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**Maj Gen Jagatbir Singh VSM (RETD)**

Wing Commander Padmanabha Gautam one of only six officers to have been decorated with the Maha Vir Chakra twice was born in Chennai on 23 July 1933 and grew up in Indore, where both his parents were academicians. His father Mr. Neelkant Padmanabha taught Physics and was later the Principal of Ahalyabai Holkar College.

There is a unique family as all three brothers joined the Indian Air Force and served the country with distinction. While Padmanabha Gautam was a legendary Bomber Pilot, his two younger brothers, Wing Commander P Ashoka and Wing Commander Ajit were part of the much-coveted group of Test Pilots in the IAF.

Gautam was initially home-schooled till the age of 12 and then went on to complete his education from Holkar College Indore. He joined the Third Course at the Joint Services Wing (JSW), the predecessor of the NDA, which was in Clement Town, Dehra Dun at that time.

After JSW he trained as a pilot at Begumpet, with the 60th Pilots Course, and was commissioned on 01 April in 1953. His first spells of Squadron Service were with a Spitfire Squadron, in Halwara in Ludhiana, Punjab, and then with a Toffani Squadron.

In 1956 he was selected for the Flying Instructors' School. During 1957-58, he was an Instructor at the Air Force Flying College in Jodhpur, instructing on Harvard aircraft. In 1959 he converted to the Canberra, at the Jet Bomber Conversion Unit (JBCU), in Agra.

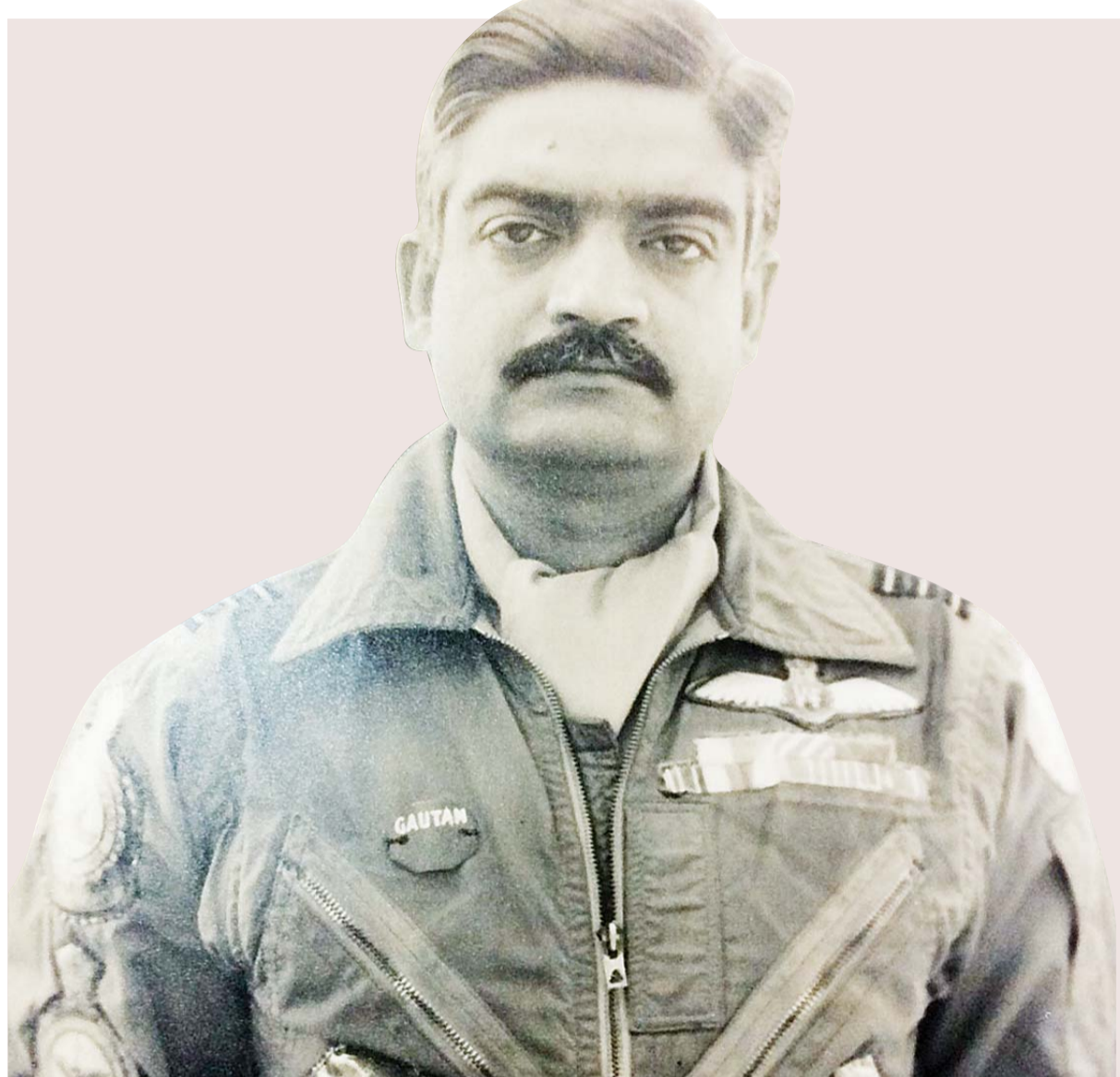
### Commandable Courage

As a Flight Lieutenant in No 5 'Tuskers' Squadron Padmanabha Gautam was in the first batch of Indian Expeditionary Forces deputed to Congo in 1961, operating with the Canberra Unit. On 6th of December 1961, he was ordered to attack Kolwezi airfield in Katanga. Despite extreme adverse weather conditions and heavy enemy opposition, he courageously and successfully carried out several attacks on the airfield and completely destroyed the aircraft which was harassing UN ground forces. He also shot up fires of the Katangese aircraft on the ground and neutralised other installations around it. Flight Lieutenant Gautam also carried out several other successful missions or Elizabethville in close support of



Corgi Canberra and Wing Commander Padmanabha Gautam.

# The 'Mahavir' Ace Bomber Padmanabha Gautam



Wg Cdr Padmanabha Gautam MVC (Bar), VM.

## #BRAVERY

the ground forces operating against Katangese. Throughout the operations, Flight Lieutenant Gautam displayed commendable courage and devotion to duty in the face of enemy. This is where he was awarded the Vayu Sena Medal.

On his return Squadron Leader Gautam was posted as the Commanding Officer of the Jet Bomber Conversion Unit in Agra to pass on his unique skills of flying the Canberra to aspiring bomber pilots. However, during this tenure, he was called upon to participate in the Indo-Pak war of 1965.

During the war, he led raids on Peshawar as the lead aircraft, marking the target with Target Indicating bombs and incendiary flares. In such missions, it was the pathfinders that indicated the targets. Success or failure depended a great deal on the accuracy of the pathfinder. Their job was difficult and unenviable flying at the extremities of the aircraft's radius of action. Heading much in front of other bombers, these Canberras were specialists. They marked out

the way to the target and the target as well. Six aircraft flew all the way to bomb Peshawar airfield successfully. All the six returned without loss, in spite of being intercepted by Pakistani Starfighters carrying missiles.

Throughout the war he was given a number of challenging and dangerous missions within the enemy territory on short notice when combat first started. Between 06 and 21 September 1965, he conducted six offensive, tactical and close support missions deep into enemy territory, despite intense ground fire and the presence of Pakistani Sabres. These missions included reconnaissance into enemy territory; destroying the airfields at Akwal and Gujarat, and strafing enemy concentration in the Gujarat and Chawinda regions. He was awarded the Maha Vir Chakra for exhibiting extraordinary bravery, determination, and devotion to duty.

In 1968, on completion of his tenure as the Commanding Officer of the

Wing Commander Gautam's third mission over West Pakistan was an interdiction mission over Raiwind Rail marshalling yard South of Lahore. They did the first run over the yard with rockets and three subsequent runs with 20 mm front guns. Heavy ack-ack fire was experienced during these runs, but they came back unscathed.

Bomber Conversion Training Unit, Gautam was posted to Iraq, as part of the Indian Training Team. In this tenure, he trained Iraqi pilots in fly the MiG-15, and MiG-17. An emergency during a training flight caused a forced landing on the runway. True to form, Gautam displayed exemplary skill and presence of mind saving two precious lives as well as an expensive aircraft of the Iraqi Air Force. He was commended by the Iraqi Air Force for this act.

After his return from Iraq in 1969, he took over No16 Squadron - 'The Black Cobras', based at Gorakhpur, operating the Canberra Bomber. Gautam made the Black Cobras a formidable unit as war clouds loomed on the horizon. As per Air Vice Marshall Arjun Subramaniam; "Gautam created

the previous night, the special bombs under 'Y' plan were prepared and loaded in time for the mission. They undertook the mission and found themselves facing heavy fire from anti-aircraft guns. They dived to 100 to 200 feet to fly parallel over the runway and release these special bombs. The only light visible was the ack-ack tracers which illuminated the runway. They had to fly under the arcs of the ack-ack along the runway. The heavy fire did not deter Wing Commander Gautam



Wing Commander Padmanabha Gautam in his early days as a young IAF Pilot.



Wing Commander Padmanabha Gautam MVC (Bar), VM.

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The subsequent three missions were flown over East Pakistan. Out of these, the first on 11 December, was a daytime attack as a single aircraft over an Army concentration near the West bank of river Sitalakha, East of Dhaka.

The fifth mission of Gautam and Dutta was also over East Pakistan on the 13 December. It was a bombing mission over Tezgaon, Dhaka's well-defended military-cum-civil air base. This mission was carried from Gorakhpur.

The sixth mission flown by this crew was the last mission of the war, flying on 15 December they bombed Kurmiotla Airfield at Dhaka. Though they were to bomb the airfield from 7000 feet, but because of the cloud cover up to 4900 feet, they descended below the clouds and released the bombs over



Wing Commander Padmanabha Gautam (encircled), the Commanding Officer of 16 Squadron during the 1971 war, made it a point to engage with all his aircrew on issues such as courage, bravery and fear. Everyone in the Black Cobras knew who would be the one to fly the riskiest missions and that leadership under fire would never be an issue.

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Wing Commander Padmanabha Gautam was awarded a Bar to Maha Vir Chakra for his gallantry during the 1971 Operations for his inspirational leadership while carrying out many hazardous missions, devotion to duty, professional skills and courage in the finest traditions of the Air Force.

On completing his tenure at No. 16 Squadron, in 1972 Wing Commander Padmanabha Gautam was posted as Chief Operating Officer (COO) of No4 Wing, Pune. During his tenure as COO, he converted to fly the famous MiG-21, which had given a creditable performance in the 1971 operations.

On the morning of 25 November 1972, while taking off from Pune, the engine of his MiG-21 FL aircraft failed. A school located close to the Air Force station still commemorates that day with a silent prayer in remembrance of Gautam, as he is believed to have steered the stricken MiG-21 away from the school where it was directly headed for impact. In the process, he lost critical seconds that would have facilitated an ejection, since this version of MiG had an ejection seat which could operate only above a height of 300 meters.

Gautam's courage and selflessness had followed him from the war zone and he will remain an inspiration for future generations of the IAF. His aircraft crashed into rocks and burst into flames engulfing one of the greatest heroes of the IAF, leading to his untimely demise.

The Air Force had tragically lost one of its bravest fighters, Wing Commander Padmanabha Gautam, was a personification of the qualities of a very able leader, professionally competent pilot, and an exemplary human. He left an indelible mark that has been difficult to emulate.

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Mianwali on 04-05 December 1971. Unlike the previous night, the special bombs under 'Y' plan were prepared and loaded in time for the mission. They undertook the mission and found themselves facing heavy fire from anti-aircraft guns. They dived to 100 to 200 feet to fly parallel over the runway and release these special bombs. The only light visible was the ack-ack tracers which illuminated the runway. They had to fly under the arcs of the ack-ack along the runway. The heavy fire did not deter Wing Commander Gautam

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## World Oceans Day

66%

of the world is covered in a blanket of rich, vibrant blue, from its depths once came all life on the Earth, and it continues to house an immense amount of life. This blanket is the world's oceans, and they serve as one of the most popular vacation spots in the world and play a vital role in the economy of countries worldwide. It still serves as the primary thoroughfare for trade. World Oceans Day celebrates the ocean and the important role it plays in our lives.

## #SCIENCE

### Oldest Known Complex Organic Molecules

Observing the galaxy as it was 1.5 billion years after the big bang.

An international team of astronomers have used the James Webb Space Telescope to detect organic molecules in the most distant part of the universe to date using the kind of molecules discovered are abundant on Earth in the form of smoke, soot and smog.

The researchers used the Webb telescope to find organic molecules in a galaxy that is more than 12 billion light years away, according to the University of Texas A&M. Since the galaxy is that far, it means that the light took 12 billion years to reach the telescope. This means that astronomers are observing the galaxy as it was at the time-when the



universe was less than 1.5 billion years old.

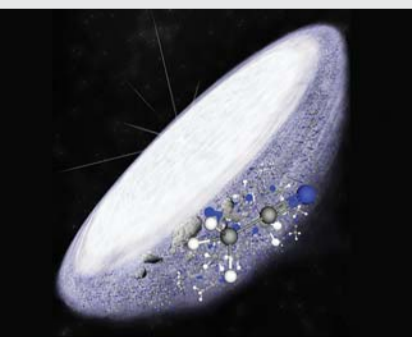
Apart from the impressive prowess of the Webb telescope, the researchers also got a little help from a phenomenon called gravitational lensing. When you are observing a distant cosmic object, if there is a massive galaxy in between that and you, the foreground galaxy will bend and distort the light from behind it, effectively creating a lens that will allow you to see the distant object better.

In this particular case, the light from the background galaxy is stretched and magnified into a round-ish shape known as an Einstein ring. Albert Einstein originally predicted the phenomenon of gravitational lensing in his theory of relativity.

In the data from Webb, researchers found the signature indicating the presence of large organic molecules like that found in smog and smoke.

These big molecules are actually pretty common in space. Astronomers used to think they were a good sign that new stars were forming," said Justin Spilker, lead author of the article.

But the new research shows that this idea may not always be true, according to Spilker. In the high-definition images from Webb, the researchers saw a lot of regions with "smoke," but no star formation and others with new stars forming but no smoke.



## #GET-TOGETHER

It was an evening replete with jungle adventures at Rashtradoot as Sunayan Sharma, the well-known forester and author regaled the audience with his stories of the jungle



Sunayan Sharma in conversation with Shailaza Singh.

# A Rendezvous with the Jungle Man



Shailaza Singh Published author, poet and a YouTuber

It was a lively session at Rashtradoot with Sunayan Sharma, the famous forester and author, regaling stories about the jungle which involved heroic escapades from the tiger and many more. The awestruck audience could not have enough of these stories as they kept asking questions about his exploits and adventures.

This session was also attended by a lot of youngsters and children who were curious about the prospects of a career as a forester. For them, it was a more interesting and refreshing change from the usual careers like engineering or medicine.

Many people in the audience who had worked with Sunayan Sharma talked about his commitment to the cause of the jungle. Many of them had read his books which they said helped them to understand the real problems of the jungle and how he managed to tackle them. All said and done, this was an evening where the jungle and its stories came alive for everyone.

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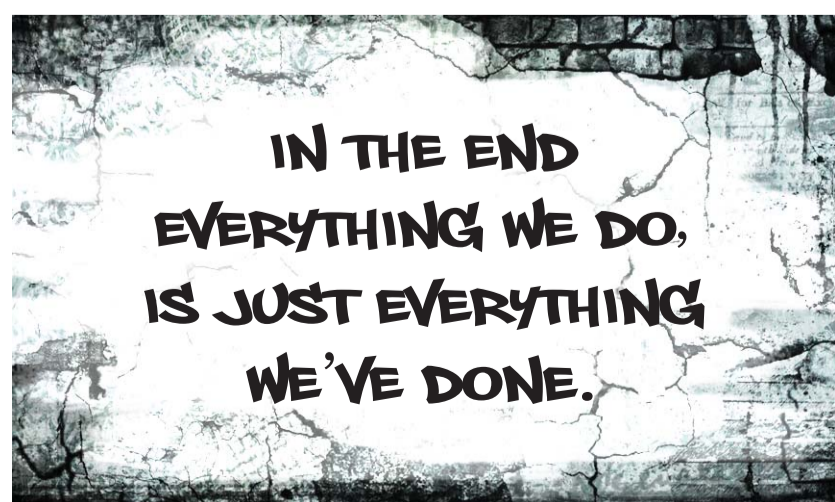
encroachment, a rampant issue which endangers the life of humans and animals alike in Sariska. He said that he had to always make the tough choice between appeasing the politicians and the people or protecting the jungle. He talked about how he erected a wall at the Silberer Umri valley which attracted the ire of the villagers. He said that many a times his staff and he had to face the wrath of the people. He said that protecting the jungles in today's times of increasing population, burgeoning land demand is indeed a tough proposition. This session was also attended by a lot of youngsters and children who were curious about the prospects of a career as a forester. For them, it was a more interesting and refreshing change from the usual careers like engineering or medicine.

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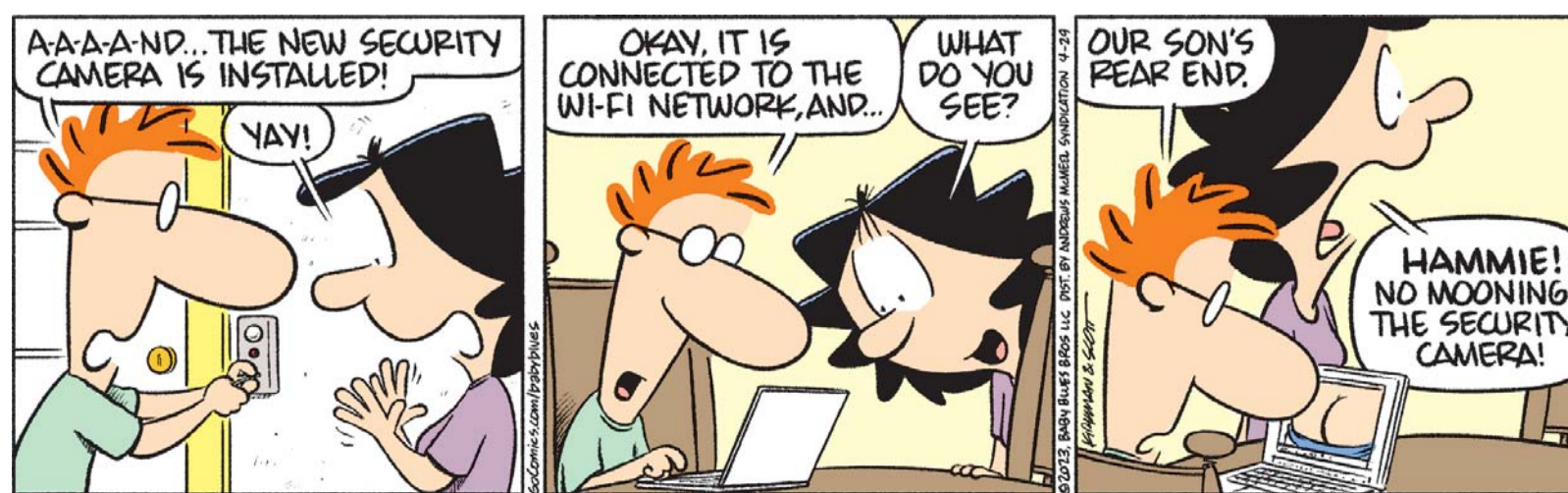


Photos by Zakir Hussain

## THE WALL



## BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

## ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman