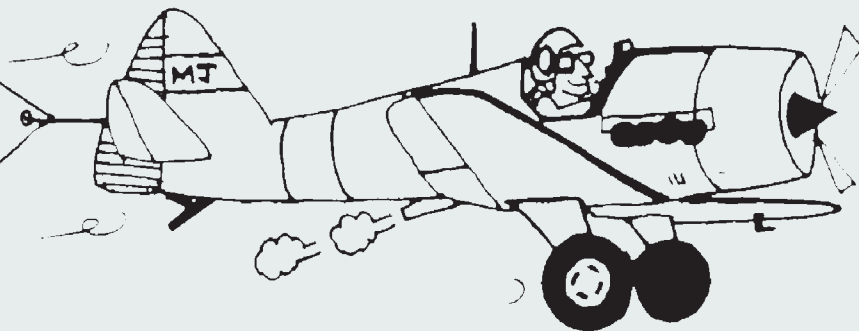


Ancient Aviator Anecdotes



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

TWENTY TWENTY – TWO



For this writer, born in 1932, calendar year 2022 has four personal milestone dates, one anniversary of which has already been commemorated, while three more are looked forward to.

On 14.02.2022 my wife and I marked our 66th wedding anniversary with a small covid-controlled gathering of friends. We shared memories of the 23 year old flying officer of the IAF marrying a 20 year old teacher at St. Georges Grammar School Hyderabad, after courting her for five years! Twenty nomadic years later we were able to build our retirement home at the AFOCHS Vayupuri Secunderabad and 66 years later continue to live comfortably in the same house. The marriage has been blessed and the family has grown with the addition of two children, six grandchildren and two great grandchildren now spread all the way

from India to the UK in the west and to New Zealand in the east.

On 30.08.2022 the 58th Pilots Course will mark its 70th anniversary. Seventy years ago, thirty young pilot officers won their wings and were commissioned into our air force by (then AVM) Subroto Mukherjee at No. 1 AFA Begumpet. Of these 30 (as on date) there are eight surviving members, four of whom are nonagenarians and the other four will join them in Club 90 in a few months. For the record, they are: SL Tandon, SC Saxena, RL Badhwar, DE Satur (NCR/NOIDA), MK Rudra, CV Parker (Secunderabad) and RC Mariano, MW Tilak (Australia). Unlike our riotous course reunions in the past ('Bees Saal Baad 'et al) geography and age will at best restrict this get-together to a 'Zoom Meeting'. One remembers the 22 coursemates that have gone ahead, some of them were close friends and whose families continue to remain in touch.

28.10.2022 will mark 70 years since a teenaged pilot officer had to bale out from

a Tempest aircraft while undergoing fighter conversion at CTU Hakimpet. I survived that somewhat traumatic beginning to my flying career and continued to enjoy my flying on various aircraft types for the next 34 years. I have always been grateful for that lucky escape and becoming only one of two Indian pilots to have successfully baled out from the Tempest IIA aircraft which served our air force 1946-54. This mark had a Centaurus engine whose frequent con-rod failures took many young lives including a pioneer naval aviator from my pilots course. As a fighter pilot I have had my share of emergencies in the air but none of them compared with my experience on 28.10.1952.

Finally, on 22.11.2022 (provided I am destined to reach that date), I will join the nonagenarian club. 90 will be a milestone that marks our ongoing happy family life, a rewarding professional life (both in the air and on the ground) and a fulfilling retirement. This fortunate writer is grateful for having reached 2022..... and life goes on.



Representative image of the Tempest (Drawing: wall.alphacoders.com)

No. 58 PILOTS COURSE: PLATINUM JUBILEE

Dear Coursemates,

On 30 August 2022 our pilots course will mark its 70th anniversary. Unlike past years, owing to distance and age, we seven survivors (as on date) will not be able to get-together in person to celebrate. On that date however, I am certain our memories will go back to March 1951 when 51 of us young lads met up in No 1 Air Force Academy Ambala to form No 58 Pilots Course and learned to manage on a stipend of Rs 40 per month (from home) for the next 18 months! Barely had we commenced flying training when we were all sent home for a month while the academy relocated to Begumpet in Hyderabad. We spent nine months in the rear cockpit of the Tiger Moth followed by another nine months in the front cockpit of the Harvard. Standards were high and on 30 August 1952, only 30 of us (plus the naval aviator) won our wings and were commissioned by (then AVM) Subroto Mukherjee and allotted permanent service numbers from 4331 to 4360 (see picture).

17 of our coursemates went off to TTW Agra to convert on to the Dakota and thereafter flew the Devon, Liberator, Canberra, Avro, Viscount, IL-14, AN-12

and Chetak helicopters 13 of us, along with the naval aviator, reported to CTU Hakimpet for our fighter conversion on Spitfire and Tempest aircraft and thereafter flew the Vampire, Toofani, Mystere, Hunter, Gnat, Mig and Jaguars. As QFIs we instructed on HT-2, Prentice, T6-G, Iskra and Kiran trainers. We participated actively in the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pak wars and, from our course came two test pilots, 15 commanding officers, 11 QFIs, one air attaché, one MVC gallantry awardee and four air officers.

Our PC joined the IAF in its formative years and was instrumental in the transition of our air force from pistons to jets, subsonics to supersonic, single/twin engines to multi-engine and fixed wing to rotary wing before the last of our coursemates to retire, did so in 1988. Including the loss of our naval colleague we lost seven coursemates in flying accidents from 1952 to 1988. As on date a total of 23 coursemates have preceded us, some of them were close personal friends whose families continue to remain in touch. All seven of us surviving coursemates (average age 91 years) are now on short finals to the last touchdown at

an unknown runway. We have served the country and our air force with distinction and dedication. Who knows (?) our next lives may well commence with a celestial reunion of No 58 Pilots Course! Greetings, warm regards and best wishes on 30 August 2022 to you all from ceeveepee. 🦋

Ancient Aviator Anecdote (AAA-100)

Observant readers would have noted that this anecdote makes a century – a nice round figure to now close these series. I have had immense pleasure in re-living memories of people and events and deeply appreciate the readers responses. Finally, my thanks to Dolly whose excellent computer expertise more than compensated for this ancient writer' digital deficiencies!

Cecil Parker



58 PILOTS COURSE : NO 1AFA BEGUMPET : 30 AUGUST 1952

Top Row L - R : YP Mehta VBR Misra S Bhat SC Saxena DE Satur OP Gupta TK De JP Gupta VK Singh RL Badhwar
Centre L - R : HN Koul RG Mariano MW Tilak KD Hoon RP Vashisht RN Kaul KK Malik Jagannath Rao S Sen PK Chitnavis
Bottom L - R : CV Parker MS Rane AJ Maitland MK Rudra GS Iyer SL Tandan MK Khanna BK Dhiman Hari Singh
(Missing : MN Singh & Lt Jayachandra, IN)