

The Further Adventures of
YOUTHLY PURESOME

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So the great ship thrummed out of the quiet waters of Subic Bay and into the open sea, finally ready to do battle with the rat-eating commies that lurked on the feet-dry side of Yankee Station in the Gulf of Tonkin. Puresome, whose strength was as the strength of ten because he was youthly and ignorant, couldn't wait.

After the long journey from Norfolk and many strange adventures during the trip west, Puresome had enjoyed Cubi Point and the Philippines immensely. While the black shoes unloaded the ship's boats and did sailor stuff, the air wing got to fly and shake the kinks out as it savored the joys of the Philippines.

The carrier, finally ready for the last leg of the trip west and loaded with manly young men ready to see the elephant, backed away from the pier and steamed ceremoniously out of Subic Bay. Puresome almost forgot the quease in his stomach as he savored the fierce joy of the moment.

The Great Earlobe Episode

The ship arrived at Dixie Station in the Tonkin Gulf under a clear, hot July sky. The air wing was to start off Down South, warming up before going big time Up North. Puresome, sweating in his newly green-dyed flight suit, got occasional glimpses of land looming out of the distance. Listening to radio chatter in the air operations center, he heard disembodied UHF voices of a flight reporting that its forward air controller had just been shot down. It was Indian country all right.

The big day finally came. Puresome was scheduled as wingie on an actual shooting mission. Because the mighty US of A had concentrated on doomsday nuclear devices, there was a shortage of iron bombs, and Puresome was going to tote three 500-lb. WW II fat bombs over to the Viet Cong. Puresome didn't care — they were still things that went bump in the day.

"Yahoo!" Puresome hollered into his oxygen mask as the catapult thumped him airborne into a beautiful flying day, and he climbed up to his squadron rendezvous altitude. As the launch progressed, however, his heart sank. Judging from the chatter on land-launch, it looked as if lead's aircraft had suffered bubbles in the wet compass or other severe downing gripe, and would not launch.

"Eta! Japanese word for pain!" thought Puresome as he remembered that it was verboten to go over the beach as a single ship.

"Eta!" Puresome thought again when he was unable to contact the squadron's other section that had launched earlier and had boogied on their way. Fortunately, there was another single still around in the form of an A-3 Whale driver who had convinced someone that he should be allowed to tote a couple of bombs just once. Puresome didn't care if it was a blimp — he easily picked up the aluminum overcast lazily circling the ship and rendezvoused. The improbable duo then headed outbound across the blue gulf toward the brown and green land of sneaky, black pajamas.

Under the direction of *Toejam 32*, the Air Force FAC, they successfully bombed possible land. Righteously. According to the FAC's damage report, the flight scored 13 trees and 140 assorted small bushes and vines



KBA (killed by air), important data to be eventually shipped to Robert the Strange McNamara's computers as proof that the Estados Unidos was seeing the light at the end of the tunnel in the war against commie vegetation.

The warm-up period Down South came to an end without major hits. A couple of airplanes had taken some pocks from number-four shotgun pellets fired by skeet-shooting gomer experts. With the honeymoon ended, the ship pointed north to Yankee Station.

The air wing's first Alpha strike was to be an early morning go, led by CAG Earlobe himself, with most of the squadron heavies leading their components. The brand new A-6As had been fussed over endlessly by a regiment of tech reps and four had been made ready, draped with an obscene number of 500-lb. bombs. Eight A-4s rounded out the bombers, and there were F-4s for flak suppression, BarCAP, TarCAP and noise. Two Whales were to pump gas to the fighters while Teeny, Tiny Tinker Tankers monitored the launch. Two more A-4s were to truck out to the orbiting Air Force HU-16 *Albatross* to fly shotgun for any rescue operations. Fudds flew out to watch the gaggle on radar, and Electric Spads had been given a running start earlier so they could jam fire control radars. Of course, a RA-5C Viggie would take 8x10 color glossy photos for post-strike commemorative purposes.

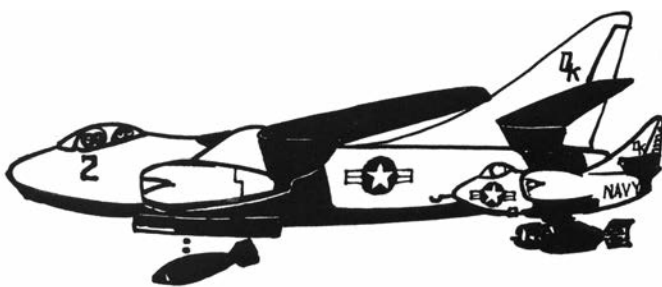
Puresome had been left out once again, since he was at the awkward seniority of not being junior enough to fly the skipper's wing nor senior enough to be a favored number four. Though he was scheduled for a road reconnaissance mission later in the day, he enviously went up to vulture's row to watch the launch.

He just happened to be watching the starboard catapult when *Hawk 300*, CAG's airplane, fired down the track. Almost immediately, the A-4's canopy separated from the aircraft and spun ignominiously away while its owner, looking curiously like a semi-plucked fowl, made an acceptable clearing turn, cleaned up and ducked out of sight to jettison gas and bombs before sneaking back aboard. Somehow, the canopy had not gotten over-center locked, an important Scooter cockpit check, and it had just unexplainably, mysteriously separated from the aircraft. CAG was having a bad canopy day.

Puresome just shook his head and watched the smoke trails of many J79 and J52 engines paint a path across the sky as they headed north. He did not realize that the big frabbup scoreboard in the sky, now reading "one" in the Earlobe column, was not done with lights and gongs for the day.

Eventually it came time to brief for the 1500 launch. Two Snake sections were scheduled for different road recce missions. CAG was to lead one section with LT Raypat as wingie while Puresome was number two to LT Poon. They were slated to look for anything military moving between roughly Thanh Hoa and Vinh and bomb, rocket or shoot it into unusable pieces. It sounded a lot more satisfying than most of the stuff he had done down south, and Puresome had studied up and was ready. The adrenaline build up was not, he assured himself, really an attack of the chicken shits, though the net effect was about the same.

Puresome was glad he was flying with LT Poon, who had been around A-4s for a while and was a good, level stick. On the other hand, Puresome had flown a couple of hops with CAG Earlobe that were real interesting. CAG was a former F-8 pilot and a hard-charger. He could fly an airplane real well, but other airplanes in his division were sometimes buffalooed by



his exotic, pre-NATOPS hand signals. For instance, CAG's signal for a wingman to cross over was a finger point at the wingman, followed by a finger point in the direction he wanted him to go. Section signals were a bit trickier. Given the smack-into-another-airplane potential of parade formation flying, everybody gave each other a lot of room until the formation was sorted out.

CAG also had a bad case of the redfanny over his tactical callsign, "Earlobe," which had been assigned by some paper-shuffling staff weenie. He considered it definitely unmanly and unbecoming a former *Crusader* pilot, and had full-time CAG staff personnel hard at work to get it changed to something more befitting, like "Snakepit." In the meantime, he ground his teeth and growled as much intensity into "Earlobe" as he could.

Puresome had an uneventful launch, and his excitement was high as he circled at rendezvous altitude looking for Poon. He briefly cut across the circle toward an A-4 but pulled away when he saw another A-4 join up to form a section, since that was CAG and Raypat. Continuing to circle, Puresome soon realized that Poon was not airborne, but was hard down on deck. Frabbed again!

But Puresome was not to be denied. He switched frequencies and called Earlobe flight. Surprisingly, it was Raypat who answered. "Hey, Raypat, what's your posit?" Puresome axed.

When Raypat came back with the information, Puresome explained that he was single-ship and was on his way to join them. Cramming on full throttle, he headed up the Gulf. Periodically, Puresome would ask Raypat for a posit update. After about two calls, it became clear that he was not closing very fast and he asked Raypat to slow down some.

"I would," Raypat answered, "but CAG is NORDO (no radio) and he's leading!"

"Arrrrr!" Puresome snarled into his mask, his chain shortening noticeably. Not only was he being thwarted from winning the war, but bottled-in-bond, locked-in-concrete air wing rule number two was that you didn't go over the beach without a radio.

Fortunately, Puresome caught the section just before they went feet dry, and then it was Raypat and Puresome hanging onto CAG, who flailed about the sky as he recce'd like crazy. Puresome hung on, simultaneously trying to avoid a mid-air, look for the flak that dead-eye gunners obviously planned for him alone, and not allow sneaky-eye MiG pilots to gun him as they had two F-105s earlier in the war.

Finally, CAG Earlobe was ammo minus and pulled off high. Raypat directed Puresome to stick with CAG, now beginning to fly semi-predictably, while Raypat went down to crater the approaches to a small wooden bridge. Aching to blow the thing to bits, Puresome stuck with CAG and watched Raypat expend his ordnance.

When Raypat finally called off ammo minus, it was Puresome's turn. As Raypat climbed up toward them, Puresome assumed he had them in sight and directed his attention below to the target.

"Okay, Raypat. Three's in hot!" Puresome called, dumping his nose and turning his master arm switch to the "on" position.

"Real good," said Raypat, "where's CAG?"

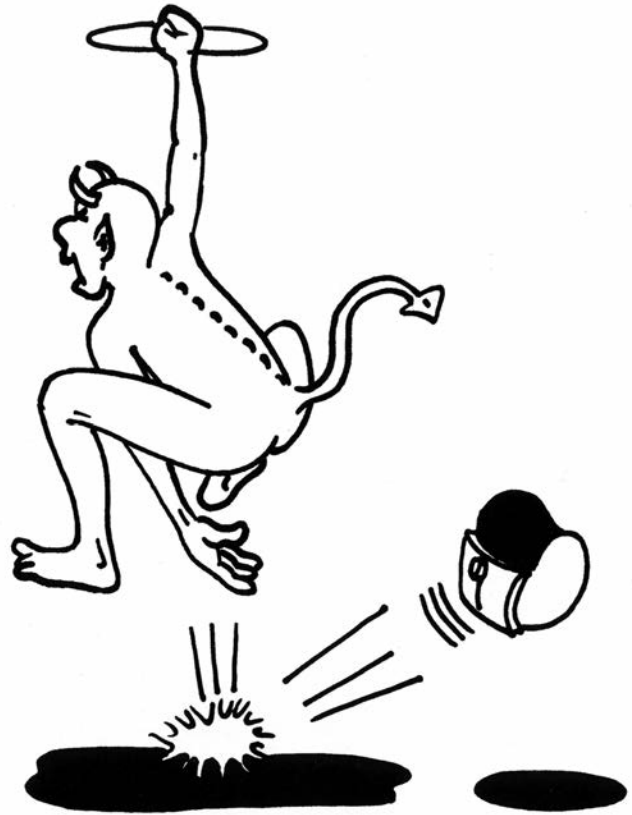
In the two potatoes that Puresome had taken his eyes off Earlobe, CAG had done an octaphlugeron and flailed off again with Raypat and Puresome tailchasing the hell after him.

"Arrrrr!" Puresome growled in frustration as his chain shortened by several more links.

Finally, almost out of gas and time, Raypat captured CAG while Puresome hurriedly re-cratered the approaches to the little bridge. That done, they headed back to the ship.

Puresome was not a happy camper as the three-plane came up the starboard side of the ship in right echelon — Raypat leading, CAG, the NORDO, as number two and Puresome number three. Taking interval on the Hawks already downwind, the flight broke to join the landing pattern.

Puresome busied himself with dropping gear, flaps and tailhook while slowing to optimum angle of attack for the approach, cross-checking it with airspeed and gauging his turn to final abeam the LSO platform so as not to be long in the groove. As he made his turn, CAG was rolling in the groove about the time the red waveoff lights on the mirror started flashing. Since the air wing operated zip-lip, nothing was said. Puresome watched, horrified, as CAG's A-4 continued down the glide slope while the waveoff lights continued to wink, touched down and bolted! Puresome was past the "arrrrr!" stage. He whanged the stick from side to side and screamed multiple "ratsfannies!" into his mask as he rolled into the groove with a clear deck and trapped.



Puresome stomped down the boarding ladder after his plane was parked port side forward. He snarled his way through signing off the airplane's yellow sheet in maintenance control and "ratsfanned" his way toward IOIC, the intelligence center, for debriefing.

Raypat was already there, quietly smoldering in his sweaty flight gear. Puresome joined him, flang down his nav bag and was burbling at about 50 burbles per minute when CAG came in, having finally trapped. He appeared to have about 180 ft/lbs of torque on his jaw.

A small, yellow demon, visible only to Puresome, forced its way out of Puresome's mouth as it heatedly told CAG Earlobe that "that was the most frabbed up flight I've been on in my life!"

The reaction was predictable. As the small, yellow demon unloaded and left the fight, Puresome got to experience the full effect of an *Atlas* rocket liftoff, acceleration through multiple steel decks and back down again to in front of Puresome's nose. The frabbumeter by Puresome's name pegged out.

Raypat tried to intervene, and the two were directed to CAG Earlobe's stateroom for some real chewing up and spitting out in small shreds of junior officer beautocks.

It was not pretty. CAG Earlobe had just grounded Raypat and Puresome for life when the LSO in charge of the recovery knocked on the stateroom door and delicately inquired why CAG had chosen to land while being given a waveoff. The ensuing blast resulted in the LSO being grounded as well.

Finally, they were dismissed. Trudging down to the ready room, Puresome knew he was indeed frabbed. He hung up his fuming flight gear and skulked into the ready room, the yellow demon nowhere in sight. Sitting in the Rocket One ready room chair was the olympian figure of the skipper, reading the message board.

"Holy mierda!" thought Puresome. "CAG can ground you, but Skipper can kill you!"

But Puresome figured it was time to come to the Big Guy in charge of Vacation Bible School. Since the skipper was practically the same thing and didn't seem too busy, Puresome crawfished up to the front of the ready room and axed if the skipper, sir, was busy.

He was not.

“Skipper,” Puresome began, “I’ve got a problem!”

So Puresome told his story, leaving out only the part about the small yellow demon. The skipper listened without comment, his eyes darkening and brow furrowing. In the end, he only said, “All right.” No thunder. No lightning bolts. And Puresome had gone off, resigned to his doom and probable dismemberment. It was a very long evening.

But when the flight schedule came out for the next day, Puresome’s name was on it for an Alpha strike against the evil oil storage tanks of Nam Dinh. After the movie, Puresome asked Norman the Fink, the beloved schedules officer, about being on the flight schedule.

“Skipper said you’re flying tomorrow, that’s all I know.”

So Puresome got up early and went to the air wing brief in IOIC the next morning, scarcely daring to breathe. After all the three-part harmony mission brief by strike lead, meteorology and intelligence, the assembled pilots got up to go for their individual briefings in their ready rooms. CAG Earlobe spotted Puresome and strode over — Puresome braced for a major hit.

But all CAG said was “you’re ungrounded,” and left to do more important stuff.

Puresome miraculously did not soil himself and was able to troop down to the ready room and turn his mind to the business of blowing up things and getting seriously shot at. But the relief was so overwhelming that Puresome vowed to build a Shrine of the Miraculous Ungrounding, furnish it with jelly donuts daily for the rest of time, scrupulously restrain the small, yellow demon and always worship the skipper, the architect of his reprieve.

Time was to prove that Puresome was only really serious about venerating his skipper. Nothing was ever said again about the grounding or events surrounding it. CAG Earlobe got his call sign changed to CAG Snakepit and was a brave, tough combat leader.

He went on to make rear admiral. Puresome went on to become rather more Puresome.

He always felt there was a certain symmetry to it.