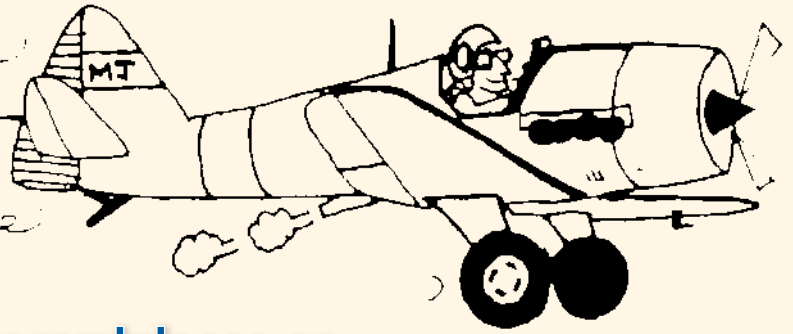


Ancient Aviator Anecdotes



Air Vice Marshal Cecil Parker reminisces on



ONE PILOT, MANY LANGUAGES !

Most Indian children grow up bilingual but very few would have been exposed to four languages even before they commenced schooling. My mother (an ethnic Bengali) was born and brought up in Surat as her (Bose) family relocated from Bengal to Gujrat at end of the 1800s. By profession she was a language teacher who was fluent in Bangla, Gujarati and English. My father an engineer by profession, was born and brought up in Bilaspur (Madhya Pradesh), was fluent in Hindi but learnt English only in college. English therefore was the only language my parents had in common at the time of their marriage. I was born in 1932 in Anand (Gujrat) and, because of my father's postings, we were a very nomadic family. For my first few years, I communicated in the four languages I heard, depending upon my location, be it in Gujarat, MP, Bihar or Bengal where my father was regularly posted.

In 1942 I was enrolled in a Raj-era public school as a boarder where we were not permitted to speak in any language

other than English and where, from Std IV onwards, French was an elective for the SC (Senior Cambridge) exam. However, as Independence became imminent, the school added a Hindi pandit to the faculty and nearly all of us Indian students took it as a subject for the SC exam in 1948. Thereafter I joined a college in Calcutta where most of my fellow students and friends were Bengali, hence I regained some of my childhood fluency in that language. In 1951 I joined the IAF as a flight cadet in Ambala; my 50 coursemates came from all four corners of the country hence I was exposed to newer languages and dialects.

The life of any language is dependent upon its utility and usage. To my generation, the air force offered a 'lingo' of its own. To begin with I added a couple of very expressive and colourful phrases in Punjabi to my vocabulary. Some of our seniors still vocalised some colonial-era linguist leftovers from the RAF / RIAF (*p.c. prune, prang, popsie, pongo, pyfo* and a few more that are unprintable); R/T natter added some new words (*wilico, roger, angels* et al)

while some signals brought in new meanings (*thumbs up / down*). Linguist indigenisation commenced with Hindi words of command on the parade ground and proficiency tests in the language were made mandatory to pass promotion exams.

In 1956 I married a young Mulzumi lady teacher from Hyderabad who was fluent in the Tamil language and who had studied Urdu as a second language in her convent. Four postings to the south (one to FIS Tambaram and three to DSSC Wellington) introduced me to Tamil but I did not progress much beyond a few simple phrases. Having settled in AP /Telengana, we are now working on our Telegu. As I enter my 88th year, I must confess my very limited ability to cope with the digital e-language of the virtual world created by technology. Of course the internet and smart phones are part of life but our lack of training makes for ineffective usage; I greatly fear that emojis will soon replace words! Like learning the skills of flying, the e-language too requires continuous self-learning in the course of which I even created my own e-alphabet:

A - Amazon	: B - Browser	: C - Computer	: D - Data	:
E - E-mail	: F - Facebook	: G - Google	: H - Huawei	:
I - Internet	: J - Java	: K - Kilobyte	: L - Laptop	:
M - Mobile	: N - Netflix	: O - Online	: P - Password	:
Q - Quicktime	: R - Reliance	: S - Skype	: T - Twitter	:
U - Uber	: V - Voice	: W - Whatsapp	: X - Xerox	:
Y - YouTube	: Z - Zuckerberg	:	:	:

Looking back, I feel that communicating in four languages in the real world over 80 years ago, was comparatively child's play ☺☺!

A Ferry Flight in the Fifties

In 1957, as a young flight-lieutenant, I was posted to Ambala which housed three squadrons, two of which were equipped with Toofani aircraft while the third (No.10) was awaiting re-equipment. As an interim measure, Air HQ decided to loan allot a few piston-engined Harvard trainers to them. One was allotted from the ASU (Aircraft Storage Unit) in Sullur. As a QFI still current on type, I was detailed to ferry the aircraft from Sullur, via Bangalore, Begumpet, Nagpur, Kanpur and Palam, to Ambala. I had earlier ferry experience of Vampire Mk 52s from HAL Bangalore to my first squadron (No. 7) in Palam, but these flights were always flown in pairs or more. This would be my very first long, solo ferry flight.



I was given maps, authorisation sheets, a parachute and sanction for civil flight by the then IAC night air mail service, Delhi-Nagpur-Madras. It still took over 48 hours to reach Coimbatore from where I got to Sullur which turned out to be a quiet airfield with almost no flying activity. The only officer of the GD(P) / Flying Branch was the wing commander commanding the air base who was very kind and helpful to this lone ferry pilot. The allotted Harvard had been in storage for a few months and it took two air tests before it was cleared of all snags. On the evening before my departure, the base commander invited me to dinner

and asked if he could take a lift in the rear cockpit to Bangalore as he was required there on TD (Temporary Duty). I agreed immediately but pointed out that I had only one parachute! He burst out laughing and confirmed that he would arrange one for himself.

As per my log book, on 6 June 1957, I took off in Harvard IIB (HT 826) for Bangalore with a Wg Cdr Sathyanathan as co-pilot. The weather was fine and we had an uneventful flight to Bangalore where we were received by the Comn Flight and where a jeep awaited the Wg Cdr. After thanking me and being dropped off at his destination, he very kindly left the vehicle at my disposal; we never met again. I got in touch with my two coursemates who were test pilots on deputation with HAL. One of them, learning I was routing through Kanpur where he himself was headed to ferry back an aircraft, asked if he could take a lift with me? Coursemates are of course a lifetime relationship and next morning I

was happy to have his company. En route we re-capped our experience as flight cadets five years earlier at No 1 AFA when we had flown the same route(s) Begumpet-Bangalore-Begumpet on our solo navigation sortie on Harvard aircraft.

The third leg to Nagpur was also uneventful but for the first time, I had to do and sign the DI (Daily Inspection) of the travelling copy of the Form 700 myself owing to lack of some tradesmen at Nagpur. There was some pre-monsoon cloud build-up on the leg to Nagpur but we were flying VMC and reached Chakeri airfield where I was pleasantly surprised to meet up with the Sgt heading the Duty Crew, an ex-member of my second squadron (No.3) at Ambala earlier. The fifth leg from Kanpur to Palam was flown with an empty rear seat but with strong head winds for a change. I was received by 'C' Flight of Air HQ Communication Squadron; little did I know that in a few months I myself would be posted there! My last leg to Ambala was flown in a totally overcast sky but over familiar terrain and it was one very tired but satisfied pilot who handed over the ac after a great learning experience 63 years ago.

Twelve years later in 1969, as a wing commander, I led a Hunter Mk.56A ferry flight from Dunsfold in the UK to Kanpur, but that is another ferry tale which has been told in an earlier AAA feature. 🦋



An IAF T-6G Texan (Harvard) of the Vintage Flight