

The Further Adventures of  
**YOUTHLY PURESOME**

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Belching smoke, the Fox Four *Phantom* jet slud across the wake of USS Boat and lined up on its angled deck. "Ball!" came the terse radio call from the *Black Ace* in the groove.

Since this was a zip-lip air wing, the air wing LSO didn't say squat, but raised his waveoff pickle and padlocked on the approaching F-4. Puffs of smoke came from its engines as its pilot did his meatball-lineup-air-speed thing, trying to awe Paddles with his skill, not bolter, smack the blunt end of the boat or otherwise look bad.

By the time the sailor with binoculars had checked the Phantom's gear and hook down, the green light indicating a clear deck had come on. "All down, clear deck!" he hollered back at Paddles.

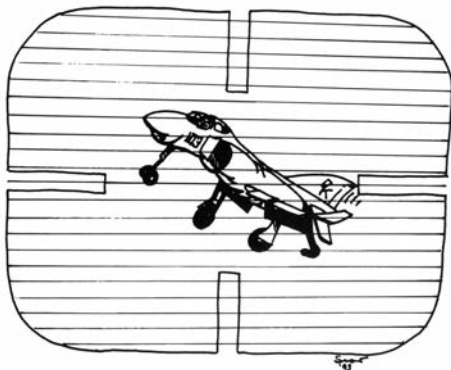
## Readyroom-O-Rama: The Droptanks of Doom

"Roger, clear deck!" Beaver responded, his internal computer beeping and blinking, integrating the F-4's attitude, smoke puffs and inputs from his hemorrhoidal sense of the wash and wallow of the mildly pitching deck. The assistant LSOs and other groupies and vultures with him on the platform casually checked escape routes into the net one more time.

The 1500 recovery had begun.

All over the ship, pilots watched black and white television screens in front of ready rooms (known as PLAT — Pilot's Landing Aid Television) as the object grew into a recognizable Phantom jet and slud more or less into the cross-hairs that electronically represented the proper lineup and glide slope for a perfect carrier landing. And professional PLAT LSOs critiqued each squadron's individual passes at the ship. Daytime recovery comments tended to be real boisterous — night recoveries more respectful. After all, it might be you up there in the dark flailing at the deck.

In Ready Room 4 Starboard, Puresome looked up from his pile of papers as the first *Phantom* whanged aboard in acceptable fashion. It disappeared off the screen as a second F-4 edged into the picture.



"...professional PLAT LSOs critiqued... passes at the ship"

"Fair, too much smoke in the groove, too far from the ramp in close, four wire," graded Candy Andy, who didn't cut fighter pilots any slack.

The ready room was filled with the usual useless characters not currently on the flight schedule who hung around, drank coffee and tried to look busy whenever some heavy happened to show up.

Puresome was real good at this. His seat in junior officer country way in the back of the ready room afforded him max separation from the upper rocket numbers up front. Slyly, he always had some obscure legal paperwork or NATOPS manual spread out in case justification for his existence was demanded by some surly senior puke.

But this was merely a smoke screen for hanging out in the cool ready room, telling lies and watching the recovery on the telly every hour and a half or so. Puresome considered himself a PLAT expert of the first rank. He could say, "Looked good when he went by me," or "Sorry about that!" with the best of them.

A *Jolly Roger* F-4 was long in the groove and was righteously waved off so that the plane behind him with the proper interval could land. "Do a loop and we'll take you!" snarled Weed, who was a real LSO sitting out this recovery and pretending to read the message board.

As the last fighter trapped on board, a *Blue Hawk* A-4 appeared on the screen. Interest picked up because the *Blue Hawks* were "Brand X" competitors, and their Ready Room 4 Port was just on the other side of the bulkhead. Competition was such that any frabbups were dealt with unmercifully and loudly.

"Power! Power! Don't climb!" Puresome suggested hopefully as the A-4 squirmed down the cross hairs toward the deck. But the *Blue Hawk* relentlessly smoked on in and trapped. No such luck as a bolter.

Bolters were occasions of great joy throughout the air wing, because the squadron duty officers could use the bitch box and razz the offending ready room. The Snakes utilized an old-timey auto horn that hung above the SDO's desk to signal their pleasure. Whanging on the bulkhead between the ready rooms and blowing juicy raspberries through one's circled thumb and forefinger in the general direction of the Hawks were also accepted celebrations. Of course, it worked both ways.

Worm, who was likewise a real LSO, liked to call up the offending ready room and loudly grade the bolter pass as "kinda low in the middle, kinda too much power, over the top, hook skip eight." Which was only four wires too many.

If a home boy should bolter, suitable blackboard art would be awaiting the offender along with the boys' soprano chorus singing several choruses of "Why, yes, I fly jets! Why do you ask?" Rockets 1 and 2 were exempt, of course, due to their lofty, semi-senior citizen status and known ability to hurl lightning bolts with great accuracy.

But today, the Hawks did their usual professional best and trapped in rapid succession. Now it was the Sidewinder's turn in the barrel. America's team was in the groove! LCDR Paganuch was first up.

"Skyball, Hawk!" Weed falsettoed loudly, drawing a dark look from Norman the Fink, who had immortalized himself by making the radio call to the LSO (instead of "Skyhawk, ball!") in a quavering voice back during a peacetime cruise. Since such reminders consistently yanked the already short chain of the stumpy schedules officer, it was also a great way for frustrated baggers to get into his knickers for giving all the good hops to someone else.

"Meatball on the ball!" Puresome sang.

This was part of a tender ballad he'd composed as rejoinder to Pag's insistence that Puresome's semi-Bubba heritage made him a "plain" person. Puresome insisted that he belonged to that great ethnic group known as "salts of the Earth," and that Pag probably had purple feet from secretly stomping grapes in his stateroom.

But it was all in tender aviator fun, and Pag had early-on taken Puresome and Weed under his ops officer wing and often invited them to his stateroom to partake of junior officer counseling fluids and rare goodies from his well-stocked reefer, like potato salad wheedled from the master chefs of the prestigious Wardroom 1.

Both Pag and his wingman trapped in fine fashion.

But as the next airplane of the division grew larger on the screen, it was obvious to everyone that something was wrong with this picture — sticking down under the Scooter's starboard wing was a white, 300-gal. drop tank. On the port wing, where the other drop tank should be, there was nothing. But next to it, on the outboard wing station, which should be empty, there was a 500-lb. bomb!

MAJ "Bird" Whistle, the squadron's resident ascot-wearer and pipe smoker, had yet again smote the enemy with a drop tank instead of a bomb, thus sparing the rod and spoiling the Gomer.

The rest of the recovery went by almost unnoticed as the ready room went preppers with the ripe possibilities of the moment. Everyone was waiting for MAJ Grape to leave the flight deck, sign off his airplane in

Maintenance Control, debrief his mission with the intelligence pogues and come on down to the ready room to be plucked.

The first time the intrepid major had punished the unsuspecting Gomers with a giant, 300-gal. blivet, he had completed the mission blissfully unaware of his contribution to the war effort. Back in the ready room, he was generating genteel clouds of pipe smoke when the maintenance chief came in and axed him how come he'd brought back the bomb and not the drop tank.

MAJ Whistle was a gratifyingly indignant frabbee. It simply wasn't possible that he had mismanaged his station selector switches and picked the wrong one. But it hadn't taken maintenance long to check out the circuits, and Whistle was had.

And so the word got passed. Switchology was everybody's secret paranoia, since all sorts of stuff could be hung from the Scooter's five underwing stations, and it was real important to get things right. It was an easy way to look bad fast. Or to kill yourself. So everybody had gone super-conscientious about switches and tabled too much rock throwing, since a sure-fire way to frabbup yourself was to say out loud, so that Grong the Goat God could hear, that only a real dumb piece of foul stuff could do something like that.

But, in the unofficial squadron logbook of frabbups, the entry next to Bird Whistle read: "That's one..." Today's entry read, "Welcome, sports fans, to the World Series of frabbups!"

Weed, the ordnance expert, was the first to roll in, switches hot. "Hey, Bird! Don't you know 'bigger isn't always better'? You damn near got to get a bull's eye on one of them little bitty Gomers with one of them drop tanks to do any good!"

Bird just glared and harrumphed himself up to the sanctuary of the senior part of the ready room. But it was not to be. The blackboard was well and truly decorated in his honor.



"...where the other drop tank should be, there was nothing."

Puresome had contented himself with this contribution, since his billet of SLJO fell under MAJ Whistle's Admin Department, already a high-threat environment. So he had prudently heshed his mouth and had drawn a cartoon featuring Mr. Whistle's A-4, accurately configured under the wings. Two symbolic drop were tanks painted under the canopy rail signifying kills, its grinning pilot giving a large thumb's up.

It was not the hit of Whistle's season.

But the final straw came when the *Blue Hawks* called up on the bitch box, "Hey, 4-Starboard from 4-Port! Don't you know the bomb shortage is over? You don't have to save them things!"

And as the skipper rose from his Rocket 1 chair to his full, Olympian height, with rain clouds and lightning playing around his stern features, Bird Whistle knew it was not to be praised in public, but the other thing in private.

Sometimes it's not nice to be a legend in your own time.