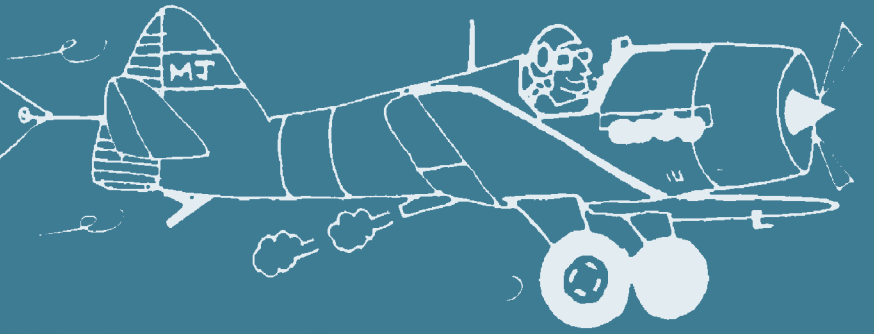


# Ancient Aviator Anecdotes



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

## Rear View Mirror



*A veteran pair: Harvard and Tiger Moth of the IAF's vintage flight*

### The Early Years

Our air force shares a year of birth (1932) with this writer. The new year (2021) marks 70 years since I joined the IAF (1951) and 35 years since I left it in 1986. My first 18 years of early childhood, school and college were spread over five states from Gujarat in the west to Bengal in the east. My boyhood dream to become a pilot appeared to take off when I received joining instructions from No. 1 Air Force Academy in 1950. The next 35 years were equally nomadic as I moved 19 times on posting(s) across seven states from J&K in the north to TN in the south. I learnt that the air force trains its officers in very professional courses and employs them thereafter in the inter-dependent functions of Operations, Training, Staff and Command.

### The Air Force Years

*Courses:* No 58 Pilots Course 1951-52 (Tiger Moth & Harvard): Fighter Conversion 1952 (Spitfire & Tempest): Flying Instructors Course 1955 (HT-2 & Harvard): Junior Commanders Course 1957: Air Staff Course 1960-61: Instrument Rating Instructors Course 1965 at IPIS USA (T-39): Combined Course 1969 at CAW: Work Study / Management Course 1969 at CDM: Indoctrination Course at IAM: Defence Studies Course 1980 at RCDS UK (Hawk & Harrier): SDMC 1984 at CDM.

*Operations:* Squadron pilot in No.7 Sqn (Vampires): Squadron pilot in No 3 Sqn (Toofani): Staff pilot in Air HQ Comn Sqn

(Vampire & Devon) Flight Commander in No.20 Sqn (Hunter).

*Training:* QFI at AFFC (HT-2, Prentice & T-6G): Directing Staff (Air) 1973-74 and then Chief Instructor (Air) 1981-83 at DSSC Wellington.

*Staff:* Air HQ (Dte of Trg) 1961-62 and HQ TC IAF (CFTO) 1975,

*Command:* Founding CO of MEU Ambala 1957: Founding CO of OTU at Jamnagar (Hunters): CO No. 20 Sqn 1969-72 Hindan / Pathankot (Hunter) : Stn Cdr FTW Hakimpet 1975-77 (Iskra, Kiran & Chetak): AOC Adampur 1978-79 (MiG-21s): Comdt AFA 1983-85 (Kirans) and AOC J & K 1985-86 (Helicopters & Jaguars).

Total Flying Hours 3945.

## The Later Years

Retirement, for the first time, gave me control over my own time and choice of activities, commercial and otherwise. The first decade (1986-95) were spent in the corporate and academic world(s) with the added comfort of WFH (long before the OED sanctified this abbreviated phrase, post Covid-19!). We travelled extensively; I had the leisure for swimming and tennis, flew a microlight and was able to write regularly. One book ('Airlooms') was published in 2014 and, since then, this is my 83<sup>rd</sup> AAA which is a summarised look-back at the long road travelled in 88 satisfying years. The road ahead is of course a very short one but will be traversed with the same support from faith, family and friends.

## From the Rostrum

Early last month, along with New Year greetings, came two invitations, one each from Commandant(s) of CAW (College of Air Warfare) and AFA (Air Force Academy). The first was to address an ongoing course on air operations in the 1971 Indo Pak war and the other to participate in a Training Workshop as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of AFA. Thirty five years have elapsed since I retired from the air force, hence I was certainly privileged to be remembered and invited. I expressed my thanks to both but explained that this hearing-impaired, 88 year-old great grandfather had given up public speaking a decade ago! They very gracefully accepted my regrets; however the subject did take my memory back to some of the public speaking I was required to do both during and after my years in the air force.



The confidence to speak effectively in public is an attribute that can be developed depending upon individual motivation. I was introduced to speaking from the rostrum during the 1960-61 Air Staff course at DSSC Wellington. In 1963 during *Ex Shiksha*, I was a flight commander in a Hunter squadron based at Palam and was detailed to give a Briefing-cum-Lecture on IAF SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) for air operations from Palam to the senior staff of the visiting USAF F-100 squadron. After the talk, our American aircrew visitors were served their very first *samosas* along with tea. (I do not know if it was my lecture or our *samosas*, but their air operations went off very well)! Soon after the 1971 war the Government of Punjab hosted a civic reception for the air force gallantry awardees from our air force base at Pathankot where I was in command of a squadron. Each of us were requested to say a few words. I was extremely proud of my young officers who spoke extempore very confidently both in English and in *shudh* Hindi.

In 1972 I was invited by Principal of the Hyderabad Public School to address the boys on the Indo-Pak war. I did so and was delighted at the volley of questions I had to field. There was however one student who asked no question and sat quietly at the back: my teen-aged son seemed embarrassed to have his father at the teachers podium!

Post retirement in 1986 I was with a company in Mumbai and was required to make presentations where my air force experience in briefing rooms came in very handy. Having left the air force some years earlier, I was pleasantly surprised to receive an invitation to address the officers at Pathankot on the subject of 'Courage'. The Chairman of my company was an aviation enthusiast and encouraged me to accept the invitation. Later on in the academic world I was fairly comfortable on the teacher's dais.

Friends and relatives have periodically requested me to raise the toast at weddings/anniversaries of sons and daughters and I was happy to oblige. But after a couple of these nuptials terminated in divorce, I observed a distinct decline in such invitations! What I enjoyed most however were my visits to schools as the Chief Guest for functions where I had the opportunity to interact with the future generation of young boys and girls who were very forthright in their comments and questions. Any effective presentation in the public domain requires preparation and practice and in these two endeavours I must acknowledge the great help I receive from my wife, herself a teacher for many years. 14 February 2021 marked 65 years that she has patiently vetted (and improved) almost all my scripts whether destined to reach the reader in text or audience in person from the rostrum. 🦋

