



An ME-109G of the elite Hungarian Puma Group Veszprem Airdrome, near Lake Balaton, July 1944

the Mount of Olives and Calvary. The surroundings, with their densely packed buildings, were nothing like the crucifixion pictures I had seen, however, and my preconceptions made connection with the real sites all but impossible. We drove past a police station whose lower floor had been blown out by Jewish nationalists a few days before, killing two constables. Is the Irgun on the side of the Germans?" I wondered aloud. Not hardly! "Then why are they killing Brits?" Doctor Tom started a long rambling discourse on the politics of Palestine that tailed off inconclusively. He didn't know either.

One of the Toms had found a girl and brought her up to the room for a drink. She was of indeterminate origin, but certainly a Middle Easterner and not bad looking, either, except for a gap between her two front teeth. She proclaimed more than once that "I am more byoothiful than Hedy Lamarr, only my theeth are too far apart." I thought that was stretching things a bit, but I nodded and smiled noncommittally.

Then it was time to pack up. I think all of us, but especially Molland and I, were happy at the prospect of going back home to San Severo.

While I was in the Middle East, Claude went off to gunnery school somewhere in Africa. I didn't even know there was such a school until I got back and heard his story. Exactly who did the teaching and what they taught was a mystery to me. I, for one, had found out all I needed to know about gunnery; I was perfectly happy with my combat intuition. If they'd tried sending me to the school, I'd have resisted going for fear that a lot of theory would cause me to start analyzing things, to start thinking too much. Unless they could show me a new way to get a zero-deflection shot, I was not interested. But I don't think Claude had anything to fear from too much desk work. It was an even money bet that while at school he drank and played poker all night and slept all

day.

He took a P-51 down there, so, when the course was over, he fired up his Mustang and took off for San Severo. Not far along the way, while still over some very inhospitable-looking terrain, his engine quit and he was forced to leave the airplane. His chute opened, and he landed without injury in a desert wasteland. While Claude was sitting on a rock, trying to collect his wits, several burnoose-clad Arabs rode up on camels and glared at him fiercely while fingering the hafts of some nasty-looking knives. Claude gave them his most disarming smile, which disarmed them not one bit. Then he tried his "Me American" thing, but that didn't impress them either. Finally he managed, by signs and words like baksheesh to convince them that they would be paid handsomely if they got him to an army unit. That they understood.

Their encampment was not far off. Claude was left to roam about among the tents while they made preparations for the trek to take him out, which they planned for the following day. Here Claude's narrative digressed a bit to describe the beautiful brown eyes that glanced at him furtively and invitingly over drawn veils. Surely this part of the tale was all BS. Stories about American Romeos being found with their testicles inside their mouths and the lips sewn together were passed around as gospel. True or not, they were enough to give one pause. Still, knowing Claude....

Claude and his guides started early and traveled all day and part of the next before coming to a small U.S. Army outpost. Claude had no idea where he was. After a few preliminary inquiries, arrangements were made to take him to their headquarters and thence to an airfield. He finally caught a ride to Italy and then to San Severo. He was unable to tell us where he went down or what reward his rescuers received. If they were lucky, it was a couple of cartons of cigarettes. But, knowing the Army's propensity for red tape, it was probably nothing at all. And as far as I could tell,