

# Ancient Aviator Anecdotes



## Air Vice Marshal Cecil Parker recollects

### The Ties That Bind

The youth of my generation who were educated at public schools in the Raj era, will still recall their school motto and tie which was integral to the school uniform. The former, in my case was Latin: *Non Nascor Mibi Solum* i.e., Live Not For Self Alone. I must confess we did not always live up to it, but that is another story! The introduction of the school tie however was the forerunner of many more over the years, some for sartorial effect and others for identification.

One practical use of the tie was demonstrated to me by my paternal grandfather, an agriculturist in a tiny village in what is today Chhattisgarh. He was the village *sarpanch* and I had never seen him dressed in anything other than kurta, pyjama and *chappals*. During World War II my school in Namkum (Bihar) had been taken over by the Army to serve as a military hospital, with the school temporarily relocated to Allahabad (UP). We no longer had the privilege of a special school train and all boarders were required to be personally escorted by parents/guardians to the new

location. I had just entered my teens and spent my summer vacation with my grandparents in the village. My father in Kolkata had requested my grandfather to escort me to Allahabad and, in view of the prevailing sartorial culture, had suggested that he wear western attire, including a tie, which he mailed to him by post and which I was required to knot for him. On arrival at our destination, we went to the railway waiting room where grandfather freshened up and emerged looking very smart and spruce in shirt, trousers and shoes. When I looked for the tie to knot, I found it looped neatly around his waist substituting for a belt he had forgotten to bring!

From school to college to the Air Force my wardrobe included a growing number of ties from academies, reunions, anniversaries, and by way of gifts. In 1980, while attending the Royal College of Defence Studies in London, the dress code was invariably a suit and therefore a tie was *de rigueur*. One day on the London tube, an older gentleman in front glanced frequently in my direction. When I disembarked at Earl's Court, he followed me and very politely asked if I

was wearing the Caterpillar Club tie? I complimented him on his keen eyesight and confirmed that I was. He then removed his scarf and I saw that he was wearing the same tie. In the station coffee shop we introduced ourselves and shared our experiences leading to membership of the club. I explained that I was from India and had bailed out from a Tempest fighter on fire in 1952. He was a Canadian and was the captain of a Lancaster RAF bomber during World War II and had also to bail out from his aircraft on fire over France in 1944. We exchanged names, addresses, and numbers and promised to keep in touch. From this chance encounter some years later, the story of my club membership appeared in a Canadian publication, 'Bless You Brother Irwin (The Caterpillar Club Story)' by John A Neal and titled by him as 'Bailout Over India.'

On retirement I disposed of most of my fancy ties but today, in my 85th year, I find I still have 30 hanging in my wardrobe, half of which are 'regimental' in nature and kept only for sentimental reasons. I am now very rarely required to wear a tie, so



Hawker Tempest II of the Indian Air Force