

The Further Adventures of
YOUTHLY PURESOME

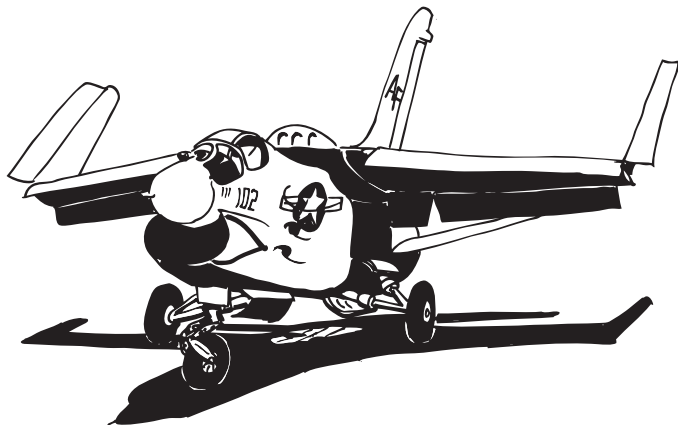
by CDR Jaek D. Woodul, USNR(Ref), artwork by Carl Snow



It was a boondoggle — the mighty U.S. Government had some extra money and some of it had trickled down to the Naval Air Reserves. LT Youthly Puresome, part-time fighter pilot, had wrangled his piece of the pie by bagging a week's active duty to attend an electronics countermeasures school at NAS Lemoore, Calif.

Puresome had always had a creepy fascination with the gawps and gleeps generated by his ECM gear that came over his headset back when the bad guys in Vietnam used to paint him with their radars. The warbles of SAM launches fascinated him almost to the point of soiling his already green flight suit. "Anyhow, a couple of bucks, a couple of yucks, maybe some decent Mexican food," he thought.

The flight out west was not as placid as Puresome's usual civilian DC-9 trip. Since the weather was supposed to be hot and dusty, and as he hated chatting with the ATC folks if it wasn't absolutely necessary, he had filed an easy visual flight rules flight plan. But the cirrus layer he found to hinder his view of the desert unfortunately extended way above 41,000 feet, which was where he finally gave up trying to find blue sky. Then there was a silly business with the roll stabilization of his single-seat supersonic transport not working. When Puresome finally reached the land where the skies are not cloudy all day, he was happy to leave his quietly leaking F-8 *Crusader* on the transient line.



A Different Place

Lemoore seemed semi-deserted. Puresome remembered days before the Big War when swarms of A-4 *Skyhawks* peopled the ramps and crowded the taxiways and the skies overhead. But with Lemoore air wings on aircraft carriers at Yankee Station in the Tonkin Gulf, and with others in transit to and from the Western Pacific, things now seemed kinda ... empty.

"Course, it's Sunday afternoon, too," he thought on the way over to the BOQ, rubbing his face where his oxygen mask had deeply creased it. Slumped against the pickup door as the duty driver jolted along, Puresome fantasized a moaning wind driving a scrap of newspaper along a deserted street, a screen door with a busted latch somewhere monotonously banging against the frame.

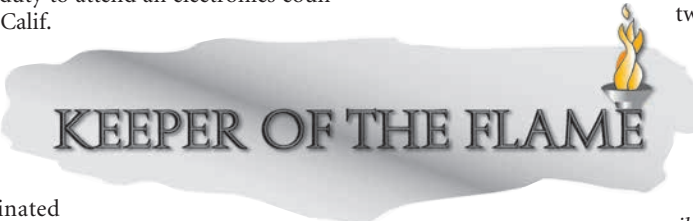
Since Puresome had honest-to-goodness orders, checking in the bachelor officers quarters was no sweat. He had always felt that a BOQ was, like the interior of an aircraft carrier, one of life's generic experiences — in one, in all — the same smells, colors and jolly utilitarian construction. The only thing that brought a BOQ to life was being in one with your pals on the brink of some hairy adventure.

Puresome considered himself a loner in the great, self-reliant cowboy tradition. But there was something about watching strangers passing through a BOQ lobby in flight gear that made him feel that they had just done or were just going to do something really dangerous and righteous,

and not being a part of that had always made him feel lonely. He felt that they were doing something he ought to be doing.

"Time to kick the situation in the canugies and get out of this place," he thought as he dug his swim trunks, flip flops and a ratty T-shirt out of his parachute bag. "Lets go see if there are any winsome ladies toasting their parts out by the pool."

The pool experience was another biggie for Puresome. No svelte nymphets simmering in coconut oil — just a few people. He drank some beer, ended up watching a shy mommy and two quiet little girls, and wondered where the old man was ... a temporarily safe-at-home shore-duty puke; plowing around Yankee Station on a big iron boat; or maybe enjoying the Hanoi Hilton; perhaps MIA or just plain KIA. "At least, my wife knows where I am ... still out playing part-time fighter pilot," he thought.



The Good Deal Comes to an End

The electronic countermeasures course was jolly good. There was a day of classroom instruction in new equipment and techniques. Puresome put considerable heat on a technician to design something to put on his Porsche that would melt police radar guns, but to no avail.

Another day was spent flying up to the Fallon ECM range in the station S2F and actually working bad guy gun-tracking and SAM radar against a chap in an A-7 *Corsair* who was doing his best to keep from getting zapped. Even as he cranked the tracking wheels trying to nail the airplane, Puresome was rooting for the A-7 driver.

So another good deal came to an end. Puresome stuffed his old skivvies, civvies and shaving gear into his parachute bag, put on his flight suit and caught a ride to base operations to file his flight plan for home.

Puresome did all the usual stuff — figured out a navigation card, anticipated the customary radio and/or navigation equipment failure, talked to the weather guys and turned in his DD-175 flight plan to the operations guys.

Don't Forget Us

Then, as he was leaving for the transient line, he noticed the plaques. There, on the wall, were posted the names of all the guys from Lemoore who had been bagged in the war in Vietnam. There were lots of names.

Time stopped in Puresome's universe as he read the names. Some he knew, most he didn't. The young pilot felt them, what they had done and what he had not. He felt the honor in them and the sadness of a lost and trampled cause.

"Don't forget us, don't forget us," the wall whispered. "We gave and we're gone, and nobody gives a damn, so don't forget us ..."

Puresome started as two sailors came around the corner, talking loudly. He walked out of operations toward his plane.

On the flight home and on other flights through the years, Puresome could hear the ghosts. They joined his friends on another wall in another place.

The bright fire in him burned, and he did not forget them.

