



International Color Day

Pervasive in nature and based on the electromagnetic spectrum that the human eye can behold, color is not only about beauty but it is deeply embedded in science. Proposed by the Portuguese Color Association at an international gathering, this date was chosen particularly as it related to the spring equinox. The equinox marks the time in this half of the year when the length of the daylight is almost the same as the length of the nighttime, providing symbolic relevance as the contrast of light and shadow is considered not only in the rainbow but also in human cultures.

I was to be the 'tail-end Charlie'

PART: I

We all knew that the IAF would have to retaliate the next day, but we had no idea of where and when. Paddy Earle came to the mess and told all of us to have an early dinner and catch some sleep. I slept fitfully, rolling and tossing in bed not knowing what to expect. We were woken up by a messenger at 0300 hrs and told to report to the squadron briefing room at 0400 hrs. No mission details were given and we could only guess that it was something big.



Air Marshal Philip Rajkumar (Retd)

This is the story of the only successful broad daylight attack carried out on the famous Pakistani airbase, Sargodha. A raid acknowledged for its audacity even in the official PAF history.

I returned to India in Sep '64 after five months of gunnery training in the USA, immeasurably richer in skills and confident and was posted to No 1 'Tiger' Squadron, equipped with the Dassault Mystere IVA ground attack fighter, at Adampur close to Jullundur in Punjab. The squadron was commanded by Wing Commander Om Prakash 'Omi' Taneja. A fighter squadron is divided into two flights of eight aircraft each, and Omi's Flight Commanders were Squadron Leader (Sqn Ldr) Patrick Russel 'Paddy' Earle and Sqn Ldr Denzil 'Denny' Satur.

The Mystere IVA could exceed the speed of sound in a dive, and on 12 Oct '64, I broke the sound barrier 17 years after Chuck Yeager had done so for the first time ever over the skies of California in his experimental rocket powered aircraft, the Bell X-1. It was a huge thrill! Operational flying training in the squadron progressed rapidly, and when the Indo-Pak war started on 01 Sep '65, I was fully operational and ready for the fray.

For the first five days, only the Mystere and Gnat squadrons, based at Pathankot to the North of Adampur, saw action in the Chamb sector while we chafed at the bit. No 1 Squadron was sent into action at dawn on 06 Sep '65. After the first search and strike mission in the Gujranwala sector, led by Omi Taneja, nothing happened for the rest of the morning. At 1 P.M., we heard Field Marshal Ayub Khan, President of Pakistan, telling his countrymen on Radio Pakistan that the Indian Army had committed aggression by crossing the international border in the Sialkot, Dera Baba Nanak and Lahore sectors and that Pakistan had no option but to defend itself. We anxiously waited for orders to go into action but none came. The balloons had gone up!

Around 5 P.M., we heard the news that Pathankot airfield had been raided by the Pakistan Air



#TIGERS OVER SARGODHA

Force (PAF) and that a number of our aircraft had been destroyed on the ground. As dusk fell, we were told to go back to the mess. My room-mate 'Frisky' Verma (later Air Marshal, AOC-in-C, Central Air Command) and I got on to Frisky's Jawa motorbike and set off for the mess, when there was a loud explosion at the Southern end of the runway and the anti-aircraft guns opened fire. Glowing red balls of tracer shells arced through the fading light, and in their glow, I picked out the silhouette of a PAF B-57 bomber go past. I yelled 'Frisky, B-57 over us' and we dove into a trench. The Pak bomber carried out a second attack and dropped a bomb near the Air Traffic Control (ATC) building at the middle of the 3000-yard runway. After about 15 minutes, the all-clear sounded and we gingerly rode back to the mess in pitch darkness because black out had been enforced not only in the base but also all over Punjab.

In the mess, pilots from the other two Mystere squadrons on the base and a number of senior flying instructors from Training Command, who had been attached to the three squadrons for operational duties, were gathered in little knots, talking in hushed tones about another PAF raid on Halwara to the South of us earlier in the evening. Some more bad news came in the form of a Mig-21 parked at the end of our runway being destroyed by the PAF bomber. The only cheery news was that two F-86 Sabre jets of the PAF had been shot down by our Hunter fighters over Halwara. We all knew that the IAF would have to retaliate the next day, but we had no idea of where and when. Paddy Earle came to the mess and told all of us to have an early dinner and catch some sleep. I slept fitfully, rolling and tossing in bed not knowing what to expect. We were woken up by a messenger at 0300 hrs and told to report to the squadron briefing room at 0400 hrs. No mission details were given and we could only guess that it was something big.

When we assembled in the briefing room fitted with black out curtains, I looked at the briefing board and saw the formation details for a 12 aircraft attack on Sargodha, the heavily defended PAF base, about 100 miles inside Pakistan. As my eyes ran over the details, my heart sank because I saw Frisky's name in the first wave of four aircraft but did not see

my name. I was going to miss all the action! Another frantic search and I found my name at No 12 in the list, in the last wave of four. I was to be the 'tail-end Charlie'. As enemy aircraft attempting to intercept our formation would have to approach from the rear to bring their forward firing guns to bear on our aircraft, the last man in the formation's job was to warn the others about an impending attack. The job required the keen eyes of a hawk and a rubberneck to keep looking as far back as possible. It was a crucial duty and I had been chosen to do it. My disappointment gave way to pride. It could have also meant that I was disposable but I preferred the earlier thought! Two senior flying instructors, one of them Sqn Ldr AB Devayya, were stand by in case any of the first 12 aircraft dropped out.

Omi Taneja started the briefing with a serious demeanour. The excitement and tension in the room was palpable. This was the real thing! We had to start up and taxi out to the take off point in the correct sequence in total radio silence on unit taxi tracks. The runway lights would come only when we were ready to roll. Take off would be in pairs with each aircraft occupying one half of the runway and the interval between pairs was to be 30 seconds to avoid the jet wake of the aircraft in front. We were to take off at 0528 hrs and fly at 300 feet Above Ground Level (AGL) in darkness for 30 minutes and carry out our attacks at 30 second intervals at 0558 hrs, just as dawn was breaking over the target. The very low altitude was chosen for the inbound leg to avoid radar detection. Navigation would be only by compass and stopwatch as darkness would not permit map reading. Omi would lead the first four aircraft armed with 8xT-10 rockets each, Denny Satur the second four armed with 2x18 SNEB 68mm rocket pods each and Sqn Ldr Sudarshan Handa the last four with 2x1000 pound bombs each. As the target was at the extreme distance, the Mystere could go at a height of 300 feet AGL with a full fuel and armament load that we had to fly at the optimum speed for range, which was about 120 mph slower than the preferred tactical speed for manoeuvring at low level. Each of the 12 pilots was given a specific target to attack on the airfield with preference for aircraft spotted on the airfield.

To be continued...
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THIS IS A PAINTING BY DEB GOHAIN. HE HAS BEEN AN AIR FORCE PILOT AND, AS OTHER PILOTS OF THE FORCE, REMEMBERS THIS OPERATION WITH REVERENCE. HE HAS A COLLECTION OF PAINTINGS OF VARIOUS FORCES' ACTIONS THAT ARE A PART OF OUR HISTORY AND DUE TO HIM, NOW, WE HAVE ANOTHER DIMENSION TO REVERE THEM.

Pen Pictures Of The 13 Air Warriors Who Struck Sargodha on 07 September 1965. The 13 pilots of No 1 Squadron, based at Adampur in Punjab, attacked the heavily defended Pakistan Air Force base at Sargodha at the dawn on 07 September 1965. They flew in three formations of four aircraft each as shown.



The Adampur Tigers: The three pilots in the later daylight raid are standing right to left F/O Rajkumar, Flt Lt DS Brar, Sqn Ldr S Handa. Wg Cdr Taneja, Sqn Ldr PR Earle and Flt Lt DS Kahai are standing 5th, 6th and 7th from right.

RED FORMATION

Wg Cdr Om Prakash 'Omi' Taneja



Omi was born in Dera Ismail Khan in undivided India in 1928. His father, being a doctor in the British Indian Army, opted to serve in the Indian Army Medical Corps at partition in August 1947 and retired as a Surgeon Rear Admiral in the Indian Navy. Omi Taneja was commissioned as a fighter pilot in the Indian Air Force with the 51st Pilots Course in 1951. He initially flew Spitfires and Vampires before converting on to the French Mystere IVA in 1957. A qualified Pilot Attack Instructor, he took over command of No 1 Squadron at Adampur in September 1964. His leadership of the squadron during September 1965 was exemplary. He led the first search and strike mission across the border on the morning

of 06 Sep 1965, and again lead from the front for the dawn attack on Sargodha on 07 September 1965. He flew nine more ground attack missions in support of the Indian

army. For his courage and leadership, he was awarded a *Vir Chakra*. He retired from the IAF in 1974 after commanding 503 Signals Unit at Delhi in the rank of Group Captain. Post retirement, he participated in many Himalayan caravans with his son Nikhil Taneja. Later, Omi participated in the Charminar rally in Hyderabad and survived a couple of car crashes. His son, Nikhil, won the Himalayan rally on two consecutive years in 1987 and 1988. Omi was married to Zohra and they had two sons, Nikhil and Rahil. He had a daughter Shalini from an earlier marriage. Omi passed away in 2017 at the age of 89 while visiting Shalini and her family in the USA. Zohra also passed away in 2023.

Flt Lt Vinod Kumar 'Frisky' Verma



He was born in April 1942 in Madhya Pradesh. He was educated at the Bishop Cotton School, Nagpur, and was commissioned in the flying branch of the IAF in May 1962 with the 81st Pilots Course. He initially flew the Dassault MD 450 Ouragan 'Toofani' fighter with No 4 squadron and then underwent gunnery training with the United States Air Force at Nellis Air Force Base in 1964. On his return, he was posted to No 1 Squadron in September 1964. After the Sargodha raid, he flew several ground attack missions against enemy targets in the Lahore, Khem Karan and Sialkot sectors. On 10th September, his aircraft was hit by ground fire while attacking Pakistani tanks in the Khem Karan sector. His main and stand-

by hydraulic systems were put out of action. He skillfully brought the aircraft back using only the emergency electric hydraulic pump. For this courageous act, he was awarded a richly deserved *Vayu Sena*

Medal (Gallantry). Later, he had a distinguished career, commanding No 7 Squadron equipped with the Mig-21MF aircraft, the prestigious Tactics and Combat Development Establishment, Air Force Station Halwara and retired as the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Central Air Command in the rank of Air Marshal. He is married to Santosh and they have two daughters. His elder daughter, Vandana Verma, has a PhD in Robotics from Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, USA and works as a Planetary Exploration Scientist at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. For his distinguished services, Frisky Verma was awarded the Param Vishisht Seva Medal and Ati Vishisht Seva Medal by the Rashtrapati. Frisky and Santosh live in Bhopal.

PINK FORMATION

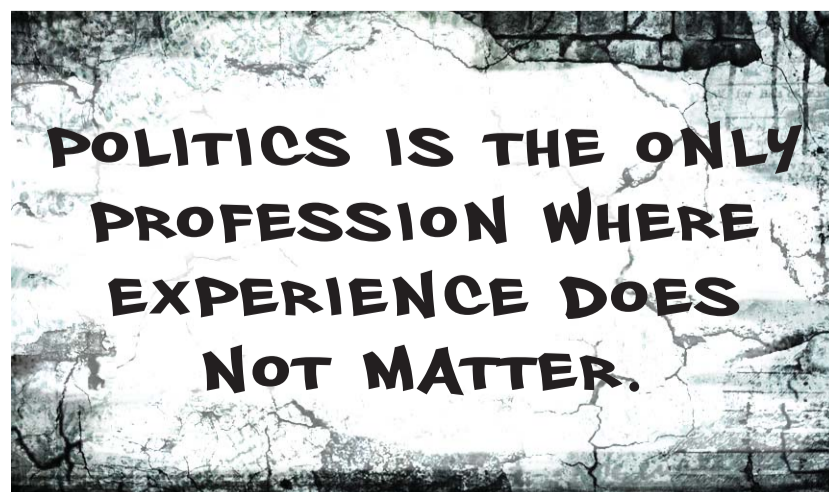
Flight Lieutenant Ajai Kumar 'Brahms' Brahmawar



Brahms was born in Delhi in 1939. He joined the 15th course at the National Defence Academy and was commissioned as a fighter pilot with the 77th Pilots Course in June 1960. He initially flew Toofani with No 4 Squadron before converting on to the Mystere IVA with No 1 Squadron. The navigation planning for the Sargodha raid was done entirely by him. Later, he flew a number of ground attack missions in support of army operations and was awarded a Mention-in-Despatch for gallantry. Ajai flew in the December

1971 war also with No 1 Squadron and was awarded a *Vayu Sena Medal*. He qualified as a Fighter Combat Leader and led a team of eight instructors for instructional duties with the Iraqi Air Force in 1981. He commanded the IAF bases at Bhatinda and Hasimara. After holding several prestigious staff appointments, Ajai retired in the rank of Air Vice Marshal in 1995. For his distinguished services, the Rashtrapati awarded him the Ati Vishisht Seva Medal. Ajai is married to Rekha and they have two sons, Sanjay and Sandeep.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES



ZITS

