

The Further Adventures of
YOUTHLY PURESOME

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



Low over the scenic Southwestern desert floor whoostled T-Bone's *Crusader*. Behind him, the occasional goatherd cursed the great thunderbird that had driven his animals into a bat-guano scramble in all directions; snakes, Gila monsters and jackrabbits went IFR and deaf in the roiling dust cloud extending in a wide "V" behind the sleek fighter with the Texas flag on the tail.



Behind him also lay the first week of the air wing group grope at NAS Fallon, the wreckage of Friday night happy hour at NAS Miramar and an entire haunch of dead cow and a pitcher of stingers at Bully's. With a packet of gas chits and his own F-8, T-Bone was accumulating flight time and had in his sights the target-rich environment of *mujers* (pronounced "moo-hairs," the local dialect for available young ladies) surrounding his home air patch. Knowing you can't get hurt in a big fight, he contemplated a series of 1-v-many engagements before returning to Fallon Sunday night.

The Mesa With Stuff On It

"Life in the fast lane!" sang the Eagles in stereo as John Wayne country flashed by on the wide screen. T-Bone absently hummed along, oxygen mask comfortably in his lap, his steely eyeballs behind Joe Cool Ray-Bans contemplating the rushing landscape for items of possible interest. Since he had long since departed from the kinda-maybe-semi-legal Miramar low-level route, T-Bone figured he was an equal opportunity flathatter.

A mesa loomed in the distance, and ... *there was stuff on it!* T-Bone edged over a tad toward it and popped up to be level with the top. Sure 'nuff, there were mud-colored buildings and a bunch of people that vibrated at a nominal rate as he whoomed past. Dust sifted from the rafters.

"Hey, that was interesting!" thought T-Bone, his fighter pilot reflexes instantly blocking rational mental process and survival instinct. Considering the likelihood of much flak to be scarce, he swooped around for a second pass, breaking a basic rule of the professional flathatter.

What waited for T-Bone was worse than flak. What was going on was a tribal religious festival attended by notables and a crusading lady reporter from the local newspaper with a camera. And the great screaming war-eagle had definitely gotten everyone's attention. Brendita Starr cocked her Nikon and patiently waited for the Yankee war-pirate to come around again.

But T-Bone was oblivious and had forgotten that, like cats, curiosity often smushes the Naval Aviator. Also, figuring that a permissive environment was good for sightseeing, he put the *Crusader's* wing up and slowed way down to give himself more time to look out the window.

It was real interesting. Pueblo architecture. Colorful costumes. No ground fire. As T-Bone flew by, low and slow, an optically aimed, motor-driven Nikon clunked off five shots, catching the unsuspecting *Crusader* dead-on. Blissfully unaware, T-Bone added power, cleaned up the airplane and disappeared into the distance toward Big D and destiny.

And so the weekend passed. T-Bone flew back to Fallon and the air wing flailed around the sky for another week of annual active duty for training. No MiGs were seen in the Nevada skies and the attack puked hit possible ground with nearly every Mk 76 practice bomb. All was apparently tickedy-boo.

Dances With Wimmins

But back on the mesa, guano was starting to hit the fan. The pueblo had stood some 500 years of grief, but there really was a low-level route kind of close by and the F-111 *Ardvaarks* from Desert Hole AFB regularly roared by at the speed of heat. The three-foot adobe was starting to crack. Besides, the noise was a pain. T-Bone qualified as the last straw.

More than that, there were pictures.

T-Bone's Timeout Means Trouble

And so the giant mudball started downhill, gaining size and velocity as it unerringly tracked toward T-Bone. The tribal government complained to the governor of the state; the governor and a state senator complained to Washington. From there, the mudball gained momentum on its way through Washington and the Pentagon downward to the Reserve high command and on down to the squadrons.

Rumors and innuendoes burbled beneath the surface. Puresome's child-bride, Tunita, received anxious calls, "*Was it Puresome?*" as it had long been felt that he had the flathatting franchise in his home state. But Puresome for once had been off rescuing Virgil Viper from the maintenance puked at Hill AFB and was able to self-righteously deny, deny, deny.

Jim-Tom Greene, Reserve skipper of the Tex-Tails, denied any of his squadron's planes were even airborne that month. "Besides," added Maximum Gore, the TAR officer in charge, "you don't have a number!"



That worked until the crusading girl reporter published her front-page newspaper article with the 6-by-5-in. glossy picture of a *Crusader*, wing up, with the Texas flag on the rudder and side number clearly shining in the Southwestern sun above the colorful costumes and brown mud walls. “YANKEE AIR PIRATE PUNISHES PEACEFUL PUEBLO,” read the banner headline. After *The New York Times* published a follow-up story, the Tex-Tails realized they might have a problem.

T-Bone was had. Inspector Dufus of the *Federales* got involved. He flew a light airplane around the alleged area, made triangulations and calculations and charged the Naval Aviator with violating airspace above a rain dance. From the highest Naval parts, the word came down: “*Get that boy!*”

At the NAS, a board was convened to deal with T-Bone. Oscar Foxtrots came out of the woodwork to serve. Super TAR and Crazy Horse from the Big Red Fighter Squadron were volunteered, but it was felt that perhaps Crazy Horse was too close to the problem. The drums did roll and the ax did fall. T-Bone was grounded for two months.

Part of the deal in sparing T-Bones’ actual life involved apologies. His skipper wrote, “The sun was in his eyes, he had a hole in his glove and he had a headache due to a bad case of swollen testosterone.”

But the real threat came from Inspector Dufus, who posed a threat to T-Bones’ *federale* flight licenses. Without them, he would be unable to leave his flight engineer panel to fetch “three-fourths a cup of coffee with two creams and half a Sweet-and-Low” for tyrannical Anal Airways captains. T-Bone would miss that.

So, he figured he’d better give a really good apology to the pueblo. He put on a sporty coat and tie, grabbed his Dopp kit and jumped on a plane. Renting a conservative car, he put on his sincere face and headed west through the yucca and sagebrush and curiously deaf wildlife, leaving almost as much dust as his Fox-Eight had.

T-Bone was truly, effusively apologetic. He was really sorry he made a second pass. The tribal council magnanimously accepted his apology — it was the second pass that had pissed them off. Besides, all the fuss had succeeded in getting the low-level route that the F-111 devils used moved someplace else.

Saving His Sincerest Apology for Later

Not one to waste a sincere face when he was on a roll, T-Bone motored into town to render apologies to the crusading girl reporter. It turned out that Brendita Starr was not a bad-looking media person.

It was the mother of all apologies. By the time T-Bone finally linked his appearance in the skies to a postnatal feeding problem, she felt he was not bad looking in a Yankee air-pirate sort of way, and dinner might be nice.

Dinner was nice, with candles, wine and lots of soft music. Later, at her home, the passing trains shook his Dopp kit. And the earth moved.

Much, much later, back in the big city, Inspector Dufus received a very passionate letter from a crusading girl reporter who felt that a certain recently maligned pilot had suffered enough. And his black heart was touched. In the after-years, T-Bone often wondered where the bale of incriminating government paperwork went.

And now, from time to time, flying over the great southwest in gaily painted airliners, T-Bone still remembers what happened at the 069-degree radial, 40-mile fix off the Desert Hole VORTAC. Looking down from 35,000 feet, he can still spot a mesa with low, brown buildings on it.

“Hey, looky down there,” he points out to fellow crewmembers. “Lemme tell you a story about that place!”

But only if they’re ex-Navy.