

# PAUL TUNTLAND

By JOHN C. CAMPION

June is a murderous month in Arizona especially in the southern part of the state in little towns like Douglas along the Mexican Border where at the close of World War II Paul Tuntland and I were stationed. Jagged red rocks twist and crack beneath the heat; ironwoods reach up as if to grapple with the blazing sky. Below the Border a low pressure area begins moving northward, slowly at first, almost unnoticed, then picking up speed like some sluggish giant awakening from a long winter's sleep.

That was the way it was that day in 1945 when Paul and I made our last flight together. We'd both recently received commissions in the Army Air Force as pilots and it was still something of a thrill to swing up into the cockpit of a B-25 and know that there, for the next few hours, we were free to do that which we both liked best. Fly.

As the plane left the runway I remember looking off to the South. In the distance the foothills of Agua Prieta stood out across the Border in dark relief against a strangely yellowing sky. It gave me an uneasy feeling even though at the time I admitted no fear of it. The weather had been that way for almost a week. Routine training flights had continued uninterrupted. There was no reason to believe ours would be any different.

The uneasiness left me as we continued climbing. The upper reaches of the sky were as untroubled and as breath-takingly beautiful as the crystal waters of a tropical lagoon. We spent hours surf-boarding through an unbroken sea of blue. Then at eight thousand feet it happened.

Our command set went dead. Once just before it went out we'd heard a voice trying to reach us. Then silence. As we swung back toward the field I froze suddenly in my seat. I glanced at Paul. His eyes were riveted on what lay ahead of us. A huge wall of writhing blackness, tainted here and there with muddy yellows and vivid greens, was racing toward us with what seemed incredible swiftness.

Its extent was so great it appeared to spread from horizon to horizon. And its visage could have been no less awful had Villa himself suddenly risen from his grave in terrible anger to begin another march across the barren wasteland that is the **Senora**.

Paul's eyes shifted to the gas gauges even before my own. Nothing needed to be said. We had used up most of our four-hour fuel supply. The terrain beneath us argued eloquently against a forced landing. There was then only one course open to us. Try to make it back to the field. We pushed the seventeenthies to the limit as we started in.

Three minutes from the field we encountered the outer fringe of the storm. Thirty seconds later we were in a world without dimension. No up. No down. Nothing. Only a roaring wet blackness that engulfed our plane and threatened to tear it asunder as if it had been a leaf left to the mercy of the storm.

The next sixty seconds were the longest of my life. I can remember Paul sitting beside me, his eyes never leaving the battery of instruments that spun crazily before us, his hands strongly reassuring on the wheel that threatened to tear itself loose from its moorings. To me, however, our situation was utterly hopeless. I began tightening the leg straps of my parachute. I glanced at him as I slid from my

seat but if he was aware of it he gave no sign.

Slowly I fought my way to the escape hatch on the floor. The pull and release of gravity constantly changing sapped my strength until it seemed an eternity before I was finally able to open the hatch. Below the roaring was louder now and I thought about what it would be like bailing out into that swirling hell and of the jagged red rocks that unseen would reach for me. But at least there was a chance. It was better than going in with the plane.

As I turned to Paul to shout to him what I wanted to do I saw him watching me. A faint trace of a smile played at the corners of his mouth. I remember it because at the time it seemed so utterly incongruous. Then I heard him say: "Take it easy . . . we'll do all right . . ."

At the time I felt like saying something to him you only find in an uncensored Hemingway novel but a few seconds later the words were forgotten. Paul had found a tiny crack in that almost impenetrable storm and minutes later we crash-landed at the end of the North-South runway. We washed out a landing gear but by then nobody cared. In fact I felt like kissing him.

Shortly thereafter both Paul and I left the Army. I saw him only once or twice after that. And now, knowing I shall never see him again the way I was accustomed—beside me in the senior pilot's seat—I've suddenly realized those words of his are well suited to nearly anything we encounter in this life. Perhaps they're worth repeating.

"Take it easy . . . we'll do all right . . ."

Columbia Pictures Corp.,  
Hollywood, Calif.

Editor, Soaring Magazine

As one of Paul Tuntland's friends, I should like to express a personal word of tribute especially as it regards his work in the motion picture, "Gallant Journey." My job as a publicity man on the picture gave me an opportunity to see Paul in action rather well.

If you recall our publicity releases in the spring of 1946, during production, you know that "Gallant Journey" was the story of John J. Montgomery, who flew gliders on the Pacific coast as early as 1883. He was a side-eddy in the main current of aviation, but an earnest one. Glenn Ford played the Montgomery role, but Paul Tuntland did the flying.

Paul has told me that his work in "Gallant Journey" was perhaps his most challenging assignment, inasmuch as he literally was flying the unknown. The Montgomery gliders, of three main types, were reproduced in tubular metal framework and aviation cloth. And Paul flew all of them.

I don't wish here to dwell on the technical aspects of **how** Paul flew the Montgomery-type gliders, except to point out that only a guy with an instinctive "feel" for soaring could have done the job at all. It seems pertinent, though, to emphasize not merely the skill needed to fly the things, but also to do it within the production framework of a motion picture.

As you doubtless know, a movie company on location must have the integrated teamwork of a small army. This is true of even the most routine Western. Add any unique element—in this case the Montgomery gliders—and the problems multiply enormously. It is not enough merely to fly; one must fly within camera