



YP was rapidly running out of his ejection seat qual, so, wot to do? Aha! NAS New Orleans had such a trainer, so YP snagged a Mighty 55-Foot Long *Crusader*, whose burner goes boom boom and wing goes up and down (or, maybe it's the fusilage that does that, wotever...). Finally one came available late in the day that was not gushing hydraulic fluid; blastoff was achieved and a landing in the darkiness at N'Orlens was jolly enough. So, two quick cold beers and a bagout at the BOQ without being et by gators or fanged by slithery things.

Rode the ejection seat up the rails, got the required stamps and notations in the log book. No Muffalata's or oyster Po' boys at the ops grill, but a suitable cheeseburger sufficed. Time for RTB.

Well now then there. This was back in the wonderful days when a chap could fly VFR below FL 240 — no steeking IFR unless it was REALLY

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## YOUTHLY TAKES ON THE THUNDERBOOMERS

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crap WX — and so a VFR flight plan back to Navy Dallas was filed. It was summertime, so some thunderstorms were expected along a cold front out there, said the wx man. Looking out the window, YP could see wot looked like a solid line of nasties that seemed to extend from roughly Mexico City up to Chicargo. No sweat, sez YP, my might jet knows no fear, and I won't tell anyone if I have to sneak above FL240. All the important bits seemed to be attached to the *Crusader*, so boom-boom went the burner and zoom-zoom went the jet.

It shortly became apparent that the line of TRW's were rather higher than FL 240. By quite a bit. No sweat — boom-boom went the burner, zoom-zoom went the jet. Seems like the tops were between 50,000 and 52,000 feet, with regular peaks up thru that, like a picket fence.

Staggering along just out of the clag, YP was aware that this was not good. To stay out of the clag took occasionally resorting to the burner, which about half the time did not light. *Etai*, Japanese word for pain! Nozzles opened, no belch fire, loss of thrust, down into the clags. Quick outta burner, close the nozzles, pick up some lost smash and hoping not to encounter a hard part of cloud. Try again on the burner, and, YES! Regain enough smash to get back on top.

Now, YP was also aware he was not wearing a pressure suit. If his pressurization hiccuped, things would go pear shaped. There were these lumpy clouds all around. Even though it was a relatively short flight from N'Orlens to Navy Dallis, and he was way up high, he was using fuel at more than an ordinary rate, due to excessive use of Mr. Burner to save his hiney.

Grampa Pettibone was definitely jumping up and down, screaming "Jumpin' Jehosephat!" Yet once again, YP assured the Big Guy that he would join the Boy's Soprano Chorus at Sunday School if'n he'd hep him just a little, one more time.

And, right quickly, he popped out into clear blue skies behind the frontal thunderstorms. YP slowly retarded the throttle to idle and back an RCH to close the nozzles, and eased out of hyperspace and boiling blood country. He figgered he could idle descend to practically the Westerly Coast, and would not flame out and look bad before he got home.

He even had enough petrol for a Sierra Hotel break back at the Home Patch.

Yesssss! Piece of pie!

But sometimes, on the darkest nights when thunderous storms boomed and lightening spat fire, YP would remember the Boy's Soprano Chorus thing. Someday, when it's sunny, I got to do that.

Grandpa Pettybone just lurked in the background, smiling.

He knew the boy.