

The Further Adventures of
YOUTHLY PURESOME

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He could see the rocket from the steps of the hotel. It was just where they told him it would be, its tip sticking up above the trees beyond an unkempt Moscow park. The light mist made its sun-faded green paint look even duller, but it had not lost any of its menace. Puresome pulled up the collar of his jacket and started walking toward it. Even though there were no KGB operatives assigned to follow him like they used to follow his former Pan American crewmembers, he still had to look back to be sure.

Rocket in the Rain



The commies had been there for as long as he could remember, cold people, comrades with history and stainless-steel teeth marching in bayoneted phalanxes through Red Square, off to bury capitalism. Comic books showed commissars with shaved heads lurking about in leather coats smoking small black cigars made from truck tires, downing endless shots of vodka while they plotted the downfall of America.

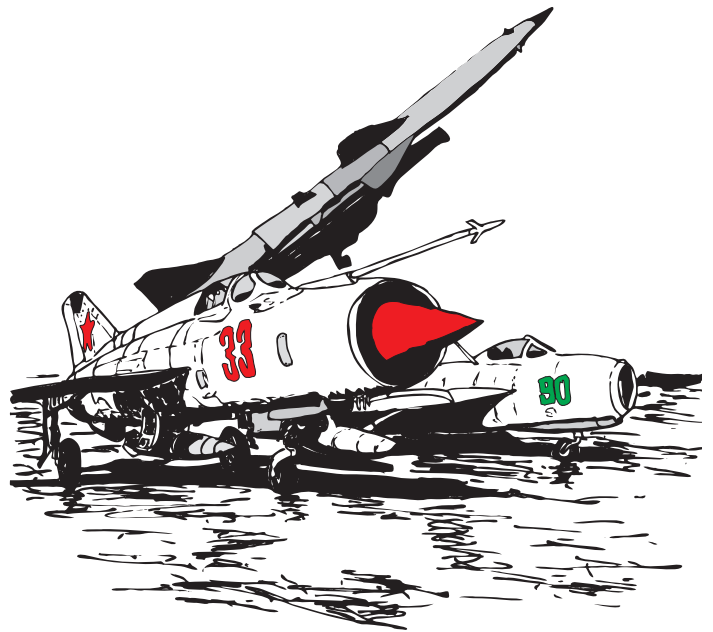
Their leaders had banged shoes on the august tables of the United Nations and nudged the coming of the dictatorship of the proletariat along with military hardware and advisors in lots of nasty little wars.

In his youth, Puresome had learned to “tuck and roll” under his school desk in case Premier Kissoff actually decided to nuke the grain elevator in metropolitan Portales. Perhaps, he thought, this missile was one of those shipped back from Cuba. The *Hunters* fought with a Rooskie Casey Jones and his honcho pals over the Yalu River, and many senior Naval Aviators he knew wore gongs from the “police action” that was very much a war. The MiGs, SAMs and flak that Puresome faced in the late unpleasantness in Southeast Asia certainly had not been provided by Switzerland. But in the end, it had all cost too much for the Evil Empire, and it had gone away with only the occasional bang and the odd whimper.

Captain Mitty Puresome

Now those sweptwing, manly jets Puresome had flown that had avoided being parked in the Arizona sun were stuck on sticks in front of naval air stations or shining in warbird museums. Youthly the warrior was now CAPT Mitty Puresome, who wore his heavily brocaded cap down over one cold gray eye, programmed his many-motored heavy airliner across the pond to exotic places and dreamed of the reheats. Inevitably, given the state of his airline juniority, flights to Moscow in the chillier months showed up on his “things to do” list.

“Maybe the KGB or SMERSH will have misfiled my dossier, and I won’t get abducted and brainwashed into assassinating the CEO of Consolidated Vultee at the phone command of my OP Granny, who had been secretly turned by Leon Trotsky, back in the Thirties....” Puresome certainly wasn’t paranoid that commies wanted to kill him because they used to shoot at his madly jinking Scooter, but he kept it in mind. He studied up on how to use meters instead of feet for flight levels and

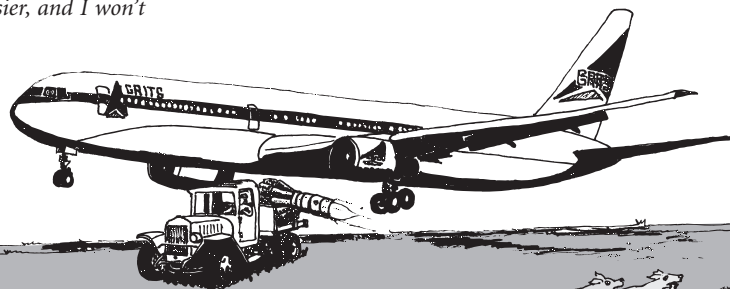


how to navigate across the Great Cold Places to Moscow’s Nicolai Ivonovitch Lobachefski International Airport.

It turned out to be not a big deal, except for the compacting of Youthly’s beautocks during the 10-hour flight. It did take all three flight crewmembers, listening hard and taking notes, to decipher the Automated Terminal Weather broadcasts that were read with a Russian accent of great thickness. Even though it was suspected that some of the navigational aids were, slyly, not exactly where the Russians said they were, the magic boxes in Youthly’s airliner successfully found the airport, and they landed without fanfare or fireworks. In fact, NIL International Airport was much like any other, except for the pack of dogs that chased across the ramp after airliner jetsam that was being blown toward the perimeter fence by a transversely mounted jet engine on a flatbed truck.

“We should have thought about that back in the Nav, instead of doing all those FOD walkdowns of the ramp after quarters every morning,” Puresome thought.

After deplaning, Puresome and his crew waited to follow an Aeroflot flight crew through security. The Russians had been to a far, far away country and had scored some impressive souvenirs like truck tires and bundles of long florescent light tubes. Thus, it took some time to pass through all the custom officials’ scrutinizing, and passports and visas stamping.





The security area was definitely not decked out like a fern bar, and the officials, with their big Frisbee-top hats, uniforms and grim expressions, brought visions of applications of maniacal devices to the body. But, unlike some of the flight attendants who were carrying in lots of Levi blue jeans to sell on the black market, the only thing Puresome had to fear was fear itself, and he passed through with a nominal number of scowls.

Exploring the Sights and Sounds

Mother Russia was not yet a winter wonderland, but was stuck in the October drizzlies. The driver of the crew bus pointed out a giant anti-tank obstacle left over from the Great Patriotic War that marked the closest the Nazis had come to Moscow, but otherwise the scenery was uniformly gray and grim. Visions of prancing off to the Bolshoi or scoring some bottles of high-grade rocket-fuel vodka faded to the customary jet lag need for some time in the hammock.

After checking in at the hotel, it was agreed that the first officer and some of the flight attendants would show FNG Capitano Puresome the obligatory sights later on that day. The relief pilot refused to leave the hotel, convinced that he would glow from eating Chernobyl chicken in some dive or be abducted by the Russian mafia, to be tortured and held for ransom. Youthly thought he had a point.

It was a good thing that Puresome had a senior-mama Lead Elephant for the migration to Red Square, because he awoke from his nap truly lost in space. A shower and some scraping left him somewhat better for wear, but he was grateful when their small party set off from the hotel and actually found a subway station. The Lead Elephant had brought along a sack of small coins that looked like various-sized washers — about four hundred of them, amounting to some 37 cents, bought five people a ride to the station closest to their destination. Since the only Russian Youthly knew was “Stolichnaya,” he hadn’t a clue, since none of the signs said that. Still, they all boarded a subway train that clattered them along in what the Lead Elephant assured him was the proper direction.

Perhaps Puresome’s black roper cowboy boots and decidedly foreign get-up put the local passengers off their digestion. They were heavily bundled in dark, quietly fuming clothes, and they seemed to be trying to work through a gnarly chess problem or were suffering from bad

borscht. Nobody, not even the children, was permitted a smile in the presence of an obvious Foreign Lackey Libertine Bastid, and Puresome was sorely tempted to do the Chicken Dance and make weird faces to see if anyone’s lip might curl.

They emerged from the underground and strolled along. Puresome was being nattered at by one of the veteran flight attendants when they passed by what looked like a refrigerator that had been hand-painted green. In its front, there was a small niche with a glass sitting in it, and there was a slot for kopeks or different sized washers. Puresome could only imagine what fluid might be expelled into the communal glass, but, having contracted a rather pesky gastrointestinal disorder from drinking orange juice from a communal glass in Mexico, decided to let it pass as local color. Further on, as they passed into Red Square, there was the famous GUM department store, where there must have been a sale on radiator caps, because there was a long line queued up beyond the door.

Red Square didn’t look quite right without formations of T-34 tanks, ICBMs on trailers and masses of men marching through it. Lenin was having his anti-freeze replaced, so his tomb was closed. But the colorful onion tops of St. Basil’s church looked just as they should, as did the walls of the Kremlin, and Youthly put his “X’s” in those boxes.

They wandered down Arbat Street, where nascent capitalism was aborning. Puppies, whole armies of stacked Matrioshka dolls, night-vision goggles and lots of stuff with the Red Star on it were for sale on long tables. Puresome made a Russian’s day when, after some intense, incoherent bargaining, he bought about a hundred ornate badges on a cloth display for 10 dollars American. By this time, Youthly’s fun meter was pegged out and it was time to get to the hotel before dark. After more haggling, taxis were arranged and dispatched to the hotel. Little old babushka grannies were sweeping leaves from the median of the broad *prospect* as they drove, and Puresome understood that all the rubles went into Sputniks and *Foxbats* for all those years, certainly not into infrastructure. For a place that was recently a super power, Russia sure looked like, if not a full Third World Country, at least a firm two-point two-five.

“*But, you know,*” Puresome reflected as they bounced along, “*maybe if Los Estados Unidos had lost some twenty-seven million soldiers and civilians to the tender ministrations of the Wermacht during the Great Patriotic War, and had lots of the Worker’s Paradise shot up and mashed under Panzer treads, we might be a lot grimmer and concentrate on not letting it happen again.*”

As they went into the lobby of the hotel, the First Officer asked Puresome, “Hey, did you see the ICBM sticking up over by the park outside?” Puresome, whose feet hurt and beer low-level light was on, had not. “Well, there is a military museum over there with lots of stuff. You can just walk over.” Puresome had heard about the museum from other chaps, and he resolved to have a look, certainly after cold beer and a good night’s sleep.

All Those Weapons, Once Alive

Puresome walked along the path worn through the patchy grass under the trees of the park. Eventually, he came to a bunch of rat shacks, and he passed through them in the direction of the rocket. He scrunched up his shoulders, expecting a burst of AK-47 fire from his six o’clock at any second. But nobody was around, and suddenly he was in the middle of a vast array of Soviet military might, dominated by the high altar of the looming ICBM.

Immediately around him were a MiG-17 and a MiG-21. There was a SAM-2 on its launcher. There were other aircraft, missiles, anti-aircraft cannon and many tanks. All looked a little sad and dilapidated as they sat on weedy grass in a light rain. Puresome was lost in memory of what these fearsome weapons meant to him for so long. Now they were drooping and wet in a forgotten park, and Youthly was an airline puke, a tourist, just as wet in the same park. The world had changed. Evil, which abhors a vacuum, had shifted to other climes, and younger warriors wielded newer, shinier weapons.

But Puresome knew where the SAMs of yesteryear were. Certainly, they were not here, rusting away on forgotten display. But, any time he cared remember, all these weapons were alive, and vital, and deadly, just as he was, forever Youthly, forever joyous in battle.

As he slowly walked back to the hotel, he reflected what a comfort that was.