

# From Here to Banggai

**Ponga Jim**

**by Louis L'Amour, 1908-1988**

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„You know, William,“ Ponga Jim Mayo said drily, „I’m getting so I hate to see that handsome pan of yours showing itself around. Every time you come around me I end up getting shot at.“

Major Arnold smiled blandly. „Never give it a thought, Jim. I don’t. They can’t shoot a man that was born to be hung.“

„Huh!“ Ponga Jim emptied his glass and reached for the bottle. „That’s a swell crack from the guy whose bacon I’ve saved at least twice. If it wasn’t for me you’d have lost the war right here in the East Indies. And you, a British Intelligence officer, razzing me. It pains me, William, it really pains me!“

„All of which,“ Major Arnold continued, ignoring him, „reminds me. How did you ever get that *Ponga* tied to your name?“

Mayo grinned and settled back in his chair. „It’s a long story, William. A story that will make your pink British ears pinker, and much too rough for your sensitive moral condition. However, over in Africa, there’s a place called Gabon, and in Gabon is a town called Ponga-Ponga. Now a few years past over in Ponga-Ponga was a young man named Mayo, and—“

„Jim,“ Major Arnold whispered suddenly. „Who are those men at the next table?“

Ponga Jim chuckled. „I was wondering how long it would take you to wake up to those lugs,“ he said. Then he said guardedly, „Despite the obvious military bearing of at least two of them, those gents are merely innocent passengers on the good ship CARLSBERG. You may remember the CARLSBERG is from Copenhagen, but not so many days past her home port was Bremerhaven.

„The chap with the bulge behind his belt is a commercial traveler, even though he looks like a member of the Nazi Gestapo. The lean, hard-faced guy isn’t a naval officer, but only a man traveling for his health. The—“

„Ssh!“ Major Arnold whispered. „The fat one is coming over.“

The man’s face was rotund, and his round belly was barely controlled by a heavy leather belt. He looked jolly and lazy until you saw his eyes. They were small, and hard as bits of steel. Like the others, he wore whites and a sun helmet.

He stopped beside their table. „I beg your pardon,“ he said, smiling slowly, „but I accidentally heard your friend call you Ponga Jim. Aren’t you master of the SEMIRAMIS?“

„Yeah,“ Jim acknowledged. „Have a seat.“

The German seated himself between them, smiling contentedly. „And your friend?“

Major Arnold waved a deprecatory hand, looking very much the neat, well-bred Englishman. „My name is Girard, William Girard,“ he said. „I’m trying my hand at pearl buying.“

„And mine is Romberg,“ the fat man said. Then he turned to Jim. „Isn’t it true, Captain, that you clear for Bonthain and Menado soon? Captain van Raalt, the pilot, told me your cargo was for those ports. My friends and I are interested, as we have some drilling machinery for shipment to Banggai.“

„Banggai’s on my route,“ Jim said. „You and your friends want to go along as passengers?“

Romberg nodded. „I can start the cargo moving right away, if you wish,“ he said.

„The quicker the better,“ Mayo said, getting up. „Alright.“

Romberg, after shaking hands with each of them, rejoined his friends.

„Well, William,“ Jim said softly, when they had reached the street, „what do you make of it?“

„That cargo to Banggai looks like a load of trouble, if you ask me,“ the major said grimly. „Cancel it. I didn’t know they were here yet, but I knew the Gestapo was out to get you. They know you messed up that New Guinea deal and their plans here.“

Ponga Jim shrugged. „So what? Cargo doesn't lay around waiting for a guy. I'll take my chances and—“ he smiled grimly, his eyes hard, „they'll take theirs!“

„Don't say you weren't warned,“ Arnold said resignedly.

„William,“ Ponga Jim said pointedly, „I need that money. Everything I got in the world is in that old tub down there by the dock.“

He turned and walked rapidly down the street. Over six feet tall, Ponga Jim weighed two hundred pounds and carried it like a featherweight. In the officer's cap, the faded khaki suit, and woven-leather sandals he looked tough, hard-bitten. His jaw was strong, and his face was tanned by wind, sun, and brine.

Arnold shrugged. „Maybe,“ he said softly, „maybe he can do it. If ever a man could go through hell barefooted, that's the one!“

Makassar was dozing in the heat of a tropical evening. Like many tropical towns it can sleep for weeks or months and then suddenly explode with volcanic force, releasing all its pent-up violence in one mad burst and then falling quietly into the doldrums once more.

Now it was quiet, but with an uneasy stillness like the hush before a storm. Ponga Jim stopped on the end of the Juliana Quay, and Slug Brophy walked up.

„Been around the joints?“ Jim asked him.

Brophy nodded. He was a short, thickset man with enormously broad shoulders and a massive chest. His head was set on a short, thick neck. His heavy jaw was always black with beard. He was wearing whites, with shirtsleeves rolled up and his cap at an angle.

„Yeah,“ Brophy said, „but I came back. I don't like the looks of things. Everything is quiet enough, but some of the bad ones are looking wise. I saw Gunong, Stello, and Hankins. They've all been drinking a little, and they've got something up their sleeves.“

„Crew aboard?“ Jim asked.

„All but Li Chuang, the Chinese steward you picked up in Perth. He's ashore picking up something extra special for you.“

Jim nodded. „I'm going to look him up. We're getting under way as soon as this new cargo gets loaded. The Gunner watching it?“

Brophy nodded. „Cap,“ he asked, „is there anything funny about this cargo?“

„Trouble. Those Nazis want me out of the picture. This whole deal is a trap. But they pay in advance.“

Brophy grinned widely. „In advance, huh? Okay, Cap. Let's go!“

Ponga Jim turned and started back up the street. A month before, he had bought the SEMIRAMIS in Melbourne, a battered old tramp with too many years behind her. From the beginning, there had been trouble finding a steward. Then he had stumbled across Li in Perth and had shipped the Chinese at once.

Since then life aboard ship had improved. Li knew how and where to buy supplies, and he always managed to save money. In short, he was too close to a miracle to have running around loose, Jim thought.

Jim was passing the Parakeet Nest, a dive near the waterfront, when he heard a fist smack and a rattle of Chinese in vigorous expostulation. His pulses jumped at the sound, and he wheeled, pushing through the swinging doors.

Hankins, a burly beachcomber with an evil reputation; Gunong, a Buginese; and Stello, a Portuguese Malay were gathered about, shouting. On the floor lay Li Chuang, his packages scattered about, his face livid with anger.

Hankins stood over him, kicking the slender Chinese in the ribs.

With one bound, Mayo was through the door. Gunong shouted and Hankins whirled, and even as he turned he unleashed a terrific right. It was a killing punch, and Jim Mayo was coming fast. It caught him full on the chin and sent him crashing against the wall. His head bounced, and he slid to the floor.

For just an instant, everyone stared, unbelieving. Then with a roar, Burge Hankins leaped to finish the job. But that instant had been almost enough, and Jim rolled his head away from the wild kick launched by the raging beachcomber.

Hankins's recklessness cost him victory. The kick missed, and Mayo lurched drunkenly to his feet. The room swam before him in a smoky haze. A punch slid off the side of his head, and he staggered forward, fighting by instinct while Hankins wasted his fury in a mad rain of blows when one measured punch would have won.

Ponga Jim Mayo was out on his feet. The room circled him dizzily, and through the haze he saw the horror-stricken face of Li squatting on the floor, blood trickling through his lips.

Ponga Jim was punch-drunk and he was still groggy, but suddenly he was a fighting man. With a growl like a wounded beast, he struck savagely. His left smashed into Hankins's face and knocked the surprised beachcomber against the bar with such driving force that his head bobbed, just in time to meet the sweeping right that lifted him off his feet and knocked him bloody and broken into a corner.

The startled crowd stared, and the giant Gunong ran a thin tongue over his parched lips. Feverishly, his eyes sought the door. Ponga Jim took a step forward, and then, with the speed of light, he leaped.

Gunong's knife slashed out. A half inch closer would have ripped Ponga Jim's stomach open. But it ripped his shirt from side to side and left a red slash across the skin. Then Jim was upon him with a hail of blows that swept down almost too fast for the eye to follow. In seconds Gunong was out cold.

But Ponga Jim was playing no favorites. He smashed out and knocked a Buginese cutthroat reeling. Someone leaped astride of his back and he grabbed the man by the head and threw him bodily over his shoulder into the wall. With a roar of fury Jim waded into the crowd. Blows rained about him. Men screamed with pain, and he felt hands grasping at his legs. He kicked back desperately, and somebody cried out.

With a leap, Jim reached the bar. He smashed a bottle over the head of the nearest man. Maddened faces, streaked with blood and sweat, massed around him. A fist struck his chin, staggering him. He came up with a broken chair leg.

The room was a riot of fighting and insane fury.

Suddenly Jim remembered the gun, and his hand jerked up and ripped open the holster. Then he cursed with fury. To hell with it! He slammed a fist into a face nearby, grabbed the man by the throat and jerked him to arm's length overhead, and heaved him out into the crowd. He was swaying dizzily, and suddenly he was

conscious that his arms were heavy, that he was fighting with his back to the wall. Still they crowded around him.

The floor was littered with injured men, but still he didn't use the gun. For an instant, they drew back, staring at him with malevolence.

A big Dyak was down, his face a smear of blood. He tried to get up and then fell back. The pack sensed a kill. Like wolves about an injured bull, they circled warily. They were closing in now.

Ponga Jim Mayo crouched, waiting. He still had the gun, but like a true fighting man, he hated to use it. Guns were his business, but a fight was a fight, and gang fight or otherwise, Ponga Jim Mayo had always won. Desperate, bitter, bloody, but always he and his crew had come out on the top.

Stello, who had hung back, now came forward. He was clutching a kris, and his lips were parted in a sneer of hatred. Yet, even as Jim waited, knowing the next attack would be the last, he realized something was behind this, something more than a mere attack on his cook. These men were cutthroats, but they were organized cutthroats. They hadn't gathered here by accident. Even as he realized that, his mind leaped to his ship, to Romberg, to...

Stello smiled, his beady eyes gleaming maliciously. „You want beg now, Ponga Jim? You want die now?“

The big half-caste took a step forward. Behind him, the semicircle moved forward. In a split second they would attack!

Ponga Jim's hand, out of sight behind the bar, fell across the handle of the shot-filled hose that the bartender used in case of brawls. In that instant, Stello lunged. But as he lunged the loaded hose swept up and lashed him across the face!

Ponga Jim Mayo heard the bones crunch, saw the big man's nose flatten and his face turn blue with that vicious blow. And in the instant the doors burst open and Slug Brophy leaped in, followed by the crew of the SEMIRAMIS. What followed was a slaughter.

Somewhere outside a policeman stopped. He looked at the door. He saw a notorious cutthroat stagger outside, trying desperately to pull a knife from his chest. Then the officer turned and disappeared into the darkness. This was no place for an honest policeman.

The streets were silent and still very suddenly, as a silent body of men walked out on Juliana Dock and aboard the SEMIRAMIS.

The Gunner was standing by the gangway, pistol in hand. Ponga Jim came up, staggering. His face was smeared with dried blood and his shirt was gone. The holster with the gun was still hanging from his shoulder. As the men trooped slowly aboard, Ponga Jim turned to the Gunner.

„All aboard, Millan? If they are, get the anchor up. There'll be hell from here to Batavia for this night's work.“ He glanced across at the CARLSBERG, her shadow looming large in the darkness.

He walked to his cabin and fell across the bed. There were things to be done, but they would have to wait. With a sigh Ponga Jim fell asleep.

It was morning when he awoke. He took a shower, washing away the dried blood from his face and hair. Gingerly, he bathed a swollen lip and hand. There was a

bad gash on his scalp, too, and a lump under one eye. Casually, he dressed then and checked his gun.

The morning sun struck him like a blow, and he stood still for a moment, looking out over the sea. It was calm, with the wind about force two. Ponga Jim climbed the ladder to the bridge. The Gunner came out of the wheelhouse. He looked worried, but brightened when he saw Mayo.

„Hi, Cap. Glad to see you around.“

Jim grunted. „Yeah, I’m glad to be around.“

„That must have been some fight!“ Gunner exclaimed.

„That fight was a plant, a put-up job!“ Ponga Jim looked off over the sea astern. To the south loomed the heavy shoulders of a mountainous island. „Kabalena?“ he asked Gunner. „That’s Batu Sengia, isn’t it?“

„Yeah,“ Millan agreed. „We’re doing okay. You want to take over now?“

Jim shook his head. „Hold it till noon. I’ll take the twelve to four.“

Ponga Jim walked into the wheelhouse and stood staring down at the chart spread on the table. Major Arnold had been right. That effort in the Parakeet Nest had been the first attempt. That failing, there would be something else. The only question was when and where. Soon his ship would be in Tioro Strait, then Wowoni Strait and the Banda Sea. These islands, Muna and Butung, were little known, their inhabitants strange tribes of Malay-speaking people who kept to themselves.

Ponga Jim had taken the cargo with the full knowledge that it meant trouble, confident of his ability to cope with it. Remembering the icy flecks in Romberg’s eyes his scalp tightened. He glanced at the passenger list lying on the desk. Romberg, Kessler, and Braunig. Kessler was the thin, hard-faced man, Braunig the burly, silent fellow.

The Gunner came in. „How’s it look, Jim?“ he asked softly. „We got some tough babies aboard?“

„Yeah,“ Ponga Jim said. „Keep your eyes on them, and tell your watch to do the same thing. Keep a rod handy.“

The Gunner slapped his waistband. „I got one.“ His brow wrinkled. „I’m more scared of that damned orangutan than I am of any of them.“

„That *what*?“ Jim wheeled. „Did you say orangutan?“

„Sure, didn’t you know?“ Millan was astonished. „Braunig says it’s a pet. Biggest one I ever saw. He feeds it himself, won’t let anybody else get close.“

„Pet, is it?“ Ponga Jim’s left eyebrow squinted and his eyes narrowed. „In a strong cage?“

Millan nodded. „Yeah, It would be a hell of a thing to tackle in the dark. Or in the daytime, for that matter.“

Mayo shrugged. „It won’t get out. Put an extra lock on it. And if Braunig kicks, send him to me.“

He watched the blunt-bowed SEMIRAMIS plow through the seas. Old she might be, but she was dependable. Ponga Jim knew that peace in the East Indies might erupt into war at any moment. The war that had thrown all Europe into arms and that threatened at any moment to turn cities into a smoking shambles, was already eating at the shores of these lonely islands. Twice, Ponga Jim Mayo had

been involved in attempts to create strife here, at this furthest limit of the British Empire.

An American adventurer and master of tramp freighters, Mayo preferred to mind his own business, settle his private fights, and stay out of international affairs. But following the sea in the Indies had never been a picnic, and he had come up from the brawling fury of a hundred waterfronts to a command that he meant to keep.

Jim's eyes narrowed angrily, and his jaw set. Once, he had deliberately butted in to avert more trouble. Now they were out to get rid of Jim Mayo as fast as possible.

Carefully, his fingers touched the swollen lump under his eye and felt his jaw. He felt stiff and sore from the brutal kicking and beating he'd taken.

Somewhere in the islands, perhaps still back in Makassar, Major William Arnold was waging an almost single-handed fight to keep peace in these East Indian waters. But it was a lonely, dangerous job. All over the world secret agents of the Gestapo were striking at the lifeline of the British Empire. All through the islands there was sabotage, propaganda, and undercover warfare.

Slug Brophy came up to the bridge. „Romberg was asking about you,“ he said, winking. „When I told him you were on the bridge, he seemed surprised. Those guys got enough guns to arm the U.S. Navy.“

„Yeah?“ Jim stroked his chin thoughtfully. „Let the Gunner handle this a bit longer. You come with me.“

He wheeled and ran down the ladder. Sakim and Longboy were painting amidships.

„Drop those brushes,“ Jim snapped. „Slug, get them a couple of guns.“

When they were armed he went amidships. The three Germans were sitting in the petty officers' mess, talking and drinking beer. Jim stopped in the doorway.

„I understand,“ he said crisply, „that you men have guns aboard. I want them. Nobody packs a rod on this boat but my officers and myself.“

Romberg shrugged. „But in times like this maybe we need our guns,“ he said softly.

„You get them when you leave the boat,“ Mayo snapped. „All right, on your feet for a search.“

Romberg's face whitened.

Kessler got to his feet, face flushing with anger.

„There will be no searching here!“ he snapped. „This is insolence!“

„Yeah?“ Ponga Jim chuckled without mirth. „You guys got a lot to learn. An' when you talk about insolence, sourpuss, remember you're not in the German army now. You're on my ship, and I'm in command here!“

Kessler started forward and then stopped. „So? You know, do you? Well, what of it?“

Mayo's gun slid into his hand. „You guys asked for transportation for yourselves and your cargo. You're getting it. Get tough, and you'll get a lot more. I said I'd get you there, but I didn't say I'd get you there alive.“ He shrugged. „Take their guns, Slug. The first one that peeps will have to digest some lead.“

The three men stood very still, hands raised, while Brophy frisked them expertly. Once Romberg's eyes flickered to the port and he stared.

For outside was Sakim, with a rifle barrel resting on the edge. Longboy stood outside the other, his brown face eager.

Romberg's eyes swung back to Mayo, and there was a hint of admiration in them. „You'd have made a good German officer, Captain Mayo.“

Jim snorted contemptuously.

Brophy passed out of the room with the guns tucked in his waistband. Then Ponga Jim slid his back into its holster.

„Sorry to have bothered you, Gents. Adios.“

Day slid into night. Mayo was worried. Something had to break. There was a possibility that disarming them had also wrecked their plans, but he had no faith in the idea. There was something else, something more to be expected. At twelve he would go on watch, and by that time if everything went well they would be entering the Banda Sea with a straight shot for Bangkulu before turning east for Banggai Bay.

Night had fallen and the stars were bright when he turned aft for a last look around before his night watch. The passage amidships was empty, but he heard voices in Romberg's cabin.

For an instant, Ponga Jim hesitated outside the door. Kessler was talking. If Braunig was there he was not speaking. But that was usually the case. Jim walked aft to the sternpost and stood watching the wake, his back to the after deckhouse. Then he turned and started forward.

Sharp, fierce snarling and then a shrill, angry yapping shattered the still air. Puzzled, he hesitated. Something was bothering the orangutan. He went down the ladder to the storeroom beneath the after wheelhouse.

In the small space was the cage of the orangutan, a huge beast, almost as big as a gorilla. Foaming at the mouth, the big ape was screaming with fury and trying to get through the bars at Braunig, who was crouching before the cage. His wide, ugly face was contorted with sadistic frenzy as he stabbed at the ape with a pointed stick.

As Ponga Jim reached the foot of the ladder, the ape grabbed the stick and with a terrific jerk, ripped it from Braunig's hands. The stick broke and the ape hurled the pieces at Braunig. The burly German roared with laughter, until one of the sticks hit him on the shoulder. Then, with a snarl of rage, Braunig jerked up a boathook and stabbed at the ape with the sharp end.

„I'll show you!“ Braunig snarled. „You slobbering beast!“

Jim crossed the intervening space in a leap, ripping the boathook from Braunig's hands. „I'll be damned if you will!“ he snapped. „Get back to your cabin before I lose my temper.“

„You! Why, you—!“ Braunig's face purpled with fury.

*Smack!*

Jim's right smashed into the big German's mouth and knocked him skidding along the deck. The German sprang to his feet, crouched, and then lunged. Jim sidestepped.

„Better get on deck before I get peeved,“ he said again. „I don't want to hurt you.“

Braunig was powerful. He wheeled and rushed at Ponga Jim. But Mayo stepped back quickly. The German plowed ahead. Jim crossed a right, hooked both hands



to the body, and jerked up a hard right uppercut. Braunig staggered, and Jim knocked him down with a hard left hook. He got up, and Jim floored him again. The big man lay there, groggy, but still conscious.

„All right,“ Jim said coolly, „now go on deck.“

Slowly, heavily, the man climbed to his feet and staggered drunkenly up the ladder. Jim crossed to the cage where the big ape clung to the bars, staring.

„What’s the matter, old fellow?“ he asked softly. „Been treated pretty mean, haven’t you?“

The orangutan stared back at him, its eyes bloodshot, ugly. Staring at the ape, Jim could see that the beast’s mind had been warped into a seething caldron of hatred where nothing lived now but the lust to kill. Through the red hair on its body he could see countless scars. Why, Jim wondered? Just cruelty? But why cart the ape around and suffer the expense of keeping it for only cruelty? He shrugged and went up the ladder to the deck.

Brophy was standing in the wing of the bridge when Jim came on watch. „This kind of gets a guy,“ Brophy said softly. „Something’s in the wind, and you don’t know what or where it’ll come from.“

Mayo nodded. „Better get below and turn in,“ he said. „They won’t wait much longer. They’ve got to strike between here and Banggai, because there’s a destroyer there now.“

He watched Brophy down to the main deck and then turned back. The visibility was good, for the night was clear and the stars were bright. Tupa, the Alfura seaman taken aboard in Bonthain, was at the wheel, Selim on watch in the bow.

His thoughts reverted to Romberg. There was more in the wind than a plan to eliminate him. That, he was certain, was only incidental to greater plans, and they must be plans with some bearing on the cargo below. Drilling machinery it might be, and some of it obviously was; but there were other supplies, also.

The sea was calm, just a light wind blowing. He took his glasses and scanned the sea thoughtfully. A sub? There hadn’t been a sub sighted since the affair off the New Guinea coast. True, there were German agents in the East Indies; there had been efforts at sabotage, but most of it ineffectual.

Aside from the attempts to create revolt among native tribes in Papua and to destroy shipping, things had gone along smoothly. It was so obvious a tactic to attack the far-flung British Empire at many points, and as Holland was supported by the British navy in the Indies, that included the Netherlands Indies.

Ponga Jim let one hand slip up to the gun butt in the shoulder holster. War couldn’t come to the Indies without becoming a personal problem.

Romberg was a wily customer. Had the plot to kill him in the Parakeet Nest succeeded, he would have been safely out of the way, and still the cargo would have gone on to Banggai Bay, and whatever else remained of the plot would have proceeded without further delay.

Sparks walked out on the bridge. „Message for you, Cap,“ he yawned sleepily. „Just came in.“

„Suppose you turn in, Sparks? You may get another long shift tonight. I’ll listen in occasionally.“

McVey turned and left the bridge. The message was brief and to the point. It said:

NO CARGO EXPECTED BANGGAI. ROMBERG, KESSLER, BRAUNIG  
UNKNOWN. HAVE YOU GOT YOUR NECK OUT!

WILLIAM.

Ponga Jim frowned thoughtfully. He had suspected that it was some point near Banggai, but that they intended to transship there. He paced the bridge, his mind weighing the possibilities. When Gunner Millan came up to relieve him at four o'clock, he was still far from a solution.

The hours slipped by. The sun came up and the day warmed. The crew was under a strain. The men were jumpy. Several times Jim saw his three passengers gathered in serious conversations, but he ignored them until late in the afternoon. Braunig, his face battered and swollen, had just returned from feeding the orangutan, and the three were standing amidships. Jim came out of the passageway and strolled up to them.

„Suppose you guys let your hair down,“ he said slowly, „and tell me just where you think you're going? I know it isn't Banggai.“

Romberg's lips tightened, and he glanced at Kessler. „Unfortunately, Captain Mayo, our plans have gone somewhat awry. However, it is true we don't have any great desire to land at Banggai. We intended to see the cargo was taken to Tembau.“

„My deal says Banggai,“ Ponga Jim said sharply. „And to Banggai we go.“

Romberg cleared his throat. „Captain Mayo, I know something of shipping conditions in these waters now and how difficult it is to keep busy. Suppose I offered you a bonus to carry us to Tembau.“

Jim shrugged. „You know my terms: cash first. It'll cost you five thousand. If I don't get it, you go to Banggai and you can deal with the native rajah there.“ He grinned. „However, he has no love for Germans and is very pro-British.“

Romberg hesitated, but Ponga Jim had seen triumph leap into his eyes.

„All right, Captain Mayo,“ Romberg said. „I'll see you in the salon at dinner. It will take all my available funds and those of my friends. But we'll manage.“

On the impulse of the moment, Jim stepped into the radio room when he went forward. Picking up a pencil, he wrote rapidly.

„Tear that up after you send it, Sparks,“ he ordered. „And stand by.“

It read:

WILLIAM GIRARD,  
HOTEL KONINGSPLEIN,  
MAKASSAR, CELEBES, N. E. I.  
DESTINATION TEMBAU. OUT OF THE FRYING PAN INTO THE FIRE.

MAYO.

The Semiramis pushed her bows into the seas, rolling easily on a changed course. Tembau lay on the edge of the Greyhound Strait. There was one

anchorage, Ponga Jim Mayo was remembering. It was one he had never seen, but it had become almost a legend in the islands. Tukoh Bay wasn't a nice place, for it had become a resort for all the renegades in the islands. But if it was Tukoh Bay they wanted, to Tukoh Bay they would go.

Tupa was in the crow's nest when the SEMIRAMIS slipped through the outlying reefs to Tembau. The island lifted itself high out of the water, and from the sea there was no evidence of the village at Tukoh Bay. Slug Brophy came up to the bridge. He had two guns strapped on. Gunner Millan was standing by on the poop deck with several of the crew.

Slowly the old tramp wallowed into Tukoh Bay, and Jim Mayo gave the word to let go forward. A few minutes later, the three Germans went over the side into a native sampan and were taken ashore. Lighters came alongside, and with them, Kessler and Braunig to superintend the discharge of their cargo.

When the last sling was going over the side with its cases, Romberg came aboard.

„Well, Captain, you promised delivery, and here we are. I want to thank you for a pleasant voyage. But as the tide is out, you won't be leaving before daybreak. Perhaps I'll see you before then.“

Daybreak! Ponga Jim felt himself turn cold inside. Night in Tukoh Bay? That was something he'd overlooked. The town was full of cutthroats ready for anything that promised payment. He watched the three men go ashore and saw the lighters pull away.

Red Hanlon, the chief engineer, came up from below, wiping his hands. Jim motioned to him.

„Listen, Red, I want you to keep steam up all night. We can't get out of here until daybreak. And with that crowd ashore, anything may happen.“

„Tell Slug and the Gunner I want to see them in my cabin, Li, and quick!“ Jim ordered the steward.

In a bungalow built back under the trees behind the little village of Tukoh Bay, the three Germans sat together. Behind a low table was another chair, and the man who sat there was thin and bald. He looked old, yet when he moved it was with a grace that proved him much younger than he appeared. His features were narrow, hawklike. A big man, powerfully built, lay on a divan nearby.

The man behind the table shuffled some papers on his desk. „How many men does he have?“ he demanded harshly.

„Twenty-five in all,“ Romberg said. „The steward is a Chinese and can be discounted.“

The man behind the desk stared at Romberg coldly. „A Chinese? Discounted? That was what the Japanese thought. Let us not make the same mistake.“ He paused. „Armament?“

Romberg hesitated. „I'm not sure. Each of the officers is armed. I believe they have two rifles for game, and a shotgun.“

„You needn't worry, Herr Heitn,“ the big man on the divan said. „I've heard a lot of this Ponga Jim Mayo, and those boys of mine would like to take him.“

„Don't forget, Petrel,“ Heitn replied drily, „that a submarine has failed, that this man almost single-handed captured a ship and destroyed a sub. This man is not

to be trifled with. No doubt," he said, glancing at the discoloration on Braunig's eye, „that our friend could tell us a little about him.“

Heitn glanced from one to the other. „We must not fail this time. The boat must be seized, the crew destroyed.“

It was dark in the cabin when Li entered, but he flashed no light. „Captain Mayo?“ he whispered. „They come now.“

Silently, Ponga Jim got up and strapped on his guns. Then he took down the rifle. By the chronometer, which he struck a match to check, it was almost three in the morning. Another hour and it would be turning gray. He picked up the automatic rifle and walked to the bridge.

Brophy was leaning on the bulwark looking over the dodger. It was pitch-dark, but not far out there was a larger blob on the water.

„Tupa in the crow's nest?“ Mayo asked.

Brophy nodded. „Yeah, everybody's at his station. What you going to do, Skipper? Hoist 'em aboard with the winches?“

„Wait and see. I'm going to give those boys a bellyful of war.“

„I hope you know what you're doing. There's more than two hundred men out there. Selim slipped ashore, and he says they're armed to the whiskers.“

The boats were nearer now. Ponga Jim walked back slowly to the wheelhouse.

„All right, Sparks,“ he commanded. „Lights!“

Suddenly the sea flashed into white brilliance under the rays of three great searchlights, and almost at the same instant, the whistle blew the fire drill signal. Hoses were strung out and connected. The boats swung alongside, and the attackers began swarming up the side.

„Steam!“ Jim roared, firing a blast into the nearest boat.

In almost the same instant, a roar of steam belched from the fire hoses, full into the faces of the men swarming up the sides and clinging to the rail of the SEMIRAMIS!

One gigantic half-caste took the blast full in the face at scarcely a yard. His face vanished as if by magic, and screaming horribly, the man let go of the rail and tumbled back into the water.

It was all over in an instant. Screaming in agony, the attackers leaped into the sea. From the bridge, Ponga Jim waited, watching.

Unnoticed, a motor launch had slipped in close to the bow, and suddenly, there was a yell from forward. Ponga Jim spun around, firing as he turned. His shot knocked the gun from the hands of a big Swede he recognized as Hankins.

Then, with a rush, the group swept aft. Two of his own men went down. The others, caught from behind, rushed for shelter aft, unable to handle the hoses effectually without endangering others of the crew. The major attack was broken, but now, with dawn breaking and safety in sight, defeat swept down upon them behind a hail of lead. Jim ran down the ladder, and whirled at the foot of it to find himself face-to-face with Braunig.

The big German had rushed forward from the after part of the ship, and for an instant Jim failed to appreciate what it might mean. The German jerked up his gun and fired. Mayo dropped into a crouch, hammering a stream of slugs at

Braunig. The first shot struck the man in the chest, but by some superhuman burst of strength he lunged forward, firing again.

A terrific blow slammed Mayo on the head, and he spun halfway around, but not before seeing Braunig topple over on his face, dead.

Romberg was nowhere in sight, but the battle had divided itself suddenly into a series of individual scraps. Kessler, leaping from the body of a Malay fireman, his knife red with blood, turned to see Ponga Jim, coming toward him. Kessler hurled the knife, but he missed. Then Jim leaped in a flying tackle, and they crashed to the hatch, rolling over and over.

Jim came up on top and leaped free. The German jumped up and landed a left that knocked Jim back on his heels. Kessler let go with another, but Mayo grappled with him and hurled the man back against a winch. As Kessler came at him, Mayo caught him with a short left hook that cracked against the German's chin with a pop like the report of a pistol. Kessler toppled forward, unconscious.

Grabbing up his fallen gun, Ponga Jim ran aft. In the passageway he stumbled over a body. And on number four hatch was another, but the battle seemed to have centered forward. And Jim Mayo could only recall that Braunig had come forward. What could he have done aft? And how did he get there?

Suddenly, a shrill scream of horror sounded from the poop deck, and Mayo reached the stern in two bounds, just in time to see Li come staggering out of the passageway, screaming with fear.

The Chinese steward staggered over a chock and fell headlong just as Jim leaped through the door. He stopped, dead still, feet spread wide.

Not six feet away, the huge orangutan was standing, its bloodshot eyes burning with hate. Its hands, arms, and face were stained with blood, and at its feet lay what was left of Romberg, a horror only to be recognized by the clothing. Then the ape sprang!

Mayo's gun jerked up, and the trigger slammed on an empty chamber. Quickly, Jim dropped the gun and hurled his closed fist at the creature's body. It landed solidly, and the beast gave a queer, gasping cry. Then one hand slapped across Jim's face, knocking him against the bulkhead. The ape sprang, ripping the shirt from his shoulders. But Mayo swung aside, and then leaped, swinging a barrage of blows that knocked the big ape head over heels.

Slowly, the orangutan crawled to its feet. The murderous fury still blazed in its eyes, but it was wary now. This was a different mode of attack, something new. Suddenly, it grabbed the pipes overhead and hurled itself bodily through the air, feet first!

Jim tried to duck, but those feet struck him full on the chest and he turned a complete somersault, sprawling on the deck outside, gasping for breath. The ape sprang at him, snarling and screaming; but Jim rolled over and caught the animal with a vicious kick as it leaped toward him. It toppled back, and Jim smashed a right to the face.

The orangutan dropped to the deck and began to whimper.

Cautiously, Jim got to his feet, and prodded the ape below and into its cage. Then he snapped the lock that Romberg had unfastened. Somehow, the big ape had got to him before he could escape. Trained to hate men and to kill, the beast had acted violently.

Ponga Jim Mayo staggered back to the deck. There were no sounds of fighting now, but when he raised his head he saw a seaplane at anchor nearby. He went toward it.

Major Arnold was leaning against the deckhouse amidships lighting a cigarette. He lifted an eyebrow as he saw how battered Jim was.

„Fighting again?“ he asked wearily. „Such brutality! Tsk, tsk, tsk!“

Ponga Jim looked very astonished.

„Me? Fighting? I’ve done more battling in the last few days than the whole Allied army has done since the war started!“

Arnold nodded. „We got Kessler. What happened to Romberg and Braunig?“

Ponga Jim told him briefly.

„The worst one got away,“ the major said. „Heitn, his name was. We’ve been trying to get him for months.“

„Have a drink?“ Jim invited.

The major nodded. „What were they carrying in those cases, Jim?“

„Ammunition and guns,“ Jim replied. „It’d been chaos for us if they’d distributed them. I wasn’t certain of their cargo until we reached Tembau. Then I knew.“

„Well, here’s how,“ said the major, downing his drink. Then, „Who-o-o-o! What was in that glass?“

„My own concoction. I call it a Barata Sling.“

„Gad!“ breathed Major Arnold. „What action!“

„Action?“ said Ponga Jim Mayo, laughing. „You mean reaction. Wait until you try to get up!“

