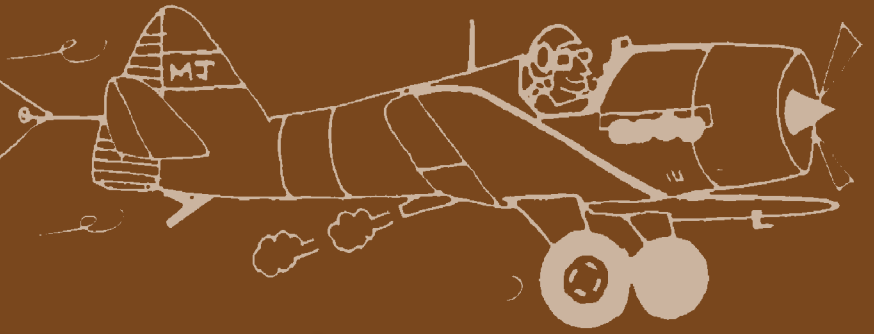


# Ancient Aviator Anecdotes



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

### GURUS WITH WINGS

In this digital era greetings cards have migrated to the internet and e-greetings have become common place. There are however diehards from my generation (i.e. those born the same year as our air force or thereabouts) who continue to snail-mail personalised, hand written greetings on special occasions. Among the dwindling number of end-of-year greetings cards we received in 2021, was one from a 95-year old IAF officer settled in the UK. Good memories make good stories and I will remember first meeting Flt Lt Norman Walker (3405) GD (P) of No 41 Pilots Course circa 1946 when he was a flying instructor and I was a flight cadet at No. 1 Air Force Academy in Ambala in 1951.

My own instructor was that marvelous man Navroze Lalkaka who instilled the love of flying while teaching us its skills.

In those days, to increase the variety of training inputs, it was an informal policy to programme pupils to occasionally fly with QFIs other than their own. My log book reminds me that I flew instructional sorties with Cecil Digby, Rampal, Les Preston, Babla Senapati, Norman Walker, Jaggu Shaw, Pete Wilson, Sham Powar and CGI Philip. This covered the 18 month training period of my Basic Stage (Tiger Moth) and Advanced Stage (Harvard) before earning my wings and being commissioned in August, 1952. In a few cases personal friendships developed between instructor and pupil that lasted a lifetime.

Like Navroze, Norman had a nice, easy, informal, friendly approach to teaching both in the air and on the ground. Flying per se, is one profession in which learning never stops till one leaves the cockpit for

the last time. The years passed and, while attending the course at the RCDS in the UK in 1980, I was invited to attend the annual get-together of the IAF Association in the UK. My wife and I were happy to meet up with some old/senior friends settled in the UK including an ex-squadron commander, David Bouche, coursemate Buster Kaul and Norman Walker who immediately invited us to his home. He had left the air force in 1954, emigrated and created a very successful business in the UK. Despite not having re(visited) India in 60 years, Norman's Hindi is still surprisingly fluent and he is nostalgic about his house in Nagpur. As a young school boy there he recollected a gathering which included Mahatma Gandhi who patted his head in passing. After my own retirement from the air force in 1986 we travelled regularly to the UK to visit our daughter and family who had settled there. On nearly every occasion Norman would ensure mutual visits and



*Representational image of the De Havilland DH-82 Tiger Moth (Photo: Angad Singh at Yelahanka 2015)*

never failed to enquire about his friends and colleagues in the air force. A few years after he became a widower he remarried a widow who herself has now passed away leaving this nonagenarian guru with wings alone to look after a handicapped adult son. Yet, he still finds time and has the energy to send us a personalised, hand-written greeting card every year.....long may his tribe increase.

## A JOURNEY

### 1932-52

This writer was born in 1932 to a mother from Gujarat and a father from Madhya Pradesh. My nomadic life-to-be commenced with childhood and education spread over Bengal, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. My boyhood dream to 'fly' materialised when I was selected to join No 58 PC (Pilots Course) at No 1 AFA (Air Force Academy) in Ambala (Punjab/Haryana). Soon thereafter it was relocated to Begumpet, an airfield in Secunderabad, then in the erstwhile Nizams state of Hyderabad (subsequently Andhra Pradesh). It was here, as a flight cadet, I was destined to meet and court the young lady I was to marry five years later. On 30 August, 1952, at my POP (Passing Out Parade), she was introduced to my parents and received an invitation to visit our home then in Calcutta (Kolkata). As a newly commissioned young officer in the fighter stream, my air force journey commenced from Begumpet (Tiger Moth/Harvard) to nearby Hakimpet (Spitfire/Tempest).



*Representational image of an IAF Hunter*

### 1953-86

On 1 January, 1953 I reported to my first squadron in Palam (Vampires) and thereafter to Ambala (Toofanis) – Tambaram (HT-2/T6G) – Jodhpur (Prentice/HT-2/ Harvard). During this period the young lady graduated, became a teacher and our courtship was conducted by post! On 14 February, 1956 we were married in Secunderabad and my onward journey was now enriched by a wife, companion, helpmate and supporter who brought meaning and direction to my life. In the next 30 years of my life in the air force, she set up home 17 times, continued teaching whenever possible, designed our future home (built in 1976), performed her duties as local President of AFWWA (Air Force Wives Welfare Association) wherever required and brought up two wonderful children who added meaning to our lives.



*Representational image of Jaguars (Photo: Simon Watson)*

From Jodhpur our joint journey continued on to Ambala (MEU) – Palam (Devon/Vampires) – Wellington (DSSC) – New Delhi (Air HQ) – Palam (Hunters) – Jamnagar (Hunters) – Hindan/Pathankot (Hunters) – Wellington (DS Air) – Bangalore (HQ TC) – Hakimpet (Iskra/Chetak/Kiran) – Adampur (Migs) – London (RCDS) – Wellington (CI Air) – Hyderabad (Kirans) and finally Udhampur (Hepters/Jaguar). It has been a wonderful profession as I had thoroughly enjoyed my time in the cockpit but my days of active flying (3642 hours) were now coming to an end. In 1986 the air force opened up an option to take premature retirement. I was happy to do so and move on.

### 1986-(2022)

The next decade was spent in the corporate world in Mumbai followed by an equally constructive tenure in the academic world back in Hyderabad where we were happy

to finally live in our own home in the AFOCHS Ltd Vayupuri. Retirement from all commercial activities now gave me control over my own time for favoured interests like tennis, swimming, reading, writing and travel by choice. Our journeys have taken us from USA in the west to Japan in the east and from Norway in the north down to South Africa. Our two children (now both in their early sixties) have made their own lives and augmented our family with six grandchildren, one great grandchild plus one more due in April. 14 February 2022 marks 66 years of the joint element of my journey which had commenced in the colonial era, spanned World War II, Independence, Partition, 35 years in the IAF from J & K to TN and from Gujarat, where it all started, to Telengana where it will terminate in due course. 🦋