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Let me first introduce myself as the second Indian to be appointed as the Chief of the Indian Air Force. The first Indian C.A.S. was my very good friend, the late Air Marshal Subrato Mukherjee. Yes, I am proud and happy of the good and sincere relations that we two, the senior-most officers of the post partition I.A.F., always maintained. This meant a lot to the service.

As I write this, I am now over 80 years old and staying in California recovering from a cardiac problem. Up here, I have no records to refer to. However, I do remember the past in great detail. Of the birth of the Indian Air Force in early 1930 in the India of those days. The British ruled and India included such countries as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Ceylon. Even Burma was ruled by the Viceroy from New Delhi and the Indian rupee was the prevailing currency of many parts in the Persian Gulf.

Since India had a great Army and more recently a Navy, the powers that decided such matters, felt that India should also have, on an experimental basis, an Air Force. So six cadets (Harish Soicar, Subrato Mukherjee, Bhupinder Singh, Amarjeet Singh, Azad Bux Awan and 'Titch' Tandon), were sent to the Royal Air Force College in Cranwell, England, for training. On his very first dual flight, the instructor advised little Titch that he should apply more rudder in a turn. Titch countered through the speaking tube, "How do you expect me to apply more rudder since I cannot reach it." This resulted in dear Titch being transferred to the Equipment Branch

Titch Tandou died early in life after years of devoted service.

I had just won the Aga Khan's Prize in 1930 for being the first Indian to fly solo between India and England or vice versa within 28 days. Earlier Mr. Ram Nath Bhawla and I had flown out from India to England and the Government of India awarded us Rs. 7,500 for being the first Indians to do this flight. I mention this as Bhawla was to become the senior most equipment officer in the Indian Air Force after partition. Titch Tandou's transfer to the equipment branch created a vacancy at Cranwell. I was, therefore, nominated and on graduating from Cranwell, I won the Groves Memorial Prize for being the best all round pilot of my term. Yes, all the Indians did well at Cranwell.

It was decided to form 'A' Flight, No. 1 Squadron, Royal Indian Air Force at Drigh Road near Karachi. Let me mention here that both Nos. 1 and 2 Sqdns. and later some of the other squadrons as well saw much of their earlier service in parts of India which are now in Pakistan. However, to return to 'A' Flt. No. 1 Sqdn., R.I.A.F., the service was under the overall command and control of the C-in-C, India, an Army officer. On ceremonial occasions, the officers of the R.I.A.F. wore colonial type topes, hob-nailed boots and puttees. The other ranks were called "Hawai Sepoys" and they wore hob-nailed boots and puttees and the Kulla and turban for headgear. The Hawai Sepoys lived and worked without any communal friction. They all ate in the same mess and shared the same rations. We were all very proud of this custom.

The main equipment of the RIAF, i.e. the aircraft

we flew were really antiquated. The Westland Wapiti was an ungainly biplane and carried a pilot and rear gunner in open cockpits. We had none of the air-brakes, flaps or even wheel brakes. No R/T communications but for artillery and other Army co-operation, we used W/T by letting out a long aerial which was a constant menace to other aircraft. Messages were picked up by letting down a hook and messages read from a ground panel called the "POPHAM" Panel. In the normally high wind conditions near Digh Road, bad landings were frequent. The Wapiti had a front gun firing through the fourteen foot long propellor and a rear gun. Rear gunners, standing up in open cockpits were known, on occasions, to nibble away some of the aircraft's aerofoils. Starting the engine which was done by cranking it by hand or employing the bag-and-rope was an ordeal.

All six of the R.I.A.F. officers lived in quarters specially built for them on a small hillock away from the R.A.F. officers' quarters. From our quarters which we called "Gandy Hill", we all walked to work across the main railway line onto the aerodrome. Runways, as we know them now, were non-existent. Very soon it was time for No. 1 Squadron to move to Peshawar and from there to Miranshah in Waziristan; normally one flight at a time. Most frontier operations were conducted from Miranshah where everyone lived in a fort. Even the aircraft had to be wheeled in every evening. Here I have to mention the name of a remarkable Havai Sepoy who later rose to the rank of Air-Vice Marshal and A.O.C.-in-C, Maintenance Command. Harjinder Singh was indeed a dedicated and energetic soul; the IAF was fortunate to have him. Then the

were some people who should never have joined any air force. As the detachment commander at Miranshah, I had the misfortune to have a new posting. I will call him Burhan. Son of a petty chieftain from way up north, he first joined the army but one mess night he threatened to shoot his C.O. after the latter had remonstrated that Burhan's two dogs would not let him enter the building. Burhan promptly retorted, "Sir, you shoot my dogs and I will shoot you." Well, that is how I had him in my unit. To cut several hair raising ^{stories}, short, I had ordered his pet wolf shot, as the only humane option left after the wolf had severed his tongue by trying to chew through a Wapiti's spare main plane. So glad to inform that I am still alive in 1993.

World War II started and with it, the expansion of the RIAF. - The intentions of the Germans and Japanese to link up, possibly in India, was considered by Winston Churchill as the single most important military action planned in World War. Rommel was approaching Cairo and the Suez canal; the German Panzers were in sight of the Caucasus; the Japanese making inroads in the Arakan; Admiral Nagumo with his huge fleet making rings round Ceylon and a small fort (Sala Khel) on the Tochi River in Waziristan effectively cut by tribals (except for air drop of supplies). Yes, the RIAF was in the centre and well being tested. The history of the IAF recounts the gallant exploits of RIAF Squadrons on the Arakan front.

I will now move onto the bifurcation of the old RIAF into the IAF and the Pakistani half. The Air Force part of the Partition Committee had Subrata Mukherjee and

myself as the Indian members and Janjua and Ashgar Khan on the Pakistani side. The Chairman was a British officer. He first asked Subrato how many British officers the IAF wanted to be seconded. Subrato Mukerjee mentioned a few as we had discussed this earlier. The Chairman appeared to be taken aback but said nothing. Then he turned towards me and asked, "How many R.A.F. Senior N.C.Os. does the IAF want seconded?" When he heard the one word, "NONE", the chairman dropped his pen, leaned back and said, "Engineer, I suggest you go get a cold shower and come back." He paused and added, "This is a serious matter and I give you 3 months before the IAF collapses and asks for the infusion of a large number of R.A.F. N.C.Os." On hearing this, Ashgar Khan stopped twirling his moustachois. I replied to the Chairman, "Sir, as a matter of fact I had to take a cold shower this morning as the heater had packed up."

Experienced senior N.C.Os. are the backbone of any military formation but more so in an expanding air force. Subrato Mukerjee and I had discussed this subject for long hours before taking the stand that we did at the Partition Committee. We were convinced that this was the right decision as we had to stand on our own feet as soon as possible. What was equally important that we took this decision jointly and stood by each other. As if to test us a few months later, the tribals and other Pakistani "volunteers" from the North infiltrated into the Kashmir valley. India's response was immediate and the newly formed IAF helped our gallant army to evict the marauding hordes.

Towards the end of the 1 year course that I attended

at the Imperial Defense College, London, we were taken on a visit to De Havilland Aircraft Co. The Manager pointed out to me the 50 new Vampire aircraft all lined up and awaiting shipment. He said that the Government of India had paid for the aircraft but that the British Government who had received the money, would not permit shipment. The British had decided, as a matter of policy, to enforce a quota of 3 aircraft to India and 1 to Pakistan. Since Pakistan did not buy any, our shipment was held up! This policy was also followed for spares and ammunition. Subrato Mukherjee then decided that the I.A.F. should look around for alternative sources of supply. The late Air Cdre. Narendra was sent to France and established an alternative source of supply. Competition also ensured lower prices. India concurrently embarked upon establishing indigenous sources of military supplies.

After I returned to India from the I.D.C., I held various posts and led several missions which resulted in the training of pilots and technicians for ~~some~~ other developing countries. The training of technicians of the Indonesian Air Force at Bangalore was possibly the largest. I met President Soekarno twice since he was personally interested in the programme. Similarly President Nasser of Egypt also took a personal interest in our pilot training programme for the Egyptian Air Force. Similarly we had accepted the training of pilots for the Iraqi and Afghan Air Forces. We took on these commitments although we had to accelerate our expansion to a 64 Squadron force. Here it is well to remember that it takes a long time to train operationally qualified pilots in particular. Planning and Government approval for the 64 Squadron force was, therefore,

vital to the success of meeting the manpower requirements of the service. Even if, for some reason, the full 64 Squadron force was not formed, the nation could always utilise highly trained personnel.

I was appointed the Managing Director of Hindustan Aircraft Ltd. (HAL) at a time when the factory was experiencing serious labour trouble. Fortunately labour relations improved and we were able to embark upon several new projects including the construction of a new engine factory. When on a visit to Ministry of Defence in Delhi, I was rung up by Hiroo Chatterjee who gave me the sad news that Air Marshal Subrato Mukherjee had passed away in Tokyo. This was in 1960 and I was appointed Chief of the Air Staff. Pakistan was as usual sabre rattling and their new found friends were encroaching from Tibet; both in Ladakh and Assam. We had to revise our operational plans and step up all urgent construction works.

From Leh, Srinagar, Jammu, Adampur and Halwara to Jodhpur and Jamnagar. Mr. Krishna Menon suggested Amritsar as the air supply base for Ladakh. He agreed to Chandigarh since it was obviously more secure and surprisingly nearer to Leh. Salam was an I.A.F. airfield but the civil air traffic created serious security problems and hamstrung the development of both the I.A.F. and civil aviation. Therefore we decided to hand over Salam to D.G.C.A. and move to Hindon. For close co-operation with the army, Tactical Air Centres were established. We found out later that some of the Western air forces showed considerable interest in some of the innovations we incorporated. For better security of the V.I.P. Flight, urgent measures were taken and the designation V.V.I.P. introduced.

We also established the new rank of Master Warrant Officers. I was extremely happy that Air to ground missile became the responsibility of the I.A.F. Considering the air defence requirements of our theatre of operations this was the right decision. Air force ammunition depots were established and this helped in the correct storage and maintenance of I.A.F. armament stocks.

With the appointment of the controversial Mr. Krishna Menon as Defence Minister, the indigenous manufacture of defence related equipment was given a real boost. Here I must mention the name of one of the dedicated and capable civil servant who worked quietly in the back ground. Mr. Harish Sareen's immense contribution in assisting the defence services in various fields was an important factor at critical times. The Chinese were constantly nibbling away at our outposts. On the morning of 22nd October, 1962, the President and all cabinet members were assembled under a large shamiana to bid farewell to a departing foreign dignitary. I was sitting down with the other service Chiefs in the centre of the second row when I noticed that the late Air-Vice Marshal Pinto, one of our finest officers, was gesturing for me to come out. There were some angry looks as I stepped over important dignitaries. Pinto requested me to walk over to the small operations room of his command. The duty officer was in direct R/T contact with one of the supply dropping aircraft. The pilot said that his aircraft was damaged by ground fire by the Chinese and that he was returning to base. I knew the pilot and spoke to him. The pilot said that the Chinese were attacking our positions. He said that he could clearly see Chinese troops clad in khaki attacking and burning our positions. All this

was confirmed by the pilot of another aircraft. Telephone communications in those days were very poor but on this occasion I was able to speak to the A.O.C.-in-C Eastern Air Command. He was trying to contact me and confirmed similar Chinese attacks in the Assam area.

It was now clear that the Chinese were in the process of carrying out an all out offensive on a wide front.

After thanking Pinto, I returned to the shamiana to find the assembly dispersing. I took Mr. Krishna Menon aside and informed him about the Chinese attack. I really felt sorry for him for he was shaken by the news I gave him. Prime Minister Nehru was about to leave so I had to move fast and informed him that Mr. Krishna Menon would like to speak to him urgently. The PM waited with his two hands resting on the open car door as Mr. Krishna Menon came up, leaning heavily on his cane, and gave him the news. Mr. Nehru did not say a word but got into his car and left. I then informed the Chiefs of Staff of the Army and Navy. The rest is history. The surprise Chinese attack led to a real awakening and the defence of the country was again given the highest priority.

During my years of service, I was fortunate enough to have met and personally known some wonderful commanders of the Indian Army. Field Marshals Cariappa and Sam Manekshaw, Generals Thimaya, Shrinagesh, Rajindersinghi and much more Chowdhry amongst many others. The morale and discipline of the Indian Army was always high. As the infant of the 3 services, both Air Marshal Subrato Mukherjee and myself were anxious to develop the IAF into a disciplined and efficient force with high morale and confident of our

own ability. The Indian Air Force can be proud of its record. I wish it the very best of luck in the years to come.

Air Engineer.