

went to triple shifts, seven days a week. There were problems: in particular, the plane was now 3,000 pounds overweight. Substitutions were made—woven graphite fibre was used instead of metal, at half the weight and sixty per cent of the cost. The first plane came off the line three months behind schedule, but it was an impressive beauty.

Finally the plane was ready for testing. First there were high-speed runway tests, then chief test pilot Doug Atkins took off. It flew beautifully, and, to the relief of all, no significant modifications were needed. Atkins said it was the "best damn airplane this company has ever built." On August 11, 1980, after eighteen months of test flying, the Canadian government certified it, and U.S. government certification soon followed.

Dan Cooper

Dan Cooper is, quite possibly, the best known mythical Canadian Hero in the world.

He is, however, almost unknown in Canada or in the United States.

He was created twenty-eight years ago by Albert Weinberg, a Belgian cartoonist, who, inspired by a film on supersonic aircraft, drew a comic strip starring Canadian Forces pilot Cooper as a kindhearted, chivalrous defender of widows, orphans and democracy. The strip has been translated into seventeen languages and sold in twenty-four countries, including Greece, Turkey, Mexico and Brazil. Nine million cartoon albums have been sold, and it is the most popular strip in West Germany.

Cooper is ambidextrous and he flies all the planes the Canadian Forces have, Huey helicopters, Hercules transports, CF-104 Starfighters and CF-101 Voodoo fighters. He was the first Canadian pilot to fly the CF-18 Hornet, since their actual delivery will not begin until late this year. Weinberg, who lives in Brussels, visits Canadian Forces bases in Europe and Canada to keep up-to-the-minute with equipment and tactics, but the main emphasis in the strip is "on the characters, their feelings and the individual traits."

He writes a new basic scenario each year, and draws in ink on plates and then turns his drawings over to a team of assistants who add details and colour.



DAN COOPER