

it was a rash act indeed. Perhaps he had recently come from the Eastern Front and had no fear of Russian fighters, but we were not the Yaks or MIGs he was used to fooling with.

We broke into them. In thirty seconds he had discovered his mistake. As soon as we broke, he pulled straight up into a loop. Then, as he got over the top and started down, he rolled out, doing a sort of half Cuban eight. He lost his friend in this maneuver; the wingman continued diving, and I'm not sure anyone picked him up. I tried to follow my man, but I didn't have enough speed. In military-emergency power, I just managed to stagger over the top of the loop. But once I got the nose down, I accelerated rapidly. He had opened quite a lot of sky between us, but I had kept him in sight. Now I began to close the distance. We were in a long shallow dive. His wingspan gradually grew within the bright orange circle of my sight. A quick glance down at the gun switch verified that my guns were hot. I stayed slightly low in his blind spot. He may have mistaken my wingman, who was quite far back, for me, because the German continued in his descending, high-speed run. Although my wingman was way back, he was well out to the side, and my numbers 3 and 4 were wide on the other side. We had the poor bugger boxed in.

Now the 109 almost filled the sight; I had to be in range now! Surely I was no more than 200 yards away. I had the pipper low in the center of his fuselage when I squeezed off the first short burst. No strikes. Thank God our group did not put tracers in the normal load, or they would have given me away. I didn't like tracers anyway; they tended to draw the eye away from the sight. The pilot invariably wound up holding the trigger down, trying to steer the tracers onto the target, a nearly impossible task. Quickly raising the pipper almost to the tip of his tail, I fired again and was rewarded this time with strikes quick-flashing around the fuselage and wing roots. Then his prop wash threw me off him momentarily.

Before I could get the sight back on him for another burst, the pilot left his airplane. The 109's nose dipped suddenly, catapulting him out. His chute blossomed. I could plainly see him suspended beneath it, a dark, toylike figure, swaying gently as he floated down. I told my number 3 to take my wingman and his and to pull off a ways so I would be free to maneuver around the chute. Putting the gun switch in the Camera Only position, I made a pass at him, being careful to break off so my slipstream would not collapse his canopy. As I passed to the side of him, I raised my gloved hand in a half wave-half salute and then re-formed my Right.

It occurred to me as we started for home that he may have thought I was going to shoot him out of his harness when I lined up on him. Poor bastard; he must have really puckered up. We had heard that some in the Eighth Air Force were shooting Germans in parachutes, but I didn't believe it. I knew for sure that nobody in our group did it, and I never heard of an instance of it in our wing. I don't think we would have tolerated anyone who pulled a trick like that. Leaving chutes alone was not a written policy, just an application of the Golden Rule-no one knew when his turn to bail out was coming. This latest victory brought my total to four.

When the pilot strength of the group finally rose to an acceptable level, a few pilots from each squadron were occasionally relieved from ops to make use of the R and R facilities both in Italy and the Middle East. My turn finally came, a trip to Egypt

and Palestine. Tommy Molland was going too, as was Doctor Tom and Edge.

Captain Leland "Tommy" Molland was one of the few remaining pilots from Spitfire days and was, by any scale of reckoning, a fighter pilot's fighter pilot. He had joined the 31st in June 1943 at Korba North in Tunisia and had fought through Malta, Sicily, and the landing at Salerno. Three victory crosses decorated his Spit by the time the group left Castel Volturno. He was one of the few old-timers who took the change in aircraft in stride, continuing his outstanding combat record in the Mustang. He became an ace over Ploesti on April 21, 1944, when he scored twice.

Tommy looked the fighter type: handsome, of average height but lean, and he moved easily, with the certain grace that marked him as an athlete. He was not given to idle chatter, generally remaining quiet unless he had something to say and never using two words when one would do. But he could fly that machine; he was a great pilot and a courageous and resourceful leader in the air. I was pleased that Tommy would be part of the R and R group.

After an uneventful flight across the eastern Mediterranean in a war-weary B-17, our magic carpet, we were installed in quite a nice hotel in Cairo. We were within walking distance of Shepherd's Hotel, whose lovely garden beckoned and to which we hied ourselves most afternoons. We passed the time sitting in the shade and sipping our drinks. It was very pleasant.

We did make a halfhearted attempt at sight seeing, of course. We were taken in tow by a hotel employee who spoke passable English. At least, I think he was a hotel employee. He sported an official looking brass badge, which proclaimed him to be a dragoon (whatever that was). I don't remember what he charged, but it was not much and he earned it. He did all the negotiating with taxi drivers and tradespeople, gesturing wildly and speaking rapidly in Arabic. The discussions were often heated, but I don't think it was a show for our benefit, the prices he got for us were considerably lower than those paid by more adventuresome travelers.

We went out to see the pyramids but declined the invitation of one of the guides to enter Cheops, preferring instead to stage a camel race between Doctor Tom and myself. In spite of our best efforts, the poor beasts could be urged along only just fast enough to stay ahead of the outraged camel drivers, who ran along behind yelling unintelligibly. We called the race a draw and salved the drivers' ruffled feelings with a little extra baksheesh. The Sphinx, its chin supported by an impressive array of sandbags, looked down on us benignly. Then, suddenly, we were hot and sweaty and had enough. Back to Shepherd's we went. The train trip up the Nile to Alexandria was made in darkness, so we saw nothing of the scenery. We said little as we rattled and swayed through the warm Egyptian night, alternately dozing and observing the British soldiers and robed Arabs who were our co-travelers.

Alexandria presented a different appearance, more modern, and cleaner than Cairo-this last was not a particularly difficult feat to achieve. Not too far from the city was a horse-racing track with a fine clubhouse, the whole of which had been taken over by the British Army. There was a golf course within the oval, so Doctor Tom and I tried our hand at nine holes, stopping occasionally to marvel at the cluster of thoroughbreds that went thundering by. It was a delightful place to be in the summer of 1944.

I got sick in Tel Aviv-the pharaoh's revenge. Although I did manage the trip to Jerusalem, I aborted on the side trip to Bethlehem, spending the day in my room convalescing. Later we visited