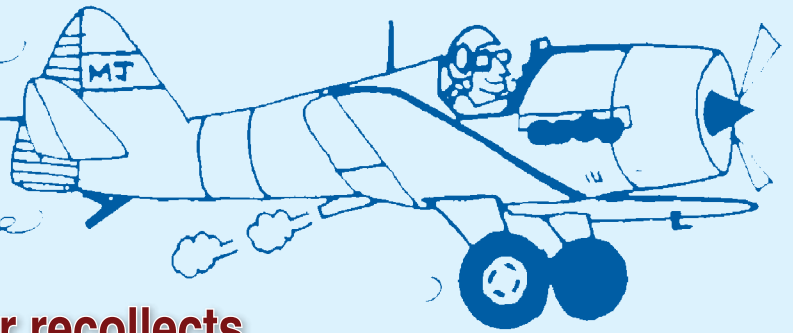
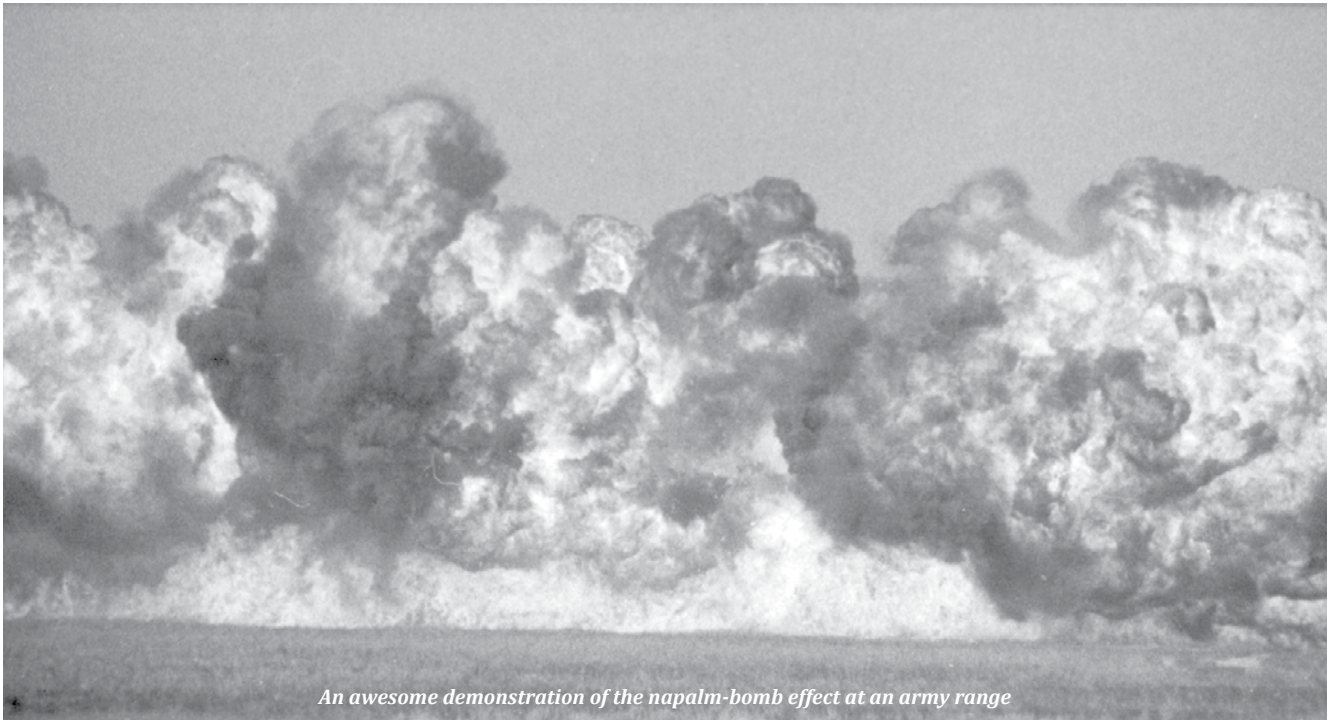


Ancient Aviator Anecdotes



Air Vice Marshal Cecil Parker recollects...



An awesome demonstration of the napalm-bomb effect at an army range

ON A WING AND A PRAYER

In the sixties a decision was taken to introduce the napalm bomb into the Indian Air Force armament inventory. The ongoing Vietnam War however gave 'napalm' an ugly connotation, hence in the IAF it was referred to by another name. My squadron, equipped with the famous Hunter, carried out the ground/flight trials and inducted the weapon which was to be carried on the inboard pylons in lieu of the 230 gln fuel tank. Being a visually spectacular sight when dropped low, fast and in formation, we were much in demand for all Fire Power Demonstrations (FPD) thereafter.

On 14 September 1970, I had taken a detachment of eight Hunter Mk. 56A aircraft from our base at Hindan (near

Ghaziabad) to Agra to be the grand finale at the FPD at the army range at Babina located a few km south-west of Jhansi. Flying in two sections of four aircraft, each one was to drop a pair of 100 gln FTF containers (inboard pylons) while our normal 100 gln fuel tanks were fitted on the outboard pylons. On the actual day widespread bad weather with low cloud prevented participating aircraft from all other bases from taking off. We were the only formation able to fly VMC low level below cloud and on scheduled TOT (Time over Target) I was able to give our SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) R/T (Radio Tx) call, 'Lightning Drop, Drop NOW'. At that moment, unknown to us, only 15 FTF containers actually hit the ground.

At the time of drop I had felt my right wing pull sharply downward and to my surprise I saw the starboard FTF container still on the inboard pylon. There had never been a case of a 'single' hang-up before. Being a FPD there was no possibility of my returning to try and dislodge the container over the target and from the cockpit there was no way to disarm the weapon or close the electro-mechanical system that operated the release mechanism. In any case, with seven other aircraft forming on me below 8/8 cloud cover at low level, there was little I could do except head for Agra avoiding any built-up area on route. Once in sight of Agra, I handed over lead to my deputy, explained the problem to the ATC (Air Traffic Control) and decided to land