

wants one last sortie as it flies into the sunset



Air Commodore Surendra Singh Tyagi (retd) wants one last take-off roll down the runway in the MiG-21 aircraft before it bids adieu. (Photo courtesy Air Cmde Tyagi)

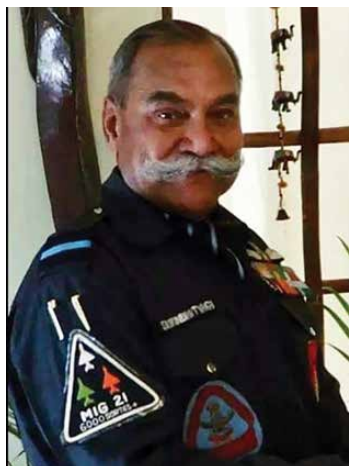
When it comes to MiG-21s, there is no one more knowledgeable than Air Commodore Surendra Singh Tyagi (retd), who has a record-breaking 4,306 hours flying the aircraft—a feat acknowledged by the Russians themselves—and a staggering 6316 sorties in total. So when he speaks about the pros and cons of the Russian aircraft, everyone listens.

And now, when the departure of MiG-21 bison from the Indian Air Force (IAF) is imminent, all that the 83 year-old veteran fighter pilot wants is one last take-off roll down the runway in the power-packed aircraft before it bids adieu.

"This is one request which I will be making to the Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal AP Singh, whom I shall be meeting very soon," says Air Commodore Tyagi in a freewheeling conversation with this reporter over the phone from his home in Jamnagar, Gujarat.

The intrepid fighter pilot who flew almost every fighter aircraft in IAF's inventory till he retired

Air Commodore Tyagi has flown aircraft ranging from Vampires, Hunters, Gnat, Ajeet, Jaguar, Canberra, MiG-23, MiG-29 and Mirage during his service in the IAF from 1965 to 1996. (Photo courtesy Air Cmde Tyagi)



in 1996 made Jamnagar his home after multiple tenures there and finally retiring as the air officer commanding of the Jamnagar air base.

“I would also be presenting my logbook, which I have meticulously maintained throughout my service from the first day to the last to the air chief with the request that it may be placed in the IAF museum, where it could serve as an inspiration for future generations,” says Air Commodore Tyagi.

First brush with MiG-21

Air Commodore Tyagi's first operational unit was 27 Squadron flying Hunters before he moved to MiGs. Initially he flew Vampires. In 1968 he trained on MiG-21s in the No. 45 Squadron in Chandigarh, where pilots were given operational conversion training on MiG-21 FL.

“Hunter was a docile aircraft. We never thought of MiG-21s as a problem aircraft, though it was very different. We never felt any problem. It was definitely fast handling, and the challenge was of a kind that you were always busy in the cockpit,” recalls Tyagi.

YEAR 1996		AIRCRAFT		Pilot or 1st Pilot	2nd Pilot, pupil or Passenger	DUTY (Including Results and Remarks)
Month	Date	Type	No.			
—	—	—	—	—	—	— Total brought Forward
—	—	—	—	—	—	—
TEMBER	22		1006	SELF	FL MKSINGH	JAM - NALIYA
	24		1839	SELF	FL HARANG.	C.T.
	24		1006	SELF	NIC FULAY	HE IF
	26	MI-8	2-2348	SIL SHANKAR	SELF	CONTEG.
	26		2348	NIC PATHAK	SELF	SH60
	30	MIG-21	2106	SELF	—	1 V 1, LL HAND
SUMMARY FOR JUL-TO DEC 96						
		UNIT.		33 WING.	MIG-21	
					HUNTER-	
		DATE-		27 DEC '96	CHETAK	
					MI-8.	
		SIGNATURE		[Signature]		
		ON		MIG-21		
				HOURS	- 4003:45	
				SHORTS	6316	
GRAND TOTAL (Cols. (1) to (10))						
A. F. F. (A. O.) - 1266.		4884		Hrs	55	Totals Carried Forward
						Mins.

The logbook: The intrepid fighter pilot who flew almost every fighter aircraft in IAF's inventory till he retired in 1996.