

# Frank Palenik and the Crazy Canadians

By John W. Howland

During his second tour of duty, Frank Palenik was Squadron Bombardier for the 535th Squadron. Frank became acquainted with some Mosquito reconnaissance pilots who were flying out of a base just north of Ridgewell. These Canadians rented a house in the London area, and all shared in stocking the larder with booze and food. Some of the food was liberated from the well stocked pantry of the 381st BG Mess Hall. One one occasion a Mosquito pilot invited Frank to take a ride in one of their fast, wonderful, twin engine planes. Frank accepted the offer, cleared the flight with his commanding officer at the 381st BG, and showed up at the Mosquito base for a joyride.

Frank was outfitted with an oxygen mask, flight suit and parachute, and they took off. After they were in the air and climbing Frank asked, "Where are we going?"

The pilot looked at Frank, smiled, and said "Berlin!"

Frank had already made five or six trips to that target with the 381st BG. He knew what kind of a reception to expect and wasn't at all happy about being Shanghaied aboard a Mosquito. However, he merely smiled back at the Canadian pilot and said, "Okay you Crazy SOB, let's go!"

The flight at high altitude was smooth, but as they flew into the Berlin area they noted a contrail coming in behind them and closing at a high rate of speed. Only one answer. It had to be a jet fighter, the famous Me-262. The Canadian pilot put the Mosquito into a 5 degree dive and they maxed out at about 450 MPH. But the jet was still gaining on them.

"What now?" asked Frank.

"Let me know when he is 500 yards in back of us," replied the pilot.

Frank watched intently and when the jet had closed to 500 yards, he sounded off. Immediately, the pilot cut the throttles back and dropped the wheels in one sweeping motion. The Mosquito's props and increased drag braked the aircraft. They slowed down rapidly and the jet went zooming by without firing a shot. Frank was still apprehensive about the jet returning to make another pass. However, the Canadian pilot wasn't concerned at all.

"Don't worry Frank. He's about out of gas. He's heading back to his base now."

Sure enough, the jet headed for home and they finished the mission without further incident.

Frank relates it was quite an experience, but he never went joy riding with those "Crazy Canadians" again.

Frank Palenik flew 62 missions and finished the war as a Captain. He retired from the Air Corps in 1945 and went to work in Forest and Wildlife Management. He died of natural causes in September 1992.

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