

# ZAMBOANGA MONKEY CAPER

As Monkeys go he wasn't much to look at. Just your average brownish-orange primate. Mugsy was ten to twelve pounds of pure devilment with a pot belly from the good life he led as mascot aboard our ship.

Our ship was a wooden, Australian built 112 ft. Fairmile "B" U.S. Army Transport vessel supplying the Army forces that held small secured perimeter areas along the New Guinea coastline in that far-away battle area of '44-'45. (And yes, Virginia, it's true..... "The monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga!")



Our unit of three similar vessels was being moved up to the Philippines. We were to be towed in tandem to conserve logging time on the twin high-octane Stirling gas engines that powered our FSA's. The night before leaving Finschhafen we took on stores for our ten-day trip. After loading we were invited to what turned out to be a wake to solemnize the break-up of the Harbor Craft group, as everyone was moving up to different areas. The scuttlebutt was that someone was out to steal Mugsy while we were whoopin' it up at the party. So,

instead of locking him up in his cage out on the deck as was our usual habit when leaving the ship, someone had the bright idea of locking him up in the wheelhouse.

The party was a good one. It was near six hours before we stumbled boozily aboard and proceeded to the wheelhouse to remove Mugsy to his cage before falling into our bunks.



We were met with a sight of destruction so monstrous we were instantly sobered. The smell hit us first....an odorous mixture of urine, vomit, tobacco, whiskey, candy bars, and cookies. That damned monkey had broken into the stores we had carefully loaded aboard. He had methodically opened the case of "Old Gold" cigarettes, then every carton, and every pack....then tore apart every cigarette!

We never found out if he started with the candy and cookies, the cigarettes, or went to the booze first. In any event he was passed out.... laying there in his

own filth, drool seeping from the side of his mouth, not moving except for an occasional burp and shudder that wracked his small body like a minor earthquake.

It took the entire crew the rest of the night to clean up the mess, and come 0400 we received a hail from the tug to attach their messenger line to our bridle, so they could haul it aboard their tug. After checking and securing the towing gear for the vessels being towed behind us, we were off.

Not two hours into the trip we found the rest of the damage done by our very hung-over and sick mascot. He had also managed to wreck the radio and mess up all the charts. The Skipper, who hadn't wanted the "filthy animal" aboard to begin with, was livid and threatening to throw the little SOB overboard if he so much as laid eyes on him again. I don't know to this day what happened or who the culprit was, but early the next morning we discovered an empty cage and no sign of our mischievous mascot. Some said they saw him tossed overboard, but were forever sworn to secrecy.

A pall covered the ship with a gloomy atmosphere almost thick enough to taste. Grown men with tears in their eyes spoke in hushed tones of their "little buddy" tossed to the cruel sea. Tales of his escapades (now harmless and cute) told over and over. How he liked to play hide and seek, jumping out of nowhere to spring on a passerby, how he loved to play tag, and how much company he was (many a watch even I had found myself talking to him). And how once the crew was at each others throats for days thinking we had a kleptomaniac aboard, until we removed the cover from the 20mm cannon and out dropped the missing lighters, money, pens, etc. hidden there by our small friend. We all missed him....even the Skipper, who swore he wasn't the one that threw him overboard.

After a couple of days cold reason finally took hold....brought on no doubt by the fact that we had only salvaged less than three packs of cigarettes to last the whole crew for the ten day trip. Sentiment gave way to raw nerves and nicotine withdrawal tension, and finally anger at that blasted animal that not only wasted the cigarettes but ruined the candy bars and cookies that might have put an end to some of the withdrawal symptoms.

By the time we pulled into Zamboanga the consensus was unanimous that we were well rid of the cigarette-eating little bastard. In fact, if we'd have known his name, we'd have pinned a medal on the guy who turned that damnable monkey into flotsam.

The tug helped our three vessels to the pier and as the last ship in line tied fast, a group jumped ashore and came running up to us screaming at the top of

their lungs. As they neared we heard joyous shouts of “WE SAVED YOUR MONKEY! WE SAVED YOUR MONKEY!!”

They had indeed saved our monkey. Seeing him clinging to the tow line, they had plucked his wet and bedraggled body from the ocean and had lovingly nursed him back to health. Those guys were so proud of saving the little devil that even the Skipper didn't have the heart to tell 'em what we really thought.

I was transferred soon after that so I couldn't say if Mugsy ever was made to feel really at home again aboard ship. But I can say this....whenever I see a monkey....or hear of a monkey, I think of Zamboanga....ships....the sea....salt air....and THANK GOD I've got a DOG!!