

Air Marshal Philip Rajkumar recollects

Four Unforgettable Events

In a flying career which lasted a little over forty years, there were a great many close shaves, near misses and 'There but for the grace of God go I' moments. Four events stand out in my memory as they happened during various stages of my career. The first was when I was inexperienced, the second was my very first operational sortie in a war, the third was during test flying and the last was at the fag end of my career when I had my neck well and truly inside a noose !

Abandoning take off in a Toofani

In October 1963, I was a Pilot Officer flying Toofanis with No 47 Squadron at Bagdogra. I had about 50 hours on type and 300 hours in my log book. The 18/36 runway was only 1800 yards long leaving little room for error during take off and landing. One morning I was doing a formation take off on R/W 36 and concentrating a lot on station keeping. As the speed built up I felt the stick move forward on its own. When the leader raised his nose wheel I tried to do the same but the stick was frozen solid. I could not move it back even a millimetre. I immediately abandoned take off by throttling back and braking hard to bring the aircraft to a stop just before the black top ended. As I cleared the runway I moved the stick and it moved freely. I was nonplussed! After switch off I got out and went to look at the elevator. The elevator trim tab which was electrically operated by a trim wheel in the cockpit was in the fully nose down trim position. The cockpit indicator which was also electrically operated showed neutral. The Court of Inquiry found the screw jack which moved the tab had failed in the fully nose down trim position. The C-of-I also found the trim position indicator did not show the actual position of the trimmer, something which we did not know. Eastern Air Command recommended me for a CAS Commendation for displaying good airmanship. A slightly delayed decision to abandon take off would have been catastrophic due to the short runway and a very, short, uneven overshoot area.

Daylight raid over Sargodha

When the Indo-Pak war started in September 1965, I was a Flying Officer in No 1 'Tiger' Squadron at Adampur, flying the Mystere IVA ground attack aircraft. On 7 September I was in a four aircraft formation ordered to attack the heavily defended PAF air

base, Sargodha which was 100 miles inside enemy territory. The aircraft were armed with 2x1000 lbs bombs and front guns. We took off at 0945 hours, flew at extreme low level and were over the target at 1015 hours. As we pulled up for the bombing dive, heavy flak greeted us. Three Sabres and one F-104 were attacked on the ORP and the ATC building was destroyed. All aircraft returned safely to base. The formation members were, No 1 Sqn. Ldr. Sudarshan Handa, No 2 Flt. Lt. Darshan Singh Brar, No 3 Flt. Lt. Dilmohan Singh Kahai, No 4 Fg. Offr. Philip Rajkumar. This raid was the most successful counter air mission of the entire war. It was acknowledged for its audacity even in the official PAF history of the war. Handa and Kahai were awarded the Vir Chakra while Brar and I were awarded a Mention-in-Despatch.

Hairy Moment in a Gnat

In August 1975, I was a SqnLdr at the Aircraft and Systems Testing Establishment at Bangalore. On 2 August I was to air test

a Gnat Mk. 1 before ferrying it to Hindon for a trial. I had about 12 hours on the Gnat. As I taxied out for take off the sky was overcast with a cloud base of 1000 feet above ground level. I kept moving the ailerons all the time while taxiing, as was the practice in Gnat squadrons, to ensure the ailerons were in hydraulic power. When I moved the stick to the left and released it, it would not self centre. To the right it would. This made me suspect that the left aileron was in manual. After line up I did the check again and the stick stayed stubbornly stuck to the left stop. I abandoned the sortie, returned to dispersal and reported the snag to the Chief Test Pilot, Wg Cdr 'Babi' Dey who was a very experienced Gnat pilot. He started up, checked the ailerons and said they were fine. He told me to go ahead with the air test. I started up again and after ensuring the ailerons were in power I took off, did an instrument climb through a thick overcast to 30,000 feet, broke cloud and levelled out. Seconds later the stick snatched violently to the left



Mystere IVA of No.1 Squadron, IAF