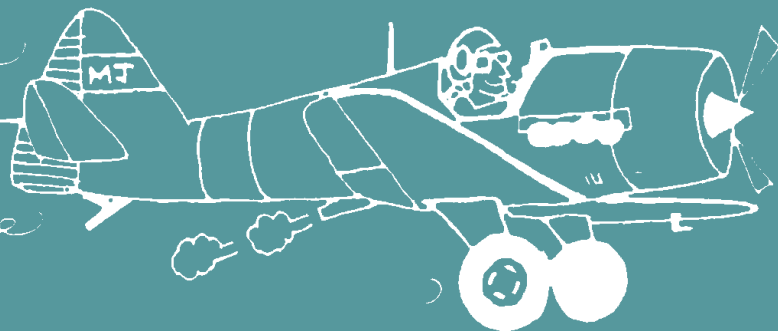


Ancient Aviator Anecdotes



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

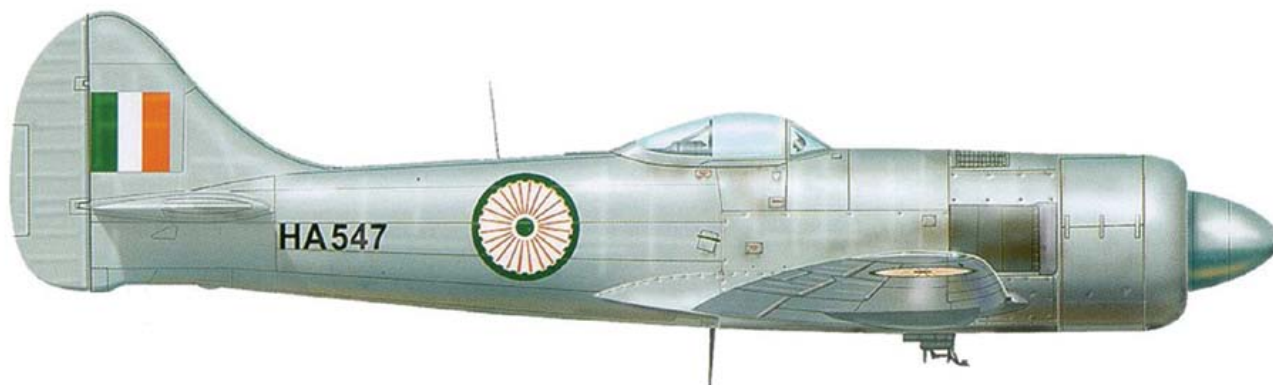
OCTOBER REVISITED

The month of October has two dates of commemorative significance, one professional and the other personal. On 8 October 2020, our air force marked its 88th anniversary and 28 October 2020 was the 68th anniversary of my bale-out from a blazing Tempest aircraft.

at the Officers Mess; all the functions were attended by both serving and locally resident air veterans. In mid 1970s the observance of Air Force Day was changed to 8 October, its legal birthday. Post 1986, when I took premature retirement, I still feel privileged to receive an invitation to the Air

Club, available Flight Safety records indicate that there was only one successful bale-out from the Tempest IIA in the (R) IAF which operated it from 1946–54.

On 28 October of every year my wife never fails to remind me by organising something special wherever we were posted.



I share a year of birth with the IAF which was born by Govt. sanction on 8 October 1932. It actually came into being on 1 April 1933 when the first Indian officers and airmen were inducted into 'A' Flight of No 1 Squadron alongside the RAF which itself had been born on 1 April 1918. Since the IAF grew out of the RAF, like so many other procedures/traditions initially adopted, it also continued celebrating Air Force Day on 1 April. In early 1951, much against my father's wishes, I joined the IAF as I had a keen boyhood desire to fly.

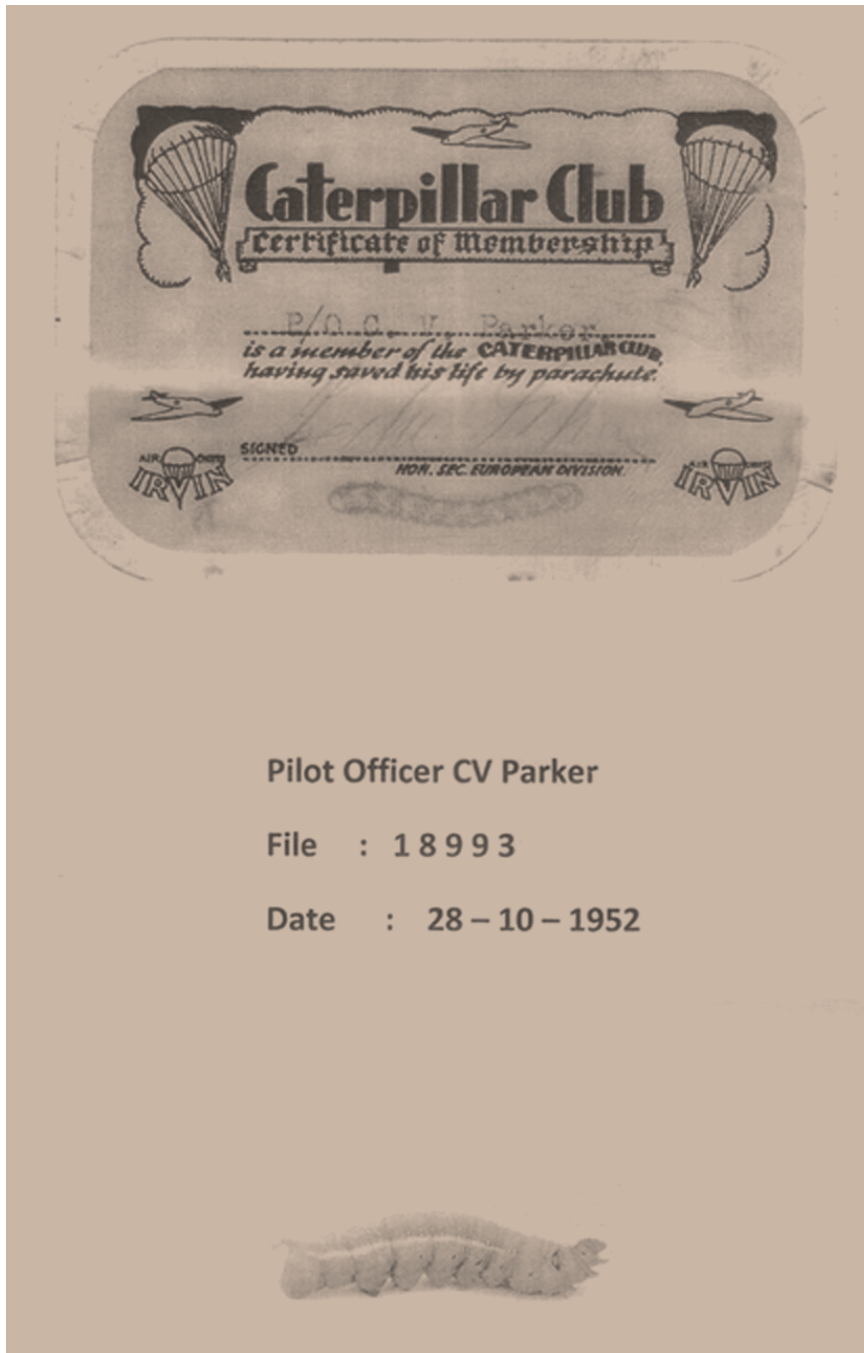
While under training and as young officers we were taught the significance of Air Force Day which in early years comprised a station parade, small flypast of locally based aircraft, a glass of beer with the SNCOs followed by a *Bara Khana* in the Airmen's Mess or Squadron hangar. In the evening there was a formal dinner

Force Day function from all four local IAF establishments, two of which I commanded and the other two I trained at. This year of course, Covid 19 sanctions involved a 'virtual' celebration at home!

On 28 October 1952, as a newly commissioned young pilot officer still short of my 20th birthday, and undergoing fighter conversion at the CTU Hakimpet, the engine of the Tempest aircraft I was flying caught fire and, after a great struggle, I just about managed to bale out safely with some minor burn injuries. It was a traumatic, near-death experience for a new pilot with just under 200 hours of flying. On hearing the news my father flew down from Calcutta intending to take me back home but was surprised to learn that this was not possible and that I would shortly recommence flying – which I did. Many years later, while researching for an article on the *Caterpillar*

In October 1971 my parents (in their sixties) paid us a visit in Pathankot where I was in command of No.20 Squadron then flying the Hunter Mk.56A. They were very impressed with their first visit to an operational air base. On 28 October 1971, just before they left, we invited all my squadron officers and their wives to dinner and my parents were delighted to meet the lively bunch of air warriors and their families. In December 1971, back in our family home in Madhya Pradesh, they heard from AIR about the award of MVC to their son.

In October 1972 I received a very last letter from my father now diagnosed with terminal cancer. It dealt with instructions regarding his finances, family, property and so on. It terminated with an admission that, despite his opposition to my joining the air force he was very proud of me; seven months



later he passed away. October continued to be another month when I am reminded how fortunate I have been in both my professional and personal lives.

A FAMILY GROWS

A normal human life span covers five generations, extending from grandparents to grandchildren. Born in 1932, my parents ensured that my early nomadic years included regular visits to my grandparents on both sides. In 1951, I was a direct entry into our air force thus fulfilling my boyhood

dreams of becoming a pilot. My next 35 years as a fighter pilot were even more nomadic but most rewarding both in the air and on the ground. During this period I met and married a young teacher in 1956 and our son (b. 1958) and daughter (b. 1960) were both able to interact with their grandparents and great grandparents. Their upbringing and education taught them to be independent and to take their own decisions in life. While I was still in service, each of them chose their own professions and life partners.

In fact, by the time I took premature retirement in 1986, my wife and I were already grandparents!

The first decade of our post air force years was equally rewarding as new learning and its application generates job satisfaction whether employed in national defence or generating revenue in the corporate sector or disseminating knowledge in academia. Of course my air force experience was invaluable in my civilian commercial activities. The last 25 years of retirement have been stable and given us control over our time and choice of activities while living in the comfort of our own home we built in 1976. We still travel regularly but now out of choice and not compulsion. Most of our travels have been to visit our children in whichever country they were settled or based. Each of them has added one son and two daughters to our growing family.

Like many other elderly couples we live alone but digital technology keeps us in touch with our children and grandchildren almost daily. The advent of Covid 19 has now however curtailed our outings and confined us to our home. From time to time we do need a little help and this is readily provided by friends and neighbours in the air force officers co-operating housing society we are members of. Thanks to the visuals provided by the internet, our sense of physical isolation from the family is somewhat reduced; two recent examples will help illustrate.

On 23 June 2020, courtesy of our elder grandson and wife in the UK, we became great grandparents. Of course we do not know if and when we will get to meet-and-greet our very first great grandchild but are delighted to receive photos and videos of a beautiful little baby girl – the first member of the sixth generation of our family. Independence Day this year was also made special for us. On the evening of 15 August 2020, kind young friends helped my wife and I to watch the live stream of the wedding of one of our granddaughters in London. It was of course a “masked / socially distanced” marriage for the 27 attendees who comprised immediate family and close friends from the medical world as both bride and groom are doctors. It was a very emotional viewing for both of us.

Soon after, my pilot course (No. 58) marked its 68th anniversary on 30 August 2020 and our generation, now in its twilight years, will soon make its final take-off for the aviators *valhalla*. But life will go on and our family will continue to grow. 🦋