

The Further Adventures of  
**YOUTHLY PURESOME**

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



## COOL HAND LUKERIES 1963-1983

Cool Hand Luke's wager that he could eat 50 eggs in an hour was still in a far, far future movie when brand new butter-bar ENS Youthly Puresome strode into the Mustin Beach Officer's Club and met his first Apalachicola oyster. It was somehow appropriate that said oyster was naked and quivered in its half shell. It only seemed right to slurp it down on the spot, followed by 51 more. No wager or challenge had been set, but precedence certainly had. In the quest for Naval Aviator Wings of Gold, competition wasn't only for flight grades, but many bouts of scarfing and swilling came naturally in the scramble for Ace-of-the-Base-for-a-Day awards. Puresome always said, "I'm your huckleberry," when such gauntlets were flung down. Youthly's strength was the strength of 10, pure in the knowledge after that first encounter with the "nekkid" oyster; he had only quit because the shucker in the kitchen came down with heat exhaustion.



Later jousts over the years involved contests of massive nacho and jalapeño scarfing, and swilling just one more amber, frothing pitcher of Happy Hour Delight than anyone, except his skippers. They were certainly in another league. Squadron law was that they could down more stingers than anyone and still buy hay for the horses.

So it happened that after he was catapulted into the Brave New World of attack and fighter pilotry, many such contests occurred, as nature intended. The results were not always pretty, particularly when Youthly met the famous and obligatory Filipino delicacy, the balut, but he knew that you had to expect some losses in an operation like this.

### A Really Big Fish

Miracles do happen, and even Puresome did not stay butter-bars forever. As he careered along, some actual saltiness adhered, and shore duty. Youthly got to take cross-countries to exotic military bases where big jets whined, certainly for proficiencies and often to expend excessive OPTAR monies. The downside to these excursions was that mighty belch-fire war machines had a naughty habit of going "sproing!" en route, resulting in surprise destinations, or deciding to bleed to death far away from the home air patch. Naturally suspicious skippers needed convincing sometimes when one of their birds was hard down at some exotic destination, but that was just another of the "Breaks of Naval Air."

So it was not really unusual that Puresome ended up at Magnolia Blossom AFB one evening instead of Fightertown on the Left Coast, where they had tribal rites at the officer's club, Mex Village, Bully's and the like. There were still folks around who had actually worked on *Crusaders*, and there were bushel baskets of parts left over when most of the squadrons there converted to Phantoomery. But Youthly had no good choice but Magnolia Blossom when his TACAN-less F-8, happily

being radar directed cross-country by less happy controllers, went "sproing!" and jetted a stream of hydraulic fluid at 3,000 psi over them old cotton fields below. The Blue Suiters didn't exactly say, "Whut in the hale is that?" when he taxied into the transient line, but his plane certainly didn't look like the lumpy, many-motored trash haulers that populated their ramps. And, while they had enough yellow gear to have simultaneously started all the aircraft on any naval air station, they didn't know about that-there hydraulic pump thing.

So Puresome AUTOVON'd the squadron and explained that he wasn't exactly at Miramar, and would somebody please bring him a hydraulic pump. After the screaming subsided, a rescue mission was arranged, and it was time for a palatial bachelor officer quarters (BOQ), civvies, cold beer and at least some garlic cheese grits, since he could get a cheese-burger practically anywhere.

The BOQ, shower and arranging some wheels took time, and it was dark when he motored off base past the usual fast fooderies. He looked in vain for some catfish place with lots of pickups around it, and was about to give up when a brightly neon-signed message that said "Papadoulis Diner" lit up the surrounding cypress trees and hanging Spanish moss. "Bingo!" Puresome did a four-wheel drift into the crushed oyster shell parking lot and managed not to impact anything important. His stomach growls took precedence over any incredulity over howcum the Glory That Was Greece had come to the boonies of Dixie.

Inside the diner, Youthly found that he was the least senior of both the staff and clientele by some 40 years. But cold beer was advertised, and when a little old waitress toddled over, he was ready. "I want two beers, a bowl of gumbo and A BIG FISH." She withdrew a pencil that was stuck in her gray hair bun and wrote his order deliberately. "How big a fish you want?"

"I want A REALLY BIG fish." The waitress just nodded knowingly and toddled back through the pair of swinging doors to place the order.

The two beers and bowl of gumbo appeared and disappeared right quickly. The Greek Top 40 was playing as dinner music, and Puresome reckoned he had heard the countdown to about ten when his waitress shuttled past, still BIG fishless.



"Say, Ma'am, how's that fish coming back there?"

"It takes a while to cook a BIG fish," she answered with a Greek version of the Sphinxie's Inscrutable Smile. Puresome got another beer and ate some crackers while he considered doing a Chicken Dance version of Zorba.

Finally, the swinging doors burst open, and his waitress staggered out with a platter she had to hold with both arms. On it was a broiled flounder about the size of the Parthenon. Through the circular windows in the swinging doors, the dark faces of the cook staff peered at the foo' who had ordered such a giant delicacy.

Puresome had been had. The gauntlet had been flung down, and it was time to pony up. As he tucked into rendering the monster slabs from the fishie's backbone, he regretted all those crackers ... "I can do this! I can do this," he mantra'd, as ghostly, but very real legions of his Squid and Jarboon scarfing competitors watched from the wainscoting. Honor was at stake, and anything other than victory would be wussiness and disgrace.

But it was not filthy work that had to be done, it was delicious. Under the watching eyes of everyone in the diner, Youthly, pacing himself, started disappearing flounder.

A clock advertising RC Cola on its face tocked away on the wall as flounder disappeared and Puresome's stomach distended over his I-Been-There belt buckle that the Olongapo Filipinos had fashioned from old practice bomb casings. No actual shirt buttons popped at rifle velocity across the room, but the edges of the stomach envelope were being explored and tested. Folks came and went at the swinging glass door, shaking their heads in disbelief, disgust or admiration.

Finally, there was nothing but a roly-poly fish head and a tail attached to the gleaming skeleton on the platter. The collard greens and boiled potatoes still wreathed the remains, but Puresome, in some pain, figured they didn't count.



With as much bravado as he could summon, he called for his check. Over in the wainscoting, his phantasm aviator audience nodded approval and disappeared with an audible "pop!" The Greek Top 40 had cycled through a couple of times by then, and his diner audience had long since factored insanity into the equation.

It took iron will to actually stand up straight, much less walk the 13 steps to the cash register without ripping fabric or something more ominous. But it was done, and Puresome made it outside into the darkness before doubling in half.

Even though he felt like the python who had devoured the entire pig and would have to lay in a torpor for a month, a smile crossed Puresome's greasy lips because he knew he could add an Oak Leave Cluster to his Distinguished Scarfing Cross and maybe someday far away actually again order a Not Quite So Big A Fish.

### A Very Cosmic Roll

Eventually, Youthly joined what he used to derisively call "Senior Citizen Flight." All that running around with his hair on fire had left him with less hair. Had he cared about shining shoes, brass and physical training, folks might mistake him for a Marine. He was supposed to

think abstract thoughts and deal in concepts. CompEx opportunities seemed to be few and far between, but Puresome scanned the skies and kept himself ready.

When he sauntered into the Old Tokyo Bait and Sukiyaki House for lunch, he was not really sensing an opportunity to excel. Usually, he just had a cold beer and some recently dead raw fish pieces, but he decided to check out the chalked-in specials on the blackboard. There were seaweed and tofu California Rolls and some appetizers that did nothing about blowing up his kilties, but the last item sounded interesting: "Cosmic Roll—very, very, very, very *SPICY!* If you eat it all, you win a free bottle of Saki!" Puresome could almost hear the sound of a 15-pound iron gauntlet being flung down in front of him. "I'm your huckleberry!" He thought.

So when the sweet little Japanese waitress took his order of some warm sake, two pieces of bait, and the very, very, very, very spicy Cosmic Roll, she suddenly became a Round-Eye. "Are you sure," she had to ask and launched into the multiple very spicy thing.

"Yes, Ma'am. Bring 'er on!"

"You want glass of water?"

"Nope. I don't want a blindfold, either."



So Puresome sucked on his warm sake and deftly dunked his bait into soy sauce and wasabi with his chopsticks, blinking a little when the mixture opened up his sinuses some after the first bite. Finally, his waitress brought out a plate with about eight round segments of a roll, which would have caught fishes in any pond, were it not for a dollop of evil green that crowned each one. Anticipating a horror show, the waitress brought a glass of ice water anyway.

She withdrew to the safety of a corner, and from behind the glass fish counter, the sushi chefs did their best to check out the coming action inscrutably.

In truth, the Cosmic Roll wasn't that bad. His chopsticks didn't even catch fire. Since he had his innards ulcerated by some really evil little green devil chilies down in Mexico, his Child Bride had maintained that he had no taste buds left in his burnt up mouth. Youthly didn't dispute that, but he figured that the Japanese had Gringo'd up their food some.

With the last piece gone, he raised both arms over his head in the classic gesture of victory, and then pointed his smoking chopsticks at his empty plate and at the pointedly untouched glass of water. The Japanese wait staff was rather less demonstrative, but they smiled and accepted their defeat with good grace.

But when they brought his decorative bottle of sake with a shot glass, Puresome didn't leave with his trophy intact. As calmly as was possible, he unscrewed the top and managed to not gulp the contents.

After a lifetime in Naval Aviation, he had learned he'd rather die than look bad. Though things had changed in the Wings of Gold world, that much certainly had not.