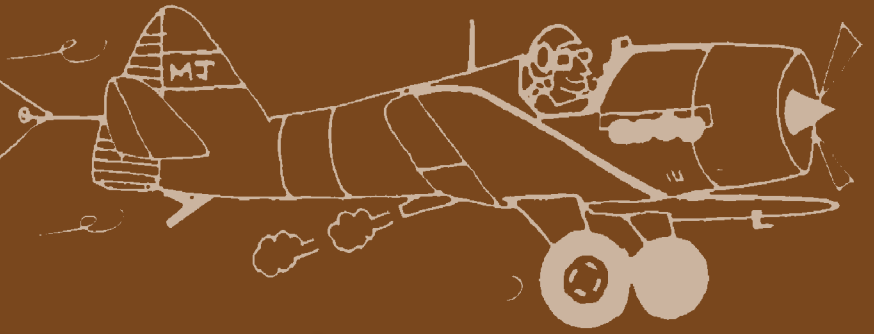


Ancient Aviator Anecdotes



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

GURUS WITH WINGS

In this digital era greetings cards have migrated to the internet and e-greetings have become common place. There are however diehards from my generation (i.e. those born the same year as our air force or thereabouts) who continue to snail-mail personalised, hand written greetings on special occasions. Among the dwindling number of end-of-year greetings cards we received in 2021, was one from a 95-year old IAF officer settled in the UK. Good memories make good stories and I will remember first meeting Flt Lt Norman Walker (3405) GD (P) of No 41 Pilots Course circa 1946 when he was a flying instructor and I was a flight cadet at No. 1 Air Force Academy in Ambala in 1951.

My own instructor was that marvelous man Navroze Lalkaka who instilled the love of flying while teaching us its skills.

In those days, to increase the variety of training inputs, it was an informal policy to programme pupils to occasionally fly with QFIs other than their own. My log book reminds me that I flew instructional sorties with Cecil Digby, Rampal, Les Preston, Babla Senapati, Norman Walker, Jaggu Shaw, Pete Wilson, Sham Powar and CGI Philip. This covered the 18 month training period of my Basic Stage (Tiger Moth) and Advanced Stage (Harvard) before earning my wings and being commissioned in August, 1952. In a few cases personal friendships developed between instructor and pupil that lasted a lifetime.

Like Navroze, Norman had a nice, easy, informal, friendly approach to teaching both in the air and on the ground. Flying per se, is one profession in which learning never stops till one leaves the cockpit for

the last time. The years passed and, while attending the course at the RCDS in the UK in 1980, I was invited to attend the annual get-together of the IAF Association in the UK. My wife and I were happy to meet up with some old/senior friends settled in the UK including an ex-squadron commander, David Bouche, coursemate Buster Kaul and Norman Walker who immediately invited us to his home. He had left the air force in 1954, emigrated and created a very successful business in the UK. Despite not having re(visited) India in 60 years, Norman's Hindi is still surprisingly fluent and he is nostalgic about his house in Nagpur. As a young school boy there he recollected a gathering which included Mahatma Gandhi who patted his head in passing. After my own retirement from the air force in 1986 we travelled regularly to the UK to visit our daughter and family who had settled there. On nearly every occasion Norman would ensure mutual visits and



Representational image of the De Havilland DH-82 Tiger Moth (Photo: Angad Singh at Yelahanka 2015)