

#STAGE  
Of Sultana & Son  
Machariya

Rama Pandey inspires audience all over again!



Sadhana Garg  
Journalist & Social Entrepreneur

After 75 years of Independence, if we in our country, still debate over women's rights, it is indeed a marker of how we as a society run in circles! That women need to have power over themselves is a distant cry, in case you think it is a grossly exaggerated statement, take a look at Sultana.

Recently, on one hand, and mechanisation of fisheries, on the other, undermines the food, security and livelihood of these traditional communities. Adding insult to injury is the government policies of farming out fisheries to big time contractors, which further threatens the subsistence of age-old aquaculture.

The high-voltage melodrama centered round a fisherwoman, who not only faces defamation by fellow women and verbal abuse, but also male coercion, once her partner is implicated falsely and put behind bars.

The verbal abuse and psychological 3rd degree treatment may seem mundane in interpersonal relations in families, in particular, and society at large, but it certainly has a demenssing and unfavourable effect on the victim more often than not a woman, as is the case in Son Machariya. The play drew attention to the gender-based violence which is accepted as a normal societal practice.

To Pandey goes the credit of tirelessly telling her audience that a woman in shakles facing discrimination anywhere is limiting for all women everywhere.

The play also focused on the conflict between traditional communities and the vested interests of other stakeholders. The Marine biodiversity is not only destroyed due to overfishing by the contractors but the entire timeless aquatic ecosystem, that for centuries, sustained the coastal village communities and is held hostage to the profit motive of the former.

If the role of a playwright is to raise questions, then Pandey does full justice to it. Also, if theatre is a spiritual and social event, then we could not have had a clearer picture as the one presented by Sultana and Son Machariya.

Pandey, as majority of audience feels, raises questions and leads them to think what they should aspire for.

SABRE SLAYERS  
OF THE 1965

#THE KEELOR BROTHERS



In the illustrious history of the Indian Air Force (IAF), there are many stories of valour and sacrifice in times of war and peace. One such fabled story is about two Anglo-Indian brothers, born and raised in Lucknow, who wrote their names in letters of gold in the annals of the IAF during the 22 day war with Pakistan in September 1965. They were Squadron Leaders Denzil Keelor and his younger brother Trevor Keelor.

Denzil was born on 07 December, 1933 and Trevor on 08 December, 1934. Their parents were Charles and Isobel Keelor of Lucknow, UP. Charles Keelor was the Headmaster at St Francis College, which was a high school. The brothers initially studied at St Francis College and later at La Martiniere College at Lucknow. Apart from being good students, they were good sportsmen as well excelling in boxing, athletics and hockey. They grew up reading tales of daring fighter pilots shooting down German bombers over London and other theaters during the second world war. They wanted to pursue a flying career and thus developed an abiding ambition to serve in the Indian Air Force as fighter pilots. When they had the required qualifications, they joined the 64th Pilots Course and were commissioned as Pilot Officers in the fighter stream on 06 November, 1954. The Pilot Officer rank no longer exists in the Indian Air Force (IAF).

During those years, the British de Havilland Vampire was a front-line fighter and all newly commissioned pilots were posted to these squadrons. Later, Denzil went to No 4 squadron equipped with the French MD 400 Ouragan, and in 1962 was selected to go to the erstwhile Soviet Union to be trained to fly the supersonic Mig-21. Unfortunately, the Soviet doctors did not find him medically fit to fly, which at that time, was one of the fastest aircraft in the world. He returned to No 4 Squadron. Later, he moved to No 9 Squadron at Ambala which was equipped with the diminutive and nimble Folland Gnat. The Commanding Officer of No 9 Squadron was Wing Commander RJM Upot and the Squadron was called the Wolf Pack.

Trevor Keelor first flew Vampires, and later, the Hawker Hunter 56, one of the latest entrants in the IAF inventory. In 1965, he was also flying the Gnat with No 23 Squadron at Ambala. The Commanding Officer of No 23 Squadron was Wing Commander S Raghavendran and the Squadron was called the Panthers. During this tenure, Trevor was awarded a Vayu Sena Medal (VM) for landing a Gnat after it had lost engine power.

In the run up to the September 1965 war, No 9 Squadron was moved to the Halwara airbase near Ludhiana, which was closer to the western border with Pakistan. A detachment of eight Gnats from No

23 Squadron was deployed at Pathankot on 02 September, which was only 15 miles from the border. Squadron Leader Trevor Keelor was one of the Gnat pilots in the detachment. It was this base which first saw action when the Pakistan Army started a land offensive across the international border in the Chamb-Jaurian sector, north west of Jammu, at dawn on 01 September, 1965.

Pakistan called this offensive Operation Grand Slam because its strategic aim was to take over the state of Jammu & Kashmir by the force of arms. The strategic aim of the Indian armed forces was to prevent this from happening. The victor in any conflict is the side which achieves its strategic aim. Since the state of Jammu & Kashmir is still part of the Indian Union today, it should be abundantly clear to everyone that India won this war. Pakistani propaganda that the war was a stalemate forgets this basic fact.

The enemy's objective was to seize the vital bridge over the Chenab at Akhnour; cut the road link to the valley and make it very difficult to supply the Indian army stationed further north. There, being no other road link to the Kashmir valley at that time, all personnel, every bit of equipment and ammunition would have had to be flown into the valley to sustain land operations to the west and north of Srinagar. The transport aircraft fleet of the Indian Air Force would have found it extremely difficult to meet this demand due to paucity of resources.

The IAF was pressed into action on 01 September, 1965 when the hastily prepared defences of the Indian army started to crumble under the fierce onslaught of the Pakistan army, whose infantry was backed by adequate resources of artillery and tanks. A desperate Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General JN Chaudhary requested the Defence Minister Shri YB Chawan to order the Chief of the Air Staff (CAS), Air Marshal Arjan Singh, to provide close air support to the beleaguered army at Chamb. Within 30 minutes of the order from Delhi, being received at Pathankot at 5 pm, 12 x Vampire 52 fighter bombers of No 45 Squadron, each armed with 8 x T-10 rockets, were launched in three formations of four aircraft each. These formations were followed by 15 Mystere IVA aircraft of Nos 3 and 31 Squadrons, each armed with 36 x 68 mm SNEB rockets. The first Vampire formation, led by the Commanding Officer Squadron Leader SK Dahar, attacked tanks close to the forward line of our own troops and three aircraft returned to Pathankot. The fourth Vampire, flown by Flight Lieutenant S. Bharadwaj, appears to have been shot down by ground fire and the pilot was killed.

The second wave of four Vampires led by Flight Lieutenant A Bhagwagar was not so lucky. They were intercepted by three Pakistani F-86 Sabres led by Squadron Leader Sarfaraz Rafiqi and three aircraft were shot down. Flight Lieutenants A Bhagwagar and VM Joshi were killed in action while the third pilot, Flight Lieutenant SV Phatak managed to bale out and return to Indian lines. The fourth Vampire flown by Flight Lieutenant WM Sondhi returned to base. The third formation of four Vampires, led by Squadron Leader FJ Mehta, did not see any action on

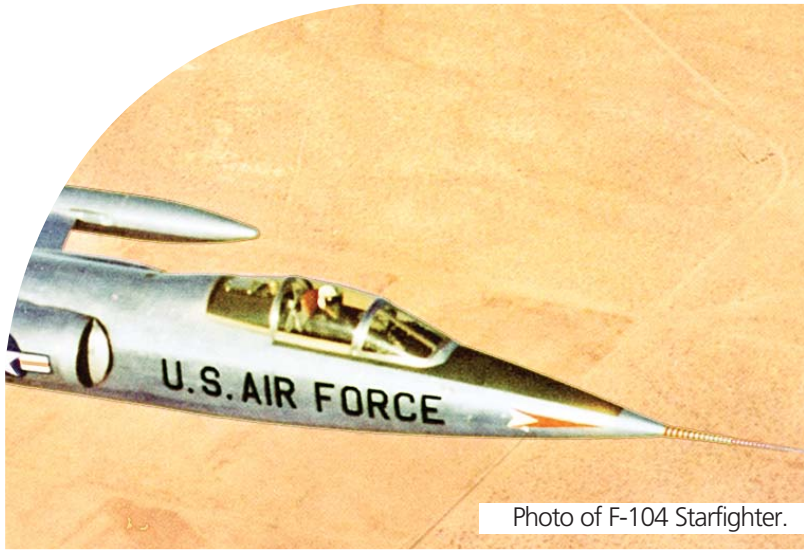
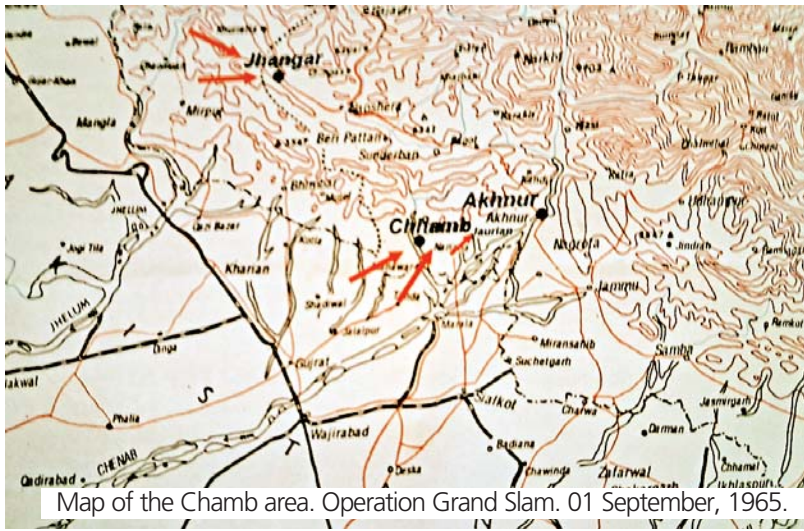


Photo of F-104 Starfighter.



A good photo of the Gnat showing its small size.

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the ground and returned to base without expending their rockets. All the 15 Mysteres returned safely to base. The loss of four Vampires and three experienced pilots was a severe blow to the morale of all personnel at Pathankot. The mood was sombre in the Officers' Mess that evening. The IAF was now thirsting for blood.

There was not much air action on both sides on 02 September, 1965. The eight Gnats from Ambala, under the command of Squadron

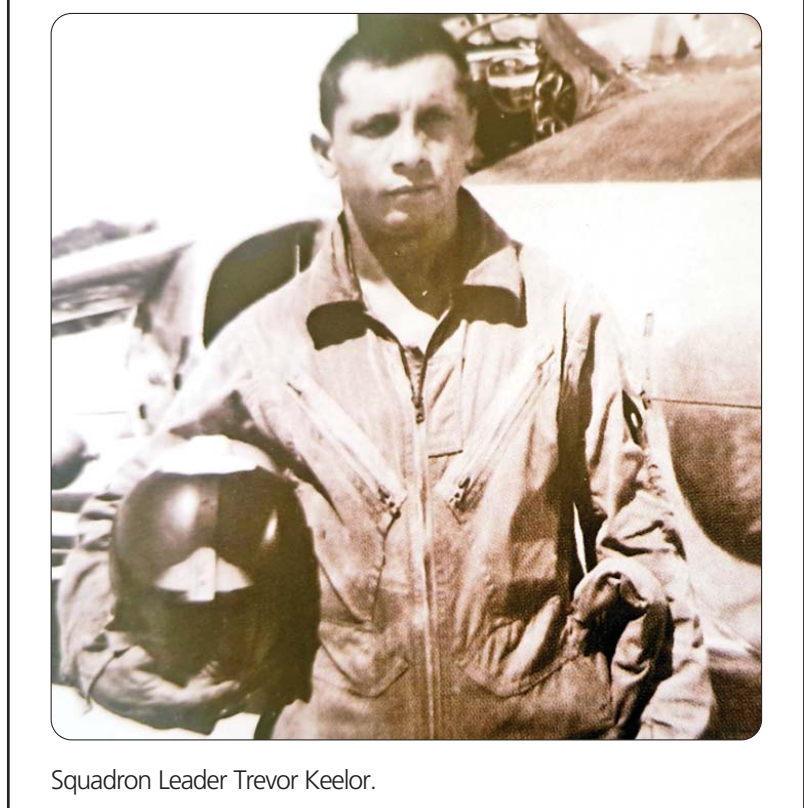
Leader BS Sikand, landed at Pathankot around 4 pm.

The next day, 03 September, 1965 was a momentous day in the history of the IAF as that was the day the IAF scored its first air-to-air kill in independent India. The plan was to lure the Pak Sabres into air combat as the Gnat pilots were quite confident of taking on the adversary.

Two Mysteres from No 31 Squadron, flown by the Commanding Officer Wing Commander Jim Goodman and



Sqn Ldr Denzil Keelor.



Squadron Leader Trevor Keelor.

Flying Officer TS Sethi, were to fly at around 1500 feet to Chamb under the control of the No 230 Signals Unit radar at Amritsar. Eight Gnats, split into two formations of four, were to fly in at 300 feet so as to be invisible to the Pakistan radar at Sakesar until the Mysteres were warned by Amritsar radar of approaching enemy aircraft. Then, the Gnats would zoom up to engage them while the two Mysteres would dive down and return to base. It was to be a classic sandwich ambush.

The first Gnat formation of four aircraft was led by Squadron Leader Johnny Greene and the second four by Squadron Leader BS Sikand. All ten aircraft got airborne at 7 am. The Mysteres approached Chamb flying at 1500 feet above ground and maintaining 300 knots (a knot is one nautical mile = 1.85 km). This was done

Indulge in Sweetness: Blueberry Cheesecake Day

celebrated every year on May 26, Blueberry Cheesecake Day is a delicious tribute to one of the most beloved desserts around the world. This creamy, tangy, and fruity delight combines the richness of cheesecake with the refreshing burst of blueberries, often layered, swirled, or topped generously. Whether baked or not baked, this dessert offers a perfect balance of flavors and textures. It's a great excuse to visit your favorite bakery, try a new recipe at home, or simply savor a slice with loved ones. So, grab a fork and treat yourself, because life's too short to skip cheesecake!



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Painting of Trevor Keelor's Sabre Kill on 03 September, 1965.



Gnat – The IAF's Small "Sabre Slayer" (Photo shows two pilots running towards their aircraft for a scramble). This is to quickly counter intruding aircraft detected by radar.



Photo of the F-86 Sabre fighter.

On reaching the target area, the Mystere formation pulled up from low level to deliver their rockets at the gun positions. The Mysteres were ordered to exit the area after delivering their load. At that moment, Mayadev reported four Sabres circling above and Denzil threw in a climbing turn to engage them.

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When news of the first Sabre kill of the IAF reached Air Headquarters, the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Arjan Singh, first informed the Defence Minister

Shri YB Chawan and then sent a congratulatory message to Pathankot. It was read out to all pilots in the crew room by the Station Commander, Group Captain Roshan Suri. Downing of the Sabre and the message from the Chief Of the Air Staff sent pilot morale soaring. The next day, the President awarded the Vir Chakra to Squadron Leader Trevor Keelor for displaying conspicuous gallantry in the face of the enemy. Unrelenting attacks on the Indian army at

Chamb made Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri order the Indian army to start a land offensive across the international border in the Punjab to ease pressure at Chamb. At dawn on 06 Sep, 1965, the Indian army started offensive operations on the Amritsar, Lahore and Jammu-Sialkot axes. A third attack was launched at the Dera Baba Nanak bridge across the Ravi river in Punjab. As expected, the air war also heated up and other IAF bases at Adampur, Halwara, Ambala, Jodhpur and Jammargar, were drawn into the war. A detachment of eight Gnats from No 9 Squadron was positioned at Adampur for air defence and escort duties for ground attack missions by Mysteres as when the situation demanded it. The detachment was commanded by the Commanding Officer Wing Commander Reginald Upot. Squadron Leader Denzil Keelor was one of the eight pilots in this detachment.

On 19th September, 1965 at about 4.30 pm, four Mysteres from No 1 Squadron were ordered to attack Pakistan artillery positions at Chawinda, close to Sialkot where a furious tank battle was in progress. The Mysteres were provided with four Gnat escorts led by Squadron Leader Denzil Keelor. His wingman was Flying Officer Munna Rai. The deputy leader was Squadron Leader Vinay Kapila with Flight Lieutenant Vijay Mayadev as his wingman. All eight aircraft proceeded to the target area at very low level to avoid being picked up by enemy radar.

On reaching the target area, the Mystere formation pulled up from low level to deliver their rockets at the gun positions. The Mysteres were ordered to exit the area after delivering their load. At that moment, Mayadev reported four Sabres circling above and Denzil threw in a climbing turn to engage them. His wingman Munna Rai lost contact with his leader in this turn and was told to return to base. Kapila delayed his turn to trick the Sabres into a sandwich between the leading two Gnats and the trailing pair. On spotting the Gnats, the Sabres also turned in and flew into the sandwich exactly as planned. When one Sabre came within range, Kapila shot it down and formation members saw the aircraft hit the ground and explode. Meanwhile, Denzil also manoeuvred behind the leading pair of Sabres using the Gnats superior power to weight ratio and agility. Denzil closed in and shot a Sabre, which flew west into the setting sun, trailing a thick column of black smoke. It was later confirmed by intelligence sources that the Sabre had crashed short of the runway at its home base. Unfortunately, Mayadev was shot down by a Sabre. He ejected and became a POW. Both Denzil and Kapila were awarded the Vir Chakra (VrC).

The Keelor brothers continued their careers in the IAF. Trevor retired as a Wing Commander in 1978 after commanding No 18 Squadron equipped with Gnats. He passed away in 2002 at the age of 67 years. He will always be remembered as Wing Commander Trevor Keelor, VrC VM.

Denzil did a stint at the radar station at Barnala in Punjab and attended the Defence Services Staff College in Wellington, Tamil Nadu in 1968. During the December 1971 Indo-Pak war, Denzil's Mig-21 was

shot down by anti aircraft fire while on a ground attack mission in the Chamb sector. He ejected over Indian territory and survived. As a Wing Commander, he commanded No 4 Squadron equipped with Mig-21 aircraft.

On promotion to the rank of Group Captain, he assumed command of the prestigious Tactics and Combat Establishment (TACDE). During his time at TACDE, Denzil experienced a serious inflight emergency while flying a Mig-21. His canopy blew off at altitude, exposing him to a vicious blast of freezing cold air and hypoxia (lack of oxygen). Denzil, displaying exemplary determination and flying skills, brought about by years of experience in the cockpit, landed the aircraft safely back at base. For his act of courage and devotion to duty, Denzil was awarded the Kirti Chakra (KC), the second highest award given for gallantry in peacetime.

On promotion to the rank of Air Commodore, Denzil was given the onerous responsibility of inducting the modern Mirage 2000 aircraft into the Indian Air Force. He assumed command of Air Force Station at Gwalior and set about acquiring land to expand the base and setting up the necessary infrastructure to house the squadrons, maintenance facilities and housing for personnel. His drive and enthusiasm ensured smooth induction of, in the mid 1980s, the most modern aircraft in the IAF inventory.

The Mirage 2000 Squadrons became operational in a very short time, much to the delight of the IAF leadership at the time. For his devotion to duty, Denzil was awarded the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal (AVSM) by the President.

Continuing his ascent into the upper echelons of the IAF, Denzil was promoted to the rank of Air Vice Marshal and served as the Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (Operations) during the time of the Indian Peace Keeping Force operations in Sri Lanka. The operations were heavily dependent on transport and helicopter support by the IAF and Denzil ensured that all demands were met in time.

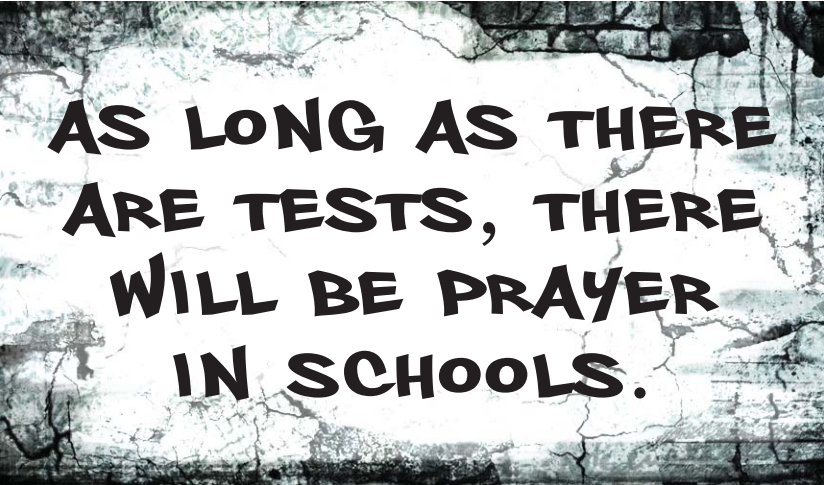
On promotion to the rank of Air Marshal, he was appointed the Inspector General of the IAF, the person responsible for ensuring operational readiness of units and flight safety. Before his retirement in December 1991, in recognition of his distinguished services of the most extraordinary order to the IAF and the nation, the President awarded him the Param Vishisht Seva Medal (PVSM), the highest award for services rendered in peacetime. He retired in 1992 as Air Marshal Denzil Keelor, PVSM KC AVSM VrC, which, by any yardstick, reflects a career of courage, devotion to duty and exemplary service to the nation. Air Marshal Denzil Keelor passed away in 2024 at the age of 90 years.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself wrote a condolence letter to Mrs. Marie Keelor, lauding the services of her husband to the nation in both war and peace.

In the storied history of the Indian Air Force, the Keelor brothers will long be remembered as the Sabre Slayers of 1965. Their services to the Indian nation, in times of war and peace, can only be described as extraordinary devotion to duty and patriotism.

rajeshsharma1049@gmail.com

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman