

# EXODUS EL ARISH

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The Six Day War in the Middle East was less than a week away. The RCAF at 115 ATU El Arish and the Canadian Army at Raffa were given 48 hours to leave Egypt by Col. Nasser, after which we were "persona non grata".

Monday morning, 29 May 67 had, as usual, a beautiful sunrise. The first C-130 from Trenton whistled over our Camp at dawn toward El Arish Airport, eight miles in the desert, to begin shuttling personnel to Pisa, where the Yukons were waiting to take our people to Trenton. As adjutant, all ranks started to ask me if it was okay to go to the airport to see the action taking place there. Little did I know that as soon as they got to the airport they were hustled aboard a C-130 and departed forthwith for Pisa and Trenton. Even my CO (W/C James Fitzsimmons) said he was heading for the airport to meet the first C-130 and that I was to see that the Marina was evacuated in an orderly manner. He told me he would be back by 1000 hours to ensure everything was made ready to abandon the Marina, which had been the home of the RCAF for nearly ten years with UNEF.

## BEDLAM

I kept myself busy, destroying files, papers, code & cypher books, classified documents, etc. I never realized that as the Canadians poured out, the "Gypos" poured in. The Marina became a bedlam and nightmare. As the buildings became vacant, the house boys and laborers looted them. Fights broke out all over the camp. I saw our Egyptian workers carrying away rations, chairs, tables, and anything that could be moved. The mess hall staff had so much stuff piled in their arms that it kept falling off. I remember seeing a frozen turkey awkwardly juggled like a basketball, being dropped and picked up in an endless cycle. They were merely enacting a typical desert scene — when a camel dies on the Caravan Road, the hyenas are first on the spot and take what they want, and vultures have to wait, but immediately the hyenas withdraw, the vultures rush in, and after this, the disintegration of the carcass is rapid.

I went to the Officers' Mess, where, over the entrance door was a sign reading "Welcome to 1000 B.C.", at about 1100 hours, and although Mess Regs. stated I should not partake of drink before noon, I thought — what the hell! As the temperature was getting into the 90's I may as well enjoy myself, and have a beer. As I approached, I could hear the clatter and loud shouting in Arabic, when I opened the door, the place

was choked with our former servants, laborers, house boys, etc.

## CHRISTMAS TREE

These people who would have never entered this "Sanctum Sanctorum" under any circumstances, were helping themselves to our "hospitality" bar. The word was out! The Canadians are leaving — fast! and as I said before, according to their laws of survival, everything and everyplace was fair game for looting. A few fled when they saw me, but many stayed, just to defy me. One had our Christmas decorations strung around his neck — my expression was answered! — "they would," he said, "make a nice decoration for his Bedouin wife," — A Muslim! with Christian symbols? I agreed, but snickered to myself, what would the Israelis think when they saw this walking Christmas tree. That is, if they ever got this far!

Little did I realize, that only five percent of the Egyptian Army was literate, and could handle the sparkling new Russian equipment they were entrusted with. I was always fascinated when I used to watch how the Egyptian mechanics removed MIG-17 Main Sparfs with a sledgehammer. I always joked with our EO about one sledgehammer is just as good as a whole box of tools.

## RUSSIANS

On the way to the Mess, I wondered —

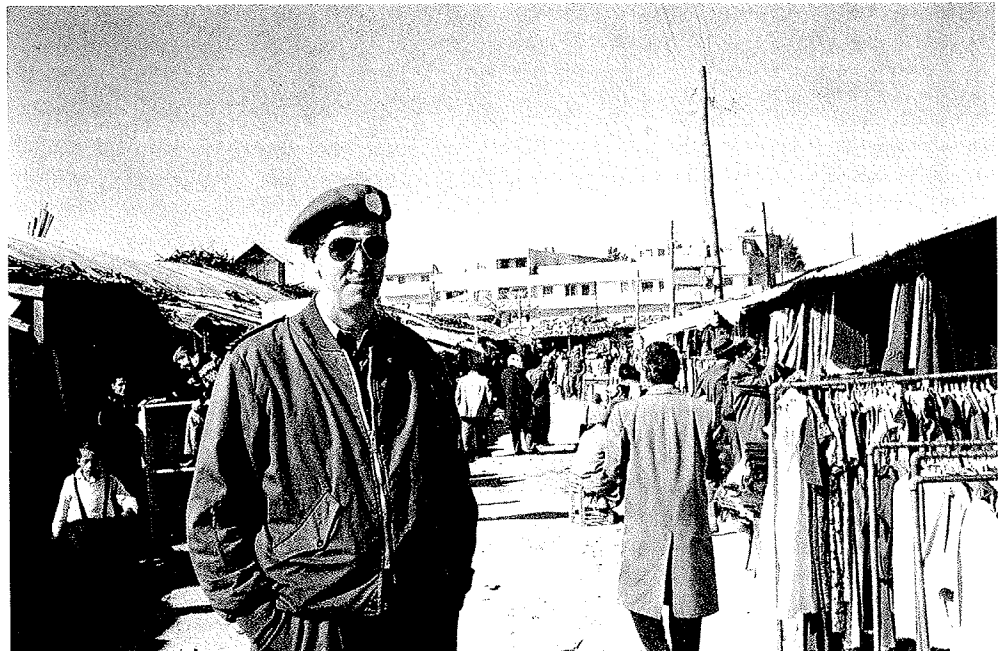
where the hell are all of my buddies? No Canadians in sight — what the hell was going on? Where the hell was the CO? The road outside the gate was clogged with long lines of military traffic. From Cairo came the ponderous T-34 and T-54 Russian tanks, clanking down the only road in the Sinai, and up to Gaza to join the billion dollars worth of equipment already arrayed along our camp perimeter road. Flat cars of confidently waving troops, shouting "Tel Aviv in three days", chugged by.

The grass shack outside our gate which sold souvenirs to new "Pinkies," (new arrivals who sunburned easily), appropriately named "Simpson Sears," had a new sign, "Going out of business." The Egyptian, who was the proprietor, and who could not read English, wondered as well as I what was happening.

I got myself a beer and waited with my entourage of tattered "Gypos", I smiled, and they smiled — we were all having a wonderful time! Just like the "Mad Hatters Tea Party." 1300 hours — and no CO! Where the hell was he? Not a Canadian anywhere in sight on the camp! It was then I realized I was the only one left at this God damn Marina, eight miles from the airport.

## FORGOTTEN

The C-130's were still flying overhead, heading for Pisa with happy time expired RCAF personnel on board — and maybe even my CO, who had, I thought, completely forgotten me.



The author in the Palestinian Bazaar, Gaza, Apr 67. Note both hands in pockets

— one hand was on the wallet, the other on valuables!

Finally at 1330 hours, the CO burst into the Mess, and wanted to know, what the hell was going on? I said that I was having an early TGIF and do you care to join me, Sir! I mentioned we had a few extra Mess guests, and that I couldn't vouch for their conduct!

After several beers, suddenly the electric power was shut off. The CO instructed me to go and check the power house, and get the power on. "Christ," I was never in the power house in my life.

I made my way towards the power shack, watching beds being thrown out second story windows, looting and screaming, it was a shambles. The Egyptians were everywhere, picking the bones of our once spotless little camp clean.

#### YOU DO IT

The power house contained two large diesels, the operators were having a discussion, chattering in Arabic, and when I ordered them to turn the generators on, they replied "you turn them on", to which I made a 180' and headed back to the Mess.

Things were getting a little hot and the natives, not being used to alcoholic drinks, were really getting restless. The CO and I realized at once, that although we were supposed to stay till 1630 hours — remaining any longer would only have been foolhardy, so with my one suitcase, and the clothes on my back, we headed for the airport. It was like a grade "B" movie, the CO driving like a lunatic, I had all my nails bit down to the quick before the first mile. The name of the game was blow the horn and step on the gas! Half way there, an Egyptian MP waved us to stop. The CO told me to



Looking toward our beach house from my quarters at the Marina (home of the

RCAF) with the railway line in the foreground.

hold on, and we flew off the road and over a sand dune, I thought I was back with "Lawrence of Arabia." On the other side was a large Russian T54 tank manned by an Egyptian crew, who had lost control and ran over one of their scout cars, the two occupants were squashed like "bugs in a rug".

#### CARIBOU

We finally got to the airport, and there, waiting for us was one of our Caribou's, flown by F/O Reb Edgar, and, I believe, F/O

Dave Lamb. The starboard engine was shut down, but the port was still running. They had been waiting for us for at least an hour, and didn't know if we would ever "show" or not!

As we drove up and stopped under the starboard wing, the CO took the keys from our white UN staff car and threw them into the desert. We were airborne in minutes. As we flew over the Marina at about 50 feet, the CO in the right seat called me forward, and said with a smile, "I just looked down at our Headquarters building, and "YOU" forgot to lower the ensign!"

**GHOST FLIGHT OF RL 206**