

COMPLETE 63-PAGE ACTION STORY

No.4705
£2

Commando

FOR ACTION AND ADVENTURE

BONUS
STORY INSIDE



BATTLES 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.

BATTER THASTINGS

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?

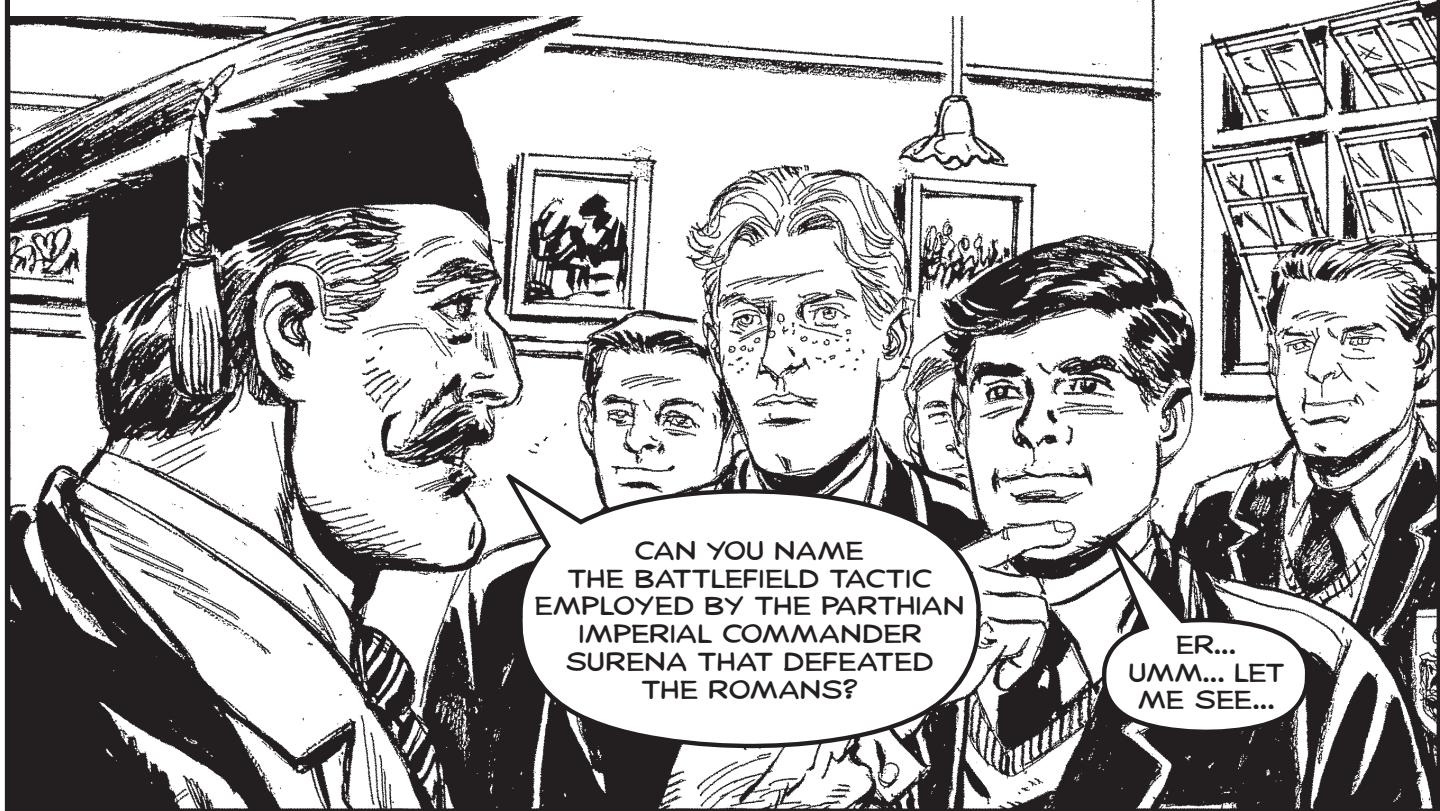
STORY
ALAN
HEBDEN

ART
REZZONICO

COVER
JANEK
MATYSIAK

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

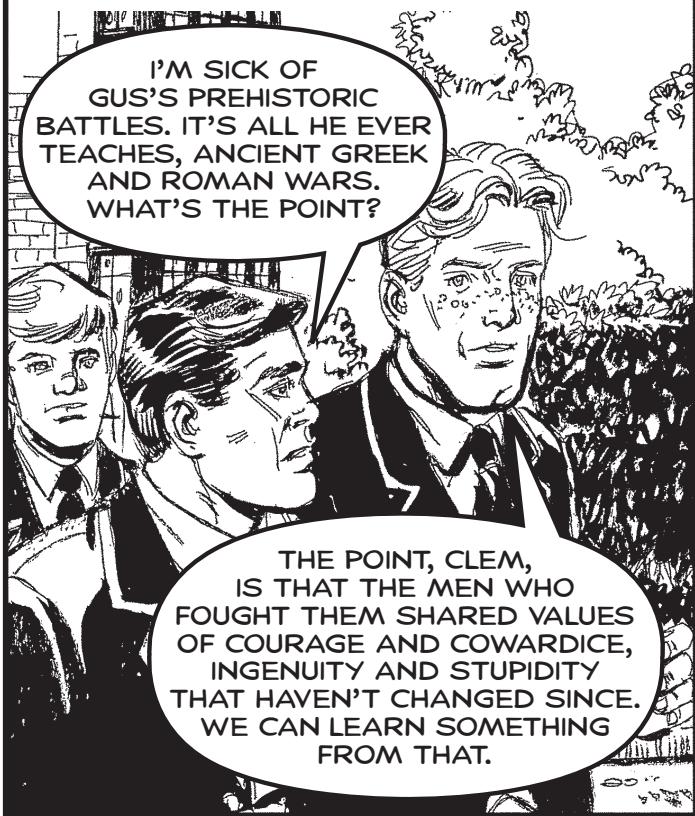
AUGUSTUS HORACE PLANTAGENET-HASTINGS HAD BEEN ITS HEADMASTER SINCE THE END OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR, TEACHING A WHOLE GENERATION OF SERVING OFFICERS' SONS, MOST OF WHOM HAD GONE ON TO BECOME SERVING OFFICERS THEMSELVES.



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.



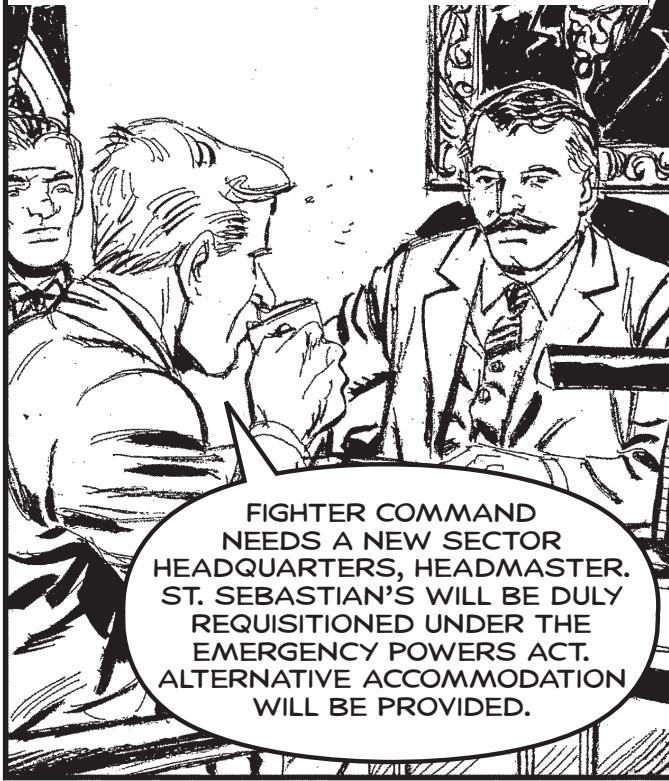
CHRIS MORAN WAS THE SCHOOL'S OUTSIDER, HIS INSIGHTFUL INTELLIGENCE AND ATHLETIC PROWESS MAKING BOTH RESPECTED AND A LITTLE FEARED BY MANY, THOUGH NOT CLEM.



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



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.



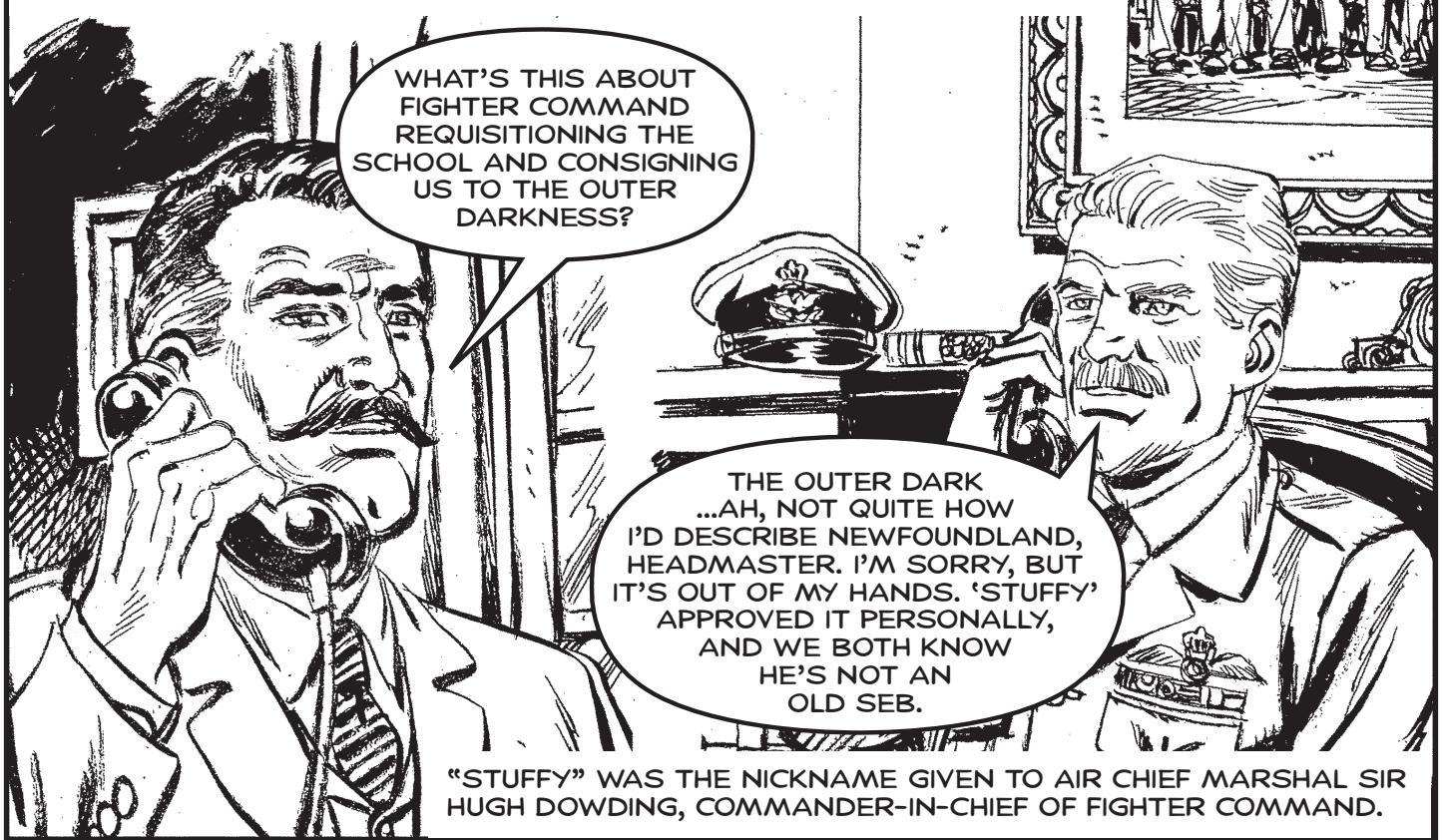
EVEN AS GUS ABSORBED THE FIRST BODY BLOW, THE SECOND ONE HIT HIM FOR SIX.



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



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.

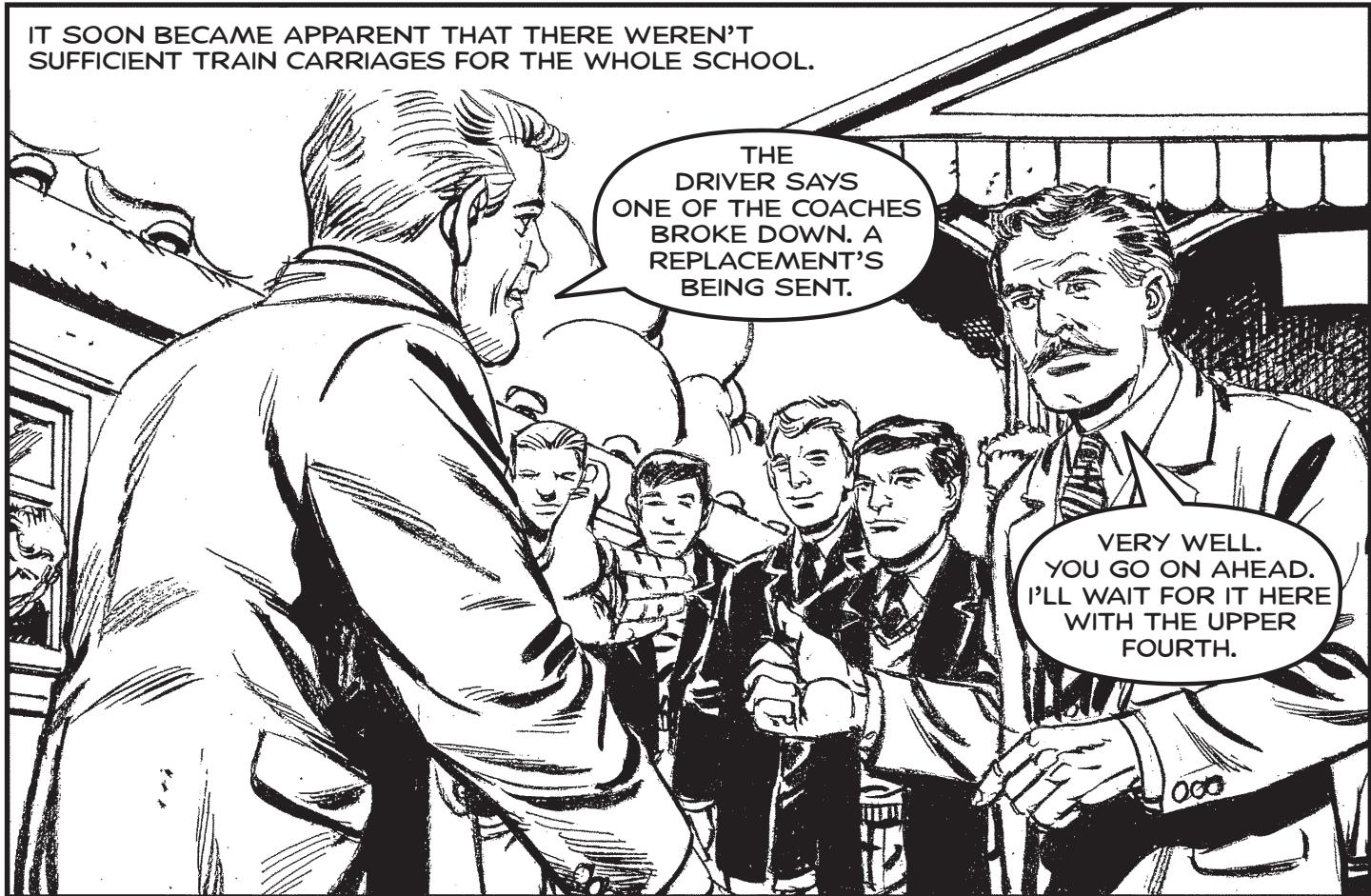


"STUFFY" WAS THE NICKNAME GIVEN TO AIR CHIEF MARSHAL SIR HUGH DOWDING, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF FIGHTER COMMAND.

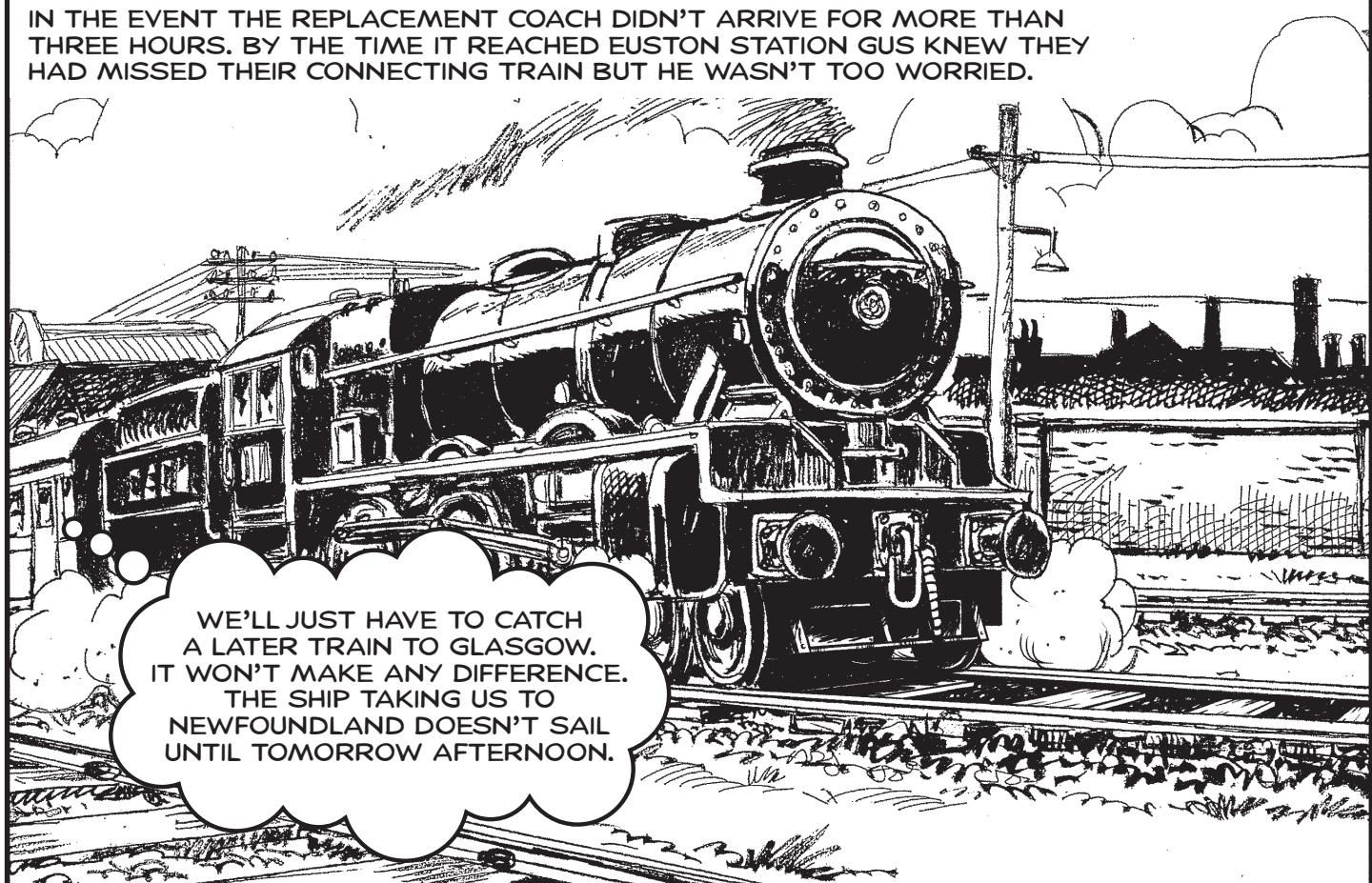
NO MATTER HOW MANY STRINGS GUS PULLED HE COULDN'T GET THE DECISION CHANGED. A WEEK LATER HE WATCHED GRIMLY AS THE EXCITED BOYS BOARDED LOCAL TRAINS TO TAKE THEM TO LONDON, THE FIRST STAGE OF THEIR JOURNEY TO NEWFOUNDLAND.



IT 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 COMMANDERED 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 FROWNED 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.



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.



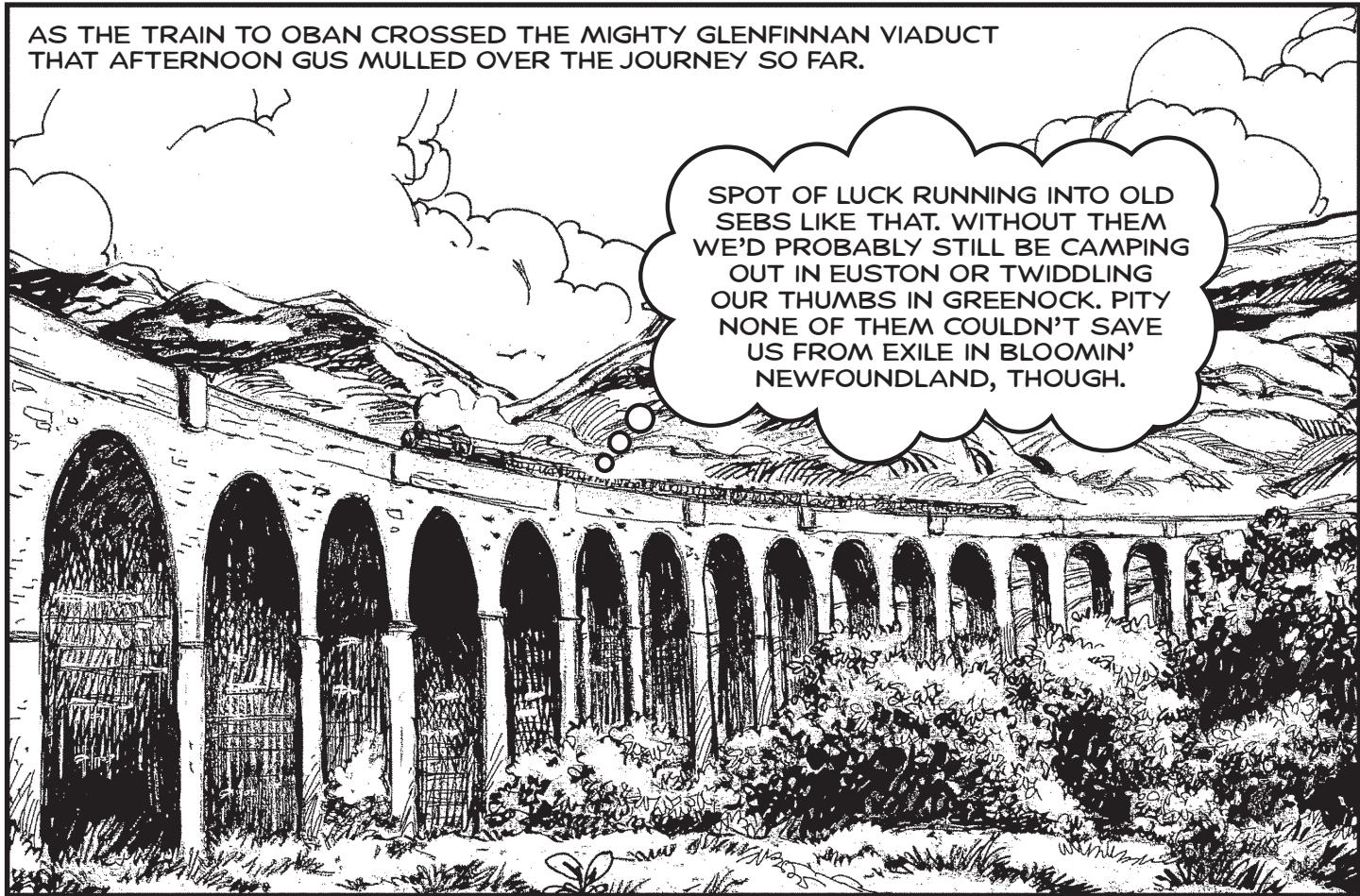
BUT WHEN THEY REACHED GREENOCK THE FOLLOWING MORNING THERE WAS ANOTHER SHOCK WAITING.



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.



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



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



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.



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.



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.

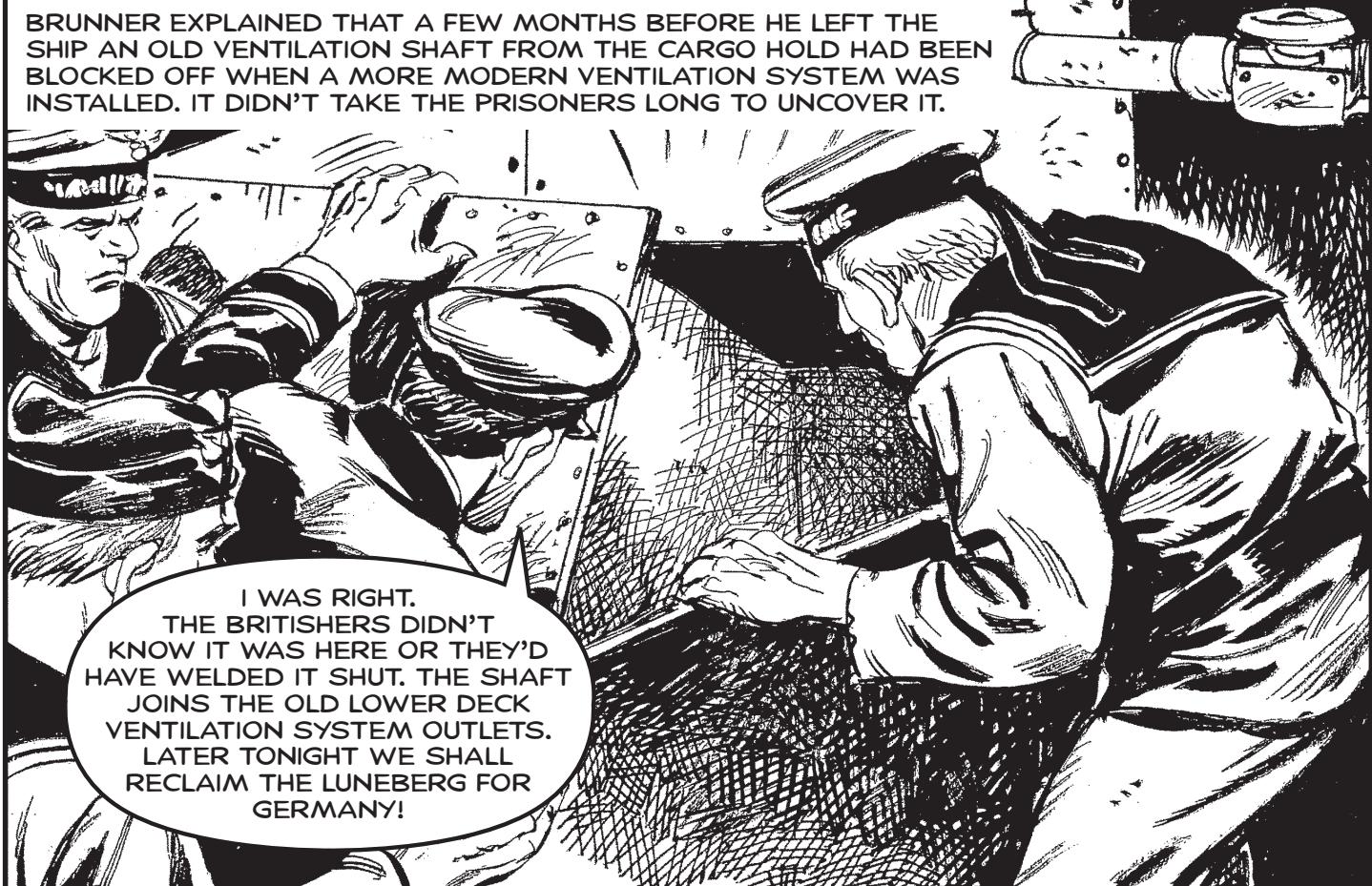


IN THE BRIG THE GERMAN COMMANDER, JURGEN BRUNNER, WHO HAD BEEN SO SURPRISED TO SEE WHICH SHIP THEY WERE SAILING IN, GATHERED THE OTHER PRISONERS AROUND HIM.



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
ARMOERY 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.



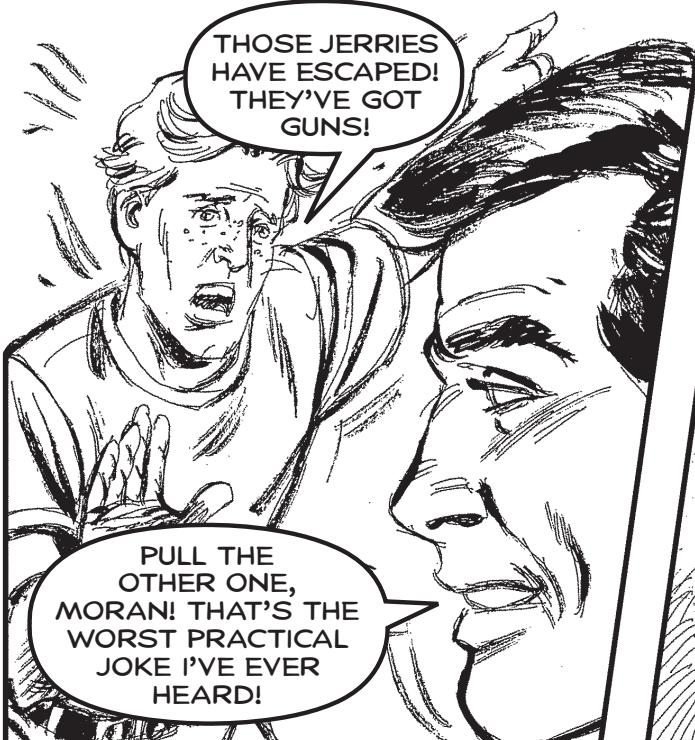
AT THE SAME MOMENT CHRIS WAS ON HIS WAY TO THE WASHROOM, CLOSE ENOUGH TO THE LOUNGE TO HEAR THE SHOTS.



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.



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.



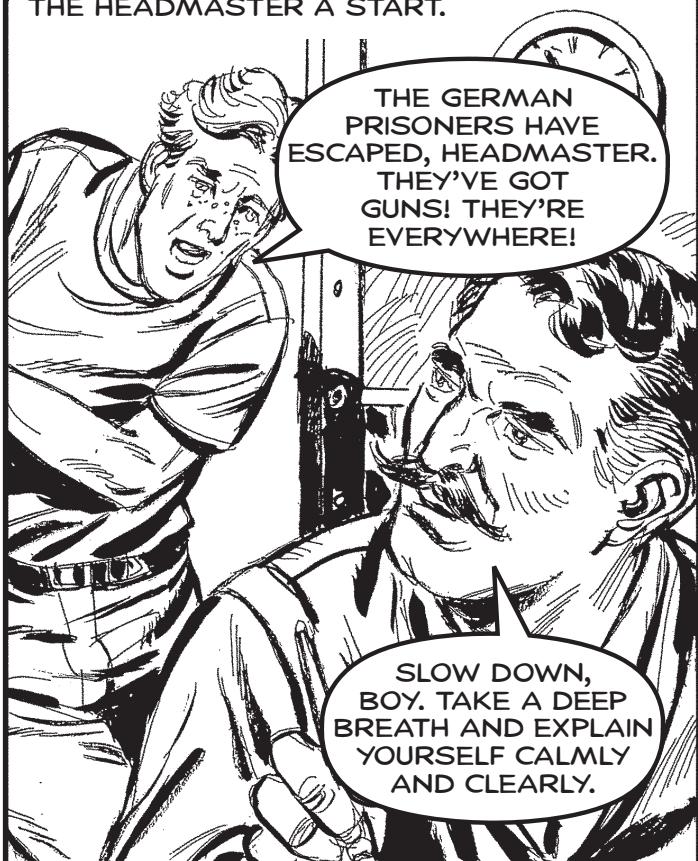
WITH CLEM'S SCORN RINGING IN HIS EARS, CHRIS WASTED NO MORE TIME.



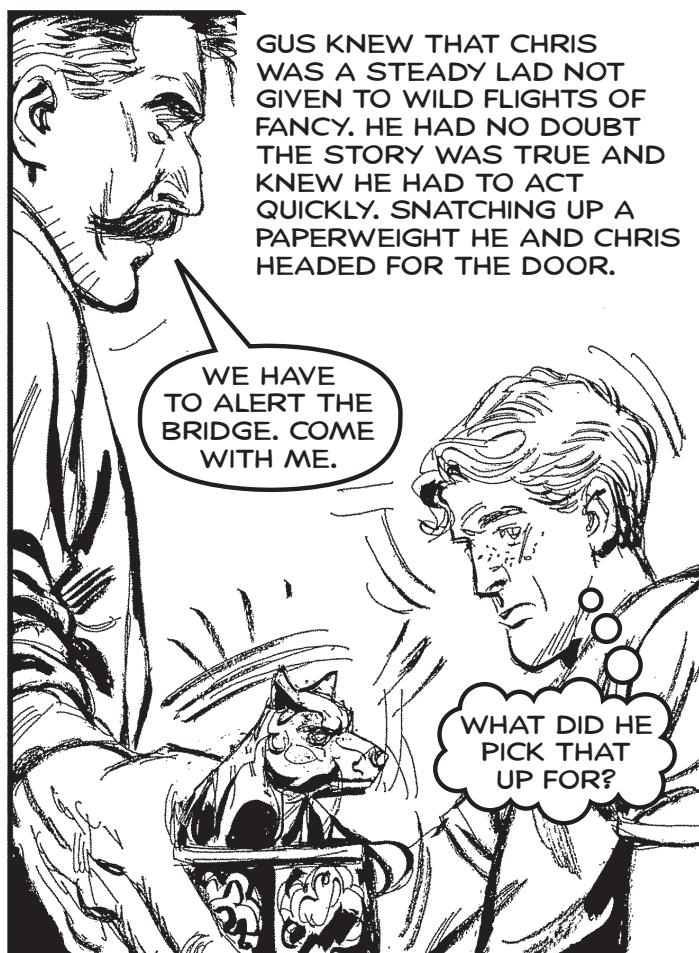
HARDLY HAD CHRIS DISAPPEARED BEFORE SHOCKING CONFIRMATION OF HIS WARNING ARRIVED IN THE SHAPE OF ARMED GERMANS.



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.





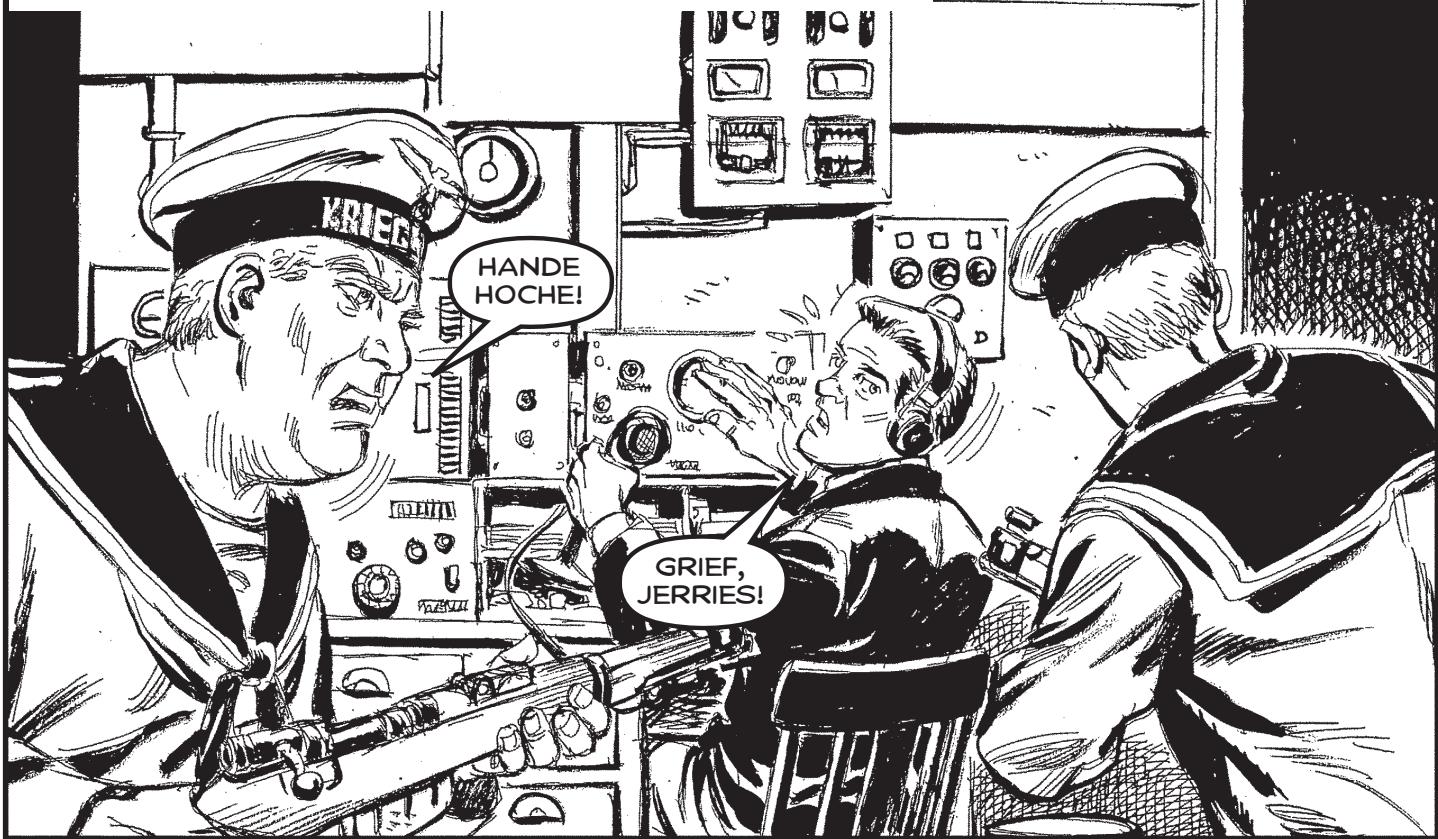
WITH A SIGH GUS HANDED OVER HIS GUN.



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



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.



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.



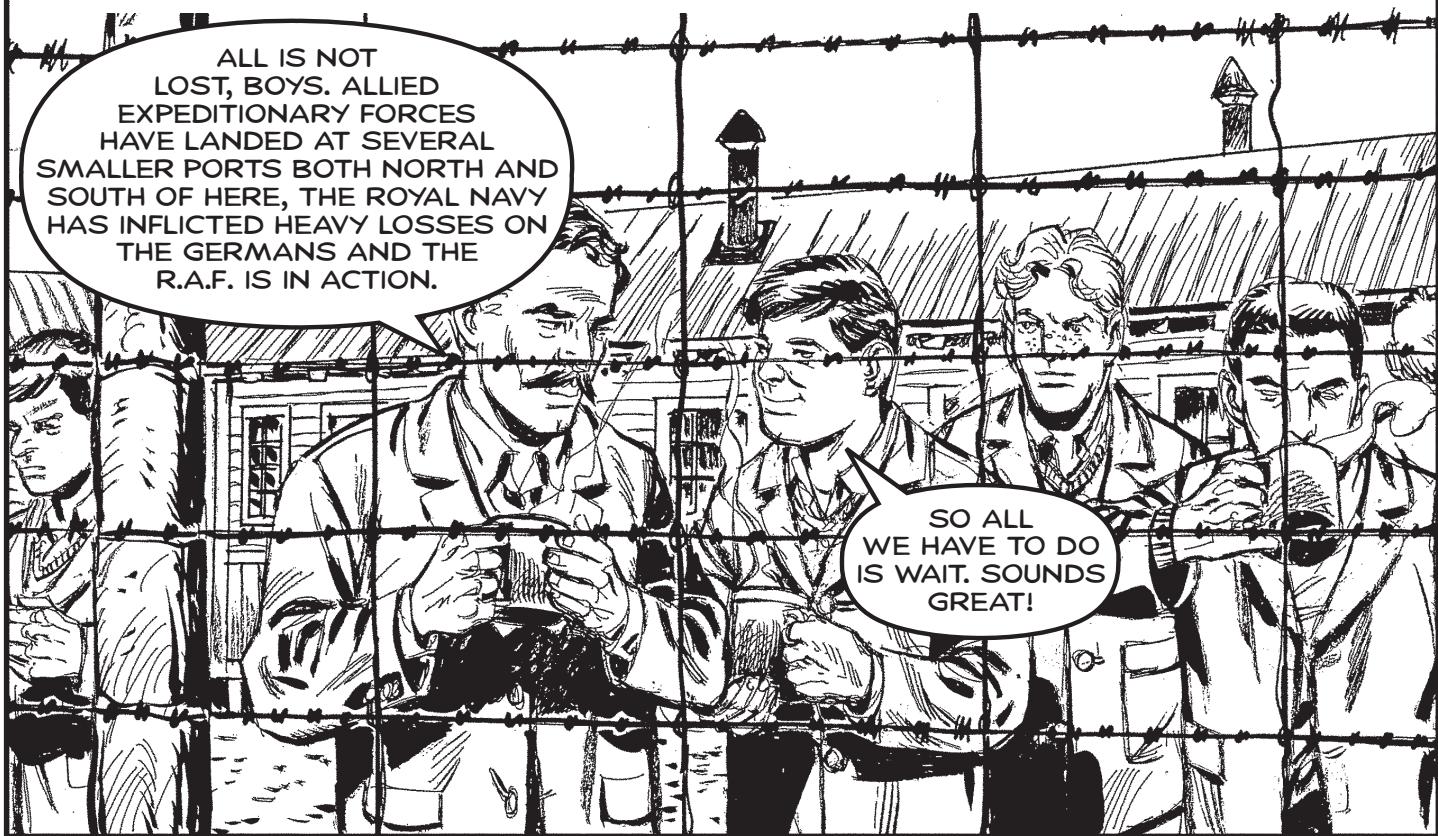
THE BRITISH CAPTAIN WAS AN OLD SEA DOG FAMILIAR WITH EVERY MAJOR PORT IN NORTHERN EUROPE. LOOKING OUT HE GASPED.



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.

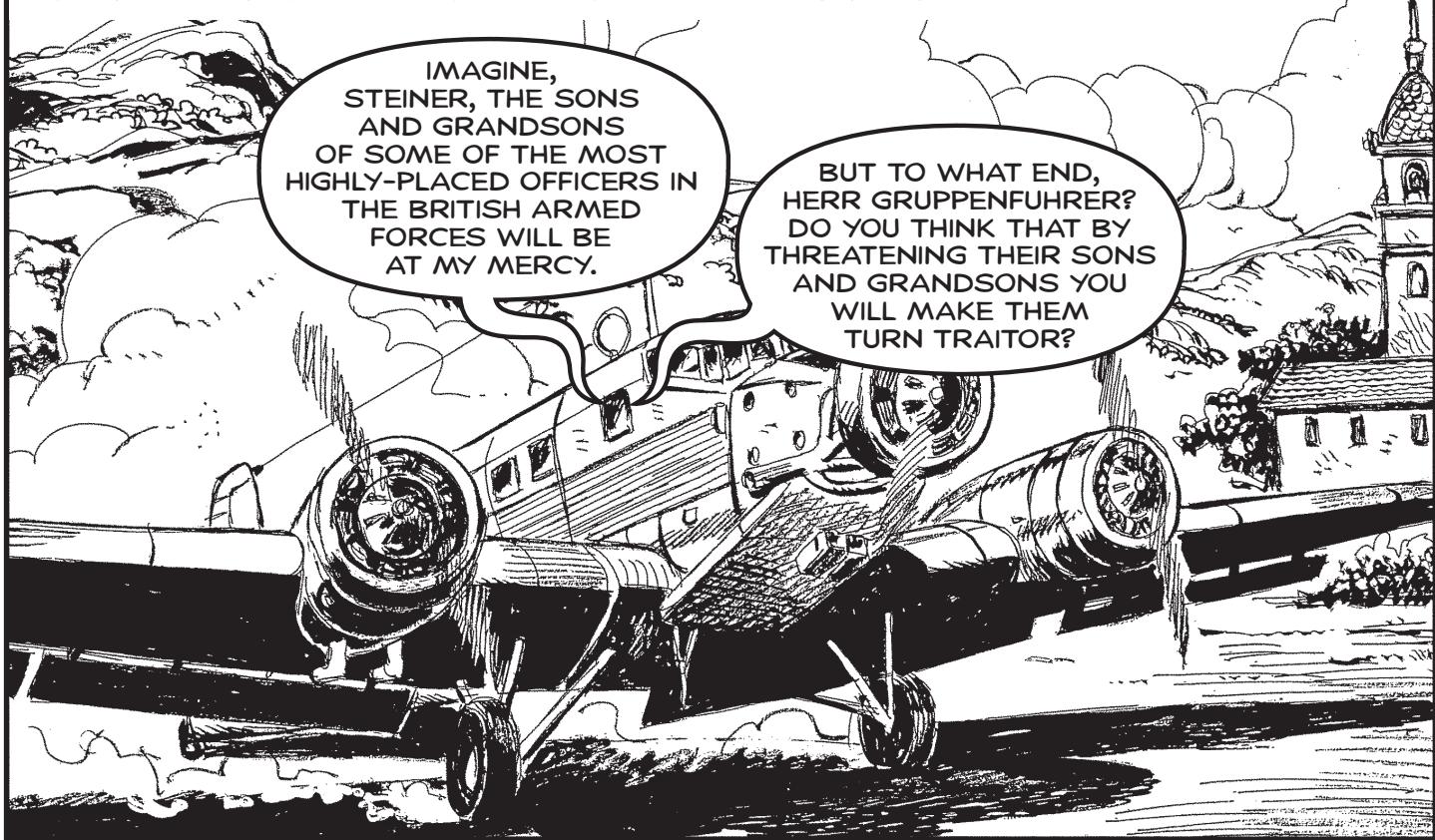


GUS AND THE BOYS WERE SEPARATED FROM THE REST OF THE PRISONERS AND TAKEN TO A FORMER ARMY CAMP OUTSIDE TRONDHEIM. GUS TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY OF EXCHANGING WORDS WITH A NORWEGIAN DRIVER DELIVERING SUPPLIES.





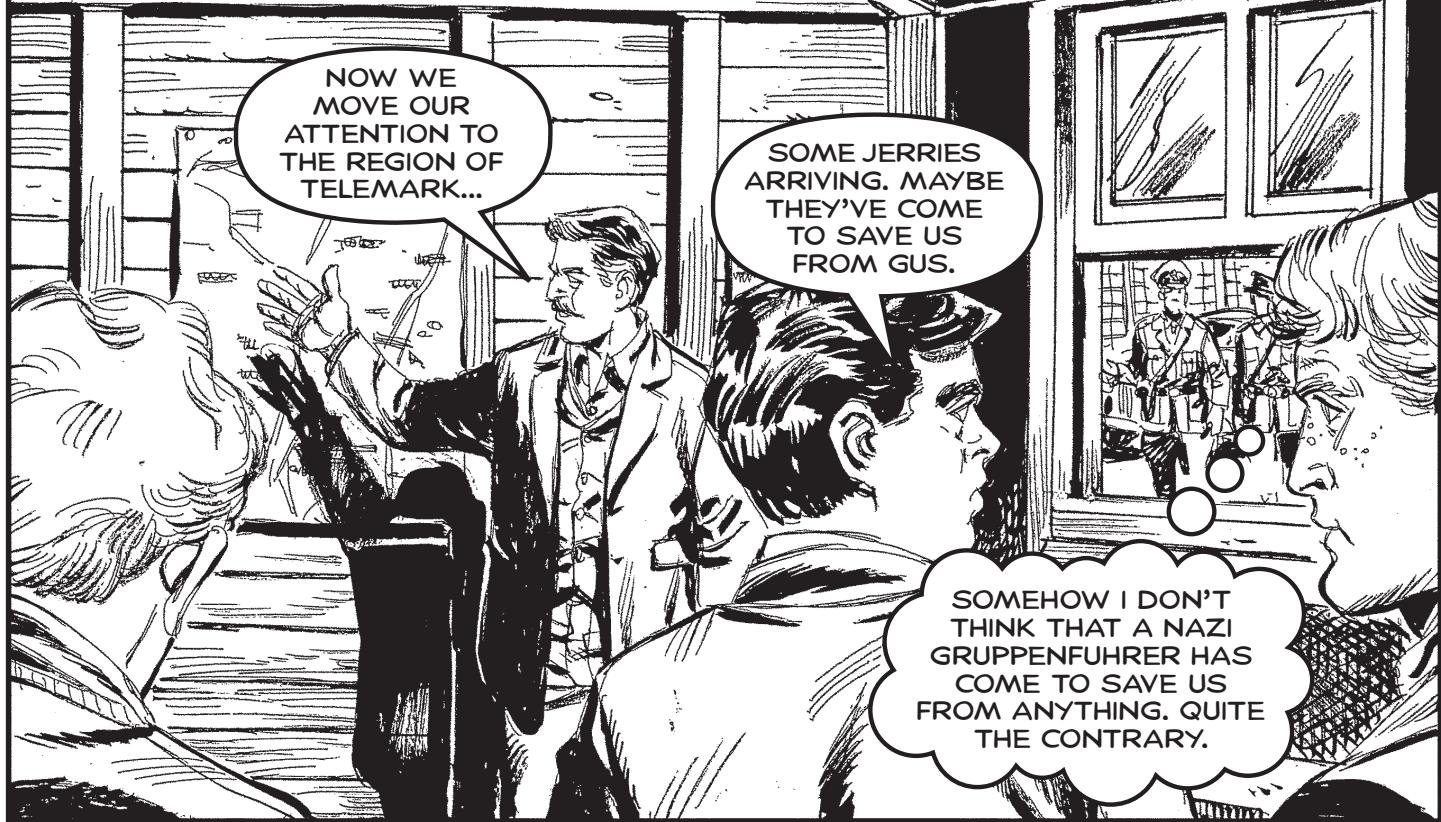
THE FOLLOWING WEEK SAW THE ARRIVAL AT TRONDHEIM OF A SPECIAL TRANSPORT FLIGHT, ONE THAT BODED ILL FOR GUS AND THE BOYS OF THE UPPER FOURTH OF ST. SEBASTIAN'S.



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



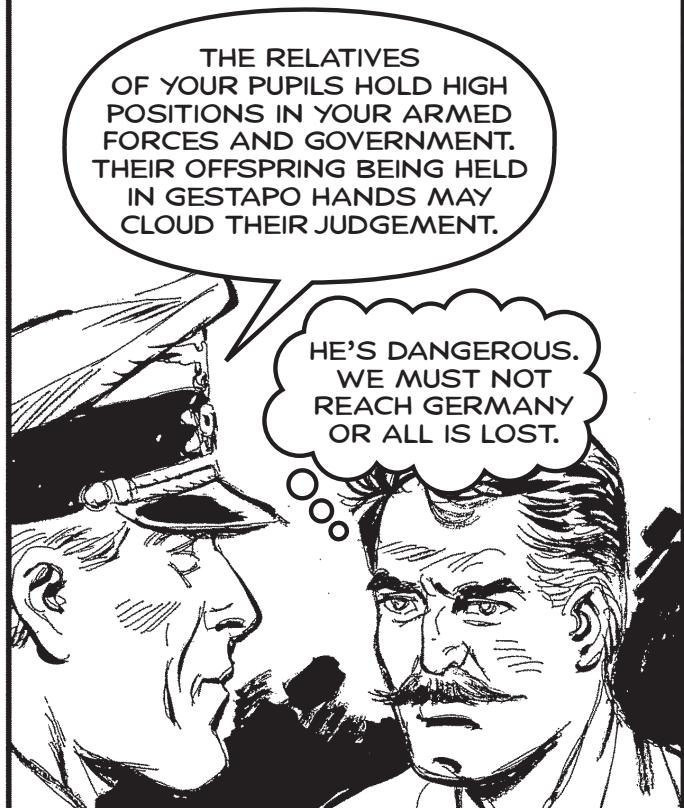
AT THE FORMER ARMY CAMP, GUS WAS CONTINUING WITH LESSONS, THIS ONE BEING ON NORWEGIAN GEOGRAPHY. BORED TO TEARS CLEM PERKED UP AS BITTERFELD'S STAFF CAR ARRIVED OUTSIDE.



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.

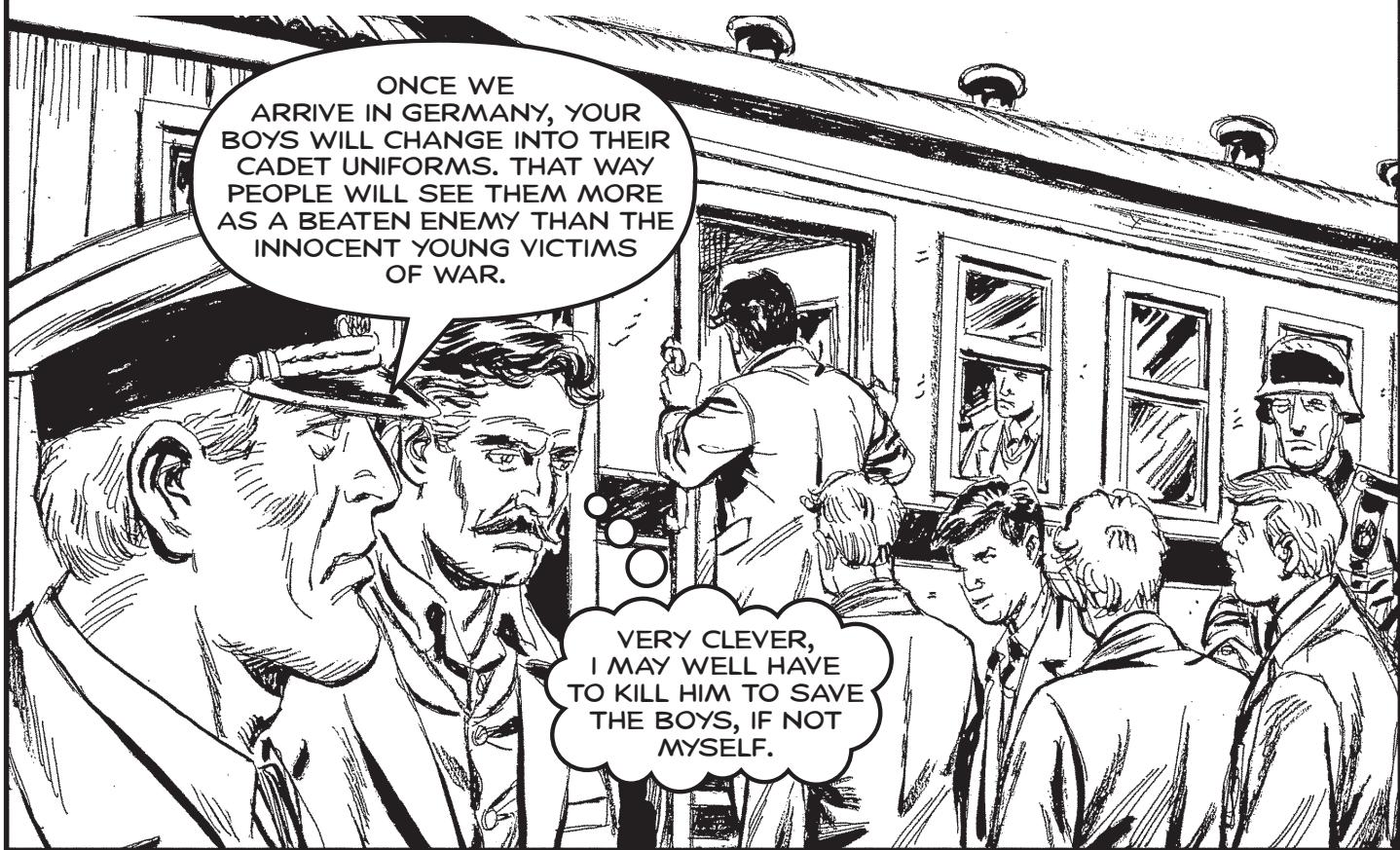


THE BOYS' LUGGAGE HAD BEEN BROUGHT ASHORE AT TRONDHEIM. AS THEY MADE READY TO LEAVE, CHRIS HAPPENED TO SPOT GUS REMOVING A SLIM LEATHER POUCH FROM A SECRET COMPARTMENT IN HIS STEAMER TRUNK.

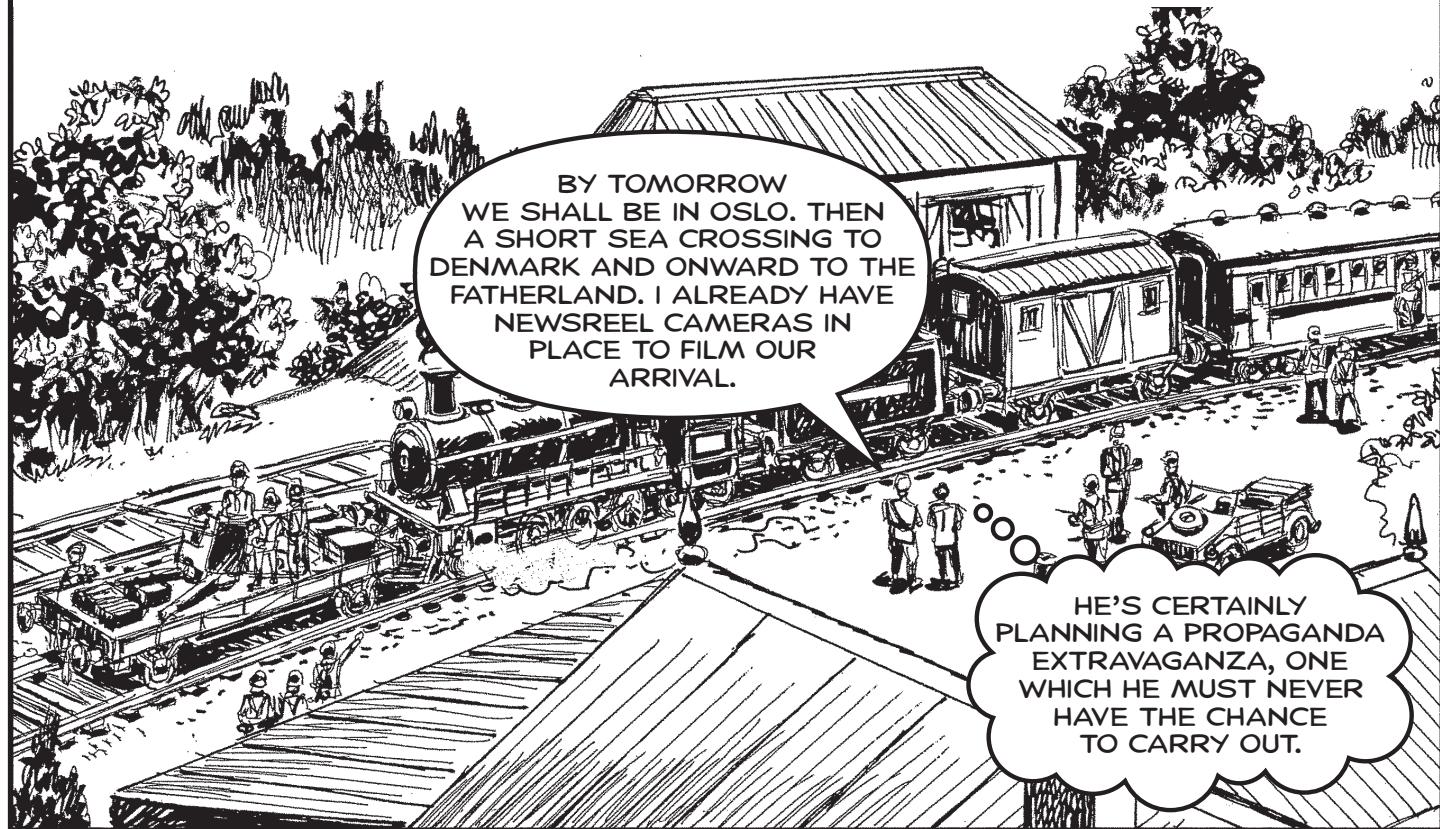


UNAWARE HE'D BEEN SEEN, GUS SLIPPED THE POUCH INTO HIS JACKET.

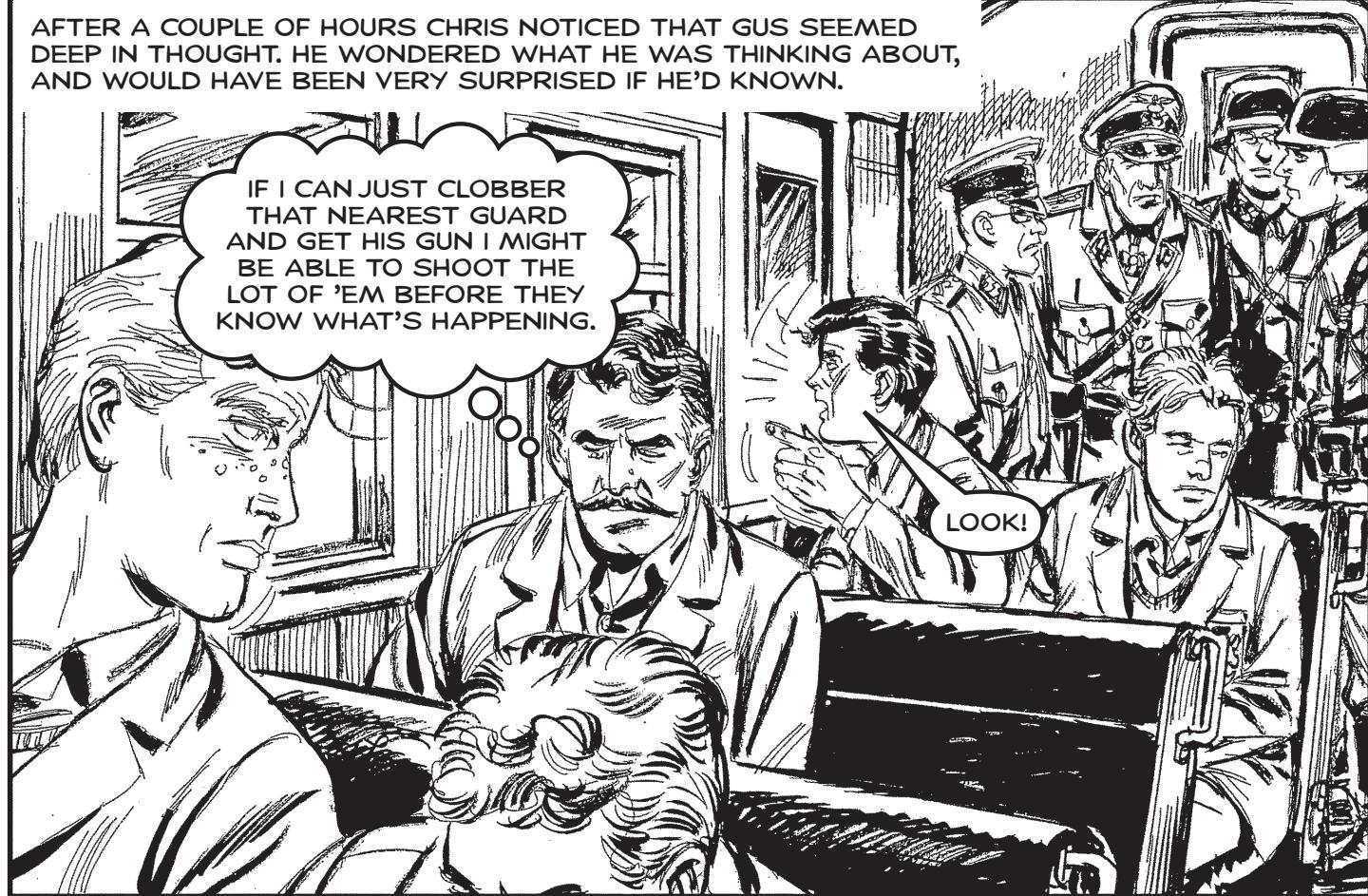
AS THE BOYS PREPARED TO BOARD A WAITING TRAIN COACH BITTERFELD REVEALED MORE OF HIS DARKER SIDE TO GUS.



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.



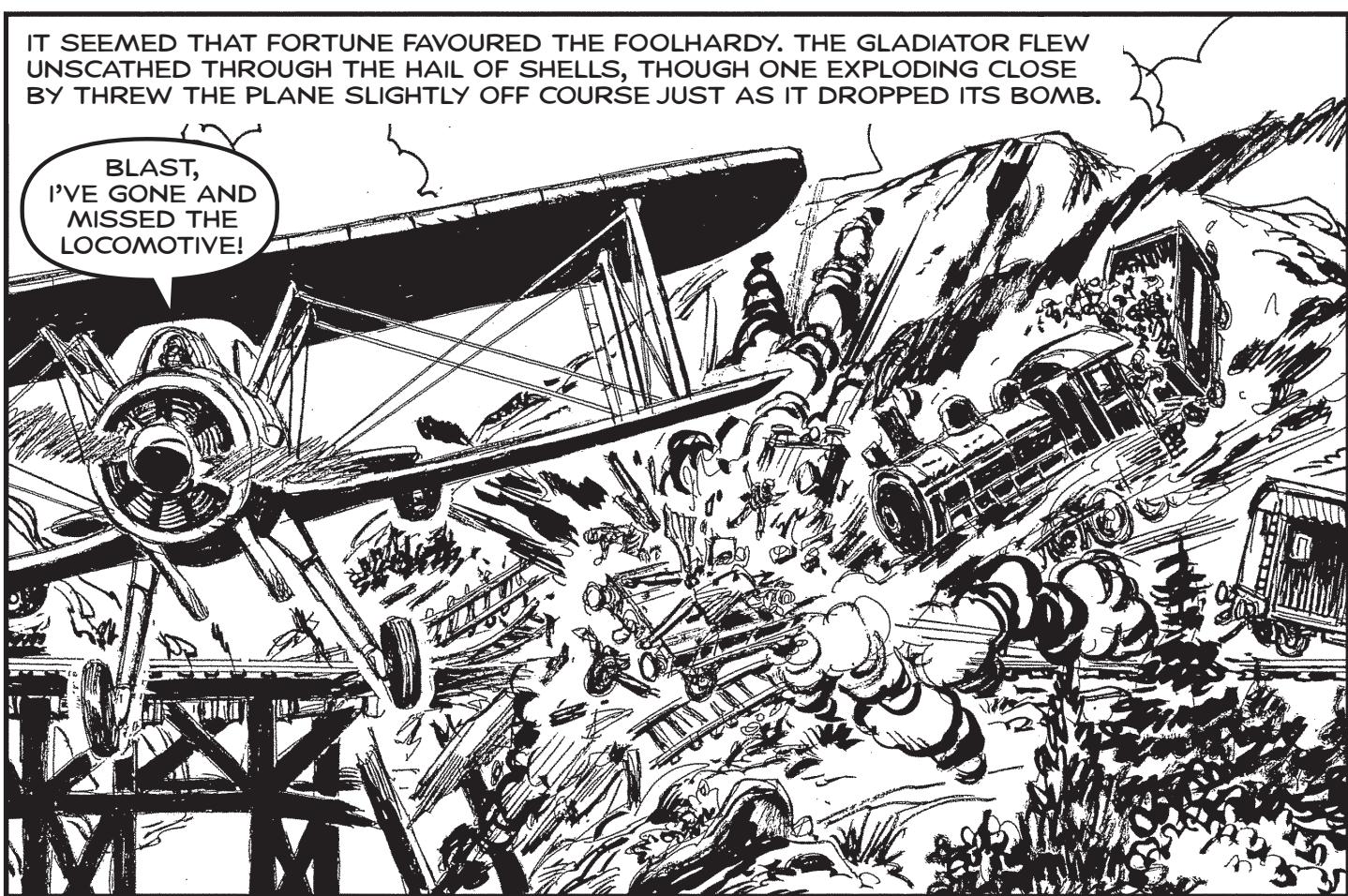
AFTER A COUPLE OF HOURS CHRIS NOTICED THAT GUS SEEMED DEEP IN THOUGHT. HE WONDERED WHAT HE WAS THINKING ABOUT, AND WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY SURPRISED IF HE'D KNOWN.



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.



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.



**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.



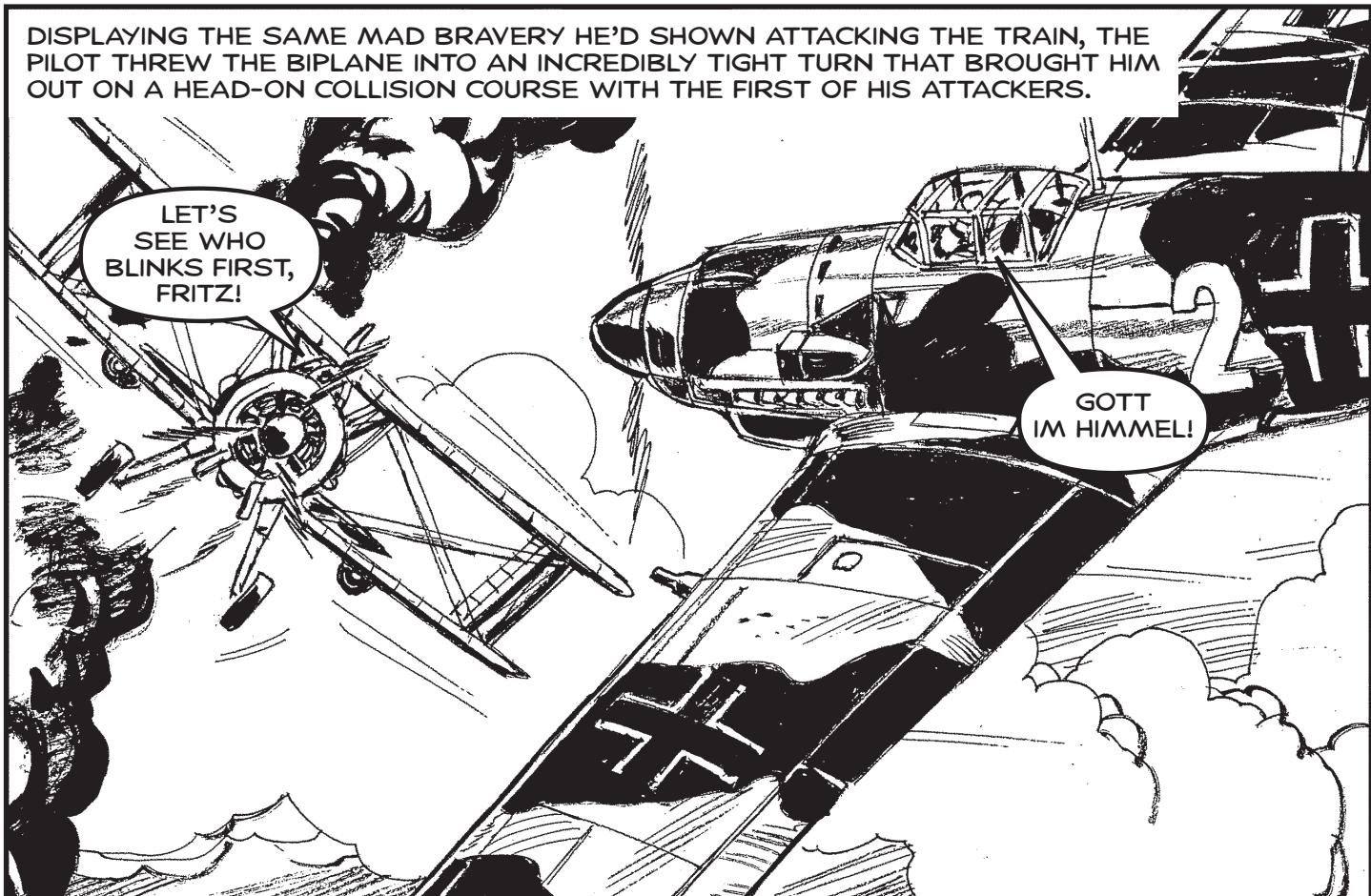
GUS SNATCHED UP THE GUARD'S FALLEN SCHMEISSER. HANDLING IT LIKE AN EXPERT HE TURNED IT ON THE REMAINING THREE GUARDS AND CUT THEM DOWN WHILE, IN NEAR PANIC, BITTERFELD AND STEINER SCRAMBLED TO GET AWAY.



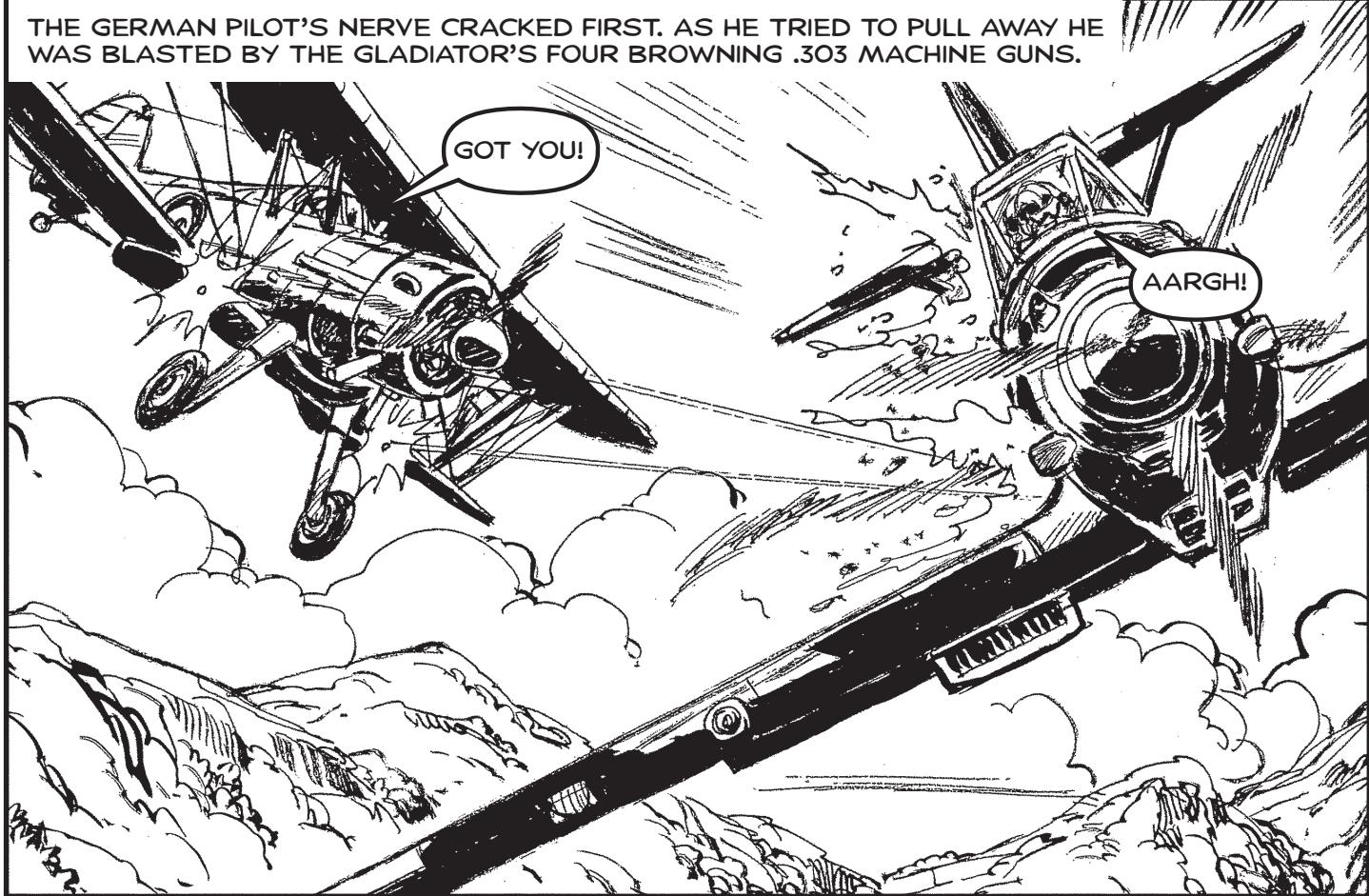
BY THE TIME GUS AND THE BOYS GOT OUT, THE TWO GERMANS WERE WELL AWAY. MEANWHILE THE GLADIATOR FLEW OVER ONCE MORE, ITS PILOT PEERING DOWN IN ASTONISHMENT.



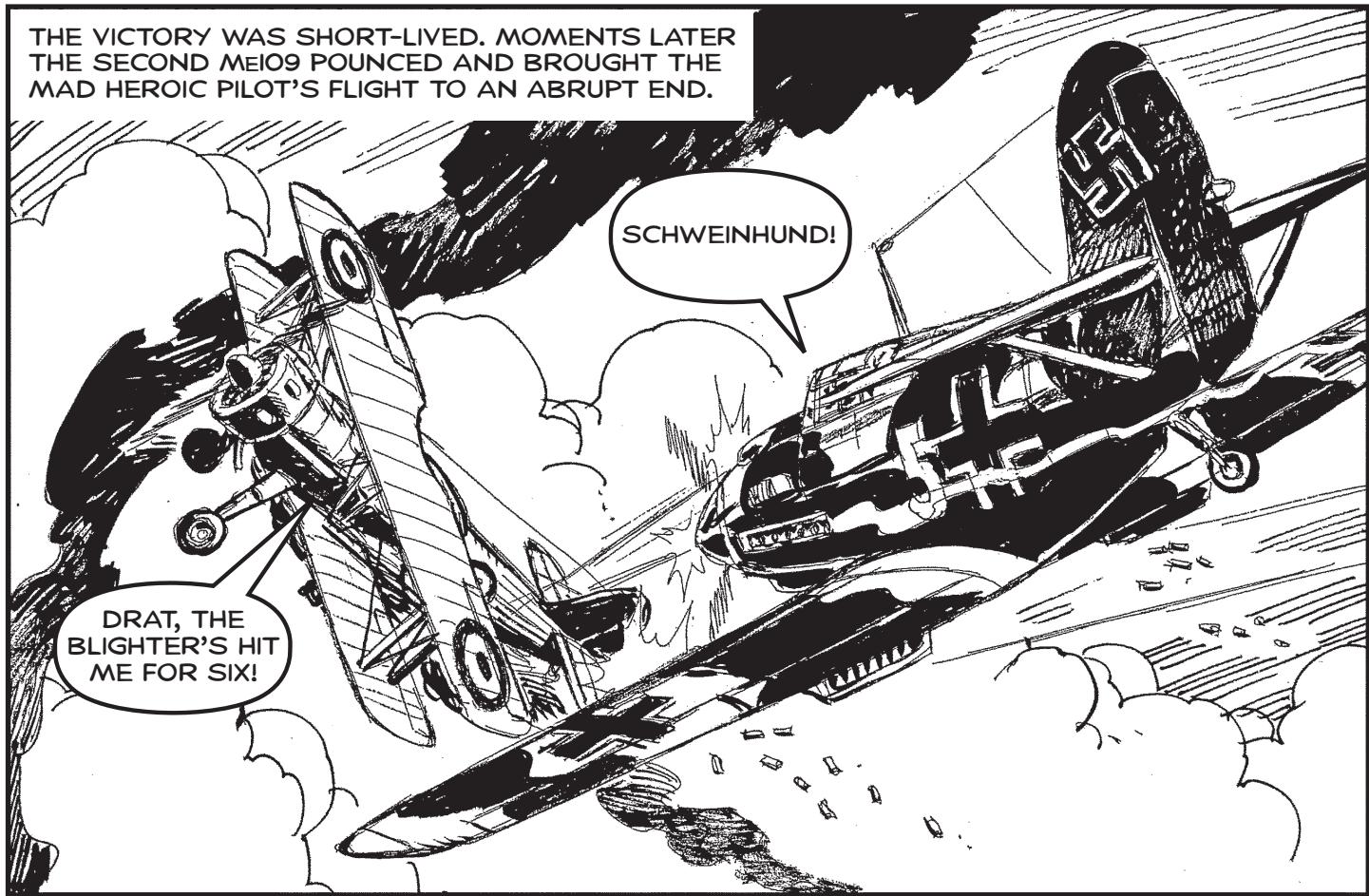
DISPLAYING THE SAME MAD BRAVERY HE'D SHOWN ATTACKING THE TRAIN, THE PILOT THREW THE BIPLANE INTO AN INCREDIBLY TIGHT TURN THAT BROUGHT HIM OUT ON A HEAD-ON COLLISION COURSE WITH THE FIRST OF HIS ATTACKERS.



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.



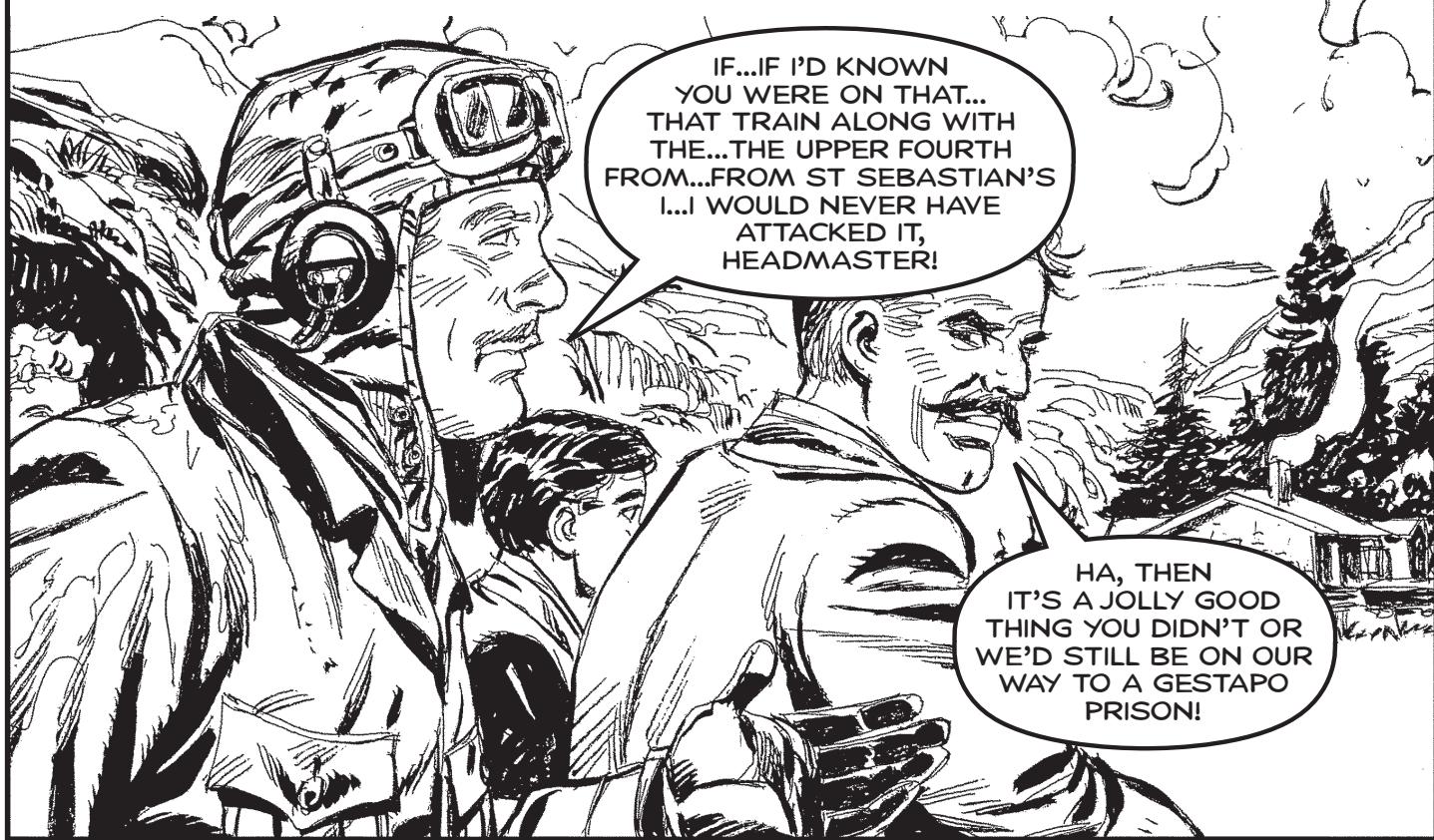
ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BRIDGE THE GLADIATOR HAD CRASHED INTO A SHALLOW MELTWATER POOL. THE PILOT WAS FLOUNDERING THROUGH THE ICY WATER TOWARDS THE SHORE, WAVING HIS PISTOL MENACINGLY.



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



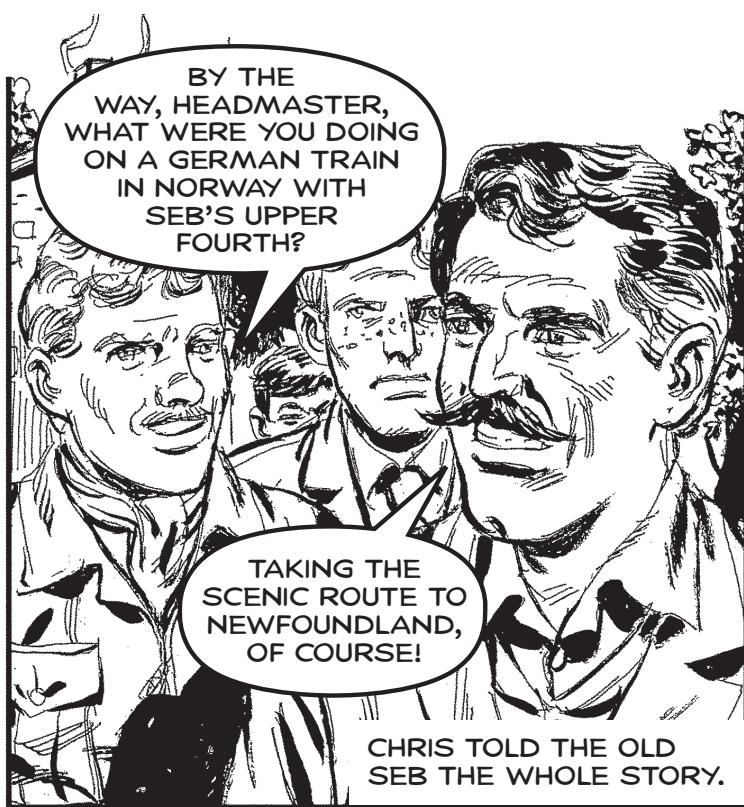
SHAWCROSS MINOR WAS, OF COURSE, YET ANOTHER OLD SEB. GUS SPOTTED A SHEPHERD'S HUT WHERE THEY COULD TAKE SHELTER AND LIGHT A FIRE AS HE BRUSHED OFF HIS FORMER PUPIL'S BABBLING APOLOGIES WITH A BARKING LAUGH.



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.



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



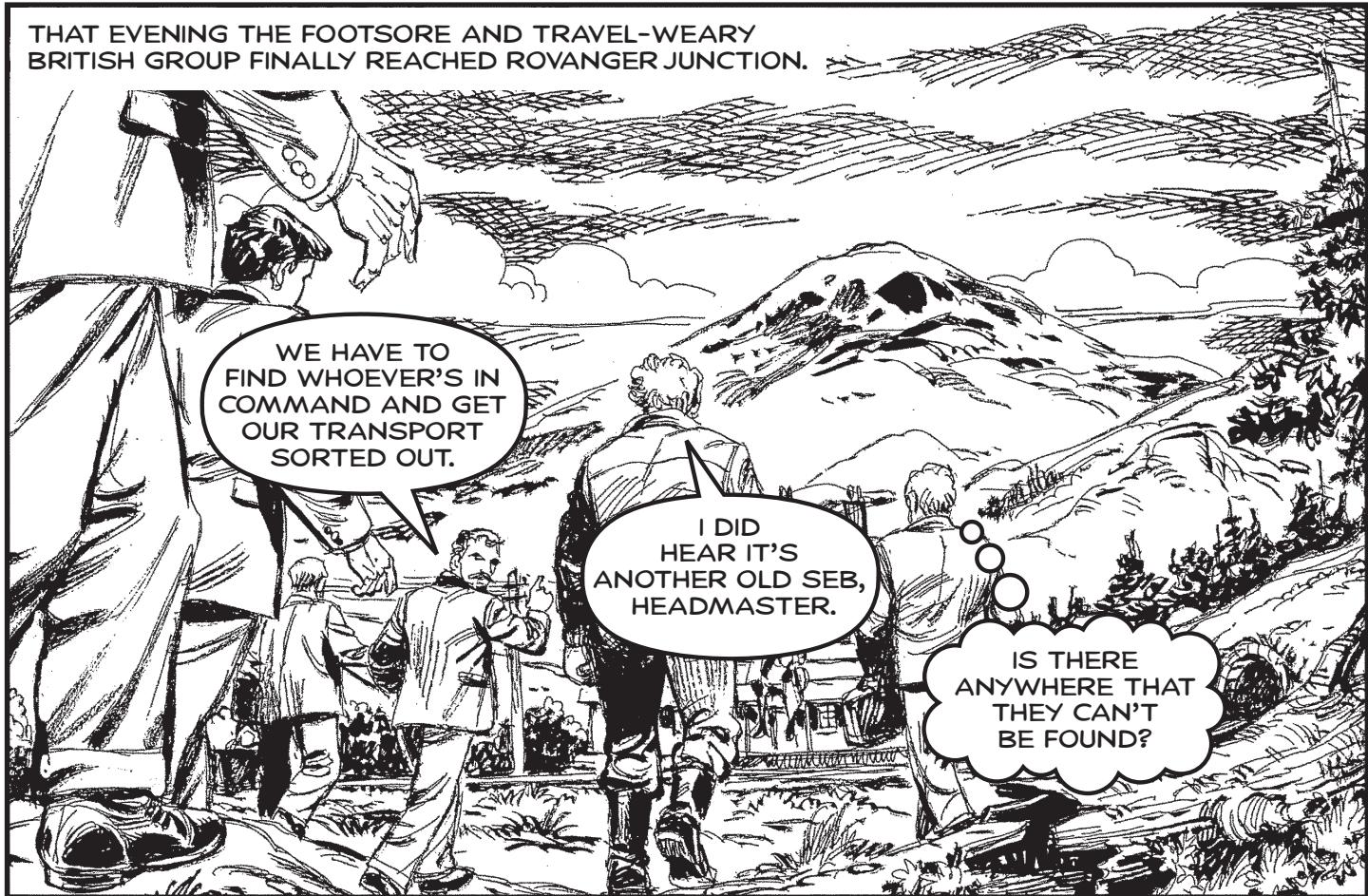
MEANWHILE BITTERFELD HAD REACHED A ROAD CLOSE TO THE RAILWAY AND WAVED DOWN AN ARMY COLUMN TRAVELLING TO TRONDHEIM. HE ASKED FOR A MAP AND POURED OVER IT.



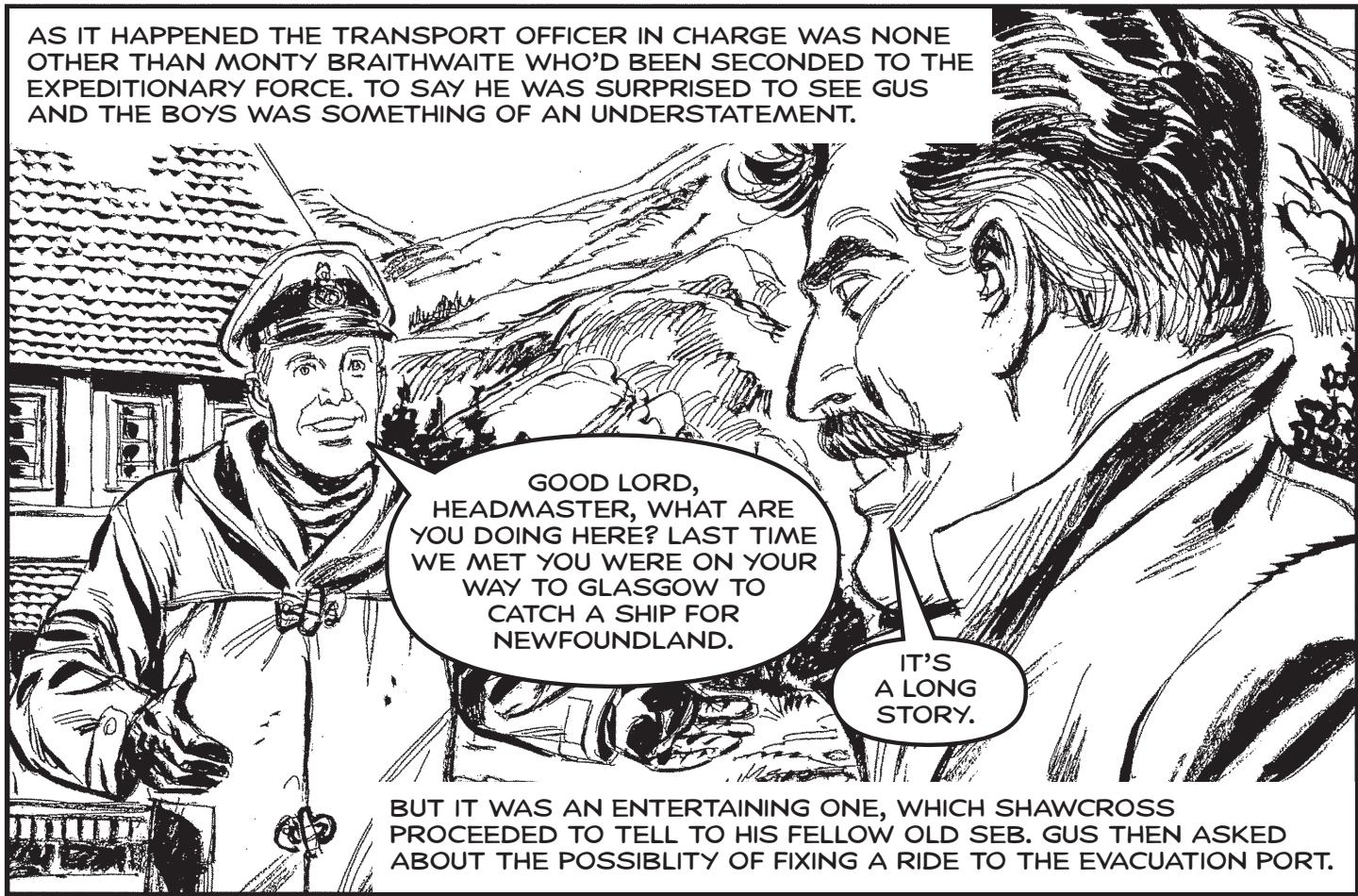
BITTERFELD USED THE RADIO TO CONTACT H.Q. WHAT HE WAS TOLD BROUGHT A SMILE TO HIS LIPS.



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



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.



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.

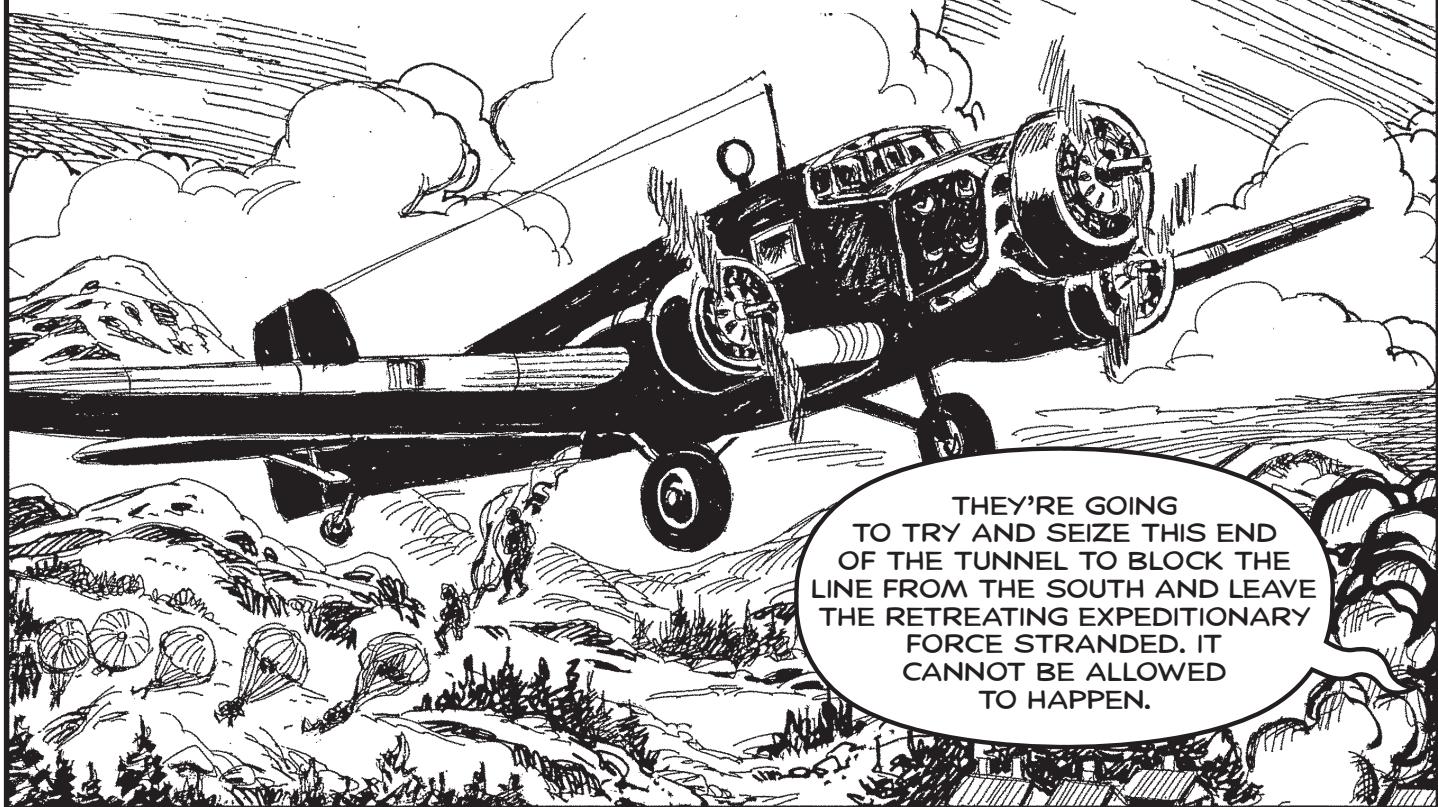
AFTER A WARMING MEAL THEY SETTLED DOWN FOR THE NIGHT ONLY TO BE RUDELY AWAKENED AT DAYBREAK BY A SERIES OF HUGE EXPLOSIONS.



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.



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



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.



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.



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



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.



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.



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.



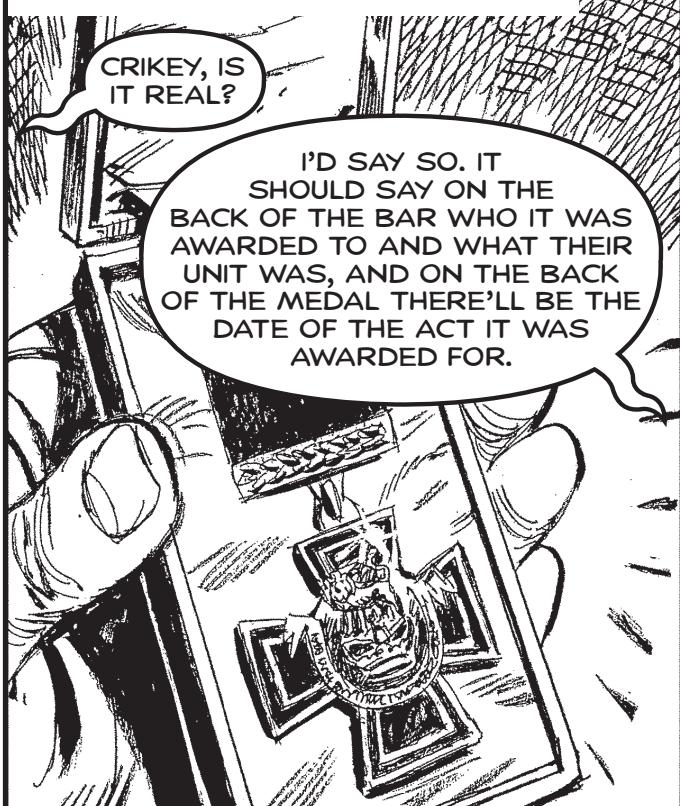
MUCH AS HE WANTED TO DEFEND GUS CHRIS HAD TO ADMIT THAT CLEM WAS PROBABLY RIGHT. PUTTING HIS HAND IN HIS POCKET HE SUDDENLY REMEMBERED THAT HE STILL HAD GUS'S POUCH. CLEM WANTED TO KNOW WHAT IT WAS.



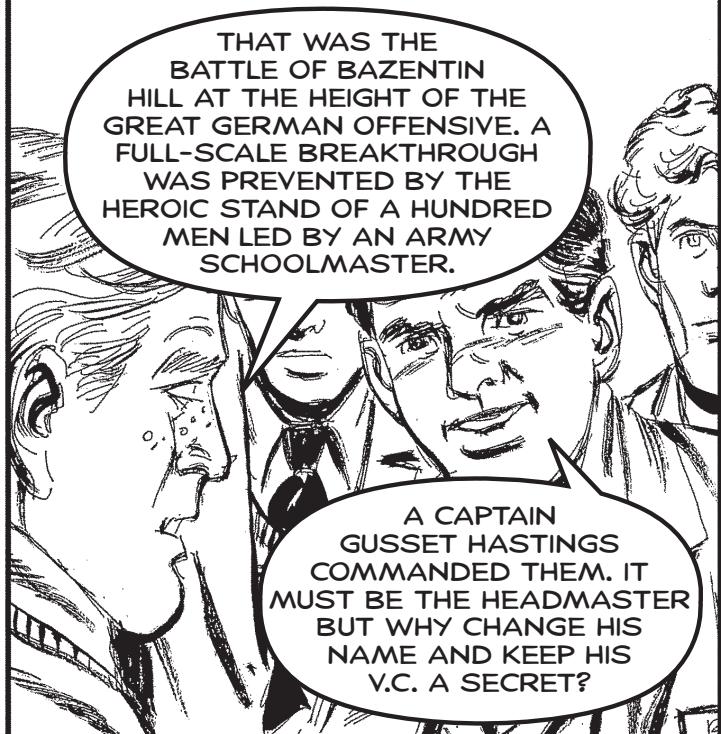
SOMEWHAT RELUCTANTLY CHRIS PULLED A SMALL CASE FROM THE POUCH. CLEM RECOGNISED WHAT IT WAS IMMEDIATELY.



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



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.



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



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



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.



IT WAS ALREADY CLEAR THEIR PURSUITERS 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.

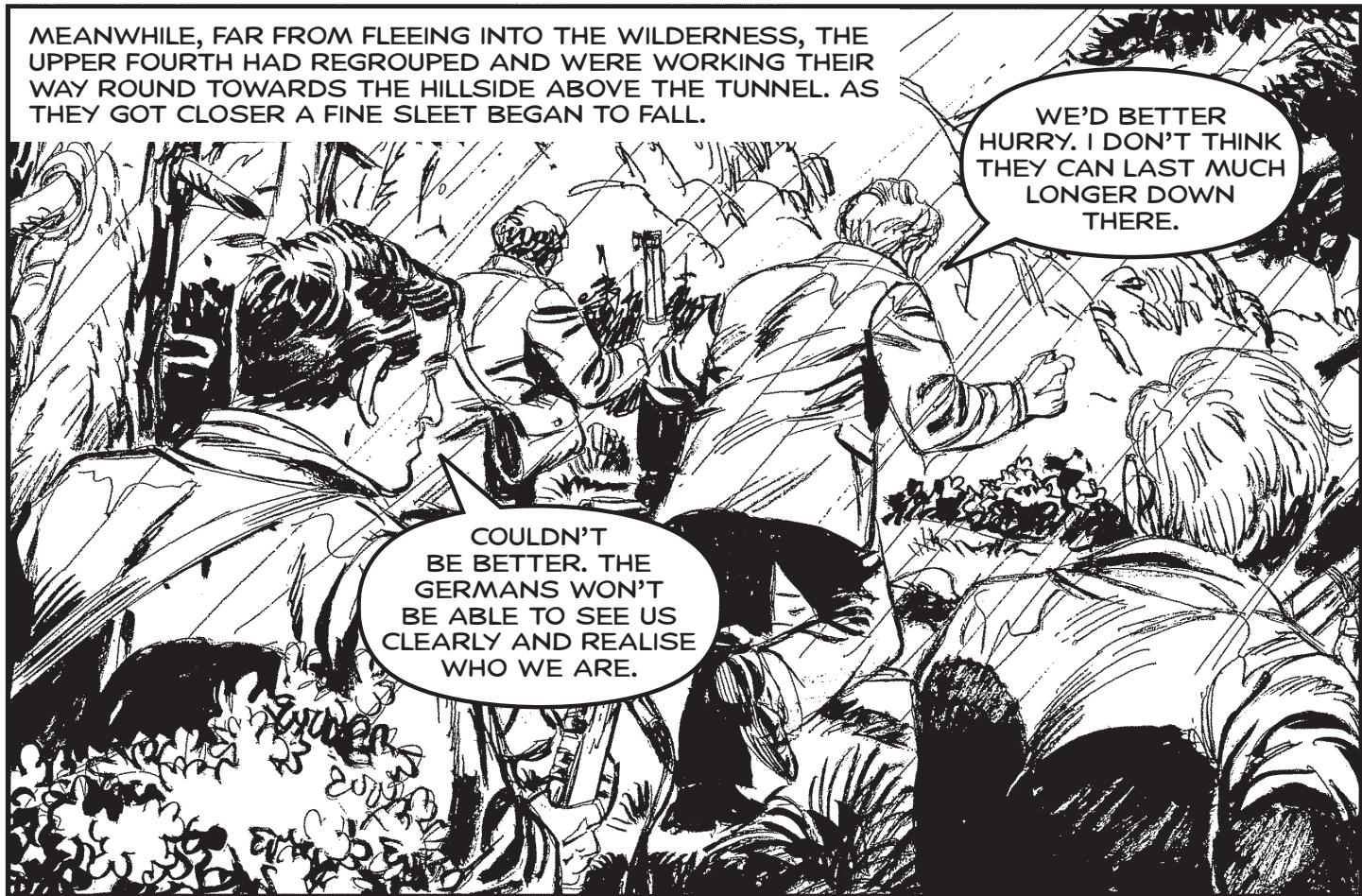


CHRIS WAS RIGHT. WITHOUT SHOOTING, THEIR PURSUITERS COULDN'T KEEP UP, AND TRIGGERING A ROCKFALL OR TWO SLOWED THEM DOWN EVEN MORE.

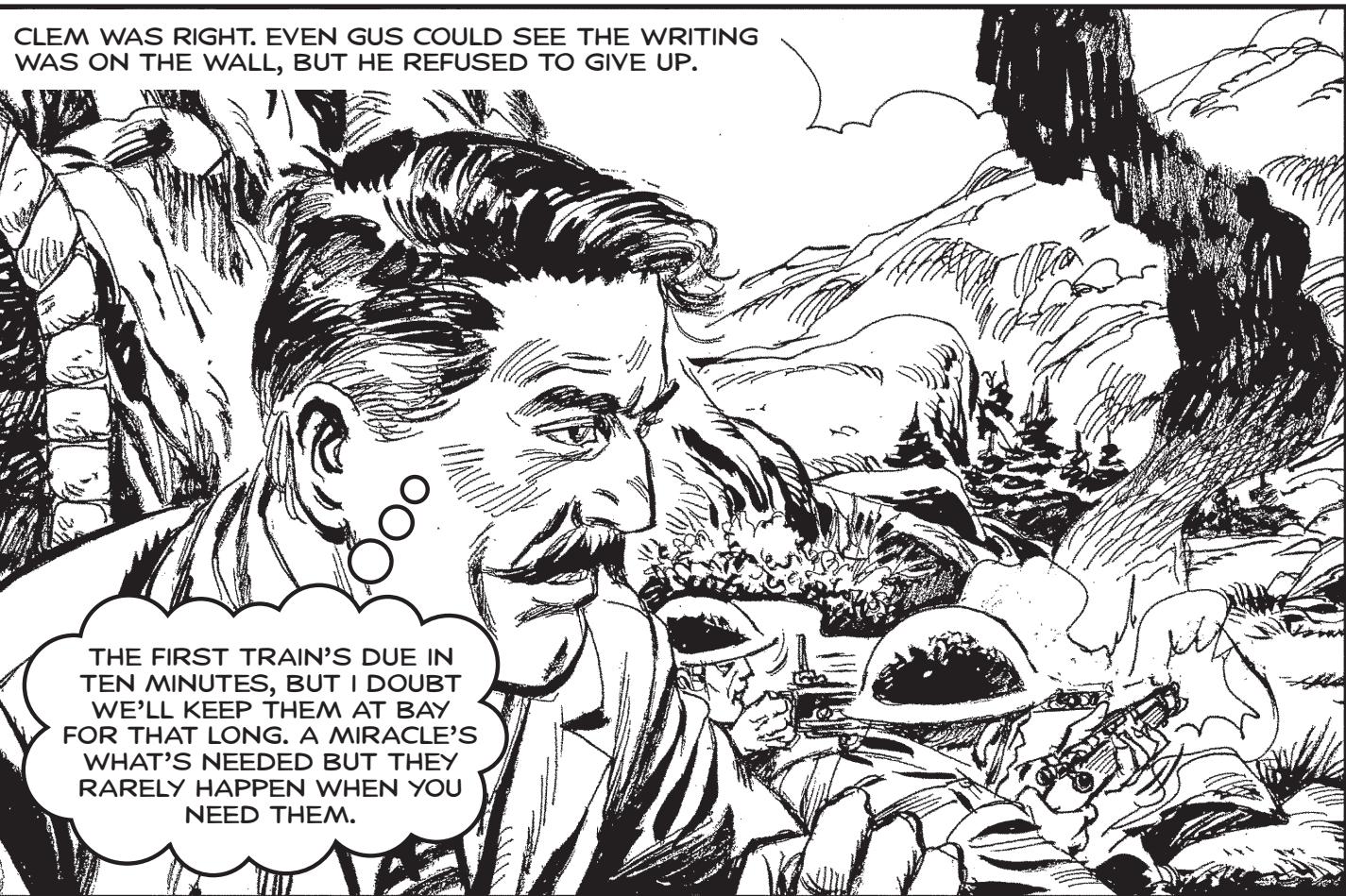


EVENTUALLY BITTERFELD REALISED HE WASN'T GOING TO CATCH THEM AND RECALLED HIS MEN. HE WAS FRUSTRATED BUT NOT TOO DOWN-HEARTED.





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



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



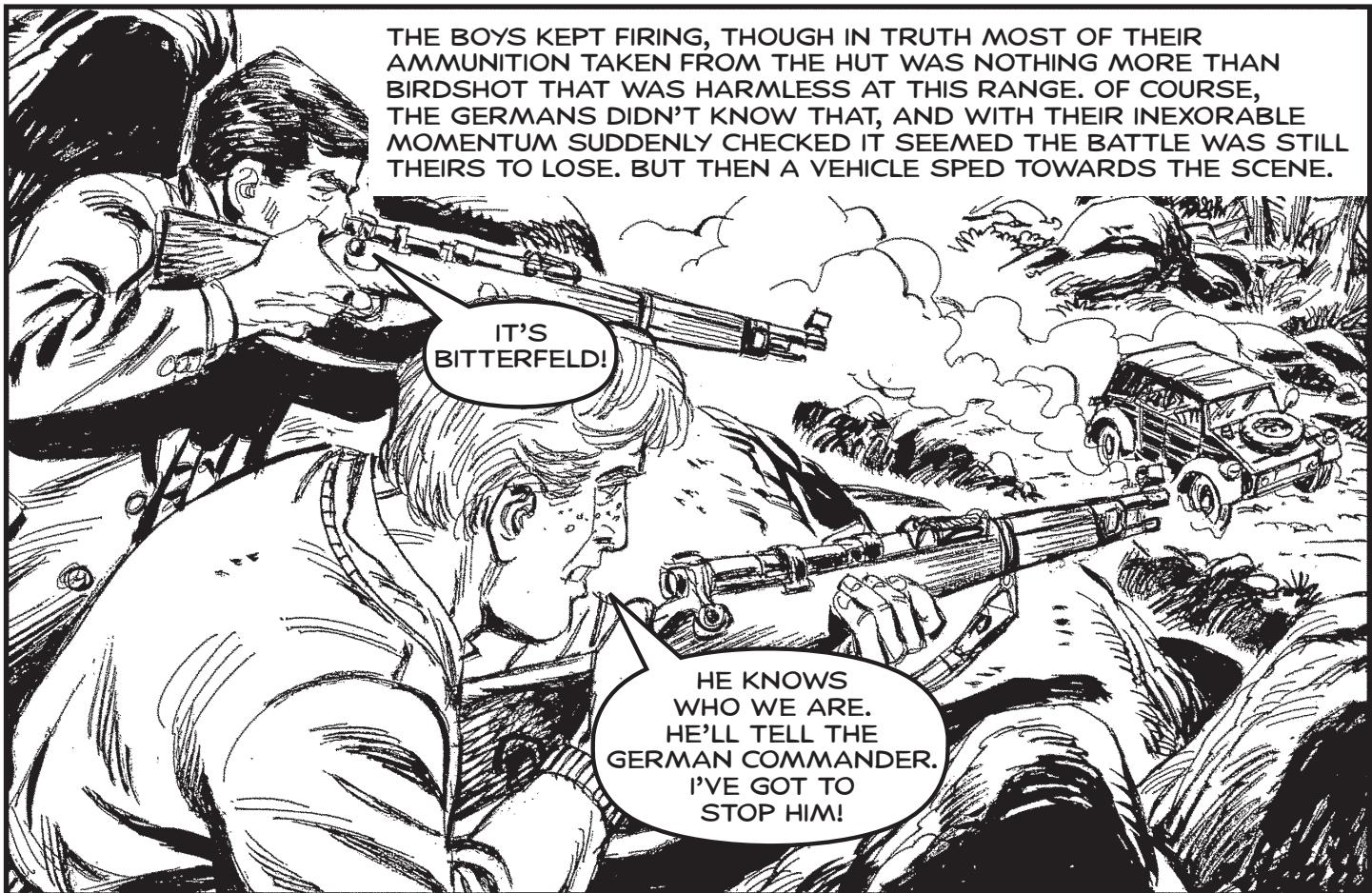
LIKE GUS, AT FIRST BITTERFELD COULDN'T MAKE OUT ANY DETAILS OF THE NEWCOMERS, BUT THE STEADY SHOOTING WAS UNMISTAKABLE.



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



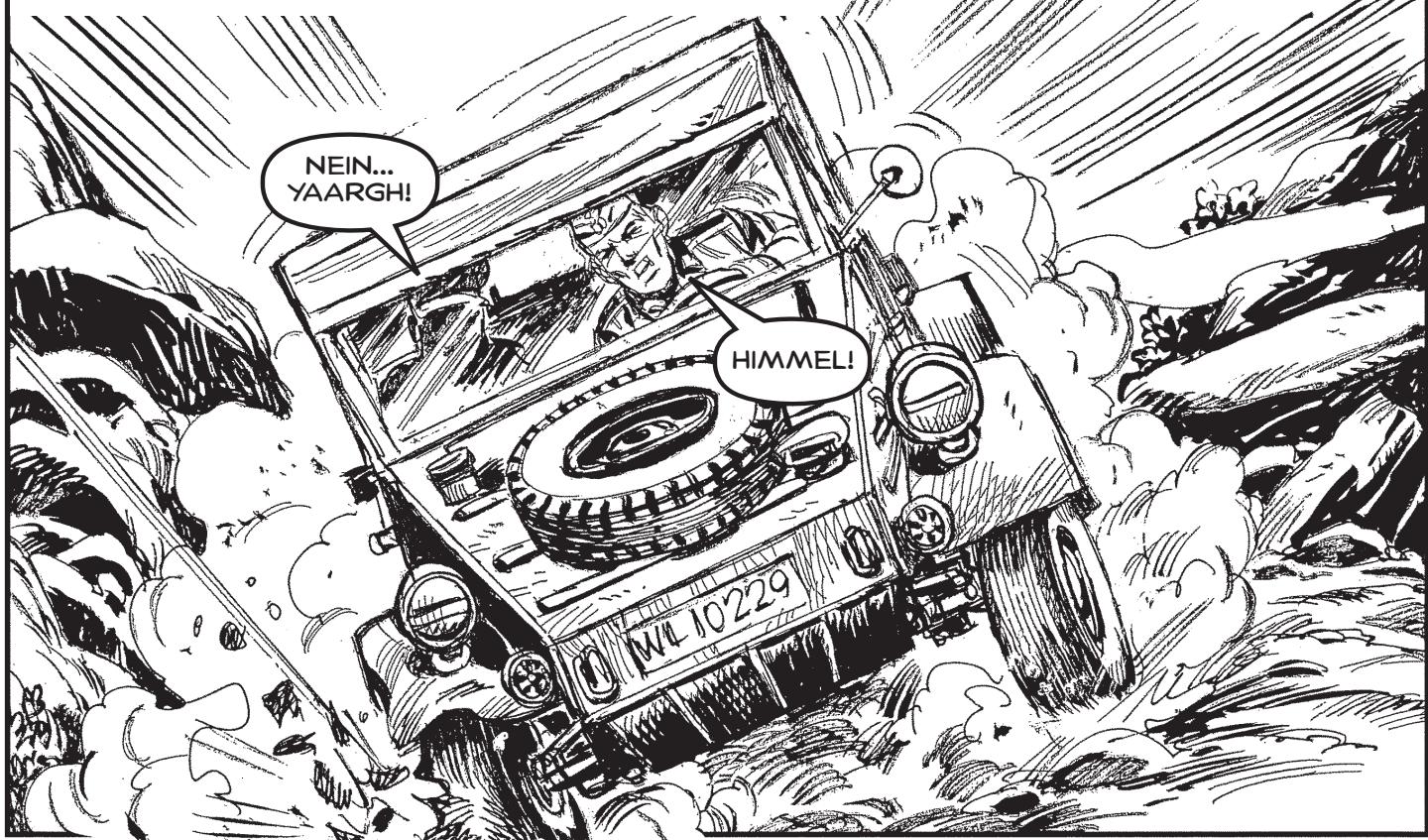
THE BOYS KEPT FIRING, THOUGH IN TRUTH MOST OF THEIR AMMUNITION TAKEN FROM THE HUT WAS NOTHING MORE THAN BIRDSHOT THAT WAS HARMLESS AT THIS RANGE. OF COURSE, THE GERMANS DIDN'T KNOW THAT, AND WITH THEIR INEXORABLE MOMENTUM SUDDENLY CHECKED IT SEEMED THE BATTLE WAS STILL THEIRS TO LOSE. BUT THEN A VEHICLE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



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



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 LEAPED OFF THE TRAIN TO JOIN IN THE CHASE. HOWEVER, NOT EVERY GERMAN WAS FLEEING.



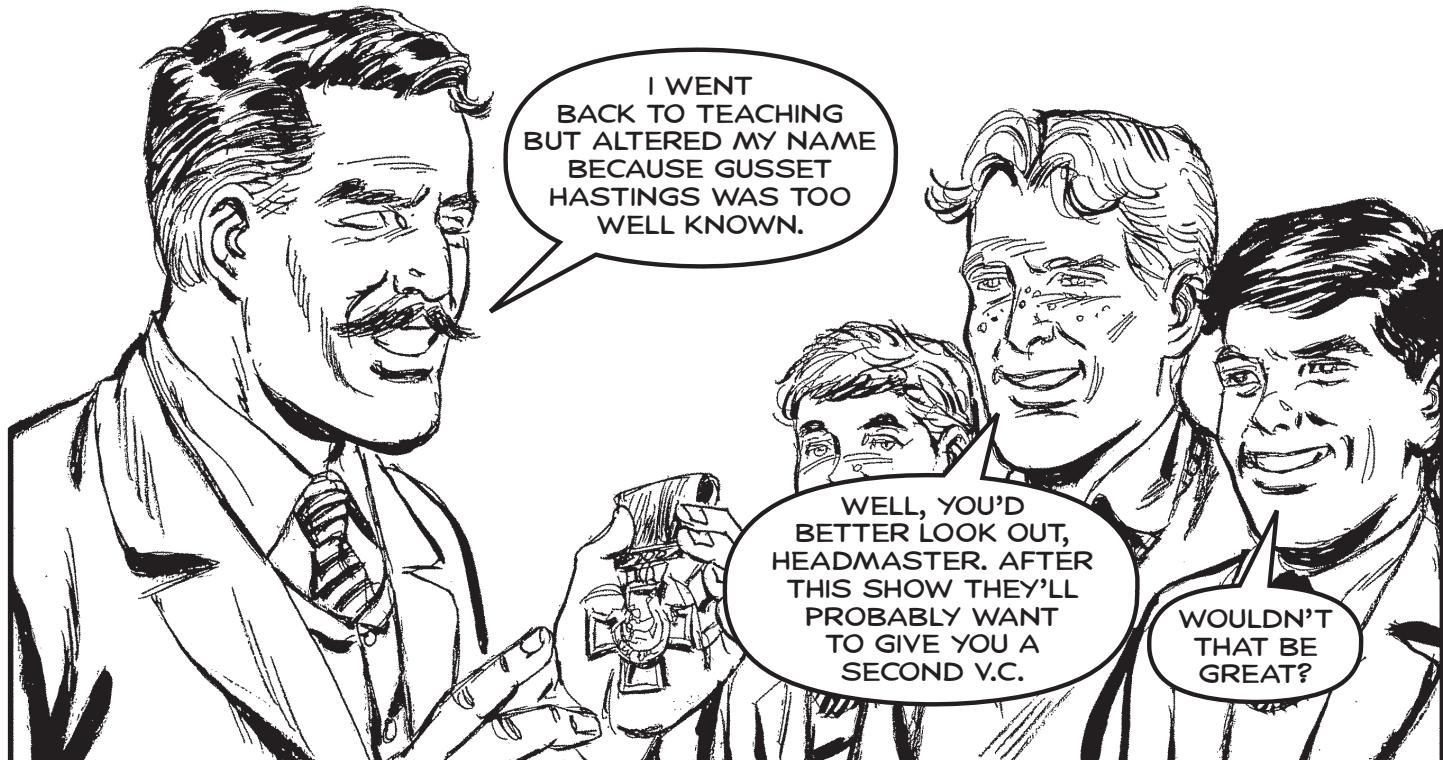
FROM THE SMOKE OF BATTLE GUS EMERGED, A GUN IN HIS HAND AND A SMILE ON HIS FACE.



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



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.



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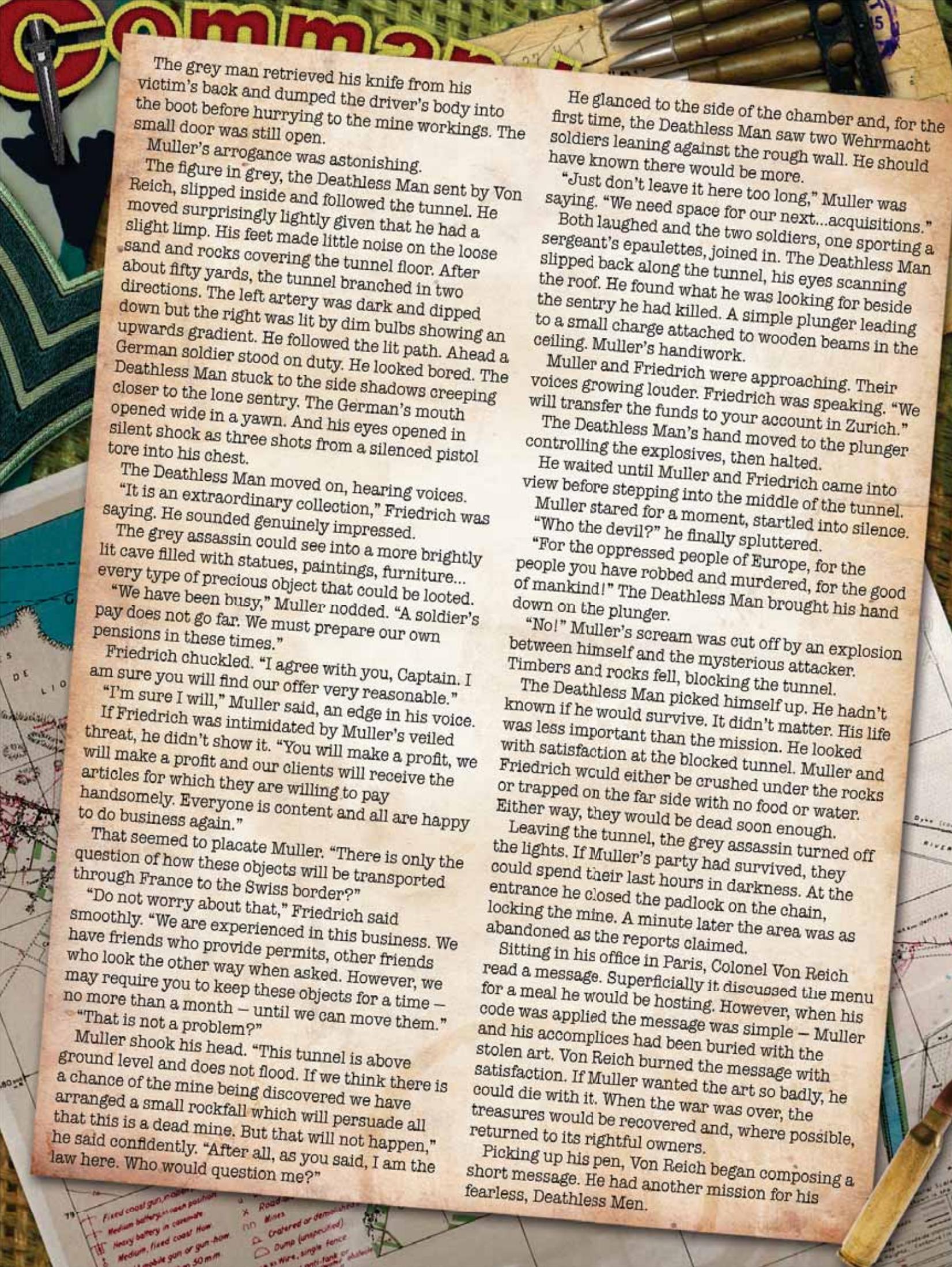
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The grey man retrieved his knife from his victim's back and dumped the driver's body into the boot before hurrying to the mine workings. The small door was still open.

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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