

A fragment of IAF History



Ouragans to India

The first batch of Dassault Ouragans (Toofanis) at Palam, November 1953 .

In the 1952-53 period, rumours had it that Gloster Aircraft, manufacturers of the Meteor twin-engined fighter were pushing their aircraft for the Indian Air Force which Service had wanted to diversify its source of combat aircraft and had preferred the Dassault Ouragan from France. In any case, Gp. Capt. H Moolgavkar, regarded as an authority on that jet fighter, had flown the Meteor Mk IV extensively during his Day Fighter Leader's Course with the RAF at West Raynham and had pronounced that type as "not suitable for Indian conditions". And so, the Dassault Ouragan was ordered by the Government and the IAF chose to ferry the French fighters themselves back to India.

Displaying little disguised scepticism, Air Marshal Sir Gerald Gibbs the then IAF Chief, opined that the Ouragans "would never reach" and would be "abandoned enroute". Air Vice Marshal S Mukherjee, then Deputy Chief and Air Commodore AM Engineer were determined to prove this otherwise.

As Director Operations, Group Captain H Moolgavkar was chosen to lead the team for the ferry, the others



Leading the ferry flight of Ouragans from France to India was then Gp. Capt. Arvind Moolgavkar, seen here at Almaza airport enroute to India.



The other ferry pilots included PVS Ram, Suranjan Das and Roshan Lal Suri, seen here with Wg. Cdr. Arvind Moolgavkar at Almaza.



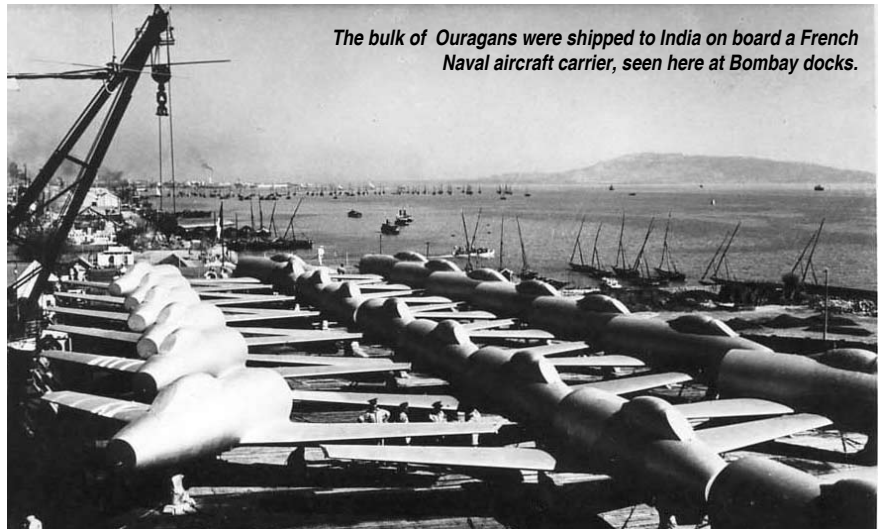
One of the first batch of Ouragans was IC 554, seen here at Palam.

being Squadron Leaders Suranjan Das, PVS Ram and Roshan Suri. He requested that a Devon light transport from the IAF Communication Squadron be provided to fly them all along the route to France.

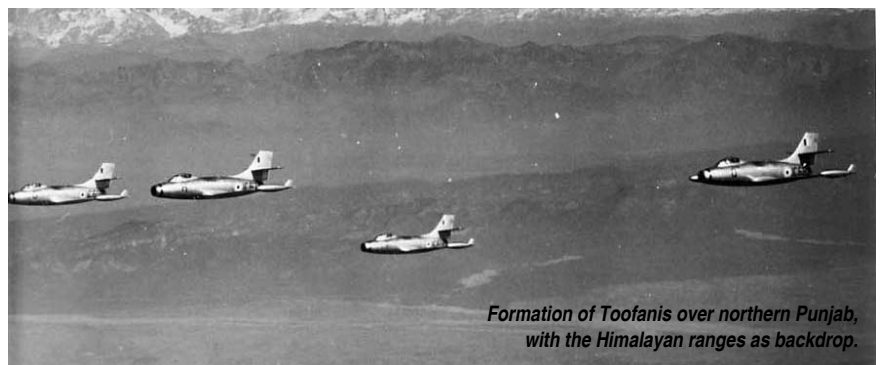
Thus, on 20 August 1953, Devon (HW519) with the ferry pilots on board took off from Palam leading west, via Mauripur in Pakistan, to Sharjah in the Persian Gulf, thence to Bahrain, Baghdad, Nicosia, El Edem in Libya, Idris, El Mas in Sardinia, thereafter to Nice in southern France and then Villa Coublay to Mont de Marson arriving on 27 August. Here, the intrepid pilots began their conversion course on the Ouragan fighter-bomber the very next day, 28 August 1953, completed within six weeks.

On 18 October 1953, Gp. Capt. H Moolgavkar (in 1C 558) led the formation of 4 Ouragans to India, transitting the same stations earlier taken by the Devon and arrived back at Palam exactly on schedule without any unserviceability, on 24 October 1953.

“Leading from the Cockpit: A Fighter Pilot’s Story” on Air Chief Marshal H Moolgavkar is being released on 8 October 2010, Air Force Day.



The bulk of Ouragans were shipped to India on board a French Naval aircraft carrier, seen here at Bombay docks.



Formation of Toofanis over northern Punjab, with the Himalayan ranges as backdrop.