

The drums of war:  
the development in the representation of Japanese in  
the British post-WWII *Commando* war comics (1961-2000)



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During an intensive 7-month period, I conducted research on the development in the representation of Japanese in the British post-WWII war *Commando* comic books and wrote a thesis about this subject. It was a period in which I not only learned to set up a valid and reliable research, but also to be a better evaluate, to improve myself and also to appreciate my work. I however did not do this on my own. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people who gave advice, helped and supported me during my research. First, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Professor dr. Kees Ribbens for his advice and support. With the help of his guidance and encouraging words I was able to successfully complete this research. I also want to thank dr. Pieter van den Heede and Professor dr. Robbert-Jan Adriaansen who's lectures in the Thesis Research Workshop were also essential in the process.

I hope my work honours the dedication and support of the aforementioned people,

## Abstract

Even though British comic publisher since the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century let the drums of war beat in their stories and let them reverberate into the 21<sup>st</sup>-century by depicting not only glorious victories but also the harsh defeats, there is still a knowledge gap in the occurrence and distribution of Japanese representation in Western, especially British, post-Second World War (WWII) war related comic books. This however is remarkable as during WWII Japan wanted to expand its empire by conquering Asian colonies of, for example, the Netherlands, France and Great Britain, of which especially soldiers of the latter came in close contact with Japanese a lot. These British-Japanese encounters, especially in the 1960's, inspired British publishers of comics to print stories about these events as they were quick to identify the appeal that WWII war comics had on British post-WWII baby-boomers who wanted to know who their fathers, uncles, grandfathers and other Allied soldiers fought and what they had been through during WWII. Currently the American comics, that were printed during WWII and have presumably had an influence on other Western portrayals of Japanese during WWII, are the most investigated comics on the representation of Japanese during WWII. As a result, the dominant perception is Western post-WWII war comics portray Japanese in the same fashion as the American WWII-comics in which Japanese are portrayed as 'inherently evil' in the *Yellow Peril* trope and as the backward and strange looking other in the *Orientalist* trope. However, there are dissenting voices who say that these descriptions are "too American" and vouch for more in depth researches of Western post-WWII war comics that portray Japanese during the events of WWII. First of all, with my research I aim to fill a gap in the representation of Japanese in British post-WWII war comics by examining one of the most popular British post-WWII war comics *Commando* (1961- ). With this research I try to discover how Japanese are represented but also examine the developments over time by raising the question *In what manner are Japanese soldiers and Japan's involvement in WWII represented and which developments occur in the portrayal of Japanese in the British Commando comic books between 1961 -1980 and 1981-2000?* Penultimately, before closing off the research I will also critically reflect on the (mis)use of the "too American" tropes applied to the representation of Japanese during WWII in *Commando* and will discuss whether I deem the tropes useful for future researches regarding the presentation of Japanese in British and other Western post-WWII war comics.

**Keywords:** Japan(ese), Comics, British war comics, Second World War, Orientalism, Yellow Peril

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***I certify that this report is my own work, based on my own research and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports, lecture notes, and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication.***

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## Introduction

Coming of age stories, sizzling love triangles and horror comics in which zombies try to separate flesh from the bones of the protagonists, James Chapman's book *British Comics a Cultural History* covers all. Chapman, Professor of Film studies, specialized in the history of British popular culture filled a gap in the market with his book about the history of British comic books as he charted most of the prominent trends in British comics of all genres from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century onward. Next to the stories of growing pains, love and horror, Chapman also devoted a section to the depiction of war in comics. In his book he writes that especially the events of the Second World War (WWII) inspired a lot of comic storylines to portray events and actors<sup>1</sup> of that time period in which primarily Nazi's received a good whooping of British, American or French soldiers. However, the description of the Allied soldiers and indigenous people of former Western colonies like Burma and Indo-China fighting Japanese during the events of WWII are largely left untouched.

Chapman provides some information about WWII and the involvement of Japan and the representation of Japanese but just scrapes the surface on the representation of Japanese in these British post-WWII war comics and thus there remains a knowledge gap in the occurrence, distribution and development of this representation in British comics. The lack of studies is remarkable as there are enough British post-WWII war comics that depict Japan's quest during WWII to expand its empire by conquering Asian colonies of for example, the Netherlands, France and Great Britain. However, a valid explanation why these comics have been left untouched remains largely unanswered to this day.

What is known is that most of the British war comic books and the military portrayal of Japanese during WWII did not emerge years after WWII, mostly in the 1960's, while the military portrayal of this narrative already was popular in Belgium and France from 1945- to the early 1950's.<sup>2</sup> It might be that British comics were less eligible for researchers regarding the representation of Japanese as they may have fallen behind in appeal as other European comic books were more eager in printing comics with Japanese in their storyline sooner after WWII. This does however not mean that British comics should be overlooked.

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<sup>1</sup> I chose to refer to Japanese as 'actors' instead of 'characters' as to avoid confusion with Japanese writing, which consists out of 'characters'.

<sup>2</sup> Pascal Lefèvre, "The Shifting Representation of Japan in Belgian Comics, in Fifteen Years after WWII (1945-1960)," *Mutual Images* 1 (2016): 123, 138.

Even though a bit later, some British post-WWII war comic books enjoy longevity and still print war stories that portray Japanese to this day. One of these comics is the *Commando* comics series, which is according to its website [commandocomics.com](http://commandocomics.com): 'Britain's longest serving war comic, printing stories of action and adventure since 1961'<sup>3</sup>. Exploring the *Commando* series it becomes evident that there are more than enough stories in which British and Allied men came in close contact with Japanese and thus *Commando* lends itself perfectly for the study of the representation and development in the representation of Japanese and should definitely not be overlooked.

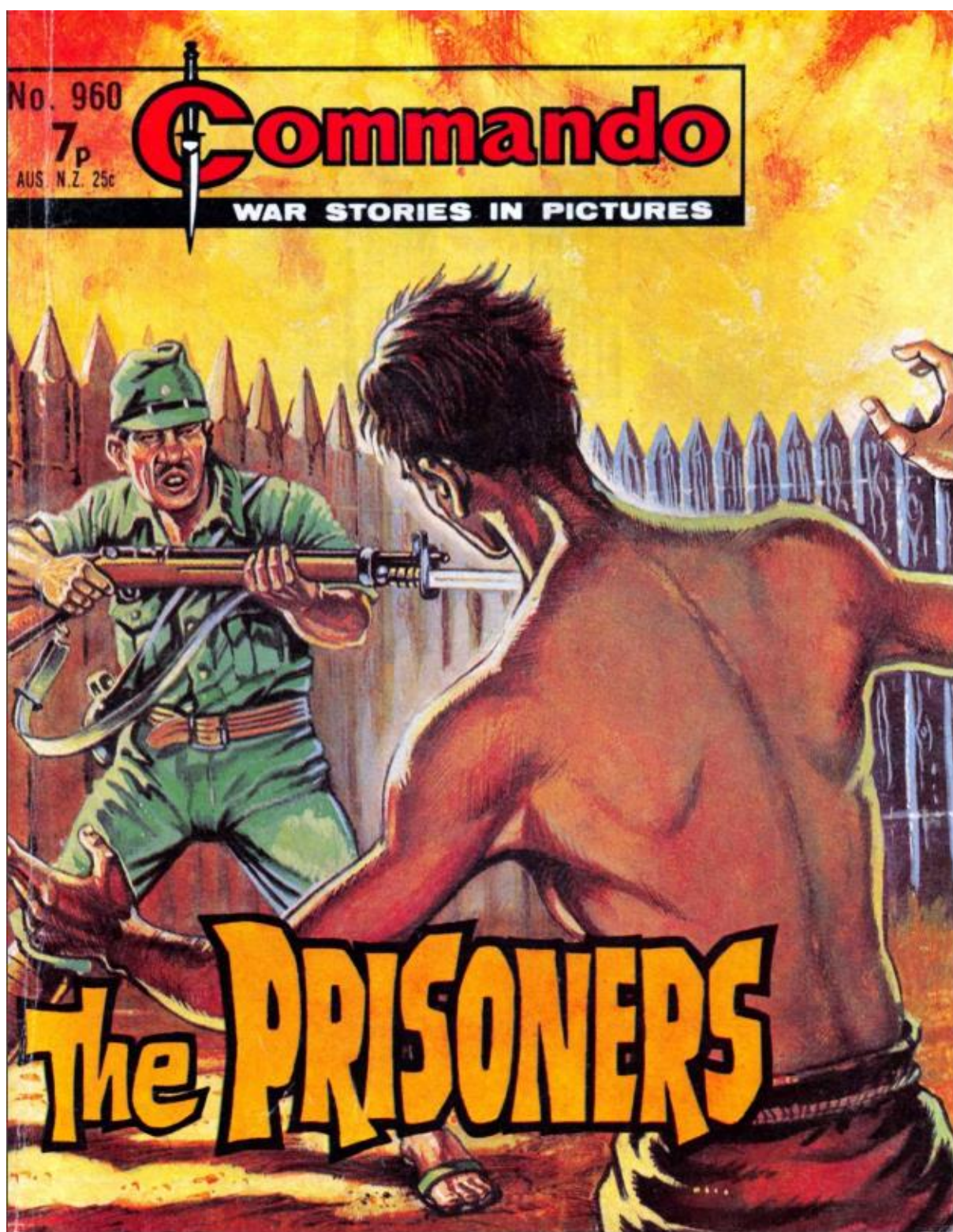
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<sup>3</sup> "About Commando," accessed April 4, 2022, <https://www.commandocomics.com/about-commando/>.

## Contents

Before the examination of the *Commando* comics, the research starts with a section in which I will elaborate on the selection of sources followed by the methodology and theoretical framework. As the tropes used for the theoretical framework are often challenged in contemporary studies regarding the research about the representation of Japanese in Western popular culture chapter 1 delves into the tropes before elaborating in which manner Japanese and Japan were portrayed the Western media in the course of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century up until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Chapter 2 focusses on the depiction of historical events in Western comic books and how comics increasingly became a more respected medium in which historical narratives were portrayed, followed by the history and the development of British (war) comic books in chapter 3. Chapter 4 starts with the examination of the *Commando* comic book covers which are examined on their titles, illustrations, subtexts and blurbs, followed by chapter 5 in which the storyline of each individual comic; text, additional texts and illustrations, are carefully examined. The empirical chapters are each divided in themes in which each separate element on the comic's cover or in the comic's storyline from each time period are individually examined before elaborating on a next element. After chapter 5 a summary is provided of all the findings from all the examined *Commando* covers and storylines.

Lastly, chapter 6, the end conclusion, starts with looking back on the (non)-developments of the representation of Japanese in *Commando* and provides them with a rationale. Lastly I will raise the question if the tropes in the theoretical framework are still workable and applicable for the research regarding the representation of Japanese in the post-WWII British (*Commando*) war comic books or should be revised for future researches before the research comes to a close.



[Fig. 0] *Commando* 960 'The Prisoners,' (1975), cover.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> 960 *The Prisoners*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1975).

## Sources and Selection

The selection process started with a corpus of over 400+ scanned *Commando* comics that I was able to access digitally. As the scanned comics originate from *Commando* comics enthusiasts that have collected a wide selection of WWII related topics the database provided me with a wide plethora of WWII related subjects. Of the 400 scans 29 titles were useful to me of which 14 comics were used to assess the *Commando* comic covers and storylines for 1961-1980 period, and 15 comics for the 1981-2000 period.<sup>5</sup> These 29 titles were available to me in its entirety; their cover illustrations with the titles, subtexts and the blurbs -the comics summary- and the 65-paged *Commando* comics with all the texts and illustrations where all used for examination. A remaining 21 titles, which can be divided into 19 titles for the 1961-1980 period and 2 for the 1981-2000 period, are comics of which primarily the titles on the covers and some cover illustrations were used in section 3.1 and 3.2 to provide a more elaborate image of how Japanese were referred to and presented on the covers of those time periods. For this I used the websites [web.archive.org](http://web.archive.org)<sup>6</sup> and [commandocomics.fandom.com](http://commandocomics.fandom.com).<sup>7</sup>

Before elaborating on the methodology there are still two things that should be clarified. Firstly, even though the source availability was limited I do not regard this as a weakness as a limited database was more beneficial for an in-depth research of all the elements of the *Commando* comics which has not been done before. Secondly, the most comics that were available to me in its entirety were comics in which Japanese were foot-soldiers. This does however not imply that there is a lack of the representation of Japanese pilots, marines and even civilians in *Commando*. However, as a result, the narrative and representation of the Japanese foot-soldiers is pushed to the fore in this research.

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<sup>5</sup> Of the 33 comics used in the period 1961-1980 were 14 complete and of the 17 comic titles from the 1981-2000 were comics 15 complete. 'Complete' means that the *Commando* comic was fully accessible to me; the cover with the title, the illustration and the blurb and the complete comic storyline could all be investigated while other titles provided parts of the comic, whether it only be the title, cover illustrations or just its storyline.

<sup>6</sup> "Commando Comics," February 13, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070213041429/http://users.tinyonline.co.uk/vic2/www26255/home.htm.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> "Commando Comics Wiki," accessed June 21, 2022, [https://commandocomics.fandom.com/wiki/Commando\\_Comics\\_Wiki](https://commandocomics.fandom.com/wiki/Commando_Comics_Wiki).

## Methodology and theoretical framework

The question that is central to this research is *In what manner are Japanese soldiers and Japan's involvement in WWII represented and which developments occur in the portrayal of Japanese in the British Commando comic books between 1961 -1980 and 1981-2000?* The reason for splitting 40 years of material in two time periods is because Chapman states that wartime slang and racial epithet towards Japanese in British comics remained popular till around 1980.<sup>8</sup> By splitting the 40 years into two sections the aim of the research; to track trends and developments in the representation of Japan and the Japanese during the events of WWII *Commando*, will be achieved.

I started the examination of the comics by applying the *Grounded Theory-approach* which has also been used by Belgian comic book theorist and historian Pascal Lefèvre in his research *The shifting representation of Japan in Belgian comics in fifteen years after WWII (1945-1960)*.<sup>9</sup> Even though all studies presumably start with the *Grounded Theory-approach* in which the researcher aims to not start with a preconceived theory in mind and rather seeks to arrive at conclusions and interpretations close to the object of study,<sup>10</sup> there must be a theoretical framework applied as to shape the findings into a research. The theoretical framework chosen includes the *Orientalist* and *Yellow Peril* trope. These tropes, regarded by literature as the dominant trope to describe the representation of Japanese in (post-)WWII war comics, will be useful as these tropes provide room for debate in the end conclusion as they can be affirmed, challenged or contested.

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<sup>8</sup> James Chapman, *British Comics: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 89.

<sup>9</sup> Lefèvre, "The Shifting Representation of Japan," 123–34.

<sup>10</sup> Schmidt-Lauber, Brigitta. "Seeing, Hearing, Feeling, Writing. Approaches and Methods from the Perspective of Ethnological Analysis of the Present," In *A Companion to Folklore*, ed. by Regina F. Bendix, Galit Hasan-Rokem, 563 (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118379936.ch29>.



## **Part 1: Historiography**



## Chapter 1: The developments of the representation of Japan and Japanese in the West through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century

### 1.1 Japan as the “other”

According to Jürgen Angelow Japan has always been fascinating for foreign observers.<sup>11</sup> The country was for 200 years closed off from the world and when they had to forcefully open their ports in 1854 for the Americans. In the years after the American arrival in Japan, the country was also forced to sign treaties with European countries guaranteeing their access to Japanese ports for re-provisioning and trade.<sup>12</sup> The American and European expeditions to Japan however, where the Western “self” came in close contact with the Japanese “other” - which habits and customs were so alien to the West - did not come without judgement. Especially in the first years upon opening its ports, Japan mostly seemed to be the perceived as the most attenuated of civilized cultures because they seemed reluctant to adapt to Western cultural and industrial modernization and rather held on to age-old traditions. Japan was considered to be completely beyond the ken of Western commonsense and understandings of reality.<sup>13</sup>

When assessing the aforementioned Western criticism and superiority complex over Japanese as “other” it is important to include Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). Palestinian-American cultural critic and theorist Edward Said (1935-2003) argues in this book that the self-acclaimed strong, rational, innovative Western “self” reflected on the (post-)colonial Oriental “other” and by default depicted them collectively as irrational, childish, sensual and backwards in comparison with their own culture. With *Orientalism* it became evident that how effectively the West, through language and depictions of the Middle-Eastern “other” created a hierarchical interpretation and successfully defined the “other” in an overall negative daylight. Even though *Orientalism* is mainly viewed as the way of knowing and understanding how power relations between the West and their (former) colonies in the Middle-Eastern Orient were constructed, Steven L. Rosen, Professor of American and British Studies, provides a different description of *Orientalism* that also includes East Asian

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<sup>11</sup> Jürgen Angelow, "War and Stereotypes, The Image of Japan's Military Abroad," *War (Hi) Stories* 7 (2020), <https://brill.com/view/title/56635>.

<sup>12</sup> David Wells, "Early Russian Travel Writing on Japan," *New Zealand Slavonic Journal* 38 (2004): 28.

<sup>13</sup> Steven L. Rosen, "Japan as Other: Orientalism and Cultural Conflict," *Intercultural Communication* 4 (2000), <http://www.immi.se/intercultural/nr4/rosen.htm>.

countries. Rosen argues in *Japan as Other: Orientalism and Cultural Conflict* (2000) that "Orientalism is a way of life, and not just an outdated way of knowing from the colonial past; it is an integral part of modern consciousness."<sup>14</sup> According to Rosen, thinking that one's own (group's) ways are superior to others is a culturally mediated system of understanding others and defining one's self in the world. *Orientalism* is thus not only applicable to the Middle-East but can also be applied to explain the East Asian stereotypical images that are imposed by the West.<sup>15</sup> Japan for example was – and sometimes still is – often depicted as 'sensual', '(too) different' and 'inferior' to the West.<sup>16</sup>

However, scholars Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan, Thoralf Klein, Yevhennia Prasol and Robert MacDougall argue that the Japanese representation in the West is not only framed from an *Orientalist* perspective, but also shaped around the *Yellow Peril* discourse. However, according to Thoralf Klein this *Yellow Peril*, in which people from East-Asian descent – in this particular case Japanese – are constantly perceived as a threat to the West,<sup>17</sup> was at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century up until the 1930's not that evident in all of the West as the *Yellow Peril* discourse was, according to Klein, a term coined in America in the 1870's and continued to be mainly applied to the American description of Japan and Japanese throughout the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> However, Klein does mention that in the decades after WWI, when Japan got more and more industrially developed, the country became gradually more perceived as a threat for all what "the Free (Western) World holds dear."<sup>19</sup>

## **1.2 The evolution of the representation of Japan in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century West: from flowery beauty to that of might**

The representation of Japan in the West thus appears to be two folded: the *Orientalist* trope, in which Japan is perceived as backward and strange, or/and in the *Yellow Peril* trope in which the country is perceived as dangerous and a threat to the Western civilization.

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<sup>14</sup> Rosen, "Japan as Other."

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan, "Adopting Stereotypes: The Yellow Peril, the Model Minority and Crazy Rich Asians," *Transcommunication* 2 (2021): 111.

<sup>18</sup> Thoralf Klein, "The 'Yellow Peril,'" *European History Online*, 2015, <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/18133>.

<sup>19</sup> Robert MacDougall, "Red, Brow and Yellow Perils: Images of the American Enemy in the 1940s and 1950s," *Journal of Popular Culture* 32:4 (1999): 73.

There is a significant amount of studies that have delved into the Western-Japan relations to further elaborate on the two tropes in which Japan is represented in the West but contemporary studies voice their concern as they claim that researchers hold on too tightly to certain ideal types of the tropes and rather regard the tropes as “too Americanized.”<sup>20</sup>

Historian Yoko Chiba for instance does agree with Said’s overarching statement that the Western perspective of the East as “the inferior other” was not uncommon, considering that in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century a lot of Western countries were still focused on expanding their frontiers, but would have commented that the cultural diffusion between Europe and Japan should have been highlighted more.<sup>21</sup> According to Chiba a lot of studies fail to stress the influence and positive impression that the “*Oriental*”-Japanese culture left on the West in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as Japanese art, clothing and architecture influenced the change in the *Oriental* discourse in which Japan was previously portrayed as backward and strange to a more enthusiastic portrayal as described by Hiromitsu Inokuchi in “*Different than Us*” (2005). Thus when one applies the concept of *Orientalism* on the representation of Japanese it must be understood that the *Orientalism* can be fragmentary as it can be enthusiastic in its description or very dismissive of the “other” in the Orient.<sup>22</sup>

The “other”, in this specific case Japan, was in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century seen as a “new exotic other” that the West could not identify with<sup>23</sup> but did want to immerse themselves in. Especially in the 1870’s the Japanese art style increasingly influenced European pictorial and decorative art, literature and theater and became more commonly known as *Japonisme*. The term originally coined in 1872 by the French art critic Philippe Burty (1830-1890) manifested Japan’s presence and influence on the European arts and Western scholars felt the urge to explain Japan’s culture and its influence in the West. Claiming to stick to historical and factual accounts many European scholars published *nihonjinron*,<sup>24</sup> a genre of texts that focus on Japanese national and cultural identity,

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<sup>20</sup> Yevhennia Prasol, "On the Importance of Studying the Image of Japan in Culture and Literature from a Comparative Perspective," *Multicultural Sociology* 7 (2021): 195.

<sup>21</sup> Yoko Chiba, "Japonisme: East-West Renaissance in the Late 19th Century," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 2 (1998): 19.

<sup>22</sup> Hiromitsu Inokuchi and Yoshiko Nozaki, "“Different than Us”: Othering, Orientalism, and US Middle School Students’ Discourses on Japan," *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 25:1 (1 May 2005): 63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188790500032533>.

<sup>23</sup> Inokuchi and Nozaki, "Different than Us," 62–63.

<sup>24</sup> *Ni-hon-jin-ron* (日本人論) literally means Japan, people, theory thus the study of the Japanese culture. This study however is not solely used for describing the study of Japanese culture from a Eurocentric/Western perspective; Japanese scholars also write *nihonjinron*.

explaining Japan's origins, the nature of the Japanese people and debated amongst each other the Japanese identity and its constructions.<sup>25</sup>

Because of the spread of *nihonjinron* <sup>26</sup> more Europeans - primarily the wealthier upper class - became curious about Japan and wanted to experience the culture first hand. According to postcolonial literature historian Ali Behdad, travelling to distant countries came with the trend of keeping travelogues and the former academic and political discourses about Japan stemming from colonial mindset were gradually replaced by stories of non-academic travelers who increasingly centered the exotic<sup>27</sup> and romantic.<sup>28</sup>

However, around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europeans, who were reminiscent of the pre-industrial times and glorifying Japan's natural beauty, gradually started to realize that Japan was destined for industrialization and thus Westernization. Japan's rapid Westernization invoked mockery from the West<sup>29</sup> but shortly after, Japan was applauded when its army and fleet were victorious in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-5) <sup>30</sup> and when Japan was able to hold its own facing Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) <sup>31</sup> a few decades later. Japan's victory over Russia specifically shifted the balance of global power, marking the first time in modern history that an Asian nation had defeated a European nation in military combat. <sup>32</sup> The West, surprised by this unexpected victory, regarded Japan as "Asia's Prussians" and the country was often described by Europeans as a "gallant enemy",<sup>33</sup> but as more photographs of the Russo-Japanese war emerged in newspapers, which specifically visualized the technical devices and machinery used during the war,<sup>34</sup> it became evident that industrially Japan had really caught up with the West.<sup>35</sup> WWII further affirmed these suspicions after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and propaganda

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<sup>25</sup> Ian Reader, "Identity, *Nihonjinron*, and Academic (Dis)Honesty," *Monumenta Nipponica* 58:1 (2003): 113.

<sup>26</sup> Reader, "Identity, *Nihonjinron*, and Academic (Dis)honesty," 113.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Milne, "Discourses on Japan at the End of the Nineteenth Century in Murray Guidebooks," *Social Systems: Political, Legal and Economic Studies*, 2013, 136.

<sup>28</sup> Milne, "Discourses on Japan," 148.

<sup>29</sup> Milne, "Discourses on Japan," 149.

<sup>30</sup> A competition between China and Japan over the influence on the Korean peninsula

<sup>31</sup> Russia and Japan got into conflict when both countries laid territorial claims on Manchuria and the Empire of Korea.

<sup>32</sup> Milne, "Discourses on Japan," 147.

<sup>33</sup> Angelow and Gerlach, "The Image of Japan's Military Abroad."

<sup>34</sup> Marco Gerbig-Fabel, "Photographic Artefacts of War 1904–1905: The Russo-Japanese War as Transnational Media Event," *European Review of History—Revue Européenne d'histoire*, 6 (2008): 633–634, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13507480802500301>.

<sup>35</sup> Angelow and Gerlach, "The Image of Japan's Military Abroad."

against the Japanese increased.<sup>36</sup> Especially the American reports during WWII, who described Japanese as back-warded yet power hungry devils,<sup>37</sup> were not only very influential in its own country but spread all throughout the West.<sup>38</sup> The Western image of Japan as a nation of flowery and exotic beauty had now turned into that of malice and might.<sup>39</sup>

### 1.3 Multiperspectivity in the Western representation of Japan in the West

The aftermath of WWII made it apparent that America was the new superpower, an empire manifested through military and political hegemony (hard power) which had equally the hegemony on popular culture (soft power).<sup>40</sup> As a result lot of research into the representation of Japan(ese during the events of WWII) in the West has been conducted from the American perspective. The main conception now is that Japanese (soldiers), during WWII and the years after the war, were constantly ridiculed and de-humanized in all Western media but Belgian comic book theorist and historian Pascal Lefèvre argues that this representation is mainly constructed from the American perception. According to Lefèvre it is a shame that even though there is a rise in *Yellow Peril* studies academic studies on Asian stereotypes in popular culture of other countries are often not taken into account.<sup>41</sup>

In recent studies it has become more evident that the American discourse and dominant portrayal of Japan, in which the representation of Japan is seemingly molded around nativism and decades of deep rooted fear of the other,<sup>42</sup> is not entirely applicable to every Western portrayal of the country and its people. Yevheniia Prasol for example , who majored in Multicultural Sociology, is one of the researchers who addresses in her article '*On the Importance of Studying the Image of Japan in Culture and Literature from a Comparative Perspective*' (2021) that the contemporary representation of Japan in the West, which is either an *Orientalist* depiction or that of *Yellow Peril*,<sup>43</sup> is yet still too unambiguous and overly American.<sup>44</sup> Prasol stresses that a reevaluation of the dominant depiction and

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<sup>36</sup> Spencer Gutierrez, "Comics in Action," 38.

<sup>37</sup> Angelow and Gerlach, "The Image of Japan's Military Abroad."

<sup>38</sup> Gutierrez, "Comics in Action," 36.

<sup>39</sup> Chiba, "Japonisme: East-West Renaissance in the Late 19th Century," 3.

<sup>40</sup> Loyo, "It Came from the 1950s! Popular Culture, Popular Anxieties," *European Journal of American Studies* 2 (2012): 1–4.

<sup>41</sup> Pascal Lefèvre, "The Shifting Representation of Japan in Belgian Comics," 123–24.

<sup>42</sup> Klein, "The 'Yellow Peril.'"

<sup>43</sup> Prasol, "On the Importance of Studying the Image of Japan," 194.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

(visual) representation of Japan and its people in the West can only be fruitful if more researchers delve deeper into each country's individual culture, trends, media and economical, political and social relations with Japan.<sup>45</sup> Only then it will be possible to construct a more inclusive and diverse discourse about the perception and imagery of Japan(ese) in contemporary Western media instead of repeatedly referring to the dominant American perception(s). Thus regarding researching Britain's contemporary representation of Japan, it is necessary to go back to the beginning of their relations in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the ports of Japan opened. If scholars want to make a significant case that the British perception of Japan(ese) and its imagery in popular culture differs from the American representation and is worth investigating, plausible proof must be provided that the representation of Japanese has been influenced by the ideological climate in which individual countries found themselves.<sup>46</sup>

#### **1.4 The British perception of Japan and Japanese from the 19<sup>th</sup> up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

Starting with the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, a few decades after Japan opened its ports, the 1880's British *Murray* guidebooks (1880s - 1910s) -travel guides which were extremely popular in Britain-<sup>47</sup> plus a number of English exhibitions, like the *Great Britain–Japan Exhibition* in 1910, were the biggest contributors to the prolonging of the flowery *Orientalist* discourse on Japan.<sup>48</sup> However, Britain was not only admiring Japan, they were even supportive of Japan's Westernization and war efforts at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as Britain, after Japan was victorious after the Boxer-War (1899-1901), formed the *Anglo-Japanese Alliance* with the country in 1902.<sup>49</sup> Even though their friendship prolonged as Britain keenly clung to the everlasting image of a flowery and authentic Japan and its tenacity to hold onto the ancient traditions even though the country became more industrialized, Britain did begin to grow more skeptical about Japan as the country started to notice that their relationship provided Japan -the first Asian industrial power- an important setup as a world player. Britain began to fear increasingly that the *Anglo-Japanese*

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Milne, "Discourses on Japan," 149.

<sup>48</sup> Moni, "Japan–UK: Perspectives of Partnership," 352.

<sup>49</sup> Klein, "The "Yellow Peril."

*Alliance* attracted the imagination of the Japanese too much.<sup>50</sup> Even though Britain's growing concerns and reservations against Japan, they were not reluctant to call on the country for help during WWI which led to close cooperation's between the countries. After WWI however, the relationship between Japan and Britain really started to show cracks when Britain, under the pressure of the American navy in the Pacific, had to abandon the *Anglo-Japanese Alliance*.<sup>51</sup> Relations even deteriorated further in the 1930's and eventually fell apart entirely in 1941, when Japan attacked British colonies in Malaya, Singapore and Hong Kong. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of December in 1941 the government of the United Kingdom declared war on the Empire of Japan and the two countries formally went to war.<sup>52</sup> The "American" *Yellow Peril* had thus now, next to most of the West, seemingly fully reached Britain and culminated in more news coverage of historical events and Japanese military actions during WWII and eventually to the portrayal of this in British comics in the 1960's.

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<sup>50</sup> Moni, "Japan–UK: perspectives of partnership," 352.

<sup>51</sup> Moni, "Japan–UK: perspectives of partnership," 352.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 2: Depicting history in comic books

History making, the way of sharing history, has according to Professor of Popular Historical Culture Kees Ribbens become an increasingly diverse phenomenon in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century.<sup>53</sup> Even though sharing history in a variety of ways has become more diverse at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ribbens states that sharing history is primarily still a written matter but does declare that images are increasingly taking on a more important role in contemporary history making.<sup>54</sup> According to Ribbens, images are considered vivid and accessible and are able to manoeuvre and combine both historical knowledge and atmosphere into one and strengthen the idea of tangibility and a “closeness” of the past.<sup>55</sup> As (historical) comics show a specific representation of current and past events that is disseminated, consumed and frequently (re)produced on a large(r) scale, academics just begun to understand the meaning and impact of this intriguing phenomenon. In the academical field it is becoming increasingly acknowledged that popular culture, including (historical) comics, are not something that cultural scientist should or can distance themselves from.<sup>56</sup>

### **2.1 From nonsensical ‘toss-aways’ to a respectable medium that can portray (war)histories: the development of historical war comic books in the West**

Chapman would agree with Ribbens as he states that comics can have a significant influence on understanding history, creating meaning and leaving an (long lasting) impact and are capable of influencing on its readers as comics represent a distinct mode of cultural practice in their own right.<sup>57</sup> Even though comics are increasingly acknowledged in contemporary cultural studies, giving more critical attention to comics in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not that apparent as the medium was not taken so seriously as it was perceived to contain disposable content.<sup>58</sup> According to Professor of Creative Arts Joseph

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<sup>53</sup> Kees Ribbens, "Popular Understandings of the Past," *The Oxford Handbook of Public History* (2017): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199766024.013.5>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Kees Ribbens, "World War II in European Comics. National Representations of Global Conflict in Popular Historical Culture," *International Journal of Comic Art* 12 (2010): 28.

<sup>57</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 11.

<sup>58</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 7.



Witek, the scrutinization and the overall lack of interest in comic books stems from the notion that comic books were, and sometimes still are, regarded as 'bloated comic strips'.<sup>59</sup> Comic books were not regarded as a separate phenomenon from the 'funnies', the American comic book format<sup>60</sup> with its slapstick humor and the 'penny dreadfuls', the inexpensive popular serial comic stories produced in Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that were condemned by their sensational and violent content.<sup>61</sup> Another reason why comics were presumably not taken more seriously sooner was because they portrayed the lower class, tramps, vagabonds and other social misfits as the protagonists<sup>62</sup> which made it presumably easier to scrutinize the comics as they were perceived as culturally low-brow material. Comics thus presented the worst kind of mass-produced popular culture; 'solely for the purpose of amusement of the urban proletariat, with no claim to artistic merit'<sup>63</sup> and this perception lasted for decades.

Even though conventional comic strips and cartoons in their 'nonsensical' form, which was a mixture between farce and physical comedy,<sup>64</sup> were frowned upon they were also being formed and continued in newspaper pages in their earliest years around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>65</sup> Even though the "funnies" were the most dominating genre in the comic medium and would not be discarded from their corner in the newspaper, the authors and artist were continuously scrutinized for their 'low brow' work. However, in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century in the wake of WWI, authors and artist of comic strips were presented with a chance the war gave them to shift their content to more serious topics that not only concerned the lower working class but also the upper class of society. Some of the comic book authors and artists established themselves in the context of disseminating a crucial new kind of visual journalism,<sup>66</sup> which entails spreading serious reportage by displaying its graphic information,<sup>67</sup> and fictional newspaper comic artist, who drew funnies and penny dreadfuls,

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<sup>59</sup> Joseph Witek, *Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 6.

<sup>60</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 72.

<sup>61</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 52.

<sup>62</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 25–26.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 25.

<sup>65</sup> Hillary L. Chute, *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* (Harvard University Press, 2016), 18.

<sup>66</sup> Chute, *Disaster Drawn*, 74.

<sup>67</sup> Chute, *Disaster Drawn*, 18.

increasingly extended their repertoire as they gradually steered towards pictorial realism.<sup>68</sup> As a result some comics started to outgrow their format in the newspaper's supplement section and moved to the comic book medium.<sup>69</sup>

2.2 When American superheroes took the punch. From looking what is in front of you to looking back: historical comics that were shaped during and after WWII (1940-1980)  
Comic books over the years have diversified into a medium with a wide range of sub-genres (as well as cross-overs) of adventure, romance, humour, politics, (auto)biography and, last but not least, (war) history.<sup>70</sup> According to Ribbens, comics can refer to history in two different ways. The first category encompasses comics that are written and drawn in the same time that the events of that certain period take place and thus will therefore reflect - usually more implicitly than explicitly - 'the opinions and ideas of its creators who are influenced and shaped by circumstances of their own epoch.'<sup>71</sup> Comics of the second category, are comics in which its creators can deliberately choose to portray events or developments in another period than their contemporary time as they want to explore times that yet must come to pass and illustrate unknown futures in science fiction narratives while others decide to create comic stories concerning the past. The next two sections will elaborate about both variants starting with the comics that were created during the historical events in section 2.2. while section 2.3 will elaborate on the comic stories that look back on historical events.

When looking at comics that were written and drawn at the same time that the portrayed events took place especially WWI and WWII inspired a lot of pictorial journalism<sup>72</sup> to depict deadly serious subject matters<sup>73</sup> in their storylines. The comics were then still dominated by genre conventions that centered historical events but gradually started to experiment as some incorporated superhero personas into the historical plotlines.<sup>74</sup> This experimentation

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<sup>68</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 71–72.

*Pictorial realism*: a movement that is related to realism in which the artists becomes more aware of, and focusses on the portrayal of the (social) problems and objectively tries to capture this reality on paper.

<sup>69</sup> Chute, *Disaster Drawn*, 18.

<sup>70</sup> Ribbens, "World War II in European Comics," 2.

<sup>71</sup> Ribbens, "World War II in European Comics," 2.

<sup>72</sup> Chute, *Disaster Drawn*, 74–75.

<sup>73</sup> Chute, *Disaster Drawn*, 20–21.

<sup>74</sup> Chute, *Disaster Drawn*, 18.

presumably boosted the sales as at a certain point the comic book format, that began in 1929 as bound floppy commercial inserts,<sup>75</sup> was at its peak selling 15 million copies a week.<sup>76</sup> Superheroes knew how to reel in money.

Famous examples of comic books incorporating war and history in their plotlines - which during the events of WWII often took a spin on the pictorial realism and incorporated superheroes in their stories - are American superhero comics depicting Hitler and Nazi's, Mussolini and Japanese getting a good whooping from righteous persona's with superpowers. These depictions however were far from just 'fun' and 'experimental' as Spencer Gutierrez mentions in his research *Comics in Action: A Reflection of the Dominant Narrative in World War II* that the majority of these comics were used as propaganda by the American Government against Axis powers<sup>77</sup> and not necessarily depicting events of WWII and the involved parties truthfully. A famous example that covered the subject of WWII with caricatures of Axis powers and superheroes incorporated in the plotline are the covers of *Captain America's* March 1941 edition in which Captain America punches Hitler in the jaw after raiding a Nazi headquarters<sup>78</sup> and *World's Finest* cover in 1943 that depicts Superman, Batman and Robin throwing tennis balls [figure 1] at a banner that displays the heads of Hitler, Mussolini and presumably the Japanese emperor Hirohito,<sup>79</sup> who has visibly been given big buckteeth and big(ger) ears compared to the other Hitler and Mussolini.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Spencer Gutierrez, "Comics in Action: A Reflection of the Dominant Narrative in World War II," *SMU Journal of Undergraduate Research* 4 (2019): 36, <https://doi.org/10.25172/jour.4.1.10>.

<sup>78</sup> Chute, *Disaster Drawn*, 18–19.

<sup>79</sup> The depicted Japanese man could also be Tojo Hideki, the prime minister of Japan during most of the Pacific War. During the events of WWII Tojo Hideki was emperor Hirohito's advisor.



[Fig.1] DC Comics, 'World's Finest Comics 9,' (1943), cover.<sup>80</sup>

What thus is striking is that especially Japanese were looked upon as sub-human and repulsive; in some ways even how people feel about cockroaches or mice<sup>81</sup> [figure 2] and were often portrayed as 'lesser humans' or men with animal like characteristics or apish features<sup>82</sup> who were even preying on defenseless Caucasian women.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, as icing on the cake most Japanese were also portrayed with big(ger) ears, exaggerated slanted eyes -which were often magnified by big rounded glasses- buckteeth, and often a thin, funny looking moustache.<sup>84</sup> Even though Japanese, out of the Axis powers, seemed to be ridiculed

<sup>80</sup> "World's Finest Comics No.9," accessed April 19, 2022, [https://www.si.edu/object/worlds-finest-comics-no9%3Anmah\\_1449382](https://www.si.edu/object/worlds-finest-comics-no9%3Anmah_1449382).

<sup>81</sup> Shillony, Ben-Ami. "Review of War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War by John W. Dower," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 14:1 (1988): 202, <https://doi.org/10.2307/132546>.

<sup>82</sup> Murakami Yumiko, "Hollywood's Slanted View," *Japan Quarterly* 46:3 (1999): 59.

<sup>83</sup> Michelle Brock, "Portrayal of the Japanese during World War II in the United States" (Master diss., California, California State University Dominguez Hills, 2013), 48–49.

<sup>84</sup> Brock, "Portrayal of the Japanese during World War II in the United States," 28.

the most in these American comics, there was one thing that all Axis powers had in common; they all got a good whooping from the superheroes. The readers thus had nothing to worry about as the enemy would be knocked out in no time; (American) superheroes were here to save the day!



[Fig. 2] 'Jap Trap.'<sup>85</sup>

The influence of the superheroic take on war related events - especially in WWII – that primarily started in America spread and did not lose its appeal for decades but there was also a branch of comic books that held on more firmly to pictorial realism as they wanted a truthful as possible depiction of historical- and present day narratives. One of these comics was the American *True Comic* magazine (1941-1950), published by *The Parent's Institute*, which even had enabled an editorial advisory board of experts including Professors, historians and educators to present historical and current events as accurate as possible.<sup>86</sup>

In Europe, French speaking territories led the way with comic stories that ingested historical narratives. Belgium for example released the newspaper comic *Tintin* (1929) -also known as *Kuifje* in the Netherlands- by Hergé that grew in to a comic book and got released

<sup>85</sup> "Jap Trap," accessed May 19, 2022, <https://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-37-498/>.

<sup>86</sup> Ribbens, "Popular Understandings of the Past," 3.

for the first time in the Netherlands in 1946, followed approximately a decade later by the Belgian comic book *Spirou* (1938), a magazine that published some serious comics in a realistic drawing style<sup>87</sup> and 8 years later, the equally historical '*Corentin*', (1946) a series by Paul Cuvelier, was printed shortly after WWII. Translated editions of all of the aforementioned comics were spread across Western Europe which increased its readership and harbored the growth of a diversity of genres.<sup>88</sup>

### **2.3 Looking back, WWII related stories: Maus and Anne Frank**

Over time the genres in comic books became more varied as the medium had gained a larger audience over the years as it was increasingly considered to be leisure material for all ages.<sup>89</sup> The medium included fairy tales, adventures in nearby and exotic locations, police and detective stories as well as horror stories, violent comics and continued publishing comics with historical narratives.<sup>90</sup> The latter genres however, the horror stories, the violent (superhero) comics and even the historical comics, were not so well received by political and moral authorities as concerns about popular mass media as an influential transmitter of messages resulted in discomfort in the wake of the Cold War (approximately 1947 – 1991 ).<sup>91</sup> The public notion that comics were an irresponsible medium grew especially with the authorities, educators and intellectuals<sup>92</sup> as they grew more fearful of the consequences of media consumption in the early 1950's, and the comic medium in general felt the urge to go on the defensive. However, even though comic artists wanted to make a stand, their publishers feared for the reputation of comics and the possibility of decreasing sales. Thus even though most magazines continued to print stories of the entertaining nature, moral and educational aspects and narratives in comics increased.<sup>93</sup>

After a dip in the 1950's up to the 1960's, comics in the 1970's started to slowly (re)gain respectability as graphic narratives were gradually regarded as a medium capable of

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<sup>87</sup> "Spirou, the Classic Period (1938-1969)," accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.lambiek.net/magazines/spirou.htm>.

<sup>88</sup> Ribbens, "Popular Understandings of the Past," 3.

<sup>89</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 10.

<sup>90</sup> Ribbens, "Popular Understanding," 3.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.



reaching mature audiences'.<sup>94</sup> As more scholars in the wake of the 1980's started to acknowledge the possibilities of comics as a medium to convey serious and historical narratives, graphic narratives were, according to renowned journalist and cartoonist Joe Sacco, able to 'render and mediate the painful experience in a way the camera is not capable of.'<sup>95</sup> On top of comics being able to portray 'very real things' drawings can also show what the camera could not and can never see because it was made impossible to capture events on film due rules, regulations and accessibility or there was at the time just no technology to record it.<sup>96</sup>

A good example of a comic that is able to portray gruesome events in a graphic manner in the absence of camera's, and that deserves – even though it has been spoken about many times – to be highlighted because of its influence on comics as an historical medium, is Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* (1980), in which Spiegelman portrayed the experiences of his Polish father in the Holocaust.<sup>97</sup> Even though comic books regained some respectability in the 1970's the emergence of comic books as a respectable literary form in the 1980's was unlooked for after decades of cultural scorn and active social repression.<sup>98</sup> However, Spiegelman's work got praised by many and even won the Pulitzer Prize with his two-volume work and inspired the creation of more visual-verbal forms portraying stories of hardship, loss and survival during WWII from a different cultural starting point.<sup>99</sup> Drawing history, and especially war, became a gripping subject and received increased attention from comic readers but also from authors of comics.

As comics became more and more perceived as being a medium that can portray and educate about historical events that are of the more serious nature, comic authors, artist and institutes increasingly wanted to explore the possibilities of the medium to portray war histories. Among the currently most esteemed war related comics of the twenty-first century are the internationally renowned educational comics from the Anne Frank House. The Anne Frank House tried as carefully and as truthful as possible to represent the historical context

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<sup>94</sup> Ribbens, "Popular Understanding," 4.

<sup>95</sup> Dorian L. Alexander Micheal Goodrum and Philip Smith, *Drawing the Past. Volume 2* (Mississippi: The University Press of Mississippi, 2022), 134.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ribbens, "Popular Understandings of the Past," 4.

<sup>98</sup> Witek, *Comic Books as History*, 11.

<sup>99</sup> Chute, *Disaster Drawn*, 119–220.

and reflect on the universalization of the Holocaust <sup>100</sup> in the originally Dutch comics *De Ontdekking ; The Discovery*<sup>101</sup> (2003) and *De Zoektocht, The Search*<sup>102</sup> (2007), which were translated in multiple other languages, and years later took it upon themselves to graphically portray the story of Anne Frank, the Jewish refugee girl from Germany who went into hiding with her family and others in Amsterdam during WWII, and published *Het Achterhuis* (2017).<sup>103</sup> Comics now reached a stage where they had obtained an international, newly confirmed status as an capable vehicle for presenting both appealing and clarifying discourses on history.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ribbens, "Popular Understandings of the Past," 11.

<sup>101</sup> Author: Eric Heuvel, Dutch cartoonist who is most known the comic series *Bud Broadway, Secret of Time* and *January Jones*.

<sup>102</sup> Authors: Eric Heuvel, Lies Schippers and Ruud van der Rol.

<sup>103</sup> Ribbens, "Popular Understandings of the Past," 13.

<sup>104</sup> Ribbens, "Popular Understandings of the Past," 14.



## Chapter 3: The British comics

The previous section has illustrated how comics and graphic novels in the West have become more respected as a medium to convey historical events and get nowadays more possibilities of representing sensitive topics containing loss, survival and hardship. However, that comics from the 1970's onward increasingly reached a more credible status was not the case in every Western country. In comparison with America and some European countries – specifically France– <sup>105</sup> where comics had long been accepted as a legitimate form of entertainment for children as well as adults,<sup>106</sup> and gradually gaining credibility as a medium that could convey (historical) knowledge, British comics were still often scrutinized as the medium was, and still often is, regarded to contain juvenile material.<sup>107</sup> This outlook on British comics presumably originates from literature in which the most famous British comics *Dandy* (1937-2012), *Beano* (1938 – present), *Beezer* (1956-1993), *Topper* (1953-1990) and *Bunty* (1958 -2001) <sup>108</sup> -which were/are the children's comics- are continuously pushed to the fore. This view however, that British comics are only for children, does according to Chapman not stand up to scrutiny as the first comics that appeared in late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain were primarily read by adults.<sup>109</sup> Later, around the 1960's, publishers realized the popularity amongst children and then comics were more tailored towards a younger audience.<sup>110</sup> So, what than could be given as an explanation for Britain's prolonged lack of interest and prolonged scrutinization of the medium?

### 3.1 "Too American?" "Too juvenile"? The British comic books in the 1940's and 1950's

One of the main arguments seems to be that in Britain the cultural status of comics has suffered from its association with their American counterpart. In the wake of, and during WWII, there was a shortage of paper <sup>111</sup>and Britain needed to promulgated a paper rationing which had immediate impact on newspaper and comic publishers as they had to

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<sup>105</sup> Here it is not specified whether Chapman makes a distinction between comic strips and comic books.

<sup>106</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 6–7.

<sup>107</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 10.

<sup>108</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 8.

<sup>109</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 10.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Yvonne King, "Paper Rationing'," accessed April 13, 2022, [https://www.ourwelwyngardencity.org.uk/content/topics/wartime/wwii/paper\\_rationing](https://www.ourwelwyngardencity.org.uk/content/topics/wartime/wwii/paper_rationing).

reduce their pre-war paper consumption by 60 percent.<sup>112</sup> The paper rationing signaled the end of the road for many popular titles. For the story papers it meant that the British comics *Gem*, *Modern Boy*, *Boy's Cinema* and *Girls' Cinema* were discontinued before the end of 1939 and several established comics including *Butterfly*, *Sunbeam*, *Puck*, *Joker* and *Tiger Tim's Weekly*, were also discontinued.<sup>113</sup> The British comic strips and comic book market was brought to a screeching halt as newspapers were granted every limited amount of paper that they could use to report the events of WWII.

As the restriction on new periodicals meant that no new titles could be launched during the war, and a lot of comics became wartime casualties<sup>114</sup> Britain became dependent on importing comics from elsewhere. In Britain, especially during WWII and approximately the first 5 years after the war, some enterprising publishers were able to circumvent wartime regulations by issuing occasional one offs and specials<sup>115</sup> but primarily imported American love, hero and adventure stories.<sup>116</sup> Because of the increased import of American comics the format of the remaining British comics increasingly took inspiration of the American comic books -that already have been imported since the interwar period- and essentially lost a part of their 'Britishness'.<sup>117</sup>

During wartime, and as a result of the wartime shortages, the American imported comics and its influence on British comic books was not yet so much frowned upon as any kind of comic was always on demand,<sup>118</sup> but the positive outlook on the "Americanized" British comic books did not last as the British comic books were regarded as a rehash of American comics. So around the mid 1950's, when the paper rationing in Britain came to an end,<sup>119</sup> a lot British printing houses took it on themselves to launch more original comics to distinguish themselves from the American ones. However, the "new" comics from British soil were not able to surpass their status of 'an ephemeral medium that exist only to satisfy the immediate curiosity of their readers'.<sup>120</sup> Because of the long lasting scrutiny British comics

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<sup>112</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 32.

<sup>113</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 23.

<sup>114</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 32.

<sup>115</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 32.

<sup>116</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 105–6.

<sup>117</sup> Chapman, "Comic Cuts and Saucy Strips," in *British Comics: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011).

<sup>118</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 32–33.

<sup>119</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 48.

<sup>120</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 7.

received the 'fleeting' label and it was widely understood that British comics were, even for the enthusiast, just to be 'enjoyed, well thumbed, passed around and -after reading- thrown away even,'<sup>121</sup> but not to be kept, bundled and re-read and were certainly not yet to be regarded as a suitable medium for the depiction of serious (war related) stories.

### 3.2 The drums of war: when the British comics went to war

In the previous sections it was discussed that comics in Britain are in comparison with American, Belgian, French and Dutch comics less 'prestigious'. It seems that in Britain, comics never really have reached the stage in where they have been exalted to a higher art form, as British comics have a difficulty of shedding their juvenile label. However, this according to Chapman, the general attitude towards British comics does not mean the British comic market is depleted as many British comics have enjoyed extraordinary longevity.<sup>122</sup> Adding to this, according to Adam Riches -a British journalist and writer- British comics are far more diverse than just comics meant for children and even depicted more serious and war related content long before originally thought. According to Riches, the history of Britain has been shaped by the feats of the battlefield where the stories of glorious victories but also harsh defeats through the centuries were the source of inspiration for play writers, poets, novelist and (graphic) storytellers.<sup>123</sup> Even though the American war comic books in the 1930's accelerated the comic book's format into its modern form, with which the readers of (war) comic books are acquainted with today, the British war comics have a noteworthy history of their own as the medium had its first war publications in the 1860's and enjoyed a fair life span as its last wave of new war comic titles was published in the mid-1980's.<sup>124</sup>

According to Riches, British publishers in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were quick to identify the appeal that war stories held for readers -especially the young ones – and all kinds of youth magazines such as *The Boy's own Paper* (1879 – 1967) and the *Halfpenny*

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<sup>121</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 7.

<sup>122</sup> Chapman, 9–10.

<sup>123</sup> Adam Riches, Tim Parker and Robert Frankland, *When the Comics Went to War. Comic Book War Heroes* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2009), 9.

<sup>124</sup> Riches, *When the Comics Went to War*, book cover.

*Marvel* (1893-1922) turned to the Napoleonic and Crimean war for inspiration.<sup>125</sup> While war stories were a mixture of tales that included elements of adventure, crime and sports, the emphasis changed at the end of the century when Britain became gripped by the wars in South Africa. The 1890's, in the midst of the campaigns against the Boer,<sup>126</sup> created circumstances in which the industry could flourish and an increasing amount of war titles could be printed.<sup>127</sup> Comics like *Union Jack*, *Boys of the Empire*, *Young England* and *Dreadnought* tapped deep into the patriotic fervour and were stories filled with true accounts of heroism in places etched on the national consciousness.<sup>128</sup> As the war comics in the story-papers after a period of rationing<sup>129</sup> enjoyed a period of unprecedented growth in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century as WWI inspired a massive number of war stories that appeared each week picturing true-life drama alongside elements of fiction.<sup>130</sup> The popularity of the war comics did not go unnoticed by the British government as it was quick to identify that the comics could serve as a powerful propaganda machine, and thus, even when the paper shortages became acute, comics that portrayed conflict and war continued to be published.<sup>131</sup>

In the inter war years -the years between the events of WWI and WWII- British comics former primary purpose, as a propaganda machine for the acquisition of soldiers, changed and there were new significant launches of comics and juvenile magazines that all included war but without being the dominant theme. Comics like *Rover* (1929-1973), *Hotspur* (1933 -1959), *Triumph* (1924-1940), *Wizard* (1922- 1963, 1970 -1978), *Modern Boy* (1928-1939) and *Champion* (1922-1955) had focused on the subject of war for quite some years but were printed quite irregular as the rationing of paper in the wake of WWII on the home front made it impossible to print all comics on a regular basis.<sup>132</sup> This however did not mean that there was a shortage of wartime reporting in British newspapers in the midst of

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<sup>125</sup> Riches, *When the Comics Went to War*, 9.

<sup>126</sup> "South African War," accessed April 22, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/South-African-War>. Referring to the Boer War that is also known as the South African War, Second Boer War, or Anglo-Boer War; to Afrikaners and also called Second War of Independence, war fought from October 11, 1899, to May 31, 1902, between Great Britain and the two Boer (Afrikaner) republics—the South African Republic (Transvaal) and the Orange Free State—resulting in British victory.

<sup>127</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 69.

<sup>128</sup> Riches, *When the Comics Went to War*, 9.

<sup>129</sup> King, "Paper Rationing."

<sup>130</sup> Riches, *When the Comics Went to War*, 9.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Elizabeth Bundy, "February 1942," *The British Newspaper Archives*, 2017, <https://blog.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/2017/02/01/february-1942/>.

WWII. Some papers even released special wartime issues to further cover military and naval news like articles on the *Battle of Singapore* in 1942 and the *Western Desert Campaign*, and the rationing on the home front caused by the ongoing world war.<sup>133</sup> However, next to the aforementioned articles, there were not a lot of news reports that extensively elaborated on the British military operations during WWII in East-Asian countries where British and Allied troops would encounter Japanese soldiers. It rather seemed a sensitive subject.

Modern British History Historian Gavin Schaffer provides an explanation for this sensitivity as he emphasizes in *De dynamiek van de herinnering* how Britain stressed nationalistic and militaristic aspects during the war and especially after the war. During WWII the British Empire suffered great loss of territory by the hands of the Japanese who attacked British territories in Hong Kong (1941), Malaya (now Malaysia) in 1941, Singapore (1942) and Burma (Myanmar) in 1942. After WWII Britain was a weakened and could not attempt to regain the lost colonies after the events of WWII because America and the Soviet Union opposed colonialism.<sup>134</sup> Previously, loss of territory was always accompanied by defeat, but the decolonization after WWII was seen as a moral defeat and left a bad taste in the mouth of Britain. Stressing the claim of victory directly after WWII became very important, not only for British civilians and soldiers but also for British values in general<sup>135</sup> and thus commemorations in Britain around 1950's were mostly centered around the narrative that Britain had not been crushed by the Nazis. According to Schaffer the commemoration of the nationalistic and militaristic became so important that it can almost be regarded as something that is 'typically British'<sup>136</sup> and thus, the British war commemoration around the 1950's has been less reflective on the totality of WWII by pushing their colonial losses to the background and rather presented Britain as a country that was forever victorious and never broken.<sup>137</sup>

Even though the British culture of remembrance that emphasizes pride and triumph immediately after WWII, there was soon more room for other sentiments suited to the

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<sup>133</sup> Bundy, "February 1942."

<sup>134</sup> "Western Colonialism," accessed June 7, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Western-colonialism/Decolonization-from-1945>.

<sup>135</sup> Gavin Schaffer, "Een Angstvallig Gekoesterde Overwinning," in *De Dynamiek van de Herinnering. Nederland En de Tweede Wereldoorlog in Een Internationale Context* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2009), 248.

<sup>136</sup> Gavin Schaffer, "Een Angstvallig Gekoesterde Overwinning," 245–46.

<sup>137</sup> Serena van der Hoek, "Een Hamer Mist Soms Zijn Doel, Een Boeket Bloemen Nooit. De Transnationale Naoorlogse Herinneringscultuur vanaf 1945 tot en met 2020 Op de Airborne War Cemetery in Oosterbeek," (Master diss., Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2021), 19.

disintegration of the British Empire.<sup>138</sup> Around the 1960s, more than a decade after WWII, the pain of the colonial losses during WWII at the hands of Japan now were far enough removed and Britain became more able to simultaneously reflect upon the colonial losses during WWII and to celebrate the glory of Britain's victory in the war.<sup>139</sup> Books like *Town like Alice* (1950) and *Bridge on the River Kwai* (1952) were revived and transported to the British cinema's around the end of the 1950's to bring more awareness of the suffering of the British prisoners at the hands of Japanese servicemen during the WWII<sup>140</sup> and started to gradually inspire a wider variety of depictions of WWII and Japan's involvement in other visual media.

Around the 1960s it became increasingly evident that 'remembering' WWII required no immediate experience of those years and this appeared to be especially true for the post-WWII war generation. According to British-German historian Geoff Eley, the generation who was born between 1943-1945 and the mid-1950s, grew up suffused in the effects of the war by contemporary media and thus their "memory" of WWII came entirely after the fact.<sup>141</sup> During that generation's formative years around the mid-1960s, official and popular cultures were pervaded by WWII's presence via citations, evocations, stories, and commentaries which were set apart from the traces of everyday life and the private marks of families and personal histories.<sup>142</sup> Beyond the corpus of anniversaries, speeches, sermons, retrospectives, and the honoring of the dead, entertainment cultures became a rich arena of memory production. War heroics and heroes afforded material for the British cinema, but also permeated the forms, conventions and thematic by portrayals of WWII-events in television drama's, documentaries, comedies and of course comic books.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Schaffer, "Een Angstvallig Gekoesterde Overwinning," 248.

<sup>139</sup> Gordon Daniels and Chushichi Tsuzuki, *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations 1600–2000* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 13.

<sup>140</sup> Daniels and Tsuzuki, *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations 1600–2000*, 13.

<sup>141</sup> Geoff Eley, "Finding the People's War: Film, British Collective Memory, and World War II," *The American Historical Review* 106:3 (2001): 818.

<sup>142</sup> Eley, "Finding the People's War," 818.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

### 3.3 The depiction of Japanese in British war comics

Especially the 'ephemeral'<sup>144</sup> British comic books saw an increase in demand and credibility after many British baby-boomers of the 1946-1948 after-war period<sup>145</sup> wondered what had exactly occurred during WWII.<sup>146</sup> This interest in historical (war) events from the British youth presumably inspired a new style of British comics and helped to develop the establishment of some war publications in the wake of the 1960's and onward when the comics shifted from a text-heavy based story to a comic-strip format.<sup>147</sup> The comics that were printed during this period included titles like *Eagle* (1950-1969), *Lion* (1952-1974) *Tiger* (1954-1985), *Victor* (1961-1992), *War at Sea* (1962-1963), and *Valiant* (1962-1976), which all included elements of war. The war comics, which became synonymous with 'British boy comics',<sup>148</sup> even further flourished in the 1960's and 1970's as the 'baby-boomers' helped to establish some popular war comic series like *Action War Picture Library* (1958-1984) *Air Ace* (1960-1970), *Victor* (1961-1992), and the *Commando* comics (1961- ),<sup>149</sup> of which the latter are still printed till this day. Where there had been a declined interest in war comics, the comic world –with the help of the baby-boomers- yet had (re)created one.<sup>150</sup>

Remarkable is that the comic books *War Picture Library*, *Victor*, *Battle Picture Weekly* (1975-1988) and *Commando* ( 1961- ) primarily seem to center around Allied forces fighting against Nazi Germany which seems to suggest that writing, reading and talking about the Japanese occupation of the British colonies during WWII was still too painful. Even though the occupation of the British colonies by the Japanese army was presumably a hard subject to portray, the British war comic books did leave room for stories that depicted the fight against the Japanese in the former British colonies as well. So, how does this depiction look like?

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<sup>144</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 7.

<sup>145</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 85.

<sup>146</sup> Serena van der Hoek, "Een Hamer Mist Soms Zijn Doel, Een Boeket Bloemen Nooit. De Transnationale Naoorlogse Herinneringscultuur Vanaf 1945 Tot En Met 2020 Op de Airborne War Cemetery in Oosterbeek," 19.

<sup>147</sup> Riches, *When the Comics Went to War*, 10.

<sup>148</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 84.

<sup>149</sup> Riches, *When the Comics Went to War*, 10.

<sup>150</sup> B. Edwards, "The Popularisation of War in Comic Strips 1958-1988," *History Workshop Journal* 42:1 (1996): 184, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/1996.42.181>.

When reading literature of Edwards, Murakami, Shillony and Chapman regarding the depiction of Axis soldiers and men in post-WWII, Second World War-related war comics it seems that Germans (and Italians) despite the committed atrocities, were primarily still regarded as part of the white race, the one the “self” is familiar with, whereas the Japanese were seen and portrayed as yellow slant eyed<sup>151</sup> culprits in the East<sup>152</sup>, far removed from everything the “self” is familiar with and were presumably by default automatically doubted and questioned.<sup>153</sup> An example of this distinction between 'the self', what is familiar, and 'the other' in British post-WWII war comic books can be found in Chapman's book *British Comics* as he highlights that there was made a distinction between 'Nazi's' or '(Saur)Krauts'<sup>154</sup> -the “bad” Germans’ - and the ‘Germans’ who were “good”, when in contrast there is just one way to describe the “culprit from the East” as Japanese where always regarded as “bad” and referred to as ‘Jap’ or ‘Nip’ during WWII.<sup>155</sup>

The words ‘Jap’ and ‘Nip’ were used extensively in war slogans and in racist propaganda in America with a specific aim of generating hatred and anger towards the Japanese and spread all over the West. According to Chapman, especially the name-calling of Japanese in British post-WWII war comics would not stop at the end of WWII, but continued for several decades after the war. This would thus suggest that the language used to address Japanese in British post-WWII war comics perpetuated the propaganda discourse of war itself when calling the enemy ‘Jap’ and ‘Nip’ was commonplace and thus, this war-time slang will also be presumably the most prominent way of addressing Japanese in *Commando*.

Another stereotype in which Japanese are portrayed, according to Cultural Psychologist Perry Hinton, is that they are depicted as dedicated warriors but morally inferior to their Western counterparts.<sup>156</sup> This description according to Hinton primarily resulted into the dominant depiction of Japanese as a collective horde of ‘robotic emotionless’ people<sup>157</sup> in not only British, but in many Western popular media including comics. As a majority of the researchers, who have looked into the representation of Japanese in Western post-WWII

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<sup>151</sup> Murakami, "Hollywood's Slanted View," 57.

<sup>152</sup> Shillony, "Review of War without Mercy," 202.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 89.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Perry Hinton, "The Perverse Stereotype of the Japanese Man in the British Media," *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies* 15 (2015), <https://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/ejcs/vol15/iss2/hinton.html>.

<sup>157</sup> Hinton, "The Perverse Stereotype of the Japanese Man in the British Media."



war comics, claim that the representation of Japanese in these comics, whether they were made directly after WWII or years later, remained the same, one could expect that throughout the decades Japanese in the *Commando* comics will primarily be addressed as evil, inferior and always portrayed in battle belting out loud war cries. However, it seems rather odd that nothing in the representation would have changed over the course of 40 years. Can this non-development be said with absolute certainty, or have things been overlooked? And if so, how can any development in the representation of Japanese in *Commando* be explained?

### **3.4 'Remolding' Japanese in popular culture: The influence of developments in the cultural and ideological climate**

Even though literature suggests that Japanese were depicted as inherently evil in the British post-war comics, one might wonder if really all Japanese were depicted in the same fashion, or that there were just like the Germans also “good” and “bad” Japanese, as most British-boy's comics were printed after WWII when relations between Japan and Britain slowly but surely changed. Another question that is also left unanswered, is if British post-WWII war comics did not ridicule the Japanese by portraying them like animalistic disfigured human beings like the American comics.<sup>158</sup> The only thing that has been mentioned in the way in which Japanese were portrayed in British post-WWII war comic books is the language used to address people from Japanese descent. Even though WWII ended years ago British comics primarily used the terms ‘Jap’ and ‘Nip’ as these terms perpetuated the propaganda discourses of the war time itself when name-calling the enemy was commonplace. However, according to Chapman, the language used to address Japanese in British comics thus persisted until the 1980s as several generations of British grew up thoroughly versed in wartime slang and racial epithets.<sup>159</sup> But what could have inspired a shift in the decline of racial epithet in the wake of the 1980's?

According to Gorden Daniels and Chushichi Tsuzuki's research *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations 1600–2000*, in the late 1980's a new amalgam of economic and cultural trends

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<sup>158</sup> Gutierrez, “Comics in Action,” 38.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

refined and diversified British perceptions of Japan<sup>160</sup> and the previous depictions and racial slur that were used to address Japanese in British media started to decline; partially because of an improved imagery of Japan but also more naturally due to the discontinuation of a lot of post-WWII war-comics. Additionally, other British media rather focused on Japan's technological and economical advancements and trends when rising imports of high-quality Japanese electronic goods impressed millions of consumers and new image of Japan emerged that depicted the country as 'innovative' and ahead of its time. The Japanese technological innovations inspired lot of Brits (and other Westerners) to visit Japan and simultaneously welcomed large numbers of polite and freespending Japanese tourists in Britain which helped to dissolve the notion and WWII-depiction of Japanese as "Spartan" and "inscrutable"<sup>161</sup> which (re)strengthened their relationship. Now Japan was rather deemed 'cool' and a country to look up to.<sup>162</sup> Even though Chapman, who himself is somewhat skeptical about the influence of the ideological climate on the storyline of comics, also regards it axiomatic that comic books would not be informed by and respond to cultural conditions and the ideological climate in which there are produced <sup>163</sup> which is supported by Cultural historian Sara Mills as she explains that (dominant) discourses – whether this may be utterances, texts or imageries – are very much social product<sup>164</sup> in which the individual is influenced and influences the discourse and the representation of an 'other'. Thus according to Mills, the representation of Japanese -whether it would be about an individual, group or all Japanese- in the British post-WWII *Commando* comics would in one way or another be influenced by its cultural climate as it is inescapable and detrimental in the 'understanding of transnational similarities and differences and to establish its ever changing position as a cultural phenomenon'.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Daniels and Tsuzuki, *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations 1600–2000*, 13.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Daniels and Tsuzuki, *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations 1600–2000*, 13.

<sup>163</sup> Chapman, *British Comics*, 14.

<sup>164</sup> Sarah Mills, "Introduction," in *Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1997), 10.

<sup>165</sup> Kees Ribbens, "War Comics beyond the Battlefield: Anne Frank's Transnational Representation in Sequential Art," in *Comics Worlds and the World of Comics: Towards Scholarship on a Global Scale* (Kyoto: International Manga Research Center, 2010), 230.

**Part 2: *Commando* comics:**

**The examination of the portrayal and the development in  
portrayal of Japanese in Second World War related stories.**

## Prelude: introducing the *Commando* comics

Even though the British war comic book industry revived after WWI in the 1960's, by the late 1980's a lot of the war titles were discontinued. However, the *Commando* comics, published by DC Thomson Media, are still going strong with currently a list of more than 5500 titles - reprints and originals - printed to this day. To prevent topic exhaustion *Commando* set up a more diverse platform around 2000. Next to portrayals of events during WWII, *Commando* also portrays stories ranging from 'the Roman and other Ancient Empires, to Medieval and Viking combats, WWI, The Falklands War, The Gulf War and more recently even futuristic wars.<sup>166</sup> Now, *Commando* sometimes even includes full-colour graphic novel editions and diversified the distribution of their medium by also distributing their stories online to cater to a broader contemporary audience<sup>167</sup> so that their readers have the option to flip or to scroll through the pages.

Even though diversifying war related topics, the majority of the *Commando* comics primarily feature stories concerning WWII in which British heroic man, but also heroic Allied soldiers from France, America and Australia are depicted fighting Nazi Germans and Japanese. According to the online magazine of the *Huffinton Post UK*, plenty of publishers – that were still able to print comics- during and shortly after the WWII period, got on board to 'sock it to the Germans and the Japanese in many fantastical (and often racist) tales'<sup>168</sup> as their American counterpart did during the events of WWII. However, as the representation of Japanese over several decades in *Commando* is not yet properly mapped out, it now remains to investigate whether the authors of the more contemporary *Commando* comics also still represent Japanese in the same fashion in the research regarding the development of the representation of Japan and Japanese in the *Commando* comic books through the decades.

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<sup>166</sup> "About Commando," accessed April 4, 2022, <https://www.commandocomics.com/about-commando/>.

<sup>167</sup> "Commando: War Comic For Action and Adventure," accessed March 9, 2022, <https://www.commandocomics.com/>.

<sup>168</sup> "Comic Books Go to War- A Very Brief History of the War Comic," last modified October 24, 2011, [https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/owen-van-spall/comic-books-go-to-war-a-v\\_b\\_933643.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/owen-van-spall/comic-books-go-to-war-a-v_b_933643.html).

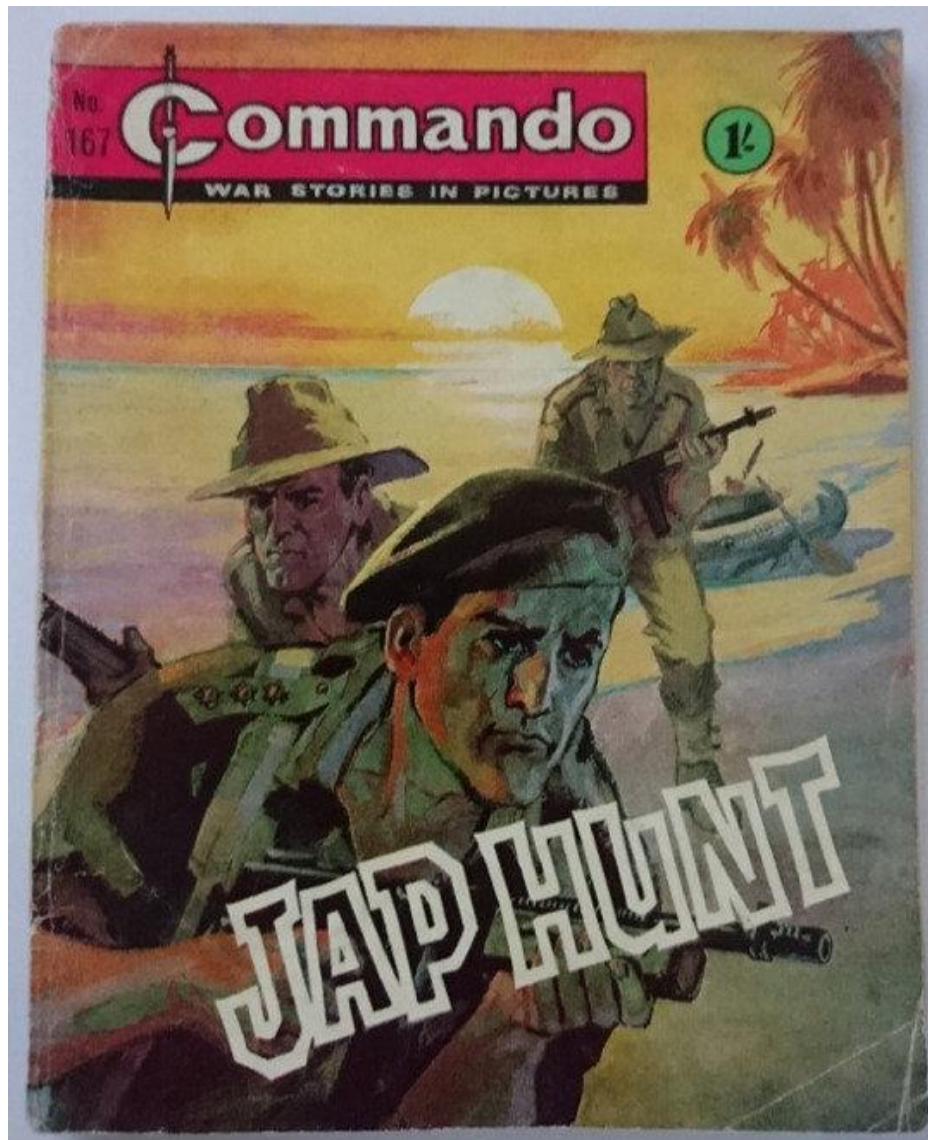
## Chapter 4: *Commando's* exterior: to judge a book by its cover

As the cover of a comic is the first thing that will be noticed, it is important that the illustration on the exterior will draw the reader's attention. As the cover is deemed such an important part of the comic it is important that the elements on the cover 'pop' as these can be regarded an invitation to the potential reader to read the comic. Covers, just like the comic's storyline, tell a story as well; or at the very least, hint at a storyline, and this chapter delves deep into the examination of the exterior of the comic book by examining the titles, the illustration on the covers, and the blurbs -the summary of a comic book that is often printed on the back of a book- cover before examining the interior of the comic book in the next chapter. The main question of this chapter is *'In what manner do the elements on the Commando comic covers hint to the presence of Japanese in the comics and how are Japanese represented over time?'*

### 4.1 The titles and themes

#### 4.1.1) 1961-1980: To kill a Jap and pinch a Nazi

The titles of the *Commando* comics that were printed between 1961 and 1980 are often coloured in yellow's, blue's, followed by titles with red and white colour schemes, and are primarily the first thing the reader notices when glancing at the exterior of the comic. The bold letters create a break from the depicted scene as these colourful words are often placed in the centre of the illustrations, often plasters on or wedged in between (fighting) men, [figure 3] and thus draw one's eye straight to it. However, as the colours of the titles catch the readers eye it is mostly the words that makes the eye linger.



[Figure 3] *Commando* 167 'Jap Hunt,' (1965), cover.<sup>169</sup>

Scanning through the list of comic titles on the website [web.archive.org](http://web.archive.org),<sup>170</sup> a website on which up to the 3422<sup>nd</sup> title of the *Commando* comics can be found, it might not be immediately clear which comics contain a storyline in which Japanese are depicted, but 13 titles up to the 1428<sup>th</sup> edition<sup>171</sup> made it evidently clear that Japanese were in some shape or form present in the story as the word 'Jap' is displayed on the cover. What seems striking is that the amount of 13 titles which contain the word 'Jap' are often combined with a word that indicates physically abusing Japanese. According to the following titles Japanese

<sup>169</sup> 167 *Jap Hunt*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1965).

<sup>170</sup> "Commando Comics," February 13, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070213041429/http://users.tinyonline.co.uk/vic2/www26255/home.htm.htm>.

<sup>171</sup> The 1428<sup>th</sup> title, *Terror of the Japs* (1980) is the last title of the 1961-1980-period that printed a cover containing 'Jap' in the title.

are (or should be); killed 15 '*Jap Killer*' (1961), scourged; 27 '*Scourge for the Japs*' (1961), tamed; 100 '*Jap Tamer*' (1964), trapped, 146 '*Jap Trap*' (1964) or hunted down, 167 '*Jap Hunt*' (1965) and are thus rather descriptive in what awaits Japanese when they encounter Allied soldiers. As the use of words that indicate physical abuse were certainly not uncommon in titles that depict events of WWII, it is noteworthy that, when cross-referencing the titles in which the word 'Jap' is used with titles that contain the word 'Nazi', Nazi's seem better off than 'Japs'. Firstly, there are only 5 titles that contain the word 'Nazi' between 1961-1980 period, and of those 5 titles there are 2 that suggests a physical altercation between two or more parties. For example, the 16<sup>th</sup> title suggests that a knife is involved; '*Knife for a Nazi*' (1961), while the other title has a more playful disposition as the title suggest that one should 'pinch' a Nazi; 445 '*Pinch down a sleeping Nazi*' (1969), which seems rather harmless in comparison with 'scourging', 'hunting down' and 'killing' 'Japs'.

Titles containing words like 'Jap' in combination with 'hunting down', 'taming' and killing Japanese are however the more extreme examples of *Commando* titles in which racial slur and hatred towards Japanese is pushed to the fore. Most titles of the *Commando* comics in this time period are implicit, thus not using racial slur in the title to hint to the presence of Japanese in the comics and rather use verbal cultural markers, which can be regarded as aspects of a culture, symbols, clothes and even language that create a sense identity but also serve as a landmark for others who do not belong to the culture,<sup>172</sup> as to hint to the presence of Japanese in the story.

When looking at the implicit titles, the titles can be divided in two categories: titles that often incorporate cultural references, like (common) phrases used by Japanese, names of weapons or military conveyances used by the Japanese during the events of WWII and secondly, titles that hint at a location where a confrontation between Allied soldiers and Japanese commenced. Titles of this category primarily contain military phrases or heroic deeds of Allied soldiers and do not hint on the appearance of Japanese or other Axis soldiers.

When examining the titles of the first category common words are 'Zero', that refers to a Japanese fighter plane that was used during WWII, 'Jungle', as to implicate that battle took place in presumably Burma or New Guinea or Indo-China where the Allied soldiers often encountered Japanese, and on occasion the word 'Banzai', that denotes a Japanese

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<sup>172</sup> Meike Watzlawik, "Cultural Identity Markers and Identity as a Whole: Some Alternative Solutions," *Sage Journals* 18 (2012): 253–60, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354067X11434843>.

cheer or war-cry. Amongst the three, the word 'Jungle' is the most popular as it is used more than over 20 times in the 1961-1980 period, followed by 'Zero' that has been used over 10 times, followed by 2 covers that display the word 'Banzai'. The titles that contain the words 'Zero' and 'Jungle' in particular have some overlap with the titles that implicitly refer to the appearance of people from Japanese descent in the comics. When examining some titles that contain the word 'Jungle' like 9 '*Jungle Fury*' (1961), 434 '*Jungle Hunt*' (1996), 442 '*Jungle Trap*' (1996) for example, there is an immediate overlap with *Commando's* 146 '*Jap Trap*' (1964) and 167 '*Jap Hunt*' (1965) that mention that physical harm will be inflicted on Japanese, but there are also a majority of other titles like 136 '*Zero Basher*' (1964) and 565 '*Zero Smasher*' (1971) for example, that are less explicitly violent although the titles do suggest that Japanese will not be left unharmed.

As shortly mentioned before, the titles of the second group often seem to put emphasis on the depiction of sacrifices, heroism and the successes of British and other Allied soldiers, and do not hint to the presence of Japanese in the comics. Titles like 905 '*Sub-Chaser*' (1975), 960 '*The Prisoners*' (1975) and 1348 '*Ten Years After*' (1979) for example are non-specific and make the reader dependent on the illustrations and other additional elements on the cover to inform them if there are Japanese present in the story. A thorough examination of these elements can be found in section 3.2 and 3.3.

#### 4.1.2) 1981-2000: Warriors, raiders and heroes behind enemy lines

Entering 1981 up to the year 2000, the colour scheme of the titles of the *Commando* comics that portray Japanese has not changed as yellow, blue, red and white colours adorn titles like *Commando* 1503 '*The Bridge must Fall*' (1981), 1571 '*Trap for a Jap*' (1982), 1611 '*Japanese Jinx*' (1982), 1688 '*Island of Mystery*' (1983), 1714 '*Shipwrecked!*' (1983), 1961 '*Sub-hunter*' (1986), 2413 '*One Way Worriers*' (1990), 2389 '*Behind Jap Lines*' (1990), 2521 '*General Civvies*' (1991), 2616 '*Prisoners of Fear*' (1992), 2737 '*Regan's Raiders*' (1994), 2781 '*Samurai Challenge*' (1994), 2954 '*The Trap Closes*' (1996) and 3183 '*Mountain of the Lost*' (1998). Even though the colour scheme did not change over the years, the changes in the titles themselves are noteworthy. When comparing the 13 titles of the *Commando* comics between the 1961-1980 period, that hint on the appearance of Japanese with racial slang with the titles between the 1981-2000 period, there are just 3 titles that hint on the



appearance of Japanese in the comic, of which 2 use racial slang to refer to Japanese; *'Trap for a Jap'* (1982) and *'Behind Jap lines'* (1990). Not only the use of racial slang aimed towards Japanese has declined but also the intention with which the racial slang was used has changed as well. Instead of combining racial slang aimed at Japanese with words like 'kill', 'scourge' or 'hunt' down Japanese, the titles have shifted to less pain inflicting words like 'trapping'; *'Trap for a Jap'* instead of 'killing' Japanese, or adding an element of mystification in the title like *'Japanese Jinx'*, or tell something about the location of the protagonists of the story for example in *'Behind Jap Lines'*.

Looking at the other titles that contain stories in which Japanese are present, titles with 'Jungle' increased as there are comics that have used the word 'Jungle' in the title, while there is a decrease in the titles that use 'Zero' or 'Banzai' as there are no titles that contain those words. A further examination of the titles that contain 'Jungle' makes it evident that they have some overlap with the comics from the 1961-1980-period that emphasized violence used against Japanese when looking at the titles 2573 *'Jungle Manhunt'* (1992), 2587 *'Jungle Fury'* (1992), 2668 *'Jungle Killer'* (1993) and 2686 *'Murder in the Jungle'* (1993) but do not explicitly suggest that 'manhunt' and the killing happened to Japanese or that the Allied soldiers were assaulted by Japanese. Thus even though these titles are interesting, they cannot tell much about the way in which Japanese were perceived by *Commando*.

Another overlap between the two time periods is that there seems to be an increase in new titles and some reprints that underline the action-packed and heroic military narrative, like 2233 *'Bulletproof'* (1988), 2413 *'One Way Worriers'* (1990), 2737 *'Regan's Raiders'* (1994), 2782 *'Operation Navajo'* (1994), and for example more exotic places and location like, 1512 *'Escape from Burma'*, (1981) and 1688 *'Island of Mystery'* (1983). Thus Instead of centring, and maybe even in a way, glorifying actions taken against 'Japs', the focus primarily remains on the heroic military narrative of the Allied soldiers than referring to the occurrence of Japanese in the comics. Can same be said of the *Commando* cover illustrations?

## 4.2 The Cover Illustrations

As mentioned in the previous chapters, most *Commando* comic titles put emphasis on militarism and the depiction of sacrifices, heroism, successes of English and other Allied soldiers. Solely reading the titles 905 'Sub-Chaser' (1975), 960 'The Prisoners' (1975), 1348 'Ten Years After' (1979), 1503 'The Bridge must Fall' (1981), 1714 'Shipwrecked!' (1983) and 'General Civvies' (1991), for example, a reader might not automatically think of the appearance of Japanese in these stories. Upon the examination of the illustrations cover on the comics it will be become more clear that in these comics Japanese do make an appearance.

### 4.2.1) 1961-1980: The menacing faces of the land of the rising sun

When examining the cover 960th *Commando* issue 'The Prisoners' (1975), with its yellow with red infused sky - which might signify a fire or a bombing - that serves as the backdrop for illustration of two men; one amesiated with a bare back holding is hands up, and the other threatening the bare-backed man with a bajonet, [figure 4] the reader might wonder who these men are.



[figure 4] *Commando* 960 'The Prisoners,' (1975) cover.<sup>173</sup>

<sup>173</sup> 960 *The Prisoners* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1975), cover.

As the face of the man in the right corner is not visible, and he does not carry any weapon or wears any clothing that could be significant for identification, the reader might shift to man in the left corner of the illustration as he is frontally portrayed. Looking at the man's outfit, scanning his feet, moving up to his legs and torso not anything seems to stand out. However, moving slightly more up, reaching the headgear of the man may provide the observant reader with a clue. When one looks closely at the hat the man wears, a yellow speck can be detected in the middle. This yellow dot on the hat of the man in the right corner is presumably the star insignia that serves as an identity marker to identify Japanese. Zooming in on the illustration though, reveals that the 'star' remains just a yellow dot. However, it must be taken into account that the size of the hat does not allow for any detailed drawing of the insignia. The illustrator thus probably opted for the practical solution that the reader would at least perceive the hat as a part of the Japanese uniform and thus favoured function over form.

Another element that could provide some more information about the man's ethnicity are his facial features. Even though examining facial features in the representation of actors in comics is also important it can be a tricky undertaking as facial features are open to interpretation and are thus subjective. What one might deem as 'very Japanese' another person might not agree upon. However, considering the literature of Chapman, Gutierrez and Brock about the appearance of Japanese in war comics, the man's facial features do overlap with some of the descriptions they provided. Looking at the man's face; his slightly squinted eyes, slightly long(er) teeth and moustache <sup>174</sup>are most striking when comparing them to the list of the appointed features for Japanese. Thus, even though one cannot be fully sure that the depicted man is indeed from Japanese descent, the combination of the man's facial features with the "yellow star" on the hat, give enough reason to regard the illustrated man in the left corner as Japanese.

Looking at a few other comic covers like *Commando's* 48<sup>th</sup> edition '*Banzai! Banzai! Banzai!*' (1963), followed by the comic 1348 '*Ten Years After*' (1979) and '*Banzai!*' (2011), a bundled work which contains three *Commando* works from the 1961-1980 period in which

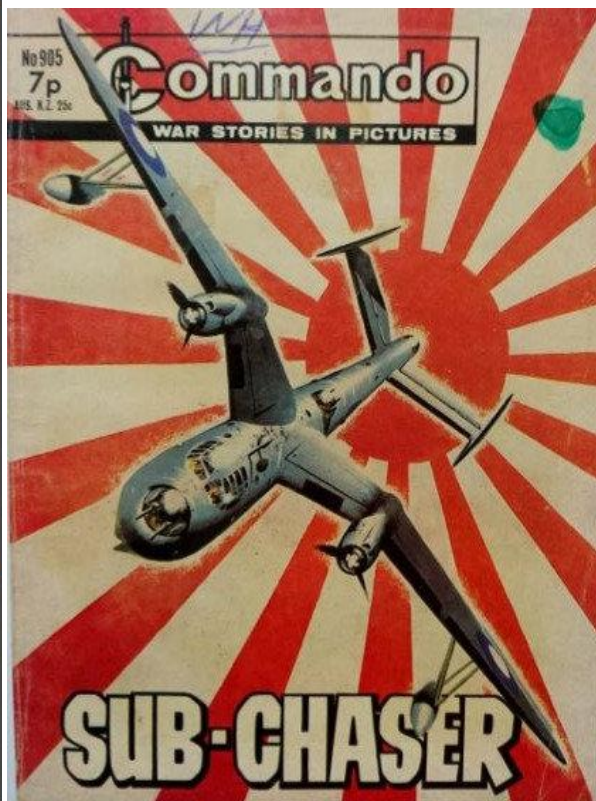
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<sup>174</sup>Brock, "Portrayal of the Japanese during World War II in the United States," 28.

Japanese are present in the storyline, it becomes evident that illustrators hold on to a certain way to depict Japanese. What is striking is that Japanese, regardless of their facial features often are depicted with menacing faces and always seem ready for battle when carrying a sword - whether this may be a regular sword, bayonet or katana - or gun in hand. This depiction however, of the 'menacing battle ready Japanese' [figure 5,7,8] is often accompanied by an illustration of the Japanese flag which, when it is portrayed, is primarily depicted very largely on the cover [figure 5, 6,7]so it is undeniable that Japanese will make an appearance in the comic.



[Fig 5] *Commando* 1348 'Ten Years After,' (1979).<sup>175</sup>

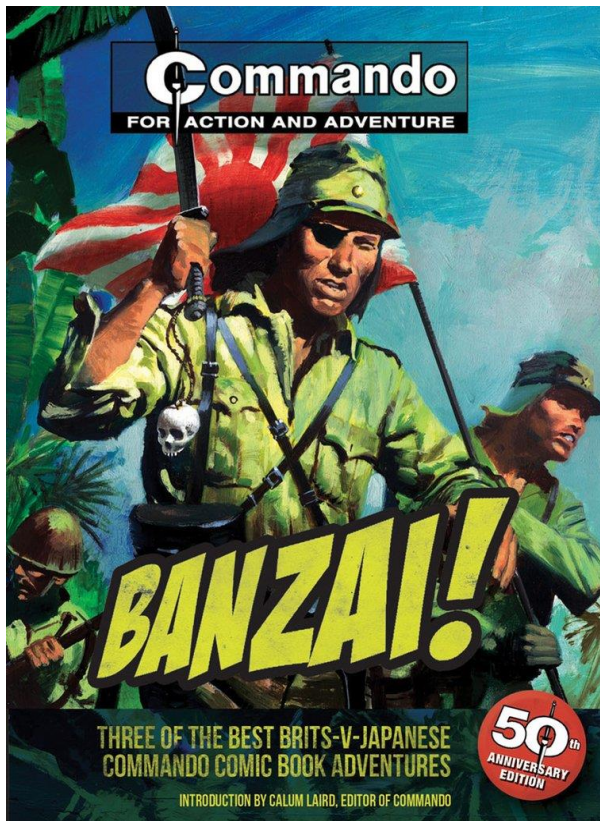


[Fig 6] *Commando* 905 'Sub-Chaser,' (1975).<sup>176</sup>

<sup>175</sup> 1348 *Ten Years After*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1979), cover.

<sup>176</sup> 905 *Sub-Chasers*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1975), cover.





[Fig. 7] *Commando* (-) 'Banzai' (2011).<sup>177</sup>



[Fig. 8] *Commando* 48 'Banzai, Banzai, Banzai', (1962).<sup>178</sup>

However, in the absence of faces and flags or other cultural (identity) markers that can hint on the portrayal of Japanese, *Commando* provided some other elements that can help assist in the identification process. Looking at the 775<sup>th</sup> edition of *Commando* named *Island of fear* (1965) [figure 9], the cover immediately grabs the reader's attention as the depiction of a swashbuckling hatted man with a weapon in hand striking his opponent, but does not directly make it clear that the story involves Japanese. However, looking at the man's hat and his tool, made into a weapon, do not only help to clarify where the man might come from and where the man currently might be but also give more insight on his opponent who's face is largely obstructed from the view. The hat of the man in the left corner has the shape of a slouch hat which is the shape of hat that is in that time worn primarily by Australians, and the object he wields is a machete which is that is a powerful tool that can, as seen in this example, be imposed as a weapon to wield against enemies but is mainly used for clearing bush in the tropics, which the man is currently surrounded by.

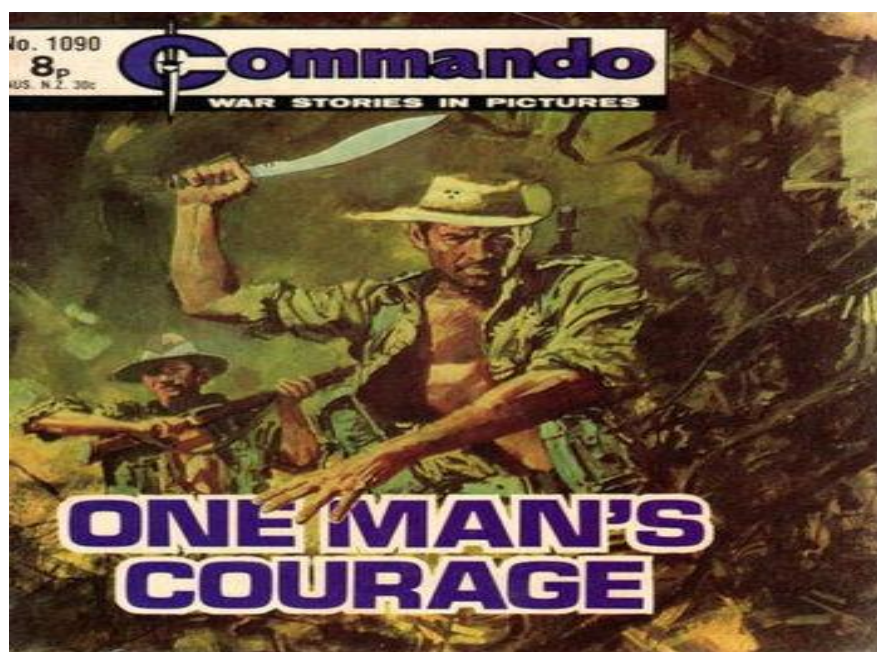
<sup>177</sup> *Banzai!*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 2011) cover.

The issue number was not included on the cover nor could I find it online.

<sup>178</sup> *48 Banzai! Banzai! Banzai!*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1962) cover.



[Fig.9] *Commando* 775 'Island of Fear,' (1973).<sup>179</sup>



[Fig.10] *Commando* 231 'One Man's Courage,' (1967).<sup>180</sup>

<sup>179</sup> 775 *Island of Fear*, 2nd ed., *Commando* (Dundee: D.C. Thomson, 1973), cover.

<sup>180</sup> 231 *One Man's Courage*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1967), cover.





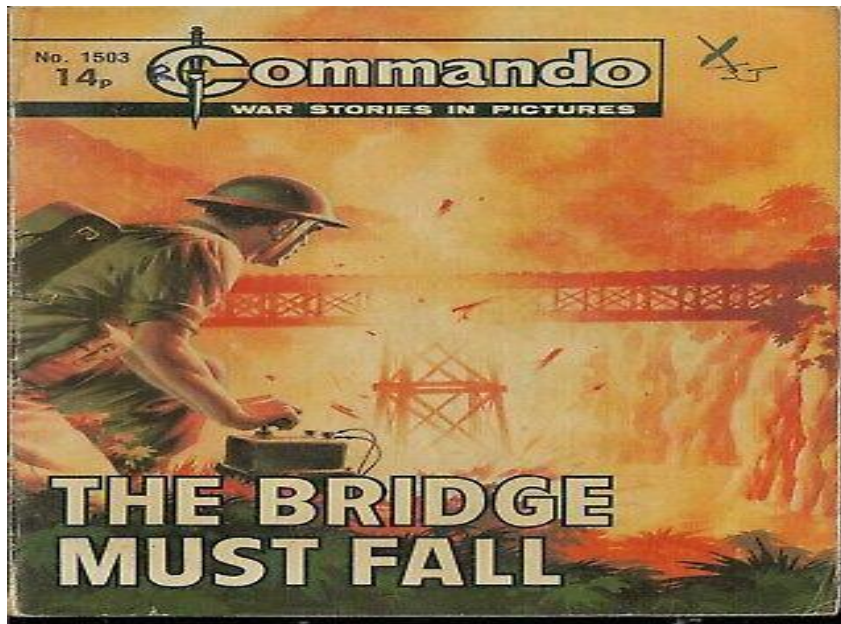
[Fig. 11] *Commando* 738 'No Stopping Them,' (1973).<sup>181</sup>

All the elements, the hat that identifies the man as Australian and the machete, also seen on 231 'One Man's Courage' (1967) [figure 10], used for clearing one's way through the bush, can refer to the tropical forested locations on for example Singapore, Borneo or New Guinea, which are locations that Japan occupied during WWII and fought against Australian forces. However, shifting to the man in the downright corner; his position, camouflaged helmet and clothes do not give a lot of viable information to confirm the assumption that the man could indeed be Japanese and thus his ethnicity remains unconfirmed and largely guesswork. When also looking to other comics, like 738 'No Stopping Them' (1973) [figure 11] for example the visibility of Japanese on the *Commando* comics between 1961-1980 seems fifty-fifty; or they are largely depicted on the foreground and easily recognizable or they remain "invisible" and can only be identified as Japanese by other actors or elements on the cover.

<sup>181</sup> 738 *No Stopping Them*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1973), cover.

#### 4.2.2) 1981-2000 Covers: To trap, to sink, to shoot and knife a 'Jap'

In the 1980's up to the year 2000, the trend of the 'invisible Japanese' or even 'anonymous Japanese' seems to increase. Looking at the cover of *Commando's* 1503 '*The Bridge Must Fall*' (1981), enthusiasts of WWII-inspired fiction might be directly transported to a scene from the movie *Bridge on the River Kwai* (1952)<sup>182</sup> when they see the cover of '*The Bridge Must Fall*' and will assume that there will be Japanese present on the blown up bridge even though Japanese are not at visibly Japanese portrayed. [figure 12]



[Fig. 12] *Commando* 1503 '*The Bridge must Fall*,' (1981).<sup>183</sup>

However, not every reader will be able to make a connection with the movie, nor every comic with a depiction of a blown up bridge, a sinking ship or the depiction of dogfight<sup>184</sup> hints to a fight between Allied and Japanese soldiers. In the previous section it became evident that frontal depictions of Japanese and cultural markings and other signifiers, especially in the absence of titles that do not hint on the presence of Japanese in the comic, can be helpful to establish where the story is set and which actors are involved. Looking at the covers *Commando's* 1688 '*Island of Mystery*' (1983), 1714 '*Shipwrecked!*' (1983), 2521 '*General Civvies*' (1991), 2616 '*Prisoners of Fear*' (1992), 2737 '*Regan's Raiders*' (1994) and

<sup>182</sup>David Lean, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, Adventure, Drama, War (Horizon Pictures (II), 1958).

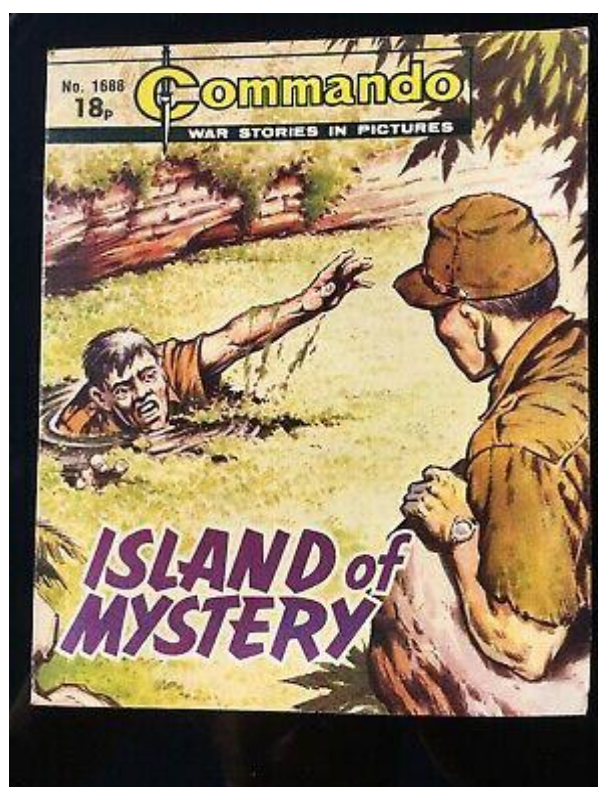
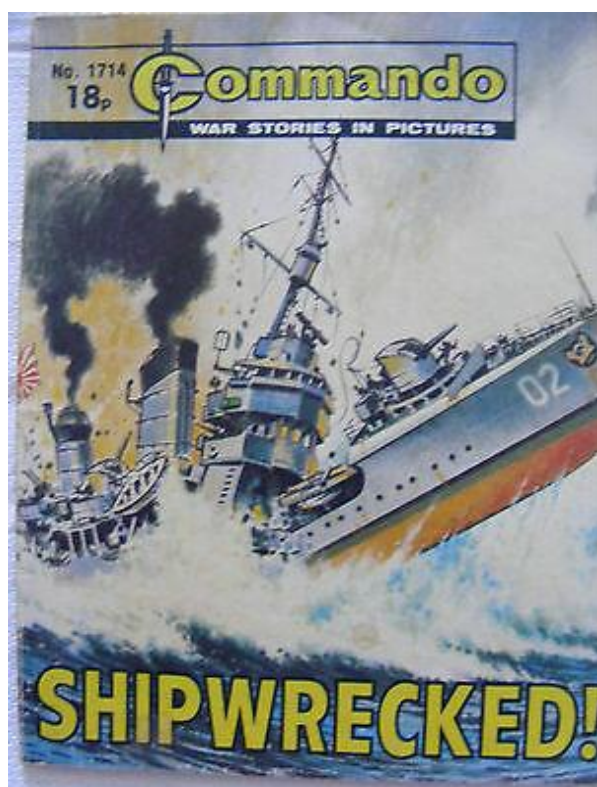
A movie that centres around a group of Allied British prisoners of war who are forced to build a railway bridge across the river Kwai for their Japanese captors in occupied Burma whilst unknowing that 'Allied forces are planning a daring commando raid through the jungle to destroy it.

<sup>183</sup> 1503 *The Bridge Must Fall*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1980), cover.

<sup>184</sup> A dogfight is an aerial battle between two or multiple fighter aircrafts at close range.



2781 *'Samurai Challenge'* (1994) for example, the illustrations all have incorporated an element, whether big or small, that helps to inform the reader which actors will be present in the story and provide some information for the reader where the story is set and what the storyline might be about. Upon closer inspection the reader can for example spot on the cover of *'Shipwrecked!'* [figure 13] a part of the Japanese flag in the middle left corner of the illustration. Even though the size of the flag, it still serves as a cultural marking and is quite helpful to establish the presence of Japanese in the comic. For the cover illustration of *'Island of Mystery'* though, [figure 14] the readers must be knowledgeable of WWII renditions in movies and on television shows as the military uniform of the man in the right corner suffices as a cultural marker that can help the reader identify the ethnicity of the soldier without having to see his face. Without this knowledge, his identity will remain a mystery.



[Fig. 13] *Commando* 1714 *'Shipwrecked!'*, (1983).<sup>185</sup> [Fig. 14] *Commando* 1688 *'Island of Mystery'*, (1983).<sup>186</sup>

When more thoroughly examining the cover illustration of 1688 *'Island of Mystery'* (1983) it can be argued that, after the reader has correctly identified the hatted man as Japanese, the Japanese man is 'evil' and heartless as he rather seems to observe the submerging but not

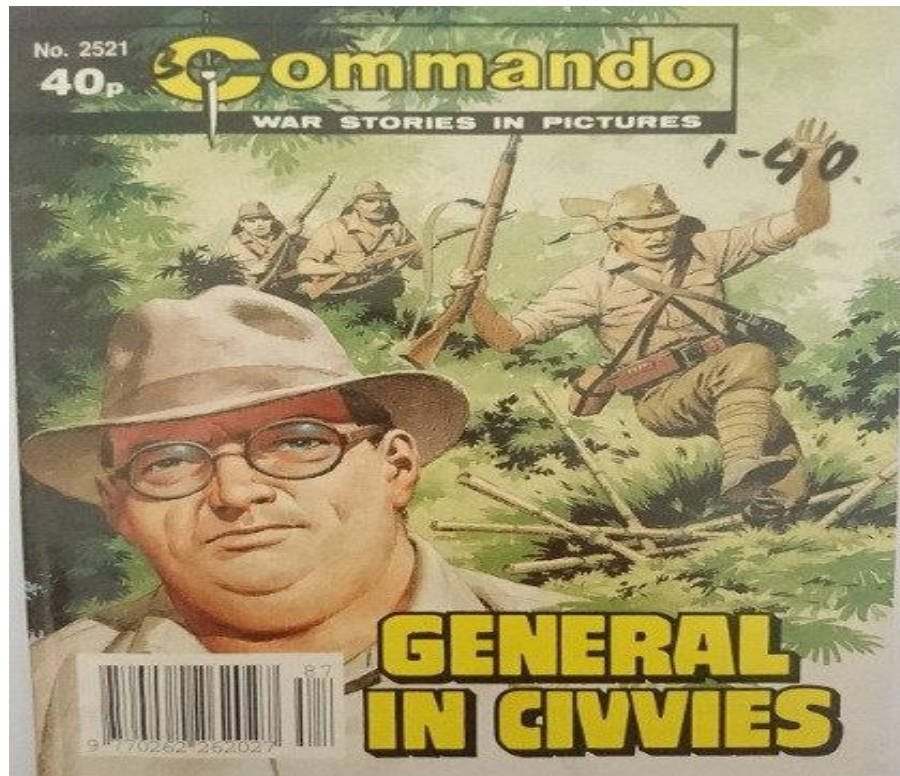
<sup>185</sup> 1714 *Shipwrecked*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & Co., 1983), cover.

<sup>186</sup> 1688 *Island of Mystery*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & Co., 1983), cover.

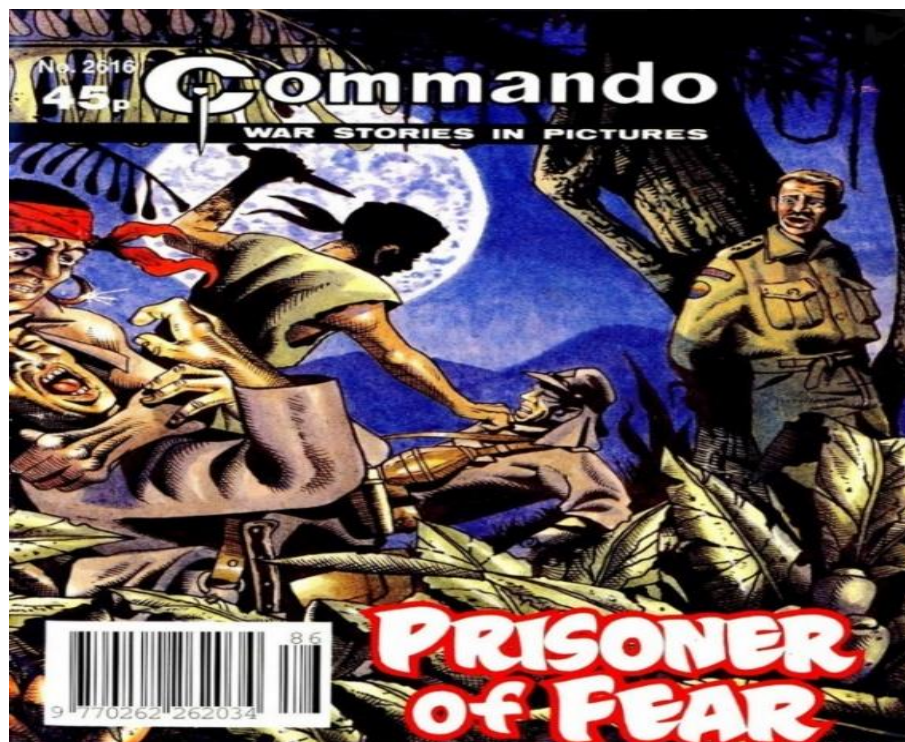
offering any help. However, the reader cannot be exactly sure what is depicted as the illustration is just a still from an event of which the reader has no prior knowledge of. It also could be that the Japanese soldier was alerted by the man's screams and has just arrived at the scene to help instead of being the executer who threw the man into the quicksand. However, with the depiction of the Japanese man, who's back is turned to the reader, makes it impossible to make out if the Japanese man shows any signs of distress or remorse and thus the illustration makes it easy to assume the worst and regard the Japanese man as 'heartless' and 'evil' by letting someone defenceless slowly drown.

Upon further comparisons of the illustrations of the *Commando* comics printed between 1961-1980 with the covers of the comics printed between 1981-2000, the comics of the latter time period do not often portray Japanese up close and rather show them from a distance or with non-divined features. Japanese are often blurred or obstructed from view in comparison with the comics from the previous decades. What is most striking though, is that Japanese on these comics are portrayed more visibly in dire situations when compared to the covers prior between 1961-1980. Japanese are on the *Commando* covers of the 1981-2000-period for example portrayed when falling into a trap; 2521 '*General Civvies*' (1991), [figure 15] being knifed; 2616 '*Prisoners of Fear*' (1992), [figure 16] or shot; 2737 '*Regan's Raiders*' (1994) [figure 17] instead of being portrayed as fearless men with menacing looks on their faces who proudly wave the Japanese flag in the previous time period. Now, the Allied heroism and bravery is pushed more to the fore in which they are cleverly ambushing the enemy with guns and knives. But what about planes, boats and other military vehicles? Where are these on the covers?





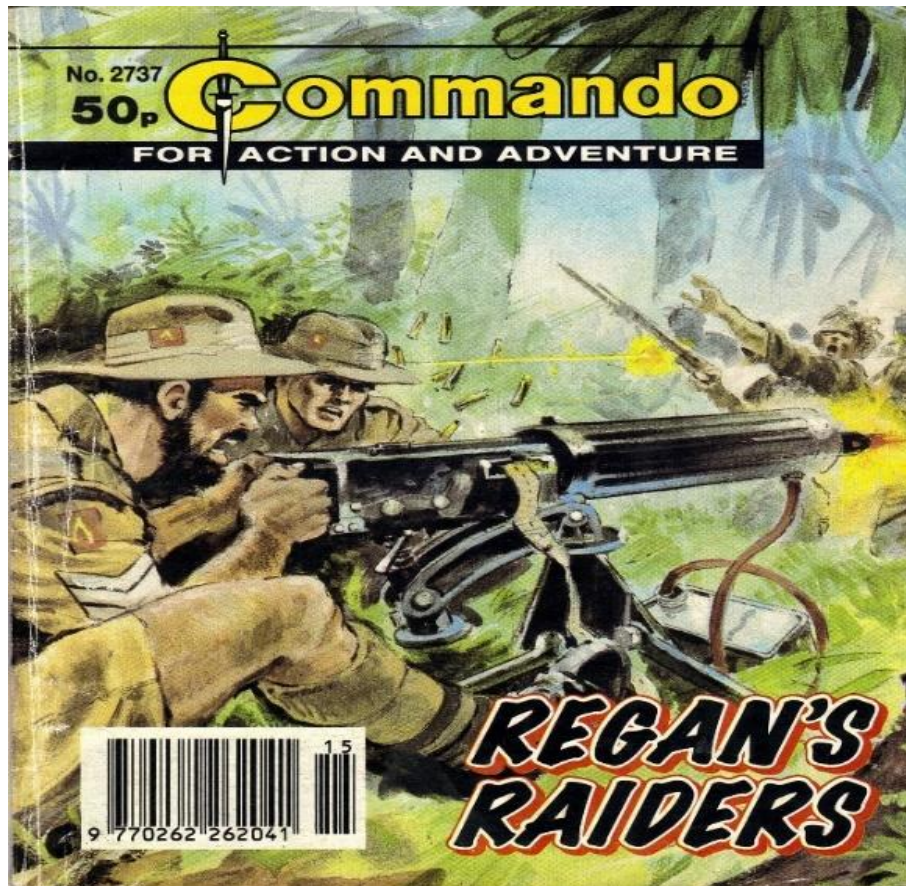
[Fig.15] *Commando* 2521 'General Civvies,' (1991).<sup>187</sup>



[Fig. 16] *Commando* 2616 'Prisoners of Fear,' (1992).<sup>188</sup>

<sup>187</sup> 2521 *General Civvies*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1991), cover.

<sup>188</sup> 2616 *Prisoners of Fear*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1992), cover.



[Fig. 17] *Commando* 2737 'Regan's Raiders,' (1994).<sup>189</sup>

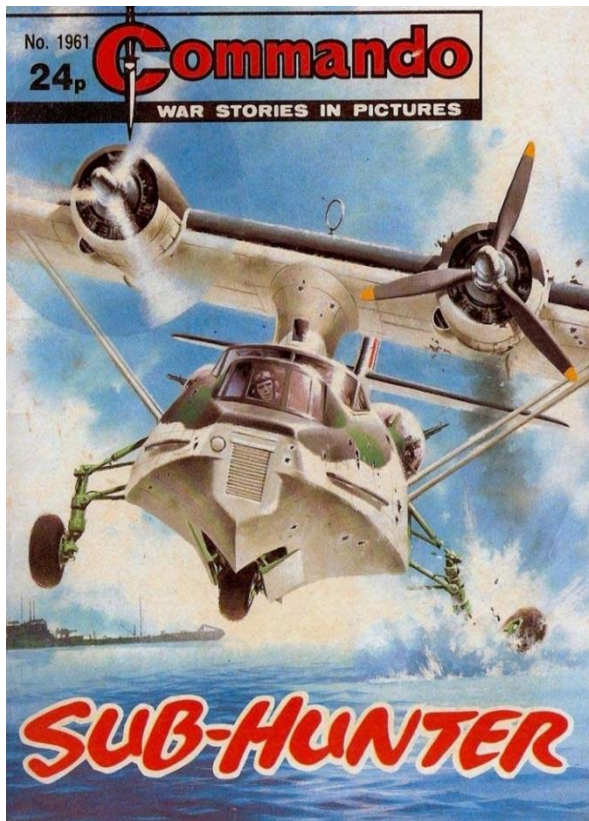
As a concluding remark for this section, another element that is striking is the military narrative that is noticeably more prominent in the illustrations. The display of aircrafts or submarines on the cover of 1961 'Sub-hunter' (1986) [figure 18] and 2413 'One Way Worriers' [figure 19] for example overlap with the explanation in Schaffer's *De dynamiek van de herinnering* in which he emphasized the importance of nationalistic and militaristic commemoration, and the portrayal of 'unbrokenness' were important for the Britain during, and continued even after the war.<sup>190</sup>

Because the scope of this thesis there is unfortunately not much room left to discuss the additional information on the covers. However, as it is important to incorporate this element in this research the decision has been made to discuss and compare the two time frames in jointly in section 4.3 before moving on to the comic book pages in chapter 5.

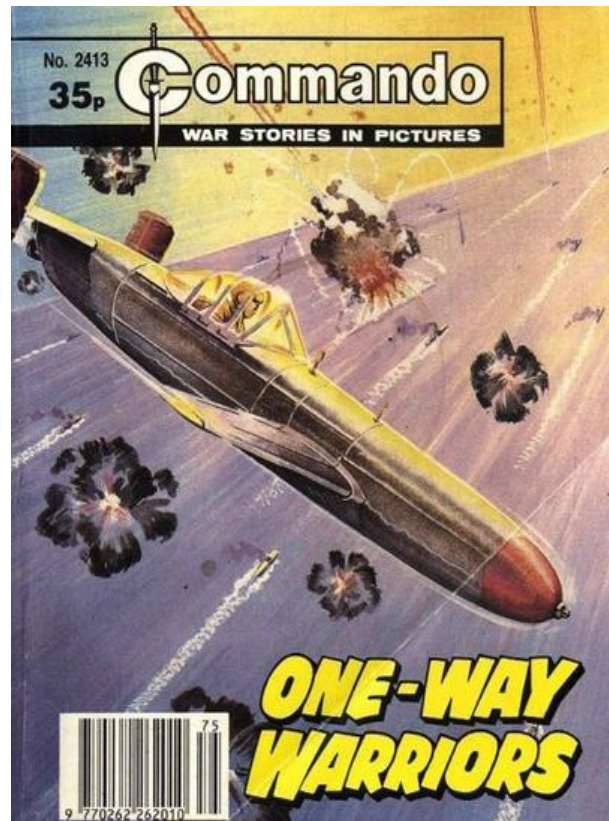
<sup>189</sup> 2737 *Regan's Raiders*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1994), cover.

<sup>190</sup> Schaffer, "Een Angstvallig Gekoesterde Overwinning," 245–46.





[Fig.18] *Commando* 1961 'Sub-hunter,' (1986).<sup>191</sup>



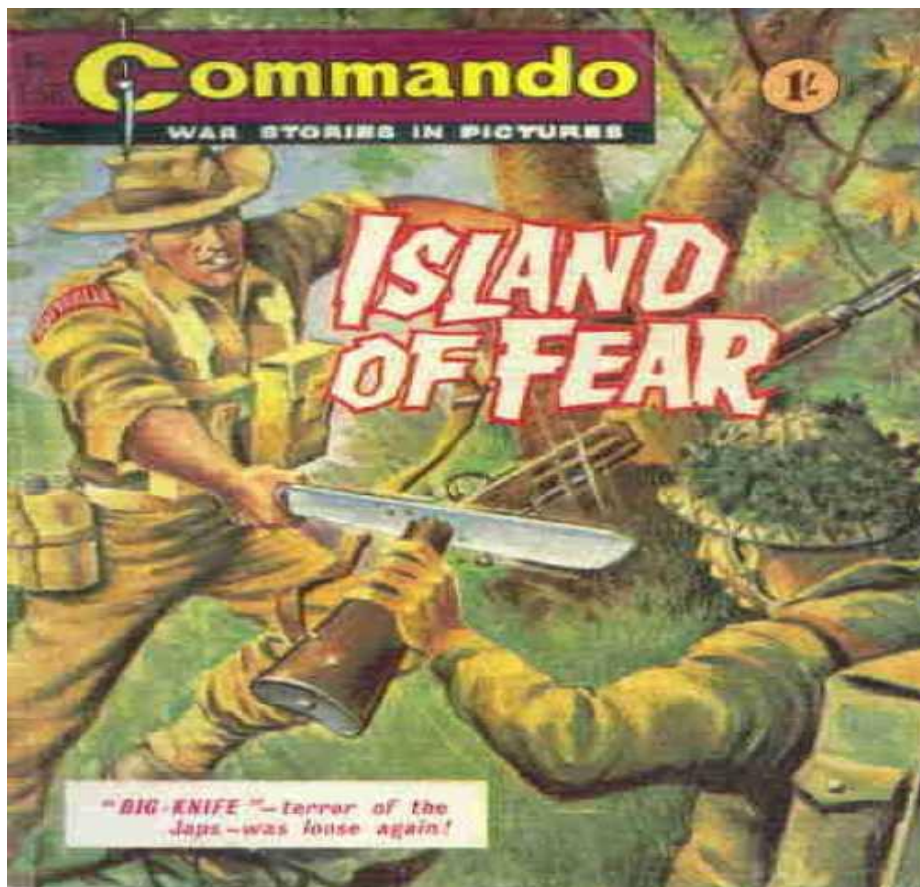
[Fig.19] *Commando* 2413 'One Way Worriers,' (1990).<sup>192</sup>

<sup>191</sup> 1961 *Sub-Hunter*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1986), cover.

<sup>192</sup> 2413 *One Way Worriers*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1990), cover.

#### 4.3 Additional information on the covers: subtexts and blurbs

When sometimes the titles and illustrations do not help in determining that Japanese appear in the story, the publisher or author can offer the reader one last aid with additional texts and blurbs. When looking at the subtexts of *Commando* between 1961-1980 it becomes evident that the additional information, often placed in a white slab that breaks the composition of the cover illustration, frequently displays wartime slang and racial epithet aimed at Japanese. [figure 20]



[Fig. 20] *Commando* 158 'Island of Fear,' (1965).<sup>193</sup>

<sup>193</sup> 158 *Island of Fear*, 1st ed., *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1965), cover.



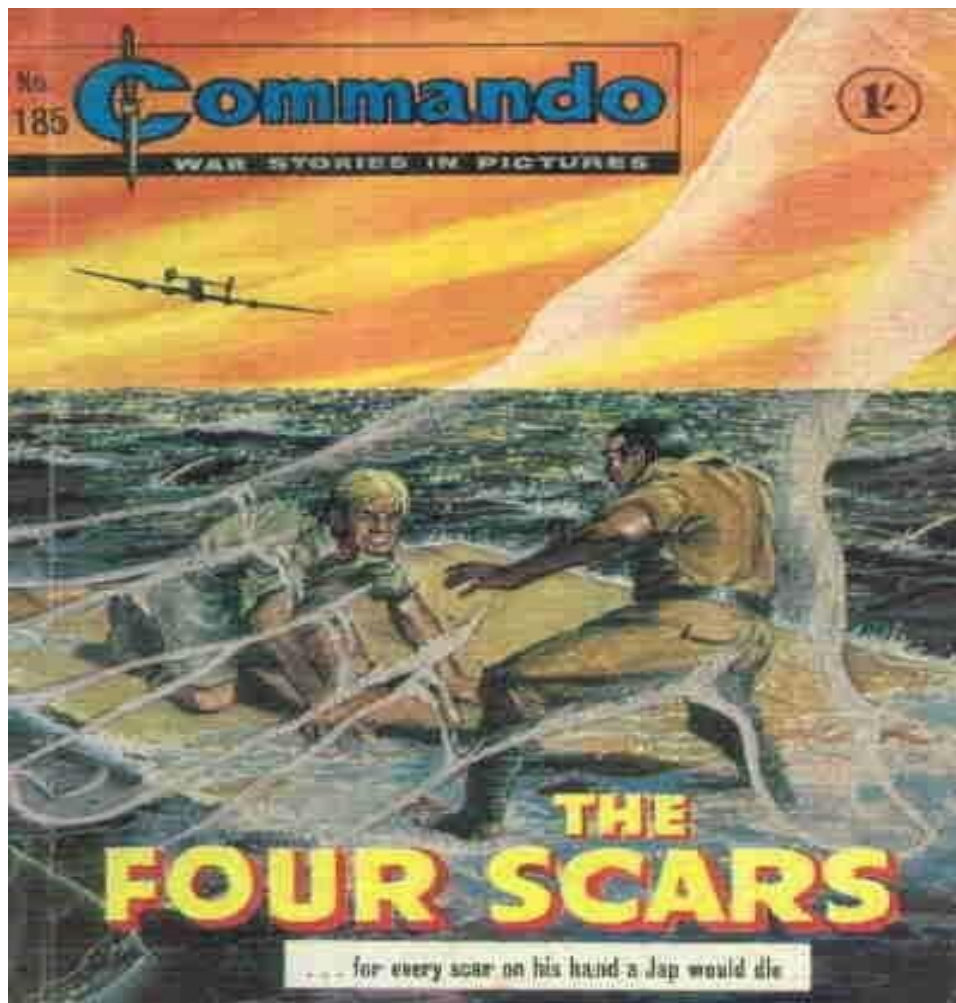
[Fig.21] *Commando 775 'Island of Fear,'* (1973).<sup>194</sup>

Upon closer inspection of figure 20, it appears that the text reads “BIG KNIFE”- terror of the Japs- was loose again!’. This text however, is not incorporated on the 1973 reprint edition of *‘Island of Fear’* and has even been completely removed. [figure 21] This is also the case for *Commando’s* 185 *‘The Four Scars’*. When examining the cover of the first edition, the additional text in the white slab states that ‘for every scar on his hand a Jap would die’. However, looking at the second edition, which was printed almost a decade later, the additional text in the white slab has also been removed. [figure 22, 23]

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<sup>194</sup> 775 *Island of Fear*, cover.





[Fig.22] *Commando* 165 'The four scars,' (1965).<sup>195</sup>

<sup>195</sup> 165 *The Four Scars*, 1st ed., *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1965), cover.

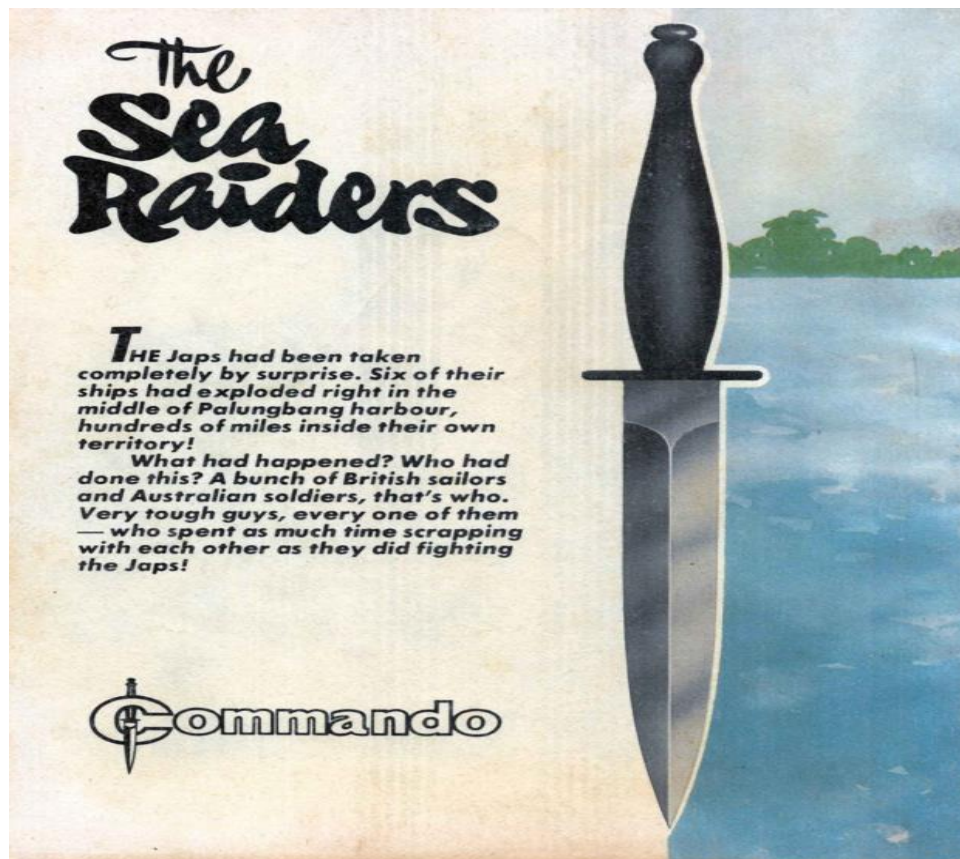




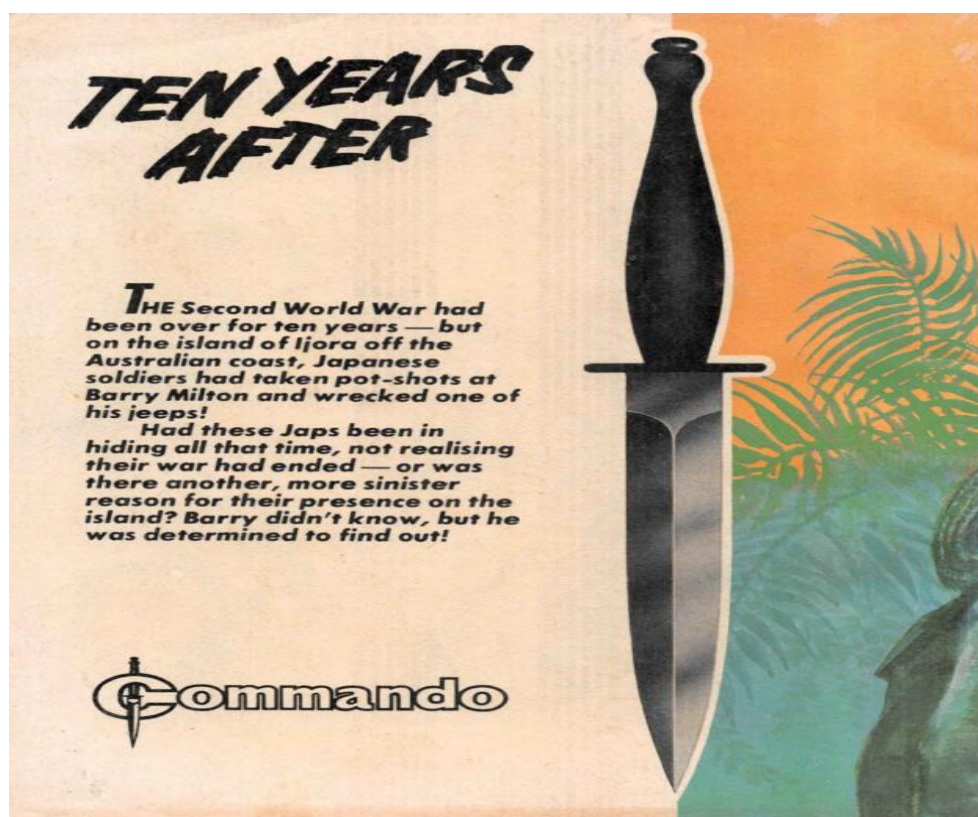
[Fig. 23] *Commando* 831 'The Four Scars,' (1974).<sup>196</sup>

Looking at the blurbs, the summary of a comic book which can be found at the back of *Commando*, have also undergone some changes over the year. These changes however did not include entire the removal racial slang but instead used 'Jap' and 'Japanese' more interchangeably which can be seen on figure 23 and 24.

<sup>196</sup> 813 *The Four Scars*, 2nd ed., *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1974), cover.



[Fig.23] Commando 1312 'The Sea Raiders,' (1979).<sup>197</sup>



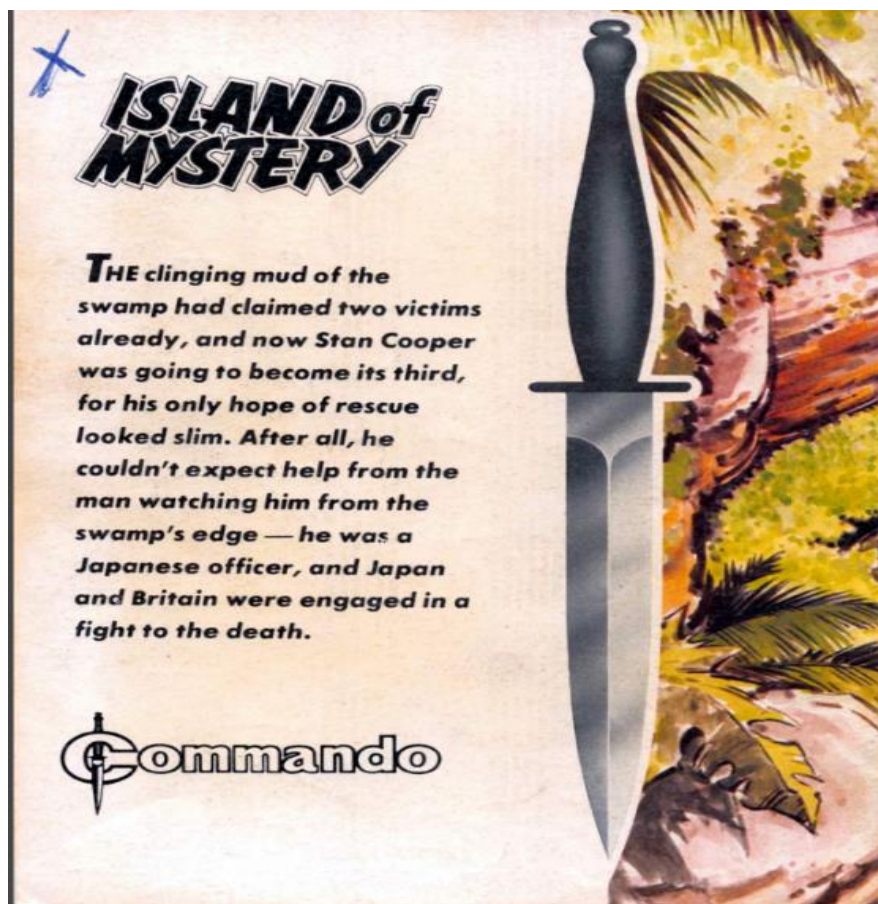
[Fig.24] Commando 1348 'Ten Years After,' (1979).<sup>198</sup>

<sup>197</sup> 1312 *The Sea Raiders*, Commando (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1979), cover.

<sup>198</sup> 1348 *Ten Years After*, Commando (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1979), cover.

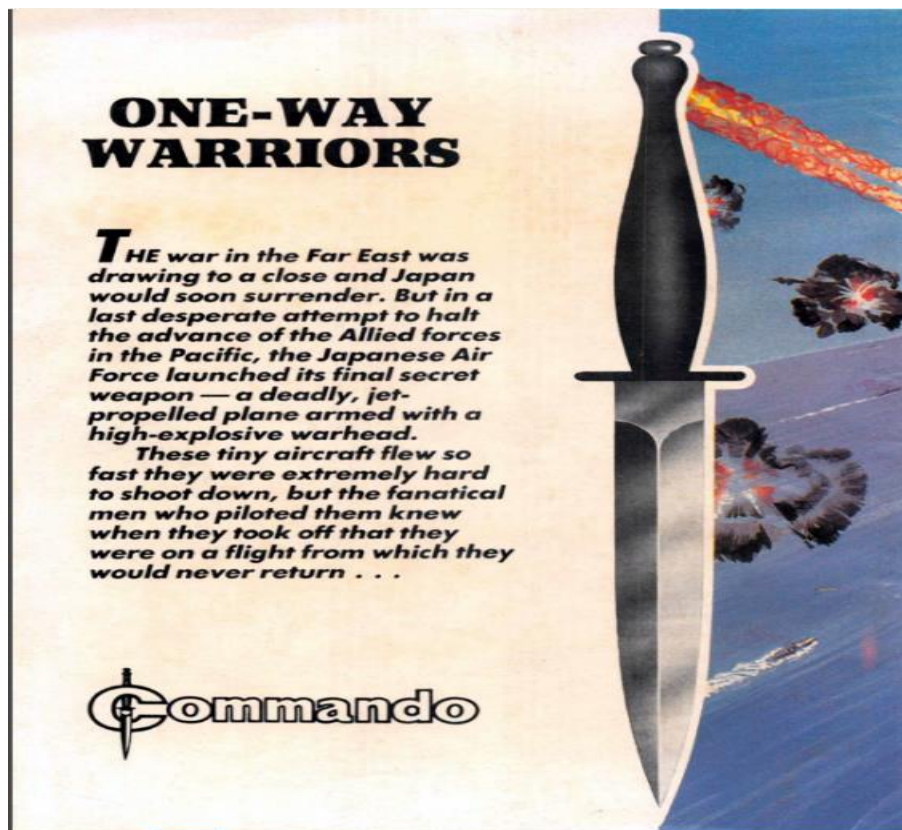


When examining the selected *Commando* titles that have been printed between 1981-2000 that portray Japanese in their storyline, no additional texts can be found on the covers so no comparisons can be made with the previous time period. What is rather interesting though in comparison with the previous time period is that in the blurbs the racial epithet seems to be fully absent. [figure 25,26,27,28] Although this is a striking development, a rationale for this and all the other discussed elements is left open for now and will be discussed in detail in the *End conclusion* after the examination of the comics' storyline in chapter 5 as to avoid unnecessary repetition.



[Fig.25] *Commando* 1688 'Island of Mystery,' (1983).<sup>199</sup>

<sup>199</sup> 1688 *Island of Mystery*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1983), cover.



[Fig. 26] Commando 2413 'One-Way Warriors,' (1990).<sup>200</sup>



[Fig. 27] Commando 2782 'Operation Navajo,' (1994).<sup>201</sup>

<sup>200</sup> 2413 One Way Worriers, Commando (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1990), cover.

<sup>201</sup> 2782 Operation Navajo, Commando (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1994), cover.



[Fig.28] *Commando* 2413 'The Trap Closes,' (1996).<sup>202</sup>

<sup>202</sup> 2954 *The Trap Closes*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1996), cover.

## Chapter 5: The Comics.

After the examination of the covers of the comics it is now time to delve into the comic pages as comics are after all considered a combination of sequenced graphic design and text that work together to construct a narrative. As comics do not only have the ability to capture current events, look back on them or even into the future and can easily switch back and forth between time and place, the medium is a versatile and an interesting form of witnessing. In this chapter, all the texts and illustrations in the *Commando* comics will be examined starting in section 4.1 with the texts, followed by the examination of cultural markers in 4.2 and lastly striking elements and anomalies in the storylines are discussed in section 4.3. The sub-question for this chapter is *In what manner do the elements in Commando portray Japanese and are there any developments over time?*

### 5.1 Wartime slang and racial epithet

#### 5.1.1) 1961-1980: The 'Yellow', 'slit eyed' aggressor

As the focus of the storyline of *Commando's* 231 '*One Man's Courage*' (1967) primarily lies on lieutenant John's bravery and his personal quest for acceptance, the comic does not portray a lot of scenes in which Allied soldiers are in close combat with Japanese soldiers. However, the battle scenes in which Allied soldiers and Japanese are depicted together are interesting to examine. The scenes are not only a good example of the racial slang in the speech bubbles in which Japanese are repeatedly referred to as 'Japs' and are frequently physically "othered" in the *Orientalist* tropes as Japanese are often described as 'yellow' looking, but also othered when seemingly addressing the backwardness of Japan versus the progressiveness of the 'West' and finally the *Yellow Peril* trope, in which Japanese are perceived as inherently evil.

An example of negative *Orientalism* and othering can be seen on page 16 when lieutenant John verbally proclaims his disdain for Japanese culture by referring to the katana, an ancient Japanese sword which was first made around the 13<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>203</sup> as a tool for

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<sup>203</sup> "Katana," June 9, 2022, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Katana&oldid=1092240774>.



slicing melons. Even though this remark might seem harmless, it might also implicitly implicate the imagery of the 'progressive' West against the 'strange' and 'backward' East, which is even more emphasized when John shuts the Japanese man with his gun.[figure 29] A few pages later the narrative has shifted from cultural scrutiny to physical scrutinizing Japanese as John refers to them as 'slit eyed dogs'<sup>204</sup> and stereotypes the cruelty of Japanese by laying emphasis on the 'shrewd and cunning eyes',<sup>205</sup> which seems fitting for the *Yellow Peril* trope. After re-reading the comic, another example that is related to the *Yellow Peril* trope can be found on page 26, another example Japanese cruelty, in this particular case the cruelty of the Japanese officer to his own men, as the illustration seems to support the notion of the 'cruel' nature of a Japanese when the officer literally talks down on Japanese foot-soldiers by mentioning they 'shamble along like old women' <sup>206</sup> from his (high) horse while the reader can see in the speech bubble of one of the Japanese foot-soldiers that they are clearly struggling to keep up with the officer. [figure 30]



[Fig.29] *Commando 231 'One Man's Courage,'* (1965), 16.<sup>207</sup>

<sup>204</sup> 231 *One Man's Courage*, 1967, 23.

<sup>205</sup> 231 *One Man's Courage*, 58.

<sup>206</sup> 231 *One Man's Courage*, 26.

<sup>207</sup> 231 *One Man's Courage*, 16.



[Fig. 30] *Commando 231 'One Man's Courage,'* (1967), 26.<sup>208</sup>

Even though racial epithet like 'Jap', 'Yellow (men)' and occasionally 'Nip' are most common there is a fair amount of comics that take a spin on these descriptions. Looking into '*Island of Fear*' (1973), '*The four Scars*' (1974) and '*Sub-Chasers*' (1975) for example, which are comics that display more close combat between Allied against Japanese men, the reader is more often presented with Allied soldiers uttering wartime slang and racial epithets targeted at Japanese. Common phrases that mention physical features in these comics are 'yellow men',<sup>209</sup> 'yellow head(s)',<sup>210</sup> 'slit eyed scum',<sup>211</sup> but are regularly alternated with terms that describe Japanese as 'yellow monsters',<sup>212</sup> or describe them as animals of which a few examples are; 'yellow skunks',<sup>213</sup> 'slit eyed rats',<sup>214</sup> 'yellow monkeys',<sup>215</sup> and 'slit eyed dogs'.<sup>216</sup> Nazi's however are never ridiculed because of their facial features like Japanese

<sup>208</sup> 231 *One Man's Courage*, 26.

<sup>209</sup> 831 *The Four Scars*, 1974, 39.

<sup>210</sup> 775 *Island of Fear*, 642.

<sup>211</sup> 831 *The Four Scars*, 47.

<sup>212</sup> 831 *The Four Scars*, 14.

<sup>213</sup> 831 *The Four Scars*, 11.

<sup>214</sup> 831 *The Four Scars*, 9.

<sup>215</sup> 905 *Sub-Chasers*, 406.

<sup>216</sup> 231 *One Man's Courage*, 1967, 23.



but what is interesting is to note on is the description of Germans who are in comparison to Japanese divided in two camps; the “good”, who will be called ‘Germans’, and the “bad” who will be generally referred to as ‘Nazi’s. As the ‘Germans’ remain largely unblemished in the comics, Nazi’s will often be described by Allied soldiers as ‘rats’, which is a metaphor for people who are disloyal and deceitful,<sup>217</sup> ‘snakes’ [figure 31] who are a metaphor for unpleasant and untrustworthy people<sup>218</sup> and ‘devils’, [figure 32] but are not like Japanese compared with monkeys or apes who are considered to be ‘mischievous or badly-behaved children, who appear ‘foolish’ and can ‘go ape’ as showing uncontrolled violence<sup>219</sup> which seems in line with *Orientalist* trope in which the ‘other’ (Japan) is less intelligent and should be (re)educated. Thus even though ‘Nazi’s’ did not get unscathed in *Commando*, it seems that Nazi’s in general, despite their committed atrocities, are still regarded as part of the white race, a part that the (Western) “self” is known with<sup>220</sup> and are because of this less ridiculed and less depicted as ‘inherently evil’ in comparison with the ‘culprits in the East’<sup>221</sup> who are by default doubted upon, questioned in their intellect,<sup>222</sup> but also who should be ridiculed for their physical appearance.

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<sup>217</sup> Andrew Goatly, "Humans, Animals, and Metaphors," *Society & Animals* 14:1 (1 January 2006): 27, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853006776137131>.

<sup>218</sup> Goatly, "Humans, Animals and Metaphors," 27.

<sup>219</sup> Goatly, "Humans, Animals and Metaphors," 26.

<sup>220</sup> Shillony, "Review of *War without Mercy*," 202.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.



[Fig. 31] *Commando 805 'Sea Fury,'* (1974), 14.<sup>223</sup>



[Fig. 32] *Commando 805 'Sea Fury,'* (1974), 18.<sup>224</sup>

<sup>223</sup> 805 *Sea Fury*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1974), 14.

<sup>224</sup> 805 *Sea Fury*, 18.

Before closing off this section it is also important to look at the additional texts that are situated mostly above the illustrations. When looking at these texts, sentences often contain the words 'Jap' and 'Nip' to refer to people from Japanese descent. As name-calling the enemy was such a commonplace during WWII, and as the Japanese are often referred to as 'Jap' of in the speech bubbles, the reader might not be taken aback by the use of these words in the additional texts, but its use in additional texts can give a wrong impression.

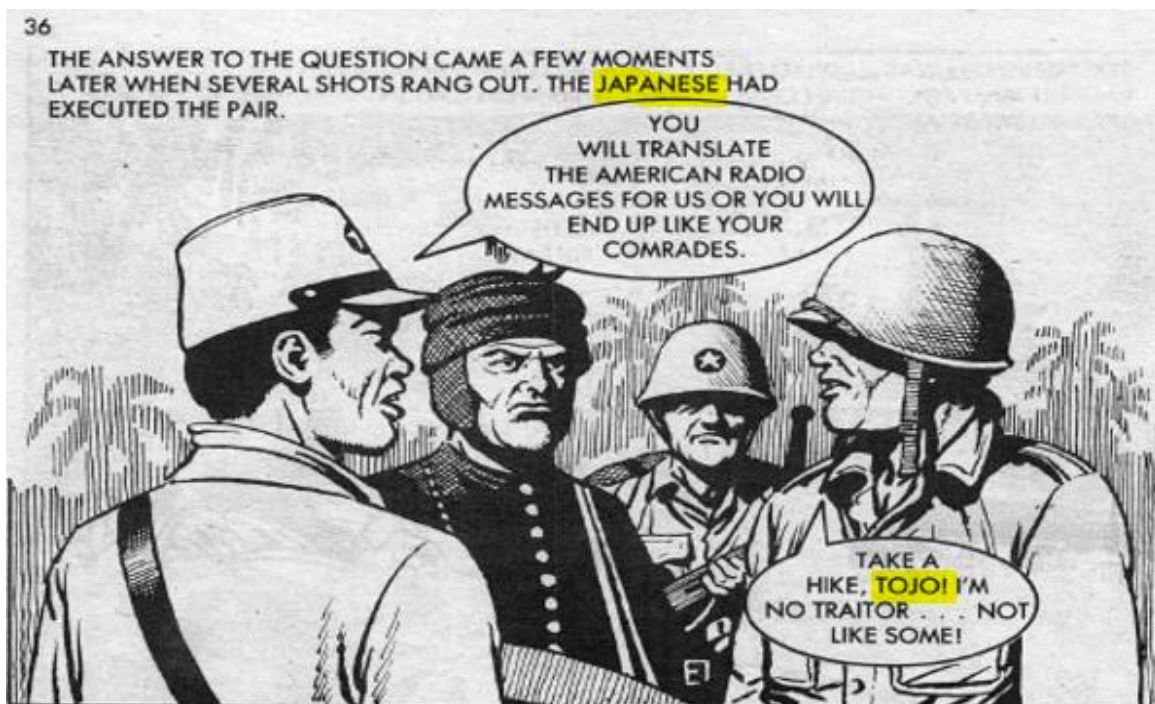
As the comics depict events and people during WWII, it is 'natural' that Allied actors in *Commando* use racial epithet to refer to Japanese, but the author who provides supplementary information for the reader in the additional texts, does not have to. Use of racial slur in addition texts might rather give the wrong impression that the scriptwriter or author of the comic might harbour negative feelings towards Japanese. However, from pragmatic and visual point of view, the use of the term 'Jap' is shorter than the word 'Japanese' and leaves more space for other text. Of course, it is also possible that the use of the word has nothing to do with convenience but with a rash attitude and lack of knowledge of the term, which has resulted in the word being frequently used outside of speech bubbles. What about the comics from 1981 onward? How did those comics refer to Japanese?

### **5.1.2) 1981-2000: 'Jap!'**

When examining the second time period it becomes evident when reading *Commando's* 1503 *'The Bridge Must fall,'* (1981) for example, that racial epithet and name calling Japanese was still very common and did not just stop at the beginning of the 1980's. As previously discussed in 1961-1980: *The 'Yellow', 'slit eyed' aggressor*, the scriptwriters presumably opted to focalize the Allied soldiers with racial slur referring to Japanese in their speech bubbles as this was common practice during the WWII war-time period and thus the authors continued to voice the actors in a fashion that aligned with the zeitgeist of that time. However, a slight change can be spotted in the additional texts as Japanese are more often referred to as 'they' and 'Japanese' [figure, 33, 34, 35] which might indicate that *Commando* had become more aware of the spill over of racial slur regarded at Japanese in the speech bubbles to the additional texts.



[Fig.33] *Commando 1688 'Island of Mystery,'* (1983), 37.<sup>225</sup>

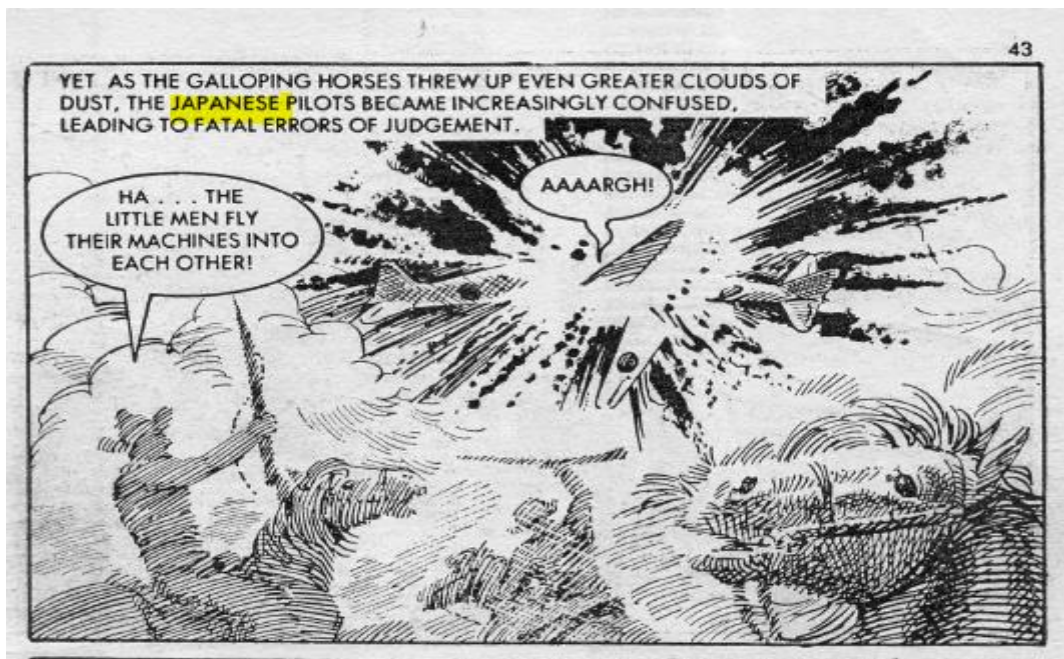


[Fig. 34] *Commando 2782 'Operation Navajo,'* (1994), 36.<sup>226</sup>

<sup>225</sup> 1688 *Island of Mystery*, 37.

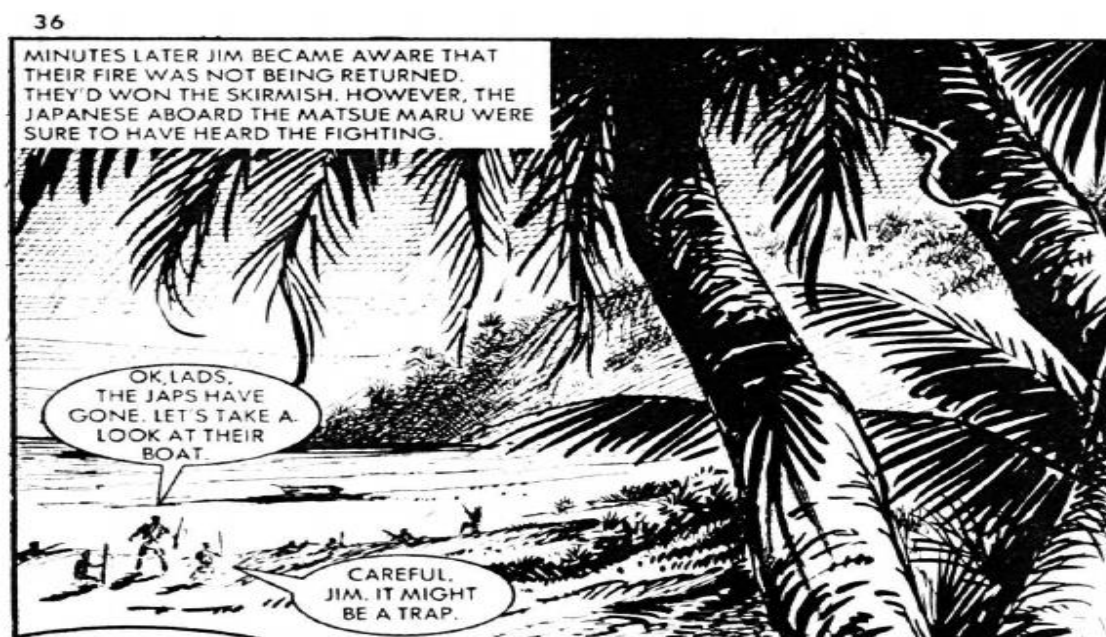
<sup>226</sup> 2782 *Operation Navajo*, 36.





[Fig. 35] *Commando 2245 'Target China,'* (1989), 43.<sup>227</sup>

When examining the speech bubbles it is interesting to mention that the diversity in addressing Japanese has changed. In the 1960's and in the first half of the 1970's Allied soldiers in the *Commando* comics would repeatedly vocalize their disdain for Japanese in a singular comic by address them as 'yellow (monster)', 'monkeys', 'rats' or 'slit eyed' humans, while in the wake of the 1980's the racial slur seems to be limited to 'Jap' or 'Nip' [figure 36, 37, 38],



[Fig. 36] *Commando 1714, 'Shipwrecked,'* (1983), 36.<sup>228</sup>

<sup>227</sup> 2245 *Target China*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1989), 43.

<sup>228</sup> 1714 *Shipwrecked*, 36.



[Fig. 37] *Commando 2782 'Operation Navajo,'* (1994), 42.<sup>229</sup>



[Fig.38] *Commando 2629 'Sewer Rat,'* (1993), 22.<sup>230</sup>

<sup>229</sup> 2782 *Operation Navajo*, 42.

<sup>230</sup> 2629 *Sewer Rat*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1993), 22.

with an occasional outlier of an Allied soldier calling a Japanese 'big ape'<sup>231</sup> [figure 39] or 'skunk'<sup>232</sup>[figure 40] or shouting a phrase containing the word 'yellow' [figure 41] for example.



[Fig.39] *Commando 1503 'The Bridge Must fall,'* (1981), 37.<sup>233</sup>



[Fig.40] *Commando 2413 'One-way Warriors,'* (1990), 32.<sup>234</sup>

<sup>231</sup> 1503 *The Bridge Must Fall*, 37.

<sup>232</sup> 2413 *One Way Worriers*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1990), 32.

<sup>233</sup> 1503 *The Bridge Must Fall*, 37.

<sup>234</sup> 2413 *One Way Worriers*, 32.





[Fig.41] *Commando* 2628, 'Last Man Out,' (1993), 61. <sup>235</sup>

One can thus question if *Commando* has become more aware of the negative effect that animal metaphors can have on the perception of Japanese as according to Andrew Goatly, English language Professor, language and how people describe others<sup>236</sup> can create (false) expectations that can have a long lasting -whether this may be positive or negative- effects. <sup>237</sup> Thus the 1981-2000 publishers of *Commando's*, reflecting on previous period when *Commando* was addressing Japanese in a very "colourful" way, might have ought it better to stick with what was predominantly known as wartime and racial slang and stuck with 'Jap' and 'Nip' than rather frequently describe them with animalistic characteristics as this would be adding to the 'subhuman' or 'unhuman' perception that readers would have of Japanese.

<sup>235</sup> 2628 2628 *Last Man Out*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1993), 61.

<sup>236</sup> Goatly, "Humans, Animals and Metaphors," 30.

<sup>237</sup> Goatly, "Humans, Animals and Metaphors," 32-37.



## 5.2 Cultural markers

When shifting from the textual to the visual in *Commando*, it is noticeable that Japanese soldiers are not that distinguishable in physical appearance from Western soldiers. Firstly, when Japanese are depicted they are not portrayed in a distinctive inhumane yellow colour that matches the description of the 'yellow Jap' as the *Commando* series, except for the covers, are printed in black and white. In addition to the skin colour, Japanese are not depicted with monkey or rat-like features or exaggerated features like big(ger) ears, noses and buckteeth <sup>238</sup> as they were often portrayed with in American comics. The only, and the most common physical difference between the Japanese and Western actors – including Allied men and Axis allies like Germans and Italians for example - in *Commando* are the narrow(er) eyes, that seem to match the description of the 'slit eyed' Japanese. Other than the shape and size of the eyes, Japanese are hardly differently portrayed than Western actors. As an argument one can thus say that Japanese in *Commando* can still be identified by their eye-shape but this argument falls short when Japanese are often not faced towards the reader or are depicted from such a distance that facial features are not clearly visible. So if Japanese are not immediately physically distinguishable by portrayals of unnatural yellow skin colour, buckteeth or when their "characteristic" 'slit eyes' are obstructed by the viewpoint, how can readers then recognize Japanese in *Commando*?

### 5.2.1) 1961-1980: Waving flags, katana's and 'Japaneseness' on the battlefield

As *Commando* wants the readers to be able to identify Japanese even when it is decided to depict them from afar or from behind, there will be placed verbal and visual elements in the vicinity of Japanese which the reader can identify as 'typically Japanese'. These 'typical' Japanese elements then function as cultural (identity) markers <sup>239</sup> which are best described as aspects of a culture that create a sense of belonging and identity with those who belong to the culture, but also serve as a recognition point for others who do not belong to the culture.<sup>240</sup> One of the most common ways of helping the reader to identify an actor -or a group of actors- as Japanese is the subtle "yellow" star that is often displayed on Japanese military headgear. [figure 42, 43] This cultural marking however is very subtle and does not

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<sup>238</sup> Brock, "Portrayal of the Japanese during World War II in the United States," 28.

<sup>239</sup> Watzlawik, "Cultural Identity Markers and Identity as a Whole," 255.

<sup>240</sup> Watzlawik, "Cultural Identity Markers and Identity as a Whole," 253, 260.

directly catch the readers eye, thus the star is mostly accompanied by something more theatrical; the katana (刀), which is a curved traditional Japanese sword that Japanese officers carried during WWII. [figure 42, 43, 44]



[Fig. 42] *Commando 231 'One Man's Courage,'* (1967), 16.<sup>241</sup>

<sup>241</sup> 231 *One Man's Courage*, 16.



[Fig. 43] *Commando 855 'Floating Fortress,'* (1974), 15.<sup>242</sup>



[Fig.44] *Commando 738 'No stopping them,'* (1973), 10.<sup>243</sup>

<sup>242</sup> 855 *Floating Fortress*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1974), 15.

<sup>243</sup> 738 *No Stopping Them*, 10.

Even though the star and katana are often used as cultural markers for the reader to identify Japanese, the Japanese flag, officially Nisshōki (日章旗, the "flag of the sun") but more commonly known in Japan as the Hinomaru (日の丸, the "circle of the sun"), seems to be depicted the most. The minimalistic design of the Japanese flag, a red circle on a white canvas, with additional red vertical, horizontal and diagonal stripes, has remained much the same since 1889<sup>244</sup> so it is easy to identify as 'Japanese'. As the simple design of the Japanese flag lends itself easily as a cultural marker on military gear, for buildings that are occupied by Japanese or when Japanese are depicted in battle, whether this may be on land or water and sometimes in the air, it is therefore also regularly used to mark Japanese military uniforms and modes of transportation. Some examples of the use of the Japanese flag can be found in 715 'Trail of a Hero' (1964), 775 'Island of Fear' (1965), 831 'The four Scars' (1965) and 1331 'Jungle Drop' (1979). [figure 45-48]



[Fig. 45] *Commando* 715 'Trail of a Hero,' (1973), 40.<sup>245</sup>

<sup>244</sup> "Flag of Japan," last modified May 24, 2022,

[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Flag\\_of\\_Japan&oldid=1089600468](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Flag_of_Japan&oldid=1089600468).

After WWII it was less common to depict the Japanese flag with horizontal stripes but as the stories in which Japanese are present take place during the events of WWII the flag in the *Commando* comics is depicted as a red circle with the additional stripes.

<sup>245</sup> 138 *Trail of a Hero*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1964), 40.





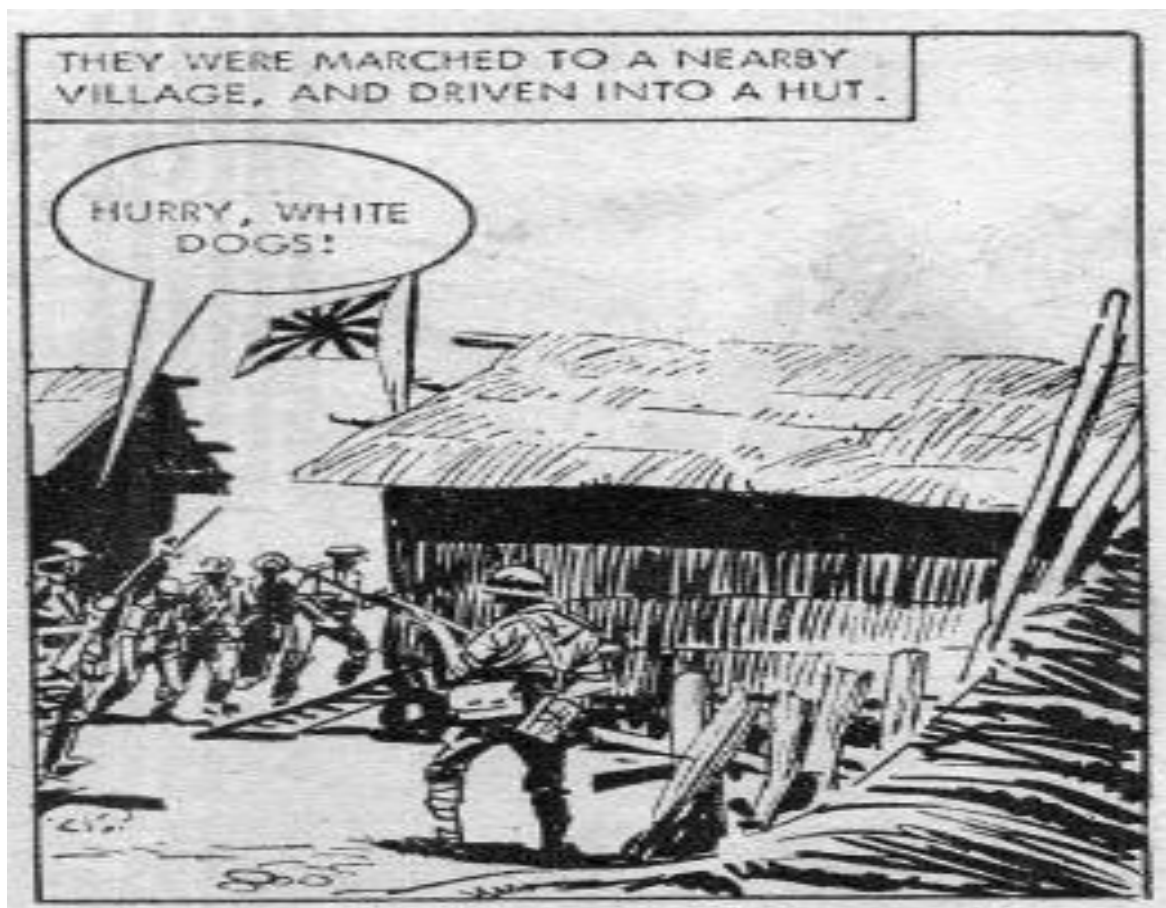
[Fig 46] *Commando* 775 'Island of Fear,' (1965), 629.<sup>246</sup>



[Fig. 47] *Commando*, 831 'The four Scars,' (1974), 18.<sup>247</sup>

<sup>246</sup> 775 *Island of Fear*, 629.

<sup>247</sup> 831 *The Four Scars*, 18.



[Fig. 48] *Commando 1331 'Jungle Drop,'* (1979), 56.<sup>248</sup>

However, cultural (identity) markers do not only have to be pictorial but can also be combination of (literal) imageries; for example, cultural customs, practices and words. When looking at page 31-32 of 855 *'Floating Fortress'* (1974) for example, the page rather focusses on the 'Japaneseness' of the other; their mannerisms and customs what makes them, according to the Western perception, "Japanese". Not only on page 28 of 855 *'Floating Fortress'* (1974), but in a majority of the comics that were printed between 1961-1980 it becomes evident that almost every Japanese soldier in *Commando*, with the exception of the stereotypical, -often corpulent- glasses wearing Japanese colonel with a moustache, is depicted in a large group and is seldom portrayed alone. This particular representation of Japanese seems to have been shaped on the basis of the collective cultural property of the Japanese, called '*ware ware Nihonjin*' ('we Japanese'). This '*ware ware Nihonjin*', which according to the Belgian Japanologist Luk van Haute, has a predominantly positive connotation in Japanese culture as it emphasizes Japanese unity and uniformity in civilian

<sup>248</sup> 1331 *Jungle Drop*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1979), 56.

everyday life<sup>249</sup> has been taken very literally and has taken on a negative connotation. Not only in 855 *'Floating Fortress'* (1974) but in several *Commando* Japanese uniformity is depicted literally and has presumably been used to portray a negative imagery that clashes with the Western idea of freedom and individuality as Japanese are for example described as a horde of mindless 'advancing (...) robots'<sup>250</sup> who collectively under loud 'banzai's!' only bring destruction like 'a yellow tidal wave'.<sup>251</sup> [figure 49, 50]



[Fig. 49] *Commando 855 'Floating Fortress,'* (1974), 31.<sup>252</sup>

<sup>249</sup> Luk van Haute, "De mythe van de monocultuur," in *Japan. Schetsen Uit Het Leven*, Kobo-edition (Tielt: Lannoo, 2019).

<sup>250</sup> 855 *Floating Fortress*, 34.

<sup>251</sup> 855 *Floating Fortress*, 32.

<sup>252</sup> 855 *Floating Fortress*, 31.





[Fig. 50] *Commando 855 'Floating Fortress,'* (1974), 32.<sup>253</sup>

Even though all the elements mentioned; the star on military caps, the katana, the flag and even the Japanese uniformity seem necessary and fitting for the storylines as these are all – some more than others- viable cultural tangible and intangible elements that are useful for the identification of Japanese on the battlefield, these cultural markers are never shown in a more positive context. Firstly for the katana, which enjoys a long history in Japan as the first were forged from around 300 B.C.<sup>254</sup> and thus is intimately tied to Japanese culture and part of Japanese heritage is often depicted in a gun fight in which its wielder always loses from the opponent with a gun and is additionally sometimes ridiculed by its “uselessness” as can be seen on page 16 of 231 *One Man's Courage*, (1967) [figure 43] when an Allied soldier exclaims that the sword is just for slicing melons.<sup>255</sup> Secondly the use of the Japanese flag and the depiction of Japanese uniformity '*ware ware Nihonjin*' are in *Commando* only shown in the negative context of war. As especially the two last aforementioned elements are used as cultural markers in the context of war and violence

<sup>253</sup> 855 *Floating Fortress*, 32.

<sup>254</sup> "The Legendary Japanese Sword," accessed June 11, 2022, <https://www.japan-zone.com/culture/katana.shtml>.

<sup>255</sup> 231 *One Man's Courage*, 1967, 16.

they collectively ignite an overall backward and negative image of Japan and Japanese. However, one can question if this is the job of *Commando* to take a more diversified or more in-depth representation of Japanese into account as the website states that *Commando* 'truly is the home of heroes (...) Royal Navy, British Army, Royal Air Force, Special Forces and SAS'<sup>256</sup> and thus focus on the heroic and positive portrayal of British and Allied forces, not Japanese.

### **5.2.2) 1981-2020: Japaneseness on and off the battlefield; Shintoism, Torii gates, Japanese interior and Japanese characters**

As mentioned in the previous section it was very common that the "yellow" star on caps, katana, Japanese flag were used and Japanese uniformity as cultural (identity) markers for readers of *Commando's* that were printed between 1961-1980 to identify Japanese. However, all the aforementioned cultural (identity) markers are portrayed in the negative context of war and violence and can make Japanese culture and Japanese seen as overly inscrutable and dangerous. The use of the cultural (identity) markers like the star, the katana, the Japanese flag and Japanese uniformity did continue in the 1981-2000 as *Commando* presumably considered these elements most effective in the identification of Japanese soldiers on the battlefield. However, what is striking is that there is seemingly a (re)new(ed), or at least an increased, interest in Japanese culture from the 1980's onward. When examining *Commando's* 1716 'The Hunted Jungle' (1983) for example, which original print was first released in 1972, shows aspects of Japanese civil life, culture and its architecture by illustrating Japanese stone lanterns and a 'torii gate', a traditional Japanese gate most commonly found at the entrance of or within a Shinto shrine,<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> "About Commando."

<sup>257</sup> "Torii," last modified April 26, 2022, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Torii&oldid=1084755937>.

with inscriptions that supposed to look like Japanese characters and mentioning ninja and the Japanese martial art ninjitsu. [figure 51]



[Fig. 51] *Commando 1716 'The Hunted Jungle,'* (1983), 17.<sup>258</sup>

As 1716 *'The Hunted Jungle'* (1983) is a reprint from the 1970's it can be argued that interest in Japanese civilian life and culture was not entirely new. However, this reprint should be mentioned as this depiction inspired comics from the 1980's onward to further explore and portray this side of Japan and Japanese. The renewed interest in Japanese culture comes more to the fore when examining 2781 *'Samurai Challenge'* (1994) in which Japanese looking characters are depicted on a poster on the wall and rice bowls with hashi (箸) –

<sup>258</sup> 1716 *The Hunted Jungle*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1983), 17.

chopsticks – are depicted on a short-legged table [figure 52] that can also be seen in 2954 'The Trap Closes' (1996) when the chabudai (茶部台),<sup>259</sup> [figure 53] - a short-legged table which is placed in traditional Japanese homes- is depicted with the finishing touch of the wall painting with traditional Japanese sceneries like mountains and seafarers.



[Fig. 52] *Commando 2781 'Samurai Challenge,'* (1994), 24.<sup>260</sup>

<sup>259</sup> "Chabudai," last modified June 12, 2021, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Chabudai&oldid=1028216551>.

<sup>260</sup> *2781 Samurai Challenge*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1994), 24.



[Fig. 53] *Commando 2954 'The Trap Closes,'* (1996), 22.

Even though 2781 *'Samurai Challenge'* (1994), does not depict the events of WWII, as the story is set in the year 2020, the comic still deserves an honourable mention as the storyline centres around the rivalry between a Japanese man named Takara and a British man named Locke who are both players in artificially generated challenge games in which the 'price of defeat is death.'<sup>261</sup> It seems that the author and the illustrator show special interest in Japanese culture as the two players must fight each other to the death in an artificial setting that resembles feudal era Japan (1185-1603 CE). 2781 *'Samurai Challenge'* portrays Japanese culture by portraying ninja, displaying traditional Japanese armour karuta (カルタ金, karuta-gane), which was a type of armour worn by samurai warriors during the feudal era of Japan<sup>262</sup> [figure 54] and left some room to display architecture, civilian life

<sup>261</sup> 2781 *Samurai Challenge*, blurb.

<sup>262</sup> "Karuta (Armour)," last edited November 20, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Karuta\\_\(armour\)&oldid=1056156416](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Karuta_(armour)&oldid=1056156416).

[figure 52] and weaponry used [figure 55]. Even though the depiction of Japanese culture in this comic may seem outdated by solely depicting an *Orientalized* romantic old version of Japanese culture from a Western perspective, 'Samurai Challenge' is in the *Commando* series the first comic in which Japanese culture is displayed to such extent and detail and seems to be portrayed in an overall more positive light and thus could not be left unmentioned.



[Fig. 54] *Commando* 2781 'Samurai Challenge,' (1994), 22.





[Fig. 55] *Commando 2781 'Samurai Challenge,'* (1994), 29. <sup>263</sup>

Another development in the representation of Japanese (culture), which has been already lightly touched upon, is the depiction of “Japanese characters” in the comics 1716, ‘*The Hunted Jungle*’ (1983) and 2781 ‘*Samurai Challenge*’ (1994). When looking at the torii gate in figure 51 and the scrolls hanging on the left and right side of the wall in a Japanese home in figure 52, the markings on the gate and on the scrolls can be identified as “Japanese characters”. From the *Commando* comic books that were available for these research, this is the first time that “Japanese characters” have been so frequently and more closely portrayed. Another interesting example is of a letter with “Japanese characters” in 2954 ‘*The Trap Closes*’ (1996). [figure 56] Even though the characters do not seem to resemble any Japanese writing in hiragana( ひらがな)<sup>264</sup>, katakana (カタカナ)<sup>265</sup> - or kanji (漢字)<sup>266</sup> and rather look like scribbles that are meant to look like Japanese characters, the “Japanese characters”, next to the display of temples and furniture, do create “windows” for the reader

<sup>263</sup> 2781 *Samurai Challenge*, 29.

<sup>264</sup> Hiragana: Japanese characters used for Japanese ‘everyday’ writing

<sup>265</sup> Katakana: Japanese characters used for English loanwords

<sup>266</sup> Kanji: Japanese characters that are derived from Chinese writing

to see Japanese in a different light. As *Commando* is depicting more Japanese civil life, culture, heritage and language readers of *Commando* might come to acknowledge, respect and become more curious about Japanese culture and as a result can increasingly regard Japanese more as human beings –like Western soldiers- that are not so different from “us”.



[Fig. 56] *Commando* 2954 'The Trap Closes,' (1996), 19.<sup>267</sup>

Moving on from the tangible elements that depict Japanese culture and everyday life, there also seems to be a development in verbal elements in the speech bubbles of Japanese soldiers, pilots and marines. The word 'banzai!' (万歳), which literal meaning is "ten thousand years (of long life)"<sup>268</sup> but is also used as a war cry during battle,<sup>269</sup> is regularly used throughout *Commando* but in the *Commando*'s printed between 1981-2000 there is an increase in Japanese using -or rather screaming- words related to Shintoism during battle. Shintoism, which is a Japanese polytheistic, indigenous religion that refers to a set beliefs and practices around kami (神, God(s)) and supernatural entities believed to inhabit all

<sup>267</sup> 2954 *The Trap Closes*, 19.

<sup>268</sup> "Banzai," last modified July 11, 2021, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Banzai&oldid=1033071302>.

<sup>269</sup> "Banzai Charge," last modified May 23, 2022, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Banzai\\_charge&oldid=1089390319](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Banzai_charge&oldid=1089390319).

things<sup>270</sup> and who spread harmony,<sup>271</sup> is used out of context in *Commando* as Japanese actors seem to use 'Shinto!' as a swear word. Page 23 of 2245 '*Target China*' (1988) [figure 57] for example, depicts a Japanese soldier who is clearly agitated as a horse tries to escape and loudly exclaims 'by Shinto!' which not at all portrays the harmony, sincerity and tranquility Shintoism in Japanese culture is associated with.<sup>272</sup> Another example can be found in *Commando* 2413, '*One Way Worriers*', (1990) page 30 as the reader is presented with a speech bubble near an airplane that is seemingly occupied by a Japanese pilot as the text bubbles reads 'By Shinto! The dog is right under me.' [figure 58]



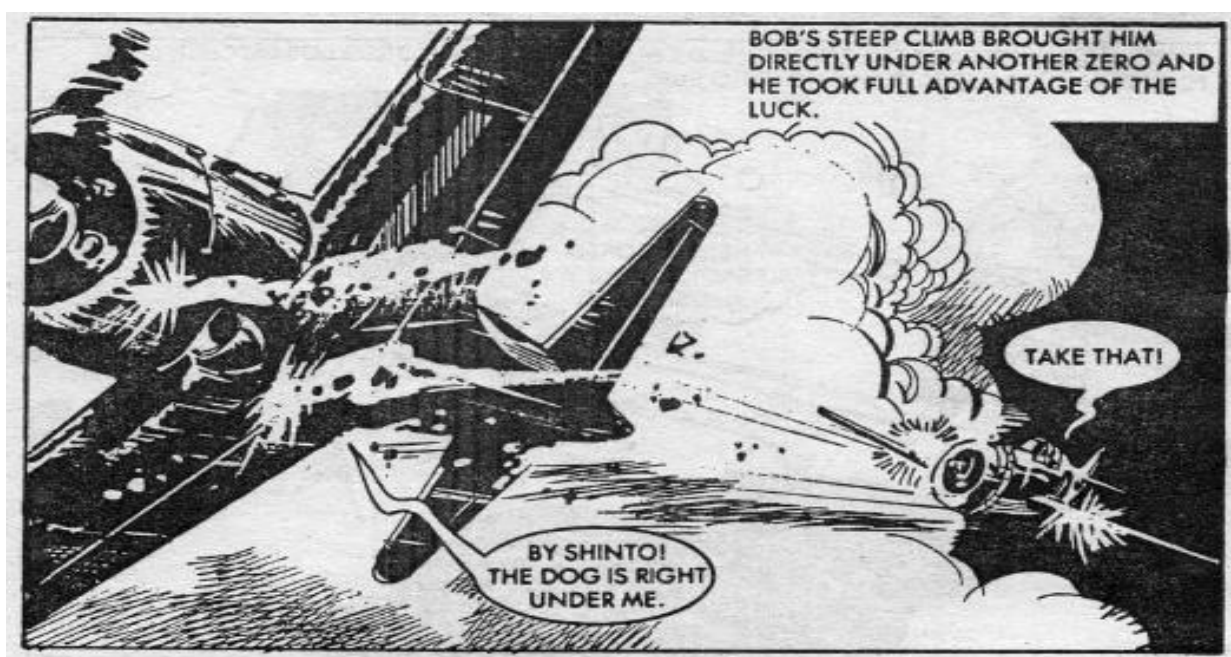
[Fig. 57] *Commando* 2245 '*Target China*,' (1988), 23.

<sup>270</sup> "Shinto," last modified May 11, 2022,

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Shinto&oldid=1087340229>.

<sup>271</sup> "Shintō Literature and Mythology," accessed May 30, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Shinto>.

<sup>272</sup> "Shintō Literature and Mythology."



[Fig. 58] *Commando 2413 'One Way Worriers,'* (1990), 30.<sup>273</sup>

Once more the reader is presented with an example in which Shintoism is used out of context and gets a negative connotation of the religious practice instead perceiving it as conveying harmony<sup>274</sup> as the Japanese pilot uses 'Shinto' as wartime slang aimed at the Allied pilot 'Bob' who just fired a missile at his aircraft. Even though it is a creative solution to use a Japanese religious practice as a verbal cultural (identity) marker for the reader to identify the pilot of the aircraft as Japanese, especially when pilots often cannot be seen, the use of Shintoism as a verbal cultural (identity) marker can be misinterpreted by readers as they might think that Shintoism practices violence. Frequently using this religious practice during battle or randomly in a sentence will discredit a Japanese religious practice, the culture and the perception of Japanese in general as currently 48.6 percent of Japanese practice Shinto.<sup>275</sup> Even though the *Commando* comics printed between 1981-2000 seem to be in favour of positively portraying Japanese, this use of Shintoism might create a setback in the process of 'humanizing' Japanese.

<sup>273</sup> 2413 *One Way Worriers*, 30.

<sup>274</sup> "Shintō Literature and Mythology."

<sup>275</sup> "Japan," accessed June 25, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/japan/>.

### 5.3 Naming, voicing and portraying faces: the individuality of “the enemy”

As previous chapter delved into the clever use of Japanese cultural heritage, phrases and practices as cultural (identity) markers to improve the readability of *Commando* readers, the use of some cultural markers can cause misunderstandings and incorrect expectations about Japanese culture and customs which *Commando*, especially in the 1981-200 period, seemingly wanted to decrease. This section will explore alternative methods in identifying Japanese in *Commando* comics of which some can even be considered more beneficial for a more diversified image of Japanese and Japanese culture.

#### 5.3.1) 1961-1980: Acknowledging the ‘other’.

Throughout *Commando* it becomes evident that a majority of Japanese (men) are perceived to be born evil, and thus are repeatedly ‘dehumanized’ and reduced to ‘mindless robot’ foot-soldiers, pilots and marines who just fight for the ‘glorious emperor’, [figure 59-61]



[Fig. 59] *Commando* 1201 'The Forces of Evil,' (1961), 15.<sup>276</sup>

<sup>276</sup> 1201 *The Forces of Evil*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1978), 15.



[Fig. 60] *Commando 1201 'The Forces of Evil,'* (1961), 22.<sup>277</sup>

but are incapable of showing any emotions and often show little to no empathy to defenceless others [figure 61] or even to their own.<sup>278</sup> An example of the letter can be found in 922 'A Question of Honour' (1975) which depicts a Japanese colonel shooting his own cousin -who had been forcing New Guinea natives to dive for pearls- with a straight face as this was the only way to restore the family honour. [figure 62]



[Fig. 61] *Commando 855 'Floating Fortress,'* (1965), 50.<sup>279</sup>

<sup>277</sup> 1201 *The Forces of Evil*, 22.

<sup>278</sup> Kayleigh Post, "ESSAY II Reading against the Grain" (Paper Text and Context, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2022).

<sup>279</sup> 855 *Floating Fortress*, 50.





[Fig.62] *Commando 922 'A Question of Honour,'* (1975), 33.<sup>280</sup>

Even though the cousin of the Japanese colonel was participating in illegal activities, the ease with which the Japanese colonel shut him and especially after the fact acted like nothing had happened seems in line with the *Yellow Peril* discourse and with the description of Japanese being emotionless and unable to show empathy. However, this does not mean that Japanese never show empathy towards others even though this empathy might sometimes come from a sense of duty. First example is 738 '*No Stopping Them,*' (1973) in which the second Japanese officer in command forces Allied soldiers to provide medical care for his commander who is badly injured [figure 63] followed by an example in 855 '*Floating Fortress*' (1974) in which the comic deviates from the pattern of the 'emotionless' and 'aggressive' Japanese when portraying a scene in which a few Japanese soldiers are literally stuck in a dire situation when the group is slowly submerging in quicksand.

<sup>280</sup> 922 *A Question of Honour*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1975), 33.



[Fig. 63] *Commando 738 'No Stopping Them,'* (1973), 16.<sup>281</sup>

Faced with imminent death, the reader can see the distress on the faces of the Japanese soldiers as the reader is placed 'next to' the Japanese and is able to see the panic up close. [figure 64] This scene specifically breaks the dominant narrative of the "invisible" and the 'emotionless Japanese' as one of the Japanese soldier calls out his fellow soldier 'Kiichi', who's reaction is to reach out his hand and trying to stop the other Japanese soldier from going under. The way this scene is illustrated can incite (more) empathy in the *Commando* readers as the research of German psychotherapist Christina Regenbogen shows that the display of people's facial expressions influences recognition and empathy<sup>282</sup> and closes the gap between "us" and "them".

<sup>281</sup> 738 *No Stopping Them*, 16.

<sup>282</sup> Christina Regenbogen and Ute Habel, "Facial Expressions in Empathy Research," in *Understanding Facial Expressions in Communication: Cross-Cultural and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Manas K. Mandal and Avinash Awasthi (New Delhi: Springer India, 2015), 101–17, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-81-322-1934-7\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-81-322-1934-7_6).



[Fig. 64] *Commando 855 'Floating Fortress,'* (1974), 34.<sup>283</sup>

Before wrapping up this section, it is important to dedicate a few lines to what is 'spoken' and the way how words are pronounced by Japanese as they can also reveal a lot about the identity<sup>284</sup> given to Japanese. What is striking is that Japanese in all *Commando* comics are very eloquent and can speak English fluently. At first this flawless English vocabulary seems to be attributed to all actors in the comic, presumably to foster the readability, but this does not stand up to scrutiny when the English of Japanese [figure 65] in 855 '*Floating Fortress*' (1974) for example is compared with the English of indigenous men who talks in somewhat broken English. [figure 66, 67]

<sup>283</sup> 855 *Floating Fortress*, 34.

<sup>284</sup> Robyn Fivush, "Speaking Silence: The Social Construction of Silence in Autobiographical and Cultural Narratives," *Memory* 18:2 (2010): 89, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2013.06.010>.



[Fig. 65] *Commando 855 'Floating Fortress,'* (1974), 31.<sup>285</sup>



[Fig. 66] *Commando 855 'Floating Fortress,'* (1974), 28.<sup>286</sup>

Another few example of indigenous' broken language -or even silence- can be found in 775 '*Island of fear*' (1961) [Fig. 67] and in 1331 '*Jungle drop*' (1970) when indigenous are introduced but remain silent throughout the whole comic as to presumably emphasize that they cannot speak English [figure 68, 69, 70] and thus are different from "us". Thus, even

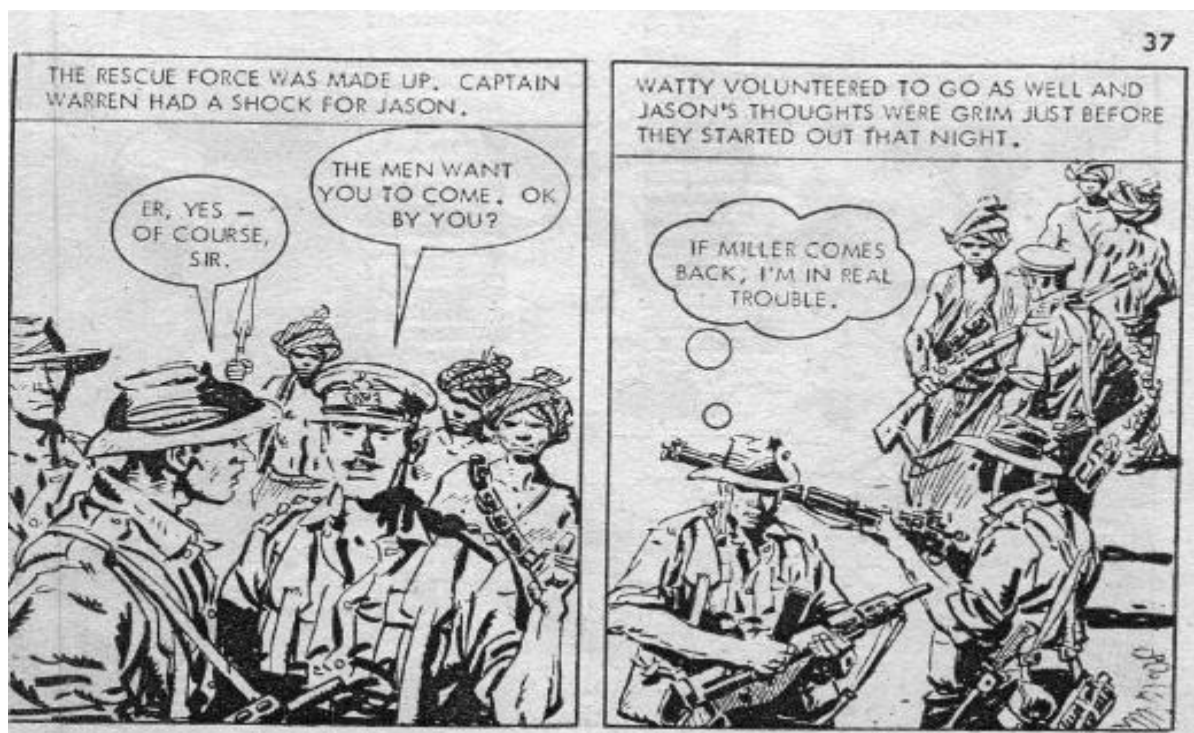
<sup>285</sup> 855 *Floating Fortress*, 31.

<sup>286</sup> 855 *Floating Fortress*, 28.

though not explicitly stated, the fluent English of Japanese soldiers may indicate that *Commando* does perceive Japanese more as equals and not so different from the Allied soldiers and the Western “us”.



[Fig. 67] *Commando* 775 'Island of fear,' (1965), 613.<sup>287</sup>



[Fig. 68] *Commando* 1331 'Jungle Drop,' (1979), 37.<sup>288</sup>

<sup>287</sup> 775 *Island of Fear*, 613.

<sup>288</sup> 1331 *Jungle Drop*, 37.





[Fig. 69] *Commando 1331 'Jungle Drop,'* (1970), 43.<sup>289</sup>

<sup>289</sup> 1331 *Jungle Drop*, 43.





[Fig. 70] *Commando 1331 'Jungle Drop,'* (1970), 44.<sup>290</sup>

### 5.3.2) 1981-2000: Japanese friendship and honour

Next to the drowning Japanese soldier 'Kiichi' in 855 '*Floating Fortress,'* (1974) there are several more *Commando's* from the 1961-1980 period in which Japanese individuals became more 'visible' by providing them names. For example, page 4 of *Commando 831 'The four Scars'* (1974) on which a Japanese colonel is called 'Mako' and on page 48 a Japanese is named 'Tojo', [figure 71] and also 715 '*Trail of a Hero'* (1973) in which a soldier mentions the name 'Suki' on page 37 and in 922 '*A Question of Honour'* (1975) when an Allied pilot speaks about a Japanese colonel 'Marasawi'.

<sup>290</sup> 1331 *Jungle Drop*, 44.



[Fig. 71] *Commando 831 'The four Scars,'* (1974), 48. <sup>291</sup>

Even though it seems that there is a significant amount of Japanese who have a name and are pushed to the fore in this time period, besides the Japanese second in command in 738 '*No Stopping Them*' (1973) and 'Kiichi' in 855 *Floating Fortress*, (1974), Japanese (men) are almost never provided with an alternative storyline that goes against the representation of the emotionless and inhuman Japanese towards Allied soldiers. From the 14 selected comics for the first time period, the only big outlier is in 831 '*The Four Scars*' (1974) in which 'the little medical officer' <sup>292</sup> Suzuki helps two Allied soldiers escape from his superior captain Mako. <sup>293</sup> [figure 72]

<sup>291</sup> 813 *The Four Scars*, 48.

<sup>292</sup> 831 *The Four Scars*, 1974, 6.

<sup>293</sup> 831 *The Four Scars*, 6.



[Fig. 72] *Commando 831 'The Four Scars,'* (1974), 6.<sup>294</sup>

When introducing and assigning names to Japanese, the *Commando* comics between 1961-1980 generally focus on the portrayal and naming Japanese colonels, generals, officers and medics as they are the key figures in Japanese military operations. When looking at Japanese soldiers and sailors, with pilots being the exception, are mostly portrayed in a group from afar and seldom derive from the 'imperialist militaristic'-narrative in which are depicted jointly, enthusiastically throwing themselves into battle and stay 'invisible' a majority of the time as all their faces and bodies blend into the crowd. [figure, 73, 74, 75]

<sup>294</sup> 813 *The Four Scars*, 6.





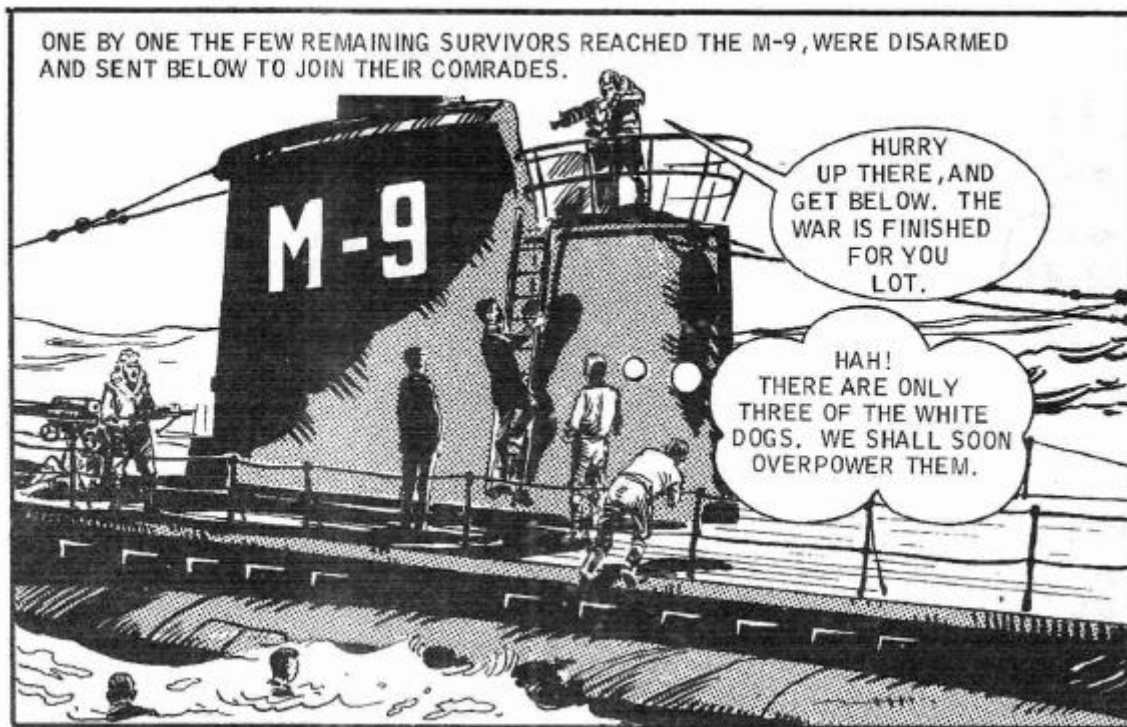
[Fig. 73] *Commando 231 'One Man's Courage,'* (1967), 16.<sup>295</sup>



[Fig. 74] *Commando 855 'Floating Fortress' (1974), 32.*<sup>296</sup>

<sup>295</sup> 231 *One Man's Courage*, 16.

<sup>296</sup> 855 *Floating Fortress*, 32.



[Fig. 75] *Commando 905 'Sub-Chaser,'* (1975), 508.<sup>297</sup>

However, in the 1981-2000 period there is an increase in storylines that not only centre around Japanese generals, medics and officers but also lower ranking soldiers and there is an increase in storylines in which Japanese are portrayed with more positive characteristics. An example of the latter can be found in 1714 *'Shipwrecked'* (1983) in which a Japanese officer named Hirado is being subtly praised by an Allied soldier for his dedication<sup>298</sup> [figure 76] and in a few other comics Japanese foot-soldiers are shown helping and even befriending Allied soldiers. Examples of this are *Commando's* 2629 *'Sewer Rat'* (1993), 1688 *'Island of Mystery'* (1983) and 2413 *'One Way Worriers'* (1990).

<sup>297</sup> 905 *Sub-Chasers*, 508.

<sup>298</sup> 1714 *Shipwrecked*, 1983, 29.





[Fig. 76] *Commando 1714 'Shipwrecked,'* (1983), 29.<sup>299</sup>



[Fig. 77] *Commando 2629 'Sewer Rat,'* (1993), 49.<sup>300</sup>

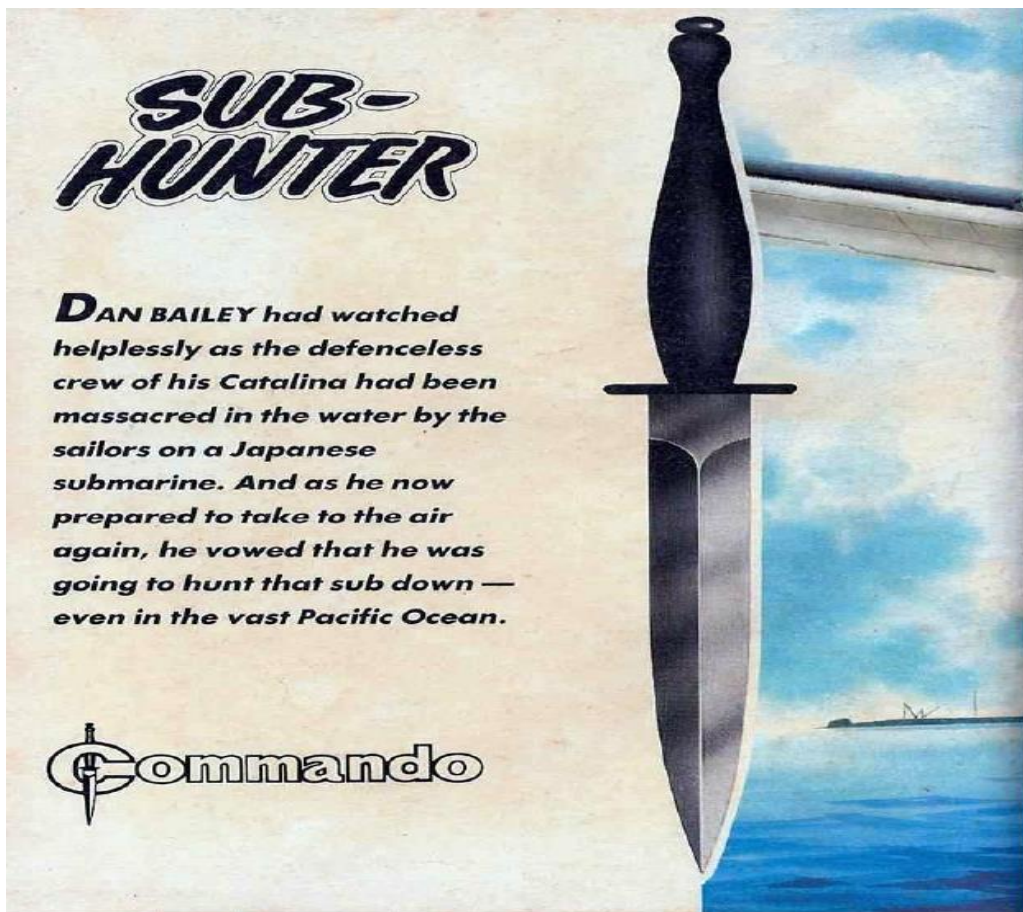
Starting with the example in 2629 *'Sewer Rat'* (1993), a Japanese is described as '(...) a friendly Jap who tried to treat the prisoners decently' [figure 77] and this imagery is even strengthened by the depiction of a British soldier and the Japanese in question are engaged in civil conversation. However, to label these relationships as a 'friendship' is perhaps too

<sup>299</sup> 1714 *Shipwrecked*, 29.

<sup>300</sup> 2629 *Sewer Rat*, 49.

farfetched as it seems that there is rather a mutual understanding, or at least a form of respect, towards each other instead of an established friendship.

Another example of showing respect to the “enemy” is *Commando* 1961 ‘*Sub-hunter*,’ (1983). When glancing over the blurb, there is no hint to any anomaly in the portrayal of ‘evil’ Japanese as the summary describes that a ‘helpless’<sup>301</sup> and ‘defenceless’<sup>302</sup> Allied marine crew is massacred by Japanese. [figure 69] However, when opening the comic book pages, it soon becomes evident that not every Japanese was in favour of murdering the defenseless Allied men in the Pacific Ocean as one of the officers in command does not want to ‘slaughter helpless men’ as he regards this ‘the way of the coward’.<sup>303</sup> [figure 79]



[Fig. 78] *Commando* 1961 ‘*Sub-Hunter*,’ (1986), blurb.<sup>304</sup>

<sup>301</sup> 1961 *Sub-Hunter*, *Commando* (London: D.C. Thomson & CO., LTD., 1986), blurb.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> 1961 *Sub-Hunter*, 15.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

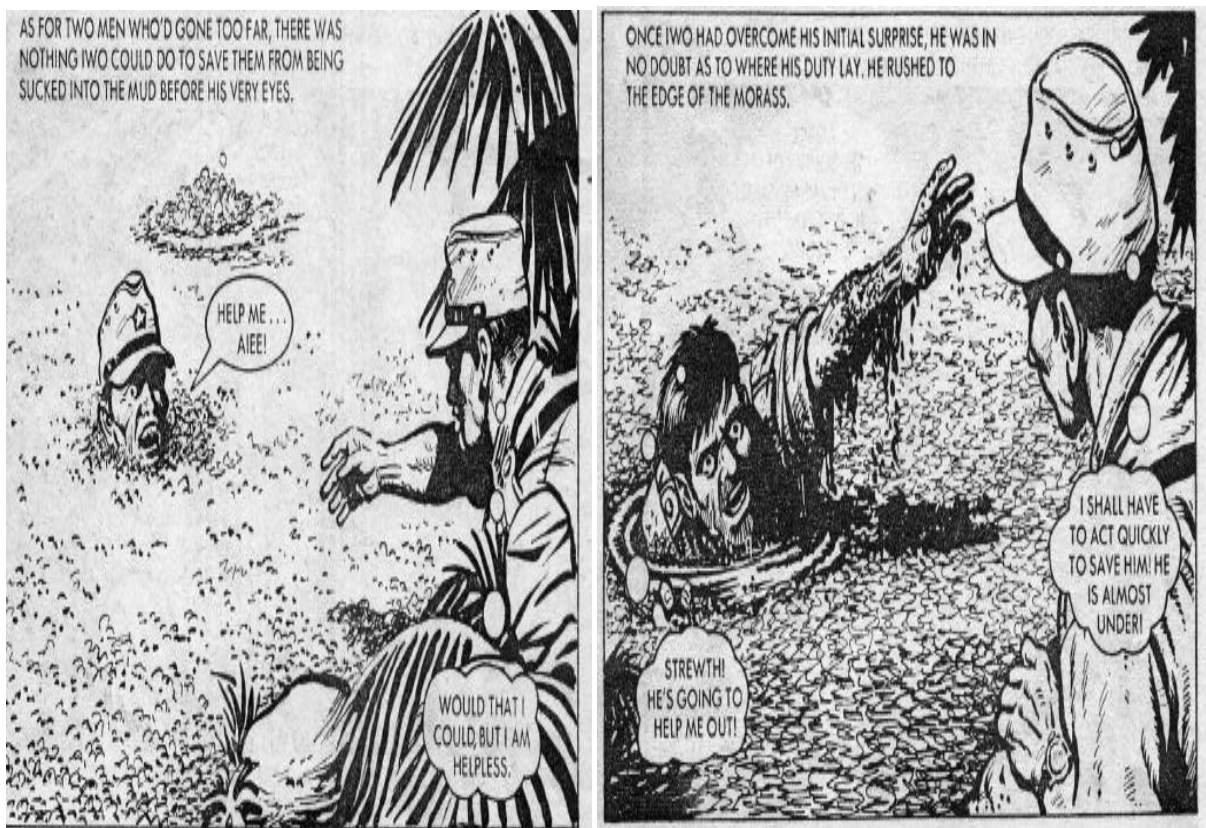


[Fig. 79] *Commando 1961 'Sub-Hunter,'* (1983), 15.<sup>305</sup>

More amicable and seemingly more long lasting relations between Allied and Japanese men are portrayed more frequently over time. When examining 1688 *'Island of Mystery'* (1983) for example, the reader is introduced to a Japanese soldiers named Iwo who first tries to help one of his fellow soldiers who has fallen into quicksand but also later in the story is trying to help an Allied soldier who shares the same fate. [figure 80] After Iwo rescues the Allied soldier the two men part ways but meet again at the end of the story in which the Allied soldier concludes that 'this one' (Iwo) "is friendly"<sup>306</sup> [figure 81] and have seemingly become more amicable towards each other as the Allied soldier now seems to trusts Iwo and tries to protect him from harm.

<sup>305</sup> 1961 *Sub-Hunter*, 15.

<sup>306</sup> 1688 *Island of Mystery*, 60.



[Fig. 80] *Commando 1688 'Island of Mystery,'* (1983), 32, 57. <sup>307</sup>



[Fig.81] *Commando 1688 'Island of Mystery,'* (1983), 60. <sup>308</sup>

<sup>307</sup> 1688 *Island of Mystery*, 32, 57.

<sup>308</sup> 1688 *Island of Mystery*, 60.



Before closing of the last section of chapter 5, there will be just one last example provided of a Japanese and an Allied soldier becoming more amicable towards each other to round off the empirical research regarding the representation of Japanese on a positive note. When examining 2413 *'One Way Worriers'* (1990), the reader is presented with two pilots engaging in a dogfight, in which at one point the Allied pilot Bob has to eject himself out of his aircraft to survive, on which Japanese pilot Kato does not shoot Bob down as he regards him defenseless hanging parachuting mid-air. [figure 82] Shortly after this encounter they meet again in the jungle where the Allied pilot returns the kindness that the Japanese pilot has shown him before as he spares his live. [figure 83] Even though the two men fight on opposite sides they form a friendship and hope for a better tomorrow as Kato states that they will hopefully built tomorrow 'together, and in peace.'<sup>309</sup>[figure 84] This comic in particular shows that friendships between enemies can exist and that not all Japanese wanted to go to war, but presumably went to war out of a sense of duty, and also most likely wanted peace as much as anyone else. *'One Way Worriers'* (1990) is an example of a *Commando* comic in which the author has taken the time to portray Japanese more diverse by investing in 'visibility', character development and presenting Japanese capable of showing and verbalizing emotions when they are conflicted, anxious and scared, to show that the Japanese "other" is also human and not inherently evil, but are also people just like "us" who all from their own beliefs and philosophy are striving for a better tomorrow.

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<sup>309</sup> 2413 *One Way Worriers*, 1990, 65.





[Fig. 82] *Commando 2413 'One Way Worriers,'* (1990), 33.<sup>310</sup>



[Fig. 83] *Commando 2413 'One Way Worriers,'* (1990), 37.<sup>311</sup>

<sup>310</sup> 2413 *One Way Worriers*, 33.

<sup>311</sup> 2413 *One Way Worriers*, 37.



[Fig. 84] *Commando* 2413 'One Way Worriers,' (1990), 65.<sup>312</sup>

<sup>312</sup> 2413 *One Way Worriers*, 65.

#### **5.4 The shifting representation of Japanese in the *Commando* comics between 1961-1980 and 1981-2000**

After approximately 70 pages of examining all the elements on the *Commando* covers and delving into all the pages it is time for a summary before an assessment of all the findings and conclude with a rationale for the (non-)developments in the representation of Japanese in *Commando* in chapter 6. Chapter 4 started with the question *In what manner do the elements on the Commando comic covers hint to the presence of Japanese in the comics and how are they represented over time?* The first section of chapter 4, began with the examination of the titles of the *Commando* comics. Upon the examination of the *Commando* comics that were printed in 1961-1980 period, the titles that portray Japanese in their storyline often contain the terms like 'trapping', 'killing', 'scourging', and 'hunting' 'Japs' to indicate that Japanese were in some shape or form part of the narrative, but in the course of the 1980's the use of verbal aggression and the term 'Jap' in the title declined and titles in which adventurous locations and the heroism of the Allied soldiers are put more to the fore.

Looking at the illustrations on the covers from the period between 1961-1980 it was more common that *Commando* depicted Japanese alone and up close on the cover, additionally providing them with menacing faces. The *Commando* comics between 1981-2000 however, do not show illustrations of the 'evil menacing' Japanese up close but rather seem to highlight the Allied men's point of view which shows off their military assets and bravery against Japanese as there is an increase in Allied soldiers depicted on the foreground while Japanese are now pushed to the back of the illustration.

Lastly examining the subtexts and blurbs on covers of the *Commando* comics shows that subtexts between 1961-1980, mostly contain a catchphrase with wartime slang and racial slur regarded at Japanese but are often removed in the reprints, but the blurbs through the years primarily still contain the word 'Jap'. Developments in the blurbs become more evident from the 1980's onward when the interchangeable use of 'Jap' and 'Japanese' decreases and there is an increase in the word 'Japanese' to refer to people from Japanese descent instead.

Chapter 5, started with the question *In what manner do the elements in Commando portray Japanese and are there any developments over time?*, and in its first section delved into the storyline of the comic book pages starting with a section of the examination of the texts. When looking at the texts, two elements were examined; the speech bubbles and

additional texts. Even though the detected changes are minor they are still worth mentioning. Firstly, in the 1961-1980 period there is a large selection of racial epithet for Allied soldiers to choose from when addressing Japanese. When scanning the texts words like 'Jap', 'Nip', 'Yellow (men)', 'snakes' and 'rats' are often used by Allied men in the speech bubbles to describe people from Japanese descent, which is according to Chapman not uncommon as on the battlefield wartime slang and racial slur was often used towards the enemy. However, the additional texts, in which the narrator provides information to the reader which is inaccessible for the actors in the comic, uses 'Japanese' and 'Jap' interchangeably when neutrality could have been chosen as the narrator is not an Allied soldier in the storyline who (re)lives the events. Looking at the speech bubbles from the 1981-2000-period there is a decline in the 'colourful' descriptions of Japanese as 'Jap' and 'Nip' seem to have become the most common way to refer to Japanese. Additionally, there can be seen a decrease in the use of the word 'Jap' in the additional text but the word remains a common term for the narrator to refer to Japanese.

In section 5.2 the cultural (identity) markers were examined. Upon the examination of the comics of the first time period it became evident that the "yellow" star on Japanese military headgear and katana were often placed in the vicinity of Japanese actors to help the reader identify Japanese in the comics. The use of the Japanese flag however remains the most popular cultural (identity) marker because of its easily recognizable design. Another common but less easily recognizable cultural (identity) marker for Japanese is the depiction of Japanese uniformity. This uniformity, '*ware ware Nihonjin*', has gotten a literal depiction as Japanese are always shown in a group, which in their own culture is seen as a strength, but in *Commando* regarded as negative feature as this uniformity is only shown in the context of war. In the 1981-2000 period *Commando* diversified Japanese cultural (identity) markers and increased the depiction of other Japanese cultural elements that mainly occur in everyday Japanese civil life as shrines, Japanese written characters and typical Japanese furniture. By depicting everyday life elements, even though sometimes incorrectly applied and portrayed, the readers of *Commando* are provided with an imagery that emphasizes that Japanese are not born soldiers, but that they are humans too as they have people waiting for their return and have a home where they came from and eventually hoped to return to.

Section 5.3 starts off with briefly mentioning that throughout the *Commando* comics in the 1961-1980-period it has become evident that the majority of Japanese (men) are perceived to be born evil, incapable of showing emotions and often show little to no empathy to others or their own. However, there are some anomalies in which Japanese do show empathy towards others as a result that the reader is able to regard Japanese not solely as nameless, 'alien', emotionless 'humans, but are rather able to see that Japanese are humans 'just like us'. What seems most striking is that Japanese in all the *Commando* comics are very eloquent and can speak English fluently in comparison with the English of indigenous men who mostly speak in broken English. Even though not explicitly stated, this fluency in English of Japanese soldiers may indicate that *Commando* does perceive Japanese more as equals to the Allied (white) men and that they are maybe not so different from "us" and this trend continued in the 1980's and onward. Looking at the *Commando* comics between 1961-1980 the reader can see that generally Japanese colonels, generals, officers and medics were given names as they were presumably they are the key figures in Japanese operations. However, in the 1981-2000 period there seems to be an increase in storylines that not only centre around Japanese generals, medics and officers and portray more Japanese with positive characteristics as there is an increase in lead roles of lower ranked Japanese soldiers who are increasingly more closely portrayed, provided with names and have individual storylines in which Japanese are more often shown helping or befriending Allied men, which causes Japanese to be seen less as inscrutable and Spartan and thus more 'human'.

After exploring the developments in the representation of Japanese in *Commando* over a period of 40 years, it can be established that the overall changes – as well as on the comic covers and in the comic storyline- provide overall a more diverse and more 'human' portrayal of Japanese. For the comic covers this development is subtle as there is a decrease of racial slur addressing Japanese in the titles and the menacing faces of Japanese on the covers have over time been replaced by the heroic actions of Allied soldiers. This change however does not necessarily portray Japanese as less 'inscrutable' or evil and mainly just showcase that there was a revival of British nationalistic and militaristic narrative that were so important directly after WWII. In the 1980's *Commando* comic's 65- paged storylines however, in which sequenced graphic design and text get more room to work together to



construct a narrative, the *Commando* reader is presented with more storylines that show Japanese soldiers separately from the battlefield whereby the reader gets to know the 'human' behind the soldier as Japanese individuals are increasingly portrayed as protagonists who are drawn up close showing emotions and empathy which makes them seem less inscrutable and Spartan and not so that different from the Allied soldiers and ultimately the "us" that Westerners are familiar with.

However, though even the representation of Japanese in *Commando* seems to have become more positive from the 1980's onward, two things must be emphasized before this summary comes to a close. The first thing that should be mentioned is that not all the developments in the representation that deviated from the 'American' representation of Japan(ese) in *Commando* took shape after Japan was increasingly regarded as 'cool' from the late 1970's and 1980's onward when the country became one of the largest exporting countries for many modern commodities such as cars and electronic devices. Some of the developments, however small they may seem, can also already be detected in some of the *Commando* comics in the 1960's.

Secondly, is that even though Japanese were increasingly portrayed more 'human' by the depiction of 'friendly' Japanese and the increase in cultural (identity) markers that occur in civilian everyday life, the representation of Japanese as 'less 'human' in the 1960's and early 1970's in *Commando* continued to circulate in reprints in the following decades as no changes were made to the storyline as only blurred (cover) illustrations were restored. Thus, even though more and alternative storylines for Japanese were printed in *Commando* between 1981-2000, there were also enough *Commando* comics from the 1961-1980-period that portrayed Japanese more negatively that were reprinted between 1981-2000 which can give contrasting and conflicting opinions about the developments in the representation of Japanese in the *Commando* comics.

With this summary the empirical research has almost come to close. Even though having established that Japanese are over time portrayed more diverse and 'human' in *Commando*, the changes still need to be provided with a rationale. Chapter 6, the *End conclusion*, is the final chapter of this research in which a rationale for the findings and developments in the representation of Japanese will be provided. Following the rationale, a section is dedicated to the critical reflection on the *Yellow Peril* and *Orientalist* tropes that have been used as a

backbone for the examination of the representation of Japanese in *Commando* before ultimately closing the research with a final statement about future researchers regarding the representation of Japanese in British and other Western post-WWII war comics.

## Chapter 6: End conclusion

Firstly, looking at the overall developments on the *Commando* comic covers and its storyline between the two time periods, the shifts to more positively addressing and portraying Japanese over time have possibly been fuelled by the positive cultural reinforcement of Japanese culture, trends and rising imports of high-quality Japanese electronic goods in Britain in the wake of the 1980's and onward. Even though racial slur aimed at Japanese on the covers and in the comic storyline of *Commando* did not fully disappear in the wake of the 1980s and onward, primarily due to the rash use of wartime slang and racial epithets in everyday life, *Commando* did choose to decrease the 'colourful' racial slur when referring to Japanese and additionally portray Japanese not only as the 'inherently evil' as this representation presumably became regarded as outdated and unnecessarily offensive as the relations between Japan and Britain bettered in the wake of the 1980's and onward.

What is rather striking though is that Chapman, when elaborating on the cultural influences on the representation of actors and events in comics, argues that the relationship between comics and their historical context is too complex to ascribe developments in comics to the changes in the cultural climate in which the comics are produced. Even though I partly agree with Chapman that not all the developments in the representations – of in this case Japanese- are influenced by its cultural climate, as there is also such a thing as artistic freedom, I do think this is rather an odd statement as Chapman's book is called '*British Comics: A Cultural History*' but Chapman seems to discard the 'cultural' aspect. Even though Chapman seems to revise his comment and shortly after this remark acknowledges that changes in the comics do not just occur and that it must be rather axiomatic that comics do not at all respond to the cultural conditions and ideological climate in which they are produced,<sup>313</sup> this is not explicitly reflected in his work. This is a shame as Chapman seemingly agrees with Mills that cultural conditions do influence the representation of certain events and people in popular culture<sup>314</sup> and thus its influence should not be underestimated. However, even though Chapman should be applauded for his work, he has been overambitious by covering too much historical knowledge about different genres and trends

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<sup>313</sup> Chapman, *British Comics: A Cultural History*, 14.

<sup>314</sup> Mills, "Introduction," 10.

in his book which unfortunately has left a majority of cultural aspects and developments neglected that contributed to changes and shift unanswered.

Secondly, when comparing the *Yellow Peril* trope and *Orientalist* trope, in which Japan and Japanese were represented in American WWII (war) comics and which has been repeatedly applied to British and other Western post-WWII war comic books, a few anomalies can be found in *Commando*. In chapter 1 it became evident that the representation of Japanese in *Commando* comics is mainly perceived to be similar to the American *Yellow Trope* and *Orientalist* representation of Japanese during WWII in which the Japanese are perceived as the 'inherently evil other'. At first glance the representation of Japanese in *Commando* seem to have overlap with the American *Yellow Peril* and *Orientalist* representation of Japanese in WWII propaganda and comics but in-depth research shows that this imagery of Japanese in *Commando* has been largely constructed by a combination of recklessly (re)applying American prejudices and viewing historical events from a too American point of view which has been constructed and applied during WWII, which has resulted in the "too American" ideal types of the *Yellow Peril* and *Orientalist* tropes that have been ascribed to Japanese by America during the events of WWII.

Firstly, in the American comics, Japanese soldiers were in the American *Yellow Peril* trope depicted as inherently evil as this imagery moved beyond the battlefield as Japanese men were also portrayed attacking Western civilian homes in which their targets were the defenseless Caucasian women<sup>315</sup>-and sometimes children-, which is an imagery that has not been depicted in *Commando*. Secondly, when comparing the depictions of Japanese that can be assigned to the *Orientalist* trope, Japanese were in American WWII comics primarily negatively "othered" by being portrayed as oddly looking, even animalistic 'non-humans' and additionally do not show depictions of Japanese civilian life. *Commando* on the other hand, does tap into the more enthusiastic side of *Orientalism* than rather the dismissive side by providing Japanese soldiers with names, alternative storylines that deviate from the 'evil' Japanese and do show elements of civilian everyday Japanese life and thus deviate from the American representation of Japanese during WWII. Especially from the 1980's onward *Commando*, even though depictions of Japanese everyday life are not that extensive and not

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<sup>315</sup> Brock, "Portrayal of the Japanese during World War II in the United States," 48–49.

always accurate, these portrayals invite readers to take an interest in Japanese and Japanese culture beyond the battlefield and showcase that Japanese are not born soldiers but are also humans who lived an ordinary civilian life before they were sent to war and thus are similar to 'people just like us' and not so "other", or 'different'.

What has become evident to me during this research regarding the representation of Japanese in the British post-WWII *Commando* war comics is that one must be mindful of the time and the place in which the comics are produced when applying and examining the *Yellow Peril* and *Orientalist* tropes as time and place influence the message and the connotations assigned to the tropes. When looking at American WWII comics depicting Japanese, they solely used the *Yellow Peril* trope to install fear by depicting all Japanese as evil and power hungry and the *Orientalist* trope to portray the Japanese as backward during WWII to enlist more men for the army, while *Commando*, when applying the *Yellow Peril* trope did not portray every Japanese evil to incite fear and anger towards Japanese in their readership and overall applied the *Orientalist* trope in a more positive way. This in my opinion was largely possible as *Commando* was looking back on WWII and was thus eventually able to depict a more diverse imagery of Japan and Japanese during the events of WWII. This thus shows that the assumed "American" two folded representation of Japan in the *Orientalist* trope, or in the *Yellow Peril* approach, is from the very beginning not entirely applicable on the British post-WWII *Commando* war comics as the portrayal and storyline never aligned with the message America wanted to convey about Japanese during WWII.

Thus without completely contesting the tropes, as I do regard them useful as they can be used as a backbone to affirm, challenge or contest the tropes in future researches regarding the representation of Japanese in British and other Western post-WWII war comics, I rather vouch for more in-depth qualitative researches of Western post-WWII war comics and not selecting a large corpus of comics as 'more' does not necessarily mean 'better' or more reliable. Secondly, by just shifting through a large corpus of comics and just looking but nothing really perceiving what is portrayed and why it is portrayed in that way and rather recklessly (re)applying, as Prasol would say; 'unambiguous and overly American descriptions' of Japanese on Japanese in other Western post-WWII war comics without considering each countries' individual history, economical, political and social relations with Japan, many anomalies will be overlooked and all the result regarding the representation of



Japanese in Western post-WWII war comics will keep referring to the American representation of Japanese in war comics. This in-depth research has shown that comparing the transnational similarities and differences in the meaning and the role of comics in the representation of Japanese during the events of WWII is fruitful and will hopefully contribute to bring other British and Western comics under consideration when people want to research the representation of Japanese during WWII in post-WWII war comic books as there are many still awaiting a genuine cultural examination and description of their own.

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