

# Shanghai Snare

By Arch Whitehouse  
A Tug Hardwick Adventure

*Just why had he got mixed up in that maddening war-correspondent game in bloody, shell-racked Shanghai? Tug Hardwick pondered over that question. But before he had time to answer it, Fate sent that hardy young newsman to cover an amazing story which wasn't listed in his assignment book. The stage was set for that story when Tug dropped into the Astor House—and the bang-up action began when a bomb dropped in after him.*

TUG HARDWICK peered out of the third floor window of the Yusen Kaisha building on Shanghai's Woosung Road. He saw seven Chinese Northrop fighters speed out across the Whangpoo and head for Pootung. A single blade of light slashed across the twilight sky and a three-incher barked from somewhere just the other side of the Astor House.

"They must have pop guns in the Japanese Consulate's rose gardens now," he said, taking a sheaf of unsigned mail from the tubby individual on the other side of the table. "But say, have you got a complete list of the dead in the French Concession yet, Bish?"

"Call me Beansie," the chubby lad replied. That was a request he always made, but so far no one had taken him seriously. "I got 57 names on my 'dead and injured,'" he went on. "No Americans though. Can we file the story in time to make the deadline at 'Frisco?"

Hardwick didn't answer. Along with the "Beansie" business, that was another of Bishop's regular cracks. Hardwick packed his pipe, watched from the window as a fighting plane dribbled down out of the Pootung sky with a steamer of flame at its rotating tail. Then he returned to his desk and signed the sheaf of outgoing mail.

Hardwick was tall and of athletic build. His hair was crinkled—the kind that defied combing and brushing. He wore a light-tan linen suit which somehow always seemed to retain its press. He walked with a sure stride and had the precise reflexes of a bull-fighter. What the devil he was doing in Shanghai with the Amalgamated News Service he had no idea. The job was offered him one day when he was up in Nanking—and he took it. Bishop, who spent most of his life trying to get someone to call him Beansie, had been taken over with the rest of the office equipment.

"That jane here again today?" Hardwick suddenly asked.

"She's here every day," answered Bishop. "And always comes when you're out."

"What's she look like?"

"Well, I hope you never meet her. You'd probably marry her and ask her what her name is afterwards."

"How old do you figure she is?" Hardwick went on, again turning to watching the mad air battle that was going on over Pootung.

"I don't know—I didn't look at her teeth. She just comes in and sits there at your desk. Finally she gets impatient and hurries out again."

"She's after something—but I don't see how it can be me," Hardwick said. Then he grabbed his hat. "I'm going down to the Astor House. You hold down the fort—I'm depending upon you to get that story straight on General Kiang Chek Tsu, you know."

"Call me Be—" Bishop began. Then he cracked, "What if the skirt comes in again?"

"Just tell her to keep her fingers out of my desk," Hardwick said yanking the door open suddenly. His suspicion was unfounded. There was no one kneeling at the keyhole.

HARDWICK strode out, his somewhat battered straw hat cocked on the side of his head. It threw certain shadows along his nose that accentuated his trim features. He went down the dusty stairway two steps at a time and hurried into the street. Overhead a flight of Chinese bombers sped by in the gathering gloom, and Japanese A-A guns somewhere beyond the Bund were hurling high explosive at them as they fingered through the smoke to strike at the Nipponese warships lying in the river. A slow metallic rain of shrapnel tinkled on the cobblestones as Hardwick finally ducked under the marquee in front of the Astor House.

He stood there a moment looking into the sky, then he stared suddenly at a sleek high-bonneted roadster that stood at the curb nearby. Its top was down and it gleamed with bright nickel and black enamel. The radiator grille bore the gleaming nameplate of a noted European manufacturer.

In this strange street of Death, the gaudy roadster seemed like a gilded chariot in the runway to an *abattoir*. Hardwick walked slowly up to it, inspected it with a critical eye. It carried International plates and had several posters attached indicating that it had been used in wide-range travel.

Flipping the ash from his pipe the American news correspondent then turned away and entered the lobby of the hotel. Inside there were but a few guests with any display of repose. Uniforms of all colors prevailed. The civilians wore arm bands with national markings while a number of International Settlement police stood about with side-arms. Sections of the walls were damaged and much of the furniture had been removed, but the life of the hotel was charged with that particular brand of electricity that abounds during times of warfare and strife.

Hardwick strode through the lobby, sought familiar faces. He elbowed his way through a narrow corridor that was lit by two large oil lamps. Then he turned to his right, entered the American Bar, and sat down in a corner to survey the crowd.

"Boy! A whiskey *tansan!*" he called to an olive-faced waiter.

"Yes, Mr. Hardwick," the Chinese said with charming diction.

From somewhere, Hardwick caught a strange perfume. It was not the sandalwood of the Orient. It had a tinge of musk and—yes, English primrose.

Hardwick didn't look around at once. He opened his leather tobacco pouch, flipped the cover back. The small circular disk inside was not a tobacco humidor device but really a mirror. He packed his pipe carefully and tilted the mirror so that he could see the person who sat at the table just behind him.

One look was not enough. He nodded to the waiter, signed the chit for the drink, then waited for the expected. It came just as he raised his glass.

"Ah, Mr. Hardwick," a smooth well-modulated voice broke in.

"I know. . . I know," Hardwick said replacing his glass on the table. "You have been trying to meet me for days. You have waited for hours at my desk. I recognized that perfume; it's all over our office. Not offensive, mind you. You're British, eh?" he continued. "Perhaps Russian?"

The girl did not answer his question. "I have paid my chit. May I come and sit with you?" she said simply.

"Let's get it over. I can't get you an American passport, I know no one in Manchukuo, and I have no friends in the American Express Company. What else can you want?"

Hardwick was bored in tone, but the beauty of the girl really left him somewhat stunned. Something had tightened up inside him.

She came and sat down. There was grace in her movement and her eyes gleamed with radiant health. She had straw-colored hair which gleamed like the brightwork of a destroyer. Her eyes were gray in some angles of the light but blue when she bent her head forward. She had an ivory skin that seemed almost unreal.

"Let's have it," Hardwick said. Then he beckoned to the waiter. "What do you drink?"

"*Apolinaris*. . . and brandy," she said, adjusting her silk scarf.

THE waiter brought her drink. She sipped the liquor and charged water before she went on. Hardwick studied her carefully, knew she was after something. Pretty women travelling alone in the Orient always are.

She dabbed at her lips with her handkerchief. "Would you like to learn a secret? I can show you—"

"I've seen everything. Tell me something new," the American newspaperman interrupted.

"Have you seen the new Japanese destroyer plane?" she said quietly.

"What's that?" he queried.

"This is a new type ship built in secret by an American firm at a base on Quelport Island. Would you be interested?"

"Why should I be?"

"Well, you are a newspaperman. It should be of interest to your State Department—an American firm building planes for the Japanese on Japanese soil."

"What plane?" he asked, puffing on his pipe.

She mentioned the name of a noted striking new American aircraft firm in a whisper.

"That's crazy. They have all the orders they can get now from the U.S. government. As a matter of fact they are behind."

The girl only smiled. Hardwick's blood was thumping through his veins, and the girl did not miss the evidence of his interest. She glanced at a small platinum watch under the froth of lace at her wrists.

"Where is this plane?" cracked Hardwick.

"I will take you to it—at once," she said with a smile of triumph.

"How much is this going to cost me?" Hardwick broke in.

"Nothing—only a little of your time."

"But who are you?" he asked suddenly. "This sounds like a gag to me."

"Call me Miss Velox," she said with a twinkle in her eye.

"Yeah, a glossy surface all right—but what's your real name?"

"That will do for the present. After all, what does it matter. I'm showing you a 'story', as you reporters say. And that's all there is to it."

A small wizened-faced Japanese in a tweed Norfolk jacket, and a pair of white ducks suddenly approached their table and bowed.

"Hello, Arita," greeted Hardwick. "What's your gum-shoe squad up to now? What can I do for you?"

"For your benefit, Mr. Hardwick," the Japanese secret service man said with an oily

smile, "I would advise you not to be seen with this young lady. She drives, shall we say, too expensive a car. . . yes?"

Hardwick thought quickly, then turned to the girl, who was calmly sipping her drink.

"That your car outside?" he said.

"One of mine," she said provocatively.

"How about taking me for a spin?" he said. "I need the air."

"I warn you, Mr. Hardwick. Countess—"

But the little man got no further. There was a sudden crash, a loud jumble of sounds, then an ear-splitting explosion outside. Arita gasped, fell across their table with a scream.

Almost at the same instant the lights in the American Bar went out. Hardwick reached over, grabbed the arm of the girl, pulled her clear of the table. Together they raced down the corridor through the wild scramble of humans. Two more crashes sounded somewhere outside the hotel.

Hardwick yanked a telephone booth door open, shoved the girl inside. Then he reached up, drew down a telephone set, and called a number. As he waited, covering the mouthpiece with his hand, he said: "You were lucky to get away with that. You shot that guy. What for?"

But the girl was still getting her breath when Bishop's voice barked back through the wire.

"Bish?" Hardwick bawled. "Hardwick talking."

"Call me Beansie," came Bishop's reply. "What the hell happened over there?"

"Two bombs fell outside the Astor House."

"Don't I know it? Two more dropped over here in our back yard. More fun, eh?"

"Sure. Now get this—and get it right. Remember Arita?"

"The sleek-haired boy of the Jap secret police? Yeah."

"Arita was killed by a hunk of shrapnel. Dead as a door hinge. Give it about 150 words. . . understand? And listen, Bish—"

"Call me Beansie," Bish gurgled back.

"Turn off that 'Beansie' business and listen. I'm going out on a story with that jane—the gal that's been trying to get hold of me. Something about the christening of another plane given to the Japanese air force by the Daughters of Jinrickshaw Drivers, Local No. 717, or something. Get it?"

“Sure! Call me Bean—Did you say No. 717?”

“I said 717,” answered Hardwick, hanging up.

“LET’S go, Countess,” said Hardwick, shoving the girl out of the big booth. “This is beginning to get interesting.”

They milled through the crowd in the lobby again, stood aside while a Japanese stretcher party clumped through with the body of Arita, partially covered with a table-cloth. The girl looked down on the body with calm indifference. Then she took Hardwick’s arm.

“How’d you do it—under the table?” asked Hardwick out of the corner of his mouth.

“I had to. He was betraying me,” the girl said.

“Well, the plot is getting hotter. You certainly timed it with those bombs—or are you just lucky?”

“I have been so far.”

They made their way through the throng on the sidewalk, moved toward the big roadster. The bombs had fallen at the other end of the street and except for a long shrapnel gash across a rear fender, the car seemed unharmed.

The girl slid behind the big wheel, drew a white cloak about her shoulders, and pressed the starter. Hardwick snuggled back with his pipe relit, let her take charge. The car moved quietly along the street, turned right into Woosung Road, and headed north. Hardwick sensed she was heading for Hongkew Park. There were a number of Japanese Army barracks out there.

Just before she came to the army rifle range, the girl turned sharply again, sped the car over a narrow side road for about twenty minutes.

Hardwick laughed aloud once and the girl stared at him.

“What’s funny?” she said. “You seem amused.”

“Everything in this mess is funny. A guy starts to mention your name and you calmly plug him with a gun. Now what happens to me if I get inquisitive?”

“I’ll answer any question you wish to ask, except—”

“Except tell me who you are.”

“This is China. . . and these are war days,” the girl said. “We both have our place in the scheme of things. You have your job—and I have mine.”

“But you can’t tell me that you are taking all these chances just to get me a story,” argued Hardwick. “That wouldn’t make sense.”

“You’re quite right,” the girl smiled, as she slowed the speed of the motor car down. “You see, I want your personal opinion on this plane, too.”

Hardwick sat up with a jerk, yanked his pipe out of his mouth. “What does my opinion have to do with it?”

“Oh, don’t be alarmed! You see, Mr. Hardwick, I happen to know that you are—or were—the famous Tug Hardwick, once of the American Army Air Corps, once a great figure in various National Air Races, and an even more intriguing character as a test pilot.”

Hardwick sat back, attempted to be nonchalant as he again lit his pipe.

The girl went on: “I also happen to know that you got out of aviation about a year ago and swore never to fly again. I believe there was an unfortunate accident in which your brother lost his life in a plane you yourself had tested.”

“So now I’m out here seemingly as a news correspondent, but really as a Secret Service man for the United States government,” smirked Hardwick. “That’s the old gag about news correspondents—but you’ve picked a dud this time, Countess.”

“Oh, no, I didn’t say that. According to my information you were offered a post of that sort but turned it down. Yes, you’re a newspaperman, Mr. Hardwick. But you can fly.” She hesitated. “Well, can’t you?”

“Don’t know. I’ve not tried in months—so get that out of that golden noodle of yours.”

“That’s all that really interested me,” the girl said, turning the car off the road and swinging into a two-track lane that ran across a somewhat marshy section of ground. Ahead, Hardwick could see the low outline of a small building. In a few minutes the car reached it, whereupon the girl flipped off the lights and eased into the shadows of the building.

“This way,” she said, after they alighted. “I’ll lead you.”

HARDWICK stuffed his hands into his trousers pockets and studied the layout. Before him was a metal-made barn-like shed that looked

suspiciously like a portable airplane hangar. There were wide doors at one end facing a swath of turf that ran off into the smoky horizon.

The girl escorted him to the side of the structure. She opened up a small side door, took a small flashlight from her coat pocket, and flipped a small beam inside. She whistled a light trill and Hardwick followed her in. He could see the gleaming dural of a strange low-winged fighter fitted with two long motors beautifully faired into the wings and set as pushers. In the front of the engine nacelles were gun pits well shielded with splinter-proof glass tops under which gleamed stubby air cannons of a make he did not recognize.

Hardwick let out a low whistle. "This was built at Quelport Island, you say?"

The girl nodded: "Recognize it?" she queried. "Who wouldn't!"

"Come on. I want you to meet someone," said the girl, taking his arm.

She led the way back to another door, pushed it open, and let Hardwick go in first. Meanwhile she fumbled with something in her coat pocket. Hardwick entered—then felt something hard rammed into his back.

"Go on in, Mr. Hardwick." The girl's, voice was now hard. "We're going to need your assistance for a few hours and you'd better obey orders. This," she said, indicating a man who now stood before them, "is General Ling Kai Ching." Tug Hardwick remained cool. He simply walked across the room and dropped into a rattan chair. The Chinese, he noted, was also armed, carrying a massive black Luger in a holster at his waist. He was now watching the American, more in admiration than in triumph. "You have changed very little, Mr. Hardwick," he intoned.

"Thanks," replied Tug. "You seem to have changed a lot. You were 'assassinated' by a group of Nationalist students a few months ago, weren't you—up in Shantung?"

"So you do remember me?"

"I'll never forget you. Met you at Cleveland, two years ago."

"Yes," said the General, smiling. "I was introduced to you after the Thompson Trophy race."

"You pulled one of the finest snappy comebacks I ever heard," Tug laughed.

"Remember when old Brigadier-General Michael pointed out those three Boeings doing fight formation stunts, then asked you if you didn't consider it a wonderful show? And remember what you replied?"

"Many months have passed and many things have happened since those happy days," the General answered. "Well," said Tug, "I'll never forget it. You looked at the Boeings, then at old Michael, and said: 'Wonderful? Isn't that what they are supposed to do?' Old Michael was never the same after that. I think he put in for a transfer to Panama where he could sit on top of the Gatun locks and pose like Rodin's 'Thinker.'"

The General allowed a slow smile to crease his tired face. He sat down opposite Tug, rested his elbows on his knees, and stared at a low oil-stove. They sat thus for several moments without talking. The girl simply watched them, her gleaming gun still covering Tug.

"Sit down, Countess," Tug said. "You certainly handed me a couple of yarns today. We'll have the cable hot for three hours tonight."

The girl walked over toward them. "We're wasting time, General," she said, drawing the belt of her coat tighter.

"He knows your name? He called you Countess," the old Chinaman said.

"Mr. Ushio Arita, the secret service man, was about to introduce us," Tug smiled, "but the Countess tagged him with a slug from under the table. . . just as two bombs burst in the street outside, thus making it look as though he was killed by a chunk of shrapnel."

"They will think that until they get him somewhere and find out that it was a bullet from a Webley pistol; then they'll remember that he was leaning over the table talking to you, Mr. Hardwick," the girl explained with a faint smile. "You will not be very welcome in Shanghai after tonight."

TUG sucked on his pipe, reflected that there was much in what she had said. More than ever, he hoped Bishop would use his head during the next hour or so.

But the plane in there! And General Ling Kai Ching still alive—Ling Kai Ching, the Puma of Peiping, who once held the secret of the Great Yatu Plan that threatened the Japanese rule in

Korea and opened the way for a mass attack on Japan! Tug Hardwick knew he was sitting in on two of the greatest stories Amalgamated had ever stumbled over. And someone had stolen the plans of a new American high-speed fighter and was planning to build these ships for the Chinese government on an island only a few hundred miles from Shanghai.

Yes, he hoped Bishop would use his head.

“What are your plans, General?” Tug asked suddenly.

“I must get away from here—must join my forces north of Nanking. Our hour has come, this is the time to strike!”

“You don’t expect to get through in the Countess’ Mercedes, do you?” Tug asked, mainly to stall for time. “You’ll be picked up in no time if you try to take the Szechuan Road.”

The General contemplated his baggy uniform coat which carried no rank insignia or decorations. Then he stared at Hardwick with a puzzled expression.

“But I thought you understood, Mr. Hardwick? You are going to fly me up there in this plane.”

Tug tensed. What could he answer? The girl was now doing something off in a dark corner, and after a glance Tug turned his head away. She was changing into some other clothing more suitable for what was to come.

“I’m afraid you have me wrong, General. This is no war of mine. We still remember Bob Short, you know. You’re not going to get me mixed up in any mess.”

“Nevertheless, you can’t go back to Shanghai,” the girl interjected as she came forward buttoning a sleek chamois leather jacket up to her ivory throat. “You can’t get either of these stories out of Shanghai—and you know it, Mr. Hardwick. And if you don’t fly the General, there never will be a story.”

“But the area between here and Soochow is thick with Japanese aircraft. We’ll never get through.”

“We’ve got to get through,” the old General snarled. “Yes, we must get through tonight. We have delayed long enough.”

“But where’s the guy who brought this crate in?” Tug asked. “Let him do it.”

“Unfortunately, he has vanished. He went into Shanghai two days ago—and has not returned.

We have every reason to believe that he has been ‘picked up,’ I believe you would call it. That’s why we had to select you.”

“Wait a minute!” argued Tug. “If they have grabbed off your man, they’ll put the screws on him and he’ll squeal to high heaven. You’re in a tough spot, General.”

“So are you—if they come here before we take off,” added the Countess knowingly.

Tug Hardwick swore—but he knew she was right.

TUG arose, and the girl eyed him carefully, keeping her gun leveled. The General did not move.

“Let’s go and look at this ship,” Tug said. “I’m not particularly desirous of being picked up by a pack of Japanese marines.”

The General took a heavy camel-hair coat from a nail, struggled into it. Then he dragged a woolen cap down over his ears. Tug made his way to the plane, walked around it. He recognized the engines at once. They were excellent copies of a new American V-type chemically cooled plant that turned out about 1,120 h.p.

“The devils!” he said under his breath.

He climbed up through a small cabin door, entered the trim cabin. There was a folding table on one side with a two-way radio set mounted above it. Aft was a complete gun turret with two deadly weapons mounted on speed mountings. One was set at an angle through a slot in the Plexiglas covered turret, the other was fitted to fire through a slot under the tail which was now covered with a triangular panel.

“They certainly did a swell job of swiping, didn’t they?” he said aloud.

The General had followed Tug in. “As you Americans would colorfully state, they ‘rang the bell,” he said with a grin. Then he calmly raised his gun and fired two shots into the center of the radio set.

“You must have been listening to a lot of lousy radio comedians while you were in hiding,” cracked Tug. “Say, where the devil have you been all this time anyway?”

“That I will tell you—once we are in Nanking,” the General muttered. “Can we start now?”

“I’d like to study this barge a bit more first.”

For ten minutes Hardwick inspected the plane, covering it from nose to tail. He recognized the type of variable-pitch propellers that were fitted to the motors. He checked the fuel tanks and was certain there was more than enough for the 140 mile run to Nanking. He went over the controls from stem to stern, checking the movement of the trailing edge flaps.

Finally he started the motors, let them run for a few minutes, then got down and went across the floor to inspect the shed's doors.

Outside, he could hear the sound of a motor and the creak of outraged springs. The girl let out a gasp, rammed her gun into Hardwick's back.

"Quick!" she cried. "Get the doors open. We'll have to climb in and make a run for it."

Hardwick struggled with one door, then saw the lights of a small car which was bouncing over the ruts.

"Shut up. It's all right. I think it's Bish."

"Your man in Shanghai? But how did he get here? How did he know?"

The car rolled up, hissing steam from its uncapped radiator. Out jumped the portly Bishop.

"Bish!" Hardwick bawled. "Hurry up!"

"They're looking for you, Tug," Bish yelled. "I got your 717 business. What's the dope?"

Hardwick yanked him inside, told him to pull the other door open. "And don't ask questions now."

Bish, one eye on the plane and the other on the girl in jodphurs, struggled with the old door, finally got it open. Then he came up to Hardwick under the nose of the strange fighter.

"I got your 717 signal and buzzed down to the Astor. There I saw a *Skibo* patrol and I could hear them asking about you. Another patrol came up in a Mitsubishi-Bentley car. They had a guy in the back seat smothered in bandages."

"A blonde youth in a yellow uniform jacket and white trousers?" asked the girl.

"Yeah? How did you know?"

"Go on Bish. What then?" snapped Hardwick.

"Well, they started out the North Szechuan Road all of a lather, and I figured they were looking for you. So I got in my boiler and followed."

"Where did they go?"

"On through past the rifle-range. Hopi, the waiter, had already told me you had gone away

with a girl in a Mercedes. I'd seen the car before, so I was able to pick up the tracks of her tires."

"Good old Bish!"

"Call me Beansie. . . Anyway, I had to stop to figure out which way they went at the road out here, and I spotted the criss-crossed bars of those Mercedes tires. So I took a chance and came on here, keeping my eyes open for a hang-out of some kind where you might be."

"Come on. Get into this ship," Hardwick ordered. "We're going to Nanking. By the way, can you shoot? Anyhow, there's some Swedish quick-firers of some sort in this barge. See what you can do with them. I think you're going to get a chance to bean some one."

"Wow! yeah, I can shoot a little!" replied Bishop. "But say—"

"Say'what?"

"I forgot to pound out that story on Arita."

"Never mind. When we get to Nanking you can pound out five million on old General Ling Kai Ching. We're taking him back to his soldier boys. The old devil is still alive!"

Bish had no answer for that, he just puffed like a porpoise and bounded toward the plane. A second look at it, and he let out a turkey cackle. "How the heck did this get here?" he barked.

"One of those Chinese pelicans dropped it out of his mouth," answered Tug. "But for heaven's sake get in—here they come!"

TWO lance-like beams slashed up and down from a point somewhere across the marsh. A powerful car was rumbling over the uneven road, lurching and slapping its twin pencils of light at the parched grass tops. There was no need for the girl to keep Hardwick covered now. They were all trapped.

Once the four were inside the plane, Bish disappeared through a tunnel that led into the wing root. And before the plane had rumbled out of the door, he'd bobbed up again like a grinning Billikin inside the port gun nacelle. He was fumbling with the weapon when the plane began wheeling out into the clear, and he fired a short burst in the general direction of the onrushing car before the plane was actually in the air.

Hardwick hoiked the ship clear, set the props for the climb. The twin-engined fighter responded with a vim that jerked Bish back from his gun-

mounting. Hardwick curled the craft over, peered down to see the car roll up close to the black shed and finger inside with its silver headlight prongs.

Tug turned, and for the first time in hours he grinned. He saw the General staring toward the ground with eyes that were deep pools of mystery. Behind him the girl was leaning anxiously over the General's shoulder; but there was no mystery in her eyes. There was stark terror. Her eyes were fixed on the black car. There was a figure in a yellow jacket and white trousers reclining in a painful and grotesque position in the open *tonneau*. Tug looked at her again as he brought the ship around. The look of terror had subsided to a mask of hopelessness.

He leveled off, then suddenly circled again. "Wait a minute," he cried over his shoulder. "Who is that guy they've got in the back seat down there?"

The General simply raised his eyebrows a trifle, then turned to the girl.

But she had sat down at the radio table and under the dim light, Tug could see that she was dabbing at her eyes with a small handkerchief.

"Who is that fellow, General?" Tug demanded again.

The General raised his hands in a helpless gesture, displayed his long talon-like fingers. "It is her brother, Serge," he confessed. "He was helping her, and he was captured.

Tug did not hesitate. He sent the twin-engined fighter into a wrenching side-slip, then bellowed to Bish through the phone mouthpiece fitted into the wall near his head: "Get those Japs, fellow. But look out for the kid in the back seat of that car. We're going to get him out. Act fast!"

Bish swung his gun, took a careful aim as Hardwick circled low over the shed. There was a tremendous rattle and a salvo of 20 m.m. explosive bullets fanged through the air toward the nose of the car. A few went through the open door of the shed and set up a mad fireworks display.

Before the General realized what was happening, the fighter was back on the ground and rolling up to the open spot in front of the hangar.

"Cover me, Bish!" Tug bawled into the wall phone. "I'm going to get that kid out."

Leaving the two motors running, Hardwick struggled past the wildly gesticulating General.

The girl stood near the door, uncertain, her hands clasped together nervously. Tug gave her a look, then yanked the latch down and shoved the cabin door open. He paused just long enough to pull a pocket knife from his trousers and snatch the girl's small but effective automatic.

"Hang on, sister. . . er, Countess. I'll soon get your kid brother," he grinned.

THE next few minutes saw mad insane action. It was like a runaway sound film intensified to ear-splitting pandemonium. Hardwick darted out into the night, began a broken-field dash toward the black car. To cover him, Bish slammed single-shot blasts at moving figures near the shed and he drew flicked pencil-like streaks of yellow flame in return. Hardwick finally crouched in the shadows at one side, then dashed in and hurled himself high into the air and across the top of the touring car's back seat. He landed with a thud on a crouching Japanese who had been firing at the plane over the folded top.

There was a quick scuffle, a low scream, and the Nipponese fell back as Hardwick brought the butt of his automatic down on his head. Tug rammed him away with his foot and with another quick move slashed the heavy cords which bound the legs of the slight man in the yellow jacket.

"Come on, Serge!" he yelled. "Get moving, kid."

Hardwick kicked a door open, started lugging the youth out. But he was dead weight and rolled through the door in a heap. Hardwick saw that his man was "out." The captors had done a thorough job on their prisoner.

With a low growl, Tug quickly swung the youth up in a fireman's lift and started running. Realizing what had occurred, two of the outwitted Orientals ran from the shed, firing as they came. But Bish was ready and steel answered copper-jacketed lead. The tubby newsman now sent a short burst into the gas tank of the car, and it exploded with a roar, throwing burning fuel in all directions.

Meanwhile, Tug staggered on through the shadows with his load, and finally he again reached the ship. He was able to hurl Serge through the cabin door at the feet of the girl. Then he, too, clambered in and slammed the door shut.

A smirk on his face, the General stood like a wrinkled statue, staring across the field, while out in the turret Bish was still staging a Roman holiday with his 20 m.m. gun.

“Let’s go,” yelled Hardwick, scrambling past the General. He set the brakes on one wheel, opened the opposite motor high, and shoved the stick forward to ease the tail up. The fighter whipped around sharply, rolled away for another take-off.

Into the blackness the plane was hurtling again, and Tug held her tightly to make certain all controls were intact. Then he skimmed up for height and headed north toward Nanking. He finally turned to look at Bish and was startled to see a strained expression on his assistant’s face. Bish had reloaded the gun shell-spool and was peering anxiously along the sights. Tug followed his gaze, almost slipped out of his cockpit seat at what he saw.

Ahead and slightly higher gleamed the knife-like wings of six Japanese Kawasaki 93’s! Hardwick was sufficiently familiar with most military types to recognize them at once, and he knew they were staunch two-seaters, well-armed both fore and aft. They had a speed of about 170 with a complete military load.

“Whew!” he gasped. “Now we’re in for it!”

Bishop waited for an excuse to fire—and he soon got it. The six two-seaters plunged down on them like a ton of brick. Tug set the props for speed, nosed down. They smashed through a curtain of fire from the Japanese ships. But Bish stuck to his gun, pounded at them over open sights.

Somehow they got through and Bish quickly darted in from the nacelle and went to work with the rear guns. Tug now opened her up full, slammed over the rifle range, and headed out past the long line of barracks in Hongkew Park. The two-seaters had turned for the chase, and now a blanket fire of anti-aircraft raged up from the cantonments below. Savage shells crashed all about them, spewed yellow and scarlet flame against the sky. Sharp bludgeons of shrapnel and metal screamed from the explosion centers, wailed their war cries against the sable sky.

Through it all, Tug Hardwick jockeyed the twin-engined fighter, slinging her speedily from

side to side so that the trim Kawasakis had little chance to hurl a death blow.

But finally a wild Kawasaki slammed in as though from nowhere and hammered a hail of metal through the top of the cabin just aft of the radio panel. The girl, who was kneeling over her brother, screamed and flattened herself across him. The youth stirred at the impact and for the first time showed signs of life. The girl raised herself, turned a pair of appealing eyes at the General.

The General ignored her, remained steady himself in the gangway. Tug caught the girl’s appeal as he turned to watch Bish.

“Give her a hand with that guy!” he yelled at the stubby reporter. “He’s had a terrific beating.”

The General glowered, tapped his big leather holster. “You will hurry to Nanking,” he said gruffly.

“Don’t worry, I’ll hurry there,” Tug growled over his shoulder.

Now back in the port nacelle, Bish was putting up a rare fight. As the leading Kawasaki plunged back in, he frantically swung his light cannon, loosed a savage burst that blasted the attacker’s top wing. The disabled 93 fell off in a roll, gradually nosed over, then plunged earthward convulsed in its death throes.

Bish banged a second five-round burst at another 93 that was poised for a dive. A direct hit was scored, and the red-ball marked craft jerked up, then slithered away and disappeared into the darkness.

A few more desultory dives and the Kawasakis sheered off, with Bish still hammering pot shots after them. Eventually they were in the clear and the stocky fellow returned to the cabin to give the girl a hand with her brother.

The youth’s face was bloated and purple with bruises. One eye was closed and he fought for his breath. His wrists were raw flesh where cruel thongs had been bound and twisted. At intervals he fought spasmodic jerks that tortured his body.

“Boy, they certainly gave you a beating,” Bish said with a motherly gesture. “But never mind. Leave it to Beansie, he’ll have you ticking again in no time.”

From a kneeling position, he peered about the chamber, then spotted a black-enameled box on the wall. He ripped it out of its prongs, tore open

the top. Inside was a complete first-aid kit. He snatched at the bottles and boxes, read the labels quickly. Then he and the girl went to work on the lad.

In five minutes Serge was sitting up and staring about. It was plain he was putting up a good fight to recover. He tried to talk, but his lips were too puffed to form audible words. Tears ran down his eyes, and he stared up at the General, trying to plead with him.

"Now take it easy. Beansie and Tug will have you out of this and between the loveliest sheets you ever parked your rump on. Take it easy, kid. It's a joy ride from now on."

BISH went forward, brushing past the stoic General Ling Kai Ching, who still maintained his cramped position in the gangway.

"Whatever you do, General," Bish smirked, "don't you raise a mitt to give a hand. I'll bet you ten bucks you never fired a gun in your life. No wonder generals die in bed. But wait until we get you into Nanking. Tug and Beansie will put you on the pan, you old dodger!"

The General's face never changed, and Bish went on up and leaned over Tug's shoulder. Ahead lay the gleaming rails of the Shanghai-Nanking Railway and to one side the bleak sparse area south of Soochow. A new moon that looked like an apple paring appeared out of the haze, cast silver over the rice fields below.

"Nice work, kid," Tug said. "How is Serge?"

"Call me Beansie. You're pretty hot stuff yourself. But we gotta get that story out, somehow. It's a beaut!"

"A scoop—if we ever get it, Bish," Hardwick said quietly.

"Call me Be—"

"Forget that tripe and get back there and start pumping that jane. Find out as much as you can about this General guy. I have a hunch he'll jump us the minute we plant this boiler down."

"That guy will be lucky if we get him there at all."

"Don't worry about that. Get back to that skirt and get that story."

Beansie wandered back, ignoring General Ling Kai Ching. He squatted alongside the youth and the girl.

"What the devil did you send him into Shanghai for?" demanded Bish.

"To find out what was happening in Nanking. We had to get the General to some safe spot, and we didn't know whether Nanking was open or whether we would have to go through to Tientsin."

"Where'd you find the old buzzard, anyway?" asked Bish, leaning back against a metal rack. "He was supposed to have been assassinated."

"That's a long story," the girl said.

"Well, we got lots of time. Let's have it."

"He was kidnapped," the girl explained after a few seconds of thought. "He was picked up outside Hangchow about a year ago, placed aboard a Japanese river gunboat, and taken to Quelport Island."

"How did you know?"

"I was looking for him—I had a plan and I knew he was the only Chinese general who could help me. I am a White Russian. And anything that General Ling Kai Ching could do toward furthering the famous Yatu Plan would help us defeat the Communist movement in China, for it would throw the weight of the Soviets against Nippon and ease the pressure on China."

"It's an idea, anyway," agreed Bish.

"General Ling Kai Ching was the only man who could unite the anti-Communist forces—the only man who could harness the Nationalist Government in Canton with the Republican Government in Peiping for an organized war. I was appointed by the White Brigade to find him. None of us believed the reported story that he had been killed. Finally, after months of search, my brother and I learned the story of the abduction and traced him to Quelport."

"Swell, but how did you get there?"

"We disguised ourselves as the survivors of an American yachting party, which had been wrecked off Fukouka."

"That's on the west coast of Kyushu, isn't it?" asked Bish.

"Correct. We towed a raft out from Tsingtao behind a motor boat. And at night, a mile or so off the island, we sank the motor boat, climbed aboard the raft, rigged a jury sail, and just about made it. Needless to say we dressed for the part and brought along some damp, but well-forged papers to clinch our identification. We got on the

island, and stayed there while we sent touching appeals to our 'friends' in San Francisco for money and further credentials."

"Go on," said Bish, taking a few notes.

"Well, we had a lot of time on our hands and we were allowed to move around more or less freely. One day we decided to climb Mt. Auckland, which is on the island, and there we ran into a number of workmen—mechanics. We shared our lunch with them and managed to ferret out the aircraft story in a sketchy way. We learned that there was a factory hidden away in the hills and that they were just completing the first plane from their set of stolen blueprints.

"Figuring this information would be useful, we continued our hunt for the General. We finally located him—he was being held captive at a house on the outskirts of Cheju. Well, we broke in by outwitting the guard, got him into the hills, and eventually stole this plane—the only one completed—together with the blueprints. Then we flew to Shanghai, but arrived only to run into this mess. There we were, minus our pilot and dangerously close to the Japanese barracks."

"Wow!" gasped Bish, "that's enough. We'll get the rest of the details later. But maybe the General is playing us for suckers now, huh?"

"I am not certain. He does act strange, now that he seems to be in the clear. We must watch him," the girl whispered.

"I have a hunch we're in for some monkey business, but we might as well go through with it now," Bish said. Then he continued: "But I wonder if General Ching has figured on Kiang Chek Tsu. Kiang may not like Ching returning at this stage of the game."

"That was one thing we never figured on," the girl explained. "If things haven't worked out right when we get to Nanking, we'll have to take things into our own hands."

Bish nodded. "Leave it to Tug and Beansie," he said with more confidence than he really had. Then he arose and turned to Ching. "Where do we go from here, General?" he asked.

Ching was staring over Tug's shoulder toward the fringe of lights that marked the once great wall around Nanking. He now turned around, somewhat startled. "Oh yes, you mean where are we to land?" he queried, stepping back with Bishop.

"Sure, we don't know this area very well. Have you anything in mind?"

"I have. There are the grounds of the old Hung Wu palace ruins near the north-east corner of the city. It is well shielded and Mr. Hardwick will be able to get in there with plenty of room to spare. If you can pick out one of the old gates and continue due north-east, it will be easy to find."

THEY were very near to the city now, and Bish started to explain the situation to Hardwick. Tug nodded, stared at an automobile road map he had stretched on a frame in front of him. "I don't like that crack he made about the place being 'well-shielded,' do you, Bish?" he started to say. But just then there was a scuffle somewhere behind and Bish disappeared. A few seconds later, there was an answer to it all.

The gun in the starboard turret suddenly flamed out. Bish had dived down the wing tunnel and was now swinging the starboard nacelle gun wildly. Tug stared ahead and above.

"I get it," he muttered. "Now we've got to run a Chinese gauntlet—all to be expected, since we carry no insignia."

From above came a startling blast of gunfire. Three Chinese fighters, unmistakably imported Italian single-seaters, came down on them like a clap of thunder. As they dived in, the sky was illuminated with slashing blades of searchlight.

Vickers lead now spanged from the attackers, and Bish slammed 20 m.m. stuff back at them, beat the first formation off.

Hardwick nosed down, skated into a silken mist that hung over the old city, eluded the fire of anti-aircraft guns that suddenly blasted three-inch stuff up at them. The plane danced on a sea of concussion, but Hardwick dodged through and finally cleared as Bish sprayed new bursts at the Chinese fighters. The Orientals were not quite certain what to do against this new aerial devil that spat so venomously.

For ten minutes they slammed back and forth and finally Tug gave them the slip by abruptly shooting east and disappearing in a bank of velvet clouds. The General moved up, tapped him on the shoulder, and smiled.

"Very good, Mr. Hardwick. Now you can select our field. I think you will find it with ease. We are quite near."

“Does anyone expect you?” Tug asked.

“I believe so,” Ching replied with a dull oily grin.

“How soon can I get into the city and rap out that story?”

“That remains to be seen. There are several matters to be cleared up first.”

Tug bit his lip, peered at his instruments a moment. Finally he turned back and said: “What will General Kiang Chek Tsu have to say about all this, General?”

“That,” replied Ching as imperturbable as a sphinx, “remains to be seen.”

A CONFUSING chain of thoughts raced through Hardwick’s mind as he tried to figure out a plan of action. First there were two stories to get out and file with the cable office. They would have to be sent in code—to make certain they would go through. That would be Bish’s job. Then there was the mysterious business about the girl and her brother. What was it all about, and how safe were they all with the knowledge they had? What did the General have in his mind? No matter how he figured the situation, Tug realized that they were in a tough spot. However, there was no time for speculation.

Now the General was patting him on the shoulder and pointing down toward a blackened splotch that seemed to lie a short distance outside the remains of the old city wall.

“Approach from the north side and keep the right-hand edge well in the clear,” the Chinese intoned. “There is plenty of room. That field was once the wide parade ground where Hung Wu trained his soldier-tribesmen. After landing, run the ship up to the low building you will notice on your left.”

Tug nodded, pulled the lever that lowered the landing wheels. He curled the plane around, gave the landing flap wheel two turns, and she seemed to hang in the sky. Outside, Bish was still scanning the sky through the shatterproof glass. He was taking no chances on a thrust from any nocturnal Chinese fighter.

The twin-engined plane eased in and Tug planted her down on a lush turf field. He eased back on the throttles, turned to say something to the General—and found himself staring into the grim black muzzle of an automatic!

It was the General. And there was a merciless expression on his face. “You will run the plane up there to that low building, just as I told you, Mr. Hardwick,” he ordered.

There was nothing else to do. But Tug wished the Countess were as handy now with her gun as she had been at that cocktail table in the Astor Hotel. Then he remembered with a start that he had taken her gun, and somehow had lost it while carrying her brother back. Nothing was breaking right now.

He ran the military machine up to the low hanging shed, and quickly several men in strange costumes came out and surrounded the machine.

“Now what?” demanded Bish, coming up out of the tunnel.

“You will walk out—with your hands up,” the General snapped, jabbing his gun into Bishop’s ribs. “And now you, Mr. Hardwick!”

There was nothing to do but obey. Tug followed Bish out and saw the girl huddled near her brother, who was trying to get up on one elbow.

“Come on, Countess. This is all there is—there ain’t no more,” Hardwick said with a tinge of bitterness in his voice.

Once outside, the General barked something in Cantonese and they were immediately surrounded. Their arms pinned behind them, they were rushed into the building. The girl followed a few moments later, walking ahead of a foursome that was carrying her bruised brother.

The room was low and rambling, but strongly built. There were a few windows, but they were well barred. A table, piled with dirty dishes, chunks of bread, and empty tin cans stood at one side, and a mongrel terrier had leaped up to scrounge among the remains. Illumination was supplied by a few box lanterns that spluttered with impure oil. The stench of decayed food, oil, moldy hangings, and the perspiration of men, almost knocked them down.

The General stepped over and jabbered excitedly with three others who wore garish Oriental dress. The rest of the nondescripts appeared to be plain coolie types, with straw sandals, strips of cloth wound around their legs, and wide-sleeved tunics belted with flaming scarlet sashes, as their uniforms. There was a

generous sprinkling of short broad-bladed swords, heavy ancient revolvers, and cavalry carbines.

"Beansie thinks it's gonner be a nice night," Bish said with an attempt at gayety. "But he'd sooner be back on the Bund."

They were hustled into a corner, where the Russian lad was flung down on a long, greasy bench. The General now seated himself at the table, first sweeping the dishes and debris to the floor.

The girl dropped to her brother's side, and Tug joined her. Serge was better, but still very weak from the tortures he had undergone in Shanghai. Bish stood near, whispered the story the Countess had told him so that Tug would know just what the situation really was.

The girl, however, was listening to the mad clacky conversation that was going on at the table.

One heavy Chinese, attired in the nearest to military uniform that could be found in the crowd, was doing all the talking. He read from papers and military dispatches in his hands between spurts of excited conversation.

"What's it all about, Countess?" Tug asked out of one corner of his mouth, as he thumb-nailed a match and lit a cigarette. "You are a Countess, aren't you?"

"Countess Astrid Khitrovo," the girl whispered, a faint smile tinging her eyes.

Hardwick let out a whistle. He knew the story of the Khitrovo family and their courageous efforts to aid the exiled monarchist Bussians. All this was grist to his news mill. What a story this was becoming!

"Don't worry, you'll never write that story," the girl said, guessing his thoughts as she kept her eyes on the men at the table.

"No? Wait until we get out of here," Tug said slowly.

"You never will get out of here," the girl answered slowly.

Tug looked across at the men at the table. General Ling Kai Ching was now pointing out Bish and Tug. The others were nodding, and one particularly offensive looking Mongol grinned fiendishly.

"What's the game?" Tug asked.

"I'll bet we're for the soup," Bish said.

The girl now spoke: "The General cannot return. General Kiang Chek Tsu has refused to

allow him to appear—under pain of death. He must disappear again."

"Not if I can get to a cable," Tug growled.

"That is the trouble," the girl replied. "They won't let you. They are going to—to behead the lot of us and get away."

Tug ran his hands quickly through his pockets in the vain hope he might find something to get them out of this terrible predicament. Not even his pocket-knife came to light. He'd dropped that, too.

"So the Wolf of the Woosung refuses to allow Ching to return and grab the glory, eh?" Bish said. "Well, Beansie could have told you that."

The big, evil-looking Mongol was now walking about flashing his great broad-sword and fingering its edge with anticipation.

The girl sobbed into her hands. Her brother tried to get up and say something to her, but Bish shoved him back with: "Take it easy, Serge. Beansie will have an idea. . . maybe."

TUG was boiling. He pushed past the three guards who stood facing them a short way off.

"Look here, General," he barked, forcing himself up to the long table. "We played the game with you. Now you've got to give us a break. You can't hold us here this way. I demand my rights as an American citizen. I wish to communicate with my Consul."

The General smirked. "The same old story of the American in foreign lands. The minute he gets himself into trouble, he wails for his Consul. You should have thought of all these things when you became enamored with the Countess. After all, she has no national standing in China. You are now outside the law after that affair at the Astor Hotel and later outside Shanghai."

"I'm willing to take my chance with the law—but meanwhile I demand the right to the advice and protection of my Consul."

"Unfortunately, you are a mere pawn in this unhappy game. You did your bit, as you say, for what you believed would be a reward in the form of a story that would startle the world. But Fate took a hand—and the game did not work out. General Kiang Chek Tsu has refused to recognize me, hence I must disappear again until such time as it seems that the National Government of China is ready to accept me."

"All right, let us clear out with you. You can drop us anywhere—but at least give us a fighting chance for our lives. We took plenty with you in the air. Give us the same chance on the ground—anywhere."

"I cannot afford to take that chance. Maybe with the lady, yes. She is too beautiful to lead to the block. But you gentlemen have completed your part in this grim drama. That is war, Mr. Hardwick—the fortunes of war."

"Why you devil—I. . ." Hardwick started to say. Then the full realization of Ching's words came to him. He intended killing off the men, but planned to kidnap the girl—to make her a slave. The whole thought revolted him and he stood there trembling. For the first time in his life Tug felt the desire to murder a man in cold blood.

"You have a short time to contemplate your past—and the future of your souls," General Ling Kai Ching said coldly. "We shall not be leaving for a few hours when it will be near daylight. Besides, we may first need a little advice concerning the plane."

"You'll never get it, and I hope the mug who pilots that bus hurtles it straight into the ground from five thousand feet," raged Tug, now held firmly by two of the guards.

THE guards shoved Tug back into his group and took their positions again. The General sat down with four of the most important looking of the uniformed men and ate sparingly of a meal that was brought in from somewhere outside. Their conversation was held in low tones now and Countess Astrid could not get much of what they were saying.

Tug sat back on the bench, folded his arms across his chest. Two of the coolies brought them some platters of pungent meat, rice, and greasy gravy. Bish wallowed into it with vigor, for he could always eat. The girl selected the best morsels of the poor fare and gave them to her brother, and soon a warmer flush spread across his face.

But Tug kicked his dish all the way across the floor. "We've got to get out of here," he snapped.

"Sure," Bish agreed, cramming more food into his mouth. "But how?"

"That louse plans to make a common slave out of the Countess," Tug told him between his teeth.

Bish gulped, then choked on a wad of rice. Finally, he put his plate down and stared around.

"Let's rush 'em," he said quietly.

"Don't be a sap! Those guys would split our skulls with those choppers before we moved ten feet. Besides, we got to think about that kid Serge. He can't stand up!"

"Well, we're gonner get it in the neck, anyway. What's the difference?"

"Maybe so. But we'd better wait until they try to get us to the block. We might hit on something. Keep thinking, Bish."

For nearly an hour they sat turning wild plans over in their minds. But no feasible idea materialized. The girl, physically and emotionally exhausted, finally dropped to sleep beside her brother.

At this stage, the guards relaxed a bit, and Tug found himself agreeing that Bishop's suggestion that they make a rush for it was their only hope. But just as a plan was forming in Tug's mind, he saw the door open and two grease-splotted men, evidently mechanics, came in and spoke to the men at the table.

The General nodded, then came over to the hapless group in the corner. He smiled at Bish and bent his long forefinger: "You will come this way, please?"

"What's the idea?" Bish said, going white.

"This way, I say," the General motioned, giving another of his oily smiles.

Bish looked at Tug, and Tug looked at the General. There was no sign in Ching's eyes that gave any hint as to what was wanted.

"Okay," Bish said. "Beansie can take it. So long, Tug. We had a lot of fun while it lasted, eh? Be seein' you. . . somewhere."

One of the guards quickly yanked Bishop out of the group, sent him stumbling across the floor. Bish recovered his balance slowly, then suddenly spun fast. The guard went over like a blocked tackle, crashed to the floor on his face.

Bish laughed as two more Chinese grabbed his arms: "Leave it to Beansie, Tug. That was worth whatever I'm gonner get."

They rushed Bishop through the door, and a lump as big as a cobblestone rose in Tug's throat. Gallant little Bish—game to the last! He turned his eyes from the door, tried to force any mental picture of what was going to happen out of his

mind. But he couldn't. He kept seeing flashes of Bish in his rattle-trap Ford. . . Bish sauntering on the Bund in his best with a walking stick. . . Bish pecking away at a battered typewriter. . . Bish—just Bish, who wanted to be called Beansie.

Tug spat out an oath, struggled with himself as he counted the minutes. He did not dare look down at the girl. Instead he kept his gaze on the General. Yet outside there was not a sound except the low piping chirps of a few early morning birds. A lantern spluttered and went out. A guard changed his position and turned to watch them.

Then, like a crash of doom, several loud reports echoed outside.

Tug jerked, set his teeth, and closed his eyes. So they had shot little Bish! Well, that was a better end for a white man than the sword and the block.

Silence again. Cruel silence that seemed to thump against his eardrums. Then the door banged open and the big Mongol came in, his great sword flashing in the dim light. There was a new glint along the edge, and Tug knew he had been whetting it on a grindstone. None of this made sense—if they had shot Bish.

The fiendish Mongol spoke quietly to the General, then turned, went down the room, drew open a low cupboard door, and struggled with something heavy and bulky. Tug watched a moment, then realized that they were going through with the beheading after all! That was a chopping block—a dirty block with a low curve in the top and a dark stain down the front.

The Mongol set it in position and took his stance beside it. He swung the big sword back and forth several times, then marked two scratches with the pointed end on the floor where his toes touched.

“Nothing like figuring the whole thing out right,” muttered Tug to himself grimly. “These birds seem to have this business down to a science.”

Then to Hardwick's amazement, the door opened again and Bish came back! He had a strange grin on his face as he returned to the group. Tug was speechless. He got up and held his arms out.

Bishop grinned. “Little Beansie, the ballistics expert,” he snickered. “They didn't know how to fire the cannons. I had to show them.”

“But,” Tug gasped, “I thought they'd shot you—like a gentleman.”

The girl sat up, stared about unable to make it all out.

“What are they doing?” Tug asked Bish quietly.

“Getting ready to clear out. They've got the bus refueled and two guys somewhere about who think they can fly it.”

Tug wagged his head back and forth, and Bish jabbed him in the ribs when the guards were not looking.

“I did—did something out there. But I don't know what to do about it,” he said.

“What are you talking about?”

“I—I mean I tried to get a gun or something. They were watching me, and I couldn't get away with it. But—”

“But what?” Tug implored.

Bish fumbled in his pocket, keeping an eye on the guards.

“You see, they made me show them how to load that Swedish gun for single and rapid fire and—” He broke off as a guard approached.

THEY were pulling the table back and setting the stage for the execution now. The guard who had interrupted their conversation continued past them and locked the heavy wooden door, while the General and his advisors stood up and moved over to the block. The big Mongol executioner waited expectantly, taking practice slices at the block.

“Make it fast! What have you got?” demanded the excited Tug.

“These! They're all I could pick up without their noticing what I was doing.” And Bish brought out two of the 20 m.m. shells from the Swedish cannons and hid them behind him.

“We can't do anything with them, can we?” Bish said hopelessly.

“Wait a minute,” Tug said, keeping his eye on the group around the execution block. “Let me think. . . Let me think. . .”

Two more guards now turned from the group around the block and began walking slowly toward them.

“Got it!” hissed Tug. “Get the Countess well into the corner with her brother. Then give me those shells—slip 'em to me behind your back.”

Bish, puzzled, handed the shells over to Tug in a fast movement as they drew the Countess over.

“Now cover her,” he whispered. Then he brought one of the shells around in front of him and twisted his body to hide it from the sight of the oncoming guards. With a quick inspection of the shell’s nose, Tug twisted the fuse knob to zero, then did likewise with the second shell.

The two air cannon missiles were now changed into hand grenades—fitted with graze fuse attachments, they would explode on the slightest contact!

With a quick glance at the guards, Tug suddenly drew his arm back and hurled the first shell with a spinning motion, nose first toward the execution block.

“Duck!” he screamed, turning his back to the other end of the room.

There was a terrific explosion, followed by the screams of trapped men. The shell had hit the base of the block and blown it to smithereens. The General threw up his arms and took a burst of shell splinter full in his middle. He fell over the battered block with a gurgle.

Bish now leaped out of his crouch over the Countess and flattened the first of the two amazed guards who had come to get them. He felled him with a punch, grabbed his sword and gun and hacked at the other guard. The man went down screaming. Tug was quickly on him. He grabbed the Oriental’s gun and cocked its heavy hammer. Together they now hurtled across the several screaming and groveling men who lay where the block had been. They were deafened and could hardly hear the cries of the wounded men on the floor.

Like two wild men they charged in and cut down those who were still full of fight. A tall screaming warrior hurled himself at Tug, but Bish brought him down with the butt of his gun, left him helpless. Tug bashed down two more heads with the flat of his sword, then ran up the room toward the Countess.

Two Mongol warriors now tried to get to the door and barricade the way. But Tug fired twice and they dropped their swords, grabbed their chests, and toppled to the floor.

“Keep back!” Tug bawled at the remaining Oriental. Then he dropped his sword, took out the second shell, and poised again. This time the shell

sped across the room and crashed into the massive lock of the great door. Bish had upturned the table in his battle with a big Mongol, and they huddled down behind it. It seemed that a second passed before there was any reaction. Then came a screeching detonation—and the great door held them prisoner no more.

Bish led as they fought their way through the flailing arms of the wounded guards. He had to drill one of them with his pistol. But they broke through, with Tug carrying Serge and the Countess, a revolver in her hand, following.

Quickly, Tug yanked the door open. The great lock had been completely blown through the heavy wood. The old portal swung wide and they lurched out into the darkness beyond. “The ship’s over here, headed into the clear,” yelled Bish.

They staggered on, found the twin-motored plane, felled a man who came out from the darkness undecided what to do, and snatched at the cabin door. Two more, hiding inside terror-stricken, were yanked out and felled with Tug’s heavy revolver.

They got the Countess and her brother inside and slammed the door. Bish went through the wing tunnel again and left Tug to get the ship away. As the motors opened up, Bish’s aero gun began to rattle again. He put burst after burst into a new detachment of men that came running up. But there was no danger now. Their plane was away.

“Whew!” gasped Tug. “There’s nothing like cutting it close.”

The big twin-engined fighter now left the turf-patched field and climbed easily into the half light of the oncoming dawn. Bish sat in the port nacelle, grinned over at Tug.

Hardwick checked everything again, then drew up the wheels. He let the ship climb hard as he circled wide of Nanking, then plotted a due-south course that followed the Imperial Canal.

Finally, the sun peeped through the misty fringes in the east and splashed its warmth over the forbidding walls of the Shansee range. Then Hardwick relaxed, let her run on the robot.

He now sensed that he was being watched and turned to see the Countess, weary but lovely, peering over his shoulder.

“Where to this time?” she asked with a smile.

“All the way down, Countess. Hong-Kong is the safest place for us by now. Can you hang on that long? It’ll be three hours at the worst.”

“I could hang on for three years—after what I’ve seen,” the girl said with an admiring glance at Tug.

Hardwick sat behind the big wheel, his eyes looking into the distance. He wondered how long it would take him to forget this girl with straw-colored hair and a peach-bloom skin. He looked at his reflection in the airspeed indicator dial. “You newspapermen meet such interesting people,” he said to himself.

“Well,” he said, turning to the girl again, “are you through playing Chinese generals against the Soviets? You came near losing out that time.”

“The Khitrovos are pledged to keep up the fight,” came the proud answer. “But I do wish we had more men in our cause like you, Mr. Hardwick.”

“But, Countess, don’t forget my sidekick. He did a swell job, did Bish!”

“Will you kindly,” a voice suddenly bleated out of the wing tunnel, “call me Beansie!”