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The Mummy's Flight
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In 1968 when American relations with Egypt were at a low point, the Central Intelligence Agency approached Howard Hughes with an expensive plan to obtain the Great Pyramid of Cheops.

At that time Egypt possessed the most formidable pyramids in the world. The C.I.A. believed that if the United States could secretly get hold of one for close study we would accumulate a mine of invaluable information with which to defend ourselves if Egypt started anything.

Hughes was equal to the challenge. His engineers proposed fitting wings on the Great Pyramid and flying it to the United States.

The idea was breathtaking in its simplicity, but the technological problems were immense, since the entire project had to be carried out in such a way that Egypt would not suspect anything unusual was going on.

To get wings on the pyramid without attracting attention, the builders had to fit them to the pyramid's base, which is always covered by sand. In this way, each night's progress on

wing-building could be concealed by covering the work with sand before sunrise.

Simultaneously, in Armonk, N. Y., an exact replica of the Great Pyramid was built in plastic. This was to be dropped by parachute on the same night the real Great Pyramid was flown out of Egypt, and put in its place so the Egyptians would not notice anything was missing.

Both ends of the job—in Egypt and Armonk—were completed on schedule and at 0300 on P-Day (Cairo time), the Great Pyramid of Cheops, powered by 300 jet engines mounted on underslung wings four miles long, roared down the desert floor and became airborne over the Mediterranean.

Moments later giant parachutes dropped the plastic replica into place. When the pyramid was approaching the Azores, however, it began to ice up and lose altitude alarmingly. The crew, aware that when it hit the water it would probably sink, before they could execute emergency abandonment procedures, had no choice but to bail out at 1,000 feet. This lightened the pyramid and its

descent stopped. A few minutes later, it passed through a weather front, the ice melted and the pyramid began to regain altitude. On automatic pilot, it went to 30,000 feet, circled awhile and then, more or less whimsically, started flying toward London.

This left the C.I.A. little choice. Richard Helms, then the director of Central Intelligence, called the Air Force and asked them to shoot the pyramid out of the sky before it reached London.

The Air Force duty officer to whom Helms spoke assumed that the director had gone insane and instantly notified the White House. The President was interrupted at tea and told that the Great Pyramid of Cheops was flying to London without a pilot.

He telephoned Helms to congratulate the C.I.A. for performing a prodigious technological feat and then telephoned the British Prime Minister and informed him that there was a pyramid headed his way out of control. The Prime Minister congratulated the United States on a fantastic achievement and requested the C.I.A. to apply

its wizardry to heading the pyramid off at the Channel.

Needless to say, the agency's best minds had already solved this problem. Even as the Prime Minister pleaded for help, agents in London were buying up every meat pie and boiled Brussels sprout on the English market.

Within the hour, squadrons of S.A.C. bombers loaded with meat pies and sprouts were taking off from the airfields of England. They intercepted the pyramid 300 miles southwest of Cornwall and plastered it.

True to C.I.A. technologists' predictions that no pyramid on earth could withstand the weight S.A.C. had at its disposal, the Great Pyramid stalled in midair, went into a spin and crashed into 3,600 feet of water, carrying 200 meat pies and 3,000 Brussels sprouts with it.

Was this daring operation worth its incredible cost to the taxpayer? Few at the agency have any doubts. Although the mission did not succeed in its original aim, they believe, it was still worth every cent it cost for what the United States learned about how to defend itself against attack by pyramid.

Since then the Pentagon has been stockpiling an arsenal of British cooking.