

Ancient Aviator Anecdotes



Air Vice Marshal Cecil Parker recollects...



The venerable IAF Hunter

The Kindness of Strangers

A writer–friend, who is also a regular reader of this column, once asked me if the ‘Ancient’ in my column–title referred only to ‘Aviator’ or also included ‘Anecdote’? I explained that, while it certainly described the vintage/profession of the author, interesting anecdotes are not confined to the world of aviation but are a continuing occurrence even now in my 86th year, as the following story would illustrate.

On 4 December 2017, I was walking back from the local shopping area to our residential colony which is connected by a short, snaking, narrow, pitted road with no shoulders or a pavement. I had a full shopping bag in each hand as I traversed this road whose width barely allowed two vehicles to pass each other simultaneously. Traffic was light, the weather was pleasant and my mind was recollecting events that had occurred exactly 46 years ago to the day. I had led the first ever fighter attack,

(with Hunter aircraft) on the PAF air base at Peshawar in the very early hours of 4 December 1971.

Suddenly I saw a small, black car approaching me directly, and so allowing another car to overtake me. To avoid being hit as the cars crossed each other, I had to jump rapidly into the shallow ditch on my right. After I had regained my balance, I observed that the black car had immediately stopped thus giving me time and space to clear its projected path. I saw that the sole occupant was a lady driver and I waved my hand in thanks for her swift and thoughtful action. She just smiled and drove on while I continued my walk but with my mind now more on the road than in the past!

I had barely covered 100 yards inside our colony when the same black car drove up from behind and stopped alongside. I realised that the driver must have made a quick 180 degree turnaround in that restricted area. The bespectacled young lady

driver lowered her glass, smiled and said politely, “Uncle I will be happy to drive you home”. I was somewhat taken aback but thanked her and explained that I was a very short distance from my home. I added that I deeply appreciated the offer which was probably prompted by the sight of a grey haired old man jumping out of the way of her car! She merely smiled once again, bade me good bye, did another smart u–turn and drove away.

On reaching home I related the incident to my wife who felt that I ought to have at least accepted her offer, asked her name and invited her into our home. I felt bad for not having thought of it as I was quite touched at this gesture from someone unfamiliar and, no older than my own granddaughter. I now have no way of knowing who she is but, if she happens to read this little anecdote in the print or electronic media, she will know how grateful this air veteran is for her kind offer to a complete stranger.