

#STAGE

Of Sultana & Son Machariya

Rama Pandey inspires audience all over again!



Sadhana Garg
Journalist &
Social Entrepreneur

After 75 years of Independence, if we are 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, a play 'Sultana,' written, produced and directed by Rama Pandey, was held at RIC, says Rama Pandey. "This is a true story of a girl born in the Sangre valley of Kho Nagarkot, Nepal, which was founded 2500 years ago. Famous for its historical sites and waterfalls to date, it remains one of the most neglected places, even though it promises to be a great tourist destination. But that's another day!"

However, coming back to the play, Sultana, a 15-year-old girl, who masters the art of dying at a very young age, is famous for her craft. After the death of a older sister, she is being forced to marry her brother-in-law not only by the self-serving male chauvinist but her own parents, too!

If all life is a theatre, then it is equally true that all the actors imitate real life. When her sister delivered a baby, Sultana is forced to take up the role of a caregiver, which left her skin of a dyer that had eaten her family far and wide. And now when her sister dies, the male sense of entitlement and exploitation is accepted by all.

Sultana, like every other woman, puts up a fight but faces the risk of succumbing to her dismal fate.

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 x-ray of our time, then we could not have had a clearer picture as the one presented by Sultana and Son Machariya.

SABRE SLAYERS OF THE 1965

#THE KEELOR BROTHERS



Air Marshal
Philip Rajkumar
(Retd)

In the illustrious history of the Indian Air Force (IAF), there are many stories of valor 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 fly aircraft and so they developed an abiding ambition to serve in the Indian Air Force as fighter pilots. When they had the required qualifications, they joined the 6th Pilots Course and were commissioned as Pilots 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 450 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 F-86 Sabre. The Commanding Officer of No 9 Squadron was Wing Commander RJM Upot. 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 (VSM) 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 Hawa airbase near Ludhiana, which was closer to the western border with Pakistan. A detachment of eight Gnats from No

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 Pakistani 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 Air Force was to prevent them from handing the victory in any direction in 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 Akhnoor; 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 Pakistani army, whose infantry was backed by adequate resources of artillery and tanks. A desperate Chief of the Army Staff requested the Defence Minister to order the Chief of the Air Staff to provide close air support.

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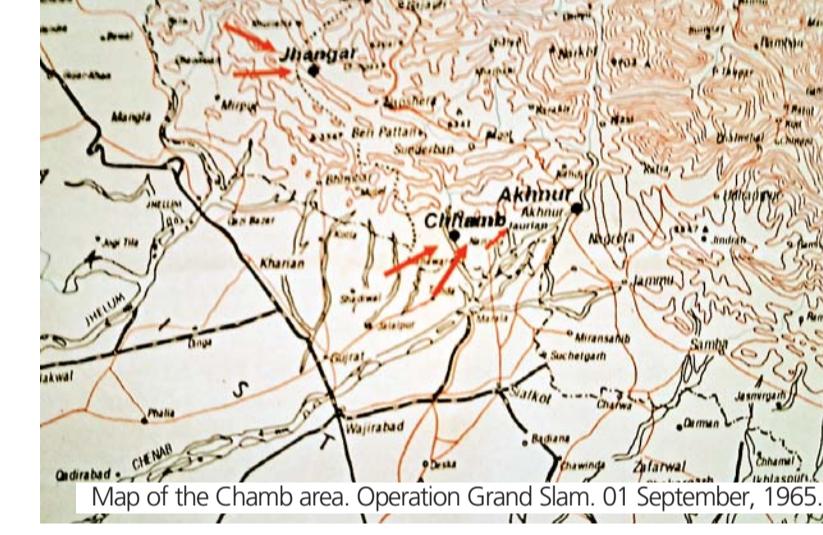
Leader BS Sikand, landed at Pathankot around 4 pm.

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 Jim Goodman and

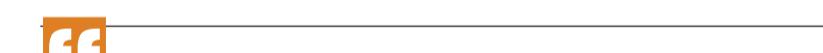
the first Gnat formation of four aircraft was led by Squadron Leader Johnny Greene and the second four by Squadron Leader BS Sikand. All ten aircraft got airborne at 7 am. The Mysteres approached Chamb flying at 1500 feet above ground and maintaining 300 knots (a knot is one nautical mile = 1.85 km). This was done deliberately to simulate the speed of a Vampire and lure the Sabres into a fight. The Pak radar picked up the tracks and scrambled a large force of four Sabres and two F-104 Starfighters to intercept what they thought were two Vampires. Amritsar radar picked up this Pak formation and ordered the two Mysteres to return to base. Under instructions from Amritsar radar, the lead Gnat formation zoomed up to meet the incoming Sabres and Trevor Keelor followed with his four Gnats 3000 yards behind. As expected, the Sabres spotted Johnny Greene's Gnats and started to turn inside them to get a shot at one of them. The unsuspecting Sabres did not spot Trevor's four and flew right in between the two Gnat formations. The planned sandwich was achieved. One Sabre lagged behind in the turn and flew down by cannon fire from his Gnat. The fast moving engagement between the eight Gnats and six Pak aircraft barely lasted two minutes before the Gnats were forced to withdraw due to low fuel. The Pak aircraft also disengaged probably for the same reason.



Photo of F-104 Starfighter.



A good photo of the Gnat showing its small size.



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!



Air Marshal Reginald Upot, PVSM KC AVSM VrC.

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 Development 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 violent blast of freezing cold air and hypoxia (lack of oxygen). Denzil, displaying exemplary determination, Adroitly flew his aircraft to ground attack missions by Mystery aircraft when the situation demanded it. The detachment was commanded by the Commanding Officer by 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 9 Squadron were ordered to attack Pakistani 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 Mysteres 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 Gnat 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 skillfully flew around 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 (VC).

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, he was awarded the Ati Vishishtha Seva Medal (AVSM) by the President.

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