

The Further Adventures of
YOUTHLY PURESOME

by CDR Jack D. Woodul, USNR(Ret), artwork by Carl Snow



In small moments, the War always came back to him. He never remembered his minor triumphs, but frabb-ups were always sneaking up out of his subconscious, tapping him on the shoulder to say, "Remember me?" The ghosts of his flying career also occasionally emerged from their smoking holes in the ground and their fireballs in the sky to visit, though over the years they had largely merged with the spirits that haunted the skies over Schweinfurt, stilled the air over Gettysburg and sounded distant trumpets over the lonely white markers on the hills above the Little Big Horn.

But mostly, the daydreams came to Puresome in disassociated moments while going for a trot in the neighborhood or droning along at 41,000 feet following the magenta line from New York to San Francisco. The bagpipes would begin to keen and the drums would mark the relentless advance to the target. And Puresome would be gone.

The Shrill of the Bagpipes, The Roll of the Drums

Suddenly back in time, Puresome was stooging around a USAF HU-16 *Albatross* as it droned low over the ResCAP station in the Gulf of Tonkin. Far above, Puresome and his wingie on the other side of the circle from him were at max conserve power settings, waiting to cover the amphibian if someone got shot up and had to punch out over the water to land in the middle of a bunch of gomer bounty hunters. Or much more probably and seriously, the jets would be ready to go feet dry and shoot up the bad guys trying to hustle the duty downed F-105 Thud pilot or one of his pals off to the Hanoi Hilton before a helo showed up.



But today was quiet so far. Puresome had his mask in his lap. The sun streamed in through his canopy as he made lazy, low-speed wingovers. He watched the gray HU-16 over the drop tank and *Zuni* rocket pack sticking out from under the port wing of his A-4, the red paint under the leading edge slat starting to show as it crept out during the slow parts of

the gyrations. The *Albatross* crew below was probably eating box lunches instead of properly admiring his flying, he figured. This was the attack-puke version of the fighter guys orbiting at their CAP stations, waiting for MiGs that never came. Puresome looked at the waves, the puffy white cumulus clouds and the perfect blue sky. He was amazed that despite all the bang-bang, shoot-shoot going on just down the way, the earth was abiding well and the sun still rose and set with indifferent regularity.

Big Look, the aircraft that kept radar watch of the skies over North Vietnam, came up on guard with the MiG caution and location code words of the day. Puresome snuck out the ONC chart that was folded up in the lower left pocket of his g-suit and noted that the MiGs were up from both Kep and Phuc Yen. The calls kept coming—the changing codes showed that the gomers were flying around like it was their country or something, and business looked like it was going to pick up for some lucky fighter pilot. Puresome didn't go to high PRF, but when *Red Crown*, the ship that watched over gomer airspace from its station in the northern Tonkin Gulf, started making calls and the babble on guard increased, it was obvious that things were heating up. Puresome put on his mask and checked his fuel state.

When the call came that vectored them toward an A-4 pilot who had been unlucky enough to get shot up but lucky enough to make it to the water before he had to punch out, Puresome got real serious. He kicked his Scooter to 350 knots, selected wing stations one and five for his four-shot *Zuni* packs and rotated his weapons selector to "rockets." He next turned his gunsight rheostat to bright and double-checked his mil setting for *Zuni* delivery. All that was left was to turn on the master armament switch to make the trigger on his stick grip ready to fire.

The clouds grew thicker and lower as the HU-16 motored along as fast as its fat props would flail. Puresome was having to work hard to keep clear of the clouds while keeping his wingie and the *Albatross* in sight. Fortunately, the Scooter was quick and nimble when lightly loaded and its external tanks were dry. Puresome didn't carry the usual cargo of bombs today, only the two four-shot *Zuni* packs hanging under his wings and 150 rounds of 20mm ammunition.

As Puresome and his wingman approached the small bay where the downed pilot bobbed in his raft, the radios went completely crazy with terse conversation from the ResCAP flight. Mixed with those were calls from the downed pilot's wingie who was trying to direct those who were shooting at gomers heading toward the downed pilot. Guard channel was constantly breaking in with various codes, SAM and MiG alerts as well as fragments of tight-throated broadcasts from others in the area getting their asses shot off, screaming for tankers or hollering for help. The unnatural pitch and urgency of the transmissions alone were enough to raise the hair on Puresome's neck. It was understandable that the last part of a transmission from *Big Look* got stepped on.

"Garble, *Shotgun*, red...garble." The MiG code word for the day and the signal for probable attack was all Puresome heard. The rest of the transmission, the location code, was lost. Puresome was too busy to check his chart, but he knew the activity was close.

Suddenly there were fireballs streaking toward the HU-16 from a dark-green MiG that had popped out of nowhere and was closing at the speed of heat. "*Lifeguard*, break left! Break left! You've got a MiG up your ass!" Puresome screamed as he rammed the throttle to 100 percent and stuffed his nose over toward the *Albatross*, which cranked on a good turn. At its low speed and lower altitude, the amphibian's maneuver caused the fast-moving gomer to lose his firing solution and overshoot his target.

Puresome had just stuffed his nose down when he spotted a MiG closing on him rapidly, its front end lit up as it fired at him. Fireballs floated through the space where he'd just been. "*Ralph* lead, break left, break left! You've got a MiG on your ass and he's gunning!" hollered Puresome's wingman.

"No shitski!" thought Puresome as the rapidly closing MiG's nose pulled lead inside his turn and started hosing again. Puresome yanked on max g's and pulled his nose up to disappear into the clouds. He didn't have time to think, "He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day." Too busy for anything but surviving, he was by now nose high in the clouds and went on his Abba-Jabba all-attitude indicator to keep the nose

coming up, over, around and down in a barrel roll. As the A-4 rapidly picked up speed as it came down through the clouds, Puresome knew the MiG would either be gone or, with luck, out in front of him somewhere.

When he broke out of the clouds, he was nose low and going like stink. And there below him was the first MiG, re-engaged and trying to set up another pass at the squirming HU-16. Puresome had lots of smash and had flown into the clear almost on top of the MiG. He pulled lead and fired a pair of *Zunis*, which roared out in their impressive manner but were way short. Puresome kept pulling and fired again. And twice again. The fourth pair of *Zunis* either hit the low-flying MiG or he flew through the considerable waterspouts thrown up by the five-inch, supersonic missiles to crash in a tremendous splash of spray.

Ralph Two, his wingman, was hollering on guard for fighters. Puresome was about to ask his posit when he spotted an A-4 under the clouds opposite him and, low and fast, pulled across the circle to join.

Behind his wingie was MiG lead, now closing from deep six o'clock. Puresome reached down and pulled his emergency jettison T-handle to blow off his drop tanks and the empty *Zuni* pods. At the same time, he flipped on his gun-charging switch and felt the breech blocks slam home. His hand continued up to the gunsight to dial in 60 mils, the duty starting point for lead.

"*Ralph Two* from lead, you've got a MiG at your six, but I'm closing on him. I want you to drag him for a minute — I'll call your break."

"I don't have him. Ah...OK, tally at seven o'clock low."

The MiG was padlocked on his target and Puresome smoked on in, sliding slightly behind and underneath the two aircraft. With no fancy deflection shooting in mind, Puresome waited until the MiG's tailpipe filled his windscreen before he fired. The combination of tracer, high explosive and ball ammunition allowed him to hose a sparkling stream into the unsuspecting MiG; the short range allowed enough BBs to hit the gomer aircraft hard enough for parts to fly off. It exploded and plunged into the ocean in a bright orange wipe, followed by a dirty cloud of black smoke.

For purposes of the daydream, Puresome captured the fight on eight millimeter film, shot with the camera rigged with the remote release to film through the gunsight. Sometimes the *Albatross* crew caught it on film, too. Puresome was an attack pilot who wanted a MiG in the worst way, who always jumped everything he could as often as he could for the absolute, fierce joy of kicking someone's butt. Fortified with the armor plate of youth and extreme ignorance, there was never any other possibility.

The other daydream was a variation of an attack on Nam Dinh POL tanks. Since "I'm hit, but I'm rolling in anyway" was already taken, Puresome's variation was "shut up and let me bomb."



But reality was a sump of caution, misdirection, waste, abuse and a black wall below ground in Washington, D.C., with lots of names on it. The daydreams were different—a constant loop, a chapter that would not close. So Puresome chose, like his co-religionist Walter Mitty, to refuse the blindfold, place his heels together and flick his cigarette away into the fog, defiant and unafraid to the end.

It was better that way.