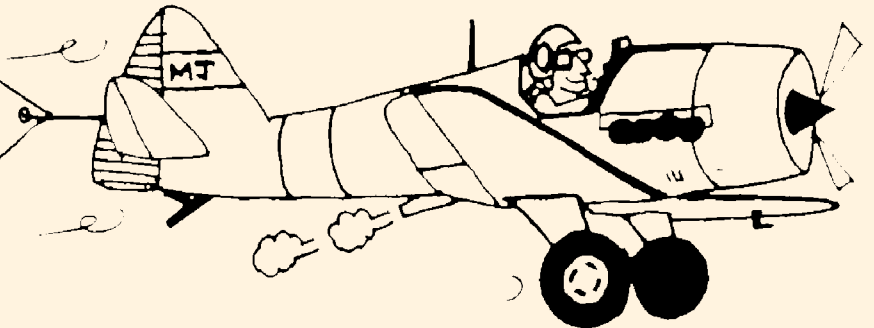


Ancient Aviator Anecdotes



Air Vice Marshal (R) Cecil Parker recollects....



Hawker Tempest Mk.IIAs at Hakimpet (photo: SAS Archives)

The above digitalised title refers to No.58 Pilots Course's forthcoming 68th anniversary on 30 August 2020. The course commenced in February 1951 at No 1 AFA Ambala and covered an 18 month training period on Tiger Moths and Harvard IIBs. The 50 of us flight cadets, straight out of school and college, along with one naval aviator, had an attrition rate of 40%. Only 30 of us were commissioned as Pilot Officers and received our wings, along with our naval course-mate, on 30 August 1952 at Begumpet from AVM Subroto Mukherjee (then DCAS). 14 of us new pilots went to CTU Hakimpet for fighter conversion on Spitfire Mk IXs and Tempest IIAs while 17 proceeded to TTW Agra for twin-engined conversion after which we all were posted to our first squadrons. The very last member of our course to retire from the air force did so in 1988.

68 years after graduation, ten of us survive (as on date of writing!), while 21

have gone ahead: gone yes but certainly not forgotten are our coursemates, seven of whom we lost in flying accidents and 14 of whom passed on owing to natural causes. PK Chitnavis : TK De : BK Dhiman : JP Gupta : OP Gupta (Dakota) : Hari Singh (Dakota) : KD Hoon (Toofani) : GS Iyer (Chetak) : Jaganath Rao : HN Koul : RN Kaul : AJ Maitland : KK Malik : VBR Misra : YP Mehta : MS Rane : VK Singh

(Vampire) : S Sen : MN Singh : RP Vashisht (An-12). To this list must be added the name of Lt Jayachandra IN, a pioneer pelagic pilot who tragically was our first post-commission fatality in a Tempest IIA accident in Hakimpet in November 1952. The ten surviving air veterans (aged 88-90) are disbursed over six cities in two countries (see below)

• Wg Cdr MW Tilak	(4331)	Perth, S. Australia
• Gp Capt SL Tandan	(4334)	New Delhi
• A V M DE Satur	(4339)	NOIDA
• Wg Cdr RL Badhwar	(4341)	Gurugram
• A V M CV Parker	(4346)	Hyderabad
• Fg Offr S Bhat	(4352)	Gurugram
• Sqn Ldr RC Mariano	(4357)	Adelaide, S. Australia
• A V M MK Rudra	(4358)	Hyderabad
• Gp Capt SC Saxena	(4359)	NOIDA
• Gp Capt ML Khanna	(4360)	New Delhi

While the internet keeps us in touch, single malt keeps us active!

Members of our course flew every aircraft type in the inventory of our air force from 1951-88, covering piston/ jet, single/twin/ multi-engine and rotary wing platforms in all the roles of air power. From this course came two test pilots, 11 QFIs, 10 COs, one Air Attache, four air officers, two AI Captains, one pioneer professor in aviation law and the sole recorded successful bail-out from a Tempest. This PC participated in both the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pak wars and one member earned an MVC in the latter. We have had two major reunions: a boisterous 'Bees Saal Baad' in 1972 at New Delhi and another a decade later. As numbers gradually depleted, anniversaries were marked by smaller and more sedate get-togethers of surviving members, families, widows and children. On the occasion of our coming anniversary, and through this memorial tribute, I send my good wishes to all my surviving coursemates with a message to "Keep Walking"!

The Pilot as a Writer

Our air force shares a year of birth with this writer, hence we both grew up through the Raj-era, World War II, Independence and the Partition. My first 18 years (1932-50) were spent in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Bengal. Books were a constant companion in our itinerant family's travels and I became an avid reader at an early age. A desire to write then developed, encouraged no doubt by the inheritance of maternal genes, as my mother was a

prolific writer. In 1947 while in school at Allahabad and, influenced by the sight and sound of aircraft from nearby Bamrauli, I had my very first article, titled 'Aeroplanes' published in *The Leader* a local newspaper and received my first cheque of Rs 7! Three years later, while in college in Kolkata, the set of books which was the prize for winning an essay competition, included one on military aviators of WW II.

The next 35 years (1951-1986) were equally nomadic while serving as a fighter pilot at 12 air bases in various operational and training appointments in WAC and TC. My writing was confined to the weekly letter to the young lady I courted for five years and married in 1956. Like all my colleagues we raised our two children and built a house during these frequent postings. My first writing in the IAF developed while attending the 1960-1961 staff course at DSSC Wellington. Thereafter it was intermittent and restricted to articles on military aviation and flight safety. In 1973 I was the air force representative of a three-member joint services team to draft our armed forces very first JSSD Manual Vol I on Service Writing. I had joined the air force to fly and enjoyed every minute in the air from Tiger Moths to Jaguars with a wonderful 10-year tenure on that most magnificent aircraft, the Hunter.

In 1985-86 the air force opened up an option for me to take premature retirement. I owed the IAF a great deal but, having paid the debt in toto, was happy to separate, move on and retain very fond memories of my years with the air force.

The past 34 years from 1986 to date continue to be a most stable and productive period. Learning and its application never cease and my post-retirement tenures in the corporate and academic worlds, were equally rewarding. We now had the time, freedom and opportunity to follow our own interests from the comfort of our own home. We travel extensively though I am now 'downgraded' from cockpit to cabin! Most important is the time I can now devote to freelance writing. In 2014 I published a book titled 'Airlooms' which was a collection of 65 articles written from 1961 onwards. Over the past six years I have scripted 75 of these Anecdotes under my AAA column which appear periodically in both print and electronic media.

For the most part reader response has been gratifying though a few tend to confuse these personal memories of an aviator with air force history. This writer is no historian and neither are his recollections of people or events history per se, though a few might possibly bring life to history and vice versa. In fact, to my grandchildren these anecdotes appear as "the story of grandpa's life in instalments" (!!).

Mention of family reminds me to share some happy news. In the 65th year of our marriage, we are to become great grandparents in a few months time. This is being written during the lockdown and no one really knows what a post Covid-19 world will be like. We wonder if our plans to make our very last flight abroad later this year will fructify? If they do, it will not only enable us to meet-and-greet our very first great grandchild but also give this old pilot something new to write about! 🛩️



The beautiful profile of a Hawker Hunter is seen in this photo by Peter Steinemann