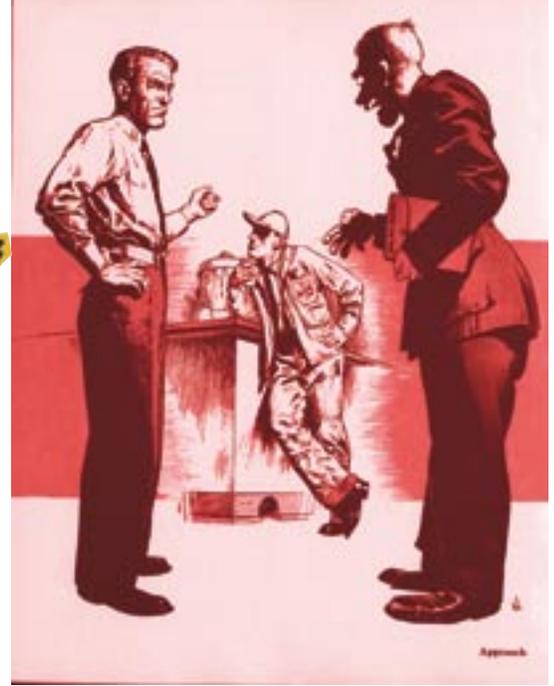


The Return of WALTER SMITTY



March 1956

Herewith, in response to the number of requests (two by actual count), the Approach chronicles another episode in the fabulous career of Lt. (jg.) Walter Smitty, Scourge of the Skies. Smitty's initial appearance was in the August, 1955 issue. With proper apologies to James Thurber, creator of the original character, the reader is

invited to participate in another "incident," the details of which are based on two actual Anymouse Reports.

Lt. (jg.) Walter Smitty, aviator extraordinary, pilot's pilot, air adventurer, lounged against the coffee mess bar and listened indifferently to the readyroom chatter about him. As always, his lean, hawklike face was inscrutable, masklike. Idly his tapered fingers drummed in time with music from the radio nearby. Rocka-rolle-rocka.

Across the readyroom, elbows nudged into ribs and furtive, respectful whispers marked the presence of Smitty the Sky Scourge.

"That's Walter Smitty," a lieutenant whispered to a newly reported ensign, "The one and *only* Walter Smitty. And believe me ..." The rest of the sentence faded as Smitty's steely glance flicked about the room.

"Who's Walter Smitty?" The newcomer, Ensign Peavey, was plainly unaware of the reputation of the Sky Scourge.

"Gad, man!" His companion regarded him with pity as he sought to correct this educational deficiency.

"Well," he began carefully, "You know who Lindberg

was, don't you? Did you ever hear of Rickenbacker? Well, now forget them and just try to imagine Jesse James playing Captain Video, and ..." The lieutenant found the task too great and got down to cases.

"Do you know that Smitty once shot off a towbanner?"

"So, what's so amazing about that? Peavey was still dubious.

"Nothing, stupid, except Smitty happened to be flying the tow plane at the time!"

Peavey gaped and stared with unabashed wonder at this marvel of military aviation. At the snack bar, Walter Smitty permitted the faintest of smiles to drift across his face. Abruptly he wheeled toward the door.

"Okay, you tigers!" His voice cracked vibrantly in the stirring language of airmen, "Launch 'em! Let's get that 'ol *Beechcraft* into the blue!"

The other pilots flinched slightly and, eyes averted, chewed vigorously on their hamburgers. Chompa-choppa-chomp.

"Well?" Smitty demanded, "Ain't nobody gonna go with me on this hop to pick up them spare parts at Jax?" The answering silence was mute tribute to the awe in which the Sky Scourge was held. Then the new ensign, Peavey, leaped to his feet.

"Sir, *I'd* like to go with you." And the young man was suddenly red-faced under the keenly appraising eyes that swept him. The ensign shuffled nervously under the penetrating glance that seemed to ferret out his innermost secrets.

"You a pilot?" With characteristic directness Smitty's question drove straight to the heart of the matter.

"Yessir, designated three months past, sir."

Again the cool, hard look—weighing, testing, searching.

“Okay, let’s go, son. A night cross-country’ll do you real good.”

And the two, master airman and apprentice pilot, strode into the night. In the readyroom, a long sigh from the other pilots marked their departure.

When airborne, Smitty turned the *Beechcraft* to a southerly heading and, as Ensign Peavey watched in appreciative bewilderment, his hands moved knowingly over radio controls tuning in Jax omni. Clicka-screecha-squawk. Under Smitty’s sure touch the little twin-engined plane bracketed easily between the Atlantic coastline and the Appalachian mountains. Brack-a-braacka-yaw. Nearing Jax, Smitty disclosed further evidence of his legendary prowess as he bird-dogged in on NAS Jax’s low frequency range.

Over the range station, the Great Pilot graciously allowed the delighted Peavey to assist.

“Which way’s the field from here, son?”

The copilot gulped slightly but was ready with the answer.

“East, sir,” and Peavey’s heart quailed at the quick frown on Smitty’s face. Then the Sky Scourge permitted another of his rare smiles to be visible as his hawklike vision spied a field with a well-lighted runway dead ahead.

“Never mind, son. Course inbound is 269 degrees. There’s the field straight ahead.” The copilot wagged head, amazed, Egad! The man’s skill confounded even the Radio Fac Charts! The RFC showed the inbound bearing to NAS Jax to be 089 degrees from their position! Peavey’s heart swelled at the knowledge that he was flying with True Greatness.

On standard tower channel Smitty requested landing instructions of Navy Jax and the acknowledgment came promptly. Landing runway 27. Smitty descended into the pattern and began his normal approach. Vrooma-zooma-vroom.

Below, on runway 27 at Navy Cecil Field, members of the crash crew glanced up from their task of removing a crippled Banshee fighter from where it had engaged the field arresting gear following a landing gear malfunction. The unidentified aircraft on downwind continued its approach, and Cecil tower began to call frantically to warn the airplane of men and equipment on the runway. UHF, VHF and Guard frequencies gained no response. Two signal lights then speared their red warning beams at the Beech. The crash crew scrambled to clear the runway.

In the *Beech*, Smitty unfolded another bit of flying lore to the admiring Peavey.

“Ya see lotsa diffrent kinds of lighting on these fields. That cluster of lights up there at the other end of the runway fr’instance. Some new kinda threshold or boundary markers, I reckon.” The copilot bobbed his head in agreement, marveling anew at the uncanny depth perception of the Master Pilot.

The *Beech* touched down neatly, with lots of room to spare, and Smitty allowed the plane to roll out easily with deft touches of braking; Scruncha-screecha-scrunch. Nearing the end of the runway the *Beech* jolted over the arresting gear anchor chain and Smitty spat a blistering remark about fouled-up air stations which permitted such a threat to runway operations. Peavey attempted unsuccessfully to imitate the deep growl of the Sky Scourge and, failing, curled his lip scornfully at this sad-sack air station.

Now, as the *Beech* threaded its way towards the turn-off, shadowy figures on either side scurried madly for cover. Pat-a-patta-pat. Smitty’s contempt increased.

“Wish they’d knock off that blasted red light blinking over there by the tower—danged thing might confuse a inexperienced pilot. Wait’ll I get into operations, I’ll tell those characters off.”

Peavey nodded firmly, resolving to make a few remarks of his own, say to a line crewman, or even a chief, maybe. He glanced approvingly at Smitty and tried to compress his lips into the same bitter line that creased the mouth of the Great Man.

At Navy Jax, a tower operator peered again into the darkness around the field, and seeing nothing, continued to call the Beechcraft. Some 12 miles west, the Cecil Field operations officer strode the floor in purple-faced wrath as he awaited the arrival of the pilot of the airplane which, unannounced, had just narrowly missed piling into the runway crash equipment.

The operations office door swung open and a lean, hawkfaced pilot strolled in, cigaret drooping from the corner of his mouth as he flicked a negligent glance about the room. Tossing a flight plan towards the duty officer, Smitty yawned broadly and draped himself with unconscious grace over the counter, smoke curling lazily past half-lidded eyes.

“How ya, pal,” the Sky Scourge’s steely stare was only half-veiled, “Crummy sort of a outfit you folks run here ...”

Across the field, the crash crew paused in their task as a sudden outburst of sound erupted from the vicinity of the operations building. Pow-a-powa-yeow.

The driver of the cherry picker squinted towards the source of uproar, flinching as the noise increased in volume.

“Cheeze!” He exclaimed wonderingly, “I think the hangar roof just blew off!”