

Hawks From the Smoke

A Tug Hardwick Adventure By Arch Whitehouse

Peculiar white wisps on the ocean below! What sinister thing did they hide? Tug Hardwick had to know. But “Beansie” Bishop had no time for that mystery—what with gun-bristling Mitsubishis swarming down the skies to face his twin Brownings. What’s more, he now was encountering a mystery of his own. For a strangely-marked Breda had suddenly dived in among those vengeful “Rising Sun” fighters. And the gunner aboard that Breda was—too efficient to be human!

IT REALLY was a beautiful airplane, that secret Northrop—silver in color and streamlined to the *nth* degree. There was an elaborate cockpit set well aft near the tail and an automatic rotary gun turret that commanded a wide arc of fire to the rear. She was well fueled and the guns in her wings had been properly supplied with plenty of honest-to-gosh American ammunition. She was good for the long hop from Hainan to Manila, which was where Tug Hardwick was heading her.

His partner, Alton “Beansie” Bishop, sat behind him, weary and somewhat numb in expression. He had no particular interest in the flight to safety, because for one thing, he wasn’t sure there was such a thing as safety west of the 180th meridian.

This time it was to be Manila. A few hours before it had been Hainan where they had managed to destroy a menacing secret air base. What lay ahead only Providence knew.

But that was not all that was worrying the Bish. There was the more important matter of mysterious Miss Velox, glamorous undercover operator whose real name was Countess Astrid Khitrovo and who was supposed to have been at Kiungchow where they had stored the Northrop. Miss Velox had failed to appear and Manager Birchfield had shooed them off without her.

The Bish had been mooning about that for the past four hours so much so he had been paying very little attention to his job as navigator.

“Say, when are you going to make a report?” demanded Hardwick. “Where are we? We’ve been hitting a headwind for the last two hours.

How about a checkup on what’s what and how’s how on the course?”

“Aw, keep flying east. You’ll hit the hills north of Manila soon. They’re high enough.”

“What’s eating you, anyway?”

“Oh, we’re a couple of rats for leaving that girl. We could have waited. She might be nabbed by some of those Blood Brotherhood guys.”

“I feel sorry for *them* if she has. Remind me to send ‘em some flowers when we get to Manila.”

But Bishop was still disconsolate: “Yeah! That’s all right for you to say in safety out here. But, hey! What’s all the traffic below?”

Tug twisted in his seat, stared over the side. Then he banked the sleek Northrop fighter to see better. And it was just as well he did, for the slight change of course proved to be their salvation.

Three spluttering pencil streaks of fire spat down from somewhere above, converging on the point where the Northrop would have been. That withering blast had come from three low-wing Mitsubishi “Karigane” type fighters with Japanese Navy markings. And another forking of deadly tracers blazed up from somewhere below to sizzle among the lines of lead spat from above. In the fraction of a second that Hardwick had peered down he was quite sure he had seen a number of surface vessels under forced draft, pluming long trails of smoke and dragging white pennons of milky wash from their sterns. .

“Now we’re in for it,” barked Tug. “And I thought we were flying to something called ‘safety.’ ”

But the Bish was too busy to argue the relative merits of safety. He was unshipping his tail turret guns and going through the loading sequences.

The six Mitsubishi fighters which faced them were now curling around for a concerted attack on the silver Northrop. Thereupon, Bish opened up with a defensive fire while Tug continued his own curling and peering over the side. "Come on! Get those front pop guns going, will you?" the Bish yelled.

"You take care of them," was the answer. "There are only six. Getting soft? As for me, I want to see what's going on down there on the water."

BISHOP waited this time until the Nippon ships slammed in. Then he let them have everything his guns could spit. Still, the six Mitsubishis came on like aerial chargers, their noses dead on the Northrop. And still Tug continued his observations below just as if nothing unusual was taking place.

The Bish's guns continued to sing out. He swung the muzzles back and forth, spraying the attacking ships with every pound of pressure in his barrels. One Mitsubishi blew apart in mid-air and threw a wild curtain of finely divided dural in all directions. That yolk of explosion forced the rest to bank away, and Bish poured more lead poison after them as they soared to clear the wreckage.

Another Nipponese took a long burst in the wing-roots and floundered with a series of creaks that could be heard all across the sky. Then its nose twisted hard as if in an effort to look back at its own tail, throwing a wing panel as a result. A splash of flame surged out of the root where the gas tanks were stored and a glistening spear-point of flame jetted out as if in a final effort to fork at the falling wing and save it.

This was the end of the second Mitsubishi. It screamed up into a short half loop, vomited a man from its cockpit, then fell back helpless and slithered into a wailing flat spin.

"Nice going," muttered Tug, still staring over the side. "Did *you* do that?"

"Where would you be without a gunner? Of course, I did it!" flamed the outraged Bish. "What are *you* doing? Enjoying a Cook's tour while I'm sweating blood?"

"I'm studying what must be some new idea in modern sea warfare. I wish I knew *what* it was." Then Tug gave Bish the nod toward two more

Mitsubishi planes that were pounding at them. "Here come the men about the rent again."

Bish waited. He really was a good gunner, for he knew the value of timing. He snapped a burst at the nearer of the two and watched the sparks dance off its radial nose. Then, as she showed signs of breaking away, Bish spat another burst at the second. This time he held the spade grip steady and worked the synchronization gun gear gag with reverse English. That is, he fired through the blades of the Jap's whirling prop, and—well, another son died for the "Land of the Rising Sun."

"I'm a good gunner, Brother Hardwick," he then called. "Me and Robin Hood!"

"R. H. used a trusty yew, not a gun. Keep your story historically correct. But say, what do you make of that business down there?"

"What? The ships?"

"What ships?" said Hardwick over his shoulder. He was strangely calm, and yet there was an ashen tinge to his face that gave his whole show away. The Bish looked at him between glances at the Jappo planes that were now circling well out of gun range.

"I said what ships?" said Tug again.

"I know you did. Well, there must be ships down there. There's smoke and there's wake and—"

"Sure. But no ships," broke in Tug. "How do you figure that?"

"What we bin drinkin' lately?" asked Bish, lapsing into the vernacular he always used when puzzled.

"I guess we ought to have our eyes examined," said Tug. "I see smoke and I see foamy wake—but I'll be darned if I see any ships."

FULL REALIZATION of the mystery struck them as they circled again and stared down on the strange flotilla of smoke below. Maybe when they first spotted it, their imaginations alone had placed ships there. Or did they actually see ships there—at first?

"You saw them before that smoke was hosed out, didn't you?" demanded Tug.

"Sure that is, I think I did," answered the flustered Bish. "I thought I saw a number of steamers er liners of some sort."

"That's what I thought *I* saw. But they're not there now. Only smoke and foam."

“Like in a beer parlor,” suggested the Bish, thoughtfully. “Hey! What the—?”

From out of nowhere, another angry swarm of Mitsui hornets abruptly thundered at them—and they were playing for keeps this time. Yes, there was at least a full dozen of the hawks from Nippon.

“Come on,” screamed the Bish. “You get in this with me this time.”

Tug drew his eyes into gun-sighting slits and went into action.

The Northrop opened fire from her front m.g.’s and slammed madly into the tight formation. The Jappos broke up as the American darted through the hole. And Bish poured it to them broadside from his tail turret.

“Keep going!” he yelled. “We can’t take this whole lot on. Fly outa here!”

“What, and lose the gang below?”

“What gang? You can’t see anything!”

Tug did not answer. He whipped the Northrop over hard and went back smack into the broken formation. His front guns flamed defiance, screamed as high caliber stuff flared out at the scattering Mitsubishi jobs.

“Where the deuce do they all come from?” the Bish yelled.

“Out of that smoke somewhere below. We’re gonna find out how, too.”

“And get our rompers wet. Anyhow,” he growled, “you’re lucky I’m along to protect you, even if I do say it myself.”

“Good gunners are a dime a dozen,” was Tug’s reply. “What I need is a guy who can *think*. Anybody can pull a trigger.”

The Bish swallowed an oath and took it out on a Mitsubishi. Meanwhile, Hardwick pelted a load at a Nipponese who was now trying to kid himself into believing he was the leader of the attackers. But Tug’s hosing of lead had the leader business beat a mile. The Jap nosed down and banked off—to let someone else get the leader bug.

“Are you gonner get out of this?” bellowed the Bish again. “How do you know that smoke means anything? It’s probably just some sea-going tobacco salesmen working out a new idea for publicity. It’s a gag, I tell you.”

“Sure it is and we’re going to buy it.”

But even Tug now sensed they were playing their luck out. He knew there was a law of

averages somewhere. Any minute one good shot would put them down—into the drink.

Then out of nowhere came a new twist to the crazy business. Another low-wing monoplane was slicing in and out among the Mitsubishi fighters—and cutting them to ribbons.

“Look!” cried Tug. “We got company. An Italian job!”

“Ba-bee!” chimed in Bish. “We sure needed some help, too!”

“And there’s a *real* gunner for you, Bish. Look at the way *they* work. Do you see it? The pilot slams through, pelting everything, while the gunner simply waits until they are in position. Then he just pulls the trigger as the pilot treads his rudder pedals—and they score. They score, boy! Look at ‘em! They got a total of three already.”

“Sure, that’s a team! You don’t see that pilot worrying about what’s goings on below. He’s busy shooting.”

“It’s the gunner, I tell you. I’ll bet he’s an Army-trained man. You can tell the way he works. He’s up bobbing about like a jack-in-a-box. I’ll bet he don’t wear his pant’s seat shiny like you. Why don’t you get off your sit-upon?”

The Italian Breda-65 now hurtled past them and the pilot waved. Tug waved back, and then, in the glare of a burning Mitsubishi, he spotted a strange device painted on the side of the Italian plane.

“Did you get that insignia it’s got?” barked Tug as he slammed a long burst across the sky.

“No. What was it?”

“There you are again. A swell gunner you are. You can’t even see. Why, there’s a tank of some kind painted on that Breda with a gorilla’s head mounted above it. Quite an idea!”

“Monkey business of some kind,” growled the Bish. “Who would want to go barging about the sky with a thing like that daubed on the fuselage?”

“I would—and I wish I had that gunner,” baited Tug. He was really enjoying ribbing his comrade now, for the Jap planes had drawn away in the growing darkness. And that gave him a chance to relax.

The Breda slammed across their bows and the pilot pointed ahead and down.

“Now what does he want?”

"I guess he's doped something out. We'll just see what he does and follow," said Tug swinging in near the Breda. The other pilot waggled his wings—then something startling happened. The Breda gunner fired a short burst directly, at the Northrop! And Hardwick cleared just in time.

"Wow!" gasped the Bish. "That guy is firing at us now!"

Tug drew off and watched the activity in the cockpit of the Breda. Soon he saw a green light flicker up in its front cockpit.

"It's all right. That guy made a mistake," he explained to Bish.

"Sure. He's a swell gunner. Fires at everything and anything."

"Oh, he was just playing safe. I saw the pilot grab his shoulder and shake him. That's what I'd like to do with you sometimes."

"Okay! Let me have one shot at them! Then you can shake me."

"Shut up! But, hello—here's land of some sort. Where the devil are we?"

"That don't look like Manila to me, or anywhere like it."

"You were the navigator. I told you to check that northeast wind. I'll bet we're miles off our course," said Tug, trying to figure it all out. Ahead lay a long narrow strip of land that stretched from northeast to southwest. From their height they could see both of its coastlines, for it couldn't be more than twenty miles wide. Then the answer came to him. It was the island of Palawan, part of the Philippines, and it was obvious that they had been blown well off their course. They were fully 300 miles southwest of Manila—and above a strip of country that might provide almost anything.

Still, the bird in the Breda seemed to know where he was heading for, and Tug figured it might be worthwhile to see what his game was. After all, he had helped them get out of the mess with the Mitsubushi fighters. He might also have some idea what all that smoke and foam business was about.

They teamed up now, flying close, and then while Tug studied a map of the area he sensed that the Breda guy was heading for an open section south of a mountain called Mantalingajan, which was stated to be 6,840 feet high. In the foothills

were several wide plain-like areas suitable for landings.

"That fellow knows where he's going, all right," Tug agreed with himself. "I wonder who he is—what his game is."

"You following that bozo down?" asked Bish.

"Sure. He seems to be one of the good guys, and he probably knows where he's heading."

"I'm glad of that. I want to get a good look at that gunner guy you're so warped about," mooned the Bish.

AN EARLY DAWN was creeping in from out of the east by the time they had reached the foothills of Mantalingajan. Since this left a dull silver line along the eastern shore of Palawan, Tug sensed they would have enough light to make some sort of a landing—but landings here had to be good!

They continued on, working their way toward the western side of the mountain. There were stretches of stubby pine and cogon, a husky grass weed which had grown up to cover the scars left by forest fires. Beyond, stretched shapeless patches of mangrove swamps and odd stands of lalang.

Suddenly, the man in the Breda gave a signal. He waited for a response from the Northrop, then hoiked up, fell off, and went down in a straight dive. Tug repeated the maneuver and followed.

The two military planes cleft the air like wide-feathered arrows. At about 600 feet the Breda pulled out gently, turned back toward the mountain, and began a long gentle glide toward the seared base of the massive rocky prominence. Tug watched carefully, keeping the Northrop almost dead behind the Breda and following its every move. This was real sport—sport with certain spine-tingling thrills to it.

"But where's he heading?" the Bish asked.

"A Devil's hole of some sort. And I hope he can make it."

"He has his flaps down. Better drop ours, eh?"

"The right idea. I'll give 'em a few turns."

The Breda was now well down and maintaining its course. Tug followed, bumping slightly in its wake. Then he saw what the Breda guy was aiming at and he snapped the switch that lowered their wheels.

“Perfect!” he beamed. “Take a look at this, Bish.”

“Call me Beansie,” said the Bish with sweet dreams in his eyes.

“Rats! I’m not Miss Velox. Look down ahead—a perfect runway through the apitong and bamboo!”

“How you go on! And what may apitong be, my dear fellow?”

“A tree, dope! A Philippine tree. Anyhow, here we go, so snap on those wing lights, will you?”

A few seconds later they dropped gently and rolled along what appeared to be a natural boulevard cut through the trees. It was obviously the site of some ancient lava stream that had rolled down from volcanic Mantalingajan. It ran on toward a large opening in the side of a cogan-covered hill.

““Marvelous—for something,” said Tug.

“I gotta hunch we should turn round and beat it,” the Bish moaned. “This is all too smooth. Too many queer things happening to be right. I don’t like it—and I blame that gunner guy,” he added.

“If so, I blame you for letting us get off course while you dreamed about the Countess,” Hardwick said as he steered the Northrop along the causeway.

“I still say there’s something screwy about this place here,” spoke up Bish.

“Looks all right to me,” said Tug, though somehow he too now sensed a menace. “Let’s go through with it, pal. If we beat it, we’ll always wonder what was in here. That would be terrible. We’d get the urge one night in New York and have to pack our bags and dinner jackets and come all the way back here to see.”

“*Who* would? If I ever get into a dinner jacket anywhere within 500 miles of New York, I’ll walk the rest of the way,” the Bish argued.

“That’d get you an appetite for dinner, and—” but then Tug stopped short.

For as he ran the Northrop down alongside the Breda, he saw that they had been trapped! Trapped following the Breda!

Yet the Breda guy

It all happened so quickly! No sooner had they drawn up beside the Breda when they were swarmed over by indistinct figures carrying weapons that were far from being indistinct. The

men were Jap Marines carrying short automatic rifles.

“Where’s your gat?” snarled Tug to Bish.

“I packed it away for landing. C-r-i-i-pes!”

The Nipponese now stood off in a circle around the two planes and covered everyone. As for the Breda pilot, he twisted in his seat and said something to the gunner behind. Then those two climbed out silently and walked toward the Northrop.

The Breda pilot approached Tug. “I’m sorry, Hardwick. You are Hardwick, aren’t you? I led you into a nice mess,” he said.

Tug noted that he was tall, lean, and wore a convincing smile. But the man with him was a short stocky chap with a face that would frighten his mother—or anybody’s mother. He wore a suit of dirty whites that seemed to have been lifted from someone’s Navy, a pair of sneakers with no soles to them, and a dirty canvas helmet that only gave him a more terrifying expression.

Both Tug and Bish sat staring at this little muscular man as if they could not believe their own eyes. But two Marines were now clanking things outside their covered cockpit and ordering them out. There was no time for further examination of the strange specimen.

They got out and were herded together, but even under that strain there was something fantastically funny about the manner in which Bish stood staring at the little man who had done the gunning aboard the Breda.

A small Jap, held together with belts and bandoliers and who clacked what he considered to be English, ordered them to march on while the rest of the Marines moved to their rear and followed them as they strode toward the cave at the end of the lava strip.

Tug said nothing. He was studying the man who had spoken to him and used his name. Meanwhile, the Jap officer walked along with them, asking questions by the dozens, but they paid no attention.

“Keep quiet about that business out there,” the Breda pilot warned out of the corner of his mouth. “We won’t last ten minutes if they get wise.”

Still, Hardwick said nothing. He was trying to figure out the Breda flyer. Behind them walked Bish and the strange individual in the Navy togs. Bish likewise was cagey, watching the little man

out of the corner of his eye. So this was the bird Hardwick had been praising as a gunner! Bish didn't think much of him.

They were marched inside the cave which was broad and reasonably high. The floor was hard and dry, and off on the sides there appeared to be channels to other compartments of the cavern.

A beautiful hideout!

THE LITTLE JAP gave a command, halted them in the middle of the main gallery. There they saw small power plants running on low platforms and dull lights blinking in the cave channels beyond. Now the Marines broke up and moved to various posts, leaving only a select few to cover the prisoners, who were then carefully searched. A gun was found on the Breda pilot, but none on the others. A few papers were taken from Bish and Hardwick, but the strange little gunner, keeping his tongue between his teeth, had no words for anyone and no papers or weapons for them to collect.

"That is all, gentlemen," the little Jap announced with dignity. "We are sorry to have had to do this, but they are orders. You will be held here until the completion of the inva—er—naval manuevers. I believe *you* understand, Mr. Kirk. You are Mr. Kirk, yes?"

"Coffin Kirk to you," the man addressed as Kirk answered, "and you needn't pull that 'Naval manuevers' gag on me. I know your game. You're an outlaw Japanese military group bent on snatching the Philippines. I know that much. But these gentlemen, Mr. Hardwick and er"

"And Mr. Bishop," supplied Tug. "Mr. Alton Bishop, correspondent of the Amalgamated Press."

"Call me Beansie," said the Bish.

"Not dear little Beansie, the playboy of Broadway?"

At this, Bishop turned, startled, toward the little hairy gunner.

"How did you know?" he queried.

"I read all about you in the *Phi Gamma Quarterly*. My mother sends it to me regularly. That and the *Ladies Home Journal*."

"What is this, a rib?" demanded the Bish. He had not seen the wink that flashed from Brian "Coffin" Kirk to the redoubtable Tug Hardwick.

"What I was saying," Kirk explained to the puzzled little Jap, "was that these gentlemen are *bona fide* newspapermen—and you are likely to get into serious trouble if you detain them."

"I am so sorry," the Nipponese replied. "Unfortunately, however, this is my duty. I have no other course."

"But this is an outrage!"

"You came here at your own discretion," the Jap flamed. "It is—regrettable."

"But this is U. S. territory," argued Kirk.

"Admitted. That is, it is today. But tomorrow, who can tell?"

"See here—we were on an ordinary mission and decided to land at this point before pushing on for Manila. We were fired on by mistake—by a number of Japanese aircraft—and we decided to make sure no serious damage had been done to our planes before continuing."

"That is also known. But what we don't understand is why you selected this precise spot to land," the little Jap beamed with a Cheshire cat grin.

"I've known of this place for years," came back Kirk. "I spent a summer here a number of years ago. I knew it would make a good landing ground and provide shelter."

"Quite right. It has," the Jap agreed. "Now, gentlemen, will you come this way?"

"We ought to punch him in the nose," Bish suddenly flared up.

"Ah, no! None of that, Beansie," came from the little homely gunner beside him. "You mustn't get rough; you know you don't realize your own strength."

"Will you keep out of this?" the Bish snarled at the stocky gunner, who was glancing up at him with a pained expression. "Say, who is this guy, anyway?"

"Please, gentlemen," the little Jap repeated. "This way."

They were marched down a short natural corridor and directed into a smaller cave. The opening had been squared off with concrete and a heavy door fitted in.

"You see, we are not being cruel. This is one of our Officers' quarters. I am sure you will be comfortable."

Bish was a little reluctant to enter, but a heavy boot in the rear assisted him to make up his mind.

At that instant, the little gunner alongside him let out a low growl, snatched a gun from one of the Jap guards, and before anyone could make a move, he had crashed in the guard's skull with it.

Kirk let out a yell: "Tank! Stop it!"

The strange, slope-shouldered little gunner then walked peacefully inside as though nothing had happened, and the heavy door slammed to with a crash.

"Wow!" gasped Bish. "Did you see that, Tug?"

"No. It happened too fast for me."

They stood about a crude table and stared at the door, fully expecting a wild burst of gunfire to come pelting through. The little man called Tank then moved over to a corner, curled up on a box, and covered his eyes with his large hands. Both Bish and Hardwick stared with unbelieving eyes.

"I have trouble with him like that, at times," Coffin Kirk explained. "He means well, but he gets out of hand now and then."

"What's his name?" asked Bish in a whisper.

"Tank."

"And does he really get the *Phi Gamma Quarterly*?"

"Of course. He's quite a guy that way. He finished his education in Berlin."

"But he looks like a prize fighting stevedore. Did you see him crash that Jap?"

"You haven't seen anything yet, brother. I only hope he doesn't pull this cave down on us."

A voice came from the corner: "If I can get Beansie to help me, I'll toss it out in the Pacific."

Bish stared across, his eyes as big as nutmegs. "Good Lord, what a dangerous guy!"

"Okay," broke in Hardwick. He had sensed Kirk's ventriloquism, somehow, and so far had enjoyed it. But there were other matters to attend to. "What's your game, Kirk?" he questioned.

"Let's sit over here and speak quietly," suggested the other. "Never mind exactly who I am or where I came from. It's a long story, but I'm out to get what I know as the Circle of Death. That's a long story, too, but it now ties up with you."

"How?"

"I got the tip-off on your flight from Hainan through a Miss Velox. Is that good enough? Right! Well, I had hoped to pick you up in Manila, but I ran into the same thing you did, and we both had to fight our way out."

"Did you see what we saw?" asked Tug.

"You mean, what we *didn't* see?"

"Precisely. And what was it all about, the way you figure it?"

"Well, just as that Jap out there has all but admitted, this outlaw gang of Nipponese militarists intends to snatch the Philippines probably tomorrow night. They're playing a smart game. I'm not sure how they work it, yet."

"So you did see that smoke and the wake of those vessels?"

"Sure—but no vessels."

"Right. We think *we* saw them at first. But after our initial skirmish against those Mitsubishi ships, they seemed to have disappeared."

Kirk pondered on that for several moments while Bish glanced over his shoulder toward Tank.

"Um Perhaps you did," said Kirk finally. "Maybe they pulled something like that."

"You think those Mitsubishi planes came from those ships? I'll swear that the dream vision I had of 'em indicated they were ordinary vessels," said Tug.

"They probably were—once. But I think they're some special sort of aircraft carriers now."

"Confound it," growled Tug. "If I'd only got a better look at them!"

KIRK pondered again, then suddenly remembered something. "They missed this," he smiled, slipping off his polished field boot and drawing a sheet of paper from under the laces of his breeches leg. "Maybe this message will explain it. It's signed by Miss Velox and was cabled out of Hainan."

Tug took the sheet. It read: "*Remember Camels in North Sea? They may barge again—Miss Velox.*"

"But what the deuce does that mean?" asked Tug, puzzled.

"It refers to some gag they used in the World War," half-whispered Kirk. "They employed what they called shipboard Camels off the old *Furious*, didn't they?"

"Sure. But the *Furious* was an aircraft carrier—with a real flight deck. These things we saw had no space for take-offs or landings."

Kirk frowned and studied the sheet again.

“‘They may barge again’ ” Tug quoted. “That must mean something, you know. Yet what would a barge have to do with it?”

“Wait a minute,” broke in the Bish, who had brightened at the mention of Miss Velox. “I was reading once about some of those wartime planes taking off from a barge. The barge was a shallow affair and it was towed behind a destroyer. They used quite a few of them at one time.”

“That’s right,” both Kirk and Tug agreed beaming.

“They towed the barges out with a Camel plane on board them,” went on Bish. “They took them as near the German coast as they dared, then the Camels went up, chased the German seaplanes, and bombed their ports.”

“And they also used them for Zeppelin patrols,” supplied Kirk. “They released them from the barges which were being towed at high speed, and they did a patrol and got back somehow to the beaches along the Belgian coast.”

“All right,” agreed Hardwick pondering. “Now how are these guys working it, and why?”

“Let’s assume they have several tramps and freighters fixed up to house a number of light Mitsubishi planes. They have the take-off barges drawn up close to the stern. They put a Mitsubishi overboard to the top of the barge. They let the cable out and when she is ready, the Mitsubishi revs up. Then they release the special wheel brakes, she runs the short distance along the top of the barge—and takes off.”

“Okay,” agreed Hardwick. “Now how do they get back?”

“Well,” Kirk went on, “they might have planned to land here.”

“But they haven’t,” said Tug. “And that’s why I don’t think the cable-and-freighter idea holds water.”

“How do we know? They might be hidden away somewhere. This place is a rabbit warren of caves. I know because I’ve been here before.”

“But they didn’t get here ahead of us,” argued the Bish. “We most certainly beat them in, and they are not landing now.”

Kirk nodded, and puzzled some more.

“Then, somehow, they get back on those barges. Perhaps they have some way of landing. Those Mitsubishi planes have fixed undercarriages, and they may have some form of

flotation gear with which to get down on the water and be picked up.”

“Could they land back on the barges?” asked the Bish.

“They might if the barges have speed and space enough. But it seems pretty improbable, unless they have some sort of elaborate equipment. They may have just that, though. After all, we didn’t really see the barges. They seem to have shielded them with that smoke.”

“Well, whatever they are doing, we are sure of one thing: They’re going to use them in this plan to take the Philippines. From what that Jap guy said, I think the game will be pulled within twenty-four hours.”

“And we’re tied up here,” mooned the Bish.

“Don’t worry about that. We can get out when we want to. Tank will take care of that,” Kirk said.

“Well, he don’t look any too bright to me,” growled the Bish. “Look, he’s asleep now.”

“I wish I had him, instead of you,” Tug taunted his comrade. “There’s a real gunner.”

“Call me Beansie,” said the voice from the other corner. “I know how to give ‘em beans.”

“I’d like to punch you in the snoot!” the Bish bellowed back.

“Don’t,” warned Kirk. “He’d kill you with one sock.” Then he told them the story of Tank and their adventures together, explaining how they had been comrades since that horrible morning in the Berlin zoo when Kirk’s father had been trapped by the Circle of Death and killed in cold blood; how they were following a trail around the world to score revenge on the men who made war a business and who financed revolutions and revolts; how the trail had led them through North Borneo and now into a plot that threatened the peace of the United States.

“An ape?” gagged Bish when he caught his breath. “But the guy *talks!*”

“Sure he talks. I can teach him anything. Why, you ought to hear him sing,” went on Kirk, his face a mask of sincerity.

“And you’ve been comparing me with *that guy?*” Bish flamed at Tug. “What is this? He’s just a sim—a simian,” he stuttered.

“Ain’t we all?” demanded Kirk.

The Bish fumed at that. “I’m no ape!” he bellowed.

“Your grandparents a few generations back were.”

“Okay, Darwin. You can have him. I’ll show you guys, if we ever get out of here. If we ever get out!”

The voice from the corner then said:

*“Oh, that a man might know
The end of this day’s business, ere it come,
But it sufficeth that the day will end;
And then the end is known.”*

“Who said that?” half-yelled the Bish getting to his feet and staring about wildly.

“Shakespeare,” said the voice from where Tank was huddled.

“Don’t you remember your Shakespeare?” asked Tug solemnly.

“Look here. Do you mean to tell me that ape said that?” the Bish barked.

“No, Shakespeare,” came from the far corner again.

TUG AND KIRK exchanged knowing glances and inwardly thanked their stars they had something to joke about. This would entertain them until they could think of a way out.

They all sat in silence for some time after that, hands deep in breeches pockets, legs outstretched, and eyes staring at their boots. They were tired and their muscles ached, but stern realization of their position goaded them on to plan an escape and some scheme to thwart the mad plan to take the Pacific islands.

“What’s the time?” asked Kirk finally.

“About 6 A.M. Must be light outside now.”

“That’s right. And that means it will be well over twelve hours before it is dark again. We should get some sleep, somehow, and plan to break out as soon as it gets dark. That’s our best bet.”

“Break out for what? We don’t have a gun among us,” muttered the Bish.

“No, but we’ve got Tank. He’ll be handy if things get tough.”

Bish threw a smirk across the room to where the ape was sleeping. “I wish I knew how he does it,” he mumbled.

“You watch him when I give him the word,” warned Kirk. “But let’s forget it for a while and get some rest.”

They all agreed and curled up in various positions on the floor, along the bench, and across the table. Kirk reached up and snapped off the light, making the observation: “That electric bulb may come in handy later on, somehow.”

Three weary bodies relaxed, but three jangling minds refused to relent for what seemed hours. They twisted and squirmed, trying to find solace for tired limbs while their minds probed and sought an answer to their predicament. Whether they could get away was one problem, and what they could do if they did get out was another. The secret of the mysterious ships that could not be seen, and the part they were supposed to play in the proposed raid on the Philippines was still another.

THEY were aroused some time later by thumps near their door. A lock scrawnched and a chain rattled. Kirk sat up, snapped on the light, and watched the door slowly open. Hardwick lay on his back along a bench staring toward the portal, and Bish sat up on the floor blinking. The ape never moved.

The little Jap officer, well guarded behind by several Marines, came in and glanced around. The Marines spread out and kept their hands on their heavy automatics.

“Soup’s on, I hope,” mumbled the Bish, caressing his empty stomach.

“You gentlemen have slept well, I hope?” the Jap officer asked coldly. “In any event, we have some food, if you care for any—navy soup and some bread. You will take some?”

“Bring it in,” said Tug. “How about a wash-up, too? And what about our planes?”

“I think the washing can be arranged—but only one at a time. I will have your food brought in here. As for your planes, they are just as you left them. None of the men here understand planes and we are leaving them—leaving them for the others.”

“When do they get here?” asked Tug. “And what time is it now?”

“That information is not necessary,” replied the little Jap with a wry smile, “though I will allow you to know that it’s 3 o’clock in the afternoon.”

“Okay,” nodded Tug. “I’ll go out and wash up first.”

The Jap nodded. Then he spoke sharply to two of the guards who proceeded to lead Hardwick out along the corridor, across the wide central gallery, and down another corridor. There he found suitable lavatory facilities and water for a refreshing clean-up. All the while, he was keeping his eyes peeled, and on the way back he saw that the Northrop and Breda had been wheeled down near the doorway of the main gallery.

When he returned, two orderlies were pouring hot soup from a pannikin into deep basins and cutting up chunks of hard bread.

"You go now, Bish," Tug said. "And what about your man, Kirk?"

"He'll be all right. Let him sleep. He'll need it."

The food was dished out and they sat down as the orderlies left.

"What's it like out there?" queried Kirk out of one side of his face.

"Well, the planes are there okay. Only a few guys about."

"Good. They're expecting something later on, all right. We'll make our bid as soon as we figure its dark. Here's Bishop back. I'll go out now."

They ate ravenously and finally, when Kirk came back, the ape awoke and sauntered toward the table. Bish watched carefully, but the ape was well trained and used the big spoon just the same as the rest of them. He ate plenty in silence, watching Bish with his big solemn eyes. When it was all through he got down, walked around the cave, and began to inspect the door.

"No, not yet. Tank," Kirk ordered. "Later on you'll get your chance."

Bish stared at the ape in wonderment: "Do you mean to say he's gonner *break* out of here?"

"There's no sense in staying here, is there, Beansie?" the ape appeared to say over his shoulder.

"Oof! He'll get us all murdered!"

"Tankie will take care of Beansie," the voice said again.

Both Hardwick and Kirk now studied the guards who came back for the bowls and spoons. They checked their equipment and how they carried their guns. They were planning hard now and nothing was being missed.

"Think we can get away with it?" Kirk asked when the room was clear again.

"There's plenty of them, but if we can pull something, we might do it," Hardwick agreed. "A couple of hours more, and we'd better try to make a break."

"Make a break, for what?" demanded the Bish.

"For Manila, of course, and warn the U. S. Navy," chimed in Kirk.

"Why the Navy is miles away—somewhere along the Pacific coast. Sure, there's a few old gunboats with the China squadron. But they'd never make it," argued the Bish.

Kirk looked startled at that. "I've been away too long, I guess. I just figured the Navy would be off the Philippines. There's a few patrol squadrons at, or around, Manila, aren't there?"

"Where did you get that idea from? There's no Air Corps squadrons west of Hawaii. Of course, there's a dinkey eleven-ship Philippine Islands air force, if that will do you any good," the Bish explained.

"Then what the deuce is going to stop these guys from taking Manila?" demanded Kirk.

"I guess it's up to us."

"Swell! But how do we do it with what we've got?"

"I don't know, unless we're lucky," mooned Hardwick. "But wait a minute. If they've taken all these pains with this place, it must be a supply depot of some sort. They may have fuel and possibly ammunition or bombs here. If so, we've got a chance of swiping their stuff."

"Swell—if it works," agreed Kirk.

"Well, it stands to reason that they didn't go to all this trouble just to give a few Jap Marines a vacation. This place must have something here. We've got to find out what, too."

"Wait until it gets dark," said Kirk with a grin,

THE NEXT THREE HOURS rolled along with painful oppression. They stalked up and down, smoking their last few cigarettes and listening intently for every sound. The inactivity and feeling of hopeless indecision began to shred their nerves. Finally, Kirk glanced at his watch and made a final decision,

"All right. Let's get going. Where's that empty cigarette package you just tossed away?"

The paper was found under the table and Kirk carefully unwrapped its silver-foil and folded it into a small disc about the size of a penny.

“Come on, Tank. Let’s go!” he cried, at which the ape ambled from his silent corner and stood staring at his master.

“First, the legs off this table, Tank.”

The ape grabbed leg by leg and with what seemed to be no more effort than is required to snip the stem off a tulip he wrenched the legs from the table. Kirk handed them out with a knowing glance.

“Now let’s see what we can do with the door, Tank.”

Nodding, the stocky anthropoid approached the door. It was solid and well built. They inspected it for a break, then forced two of the table legs under the lower ends of the frame and forced them out.

“Come on, Tank! No—wait a minute.”

Kirk then went over and unscrewed the electric light bulb. He inserted the small disc of silver-foil into the socket and then put the plug back in. There was a low plop, then darkness.

“Okay! That’s snapped their fuses. Let’s work fast. And good luck, everyone! Get going, Tank!”

The ape went to work in the darkness. They could hear his jungle grunts and the answering creak of heavy timbers.

“Get going, Tank!” urged Kirk. “The old fight, you lazy lout!”

Bish and Tug helped as much as they could with the table legs. And then at last Tank, struggling with his feet against the wall and his great hands gripping the edge of the door, gave a final mighty heave and the great door came away with a crack that echoed along the dim corridor outside.

The whole lot came down with a crash. Then the ape darted outside with a dull squeal. The dim figure of a guard appeared from somewhere and the ape hurtled at him with a cry. A scream and a choking sob followed a sickening thud. There came a metallic clank on the stone floor—and Bish dived for a gun that had fallen.

“Steady, everyone,” ordered Kirk. “Play safe now. Let Tank go ahead and mop up. Nail everyone.”

They moved down the corridor carefully, but the ape was now nowhere in sight. They got out into the main chamber and peered around. There was no light except a dull gleam from outside.

Two men came toward them from the darkness and Bish’s gun spoke. They went down and rolled

over, and both Tug and Kirk grabbed their guns and bayonets. Shots sounded down another gallery and they went in and found Tank in a hand-to-hand conflict with several Japs. The three released prisoners slammed in and wielded gun butts with wild abandon. More shots were fired from somewhere behind, then the ape hurtled over them all, charging again and again with a short length of door timber in his hand.

More Japs came thundering in and ran smack into a bundle of fighting bone and muscle. Their weapons were useless. They tried to fire but they were knocked in shapeless heaps by the mad simian who picked them up like sacks of flour and hurled them in all directions. A few bounced off the wall and their weapons rattled to the floor. Tank picked these up and slung them with full-arm sweeps into the pile of writhing humanity.

Then the lights went on again. Someone had replaced the fuse, whereupon the battle began once more.

Kirk called Tank back. They retrieved as many weapons as possible, and in fighting formation they strode on into the various galleries, firing from time to time in order to keep the Jap Marines off until they could consolidate their gains.

Then they remembered the planes.

“We’ve got to get out there to them, somehow. Any minute they may be damaged,” Hardwick said. “Come on, let’s take a chance.”

They huddled together at the opening of a corridor and then in skirmish formation skeltered for the portal. A few shots crossed the gallery, deafening them, but no one was injured. The Bish poured a series into a side-gallery entrance and won the reward of a long, loud squeal. Kirk led the way from there, and they finally reached the opening and the runway outside.

Two or three Japs appeared in the shadows, but more shots scattered them and they climbed the vegetation-covered banks of the wide roadway, probably to get reinforcements. The initial group of Nipponese guards had been depleted, and Tank had demoralized those who still lived.

More shots then rang out in the darkness behind them, but at last they reached the ships and huddled near the engine of the Breda.

“Are we all here?” husked Kirk.

“All but that ape gunner of yours,” the Bish growled. “Where the deuce is he?”

“He was with us when we started across the main gallery,” argued Kirk. “I’m going back for him. He might be hit.”

“What with?” the Bish blurted out. “These guys didn’t have any anti-tank guns. That’s the only thing that would pierce that guy’s hide.”

“I’m going back and look for him. You get the engines started and take off if you have to. Don’t bother about us. Get to Manila, somehow,” Kirk snapped.

“Wait a sec. Here he comes,” said Hardwick peering into the mist.

“What’s he bin up to—swiping loaves of bread?” the Bish bellowed.

Tank came out of the smoke and dust with two long yellow somethings under his long arms. They looked like huge loaves of bread, but when he waddled into their group it was discovered that they were high-explosive bombs.

“Oh! Oh! Where did he get those?” gasped Bish as Tug and Kirk each grabbed one before the ape dropped them at their feet.

“This guy is a *real* gunner,” said Hardwick, and he really meant it this time. “He comes up with everything.”

They kneeled beside the bombs and Kirk checked the rack flanges and release nipples. “You fellows have regulation A-8 racks on your boiler,” he said looking up. “That’s swell! These will fit, so get ‘em on. I’ll go back with Tank and get some more. My Breda will take four of these babies the way she’s fitted now.”

They were 100 kilogram bombs of Japanese manufacture built under license from a German firm. The Northrop had racks up front under the wheels which would accommodate three on each side. Bish and Tug raised them into the guides, adjusted the steadying prongs, and snapped the releases into the nipples. They would set their own detonators once they were released so that the nose vanes could turn in the slipstream as they fell.

“Imagine that monk getting these,” said Tug. “He must have heard what we were saying about needing some bombs. I never saw anything like it. Why aren’t you that bright?”

“Aw, he ain’t so smart. He’s just a natural thief. He’d pick up anything. It just happened to be bombs this time,” the Bish argued. “You can’t tell me he knew what they were.”

“Didn’t he?” said Kirk returning out of the darkness. “He actually found them nailed up in crates. They’re here for those Mitsubishi planes to pick up. Here’s four more. You can load your rack and be ready to take off while we get another load.”

They were off in the darkness again and Bish and Tug worked feverishly to get their racks loaded and their engines going.

They had completed their arrangements and tested the releases when Tank and Kirk returned with four more bombs. “The Jappos have disappeared somewhere,” said Kirk anxiously. “But I spotted a series of light flashes farther down a gallery to the rear. I have a hunch they’re signaling something. We’d better work fast. Give us a hand with these bombs before something serious happens.”

“Before it happens?” yelled Bish. “Cripes, it is happening! Here they come!”

From out of the blackness beyond came a roaring formation of fighters. Their knife wings were edged at the lava runway and their pennons of exhaust flame spat out with a wild glare of revenge.

All along the runway spattered machine-gun fire that sparkled and threw off splashes of fire. Tracers blazed, spluttered, and bounced like insane fireworks. The Mitsubishis came on firing a flying salvo that whistled all about them.

“Get off, you guys!” yelled Kirk. “We’ll try to load these while you annoy them. Stick over this place until we get into the air, then we’ll stay together for the run to Manila. Get it?”

“Sure! But you’d better get off fast, or we’re coming down to hoik you out,” yelled Hardwick.

HE then leaped into his seat. The Mitsubishis were circling again to make another rush at them. The Bish found that the guns were just as they had been left and he set his little stage for action. The Northrop was taxied out and then sent thundering down the runway. It was off almost too soon and they were slashing through the fronds of palms that hung over the runway edges.

Then they were in the air and hoiking into a wild climbing turn. Bish slammed one heavy burst across the blue-black sky into the Japs’ leading plane. It flamed immediately, fishtailed hard, and screamed for the sky with a wild zoom.

“Don’t pop ‘em over the runway,” yelled Hardwick. “Kirk has to get off, remember. And we don’t want to clutter the runway up.”

“That Tank bird will bite them in two and spit the pieces a quarter of a mile,” argued the Bish. “There they go. Now head those Jappos off and let them get clear.”

They charged across the sky and drove the single-seaters away from the runway. Below they could see the Breda thundering along the lava trail. They waited and watched it zoom into the sky, then turn to slam into the fray full tilt. The Mitsubishis seemed to hesitate at this point, and that opening was taken by the two two-seaters. They hammered in hard with all guns flaming.

The Jap formation broke up on the left. Bish and Hardwick rounded hard and dashed into the other half of the formation and a heavy fire from Hardwick’s front guns forked them all over the sky like some massive hay tedder. They slammed through the storm of dural, flaming gasoline, and fluttering Mitsubishis until they reached a position just off the Breda’s tail plane.

Then Kirk fired a white light, waved his arm in the glare, and headed out to sea a short distance. At this. Tug spoke to Bish: “He probably figures on finding those smoke tossers again.”

“What—the mystery vessels we can’t see? That’s a pip!”

“We’ll see something, all right. They may be going to try an attack of some sort. We’ll have to warn Manila through station KAY.” Then Hardwick turned on his radio and caught the voice of Kirk already sending a message through to the Manila station. “Well, so far, so good,” concluded Tug, explaining to Bish what was going on. “Kirk’s heading north toward Manila, and if I know anything we’ll run into something hot any minute now.”

The rest of the Mitsubishi fighters were left far in the rear. They now appeared to be leaderless; and since the Breda and Northrop had broken clear, there was little hope of their heading them off.

“I still can’t get over that ape,” mooned the Bish as they huddled close to the Breda. “That darn thing—”

“—Is smarter than you,” broke in Tug, teasingly again. “What does it feel like to be made a monkey of—by a monkey, Bish?”

“You stop worrying about me. I’ll put one over on that baby yet. There must be something he *can’t* do. You just worry about those ships we can’t see,” Bish mumbled.

They were well up the coast of Palawan now. Ahead lay the scattered islands of Kalamianes and Manila was not much more than three hundred miles away. Then Tug saw Kirk pointing ahead and downward. A slow flashing, such as might come from a signal lamp, had attracted his attention in the growing darkness below.

And when they went down lower, they caught just what they expected to catch—a welter of anti-aircraft fire.

Below them again appeared the strange smoke which *might* be coming from the funnels of a ship. Also the milky wake which likewise *might* be churned up by the screws of a steamer. But again, they could see no actual vessels. “We bin drinkin’ anti-freeze again,” Bish argued. “What the gosh is all that, anyway?”

“I don’t know. But there’s guns of some sort down there. Hello! There goes Kirk down after them!”

“After what?” bawled the Bish.

“Don’t ask me, dope! Get ready to toggle those bombs—and don’t waste ‘em!”

“On what?” queried the confused Bish.

BUT TUG was too busy to argue with his comrade. The Breda was well down near the smoke now. At this height, it was easy to notice the flashes that were coming up through the smoke pall. There were guns somewhere under there!

Abruptly, the Breda jerked and Tug knew a bomb had been dropped. Then a terrible bash of flame and concussion belched up through the smoke pall. It blotted out the hazy screen and disclosed the outline of a long flat deck of some kind.

“You see that, Bish?” Hardwick bellowed. “There *are* barges of some sort down there.”

“Barges? When I see barges doing well over thirty knots, they ain’t barges. Cripes, look at ‘em go!” The Breda was charging back at another white smoky patch now. Then another bomb lanced through the screen, and another terrible welter of flame and wreckage flared up through the white.

“Hey! When do *we* get into this game?” yelled the Bish.

“Wait a minute. Do you see it? I mean, do you see how the Japs work it? They move in two-barge formations. The barge in front sends out black smoke which covers both barges, and the rear one sends out white smoke that makes it look like they’re sending out a regular wake. Clever, these Japs!”

“Let’s have a crack at ‘em!”

Hardwick dodged through several bursts of A-A fire. He was quietly admiring these new-type craft which obviously were small, high-speed aircraft carriers. They were not more than 100 feet long and about forty feet wide. And probably they were fitted with racing hulls and powered with high-speed Diesel engines.

There were about six more hurtling through the water. They seemed to be leaping like Gold Cup racers from roller to roller.

Together, now, the Breda and Northrop went to work on them with the bombs they had stolen from the Jap hide-out on Palawan. They couldn’t afford to waste many—and they didn’t. Hardwick’s first bomb almost missed, but just managed to graze a stern corner and blow the rudder and screw away. The skipping barge curled sharply and crashed into another coming up from the rear. They had dispensed with their black and white smoke screens now and were frantically attempting to get away from the tormenting hornets above.

The Breda released her last two bombs and blew two more barges to atoms, scattering the wreckage in all directions. On Hardwick’s next try, he nailed one cold, dead in the center, and it split down the middle. The hull rolled over, showing a dirty white belly,

Hardwick was about to slam at another when the Breda cut across him hard and signaled Hardwick away.

“Hello! I get it,” cracked Tug. “Look he’s got his flaps down all the way. Why, he’s going to try to get aboard one!”

“Holy Smoke!” gasped the Bish, “I’ll bet that’s the monk’s idea. He’s crazy enough for anything!”

“It’s an idea,” argued Tug. “But they’re crazy—if they think they can get away with it. Yet maybe they can. I’ll even bet we—”

“Oh, my sister’s cat’s aunt!” wailed the Bish, “Don’t tell me *we’re* gonna try it, too?”

Below them, streaking north, raced one of the undamaged flight-barges. And behind it sped the Breda, taking its time to get into position for a landing on the deck, which was clear. Hardwick took it all in quickly. He cut across, then nosed down too, keeping his guns dead on the low turret-topped control bridge which was let into the port side of the flight-deck.

There he held his position, threatening the barge bridge while the Breda poised and hung delicately a few feet above and behind the barge. Then the Breda dropped and seemed to be missing the lip of the deck. But a quick blip of the throttle carried her far enough forward and she danced gently onto the throbbing deck.

“He’s done it!” yelled Hardwick. “And here we come, too. Kirk!”

“We’re going on, too?” cried the Bish, “Where? There ain’t enough room, is there?”

“They get about six Mitsubishis on there, or I miss my guess,” yelled Tug,

“Well, if you miss your guess, we go in the drink!”

They saw the Breda roll forward and halt a few feet from the curled takeoff lip. Hardwick still held his threatening position above the turreted bridge, two more bombs in position for dropping. Then he saw Kirk, followed by the ape, race across to the bridge, automatics in hand.

“The crazy guy’s gonna take over,” yelled Hardwick.

“Oh! Oh! Oh! This is where we go off the deep end,” chanted the Bish. “Batten down everything!”

“Shut up and hold your hat on,” Hardwick said: “Look, he’s giving us a white light! It’s okey-dokey!”

Hardwick banked and set the Northrop’s flaps all the way down. That would bring her in at something about fifty. But since the barge was hitting about twenty-five or thirty knots now, they would be touching the deck at almost zero speed. Whatever headway she might have would be taken care of by the short run and the proper application of brakes.

“It’s worth taking a chance,” spoke up Tug. “Kirk probably wants to swipe the barge and hand

it over to the U. S. Government. And we can help.”

The Northrop fishtailed to kill speed, then went down for the dancing deck. Hardwick hoped there was plenty of play in his undercarriage. Then before he knew it she was down over the flight deck and he steadied her.

There was a retch of oleos with the dull plonk of contact. Kirk applied the brakes carefully, easing the pressure in as she rolled dangerously close to the standing Breda. Then, somehow, they stopped, and both let out a sigh of relief that almost raised the hatch.

They were down—safe and sound!

THEY leaped out, skated across the complicated arrester gear on the deck, and went into the knobby turret-bridge—to find Kirk standing over a crew of three men. A Japanese Commander had been in charge, and a young Midshipman was at the chart desk while a bulky Petty Officer was at the wheel.

“Nice landing, Hardwick,” said Kirk. “We made quite a capture, eh?”

“You had your nerve with you. Kirk,” said Hardwick.

“I was afraid you were going to bomb every one of them. We had to swipe one for Uncle Sam, you know. This barge is quite a gadget, eh?”

“Yeah, and whata we do now?” asked Bish. “Stay on board here all the way in to Manila?”

“That’s the ticket,” said Tug. “And since I know you’re thinking about food you can go down into the hull presently and see what you can rustle up. We’ll stay here and see that these babies play the game. But why did they let you aboard, anyway, Kirk?”

“Because you had them covered with your guns and bombs,” replied Kirk.

The Jap Commander broke in at that and said: “You were fortunate. Most of our deck crew had been washed overboard. Resistance was useless. But there will be other times and other means.”

Just then a yell from the Bish halted the conversation.

“Hey!” he yelled. “Full astern! Man overboard!” With that he was out of the shallow bridge with a series of bounds and across the flight deck. He went headlong over the side for some reason and Kirk took over the barge’s

controls, swinging the ship around and trying to figure out what had happened.

Tug raced across the deck, grabbing a life ring. He saw Bish struggling to keep Tank afloat in the water. The life ring swung out carrying the floating flare with it and the cannister blossomed out with the phosphorus glare and gave them a chance to keep them in sight. Kirk brought her around and Tug dragged them aboard.

The ape was helpless and chattering wildly. Bish shoved him aboard and clambered up a short rope ladder that was dropped.

“What happened?” demanded Tug.

“The dope was walking along the edge. He slipped somehow, and went into the drink. And do you know, I didn’t mind going in for him. It proved one thing—I told you I’d put one over on that monk.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, he *may* be a good gunner. He *may* be able to talk, and he *may* be pretty strong. But there’s one thing you forgot.”

“What’s that? What’s the gag!”

“No monkey can swim!” beamed the Bish, “Yeah man! No gorilla can swim.”

“That’s right, Bish” grinned Tug.

“Call me Beansie, Mr. Hardwick. Call me Beansie!”

They both laughed aloud as the ape huddled off to a secluded corner of the deck and curled up in the lee of the bridge.

“Thanks,” said Coffin Kirk when they went inside again. “I wouldn’t lose that guy for anything.”

“Nothing to it! Nothing to it!” beamed Bish. “Just a case of mind over muscle, Mr. Kirk. Call me Beansie.”

“Thanks, Beansie. Now for that, you can have charge of this boiler and take her to Manila.”

“The pleasure is all mine,” said Bish. “Move over. Admiral,” he then cracked at the Nipponese as he grabbed the wheel. “Your troop ships won’t make any attempt to land now. For you can’t cover an invasion with war-bird barges that have been bopped off.”