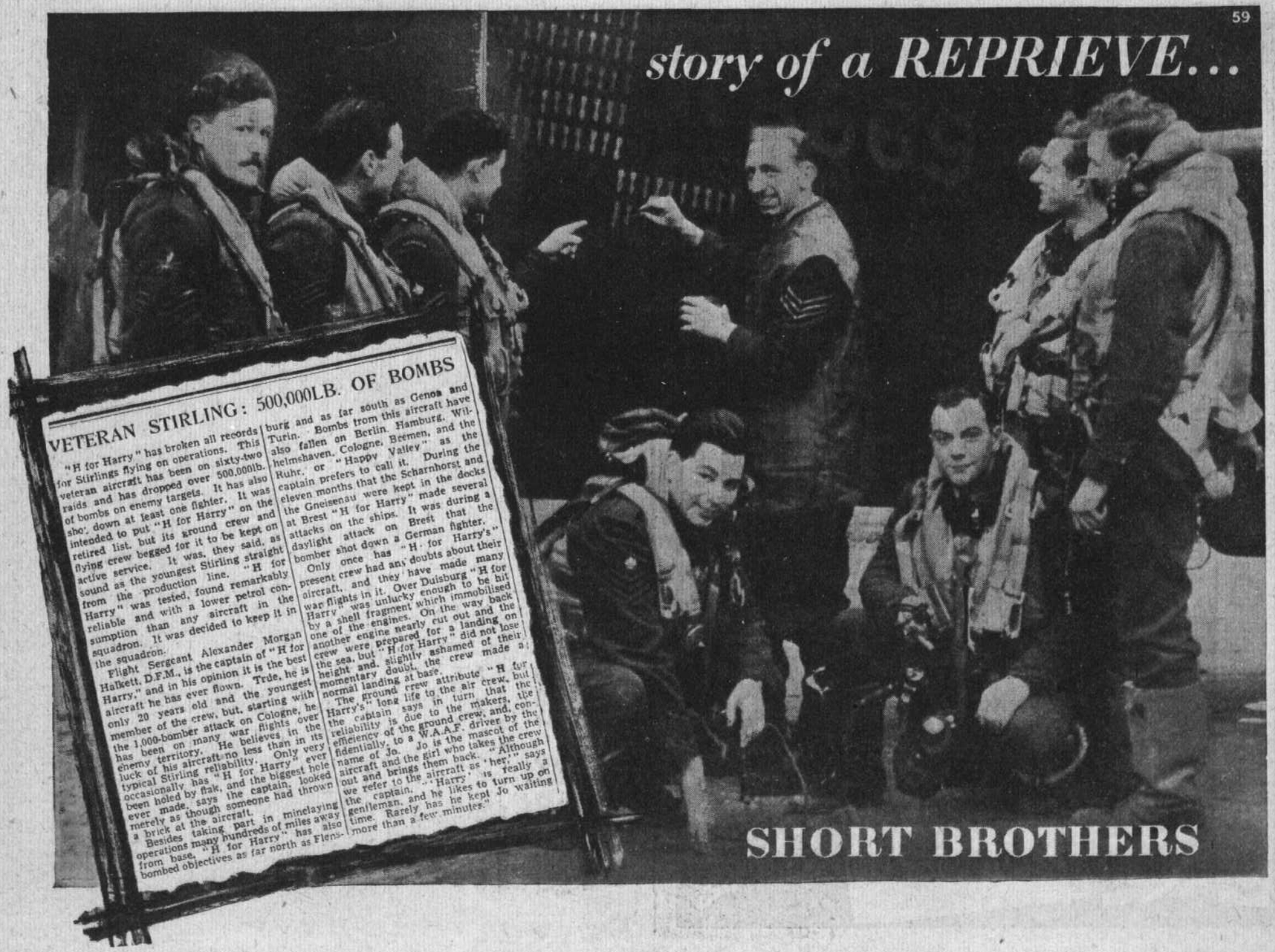
story of a REPRIEVE...
VETERAN STIRLING: 500,000LB. OF BOMBS
"H for Harry" has broken all records for Stirlings flying on operations. This veteran aircraft has been on sixty-two raids and has dropped over 500,000lb. of bombs on enemy targets. It has also sho' down at least one fighter. It was intended to put "H for Harry" on the retired list, but its around crew and flying crew begged for it to be kept on active service. It was, they said, as sound as the youngest Stirling straight from the production line. "H for Harry" was tested, found remarkably reliable and with a lower petrol consumption than any aircraft in the squadron. It was decided to keep it in the squadron.
Flight Sergeant Alexander Morgan Halkett, D.F.M., is the captain of "H for Harry," and in his opinion it is the best aircraft he has ever flown. True, he is only 20 years old and the youngest member of the crew, but, starting with the 1,000-bomber attack on Cologne, he has been on many war flights over enemy territory. He believes in the luck of his aircraft no less than in its typical Stirling reliability. Only very occasionally has "H for Harry" ever been holed by flak, and the biggest hole ever made, says the captain, looked merely as though someone had thrown a brick at the aircraft.
Besides taking part in minelaying operations many hundreds of miles away from base, "H for Harry" has also bombed objectives as far north as Flensburg and as far south as Genoa and Turin. Bombs from this aircraft have also fallen on Berlin, Hamburg, Wilhelmshaven, Cologne, Bremen, and the Ruhr, or "Happy Valley" as the captain prefers to call it. During the eleven months that the Scharnhorst and the Gneisenau were kept in the docks at Brest "H for Harry" made several attacks on the ships. It was during a daylight attack on Brest that the bomber shot down a German fighter.
Only once has "H for Harry's" present crew had any doubts about their aircraft, and they have made many war flights in it. Over Duisburg "H for Harry" was unlucky enough to be hit by a shell fragment which immobilised one of the engines. On the way back another engine nearly cut out and the crew were prepared for a landing on the sea, but "H for Harry" did not lose height and, slightly ashamed of their momentary doubt, the crew made a normal landing at base.
The ground crew attribute "H for Harry's" long life to the air crew, but the captain says in turn that the reliability is due to the makers, the efficiency of the ground crew, and, confidentially, to a W.A.A.F. driver by the name of Jo. Jo is the mascot of the aircraft and the girl who takes the crew out and brings them back. "Although we refer to the aircraft as 'her,'" says the captain, "'Harry' is really a gentleman, and he likes to turn up on time. Rarely has he kept Jo waiting more than a few minutes."
SHORT BROTHERS