

The Further Adventures of
YOUTHLY PURESOME

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It was a time of great bouncing to ready the Reserve squadron for the boat. The operational types had figured out an intricate plan to qualify the squadron's wayward airline pilots and laid-off gypsies and to burn up some excess operating money. The idea was to launch flights with a full bag of gas and let them drive around the sky to create flight hours until Charlie time back at the air patch.

Even more ingeniously, they had persuaded the station pukers to allow the *Crusaders* to hot refuel from trucks on the off-duty runway after the first bounce period so they could roar back into the pattern without shutting down. To shut down took lots of time and often stressed the tired F-8's into being broken, thus ticking off Ops pukers, pilots and wrench-turners.

The Long Green Table

So it was that Puresome, Killer and Super TAR were scheduled for the early go. The weather was hot and dusty, and the first part of the hop involved driving out to the operating area and hoping one of the three planes had enough of a radar to run some intercepts — a pleasant enough grindex. The real mission was to drive around and not crash, and to show up back at the field on time.

Killer had the lead, and he gave his usual power-of-positive-thinking brief for the flight. Puresome dutifully wrote some stuff on his knee board card while Super TAR managed to insert a couple of zingers about non-regulation sideburns and shabby flight boots into the proceedings, which brought a harmonious hoot from the long-sideburned, shabbily booted members of the flight. These formalities attended to, the three aviators ambled over to maintenance control, drew airplanes and manned up.

"Yahoo!" hollered Puresome as he taxied out. "What a beauteous day to fly!" Both Killer and Super TAR were having some problems with their airplanes, he surmised, as he observed much hand-waving and scurrying around by plane captains and trouble-shooters.

"Pull up the ladder — I got mine," thought Puresome as he called for takeoff.

Youthly on the Attack

Puresome anchored over the field and droned around at max conserve, waiting for the other two to get fixed and launch. Finally, one F-8 taxied, pulled onto the runway and burnered off into the blue.

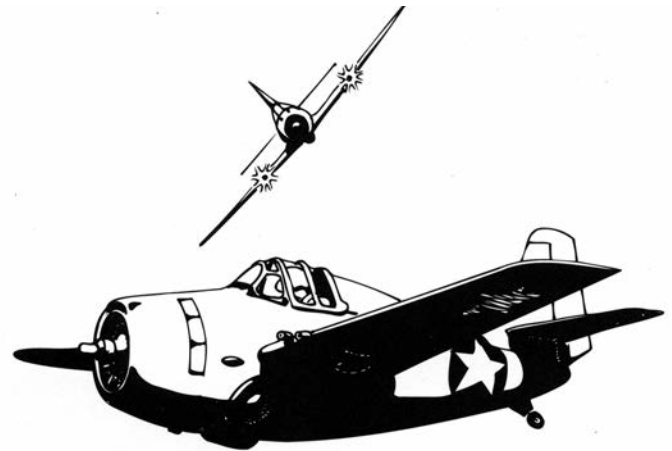
Observing the airplane rolling down the runway from on high, Puresome got all squinty-eyed. Scenes from World War II movies fast-forwarded through his mind—the treacherous enemy, high in the sun, points down at the hapless American quarterback in his Wildcat and, in a screaming power dive, closes and opens fire. Bullets stitch across his victim as ketchup runs from his mouth...

"Banzai!" cried Puresome, pushing over and lighting the burner.

Super TAR never knew what hit him. Humiliation and death came quickly off the end of the runway. Naturally, this really ticked off Super TAR, but Puresome danced away effortlessly with the grace of lots of smash, zooming back to the perch to await Killer's takeoff. Sure enough, an F-8 was taking the runway.

"Maline, you die!" hissed Puresome into his mask as again he roared out of the sky.

Puresome had enough gas for a semi-respectable four passes once FCLP had begun, and the refueling and second period went fine. However, back in maintenance control after the hop, calling Killer and Super TAR "wussy pussies" perhaps didn't help. Puresome knew a precedent had been set when they both just nodded and said, "All right, sumbitch."



So the mission became who could get in the air first to bounce the rest of the flight. Killer avoided things like preflight and after-start checks. But everyone was forewarned that screaming death awaited off the end of the runway, and they were ready.

The rest of the pump-up for the ship went smoothly. Puresome was happy he was only getting a paragraph debrief from the LSO on each pass instead of a page. As an ace ex-Tink driver, Puresome had thought the only landing grades were "major OK," "OK" and "semi-OK." Most LSOs were jolly sorts with "Sorry 'Bout That" T-shirts who said things like "looked good when he went by me." F-8 LSOs were a hollow-eyed bunch with eye twitches who were prone to spastic leaps toward anything that looked like a net. Puresome figured that the *Crusader* was so lengthy that, at any given time, any part of the bird could be doing anything. Paddles just needed to be more holistic or, failing that, concentrate on the good part where Puresome was.

The Victor and the Vanquished

On the fateful day, the same three were again scheduled to fly together. Puresome hurried out to his aircraft, started up and was promptly greeted with a decent hydraulic leak. Trouble shooters, the line chief and the plane captain waved their hands and ran about as Killer streaked from the line, followed shortly by Super TAR. Puresome howled in anguish and pounded the canopy rail.

The good news was that maintenance soon fixed the leak. The bad news was that the other two *Crusaders* were already airborne. Puresome finished his checks and taxied out while anxiously scanning the sky.

Sure enough, as he took the runway for takeoff, Puresome spotted an aircraft on the perch, waiting high above the field. But Puresome had a plan. Instead of the prescribed right turn out of the traffic pattern, he would turn left, zoom up and engage the enemy.

"Tower, *Alfa Fox 112*, request a left turn after takeoff."

"Roger, *Alpha Fox 112*," replied the controller, who was busy with his third jelly donut of the morning. "Cleared left turnout, cleared for take-off."

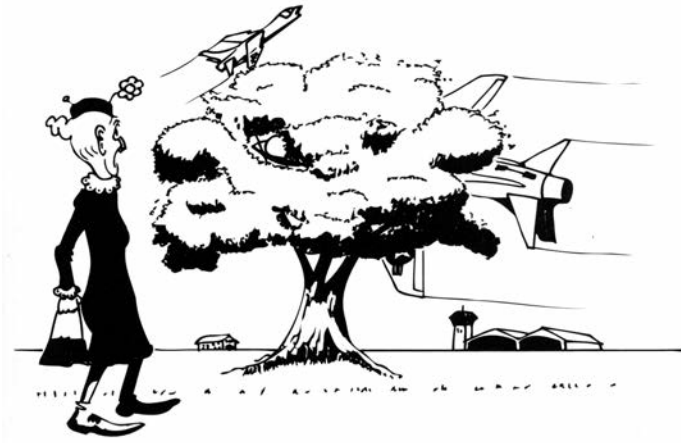
"Yahoo!" hollered Puresome, lighting the burner.

Puresome roared down the runway, sucked up the gear and lowered the wing, keeping the *Crusader* right on the deck, building up smash. At 400 knots, he pulled up left, zooming in burner toward the enemy.

Whoop! Puresome sliced by his opponent in a high yo-yo. Whoop! Puresome sliced by in a low yo-yo. Puresome slud into the saddle behind the other airplane in gun range. "Bang! Bangety bang bang! Drink simulated leaden death!"

But a giant question mark appeared above Puresome's canopy — this was too easy. The other F-8 wasn't maneuvering. "Etai!" realized Puresome, "it's Super TAR, and he's out of gas, and that leaves..."

Whoop! Killer's airplane sliced past at the speed of heat.



Puresome dumped his nose and lit burner, rolling to keep Killer in sight. When he had enough speed, he pulled up hard and into Killer, who was coming downhill with his hair on fire.

'Round and 'round, up and down they went, Puresome's oxygen mask down around his chin as he pulled g's to keep Killer in sight across the circle. The fact never occurred to either Killer or Puresome that all this was taking place above and close aboard the naval air station, and had drawn a considerable crowd.

The furlball contracted and degenerated into a slow-speed scissors, each airplane trying to spit the other out in front, all the time getting lower and lower. Finally, both Puresome and Killer realized that they were quite low enough down among the brush and knocked it off. "Etai!" Thought Puresome, when he finally had time to look at something other than Killer.

Puresome Pays the Piper

Another "Etai!" in store for Puresome when he checked his fuel state. All that charging about in burner had left little for driving around until Charlie time, much less much of a bounce period. Puresome had a definite quease going as he joined on Killer's wing.

By judicious poking around, lying about fuel states and flying on fumes until he was completely puckerred, Puresome bagged three bounces during his first period and made it to hot refueling without flaming out. It was a bit of a near thing, but maybe no one would notice.

But after the second period, as soon as Puresome climbed down from his aircraft, he knew the word was out — it was a major frabbup and he was the frabbee. Again. "Holy ratsfannies," thought Puresome, "even the plane captain won't look me in the eye."

Maintenance control wasn't any better. By the time Puresome got back to the locker room and was shedding his soaked flight gear, he had a major-league quease going and was experimenting with stories. He didn't think a firm "wadn't me" would work. Maybe if he just sneaked out and played civilian for a while, it would all blow over by next drill weekend.

But this was not to be. Crazy Horse, the squadron's full-time TAR XO, caught Puresome putting on his mustard paisley bell-bottoms.

Crazy Horse had been a spectator of the aerial show and had not been overly disturbed. But he had been seized by the outraged NAS operations officer, who had been phoned by an even more outraged XO of the air station, who had been the recipient of numerous calls from the communities near by. As an ex-blimp driver wary of any kind of bag-over, the NAS XO was especially snitted. Thus, Crazy Horse was on a mission of doom.

"Puresome, you are in a world of hurt," said Crazy Horse, his black eyes inscrutable and fixed on Puresome in the same manner that his ancestors fixed on Custer. "You, Killer and Super TAR have an appointment at 1000 with the station pukers at their long, green table. You have frabbed up big time, and they 'haff vays' of making you talk."

"Seemed like a good idea at the time," Puresome responded lamely, again queasily contemplating life without canugies and wings.

"Station XO said they got a call from a little old lady that said she wasn't worried too much until you disappeared behind the trees."

Puresome decided against any response except name, rank and serial number, and successfully disengaged.

At the Long, Green Table with the Ashtray at the Other End

It was a long night and a long next morning until Puresome showed up at the base again with his uniform uncharacteristically spiffy. Killer and Super TAR were also shiny. Several experimental stories were tried, but all agreed they were dog-squeeze. It looked like mercy of the court, temporary insanity and probably being fed to the station geese. Even Killer couldn't come up with anything semi-positive.

Finally, Crazy Horse stuck his head out of the conference room and beckoned with his finger. Puresome took a deep breath, resolved not to request a blindfold and joined himself at the hip with Killer and Super TAR. Together, they rented-a-tent-a-tent-a-tented into the room with the long, green table and stood at attention before it.

Behind it sat a bunch of scowling, well-fed, senior station officers. Crazy Horse was there as a witness to the proceedings, since these miserable scum were part of his squadron, and he would have to deal with their personal effects.

After a suitable dramatic pause, the head commander cleared his throat and listed their many crimes. Puresome kept his gaze fixed on the intricacies of the knotty-pine paneling on the opposite wall.

Finally, the commander asked, "What do you have to say?"

"That's My Story and I'm Stickin' To It!"

Up to this time, Puresome had been clueless. But now, grasped by the very short hairs, he knew. "The best defense is a good offense!" blazed across his mind. "Are we not men?"

"Sir, I'm LT Puresome, and I can explain this."

"Please do."

"Well sir, I was a member of a flight of three. I had problems with my airplane, and the others took off without me and anchored overhead the base, waiting for me to join up. I finally got my plane fixed and when I taxied out, I saw my flight overhead waiting for me. Wanting to expedite my join-up, I called the tower and received clearance for a left turn-out from the traffic pattern. As I approached the other two members of the flight, I did a high yo-yo and a low yo-yo to join the formation so we could continue our mission. If little old ladies don't understand how fighter planes join up, I can't help it."

In his mind, Puresome postscripted, "That's my story, and I'm stickin' to it!"

Time counted up to ten potatoes. Flies buzzed at the windows. Finally, the head inquisitor cleared his throat.

"Well, all right. But do try to be more careful in the future. We have our relations with the communities to consider, and we mustn't annoy them too much."

"Yessir!" cried Killer, Super TAR, and Puresome as one voice. With that, the three wheeled as one and marched out into the sunshine that was once again clear and bright.

"Holy cow!" exhaled Puresome, putting on his cap. "They bought it!"

"Of course they did. That's how it happened!" Killer responded. "You can't expect a bunch of patrol pukers and blimp weenies to understand any thing about fighters." Convinced in his own mind, Killer turned to more important things, like his handball court time.

Super TAR uncharacteristically didn't have much to say, having come so close to his professional ducks not being in a row. He headed back to his office while warily checking his six.

Crazy Horse caught up to Puresome at his car. "Ya ta hey, XO," greeted Puresome, holding up his right hand.

"Ya ta hey, yerass! That's two!" he said, holding up two fingers. "Number three, we stake you out, pour honey all over your unit and call in the aardvarks. You savvy?"

Puresome did indeed savvy, though not entirely about the aardvark part. He had learned an important lesson — if when one roams the air in any manner he chooses and spots the enemy, attacks and shoots him down, it had better not be over the naval air station.

Anything else would be rubbish.