



Air Vice Marshal Cecil Parker recollects....

A Haven in Hyderabad

The Air Force Officers Co-operative Housing Society (AFOCHS) at Vayupuri in Hyderabad came into being on 8 January, 1963. The (then) Andhra Pradesh Government had allotted 50 acres of land (adjacent to and south of Sainikpuri) to the Society at market rates. The land was allotted to provide affordable housing plots to officers of the defence forces. In the mid-sixties, landscaping and development took place and 210 plots were created. The layout ensured wide roads, adequate greenery and prohibited multi-storied buildings or flats in the residential zone. Gradually air force/defence officers purchased plots and commenced building the first generation of houses.

In the early 1970s, at the request of my recently widowed mother, we sold our family property in Madhya Pradesh. In 1975, I was posted to command the air base in Hakimpet, a short distance from the housing colonies in Vayupuri / Sainikpuri / Defence Colony. I was in need of a plot to build our house and Hyderabad was eminently suitable as we had both personal and professional links with the city. We acquired a plot in Vayupuri and in 1976 'Parkhaven' was built. For the next 13 years it was rented out while I completed my innings in the air force and a post-IAF retirement assignment in the corporate world in Mumbai. Since 1990 we have resided in 'Parkhaven', so named, partly for

its proximity to West Park (*see image*), partly for the name of its owner but primarily for its future role as our retirement harbour after having led a very nomadic life.

In the 56 years of its existence, Vayupuri has grown extensively. Of its 210 plots, only eight remain 'open', while 202 houses have been built of which 100 were owned / occupied by defence officers / widows, while 102 are owned / occupied by non-defence civilians. The cost of land has escalated and very few defence officers can now afford to purchase plots there. In fact most prefer to buy flats in gated colonies, this being more cost-effective and convenient. Over the years, architecturally, the first generation of houses have developed a distinct 'character' of their own. These houses are very gradually giving way to three-storied, steel and glass 'designer' homes of the new owners. A similar change is visible in our adjoining colonies.

'Parkhaven' is now 43 years old and now for 30 years we continue to enjoy a most comfortable retired life. For the first ten years I was in the academic world but had the privilege of working from home. Among our residents is the son of a founder-member air veteran whose generous donation has given Vayupuri an international class indoor badminton court. Another generous donation from the seniormost surviving, plot-owning resident (a nonagenarian) has created a club house which abuts a new swimming pool. Community activities range from annual celebrations of Independence / Republic / Founders Day to monthly get-togethers. Our quiet, clean and open colony is not only a magnet for early morning / evening





The Ancient Aviator with (the young) Shirley Parker

walkers from adjoining colonies, but has won many awards / certificates in a very productive tenure of our present President.

A few days ago, my pilots course (No. 58 PC) marked its 67th anniversary. Of the 30 of us young pilot officers who were commissioned at nearby Begumpet on 30 August, 1952, ten are very much alive (and kicking!) ranging in age from 87 to 90 years. While six reside in the NCR and two are in Australia, two of us retired in Vayupuri and Sainikpuri. We two, along with coursemate's widows, families and children celebrated our course anniversary with a Luncheon gettogether at 'Parkhaven' Vayupuri.

The Char Minar(s) of Hyderabad

Hyderabad's iconic Charminar is almost as well known as is its biryani. Not as is well known is that the city is also home to our air force's *char minars* of learning. These four foundational training establishments are located at the air bases at Begumpet, Hakimpet, Dundigal and the CAW (College of Air Warfare) in Secunderabad. In 1951 No. 1 AFA (Air Force Academy) was relocated from Ambala to Hyderabad.

Basic and Advanced stages of flying training moved to Begumpet with Tiger Moth and Harvard IIB respectively while Applied stage (Spitfire and Tempest) moved to Hakimpet. CAW was established in 1959 while the permanent AFA was set up at Dundigal in 1973. I had a personal link with all four of these training institutions.

Most of my flight cadet training period of 18 months were spent at Begumpet. Of the 50 of us who commenced pilot training at Ambala, 30 won their wings and were commissioned as pilot officers by Air Vice Marshal Subroto Mukherjee (then DCAS) on 30 August, 1952. Our graduation was a fairly simple ceremony on the flight tarmac of Begumpet in the presence of a small gathering which included my parents and a specially invited young lady (now my wife of near 64 years). With the setting-up of the AFA, the basic stage of flying training moved there while the advanced stage relocated to Hakimpet. Begumpet now houses the NSS (Navigator & Signaller School) with Avro 748s.

In 1969, as a wing commander, I was detailed to attend a six-week training course at the CAW. Consequent to the



HAL Kirans over the AFA Dundigal



HAL-HS 748s at Begumpet



HAL Chetaks and Kirans at Hakimpet

In 1975, as a group captain, I returned to command FTW (Fighter Training Wing) at Hakimpet. It was a great professional education to induct 50 new Polish jet trainers (the Iskra) into our air force, oversee the advanced stage of pilot training on both Iskra and Kiran aircraft, rotary wing training at HTS (Helicopter Training School) and controller training at ATCOTE (Air Traffic Control Officers Training Establishment) : very few Station Commanders / AOCs have has 84 aircraft on base! Today Hakimpet continues pilot training on both Kirans and Chetaks helicopter and this year deservedly received the Presidents Colours.

In 1983, as an Air Vice Marshal, I was posted as Commandant of the AFA. At that point of time, our air force had no basic trainer as the HT-2 had been phased out and the HPT-32 was still two years away. My primary task was to oversee the IAF's very first attempt at direct basic flying training on Kiran jet trainers. This was an expensive exercise and we had to seek a balance between an acceptable attrition rate while maintaining strict training standards. In addition, we had all officer branch training (except technical) at the AFA together with a rather splendid GP (Graduation Parade) twice a year. Today the AFA operates the Pilatus PC-7 basic trainer for Stage I pilot training.

Nearly all IAF officers (and many foreign ones too) have passed through these portals of learning where skills and knowledge take root in the Human Resource element of India's military air power.

I left the Air Force 33 years ago but, having settled in Hyderabad, have the pleasure of receiving an invitation to Air Force Day celebrations from each of the IAF's *Char Minar's* of learning while this enables us to participate and renew memories every October. 🦋

feedback requested by the faculty, CAW was happy to accept and implement most of my recommendations pertaining to syllabus content and presentation thereof. I was pleasantly surprised and privileged to receive a letter of appreciation from the Commandant. This year, CAW marked it's Diamond Jubilee.

My four-month stay at CTU (Conversion Training Unit) at Hakimpet is remembered primarily for my bale-out from a blazing Tempest on 28 October 1952. Following a series of engine failures, this aircraft type was grounded and we moved to our very first jet squadrons.



Pilatus PC-7s on the Dundigal flight line