

Ancient Aviator Anecdotes



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

HAKIMPET HIGHLIGHTED

The ongoing Swarnim Vijay Varsh celebrations brought the Vijay Mashaal to Air Force Station Hakimpet on 11 September 2021. Gallantry awardees of the 1971 Indo-Pak war, along with air veterans and guests from all three Services, were invited to attend the function. Two gallantry awardees from the air force, resident in Hyderabad, were felicitated; one, an 89 year old recipient of the MVC and the other an NOK member of a VrC awardee.

In 1952, as a young, newly commissioned pilot officer, I did my fighter conversion at CTU Hakimpet on Spitfire and Tempest aircraft. My most enduring memory of that period was having to bale out of a blazing Tempest on fire. In 1959 as a QFI I was attached to FTW Hakimpet for instructional duties on Vampires. In 1975 I returned to command Hakimpet which now had 84 aircraft on base comprising 50 new Polish Iskra trainers (which were required to be commissioned and inducted into our air force) plus 24 Kiran trainers and 10 Chetak helicopters of HTS. At peak we were flying well over 100 hours per day which made for a very busy but productive tenure. However I did find time to buy a plot of land and build a house in AFOCHS Ltd Vayupuri, just 5 km from Hakimpet, and in which we continue to live 45 years on.

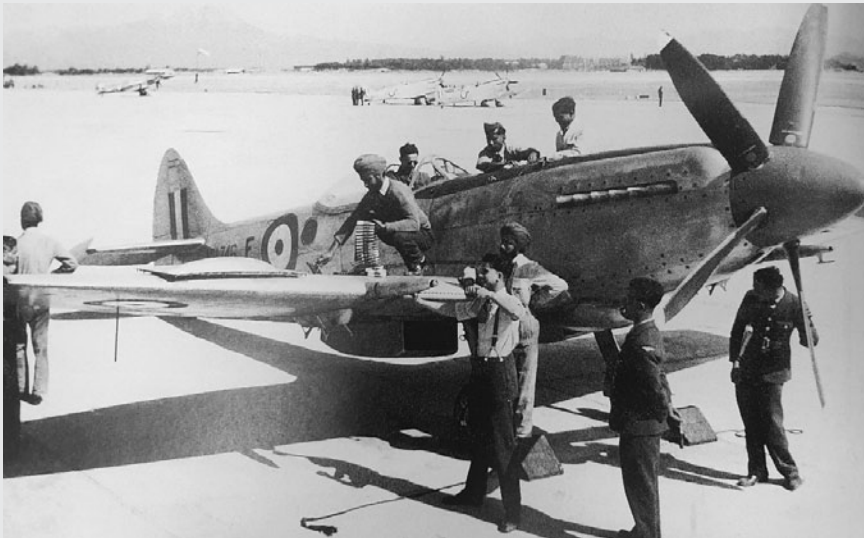
Having retired from the air force in 1986, we feel privileged to still receive an invitation from AFS Hakimpet every year to attend the Air Force Day function held in the Officers Mess built in my tenure; the advent of Covid 19 has of course curtailed such gatherings. In 2005 I was invited to the decommissioning ceremony of the Iskra after its 30 years of service at Hakimpet. I wonder if there is any other air veteran from the IAF who has been present at both, commissioning and decommissioning, of



the same aircraft? In 2019 AFS Hakimpet very deservedly received the Presidents Colours. We were once again privileged to be invited but were unfortunately unable to attend as the function was held at Sulur.

For me therefore, any visit to Hakimpet is like a homecoming. As we drove into the station to attend the function on 11 Sep'21 we passed the VISTAK auditorium; the name is an acronym I had created from the six aircraft types that had been based at Hakimpet: Vampire, Iskra, Spitfire,

Tempest, Alouette (Chetak) and Kiran. My wife and I, now both in our sunset years, received a warm welcome from the AOC and his staff. The programme commenced with the arrival and reception of the Victory Torch by the AOC and this writer and went on to include speeches, audio – visual presentations of citations of both gallantry awardees, vocal renditions and spirited dramatic depictions from children of the local KV. The icing on the cake was the sunset flypast by three Kiran



and three Chetaks. It was an emotional mixture of pride, humility and gratitude to be remembered and honoured.

2021 marks 70 years since the IAF gave life to a deserted WW II airfield by relocating CTU from Ambala to Hakimpet in 1951. In turn, Hakimpet has produced generations of fighter and helicopter pilots who have gone on to do the Armed Forces and the Nation proud both in peace and in war.

JAPAN: EXPO 70

The recent news coverage of the Olympics brought back memories of our only visit to Japan 51 years ago on. On 1 April 1970 I was awarded the Vayu Sena Medal (VM) for my performance as the founding CO and CI of the IAF's first Hunter equipped Operational Training Unit (OTU). When he learnt of the award, my delighted father (who 20 years earlier had opposed my joining the air force) offered to gift us a holiday trip to the East. I might explain that, as an engineer with the GOI, in the mid-1950s he had been the Head of our Supply Mission in Tokyo. He soon alerted his many friends and contacts in Japan to our visit to Expo 70.

In late 1969 I had taken over command of No 20 Squadron and left immediately for the UK to lead a ferry of updated Hunter aircraft back to India. My unit was equipped with this type and we had many commitments before I could apply for and be granted leave to proceed abroad. Our two children aged 12 and 10 years were in boarding school and hence could not join my wife and self as we boarded our Thai Airways flight via Dhaka (then in



The Award: ACM PC Lal, CAS presents the VM to Wg Cdr CV Parker, CO No. 20 Squadron on 1-04-1970

East Pakistan) with sight-seeing stopovers in Bangkok, Hongkong, Taiwan and on to Osaka. The next few days were full of unforgettable sights, sounds and events. Expo 70 was an eye-popping display of Japan's technological progress 25 years after its devastation in World War II. Equally admirable was the amazing display of courtesy, punctuality, cleanliness and hospitality observed and experienced throughout our stay.

We resided in both hotels and homes and, thanks to our hosts, saw a great deal more than the exposition itself. Our first ride in a bullet train was a revelation. One

of our hosts drove us to see Hiroshima from a distant authorised viewpoint; the sight of the silent dead city has a deep emotional impact. On one occasion my wife left her handbag containing passports and money in a restaurant. On our (panicked) return a half hour later, it was found exactly where she had left it guarded by a smiling manager. Language was not a major barrier; for the benefit of tourists nearly all restaurants had model replicas of dishes on offer in window display with adequate content - information to indicate choice. We must admit that Japanese cuisine was somewhat bland for Indian palates and we periodically returned to the Indian pavilion of the Expo which had an Indian restaurant.

Like most ladies my wife's primary interest was in the shopping arcades located conveniently right above major railway stations. A very persuasive and friendly Japanese sales lady, who knew no English, even 'talked' her into purchasing a rather glamorous half wig! In those days there were not too many Indians in Japan and on more than one occasion my sari-clad wife was politely requested to pose for a photograph; 'selfies' were still in the future. When we were dangerously close to exceeding our airline baggage, we bid our new friends farewell, proffered our *'arigato guzai masu'* (profound thanks) and extended invitations to visit us in India, which two of them did. Five minutes after entering our home in Hindan the phone rang; it was our good friend and neighbour welcoming us back and letting us know that breakfast was on its way; *paratha* and *aloo* never tasted better!

On 1 October 2021 the OTU (renamed OCU) will be 55 years old; it now operates from two air bases and is equipped with the Hawk AJTs. The only surviving souvenir of our trip to Japan (the half-wig), having earned its share of 'oohs and aahs' from admiring ladies, now lies buried in my wife's wardrobe awaiting resurrection by a feminine progeny in time for a possible India Expo 70! 🦋



The Reward: Standing, Shirley and Cecil Parker, 2nd & 3rd from left