

COMPLETE 63-PAGE ACTION STORY

No.4768
£2

Commando

THE GOLD COLLECTION



COMMANDO - GOLD COLLECTION

Title

NIGHT FIGHTER

Subject

While we try to keep Commando as authentic as possible, we have taken liberties over the years. Sometimes the plots are well over-the-top, sometimes — like here — they're just the tiniest bit far-fetched. It's still very believable but... For all that, it is a good yarn, one that'll have you rooting for the main character. Let's hope the author doesn't let you down.

Inside artist, Medrano, is up there with the best of war aviation artists and his crisp, precise eye for detail adds an extra layer of enjoyment to the story. He's also not afraid to use a lot of black ink, and does so to good effect.

No doubt it was Ken Barr's cover that drew you in, rest assured the contents of the book live up to its promise.

Calum Laird, Commando Editor

Issue Number

Night Fighter, originally Commando No 140
(November 1964)

STORY
PARLETT

ART
MEDRANO

COVER
KEN BARR

First Published
1964
No 140



NIGHT FIGHTER



A MEMBER OF AN AIR CREW IN THE R.A.F. WAS THE FINEST THING ANY MAN COULD BE IN THE DARK DAYS OF 1942, WHEN HITLER WAS TRYING TO MASTER THE SKY. BUT TO MAKE SURE THE PLANES WERE ALWAYS READY, THE MEN OF GROUND CREWS WORKED DAY AND NIGHT, EARNING NO LEAVE OR MEDALS, ONLY THE EVERLASTING GRATITUDE OF THEIR PILOT. THE PUBLIC NEVER HEARD OF THEIR DEVOTION. AT LEAST, NOT UNTIL A.C.1. HERBERT BARNET TOOK TO THE AIR.

BERT BARNET WANTED TO FLY MORE THAN ANYTHING IN THE WORLD, BUT AS HE FACED THE AIR CREW SELECTION BOARD, HIS MANNER WAS NERVOUS, ALMOST AS IF HE INWARDLY DREADED THAT HE MIGHT, BY SOME MIRACLE BE ACCEPTED.



AFTER HALF AN HOUR, THE MEMBERS OF THE BOARD GLANCED AT ONE ANOTHER AND THEN THE PRESIDENT SPOKE.



AS BERT MISERABLY RETURNED TO HIS BENCH IN THE WORKSHOP AT THE FAR END OF THE RUNWAY, CROSBY, HIS SECTION SERGEANT, GREETED HIM WITH AN UNFRIENDLY SCOWL.

SO THEY TURNED YOU DOWN, EH? I'M NOT SURPRISED. NOW PERHAPS YOU'LL STOP MOONING AROUND, DREAMING OF BEING A FILER, AND GET DOWN TO A BIT OF REAL WORK. GET CRACKING, AIRMAN, THE A.I. SET IN MR BULLER'S BEAUFIGHTER NEEDS TUNING. JUMP TO IT!

YES,
SARGE.

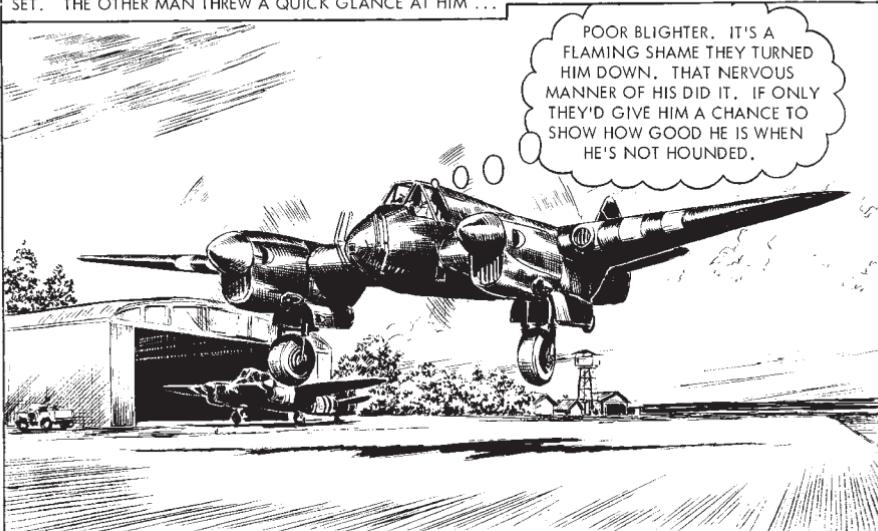
THE A.I. SET WAS THE AIRCRAFT INTERCEPTION SCREEN USED IN BEAUFIGHTERS TO SPOT ENEMY RAIDERS AT NIGHT.

FLYING OFFICER BOB BULLER LOOKED UP WITH A FRIENDLY GRIN AS THE DISCONSOLATE BERT CAME INTO SIGHT. GENEROUS AND IMPULSIVE BY NATURE, THE BIG PILOT KNEW HOW BERT MUST BE FEELING, AND HIS MANNER WAS SYMPATHETIC.

FROM THE LOOK ON YOUR FACE I TAKE IT THE SELECTION BOARD TURNED YOU DOWN. NEVER MIND, THESE BODS DON'T KNOW A GOOD MAN WHEN THEY SEE ONE. I'D BE GLAD TO HAVE YOU ANY DAY. WE'VE A RADAR AIR TEST TO DO, SO COME ON, I'LL TAKE YOU FOR A FLIP.

THANK YOU,
SIR....I...I'D
LIKE THAT!

AS THE AIRCRAFT TOOK OFF, THE THRILL THAT BERT FELT AT BEING AIRBORNE WAS SPOILED BY THE FACT THAT HE HIMSELF WOULD NEVER FLY. TO FORGET HIS DEPRESSION, BERT BUSIED HIMSELF WITH THE A.I. SET. THE OTHER MAN THREW A QUICK GLANCE AT HIM ...



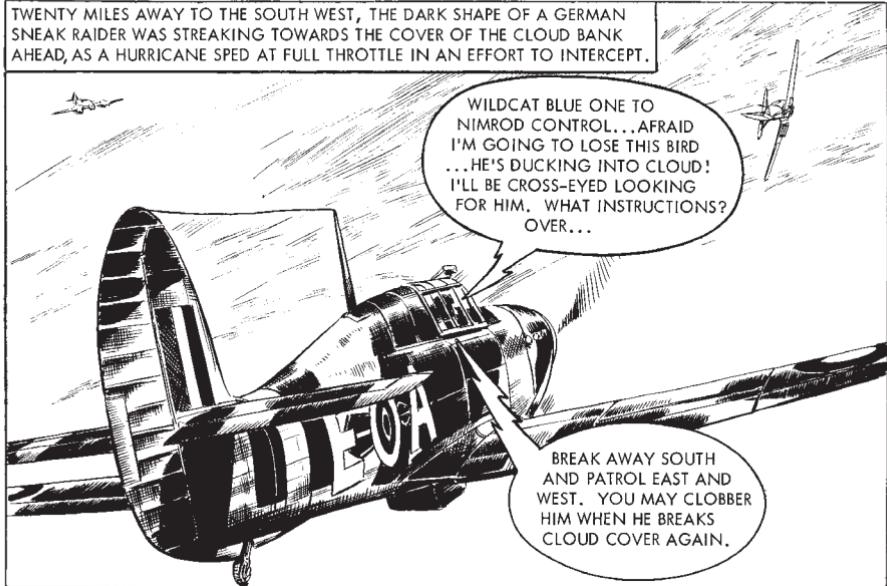
INSTINCTIVELY AWARE OF THE YOUNG OFFICER'S SYMPATHY,
BERT SPOKE GRATEFULLY INTO THE INTERCOM.

THANKS FOR LETTING ME COME
UP WITH YOU, SIR. THE A.I.'S
WORKING ALL RIGHT NOW. I ONLY
WISH SOMETHING WOULD HAPPEN
TO GIVE ME THE CHANCE TO SHOW
YOU WHAT I COULD DO AS A
RADIO OPERATOR!

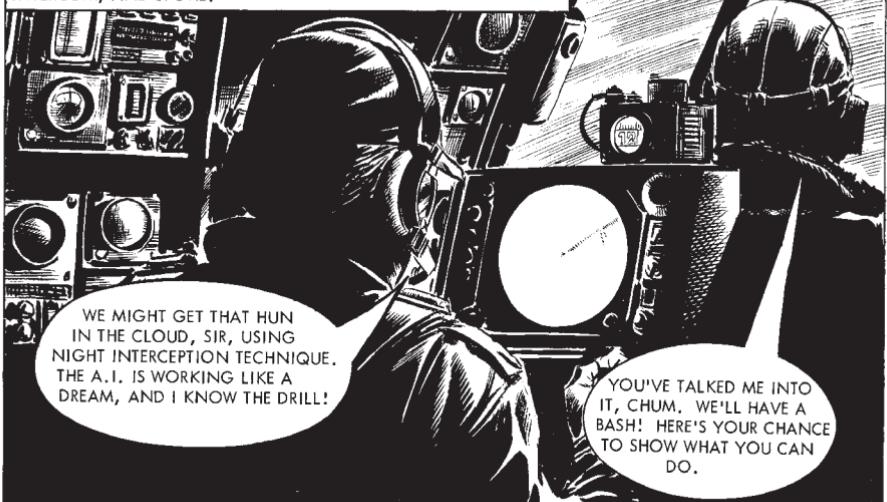
NOT MUCH HOPE OF THAT,
I'M AFRAID. NIGHT FIGHTERS
ON DAYTIME CROSS-COUNTRY
TEST FLIGHTS DON'T GET MUCH
EXCITEMENT. IF THERE ARE ANY
HUNS ABOUT, THE HURRICANE
BOYS WILL TAKE CARE OF THEM!

BUT BOB BULLER WAS WRONG. EVEN
AT THAT MOMENT, THE UNEXPECTED
WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN...

TWENTY MILES AWAY TO THE SOUTH WEST, THE DARK SHAPE OF A GERMAN SNEAK RAIDER WAS STREAKING TOWARDS THE COVER OF THE CLOUD BANK AHEAD, AS A HURRICANE SPED AT FULL THROTTLE IN AN EFFORT TO INTERCEPT.



IDLY TUNING ON TO THE DAY FIGHTER FREQUENCY, BOB BULLER STIFFENED AS THE BRISK EXCHANGE OF MESSAGES CRACKLED FROM HIS RECEIVER. BERT, INSTANTLY ALERT, SWITCHED ON THE INTERCOM, AND SPOKE.



ONE MINUTE THEY WERE IN SUNSHINE, THEN BOB SLOWLY OPENED THE THROTTLE AND THEY PLUNGED INTO THE DARKNESS OF THE CLOUD, WITH ONLY THE GLOW FROM THE INSTRUMENTS SHEDDING AN EERIE BLUE LIGHT UPON THEIR FACES.

CONTACT! I'VE GOT HIM, SIR. RANGE, EIGHT MILES, ELEVEN O'CLOCK, CROSSING PORT TO STARBOARD. DOWN FIVE HUNDRED FEET, SIR AND STARBOARD TEN!

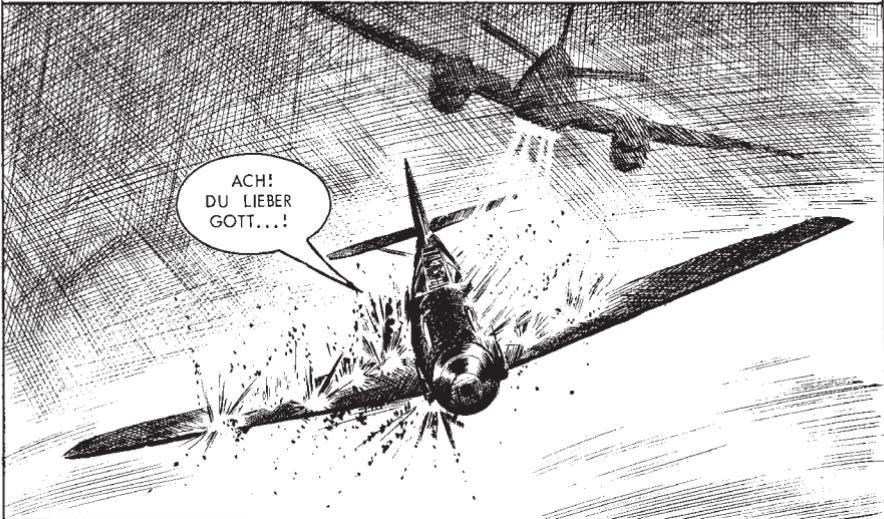
DOWN FIVE HUNDRED, STARBD TEN! ROGER! THAT WAS QUICK WORK, OPERATOR.

BERT FLUSHED WITH PLEASURE AT THE CASUAL WORDS OF PRAISE. HIS PILOT WAS ACCEPTING HIS DIRECTIONS WITHOUT QUESTION AND, INSPIRED BY THE TRUST WHICH BOB HAD IN HIM, BERT'S NERVOUS MANNER DISAPPEARED LIKE MAGIC. WHEN HE SPOKE AGAIN, HIS VOICE WAS CRISP AND DECISIVE.

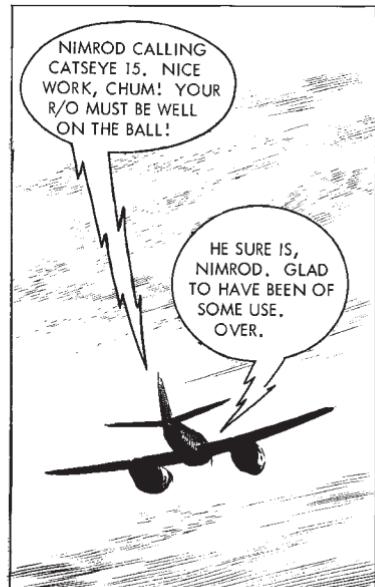
DEAD AHEAD NOW, SIR...RANGE ONE, STARBOARD FIVE AND YOU'VE GOT HIM!

THANKS, OPERATOR! I SEE HIM. THIS IS ONE JERRY WHO WON'T BE GOING HOME TODAY.

THE GERMAN PILOT NEVER KNEW WHAT HIT HIM. FROM THE VERY HEART OF THE CLOUD A SHATTERING SALVO RIPPED INTO HIS MESSERSCHMITT. IN A SECOND, THE PLANE WAS HURTLING DOWN THROUGH THE VOID, ABLAZE FROM END TO END.



IN THE SECTOR OPERATIONS ROOM, THE CONTROLLERS LISTENED ALMOST WITH DISBELIEF AS THE R/T CRACKLED.



AN HOUR LATER, AS THEY TAXIED TO A HALT AND CLAMBERED STIFFLY FROM THE PLANE, BULLER SPOKE TO WING COMMANDER STEVE MARSH, WHO WAS WAITING THERE TO GREET THEM.



AS THE TWO OFFICERS WALKED AWAY, SERGEANT CROSBY BECKONED TO BERT AND, BY THE LOOK ON HIS FACE, IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT HE WAS FAR FROM PLEASED. HIS MEAN LITTLE EYES GLINTED WITH AN EXPRESSION OF PURE DISLIKE AS THE AIRMAN HALTED BEFORE HIM.

SO YOU'RE A FLIPPING HERO, ARE YOU? WELL, DON'T LET THIS GO TO YOUR HEAD, AIRMAN! A RADAR MECHANIC'S PLACE IS ON THE DECK, ANY TIME I SEE YOU DREAMING ABOUT A D.F.C. I'LL BE ON YOUR NECK LIKE A TON OF BRICKS.
SO WISE UP!



THE NEWS OF BERT'S EXPLOIT QUICKLY SPREAD ROUND THE STATION, BUT CROSBY GAVE HIM LITTLE OPPORTUNITY FOR PRAISE.

YOU OUGHT TO GET A GONG FOR WHAT YOU DID THE OTHER DAY.

BELT UP, COOPER! BARNET, GET ON WITH YOUR WORK. NO SKIVING, OR ELSE!



BUT BERT WAS NOT EVEN LISTENING. HE WAS STILL RE-LIVING HIS FEW SECONDS OF VICTORY.

IF I PUT UP ANOTHER GOOD SHOW, THE SELECTION BOARD MIGHT CHANGE THEIR MIND. I'VE JUST GOT TO GET ANOTHER CHANCE.



THAT NIGHT, NUMBER 958 SQUADRON'S BEAUFIGHTERS ROSE INTO THE AIR ONE AFTER THE OTHER LIKE HUGE BLACK BIRDS. FROM FAR AWAY DOWN THE COAST CAME THE RUMBLE OF GUNFIRE AND THE DRONE OF DISTANT BOMBERS. IT WAS A NIGHT OF DESTRUCTION AND SUDDEN DEATH.



FIND
MORE
FREE
MAGAZINES

FREEMAGS.CC

AN HOUR PASSED BEFORE THE FIRST OF THE NIGHT FIGHTERS RETURNED. THE GROUP OF AIRMEN BURST INTO A FLURRY OF SUDDEN ACTIVITY.



UNDER BERT'S SKILFUL FINGERS, THE A.I. WAS SOON REPAIRED.



HARDLY HAD THE PLANE ROARED AWAY AGAIN INTO THE NIGHT THAN ANOTHER APPEARED, ANGLING DOWN TOWARDS THE FAR END OF THE RUNWAY. BERT WATCHED HER IDLY FOR A MOMENT. THEN HE TENSED AS HIS KEEN EARS CAUGHT THE UNMISTAKEABLE BEAT OF ENEMY ENGINES...



HARDLY HAD THE WORDS LEFT THE SERGEANT'S LIPS THAN THE UNSEEN INTRUDER SCREAMED DOWN FROM ABOVE WITH CANNON BLAZING. WHEELS DOWN, THE BEAUFIGHTER SEEMED TO STOP IN MID-AIR FOR A MOMENT BEFORE PLUNGING HEADLONG TO THE GROUND...



IN THE CREW ROOM AT DISPERSEL, THE STATION TANNOY GAVE A PRELIMINARY CRACKLE AND THEN A FLAT METALLIC VOICE RESOUNDED THROUGH THE SMOKE-LADEN AIR.



COMING FULL-ТИLT OUT OF THE HUT, FLYING OFFICER PETER TENNANT AND HIS RADAR OPERATOR, SERGEANT MARRIOTT, TORE OVER TOWARDS THEIR WAITING AIRCRAFT. BUT DIRECTLY IN THE SERGEANT'S PATH LAY A DISCARDED BAG OF TOOLS FOR WHICH BERT WAS SEARCHING EVEN AT THAT MOMENT.



SERGEANT MARRIOTT'S LUCK WAS OUT THAT NIGHT FOR, AS HE PITCHED FORWARD, HIS HEAD STRUCK THE BACK OF A PARKED JEEP. WITHOUT A SOUND HE SLITHERED TO THE GROUND AND LAY STILL WHILE HIS PILOT, UNAWARE OF THE INCIDENT, WENT RACING ON ALONE.



BENDING OVER THE UNCONSCIOUS MAN, BERT COULD SEE AT ONCE THAT HE WAS NOT SERIOUSLY HURT. THEN, AS AN INSISTENT VOICE BELLOWED FROM THE AIRCRAFT PARK, HE REALISED THAT FATE HAD PLAYED INTO HIS HANDS. HERE WAS A READY MADE CHANCE TO FLY AGAIN, AND TO PROVE HIS WORTH ONCE MORE.



SNATCHING UP THE FALLEN MAN'S FLYING KIT, BERT RACED AFTER THE PILOT, PULLING ON THE LEATHER HELMET AND ADJUSTING THE GOGGLES AS HE RAN. AS HE REACHED THE BEAUFIGHTER THE POWERFUL ENGINES BURST INTO A FULL-THROATED ROAR.



A MOMENT LATER HE WAS SCRAMBLING BREATHLESSLY INSIDE AND PULLING UP THE ALUMINIUM LADDER BEHIND HIM. HIS FIRST OPERATIONAL SORTIE WAS ABOUT TO BEGIN.

THE VOICE WHICH GREETED BERT ON THE INTERCOM WAS FAR FROM CORDIAL, AND HIS PILOT WAS NOT THE FRIENDLY BOB BULLER AS HE HAD HOPED. IT WAS THE VOICE OF A MAN WHO WAS NOT ACCUSTOMED TO BEING KEPT WAITING AND WHO, AT THIS MOMENT, WAS IN A FLAMING TEMPER.

AND ABOUT RUDDY TIME TOO! THIS IS A SCRAMBLE, NOT AN EVENING STROLL ROUND THE AIRFIELD! HULLO, TOWER, CATSEYE 21 READY FOR TAKE-OFF. TAXI-ING FOR TAKE-OFF NOW!

CRIES! IT ISN'T MR BULLER, IT'S MR TENNANT, AND HE'S AN AWKWARD CUSTOMER WHEN HE'S IN A TEMPER. IF HE FINDS OUT WHO I REALLY AM, HE'LL TEAR A STRIP OFF ME A YARD WIDE!

UNDER THE SKILFUL, IMPATIENT HANDS OF HER PILOT, THE BEAUFIGHTER FAIRLY LEAPED INTO THE AIR AND STARTED TO CLIMB. ONCE AGAIN BERT FELT THE THRILL OF FLYING WITH DANGER AT EVERY TURN.

WATCH THAT BOX OF YOURS, OPERATOR. IF YOU LET THAT JERRY SLIP THROUGH OUR FINGERS, I'LL HAVE YOUR HIDE! G.C.I. SAY HE'S STILL UP THERE SOMEWHERE, BUT HE'S TOO CLOSE TO THE STATION FOR GROUND RADAR TO PICK HIM UP.

UNDER THE CHEERFUL BOB BULLER, BERT COULD GIVE OF HIS BEST, BUT PETER TENNANT ONLY CONFUSED HIM.



CONTACT! TARGET ONE O'CLOCK, HIGH, CROSSING STARBOARD TO PORT. PORT FIVE AND UP A THOUSAND!

PORT FIVE, CLIMBING TO ANGELS ELEVEN! WHAT RANGE AND SPEED? WELL? HAVEN'T YOU GOT IT YET? IF WE BLUNDER IN FRONT OF THE TARGET, HE'LL SHOOT US DOWN!

MEANWHILE, BOB BULLER FLEW CLOSE BY, SEEKING TO INTERCEPT YET ANOTHER OF THE ENEMY INTRUDERS. UNAWARE THAT TENNANT'S BEAUFIGHTER WAS RAPIDLY CLOSING WITH HIM IN THE DARKNESS, BULLER FLEW ON.



SIR! 21 IS SOMEWHERE NEAR US ON THE PORT SIDE. DOES HE KNOW WHERE WE ARE?

PROBABLY NOT, AND GROUND CONTROL CAN'T SEE EITHER OF US ON THEIR SCREENS. BETTER SWITCH ON 'CANARY' IN CASE OUR TRIGGER-HAPPY PLAYMATE SHOOTS US UP BY MISTAKE!

AND, WITH A CLICK, THE SECRET IDENTIFICATION SIGNAL KNOWN AS 'CANARY' WAS SWITCHED ON.

BERT STARED, HORRIFIED, AS THE FRIENDLY IDENTIFICATION SIGN FLASHED ON HIS SCREEN. FOR A MOMENT WORDS WOULD NOT COME, AND THEN HE YELLED HIS FRANTIC WARNING ...



I CAN SEE HIS EXHAUSTS. HERE WE GO! HULLO, WATCHDOG ...21...JUDY! JUDY!

GOOD GRIEF! IT'S SHOWING 'CANARY'! HOLD IT, SIR, HOLD IT! IT'S ONE OF OURS!

BUT IT WAS ALREADY TOO LATE. WITH HIS TARGET FULL IN HIS SIGHTS, TENNANT'S THUMB WAS PRESSING THE FIRING BUTTON.



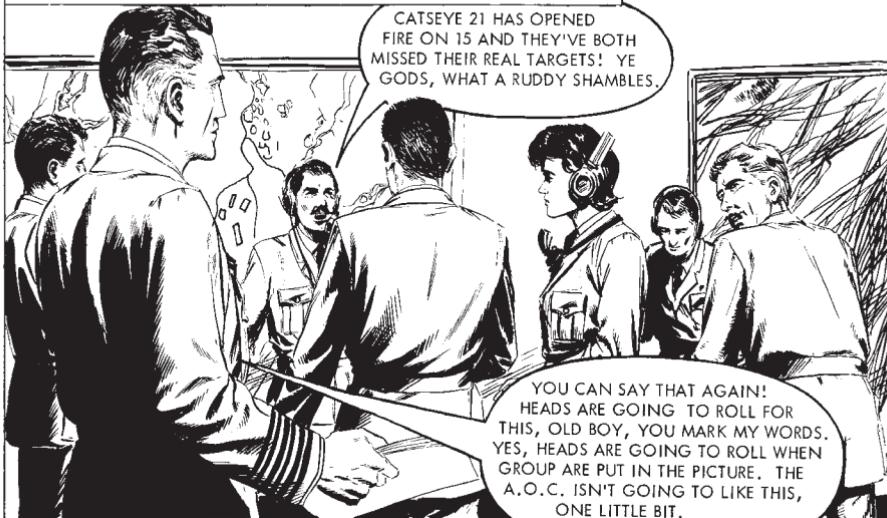
TENNANT'S GUNS CEASED FIRE ABRUPTLY, BUT BOB BULLER WAS TAKING NO CHANCES. WEAVING AND SIDE-SLIPPING, HE SKIDDED OUT OF DANGER BEFORE STRAIGHTENING UP TO RESUME HIS OWN INTERRUPTED CHASE.



IT'S BAD ENOUGH BEING SHOT UP BY OLD JERRY WITHOUT ONE'S OWN PALS HAVING A GO, TOO!

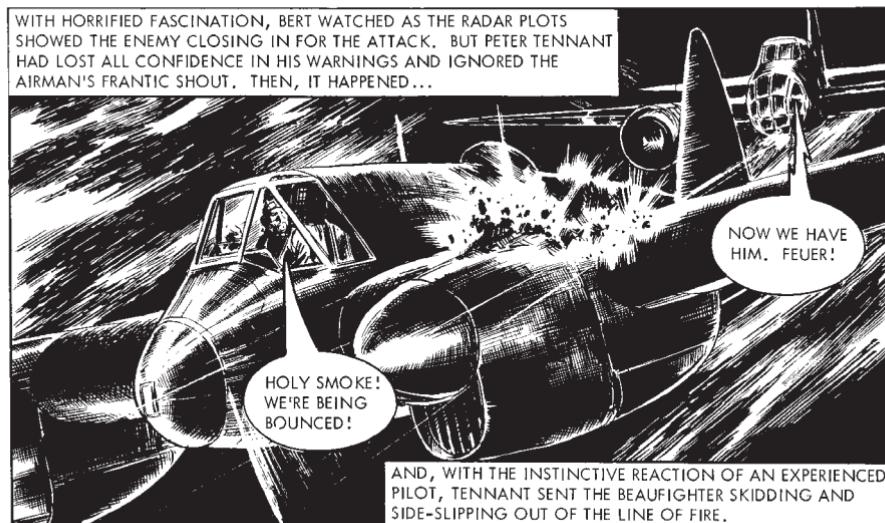
THE CRAZY CLOT! HANG ON, CHUM. WE'RE GETTING OUT OF THIS, FAST!

IN THE G.C.I. OPERATIONS ROOM FAR BELOW, CHAOS REIGNED SUPREME AS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SNATCHES OF THOSE FEW HASTY TRANSMISSIONS DAWNED UPON THE HARASSED CONTROLLERS.



BERT HAD NOW REALISED WHAT HAD HAPPENED. SO, TOO, HAD HIS PILOT AND THE LATTER DID NOT MINCE HIS WORDS. THEN, IN THE MIDST OF THE TIRADE, A NEW 'BLIP' SWAM INTO VIEW UPON THE LITTLE SCREEN...





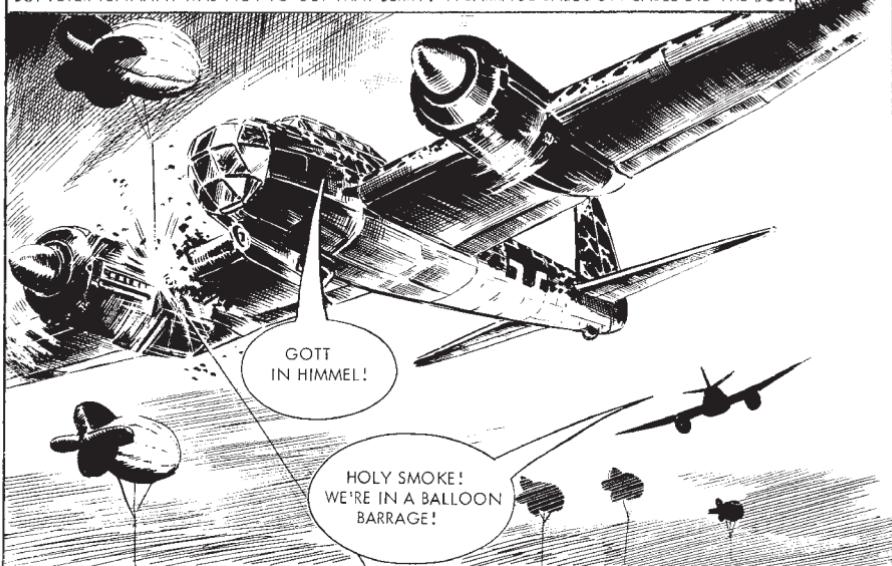
TO THE GERMANS IT SEEMED AS IF THEY HAD DESTROYED THEIR TARGET WITH THAT ONE VIOLENT BURST AND, AS THE BRITISH FIGHTER PLUNGED DOWN AND RECEDED FROM THEIR RADAR SCREEN, THEY BROKE OFF THE ATTACK AND TURNED AWAY TO THE SOUTH.



BUT, THANKS TO TENNANT'S SKILL, THE BEAUFIGHTER HAD NOT BEEN DESTROYED. NOW, AS THEY PULLED OUT OF THAT SCREAMING, EVASIVE DIVE, BERT SIGHTED THEIR ATTACKER ONCE MORE ON HIS SCREEN. THERE WERE OTHER ECHOES REFLECTED THERE TOO BUT HIS ANGRY PILOT GAVE HIM NO CHANCE TO WORK OUT WHAT THESE MIGHT BE.



BUT PETER TENNANT WAS NOT TO GET THAT JERRY. A BARRAGE BALLOON CABLE DID THE JOB.



ONLY BY A MIRACLE DID THE BEAUFIGHTER SURVIVE. WHEELING AND TWISTING THROUGH THAT NIGHTMARE FOREST OF STEEL CABLES PETER TENNANT FLEW AT LAST INTO THE CLEAR SKY BEYOND, SEETHING WITH FURY AT THE RISK THEY HAD SO UNNECESSARILY RUN.



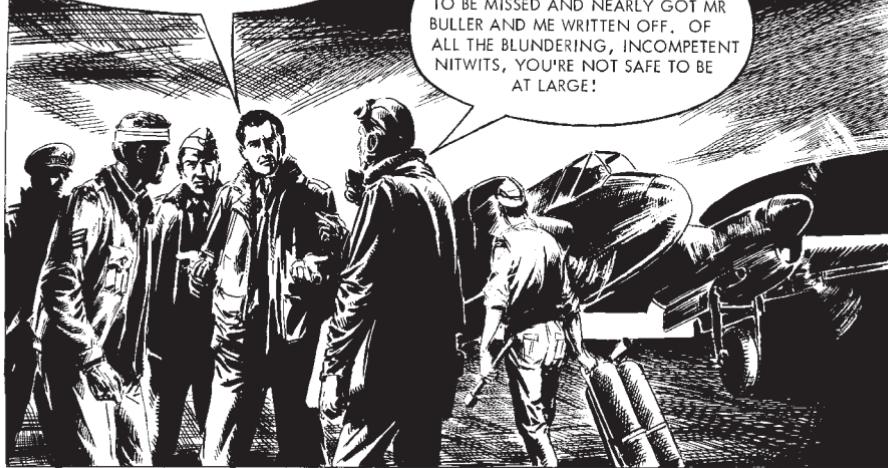


THE FIGHTER ROLLED TO A HALT AND BERT CLAMBERED TO THE GROUND, FOLLOWED BY THE IRATE PILOT. HIS DISASTROUS ATTEMPT TO DEMONSTRATE HIS ABILITY HAD ENDED IN DISMAL FAILURE, AND HOW HE WOULD HAVE TO PAY FOR IT.



THE SERGEANT HAD BEEN KNOCKED OUT, SIR, AND MR TENNANT WAS IN A HURRY TO TAKE OFF AFTER THAT INTRUDER. I THOUGHT I COULD BE OF USE, I WANTED TO SHOW WHAT I COULD DO.

YOU SHOWED US ALL RIGHT! YOU CAUSED TWO INTERCEPTIONS TO BE MISSED AND NEARLY GOT MR BULLER AND ME WRITTEN OFF. OF ALL THE BLUNDERING, INCOMPETENT NITWITS, YOU'RE NOT SAFE TO BE AT LARGE!



IMMEDIATELY HE HAD BROUGHT HIS BATTERED BEAUFIGHTER TO A HALT, BOB BULLER STRODE ACROSS AND, WITH QUICK UNDERSTANDING, TOOK IN THE SITUATION AT A GLANCE. WITHOUT HESITATION, HE SPOKE UP IN BERT'S DEFENCE...

IF YOU'RE BLAMING THIS AIRMAN FOR WHAT HAPPENED TONIGHT, PETER, YOU'RE AWAY OFF THE BEAM. HE'S A FIRST CLASS R/O.

YOU KEEP OUT OF THIS, BOB. YOU WEREN'T FLYING WITH HIM TONIGHT. I WAS, AND IT WAS AN EXPERIENCE I DON'T WANT TO REPEAT. SIR, I'M PUTTING THIS MAN ON A CHARGE!



WHEN STEVE MARSH HAD HEARD ALL THAT HAD HAPPENED, HE LOOKED AT BERT WITH A GRAVE EXPRESSION UPON HIS KINDLY FACE AND SPOKE WITH OBVIOUS RELUCTANCE.

BARNET, I'M PUTTING YOU UNDER CLOSE ARREST FOR LEAVING YOUR POST WHEN ORDERED TO STAY THERE BY YOUR SECTION SERGEANT AND FOR ENDANGERING THE SAFETY OF AN AIRCRAFT BY IMPERSONATING A QUALIFIED MEMBER OF THE AIRCREW. YOUR PREVIOUS GOOD CONDUCT WILL BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT. DISMISS!



STUNNED BY THE RAPIDITY OF EVENTS AND THE GRAVE SITUATION IN WHICH HE HAD PLACED HIMSELF, BERT MARCHED BETWEEN HIS ESCORTS LIKE A MAN IN A BAD DREAM.

YOU'VE MADE A RIGHT MESS OF THINGS TONIGHT, MATE! STONE THE CROWS, YOU'LL BE ON 'JANKERS' FOR LIFE FOR THIS LITTLE LOT, I RECKON!

STOW IT, JOE. THE POOR COVE'S HAD ENOUGH FOR ONE NIGHT!



AS THE CELL DOOR CLANGED BEHIND HIM, BERT FELT ALONE AND FORGOTTEN IN A FRIENDLESS WORLD. BUT, IN THE OFFICERS' MESS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CAMP, HE WAS FAR FROM BEING FORGOTTEN.

YOU CAN STICK UP FOR THAT CLOT IF YOU LIKE, BOB. TO ME AIRMEN ARE JUST BODS WHO DO A JOB, AND, PROVIDING THEY STICK TO WHAT THEY KNOW, WELL AND GOOD. BUT WHEN THEY GET IDEAS ABOVE THEIR ABILITIES, THEY'RE A MENACE AND NEED SLAPPING DOWN — HARD!

NO, THIS MAN HAD REAL ABILITY. HE'S A BORN AIRCREW TYPE, AND I'LL DO ALL I CAN TO HELP HIM. IT'S MY GUESS YOU FRIGHTENED THE WITS OUT OF HIM AND CREATED ALL THIS HOO-HAH YOURSELF!



THE NEXT MORNING, BERT REALISED WHAT HE HAD REALLY DONE.

WHAT A FOOL I'VE BEEN.
IT'S ALL MY OWN FAULT,
TOO.



MEANWHILE, THE HURRICANES FLEW SORTIE AFTER SORTIE. IN VAIN THE TIRED NIGHT FIGHTERS TRIED TO SNATCH SOME REST BEFORE IT WAS AGAIN THEIR TURN TO TAKE OVER.

CURSE THOSE HURRIES!
DON'T THEY EVER LET UP
AND GIVE A BLOKE A CHANCE
TO SLEEP?



CHEER UP! YOU'LL HAVE
965 SQUADRON TO LEND A
HAND TONIGHT. ONE OF THEIR
PILOTS IS BY WAY OF BEING AN
'ACE', SO YOU'LL HAVE SOME
REAL COMPETITION!

BY LATE AFTERNOON THE ENEMY ACTIVITY SLACKENED OFF AND, FOR A WHILE, THE AIRFIELD WAS COMPARATIVELY QUIET. IN THE MESS, THE TIRED PILOTS RELAXED ONCE MORE, BUT THEIR SLEMBERS WERE DESTINED TO BE SHORT-LIVED. THE ROAR OF MANY ENGINES FILLED THE ROOM WITH A CRASHING CRESCENDO OF SOUND AS AN ENTIRE SQUADRON OF BEAUFIGHTERS FLEW IN FROM THE WEST. THE REINFORCEMENTS HAD ARRIVED.

STONE ME, I GIVE UP!
THIS IS LIKE TRYING TO SLEEP
IN A SHIP-BUILDING YARD WITH
A RIVETTING GANG AT WORK! I'LL
BE AS MUCH USE ON OPS. TONIGHT
AS A SLEEPWALKER IN A RACING
CAR!

THAT'S A PRETTY
FAIR DESCRIPTION
OF YOUR PERFORMANCE
LAST NIGHT TOO, CHUM.

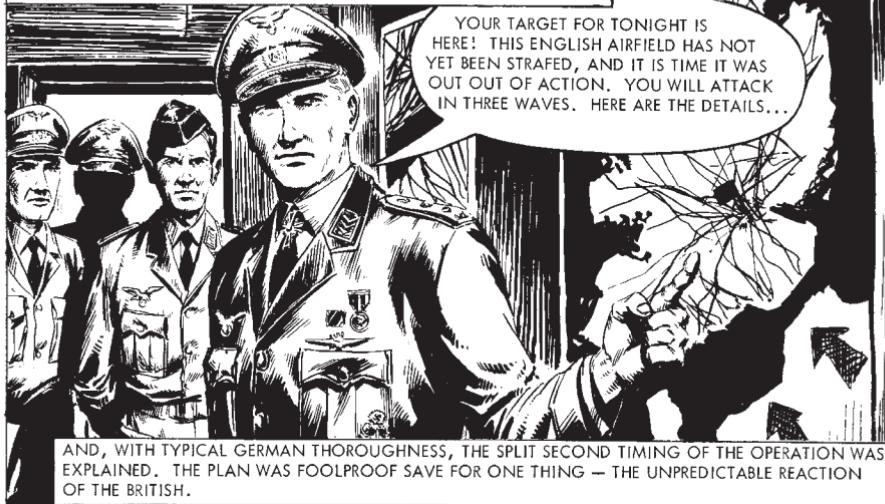


FROM HIS CELL, BERT WATCHED AS SOME OF THE NEW ARRIVALS
WALKED PAST THE GUARDROOM.

WELL, HERE WE ARE,
BLOKES. LET'S GET A
CUP OF CHAR AND THEN
GRAB SOME SLEEP, BEFORE
TONIGHT'S FUN AND
GAMES START!

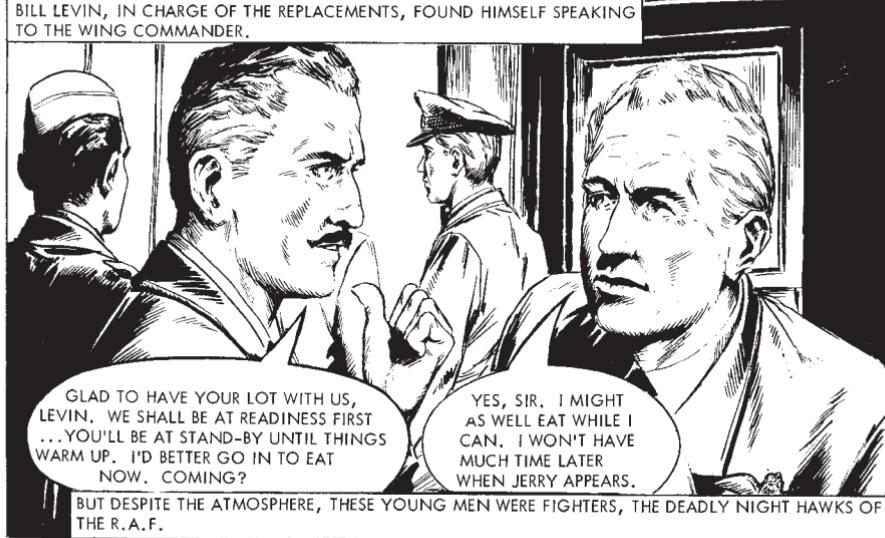
ME TOO! A GOOD KIP IS ONE
THING I NEVER SEEM TO GET SINCE
JERRY STARTED GIVING OUR AIRFIELDS
A WORKING OVER. THEY SEEM TO HAVE
MISSSED THIS PLACE SO FAR. MAY BE
ITS TURN NEXT, THAT'LL ACCOUNT
FOR US BEING SHIFTED OVER HERE!

THE YOUNG FLYER'S GUESS WAS MORE ACCURATE THAN HE KNEW. IN A BRIEFING ROOM AT A GERMAN AIRFIELD IN OCCUPIED FRANCE, THE LUFTWAFFE BOMBER CREWS LISTENED TO THEIR INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE COMING NIGHT'S WORK.



AND, WITH TYPICAL GERMAN THOROUGHNESS, THE SPLIT SECOND TIMING OF THE OPERATION WAS EXPLAINED. THE PLAN WAS FOOLPROOF SAVE FOR ONE THING — THE UNPREDICTABLE REACTION OF THE BRITISH.

AS THE HOUR FOR BATTLE DREW NEARER, THE ATMOSPHERE IN THE R.A.F. OFFICERS' MESS GREW MORE RELAXED AND CHEERFUL. SQUADRON LEADER BILL LEVIN, IN CHARGE OF THE REPLACEMENTS, FOUND HIMSELF SPEAKING TO THE WING COMMANDER.



BUT DESPITE THE ATMOSPHERE, THESE YOUNG MEN WERE FIGHTERS, THE DEADLY NIGHT HAWKS OF THE R.A.F.



TEN MINUTES LATER, THE FIRST PAIR OF INTERCEPTORS TOOK OFF AND VANISHED INTO THE DARKNESS. THE ENGINES OF TWO MORE REVVED UP AS THE CHOCKS WERE REMOVED AND THEY BEGAN TO WHEEL TOWARDS THE RUNWAY.

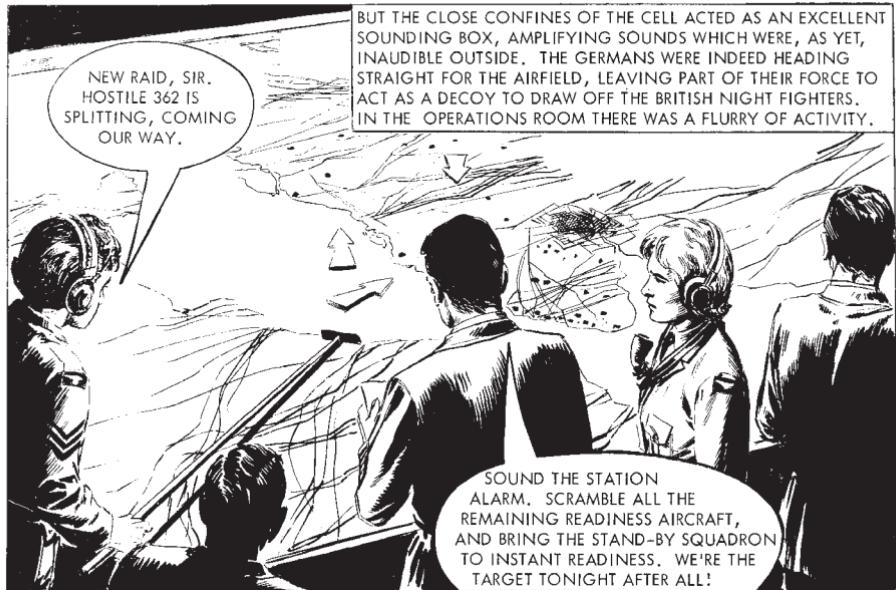
TOWER TO CATSEYE 19 AND 21...
YOU ARE CLEAR FOR TAKE OFF... FIFTY
PLUS BANDITS SEVENTY MILES SOUTH EAST
STEERING NORTH... VECTOR 160... ANGELS
TWELVE... CALL WATCHDOG ON 'G'
GEORGE WHEN AIRBORNE... OVER...

19 TO TOWER...
WILCO... TAXI-ING
NOW... 21 LEADING
...OVER...



COULD BE, BUT I WOULDN'T BANK ON IT. THIS MIGHT BE A DIVERSION. HE'S GOT TO CLOBBER OUR AIRFIELDS BEFORE IT'S SAFE TO TACKLE THE TOWNS. ANYWAY, WE'LL SOON FIND OUT!





AS THE STATION SIREN WAILED ITS EERIE, SPINE CHILLING WARNING, BERT FELT A MOMENT OF PANIC. FROM THE GUARDROOM OUTSIDE CAME THE SCUFFLE OF MEN RACING FOR THE SAFETY OF THE SHELTERS. FRANTICALLY HE RATTLED THE BARS OF HIS PRISON...

STONE ME! OF
ALL THE DUFF GEN!
GET TO THE SHELTER, YOU
BLOKES — QUICK!

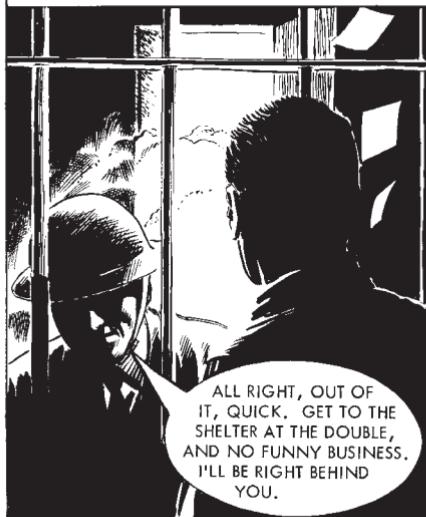


THEN, FROM THE DARKNESS ABOVE, THE FIRST BOMBS SCREAMED DOWN IN A GHASTLY RAIN OF DEATH, DETONATING WITH STUNNING VIOLENCE AMONG THE AIRFIELD BUILDINGS.



THE GUARD COMMANDER HAD NOT FORGOTTEN BERT. THE KEY RASPED IN THE LOCK AND THE CELL DOOR WAS READY TO OPEN.

THEY WERE ONLY JUST IN TIME FOR, AS THEY RAN TOWARDS THE SHELTER, THE GUARDROOM SUFFERED A DIRECT HIT.



BEFORE EITHER MAN COULD FLING HIMSELF TO THE GROUND, THE WHOLE WORLD SEEMED TO DISSOLVE IN ONE LURID BLAZE OF LIGHT. NUMBED BY THE SHOCK OF THE BLAST, BERT WAS FLUNG TO ONE SIDE.



DAZED AND VAGUELY SURPRISED TO FIND HIMSELF STILL ALIVE, BERT ROSE STIFFLY TO HIS FEET AND LOOKED AROUND. THE HUDDLED FIGURE OF THE GUARD COMMANDER LAY MOTIONLESS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SMOKING CRATER...



HIS MIND STILL REELING, AND DEAFENCED BY THE UPROAR AROUND HIM, BERT WAS CONSCIOUS OF ONLY ONE THOUGHT — HE MUST GET THE HELPLESS MAN TO SAFETY WHILE THERE WAS STILL TIME. SLOWLY, HE DRAGGED THE HEAVY FIGURE TOWARDS THE BUNKER...



SOMEHOW BERT DRAGGED THE SERGEANT DOWN THE STEEP STEPS AND PROPPED THE UNCONSCIOUS FIGURE INSIDE THE OUTER ENTRANCE TO THE SHELTER.

BERT WAS STILL DAZED BY THE BLAST. HARDLY KNOWING WHY, HE BEGAN TO RUN, RIPPING HIS IDENTITY TAGS FROM HIS NECK...



BERT HURLED HIS IDENTITY DISCS INTO THE SMOKING RUINS OF THE PRISON AND HE FELT THAT HE HAD NOW PUT THE PAST BEHIND HIM. IN HIS BEMUSED STATE OF MIND HE WAS NO LONGER A PRISONER IN DISGRACE, BUT A MAN WITH A DUTY TO PERFORM — A MAN WITHOUT A NAME OR NUMBER...



HEDELESS OF THE BOMBING, HE TURNED AND BROKE INTO A RUN.

WITHOUT THINKING, BERT MADE HIS WAY ALONG THE PERIMETER TRACK, HEADING TOWARDS THE DISPERSAL POINT WHERE THE DARK SHAPES OF VENGEFUL FIGHTERS STILL MOVED TO TAKE OFF DURING EVERY BRIEF LULL IN THE BOMBING.



THE CRATER. THE PILOT HASN'T SEEN THE CRATER. I MUST WARN HIM!

SEIZING AN EMERGENCY 'GOOSENECK' FLARE, BERT TOUCHED THE LONG, OIL-FILLED SPOUT TO THE NEAREST OF THE HISSING INCENDIARY BOMBS. THEN, AS THE FLARE SPLUTTERED INTO BRILLIANCE, HE RAN TOWARDS THE APPROACHING AIRCRAFT, WAVING IT WILDLY IN WARNING.



IN THE NICK OF TIME, THE FIGHTER SWERVED, AVOIDING DISASTER BY INCHES.

THEN ON HE WENT ONCE MORE, STUMBLING AND CONFUSED BY THE PANDEMONIUM OF VIOLENT SOUND, UNTIL, SUDDENLY, HE WAS AMONG THE DARK SHAPES OF PARKED AIRCRAFT — THE SILENT BEAUFIGHTERS OF THE STAND-BY SQUADRON.



THERE'S NOBODY
HERE. WHERE ARE THE
CREWS? I MUST FIND MR
BULLER AND TELL HIM
I'M READY TO FLY!

FROM THE SHELTERS OUTSIDE THE OFFICERS' MESS, A GROUP OF RUNNING FIGURES EMERGED, MAKING FOR THE AIRCREW TENDERS WHICH STOOD READY AND WAITING. THE MUFFLED BLARE OF THE TANNOY SOUNDED BEHIND THEM AS THEY RAN...



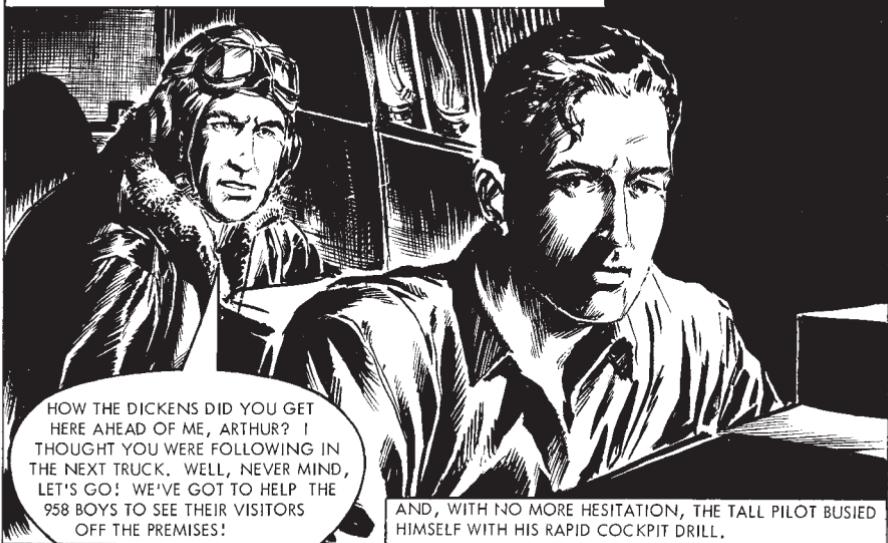
BUT THE SOUND OF THE APPROACHING TRUCKS RACING ALONG THE PERIMETER TRACK ALERTED BERT.



CROUCHING THERE, HOLDING HIS ACHING HEAD, BERT LISTENED AS THE TRUCKS DREW NEARER, THEN HIS MOUTH WENT DRY AS THE FIRST VEHICLE SCREECHED TO A HALT BESIDE THE VERY BEAUFIGHTER IN WHICH HE LAY HIDDEN.

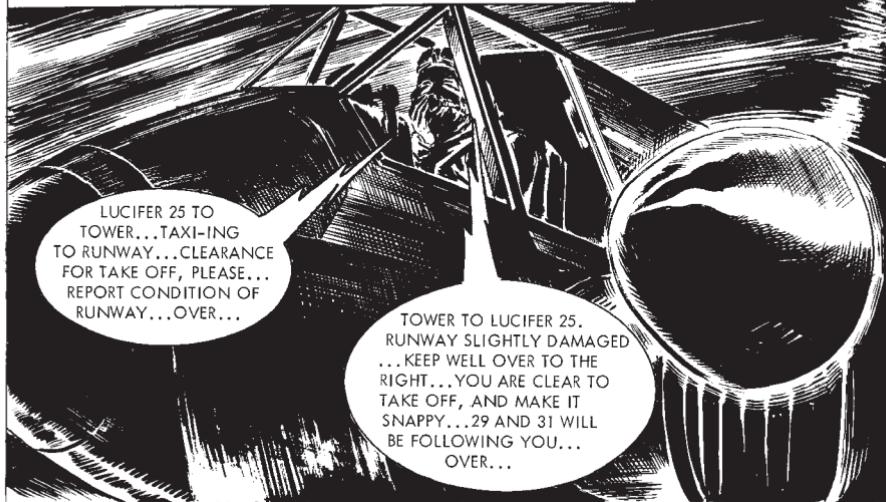


SQUADRON LEADER LEVIN GAVE A GRUNT OF SURPRISE AT SEEING THE OBSERVER'S SEAT ALREADY OCCUPIED AS HE CLIMBED IN TO THE PLANE.



AND, WITH NO MORE HESITATION, THE TALL PILOT BUSIED HIMSELF WITH HIS RAPID COCKPIT DRILL.

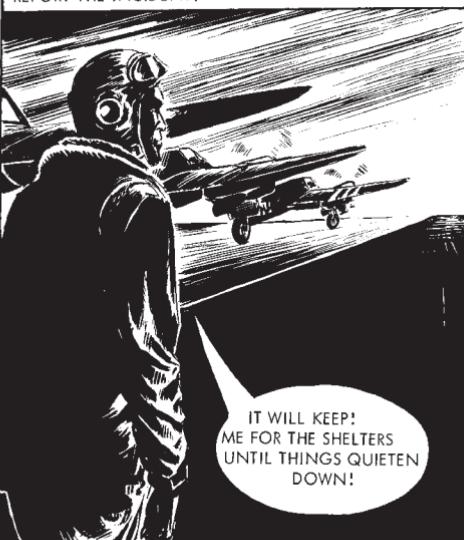
THANKFUL THAT HIS FEARS HAD BEEN GROUNDLESS AND THAT HE HAD NOT BEEN RECOGNISED, BERT HASTILY DONNED THE SPARE HELMET AND GOGGLES WHICH LAY BESIDE HIM. THEN THE ENGINES ROARED INTO LIFE AND THE AIRCRAFT BEGAN TO MOVE.



THE BEAUFIGHTER WAS GATHERING SPEED AS THE SECOND TRUCK HALTED AND A PILOT OFFICER LEAPT TO THE GROUND, WAVING HIS ARMS WILDLY.



BUT THE PILOT OFFICER WAS NOT RISKING HIS LIFE TO REPORT THE INCIDENT.



IN THE NIGHT FIGHTER, BERT MADE AN EFFORT TO CONTROL HIS NERVES. THIS AIRCRAFT IN WHICH HE HAD SOUGHT REFUGE COULD QUICKLY BECOME A FLAMING COFFIN UNLESS HE GAVE OF HIS BEST. WITH UNWAVERING ATTENTION HE WATCHED THE FLICKERING TUBE BEFORE HIM, THEN SUDDENLY THE RADIO SPOKE...

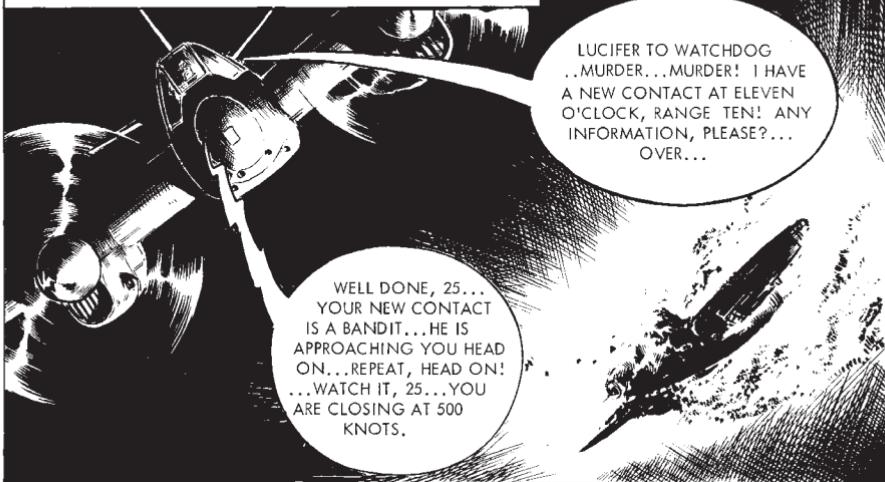
WATCHDOG TO 25...
TARGET AT TWO O'CLOCK,
CROSSING STARBOARD TO
PORT...A THOUSAND
BELOW YOU...RANGE
FIVE...OVER...

I'VE GOT HIM,
SKIPPER, CONTACT!
THROTTLE BACK A BIT
OR YOU'LL OVERSHOOT!

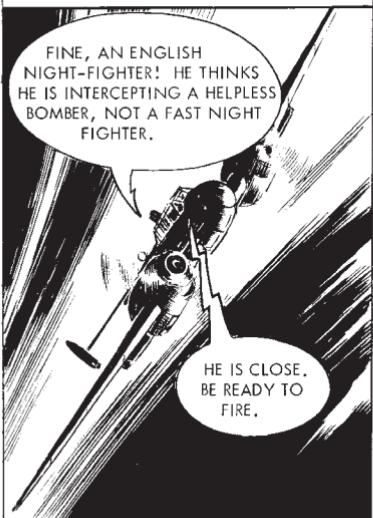
GUIDING HIS PILOT WITH A SKILL BORN OF HIS INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF THE INTRICATE INSTRUMENT, THE FUGITIVE AIRMAN HAD THE SATISFACTION OF KNOWING THAT THE ENEMY COULD NOT ESCAPE. WITH UNERRING PRECISION THE BEAUFIGHTER CLOSED UPON THE TARGET AND OPENED FIRE.

NICE WORK, CHUM.
BANG ON! THIS IS ONE JERRY WHO WON'T BE GOING BACK!

WITH A ROAR THE BOMBER BLEW UP, AND THE BLAST OF THE EXPLOSION SLAMMED THE FIGHTER VIOLENTLY TO ONE SIDE. MOST OPERATORS WOULD HAVE JUST HUNG ON, BUT BARNET'S EYES NEVER LEFT THE DIM BLUE DISC BEFORE HIM, PICKING UP A NEW TARGET EVEN AS THE FIRST WAS DESTROYED.



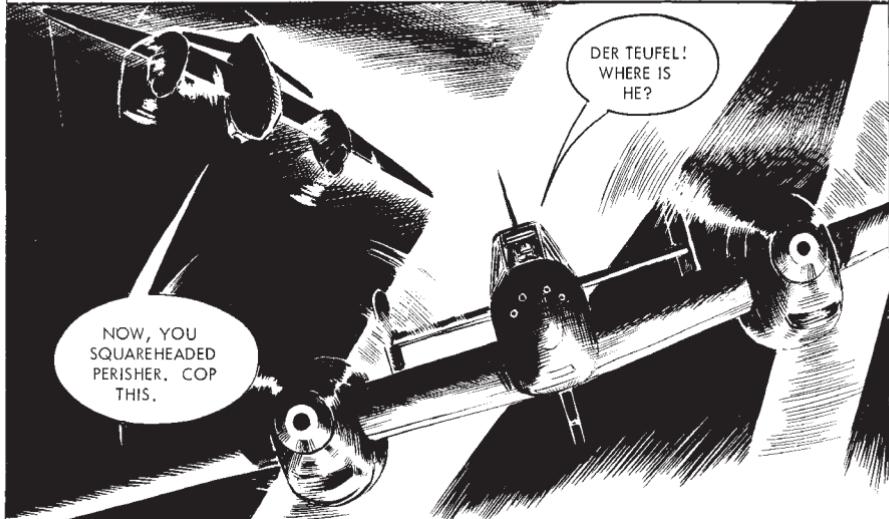
IN AN ME. 110 THE GERMAN PILOT LAUGHED GRIMLY AS HE LISTENED TO THE BRITISH TRANSMISSIONS.



BUT, BERT REALISED BY THEIR CLOSING SPEED THAT THIS
WAS NO BOMBER.



THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH SQUADRON LEADER LEVIN'S NERVES. CALMLY HE HELD ON UNTIL THE LAST POSSIBLE MOMENT — THEN, SWERVING HARD A-PORT, HE THREW THE BEAUFIGHTER INTO A TIGHT UPWARD LOOP AS THE GERMAN AIRCRAFT BLUNDERED PAST.



WITH HIS AIRCRAFT STILL UPSIDE DOWN, LEVIN SCREAMED DOWN UPON THE ENEMY, GUNS BLAZING. THERE WAS NO TIME TO FIRE AGAIN, BUT THERE WAS NO NEED.



IT WAS OVER IN AN INSTANT. BEFORE THE BEAUFIGHTER HAD COMPLETED ITS LOOP, THE NAZI PLANE WAS SCREAMING DOWNWARDS. BERT REPORTED.

AN ME. 110 ACCOUNTED FOR. WHAT OTHER TRADE HAVE YOU GOT FOR US? OVER...

TRADE TO THE EAST... STEER 120 AND STAND BY FOR NEW INSTRUCTIONS...

INSIDE THE BEAUFIGHTER, SQUADRON LEADER LEVIN GAVE THE THUMBS UP SIGN TO INDICATE HIS SATISFACTION.

YOU'RE IN GOOD FORM TONIGHT. KEEP IT UP, ARTHUR. MAYBE WE'LL DO THE HAT TRICK.

BUT, IF EVERYTHING WAS GOING WELL WITH LUCIFER 25, OTHERS WERE LESS FORTUNATE. FROM THE LOUD-SPEAKER IN THE CONTROL CABIN FAR BELOW CAME A CALL FROM THE BATTLE TORN SKY — A CALL FOR HELP FROM A FIGHTER IN DISTRESS.

CATSEYE 2! TO WATCHDOG! MAYDAY! MAYDAY! RADAR HIT AND STARBOARD ENGINE ON FIRE! TWO BANDITS CLOSING ME NOW! OVER!

ROGER, 21! AM SENDING LUCIFER 25 TO HELP YOU! HULLO, 25... ARE YOU RECEIVING? OVER...

THE REPLY FROM LUCIFER 25 CAME LIKE A FLASH...

ALL RIGHT, WATCHDOG
...I HEARD ALL THAT. WE CAN
TAKE CARE OF 21'S PLAYMATES.
I HAVE THREE CONTACTS AT
FIVE MILES...ARE THESE
MY TARGETS? OVER...

YOU'RE RIGHT
ON YOUR GAME
TONIGHT, PAL! SUITS
ME. GIVE ME A STEER,
QUICK.

STARB'D TEN, SKIPPER
...UP FIVE HUNDRED...
TWO BANDITS...RANGE
FIVE...CROSSING TO
PORT...CATSEYE 21 IS
OVER THERE...YOU'LL
SEE HIM AT ELEVEN
O'CLOCK!

BLOW ME DOWN!
YOU'VE GOT ALL THE
ANSWERS OFF PAT, HAVEN'T
YOU? HERE WE GO, AND
LET'S HOPE WE'RE IN
TIME!

AND, WITH THROTTLES WIDE OPEN, THE NIGHT FIGHTER SURGED FORWARD AT HER MAXIMUM SPEED.

MEANWHILE, THE CRIPPLED BEAUFIGHTER HAD ATTRACTED TROUBLE.

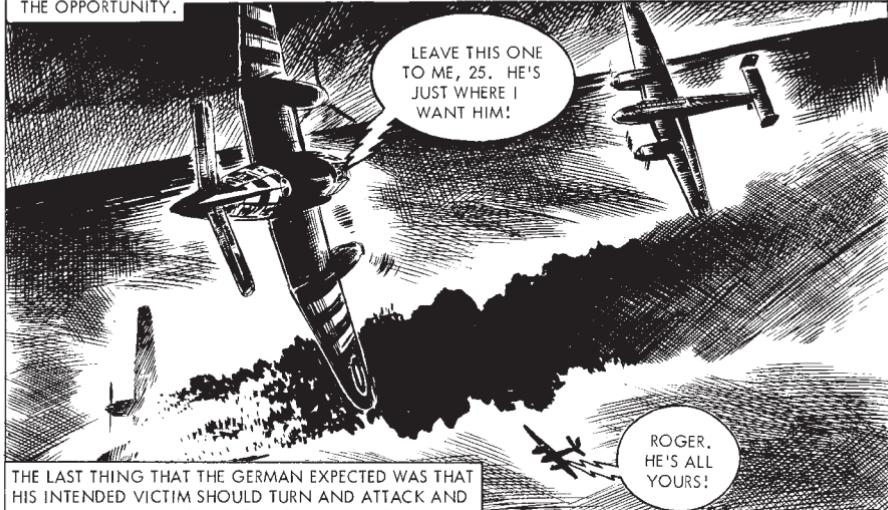
THERE'S THE ENEMY.
HE CANNOT ESCAPE US
ON ONE ENGINE! YOU
ATTACK HIM FROM BEHIND
WHILE I HEAD HIM OFF
AND FORCE HIM TO
STAY IN YOUR LINE
OF FIRE.

JAWOHL! GOING
IN TO ATTACK NOW.

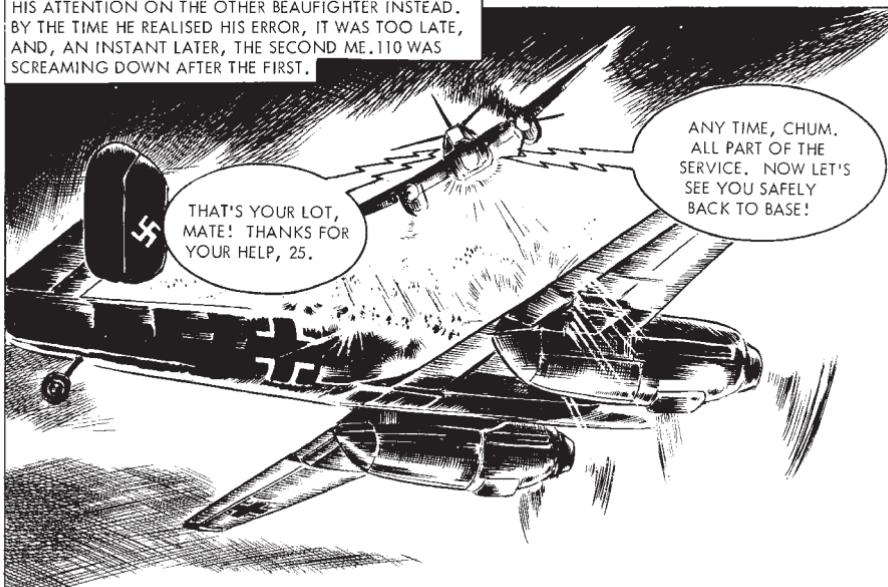
BUT, BEFORE THE SPANDAUS COULD SEND THEIR STREAM OF DEATH
INTO THE HELPLESS BRITISH PLANE, A SECOND BEAUFIGHTER
SCREAMED OUT OF THE NIGHT. CAUGHT UNAWARES, THE NEAREST
ME. 110 LURCHED AND BURST INTO FLAME...

LATCH ON
TO THAT, YOU
NAZI THUGS!

LIKE A BLAZING TORCH, THE GERMAN PLANE PLUMMETTED DOWN, THE GLARE FROM THE BURNING FUEL LIGHTING THE WHOLE SAVAGE SCENE. THE SECOND ME.110, STARKLY ETCHED AGAINST THE SKY BY THE BLAZE, WATCHED HELPLESSLY AS TENNANT'S AIRCRAFT LUMBERED ROUND TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE OPPORTUNITY.



THE LAST THING THAT THE GERMAN EXPECTED WAS THAT HIS INTENDED VICTIM SHOULD TURN AND ATTACK AND HE HAD MADE THE MISTAKE OF CONCENTRATING ALL HIS ATTENTION ON THE OTHER BEAUFIGHTER INSTEAD. BY THE TIME HE REALISED HIS ERROR, IT WAS TOO LATE, AND, AN INSTANT LATER, THE SECOND ME.110 WAS SCREAMING DOWN AFTER THE FIRST.



BUT, GUIDING THE CRIPPLED PLANE BACK TO BASE THROUGH A SKY WHICH STILL SWARMED WITH HOSTILE AIRCRAFT, PRESENTED A DANGER WHICH NOBODY COULD HAVE FORSEEN.

ACHTUNG!
ACHTUNG! TWO
ENGLISCHER FIGHTERS
AT EIGHT O'CLOCK. ONE
OF THEM HAS AN ENGINE
ON FIRE. AN EASY
TARGET. SHALL WE
ATTACK?

JA! I AM
ATTACKING NOW!
ACHTUNG, ALL
GUNNERS!

BERT'S WARNING OF THE IMPENDING ATTACK, INSTANTANEOUS THOUGH IT WAS, CAME TOO LATE. THE ENEMY COULD SEE THEM CLEARLY AND OPENED FIRE BEFORE LEVIN COULD TURN.

FEUER!
SHOOT THEM
FROM THE
SKIES.

HARD A-STARBOARD,
SKIPPER,
QUICK!

THE BEAUFIGHTER WHEELED INSTANTLY AND IN SO DOING EVADED THE WORST OF THAT MURDEROUS SALVO. BUT ONE ENEMY GUNNER REGISTERED A HIT, AND SQUADRON LEADER LEVIN SAGGED FORWARD OVER HIS CONTROLS.



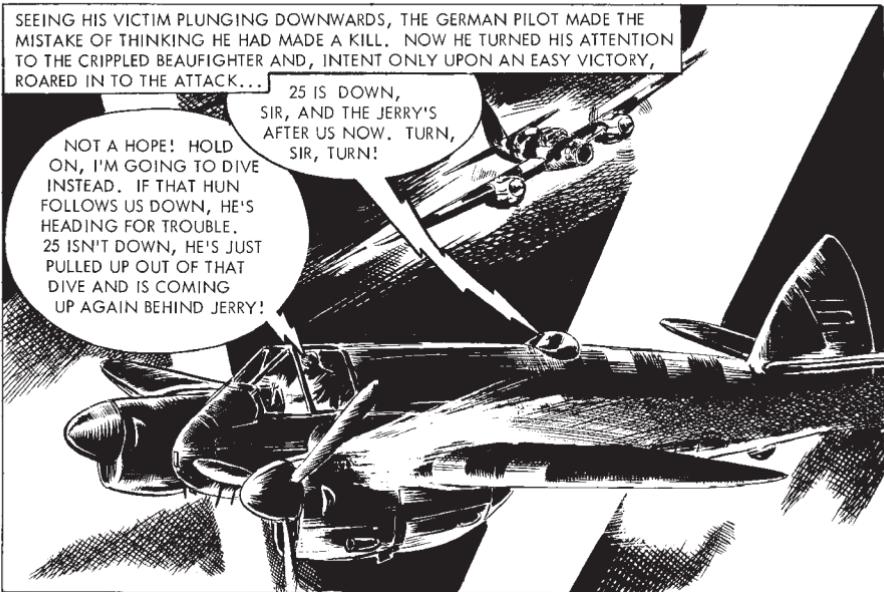
WITH THE CONTROL COLUMN PUSHED FORWARD UNDER THE WEIGHT OF THE WOUNDED MAN, THE BEAUFIGHTER'S NOSE WENT DOWN IN A SCREAMING POWER DIVE. REALISING THE DANGER BERT STUMBED FORWARD AND WITH A STRENGTH HE DID NOT KNOW HE POSSESSED, HE JERKED THE LIMP FORM ASIDE...



SEEING HIS VICTIM PLUNGING DOWNWARDS, THE GERMAN PILOT MADE THE MISTAKE OF THINKING HE HAD MADE A KILL. NOW HE TURNED HIS ATTENTION TO THE CRIPPLED BEAUFIGHTER AND, INTENT ONLY UPON AN EASY VICTORY, ROARED IN TO THE ATTACK...

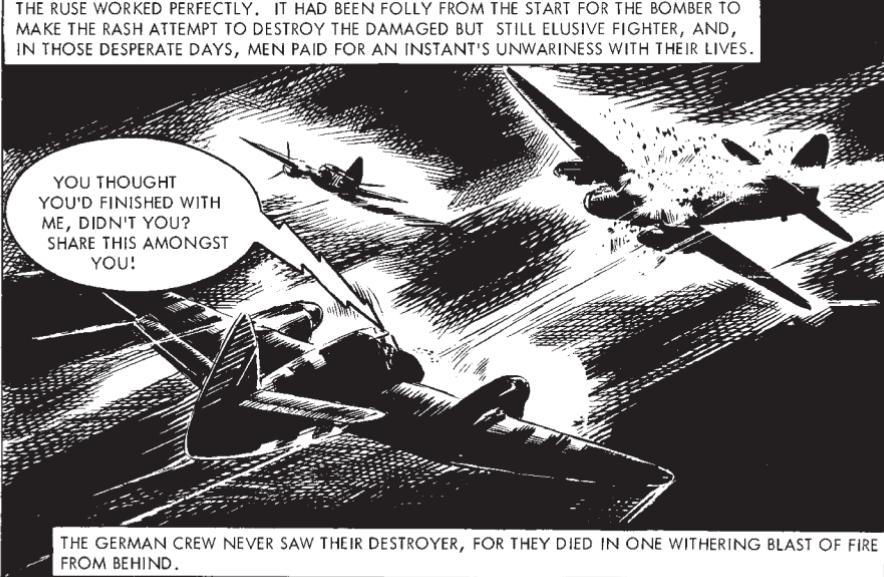
25 IS DOWN,
SIR, AND THE JERRY'S
AFTER US NOW. TURN,
SIR, TURN!

NOT A HOPE! HOLD
ON, I'M GOING TO DIVE
INSTEAD. IF THAT HUN
FOLLOWS US DOWN, HE'S
HEADING FOR TROUBLE.
25 ISN'T DOWN, HE'S JUST
PULLED UP OUT OF THAT
DIVE AND IS COMING
UP AGAIN BEHIND JERRY!



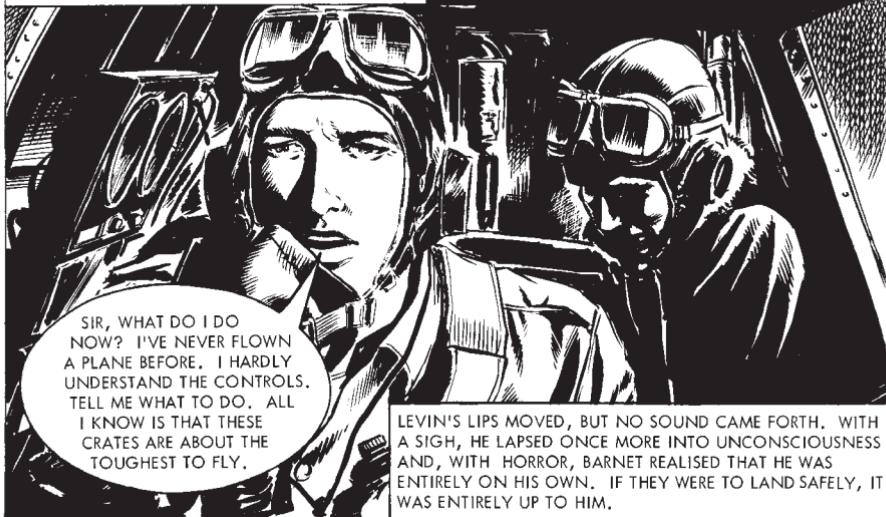
THE RUSE WORKED PERFECTLY. IT HAD BEEN FOLLY FROM THE START FOR THE BOMBER TO MAKE THE RASH ATTEMPT TO DESTROY THE DAMAGED BUT STILL ELUSIVE FIGHTER, AND, IN THOSE DESPERATE DAYS, MEN PAID FOR AN INSTANT'S UNWARINESS WITH THEIR LIVES.

YOU THOUGHT
YOU'D FINISHED WITH
ME, DIDN'T YOU?
SHARE THIS AMONGST
YOU!



THE GERMAN CREW NEVER SAW THEIR DESTROYER, FOR THEY DIED IN ONE WITHERING BLAST OF FIRE FROM BEHIND.

AS THE BOMBER WENT DOWN, BERT SAT BACK IN THE PILOT'S SEAT AND FELT SUDDENLY SICK. HE JUST COULD NOT BELIEVE THAT HE HAD MANAGED TO PULL THE BEAUFIGHTER OUT OF A DEATH DIVE A FEW MOMENTS BEFORE.



BUT, WITH INEXPERIENCED HANDS AT THE CONTROLS, THE BEAUFIGHTER NARROWLY MISSED COLLIDING WITH TENNANT'S PLANE.

BERT'S REPLY BROUGHT CONSTERNATION TO TENNANT AND TO CONTROL, BUT BERT HIMSELF WAS ICE-CALM.



HOWEVER, IN CONTROL...

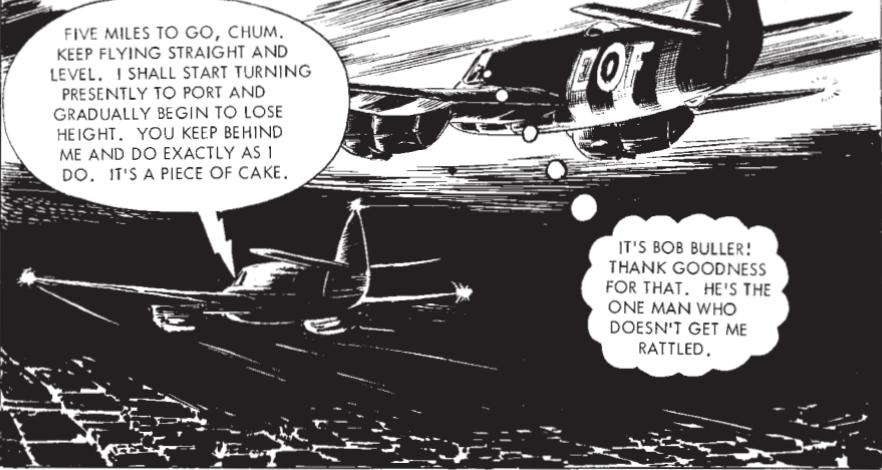


BERT'S ANSWER WAS SHORT AND TO THE POINT.



BUT COULD THEY GIVE HIM ENOUGH HELP? ALL IN CONTROL KNEW ONLY TOO WELL HOW DIFFICULT A PLANE THE BEAUFIGHTER WAS TO HANDLE.

WITHIN MINUTES, BOB BULLER HAD BEEN DIRECTED TOWARDS THE HELPLESS BEAUFIGHTER AND, WITH NAVIGATION LIGHTS SWITCHED ON, WAS LEADING BERT IN. AT THE SOUND OF THAT CHEERFUL, REASSURING VOICE IN HIS HEADPHONES, BERT FULLY RELAXED, FOLLOWING EVERY INSTRUCTION WITH CALM DELIBERATION.



FIVE MILES TO GO, CHUM. KEEP FLYING STRAIGHT AND LEVEL. I SHALL START TURNING PRESENTLY TO PORT AND GRADUALLY BEGIN TO LOSE HEIGHT. YOU KEEP BEHIND ME AND DO EXACTLY AS I DO. IT'S A PIECE OF CAKE.

IT'S BOB BULLER!
THANK GOODNESS
FOR THAT. HE'S THE
ONE MAN WHO
DOESN'T GET ME
RATTLED.

THEN THEY WERE OVER THE AIRFIELD AND LOSING HEIGHT AS THEY CIRCLED FOR THE FINAL APPROACH RUN. DESPITE THE POSSIBLE PRESENCE OF ENEMY AIRCRAFT, THE RUNWAY LIGHTS SUDDENLY CAME ON AND BERT STEELED HIMSELF FOR THE FINAL AND MOST EXACTING TEST OF ALL — THE TOUCH DOWN.



WE'LL DO A TRIAL RUN OVER THE RUNWAY. BETTER GET YOUR WHEELS DOWN NOW. WATCH FOR THE GREEN INDICATOR LIGHTS TO COME ON TO SHOW YOU THAT THE WHEELS ARE DOWN. OK LET'S GO! LEVEL OFF... THROTTLE BACK TO ONE— TWENTY KNOTS!

IN SWITCHING ON THE RUNWAY LIGHTS, THE FLYING CONTROLLER HAD TAKEN A CHANCE THAT THE ENEMY WERE OUT OF THE VICINITY. BUT HOSTILE EYES WERE ALERT AND SAW THE RARE OPPORTUNITY AT ONCE.

A PLANE WITH ALL ITS LIGHTS ON, LEADING ANOTHER ACROSS THE RUNWAY, THE SECOND ONE MUST BE IN DISTRESS. WE WILL GET THEM BOTH.



A CHANCE LIKE THIS IS TOO GOOD TO MISS!

AND THE NIGHT FIGHTER'S NOSE WENT DOWN AS THE NAZI PILOT SWOOPED UPON HIS UNSUSPECTING PREY.

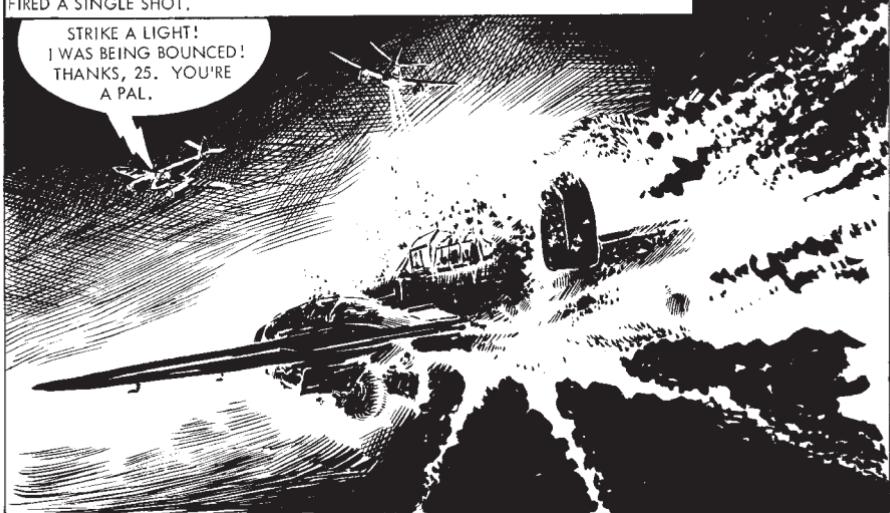
WITH COLD CALCULATION THE GERMAN SELECTED THE LEADING PLANE AS HIS FIRST VICTIM. THE OTHER COULD WAIT, IT WAS IN DISTRESS ALREADY, AND WOULD BE AN EASY TARGET AFTERWARDS. BERT LOOKED IN DISBELIEF AS THE NAZI SWEEPED DOWN ON THE BEAUFIGHTER AHEAD.

A JERRY! HE'LL GET MR BULLER...HE CAN'T POSSIBLY MISS!

THEN, WITHOUT CONSCIOUS THOUGHT, BERT FLIPPED BACK THE SAFETY CATCH ON THE FIRING BUTTON IN AN INSTINCTIVE EFFORT TO SAVE THE OFFICER WHO HAD BEFRIENDED HIM.

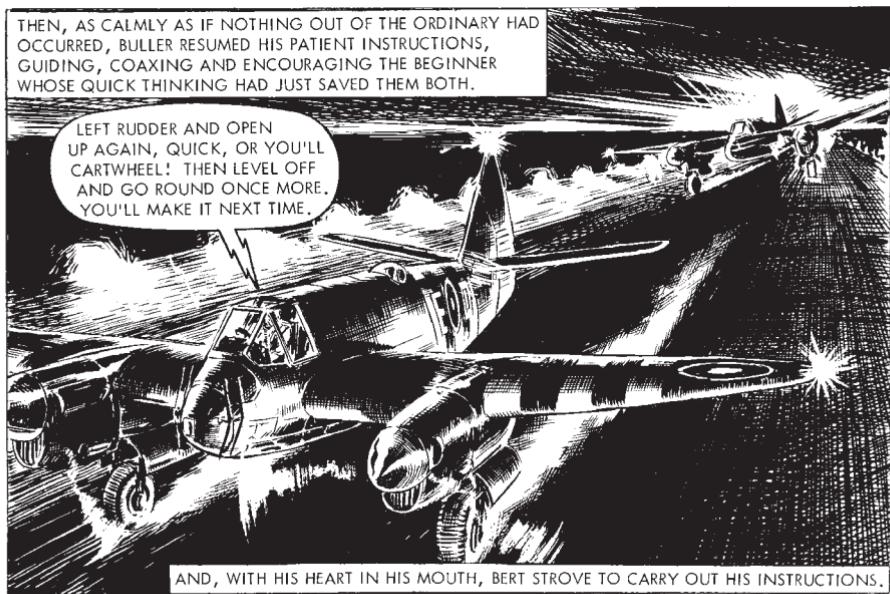
FOR AN INSTANT THE ENEMY WAS FULL IN HIS SIGHTS. THEN THE BEAUFIGHTER'S GUNS CLATTERED INTO ACTION FOR JUST TWO SECONDS, AND IN THAT FRACTION OF TIME THE GERMANS WERE SWEEPED INTO ETERNITY BEFORE THEIR OWN GUNS HAD FIRED A SINGLE SHOT.

STRIKE A LIGHT!
I WAS BEING BOUNCED!
THANKS, 25. YOU'RE
A PAL.



THEN, AS CALMLY AS IF NOTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY HAD OCCURRED, BULLER RESUMED HIS PATIENT INSTRUCTIONS, GUIDING, COAXING AND ENCOURAGING THE BEGINNER WHOSE QUICK THINKING HAD JUST SAVED THEM BOTH.

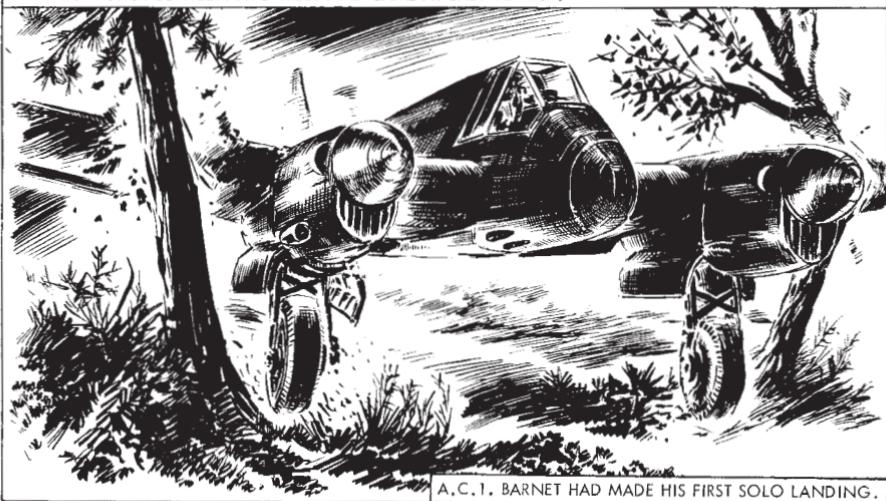
LEFT RUDDER AND OPEN UP AGAIN, QUICK, OR YOU'LL CARTWHEEL! THEN LEVEL OFF AND GO ROUND ONCE MORE. YOU'LL MAKE IT NEXT TIME.



THE NEXT ATTEMPT WAS BETTER, BUT THE LANDING SPEED WAS FAR TOO HIGH. BEFORE BERT COULD REMEMBER TO SLAM BACK THE THROTTLES, THE BEAUFIGHTER WAS OVER THE END OF THE RUNWAY, JOLTING AND BOUNCING ACROSS THE ROUGH GROUND OF THE FIELD WHICH LAY BEYOND.



THE SPEED FELL OFF AS BERT OBEYED THE FINAL INSTRUCTIONS, BUT STILL THE TREES SEEMED TO LEAP TO MEET HIM AS THE PLANE LURCHED AND BOUNDED FORWARD. A TANGLE OF UNDERGROWTH BROUGHT THE SPEED DOWN STILL FURTHER. THEN, WITH A MIGHTY RENDING NOISE, THE WINGS STUCK AS THE FUSELAGE SHOT BETWEEN TWO TREES AND CAME AT LAST TO REST.



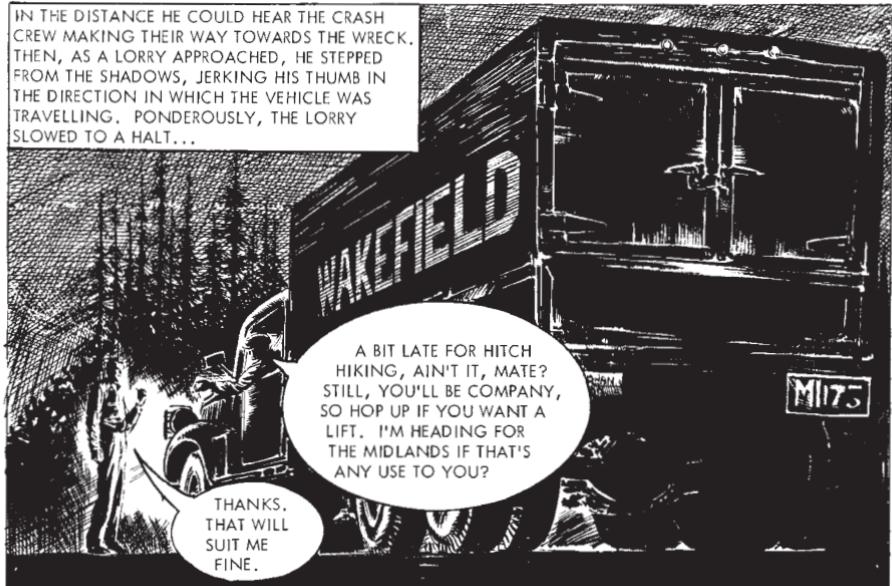
A.C.T. BARNET HAD MADE HIS FIRST SOLO LANDING.



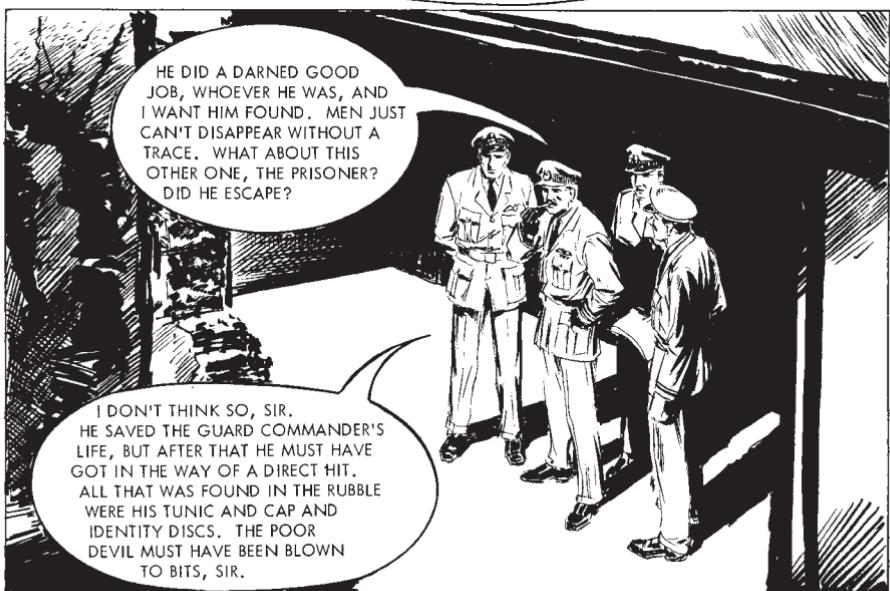
HIS MESSAGE DELIVERED, BERT TURNED AWAY, CONTINUING ON ALONG THE LANE UNTIL AT LENGTH HE CAME TO A MAIN ROAD. AND, AS HE WALKED, HE DISCARDED HIS FLYING KIT AS IF, BY THE VERY GESTURE, HE WAS RENOUNCING HIS CONNECTION WITH A SERVICE IN WHICH HE HAD BECOME AN OUTCAST.



IN THE DISTANCE HE COULD HEAR THE CRASH CREW MAKING THEIR WAY TOWARDS THE WRECK. THEN, AS A LORRY APPROACHED, HE STEPPED FROM THE SHADOWS, JERKING HIS THUMB IN THE DIRECTION IN WHICH THE VEHICLE WAS TRAVELLING. PONDEROUSLY, THE LORRY SLOWED TO A HALT...



AND SO A.C. 1 BARNET DISAPPEARED INTO THE NIGHT AND HIS GOING CAUSED NO STIR. AT THE R.A.F. STATION, MORE IMPORTANT MATTERS WERE DEMANDING ATTENTION...



AND SO HERBERT BARNET WAS OFFICIALLY PRESUMED TO BE DEAD. BUT SOME WERE ALREADY BEGINNING TO HOLD ANOTHER VIEW — A STARTLING THEORY WHICH MIGHT EXPLAIN TWO MYSTERIES IN ONE. AT SQUADRON LEADER LEVIN'S BEDSIDE IN SICK QUARTERS ONE AFTERNOON...



BUT THE WEEKS WENT PAST WITH BOB'S THEORY STILL UNPROVEN. SERGEANT CROSBY, NOW ON LEAVE, COULD NOT CARE LESS...



THE OWNER OF THE RADIO SHOP LOOKED UP AS CROSBY ENTERED. THEN HE CALLED TO HIS ASSISTANT...



AS THE ASSISTANT TURNED, CROSBY'S JAW DROPPED AND HE STARED IN AMAZEMENT.



FOR A MOMENT THE ASSISTANT LOOKED PUZZLED. THEN, AS IF REALISING THAT THIS MAN WAS AN ENEMY, HE KNOCKED THE RESTRAINING HAND ASIDE AND FLUNG OPEN THE DOOR.



ONCE MORE THE BULLYING SERGEANT MADE THE MISTAKE OF USING FORCE. THE NEXT MOMENT HE WAS LYING FLAT ON HIS BACK, HOLDING AN ACHING JAW. THEN ATKINSON WAS STRIDING ACROSS THE PAVEMENT...



THE CONSTABLE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STREET SHOUTED AS ATKINSON STEPPED FROM THE KERB, BUT HIS WORDS WERE DROWNED BY THE NOISE OF THE TRAFFIC.



AT THE VERY LAST MOMENT ATKINSON SAW HIS DANGER AND LEAPTED ASIDE. A MUDGUARD CAUGHT HIM A GLANCING BLOW, SENT HIM REELING AND HIS HEAD STRUCK THE KERB.



ATKINSON LAY WHERE HE HAD FALLEN. THEN HE SAT UP AND RUBBED HIS HEAD. AND AS HE GLANCED UP AT THE MALICIOUS FACE OF SERGEANT CROSBY, HIS EXPRESSION CHANGED AS MEMORY CAME FLOODING BACK.



TWENTY-FOUR HOURS LATER, IN THE WING COMMANDER'S OFFICE...

BARNET, I'M PREPARED TO DROP ALL CHARGES IF IT WAS YOU WHO CRASH-LANDED LEVIN'S BEAUFIGHTER. IF YOU WERE ABOARD THE PLANE, YOU'D KNOW THE CALL SIGN. WHAT WAS IT?

IT WAS LUCIFER 25, SIR.

HE'S THE CHAP, SIR! HE'S MY MYSTERY R/O. I'D RECOGNISE THAT VOICE ANYWHERE!

SERGEANT CROSBY'S HOUR OF TRIUMPH WAS OVER, AND HIS MEAN FACE WAS A STUDY WHEN THE WING COMMANDER SPOKE AGAIN...

THAT SETTLES IT! SERGEANT, DISMISS THE ESCORT! YOU REMAIN HERE, BARNET. FLYING OFFICER BULLER NEEDS A NEW RADAR OPERATOR. WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED?

YES SIR. I'D LIKE IT VERY MUCH. THANK YOU, SIR.

WHEN AT LAST HE LEFT THE OFFICE, BERT FELT HE WAS WALKING ON AIR. HIS WILDEST DREAMS HAD COME TRUE. THEN A FRIENDLY VOICE CALLED AFTER HIM, AND HE FOUND BOB BULLER FALLING INTO STEP BESIDE HIM...



STRING ALONG AND I'LL INTRODUCE YOU TO THE CHAPS. OH, BY THE WAY, SQUADRON LEADER LEVIN IS RECOMMENDING YOU FOR THE D.F.M. FEET NOT OFF THE GROUND OFFICIALLY, AND YOU'VE ALREADY GOT A FLYING DECORATION! A GOOD START!

IT WAS A GOOD START. NOW BERT HAD CONFIDENCE IN HIMSELF AND COULD FLY WITH THE BEST OF THEM.



I CAN HARDLY BELIEVE I'M REALLY GOING ON 'OPS' OFFICIALLY AT LAST! I OWE ALL THIS TO YOU, SIR!

RUBBISH! YOU'RE JUST ONE OF THOSE CHAPS WHO WON'T TAKE 'NO' FOR AN ANSWER. YOU PROVED THE SELECTION BOARD TO BE WRONG, NOW LET'S GO AND RUB THEIR NOSES IN IT FOR GOOD MEASURE!

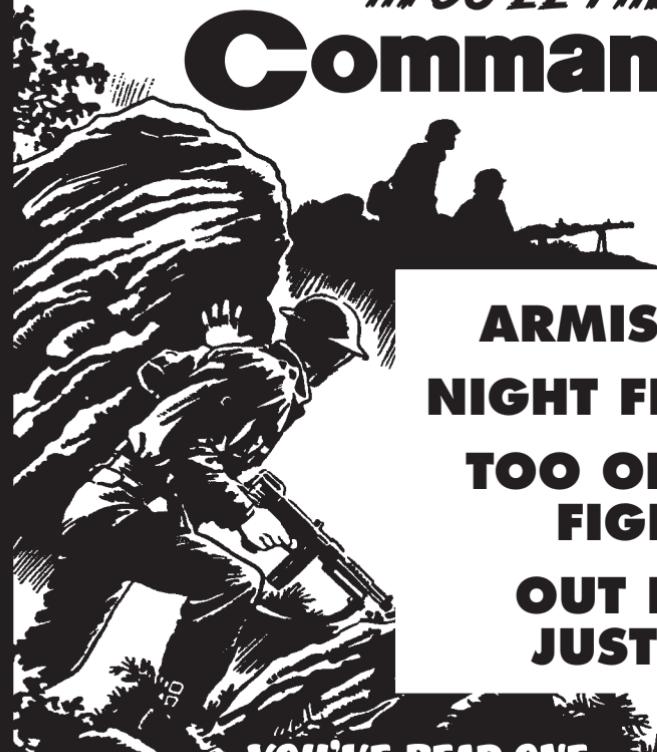
SO, WITH THE QUIET CONFIDENCE OF ONE WHO HAS ALREADY PLAYED HIS PART IN THE BEST TRADITIONS OF A FINE SERVICE, BERT FLEW ONCE MORE INTO THE DEATH-LADEN NIGHT SKIES, KNOWING THAT HE HAD WELL EARNED THE RIGHT TO BE THERE BESIDE THE MAN WHO HAD TRUSTED HIM.



BERT COULD NOT HELP BUT THINK AS THE PLANE SLOWLY LIFTED UPWARDS, THAT HE HAD LIVED THE R.A.F. MOTTO – PER ARDUA AD ASTRA – THROUGH DIFFICULTIES (OR TOUGH TIMES) TO THE STARS.

**Commando
THE END**

**LOOKING FOR EXCITEMENT...
...YOU'LL FIND IT IN
Commando!**



**ARMISTICE!
NIGHT FIGHTER
TOO OLD TO
FIGHT
OUT FOR
JUSTICE**

**YOU'VE READ ONE,
SO GET THE OTHERS-TODAY!**

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