

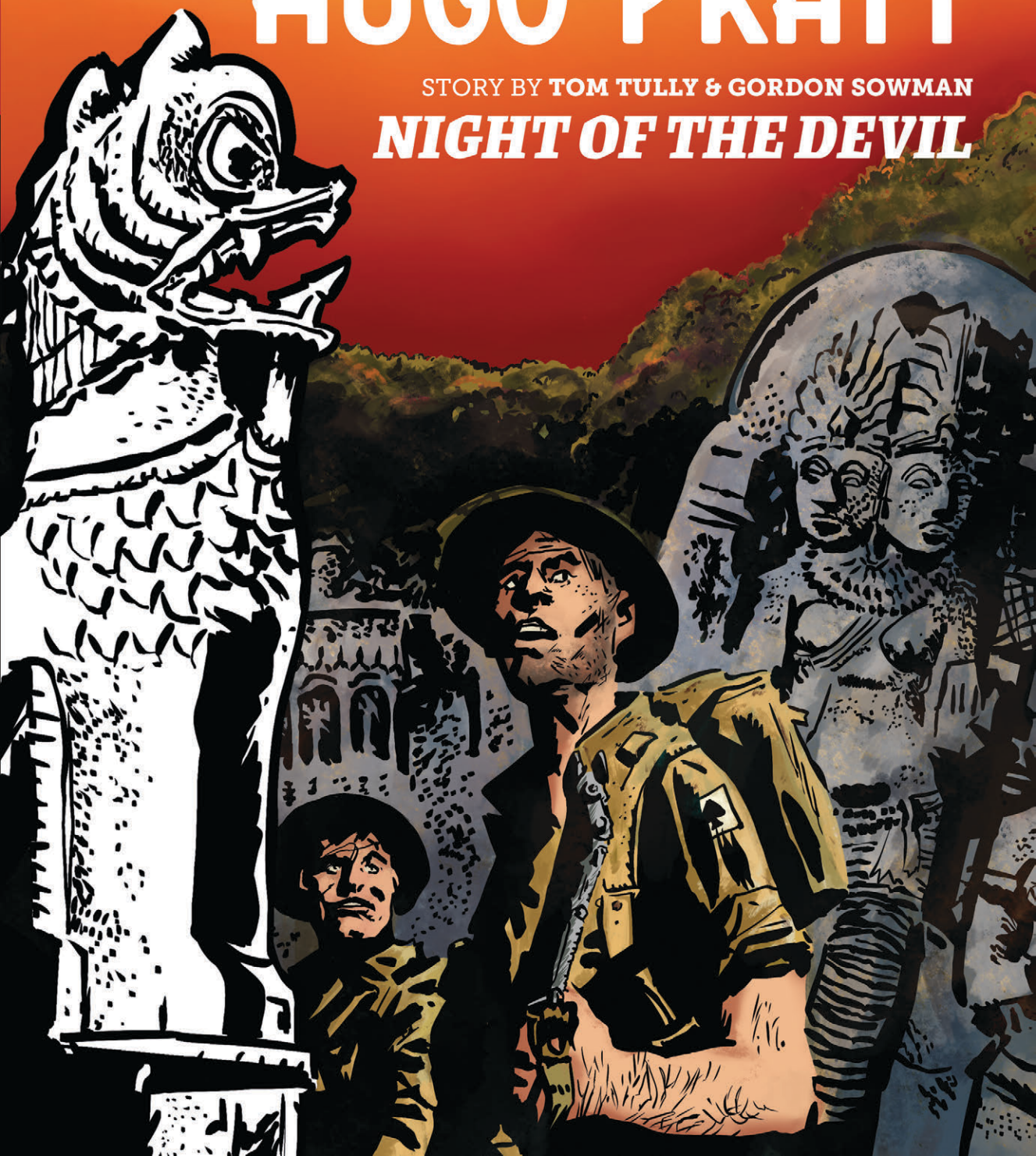
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ART BY

HUGO PRATT

STORY BY TOM TULLY & GORDON SOWMAN

NIGHT OF THE DEVIL





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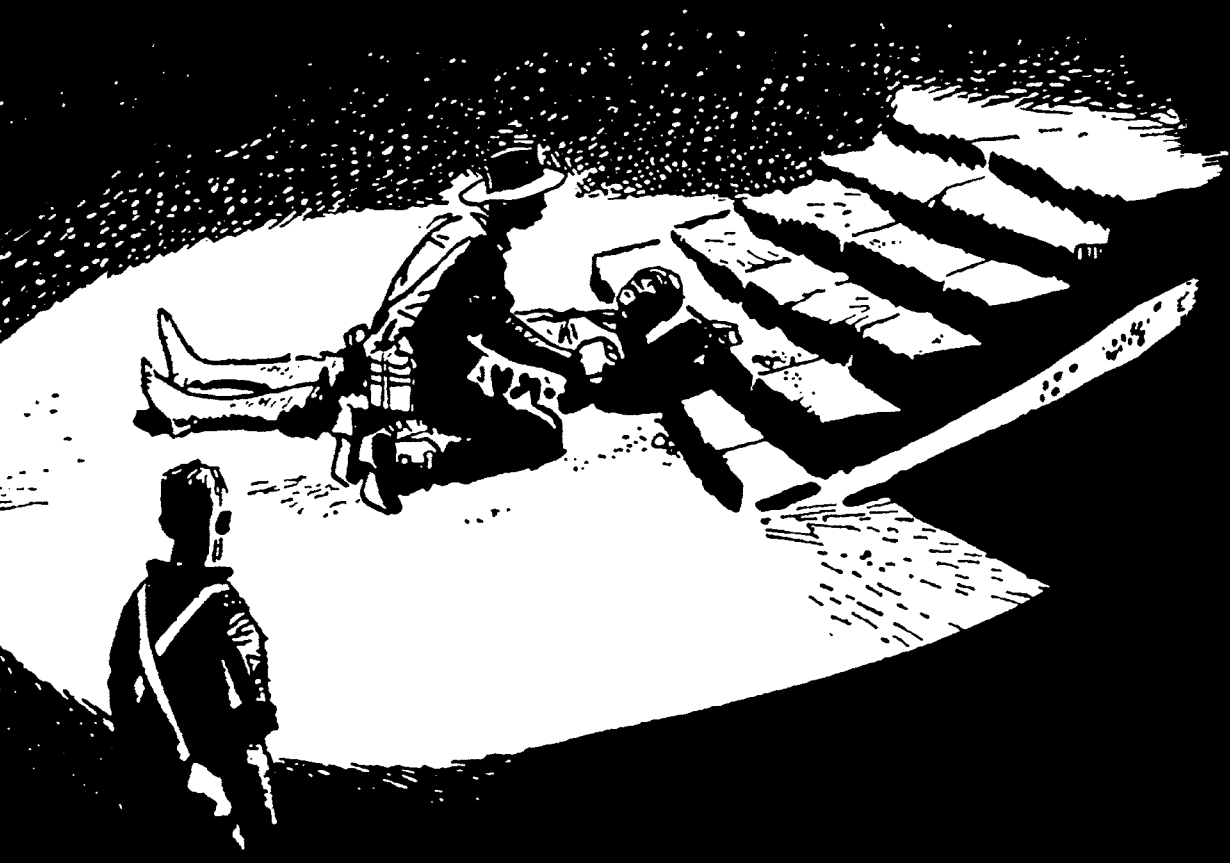
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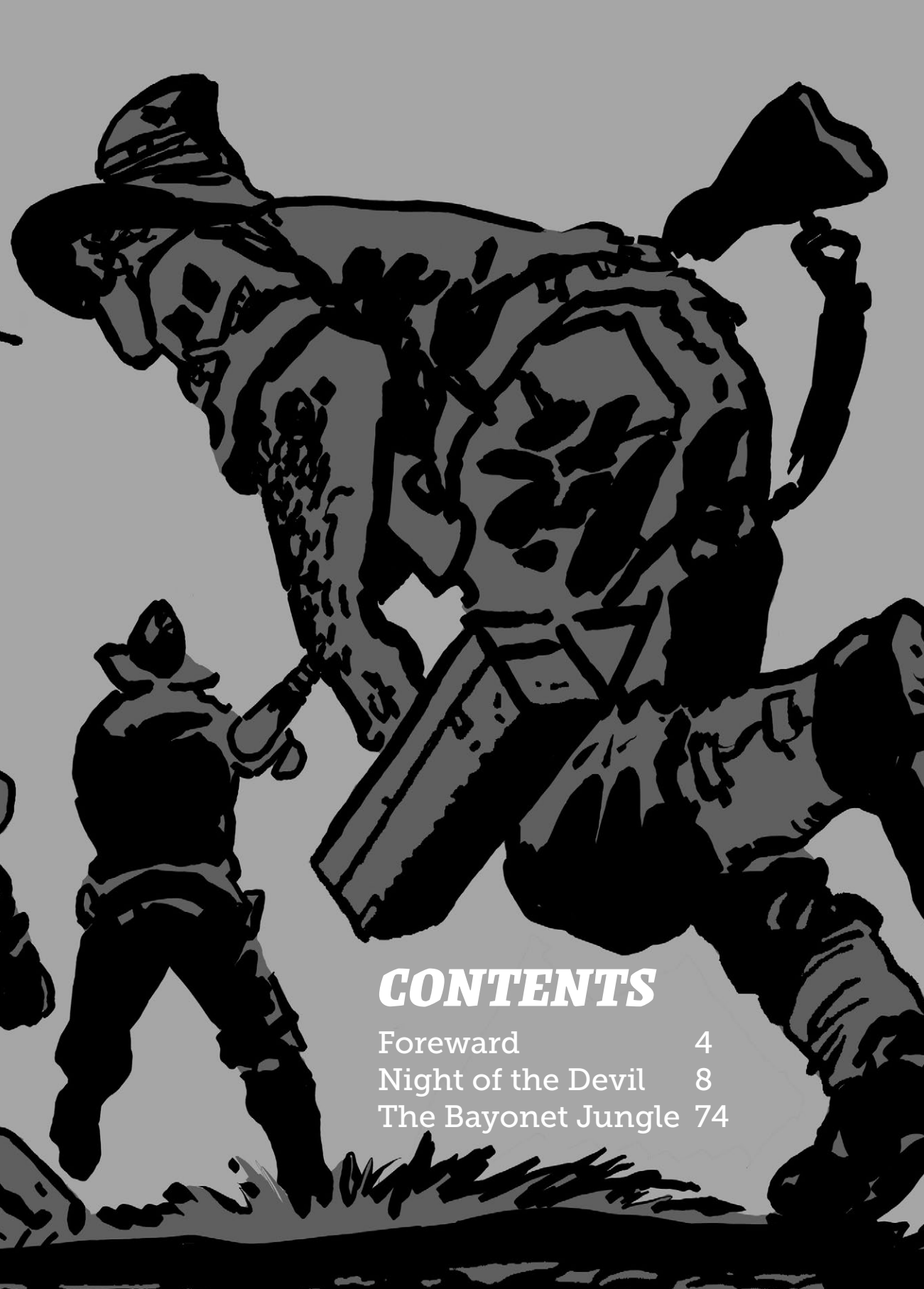
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Night of the Devil





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FOREWARD BY CHLOE MAVEAL

ANYONE WITH AN INTEREST IN CLASSIC EUROPEAN COMICS IS WELL AWARE OF HUGO PRATT'S BELOVED ADVENTURE SERIES *CORTO MALTESE*, AND WITH GOOD REASON; we can all make time for the eponymous sailor and his sea-faring adventures, which Pratt created between 1967 and 1989. A quarter-century after the famed illustrator's death, however, it's fitting that Pratt's earlier work and especially his early war comics -- where the world renowned illustrator was truly able to cut his teeth and first display an instinctive ability to portray the great wars of the world, informed by a life filled with outsized experiences -- are finally receiving the attention they finally deserve.

Much like the characters of his stories, Pratt's life was one of travel and unusual experiences; born in Italy, he was raised partially in Ethiopia where his father, a non-commissioned officer in the *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale*, was stationed just before the outbreak of the Second World War. At the ripe age of fourteen, and under the direction of his father, Pratt was forced to join the colonial police, thus birthing his first personal experience with the military world.

Through a mixed bag of military culture -- including Abyssinian, Senegalese, French, Italian and British influences that came with the colonization of Africa -- Pratt became learned in the charms, customs, and languages that many traditional imperialists never considered important. It was around this time that Pratt discovered American adventure comics, with *Terry and the Pirates* by Milton Caniff making the biggest impression of all, depicting a young American boy on adventures around the world that found him facing off against daring foes amid culturally rich backgrounds.

Pratt became so enthralled with the concept of depicting adventures in visual storytelling that, after returning to Venice in the wake of his father's death in military captivity, he spent two years flexing his knowledge of English by translating for Allied forces before setting out for his true lot in life: cartooning.

In 1945, armed with his love of American comics and accompanied by like-minded creators known as the "Venice Group," Pratt began his illustration career by teaming up with writer Mario Faustini, with whom he created his first comic book serial, *Asso di Picche* ("Ace of Spades") -- a thrilling riff on American superhero comics of the golden age featuring a masked vigilante taking on international crime. With an 18-part story set in what was intended to be San Francisco, California, it was clear that Pratt was more than happy to oblige an audience as focused on American heroism as he was.

Asso di Picche proved successful for its small Italian audience until 1949; WWII had taken its toll on Italy as the iron reign fell and fascists continued to be purged from the country. With aftershocks of the conflict in full swing, and post-war Italy finding its feet again, work was hard to come by even for cartoonists. Luckily for Pratt, he and his team received an invite by publisher Editorial Abril to move to Argentina, kicking off one of the most important, and little-known, parts of Pratt's comic career.

His time in Argentina saw Pratt become acquainted with a number of local cartoonists, create his first comics as both writer and artist -- *Anna della jungla* ("Ann of the Jungle"), and *Capitan Cormorant* -- and, most importantly in terms of his career, begin working for the magazine *Salgari*, where he would co-create the strip *Sgt. Kirk* alongside writer Hector German Oesterheld. Sgt. Kirk, displayed a new sensitivity for Pratt in his portrayal of the serial's subjects. Drawing on both professional and personal experience of war, Pratt brought a message of empathy towards Native Americans that had been rarely seen in the Western genre throughout comics and Hollywood before.

One of the more notable recurring aspects of Pratt's career was his ability to look back and bring a new light to wars past. This was particularly prominent in the late 1950s as Pratt's career took yet another turn, allowing him to return to World War II (as well as the Korean War that had just ended years prior) through the series *Ernie Pike*. Pratt and his Sgt. Kirk collaborator Oesterheld drew on their combined wealth of historical knowledge to fictionalize the real life stories of Ernie Pyle, a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist killed in action in Japan during WWII, whose reporting and war correspondence a shifted readers' focus from the front lines propaganda to the everyday experience of the unknown soldier. In true Pratt fashion, the story of the everyman doing extraordinary things for the sake of his country came alive on the page through visual narrations; honoring those whose experiences he chose to mimic.

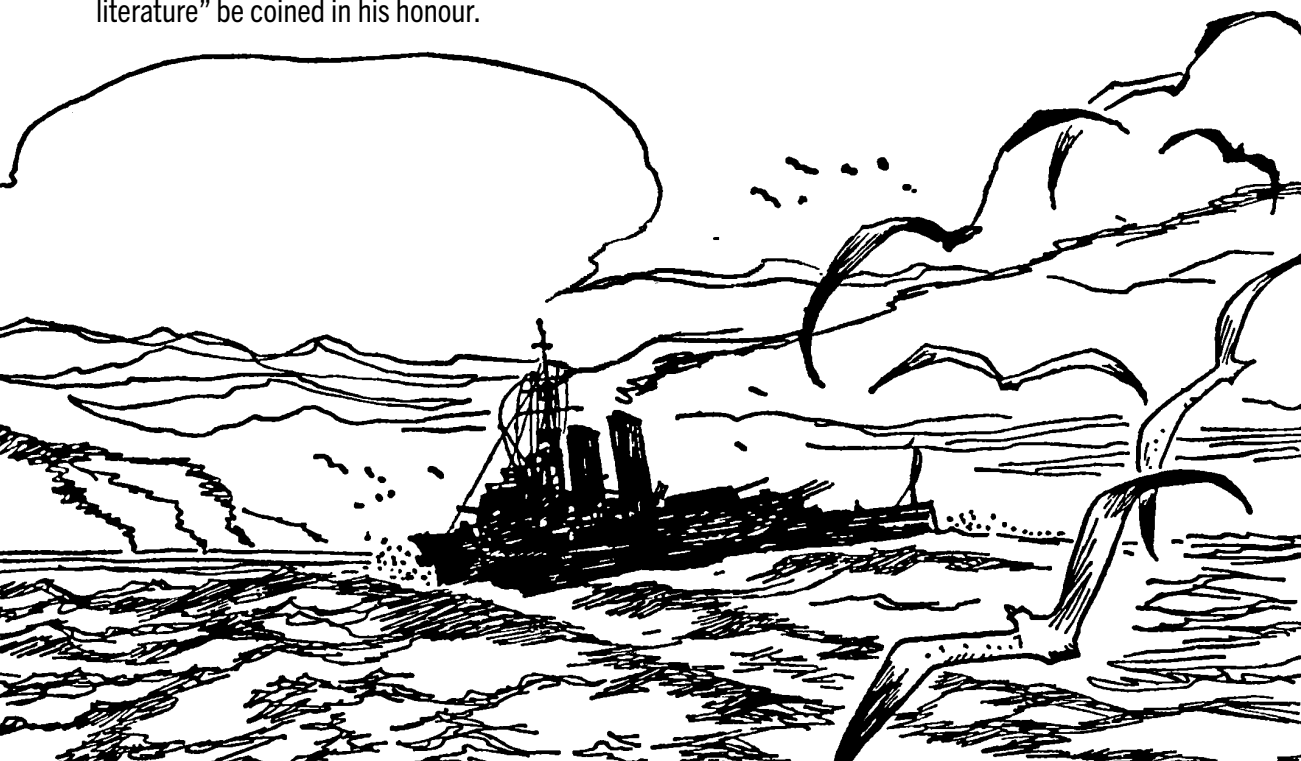


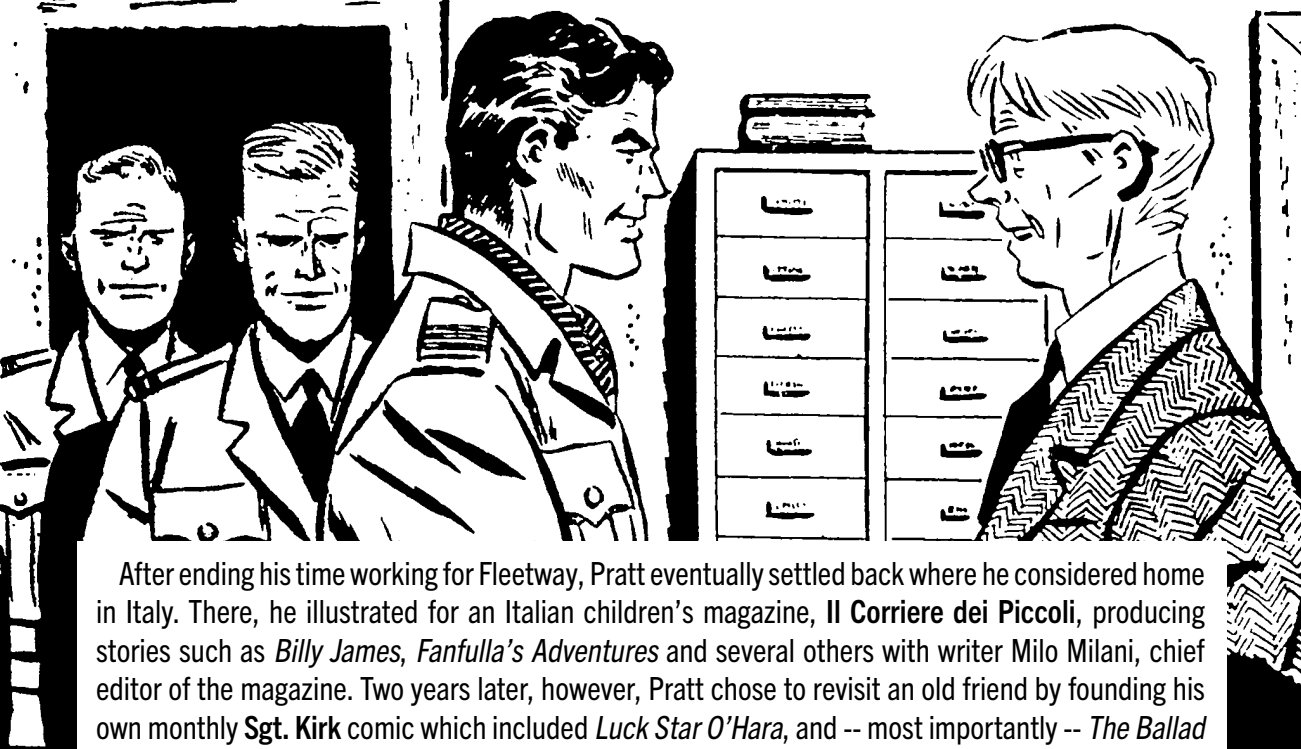
After a brief stint in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Pratt moved to London where he found a home illustrating war comics for the British publishing company Fleetway. He contributed to titles including **War Picture Library**, **War at Sea Picture Library**, and **Battle Picture Library**, gaining notice for his bold use of heavy lines, impeccable rendering of battles, and his kinetic storytelling abilities.

Through stories like *Battle Stations*, *Rockets of Revenge* and *Wagons of Gold*; Pratt and his collaborators brought examples of humility and empathy during times of war that were, if not at odds with more traditional tales of derring-do, then at least rare but welcome glimpses of a deeper, more complicated morality than was usually displayed in “boys’ comics.” This was done without sacrificing the expected adventure and excitement, with audiences scrambling to see the sea-faring thrills of, say, the notorious Battler Britton and the moral struggles between British submariners marooned with a group of Nazis.

Fans reacted differently to Pratt’s work having spent years reading war comics that, more often than not, were more restrained and detached from the reality of war. Even on stories where Pratt was not the sole author -- an issue complicated by Pratt’s tendency even in this period to re-write scripts uncredited -- fans were drawn in regardless because, for many, Pratt’s visual storytelling was enough on its own. Pratt’s work for Fleetway provided a look into all of the influences gained by Pratt over the years, including a style of linework and inking often compared to that of cartoonist Milton Caniff, that was more muscular and dynamic than many of his British peers, bringing an emotional intensity that other artists lacked.

The overall effect was something that, even as it worked inside the framework of the conservative British comics industry, was quietly revolutionary, acting as foreshadowing for the powerhouse of adventure found in his later work with *Corto Maltese*. Not for nothing would the term “drawn literature” be coined in his honour.





After ending his time working for Fleetway, Pratt eventually settled back where he considered home in Italy. There, he illustrated for an Italian children's magazine, *Il Corriere dei Piccoli*, producing stories such as *Billy James*, *Fanfulla's Adventures* and several others with writer Milo Milani, chief editor of the magazine. Two years later, however, Pratt chose to revisit an old friend by founding his own monthly *Sgt. Kirk* comic which included *Luck Star O'Hara*, and -- most importantly -- *The Ballad of the Salt Sea*, a tale of the high seas featuring a rascalion captain that would later become the famous Corto Maltese.

Taking off after being picked up by the French magazine *Pif Gazette* in 1970, the reach of *Corto Maltese* offered Pratt a whole new glimpse at the world as the stories traveled from France and Italy to all over the world where it is still revered to this day.

Pulling elements from his previous work in war comics -- note the First World War setting -- it's hard to not draw parallels between Pratt's own life and the life he created for Corto. Acting as an alter ego, Corto traveled all over the world as the swashbuckler with a heart of gold, giving Pratt the landscape to adventure and travel once again as he grew older and was no longer able to participate in the reverie. While the characters and circumstances on the page may have been new, the smallest details -- from lines in uniforms to the sun-in-your-eyes, far away landscapes of tropical lands -- harken back to a time when Pratt was the captain of his own journey himself.

I have to admit that recounting the many adventures and travels of Hugo Pratt is no easy feat. For all of the worldly excursions that are featured across the spectacular decades of his career, Pratt's life was one of living story in and of itself, with parallels easily drawn between his fiction and what created the bombastic and deeply passionate stories that are just now given the modern light in which they can shine once again. Though every comic creators likes to believe in the old adage of "write what you know", Pratt managed to do that and more; offering multiple generations a glimpse into the past -- and therefore into his own life -- through the gift of the swift lines, far away landscapes, and the wildly undaunted lives found in his unmatched visual storytelling.

Chloe Maveal writes for Publishers Weekly, Polygon, and Shelfdust, and is a long-form essayist at Neotext.

**BATTLE
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№ 62



NIGHT of the DEVIL



THE SEVEN-MEN PATROL MOVED QUICKLY THROUGH THE HUMID WALLS OF JUNGLE... A LIMP CROCODILE OF MEN — PART OF A BRITISH ARMY THAT WAS SOON TO REEL FROM THE JAPANESE INVASION OF BURMA. AHEAD OF THEM, LAY THE ENEMY...

ALL SEVEN MEN WERE ACUTELY AWARE OF THEIR PERIL — BUT SIX OF THEM WERE IN EVEN GREATER DANGER THAN THEY KNEW...

Chapter 1. *The Lieutenant*

LIEUTENANT ROBERT SALTER WAS TIRED, BUT NO TIREDNESS COULD QUENCH THE DRIVING FORCE IN THIS MAN WHO HAD DRAGGED HIS PATROL THROUGH TWENTY TOUGH, TORTUOUS MILES...



PRIVATE LEN WHITING WAS TIRED, TOO. THE HEAVY RADIO TRANSMITTER-RECEIVER SET HUNG ON HIS BACK LIKE A DEAD, MERCILESS WEIGHT...



UNLIKE THE OTHERS, SERGEANT MATT BRIND WAS A HARD-BITTEN REGULAR. DRAFTED EAST IN 1940, HE HAD LEARNED SOMETHING OF JUNGLE WARFARE. BUT HE STILL HAD A LOT TO LEARN ABOUT LIEUTENANT SALTER...

THE MEN ARE
PRETTY TIRED,
SIR.

THE MEN ARE A
BUNCH OF OVERFED
CIVILIANS IN UNIFORM,
SERGEANT! WE WILL
REST—BUT NOT
FOR LONG!

LIEUTENANT SALTER WAS A NEWCOMER TO THE PLATOON AND A NOVICE AT THE HARD GAME OF JUNGLE WARFARE. THE MEN RESTED, BUT THERE WAS NO REST FOR SALTER.

THE JAPANESE ATTACK
IS EXPECTED ACROSS THE
TAIGU RIVER, ON THE BORDER WITH
SIAM. ONE BRIDGE, HERE, IS STILL
INTACT! OUR JOB IS TO FIND
THAT BRIDGE—AND
DESTROY IT!



SALTER'S PIERCING EYES FLICKED SHARPLY TOWARDS MATT BRIND. THERE WAS A BRITTLE EDGE TO HIS VOICE...

WE ARE ONLY
A FEW MILES FROM THE
TAIGU! I INTEND TO DESTROY
THE BRIDGE WHILE IT IS STILL
LIGHT, MAKE A SHORT CAMP,
THEN RETURN TO BASE
UNDER COVER OF DARKNESS!
QUITE CLEAR,
SERGEANT?

...YES,
SIR.



MATT BRIND KNEW THAT THE MEN HAD BEEN PUSHED TOO HARD ALREADY. BUT HE WAS TOO MUCH OF A SOLDIER TO QUESTION THE ORDERS OF AN OFFICER...

WE'RE MOVING OUT, LADS! PUT YOUR BACKS INTO IT. THREE HOURS AND YOU CAN REALLY PUT YOUR FEET UP!

THREE HOURS! STONE THE CROWS!

THE PATROL STRUGGLED ON. ONLY ONE MAN WAS UNCOMPLAINING. LANCE CORPORAL PADDY PRICE, THE SOFT-VOICED SAPPER FROM BELFAST, BORE HIS PACKS OF UNFUSED T.N.T. WITHOUT A MURMUR...

HOW DO YOU DO IT, PRICE? WITH A LOAD LIKE YOU'VE GOT, I'D HAVE FLAKED OUT LONG AGO!

SURE, SCUD; IT'S BETTER THAN CARRYIN' A HEFTY GREAT BREN GUN AROUND!

BUT PRIVATE BEN SCUDDER WOULD HAVE ENDURED ANYTHING TO KEEP HIS BREN. IN HIS HANDS IT WAS A DEADLY WEAPON, AND SCUDDER HATED JAPS. NOW HE WAS BEGINNING TO HATE ROBERT SALTER...



A MILE FARTHER ON, THE TRACK SKIRTED BROWN, GRASS-COVERED HILLS. WITHOUT WARNING, THEY FOUND THEMSELVES WADING THROUGH DEEP MUD.



SCUDDER'S BITTER EXAGGERATION DISTURBED LIEUTENANT SALTER.



MATT BRIND HESITATED. HE HAD A RESPONSIBILITY TO THE OTHER MEN IN THE PATROL...

SHOULDN'T WE STICK TO THE TRACK, SIR? CROSSING THE FOOTHILLS WE'LL BE A CLEAR TARGET FOR EVERY JAP SNIPER IN THE AREA!



THE FIERCE, INNATURAL LIGHT FLARED AGAIN IN ROBERT SALTER'S EYES.

THE JAPANESE CANNOT POSSIBLY HAVE PENETRATED THIS FAR NORTH! I INTEND TO REACH THAT BRIDGE BEFORE NIGHTFALL, SERGEANT. WE'RE GOING BACK!



BUT MATT BRIND HAD SOWN THE SEEDS OF DOUBT IN SALTER'S MIND. TEN MINUTES LATER...

YOU ADVISE CAUTION SERGEANT. VERY WELL—PRIVATE LAWRENCE... SCOUT FORWARD TO THAT SHOULDER OF JUNGLE!



KEN LAWRENCE WAS THE YOUNGEST MEMBER OF THE PATROL. MATT BRIND SPOKE QUICKLY AS HE SAW THE YOUNGSTER'S FACE TIGHTEN...

LET ME GO, SIR! I'M USED TO THIS KIND OF THING!

NO, SERGEANT! IT'S ABOUT TIME THE OTHER MEN GAINED EXPERIENCE OF THIS TERRAIN! CARRY ON, LAWRENCE!



A PROTEST ROSE IN BRIND'S THROAT. HE BIT IT BACK AS KEN LAWRENCE MOVED OUT INTO THE DRY ACRE OF GRASS UNDER THE PITILESS SUN, PERHAPS SALTER WAS RIGHT. PERHAPS THE JAPS WERE MILES AWAY...



KEN FELT A LITTLE BETTER AS THE SECONDS PASSED IN SILENCE.



BUT IN THE SHADE OF A BAMBOO SCRUB, SLANT EYES WATCHED HIM THROUGH THE SIGHTS OF A MACHINE-GUN!

THE SCOUT HAD NO TIME TO HEAR THE WOODPECKER HAMMERING OF THE GUN. THE SUDDEN BURST OF LEAD WAS TOO SWIFT AND TOO BRUTAL...



MATT BRIND DID NOT MOVE IN THE ECHOING SILENCE. BUT HE SPOKE QUIETLY, CONTROLLING HIS FURY...



THEY'RE COVERING THE WHOLE RIDGE! SHALL I DEAL WITH IT, SIR?

YES...YES, SERGEANT! WHAT... WHAT TACTICS WOULD YOU... SUGGEST...?



BEN SCUDDER WAS GRINNING. HE TOOK UP HIS POSITION AT THE EDGE OF THE JUNGLE AND FLICKED OFF THE SAFETY CATCH OF HIS BREN GUN...



BRIND WAS AIMING FOR A FOLD OF GROUND ABOUT THIRTY YARDS FROM THE JAP MACHINE-GUN. BUT THE JAPS PICKED HIM OUT LONG BEFORE HE REACHED IT...



THE SERGEANT'S LOW, WEAVING RUN TOOK HIM SAFELY TO COVER. THEN...



BRIND'S ARM WAS STRONG AND HIS AIM WAS GOOD. THE GRENADE HIT THE TREE JUST ABOVE THE HEADS OF THE JAPANESE GUNNERS...



ONE OF THE JAPS DIED INSTANTLY. THE OTHER HAD NO CHANCE TO RECOVER FROM THE SHOCK OF THE EXPLOSION AS BEN SCUDDER LUNGED UP WITH HIS STAMMERING BREN...



THE FIGHT WAS SAVAGE BUT BRIEF—TOO BRIEF FOR SCUDDER. HE FOUND ANOTHER TARGET FOR HIS HATE AS THEY GATHERED ROUND THE BODY OF THEIR COMRADE...

LAWRENCE DIDN'T HAVE A CHANCE! SALTER MADE A TARGET OF HIM!

MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT, SCUD! I SHOULD NEVER HAVE LET IT HAPPEN!

THEY BURIED LAWRENCE IN THE JUNGLE, AND PRESSED ON TOWARDS THEIR OBJECTIVE. THEY CROSSED THE RIDGE AND PICKED UP THE TRACK IN A NARROW, SLIMY GULLY.

THIS WILL DO FOR THE MOMENT, SERGEANT! WHITING, MAKE A SIGNAL TO BASE! TELL THEM WE'VE DESTROYED A JAPANESE MACHINE-GUN NEST...

HOLD ON, SIR!

THE SERGEANT'S VOICE WAS HARD WITH SHOCK. LIEUTENANT ROBERT SALTER SEEMED TO BE SET ON MAKING EVERY MISTAKE IN THE BOOK...

IT'S TAKING A CHANCE, SIR! JAP PATROLS COULD PICK UP THE SIGNAL AND GET A FIX ON OUR POSITION.

MATT BRIND WAS RIGHT. SALTER REALISED IT, BUT, TO SAVE FACE, HE BLUSTERED ON...

YOU SEEM TO HAVE A KNACK FOR QUESTIONING MY ORDERS, SERGEANT! THE JAP PATROL WE ENCOUNTERED WAS OBVIOUSLY AN ISOLATED ONE. THE SIGNAL WILL BE SENT!

THE BRITTLE LIGHT HAD RETURNED TO ROBERT
SALTER'S EYES... THE YOUNG MAN WHO HAD
DIED ON THE RIDGE WAS FORGOTTEN...

... AND, SERGEANT,
DETAIL ONE MAN TO
SCOUT THE MAIN TRACK
FOR THREE HUNDRED
YARDS!

MATT BRIND SAID NOTHING. AGAIN, HE FOUGHT DOWN THE IMPULSE
TO PROTEST... BUT IT WOULD BE FOR THE LAST TIME.

BEN SCUDDER WENT MUTTERING INTO THE JUNGLE. THE LIEUTENANT SLIPPED
OFF HIS PACK, AND SAT DOWN AGAINST A TREE...

BLUE PATROL
TO RED LEADER...
ARE YOU RECEIVING
ME...!

SALTER SUDDENLY FELT VERY TIRED. HIS
EYELIDS DROPPED HEAVILY... LEN
WHITING'S VOICE SEEMED TO FADE...

Chapter 2. *The Temple*

IT SEEMED HOURS LATER THAT HE WAS ROUSED INTO WAKEFULNESS. HIS EYES FLICKED OPEN... HE SAW THE GRIM FACE OF MATT BRIND...



ROBERT SALTER'S MOUTH WAS DRY. HE BECAME CONSCIOUS OF A RAUCOUS TWITTERING COMING FROM THE RADIO.



EVEN AS BRIND SPOKE, THE RADIO EARPHONES BLARED SUDDENLY. THE VOICE WAS TAUNTING, HIGH-PITCHED — LIKE A SINISTER, INVISIBLE MAN IN THEIR MIDST...



ABRUPTLY, THE SET WENT DEAD. IN THE SUDDEN, FROZEN SILENCE, IT WAS DON EVANS, THE LITTLE WELSHMAN WHO SPOKE FIRST...



WHITING'S HARSH CRY STOPPED DEAD AS THE UNDERGROWTH RUSTLED. THEY MADE A LUNGE FOR THEIR WEAPONS... BUT IT WAS BEN SCUDDER WHO LUMBERED INTO VIEW...



LIEUTENANT SALTER WAS WIDE AWAKE NOW. THE SINISTER, INTRUSIVE VOICE ON THE WIRELESS HAD CHANGED HIS MIND ABOUT PRESSING ON TO THE BRIDGE.

IT SEEMS THE JAPS ARE NEARER THAN WE THOUGHT, SERGEANT. WE'LL INVESTIGATE THIS TEMPLE, IN CASE IT BECOMES NECESSARY TO... TO GO TO GROUND!

YES, SIR...!
ALL RIGHT, LADS!
WE'RE MOVING OUT...!

SCUDDER SOON HEARD ABOUT THE VOICE ON THE RADIO. HE WAS STILL CURSING LIEUTENANT SALTER WHEN THE TRACK WIDENED — AND THEY LOOKED DOWN ON THE STRANGE, CONICAL STRUCTURE IN THE HOLLOW...

WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF IT, SARGE?

DON'T KNOW, SCUD! IT'S NO BUDDHIST TEMPLE, THAT'S FOR SURE!

D'VE RECKON THERE'S ANY JAPS IN THERE, SARNT'?

MATT BRIND DID NOT WAIT FOR AN ORDER THIS TIME. HE SLID FORWARD BEFORE THE LIEUTENANT COULD SPEAK...

STAY PUT WHILE I MAKE A RECCE! COVER ME WITH THAT BREN, SCUD!

WATCH IT, SARGE! THAT PLACE COULD BE CRAWLING WITH JAPS!

THEY WATCHED TENSELY AS THE BIG SERGEANT DOUBLED ACROSS THE CRUMBLING FLAG-STONES AND HALTED IN THE SHADOW OF ONE OF THE HUGE, CARVED-STONE FIGURES. BEN SCUDDER BREATHED SHARPLY...

WATCH IT, LADS! HE'S GOING IN!

THEY SAW BRIND PLUNGE UP THE
ROTTING STEPS, INTO THE TEMPLE.
A MOMENT LATER HE WAVED THE
REST OF THE MEN FORWARD.
LIEUTENANT SALTER LED THEM
ACROSS THE CLEARING...



THEY PUSHED SLOWLY INTO THE DANK, CRUMBLING
GLOOM OF THE BUILDING. THEIR EYES TOOK A LITTLE
TIME TO FOCUS. THEN THEY WERE ALL STARING
AWESTRUCK, WIDE-EYED.



THE FACE WAS THE FIRST THING THEY SAW. IT SEEMED TO FROWN ON THEM DELIBERATELY—STRONG AND MALIGNANT—ALMOST ALIVE IN THE DUSTY HALF LIGHT...



THERE WAS THE COLDNESS AND DESOLATION OF DEATH IN THE FORTY-FOOT, ALABASTER IMAGE. THE ATMOSPHERE WITHIN ITS PRECINCTS SEEMED TO BE FLOODED WITH EVIL...

THEY STOOD THERE MOTIONLESS, STARING AT THE HUGE FIGURE. IT WAS PADDY PRICE WHO BROKE THE TIGHT, STUNNED SILENCE...



THEY WERE STILL LOOKING AT THE IDOL WHEN A TALL FIGURE STEPPED FROM THE SHADOWS AT ITS BASE. THE VOICE WAS SOFT AND RHYTHMIC, ALMOST TIMELESS IN QUALITY...



LIEUTENANT SALTER WAS THE FIRST TO MOVE. THE SIGHT OF THE IDOL HAD UNNERVED HIM, AND THE VOICE FROM THE SHADOWS TRIGGERED HIS FEAR...

LOOK OUT...
IT'S A JAP!

HOLD IT,
LIEUTENANT!

BUT THE SERGEANT WAS TOO LATE. HIS VOICE WAS DROWNED IN THE JAGGED CLATTER OF ROBERT SALTER'S GUN...

BRIND WAS THE FIRST TO REACH THE CRUMPLED FIGURE. THE SERGEANT FELT THE BONY CHEST BENEATH THE BULLET-TORN ROBE...

HE'S STILL
ALIVE!

HE'S NO
JAP! LOOKS
LIKE SOME KIND
OF BURMESE
PRIEST!

POOR
FELLER!
BETTER DO WHAT
WE CAN FOR
HIM!

THEY MADE THE OLD MAN AS COMFORTABLE AS THEY COULD, BUT THEY KNEW HE WAS DYING. THEY KNEW ALSO THAT THE MANNER OF HIS DEATH WOULD MAKE IT HARDER FOR THEM TO LIVE...

THAT SHOOTING SHOULD ROUST OUT EVERY JAP FROM HERE TO TOKYO, SARGE!

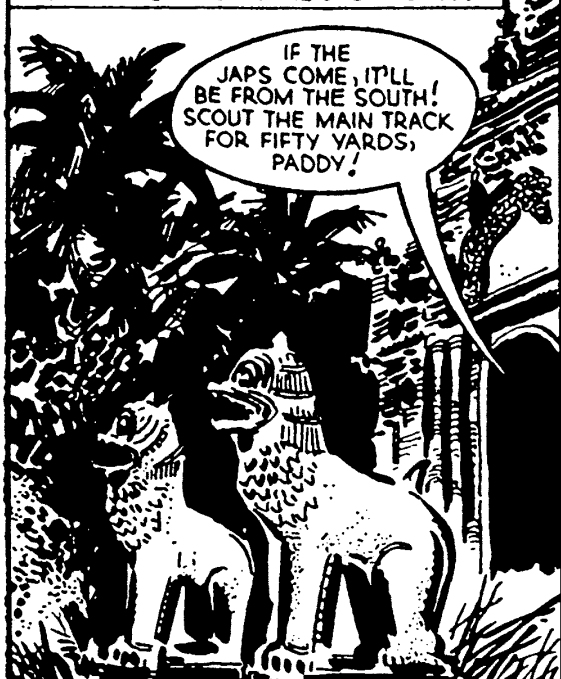
I KNOW, SCUD! I'M WONDERING WHO WE'VE GOT TO WORRY ABOUT MOST... THE JAPS — OR SALTER!

THE LIEUTENANT HAD NOT BOTHERED TO EXAMINE THE OLD MAN HE HAD SHOT DOWN. HE WAS STARING AT THE FACE OF THE IDOL WHEN MATT BRIND APPROACHED HIM...

THAT SHOOTING MAY HAVE ALERTED THE JAPS, SIR! I SUGGEST WE STAY HERE UNTIL DARK, AND HOPE TO DODGE THEM!

YES...YES, SERGEANT! I AGREE, OF COURSE...!

SALTER'S VOICE WAS VAGUE, ALMOST DREAMLIKE. BRIND FELT UNEASINESS AS HE CALLED THE REST OF THE PATROL TOGETHER TO EXPLAIN THE SITUATION...



WHEN THE IRISHMAN HAD GONE, BRIND TOOK ANOTHER LOOK AT THE VICTIM OF ROBERT SALTER'S FLASH OF PANIC...



IN THE SILENCE OF THE APPROACHING NIGHT, THEY TOOK THE CHANCE TO SNATCH A QUICK MEAL OF BULLY BEEF AND BISCUITS. BUT DON EVANS, THE KEEN-EYED LITTLE WELSHMAN, WAS NOT HUNGRY...



EVANS' FINGER STABBED SUDDENLY AT A PAGE.
HIS VOICE FLARED TRIUMPHANTLY...

THERE YOU
ARE, SCUD BOY!
I THOUGHT THAT IDOL
LOOKED FAMILIAR!
LOOK... IT'S THE SAME
AS THE ONE IN
THE PICTURE.

YOU'RE RIGHT,
MATE! WHAT DOES
IT SAY ABOUT
IT, TAFF?

EVANS' EYES
RAN SWIFTLY
OVER THE TEXT.
HIS VOICE
MOUNTED...

LISTEN TO THIS, LADS! OUR PICTURE
SHOWS THE IMAGE OF PHYA YOMARAJ,
LEGENDARY KING OF THE DEVILS! TO
THE PEOPLE OF SIAM, HE ACTS AS
THE GUARDIAN OF THE DEAD—!

SIAM?
GOOD GRIEF...
WE MUST HAVE
CROSSED THE FRONTIER!
WE COULD BE SITTING
RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE
OF THE WHOLE
JAP ARMY!

LEN WHITING'S HARSH OUTBURST DID NOT WORRY BEN SCUDDER. HE WAS MORE INTERESTED IN PHYA YOMARAJ...

GO ON, TAFF!
WHAT ELSE DOES
IT SAY?

IT SAYS...
'TEMPLES HOUSING
THE DEVIL-KING CAN BE
FOUND IN THE VERY
DEPTHS OF THE SIAMESE
JUNGLE! THEY ARE
USUALLY OCCUPIED BY
A SINGLE PRIEST,
WHO...WHO...



THE WELSHMAN'S VOICE DIED. THEY WERE ALL LOOKING AT LIEUTENANT SALTER. BEN SCUDDER SPOKE LOUDLY IN THE UNEASY SILENCE...

HEAR THAT? THE
LIEUTENANT NAILED THE
DEVIL-KING'S OPPO!
I RECKON SALTER'S
FOR IT, NOW!



IT WAS THEN THAT THE DYING PRIEST GROANED. THE OLD MAN WAS TRYING TO SIT UP...

...MY DEATH IS AN INSULT TO THE
GUARDIAN OF THE DEAD! PHYA
YOMARAJ IS ANGRY! HE WHO
HAS ANGERED HIM... **SHALL
PERISH BY HIS WRATH...**



LIEUTENANT SALTER LURCHED TO HIS FEET AS THE OLD MAN FELL BACK. HE STUMBLED FORWARD LIKE A MAN IN A TRANCE.

WHAT DID HE SAY, SERGEANT?

YOU HEARD AS MUCH AS I DID, SIR! ANYWAY, HE'S DEAD NOW!

THE LIEUTENANT TURNED AWAY. HE WAS STARING DUMBLY AT THE IDOL WHEN LEN WHITING SPOKE HARSHLY...

HERE COMES PADDY, SARGE! IN A HURRY, TOO! MAYBE HE'S SEEN SOMETHING!

LET'S HOPE NOT! COVER HIM ACROSS THE CLEARING, LEN!

A MOMENT LATER, PADDY DIVED INTO THE TEMPLE. HIS USUAL IRISH CALM HAD GONE...

JAPS, SARGE... A FULL PLATOON COMIN' UP THE TRACK! ARMED TO THE TEETH! THEY'LL BE HERE IN ABOUT TEN MINUTES!

THEY WERE TRAPPED BY A SIGNAL THAT SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN SENT—THE SOUND OF A HASTILY-FIRED TOMMY GUN. MATT BRIND DID NOT PAUSE TO CONSULT LIEUTENANT SALTER...

IT LOOKS LIKE A FIGHT, BLOKES! SCUD AND EVANS, TAKE THE FRONT STEPS AS FAR AS THOSE STATUES! I'LL COVER THESE BREAKS WITH LEN AND PADDY!

RIGHT, SARGE! COME ON, TAFF!

BRIND WAS CHECKING HIS TOMMY-GUN WHEN HE FELT A MOVEMENT BEHIND HIM. ROBERT SALTER STOOD THERE, A DAZED EXPRESSION ON HIS FACE...

I'VE DEPLOYED THE MEN, SIR! HAVE YOU ANY OTHER ORDERS?

NO, SERGEANT! I SUPPOSE ALL WE CAN DO NOW... IS WAIT...

Chapter 3. *The Siege*

IT WAS DARK WHEN THE JAPS
CAME TO INVESTIGATE THE SHOTS
WHICH THEY HAD HEARD. THEY
FOUND THE TEMPLE OF PHYA
YOMARAJ...



MATT BRIND SAW THE STUNTED SHADOWS ACROSS
THE CLEARING. HIS VOICE HISSED THROUGH THE
MURK OF THE TEMPLE...



LET
THEM COME,
LADS! I'LL GIVE
YOU THE
WORD...

THE SHADOWS SPREAD OUT AND
CAME STEADILY ACROSS THE
CLEARING. THE MOON GLINTED
ON THE STEEL OF BAYONETS.
SERGEANT BRIND'S YELL SPLIT
THE SILENCE...

NOW!
LET 'EM HAVE
IT!

FOR THREE CENTURIES, PHYA YOMARAJ, GUARDIAN OF THE
DEAD, HAD STOOD AMID SILENCE. NOW HIS DOMAIN
SHOOK TO A VICIOUS VOLLEY OF FIRE THAT MOWED
DOWN THE JAP RANKS...

THERE WAS NO COVER IN THE CLEARING. THE JAPS WERE STILL TWENTY YARDS FROM THE TEMPLE WHEN THE STREAM OF LEAD SCYTHED INTO THEM...



BUT THE JAP SOLDIERS WERE QUICK TO RECOVER. THEIR CAPTAIN WAS A BRAVE AND FANATICAL MAN...

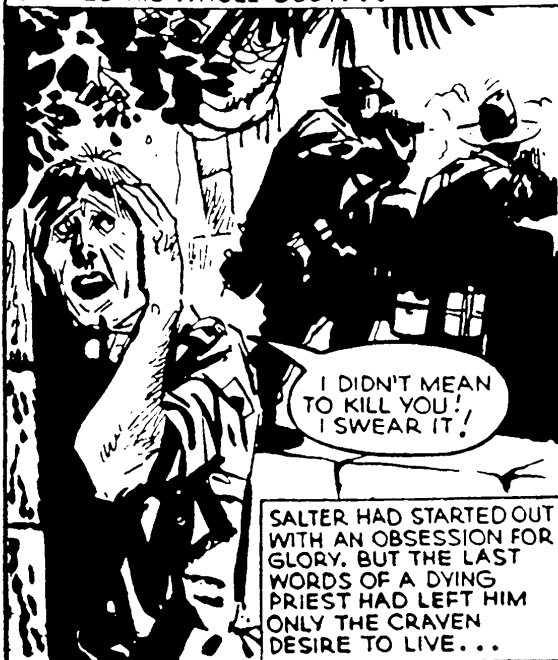
FORWARD,
YOU PIGS!
BANZAI!



A KNOT OF JAPS TRIED A CLUMSY FLANKING ATTACK. THEIR BOOTS CLATTERED ON A STONE PATH NEAR THE TEMPLE. BEN SCUDDER'S MERCILESS BREN KILLED THEM THERE...



AGAIN, THE FIVE PULSING GUNS FOUGHT THEM BACK. THE SIXTH GUN STAYED SILENT IN ROBERT SALTER'S HANDS. HE COVERED DOWN, RIGID WITH THE PARALYSIS OF FEAR THAT GRIPPED HIS WHOLE BODY...



AGAIN THE JAPS CHARGED, THEIR ARMS JERKING AS THEY RAN. BRIND PICKED OUT THE SHARP MOVEMENTS IN THE MOONLIGHT...



THE THICK WALLS OF THE TEMPLE SAPPED MUCH OF THE FORCE OF THE JAP STICK-GRENADES. BUT ONE OF THEM EXPLODED RIGHT BETWEEN THE GREAT GUARDIAN BEASTS OF THE TEMPLE — WHERE EVANS AND SCUDDER WERE POSTED...



DEBRIS WAS STILL SLICING THE AIR AS MATT BRIND CLAMBERED FORWARD...

SCUD AND EVANS HAVE CAUGHT IT! COVER ME, PADDY!

OKAY, SAR'NT!





THREE JAPS RUSHED UP. THEY WERE STILL TWO YARDS FROM THE INERT BODIES OF SCUDDER AND EVANS WHEN THE SERGEANT HIT THE STEPS...



THE SERGEANT GLANCED ONCE AT THE LITTLE WELSHMAN, THEN TURNED TO SCUDDER. THE BIG MAN GROANED AS MATT BRIND DRAGGED HIM BACK INTO THE TEMPLE...

...TAFF!

HE'S HAD IT, PADDY! BUT SCUD'S STILL ALIVE! KNOCKED OUT, BUT I CAN'T FIND ANY WOUND...

A PIECE OF MASONRY HAD STUNNED BEN SCUDDER. THE HATE CAME BACK TO HIS EYES, AS HIS HEAD CLEARED...



IN THE SUDDEN LULL, IT WAS PADDY PRICE WHO REMEMBERED THAT ONLY FIVE MEN HAD DONE THE FIGHTING...



PERHAPS SCUDDER WAS RIGHT. PERHAPS, FOR LIEUTENANT SALTER, THE PATROL HAD BEEN MERELY A STEPPING-STONE TO GLORY. MATT BRIND HOPED THAT THIS WAS NOT TRUE.



BRIND DID NOT LOOK AT LIEUTENANT SALTER AS HE MOVED BACK TO THE JAGGED BREAK IN THE TEMPLE WALL. LEN WHITING WAS KEEPING WATCH BEHIND THE COOLING BARREL OF HIS RIFLE . . .

BETTER HAVE ANOTHER SHOT AT RAISING BASE, LEN! TELL THEM WE'RE UNDER ATTACK BY A STRONG ENEMY FORCE!

THAT SET'S GONE DUFF, SARGE! BUT I'LL GIVE IT A TRY!



UNDER THE SOLID CURVE OF THE TEMPLE WALL, LEN WHITING CROUCHED OVER HIS RADIO. HIS VOICE INTONED THE LAST HOPE OF FIVE TRAPPED MEN . . .

BLUE PATROL TO RED LEADER...
BLUE PATROL TO RED LEADER...ARE YOU RECEIVING ME...?



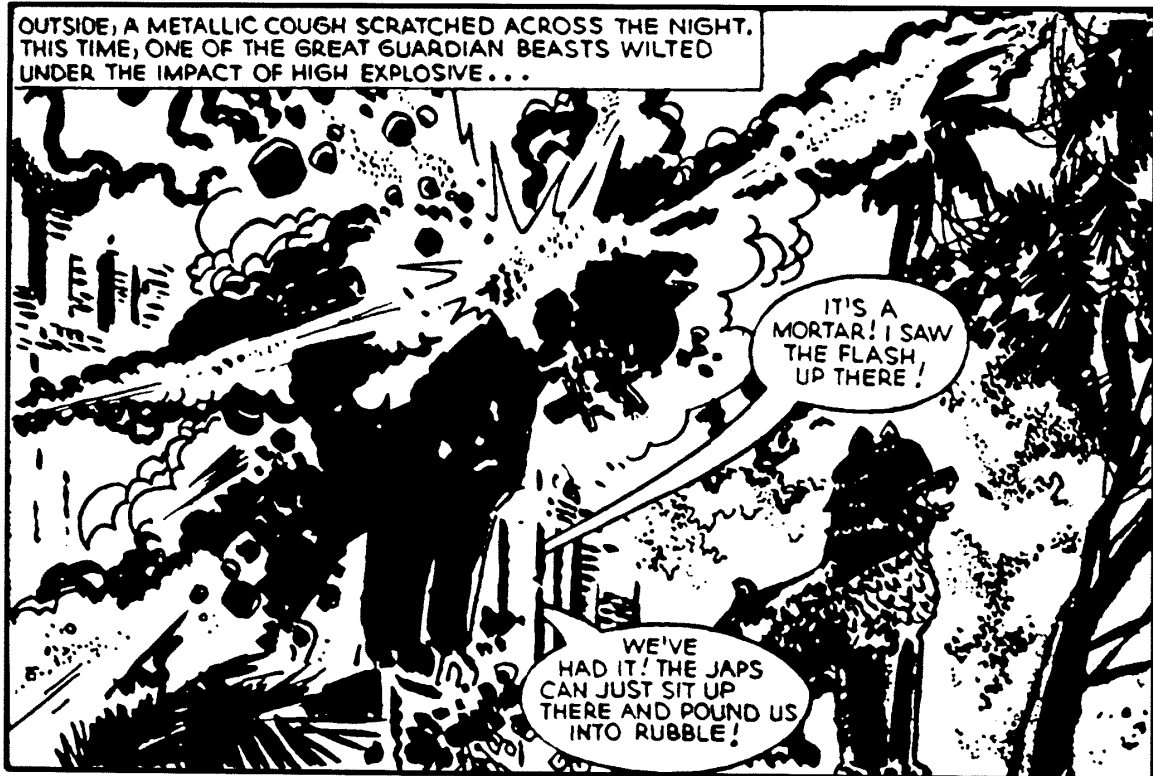
LISTLESSLY, WHITING PRESSED THE RECEIVER SWITCH. SUDDENLY, IN A NIGHTMARISH MOMENT OF TERROR, THE TEMPLE WALL BULGED INWARDS ABOVE HIS HEAD...



DEBRIS PELTED THE STONY FACE OF PHYA YOMARAJ, GUARDIAN OF THE DEAD. PADDY PRICE WAS THE FIRST TO REACH THE HALF-BURIED BODY OF WHITING...



OUTSIDE, A METALLIC COUGH SCRATCHED ACROSS THE NIGHT. THIS TIME, ONE OF THE GREAT GUARDIAN BEASTS WILTED UNDER THE IMPACT OF HIGH EXPLOSIVE...



THE NEXT BOMB DROPPED MERCIFULLY SHORT. BEN SCUDDER'S EYES GLEAMED. HE WAS CLIMBING THROUGH THE CORDITE SMOKE BEFORE MATT BRIND COULD STOP HIM...



THE JAPS DID NOT EXPECT ANY RESISTANCE TO THEIR MORTAR ATTACK. SCUDDER WAS HALF WAY ACROSS THE CLEARING BEFORE THEIR RIFLES PICKED HIM OUT...

THE
CRAZY FOOL!
DOES HE MEAN TO
TACKLE THAT MORTAR
BY HIMSELF!

RIGHT NOW,
IT'S THE JAPS I
FEEL SORRY FOR,
PADDY!

SCUDDER WAS STILL ALIVE AS HE HIT THE SCRUB-COVERED SLOPE BELOW THE KNOLL WHERE THE MORTAR WAS SITED. THE BOMBS WERE STILL WINGING THEIR WAY TO THE TEMPLE OF PHYA YOMARAJ...

LOOK AT
'EM...WORKING
AGAINST A SKY-
LINE! COCKY
LITTLE BUNCH...!

SCUDDER'S HATE WAS STRONG AS EVER AS HE PULLED THE PIN FROM THE GRENADE. HIS GRIN WAS JAGGED IN THE MOONLIGHT...

THIS'LL SHAKE
YOU UP A BIT,
JAP! I WANT TO
SEE YOU FIGHT
BEFORE YOU
DIE...!

THE GRENADE, AIMED DELIBERATELY SHORT, DROPPED FIVE YARDS AWAY FROM THE JAP MORTAR. THE BLAST HIT ITS CREW, SLAMMING THEM TO THE GROUND. . .



BUT AS SCUDDER CAME IN WITH HIS BREN AT HIS HIP, TWO OF THE JAPS HAD RECOVERED. THEIR GUNS WERE READY.



SCUDDER FELT THE BULLETS HIT HIM, BUT HE KEPT GOING. HIS BREN WAS HAMMERING RIGHT THROUGH THE LAST TEN YARDS OF HIS RUSH...



THE JAP SOLDIERS DIED SWIFTLY, ALMOST SILENTLY. SCUDDER STOOD UPRIGHT IN THE SHAMBLES OF DEATH. HE WAS NOT CONSCIOUS OF THE CLOYING WARMTH OF HIS WOUNDED CHEST...



THE BIG MAN TOOK THREE STEPS TOWARDS THE SILENT JUNGLE. HE WAS STILL FULL OF HATE WHEN THE DARK HAZE OF DEATH DRAGGED HIM DOWN...

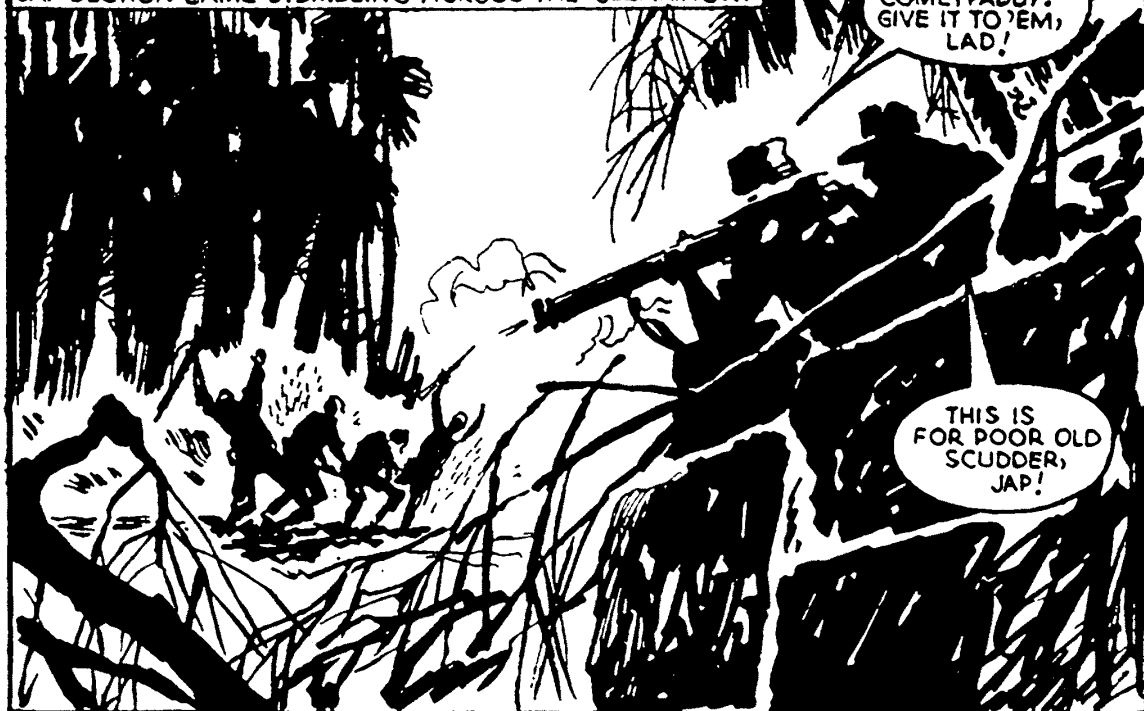


Chapter 4. *The Bridge*

THE JAPANESE CAPTAIN GUESSED THAT HIS MORTAR HAD BEEN SILENCED. BUT HE WAS NOT SURE HOW MANY MEN STILL REMAINED IN THE TEMPLE OF PHYA YOMARAJ...



THREE MEN STILL LIVED IN THE TEMPLE OF THE GUARDIAN OF THE DEAD. BUT ONLY TWO OF THEM WERE FIRING AS THE JAP SECTION CAME STUMBLING ACROSS THE CLEARING...

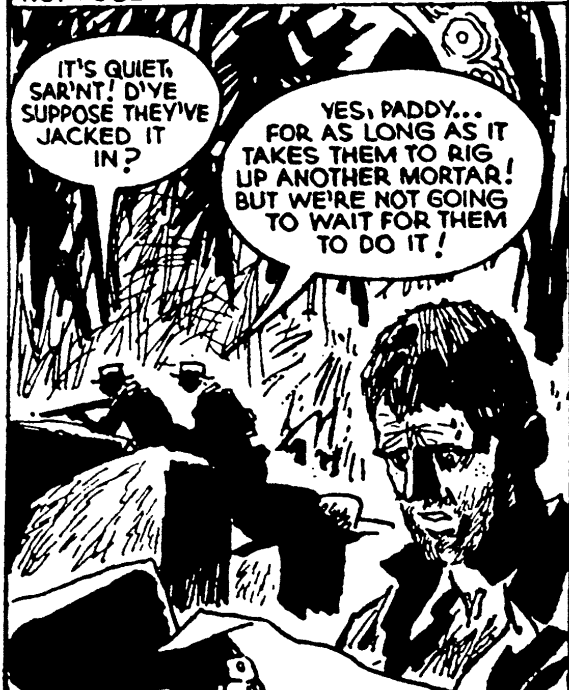


THE ATTACK FOUNDERED, BUT THE CAPTAIN WAS SATISFIED. THE FIRING FROM THE TEMPLE HAD TOLD HIM ALL HE WANTED TO KNOW...



ONLY TWO OF THE WHITE DOGS OPPOSE US! IT WILL NOT BE LONG NOW! THEN I... CAPTAIN YAMASHI... WILL ACHIEVE THE FIRST VICTORY OF THE CAMPAIGN!

THE JUNGLE SETTLED BACK INTO ITS RESTLESS SILENCE — A SILENCE THAT DID NOT FOOL MATT BRIND...



IT'S QUIET, SAR'NT! D'VE SUPPOSE THEY'VE JACKED IT IN?

YES, PADDY... FOR AS LONG AS IT TAKES THEM TO RIG UP ANOTHER MORTAR! BUT WE'RE NOT GOING TO WAIT FOR THEM TO DO IT!

LIEUTENANT SALTER WAS STARING AT HIS MAP, HIS GUN COLD AT HIS SIDE. THE SERGEANT HID HIS DISGUST...



WE'VE GOT TO MAKE A BREAK FOR IT, SIR! IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE!

I AGREE, SERGEANT! I'VE BEEN LOOKING AT THE MAP! IT SEEMS THAT WE ARE CLOSER TO THAT BRIDGE THAN WE THOUGHT....!

THE BRITTE GLARE HAD RETURNED TO ROBERT SALTER'S EYES. HE JABBED ALMOST EXCITEDLY AT THE MAP...

THIS UNIDENTIFIED STRUCTURE MUST BE THE TEMPLE! AND HERE IS THE BRIDGE... ONLY HALF A MILE AWAY! I SHALL REMAIN HERE AND DRAW THE ENEMY'S FIRE, WHILE YOU AND PRICE BREAK OUT, LOCATE THE BRIDGE... AND DESTROY IT!

MATT BRIND STILL CLUNG TO THE HOPE THAT A BRITISH OFFICER COULD NOT BE A COWARD. IT WAS THIS HOPE THAT LESSENNED HIS SURPRISE AT THE LIEUTENANT'S WORDS...

IT MIGHT WORK, SIR! BUT YOU DON'T STAND A CHANCE. THE JAPS WOULD REALISE THAT ONLY ONE MAN WAS DEFENDING THE TEMPLE--!

I KNOW, SERGEANT! BUT OUR MISSION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN MY SURVIVAL!

THE SERGEANT WENT BACK TO PADDY PRICE — TOLD HIM OF LIEUTENANT SALTER'S PLAN. THE SAPPER MUTTERED HIS SURPRISE...

MAYBE
WE MIS-JUDGED
HIM, SAR'NT?

MAYBE!
BUT HE'S RIGHT
ABOUT THE BRIDGE!
GET THE EXPLOSIVES
TOGETHER,
PADDY!

WHILE MATT BRIND RELOADED HIS
TOMMY-GUN, PADDY COLLECTED
HIS PACKS OF UNFUSED EXPLOSIVE.

WE'LL
BREAK FOR THAT
PATCH OF BAMBOO...
WHERE THE JUNGLE
SWINGS CLOSEST TO
THE TEMPLE!

THE
JAPS'LL SEE
US FOR SURE IN THIS
MOON! LET'S HOPE
SALTER DOES HIS STUFF
AND KEEPS THEM
BUSY!

LIEUTENANT SALTER WAS IN POSITION. HE WAS STARING AT THE JUNGLE STRANGELY. MATT BRIND SAW HIM IN THE COLD MOONLIGHT...



MATT BRIND HESITATED, THEN SLID AWAY. LIEUTENANT SALTER LIFTED HIS GUN. HE SMILED — AND HISSED SHARPLY...



DRY-MOUTHED, THE SERGEANT AND THE SAPPER RAN FROM THE TEMPLE OF PHYA YOMARAJ. THEY WERE STILL TWENTY YARDS FROM COVER WHEN PADDY PRICE GASPED HAPSHLY...



BULLETS WERE LASHING THE NIGHT AS THEY FLUNG THEMSELVES DOWN BY THE CLUMP OF BAMBOO. SOMEHOW, THEY REACHED IT. THEY LAY THERE, APPALLED BY THE STUNNING TRUTH. . .



THE JAPANESE CAPTAIN HAD SEEN ONLY TWO MEN FIRING FROM THE TEMPLE OF PHYA YOMARAJ. HE HAD SEEN TWO MEN RUN AWAY FROM IT, HIS REACTION WAS UNDERSTANDABLE . . .

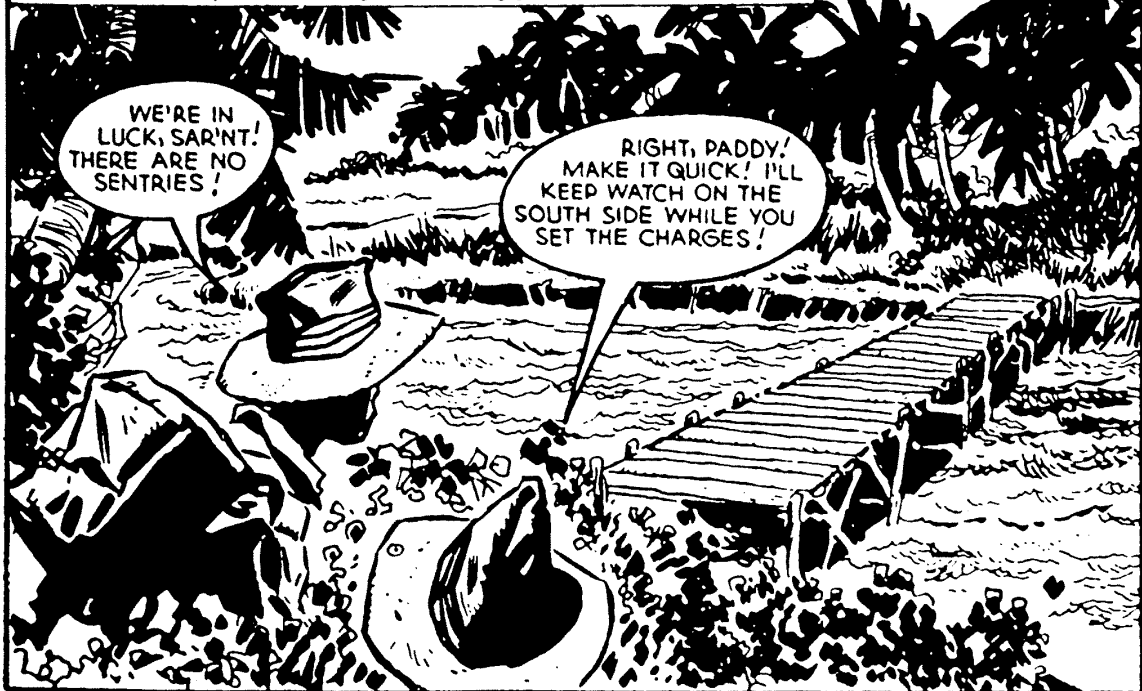


THE JAPS CRASHED THEIR WAY THROUGH THE UNDERGROWTH. IN THE SILENT TEMPLE OF THE DEVIL-KING, LIEUTENANT SALTER SMILED...

SO IT
WORKED! THE
JAPANESE THINK
THE TEMPLE IS
EMPTY! NOW I
CAN ESCAPE...

ROBERT SALTER'S TWISTED TRIUMPH DIED. SUDDENLY, HE REALISED THAT HE WAS NOT ALONE IN THE TEMPLE OF THE DEAD. BEHIND HIM, THE GLARING FACE OF THE DEVIL-KING SEEMED TO RIPPLE MALIGNANTLY IN THE MOONLIGHT...

MEANWHILE, BRIND AND PRICE WORKED STEADILY SOUTH. THEY FOLLOWED THE MAIN TRACK UNTIL IT CUT ACROSS A SECONDARY ROAD. TEN MINUTES LATER, THEY FOUND THE BRIDGE...



PADDY PRICE WAS A GOOD SAPPER. HE KNEW JUST WHERE TO SET HIS EXPLOSIVES. MOMENTS LATER, HE WAS WORKING QUICKLY AND EFFICIENTLY ABOVE THE GLOWING WATER OF THE TAIGU...

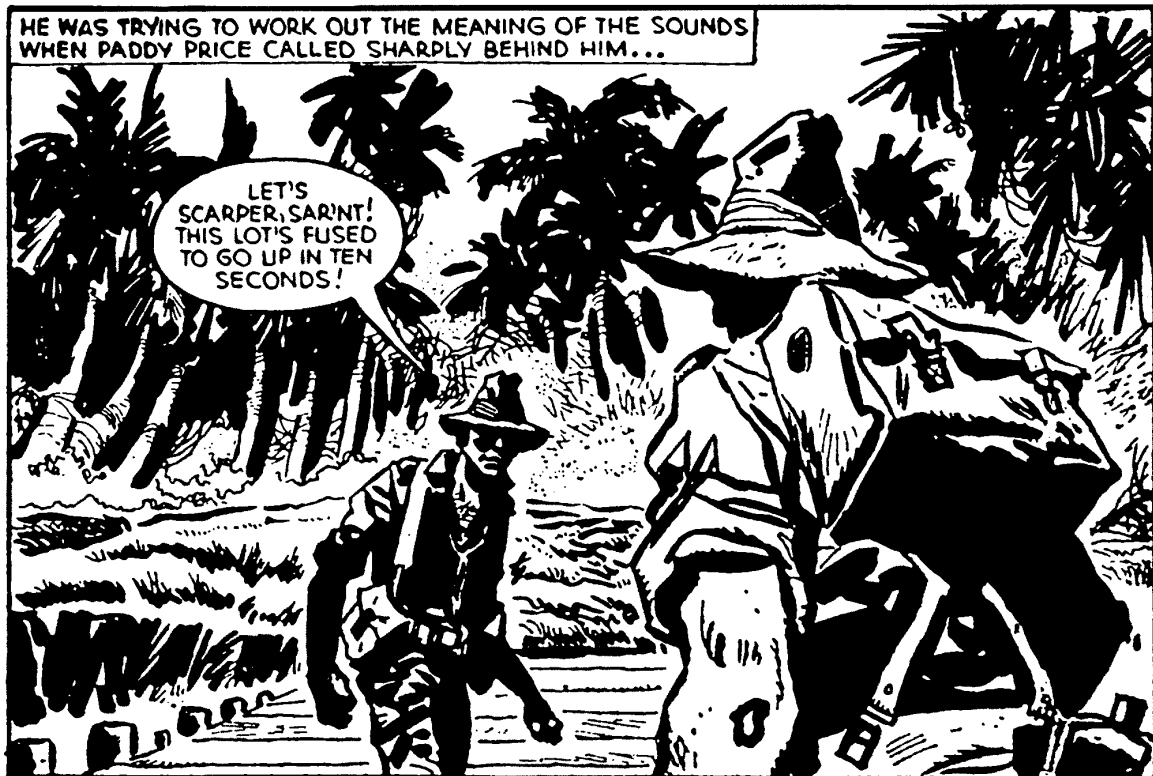


ABOVE HIM, MATT BRIND CROUCHED ON THE BRIDGE. SLOWLY HE BECAME AWARE OF THE DISTANT CLANK OF METAL — A CONTINUOUS, THREATENING VOLUME OF SOUND THAT WELLED FROM THE DARK DEPTHS OF SIAM...

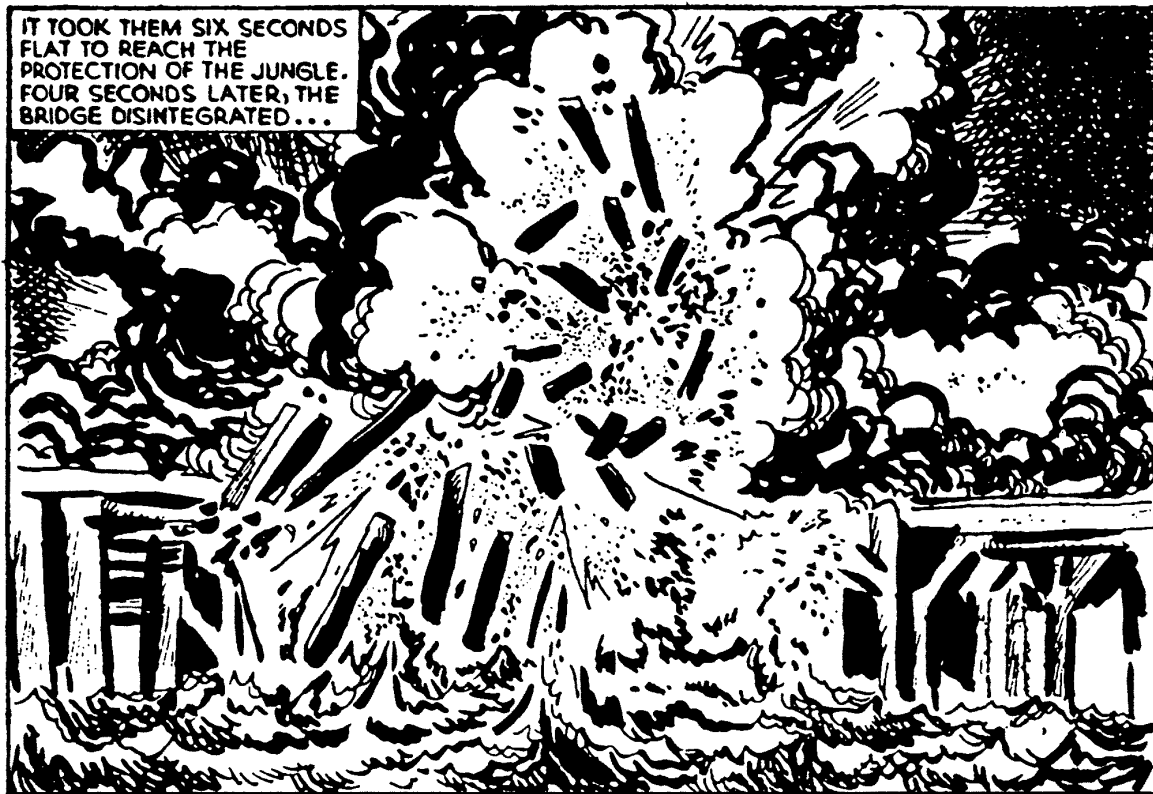


HE WAS TRYING TO WORK OUT THE MEANING OF THE SOUNDS
WHEN PADDY PRICE CALLED SHARPLY BEHIND HIM...

LET'S
SCARPER, SAR'NT!
THIS LOT'S FUSED
TO GO UP IN TEN
SECONDS!



IT TOOK THEM SIX SECONDS
FLAT TO REACH THE
PROTECTION OF THE JUNGLE.
FOUR SECONDS LATER, THE
BRIDGE DISINTEGRATED...





THE FIRING STOPPED SUDDENLY. THE UNDERGROWTH SQUELCHED AHEAD.



BUT THE UNSEEN BODIES CRASHED NEARER AND NEARER. MATT BRIND SNAPPED TO HIS FEET...



BACK AT THE TEMPLE, LIEUTENANT SALTER HAD HEARD THE DISTANT CRUMP OF HIGH EXPLOSIVE, FOLLOWED BY THE CRACKLE OF SMALL-ARMS FIRE... THEN SILENCE. IT COULD MEAN ONLY ONE THING...



THE LIEUTENANT WAS GLAD TO GET AWAY FROM THE ACCUSING FACE OF PHYA YOMARAJ. HE HAD REACHED THE REMAINS OF ONE OF THE GUARDIAN BEASTS, WHEN HE SAW THE THREE SHADOWS DROP DOWN INTO THE CLEARING...



BUT THEY WERE JAPS. THEY HAD SLIPPED AWAY FROM THEIR SECTION. NOW THEY WERE CHATTERING CARELESSLY AS THEY SHAMBLING ACROSS THE CLEARING...



SALTER BACKED QUICKLY INTO THE TEMP. E. HE COULD HAVE CUT DOWN THE JAPS WITH EASE... BUT THE TOMMY-GUN WAS SILENT IN HIS HANDS...

I-I DAREN'T FIRE!
THE NOISE WILL ALERT
EVERY JAP IN MILES!
I'VE GOT TO HIDE...

THE LIEUTENANT HAD HEARD A LOT ABOUT WHAT THE JAPANESE DID TO PRISONERS. HIS FEAR OF THE JAPS CONQUERED HIS FEAR OF THE DEVIL-KING...

THE TOP
OF THE IDOL SEEMS
FLAT... PERHAPS I
COULD HIDE UP THERE
UNTIL THE JAPS
HAVE GONE!

THE ORNATE CARVING OF THE FIGURE PROVIDED GOOD HANDHOLDS. ROBERT SALTER BEGAN TO CLIMB WITH DESPERATE STRENGTH.



FOR THREE CENTURIES, THE DAMP AIR OF THE SIAMESE JUNGLE HAD RAVAGED THE ALABASTER BODY OF THE DEVIL-KING. NOW THE SCRABBLING, CLAWING WEIGHT OF LIEUTENANT SALTER PROVIDED THE FINAL FACTOR OF DESTRUCTION . . .

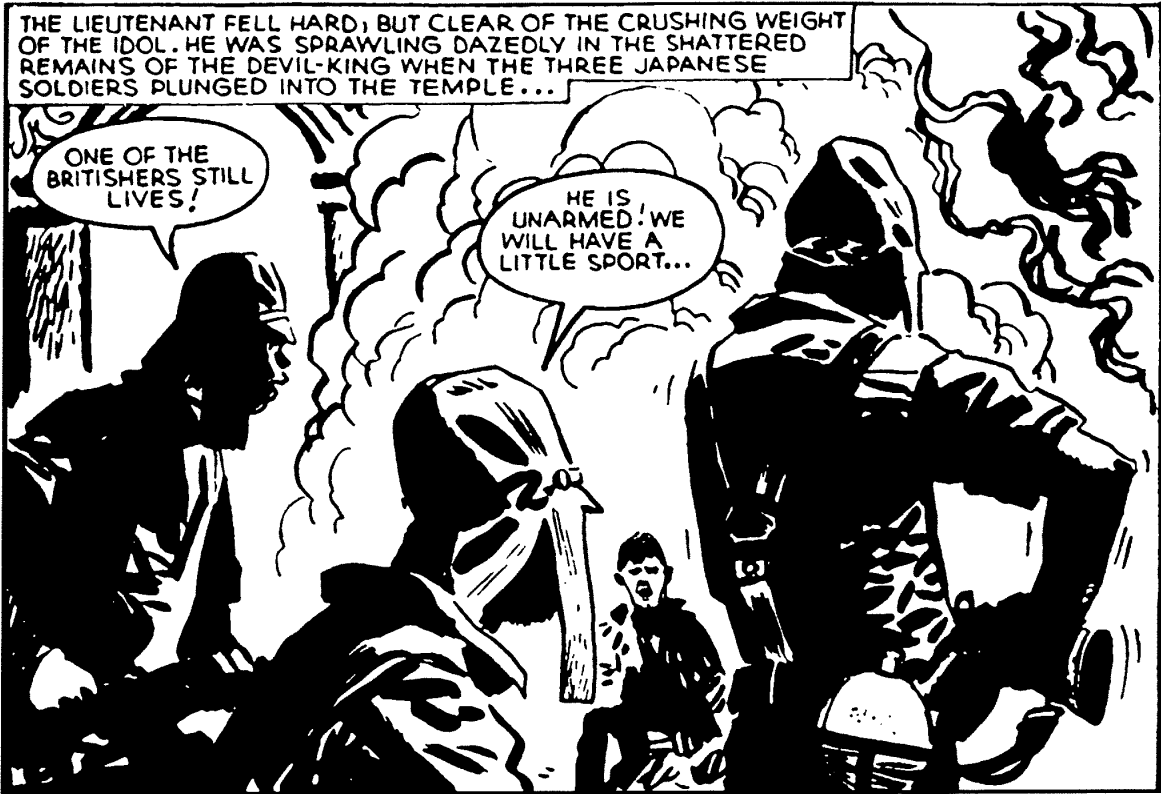
THE IDOL!
IT-IT'S FALLING!
I'LL BE
CRUSHED....!



THE GAUNT IDOL SEEMED TO GROAN AS IT TOPPLED FORWARD.
SALTER SCREAMED AS HE THREW HIMSELF CLEAR...



THE LIEUTENANT FELL HARD, BUT CLEAR OF THE CRUSHING WEIGHT
OF THE IDOL. HE WAS SPRAWLING DAZEDLY IN THE SHATTERED
REMAINS OF THE DEVIL-KING WHEN THE THREE JAPANESE
SOLDIERS PLUNGED INTO THE TEMPLE...

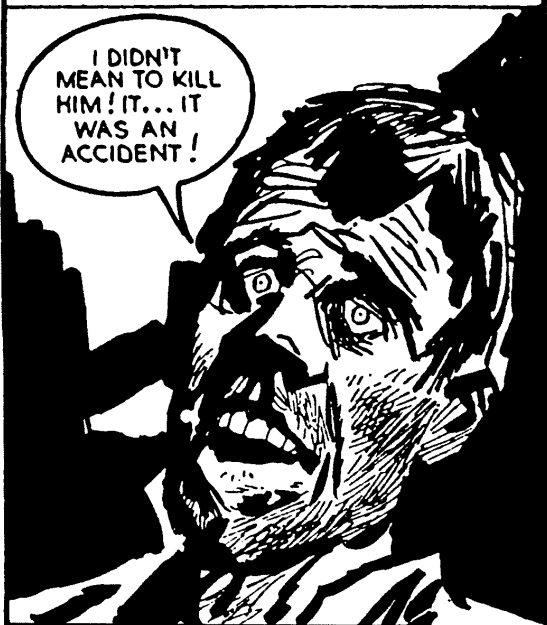


THE JAPS CLUSTERED EAGERLY ROUND LIEUTENANT SALTER. HE BLINKED UP AT THE PINCHED, GRINNING FACES. HIS CRACKED VOICE RAMBLED STUPIDLY...



I... I AM YOUR PRISONER! TAKE... ME TO YOUR COMMANDING OFFICER!

SALTER'S EYES GLIMPSED THE BROKEN HEAD OF PHYA YOMARAJ. THE IDOL'S FACE SEEMED TO SNARL WITH A MONSTROUS, LIVING ANGER. THE LIEUTENANT'S TERRIFIED CROAK HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE JAPS...



I DIDN'T MEAN TO KILL HIM! IT... IT WAS AN ACCIDENT!

THE JAPS EXCHANGED GLEEFUL GLANCES. THIS RAVING BRITISHER WOULD PROVIDE MUCH SPORT BEFORE HE DIED.



I HAVE MY RIGHTS AS A PRISONER! LEAVE ME ALONE!

THE LIEUTENANT SCREAMED. THE SOUND REACHED THE EARS OF TWO MEN. IT WAS SHEER COURAGE AND LUCK THAT HAD ENABLED BRIND AND PRICE TO FIGHT BACK TO THE TEMPLE.



THE SERGEANT PALED BENEATH HIS LAYER OF GRIME. HE STARTED FORWARD...



PADDY PRICE'S FACE WAS GRIM...

SOMEONE'S GOT TO GET BACK TO BASE AND TELL THEM WHAT'S HAPPENING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT BRIDGE! IF WE HELP SALTER, WE'LL PROBABLY WIND UP ON THE END OF A BAYONET! AND A LOT OF GOOD MEN ARE GOING TO DIE BECAUSE WE DIDN'T WARN THEM IN TIME!



MATT BRIND RECOGNISED THE TRUTH IN THE IRISHMAN'S WORDS. IT WAS ONE MAN'S LIFE AGAINST THOUSANDS. HE TURNED AWAY FROM THE TEMPLE OF PHYA YOMARAJ.

OKAY, PADDY! WE'LL GO BACK TO BASE AND MAKE OUR REPORT! AND WE'LL MAKE IT A GOOD ONE WITH BAGS OF GLORY... THE WAY SALTER WOULD HAVE WANTED IT!



DOWN IN THE TEMPLE OF THE DEVIL-KING, THE JAPS WERE JUST STARTING TO CLOSE IN ON ROBERT SALTER. THE LIEUTENANT HAD ALWAYS DREADED PAIN...

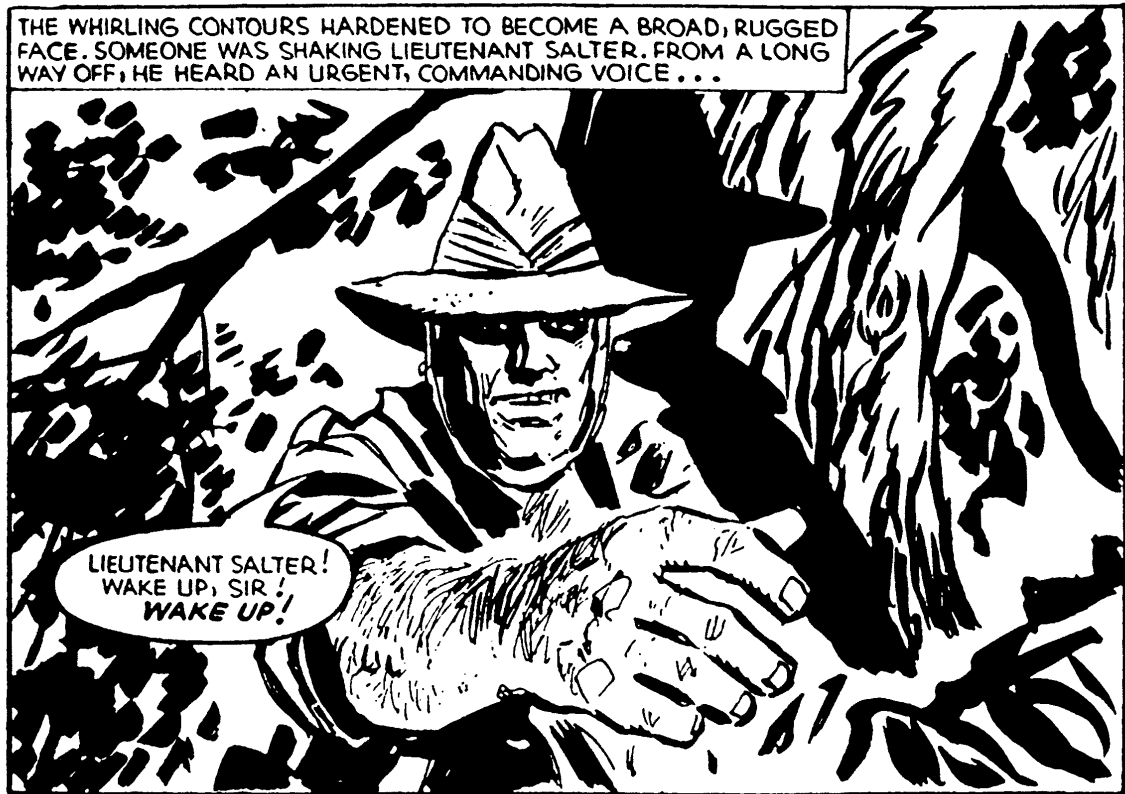
NO! LEAVE ME ALONE! HELP... HELP ME!



THE LIEUTENANT WAS STILL SHOUTING WHEN HIS TORMENTORS' OUTLINES SEEMED TO SHIMMER AND FADE...



THE WHIRLING CONTOURS HARDENED TO BECOME A BROAD, RUGGED FACE. SOMEONE WAS SHAKING LIEUTENANT SALTER. FROM A LONG WAY OFF, HE HEARD AN URGENT, COMMANDING VOICE...



LIEUTENANT SALTER!
WAKE UP, SIR!
WAKE UP!

Chapter 5. The Awakening

THE LIEUTENANT'S EYES SNAPPED OPEN. HE FOUND HIMSELF SITTING AGAINST A TREE, STARING AT THE FROWNING FACE OF MATT BRIND...



THE LIEUTENANT SWAYED TO HIS FEET. HE BLINKED ROUND THE SUN-SPLASHED CLEARING, AND THE TRUTH STRUCK HIM WITH BLINDING RELIEF...



SALTER BREATHED THANKFULLY, AFTER THE HORROR OF HIS DREAM, THE MEN OF THE PATROL LOOKED HARMLESS ENOUGH.

BLUE PATROL
CALLING RED LEADER...
ARE YOU RECEIVING
ME...!

SALTER WATCHED IDLY AS LEN WHITING PRESSED THE RECEIVER SWITCH. THE LOUDSPEAKER BLARED FORTH — ENGLISH WORDS IN AN ACCENT THAT WAS SHRILL AND MOCKING...

JOHNEE...
BRITISH JOHNEE!
WE KNOW... WHERE
YOU ARE! WE COME
TO GET...

SALTER STOOD ROOTED, AS IF IN A TRANCE, HE HEARD THE GASPS OF THE MEN.

THE JAPS HAVE
PICKED UP OUR SIGNAL!
THAT WAS HOW THE
DREAM STARTED...
FIRST THE VOICE ON THE
RADIO, THEN SCUDDER
REPORTING A TEMPLE
AHEAD... IT
CAN'T BE
TRUE!

THE MEN WERE STILL STARING
AT THE LIEUTENANT WHEN
BEN SCUDDER WALKED INTO
THE CLEARING...

HEY, SARGE!
THERE'S ONE OF
THOSE OLD TEMPLE S
UP AHEAD! SPOOKY
LOOKING JOINT! IT MIGHT
MAKE A GOOD PLACE
TO BED DOWN FOR
THE NIGHT!

LIEUTENANT SALTER'S VOICE CHOKED AND DIED. HE STOOD TRANSFIXED AND TREMBLING — STARING INTO THE HORROR OF HIS FUTURE. THE MEN GLANCED AT HIM UNEASILY AS THEY GATHERED UP THEIR EQUIPMENT. . .

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH SALTER, SARGE?

MAYBE HE REALISES IT WAS A MISTAKE TO SEND THAT SIGNAL. COME ON, SCUD! WE'D BETTER TAKE A LOOK AT THIS TEMPLE!

LIEUTENANT SALTER KNEW THAT, SOMEWHERE AHEAD, LAY THE TEMPLE OF PHYA YOMARAJ, GUARDIAN OF THE DEAD. FOR LIEUTENANT SALTER, THE NIGHTMARE WAS JUST BEGINNING. . .

END





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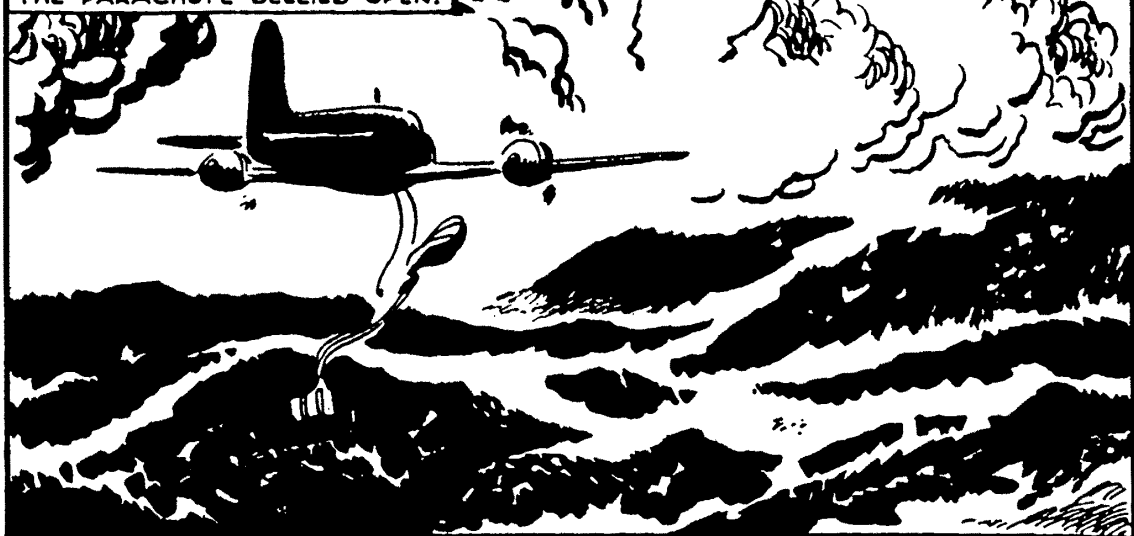
The Bayonet Jungle

THE WAR IN BURMA WAS AS SAVAGE AS THE PRIMITIVE JUNGLE IN WHICH IT WAS FOUGHT. THE ENEMY WERE CUNNING, MERCILESS JUNGLE FIGHTERS BUT THE BRITISH TROOPS FOUGHT THEM BITTERLY, DENYING THEM EVERY INCH OF THE EMPIRE THEY COVETED. NO. 3 PLATOON OF A FAMOUS INFANTRY REGIMENT WERE TYPICAL. TOUGH, INDESTRUCTIBLE, FEARLESS THEY HAD SEEMED... UNTIL PRIVATE JACK GREEN JOINED THEM AS A REPLACEMENT.



Chapter 1. SOLE SURVIVOR

THE FAT DAKOTA TRANSPORT PLANE ROARED AT FIVE HUNDRED FEET ABOVE THE DARK GREEN CARPET OF JUNGLE. FROM A BLACK OPENING IN ITS SIDE, TUMBLED A LARGE CONTAINER AND A THIN TRAIL OF WHITE FAERIC STREAMED BEHIND IT IN THE WIND. SUDDENLY THE PARACHUTE BELLIED OPEN.



CROUCHED IN THE GREEN FASTNESS OF THE JUNGLE BELOW, NOT TWO HUNDRED YARDS FROM THE JAPANESE TROOPS, BRITISH SOLDIERS WATCHED THE PRECIOUS CONTAINER FLOAT EARTHWARDS.



OH, NO! THEY'VE DROPPED THE SUPPLIES WIDE OF THE D.Z. AGAIN!

THAT'S THE SECOND TIME THIS WEEK! STRAIGHT INTO THE JAPS' HANDS!

THE LEAN WIRY OFFICER COMMANDING 'A' COMPANY, MAJOR WEBB, MENTALLY JUDGED THE DISTANCE TO THE STRAY CONTAINER... AND SNAPPED A SWIFT ORDER...

WE NEED THAT FOOD AND AMMO BADLY, JAPS OR NO JAPS! SERGEANT BAXTER, TAKE FOUR OR FIVE MEN AND SEE WHAT YOU CAN DO!

RIGHT, SIR!



THE PATROL SLIPPED NOISELESSLY THROUGH THE THICK UNDERGROWTH, EVERY SENSE HAIR-TRIGGERED FOR DANGER.

THERE IT IS, SERGEANT!

ALL RIGHT, GREEN, I'VE GOT EYES IN ME 'EAD!



THE JAPANESE WERE WELL AWARE HOW DESPERATELY THE BRITISH NEEDED THE PARACHUTED SUPPLIES AND PLANNED ACCORDINGLY...

AH YES... WE WERE RIGHT! THEY COME NOW! A FEW MORE PAGES, WHITE CURS...



THE JAPANESE WAITED MOTIONLESS, EYES COLD AND UNBLINKING LIKE THOSE OF POISONOUS LIZARDS...

LET THEM COME CLOSER... CLOSER. WE WANT TO DESTROY THEM ALL... AND TO TAKE NO PRISONERS!



JACK GREEN WAS UNEASILY CONSCIOUS OF THE STILLNESS... A SINISTER STILLNESS THAT UNSETTLED HIM SO THAT HE STARTED NERVOUSLY WHEN THE SERGEANT SPOKE, EVEN THOUGH IT WAS IN A WHISPER...

COME ON, LADS. GET BUSY UNLOADING IT. THE SOONER WE'RE BACK WITH THE COMPANY THE BETTER. GREEN, JONES, KEEP YOUR EYES SKINNED AND...



HE FROZE SUDDENLY, ALARM LEADING TO HIS EYES, AS HE GLIMPSED MOVEMENT AMONG THE BUSHES AHEAD. HIS LIPS PARTED TO SHOUT A WARNING, BUT HE WAS TOO LATE!



A SUDDEN DEADLY HAIL OF FIRE CUT THE PATROL DOWN AND GREEN WAS ONE OF THE VERY FEW TO REACH COVER. HE PUMPED BULLETS AT THE INVISIBLE ENEMY EVEN AS OTHER MEN FELL AROUND HIM. THEIR CHANCES SEEMED HOPELESS...

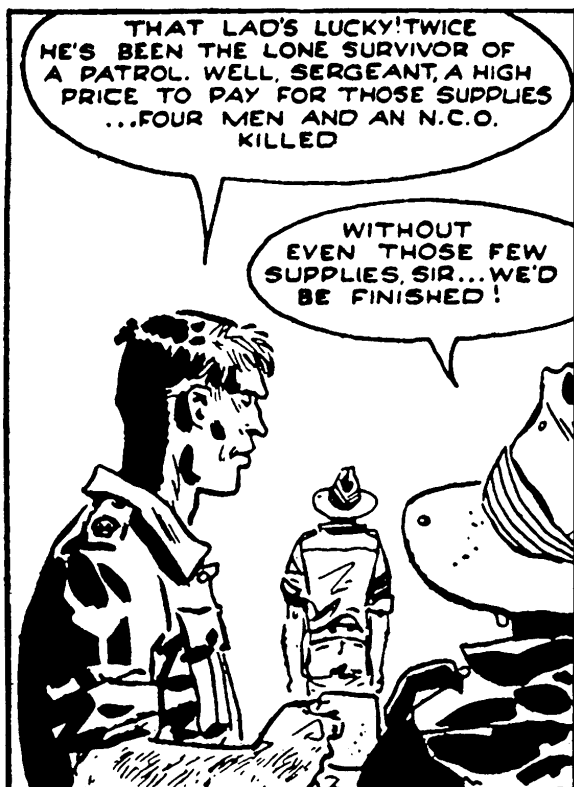
TRY TO GET BACK, GREENIE! DON'T TRY TO BE A HERO! I'M DONE FOR AND SO IS EVERYONE ELSE! DON'T YOU REALISE IT? YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE FIRING AND...

... BUT I'M NOT NOW, CORP! HERE COME SOME MORE OF OUR LADS! WE'RE SAVED!

ON HEARING THE BURST OF FIRING, THE MAJOR HAD SENT REINFORCEMENTS AND FACED BY SUPERIOR FORCES, THE ENEMY FIRED A FINAL BURST AND RETREATED. BACK IN THE COMPANY AREA, GREEN REPORTED WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

HALF THE PATROL DIED IN THE FIRST VOLLEY, SIR, INCLUDING SERGEANT BAXTER. WE... WE DIDN'T STAND A CHANCE.

ALL RIGHT, GREEN. GO AND GET YOURSELF SOME TEA, AND THEN REPORT TO SERGEANT FREEMAN, THREE PLATOON.



THAT LAD'S LUCKY! TWICE HE'S BEEN THE LONE SURVIVOR OF A PATROL. WELL, SERGEANT, A HIGH PRICE TO PAY FOR THOSE SUPPLIES ...FOUR MEN AND AN N.C.O. KILLED

WITHOUT EVEN THOSE FEW SUPPLIES, SIR...WE'D BE FINISHED!



JACK GREEN'S RECEPTION FROM SOME MEMBERS OF No.3 PLATOON HAD BEEN COOL AND UNEASY.

FOSTER KNEW HIM BACK IN BLIGHTY. HE WAS IN A LEAVE TRUCK THAT OVERTURNED. EVERYONE WAS HURT EXCEPT GREEN! THEN HE WAS THE SOLE SURVIVOR OF A PATROL! HE'S GOT A JINX ON HIM!

IT'S BAD ENOUGH THIS JUNGLE FIGHTING, WITHOUT HAVING SOMEONE WITH YOU WHO'S GOT TROUBLE ON HIS TAIL!

SERGEANT FREEMAN AND THE CHEERFUL COCKNEY, SMILER COBB, KNEW OF GREEN'S REPUTATION AND PROTESTED DISGUSTEDLY. . .



THAT'S A LOAD OF TRIPE AND YOU KNOW IT, JENKINS! THE ODDS ARE HEAVY AGAINST ANYONE OUT HERE!

YOU SAID IT, SARGE! HE'S NO JONAH! IF YOU ASK ME, 'E'S BLINKIN' LUCKY! WHAT DO YOU SAY TOMMO?

MY DEAR OLD MUM...BLESS HER...ALWAYS SAYS, WHAT'S TO BE IS TO BE, AND I THINK SHE'S RIGHT!

THE SUPERSTITIOUS JENKINS SCOWLED.

HE'S LUCKY, YOU SAY? I KNEW A MINER LIKE HIM ONCE, MAN! HE BROUGHT BAD LUCK TO EVERYONE ELSE. IT'S TROUBLE WE'RE GOING TO HAVE NOW HE'S WITH US!

OH, SHUT UP, JENKINS!

YES.. PUT A SOCK IN IT! HERE COMES THE O.C.

MAJOR WEBB TOOK SERGEANT FREEMAN ASIDE...

AS YOU KNOW, 'C COMPANY ARE NORMALLY GUARD COMPANY BUT AS THEY ARE ON A FIGHTING PATROL, BRIGADE H.Q. WANT US TO PROVIDE A GUARD FOR THE AMMUNITION DUMP. IT FALLS TO YOUR PLATOON, SERGEANT.

RIGHT, SIR. WE'LL GET CRACKING!

MINUTES LATER, THE PLATOON WERE SWINGING OFF THROUGH THE JUNGLE TOWARDS THE BRIGADE AREA.

JUST OUR BAD LUCK TO COP NIGHT DUTY ON THE ARMS DUMP! I CAN'T THINK OF ANYTHING WORSE!

I CAN! LISTENING TO YOUR GLOOMY NATTERING! GIVE IT A REST JENKINS, OR YOU'LL SEND US ALL ROUND THE BEND!



THE DISGRUNTLED JENKINS GLARED BUT HE SAID NOTHING MORE AND FINALLY THEY REACHED BRIGADE H.Q.

THIS IS THE BRIGADE AREA ALL RIGHT, MATES! THEY'VE GOT NOTHING ELSE TO DO BUT BREW UP!

THE COOK'S PROBABLY LAYING IT ON FOR US... I HOPE! JENKINS AND GREEN... YOU'LL TAKE FIRST AND LAST SHIFT.

JENKINS SWALLOWED AND GLANCED SIDWAYS. AT GREEN.

IT'S NOT TROUBLE WE'RE LIKELY TO GET HERE, IS IT, SARGE? TOO FAR BACK FROM THE JAPS, AREN'T WE?

YES, BUT THE O.C. SAYS COLLABORATORS ARE OPERATING IN THE AREA SO NO DOZING OFF. I'LL SLIP YOU A MUG OF CHAR AS SOON AS I CAN!

TWENTY MINUTES LATER FREEMAN RETURNED WITH SOME HOT TEA...

HERE YOU ARE, LADS, TEA UP! THIS IS DUSTY... HE'S A CHAR WALLAH IN THE BRIGADE COOK-HOUSE... GOT A LETTER SIGNED BY THE BRIGADE MAJOR SAYING HE'S TO BE TRUSTED. SO IT'S NOT POISONED, JENKINS. YOU NEEDN'T LOOK DOWN YOUR NOSE!

WELL, MAN, YOU NEVER KNOW!

THE NIGHT SEEMED NEVER ENDING FOR JACK GREEN, WHEN HE WAS AWAKENED FOR HIS SECOND SPELL ON GUARD. HE MISSED HIS OLD FRIENDS AND A LUMP CAME IN HIS THROAT AS HE THOUGHT OF THEM...

MOST OF THREE PLATOON LEAVE ME ALONE AS THOUGH I HAD THE PLAGUE. THEY DON'T SAY ANYTHING BUT I KNOW THEY THINK I'LL BRING 'EM BAD LUCK.

THE APPROACHING HUM OF AN AIRCRAFT ENGINE DREW HIS GAZE UP TOWARDS THE PALE DAWN SKY. SUDDENLY, HE STIFFENED...

BY HEAVENS! THAT'S A JAP PLANE... IT MUST HAVE SPOTTED THE DUMP! IT'S DIVING... WE'RE FOR IT NOW! LOOK OUT, JENKINS!

THE ROAR OF THE ENGINE
INCREASED TO A CRESCENDO
AS THE ENEMY AIRCRAFT
DIVED DOWN OUT OF THE SKY.



ALREADY MEN
WERE DASHING
FROM THEIR
BIVOUACS, RIFLES
AND BRENS IN
HANDS...

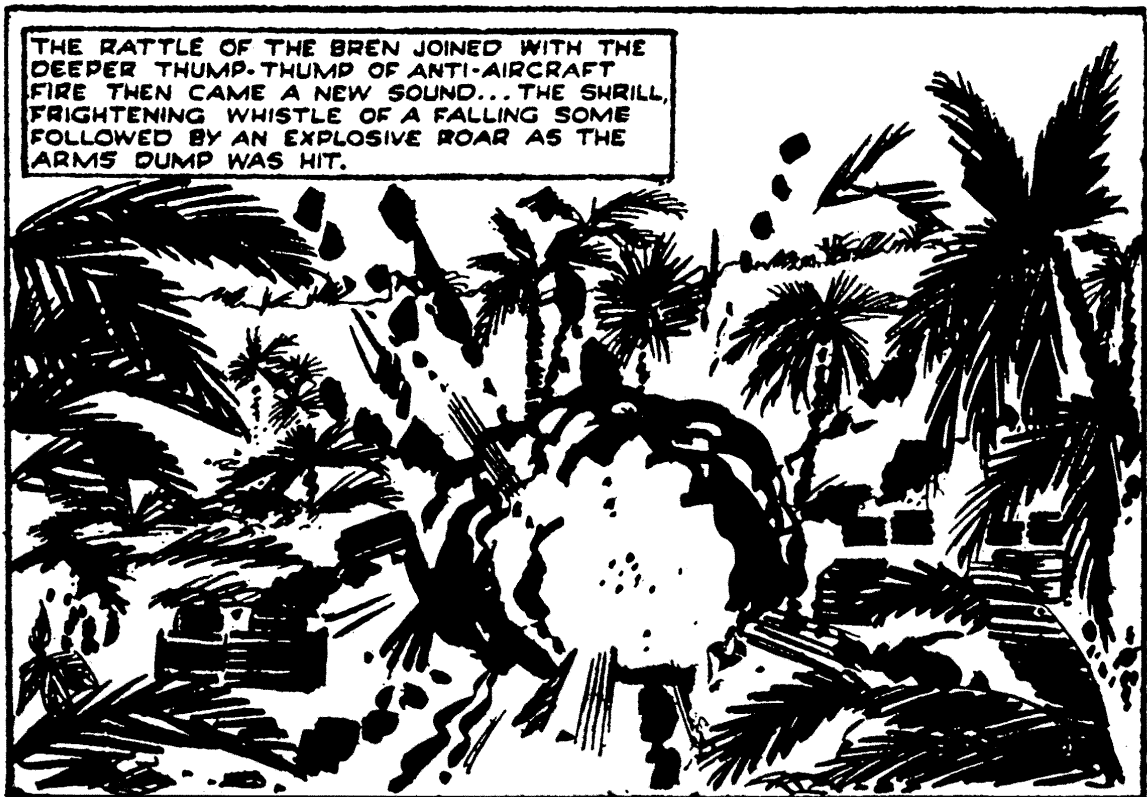


BULLETS LASHED THE FOLIAGE ABOUT SERGEANT FREEMAN AS HE STEADIED THE BREN AND BEGAN TO SQUEEZE THE TRIGGER.



COME ON, JAP! YOU MAY GET US... BUT THIS TIME YOU'VE BITTEN OFF MORE THAN YOU CAN CHEW! YOU'RE RIGHT BANG IN MY SIGHTS!

THE RATTLE OF THE BREN JOINED WITH THE DEEPER THUMP-THUMP OF ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE THEN CAME A NEW SOUND... THE SHRILL, FRIGHTENING WHISTLE OF A FALLING BOMB FOLLOWED BY AN EXPLOSIVE ROAR AS THE ARMS DUMP WAS HIT.



IN A SECOND, ALL WAS CONFUSION AS PILE AFTER PILE OF AMMUNITION BLEW UP, BUT THE ENEMY PLANE HAD NOT ESCAPED UNSCATHED...

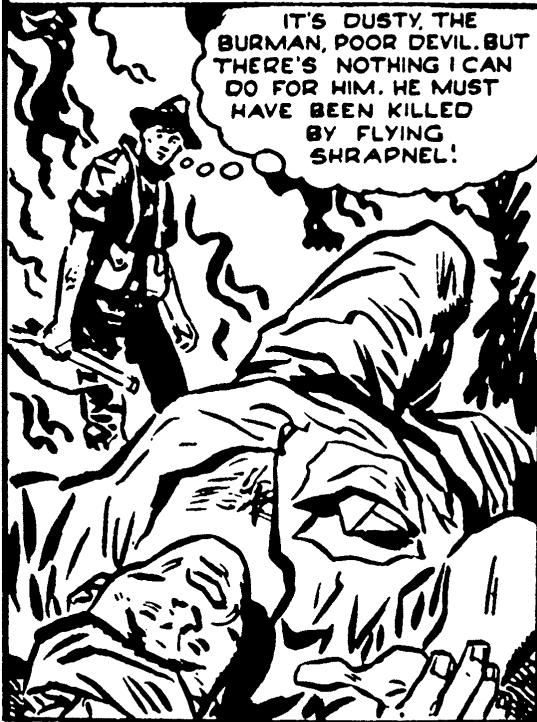


A SOBBING CRY FOR HELP REACHED THE EARS OF PRIVATE JACK GREEN FROM AMIDST THE TANGLED UNDERGROWTH NEARBY...

WHAT WAS THAT CRY? IT CAME FROM OVER THERE! SOME POOR DEVIL MUST HAVE STOPPED A NASTY ONE!



A FEW YARDS FROM THE CLEARING HE CAME UPON A SPRAWLED FIGURE IN DIRTY WHITE NATIVE CLOTHES...



IT'S DUSTY, THE BURMAN, POOR DEVIL. BUT THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO FOR HIM. HE MUST HAVE BEEN KILLED BY FLYING SHRAPNEL!

HELP WAS NEEDED ELSEWHERE AND HE RAN OFF, COMPLETELY UNAWARE THAT SOMEONE ELSE HAD CREPT UPON THE SCENE, SOMEONE WHO COVETED THE LETTER OF TRUSTWORTHINESS CARRIED BY THE DEAD BURMAN...



IT WAS ANOTHER NATIVE, THE TREACHEROUS COLLABORATOR WHO HAD RADIOED THE DUMP'S POSITION TO THE ENEMY. AN EVIL GRIN OF TRIUMPH ON HIS FACE, THE MAN SLIPPED AWAY INTO THE SHADOWS OF THE JUNGLE.



THIS GOOD THING FOR ME. ONE DAY... PERHAPS SOON... BRIGADE MAJOR'S LETTER COME IN USEFUL TO ME.

Chapter 2. JUNGLE AMBUSH

EVEN AS JACK GREEN REACHED THE BRIGADE AREA, HE SAW A TRUCK HAD CAUGHT FIRE...

HEY! THAT'S THE MAIL TRUCK! THE FIRST LETTERS WE'VE HAD FOR WEEKS ARE INSIDE THERE!

QUICK, GREEN, GRAB THE EXTINGUISHER OUT OF THE CAB! I'LL GIVE YOU A HAND!



IN A MOMENT, THE TWO MEN WERE FIGHTING THE FLAMES...

KEEP AT IT, LAD, WHILE I DRAG OUT THE MAIL! BY GUM! BUT IT'S GETTING HOT AROUND HERE!



THE HEAT SCORCHED GREEN'S FACE AS HE FINALLY FLUNG ASIDE THE EMPTY EXTINGUISHER AND HELPED SERGEANT FREEMAN DRAG OUT THE SMOULDERING SACKS.

WE'D HAVE LOST THE LOT IF YOU HADN'T SPOTTED IT, GREEN! WHO SAID YOU WERE UNLUCKY? THEY MUST BE ROUND THE BEND! AH... THAT'S THE LOT! SOME OF IT'S DAMAGED BUT MOST OF IT'S ALL RIGHT.

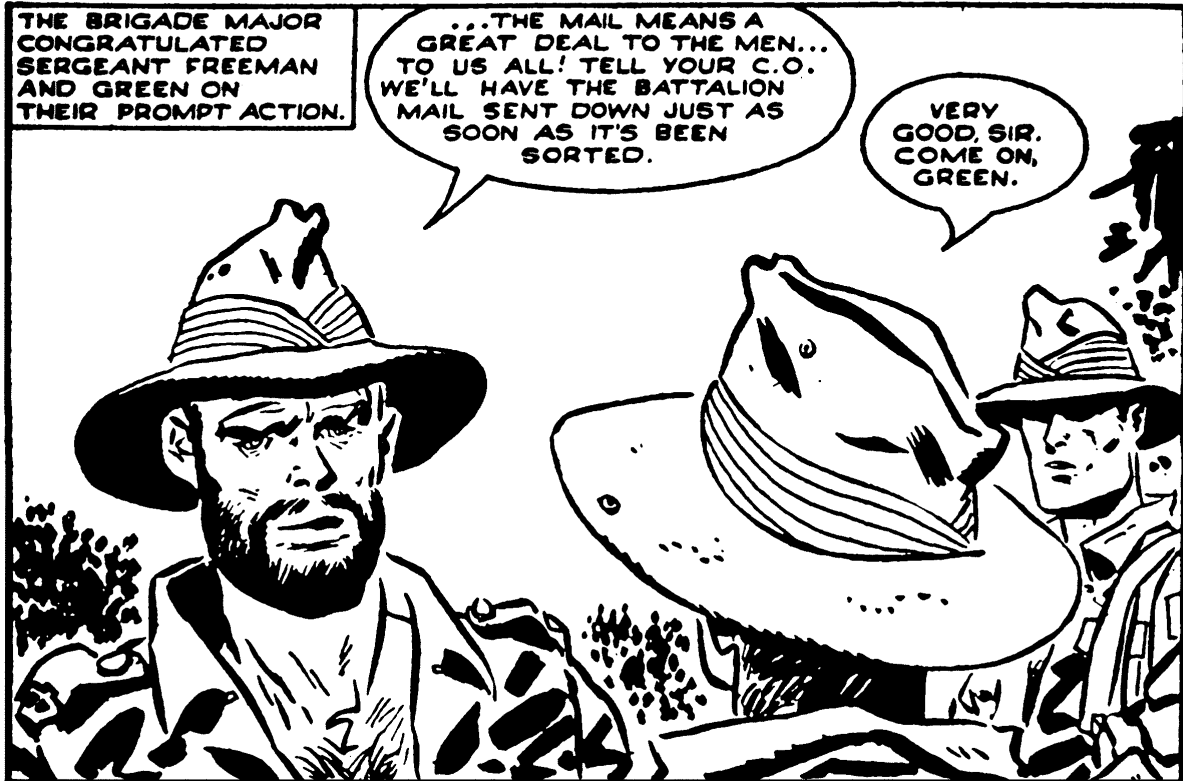
NICE WORK, CHAPS!



THE BRIGADE MAJOR CONGRATULATED SERGEANT FREEMAN AND GREEN ON THEIR PROMPT ACTION.

...THE MAIL MEANS A GREAT DEAL TO THE MEN... TO US ALL! TELL YOUR C.O. WE'LL HAVE THE BATTALION MAIL SENT DOWN JUST AS SOON AS IT'S BEEN SORTED.

VERY GOOD, SIR, COME ON, GREEN.



THE FOLLOWING MORNING, THE COMPANY HAD ORDERS TO ATTACK AN ENEMY-HELD VILLAGE TWO MILES AHEAD. IN OPEN ORDER, THE TROOPS ADVANCED SLOWLY, CAUTIOUSLY, THROUGH THE JUNGLE TO THE EDGE OF THE VILLAGE...

MAYBE THE JAPS HAVE GOT A COLLABORATOR THERE WITH A RADIO SET!

IF THERE IS I'D LIKE TO GET MY HANDS ON HIM! I DON'T THINK THAT PLANE COMING OVER AND SPOTTING THE DUMP WAS A LUCKY BREAK FOR THE JAPS. SOMEONE HAD TIPPED THEM OFF!

THE JINX IS WORKING, I KNOW IT IS! FIRST THE RAID ON THE DUMP... AND I BET THERE'S WORSE TO COME...

THE SUN BLAZED DOWN FROM A BRASSY SKY AND STEAM ROSE FROM THE ROTTING VEGETATION. FREEMAN GLANCED AT HIS WATCH... THE SILENT SECONDS TICKED BY... THEN...

ALL RIGHT, MEN! LET'S GO AND WINKLE THEM OUT!

WINKLE IS RIGHT! AND IF YOU ASK ME, THE ONLY THING THAT'LL SHIFT 'EM IS A PIN... DRAWN OUT OF A GRENADE.

INSTANTLY, THE ENEMY DEFENCES OPENED UP. BULLETS RIPPED THROUGH THE TREES. SHELLS WHINED CLOSE, EXPLODING WITH TERRIFYING FORCE...

AYE, LAD, BUT NOT FOR LONG! THIS IS THREE PLATOON, REMEMBER? WE'LL SOON HAVE 'EM OUT OF THERE!

THE BLIGHTERS ARE WELL DUG IN, SARGE!

BUT THE JAPANESE RAKED THE JUNGLE WITH A MURDEROUS MACHINE-GUN FIRE THAT PINNED THE BRITISH TROOPS DOWN.

THIS IS HOPELESS, SARGE! WE'LL NEVER GET THROUGH UNTIL WE'VE FIXED THOSE MACHINE-GUNS!

YOU'RE RIGHT, THERE, SMILER! LET'S SEE WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT! TWO MEN MIGHT BE ABLE TO SLIP THROUGH THEIR LINES!

BULLETS GOUGED UP THE EARTH, RICOCHETED OFF THE TREES AS THE TWO MEN WORMED THEIR WAY ROUND IN A HALF CIRCLE...



INCH BY INCH THEY EDGED FORWARD. FREEMAN FELT THE SWEAT BREAK OUT ON HIS FOREHEAD. HIS EYES FELT RAW AND STRAINED AS HE SEARCHED THE CAMOUFLAGING GREEN VEGETATION FOR THE ENEMY POSTS...



FREEMAN SNATCHED THE PIN FROM A GRENADE AND FLUNG IT UNERRINGLY...



BEFORE THE
ENEMY COULD
SWING THEIR
MACHINE-GUN
ROUND, THE
GRENADE
EXPLODED IN
THE WEAPON
PIT.



IN A QUICK DASH, THE TWO MEN BEACHED THE
SILENT ENEMY POSITION AND AT ONCE THE
SERGEANT YELLED TO HIS MEN...



ALL RIGHT, LADS!
ADVANCE! WE'VE GOT
THE BLIGHTERS
COLO!

THE COCKNEY SOLDIER WAS
RIGHT. WHOOPING AND
CHEERING, THE PLATOON
SURGED FORWARD...



THE JAPANESE
FOUGHT BACK
SAVAGELY. BUT
THERE WAS NO
HOLDING THREE
PLATOON.
REMORSELESSLY,
THEY CLOSED IN
ON THE NATIVE
VILLAGE...

...THAT'S FOR
SAM... AND SKID!
AND ALL THE
REST!



COLD STEEL FLASHED IN THE BRIGHT SUNLIGHT AS THEY DROVE THE JAPANESE FROM THE BLAZING HUTS. THE FEW THAT ESCAPED THEM, FLED IN DISORDER INTO THE DARK GREEN DEPTHS OF THE JUNGLE.

THAT'S THE LOT OF 'EM. TAKE A MESSAGE BACK TO THE O.C. THAT THE VILLAGE IS CLEAR.



AS TOMKINS, THE PLATOON RUNNER, TURNED AWAY...

NICE GOING, LADS! NOW GET DUG IN...THE JAPS MAY BE BACK TONIGHT. THEY DON'T GIVE UP...



SUDDENLY, SERGEANT FREEMAN FROZE AS A FAINT, WAVERING CRY CAME TO THEIR EARS...

WHAT WAS THAT?

IT CAME FROM OVER THERE, SARGE! ONE OF OUR CHAPS MAY BE LYING WOUNDED IN THE LONG GRASS...





THE BURMAN WAS NOT BADLY HURT AND LATER, AFTER HE HAD RESTED AND BEEN QUESTIONED BY THE O.C., HE PREPARED TO LEAVE IN SEARCH OF HIS FAMILY WHO HAD FLED INTO THE JUNGLE WHEN THE JAPANESE HAD SEIZED THE VILLAGE.

THE JAPANESE THEY LEAVE ME TO DIE! THEY LAUGH AND SPIT IN MY FACE. BUT YOU SAVE MY LIFE, I NOT FORGET YOU!

THAT'S ALL RIGHT, MATE!

AS THE GRATEFUL BURMAN LIMPED OFF INTO THE JUNGLE, GREEN AND SMILER HEARD A WELCOME SHOUT FROM SERGEANT FREEMAN.

MAIL UP! ONE FOR GREEN... WHERE'S GREEN? ONE FOR YOU, TOMKINS...

TOMKINS OPENED HIS LETTER EAGERLY, AND BEGAN TO READ. BUT AT ONCE HIS FACE WENT DEATHLY WHITE, A STRANGLERD CRY BURST FROM HIS LIPS...

OH
NO...
NO!

WHAT
IS IT, TOMMO?
NOT BAD
NEWS...



TOMKINS GLANCED ACROSS AT HIS FRIEND, SMILER, AND THEN TURNED AWAY. HIS EYES MIRRORED HIS ANGUISH AND WHEN HE SPOKE, HIS VOICE TREMBLED...

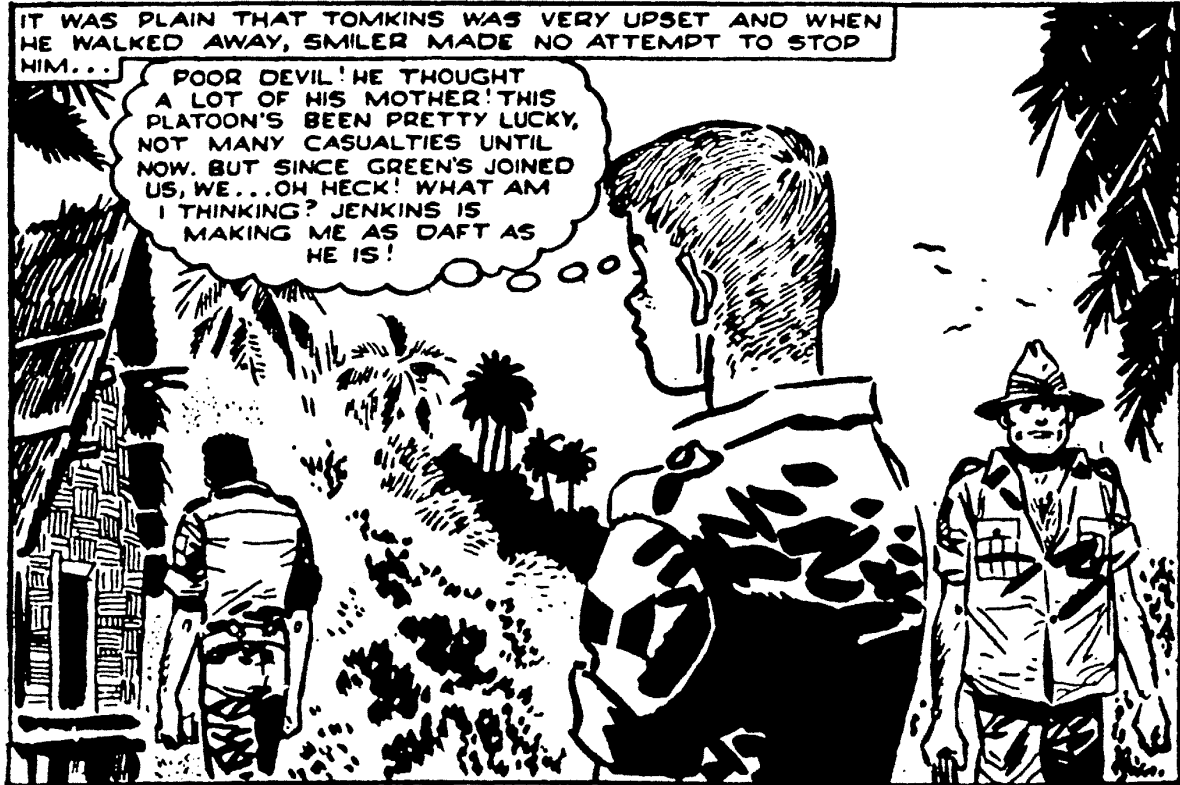
I...I'VE
BEEN WONDERING WHY
I HAVEN'T HEARD FROM MY
MOTHER LATELY...AND...
AND NOW I KNOW. SHE...
SHE'S DEAD...WAS
KILLED IN AN AIR RAID
ON LONDON.

I...I'M
SORRY,
TOMMO...



IT WAS PLAIN THAT TOMKINS WAS VERY UPSET AND WHEN HE WALKED AWAY, SMILER MADE NO ATTEMPT TO STOP HIM...

POOR DEVIL! HE THOUGHT
A LOT OF HIS MOTHER! THIS
PLATOON'S BEEN PRETTY LUCKY,
NOT MANY CASUALTIES UNTIL
NOW. BUT SINCE GREEN'S JOINED
US, WE...OH HECK! WHAT AM
I THINKING? JENKINS IS
MAKING ME AS DAFT AS
HE IS!



THE NEWS OF TOMKINS' LOSS SPREAD THROUGH THE PLATOON AND MANY OF THE MEN SEEMED TO SHARE JENKINS' DISMAL FOREBODINGS ABOUT GREEN.

LOOK AT POOR OLD GREEN, SARGE. THE BOYS ARE ACTING TO HIM LIKE A LOT OF KIDS...

DON'T THEY REALISE CASUALTIES HERE AND AT HOME ARE INEVITABLE? SOMEONE HAS TO DIE! WE JUST HOPE IT WON'T BE OURSELVES... I'LL HAVE A TALK WITH THEM LATER ON...



WISH YOU WOULD, SARGE! BY THE WAY, I HEAR A D.R.'S JUST LEFT H.Q. WHAT'S IN THE WIND?

YOUR GUESS IS AS GOOD AS MINE, SMILER. WE'LL KNOW SOON ENOUGH... I'M ON MY WAY THERE NOW. JUST GO AND KEEP GREEN COMPANY, WILL YOU?



AN HOUR LATER, SERGEANT FREEMAN RETURNED... HE WAS SMILING.

GOOD NEWS, LADS! STAND BY TO MOVE OFF! WE'RE BEING WITHDRAWN!

HURRAY! WHO SAID GREEN WAS A JINX, EH, JENKINS? I BET WE'RE GOING TO A REST CAMP AND NOT BEFORE TIME, EITHER!



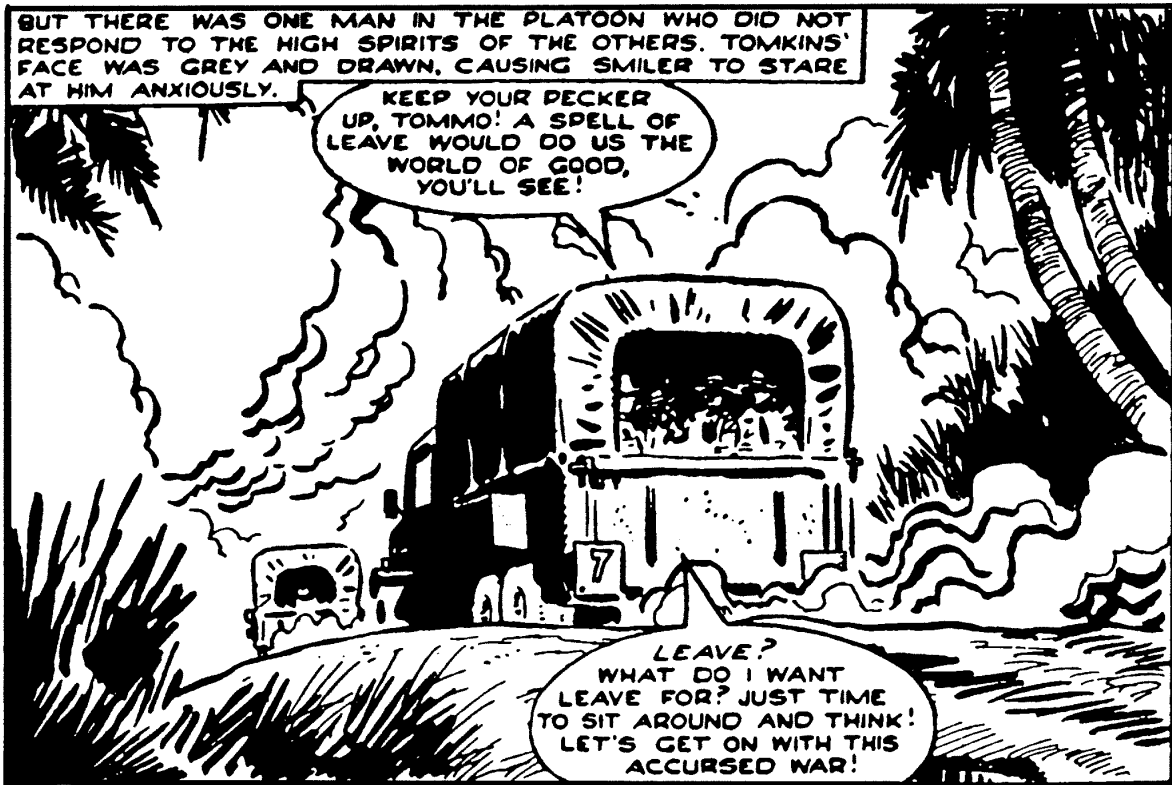
JUBILANTLY, THE INFANTRYMEN CLIMBED INTO THE TRUCKS THAT HAD BEEN BROUGHT UP FOR THEM. THEY HAD BEEN IN ACTION FOR SEVERAL WEEKS WITHOUT A BREAK.



BUT THERE WAS ONE MAN IN THE PLATOON WHO DID NOT RESPOND TO THE HIGH SPIRITS OF THE OTHERS. TOMKINS' FACE WAS GREY AND DRAWN, CAUSING SMILER TO STARE AT HIM ANXIOUSLY.

KEEP YOUR PECKER UP, TOMMO! A SPELL OF LEAVE WOULD DO US THE WORLD OF GOOD, YOU'LL SEE!

LEAVE?
WHAT DO I WANT
LEAVE FOR? JUST TIME
TO SIT AROUND AND THINK!
LET'S GET ON WITH THIS
ACCURSED WAR!



THE WORDS SPAT SAVAGELY FROM HIS LIPS AND SMILER TRIED TO FIND WORDS TO COMFORT HIM...

LOOK OUT!
JAPS!

STEADY,
TOMMO! I KNOW
HOW YOU FEEL,
MATE, BUT...

A SAVAGE BURST OF FIRE RAKED THE TRUCKS AND THEY SKIDDED OFF THE ROAD AND JOLTED TO A HALT. EVERY MAN WHO HAD NOT BEEN CUT DOWN IN THAT FIRST VOLLEY SNATCHED UP HIS WEAPON AND SERGEANT FREEMAN YELLED AN ORDER...

AMBUSH!
MAKE FOR THE
TREES!

A PITIFUL FEW REACHED THE COVER OF THE JUNGLE. SOME OF THEM LOOKED BACK AND SAW ONE OF THEIR NUMBER STANDING FEARLESSLY OUT IN THE OPEN, HIS RIFLE BLAZING AT THE ENEMY IT WAS TOMKINS.



ONE AFTER ANOTHER, ENEMY SOLDIERS FELL TO HIS GUN AND HE REMAINED UNSCATHED, BUT SERGEANT FREEMAN KNEW IT COULD NOT LAST.

THE CRAZY IDIOT! WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH HIM? HE'LL NEVER...



SMILER CRIED OUT IN DISMAY...

TOMMO... THE DEVILS HAVE GOT HIM!

IT'S WHAT HE WANTED IF YOU ASK ME, SMILER! BUT THIS IS NO TIME FOR SENTIMENT... THEY'RE SURROUNDING US! IF WE DON'T FIGHT OUR WAY OUT WE'VE HAD IT!



Chapter 3. VILLAGE OF TREACHERY

STEP BY STEP, THE REMNANTS OF THREE PLATOON FELL BACK INTO THE JUNGLE AND WHEN AT LAST, THE ENEMY WERE LEFT FAR BEHIND, THERE WERE ONLY FOUR OF THEM LEFT... SERGEANT FREEMAN, SMILER, GREEN AND JENKINS.

I THINK WE'VE MADE IT, SARGE. BUT IT WAS A CLOSE THING...

WE'RE NOT OUT OF TROUBLE YET. WE'VE GOT TO KEEP MOVING... THAT WAY WE LIVE TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY. COME ON, WE MUST TRY AND MAKE CONTACT WITH THE REST OF THE BATTALION...



FOR HOURS THEY FORCED THEIR WAY THROUGH THE THICK UNDERGROWTH, NEVER DARING TO RELAX THEIR VIGILANCE FOR A MOMENT. THE HEAT WAS ALMOST UNBEARABLE.

PHEW! ISN'T IT TIME WE HAD A BREAK, SARGE? I'M PRACTICALLY ON MY KNEES!

AREN'T WE ALL, MAN! AND IT'S SURE I AM THAT IF GREEN HADN'T BEEN WITH US WE WOULDN'T BE HERE NOW! IT'S A JONAH HE IS AND NO MISTAKE!

SHUT UP, JENKINS! ALL RIGHT! FIVE MINUTES' BREAK, AND TAKE IT EASY WITH THE WATER!



GREEN SAID NOTHING. THE HEAT HAD SAPPED HIS ENERGY AND HE FELT TOO EXHAUSTED TO ARGUE. HE LAY BACK, LETTING A MOUTHFUL OF THE WARM WATER TRICKLE SLOWLY DOWN HIS PARCHED THROAT. . .

SMASHING THAT DRINK WAS... JUST LIKE THE WINE MY MOTHER USED TO MAKE.

IT'S ALL YOU'LL GET FOR A WHILE, JENKINS, ACCORDING TO MY MAP WE'RE STILL SOME DISTANCE FROM A STREAM!

DREAMING OF THE LITTLE FARM NESTLING AT THE FOOT OF THE TALL MAJESTIC MOUNTAINS, JENKINS HAD PUT DOWN HIS WATER BOTTLE BEHIND HIM... AND THEN CAME DISASTER. GREEN STRETCHED HIS LEGS... AND THE BOTTLE FELL ON ITS SIDE...

MY WATER!
MY WATER! LOOK OUT!

JENKINS SPRANG TO HIS FEET, EXHAUSTION FORGOTTEN. HIS FACE WAS MURDEROUS...

GOSH!
I'M
SORRY!

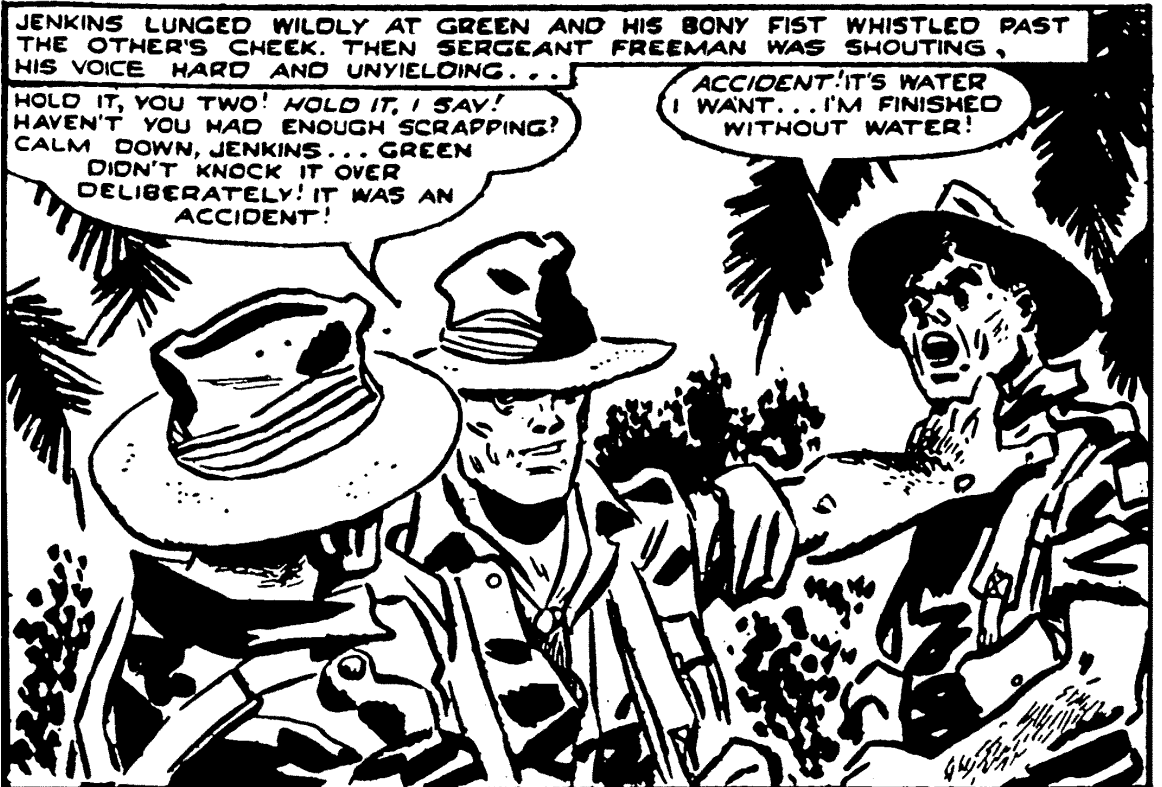
SORRY YOU
ARE! SORRY! YOU
CLUMSY FOOL! WHAT AM
I GOING TO DO
WITHOUT WATER! WHY
YOU...YOU...



JENKINS LUNGED WILDLY AT GREEN AND HIS BONY FIST WHISTLED PAST THE OTHER'S CHEEK. THEN SERGEANT FREEMAN WAS SHOUTING, HIS VOICE HARD AND UNYIELDING...

HOLD IT, YOU TWO! HOLD IT, I SAY!
HAVEN'T YOU HAD ENOUGH SCRAPPING?
CALM DOWN, JENKINS... GREEN
DIDN'T KNOCK IT OVER
DELIBERATELY! IT WAS AN
ACCIDENT!

ACCIDENT! IT'S WATER
I WANT... I'M FINISHED
WITHOUT WATER!



AT LAST, JENKINS BEGAN TO QUIETEN AND THE SERGEANT HASTENED TO HEAL THE BREACH.

YOU CAN SHARE MINE, JENKINS, SO STOP NATTERING! WE'LL GET ON THE MOVE AND FIND THIS STREAM, THEN WE CAN ALL REFILL OUR WATER BOTTLES! LET'S GO!

THOUGHTS OF FRESH WATER MADE THEM FORCE THEIR WEARY LEGS TO A QUICKER PACE BUT WHEN THEY FINALLY REACHED THE STREAM... A BITTER SHOCK AWAITED THEM.

BY HEAVENS! IT'S DRIED UP!

WHAT DO WE DO NOW? MY TONGUE'S JUST LIKE A BIT OF CHEWED LEATHER!

JENKINS GLARED AT GREEN WHO BIT HIS LIPS AND DROPPED HIS EYES. BUT NO WORDS WERE SPOKEN. SERGEANT FREEMAN TOOK A COMPASS BEARING AND ONCE MORE THEY SET OFF. SLOW TORTUROUS HOURS PASSED AND WITH EVERY STEP THEY FELT WEAKER. THE LAST OF THEIR MEAGRE RATION OF WATER WAS DRUNK...

... AND THAT'S THE LOT, BLOKES! BUT CHINS UP! WE SHOULDN'T BE FAR FROM THE NEXT STREAM, SO KEEP YOUR FINGERS CROSSED! I'VE GOT A FEELING THAT THIS TIME WE SHALL BE LUCKY!

BUT THE SERGEANT WAS LYING. THE NEXT STREAM WAS STILL MANY MILES AWAY. IT WAS JENKINS WHO BEGAN TO CRACK FIRST...

THAT CURSED GREEN... HE'S DONE FOR US ALL... HE'S A JINX, I TELL YOU... A JINX! I'M FINISHED, MAN! I CAN'T GO ON!

STEADY, JENKINS, STEADY!

BUT JENKINS BEGAN TO SHOUT DELIRIOUSLY, HIS EYES WILD AND GLARING. HE SEEMED ABOUT TO HURL HIMSELF AT GREEN AND SERGEANT FREEMAN WAS FORCED TO GRAPPLE WITH HIM.

HOLD IT, JENKINS... YOU'VE GOT TO GET A GRIP ON YOURSELF! WE DON'T WANT THE JAPS TO HEAR US, DO WE?

THE WELSHMAN CALMED DOWN AND SMILER SQUEEZED HIS ARM REASSURINGLY.

YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT, CHUM! YOU MARK MY WORDS! THE STREAM CAN'T BE VERY FAR OFF NOW AND...

WHAT WAS THAT?

GREEN'S SUDDEN, LOW WARNING SWUNG THEM ROUND, THEIR NAGGING THIRST FORGOTTEN. THEIR RIFLES LIFTED MENACINGLY AS A RUSTLE IN THE UNDERGROWTH HERALDED SOMEONE'S APPROACH...

LISTEN, MATE, IF YOU GO CREEPING ABOUT ON CARPET SLIPPERS YOU WON'T BE AROUND LONG ENOUGH TO HELP ANYONE! WHO ARE YOU?

ME FRIEND... DON'T SHOOT! I GOOD MAN AND HELP YOU!



THE BURMAN SPOKE QUICKLY...NERVOUSLY...

BRITISH TOMMIES CALL ME JOE GOODMAN...I HELP PLENTY AGAINST EVIL JAP MAN. COME! YOU HIDE IN MY VILLAGE WHILE I GET HELP.

CAREFUL, SARGE, IT MAY BE A TRICK!



THE BURMAN FUMBLER EAGERLY IN HIS SHIRT AND PRODUCED A DIRTY, CRUMPLED PIECE OF PAPER...

I CAN PROVE
I GOOD MAN. I HAVE LETTER.
BRITISH OFFICER VERY PLEASED
WITH ME... OFFICER HE SAY
ME JUST THE JOB. HERE
YOU SEE.



SERGEANT FREEMAN READ FROM THE PAPER THOUGHTFULLY...

...HAS PROVED
HELPFUL AND WILLING AND
IS COMPLETELY TRUSTWORTHY
HM! IT LOOKS GENUINE ENOUGH!
SIGNED BY MAJOR HAMILTON
AT BRIGADE H.Q., SO WE
CAN'T BE FAR AWAY FROM
OUR OWN COMPANY.

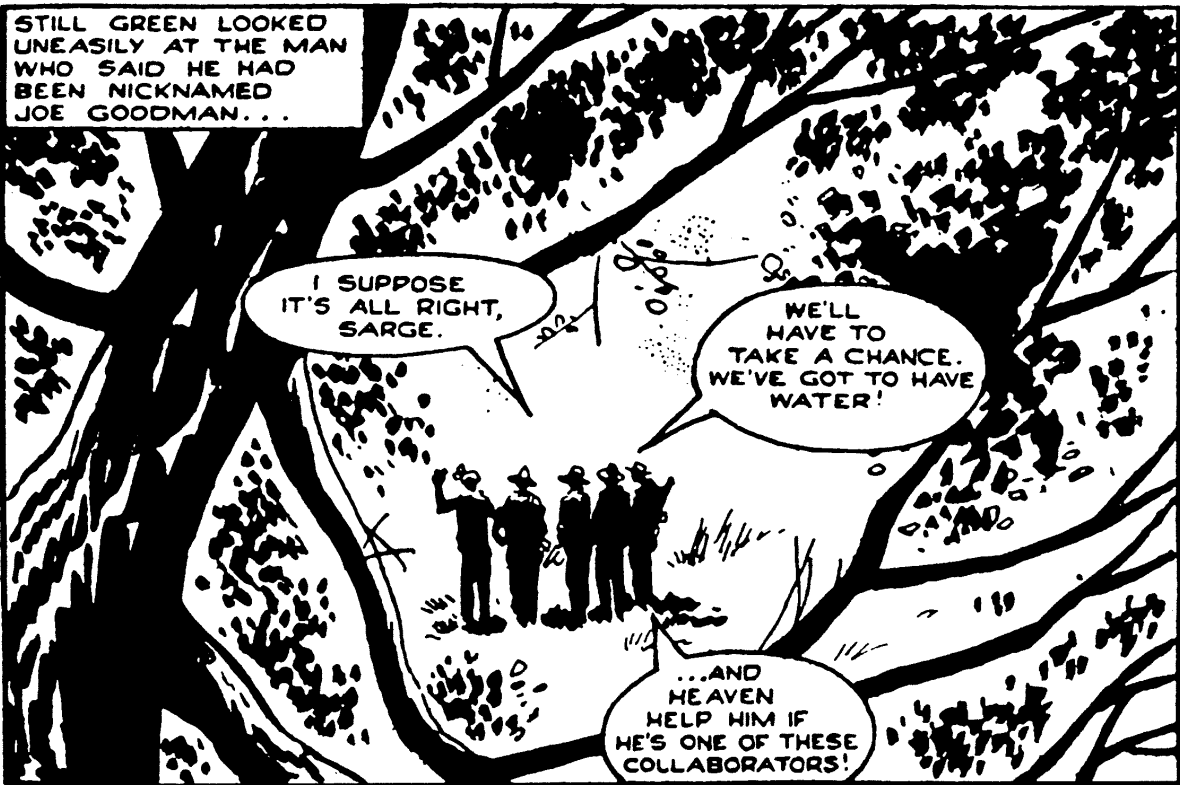


STILL GREEN LOOKED
UNEASILY AT THE MAN
WHO SAID HE HAD
BEEN NICKNAMED
JOE GOODMAN...

I SUPPOSE
IT'S ALL RIGHT,
SARGE.

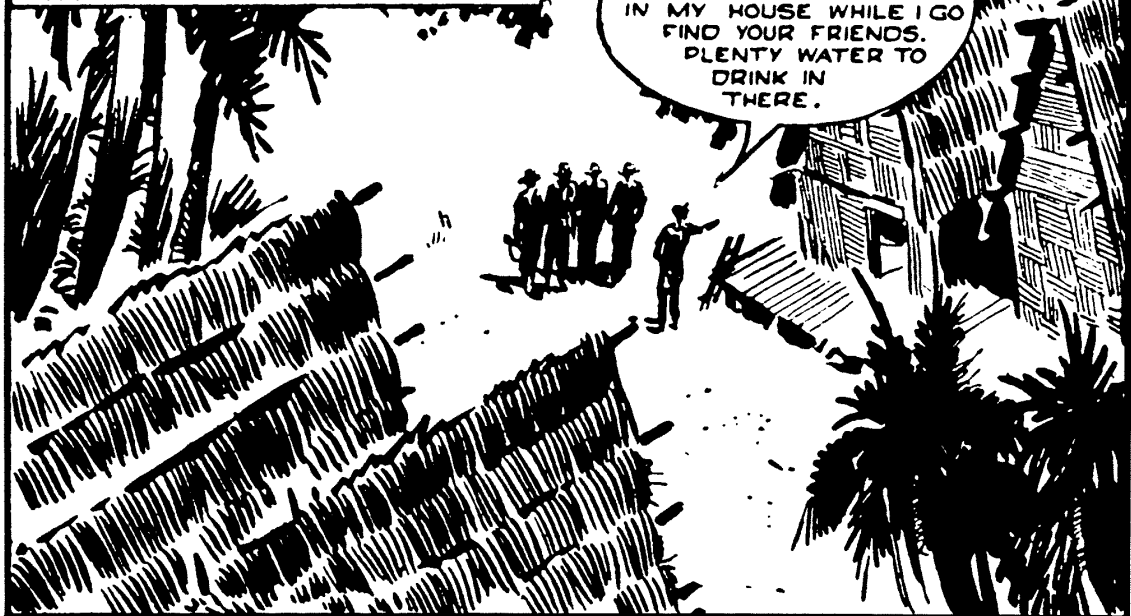
WE'LL
HAVE TO
TAKE A CHANCE.
WE'VE GOT TO HAVE
WATER!

...AND
HEAVEN
HELP HIM IF
HE'S ONE OF THESE
COLLABORATORS!



THE FOUR SOLDIERS FOLLOWED THE BEAMING BURMAN, TO A NATIVE VILLAGE. IT SEEMED DESERTED BUT SO MANY NATIVES HAD FLED INTO THE JUNGLE BEFORE THE SAVAGERY OF THE JAPANESE, THAT THEY THOUGHT NOTHING OF IT.

YOU
SAFE HERE. THIS
MY VILLAGE. YOU REST
IN MY HOUSE WHILE I GO
FIND YOUR FRIENDS.
PLENTY WATER TO
DRINK IN
THERE.



IT WAS HOT AND CLOSE IN THE HUT BUT AFTER THEY HAD QUENCHED THEIR THIRSTS, THEY WERE GLAD TO FLING THEMSELVES DOWN AND RELAX. WHEN AN HOUR PASSED AND THE BURMAN HAD STILL NOT RETURNED, HOWEVER, THEY BECAME RESTLESS.

I DON'T
LIKE THIS! WHAT THE
BLAZES IS KEEPING
HIM?

YOU
DIDN'T
EXPECT
ANYTHING
TO GO RIGHT
DID YOU,
SARGE...NOT
WITH GREEN
ROUND OUR
NECKS! IT'S
TROUBLE WE'RE
GETTING...
I TELL YOU...
I CAN FEEL
IT IN MY
BONES!



FREEMAN'S LIPS TIGHTENED AND HE
BEGAN TO REPRIMAND JENKINS ANGRILY
WHEN...

SHUT UP
AND KEEP YOUR
EYES AND EARS
OPEN. I - BY
HEAVENS!

STAND
STILL - ALL OF
YOU!

THE BRITISH TURNED IN HORROR...
AND RAGE.

THAT
TREACHEROUS
BURMAN! WHY...I'D
LIKE TO...

DIDN'T
I TELL YOU
THAT GREEN WILL
BE THE DEATH
OF US!

SILENCE...
AND DON'T MAKE A
MOVE...OR YOU DIE!

MORE JAPANESE PUSHED THEIR WAY INTO THE HUT AND PRODDED THE BRITISH BRUTALLY INTO THE OPEN WHERE AN OPEN TRUCK HAD JUST DRAWN-UP.



SMILER GLARED AT THE GRINNING BURMAN WHO STOOD NEARBY AND WAS SLOW TO CLAMBER ABOARD...



A SHORT DISTANCE FROM THE VILLAGE, THE TRUCK BUMPED ON TO A ROUGH TRACK AND SOON IT BEGAN TO PASS CONCEALED DUMPS OF AMMUNITION, WEAPONS AND FUEL.



SERGEANT FREEMAN'S LIPS PURSED IN A LOW WHISTLE AS THEY RAN CLOSE TO A RIVER, FOR MOORED TO ITS MUDDY BANKS WERE ROWS OF SUPPLY-LADEN RAFTS...



WHEN THEY REACHED THE ENEMY H.Q. THEY WERE THRUST INTO A HUT WHERE THEY WERE INTERROGATED BY ANOTHER JAPANESE OFFICER, A SNEERING DANDY OF A MAN.

YOU TELL ME STRENGTH OF YOUR BATTALION AND TROOP MOVEMENTS IN THIS AREA, BRITISH DOG!

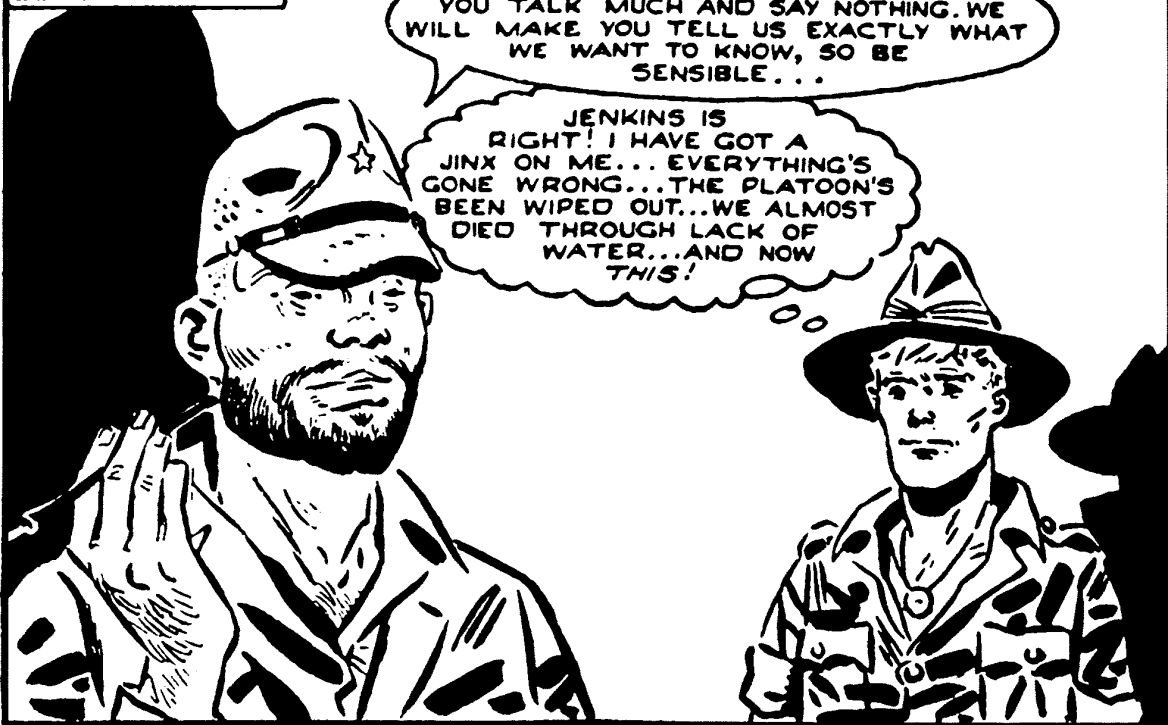


NUMBER, RANK AND NAME'S AS MUCH AS YOU GET MISTER! GO AND BOIL YOUR FACE!

THE OFFICER MERELY SMILED... BUT HIS WORDS WERE QUIET AND FULL OF DEADLY MENACE.

YOU TALK MUCH AND SAY NOTHING. WE WILL MAKE YOU TELL US EXACTLY WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW, SO BE SENSIBLE...

JENKINS IS RIGHT! I HAVE GOT A JINX ON ME... EVERYTHING'S GONE WRONG... THE PLATOON'S BEEN WIPED OUT... WE ALMOST DIED THROUGH LACK OF WATER... AND NOW THIS!



SUDDENLY THERE WAS A SCUFFLE OUTSIDE THE HUT... DARK FIGURES FILLED THE DOORWAY AND BEFORE THE JAPANESE COULD SWING ROUND, A TOMMY GUN RATTLED HARSHLY...

WHAT THE...
BY GLORY! OUR
LADS!



THE NEWCOMERS SNAPPED QUICK ORDERS AT THE ENEMY'S PRISONERS...

QUICK!
THE SOONER
WE GET OUT OF
HERE THE BETTER!
WE'VE RAISED
A HORNETS'
NEST!



A SAVAGE BURST OF GUNFIRE GREETED THEM AS THEY LEAPT FROM THE HUT...

DON'T LET THEM ESCAPE, YOU FOOLS! RAPID FIRE! SHOOT DOWN THE BRITISH SWINE!

MAKE FOR THE JUNGLE! THERE'S HUNDREDS OF JAPS DOWN BY THE RIVER...WE DON'T WANT TO RUN INTO THEM!



HEART THUDDING, SMILER POUNDED AFTER THE OTHERS AND ALMOST RAN INTO A JAPANESE SOLDIER.

YOU DIE, BRITISH SWINE!



THE RIFLE FLAMED AND A BULLET WHINED PAST SMILER'S HEAD. BUT THE ENGLISHMAN LUNGED FORWARD AND HIS FIST SLAMMED AGAINST THE JAP'S JAW.



BUT THEY WERE A LONG WAY FROM SAFETY. AS THEY SPURTED TOWARDS THE COVER OF THE UNDERGROWTH, MORE OF THE ENEMY APPEARED FROM AMONGST THE HUTS...

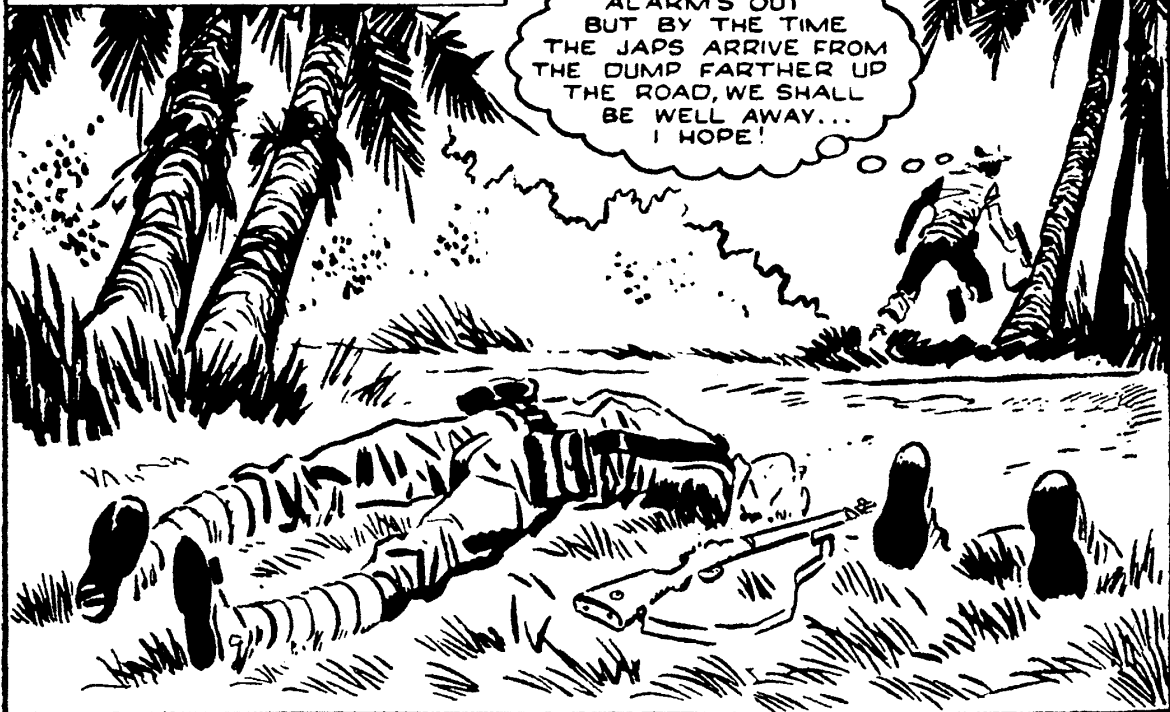


ONE OF THEIR RESCUERS DROPPED DEAD IN HIS TRACKS AND INSTANTLY SERGEANT FREEMAN HAD SNATCHED UP THE MAN'S GUN AND HAD TURNED ON THE ENEMY...



FREEMAN POURED A HAIL OF LEAD INTO THE ENEMY AND THEN FLED AFTER HIS COMPANIONS...

THE ALARM'S OUT BUT BY THE TIME THE JAPS ARRIVE FROM THE DUMP FARTHER UP THE ROAD, WE SHALL BE WELL AWAY... I HOPE!



THE RELEASED PRISONERS WERE TAKEN TO A CAVE IN THE HILLS AND SERGEANT FREEMAN'S EYES BULGED WHEN HE SAW THE NUMBER OF TROOPS THERE, FOR HE KNEW THEY WERE WELL BEHIND ENEMY LINES.

WHAT THE HECK! HAS THERE BEEN A BIG PUSH!

NO! WE'RE PART OF A PATROL PARACHUTED BEHIND THE JAP LINES. OUR JOB IS TO DISRUPT THE JAP LINES OF COMMUNICATION MY NAME'S DIXON, BY THE WAY.



SERGEANT DIXON TOOK THEM INTO A SMALL CAVE NEARBY, WHICH WAS PLATOON HEADQUARTERS.



MOMENTS LATER, FREEMAN AND HIS MEN GOT A SHOCK



SERGEANT DIXON TOLD FREEMAN AND HIS COMPANIONS THAT HE WOULD BE UNABLE TO HELP THEM RETURN TO THEIR OWN UNIT. . .

NOT FOR A WHILE, ANYWAY WE'VE HAD CASUALTIES AND ARE SHORT-HANDED. I'VE ALREADY BEEN IN TOUCH BY RADIO WITH HEADQUARTERS AND YOU'RE TO COME ON OUR STRENGTH FOR THE TIME BEING'

NOTHING WOULD SUIT US BETTER'



THAT'S RIGHT ENOUGH! I'M READY TO HAVE ANOTHER CRACK AT THE JAPS ANYTIME? REMEMBER WHAT THAT OFFICER BLOKE SAID? MOVE QUICKLY WHEN THE MASTER RACE GIVE AN ORDER! I'LL GIVE THEM MASTER RACE'

SARGE! THERE'S SOMETHING COMING THROUGH ON THE SET'



RECEPTION WAS NOT GOOD OWING TO THE HEAVY STATIC, BUT THE WAITING MEN WERE JUST ABLE TO HEAR THEIR ORDERS. . .

...AND AS PREVIOUSLY ARRANGED HORNETS WILL ARRIVE AT KENSINGTON AT SEVENTEEN HUNDRED HOURS. IMPERATIVE BEES CAUSE DIVERSION... QUEEN BEE OUT.



GRIMLY SERGEANT DIXON BEGAN TO STUDY HIS MAP.

RIGHT! WE'LL LAUNCH A SURPRISE ATTACK ON THIS VILLAGE HERE! IT'S THREE MILES EAST OF THE O.Z. THAT SHOULD KEEP THE JAPS OCCUPIED WHILE THE REST OF THE BRIGADE ARE DROPPING.



Chapter 4. TEST OF COURAGE

IT WAS A SOUND PLAN AND ONLY JENKINS SEEMED WORRIED. NO LESS COURAGEOUS THAN HIS COMPANIONS, PERHAPS IT WAS HIS SUPERSTITIOUS CELTIC ANCESTRY WHICH KEPT ALIVE HIS FEAR THAT GREEN WAS UNLUCKY.



SOON AFTER DAWN THE PLATOON SET OFF ALONG A ROCKY PATH THAT WOUND THROUGH THE HILLS. IT WAS QUICKER MOVING ACROSS THE HILLS TO THE JAP-HELD VILLAGE, BUT THEY WERE EXPOSED TO THE FULL GLARE OF THE SUN... AND THE ENEMY...



SEVERAL MEN
WERE HIT ...
INCLUDING THE
PLATOON
SIGNALLER ...



THE SIGNALLER WAS KILLED AND
THE RADIO WRECKED IN THE FALL.
THEY WERE OUT OF CONTACT WITH
HEADQUARTERS. ...

WE'RE UP
AGAINST IT,
SARGE!

AYE,
LAD! BUT
WE'RE DOING
WHAT WE CAME
TO DO - WE'RE
DRAWING THE JAPS
AWAY FROM THE
D.Z.



THE BATTLE WAS MOUNTING IN CRESCENDO -
BUT COULD THEY HOLD OUT UNTIL THE
PARACHUTISTS' DROP CAME.

I THINK I'D
BETTER RECCE THE
D.Z. FREEMAN, WILL
YOU TAKE OVER
HERE?

OKAY,
DIXON - BUT
WATCH YOUR
STEP! THE JAPS
HAVE SNIPERS
EVERYWHERE!



BUT A SHOCK AWAITED
SERGEANT DIXON WHEN HE
SCANNED THE AREA OF
THE D.Z. THROUGH HIS
BINOCULARS. . .



GREAT HEAVENS!
THE JAPS ARE AS THICK AS
FLIES, BANG ON THE DROPPING
ZONE? OUR BLOKES WILL BE
MASSACRED! WE'VE GOT TO
DO SOMETHING. . .

THE GRIM NEWS SHOOK THE PLATOON. . .

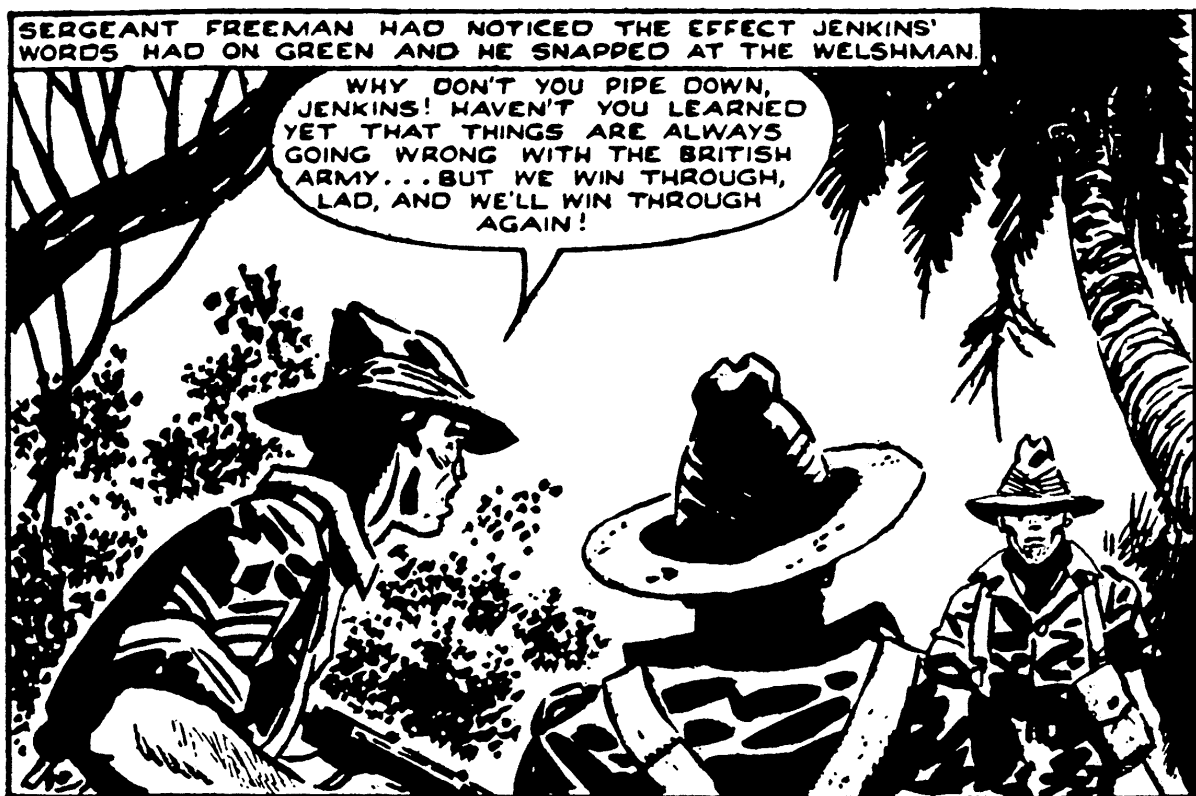
I DON'T THINK THEY CAN
HAVE GOT WIND OF THE
PARACHUTE ATTACK. . .
IT'S JUST DARN BAD
LUCK. THEY MAY HAVE
MOVED IN BECAUSE
THEY THINK OUR FORCE
IS LARGER THAN IT
ACTUALLY IS

YOU'RE
RIGHT. . . IT'S BAD
LUCK AGAIN! WE'VE
GOT A JINX ON US,
YOU MARK MY
WORDS!



SERGEANT FREEMAN HAD NOTICED THE EFFECT JENKINS' WORDS HAD ON GREEN AND HE SNAPPED AT THE WELSHMAN.

WHY DON'T YOU PIPE DOWN, JENKINS! HAVEN'T YOU LEARNED YET THAT THINGS ARE ALWAYS GOING WRONG WITH THE BRITISH ARMY... BUT WE WIN THROUGH, LAD, AND WE'LL WIN THROUGH AGAIN!



THIS IS A HECK OF A MESS! WITH THE RADIO SMASHED AT THE BOTTOM OF THE RAVINE, WE'VE NO WAY OF TIPPING OFF HEADQUARTERS! BUT WE'VE GOT TO DO SOMETHING OR THE BOYS WILL BE SLAUGHTERED WHEN THEY DROP!



HEY, DIXON - I'VE JUST REMEMBERED SOMETHING!

SERGEANT FREEMAN
BEGAN TO SPEAK
QUICKLY, HIS EYES
GLEAMING . . .

WHEN WE WERE TAKEN PRISONER BY
THOSE JAPS, WE PASSED A LARGE ARMS
DUMP AT THE ROADSIDE . . . GUNS, AMMO
AND FLAME-THROWERS! IF WE COULD
SEIZE SOME OF THOSE AND CAUSE A
DIVERSION - PERHAPS SET FIRE TO THE
RAFTS AT THE RIVER - WE'D VERY
LIKELY DRAW THE JAPS AWAY
FROM THE D.Z.

YOU'VE GOT
SOMETHING
THERE,
FREEMAN!

ALL THE MEN, EXCEPT JENKINS, GREETED THE PLAN WITH
ENTHUSIASM. THE WELSHMAN REMAINED SILENT . . . AND IT
WAS EASY FOR GREEN TO READ HIS THOUGHTS . . .

HE'S AGAINST IT.
HE'S AFRAID IT WILL ALL
GO WRONG. MAYBE
EVERYTHING WOULD TURN
OUT RIGHT IF I WASN'T
WITH THEM . . .

CONSCIOUS OF JENKINS' BROODING GLANCE, GREEN WAS FAST LOSING HIS SENSE OF PROPORTION, ALLOWING DOUBTS TO FILL HIS OWN MIND. HE TRIED TO SHAKE OFF HIS UNEASINESS AS SERGEANT FREEMAN AND HIS PARTY WITHDREW FROM THE MAIN BATTLE AND MADE FOR THE ENEMY DUMP.



THERE IT IS, LADS! NOT A SOUND! WE DON'T WANT TO RAISE THE ALARM BEFORE WE GET THOSE FLAME-THROWERS. I'LL DEAL WITH ONE OF THE BLIGHTERS!

...AND ME THE OTHER, SARGE! LET'S GO!

SILENTLY FREEMAN AND SMILER STEALTHILY WORMED THEIR WAY CLOSE TO THE SENTRIES. . . AND THEN THEY POUNCED.

MOMENTS LATER, THE JAPANESE GUARDS LAY STILL AND SILENT ON THE GROUND. THE PLATOON RACED FORWARD AND SOME OF THEM STRAPPED ON THE FLAME-THROWERS LYING AMONGST THE MATERIALS ON ON THE DUMP.

MAKE IT SNAPPY, LAOS! IT ONLY WANTS ANOTHER THREE HOURS AND THE PARACHUTISTS WILL BE DROPPING! WE'VE GOT TO GET THE JAPS CLEAR OF THAT D.Z. BEFORE THEN!



AT LAST THEY BROKE THROUGH THE JUNGLE ON TO THE RIVER BANK. BEFORE THEM LAY THE JAPANESE RAFTS, STACKED WITH SUPPLIES.



THOSE WITH FLAME-THROWERS, SPREAD ALONG THE BANK AND SET LIGHT TO AS MANY RAFTS AS YOU CAN!

BUT EVEN AS THE MEN MOVED TO OBEY, THERE CAME A SHRILL CRY FROM AMONG THE TREES AND A RATTLE OF SMALL ARMS FIRE



INSTANTLY, SERGEANT FREEMAN RAPPELLED OUT ORDERS...



A MOMENT LATER,
THE SULEN ROAR OF
THE FLAME-THROWERS
MINGLED WITH THE
HARSH CLATTER OF
THE BREN AS IT SWEEP
THE JUNGLE
CONCEALING THE
ENEMY.



RAFT AFTER RAFT BURST INTO FLAMES
AND THE INTENSE HEAT DROVE THE
SOLDIERS BACK FROM THE WATER'S
EDGE AND LICKED GREEDILY AT THE
LEAVES OF THE JUNGLE . . .



THE JAPANESE SURGED FORWARD...
DRIVEN ON IN FRENZY BY THEIR
OFFICERS AS THEIR PRECIOUS
SUPPLIES WENT UP IN GREASY, BLACK
SMOKE.

SEND URGENT SIGNAL
REINFORCEMENTS REQUIRED
AT ONCE! HEAVY CASUALTIES
SUFFERED. HURRY, RESERVE
TROOPS ARE THREE MILES
AWAY... WE MUST HAVE
THEM?



AGAIN AND AGAIN THE HANDFUL OF BRITISH TROOPS
HURLED BACK THE ENEMY, FOR EVERY CASUALTY
INFLECTED, EVERY MINUTE THE ENEMY WERE HELD
IN BATTLE, WOULD INCREASE THE SUCCESS OF
THE DIVERSION.

KEEP AT IT,
LADS, WE'RE DOING
FINE!

I BET
THIS HAS DONE
THE TRICK! THERE'S
JAPS EVERYWHERE.



THE BRITISH PATROL WAS STRUNG OUT ALONG THE RIVER BANK, EACH MAN FIGHTING FOR HIS LIFE. GREEN, ON THE FLANK, EDGED FARTHER ALONG OUT OF THE SMOKE AND SUDDENLY HE SIGHTED A GROUP OF JAPS



GREEN GUESSED THAT SERGEANT FREEMAN'S PLAN TO DRAW THE ENEMY TROOPS AWAY FROM THE D.Z. HAD SUCCEEDED. WITHOUT A TRACE OF FEAR, HE ROSE TO HIS FEET - AND THE TOMMY GUN IN HIS HANDS CHATTERED INTO VIOLENT LIFE.



JAP AFTER JAP WAS CUT DOWN BY THAT HAIL OF LEAD. BUT HERE AND THERE, AN ENEMY SURVIVED - TO FIGHT BACK. BULLETS RIPPED PAST HIM - A RICOCHET WHINED OFF A TREE BOUGH - AND PAIN STABBED GREEN'S HEAD



THE REST OF THE PLATOON WERE IN DIRE STRAITS AS THEY STROVE TO HOLD OFF THEIR FANATICAL ATTACKERS. BUT SERGEANT FREEMAN KNEW THEY HAD SUCCEEDED IN THEIR INTENTION. . .

IT'S NEARLY TIME FOR THE PARATROOP DROP AND IF THE LUCK IS WITH US, THE D.Z. SHOULD BE CLEAR OF THE JAPS. THEY MUST ALL BE HERE! BUT WE CAN'T HOLD 'EM OFF MUCH LONGER!



THE SERGEANT TURNED AS THERE WAS A RUSTLE AT HIS SIDE. IT WAS SMILER - STILL GRINNING - STILL CHEERFUL...

THEY'RE MASSING TO ATTACK AGAIN, SMILER, AND THEY'RE CREEPING UP BEHIND US... I THINK THIS IS GOING TO BE IT!

LET'S GIVE THE LITTLE HEATHENS THE OLD ONE-TWO, SARGE? FOR GREENIE, AND BUSTER AND TOMMO!



THEN THE ATTACK CAME. WHAT REMAINED OF THE PLATOON SLAMMED SHOT AFTER SHOT INTO THE HORDES OF YELLOW MEN AND THEN THEY WERE ON THEIR FEET, HACKING - SLASHING - IN AN UNEQUAL BATTLE THAT COULD HAVE BUT ONE END.



A SAVAGE BLOW FINALLY SENT SERGEANT FREEMAN SPRAWLING. HE HAD FOUGHT LIKE A MAN POSSESSED AND ONLY A SHARP COMMAND SAVED HIM FROM BEING BAYONETED...



SLOWLY, SADISTICALLY, THE JAP OFFICER DREW HIS SAMURAI SWORD. FREEMAN SUDDENLY FELT HIS MOUTH GO DRY...



THE SERGEANT, SMILER, JENKINS AND ANOTHER SOLDIER HAD SURVIVED - TO FACE A DEATH MOST VILE. AT BAYONET POINT, THEY WERE FORCED TO KNEEL...



THERE WAS A MOMENT'S SILENCE. THEN SMILER SPOKE. HIS VOICE CAME LOUD AND CLEAR AND CONTEMPTUOUS.



SCREECHING WITH FURY, THE JAPANESE OFFICER SWUNG HIS SWORD ABOVE HIS HEAD - AND THEN A BLUR OF SHOTS RANG OUT FROM THE JUNGLE EDGE.

HE'S KISSING
THE DIRT, NOT SMILER!
I GOT HERE JUST
IN TIME!



IT WAS GREEN - DAZED STILL BUT FIGHTING MAD.

THE JAPANESE SOLDIERS SCATTERED, SHRIEKING IN TERROR FROM THE VENGEANCE THAT LASHED THEM IN LEADEN FURY.

LUMME!
IT'S GREEN! OLD
GREENIE!

IT'S A
MIRACLE I'M
SEEING, LOOK
YOU!



THEN CAME FURTHER BURSTS OF RAPID FIRE. FIGURES BEGAN TO SWARM FROM AMONGST THE TREES FIGURES IN CAMOUFLAGED JUMPING JACKETS AND RED BERETS.

WE'RE
SAVED! SAVED! IT'S
THE PARATROOPERS!
GOOD OLD GREENIE!
HE MUST HAVE
BROUGHT
THEM!



THE BATTLE SWEEPED PAST THE LITTLE GROUP IN THE CLEARING AS THE PARATROOPS DROVE THE JAPS BEFORE THEM IN DISORDER.

... I WAS JUST LUCKY. A RICOCHET GRAZED MY FOREHEAD AND I PASSED OUT. WHEN I CAME ROUND I SAW THAT THE PARATROOPS WERE LANDING. I BROUGHT THEM THIS WAY JUST LIKE ANYONE ELSE WOULD HAVE DONE!



THE WELSHMAN GRIPPED GREEN BY THE HAND - AND FOR ONCE, WORDS DID NOT COME EASILY TO HIM.

THEY'LL BE INSEPARABLE AFTER THIS, SMILER - YOU WATCH.

I-I WAS WRONG, MAN. I'M SORRY!

SKIP IT, TAFFY - IT'S ALL OVER NOW.



THE SERGEANT WAS RIGHT. GREEN AND JENKINS FOUGHT SIDE BY SIDE THROUGH THE REST OF THAT BURMA CAMPAIGN - AND THESE DAYS THEY ARE PARTNERS IN A LITTLE FARM AT THE FOOT OF THE WELSH MOUNTAINS.

END





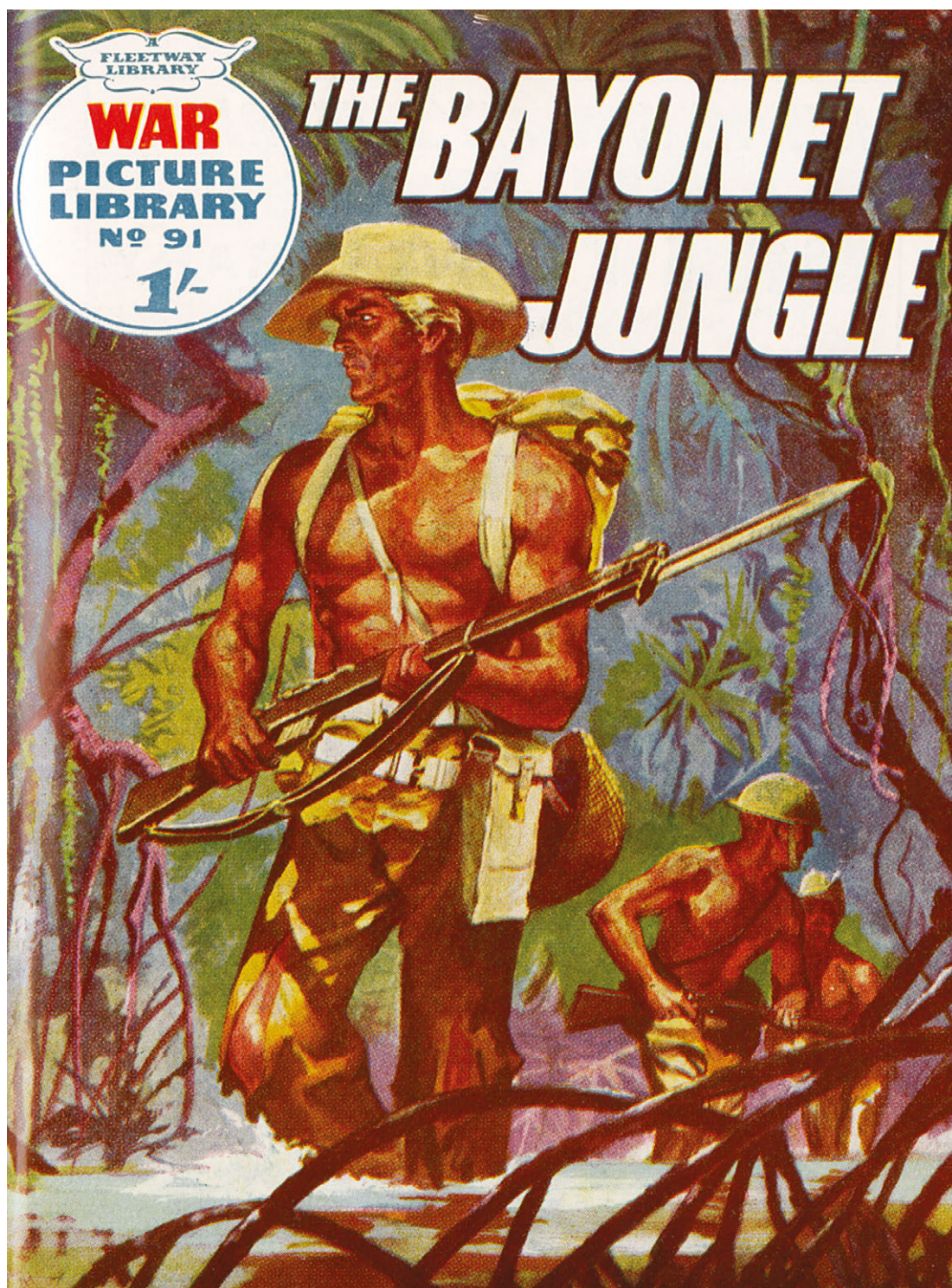


*The fate of the lonely patrol was
hidden in the nightmare jungle!*

NIGHT OF THE DEVIL



Battle Picture Library issue 62, June 1962
Art by Pino Dell'Orco



War Picture Library issue 91, March 1961
Art by Pino Dell'Orco

TOM TULLY

Tom Tully is one the most prolific writers ever to grace British comics. His diverse portfolio of work was produced over four decades. Born in Glasgow, Tully entered the industry in the sixties when he began working for Fleetway. One of his earliest strips, *Heros the Spartan*, ran in the original **Eagle** and was illustrated by the great Frank Bellamy. He also wrote *Mytek the Mighty* (**Valiant & Vulcan**) and *The Steel Claw* (**Valiant & Vulcan**) in the same decade. The seventies saw Tully work on a variety of significant stories including *Adam Eterno* (**Thunder**), *Johnny Red* (**Battle**), *Harlem Heroes* (**2000 AD**), *The Leopard from Lime Street* (**Buster**) and *Roy of the Rovers* (**Tiger**), the strip he worked on longer than any other writer.

GORDON SOWMAN

Gordon Sowman worked as a friter for Fleetway in the 1950s and 60s. He contributed to many stories for their **Picture Library** line (Battle, War, Thriller) and, under the pseudonym of Desmond Reid, wrote such titles as *Homicide Blues* and *Death in Dockland* for the **Sexton Blake Library**.

HUGO PRATT

Hugo Pratt was one of the 20th century's greatest comic artists and his influence on comic art can still be felt today. Born in Rimini on July 15th 1927, his childhood was partly spent in Ethiopia where his father, a soldier in the Italian army, was stationed. It was here that he was introduced to Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates*, whose style would be a huge influence on his own. After his father's capture by British troops and subsequent death from disease as a prisoner of war Pratt returned to Italy in 1943 and became an interpreter for the Allied army for the rest of the war. He began drawing comics in 1945, but it was when he moved to Argentina in 1949 that he started to find his artistic voice, meeting fellow artists Alberto Breccia, Francisco Solano López and Héctor Germán Oesterheld, with whom he created *Sgt. Kirk* and *Ernie Pike*.

In 1959 he moved to London where he worked for Fleetway drawing sixty-four page war stories that appeared in **Battle Picture Library**, **War Picture Library**, **War at Sea Picture Library** and **Battler Britton**. In 1967 he created the internationally popular comic book character *Corto Maltese*, for the **Sgt. Kirk** magazine, and two years later new Corto stories were created for the French magazine **Pif Gadget**. In the eighties he wrote scripts for Milo Manara, and together they created such graphic novels as *El Gaucho* and *Indian Summer*. He won countless awards for his work and was made a Knight of Arts and Letters by the French Minister of Culture before he died in 1995.



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