require you to keep these objects for a time – no more than a month – until we can move them."

"That is not a problem?"

Muller shook his head. "This tunnel is above ground level and does not flood. If we think there is a chance of the mine being discovered we have arranged a small rockfall which will persuade all that this is a dead mine. But that will not happen," he said confidently. "After all, as you said, I am the law here. Who would question me?"

He glanced to the side of the chamber and, for the first time, the Deathless Man saw two Wehrmacht soldiers leaning against the rough wall. He should have known there would be more.

"Just don't leave it here too long," Muller was saying. "We need space for our next...acquisitions."

Both laughed and the two soldiers, one sporting a sergeant's epaulettes, joined in. The Deathless Man slipped back along the tunnel, his eyes scanning the roof. He found what he was looking for beside the sentry he had killed. A simple plunger leading to a small charge attached to wooden beams in the ceiling. Muller's handiwork.

Muller and Friedrich were approaching. Their voices growing louder. Friedrich was speaking. "We will transfer the funds to your account in Zurich."

The Deathless Man's hand moved to the plunger controlling the explosives, then halted.

He waited until Muller and Friedrich came into view before stepping into the middle of the tunnel.

Muller stared for a moment, startled into silence.

"Who the devil?" he finally spluttered.

"For the oppressed people of Europe, for the people you have robbed and murdered, for the good of mankind!" The Deathless Man brought his hand down on the plunger.

"No!" Muller's scream was cut off by an explosion between himself and the mysterious attacker.

Timbers and rocks fell, blocking the tunnel.

The Deathless Man picked himself up. He hadn't known if he would survive. It didn't matter. His life was less important than the mission. He looked with satisfaction at the blocked tunnel. Muller and Friedrich would either be crushed under the rocks or trapped on the far side with no food or water. Either way, they would be dead soon enough.

Leaving the tunnel, the grey assassin turned off the lights. If Muller's party had survived, they could spend their last hours in darkness. At the entrance he closed the padlock on the chain, locking the mine. A minute later the area was as abandoned as the reports claimed.

Sitting in his office in Paris, Colonel Von Reich read a message. Superficially it discussed the menu for a meal he would be hosting. However, when his code was applied the message was simple – Muller and his accomplices had been buried with the stolen art. Von Reich burned the message with satisfaction. If Muller wanted the art so badly, he could die with it. When the war was over, the treasures would be recovered and, where possible, returned to its rightful owners.

Picking up his pen, Von Reich began composing a short message. He had another mission for his fearless, Deathless Men.

BATTLER HASTINGS

Augustus "Gus" Hastings was the strict-but-fair headmaster of St. Sebastian's school — an institution that had educated those destined for high military rank or government appointment for generations.

With the Second World War raging, Gus and his pupils were packed off to the safety of Newfoundland. En route, however, they were caught up in a hair-raising adventure, tangling with Germans all the way.

As time went on, the boys realised there was more to Gus than met the eye. And just where did he learn to fight?

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