

Savoias Out of Sapporo

A Bancroft and Leadbeater Adventure By Arch Whitehouse

I

IT WASN'T that anything untoward had happened that made Todd Bancroft and Larry Leadbeater cringe. Practically nothing had happened, and you can't take a punch at nothing. You're likely to throw your arm out.

Long before Todd and Larry had reached Sapporo, plenty of nothing had happened and it had happened in large, oval chunks.

"I read once," Leadbeater said, as they followed the railroad from Shiraoi up toward Sapporo, "that these Japs use the same old torture methods their great-grandfathers used. They say they start off by lighting fires on your belly."

Todd Bancroft, pilot of the Seversky Convoy fighter, considered that for several seconds and then supplied further information.

"No, that's the old Afridi trick they pull up along the Northwest Frontier. I think they stick a curved funnel in your ear and pour hot lead down it."

"A lot you know about torture!" argued Leadbeater.

"That's Chinese. I think the Japs bore holes in you with things like the Boy Scouts use to light fires by friction. The Death of a Thousand Perforations, I think they call it."

"You've got it mixed up with the Death of a Thousand Cuts," corrected Todd.

"What do they do, run a lawnmower over you?"

Todd gave it up at last and returned to his instrument board, faintly smiling at the knowledge they had both been gagging to keep up their spirits. At times the pair of them seemed to be nothing short of hopeless fools bargaining about the world with no other qualification but the ability to get into trouble. Actually they were two highly skilled members of the United States Secret Service, and it was informal little conversations of this kind that covered up their thoughts and plans.

For instance, their plane, a modern, high-speed military fighter of long range, had been beautifully camouflaged to appear like any ordinary piece of service equipment used by the

U. S. Meteorological Survey. They were in the Far East carrying out secret missions conjured up by a man named Blaisdell who sat at a prosaic desk in Washington, D. C.

"Well, we're sure of one thing," the Leadbeater guy said after another lengthy pause. "Old Yoshida will be at Sapporo, won't he?"

"He should—he and the Russian gal, Olinka Ivanovna, who got away with him."

Leadbeater started to remove the discharge disk from the rotary machine gun which they had christened "Slingin' Sal" when he instinctively looked around as a precaution. He stiffened, gulped and rammed the disk back on the shaft.

Todd Bancroft, his keen eyes on his instruments and his mind on problems of piloting, sensed that something had happened. As he started to turn his head he heard Larry say:

"Jumpin' spark gaps! Pieplate!"

Bancroft went warm at the throat. His palms perspired as he followed Larry's gaze across the inky-blue sky.

"She's back, the little fool!" Leadbeater was shouting.

Bancroft spotted the wide-winged Koken plane which Sturgis Sands, the girl from Pieplate, Kansas, had purloined to get the famous Professor Deuhl out of Vladivostok and into sanctuary of the Philippines. Now she had risked her life again on another long-distance flight from Manila back onto the stamping grounds of the enemy.

"The little idiot!" growled Bancroft, as the full force of the event struck him.

"That makes it unanimous," said Leadbeater coldly.

"What are we waiting for?" snapped Todd. "Let's call her wavelength."

Larry leaned over and swung the lever on their set while Todd slipped the ear-phones on his head and snatched at the muzzle mike. The tubes warmed, and then they learned that the girl aboard the Japanese Koken plane had been trying to call them.

"Hello, Pieplate!" cried Todd into his mike.

"I thought you would never answer," came back over the ether. "Doesn't one of you ride with your set in?"

"Sorry. What's the game, Pieplate?"

"Miss Sands," said Larry. "Don't call her Pieplate!"

"You gave her that name—shut up! Hello, Sturgis."

"You're going through to Sapporo?" the girl asked, and there was an anxious tone to her voice.

"We'll have to now. We're almost out of juice."

"Fine! We've got to find Hallerton. There's something mysterious about Hallerton. If you register at the Imperial Hotel, I'll try to contact you. The Imperial is on the Nishi-Ginza Square and you can get there from the Sapporo airport by taxi very quickly. Stay there until you hear . . ."

"Who's Hallerton?" called Todd, as the girl's signal faded. "Who's this guy? What's up, Pieplate?"

"Plenty!" yelled Leadbeater. "Look, they're shooting at her!"

"Good Lord!" gasped Todd, swinging the Seversky over hard and ramming after the Koken plane. "Nakajimas!"

"Yeah, and they're going to work on her!"

"They've gone to work on her. She's in flames!"

The two Americans stared with straining eyes and watched the Koken monoplane strangle itself in mid-air. Three Nakajima fighters with Japanese Imperial Navy markings on their flanks were pouring flaming tracers and armor-piercing slugs into the floundering, long-range ship as it stalled at the top of a mad struggle to get away.

"Let 'em have some of it," husked Leadbeater. "What you waiting for?"

Todd did not answer, but drew back a lever that opened the ports of the 37 mm. guns hidden in their wings. He tripped in the gear, pressed the firing lever and a series of cannonading chugs splashed from the wing orifices.

A Nakajima skidded across the sky minus its tail assembly. Another, intent on its effort to splash more lead into the floundering Koken, never saw the Seversky slam at it and pour another salvo of shell-gun ammo into its vitals.

"Good stuff," approved Larry, over Todd's shoulder. But that doesn't save Pieplate."

"Why the devil doesn't she jump?"

"How do you know she has a 'chute?"

"Of course she has a 'chute—I hope. What's the matter with you, Larry?"

"What's the matter with you? She hasn't jumped yet, has she?"

"How do I know? I haven't seen her jump," argued Todd, taking another long shot at the last of the three Nakajimas.

"Well, how do you know she hasn't jumped? She might have," Larry argued pathetically.

Neither of them had any idea what they were saying. All they knew was that Sturgis Sands, a fellow agent who had more than proven her worth, was going down in a flaming plane.

"I haven't seen a 'chute yet," said Todd mournfully. He had a face like the business end of a vinegar cruet now.

The whole sky was lit up by the flame and glare of two burning planes. One was a Koken, the other a Navy Nakajima. But there was no sign of a fluttering white canopy that meant life or hope for a young girl.

The two torches fluttered down toward the rice paddies below. A small river trickled placidly through it all and gurgled over its banks in spots. The Koken, a mere smoking skeleton, fell with a low hiss into a bend of the muddy river.

The two grief-stricken agents circled the spot several times, but there was no sign of life or evidence of hope. They circled wider and tried to find a clearing to get down, but the rice paddies covered miles of territory, and was no place to attempt to land a 300 m.p.h. Convoy fighter.

"I guess that's that," moaned Leadbeater. "What was that all about, anyhow?"

"You've got me. She was just saying that we had to find a guy named—let's see—a guy named Hallerton. Who's that?"

"Hallerton? The name is familiar, but I don't know anyone by that name. That was all our fault."

"Where the deuce did they come from?" demanded Todd, climbing again and reluctantly returning to their original course.

"They could have come from anywhere. What really matters is how they nailed her. Something's slipping in this game somewhere," Larry exploded. "We're just sticking our necks into a noose. Why don't we beat it out at sea and try to get picked up by a P. and O. liner?"

"What about Pieplate? You can't leave her out here."

“Well, did you—did you see her jump or something?”

“No. But something tells me she got out of that mess, somehow.”

“Oh. Swell chance!”

“She’s not that dumb,” argued Bancroft. “She must have jumped. We couldn’t see the other side of the glare, remember.”

“I guess we go to Sapporo,” said Leadbeater with a doleful air. “How will she get out of that mudpuddle back there?”

“You tell me. Maybe she’s not even in there. A million things could have happened.”

“Yeah, but only one did.”

Mumbling the rest of the argument to themselves, they settled back glumly for the remainder of the trip to Sapporo. There was an airport there of fairly reasonable importance, although Todd could find no list of the call letters of any radio station connected with the field. So he just went on and trusted to luck to get in.

Sapporo, the official capital of the island of Yezo, was now called Hokkaido. It had a population of more than 150,000, was an important garrison town; boasted an agricultural college, several important saw mills, flour mills, breweries and flax factories. Even at this unearthly hour of the morning there was plenty of activity discernible.

Smoke stacks belched fire. The main streets were illuminated and cut the city up into shapeless slabs. The railroad yards were touched up with blobs of steam, streaks of fire and the intermittent glare of open fireboxes. The steel rails gleamed and signal lamps twinkled their red and green warnings.

“Wonder what the hoosegow is like down there?” pondered Larry.

Todd was busy circling the city now, looking for the airport. He studied the Interavia map again and finally checked that the field was located two kilometers north of the widest section of the railroad yard. He swung across the city again and caught the fan-shaped wedge of light that fanged out from a portable landing light.

“Well, they’re putting out the carpet for us,” Leadbeater said, as he tucked the last important part of Slingin’ Sal away.

“You keep your trap shut when we get in and don’t start a fight with the first bird you see,” warned Todd, lowering the landing gear.

Larry blinked at that, but let it go. Todd needed all his skill to get in, and this was no time for horseplay. The Seversky swished around, caught the wind and headed into the glare that was set across the field for landing. A shadow bar across the lens gave them a chance to keep out of the glare and eventually they touched down gently, scrawnched their cleos and finally pulled up safely.

A hangar door was open, and a wide oblong of light fell out and formed a ceremonial carpet for them to approach. A number of indistinct figures moved back and forth across the entrance, throwing grotesque shadows before them. The hangar door was pushed open farther, and inside they could see several Nakajima-Douglas transports of the Nippon Koko Yuso Kabushiki Kaisha (Japan Air Transport Co.) around which a number of Japanese mechanics were carrying out routine duties.

“Douglasses?” gagged Larry.

“Sure. They make ‘em under manufacturing license over here. These Japs know what they’re doing.”

“I’ll bet they do. We’ll know what they’re doing, too, when we get in.”

A group of mechanics came out and took the wing-tips of the Seversky and guided Todd in. The Seversky was inspected with only ordinary interest as the two Americans climbed down. A young foreman in American coveralls directed them to an office on the far side of the building which obviously housed the customs officials.

“Here it comes,” said Larry under his breath.

“Shut up! They’ve been very cordial so far. What do you want them to do at this time of morning? Serve cocktails?”

“Let me alone, that’s all. Just a hotel bed, something to eat, and—”

“Sure! I know the rest. You’re thirsty.”

The customs official was a small, spare man in a neat blue serge suit. He wore the omnipresent tortoise-shell glasses and a snap-brim felt hat. He smiled, lit a cigarette and began talking, but his voice was pitched so high and he spoke in such rapid tones that it was some time before they could get the drift of his speech.

Todd just stared at him and offered his passports, travel permits and government credentials on the plane and their equipment. The Jap official ignored them and continued his

bleating until finally they sensed that he was presenting some form of formal greeting.

II

“As we have heard so much of you two gentlemen,” the customs official was saying, “we here in Sapporo are most delighted to welcome you and to offer all our services. We appreciate your efforts here and hope you will call on us should you require our assistance in your meteorological work. The Japan Air Transport Company is most interested, I assure you.”

“Well, bounce my landing gear—that’s right,” muttered Larry. “We are in the Meteorological Survey Service.”

Todd wanted to kick him in the shins.

“And so, gentlemen,” the Jap official went on, “I am most pleased to waive all customs formalities and offer you all our assistance in getting into the city and to a hotel. I have a car outside.”

“Well—thanks,” said Todd, watching the Jap stamp their papers and scrawl his name on their passports, “but I guess we can manage, if we first arrange for the servicing of our plane.”

“Of course, but you are not leaving at once, surely?”

“No, but we get orders unexpectedly. Certain meteorological situations arise frequently and we have to be on hand to make our computations,” explained Todd.

“Where did you learn all that line?” asked Larry out of one corner of his mouth.

“Your plane will be checked and serviced immediately,” the customs official said. “Now, may I run you gentlemen into the town? Have you any idea where you wish to stay?”

“We have considered the Imperial Hotel,” said Todd.

“I am quite sure it will more than meet your expectations, Mr. Bancroft.” Then the Jap made a queer grimace as he shuffled his papers. “I do not suppose you have heard anything further about Mr. Hallerton, have you?” he said, and for the first time they sensed an icy tone of suspicion in his voice.

“Mr. Hallerton?” repeated Todd, trying to remember where that name had come up before. “Mr. Hallerton?” Then it struck him. “I’m sorry,

but I’ve never heard of him. Why, is there anything wrong?”

“Anything wrong?” repeated the Jap. He stared through his thick lenses at the two Americans, studied Leadbeater carefully and then said, “No, I hope there’s nothing whatever wrong.”

Todd decided to drop the subject and sent Larry out to collect their bags from the plane and give orders for the servicing.

“You know,” he snapped suddenly, “we have been getting a rough handling in this area.”

The customs man frowned and pursed his lips. “A great many things have been happening in this section and you should have known that it is a restricted area,” he said finally. “That is why you have been attacked—or at least fired on as a warning to stay away. I hope you will acquaint yourself with these restricted areas in the future. You should get permission for such flights.”

“Don’t worry, we will, after this.”

The Jap led the way out to his car, a new German Mercedes. He slid behind the wheel after they piled in, pressed the starter and drove skillfully out of the airport confines. He swung into the main road that led to Sapporo. Both Todd and Larry were silent all the way in, not fully satisfied that everything was on the up and up. That Mr. Hallerton business had them worried.

Sapporo was typically Japan. It appeared to be a weird combination of Bethlehem, Pa., Harrison, N. J., and something designed for a Japanese exhibit at the World’s Fair.

There were factories, modernistic department stores, smelly warehouses and Oriental structures all stirred in together. Then there was the Hotel Imperial, reminding one of a midwest cinema minus the billboards. It was built of white marble or terra cotta.

It had an imposing entrance in spite of the early morning chill. There were windows set so that the patrons could sit and look down on the turmoil of the street and the restrained gaiety of the sidewalk. The streets were cluttered with creaking-wheeled carts, wheezing motor cars, bicycles and rickshaws. Bells rung and tingled. Gongs clanged and vibrated from the most mysterious places. Men in uniform blew whistles and flashed short swords. No one took the slightest notice, and life went on in a strange even tempo.

The customs man pulled up before the Imperial, turned in his seat and spoke.

"I'm most interested in Mr. Hallerton, gentlemen, and would appreciate any information you may receive on his whereabouts."

"Who the devil—" started Larry, but a nudge from Todd made him convert the statement to, "Who the devil designed this town?"

"We can do a lot for each other, Mr. Bancroft," said the Jap with a steely timber to his voice. "If you hear anything about Mr. Hallerton—well, I think you understand."

"If I do, I'll let you know. I guess he'll turn up in time," Todd said with an innocent gesture.

The customs man jerked in his seat. "You think he will?" he asked with a queer twisting of his lips.

"Oh, no doubt of it. He always turns up," answered Todd, picking up their bags.

"He always turns up?" the Jap repeated in a low, choked tone. "What do you mean? Has he been missing before?"

"Missing?" exclaimed Todd. "Is he missing?"

The Jap customs man gave them both a glance that was a cocktail of curdled frozen custard and double-strength vitriol.

"I'm afraid we are wasting our time. I have no use for levity in a case like this."

They got out, thanked the Jap and watched him drive away in the chill morning.

"Now who is Mr. Hallerton?" they blankly asked each other.

A Japanese boy in oversize uniform greeted them in the lobby and took their bags. Another Jap, an almost exact replica of the customs man was behind the counter of the office. He greeted them and mentioned their names at once.

"How do you know us?" demanded Todd, deeply perplexed.

"But the lady called and reserved your room, sir," the desk clerk stated. "You are to have room three-o-seven."

"The lady called?" they both said. "What lady?"

"The lady who say she is your secretary. A Miss Sands, her name is," answered the surprised clerk, fairly hissing his words.

That was too much for them. How could Sturgis Sands call and arrange their room for them?

"When did she call?" asked Todd.

"Yesterday—yesterday morning. Nossing is wrong, I hope?"

"Yesterday morning?" Todd managed to get out. "But there must be some mistake. She couldn't know we were coming to Sapporo then. Are you sure?"

The clerk waxed emphatic.

"Positively. I took the message from Osaka—on the telephone."

"Osaka? But Miss Sands was in Manila! That is, I think —oh, forget it. She could have been in Osaka. I guess it's all right."

"Of course, gentlemen," beamed the relieved clerk. "The room is the exact one she ordered. We even managed to get Mr. Hallerton's book in time."

"Mr. Hallerton's book?" exploded Leadbeater.

The clerk fumbled with the register a minute, glanced about furtively and then displayed all the symptoms of a man about to faint. His eyes popped and blazed and his throat muscles constricted to stiff cords.

"What's the matter?" Todd started to say.

"The book—quick, Mister Bancroft," the clerk began, "the book! I have it here—you are to read page three—"

Something swished between Todd and Larry. Something that sizzled and then left a leaden and horrible silence.

There was a scuffle behind them and a low Oriental oath. A figure went quickly past a square pillar that had a gaudy potted palm near it.

"In the throat!" husked Larry.

Todd turned quickly and saw the clerk clutch at his neck. His mouth was open and he was trying to scream.

Something had paralyzed his throat muscles, and he fell forward clutching at the edge of the counter as he shoved the brown paper package toward Todd.

"Book—page—" he choked.

That was all. His body gave one quivering jerk and slipped off the counter to the space behind with a cruel thud.

Todd grabbed the package, darted around the counter and saw the body flat on its back. In the neck trembled a short four-inch dart, a black cigar-shaped missile that had snapped off a life in terrible silence. Todd winced as he watched the reflex action of the dart tremble and stop, drooping at a slight angle. The form gave another convulsive jerk and a foot kicked a rattan waste-paper basket over.

“A Malay blow-dart!” whispered Todd. “Must be tipped with the famous Japanese five poisons known as wu tu. There’s one you didn’t think of.”

“Knocked him deader than King Tut,” commented Larry. “Who did it?”

“Don’t ask me,” Todd said, getting up off one knee.

Then someone put on a Luna Park fireworks display. There was a dull thock, and Todd was knocked senseless. Comets charged across a pale pink sky. Thirty-five flaming onions went up and formed a loud oath. A flock of giant salutes blew up somewhere near the lot and started a new display of crashing pyrotechnics.

When he came to, Todd found himself sprawled out across the floor near the feet of the dead office clerk. He made his eyes behave and tried to move a lump the size of a sand-bag from somewhere behind the back of his head.

The Leadbeater guy was on the other side of the counter

bellowing for all the constabulary in Japan, and waving an automatic half the size of an anti-tank gun. Todd scrambled to his feet, tottered across the floor and grabbed Larry about the waist and hung on.

“What happened?” he gasped. “Two big guys came out of nowhere behind you, and socked you with a hunk of wood. It sounded like a cracked gourd—your noggin, I mean. I tried to get at them, but one of the guys slipped a piece of yellow cord around my neck and almost cut my head off.”

“Jap garrote!” said Todd. “You’re lucky! You’re supposed to be dead.”

“Thanks! They got away with the package—the book. That’s what they came for.”

Todd rubbed the back of his head, and Larry fingered his collar while hotel men and two Jap policemen made some attempt to clear it all up.

“So sorry, gentlemen,” a Jap plainclothes man said as they stood by and watched the clerk’s body carried out. “You will not be annoyed further. Unfortunate. We shall investigate.”

Larry and Todd said nothing but exchanged glances.

“Nice, eh?” Todd said finally. “They got the book, eh? Pieplate must have wanted us to have it, too. What the hell is all the Hallerton stuff about, anyway?”

“This business gets screwier every minute. Where’s someone who knows something about this joint? I’ve got to have a drink,” said Larry. “Hey, boy, come here!”

A toothy youth in a uniform jacket and black silk trousers came forward.

“Is there a bar here—where we can get something to eat, too?” Larry asked.

The boy bowed, half-smiled and led them across the lobby to a doorway that was bordered in palms. There was a series of leather screens through which they passed and then a bar—a real bar with bottles and cigarettes and cigars. There were deep leather seats and comfortable wide tables. It was snug and warm and they sat down, still pondering the events of the past few minutes.

“Okay, boy, mix up something. Brandy-soda—make it two—double, before Mr. Hallerton blows in again,” said Todd.

“Mister Hallerton very wet, sir,” the boy said. “He no come here. Mr. Yoshida look for him, too. No come yet. Probably very wet.”

“As you say in America,” added Larry.

“No,” the boy peered over from the other side of the bar, “not as you say in America. Mister Hallerton most likely very wet—in junk.”

“Junk! Gets wet in junk? What sort of talk is that? What’s he flying?” argued Leadbeater.

“Him no fly, sir. Him in junk—Mister Hallerton. Him missing now many long days.”

“In junk?” probed Larry again. He was intrigued by this junk business.

“If that bird don’t soon get those drinks around here, I’ll be on a junk pile myself,” said Todd wearily, rubbing the back of his head. “I’m going crazy! We’ve got to get that book back.”

The boy brought the drinks around, and they ordered a breakfast to be brought into the bar. They gulped the first drink and ordered another, for the first real pangs of hunger and the weariness of fatigue were beginning to take their toll.

A pungent breakfast of ham and eggs was brought in along with a generous pot of steaming coffee, and they fell to without a word.

III

Why had they been so courteously treated by the customs man? It was obvious that they had been expected, for he had been waiting for them at the airport. Why had he failed to mention any of the escapades they had experienced and the battles they had had with the Mitsubishis and Nakajimas of the Japanese government? Why had Sturgis Sands ordered a book, Hallerton's book, all the way from Osaka, the famous Japanese naval base?

"We've walked into a beaut," muttered Todd, breaking a slab of buttered toast. "They're setting the shop out for us for something, you can depend on that."

"I'm worried about that girl," Leadbeater mumbled into his coffee. He looked worried, too. His neck still ached.

"I'm not," Bancroft stated with decision. "That girl is somewhere about. She didn't get it in that plane. As a matter of fact, I'm not sure now she was in that one."

"Don't be goofy! Of course she was in that Koken. She called from that plane, didn't she?"

"We have no concrete evidence that she did. Except—" added Todd with a mournful mug, "except that she stopped speaking the instant those Nakajimas started firing at her."

They continued with their meal and washed it down with plenty of hot coffee, still pondering on their strange situation. Then signing the chit for the meal and the drinks, they had the boy show them to their room on the third floor. They were weary and the drag up the two flights of stairs about finished them. They threw themselves across the beds with complete relief. The boy opened the windows, placed their bags on the bag-stands at the foot of each bed and quietly left the room.

"Hallerton—Hallerton," said Todd, kicking off his shoes. "Isn't there a writer named Hallerton—some nut who goes all over the world doing screwy things to get material for travel books?"

"Junk! I mean aboard a junk—a Chinese junk." Larry was gnawing on his thumbnail, deep in reflection of his own. "Sure. He's a writer. Had an elephant once. Went over the Alps with it like Bismarck or Lady Godiva. He writes books!"

Todd placed his hands about his throbbing temples and closed his eyes.

"What a memory for details," he moaned.

"He was crossing the Pacific to go over Fujiyama in a Chinese junk," added Larry.

"That's it! He wrote a book called 'Twentieth Century Vagabond', a best seller. His name is Reynal Hallerton. The guy must be missing."

"It's a gag—he ain't, I'll bet," Leadbeater argued.

"Pieplate tried to get a book of his to us. The poor mug downstairs tried to get the message to us—a message written somehow in the book on a certain page."

"But we get conked and someone swipes the book. We're where we started, only you got a sock on the noggin and I almost choke to death."

"He's missing. We've been tipped off, only we muffed the play."

"Yoshida got the book somehow, Todd."

"The move smells of Yoshida," agreed Bancroft, "Let's get some sleep. We're both dead on our feet. We can't think or act like this."

And in spite of their despair, their fears, their frustrations, they both curled up on their beds and were sound asleep in a few minutes.

Larry was awake first. He stared at his wrist watch and noted that it was about 2:30 in the afternoon. He decided to get a bath somehow and went prowling around the corridor in his dressing gown and finally found the elusive bathroom he was looking for.

He returned to their room and aroused Todd. Bancroft sat up and pondered with sleepy eyes.

"Hello—what's that?"

The even room-room-room of aero engines sounded somewhere outside. Larry ran to the window and peered out.

"What is it? One of the Jap Douglasses?" Bancroft repeated.

"No. A Savoia-Marchetti flying boat. Carrying Japanese Navy markings. Wait a minute. I guess this one is an amphibian of some kind. Yeah, she's turning over the city now. I can see the wheel gear down for a ground landing."

"That's a new one on me. I never heard of that job before. Must be a special for the Japs."

"Well, that's what it is, all right. Something like our new Grummans. What is that doing way up here?"

"I don't care," snapped Todd suddenly. "I'm worried about that book."

"Maybe you can get a boy to go out and get one."

Todd growled, pulled on his clothes, combed his hair and went downstairs. He hurried across the lobby to the desk when he suddenly spotted Kato Yoshida sitting in earnest conversation with a woman whose back was toward him.

Yoshida had a yellow-jacketed book in his hand.

Todd made a bee-line across the floor to the side of the Jap Secret Service man.

"That doesn't happen to be my book, does it, Yoshida?" he snapped.

Yoshida looked startled for a minute, stared at the book in his hand and back at Todd. Then he recovered.

"Why, Mr. Bancroft! What are you doing here in Sapporo—here in Japan?"

Todd was taken aback at that for an instant. He saw that the book in Yoshida's hand was a copy of "Twentieth Century Vagabond," by Reynal Hallerton.

"I'm still working for the U. S. Meteorological Survey, Yoshida, and I won't stand this sort of thing. That's my book."

Then he turned and glanced at the woman. It was Madam Olinka Ivanovna, the woman spy whom he had last seen apparently dead on the floor of the Hotel Moderne lobby in Vladivostok.

"Hi, Madam Ivanovna," he said bluntly. "Nice trick you pulled back there in Vladivostok, eh? The old red ink game to make it appear you had been hit. You'll be wanted for murder if you ever go back."

"I, wanted for murder, Mr. Bancroft?" her voice had a tingling, dulcet sound. "You accuse me of murder? What about you?"

"I beg of you, Miss Ivanovna," broke in the Jap. "Please remember that Mr. Bancroft is a respected member of the U. S. Meteorological Survey."

"Never mind the gagging, Yoshida. What about my book?"

"Your book, Mr. Bancroft? This? I have been reading it for several days. I bought it in Vladivostok just before we left."

He handed it over and inside was stamped a trade-mark of a noted Russian merchant in Vladivostok.

"We are all very interested in the fate of Mr. Hallerton. Very unfortunate, his being missing

like this. A most interesting young man," Yoshida went on in his oily tones. "Have you lost a book, Mr. Bancroft?"

"Look here, Yoshida," snapped Todd. "What happened to that bird?"

"You mean to say you don't know, Mr. Bancroft?" said Yoshida, "I thought the whole world knew about the loss of Mr. Hallerton. He has been sought for some time now."

"He was crossing the Pacific in a Chinese junk?"

"Yes. Last heard from near—well, about one thousand miles west of Midway Island."

"Where were you going to say he was near, Yoshida?" asked Todd with a taunting gleam in his eye. "You almost tripped up on that one."

"My dear Mr. Bancroft!" replied the Japanese Secret Service man with a pained glance. "You do me an injustice. You know that I have been carrying out routine missions in Vladivostok."

"You mean you were trying to carry out your missions, Yoshida. Now why did you so suddenly hurry to Sapporo? Why are you so interested in a popular writer of travel stories?"

Yoshida did not answer. He gave Olinka Ivanovna a glance and then turned to stare at a group of American news-reel men who were noisily entering the hotel lobby. They were dragging cases, boxes of film, coils of heavy cable and all the impedimenta of their trade.

Yoshida frowned. "You see," he said, turning to Bancroft, "there is much interest in your Mr. Hallerton. These news-reel crews have been working on the case from here."

"From here? And you said he was last heard from a thousand miles west of Midway Island. That's about eight or nine hundred miles away from Sapporo, even at a rough guess."

Yoshida stiffened as he glanced over Todd's shoulder. Bancroft turned instinctively and saw that a young Japanese Naval Aviation officer was approaching. To his surprise the young officer came up to him, stiffened to attention and spoke.

"Mr. Bancroft of the United States Meteorological Survey?"

"Yes, what do you want?" answered Todd with a scowl.

"The compliments of Commander Yano, Imperial Japanese Navy, sir. A message for you, sir." "A message for me? What's this, Yoshida? Another gag?"

He slipped his fingernail under the flap of the flimsy tissue envelope and withdrew a sheet of paper. It was a regulation Japanese Navy "signals" form and to his somewhat incredulous eye came the message in scrawled pencil:

Read Page 343, third paragraph, Hallerton book under Ivanovna. Must get him out. Be at airport in an hour.

Pieplate.

Todd crumpled the message quickly and crammed it into his pocket. Then he turned to explain to the Japanese lieutenant that there was no answer, but the message carrier was nowhere in sight.

"Where did he go?" he asked, puzzled.

"What's wrong, Mr. Bancroft?" asked Yoshida in reply. "The lieutenant? He hurried out through the side door."

"Nothing's wrong. I have an invitation to dinner at the Naval Aviation mess this evening. What's the gag?"

Yoshida did not answer, and Todd Bancroft glanced down at Olinka Ivanovna who still sat in the same stiff position. Then he got an idea.

"Here, boy," he called. "Bring us three drinks. What will you have, Yoshida? And you, Miss Ivanovna? I feel lucky."

The boy took the orders, a Benedictine for the woman, a whiskey san-tan for Yoshida, and a shell of imported German beer for Todd.

"Do you know Commander Yano?" asked the still puzzled Yoshida.

"Never heard of him in my life," said Todd truthfully.

"He's in charge of Naval Aviation in this area. He probably wants to talk to you about Mr. Hallerton."

"Hallerton again, eh? He seems like an interesting guy all of a sudden. Too bad you can't find him, eh?"

"Do you expect to find him, Mr. Bancroft?" the girl said in a strange, throaty tone. She added a smile that might have been put on by a Bronx Zoo adder.

"I do now," answered Todd quietly.

The Jap bit his lip, twisted around to allow the waiter through with the drinks, but made no comment. Todd first signed the chit for the drinks, passed the san-tan over to Yoshida and then gingerly raised the small cordial glass of Benedictine and moved toward the girl with it.

"The nectar of the gods, they say, Miss Ivanovna. I admire your taste in liqueurs."

The young woman smiled faintly, raised her hand to take the glass and then something slipped. The small glass somehow twisted in Todd's fingers and it flipped across the space between his hand and the outstretched fingers of the girl. The gleaming liquid splashed and spilled down the front of Miss Ivanovna's dress. Instinctively she arose to her feet and in the same instant Bancroft stepped half a pace to one side and made a quick gesture. His hand came away from the seat of the big club chair with another copy of Hallerton's "Twentieth Century Vagabond."

"Thanks!" he smiled, glancing quickly at the inside of the cover. "Sorry to have to do that, but you were sitting on my property all the time."

"You beast!" was all Miss Ivanovna could say.

Todd simply picked up his beer, drank it down in a long comfortable gulp, bowed to the enraged people before him and threw a dollar down on the waiter's tray.

"I'll be sein' you, Yoshida," he grinned and hurried away.

IV

Bancroft raced up the stairs and explained in a few short sentences what had happened and flaunted the book in Larry's amazed mug.

"Well, what does page three-forty-three say?" demanded Leadbeater, rubbing his head briskly with a large coarse towel.

Todd flipped the pages till he came to the page and paragraph mentioned. He read:

I have seen many strange and interesting things in my travels. Man is the strangest of all. As I wander the world's highways, skyways and seaways, I never fail to find some new evidence of man's inherent treachery to man. I have seen men at war and men preparing for war. I have seen their well laid plans, and I fully expect to see more—particularly in the Pacific. One of these days I am going to satisfy myself on one point concerning the little yellow man in the Pacific, for I am a man of peace and from now on my work in this world will be to betray those who plan for war.

"There it is," beamed Bancroft. "You see what happened?"

"No. Do you?"

"Just about. This fellow Hallerton had an idea in his mind when he started this trip across the Pacific. He used a Chinese junk because it suited his purpose in several ways. He could move almost anywhere in the Pacific without being conspicuous. The craft, they say, is very seaworthy. He crossed, somehow, and headed for something he had been suspicious of for some time. Now what has happened?"

"He's missing."

"Maybe, but if so, why are the Japs all so anxious to find him?"

"Because he has found out something."

"Right! Now the question is, what has he found and where is he now to tell us what he has discovered?" demanded Todd. "Here! You're bathed and dressed. You pop downstairs and avoid Yoshida somehow and get in conversation with those news-reel men. Get hold of a picture of Hallerton's junk, if possible."

"Wait a minute!" said Larry like the popping of a cork. "What about that message? I mean the guy who brought it?"

"I don't know. He was just a Jap officer, a navy aviation bird of some sort."

"And he said the message was from the commander of the area?"

"Sounds woozy, doesn't it?" said Todd reflectively.

"Sounds like Pieplate to me."

They both raised their eyes until their glances met.

"I wonder!" said Todd finally. "She was saying something about this guy Hallerton—just before."

"And now she signs a paper that picks out a certain passage in his book. Why, you dope!" exclaimed Lead-beater. "I'll bet that was Pieplate, herself, all the time!"

Todd considered that for a minute, said nothing, but was convinced that Larry was right.

"Maybe, I don't know," he finally admitted. "I really didn't look at the guy. I was watching Yoshida, making sure he didn't read any part of the message."

"Well, I'll go downstairs and try to get a line on this Chinese junk of Hallerton's. You get a bath and we'll rush out to the airport."

Larry ducked out, and Todd hid the book under the dresser and went out to get his bath. He made it quickly and was soon back and climbing into some clean garments. He left his laundry to be

picked up by the hotel staff, arranged the rest of his stuff to make it appear that they were there for some time, but was careful to place all code-books and papers where he felt they would not be found.

Larry was back in a few minutes, excited and flustered.

"Come on," he said. "Here's an out. The news-reel guys are going out to the airport. We can ride with them. Yoshida won't give us a tumble."

"Swell! What are they going to do?"

"They are making another effort to contact freighters in this section to see if any of them have picked this bird Hallerton up anywhere."

"I get it. Okay, I'm ready."

They left their room with a last glance around and locked the door. Downstairs they found the American news-reel crew under the command of one Pete Donovan, a bulgy, red-faced gent with a cigar as big as half a whiffletree stuck in one side of his face. He was fat, but he moved with the ease and grace of a swordsman. He studied Todd for several seconds after they were introduced and said quietly:

"You work with Blaisdell don't you?"

Todd gave an almost imperceptible nod, and the fat news-reel man nodded toward Larry.

"Believe it or not, he's one of the annointed, too," smiled Bancroft.

"Bong!" burst out Donovan, which was his way of expressing satisfaction. "You guys got the inside on this yet?"

"No. We didn't know a thing about it until we arrived a short time ago. Have the Jappos got him?"

"No, not yet, but they're planning to pick him up somewhere. They got a Savoia-Marchetti out at the airport—and they ain't got it there for nothing. What are you flying?"

"A Seversky Convoy fighter—on wheels."

"Ugh! That's bad. I guess you need floats. Can you get any out here?"

"Down at Osaka. That's miles away—below Tokyo."

"I know it. We're stuck, too, if they land on the water anywhere. We got an Electra."

They went outside and clambered into a truck Donovan had hired to transport their gear to the airport. Nothing more was said about Hallerton or the possibility of finding him. Donovan simply sat on a pile of coiled cable and blew vast clouds of

blue smoke at the Japanese afternoon sunshine. Todd and Larry squatted on a huge camera case and pondered.

They reached the airport with a few minutes to spare according to the time set in the message delivered at the hotel. Todd and Larry sauntered off and sought their own ship in the hangar, making certain that servicing orders had been properly carried out.

"Hey, pipe this," whispered Larry, leaning over from his cockpit. "A note on the radio set. Pieplate, I guess."

The small sheet of paper gave a wave-length number and added:

Tune in at 3:30—your clock time.

They both glanced at the clock on the instrument board. It showed 3:29. Larry went on checking to cast off suspicion, but Todd dropped in his seat, held one of the earphones to his ear and snapped the switch. He sat there apparently checking the set, but his eyes were watching the hand on the clock crawl down to the "6" at the bottom of the dial. Then before he realized it there was a crackle in his ear-phone and he caught the words:

"Thought you would never make it. Wander over to the Savoia-Marchetti and be ready for anything. Same guy."

Todd had just time to answer, "Be right over, Pieplate. What's the idea?" But there was no answer.

"Come on," he said to Larry. "Act dumb now, but move fast if we have to."

Sauntering out, they spotted the Savoia-Marchetti amphibian staked out at a point a short distance beyond the row of hangars. There was a Jap marine on guard just under the high nose. About the plane the news-reel men were putting on a swell show of feverish activity that held the sentry spellbound. They were busy setting up portable microphones and cameras. Donovan gave them a knowing glance as the Secret Service pair sidled around the hangar and approached the amphibian from the blind portion of the tail.

Donovan's voice was raised again and again. He set his stage beautifully and then moved the sentry over to a new position, clear of the wheels and the wing-tips. He muttered something to him and took new sights on the plane and then on the sentry.

Todd and Larry missed most of this as they eased their way around to the cabin entrance of the Italian plane and slipped unseen into the fuselage.

They got a shock at first for all they could see was the shapeless back of a Japanese flying officer crawling up the narrow companionway to the control hatch. Todd followed quickly and made a grab for the officer's arms as Larry closed and bolted the cabin door.

"Take it easy, cave man," a voice said from over the shoulder of the Jap officer. Then there was a billowing of honey-colored hair from under a dislodged cap, and Sturgis Sands grinned into Todd's amazed mug.

"Sturgis!" he gasped.

"Pieplate!" added Larry from the depths of the cabin.

"Take it easy and lie low," the girl ordered. "We've got to get this thing off before they spot you. Stay there and watch Donovan."

"Gosh!" gurgled Leadbeater, "Did you see how she was made up? I was fooled until her hair came down."

The rest of his startled observations were drowned out with the bellow of two motors that were suddenly opened up. They crowded close to the bulkhead separating the control compartment from the main cabin and watched through a small window the antics of Donovan.

First he yelled and pointed wildly at the motors. Then he pulled the little Jap marine away and ran toward the ropes that were holding the wingtips steady. He slashed at them with a jack-knife that had seen service in someone's navy and had a blade big enough to sever a hawser. In ten seconds after Sturgis had opened the engines they were free and rolling wildly right out to the center of the field.

Todd watched carefully from the small port. The little Jap marine was running around in circles shooting into the air. Donovan was trying to make him stand still, risking being skewered with the bayonet in his effort to carry out the pantomime of taking a news-reel picture.

Sturgis turned the bouncing ship into the wind and yelled, "Okay. Come and get it."

She slipped out of the pilot's seat and allowed Todd to take her place. Larry stayed at the foot of the companion-way, and the girl plunked over into the co-pilot's seat with a happy laugh.

“You got a lot of explaining to do, lady,” said Todd with a serious grimace. “Where’re we going now?”

“Head almost due north for Uruppu Jima!” the girl answered.

V

Todd gave her a look and then turned his attention to getting the new Savoia-Marchetti off. She was slow at first, but as she gained speed, he was able to lift her clear, climb slowly and head for the sea on his left.

He drew down the switch that retracted the wheels, set his engines for normal cruising, and then turned to the girl.

“What was that again?” he asked.

“Head due north for Uruppu Jima,” she replied.

“Quit gagging. Where’re we going?”

“Good heavens!” the girl responded. “Can’t you ever get away from the New England shore? You’re in Japan now. Uruppu Jima is a small island along the Kuriles and it’s about four hundred and eighty miles from here. Now get going. Here’s a chart—it’s as plain as day.”

She drew a Japanese Admiralty chart out of the jacket pocket of the uniform she was wearing. Todd glanced at it and saw that Uruppu Jima actually was one of the series of the Kuriles curving out from the north shore of Hokkaido toward the Peninsula of Kamchatka. There were several such names with the suffix “Jima” which he figured must mean “island” in Japanese.

“Where did you get that makeup?” he then demanded, satisfied that the girl knew what she was talking about.

“I borrowed it from the locker of one of those Nakajima planes you shot down. I didn’t have to take it off a body. The poor man must have been carrying an extra outfit with him and it certainly came in handy, because when I got out of that rice paddy I was a muddy mess.”

“We didn’t see you jump. We only heard you cut off when you were talking to us about Hallerton,” explained Todd. “Figured you were done.”

“I thought I was, too. I had to make it fast and I got clear, but to play safe I pulled a delayed drop for fear they would follow me down if they saw my chute open too soon. I was using a black one and I guess they didn’t see it since I think I

opened it well under one thousand feet. Too low for comfort. I had only just stopped swinging when I hit in the paddy.”

“Nearer five hundred then,” added Todd. “You certainly took a long chance.”

“Then the first Nakajima fell with a wing off, not twenty yards from me. I wallowed over to it, to get papers—if any, and a map to see what they were heading for. They had a point off Uruppu Jima marked with a red circle. So I got the first tip on what was up. I found the locker and the suit of clothes and decided to check on it.”

“And you think this guy Hallerton is up there?” Todd interrupted the girl again.

“No doubt of it now. He has probably been there for some time. He contacted one of our seal patrol boats by radio, but he had made up a code of his own and it had to be relayed on to Washington so that it could be broken down. It was a tough one based on his book, but they eventually broke it and discovered that he had found something and that he had better be picked up at once.”

“Then why wasn’t a sealer sent in after him?”

“The code was too tough to figure that much or else he had failed to include his position. I found out about this Uruppu Jima angle when you shot down the Nakajimas. They were on their way up there, or else they were to escort this Savoia-Marchetti late this afternoon. They were waiting for more escort planes, figuring they might run into trouble.”

“Probably some smart Jap picked up his code, too, and deciphered it,” suggested Todd.

“No doubt now. That’s why they are so interested in getting hold of him first. He has found out something here in the Pacific that should be attended to. They probably know he has, for it is obvious now that his junk has been identified in or near some prohibited area.”

Sturgis sat back with a relieved smile. There was a new color in her yellowed cheeks now and a certain fire in her eye. She was happy and she brought out a vanity case from somewhere and began removing the remains of the makeup that had transformed her from a Mid-west beauty to a smug, bland Jap.

“It was really fun while it lasted,” she said, smiling across the cockpit.

“Being shot down?” asked Todd dryly.

“No, playing at Japanese soldiers. It’s queer what a uniform will do to the man who has to

salute the braid on your sleeve, but I'd rather be what we are—members of an army that wears no insignia or braid."

"You're right there, Sturgis," agreed Todd, staring ahead into the mystery of the north. "If you don't get caught."

Three hours later they were circling the northern tip of Uruppu Jima. The island was about one hundred miles in length, and, like the rest of the Kuriles, group, abounded in volcanic cones and stretches of wild conifers. It was practically uninhabited except for a few wandering groups of Ainu tribesmen shoved into these vast wastes by illegal seal fishers, some wilder aborigines, and the authority of Nippon which was gradually creeping north out of Etorofu Jima, the largest and most southerly of the group.

Smoke seeped out of lava crevices and crawled through the parched vegetation. Steam from boiling wells threw hazy plumes across the rocky valley. Stubby patches of Shikotanchiku, a strange specie of bamboo having brown spots on the cane, bravely tried to add a warmer tint to the picture.

By flying low, they were able to discover that much of the wild country was carpeted with heavy ferns and a tangle of flowering vine that promised slow footing. The shore was an even worse tangle of seaweed netting that indicated that practically no coastal commerce of any kind had been attempted.

"Coney Island on a warm Sunday," said Todd, peering down.

Larry peered over his shoulder and added, "I can smell the hot dogs and pop corn. What'll you have, Pieplate?"

"Will you two get serious? Where's the junk?"

"Don't you know? This is supposed to be a personally conducted tour."

"Well, he's likely to make for a bay or sheltered spot of some sort. We'd better fly low over the whole coastline until we find the junk."

"Here's a picture of it," said Larry, offering a newspaper clipping of a typical high-sterned vessel, broad of beam and carrying the usual lug sails made of bamboo matting.

"Reminds me of Lipton's 'Shamrock'," said Todd.

They were skirting the coast now in the lowering daylight. Ten minutes later they came upon a natural harbor that formed the base of a

volcanic mountain, gray and parched, that carried a plume of yellow smoke at its fore-peak. "There's the junk!" yelled Larry. "Look, down there in that narrow opening off to the right of that bay."

The girl gave it a glance, turned back into the main cabin and grabbed an Aldis signal lamp from a bracket on the wall.

"Circle as low as you can while I give him the tip-off," she said, moving across to a window that could be opened. Then as the big Savoia-Marchetti circled the bay, she pointed the lamp down toward the little bay and began to send a series of signal flashes by means of the trigger switch.

In a few minutes they got an answer. A fire was lighted at the end of a small jetty built of stones, and they could see a small, compactly built man in shorts, white canvas shoes, a blue-and-white striped basque shirt and with a shock of blond hair, waving to them with a strip of white cloth.

"Okay! Steady everything for a landing," barked Todd, "but be ready for anything!"

He checked the wheels and saw that they were up, set the flaps and prop blades for a slow glide in. He curled out to lose more height and brought the ship around so that she would land directly down the main channel.

The man on the jetty continued to wave and watch them anxiously as they came in. He paced up and down and glanced back from the amphibian to his junk as the big plane settled and began to move carefully up the channel.

He bellowed advice as they brought the plane up to the side of the junk, and Larry slipped under the instrument board and into the marine locker where he opened a hatch and threw the man a line.

"You Hallerton?" yelled Leadbeater as the man drew the ship up and planted canvas-covered buffers over the side to snub her.

"I certainly am, and am I glad to see you chaps! You Bancroft and Leadbeater?" he asked with a clipped university intonation.

"I'm Leadbeater. Bancroft is at the controls and Miss Sands is aft. She signaled you."

"Splendid! Come aboard. How soon can you get away again?"

Larry laughed at that. "Glad to see you, here's your hat sort of thing, eh? We can get going any minute. How about you coming aboard?"

“No, you probably need to stretch your legs and get a drink.”

Larry was over in three moves at that suggestion. Todd helped Miss Sands out and followed. They introduced themselves all around and made themselves comfortable with a bottle of brandy and soda from a charged metal bottle.

“All the comforts of home,” beamed Larry, sticking his nose into a cold beaker.

They drank up, set their glasses down and in three distinct voices asked:

“Well, what about it?”

Hallerton glanced around anxiously took another pull from his glass and set it down on a hatchway.

“There are three of you here,” he opened up with a serious face. “I look all right, don’t I? I mean, I’m acting normal? I don’t seem crazy, do I?”

“You sound perfectly normal to us,” encouraged Todd Bancroft, “what’s up?”

“The brandy is swell,” added Larry.

“Go on, Mr. Hallerton,” said Sturgis. “We may be wasting time.”

“All right. You’ll say I’m crazy when I tell you. For several hours after I saw it, I was not sure myself. That’s the worst of working alone on a show like this. You get talking to yourself and you answer yourself and after a while you begin to wonder. But I actually saw all this.”

“Let’s have it. The brandy will help us take the shock,” suggested Todd.

Hallerton sat staring at them for several seconds. He acted as though he were trying to make a great decision. Then he suddenly blurted out:

“Ever hear of LZ One-thirty-one?”

They were all silent for a minute wondering what would come next. The LZ 131!

“I have seen the LZ One-thirty-one not far from here, anchored to a mother ship with a regulation airship tower.” He might have been opening a lecture.

“Wait a minute,” Bancroft interrupted, getting to his feet. “Haven’t you made a mistake? I know that the LZ One-thirty-one was built at Friedrichshafen. She was finished after the disaster that destroyed the Hindenburg at Lakehurst. They could not get helium from the United States, so they stopped work on the LZ One-thirty-one after the keel had been laid. That dirigible was never finished.”

“That’s what I thought,” said Hallerton with a weary smile. “I know about the Hindenburg. I made a trip to Friedrichshafen on her. I saw them completing the LZ One-thirty-one, later called the Graf Zeppelin in honor of the older ship of that name. I also saw the keel and several rings of the LZ One-thirty-one with Japanese insignia on her envelope, tied up to a mother ship.”

“You looked all right when we came aboard,” offered Larry, glancing around for the brandy bottle.

“I don’t blame you,” said Hallerton, shoving the bottle over, “but I saw her—the LZ One-thirty-one being loaded for a raid.”

“A raid on what?” Miss Sands said quickly leaning forward.

“I can show you their map,” said Hallerton with decision. “Here, look at this!”

He drew out a German nautical chart of the western Pacific upon which was marked in graphic detail a course from a point only a few miles east of Uruppu Jima that followed a Great Circle route across to the Aleutians, then skirting the southwest tip of Alaska and down clear along the British Columbian coastline to Seattle. Several important cities along the west coast of the United States were marked with red circles and alongside these circles were dates.

“Where did you get this?” asked Todd.

“You won’t believe me, but I found it aboard the mother ship. She’s called Kamoi. She used to be a United States’ owned tanker and at one time was listed as an aircraft tender. She’s an airship tender now.”

They all stared up from the chart to the face of this amazing little man.

“You were aboard?”

“Absolutely. I almost ran into it in a fog. They didn’t see me at all and I just drifted by on the Kuro Siwo current which is prevalent in these waters. So I dropped anchor a few yards off, slipped into the water and went up their anchor chain, through the hawsehole and into the ship. The whole crew was busy loading the airship through the anchoring mast. The rest was hectic, but I got away with it and returned to my junk just in time to have the fog lift momentarily so that they spotted me.”

“You got away?”

“Yes, I raised my anchor and drifted into another bank of fog. They were helpless with the

airship at their mast. They tried to find me, but Providence—or the fog, was good and I managed to get in here where—well, where I have been ever since!”

“No wonder the whole world—and the Japs are looking for you,” beamed Todd. “This certainly looks like they’re planning a raid on the United States and in particular on all cities that have important aircraft plants. Notice how they have marked Seattle, San Diego, Santa Monica, and Burbank to bop off Boeing, Consolidated, Lockheed, and Douglas?”

“Well, what are we waiting for?” demanded Larry, getting up and putting down his glass.

VI

Hallerton made more explanations, but they were satisfied now that he had seen something that was almost unbelievable.

“You see,” he explained, “had I mentioned the L Z One-thirty-one in my message, I would have been ignored, but she’s out there. I can plot you a course to her. Of course, Washington thinks that airship was never finished, but there she is, and if she gets away with this raid, they’ll have a devil of a time proving what airship it was, who owned it, and who was responsible. The markings will mean nothing because Japan will deny ever having built such a ship. Germany probably has a lot of old junk laying around Friedrichshafen to show that the L Z One-thirty-one was never actually built. They’d never find out what blew up what.”

“Let’s get going,” said Todd. “According to this chart, they are due to set out early in the morning and figure to get somewhere near Seattle about sixty hours later. We’ll get off in time to hit them soon after dark. How far out did you say she lay?”

“Less than fifty miles. Got anything to use?” asked Hallerton.

“Machine guns, that’s all. Still, a few bursts in the right place will do the work. You any ideas?”

“None as good as yours, I suppose. I’d like to go along, of course, if you can use me.”

“Anyone who can pull the stunt you pulled getting this chart should be made to go along. I’ll bet you’ll have some more bright ideas.”

“You mean getting the chart? I’m afraid I do things that way. The idea occurred to me, and I had little chance of ignoring it. I had anchored the

junk and was climbing up the anchor chain before I asked myself why I was doing it. What I did after that was only done to justify my initial gesture.”

“You can explain all that as we go,” said Sturgis. “In the meantime we had better be getting away. It’s getting dark now and we don’t want to let them get too big a lead, should they get started.”

They took turns enjoying the comparative luxury of Hallerton’s quarters and conveniences aboard the junk and Hallerton was told the story of their adventures thus far. He was amazed at their experience in getting away with the Savoia-Marchetti.

“And I think I have had some adventures,” he remarked as Sturgis Sands came up the teak companionway from the cabin below. Her hair was tucked under a Basque beret and she looked very refreshed.

“I’ve borrowed a pair of your tennis shorts, a clean shirt and that lovely chain-stitch sweater,” she said, smiling at Hallerton. “I was beginning to feel clammy in that Jap uniform. I hope you don’t mind.”

They made the junk snug and climbed aboard the amphibian. By throttling both motors in turn, Todd was able to turn the ship in the narrow channel and head her out into the open. Once in the clear he looked around, saw that Larry and Hallerton were busy setting out the stage for the next move, and then thumped her off a roller and put her into the air.

“What are we going to do after—after this mess?” the girl said to Todd from the co-pilot’s seat.

“Turn back for Sapporo in triumph and arrive with the missing adventurer. That’s all we can do.”

“What about Yoshida and the Japs?”

“What about them? They can’t charge us with destroying an airship that apparently is not yet built. They will have to keep their mouths shut and try to get us on some other gag.”

“Such as stealing a government plane?” the girl suggested.

Todd grinned at her.

“We’ll get away with that. We can say we got a quick call which we picked up on the Seversky Convoy fighter set and made the most of the fact that the amphibian was at the airport. After all,”

smiled Todd, "they were all so solicitous about Hallerton's welfare. They will have to continue their enthusiasm to save face."

"You know all the answers, don't you?"

"I have to do something on this junket. Got a pile of opposition aboard. You swipe Savoias and turn up in a Jap uniform. Hallerton swipes a secret chart right from under the noses of the Japs. The Leadbeater guy nails Nakajimas and Kawasakis by the dozens. I've got to do something, so I think up the answers."

"Yeah?" came a voice from the companionway. "Well, think up one for those guys up ahead!"

It was Larry, and as usual he had spotted the opposition first. A beautiful wide V-formation of Japanese Navy 96s sitting over a long, silver, cigar-shaped dirigible that was turning slowly to get its nose around into the northeast.

"Good gosh!" gasped Bancroft. "We're sunk against that lot!"

"You see," murmured Hallerton. "I told you. There she is, and there's the Kamoi, the airship tender, a mile or so ahead. See her mooring mast mounted on the aft platform?"

"I see too much," muttered Todd. His eyes were mere gun-turret slits now. "They're certainly taking no chances, are they? Look at all that stuff!"

"Well, hurry up!" taunted the girl. "She'll be well under way soon and may drop a lot of ballast and get altitude fast!"

"Okay! Get to those guns, you guys. You take care of the Mitsubishis. I'm going to sit on top of that gas-bag until I think of something to do. You keep those Jappos off!"

True to his word and while Miss Sands sat tense watching with unbelieving eyes, Todd slammed the Savoia-Marchetti with the Jap markings on her wings, straight through the narrow angle of the V formed by the navy fighters. He shoved through so close his wide wing-tips almost brushed those of the two escort planes lined up behind the leader. He continued on through as the guns behind him opened with their first rattle of revenge.

The Savoia-Marchetti was through before the startled Japs could make a move to stop her. Todd, his face grim and tense, turned and looked at the girl. She was gripping the arms of the cockpit seat, staring ahead with honest fear in her eyes.

"Don't worry, Pieplate," he said out of the corner of his mouth. "You're going to blast that baby to Hades. You, I said."

She turned and stared at him and saw that his right hand was pointing at a small steel spade-grip handle set in the upper right-hand corner of the instrument bank. Under the handle was a small steel tag with two words in Italian riveted below it. She read them and gasped.

"Right!" he clipped tersely. "The port wing jettison gear. When I say 'Pull,' you pull, Pieplate. You'll see some real fireworks then."

"We won't get back!" she almost screamed.

"We'll get back to Hallerton's island. We'll go back to Sapporo in the junk—in style. Get it?"

She nodded, but with indecision.

"Come on, make it fast now. We've got to time this right."

The Savoia-Marchetti nosed down toward the high fin of the big airship. Behind them Larry and Hallerton were blazing away at the covey of fighters that was slamming down at them. Todd glanced at the girl quickly, got a reassuring smile in response and then nosed down lower until it seemed that they must dive through the top of the gas bag. Then he yelled.

"Pull!"

Miss Sands pulled with both hands. There was a strange metallic retching sound somewhere, and the amphibian jerked as the load of fuel was dumped all along the top of the gas bag. Todd kept the bow of the amphibian's hull well down close to the upper girder and skimmed along the top of the big airship.

All around them fanged enemy slugs and tracer. That was what Todd had banked on.

"Come on, pour it to us," he bellowed, peering back through the upper hatch. "Pour it to—"

The amphibian leaped under a violent blast of concussion. She almost went over on her back, and Todd fought to hold her out of a stall. They were suddenly in the blistering limelight of a scarlet giant spot. A garish aerial bombshell built into the dural girders of an airship had blasted itself against the night sky.

"What—what happened?" Sturgis gasped, pulling herself back into the seat.

"You did that, sister," Todd replied grimly, fighting the amphibian out of the widespread storm of fire and dural. "You and your little jettison gear. We dumped half of our fuel on top

of her. Most of it ran down and was ignited by the exhausts from the motors. The cells of hydrogen did the rest. Lovely, eh?"

They somehow cleared the storm and got far enough away to see the butt end of this cigar of catastrophe begin its final plunge into oblivion. They could see the tangle of blackened dural framework being eaten away by the hungry flames. Giant sections of bulkhead slithered across the sky, and puny black objects, all arms and legs, went fluttering out into the blackness below.

"Whew!" ejaculated Todd, wiping his brow. "We'd have never done that with machine-gun fire."

They darted away into the heavy darkness of night that was intensified by the still flaming airship, and evaded the frantic Jap pilots who knew they had "lost face" and would make no further effort to head them off.

"Who did that?" bellowed Larry through the companion-way.

"Little Pieplate and her atomizer," grinned Todd. "We dumped fuel."

"And now?" asked Hallerton.

"We return to the junk. There is still a little left in that bottle of yours!"

"Back to the junk?" beamed Larry.

"Back to where we belong," said Bancroft, laughing, "We've got to get rid of this boiler, and then we'll return in state with the missing adventurer, sublimely ignorant of current events, and with nothing more on our minds but to kill the fatted calf—to which banquet, ladies and gentlemen, we shall be most pleased to invite one Kato Yoshida— who, I am quite sure, will be speechless!"

"Cheers!" boomed Leadbeater. "We'll sell him a book, eh, Hallerton?"