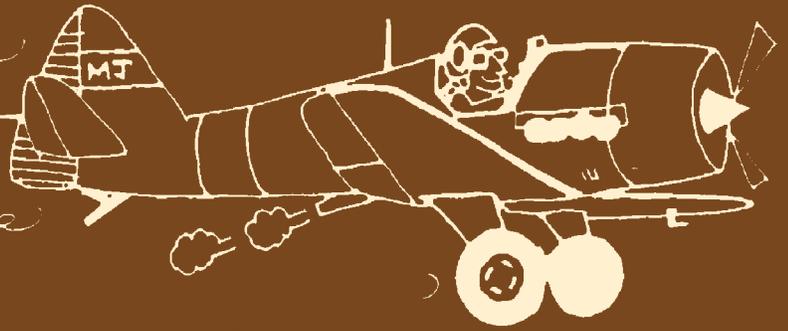


# Ancient Aviator Anecdotes



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

## AUGUST ASSOCIATION(S)



*Photo for reference purpose only: DH113 Vampire NF54 ID606 of the Indian AF on display at Palam, New Delhi. (Image by BAE Systems/Ron Smith)*

30 August 2021 marks 69 years since No 58 Pilots Course (PC) was commissioned into the IAF at Begumpet by AVM Subroto Mukherji the then DCAS. The members of this PC were born in the early 1930s when the first of our pioneer Indian military aviators joined the RAF; Subroto Mukherji himself was commissioned on 8 October 1932. Our generation grew up in the colonial era, were in school during World War II (WW-II), celebrated Independence and lived through Partition. Post WW-II the RIAF evolved out of the RAF and soon after Partition, had to independently undertake air support operations in J & K with depleted numbers of Dakota, Spitfire and Tempest aircraft and manpower. The first jet aircraft (Vampires) were acquired in 1948 and the initial expansion of our air force commenced. On becoming a Republic in 1950, the IAF emerged from the RIAF. Most of us future pilot trainees of No 58 PC were at that time college students and entered for the FPSC entrance exam for the IAF. After clearing the

same, along with selection/medical boards, fifty of us reported in early 1951 to No 1 AFA in Ambala and No 58 PC was born. Shortly thereafter the academy was relocated to Begumpet.

Pilot training was then of 18 months duration; nine months on the Tiger Moth (Basic Stage) and Harvard (Advanced Stage). Standards were high and our course had a 40% attrition rate with just 30 of us (plus a naval aviator) graduating as Pilot Officers and earning our wings on 30 August 1952. 17 of our coursemates moved to TTW Agra for twin-engined conversion and thereafter flew Dakota, Liberator, Packet, AN -12, AN- 32, Super Constellation, IL-14, Avro748, Viscount, Devon, Canberra and the first Chetak helicopters. The other 13 of us, along with the naval aviator, moved to CTU Hakimpet for fighter conversion on Spitfire and Tempest and thereafter to squadrons flying Vampire, Toofani, Mystere, Gnat, Hunter, MiG and Marut plus the HT-2, Prentice, Iskra and Kiran during our instructional

tenures. The very last member of our course to retire, did so in 1988.

From our course came an early generation of test pilots, QFI / IRIs, Sqn Cdr / CFIs, CO /, CIs, Stn Cdr / AOCs, Commandants and an Air Attache. They participated in both the 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pak wars with one member earning an MVC. In its first few years our course lost seven pilots in flying accidents, three each from transport and fighter aircraft plus one from a rotary wing. Since then, over the years another 15 have passed on due to natural causes. This leaves nine of us surviving members (as on date) of whom three are nonagenarians and the other six nearly there! Age, distance (plus Covid restrictions) no longer permit the many happy get-togethers we enjoyed in the past, commencing with a memorable 'Bees Saal Baad' reunion in Delhi on 30 August 1972, but the internet and smartphone keep us in touch. In Oct/Nov this year our air force and the author will both mark their 89<sup>th</sup> birthdays; another august association for this ancient aviator. 🦋