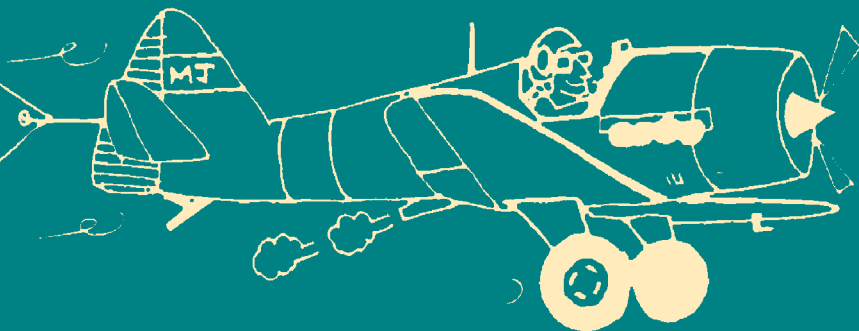
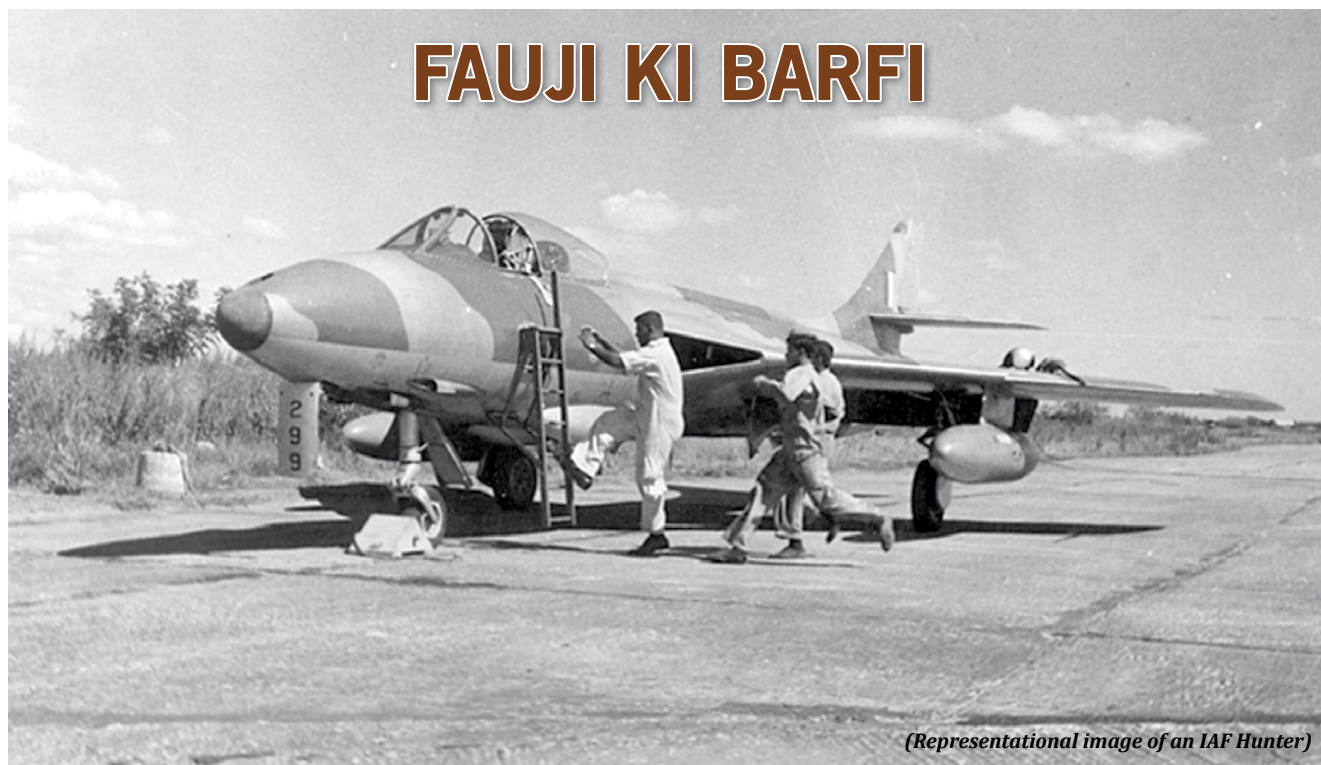


Ancient Aviator Anecdotes



Air Vice Marshal (R) Cecil Parker and his.....



(Representational image of an IAF Hunter)

One of the fallouts from the Swarnim Vijay Varsh celebrations last year was the large number of little known stories from the 1971 Indo-Pak war which stimulated the memories of the rapidly diminishing number of surviving participants. In my 90th year I find that short term memories sometimes fail but long term ones are still reasonably clear. One such unknown story describes a simple gesture of spontaneous jointmanship at the operational level. During that war I was in command of a squadron, then equipped with Hunter Mk 56A aircraft and based in Pathankot. Our primary task was counter air operations deep inside enemy territory (airfields/radar units/oil refineries/dams) for the first five days after which our role was changed to CAS (Close Air Support) to our land forces in Punjab and J & K. On

10 Dec 71 an urgent request for CAS came in from a bde (brigade) in the Chamb area where its lead elements were held up by a well dug-in enemy gun position, up-slope in a ravine and which dominated the only road to a bridge. Our army GLO (Ground Liason Officer) briefed us on the situation, terrain, location and urgent requirement to neutralise this gun position holding up our advance on that axis.

Mission 527 was led by me and I took with me one of our younger pilots as my wingman. In addition to the 4 x 30mm guns integral to the aircraft, we each carried 2 x 68mm RP (rocket pods) externally. Within an hour of receiving the request we were airborne and soon in contact with the FAC (Forward Air Controller) with the bde who directed us correctly to the gun position. The terrain did not permit conventional

RP attacks so I decided to improvise and fire all 16 rockets in salvo from close-in and just above the camouflaged enemy position. Probably not wanting to give away its position, it refrained from any defensive fire. My wingman capped the area above for any enemy air threat while I put in my attack which he replicated while I gave him top cover. The target was a mass of smoke, dust and debris from which we could see some figures running downhill towards their vehicles which we then shot up with our front guns. As we left our FAC called out 'Good shooting Sir' and during our debrief I complimented my wingman for coping very well.

Later that evening, just prior to the nightly 'blackout', I received an unexpected visit at my residence from the army GLO who arrived carrying two gift wrapped sweet



(The author of this piece and series in the Vayu magazine is busy typing away to meet the next deadline!)

boxes. He had received a message from the BM (Brigade Major) saying that thanks to the effective air support provided, they were on the move and requested that *'dono pilot ko barfi khilana!* I conveyed our thanks and requested him to kindly hand over the wingman's box directly to him in the Mess. Most evenings/nights I made a visit to our loop dispersal where our night shift of technicians carried out repair and service of aircraft inside the covered blast pens. Our 'Chiefy' would brief me on the number of aircraft we could plan on for the next day; I handed over my box of *barfi* to him for the airmen and explained that it was a token of appreciation from the Army! I do not know what happened to the other box, but it is unlikely to have survived very long either in the Mess or the crew room!

VISUAL HISTORY

During the 1971 Indo-Pak war, No 20 Squadron, equipped with Hunter Mk 56A aircraft, was based at Pathankot. Among its many counter air targets was the PAF air base at Murid. This airfield was attacked by No. 20 Squadron Hunters on 4, 7 and 8 Dec'71 and took a collective toll of nine

F-86 Sabre aircraft destroyed/damaged on ground. On Page 82 of his book 'In the Ring and Standing' (published in 2018), Air Cmde Kaiser Tufail (Retd) of the PAF confirms this loss adding that 'the base took the worst beating of the war on 8 Dec 71 when seven Sabres were destroyed/damaged along with many drop tanks'. This was a most significant event in the air war for our air force and No. 20 Squadron.

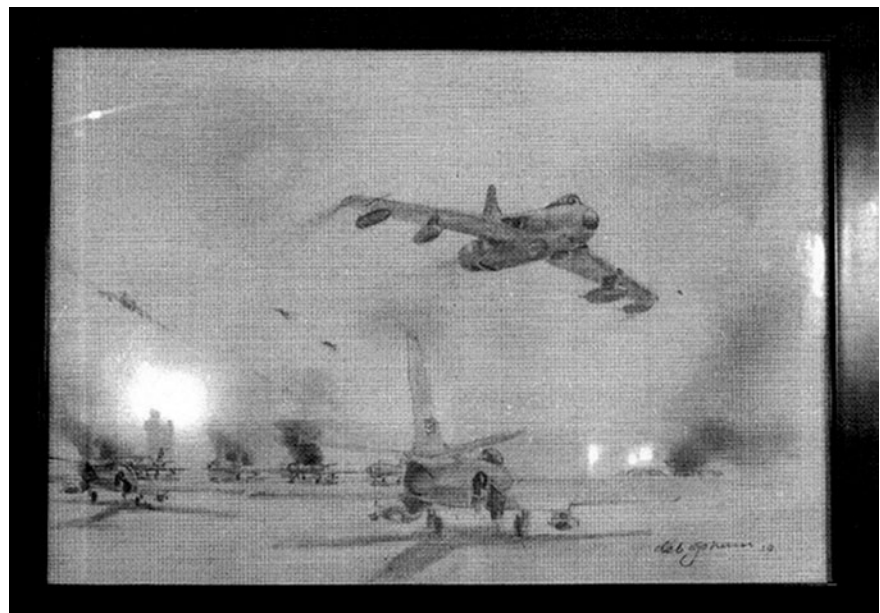
The successful raid(s) on Murid inspired Gp Capt Deb Gohain (Retd), himself a fighter pilot with 30 years of service, to get in touch with this writer in Hyderabad from his home in Gauhati. Deb is also a gifted artist whom I have never met but whose oil paintings on IAF activities I have seen. He was keen to depict the Hunter raids on Murid on canvas. Since I had been the CO of the squadron during the war and had led one of the strikes, he needed some information on aircraft configuration and layout of Murid airfield. I was happy to share whatever information I could remember.

In November 2021, a truly realistic oil painting (packaged safely within a cylinder) was hand delivered to my home. It accurately depicted four Hunters pressing home their gun strikes successfully through defensive ground fire. It was colourful visual history and I was privileged to receive it. However I genuinely felt that its proper and rightful home should be in No. 20 Squadron and not in the possession of an individual. I shared these thoughts with

Deb who was very understanding and supported my request to the current CO of No. 20 Squadron to kindly arrange for its collection. On 2 Dec'21 I received telephonic confirmation that the painting had reached the Squadron. Since then, neither the donor artist or this writer have heard anything further.

Unknown to me Deb was working on another idea. He ascertained my postal address and last month I was surprised to receive another large professionally packaged parcel by courier. Inside was a striking (pun intended) black and white replica of the very same painting. In his covering letter he explained that all his oil paintings are based upon a pencil sketch and requested me to accept it as a personal gift. I was greatly touched by this gesture and his thoughtfulness. I am no connoisseur of art but visual realism is equally effective in the black and white pencil sketch; see picture. Duly framed it is now another valued addition to the memories of my years in the IAF and in particular those with No. 20 Squadron.

History is a link from the past to the present; it serves a purpose and exists in many forms. Creative art that accurately depicts significant air force events, is visual history. Such history should be preserved and displayed wherever it is appropriate and facilities to do so exist. Perhaps our air force may now like to think in terms of a professional art gallery in our Air Force Museum. 🦋



IAF Hunters raid PAF airbase Murid: December 1971