



When They Fly Past...

We have fought wars and recorded our braves well, commemorated them and recorded for posterity. In many ways. And here is another, to remind ourselves of what our men are made of. These are paintings recreating the famous battles won, and some men lost, but not from our memories.

Paintings are done by reading accounts from various sources, and corrections are made along for true narration.

Starfighter shot down over Jamnagar

1971 war with Pakistan finally broke out on 03 Dec, 1971, with PAF carrying out pre-emptive strike against 12 IAF air bases. No. 47 Squadron, 'Black Archers' with six MIG-21FL ac were meanwhile deployed at Jamnagar for ORP duties. The detachment was headed by its CO, Wg Cdr HS Gill. Other pilots were Sqn Ldr Vinay Kapila, Vr C, Sqn Ldr Guni Saigal, Flt Lt SC (Neelu) Malik, Flt Lt BB Soni, Flt Lt JJS Boperoi etc. The recently added twin GSh-23mm cannon in gondola to MIG-21's main armament of 2 X K-13 heat seeking air-to-air missiles proved big morale booster for the squadron pilots.

The squadron had mounted down to dusk ORP since arrival at Jamnagar. With PAF raids limited to only few night time unsuccessful raids over the airfield, ORP duties were becoming quite tedious for the MIG pilots. The long awaited ORP hooter, however, finally came to life on 12 December, with Sqn Ldr Guni Saigal and Flt Lt BB Soni on ORP duty. CAP Controller was Flt Lt JJS Boperoi, assisted by two Pilot Officers from OCU.

MOPs positioned along the Saurashtra coast had reported two bandits flying low, crossing the coast in the general direction of Jamnagar. Two MiGs on ORP quickly got airborne to set up CAP overhead at 3 kms (10,000 Ft). Shortly, CAP Controller received sightings of two bandits at low level, with No 2 in a long trail, approaching the airfield from the direction of the town. Bandits were identified as two PAF F-104A Starfighters. The lead Starfighters appeared to have spotted a MIG-21 on ground next to ORP 24, which was actually a decoy. He opened fire flying along the runway. No 2 Starfighter was

seen turning hard onto Northerly direction, trying to align himself for a strafing attack on another decoy ac.

With CAP Controller providing running commentary on positions of two bandits, both CAP aircraft, reported visual contact. They positioned over the raiders and were to descend for engagement after going past the ack-ack envelopment. However, it later appeared that in the excitement, both pilots had positioned behind the lead Starfighter, letting the No 2 Starfighter make a clean escape. He was seen by OP going flat out with afterburner on at low level in general direction of Karachi.

It was finally Flt Lt BB Soni who positioned behind the lead Starfighter and closed in for a missile launch. The F-104 successfully used its IR flares to deflect the K-13 heat, seeking missiles fired at it, by BB Soni. Both aircraft were now skimming the sea level at extreme high speed with Soni in hot pursuit. With missile missing the target, Soni selected 'guns' for engagement at close range. As MIG started closing the gap between the hunter and the hunted, with speed clocking almost 1200 km/hr, the Pakistani fighter made a desperate attempt to shake his adversary by pulling up sharply to his right, perhaps, to throw off a second missile. The MIG-21 now rapidly closed distance, and from 900 meters, fired three sharp bursts with GSh-23mm cannons at the F-104, which started wobbling as if out of control. It pulled up momentarily and started to flame, and almost immediately, the Pakistani pilot ejected. Flt Lt Soni flew past the stricken enemy aircraft, and pulled up to see the parachute deploy. He informed the

base of the ejection and kept in contact with the bright orange canopy of the ejected pilot's parachute, as it fell into the shark infested sea below, with the pilot still in harness. It is possible that the PAF pilot, during the process of ejection at very high speed, suffered serious injuries.

#PEACOCKS OF VALOUR THE BATTLE OF LONGEWALA

The Battle of Longewala was one of the major decisive battles fought on the Western sector during the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. On the night of 04/05 Dec, 1971, Pakistan forces comprising 4000 soldiers, T-59 and Sherman tanks, and a medium artillery battery crossed the Indian border to advance towards Jaisalmer. What followed was a complete debacle for Pakistan Army as their Chinese-made T-59 tanks started to get bogged down in the sand and the rear supply supports were not able to catch up with the forward elements for a rapid advance, essential for an armoured thrust into the enemy territory. At nightfall, the advancing column came across a small Indian border post at Longewala, manned by a handful of Indian troops of 23 Punjab. They had just one RCL gun that could be the only weapon to engage a tank. Till then, the advancing Pakistani force had achieved a complete element of surprise. Frantic calls to Indian Air Force at Jaisalmer to come to the assistance of the beleaguered Army troops at Longewala could not be realised as the Hunter fighters, based at Jaisalmer, were not designed to engage ground targets at night. The small Army unit, however, held on and that heroic resistance, led by Major KS Chandpuri, has been well-portrayed in the

Bollywood film named 'BORDER'. At first light, the Hunters took to the air and what followed was a mayhem for Pakistan forces. The Hunters systematically picked up the enemy tanks caught in the open desert, and went about engaging them with rockets and guns that IAF pilots termed it as 'Partridge shooting'. By end of the day, close to 30 tanks were seen fiercely burning along with an equal number of soft skinned vehicles. The pride of Pakistani armoured force lay in ruins. In retrospect, the Pakistani top brass had agreed that planning such a massive operation, to advance deep into the enemy territory without an air cover, was suicidal.



Tuskers raid Peshawar: Indo-Pak War, 1965

This is an account of a few audacious Canberra crews, who flew almost 600 NMs into the enemy territory at night, trailing one another at near medium levels, without any escort and without any radar cover, to bomb a very formidable airbase of Pakistan Air Force (PAF) in 1965 war with Pakistan.

Unlike IAF in 1965, PAF with its US built F-104 Starfighters, equipped with Sidewinder AIM 9B missile, had night intercept capability and vintage Canberras practically were sitting ducks against this supersonic, state-of-the-art interceptor. PAF also was fortunate to receive from US an effective radar chain for early warning purposes. Against this background, planning a mission to Peshawar

for Canberras was suicidal, as it entailed flying to a target at its extreme flying range, through the enemy heartland, with no allowance of fuel for any tactical routing. Fuel constraint also meant limited payload.

Attacking Peshawar became important for India as PAF had moved bulk of its attack force to its rear airfields, and almost the entire B-57 ac bomber force was shifted to Peshawar immediately after IAF carried out retaliatory strikes on most of PAF bases, with its Hunters and Mysteres on 07 Sep, 1965. PAF considered Peshawar to be outside the range of Indian strike aircraft, and hence, a safe haven for its strategic force of US made B-57 long range bombers. Yet, as night fell at Peshawar on 13 September,

1965, 08 (Eight) Canberras of 5 Squadron stealthily approached Peshawar. The typical profile of a Canberra raid was to approach to a pre-calculated pull up, point between 200 and 500 ft AGL, pull up steeply to about 12,000 feet to drop the load, and then, climb progressively to 40,000 ft to escape from Pakistani territory.

As Canberras closed in to their target, the ack-ack batteries opened up, signalling that raiders have been detected. PAF pilots and ground crew ran to take shelter in trenches, and they had the rare privilege of seeing the first Canberra drop flares, to illuminate the airfield, and then thunder down the main runway at 200 feet, before pulling up at its end in an wingover to turn back and drop its bomb

load at the end of a dispersal of parked aircraft. Had luck favoured the Tuskers, they would have wiped out the entire strategic strike component of the PAF with a single blow, as the entire force of sixteen B-57s were lined up using tip to wing tip on a dispersal. Unfortunately, for IAF, the single 4000 lb bomb, that fell closest to the parked B-57s, hit soft soil and its explosive force was dissipated. However, bombs dropped from other members of Tusker force found their marks, as fuel dumps were set ablaze. ATC building was flattened and aircraft on ground were damaged. As Canberras set course for home, the inevitable happened. A lone Starfighter was vectored for an intercept on the retreating bomber force. Canberras did all that was possible to do to prevent a massacre. Sqn Ldr Gautam saw a streak of flame

appear in the darkness and made its way towards the bombers, as the Starfighter launched its missile. However, luck favoured the brave and the missile exploded harmlessly, possibly due to its proximity fuze malfunctioning. All eight Canberras landed safely at Agra. The raid shook the PAF out of its complacency. No airfield or town was under range of Indian bombers. No one in Pakistan had thought that the IAF would bomb Peshawar with impunity. The raid also forced the Americans (USAF), that had maintained a full-fledged Signal Intelligence base, about 20 miles South of Peshawar, to evacuate all its personnel with families through Iran, and return only after cessation of hostilities.

Tuskers raid of Peshawar will certainly go down as one of most audacious bomber attacks in history of military aviation. The significance of the raid was a symbolic gesture, less material damage. Even John Fricker, the PAF commissioned hagiographer, was moved to an effusive turn of phrase in describing the raid as "the most effective Canberra attack of the war". The real heroes of the raid were, undoubtedly, the Navigators, whose chances of survival, without an ejection seat for them in Canberras, were very close to nothing. It is, therefore, rightly so that Navigators Sqn Ldr SN Bansal and Flt Lt P Dastidar were awarded Vir Chakras for their acts of exceptional gallantry and Commanding Officer Wg Cdr PP Sing was decorated with a Maha Vir Chakra, country's second highest gallantry award. Other members of the raid were Sqn Ldr JC Verma (Leader), Flt Lt Deshpande, Wg Cdr PP Singh, Sqn Ldr CR Mehta, Sqn Ldr VC Godwin, Navigators, Ahluwalia

and S Kapoor. My painting 'Tuskers raid Peshawar' was inspired by the account that I read in the book The India-Pakistan Air War of 1965 by Jagannath Samir duo. So, it was initially composed entirely on impressions created in my mind of the attack, as it was narrated in the book. I was very fortunate to have received more inputs from Capt Vivian Goodwin, who was one of the members of this fateful raid of 1965 war. I am also glad that Canberra gang of veterans has appreciated my painting. I am told that they are an extremely close-knit lot and thick as thieves. It was wonderful to interact with few of them through e-mails and very sincerely hope that the painting evokes some memory for those remaining 'few good men' of 5 Squadron and JBCU of September 1965.



Indian Republic Day

Marking the day when the Constitution of India came into effect, thereby making India a republic, Indian Republic Day is a national holiday with parades, speeches, and cultural performances all over India. It's a time for Indians to come together and reflect on their national identity and the values that unite them as a nation. The Constitution of India was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on 26th November, 1949, but it came into effect on January 26th, 1950, thus making India a republic.

Mystere Vs Starfighter : Sargodha: Indo-Pak war, 1965

In this painting, I tried to recreate an unmatched gallantry of a young Indian pilot, who, unfortunately, did not return from a raid over Sargodha, Pakistan, on 7th September, 1965.

Squadron Leader A.B. Devayya was part of a large formation of Mysteres of No. 1 Squadron, attacking Sargodha at the crack of dawn. Owing to the extreme range of the target, only when this should have been the last option to exercise for a pilot, who had barely enough fuel to land back home and was hundreds of miles inside the enemy territory.

From the accounts published in books and articles in Pakistan, IAF could reconstruct what now can be termed as an 'incredible act of heroism' by an airman, who decided to stand up and fight when this should have been the last option to exercise for a pilot, who had barely enough fuel to land back home and was hundreds of miles inside the enemy territory.

It is now believed, beyond doubt, that Devayya after being shot at and his aircraft damaged by the lethal cannon fired from the Starfighter, turned around to challenge his adversary in a fight to finish like a true gladiator. In

together by some contradictory accounts available from Pakistani source. None of the members of Devayya's formation was aware of this attack developing on their tails. Devayya's act of gallantry would have gone unknown and unrecognised by his countrymen, had it not been for the Pakistani account that acknowledged the extreme courage of this young Indian pilot. Some 23 years later, Devayya was decorated by Indian Government with a Maha Vir Chakra posthumously, country's second highest gallantry award. Air Commodore Kaiser Tufail, a retired officer of PAF in his book, Great Air Battles of Pakistan Air Force, had summarised the encounter between Devayya and Amjad Hussain as below. "For many decades, the famous dogfight has confounded



The Attack on Tiger Hill AVM R Nambiar VM & Bar

On the 24th of June, 1999, the Indian Air Force dropped its first LGB in anger. The release was from a Mirage 2000, and I was privileged to have been the pilot in-command. In the days that followed, I was honoured to drop four more LGBs, thus dropping 5 out of the total of 8 LGBs delivered by the Mirage 2000 in the Kargil Conflict. This is my story.

Adampur is a major Air Force Base in Punjab and I had been deployed there since 22 May, 1999 for Operation Safed Sagar, which was a LGB mission. On the evening of 22 June, we were tasked to attack Tiger Hill with LGBs the next morning. I was selected to captain a two-seater with Sqn Ldr Monish Yadav as my backseater. The target was a set of enemy tents perched at the top of Tiger Hill. Tiger Hill is unique in shape and size when viewed from the ground. But from 30,000 ft up, it is indistinguishable from the other tall peaks in the vicinity. The only mountain that stands out in this grand vista is K2, Mount Godwin-Austen, which at 28, 2510 ft towers over its surroundings. The aids on board the Mirage allowed us to spot Tiger Hill with relative ease. We had it in contact by 50 kms and were unpleasantly surprised to find a tiny cloud perched with right on its tip, obscuring the DMPI and rendering the LGB impotent. The endurance of the Mirage allowed us to hold on station for about 30 mins, so that we went around three more times, hoping that the cloud would drift away and we could complete our mission. In the fourth attempt, as we turned away from the target, Monish yelled at me to 'flare left', indicating a missile launch. I instantly throttled back to idle power and halted the aircraft upwards in a steep left turn and commenced dropping flares. I did not spot the tiny shoulder launched mis-

sile, but Monish did see it climb towards us and thereafter fall away, as we were outside its envelope. We had no choice but to go back with our armament load and prepare for a reshoot the next day. Morning briefing on the 24th was at 0500 hours, and by 0530 hours, a short brief was carried out with the CAS in attendance. The plan was for a three aircraft mission, with two lead aircraft armed with an LGB each, while the third aircraft would follow behind with the CAS in the backseat. The plan was to hit Tiger Hill first and then proceed to rectify Point 4888, located 30 kms NW of Tiger Hill. By 0600 hours, we had walked to the aircraft. Walking to the aircraft is a tedious task in war time. We were overloaded with our G-suits, helmets and had to lug our Makarov 9 mm pistols, along with the various essential items necessary for a successful sortie, such as maps, call-sign cards, MILPs, EW MILPs, INU plans, authentication tables, all in all, a very cumbersome procedure. Tiger Hill was spotted from about 50 kms distance in the Listening Pod, and we were thrilled to see that there was not a speck of cloud around. Things then moved forward at a rapid pace. I had altered heading to a place that the aircraft tracked directly at a set of seven Arctic tents, perched precariously on the South face of Tiger Hill. The white tents made good camouflage in winter, but in summer, with most of the snow melted away they stood out in stark contrast against the black rock formation. Tiger Hill is at an altitude of 16,600 ft, and the pre-briefed altitude for the attack was 28,900 ft, to which we quickly descended. A glance at the INU indicated that the winds at this altitude was 70 kts in a westerly direction and at 90 deg to our planned track. This was excessive, and outside, there was a lease envelope for the LGB. Going up was not an option as the Laser was known to switch off automatically at around 30,000 ft. A different direction was also not

feasible as the target would be shadowed. A quick decision was, therefore, taken to descend down to 26,000ft, placing us well within the envelope of shoulder fired SAMs.

At 28 kms, I pulsed the laser to designate the target for the first time. The Listening Pod instantly ranged the distance to target. We had, by then, accelerated to a groundspeed of 1000 kmp/h, and the distance to the release point rapidly reduced. I repeatedly re-designated the target as it became more discernible when we closed in. At the release range, I pressed the trigger and we felt the aircraft jerk upwards, as it suddenly shed 600 kgs of load. I immediately commenced a hard turn to the left at 4g and started firing. Monish took over pod steering and pointed the laser directly at the target, while I concentrated on the turn and monitored the video image. The Laser was steadily flashing, and we waited anxiously for the target to explode, thus signalling a successful delivery. The time of flight of an LGB under the delivery conditions, that we had dropped it in, was under 30 sec, but to us in the cockpit, it appeared as an eternity. Our joy knew no bound as the entire video image of the target burst out into a soundless explosion.

On return, 15 mins later, we routed back via Tiger Hill to film the hill from close to assess the damage. The target had been blown to smithereens, so, we filmed the rest of the hill for any other visible signs of the enemy. We accelerated our speed to get back to Base by 0800 hours.

After landing, we extricated the video tape from the Listening Pod, and headed to the crew room for the debrief. The entire squadron was gathered around the TV as the tape was rewound and played back. Clearly visible on the tape were four enemy soldiers, rushing across the screen, a few seconds before the bomb got to them. The video on the way back also revealed a person 2,000 ft below the hilltop, climbing painstakingly upwards to the camp.



THE WALL
"SARCASM HELPS ME OVERCOME THE HARSHNESS OF THE REALITY WE LIVE, EASES THE PAIN OF SCARS AND MAKES PEOPLE SMILE."
-MAHMOUD DARWISH

