

No.4806

COMPLETE 63-PAGE ACTION STORY

Commando

THE SILVER COLLECTION



SECRET OF THE ALPS

COMMANDO - THE SILVER COLLECTION

Title

SECRET OF THE ALPS

Subject

Saichan — responsible for the inside art here — drew 13 Commandos in total. Well, not quite, his final book (*Unlucky 13*) had to be finished by another artist. The reasons are lost in the mists of time but it wasn't due to lack of quality for his style — though quirky, and cartoon-ish in places — is certainly effective. The story is classic Alan Hebden, a man well known for intricate plotting and (just) believable secret weapons. He was on his game for this one!

Saichan's *Unlucky 13*, by the way, featured some of Commando's early recurring characters — The Bomb Gang. This story is as explosive as any of theirs.

Calum Laird, Editor

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STORY
HEBDEN

ART
SAICHAN

COVER
KENNEDY

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SECRET OF THE ALPS

THE VAL DE CRISTAL, OR CRYSTAL VALE, WAS A REMOTE VALLEY NESTLING HIGH IN THE FRENCH ALPS. THE WAR RAGING IN EUROPE HAD PASSED IT BY, LEAVING ITS SCATTERED FARMS UNDISTURBED. THEN ONE DAY IN THE SUMMER OF 1944, THE LONG PEACE WAS SHATTERED BY THE ARRIVAL OF A POWERFUL GERMAN FORCE . . .



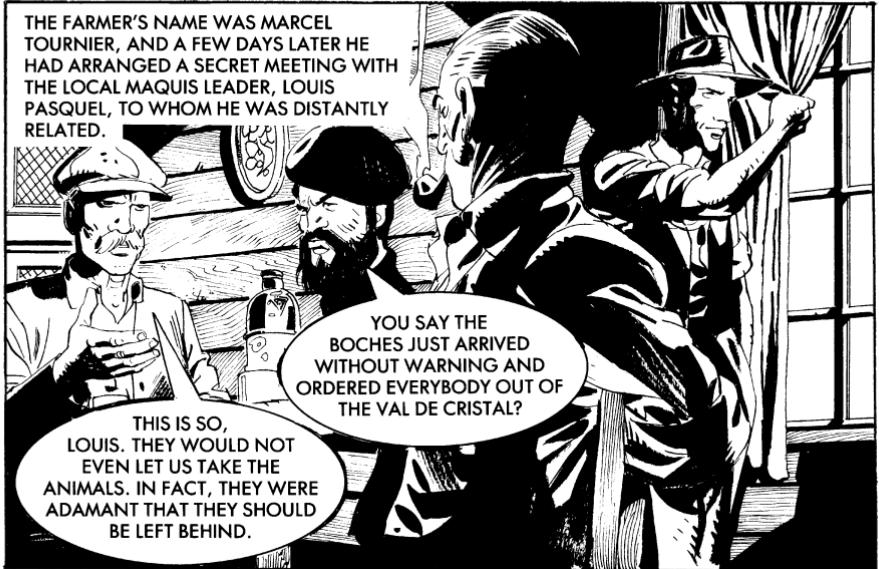
WITH METHODICAL PRECISION, UNITS OF GERMAN TROOPS VISITED EVERY FARM IN THE VALLEY, ISSUING UNCOMPROMISING INSTRUCTIONS.



THE SOLDIERS WOULD MAKE NO CONCESSIONS. THEIR ORDERS WERE CLEAR — TO ACCOMPLISH THE FORCED EVACUATION OF CRYSTAL VALE AS FAST AS POSSIBLE. ALL ANIMALS WERE TO BE LEFT BEHIND.

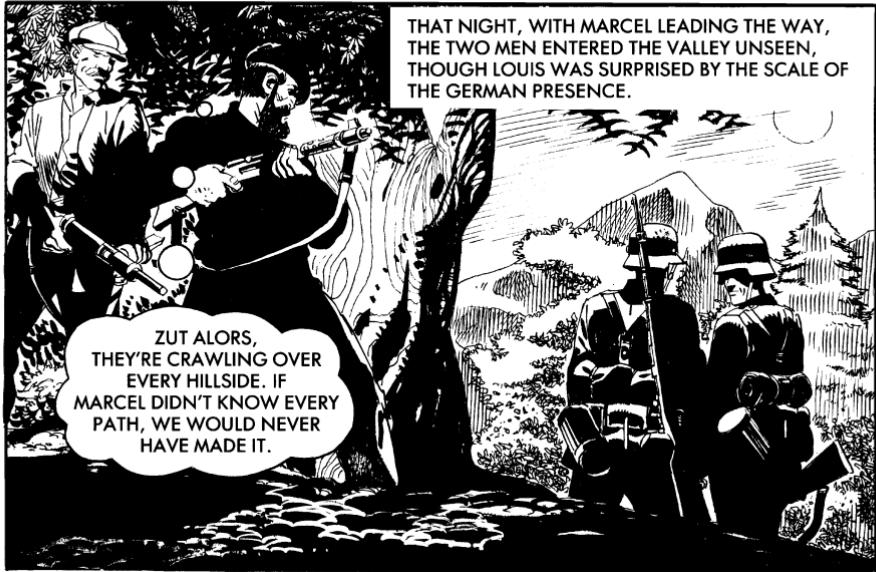


THE FARMER'S NAME WAS MARCEL TOURNIER, AND A FEW DAYS LATER HE HAD ARRANGED A SECRET MEETING WITH THE LOCAL MAQUIS LEADER, LOUIS PASQUEL, TO WHOM HE WAS DISTANTLY RELATED.



LOUIS WAS FORCED TO ADMIT THAT THIS GERMAN ACTION WAS SO BAFFLING THAT IT MERITED IMMEDIATE INVESTIGATION.





MARCEL WAS MORE CONCERNED WITH HIS ANIMALS THAN WITH THE DEPARTING GERMANS, BUT THEN LOUIS HEARD ANOTHER SOUND APPROACHING.



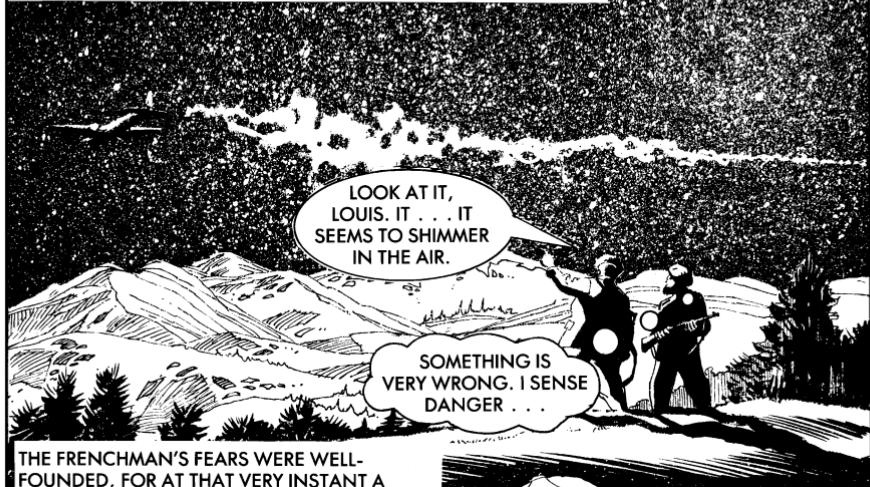
THE NOISE GREW LOUDER, AND A FEW MOMENTS LATER A JUNKERS 88 FLEW SLOWLY DOWN THE VALLEY AT A LOWER HEIGHT THAN THE SURROUNDING MOUNTAINS.



THE AIRCRAFT TURNED LAZILY AT THE BOTTOM OF THE VALLEY AND BEGAN ANOTHER FLIGHT ALONG THE LENGTH OF CRYSTAL VALE. UNKNOWN TO THE WATCHING FRENCHMEN, THE CREW WERE MAKING STRANGE PREPARATIONS.

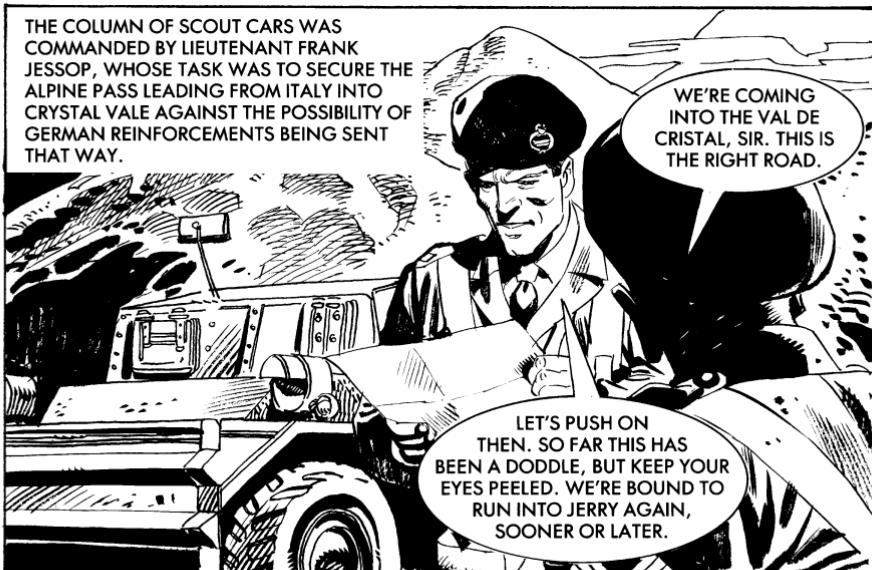
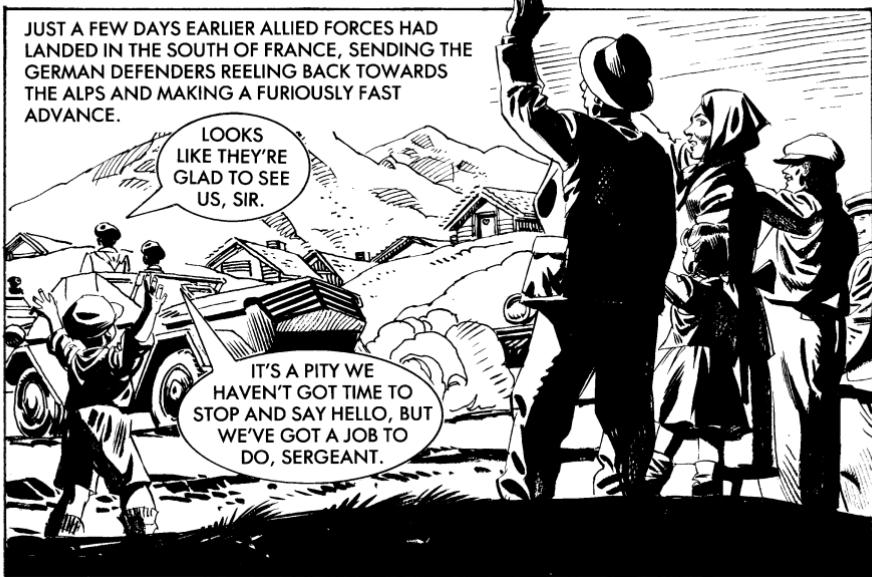


FROM AN UNDERWING CANISTER A MYSTERIOUS SUBSTANCE WAS RELEASED IN THE AIRCRAFT'S WAKE. IT WAS SOMETHING THAT NEITHER WATCHER COULD MAKE SENSE OF.



THE FRENCHMAN'S FEARS WERE WELL-FOUNDED, FOR AT THAT VERY INSTANT A BUTTON WAS PRESSED ON BOARD THE AIRCRAFT, AND FOR THE TWO WATCHERS, THE SKY EXPLODED.





SOONER WAS THE OPERATIVE WORD. RIGHT AROUND THE NEXT CORNER THEY RAN STRAIGHT INTO A GERMAN CHECKPOINT COVERING THE ONLY ROAD INTO THE VALLEY.



THE COLUMN SCATTERED AND REFORMED FURTHER BACK DOWN THE ROAD, OUT OF RANGE OF THE ENEMY POSITION. FRANK WAS LOATH TO RISK ANY CASUALTIES DEALING WITH SUCH RELATIVELY SMALL OPPPOSITION, BUT HIS SERGEANT, GARETH WILLIAMS, WAS ABLE TO SUGGEST A BETTER WAY.



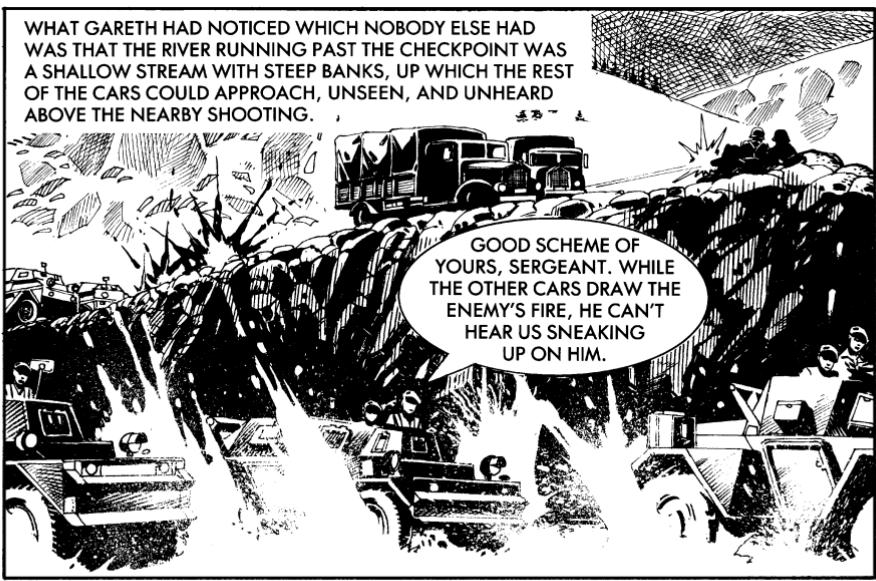
II

GARETH EXPLAINED HIS IDEA, WHICH FRANK READILY ACCEPTED. A FEW MINUTES LATER, SOME OF THE ARMOURED CARS REAPPEARED CLOSE TO THE GERMAN CHECKPOINT, THIS TIME KEEPING THEIR DISTANCE.

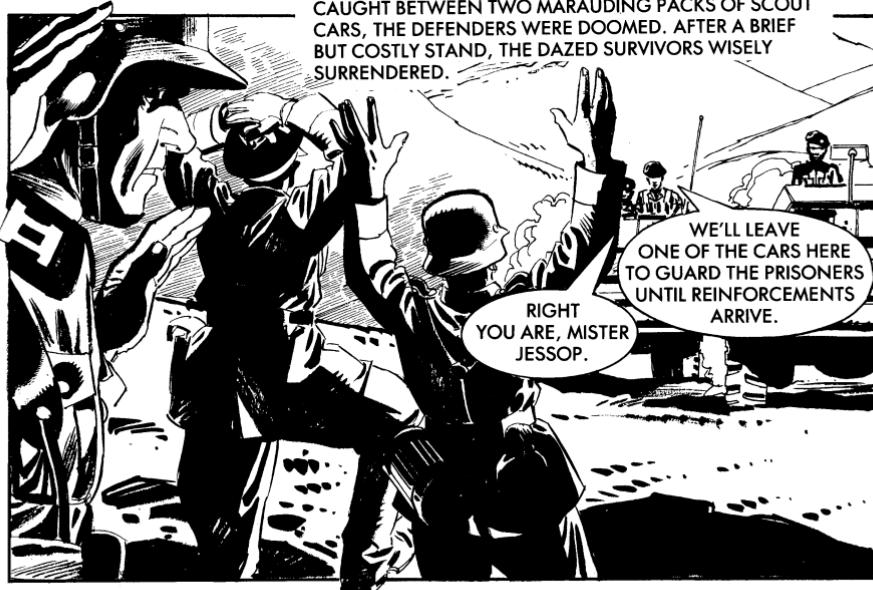


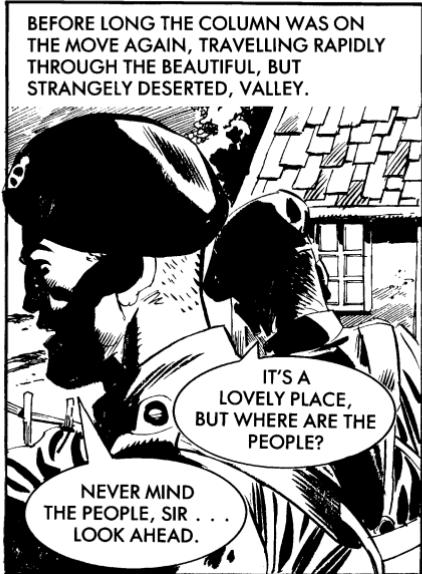
JUST KEEP THEM AT BAY. THEY CAN'T GET PAST WITHOUT RISKING HEAVY CASUALTIES.

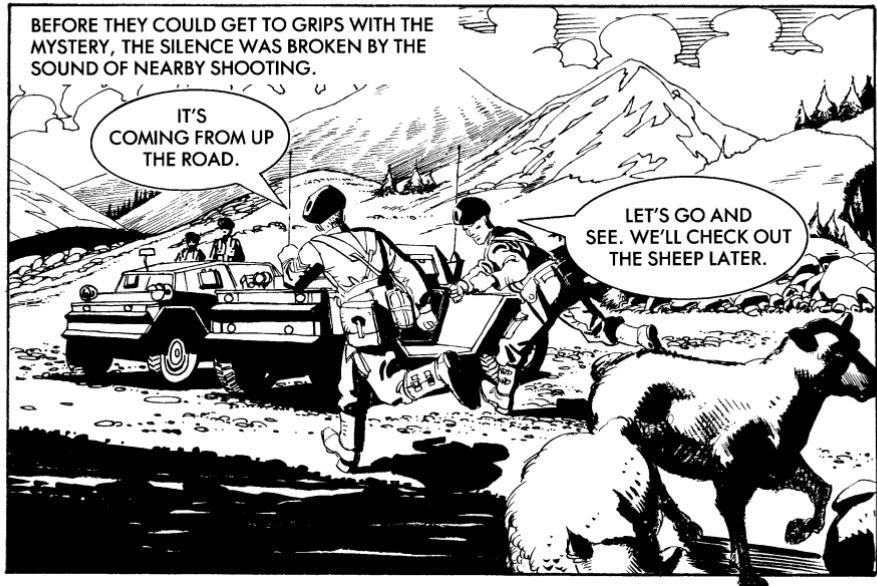
WHAT GARETH HAD NOTICED WHICH NOBODY ELSE HAD WAS THAT THE RIVER RUNNING PAST THE CHECKPOINT WAS A SHALLOW STREAM WITH STEEP BANKS, UP WHICH THE REST OF THE CARS COULD APPROACH, UNSEEN, AND UNHEARD ABOVE THE NEARBY SHOOTING.



GOOD SCHEME OF YOURS, SERGEANT. WHILE THE OTHER CARS DRAW THE ENEMY'S FIRE, HE CAN'T HEAR US SNEAKING UP ON HIM.









THE TWO MEN WERE LOUIS AND MARCEL, THE LATTER ALREADY WOUNDED BUT DETERMINED NOT TO BURDEN THE MAQUIS LEADER ANY MORE. LOUIS, HOWEVER, WAS HAVING NONE OF THAT.



LEAVE
ME, LOUIS. SAVE
YOURSELF.

NONSENSE, MON AMI.
THE BLIND WILL GO ON
LEADING THE BLIND.
HOLD TIGHTLY.

BUT THE STUMBLING FIGURES
WERE SPOTTED BY THE
GERMAN OFFICER IN CHARGE,
WHO SHOUTED A COMMAND
TO THE NEAREST OF HIS MEN.

DON'T LET THOSE
TWO ESCAPE. SHOOT
THEM DOWN!

YEEUUGH!

NON, THEY
HAVE KILLED
MARCEL!

FIND
MORE
FREE
MAGAZINES

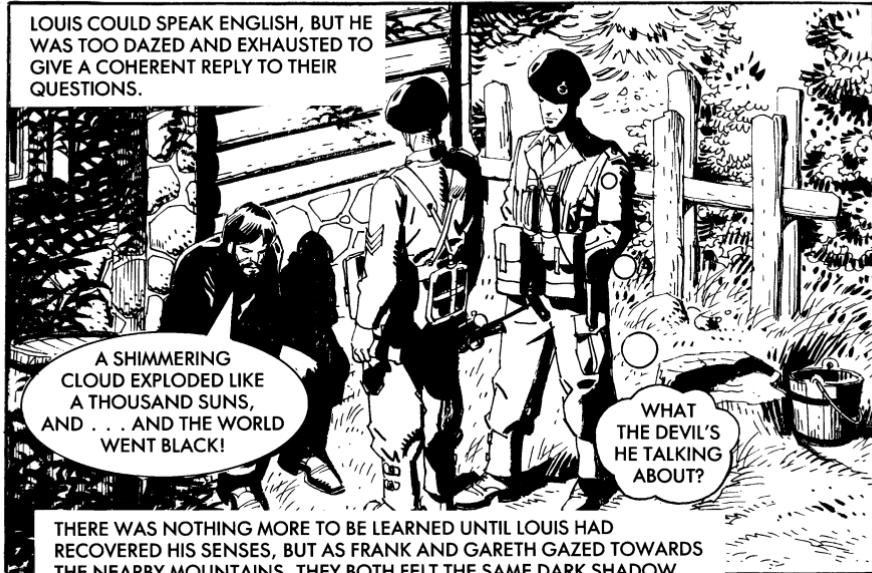
FREEMAGS.CC

THE GERMAN WAS ABOUT TO SHOOT AGAIN, BUT FRANK'S ARMoured CAR INTERVENED BEFORE HE COULD PULL THE TRIGGER.



WITH THEIR QUARRY SAFELY IN BRITISH HANDS, THE GERMAN RESISTANCE FADED AWAY, AND FRANK WAS SATISFIED TO LET THEM SPEED OFF IN THE DIRECTION OF THE MOUNTAINS.

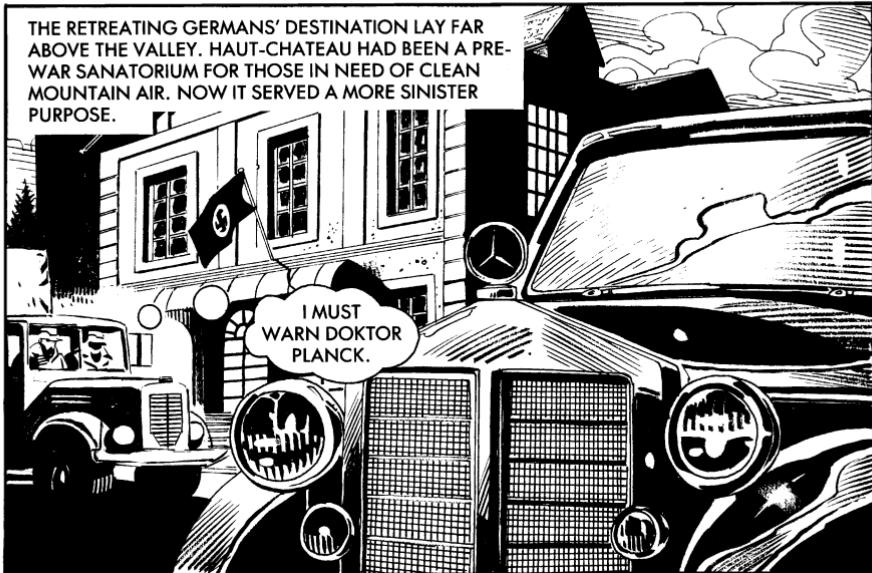




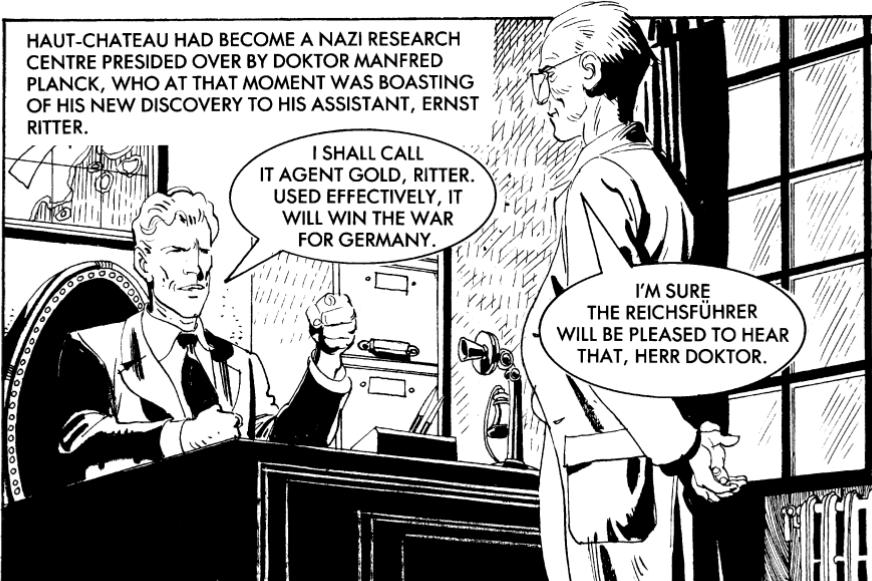
THERE WAS NOTHING MORE TO BE LEARNED UNTIL LOUIS HAD RECOVERED HIS SENSES, BUT AS FRANK AND GARETH GAZED TOWARDS THE NEARBY MOUNTAINS, THEY BOTH FELT THE SAME DARK SHADOW THAT SEEMED TO HANG OVER THE VALLEY.



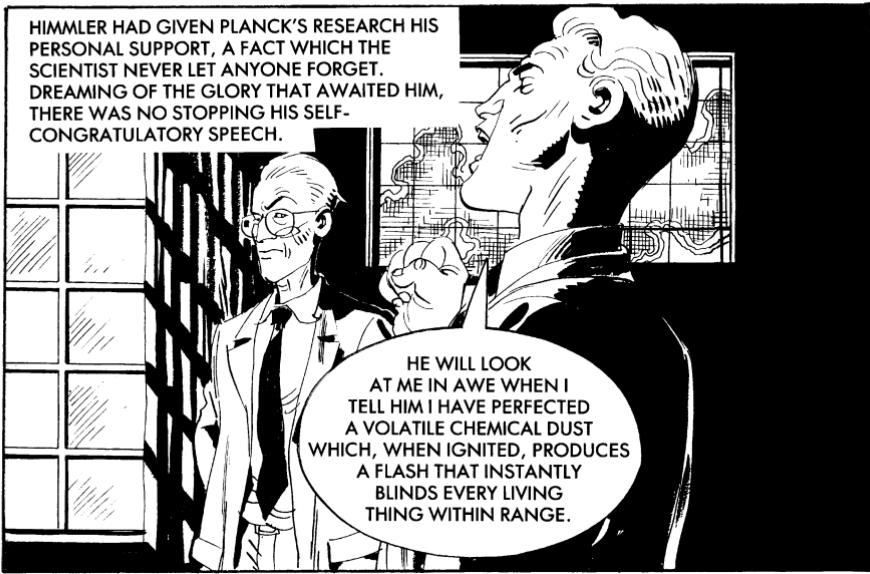
THE RETREATING GERMANS' DESTINATION LAY FAR ABOVE THE VALLEY. HAUT-CHATEAU HAD BEEN A PRE-WAR SANATORIUM FOR THOSE IN NEED OF CLEAN MOUNTAIN AIR. NOW IT SERVED A MORE SINISTER PURPOSE.



HAUT-CHATEAU HAD BECOME A NAZI RESEARCH CENTRE PRESIDED OVER BY DOKTOR MANFRED PLANCK, WHO AT THAT MOMENT WAS BOASTING OF HIS NEW DISCOVERY TO HIS ASSISTANT, ERNST RITTER.

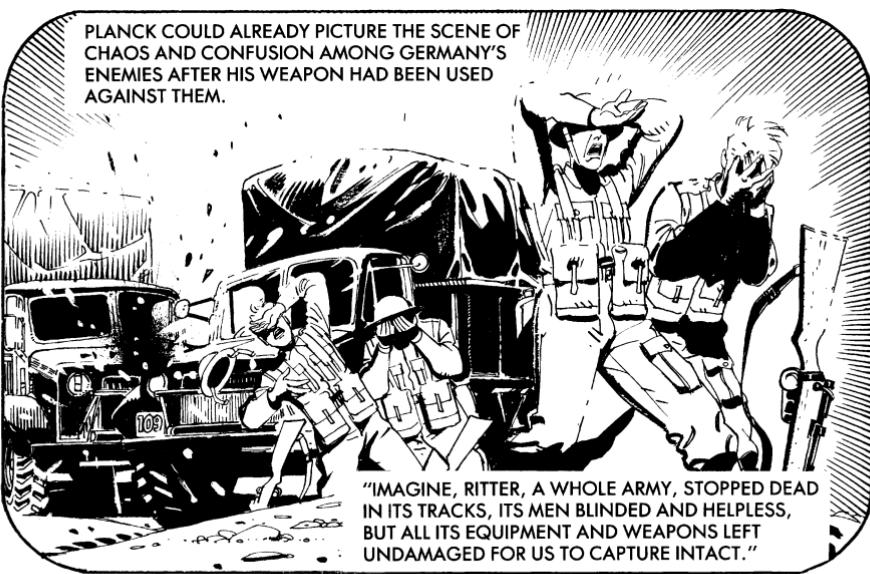


HIMMLER HAD GIVEN PLANCK'S RESEARCH HIS PERSONAL SUPPORT, A FACT WHICH THE SCIENTIST NEVER LET ANYONE FORGET. DREAMING OF THE GLORY THAT AWAITED HIM, THERE WAS NO STOPPING HIS SELF-CONGRATULATORY SPEECH.



HE WILL LOOK
AT ME IN AWE WHEN I
TELL HIM I HAVE PERFECTED
A VOLATILE CHEMICAL DUST
WHICH, WHEN IGNITED, PRODUCES
A FLASH THAT INSTANTLY
BLINDS EVERY LIVING
THING WITHIN RANGE.

PLANCK COULD ALREADY PICTURE THE SCENE OF CHAOS AND CONFUSION AMONG GERMANY'S ENEMIES AFTER HIS WEAPON HAD BEEN USED AGAINST THEM.



"IMAGINE, RITTER, A WHOLE ARMY, STOPPED DEAD IN ITS TRACKS, ITS MEN BLINDED AND HELPLESS, BUT ALL ITS EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONS LEFT UNDAMAGED FOR US TO CAPTURE INTACT."

THERE WAS EVEN MORE TO AGENT GOLD, SOMETHING WHICH MADE PLANCK'S HEART SWELL WITH PRIDE, AS ONLY A TRUE NAZI'S COULD.

AFTER JUST A FEW HOURS THE BLINDNESS WEARS OFF. BY THEN THE ENEMY WILL BE OUR PRISONERS, AND THE REICH WILL HAVE ALL THE ABLE-BODIED SLAVE LABOURERS IT WILL EVER NEED.

YOU PAINT A BEAUTIFUL PICTURE, HERR DOKTOR. SHOULDN'T WE WAIT FOR HAUPTMANN LUTZEN TO GET BACK WITH THE RESULTS OF THE FIELD TEST, THOUGH?

THE FULL-SCALE FIELD TEST OF AGENT GOLD HAD BEEN THE REASON CRYSTAL VALE HAD BEEN CLEARED OF PEOPLE. BUT NOT OF ANIMALS, WHO WERE EQUALLY AFFECTED BY THE BLINDING FLASH, BUT COULDN'T TALK AFTERWARDS.

THE TEST IS A MERE FORMALITY. AGENT GOLD WORKS IN THE LAB, SO IT WILL WORK IN THE FIELD. AH, HERE COMES LUTZEN NOW.

THIS CAPTAIN OF A MOUNTAIN REGIMENT
WAS IN A HURRY, FOR IT HAD BEEN HIS MEN
WHO HAD CLASHED WITH THE BRITISH.

ENGLANDERS HAVE
REACHED THE VALLEY, HERR
DOKTOR. WE MUST PREPARE TO
EVACUATE OVER THE
PASS TO ITALY.

WE MUST HURRY.
RITTER, SEE THAT THE
CANISTERS OF AGENT GOLD ARE
LOADED SECURELY, AND GIVE
THEM TOP PRIORITY.

AT
ONCE, HERR
DOKTOR.

PLANCK WAS DESPERATELY EAGER TO
HEAR LUTZEN'S REPORT ON THE EFFECTS
OF AGENT GOLD, PLEASED BY WHAT HE
WAS TOLD.

SO, EVEN IN THE
BRIGHT, CLEAR DAYLIGHT OF THE
VAL DE CRISTAL, IT BLINDED ALL THE
ANIMALS — AND TWO FRENCHMEN —
JUST AS I PREDICTED. A PITY YOU LET
ONE OF THE INFILTRATORS FALL INTO
ENEMY HANDS, BUT HE CAN ONLY TELL
THEM WHAT HAPPENED, NOT
HOW IT HAPPENED.

I SUGGEST WE
DESTROY HAUT-CHATEAU
COMPLETELY, IN CASE
THE ENEMY LEARNS
YOUR SECRET.

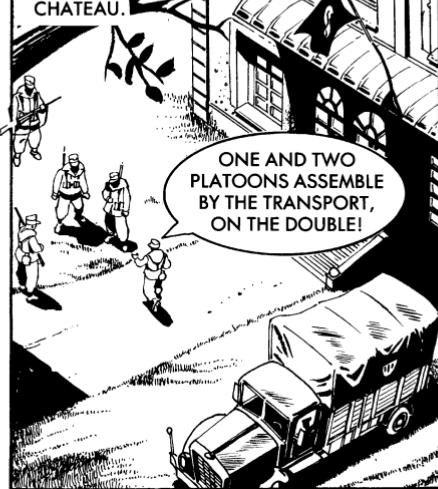
PLANCK LOOKED SMUG AND TAPPED HIS HEAD.

THE ONLY COPY OF THE FORMULA IS IN HERE. SO YOU'D BETTER MAKE SURE NOTHING BEFALLS ME, OR YOU WILL HAVE TO ANSWER PERSONALLY TO THE REICHSFÜHRER.



WITH HIS OWN SURVIVAL DEPENDENT ON PLANCK'S, LUTZEN WASTED NO TIME IN ORGANISING SOME DEFENCES FOR HAUT-CHATEAU.

ONE AND TWO PLATOONS ASSEMBLE BY THE TRANSPORT, ON THE DOUBLE!



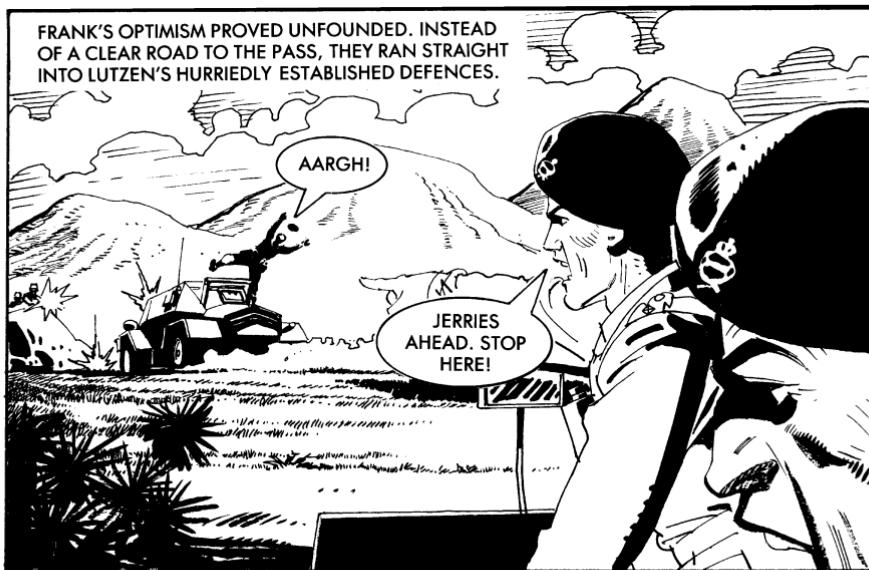
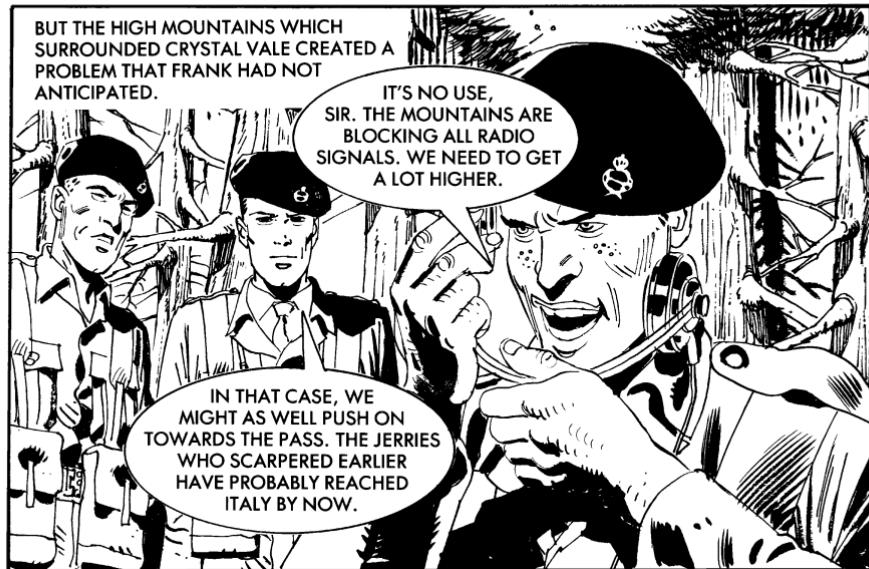
DOWN IN THE VALLEY, LOUIS HAD RECOVERED SUFFICIENTLY TO DESCRIBE IN DETAIL EVERYTHING THAT HAD HAPPENED UP UNTIL THE MOMENT HE HAD BEEN BLINDED.



I BELIEVE THE BOCHES WERE TESTING A NEW SECRET WEAPON, ONE WHICH BLINDS PEOPLE AND ANIMALS.

THIS IS BECOMING TOO BIG FOR ME TO HANDLE. I'LL RADIO HEADQUARTERS AND ASK FOR FULL SUPPORT.





GARETH RAN FORWARD TO HELP ONE OF THE WOUNDED MEN BACK TO COVER.

GIVE THEM COVERING FIRE!

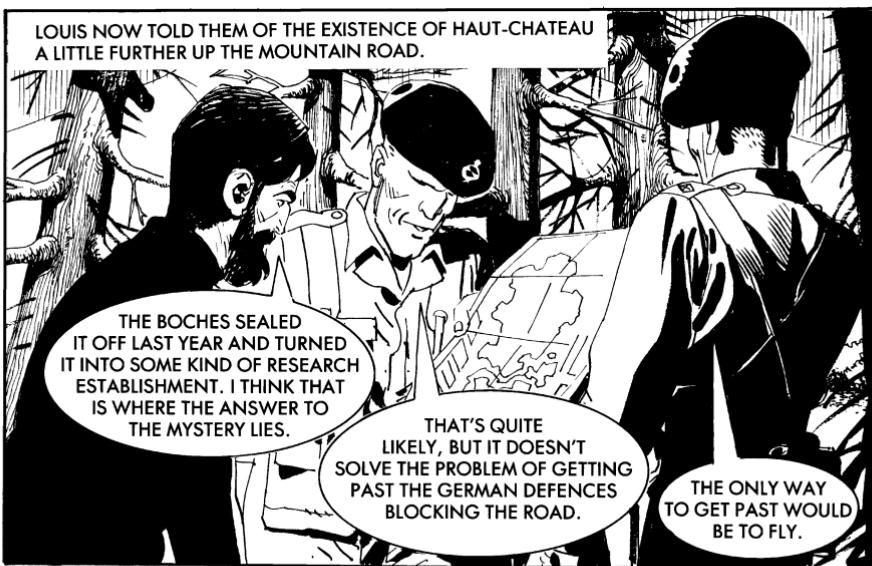
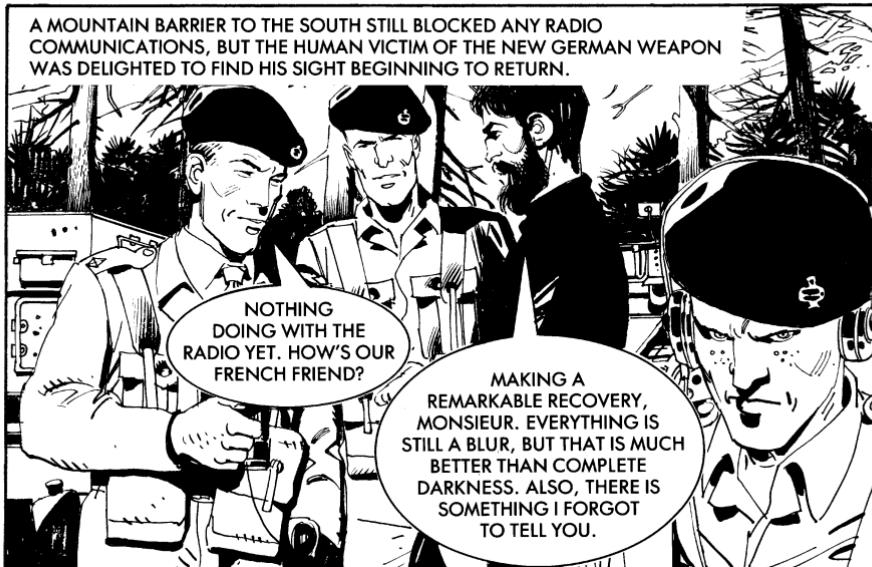
IT'S ALL PART OF THE SERVICE,
SMITH.

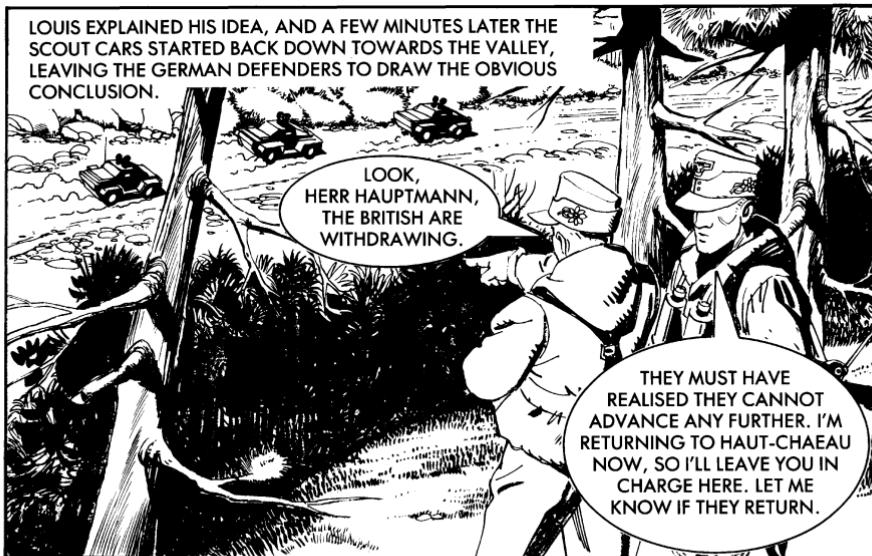
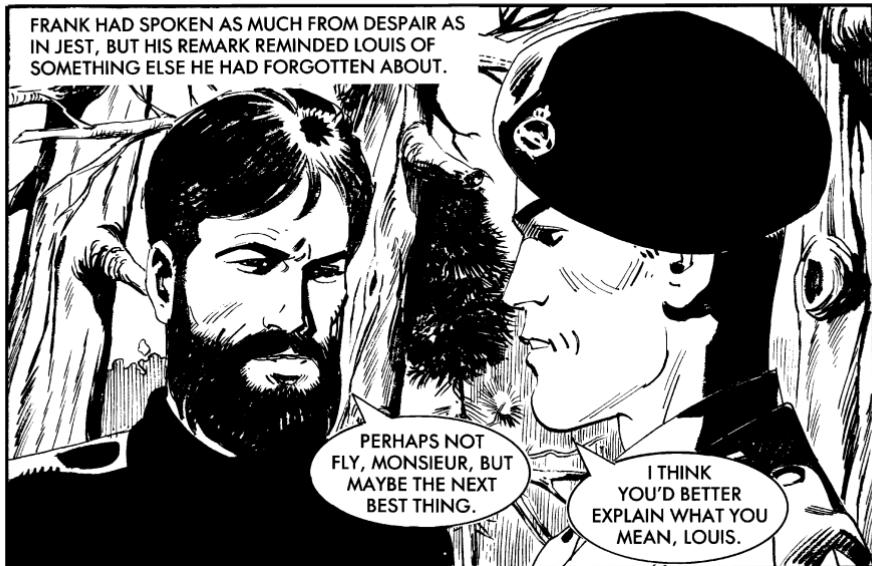
TH . . .
THANKS,
SARGE.

A CAUTIOUS RECONNAISSANCE OF THE GERMAN POSITIONS LED BOTH FRANK AND GARETH TO AN INESCAPABLE CONCLUSION.

THEY CHOSE WELL, MISTER JESSOP. A DOZEN MEN COULD KEEP A BRIGADE AT BAY IN THIS TERRITORY.

YOU'RE
RIGHT. MAYBE WE'RE HIGH ENOUGH FOR THE RADIO NOW.

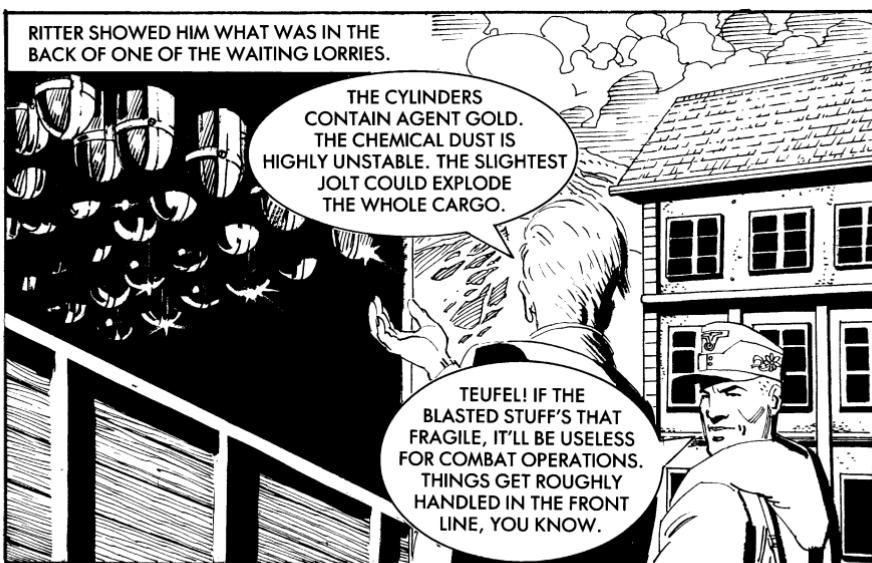


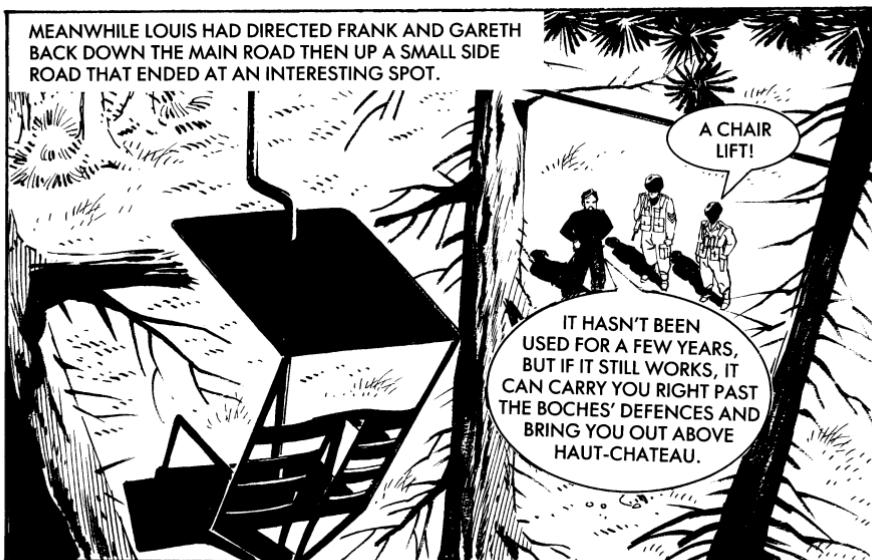
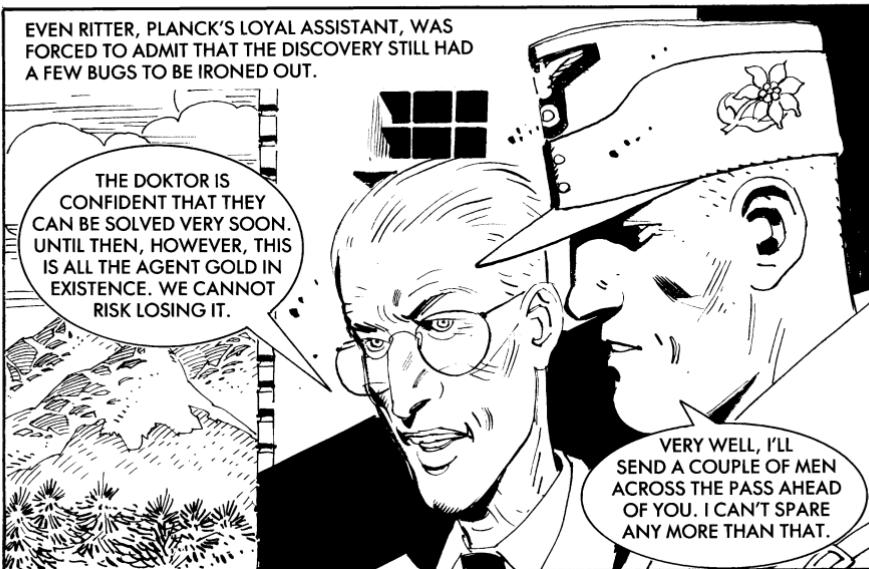


SATISFIED THAT THE IMMEDIATE DANGER HAD RECEDED, LUTZEN RETURNED TO THE RESEARCH CENTRE, WHERE HE WAS MET BY AN AGITATED RITTER.



RITTER SHOWED HIM WHAT WAS IN THE BACK OF ONE OF THE WAITING LORRIES.

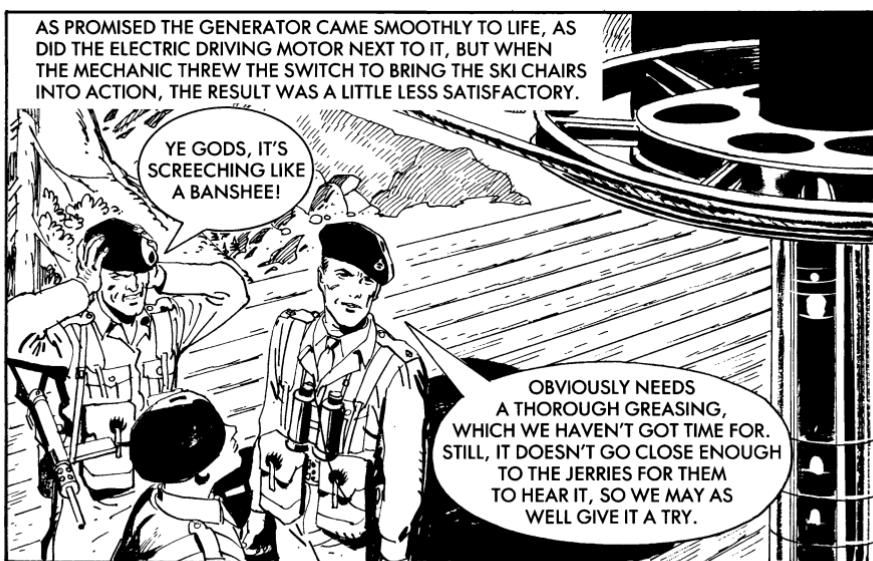




THEY DECIDED IT WAS WORTH A TRY AND GOT TO WORK. FRANK'S UNIT INCLUDED A COUPLE OF COMPETENT MECHANICS, WHO WASTED NO TIME CLEANING UP THE UNUSED GENERATOR.



AS PROMISED THE GENERATOR CAME SMOOTHLY TO LIFE, AS DID THE ELECTRIC DRIVING MOTOR NEXT TO IT, BUT WHEN THE MECHANIC THREW THE SWITCH TO BRING THE SKI CHAIRS INTO ACTION, THE RESULT WAS A LITTLE LESS SATISFACTORY.



AS THE NEXT CHAIR LURCHED TOWARDS THEM, FRANK AND GARETH PLONKED THEMSELVES DOWN AND HOPED FOR THE BEST.

AT LEAST
THE CABLE DIDN'T
BREAK THE MOMENT
WE GOT ON.

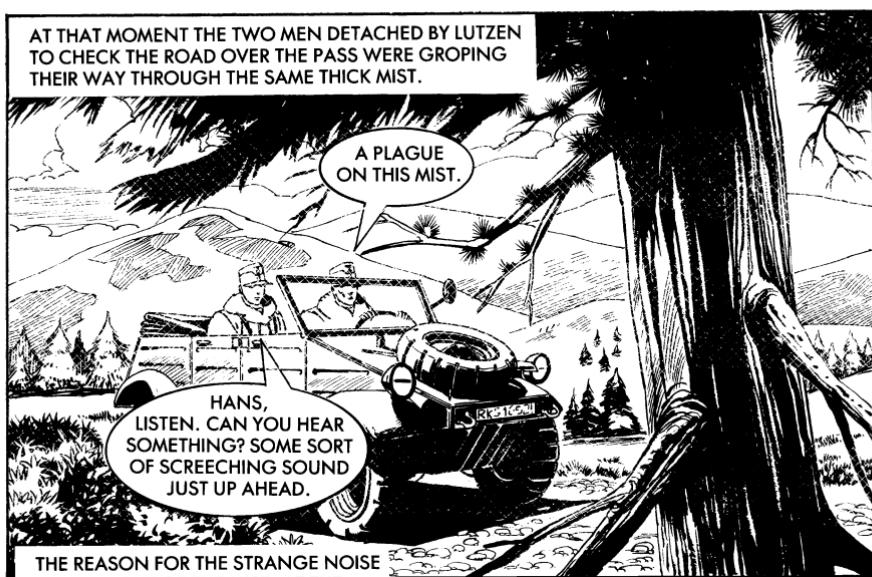
I'M NOT WORRIED
ABOUT IT BREAKING
HERE. IT'S THE THOUGHT
OF IT SNAPPING UP THERE
THAT GIVES ME THE
HEEBY-JEEBIES.

FOR SEVERAL NERVE-RACKING MINUTES THEY LURCHED AND SHUDDERED THEIR SCREECHING WAY UPWARDS UNTIL THEY RAN INTO LOW CLOUD WHICH OBSCURED EVERYTHING.

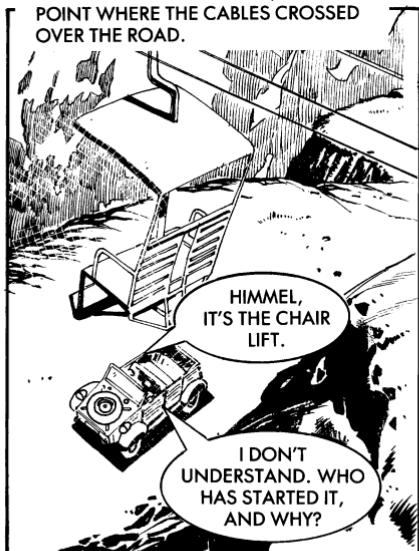
WE'RE GOING DOWN
AT LAST. WE MUST HAVE
CROSSED THE CREST OF THE
MOUNTAINS. LOOK OUT
FOR SOMEWHERE TO GET
OFF THIS THING.

I'M LOOKING,
MISTER JESSOP. TROUBLE
IS, I CAN'T EVEN SEE THE
GROUND RIGHT NOW.

AT THAT MOMENT THE TWO MEN DETACHED BY LUTZEN TO CHECK THE ROAD OVER THE PASS WERE GROPING THEIR WAY THROUGH THE SAME THICK MIST.



THE REASON FOR THE STRANGE NOISE LOOMED OUT OF THE MIST, AT THE POINT WHERE THE CABLES CROSSED OVER THE ROAD.



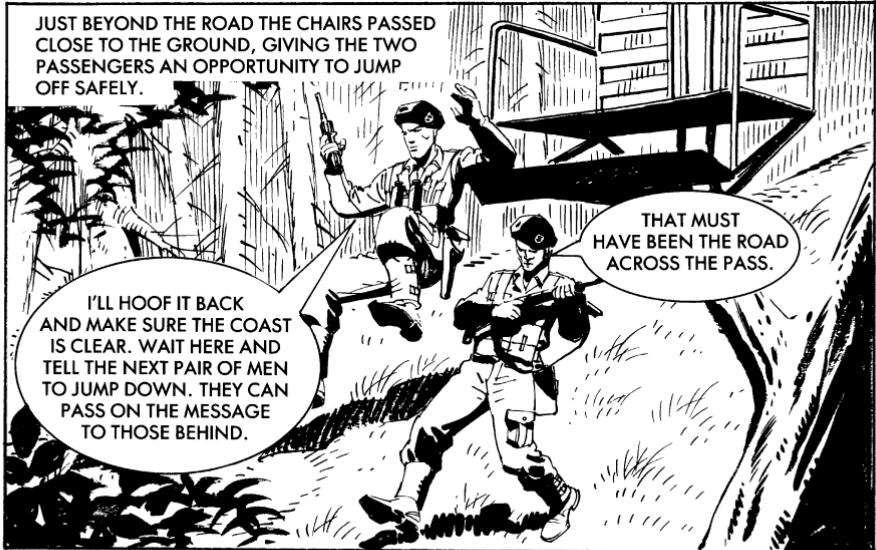
MOMENTS LATER THE PUZZLED GERMANS HAD THEIR ANSWER.



THE TWO BRITISH ALREADY HAD THEIR GUNS AT THE READY, SO THE ADVANTAGE LAY WITH THEM AS EACH PAIR RECOVERED FROM THE UNEXPECTED SURPRISE.



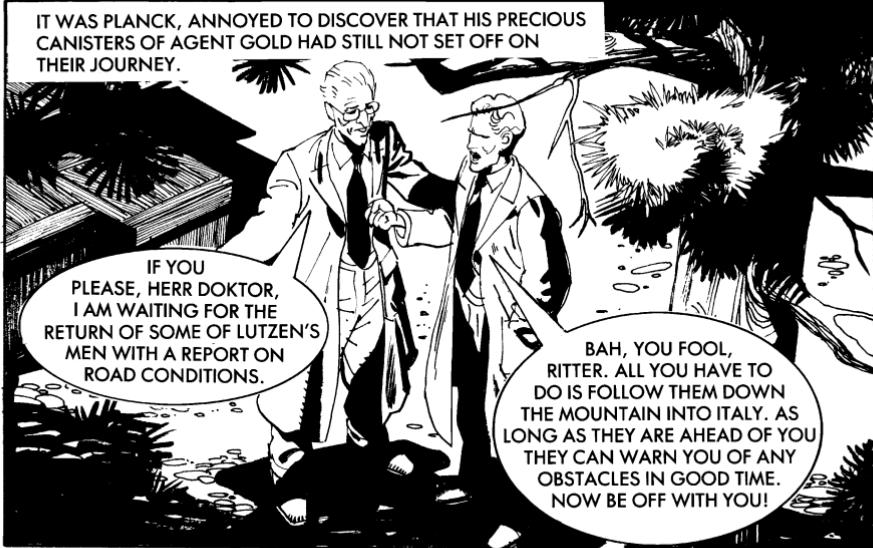
JUST BEYOND THE ROAD THE CHAIRS PASSED CLOSE TO THE GROUND, GIVING THE TWO PASSENGERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO JUMP OFF SAFELY.

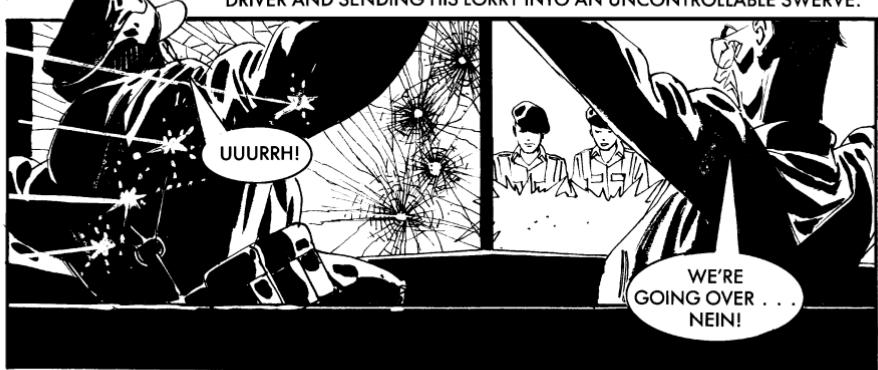
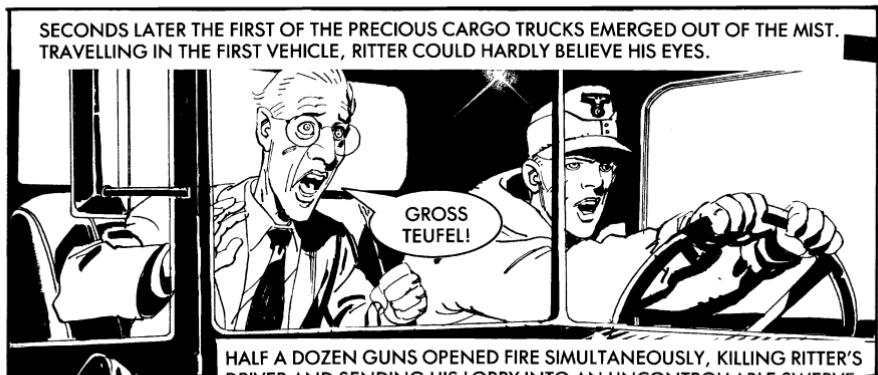
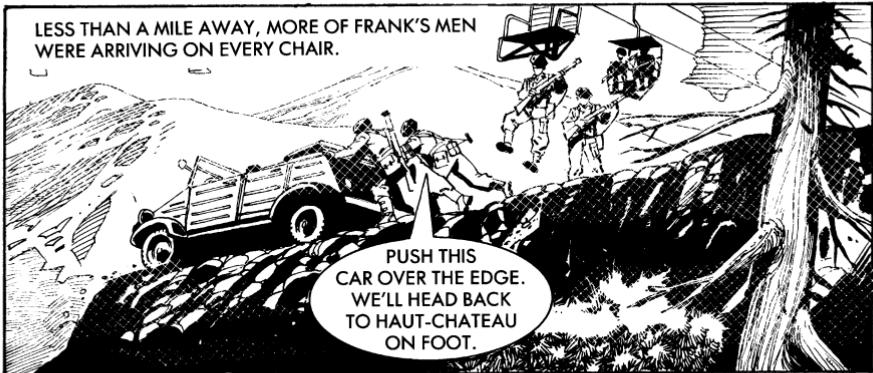


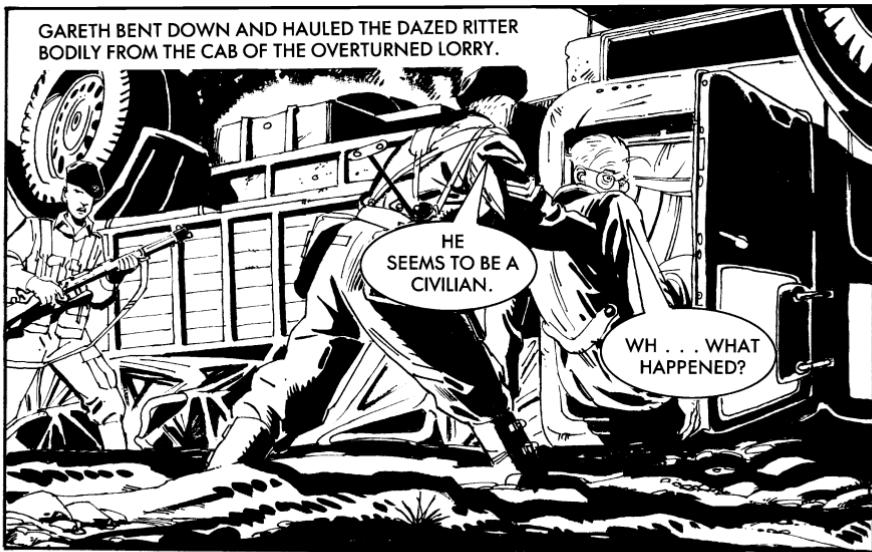
MEANWHILE RITTER WAS WAITING IMPATIENTLY AT HAUT-CHATEAU FOR THE TWO SOLDIERS TO RETURN AND REPORT ON THE CONDITION OF THE ROAD. HE DIDN'T HEAR SOMEBODY CREEP UP BEHIND HIM UNTIL A VOICE MADE HIM JUMP.



IT WAS PLANCK, ANNOYED TO DISCOVER THAT HIS PRECIOUS CANISTERS OF AGENT GOLD HAD STILL NOT SET OFF ON THEIR JOURNEY.







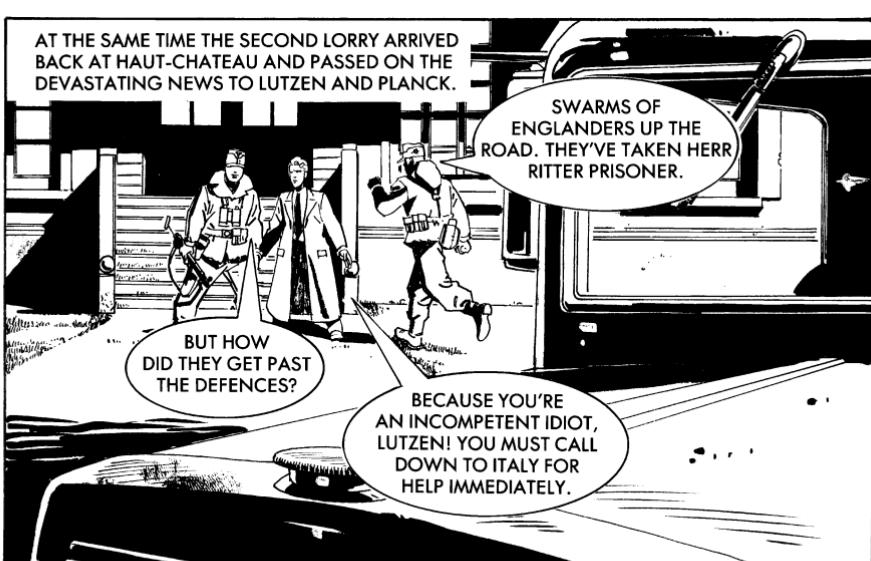
FRANK WENT TO LOOK IN THE BACK AND GAVE A LONG WHISTLE WHEN HE SAW WHAT THE LORRY WAS CARRYING, SUSPENDED IN HARNESSSES.



YOU . . . YOU RECKON THIS IS THE SECRET WEAPON, MISTER JESSOP?

I DON'T SEE WHAT ELSE IT CAN BE. LET'S HOPE OUR CAPTIVE SPEAKS SOME ENGLISH. HE'S GOT A FEW QUESTIONS TO ANSWER.

AT THE SAME TIME THE SECOND LORRY ARRIVED BACK AT HAUT-CHATEAU AND PASSED ON THE DEVASTATING NEWS TO LUTZEN AND PLANCK.



BUT HOW DID THEY GET PAST THE DEFENCES?

SWARMS OF ENGLANDERS UP THE ROAD. THEY'VE TAKEN HERR RITTER PRISONER.

BECAUSE YOU'RE AN INCOMPETENT IDIOT, LUTZEN! YOU MUST CALL DOWN TO ITALY FOR HELP IMMEDIATELY.



THE NEXT WORDS FROM THE TELEPHONE DEFLATED PLANCK'S OVER-INFLATED EGO LIKE A PUNCTURED BALLOON.



YOU ARE
FORTUNATE THAT THE
BRIGADE WAS ALREADY ON
ITS WAY. IT IS EN ROUTE
TO FRANCE TO ENGAGE
THE ALLIED INVADERS
FROM THE SOUTH.

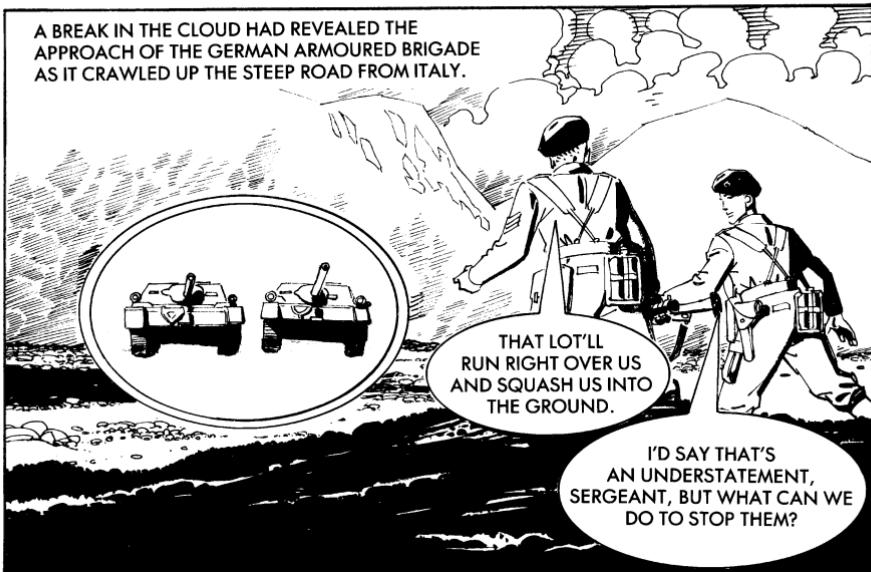
THAT'S
SHUT PLANCK UP
FOR ONCE.

MEANWHILE IT HAD BEEN DISCOVERED THAT
RITTER SPOKE GOOD ENGLISH. ALREADY
BEING SCARED HALF TO DEATH, HE NEEDED
LITTLE PROMPTING TO SPILL THE BEANS.

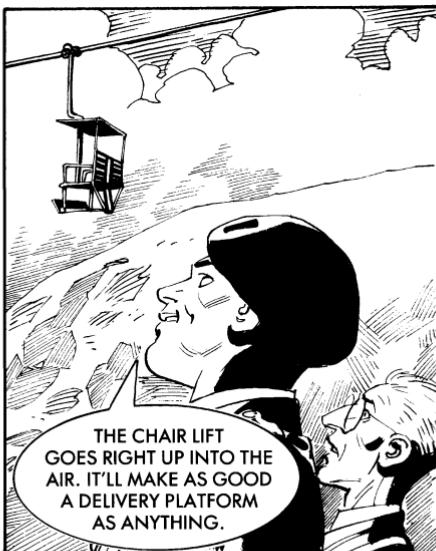


A BLINDING FLASH
THAT CAN INCAPACITATE
EVERYONE CAUGHT BY IT.
IT COULD VERY WELL BE
A WAR WINNER.

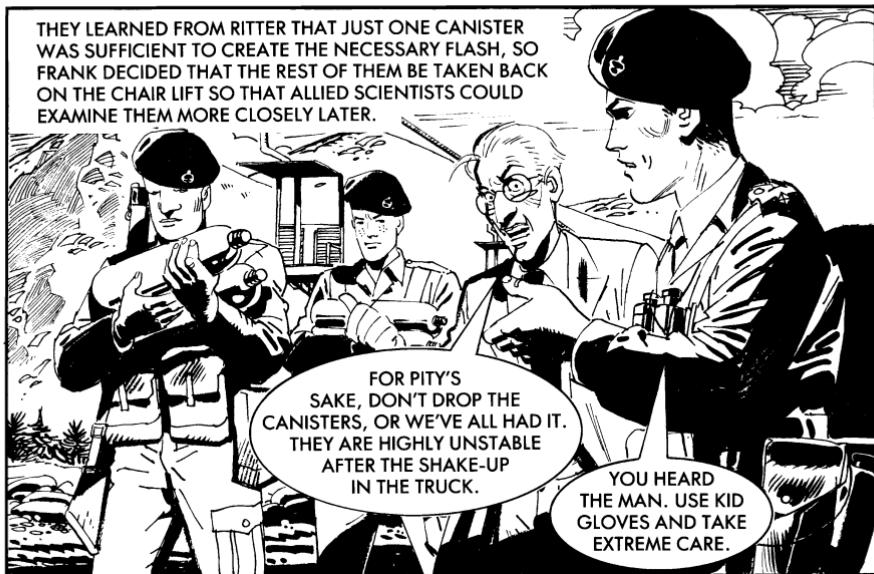
YE GODS!
LOOK WHAT'S
COMING!



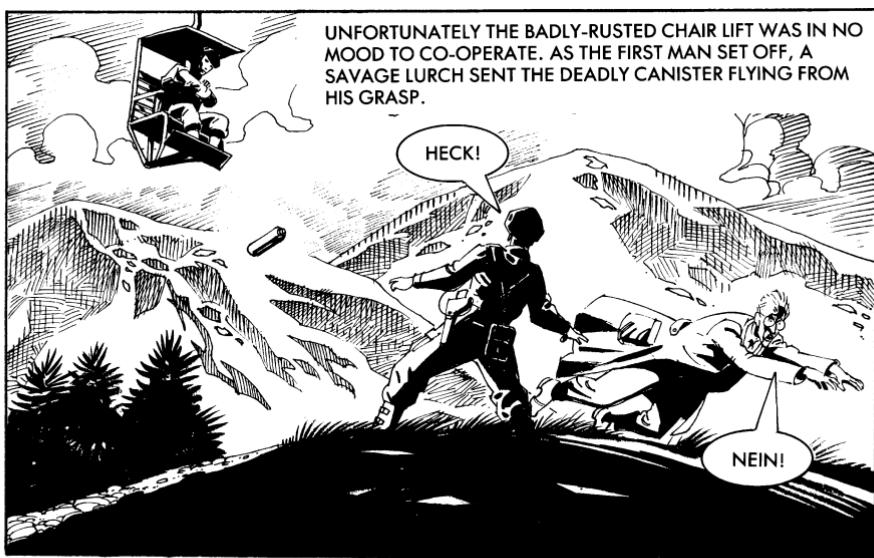
THAT WAS CERTAINLY TRUE, BUT AS FRANK SUDDENLY REALISED, IT WASN'T ALWAYS NECESSARY TO HAVE AN AIRCRAFT TO DELIVER SOMETHING FROM THE AIR.



THEY LEARNED FROM RITTER THAT JUST ONE CANISTER WAS SUFFICIENT TO CREATE THE NECESSARY FLASH, SO FRANK DECIDED THAT THE REST OF THEM BE TAKEN BACK ON THE CHAIR LIFT SO THAT ALLIED SCIENTISTS COULD EXAMINE THEM MORE CLOSELY LATER.



UNFORTUNATELY THE BADLY-RUSTED CHAIR LIFT WAS IN NO MOOD TO CO-OPERATE. AS THE FIRST MAN SET OFF, A SAVAGE LURCH SENT THE DEADLY CANISTER FLYING FROM HIS GRASP.



IT WAS GARETH WHO SAVED THE DAY WITH A MAGNIFICENTLY TIMED FLYING CATCH THAT SAVED THE CANISTER JUST INCHES FROM THE GROUND.

WELL HELD!

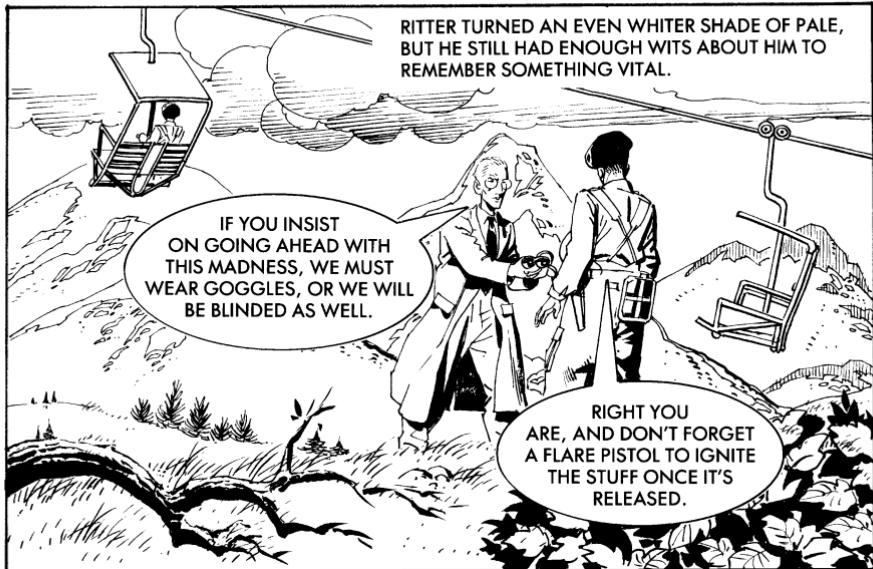
LUCKY I WAS
A WINGER WITH THE
LOCAL RUGBY TEAM BEFORE
I JOINED UP.

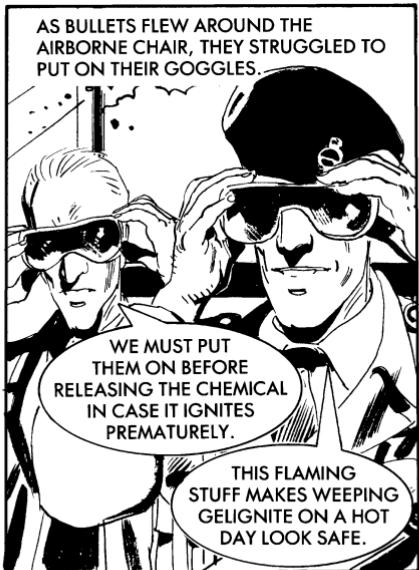
ONE BY ONE THE CANISTERS
THEY COULD EVACUATE WERE
CARRIED OFF OVER THE
MOUNTAINS, UNTIL ONLY
FRANK, GARETH, AND RITTER
WERE LEFT.

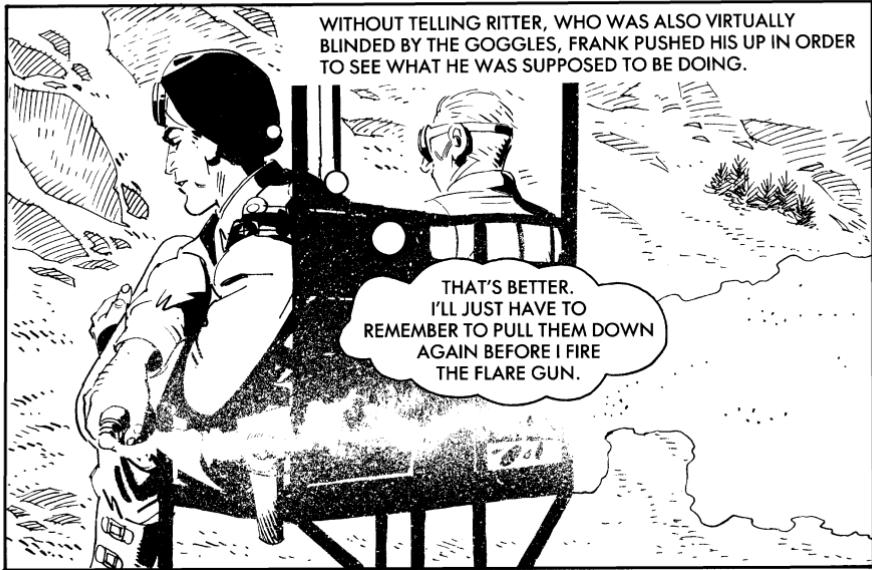
GET GOING WITH
THAT CANISTER. I'LL
FOLLOW WITH ANOTHER
ONE, AND RITTER CAN COME
WITH ME TO SHOW
ME WHAT TO DO.

ME?









THE PREVIOUSLY HALF-HEARTED POT SHOTS WERE REPLACED BY THE RAPID CHATTER OF HEAVY TRACER FIRE AS THE GERMAN GUNNER ZEROED IN ON HIS TARGET. DESPERATELY, FRANK BROUGHT UP THE FLARE PISTOL.



THE REALISATION SCARCELY HAD TIME TO REGISTER BEFORE THE WORLD EXPLODED SILENTLY AROUND FRANK. THERE WAS NO SHOCK WAVE, OR HEAT BLAST, JUST A TERRIBLE, BLINDING, ALL-CONSUMING LIGHT.



DOWN THE ENTIRE LENGTH OF THE ARMOURED COLUMN HUNDREDS OF PAIRS OF EYES WERE BLINDED AT THE SAME INSTANT. EVEN INSIDE TANKS THERE WAS NO PROTECTION FROM THE UNEARTHLY LIGHT.





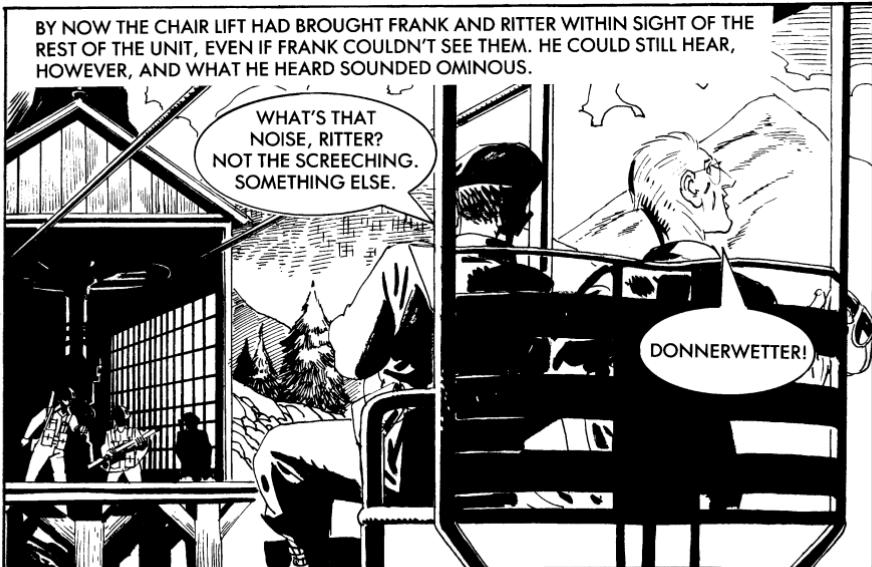
THE MAN WHO CAUSED IT ALL HAD OF COURSE BEEN BLINDED HIMSELF, BUT FRANK MADE IT QUITE CLEAR THAT IT WAS RITTER'S CONCERN AS MUCH AS HIS.

JA . . .
JA, ANYTHING
YOU SAY.

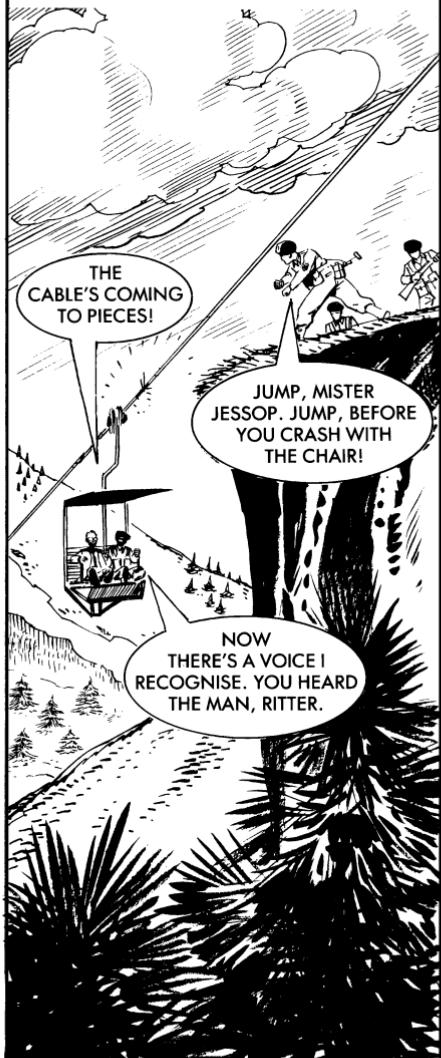
I MAY NOT BE
ABLE TO SEE, BUT I
DON'T NEED EYES TO BREAK
YOUR NECK IF YOU TRY
ANYTHING. WHERE YOU GO,
I GO, SO YOU'D BETTER
LOOK OUT FOR ME.

THE CREST OF THE MOUNTAINS HAD PROTECTED HAUT-CHATEAU FROM THE DIRECT EFFECTS OF THE GLARE, BUT WHEN LUTZEN RUSHED DOWN THE ROAD TO DISCOVER WHAT HAD HAPPENED, HE WAS APPALLED BY WHAT HE SAW.

GOTT IN
HIMMEL, THE ENTIRE
BRIGADE HAS BEEN REDUCED
TO A HELPLESS RABBLE
OF BLIND MEN.



WORKED TOO HARD WITHOUT SUFFICIENT PREPARATION, THE MAIN CABLE CARRYING THE CHAIRS WAS ABOUT TO GIVE UP THE GHOST.



EVEN AS THE TWO MEN LAUNCHED THEMSELVES INTO SPACE, THE CHAIR LIFT GAVE ONE LAST MIGHTY SHUDDER AND THEN THE MAIN CABLE PARTED WITH A SOUND LIKE A GUNSHOT.



AS GARETH HAD REALISED, THEIR FALL WAS CUSHIONED BY BUSHES DIRECTLY BELOW, AND THE TWO WERE HELPED UP, BRUISED BUT OTHERWISE UNHURT. ALTHOUGH THE SERGEANT GASPED WHEN HE REALISED WHAT HAD HAPPENED TO FRANK.



HAVING EXPERIENCED THE EFFECTS OF AGENT GOLD FOR HIMSELF, FRANK REALISED WHAT A DEVASTATING WEAPON IT WAS, BUT THERE SEEMED NOTHING TO STOP THE GERMANS IN HAUT-CHATEAU TAKING THE REST OF IT SAFELY INTO ITALY.



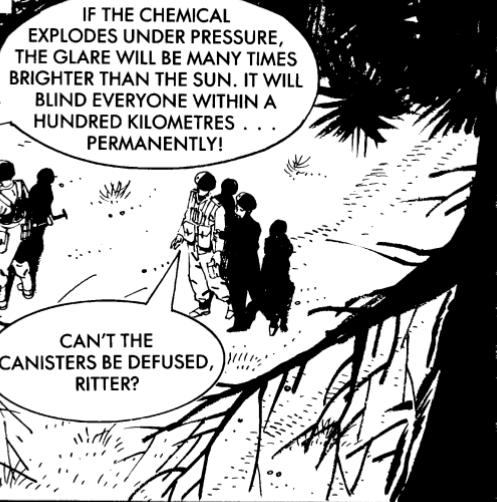
GARETH'S CASUAL REMARK LEFT RITTER LOOKING MORE SHAKEN THAN EVER. HE DEMANDED TO FEEL THE CANISTERS FOR HIMSELF.



THEY'RE HOT!
THIS IS DISASTROUS.
THE CHEMICALS ARE COMBINING
SPONTANEOUSLY. THE CANISTERS
WILL GO ON HEATING UP
UNTIL THEY EXPLODE.

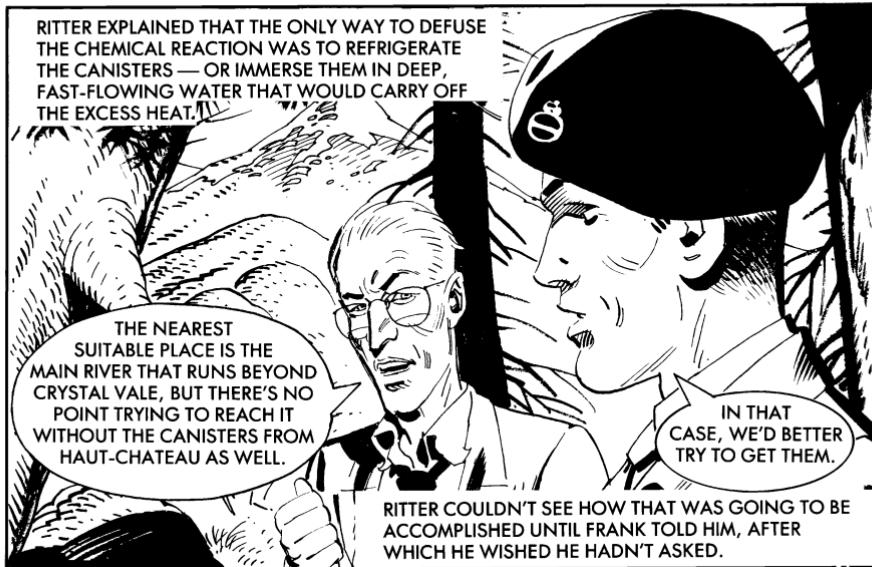
IN THAT CASE,
WE DON'T HAVE TO WORRY
ABOUT THE CANISTERS UP AT
HAUT-CHATEAU. THEY'LL
SELF-DESTRUCT, AND
THAT'LL BE THAT.

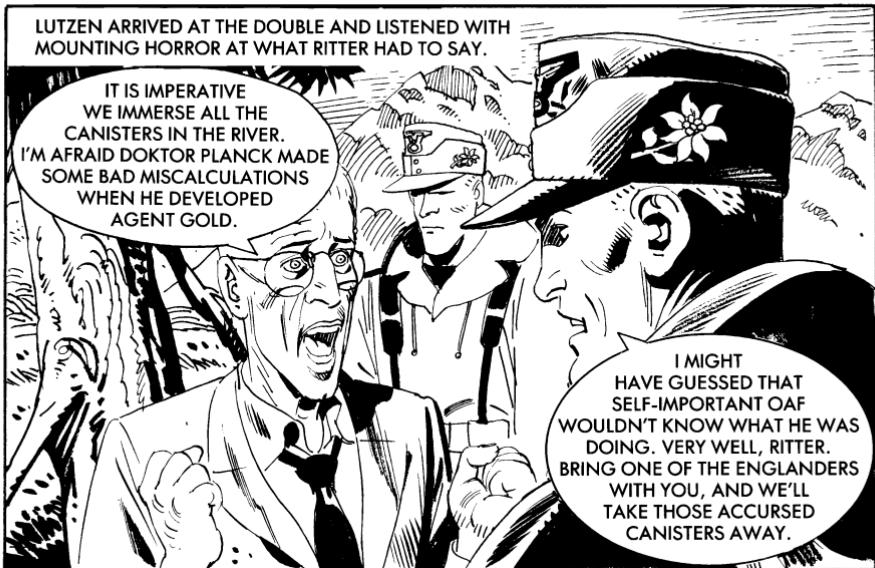
IT WAS A LOGICAL DEDUCTION, BUT IT FAILED TO TAKE ONE MORE FACTOR INTO ACCOUNT.

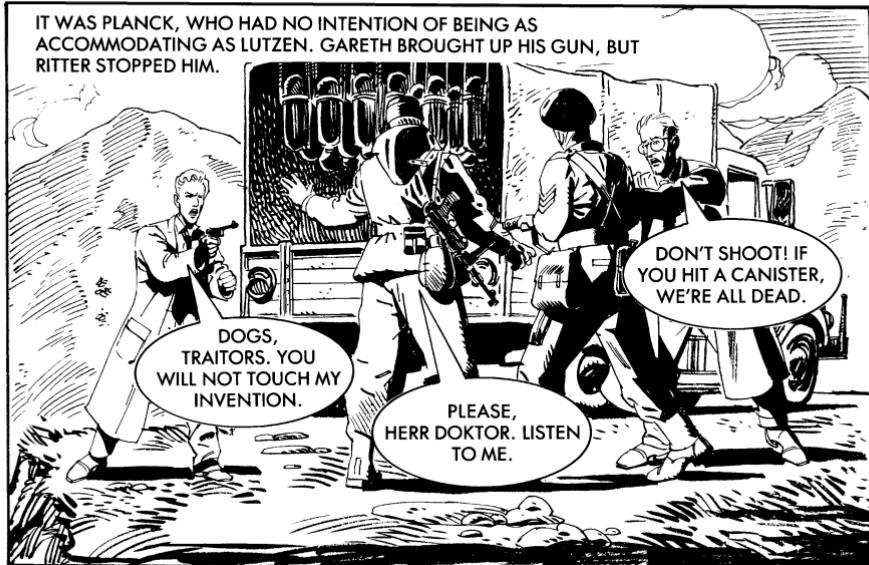


IF THE CHEMICAL EXPLODES UNDER PRESSURE,
THE GLARE WILL BE MANY TIMES
BRIGHTER THAN THE SUN. IT WILL
BLIND EVERYONE WITHIN A
HUNDRED KILOMETRES . . .
PERMANENTLY!

CAN'T THE CANISTERS BE DEFUSED,
RITTER?









THE BURNING SHOCK SENT PLANCK REELING BACKWARDS UNABLE TO LET GO OF THE DEADLY CANISTER, UNTIL HE STEPPED INTO SPACE AND PLUNGED TO HIS DOOM.



IT SEEMED INEVITABLE THAT THE CANISTER WOULD EXPLODE AT THE END OF PLANCK'S FALL, BUT THE SCIENTIST'S BODY SERVED A FINAL PURPOSE.



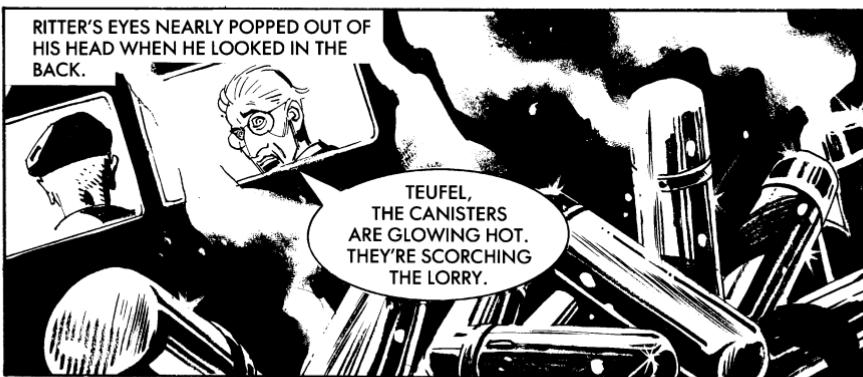
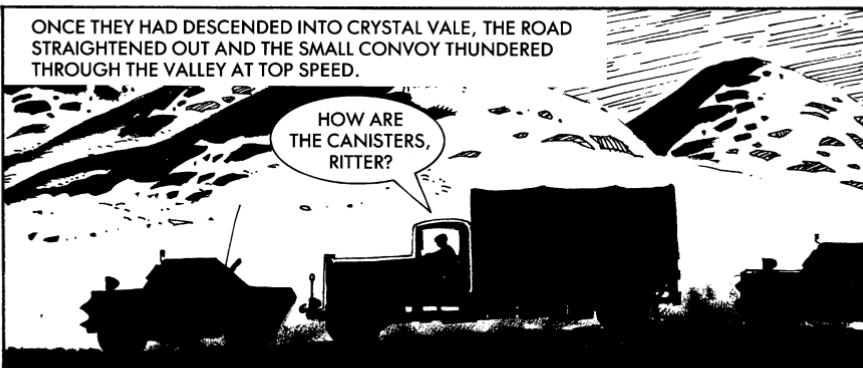
THE CANISTER WAS TOO HOT TO BE PICKED UP, BUT LUTZEN, WHO'D ESCAPED WITH A FLESH WOUND, CALLED FOR CLAMPS TO BE BROUGHT.



GARETH AND RITTER GOT ON BOARD AND WERE SOON SPEEDING DOWN THE HILL TOWARDS FRANK'S UNIT.







THEY LEFT CRYSTAL VALE AND TURNED TOWARDS THE MAIN RIVER, PASSING THROUGH A VILLAGE EN ROUTE.

CLEAR THE ROAD! GET OUT OF THE WAY!



BY NOW THE LORRY WAS PRACTICALLY IN FLAMES, AND RITTER WAS COUNTING OFF THE SECONDS.

THE CANISTERS ARE BEGINNING TO MELT. WE'VE ONLY GOT MOMENTS LEFT.

WHERE THE HECK'S THAT RIVER?

JUST BEYOND THE VILLAGE THEY MET AN AMERICAN ARMOURED UNIT MOVING NORTH, BUT THERE WAS NO TIME FOR PLEASANTRIES.

HEY, YOU GUYS, THERE'S A RIVER RIGHT AHEAD OF YOU.

AT LAST. MUSIC TO MY EARS.

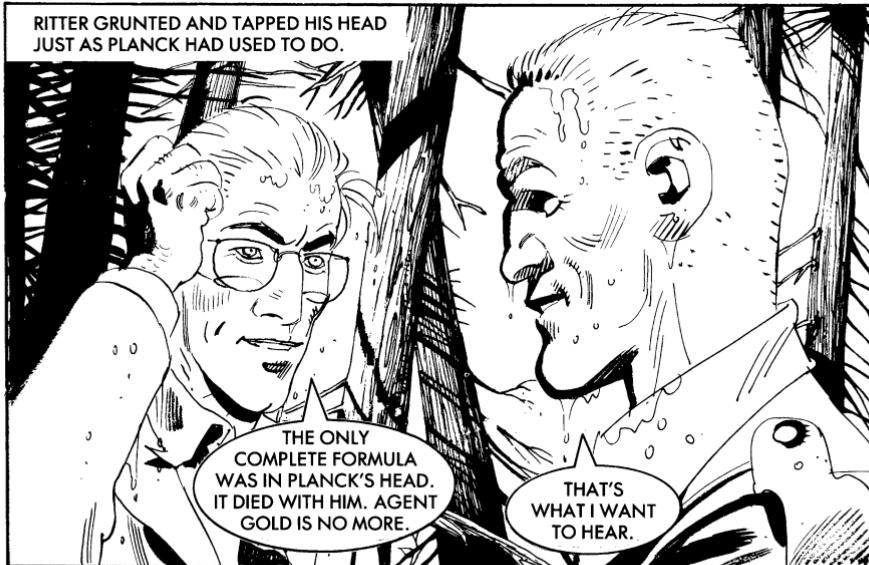
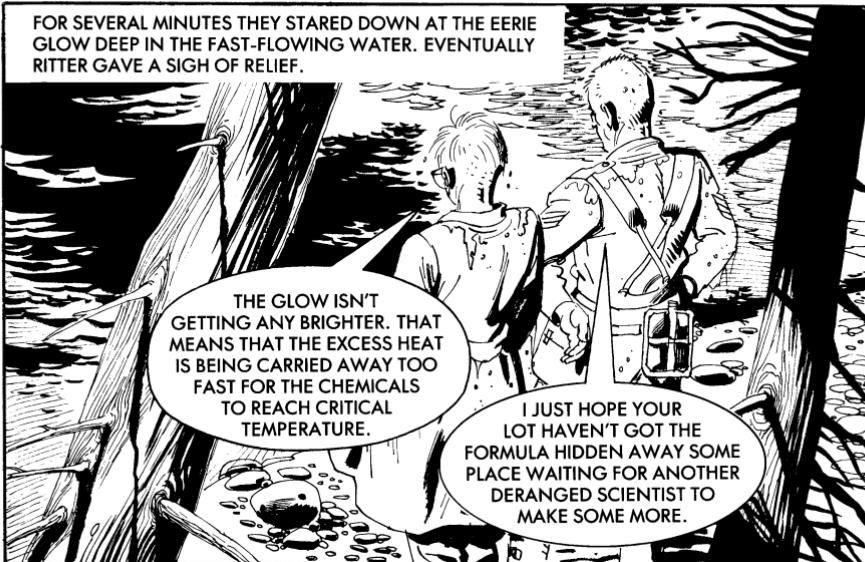


THE RIVER LAY JUST AROUND THE NEXT CORNER, AND GARETH SOLVED THE PROBLEM OF IMMERSING THE LORRY IN IT BY THE SIMPLE EXPEDIENT OF DRIVING ON IN A STRAIGHT LINE.



THERE WERE PLENTY OF WILLING HANDS TO HELP THEM OUT OF THE BITTERLY COLD WATER, BUT EVEN NOW THEY DIDN'T KNOW IF THE CANISTERS WERE SAFE.





BY THE FOLLOWING DAY THE WRECKAGE HAD COOLED ENOUGH TO BE DRAGGED OUT OF THE RIVER. LOUIS AND FRANK, NOW FULLY RECOVERED, JOINED GARETH TO WATCH.



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THE END

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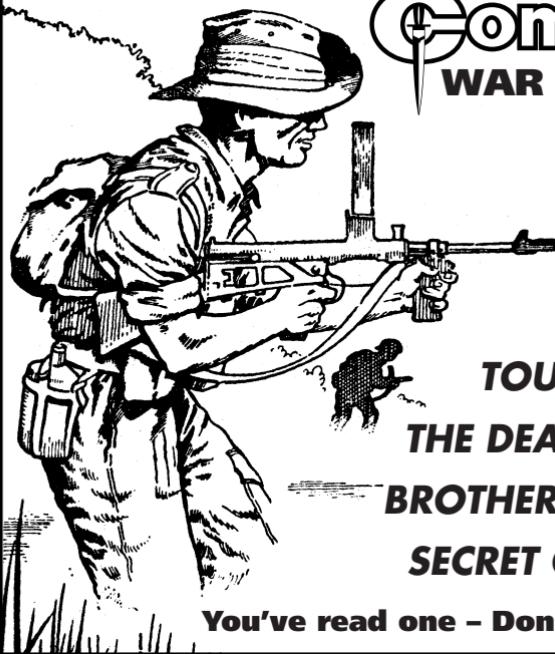
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