

IAF No. 17 Squadron: The Golden Arrows

Seven decades of India's most decorated air squadron



There is a saying in the Indian Air Force that some squadrons have history, and some squadrons are history. No. 17 Squadron falls firmly in the second category. Known as the Golden Arrows, this unit has been flying for India since 1951. It has flown American trainers, British jets, Soviet fighters and now French Rafales. It has fought in Goa, in the 1971 war, in Kargil and in Operation Sindoor. Through every era of Indian air power, the Golden Arrows have been in the thick of it.

Where it all began

The squadron was born on 1 October 1951, at Ambala Air Force Station. The man who formed it was Flight Lieutenant DL Springett, and the aircraft it flew was the Harvard IIB, an American trainer that had been in service since the Second World War. In those early days, the squadron was tasked with tactical reconnaissance. It was not glamorous work, but it was foundational work.



By November 1955, the Golden Arrows had entered the jet age. They converted to the de Havilland Vampire, a British twin boom jet fighter that was the IAF's first



combat jet. Then, in 1957, they made another switch and became the first IAF squadron to receive the Hawker Hunter. That matters because the Hunter was a far more capable machine than anything they had flown before. It