

The Further Adventures of  
**YOUTHLY PURESOME**

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



It seemed to Puresome that the Grumman Ironworks AF-9J *Cougar* had come directly from Toko-Ri. Even though it was painted in the Training Command's high-visibility orange and white, and the wings were bent back, possibly from being dived too fast, there were sealed-over gun ports where four mighty 20 mike-mike cannons had once spat leaden death. It had a lethal look that the somewhat preppers two-seat *Cougar* did not have, and there was no howling instructor to disrupt fantasies of aerial glory.



## CHEATING GRAMPAW PETTIBONE

Puresome fervently hoped that the answer to "Where do we get such men?" was VT-25 at NAS Beeville, Texas. He had thrashed his way through most of the Advanced Training Command jet syllabus with only carqual, transition to the F11F *Tiger* and tactics training standing between him and Golden Wings. Even though the end was in sight, every flight had to be taken in turn, and eternal vigilance was still needed to guard against frabb-ups. Even Elder God Winged Persons went out and had themselves bad days, causing Grampaw Pettibone in *Naval Aviation News* to point the finger bone of scorn and scream "Jumpin' Jehosaphat!" It was better to be dead than look bad, but worse still to get cashiered before you got the chance.

But it was a good omen that Youthly had drawn the single-seater for carqual, and he had gloried in the freedom of flying solo to the outlying field at Alice Orange for field carrier landing practice. He and his fellow students had avoided being detected in some of their more exuberant transit activities and had finally amassed enough bounces to satisfy the watchful LSOs. It was time to hit the boat.

The final lectures about carrier procedures were serious stuff. Beyond prangs, there were many chances for the squadron, the LSOs and student Naval Aviators to look bad. By now, the students were used to pooting around in a 600-ft. landing pattern, and they chanted "meatball, line-up, airspeed" in their sleep.

They were used to obeying Paddle's calls as they would pronouncements from the Burning Bush. They learned early-on that one did not call down lightning bolts by being waved off for being long in the groove, getting hung in the gear, or otherwise wasting sea room and screwing up the Olympian plans of Skipper of the Boat. They were reminded again and again that the first rule of carrier aviation was, "Your formation flying *vill* look good around the Boat, or you *vill* be shot!" Puresome clicked his heels, shouted "Jawohl!" and resolved to be a truly welded wingman.

On the selected day, USS *Lexington* (CVS-16) had chosen to operate in a far corner of the *Golfo de Mexico*, and it was decided to stage out of NAS Kingsville. Instructors led flights of three students there, and the planes were serviced while the pilots awaited the pleasure of a Charlie time in base operations. Puresome had done his Basic Training carqual in the prop-driven T-28, and this was his first experience around the Boat in jets. As a result, he had a bit of a quease going.

The feeling was not helped by the instructor, a somewhat swollen Marine major. Though he had clearly lost some of his PT commitment, he was to lead them to the ship. The major was clearly nervous about the whole Boat thing, and plotting boards and navigation devices festooned his flight gear. But this was the Big Game, and this was the reason Puresome had wanted to be a Naval Aviator all his life. It was hugely exciting.

He resolved to keep everything all compartmentalized, and the first thing was to fly wing like the first student Naval Aviator *Blue Angel*.

With the arrival of a firm Charlie time, the carqual flights saddled up, turned up and launched. Puresome noted right away that his Tacan navigation system didn't work, but he reasoned that he was just a wing person who was being led, anyway.

### A Covey of Quail

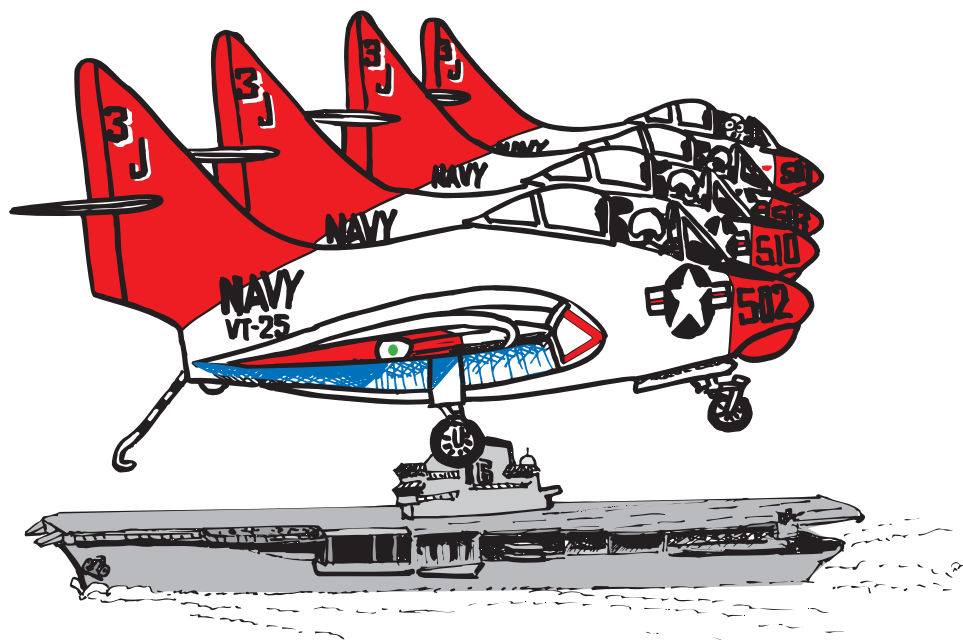
He concentrated on flying formation, aware that the section on the major's other wing was doing the same. As they went feet wet, the major contacted *Lexington*, who requested a "see me" call when the flight had the carrier in sight.

It was a typical Gulf day with hazy visibility and low-altitude scud, and when the major finally made his "see you" call, Puresome looked down from the formation's cruise altitude at the impossibly small-looking carrier, a dark object followed by a streak of white wake. They were told to anchor at 5,000 feet over the ship to await the call into the landing pattern. As they flew in circles above the port side of the carrier, Puresome glimpsed tiny airplanes in their circuits against the whitecaps of a choppy, gray sea.

Finally, the landing pattern cleared out and Youthly's flight was given a "Charlie now!" With the switch to land/launch frequency, the major started a descent down to pattern altitude. As they started the turn to pass down the boat's starboard side, the major gave the signal for Puresome to cross over to his starboard side, and the section already positioned there dutifully moved over to make room for the young ensign.

The formation was in a neat right echelon as the flight rolled out. Youthly, as Dash 2, was working hard to be tight on the leader and smooth for the other two members of the flight. He had a vague impression of the white wake and the dark bulk of *Lexington* passing close aboard his port side.

All of a sudden the major's gear came down, followed shortly by his flaps! *Yaaa!* Puresome reflexively dropped his gear and flaps — he had no choice but to parallel the



major's moves — and the other two members of the flight did the same. The major had skipped the part about signaling the break for interval, and now there was a four-plane echelon flying downwind abeam the LSO platform looking much like a covey of quail that had been shot into, madly maneuvering to avoid smacking into each other or the water. The air turned blue with Paddle's shrieks as he tried to sort out the mess.

*Jerbis Flinderbars!* Puresome's heart was doing about 160 pittypats a minute. Wildly yanking and banking was not the way to start an exercise where smoothness and concentration was the name of the game. There was the wine-dark sea below, the blunt end of the boat, and things were Alpha Fox Uniform-ed.

Puresome, though, was too busy trying to fit himself back into some kind of orderly pattern to have time for metaphysics. He got himself re-established upwind, picked out his interval and turned in behind. By the time he made his identifying radio call abeam the LSO platform, his airplane was on altitude and trimmed up, and Youthly's voice was down to merely soprano.

### A Piece of Pastry

Puresome's first two passes were touch-and-goes without his hook down, and they went by in a blur. When he was told to drop his hook, things actually slowed down some. The impact and deceleration of his first trap came as a surprise, and Puresome actually imagined that the bow of the ship pitched up from the force of his impact. But once he cleared the landing area, actually he was able to relax a little while being positioned for the next catapult shot.

So it went for his six traps. Puresome had a qual, and he was pulled over to the lee of the boat's island, shut down and serviced by the purple-shirted refuelers for the flight back to Kingsville.

"*Piece of pastry,*" thought Puresome with relief, "*I am a steely-eyed student Naval Aviator carrier pilot!*" He was already starting to taste celebratory cold foamy beverages. Finally, the grapes took away their hoses and he went through the engine start and aircraft checks with the plane captain. The yellow-shirted taxi directors guided him onto the starboard catapult.

The catapult crew and quality control checkers did their thing just before Puresome ran his engine up to takeoff power. He checked the controls and his engine instruments, saluted the catapult officer and jammed his head against the headrest. Whoom! The catapult fired, squatting the airplane down, hurling it forward and squishing Puresome back into his seat. Very suddenly, he was flying! *Yeeehaw!* He reached over, flipped the landing gear handle to the "up" position and climbed away from the sea while waiting for enough airspeed to retract his flaps.

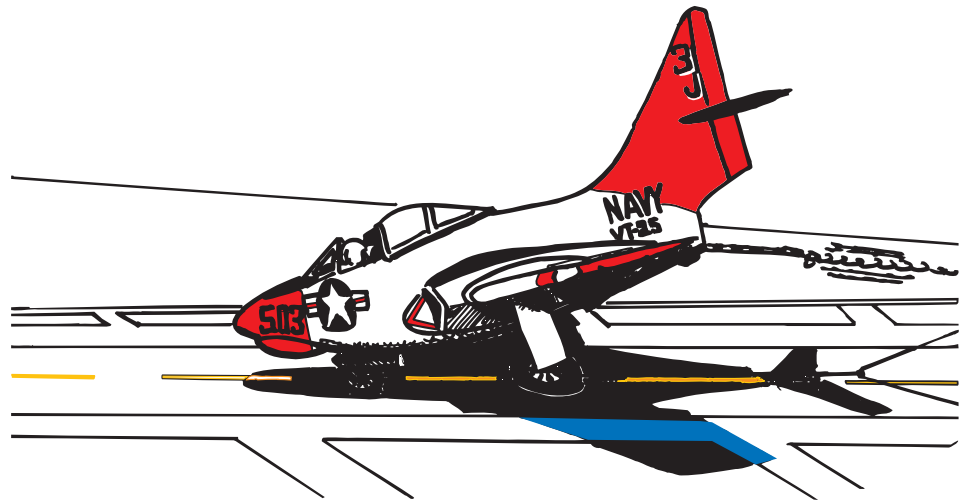
The Boat's land/launch frequency crackled in his headset, giving him his "pigeons" to Kingsville and clearing him to change frequency. This information on the bearing and distance was real important, especially since Puresome didn't have a Tacan to guide him.

### Unplanned Trip Back to the Carrier

Puresome needed to jot down the numbers, but his Thunder Machine wasn't accelerating in a normal manner, and he hadn't retracted his flaps. When he looked over and checked his gear handle "up," there was a red light in the handle and three little wheels in the indicators. His gear was still down!

"*Wut?*" A big question mark appeared above Youthly's helmet, and he moved the gear handle to the "down" position. The red light in the gear handle went out and the three little wheels in the indicators showed the gear was definitely down. He raised the gear handle but the wheel indicators remained showing — his landing gear was definitely not going to come up.

This turn of events definitely put a crimp in Youthly's plans. Because he had been wandering around some at about a thousand feet messing with his problem, he was not sure of where he was, where the ship was or whether he had enough gas to make it to Kingsville with his gear down — if he even could find it!



Puresome decided "negats!" to all that and to go home to Momma — there was a perfectly good ship back behind him somewhere. That decided, he turned around to head back to the boat, switched back to land/launch frequency and started calling for help.

That seemed a real good plan, but nobody would answer him on the radio. As the low-altitude scud had thickened somewhat, Puresome reluctantly descended for better visibility. Though he continued calling Paddles and he could hear the LSO talking to airplanes in the pattern, nobody would answer his transmissions. Grampaw Pettibone was definitely looking over Youthly's shoulder, finger bone at the ready, as the *Cougar* stooged along with gear and flaps down at low altitude looking for *Lexington*. Finally, there was the *Lexington's* Tacan pot, sitting atop the radar mast as it skimmed through the scud!

Puresome positioned himself at pattern altitude and maneuvered for a slot in the downwind pattern. When nobody answered his radio transmissions, he figured it was easier to beg forgiveness than wait for permission. He turned abeam the LSO platform, flew his pass and trapped!

Naturally, there was some consternation. After a great deal of gesticulating, Puresome managed to convey that his aircraft was "down," and he was directed to an empty space behind the island and was shut down. A squadron maintenance type climbed up beside him, whereupon Youthly told him about his radio, Tacan and landing gear problems. Others with tool boxes soon arrived and began working.

### More Misadventures

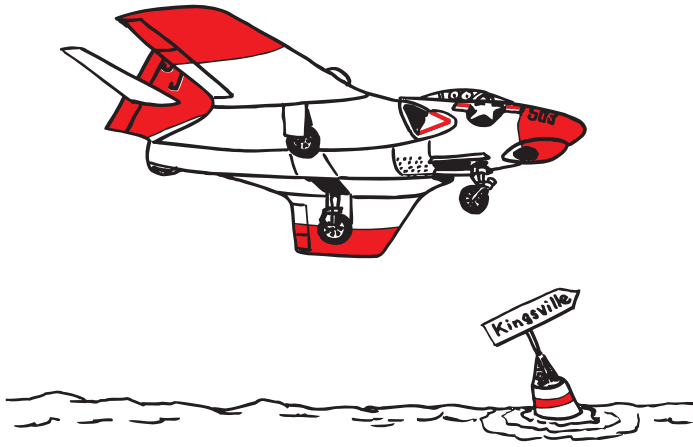
Cheating Grampaw Pettibone had been sweaty work so far, so it was nice to relax some and watch the chaps still in the pattern whang aboard, but he was too tired to feel superior for having CQ'ed already. Finally, a mechanic climbed up and told Puresome that his radio gear had been fixed, but the Tacan and gear problems had not. The decision by all highest was to fuel him up and launch him for Kingsville with his gear down!

"*Oh, boy! Here we go again!*" Puresome queased. While the grapes refueled the plane yet another time, he whipped out his whiz wheel and started furiously figuring some data for stooging along with his gear down while the engine sucked fuel at a prodigious rate.

Since Puresome was a stranger in a strange land around Kingsville, being a furriner from Beeville, familiar landmarks would not be helpful. Navigation would have to be of the heading-and-time variety. It was a real good opportunity to frabb up, and he could visualize a skinny old coot of a Naval Aviator jumping up and down on the pages of a future *Nav Air News* asking how any Dilbert could be so dumb?

So Youthly was flang into the air one more time. He was extremely mindful of his heading, and he had punched his clock and watched the minutes tick away as he pooted along at middle altitude with his gear down like some sort of FLAP (floofy light airplane) on steroids.

Very soon it was apparent that nobody would talk to him anymore. He watched the hands on the elapsed time clock tick away and the fuel sucked from his tanks at a prodigious rate. He pondered how much the speeding ticket might be if he had to land on some farm-to-market road, and he considered the improbability of making a smoking hole on



anything other than cactus on what had to be the King Ranch that stretched beneath him.

Puresome was strongly considering promising to sign up for the Boy's Soprano Chorus at Sunday school just before the parallel runways of Kingsville hove into view. Thankful that he hadn't actually signed on the dotted line, he eased out of altitude and down to the traffic pattern. The tower flashed him a green-light signal to land, and it was a very grateful student Naval Aviator that taxied to the transient line and shut down.

Puresome finally made it back to Beeville. When the LSO finally showed up to debrief his passes, nothing was said about shot-up coveys of quail or an extra trap. The predominant comment on his passes was "F...A...S...T!" with lots of "a's" between the "F" and "T." Puresome dimly prefigured that "speed is life," and that was way better than being "S...L...O...W!"

And Grampaw Pettibone didn't have a damn thing to say, either