



Demolishing myths of Indo-Pak wars 1965 & 1971

Flight of the Falcon

S SAJAD HAIDER

STORY OF A FIGHTER PILOT



FLIGHT OF THE FALCON

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By

S SAJAD HAIDER

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T R I B U T E

To my parents who taught us the meaning of integrity, honour and courage, silently through their indomitable personal example. And...

To my gallant comrades who were martyred defending this nation, laughing in the face of death; and to those who fought with courage and survived; neither knew that their sacrifices were in senseless wars perpetrated by helmsmen with defeated minds.

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PREFACE TO REVISED THIRD EDITION

When confronted by fairytales, I am compelled to tell the whole truth and not a monosyllable less. I have been prompted to say this by certain observations that were made on my version of history which I feel need to be addressed. It would be prudent to mention that I went ahead and wrote this book despite the opinion of some of my peers that raw truth, even if it is backed by evidence and corroborated by impeccable sources, will not change opinions, let alone demolish myths or half-truths that have endured for decades. They argued that the nation has been nurtured on lies and fantasies which are as pervasive as they are toxic and hence my quest to unveil facts would have little market potential and major publishers would be reluctant to publish my work.

My resolve remained unshaken and I am glad I persevered.

Flight of the Falcon was a leap of faith and a labour of love. I am humbled and honored by the interest generated in Pakistan and

the feedback received from

countries

ranging from Australia and UK to USA (Los Angeles), all the way up to Canada. *Flight of the Falcon* is in fact soaring to heights far beyond my

expectations. This freshly revised version is the third edition to hit the shelves in five months. I am overwhelmed by the response, some uplifting others poignantly cynical.

These include a preview by Anjum Niaz (DAWN), articles and reviews by Dr Shireen Mazari (The News), book reviews by Raza Rumi (TFT) and the author of *Crossed Swords*, Shuja Nawaz (DAWN Books and Authors), articles by Afrah Jamal (The News), and interviews by Ahmed Faruqui (DAWN TV), Naeem Bokhari (HUM TV), SAMAA TV, and Sultan Hali (PTV). All this publicity has acted as a catalyst in the surging sales and is responsible for the astonishing success of this book.

The objections raised were brought to my attention by respected senior officers and one by a former colleague. One concerned the 6th of September 1965, referring to a tactical failure of the strategic pre-emptive plan which was botched that day and its bearing upon air superiority claims the next day. A candid analysis based on irrefutable empirical data had been chronicled in Chapter 10, which has again been reiterated to discard any notions that complete air superiority was achieved by the PAF

by 7th September 1965. In reality, we had a good measure of air superiority over our vulnerable assets and desired air superiority over crucial battle areas in Kashmir and later over Punjab. Maximum IAF aircraft shot in the air (3 Hunters against the claim of 7) and destroyed on the ground (13 against the claim of 12) were on 6th September, not the 7th September. On 7th Sept the IAF launched about 60 sorties but only 33 came through. A total of four IAF fighters were destroyed and 29 went back safely. Sargodha had 75

fighter aircraft sprawled on the ground when the first IAF raid arrived. They were in a hurry and showed very poor marksmanship. The 33 IAF raids only destroyed one PAF

fighter on the ground. Resultantly, the insalubrious performance by the PAF air defence command and its elements did not justify calling 7th Sept the “Greatest Day”

by our historians. The 7th September performance against the Indian raid notwithstanding, all the elements of the Pakistan Air Force operational command put up a stunning performance throughout the 1965 War. My only intent in this candid, if brutal synopsis of these two Indo-Pak Wars (1965 and 1971) was to help the present generation of commanders to avoid the same pitfalls of yore. No lessons were brought out then or at any other time. The Armed Forces have always remained above

reproach sans accountability owing to incompetent political leadership.

The other critique was about the treacherous planning and attempted hijack by the Bengali pilot Flt Lt Mati ur Rehman in 1971. The redoubtable Gp Capt Zaheer Hussain, President of the Air Investigation Board, who had conducted the investigation, was indignant at the way his findings had somehow become tainted. The edited version of the botched hijack attempt of 1971 on page 220 has been

replaced with the one attested by Gp Capt Zaheer Hussain.

This brings me finally to the issue chronicled in the Epilogue about the people of Pakistan and the quagmire they find themselves in at the hands of the political mafia, their despotic leaders and dictators. A lot has happened in the past year, so a comment is needed to recapitulate the misery of the poor masses and the dwindling middle class.

Never has the slogan of ‘

Roti, Kapra aur Makan’ (‘Bread, Cloth and

Home’) jarred so much as now when women die for a sack of flour and a bowl of sugar. The great Quaid had said, “If you want to make this great state (sic) of Pakistan happy

and prosperous we should wholly and solely concentrate on the well being of the people, and especially of the masses and the poor.” His vision has been destroyed by successive governments, especially by unscrupulous politicians who under a façade of democracy, have started selling what shreds of national dignity that remained.

They were facilitated by a dictator through his ignominious NRO that legitimized and legalized corruption. Now all corruption by the power elite will be above the law. Is there any wonder that the masses silent protests are resounding in the words of Barack Obama and the solution being offered through the stringent small print in the Kerry-Lugar bill is to keep the hyenas of the establishment from pulling Ayub Khan and Zia ul Haq type of tactics in the future.

What an irony that the hunger pangs of the nation mean flourishing business for the plunderers who are the cartel mafia of sugar, cement and flour. The big fish, 99 % of the top elite (military, bureaucrats and politicians) are all guilty of financial and moral crimes. I doubt if this democracy can stand up to the exacting standards of the West.

Sovereignty is a precious thing, but only those born in the 1930s, who witnessed Pakistan emerge as a proud nation but also saw it wither away into oblivion soon after the father of the nation died, will mourn for what they lost and know what is at stake. The power to change lies with the young generation. Only by stoking the fire in their heart can they show power and demand their dignity and sovereignty back in a mighty blitzkrieg.

Abbreviations

Ack-Ack

Anti Aircraft
ADC

Air Defence Centre
ADGES

Air Defence Ground Environment System AGL

Above Ground Level
AHQ

Air Head Quarters
AOC

Air Officer Commanding
ASI

Air Speed Indicator
ATC

Air Traffic Control
C-in-C

Commander in Chief
CAS

Close Air Support
CAP

Combat Air Patrol
CAS

Chief of Air Staff
CENTO

Central Treaty Organisation CO

Commanding Officer
COC

Command Operations Centre

COAS

Chief of Army Staff
ELINT

Electronic Intelligence
GOC

General Officer Commanding GOC-in-C

General Officer Commanding in Chief HJ

Hilal-e-Jurat
AHQ

Air Headquarters
IAF

Indian Air Force
OC

Officer Commanding
ORP

Operation Readiness Platform

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PAF

Pakistan Air Force

POW

Prisoner of War

RAF Royal Air Force

RPAF

Royal Pakistan Air Force

SAM

Surface to Air Missile

SASO

Senior Air Staff Officer

SEATO

South East Asian Treaty Organisation S]

Sitara-e-Jurat

TOT

Time Over Target

USAF

United States Air Force

VCAS

Vice-Chief of Air Staff

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book would not have been possible had the late Air Marshal Rahim Khan not encouraged me to pursue it with enduring commitment. It took me

years to finally get down to start the writing, but the resolve to complete it is owed to the remarkable guidance, patience, and support from the living legends, Air Marshals Asghar Khan and Nur Khan, and many former air force

colleagues. Words would be inadequate to describe my gratitude to Air Cdre (R) Bill Latif whose relentless support, long hours of diligent editing and authentication of my dissertation with incredible attention to detail, kept me immersed in the endeavour. Until one fateful day, having completed 80% of the work, he was felled by a stray bullet during an evening stroll in Islamabad's F8/4 Sector. The bullet penetrated above his right jaw and was lodged in his left cheek bone. Tragically, he lost his right eye and after the bullet was removed he suffered a stroke. This unforeseen tragedy brought my project to a near halt, for I was emotionally shaken beyond belief. I owe to him the outcome of my story which he had read through twice before he decided to edit it. May Allah restore his health. I also owe my jump start to a young lady called Eeman Malik who composed as I dictated for over 8 months. Thanks are also due to my comrade Sqn Ldr (R) Nisar-ul Haq who provided me reference books, excerpts and innumerable contacts with persons I needed to interview. Surely, I could not have put the élan in the presentation of my effort, especially the intricate photo work, without the diligence of my daughter-in-law Sophiya Haider. I am thankful to my children, Adnan, Zohare and Zaiena, and especially to my sister Kausar, for

their unflagging support through out the years. Lastly, despite all this support, the book became a reality owing to the resilience and dedication shown by Rina Saeed Khan. Most fortunately, Air Cdre (R) Kaiser Tufail joined in at the end and offered to edit the final manuscript incisively. To the two of them I owe my deepest gratitude.

Air Cdre (R) Sayed Sajad Haider

ISLAMABAD

1st March 2009

AUTHOR'S NOTE

They say those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it. In Pakistan, I can safely say that history has been murdered by those who have come to power. It is now time that history is re-written and the truth is told. The lessons of past wars need to be brought out for Pakistan's survival. Today, as I enter the twilight of my life I have surfed through my past, recapturing exciting events, especially the spectacular episodes during my 28 years in the Pakistan Air Force. I have also chronicled the trials and tribulations which I had to face. I feel it should be my legacy to leave behind a detailed account of not just the battles in which I fought, but the circumstances that led to these senseless conflicts with India and the leaders responsible for the wars. I want to present an honest exposé of what really happened in Pakistan's history.

I inherited a strong sense of patriotism from my father who was a staunch devotee of Mohammad Ali Jinnah and a pioneer of the Muslim League in Baluchistan. My notions of *Azadi*(Freedom) and loathing for the colonialists were nourished in this embryonic stage. As World War II ended, the movement for freedom from the colonial powers gathered impetus. Then came the Partition with all its fury and the inferno of hatred and unjustified revenge on a religious basis, which tore apart the fabric of communal unity of the Sub-continent. My young mind could not comprehend the velocity of events as we sat numbed from the loot, plunder and human carnage that followed. Many Hindu women and children who were known to my parents were sheltered in our modest house for days before all of them left Quetta. Time evaporates bad memories, as gradually all of us children grew out of the trauma of the

Partition and got on with life dreaming about the future, in which the Quaid-e-Azam was the symbol of hope for our young minds.

The more I heard about the Quaid-e-Azam from our parents, the more my adoration for him grew. Names like Lord Mountbatten, Radcliff, Nehru and the Indian Congress were an anathema to our young minds because in our understanding this nexus had taken Kashmir, Hyderabad Deccan, Junagarh and other Muslim princely states from Pakistan by brute force and the connivance of the British Indian Governor General, Lord Mountbatten. Emotions ran high as many of us friends joined the Muslim Students Federation, where we were indoctrinated as the future

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leaders of Pakistan. The first expression of our teenage political motivation came in a massive dose as I sat an arm's length away from the Quaid-e-Azam when he was invited to my old school. I sat on the floor of the stage and gaped at the founder in sheer awe and somewhat enviously watched my younger brother, Bunyad Haider, shake hands with him and receive four prizes for academic excellence. My father had rejected my imploring to shake hands with the Quaid-e-Azam, declaring that it was only the privilege of those who excelled in studies to deserve such a good fortune. Bunyad, who is now a top cardiologist, was also selected to give a speech about Pakistani patriotism and he delivered a fiery one that he still remembers today.

The Quaid addressed us in English and every one listened in rapt attention; he said something about young men joining the proud profession of the military to defend the motherland. In those propitious moments the seed of becoming an air force pilot was planted in my mind. That

was the dream I chased with intense commitment for nearly three decades of my youth along with many other trail blazing comrades. We reached for the sky to be 'second to none' as the Quaid had ordained when he addressed a handful of officers who comprised the core of the emerging air force in those early days.

The PAF indeed rose to the challenge when war was thrust upon the nation by the first dictator Ayub Khan in 1965. The PAF made the headlines of the national and international media. We were seen on the BBC by friends and foes alike, as young fighter pilots fighting the war of 1965 against India. Those clips of pilots being interviewed by the BBC war correspondent can still be seen on You Tube even after 43 years. That euphoria lasted a long while until one day decades later I discovered that the nation and its defenders had been emotionally black-mailed into believing that the enemy India had invaded our motherland unprovoked.¹ That was a pack of lies told by President Ayub Khan and his compliant Army Commander-in-Chief, General Musa. The nation has been kept in the dark about the colossal failure of high command and about the strategic blunders of the 1965 War. Hence, the much touted contrived victory to keep buried the criminal incompetence of those who were at the helm.

Every year the 1965 War is celebrated remorselessly by our ill-informed and gullible nation. I feel patently cheated and enraged at the loss of many gallant men who were martyred believing they were fighting for a sacred cause. The 1971 War was a corollary to the 1965 War. Shallow personal interests were projected as national interests by two dictators. Both wars proved to be catastrophic for the economy and security of Pakistan. Were these conflicts avoidable? If not, why were they not planned and directed with professional dexterity? Had there been genuine

political will and wisdom, could the nation and armed forces been saved

1 Field Marshal (self-proclaimed) Ayub Khan in his speech on 6th September 1965, from General Musa's book, *My Version*.

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from the humiliation of capitulation in the East and near defeat in the West in 1971? Such questions have hardly been addressed candidly.

Resultantly, Pakistan goes through an endless cycle of power plays, wars with India and internal conflicts, without any signs of a metamorphosis. The question on every Pakistani mind is: why is the present so chaotic and the future so grim? It is my conviction that an honest study of the past can throw up the answers to our perpetual national morass. The root cause of our misfortunes has to do with the bankruptcy of leadership. I have sifted through the water sheds of history to uncover the reasons why we have suffered ignominy under corrupt, incompetent and dishonest leaders. I shall present facts without malice and chronicle them as accurately as the accessible historical record has enabled me to do so.

Unfortunately, the armed forces have become the punching bags for all the ills of the country. Nothing is farther from the truth. The combat crews from the army, navy and especially the PAF have fought with indomitable courage to thwart a larger and more resourceful enemy in conflicts and the two wars. Who pushed us into the devastation of wars is a moot point and will be the focus of my book.

The performance and sacrifices of the fighting men saved Pakistan, pushed to the brink by the self-proclaimed 'Field Marshal' Ayub Khan in 1965. Was the coveted rank of a Field Marshal worn in the tradition of Field Marshal Rommel and

Guderian or was it reminiscent of Field Marshal Raglan of the 'Charge of the Light Brigade' infamy in the Crimean war in which Raglan's poor soldering qualities caused the death of 75% of the 'Light Brigade'? Only an honest and courageous nation could have begged such a question.

Have we learnt anything from history? The present generation should realize that when you allow yourself to be led by defeated persons you should not expect anything better. Did Ayub Khan's controversial appointee, General Musa, have the wherewithal of commanding one of the best armies in the world? History says nay to both questions. So why is the nation surprised at what followed with such persons at the helm?

After I had retired from active life and had time for introspection, all these thoughts gathered like a storm in my head. The nation had been fed abject lies for half a century and its people, including me, took it hook line and sinker. At the national level, there has been a lack of propensity for learning about the truth of how and why Pakistan had gone into a downward spiral soon after the death of the Quaid.

In my early air force years, all we experienced was merit, integrity, honesty and passionate pride in wearing a Pakistani uniform. This was during the era of Air Marshal Asghar Khan and it lasted until 1971. Soon after, the PAF began to slide, as had the other institutions in the country since the mid-fifties. After the first Martial Law it was heydays for quislings and courtesans in high places and mediocrity

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flourished. This moral degradation was condoned at a grave risk which resulted in the professional and moral destruction

of institutions and society. Why had mediocre people wrested the lead in every facet of life from national institutions to politics? Why were corruption and thievery condoned and honesty and excellence sniggered at? Yes, I was confounded by these questions and especially as to what happened to the Quaid's vision of a Pakistan where justice, fair play, dedication to duty and merit was to be the yardstick for Pakistani citizens irrespective of their personal beliefs, their faith, and preferred way of life. It was mind boggling to grasp how far away we had drifted from the path the father of our nation had set for the country.

Today, Pakistan has reached its nadir economically, morally and spiritually. Citizens have lost all rights to security, justice and freedom at the altar of the sham of democracy, owing to the dishonesty and graft of those very reprobates who stole from this poor country. We are now condemned as one of the most corrupt and dangerous countries in the world. Worse still, by some strange stroke of bad luck for this wretched nation, the same merry go round throws up leaders at regular intervals who claim to be custodians of the Quaid's vision. Each change in leadership turns hope into despair in a matter of months as the nation reels at the receiving end of these leaders.

What happened to the great sacrifice of precious lives and the national spirit which had propelled us aloft half a century ago? Undeniably, some thing terrible had started to happen soon after the Quaid-e-Azam lay gasping for breath in the back of a ramshackle ambulance, lying in the most putrid stench of the sea a few miles from Mauripur. Where were Liaquat Ali Khan and all the stalwarts who claimed glory for the creation of Pakistan when it truly belonged to just one man, who was dying in that ambulance with his loyal sister, Fatima fanning air in his collapsing lungs and shooing away droves of flies? From that day, fate may well

have cast an ominous shadow for our condemnable neglect of the father of our nation.

I have now completed my research into the past, uncovering many a conspiracy and acts tantamount to treason especially during the 1965 and 1971 wars with India. Thus far the only serious attempt at service history has been the official PAF history (*The Story of the Pakistan Air Force*). It is an exacting compendium of the history of the PAF from its inception. The 1971 War has been most accurately narrated. Sadly though, I discovered during intrinsic scrutiny of events chronicled by the historians that something went terribly wrong in several narratives of the events preceding and, during the 1965 War. Quite often controversial events and bad decisions were circumvented by the authors instead of presenting a candid and honest analysis. Hence, no lessons were spelt out. Possibly one reason could have been that the officers assigned the task were not professional historians but an integral part of the controversies. No wonder then that recently, Indian historians have asked the question as to

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why the PAF insisted on some flights of fantasy when in fact it had performed so admirably against a much bigger adversary and why the entire Pakistani nation was being kept bemused with myths.

While praising the overall performance of the PAF, the Indian historians have been critical of the PAF claims of 6th and 7th September 1965, referring to the latter episode as the 'Sargodha Ghost'. They wonder why the PAF has deliberately propagated the myths of shooting down 5 Indian Hunters over Halwara on the 6th of September and then shooting down another 5 Hunters in 22 seconds near

Sargodha on the 7th of September. In the opinion of the Indian historians, "Whether this was a belated attempt to boost the PAF for some internal power politics... it cannot be doubted that it was a cynical attempt". The same Indian authors point out that till that moment on 6th September, Sarfaraz Rafiqi was the highest scorer with 3 aircraft shot down and he deserved the highest credit till he was martyred. In the same vein, in 2005 another extremely well researched and better version of history, *The India-Pakistan Air War of 1965 (IPAW)* by Jagan Mohan and Samir Chopra gave the PAF more credit than ever before. Their book has elaborately chronicled the performance of the PAF kills in ground attack and in air combat, especially the destruction caused by our B-57 bombing at night, hitherto unknown to the PAF. These statistics were officially released by the Indian Government. India has admitted the loss of over 70 aircraft in each of the two wars to all causes. ²

According to the *IPAW*, "The PAF did well in the war. It's a pity that its government and its leadership saw it fit to denigrate its achievements by making claims that have ensured that the PAF is associated with bragging as opposed to its actual praiseworthy achievements". For all those pilots who fought the 1965 War with indomitable courage, these have been distressing remarks. This indignation motivated me to systematically reconstruct all controversies with professional incisiveness and lay the phantoms of the 1965 air war to rest; if for no better reason than to tell the world that we can accept failures as proof of our courage and can tell the truth without embarrassment. The PAF owes it to itself to correct the unacceptable claims and to restore its institutional dignity for the sake of those whose claims have not merely been acknowledged by the adversary 40 years hence but belatedly enhanced by India's official declaration. The B-57 night bombing results are a case in point.

For Pakistani researchers, regrettably and inexplicably, the PAF in recent years has become reticent about releasing statistics and facts about the two wars. Forty years after the event, this attitude is indefensible and in fact harmful as it deprives students of air war history and the present generation of pilots from the benefit of the lessons of history. There has been one recent exception to the

2 Website *Bharat Rakshalink*, 1965 Indo-Pak Air War. **xx** | Flight of the Falcon

inexplicable behaviour of the policymakers in the PAF; Air Cdre Kaiser Tufail's excellent dissertation on the famous air battles by Pakistani fighter pilots in the Subcontinent and the Middle East has added a professional and sanguine chapter to PAF's history.

My cardinal purpose of researching controversies in depth is to recapture some epic stories of the two senseless wars fought against India. Also, to unveil the colossal blunders committed by the Pakistan Army high command. President Ayub Khan's epoch and his legacy of usurpation of power which derailed and finally severed Mohammad Ali Jinnah's Pakistan, has been researched and brought into sharp focus. Intertwined with the story of my life are the events during the eras of dictators and despots. My intent is to clear the opaque haze that has been perpetuated by vested interests over the past five decades.

I have lived through Pakistan's decline, being an eye witness to many a historical event. The prime mover and core of my autobiography is an investigation into why the 1965 and 1971 wars were started without a national aim or even a grand military objective. The treachery of the leaders during the interregnum will dominate my story.

In writing this book, it is my prayer and hope that I can leave some thoughts to be pondered upon by the enthusiasts of history and the large segment of patriotic Pakistanis, especially the present generation. More specifically, I write this book for the combat elements of the PAF and other services who wish to discover veiled aspects of our national and military history in an honest exposé. I merely hope to provide a catalyst for much deeper and more incisive probes than have been done in the past, and urge greater respect for the lessons of history and their application.

FOREWORD

It is a privilege to have been asked to write this foreword by the author with whom I have enjoyed a long and cherished association. It all started on my return from flying training in the USA in 1964 as a newly commissioned pilot officer. I was instantly inducted into the 'Sabre-Jet' equipped No 19 Squadron of the PAF then commanded by Squadron Leader Sajad Haider, the author. I dare say within the first three days I wanted 'out'. I sensed a feeling of intimidation by the heavy presence and imposing personality of the Squadron Commander, who was highly demanding and expected performance on a war footing. Conversely, I thought I deserved a soft transition into the PAF environment (having been used to the relaxed surroundings of the USAF training establishments).

Within weeks, however, my perceptions were to change dramatically as I got to know him better. Ironically, the change was to take place partly in the now banished institution of the 'Bar'. Despite being fated to oblivion in the years ahead, it had provided an amazing platform and culture for juniors to freely air their grievances while the seniors patiently permitted debate to the extent of acknowledging their excesses if they were convincingly argued. The author conformed to such a culture. But what impressed me most was his outstanding quality to protect and defend his subordinates whenever the situation so demanded. This resulted in raising the squadron morale, confidence, and developed a sense of camaraderie. Even to this day he jealously guards and defends the PAF if unjustly maligned. It was, however, in the 1965 War that he was able to demonstrate exemplary leadership.

Today, other than a few exceptions, you see few aviators willing to put pen to paper to recount their experiences. That the author has mustered the courage and commitment to undertake such an exercise is commendable and hopefully a forerunner to setting a trend. Consumed by his passion to sift truth from fiction, he took no less than six years to research his story, drawing on scores of publications by diverse sources which he has faithfully referenced.

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The 1965 air war operations are subjected to a detailed scrutiny. There is no doubt that this war took place in an era of unadulterated airmanship and devotion with no diversions. The PAF's performance is widely acknowledged to have outdone that of a much bigger adversary. The author, however, goes on to question certain events and command decisions in a fresh reappraisal, partly made possible by accounts becoming increasingly available from across the border. The author's version, therefore, may 'add or subtract' from the official PAF history not privy to these inputs when published.

While his core story spans over his two and a half decades of PAF service, it spills over either way when he paints a larger canvas covering critical national events on one side and his early family life on the other. The lion's share of space, of course, is reserved for the two cataclysmic and senseless Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971. In a self-confessed 'no holds barred' approach, he is ruthless and comes down heavily on most of the national leadership who he holds responsible for consistent failure in leading the nation to its otherwise 'potentially' glorious status. The account in other places is punctuated by rich tributes to the

sterling leadership of Air Marshals Asghar Khan and Nur Khan.

In a society generally given to conformity, the author's penchant for outspokenness (such as the one when he criticized General Zia ul Haq's policies to his face, not to talk of his skirmish with the Shah of Iran during his diplomatic assignment in Washington) may have contributed to stunting his career, potentially destined to the highest pinnacle. But what will ultimately stand out about him is his sterling performance in the 1965 War, the ultimate test of one's moral and professional calibre; a war in which he led from upfront and often beyond the call of duty. This was decidedly his 'finest hour.' He is bound to draw much comfort from destiny having bestowed upon him a heroic status, which all warriors crave but few are awarded.

His story is gripping, fast paced and lucid. While it will be read by the aviation fraternity in general besides students of the Indo-Pak wars on either side of the border, the uninitiated too will find it very absorbing. They will gain an insight into a career (that of fighter pilots) arguably the most challenging on the planet today; a profession that tests the combat aviator's physical, emotional and mental capabilities to their limits. Since the author describes some of the war missions most vividly, the reader will relive and feel the same excitement and self-belief as that of PAF combat crew – gladiators out to humble the mighty opposing force in the coliseum of air combat. So, you need to get your safety belts on to embark on a roller coaster autobiography that will keep you gripped to your seats.

In the end, let me note that since the author has taken many leaders and commanders (civilian and military) to the cleaners for what he considers their

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gross ineptitude, lack of integrity and mishandling of national or service affairs, this will assuredly provoke rebuttals, reactions and ripostes. Ultimately, it is the author's story, his research and his conclusions and he appears ever willing and ready to defend them and meet any potential onslaught head on. In the air force lingo, 'He is on red alert.'

ACM Mohammad Abbas Khattak

Former Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force

PROLOGUE

A warm breeze ruffled the palm trees as I sat outside in the sun. I could see the Mediterranean Sea in the distance, the emerald green of the shore giving way to sky blue then a deep, cobalt blue as the coastline fell to greater depths. The villas between the fabled La Concha Mountain on my right and the Mediterranean on the left, glistened white in the sunlight, and my mind went, as minds do when in an idle state, to looking back over my life. And what a life it has been, I thought, with its hopes and utter disappointments, and its mercies and sweet charms, the blood in war and the sweat in peace.

I was thousands of miles away from home, in the country of my adoption which I love. Yet I love my own country too, with an almost fierce passion that has ruled my actions for the past forty years. But it was therein Spain's legendary Costa del Sol that I first thought of putting it all to paper.

I felt a strange nostalgia about how I got to be where I was, after all those exciting yet turbulent years. I began tracing the broad strokes of fate on the canvas of my past, eventually steering me to the heavenly landscape on earth where I now was. The past started coming into sharp focus and I felt myself being transported back in time. It is truly amazing how the mind surpasses any computer invented. In a millisecond, the human mind can rewind decades into the past and stop or start at any point or moment in life that it wants.

My mind scanned back to contemplate the most crucial turning points in my life. Besides the two intense wars and close misses with death, three indelible moments of my life came into focus with foreboding. The first dark memory that

came back with flashes of anguish was when I was arrested and charged with treason and mutiny on trumped-up charges of being a part of the coup d'état to overthrow Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's (ZAB) regime. What hell that was! The second was several years later, while in Washington as Air Attaché when the Shah of Iran targeted me and asked ZAB in person to severely punish me for degrading him. Then came the coup de grace; during the famous address by the then dictator General Zia ul Haq, to his cabinet, the armed forces high command and the four military governors, renouncing his promise to the nation of holding elections. My riposte to his speech produced a predictably rancorous and vindictive reaction. He wished to see me with a begging bowl in my hand. (The

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entire incident is briefly described in a recent publication *The Gold Bird* by Mansoor Shah.) I had to walk away from my life in the air force, the only life I had ever known and loved.

As it turned out, destiny had a different plan for Air Cdre Khaqan Abbasi who, (along with the then Air Chief), had targeted me on trumped up charges of treason. An even more pathetic fate awaited the Shah of Iran and General Zia ul Haq. In all my life, God's miracles never ceased, not during my failures or in my triumphs. To Him I owe my strengths and good fortune.

These thoughts abounded on that brilliant day in the summer of 1986. By the time I heard the silver laughter of the girls - my daughter Zaiena and her Spanish friend Carlotta, who often came over to our place - my mind had spun through half a century, leaving me in a reflective mood. That day, I made a resolve to fulfil a promise I had

made to one of my peers, the third gallant Commander-in-Chief of the PAF, the late Air Mshl A Rahim Khan, to write my life's story, especially my years in the Pakistan Air Force. Rahim Khan had told me many times, after we had both retired, that I should not postpone my memoirs while my memory was still fresh. I remembered him saying, "Sajad, time is a great healer but inevitably also a memory eraser; write your memoirs quickly before time takes its toll!" His words had resonated for a long time and I felt it was time I began to envision an outline plan for the book.

Over the next several years I tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to make a serious beginning, because there were too many distractions and demands upon me, with the children growing up. My modest business was being targeted by two generals from the Defence Procurement Division and my third marriage was on the rocks. Yet slowly but deliberately, it became an obsession with me to fulfil this compelling dream. By 1990, I had decided to pull the shutters down on my defence, aviation and communication company called Cormorant, while honour was still an option. With the endemic corruption and coercion by the sitting Director General Defence Procurement (DGDP), it had become obvious that either I resorted to giving kickbacks, or packed up. This was a choice between honour and financial lure, at the cost of dignity. Once again I walked away, to let fate propel me, where it wanted me to go. This was also a period when I had to make some difficult decisions about my matrimonial plight.

About that time we had purchased some arid land in the rural suburbs of Islamabad where I started spending a lot of time to develop a small farm in the rocky terrain, en route to Simli Dam, now called Las Colinas Farm (Spanish for 'Little Hills'). Despite all the travails and tribulations, I started to gather relevant books, magazines and old documents which

I had preserved over the years for this undertaking. I began to read extensively about Pakistan's history, with emphasis on the period after the creation of Pakistan, the death of Quaid-eAzam and its consequences for the future of Pakistan.

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My schooling at Quetta, the two years I spent at FC College Lahore and the episode of my joining the PAF were all still fresh in my memory. The years in the PAF, especially the two wars and the interregnum, were recaptured with the help of my own log books as well as those of other fighter pilots who had shared the skies during the war and peace with me. The series of interviews with at least a score of colleagues, junior and senior, provided me with information which gave many important missing links. The support and encouragement I received from Air Mshl Asghar Khan¹ and Air Mshl Nur Khan² was candid and valuable. Gen Sahabzada Yaqub Khan provided valuable analysis of the facts leading to Operation Gibraltar and the failure of the armoured offensive in the Kasur sector during the 1965 War. Some of the material about the wars with India was assimilated from compendiums by Indian historians and diaries of senior Indian generals. I was now ready to start my journey.

Writing my autobiography was to be a way of fulfilling my small responsibility towards my country. During the 1965 and 1971 Wars with India, I was the commander of a fighter squadron and, commander of PAF's biggest tactical fighter wing respectively. I was a witness to history in the making and a country in the unmaking. During the 1965 War, I was in command of the No 19 Squadron based at Peshawar, where I had some of the youngest and the best fighter pilots in the PAF. I had put them under the 'warriors' training regime before the war sirens were sounded. No 19 Squadron

carried out the most difficult missions of the 1965 War and these have been detailed by British, Indian and Pakistani scholars in various history books. However, most of these historians have narrated the operational episodes of the war from both sides, as told to them by the participants and at times embellished by the authors to accentuate bravado of combat crews.

Consequently, many of them have become questionable for lack of incontrovertible evidence. Yet these controversial claims have assumed a pervasive aspect of history. I want to give a candid account of these two

1 The first Pakistani Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Air Force, who created a formidable fighting machine in the eight years of his command. We went to war five weeks after he retired. He also had an important role in running the national carrier PIA and propelled it to the front line of world aviation. After retirement, he joined politics to oppose the despotic rule of Ayub Khan. Later he opposed Bhutto and finally went for Zia ul Haq's jugular. He was often incarcerated by those who feared his upright and sterling character. He is a venerable man in his late eighties, still revered by those who value character and honesty above all else.

2 The second Commander-in-Chief of the PAF who led from the front during the 1965 War. An indomitable and daunting leader, he was always an achiever from his school days as was evident from his reports by the British Principal of the Royal Indian Military College, Dehradun, India. He ran PIA for 6 long years before Air Marshal Asghar Khan took over from him in a swap. He built the national carrier from fledgling flying club status to a world class carrier. In the field of sports he infused Pakistan's hockey and cricket teams with a spirit of excellence, creating world champions out of both. That is also what he achieved for the PAF - excellence. His personal courage and sheer guts are legendary. As an octogenarian like Asghar Khan, he can still out climb and out do many half his age.

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controversial wars in which the leaders of both sides have claimed victory over the other - yet there was no clear winner.

Nonetheless, the Pakistan Air Force, being one third the size of its opponent, not only saved Pakistan, but emerged

better by inflicting three times its own losses upon the preponderant adversary. With the passage of time, the Indian writers of military history have come reasonably clean about their failures and exaggerations. Sadly, no such candid attempt has been made from the Pakistani side. Even some of the better compendiums are mostly narratives without critique or apportioning of responsibility. This is why I felt that after four decades, the truth about the wars must come out without any embarrassment or trepidation. We owe it to our future generations, particularly today's young commanders and students of military history, to set the record straight. There has been a reticence to carry out an honest analysis to learn from the lessons of these wars. This was done to protect the leaders who were responsible for their strategic incompetence. Their mistakes cost the lives of many gallant men and led eventually to the break up of Pakistan.

A small miracle helped me jump-start my story after I met Eeman Malik during an interview on the television with her as the anchor. The subject was the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) and it was an interesting experience to discover that this young lady knew PAF history better than any other anchor person who had interviewed me in the past. I was impressed with her preparation for the interview. The next time I met her was when she contacted me to say that she was trying to make a short feature film on the life of a fighter pilot during the India-Pakistan wars. She was adamant that it had to be about my ventures in the PAF. One thing led to another as I was interviewed by her team until one day she asked me why I did not write my memoirs. I told her that it was my dream to write my autobiography but had problems with the computer and my typing was too slow. She jumped at the opportunity and made a commitment to help me with the computer work. That was how my venture took off. It would not have been possible for me to take such a flying start

had it not been for such dedication by this young lady. Sadly, Air Mshah Rahim Khan had passed away in the meantime. This was a personal tragedy for me, and further propelled me in devoting my energies to writing my memoirs to honour my promise to Rahim Khan. Before Eeman appeared like a divine nudge, I would incessantly dream about what and where to start, till that day on the Costa del Sol, I went full circle, reliving four decades of my life.

I remembered that day in Spain well because it had a special significance for our family. On that day, 3rd of July 1986, my noble father had returned to the Creator at the ripe age of 104 years. The evening it happened I was in Geneva with my third wife and a couple we had invited to join us for the weekend in Palmas de Majorca, as guests of Prince Tachegetua of Spain. We had retired

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very late after a sumptuous dinner, as the four of us had sat chatting about the good and not so good old times. I recall the phone ringing past 3 am, rattling me as it woke me up with a start from deep slumber. Groping for the phone in the dark, I fell off the bed; a bad omen, I thought nervously. On the line was my sister Kausar calling from London where she had been baby-sitting our two children. My sister is usually an extremely brave person, not easily perturbed. But that morning her voice quivered as she whimpered. "Sajad, Abaji (father) has passed away." I felt as if my world had come to an end.

More than any of us siblings, Kausar had been the closest to our parents, especially to our father. She had spent her entire youth taking care of our aging parents at great sacrifice of her temporal needs and own future. For the next

six hours there was mayhem in our lives as I tried to get airline seats and make a rendezvous with her at Frankfurt to catch a Pan Am flight to Pakistan. My two brothers living in the United States were already in the air as we took off on possibly the worst flight of our lives. A memorable chapter had come to its predestined end.

Respectfully known as Baba-e-Baluch by his Baluch friends and families, our father was a daunting personality whose six feet and five inches erect frame and character seemed as though it had been cast in tempered steel. Even though we had a long innings with him and lived under his protective shadow for many gratifying years, there was a great sadness to the moment. The memory of a truly great soul came back to me vividly.

We had grown up in Bugti House³ before we moved into the small tin roof house in the Bugti complex built by Nawab Mehrab Khan, the fearsome chief of the Bugti tribe. The Nawabs of Bugti, Marri, Mazari, Magsi, Kalat and Jaffer Khan Jamali and Abdul Ghafoor Durrani were my father's venerable companions throughout their lives. Although older in age to all of them, my father had outlived them. Nawab Mehrab Khan Bugti was my father's closest friend. I still recall that whenever Nawab Sahib was in Quetta, he invariably had lunch with my father every day. That was the reason why my sister and I spent our formative period in the fabled Bugti house, where Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti later lived with his family.

I grew up playing with Akbar Bugti's siblings after my parents had shifted to the house in the Bugti complex. I recall Akbar Bugti as a stunning and fearsome person who always called me *chapeitor* scrawny boy. His younger brother Ahmed Nawaz Bugti would take me with him every day for the driving lessons he took from a taxi driver who

would turn up five days of the week to teach us driving. This was until it was time for Ahmed Nawaz to

3 We lived in Bugti House while the Bugti Complex of eight houses was under construction by Nawab Mehrab Khan Bugti. Two of those houses were given to my parents, where I grew up along with my siblings.

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return to Aitcheson College in Lahore. Thus, we grew up living in the midst of the fierce Baluch and Pathan culture and our friendship was with children from these clans as well as a smattering of Hindus and Sikhs living in the neighbourhood. We grew up with inter-communal harmony in Baluchistan. In those days there was a set of values which everyone lived by, without bias towards an individual's faith, cast or creed. Life in that multi-cultural community was wonderful and uncomplicated.

I stared at the Mediterranean Sea lost in my thoughts about my childhood, growing up in Quetta during the oppressive WW-II period. My thoughts shifted. How had I gotten to the Costa del Sol? What had brought me here, what were the events that had culminated in this vista before me, so far from home? Well then, this is my story.

1

IN THE SHADOW OF MY FATHER

My life's dream to become a fighter pilot was a rendezvous with destiny when at the age of 15 I sat spellbound, no more than four feet away, from a man for whom my adoration was incalculable. He was truly the only one worthy of the title Quaid-e-Azam, because Mohammad Ali Jinnah was the man who created Pakistan single-handedly. A part of his speech that evening in Quetta was embedded in my mind when he spoke of how Pakistani youth would grow up to serve their beloved country, as lawyers, engineers, doctors, scientists and defenders of the God given land. He said (words to the effect), "...and then some of you will choose to defend your country with your lives as members of the army, navy or the air force." At that moment, I made up my mind to be a defender. It sounded so powerful. As a lean and scrawny boy, this was an ambitious path to tread. Which uniform I would wear became my obsession for months, which I shared only with my beloved sister. I would see myself in the army uniform since Quetta was predominately an army cantonment. However, khaki did not give me the high I was imagining; the navy did not excite me at all because of my sheer fear of water and the ocean.

Then one day I saw a bunch of fighter pilots at Café Stanley, with their peak caps tilted and their tunic buttons open in a real gung-ho style. This was terribly impressive for a teenager seeking a choice of uniform. I was moonstruck

with that uniform and the attitude they wore on their sleeves. The next day I saw them again, in their planes. At the time I didn't know the planes were Spitfires, but I gazed at them, awestruck, and fell backwards into a rose patch as I followed the mock air combat. Shivers ran up my spine as I wondered if one day I could perform similar intricate manoeuvres. To me it will always be that momentous occasion and the Quaid's powerful words that motivated me with passion towards flying as a defender of my country.

As I walked home in euphoria, not quite feeling the thorns on the rose bush, I wondered how my family would take the news that I wanted to become a fighter pilot. I thought my father would understand, because after all he came from a long line of gallant people whose characters, as they say, had been forged by fire. I have always felt that family background and upbringing moulds one's personality, conduct and character.

My Heritage

Moin-ud-Din Pur is a small village in the district of Gujrat in the province of Punjab, which became part of Pakistan in 1947. The village was founded by our family elder Sayed Moin-ud-Din Shah, a direct descendant of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), and from the Khwarizmi clan, which dates back to one of the biggest Muslim empires ruled by the Shah of Khwarizm. His empire was pulverized and finally obliterated by the hordes of Genghis Khan.

Sayed Moin-ud-Din, his brothers, Sayed Said Sulman Shah and Sayed Jamal Shah along with their families had migrated from Arabia where they were being persecuted by the Ommayads for being from the lineage of the *Ahle-bait* (family of Prophet Mohammad SAW). After the death of the Prophet (PBUH)

and the tragedy of Karbala, their harassment did not abate even after the and the tragedy of Karbala, their harassment did not abate even after the

62 Hijri (Islamic calendar year). Although the Abbasids had fought the battles on the pretext to avenge the Karbala tragedy, they continued the discrimination of the *Ahle-bait*. The persecution became brutal and our ancestors made their escape to the empire of the Shah of Khwarizm.

After Khwarizm was pillaged, the survivors who had by then assumed the identity of the Khwarizmi Sayed clan scattered all over wherever they could find refuge. Our ancestors travelled to the small town of Tulumba near Multan and from there, with the passage of time the three brothers travelled to the empire of Jalal-uddin Akbar, and camped down at what is present day Gujrat on the banks of the Chenab River. Owing to the family lineage of *Sadaat* (Prophet's [SAW]

descendants), the three brothers were treated with great respect by the Emperor and awarded huge swathes of land for permanent settlement. The land was divided at some point in the 17th century, and the settlements grew into big villages which are today known as the villages of Jamalpur and Medina, contiguous to our village Moin-ud-Din Pur, located two miles east of the city of Gujrat.

My father had two brothers and a sister. Sometime in 1890 the three brothers Jeevan Shah, Fazal Hussain Shah and Ghulam Hassan Shah came out of their Haveli in the village and hit the dirt road leading out of Moin-ud-Din Pur. They were heading for their school, situated a couple of miles away. My father Fazal Hussain and Uncle Ghulam Hassan (the youngest brother) hurried to get to school on time. The eldest, Jeevan Shah was sluggish and lacked the alacrity of the two younger brothers. About halfway to the school,

Jeevan Shah headed for the huge *peepal*(banyan) tree near the *Mazaar*(Shrine) of 'Saien Kawan Walla' and sat under it for a respite. He sat there long enough to catch up with his two brothers when they were on their way back to the village after school had ended for the day. This day was to be the forerunner of their destinies. Jeevan Shah remained uneducated and inherited *Safaid Posh* status which was an appointment by the rulers as the village Choudhry (village chief who was authorised to settle minor cases and crimes and was paid a small stipend for his services to the community) from our grandfather. The other two went on to make history in their own right.

My father was born in 1882 and died in 1986. He was a pioneer of the Muslim League from 1936 onwards. He served as a doctor in World War I and later, he set up practice in Quetta at the invitation of Nawab Mehrab Khan Bugti (father of the late Nawab Akbar Bugti), and Jaffar Khan Jamali. During WWI, he spent most of his time in Rouen in France. During a heavy German assault on their location at night, the enemy shells kept exploding continuously for several hours. There were huge casualties and more than a hundred soldiers were injured including my father who received a four-inch shrapnel wound in his groin, causing serious and lasting damage to his ability to jog or run. But for that night, after giving himself first aid, he set about attending to the injured soldiers single-handedly since there was no other medic available until morning. The officer commanding the affected force was astounded at what he saw of his troops the next morning. When he was told how my father had accomplished the impossible, the British commander wrote a befitting citation. As a result, my father was awarded a medal for courage and professionalism beyond the call of duty. It is a matter of pride for us to know that even today our father's portrait hangs in the Red Fort in

Delhi. But my father never talked about the war and his achievements, owing to his silent and modest character.

We only heard about the episodes from our mother or father's friends. Quetta was a small town in those days and everybody knew everyone else. Simple and honest living, integrity and a sense of honour were the keys to social status and stature. The Nawabs, Sardars and chiefs of the big Baluch and Brahvi tribes and the Pashtoon Maliks, even though they were all persons with fiefdoms or large land holdings, were incredibly modest in their social demeanour. People by and large respected values over other assets. Father found a highly respected place among these families and was an exclusive family physician to most of them.

Totally dedicated to his medical profession, father had to toil very hard in his practice, treating a lot of poor patients at nominal or no fees at all. He responded to every single emergency call from seriously ill patients in the middle of freezing Quetta temperatures, travelling to faraway places like Dera Bugti to attend to Begum Bugti (mother of Nawab Akbar Bugti) and wife of his sworn brother Nawab Mehrab Khan Bugti (a tradition between true friends, when not blood brothers) and to Rojahan Jamali (the village of Sardar Jaffer Khan Jamali), and many other remote villages. Never to my memory did he once refuse or protest that the patient had outstanding arrears of payment. He quietly put up with the odd call timings, the distances and particularly the mode of transportation which varied from a *tonga* (horse drawn cart) to a jeep, even horseback at times.

Consequently, his income just barely provided for his seven children (three from a previous marriage and the four of us). Father stood very tall and had an imposing figure. He supported a very well kept beard and had very fierce eyes. He was slim and very broad shouldered; owing to his height

he was easily identified even in a huge crowd. Father was an impeccably truthful and brave person, feared by those who did not live by an honest code of conduct. He was blunt when necessary, but an absolute gentleman and an extremely generous person.

Entering a Man's World

I recall vividly his parting advice to me as I was boarding the Bolan Mail at Quetta Railway Station in December of 1951, to join the Royal Pakistan Air Force College at Risalpur. My mother and three siblings were sitting in the second class waiting room when my father signalled for me to say goodbye to them. He walked me to my rail compartment. As we walked across the spacious railway platform, many people walked up to father to greet him till we entered the second class compartment where I was the sole occupant. We had always travelled in Inter class like the majority of middle-class families. Now as an Officer Cadet in the RPAF, I was entitled to second class.

Father sat next to me and put his hand around my shoulder with affection I had not remembered before. He began to say words to the effect. "Son you possess an extremely sensitive nature and a low threshold for harsh punishment, but now you are entering a man's world where you will come across different kinds of people; you are going to falter at times and make mistakes, so remember when you have erred, be strong enough to admit it and take the punishment boldly. Be careful, because each man above you, especially in the career you have chosen, will differ in his assessment of your mistake and each will react differently. You will have to take whatever comes with courage. A superior with strength of character will generally resort to admonishment and good advice. On the other hand someone with an inherently weak character and

uncharitable disposition will punish you in extreme terms. Don't whimper or argue but take whatever comes with grit, never whine like a weakling. However, if you have not erred and are innocent then make your case forthrightly and don't be cowed down by authority. Face the problem head-on to its just conclusion.

One day you may be pushed into a corner and you may have to choose between career and wealth or self-dignity and honour. Then remember life without honour is worthless." This was the gist of a long but profound sermon. I could not recall the last time he had spoken to me so seriously yet affectionately, but what I noticed for the first time was the kindness and concern in his usually steely eyes. He kept his hand around my neck, held ever so lightly.

As the guard blew his whistle, father got up and held me with incredible warmth and stepped down. He stood a few feet away from the train and I noticed the rest of my family had come out in the veranda and waved vigorously as the train began to move away. It was a strange feeling for a teenager to be leaving his family, forever, it seemed. Once the train station disappeared behind the sharp bend I stepped back and sat down. Certainly, there was a sense of catharsis and I was not sure what I felt. My father's counsel did not make any impact in those moments, but came back to me in flashes at different turning points in my life. I can sense the depth and truth in his exhortation today, more than ever before. His words proved incredibly prophetic because the years ahead were full of such experiences.

My father's words have rung very often and very strongly in my ears in times of desolation, intrigue and witch-hunting when injustice was inflicted upon me. This happened mostly due to the vindictive nature of those superiors who were egotistical and demanded rather than commanded respect,

because they did not have the professional stature to lead from the front. Yet, there were many superiors, whose strength of character and qualities of leadership were reflected in their compassion and maturity while dealing with their subordinates.

They expected professional excellence once they had prepared the younger men in the art of airmanship through personal example, which was symbolic of the small but formidable Pakistan Air Force in its early years. Father had been so right in his parting sermon to me. But all that was to come later.

The train moved on until the winding track started the snake climb at a snail's pace which was so familiar from years of travel. The Kolpur railway station had the significance of being the highest point in the journey. I sat by the window staring at the landscape, possessed by an irrepressible excitement. I was breaking away from everything I had ever known, leaving my old life behind, and a strange mixture of fear and excitement was twisting my insides until I could hardly breathe. I thought of my mother and my siblings, and home seemed very far away. I thought of sitting inside a plane, of touching the controls; how would they feel? How would it feel to make the plane turn and dive and to know that I held my life in my hands? I thought of it, and I trembled; then the excitement took hold of me again and I dreamt. I knew that life was going to be hard now. My father's firm hand was no longer on my head, and would never be again. When I would go back home to see him, things would be different. I would have grown up.

The train lurched, and I came back to the present with a start. I don't know how many people have seen a train pulled by three steam engines ride over the steep ascent to the top of a mountain range. It is fascinating as one had to

walk along the train for nearly a mile owing to its slow crawl up. I kept looking at the desolate landscape and my past years started capturing my imagination again. The towering personality of my father was the overwhelming thought in my mind. It all started coming back; my father's settling in Quetta and his political life and his contribution in the formation of the Baluchistan Muslim League chapter. His persona left such an indelible impression on my life, that I told my children never to defend my failures if they felt uncomfortable, and encouraged them to question even their own father about his demeanour when they felt it was a contradiction of what I preached. In all my father's undertakings with people, friends and family, honesty and truthfulness were the linchpin and therefore, bribes, nepotism and corruption were considered the most despicable human traits.

The train's journey was smooth again. I started thinking of Quetta and my childhood. I recalled mother telling us the story which she described as our good luck to be growing up in Quetta instead of the village in Gujrat or Jacobabad, the hottest place in the world. I sweated, because the train was going into the plains now and it was hot. As the story went, during a posting at a town in Sindh as the Medical Officer, our grandfather became seriously ill. Father being very close to him, had asked for compassionate leave, which was not granted. He left his resignation on the office table and proceeded to attend to his father, never to return to government service again. After his resignation he set up two clinics, one in Quetta and the other in Jacobabad, essentially to attend to his close friends who were also pioneers of the Muslim League in Sindh and Baluchistan. Father was a committed protégé of the Quaid-e-Azam and I was privy to his dedication to lend every support to the Quaid's mission. He took me along to many congregations despite my tender age. He wanted to infuse the spirit of

Pakistani nationalism in me at the nascent stage. It is a matter of great pride for our entire clan today that my father was a passionate supporter of Quaid-e-Azam.

As the train chugged along I was filled with a sense of gratitude and warmth for my father and wanted to feel close to him by remembering how he had influenced me. As though by extraordinary perception I sensed my mother looking down at me in protest that all her love and caring was being ignored as I delved so exclusively about my father. I suddenly felt a remorse for leaving her to take on a career which would be a constant agony for her. My mother was the last of four wives my father had married and bore four children, three sons and one daughter. Our sister Kausar was born in Jacobabad on the 20th of June, known to be the hottest day of the year on earth. Bunyad Haider and I were born in Sargodha and Jawwad Haider, the youngest, was born in Quetta. Our mother's passion was us children and our education at home and at school.

Hygiene, personal as well as environmental, was a code of life for her and she made it an inextricable part of our training as well. Today, all of us between our mid-sixties and I, in my seventies, are notorious for cleanliness and for being environmentally conscious.

Her left-over passion and time were devoted to social work. That was when I took control of my siblings, not so much my sister for I loved her too much to put her to work, but the brothers had to slave it out as I directed them. No wonder they hold that bullying against me just as much as my sister and I adore each other. My mother was extremely religious. It was this closeness to God, and her faith in Him, that tided her over in the years she spent in prayer for me, when I was flying high in the skies and she was terrified for my safety.

This, then, was what I was leaving. Suddenly I felt very lonely. And yet, I was excited too. I was leaving something wonderful behind, but weren't there wonderful things to be had ahead? The train slowed then sped up again. With my nose to the window, I thought about my past.

At Quetta, I studied in Mission School, run by Christian teachers and sponsored by a great philanthropist and eye specialist, Dr. Luther. I studied there till fourth standard and was later admitted to Islamia School in fifth grade.

Compared to Mission School, the teachers at Islamia School were very dedicated but ruthless. My penchant for the English language drove me into a frenzy to join the St Francis Grammar School at Quetta. It was a completely English medium school and a sophisticated one at that. After a lot of persuasion and more tears, father finally agreed to let me join the school if I could pass the entrance tests. I managed to scrape through the tests just barely because the English at the school was of a very high standard. It was a great break and I think the three years there did me a lot of good as far as my joining the Air Force was concerned.

I had passed my Junior Cambridge examination when my father advised that, instead of wasting time loafing around I should also clear my Matriculation examination. This would help me get into college quicker than completing Senior Cambridge. I thought that was a real bore, to get back to the books and especially completely different ones, to clear Matric. Little did I know that father had just propelled me towards my dream.

When I had completed my Matric, I was sent to Forman Christian College in Lahore. Forman Christian College was a whole new world to me. Tall, ancient trees towered into the

sky as their deep shades cooled the ground where students sat to study, eat and talk. I was young, and had grown up in an extremely conservative family. This was my first real exposure to the fair sex, and although it took me time to become comfortable with them, I think Forman Christian College had a strong role in making me a more rounded person.

After the first year I came back for the summer holidays, I had gone to see my friend Muzzafar Ahmed, son of an army major living in the cantonment. I noticed a big sign which read "Join Royal Pakistan Air Force". The sign on the three-room barrack read "RPAF Recruitment Centre". In the background were a propeller driven fighter, a Spitfire, and a fighter pilot leaning against it with his helmet over his shoulder. It was as though I had tripped over a wire; friend forgotten, I walked through the gate as though I was mesmerized. I found myself in front of the veranda where the walls were lined with showcases with pictures of Air Vice Marshal (AVM) Atcherly, taking a salute at the Risalpur College, according to the caption. I entered an office occupied by an air force sergeant and respectfully asked how I could join the air force. He asked me my age and where I lived. He then made me fill out a form and asked me if I possessed a Matriculation certificate, to which I said yes. He went through the form and told me that once it was processed I would be called back to report for an interview and physical fitness and medical test.

Thrilled, I was about to run home and share the secret with my sister. But suddenly the sergeant called out that the policy required that I get my parents'

written consent for joining the air force. This I would need to bring with my Matric certificate when I got the call for the interview. My instant reaction was of apprehension; that it

would be an uphill task to get permission from such over protective parents. Right then there was not much I could do except to wait for the letter from the recruiting centre. Much to my disappointment what came first was the end of the summer vacation and time to go back to college. No letter had arrived from the recruiting centre as the sergeant had advised me that it would take time.

During the winter break when I returned to Quetta, the first thing I did was to go to the recruitment centre. Soon I had cleared all the requisite IQ and physical tests.

After some truly gruelling weeks, nearly a month later, my father came home for lunch flapping a long brown envelope along his leg. My heart beat felt like a bongo drum as my father handed me the envelope. I thought I was going to faint. I ran to my room and carefully opened the envelope. It was the anxiously awaited letter from the Inter Services Selection Board (ISSB), and contained a pile of forms and lists of things to do and what clothing to bring along. I went through it all and tried to muster enough courage to divulge its contents to the rest of my family, especially my mother. My mother went into a state of hysteria when she realized what I had been up to. I could see the reason why my mother was torn between her immense love for me and her fears about seeing me take up a career which despite its thrills was full of perils. My mother was a very religious lady and when she was not working or taking care of the chores, she was always praying. Today, as I look back at how closely I had experienced death on so many occasions in war and peace, I am absolutely convinced that her prayers have protected me through all those hazardous incidents.

2

CHASING A PILOT'S DREAM

The Inter Services Selection Board (ISSB) was a hard test of individual qualities. We were put through some strenuous physical, mental and psychological testing. We soon discovered that the rejection rate was very high. Some of the aspirants were sent home after the first day's psychological tests. I was lucky to have made it, possibly through the skin of my teeth. I only saw one other candidate from my ISSB batch at Risalpur. But even he did not make it to be an officer. One strange phenomenon which deserves mention for the sake of posterity is that the assessment by the Group Testing Officers at the ISSB stood on its head as we matured in service. Many graded below average and average by the ISSB

scaled the heights of professionalism. Most of those who had been graded as above average dropped out like over-ripe plums. Something was patently wrong with the selection process. In the years ahead, we discovered that one of the contributing factors was that most of the sidelined officers (for professional mediocrity) were posted to the ISSB for the selection of future candidates.

Hopefully, there has been a change in this regard.

After some nail biting weeks, finally on 15th December 1951, the orders came to report to the RPAF College at Risalpur. On my way to the training college, I caught sight of some smartly dressed senior air force cadets at the railway station. They looked so dashing in their uniforms that I felt

like going to them and saying “I am on my way to becoming one of you”. Somehow, I sensed that there was a certain aloofness exuding from them and I decided to let it go, not knowing I had made the first sensible decision of my career. Later on, I was to find out the jarring side of their impressive appearance when all the new arrivals were put through an elaborate phase of ‘Senior Cadet Ragging’. The first two days were absolute hell. The traditional ragging was terribly harsh.

There were cases where some of the cadets couldn’t put up with it and left within a couple of days of their arrival. Senior Cadet Humayun known as the ‘Doc’ (not a real doctor) would order each newcomer to strip down and proceeded to stamp our bare butts with ‘Passed.’

Ours was the largest batch since the inception of the academy. In later years, some of the best pilots of the Pakistan Air Force were from this batch called the 13th General Duty Pilot’s [GD (P)] course. Heroes like Sarfaraz Rafiqi, Shamim Ahmed, Masood Khan (later Air Vice Mshl), Malik Sohail, Mehmood Chonara, M Iqbal, and others such as Arshad Choudhry (later Air Vice Mshl), Agha, the Chughtai cousins, Waqar Azim (later Air Mshl) were amongst many other excellent young men.

The first few days knocked the wind out of us because the routine was extremely tough as compared to the life all of us had led before. We were being regimented to respond to commands like robots. It seemed that our ability to think and sense of independence were being moulded into a preconceived format. Looking back, I wish I could have put all my children through that experience where the margin of error was taught to be zero. Retribution for erring came swift and harsh. It was only the craze to have a pair of wings on our chests that drove us and motivated us. Slowly, we all

began to fall into a regimented mould which made us – all from diverse backgrounds – bond together. Speaking in vernaculars (Urdu) was totally forbidden and this British legacy was drummed into our heads so vehemently that we were afraid to even dream in the vernaculars.

The first sense of change from the previous life to the new environment was the day our custom-tailored uniforms were issued to us. The first day shall always remain pleasantly nostalgic, for like a booster injection of concentrated vitamins that sprung us to our feet, something came naturally with the donning of that uniform. That was: don't sit but stand, don't walk but run and whatever you do, there must be uniformity. Left foot forward on the beat of the drum!

Even meals became a ceremony with their well defined parameters which were to be strictly adhered to. How we dressed and how we sat, where we sat, and for some the use of fork and knife, seemed a kind of torture. In the dining room, where all meals had to be taken within certain time limits, there was an area reserved for the senior cadets, about two ft high, further accentuating the fact that the senior cadets were a genre apart and at a level far superior to us junior mortals. The seniors would walk in with a slight swagger and would ignore us, which was the usual practice; or when they found a reason to chastise or insult us then they would look disdainfully at us like we were new chicks waiting to be slaughtered. But it was a challenge that we all aspired to take up so that we might be there one day, if at all we survived that long.

Gradually, we realised that this plan to mould us had its imperatives because we all came from such diverse backgrounds. I recall a couple of our colleagues would wear *dhotis* at night while going to sleep and their English was

absolutely dismal. It wasn't until we received our evening apparel called the 'Evening Mess Kit' that we discovered the sophistication and finesse that was necessary to carry that uniform in the evening. With this came the culture of 'Dining-In Nights'. We learnt table manners and much more, in the British tradition, but these became a pain after a while as the day's toil would exhaust us completely. Any notions which we might have harboured about making a smart escape from the burden of further college studies was shattered quickly because the reality was a wake up call. We were put through the most strenuous educational programme with its myriad subjects such as aerodynamics, physics, airmanship, meteorology, Morse Code, history, English and the list goes on.

We only heard the roar of engines from the Academics Block and looked at the senior cadets in their flying gear with envy. Months rolled by before the good news came with all the attending euphoria. Flying training was to start soon!

The first day of going to the aircraft for indoctrination and familiarisation was a momentous one. The first sortie comes after several of these cockpit and instrument familiarisation exercises. Then a long briefing on the blackboard followed about the execution of the familiarisation sortie. This was the first time that we saw our names written as Flt Lt Abbasi/ Flt Cadet SS Haider - mission Fam-1, meaning familiarisation. The night before my first sortie was totally devoid of any sleep since the anticipation was too much to bear. By this time, we had been taught the use of a parachute in case of an emergency and given detailed instructions on how to respect the sanctity of a parachute. We had to do many dummy exercises of pulling the rip cord to get the feel of the technique and pressure to successfully deploy the parachute. During this training none of us thought we would ever need to use one.

Little did I know that I would have to use it twice to save my life!

On the day of reckoning, we got into the front cockpit of the Harvard aircraft, with the bulk of the parachute forming the seat. The rest was taken care of by the instructor, sitting in the back seat. I was frozen stiff since we were not allowed to touch any of the gadgets. I had to keep my feet very lightly on the rudder and just observe during my first flight. While taxiing, the instructor showed me how to weave in an arc of 120 degrees, the idea being to see what was in front. While this phenomenon may seem strange today with nose wheel as standard airframe equipment, we were in a tail wheel aircraft, sitting 1/3rd way behind the engine which gave no visibility in front, unless you manoeuvred the aircraft on the ground from side to side.

I Have the Controls

The take-off was my first ever in life in a WW-II era piston aircraft. The feeling was euphoric, difficult to encapsulate in words. The Instructor Pilot (IP) kept a running commentary going as we headed towards the flying training area.

On that first mission, the instructor demonstrated gentle turns, stall and recovery and general handling of the aircraft. He levelled off at 5,000 ft uttering the magic words, "You have the controls" and that is the first time that I gripped the control column in the air and was guided by the instructor on how to maintain height and execute shallow turns. That was a sensational flight experience including the circuit and the landing. I recall I held the column ever so delicately and felt a bit timid. It was a tremendous feeling of being partially in control of a fighter; like a dream come true. I made a few turns and weaved around a little.

After ten minutes of getting the feel of the aircraft, the IP asked me how I felt. I responded confidently that I felt great.

Then the IP got the control back and cautioned me to recheck my harness tight and locked and take my hands and feet away from all the controls. I took my hands off the throttle and stick and feet back from the rudders and sat tight while thinking he was going back for a landing. Suddenly, the engine whine changed and I noticed the engine RPM (Revolutions Per Minute) needle move to 2000

and then he lifted the nose of the aircraft above the horizon and we went into a climb. Then he lowered the nose further and fully towards the horizon and suddenly throttled back. I noticed the speed dropping quickly from 140 miles an hour to 120, 100, 70 and the aircraft started quivering and I wondered what was going to happen next. Then he asked me to watch the height as the speed bled further. I saw the altimeter register a loss of about 150 ft. He came on with full throttle and gently lowered the nose further and fully recovered the aircraft in level flight after losing about 200 ft. He explained to me this is how the aircraft stalls and while the natural tendency is to pull the nose up to recover, by doing so it would lose altitude even faster. So he taught me how to lower the nose and bring the throttle forward and recover from the stall. He again climbed up to 6,000 ft and I was taken through the first loop of my life. Due to the 'G' forces which I also experienced for the first time, I blacked out.

From this point the IP turned towards Risalpur for the return flight. We descended down to the circuit height and the IP entered into the landing pattern.

There were several aircraft in the circuit and it seemed amazing how they were all being neatly stacked one behind

the other with plenty of safety margin to avoid air collision. Several aircraft were carrying out circuits and landings – the first exercise when the training begins. The aircraft would touch down, tail would come down, and the IP would ask the cadet to carry on rolling and repeat the circuit and landing. We got onto down wind, which meant running along the runway but opposite to the landing direction. Then he asked me to lower the landing gear, and continue along the down wind. When our wing-tip was past the touch-down point we turned through 90 degrees onto the base-leg before turning onto the runway for landing. I kept watching all the changes very intensely as the IP dropped the air speed to about 90 miles an hour and the flareout depleted the speed further till the touch down at about 85 miles an hour.

The landing part was a difficult proposition in all aircraft as we were to learn, but in a Harvard it was particularly hazardous owing to the vicious swing characteristics of the aircraft as the tail-wheel touched down. The sortie lasted for about 40 minutes. In those early days we did not have the luxury of a long, broad runway ahead, instead a grass strip was used at Risalpur for landings and take-offs. As we were turning off the grass runway, my IP pointed out a cement structure well off the side of the landing field, a much talked-about feature known as the 'Finger Point'. It had the sign of a middle finger pointing upwards; this we were to learn slowly would be the chastisement point for young cadets who had committed an error during the training sortie. While driving a car I had a habit of keeping my elbow on the edge of the car window. I paid a price for undoing this habit in the cockpit after the canopy was opened in the landing pattern. The IP had thrown a fit as soon as my arm slid onto the canopy rail. I remember how he taxied the aircraft towards the Finger Point and I was ordered to disembark and had to walk back about a mile in the heat of

the blazing sun, with a heavy parachute slung over my aching shoulder.

I had to do this “desert safari” twice during my training period, before my arm got disciplined. After the landing we would be debriefed by the instructor and he would explain the entire mission profile in detail. The familiarisation process was spread over three missions. By the third sortie, we were given controls through the landing pattern and were required to touch down a few times and take-off again to practice the circuit landing exercise.

My First Solo

The moment of truth for a cadet pilot is his first solo. The maximum time in which a cadet had to go solo was around 30 hours of dual flying, or suspension was almost guaranteed. However, depending upon the previous flying experience, individual capability and performance of a cadet, some would be cleared for a first solo earlier than the others. Shamim Ahmed, Sarfaraz Rafiqi, Masood Khan, Agha, and Mahmud Choonara were amongst the first to solo¹. Most of them had the advantage of flying several hours including solo on Tiger Moth aircraft at the University Air Squadrons. On a fine morning, I was detailed with Flt Lt Chunoo Abbasi, my very demanding and unforgiving flight instructor. The mission was general flying, aerobatics and practice forced landing.

The take-off was normal; I left the circuit and climbed to 10,000 ft. It was a clear day with perfect visibility. We levelled off in the training area which was roughly 30 miles away from the airfield. The instructor asked me to show him a spin and recovery which I did without any comments from the demanding instructor which meant that it was pretty good. This was followed by climb back to 10,000 ft. I was

instructed to perform a loop and then a stall turn. I recall the stall turn was not good so the instructor for the umpteenth time guided me through a smoother turn. Finally, the aerobatics ended with a roll off the top. Then he immediately cut the engine and asked me to force land. We were at about 5,000 ft at that time and I managed a pretty good pattern right to the finals. Then he asked me to go around and climb to 4,000 ft and once we got there, he cut the engine again and asked me to turn and force land in a right hand pattern. Once on the final approach, he told me to take it around for another practice forced landing.

1 Solo means to be allowed to fly the aircraft alone without an instructor. This is a defining moment in a learner's life as a pilot.

Having completed the planned exercises in the training area, Flt Lt Abbasi asked me to return back to the airfield and rejoin the circuit. After joining the circuit I carried out all the standard operating procedures and touched down in a wheeler landing. This required touching on the main wheels and gradually letting the tail wheel come down. With some help from the instructor, I managed to keep the aircraft straight and heaved a sigh of relief. Taxiing back, I felt quite safe going past the Finger Point, feeling confident that the instructor had not yelled at me throughout the mission. What's more, even my left elbow was kept well under control after learning to do so the hard way.

Just as we were returning towards the apron, the instructor took over the controls, turned around and went back to the beginning of the strip. He asked me to put the parking brakes on and lock them. I saw the rear canopy moving forward and the instructor getting out of the aircraft. He stood on the wing for a while and bent in his cockpit and I thought he was stowing his parachute. He closed the

canopy and stepped up to my cockpit; I lifted my helmet ear phones and he told me "Ok boy!

You are on your own, don't break up the aircraft and don't do anything silly!"

I was stumped for a while but quickly regained my composure and waved to him, took permission from the tower and lined up on the runway. I was cleared right away as there were no aircraft on the down wind leg. I revved up the engine, checked the magnetos again and let go the brakes, breathing heavily through out take-off and went screaming into the air. Gears up, speed at 110

miles an hour. As I turned away from the circuit, an incredible feeling overcame me. I can capture it very vividly but can't explain what it was. It was a sense of freedom, of self esteem, and no apprehension. The one thing I recall well is that I kept turning my head to be sure I was alone. I climbed away to 8,000 ft heading for the flying training area. Once settled, I started with some steep turns and started throwing the aircraft around in yo-yos. I think I was screaming at the top of my voice with joy, knowing there was nobody watching me over except God Almighty. I did a loop which wasn't very good but I tried it again and the results were slightly better this time. Then I did a few stalls and many rolls to the right and left but barrelling out at the end of each.

I skipped the stall turn which wasn't my favourite manoeuvre and went for a practice forced landing. It was time to head home since my instructor had asked me to return after 30-40 minutes. I headed back for Risalpur and joined the circuit. I lowered the gear on the down wind and carried out all the pre-landing vital actions.

On base leg, flaps were lowered on towards the final approach. I sensed that I may be slightly undershooting, so I gave a burst of throttle and came down on a landing which was neither a three point nor a wheeler but as the tail wheel came down, the aircraft started to buck on me but I managed to kick the rudder into the swing and controlled it. I held my breath until the aircraft came to a standstill. I exhaled a big phew and thanked God for the safe landing. The instructor came and said "You clot!

(His favourite phrase which practically replaced my first name throughout the flight training) "You almost swung the aircraft". But that was the only time I almost, but not quite, swung the aircraft and it never happened again. This was my first solo which was a momentous achievement for me. I performed my first solo after about 22

hours of dual instructions. This was rather slow progress but I maintained my position in the middle of the course.

Days turned into weeks and months as we learnt more about aerodynamics, mathematics, meteorology, Morse-code, English language, history, physics and you name it, we learnt it. Flying progressed from ab-initio handling and safety exercises to aerobatics, navigation, formation flying and the most boring yet demanding, instrument flying. Night flying was great fun once we got used to the darkness all around. Then came the final stage of assessment of each cadet in all aspects of a future pilot, an officer and a gentleman.

As all the tests for flying and other subjects were completed, the tension started to build up since one is never sure how well one has fared and whether we were up to the mark to get the wings. The torturous parade rehearsals for the day of reckoning also started. One of the cadets would make a

mistake and cause the entire parade to suffer the whole process from the very outset, all over again. As the date of the passing out drew nearer, the list of those who had been declared successful would be posted onto the notice board any day. That meant many sleepless nights. One day the inevitable happened. When we arrived at the squadron, the list was pasted on the notice board. Our hearts racing fast, we searched for our respective names. There were screams of joy as soon as one of us saw his name on the list of successful cadets. Thank God, I found my name somewhere in the middle of the fortunate ones. However, there were a few who had been relegated to the next course and some who had been suspended. This course became distinct in the history of Risalpur in having an almost 80 percent passing rate, with nobody below the grading of 'average' (B5).

The Big Day

After a few days of torturous parade rehearsals, came the Big Day for the young men who had worked hard to arrive at this long-cherished moment. The anxiety that overwhelmed all of us for the last week was an excruciating experience for most of us (even though almost 90 percent of us knew that we would get our wings). The uniforms of the cadets were sent to the tailor to get three press buttons for the flying wings to be pinned a few days before the graduation parade. The night before the last day was sheer anxiety and almost none of us could get much sleep. I pleaded with my parents to come over for the graduation but unfortunately both Bunyad and Jawwad and my sister Kausar were taking exams and it was virtually impossible for them to leave the others on their own at such a crucial time.

The morning of the passing out parade day was a totally different one from any other in my earlier, uneventful life. It

was a sweltering hot day in June in Risalpur. We were woken up at 5:30 am with the usual steaming hot cup of tea.

We took turns to get into the bathroom to shower and shave. My room-mate was Sergeant Cadet Shamim Ahmed, brother of Admiral Rashid Ahmed, a bright

naval officer. Shamim was a cool customer. But on a day as eventful as this even his sombre persona was upbeat. Our batman Baboo was equally excited and had made sure that our shoes were mirroring our excited faces. The uniforms were so well starched that we virtually had to climb into them. Then we rushed towards the Mess hall for a quick breakfast. We barely managed to swallow our breakfast because we couldn't wait to get to the parade ground.

Formed up on the parade square, we saw parents, relatives and friends who had started to arrive. Seeing all those people sharing the excitement and joy with other cadets, for a moment, I felt quite depressed that my parents hadn't been able to make it. The Cadet Wing Under officer, in this case Masood Khan, (later to be Air Vice Mshl, who recently passed away) was the parade commander.

The 13thGD (P) Course was ordered to march forward a pre-determined number of steps and all came to a resounding halt, without any command. Then the Wing Under Officer marched up to the dais and saluted the Guest of Honour and announced that the parade was ready for his inspection. This was the defining moment of over 30 young men, who had given their best and won a place in the service of the nation with this elite air force.

The Reviewing Officer walked up to each cadet and pinned the flying wing above his left breast pocket. Surely, his fingers must have sensed the pounding hearts right beneath

the wings. This was a moment that remains wedged in the memory of the cadet for the rest of his life. Just as it remains fresh in my mind as I write this. The ceremony over, we were dismissed. Unlike the US and other Western air forces, where the cadets throw their hats high up in the air, we followed the British tradition of silently breaking-off and then suddenly there were hard and warm embraces exchanged between all the batch mates. It was a moment of catharsis and all the tension of the past years seemed to be draining, taking along with it some of the emotional highs of a few minutes earlier. The next day or so was spent in clearing up and getting ready to proceed to our homes for a three-week break before joining the relevant conversion schools.

Everybody caught trains in the direction of their homes. My three weeks in Quetta were extremely jubilant, but the curiosity to get on with the fighter conversion was overriding and constantly pervading my mind.

Fighter Conversion

We finally arrived at Karachi railway station in dribs and drabs, but by late afternoon, most of us coming from the Punjab, NWFP and Baluchistan, arrived at different intervals. A PAF truck brought us with our baggage to the PAF Station in Mauripur, and dropped us at the Officers' Mess Reception. A chart displayed in the reception indicated room allocation in pairs. My room-mate was to be Sarfaraz Rafiqi. We settled down in our rooms and the next day, were taken to the Fighter Conversion School barracks on the airfield. We were all asked to take our seats in the crew room and after a while the Chief Instructor, Sqn Ldr Ashraf Chaudhry accompanied by other flying instructors, arrived. He addressed us about the scope of the course, adherence to flying discipline, and serious attention to ground subjects.

He then introduced the instructors present there, who were Flt Lt Jan Mehmood, Flt Lt Trevor Gottings and Flt Lt Qayyum. The former two had amiable personalities, reflected through their smiles and the Chief Instructor also seemed very congenial and relaxed. We were plunged into ground subjects for the first week, which included most of the subjects studied at Risalpur, but the airmanship subject was more comprehensive as were the operating procedures of the Tempest aircraft.

The Tempest was a WW-II aircraft, but it came on line after the war was over. In fact, it was a superior version of the famous Spitfire of the 'Battle for Britain'. In the second week flying began, and between Flt Lt Jan Mehmood and Flt Lt Trevor Gottings, all of us, about 25 pilots were converted in the dual-seat Fury. The dual Fury was the trainer model of the famous Sea-Fury, which was considered the fastest and most effective fighter of the post WW-II period.

Our Tempest conversion was the first completely Pakistani run affair. Prior to this, contract pilots from the Battle of Britain were employed by the PAF, to carry out the conversion. Our course was to be the first experience in totally indigenous flying and ground staff. These Tempest aircraft had been received by Pakistan as its share after Partition, and were handed over in a terribly dilapidated state.

The Tempest was a powerful aircraft, however, and a phenomenal change from the Harvard we had been flying as cadets. We adapted to its high performance characteristics quite well. A lot of the credit goes to the two instructors, who walked us through the flying exercises with great affection and consideration. However, nothing is perfect in life, least of all, people. I had my first bitter showdown with my instructor, Flt Lt Qayyum, while flying an instrument

training mission in a Harvard aircraft. He obviously had a chip on his shoulder and we never saw him smiling. During the sortie, I was carrying out a 45 degree bank turn under the hood, simulating cloud conditions, when I lost about 75 ft during the turn. This was still within good average flying parameters.

The instructor got riled up out of proportion and calling me a “stupid idiot” and told me to watch my height. Five minutes later, he used even more abusive language, because as I straightened out of the turn I overshot the intended heading on the compass by a couple of degrees. Once again, a very acceptable error but this time I could not control my rage, and yelled back at him.

He screamed at the top of his voice, and using a profanity, told me to return to the airfield. I retorted back and told him, “You take me back, Sir!”. I did not care any more about the dire consequences when we landed back. As soon as he had switched off the aircraft, the norm was for the student pilot to wait till the instructor jumped out of the aircraft. But I was simmering and virtually catapulted out of the aircraft and went straight to the orderly room and asked the clerk to give me two blank sheets of paper. Returning to the crew room, tears rushing from my eyes, I stood by a table, and started to write my resignation.

Several of my batch mates tried to pacify me, and advised me not to rush into a rash course of action. But I was hell-bent on retaining my self-esteem.

Before I could figure out how to forward the application, Flt Lt Jan Mehmood got wind of the incident. This wonderful roly-poly man came and put his hand around my neck and took me into the veranda, and asked me what had happened. I repeated the incident; explaining to him without

any embellishments and holding back my tears. He smiled and told me to go and sit in the crewroom and calm down. Just a few minutes later, I was sent for by the Chief Instructor, Sqn Ldr Ashraf. I entered his office, saluted him and took the folded paper out of my pocket. But before I could give it to him, he asked, "What happened young man"?

I replied, "Sir, I have written everything on this paper", and put it in front of him on his desk. He unfolded it and read through my redress of grievance. He folded it, tore it into four pieces, and placing it in front of him, he said, "Go boy, and fly well, you will make a fine fighter pilot". I was speechless. I marched out, and the course finally finished. I made second place amongst my batch, which was a quantum jump for me from my performance at the College in Risalpur. Sarfaraz Rafiqui, hero and martyr of the 1965 war, topped the course.

The course ended on an unpleasant note due to rather a minor incident. On the afternoon of the Dining-Out Night for the course, Flt Lt Jan Mehmood invited about six or seven of us for a beer session in the Mess bar. Adjacent to the bar was a room which was used by officers as a bridge-playing room. We were in great spirits and our laughter and guffawing was highly irritating for a Wing Commander and his colleagues playing bridge. The incident was blown out of proportion and reported to the Commandant. During the Dining-Out Night, Gp Capt Khyber Khan stood up with a fierce expression. He said, "Gentlemen, I had intended to pay some of the highest compliments to this course, for its performance and to the instructors for doing such a superb job on the first all-Pakistani Fighter Conversion Course. However, the despicable behaviour of the student pilots earlier in the afternoon reported to me by a senior officer, made me change my mind. So I am replacing my kudos to

you, with the following punishment: the course leave is hereby cancelled, and for those two weeks before joining your respective fighter squadrons, you will all report to the Station Headquarters, collect picks and shovels to break-up the concrete platform in front of the Conversion School, and turn it into a grass lawn". This must have been the most miserable start of our career, especially the cancellation of leave. Ten days and a broken up tarmac later, we were allowed five days in which to touch base with our parents, and report on time to our new units. I was posted to No 14

Fighter Bomber Squadron at the PAF Station in Peshawar.

First Fighter Squadron

On the day of my departure from Quetta, my father and mother as well as my sister followed by my two other siblings, Bunyad and Jawwad, came to the railway station. Long, tearful goodbyes followed, along with promises to stay in constant touch. It was a long and tiring journey to Peshawar, but uneventful. The transport sent by the PAF once again collected us in batches as we arrived, and ferried us to the Officers' Mess. I recall that we arrived on a Saturday and the next day was a holiday, which allowed us to settle into our Bachelor Officers'

Quarters (BOQs). Luckily Pilot Officer Zaheer Hassan (Tinchoo for his short height and sprightly personality) was to be my room-mate. Tinchoo was a real fireball, and a wonderful friend. We enjoyed some good times together at Peshawar. On Monday morning we arrived at the squadron, with great expectations, but apprehensive about the unknown elements we were to confront. It was a surprise to meet with the Squadron Commander, the handsome and suave Sqn Ldr Masroor Hossain. He had a cut on his lip,

which added a certain charm to his visage. It was a highly civilized briefing by him on what was expected of us.

After work, we all proceeded to the Officers' Mess. Sarfaraz Rafiqui, Arshad, Tinchoo and I were climbing up the stairs to the veranda of the Officers' Mess, when a portly gentleman, a senior pilot from No 14 Squadron, signalled us towards the door. He asked us to come inside the door, which turned out to be the Mess bar. This gentleman and a great officer was Flg Off Munir-ud-din Ahmed (fondly and respectfully called 'Bha' Munir). Stuttering profusely, 'Bha' Munir placed four glasses from the counter in our hands. A huge jug full of frothing beer was poured into the glasses. This was a fabulous launching of four brand new fighter pilots (young cubs to Munir), into the realm of fighter operations. This jug of shandy (beer in lemonade) became symbolic for us in the sense that for many years, whenever this group happened to be together at a flying station, shandy was the thirst quencher of choice.

We were launched into flying almost immediately under the supervision of two outstanding officers and fighter pilots; Flt Lt Titch Rehman (addressed as 'Boss') and Flt Lt Durrani (Dan), the fierce fighter pilot. The other person besides 'Bha' Munir was Flg Off Cullen (Lenny). They were to be our instructors over the next six to eight months of flying the Sea-Furies.

The Fury was far superior to the Tempest we had just flown: these Furies were very new and awesome to look at, and fabulous to fly. Those days the concept of flight safety took a back seat, and the flying character of the air force was more on the WW-II RAF gung-ho style. Low gear retractions, curved approaches and three point landings were considered the mark of hot rod pilots.

After a couple of months of flying, a new Officer Commanding of the Flying Wing, Wg Cdr Rahim Khan (known behind his back as Shantay Khan), took

over the Wing. He was a much-feared person and had a very strong presence and personality. I was to get to know him in later years and discovered that he had the kindest heart, yet a lot of fury in his personality.

An exercise was held every Monday after his arrival, in which the Squadron from Miranshah (the famous outpost of the Scouts) used to arrive at Peshawar, and a combined Wing exercise would be held between No 5, No 9, and No 14

Squadron. It would be planned for 18 Furies in the attack role, and one squadron with all its aircraft was assigned the interceptor role. Before the briefing, it was a sight to see nearly 24 Furies lined up according to the squadrons, having been washed and polished by the pilots the previous afternoon. The Squadron Commanders would stand in front of the units, with one pilot in front of the propellers of the aircraft, and two airmen along the wings. The Wing Leader, Wg Cdr Rahim Khan, would descend from what was tauntingly called the ivory tower

- his office, perched at the second level which was a two room structure. He would then walk to each squadron, which was brought to attention, and examine every aircraft one by one with the Squadron Commander trailing behind him.

With shaky legs, each fighter pilot would answer his questions. These ranged from knowledge of aircraft engine, specifications, to the names and welfare of the airmen standing on the wings. It was not unusual for him to pull out his pristine white handkerchief from his pocket, and run it through the engine cowlings to check if it would leave any marks due to a poor polishing effort.

This ordeal over, the next would begin in the No 14 Squadron briefing room. All the formations were already drawn up on the black board, with different colours denoting different squadrons and formations, and the strike missions drawn in chalk. The interceptor squadron was not allowed in the briefing room, so as to keep the flight plan of the strike mission secure from leakage. These were like the WW-II strike missions against Germany. The common fear was that if anyone lost the leader during this exercise, he would have to roll up his bedding and await posting to a transport squadron or Risalpur to become an instructor. This was the same style which Rahim Khan maintained in the first jet squadron, the No 11 Attacker Interceptor Squadron. The first time when we were attending this exercise, I almost spun on the spot, as I saw my name as his wing man: the most unwanted position that pilots generally feared to be in. The briefing was a short mumbling session, because he was not given to articulation like Sqn Ldr Saeedullah who had a crisp British accent.

Therefore, people had to have their ears detached from their bodies and be strategically placed to make sense out of his briefing. For me, that day was a continuous haze, and my mind only focused on how to stay in position as his wingman, and not to lose him. I survived as did the rest.

The last memorable event of my short seven-month posting to the first fighter squadron was the adventure of No 14 Squadron proceeding to Dhaka for one month. This was to be the first fighter squadron to fly across India, transiting through Palam Airport, for a goodwill mission to East Pakistan.

Landing at Palam was quite exciting as the formations of four stacked in astern were in close formation and the break-offs were deliberately aggressive as it was a matter of

national pride to perform to perfection over an Indian airfield. All the aircraft landed safely, and after refuelling, took off again without any contact with our Indian counterparts. The flight to Dhaka was uneventful and finally, after a long day, we settled down in small *bhasha* (bamboo huts), supposed to be the BOQs. Dan Durrani got hold of Tinchoo, Cullen and me, and suggested we go up to the famed Dhaka Club for some entertainment. In those days, this Club had a reputation of being one of the finest in the country. We arrived swaggering into the bar, and the handsome Pathan, Dan Durrani, thumped the bar and said, “*Abdar*(barman), please give us five whiskeys”. Certainly, we from West Pakistan had an attitude problem when it came to the Bengalis. But what we learnt in that one month was that our attitude problem was equally and forcefully reciprocated by the educated Bengali class. That evening, however, we were to experience a smattering of both attitudes.

The barman did not budge from where he was standing, but asked a question in response to Durrani’s demand, “Are you a member of this Club, sir”? Durrani was quite taken aback as were the rest of us. Durrani replied, “We are officers of the Pakistan Air Force, and I want you to serve us the drinks”. Instantly came the retort rather than a polite refusal, “Sorry sir, only members can be served here”.

Witnessing this drama was a lady sitting at the other end of the long bar counter.

Addressing the barman by name, the lady said in a very authoritative voice, “Give the gentlemen what they like now and whenever they visit the club, they shall be my guests.” The barman sprinted towards his service counter with unusual alacrity, and started pouring as he was ordered. All

of us were quite stunned at the happenings of the last few minutes and did not know how to thank the lady.

Durrani clicked his heels and took a very English bow facing the lady without a word. The woman said, "Welcome, gentlemen, to East Pakistan, and feel free to enjoy the hospitality of our city. I am the Begum of Dhaka and you shall be my guests at the Club whenever you so wish". Durrani signalled all of us and we walked up to the Begum of Dhaka and started a polite conversation.

Some other impressionable incidents took place during the month.

Unfortunately, our visit was construed by the politically aware and educated Bengalis as a threatening gesture rather than one of goodwill. Today, as I write these lines, I can look back and see that the seed of discontent was laid by the West Pakistani dominated government with a dishonest bureaucracy. Even though the Prime Minister of Pakistan at the time, Khawaja Nazimudin, was himself a Bengali, he had been checkmated by the political shark Mumtaz Daultana, and the army leadership under Gen Ayub Khan. Nazimudin was removed soon after the killing spree by the Jamaat-i-Islami and Khaksar brigands, in a conspiracy by the Punjabi Governor General Ghulam Mohammad, with a nudge from the over ambitious army C-in-C Ayub Khan. East Pakistanis had begun to dream of independence then.

Upon our return from Dhaka, one fine morning, Tinchoo and I were summoned by the Squadron Commander. Dan Durrani, playing the joker, looked at us seriously and said, "What the hell have you two been up to, boys, the Squadron Commander is livid with rage". I replied, "But sir, what did we do wrong!" He told us to double up to the Squadron Commander's office and find out for ourselves. With hearts

palpitating and legs quivering, we entered and put out our best salute in unison. There in front of us was the smiling Squadron Commander, Sqn Ldr Masroor Hossain. He said, "Well, Haider and Zaheer, by all accounts you two have done very well in the past few months, and the AHQ

wants to send young and energetic fighter pilots to No 11 Squadron". The very name of the No 11 Squadron used to spike the stomach of every fighter pilot because it was the first and only jet squadron in the Pakistan Air Force. This posting was considered a harbinger of a promising career in fighter command.

We left the office hugging each other.

3

FIRST JET SQUADRON IN PAF

No 11 Squadron holds a very special place in my heart and mind for several reasons; the most important is that it laid my true foundations as a fighter pilot in all its manifestations. It propelled me to follow the professional excellence of legends like Air Cdre FS Hussain, Air Mshl A Rahim Khan, Air Cdre 'Mitty'

Masud and Sqn Ldr Alauddin ('Butch') Ahmed. Here is a brief flashback of memories in No 11 Squadron.

First and foremost, it was the posting to No 11 Squadron that carried a tremendous significance for young fighter pilots moving from the Fury squadron. It was the first jet squadron in Pakistan (oddly, a tail wheel jet aircraft) and to be selected for this squadron was a dream. For Flg Off Zaheer ('Tinchoo') and me, the news came when we had had barely 25 hours on the Sea Fury, an incredible WW-II fighter itself. Our self-esteem skyrocketed and we walked in semi-euphoria above ground level until the time came to catch a train to PAF Station Drigh Road.

Our first encounter with the pilots of No 11 Squadron was as happy and exhilarating as being treated to a glass of shandy by 'Bha' Munir on our first posting to No 14 Squadron at Peshawar. After arriving at the squadron hangar (there was no crew room per se) and checking in at the Station Adjutant's Office, we were warmly met by the irrepressible Flg Off Alauddin Ahmed (Butch to all his friends). Butch truly never had an enemy; everybody loved Butch, especially the

girls from the Burt Institute (an Anglo-Indian club operated by the Railways).

We had already met Sqn Ldr Rahim Khan (Shantay Khan) who was the first Squadron Commander, and heard exciting stories about his subsequent successors, the legendary FS Hussain and Flt Lt 'Mitty' Masud.

Learning the Ropes

Life in 11 Squadron had an exciting start. Butch called us new arrivals and handed us an operational manual on the Attacker aircraft. The next few hours he went over the salient features of jet engine handling as opposed to a piston engine, explaining the function of various indicators in the cockpit and the importance of respecting the limits of the aircraft. After giving us a comprehensive brief, we were ushered to the aircraft. There, joined by Flg Off Naqvi (who later collided with Flt Lt 'Pete' Malik over the airfield during a formation loop and crashed), each of us was given an external check practice and engine start up. This was followed by a brief taxiing practice, which proved extremely tricky because of the tail wheel and limitation of engine power application. This, in sum total, was the entire description of our training classes.

We were told by Butch to study the emergency procedures for the rest of the day. In the evening we were given the news that whoever passed in the emergency and other procedures the next day would be going solo.

So, the next day some of us went solo after that day-long familiarization, without any dual check because there was no such configuration for the Attacker. From then on, we were put through some of the toughest flying anywhere in the military aviation world. The Attacker had no cooling or

heating systems, no navigational aids and a miserable manual (non-boosted) flight control system, which made it necessary for the pilot to use full force of both hands to perform a loop. Formation aerobatics, therefore, were a feat of flying and sometimes deadly. The real torture was the long-range flights to Lahore, Chaklala and Sargodha or the much-disliked 'high-low-high' strikes. What happened to some of us was that owing to the lack of heating at high altitude, we would experience the bends, that is air trapped in our joints especially shoulder joints and gums. This sounds funny but it was much more than that! The pain was so excruciating that once I recall on the way to Lahore, I was over Sukkur when my gums started hurting. Clenching and screaming (a common relief action in excessive 'G' conditions or pain from bends) didn't help. So to relieve the pain I tore at my gum with the fuel tank opener, until it bled. And during all this agony we had to be in proper battle-formation!

'Mitty' Masud and 'Corny' Karim were terrors in the sky; they would tear you apart with seething transmissions if you fell out of the briefed position.

Summers in Karachi were agonizing, especially without cockpit airconditioning; with the heat and blithering humidity it was like being in a sauna, especially during low-level strike missions and armament sorties at Gizri Range. Luckily, we not only survived but were trained and motivated to aim high and clearly understood that just being average was not acceptable to remain in the first jet squadron. In all this hard flying, there was some sensational flying skill and outstanding leadership demonstrated by the Squadron Commander, Sqn Ldr FS Hussain¹, a world-class legend of military aviation, I say with absolute confidence.

Our first experience of FS Hussain's total mastery over the Attacker, for that matter any aircraft, was witnessed just a few days after we had been inducted into the squadron. We were all standing around the crew hanger when suddenly there was a thunderous sound followed by a screaming whistle. At the front end of the noise was an Attacker at less than fifty ft off the deck on its back! FS Hussain pulled up into an inverted loop with thick contrails at the wingtips. What a sight it was! It shall never fade in the memory of those who were seeing an inverted loop for the first time. We witnessed much more of this in No 11 Squadron.

Life in the squadron and life after we doffed our uniforms (or flying coveralls) was equally challenging, but in different ways. Our living quarters were spread right across the Officers' Mess area. One block was at the eastern end below the road level and the other was on the western side past the Officers' Mess, situated on a high mound called 'The Lavender Hill'. The six of us living in three rooms were known as the Lavender Hill Mob. My roommate happened to be Flg Off Dutta, who was recently posted to No 11 Squadron. Other than FS Hussain only Zaheer Massey owned a car: the tiniest of minis, a Fiat 500. 'Lucky' Hayat, the most colourful character, owned a rickety old motorcycle which was used by all of us who knew how to ride it. Lucky lived outside the Mess since he was married - of sorts. The rest all lived in BOQs. The working hours were very busy with flying and some measure of academics. We had FS Hussain's spectacular "beat-ups" on the airfield to entertain us every once in a while.

There was an unforgettable situation that FS Hussain found himself confronted with, one fine morning. Sensing a commotion outside the crew room, we all ran out and saw an Attacker on its back, very low, with one gear sticking out. Soon we were to learn that FS, as he was commonly known,

could not get the right gear down. One would imagine that a “one wheel landing” would be a hazardous exercise but not for FS. He carried out some blood curling manoeuvres at low speed because of the “one gear” hanging down, in order to, what he called “burn out maximum fuel to eliminate the hazard of fire on landing”. He made a perfect one-wheel landing and held the opposite wing up with his control column and gently lowered the wing as the speed came down.

The belly tank helped the asymmetric wheel landing with minimal damage. It was amazing to see the same aircraft on line the next morning. This reflected the dedication and professional competence of the technical staff. Even the British technical representative of the Super Marine Corporation was amazed at the perfection and flying skill of our Squadron Commander and the ability of technicians to bring the Attacker on the flight lines without wasting a day. Now, these kinds of stunts were only the Squadron Commander’s prerogative and no one dared venture such risky stuff, even though any concept of flight safety was totally non-existent. This was manifested in some of the silly near misses and accidents which I shall recount.

1 As the first young Flying Officer, the second lowest rank of a pilot, FS Hussain created the Commonwealth Air-to-Air Gunnery record at the Royal Air Force Central Gunnery School in August 1948. This was a great honour for the Royal Pakistan Air Force.

There was a tradition of doing air shows for visiting dignitaries and on special occasions like Independence Day. The air shows were rehearsed well to put up spectacular firing and aerobatics, individual as well as in close formation.

The targets in this case were laid out on the south western side of the airfield with clear overshoots just in case there

was a runaway aircraft. The audience included the President and the Prime Minister of the time. During a strafing run the pilot suffered target fixation, a phenomenon not common, but possible, as in this unfortunate fatal accident. Right in front of their eyes the audience saw the Attacker fly straight into the target, exploding into a thousand pieces. It was very tragic, but such was to be the shape of things during those early days of fighter flying. On another occasion a formation aerobatics team was to be formed and various pilots were being tried to select the best. The Flight Commander, Flt Lt 'Pete' Malik was practicing loops and rolls over the runway, with good old Flg Off Naqvi in astern position. Right in front of our eyes, Naqvi hit the tail of his leader's aircraft and spun into the ground on the other side of the runway. Naqvi was a popular chap and was badly missed by all of us.

These accidents happened right on the airfield and stayed in our minds for a long time. But flying went on as usual even on the day accidents took place.

This was essential for young pilots like us to understand that we were in a risky profession and had to learn to not only deal with the emotional aspect but to draw lessons from each experience in order to avoid repetition of mistakes. We grew into the adulthood of fighter flying swiftly.

The spell of normal flying training was broken when there were interservices exercises or major inter-squadron events. These entailed cross-country flights to bases in the north. In this connection, there was to be a major air show at Lahore which was not an operational base. Three Sea Fury squadrons were already there and all personnel lived in tented accommodation with field toilets and improvised baths covered by Hessian. Being from the only jet squadron, we walked with a swagger and tried to be different from the

prop jocks. So it was in this atmosphere that rehearsals began.

My first sense of rage and frustration was felt when Flt Lt 'Corny' Karim, the junior Flight Commander, bullied the life out of me for being unstable in close formation where I was flying in the No 5 position. All my imploring that the aircraft in front, ie No 3, was in a constant porpoise making it very difficult for me to be steady, was unacceptable to Karim. He kept me on the ground the next day.

But there was to be a silver lining at the end of this dark day. Mitty had been grounded from flying and was hanging around with FS Hussain - his great buddy.

In spite of his disposition he was flying and doing synchronized aerobatics with FS. He walked up to me and asked why I wasn't flying. I nearly burst into tears, but he provided solace and said "Your day will come, just take it lying down".

His words proved prophetic, as a year later, Karim was flying T-33's as an instructor while I was flying No 3 in the PAF official formation aerobatics team lead by the consummate professional, 'Mitty' Masud. The day we performed over the Mauripur airfield in F-86s, Karim was the first to come and congratulate me for an excellent performance. I told him that he was responsible for my success and I reminded him when he had grounded me for a day for formation trouble. He had a good laugh and patted me for being selected from the entire PAF. The final show was watched by thousands of Lahoris and mercifully it was uneventful and we planned our return to Drigh Road. There was a problem as there was a jet stream at our cruising altitude. This reduced our ground speed sufficiently to give us dangerously low fuel at destination, with little in reserve to divert in case of runway

blockage or weather conditions. The met officer told the Squadron Commander that the winds were likely to die down in the next 24 hours.

Our Flight Commander, Flt Lt 'Pete' Malik had a 'homesickness' syndrome because he was missing his sweetheart and wanted to get back come high winds or high water. The first formation of four to depart included me, Pete, Dutta and WD Ahmed. We had prepared a very thorough flight plan and, if all went as planned, we would be landing with less than a hundred gallons of fuel which was precariously low. It was alright for the leader because he would have a constant throttle setting, but the rest of us had to maintain battle formation, pumping our throttles up and down to keep position.

Until we were abreast of DG Khan, things went almost as planned. Then the Jet Stream (high altitude winds) hit us and our ground speed fell. Near Sukkur the formation was very loose and as Dutta called out his remaining fuel, the leader announced that "every one was on his own", meaning that we don't waste fuel trying to keep formation. I was almost abreast of him at that time and decided to leave my throttle where it was. Then another phenomenon further complicated matters. Cirrus clouds reduced visibility and soon the formation's integrity was lost. This was my first experience of very poor leadership, by any standard. I found myself to be the first to join the circuit. It was good to hear good old Lal (Flg Off Lal Shahzada, ATCO) on the radio. I made a tactical approach despite low fuel. On the downwind as I tried to level off, I got no response as though my aileron was jammed and I started losing height. The controller cleared me to land but I was fighting with all my force to lift the left wing up. I was going through 500 ft and sweating profusely. Slowly, in fact dangerously slow, I got a response with my full might forcing the control column to the right.

The aircraft levelled off when I was perilously low on finals. Thank God I had remembered to lower the under carriage as I called the tower and announced that my controls had frozen but were now responding somewhat. My tactical approach was forgotten and I gingerly managed to make a landing with a huge thud. It was a bad landing but I was in one piece.

As I turned off the runway on to the taxi-track, I tried to check my ailerons but couldn't see anything. After switching off, I climbed down, my heart still pounding. The sergeant in charge of flight lines came to greet me. I told him what had happened on landing and walked towards the aileron. There was a wire stuck in the aileron, twisted from the force I had applied but it was there all the same. I stood in shocked horror, thanking God again that I was on the ground safely. What was most surprising was that nothing was thought of this near shave I just had! Such were the stakes for survival; we had to display resoluteness in facing the tough challenges of our profession.

After a few months, there was yet another major exercise involving the army and the air force in the plains of the Punjab. Our squadron was to move to Sargodha in December of that year. The events during the exercise are worth recounting. After landing at Sargodha we underwent the ordeal of settling down in our tented accommodation. I was sharing mine with Flg Off Sardar, my mate and a wonderful chap. On the second day of the exercise I was detailed as No 2 to Jamal (later Air Chief) on cockpit standby as the first pair at dawn.

The Sea Furies were the attack force and No 11 Squadron was assigned as the aggressor squadron in the interceptor role. It was freezing in the cockpit and to keep the circulation going I kept clenching my hands and feet. Owing

to the absence of low-looking radars, the raid warning was provided by the different layers of Mobile Observer Units (MOUs). Given the organizational delays, the warning about an incoming raid was very short and the jet engine start-up and taxi was longer than the piston engine Furies. So, it was always a tense moment. We had to get airborne before being caught on the ground, which could be very humiliating.

A dawn attack predicted by Combat Operations Centre (COC) was a good possibility and we were waiting with anticipation to hear the scramble sirens go off any moment. Minutes passed into half an hour and then into an hour but not a buzz so far. It was just then that I saw 'Pete' Malik, walking towards us. It was the sight of Flg Off Sardar, my tent mate that got me worried. I pretended not to sense Pete's proximity to my Attacker (named 'Jezebel', as we were allowed to paint our choice of name on the allocated Attackers). Pete thumped my fuselage and as I looked down I saw his effusive smile, thumbing me out of the aircraft. I took off my helmet and implored him to give me just fifteen more minutes.

Sardar was by his side looking somewhat sheepish, knowing my anguish when I was deprived of a mission. Clumsily, I laboured out of the cockpit and down onto the ground. Pete patted me and said he would put me back as a fourth pair on stand-by but I was exasperated at his decision. I blurted out "How come Jamal is still in?" Pete told me that Butch was just finishing breakfast and would be relieving Jamal in a moment. Sure enough, as I entered the makeshift Mess Tent, Butch was polishing off the last bite of his *paratha* with *khageena* wrapped inside. Pete joked and asked the Mess waiter to get me a sizzling hot cup of tea, adding that it would cool me down. Accepting the moment as a fait

accompli, I took my mug of tea and walked with Butch out of the tent as he strode towards the aircraft to replace Jamal.

I couldn't believe my ears as the scramble siren went off accompanied by the yelling of the Duty Officer: "Scramble, scramble". Butch let out a real solid four letter obscenity, cursing his bad luck. Well, that was part of the fun of operational exercises and its electric effect on young fighter jocks. The two of us stood watching the Attackers start up while some others came out of the Mess tent to watch the lucky ones going for a score. The Mess, the apron (where aircraft were parked) and the runway were all in close proximity; therefore, we could watch the take-offs. It was a left hand turn out of traffic so the Attackers became visible again as they flew along the runway down-wind. The leader was staying low and the wingman could be seen cutting in on his left. The last sighting was of the formation going into left turn and then it disappeared from sight. Pete had joined us in the meantime and gave me a look of sympathy.

Suddenly, a loud bang startled all of us. It sounded like a thousand pound bomb had detonated nearby. The senior lot huddled around the field telephone manned by the Duty Officer. There was a nervous crackling in the air, but not for long. FS Hussain's hand went up to his forehead as he straightened up and sighed, "My God, No 2 has hit the ground". I was stunned. Sardar was gone, Jezebel in smithereens. Jezebel would be replaceable but not bushy brows Sardar. This was the third fatality in a few months. In my opinion all were avoidable, had the concept of flight safety and responsible leadership been an essential requirement of fighter flight training. Sardar was an extremely amiable and warm person; his absence was felt for a very long time. But life goes on and time diminishes the haunting shadows of fatal crashes and loss of comrades. If I recall well, the Court of Inquiry determined that the

formation stayed too low after take-off and as the No 2 was getting into echelon left, that is inside the turn looking up at the leader, he didn't realize he was too close to the ground. His left wing connected with the ground and cart-wheeled breaking up the aircraft. Since the aircraft was full of JP-1 fuel, the impact produced the enormous bang resembling the sound of a big bomb.

The rest of the flying from Sargodha was suspended for a short while, but I believe the exercise was resumed later in the day. The entire crew of No 11

Squadron, as well as many of Sardar's friends from the other Units dropped in to commiserate with us. His funeral prayers were held with full honours later that day. I could not hold back my tears, which kept flowing as we prayed for our departed friend and comrade-in-arms. Death ceased to be so terrifying for us young men in our formative years after seeing three close friends depart one after another. This was a major change from the past, when living with our families, even the news of a far off relative's death would cause mayhem. We were learning to accept the loss of compatriots as a risk in the profession we had chosen.

There were several other happenings that we as young pilots couldn't grasp, because these came to us naturally without conscious effort and therefore, did not register as a major change in our overall behaviour. The prime catalyst in what I am getting at was the honesty and dedication of most of the senior officers. There were no tensions, insecurity about the future and least of all, worry about financial solvency. Money, marriage, mediocrity and moaning were taboo in the fighter pilot world of Rahim Khan, 'Mitty' Masud, FS Hussain and their ilk.

The posting to No 11 Squadron was a quantum jump in many ways. What was happening to us was an attitude change. We were now surrounded by highly motivated superiors who impacted our lives most profoundly. We picked up a lot of their mannerisms, life style and convictions. Quite naturally, we adapted to some of their weaknesses as well, but not incurably. 'Mitty' Masud made us learn the national anthem before he taught us low level strike planning. We sang it with great pride. For us the seniors become icons and most remained so at least for me, for the rest of my life.

The next episode that is embedded in my memory was yet another near miss (in air force lingo, 'close call'). Once again, it was an exercise involving the air force and army. Air Vice Mshl Sadruddin tells me it was 'November Handicap'.

As at Sargodha, we were deployed in the interceptor role, tented down near the dumb-bell runway in use for that time of the year at Chaklala airfield. One fine morning, I was detailed as No 2 in the pair on cockpit standby. Jamal was the leader once again. It was winter time and we were clad in the WW-II issue fur boots and jackets. This time around, the mission was to be flown at midday and I was sweating under the noon sun. So I decided to take off my jacket - this entailed un-strapping and standing up in the cockpit. Just as I got the right arm out and was pulling the jacket off, the scramble came. I had one hell of a time keeping up with Jamal on the runway with my straps still not fastened.

The Attacker had a tail-wheel, and taxiing was a real art; one hand had to be on the hand brake. It was quite a hassle to get my straps fastened as we started to roll down the runway. After take-off, we carried out the vital actions like checking oxygen and QNH (standard altimeter setting

corrected for sea-level to give all the aircraft flying a standard height indication, to avoid collisions). We were off into the 'wild blue yonder' (as we called it then), and switched frequency to the Sector Operations Centre (SOC) for intruder information and intercept instructions. After a series of turns and levelling at 15,000 ft the controller advised the leader that the target was so many miles 12 o'clock. The distance was closing as we were at full throttle and high speed. The leader was asked to descend to 10,000 ft and look for the target at 10 o'clock low. Just then I spotted the bandits (term used for enemy raiders), four Furies in battle formation. After a pause my leader asked me to take the lead as he had not spotted the bandits and time was too crucial to lose the opportunity. I overtook him from the left slowly as I had a small power margin. Soon the leader called contact as we got to around two miles of the bandits.

The leader assigned the left pair to me and he went for the right pair. Soon we were in attack profile and the Furies broke hard in opposite directions. I was onto the left pair and shooting at the wingman (with camera film of course). I pulled slightly up and right to go for the leader by diving hard left. I had my sight right on the target and finger on the trigger closing into 1,000 ft. Just as I pressed the trigger I heard the Squadron Commander's voice on the radio, "Red Section, check fuel." In the heat of the chase, the leader had missed the call for fuel check and I hadn't looked at the fuel at all. As I looked in, the fuel gauge seemed to stare back mockingly; it was bad news as the fuel was very low. I broke the attack and heaved straight up, trading height for speed and turned west into the sun. As we checked in our fuel state, FS Hussain nearly screamed, "Get back to base, idiots, if you can reach it with this fuel!"

In the next transmission from FS he asked our respective ground positions. I had lost sight of my leader and he was unaware of mine. I called out my ground position as Qadirabad Headworks, and gave my height and heading for base. FS

then called Jamal and asked him to climb up immediately. My leader had pressed on behind his quarry for a little longer than the prudence demanded.

This became apparent later as we headed towards Chaklala for recovery. I changed radio frequency to the Air Traffic Control (ATC) for joining circuit, as I virtually glided towards Chaklala, too scared to increase power. The fuel was running out faster than my heartbeat, by this time. The adrenaline rush of tearing through the sky looking for the targets had now morphed into serious apprehension; would I flameout before or after landing?

Suddenly, as I passed through 4,000 ft, I remembered I had to perform vital actions before landing. QNH was set to the airfield pressure as advised by the ATC. I heard the Squadron Commander on the ATC frequency asking the controller if red section was in the circuit. He was advised that No 2 was in contact. FS asked my position. I told him I was passing through 3,000 ft and the fuel was just 30 gallons (the fuel quantity indicator was near the empty mark). He suggested I make a direct approach for a landing on the runway in use. I replied "Roger, sir. I am coming in for a straight in landing". At this point I hadn't heard my leader on the ATC channel. I turned on to downwind and lowered the gear, praying profusely it would come down without a hitch. With the thud and click of each wheel my heart would jump. Luckily, I saw all greens on the panel and took a deep breath. It was time I started to concentrate on the approach. I was hyperventilating like a sprinter in his last lap but the

wheels touched down in a surprisingly smooth landing; a fluke indeed, given the tense situation. I only heard the ATC start to address the leader when the controller said, "You're clear to join Red" but he stopped transmitting before he said "Leader".

It was much later in the day that I found out the reason; the leader had maintained the radar frequency, probably in the heat of the fuel crisis. The controller by error must have started his transmission and realized Red Leader was calling him on the intercept channel. As I finished the landing run I tried to turn left off the runway to move onto the taxi-track. My tail wheel wouldn't unlock. I added power and had full rudder into the turn, holding tight the brake lever, but to no avail. I sat there like an idiot wondering how Jamal would turn off, knowing he must be on the final approach. I didn't have to worry for long as I saw an Attacker swish past me at a hell of a speed on the fair-weather strip, about 15 ft on my left. I couldn't believe my eyes and my heart restarted pounding like abongo drum!

Then after crossing the end of the runway's boundary barbed wire, the aircraft came to a halt with a huge mushroom of dust enveloping it.

My immediate reaction was to get to Jamal, praying he wasn't hurt.

Incidentally, if memory serves me right, the aircraft was on its belly and not on its wheels as it sped past me, hence the cloud of dust. I switched off right where I was after informing the ATC that my aircraft had to be towed back since the tail wheel was refusing to unlock. Before jumping out of the cockpit I took my camera magazine with me (hopefully, one 'kill' and one 'damaged') captured by it.

As I drew closer to Jamal's aircraft I really prayed hard for his safety. I approached his aircraft nervously and got on the left wing. He looked a bit dazed. Clearly he had seen the impact and its tragic outcome. As he noticed me coming towards him, he unstrapped and stood up in the cockpit. After he climbed out, I reached over and took out his film magazine also, now that I knew he was safe. Meanwhile, the crash tenders and other vehicles had approached the scene. Unfortunately, there was a lot of commotion on the road across the airfield perimeter owing to some of the spectators receiving serious injuries. One of them, I think, was fatally wounded when the aircraft crossed the barbed wire and hit the onlookers.

Back at the squadron, everyone was happy to see Jamal safely back. A Court of Inquiry was ordered to determine the cause of the accident and apportion blame. In the hullabaloo that ensued Jamal probably escaped the Squadron Commander's wrath for negligence about fuel and for overshooting the runway. I thanked God for small mercies and tried to get over the sortie.

What actually happened was that the leader had forgotten to set the QNH and since he was not on the ATC frequency, thereby, on down wind he was higher by the height of the airfield above sea-level. This caused him to be high and hot on the finals, with no fuel to go around for a second approach. Given our experience and the operational spirit which tended to make us somewhat casual, such accidents took place often as flying discipline was lax.

We returned to Drigh Road after some days and this time FS Hussain was leading the entire squadron in one big formation. Once back home we settled back into the routine of life in the grand metropolis with its nocturnal excitement

and challenges of advanced flying missions in the day light hours and the introduction of night flying.

The following days were engaged in armament sorties, firing guns, rockets and dropping practice bombs at Gizri Firing Range. Unfortunately, Mitty was not as good in armament as in strikes, close formation and dog-fights. Therefore, as we learnt the art of leadership, navigation, formation flying and aerobatics, armament came slowly but surely. One day we were told that a new rocket called Hispano-Suiza, from Switzerland, was going to be tried out and all of us were going to get a chance to fire these very fast rockets. Soon thereafter, the Hispano-Suiza rockets were demonstrated in front of the squadron. A Swiss technical expert gave a briefing about the performance parameters of the rocket and the firing envelope. I recall vividly on that day there was a portly man, who had a constant twitch in his neck. That was the great character 'Maanah'

Rehman, a very prominent person on the rich and famous circuit of Pakistan. He must have been the agent for the Swiss company. Many years later I got to know the gentleman quite well.

The next day onwards, we all were given two sorties each to establish the effectiveness of the new weapon. I am not sure what became of the induction of the new rocket but my second mission remains a shattering memory of one of the close encounters with death in my flying career. We were flying the trial missions single-ship, so that we were not hassled with keeping position in a formation and had all the time to fire the rockets and to plan the circuit with ease and, fire without any other pressures. I had fired both the rockets and much to my disappointment both were way off the rocket pin (bull's eye). Disappointed and prepared for some dressing down by the bosses, I joined the circuit and called

down wind. Seconds later I heard a somewhat panicky transmission by the ATC

controller, "Your aircraft on fire, bail out." For a moment I froze in the cockpit, my adrenaline spiking and stomach turning. Not sure the transmission was as I had heard it, I asked, "Drigh Road, say again". At the same time I lowered the gear.

The tower yelled back this time, and repeated the earlier message, "You are on fire, get out!" I was totally confused because I didn't have the height to bail out. The Martin Baker egress system was rudimentary and the minimum height for bail-out was around 800 ft AGL and the rest of the actions were to be performed manually. There was no chance to egress in the situation I was in. In a slight daze I continued the landing process, touching down with a thump. The controller kept making transmissions but I wasn't listening. As the aircraft touched down I switched off the main fuel cock, cutting the fuel to the engine.

As the aircraft slowed down, I un-strapped myself and held the brake lever fully closed, not caring if I would burst the tires. I recall jumping out of the cockpit and running at top speed. A jeep overtook me and stopped to get me onboard.

The British technical representative Ian, who was stationed with our squadron, was in the jeep and as I hopped in shaking, I heard him say, "You lucky 'B' look at your aircraft". As I looked back, I saw the rear of the Attacker in flames.

Taking a wide berth, he drove past it as the crash tender started to get into action to suppress the fire. Later in the day when all was back to normal, it was discovered that the exhaust pipe which carries the jet flame outwards had

severed at the joint where the engine ends; thus, the flame was leaking out in the middle of the fuselage melting the metal at the joint. In fact the fuselage had been separated in the next few minutes after I had landed. The technical representative opined that if I had stayed 10 or 15 seconds more I would have been history.

After-Duty Capers

My formative period in No 11 Squadron was exciting and an education of a different kind, after duty hours. Episodes during this period in our social and personal spheres were something to be remembered fondly. To better describe the environment of how and where we lived, a mental sketch would be helpful.

Indeed, there was an Officers' Mess with the usual dining hall, ante-rooms and living quarters for juniors and seniors, spread across the big complex. Butch and others of senior standing were living in the middle block adjacent to the senior (later VIP Block), where FS Hussain and 'Mitty' Masud lived along with KM

Ahmed (a brilliant technical officer). Between the Mess hall and the senior BOQ's was a wooden hut and a small pond in front, called the 'Rose Revived'.

Most of the interesting Mess events took place at the 'Rose Revived'. But our squadron considered it our exclusive domain when there wasn't an official Station event. There was a small pond in the centre of the lawn which had a tortoise called Oscar, for some unknown reason. Oscar was the squadron mascot and a great line and hook for a first date with a girl. There were many stories about the 'Rose Revived' and many episodes of mischief and romantic

tragedy - unfortunately, not all of them can be written about!

'Mitty' Masud was a very dominating commander and we all considered him a role model. For many of us bachelors, it was an absolute necessity to be in his company in the evening. The inevitable rendezvous was the Mess bar. We learnt many different things during the hours we spent with him. It created a sense of bonding and camaraderie amongst us. He was a total misogynist at that period of his life, so talk about the opposite sex was minimal. There was one problem in this otherwise happy family; the Station Commander, Gp Capt Cheema didn't feel comfortable with our senior lot. His bias found expression in his taking the wrath out on us, the junior fighter pilots. One well known fact was that the Station Commander tried to fly the Attacker but couldnot get beyond taxiing and would get the tail wheel locked every time he made the attempt. We didn't know what went on between him and the Squadron Commander, but we gave him an opportunity to really put us on the mat.

The Squadron Commander, FS Hussain owned a Humber Hawk, and along with that, Zaheer Massey's Fiat and the incredible Lucky Hayat's motorbike, we had a great time. Lucky's motorbike has so many hilarious and, at times dangerous, stories about it that it would need a chapter itself. There were weekends when we had just enough rupees to pay for a Chinese meal but not for transportation. So, Lucky would cart three at a time, making two trips back and forth from the Mess to Karachi's Elphinstone Street. It was dangerous because liquid 'refreshments' had been consumed since we fighter pilots didn't believe in eating on empty stomachs. But Lucky, being married to a nice lady named Martha, was not usually around to cart us around on our jaunts, which is how Butch came across a novel

opportunity and wasted no time to seize it. On a New Year's Eve, we made plans to go to town in a big way having chipped in part of the salary earlier in the month. Butch was to be the cashier for the evening. He called a cab from the Metropole Hotel, the well known hotel of that period. The cab turned out to be a Kaiser and the driver a young man called Qadir. What was novel about this cab was that Butch convinced Qadir to settle for a deal. We would fill his huge petrol tank which would be Qadir's total fare for the night since he would use only 1/3rd of the tank driving us around, and the remaining petrol would be his fare.

The deal having been sealed, Butch added an unwritten clause to the contract: that Butch would drive, since there would be seven of us and that Qadir would have to suffer the discomfort of the car boot. Qadir turned out to be one hell of a sport and agreed to every unreasonable demand. He made the mistake of confessing that for him jet pilots were like warriors of Islam. He paid a heavy price for it for many months to come as we considered this novel arrangement of 'petrol for fare and driving a Kaiser' very brilliant.

It all went well until one day we were hauled into the Station Commander's office. Gp Capt Cheema (alternately called Cheerful Charlie or Scarface, depending on the occasion) had never looked so ferocious. He was ready to lacerate us, and he did just that. "You little vultures", he said with all the contempt he could muster, "with one broken down motorcycle and a rickety Fiat, how have you bloody miserable pilots managed to use 200 gallons of petrol from the PSI petrol pump"?

We all shivered at the realization that we had been exposed for our clever wheeling and dealing with Qadir, the good taxi *walla*. The PSI petrol pump actually belonged to the

airmen's welfare fund. That is why we were able to sign for petrol. This was not all; with time we also had a deal with the young and smart manager of the pump to sign for petrol and instead of taking gasoline he gave us cash when we were strapped for bucks. He also curried some favours from us in return for the barter.

Then one day when the Shell tanker arrived to fill the supposedly expended gasoline, the tank filled up much before anticipated and then the intelligence hounds were let loose to find out what was going on.

Indeed, we were all to share the blame even though financially we had not committed any indiscretion and always cleared the bills on payday. The parting shot by the Station Commander was something to carry back to our mentors, FS

and Mitty. "Why do you think I gave this squadron its call sign 'Pay Bill?' It's because none of you vultures clear your Mess bills on time. All of you think you are God's greatest gift to the RPAF!" I recall that my call sign was 'Pay Bill 12'.

After dismissal, we marched off with some heavy punishments of 'Orderly Officer duties', enough to cover the next few months. As we strode out of the odious environment of the Administration Block, Butch said, "Hey, Lucky, he really went overboard with us for a minor prank, but he made some pointed reference to our bosses for notpaying Mess bills on time, which is untrue".

Lucky was fast to draw the inference and said, "We have to inform the Squadron Commander about this slight thrown at him". This would start a war as far as we knew, between the FS-Mitty combo and Scarface.

The Orderly Officer punishment totally demolished our social life as one of our close group members was always on duty, while the other was sleeping off a wakeful night. It was in this situation that Zaheer Massey and our great instructor from Tempest Fighter Conversion, Flt Lt Jan Mehmood flew in a T-33 aircraft onto the Drigh Road airfield. Wow! What a fantastic aircraft that was, with a huge bubble canopy, air-conditioned and beautifully laid out cockpit and instrumentation. Massey told us that after start-up the pilot could produce snow flakes by turning the airconditioning to lower temperatures. This was unbelievable for us Attacker jocks used to intense heat in the cockpit. But wait, when we heard that the flight controls were feather touch and it was actually tricky to control ailerons on take-off because of the highly sensitive hydraulic control system, we fell over with envy, considering it took a strong Attacker pilot to loop with one hand.

By this time there had been a pleasant addition to the squadron strength. Plt Off MA Shamim had returned from his flight training in Australia, bearing a very pink face and smiley eyes. He soon got promoted to Flight Lieutenant and became my roommate since Dutta had been allotted a single room. Shamim was a very amiable and polite senior and the previous tension in the room dissipated.

Since he had a ruddy pink complexion, he was nicknamed 'Pinkie' as per air force tradition, just as I was condemned to the nick name 'Nosy' which has stuck like glue. It was more often than not that we were summoned to the bar or 'Rose Revived' by Mitty. We being young and impressionable, hero-worshipped Mitty and FS Hussain, so we responded with alacrity most of the time, but sometimes grudgingly, because of sheer fatigue after a day's hard flying.

Shamim stayed away and declined to become part of the hot rod group.

I remember one particularly funny episode that took place on New Year's Eve in 1955. Butch had been the organiser for a pub crawling night to herald the New Year. Short on cash and high on hope for an exciting night, we set out with an ex-air force nut-case called Khawaja Sunshine and Georgi Durrani (another former air force fellow). Our first stop was La Buck, the Burt Institute. We always found it full of fun-loving Anglo-Indian girls and, it was inexpensive for a starter.

Eventually, four of us men and three females including 'Butch' Ahmed's girl friend Carol (later Sophie Ahmed after she converted) arrived at the last frontier of fun and dance, the Malir Hotel and Club. As expected, it was full of foreigners and we managed to get a table next to a bunch of burly men. The binge began and the dance floor was packed with couples dancing to some Latin music.

I was the only unattached guy at the party, and hoped to find a familiar face amongst the glitterati. By 3 am, I had enough and I sauntered off to the parking lot and went to sleep in the back seat of Sunshine's Humber Hawk. I couldn't tell how long I had been there when I was woken up with Georgi thumping on the car. I barely managed to open my eyes and asked him what the problem was. As I unlocked the door, an excited Georgi told me, "Come on buddy there is a fight going on between Butch and some foreigner". I think Georgi came to me because I was the tallest one in our group, although I was very gaunt and not the type to get into brawls. Nonetheless, I had to show camaraderie, so I staggered behind Georgi as we ran back into the hall. There was a funny scene going on - Carol had a chair which she was swinging at this massive character.

He must have been over 6 ft tall and huge. The hilarious aspect was that Butch was dangling from one of his muscular arms, while Sunshine was dangling from the other arm. Both were desperately throwing punches at what turned out to be a burly wrestler from Hungary!

On seeing the man's size, my bravado evaporated as did the spirits inside me. I chose discretion over valour and frankly told Georgi that this was a no-win situation. Meanwhile, Carol had scored a direct hit at the wrestler's shoulder which broke the chair but I'm sure the wrestler didn't even feel the impact.

Georgi picked up another chair and was about to strike the giant on his head when one of his other colleagues got Georgi by the throat as I stood watching.

Luckily, people intervened and Butch and Sunshine fell off the wrestler's arms.

At that point I told Butch and Carol to break it up and get back before the wrestler group broke our bones. It took some persuasion since Butch and Sunshine were unwilling to accept defeat!

So this was the beginning of my career, with my friends and my course mates and the highs and lows, but specially highs, of life in the Pakistan Air Force.

4

WESTWARD HO!

By this time several pilots were being sent to West Germany to Furstendfeldbruck (known as Fursty) for T-33 conversion and then onto the USA for combat crew training courses. The Sea Fury pilots were already heading for West Germany but not the original hot rods of No 11 Squadron.

We were not really pushed like the others from the Sea Fury Squadron about going for jet transition courses. Then one day on a crisp winter morning, we had just arrived at the squadron hangar for a normal flying day when FS

Hussain walked into the crew room with a discernible smirk and said, "How would you chaps like to go to a freezing city called Munich"? It didn't sink in for a moment nor did we gather as to who was being addressed by the boss. As expected, the pet of all the seniors, Butch, took the initiative and asked, "Sir, is this about going the Yankee way with US aid?" There was a happy commotion as FS shook his head in the affirmative saying that the names of the first batch would be announced shortly, and those not included would follow soon. The rest of the day turned into great excitement, more I think from the thought of travelling abroad for the first time, than what awaited us by way of new and state-of-the art aircraft.

As the names trickled in, there were shouts of joy from all of us who were selected for the courses to West Germany followed by conversion on the swept back F-86 Sabre jet of Korean War fame. There was a movie showing in town with

John Wayne as the American fighter pilot and Janet Leigh as a Soviet fighter pilot. This movie called *Jet Pilot* was watched by all of us from the 'Lavender Hill' mob led by Butch, the natural leader in all such undertakings.

We wore uniforms and tilted peak caps in the style of WW-II pilots. God, what show-offs we were!

Those were very heady days as we planned and dreamed about our first trip abroad. As the departure date drew closer the hype increased and we were packed off for the trip on a USAF Military Air Transport aircraft. We were soon airborne heading for some destination en route to Wiesbaden, the final point of disembarkation. I vividly recall the joie de vivre that permeated on board the aircraft amongst our crowd. Half an hour out of Mauripur the public address system came alive and the captain of the aircraft spoke with a heavy drawl through his nasal passage. "This is the captain speaking, I regret to announce that we are (just then we could sense the aircraft start to turn) experiencing some problems with one of the engines and are returning to Mauripur. We estimate it will be a few hours before we can be on our way again". There was deathly silence as we heard the ominous announcement and we conjured up visions of landing and being told that our trip was off and other horrible possibilities. So pessimistic and disappointed were we juniors, that someone from our crowd said, "Why can't he fly straight on for the half hour he will take to land us back?

Then he could land outside Pakistan." But that was not to be.

Finally, in the early evening hours we were herded back onto the plane and this time we landed west of Karachi in the city of Dhahran in Saudi Arabia. This was a desolate

outpost of the US Air Force. Our next stop turned out to be an eye opener. This was our first glimpse of a European city, Athens in Greece. We were allowed to disembark for one hour and we passed through the terminal into the airport Duty Free shopping area. We the younger lot, were absolutely stunned by the array of beautiful shops, restaurants and especially the salesgirls, all young and beautiful. Wide-eyed and in a trance we must have looked like a bunch of morons.

FS and Mitty, having been accustomed to such sights during their courses abroad, were highly amused at our awe-struck demeanour. Butch signalled me to follow him to one of the counters full of Greek souvenirs. It was not a coincidence that the sales girl was a stunner. Butch started chatting her up in his debonair style and tried to convince her that this was a dreamand, unless she pinched his arm and he felt the sting, he would wake up and she would be gone.

It seemed to have worked but she was even smarter than Butch. She said, "You buy a souvenir and I will promise you will wake up tomorrow and every day to find the 'Venus de Milo' statue next to you, reminding you that you were really in Athens and that you spoke to me." Not easily defeated, Butchinsisted she pinch him first before he parted with his money. Both of us bought a 10 inch statue of Venus, while she gave Butch a cute pinch. Taking a cue from the maestro, I asked her name and if she would sign on the statue. She did and we walked away, feeling it was our first minor conquest. The statue stayed with me for years and I always remembered the first encounter under Butch's lead.

Awe-Struck

The rest of the journey was uneventful and a bit hazy, owing to the time lapse. What I recall well is settling down in the

BOQs, which were large and sparsely furnished rooms. Butch, Jamal and I roomed together. The winter of Furstenfeldbruck was severe and snow fall a common daily phenomenon. In fact most of the colleagues had never seen such snow fall. I had been brought up in Quetta and snowfall was nothing new for me. Actually, when I told people that the weather was not as cold as I had lived in, they would laugh it off. For me it was easy to take the cold especially because all the indoor areas were centrally heated, a luxury I didn't experience during my formative years in Quetta.

There were certain novelties that we younger ones observed with awe, which need to be recounted at this stage. Upon reflection, we felt as though we had been transported from medieval times into the space age. But in all fairness, as we entered into this new realm of sophistication, there was something real about the tradition we had left behind. Indeed, our attitude towards flying the Furies and later on, the Attacker, was a vestige of the reckless, gung-ho Battle of Britain style and most of the operational missions we flew were against the Faqir of Ipi and the hordes (*lashkar*) launched by the Afghan King to capture the northern areas of Dir, Bajaur and Swat.

For us, the entire arrival procedure, the issue of flying kits, our first shell helmet (instead of the cloth one of British make), the Officers' Club, its huge oblong bar and several eating places were highly organised and worked like clockwork. All activities were documented and operating procedures, timings and code of conduct were strictly observed by one and all. For us, a somewhat unruly bunch, it was a major change to which we had to adapt and become experts in a very short time. There was little margin for error and all the aggression and initiative had to be marshalled into professional focus. The most peculiar element of all this indoctrination or rather conversion into

the American system was that those persons who had been our commanders and guided us through life had suddenly become our equals and at par, since we all had student status. This by no means affected our respect and admiration for them but a whole metamorphosis had come about.

The flying training began on T-33 trainer aircraft. As mentioned earlier, this was a far cry from the Attacker we had been flying. It was luxurious and for us a highly sophisticated machine. To start with, we were put through an academics phase known as OJT (On the Job Training). This was really hard for all of us because our concept of flying so far had been 'stick and rudder' and 'fly by the seat of your pants'.

FS Hussain, understandably, was the first to go solo on a T-33 after two dual missions; proudly, I was the second to be sent solo after four dual sorties.

My instructor, at the start, was Captain Ralph Johnston, a very serious and professional flyer as well as a Korean War veteran. His highly demanding standards peeved me in the beginning, but I soon realized that I was extremely lucky to be his pupil. My first solo flight was like a dream, a nervous one at that.

I carried out the mission as planned, performing all the complexities of moving from one radar controller to another, finally arriving in the general flying area.

Climbing to 20,000 ft, I levelled-off on top of a cloud under a clear blue sky and the sun shining bright. After performing some stalls and recoveries, I carried out some loops, clover leafs and chandelles which were all new manoeuvres for us who had been trained in the British concept of aerobatics.

Every sortie was precisely timed and we had to arrive overhead the runway at a precise time, in contact with the control zone and to follow the instructions meticulously for a radio compass let-down. At 500 ft we had to switch to Ground Control Approach (GCA) frequency while still in thick cloud. The GCA set me up for a very precise, controlled descent, where the rate of descent had to be very exact.

Ten feet up or down and the controller would tell you very authoritatively to watch the rate of descent. The cloud base could be as low as 200 ft above ground level and one could feel one's bottom quivering from the proximity to the ground.

I think I must have been holding my breath when the controller informed me my distance from the touchdown point. Suddenly the approach lights came into sight and I let go of my held breath and called contact with the runway.

The landing was fortunately normal and I turned off at the end onto the taxi-track. Very excited, for a mission completed safely and successfully, I did not know that it wasn't over as yet. As I was about 100 yards from the parking apron, the taxi-track which was slippery with sleet, sent me into a skid. Our briefing was to turn into the skid gently until the aircraft was aligned on the taxi-track. This didn't help and my aircraft kept skidding uncontrolled, nearing scores of parked aircraft. The controller had told me not to use brakes which I wasn't in any case. Luckily, the aircraft stopped close to the edge of the parking apron. The controller told me to switch off the aircraft, which I did instantly. It was a close call and I felt helpless. In a few minutes I was towed back into parking position. As I unstrapped to leave the aircraft, I was really apprehensive of any repercussions of the last 30 seconds on the future of my flying. However, my instructor had already arrived at my

aircraft and gave me a hand to climb down. I didn't need to give any explanation for the skid because he said to me, "Hey, you did a good job on the GCA and landing; there isn't much you can do to halt a skid on this god-damned sleeted taxi-way unless they use the snow plough". I was relieved.

One of our instructors, Mahalman was a WW-II veteran with 200 bombing missions to his credit. He was an incredible person with a powerful personality.

The others were even more celebrated; one of them had some 50 kills to his credit. Soon we were to meet one of the famous Luftwaffe aces, Col Johannes Steinhoff - the fighter pilot with a burnt face whose name was mentioned in the same vein as Richthofen and other aces. He was our co-pupil and after completing all the flying training in Germany and later, on fighter aircraft in the USA, he started to lay the foundations of the new post-War Luftwaffe. He was promoted to the rank of a General and remained the Chief of the new Luftwaffe for many years. I had the pleasure of getting to know him at a personal level in the mid-seventies through a good friend Admiral Fred Bardshar, who had been the Vice Chief of US Naval Staff.

FS for Flight Safety?

Flying progressed from basic to advanced phase. The only unusual incident happened because FS got bored with such elementary training. One day FS and I were airborne for general flying in different areas but in the same time slot. I was in the training area and the weather had cleared for a change, which gave unlimited visibility and hence an awesome panorama of beautiful fields and neat towns came into view. I was in a loop when I heard the familiar voice on the radio as had been pre-planned before take-off. FS asked, "*kidhar ho*"(where are you). I answered, "*jheel ke maghreb*

main" (west of the lake). There was a big lake in the flying area near Wiesbaden, which was to be our rendezvous point.

FS came back on the radio and said, "*chakar lagao main aa raha hoon*" (start circling, I am coming). So I went into a steep turn enjoying the moment till he called contact, of-course in Urdu, and joined up with me. I levelled off and waited for his signal. He rotated his finger meaning I should loop. I did and he maintained immaculate formation on my wing. Then followed a roll and a chandelle. This went on for a while and then he broke-off to return as our mission time was coming to end. So, happily we returned and landed back safely. We thought that was a great change from the routine. I requested FS that if there was another opportunity I should get a chance to do the same. He agreed, but that was not to be. Before the end of the day we were all asked to proceed to the briefing room for an address by the Squadron Commander, Major Smallen.

We had met the Major in Pakistan before our departure. The USAF had sent its formation aerobatics team to Mauripur Station on a goodwill trip. The team of T-33s was led by Major Smallen, who, upon his return had managed to emulate Rahim Khan (the Attacker belly landing at Sonmiani, after running out of fuel) by landing his formation in the desert near Dhahran, out of fuel. There must have been nearly a 100 students in the briefing room, when we were addressed by the commander. After the usual pep talk about safety and flying standards, Major Smallen came to the prime purpose of the short notice congregation. He said, "Now there are some hot-rods around here that make me uncomfortable. Today, you Major Hoosain (FS Hussain) violated the basic tenet of flying safety; I can send you packing home and you can do all the low-level aerobatics you want and I know you are damned good at it, but it won't

work here. However, I will ground you for one week and you can cool your shins.

Remember, we know all the languages that are spoken here except one, and that's got to be Pakistani". That was the curt message from the Squadron Commander, who had enough authority to have taken an even harsher action but having witnessed FS perform during the stay of the USAF Aerobatics Team, he showed consideration which was welcomed by all of us. The pleasant and surprising part was that I got away scot-free!

The USAF in Germany had a frequency monitoring agency and the monitor had heard a strange language - not Spanish or Italian, not even Russian. The radar network must have analyzed all the signatures being painted, plus the join up of two aircraft, identified each flight authorization and come to the obvious conclusion that the alien language had to be Pakistani. Then the timing of the transmission between FS and me, and the two of us being airborne in the same time block caused us to be identified. That must have raised alarms and hence the whole ploy of Smallen unravelling the incident during the flash de-brief.

This episode remained the talk of Fursty (short for the training base) for weeks to come. The course ended with no further incident and ten of us were selected to proceed to the USA.

In the Hotbed of Fighters

We arrived in Phoenix, Arizona, three days after we commenced our journey. We had to get to a little town which was at the end of the long cross country trip. The base was known as Williams Air Force Base - the Combat Crew Training Base. We had no difficulty finding the Base as

directions were clearly marked on the main route. We arrived in the afternoon on a sizzling hot day, which reminded me of my childhood days in Jacobabad. We had arrived at the hotbed of fighter flying, where we were to be converted to warriors and not mere fighter pilots.

We settled into the new environment very quickly and comfortably. The general ambiance was different from Germany and more casual and friendly.

The first few weeks were all about OJT, learning about the F-86 technical details with a lot of tests and much study. The simulator training was a real drag but had significant bearing on our overall grades because we had to master all the procedures of the USAF flying training system. The American approach to fighter flying was extremely well organized and flight safety was the lynch pin of it all, without compromising the operational standards. Then the day of my first solo arrived. The flying instructor assigned to me was a young Korean War veteran, as they liked calling themselves. Lieutenant Mansfield was a tall and very handsome fighter pilot. We had almost comparable experience, notwithstanding his war record and the fact that his entire flying was limited to some hours on T-33s but mostly on F-86 Sabre jets. It was standard practice to have an IP chase you in the first two missions. It was a different experience to fly a swept back wing fighter from any thing that I had flown before. Now I was ready for the more exciting phase of flying. Our group completed the combat training with the USAF with distinction.

Time had soon come when I was really anxious to get back home and apply all that we had learnt in an indigenous environment. Finally, the day came when we packed our meagre belongings and boarded an aircraft back for McGuire Air Force Base in Trenton, New Jersey, where we

had started from. We had a two day wait before we caught the MATS Super Constellation for Pakistan.

'The Group' and the New Air Force

Upon return, we were all given two weeks joining time to our new units, with their new equipment, the F-86s. It was wonderful to be home with my parents, my brothers and my dear, wonderful sister. The gifts I carried were basically perfumes and other cosmetics for the ladies, a few pairs of woollen socks for dad and little knick knacks for my two brothers. Forus the most exciting gadget was the tape recorder, which I carried with me to my home in Quetta. It was a novel thing and as the word got around to my friends, there was a real crowd every day to see the marvels of science. Time went by quickly, and before I knew it was time to report to PAF Station Mauripur (later to become Masroor named after my first Squadron Commander).

The difference this time around was that I was more excited about the new air force we were going to be a part of, with its enormous professional opportunities. As always my sister Kausar packed a roast chicken stuffed with *mash ki daal*(lentils) and *shami kebabs*between layers of two big *parathas*. I was always seen off at the railway station by my friend Minoo Marker, the prodigal son of the wealthy and famous Parsee family who owned a big pharmaceutical manufacturing business. Minoo always carried a basket meant to carry fruit but this one would have a couple of beer bottles for the long journey to Karachi. He would sidetrack my dad on the station and place the basket under my seat in the first class compartment. Bidding farewell to my dad and brothers, I would hug old Minoo and whisper thanks in his ear for the gesture.

On arrival at Mauripur, the reception had our room plan and I found Sarfaraz Rafiqui and Sattar Chaudhry sharing one room and Tinchoo and I sharing the adjacent room with a common bathroom for all four. What a coincidence, we were all from the 13th GD (P) Course. On Monday morning we all reported to the Station Adjutant to fill in arrival reports and get our posting orders. I was posted to my old unit, No 11 Squadron. The moment I stepped in the squadron crew room, I had my first pleasant surprise to see Butch busy with the newly posted young pilots like Kamal and seniors including Nizam and Shahid Hussain. I embraced Butch and wished the others formally because I didn't know any of them. Butch said that the Squadron Commander wanted to see me right away. "Who is it?" I asked, hoping it was not one of the propeller types of Peshawar vintage (with the exception of that great officer and a gentleman, Masroor Hossain). A few of them had come to Germany for short conversion and were likely candidates for command. "You don't know?" Butch asked. "No, I just got in last night from Quetta," I replied, still waiting for his answer as we came right in front of the CO's office. "Mitty, who else", Butch replied. "Oh, wonderful!", I said with true joy. I knocked and entered.

Mitty could be very dramatic at times if he wanted. But the problem was no one could tell when he was serious and when he was just kidding. "Oh, hello, what are you doing here; don't tell me you have been thrust upon me." I wasn't sure what to make from this unwelcome comment. So I said I had come where I was ordered by the Station Adjutant, adding with obvious hurt, "Didn't you want me in your unit, Sir"? To my utter relief he laughed out loud and said, "Get yourself outfitted and get your Operating Manual out, we should start flying in a couple of days". So we did, and so began a fast forward into some of the most exciting times in the life of a fighter pilot, under the command and

supervision of an invincible fighter pilot and Squadron Commander.

The aircraft were being allotted as they arrived and new units were being formed, all at Mauripur. Soon we had No 5, 14, 15, and 16 Squadrons equipped with F-86s; No 2 Squadron was raised as a T-33 Conversion Unit. No 20

Squadron was really a small flight with RT-33 recce aircraft. No 9 Squadron remained a Fury Squadron with all the toads in it. Each unit had a group of UStrained fighter pilots.

It may be slightly uncharitable to say this but for the reader it is important to know the anatomy of how the unwritten code for a pilot's potential worked in the minds of our superiors. The best pilots were nearly always sent to a fighter squadron; naturally therefore, everyone at the time of getting their wings at the Flying College wanted to go the fighter pilot route. Only the top graders made it, however. They were sent for fighter conversion, others to transport units and the last category to rescue flights to fly helicopters or other rescue aircraft. Then there was a category of average fighter pilots, who had lesser potential of making fighter leaders, and these ended up in No 20 Recce Squadron. There were exceptions of course, in that, some of the top pilots were sent to the transport squadron to keep the unit from hitting the professional pit as it were.

Prominent amongst these were Lanky Ahmed and Zahid Butt.

Our course, the 13th GD (P), which was reputed the best course Risalpur College had ever produced, made the maximum contribution to the Transport Wing by entry of Masood Khan (Wing Under Officer of our course), Shamim

Ahmed, Mehmood Choonara, M Iqbal, and Malik Sohail (all outstanding pilots).

Later Iqbal (alias Saab) also joined the transport wing. This apparently was a wise high command decision to stop the rapid decline of the professional calibre of the transport unit. The decision paid off extremely well if one looked at it from posterity's viewpoint. All of them from our course became VVIP pilots in time and were awarded the exceptional pilot's Golden Eagle.

Shamim and M Iqbal ('Bala') went on to join the Bomber Wing when these were formed; Shamim died in my arms after suffering a heart attack at a very young age, and 'Bala' Iqbal commanded the secret RB-57 Elint unit and carried out some incredible flying over Soviet territory. He was shot down by our own anti-aircraft guns over Rahwali by the sheer stupidity of the crew manning the radar and the guns. It became apparent slowly, that the high command policy was to earmark fighter pilots who had the potential to be future commanders and leaders. A lot of the rest were sent to the training command, the jet conversion unit as flight instructors and the better ones to the bomber squadrons, after they were formed.

This, by no means, is being judgmental, nor has this theory held good for everyone. There were persons from the Bomber Wing such as Air Cdre Bill Latif who went on to command the best fighter squadrons and the hotbed of fighter and tactical command like PAF Sargodha.

By now, we were into the year 1958 and all the Squadrons were getting settled. Armament firing had begun at the Sonmiani Range and pilots were hitting really high scores. The old 11 Squadron crowd was still rallying around Mitty and FS Hussain, and the Mauripur Mess was a lively place

buzzing with the who's who of the PAF. While most of us from 'The Group' which went to the USA, brought back a Grundig tape recorder as the symbol of our savings, there was a smarty embedded in our group. This we discovered for the first time when Waqar Azim dazzled everyone the day he drove up in his brand new

Chevy Biscayne, 10 yards long and WOW!

Mitty was trying to muster candidates for a lobster thermador dinner at the Beach Luxury Hotel that evening when Waqar was sighted driving towards us in his new ship-size Biscayne. One fellow from 'The Group' squealed to Mitty, "Sir, look at that babe; if only you had kicked us out from the bar in Germany and the States and ordered compulsory savings, we would all be mobile today!".

Mitty grunted and said "And miss all the fun you had in this one life?"

About this time Flt Lt Rehmat Khan was also posted to the Conversion School. I had a good rapport with him and went out quite a lot with him and his fiancée, the lovely Anna. One day, he introduced me to the rather handsome Flt Lt Sadruddin, who had returned from abroad and was also posted to one of the fighter squadrons. I consider it important to mention these two colleagues because we were destined to share many memorable moments in the future, especially Sadruddin from whom I learnt a lot about flying in general and armaments in particular.

Rehmat and Anna met this all American beautiful girl, Lynn Gautier, daughter of the head of the US aid program in Pakistan. I was introduced to her one day and we all had a picnic with Wg Cdr Gerry Khan and his wife at PAF

Korangi Creek, where Gerry was the Station Commander. It was a memorable day and I was in love (oh, always!).

5

COMING OF AGE

This was a period of peace in the Sub-continent; the Indians were licking their wounds after a humiliating defeat by the Chinese, and trying to rebuild and re-organise their defence services. Consequently, there was no sign of any impending hostilities from across the border. As a result, the leadership had to visualize ways and means to create challenges and competition for these eight newly formed tactical squadrons.

It was a great day when we heard the news that the highly respected Pakistani officer, a consummate professional and a person of redoubtable character, Air Mshl Asghar Khan, had been chosen to become the first indigenous Commander-in-Chief of the PAF at the young age of 34 years. He had been an outstanding officer, one who had the reputation of refusing the order from the British Force Commander to strafe a convoy of *Hurs* (disciples of Pir of Pagara) because it comprised civilians including women and children.

After aborting the mission when the British Commander showed his displeasure, Asghar Khan had told him that he would only obey a lawful command, and that this was a wholly unlawful one. Such was the character of the officer who would be our leader for the eight formative years of the newly equipped air force.

This was one time in the life of the PAF that everyone in the service was happy and proud to have Air Mshl Asghar Khan

as the new Commander-in-Chief. For him this was an invincible challenge and a God-given opportunity to create history, and this he did magnificently. Another factor which was very pertinent at this moment in history was that Asghar Khan inherited a most willing band of officers and men, imbued with deep patriotic spirit and a resolve to realise the hopes and objectives laid down by the Quaid-e-Azam. It would be prudent to say that Asghar Khan inherited an air force which had all the positive factors to build upon, even though it lacked the desired resources. What the PAF

at the time did possess was the leadership that would lead from the front, through the highest personal example.

For better or for worse, US aid became available at the time even though it was inadequate in comparison to what was needed. The 100 or so F-86 fighters and a handful of bombers were made available as part of the American military aid for, what I consider, selling our sovereignty. It was in this milieu that the newly formed Squadrons were provided direction for combat readiness, as well as to have elements trained for the public display of air power. Air Mshl Asghar Khan directed Gp Capt Nur Khan to task the fighter command with demanding professional events. Nur Khan did two things: he told 'Mitty' Masud to build a world class formation aerobatics team, the likes of the Thunder Birds of the USAF (United States Air Force) and secondly, to train for fire power displays which became de rigueur during the successive years of peace time flying.

These exercises were to be the harbinger of the PAF rising up to the level of a world class air force.

The Falcons in Action

The Falcons Four team was finally ready to show its consummate aerobatics performance to a wider public. One day after a practice run in the flying training area, the leader opened us into loose formation and headed for base. Before entering the circuit he told the tower that the Falcons would be performing over the base. Adrenaline started pumping hard as we started our first dive onto the runway. The leader took us into a steep dive aiming for the beginning of Runway 27 and started to recover from the dive at about 150 ft above the runway, clocking 480 Kts (nautical miles per hour). The first manoeuvres began with our formation team, ten ft between each aircraft, zooming up towards the sky, with Sonmiani beach in the background. From the vertically up position the formation turned 180 degrees and inverted on our backs as we half-rolled, diving onto the runway again to perform a gentle climbing slow roll commencing at 200 ft AGL.

This was followed by a chandelle manoeuvre to position for a vertical loop during which we changed position to line astern (by sliding behind each other) during the pull up. Over the top of the loop we stayed in astern position 10-15 ft behind each other, and changing to line abreast (moving abreast of the leader's aircraft) as we bottomed out over the runway again. Panting, huffing and sweating we stayed glued at 10 ft from the leader's wings. Up again, we changed to echelon right (all aircraft slide across to the right of the leader at a 45

degree angle). This meant I had to skim close under the two aircraft and fit in as the third, as No 4 would slide onto my wing just as the leader commenced a slow pull-up for a slow roll to the left with three aircraft immaculately positioned on his right side, as though tied by a wire.

Tremendous precision was required to perform these manoeuvres. Up again changing back to box formation, the leader would enter into a 5 'G' steep turn over the runway at barely 50 ft above ground level. This was perhaps the hardest manoeuvre at such high 'Gs' and nearly 90 degree bank, at the end of a constant 5 'Gs' for 10 minutes or so. The end of a 360 degree turn was the final manoeuvre followed by formation landing in box. Poor No 4 had a tough job to remain in position dead behind the leader because he had to touch the runway before the leader to steer clear of his jet-wash. As we rolled into the parking apron, we saw a crowd awaiting us. As we switched off, our colleagues broke into applause. Very conscious of ourselves, we alighted and walked up to the crowd, thrilled by its roars of praise.

From here on many air displays were held for visiting dignitaries, and Pakistani leaders. These displays started typically with a sonic boom by four aircraft, the simplest of all the phases of display. This was followed by solo aerobatics, and quite often these displays were preceded by very impressive fire power demonstrations. During these displays, the most awesome armament munitions dropped were the napalm bombs, carried by F-86 aircraft, flying at 35

ft AGL, approaching the pyramid of tar drums which simulated the target. Four aircraft, in loose finger-four formation would drop eight napalms simultaneously, creating a massive ball of fire. Its core devoid of all oxygen, it would burn even rocks and all else over a few hundred yards. All this was done close enough for the spectators to feel the intense heat of the burning petroleum jelly. The spectacle always ended on the most spectacular and demanding part: 'The Falcons in Action'.

The display which deserves special mention here is the one held in honour of Chinese Premier Zhou-en-Lai. I am not certain of the date, but this was the first official formation aerobatics display by the original 'Falcons Four' team.

After initiating the first loop, as we were about 60 degrees above the horizon, a loud bang in my aircraft spiked up my adrenaline already pumping furiously. I called, "Leader, bang in my cockpit," while staying right in position. "Stay with me," he ordered as we inverted. On our back, he glanced at my tail pipe and asked me to check if the fire warning light was 'on'. I answered in the negative as we came over the top of the loop. We went through the routine without further transmission.

The show ended, we taxied-in and parked in front of the spectators stand.

As we climbed out of the cockpits, and stepped down, I saw the big access panel on the left of my fuselage had ripped off, hence the bang. Mitty, Butch and Shuja'at came around to examine the missing panel. Mitty made my day as he said, "Well done, my boy." We then went towards the crowd and lined up with the others. Premier Zhou-en-Lai was introduced to the participating pilots and as he came to me, Mitty told him (instantly translated by the interpreter) that I had performed despite an emergency situation in my aircraft. He looked me in the eye with such burning intensity that I can recapture the laser-like focus even now. He moved forward and patted me on the shoulder. This was a prize I shall cherish all my life.

Legend has it that Air Mshl Asghar Khan had not been satisfied with the Falcon Team with just four aircraft and asked 'Mitty' Masud to do something more spectacular. This is how the Falcons Seven came into existence. The highly

demanding Air Chief was still not satisfied and ordered that for the impending visit by the King of Afghanistan, the PAF must rise to the occasion and create a spectacle with a performance unmatched. Thus the 16 F-86 fighters formed the 'Falcons' team and propelled the PAF into the galaxy of the powerful air forces of the world. Nine more pilots of exceptional flying calibre were chosen from the fighter command.

The training for the final display gained impetus as the entire professional energies of every fighter squadron were focused on this first mega display. One by one, like individual solitaires, Mitty fitted each new member of the Falcon 16

Team like a consummate craftsman, to create a perfect diamond of 16. The aircraft sliced vertically upwards, going on their backs and then hurtling down like falcons for their prey, hitting their own jet wash left behind at the start of the loop, to complete a precise circle. This process was easier said than done.

Each of the additional nine pilots had to go through very rigorous formation aerobatics practice every day, relentlessly. Each pilot had to start with practice on the side of the leader's wing till he was perfect.

On 2nd February 1958, on a clear, crisp morning, it was the dawn of a new age. A sense of urgency and intrinsic purpose was clearly visible in the way the 16 pilots walked towards their gleaming fighters. Everyone bore a solemn look, for the moment of truth was staring them in the face. Assisted by the ground crews, the pilots carried out their external checks and then strapped into their cockpits. A few hundred yards north of the tarmac, were thousands of spectators gathered to witness this new born air force go

into action. Excitement was surging everywhere at Mauripur. The rumbling of fighters taking-off had begun as the 'sonic boomers' and fire power display aircraft rolled down the runway.

Finally the 'Falcon 16' got airborne in immaculate four-diamond formation take-offs.

About ten minutes later, Mitty leading 16 aircraft appeared as a mushroom of smoke on the western horizon as the commentator drew the attention of the eager spectators. These included the King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan, Pakistan's leaders and the entire diplomatic corps. As the aircraft approached the beginning of the runway, the commentator very quickly announced that world aviation history was about to be created in a few more seconds. The 16 Falcons pulled up in the middle of the runway and made a most spectacular view against the clear horizon; a 16 aircraft diamond, moving vertically up and over the top as the viewers tilted their heads back so as to not lose sight of the spectacle being performed. Then the 16 Falcons came swooping down as though aiming at the gasping and clapping crowd, to complete a loop precisely where they had commenced. The rear nine aircraft broke off like a banana stripped simultaneously into nine precise peels. The seven pulled up, the distance between aircraft decreasing from

20 ft to 10 ft, changing positions during the

vertical pull up, making the letter 'F' for Falcons, and continued into the next series of complex aerobatics changing positions in each manoeuvre till the second sequence was complete.

Three from the rear peeled off, leaving the core, the four original falcons.

This signalled the 'Falcons Four' to tuck in as earlier described into very tight close formation, to perform some very precise and awesome manoeuvres. These ended in the most demanding of the entire saga, a 5+ 'G' extremely tight 360

degree turn over the runway which was the grand finale. The four landed in close box formation to the deafening applause of the exuberant crowd, as told to us by our compatriots watching from the spectators' gallery. The PAF had just made aviation history.

The day after we had performed in the air display and thanked Allah for our success, we were told that the loop would have to be performed again, this time around over the city of Karachi, for the world renowned British magazine *Flight and Aeroplane*, whose crew had arrived to photograph this event. This was somewhat more dangerous than performing over Mauripur, owing to the huge bird menace over Karachi city. But luck favoured us and the loop was performed to perfection on that day. The Falcons made the cover of *Flight and Aeroplane* magazine in its next issue.

Our mother air force, the RAF, which had laid our foundations, was shocked out of their wits one morning when they heard from the British Air Advisor in Karachi, that this ex-colonial flying club of Attacker fame had flown 16 F-86s fighters in perfect diamond close formation through a loop. It was in this background that the RAF demonstrated its prowess by performing a loop with 21 aircraft soon after. Well done for the RAF - nonetheless, the PAF had taken the initiative. The 16 Falcons captured by camera, in perfect diamond formation, vertically up against the Sonmiani coastline shall remain as though caught in suspended animation, for all eternity.

A Rung up the Ladder

Soon after this historic air display I was promoted to the rank of Flight Lieutenant and in September 1958, I was posted to No 16 Squadron as the Flight Commander. This was yet to be another milestone in my life because I had stepped up to the junior commander's level, where I would be teaching young fighter pilots the art of combat flying. Soon I realized that my training was not really over. I had entered yet another phase of learning and there were some humble achievements. Firstly, the new Squadron Commander was a pleasant surprise. Sqn Ldr Sadruddin, was an outstanding fighter pilot and a gentleman, whom I had already known from earlier days in Mauripur and had developed professional as well as personal respect for him. He was the type who kept to himself and didn't show much emotion, but was very correct in all his undertakings. He was sincere rather than smooth. Quiet he was, but once in a while, he would let his hair down at the bar, and entertain all of us with some superb accordion music, a la Mitty and Butch.

I was most fortunate to be his deputy because he placed his trust in me and that, I learnt, was the linchpin to command respect and get absolute loyalty from a subordinate. To this day I have not forgotten that I learnt a great deal from him in all aspects of fighter flying, as well as devotion to one's profession and the meaning of excellence. Consequently, my respect for him has remained intact.

Sadruddin was deeply committed to aviation and technology, which placed him well apart from the average Squadron Commander. He had, therefore, a scientific approach to flying. I learnt the art of high scoring in all phases of armament by intently listening to his briefs and de-briefs and watching his camera films. The value of

camera debriefs assumed an important role in my success as a fighter leader and commander. My personal scores soared after I started to watch my camera films seriously. I passed my knowledge to the squadron pilots. I would not program a pilot for an armament or an air combat mission until I had assessed with him, his performance as seen through the gun camera. In a short period, we were all getting to be better shots in comparison to our compatriots in other squadrons.

A few realities which came early to me in life about professionalism and excellence were to be my beacon in the life ahead. First and foremost, at any level of leadership and command, you had to show younger pilots how to do it – and not merely tell them to do it. Secondly, you had to lead your men in the air, not from the ground with your rank. Thirdly, everyone you led had to be damned sure that you would willingly put your life at stake for the cause; only then would they follow you to the end, even if it meant sure death. I lived by these principals and practiced them with conviction.

With all its triumphs, this was also the year of a tragedy which was felt throughout the PAF. A top level visit by some dignitaries was expected on 24th of June, 1958. Sqn Ldr Khalid Khan, an exceptional pilot and an officer of great potential, besides being the younger brother of Air Mshl Asghar Khan, was given the task to put up a fire power demonstration. He borrowed me from my Squadron and we practiced for a couple of days. On this fateful day, Khalid Khan called me and asked me to come to his Squadron at pack-up time as he would have the aircraft ready for a final rehearsal. I protested and said, “Sir, please it is sizzling hot, even the birds are in their nests, we don’t really need any more practice, it’s a piece of cake”. He commanded me to be on time.

We were in the second attack for a strafing run, with Flt Lt Shahzada as No 2 and me in No 3 position. No 4 had aborted earlier. As the leader pulled out of the dive, he called smoke in the cockpit. I had called in, but as I noticed smoke billowing out of his aircraft I called off the attack and told him he may be on fire. He immediately called, "Fire warning light on, am ejecting." He was absolutely calm and in total control as I heard him and saw his canopy flying off, followed instantly by the egress system ejecting the seat upwards. I called No 2 and asked him to keep the leader in sight and that I would direct an ambulance towards his landing site. I changed the channel to ATC and called for an ambulance informing the controller of bail out by the leader. I advised the ATC about the shortest route to the scene. Having done that, I switched back to the range frequency hoping to see Khalid Khan waving from the ground. I didn't see him in the area where I last left him. I asked No 2, "Where is the leader?", as I didn't see any parachute in the air or underneath. No 2 replied in a panicky voice, "No 3, leader has fallen down, seems his chute has collapsed." "Oh my God, what are you talking about," I yelled back, "I saw his chute deploy." Then I went towards Khalid Khan's location as pointed out by No 2. His body seemed tiny from 2,000 ft as I dove towards him. In a few seconds I flew over a very still, spread-eagled body lying away from the parachute.

The rescue party arrived and collected his body. We were soon attending his untimely funeral, shattered to have lost one of the best fighter pilots and a future leader of the time. There were several theories expounded by the investigators as to how his parachute collapsed after having been deployed. It was suspected that the reason could have been the jet blast from Shahzada's aircraft as he circled around the descending chute. In the final analysis, however, the reason for the accident was assigned to Khalid Khan having

opened the parachute release clasps (which hold the chute to the body of the pilot) much too early. This caused him to free fall over 100 ft resulting in his death. Asghar Khan had earlier lost another brother Asif, who crashed a decade earlier near Gilgit, in a Harvard aircraft.

PAF Draws First Blood

In March 1959, a locally organized armament camp was held at Peshawar for competition between all the fighter squadrons. One of the phases was air-to-air ciné mission, since there was no live air-to-air firing range of the required standard in the North. We had been fully prepared for the challenge. The squadron fared very well. My personal scores set some records. Every pilot was to fly 10 armament sorties covering all phases of armaments as well as ciné missions. My strafing average for ten missions was 61%, but in skip bombing was only 50%. My highest score in strafing was 85%, the highest in the PAF till that time, followed by one of junior most pilots Flg Off Aliudin from No 19

Squadron, who later bagged the highly coveted Sher Afgan (lion-slayer) Trophy.

In September 1959, Sqn Ldr HH Karim ('Hood Hood') asked Sqn Ldr Sadruddin, with the permission of the Station Commander, Gp Capt Ghulam Haider, to lend my services to his Squadron (No 15) to bring it up to steam. My history with Karim hadn't been all that fantastic, but Sadruddin assured me that it was a compliment by the Squadron Commander of No 15 Squadron, who thought I would induce some professionalism into his pilots. It was during these four months or so that on Eid-ul-Fitr day, an Indian Canberra ventured into Pakistan's airspace, with a view to photographing our vital installations. The Indian leadership thought that on this sacred day, at the end of the holy

month of Ramadan, the PAF would be either rejoicing, sleeping or in the mosque, praying. But they had a surprise coming to them. When the Duty Operations Officer contacted me at around 0800 Hrs and told me that there was a 'hot scramble', I ran for my flying coverall. Arriving at the Squadron ten minutes later, I discovered that Flt Lt MN Butt and a young pilot Flg Off Yunis were in hot pursuit of the Indian intruder flying at 47,000 ft. I contacted the air defence unit handling the interception, but was told to wait, since the interception was in progress. No more than ten minutes later I got a call from Plt Off Rab Nawaz that the intruding Indian Canberra had been shot down over Rawalpindi.

Twenty minutes later, two figures emerged from the two F-86s that had intercepted the Indian bandit. Funnily, Sqn Ldr Butt seemed to have his chin hitting his knees while Flg Off Yunis had his thirty two teeth gleaming from his ebony complexion. Butt had gone 'Winchester' (which meant that he had fired all of 1,800 rounds) and missed the bomber, but his wingman had shot him down. This was first blood for the PAF.

The credit for shooting down the Indian Canberra indeed went to Flg Off Yunis, but the most remarkable feat in this episode was that the entire interception was conducted by a young Air Defence Controller, Plt Off Rab Nawaz (later Gp Capt). He did this through dead reckoning, working from a rudimentary Perspex sheet with a map underneath it, lying on a table in the control room. He was receiving raw data from an old radar located twenty miles away. Rab Nawaz effected a perfect interception even though he was not watching the intruder on a screen. Such was the excellence of our radar controllers who, I feel, were amongst the best in the world, yet they were unsung heroes in PAF's history. Rab Nawaz was to get another distinction when he controlled the

interception years later during the 1971 war when the first Indian Mig-21 was shot down by a very young Flg Off Maqsood Amir on his second operational mission. Kudos to this intrepid air defence maverick and indeed, to Flg Off Maqsood.

Another fact that may seem amazing today was the initiative of the Pilot Officer of the PAF who ordered the interceptor formation to shoot down the enemy bomber without wasting time to contact one of the senior staff officers at AHQ. In his opinion, the decision would have been delayed by the typical dithering of staff officers from the Operations Directorate.

Five years later, in a similar violation by yet another Indian Canberra, it was allowed to conduct the photo intelligence mission unchallenged. This was made possible because unluckily this time around, President Ayub Khan's permission had been sought by the PAF C-in-C to bring the intruder down. Permission was emphatically denied by Ayub Khan for fear of an Indian reaction. This is the most accurate version of this episode that I have been able to obtain from the persons actually involved in this feat.

First Armament Competition

By November 1959, I was back in No 16 Squadron and felt at home.

Soon I got into the groove and was told by Sadruddin to perk up the Squadron, as he had noticed the armament results were slumping. This was quite evident from the armament charts in the Flight Commander's office depicting pilots' scores. I made sure that over the next month I flew with every single pilot, section leader as well as senior pilots, to infuse urgency and pride in their mission

performance. That was when we heard that a massive armament competition was in the offing soon at PAF Mauripur and that all squadrons would move south.

The first PAF Inter-Squadron Armament Competition date was announced and we were ordered to move to Mauripur on 18th January 1960.

The move to Mauripur was smooth and we settled down quickly to begin practice missions over the next two weeks. This was a challenging and intense flying camp. Every squadron was betting on their victory. By the last week, it seemed clear that No 16 Squadron could be the winner, judging from the results of practice missions at Sonmiani Firing Range. I was extremely tense, and like a mother hen, kept my flock together during and after the day's flight. It was almost taboo to talk about anything except armaments. We breathed, discussed and slept guns and bombs.

At the end of the flying day, I would be anxiously awaiting the arrival of camera films of all the participants from No 16 Squadron in order to assess how each pilot was doing in the mission flown that day. Frame by frame, I would go over each attack, strafing, rocketry, skip bombing and most important, air-to-air firing. After each air-to-air mission, we would be biting our nails, till the target banner was dropped by the tow aircraft besides the runway, and brought in a truck to the flight lines area. Then, like keen eagles, we would swoop down onto the banner to check our hits, which were registered in different colours, representing each aircraft loaded with bullet-heads painted in a particular colour.

The colours of bullet scrape marks on the banner would thus indicate the score of the pilot who was flying that aircraft. But I considered all of the day's actual results only

symptomatic. Only after I had gone through each film, could I relate the actual results and have peace of mind.

This training built up to a crescendo by the 2nd of February, 1960. The actual competition began on 3rd February and lasted four days. The flying programme was meticulously planned and executed with absolute precision, whereby each formation of four aircraft had to adhere strictly to the take-off and on-range timing. It was like clockwork and a profound reflection of the quality of planning, maintenance and armament management. By the Grace of God, the entire campaign was executed without accident. The parade rehearsal for the award of trophies had started by the 4th of February. By this time, the huge scoreboard on high poles gave a pretty good idea as to the winning squadron.

Happily, No 16 Squadron was placed in the front as the most likely winner during the parade rehearsals. On the 6th of February, I flew my last two missions with three other pilots, and scored 100% in skip bombing and brought back an average error of 4.5 ft for four rockets fired, which was the best score in the entire competition. So, we were sitting pretty to take the Overall Best Trophy and also the individual Sher Afgan award, because our Squadron Commander, Sqn Ldr Sadruddin had achieved tremendously high scores and there was little chance of anyone beating him.

The last mission of the competition was to be flown by No 14 Squadron, which had only the skip bombing exercise left to be completed. We had calculated that even if the four pilots of No 14 Squadron placed seven bombs out of the total eight dropped through the target, we would still win. The only, but nearly impossible, danger was that they might come back with 100% skip bombing results, which would give them a very thin margin over No 16

Squadron. But that seemed improbable. As their flight landed back, the entire lot of pilots was waiting to get a signal of their performance. I vividly remember that the first pilot to switch-off his aircraft was Zaheer Massey (affectionately known as Jumbo). He stood up in his cockpit and yelled, "All eight bombs in, we got 100% hits"; they had done the impossible! I could have slaughtered Jumbo with my bare hands that day, for taking away our victory. The silver lining was that our Squadron Commander was declared the highest individual scorer. Proudly for the unit, Sqn Ldr Sadruddin had captured the coveted award of Sher Afgan (the 'Top Gun').

Launch from an Aircraft Carrier

A couple of weeks later, I was detailed as a Liaison Officer on HMS

Albion, a Royal Navy (RN) aircraft carrier, involved in a Naval-Air exercise, 'Mid-Link', between the Royal Navy, US Navy, Pak Navy and the PAF. I spent two exhilarating weeks on board the carrier. The next fifteen days were quite an experience as we lived in a closet-like cabin but with a huge bar on the quarter deck. One day at lunchtime, we all stood at the bar and I ordered a round for everyone in the group I was standing with, which included Lt Cdr Baines. I jokingly reminded Baines about the sortie on the Sea Venom fighter he had promised when we first met. He looked at his navigator and said "Mike, why don't you buy Flt Lt Haider a drink, because he will be taking your seat in the early morning dawn strike." Mike looked at me and said "You're looking for real trouble, even though I will be thrilled to spend this evening drinking at the bar without worrying about the morning. I don't know why you want to take this risk, especially with Lt Cdr Baines; he has no love for life, his or others". I told him that I was going to take my chances

with his Commanding Officer, come hell or high water. I broke off pretty early as I was to be woken up at 0300 Hrs.

On the dot of 0300 Hrs, I was woken up and asked to report to the operations room. I jumped out of my bunk, hitting my head against the cabin wall just two feet away before I steadied myself and stood for a whole minute, getting my bearings right. There, in the Ops Room, Lt Cdr Baines and six other crew members were already sipping coffee as I stumbled in. The briefing was for a low level strike against the United States Navy (USN) Essex, an American aircraft carrier with twin-engine Tracker aircraft and helicopter assets, which formed part of the US Red Force tactical task group. Commander Baines (he later came to Pakistan as the Naval and Defence Attaché), briefed me separately in the end about the procedures and my personal safety, especially during takeoff and landing. "The catapult launch is a different take-off experience, watch out for a grey-out owing to a lot of abrupt 'Gs', so keep your head firm against the headrest". He especially advised that on landing the hook engagement and deceleration would be phenomenal for a first experience; therefore, to tighten my straps as tight as strength allowed me. Jokingly he said, "If your straps have the slightest slack, you will have the gun sight imprint on your face and a broken nose". He wasn't joking as it turned out during this incredible experience.

It was truly a different experience in flying than anything I had done so far.

It was a night take-off and I sat tense though my harness was really tight. Baines gave me a glance and I gave him a thumbs-up. The radio came alive and he asked how I read him. "Loud and clear," I replied. He then gave a start up signal, from where on, in less than a minute, we were hooked to the catapult.

The take-off was noisy and sudden, but I didn't get even close to grey out even though the 'Gs' were tremendous. The rest of the formation was already joining up with promptness. Lt Cdr Baines was yelling at his wing man to stay low. I thought we were going to hit the waves any minute, which is how close we were from the surface. I had flown pretty low in my life but this was something else, droplets from the sea were streaming our canopy, further reducing the already low visibility. The leg was not too long, about 20 minutes flying time to the target - USN Essex. The leader called contact with target and No 3 called 3

helos (helicopters) hovering over the US carrier. As Baines pulled up in a high 'G' left turn diving towards the target, I spotted a Tracker just getting off. I told Baines on our intercom and he said he had contact. In the attack we flew between two helos very close and he couldn't have been more than a few feet over the mast as we buzzed past the carrier. The return to the base was uneventful and soon we were lined up with the carrier.

Baines came in at surface level for a tactical pitch-out. He told me to check my harnesses and ensure they were tight. I was trying my best to concentrate on the technique of landing on a deck. Then, totally unexpected, we had caught the hook and I thought I was going through the front of the cockpit. The deceleration was way beyond what I had imagined. It was like hitting a wall.

Then I saw the proficiency of the deck crew in recovery mode. It was an outstanding performance in co-ordination and precision, right until we were parked at the edge of the deck. I couldn't see the deck any more, just the ocean waves. After we alighted, I told Baines that from that moment on, I would have great respect for naval aviators. Thus ended one of the most exciting missions I ever flew in

peacetime. Also, it was yet another feather in my flying hat; I was the first and only PAF pilot to have flown off an aircraft carrier.

There was a sad epitaph to my twoweeks long ocean safari. Mike, the navigator whose seat I had taken that morning, had to eject after take-off near Aden a few days after I got back to my squadron. He didn't make it because the ejection was too low and his chute didn't deploy. They lost this jolly and wonderful young navigator. Such was life in this profession before technology made it possible to survive even if ejection was on the ground or on deck.

Floored ... but Still Topping!

I had met my first wife Iffat in Peshawar when she had been introduced to me by her uncle, whom I had met through a friend at the Peshawar Club. One day he had brought his family from Nowshera where they lived. At that young age it was not difficult to be smitten by a pretty girl but I tried not to think too much about her because she was engaged to be married. Two years or so later I met her by chance and discovered that she had been divorced. Empathy about the story of her break-up and the memory of our earlier encounter had me floored. We were married a few months later.

In the last week of November 1960, I was detailed for the local Fighter Leader's Course at Mauripur since the RAF had stopped taking Commonwealth pilots. I was happy to go to the Fighter Leaders' School (FLS), which had developed into a mature institution of good reputation, with very high standards of flying as well as associated subjects. I was determined to top the course. The next three months were full of knowledge, avionics, navigation planning, and hard 'no holds barred' type of flying. This was just down my alley

and I loved and cherished it the most. I topped the course with ease, which ended in the first week of March 1961. I was posted to No 5 Fighter Squadron as Flight Commander at Sargodha Station, with Sqn Ldr Qayyum (of Conversion School incident). Fortunately, this posting was short lived, as in early May 1961 I was told that I had been selected to attend the Test Pilot's course at the world famous Empire Test Pilot's School in England.

Unfortunately, the Financial Advisor Defence did not approve the foreign exchange and I ended up with my friend and course mate Flt Lt Arshad and another pilot, Flt Lt Sharbat Ali Changazi (later Air Mshl), at PAF Korangi Creek's College of Aeronautical Engineering, to attend a locally designed course to prepare us for test flying F-86s. Sqn Ldr Jang, who had been the Engineering Officer for No 14 Squadron during my posting to the Furies in 1953, was to be in charge of this course. So, it wasn't going to be all aerodynamics, aero-engines and hydraulics, but some serious elbow bending at lunchtime. The problem with me was that I had just gotten married that month and I had to travel between Mauripur and Korangi every day. Bless the (late) Arshad's soul who had a car and would give me a ride to and from the widely distant bases.

At the end of the course in June 1961, I was selected to be the Flight Commander at the prestigious FLS. I was euphoric at the turn of fate which delivered me my cherished hope of instructing at the FLS. It was also an acknowledgement of my earlier selection for the course in England, and the fact that topping the FLS course at Mauripur put me on top of the list for this appointment. It was a unique experience to teach fighter pilots the advanced art of "all-aspect combat flying."

Destiny was smiling as I received my third A-9 (Exceptional Fighter Pilot) assessed by Wg Cdr 'Bill' Latif, Officer Commanding Flying Wing and endorsed by the legendary Air Cdre FS Hussain. The official recognition came in the form of a Golden Eagle pinned on the flap of my breast pocket. This was amongst some of the first Golden Eagles awarded to fighter pilots after Independence, to the best of my knowledge. I was completely euphoric, when I walked around in uniform on and off the base. Within a few days I also received my third Green Endorsement (for flight safety) from Air Mshl Asghar Khan. So professionally, I couldn't ask for more at this early stage in my career and I was grateful to God for his benevolence.

Close Call with Death

On 19th September 1961, Sqn Ldr Sikandar ('Siki Boy'), was on a highlow-high strike mission with three students including Flt Lt Azim Daudpota (later Air Mshl), against a simulated target beyond Sukkur north of Mauripur, in the province of Sindh. Along with Flg Off Dar, I was to act as a bouncer/interceptor to intercept the formation during their run-up to the Initial Point (IP) with a view to creating confusion amongst the striking aircraft. This would allow the instructor pilot to check the response of the student leader in handling the situation. We were over the mighty Indus River and I had the formation of four in sight about four miles at 12 o'clock, just about to start their descent to the IP. I noted with surprise that I had never flown an F-86 with such a beautifully silent engine. I looked to re-check the tail number of the aircraft embossed in the front of the cockpit with the intent to fly it again. It was as though Fate had heard me and laughed at what was awaiting me in the next few seconds.

Suddenly all hell broke loose in my aircraft cockpit. It shook so violently that I couldn't read any instrument on the panel in front. I suddenly felt the throttle kicked fully back on its own and got stuck solid at the back of the quadrant. To add to the bewilderment, I noticed blurring red lights, both of them indicating fire in the forward and rear sections of the aircraft. I knew I had to eject immediately. My attempt to transmit a May Day emergency call to my wingman failed, as there was complete electrical failure. I looked over my left shoulder to spot my No 2, Flg Off Dar, and saw him dangerously close on my right wing, furiously pointing towards my rear and using his fingers in a blowing action, a standard signal for ejection in case of no communication. All this happened in less than one minute. My immediate problem was to get my wingman to break away to let me blow away my canopy prior to my ejection. I checked my rear view mirrors which were vibrating; sure as hell there was a long flame blazing out of the exhaust enveloped in thick dark smoke. Then there was the River Indus at its broadest width underneath, which was even more frightening. How would I swim if landed in the river? I could barely do 20 yards at the time. I made a quick decision. I banked 90 degrees and turned right into my wingman Dar, who broke hard right and up, as I shoved my stick down to lose height. Mercifully, the controls responded, though sluggishly.

I wanted to clear the river so I turned left towards Shikarpur city in the distance. The controls became rigid as I bent my head fully down in my lap to jettison the canopy, a drill necessary if you wanted your head still attached to your neck before ejection. That done, the air rushed in a massive gush into the cockpit. I pulled the emergency oxygen green apple, checked my chute-hook disconnected, sat fully erect, arms tucked-in to ensure I still had them attached to my body after the ejection. Then I squeezed the trigger and

woof! There was a pause as though nothing had been triggered, then suddenly the seat fired-off at a tremendous velocity and I blacked out. The body during ejection is exposed to 14 'Gs' or so for a fraction till the seat reaches 144 ft clear of the aircraft. Then as soon as I felt the blood rushing back I regained my senses and my sight. The seat was tumbling down and as I was about to stand up in the seat, I got separated by sheer linear forces and gravity. I kept tumbling down from around 25,000 ft where I had left the seat, waiting for the chute to open automatically at 14,000 ft, through a mercury actuated mechanism in the chute system which initiates the chute opening by extracting the pin which holds the chute together.

I was also ready to do this manually with my right hand gripping the ripcord. Then, with a jolt, the chute opened and the bi-colour orange and white canopy above me was an incredibly beautiful sight. It was too good for words to know I was alive and heading for Mother Earth. I was floating down without any thought about the sequence I had just been through and was just looking at the landscape east of the Indus. Thank Heavens, I was clear of the river, which was my real fright. Once I looked down, I saw a shepherd boy herding some animals in the fields. I yelled in sheer joy and said something innocuous but he took off, leaving his herd and from where I was I could sense he was petrified.

As I descended, the shepherd started getting farther and finally I lost him just before I prepared to touch down.

The landing was smoother than I expected. Once I had unclipped my chute in a hurry, I found I was lying in a slushy paddy field. That explained the soft landing. In minutes I was surrounded by the locals, all Sindhi villagers. I spoke good Sindhi at that time, having learnt it during our winter vacations in Jacobabad where my father had a clinic. Much

to their surprise, when I asked them if they knew where my seat was lying, they seemed overjoyed with my spoken Sindhi. Along with a crowd, I got to the seat lying at a distance. I asked to ensure that the ejection seat was not messed around with and was kept securely. That taken care of they led me to the nearest road on my request.

An hour later, full of black slush from the paddy field, I was put on a bus heading for the town of Shikarpur. During the shaky journey several passengers started to inundate me with questions. Simple people, they had some really funny questions to ask. One comment I have not forgotten is about the shepherd boy who ran for his life as I shouted down in ecstasy for being alive. The boy, I was told, thought I was an angel coming from heaven to take his life! Everyone on the bus had a good laugh. One of the passengers sitting directly behind said that there was blood on my left elbow. Quickly I checked by bending my elbow and sure enough there was blood. I pulled up the sleeve of my coveralls and saw an ugly wound running from the elbow down to about six inches, where all the flesh was missing and blood oozing out. I had hit my left arm with the aircraft railing, the cockpit being very narrow and I probably had not tucked my arm in fully.

I asked the driver to take me to the main police station of Sukkur. He was clever enough to suggest that it being late, the Superintendent of Police (SP) would have left his office, but that his house was directly on the road when entering Sukkur. I agreed to be taken there and found an anxious SP already awaiting my arrival since he had been informed by Mauripur Station about the accident in his precinct. A doctor had arrived to administer first aid to my bleeding elbow. He assured me that there was no fracture but it had been a close call as the flesh from the bone above and below the

elbow had been ripped off. I told the doctor that being alive felt fantastic, and the damage had been minimal.

I was rescued within hours by our rescue crew led by Flt Lt Afsar Jadoon, the officer-in-charge of the rescue operations who had landed at the Sukkur landing strip. The SP drove me to the strip in his jeep where I was given a warm reception by the rescue crew who were happy to see me alive. Back at Mauripur, I was met by a happy bunch of my compatriots who suggested I get my orientation and senses together and told me that we were invited to a party at the Drigh Road Officers' Mess that evening. Such was my life - a near death experience and a party all in one day. Surely, there was no other profession in the world where you got up with the excitement of a young boy to face daunting challenges each day, where life and death were a hair-breath apart, and in the end you got paid for doing what you loved doing best in the world: being a fighter pilot.

A fighter pilot plays with life every flying moment. He is solely in charge of his mission once he straps inside a cockpit. His daily routine entails risks, but calculated and well-rehearsed before he undertakes a mission. Armament firing is a precise science but at that time in our lives the precision was essentially a product of ability to estimate because there were no guided munitions or allsolution attack systems available to pilots in developing countries such as Pakistan and India. In air combat, again it was the audacity and calculated manoeuvring that made the difference between the predator and the hunted. A pilot had more than 15 or 20 instruments and switches to manipulate and keep in his field of vision for completing a successful mission, adversities and emergencies notwithstanding.

Another Close-Call!

It was in this milieu that on 9th December 1961, just after 14 sorties, I again faced death squarely in the face. It was a Monday, which was traditionally a maintenance day when all aircraft were put through rigorous inspection after a week's intense flying. The only exception to the rule was air tests. Flt Lt Arshad (later Air Vice Mshl) was the Quality Control Officer who had taken over from me. I had finished my lecture assignment at the FLS, and had a dull day ahead, or so I thought after finishing the lecture to the students. I called Arshad and asked him if he needed help in an air test. He said yes and requested me to go to the maintenance hangar to test fly 380 (this was the tail number of the F-86

which was to be tested). He told me that he was going for an air test also. Half an hour later, I rolled out of the tarmac and commenced making notes on my knee pad. Pre-take-off checks were normal and I took-off on Runway 09. There was a required pattern for air tests and the performance was noted at each step. I had climbed to 30,000 ft and was checking aircraft performance when I felt a slight flutter on the control column.

All instruments showed normal and I slowed the aircraft to check its stall characteristics. Again I felt the same jerk while in straight and level flight. I couldn't find any indications in the cockpit to cue me to the problem. I called out to check if Arshad was airborne and in the flying training area. Luckily, he responded immediately and I asked him to rendezvous with me at a particular ground feature in the training area near Sonmiani. He joined up on me and I started to put the aircraft through different speeds and manoeuvres. He said there was nothing visibly wrong and I also didn't experience the flutter again. I told him that I was breaking-off as all seemed alright. As I broke left in a hard

turn, the control column moved right back without me having moved the controls.

The aircraft went into a high speed stall as maximum 'G' forces were experienced owing to the control column stuck solid in full back position. I called out to Arshad and said I was in an uncontrolled spin. From then on, I concentrated on how to control the aircraft spinning violently downwards.

In a typical spin profile the F-86 would lurch steeply down first followed by an upward movement towards the horizon, and then violently dip again almost vertically down. My aircraft had spun at around 15,000 ft and I was losing altitude rapidly as is the case in a spin. The most vital action to get out of a spin is to move the control stick fully forward and apply rudder opposite to the direction of the spin, but the elevator controls were totally frozen. I quickly jettisoned the external drop tanks and pulled the emergency flight control lever, hoping to get some response. Nothing happened as I entered the third spin and I could see the hills below getting frighteningly larger. I knew well that I had to make a split-second decision to eject. Everything was happening at lightning speed. I bent fully forward and jettisoned the canopy, as the aircraft perilously went into a vertical dive. Then as per procedure, I sat fully back and pressed the ejection lever. For the second time in only weeks I blacked out as the 'G' forces acted against my body. Fortunately, this state lasts only for two or three seconds and as the seat ejection firing sequence completes, the senses start to recover.

All I remember was that I was trying to pull away from the seat, which happened suddenly. As I was detached from the seat I remembered that my parachute hook was not attached for instant chute deployment (it had not been attached as yet, due to high altitude flight). Without waiting,

I pulled the ripchord across my chest and, in what seemed like eternity, I felt the jerk of the chute. My head jerked back and up and I saw that immensely assuring sight of a white and orange canopy fully blossomed. All this happened in seconds, and I heard an explosion right below me as the aircraft crashed onto the side of a hillock. This was a very close call because if had I stayed just a few seconds more in the aircraft I would have been in pieces. The time lapse between ejection seat firing-off and aircraft hitting the ground was no more than a few seconds. *Alhamd-o-Lillah*-God saved my life once again. The one person to whom I feel I owe deep gratitude was the airman who had packed my parachute so professionally. Had the chute not deployed, no one would have known what really happened to Sajad Haider.

I made contact with the ground on the lee-side of the hill, falling through the bushes and came to stop at a very thorny tree. I lay still and stunned from the events of the last minute, for what seemed like eternity, not sure if I was in one piece. Parts of my body started to sting and the pain in my left rib cage was acute. I took all this in, staring at the sky and recollecting the last 60

seconds. I was alive all right because I heard Arshad's aircraft roaring in the vicinity. I unhooked the chute and tried pulling at the stanchions but piercing pain prevented my attempt. I staggered up and, hooding my forehead with my right hand, spotted Arshad coming low at me. I waved out and he signalled back thumbs pointing at the sky, meaning Allah had been merciful. He went out of sight as he climbed up. The second pass by him was very low and slow. His canopy was open this time and I saw a rolled paper fluttering down.

With pain searing through my chest I walked down a hundred yards to pick up the balled up paper. It was a message saying, "Thank God for saving you, the rescue helicopter will be here in 45 minutes, stay where you are and see you at the bar."

I saw a few locals walking up the hillock as soon as Arshad's aircraft had disappeared. They approached me cautiously. These guys looked ferocious and aggressive. I called out first and said something innocuous and the elder man in his thirties or so answered in Brahvi (a Dravidian relic of the ancient civilization). One of them was wearing a blanket on his shoulder and he offered to wrap it around me as I was very cold. I tried speaking Pushto and then Sindhi with them but was relieved to get response from a young lad in Urdu. I explained that I had to jump out from the aircraft because of a technical problem but soon the rescue helicopter would be there to take me back. They made a sort of a pillow and lay me down as I kept wincing in pain. I must have laid down for over half an hour, while the bunch sat around me like a camp fire. Then we heard the 'putter putter' of the helo blades. They were about a mile off my position and appeared to be searching for me. I got up and asked the locals to pick up my chute and spread it out. The copter crew must have picked up the movement as the copter took a steep turn and headed in my direction.

I was picked up by a happy crew who embraced me, much to my chagrin, as the pain in the chest was getting worse. The doctor onboard unzipped my coveralls and checked the damage. My arms and neck were lacerated by the thorns in the bushes. He guessed that my rib cage may well have been compressed during the ejection, causing the pain. I was made to swallow some pills and made comfortable for the rest of the journey.

We landed at Mauripur at about 1300 Hrs. The doctor took me to the Medical Inspection Room to look me over, checked my blood pressure and did the usual go around of my body. The application of spirit and tincture iodine stung like hell. After an x-ray of my chest I was released to my family. Instead, I made a bee-line for the bar to meet Arshad and the others waiting to give me a beer and some cheer. My wife was happy enough to see me back and didn't hassle me as I gulped down tankards of chilled beer, on Arshad's account.

The ensuing enquiries in all these type of accidents are a pain in the butt and all kinds of nursery-type questions are asked. In this case the occurrence was most unusual but given my experience and calibre it was declared an undetermined accident after a long inquiry. But for one professional investigator that was not acceptable. Wg Cdr Pat Callaghan, the head of the PAF Accident Investigation Team kept working at it with the rare dedication he was known for. After nearly six months, oneday Pat called me in the Quality Control Office and broke the news that he had successfully replicated the control failure which had caused me to eject. Jokingly he said, "Bloody man, you are getting in the habit of taking-off in a good and expensive hard-to-come-by fighter and not bringing the precious machine back."

F-86K That Was Not to Be

In 1963, although American aid was in full swing, the PAF happened upon an additional deal which seemed well worth paying for. The West German Government was intending to dispose off 75 used F-86 'Ks' from the Luftwaffe's inventory and was offering them at a total cost of 7 million US

dollars, including some spares and ground support equipment. There was a lot of commonality between the PAF's 'F' model and the 'Ks' being offered, and such an opportunity was not to be missed. Air Headquarters proposed to raise two new Squadrons of 12 aircraft each and cocoon the remaining F-86 'Ks' as a healthy reserve. The project seemed to be well on its way, with induction and ferry arrangements in the advanced stages, when the subject suddenly dropped out of all files and documents, leaving no trace as to why the project never came to fruition.

In fact, it is very surprising for me that the PAF has no record of what actually happened. It became well known that the Americans got wind of the deal and were furious with the German Government for not seeking US Defence Department clearance before even discussing such a deal with the Pakistani Air Force. As a consequence, the General of Luftwaffe who had made the deal became the casualty of American ire. This was confirmed to me by General Steinhoff, the long time Chief of the Luftwaffe, many years later in San Diego when I met him at the home of Admiral Fred Bardshar of the US Navy, a very close mutual friend.

6

COMMAND OF A FIGHTER

SQUADRON

My command of a fighter squadron on the 1st of October, 1963 was perhaps the most exciting day of my life. The euphoria was indescribable. All the remorse hanging over from various disappointments dissipated like ether. This was the moment destiny had been driving me towards. For the next couple of days I was walking in a semi-trance, receiving congratulations from family and friends inside and outside the air force. As I walked into the office of the Squadron Commander No 19 Squadron, wearing my bolstered ego on my sleeve and the Golden Eagle on my chest, I felt strange and somewhat awkward, even though I had visited this very office many times before. Flt Lt Mo Akbar, one of the smarter young officers and a good fighter pilot entered right behind me and said, "Welcome to No 19 Squadron. Sir, the squadron is really excited to have you as our Commander." I said, "Thanks old pal, we are going to make it the No 1

Fighter Squadron together." He asked, "Would you like to see tomorrow's flying schedule; that would give you an idea of our programme and if you would like to make any changes"? The words were like music to my ears. I was now destined to mould this unit according to my plans and ideas. Boy, what a feeling!

Before getting command of No 19 Squadron as well as getting promoted to the rank of Sqn Ldr, I was blessed with

a son we named Adnan. In fact, the name was suggested by Capt Attila Celebi, a Turkish Air Force Captain on exchange posting with the PAF, a mutual exchange programme with our Turkish brothers. Attila and his other colleague Nacedet Teckdemir had become really close friends and spent many evenings at our home. We had a lot of fun, especially cooking Turkish food together.

Some major and unpopular changes took place a few months after I got my command. The popular commander Air Cdre FS Hussain was posted as Air Secretary at AHQ, Peshawar, and Gp Capt Khaqan Abbasi took over the base.

Wg Cdr MG Tawab was posted as OC Flying Wing to replace the popular Wg Cdr 'Bill' Latif, who had been posted as Commander Bomber Wing (No 31

Wing) to replace Wg Cdr Khaqan Abbasi. It was known that the bomber command was changed especially by Air Mshl Asghar Khan, who had pointed out during his earlier inspection of Mauripur Base, that serious command weaknesses were reflected in the poor training and unacceptable armament scores of bomber pilots. Some of these postings turned out to be ominous as events would unfold. Air Mshl Nur Khan had long been sent to the PIA in 1958.

Consequently, new blood had replaced the older generation. MG Tawab and I hit it off well in the beginning. Whatever task he gave me was performed with eagerness and to the best of my ability. Unfortunately, I soon began to experience more and more interference from the OC Flying Wing in my squadron's affairs which dampened my ability to mould my Unit as I thought best. I took his niggling quietly though as I did not want to rock the boat. By this time Flt Lts Saad

Hatmi and Masud Hatmi (brothers) had been posted to No 19

Squadron. So I had a good lot in my herd.

I went into reshaping the squadron training program after a couple of weeks. Too much flight safety can be as dangerous as too little of it. It is like a reluctant driver on the road who is afraid of an accident, drives too slow and hesitates at every turn and is thus dangerous. I decided to change things a step at a time.

Large commands have a problem, especially if the boss is an overenthusiastic stickler for authority and protocol. With FS Hussain and 'Bill' Latif, we did not have the problem of the boss trying to prove his prowess. Both were legends in their own right but they did not interfere in squadron command at all.

This had changed with the new set-up. All those Squadron Commanders who had a penchant for independence were irked at being told how to run their Units and especially hated their pilots being assigned other duties outside the operational domain by the Officer Commanding Flying Wing. Somehow, we learnt to deal with it, with clenched teeth of course. But overall it was wonderful at work as well as off-duty. During Asghar Khan's command, the air force was organised and integrated on the modern concepts of air power.

He worked patiently, with resolve and vision and demanded the highest standards of discipline, professionalism and moral integrity. He may have seemed rigid¹ to his detractors and critics but that was a cynical interpretation just because he was uncompromising on principles and discipline. Before taking any decision, he would keep an open mind to

suggestions and inputs from his Air Staff. Once he had made up his mind he would pursue his decision without vacillating. This rare human attribute has been a unique strength in his life. He was the best thing that happened to the PAF in its nascent and embryonic stage.

Had the choice been any other officer senior to him, the history of PAF would have been somewhat like the leadership of the other two services during that period. In eight years of conscientious and relentless crafting, Asghar Khan created a formidable, highly integrated, motivated and professional PAF.

1 AM Asghar Khan was a typical air force commander; he was liberal in that he did not have intelligence hounds snooping around officers to report on their personal lives. His sole criterion for selection of a unit commander was that he should be well respected by compatriots and subordinates and be a good leader in the air. Of course, good conduct was always expected of an officer.

Interestingly, he was a very liberal person who was not judgmental about the preferences of the men under his command. Bars and dancing on Mess Nights was a RAF inheritance and also an institutional rallying point for all the officers, their families and friends. The AHQ policy made Mess regulations stringent and effective enough so that no one could violate the timings of the bar closing or exceed the top limit of Rs 150/, which in the fifties was adequate enough. The jargon '10 hours between the bottle and the throttle' became a sine qua non of bar discipline. Both Asghar Khan and Nur Khan didn't consume alcohol but they were tolerant enough to allow these activities as long as they remained within the confines of good behaviour and discipline. They participated with their spouses in most Mess functions if they were able to do so.

During their presence there were never any tensions or 'attentions' of the kind one saw else where in the sister

services.

By July 1965 Asghar Khan had been able to launch the PAF into the galaxy of the best air forces in the world. The PAF was ready to take on any challenge with its newly acquired professional status. The challenge loomed a mere five weeks after Asghar Khan handed over the air force to Air Mshl Nur Khan, who undoubtedly inherited a highly structured and operationally focused air force.

I have to admit that my own threshold for mediocrity amongst the pilots assigned to my squadron was low. This was a mind-set I had inherited from my peers. The worst characteristic which I disdained was carelessness and indifference to excellence. I learnt and applied the lesson that if you have the anatomy and compulsion for being a good fighter pilot then nothing could stop you from achieving the highest standards, and if it did not come naturally then one should go fly Boeings or what ever. That is because a fighter pilot flies with his wits, knowledge, resolve and courage, alone in a cooped up cockpit, not remotely controlled from the ground. So, there lies the difference and that is why an outstanding fighter pilot was, and shall remain, an exception.

Squadron Move

Life was going on when one day we heard from the Base Commander (I think by this time, the word 'Station' had been replaced by 'Base' in order to adapt to the American system) that AHQ had decided to move one of the fighter squadrons to Peshawar. No one wanted to be displaced from our settled life to move to Peshawar, which was crowded with senior officers at AHQ, and also dreary, as compared to the buzzing life of Karachi. There was some sense of reprieve when the Base Commander added that he would

try to send a squadron commanded by a bachelor rather than a married officer. So, I felt it could not be my squadron that would be the one moving. A week after the casual news of a squadron move, I was rattled to see a signal order in my mail folder which was an order for the move of No 19 Squadron to Peshawar.

Mo Akbar entered my office with an anxious look on his perpetually smiley face. "Sir, why us, what are we going to do in that dull 'Khoche' town?" I replied, "Let me see the Base Commander and ask him why, because I don't understand it myself." The PA to the Base Commander asked me to see him at his residence after games, at 6 PM. I arrived and was ushered into the sprawling lawn of the Base Commander's residence. I saw him sitting in the middle of the lawn getting a hair-cut. The barber stopped to let him raise his head. "Oh! Hello Shah Jee (a way of showing familiarity and affection). Sit down and tell me what the problem is?" I cleared my throat and started with an opener that even surprised me. "Sir, I had the impression you liked me, then why are you dislodging me when there are bachelor Squadron Commanders who would like to go to Peshawar?" His reply was very strange. "I didn't want to send you but it seems that ACAS (Ops) Air Cdre Rahim has asked for No 19 Squadron by name." I was rendered speechless. He told me to relax and go ahead because ACAS (Ops) is not a man any one can argue with. As I left, I had a suspicion that the Base Commander had a hand in my squadron's move.

The same evening, around 7 pm, Butch called me and said we were invited by Mr and Mrs Choudhry (in-laws of FS Hussain, our former and much admired Squadron Commander), because FS was in town. I picked up Butch and Sophie (née Carol) and we headed for Karachi. Mrs Choudhry was always a great hostess and Choudhry Sahib a

bit gruff. FS with his disarming smile met us and asked me when I was moving to Peshawar. I grumbled and complained about being the target of Air Cdre Rahim Khan's special attention. To this, FS said it was not true. "I had sent the signal for the move of one F-86 squadron to Peshawar and vividly recall that we left the choice of the squadron to the Base Commander." I was shocked and told him what the Base Commander had said to me. He replied "Nonsense! Your Base Commander made the choice and suggested your squadron." He then laughed and said "He obviously wants to get rid of you, but don't worry we will take care of you. Beware though, that a lot of old but not so bold seniors will be descending on you to make up their annual flying hours to qualify for flying pay."

Accepting it as a

fait accompli, I got down to business and flew off to Peshawar after all the arrangements had been completed for the move, to report to the new Base Commander. The new boss was a very senior officer; Gp Capt AR

Khan (popularly called Auzi Khan). I had known him before and considered him a very good person and not a stickler for silly little things. We finally moved to Peshawar in March 1964. We had left all the families behind while accommodation was being earmarked for us. We settled down very well within a short period - thanks to the outstanding support from the Base Commander, Gp Capt Auzi Khan. He was a very unpretentious officer with no chip on his shoulder, a very straight and sincere man, but no one could take liberties with him.

We truly blossomed as a fighter squadron, owing to the freedom of conduct of all flying activity. This proved conducive to our standards of flying, safety and importantly,

in training for the squadron's war role. The intention with which we were sent to Peshawar viz, senior officers from AHQ breathing down our necks proved to the contrary. From the C-in-C down, every senior officer was able to see the performance of the squadron. Until July 1965, before Air Mshl Nur Khan took over from Air Mshl Asghar Khan, Air Cdre Rahim Khan was the senior-most officer, who came and flew with the squadron once in a while. But as Air Mshl Nur Khan took over, he flew practically everyday with No 19 Squadron. So we had a welcome exposure to the top echelon.

This kind of independent identity was a dream of a Squadron Commander who had could train his Unit as he thought best. Such an opportunity was available to us in the West and to No 14 Squadron in East Pakistan. Posterity was to prove that this element of independent command was to be the real test of performance in war. Meanwhile, it dawned on me that with this newly acquired freedom to plan and train the unit, came a grave responsibility to create a razor edge balance between operational excellence and flight safety. I had to ensure that avoidable accidents were declared to be a virtual crime and flight safety a cardinal mission for the supervisors. Having said that, I also made sure that every member of the Squadron fully understood that operational standards would take precedence over safety when the situation so demanded. It was time to start introducing realism into the tactical concepts we had practiced so far.

Excellence had to become a habit.

Every move I made had to do with the ultimate aim ie, 'The Mission'. This was about the ability to lead men in the air towards the assigned target with impeccable formation integrity and aggressive spirit; arrive at the target precisely

through accurate navigation; or place the formation in the curve of pursuit against an enemy (simulated or real) in the air or enter into a perfect strafing, rocket or bombing attack. The destruction of the target had to be done swiftly without wavering and there had to be a safe recovery plan as well as a contingency plan to handle emerging situations not planned. If intercepted, one had to manoeuvre the elements to tactical advantage through best and swift 'Situational Awareness' and try to recover with minimum losses. That was the task I set for myself.

This was a demanding task, but as time was to prove it was capable of being achieved if sensibly planned and audaciously achieved. The focus was on intense training, prioritisation of tasks and their pursuit with resolve and dedication. These were the factors that were indispensable to motivating every member of the unit to be capable of assuming the lead role at any time and perform it with confidence, courage and precision. The key to all this was the high morale of the team. I was ready, equipped and resolute about carving a fighter unit of distinction that would be a matter of envy for others, but pride of the PAF. We set the highways in the sky ablaze with jet flame over the coming months.

An Ominous Foreshadow

Mo Akbar always walked with me to my office after the morning briefing, in which I had added a new feature unrelated to flying; it was reading passages from the newspaper by pilots whose articulation was poor. It had been passed onto us by our peers, that flying was not the be-all and end-all of a good fighter pilot; wholesomeness was equally important towards the making of an officer and a future commander.

As we put our heads down to serious training, Mo Akbar would give me a rundown on the films assessed the day before and point out the levels of progress of pilots in armaments and air combat. One day he came into my office looking a bit worried. When I asked why he was shaking his head so vigorously, he said. "Sir, this newcomer Flg Off Mati-ur-Rehman (who was involved in a botched attempt to hijack a T-33 trainer shortly before the 1971 War) is very dangerous on take-offs. He nearly collides in every take-off in his over enthusiasm to maintain close formation." I told Mo to detail him with me the next morning. During the briefing I told the young man that on take-off the distance is to be 20 ft, not 19 or 21. "If you are too close or out, it means you have no control of the aircraft." I cautioned him that he had three more take-offs to show me that he was capable of making a fighter pilot. I hoped he got the message. We took-off some time later, and I kept him in my field of vision. He lagged behind a bit and then was tucked-in closer than desired. But take-off is too critical a manoeuvre to be corrected during the run. So, we proceeded towards the local flying area.

During the mission I found that Mati was over anxious to perform well.

When I placed him 1,000 ft in line astern² to begin the tail chase I found him closing in too fast during reversal turns. So, I would ease-off to let him get the hang of maintaining proper distance. After we landed, I debriefed him and told him that his enthusiasm to do the right thing was good but he had to get there one step at a time or he may not get there at all for reasons of flight safety. I flew two more missions with Mati till he got the anxiety out of his endeavours.

²In line astern: one aircraft directly behind the other.

Years later while flying a practice air combat mission in an F-6 (Mig-19) aircraft, Mati's wingman hit the ground because Mati had taken the fight below the minimum height. This was still minor compared to what he did in the 1971

War. In retrospect, I wonder if I should have taken a sterner view of his performance in the squadron.

Life in the Squadron

As spring in Peshawar blossomed, the pace of life picked up. I would get the squadron pilots in small batches to come and have dinner at my home or we would have a shindig at the Mess ladies' room (a tradition from the RAF

whereby ladies were not allowed in the Mess hall or the bar, to give the bachelor officers the freedom to blow off steam, hence the existence of a ladies' room where families could be entertained). Life was not so expensive in those days and *chapli kebabs* were a great supplement to the home or Mess cooked food. At best, one could order a leg of lamb and a few dishes from the Mess and we would all have a great time. My little son Adnan whom I loved intensely would be the centre of attraction. Abbas (Abby) Khattak, Dilawar (Dili) and Akram (Aiki) were always there at these weekend bashes. Adnan was still a toddler and would be rolling around in the middle of the drawing room like a football, with Abby Khattak and Aiki spooning beer in his infant mouth, until I got on their case and forbade them such frolic. It was like a family get together and all the tensions of the work week were drowned in bonhomie.

Upon reflection, I feel that these hours were as important if not more to create bonding between team members. Fighter pilots are special because there is no profession in the world, not even being an astronaut, if I dare say so, where

persons share a calculated danger every day of their life. Some of the closest bonding in life happens between strangers when they share moments where their collective lives are endangered. Those few hours of facing danger together can create the best friendships in life. Since we shared the risks of fighter flying every day of our lives, we were bonded by an incredible compassion which did not need vocal nor physical expression - it just permeated our hearts and minds.

This feeling was accentuated each time we had to be at the funeral of a comrade.

Thank God, it only happened once during my command of No 19 Squadron when Flg Off Iftikhar had a fatal accident as his engine flamed out immediately after take-off.

The end result of this deep-rooted camaraderie was that to me, each one of my squadron pilots represented a very precious entity. I wanted them to be the best, at the same time I had to do my utmost for them to live to be old and bold pilots through the challenges ahead of them. This balance had been so fine tuned in my mind that I could read their expressions when something was not right with them, personal or professional. I considered it my cardinal duty to ensure that my pilots stepped into the cockpit with a clear mind, focused on the mission detail without any mental disturbances. This was a difficult task, but not entirely impossible. I developed a propensity to stand by my men when they were troubled or in trouble. It was utterly important to have their full confidence in all undertakings. They had to feel secure and protected to be able to give their best, even at the peril of their lives.

The PAF policy makers, essentially under the leadership of Air Mshl Asghar Khan, had moulded the PAF into a highly

efficient fighting machine. Air Defence Alert (ADA) was one such capability which had been perfected like clock work. Every base was required to keep a certain number of aircraft on ADA duties. These aircraft were armed with 6 machine guns and later some could carry two GAR-8 air-to-air heat seeking missiles. At the first indication of our air space being violated, the ADA fighters would get airborne in 2 minutes after the radar centre ordered a scramble. It was such efficiency which enabled the PAF to draw its first blood in 1958 by shooting down an Indian spying reconnaissance bomber, and again forced down an IAF Ouragon in the spring of 1965.

Teaching them a Lesson

It was on a beautiful February afternoon in 1965, when I was interrupted at the PAF golf course at Peshawar. I played golf every day, and that day I was paired with FS Hussain for a tournament. We were on the third hole which was towards the direction of the club house. We noticed a front boy from the club come running. He stopped near me as I was about to take a shot. After I had hit the ball he said to me that there was an urgent call from Flg Off Dilawar. I knew he was on ADA duties. I wondered if all was well as I excused myself, telling FS about the call from ADA. When I took the call Dili told me that he had received an 'XX' from AHQ Ops and asked if they should get their guns armed or not. An 'XX' call was made when for our Frontier Corps (FC) deployed along the Durand line on the Pak-Afghan border, asked for air support if they were under attack by Afghan mercenaries. The nature of air support was determined by the Corps HQ, either by way of show of air power, or in a dire situation, to attack the Afghan bandits. The Senior Duty Controller in consultation with the Director of Operations would decide how to respond to the request by the FC HQ.

The decision to use weapons against the intruding vagabonds was taken once the fighters arrived in the area in case of a 'HOT' call which was indicated by the number of Xs. Our FC troops would display a huge 'T' in white with round cloth pieces to indicate the direction of the enemy intruders and the colour of the round balls would indicate whether they wanted just a show of force or attack with live munitions. The number of balls gave the distance of the enemy, each ball denoting 1,000 yards. Red meant they were in a serious situation and wanted the enemy taken out.

I told Dili to hold his horses, and wait for me at the aircraft. I dashed off to the squadron in my spiffy Volkswagen. Arriving at the squadron I pulled up my flying coveralls and ran to the ADA aircraft. Dili had a set of maps ready for me and briefed me about the area where trouble was reported. We started up and I asked the armament airman to charge one of my six guns. I did that from a sense of intuition; I felt some thing must be wrong to get an 'XX' call at that late hour.

Once airborne, Dili moved into a perfect combat wingman formation. This was the kind of swift and instinctive conduct that made a fighter pilot different from a wingman that just flew the fighter – the pride of maintaining position in all combat manoeuvres from take-off to landing. Also, for a leader this was the litmus test to adjudge a pilot with zeal and pride for his upward movement. A good wingman made it to where he aspired, while a mediocre one who needed goading and shouting to fall in place usually petered out in the profession of fighter flying. The performance of wingmen in a formation gets more demanding as his position number increases; No 6, 7 and 8 in a large formation have to be on their toes and anticipate and react swiftly to the slightest change.

We were flying at 20,000 ft heading towards the northern border. As we got closer to the briefed position we got down to 10,000 ft for better visibility to pick up the 'T' display. I called Dili to keep a good look out for the 'T'. After about two minutes I initiated a turn to the right and it seemed we both picked up the 'T'

at the same time. There it was at 11 o' clock about four miles away, just a white speck from that height, close to a precipice, and mountains all around. I dove vertically down for the 'T'; it was not white for sure. As we ran along the long bar of the 'T', I saw two round red balls of cloth. Our troops were in serious trouble and the red balls meant that the enemy was around 2,000 yards ahead. We pulled up steeply to stay out of the range of fire by the intruders till we had spotted them.

In that treacherous terrain it was their call since it was easy for them to hide on hearing the jet-noise. Dili picked up two of them sheltering behind a huge rock.

The crafty Afghans knew the fighter profile well and thus they had selected a spot which would make it difficult to accurately attack them and safely pull out avoiding the mountain peak. I called in 'LIVE' with one gun. Dili was frustrated not having his guns charged, and he said so. I had to attack from an acute angle to be able to pull-up on the lee side of the mountain. So I had to fire during a turn, requiring high accuracy and good judgment of when to open fire.

Of-course in those days the fighters had no laser and other equipment, so it was all estimation. I was turning along the hill side and had a maximum of 1 ½

seconds of firing time. I had to hit the two white clad figures with the first salvo of bullets. I got in range and kept the hill in my field of vision. I dropped the aiming piper from above to place it on the target, simultaneously reaching a 1,500 foot slant range. It was not easy. I fired a burst of one second and heaved up to avoid the hill-side. It was close but what was the result? Dili, who had been asked to circle on top at 3,000 ft AGL called out, "Leader, two red bundles rolling down the mountain." I had hit them smack on. As I was pulling up I wondered where was the *lashkar*(the band of intruders as they came in groups).

They were visible nowhere.

I spotted a mud house as I turned left while surveying the area. I was watching the mud hut casually, flying close to it at a 1,000 ft AGL when I made contact. I had spotted three men moving inside the small court-yard. I called Dili, by then flying loose astern and asked him if he also had contact with three figures. Without waiting for affirmation, I told him to keep an eye on them as I was getting obstructed by the shade extending from the veranda. Dili called visual contact and then calmly said, "They are holding some kind of weapons and are probably firing at you. "Roger, copied message, I will blast the house from the south, don't lose sight of them as they egress the hut". I was positioned north-west at the time. I pulled up steeply to around 5,000 ft and could see Dili way behind in the eastern quadrant. I dove in without seeing any one below and carried out a high angle strafing attack to stay out of their small arms range. It was a good three second burst and I pulled off, well away from any bullets that may have been coming at me. It was at the bottom of the pull-up that I saw one of them running out of the hut. It was too late to get him, but I kept him in sight as he ran along a *nullah* (ravine) below the hut heading east.

The visibility was reducing especially towards the east as the sun neared the western horizon. Dili called and said it was all quiet in the hut but reported the escaping marauder. I said I had him in my gun sight and was going for him. The scene of the setting sun, rugged mountains and my first blood had an eerie something about it. What happened in the next few seconds remains wedged in memory. I had entered the attack and my gun sight was, maybe 500 ft away, lining up with the direction of the running man. The fellow must have slipped or tripped on the rocks, as he tried to get his balance and then he fell and lay absolutely prostrate, spread-eagled with his weapon on the side, my sight inching up to him. All I needed to do was to run my sight through him with my gun blazing away. What did I do? I held my finger on the trigger very lightly.

It's amazing how our training comes instinctively to mind, "Thou shalt not shoot at thy enemy hanging by the silk cord," was not meant only for an adversary hanging at the end of a parachute after you had shot his aircraft down, but any enemy who was helpless, like the man below. I flew very low over him and pulled up steeply, to let him get the blast from the jet wash. Surely, this man was going home to Kabul or where ever he had come from; he wouldn't venture into Pakistan again, I thought.

Just then I heard FS Hussein's voice on the radio. He had followed me and was in the area, monitoring my radio talk with Dili as I attacked the hut. "Did you spot any of them?" FS asked. "I think I splashed three, sir," I replied.

"Come on, I am 3 o'clock about 4,000 ft, let's join up and get back, you bloodthirsty chaps." I called contact with him after a few seconds and we joined up in fluid three formation and returned to base without further ado. That evening there was a reception at the golf club and I went

there along with FS. I was telling some friends what happened that afternoon when someone from behind me put a hand on my shoulder and said, "That was an excellent air support sortie, Haider." I turned to find the highly regarded Gen Bahadur Sher addressing me. He said our squadron had been mentioned in dispatches.

Whatever that meant, the Director of Ops was most displeased with my initiative. In fact, after landing, I was surprised to see the Director of Ops at the Operational Readiness Platform (ORP). I figured he had come to ask about the mission and give me a pat for a job well done. He ignored me at first and asked FS about the mission. FS said he had reached too late and added that Haider had cut a few down already. The Director of Ops then walked right up to me and asked curtly why I had (charged) my gun hot. "To teach the bloody chaps a lesson, sir," I quipped. "They are killing our Frontier Corps soldiers inside Pakistan." From his expression I could tell he hadn't liked my demeanour and made that amply clear to me, even though I had done the right thing.

7

RANN OF KUTCH SKIRMISH

Life was getting interesting with all this excitement, mercifully with an excellent safety record thus far. I was determined to annex the Flight Safety Trophy that year. Often, after flying had finished for the day, Mo Akbar and I would sit together to discuss ways to raise the tactical and operational proficiency threshold without compromising the safety factor. This brainstorming was a manifestation of my own training and firm belief that in the final analysis, the mission results in a war-like situation would reflect the quality and realism of our training. The problem was how to achieve very high standards in weapons delivery, air combat and high precision in low-level navigation flying, the lynchpin of a successful operational mission in war. The limiting factor in achieving excellence was the consideration of the flight safety perimeters imposed. Rules limited us to 250 ft AGL in low level flying which made navigation quite easy, owing to fair visibility. But in a real war we would be sitting ducks for the Ack-Ack at that height and would have to lower our height to no more than 50 ft AGL.

Similarly, the steep dive angle and minimum pull out heights stipulated by the US Air Force standards made it very difficult to achieve realistically effective results. We were severely hampered in that regard because violation of parameters meant severe retribution in case of an avoidable accident.

Resultantly, we had a very narrow and almost razor edge envelope to operate within to get what I felt was

operationally realistic while respecting the safety policy. So we started working on composite mission profiles where we would put the operational pilots through the absolute edge of aircraft performance limits and safety envelopes.

Meanwhile, we were also putting together the plan to upgrade the squadron offices, especially the crew room for better briefing environment and comfort.

As we were in the midst of the upgrade, my phone rang and if memory holds well, it was the great Butch Ahmed on the line. "Hey, Nosy, we are at war boy, did you know?" "How and where?" I asked excitedly. He shot back, "We just flew a recon mission in the Kutch area. The Indian Army came into Pakistan but is getting a thrashing from our infantry and may be tanks too." What about us, were we going to be sent south? "No boy, we will take care of it from here, this is for mature fighters, and you kids can suck your thumbs for now." Funny it was, but it got me riled up because we were so far away from real action.

A Deft Move by PAF C-in-C

In the coming days we learnt more about the army action in the Kutch region. For us in the northern half, there was no real action except for a heightened state of air defence alert. As history tells us, Air Mshl Asghar Khan had decided that the PAF would stay out of the skirmish owing to the obvious tactical disadvantage of being too far away from the battle zone. The Indians, operating from nearby Bhuj air base would have played havoc in our land operation. But for us fighter jockeys hungry for real action all we had in mind was to take on the enemy without understanding the bigger picture.

The skirmish in the Rann of Kutch was being fought by our army units to take back what was ours and had been

annexed by the Indians for the reason not commonly known, that there were good prospects for oil in the area. Another reason was that after the humiliating defeat inflicted by the Chinese on the Indians in 1962 the Indians had gone all out to re-equip their armed forces. By 1965 they were itching to show their muscle whenever the opportunity arose.

Rann was their target for an adventure. First, the Indians, who were well fortified in a defensive posture, attacked a police post at Chad Bet in April of 1965. Our forces responded with speed, using tanks and armoured vehicles.

However, this meant that our land forces were in the open, exposed and on the move; a succulent target for the Indian Air Force. The area of conflict was in easy operational reach of the IAF bases in the vicinity, particularly Bhuj air base with several fighter squadrons less than 5-6 minutes from the area of conflict.

Jaisalmir was about 20 minutes at 480 Kts speed.

Had the Indians committed their air force in support of their army, our troops would have been attacked from the air and destroyed with impunity, bringing our land operation to a halt. The PAF would have been relatively ineffective as the battle area was too far from Mauripur, the only PAF base in the south. Our fighters would require about 30-35 minutes getting to the battle area, the organisational delay notwithstanding. Besides, these fighters would be on marginal fuel owing to the long distance, and therefore susceptible in the event of being bounced by the IAF interceptors. Another issue which factored into the decision by our Air Chief to not engage the air force was that the Indian invaders were well dug-in, in fortified defences, and extremely difficult to identify from the air by fast fighters.

The history of the Rann skirmish would have been written differently had Air Mshl Asghar Khan not taken the unique strategic initiative to keep the air forces out of the battle. Indeed, his unilateral decision to establish a dialogue with his counterpart was somewhat utopian under the circumstances, yet a worthwhile option to exercise. The wisdom of a commander is to win a war with minimum loss to his own forces. Because such a result was achieved by our land forces, it was the sagacity of Air Mshl Asghar Khan to have taken the initiative and provided this indirect support by keeping the enemy air force from interfering with the land operations. What Air Mshl Asghar Khan said to his counterpart was loaded with a guarded warning and it worked like a charm with Air Chief Mshl Arjun Singh. This is how it happened.

Air Mshl Asghar Khan called Air Chief Mshl Arjun Singh – a former colleague from WW-II – on the old boy's network. The PAF chief suggested that they should try to influence their political leaders to hold back the air forces to avoid escalation, adding that if the IAF was committed into action the PAF

may opt to hit targets anywhere it chose, not restricted to the Rann swamps.

Arjun Singh was non-committal and said he would have to refer the idea to his political leadership and made no promises.

Indian historians have described the reaction on their side. It is stated by Samir Chopra and Jagan Mohan in their book about the 1965 War, that when Defence Minister Chavan asked Arjun Singh to throw his air force into action to stop the Pakistan Army's blitzkrieg, Arjun Singh had relented. Luckily for the Pakistan Army, the IAF did not go into action,

thus allowing our troops freedom of action without air opposition. Strange as it may sound (even though lucky for our troops), Arjun Singh had showed hesitation for the precise reason he should have, in fact, committed his air force. His contention was that the PAF had the advantage of radar cover and its bases were closer to the battle area (owing to the stupidity of intelligence agencies, Arjun Singh had wrongly assessed Nawabshah, Hyderabad and one other mystery airfield as active PAF bases) and that the IAF was too far.

The reality was, in fact, just the opposite! General Musa and the army hierarchy should have been grateful to Air Mshl Asghar Khan's deftness in having saved the precious lives of our fighting men. But that might have been too much to expect from Gen Musa and the self-styled field marshal to have the penchant to grasp the complexities of air operations; particularly the capabilities the limitation of tactical aircraft. In line with his supreme commander, Gen Musa had little respect for the PAF and much less for its C-in-C, whom he envied for his superior qualities and the way the PAF had gained national and international stature. This phenomenon gained world wide attention as the glamour and spectacular image of the air forces took the lime light away from the sister services. Ironically, in the case of Pakistan, it generated woeful envy in the army hierarchy rather than mutual respect and enhanced confidence. In a cynical attempt Gen Musa tried insinuating Air Mshl Asghar Khan. In his book *My Version*, Gen Musa alleges that during the Rann of Kutch episode Asghar Khan's reluctance to commit the PAF, and his contact with the Indian Air Chief to suggest keeping the two air forces out of the skirmish was an act of cowardice. (Similar inanity has been parroted by Gauhar Ayub in his recent diatribe). So much for the Army Chief's ignorance and even a basic comprehension of the

limitations of PAF combat aircraft and, most importantly, the proximity of Bhuj airfield.

That the IAF was kept away from the battle should have been Gen Musa's moment of thanksgiving and not criticism of a highly reputed colleague. Our army hierarchy had not bothered to consider the air force with any seriousness, leave alone a desire to evolve any concept of joint operations. This inordinate attitude had been inherited by the indigenous leadership since the days of Gen Gracey, the British C-in-C of Pakistan Army. Like his Pakistani successors, he considered the air force as an extension of the artillery. Reportedly, the RPAF

C-in-C, AVM Atcherly, a fighter pilot of repute, had snubbed Army C-in-C, Gen Gracey during a dinner party about his poor perception of the employment of air power in the shifting paradigms of future wars.¹

Had Ayub Khan and later Gen Musa paid heed to Asghar Khan's plea to evolve a concept of joint operations, they might have been wiser about the PAF's air strategy and its real capabilities and limitations. But such realism in conceptualizing and planning was unthinkable for them. More on this aspect will be discussed in the coming chapters.

A Reality Check

For the sake of posterity and to present history in an accurate perspective, the decision by the Air Chief to persuade his opposite number, the Indian C-in-C

to keep his air force out of the skirmish needs a professional and objective reality check. For readers to determine who was the real 'chicken' during his soldiering career it would

be instructive to read a part of the classified report by the US Air Attaché raised on 15th May 1965 and addressed to the US

Department of State, Secretary of State and copied to their embassies in New Delhi and London. The report is about the intrusion of an IAF Canberra over the Lahore sector for several minutes soon after the Rann of Kutch cease-fire.

The Indian Prime Minister Shastri and his Defence Minister Chavan had threatened to avenge the Kutch defeat at a time and place of their choosing. A prelude to this was the IAF's attempt to photograph the land features of the Pakistan Army's main battle area. As soon as the intrusion was identified as 'hostile' by our air defence system, the PAF C-in-C was informed and permission requested to force the bomber down. While the Air Chief gave the go ahead for the interception, he decided to inform President Ayub Khan on the newly installed direct line between him and the President. The President had a fit and ordered the intruder to be left alone owing to the fear that it may provoke the Indians and escalate tensions or impede the Rann of Kutch ceasefire brokered by the British. Part of this US Embassy report is placed at Appendix 'A'.

1 *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force, 1988.*

We in the PAF had been aware that an Indian Canberra had been over flying south East of Lahore over our troops and strategic lines of defence for several minutes. PAF interceptors had been scrambled and had made contact with the Indian Canberra but were awaiting orders to shoot it down and replay the earlier shooting down of the IAF Canberra in 1959. Unhappily, the interceptors were ordered to return minutes prior to the interception by a disappointed Air Chief.

This time Asghar Khan had chosen discretion over initiative and called the President and was denied a golden opportunity to send a harsh message to the Indians to lay-off. The prime reason for Asghar Khan clearing this with the President was possibly owing to the earlier Rann of Kutch bickering by Musa and Ayub Khan about PAF C-in-C having negotiated with the IAF on his own.

Field Marshal Ayub Khan had the jitters and thus refused permission for Asghar Khan to intercept and force the intruder to land in Pakistan. According to the US embassy report, the Indian Canberra was allowed to complete its mission at 33,000 feet, over-flying for several minutes, capturing the landscape of the Pakistan Army's main battle area. We in the PAF were livid at the defeatist attitude of the government. This defeatist mind-set did not end here. Air Mshl Asghar Khan had, later that day, contacted Aziz Ahmed, the Foreign Secretary, and told him that the PAF was issuing a strongly worded press statement about the violation by the IAF, with a warning that there would be no letting go next time. Aziz Ahmed readily agreed to the idea and suggested including deference to Ayub Khan for intervening to block the interception in the interest of peace.

Asghar Khan was also advised by the foreign secretary to clear the press statement with the information ministry and to send a copy of the text to Altaf Gauhar, who was in charge of Ayub Khan's propaganda.

Altaf Gauhar reacted strongly to the initiative on the grounds that the news of the decision by the President to let the Indian intruder go scot-free would send a wrong signal to the public and adversely affect national morale. Ominously, according to the most reliable historical record by Gen Jogindar Singh, that was the exact time when the Indian

Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Gen Choudary had ordered his General Staff to prepare operational plans for battles to be fought in the plains of the Punjab, centred on the area which had just been photographed by the Indian Canberra. The operation was code named 'Op Ablaze' and was put into effect on 6th September, 1965.

With the above episodes of March-April 1965 in mind, it would seem prudent to note here that the facts about the land battles in Kashmir and across the international boundary have been similarly distorted and misrepresented by the leadership of the time. Today, with Ayub and Musa gone, the crusade to embellish their blunders and present them in 'Diaries' and 'Memoirs' and 'Glimpses into the Corridors of Power' goes on unabated. Is it not time to ferret out the facts of the wars and establish the truth holistically? This should help dissipate the shame of having to galvanize fabrications and manufactured fairytales about consummate leadership and the justification for going to war; much worse, the celebration of the 1965 War as a victory which it was not. Actually it was an episode of indomitable courage displayed by the fighting men who saved Pakistan from the brink of colossal disaster, perpetrated by the very leaders in whose defence eulogies are being mirthlessly written.

War Clouds

In the last week of June, 1965, on a hot and sultry day something unexpected happened. I recall the exact date; it was 28th June, 1965 when I was told by the Station Commander that I would be accompanying him to attend a brief at the AHQ the next morning. I asked if I needed to be prepared with any information about the squadron, to which he simply said "No." At the squadron there was much speculation about what this was all about but we did not resolve the mystery until that afternoon when we saw

Butch, Rafiqui, and other Squadron and Station Commanders and the Sargodha Wing Leader arrive at Peshawar for the same conference. We then figured that some big action was in the offing.

We all arrived at the AHQ and were ushered into the C-in-C's conference room. There was deathly silence as we saw the brass enter and take the front seats. The C-in-C, Air Mshl Asghar Khan along with the ACAS (Ops) Air Cdre Rahim Khan trailing right behind, entered the room when all were seated. This was the first time that most of us junior commanders had sat so close to the high command, especially the Air Chief. The next hour had us young commanders stunned as we heard our Commander-in-Chief speak. He told us that the war clouds were building furiously, and the PAF had to be ready to face the enemy.

The entire PAF operational plan was laid bare in the ensuing hour or so as our heartbeats got faster from the excitement of what was being shared with us junior commanders.

The C-in-C stressed that the enemy was preponderant in numbers; as a consequence, two factors were cardinal in determining the PAF strategy. One, the adversary's operational assets must be attacked at its base to reduce its numerical superiority and create a more equitable balance of air power. Second, the enemy cannot be allowed the luxury of a surprise attack because that could render the PAF ineffective and the skies would be in the enemy's control, leaving the land and naval forces totally vulnerable to air attacks. Consequently, the PAF needed to have a tactically offensive posture. Pre-emption was, therefore, to be an imperative for the PAF, not a mere contingency. All the enemy forward airfields and radars would be struck 15 minutes before dusk, to deny the IAF opportunity to retaliate effectively in day-light conditions.

This is a sketchy interpretation of what the C-in-C had said as a prelude to the target detailing. Thereafter, targets were allocated to Sargodha, Mauripur and Peshawar and even Risalpur. I recall with pride that I was to lead the largest single attack with 16 F-86 aircraft for a strike against Ambala airfield. The first eight were to be from No 19 Squadron, while the second lot of eight aircraft were to be led by Sqn Ldr Wiqar Azim from No 17 Squadron, ex-Mauripur. The were to be led by Sqn Ldr Wiqar Azim from No 17 Squadron, ex-Mauripur. The

ship formation. I heard all of this in gleeful amazement. Elaborating further, we were told that all 16 aircraft would assemble at Lahore airfield well before the launching, and plan to execute the attack 15 minutes before dusk against the IAF

base at Ambala; our mission was to destroy aircraft on the ground with 'Guns Only'. (F-86 had 6 guns, with a total of 1,800 rounds of .5" calibre.)

The C-in-C ordered that both Squadrons taking part would practice landings on an airfield with a 6,000 feet runway during the day as well as at night, to ensure every one was fully operational on the Lahore runway. He emphasised that staying out of Indian radar cover during assembly, would be the key to safe launching. Director of Operations & Plans, Gp Capt Zafar Choudhry was assigned the task to monitor the progress at both bases and report when the squadrons were fully ready to operate from Lahore. The entire plan was to be given the highest security level, we were strictly warned. All the other formation leaders were allocated their tasks operating from Sargodha and Mauripur. The targets were all the forward Indian airfields and the radars covering them. With the exception of No 19 Squadron, all strikes were to be repeated at dawn the following morning. (In the event, No

19 was the only Squadron in the West which was ordered to repeat attack against Pathankot airfield late the next day and Srinagar thrice, in the following days)²

The bombers were to follow as soon as the strike aircraft had recovered after dusk and carry on through the night, keeping the enemy under severe pressure. Much later, during the war we learnt that a plan to drop commandos at three forward bases was also part of the pre-emptive plan. This is the only part which I have not quite digested owing to its outlandish concept. In the extensive war game carried out at the direction of the C-in-C, which resulted in the 'preemptive strike' as a Hobson's choice, the enemy reaction was hypothesized with amazing accuracy. The enemy was expected to retaliate with its Canberra bombers relentlessly the same night, targeting essentially Sargodha and the radar at Sakesar. The Sargodha fighter wings would have the whole night to recuperate and be ready with a score of F-86s armed with GAR-8 missiles, along with the F-104s, to inflict heavy attrition.

²John Fricker, *Battle for Pakistan*.

No 14 Squadron in East Pakistan was assigned Kalaikunda and Bagdogra airfields for strikes the next day, on 7th September. This was owing to the reason that dusk in Dhaka would be one hour ahead of West Pakistan; therefore, by attacking a day earlier as we had, the surprise factor of the pre-emptive strike in the West would have been compromised. However, the East Pakistan task was not discussed in our presence. Many more details were discussed but I was too excited to focus on what followed; in any case, I had heard with rapt attention the task allocated to No 19 Squadron.

It was a defining moment to witness the Chief give a broad attack strategy of the PAF to field commanders, sending a message that the PAF had been asked to prepare well ahead for this eventuality and was expected to perform the task with professional excellence. After the Air Chief left the conference room with Air Cdre Rahim Khan on his heels, the rest of us gathered around the huge map on the wall to identify our targets. The high command had agreed to a plan of action and later we contemplated for a long time over the road map to finetune the unit. Then our training exercises began, warming up to the war. My aim was to create paradigms of excellence as a habit – not an exception. This was an immense challenge, but I thought it was within the realm of the possible.

The PAF's pre-emptive plan was an intrepid strategy, focused on achieving local air superiority, including over the battle areas, extendable to areas inside enemy territory where ever our land forces were in action. If successful, as had been carefully planned, it would have given the PAF a tremendous start. The PAF tactical command was fully capable, equipped and trained to achieve this opening blitz. Even by conservative estimates it could have destroyed 50 to 60

IAF aircraft on the ground in the first assault. A bold follow through, as the plan envisaged, with a repeat pre-dawn strike, after the B-57s had pulverized these bases till just before dawn, would have delivered a second powerful blow to the adversary's offensive capability. The inevitable reprisal attacks against Sargodha and Sakesar by the IAF attackers the next morning were expected to suffer heavy attrition from the PAF interceptors, many armed with air to air missiles and flown by the top guns of the PAF.

The relentless attacks by B-57s were expected to have delayed the IAF

fighter operations against our bases (as it actually happened on the 6th/7th September night). This would have made possible the second assault at dawn by the PAF fighters. The question is whether the PAF executed the June plan and achieved what it was trained and equipped to accomplish?

8

AYUB KHAN BLUNDERS - KASHMIR LOST

According to the history of the 1965 War, the Pakistan Army planned its guerrilla action in Kashmir in April-May 1965, soon after the Rann of Kutch episode. The first meeting was held at the C-in-C's HQs at Kharian. It was attended by all the Principal Staff Officers (PSOs). It is believed that this meeting took place as a consequence of an earlier presentation to President Ayub Khan by the C-in-C Army to explain the disposition of Indian troops as well as our own. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the then Foreign Minister, was also present and agreed that Kashmir was ripe and ready to grasp. The clearance for operations in Kashmir had been given in principle by the Kashmir Committee under the auspices of Aziz Ahmed but with a contrite slogan by the Foreign Office, 'do not provoke; do not escalate.'

Vacillation in GHQ

According to Gen Gul Hassan¹this paradoxical strategy caused a defensive mind-set within the high command in the GHQ, in all the operation orders issued to the formations from then on. How strange that the Army C-in-C took such advice as a guideline, without asking as to how far the army could remain totally defensive and why the enemy would not be provoked after 8,000

Mujahids had infiltrated to take the valley and capture Srinagar? Could it be that Gen Musa, allegedly having

advised the President against the adventure in Kashmir, lacked the courage of conviction to face up to him and found in this paradoxical instruction by the Foreign Office bosses his own exit strategy from the disaster he could see happening and let the onus of blame be put on the Foreign Minister and his secretary? That is exactly how Gen Musa justifies the botched operations in his book, *My Version*.

1General Gul Hassan was the Director of Military Operations (DMO) during the 1965 War. In his memoirs he mentions the advice from the Foreign Office about no provocation.

Amazing as it may sound, during a follow-up meeting between the Army Cin-C and his PSOs, it was decided to resume the peace time posture to conform to the non-provocation philosophy on the international boundary. It was so pathetic that the Commanders of 10 and 15 Divisions were told to remove all land mines and undo other defensive measures to conform to the virtual orders from the Foreign Office.

Although Gen Musa claims that he had advised the President against adventurism in Kashmir, in the very next briefing, his up-beat posturing on Kashmir was contradictory. According to a renowned general officer and strategist present at the briefing, there was a contrived over-confidence permeating amongst the brass present. He recalled that Gen Musa had sounded unexpectedly hawkish as he alluded to reports received from the units at the LOC that their recce patrols were daily reporting that the Indian Army had no fight left in it, was on the defensive, and not challenging our army patrols. These reports became the basis of Gen Musa's U-turn and new found belief that it was time to act in Kashmir. This account belies Gen Musa's repeated claims in *My Version* that he had warned his Supreme Commander (sic) Ayub Khan that action in the vale

will conflagrate to an all out war². Why this paradox? There could have been many reasons; one was the vacillating President who according to Gen Musa's lament in his book, had agreed with the general staff assessment sent to the President in writing that the Pak Army was not capable of defending Pakistan against an all-out Indian attack until two more Infantry Divisions were raised. Yet a few days later, the President ordered the C-in-C to prepare to launch an operation in Kashmir. Gen Musa was shell-shocked for a few days since he knew the dire consequences of such an illconceived adventure but did not even raise a voice in protest.

Such was the confused scheme of things amongst the top leadership of the country, as Pakistan was dragged into a pathetic situation using precious commandos and regulars from the Azad Kashmir Regiment and from Azad Kashmir's civil population (2-3 weeks training to raw, young volunteers) to form six Mujahid force elements for a protracted guerrilla war and insurgency in the Kashmir vale. This manic plan had been executed without any known covert networking with Kashmiri dissidents and potential leaders who could have given some substance to the plan which is an indispensable lynchpin for the success of any insurgency. Truly speaking, Operation 'Gibraltar' was a classic in immature military and bureaucratic planning which was tantamount to a cruel joke on the Pakistani nation. The irony of ironies is that the extension of this operation, Operation 'Grand Slam' was deliberately manipulated to fail when the capture of Akhnur was imminent even by the enemy's explicit admission³. This was all because of a President with an unflattering soldiering history, and his meek Army C-in-C.

² In *My Version* Gen Musa claims that he did not support the idea of Ops Gibraltar or Grand Slam until he received the Presidential Directive to act

militarily in Kashmir. How strange that the President's higher war direction to defreeze Kashmir was received on 30th August, three weeks after the launching of Ops Gibraltar.

They shared a common perception about military operations ('battalion level mil-ops', according to Gen Sher Ali) sans strategic depth. Gen Sher Ali Pataudi's remarks were validated by top level US and British diplomats as early as 1958. Sir Gilbert Laithwaite wrote about General Ayub, "I would not put him in the highest intellectual class by any means. He was, according to our records, a failure as a commanding officer (Lt Col) on active service and had to be relieved... His military knowledge is limited... He made Lt Gen Sir Ross McKay his personal advisor after his appointment as the first Pakistani C-in-C, with a realisation of his own inexperience and leant on him heavily." The cardinal question which emerges from the above quote is why was General Ayub Khan made the C-in-C of a highly professional army despite his incompetence?

PAF Gets Ready

The PAF C-in-C did not fit in this cabal, nor was he trusted to be part of this assembly of micro-minds. Ayub had gradually become wary of Asghar Khan's boldness and high moral ground and purposefully did not share the nebulous Concept of Operation 'Gibraltar' with the PAF. He feared that Asghar Khan would either disagree with the idea or, in case he agreed to support the operation, he would provide forceful content to the plan with full PAF

involvement. Musa, being his master's voice, had made sure the PAF was kept isolated. Asghar Khan's insightful appreciation of military developments in the region and suggestions to Ayub Khan fell on deaf ears, but Asghar Khan did not give up as far as the PAF was concerned. After the

Rann of Kutch skirmish Asghar Khan sensed the storm building on the eastern horizon, and kept the PAF

on a heightened state of alert.

On the 23rd of July, 1965, Asghar Khan handed command of the PAF to Nur Khan. Air Cdre Rahim Khan (later C-in-C) had returned quite perturbed from his meeting with Brig Gul Hassan, the DMO at GHQ. During his briefing to the outgoing and the new chiefs he informed them that the army was planning a major operation in the occupied Kashmir valley. Nur Khan looked at Asghar Khan for some clue as to what Rahim Khan had said. Asghar Khan was himself amazed at the revelation and said to his successor that he had no knowledge of any such plan. As Asghar Khan boarded a C-130 for Karachi to take over PIA, Nur Khan hopped onto a PAF aircraft and went immediately to see Gen Musa.

He confronted him with the information relayed by the PAF Operations Chief.

Musa acted nonchalant and was reluctant to say too much, except that it was a local affair being handled by Maj Gen Akhtar Malik, Commander 12 Division, and opined that PAF involvement was not deemed necessary. When Nur Khan

suggested to the Army C-in-C in earnest to create some tangible co-ordination medium between the Army and the PAF at the level of the service chiefs, the General reiterated (what he had said to Asghar Khan long before) that in the very unlikely event of a war, he would be in the field commanding and directing the war and not sitting and coordinating it from an office.

3 *Behind the Scene*, a book by Maj Gen Jogindar Singh, who was the Chief of Staff of the invading Indian Corps.

How unfortunate that, for an otherwise highly effective fighting service, it was led by such a weak commander with a sepoy's gun barrel view of military strategy. Ayub Khan had himself said in his recently published *Diaries* "Especially, Musa was incompetent and ineffective"⁴. What the former and the incumbent Air Chief had not been told was that the guerrilla war in Kashmir had been conjured up as early as May of 1965.

Gen Musa's diatribe in

My Version about Nur Khan changing the PAF

strategy has no truth. Musa's debilitating failure to place the formations on war footing when even he understood that war would conflagrate, caused a great setback for the PAF's pre-emptive. Excessive air effort had to be diverted to save Lahore and Sialkot because the army had been foolishly held back from war time deployment by Gen Musa, and the PAF had to extensively support the

sparse defensive force on the borders to halt the invasion. Yet, he has incorrectly claimed in several places in his book that the army had been ready for any eventuality since May 1965. His claim was belied by the excessive casualties at Jassar, Burki, Wagha, Attari, Chawinda and Khem Karan, to name just a few⁵.

Inexplicably, Air Mshl Nur Khan conceded to the excessive army demands to divert air effort towards non-productive close-support missions, first in the ChhambAkhnur sector and later in the Lahore, Sialkot and Kasur sectors. Between 14 to 16

Close Air Support missions a day were flown from Sargodha alone, in the wasteful exercise of chasing enemy B-vehicles

and losing a fighter in the process. This was done because Gen Musa had not placed the formations on war footing until after India's XI Corps had attacked Pakistan on three fronts in the north. That was yet another contributing factor for the PAF's pre-emptive strike botch-up. Had it not been for Gen Musa's dithering and trepidation of provoking the Indian Army by not deploying the Pakistan Army in its war role, the PAF would have demolished a large part of the adversary's fighter force in the first attack.

4 *Diaries of Ayub Khan, Page 291.*

5 *My Version* by Gen Mohammad Musa is a unique document in which a C-in-C has indicted himself by misrepresenting facts. He appears to have written the book to counter the adverse commentary about his performance in 1965 by colleagues and historians alike. His suggested lessons of the 1965 War, 15 years after the event speak volumes about his professional integrity. *My Version* is worth a read only to know how poorly the army was led and how Ayub Khan set it onto a path of degradation by superseding outstanding generals and choosing Gen Musa for his servility.

As for Gen Musa's irrational remarks that had Asghar Khan been the chief, the four Vampires shot over Chhamb would not have been possible, it is an insult to the PAF which was a highly integrated and well trained institution created by the first Pakistani C-in-C. Gen Musa's limited knowledge of tactical air operations and his perception that the "PAF had no role in the Kashmir operation" (declaring that was the reason for keeping it secret from the PAF

leadership), deserves severe condemnation when one looks back at the 1965

War and the performance of this plucky air force.

After the discouraging demeanour of his army counterpart, Nur Khan returned to AHQ, though not for long. He flew off in a helicopter to Murree to meet Maj Gen Akhtar Malik, Commander 12 Division. When Nur Khan asked

Akhtar Malik as to how the forces about to be launched, would sustain their near impossible task without logistic support, the answer was that they would use the army helicopters and mules to keep the Mujahid force supplied. This sounded like a joke to the Air Marshal who wondered how the higher echelons of the army planned to support such an audacious incursion with unarmed and low performance helicopters and mules as the sole logistic source. Nur Khan then told the Div Commander that the PAF would be able to drop supplies in the valley, to give the guerrillas a chance to survive the vagaries of the terrain and the daunting task.

Akhtar Malik was also half enthusiastic about the PAF getting involved, in consonance with the thinking of the army leadership. The Air Chief returned to AHQ fully convinced that there were all the ingredients and indicators of a conflagration in the making whether the President and Gen Musa perceived it that way or not. His thought was expressed into action. His predator instinct told him to get ready for war, and that is what he ordered his air force to do. The PAF was motioned to Phase-I on 18th August. This was completed in 24 hours, placing the PAF on a very high state of alert. This meant round the clock armed air defence alert, along with units being prepared in their respective war roles, fully rehearsed and ready. Alas, the army leadership was still vacillating with utter indifference to the heightened, imminent and impending dangers written in the sky.

It would be interesting to narrate a mission I was asked to fly in mid-August 1965, which entailed providing armed escort to a C-130 on a supply drop mission near the Kashmir border. This was to dump supplies to support the operations in the valley. All the drop missions at Gilgit and Skardu went unescorted and were being flown mostly in the daytime. On this particular occasion the situation demanded a supply

drop very close to the LOC. It was a daytime drop which necessitated an armed fighter escort. No 19 Squadron was asked to provide the escort. I picked up Khalid Latif to fly as my wingman and we effected a rendezvous with the C-130 near Kalabagh-Nathiagali at 20,000 ft AGL, with the help of Sakesar radar. We soon established radio and visual contact with the C-130 captain.

It was a beautiful clear day and the scenic landscape was awesome. We weaved above and on either side of the C-130 as we got closer to the high mountains - some clouds in the distance did not seem threatening at that moment.

Twenty minutes or so later, while descending along with the C-130, we started approaching uncomfortably close to the clouds which were increasing in intensity.

I told the Captain that we would have to come in close formation with him if we were to keep him in sight during IFR (Instrument Flying Regulations). He said "Roger Zambo Leader" as we started closing in. All along we had been watching the magnificent Nanga Parbat standing high and mighty above, nearly 15 miles at 11 o'clock position. It was an awesome sight to see the mountain touching the sky with wisps of clouds around its peak and heavier cumulous clouds beneath.

That is when the C-130 entered the first layer of clouds. We needed to get closer to him to maintain visual contact. It was one hell of a job to keep formation at 180 Kts and I have nothing but praise for my wingman for coping up on my wing. That was the stuff Khalid Latif was made off. This near stall flying went on for what seemed like eternity. The comical part of it all was that we had ceased to be effective escorts in that dangling state and extremely vulnerable if intercepted after breaking clouds on the way back. The drop

zone was accurately reached but the bad news was further reduction of speed for the supply drop as the rear ramp had to be opened. I told the captain that we had to over shoot him on the right and unless his navigator or co-pilot kept us in sight and guided us through a u-turn we would lose him for the return journey. The next fifteen minutes will remain a pulsating memory as we went through that guided pivot turn and joined up behind the C-130. Before we re-entered the clouds the view of the valley was stunning.

While watching the majestic scene, I do recall the heartbeats going up, what with a lumbering C-130 nearby and Nanga Parbat threateningly close. The cloud cover soon became so thick, I almost felt like announcing my last will. Checking the C-130's altitude, I requested the captain to hold the present altitude for one minute as I had started a blind climb hoping we had plenty of lateral as well as vertical separation. He obliged and I called 98% power, holding 180 Kts. This was one hell of a risky situation which had developed unexpectedly. I said a deep prayer and sought Allah's help to get me safely out of the situation. We kept comparing heights with the C-130 which was by then, 4,000 ft below us when we were at 19,000 feet in clouds. We finally broke clouds at 22,000 feet and came out on top of a clear and stunning sheet of snow white cloud under us. I told my wingman to go into battle formation instantly and throttle up to 99% to get tactical speed as we topped the cloud. Both Khalid and I saw the magnificent Nanga Parbat simultaneously: beautiful from afar - but far from beautiful up close.

I called the C-130 pilot and told him we were in the clear. He was still lumbering through 16,000 ft though not too far behind as I had deliberately kept my speed at 180 Kts till we cleared the cloud. Sakesar came on the air and a welcome voice told us he had radar contact with us after he gave us a

90-degree turn. In the next 6-8 minutes and after a couple of crossovers while heading east, we were given an intercept course on the C-130. Khalid reported him crossing below us about 4-6 miles north. We made visual and radio contact and got in position to escort it back to Chaklala.

That was quite an experience for both of us and it demonstrated just how perilous the C-130's role in the war would be, operating in enemy territory.

Missions flown by the C-130 crews were dangerous and demanding during the war. Gp Capt Zahid Butt, my course mate and buddy Masood Khan and their

crews performed miracles, assuming the role of heavy bombers and dropping numerous 1,000 pound bombs on enemy concentrations, assembled for a major offensive near Samba east of Sialkot. Both were awarded Sitara-e-Jurats along with other gallant crews. These fellows performed superbly, setting new traditions in transport flying.

Operation 'Gibraltar'

The rationale for de-freezing the Kashmir issue and opting for a military solution was propounded by the Pakistani Foreign Office with Zulfiqar Bhutto at the helm and Aziz Ahmed, the wily bureaucrat as head of the Kashmir Cell.

Their analysis of the Kashmir situation had been based on India's massive military build-up after her humiliating defeat at the hands of the Chinese in 1962. The USA had never considered Pakistan as a cornerstone of their foreign policy or a real bulwark against Soviet and Chinese Communism. The US

government had arrogantly disregarded their undertaking with Pakistan that any aid to India would be in consultation

with the Government of Pakistan. Even the earlier economic aid to India was indirectly helping India's military build up. It was suggested by Bhutto that by 1966 Pakistan would be left too far behind to opt for a military solution for Kashmir, and that in two years, Pakistan's tactical advantage owing to US military aid would be lost. The UN had virtually capitulated to India's firm stand that Kashmir was an integral part of India and not negotiable any more.

Nehru's earlier exhortations about the inalienable rights of the Kashmiris to a plebiscite had been cleverly reneged on the premise that after joining the Baghdad Pact (later CENTO) and SEATO Pakistan had lost its independent national status.

I would tend to agree with Nehru's assertion about joining an American-sponsored pact even though using it as a trump card on the Kashmir issue was inexcusable.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs opined that Pakistan had no other choice but to resort to covert military action to bring India to the negotiation table. Right or wrong, there was a measure of truth to the evaluation by the Foreign Office, but that did not justify starting a shooting war without thorough preparation. This called for a solid network inside the Kashmir Vale comprising dissidents committed to freedom from India's despotic rule, and well planned training in guerrilla warfare for the Mujahid force. Given six months and a well conceived plan to create a network through infiltrated insurgents before starting covert operations might have resulted in history being written differently.

As stated earlier, Gen Musa has claimed in his memoirs that the President had been given in writing that the army could not face an all out war with India and required at least two additional Divisions and a second Corps HQ before any

military action could be undertaken in Kashmir. Gen Musa⁶ also claimed that the President had agreed with the GHQ's point of view by endorsing it in his own hand writing (this is a serious allegation against the self-proclaimed Field Marshal and must be available in the GHQ archives). This was one rare claim by Gen Musa which has been borne out by Gen Gul Hassan, the DMO,

who had authored the report against the Kashmir operation. This fact demolishes Gauhar Ayub's claim⁷ that his father was never told that the Kashmir venture was not pragmatic and achievable, and that Ayub Khan would never have allowed the infiltrations had he been told so by GHQ. In fact, Ayub Khan had demonstrated greater confidence in the Foreign Office recommendations and had scant faith in his Army C-in-C and the GHQ to carry out the task.

At one point in the planning stage of the operations in Kashmir, Ayub Khan had gone to the extent of bypassing Gen Musa, because he was sure about his subservience but not about his military competence. The President had told Gen Akhtar Malik to deal only with the Chief of General Staff, Maj Gen Sher Bahadur or Ayub Khan himself, leaving Gen Musa out of the loop⁸. Gen Musa had neither taken a firm stand to uphold the recommendation of the General Staff against military adventure in Kashmir, nor was there any attempt at using the honourable option of resignation rather than letting the brave soldiers die for a war without a real aim and a cause, which was doomed from its inception.

Presumably, the success in the Rann skirmish and the Chinese-India episode was used by Gen Musa to prop up his own belief that maybe the President had been right in his decision after all. This was nothing but self deception because Gen Musa knew very well that he had neither the

conviction, nor a well-prepared trained force to have assured the success of the insurgency.

6 *My Version by General Musa, Page 6.*

7 *Glimpses into the Corridors of Power by Gauhar Ayub Khan.*

8 *In a letter written by Lt Gen Akhtar Hussain Malik to his brother Lt Gen Abdul Ali Malik in 1967*

from Ankara, Akhtar Malik confirms bypassing the C-in-C as well as the plans by Ayub Khan, Gen Musa and Yahya to halt the capture of Akhnur (copy placed at Appendix 'H').

As for the President, he had taken the plunge with his eyes shut, defying common sense as well as the recommendations of GHQ. He had absurdly hoped that it would blow over after his valiant forces had seized the vale and offered it as his biggest war trophy. Despite all the tomfoolery of the men at the helm, an intrepid general was making historic gains in the battlefield. Ironically, the defining moment had arrived on the 31st of August, 1965, for Gen Akhtar Malik to deliver his 'Grand Slam' and rattle the rafters of the abandoned Indian bunkers at Akhnur. This would have had a positive effect in the valley in support of the Mujahid forces. The shaky Field Marshal then oversaw the biggest betrayal of Pakistan's history. The GOC of the Indian Corps responsible for Kashmir, Lt Gen Harbakhsh Singh, commented in his war dispatches about the operation: "Aptly named Grand Slam, for had it succeeded, a trail of dazzling results would have followed in its wake, and the infiltration campaign would have had a fresh lease on life."

We lost Kashmir on that day but more tragically, Ayub Khan and Musa abandoned the trapped Mujahid force without a whisper of remorse. It was nothing but incompetence and lack of courage shown by the top Army commander and the

President. As part of the Gibraltar Force the brave commandos and Mujahideen (6,000-8,000) had infiltrated into the valley on the absurd assumption by Gen Akhtar Malik that such a large infiltration would remain secret and a surprise. This premise was utopian to start with. How could 8,000 infiltrators remain incognito, especially given the arduous tasks of major attacks against bridges and installations that had been assigned to them? Ayub Khan's immature decision was based on several false premises. One of the ridiculous arguments put up by some was that owing to the incident of the loss of Islamic relics from the Hazratbal Mosque (which had happened a long time ago and the matter had been resolved to the satisfaction of the Kashmiri Muslims) the Kashmiri people were angry; secondly that due to the oppression after the latest legislation on Kashmir status by New Delhi, the Kashmiris were seething with discontent and were ripe for a revolution to liberate Kashmir. All of this was contrived by the foreign policy pundits of the time.

Quite the contrary, the first information of the infiltration was reported by two Kashmiri Muslims, Mohammad Din and Wazir Mohammad⁹ because the populace was not willing to take up arms and risk their future for whatever it was worth. The last elements of the Mujahid force had entered the valley and had asked these two Muslim shepherds some searching questions about installations and other targets assigned to them and paid them Rs 400 as a reward. As soon as the Mujahids were out of sight, one of the Kashmiris ran to the nearest police station and the other chose to head for the nearest Indian army post and informed them of the incident, thereby alerting the Indian security forces. On the same day, two officers from the AJK Force were apprehended by the Indian Army and shown on television confessing their plan. That was the end of the surprise Gen

Akhtar Malik had so passionately guarded. The hunt for the Mujahid force began and their tragic end was inevitable.

9 Lt Gen Harbakhsh Singh comments about the ineffective Indian intelligence in the vale of Kashmir by saying, "We may not always be lucky in having Mohammad Din or a Wazir Mohammad to give us advance warning of a similar adventure!"

Our brave men blew-up bridges, attacked Indian Military HQ, laid ambushes against convoys, blew up ammunition depots, inflicting heavy casualties on the Indian security forces and the occupation army. But then what?

Without any proper planning at GHQ to re-supply them, and carry their operations on for the capture of Srinagar, these men were left to fend for themselves against very heavy odds.

Not surprisingly, the Kashmiris in the valley stayed ambivalent in their response to the infiltrators for fear of reprisals and severe retribution by the Indian security forces and the military deployed to capture the intruders. Indian forces had been ordered show of force against the inhabitants of Poonch sector who had sympathies with the Mujahid force and had provided shelter to our fighters. When the Indian forces started using mortars to send a strong message (combined with the fact that nothing worth while was achieved in three weeks after the launch of Op 'Gibraltar'), even that support waned. However, it was very crucial to continue supplying the forces trapped inside the valley to provide them with an exit opportunity. This is where the PAF performed some Herculean missions with their C-130, in spite of Gen Musa's response to Air Mshl Nur Khan's visit to GHQ in which he emphatically denied the Air Chief any role for the PAF.

The PAF C-in-C tasked Wg Cdr Zahid Butt, the OC of No 35 Transport Wing with supply dropping missions dangerously close to the CFL. Zahid Butt and his able navigator Rizwan had planned a perilous mission deep into the valley of Kashmir for that night. These were going to be very hazardous undertakings owing to the terrain involved, bad weather and terrifying turbulence. The first operational mission deep into the enemy territory was undertaken on 23rd August at 0200 Hrs with a weather forecast that would have left the most well trained crew of any air force shuddering.

The most significant fact in this highly dangerous environment was that the C-in-C of the Pakistan Air Force was standing behind the captain on this maiden risk-ridden sortie. This is how the PAF was led in the war of 1965, by the C-in-C leading from the front. The drop had to be aborted as the Drop Zone (DZ) was spotted directly below the aircraft as it came out of the clouds. A drop at that moment would have landed the cargo well out of the safe zone. Therefore, Zahid Butt decided to abort the drop. The C-in-C suggested they make another run-in, which involved climbing back into the cloud and navigating back on deadreckoning, while trying to avoid the mountain side on the right. It entailed some deft flying. Zahid Butt achieved the near impossible and on the next run-in dropped the life saving cargo at the DZ with astounding accuracy, later confirmed by the 12 Div to be within 500 meter accuracy. As the news of the mission's success and especially the fact that the C-in-C was himself on the sortie trickled into the PAF stations, a tremendous feeling of pride permeated the entire PAF. The finest example of leadership had been set by the Air Chief, injecting an intensity and spirit into the entire body of the PAF.

Another factor that makes the failure of Operation 'Gibraltar' and the follow-up Operation 'Grand Slam' a cruel joke was that the Indian Generals had acted very unprofessionally by not stemming the infiltration. According to General Jogindar Singh in *Behind the Scene*, despite clear instructions from their COAS Gen Choudhry on 1st Aug 1965, for the capture and closure of all possible points and gaps of ingress by the infiltrators, the GOC-in-Chief Lt Gen Harbaksh Singh did nothing. Furthermore, the Indian COAS's clear instructions to move troops to the Chhamb-Jaurian sector remained in the General's freeze box. It is a shocking indictment of the Indian high command that none of the orders of their COAS given at the conference at Jalandhar on the first day of the month were put into action. The Corps Commanders were again gathered for a review at Jalandhar when the reports about heightened intrusion by infiltrators started pouring in by the 8th of August. The COAS

pointed out that their reaction to the massive infiltration was inept and slow. In Maj Gen Jogindar Singh's words¹⁰, "It was obvious that GOC XV Corps'

negative attitude was influenced by the local situation which though not sanguinary, gave no reason to lose heart. But he was drifting towards a defensive and even a defeatist attitude; he wanted to abandon the Haji Pir Pass offensive to prevent the weakening of his forces in the valley".

Soon the Pak forces had captured Deva, a small hamlet near Chhamb, killing the Brigade Commander, Brig BF Master on 17th August. The Indian COAS, alarmed by his Corps Commanders poor conduct called a conference at Jammu. He was advised that regular troops of the Pakistan Army were being sent in as part of the AJK Force. Gen Choudhry (the COAS) was livid. He

opined that the Pak Army would continue to support the Mujahid force directly as well as indirectly and move towards Chhamb-Jaurian onto Akhnur. He ordered the Haji Pir Pass offensive to be launched within three days, to capture Pt 13620 in Kargil again, as it had been returned to Pakistan after the Rann ceasefire. He also wanted to commit an infantry brigade to capture the Mirpur Bridge over Kishanganga.

These operations were named Ops 'Faulad' and 'Bakshi'. They were launched on 26th August. Finally, the Indian Army Chief announced, "Time is fast approaching, when we have to pose a threat to Pakistan between Hussainiwala (near Ferozpur) and Jammu, as this central Punjab area will have to be developed into a vital battlefield to threaten Lahore and Sialkot, in accordance with plan Op 'Ablaze', planned in May 1965, against Lahore-Sialkot-Kasur". So there we are. The Indian Army leadership might have been even worse than ours in some ways, but they were under a capable and

professional Chief of Army Staff, Gen Choudhry¹¹.

10 *Behind the Scene* by Maj Gen Jogindar Singh, Chief of Staff Western Command in 1965 War.

Had the operation in the valley been better linked up and a solid networking developed with the dissident Kashmiris in a well thought-out plan which had to be highly integrated, perhaps the episode of Op 'Gibraltar' may well have become a harbinger to the resolution of the Kashmir issue. Despite all the blunders of the country's leadership, the aggressive and courageous regular fighting forces were highly motivated and, formidable enough to achieve the challenging objectives. Maj Gen Akhtar Malik assessed that once he had captured Chhamb in the next 24 hours and

steamrolled Akhnur, the remaining Mujahid forces would get a new lease of life and revive their operations inside the valley. This, I consider it a moot point.

It was not until 29th Aug that the Haji Pir Pass was captured by the Indians after a hand-to-hand fight with our thinly deployed defending force. The Indian Army had finally launched Op 'Faulad' whereby they captured many salient features along Kargil and Kishanganga for the control of this bulge and all the high ground from where they could control the lines of communications. The loss of these features by the end of August had a devastating effect on Op 'Gibraltar', bringing it to a virtual halt and blocking all the entry and exit points to deny escape by the Mujahid force. They were either caught or butchered by the Indian military.

Op 'Grand Slam' Turns into Grand Sham

The Presidential directive to General Mohammad Musa, C-in-C Pakistan

Army, read:

To take such action as will de-freeze Kashmir problem (sic), weaken India's resolve and bring her to a conference table without provoking a

general war (sic). However, the element of escalation is always present in such struggles. So, while confining our action to Kashmir area we must

not be unmindful that India may in desperation involve us in a general

war or violate Pakistan territory where we are weak. We must therefore be prepared for such contingency.

2. To expect quick results in this struggle, when India has much larger

resources than us, would be unrealistic. Therefore, our action should be such that can be sustained over a long period.” [Suggesting a war of attrition]

11 Ibid. Page 105.

3. As a general rule, Hindu morale would not stand more than a couple of hard blows delivered at the right time and place. Such opportunities should therefore be sought and exploited.

(Annexure G to GHQ Letter No 4050/5/MO-1 dated 29th August 1965)

The inanity of the signal and the unprofessional language used by Ayub Khan aside, the question that comes to mind is: “What was the basis of Operation ‘Gibraltar’ if it was not the de-freezing of Kashmir and why the dichotomy?” The signal should have been an anathema for Gen Musa and his general staff. But for them their posts in the army were more precious than the code of honour of soldiering and they chose not to knock any sense into their Supreme Commander’s head. This was particularly fretful because Gen Musa could not repeat enough times in his book *My Version* his claim that he had warned the President about the grave possibility of an all out war.

However, it is a well established fact and unequivocally confirmed by Maj Gen Akhtar Malik in the earlier referenced letter to his brother that Gen Musa’s authority viz Ops ‘Gibraltar’ and ‘Grand Slam’ had been denuded by Ayub Khan’s own devices (Appendix ‘G’).¹² But nowhere does Gen Musa mention or even hint in his book about him being side-

tracked. Gen Musa had an excellent opportunity to quit in honour then, on the premise that he did not believe in the concept behind the Kashmir operations and would not commit his brave men to such an adventure.

The next phase of the operation in Kashmir 'Operation Grand Slam' had been launched with the explicit aim to capture Akhnur, the jugular of Kashmir.

'Grand Slam' was also conceived at the behest of Ayub Khan long before, but its execution order was dangerously delayed by the vacillating president to within hours of its launching. As is evident from the above signal, there was no mention of the change of command from Akhtar Malik (12 Div) to Yahya (23

Div, located at Bhai Pheroo, near Lahore) because it was not intended or planned till then. Contrary to Gen Musa's erroneous claim in *My Version* that the change of command had been pre-planned, Maj Gen Akhtar Malik started his blitz against Chhamb and rolled across the treacherous terrain with Akhnur as his final objective. Tragically, that was a golden opportunity lost, which had offered itself like a ripe plum ready to be plucked.

12 *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism*, by Hassan Abbas, Page 49-50.

Appallingly, this once in a life time chance was thrown away simply for lack of courage shown by the leadership to face what they had mindlessly started. Before the Chhamb epic, Maj Gen Akhtar Malik had been running between pillar and post imploring the C-in-C to give the green light for Op 'Grand Slam'. Gen Musa kept stalling the General Staff who were also chasing him for a 'Go Ahead' for the operation. The baffled Maj Gen Akhtar Malik had also been prevented from seeing the President (ostensibly at Ayub's calling) as

crucial hours were allowed to slip away. Finally, when the green light came, Akhtar Malik's 12 Div ran over Deva and captured Chhamb in a blitzkrieg. 12

Div was a hop-step away from capturing the neck of Kashmir, Akhnur. That is when Akhtar Malik's inevitable victory at Akhnur was delivered a fatal blow; not by the enemy, which was on the run, but ostensibly from the President and the C-in-C of Pakistan Army!

Maj Gen Akhtar Malik was unceremoniously removed along with his winning soldiers of 12 Div and Yahya was ordered to take charge of Operation 'Grand Slam' and not to venture for Akhnur. The pause that took place allowed for the removal of Maj Gen Akhtar Malik as part of an intrigue to appoint Yahya mid-stream when the capture of Akhnur was declared a foregone conclusion by the Indian General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Western Command.

How ironical that two generals from the Indian Army have since described this pause as: "Providence came to our help" which saved Akhnur. I personally heard it from the horse's mouth long after the war, at a dinner at Rahim Khan's (then CEO of Gammons, Pakistan) home in Karachi from Maj Gen Akhtar Malik that he had implored Gen Musa not to dislodge him for 48 hours till he had captured Akhnur. During the handing over ceremony near Gujrat, Akhtar Malik had virtually begged Maj Gen Yahya to allow him to lead the attack as his subordinate commander and let him capture Akhnur and the glory would be for Yahya. Maj Gen Yahya had emphatically rejected his pleading and walked out.

Incontestably, Yahya had been brought in to replace Maj Gen Akhtar Malik with orders not to take Akhnur!

Soon after the 12th Div lost the Tithwal-Poonch-Kishanganga and Kargil high points as a consequence of the counter-attacks by the Indian Corps during Ops 'Faulad' and 'Bakhshi', Maj Gen Akhtar Malik figured that the Indian Corps was tied down in the valley and it was the best time to get Op 'Grand Slam' rolling. He had already launched his forces threatening Chhamb with the plan to circumvent Jaurian rather than to get delayed in securing it and go charging for the neck of Kashmir, Akhnur. This would close all approaches to the valley from the Indian mainland. A UN observer had forewarned the Indian XV Corps HQ about the presence of Pakistani tanks, artillery and major assembly of forces in the area on 1st September but no strong response was evident from the Indian side.

Blunders Galore

One of the most significant yet least known events preceding the 1965 mayhem was the early warnings of the impending Indian attack against West Pakistan given to the President and all key players from Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the three C-inC's. On 30th August 1965, the ISI had initiated a two page signal to the GHQ and all others concerned about the general mobilization of the Indian Army.¹³ Unlike any typical intelligence report, the contents of the top-secret report were definitive, emphatic and detailed. It provided the details of the movement of India's 1 Armoured Div and its current location near Pathankot and other vital information. The urgency of the threat was spelt out by the DG ISI Brig Riaz to the President, service chiefs and foreign minister. In reaction to such a serious threat to the integrity of Pakistan, what should have been the response of the armed forces leaders present, particularly the army C-in-C, even a college student could have rightly guessed.

Inordinately, Gen Musa took no action to place the formations on war footing, nor did it appear that the President had intervened with him to order the army to red-alert. This was nothing short of criminal neglect with tumultuous consequences for the men of the Pakistan Army in the coming days.

So many lives were lost due to the lack of readiness by the army, and the inexplicable secrecy to keep the PAF leadership totally in the dark, despite very credible and timely warnings by agencies like the ISI. It is not common knowledge that our Ambassador in India, Arshad Hussain, had also messaged through the Turkish Ambassador in New Delhi about imminent Indian plans to attack Pakistan. The army C-in-C's decision to have sent a fourth of the army on leave in May 1965, after the Rann of Kutch episode even while the preparations were afoot for Op Gibraltar, was totally bizarre.

Another blunder was put in motion when the 6 Armoured Div began shunting between Sialkot and their concentration area in Gujranwala, owing to the dithering by GHQ, which ordered them to move to Sialkot 24 hours after the Indian invasion had been launched against Lahore. Just as the juggernaut of the 6th Armoured Div was near their objective, the Div Commander was ordered to take it back to base without offering any cogent reasoning for the inane intervention. Consequently, they were not deployed on the 6th, as wrongly claimed by the author of *Glimpses into the Corridors of Power*, but arrived on the 7th night. Interestingly, the 6 Armoured Div had not been given any operations order until 7th September,¹⁴ 1965.

13 Air Cdre Aziz, the Deputy DG, was interviewed by the author. He confirmed that the ISI's information communicated to the leadership was unambiguous - the Indian attack was inevitable.

This fact also demolishes Gauhar Ayub's claim in *Glimpses into the Corridors of Power* that no warning of the imminent attack was given to the President. PAF's official history (*The Story of the Pakistan Air Force*) and the latest *History of Indo-Pak War-1965* by Lt Gen Mahmud confirms the briefing to the President and others mentioned above.

14 *History of Indo-Pak War-1965* by Lt Gen Mahmud Ahmed (Retd). Page 413.

An impression has been created by Gen Musa in

My Version that the idea for

capturing Akhnur had been casually suggested to Ayub Khan during the briefing on Op 'Gibraltar' by Maj Gen Akhtar Malik, at Murree. This was used later as an excuse - that the advance towards Akhnur was halted because there was no force available for such a bold operation. Gen Musa's assertion becomes suspect because a tangible force was allocated for Op 'Grand Slam' at the end of July. The elements of the force were detached by GHQ, under Gen Musa's instructions, from the newly formed 6th Armoured Division comprising 11th Cavalry, 13th Lancers, B Company 9 FF, 25th Brigade and Artillery Corps. They were sent to Kharian for employment in Op 'Grand Slam'. Gen Gul Hassan has stated unambiguously in his memoirs that 'Grand Slam' was given to Akhtar Malik for planning and execution and that Akhtar Malik was in the GHQ on 23rd August 1965 to obtain the green light from the President. Gul Hassan had even suggested to Maj Gen Akhtar Malik that he did not need any clearance for 'Grand Slam'

because the President had done so at Kharian some time earlier.

Akhtar Malik had started his blitzkrieg towards Chhamb as opening shots of Op 'Grand Slam', for the eventual capture of the strategic town of Akhnur, the centre of gravity of the Kashmir Valley. Akhtar Malik's plan had sensibly envisaged circumventing Jaurian to avoid getting bogged down and instead to go for the jugular, Akhnur, directly. This had hit the Indian Western military command with total surprise, like a sledge hammer.

I would like to make it clear that this is not an attempt to critique the valiant fighting echelons of the army, but their leaders at high command. The fighting rungs of the army always had thousands of men of valour who fought with

resolute courage in the battles of Kutch, Chhamb-Jaurian, Attari, Burki, Chawinda, Khem Karan, Chor and else where. They beat the daylights out of the adversary despite the blundering brass which was the cause of many avoidable casualties. Success in war or peace is about the quality of leadership which impacts the morale and hence the soldiers' will to fight and their readiness to put their lives on the line. In war lives are inevitably lost, but lives lost in the execution of badly conceived plans, or cowardice of the commanders is the sole responsibility of the leaders. They are morally bound to admit their incompetence to the children, widows, sisters and parents of those martyred.

Dead or alive, some day their accountability has to be done.

PAF Opens Up

In sharp contrast to the army leadership, Air Mshl Nur Khan ordered the PAF on Phase-II alert on 29th August 1965. This meant that war was imminent and triggered urgent actions by the operational staff and especially by the operational stations, to prepare for war. Interestingly, Nur Khan had

taken this initiative from his own assessment of the storm gathering on the Kashmir horizon. The plucky PAF spun into action. Like the other stations, Peshawar was abuzz with activity and the transformation into war mode was swift and efficient. Phase-3, War Imminent-Red Alert (to execute the war plan instantly), was staring us in the eye.

Aware of the pace of developments in the land battle, an anxious Air Force C-in-C could not just sit back and rely on Gen Musa's suggestion of war remaining confined to the valley. Nur Khan asked his staff to arrange with the Army Aviation to fly him to the HQs I Corps, smack into the battle zone. Flying over the area, Nur Khan's consternation turned into alarm as he saw the Pak Army assault force gathered on the Pakistani side of the Tavi River apparently ready for the crossing. After landing he told the Corps Commander, Lt Gen Rana that his forces were poised dangerously in the open and if the IAF was pitched into the fray they could play havoc with the perilously exposed troops and especially armoured vehicles.

Lt Gen Rana procrastinated and opined that the Indians would not use their air force in order to avoid escalation. Nur Khan's suggestion for air support and sustained supply drops was not received well by Lt Gen Rana either. Air Mshl Nur Khan's reaction to the irrational and complacent attitude of the Corps Commander was swift and decisive. He contacted his own Command

Operations Centre at Chaklala and ordered the PAF on Phase-III status, which meant Code Red. He ordered the Combat Air Patrols (CAPS) to be extended till 1700 Hrs. Posterity has proven that Nur Khan's decision made the crucial difference to Pakistan's survival in the days to come. Minutes after Air Mshl Nur Khan had set-course from Gujrat airfield in an army L-19 aircraft, the IAF

struck Lt Gen Rana's forces precisely as had been predicted by the Air Chief.

The Indian Army, which was getting a thrashing from Akhtar Malik's 12th Div, had asked for urgent air support by 1100 Hrs on 1st September 1965. For the IAF to launch off the Indian COAS had to request the IAF Chief Air Chief Mshl Arjun Singh and then both had to seek permission from Defence Minister Chavan to provide air support. This red-tape took five hours to process and it was not until 16:40 Hrs that the first formation of four IAF Vampire fighters was airborne from Pathankot. The IAF base at Pathankot had launched 12 Vampires in the first wave of three sections, five minutes apart. This Close Air Support (CAS) by the IAF

was their last hope as Akhtar Malik was mopping up the Chhamb operation.

The first and last formations of Vampires ended up attacking their own columns and caused destruction of their own forces according to the diaries of Lt Gen Harbakhsh Singh and Gen Jogindar Singh¹⁵. The recent book titled

15 General Jogindar Singh wrote a candid account of the wars of 1965 and 1971 in *Behind the Scene*.

Page 117.

History of India-Pakistan War of 1965 also confirms¹⁶ that collateral damage

was inflicted on the Indian Army's 3 Mahar Regiment by the IAF attackers. This faux pas is further substantiated by another Indian soldier of repute, General Lachhman Singh. It was a miserable beginning by the Indian Air Force, much to the disillusionment of their land forces.

My good friend, course mate and PAF's Top Gun, Sarfaraz Rafiqui, with Flt Lt Imtiaz Bhatti as his wingman, was vectored on the second formation of 4 Vampires by the PAF Sector Operations Centre at Sakesar. In the ensuing minutes Sarfaraz made contact with the bandits and with deft manoeuvring, two of the Vampires were turned into balls of fire from Rafiqui's deadly guns in virtually 2 to 3 minutes. One more bandit fell to Imtiaz Bhatti's sharp-shooting, while the fourth managed to stagger home (Flt Lt SV Pathak) in his aircraft full of holes from Bhatti's shooting.

That is why four hits were claimed by the two pilots. With the one lost earlier to likely Ack-Ack, the tally for the opening of air operations by the IAF had cost them the loss of four fighters and one crippled. The air-battle had quite dangerously coincided with the movement of the C-in-C, Air Mshl Nur Khan, who had been airborne minutes earlier in the battle zone. After landing, he had commandeered a T37 jet trainer which flew him to Sargodha where he personally congratulated Rafiqui and Imtiaz Bhatti for their excellent shooting.

The Indian historians have made a cynical attempt to make the 1st Sept showdown a great achievement for the 28 or more sorties launched by the IAF, claiming the destruction (12 tanks, 2 guns, 62 ammunition vehicles and troops) of 12

Div. But the signal received by the PAF Chief from Brig Amjad Chaudhry, Cmdr 4

Corp Artillery, from the front, belies these claims. Several Indian historians have also snubbed the IAF claims as outlandish and exaggerated. Messaging from the front, Brig Amjad Chaudhry wrote: "Your very first action in Chhamb left no doubt in our minds that we did not have to worry much about the enemy air attack. The pattern was set there

and then. We will never forget that spectacle – it lifted our spirits and gave us a flying start.” This kind of a jubilant message could not have come from a commander whose forces had been battered.

In the same vein, the candid Gen Jogindar Singh, COS of Western Command, in his book *Behind the Scene*, unambiguously says in the context of the land situation near Tavi, on 4th September, “Since the Pakistan Air Force ruled the sky, the thrust (Akhtar Malik’s Div) could be in the form of a ‘blitzkrieg’ action and it did start that way.”

Pakistani Leadership Gets Cold Feet

Unfortunately, back on the ground, Op ‘Gibraltar’ petered out, resulting in total failure, while ‘Grand Slam’ came to a screeching halt. Maj Gen Yahya Khan, the Commander of 7 Div who had replaced Maj Gen Akhtar Malik did

not launch the grand finale against Akhnur, on the flimsy pretext that Gen Musa was not happy with the command communications system¹⁷. His better and more valid excuse could have been that he neither had been associated with Akhtar Malik’s planning of the ‘Grand Slam’ nor was he familiar with the terrain.

16 *History of Indo-Pak War-1965. Page 70.*

What followed was not the mere removal from command of a winning general but the fate of Kashmir was sealed for ever. Few Pakistanis even know about the treachery and intrigue of those final hours which shall remain a dark watershed in the history of the Pakistan Army high command. This

reprehensible episode deserves to be exposed so that present day Pakistanis are well aware of it.

Yahya knew fully well that the C-in-C, Gen Musa, during his first and possibly only visit to the Corps HQ, had opined within the hearing of several shocked officers “What is the point in capturing Akhnur?” His words had echoed his master’s voice – the supreme commander, President Ayub Khan. The President and the Army Chief were obviously in mortal fear of an all out war (an inevitable reality) if Akhnur was captured. Both must have been terrified later when the enemy struck with two Corps in a three pronged attack on Lahore- Sialkot with a feint in the north-east at Jassar and a holding manoeuvre around Kasur in the south.

We would never have learnt of the deceptive machinations had it not been for Brigadier Amjad Ali Khan Chaudhary, who played a crucial role in the battle and was present on the occasion during those fateful moments. He revealed the truth of those last debilitating hours when the Army Chief GenMusa, Corps Commander Lt Gen Rana Bakhtiar and Maj Gen Yahya Khan had blocked the

capture of Akhnur, ostensibly on Ayub Khan’s reckoning. This written account by the intrepid Brig Amjad expresses his shock and disbelief at the behaviour of Gen Musa and wraps up the moment of the betrayal:¹⁸

In the meanwhile Maj Aleem Afridi, my GSO, informed me on wireless that the C-in-C had come to HQ 25 Bde and wished to see me. At about

10-30 AM while I was driving towards 25 Bde Headquarters I saw Brig

Azmat Hayat having a conference with his battalion commanders. When I

***asked him the reason for not meeting me at
Munawwar cross roads and***

***why the advance had not started, he informed me
that he had not received the 'code word Coca Cola' to
start the operation and he had lost wireless contact
with the Div Commander. I was surprised to hear this
because the Div Commander had spoken to me on
wireless a little earlier and had***

***asked me to meet at Moel. A few minutes later Brig
Zafar, Commander 25***

***Bde arrived in a helicopter and asked Brig Azmat
Hayat to accompany***

***him to his HQ to meet the C-in-C. I told Brig Zafar
that the C-in-C had***

***sent for me also and I would like to go with them in
the second helicopter which he had brought with
him. Brig Zafar's answer was that I was not***

required and they took off in the two helicopters.

17 *My Version by Gen Musa. Page 41.*

18 *The sordid episode has been written about in September 65, Before and After
by Brig Amjad Chaudary. Pages 54-64.*

***Bitterly disappointed and completely at a loss to
understand why we were not moving on and what
was happening at HQ 25 Bde, I decided to drive to it.***

***Maj Aleem Afridi had been telling me repeatedly on
wireless that I was***

wanted there and the C-in-C wished to see me urgently. It was a long way to 25 Bde HQ and by the time I reached Moel it was 1:00 PM. I found there

elements of a Bde HQ and asked a staff officer to ring up HQ 25 Bde to send me a helicopter. Brigade Major 25 Bde said on telephone that the C-in-C was holding a conference and he will find out if he could send the helicopter.

Nothing happened for the next couple of hours. While I was waiting, Brig Khurshid, Commander 7 Div Artillery, came there in a jeep and informed me that the command had changed and Maj Gen Yahya had taken over.

Later on, I learnt that the C-in-C had ordered the change because he had been told that the advance could not proceed because command and control had broken down and the guns had not moved forward to support the

advance. I was surprised when I learnt this. While running around in that area I had myself seen the field and medium regiments in action just short of Tavi and I regretted that I did not get the opportunity to inform the C-in-C of the real situation. As far as the command and control was concerned, it is true that it was rather scanty but by no means ineffective. Maj Gen Akhtar had set up a Tactical HQ in Kharian and for the conduct of battle had

planned to use the communication and other resources of my HQ. His main

HQ had to remain in Murree to look after full scale operations which were at that time going on in other

important sectors of Kashmir. Maj Gen Yahya after taking over command also used my HQ at Khaur while his main HQ

remained outside the operational area. Until 6 September when I moved out of this theatre of war, he operated from his jeep with a staff officer. He had of course the advantage of having his main HQ within easy reach.

Far more important than the change in command was the last minute change in the overall concept and scope of operation Grand Slam. On 2

September I had moved my HQ to Chhamb in the Tehsil building on the

near bank of the Tavi. Maj Gen Yahya conducted the battle for Jaurian

from there. The day after Jaurian was taken (4 September), a message

was received from GHQ that the C-in-C was coming to meet Maj Gen

Yahya in my HQ. The C-in-C arrived in a helicopter at about midday and

hurriedly conducted a conference with Maj Gen Yahya. After reviewing

the progress of the operation he apparently told the Div Commander to

abandon the plan to capture Akhnur and take up positions on the high

ground astride the road between Jaurian and Akhnur. I am not aware of

the reasons for this basic change in the operation as I was not present in the conference. But I do know that the final phase of operation Grand

Slam had been abandoned because when the C-in-C came out of the

conference he said to me in his usual hustling manner that there was no

point in taking Akhnur, which stunned me. The decision did not make

sense to me. Akhnur was within our grasp and considering the state of

morale of both sides and their relative strengths especially in armour and artillery, it was a political decision which gave Maj Gen Yahya no choice.

If so the Indians succeeded in saving Akhnur through diplomacy, when it

was not feasible to do it militarily. If the final objective of the operation was abandoned because it was considered that it might lead to an all out war with India, then the decision to stop short of Akhnur is all the more regrettable because it did not deter India from launching two days later, an all out attack on Pakistan across the international frontier.

Having known Gen Yahya fairly well for a long time, it was difficult for me to believe that such an unsound decision could be forced on him.

Capture of Chhamb, Jaurian and Akhnur were three phases of the

operation which had been conceived and planned as a whole and the

scrapping of its final and most important phase made little sense. Had

Maj Gen Akhtar Malik been in command at this stage in the battle, it

would not have been easy to make him accept this decision.

On the morning of 6th September 1965, Maj Gen Yahya Khan came to our HQ and held a brief conference in which he informed us that the

Indian Army had launched a two pronged attack across the international

border at Wagha and Harike. GHQ had ordered that our Corps artillery

after detaching some units was to move to Sialkot. One armoured

regiment was also detached for employment elsewhere. Before Maj Gen

Yahya Khan conducted his conference, a staff officer came with a

wireless message from his main HQ. GHQ had enquired whether he

could take Akhnur if the Corps artillery and the armoured regiment were

not taken away from him. When Maj Gen Yahya read out this message,

we waited anxiously to know his reaction. He deliberated for a moment

and then turned to the staff officer and said “No”. Was it that he considered that defence against the invasion of Pakistan

was more important than capture of Akhnur and, was it that he realized

that the opportunity for capturing Akhnur by one quick knock out blow as originally conceived by Maj Gen Akhtar Malik had been lost because of

the delay caused by the change of command and the subsequent change

in the concept and the conduct of the whole operation? Whatever his

reasons might have been for this momentous decision, he did not say a

word about it and there was no discussion. Later on when he visited Staff College Quetta as C-in-C of the Pakistan Army I ventured to ask him why

he did not take Akhnur. His reply was short and crisp. All he said, “You know, I was told not to do so”.

Was Change of Command Pre-planned?

The removal of Akhtar Malik midstream was claimed by Gen Musa to have been pre-planned.¹⁹ If true, then Gen Musa should have been sacked for planning to provide succour to the enemy when the deck was stacked against them. And if he had not been forthright about the real reason behind the change, which was in fact the case, he ought to have been tried for deception. Despite Gen Musa's ineptitude it was still not too late to implement the final phase of the operation.

The Indians were on the run and their morale had been completely shattered.

Yahya was made the C-in-C by eliminating Gen Akhtar Malik allegedly for the very reason to deny him what he had rightly deserved. Musa got Governorship of East and West Pakistan for kissing Ayub's hand in gratitude.

This was a serious debacle, which subverted the fate of Pakistan and took Kashmir from within its grasp. All of this had roots in those moments on 1st-2nd September when Gen Musa, on the orders of Ayub Khan, took the gun from

Akhtar Malik's firm grasp (aimed at Akhnur) and gave it to Yahya Khan who had been briefed to order him out just in case he got rough and refused to abandon Akhnur. The narrative of those crucial hours of history on 2nd Sept by Brig Amjad reproduced above, especially the contrived signal from GHQ asking Maj Gen Yahya if he would go for Akhnur if the armoured regiment and the Corps Artillery were left with him all seem to be a ruse. As recounted by Brig Amjad, Yahya had thought for a while as the commanders present had waited with bated breath and hoped for a positive nod for them to commence the coup de grace on Akhnur. No one could have imagined that Yahya Khan would say "No". Perhaps Brig Amjad and the rest

present had missed out the intriguing purpose of this signal about which Yahya may have already known. If the dots were connected, the arrival of the signal should have been seen as the final part of the ruse to make Yahya appear as the fall guy and save the face of Gen Musa and indeed of the President, by pretending that Gen Musa had second thoughts about his earlier remarks to Brig Amjad: "What is the point in taking Akhnur?".

The signal must have been superficially initiated to erase that impression Musa had left behind during his visit at the change of command, and to show that now it was up to the Div Commander to take the decision about Akhnur.

19 *My Version.* Gen Musa says, "The change of command in the Chhamb valley was pre-arranged; Yahya took over command on my orders." On the same page there are other contrite and assailable claims about the events from 1st to 3rd September 1965. Page 40.

That might have been a clever manoeuvre then, but it led to a great loss for the country. In the same vein, it seems clear to me now as to why Akhtar Malik's plan was altered and Troti and Jaurian, which were to be circumvented in the original operational plan, were attacked by Yahya Khan. Presumably, this was done to show off Yahya's prowess as a soldier and give the Pakistani public some semblance of a victory. Was it not another hoax to distract all eyes from Akhnur? What ever one may say about Yahya, he could not be faulted for lack of a soldier's courage, unlike his peers. He had been made a Trojan horse to fool the army commanders present, by shifting the onus of the decision about Akhnur from Gen Musa to Maj Gen Yahya. No one had dared question the all powerful Yahya Khan then as he had thrown his weight behind the Jaurian attack.

Another incident previously mentioned which firms up the probability of a conspiracy at the highest level, is the conduct of Brig Azmat Hayat and Brig Zafar, on 2nd Sept. Why had they refused to take Brig Amjad to meet the C-in-C, who had asked to see him, even when they had two helicopters at their disposal? This is the most intriguing part. Brig Azmat Hayat had been commanding the Infantry Brigade originally as part of 7 Div, but attached with Maj Gen Malik's operations group, assigned the task to capture Akhnur as a part of 12 Div operations under Maj Gen Akhtar Malik. How uncanny that Brig

Azmat Hayat had secretly received instructions from Maj Gen Yahya much before he had replaced Akhtar Malik not to accept any orders from Maj Gen Akhtar Malik, his present Div Commander. Azmat Hayat had immediately severed all communications with his Div Commander on receiving an unlawful command! This was sheer insubordination by Brig Azmat Hayat but clearly Brig Hayat had to be certain that his future would be brighter under Yahya Khan than the lame duck Akhtar Malik.

Now, if we connect these events to Yahya Khan's curt riposte to the very Brig Amjad when he was the Chief Instructor at the Staff College Quetta, several years later and Yahya Khan had become the C-in-C, the mosaic provides a plausible conspiracy having taken place between 31st August and 1st September and played out on the 2nd of Sept. Brig Amjad had justifiably asked the visiting C-in-C as to why he had not taken Akhnur in 1965. Yahya's reply, "Because I was ordered not to²⁰", leaves nothing to the imagination. Who could have given such a crucial order to Yahya Khan? Certainly not Musa. Logically, these instructions from Ayub Khan might have been communicated from President House or even Saidu Sharif because that is where he had allegedly been staying with

his daughter's in-laws (the Wali of Swat), when Pakistan's survival had hung in balance.

20 *1965 War, Before and After* by Brig Amjad Ali Khan Chaudhary. Page 63.

It may sound horrific today but the truth was that an important member of the cabinet had to take a top-secret file to Saidu Sharif on 1st Sept after the PAF

had shot down 4 Indian fighters over Chhamb, to seek the President's approval for a limited PAF strike role in Kashmir. It would be prudent to recall what Ayub Khan had said to Air Mshl Asghar Khan in May when the latter had

expounded the urgency of a joint strategy, that he would be directing the war in case it comes and not be closeted with the service chiefs. Musa, like the loyal follower he was, had also added his two cents by saying that he too would be commanding his troops from the Corps HQ. So much for these two leaders at the helm and their tall claims of manning command posts in the battle areas.

Ayub's Background Explains All

Ayub Khan's alleged decision to travel to Saidu Sharif after the ISI warning of an Indian attack and his remaining there during all the crucial battles being fought in Kashmir may well have been to stay the farthest away from the dangers of the battle. Such behaviour was an enigma even for Ayub Khan's coterie of generals and his cabinet members but he had made sure there were no courageous and morally upright men around him to advise him correctly. But in reality, the fear of the battle ground was not new for the Field Marshal; rather it was reminiscent of his widely known removal from command of the 1st Assam Regiment from the Dagger Division by General TW Reese in Burma for

wavering to lead his troops. Lt Col Parsons had been ordered to take over from Ayub Khan who had, according to Lt Col Steve Parson, “chickened out” from leading his battalion in the famous Battle of Kohima. According to Lt Col Steve Parsons, during his presentation on the ‘Battle of Kohima’ in 1984, which was reported by the Press Trust of India and published in the *Daily Telegraph* from Calcutta as well as reported in the *Daily News* from Karachi (reproduced in Appendix ‘B’). Ayub Khan had displayed “a lack of courage”.

In the Battle of Kohima when the 19 British-India Dagger Division was dashing for the capture of Mandalay, Ayub Khan was removed from the command of the 1st Assam battalion, for dithering to lead his men in the ensuing battle, where after he had stayed in a ‘forty pounder’ (tent) with a Risaldar Major M Ashraf Khan also from Hazara, till he was evacuated and sent to Shagai Fort near Peshawar to Command 15th Punjab Battalion group

comprising old veterans from WW-I and some medically unfit soldiers from WW-II²¹. Ayub Khan’s behaviour as a junior commander on the battle front was also confirmed in a letter by Lt Col Mohatram who had been an eye witness to this unflattering dramatic episode (also reproduced as part of Appendix ‘C’).

Ayub Khan was later superseded by Brigadiers Nazir, Iftikhar and Nasir, all junior to him. Ayub Khan’s being superseded was reportedly by the orders of none other than the Quaid-Azam himself. The reason for the Quaid-e-Azam to have taken such a decision had an explicit basis. Ayub Khan had been appointed as the senior officer-in-charge of the Pakistani contingent, a part of the Punjab Boundary Force, ironically under the command of the same General Reese of Dagger Division in Burma. Ayub Khan’s mandate was to provide protection to the Muslim refugees migrating from

Amritsar and nearby areas. The Sikh carnage of Muslim men, women and children was a chilling horror and the failure of Ayub Khan to protect the victims of Sikh slaughter were allegedly making terrifying headlines in the *Nawa-e-Waqt* and *Pakistan Times*. These reports had reached the Quaid-e-Azam who had reportedly placed it on record that Ayub Khan was not to be promoted any further. He would have retired in that rank had the Quaid lived a little longer. That was not to be and Ayub Khan gifted himself the rank of a Field Marshal as if to defy the Quaid, Gen Reese of Dagger Division and Gen Messervy, the first C-in-C of the Pakistan Army who had also declared him unfit for promotion²².

This background helps one to understand the events of 1965 in a clearer light and perspective. Why was there no formal synopsis of the mistakes made by the leadership? It was simply because none of the services wanted to open the Pandora's Box, exposing major strategic blunders and unjustified loss of life owing to sheer ineptitude. How would Ayub, Musa and Yahya have got the

highest gallantry awards each carrying a reward of 50-75 acres of prime agricultural land from the poor nation, had they allowed a truth commission to lift the veil from their military failure? This would have been tantamount to war crimes in a half-way civilized country. It would be a good lesson to discover that a large number of army, air force, and navy officers were court-martialled for incompetence and cowardice across the border.

Ayub Khan had been basically a very insecure man since the denigration he had suffered during the Battle of Kohima in Burma. He seemed to be in constant fear of coups. Consequently, many of his actions were guided by these phantoms which he had created or were manufactured by ambitious sycophants who had surrounded him. He had to

side-line Akhtar Malik and this he did, by sending him to Turkey where he died in a car crash. Even in Turkey, his death was under mysterious circumstances (with alleged Israeli involvement) because he had accepted a Jordanian offer to train their army. In 1965, the upshot of Ayub's decision was to replace the winning Maj Gen Akhtar Malik with Ayub's favourite and confidante, Maj Gen Yahya Khan, who had written the grand narrative of Ayub Khan's coup d'état against Iskander Mirza. Resultantly, the curtain dropped on our land battle successes and a life time opportunity viz Kashmir was lost for ever.

21 *Daily News*, 28th April 1984, Vol 23 No 102. Also, *Politics of Surrender*, by Col Ghaffar Mehdi.

Letter by Lt Col Mohatram who confirmed it to me during an interview over the phone in September 2008.

22 *Politics of Surrender*, by Ghaffar Mehdi. Pages 72-73. Also with reference to *My Story* by Gen Sher Ali and Dr Kaleem Siddiqui.

Indecisiveness and Confusion

It would be instructive to enter the mind of Air Mshl Nur Khan at this time. He was receiving zero updates from the GHQ in keeping with the President's policy of "PAF to stay away just in case one of its aircraft got shot down across the CFL, which could escalate into a general war". This must have been Nur Khan's most anxious moment. Meanwhile, the Indian reaction to the Pakistani infiltration had been strong and they had recaptured Kargil, and defeated our defences at Haji Pir Pass, and all along the ridges, occupying territory along Kishanganga. On 25th August 1965 the Indian Army had shelled the village of Awan Sharif near Sialkot, which was a stern warning about events to follow.

On 1st September 1965, with Lt Gen Rana serving as the Commander I Corps, Nur Khan was quick to guess that intervention by the IAF was inevitable and imminent.

Nur Khan's instinct told him that a major conflict was on the anvil irrespective of how the President perceived the situation and that the PAF would be put to test sooner than later. In the event of the war conflagrating the cardinal objective of the IAF would inevitably be to take out or neutralize the PAF.

Given the situation and the President's reluctance to use the PAF, the initiative for air war would rest with the numerically larger IAF. Their obvious choice of action would be to hit hard in relentless waves against Sargodha, Sakesar and even Peshawar, creating synergy with their land forces invading Pakistan. This could render the PAF ineffective and the skies under the complete control of the IAF in Punjab, the main battle front. The prognosis must have been a disconcerting thought for the PAF leadership.

These must have been very defining, frustrating and lonely moments in Nur Khan's life. The briefing by the ISI chief had left very little to the imagination.

Nur Khan had recently inherited a superb fighting machine from Asghar Khan; what if his power house, the PAF, was tied down by the inert leadership and struck a sledge hammer blow by the IAF, for which they possessed full capability? How would he explain the loss to the nation? What should he do to face-off a determined IAF assault with full fury? These ominous thoughts must have permeated his mind. He had the tough choice to either carry out an independent decision or face the harsh verdict of history. He acted like the decisive commander he was and placed the PAF on red-alert, on 1st Sept from Lt Gen Rana's Corps HQs,

before he took-off for Sargodha. Posterity would later judge the consequences of his action as the “Saving of Pakistan by the PAF”.

Finally, even though perilously and callously late, the Army C-in-C sent a signal to all formations on 4th September 1965, in which the language lacked the punch of a red-alert order. This was criminal neglect which was to cost Pakistan heavily in casualties because the signal language was not intended to evoke the operational emergency of an impending attack against the motherland.

Four decades later, it was a dreadful experience for me to read the language of the so called flash signal sent to formations, as it would be for the discerning reader to learn why the army was caught unawares. The Lahore front had been cleared of all defences in May 1965 and the GOC's imploring to re-mine the area had been stoutly rejected. Amazingly, 25 percent of the army remained on annual leave. The signal sent on the orders by Gen Musa reads verbatim as follows: “Latest intelligence reports indicate Indian concentration both on East and West Pakistan and such flash announcements on All India Radio as ‘Pakistanis attacking Jammu etc.’ indicate their aggressive intention, formations will take necessary defensive measures. All informed.” The signal timing and its timid tone, four days after the President's emergency meeting for briefing by DG ISI lacked the imminence and urgency the situation demanded. General Musa's failure to evoke a sense of national emergency was stark as there was no mention of cancelling all leave and recalling all personnel. This should have been the first action taken by Musa. Ayub Khan was shaken enough by the ISI warning about the impending Indian attack to call the civil and military brass to decide on a course of action the same day, on 31st of Aug 1965. As a

Field Marshal, Ayub Khan should have known that recall from leave was extremely important at this juncture.

The Air Chief suggested to the President that he should be allowed to put the PAF pre-emptive plan in action immediately through aggressive posturing as he could not afford to let the adversary's air force wrest the initiative which could have disastrous consequences for Pakistan. The President did not approve the C-in-C's suggested modus operandi. On the other hand the delay and the content of Gen Musa's cautionary signal to his formations was the reason that the Commander 10 Div responsible for the defence of Lahore had been reportedly hosting a football tournament on the 5th of September and was fast asleep as the Indian invasion of Pakistan developed²³. 15 Div at Sialkot had taken the initiative and started moving to their war locations a day earlier.

However, inexplicably the Commander of 6 Armoured Division, Maj Gen Abrar Hussain, was also kept in the dark until the night of 6th September.

23 *Battle for Pakistan, by John Fricker.*

According to Maj Gen Abrar Hussain's recently published diary of war dispatches of the 1965 War,²⁴ the orders to move his Armoured Division, which was 1 Corp Reserve, had not been received till late on the night of 6th September. No specific task was given to the Division even at this stage as Lahore was being virtually invaded, but they were to remain prepared for the various eventualities²⁵. The attack came on three fronts; Jassar was a feint attack; the main armoured thrust developed for the capture of Chawinda and the other Divisions moved against Kasur and Lahore via Wagha on the main GT Road, to secure the bridge on Ichogil canal for the 2

Indian Armoured Brigade to spearhead the capture of Lahore.

There were very few Pakistani troops defending the sector. Therefore, the brunt of the attack fell on the 3rd Baluch of Pak Army, led by the courageous Major Shafqat Baloch who with light defences held back the full thrust of the Indian Divisional attack, spearheaded by the enemy's 2 Armoured Brigade and artillery. The fearless men of 3rd Baluch impeded the onslaught to the last man.

According to the tradition set by the PAF's founding fathers, what would really count ultimately for the success of a war plan would not be so much the plan itself, but the human response to the actual situation. Fortunately, at the PAF Station Peshawar and No 19 Squadron in particular, we were ready to fight with courage and honour, as I imagined was the case at every PAF station. The entire PAF had been propelled into high gear. Mission awareness permeated all ranks and there was a tremendous confidence exuding in the dedication at work.

Kashmir, geographically speaking, was 19 Squadron's territory for Close Air Support and air defence of the sector but we were not given any opportunity through out August except for armed reconnaissance of the battle area. We remained without any real action until the first week of September.

Air Battle for Pakistan

On 1st September, we were all lolling on the mattresses in the make-shift Air Defence Alert (ADA) hut, exhausted from inactivity, and I particularly upset about No 19 Squadron being ignored by the brass running the show at COC.

Then we heard the sirens of Phase-III declaration. “Hey chaps, that sounds like an attack siren, may be the balloon is up”, I made my prediction to the pilots in the ADA bunker. When I turned to the duty officer to get a hold of Mo Akbar, he was virtually hysterical with the information he had received from the SOC

(Sector Operations Centre) Sargodha. This was the fantastic news that Sarfaraz Rafiqui and Bhatti had shot down 4 Indian fighters. The news worked like a high potency shot in the arm. I immediately rang up Sargodha ADA and asked for ‘Bha’ Munir to get the real story because Rafiqui (‘Gooseneck’ to us, for his long cylindrical neck) was not around. So we got a second hand account of the speed shooting with Munir’s enhanced stutters. This was indeed a smoke signal for the all-out hostilities just emerging on the horizon.

24 *Men of Steel*, by Maj Gen Abrar Hussain.

25 *IBID*, Page 11.

All air defence missions were fully justified and like the above action, produced stunning results. But wasteful air effort, just to appease the army high command had no justification as would become apparent. It eroded the limited resources of the PAF. That was the implicit reason why Asghar Khan had warned the army that in the opening phases of a war, the PAF could not provide them support except in dire circumstances. Here is a typical example.

Under the command of Air Commodore MZ (Mitty) Masud, Sargodha launched two close support missions on an urgent Close Air Support (CAS) call from the army in Chhamb sector. Reportedly the army had not provided the precise co-ordinates of the enemy forces and merely asked to attack

enemy gun positions which meant targets of opportunity. Such an assumption could have been valid had there been an enormity of enemy action on the ground. However, that was not the situation when Sargodha launched several F-86 missions in one stream. The first formation of four failed to locate the guns they had been given as targets and they emptied their ordnance on a grove. It was claimed that some vehicles broke-out of the grove and were attacked. The second formation reported contact with a bunch of soft vehicles and they claimed to have destroyed 90% of them. Like the IAF on 1st Sept, the PAF was also getting carried away with huge claims, even though they claimed destruction of innocuous vehicles at great risk to our aircraft from ground fire and interceptors from Pathankot.

After the speed shooting by Sarfaraz Rafiqui and Bhatti, the next encounter was on 3rd Sept between six Gnats²⁶ intercepted by two F-86s led by a good fighter pilot Flt Lt Yusuf (fondly called Tangewallah by his buddies). Even though an F-104 was sent to their rescue, Yusuf was shot at by the Indian Flt Lt Keelor in a fierce air battle of virtually one versus six Gnats. During this air battle, Yusuf's elevator was badly shot-up. The account of the air battle differs in both the PAF histories, as well as the compilations by Indian historians. With the vantage of hindsight and availability of documentary information from both sides, the facts need to be cleared. More importantly, the pilot, Flt Lt Yusuf needs to be paid highly deserved tributes for his professional excellence and courage which he displayed during one of the most spectacular air battles of the 1965 war. He was pitted against six enemy fighters (Gnats) in aggressor roles, not counting the four Mysteres which were used as bait.

In fact, the Gnats were not on a CAS mission to start with as claimed in the PAF's official history, but had been planned as a baiting mission to lure PAF

fighters in the air and destroy them. This was explicitly given as the mission aim briefed by Sqn Ldr Greene on the night of 2nd Sept. Factually, there were to be 12 aircraft involved in this preconceived “snare and shoot the Sabre” sortie. The Gnats attacked Yusuf while his wingman lagged behind. The facts are that Yusuf’s plane did not disintegrate as was claimed by Flt Lt Keelor but it was damaged; he single-handedly put up a tremendous fight even though hugely out numbered 1:6. It is to his credit that he managed to extricate himself and his wingman from six pursuing Gnats. Micky Abbas (who was flying the F-104)

played a crucial part in Yusuf’s escape because the sight of the F-104 staggered the Gnats who did not press home their pursuit of two limping Sabres. The IAF

over reacted after this incident in branding the Gnat a ‘Sabre Slayer’, where in fact, the commanders should have chewed their fighter pilots for letting two Sabres get away against six Gnats.

26Two of the originally planned eight Gnats aborted the mission.

Yusuf, on the other hand, showed great modesty by telling the story as it was without any embellishment or exaggeration unlike some other cases of air combat which followed after the war started on the 6th of September and were reconstructed later. What came as a hilarious outcome (read embarrassment) of this air battle was that Sqn Ldr Sikand, the Flight Commander of a Gnat Squadron, and a part of the eight ship formation, had strayed after he broke-off, allegedly owing to electrical failure and low fuel. He claimed that he mistook Pasrur airstrip for Pathankot air complex and landed there, as a wide eyed Hakimullah watched him from his F-104, circling above in disappointment for not being able to take a shot at the

Gnat. Hakim circled the strip till he saw the Pak Army men take the pilot. To say the least, it was amazing that a Flight Commander would mistake a scraggy airstrip with no hills around or any infrastructure for a huge complex like Pathankot.

What stands out is that the six Gnats allowed two PAF Sabres, with an ineffective No 2 (wing man) and with a badly damaged aircraft (leader), to get away. This news made such incredible headlines and hullabaloo at the highest level, that the IAF Chief Arjun Singh, still smarting from the loss of 4 Vampires in one sortie, called the Defence Minister Chavan to give him the good news of Yusuf's presumed destruction. Keelor was bestowed a gallantry award for presumably blowing a Sabre to smithereens. Yusuf, however, not only survived but did some good shooting, as admitted by Indian historians (awarded a kill – one Gnat destroyed on 13th Sept as noted in the *Indo-Pak War of 1965* and *Bharat Rakshak* website). It is worth a mention that the Indian story of Flt Lt Pathania's dog-fight with another two Sabres was also a fantasy as there were no other Sabres in the area.

The Indian historians may like to correct their record, that it was one F-86

damaged, and not 'disintegrated'. Also, there is little justification in calling the Gnat a 'Sabre Slayer', when six Gnats could not destroy even one F-86. In the same vein, it would be prudent to remark that the failure of the Starfighters to hunt and destroy the enemy was not entirely the fault of the pilots. They had simply lacked proper combat training.

The next engagement and air action by the PAF on 4th September ended in confusion and loss of our first aircraft,

an F-86, flown by FltOff Nasir Butt. I got the story directly from my buddy Munir Ahmed. Amazing as it may seem, again twelve aircraft, in formations of fours, with 5 minutes stagger, were launched from Sargodha against targets of opportunity in the Chhamb area. I find this number against 'may be' targets quite bizarre to put it mildly. Simply analyzed, a formation of four is the most efficient and effective fluid formation.

Normally in war it would be expected to make at least two to three attacks in a fluid battle situation as we from No 19 Squadron did through out the war to good effect. It would take about 8-10 minutes to complete two tactical pull-ups and attacks. Presumably, the second lot of 4 fighters would have to go in a holding pattern, highly susceptible in astern formation to enemy interceptors from Pathankot. So, for twelve aircraft to operate in a given area would cause chaos and confusion.

Predictably, that was exactly what Bha Munir stuttered on the phone to me.

Bha said there was confusion within the formations of four, launched one after the other - at times wingmen were losing leaders, and all that was found was a bunch of vehicles in a convoy. They shot maybe a dozen or so soft skin vehicles but lost an aircraft. Thank heavens that Butt landed on our side of the battle area and was recovered quickly, even though he was incapacitated from injuries inflicted during bail out and did not fly in the war after the incident. The twelve aircraft attack against mere soft vehicles and the story told in great length by PAF historians (1988) seems incredibly overkill in embellishment. In the absence of a confirmed major assault by the enemy against our troops there could be little justification for demanding such massive effort at the risk of losing sparse aircraft. The

fact that half of them couldn't find any targets to attack demonstrates that economy of effort was not a consideration.

On 6th Sept there was an encounter between 4 Mysteres of No 1 IAF

Squadron from Adampur, led by Wg Cdr Omi Taneja and from Sargodha, 2 F104s led by Aftab Alam with Amjad on his wing (who aborted soon after getting airborne). The Mysteres were on a mission to hit the Pak Army formation HQ

(another ghost target; how do fighters at 500 Kts identify a Div HQ from a public road repair camp?). The location was given as 'Wazirabad-Gujranwala sector'. Not finding any such HQ, the leader spotted a train and attacked it instead, claiming its destruction with great pride. This was a passenger train pulling into Gakkhar railway station when the IAF aircraft attacked it. The single F-104 was directed towards the area and soon after Aftab Alam made contact with the Mystere formation. In the ensuing chase the 4 Mysteres scooted in panic on spotting the F-104. In hot pursuit of the exiting raiders, Aftab got in missile range and fired a missile at Sqn Ldr Paddy Earle, just as he (Earle) jettisoned his drop tanks (which exploded and were presumed by the Pak Army observer to be the destruction of the Indian aircraft) hoping to put distance between himself and the menacing Mach-2 Starfighter. Exiting at tree top level, Sqn Ldr Earle escaped the missile as it hit the ground owing to greater heat emission from the ground as compared to the aircraft exhaust. There was no kill.

The PAF's official history needs to be corrected.

Exactly a similar situation confronted me later in the 1971 war while flying a Mirage. My missiles connected with the ground after I had pulled up steeply to avoid an over shoot with very high overtaking speed. I saw the cloud of dust and smoke, evidently caused by the jettisoned tanks of the Su-7 I was chasing. I happily called it a kill, without checking the wreckage.

IAF had the capacity to follow a mass-wave attack strategy against Sargodha, Mauripur, Peshawar stations and the radars at Sakesar and Badin. Had they carried it out with courage and tenacity, PAF's capability would have been obliterated. Indian historians to date have not been able to ferret out the real reason behind their lacklustre performance and especially the IAF's inexplicable absence on the 6th morning as the Indian army invaded Pakistan. The conjecture that the IAF was kept out of the loop by the army or perhaps held back by the political cabal does not hold much water, when two Indian Corps were launched in a complete surprise attack to invade Pakistan. Of course Pakistan's Armed Forces, especially the PAF had presumably lost the surprise advantage after the Indians entered Wagha. For some mysterious reason their air force was frittered away in comical pursuit as will become evident in the story to follow.

Indian historians do not mention of any joint operational plan or a hint of a meeting between the operational staff of the two services. It may well be that like our Army Chief and the President who wanted to keep the PAF out, the Indian side, too, wanted to keep their air force out. Fortunately for us, the Indian Air Force chief did not demonstrate the aggressive spirit to focus the army's attention on the pivotal role of the IAF in their invasion plans. Thank God for the inept IAF leadership that the initiative was virtually thrown into the lap of the PAF unexpectedly.

9

PAF BLUNTS INDIAN

INVASION

The first news of the Indian offensive was conveyed to Ayub Khan through a PAF Mobile Observer Unit and Air Cdre Akhtar; not through army intelligence. A shocked President called Gen Musa at 4 AM to ask him, "Where are your field troops?" He ought to have asked "Are our troops fully deployed and operational to defend the borders?" The answer by the C-in-C

was misleading; he assured the President that his troops were fully prepared to defend the motherland. This was farthest from the truth, because all the defences had been removed from Lahore, Sialkot and Kasur on the orders of Gen Musa. Imploring by Div Commanders had been boorishly rejected. As a result, the main entry point to Lahore over the BRB canal was defended by a handful of men of the 3rd Baluch. Those on leave were not recalled on the absurd pretext that recalling the men and mining the border would provoke the enemy!

On 4th September the fighter pilots of No 19 Squadron under my command were sitting restlessly in the improvised underground bunker at the Peshawar Station, disappointed that all the missions in the battle area had gone to the Sargodha Squadrons. Our prayers must have been heard as I was told by the Senior Air Traffic Control Officer (SATCO) that the C-in-C was about to land at Peshawar. I scrambled

to the tarmac area where the C-130 was to park. Air Mshl Nur Khan arrived with his staff at around 5 PM. Standing in the receiving line disappointment must have been writ on my face. It seemed to have caught the Cin-C's attention as he alighted and shook my hand. He asked in his typical nonchalant way "How is the morale?" I replied "Rock bottom, sir!"

I saw a big smile appear on Gp Capt FS Hussain's face - he was standing right behind Air Mshl Nur Khan. FS was of course a man we all idolized because he was the best fighter pilot in the PAF. "What's the matter?" asked the C-in-C. I answered "Sir! My squadron seems to have been put in cold storage while Sargodha is getting all the action. My pilots are feeling miserable, we haven't been sent into action even once. Our morale can't get any lower because we feel as though we are being held in reserve for minor tasks. My pilots need a shot in the arm, sir." Nur Khan looked over his shoulder at FS and said, "Yes, I think he is right, we must get them into the action." I believe at that moment, destiny smiled at me and at the fate of No 19 Squadron. The squadron entered the war by sheer dint of the resolve to fight and win. It all began unplanned, as the juggernaut of the Indian three pronged attack was discovered at Wagha.

On the morning of 6th September, some of us woke up having spent the night in the bunker feeling even more tired from the listless sleep in the anticipation and frustration of the past week, not having seen any action.

Suddenly, a message was communicated on the phone from the station and was jotted down by the ADA Duty Ops Pilot. He scribbled the message on his pad and after putting the receiver down he shoved it in front of me as though presenting a trophy, yelling "Sir, we are on!"

The message was for 6 F-86 aircraft to proceed to an area east of Jassar Bridge and attack and destroy enemy artillery guns. Almost immediately, I was called to the phone and heard the mumbling voice of Air Cdre Rahim Khan, "Sajad (Masroor Hussain and he were the only ones to call me by my first name), well! Have you received the mission? Now this is the opening shot for your squadron. Make sure it's a job well done; I want you to make certain that you chaps destroy these bloody guns because they have isolated our troops by destroying a bridge behind them and are causing heavy casualties."

I don't want to take up too much detail in describing the spirit of the young pilots as I detailed the formation. Those who were not part of this mission hung their heads, most certainly cursing me. I told the formation members that it would be SOP briefing for strafing and rocket firing at Jamrud, only the targets would be real. "Follow me, if you have any questions ask as we walk," I said.

As we approached our aircraft, I was taken aback to see eight 5-inch rockets loaded on our aircraft instead of the High Velocity Aerial Rocket, the 'Mighty Mouse' rocket pods, which were the standard armament we had always used.

We had never fired these 5-inch rockets from the F-86s before. Rocket firing is such a precise and demanding exercise that I can best describe it by comparing it with killing a rat at 50 yards with an air gun! So the sight of 5-inch rockets certainly impeded the gait of five swashbuckling 'Zambo' pilots (Zambo was our Squadron call sign and was changed to Sherdil at some later time).

To hit a target from the air is a very precise operation. Intricate calculations are required to determine the aiming point after factoring in precise data on rocket burn-out time,

velocity at that precise fraction of a second, the wind factor, the temperature and humidity. All these help you determine the gravity drop and thus the trajectory from the launching to the target and finally the aiming point which is in fact the size of the head of a pin. The error margin at impact has to be less than 10 feet, when fired from 3,000 feet. Such accuracy even in peace time, in perfect weather with extremely accurate calculations fed into the gun sight, requires an exceptional pilot to achieve a 10-20 ft margin of error.

So you can imagine the accuracy needed and the challenge of enemy ground defences and air interceptors, which can be a serious and dangerous distraction.

Under these circumstances, I had to make a quick decision about the 'Rockets Release Parameters' while cursing under my breath for this last minute lacuna on our very first mission. But it had to be done and I had to choose between flight safety and mission success. There was no way we could fire these bulky rockets in the same profile as the 2.75 inch rockets we were so consummate with. We quickly brain-stormed and it was decided that the only sure way to hit the enemy guns would be to fire them from very close range to minimize the gravity drop (like in a strafing attack). The pilots would observe the impact of my rockets in the first attack and take a cue from there to establish their aiming point.

This is a classical example where mission requirements took precedence over flight safety principles and I had no second thoughts about changing the firing parameters. This was war and success would only come with audacity.

We took off at around 0900 Hrs for our target which incidentally was not the "Indian armour across Wagha" as

described by most history books, but the “enemy artillery guns” near Sialkot. Both targets were at the outer edge of our combat radius, operating from Peshawar. Therefore, I had to decide on a Hi-Lo-Hi profile¹. As we climbed towards the east, the fighter pilots on my right and left maintained position in an immaculate formation as though tied by a string. It was a defining moment for all of us and each Falcon on my right and left appeared ready for the prey.

Air Battle for Lahore

We started our descent near Gujranwala to deceive the enemy radar, planning to get down to 50 feet above the ground level for the final run-in from the Initial Point (IP) for the target near Jassar. But destiny had other plans for the six Zambos emblazing the air at 420 Kts. Suddenly the radio crackled, breaking the powerful silence of six cockpits, as we heard the voice of Air Cdre Masroor Hussain, the Senior Air Staff Officer at the Air Defence Headquarters. He called me by name and in a deeply sombre voice ordered me to change my target plan and head for Atari village on the fringes of Lahore, warning that the Indian tanks had crossed into Pakistan territory, and were about to enter Lahore.

Air Cdre Masroor may as well have put 5,000 watts through my body. I cannot easily describe the effect it had on our thoughts that the heart of Pakistan was coming under attack by the enemy. The rush of adrenaline was already very high amongst the formation members, so immaculately positioned around me in battle formation on their first real war mission. This transmission acted like a fuse.

¹Hi-Lo-Hi denotes proceeding toward the target at a high level to save fuel, even though in the enemy radar range; approach low to the target, and egress low but climb high once in own territory.

There was no time for rage because I had been trained well enough to know that in a real challenge, anger surely impaired judgment. As the leader, I had much to do, flying at such low-level that I was skimming the trees. At about 0940 Hrs, we intercepted the Amritsar-Lahore road after shaking up the citizens of Lahore by flying at very low-level over the outskirts of the city.

We weaved on either side of the road to spot the enemy but it proved elusive. I might add here that three F-86s (one having aborted before take-off) from Sargodha had already been to the area and had returned unsuccessfully, without firing a shot².

Suddenly, I noticed the sky was littered with anti-aircraft shells. I immediately figured we were too close to the Amritsar radar site which had been reported as the most heavily defended vulnerable point. The Ack-Ack was an awesome sight, last seen by me in the movie *Battle of Britain*. I turned my formation hard, 180 degrees around and got into a broader weaving pattern, with the second and third sections criss-crossing to provide cross-cover against IAF interceptors who, I was sure, would arrive shortly. We were staying at deck level, skimming over tree-tops.

Crossing over the Wagha border, I noticed the famous omnibus at the barrier and many people standing there and looking up at us. Then I saw what looked to be faint tank tracks about 3-4 miles north of the Grand Trunk (GT) road. I followed the tell tale tracks to the south, praying hard to make contact with the monsters leaving those broad tracks. Just a few moments later, I spotted several tanks and armoured vehicles trying to climb from the banks onto the main road. I called out and said, "Boys, our Armoured Corps seem to be finally out, let's give them a salute." As I pulled up slightly and turned my aircraft on its back flying over the

first batch of tanks, I saw to my horror the unmistakable Indian saffron roundels; I immediately yelled as I pulled up sharp left, "These are Indian tanks, SOB! LET'S GET 'EM! Select switches to hot, fire rockets in pairs."

It was a historic moment for all of us and we had worked hard to train for every contingency. I nearly screamed, "Zambo leader is in for target at 9

o'clock. Watch my impact!" Incredibly, the moment of truth had arrived as I closed onto my target, holding my breath. I knew that my impact was most crucial to my reputation and for setting the pace for the five Falcons tearing down behind me. The bottom diamond on my gun sight had inched up and I released the first pair of rockets so close I scared myself. I pulled away steeply, not knowing where my 'five inchers' had landed. Instantly, the No 3 in the formation, called out, "Direct Hit (DH) leader! The tank is airborne." These tanks were full of diesel and ammunition which had not been fully used as yet.

Every 'DH' by my formation members resulted in a ball of fire of melting steel.

2 *Battle for Pakistan* by John Fricker. Page 90.

This is a dangerous situation because flying so low, we would have to fly through the debris of targets being hit and exploding, which is virtually like flying through anti-aircraft barrage. As I looked over my shoulder while pulling up, I saw rockets from No 3 score a direct hit, a sight to remember. By the time I was on down wind it occurred to me that we were extremely vulnerable like the 4 Vampires shot by Sarfaraz Rafiqui's pair, so I called No 5 and 6 and instructed them to climb to 7,000 feet and look out for enemy aircraft. During the second attack I heard Sqn Ldr Mervyn Middlecoat arrive

at the scene in an F-104. That was good augury and I called back No 5 and 6 to fit in the pattern and shoot away, since the F-104 would provide us the much needed cover. As I was pulling up I saw a carrier vehicle with an artillery piece on it. That was my next target and as I called "IN" again, I noticed another one of the tracked vehicles smouldering. I was out of rockets in my fourth attack. No 6 called drops dry (external fuel finished) and internal fuel low. I called back and said, "Never mind the fuel, let's get every one in sight, we will recover at Sargodha."

In the next pass I spotted what I thought was a tank and I hit it with a long burst from my six. 5" calibre guns as I manoeuvred to attack it from the rear. I thought of the time with my buddy Omar Khan Afridi at the Nowshera School of Armoured Corps and the firing range; I remembered the engine grills of the tank are its weakest area and a good target for strafing. That is what I did, and called out to my formation and saw the results after No 2 confirmed tank on fire.

The last attack I recall chasing a jeep with a flag fluttering off to the side of the road. As it saw me coming it tried to get away. But my bullets had already landed on the target. I wondered who that could have been.

Normally in a Close Air Support mission, no more than one or, at a maximum, two attacks are carried out to avoid losing aircraft to enemy's air defence weapons. But after I had set up the pattern and saw my pilots swoop down like falcons in devastating attacks, I chose to stay in the area for 16-17

minutes. The performance of my Squadron swells me with pride even today, 40

years after our first encounter of war. The PAF historians have commented that staying on the target for 17 minutes was “imprudent.” However, that was my decision as the leader and I think that is what leadership is all about; to make difficult decisions. I had deliberately stayed on till there were columns of fire all around, melting steel and enemy within. I called-off after nearly all our ammo was depleted and fuel perilously low.

The diary of Pakistan Army’s 10th Division, responsible for the defence of Lahore has recorded this attack in most salutary words and in fact a small memento exists even today in one of the army graveyards amongst the graves of the martyrs at the village Atari. I visited the site in 2003 on the invitation of my friend Gen Mohammad Safdar, the former Governor of the Punjab. It was a strange feeling recounting the decisive and devastating performance of No 19

Squadron pilots, yet a telling reminder of the grim battle that was fought by Aziz Bhatti, Shafqat Baluch and the other gallant men who drank from the the cup of martyrdom in saving Lahore.

The proof of the devastation caused by us on 6th Sept morning is best judged by the Indian historians as reproduced below. The account of this mission is also covered in the *PAF History*, as well as *Air Battle for Pakistan* by John Fricker and several Indian publications.³The Indian account in the *IndoPak Air War of 1965* reads: ***Even as the PAF planned its strategic move to hit IAF bases, one of its Squadrons flew missions supporting the Pak Army against Indian formations, which were advancing along the Lahore-GT Road axis. No 19***

Squadron from Peshawar, led by Squadron Ldr SS Nosey Haider, flew a six aircraft strike mission at 0930 Hrs against the leading elements of the Indian Army's thrust towards Lahore. The leading battalion of the division, 3 Jat, led by Lt Col Desmond Hayde had its columns strafed and rocketed by PAF Sabres. The unit lost all its RCL guns in the attack. A group of Sherman tanks sent to support Hayde's battalion was attacked from the air and incapacitated. The withdrawal of 3 Jat was a serious set back.

In the book, *Missed Opportunities*, written by the Indian Maj Gen Lachman Singh, the following description of the events of 6th September is recorded:

Hayde assembled his 'O' group near Milestone 14 to issue his orders for the advance. His 'F' echelon vehicles carrying ammunition, RCL guns mounted on jeeps, carriers with battalion mortars and reorganization stores including tools had halted on the road. Before they could disperse to camouflage and conceal themselves, 6 F-86 PAF aircraft appeared over them and started strafing the vehicles parked near the 'O' group. It was about 9.30 AM and the enemy aircraft shot up every vehicle on the road for about fifteen minutes, undeterred by any fire from our troops. 11

Corps had not been allotted any Air Defence (AD) guns and no friendly aircraft was in the area to challenge the enemy. 3 Jat lost 5 out of 6

RCL guns, 3 mortars with their carriers and a number of men. An artillery OP officer of the light battery with 3 Jat was killed. 3 Jat was without any artillery

OP officer except one FO with C Squadron who had no wireless communications with 3 Jat.

Similarly 38 Brigade on the

GT Road behind 54 Brigade lost vehicles and men to the PAF strike.⁴ Hayde was an Irishman or Scotsman settled in India... I also read that after this drubbing at the hands of the PAF, there was a rout in the leading echelons of the Indian strike force... General Sukhwant Singh in his book, 'Defence of Western Borders', writes that the CO of the battalion ran back with just one sock and one shoe deserting the battalion.

His 2nd in command followed suit and ran back on a bicycle and took refuge in Amritsar Fort. Both were Court Martialed and dismissed.

³ Fizayaby Pushpindar Singh and Ravi Rykie. Page 33. The Indo-Pak Air War of 1965 by Jagan Mohan and Samir Chopra, 2005. Page 102.

⁴ Missed Opportunities by Maj Gen Lachhman Singh. Page 206.

In the official history of the Indo-Pak War 1965 the rout on GT Road is discussed as follows:

"At 0700 hrs, Pak aircraft carried out intensive rocketing and bombing on 3

Jat and 15 Dogra positions. Later, Pakistani Sabres attacked several places on Grand Trunk Road, including Gharenda, where the Div Commander had his command post and the Divisional Reserves. The air attacks were pressed home with determination, and they took a heavy toll of vehicles. With the skies all to themselves, the PAF had no difficulty in picking out any vehicle which moved. Several ammunition

trucks were hit, and the ammunition kept exploding for hours, obstructing the road, which in turn made it necessary to make detours through slushy rice fields. Almost the entire 'F' echelon vehicles of 54 Brigade were destroyed. 3 Jats lost their 2nd-in-Command, besides 5 of 6 RCL guns and 3 mortars with their carriers."

The reason for including these versions of the attack is to ensure the credibility of the claims by No 19 Squadron pilots and to ascertain the veracity of actual performance versus perceived claims by the operators. By all accounts this may well have been the most important mission of the 1965 air war.

The Indian army did not move an inch from where we had left them till the end of the war. I know this because I led the final mission on the last day of the war, on 22nd September, exactly where we had started.

By the time I called off the attack on 6th September it was time to start a climb for optimum range while the fuel was depleting swiftly. We landed at Sargodha and I met the Station Commander after alighting, as he had come to ask how we had fared. He couldn't believe the success that my squadron had achieved, especially since his own formation, earlier on, had returned unsuccessful. I requested him to re-load us and re-fuel us so that we could repeat the mission since we knew where the attackers were left burning. He said "You will get only internal fuel, and after that get back to your base." So, we left somewhat unceremoniously but after I had exchanged some tight hugs with 'Bha' Munir and 'Butch' Ahmed, while we were being re-fuelled. They told us that the President of Pakistan had declared on the radio just a little while ago that Pakistan was at war.

Gen Jogindar Singh's book, with reference to their invasion plan sans the IAF was most critical of the Indian High Command. First of all there appeared to be very little, if at all, co-ordination within the IAF, leave alone inter-services co-operation. Gen Jogindar Singh adds that when he visited the Brigade HQ to check about the availability of air support to cover the invasion of Lahore, he found the Brigade Commander in his dressing gown, going round and round in the Ops Room. He had to be physically removed from his command.

For the rest of the day, the Sargodha pilots flew 11 sorties in the Wagha Sector and damaged more of the invading army in the area. What was most surprising was that there was no sign of the IAF throughout the rest of the day on the Lahore front. In PAF's initial assessment, the Indians had taken the initiative and PAF had lost the surprise element. This apprehension proved to be wrong. By the time we were attacking the invading army at Wagha, our fears had vanished, for the IAF failed to attack our bases and radars. Much later we found out what the IAF was up to.

The IAF was busy attacking the passenger train at Gakkhar railway station and then 4 Mysteres attacked a *tonga* after finding nothing at Kasur Railway station! In addition to this were Close Air Support missions in the Akhnur Sector - all astounding indicators of an air force not well trained, badly led and wastefully employed. This was happening while their invading army was being destroyed by the PAF fighters right under their noses. How could they miss such massive action at Ichogil Canal? Such was the dismal performance of our adversary and strangely, there is no criticism by the Indian historians or the official Indian history. Their failure became part of the reason of our success.

As an epilogue to the critical moment in our history, when the Indian army would have entered Lahore and played havoc with our country, I must narrate how destiny got my team there and how the enemy was sighted. The Indian plan was a very professional one in which the confidence of the Indian planners and commanders was based on assured success. This confidence was overflowing on 5th September in New Delhi where late at night a huge press conference was called by the Indian Army Chief. At this conference, a printed invitation was given to foreign correspondents and selected Indian journalists, inviting them to the Lahore Gymkhana for a peg of whisky to celebrate the capture of Lahore.

Such was the audacity of our enemy.

Their intelligence information had obviously told them that our defending Division at Lahore was hosting football matches on the 6th morning. Not surprisingly that our army high command was thus shaken-up with the news that the Indians were at the gates of Lahore. What the Indian generals planning this major invasion did not factor into their plan was the 'intangible factor'; the readiness for martyrdom of the Pakistani officers and men. The three-pronged attack planned in May was to assault Lahore and Kasur simultaneously. The attack was to mature across Wagha at the very early hours of the morning, well before dawn. But for the courage and blood of a handful of Pakistani officers and soldiers holding weak defensive positions, especially every single one martyred from 3rd Baluch, Lahore would have been entered within a couple of hours.

The attack was resisted and the advance delayed well into daylight and that is how the 6 F-86s of No 19 Squadron

arrived and wreaked havoc on the advancing columns. The enemy attack was brought to a halt with an inferno of fire.

Upon landing at our home base there was celebration at Peshawar given the success of our mission at Wagha. I was called by the Station Commander and told that the C-in-C wanted to talk to me. Air Mshl Nur Khan asked me the details of the mission and I gave him a detailed account of the attack. He kept punctuating my commentary with "Excellent," and "Very well done" and finally asked me if the 2.75 rockets were effective against the tanks. I replied, "No sir, these are neither accurate nor good at penetrating. May I suggest that napalm would be most effective against the armour"? He said some encouraging words for the pilots who had performed to his expectations and said that he would speak to me again.

Little did I or my pilots know how close Lahore had been to being over run by the Indians. Many years later, I read in a book written by the famous historians Pushpinder Singh and Ravi Rikhye, "What few know is that the PAF

also had a major role in stalling the Indians. But for the PAF (No 19 Squadron), the weak Pakistani defence would have been overwhelmed and the Indian army would have poured across the BRB canal and into Lahore."⁵

During those crucial moments when Pakistan's territorial integrity was in jeopardy, the President of Pakistan, shocked and overtaken by the speed of events, must have asked himself how he had been misled by his confidants and the Foreign Office. He had been duped into believing that the Indians would restrain from responding furiously to Operations Gibraltar and Grand Slam, especially to release pressure from Akhnur. There were no brave men around the President to advise him that the capture of Akhnur was the

only option available to have averted the Indian Nos 1 and XI Corps from attacking. The Indians would divert the effort to retake Akhnur, as they would never have accepted the severance of Kashmir from the mainland. But that was not to be.

Before mid-day the President decided to address the nation; the bold tone of his voice did not come from a strong heart. His speech was full of jargon to invoke religious frenzy and patriotic emotions. The nation was at war, which the President had not been ready to face. Few knew that the tough sounding President had already started seeking interventions by powerful friends to influence a ceasefire without any preconditions. The nation and fighting men were being emotionally blackmailed. This paradox was discovered by Air Mshl Asghar Khan during his solo military aid-seeking trip to China, Indonesia, Iran and Turkey. Premier Zhou-en-Lai had confronted him with the question as to why President Ayub Khan had started seeking a ceasefire already. What was the point in starting a war if Ayub Khan had not wanted to see it through to some conclusion? The baffled Air Marshal had no answer; for he was not aware that President Ayub Khan had been sending panic signals for a ceasefire.

5 *Fiza'ya, Psyche of the Pakistan Air Force* by Pushpinder Singh and Ravi Rikhye, Page 33.

PAF's Pre-emptive Strikes

On 6th September at 1100 Hrs the C-in-C Air Mshl Nur Khan called the ACAS (Ops), Air Cdre Rahim Khan, who had lived with the PAF's 'Strike Plan'

since early June, and ordered that the plan should be enacted immediately. A flash message was initiated at 1200

Hrs to all concerned. Air Mshl Asghar Khan in his book *The First Round* recounts: ***I knew that the earliest we could mount a full-scale attack was at dusk that day 6th September. Our plans required about eight hours' clear notice being given to all operational units. On receipt of these a number of moves were to take place culminating in a full scale attack on all Indian air bases opposite East and West Pakistan. It was vital for the smooth launching of this strike that the decision be taken by about ten o'clock that morning. During the discussion a few other officers joined in and at least one suggested that we should wait and fight defensively; that is not to launch an offensive but wait to be attacked. I had been discussing these plans for the last eight years and was familiar with this timid view which I had firmly rejected in the past. I expressed my views again but this time without the authority of the office. I suggested a course of action that I knew was the only one we could safely adopt. Air Cdre Akhtar and Air Cdre Rahim Khan were both enthusiastic about it, and Nur Khan agreed that this was the right thing to do. I then hurried off to see the President to apprise him of the action the Pakistan Air Force proposed to take and, on its behalf, to seek his approval.***

Further down, Air Mshl Asghar Khan makes some other statements relevant to the crucial moments. Ayub Khan gave the go ahead for the pre-emptive strike but warned him that no air action by the PAF in East Pakistan should be taken against Indian airfields. This reasserted the defensive mind-set of our President who had a limited knowledge of air strategy. For him the prime role of an air force was to maintain a favourable air situation over the battle areas. If Nur Khan had not taken the initiative our lone Squadron at Dhaka could have been written off by the 10 odd IAF

Squadrons on the 7th morning (the complete ineptitude of the IAF planners saved the lone Squadron). Nonetheless, in view of the critical developments, the Air Mshl chose to avoid discussion about restraint in East Pakistan, and assured the President that the PAF would live up to the nation's expectations.

Air Mshl Asghar Khan laments that upon his return to the Command Operations Centre (COC) he found staff officers still discussing the plan, embroiling Air Mshl Nur Khan with the merits and de-merits of a pre-emptive strike, and further adding to the confusion. Air Mshl Asghar Khan recounts in his book⁶:

I found a discussion in progress again about the merits of taking the offensive. That is why planning for war is best done in peace time. All possible contingencies should be thought of and plans to meet each one of these worked out in the minutest detail. This is what we had endeavoured to do in the previous few years. Nur Khan had been away from the Air Force for six years and was naturally anxious to examine all aspects of the problem before taking a decision. The implications of this decision could be grave and his hesitation annoying, but it was nevertheless understandable. As he listened to the divergent views of his staff, my anxiety at the consequences of the delay began to grow. I was convinced that if we did not put in the first attack the consequences would be serious. As it was, the possibility of the Indians launching an air attack at dusk could not be ruled out. This, however, I had thought unlikely since by launching an attack at dusk they would give us a night to recover. If they had intended to attack us first their best time was the early hours in the morning of the 6th. Since they had

launched a pre-arranged attack the omission of the air force was deliberate. However, situation and ideas change, and an air attack by them could not be ruled out. Ten o' clock in the morning, which I had set as the deadline for the decision, was well past and the discussion continued. These must have been the most frustrating moments of my life.

This dithering of the staff did not change the mind of Nur Khan, but induced a crucial delay of one hour in the green light from him to launch. Air Mshl Asghar Khan felt that the decision should have been taken by 1000 Hrs whereas it was taken at 1100 Hrs. This was not too late as it still allowed more than ample time to all the stations, already ordered to Phase-III a week ago, to implement their well rehearsed strike plans. Provided that the operational staff had acted with alacrity and a sense of intense urgency, the message to the stations should have reached much earlier than 1300 Hrs as stated in the PAF's official history. As per the rules governing such crucial signals, the flash signal should have been received by the commander at each station by 1130 Hrs at the latest. That this did not happen constituted a serious failure.

6 *The First Round, Page 19.*

The PAF had been in a state of readiness in Phase-III which meant 'Red Alert' for a week and relentless operations against enemy ground forces and air forces had already been going on for 6 days. From this state of readiness, the operational bases should not have required more than 2-3 hours notice at the maximum to meet their pre-designated and highly rehearsed war role.

The point being made here is that the warning time on 6th September had been adequate for the bases to launch

strikes which had been played out for months since June 1965. The only exception had been No 19 Squadron because we were given a completely different target than what had been rehearsed. So if any one should have had a grouse about insufficient time to plan a totally different target afresh, it should have been PAF Station Peshawar. The bottom line is that if one of the Squadrons was able to pull off the assigned task given under similar circumstances, then there could have been be no valid excuse for Sargodha and Mauripur not to perform even better.

THE 6TH SEPTEMBER STRIKE PLAN⁷ **STATION Force Composition &**

TARGET

Sargodha

Sargodha

Sargodha

Sargodha

Peshawar

Mauripur

Mauripur

Mauripur

Ordinance

8 F-86s – Guns only

8 F-86s – Guns only

8 F-86s – Guns only

4 T-33s – Guns only

8 F-86s – Guns only
8 F-86s – Guns only
4 T-33 – Guns only

Adampur (Aircraft on ground)

Halwara (Aircraft on ground)

Amritsar Radar
Ferozpur Radar
Pathankot (Aircraft on ground)

Jamnagar (Aircraft on ground)

Porbunder Radar
12 B-57s (4 each) Bombs Jamnagar, Adampur, Halwara

Dhaka

4 F-86s – Guns only

(Runways & Aircraft)

Kalaikunda & Baghdogra (Aircraft
on the airfields)

This attack plan was a reflection of the 6th June plan with minor variations. During an earlier interview, Air Mshl Nur Khan told me that he had felt the plan was sound and there was no need to alter its prime ingredients which were: 1) demolishing IAF's fighter bombers on the ground at its forward bases; 2) taking out the radars in the south and north; 3) making the runways untenable through bombing by B-57s through out the night. What was missing from the original plan were repeat attacks against forward airfields at dawn again. The commando force against these airfields

was to be launched at midnight. This modification to the 'June Plan' had been done owing to the circumstances, deployment of forces and the important factor of 'the threat perception at that moment'.

⁷John Fricker laid out the attack plan as provided to him by AHQ, in his book *Battle for Pakistan*, Page 91. It is a mirror image of the official PAF historical record.

Clearly, the pre-emptive initiative which was the core of the 'June Plan'

had been lost as the Indian invasion came as a total surprise. However, the inexplicable conduct of the missing IAF compensated and provided an opportunity for the PAF to conduct an all out attack on the IAF bases and radars. If the PAF did not grasp the opportunity and launch the attack, the initiative would have been handed over to the adversary and that could have been the coup de grace for the PAF and a serious threat to the security of Pakistan. Therefore, a preventive pre-emptive was the Hobson's choice, not without hazards of its own from the possibility of high attrition which was within the capability of the enemy. All these threat perceptions, however, had been thoroughly hypothesized and every possible contingency factored into the war planning process by Air Mshl Asghar Khan and his Chief of Operations, Air Cdre Rahim Khan, after the Rann of Kutch skirmish. The irony was that Asghar Khan was not in command in 1965 and every ounce of responsibility fell on Nur Khan's shoulders and time was working against him on that morning of 6th Sept.

As it happened, the PAF was the first to inform the President about the Indian attack at Wagha. History tells us that an airman from the Mobile Observer Unit (MOU) deployed at the forward most position on the Lahore border was the first to see the Indian soldiers on Pakistani soil in the wee hours

of 6th September morning. He immediately withdrew and reported about the Indian incursion to the Station Commander Lahore. The Station Commander sent the airman back to his post, but sensibly called Air Cdre Akhtar (the senior officer in the COC who was in charge of the Air Operations when the Air Chief was away or resting) and narrated the incident. Akhtar called the President at about 0430 Hrs, woke him up and told him that Pakistan was under attack on the Lahore front. Ayub Khan was totally rattled by the news.

Right after informing the President, Air Cdre Akhtar informed his own Cin-C Nur Khan, and told him about the Indian attack. The traumatised President woke up a sleepy Gen Musa and inquired if he had received the information about the invasion by the Indian Army. His response to the President was couched in the crass hope that the handful of men deployed on the Wagha-Burki sector would defend the frontiers with their lives, which is exactly what happened. In his book, Gen Musa has not said anything significant about his action after the President's call, except the rhetoric that "the treacherous enemy had invaded our sacred land in a deceptive move, but our brave army was fully prepared to take on the enemy." The tragedy is that Gen Musa was rewarded with not only a Hilal-e-Jurat but the Governorship of East and then West Pakistan.

The entire PAF was waiting with bated breath for the word 'GO'. At Peshawar, we received the message at mid-day through Wg Cdr M S Khan, a Signals Officer acting as a courier. As we got airborne I was certain that the formidable Falcons would soon be rising from Sargodha, since the flight time to their target was much less than ours. That was around 1620 Hrs on the afternoon of 6th September. An impression exists that the aircraft had to be armed with rockets and hence pylons had to be fitted, which needed

more time. That is totally incorrect because all the attackers were to use 'Guns only' and that was specified in the operation order.

At Peshawar, I had no apprehensions or fear of time constraint. We had more than adequate time to accomplish the assigned task despite the diversified target. All our pilots had flown earlier during the day and for me, the last sortie of the day was the fourth mission, but this was of little relevance to our stamina.

Any insinuation of fatigue would have been sniggered at by the combat pilots at the three stations.

It would be instructive to understand in simple words the anatomy of offensive counter air operations, their significance, the relative complexity and the danger involved in the execution of each type of mission. The most complex and demanding operational mission that put the professional calibre of fighter and bomber pilots to test was to conduct offensive counter air operations. In simple terms it means attacking enemy airfields, radars and other valuable assets, which are heavily defended by the air defence elements comprising radar and communication networks, fighter interceptors, SAMs and Ack-Ack guns (radar controlled as well as manual). During the execution of such a mission, if the attackers are intercepted by the opponent's fighters, it constitutes the most dangerous moments in a pilot's mission.

So how does a fighter/bomber pilot feel as he sits in his cockpit to start off for a counter-air operation/airfield strike mission? One of the world's most renowned aces of the US Air Force and also the first man to go into space in a rocket propelled aircraft, Brig Gen Chuck Yeager (also known as the fastest man alive), described his feelings as he was about to

lead his Squadron of Mustangs to attack the heavily defended enemy airfield of Rechlin in Germany during WW-II. I met Yeager in 1971 during one of his visits to No 33 Wing at Sargodha and I asked him what his worst fear was during WW-II operations. He narrated this story to me and promised to send me a copy of his book. For enthusiasts of air war I have ventured to reproduce his narrative of that strike.

He writes:

I was elated flying home, but shaky, too. That flak was damned close, and I always figured that if I busted my ass, it would be down on the deck rather than up in the sky, dog fighting where there were thousands of feet of sky in every direction to out-manoeuve an enemy airplane determined to destroy you. There wasn't much room for ducking on the deck, where one lucky shot could blow the radiator in your belly and bring you down.

With only sporadic fighter resistance against our bombers, we had full ammo to strafe targets of opportunity on the way home. But the strafing mission we most dreaded was 'hitting airfields'. Then, you had to hit fast, come at them from different directions and varying altitudes, and take them by surprise. God help your ass if you are a tail-end Charlie in the last wave. By then the Ack-Ack are ready.

After I shot down that plane, I was assigned to lead the entire group on a strafing mission against Rechlin; the most heavily defended air base in Germany. Located in the suburbs of Berlin, it was the

German Wright Field, where all of their latest aircraft were tested and maintained.

Bombing operations had been ineffective; I was ordered to lead our three Squadrons onto the deck to destroy their service hangers and any airplanes caught on the ground. The place was swarming with anti-aircraft batteries, and we were relying on the element of surprise plus predicted low visibility to make it through. I wasn't a warrior after months of flying combat, I was fatalistic. Hell, if I took-off with a rough engine, so what? It would probably smooth out, but if not, I would cope somehow.

But the Rechlin assignment scared me to death.

I remember sitting in my airplane, warming up for take-off, feeling clammy with real premonition that I was taking my last ride. The weather was terrible at both ends, rain squalls and turbulent winds; and I had to figure a way to get to the target and get out in one piece. I knew I was leading a lot of guys to their death, and there wasn't a damn thing I could do about it. Andy was scheduled to lead the final wave of Mustangs in the attack, probably taking the worse pounding of all. I was usually confident and gung-ho, but I found myself praying for a mission abort. Man, I had the shakes: I did not want to fly into the sky that day. And that morning...

we got an abort just as I began to taxi out to the runway. Zero visibility at the target. I never wore a bigger grin, and when I saw Andy, I hugged that son of a ---- and we began to laugh like two crazy men.

Yeager's thoughts and emotions are a graphic representation of what goes on in a pilot's mind when he is launching into a counter air operation mission.

Sarfaraz Rafiqui's attack on Halwara, the abortive strike against Adampur and several attacks against Indian airfields in the Eastern sector by No 14

Squadron, attacks on Pathankot, Srinagar and Jammu radars by No 19 Squadron and Amritsar radar by No 32 and 33 fighter wings were some of the examples of offensive counter air operations in the 1965 war with India. The unfortunate shooting down of professionally outstanding pilots like Sarfaraz Rafiqui and Yunus by comparatively inexperienced Indian pilots illustrates two factors; first, how perilous an airfield strike could be even for ace pilots; second, how relatively easy it could be for even inexperienced pilots to bring down an attacking aircraft on their own turf.

19 Squadron Strikes Again

At about 1200 Hrs, I was handed a signal by our Station Commander. I opened it and read the incredible message: "No 19 Squadron is tasked to carry out strike against Pathankot Airfield with eight F-86 aircraft, with Guns only x 1800 Rounds, single attack against aircraft on ground. Moderate Ack-Ack defences expected. TOT 1705 Hrs". The target allocation came as a big surprise for me. Pathankot had not been assigned as a target in June or later.

Consequently, we had little information about its lay out, the dispersal areas and aircraft shelter complex or even the runways direction which was an absolute pre-requisite for an airfield attack. This information was indispensable for the success of the attack, especially because we would be operating at the outer most fringes of our operational radius

of action and would have little fuel for loitering around to familiarize ourselves with the lay-out down below.

I tried to convince myself that an airfield strike should not be too different from what we had nearly perfected. That's how I felt momentarily but soon the complexity of attacking an unfamiliar target at maximum range and penetrating through the IAF Air Defence Ground Environment (ADGE), with good chances of being intercepted, dampened the excitement. One thing I knew for sure was that I had my dream team ready, and they would perform well in the changed situation as long as I could lead them to the target. We had been waiting to respond to any task at a moment's notice, and now that defining moment had arrived and we had to get a move on. My comment to the Station Commander about the change of target did not get any response except his famous shrug.

We had been operating wholly from the Air Defence Alert bunker all along.

This being a special moment and the fact that every one I had intended to take along had already flown one or two missions, I thought it would be a good idea to have some rest in a cool environment, not sure who would not return from the mission. I had asked my buddy Sqn Ldr Iqbal (Bala), commanding the special ELINT U-2 unit (of Gary Powers fame), to let my pilots and I have the use of his centrally air-conditioned crew room (called the 'Droopy hangar'). It was equipped with superb leather chairs which could recline into a bed. I consulted with Mo Akbar to decide the names of the pilots for this highly demanding and perilous mission. While deciding the names, I had uppermost in my mind the factor of attrition. Who should I take and who should I leave?

I had a difficult choice but finally I selected the best seven in my opinion.

As the names started appearing on the board, there was a bunch hanging over the Flight Commander's head as he scribbled the order of the formation. For most it was like winning a lottery as they found themselves on the mission, while others cursed for missing out on this first strike mission. Surely, the two faces that I shall never forget were those of Abbas Khattak and Arshad Sami (whose son Adnan Sami Khan is now a famous singer). I had a special feeling about young Abbas Khattak and Arshad Sami because in the short period they were in my squadron they had shown great potential and I saw them as the rising stars in the PAF. When I thought of the attrition which was inevitable and predictable, I had second thoughts about taking along these two young pilots.

Luckily, both Abbas and Sami had been on ADA and had just landed, so I had the justification to leave out both of them and suggested six others of the best warriors, besides Mo Akbar and myself.

When these two saw their names missing, I could see an expression of extreme disappointment. Abbas Khattak looked in my direction and I could not mistake that he was holding back tears of disillusionment. I looked at him and said, "Hey boy, not to worry, the war has just started and you have already flown a mission." That did not do much for him and I was confounded between compassion and military tradition. I called out to Mo Akbar and told him to change my No 6 and put Abbas Khattak in the position. Looking at Sami, I decided to add an escort with the formation. I told Arshad Sami, "You are going to be our front and rear guard boy so cheer up." He did not get me at first and I thought he too was holding back tears. I told Mo Akbar to put Wg Cdr

Tawab (he had been my OC Flying Wing at Mauripur but currently assigned to my unit for the duration of war) and Arshad Sami as tactical escorts to protect us in case we were intercepted. "We want the best air combat chaps for this role," I told Mo. I felt that did the trick for both Abbas Khattak and Arshad Sami; such was the spirit of the pilots in No 19 Squadron. I told every one to assemble at the 'Droopy hangar' for rest and briefing immediately.

It would be pertinent to mention that most of the pilots were flying our third sortie of the day, and had not slept more than a few hours for many nights. 'Bala' Iqbal's crew room was what we needed for a couple of hours of uninterrupted snooze before we launched the strike mission. In the luxury of Bala's crew room, Mo Akbar and I carefully studied the map and decided that the first leg at 25,000 feet should be a ruse to confuse the enemy radar which would indeed pick us up as we neared the Chenab River. Thereafter, we would descend steeply to disappear from the radar screen before turning towards the target.

The tedious calculations of actual headings to steer and ground speed had to be worked out very meticulously and we did not have the time for that. So I asked one of Bala's navigators to give me eight sets of flight plan cards according to the route and attack plan I had drawn out. Our plan was to go towards Gujranwala at 25,000 feet to let the enemy radar at Amritsar see us and hopefully, predict our flight path towards Halwara. We were to descend steeply on that heading till we fell out of Amritsar radar as we hit the deck, turning towards Pasrur air strip as the Initial Point (IP) and then run-in towards the target, hopefully undetected.

Standing in the plush crew room I had a sudden impulse. I asked one of my boys to get hold of a bottle of eau de cologne and pour it in a large bucket of cold water, ready

with ten hand-towels immersed in the bucket at exactly 1600

Hrs. The pilot looked at me with a comical expression but I told him not to waste time and go find the cologne. Then I got all the eight attack pilots and the escorts to get some mandatory sleep. In the cool comfort of those luxury chairs we all were out like babies, fatigued from day's tension. Those 100 minutes in the leather bound chairs was like a catharsis and it was over in what seemed like a blink. I was disturbed by our perennially nervous Station Commander (the good Auzi Khan had been posted out in July as Air Mshl Nur Khan took over command, and we really missed him in this hour of need), who insisted I call my wife because she had made life miserable for him, calling every 10 minutes.

Reluctantly I dialled the number, and when I got through, I couldn't believe it when I heard her screaming in the phone about some problem with the old, faithful cook!

Back in the hangar, I gently nudged the eight heads turn by turn to awaken the young Falcons. Zambo (our call sign) formation was up and the bucket of sweet smelling cologne water with 10 or more hand towels was given to me. I said to my team, "Boys we don't know who will be the unlucky ones who won't be able to dodge the enemy Ack-Ack. They would surely arrive in the reception hall up there (Heaven) at around 1715 Hrs; but let us be sure we all smell good for the promised *houris* and angels who will receive us at the gates leading to heaven, for fighting as Allah has commanded us." Most of our coveralls were white with the salt of sweat from the hot and humid September summer and the towels worked magic on my team.

I read in a recent article by the IAF Air Marshal Raghavendran, *The Day*

The PAF Got Away, that at that very moment, he as a Gnat Squadron Cmdr at Pathankot had been trying to convince his Base Commander, Group Captain Suri, to authorise a CAP before dusk! But God was guarding us Zambos as the dithering commander had refused to authorise the CAP, to save flying effort.

Bless him for his obduracy!

I told my team that I would not do the regular strike briefing because we had done that plenty of times. However, unlike Ambala we had no information, pictorial or otherwise, on the lay-out of the airfield at Pathankot. Consequently, in the absence of any photograph of the dispersal areas and pen's location, we would not be able to execute according to our well-rehearsed attack profile. I told them I would allocate targets after pull-up and possibly stagger the second section. I realized that I had to take account of eight aircraft in attack at the same time in restricted air space, which was not a comforting thought owing to the danger of mid-air collision, in an action-packed environment, with anti-aircraft flack blazing. So I decided to play it by sight and would instruct the second element into attack as the situation demanded.

A brief re-cap of the sortie emphasized that our primary mission was to attack the aircraft on the ground. If bounced by enemy interceptors, however, no one was to take any action until I said so, except if the attack was imminent. I drove home that the safest path was an unwavering attack on the target, "If you waver you will collide with a stray Ack-Ack shell inscribed 'to whom it may concern' and up there the Creator will sort you out for violating the fighter pilot's code of honour." Finally, when I asked if they had any questions about any part of the mission, there was a

powerful silence, which conveyed to me that they were anxious to get on with the mission.

The two escorts Wg Cdr Tawab and Flt Lt Arshad Sami were told to stay behind and at the same level with the main formation, and to descend with us close to Gujranwala. Once at deck level we would turn towards the IP and the escorts would maintain level and stay behind us. They would commence pull-up to 15,000 feet on my cue about two minutes (14 miles to the target) from our pull-up point; to stay out of Ack-Ack range, keeping the attack formation in sight at all time, and engage any one bouncing us. We had to maintain formation integrity unless seriously threatened. The escort mission was to make sure that our strike went through without any interruption by IAF interceptors. In case we were bounced by more than four aircraft, then only the threatened pair would be asked to punch drop tanks and engage. The rest would accomplish the assigned mission at all cost, with no panic.

We all moved on to our aircraft and radio check-in was completed at 1615

Hrs. Moments later, ten fighters were lined-up on the runway and the engine check at 100% power must have sounded like angry thunder. As soon as the last man had confirmed ready, I called, "Leader rolling, *Bismillah Ar Rehman Ar Rahim* (Begin with the name of the Allah, the most merciful and beneficent)". We had a Hi-Lo-Hi profile with a steep change in our heading for the final run in to the IP⁸. As we climbed to our planned height I looked at the other seven in immaculate finger-four formations. There was eerie silence (as a pre-determined code of mission conduct) as I wagged my wings to indicate commencement of descent.

I heard a crackling of the radio as I began to descend, but no transmission was heard. About 10 minutes from the target at deck level, I sensed we were 3-4

miles off track. I got a feeling my compass was bucking on me on this most crucial mission of my life. In fact it had an error. I waggled wings and No 3, Dilawar Hussain instantly closed in. I made signs about direction; within seconds he gave me a correction of six degrees. It was an excellent correction by him as it turned out. We had arrived smack-on at the IP, over Pasrur air strip, and I punched my aircraft clock and altered course for the final run-in to the target, keeping my fingers crossed about the accuracy of the compass. I waggled again and got a 2-degree correction from Dilawar. The moment of truth was nearing and adrenaline was spiking our stomachs. Ninety seconds to pull-up.

By Jove, look what is up there? A pair of enemy fighters in what was about four miles at 2 o'clock position, turning left. I held my breath, clenched my teeth and prayed to Almighty for them to pass without sighting us. I decided to keep mum hoping the escorts would have picked them up; they had not, because the pair crossed above and behind. The enemy fighters passed smack on top of us but being high (I thought around 5,000 ft) they appeared to have missed us altogether. I broke radio silence for the first time, but did not announce the enemy above. May be it was a wrong decision but that was my instinctive reaction, with an intent to maintain formation integrity. I called, "Zambos, one minute to attack." Thirty seconds later I called; "Re-check circuit-breakers IN, Guns HOT, 30 seconds to pull-up." Then I said, "*Allah-o-Akbar*(Allah is the Greatest)" as I commenced pull-up. Bang on, at 11 o'clock position, at 2 miles on my left lay the airfield of Pathankot.

Instantly, my eyes caught a number of Mysteres and two Mig-21s parked next to each other in the northern dispersal area. I called out excitedly, "There are Mig-21s and plenty of aircraft around, let's go for them". Abbas Khattak (flying my No 4) later told me that he took my call to suggest the Mig-21s were in the air and he broke so hard that he was back in position after the 360 turn; only his chewing gum went missing! I instructed Flt Lt Mo Akbar, leading the second four, to loosen out to the right and make a 90-270 turn to let us get two attacks. This was a deviation from the standard attack but this was war. I called, "Leader is in," and went for the first Mig-21.

8 Initial Point is a prominent ground feature selected while mission planning, located between 30 to 40 miles short of the target. This facilitates the formation leader to make adjustments in heading and time to the pull-up point where the leader begins a climb with his formation and enters into the attack.

At the end of my second attack I pulled up and transmitted, "In for last attack" as Mo Akbar had called 'IN' for his first attack. Mo Akbar called and said, "Not fair, sir, leave us alone." I laughed to myself and promised him plenty of shooting, but pressed on for a third attack. For the professionals it would be prudent to explain that our attacks were extremely swift, in a constant 3-4 'G'

pattern, pulling-off and re-entering within a 90 degrees arc. Finally we exited, with my No 2 glued on my left at 1,000 ft regulation distance as though we were practicing at Jamrud range. As I was exiting at 50 ft or so heading towards the Pathankot ATC building, I spotted a transport aircraft. Just as I was about to sight and blow it up, my wingman Arshad called, "Permission to shoot the transport aircraft at 12."

"Go ahead, and don't miss it or hit me," I replied. His bullets went past me on the right and hit the C-119 Packet on the

'bull's eye'. "Well done boy, let us get out!" I was hearing No 6 calling 'IN' as we left the airfield at Pathankot, pulverized and in flames. The escort leader, Wg Cdr M G Tawab, called very excitedly, "Zambo leader, fantastic shooting, I can count 14 fires, it's an inferno down below."

"Roger sir," I acknowledged and asked for a fuel check when No 8 (Ghani Akbar) was heard calling off from his second attack. I had a strange sense of incredible gratitude towards the Almighty that with all that Ack-Ack blazing away at eight aircraft in a tight circuit, only two aircraft were scratched with shrapnel, that too negligibly. I called out and told the Zambosto hug the ground for 7-8 minutes till everyone was well inside Pak territory, and join up in pairs, keeping cross-cover. Amazing as it may sound they were all reformed in elements within a couple of minutes. The fuel check was not good news for most of my formation members. Some were as low as 1,400 lbs and that is when I directed all aircraft with less than 1,500 lbs to head for Sargodha and asked for a channel change to the air defence frequency for help to recover at Sargodha.

When Air Cdre Masroor Hussain, the Air Defence Commander, heard our check-in, he came on the radio and said, "Haider you have caused us heart attacks, we expected you on the radar scope 11 minutes ago, what's happening?"

The entire Ops Command has been in suspense as to what happened to the eight aircraft." I replied by giving him a snap account of the attack but the great news was that all 10 were safely exiting. Later, after recovery, which was superbly guided by Sakesar, Air Cdre Akhtar, followed by the C-in-C AM Nur Khan, talked to me and said they had feared the worse when we didn't show up on the scope at the predicted time. I gave him the attack picture blow by blow

and proudly said, “Every one is back, sir. I decided to conduct more attacks as there were a lot of aircraft and I didn’t feel it right to run off after the first attack”. He said “Very well done, you chaps may have made history.” I chose not to tell the Chief that Abbas Khattak and Ghani Akbar were so low on fuel that Abbas flamed out before reaching the aircraft shelter. Phew! It was close but it was a decision I had made with full cognizance of the consequences.

It would be interesting to see how this mission was seen by the adversary, 40 years later. One such fighter pilot, later an IAF Air Marshal, who has recently relived the Pathankot Strike, was a Gnat Squadron Commander at Pathankot watching the Zambos of No 19 Squadron decimating their aircraft right in front of their eyes, peering from the trenches. Must have been an awesome sight! Here is the account of Air Marshal S Raghavendran who witnessed the attack:

There was pandemonium. Bullets were flying all around. We all rushed to the nearest trench and dived in, not sitting and crouching as we should have been but piling ourselves flat on top of each other! We could hear and see the Pakistani Sabres going round and round, as though in range practice, and picking off all the possible aircraft, including the 2 MiG21s, in spite of the anti-aircraft guns blazing away. The rest is history. We were told that 4 Sabres had attacked, but since they were going round and round we couldn’t count them accurately whenever we put our head up in the trench.

Mystere IA-1008, 31 Squadron was destroyed in the Pathankot raid by the PAF. The Mystere had just returned from a sortie and was being flown by Squadron Leader Tony Mousinho. 28 Squadron had

six PF's and four F13s (Type-74) on strength... Two MiG-21 PFs (Type-76s) of 28 Squadron, which were flown there on September 2nd by Wing Commander MSD

Wollen and Squadron Leader Mukherjee, were destroyed on the ground during the raid.

I have no doubt that none of the Pakistani aircraft would have gone back had the four Gnats been airborne. I am not saying this out of bravado.

That same evening the PAF had launched attacks on two other Indian airfields, Adampur and Halwara, besides Pathankot. The PAF formation bound for Adampur had not even reached their target, but abandoned their strike after a brief encounter with a formation of IAF Hunters on the way. At Halwara, four IAF Hunters had been on combat air patrol when the Pakistanis arrived, and all but one of the attacking Sabres were shot down, one even by a young Flying Officer, VK Neb, who was still U/T Ops. We would have done just as well; I am sure, with our high calibre Squadron. Unfortunately, the anti-aircraft guns didn't get any of them either and so the PAF got away with it.

Once back, there was a thunderous welcome by all and sundry at the station.

Airmen were saying thanks giving prayers for all the pilots coming safely back.

Every one was curious to know what results had been achieved. All the 10 pilots were together in the ops room, filing in after-mission reports with some what exaggerated claims. As I glanced over a few of them I saw a Mig-21 being

claimed. This was a difficult moment and I decided to be diplomatic for a change but not without announcing that only Khalid Latif shot a Mig in my view, the rest were Mysteres. Anyhow, I decided to wait till the films came. I had briefed the armament crews to make sure all the films were secure and ready for me to see that evening.

Khalid and my film had the two Mig-21s blazing away. Also, Mo Akbar, Ghani Akbar, Arshad, Dilawar and Abbas Khattak had good shots of their attacks, though the film quality was poor or perhaps the light conditions made the frames hazy. Only one from the formation had a bad shooting film, but 7 out of 8 pilots scoring was a damned good performance. The *India Pakistan Air War of 1965* is a well researched book, especially their statistics of kills and aircraft destroyed on the ground. The authors Jagan Mohan and Samir Chopra have written a comprehensive narrative of the 1965 war, which is fairly authentic as far as the PAF operations carried out inside enemy territory are concerned. The authors have captured the moments at Pathankot prior to the attack most vividly.

Nearly seven pages have been devoted to describe in vivid detail the attack by the Zambos of No 19 Squadron. I have now learnt why we did not encounter any IAF interceptors. It is a lesson for both the air forces in how poor decisions by timid commanders can impact the outcome of operations.

The authors state that the Base Commander of Pathankot, Group Captain Suri, had been told during a Western Air Command meeting that the Indian Army had crossed the International border into Pakistan, but that the high command had authorised the Indian Air Force (IAF) only to detail missions against targets of opportunity and that no counter air operations against PAF

stations were allowed. He did not elaborate as to why the IAF Chief had restrained his commanders from attacking PAF stations. Apparently, the pilots at Pathankot were quite upset at this defensive policy. The real story behind the IAF not attacking at dawn on the 6th remains a mystery because if that was to be true how come the IAF was piled up at their forward airfields of Adampur and Halwara on the 6th afternoon? There could have been no doubt that the IAF strikes on the 7th had been planned.

It also appears that the air defence controller at the Amritsar radar (IAF's main radar) site had tried to contact the Base Commander at Pathankot to warn him, but was not able to get through. As a second choice, he talked to the OC Flying Wing, Wg Cdr Kuriyan and told him that the radar had picked up several Sabres from the vicinity of Sargodha (this was our formation), but that they had lost radar contact as the Sabres seem to have descended very low (this is an amazing discovery for us today that the Amritsar radar thought we were coming from Sargodha, which is way to the South, but it was our tactical planning to be picked up near Gujranwala as though we were heading for Halwara). However the radar could see a lone aircraft heading towards Pathankot at 19,000 ft (this was in fact our escort pair led by Wg Cdr Tawab who had made the near-fatal mistake of violating my briefing and, had stayed high providing the tell-tail signs of our raid). Thereafter, a certain Wg Cdr Dandapani at Amritsar had suggested to the OC Flying Wing at Pathankot to scramble Pathankot air defence elements. Wing Commander Kuriyan claimed to have informed the Base Commander about the raid report, and asked permission to scramble his fighters, but was refused.

It is suggested by the Indian authors that the Base Commander was annoyed by the insistent OC Flying Wing

and ordered him off the shift. While this entire hullabaloo was going on, some of the ground support missions were recovering at Pathankot. It also appears that some Gnats were providing air cover to the ground support Mysteres who were also recovering at Pathankot, being low on fuel. This is when we pulled up and entered into the attack. At Pathankot, the ATC crew had been monitoring the conversation between the radar controller and the OC Flying Wing, and wondering what the hell was going on, but their eyes were scanning the Western horizon. Suddenly the ATC frantically started yelling "In coming raid" to warn the aircraft which were landing on the runway or taxiing back to their protective pens. This is how it looked from the Indian base, as described by the authors of the *Indo-Pak Air War of 1965*: ***Wing Commander Kuriyan became aware of the attack as he was driving into his garage at home and heard the Ack-Ack open up. Immediately thereafter he saw 8 Sabres pulling up for the attack. He saw 4 diving to low level, firing their machine guns while the other 4 pulled to higher altitudes.***

The AA guns had opened up and sound of the Sabres' eight (in fact 6 guns) .50 Calibre guns created an air shattering crescendo. There was chaos on the ground as aircraft were taxiing in every direction. The attacks carried on unmitigated. Finally, as the Sabres left, ten plumes of smoke rose in the air. The raid had been highly successful, resulting in the destruction of 10

IAF aircrafts; 6 Mysteres from 3 Squadron. 2 from 31 Squadron. 1 Gnat, 1

Fairchild Packet and 2 MiG-21s. Three other aircrafts were damaged.

This statement by the authors in 2005 reconfirms and substantiates almost 100% of the claims made by us after the mission against Pathankot. The only error of judgment is that some of my pilots claimed Mig-21s instead of Mysteres which is perfectly understandable. No 19 Squadron can be proud of its success for the second time in one day!

10

SUCCESS TURNS TO FAILURE

The statistical data about the exact number of missions flown by Sargodha during the war is still not accessible owing to the inexplicable policy of the PAF

in keeping records that are half a century old as a secret. Consequently, the details given have been extracted from John Fricker's semi-official history of the PAF. On 6th September 1965, Sargodha had launched 11 sorties on the Lahore front to follow up the No 19 Squadron mission. In addition, 4 sorties had been launched in the Jassar area. There is no mention of any CAPs before 1500

Hrs except the 2 F-104s which intercepted the Mysteres attacking our train at Gakkhar in the official PAF history. Perhaps some F-86 missions may have been flown for air defence but there is no mention in the official history in its coverage of 6th September¹. Two F-104s were sent in the afternoon to recce Adampur and Halwara, to check the presence of aircraft at these bases. This was to validate the purpose of the pre-emptive strikes.

Adampur Strike

A Cdre Mitty Masud, Station Commander Sargodha and possibly the Air Defense Commander presumed that the late arrival of the Sargodha strikes would be met with scores of IAF interceptors buzzing all over the place. This over assessment of IAF command's efficiency to have reacted so swiftly across the border as Pathankot was being attacked

proved to be wrong and it was devastating for the pre-emptive magnum opus of the PAF.

Resultantly, too many fighters were kept on Air Defence and No 11

Squadron launched-off late with just three F-86s for Adampur around 1710 Hrs.

By then our attack on Pathankot was already raging. While recalling the mission, Sqn Ldr MM Alam (Formation Leader) said that he saw 4 Hunters crossing over high near Tarn Taran. In recent and fairly credible research published by authors Jagan Mohan and Samir Chopra in the *India-Pakistan Air War of 1965*, it is stated that the 4 Hunters that came across the PAF strike formation were actually returning to their base, Halwara after an abortive CAS

strike mission and were not prowling CAPS from Adampur under control of Amritsar radar (code named 'Fish-oil', as mentioned in the PAF history). Had these Hunters been scrambled by 'Fish-oil' they would have been in the vicinity of their own airfield and not heading north-east, straight and level towards their base. There was no role played by 'Fish-oil' in detecting the PAF raids heading for Adampur and Halwara.

1 *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force, Pages 360-362.*

The after-mission report and statement by the leader of the F-86 formation to John Fricker soon after the war raises some interesting questions purely from the point of view of basic tactics. The PAF strike formation was south of Tarn Taran, south of Amritsar, when they spotted four Hunters crossing on top at 90

degrees. It would seem that it was the PAF strike leader who chose to jettison the tanks and go after the Hunters, who then jettisoned their drop tanks and turned towards the Sabres and a brief air combat ensued. That means that the PAF strike force drew the Hunters into a fight and not the Hunters who started the combat. Then the strike leader states that they were fighting at tree-top level in scissors at very low speeds. He claimed never to have fought at such low heights before and at less than 200 Kts. From here on, the accounts of historians from both sides tally to the extent that a dog-fight at very low level ensued.

Sqn Ldr Peter Rawlley, who was No 3 in the formation executed a break into the Sabre behind him (most likely the leader of Sabre formation), misjudged his proximity to mother earth and cart wheeled into the ground (a combat accident). Even the F-86 formation leader did not claim shooting down Rawlley, but only taking a shot at him at high angle and not sure about registering a hit.

Still, the benefit of the doubt was given to him. That was fair enough because the enemy had lost an aircraft. He was awarded this as 'destroyed' by the PAF

as well as Indian historians. Ostensibly, this aircraft was the only one that was lost during this brief engagement; the other 3 Hunters with Wg Cdr Zachariah, Flt Lt Sinha and Sqn Ldr Sharma disengaged, claiming to be low on fuel and returned to their base, Halwara. The Hunter aircraft enjoyed a clear edge over the F-86 in power and thus in speed. Consequently, unlike the Sabres, the Hunters had the choice to disengage when circumstances so demanded. No other Hunter was actually shot in this encounter. Yet, this was proof of the grit and confidence of our fighter pilots to engage the adversary on their turf.

There has been some commentary on the Adampur air battle which is somewhat questionable. Firstly, it is impossible for a fighter pilot to keep eye contact, as was claimed by the Squadron Leader Alam, with 7 aircraft dogfighting at tree-top level, pulling max 'Gs' at 200 Kts in combat over enemy territory. Secondly, the PAF's official history² claiming that the all India radio had announced that "Flt Lt Hussain (believed to be son of the Indian Vice President Zakir Hussain) had been awarded the 'Vir Chakra' for bringing back a badly damaged Hunter after intercepting the enemy Sabres at about the time of the first engagement near Adampur", was also not correctly perceived. The authors of the *India-Pakistan Air War of 1965* have confirmed to me that no pilot by the name of Flt Lt Hussain (or the son of the Indian Vice President Zakir Hussain) was present anywhere in the area on that day.

The official Indian history of losses during the 1965 War (which are essentially accurate), also confirms that no other IAF pilots were shot at or lost, except Rawlley. They have recorded the loss of Sqn Ldr Rawlley as lost after hitting the ground during combat. The last paragraph of the Adampur episode in the PAF History-1988 ends with an amazing end piece, "Although these Sabres had been prevented from reaching their target, the PAF could feel reasonably well satisfied at the credit balance of two Hunters destroyed and three more damaged without loss." This meant a claim of five Hunters destroyed and/or damaged, as recorded by our historians while there were only four Hunters in the only combat which took place! These claims were also not backed with any film, eye witness account or other valid evidence or proof. The Indians deny these claims as well as an alleged second encounter which presumably never took place. Even Air Cdre Kaiser Tufail in his well researched book *Great Air Battles of Pakistan Air Force* has not alluded to the Adampur air battle at all, leave alone substantiating the

claim of the shooting down of 3 aircraft by the leader of the formation.

Halwara Strike

The inexplicable depletion of the strike force at Sargodha during that afternoon should have been questioned by the PAF leadership but to be told at 1700 Hrs (the time when the strikes were expected to be going in for the kill) that only 6 fighter aircraft were available out of over 70 fighters held at Sargodha should have created an alarm. The nonavailability of aircraft, I am certain, must have been particularly demoralizing for the fighter pilots, who were impatiently waiting for aircraft allocation from base operations since 1600 Hrs to launch-off by 1640 Hrs. Sqn Ldr Sarfaraz Rafiqui's formation was delayed even further by several crucial minutes after the Adampur strike comprising just three F-86s had taken-off. His formation got airborne when day-light was fading fast in the target area as they crossed the border. The aborted Adampur strike was already returning and crossed Rafiqui's formation near the border. This meant that Rafiqui had taken-off at around 1720 Hrs or even minutes later, which was nothing short of courting disaster – doomed to become a suicidal mission.

2 *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force, Page 365.*

Cecil Choudhry said that Rafiqui had sounded the foreboding as they sat waiting for their aircraft, when crucial minutes were slipping by. Rafiqui was alleged to have said that it was developing "into a one way mission." This was because the Pathankot strike was in the attack while they were still on the ground and they rightly felt that the IAF would react with massive CAP effort over the other bases to deal with further strikes. Butch Ahmed made contact with Rafiqui's formation and warned him to look out for lots of

Hunters for the reason that their formation had encountered enemy aircraft. Evidently, Rafiqui's formation did not run into any Indian Hunters till they had arrived in the vicinity of Halwara and were reportedly circling to look for the airfield.

According to the narrative of Rafiqui's wing man, (No 2), Cecil, the visibility had deteriorated owing to their late arrival and they could barely identify ground features even from 1,500 feet (inexplicably though he states in the same sentence that their formation was flying at 150-200 ft AGL). What becomes evident from the narrative of the sole survivor, though not explicitly admitted by him, was that they had missed the target and spent the next five minutes at 200 ft AGL trying to locate it. The narrative also does not mention that the formation had arrived on top of the airfield, because the visibility and light conditions had prevented recognition of any ground features. However, from present historical renditions by Indian authors, it is reasonable to assume that Rafiqui's formation did fly over Halwara airfield possibly without realizing it. Just a couple of minutes before their arrival, 3 of the 4 Hunters (Sqn Ldr Rawlley having crashed) led by Zachariah, who had mixed with Alam's formation, had landed at Halwara.

The authors of

The India-Pakistan Air War of 1965, state that when the 3

Hunters were taxiing back to their pens, the Ack-Ack opened up, lacing the sky with tracers. If true, this had announced the arrival of Rafiqui's formation overhead. Quite possibly, unable to make out the targets on the ground Rafiqui may well have been planning to exit safely. That was possibly the moment when he spotted enemy aircraft on CAP at the southern end of the runway. From here on, there are several versions of the famous air battle which ensued.

A reconstruction of events as evidenced in the recent dissertations by credible authors from India and Pakistan may help elicit the most probable pattern of what really occurred before and after Rafiqui and Yunus were shot down. In the final analysis, there were only four Hunters over Halwara and not 10-12 as claimed by the No 2, the only survivor from that fateful strike. Rafiqui shot the leader of the first two Hunters spotted by him and by Cecil's own irrefutable admission it was Yunus who had gone after the second Hunter flown by Flg Off Gandhi. Gandhi did manage a pot-shot at Cecil but was not able to get him. This distraction cost Gandhi dearly as Yunus, who was chasing Gandhi, eventually managed to shoot him down. The No 2 himself admitted to me recently that he did not shoot the second Hunter from the first pair spotted by Rafiqui. He had earlier claimed shooting down the third Hunter which did not happen because only the first two Hunters had been shot down - the third and fourth Hunters had shot Sarfaraz Rafiqui and Yunus when the battle had ended.

The Indian pilots who had shot Rafiqui and Yunus confirmed that there were only two F-86s in the air battle and not

three. Could that be construed to mean that the sole survivor, No 2, was no longer in the area when Rafiqui and Yunus were shot down? Since there were no further dog fights and consequently no further loss of any Hunters, the air battle had ended there with two Hunters downed by Rafiqui and Yunus as these consummate fighter pilots were themselves martyred within seconds and crashed six miles west of Halwara near the village of Haran. The Halwara dog fight had come to a tragic end.

The rest of the story narrated by the surviving wing man about fighting with ten Hunters and shooting down three more before deciding to disengage at will, can at best be assigned to the fog of war; at worst a flight of fancy. Both of these are possible during war, but need to be cleared up half a century later. Air Cdre Kaiser Tufail, the authors of the *India-Pakistan Air War of 1965* and the recently released air combat losses of the IAF explicitly state that only four Hunters were involved in the fight over Halwara and two of them were shot down in the periphery of the airfield. Consequently, the story told by Sarfaraz Rafiqui's wing man is unsubstantiated, as is his claim of shooting down an Indian Canberra bomber at night. The story chronicled by the PAF's official history-1988 also cannot stand the test of veracity as none of the doubtful and controversial claims by Sargodha were put through incisive scrutiny, including Cecil's account, at any stage. The PAF's official history needs to be corrected - PAF's proud legacy should not be subjected to denigration by critics just because it would be embarrassing to admit exaggerations during the war (an understandable tendency at that time by both antagonists). These phantoms must be put to rest to retain the glory of the PAF.

Fiasco of Jamnagar Strike

The Sargodha fiasco was further compounded by the failure of PAF

Mauripur to launch the 8 aircraft strike against Jamnagar, for which the signal had been sent according to the June Plan. Mauripur failed to even attempt the dream mission. Any commander with a resolute will would have at least sent a formation of six or even four F-86s to Jamnagar. They would have destroyed a number of the Sea-Hawks, Vampires and Otter aircraft which were dispersed in the open and were sitting ducks. This collapse at Mauripur has been glossed over by the PAF historians who have employed the same irrationality as for Sargodha, to reinforce the justification of fewer aircraft, "None available for the PAF's strategic strike, but several kept on stand-by reserve for army support which was a shoddy approach to the cardinal mission."

The research for this bungle-up has been made difficult by inaccessibility to simple statistics available in AHQ archives. I had to search for some one who was at Mauripur in a responsible position to provide information regarding the complete indifference to carry out the assigned war task. Through a former colleague I was able to get some amazing input about the Mauripur botch-up.

One of the Squadron Leaders present at Mauripur was made in-charge of the remaining fighters by the Mauripur Base Commander Khaqan Abbasi, since the OC 32 Wing had moved to Sargodha. According to this Squadron Leader, they had 14 to 16 F-86s left behind which included a few that were unserviceable; and about sixteen pilots. This combat availability was better than what was available to No 14 Squadron isolated at Dhaka, with just 10 F-86s; also it was about the same strength as we had at Peshawar with the No 19 Squadron.

Mauripur was also the least threatened base as the IAF and the Indian Army had not undertaken any major operation in the area, while the bases at Dhaka and Peshawar were faced with a potent threat from the IAF.

The Story of the Pakistan Air Force (official history-1988) laments that

there was only a single Squadron at Mauripur, which was carrying out air defence duties and four F-86s permanently reserved for CAS.³ This is simply not true. The official history also most unconvincingly asserts that 120 gallon tanks were taken-off the aircraft a few days earlier for air defence needs, and the strike on Jamnagar was not possible without long range tanks owing to the distance. This is an utterly erroneous statement to put it mildly. Putting back 120

gallon drops required no more than a maximum of half an hour with a brave effort, since these tanks were lying right next to the aircraft and maintenance effort was available. But the rationale forwarded by the Station Commander and readily agreed to by the historians that without the tanks the F-86s would not have had the fuel for an attack on Jamnagar was far fetched. If F-86s from Peshawar could make three attacks on Pathankot 220 miles away, beyond the operational range of the F-86, why then could the Mauripur fighters have not achieved the same at a considerably less distance and with virtually no air threat?

³ *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force*, Page 360. What was actually lacking was the resolve of the local commander to make it happen; all the resources in implements and war ready pilots were available. B-57s and T-33s have completely different ground crews and technicians. The F-86 had its own Squadron which was servicing the ADA and CAS aircraft. So the confusion was in the mind of the commander spawning the entire operation. Minor problems were capitalized upon to prove why the mission could not be accomplished. An after-war synopsis would have had many heads rolling but for a rejoicing President and service chiefs who were happy to call it a success. Out of the 38

sorties planned for the pre-emptive, only 8 from Peshawar performed. That constituted 80% failure.

This was a major catastrophe by any measure.

The official history also asserts that the message for the strike was received at 1430 Hrs, while the tasking signal had to arrive at Mauripur at 1230 Hrs at the latest. However, the local handling was a matter of responsibility of the Base Commander and his signals officer. The PAF's official history has given no valid reason as to why an unbelievable three and a half hour's delay was caused between the green light from the C-in-C given at 1100 Hrs and the receipt of the flash signal. As asserted earlier, this would normally take only 15 minutes, which was SOP even in peacetime. Also, the historians have relentlessly tried to cover up by stating that enough ground crew members were not available to prepare the aircraft to launch for the strike. This implies that the Mauripur base had no inkling that war had broken out. They also contradict themselves because they have indicated that the F-86s for Sargodha had been kept waiting since the morning. The last batch of Mauripur F-86s left for Sargodha at 1320

Hrs, the bombers and T-33s had their own designated areas of operations and dedicated crews; thus leaving the full complement of manpower for the remaining F-86s at Mauripur to service them.

Like the botch-up at Sargodha, this turned out to be another missed opportunity to have removed Jamnagar as a threat to Karachi. There cannot be any acceptable excuse by the Mauripur Station Commander for not launching the strike force with aircraft and pilots available (who must have been anxious to make their mark). It is outrageous to say that there was only one squadron for Air Defence and CAS.

Where was the threat? There was actually no threat to our southern borders like in the plains of the Punjab. How many Squadrons and our southern borders like in the plains of the Punjab. How many Squadrons and

10 enemy Squadrons? One single squadron with only 10 F-86s, but the air and ground crews had an indomitable spirit to do or die. How did they achieve such stunning results against targets farther away than Jamnagar, repeating the attacks thrice on the 7th? The Station Commander at Dhaka, Gp Capt Ghulam Haider, showed what it took to be a real commander with the courage of decision making. His pilots and ground crews had the will to fight and were not paralyzed by the thought of air defence as a nightmare and the enemy as an invincible threat.

Here one must pause and examine the devastating impact on the overall strategic pre-emptive strike plan and the reasons for its failure. Had the strike gone on with its full fury of nearly 40 fighter strikes from Sargodha, Peshawar and Mauripur like it happened against Pathankot in the West and Kalaikunda and Baghdogra in the East, a minimum of 50-60 Indian aircraft would have been blown to smithereens. This is a conservative estimate owing to the eye-witness account of Flt Lt Hakimullah, during the recce pass at 1530-1600 Hrs reporting Adampur and Halwara brimming with fighters, unprotected, and parked on open tarmacs. This was also an indication that they were most unlikely to launch a surprise attack against our bases, especially Sargodha.

Every other base had been allocated targets well in advance, months before, and they rehearsed repeatedly according to the PAF history. The magnitude of the failure of PAF's centre piece, the pre-emptive strike, and the command failure responsible for the tragedy has been

eloquently hypothesized by well known Indian authors Pushpindar Singh Chopra and Ravi Rikhye, in their dissertation about the 1965 War, *FIZA'YA, Psyche of the Pakistan Air Force*.

After paying tribute to the three spectacular successes on 6th and 7th September by No 14 Squadron against Kalaikunda and Baghdogra in the East and the Pathankot strike by No 19 Squadron from Peshawar as well as their CAS

mission on the GT Road, the authors sum-up the failure of the PAF in its proposed 'Counter Air Strike Plans' as follows⁴:

To counter balance the picture of the above three successes, it is necessary to note a major PAF strategic failure, its proposed counter air strike plan against several Indian targets. Such a strike was the centrepiece of the PAF

counter air effort, and had been planned and rehearsed over and over. Had it come off, the effect on the IAF would have been every thing that Pakistan could ever hope for. But instead of the anticipated 59 strikes, only 33 were launched.

Of these 10 went to Pathankot for the sole (and spectacular) success; the rest failed. The precisely coordinated time over target was to be 1705 Hrs.

A Requiem for Great Heroes

Sarfaraz Rafiqui and Yunus's exemplary performance has become the stuff of legends. They should have earned the highest gallantry award, the Nishan-eHaider. Besides, the Government of Pakistan through the Defence and Air Attaché in New Delhi should have made concerted efforts to

recover the bodies of all the pilots who may have been buried on Indian soil, especially Sarfaraz Rafiqui, whose body was found intact and was buried with honour in a village called Haran, a few miles from Halwara airfield near Ludhiana.⁵ The Bangladeshi Air Force has been able to retrieve the mortal remains of Flt Lt Mati-ur-Rehman (one of the Bengali pilots originally of No 19 Squadron in 1965) who crashed while trying to highjack with Pilot Officer Rashid Minhas.

Sarfaraz Rafiqui, more than anyone else, deserved to be buried in Pakistan.

He died heroically for his country, and people should be able to visit his grave and pay tributes to his courage. He should have become a symbol of leadership in its highest tradition. One of the living legends of the 1965 war told me some time ago with a deep sense of remorse that in 2006, while visiting a fighter base which he had commanded years ago, he was taken to the crew room of the Squadron. When he posed a question as to what the young fighters knew about the spectacular mission led by Sarfaraz Rafiqui, the response was blank. Sadly, we denigrate history and instead of eulogizing true heroes we accept rogues as national icons.

⁴ *FIZA'YA, Psyche of the Pakistan Air Force. Pages 34,35,36.*

⁵ *The India-Pakistan Air War of 1965. Page 112.*

Failure of PAF's Grand Strategy

The strikes against Adampur and Halwara airfield were delayed for extremely questionable reasons by Sargodha. There was no rationale for keeping more than 8 F-104

Starfighters and the same number of F-86s with Sidewinder missiles and a similar number with guns only, for the defence of Sargodha in case the impossible happened and the IAF retaliated swiftly. These 16 aircraft could not have gotten off the ground in case of raids developing against Sargodha owing to a maximum of 10 minutes warning available for Sargodha about any incoming raiders. All aircraft on the ground were sitting-ducks for the attackers. Sargodha also claims to have been sending F-104 escorts with nonspecific CAS missions over Chhamb. How could the commanders justify their failure to use the F-104s as escorts for the all important strike missions and also for a simple strafing attack if necessary? The F-104s should have been an integral part of the pre-emptive strike, in part to exploit its psychological deterrent effect on the IAF, and also to perform the composite role of escort and attack against aircraft on the ground.

Such a composite force, if launched at 1615 Hrs even with 4 F-86s and 2 F104s against each target, would have wreaked havoc at the airfields of Adampur and Halwara (which were jam packed with aircraft collecting for a dawn strike the next morning). Strangely enough, the COC failed to question the decreasing availability of aircraft at 1615 Hrs when first reported. This got worse soon after, and only 6 aircraft were declared available by 1650 Hrs. Why was the air staff at COC not relating to the aircraft serviceability on their aircraft status display? Why did the senior commanders at the COC fail to order PAF

Sargodha to use all its resources for the strike, leaving no more than 4 CAPs and 8-10 aircraft on cockpit stand-by, till the raids landed back? No questions were asked about their monumental negligence in treating the centre-fold of the PAF

strategy so callously.

In the Adampur strike, the leader chose to jettison tanks and engage the Hunter formation lead by Zachariah who were returning to Halwara far north of Adampur. The question I had asked Sa'ad Hatmi, who had come to dine with me in the 90s, was whether the Hunters had attacked them first? He had said "No"; they had gone after the Hunters as soon as they were spotted (hence the hardbreak by Sqn Ldr Rawlley into his attacker who had to be behind him). It was this factor which compelled John Fricker to comment about the strikes: "The Sargodha formations did not press home their attacks." True, that was with the vantage of hindsight, but the question is: why would the mere sight of the enemy, which was not threatening your integrity, disrupt a cardinal mission?

Perhaps the leader thought that a bird in hand was better than two in the bush.

But that decision will remain a moot point - should one abandon a primary mission of such significance as was the Adampur strike? In the case of Halwara the sanctimonious conclusion by the PAF historians that the "brighter side has always been recommended" is based on a completely incorrect kill ratio. The "6

intercepted Sabres downed 7 Hunters" perception was an incorrect conclusion drawn from unsubstantiated claims and not a tribute to PAF's aces Sarfaraz Rafiqui, Yunus, and Alam. The fact is that the loss of two PAF aces was not an unavoidable causality; an inevitable factor in war. It was a senseless loss owing to poor judgment and dithering by Sargodha operations.

In actuality, 2 Hunters were shot down by Rafiqui and Yunus (one each) at Halwara later in the day and Sqn Ldr Rawlley was the first Hunter lost during a defensive manoeuvre. Therefore, the IAF lost three Hunters against 2 F-86s of the PAF lost at Halwara during the two failed strikes. This was not bad at all, and the PAF can rightly be proud of the pilots who achieved such results under the most unfavourable circumstances (launched too late, deep in enemy territory, outnumbered, and operating at deck level in poor visibility). The real problem was that the high command was getting incorrect input and that impacted their plans for the next day's counter air operations.

Having delved into an empirical analysis of the fate of the pre-emptive strike at Adampur and Halwara, it would be prudent to discuss the philosophy of accepting or rejecting claims of aerial kills by the IAF and the PAF, especially after a 40 years lapse. It would be a sacrilege for a nation to hide the losses of its gallant fighting men who sacrificed their lives in defence of their country. They deserve the highest honours given by their nation. The PAF did not hide its losses of martyrs, so why then should any one think that the IAF would do so?

Wrong Moves

Four decades after the war, it has also become clear that the PAF command had vacillated and made some wrong moves in the crucial hours before the war.

After declaration of Phase-III by the PAF C-in-C on the 1st of Sept as per the War Plan, Mauripur had dispatched No 18 Squadron to Sargodha on 2nd and 3rd Sept and finally 10 F-86s had moved on 6th September, but owing a confounded plan they were moved to Sargodha and not to Risalewala. This change was especially astonishing, as it proved to be a

blunder because according to the official history by John Fricker,⁶“No 18 Squadron led by Sqn Ldr Butch Ahmed had previously been earmarked to attack Adampur from Risalewala, but this mission was changed for inexplicable reasons with disastrous results.” Operating from Risalewala, which had been activated weeks earlier, would have also provided the flexibility for the air defence of Sargodha the next day when a reprisal by the IAF was a 100% certainty.

Whoever was responsible for abandoning this fundamental advantage to use Risalewala for the first couple of days should have been held accountable.

Placing every asset from Mauripur at Sargodha was tactically unsound and dangerous because the IAF was offered 80 fighters as sitting ducks in their tin pens when they attacked at dawn on 7th September. This flawed tactical move was also a major contributor to the confusion at Sargodha and inevitably responsible for the failure of the strike against Adampur airfield.

The PAF also had to divert its meagre resources to halt the enemy offensive against Lahore and Sialkot. As mentioned earlier, this was the specific reason that the Air Staff decided to move 10 aircraft from Mauripur on 6th morning, to supplement the army support. Looking at the effort provided to the army by Sargodha till that morning, it is evident that air effort was being wasted in chasing phantoms on the Kashmir front by sending 12 aircraft with F-104

escorts, against unknown targets of opportunity.

The Story of the Pakistan Air Force (official history-1988) is clear that the

Station Commander had taken the position that only Sargodha pilots would lead the 'pre-emptive strike missions' because they had rehearsed their missions to perfection. This is a highly contestable claim as Air Cdre Imtiaz Bhatti revealed during a telephone interview that to his knowledge, except for launching 24

aircraft, (to determine any problems during recovery) no realistic training had been carried out like the way it was done at Peshawar. On the 6th afternoon, the Base Commander felt that since they were all tired from the day's CAS/CAP

activities, the strike should be postponed till the next day. The pilots at Sargodha were alleged to have been suffering from war fatigue on the very first day of war. The question is, were they in fact tired and had indicated so, or was it just an excuse to have the strike cancelled till the next day, as was advocated by the Base Commander.

The late arrival of the additional aircraft from Mauripur has also been made the basis of severe criticism of the Air Chief for the failure of PAF's strategic 'pre-emptive strike'. This does not hold any water and was a cynical attempt at a cover up, which has been described by the official historian, John Fricker, as "Total confusion prevailed at Sargodha." All eyes were looking east, when the Sargodha Station Commander called the C-in-C at 1615 Hrs and told him that only 12 F-86s were available instead of 24 for the strike force. This was the defining moment for a hard decision and the only course of action available was to have ordered the strikes immediately without further ado. The C-in-C

ordered him to launch immediately with what ever number was available.⁷

The question arises, why did Sargodha wait three and a half hours after receiving the strike mission to express its inability to produce only about 26% of the strength present at the base? The landing of the last sortie at 1545 Hrs has been made to appear like the entire fighter force from Sargodha was airborne and had landed together. That was simply not the case!

We were told that the bulk of the Sargodha aircraft had been engaged in CAS missions and the aircraft from Mauripur had arrived late, some with unserviceable gun sights. The question that remains is why was the COC not able to determine from the aircraft availability status at Sargodha that too many aircraft had been unwisely blocked for air defence? Even if we assume that the leadership at the base was excessively apprehensive of an enemy attack and had placed all the F-104s and nearly 20 F-86s on air defence, why did Sargodha not launch the 12 aircraft against the two strategic targets, the airfields, and tackle the Amritsar radar later as a second priority, instead of dillydallying? This was war, and the most crucial minutes of our national survival were being frittered away.

What was even more bizarre was that only four of these twelve aircraft which were ready on time were sent to a relatively less important target like Amritsar radar and that too wastefully, as they aborted their mission on unsatisfactory grounds in a state of war. I can be asked as to why did a Station Commander decide to prioritize a radar station, a smaller target of much lesser significance, over attacking airfields packed with aircraft? As though this was not disastrous enough, Sargodha continued to procrastinate for another hour and at 1655 Hrs the Station Commander called to inform the COC that only 8

aircraft were available against the two airfields and suggested to the C-in-C to postpone the entire pre-emptive strike by 24 hours.

A critical mass had been reached and the PAF strategy was under imminent threat of failure. Even a peace time exercise would not have been postponed in the PAF in this manner. While Sargodha was in a state of confusion, the Peshawar runway was thundering with the roar of 10 F-86s (80% of the squadron strength, not counting Air Defence Alert aircraft), on their way to the target. Let's compare this with the even more spectacular performance of No 14

Squadron led by Sqn Ldr Shabbir Hussain Syed, at dawn the next day. Even though Dhaka was isolated by a thousand miles of hostile territory, with the total strength of 10 F-86s and a single operative runway, they had the resolute will to fight and not to fidget. At dawn on 7th Sept, No 14 Squadron had launched three missions against targets nearly 200 miles away, flying mostly over the sea and conducted devastating strikes. These were the miracles of decentralized independent command.

Even if depleted to eight aircraft, the Sargodha force should have headed towards their targets, so that in the least, the coordinated concept of the strikes could have been partially realized. If Sargodha had launched even four aircraft each against Adampur and Halwara on time, there could be no doubt that they would have produced stunning results because 4 aircraft attacking an airfield are even more flexible and capable of repeating the attack. There appeared to have been a total collapse of decision making at Sargodha.

What was happening to the Sargodha fighter aircraft inventory? According to the OC, Maintenance Wg Cdr (later

Air Cdre) Riaz Sapru and Sqn Ldr (later Group Capt) Subhani, they had not received any demand for the pre-emptive strike. Both of them told me during two separate interviews in 2007 that the aircraft serviceability on the 6th of September was around 80%, and they do not recall any urgency from the Base Operations about availability of aircraft. Cecil Choudary, who was the sole survivor of the Halwara strike, told me during a phone conversation recently that when they did not find the aircraft ready for their mission, Rafiqui and Cecil went off to the base operations centre to protest the inordinate delay. As they arrived there, Wg Cdr Sapru had also reached the operations room. On being asked about the availability of aircraft, Sapru suggested that he could make up the requisite number from the enormous air defence allocation. That was rejected by the Station Commander. Had the Sargodha Station Commander gone into an over-cautious defensive mode? Why were approximately two dozen aircraft committed to air defence when the PAF

strategy for a dusk strike was based precisely on the hypothesis that after the strike when the aircraft had recovered back at their bases, it would have been too dark for the enemy fighters and too early for the IAF bombers to conduct reprisal raids against Sargodha?

The Ack-Ack at Sargodha and the much feared night interceptor, the F-104, a great psychological deterrent for the IAF, would have prevented the IAF from achieving any worthwhile results. Secondly, and more importantly, if the Indians had, by some chance, retaliated within 30 minutes after the PAF raids, the warning for in coming raids would have given Sargodha no more than 10

minutes to react with their own Air Defence Alert aircraft. In those 10 minutes of early warning, Sargodha could not have

launched more than 10 interceptors at the most, if at all. Consequently, that would have left nearly 60 plus aircraft on the ground as proverbial sitting ducks for the attackers (provided they were motivated and trained to press home their attacks).

Sure enough, Sargodha had not scrambled more than 4 aircraft at a time. On the 7th morning, even the youngest pilot could have predicted that the IAF would strike back relentlessly in waves at dawn with full might. That was the day, 7th September 1965, when maximum fighter-interceptors should have been

strategically positioned in orbits on all the expected approaches in all directions.

Yet, surprisingly, only three F-86s were on CAP, along with a single F-104.

According to the Station Commander, nearly 80 aircraft were in the dispersal areas when the IAF raiders pulled-up over Sargodha. What a sumptuous target was placed on a platter below, and the attacks came as expected. Luckily, they left the massive target spread unscathed.

Like the Indians, the PAF intelligence was also pitiful. From personal experience, I can say that when I tried to obtain some information about the Pathankot airfield on the afternoon of 6th September from the Intelligence, there was a complete blank. Similarly, the PAF high command found out too late that there were no radars at Ferozpur or Porbunder, where lightly armed and much vulnerable T-33s were committed. Bravo for the T-33 pilots who made good their TOT's at 1705 Hrs, both in the south and in the north, but found nothing.

The radar at Amritsar was created as a formidable threat by the PAF high command, which was somewhat exaggerated. It should have been a priority 2

target in the pre-emptive strike plan execution. Anyhow, a flight of four aircraft led by OC 33 Wing was to co-ordinate his strike against Amritsar radar with an ELINT RB-57 as a target marker. The mission description illustrates poor planning of this mission, a mere 15 minutes flying time from Sargodha, and only two minutes into enemy territory.

The ELINT aircraft which was to act as the pathfinder to the target was forced to abort near Wazirabad and the 4 F-86s aborted a simple strike. The fact that Amritsar was attacked severely after the 6th by F-86s alone, without the ELINT pathfinder, proves the point that the strike could have proceeded on its own. Considering that these four aircraft could have augmented the pre-emptive force, which was allegedly assailed by poor aircraft serviceability, the decision to commit the effort against the radar was a clear case of questionable judgment.

In the ensuing days we lost another extremely admired pilot, Sqn Ldr Muniruddin Ahmed ('Bha') to Ack-Ack in a poorly planned mission against Amritsar radar. The radar was neutralized in the final days of the war in a very bold day time raid led by Wg Cdr (Bill) Latif, with four B-57s. Amritsar radar code-named 'Fish-oil', was really no threat to the PAF as an air defence interception sensor. Its only usefulness was proven for the Indian Canberra crews who would get warning of the PAF F-104s chasing them at night.

A Bizarre Operation

While conceptualizing the PAF's 'War Plan' in June 1965, Air Mshl Asghar Khan introduced a novel but hazardous idea as

a sequel to the preemptive strike to destroy aircraft and installations, which still remained intact after the strike, by using a commando force. The plan was envisaged by the PAF

leadership about four months before the 1965 War, and not several years earlier as claimed in the PAF's official history. The plan was somewhat utopian and proved to be a tragic failure, essentially because the premise and pre-requisites set forth for the mission's success were totally missing. The force which was launched did not comprise all those commandos trained for this intricate 'mission impossible' because many were on home leave and several had been committed to Operation 'Gibraltar'. Those sent on the mission were illequipped, to say the least, without current maps or proper implements, and were dropped past midnight, not affording them the time envisaged for assembly and execution of the mission. This bizarre operation had no recovery plan for the commandos.

The success of the commando mission depended upon intense training and split-second timing and co-ordination between the participating elements.

Indeed the PAF's intelligence was to play a pivotal role in the execution of the mission, with the support of the GHQ. The commandos had to be fully equipped to execute this extremely precise and dangerous undertaking. In addition, the C130 aircraft had to be positioned at the launching base ie, Chaklala, rather than the more distant Peshawar. Most of the support systems and coordination was the responsibility of the PAF air intelligence. The B-57 raids had to be precisely coordinated and adequate gap ensured to allow the commando groups to carry out their mission, allowing for delays and possible difficulties in their assembly after the drop. Finally, and most importantly, the PAF pre-emptive

strike by the fighters had to have gone as planned with the expected success with the attending chaos at the attacked IAF bases.

There were three C-130s lined up by 2000 Hrs at Peshawar, well in time to make good the mid-night TOT. I recall the unusual presence of the C-130

aircraft but had no inkling about the purpose of their mission. One of the task force commanders had dinner at our bunker along with another associate. He was somewhat listless and kept asking his colleague some questions seemingly about some others who were also expected to rendezvous with them. It was not until past 2200 Hrs that the task commander asked me if I could get some good pliers for cutting thick wire. I began to get wind of the ominous situation. As it turned out, this was indicative of the commando raiders being poorly equipped for the mission. The deck was dangerously stacked against these valiant men because the air strikes at Adampur and Halwara had failed, and alarm bells had rung at all the IAF bases raising their security level. Thus the primary ingredient of surprise and also confusion expected due to the mayhem of PAF strikes was totally lost.

The non-availability of the trained commandos had also caused inordinate delays in the launching of the C-130s on time. Consequently, the co-ordination with the B-57 attacks had been mangled. In short, not a single one of the specifications and pre-requisites for the launching of the commandos raids had been fulfilled and all the ingredients of a suicidal one-way mission had been mixed together. Disaster was waiting to happen and no one from either high command or even Gp Capt Dogar, the head honcho from the PAF, thought it prudent to call off the mission. There was clear reason to call it off, however.

This was a horrific blunder by the PAF high command.

Sadly, the authors of

The Story of Pakistan Air Force (official history 1988), have tried to shift the onus of the colossal failure of Sargodha and Mauripur in the execution of their part of the war plan, totally onto the Air Chief. The failure of PAF's grand strategy and the tragic loss of Sarfaraz Rafiqui and Yunus lies elsewhere, as I have tried to show. This is not to suggest that lives will not be lost during wars. The point here is that such losses in the course of executing the assigned tasks are acceptable, however shattering they may be for the kith and kin of the martyrs. What is not acceptable is when precious lives are lost owing to the blunders by the planners and commanders. Rafiqui and Yunus were as dear to the PAF as Munir, Alauddin Ahmed, Iqbal and all the others martyred during the 1965 War. The sad part about Rafiqui and Yunus was that they were martyred in a mission delayed for all the wrong reasons. Had both of them been shot down in a normally conducted strike, it would have been an acceptable loss.

The commanders owed it to history to address the errors of judgment and bring out honest lessons for the sake of posterity. However, like the army hierarchy, the PAF thought it expedient to join in the fray of a contrived victory and let bygones be bygones.

PAF Bombers in Action

It is not my intention here to go into any details of the bomber operation by No 7 and 8 B-57 Squadrons, but only to acknowledge the audacity, courage and sacrifices made by the air crew during the war. Many of the senior pilots, the two Squadron Commanders and some navigators were my

close friends, and had been together with me on fighter aircraft and shared their experiences with me.

The B-57 bombers were ordered into operations soon after the PAF's preemptive strike had petered out. This relentless bombardment strategy was adopted with a view to keeping all the forward airfields under pressure of attacks throughout the night, attacking their runways, aircraft and installations to prevent them from preparing a reprisal strike against our airfields and vulnerable points for as long as possible.

The sequence of all the offensive actions was aimed at keeping up the pressure against the forward airfields to reduce the quantum of threat to the PAF

operational assets and to our land forces. Four B-57s had been moved to Peshawar Station a few days before the start of hostilities under the command of one of the best fighter and bomber pilots, Wg Cdr Nazir Latif. The rest of the B57s were at Mauripur under the command of Sqn Ldr Rafi and Sqn Ldr Najeeb as the Squadron Commanders under Wg Cdr Hameed Qureshi (known to be somewhat apprehensive).

Sqn Ldr (later Air Cdre) Rais Rafi, my good neighbour for many years now, has written a fine account of bomber operations during the 1965 and 1971 wars.

I decided to have a couple of sessions with Air Cdre Rais Rafi, which he happily agreed to. He confirmed to me that he, along with Najeeb, received their operational task to attack Jamnagar at lunch time (this refutes the excuse about the Jamnagar strike not being received on time). According to him, the aircraft were loaded up with bombs, rockets and guns. Their Time-over-Target (TOT) was to be at dusk, which meant immediately following the F-86 strike at Jamnagar.

They were to conduct a 6 B-57 formation raid starting at about 1800

Hrs, carrying out two attacks at Jamnagar airfield and then continue attacking through the night in single aircraft stream. All the attacks went off superbly as planned and damaged two aircraft and installations as reported by the returning pilots and later confirmed by Indian historians.

Then the bomber wing had its first casualty. The dedicated Sqn Ldr Alam Siddiqui and his navigator Sqn Ldr Aslam Qureshi on their third mission of that night were possibly shot down by Ack Ack, though it is possible that fatigue may have taken its toll and they suffered from spatial disorientation in the clouds covering Jamnagar airfield. A combination of fatigue and low clouds over Jamnagar were the most probable cause of this tragic loss. It would be prudent to mention that this mission was originally to be flown by the OC 31

Wing, Wg Cdr Hamid Qureshi. According to his navigator known for his candidness, his captain Qureshi declined the mission for some inexplicable reason and Sqn Ldr Siddiqui volunteered to take on the mission even though he had already flown two missions on the same night. The crew died setting the highest traditions for the PAF, while Hamid Qureshi survived to become an Air Vice Mshl in the hazy aftermath of the 1965 war.

The bombing attacks against Adampur, Halwara and Pathankot were also successfully conducted and were announced on Radio Pakistan. Although the damage on the ground could not be assessed immediately, the Indian authors of the *Indo-Pak Air War of 1965* have spelt out the impressive destruction of enemy aircraft at the three airfields. The authors have confirmed that the first raid at

Adampur destroyed and damaged 2 Mig-21s at the ORP. This was done by a B-57 whose pilot was nicknamed in admiration '8-Pass Charlie'. During the B-57 raid at Jamnagar, 4 Vampires also received hits. There were many daring missions flown by Sqn Ldrs Akhtar Bokhari, Rais Rafi, Ansari, Sikander Mehmood (an excellent fighter pilot), Najeeb, Aurangzeb (a courageous and outstanding navigator), and of course the valiant Wg Cdr Bill Latif, and all the rest of their crews.

It was during the war when I discovered at Peshawar that one of the young bomber pilots Flt Lt Shams-ud-din continued to attack enemy airfields in spite of a damaged kidney, which was so serious that he was passing blood all the time, but did not let anybody know. One of the high risk missions was flown by Sqn Ldr Akhtar Bokhari who was to test the Indian night interception capability, by flying deep into enemy territory and exposing himself to Indian Mig-21

interceptors. Another mission which deserves special mention was the day light attack against Srinagar airfield by Rais Rafi and Firoze. I happened to have led the formation along with Arshad Sami, Ghani Akbar and Khalid Latif, to provide escort to the 2 bombers.

However, the most spectacular bomber mission flown was by Flt Lt Altaf Sheikh with Flt Lt Bashir Choudhry as his navigator. It was during his attack on Adampur on 15th September, where he disregarded the single attack requirement and went back thrice after his initial attack. He had a bomb hang-up with 4

bombs, which would not release despite all alternate methods used by Sheikh.

He decided to go back for the fourth time through intense Ack-Ack, and jettison his bomb load with the thought that the Indians at the airfield would not know whether these bombs had time delay fuses. This time he ran out of luck and a direct hit was received by his bomber. There was no choice but to eject from the burning aircraft. As per procedures, he told the navigator to go out first and followed him immediately afterwards. He, along with Choudhry, descended through an Ack-Ack barrage and landed safely, although he ended up with a badly sprained ankle. They managed to escape through the night, but not for too long. The story of Altaf Sheikh and his navigator Choudhry's escape is a harrowing yet fascinating episode. They were nearly lynched by enraged Sikh villagers but an officer of the Indian security force saved their lives in the nick of time.

Another incredible achievement of the B-57 bomber raids is reflected in the perfect selection of timing for the shuttle attacks. It would be instructive to learn that the thunder and flash of bombs rained down virtually every time the Indian pilots prepared to pre-flight their aircraft for the retaliatory raids. Several of the raids were delayed till the all-clear sirens were sounded. This is also a tribute to the IAF fighter pilots, who took-off after each raid, taking the risk of rolling down their runways which may have been spread with shrapnel.

Amongst the last B-57 raids, the attacks against Ambala were launched on the night of 18th September, ten days after the first raid, which was abortive. The target was 400 miles from Peshawar, and was defended by batteries of Soviet supplied SA-2 surface-to-air missiles. These missiles were meant for high level targets and were ineffective at altitudes lower than 6,000 ft. The bombers, therefore, had to attack at lower levels. It was decided that the best tactical

approach would be to use a skip-bombing technique with 1,000 lbs bombs. This was a dangerous undertaking and very deep into enemy territory. An important aspect of these strikes against Ambala was the integrity of the pilots, whose after-mission reports were so candid and correct that they deserve recognition.

Sqn Ldr Najeeb in his after-mission report said that the results of their low-level bombing were very discouraging and they had little to show for their attacks, because the 1,000 lbs bombs were bouncing like tennis balls on the runway travelling as far as 6,000-7,000 ft, many of them exploding outside the airfield area.

The strikes were repeated the next night with three aircraft led by Sqn Ldr Najeeb followed by Wg Cdr Latif and the last one flown by Flt Lt AMK Lodhi.

From the previous night's experience, they had worked out their release points well before as compared to the previous night. The Ack-Ack was blazing, the sky orange and grey with shells bursting all around them, but they delivered their attacks one after another with great accuracy. Fortunately, all of them returned safely.

This in a nutshell was the highlight of our very successful bomber operations. The destruction and havoc caused by these daring crews earned them well deserved tributes, even though it took two Indian freelance air war enthusiasts to unravel the true magnitude of their devastating attacks, forty years later in their book, *Indo-Pak Air War of 1965*. There is a lesson to be learnt by the PAF, that many of the heroic bomber pilots remained unsung during their lifetime and others were not so lucky to have discovered their good performance during or even long after the war. We do not have a tradition to honour those who truly performed heroic

feats to defend the country, unlike other nations which take pride in such belated discoveries and show their gratitude.

The IAF began its retaliatory campaign on the night of 6th September against Sargodha, Peshawar, Rawalpindi and Mauripur, starting at just past midnight. Canberras took off from bases deep inside India like Agra, Pune and Jamnagar. A stream of 12 bombers were picked up by Sakesar radar heading west at around 30,000 ft. None of them arrived at Peshawar, as we sat silently in our ADA bunker; all ears listening out for the sound of the enemy bombers. It was a frightful prospect to receive a direct bomb hit by the Canberra raiders, because the tarmac in front of the No 19 Squadron office building was packed with 8 B-57s, parked wing tip to wing tip, and being re-fuelled and bombed-up for their next strikes. These B-57s had landed after attacking Adampur, Halwara and Pathankot, taking-off from Mauripur. But Allah was watching over us. One pair of F-86s laced with Sidewinder missiles was scrambled at around 0100 Hrs.

Luckily for Peshawar, the Canberra raid heading towards us turned around near Khushhal Garh Bridge, just a few minutes away from Peshawar airfield and returned without dropping its load.

The interceptor pair returned after an hour's wild goose chase in the hope of getting behind a Canberra and getting a lock-on missile tone. No such luck came their way. Finally, the ADA bunker went dark and quiet, as the tired fighter pilots virtually fell onto the mattresses as though knocked out unconscious, their scrabble game boards lying half played.

Sargodha received several Canberra attacks as did Rawalpindi. All the IAF

bombers made half-hearted attacks with no damage inflicted at all. The bombs fell everywhere except for the targets they had in mind. A number of F-104s were scrambled and some were even placed behind the exiting raids in the hope that their airborne radar would bring back some victorious F-104s, but that did not happen as the Canberras were equipped with tail-radar warning devices and helped by 'Fish-oil' (the Amritsar radar), which kept the Canberra pilots warned of interceptor presence. One single Canberra raid was directed against Mauripur airfield, but it lost its way and aborted the mission (inexplicable conduct by a bomber with a navigator on board, to miss something as massive as Mauripur on the fringes of Karachi). However, Mauripur took its first casualty of the day. Flg Off Sikander Azam crashed soon after take-off for undetermined causes. As the darkness of night merged into the pre-dawn horizon, all eyes and ears were looking east for the IAF to launch a major offensive to avenge the losses of the night before.

Quite contrary to the Canberra raids developing in poor light conditions and their choice of tedious and long routes, our B-57s attacked most of the targets successfully. According to the Official Indian History of 1965 War, the B-57

bombing attacks had accounted for 12 Indian fighter aircraft and 3 transport aircraft destroyed on the ground.

Additionally 17 aircraft were damaged to an extent that they were out of operations for the duration of the war. The IAF on the other hand, managed to lob one bomb on the right hand edge of runway 17 at Peshawar, which was repaired within 4 hours. No other damage to aircraft or installations was done by any Canberra raids throughout the war. There was one very near miss at Peshawar, which I was watching horrified from 15,000 ft on the southern end of the runway. I saw the bombs falling on what I thought was the taxi-track leading on to the large tarmac, where several B-57s were

parked. I had another cause for concern. From where I was watching, a few bombs exploded in the area of the Officers' Mess, where many of my pilots were sleeping. Also my only child, Adnan, was 2 years old and we were occupying the small bungalow (where Air Cdre Rahim Khan used to live) for the duration of the war. Although my family was very well protected by half a dozen Frontier Corps soldiers and there were a couple of trenches in the lawn, that particular night was very dangerous.

Just then, the artillery radar located near the runway and manned by our enthusiastic Station Commander, contacted me and tried to put me behind the bomber, which was on its exit route. Half an hour of concentrated chase was like looking for a needle in a haystack; my eye-balls were popping out of their sockets but there was no target in sight. I returned remorsefully and after landing discovered that nearly 10 bombs had fallen on the eastern periphery of the airfield, destroying our ops room and several buildings behind the Mess and causing a few fatalities. Fortunately, as my jeep lights hit the gate of our small bungalow, I saw my little angel Adnan (not so little or slim anymore), standing there amongst the Frontier Corps soldiers to greet me.

Air Operations in East

In the whole of East Pakistan, there was only a single squadron comprising 12 F-86s. They were led courageously by an outstanding Squadron Commander, Sqn Ldr (later Air Marshal) Shabbir Hussain Syed, under the overall command of a dedicated and brave Station Commander, Gp Capt Ghulam Haider ('Gulli'

Haider to friends). They were operating from a single operational base, Tejgaon airfield, at Dhaka. Confronting them was a preponderant Central and Eastern Air Command

with nearly eight Fighter Squadrons and one Canberra Bomber Squadron. Theirs is a story of true grit, stellar professionalism, and courage and initiative.

On 1st September, the C-in-C had ordered the PAF on high alert. This message was also received by the Station Commander at Dhaka. From then on, Dhaka went on full scale operational readiness with CAPs flying over Tejgaon airfield. On 4th September, their aircraft strength was reduced to 11, as one F-86

was lost due to a bird hit. According to PAF's official history, on the morning of the 6th at 0430 Hrs, No 14 Squadron was placed on air defence alert. Also, the COC ordered 6 aircraft to be readied for an airfield strike at short notice. At 0830 Hrs, they received a flash warning announcing the start of all-out war (presumably, as soon as the Indian attack against Lahore was reported to Air Cdre Akhtar). There is an anomaly here, that the flash message was sent to Dhaka at 0830 Hrs but the bases in West Pakistan remained uninformed till 1200 Hrs, according to PAF's official history. This paradoxical situation has not been commented upon in the official history, while the delay in decision making by the C-in-C in the West has been presented most critically (for failure to alert the Base Commanders of the Western bases in good time). Again, a lesson for the PAF that avoiding to carry out a timely and systematic synthesis of the events of war to save reputations of errant commanders could lead to major disasters.

The strike mission alert ordered earlier was changed to a dawn strike on 7th

September. For reasons of distance between East and West Pakistan, which placed East Pakistan one hour ahead in time, they could not have been ordered to launch strikes at the same time as in the West, because they would have had

to take-off one hour earlier, thus giving away the big plan. Any later would have been too dark for the pilots, as it would have been past dusk time. Another factor was Ayub Khan's perennial hope to keep the war contained. He had ordered total restraint in East Pakistan by the PAF.

No 14 Squadron at Dhaka was in readiness nonetheless, waiting for the word 'GO'. This came sooner than expected as the Indians decided to attack bases in East Pakistan rather senselessly on the night of the 6th. The IAF, however, like its indecisive conduct on the 6th on the Western front, could not make up its mind what to attack and how. The Indians also toyed with the idea that the Sabres may try to abandon East Pakistan by escaping to West Pakistan, over flying India at night. How comic! To prevent this phantom escape, a Hunter formation was even sent up to practice a night interception on a Canberra, hoping to attack it from the glow of the exhaust flame. This has been graphically described by the Indian historians, surely to the vexation of the IAF

planners and pilots. Yet kudos to them for their candid revelations which are a rarity for us in Pakistan.

The PAF pilots in the East, like their comrades in the West, were brave and patriotic men who would shed their last drop of blood for their country. They were soon to demonstrate their grit and mettle. The Indian fighter squadrons commenced their operation from Gauhati air base in the early morning hours, reportedly after a sleepless night. It is almost funny that, having lost nearly 13

operational aircraft in the preceding 12 hours to the PAF raid at Pathankot, three brought down deep in Indian territory and at least one destroyed on the ground by our night bombers, the HQ Eastern Air Command (EAC) decided

to retaliate by ordering a strike on disused Kurmitola airfield. This account also reads like a bad movie script – to go all the way with so much of hoo-ha and strike merely an under construction and disused runway at Kurmitola, an airstrip one minute away from the fighter base at Tejgaon airfield, the home of No 14 Squadron.

Their second target was some obscure signal unit at the disused airfield. The Indian Air Force Intelligence appeared to be in bad shape because they had totally failed to discover even the most obvious of facts, such as the only Pakistani airfield that operated F-86s was Tejgaon!

I learnt from the authors of the

Indo-Pak Air War of 1965 that during the

night of the 6th, the good sleeping hours at Gauhati were used up in a colossal confusion whether to go for a high-level sweep at contrail height and draw-up the PAF Sabres or attack Kurmitola in counter air operations role. As a result of the muddled brain storming, the ground crew was kept up throughout the night putting long range fuel tanks and rocket rails on and then taking them off, depriving them of any sleep. First it was decided to go for a high-level sweep, which meant only external fuel tanks and gun pack. This was changed again and substituted with a strike at Kurmitola from a contrived scare of F-86s carrying Sidewinder missiles. Finally, the flight got airborne to make good a TOT of 0530 hours. The Hunters roared across West Bengal at break-neck speed of 420

Kts for a forty minute flight to the unusable airstrip at Kurmitola. During the last 10 minutes of their leg, they experienced some rain, which terrified the deputy leader of

the formation, Flg Off Janak Kumar, who unilaterally abandoned the mission and headed home!

The remaining three aircraft, led by Sqn Ldr Singh identified a barren runway with some construction work; the leader took a bold decision and decided to skip the Sector Operation Centre (SOC), referred to as a signal unit in their attack plan and fired their rockets and guns scratching the old surface of the runway less than a few inches deep. It is noteworthy to say that for their truthful exposure of the conduct by the IAF commanders in the 1965 War, the present IAF Air Chief has awarded a medal to the authors of the *Indo-Pak Air War of 1965*, Samir Chopra and Jagan Mohan.

That morning, two PAF Sabres had been scrambled and flashed passed this Hunter formation but to the good luck of the raiders, the F-86's leader could not make contact with them, allegedly owing to very poor visibility in drizzle. The PAF pair lost young ATM Aziz, who had hit the ground while being vectored onto the Hunters. During the chase, he was asked by his leader to change IFF

mode, or radio channel for which Aziz may have glanced inside the cockpit and, in the process cart-wheeled, being very low. No 14 Squadron was now left with only 10 F-86s. It would be a waste of space to describe the rest of the failed attacks by the Indian fighters against Lal Munir Hut, where four Ouragans chased an army jeep and received a volley of small arms fire from the soldiers below. Again I learnt this from the Indian authors of *Indo-Pak Air War of 1965*.

The Indian bombing raids were hopeless against civilian airfields. Two Canberra bombers armed with 1,000 lb-bombs and 20 mm guns had raided the civil airport at Chittagong. The description of their mission is too ridiculous for an in

depth recap because the bombs from the first aircraft fell somewhere in the parameter of the airport without exploding; the second bomber then dived and released his bombs which allegedly exploded, missing the runway by a short mile or two. The two bombers on their return nearly got shot down by the Hunters from the IAF No 14 Squadron, mistaking them for B-57s. There was yet another hapless attack by Vampires against Jessore without any real purpose and zero results.

Another description of a high-level sweep to Jessore had a funny tactical twist to it. Hunters and Vampires were to carry out a coordinated sweep over the abandoned Jessore single strip. As described by Indian historians, the Hunters noticed the Vampires as they were starting up and the leader called out on the radio and discussed whether the Vampires being slower than the Hunters should take-off earlier and they would catch up. Then they decided that they would take-off any way and circle over-head Jessore until the Vampires arrived and together, they would draw the F-86s up in the air to shoot them down in air combat. Even a flying club could have put up a more organised and well briefed mission!

All this riotous bungling and waste of fuel and ammunition by the Indian Air Force was a manifestation of an unambiguous reality - that there was no coherence in the thinking of the IAF and the pilots lacked the will to put up a fight. Attacking targets of no military value was not worthy of an air force three times the size of the PAF, and equipped with formidable fighters like the Hunter and some Mig-21s, and indeed some very good pilots. How did the sole squadron of the PAF respond to IAF tickling their toes? Dhaka Station under the command of Gp Capt Gulli Haider had been given a free hand to act and respond as

considered expedient. Gulli made superb work of his independence.

This was the lynch-pin of success of all PAF units where the commanders thought and acted independently and evolved their own tactical concept without being overly authoritative. Gulli Haider was a simple man with no pretensions or chip on his shoulder. His unassuming personality masked a real tiger of a fighter pilot, full of courage and had tremendous capacity for hard work.

In the opinion of Air Mshl Nur Khan, Gp Capt Gulli Haider deserved a Hilal-e-Jurat more than any other Station Commander, for his audacity, courage and highly aggressive air operations against very heavy odds. Air Mshl Nur Khan was unable to answer when I asked him why Gulli Haider had not awarded for his performance, when these were being dished out for average performances and at times for manufactured results. This is a subject that needs a separate chapter about awards and rewards given in indecent haste without waiting to assess and establish unequivocally the truth of what really happened up in the air and on the ground. These awards should only have been given out for acts of valour beyond the call of duty.

Kurmitola was under attack as mentioned above, when Gulli Haider gave the green light to Sqn Ldr Shabbir Hussain Syed, for a dawn strike against the main Indian Base of Kalaikunda on the morning of 7th September. With Shabbir leading the team, there were Flt Lts Baseer, Tariq Habib, Haleem, and Flg Off Afzal making up this formidable raid. All of these pilots were well known to me personally and professionally. Each one possessed high calibre. They blazed across East Pakistan in poor visibility and low cloud base, but stuck together.

They streaked through the Bay of Bengal, to avoid detection. Then turning north, Shabbir started to pull up at 0640 Hrs. Suddenly, the calm of Kalaikunda was shattered by the sound of 6 guns firing from each of the 5 F-86s as they fiercely swept into devastating attacks. There were only 2 or 3 Ack-Ack guns in position and these made no difference to the streaking Sabres.

Two Canberras about to be airborne with IAF pilots Wilson and Karve (from the names it seemed evident that many of the pilots participating were Anglo-Indian officers), were blown up with full fuel and ammunition. Another 4

Vampires were lined up on the tarmac and armed with full fuel, they made spectacular fire works. The five made history emulating the No 19 Squadron strike against Pathankot as they all returned safely home. Not satisfied with the destruction as they drew their first blood, the Base Commander ordered a replay of the strike to Kalaikunda at 1030 Hrs, led by the toughie fighter pilot Haleem.

This was not a prudent decision, even though the boldness was worthy of praise.

This time the Indians were ready as the first 2 Sabres blew up the single Canberra spotted by them, as the rest had been dispersed. They were pounced upon by 2 Hunters which had been directed from 120 nm away by the 411 SU

(Soviet built radar Unit). The Hunter pilots Cooke and Mamgain admitted to each other while en route that they were scared of the situation ahead. A classical dog-fight at low level ensued.

At the outer most fringes of the Sabre's operational range, they had to start heading back for consideration of fuel. In this process, one of the Hunters managed to shoot down the

last man in Haleem's formation, Flg Off Afzal, who was fatally injured. Tariq Habib was fighting with two Hunters with the handicap of 1 hung-up tank and his flaps stuck at 20 degrees, making him totally vulnerable to the faster Hunters fighting on their own turf. Miraculously and with Tariq Habib's reputed professional excellence and grim determination, he managed to bring back a damaged aircraft. The day's tally was nine Indian aircraft on the ground; four Canberras, four Vampires and one Dakota. The one thing that was clearly a result of fanciful bravado was the reporting of 9 Hunters over Kalaikunda by the PAF formation members on 7th September. There were just two Hunters flown by Flt Lt Alfred Cooke and Flg Off SC Mamgain and both admitted to have been scared to get into air combat with the Sabres. It was possibly the Ack-Ack shells bursting in the distance which may have been perceived as fighters with jet plume.

No 14 Squadron's offensive reprisal needs to be judged in the context of the heavy odds they were up against. From the performance of nine IAF fighter squadrons versus a single No 14 Squadron, it becomes clear that the numerical preponderance was overcome by the one Squadron with only 10 aircraft. This was a victory of intangible factors over the tangibles, tilting the numerical imbalance dramatically. The lesson for the present generation of commanders is that while state of the art weapon systems are important, it is the intangibles of bold leadership which generates courage in the sub-ordinates, and that in turn determines the outcome of victory or defeat. Too much reliance on technology is dangerous.

The Indian authors of

Indo-Pak Air War of 1965 have paid a well deserved tribute to the gallant pilots of No 14 Squadron: "The PAF was not deterred by its losses (just one F-86 shot down), for in the next few days they attacked IAF

fields like Barrakpur, Bagdogra, Gauhati and unused airstrips like Agartala."

Many IAF officers praised the way the lone PAF Squadron flew in the East. Wg Cdr Wilson, the CO of the Canberras at Kalaikunda, viewed the PAF in the East as "Highly motivated, well led and well trained." This is what intangible factors can do!

Poor Start of IAF's Counter Air Offensive

The lightning strike against the Indian airfield of Pathankot by No 19

Squadron followed by relentless bombing raids by our B-57s through out the night, could have left no doubt that the IAF would carry out major counter-air operations against all our forward bases before dawn on 7th September. For some inexplicable reason, the IAF did not launch any raids against Peshawar and Mauripur but paid their full attention to Sargodha and, what the IAF

wrongly perceived to be the Sargodha complex of airfields. The first strike by 12

IAF Mysteres was launched from Adampur. There seemed to be neither a strategy nor a credible tactical concept apparent in the conduct of their air operations. Take for instance, the first strike. The role given to the IAF's No 1

and 8 Squadrons was bizarre enough, but their weapons selection and order of attack in view of the weapons carried was even stranger.

It is constantly lamented by the Indian formation leaders that the Mysteres did not have the operational range to effectively attack Sargodha, a mere 30

minute's flight away. The Mystere is very similar to the F-86 in its operational capabilities, so why was a 30 minute leg rendering the fighter incapable of any combat after the attack? Assuming that their contention was correct and this bracketed the attack profile for the Mystere to a single attack, why then load the aircraft with rockets? These are somewhat imprecise weapons, demanding very steady tracking and aiming, thereby exposing the aircraft to the barrage of AckAck. The guns carried by the Indian fighters were highly accurate and the attack could be delivered with minimum tracking. Of course, all depended upon the precise target they were ordered to take-out and the determination of the pilots to perform with unwavering resolve.

Even more baffling is the sequence of weapons delivery by the first wave of 12 aircraft. The last 4 Mysteres in the wave were loaded with 1,000 pound bombs, presumably to render the runways untenable, which would prevent the PAF interceptors from taking-off immediately after the last attack. The pattern of weapons delivery appeared to have been in the reverse order. The aircraft with bombs attacking first and creating disruption and confusion at the airfield would have been the correct tactical choice. This should have been followed by carefully positioned gun attacks. There were over 70 fighters sprawled under the nose of the attackers.

Interestingly, the first IAF raid had met with adversity right from the start.

A PAF B-57 had raided Adampur runway just as the Mysteres were being loaded. Thereafter, the formation leader Wg Cdr Taneja found his parachute missing because the airman carrying it had thrown it in a ditch as the raid was on, and locating the parachute had delayed their take-off. His Nos 3 and 4

aborted on take-off and the leader of the second formation had also turned back.

The No 4 of his formation, a Sqn Ldr had lost his way and joined a different formation. The last four of the 12 aircraft from the first raid, loaded with bombs, lost sight of each other, and then the leader could not find his initial turning point owing to poor navigational skill. They aborted the mission and landed back with their weapons.

Battle For Sargodha

Despite all the confusion, Sargodha base was totally surprised when the first 6 Mysteres pulled up in perfectly conducted navigation, placing them a couple of miles east of Sargodha at 0538 Hrs. Neither the Mobile Observer Units (MOU) had reported the raid at any of the three belts nor did Sakesar radar pick them up. Inexplicably, only one pair of F-104s had been scrambled for pre-dawn CAP but one of them aborted leaving Flt Lt Ariq Iqbal alone in the air. The formation pulled up and carried out a pop-up strafing and rocketing attack in virtual loose close formation. In that kind of an inflexible attack profile and the incredible haste to exit after the first poorly aimed attack, there is very little chance for the attackers to pick-up aircraft on the ground

individually and then go for a determined and precise attack.

Here was the difference between the two air forces: No 19 Squadron had made 3 attacks on Pathankot, 220 plus nautical miles (approximately 40 minutes flight time) away when ordered to carry out a single attack. No 14 Squadron in East Pakistan had made even more daring airfield attacks. In case of the IAF, notwithstanding the frankness of the pilot Vinod Bhatia, who according to Indian historians admits, "As we approached the international border, I had a bit of scare," there was no effort at all to select from the multitude of targets and carry out unwavering attacks. This is why, most fortunately for the PAF, the raiders missed the 4 F-86s and 2 F-104s parked at the ORP, with pilots strapped inside the cockpits, ready to scramble. They offered lucrative targets for an aggressive attacker. *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force* (official history-1988) described this as a glaring defect to have so many aircraft on the ORP. I wonder who was to blame for such infantile tactical oversight?

These gleaming silver beauties escaped completely unscathed as the raiders fired their rockets at the ATC building, and others just jettisoned the pods with rockets inside (all of these jettisoned rockets and rails are on display at the PAF

Museum at Faisal Base).

The gun attacks were at very high speed without proper aim; this was totally inexcusable but lucky for the 65-70 fighter aircraft interspersed in different locations. It is a different subject as to why 95% of the Sargodha force was on the ground when the raid was a 100% certainty. This was an amazing bungle that a maximum number of interceptors were not in the air covering all approaches and exit routes

for Sargodha and Sakesar radar. As for the IAF claims, there was no four engine aircraft (claimed to be a C-130) within 100 miles from Sargodha, nor was a single PAF aircraft even bruised by the raiders. Consequently, the IAF claim of shooting down a Starfighter and other aircraft in circular pens (no such thing existed at Sargodha) is just fantasy. So much for the first strike of 7 Mysteres out of the 12 originally briefed, who arrived undetected, pulled up and exited without a single hit other than the ATC building.

When the inevitable happened on that dawn of 7th September, 70 odd aircraft lay cosily in their pens, while the fighter pilots from 32 and 33 Wings must have witnessed the IAF attacks in tearful frustration. It never ceases to enrage many veterans of that war, including myself, as to why the 4 F-86s and a pair of F-104s were on the ORP and not in the air as CAPs? This was colossal neglect and a serious tactical failure on the part of whoever was responsible.

There were only three fighters airborne as CAPs at the expected time of the attacks by the IAF. Those responsible for such poor employment of formidable air defence capability were decorated and promoted to lead us in the next round.

But the episode of the first attack had not ended as yet. A lagging Mystere flown by Sqn Ldr Devayya, was being hunted by a Starfighter on CAP over Sargodha, piloted by Flt Lt Amjad. Amjad let go his two Sidewinders at the escaping Mystere in a wild hope to score at a target which was barely 50 ft above the ground and flying below the F-104 (completely out of the missile envelope). Amjad pressed home his attack using his Vulcan gun and registered hits. Assuming that the aircraft was out of action and going down, he started looking out for other aircraft. Not known to

Amjad was the fact that Devayya had survived the F-104's volley and he had decided to turn back into the F-104

and fight it out. Sighting a Mystere, which Amjad thought to be a second one, he turned into it and entered a scissors manoeuvre. Instead of trading speed for height and waiting to engage a low-on-fuel escaping Mystere, Amjad tightened his turn and reduced speed to present himself as an easy target to the determined Mystere pilot. A Mach-2 fighter getting shot down by a severely damaged Mystere was a creditable achievement by any standard.

Devayya had to be a very courageous pilot for he chose to fight it out instead of ejecting and so he perished with honour in the process. Devayya deserved the highest tribute for his grit and the Indian Government awarded him posthumously with a 'Maha Vir Chakar', the second highest gallantry award, 23

years after the incident occurred. What is important in this episode is the realization that the IAF, the Indian defence establishment and the historians have pursued their research and analysis of the wars with Pakistan unrelentingly, till this day. The next formation of 8 aircraft was launched against Bhagtanwala, a long abandoned strip since WW-II with only cattle grazing over it. The IAF

intelligence in the West was even worse than their Eastern counterparts.

Bhagtanwala strip had been adorned with some well-silhouetted dummies of Sabres. These were hit by the second wave from No 8 Mysteres Squadron and they caught fire and burnt with great aplomb. It appears that the pilots realized that they had expended their ammunition at decoys, yet they claimed one Sabre destroyed and another

damaged. This formation also exited without any interference from the 70+ fighters at Sargodha, a most anguishing thought even today, as I write this. What on earth was going on at Sargodha? How has the PAF's official history frivolously titled the chapter on the Indian raids as 'The Greatest Day', when 15 Mysteres in sheer panic to fire or jettison their weapons, went back, with one shot down, for the cost of one F-104 - a shocking tally by any standards.

The next wave against Sargodha was initiated by 5 Hunters about ten minutes later. Fortunately, the Sargodha elements on ADA had been scrambled.

Sqn Ldr MM Alam with his wingman Masood Akhtar, was told to orbit overhead at 15,000 ft as was the F-104 flown by Sqn Ldr Arif Iqbal. Flt Lt Imtiaz Bhatti was also airborne but ineffective for reasons unknown (Imtiaz has confirmed to me that he has been wrongly quoted as having been witness to the shooting down of Sqn Ldr Onkar Nath Kakar. He did not see any F-86 or the Hunter). This raid by the Hunters had emanated from Halwara to attack Chotta Sargodha. Fortunately for Sargodha, once again the target selection was completely off the mark. This formation also had the experience of a resounding attack by a B-57 at 0430 Hrs. Again, like the first Mystere fly-past, this formation had also arrived undetected and pulled up at the abandoned strip of Chotta Sargodha at 0547 Hrs. They should not have been surprised to find only a few cows in the early morning. The formation leader claims to have taken on another target (this is really silly since Sargodha base, spread over miles, was almost on the down wind of Chotta Sargodha and did not grab this leader's attention).

They saw some aircraft over the abandoned strip and roared into attack. The leader Rathore (who claimed to have shot-

down Sarfaraz Rafiqui the day before) over shot whatever target he was imagining. The only real thing which happened was that they were pounced upon by 2 Sabres. The Indian pilots claimed to have shaken them off and returned to base. Yet they also admit that Sqn Ldr Jog was hit but only damaged. In addition they admit that Sqn Ldr Kacker was also hit on his fuel tank, and was losing fuel. He bailed out over Pakistan, and was captured and became a POW for 5 months. MM Alam had not implicitly claimed to have shot this Hunter. The Indian version of Kacker's fuel problem and also the aircraft being hit from the guns of a Sabre or Ack-Ack fire is muddled up and contradictory.

MM Alam himself states that both his Sidewinder missiles fired one by one had missed the escaping Hunter, but that as he over-shot the Hunter he had fired at, he saw the canopy missing and no pilot in the cockpit. He also confirms seeing the pilot coming down by parachute. He was later captured and identified as Sqn Ldr Kacker. The account by the leader of the 5 Hunters, Sqn Ldr D S

Jog, also confirmed that Kacker suffered an engine flame out during the exit while still in radio and visual contact. The formation had to leave him behind as he let out some Punjabi profanities for having to bail out owing to a technical problem.

Even for in-experienced fighter pilots it is difficult to comprehend Alam's account. After firing your second Sidewinder at the quarry in front, how can you not see its impact unless you pull-up steeply and instantly to reposition for a gun attack? Alam says he over shot his quarry at low-level, "I took the last man and dived behind him, getting very low in the process." While going past the Hunter flying straight and level, he noticed that ominously it had an empty cockpit. Is it not tactically unsound to overshoot an

enemy fighter aircraft not knowing that the pilot has bailed out? Secondly, at such low-level (around 50 feet above ground), as admitted by Alam, how does an abandoned aircraft maintain flight and how can the chasing pilot miss a whole sequence of ejection and not see the impact of his missile, while all this is alleged to have taken place during the same attack of firing the first and second missile? Why was a gun attack not pursued, since the chasing F-86 had no clue about the escaping Hunter flying without a pilot inside? Very curious, and certainly could not be constituted as a kill by a long shot. This seems to have been thrust upon Alam. Only MM Alam can explain this quandary which has been raised by historians as well as fighter pilots from both sides.

What is also not understood is the role of the first F-86 pair and the F-104

which had been scrambled as the first dawn CAP who were allegedly witnessing Alam chasing five hunters. Why did they not pursue and follow on the heels of the Sabre combating 5 Hunters who claimed to have disengaged from the Alam pair and moseyed along back to Halwara, except for Kacker?

The astounding reality was that there were 10 Hunters prowling around attacking aimlessly at Chotta Sargodha and Bhagtanwala and only 5 Hunters came for Sargodha base at 0605 Hrs. These were extremely vulnerable Hunters with very little fuel margin to engage in air combat. Two were finally shot down by Alam's excellent air combat skills. But the other 13 from the three initial strikes went back unchallenged because the formidable interceptor force at Sargodha was kept lolling on the ground.

Thirty Seconds Air Battle

This last Hunter formation arriving at Sargodha also came unannounced.

One wonders what was going on with the air defence system comprising Sakesar radar and hundreds of MOUs. How come none of these raids were picked-up and reported by these MOUs? These 5 Hunters from No 7 Squadron had taken off from Halwara with Wg Cdr Toric Zachariah in the lead. This strike had also been subjected to a thunder and lightning attack by a B-57, while their crews were preparing the aircraft. After the PAF bomber had exited the Hunter formation took-off. One of the wingmen abandoned the mission because he had lost sight of his leader and the remainder continued towards their target which was Sargodha. Approximately 30 miles short, this formation was attacked again by the lone interceptor pair with MM Alam leading. *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force* (official history-1988) has given a lengthy commentary on this air combat episode. It has also recorded the first hand account by MM Alam about the duel.

Ambiguities and tactical limitations make this incident the central subject of controversy between Indian and PAF historians. It is tactically and mathematically very difficult to resurrect the incident in which all 5 Hunters in a hard turn were claimed to have been shot down in a 270 degree turn in 23

seconds. *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force*(official history-1988)⁸as well as John Fricker also admits that the claim was difficult to confirm, especially when only 2 Hunters were found near Sangla Hill railway station, with the pilots charred beyond recognition. The IAF has repeatedly admitted the loss of 2

Hunters in this mission, along with two more damaged (Jog and Parihar).

Logically, since the five were claimed to have been shot down in 23 seconds, then they should all have crashed within close proximity. The conjecture that all the rest could have crashed after 8-9 minutes of flying is superfluous and unworthy of the official PAF history. The remainder two Hunters did escape. What makes the PAF's official history's insistence so pointless is that MM

Alam really did an excellent job of shooting down 2 Hunters, and the fact remains that he, along with his somewhat ineffective wing man, handled 10

Hunters in the few minutes of this combat.

8 *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force. Page 380.*

Added to this, Sqn Ldr Rawley's cart wheeling into the ground on the 6th, as Alam tackled him, takes his score to three and makes him the highest scorer after Sarfaraz Rafiqui till the 7th of September. Yet another Hunter shot by him on 16th of September makes Alam the uncontested top scorer from both sides in the wars fought between India and Pakistan. He deservedly earned the reputation of being an outstanding air combat pilot, a privilege not many living fighter pilots can claim.

The results of the entire day on 7th September were the botched strikes by the IAF. It was evident that nearly 44 aircraft raids were planned by the IAF.

Out of these only 33 materialized; from the 11 that aborted most need not have done so. Another Mystere strike on 7th September deserves mention for the loss of an experienced

Squadron Commander. Sqn Ldr Jasbeer Singh crashed during low-level evasive manoeuvres, taking his wing man to be a Sabre. There were no Sabres in the area as was confirmed by his wing men Flt Lts Irani and Doru.

Sqn Ldr Jasbeer was exiting at 30-50 feet above ground level and weaving as he cart wheeled into the ground. This happened about 25 miles from Rahwali during the exit after the formation had unsuccessfully attacked the mobile radar unit at Rahwali. Some how, John Fricker had mistakenly taken this crash as a kill over Sargodha on the 7th of September, in order to show a high kill rate inflicted upon the IAF raiders. That was incorrect as Jasbeer Singh had not been in any formation that attacked Sargodha. To claim an accident as a kill is very unprofessional. So, that was a false award.

However, it would be instructive to know that the claim by the attacking Mysteres led by Jasbeer Singh is also controversial. One of the Air Defence Controllers in the PAF, Gp Capt Rab Nawaz, during a recent interview informed me that the IAF claim of completely destroying the radar as described by the Indian authors was totally incorrect. He was emphatic that the Rahwali unit never went off the air for even a minute throughout the war.⁹ I also interviewed one of the most respected signals officers, Wg Cdr MS Khan, in January 2008.

He was in charge of the ELINT Squadron which had the task of analyzing the information captured by the ELINT-B-57's from No 24 Squadron, commanded by my batch mate and exceptional pilot Sqn Ldr Iqbal (Bala). Wg Cdr MS Khan recounted that the black-boxes of No 24 Squadron were analyzed on a daily basis by his experts and Rahwali was last de-briefed on the evening of 11th Sept 1965, the day the PAF lost its brave son Iqbal from our own Ack-Ack at

Rahwali. The radar at Rahwali continued to operate as it had from the start. The IAF story that the radar was pulverized is pure fantasy

⁹IBID. Page 145.

What actually happened is revealed by the tragic incident involving my friend Squadron Ldr Iqbal (Bala) and his somewhat anxious navigator Flt Lt Lodhi who were both shot over Rahwali on September 11th afternoon when they were calibrating their ELINT equipment. This entailed an approach to active radar (the one at Rahwali) to establish its precise location. For this exercise, the radar was operational and transmitting and active on 11th September. So there is no way that this radar was even scratched on the 7th as claimed by the IAF. It remained fully operational through out the war.

It is imperative that 40 years down the line there should not remain any controversy about the performance of the two air forces during the two wars.

Hence the importance of verifying the facts in the war dairies and books currently being published or written. The phantoms and myths should be laid to rest so that researchers and seekers of truth have access to valid versions of what really happened and who was responsible for the successes and failures. These controversies have raged for over forty years – they need to be resolved affably yet professionally.

Looking at the overall picture candidly and truthfully, the surprise attack by the Indian army without coordinated attack by the IAF was a God given opportunity for the PAF to have altered the course of history. The failure of the pre-emptive strategic offensive on 6th September was no less than a debacle, especially considering that the PAF

operational readiness was at the optimum with missions fully rehearsed and highly professional pilots available in droves to wreak havoc on the enemy. This once in a life-time opportunity was thrown away and shoved under the carpet and a candid synopsis of the events was veiled behind the shrill trumpet blowing of a victory that it was not. This is even more painful because even a 12 aircraft strike at 1615 Hrs launched from Sargodha would have achieved massive success. Over caution and obduracy won the day and initiative and grit, the hallmark of the PAF, became the loser.

That we were saved on the 7th was essentially for poor target selection, bad tactics, hurried wavering attacks and just bad flying by the IAF rather than good tactical employment of our interceptor force. Incontestably, the IAF

performance contributed to the PAF ultimate success in substantial measure as did the excellent performance of the cheeky PAF. There should be a serious message for the leadership of the PAF today and in the future to remember that opportunity in war only comes once and is also given away just once. This makes the difference in the final outcome. If leaders at all levels right down to the sections are not clear in their objectives and found dithering when the chips are down, the results can be traumatic. But if every one has a clear vision of their tasks and are highly motivated by the personal example of the top leadership, the results can be astounding, as indeed these were through most of the operations.

The PAF had all the ingredients for a final and thundering success. They fought an enemy 3 times its size and overawed it. They hit the enemy hard and our fighter pilots made the skies of Pakistan very dangerous for them. What took the thunder out of what could have been the obituary

of most IAF raids was the 'Over Caution' shown by the commanders handling the air defence and CAPS.

They made the same inexplicable but fatal error of keeping fighters and the finest crop of pilots vulnerable on the ground. But for this, the PAF operational elements could have brought the enemy to its knees. Yet, what this small and cheeky PAF managed to achieve was unmatched in the history of air warfare from Suez to Seoul during the last half century. They deserve the highest tribute, which they earned, at a cost that was avoidable.

The hype of success especially since all the pilots had returned safely on the 6th was still exuding at Peshawar Base on the 7th morning when six pilots were placed on ADA alert from 0500 Hrs. The PAF was anticipating retaliation and intense reprisal by the IAF any time soon. One pair with GAR-8 missiles had been placed as overhead CAP and four aircraft with missiles were placed on cockpit stand-by by the SOC. There was great expectancy about air combat in the next hour or so. Plenty of arm entangling in mock dog-fights between the section leaders and their wing men was going on in the bunker by those on 5

minutes stand by. Another pair was scrambled just as I arrived in the Squadron at 0600 Hrs after a good night's sleep after many days. The frustrating hours dragged on but we were not paid a visit by the much awaited IAF raiders.

We kept hearing from our comrades in Sargodha that they were facing the full brunt of the attacks by the IAF yet they were full of spirit, telling us that the raiders were dropping like birds out of the sky. The news of Alam claiming the shooting down of five Hunters brought frenzied screams of 'Tally-ho' in the bunker. Yet nothing had headed our way so far. As mentioned earlier, Air Cdre Rahim Khan had taken

me to Srinagar in the month of June. He had rightly assessed that the IAF could launch from Srinagar against Peshawar and Risalpur without any early-warning and could cause havoc. For this reason the preemptive strike on the 6th for No 19 Squadron was envisaged either against Ambala or Srinagar. But for reasons best known to the air staff we were given Pathankot as the first strike target.

The Theatre had taken the right decision to send us to the latter. Air Commodore Rahim Khan must have had anxious moments as to when the IAF

would raid Peshawar. We did not have to wait too long as I got a call from my Base Commander at about 1430 Hrs, asking me to come to the Base Operations immediately. With his hands wringing and playing with his wedding ring in his typical manner, he looked at me with that perpetual deep frown and whispered, "There is another one for you chaps." I waited in anticipation as he gave me the signal message he was holding. Anxiously I unfolded the paper. The tasking order read that No 19 Squadron with 4 aircraft, guns only, was to reconnoitre the airfield at Avantipura and strafe any targets on the ground and follow up to Srinagar and attack aircraft on the ground. I had already flown over Srinagar on 3rd September in an armed patrol mission and had seen one Canberra and one DC-10 aircraft.

Back in the bunker I asked my Flight Commander, Mo Akbar to detail three pilots to go with me for the Srinagar strike. He asked if he could take the mission. I told him sure he could lead the sortie as long as I was given the No 3

slot. He succumbed because we had an understanding after the Pathankot strike that both of us should not be in the same formation as far as possible. Akbar suggested Flg Offs Arshad Sami, Rao Akhtar, and Khalid Latif to form the team.

We planned for a Hi-Lo-Hi profile, making Khel under the Nanga Parbat on the bank of Kishanganga River as our IP. The rest of the mission would be determined once we got to the targets since proper intelligence was always conspicuous by its absence.

We climbed to 20,000 ft in the shadow of Nanga Parbat to avoid being picked up by the Jammu radar. Crossing the deep gorges of the Himalayas below, we commenced a steep descent over the village of Khel which was exactly a 90 degrees angle from the target area. Turning right, we entered the vale of Kashmir with its high peaks on either side till we were short of the famous Dal Lake, where we dove down to 100 feet AGL. The panorama was spectacular, visibility unlimited, and nature seemed to have poured the most vivid colours into the fields and surrounding hills. I could not help but break the radio silence, "This is where I am coming for my second honeymoon boys." We were thundering down the valley until I began to see the fabled Wular and Dal Lakes approaching, which enveloped the northern outskirts of Srinagar town.

Crossing the western edge of the Dal Lake, the city of Srinagar exuded its magical tranquillity. A couple of minutes later I looked at the clock and knew that the target should be appearing at 11 o'clock about two miles. I transmitted 'pulling up' and went into a steep climb winging over to the left.

As expected Avantipura strip was where it should have been, desolate, without any signs of life but blocked with four boulders placed equidistant on the short runway. We dipped down to deck level and set course making a u-turn back towards Srinagar airfield. A few minutes from the target, I noticed an object virtually hanging in the air at 11 o'clock about three miles. Flt Lt Rao Akhtar picked it up

simultaneously and it turned out to be a brightly painted helicopter (later reported to be carrying the Chief Minister of Occupied Kashmir). Rao asked my permission to shoot him down. I said, "No, leave it alone, it's a civilian helicopter." Akhtar must have cursed me like hell for not allowing him. Thirty seconds before pull up, I called my formation to check 'Guns hot'. Just as I commenced pull up I noticed the sky over Srinagar replete with big black puffs; this meant heavy Ack-Ack had opened up with a vengeance. I instantly called my formation for 'gun sight un-caged' for a high level strafing attack. We had trained for high angle strafing much more than was required or expected of us. That day, it was to pay the real dividend.

All of us observed the unwelcome message from the ground defences at Srinagar. They were definitely heavy guns because the shells were bursting at 10,000-12,000 ft above ground level. The sky was fairly well pitted as I called in for the attack. It was a disappointing sight to see a few transport aircraft parked with no signs of the Canberra or any fighters that I had hoped for. I took the DC3 on the left, there were actually two parked on the tarmac and I could see a fair amount of panic as men were jumping out of the aircraft and running for their lives. I opened with a very long burst and could see my bullets landing on the tail section and running through the engines in front.

Khalid Latif went in after me with his reputed deadly aim and took out another transport aircraft. As I looked back, Arshad Sami went for the white painted DHC Caribou, just like the one that Flg Off Arshad Choudhry, flying as my wing man, had shot at Pathankot. The Caribou faithfully caught fire and a very orange flame erupted towards the sky. A frustrated Rao Akhtar called and said, "There is nothing for me to attack." I said, "Shoot at the antennas on the ATC." That's precisely what he did. We exited without a scratch

from the menacing heavy Ack-Ack shells clearly visible and bursting above us. The formation joined up just like we used to after an armament mission at Jamrud range. It was amusing to find out from some one listening to Radio Srinagar that 2 PAF Sabres had been shot down over Srinagar and Sqn Ldr Haider was specifically mentioned as having been captured. The BBC crew which interviewed my pilots and I a couple of days later had asked me the question whether I knew that the Indians had claimed shooting me down.

The

India Pakistan Air War 1965(IPAW)¹⁰ confirms the results of our mission: “Squadron Leader SS Haider led the PAF raid at 1600 hours. After his earlier successful raid on Pathankot, Haider chose Srinagar, as it was the only airfield within range of his Sabres from Peshawar. As usual, no warning was available to the defences until the Sabres were almost overhead. Haider and his wingman attacked 2 Dakotas parked near the ATC. Both aircraft had to be written off. The other 2 Sabres strafed and thoroughly shot up a Caribou parked on the apron ahead of the terminal. A Sabre hit and damaged by the Ack-Ack was trailing flames as all 4 Sabres disappeared over the mountains, heading back for home. It seemed unlikely that the damaged Sabre would make it back to the air in the near future. The raid netted the Pakistanis three aircraft destroyed on the ground, one of which belonged to the IAF. One of the Dakotas belonged to the civilian Indian Airlines Corporation. The Caribou belonged to the Royal Canadian Air Force contingent of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan.”

10 *India Pakistan Air War 1965* has covered every strike by No 19 Squadron in greater and much more accurate detail than the PAF's official history. Page 146-147.

Botched Attack Against Pathankot

As we had landed from the Srinagar strike late in the afternoon, I decided to take the rest of the day off, and spend it with my wife and son. Fate had something else in store. Suddenly, I was taken by surprise by the Base Commander at the Base Ops Room, as we arrived for filing in the after mission reports. He told me that the Theatre had

ordered a repeat strike against Pathankot. I think it was past 1600 Hrs when this news was broken to me. My first reaction was why had the Base Commander waited so long and why did he not he tell my Flight Commander, Mo Akbar or even better Wg Cdr Tawab to take on the mission to attack on time, so that they could make a success of it by striking it in good light conditions? He told me that he had been unsuccessful in getting Tawab and thought it fit that he should wait for me since it was a critically important mission. As though to appease me, he announced that six aircraft were ready and two more would come on line shortly. Mockingly, I said, "Sir, make sure the night flying equipment is serviceable since it would be a novel attack in darkness by F-86s; would you like to come along, sir?" I was really upset at the Base Commander's obduracy. I told my boys, "Let's get the hell out of here."

Meanwhile, the Base Commander had taken an in-coming call from the Theatre as was apparent from the announcement of the Duty Ops Officer.

Amanullah called my name as we started to leave and pointing at the receiver indicated for me to take the call. Gp Capt Saeedullah Khan, the Director of Operations, told me in his clipped Oxford accent to speed up and take-off as it was getting late. My riposte was sharp and sardonic. "Sir, if we were even to run and go without bothering about parachutes, we would not make it to Pathankot with any daylight left to see the targets, just like Rafiqui yesterday," I added for effect. His crisp response was, "Now you do as you have been ordered and don't waste time." This was perhaps the only time in my life that I wished that Gp Capt Saeedullah was near enough for me to tell him, "Sir, why don't you lead the mission and I will fly as your wing." He was thrusting a mission upon Peshawar which had zero chances of success but was fraught with nothing but danger.

The whole incident was an enigma to me and extremely dangerous for the pilots who were going to be sent into harm's way especially considering the tragic finale of the Halwara strike only 24 Hrs earlier for the very reason of delayed launching.

The Base Commander seemed to be waiting for my reaction, knowing fully well that we would not reach our target before dark, as he would not talk sense into the Operations Director. Danger and death had little place in my mind as the Squadron Commander at that moment where my personal safety was concerned, but to shove my young pilots into an inferno knowing fully well that the light conditions on the ground would be against us while we would be easily picked up from the air and the ground was quite awful. I looked at the frowning Base Commander and said, "Sir, ours is not to reason why however ridiculous this mission is, just give me the aircraft serial numbers and location while we get our torches and pilots!" He wished us good luck and a repeat performance. What a weird sense of humour, I thought.

Mo Akbar implored me that he would take the mission. I told him that was fine but I was definitely coming along. It was getting dicey and we would have to take the best with us. The conduct of flight met with hick-ups from the start.

Only seven aircraft could be made ready in the short time available since several missions had already been conducted and the aircraft availability at that late hour was understandably under pressure. I told Mo Akbar that it was his turn to avenge my actions over Pathankot the day before and he could keep me on hold on top of the target till he had his fill. "With the way the sun is rocketing down to the horizon, we won't even recognise a jumbo jet in the middle of the runway," was his retort.

We could encounter interceptors and CAPs overhead and Ack-Ack from below. Given the light conditions, it would be past dusk, when we would pull up and I suggested to Mo Akbar that as he pulled up I would pull up higher and provide some cover to clear the formation into the attack. Exiting west, the enemy would have the advantage of spotting us as we would be against a slightly better lit horizon than the east. "Should we get into an unavoidable air combat situation, we will fight it out and not run because running would mean becoming a sitting duck." We had planned to recover again at Sargodha after the attack. For just a moment I felt a sense of foreboding for the young faces as we got ready to leave the bunker. I had made it a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for one aircraft to start-up and check-in on radio and remain stand-by to be used by any one of the formation pilots who may encounter problems till take-off for all counter-air-operations missions. It was to pay dividends that fateful evening. Only seven aircraft were ready as the day light started fading.

We decided to go ahead with the six and leave the 7th as reserve. No 6 had to abort just as we were starting to roll. There was no time to switch with the stand-by aircraft. Five of us roared down the runway, as the sun was glowing red-hot behind us, just touching the horizon. It was a spectacular sun-set; I wondered for a fraction if it was the last sun-set for some of us. But the thought was consumed by what happened in the next few seconds. The first four got airborne and turned to set-course. Suddenly, I panicked as my wheels would not retract. A very unusual un-serviceability, but on that day I cursed aloud and asked the leader to throttle back to 78% power to conserve fuel and carry out a very wide left hand orbit. I called the stand-by pilot who luckily responded. I instructed him to come to the beginning of runway 17, and stand-by to switch aircraft with me. I requested the ATCO to allow me landing from the

opposite side to the runway in use. The problem was the barrier at the end of runway 17, but I told him that I would manage. Landing with full fuel in the direction of the wind was dicey enough, but having to stay above the barrier stanchions added to the dangerous situation, owing to lesser length available and slow deceleration down wind with full weight. But this was war and a decision had to be made.

I was sceptical whether my manoeuvre would jeopardize the mission by further delaying it, but I had to give it my best shot. With a prayer in my heart, I came in holding my aircraft with a lot of power and made a very high angle of attack landing. The switch-over was amazingly swift and I was again rolling down the runway, as Mo Akbar leading the five, was completing a 360 degrees loose turn and approaching on the right side of the runway. All of that took about five minutes as I sat behind his formation which set course for the IP. The rest of the flight went without further incident and five of us like a perfect arrow were darting across to pierce the enemy's defences. At Gujranwala, the ground features became very dim as the leader started a steep descent and at Pasrur he turned towards the target. When we were about six to eight miles away, the leader called up and said, "Sir, they have lit up the target for us at 11 o'clock."

The sky ahead was a stunning colour of orange and white as we drew closer to this barrage of Ack-Ack awaiting us, denser than I had predicted. I will never forget the sight, but there was no time to admire the beauty of the 4th of July Independence Day fire works.

Flt Lt Akbar and his formation pulled up virtually over dark ground underneath. I did a tear-drop on to the formation and advised the leader to pull up high and to carry out a high

angle strafe attack, bottoming out at 2000 ft. This way I thought that we would be spared the heavy Ack-Ack fire but we had no choice but to attack smack in the core of the Ack-Ack inferno, without aiming owing to the darkness but with the sky lit up with a profusion of shells bursting all around us. It was virtually a shot in the dark as only the silhouette of a dark runway was discernable. I must have held my breath through that attack because as I exited, my lungs seem to explode with tremendous pressure. We made a random attack as nothing was identifiable on the ground and the Ack-Ack was profuse. Just as I pulled up from the attack, I spotted a lone unidentifiable aircraft travelling south to north with his navigation lights on. I called up and told the leader to hit the deck (get very low) and head west. I was enraged at the stupidity of the entire wasteful and dangerous mission we had to go through. We landed at Sargodha again and returned to Peshawar at night.

My log-book bears an irrefutable testimony to the conduct of this flight in darkness as it has logged 30 minutes of day flying and 50 minutes of night flying. My comments in the log-book cannot be repeated for the language I used. I do not think that my pilots were at all amused at taking such a grave risk without any legitimate or cogent rationale. This mission is mentioned by the British historian John Fricker, and the Indian historians but the latter have the date wrong.

Irrespective of the outcome, it is amazing that

The Story of the Pakistan Air

Force(official history-1988) has been completely quiet about this mission. Not a word has been uttered as though it was wished away to dissipate it as fast as the jet exhaust of the five pilots. Fortunately, the de facto historian, John Fricker, the author of *Battle for Pakistan* which was written a decade

before the PAF history in 1988, had chronicled this senseless mission. I have no idea why the PAF historians have chosen to exclude this ill-conceived strike.

John Fricker has encapsulated those moments vividly when he recounts, “Despite having gone without sleep since dawn on 6th September, the indefatigable ‘Nosy’ completed his second day of intense operations by taking part in another dusk strike (after delivering the strike against Srinagar hours earlier), with 4 other F-86 pilots against the IAF fighter hornet’s nest at Pathankot. This mission was somewhat of a forlorn hope in view of the preceding operations, a wall of flak arose from the Indian air base before the Sabres were even within range. Although the PAF aircraft braved the ground defences and pulled up to attack, no target was visible on the ground. One unidentified aircraft was seen flying around with its navigation lights on, but the five F-86s made their exit after only a nominal attack in the general area of the airfield.”¹¹

Friends Embrace Martyrdom

The morning of September 11th turned out to be one of the worst days of my life as for all those who had loved and admired the two legends who were martyred that day. We had been given a mission against a suspected signal/radar unit at Jammu and I had just finished briefing the formation when I got a call from the Base Commander who gave me the second worst news of the war thus far as he heard me literally scream, “But where and how the hell”? Every one in the bunker was silent as they sensed there was some real bad news being communicated to me. I put the receiver down and tried to hold back my back my emotions, unsuccessfully. My course mate and a jewel of the 13th General Duties Branch (GD), our saviour during the

Pathankot strike,¹² Sqn Ldr Iqbal, OC of special ELINT No 24 Squadron and his navigator Lodhi had been shot down.

Enraged, I said, “Not by the bloody enemy, but some stupid bastards at Rahwali using PAF Quads-guns.”

11 *Battle for Pakistan* by John Fricker. Page 118.

12 Sqn Ldr Iqbal was commanding a secret communication unit No 24 Squadron. His specially equipped Elint aircraft were highly sophisticated and could monitor and interrupt any transmission

First Rafiqi and now this wonderful Iqbal (Bala) gone. Both were close friends since the first days at the academy; they were amongst the best cadets from our batch, always smiling, infinitely kind and genuine. Both men went down senselessly.

On the morning of 13th September, I decided to fly the morning mission taking lead from Dilawar and putting him at No 3 position. I told him that he and Arshad Sami had been hogging all the CAS missions in Chawinda-Phillora area (reportedly 800 tanks were involved in this battle for the survival of Sialkot). We got airborne and all was well as we tore across the landscape in immaculate low-level battle formation. Across the Chenab River I heard a Sargodha formation check-in. I could never miss the voice of the invincible Butch Ahmed. I called him and he acknowledged. I asked him his mission and he quipped, “Hot stuff, and boy.” Jokingly I said, “Butch, if you want we will do the job for you.” He shot back at me, “Hey Nosy boy, you are forgetting who taught you to fly Jet aircraft, watch your self, son”. I wished his formation good hunting and told him to check back on his return. He said Roger and we got focused on our respective tasks.

As we returned after blowing-up quite a few of the enemy tanks and Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) swarming the

battle area, I heard Butch's No 3 Amanullah (The Kid, as I called him fondly) asking for check-in by the formation. My heart missed a beat as I asked Aman, what about your leader?

"Sir, he bailed out after going through the blast of the train he had hit. He was very low but he bailed out, I saw him coming down." I responded harshly, "What the hell are you doing here and not covering him?" He replied, "Sir, we are low on fuel." When I asked where he bailed out, he said near the Gurdaspur Railway Station. I went into an orbit at that point not sure what to do. I immediately asked my formation to change frequency to the SOC to ask them for help. Before I could call the SOC, I heard Arshad Sami check-in with his No 2. I asked him his position and instructed him to forget about his mission and go to Gurdaspur and look out for Butch Ahmed who had bailed out near the railway station. Arshad confirmed and I headed back with a prayer in my heart. I couldn't believe all that was happening.

Unfortunately, I could not pursue my basic instinct to look for Butch, but I knew one thing: if Butch had landed safely, not the entire Indian Army and the population around him could catch him. He was too invincible and had nerves of steel compounded by his unmatched resolve and he would certainly escape. But Butch did not return because the cowardly enemy soldiers could sense the danger from this short, wiry man hanging by the nylon chord of his parachute and in the most heinous act of cowardice, they shot him while he was descending towards the ground (the Indians tried to make it out to be a result of the Ack-Ack fire - imagine that from a moving train). As the PAF heard the news of Butch's martyrdom, there was a sense of foreboding of a different kind in the entire command. It was ill-omened that the very best were going down.

Not surprisingly, because it is always the best who go down in flames fighting.

on any band of frequency. On 6th September during the pre-emptive strike, he had played a pivotal role in confusing the enemy radar and interceptors by mangling their transmissions, which had provided us a great measure of freedom from enemy air defense elements during very crucial moments. His aircraft had the capability to track enemy radars and home onto them with incredible precision, acting as the path-finder right onto the target.

Before ending the episode of the 1965 war, I feel that not enough tribute has been paid to No 14 Squadron for having destroyed several enemy aircraft, for the loss of only one aircraft when Flg Off Afzal was shot down over Kalaikunda after a brave battle with enemy interceptors. The second loss was an accident involving Flg Off ATM Aziz. The No 14 Squadron strength had been reduced to 8 aircraft, yet they continued their gallant fight to the end. The IAF with 9 Squadrons could not destroy a single PAF aircraft on the ground. Besides No 14 Squadron, the performance of the B-57s was stunning. The destruction of enemy aircraft caused by their bombing is as impressive as the IAF fighters shot in the air.

In the final analysis, the PAF held its head held very high for knocking terror into the heart of its adversary, three times its size. But the tragedy that beset the PAF in the coming years was that there was never an attempt made or even encouraged at base level to carry out an in depth synopsis of the war to bring out vital lessons. This had a detrimental effect on the future leadership and performance of the air force because those guilty of neglect, lack of courage, or failing to perform their war mission with fortitude or not performing at all (Mauripur failure to attack Jamnagar on 6th September), were simply swept under the cockpit. This infused mediocrity as the key to success in one's career and some of these cunning types ruled the roost over us as the

country was pushed into the 1971 war. A lot more survived again after the second war to inject further mediocrity, corruption and nepotism in this sterling service.

Worse, the nation was hoodwinked into believing in the delusion of victory by the high command. Their incompetence and treacherous compromise in the failure of Operation Grand Slam was in fact worthy of indictment. To detract from criticism and the wrath of any truth commission, the 6th September holiday was created as a symbol of victory! The media and the services celebrate this so called victory to keep the nation in its state of ignorance. The truth never sees the light of day because it is horrendous. This 'victory' is fallaciously assigned to the leaders and not to those gallant men of God who saved Pakistan by sacrificing their lives. I have made this point with my former service chiefs and army generals that the day should be commemorated with a candid and accurate post mortem of the war. Unfortunately, even seniors whom I revere do not want the Pandora's Box to be opened and prefer bygones to be bygones. Thus we shall never learn from our history.

During the war, gallantry awards were distributed like Eidi, instead of accountability for failures. There should not have been any gallantry awards given out during the war, rather the names of the officers recommended should have been made public for boosting the overall morale. Why could these awards not have been validated after the war, after an incisive investigation and recommendation of a fact finding commission to ensure that the veracity of claims had been established?

Lastly, why were the three versions of the PAF history not given to professional historians to be written without bias, fear or favour; candidly and comprehensively researched, so

that they could stand the test of veracity for all times? Why did the sponsors of the PAF history not ensure that those tasked with the dissertation were not themselves controversial so that the episodes could be scrutinized, with exaggerations carefully edited?

In all fairness, 6th September should be Pakistan Air Force day and the purpose and the emphasis should be to commemorate the memory of the gallant sons of Pakistan, who shed their blood so that Pakistan could survive. As for those veterans whose performance was legendary, they should be the pegs on which the PAF should hang its glories. Sadly, they appear to have lost all relevance in the present day state of the air force, where tradition and legacy have faded away. One only has to see the legends and martyrs treated with regrettable condescendence on 7th September which is Air Force Day. The enclosures are separated according to the stripes on the shoulders (now bland emblems), past and present and not by deeds or misdeeds.

I have witnessed those who created history on 6th, 7th and rest of September being steered away from the enclosures exclusively reserved for the star ranking officers. What an irony that at the dinner table the incumbent chief is invariably flanked by those from the 1965 era who had heard the sounds of bombs exploding from the trenches; others who had lost their way to the targets or even half rolled away at the sight of a Gnat; and yet others who brought the name of the PAF to disrepute through illicit financial misdemeanours. This blatant disrespect for those who fought with indomitable resolve must be a sorry experience for the present generation.

This mockery of the gallant became pronounced after Air Mshl Rahim Khan was removed unceremoniously as a victim of political chauvinism. It was not until Air Chief Mshl

Hakimullah took over command that the 1965 war was given its proper perspective and tribute was paid to the martyrs and veterans.

After yet another long gap it was not until the era of Air Chief Mshls Abbas Khattak (who created a spectacular museum to preserve the glorious heritage of the PAF), PQ Mehdi and lastly Mushaf Ali Mir (a maverick and thorough professional) that tradition and the spirit of achievement of the PAF was again revived after being lost for several years. They took full advantage of using the 1965 event to inject the old spirit amongst the men in blue. However, the revival was short lived and got buried with Mushaf Ali Mir and the three other future chiefs of the PAF who were lost in the tragedy of the plane crash in Kohat a few years ago. Upon reflection, it became evident that those who had fought valiantly in the wars and had reached the summit had a good feel for how to treat the day with solemn and deep respect; the rest carried a chip on their shoulders larger than the braid on their epaulets.

The brave men in uniform who defended Pakistan in 1965 with their blood so that our country men, women and children could sleep and work in peace and the nation could live on with dignity, may well have done it in vain. The truth about the blood soaked blunders of Ayub Khan and Gen Musa was kept under wraps and no one was allowed to discuss the Kashmir tragedy of betrayal by orders of the high command. The field Intel spooks would report any criticism of the war by officers. Fortunately, the contrived victory could not endure and public opinion against the misdemeanours of leadership gathered momentum.

The capitulation of Kashmir at Tashkent by Ayub Khan brought him down crumbling. But the question that should have been asked by the nation was “What about the blood

of the martyrs, why was it shed in vain by the leaders who lacked the courage to achieve what was so obviously laid out on a platter; the control of the artery of Kashmir?”

In spite of the fact that more than four decades have elapsed since the 1965

war, the real truth is not common knowledge and hence the truth must remain the biggest casualty in the tragedy of errors played out by the leaders of that period. Like most wars, the 1965 was an avoidable catastrophe. It was horrendously senseless and falsely contrived to appear as a victory. Only those martyred and their neglected, ravaged kin had to pay the terrible price for this farce. The legacy of the 1965 tragedy perpetrated a bigger watershed in 1971.

There is no logical reason why the legacy will not continue if we are averse to the lessons of history.

In the final analysis, had it not been for the courage, unconquerable faith and resilience of the fighting men, our leadership and military high command had committed hara-kiri of Pakistan in 1965. Kashmir was lost for the second and possibly the last time. In the words of Field Marshal Von Man Stein, “No General can vindicate his loss of battle by claiming that he was compelled against his better judgment to execute an order that led to defeat.”

11

THE DRIFT AFTER 1965 WAR

Ayub Khan was imploring for a ceasefire to save his throne when the Indians reluctantly agreed. What actually happened at Tashkent and who dictated the terms of the ceasefire and how much ground was lost by Ayub Khan to achieve the ceasefire declaration remains couched in a multitude of conjectures. But condemnation by Ayub Khan's favourite young foreign minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto finally became Ayub Khan's Achilles' heel. The blame game gathered stormy proportions as Bhutto made political capital by advertising the total trade-off by Ayub Khan to the frail but staunch Indian, Lal Bahadur Shastri. In the process, he lost all moral ground on Pakistan's historic claim to the vale of Kashmir. From there on Ayub Khan's narcissist delusions gave way to serious trepidations about his remaining in power.

The entire 1965 war was fought under US and Western embargo, a price we had to pay by hocking national sovereignty as collateral to CENTO for a few hundred weapon systems. After the war, Pakistan had to change direction and find more reliable sources for armaments to escape American blackmail and total dependency. The Russians made promises to Ayub Khan but reneged on them given the pressure from India. ZA Bhutto had the vision to engage the Chinese when he was re-assessing Pakistan's foreign policy in the changing paradigms of global alliances and national interests. Chinese leadership had spontaneously offered us a substantial number of fighter and bomber aircraft.

Let us remember that a similar offer by the Chinese Premier had been stalled by Ayub Khan during the war for fear of American wrath.

A major acquisition programme was launched with typical focus and alacrity by Air Marshal Nur Khan to modernize the PAF and equip it with deep penetration operational effectiveness. He was determined to take the PAF out of the clutches of the US military aid with which Ayub Khan had burdened Pakistan.

He wanted to give the PAF potency and turn it into a formidable force without US

crutches. Within months after the 1965 war was over, F-6 (Mig-19) squadrons were being formed at Sargodha, with the help offered by the Chinese Premier Zhou-en-Lai, who had provided 70 fighters free of charge to the PAF. The PAF

leadership had also closed a deal with Germany to buy 70 Canadian built F-86-E

fighters. The Americans tried to bungle the deal but with the help of the Shah of Iran, we managed to fly the aircraft into Pakistan from an Iranian base.

Meanwhile, the PAF had also started evaluating several European fighters but finally settled for the French Mirage-III aircraft. Alas, all this was happening without any re-evaluation of the conduct and failures of the 1965 war.

Making Excellence a Habit

Meanwhile, an armament competition was planned to keep the weapon delivery efficiency high with depleted resources. However, the competition was conducted with a modified concept owing to the continuing tension with India.

All the squadrons were to participate with the entire strength of the squadron pilots but they would participate in the competition from their respective bases. Each base would have umpires attached from outside the bases who would monitor and conduct the competition. I was conscious of being under close scrutiny to produce the kind of results I had undertaken. A lot of midnight oil was burnt on film assessing. Thorough de-briefs and briefings with the previous day's films were the order of the day. The competition started. I received a call from a colleague Sqn Ldr Azim Daudpota, OC No 17 Squadron, who laughingly said to me, "*Saeen* (a Sindhi word used to address friends) the Air Chief was here in Mauripur monitoring the competition results and he said 'you chaps are wasting your bloody time because No 19 Squadron is going to beat you chaps hollow'". I was quite pleased to hear the comments of the C-in-C but kept my fingers crossed hoping and praying that we would meet the challenge.

As it turned out, No 19 Squadron won the competition hands down, and one of our youngest pilots Flg Off Aliuddin (later Air Marshal) picked up the best pilot's Sher Afgan Sword. We achieved 62% average in strafing, beating my own commitment much to the delight of Air Mshl Nur Khan, who ordered the Dir of Ops to write to all fighter units and tell them to get their armament bar as high as No 19 Squadron. I received a call from Sqn Ldr Akhtar Hatmi from Mauripur, who said, "Sir, you have got us all into big trouble" and then read out the letter to me from AHQ mentioning the high scores achieved by No 19

Squadron and the C-in-C's directive that he expected all fighter units to match these. It was signed by Gp Capt Saeedullah Khan, the Dir of Plans.

This sense of achievement was doubled when we also clinched the flight safety trophy. All three were coveted symbols of operational standards and professionalism as well as flight safety. What also made me proud was that 9 of the pilots in the Squadron had come on their first posting to 19 Squadron after the war. Consequently, only four of us were from the war time lot. All this was achieved under a professional Base Commander, Gp Capt Bill Latif. His support and professional excellence were most inspiring as the unit strived towards retaining its 'Second to None' status.

My last memorable event before departing for Staff College was indisputably the biggest firepower display, held on 9th March 1967 at Jamrud Range, Peshawar. The Guest of Honour was the Shah of Iran and Empress Farah Deeba. The Shah accompanied by the President of Pakistan, arrived at the venue exactly on time. It was estimated that there were nearly 200,000 people who had come to witness the fire power display. The big attraction was the Shah and Farah Deeba. The display was one of the most impressive feats of peace time flying, in which the F-6s performed for the first time beside F-104s, F-86s and T-37 aircraft.

A couple of weeks before demonstration day, Air Mshl Nur Khan had arrived at the squadron to fly with me. Before we started a brief, he asked the Base Commander (Bill Latif) that for the coming air display he would like something out of the routine sonic booms, strafing and rocket firing. Bill Latif asked him what he would like us to do. He said to think about something different. I butted in and said, "Sir, I'm leading 4 aircraft for rocket firing during the display, if you allow we could perform this event in close formation, which would look spectacular with 112 rockets impacting simultaneously". He said that it sounded alright but still wanted something unusual. After he had left, I asked the

Base Commander that if he agreed we could fire the salvo of rockets from a looping manoeuvre in close formation, which would be different to any performance so far. He asked me jokingly how we would perform such a stunt. I explained that we could approach the grandstand from behind the viewers very low and pull up for a loop immediately as we passed over the rattled spectators and carry out a loop slightly flattened at the top and continue to achieve the firing parameters as we release a salvo of 112 rockets. Gp Capt Latif said that if we could manage it and hit the target, the Air Chief may consider it unusual.

On the morning of 9th March, we were the first to commence the fire-power display on the programme, immediately after 2 F-104s had carried out sonic booms low over the range and were climbing vertically up with full burners.

Meanwhile, we were on the run-in to the spectator's stand. I approached the range from the Khyber Pass direction flying over the Hindu Kush Mountains. I could see a huge array of multi-coloured targets for different events and ours was a pyramid of 100 gallon drums with used oil in them. There was a massive crowd along the road to Jamrud Range. I dove vertically down aiming at the VIP

grand stand with my formation steady as a rock while I levelled off at 50 feet AGL clocking 480 Kts. Gp Capt Latif was the range officer for the display and controlling all the display aircraft. As we roared over the spectators, Bill Latif called out and said, "Good pass, it shook-up all of us, you had better hit the target as good". I replied, "Roger sir, 45 seconds to the target". I levelled at the top at about 7,000-8,000 feet and as we came down over the horizon inverted I called speed brakes and throttle back to 80% power and a moment later called speed brakes "IN". This was meant to reduce initial entry speed and achieve accurate firing

parameters. All this may sound normal but as mentioned before, rocket firing requires highly precise aim and firing parameters; all estimation by the pilot. Our rocket firing spectacle was from an elliptical maneuver rather than a classic vertical loop to obtain lateral separation from the target.¹

As I saw the altimeter through a field of vision crossing 1,800 ft AGL, I called "stand-by". Momentarily, I called "FIRE" and 112 rockets spewed out like guided missiles. As soon as the last rocket left the launcher, I commenced an instant pull-up with 4 ½ Gs looking right and left and in the rear view mirror to check the formation members were tucked in close. I felt very proud of Dilawar, Khalid Latif and Arshad, holding steady as a rock. The impact of their rockets was solely my responsibility because I had to determine all the parameters as they only had to be in close formation on me and could not know even see what the earth looked like during the attack, leave alone even sighting the target. We bottomed out at about 200 feet AGL, whereas in normal rocket firing, each aircraft must pull-up not below 500 feet. But in this case, I had to cater for my pilots in close formation, wingtip to wingtip. As we began to pull-up, we had no idea about the impact as I held my breath waiting for the result of our impact from the range officer. Bill Latif's voice broke the deadly silence of 30 seconds and said, "Fantastic shooting Haider, direct hit; it was a beautiful sight".

My instinctive response was to say to myself, "God, thank you".

After all this thunder and fury there was some peace as we settled down in our routine. One afternoon I was just returning to the mess for my lunch when I met Air Cdre Zafar Mehmud, who was the Air Secretary at that time. He

said, "Hello Haider, how are you, I believe you have not been well?" I replied I was fine now and trail blazing the skies again. He said, "Keep this to yourself but you have been promoted to the rank of Wing Commander with effect from Monday, so stomach it for two days. Besides, you have been detailed for the Air Staff College also." It was like a high volt energy shot to hear about my promotion which I had not even dreamt about as yet, but the staff college bit was even more amazing and my immediate and spontaneous response was, "But sir, I have not even attempted my 'Q' examination as yet so I don't qualify for staff college".

He said in his typical lingo, "You bloody man you are lucky. The Air Chief has given a waiver justin your case". Then he confided in me and told me not to repeat itfor my own sake, that the Dir of Operations as well as the Dir of Plans had been quite livid about the Chief's decision because my batch mates and a couple of seniorswho were related to the former, had been superseded by me and the Chief was reluctant to promote them as yet or waive-off the 'Q' examination in their case.

¹ *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force, 1988. Page 497. Matrimonial Woes*

I later learnt from Gp Capt HH Karim, who was Secretary Air Board at the time, that after the meeting, when the Air Chief had left the Dir of Plans, the latter had remarked in anger that "The barrier was lifted for this bastard and dropped for the rest". Karim cautioned me that I had powerful detractors and had to be careful. Karim also told me that Air Cdre Khyber Khan had also brought up the issue of my matrimonial problems with the Air Marshal, but Air Mshl Nur Khan had ticked him off and told him not pry in the personal affairs of young officers as long as it did not affect their

professional conduct. Karim said something then that proved to be so true in the times to come and highly detrimental to my career. He said, "You are the subject of intense envy". He advised me to watch out but did not say how and could not explain why I would have to start looking over my shoulder. I was deeply concerned to hear about the invective used by the Group Captain and wondered how and where I had annoyed these senior officers who were out to get me.

At that point in time my married life had been gradually deteriorating and had become untenable. Without going into the details, there was no choice left but for me to seek a separation from my spouse. It was like a battle of wits and took a greater toll on me than the 1965 War. Suddenly my nerves could not take the tension and the pressure cooker effect nearly cost me my life.

Finally one day my younger brother Jawwad flew into Peshawar and took me away to East Pakistan where he was working with Shaw Wallace and Co as a manager of their vast tea plantation. The love, affection and caring that I received from Jawwad's tea planter compatriots and my friends Ali Afridi and especially Gillo Afridi turned me around and saved my sanity. For the first two weeks which I spent in the tea gardens was an incredibly peaceful time. I had laid off the alcohol but my digestive system was shot to pieces and remains so till today. But the last week which I spent in Dhaka seemed one long, unending party. Finally, the three weeks of recoup and rehab were over and I was seen off at Tejgaon airport by scores of old and new friends.

Our divorce had not yet been confirmed owing to the three month reconciliation law. But as my car approached the gate of my home on Karakul Lane in Peshawar, there was no sign of light or life. A sign on a cardboard read 'To Let'. My

wife had moved every thing; the house was bare. My neighbours who were a wonderful couple had asked their guard to keep track of my return. As soon as he saw the car entering the house he came running and said that my friends were waiting for me at their home. That is where I slept for a couple of nights till I got a room in the Officers' Mess. I did not miss any of the material stuff she had taken away except my clothes and uniforms. It was the latter that irked me because I had to be on duty from Monday onwards. That problem was also sorted out and what remained as my bete noir was her taking away my beloved son. She refused to let me meet him. All messengers were met by Rottweiler-like monsters and turned away.

When three months were over and the divorce was confirmed, I tried to get some sense across but to no avail. Good old Ali Afridi finally came to my rescue. He struck a deal that she would return my clothes and let me meet my child. Ali thought he had struck a good deal - after all she was a woman and needed 30% of my salary for 36 months. The less said about my insolvency during that period the better. What I wanted desperately was my son Adnan.

One day a plan was hatched between my buddy Minoo Marker and I to get the child across to Quetta to my parents in the Bugti complex. Once the child was safely there, no one would dare attempt any adventure. How I would get possession of Adnan was a major hurdle because he had been taken away to Rawalpindi to her uncle's house. The uncle had by then curried favour of those ruling the roost and become a lackey in Ayub Khan's royal court as it were. To cut a long story short, I carried out yet another successful pre-emptive assault on the uncle's house and lifted my son in a muslin shirt, despite the taxi driver's agitation. A blow on his right jaw got him moving and I headed for the airport where Minoo had already landed from Karachi. The IG police

was a good friend owing to my close friendship with Anwar Khan Afridi, the great police chief.

The IG instructed all the relevant police stations not to take any action on a report which may have Adnan and my name on it.

It all worked out well and my son was left in the custody of my parents and brought up by my noble sister, Kausar. To this day Adnan calls her his real mother. This was the episode which caused Adnan to be finally united with me in erstwhile East Pakistan from 1969 till early 1971.

Life at the Staff College

I headed for the new horizon of higher education, even though I had always run away from academics as I loved action and not so much theorizing. Leaving my comrades in No 19 Squadron was sad as I bade farewell to these special men, courageous and heading for fame as I had predicted. Nine of them made it to the starry ranks of Air Vice Marshals and Air Marshals. One predictably moved on to become an Air Chief Marshal and Chief of the Air Force. Bloody good innings, any one would say in all fairness, not to speak of the total of five Sitara-e-Jurats – the highest number in fighter squadrons – that had been won by my Squadron. In peace time this Squadron of intrepid fighter pilots bagged the Sher Afghan ('Top Gun' sword), the Armament Trophy (the best all round Squadron) as well as the Flight Safety Trophy. At the end of this chapter of my life I could look back at the period of my first command with pride and tremendous satisfaction because No 19 Squadron had done me proud by creating history in war and peace. It had been acknowledged by all and sundry, including even our adversaries, the Indians.

My time at the PAF Staff College on Drigh Road was extremely pleasant because Air Cdre Rahim Khan was the Commandant of the College. Rahim Khan had, however, been sent there as a consequence of the disdain of the Air Chief. Had Air Mshl Nur Khan ordered an honest and incisive analysis of the 1965 war, he would have discovered that the fault lines ran right under his nose in the Directorates of Operations as well as Plans. Allah's ways are not known to us mortals as He had ordained for Rahim Khan to become the next Air Chief, and he held up the tradition of his predecessors with remarkable panache. Many true warriors of the PAF share the perception even today that he was the last 'Lord of the Ring', metaphorically speaking. A few timid ones may have a different opinion now, but they lacked the moral courage to show their contempt at that time.

I did alright on the course, but have to admit in all humility that I didn't break my back either to figure out the complex air defence academia. My real performance was at the squadron presentation as its leader. The subject given to our group was 'The Arab Israeli Conflict'. A totally new and political subject, but extremely interesting as we dug into the research. The team comprised Zaheer Hussain (Betty), and one other East Pakistani colleague. I solicited the support of the nut case Sqn Ldr Jillani, a signals officer at Drigh Road base, with a thick English accent and a great sense of humour. He was to mimic the infamous Lord Balfour, the man who was responsible for the creation of the state of Israel. I had contempt for the man and for the Zionists and much respect for the Palestinians; those sentiments I harbour with intensity even to this day.

Anyhow, we came through with flying colours as we received unusual kudos from the Commandant in his closing remarks at the end of the presentation.

The course was quite demanding, and there were times when we had to work almost around the clock before handing over complex exercises, but particularly at the time of writing our thesis for the course. This, by no means, meant that one could not partake in the pizzazz of the social life of Karachi, where I had many close and colourful friends.

Saturday was always party time and we managed to make the best of it. I had the good fortune of having my childhood friend, Minoo, a character so unique that there was never a dull moment in his company. Coming from a wealthy background, his Saturday night shindigs were always sensational. On one occasion, I had a large party at my house. I had invited the Commandant and Begum Rahim Khan along with three other instructors from the College and several colleagues who enjoyed happy moments together. It was a fantastic evening and everyone had a lot of fun, dancing the night away. I think the last to leave were Minoo the 'Malang', Aziz Wali Mohammed (Gigi to friends) and the craziest amongst my friends, Faqir Ayazuddin (Ike to friends). I had to practically throw them out just before sunrise.

The next day, being a Sunday, was the recovery day to repair the damages of the previous night. I was rudely woken up at 10 AM, which was unusual because my faithful cook/bearer, Aziz, would not let a fly disturb me on a Sunday till I sent for him. When he knocked on my door, I had a royal big headache and asked him what the hell the problem was. He said he was sorry to wake me but there was a gentleman outside with a big wagon and a huge crate like a coffin, which he wanted to give me personally and said that he had a letter, which could only be given to me and not to my cook. Despairingly, I put a dressing gown around me and went out to find Minoo Marker's office manager, Siddiqui waiting outside. I got concerned and

asked the worried looking Siddiqui if Minoo Marker was alright. He handed me an envelope and said, "Sir, Mr Marker has asked me to deliver this crate and the letter". The crate was about 5 feet long and 18 inches or so wide, too small to accommodate Minoo 'the Malang', but one could never tell with Minoo, he was extremely fond of practical jokes. As we pulled-off the wooden strips, we discovered there was a huge block of ice in it. Siddiqui wanted to get the hell out of the camp before I throttled him. The note was a typical limerick about swollen heads from the night before and a block of ice for comfort and ready for hair of the dog, the morning after. This really meant an invitation to join him at the elegant Sindh Club to treat the hang-over.

This was just a glimpse of what the weekends were like. I loved some, lost some, gained the Staff College qualification and a posting, which was to make up for all the good life I had during the course.

One incident that I want to include has something to do with the character of Air Mshl Rahim Khan. A week after the big bash at my house, I was summoned by the Commandant in his office, who asked me if I knew that my cook's daughter was quite ill. I expressed my ignorance. He became very angry and ordered me to go back home and find out about the poor man's daughter, who was not being attended to properly, because my cook had no time for his family owing to my busy social life. I was upset but also curious as to how he had come to know about my cook Aziz's daughter, because he had not told me that his daughter was ill. I drove straight home and as soon as I saw Aziz, I told him about my dressing down by the Commandant and asked him what was wrong with his daughter and how had the Commandant come to know about it.

His story was quite amazing. He said that his daughter had very high fever and the duty doctor at the MI Room told him to take her to PNS Shifa (the Naval Hospital). So he came home and wrapped up the girl and carried her on his shoulder, heading towards the main Drigh Road bus stand. While he was still inside the PAF area, a big car with a flag stopped next to him and he saw Air Cdre Rahim Khan and his Begum. The Air Cdre recognized Aziz and asked him who he was carrying and where he was going. He told him about his sick daughter. The Commandant told him to take the seat next to the chauffer and drove him to PNS Shifa. There he sent for the Medical Officer on duty and instructed him to take good care of the child. He also gave Aziz Rs 20 to take her back in a taxi. That was just one small facet of this great man, who possessed a large and warm heart, the likes of which I had not seen in my service life.

Soon my stay at the Staff College was over and I was given some memorable farewells by Minoo Malang, Toni Tufail and my gracious friends Aqueel and Doreen Rizvi. It was time to get back to hard core air force life.

Tempestuous Tenure at Sargodha

At the end of the course, I was posted to PAF Station Sargodha as Operations Officer. This was a good enough posting because it was at a station known as the hot-bed of fighter pilots, so flying would not be difficult. This period, which I looked forward to in all earnest, turned out to be one of the worst postings of my career, with too many uncalled for adversities.

Upon arrival, I stayed at the BOQs till one of the newly constructed modern flats was allocated to me. I thought it appropriate to call on the Base Commander on the second day at Sargodha. It was late afternoon when I arrived at the

Base Commander's bungalow and was asked to take a chair in the spacious lawn. A few minutes later, the Base Commander, Group Captain Zafar Chaudhary, came out and joined me. I greeted him and mumbled something about being very fortunate to have been posted to Sargodha, under his command. We made some small talk over an excellent home made ginger beverage. I departed after 20 minutes or so, during which he briefly recapped my responsibilities. I settled into the routine with a major project handed over to me by the Base Commander. He told me that the Sargodha War Book needed urgent and focused attention to make it a document worthy of its name and capable of implementation. I asked the Senior Air Traffic Control Officer (SATCO) Sqn Ldr Sikandar to help me put the war book together. He was a very willing and diligent associate and was a great help from day one.

The war book had earlier been the responsibility of the Staff Maintenance Officer, Wg Cdr Siddiqui, who had been a flyer until he lost one eye in a car accident and switched to maintenance branch. The Base Commander, while briefing me about the war book, had mentioned that Siddiqui had guarded the book like a python, hinting about the high security that it was accorded. What Sikandar and I could not figure out was as to what Siddiqui had done with the war book, because it was a shoddy collection of 100 or so pages, lacking substance and detail, which such a book must contain to be effective when it is required to be implemented. With the high hope that the two of us would create a valuable document, we set out with all good intentions and long hours.

Although I was on a staff posting, my passion for flying had to be fulfilled if I was giving my best to basic responsibilities.

It was fortunate that one of the finest commanders I served with during various postings, Gp Capt Bill Latif was the Officer Commanding (OC) No 33

Flying Wing. I, therefore, had no problem converting onto the F-6. It was a far cry from the American fighters I had been used to before. The Chinese aircraft had some very vintage operating systems, switches and handles instead of electronic actuating devices. But the power of the two engines made up for its old fashioned and rather uncomfortable cockpit. I was able to adapt to its flying characteristics and idiosyncrasies in a few sorties and was soon introduced to armament missions, a passionate love of all fighter pilots.

Sargodha had a very nice crowd of fighter pilots, which made life extremely pleasant and flying very rewarding, but this was to be short lived. Somehow, the Base Commander seemed to emanate rancour at whatever I did. If I went flying, he would send for me and say that he had been buzzing me on the intercom, but that I always seemed to be flying. I explained to him as properly as was deemed prudent that I wanted to become operational on the F-6 (Mig-19) to be able to lead and be useful for No 33 Wing. I also implored that my flying was not at all being done at the cost of my basic functions and that I was giving full attention to the operational facilities at Sargodha as well as at the satellites. He was not convinced that I could fly as well as perform my duties well.

One day, a week after I had been declared operational on the F-6 aircraft, the OC Flying Wing, Bill Latif mentioned to me that I was the senior-most officer after him on the Station and therefore, it was my right to act as OC

Flying Wing during his absence. I told him that the Base Commander may not relish this idea. Up to that time an unpopular Squadron commander, but a pet of the Base Commander used to be the acting OC Flying Wing in place of Bill Latif (even though this was his very first and only command of an operational Squadron and that too courtesy of the Base Commander). But I let matters slide as I did not consider it worth the acrimony that would inevitably follow owing to the character of the Squadron Commander concerned. None the less, a show down took place during the morning brief and I had to resort to some very harsh words for the said officer because he had tried to show his authority as the acting OC Flying Wing. The matter was reported to the Base Commander instantly by him.

I was called in by Air Cdre Zafar Chaudhary and given a drubbing while the acting OC Flying Wing sat with eyes red from what seemed like some sobbing he had resorted to in front of his mentor for receiving scathing words from me.

After this incident a tirade of complaints were addressed by the Base Commander to me over very petty matters. A couple of days later, I was called in by the Base Commander for the umpteenth time. He looked me up and down and said that it had been reported that my infant son, Adnan Haider (he was just 7 years old and a great favourite with the young fighter pilots) was seen in the air defence alert (ADA) bus riding with the ADA pilots. I did not know how to react to such a petty observation.

Such relentless niggling had finally got to me, and one day I decided to confront the Base Commander. I told him that he had not once called and said a word about the hours that I spent in my office long after everybody had gone home in order to prepare the war book in solitude. I informed him that I did most of my flying in the afternoon, after working

hours, unless one of the Squadron Commanders wanted me to fly as a check pilot to assess their flying standards. I asked him if he really thought I was committing serious violations and if my conduct was in any way unbecoming. I pointed out that perhaps my detractor's conduct was unbecoming for constantly keeping the Base Commander in a negative mood with his senior Staff Operations Officer.

Suddenly, I saw the expression on the Base Commander's face mellow and he got up from his chair, walked up to me and patted me on my shoulder saying, "Haider, I feel I have been swayed by reports and I feel you are right, it has not been easy for you. From now on, you have my full confidence," or words to that effect. I seized the moment and told him that I was fully operational and the senior most officer on the station after the OC Flying Wing, and if he considered it appropriate, I should act as OC Flying Wing when Gp Capt Latif was away. I think I had just boomeranged all the acrimony that had left the room for those fleeting moments. He asked me, not liking what he heard, "Are you really the senior most after Bill Latif"? I told him if he could please verify it from the Air Force List. He told me that if I was the senior most then I had the right to be the acting OC Flying Wing. I somehow knew that I had blown it all in that last moment. He did not like what he had to accept.

The next episode was hilarious but sad at the same time. The nagging Squadron Commander who was constantly complaining about me was also the President of the Mess Committee (PMC) and was given royal hell by MM Alam for intruding on the privacy of one of his pilots in their BOQs, trying to assert his authority. The next day there was a showdown in the 33 Wing area as the Base Commander decided to rub Alam for being rude by calling the PMC a sissy (that was the second time he had been called that).

Alam and the boss had a massive yelling match in the hearing of scores of pilots.

Even though it was a great relief for me to receive the Base Commander's re-assurance, the elation was very short lived. A day or two later, I was jolted with the most unexpected news. The Base Commander had flown to the AHQ

that morning and had returned the same day. In the evening I received a call from the ADC to the C-in-C who was a fine young fighter pilot and well known to me. He told me in confidence that my Base Commander had met with the Air Chief and had asked that Alam and I be removed from Sargodha because he could not deal with the two of us. "Watch your six, sir", he cautioned (six meant one's rear, in fighter pilot lingo, suggesting I look out for the enemy behind). I was astounded at the news. I told him about the peace deal with the Base Commander, who had assured me just the day before that he would be considerate to me from then on. To this, the ADC asked me to remain vigilant and to watch out for trouble fomenting for the two of us i.e., Alam and I.

I also learnt from the ADC that that the Base Commander was told by the C-in-C that the Alam and Haider had been posted to Sargodha at his behest and that if the Base Commander felt so strongly about the two, then it was time for the older generation to make way for the up coming officers.

Another incident which nags my memory concerning the Base Commander's frame of mind was a misunderstanding that was blown out of proportion. It began when a forced landing by Flt Lt Allahdad, who had landed his F-6 after experiencing flame out in a dry river bed, which caused him to end up in the hospital, hurt with all the jostling and

jolting. One of the young pilots at the Mess bar told Bill Latif that some of them had been to see Allahdad in the hospital and he was doing well except that the bed sheets on which he was lying were torn and unclean. It just so happened that in the next half hour, the OC Hospital Wg Cdr Walid Khan arrived at the bar.

Bill Latif asked the OC Hospital about the torn sheets covering Allahdad's bed. The doctor said that it was not possible to have torn bed sheets for any patient. Bill Latif said, "Alright then, let's go and see for ourselves, and doc you're coming with us".

Bill Latif, Flt Lt Imtiaz Bhatti and Flg Off Qayyum were to have dinner with me later after a few elbow benders at the bar.

I asked Bill about the dinner, since a plan had been made to eat at my house and my cook would not wait beyond 2200 Hrs. Bill turned around and said, "Haider, we will be seated at your dining table at 2145 sharp". So I left for my flat and waited for the cabal to turn up. There was no sign of them for the rest of the evening and so I had my dinner by 2200 Hrs, read for an hour and went to sleep. The next morning, I got to my office and had barely sat in my chair when I saw Bill Latif with his signature dark glasses virtually crash through my door. I looked at him with feigned scorn for the previous night's let down. He said, "You don't know what happened last night at the hospital; we didn't eat at all after the shamus was let loose after us by your boss".

I asked him what had happened. Just at that second, the red light and buzzer on the intercom sounded and I was summoned by the Base Commander. I headed for his office which was right opposite to mine. The Base Commander virtually pounced on me about the "grotesque conduct" at

the hospital maternity ward the previous night and asked me to explain what had happened. I told him that I had no idea what he was asking me about. "Weren't you with Bill Latif and Imtiaz Bhatti last night visiting the maternity ward in the hospital late at night?" To his visible disappointment for the second time, I told him that I had returned to my flat and gone to sleep when they went to look up the injured pilot Allahdad in the hospital. He looked quite peeved at the discovery that I had not been amongst the presumed miscreants.

Later, I discovered the details of a rather stupid incident blown totally out of proportion by the frenzied Base Commander. It transpired that after I had left the bar and gone home, Bhatti and Akhtar had hopped into the OC Flying Wing's jeep to visit the hospital. The OC Hospital followed in his own vehicle. Upon arrival at this huge hospital complex, they were only told that the pilot was on the second floor in the Officer's Ward. In a jolly mood, they opened the first door of the Officer's Ward corridor, only to be met by a shrieking matron in charge of the maternity ward. She virtually assaulted the visiting OC Wing and his companions with foul words asking them to get out, saying that they should feel ashamed of themselves crashing into the maternity ward.

The next day was a Saturday and I was informed by SATCO at about midday that Air Cdre Rahim Khan, the ACAS (Admin) was arriving in Harvard.

After that, I only came to know of his presence when the red buzzer on my intercom summoned me to the boss's office. I saw the ACAS (Admin) sitting in the Base Commander's seat and Zafar Chaudhary on a visitor's chair. Air Cdre Rahim Khan asked me how I was doing in my new job. I replied that it was a challenging assignment and I was giving it my very

best. He then asked if I had plans for the weekend to which I responded with a stammering “No, sir.”

Some thing was terribly wrong here, I thought to myself, wondering what was coming next. He said that I should get an overnight bag and accompany him to Peshawar. Rather surprised, I did not dare question “why?”. I was ferried to Peshawar by the ACAS (Admin) after lunch. Upon landing, Air Cdre Rahim Khan asked me to come and have dinner with him at 1930 at his home. I arrived at the appointed hour and was shown into the elegantly appointed drawing room where a log fire was blazing. I didn't have to wait long as Rahim Khan entered looking exuberant with bright, blazing eyes. With a smile he said, “Sajad, your Base Commander is not very happy with you. I had gone there to put this hospital episode to rest as the C-in-C was upset over a minor misunderstanding blown out of proportion, but what took much longer was your Base Commander's summary of complaints about you. Have you become some kind of a rebel, because that was the impression given by your Base Commander”. I replied, “Sir, if you tell me what specific problem areas or bad behaviour that have caused him such consternation, I could explain.”

He laughed and said, “I think he does not approve of any thing you do; you fly too much and thereby absent yourself from your primary functions; allegedly you have a bad influence on the young pilots, encouraging them to visit the bar regularly, and too many parties are being held in the Mess. He also alleges that your son misuses your position and is often seen in service vehicles in restricted areas and so forth. But the most serious charge he held against you was that you had abused a Squadron Commander in the presence of the wing pilots, asserting that you were very provocative with contemporaries and superiors. Well! What do you have to say to the list of these misdemeanours?” I

was quiet for a few moments, trying to digest the incredulous charge sheet made up by the Base Commander, wondering how to respond to the exaggerations and petty incidents, especially after he had declared a kind of peaceful co-existence just recently. “Sir, yes, I am guilty of most of these allegations, but may I ask you respectfully if these constituted conduct unbecoming and were serious enough offences according to air force law?”

Mrs Rahim appeared at that point and joined us. Rahim Khan said the best solution would be to move me out to a different location. I lamented that I would miss the opportunity of flying the F-6 and perhaps the Mirage some day. Rahim Khan said not to worry about flying and opined I needed to put in some time on a staff job.

One fine afternoon, one of my favourite fighter pilots Sqn Ldr Sikandar Mahmud came beaming in and said, “Congratulations, sir. I have good news; you are posted to Air Defence Operations Command (ADOC) under Gp Capt Sadruddin as your new boss”. At this stage in life I wondered why I was being targeted despite having achieved a lot as a fighter leader and commander. My assessments had always been ‘exceptional’ in all phases of flying and I had a clean flight safety record. I had the reputation of a hard task master and a disciplinarian, so why was I in trouble and being shunted around?

Move to ADOC Peshawar

Looking back, it still amuses me to recall the speed with which I moved from Sargodha, almost sneaking out without any customary function or even a good-bye, except for all those who had gathered the evening before I took-off for Peshawar in my car with my sparse belongings. The next

morning I reported to Gp Capt Sadruddin and was briefed on my new job description.

Even though there were no open hostilities with India at the time, tension prevailed and any infringement of our air space had to be responded to with a firm and swift response. I made out a plan to enhance the air defence reaction and response to border violations by the Indian Air Force. The plan entailed mock threats in the air to establish the state of preparedness which I had shown to Group Captain Zaki Butt, my immediate superior.

What I generally sensed at the newly created ADOC HQ was compartmentalization and a bureaucratic approach to matters of operational consequence. Gp Capt Zaki Butt had been a good flier of the Sea-Fury days, and totally gung-ho, with no taste for detailed staff work. Sadruddin was somewhat reclusive, intelligent and extremely well informed about aviation but he was not assertive. The boss, Air Vice Mshl Yusuf was a gentleman, articulate but did not want any waves in the smooth environs of his corridors. 'Don't rock the boat, don't try to be a hero' were the watch-words. The sound of silence in the corridors of the Command HQ was too much for me and I decided to run an exercise to check out the air defence readiness in the north. It entailed a formation from the Peshawar-based squadron to simulate an attack against Sakesar radar without informing the air defence elements.

The results were not complimentary either for the radar station or for the interceptors from Sargodha. I initiated a report and put it to Zaki Butt for review and comments. He asked me to write a letter to the Sector Commanders and ask them to take serious notice of the laxity of the air defence response. I put up a draft to him for approval, which he did but noted that it should be signed by me on behalf of

ADOC. I had serious trepidations about signing a letter to the Sector Commanders and especially to OC Flying Wing Sargodha suggesting that F-6s should have handled the interception more professionally instead of being shot down by F-86s. Somehow, Group Captain Sadruddin had not been in the loop and found out only when the report went to his 'In' tray.

In the next few days all hell broke loose. The AOC, Air Vice Mshl Yusuf, who was rather fond of the Sector Commander North, received a strong protest about a Wg Cdr writing such a strong letter. Same protests came from the South, upsetting the grand old AOC to such an extent, that he told Sadruddin to reign-in Sajad Haider. Later, I learnt from Sadruddin that he was asked to move me out of ADOC. I went running to Zaka Butt and expressed my grievance for being ostracized because I ran an exercise with proper clearance from him and was ordered by him to sign the letter. He said he would speak with Sadruddin and the AOC, but I knew he would stop at Sadruddin. I realised that I was operating in a stuffed chair staff-officer-mentality set up.

No one wanted to consider that in the 1965 War, on the second day when the IAF raids started against Sargodha area, out of six enemy raids, four were not reported by the MOUs and totally missed by the radars. As discussed in detail earlier, had it not been for the raiders not pressing home their attacks with grit and accuracy, Sargodha would have been severely mauled that day.

The air defence organisation had a hell of a lot to do towards achieving the desirable level of raid intercept success. But I was too small a fry, and the rest had little hands-on experience of real war. A Catch-22 situation! So, I sat back and found out that doing little and writing a lot of staff papers was the road to success. This was not my wont

to delve into clerical articulation. Somewhat disheartened, down but not out like I was in Sargodha, I sat around looking at the daily mail and passing it on with 'seen' and my initials. There were moments when I would tear away from the HQs and visit the squadron for a chit chat or even a mission. There were so many thoughts and ideas in my mind about developing concepts of combat and air defence, but my first experience had poured ice cold water on any creativity I possessed and I desisted from taking further initiatives. So I decided to cool my shins. It was amazing that so many just wanted to maintain the status quo and did not want to rock the boat. My life had been too much of a roller-coaster for things to remain dormant. Fate had to kick in sometime soon.

In the Eye of the Storm

Sadruddin called me one day and said I had been posted to East Pakistan as OC 14 Squadron. I thought my star had come out of the cusp. He said this was a good posting as the 14 Squadron in Dhaka was going to be supplemented with another fighter squadron and Dhaka would become a wing, with me as the OC

Flying Wing; that I would be independent which was best suited to my temperament. I felt really bad that I was being sent out of the ADOC for exercising initiative (Sadruddin's euphemism for over stepping my terms of reference) earlier on, but once again I thought that fate was propelling me towards my destiny, so I looked at the brighter side of the posting of an independent command. I felt this may well be a good change and a new challenge. One thing that became a glaring reality was that positive imagination and initiative to improve the PAF was only the prerogative of the seniors in command, as long as they maintained status quo and did not create waves. That was the sole reason why I was

branded as one who exercised initiative beyond my terms of reference. True, that those who did not have the passion to induce fire in their area of responsibility were headed on track except when the chips were down and real professional and personal courage were put to test. At least I knew that as an independent commander I would have all the opportunity to exercise my imagination.

The best part of the next posting was the happy prospect of serving under a superb commander, Air Cdre Zulfiqar Ali Khan. What came as disconcerting news was that Air Cdre Mitty Masud, then the ACAS (Ops), had vehemently opposed my posting to East Pakistan. Fortunately, Air Mshl Nur Khan's decision prevailed. Why Mitty did not want me to go to East Pakistan was beyond my comprehension and I kept quiet about it. However, there was that ever-present sense of trepidation of last minute change, which had become a possibility rather than an exception in my particular case. I felt as though I was being constantly chased out, possibly for the logic that I had a problem with wanting to do a lot more than the book said.

I arrived in Dhaka on 14th April, 1969. I had to put up in a *Bhasha* (thatched roof BOQs) in the Mess since my predecessor, Wg Cdr MG Tawab was still in Dhaka and intended to vacate the bungalow in a couple of weeks.

The first thing after arrival I needed to do was call on the Base Commander. I called him and he asked me to report immediately to his house. It was a very pleasant interlude with Air Cdre and Begum Zulfiqar. Both of them greeted me with a special "Hello, young man when did you arrive?" I said I had landed a few hours ago. I spent over an hour with them and they chatted with genuine affection and heard my story of the last few months and the two postings. Zulfiqar told me he was very glad to have me at Dhaka, and

suggested I get on with the war book as well as plan flying training suited to the emerging threat. I left with a feeling of relief and in high spirits. My loyalty could be commanded very simply by a commander who showed empathy and was genuinely a man of dignity.

I had a great advantage in former East Pakistan as my youngest brother Jawwad Haider was working with a British conglomerate which were involved in the tea business in the district of Sylhet. For young men those days a managerial job in the tea plantations was considered an excellent opportunity.

The tea planters reminded me in some ways of fighter pilots, operating out of posts like Miranshah; they worked hard and played hard. Jawwad was an extremely popular planter and made many good friends who in time became my friends too. Also, in Dhaka itself, a very well established family from the Isphahani clan known as the Hashims virtually adopted my little son Adnan. In fact, they wouldn't let us stay in the Mess *Bhasha*. Although the Base Commander was keen that I should hire a nice house in the cantonment, the Hashims wouldn't have it. They insisted we stay with them until the assigned accommodation was ready for my occupation. When that did happen it was an experience. When the Hashims' daughters came to look over the house, all of us were appalled to see the state of the air force accommodation! It took one month and more to get the cockroaches out and make the house liveable. So we settled down and my son was taken into the Dhaka English School.

During this period of settling down, I had been fully occupied with trying to grasp the peculiarities of flying in East Pakistan. The terrain and weather were two dominating factors which made flying training quite different to what I

had been used to. The river had such a massive delta that at places it was like a sea.

Consequently, navigation demanded much more accuracy and focus. The weather was unpredictable, and could assume dangerous proportions in the absence of a proper alternate airfield. Therefore, flight safety requirements placed a serious restraint on achieving the flying target, especially during the rainy season. It was a nightmare during the monsoons. Yet, it had to be done and fortunately we did very well in achieving our operational readiness goals.

At the same time, I had to work on the war book, which was non-existent and seemed a very sad apology for what the East Pakistan book should have looked like. This was yet another expression of the West Pakistani mindset about the defence policy for East Pakistan. Strangely enough, even though MG Tawab, my Bengali predecessor paid little heed to this vital aspect, I managed to find a senior NCO who could type reasonably well and had a fair comprehension of the English language. The problem was that it had to be done after working hours since my day was fully occupied with flying matters, including my own familiarization with day was fully occupied with flying matters, including my own familiarization with

4 afternoons of the week. I had a lot of problems obtaining a response from Wg Cdr Khondekar (Johnny to his friends). His input was the most important section of the war book because all the logistic services were under his preview. I did not understand his lack of interest in supporting the completion of the document till after events unfolded about his subversive activities at the time.

Johnny was involved with the Indian intelligence services that were conspiring to plan the break-away of East Pakistan. He would go on service leave or casual leave and allegedly visited Agartala several times. But all this came to light after the creation of Bangladesh. At any rate, Khondekar was a very mild person and a good flier.

Time passed very quickly and major events had Pakistan reeling with Ayub Khan's despotic military dominance and institutionalization of nepotism and big-bucks corruption. This inevitably led to his unceremonious downfall, which came ominously but predictably. He was replaced by Yahya Khan. Our military dictators have always perceived themselves as 'statesmen' and God's gift to the nation because the Western powers infused that delusion in them whenever they held sway over Pakistan. Neither quite understood that it was the land and people of Pakistan that were its strength and not the dictators in charge.

The PAF command also changed dramatically one fine day. Air Cdre Rahim Khan was promoted to the rank of Air Vice Marshal and he took command from Air Mshl Nur Khan. Rahim Khan was not Air Mshl Nur Khan's choice but there is no doubt in my mind that Rahim Khan was the best choice at that juncture. Some months earlier, Air Cdre Rahim Khan had asked me to have dinner with him while he was the ACAS (Admin). That is when I sensed that Rahim Khan was having a rough time at AHQ. Not being the kind to take such indignity he must have had a very hard choice to make. That evening he had told me that he had decided to resign while honour was still an option. But destiny had some other plans for him.

Before Rahim Khan was made the Air Chief, Lt Gen Gul Hassan had visited Dhaka on the 7th of July, 1969 and I had flown him to Jessore in a four-engine Widgeon belonging to

the Governor. It was during this trip that Gen Gul Hassan gave me an indication that Rahim Khan may be our next chief. It was some months later that we got the news that Rahim Khan had been appointed as the Air Chief. Somewhere in the middle of 1970, Air Mshl Rahim Khan visited Dhaka. The Base Commander and his wife hosted a beautiful candle lit dinner for him. I remember that Gillo Afridi, my friend Ali Afridi's wife and Riffat Haqqani, two young and very sophisticated ladies, had worked for days with Begum Zulfiqar to organise the dinner and the décor. They had bent their backs to make the dinner a great success. Being the elite of Dhaka's society, they expected to be placed at the table with the C-in-C or at least next to him. The evening of the dinner, the two ladies discovered to their horror that they were not even invited to the dinner! Till this day both of them remember the indignation they suffered on that occasion, although they laugh about it now.

It was during the C-in-C's trip that I got to know from the Base Commander that an F-6 Squadron was being planned for shipment by sea to Dhaka to enhance the operational strength in the East. Everything was going so well that some times I feared it was too good to last. One stormy day, I was called by the Base Commander and he asked if I knew that he was being posted to AHQ. My heart really sank and I hoped he was only pulling my leg. It turned out to be true and he told me that Air Cdr Mitty Masud would be replacing him. With a heavy heart we bade goodbye to Air Cdre Zulfiqar and his wife Sajida.

In the meantime, other major changes were to take place at the top in the PAF. Air Mshl Rahim Khan had a bad temper as well as a large heart. He never held any scorn, even for his known detractors and enemies. His compassion far exceeded his volcanic outbursts. In the end he was always fair, just and sincere.

He faced a situation soon after his take-over where a cabal of officers known more for their intrigue than professional excellence, had to be dispersed and kept at an arm's length of the main PAF team. Air Mshl Rahim Khan decided to send away senior officers, whom he knew to be the cliquish lot in the PAF. Air Cdre (later Air Vice Marshal and Vice Chief) Saeedullah Khan was the first to be sent out to PIA. Air Cdre Zafar Chaudhary (later Air Chief) was sent off to the Imperial Defence College in England and upon his return appointed as ACAS

(Ops) for a few months from January 1971 before being sent to PIA as Managing Director. The third officer, Gp Capt Khaqan Abbasi, was sent to Jordan soon after Air Mshl Rahim Khan took over command.

Whether or not Air Mshl Rahim Khan's decision to cleanse the PAF, albeit for the duration of his command, was correct or not would be manifest in how this group of senior officers conducted themselves in their new assignments and especially in the long term, when they returned to the main stream of the PAF.

Allegedly, Khaqan Abbasi had exploited his position as an advisor by promoting a US aircraft manufacturer to induct F-5 fighter built by Northrop in the Jordanian air force. The Hashemite Kingdom took notice and sent him packing back to Pakistan. Air Mshl Rahim Khan was livid on finding out that the pristine reputation of the PAF had been compromised. Khaqan Abbasi was then sent off to Kuwait as an advisor. It was common talk in the PAF that in Kuwait he was reported upon by the Kuwaiti defence ministry when he repeated the Jordan modus operandi and was discovered by the Kuwaiti defence intelligence. I heard about Khaqan Abbasi's episode in Kuwait from the Defence Minister of Kuwait in person when he visited Pakistan in the 1990s. It

was during an exclusive lunch by the Kuwaiti ambassador, Kasim al-Yaqoot, for just the three of us.

From PIA, Air Vice Mshl Saeedullah was probably sent to the USA as Air Attaché. During the tenure of Air Vice Mshl Zafar Chaudhary and Air Cdre Khaqan Abbasi, PIA had a turbulent period, as highlighted by Brig Mian Hamidud-Din in his book *Looking Back* published in 2006. They made headlines when senior airline executives like Khaliq Durrani were summarily sacked without charges or reasons. Reportedly, letters of dismissal were sent to employee's homes in the evening, which directed them not to attend their office the next day.

Ironically, Air Mshl Rahim Khan's compassionate nature got the better of him, much to the advantage of these officers whose survival was to cause serious tumult in the PAF in later years.

Brig Mian Hameed-ud-Din, who served with Air Vice Mshl Zafar Chaudhary as the boss and Air Cdre Khaqan Abbasi as deputy MD in PIA during the period, writes in his book covering his assignment in PIA²: "AM

Zafar Chaudhary was posted as MD in Shakir's place... I had hoped that with his arrival things would change for the better but I was disillusioned. Things changed for the worse; not a single decision he took during his stay in PIA was correct.. I was certain that he was being misguided by his deputy, Air Cdre Khaqan Abbasi, whom he had brought with him to be the DMD in place of Air Vice Mshl Saeedullah Khan. Abbasi was interested only in himself and had no concern for the well being of PIA or his benefactor Zafar Chaudhary. In fact, he used PIA extensively for establishing himself in business outside PIA in which he succeeded admirably as was evident from his post retirement

activities”. This revelation by Brig Mian Hamid-ud-Din was a pre-cursor to what the PAF had in store in these very hands.

Back in East Pakistan, Air Cdre Mitty Masud had put together an excellent and graphic information system of maintenance, armaments and logistics on the base. It was from this data and our exercises that he wrote an appreciation of the PAF capabilities during a possible conflict with India. The brief was prepared for presentation to the Army Commander at that time, Lt Gen Sahabzada Yaqub Khan. Briefly, it presented a realistic PAF capability in the event of a war which we would have to fight without any support from the West after the start of hostilities. Essentially, it outlined that PAF Dhaka would remain operationally effective for 12 to 18 hours, thereafter the sheer numbers game with nine Indian Squadrons facing a single Squadron with one runway and one radar, would render the Squadron ineffective. Nothing could have been more accurate and closer to reality when the war came. Incredibly, the performance of the Dhaka contingent was the stuff of history.

2 *Looking Back, by Brig Mian Hameed-ud-Din, Pages 217-233.*

In the first week of December, Air Cdre Mitty Masud came into my office after the daily drill exercise we performed for the first half hour every day before getting on with flying. He sat in my chair and gave me a stare without saying a word for a while. Unable to resist the sound of silence, I asked “Sir is something wrong”? He replied, “You have been detailed for the JSSC (Joint Service Staff Course) in England”. I was taken by surprise and told him that I had not the faintest idea about my selection. He said, “Your C-in-C has decided to send you on this course in these crucial times”. The conversation did not go much further and as he left, I felt that he did not want to me to leave at this time.

The news of my posting spread quite fast, which resulted in a string of dinner parties that lasted till my last hours in Dhaka.

I managed to survive this period, a great health hazard, but what came immediately before I left was one of the worst cyclones to hit Dhaka with a ferocity that was unknown in the Eastern hemisphere. Thus ended my fabulous sojourn in East Pakistan where my parting gift from Dhaka was to have fallen desperately in love. I finally met the enchanting 'bare-foot contessa' who was the talk of Dhaka but very elusive. She had stared many a moustachioed macho men down without batting an eyelid. I had the reputation of being challenged by beauty - in fact, I don't ever remember losing the battle of the hearts (just ask my former Chief Instructor at Conversion School, Air Cdre Kamal Ahmed!).

We met; we stared and kept staring till we landed in Nairobi, Kenya. God bless the greatest friend anyone ever had, Zia Rajput. He sponsored us as neither had the resources; just the passion to share the beautiful sky and sands of Africa...

The Chasm Deepens

Bengali nationalism was simmering too close to the surface, about to erupt. I had a close family friendship with Brig Ali al-Aidroos and after Yahya Khan's visit towards the end of 1970 I had several discussions with him about my trepidations and forebodings. He was a highly perceptive and intelligent officer and it was an education to listen to him about the serious fissures of the time. I was a rabid Pakistani, but moderate and empathetic towards the deprived, irrespective of the province I belonged to. I considered it a sacrilege to feel contempt for any person on the basis of their credo or faith. In all fairness, I was convinced that the West Pakistani establishment had

provoked East Pakistan to act the way it did. One unit proved to be divisive because it took away the individuality of the people from different provinces and the centre became all powerful.

The only commonality between the two wings was that we shared a common religion which had never proved to be a binding force in the history of mankind except for short periods when the Prophets of God were sent to reform humanity. In our case we were divided by distance, culture, customs, language and economics. The two prime factors of one nation: contiguity, culture and economic interests of the people were absent. At best, from the very start it could have been a somewhat autonomous unit with the main subjects held loosely by a centre, but in a democratic framework. But that was not to be owing to ambitious and self-serving leaders in both wings. In reality, ever since independence, Pakistan's leaders had failed to forge a strong sense of national identity between the West and East. There was no sensitivity for the participation of the Bengalis in the creation of Pakistan. The Punjab was infested with Unionists, the Frontier Province and Baluchistan had Ghaffar Khan and Abdul Samad Achakzai ruling the roost; all of them had opposed Jinnah and Pakistan.

Bureaucratic power was concentrated in the West. West Pakistanis held an almost total monopoly of appointments in the civil service, armed forces and the diplomatic service, despite being outnumbered by Eastern Pakistanis in population. I am convinced that Ayub Khan and his Punjabi cabal had the most debilitating impact on any efforts which might have facilitated a mutually acceptable co-existence. Ayub Khan's condescendence towards the Bengalis was visible and the collective attitude of his cabal had created such deep contempt in Ayub's heart and mind against the East Pakistanis that he admitted without remorse that the

Bengalis were traitors and needed to be handled with an iron fist.

When civil war finally erupted in East Pakistan, it was a sad reflection on the failure of the leadership in both wings to act earnestly in removing the root cause of malcontent amongst the Bengali populace. However, the East Pakistanis did not develop the notion of being considered second class citizens until the time the Mukti Bahini insurrection gathered momentum. Their feelings of being considered inferior and second class citizens were caused by the behaviour of successive governments and especially during Ayub Khan's rule.

Ayub's contempt for East Pakistanis and his provocation by his choice of bureaucrats to govern East Pakistan was where the fault line ran deep.

It was well known that Aziz Ahmed, the super bureaucrat had given stern orders as Chief Secretary at Dhaka that no local was allowed to walk in front of his office within his view at any time. This must have been very demeaning for the locals to be subjected to such arrogance. The economic exploitation and totally inadequate defence and security of East Pakistan were the main catalyst to have caused them a general loss of faith.

Ayub Khan had said that he had ordered the Air Chief to send a fighter squadron to East Pakistan in 1953 to appease politicians like Sabur Khan who were critical of Ayub's indifference to East Pakistan's defence, besides lack of industrialization and other developments while foreign exchange earning came essentially from the export of jute, the 'golden yarn'. Bad vibes were not only felt but were capitalized by the Bengali politicians. The language problem, though not of Ayub's making, had lit the fuse of

Bengali nationalism and this was in fact being infused into the minds of the younger generation spuriously through the educational curriculum.

The 'brown sahibs' of the bureaucracy from West Pakistan were too busy with their delusions of superiority to discern the undercurrents in East Pakistan.

Yet for a certain period, there was a positive change during the Governorship of Gen Azam Khan during the Ayub era. He became extremely popular for his genuine concern about the neglect of the central government towards East Pakistan and the exploitation of all the resources earned through jute and rice export. He took serious issue with the centre while making his best endeavours to remove the notion from the East Pakistani mind that they were any lesser patriotic Pakistanis. For his dedication to raise the morale and hopes of the Bengali brethren and fuse the people of both wings together, he earned the ire of Ayub Khan.

Egged on by his family and minions, Ayub Khan started to perceive the developments in the Eastern wing as a potential threat to his reign. That was a small reflection of Ayub's insecurity which resulted in the removal of General Azam. East Pakistan was then subjected to coercive governance under Monim Khan. The simmering volcano finally erupted and enveloped his chosen successor, Yahya Khan.

Ayub's foreign affairs head honcho SM Zafar had branded the Bengalis no less than traitors and Ayub had added: "That is the only language they understand".³ When they could not tolerate being denigrated any further, the resultant indignation was provoked by passionate Bengali nationalism. That fusion acted like a Molotov cocktail which finally imploded in the Agartala Conspiracy.

After that Ayub Khan went from one blunder to another, finally losing it all; except the 22nd richest family created under his sponsorship by his sons, with a little nudge from Seth Daud, the illiterate but clever business tycoon.⁴

³ *Diaries of Ayub Khan*, Pages 37, 107, 203, 206 (to quote just a few), unveil his contempt for East Pakistanis (Bengalis).

⁴ AM Asghar Khan recently told the author that he happened to be waiting in the office of the Military Secretary (MS) to Ayub Khan, when Seth Daud had emerged after meeting the President, hysterically shouting to the MS, "*Ayub Khan Maan Gayaa*". Meaning "Ayub Khan had agreed." To what? When asked, he made some gurgles about Gauhar Ayub entering business.

In truth, East Pakistan started to break away in spirit and action during the Ayub era; Yahya was held solely responsible for the coup de grace, although the embryonic process of dehumanizing and denigrating the Bengali populace was wholly the responsibility of Ayub Khan's establishment. According to columnists like AR Siddiqui, Anjum Niaz and Faqir Aijazuddin, Ayub Khan's *Diaries* and his son's unsubstantiated⁵ '*Glimpses*' in his book read more like an odyssey in egotism, begging more questions than revealing the truth about the misfortunes of Pakistan. These compendiums could at best be an enigma for students of history owing to the brutal contortion of the truth,⁶ and proof of Ayub Khan's predominant role in the break up of Pakistan. Ironically, neither the politicians nor the public ever tried to trace the ominous undoing in the years 1958 to 1969, which erupted into conflict within months after Yahya Khan took over.

Yahya had inherited the political

fait accompli from the Ayub Khan era.

Irrespective of the recent efforts by Ayub Khan's scion to distort the truth (he himself was largely responsible for Ayub's misfortunes). The fact remains that Ayub Khan handed over a fractured nation to Yahya Khan. For all intents and purposes the basis of subsequent catastrophes had been laid when the rape of minds was enacted through the massacre of truth in the text books of history by Ayub Khan through his information Czar, Altaf Gauhar. He was also alleged to have masterminded the 'decade of reforms' propaganda; he had been a brilliant bureaucrat but with strong tendency for sycophancy.

This jugglery to deface history has been superbly articulated by the author KK Aziz.⁷ The incisive and candid research by KK Aziz reveals some facts about these so called history books: "Out of a total of 207 pages, 63 deal with the history of India and Pakistan up to 1958 and 29 pages with the history of Islam; the remaining 115 pages are allotted to Ayub Khan's reign". Facts are so mercilessly contorted that Ayub Khan is made to look like a super Salahudin Ayubi, for ushering in democracy (the word Martial Law is not mentioned at all). It is written that owing to the distinction with which he (Ayub Khan) served Pakistan he was elected President of democratic Pakistan by the masses!

It makes me wonder how shallow must have been the minds that ingrained such odious lies into the infant minds of our children who are adults today. All the books from Ayub Khan's era contain blatant lies about the cause, effects and outcome of the 1965 and 1971 Wars with India. Ayub's scion has kept that trend alive with the help of publishers in

Pakistan who have no respect for the truth of history. They rightly or wrongly believe that lies and sensationalism sell, while the stark truth is indigestible and thus not easy to market. No one in the successive governments has shown the moral courage to stamp out these lies.

These compendiums of history are no less despicable than the ones taught in the *madaris*, of which thousands were created by Zia ul Haq. These were intended to misguide the poorest segment of our society and spread contempt and hatred against targeted persons, sects, minorities, communities and nations.

5 Book Review of *Glimpses into the Corridors of Power* By Brig AR Siddiqui infers "Why write history without any evidence or reference and make up incredible yarns without any substantiation?"

6 'Tampering with the Truth', an article by Hafizur Rahman in *Dawn*, October 10th 2007. With reference to Ayub's *Diaries* and Gauhar's *Glimpses into the Corridors of Power*, the theme "is falsifying and twisting facts of history to achieve political ends".

7 *The Murder of History* by KK Aziz, Page 29. In fact, the entire dissertation is a historic gift written with integrity and veracity for all ages.

Zia ul Haq's creations have turned into savages who are killing and mutilating the bodies of Pakistani soldiers in Waziristan and blowing to smithereens innocent Muslim citizens, women and children. These are the monsters created by our rulers who are wreaking havoc on the nation and propelling us towards a bleak future.

What is extremely disturbing is the fact that renowned publishing houses have allowed unsavoury propaganda about despots to be read as a valid part of history.

Nothing could be more destructive for the minds of the youth than to be provided perverted versions of our history. To vaporize ZA Bhutto from the annals of Pakistan's history is one such crime committed by the historians covering the

Ayub to Zia era. It is shameful not to let the enthusiasts of history know that it was ZA Bhutto who laid the groundwork and foundation of our nuclear programme and not Zia. It was Bhutto who brought the world's Muslim leaders, monarchs and even his arch enemy Mujib-ur-Rehman to Lahore and rattled the West with his charisma and potential to bring the fractured Muslim world together, not Zia.

Bhutto's rule was any thing but a dark chapter; his ways and means to achieve political goals through nationalisation and total intolerance for dissent notwithstanding (which eventually spelt his own nemesis). If it were not for venerable historians like KK Aziz, Air Mshl Asghar Khan, Sherbaz Mazari and some others who were able to tell history as it actually happened, even I would not have been any wiser about the distortions we were fed as a nation.

In the events leading up to 1971, the Agartala Conspiracy and the arrest of Mujib had done him good. Ayub Khan showed lack of courage to pursue it with an iron fist and address the real root cause. Once freed, Mujib became a hero and a messiah for the discontented Bengali populace. By the time Ayub Khan's invincibility had been obliterated by his corrupt sons, repressive policies and a shackled media, India under Indira Gandhi had scored its first master stroke in the undoing of Pakistan. Her closest cabinet confidants had meticulously crafted a plan which worked out superbly as events unfolded in East and West Pakistan in 1971. Agartala-2 became Pakistan's nemesis as the East Pakistani politicians, civil servants and more so the military personnel had become an integral part of the massive revolt that had spread through out the entire Bengali population.

Ayub Khan had actually hoped to exploit the loyalties of Yahya, Musa and Monim to rig elections for his son Gauhar Ayub to win and replace him as the next president. But then

he had feared that in a democratic set-up, the majority Bengalis would call the shots and that was a bete noir for Ayub. Mujib would never have allowed the dynastic perpetuation Ayub was planning. Also, if the plan had failed he would be in dire straits with the powerful politicians of both wings, and if Yahya Khan used the army card against him (of which there were discernable vibes), Ayub would be in worse position.

Eventually, he sacrificed the national interest at the altar of personal security by handing over power to Yahya Khan rather than the Speaker of the National Assembly which he was legally and morally obliged to do even according to his custom tailored Constitution. Yahya Khan's habit of merry making and depravity was well known to Ayub Khan. He chose to hand over power to Yahya for his weaknesses, hoping to retain his loyalty for his personal and family's protection, not for the national interest. It would be a fair comment that like Nawab Kalabagh, Yahya was strictly honest in financial matters and neither of them allowed their family members to exploit their high chairs.

Corruption, of course, was endemic in Ayub Khan's family and was purposefully condoned by him. All the dictators had a tragic end and unflattering eulogy. However, their history and end did not deter those who came after them from repeating the same crimes. And the circus goes on as Pakistan continues on its perilous roller-coaster.

Yahya wanted to stay in power but with a different intent. He gave the country reasonably fair elections, but not without ulterior motives. On the recommendation of Gen Umar he had pumped money into the Muslim League in the West and Bhashani in the East to neutralize Bhutto and Mujib and have an endemically split verdict and divided assembly. This predicated a lame-duck coalition to perpetuate his hold on

power. The National Assembly results made the intriguing plan masterminded by Yahya's confidant Gen Omar stand on its head as Mujib swept the polls in the Eastern wing and Bhutto emerged with 70

plus percent seats in the Western wing. Yahya Khan was check-mated and he began to lose his grip as Mujib held over Yahya Khan's head the sword of Damocles by way of reneging on the original six points agenda to total independence. Yahya did try his best to strike a compromise with Mujib but by then Mujib had become too big. Still, Mujib alone would not have wanted to break-up Pakistan but he found himself riding the tiger of the Awami League's hard core group. They would have killed him had he made any compromises with Yahya or even Bhutto.

The Indians had invested too much to let any East Pakistani make independent decisions. They were already training thousands of Mukti Bahinis and the large Hindu faction in East Pakistan was the Trojan horse in the East.

Consequently, what Yahya had inherited was a ship without sails which was irretrievable. His military action was not a choice he made happily but the Awami League had pushed him into a corner. The atrocities committed by the Awami League goons and Muktis supported by Indian Special Forces was far more disgraceful and brutal than the limited action taken by Gen Tikka's army.

His denigration as the Butcher of Bengal was part of the vicious propaganda unleashed by the Indians and their new found brethren, the Mukti and Mujib and his goons. There was incontrovertible evidence of the atrocities committed against the Biharis and West Pakistani men, women, soldiers and their families.

No one ever talks about the horrors of women cut-up in their private parts and soldiers decapitated in the style of the Taliban.

The cold blooded murder of Wg Cdr SM Ahmed, a friend, and Flt Lt Safi, an outstanding fighter pilot who served with me in Dhaka, along with his 20 or more air force men deployed as MOUs, left a chilling evidence of the brutal and perverted mind of the Mukti Bahini. Military action came too late and against millions by very few scarcely equipped troops with only personal rifles, wearing cheap tennis shoes to ward-off a juggernaut of Indian military might wading through the Rangamati and other water courses. This was a complete surprise to Gen Niazi who was busy with his dirty jokes and orgies, described to the author by a respected Admiral of the Pakistan Navy who was an eye witness to the general's deranged state of mind.

Ayub Khan's Nadir

The period from 1965 till Ayub Khan's fall from grace is a long and sad story. It is an epoch of Pakistan's descent into an abyss. It is also the story of a broken man, obdurate with no sense of right and wrong where the long term future of Pakistan was concerned. His final eulogy for Pakistan rang hollow because it was his family, especially his son's future, which consumed his thoughts. In all fairness, it has to be acknowledged that Pakistan's economy had a jump start during his rule but it was exclusive to the big industrialists and those feudal landlords who wielded political influence. Inextricably, massive American aid played a decisive role in this uplift programme. The street slogan was that the rich got richer and poor became poorer and the courtiers and courtesans benefited beyond belief. The common man was excluded from all this prosperity. Amongst Ayub Khan's legacies, the military coup, the mockery of the constitution,

the façade of basic democracy, his family's corruption, the US brokered Indus-Basin treaty, the 1965 war and the bartering of Kashmir in the battlefield first and at Tashkent later would continue to haunt the future generations of Pakistan.

Ayub Khan's Diaries are a manifestation of how he relished flattery and selfaggrandizement and had contempt for any dissent. Here are some offerings from his recently published *Diaries* which tell us in his own words that he lacked the vision of a great leader, nor did he possess any semblance of real (and not contrived) statesmanship. The fall of East Pakistan had been his doing no less than Bhutto, Mujeeb and even Yahya Khan. Here are some relevant quotations of how people flattered him and how he actually believed them. He recounts in his *Diaries*: □

Altaf Gauhar said, "It was the death of Pakistan when I finished recording my speech of abdication".

□ Mian Bashir (IG Police) came and kissed my hands and feet when I was lying sick and said that Pakistan could not survive without me.

□ The Saudi king would only pray for Pakistan if Ayub remained in power.

□ Waziri from Miranshah came with a message from his Pir that

Pakistanis will beg him to return to power (long after Ayub's abdication).

□ My son Gauhar visited me (Nov 1969). "I told him that communism with all its drawbacks, does organise the society - I don't see it emerging in this country". Gauhar Ayub said that it will emerge and that it will come through the army; he felt that it would take a few more Martial Laws before communism comes to Pakistan (Ayub said that he found it difficult to disagree with his son), "As in our army

large numbers of leaders come from the lower middle or peasant proprietary class. They naturally tend to be agrarian and socialistic.

The conduct of the present military regime towards pressure groups of leftists' trend is a fair pointer to the future." (Page 339).

□ He asked QA Shahab, his Secretary Education to have all the school books re-written and be edited to include the "truth" (about him being a saviour and father of democracy in Pakistan and many other such canards).

□ He was livid with Suleri, a consummate column writer, when he exposed in the *New Times* that Ayub Khan had convoluted the history books by imaging himself even beyond the Quaid-e-Azam and had spent enormous amounts to publish *Friends not Masters* written by Altaf Gauhar. Suleri squarely blamed Ayub Khan for

not spending any effort or resource to write a proper biography of the Quaid-e-Azam.

□ A booklet had been printed in Arabic which demolished Ayub

Khan as a Muslim. His fulmination was fiery and he blamed Maududi (without any proof that he was the author) for being behind the pamphlet. Ayub Khan said, "This is what Pakistan gets out of giving asylum to this traitor and true enemy of Islam. In any other Muslim country, he would have been lynched like a dog, but in Pakistan we have rule of law (sic) of which the traitor takes full advantage and protection."

□ He said that God had been very unkind to West Pakistanis by giving them Bengalis as partners.

□ "The present conspiracy was the direct out come of the perfidy of hideous elements and their (Bengali Ministers') silence. The whole object is to get whatever they can (their

rightful share) by black-mail. Meanwhile, they are doing nothing to

consolidate the nationhood; continually try to behave

differently to West Pakistan; how long will this relationship last? Bengali outlook does not conform to any rationale - it was with the advent of Pakistan that they got the blessing of freedom and equality of status (sic) and a real voice in the running of the country... Any [normal] people would have rejoiced... Something which was unknown in their history - they have cut themselves away from Muslim culture, thus making themselves vulnerable to Hindu culture”.

After his abdication he predicts nemesis for Pakistan without him on top.

□

“Two long time American friends had written penetrating things; one had said that it was a marvel that how were a

divided people like us held together (sic) by me for ten years and made to progress. How true... I can see very clearly that after Martial Law is lifted and politics allowed by political *goondas*(meaning Bhutto, Asghar Khan, Bhashani, Mujeeb et al), East Pakistan will separate and West Pakistan will

split up in penny packets”.

□

“I cannot preside over the destruction of Quaid’s Pakistan!”

(He meant let Yahya bear the onus of responsibility for the inevitable, as he decided to hand over the country to him).

These are mere glimpses into the dark corridors of power games, military incompetence and the intellectual mediocrity of a President who led us into senseless wars.

12

THE GATHERING STORM

Prior to my departure from Dhaka, I decided to dispose of a few of my belongings, which included a Chevrolet Ranch Wagon (jokingly called 'The Hearse'). This was a 15 year old junket procured for Rs 5,000 through my friend Hashim, owner of Dienfa Motors. I advertised for a kind of garage sale of my scanty belongings and received a resounding response. The car was sold for Rs 9,000 after a thrashing of 18 months or so. The other item dear to my heart was my music system. I had other miscellaneous electrical items as well. All the proceeds were converted into pounds sterling courtesy of a friend, which gave me some sustenance, given my empty coffer. The capital thus acquired enabled me to buy some half way decent clothes made for the high powered course in England. Had it not been for this garage sale, my bank account presented a bleak picture for my upcoming trip to the UK.

With the kind of salary I was earning without any supplementary income, I was accustomed to living in a Spartan manner, although I was very content and happy.

After that I spent a week or so in Karachi and destiny created a crossroad for me. I was invited for a Christmas Eve party by my friends Adeeb Ahmed and Tehmina. I was standing alone on the dance floor when Tehmina tapped me on the shoulder. I turned around, and felt as if someone had belted me in the stomach. She introduced us, "This is Tahira, and Tahira this is Sajad, I have been telling you both about each other."

She was beautiful, and as we got talking and then dancing and then talking again, I realized she was just as intelligent. Her father, Ambassador Masud was a senior and highly regarded diplomat, at that time Pakistan's Ambassador to Belgium. I was smitten. We met every day as long as I was in Karachi. Then I had to go to England, but she promised me before I went that she would marry me when I came back.

JSSC Latimer

Arrival at the Joint Services Staff Course, Latimer, was uneventful; the accommodation was like a large closet with one bed, a small table and a chair.

We had to contend with a tiny bath room. Through a notice in the reception hall all the students (they comprised officers from the US to Japan) were required to assemble at the Officers' Mess early in the evening for an informal get-together to interact with the staff and each other. When I arrived at the Mess with the Pakistan flag proudly pinned above the name tag on my lapel, I was an instant attraction owing to events in the region. One of the Royal Navy commanders offered to get me a drink, if I didn't make a habit of free loading!

This caused much laughter and broke the ice right there for the rest of the term. Some of the foreign students introduced themselves and asked questions about what was going on in the Subcontinent; what they politely meant was the imploding situation in East Pakistan. In fact, a month before departing from Dhaka, there had been two nasty incidents of misbehaviour with PAF wives involving the angry Bengali youth who had been incited and charged by Mujibur-Rehman's nationalism. I had instructed my pilots, especially the married ones, to avoid going to the city centre for

shopping with their families. But there, in Latimer, with the entire world represented including India, I managed to wriggle out of awkward discussions by pretending that the RAF tradition of strict rules forbidding political discussions were still in force in the PAF. A loud guffaw and the subject was always changed.

The meeting with the Indian student Wg Cdr Bobby Dey that evening, proved to be a pleasant experience only because he was an affable person with a positive mindset. The British and European students tried to joke about us two adversaries sharing drinks together as soon as we had introduced ourselves. In fact they were quite surprised and half disappointed to see that by the time everybody moved into the dining hall, Wg Cdr Dey and I walked together and shared the table on the very first evening. Perhaps the rest of the crowd was anticipating some sort of acrimony when the two of us had spotted each other.

Somehow, during dinner, the conversation led to the 1965 War when the British Wg Cdr sharing our table asked jokingly if we might have met in the air during the war. What a surprise it was to learn then that Bobby Dey was one of the original Mig-21 pilots! I was pleasantly surprised to learn that he was flying Gnats based at Pathankot during the 1965 war. He was quite agape to discover that I was the leader of the strike to which he was an eyewitness. That was the first time that I heard the adversary's eye witness account of our strike. His mild cynicism about our claim of destroying seven Mig-21 aircraft at Pathankot was corrected immediately by me. Unhesitatingly, I explained that only 2 Mig-21s were spotted by me and both had been destroyed. The rest were fighters of other types. I also opined that in the heat of the battle and with adrenaline pumping as hard as the Ack-Ack was pumping shells, imagination had run wild on both sides as far as claims were concerned. Happily,

it was a satisfactory tally because he admitted the destruction of nine aircraft and three damaged. The actual tally of 13 aircraft destroyed or damaged still stands today as highly credible. In 2005, the Indian historians confirmed ten destroyed with three damaged; the three damaged did not participate in the war.

Frankly speaking, the JSSC course was focused more for the British, European and American officers rather than the rest of us from the Commonwealth. The participants from African and Asian countries like Kenya and Malaysia were very casual and made little effort to learn from the knowledge imparted. It was more about being observers on most of the exercises than being part of the team participating. The social life was more prominent than the academics. The result was that a lot of friendship and bonhomie was spawned during the seven months of the course. However, a significant event took place during my stay at Latimer.

Back in Pakistan, my family formally proposed for Tahira's hand in marriage from her parents. All was agreed and the marriage date set for the first week of August 1970. During the course, we were due for a ten day break sometime in early July. A week before the college break, Air Marshal and Begum Rahim Khan had arrived in London for a 10 day visit. The Air Marshal had been invited by the C-in-C Royal Air Force to be the Guest of Honour at the passing out parade of the cadets at the coveted RAF College in Cranwell. I had the opportunity to attend the function and felt proud to see the PAF Chief stand out as distinguished and dignified. His speech was flawless and deep in substance. I wish some of his detractors could have been there to witness the event and hear him speak with such eloquence.

After the ceremony Air Mshl Rahim asked me to have dinner with him during the week-end in London.

It was during that occasion that I met some wonderful people. The Air Chief and his wife were staying at the flat of (late) Air Cdre Rabb's son Saeed Rabb, who became good pals with me for the rest of my time in the UK.

Another unforgettable person I met during that visit was Moni, the daughter of an Indian Talukdar, but born and bred in England. Her parents were friends of Begum Rahim Khan's family in India. Moni still remains a close friend and is the staunchest Pakistan supporter as compared to some of our own people settled there.

Late at night I sat with Air Mshl Rahim Khan, having a night cap when I ventured to ask him if the situation in East Pakistan was still tenable or was it going to explode. He did not sound hopeful and thought that the Indian factor was very worrisome as there were ominous signs that India might intervene directly in Pakistan's affairs. The first thought that came to my mind was the possibility of a direct conflict with India and I asked him if there was a possibility of matters detonating to such an extent. I asked if I could go back to East Pakistan to re-join my unit. I will never forget his response, "Well Sajad, I suppose we will have to fight this war without you". Whether he was joking or serious, it did leave me extremely anguished. As I was departing, the Air Marshal came to the elevator and when I bade him goodbye, he said, "Keep thinking, who knows what might happen?"

At Latimer, my thesis had been completed but I had to give some final touches before handing it in. I had made some cogent comments about China being a rising nation and a very reliable partner for its neighbours. The Chinese potential to become a world power through its socialist centric economic policies was considered an oxymoron in those days but I expressed my thoughts about China

vociferously. The Commandant, Lt Gen McNeecken, alluded to my thesis during his closing address at the end of the course, commenting that my ideas about China had engaged his attention. He suggested that China should engage everyone's attention owing to its geographic, economic and strategic realities.

In the mean time, my wedding took place in Brussels and it was a glittering affair with the younger Royals of Belgium in attendance along with the diplomatic corps. Also attending were my brothers from New York, Yousaf Haroon with wife Pasha, the Gokals and a score of friends from London who made it an affair to remember. It seemed almost too good to be true and an evil eye was cast upon us because the marriage was doomed in weeks. The exuberance of youth makes every friendship seem an opportunity to be grasped firmly or lets it fly away, in the hope for a more enduring one, not cognizant of destiny's hand.

As we returned to Latimer for the course-ending, we held a big reception at the college and invited the entire student and staff community. The menu was so good that the Commandant and several of the staff commented that the college had never had such a lavish reception in their memory. That turned out to be the highest point of this short lived marriage. Unluckily, things went wrong very abruptly and the marriage was in doldrums before it even really took off. Although she joined me at Sargodha during the 1971 War, we could not work it out, in spite of my deeply sincere efforts. We parted company soon after the war ended.

We were on our honeymoon in Paris, when my father-in-law contacted the Defence Attaché Captain IF Qadir, and told him that we needed to return to Brussels immediately, and that I was summoned back to Pakistan right away.

This was about the end of the second week of August 1971. My excitement at the news did not go down well with my new family, but I told them that it was a national crisis and that I was duty bound to respond with promptness. I recall my last evening in London, which was spent with our dear friends Abbas Gokal, Murtaza Gokal and their family, who had organized a party to celebrate our wedding and incidentally, my unforeseen farewell too. I recall Abbas asking me what I planned to do with my little Fiat 124, the first car bought with my own savings. I told him jokingly that I was leaving it outside his house hoping one of his hundred cargo ships would transport it to Pakistan.

That's exactly what he did and the car was delivered to me at Sargodha through their office in Karachi.

I returned to Karachi and was informed by the organisation handling departures and arrivals of officers from abroad, that I was posted as Staff Operations Officer at Sargodha and was required to report immediately. I was terribly upset at this posting, which I had already suffered under the Station Commander of that time in 1968. Even though I had completed the war book of Sargodha then, I could not see myself running around in a jeep arranging trenches and camouflage activities, while my compatriots were trailblazing in the war zone. I made a quick detour to Quetta to spend a couple of days with my parents, sister and son and landed up in Sargodha the last week of August.

Treacherous Hijack Attempt

Flt Lt Mati ur Rehman had been grounded along with other Bengali pilots in the aftermath of the March 1971 army action. Mati, who was performing a desk job as an assistant safety officer after being grounded, decided to hijack a T-33

trainer aircraft from PAF Base Masroor to escape to India. The conspiracy was hatched by a group of Bengali officers with Mati as the ring leader. Mati had served under my command during 1965-66 and had displayed aggressive tendencies. On 17 August 1971, Plt Off Rashid Minhas of No 2 Squadron was taxiing out for a solo training mission, when Mati tricked him into stopping the aircraft out of sight of the mobile controller. His pretext was that there was some malfunction in the aircraft. He managed to force himself into the rear cockpit and took-off without a parachute¹. Rashid Minhas was told by Mati it was a hijack and that he would use a gun if there was any resistance. Minhas had made a call two minutes before the T-33 was in the air, announcing that he was being hijacked. The air traffic controller could not comprehend the emerging situation.

Minhas made no effort to botch the hijack attempt with several options available to him. He could have ducked down to stay out of the line of fire, even if Mati would have chosen the unlikely course. He could then have switched off the main fuel shut-off switch available only in the front cockpit. He could easily have held the control column fully forward to prevent take off and pushed either rudder and sat firmly on the breaks. Any of these simple actions would have prevented the take off. These and other observations by the President of the Air Investigation Board (AIB), Grp Captain Zaheer Hussain, established that the young and inexperienced Minhas ostensibly froze in the cockpit. Mati made a low turn off the traffic in a non-standard direction. Base Commander Air Cdre Bill Latif was informed instantly by the air traffic controller about the violation.

He ordered two F-86s already in the air to intercept the plane, according to the inquiring officer, but the radar put the interceptors in pursuit of a different target. In any case it was too late to intercept the aircraft.

1The parachute also doubled as a seat cushion and elevated the pilot to the correct viewing level.

According to the findings of the AIB the aircraft canopy was not re-locked on take-off due to the rough way in which the aircraft was commandeered.

About 10 minutes after take-off the canopy gradually pried loose and blew off. It hit the rear part of the aircraft which caused the aircraft to nose-down sharply just as all the dirt blew up into the cockpit. The canopy was not jettisoned but flew off as there were deep marks of it hitting the upper fuselage. It was found 200 yards from the crash scene. Mati pulled up violently to prevent hitting the ground, but the aircraft stalled. Fearing interception by fighters he pushed the control column sharply forward which resulted in negative gravity forces. Mati (who was not strapped in) was thrown clear out of the aircraft and landed in a pond of water as the aircraft took a nose dive. The aircraft crashed on the edge of the pond with Rashid Minhas still strapped in his cockpit near the marshy Shahbandar area. Incredibly, the aircraft did not break-up and was found intact with its nose dug in. Mati's dead body was found along with a toy pistol on a string. According to the doctor from the AIB, Mati's body was scratch-less upon examination. Young Minhas crashed while strapped in his seat. No attempt to eject was made by Minhas or Mati. According to SZ Hussain, the inquiry was suddenly stopped and no findings were made public. Thus ended the story of Mati, whose egocentric nature far exceeded his better judgment and which drove him to a pitiful end, taking an innocent young pilot with him. Rashid Minhas was bequeathed a Nishan-e-Haider and deservedly so, for he died in the line of duty.

Rendezvous with Destiny

I started my staff operation duties with the immediate implementation of the phased actions as stipulated in the war book. My first priority was proper protection of personnel, aircraft and equipment. This entailed the dispersal plan, which was fairly spread out and resources were limited. Air Mshl Rahim Khan had brought about many solid changes in the operational readiness of the PAF. We had several hardened pens with protective walls in the ADA complex, but not all aircraft could be accommodated in the concrete pens. Therefore, some ingenuity was needed to use camouflage nets over the uncovered pens. For this, I made extensive use of the rescue flight helicopters to check the effectiveness of camouflage from various attack points and angles. I followed this with attacks from F-6 aircraft during the afternoons, especially at the end of each air test. I had an urge to get into a Mirage cockpit and fly this beautiful, sleek Mach-2 aircraft.

Gp Capt Rehmat Khan, my old buddy was the OC Flying Wing in his first truly operational command. He would not extend me the facility to fly the Mirage on some pretext or the other. So I had to contend with the good old F-6, also an excellent aircraft for its power and handling. It turned out to be a good thing because I managed to gather a fair amount of experience in a variety of roles on the F-6 aircraft. My other project which needed urgent attention was to ensure proper trenches, strategically located and well camouflaged, but also easily accessible to air and ground crew in case the base came under attack.

Trench digging turned out to be an arduous task. The time and manpower estimated fell way short of what the exercise entailed. I vividly recall that I had to seek the help of the Commissioner, Mr Mohsin to get manpower for digging trenches. Mr Mohsin was a gentleman and an incredible supporter of the PAF as was his Deputy Commissioner,

Mehboob. They provided us crucially needed manpower for runway damage repair teams during the war.

There were multitudes of geo-political and geo-military factors that were beginning to add to Pakistan's internal dissent. India had suffered a series of humiliations; first in the war with China followed by the Kutch defeat, and also the 1965 War had left the Indian leadership in serious introspection about its defence weaknesses. This set into motion a determined attempt by the Indian leadership to build a formidable military machine and then to create a situation where it could avenge its lost prestige. By the year 1967-68, the IAF

with 1,200 aircraft was the fourth largest air force in the world. They had applied their lessons of the 1965 War much more honestly and in earnest to revolutionize their pilot training program, strategic and tactical concepts and operational readiness.

The Indian Air Force comprised nearly twenty Squadrons of Mig-21s, seven/eight Su-7 Squadrons and nearly ten Gnats Squadrons. In addition to these, they had a second line combat force of Hunters, Mysteres and locally manufactured three Squadrons of HF-24 Maruts. They also possessed over eighty Canberra night bombers and some obsolete Vampires and Ouragans. The Indo-Soviet pact signed in 1971 had deep and dangerous implications for Pakistan because it gave India the unequivocal support of a super power to encourage India's hegemonic designs with men, materials, and munitions of war. The Indian Air Force, already heavily bolstered, was provided with some state of the art ordinance and electronic warfare capability. Most of their vulnerable airfields and military infrastructure were protected through a highly integrated air defence system comprising medium and low-looking radars. These were

defended with low-level anti-aircraft surface-to-air missiles of the category of the deadly accurate SAM-6s, operated with a combination of highly effective radar-controlled Ack-Ack guns.

The IAF had also developed a massive airfield infrastructure with airfields strategically located to hit any target in Pakistan, exploiting our lack of depth.

All the airfields had concrete pens to make gun attacks by PAF fighters ineffective, a lesson from the experience at Pathankot, Kalaikunda and Baghdogra, where they lost a large number of aircraft for lack of proper protection. By 1969, India was ready to challenge Pakistan. The explosive situation in East Pakistan and India's recently-acquired military might have made a compelling case for India to break-up Pakistan. The plan to separate the two wings had been master-minded well before the situation in East Pakistan had come to a boil. The effectiveness of the Mukti Bahini, desertions from the defence forces and visits by senior Bengali officers from the three services to Agarthala to leak Pakistan military capabilities and weaknesses were the last straw. The Indian plans were to cross East Pakistan's international border in the third week of November 1971. This overt and blatant disregard for international law was only possible because India had the full support of a super power.

In the mean time, Pakistan had passed through a traumatic period from the start of the 1965 War until 1971, with a highly discriminatory embargo by the US

establishment against India and Pakistan. Although the embargo was construed to be even handed for both the two countries, the reality was totally different. The embargo was a sledge hammer against Pakistan's defence capability,

which was totally dependent upon military hardware from the USA and Europe, while it was a mere rap on the Indian knuckles for international consumption. India enjoyed the full backing of the super power, which had been its prime supplier of military hardware from the time Pakistan became a stooge of the USA in the CENTO and SEATO pacts of the 1950s. Therefore, Pakistan had to desperately maintain its defence capability as a minimal deterrent against an aggressor. Such were the national and international circumstances as Sargodha was being prepared for a possible conflict.

I was extremely busy between staff operations duties and keeping myself abreast in flying. There was the redeeming factor which kept my mind fully preoccupied in the duties assigned to me by the Base Commander (stations came to be known as bases after July 1970), Air Cdre Ghulam (Gulli) Haider. He had always been very fair and appreciative of my professional as well as personal conduct. This made my job much easier and motivation high since I could fly as much as I wanted to, unlike my previous bitter experience in the same post at the same base. One afternoon, I was taking a nap after lunch when the phone rang and startled me. It was a call from the young Flt Lt Parvez Iqbal (Payjee), ADC

to the C-in-C, who asked me if he had woken me up. "Yes, you bloody well have and startled the hell out of me. Don't you take a nap before sports or do you play any sport at all", I yelled at him mockingly. He said, "Sir, you better get out of bed fast and stand next to the phone as the Commander-in-Chief wants to speak with you". Suddenly, I was fully awake and asked him if I was in trouble? Knowing this joker Payjee, I could almost predict his response. He quipped, "You sure are in trouble, sir. What kind, will only come to you from the Chief himself". He told me to hold on while he connected me with the Chief.

I stood up from my bed and waited for Air Mshl Rahim Khan to come on line.

Shortly, I heard his familiar voice, "Sajad, how are you doing there at Sargodha"? I replied, "Quite well, sir". In the next 30 seconds, I heard what turned out to be one of the best news of my life. I heard the Air Chief saying, "Well Sajad, I've decided to appoint you as the OC Flying Wing at Sargodha; you are a Group Captain as of today and you can put on your ranks immediately.

I want you to take over the wing tomorrow; your Base Commander has already been informed and you've less than a month in which to get ready and operational, to lead your wing into war".

He told me that he expected a lot from me and that this was a unique opportunity accorded to me to prove myself once again. "Yes sir, thank you sir,"

I said and before I could rant more gratitude, his phone clicked shut. I must have hallucinated for a while because my head buzzed like a beehive from the exciting news. Deeply euphoric, I was not sure who to call first but that question in my mind lasted only seconds because I wanted my sister and my parents to be the first ones to know about this double whammy. Of course, my sister was as surprised and excited as I was and kept saying "*Alhamd-o-Lillah*" and thanks to Allah for the unexpected news. Yet, I could sense the apprehension in her voice, because she asked me "This means that you will be back to flying again?" I said, "Yes you are right, and I could have asked for nothing else in the world at this juncture". I spoke to my dear mother and father, who gave me all their prayers for success and longevity.

No sooner had I put the receiver down, the phone rang. This time it was the Base Commander Gulli Haider, who sounded even more excited than I was and told me to report to his house immediately. I dressed up for sports since his bungalow was en-route to the sports fields and saw him sitting in the large veranda of the Base Commander's residence. He came down the steps and met me with tremendous warmth. As he congratulated me on my appointment as OC

Flying Wing, he pulled two badges of Group Captain's rank, which must have belonged to him. He thrust them in my hand, saying, "These look old but I want you to wear these on your first day". I replied in gratitude, "Sir, you bet I will wear these tomorrow and keep them on".

This is how destiny had finally propelled me to the pinnacle of fighter flying, which was the dream of every fighter pilot worth his salt. Sargodha was the hot bed of the best pilots and the fastest aircraft in the PAF. This was a dream command but carried with it a serious and heavy set of responsibilities. In barely a matter of weeks, my status had changed dramatically. That evening calls kept pouring in, the first being from my course-mate Wg Cdr M Arshad, "Congratulations, sir," he taunted. Jokingly, I told him, "Whose SUR (head) are you calling; but not to worry as your SUR (Sir) will come soon". He was a couple of numbers senior to me, but this was the second time I had superseded a few of my batch mates with senior service numbers.

Command of No 33 Wing

I took over command on the 12/13th September 1971. My first day started by paying a courtesy visit to the Base Commander, the OC Maintenance Wing and other colleagues outside No 33 Wing. The rest of the day, I met all

the Squadron Commanders, who were not merely known to me but were good friends. All of them had served with me at one time or another. My Staff Operations Officer happened to be Sqn Ldr Masud Hatif (later Air Marshal), responsible for planning flying for the entire wing.

Hatif asked me what I wished to do, meaning any changes in the routine of 33 Wing operations. I said “No” and told him to get all the OC units to attend our first tête-à-tête. I told Sqn Ldr Hatif that I intended to spend the first two weeks merely observing his planning and programming philosophy and visiting all the Squadrons to check out their normal operational training methods.

However, my first priority was to get operational on the Mirage as quickly as possible. I planned to discuss my Mirage flying with Wg Cdr Hakimullah (later Air Chief), commanding No 5 Mirage Squadron when I met the Squadron commanders in the afternoon. The F-6 Squadrons at the time of my take over were being commanded by Wg Cdr Hashmi, OC No 23 Squadron, Sikander Mehmood, OC No 11 Squadron and Saad Hatmi as OC No 25 Squadron. When all the Squadron commanders and Sqn Ldr Hatif were in my office, we chatted informally about their general perception of the war role for each Squadron and how they were achieving the given goals. Each one gave me a fairly good idea of their role and the training program.

I told them that the change in command had been a decision of the C-in-C

and that I had been tasked to get the wing operationally ready to deter and counter any threat appearing on the horizon. I also emphasized that the situation in the region was deteriorating rapidly and India had built up a massive military machine, which was intended to be put to use

against Pakistan. I advised the commanders that as an overall philosophy, we would have to change the paradigms of training with a sharp focus on operational war roles. I assured them that they would have my full support in their mission accomplishment with minimal interference unless I found it absolutely necessary to intervene. I emphasized the flight safety aspect in some detail and gave them the benefit of my experience of the 1965 War, where the parameters of flight safety and operational training had to be achieved with a razor thin line separating the two. The last thing I made clear to all present was that we were fighter pilots with history behind us and our motto in command would be to: 'To lead from the front' and our functional doctrine, 'Follow me and I shall lead you to the target'. We parted company on a clear understanding that our relationship would be guided by a democratic spirit in evolving operational concepts, and that we would agree to disagree; but in the final analysis my decision would be binding.

On that happy note and with great expectations from my commanders, I began my assignment seeking help from God. As they left my modest office, I thought about the chair I was occupying - it represented the most powerful punch of the Pakistani military, inclusive of all three services. In a flight of imagination I tried to envision the days, months and years ahead in this assignment and the mind refused to see any further in rank, status or success; this was destiny's best hand and I couldn't imagine anything better. Little did I know then how fate would conspire once again and a new trial would begin; but fortunately it would commence after the 1971 War had ended.

On my second day of command, Hakimullah had given charge of my initiation to Mirage flying to Sqn Ldr Omar Farooq, an outstanding fighter pilot.

He was given the nick name 'Jesus Christ" (JC) for his obsession with perfection. This was a nickname given by Rehmat Khan who was a master at assigning the most appropriate aliases to many, reflecting the character of the person. One of his earlier masterpieces was a pilot branded 'Teli' (meaning grease ball sycophant)! This was like predicting the future personality development of the person concerned. So, there I was confronted with Omar Farooq (JC) who started by giving me the whole nine yards about his impressive knowledge. The day was slipping past and I was getting impatient to get to the aircraft. Little did I know that Farooq had another agenda altogether. He informed me, "I am very sorry but no flying sir, till you have finished this on the job training and completed the questionnaire, which will take another two days".

During the coffee break I slipped into Hakimullah's office and told him my stamina for such grounding had been exhausted and would he organise the first mission the next morning? He had a good laugh and said this was only a taste of things to come. Anyway, Hakim suggested that Flt Lt Arif Manzoor would report to my office after the morning wing briefing, to take me through emergencies and other procedures on the simulator. He said that once Arif Manzoor was satisfied that I had all the normal and emergencies procedures tapped, Arif would take me up for a C-1, which meant familiarization mission, while Omar Farooq would continue with the on the job training contemporaneously. I gave a sigh of relief and saw Farooq waiting in the veranda of No 5 Squadron. He was an extremely polite and highly disciplined officer, with a penchant for rule of law. I told him that we would have to complete the rest of the academics today or tonight, what ever it takes.

This is how I finally found myself going around with Arif Manzoor, a tall, serious and an exceptional fighter pilot. I

had already done an hour in the cockpit with Farooq and was well versed with all the procedures. Arif put me through comprehensive mission simulation from start-up to all-aspect mission familiarization. The marathon session was performed under the supervision of a good fighter-pilot, Sqn Ldr Amanullah ('The Kid'). He had been grounded by the medical hounds of the Combined Medical Board for a non-specific cardiac problem and had chosen to be the simulator instructor as the closest thing to flying. Finished with the minimal formalities, Arif briefed me on the mission profile. In four days, I had completed my first solo on a new type where a senior pilot follows you around to ensure the safety of the mission. Immediately thereafter, I got onto daily flying on the Mirage carrying out Ground Controlled Interceptions (GCI) on Cyrano radar. Soon I was fully operational on the Mirage aircraft for day and night missions. During the month of November 1971, I flew numerous night-GCI missions at low-level. It was time to start paying attention to F-6 flying. On 9th November, I started flying the F-6 and flew many air combat missions on the F-6 as well as the Mirage.

Confronted with a *Fait Accompli*

The inevitable happened in the third week of November, when the Indians launched an invasion of East Pakistan with the full complicity of the Soviet Union. The Pakistani leadership had no clear political agenda or national goals; a repeat of the 1965 situation. After invading East Pakistan the Indian plan was to cut West Pakistan in two halves near Reti in the region of Rahim Yar Khan and starve northern Pakistan into ultimate capitulation. They nearly achieved that goal, but for the men of steel of the Pakistan Armed Forces.

Thanks to the embargo imposed by the United States government after the Rann of Kutch incident, the Pakistan Air Force had found it nearly impossible to maintain its operational punch. The realization by the Government of Pakistan of this serious weakness in the air defence of the country compelled it to make substantial allocations to the PAF for maintaining minimum deterrent as well as to acquire a limited offensive capability. The PAF acquired 90 used F-86-Es from the German Air Force through Iran. These aircraft with a considerably more powerful engine proved to be of great use. The Chinese leadership also came to Pakistan's rescue with full force, with the induction of 100 F-6 (Mig19) aircraft. The PAF with its ingenious self-reliance programme modified these short range F-6s with mediocre weapons capability, into fairly effective air defence fighters by making them air-to-air missile compatible. The remaining PAF force comprised one squadron of F-104s, eight F-86 Squadrons (nearly obsolete and being phased out) and B-57s. The first two Squadrons were extremely difficult and expensive to maintain.

It was in this milieu that the PAF leadership had decided to acquire 24

Mirage-III fighter bombers from the French. These were delivered through 1967. To support this small force of about 280 combat fighters and bombers, the PAF had developed Shorkot, Mianwali, and Risalewala as main operational airfields in the north, with Murid and Rahwali as satellites. In the surveillance sector, the PAF had to rely on the 2 US supplied high power radars at Sakesar in the north and Badin in the south. The maintenance of these 2 radars was a nightmare for the PAF, owing to the discriminatory embargo. The PAF had acquired 3 medium powered and 5 low-looking AR-1 radars after the 1965 War.

However, with all this equipment, our radar coverage was only a quarter of what it should have been to provide a high level surveillance over vital areas. The low level coverage was dismal, not even 1/10th of the minimum requirement. In terms of vulnerable gaps, this meant virtually no coverage in the northern region, including Kashmir and a huge gap from Multan to south of Nawabshah.

What this meant in operational terms was that the IAF could attack airfields like Peshawar, Murid and Chaklala with impunity without being detected.

Similarly, many airfields in the south were vulnerable to enemy surprise attack. Passive air defence measures had undergone many changes in both the PAF as well as the IAF. Learning from the experience of the 1965 War, the Indians had gone into major construction of concrete-covered aircraft protective pens. The PAF had also developed numerous hardened pens at major operational bases. This meant that unlike the 1965 War, the PAF would not be able to carry out classical counter air operations against aircraft on the ground as a strategic concept. However, the IAF may not have totally ruled out such a course of action because there was a financial constraint on the PAF as to how many covered pens it could construct. Pakistan's Ack-Ack defences comprised the newly inducted Chinese quads and medium range guns. The combination was a formidable one given the concept of raised platforms, which increased the visibility substantially and hence the effectiveness was enhanced proportionately. This was the combat potential in West Pakistan.

In East Pakistan, the solitary No 14 Squadron was not bolstered with the planned and promised Squadron of F-6s. Therefore, the squadron had to contend with 18 F-86-Es and a couple of T-33s Trainers. From the two radars at Dhaka,

one was withdrawn because its security was in jeopardy from fear of sabotage by the defecting Bengali personnel or destruction by the Mukti Bahini.

Therefore, only one radar was left to take on a huge challenge confronting East Pakistan's air defence. The PAF leadership had paid equal attention to infrastructure enhancement in East Pakistan, where a completely new airfield was in the finishing stages at Kurmitola.

Unfortunately, given the lethargic nature of the labour force, the work pace was extremely slow. Consequently, it was the fighter pilots supported by the valiant Ack-Ack gunners, who were left to face an enemy more than 10 times their size. What they lacked in materials was made up by the grit and resolve of the fighter pilots and the gunners. They had no qualms about the fact that their battle could not go beyond 36 Hrs at the most, by which time the runway at Tejgaon would have been rendered completely untenable and the fate of this formidable squadron left to Allah.

The Indians were bigger, better equipped and had a well defined strategy.

However, these were not the only factors that caused a major imbalance in a comparison between the forces of these two countries. The disparity was severely affected by the defection as well as conspiring by East Pakistani officers and men. This caused a debilitating set back to the PAF's strategic and tactical plans because the defecting senior officers from the flying and air defence elements gave away all the strengths and weaknesses of the PAF. This meant that the adversary had the most credible intelligence available on which to plan operations. There was around 30-40% reduction in the overall strength of the PAF owing to defections and the grounding of all Bengali officers.

The Indian Air Force was given information about the precise gaps in our radar cover, the exact location of aircraft pens, bunkers for pilot's protection and location of fuel storage and armament underground locations. Consequently, the IAF had every piece of information that any air force could have ever dreamt about. Some officers had different views about the grounding of all personnel of Bengali origin, but the majority of us fully supported this action by the C-in-C

Air Mshl Rahim Khan. The PAF was absolutely right in isolating the Bengalis.

Intrigue coupled with sabotage was a distinct possibility.

Flg Off Sadruddin, who had served with me and later defected and joined the conspirators at Agartala, has given his opinion about his years in the PAF, which smacks of hypocrisy. Later an Air Marshal in the Bangladesh Air Force, he feels that East Pakistanis were treated with bias and contempt. Flg Off Sadruddin's harangue regarding the injustices done to the Bengalis as an ethnic entity has no merit, at least in the PAF. I personally cannot forgive these pilots for breaking their oath and placing their erstwhile service in serious harm's way. As Air Mshl Rahim opined, had they resigned and then done whatever they wanted to do he would have had great respect for him. Incredibly, the PAF

fought with resolve and resilience in spite of this serious set back, which had given the enemy a cardinal advantage.

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WAR OF 1971 - ANOTHER

BETRAYAL

Back at Sargodha, it was in the first week of November when my wife Tahira joined me. The Commissioner of Sargodha at the time Mr Mohsin and his spouse Talat were a sociable couple and most hospitable. Visiting them was a good change from the stressful and demanding routine of life. They were interesting company for my wife because all of them were serious bridge fans.

Weekends meant long bridge sessions either at our house or arranged by Talat Mohsin. I had no interest in cards or gambling but I managed to enjoy the gettogethers anyway. The Commissioner became a source of tremendous cooperation later on during the war.

If memory serves me right, we were ordered into Phase-III in the last week of November. This announcement infused unusual vigour amongst the officers and men at Sargodha as every one learnt with shock about the Indian Army crossing into East Pakistan. Although we were operating from dispersed locations, often the main tarmacs were used for launching missions and maintenance activity. All that changed on the day Phase-III was declared. There was hectic activity but a powerful sound of disquiet permeated the base. Only the thunder of jet engines day and night was the indication of the storm brewing.

The base exuded the same spirit that I had experienced at Peshawar in 1965.

Fortunately, fate had conspired to place me at Sargodha on this momentous occasion. I intended to give the job every ounce of my energy and experience. I remembered too well the fiasco at Sargodha on 6th of September 1965, which had caused the failure of PAF's pre-emptive strike. I also knew that this time, classical pre-emption opportunity would not be the case because the Indians had gone with full military force into East Pakistan. But for the vacillating and dithering President, the Pakistani air and land assault should have begun on the first information of Indians violating the international border in the East.

Here it would be important to establish the difference between the strategy, planning and execution of the air wars of 1965 and 1971. It is now an established fact of history and recorded by none other than Air Mshl PC

Lal, the IAF Chief during 1971, as well as the statistics of IAF losses included by authors of *IPAW* that the PAF performed far better in 1971 from both wings as compared to 1965. The public perception to the contrary is mere hearsay and based on flimsy and obtuse arguments by detractors such as to why the PAF was not seen over the Lahore front like in 1965. Some of the losers from the army and navy have also criticised the performance of the PAF to veil their own dismal performance. The shadow between myth and reality has widened because like many contrived stories, this disillusionment has become invasive.

People need to read history of the 1971 war, written by authors from both sides to remove the erroneous and false impressions created by vested interests, especially the political cabal of this beleaguered nation. It should come as

a revelation that *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force* (official history 1988) presents an accurate and comprehensive coverage of the 1971 war.

According to the official history, the strategy devised by Air Mshl Rahim Khan was highly professional; it was well planned and therefore, very well executed, without controversy in claims of aircraft shot down and other exaggerations that took place during the 1965 war. PAF employment in the counter air operations and the air defence role was well conceived and fully rehearsed. The strategy and concept of joint operations with the army was finalised personally between Air Mshl Rahim Khan and Lt Gen Gul Hassan, the Chief of General Staff (CGS).

Given that some of the second tier operational staff assisting the C-in-C had been war tested and were professionally competent, the operational plan went well (not withstanding some exceptions directly below the Air Chief, the timid ones from the 1965 war who had survived and risen to star ranks since there had been no accountability). What makes the assessment and accuracy of the PAF

history's coverage of the 1971 war more credible than its controversial dissertation of the 1965 war is that the authors of *The Story of the PAF*, 1988, were not known to be acquiescent to Air Mshl Rahim Khan's policies and personality. Consequently, their collation and narration of historical facts and events about 1971 war is incontrovertible. The day to day coverage has been superbly captured in graphic detail and articulately presented, although some air kills particularly in East Pakistan could be questionable. This was owing to the fact that the situation in East Pakistan was extremely fluid and the tragic finale did not allow any detailed investigation of

claims. The fact is that the pilots fought with unequalled grit. The few minor exaggerations exist largely because of the lightning speed at which Dhaka came under relentless attacks. The pilots were going up and down like yo-yos.

In West Pakistan, the situation was very much under control. The Air Chief had appointed a team under the outstanding leadership and incisive scrutiny of Air Cdre Pat Callaghan. His team was assigned to confirm claims of every enemy aircraft downed in Pakistani territory. He was equipped with technical personnel, support aircraft and vehicles to reach the sites of wreckage.

Additionally, this team was assisted by the famous fighter ace of WW II, Brig Gen Chuck Yeager. He was the US Defence Attaché in Islamabad at the time.

Every single claim was required to be investigated by this team, its veracity established through the wreckage, its location and eye witness accounts recorded. In addition a very stringent film assessment by the local commanders was mandatory before a kill was awarded. It was unknown in the history of air war until the 1970s that any air force in a conflict had such an elaborate corroborative system in place.

Meanwhile back at Sargodha, I had made several trips to Mianwali and Risalewala to check that all facilities were fully operational and dispersal areas ready to take aircraft at a short notice. After the red-alert for imminence of war was declared, the aircraft operating facilities were positioned at these bases. No 23 Squadron commanded by Wg Cdr Hashmi was to move to Risalewala and No 25 Squadron, under Wg Cdr Hatmi, (both good fighter pilots and popular Squadron commanders) was to be positioned at Mianwali to provide back-up support and air defence to Sargodha

whenever it came under attack. Some Mirages were also positioned at Mianwali for night interceptions, if Sargodha came under a surprise attack and Mirages could not be scrambled on time. With all these arrangements in place, we waited with bated breath for the word 'GO'

to strike at the heart of the enemy. Somehow, the President of the country was capricious, presumably fearing a trouncing of Pakistan's Armed Forces, especially with the prospects of the Indians moving their forces from the East after capitulation of Dhaka and bringing them to bear upon West Pakistan.

The Indian army had already crossed the international border and the Mukti Bahini were in virtual control of the outlying areas, except the main cities like Dhaka, Jessore, Chittagong etc. The ominous calm in the West turned into restiveness as days passed and the news from East Pakistan got worse by the minute. Yet there was no movement at the Presidency till the fall of Jessore was communicated to the President. The Indians and Muktis were moving in from all four directions, through land and rivers onto Dhaka. Finally, it was Air Mshl Rahim Khan who persuaded the President that time was slipping by and humiliation was staring us in the eye if a coordinated attack by the army supported by the PAF was not launched immediately.

PAF's Employment Strategy

The employment strategy for East Pakistan was really a Hobson's choice.

The armed forces had to fight a battle to the bitter end without any help of any kind from outside. As stated earlier, this was to be a desperate battle for survival and any attrition that the sole Squadron in East Pakistan was

expected to inflict upon the preponderant adversary would be a miracle of resolve and grit. That is precisely what happened and it is an epic of air warfare. There were different paradigms of counter air operations during the 1971 war. In the East as well as the West, the PAF could not have repeated the success in destroying enemy aircraft on the ground as it did so remarkably in 1965. This was owing to the changed ground environment on all Indian air force bases as indeed was the case at PAF bases. The aircraft were mostly kept in hardened protective shelters, difficult to attack. If attempted, the aggressors would have been forced to make precision attacks in a profile which would render the attacker highly vulnerable to ground defences. This meant that the attacker would have been exposed to the inferno of anti-aircraft weapons such as the low-medium and high level intense barrage of gun-fire, made even more lethal with the presence of ground-to-air guided missiles. SA-7, the Soviet-made shoulder-fired missile was a deadly weapon against attacks with conventional weapons. The attrition rate would have been too high for either of the air forces to absorb.

Hence the most profitable choice was to bomb the enemy airfields to make the air complexes and runways untenable for certain periods of time to deny the enemy air force interference with our land assaults into Indian territory. But that ground assault by the No 1 Armoured Div was not forthcoming as will become clear in the narrative ahead. This explains why the attacks against IAF airfields were suspended after 2-3 days. Another point that should be clarified right here is the public perception that the PAF was missing over Lahore. Well, there was no real ground battle on the Lahore front, so there was no question of frittering away scant PAF resources just to show the flag over cities.

Controversial as it was, the idea persisted amongst the military high command that East Pakistan could not be seriously threatened so long as the Indians remained convinced that major reverses could occur on their Western borders if the Indian armed might was split up to attack both wings of Pakistan simultaneously. What did come under question was the potency of just one infantry division with some tanks, one destroyer with four gun boats, and one fighter squadron in East Pakistan. To provide the Eastern wing with a greater measure of confidence, some additional defence assets were thought to be necessary, and had been included in the services deployment plan soon after the 1965 war. To redress, to some extent, the great disparity between the opposing forces in the East, the PAF had decided in 1969-70 that an additional F-6

Squadron should be raised to join the single F-86 squadron in Dhaka. The plan had to be shelved when the support and operation of even the existing PAF

squadrons became problematic due to inadequate budget allocation.

The Pakistan Army had similar plans of enhancing the land force elements in the East but these assumed urgency only when India's preparations for invading East Pakistan became obvious in early 1971. Although still adhering to the concept that the crucial battle for the defence of Pakistan's Eastern wing would be fought on India's Western front, GHQ were convinced by March 1971

that the Eastern command had to be bolstered to a total of at least three infantry divisions to withstand India's imminent multi-directional thrusts. A remarkably successful strategic air lift via Sri Lanka was then organised by the PAF. PIA was placed under PAF control (the norm during national

emergencies) and responded magnificently to this unusual task, and its crews repeatedly undertook these exhausting 6,500 miles return flights without any rest. In total, within the following weeks three divisions were transported to Dhaka, the capital of East Pakistan, mainly via Colombo in Sri Lanka. This airlift was supported by C130s of the Imperial Iranian Air Force and Turkish Air Force, but actually Iran used this opportunity to donate all of its four older C-130Bs to PAF – despite an US arms embargo imposed on Pakistan. The heavy equipment of the Pakistani divisions followed, transported by a convoy of ships, escorted by warships of the Pakistani Navy.

The Eastern command was thus provided with two additional infantry divisions (9 & 16) six months before the Indians launched their full scale invasion at four points across East Pakistan's border, on Eid day, 21st November 1971. The additional divisions were very lightly equipped and did not have their normal complement of armour, artillery and signals support. However inadequately equipped, these men at least constituted some enhancement of Lt Gen Niazi's (Commander, Eastern Command) manpower resources. Armed only with rifles and cheap tennis shoes they would fight the enemy and the equally treacherous weather. The air and naval elements remained at their grossly inadequate levels.

The widely understood concept of Pakistan's military strategy was that if India chose to attack East Pakistan first, there should be an immediate response from the Pakistani forces in the West. This doctrine had been so deeply ingrained in the minds of Pakistan's general staff that it would have been inconceivable to imagine anything less than instant retaliation to such an Indian move. But once again the doctrine remained a powerfully worded plan, played on sand models.

The events which followed the Indian attack on East Pakistan showed that Lt Gen Niazi persisted in a faulty concept of border (or perimeter) defence, against the original plan of garrison (or fortress) defence. He not only failed to use his soldiers properly but also nullified the military advantage that the two additional infantry divisions had given him. In the West, the President and Army Chief of Staff fell into a paralytic state of indecision concerning the counter offensive for which they had prepared the army and the PAF for over a year.

Thus, the military as well as the moral foundation of Pakistan's defence strategy was demolished in the two wings by its own architects. As November gave way to December, the bewilderment of the soldiers, sailors, and the airmen in the field turned into raging frustration. Even when the much delayed decision was taken to open the Western front on 3rd December 1971, it was at the instance of the Air Chief, Air Marshal Rahim Khan, who, in doing so, was also voicing the feeling of GHQ's 2nd echelon generals and the army's field commanders.¹

Air Battles over Dhaka

In the East, No 14 Squadron was placed in an unenviable tight corner. They had lost 2 F-86s and their outstanding fighter pilots Flt Lt PQ Mehdi (later Air Chief Mshl) and Flg Off Khalil Ahmed. Both were shot by enemy fighters but managed to eject. They landed almost equidistant from the Mukti Bahini and the Indian army invaders. Luckily for them, the Indians took them POW, and saved them from being decapitated by the Mukti Bahini (they were going around killing their captives). I heard their story first hand from both. The incident was a very poor reflection on the leader of the formation, their Squadron Commander, who had

taken over command from me when I left for Latimer to attend the JSSC course.

The Indian army had crossed into East Pakistan on the day of the holy festival of Eid-ul-Azha on 22nd November 1971. No 14 Squadron had been flying CAS missions against the Muktis and their accomplices. Retired Air Cdre Mahmud Gul, then a Flying Officer posted with the squadron has also confirmed the story told to me by Flt Lt PQ Mehdi and Flg Off Khalil Ahmed. According to him, on that Eid day, the third and last mission to go was led by the Squadron Commander, with Flg Off Khalil as No 2 and Flt Lt Mehdi as No 3. The No 4

was a young Flg Off called Sajjad Noor who made a technical abort. The three aircraft were attacking ground targets, as in a typical peace time firing at the firing ranges. This was a tactical blunder. According to them, No 3 reported enemy Gnats behind them. As soon as he ended the transmission, he was shot down by one of the enemy attackers. Mehdi was able to eject. During the battle, just as No 3 was shot down, the No 2 also reported enemy Gnats and himself became a victim to the guns of one of the Gnats. Luckily, he also ejected safely.

During their parachute descent they saw each other's chute deployed but did not see the third F-86 anywhere in sight. The leader had allegedly half rolled away from the air battle abandoning his wing men. According to the pilots of No 14

Squadron, the leader's cine-film was seen by many of them. It was known to all the pilots that it was a clear film with radar ranging sight reticule clearly visible but there was "Not even a bird seen in the entire film, leave alone a Gnat he claimed to have shot down."

¹ *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force*, official history 1988, Pages 441-474.

Somehow, the Squadron Commander's film then went missing. This entire episode was completely unexpected – for an experienced leader to have left his formation members to the mercy of the four Gnats and then to claim shooting down one, which was proven to be incorrect. In the given situation, even a mediocre leader would have adopted more sensible tactics like having two aircraft in cross-cover while the third attacked. Setting up such a pattern should have occurred to a Squadron Commander instinctively. This could have eliminated the surprise element by the enemy interceptors, as each one took turns to attack the ground targets. The pilots learnt later that their leader had been awarded the highest award for individual gallantry, Sitara-e-Jurat, for his leadership (sic), even while he got his two wing men shot down. Reportedly, his pilots were agonised over this salt that was rubbed into their wounds of the war. They had hoped to see their Squadron Commander court-martialled and not bestowed with a gallantry award! Not surprisingly, they had lost all respect for him.

The Air Officer Commanding and Base Commander (dual-hatted) should have known better than to have recommended this timid commander for an award especially after his film of the dog fight had become a joke at the base.

Paradoxically, *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force* (official history-1988) has praised him as a commander. I was also told by the pilots who were shot down, as well as by Air Cdre Gul who had fought as one of the junior pilots of No 14

Squadron, that the Squadron Commander flew only one overhead CAP mission during the entire war and stayed in the Ops Room performing staff operations duties in place of

Wg Cdr SM Ahmed who was shot down in an air battle with heavy odds against him, a situation which he was not obliged to be in. It is not surprising that *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force* has described this mission differently as to what really happened, which is known to every pilot from No 14 Squadron. The official history even rewards him with the shooting down of one of the Gnats during this air combat. This is incorrect and his claim should have been rejected.

Interestingly, the air battles over Dhaka were described by a BBC camera crew as reminiscent of the 'Battle of Britain' fought by the RAF to save London from the Luftwaffe's relentless raids. The Squadron faced an enemy with over 150 fighter bomber aircraft, comprising SU-7s, Mig-21s, Gnats, Hunters and Canberras. The IAF had an elaborate network of airfield infrastructure and a highly integrated and effective air defence system. The Squadrons were well trained and led by competent commanders, who had been given clear military and political aims to be achieved. The Dhaka Squadron had to face this formidable threat with only one Squadron of F-86Es, a few armed with GAR-8

air-to-air missiles. The number of F-86s had depleted by four which were lost before war was declared on December the 3rd. The Squadron was left with a total of 11 F-86E fighters. They had only one runway at Tejgaon, while Kurmitola next door was still not ready and could only be used in dire emergency, for recovery in case Tejgaon was untenable.

All the intense training carried out during my tenure was dependent upon MOUs reporting the incoming raids. However, this information was denied to the interceptors as the MOUs had been pulled back after a fine young officer, Flt Lt Safi, commanding the MOUs was hacked to death by the Mukti Bahini.

Consequently, the IAF had an omni-directional capability to attack No 14

Squadron assets at Tejgaon as well as any other target of value anywhere in East Pakistan. The IAF was capable of launching relentless waves, attacking targets day and night, considering the massive quantitative advantage it enjoyed over the PAF's single squadron. The appreciation done by Air Cdre Mitty Masud still held validity. It was appreciated that the single squadron would sustain attacks for 24-36 hours and would be grounded for lack of runway length available for take-off and recovery. No 14 Squadron fighters fought way beyond the appreciation carried out earlier in the year. It were the intangibles that made the difference; grit, resolve and faith in Allah and themselves, even though the leadership of the Squadron Commander was deficient.

In this scenario, the only choice for the Tail-Choppers of No 14 Squadron was to maintain pre-dawn to post-dusk CAPs overhead Dhaka, limited by lack of night fighting capability. The Squadron could only go into action an hour before dawn until the last light. That is exactly what they did with tremendous stamina and courage and grim determination after the Indian attacks began on the night of the 3rd December. Prior to the Indian onslaught, the Tail-Choppers had flown nearly 100 missions in support of the army. They had started their action as early as 19th November against India's invading army, destroying several artillery guns, tanks and personnel.

On the 3rd, IAF launched its first wave with Canberra bombers which dropped their bombs well short of the runway. They repeated their attacks five times during that night without causing any damage to the runway, aircraft or facilities. On the 4th morning, the third pair launched was led by Wg Cdr SM

Ahmed, the Staff Operations Officer, who was neither programmed nor required to fly. In the highest PAF tradition, he fought with 4 Hunters, 2 Mig-21s and 2

SU-7s. Overwhelmed by IAF fighters attacking from all sides, he was shot down and ejected a few miles from the runway. A rescue mission failed to recover him. In all probability, he became a victim of the Mukti Bahini's barbaric treatment. His wing man, Flg Off Rashidi, fought against the IAF attackers turning hard at deck level until the Indians broke-off for fuel considerations.

During the next 24 hours, the Indians kept relentless pressure against Kurmitola and Tejgaon airfields. It was clear from the pattern of target selection and attack approaches by the IAF against airfields in the West, as well in the East, that they were concentrating on operational runways unlike in 1965 where they were attacking all un-used and abandoned airfields. That they arrived mostly unannounced was the handiwork of the Bengali defectors, who had provided accurate information to the Indians about the PAF's deployment, radar limitations of coverage, and the safe lanes of approach.

Air battles raged over Dhaka and from all accounts, Sqn Ldr Dilawar Hussain (from No 19 Squadron in 1965) was spearheading most of the combat missions. Sqn Ldr Afzaal and Flt Lt Saeed (son of the venerable Brig 'Boss'

Afzal) claimed a Hunter each but Saeed was shot down by the third Hunter.

Another officer who performed magnificently was Flt Lt Schames as well as the youngest and the maddest Flg Off Shams-ul-haq. Each claimed one of the intruders. On 4th December, Dilawar Hussain, who seemed to be flying

between cups of tea, dawn to dusk, shot a Hunter in the afternoon and the pilot Flt Lt Kenneth Tremeneere ejected and was made a POW. Dilawar's No 2, a very young Flg Off Sajjad Noor, was also shot down and he ejected. Both the IAF

and PAF pilots were picked up by PAF's rescue helicopter.

The squadron kept fighting the air battle with exemplary resolve and determination without any participation by their Squadron Commander who opted to stay on the ground in the safe chair of S M Ahmed (after he was martyred). During all these massive raids, the Ack-Ack gunners took the heaviest toll of the attackers, coming under attack with napalm bombs several times, but they stood their ground and gave a befitting account of their determination worthy of the highest tributes. By recent Indian admission, nine Indian aircraft were shot down by the anti-aircraft guns and four by the brave fighter pilots of the famous Tail-Chopper Squadron. The defenders fought much longer than had been predicted. By the 5th of December, the runway had been pretty badly cratered but the repair teams worked with tremendous will to put it back in service for the fighters to operate.

Till the 6th, the Squadron was still defending the Tejgaon-Kurmitola complex. Dilawar was the last one to lead a formation of four, who were attacked by Hunters. One Hunter was claimed by Flg Off Shamshad. During the 6/7th night, the runway was hit very accurately by 4 Mig-21s and they split the runway in half. Dilawar tried to start up for another CAP, when the airfield came under attack. Dilawar was saved by a miracle owing to the courage of the airman, who was strapping him in the cockpit, while the enemy fighters were firing. This brave son of Pakistan threw himself on top of Dilawar to protect him from getting hurt. That was

the kind of spirit amongst the men and NCOs throughout this highly imbalanced air war in favour of the preponderant IAF.

The C-in-C had ordered the AOC at Dhaka to destroy all of the 11

remaining aircraft but Gen Niazi asked him not to do that because the noise of the blasts would further shatter the morale of his troops. The AOC then ordered the aircraft engines to be perforated with gun fire and all hydraulic and electrical systems destroyed. Some of the fighter pilots of No 14 Squadron along with their Squadron Commander took-off in a Twin Otter aircraft to Akyab in Burma.

The gallant Dilawar, Atta, Schames and Shams-ul-Haq elected to remain in Dhaka despite the hopeless situation in the hope that the runway might get repaired with sufficient length to allow them operations for a few more days.

However, these brave fighter pilots finally took-off in one of the dilapidated Beavers, a spray aircraft, and headed for Akyab. After a long journey, both groups arrived at Sargodha, and at my request to the C-in-C, reformed No 14 Squadron as part of the No 33 Wing.

The performance of No 14 Squadron was superbly captured in a tribute by the BBC crew who were filming the air battle over Dhaka, by paraphrasing Winston Churchill's famous quote: "Never in a country's history (Pakistan) have so very many owed so much to such a few". Thus came to an end this saga of courage and grit of the Tail-Chopper Squadron, as Dhaka fell, slicing Quaide-Azam's Pakistan into two.

The people of both wings of Pakistan had been kept under the illusion that if India ever threatened our Eastern Wing,

there would be a major assault and invasion of Indian territory in the West. This proved a complete hoax in the defining moments when the No 1 Armoured Div was fully poised to attack and the PAF committed to defend its assault at the heaviest cost to its small force.

The President was reticent to allow the offensive to be launched in spite of the urging and imploring by the air force chief and some aggressive generals till the last hours before ceasefire, to let Tikka's No 1 Armoured Div debouch in the Indian hinterland. Yet, the brave men of the Pakistan Army and Air Force fought a grim battle on the broad Western front, from Kashmir to Karachi, from 3rd till 17th December 1971.

Not much has been written about the 1971 air war by air enthusiasts and historians from either side, at least not to my knowledge. The only writing I could lay my hands on was by a writer called Pran Chopra. His dissertation is a lot of bragging with inaccurate claims of great tactical success by the IAF. From the Pakistani point of view, the loss of erstwhile East Pakistan has been blamed on the role of the military, specifically Yahya Khan and Gen Niazi. Their role in the break-up of Pakistan was indeed indefensible, but the imbroglio was the making of the politicians, the Punjabi establishment and their nexus with the dictators, Ayub and Yahya and their civilian and political hawks. The military solution, a no-win strategy, was employed when the Bengali populace had been mentally and emotionally de-linked with Pakistan; it was only a matter of physical decapitation which was left.

The Indians provided the dagger for the severing of the umbilical cord by creating a guerrilla force of 100,000 Mukti Bahinis trained by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and special army units in the jungles and swamps of

Madhya Pradesh. They were trained in sophisticated techniques of guerrilla warfare, water borne and under water sabotage. The revolutionaries also had the full support of the entire Bengali populace. Nonetheless, the spirit of those who had to face the enemy was not lacking in courage and resolute will. It was the moral and professional collapse of their commanders which brought about the ultimate humiliation.

It is all very well for the politicians to capitalize on this tragedy for political mileage but to denigrate their armed forces is despicable. That is why Indian authors like Pran Chopra have gone the whole hog to pen down the gallantry of the Indian Army, Navy and their Air Force with sadistic relish.² Indeed, the victor has that prerogative and the vanquished have little chance to challenge even the most diabolical lies when their own people have no stake in defending right from wrong. The treacherous role played by the Indian establishment in the break up of Quaid-e-Azam's Pakistan was as much owing to the dictators who ruled Pakistan from 1958 onwards. Just for the sake of record I would like to illustrate how mangled was the perception of Indian historians about the reality of the air war, if only to vindicate the grim and heroic fight by a single PAF squadron against ten IAF fighter squadrons in the East. The author states the Indian aim in the East was 'Total Liberation of Bangladesh'. Referring to the infamous Indo-Soviet treaty, the author writes: "The Indo-Soviet Treaty can be termed political escalation of the conflict by India. But its immediate military purpose was only to discourage China from jumping into the fray." Clearly, this was a mere ruse because the Treaty was Pakistan-specific. His claims about the role of the IAF are highly exaggerated and unsubstantiated, and rubbished by the official Indian historical record. Pran Chopra claims, "On the other side the IAF simply eliminated the PAF with strikes at main airfields and combat in the air.

Half the planes Pakistan had in the East were destroyed on the ground or air combat.”

Nothing could be farther from the truth and is sheer bragging, as was the author’s indefensible claim about the Indian Navy having destroyed our submarine Ghazi, which had exploded owing to a technical failure. It had definitely not been destroyed. The most spectacular tale written by Pran Chopra is about destroying the PAF fighters on the ground in East Pakistan; not a single fighter aircraft was destroyed in the relentless waves, day and night by the IAF.

The PAF had lost two F-86s before the war to IAF interceptors and two were lost in air combat during the war. The IAF losses in a comparative strength of 10

to 1 Squadrons as given out by the Indian official history is shown in the chart placed at Appendix ‘D’ (Indian official record of war losses by PAF and IAF).

The loss of 13 IAF fighters in East Pakistan should be a sobering thought for Pran Chopra.

2 India’s Second Liberation, by Pran Chopra.

War on the Western Front

Interestingly, further ahead Pran Chopra describes the Indian aims in the West. That is the point I am trying to make; whether or not India was able to achieve its national goals against the Pakistan military in the West.

According to the author, Indian forces had to fight an offensive/defensive war with four objectives:

1) To inflict as much damage to the Pakistan war machine as possible to eliminate its offensive potential for some years at least.

2)

To crush the Shakargarh bulge; this was a Pakistani club with nails jutting into a sensitive area of Indian communications leading north to Kashmir.

3) To push the cease-fire line in Kashmir sufficiently far to the West in certain areas to eliminate the Pakistani bulge into Indian territory, to join up certain Indian bulges to make a more defensible straight line, and to strengthen the line by aligning it with some natural defences.

4)

Lastly, to capture enough worthwhile territory in Pakistan for use as a bargain to impose a political settlement which would be advantageous to India, and for this especially to aim at some sensitive targets such as Marala Canal Head-works south-west of Chhamb, which regulate not only the Ichogil Canal defence system but also other sensitive irrigation channels, or at points on the railway line which runs in an arc north-south-south-East and connects Rawalpindi with Karachi, giving the whole of northern and central West Pakistan its only outlet to the sea.

So that was the ambitious Indian plan which the Indian government considered achievable with the military might they had possessed and made possible by the imbroglio which was besetting Pakistan. The question is did they achieve any or more than one of those defined objectives? The answer is, absolutely not! Then what stopped them

from doing so? My humble suggestion to the Pakistani nation is that they failed owing to the resolute courage and determination of the men who had proudly worn the uniforms of the Pakistan army, and the air force. This nation owes much gratitude to the spirit of the armed forces.

In West Pakistan the PAF's day and night strikes against Indian airfields and radars which began on 3rd December were in accordance with the high command's operational concepts. Recognizing the limited size and resources of the PAF, it had been decided that all air operations would be governed by five basic goals. It would be instructive to understand that the paradigms in 1971

were hugely different to the ones obtaining in 1965. IAF aircraft were no more vulnerable on the ground; they had developed a highly integrated air defence system as well as point defence to make airfield attacks by the PAF most unprofitable and dangerous. The IAF was far better trained and had a clear national and war aim. The ad-hocism of 1965 was absent from the minds of the IAF planners. It was going to be a formidable adversary. In this scenario the PAF's cardinal role was determined to provide full support to the Pak Army in their land offensive. Attacks against aircraft on the ground were sensibly ruled out by the Air Chief.

By 1971, both the air forces had developed hardened aircraft shelters and protective walls to make it extremely difficult to attack targets. They also made the attackers vulnerable to formidable anti-aircraft defences. The attrition, weighed against the benefits, was unacceptable. Consequently, the bombing of airfields to make them untenable for a certain period was considered more beneficial in the context of overall joint operations doctrine. It was appreciated that the success of such bombing would deplete the IAF effectiveness against our land assault. Even

in support of the land battle it was decided by the air staff that losing our limited resources and endangering multi-milliondollar aircraft for destroying tanks and other weapons was not acceptable, until the main offensive by the No II Corps under Lt Gen Tikka was launched to capture large swathes of Indian territory. The psychological aspect of bombing enemy forward airfields was aimed at provoking the enemy to retaliate against our operational assets and draw them into fighting over our territory and destroy them in air battles.

On the whole the doctrine was a sensible one and it did produce the results when ever the enemy took the bait. The number of IAF fighters destroyed by its own admission proved the effectiveness of the tactical philosophy. Although the PAF strategy came under criticism, it was by cynical detractors. The intention to preserve assets to support the army's main offensive was lost on the critics.

Since the leadership became reticent to launch the planned blitzkrieg, the PAF

became a victim of unfair criticism.

The over-riding priority of the PAF was to give maximum support to General Tikka Khan's proposed offensive into India; every other air force objective was to be subordinated to this requirement. It is pertinent to point out the difference between the PAF operational plan of 1965, when it was put into action in piece meal, owing to the confusion on the morning of 6th September, and the clear-cut planning and execution in 1971. This is proven by the statistics of the results in the two wars. The red herring in the latter was the failure of the land offensive by Tikka Khan's II Corps to debouch. The Air Chief considered this commitment to be pivotal because the success or failure of the PAF's support

would in all likelihood determine the fate of Pakistan's crucial offensive. When the estimated 'cost' of fulfilling this commitment was calculated, at his behest, by the planning staff at AHQ in July '71, it worked out at a loss of 100-120 combat aircraft and pilots over the projected 7-10 day period. Rahim Khan was aware that this would amount to losing one third of his force but he had the full support of his senior commanders when he directed them in August to prepare their units to pay this price for ensuring the success of the army's offensive.

It followed from the pervasive primary mission that a condition of air superiority would have to be achieved, in the form of a moving umbrella over the army's deep thrust, just before it got underway. Beneath that umbrella would be the additional need for some direct offensive support by the PAF, to soften especially hard resistance by opposing Indian army units. The deeper Tikka Khan's penetration, the greater would be the IAF's intensity of attacks - and staying power - against his forces, as they drew closer to the enemy airfields in the process. This also meant that the control of air space over the battle area would be more fiercely contested as operations progressed. The implication of this assessment was that the Pak Army offensive must advance very rapidly and, having reached its objectives, must consolidate its position as swiftly as possible. The PAF's protective cover would continue to be provided in full measure until Pak forces could dig in and secure their protection.

Control of the air, even in the limited areas of Pakistan's counter attack, involved not just the prevention of IAF interference by direct confrontation overhead but the PAF also felt compelled to plan attacks against those 4-5

enemy airfields from where the maximum weight of attack against General Tikka Khan's force could be launched. How would this counter air effort be conducted? Since all the combat aircraft on these airfields would be vulnerable to air attack in their concretepens, and since other camouflaged targets such as fuel tanks, ammunition dumps and command centres could not be readily identified or accurately attacked, particularly at night, the targeting choice once again fell, as in the '65 War (after the partially successful pre-emptive), on the Indian runways and air defence radars.

Another key task to enhance Tikka Khan's chances of success was assessed to be interdiction of enemy supplies directly serving the Indian forces opposing him. To preserve the element of surprise, these interdiction and airfield strikes in support of the offensive were to commence only after it had been launched. Next came those other tasks, the importance of which the PAF fully appreciated within the context of the overriding mission, which was to promote the success of Tikka Khan's offensive.

Until the army's offensive was launched, the PAF was to maintain pressure on the IAF with sustained strikes against some of its forward and rear bases, in order to inhibit - both physically and psychologically - the enemy's ability to act against either the Pak Army in the field or other targets on Pakistani territory, including the PAF's own air bases and other installations. During this same period, the PAF was also to provide whatever air support was needed for the Pak Army's 'holding' actions along the entire 3,700-kilometer border from Kashmir to Kutch. These relatively shallow-penetrating actions were meant to tie down as many of the enemy's resources as possible and to try to achieve a favourable tactical posture in the process.

As war progressed, the PAF was also to provide whatever air support it could to the Pak Navy within the limits of its maritime support capability which, in real terms, was near zero. The PAF did not have a maritime recce capability of any consequence, and totally lacked any special anti-ship weapons. These PAF limitations had remained unchanged since before the '65 war and Naval Headquarters (NHQ) staff had been aware of them all along. Consequently, they had not placed any unrealistic demands on the PAF during that war. However, when the war broke out and the Osa boat threat menaced the navy, the PAF flew 35 missions by B-57s, F-86s, F-104s and T-33s in their support besides making 127 sorties available for visual reconnaissance.

The Navy unfortunately seems to have forgotten the sense of camaraderie and air support which was provided from the scarce resources with readiness.

That one of the ships was attacked by their own F-86s was entirely the doing of Commodore Bhombal at the Naval Command Centre and the Chief of Naval Operations who sent a desperate SOS to the COC for air support against the Osa boat threat. Air Cdre Bill Latif, Base Commander Masroor, had been given complete freedom by the Air Chief to use his assets as he thought fit to save crucial minutes instead of routing through COC. This had a profound and decisive impact on the land battle in the south. The single incident of firing on our own naval vessel took place after the naval operations had cleared the Sabres by confirming that there was no Pakistan Navy vessel in the area. Flt Lt Zaka, a good fighter pilot with his wingman went in and attacked with .5 calibre guns, which was like throwing sardines at a whale. Unfortunately, some of our seamen became collateral casualty of this unfortunate incident.

The PAF's Command Operations Centre (COC) at Rawalpindi and all the air base command posts had been fully activated on 21 November. The commanders, pilots, engineers and support personnel remained ready to launch operations at a few minutes notice. As stated before, Air Mshl Rahim Khan strove each day to persuade General Yahya to honour his political and moral obligation to counter the Indian invasion of East Pakistan with retaliatory action on the Western front. Yahya's vacillation was inviting fatal consequences. GHQ had much earlier agreed to Air Headquarters request that the army's opening action would be coordinated with the PAF's first strikes and that is how it was planned. At a meeting on 30 November between the President, the Air Force C-in-C, the Army Chief of Staff, General Abdul Hameed Khan and the Chief of General Staff, General Gul Hassan, D-day was finally set for 3 December. President Yahya made the Air Chief responsible to brief the Navy C-in-C regarding the plan of action and Rahim Khan did so on 1 December. On D-day, the President formally announced the decision at 1630

hours and spent the early evening in the PAF's COC watching the launch and recovery of the first air strikes.

On 2nd December all the commanders of operational bases were summoned to AHQ by Air Mshl Rahim Khan and briefed about the impending attacks by the PAF. Each Base Commander was also handed his attack plan with targets to be attacked. The Base Commanders were also briefed by the Air Chief on the 'Code-word' which would mean "Launch without any further confirmation." I recall one of the Base Commanders telling me after the war that he had placed his war plan document in the back pocket of his flying coverall, just in case he had to eject. I was told by my Base Commander Air Cdre Gulli Haider upon his return from AHQ that war was imminent within hours and to get the wing

ready with their strike plans; I was instructed to keep the information top secret. That is exactly how it actually happened and all the strikes took-off without any confusion or ifs and buts. This was a far cry from the situation which existed on 6th of September 1965 at Sargodha and Mauripur.

Sargodha Attack Plan

3rd December:

Strike Amritsar Airfield with 4 Mirages, carrying 4 bombs each.

Strike Pathankot Airfield with 4 Mirages, carrying 4 bombs each.

Strike Amritsar Radar with 2 F-104s, with Guns Only.

Strike Faridkot Radar with 2 F-104s, with Guns Only.³

The TOT, if I recall, was the same as in 1965, at 1705 Hrs or around that time. Considering it was December and sunset would be earlier, I felt they would just make it at dusk, still in good light and it was bombing of runways and not aircraft on the ground (which would require plenty of day-light).

³ *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force, 1988, Page 448.*

I must admit that I was rather surprised at first at the target selection and wondered why Adampur was not included since this airfield was in close range of the expected land battle zone. But mine was not to question why! However, as it turned out the overall PAF strike plan for the first day, that is 3rd December, was very elaborate and had targeted most forward, central and rear Indian air bases as well as radars at Amritsar and Faridkot.

The moment of truth had arrived and I dashed off to No 5 Squadron to break the news. The confidence level which permeated the young Falcons was awesome and it made me proud. Flight plans were pulled out and the participating pilots were asked to commence briefing at 1530 Hrs. I told Hakimullah that I would like to fly with one of the missions, preferably to revive memories of Pathankot. He was prompt to remind me with his disarming smile, "Sir, you never got any air combat in 1965 war. This is your super chance to fly ADA and be sure you will get plenty of air combat, leave this job for the young ones who have been waiting so anxiously for this moment." With hindsight I wish I had led the Pathankot strike, but then I ended up conceding to the Squadron Commander's quip.

Yet, as the leader of the largest wing which was crucial to the over all war effort, my responsibilities compelled me to supervise the conduct of operations.

I had left the bunker for the flight-lines and got hold of the OC Engineering Squadron to check the aircraft preparation for the mission. By 1600 Hrs, all 10

Mirages were fully loaded and ready to launch. Just then, I saw the pilots arriving at their aircraft in the pens and I went to each one to wish them good hunting and luck, assuring them I would be on the look-out near the border to see their safe return. Two of the 10 Mirages were manned by two senior standby pilots who were fully briefed on the missions. They were to remain started up with a full load to fill in any gaps caused by last minute un-serviceability from the strike force and had instructions to stay started for 5 minutes after the main force had taken-off. Thus, every contingency had been catered to in case of an abort even after 5 minutes of being airborne.

At 1630 Hrs, the Base Commander called me at the ADA hut and excitedly told me to listen to the radio. The President was announcing that Pakistan was at war in response to the devious and treacherous behaviour of the Indian leadership for interfering in Pakistan's internal matters. I only caught the last bit of the speech after I ran out of the ADA hut and found some technicians hunched around a portable radio. They made space for me to listen to the last few sentences. Suddenly, the thunder of 8 Mirages hitting their after burners was heard as "*Allah-o-Akbar*" reverberated across the complex. The President had apparently arrived secretly at the COC along with Lt Gen Hamid, the successor to Lt Gen Musa (not as submissive as his predecessor yet not alot better professionally either). Owing to the secrecy of the COC location, Yahya Khan was driven by Gen Hamid to watch the PAF strikes launching.

I had arranged with Gp Capt Zaki Butt to scramble my pair at 1700 and to head in the Eastern direction to cover the returning raids. It was time to get into the cockpit and wait for a scramble, some how it did not happen. Three CAPs were already in the air on the heels of the strike aircraft and Sakesar was too busy monitoring for enemy reaction to have remembered my request. The strikes had crossed the border just before 1700 Hrs and from my cockpit I looked up at the heavens in a quiet prayer for their success and safe return. At about 1715 Hrs, I was advised by the ADOC that the formations had re-entered Pakistan territory and were headed for Sargodha. I got out of the cockpit and headed for the dispersal area to meet Hakimullah and the rest of the pilots. In spite of the complete surprise achieved by the PAF raiders, the disturbing news was that Aftab Alam leading the strike against Pathankot could not find his target, which was disconcerting, considering the Doppler navigation system on the Mirage could take the pilot within a few hundred yards of the coordinates fed into the computer.

This was particularly painful for me as the OC No 33 Wing that one of the formations should have missed a simple target. Anyhow, I did not want Aftab Alam to get distraught especially because he was a good fighter pilot and I had to find out how they managed to miss the easy target. When I met him, I told him that he would lead the first strike the next day and I meant that seriously to ensure that he did not lose his confidence. In fact, the timing of the strikes was somehow the same as in 1965, except that it was December now and the dusk was several minutes earlier. This aspect of the planning had been overlooked by the planning staff at COC, which had meant less visibility at the time of the attack. Besides, the Pathankot runway was camouflaged and very difficult to pick-up in poor light conditions. Well no one is perfect.

Hakimullah's formation had hit their target successfully but bombing accuracy was not as expected. Only 6-8 bombs impacted the beginning of the runway and cratered about 2,000 ft of the runway. This caused a few hours delay during which the runway was repaired. However, according to the IAF Chief, Air Chief Mshl PC Lal, operations from Amritsar were suspended and their bombers were ordered to launch from Adampur instead. For No 5 Squadron this could be called a partially successful mission. The formation was not intercepted and the Ack-Ack defences had opened up immediately as the formation pulled up against Amritsar, but caused no damage to any aircraft. The airfield at Pathankot was also attacked by F-86 aircraft with bombs by Sqn Ldr Jilani.

They managed to damage the taxi track and part of the runway; unfortunately some of them experienced bomb hang-ups. The other airfields that were successfully attacked were Srinagar and Avantipura, both well known to me and fresh in my memory of the 1965 War. It was claimed

that both airfields were cratered but that was not confirmed by the recce photos.

The F-104 strikes were considered successful against the two radars but there was no confirmation of the radars going off the air. At Faridkot, a small aircraft was spotted on the airstrip by the wingman Flt Lt Aman. He turned around for a second attack on spotting the aircraft and the Indian plane was blown up by him.

GHQ Repeats Fatal Error of 1965

The Pakistan Army had also commenced their operations as jointly planned with the PAF. The additional air operations to support the land operations were conducted through raids by 15 B-57s, a C-130 and a few T-33s. The bombers attacked airfields at Amritsar, Pathankot, Srinagar, Halwara, Sirsa, Ambala, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Jamnagar, Utterlai and deep into Indian Territory attacked Agra airfield. The Indian propaganda machine rubbished the Pakistani bombing campaign on the night of 3rd and branded it as a 'bungled pre-emptive strike'.

The good thing is that when people reach the apex of a fighting service, they tend to be pragmatic and rational. The inane remarks by the Indian critics were refuted by none other than the C-in-C of the IAF, Air Chief Mshl PC Lal in his book *My Days with the IAF*.

He lays down a comprehensive de-brief on the Mirage and B-57 attacks against the above mentioned airfields. With the exception of Ambala and Srinagar airfields (it would be interesting to scrutinize which of the PAF pilots attacked these two targets, albeit unsuccessfully), he has commented that all other airfields were hit and operations suspended for varying hours at different airfields. That was

the exact purpose of these strikes and no more until the launching of our No 1 Armoured Division. Another credible evidence of the success of the night bombing was reflected upon by Wg Cdr Sawardekar, who took his pilots to the runway in the morning after the attack on Sirsa and said, "This is the kind of bombing accuracy the IAF pilots should achieve against Pakistani targets."

I have failed to understand why the army high command had planned such a massive deception in Kashmir while the real aim of starting the war was to capture large areas in the Punjab. Fierce battles were being fought on the ground by No 8, 10, 11 and 23 Divisions in the north. Deva and Chhamb had been steam rolled by 12 Div in the tradition of 1965 war. A battle for life and death was fought at Hussainiwala and Sulemanki by 104 Brigade and 105 Brigade for the capture of the head works and Kaiser-e-Hind. Far to the south, Gen Mustafa had postponed for some hours the desert assault by his ill-prepared 18 Div, tasked to capture Ramgarh and hop across to Jaisalmer. It would be instructive to know that Ramgarh was a complete surprise for the PAF and it was a shattering outcome for 18 Div that the PAF was ineffective at 300 miles distance from its nearest base (Jacobabad was non-operational).

History does not accept that fate had something to do with the failure of 18

Division's attack against Ramgarh. The Air Chief was in GHQ on the morning of 4 December when he heard that 18 Division was to launch an attack towards Jaisalmer. He asked the CGS as to why the army was springing this sudden surprise on the PAF. Gul Hassan replied that the Division Commander had a good plan and that he would "Jump into Ramgarh one day and the next day he would be in Jaisalmer." The Air Chief might have asked the CGS, "So

what would happen even after Jaisalmer had been captured, unless the main offensive by Tikka's division was also simultaneously launched?"

Greatly disturbed, the Air Chief's retort to the CGS was that the area was out of reach of the PAF both from Sargodha and from Karachi, and that Jacobabad was the only airfield close enough but had not been activated for want of resources. He had also reminded the CGS that the AHQ had warned GHQ in writing that activating Jacobabad would require 10 days notice which had not been forthcoming. The CGS was also reminded that the IAF had at least 3 air bases in the area including Jaisalmer from where it could give a severe pounding to 18 Division. Even if F-104s or Mirages were sent there, it would take 40 minutes at high speed which would leave them without combat fuel to achieve anything worth while. But his warning went unheeded and GHQ

allowed the operation to proceed. Otherwise too, the two brigades were neither equipped nor prepared to undertake a penetration in the desert. In the event, water, fuel and ammunition soon ran out, the tanks got lost and bogged down, units failed to reach assigned objectives and pandemonium prevailed.

The 18 Div Commander had little idea how prepared the Indians had been to receive them. This was discovered by Sqn Ldr Farooq Umar during one of his recce missions in the area, but after the war had ended. The recce missions and their analyses revealed that the Indians had planned the infrastructure in the Rajasthan-Reti-Rahim Yar Khan area to cut Pakistan at this axis. The Indian Air Force had a field day attacking our lines of communications and economic centres with impunity owing to complete freedom in the air for the

absence of the PAF owing to its limited resources and being outside the operational radius of the fighter aircraft.

The Indians had created an extensive network of roads in Rajasthan, punctuated with tube-wells and other facilities. The most amazing capability they had developed was to use a mini-duck-board technique to create roads overnight for their tank movements in desolate areas. They had built one such road overnight from Kishan Nagar to Reti for its army to clip our national coaxial and roads near Chor. Fortunately, they were stopped at Chor as they were heading for Hyderabad.

Here is an example of what happens when lessons of history are ignored.

Had the GHQ learnt any lessons from the Rann of Kutch and 1965 War, the army and Maj Gen Mustafa, the 18 Div Commander, would have been aware of the capability and limitation of the PAF. The land battle situation on 4th December 1971 was a facsimile of the Rann of Kutch episode, except that in 1971 it was a declared all out war with no holds barred and Kutch was just a skirmish. Fortunately, in the Kutch war Air Mshl Asghar Khan had dexterously saved the army from the wrath of the IAF which it managed to do to 18 Div in 1971. But typically, Gen Musa had failed to assimilate this crucial factor.

Asghar Khan's dexterous strategy and the lessons of the Rann of Kutch 1965 War were never brought to the fore in order to save Musa and Ayub's necks. Asghar Khan was instead denigrated for his reticence to bring the PAF to the army's help. The situation was now proving that history only repeats itself.

Consequently, it took just four enemy Hunters based at Jaisalmer to destroy or disable most of the Pakistani tanks on 5th and 6th December. Jacobabad had not been activated because GHQ had failed to notify the PAF about its ambitious plans till the Indian Hunters were in the attack against the 18 Div elements in the open desert, decimating the tanks and the soldiers.

The IAF had resorted to attacking our lines of communications, installations and what ever they else they chose, to create a psychological effect on the national morale. Eventually, the division had to withdraw its troops after the Longewala battering (en-route to Ramgarh, but just barely across the Indian border) where our tanks and troops had been marooned. Maj Gen Hameed replaced Mustafa on 7th December. Had that incredibly bold assault been wellrehearsed and fully co-coordinated with the PAF in substance and detail like the main assault by No 1 Armoured Div, and delivered in a surprise pre-emptive blitzkrieg, history may well have been written differently. The irony is that the army had the plan, the human resources, the weapons and an indomitable spirit to pull both debouching by the No 1 Armoured Div and 18 Div with Jacobabad activated simultaneously, but for the inherent problem of the professional incompetence of the high command.

A much more serious situation was developing further south, in the ChorNagar Parkar sector, where the PAF aircraft from Mauripur had reported massive build-up near Monabao moving in a pincer for Hyderabad with two divisions to capture the area and sever West Pakistan in two. This could have been debilitating for the northern region to have been cut-off from Karachi and supply lines blocked. Then it would have been just a matter of time before total capitulation.

That was a very close call and known to very few Pakistanis. The enemy had advanced on four axes and had penetrated along the Khokrapar-Chor Railway line, south of it up to Umarkot-Mithi to Nagar Parkar itself. That was when the PAF

had reverberated into decisive action in preventing this advance farther inland and saved the north from being decapitated from southern Pakistan. The Base Commander Masroor, Air Commodore Bill Latif wisely accorded freedom of action by Rahim Khan, acted with alacrity living up to his intrepid reputation. His pilots flew composite formations of T-33, F-86s and even B-57s during the day to attack the Indian forces advancing towards Hyderabad.

It would be pertinent to explain that during the 1971 war, the Air Chief had, as a departure from the established chain of command, decentralized air operations in the south. This dissemination and delegation of authority provided flexibility to PAF Base Masroor, to coordinate directly with the army and the navy and provide support as the Base Commander thought fit. This was the prime mover, which helped PAF Base Masroor achieve the results in the south and blocked the Indian army from threatening Hyderabad.

The Base Commander, an outstanding officer flew some daylight bomber sorties, against convention. It was his leadership and independence of command which achieved the destruction of many Indian trains, and this virtually choked the flow of supplies vital to the Indian advance. The performance of the flying units in conducting accurate and bold recce missions and the effective interdiction by the fighters and bombers averted a catastrophe.

The strikes by Mirages against all the targets of the previous afternoon were repeated again. This time Sqn Ldr Aftab Alam plastered the target, the runway at Pathankot, with

accuracy. However, Sqn Ldr Amjad flying an F-104, was shot down by Ack-Ack over Amritsar while attacking the radar. He ejected and was taken POW. The Sargodha fighter wing had the responsibility for the ground operations from Kashmir to the desert in the south. However, some of our flying efforts to support land operations were diverted to the defence of GHQ and the army's joint operations centre at Rawalpindi, which were frequently attacked by the Indian bombers. In addition, the Corps HQ and formations, 10, 11, 12, 15

and 23 as well as 8 Division and especially No 6 Armoured Division were the responsibility of airfields in the northern sector. Under my command No 33

Wing from Sargodha, Risalewala, Mianwali, and to a lesser extent the Murid detachment of a few F-86s were responsible for providing direct and indirect support to these formations. Nonetheless, as spelt out earlier, the cardinal role of the PAF was to support Gen Tikka's blitzkrieg to capture major Indian Territory. This never happened.

The 8th Armoured Brigade in the Shakargarh salient and 18th Div in the south trying to capture Ramgarh found themselves in a precarious situation requiring massive air support. I recall that more than 40-50 missions a day were being launched from Sargodha alone to support the battle in Shakargarh sector.

Some of these missions were also directed to my friend Gen Majid Malik's 11

Div and especially to support the heroic battle being fought by the 106 Brigade, which was involved in a raging battle to capture the vital enclave of Hussainiwala on the 1st day of the war. We flew nearly 40 missions to support the land battle on that day. Our F-6s and F-86-Es as well as some

Mirages were also launched to support 105 Brigade group. A massive support was provided by the fighter squadron from PAF Base Rafiqui to assist the Sulemanki assault.

Two of the Pakistan Army's venerable heroes emerged from this battle. The Brigade Commander Amir Hamza received a Hilal-e-Jurat and Major Shabbir Sharif was awarded a Nishan-e-Haider for his legendary courage.

We were also beginning to lose aircraft in the Sialkot sector. Flt Lt Fazal (nick-named Bajloo by me when he was in No 19 Squadron during the 1965

war) was shot by Ack-Ack, around the Chhamb sector. He was hit while he still had two 1,000 pound bombs hanging under his wings and blown to smithereens.

May his soul rest in peace, he was a jewel of an officer and his loss was deeply felt by all of us. The same day, on 7th December, we lost Flt Lt Shahid Raza, another extremely popular officer, in an F-6 aircraft. I recall this day for another episode that took place at Sargodha. I had just received the terrible news of Fazal's death followed by Shahid Raza, when I decided to visit both the units to commiserate with their mates.

While at Fazal's F-86 squadron, I was first met by Wg Cdr Al Bokhari, a somewhat vernacular type of person who was quite brash. I asked him about Fazal's mission and made some comments about how dedicated this young man had been. The instant response from Bokhari typified his insensitive personality, "*Sir, tusi khal MACH-2 jahaz urrande ho, kade apne purane Sabre noo wee urrake dekho*" ("You keep flying Mach-2 aircraft only, how about flying your good old Sabre"). I knew how to handle such characters. I asked him to walk with me to where the pilots were sitting

around. As we approached the little cove, I noticed Flt Lt Cecil Choudhry briefing a formation with a blackboard hanging on a tree. I walked up to them and asked Cecil what mission he was briefing. He replied that it was a bombing sortie in Samba area. I looked at Bokhari and said, "You and I will go as escort with them and try to find some Indian fighters, you will fly my wing." I told Cecil to get one of the pilots to help me with start-up and answer a few questions about the fire control system. We took-off half an hour later and proceeded towards the battle area heading east at low level, with Cecil leading the mission. He was flying at about 200 ft AGL, regulation height. This was not a problem as long as we were over Pak territory.

Once we were approaching the battle area, I asked Cecil to get down lower.

He responded by saying there were too many birds around. Birds are the biggest menace against fighter aircraft especially during low-level missions. A bird hit is no less than an Ack-Ack shell hitting an aircraft, depending on where the bird impacts and how big it is determines the danger to the aircraft and the pilot.

PAF, like any other air force has lost precious lives and aircraft in bird hits. Two of the most outstanding fighter pilots and officers were lost to bird hits; Flg Off Ijaz Rafiqui, the older brother of Sarfaraz Rafiqui was hit over Lahore airfield and the redoubtable Air Cdre Masroor Hussain was hit over Karachi. I called a second time urging the leader to get low owing to my experience that in an AckAck infested battle environment, the fighter at 200 feet is most vulnerable if spotted by the gunner observer post. That was when he responded and sounded slightly anxious; addressing me he said, "I have been hit, am going to eject."

How ironical, the choice between a bird and a shell! I instantly told him to pull up and egress. The next thing I saw to my utter relief was Cecil hanging by the silk cord (as we say for a pilot descending down with his parachute). I asked his No 3 to take-over lead and continue with the mission as I watched over Cecil's landing. This was acknowledged and I asked Bokhari, my wingman to look out for enemy aircraft and keep my tail clear as I dived down to deck-level, east of Cecil's descent path. I figured that luckily he may have landed on the West side of our target area amongst the Pakistani troops. Nonetheless, I went in for a strafing attack about 1,000 yards east of his landing point. During my pull up from the attack I could actually see the bomb impacts of the remainder three from Cecil's formation, which meant we were no more than a couple of miles West of the battle zone, but the FDLs (Forward Defence Lines) were not a straight line, so there was no telling where the enemy could be. In any case, my decision to strafe was not aimed at any particular target, but as a deterrent for any Indian soldiers, who may have been in the vicinity.

Another teardrop turn and I carried out a second strafing attack. Just then, it occurred to me that my wingman had made no calls customary in such a situation to say that my tail was clear. When I called him and asked if he was keeping a good look out, to my amazement and angst, he said, "Leader, I have lost you." I let out an expletive and decided to turn back. I had reported Cecil's bail out position immediately to the SOC requesting his rescue. We landed back without further incident and the Squadron Commander took a lot of my typical de-brief flak for incompetence. I was somewhat surprised to discover that the three remaining aircraft led by Flt Lt Choudhry, each claimed two tanks destroyed. I asked in good humour that they must be the best bomber pilots in the PAF to score a mean error of 10 ft in each attack, at the same time giving them a pat for their

accurate firing. The F-86 camera could not record bomb impact even though all other ordinances were fully recorded.

Therefore, the proof of results was only the pilot's word and confirmation by other formation members.

I decided to hang around and talk to the junior pilots as I felt concerned after their Squadron Commander's conduct in the air, even though I knew him to be a good flier. Two young pilots sitting together but seemingly detached from the happenings were asked by me about their missions and both surprised me by saying that they were not allowed to fly because of their limited experience. I asked them if they were operational on the F-86-E, both replied in affirmative. I told the Squadron Commander that he should let them fly air defence missions and gradually induct them into CAS sorties. Forty eight hours later, Sargodha was celebrating the shooting down of the first Mig-21 by an F-86 pilot. Nobody could believe it was one of the two pilots that I had cleared to carry out air defence missions. Flg Off Maqsood Amir, the youngest pilot of the Squadron probably on his second mission, had added a stunning episode to the PAF history.

Cecil, in the meantime, was rescued by Pakistan Army Jawans, a hair's breath from the Indian soldiers only a few hundred yards away from his landing zone. Cecil, an aggressive fighter pilot, pulled out his revolver, a standard weapon for all pilots during war, and tried to play cowboys with whom he thought were Indians. I do not recall the rest of the story which he told us with his usual '*Chat-Masala*', while all the formation members and some other pilots were invited at my home to celebrate his successful rescue.

A few days later, I was instructed by Air Cdre Ghulam Haider to proceed to Sakesar by helicopter immediately as the C-in-C wanted to see me there.

Somewhat apprehensive, I tried to imagine why I was being called to Sakesar instead of the Base Commander. Flt Lt Pervez was to fly me in the rescue helicopter but as I arrived for the trip, he told me that the helicopter had a snag, which could be problematic in hilly terrain. I took the co-pilot's seat and told him, "Let's go before I get the sack, the C-in-C wants me at Sakesar now and that's what we are going to do." After a pretty shaky ride, as I arrived in the SOC Ops Room, I saw Air Mshl Rahim Khan standing in front of a huge map and discussing something with the bosses of air defense command, namely Air Cdre Saeedullah, who had been attached to the SOC, Gp Capt Zaki Butt, Air Defence Commander and my predecessor Gp Capt Rehmat Khan.

Upon seeing me, the Air Chief commented, "So you have finally arrived."

Possibly he had arrived earlier and had expected me in attendance before his arrival. The Air Chief started to brief me about the developments in land battle.

He said that the Army had sprung a surprise on the PAF by launching an offensive in Ramgarh area hoping to capture it. Also, Tikka Khan's Armoured Div was to prepare for launch immediately. He ordered that No 33 Wing was to undertake this task from Sargodha and Risalewala and carry out CAP missions to protect the movement of tanks to their launching area from any threat from the IAF. Second task he directed was to start targeting the lines of communication between Pathankot and Kasur and further south during the day and night. As the Air Chief was briefing me on a very large map of Western India and Eastern Pakistan, he

indicated the Indian armour had been reported assembling near Pathankot and Jalandhar and other railway stations further south. He mentioned that besides direct interdiction missions against the enemy concentrations, we would be given missions to destroy bridges, even culverts over large ravines to deny the enemy use of railway tracks for transportation of its armour.

“The CGS told me earlier today that the Indian armour was assembling in the area south of Pathankot around Mirthal, you will be tasked with recce missions by Mirages immediately to locate the Indian concentration and these would later be targeted with bombing missions,” directed the C-in-C. “And by the way, there is just a remote chance that half of the F-86s from No 18

Squadron may be required to move at a very short notice to Jacobabad, if we can muster adequate security and a good number of Ack-Ack guns. The Squadron Commander should be told to prepare in case of this unlikely contingency.”

Then the Air Chief said, “Sajad, during my last visit to Sargodha, some of your pilots had seemed listless owing to lack of sufficient action. As I had told you then that unless the army launches its main armour offensive, we had to consider preserving our aircraft strength and pilots for the tremendous task ahead. You can tell them that the moment is fast approaching, they will get more action than they could imagine, and hopefully they have been well rested.” The Air Chief left with the other senior officer in tow, while I ran-off to the helicopter pad and took off for Sargodha.

Soon after landing, I went to No 5 Squadron and discovered that they had already received the tasking signal from base Ops for the bombing mission. The mission required No 5 Squadron to carry out attacks against Indian armour

concentration from Pathankot running south, as had been suggested by Rahim Khan. The formation was taking off just as I reached the ADA underground bunker. Hakimullah's formation had found nothing at the railway station that was given to them as the enclave of armour assembly. Hakimullah was not given to aborting missions even when at a risk, so he headed south with his Falcons and ended up devastating a huge assembly of tanks at the Mukerian railway station in the process of being loaded on the trains. They offered the most lucrative and abundant targets and were left exploding and burning.

In a fighter pilot's mind, recon missions are the least exciting and they mockingly call these sorties 'Kill 'em with Film'. However, by 1971 the art of reconnaissance had become a sophisticated and dangerous undertaking. Very little has been written and said about the formidable task performed by Sqn Ldr (later Air Vice Mshl) Farooq Umar and Flt Lt Najeeb (Later Air Mshl). Both of them flew some incredibly effective missions bringing back crucial information on battle damage by our air attacks and especially about the enemy armour concentrations and communication routes, in the north as well as south on the Rajasthan-Rahim Yar Khan axis. Their missions in the north were essentially to discover the Indian armour and its movement. Several times they were hunted by the Indian fighters owing to the extremely dangerous and tell-tale profile flown by our valiant pilots. They were even subjected to Ack-Ack fire from Kathua bridge defences near Pathankot. Farooq Umar also came back with a huge hole from a bird hit at night. They survived these complex missions even though the army's requirements were never ending.

Farooq Umar discovered the deployment of the Indian armour across the River Sutlej and brought back photos of the Indian armour well entrenched and camouflaged west

and south west of the Beas, waiting for Tikka's II Corps to debouch. On receiving the information Yahya had cold feet and the coolness was transmitted to the over-rated Tikka Khan.

Surprisingly, Tikka did not want steel hitting steel in a battle of the two tank divisions. My scant knowledge tells me that the role assigned to the Pakistan Army was to debouch, assault and annex territory and destroy the enemy's defences as a part of the attack, and let the infantry secure the annexed territory, between and across Ferozpur and Amritsar. Nothing of the sort happened because the Indians were given the opportunity to move their forces from Jhansi, because so-called Tiger Niazi had already capitulated in East Pakistan. The moment for attack by No 1 Armoured Div was the hour the Indians transgressed across East Pakistan in the end of November. But there was no Rommel heading our cavalry men rearing to go.

That evening, I asked OC No 18 Squadron to meet me with 4-5 of his senior pilots after the daily film and mission debrief. I carried out the missions debrief and had made it MM Alam's responsibility to carry out cine assessment and comment upon the claims versus what the films had recorded. Standing at the bar, I told the OC Squadron that he was required to attack the railway line between Pathankot and Amritsar with four F-86s, 10 minutes apart armed with 2x1000 lbs bombs. On hearing this, he almost fell backwards saying that this would be an extremely dangerous mission for F-86s to take-off with 2x1000 lbs bombs and fly in a dark night without any recovery aids available during the war. I gave him a piercing look, because he had uttered these words in front of younger pilots from his squadron.

I controlled my angst and turned to the remaining pilots and asked, "Who would like to volunteer for this mission that may have to be repeated"? Cecil's arm shot up first, as I expected and so did Imtiaz's and Taloot's. I told them that I would fly the last aircraft to monitor the mission and advised them to plan together and draw tracks 10 degrees apart, either side of heading 080 from Sargodha. "This would give you the desired separation. The railway line is fairly visible if you navigate accurately on ground speed and time. For recovery, time yourselves accurately and once you're five minutes away from ETA, ask ATC

to give you 25% runway lights. There should be no difficulty and I will be in the air monitoring as I feel I should take-off last to assist in case of any emergency."

Turning my gaze at the Squadron Commander, I said, "I would like to see you tomorrow first thing." I had made up my mind to bring his behaviour to the attention of the Base Commander and request him to speak to the ACAS (Ops).

I then proceeded to spend the next hour chatting with the pilots in the mess. Just as I was getting out of the main entrance of the mess to go home, the Squadron Commander came jogging to me and said, "Sir, you don't need to fly, I will take care of the mission given" and said he was sorry for his initial reaction. Being in the middle of war, I preferred to avoid unpleasantness and severity of action.

The missions were flown successfully without any untoward incident but with stimulating effectiveness. Puny but gallant Imtiaz had delivered a direct hit on a huge fuel storage near the Kathua army logistic centre. Similarly the railway line between Pathankot and Dera Baba Nanak were hit for two nights.

An Unpleasant Encounter

While we were busy interdicting with Mirages and F-86s, our task to protect part of Tikka Khan's tank division being loaded on trains was a major exercise and entailed enormous flying effort. It was code-named 'Yellow Cab' as one pair of CAP had to continue its surveillance of the rail track and stations till the next took over. This exercise seemed to have great potential for a possible scrap with the enemy, especially between the Mirage and a Mig-21. This was an obsession with our C-in-Cs who wanted an air combat between these two types of Mach-2 fighters. But none took place and 'Yellow Cab' ended without any encounters.

During the war I was flying one and some times two missions everyday, generally one on an F-6 and the other on Mirage. By the end of war, I had flown 20 operational missions on the two types, with one on the F-86E, in Shakargarh area. In all these efforts I had only one encounter, and that too was botched by me. One day, my pair was scrambled in Mirage-III E with supersonic tanks, a perfect configuration for a dogfight. After being airborne, I contacted the SOC

and was told to orbit 15 miles east of Sargodha, at 15,000 ft. I suddenly started hearing a lot of commotion and discovered that Risalewala had come under heavy attack by Su-7s. I could recognise Wg Cdr Hashmi, Saad Hatmi and Sikander on the radio in a commotion, where bandits (enemy aircraft) were being reported left, right and centre. I switched to the second SOC frequency and asked the controller why he was holding me wasting fuel and why would he not give me an interception onto the exiting aircraft. I advised him that I was not give me an interception onto the exiting aircraft. I advised him that I was

50 miles from Risalewala on their exit route. The controller told me to continue orbiting at my present position.

I could not believe why he was being so obdurate and not vectoring me onto the exiting aircraft. I did find the answer a couple of days later. But in that situation, I was enraged and let the controller have it in the tone and words they were not unfamiliar with. Yet with the same terse response, he instructed me to remain in orbit. I asked No 2 to change to a different frequency than the air defence and decided to head south-east towards Tarn Taran at Mach-1, hoping to run into the exiting aircraft heading for Adampur or Halwara. I was really desperate for an opportunity to get into a hassle with the enemy but we ended up on a wild goose chase without the cooperation of our radar. But the controller did call me on guard frequency to ask me my position as he had lost us when we got below his pick-up range. I had kept silent and advised my wing man to ignore the transmission till we had abandoned the chase.

What happened the next day was not unexpected. Saeedullah Khan sent a signal (I am sure only to Sargodha) saying that pilots under SOC control must obey every instruction strictly and exercise strict radio discipline. Pilots using other than the "SOP phraseology" would be proceeded against, or words to that effect. The Base Commander had talked to me on the phone from his Ops Room and asked what had happened the day before. I explained my frustration to him.

He asked me to see him in the Ops Room as soon I was free. It was late in the afternoon and as I entered the underground bunker, I saw Saeedullah Khan sitting with the Base Commander. I saluted and asked the Base Commander why he wanted to see me. Instead, a stiff collared Saeedullah spoke very brusquely to me and told me that I

was expected to set an example in air discipline. “Your radio transmissions yesterday were terrible.” I cut him short and asked, “Sir, were you monitoring the Risalewala air battle”? He chose not to answer but tried to cow me down further. I addressed the Base Commander and said, “Sir, you are my boss and I am the OC Flying of 33 Wing, not some under training pilot; you should deal with me personally and I will explain to you what really got me riled up. This is war, and we don’t want to feel wasted with the scant resources we have.” Having said that, I told him that I was scheduled to fly and stomped out of the bunker without responding to Air Vice Mshl Saeedullah Khan. This was not to be the end of Saeedullah Khan’s keen interest in my flying behaviour.

Battle for Sialkot

The No 6 Division was tasked to take on the Indian armoured assault that was supported with three infantry divisions. The Indian objective was to destroy the Pakistan armour or defang it, capture Shakargarh and go for Sialkot and Gujranwala-Wazirabad lines of communications. No 6 Div fought bloody battles at Phillora, Zafarwal and once again a battle for Chawinda. From the air, it was difficult to assimilate the gallantry of the men of 6th Armoured Group and the 8th Infantry Division. However, it was gratifying to know that the CGS Lt Gen Gul Hassan paid accolades to the PAF’s spectacular performance in saving Sialkot.

Indeed, without the massive air support from the PAF, in particular Sargodha, Risalewala and Peshawar, the defence of Sialkot may have been written in a different way. In fact, it was stated in so many words by the valiant commanders fighting a war with grim determination and resolve, that the raging battles of Phillora, Zafarwal, Chawinda from 12th - 17th December were won with the highly commendable role

of the PAF, in the destruction of enemy's armour and support force.

This fact is vital to grasp because after the war some of the chair-borne senior army staff officers (the navy's inordinate comments about the PAF don't even deserve a mention), drawing battle plans on shifting sand models, propagated that the PAF had failed to provide the expected support. In spite of the PAF doctrine to employ the PAF to provide full support to the army, especially the total commitment to support Gen Tikka's tank assault, at the precalculated risk of losing 100 pilots and aircraft (1/3rd of the PAF), these were odious comments and the PAF Chief took a strong exception to the irresponsible loose talk. No 33 Wing had flown the maximum missions in support of No 6

Armoured Brigade and 8 Div and had made sacrifices in support of this bloodiest tank battle, on the 15th/16th night, second to the tank battles during WW-II in North Africa and the allied assault against the German tank divisions before her defeat. All that had to be taken with a pinch of salt because we in the PAF knew how well we had delivered splendidly to support most of the crucial land battles. This fact was acknowledged by none other than the Pak Army C-inC in a letter to the Air Chief dated 1st January 1972. He wrote: "I wish the army was in a position to exploit the excellent favourable air situation that was made possible by your small yet hard hitting Air Force..."

From Sargodha alone, nearly 200 missions were launched in the ZafarwalChawinda sector. I recall No 33 Wing launched around 50 to 60 missions almost every day from 12-15th December. On 10th December a huge ammo dump was destroyed by the Sabres at Akhnur, its fire glow visible for days, recalls Flg Off Imtiaz Haider (later Air Vice Mshl) who had led the mission. On the 15th and 16th, we flew nearly 80

CAS missions against the Indian armour and took a heavy toll by destroying maximum tanks on that day of the war. Approximately 50 Indian tanks were destroyed in the sector, especially in Samba-Dera Baba Nanak area. The F-6, despite its limitations, played havoc with Indian armour with its high calibre 30 mm guns, the only effective weapon it could use against tanks. The problem with the F-6 was its limited range, like the IAF Su-7. It had barely 10 minutes over the target area, which had invariably shifted in the 3-4

hours between the formation requesting for air support and the time it took for the army command to process it and request sent to COC. This was a limiting factor for the F-6 pilots, but not a single mission returned without rattling the enemy. In addition, the F-86s proved to be the saviours when the Indian armour launched its most fierce attack against the defenders. For the close support during the crucial land battles, the F-86s carried 1,000 lbs bombs instead of the standard 2.75 inch rockets, because the 2.75 inch HVAR were ineffective against the tank armour and required precise aiming and low pull out, exposing the pilot and machine to great hazard of abundant Ack-Ack supporting the armoured assault. Even though much criticized, the bombing profile kept the fighters out of small arms fire and psychologically relentless bombing has a devastating effect on the morale and mobility of armour columns.

The objective was well achieved as it brought the Indian assault to virtual halt during the crucial battle for Sialkot. The 18 Div in the Rajasthan sector was mauled owing to the inordinate and pandemic planning by the GHQ to launch an offensive far outside the reach of fighter aircraft and that too without consultations and warning to the PAF well in advance of the misadventure. As mentioned above, the air staff made the decision to use bombs instead of rockets

owing to heavy deployment of Ack-Ack with the Indian armour that was already taking its toll. Also, the Mirages were not employed in CAS missions because the PAF could not afford to lose a 25 million dollar aircraft and especially its highly trained pilot, merely to destroy tanks and guns. The Mirages were used most effectively for interdiction missions, which meant destroying the enemy's fighting potential at its base, deeper in enemy territory. There were some adverse comments about the use of bombs against tanks but these came from lack of good sense and little knowledge of the bigger picture.

Some of these young as well as senior F-86 commanders made some foolish statements in this regard to the Hamood-ur-Rehman Commission, but during my deposition I made the Chief Justice wiser on employment of the air force in CAS. It became clear to me that the Chief Justice had been fed a lot of hog-wash about air operations and some pilots, especially the F-86 Squadron Commander, became over enthused in castigating his own service, while having shown less than courage during the war. It was manifest in the demeanour of the Chief Justice that he was asking to be told what he wanted to hear. Well, I not only did not oblige but gave a firm and befitting response to him by suggesting that just as his expertise was jurisprudence, mine was tactical air operations and told him that I would respect his supremacy in the legal profession and hoped that he would allow me to advise him on the facts of the war and not conjectures.

Simply stated, the PAF was achieving its tactical aim while keeping the pilot's safety as supreme. Besides, nothing is more terrifying for the soldier than bombs falling over his positions. The outcome of the main battle raging in the plains of the Punjab was inextricably linked to the prompt and enormous CAS provided by the PAF which proved to be

devastating for the enemy. The table at Appendix 'E' (comparison of PAF air support to the army in 1965 and 1971) would eradicate any doubts about the quantum of air support provided. It would be instructive to know that Gen Musa has paid gargantuan tributes to the PAF

for the support it provided during 1965 War. He did not care that the diverted air effort demolished the PAF's cardinal mission.

Nonetheless, the comparison of the CAS effort in 1965, 641 missions in 22

days, which was inevitably less in quantum as well as in effect, with the missions provided in 1971, which were nearly 1,000, including recce missions in only 17 days, illustrated in the said tables provides the reader with facts and figures for a conclusion to be drawn. The effort details provided to the army during 1971 is placed as Appendix 'F'.

The Story of the Pakistan Air Force records over 900 missions flown in

support of the Pak Army in the north and south. The PAF lost 27 aircraft to all causes in East and West Pakistan; 10 in air combat, as against 18 IAF fighters and 7 to enemy Ack-Ack. In addition, 7 aircraft were destroyed on the ground (which included the 1 RB-57 at Masroor and 6 F-86s lost at Murid in two different attacks). Two more aircraft were lost to combat related accidents. Consequently, the PAF losses inflicted upon the enemy were 2 ½ times its own losses. The Indians lost a total of 75 aircraft to all causes according to the *Times of India's* official history of 1971 War. *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force* claims 37 enemy aircraft shot in air combat and 17 to ground defences (Page 470). IAF lost 18

aircraft in air combat and 36 to our devastating Ack-Ack. On aggregate, the Indian history has confirmed the loss of 75 aircraft of which 17 were due to operational accidents. This is a tribute both to the Indian historians as well as Air Cdre Kaiser Tufail's tally through excellent research. For a 14 day war, this was a spectacular achievement; Sialkot, Kasur and towns east of Hyderabad were saved with the formidable support given by the PAF. This was fully recognized and appreciated by the fighting men in the defence of Sialkot, Kasur and the southern frontiers.

The PAF flew a total of 3,027 combat missions between 3rd December and 17th December. The IAF flew over 6,500 missions and lost 36 air crews against 15 of our pilots and navigators, who embraced *Shahadat* (martyrdom). For an air force 1/3rd the size of its adversary, our performance was a remarkable feat and demolishes the nation-wide perception and propaganda that the PAF did not perform to the expectation of the nation. It is sheer ignorance and deserves the contempt of the men who fought with their blood to defend their country. Looking back, I am grateful to God that we did not lose the 100 or so air crew as was predicted to support the much touted Tikka's armour assault, had it been launched after all the dithering and procrastination. Had it been launched in November just as the treacherous invasion of East Pakistan had begun, that would have been a different story. It is for the readers to judge as to how the PAF performed, as it was almost intact after flying over 3,000

operational missions and was ready for the blitzkrieg by Tikka Khan's II Corps. A paralyzed President and his inept coterie were waiting for the American Pacific fleet to stop the Indians. Yahya Khan successfully prevented a historic joint operation in the making which could have turned the tables and saved us from humiliation.

The Air Battles

After our fighter offensive on the 3rd afternoon by Mirages from Sargodha and F-86s from Peshawar and night B-57 missions which had bombed practically every runway between Srinagar, Avantipura in the north, Agra and Ambala in the East and Sirsa to Utterlai in the south, the Indian reprisal came in relentless waves as the IAF opened their bomber offensive against our airfields and radars. Fifteen IAF bombers raided Rafiqui Base, Sargodha, Mianwali, Risalewala, Murid, Chander and Masroor. According to an Indian commander, only a culvert at Masroor runway was hit, no other damage was claimed by the Indians themselves. Again at Masroor on the 5th night a hanger received a direct hit, where our precious Elint RB-57 was parked, and was destroyed. IAF lost 2

Canberras on the night of 5/6th December to our Ack-Ack at Sargodha and Masroor. One IAF Canberra was shot-down by Flt Lt Naeem Atta from a Mirage, yet another was shot on the 11th by our Ack-Ack in the south.

Watching the enemy bombing attacks at night from the ground was quite awesome. On the nights that I was at home and a bomber raid was announced by the eerie sound of sirens, I would take my 8 year old son, Adnan with my helmet on his head and I would take a sub-machine gun from my guard and help him hold that and point it at the sky, because he insisted that he was going to shoot down a bomber. My wife at the time would sit nervously in the corner of the large bunker instead of her parent's lovely home in Brussels. On a few occasions, the Commissioner and his wife were with us when the raids came; hoping it was safer to be at the base, considering the wayward bombing by the IAF. I watched two spectacular performances by the enemy raiders. One from a concrete

pen as I was pre-flighting a Mirage for night ADA, when the sirens started wailing, immediately followed by an Su-7 pulling-up from the northern end of the runway. He came at deck level over the runway, as the ground defences exploded everywhere in the sky. He pulled up at the end of the runway and made a tear drop and came-in for an attack. He hit the right side of the runway with dibber bombs leaving a massive crater. His performance was outstanding and gallant. The second time, I was sitting with the Killer-Controller on top of the huge and high water tank on the north-Eastern side of runway 35. This time a Canberra almost repeated the same pattern as the Su-7. He dropped his bombs on the Eastern edge of the runway, rendering about 350 ft of runway out of use till early morning. I was informed by the ATC runway inspection officer, that the bomb debris was all over the runway. I asked him to tell the SATCO to have the parallel taxi track checked thoroughly. With the constraints of continuous attacks and poor lighting available to the inspecting officer, he declared the taxi track useable. Flt Lt Farooq Habib, a young officer from No 5 Squadron, was allowed to scramble from the taxi track. Halfway down the taxiway, he picked up shrapnel and blew a tyre. He managed to control the aircraft and came to a halt almost at the southern edge of the taxiway. This was (to my mind) a Mirage and an outstanding pilot saved.

Incidentally, it would be instructive for the Indian historians to know that we did not lose a single Mirage during the 1971 War. Therefore, all claims of destroying or even damaging any Mirages have no veracity at all. There was no dog fight between any Mirage and IAF aircraft. I and my wing man Flt Lt Zulfiqar chased two low-level exiting SU-7s, but missed them both even as we claimed one each. An exiting IAF Su-7 was shot by Flt Lt Saleemuddin (later AVM) near Pathankot-Jammu Road, from a Mirage fighter. His second quarry, the lead Hunter, got away with some holes from Saleem's gun

attack. Another escaping Hunter was blown up by Flt Lt Safdar Mehmood's deadly Mirage guns while flying through his own Ack Ack around Sakesar. However, a gallant fighter pilot Sqdn Ldr Saleem Baig from Peshawar flying an F-86 fighter did shoot down an IAF Hunter on the 4th of December in a dog fight near Peshawar, and demonstrated his deft air combat skill by downing a Gnat fighter over Srinagar airfield on the 14th of December.

An avoidable disaster took place at Murid which had been activated to house half a squadron of F-86s. To activate Murid airfield was a poor decision.

It lacked radar cover and anti-aircraft defences were minimal and ineffectual. To make matters worse, the satellite base with a detachment of eight F-86s was commanded by a meek transport pilot (who later became an Air Marshal and VCAS) during PAF's decline. On 8th December, PAF suffered a debilitating loss of 5 F-86s at Murid airfield. These aircrafts were apparently parked in the open, with a full load of bombs for the next mission. A Hunter formation pulled up to see five F-86s on a platter. The lead Hunter shot a single F-86 parked in wide open space. As it blew up, there was a domino effect and the 4 aircraft parked next to each other were hit by the exploding bombs, which resulted in the destruction of all 5 aircraft. Yet there was also an epic of stunning courage by possibly the oldest colleague amongst us, Wg Cdr GA Khan, who dared to takeoff during the attack and saved an aircraft against terrible odds of being shot down in this vulnerable state.

On 12th December, we heard the sad news that my old friend Wg Cdr Mervyn Middlecoat, an outstanding professional and a gentleman, was shot down in an F-104 by a Mig-21 and was reported to have ejected over water, but could not be rescued. Mervyn was much missed by all of us. We also

heard that Sqdn Ldr Aslam Choudhry and Flt Lt Fazal were shot down flying out of PAF

base Peshawar. Such are the irreparable but unavoidable losses of war, made tragic only by the futility of misadventures by inept leaders.

On 13th December (supposedly lucky for me being from the 13th GD course) I was scrambled about mid-day against enemy fighters attacking our ground positions east of Shakargarh. With Flt Lt Zulfiqar Shah on my wing, we were flying with supersonic tanks, which meant less fuel but no speed limitation. We switched to the Sector Operations Centre (SOC) frequency and were directed to contact the Ground Control Interception Unit (GCIU) located near Lahore. Flt Lt Farooq Haider, an outstanding air defence weapons controller (ADWC), was immediately identified by me owing to his familiar voice. He gave us a northeasterly heading and kept us at 2,000 ft AGL in full burner. Full after-burner use causes extremely high fuel consumption thereby reduced endurance. About 12

minutes later, his target position reporting got closer and my adrenaline started pumping fast. Target 11 o'clock, 20 miles. The next call was heading change to the left and bandit at 12 o'clock, 16 miles. This meant we were two minutes away from intercept point. "12 o'clock, 10 miles, check your weapons" was his next transmission. "12 o'clock, 5 miles, leader, look out for two bandits slightly above you".

While he was transmitting, I had contacted two enemy aircraft attacking our ground forces; one in a dive and the second positioning himself for the next attack. I announced to the controller and for the benefit of my wingman, "Roger, contact, the two bandits straight ahead." Incidentally, we

had come out of burner once we were clocking around 550 Kts (Nautical Miles per Hour), so I called "Burner for No 2" and asked if he had contact. At the same time, I started a steep pull-up, which was my first mistake. I should have stayed low and approached them from 6 o'clock. These were two Su-7s on CAS mission judging from their flying profile. They spotted us almost immediately and broke hard left away from us. We were flying very fast so there was no way for them to get away. They abandoned their attack and were exiting at deck level in very wide battle formation, presenting two targets well spread out.

Clearly, the IAF had learnt their lessons and were applying them as was evident from the way the two bandits were hugging the ground. They split as the No 2 turned right and put about 10,000 feet between the leader and himself. I was compelled to split also by the smart move of the running bandit leader. I assigned the aircraft on the right to my wing man and told him that I was going for the aircraft on the left, telling him not to miss his target. I suddenly realized that my weapon selection was on missiles and there was no way to fire a missile at the target flying lower than me and barely 50 feet from the ground. To switch to guns I had to reach behind on my left and had to glance inside to reach the lever; a deadly second or so which could be disastrous at such low-levels.

Anyway, I looked in and switched to guns. I opened fire from about 3,000 ft, closing in at enormously high speed in full burner. My bullets landed a few feet off his right wing as I could see the dust from my ammo hitting the ground.

I heaved back pulling nearly 8 Gs to avoid an over shoot and half-rolled on top of my quarry during which I switched back to missiles, hoping he would pull up or even turn, giving me an opportunity to get below him and fire the missile.

I had got level with the target and was feeling his jet-wash when I fired both missiles one after the other. Obviously, I could not follow up to see the impact but seeing the first missile go straight I thought I might have impacted him. I heaved up again sharply to the left and when I was vertical I rolled over. I saw a cloud of dust on the edge of a village and there was no Su-7 in sight. I took it that I had nailed him down. I called my wing man and asked his position and status. He did not answer. I was in a left hand turn at about 4,000 ft AGL. I called him again but no response. I felt a piercing anxiety thinking he might have got into trouble with the Su-7 or something else may have happened. I hoped it was just radio failure. I glanced inside to check my fuel state and was alarmed to see the fuel had run very low owing to constant use of after-burner.

I frantically called my wing man to turn back for base asking him to check his fuel and manage it appropriately. I had hoped that he could hear me even if I could not get any response. As I turned west, I was quite astounded to see a big airfield complex right below me and saw some fighters moving on the taxi way.

There was no mistaking this airfield. It was Pathankot and I suddenly discovered that we had come a long way, not realizing in the excitement of the situation.

Aware of the likely air environment I immediately descended to deck level with full burner because I was sure there would be Mig-21s in the area. At any other time, I would have looked for a hassle or even made a strafing pass on the airfield, but my fuel state was extremely low and I had to decide whether I could make it to Sargodha or divert to a satellite airfield. I contacted the CGI controller, who came back loud and clear despite the distance. He asked me for the score and I told him one Su-7 down, but no contact with

my No 2, who was chasing the second aircraft. I then told him to look out for me in the direction of Pathankot and I pulled-up steeply to 7,000-8,000 ft and half rolled back to avoid being intercepted.

All this time, I had been weaving hard right and left to check my 6 o'clock for any chaser. The GCI controller Farooq picked me up before I could say "Boo" and gave me 'pigeons to base' (GCI terminology for a course to steer back to base). After about 4 minutes of flying in burner I knew I was in Pakistani territory, but the fuel was getting precariously low. I zoomed up to 20,000 ft and throttled back for endurance flying. Meanwhile, I asked the controller to keep my 6 o'clock clear. The fuel seemed to be vaporizing like I had never experienced before, but I estimated that I would arrive overhead with about 300-400 lbs, barely sufficient for a circuit and landing. I made it back by the skin of my teeth. The good news came as I heard No 2 asking for joining instructions in 5 minutes and also low on fuel. I wondered why he had not remained on the GCI frequency, but that had to be found out later. After he landed, I asked him what had happened. He said he could hear my transmissions, but for some reason, I could not hear his response. He said, he had shot at the No 2 and thought he had hit him. This sounded doubtful to me. In the final analysis, we both had missed virtual sitting ducks. There was no excuse for the OC Flying Wing to have missed such an opportunity.

It was just bad judgment on my part. I have not lived that down even today, and feel bad about having claimed one destroyed. During the daily mission debrief, I asked for my film to be shown first, as it was separate from the spool, which contained all the rest of the films, because I had instructed the ground crew to keep my films separate. The

missile trajectory and impact is not recorded by the camera and therefore, only the gun attack was clearly recorded.

Obviously, with hindsight, I am convinced that the mushroom of dust that I could see at the last position of the Su-7 was in fact the huge dust raised from the impact of two missiles and the earth surface being dry and dusty. In the heat of the moment, I mistook it for the aircraft hitting the ground. My gun attack was off the mark, even though a close call for the escaping Su-7. Had I put my aiming point 7-8 feet to the left, I could have got him the first time. Nonetheless, I called out to all the pilots gathered and commented, "Gentlemen, this is how not to shoot in air combat". My next mission was the last mission of the war, which became a casualty owing to a foolish error by a senior officer. It proved to be a catalyst for unrest amongst the patriotic cadres of the PAF.

Crucial Mirage Mission Aborted

On 17th December, I was scrambled on ADA and flying an F-6, I headed towards Shakargarh area. The attackers had probably been warned since we had to fly between 10,000 to 15,000 ft for fuel consideration. What I did see was a dust haze completely covering the area east of Shakargarh, the battle front. We had lost another aircraft and the Squadron Commander, who was leading told me that the dust haze was so thick over the battle area that target recognition had become impossible and our aircraft had to circle overhead the expected target area exposing them to heavy enemy Ack-Ack fire. I had myself observed the extremely low visibility in the area, where the battle was raging as the 8th Armoured Brigade had launched its counter attack. I called the COC and spoke to Air Cdre Zulfiqar (later ACM) and told him about the prevailing conditions and the risk of

losing aircraft without any returns. He said he would bring it to the C-in-C's attention.

At about 1500 Hrs, the Base Commander called me to his Ops HQ, which he often did, whenever a special mission was received from COC. He handed me a signal, which tasked 4 Mirages with a full load of bombs to attack the marshalling yard in the vicinity of Ferozpur. I charged off to No 5 Squadron and saw Farooq Umar and some other pilots playing scrabble. As soon as I saw Hakimullah, I told him about the mission and suggested that Omar Farooq be detailed to lead the mission since he had been flying extremely demanding and dangerous recce missions during the day and night. Also the fact remained that he had not led a strike mission; this could be a good opportunity for him. I also suggested that the mission be escorted and I would lead the pair. This was all agreed and an hour later, six of us were thundering down the runway, the front 4 carrying 16,000 lbs bomb loads. I thought to myself that this was going to make spectacular fireworks.

We proceeded low-level all the way, with my wing man and I keeping level about 200 ft on the right side of the formation. The mission was proceeding precisely to seconds as planned and as expected of Farooq Umar. About four minutes away from the target, a thought occurred to me, and I told the leader that I am overtaking him and would pull up slightly before his formation.

What I had intended to carry out was a strafing run against the target to mark it for the bomb run. The leader answered in the affirmative and I pulled up to 2,000 ft to be able to see the target in time. Just then, as Farooq's four were about 2 minutes from pull-up, the deathly silence was broken by a highly unwelcome transmission from SOC, calling on 'Guard Channel', which cuts through all frequencies and could be

heard by all aircraft irrespective of the frequencies one was using (except the enemy, which did not have UHF

frequency). The controller uttered something, which sounded like an expletive to me, "Sherdil leader, you are to abandon the mission and return to base immediately." I called back and asked, "Who says so, we are about to commence attack". The next transmission came with an authoritative voice, which I recognized to be Air Cdre Saeedullah, "You are ordered to abandon mission by the C-in-C, do not pursue the attack", or words to the effect. I felt a kind of rage, which I chose not to elucidate, but felt rotten as I asked Farooq Umar to turn around. He was equally shattered being so close to achieving devastating results, since a huge assembly of tanks, ammo vehicles and fuel were reported to be transporting by train to the south, possibly to defend against Tikka Khan's impending onslaught.

Dejected, we returned and the four Mirages had to land with all bombs, fully armed, a dangerous call. Fortunately, everyone landed safely. I switched off the aircraft and dashed to the Ops Room to check with the Base Commander the reason for the recall. The Base Commander also had been told by Saeedullah about the recall of all aircraft. I asked him why? He said that apparently I had informed the COC about the low visibility conditions in Sialkot sector to which the C-in-C had ordered that no more CAS missions were to be flown in that sector.

How could an Air Cdre of Saeedullah's experience and knowledge confuse CAS

with a tactical interdiction mission and, especially when the problem existed specifically in the Sialkot sector, nearly 100 miles to the south? I called the COC

and Wg Cdr Najeeb (brother of Gp Capt Jamal Khan) received my call and before I could open my mouth, he asked me "Sir, how did the mission go"? I was stunned to hear those words. I stammered and said, "What the hell are you talking about Najeeb, we were ordered to abort the mission just before pull-up by Saeedullah Khan, who told us that these were the C-in-C's orders."

Najeeb heard me and was equally shattered. He said, "The C-in-C had been monitoring your mission and had retired for a few minutes away from his chair and asked me to inform him of the results of the mission immediately as soon as we land." I told him that he had better talk to Saeedullah Khan and said vociferously that the Air Commodore ought to be removed by the C-in-C, because he was causing serious damage to our morale in these critical times by his harrying attitude. I repeated our conversation to the Base Commander, whose round eyes almost fell-out of their sockets when he realized that we were recalled under a contrived pretext and he may be subjected to some answering by the Chief. I went off to the No 5 Squadron bunker and found a group of technicians gathered who showed their rage and had tears in their eyes because their pilots had returned with the bomb load. As I entered the bunker, I saw all the pilots looking completely distraught and demoralized. I explained to them that the recall was false and contrived at the SOC, also that the C-in-C would be enraged as he had not given orders for the recall of the mission, it was meant only for CAS missions in Sialkot sector. This got the pilots even more infuriated, but it was too late to rectify the situation. I went off to the ADA hut to check if there were repercussions with the crew there. My fears were right; the airmen had gathered together and knew the Mirages had landed with their bombs.

I felt strangely depressed and did not know how to explain to them the wrong action by a very senior officer. I tried to tell them that the war was just starting and we would *Inshallah* carry out many such missions. Just then, one of the pilots on ADA came out of the bunker and told me that the C-in-C wanted to speak to me; his PSO was holding the line. I ran down and took the call. Najeeb told me that the Chief was extremely upset and wanted to talk to me. The C-in-C

came on with a burst that shook me from head to toe, saying "How could you be so stupid to not know that the recall was for operations in Sialkot sector. I will replace you if you repeat such an unacceptable mistake." I tried to explain my own conduct, that I questioned the controller explicitly as to who was ordering the recall. I was told that it was Air Cdre Saeedullah, who for some odd reason, seemed to have been in the Air Defence Operations room. This did not cut any ice with the C-in-C and he said that nobody was authorised to override his orders and that I had been tasked with this mission at the highest level. What was there for me to say to a very angry C-in-C? I thought discretion and silence was the only way. So I took the battering with a prayer that he would get to find out the real culprit, which was definitely not me. I believe that the same evening, Saeedullah Khan was ordered not to interfere any more in fighter operations.

Also, I learnt that the C-in-C asked the ACAS (O) if the mission could be relaunched. After some quick calculation he was advised that it would be too dark to pick-up any target. In frustration the mission was finally abandoned.

The repercussions of this abort became the catalyst for a later unrest amongst the airmen and the problem needed addressing. The Base Commander put me up to face the anguish and discontent of the men. One NCO asked me,

“Sir, who was the bastard who had called off the bombing of Ferozpur?” I tried to cool him down and told him to watch his lingo but that only further fuelled the enraged men. I had to leave to avoid exacerbating the volatile atmosphere.

Such were the follies of some senior commanders during both these wars. These mistakes were repeated for one reason alone – that no truth commission was instituted to ferret out the facts and punish the guilty.

I flew six missions on Mirages and F-6s after the missed opportunity on 13th Dec, hoping to get another chance of air interception but was not lucky enough.

Earlier on the same day, after I landed from the F-6 ADA mission, I was told to call my residence. This was the first time that my wife had tried to contact me during the war. It turned out that the Commissioner Mohsin and his wife had asked us for a lunch at their house. I told her to go ahead and I would come later. I joined the guests at the Commissioner’s House at about 1330 Hrs and found several friends standing on the high terrace of the Commissioner’s home. I received a very warm welcome since it had been nearly a week that I had met any one owing to the intensity of operations. Soon after lunch was over, I begged the hosts’ permission to leave and get back to the airfield. The Commissioner made a strange remark, “Sajad, stick around for a while, since your wife is going to play bridge and in any case the war is almost ended because your President doesn’t have the gumption to fight anymore.” I told him, “Wait and see as the war is just starting.” He laughed and said, “We’re waiting to hear the General beg for a ceasefire.”

When I got back and received the Ferozpur mission later in the afternoon, I thought to myself that the Commissioner

was being very pessimistic. For all intents and purposes, I was absolutely certain that the mission of bombing the marshalling yard at Ferozpur was a siren announcing Tikka Khan's blitzkrieg. I was wrong and the Commissioner had one up on me. Pakistan's shaken President decided to hold back Tikka Khan's assault across India and implored for a ceasefire, in spite of fervent pleading by Air Mshl Rahim Khan and his battlefield generals to let the armour break-out. The rest is the tragic history of the 1971 War, which was lost at the strategic level owing to the cowardice, incompetence and moral turpitude of one general and his cabal.

14

SHAMEFUL CAPITULATION

AND THE AFTERMATH

East Pakistan had become Bangladesh and most of our honourable soldiers, officers and civilians who were willing to die for Pakistan had been vanquished with the attending humiliation, because Lt Gen Niazi was deficit in courage, and had suffered moral and professional paralysis. The virtual governor, Lt Gen Rao Farman, was terrified of the Mukti Bahinis. Both had reportedly beseeched for a ceasefire through the US Counsel in Dhaka with indecent haste. In West Pakistan many had sacrificed their precious lives in botched operations or were waiting with their armour in Changa Manga forest for orders to debouch, but all they did was to wait till the bitter end. The nation was dazed and demoralized but had no knowledge of why and how it all happened.

Even though the armed forces had fought with grit and determination, and were prepared for even bigger sacrifices, they felt distraught by the ineptitude of their top commanders and were undeservedly humiliated by ignorant citizens who were incited by self-seeking politicians and bureaucrats. They wanted to capitalize on the debacle to shift the onus and find a scapegoat in the armed forces without distinction between the brave and the cowardly. The denigration goes on unabated without any one having the courage to clear up the haze and accord dignity and honour to those who deserved it. Exactly like the veil placed over

the 1965 War, the 1971 War has been kept under wraps to protect the culprits and the holy cows, both civil and military. A future war will have even more dire consequences if the veil is not lifted from the blunders of these two wars.

On the other end of the spectrum, the PAF leadership and their operational units had waited more angrily rather than anxiously for the armoured breakout by Gen Tikka Khan's No 1 Armoured Division even at the pre-calculated risk and the probability of losing one third of their operational aircraft and the pilots.

Tragically, that never happened when it should have. At any rate, it was lucky not to have been launched when it had run past the opportune time frame and this saved the lives of gallant men. Yet, the wholesale condemnation by all and sundry of the fighting men became a perpetual slight and was exploited by the politicians heartlessly. In the East, some incompetent generals commanding the troops and another who served as an advisor to the Governor East Pakistan, brought shame to their troops by capitulating in indecent haste and brought undeserved disgrace to the name of the armed forces for all times to come.

On the conduct of the air war of 1971, I would passionately deplore the perception and propaganda that the air force did not perform as well as during 1965. Since I was in command of the major element of the tactical fighter squadrons (my command comprised the entire force of Mirage-III, F-104 and three F-6 Squadrons as well as an F-86E Squadron attached with Sargodha), I would say incontrovertibly that the plans and performance of the PAF were superb and indisputably better than in 1965; a fact little known or understood by the nation. This contention will become evident to discerning readers as the statistics are

reproduced here including the recently released official figures of IAF losses by the Indian government.

Unlike the realistic planning and execution by the PAF, planning at the highest tiers of the national and army leadership, including the President and the GHQ, was intrinsically flawed, to say the least. Not launching the punch of the army, the No 1 Armoured Corps, and the senseless assault by an unprepared force without air cover against Ramgarh in the south (hoping to capture Jaisalmer in a blitzkrieg) was an amazing blunder which caused incalculable loss of precious lives and equipment. Yahya Khan acted as though the script of the ignominious finale of the operational plan had been written by the enemy and not GHQ.

The PAF flew 1,000 missions in direct support of the army; a 50% higher rate than in this role in 1965. Appendix 'E' carries a mission breakdown of the 1965 and 1971 Wars. Some of the most dangerous missions were flown by Farooq Umar and Najeeb to photo recce for the army to determine the position and movement of the Indian armour and its likely area of main thrust. That these pilots survived the Ack-Ack, deadly guided missiles and were sitting ducks for the Indian interceptors, was worthy of the highest recognition. But despite all the air support to protect the armoured assault in the Punjab with colossal attrition upon PAF's relatively scanty resources, the leadership had cold feet when the moment of truth arrived on November 24, 1971 as the Indian invasion of East Pakistan began.

What is known to very few if at all, was that in the West Yahya Khan had the unique disposition of a 1:1 ratio between the Indian and Pakistan army; a comparison of forces never imaginable given the perennial Indian preponderance in manpower and resources. That was a

defining moment in history when the army could have given the enemy a pasting to be remembered.

Air Mshl Rahim Khan's imploring with General Yahya went unheeded, as did the appeals by the fighting Generals who wanted Tikka Khan to break-out to capture a big chunk of the enemy territory as a resounding reprisal for the enemy's treachery against East Pakistan.¹

No 14 Squadron Gladiators Come Home It was a great emotional moment for many and especially for me, to see the boys from my former command of the unit in Dhaka come to West Pakistan.

They had arrived with just the clothes they were wearing, having left behind all their personal possessions. The Air Chief immediately ordered the base to provide uniforms for all the pilots and re-equip them with flying gear. Soon they began to settle down, but I sensed a kind of uncomfortable relationship between the pilots and the Squadron Commander.

A month or more down the line, I tried to scratch Dilawar's mind to find out if my feeling was correct. He was hesitant and told me that he would discuss the matter another time because everybody from No 14 Squadron was still in a state of disillusionment about what happened in 1971. I let the matter slide until one day the OC No 14 Squadron called me on the intercom and asked if he could see me. I told him to come right away. What happened in the next five minutes only confirmed my doubts about the tension that permeated the squadron. Without elaborating our conversation, the OC No 14 Squadron implored me to post him out, "Sir, please get me out of here, I request an immediate posting." I was taken aback a bit, but the tone and tenor of his request left nothing to the imagination.

On the face of it, he had lost the confidence of his pilots after the incident when PQ Mehdi and Khalil were shot down and his failure to lead the Squadron during the intense war. I discussed the matter with the Base Commander and recommended that under the circumstances and to avoid a serious situation, the OC Squadron should be posted elsewhere. The Base Commander agreed and said that he would discuss the matter with the Air Secretary and try to get a replacement.

Coup Spells End Of Yahya Khan

Soon after the 1971 debacle, given the way Yahya Khan had handled the war, there was serious malcontent in the army and the air force. The services felt humiliated for not having been properly afforded the opportunity to show their mettle. The first murmurings started at the division stationed at Mangla. A brilliant Brigadier, FB Ali, joined by his comrades Alim Afridi, Iqbal Mehdi Shah and other like-minded patriotic soldiers felt the sting of defeat most severely and held Gen Yahya responsible for the undoing of Pakistan, but more so, for the humiliation brought to the armed forces. They decided to get through to Gen Gul Hassan who was the Chief of General Staff (CGS) at GHQ. They asked Gen Gul Hassan to ask the President to step down and hand over the government to the politicians who had won the elections in West Pakistan.

1 *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force, 1988. Page 447.*

It is a long episode and I don't want to delve into the events which took place, but suffice to say that Lt Gen Gul Hassan soon found out that the call was serious and there could be a mutiny on his hands if he did not move fast enough to ebb the situation. He called Air Mshl Rahim Khan and explained the situation developing at the Mangla Garrison. The

Brigadiers had warned that they would sever all communications with GHQ (which in fact was done immediately and no calls were allowed in even by the President or Gen Peerzada (President Yahya's Chief of Staff), a despised intriguer, who was widely disliked in the army for his machinations. The Brigadiers had threatened that they would march onto the Presidency and arrest the President and his cabal if Yahya did not resign instantly.

Now as the drama unfolded, it appeared that the GOC of the division and the 6 Armoured Corps, Commander Lt Gen Karim (Bachoo), whose loyalty to Pakistan had been suspect during the war, were not included in the plan because both were considered to be sympathetic to the establishment and thus a threat to the coup makers. Even though Bachoo Karim tried to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, FB Ali did not trust him and asked that he hand over his command to him, which Bachoo Karim declined. He was placed under house arrest by FB Ali, Col Aleem Afridi and the others, as was the GOC. Gen Gul Hassan and Rahim Khan went to see the President and made him aware of the developments at Mangla and expressed their fear that the situation could turn very ugly and threaten West Pakistan if Yahya tried to confront the dissenting senior officers, warning him of a bloody coup if he resisted. Now Yahya and his minions were totally incommunicado with their general officers at Mangla and were sitting in sheer terror of the division marching onto the President's abode.

Gen Peerzada tried to get the SSG commandos to carry out an air assault on the Mangla HQs and arrest FB Ali and his colleagues. The order was refused and reasons were given why it was not possible.

Yahya finally agreed to hand over power, asking the visiting Air Chief and the CGS as to who would like to take-over,

thinking that one of the two would be the contender. Nay, he was wrong. He was told that it had to be ZA Bhutto whose party had won the elections. Yahya said that he had feared as much and told them to get Bhutto back from the UN. Bhutto had been busy playing his own game at the UN with his bellicose pitch and tearing up the Polish Resolution asking for ceasefire (though he was much admired by Pakistanis for his macho larking about). That Bhutto did not want the ceasefire when it was on the anvil is an enigma, because had the Polish Resolution been passed swiftly, the UN would have compelled a ceasefire and the humiliation of surrender could have been averted.

After Yahya Khan abdicated, Rahim Khan asked Bhutto to return immediately. Bhutto was reticent to return when it was conveyed to him that Yahya Khan had agreed to abdicate in his favour. Finally, as Rahim Khan narrated the entire episode to me in Spain, the two Chiefs got hold of Mustafa Khar, Bhutto's then confidant, and convinced him to re-assure Bhutto that his fears of being arrested were unfounded and that they were serious in their undertaking. The rest is history, notwithstanding my personal gratefulness to Mr Bhutto for having been fair to me when I was witch-hunted and framed in a conspiracy and later haunted by the Shahinshah of Iran.

ZA Bhutto ruled with an iron fist; he achieved many milestones in the social, political and international arenas, but the nationalizing of banks, industry, businesses and even schools and other institutions damaged the business incentive and investment by Pakistani entrepreneurs and denuded the economic base. Ultimate power or the quest for it corrupts and finally destroys.

Police on the Rampage

One day, I received a call from Afzal Agha, the Chief Secretary of Punjab and a very gracious friend, who treated me like a younger brother. He asked me if I had received instructions to show force in the Frontier and the Punjab as the police had rebelled and taken up arms against the administration. I told him that we had never been given such a task before and I had received no such instructions, adding that in any case the Base Commander would be the one to know about such an action. He suggested that I should get some aircrafts ready as Mr Bhutto may be speaking with the C-in-C any moment now for a show of force. I respectfully told him that I would only be able to get the aircraft ready once the Base Commander ordered me. The orders never came but something was not right. There was a conspiracy to involve the armed forces in a confrontation with the police with the suspected intent to degrade the former in public esteem.

The rebellion was quelled amazingly fast after the two Chiefs refused to get involved in the law and order situation which was allegedly contrived by some lowly politicians. None the less, their refusal to carry out the orders of ZAB cost them dearly. Soon thereafter another significant incident took place which got my antennas up. A few weeks later, I was in Karachi and ran into Rafi Munir, the wealthy scion of the Hysons Group, and a staunch and committed supporter of ZAB. Rafi's demeanour was generally very unpredictable after he had imbibed a few which meant after 9 pm till dawn (I believe he is on the wagon now, good for him). He protected ZAB more than he would his own father and was very aggressive towards ZAB's critics. I recalled Rafi's ire one afternoon at the Intercontinental Karachi, the days Bhutto was a persona non-grata in Pakistan during Ayub Khan's repressive rule. There was a book store in the lobby and Rafi and I were walking past when he spotted the book *Friends not Masters*. Rafi turned and picked up the

book and asked the sales person to charge it to his account. Then he flung the book up to hit the ceiling and it splashed down, after which Rafi started kicking the book from one end of the long lobby to the other with expletives that cannot be repeated for courtesy to the readers. Such was Rafi Munir's loyalty to ZAB! I being a witness was also reported and was warned about my association with ZAB's friends. I didn't pay any heed because I was not politically associated with ZAB and definitely not fond of Ayub Khan owing to the reputation of his sons.

That evening in Karachi, it was still early when I met Rafi Munir. Always pleasant and full of affection he was a bit sullen when we met. But a little later he came to where I was sitting and blurted out to me, "Hey Sajad, who the hell does Rahim Khan think he is, telling the boss man (ZAB) how to run his personal life concerning ... (a particular lady ZAB had been associated with)". I said, "Rafi, don't act out of your class with me. You know that I respect ZAB's intellect and his commitment to his friends and at the same time I have unswerving loyalty to my chief; besides they are good friends and I had heard it from ZAB's mouth that Rahim Khan was his only tested friend. So let us not get between the elephants." He argued a bit and I returned feeling apprehensive that things were not right between the two titans.

What amazed me was that Rafi had knowledge of such an intimate dialogue between ZAB and Rahim Khan. What I learnt many years later from Air Mshl Rahim Khan in Madrid (and reiterated by Mrs Rahim Khan most recently in 2007) was that Begum Bhutto had visited the Air House at that point in time and implored Rahim Khan, for being Bhutto's trusted friend, to speak with her husband about his nocturnal soirées with a lady from Dhaka. Begum Bhutto told the Air Chief that her husband would take his office

work to the house of the lady and stayed there most nights. People were talking and she felt humiliated.

Rahim Khan was a good Samaritan and felt that his loyalty as a friend placed a moral responsibility on him to advise Bhutto to desist from an activity which had become a scandal, even though he was the President and Martial Law Administrator.

The Air Chief suggested to Bhutto that his affair with the known lady was becoming a matter of concern all around and suggested that he use extreme discretion as the national morale was frail after the war and the loss of East Pakistan. This apparently happened on two different occasions. Air Mshl Rahim Khan told me that he had advised ZAB in all sincerity as a friend since no one else wanted to bell the cat. On the first occasion, Bhutto curtly told him, "Rahim, you've done your bit; there is no need to over step the limits." It was these innocuous incidents which sent Bhutto into a rage. According to Gen Gul Hassan, ZA Bhutto had also started interfering in the army policies which was unacceptable to Gul Hassan who was no one's toady and like Rahim Khan, a proud soldier.

It was the last day of February, a leap year and it was a Friday, when at about 1100 Hrs, I was called and told by the Base Commander that the Air Chief wanted to see me immediately. I asked him if I was in trouble, he said not to his knowledge, but to get to AHQ as quickly as a Mirage could get me there. I tookoff in a sleek Mirage and dashed to Peshawar. Interestingly, I stayed in after burner and landed at Peshawar in 15 minutes, nothing could have been faster than that. At the Air Chief's Secretariat I was met by Air Cdre TS Jan, who (I think) was the Secretary Air Board. He took me to his office and as I sat down, TS Jan told me that the Chief was busy and that I would be called in by his ADC

shortly. Over a cup of tea, we chatted generally about the war with reference to his visit to Sargodha accompanying the international press (about 10-15 foreign correspondents). There were two rather comely female reporters in the group who were monopolized by TS Jan who considered himself a ladies man. I joked about him not letting the girls mix with the fighter jockeys.

He changed the subject and asked me if I had read the latest *Timemagazine*

and what it said about the Air Chief's comments about the GHQ flop in the 1971

War. I replied in the negative. He said *Timemagazine* had quoted the Air Chief as saying that the army had failed in its prime task of launching its armoured division, and instead had chosen the desert where no air cover was possible, or words to the effect. Then TS commented, "Well Haider, you know it was war and we had a lot of foreign news media day in and day out, one could have said anything in the heat of the moment, besides, the GHQ had botched the plans."

He had unmistakably implied that such remarks may well have been made in the presence of the correspondents but it was not a big deal and besides it was a fact.

While we were chatting his intercom rang and he told me that I had been summoned by the Air Chief. I entered and saluted the C-in-C. He asked me to sit down in the alcove sofa, where he was himself seated. After some preliminaries he said, "Sajad, I want you to go on national TV and explain the conduct of the air war conducted from Sargodha. There has been some frivolouscriticism emanating from the army and the navy about the PAF failing to support them, especially in the desert assault on Ramgarh, and I want you

to put the record straight about the problems of effectively operating that far from Sargodha.” He said that he had spoken to Aslam Azhar, the Managing Director of Pakistan Television (PTV), who would be calling to interview me on the national hookup. I felt a slight tremble inside, not quite grasping why he had chosen me for such a high profile job, when other people such as Air Vice Mshl Saeedullah or TS Jan had their gift of the gab and crisp intonation. My only experience with TV had been the brief interviews with the BBC and ABC correspondents at Peshawar and Sargodha during the 1965 and 1971 Wars. I asked him haltingly, “Sir, what would I be expected to say, especially about the operations in the south”? He frowned with his bushy eye brows lowering over his piercing eyes and said, “You should not need any briefing on how the PAF performed during the war; say what the truth is and say it vociferously, especially your capability to provide cover in Ramgarh and Jaisalmer Theatre.”

He directed me to immediately get in touch with Air Cdre Bill Latif about the details of air support operations for the army and navy in the south. He then called Air Cdre TS Jan on the intercom and asked him to come and brief him about the *Timemagazine* story and referred to the calls from the President (ZA Bhutto). As TS Jan walked in, the Chief asked him, “What is this about the *Time* magazine quoting me about criticizing the army? The President is throwing a fit and wants an explanation.” As he placed the opened and marked page of the magazine on the table in front of Air Mshl Rahim Khan, TS Jan said something to my utter astonishment. He said, “Sir, I have no idea who could have made such a derogatory statement against the army and the report seems to be some mischief or a misinterpretation.” I almost choked at the horrid U-turn TS Jan had suddenly made, telling the Air Chief something

diametrically opposite to what he had just told me in his own office, about utterances being made in the heat of war.

I thought to myself that is how empires crumble, when loyalty is flaunted beneath a visage of self-interest. The C-in-C directed TS Jan to organise my interview with Mr Aslam Azhar immediately, emphasizing that it must be aired within 24 hours. I recall later speaking with Aslam Azhar from TS Jan's office after we had left the C-in-C. Aslam Azhar told me that he would be interviewing me the day after and that I should plan to meet him in Rawalpindi at lunch time where he would chat with me about the event. I was quite nervous at the prospect. As it turned out, the interview did not take place, because the day after my visit with the C-in-C, we heard the news at a lunch in Sargodha that Air Chief had been banished along with the Army Chief by ZAB.

It soon became common knowledge that trouble between ZAB and the two chiefs had started brewing when they had refused to use show of force to quell the police mutiny in Punjab and NWFP. Bhutto was livid for being turned down by his subordinates, forgetting that they were in fact being loyal to him by keeping the armed forces in the barracks. What Bhutto did to satisfy his ego became his own nemesis. Had he chosen the sensible and pragmatic course, he may still have lived and Pakistan would not have had to suffer ignominy at the hands of the hypocritical and evil dictator Zia ul Haq. Bhutto chose his own hangman. It would be interesting to rewind those moments and recapture the sequence of events.

Sword of Damocles Falls

Air Cdre Mickey O'Brian's brother, Charles O'Brian was posted at Sargodha as Excise and Taxation Officer. Charles and his wife frequently invited Gp Capt Rehmat Khan, his

wife Anna and me for Sunday beer sessions and Anglo cuisine. Commissioner Mohsin and his wife were also mostly present. One Sunday, when we were invited for lunch, and were sitting on the lawn on a beautiful summer day, Charles' wife came rushing out of the house and nearly screamed, "The TV just announced that Bhutto has sacked the Air Force and Army Chiefs, saying that there was no place for Bonapartism under his rule". My heart sank and I felt the blood gushing to my head. We all ran inside but the commentator had moved on. I immediately called the Base Commander and asked him if he had heard any bad news. He replied in the affirmative, sounding anxious and said that Air Mshl Rahim Khan had been replaced by Air Vice Mshl Zafar Chaudhry, adding "That does not auger well for you, I wish you safe landing young man."

Later that afternoon I called on the Base Commander and brain-stormed the metamorphosis that had unexpectedly overtaken the country. Before taking his leave, I asked his permission to go to Peshawar the next morning, to visit the Air House and find out what had happened. He answered in the affirmative, saying that he would also visit in a day or two. In the evening I started receiving calls from all over the country from worried well wishers, friends and family who had known Air Vice Mshl Zafar Chaudhry's unprovoked ire for me. I told them not to worry as I had no axe to grind with him and as a chief of service I hoped he would rise above his personal likes and dislikes. The night seemed long and full of anxious thoughts; I kept thinking about Rahim Khan and recalled the scene when I had heard ZAB shower accolades on Rahim Khan as a tested friend and a venerable Air Chief. The next day being Monday, a maintenance day, gave me the freedom to leave when I liked without worrying about the units' flying.

After landing at Peshawar, I was driven to the Officers' Mess. I made a bee line for the bar and let the driver go. I met some old friends and colleague who were having a drink at the bar. I asked my old buddy if I could borrow his car to visit the air house and call on Mrs Rahim Khan later in the afternoon. He said, "Yar, the Air House is crawling with agencies and sleuths and I don't want to get involved because they will track the car to me." Disillusioned, I walked to the Air House which was about a mile away. As I approached the gate, there was a bunch of intelligence hounds who stopped me and checked my identity before letting me through. I entered the Air House and being familiar with the geography I headed for the drawing room. I had barely taken stock of the room where I had last seen ZAB with Rahim Khan when suddenly Begum Rahim Khan appeared along with Mavis GA Khan (wife of my colleague, the one who took-off during the attack on Murid). Mrs Rahim Khan said, "Sajad, you shouldn't have come because you will surely be marked and reported, although I was certain that you'll be the first to visit me."²

I said that she need not worry about me because I could handle the problem and asked about the Air Marshal's situation. She said he had spoken with her and was well and hoped that he would be back in a day. I felt a lingering sense of apprehension because she did not sound convincing. I chose not to probe further as she asked me to come and sit down. I stayed for about half an hour and returned to the Mess. The manner in which the two Chiefs were removed has been much dramatized in recent days by a former Governor and Chief Minister of Punjab. This gentleman has claimed that Bhutto threw files in front of the two Chiefs, inferring that they were trying to over-throw him and impose Martial Law. No one in Pakistan with miniscule common sense can believe this canard. Bhutto had himself chosen to continue Martial Law; besides, it is jocular to claim that

these two Chiefs were planning to overthrow the man they had installed. That was the first time in the history of this beleaguered country that two powerful heads of the armed forces had implored a political leader (Bhutto had been elected) to come back and establish civilian supremacy. Why would they want to do some thing so foolish as to remove him?

I knew both Chiefs closely. Rahim Khan and Gul Hassan were not vindictive or madly ambitious people and would have supported Bhutto through their tenures as pillars of strength. What could have stopped these two from taking over the governance from General Yahya themselves instead of insisting that Bhutto return and form a democratic polity in the country? Both of them were exceedingly sincere to Bhutto. The truth is that Bhutto got carried away by the delusion of power and eventually paid an unnecessarily heavy price with his life. The refusal by the two Chiefs to come to the aid of civil power, was the most admirable and courageous decision, an expression of their respect for democratic dispensation. They had told Bhutto that he had numerous state forces other than the defence forces to control a minor localized insurrection by an extremely disorganized police force. How could any one with a sane mind send a hi-tech Mirage to terrorize a bunch of village idiots in police uniform? The two Chiefs were, in sincerity, asserting the supremacy of civilian rule, fully understanding that the defence forces should never be used in situations until they threaten the integrity of the country. They were clear that the armed forces were meant only to be used to intercede against a real threat to the country's survival from internal or external enemy; but if their power was used senselessly, it would lose its deterrent effect, as well respect. Obviously, ZAB

was not in the mood for strategic synthesis but wanted to assert his power and send a message that nobody should dare express dissent against his decisions.

2 *An Extraordinary Life, memoirs of Princess Mehrunissa of Rampur.*

During the night I spent at Peshawar, my mind was buzzing with macabre thoughts about the things to come, considering my history with the new incumbent Air Chief. Although these thoughts were none too pleasant, I was a fighter as well as a survivor. I wanted to be in control of my life, instead of being its victim. I had no qualms or fears about taking challenges head-on; this was my wont. I returned to Sargodha the next morning after checking with Mrs Rahim Khan about the status of the Air Marshal. She had been waiting to hear from him. One day, soon after my visit to the Air House, all the senior commanders of the PAF were summoned to AHQ on the 3rd or 4th March, 1972.

The purpose of the summons was to attend the new Chief's address. I tried to wriggle out of it but the Base Commander advised that I should not anticipate what was to come and get my right foot out, assuring me that my professional competence would counter any negativism by the new leadership. I thought he was right and I had to adopt a wait and see attitude.

All the commanders had gathered at the AHQ Auditorium and the new Chief took to the podium and made a superb opening speech, laced with humility, intending to infuse confidence amongst those who had been victims of his egotistic nature and unprovoked dislikes and equally inexplicable fondness for weasels in the years gone by. I took his sincerity and humility at face value and heaved a sigh of relief, believing that as Chief of the air force he might get over his hang-ups and idiosyncrasies. At the end,

he invited questions from those present. No one was surprised when his pet officer and a known lackey stood up and parroted praise about the much anticipated metamorphosis in the PAF under his command. He was in his element as he made suggestions regarding the weaknesses of the PAF and their solutions.

PAF in the Eye of a Storm

Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry was soon tearing through the sky, heading towards AHQ Peshawar for the fulfilment of his dream of many years ago. What must have seized his mind in those hours was impossible to guess but the impact on the PAF operational command, barring his close kin, the timid of the 1965

War and his coterie, was one of misgivings. People wondered if Zafar Chaudhry would rise above his spite for confident and upfront professionals who called a spade a spade when the occasion demanded. The answer to those trepidations came loud and clear in rather a short period.

The Air Chief had recalled Air Cdre Saeedullah from Washington DC

(posted as Air Attaché) to strengthen his power base. Most people were thrilled at the small mercy that Air Cdre Khaqan Abbasi, who was operating as deputy to Zafar Chaudhry in the PIA, had been left behind to complete his hatchet job on the PIA and the PAF had been spared his induction in the hierarchy.

Unfortunately, the sense of relief was terribly short lived, unhappily for many.

The PAF had already been smartening from the aftermath of the 1971 debacle and was hardly in the mood or state of

morale to withstand the reputation Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry and his close associates had earned in the PIA. The air force was too fragile and somewhat chaotic from the after effects of the war and the command change. The delicate situation needed mature and prudent handling to stem the despondency permeating the service. The only way forward that seemed possible was with tangible and positive professional activity to elevate the service morale. Unfortunately, quite the opposite happened.

The annual exercise of the Pakistan Day fly-past was fast approaching after the command changed. This very simple exercise became an ominous watershed with serious consequences for the entire PAF. This was a routine annual exercise, which entailed a fly-past of about 100 jet fighters and trainers. The aircraft which participated were from different bases in the north and used to take-off from their home base and the rendezvous was fixed about 20 miles in line with the path of the fly-past, so as to arrive in front of the dais occupied by the President and other dignitaries, as well as the three Chiefs. The timing and coordination between aircraft of different types with different speeds required meticulous planning. This was particularly so because the leader of the entire fly-past would have to synchronize his arrival in front of the spectators precisely as the last column of the parade had marched passed the grand stand. In order to coordinate the precise timing of the events on the ground, a fly-past control was established at the parade ground manned by a senior commander from a fighter command. Several rehearsals were carried out with just the leaders of each formation practicing the rendezvous and for the leader to arrive at the predetermined precise timing.

Everything went well until the final dress rehearsal. In order to cater to a contingency, where a leader's aircraft became

unserviceable, the deputy leader would take over and lead through the exercise. I decided that the final rehearsal by the Sargodha contingent should be led by Wg Cdr Hakimullah, commanding the Mirage Squadron. Consequently, I positioned myself at the Mobile Control at the beginning of runway to monitor take-offs of about 40 aircraft. After all aircraft took-off safely, and turned out of circuit, I drove off to the Air Traffic Control (ATC) and waited for their return, not knowing that there was mayhem in the air. On the day of that final rehearsal, an ugly situation developed as the leader, in this case not surprisingly, Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry, arrived over the parade ground on time and pulled up to carry out vertical rolls.

Ironically, the fly-past control was manned by Gp Capt Arshad, who happened to be Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry's brother-in-law. As he blazed past and pulled up for a vertical roll, Gp Capt Arshad unwittingly called and said, "Excellent timing leader, superb vertical rolls." His innocent transmission seemed to have triggered a chain reaction. The rest of the story was narrated to me by Wg Cdr Hakimullah, which shell-shocked me at the reprehensible behaviour of the pilots and I hoped none from No 33 Wing were involved.

Before I narrate the ugly incident, I want to recall how the Air Chief confronted me that day. I was monitoring the recovery of the aircraft from the ATC since it was a massive recovery and landing. As soon as the last section had landed, I went back to my office and was about to ask Hakimullah to come over and de-brief me, when the ATC informed me on the intercom that the CAS

had also landed at Sargodha. I was surprised to hear that, because the drill was for the Mirage pilots to fly the Mirages to Peshawar and after the Air Chief landed back at

Peshawar, the pilot would bring the Mirage back. So something was not right. I decided to wait for a few minutes till the CAS had left the base, if that was his intention. Suddenly, I saw a car with the CAS's flag pull-up in front of my office, with the Base Commander following. I moved out of my chair and decided to leave my hat behind, a naughty thing to do. The CAS

climbed up the steps to my office with Gulli Haider (God bless his soul) in the tow, stormed into my office and before I could say good afternoon, he came at me like a banshee, "OK, Nosy (not affectionately as friends called me for my proboscis, but in a demeaning tone), supposing you tell me what was that disgraceful behaviour in the air".

I was in my full flying regalia and he took it that I was flying in the fly-past.

This was the third time in my career that he had confronted me for a wrong cause and I told him so on his face, "Sir, this is the third time in my service under your command that you have presumed that I was flying. I was not flying and you should know that I do not understand what you are talking about."

Instead of asking me, he looked at my Base Commander and asked, "Ghulam Haider was he not flying?" He replied in the negative, confirming I was monitoring the No 33 Wing aircraft flying from the ATC. He turned to me, looking strangely pallid with his eyes sparking.

He asked me sternly, "Why weren't you flying"? I answered, "Sir, it is my prerogative and choice when to fly; today I was simulating that should my aircraft go unserviceable after take-off, Hakimullah should lead the No 33

Wing.” He looked shattered upon discovering that I was not in the air. He almost hissed at me and said, “Find these cowards who are a disgrace to the PAF after the way they misbehaved on the radio.” I snapped back and said, “Sir, there are three bases taking part in this exercise, why are you suspecting the 33 Wing for the misbehaviour about which I am ignorant so far”? He said, “You had better get these names to me within 24 hours, that’s all.” He stomped out of my office and I was too dazed to even go to his car and see him off. The two cars drove away swiftly and I went straight to No 5 Squadron and asked Hakimullah what had happened in the air.

He said there were disgraceful radio cat-calls and abuses hurled at the CAS

just because Gp Capt Arshad had called and said excellent timing and perfect vertical roll. After that the radio indiscipline continued till the CAS called to say, “Shut up, you idiots, otherwise I’ll shoot you down”. This really caused the pent-up volcano of frustration to erupt into an ugly blast of expletives directed at the highest authority in the PAF. Now that’s the way almost everyone described this ugly incident but I could not figure out why the Air Chief had taken the bait.

Why could he not discern the distress of the tactical force seeking expression with such profanity? He should have kept his cool at the very start and it would not have snow balled. All of us commanders would have identified the culprits in the fullness of time. But in the event that there were too many participants in the reprehensible episode, the Air Chief should have considered the option to resign and save the service, since the large numbers involved signalled the loss of confidence of the fighting force in their new Chief of Air Staff. But that was not the wont of Air

Marshal Zafar Chaudhry, he could never be wrong. I was told that after the Chief's enraged retort to the initial call, the transmissions by the culprits had become vulgarly abusive.

I asked the three Squadron Commanders if they could recognize any of the voices, even though these were cat-calls. They replied in the negative. I told them to try and speak with their pilots and tell them that such conduct was tantamount to cowardice and if they came up and admitted their tomfoolery, it would be an act of admirable courage. Later on, I met the Base Commander and told him that it was not fair for the CAS to attack me in the manner he had, and said that he should have defended me as a commander. He was not amused at my comments and told me to simmer down, because CAS's angst was justified, even though I had nothing to do with it. He suggested that I try to investigate by talking to the pilots and identifying if there were any miscreants from this wing.

I told him that I would get on it the first thing the next morning. One could sense a gloom permeating all over the air force after the fly-past was over. There was a transformation in the attitude of the PAF leadership and their campaign to target pilots considered renegades became vicious, with me in the eye of the storm.

It was most unfortunate, because Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry had not even settled in, when this shocking episode took place. This reaction of the fighter pilots in reality was the manifestation of their disillusionment in the PAF soon after Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry took over. Senior commanders, who enjoyed the respect and confidence of pilots for leading from the front, had been placed in the target sights of the PAF hierarchy. The resulting explosion was looked upon as a conspiracy against the CAS.

I came to know about it from the top level defence intelligence agency in June 1973. A spectre of terror was unleashed through the intelligence agencies under a servile and frail minded Director of Intelligence, who was thrilled to be serving the CAS in the 'self destruction plan'. Indisputably, it was the worst witch-hunt in PAF's history. When all hell seemed to be breaking loose, the Air Chief played a desperate card which was caught in mid air as it were, by the sombre advice of Air Cdre Zulfiqar who had been appointed Base Commander Sargodha. The Air Chief decided to wire-tape fighter aircraft at Sargodha and Peshawar, excluding PAF Masroor for some inexplicable reason. He also hired a speech analyst to snare the culprits of the fly-past fiasco. To top it all, Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry asked Air Cdre Khaqan Abbasi to return to AHQ as ACAS

(Ops) after he had sorted out the PIA and left it battered.³

I have not been able to ascertain the precise dates of the movements of senior air staff but Air Cdre (promoted as Air Vice Mshl) Saeedullah had already joined earlier and was appointed as the Vice Chief. When Air Cdre Khaqan Abbasi landed, the stage was set for operation 'Get the dissidents'. The AHQ priorities were totally contorted and confused. As mentioned above, the CAS had ordered that all fighter and training aircraft be fitted with tape recorders; allegedly, a ventriloquist was hired from England, who was to interpret the recordings of the fly-past rehearsal and with the tape-recordings from the aircraft tapes, identify those involved in the cat-calls mischief. It would be pertinent to mention that the entire episode of radio transmissions during the fly-past rehearsal day had been recorded by Chaklala ATC as per routine.

Incidentally, the transcripts were gotten hold of by the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) and shown to President ZAB.

In two recent interviews with an old honest soul, Wg Cdr MS Khan, a well regarded and professionally respected signals officer, I was told about some provocative activities that took place at AHQ after the fly-past incident. He told me that a team had been constituted to investigate the ugly radio indiscipline and if necessary, to interrogate the suspects. MS Khan was given the project to install 40 tape recorders mostly in Sargodha based fighters and the work was to be top secret, so that the pilots were not conscious of the tape installation.

However, according to MS Khan he had only installed four tapes when Air Cdre Zulfiqar (Air Cdre Zulfiqar had replaced Gulli Haider as Base Commander immediately after the fly-past) prevailed upon the Air Chief not to proceed with this controversial project, promising him that he would find out if any officers from Sargodha were involved in the incident.

3 *Looking Back, by Brig Mian Hameed-ud-Din, Page 232.*

Zulfiqar was successful in his undertaking owing to the respect and confidence he enjoyed. Wg Cdr Sibtain was a highly controversial person from the electronic intelligence directorate and joined the inner circle of the Air Chief for his expertise in snooping and eavesdropping. MS Khan said that he was not invited to most of the secret meetings between the CAS and Sibtain. However, during one meeting MS recalled that Sibtain was asked about the progress of his investigations in his presence. Sibtain had replied that he would soon nab the culprits. He was to play a much bigger role in the future as the electronic spy master and the lynchpin in the new crusade of witch-hunting by the PAF leadership.

15

BEGINNING OF THE END

After two weeks of eerie disquiet, one fine morning I got the news that Air Cdre (later Air Chief Marshal) Zulfiqar Ali Khan had been appointed Base Commander Sargodha. This was a cause for celebration. Not because Air Cdre Gulli Haider was posted out, but because Zulfiqar was one of the most outstanding commanders in the PAF; the proverbial officer and a gentleman. I received a call from him the same evening and he jokingly told me to put on my best behaviour as he was coming to Sargodha soon. A few days later, Air Cdre Zulfiqar asked me if I would pick him up from Lahore in the communication aircraft based at Sargodha. The next morning, I took permission from Ghulam Haider and picked up Air Cdre and Begum Zulfiqar from Lahore.

Air Cdre Zulfiqar's arrival brought about a serene and tranquil atmosphere in Sargodha which had been crackling with tension until then. Mutual confidence between the personnel and the commander was revived almost instantly. One spectacular demonstration of the level of confidence and respect he enjoyed, was the response to his address given to the pilots of No 33 Wing at my request with reference to the radio indiscipline by pilots during the fly-past rehearsal in the previous month. He told them that fighter pilots were the hope of this nation and a symbol of pride. The behaviour reported to him was not commensurate with the dignity of their profession. He told them that he expected the officers to accept their mistake and that he would ensure that disciplinary action would be left to him and not to AHQ.

Three pilots raised their hands in an amazing expression of the impact of simple words uttered by the Base Commander. For me, it was a defining moment because I witnessed poor behaviour transformed into courage. This was to me, the proverbial quality of leadership. Air Cdre Zulfiqar kept his word and took summary action against those who had come out in the open. However, they also said that they had not indulged in any verbal expletives, but had merely whistled and chirped. This meant that a lot more pilots from other bases were involved in this ugly episode. Nonetheless, the entire matter when seen critically meant a storm building up in the PAF and the thunder could be heard.

The ominous indicators were pointing at an explosion sooner or later.

I was told by a highly placed general who was extremely concerned about the malcontent in the PAF that the Chief of Air Staff had been confronted by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (ZAB) after he had seen the transcripts of the tape recorded at the Chaklala base Air Traffic Control. ZAB had warned the Air Chief of the thunder in the PAF and had opined that Zafar Chaudhry may well have lost the confidence of those under his command in a short period. To this warning and the fact that it had been brought to the notice of the Prime minister, Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry was said to have assured ZA Bhutto that he had not brought the incident to his attention because there were just a handful of miscreants who had committed the act of indiscipline and that he was going to bring them to book soon. Undoubtedly, the CAS was on the back foot and owing to his insecurity, became more vindictive and brutal to nail down his detractors and critics.

The entire energies of the air staff were being wasted on who was saying what about him and his air officers and the

chief snoops were ready and obliging, getting the Air Chief even more riled up. The PAF's operational plans and other critical areas that needed urgent attention as a consequence of the war and the loss of Bengali personnel were put on the back burner. Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry instead, gathered Khaqan Abbasi and Saeedullah around him to tackle the situation. A servile non-entity, Air Cdre Waheed Mufti as the Director of Air Intelligence completed the deck. Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry made flawed decisions because his ego got the better of him. The command of the service took a back seat and vendetta became his top priority. Resultantly, he made the fatal decision to have his team begin a witch hunt as their primary objective to identify the dissenters and crucify them.

In the days ahead, there was a fire power demonstration to be carried out at Jamrud range in December 1972, for the new head of state ZAB and his state guest, the President of the UAE (ZAB was scheduled to visit Sargodha and address all the personnel and have lunch at our Mess). On instructions from the Base Commander, I organized three Squadrons for the demonstration; a formation aerobatics team of 4 F-6s; 4 Mirages to carry out dive bombing and a single Mirage for solo low-level aerobatics. I decided to take the last item and started practice immediately. On the 3rd day after I landed, I saw the Base Commander's car approaching my aircraft. As I climbed down the ladder and greeted him, I was surprised to see my young son Adnan accompanying him.

Zulfiqar said, "Well young man, that was an impressive show but I would prefer if you led the formation aerobatics team because of its complexity and your vast experience in formation aerobatics." I was slightly disappointed but with 'Agha'

Zulfiqar (as I called him), I would never take cudgels. I asked my son to get into my car but Agha Zulfiqar told him to stay with him. Even at that young age, Adnan knew his preferences and happily went along with him on a ride of the airfield and gave me a detailed account of his joy ride.

I asked Hakimullah to assign one of his best jockeys for the solo aerobatics.

His obvious choice was Flt Lt Arif Manzoor who was an exceptional fighter pilot. Much to everyone's chagrin the Chief of Air Staff, Zafar Chaudhry told Air Cdre Zulfiqar that he (the Air Chief) would be performing the solo aerobatics. This caused disappointment in No 33 Wing and yet another reason to cause uncalled for provocation. Anyhow, we went ahead with our preparations.

ZAB at Sargodha - Fate Conspires

The Air Chief took the solo aerobatics on the Mirage for himself, depriving Arif Manzoor who had looked forward to this day. For a Chief to steal the lime light from a young pilot, just to make points with ZAB, did not go well with any of the young participants. He was able to satisfy his ego by doing some manoeuvres on the horizon, because the cloud base was not conducive for looping manoeuvres. That took the steam out of an aerobatics display, especially formation aerobatics, where four people are within a couple of feet from each other in intricate manoeuvres. The Mirages managed to do the bombing by modifying their profile and the F-6s from Rafiqui also did an impressive display of their marksmanship in strafing attacks.

By the time my formation got into their cockpits, it was drizzling and threatening to get worse. Anyhow, I started up and asked the tower about the cloud base over Jamrud

range. It was not at all a happy situation, because most of our manoeuvres were in the vertical plane. I told the ATC to get a message to the display control that formation aerobatics would be meaningless in the prevailing weather. The CAS called on the radio and asked that we take-off. By the time we were on the runway the airfield was declared below minimum weather conditions for take-off and our mission had to be aborted. An hour later the weather had improved enough for the President's Falcon to take-off. I, along with another Mirage pilot, hurriedly took-off before the Falcon and landed at Sargodha before it arrived.

It would be relevant to mention the seating plan for the President's lunch.

Although a little out of place here, it has a vital bearing on the attending events.

The Base Commander had called me a few days before the display and looking red in the face, shoved a paper across his table, saying "Can you imagine that the seating plan for the President's lunch after the Fire Power Demonstration has to come from AHQ. This is utter nonsense! I am the Base Commander here and it should be my prerogative to figure out how to host the event." Still furious, he asked if I had noticed that my name did not appear on the seating plan.

The President arrived and addressed the base personnel. He was extremely eloquent about what was expected of the PAF. His resounding speech made a profound impact on all of us. After the event, he drove off to the Officers' Mess and we followed in our cars. The President was accompanied by Hafeez Pirzada and Mustafa Khar, both his close associates and well known to me. In the mess ante-room, the President was surrounded by young fighter pilots, who were in awe of the man. Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry, Air Vice Mshl Saeedullah,

Air Cdre Khaqan Abbasi and Air Cdre Zulfiqar were flanking the President. I was standing with Hafeez Pirzada and Mustafa Khar. At that moment, the Chief of the Air Staff informed the President that lunch was ready. Slowly ZAB started moving towards the dining hall, which was a distance away and as he came directly in front of us, he turned his head possibly towards Pirzada or Khar and spotted me between the two. He stopped suddenly and beckoning me towards him, said with great affection, "Hyder (he pronounced my name as Hy-der), how are you"? I said, "Sir, I am very fine," with a glitter in my eyes that he had remembered me. "What are you doing here in Sargodha; I see a lot of stripes on your sleeve," he asked. I answered, "Sir, I am the Officer Commanding of the Fighter Wing." He asked me if I was flying in the display. I explained to him the unfortunate situation that had developed owing to the weather. He then asked me, "Do you recall the last time we met it was on my birthday and yours too.

Why haven't you come to see me"? I mumbled something about him being busy with affairs of the state and did not consider it prudent to disturb him. He said, "No, you must come sometime."

All this was heard by the pilots surrounding him, to the delight of Air Cdre Zulfiqar and to the chagrin of the Air Chief standing near him. He then turned around and walked on followed by the CAS and VCAS as well as our Base Commander. He stopped again as he saw a couple of his party men from the Sargodha area, one I knew to be a lawyer by the name of Cheema. As Mustafa and Pirzada moved behind ZAB, they said, "Let's go Haider." I told them, "I am not invited. It's only the top level who will be breaking bread with you". They were quite surprised at my reply but walked away. While the President was talking with the politicians, I saw Air Cdre Zulfiqar rushing towards me. As he

came near me he said, "Come on Haider, the CAS has told me that you should join us at lunch." For the first time since I had known Zulfiqar Ali Khan, I rebelled and said, "Sir, I am not given to after thoughts, I may be allowed to stay back." He said, "Sajad this is not a time for arguing, it is an opportunity you should not miss, now come along, let's go." He caught me by my wrist and I followed him obediently, to avoid a scene as the young pilots were watching.

The visit was soon over and we were back to work but I was still in the eye of the storm. Presumably, there was a post-mortem of the President's demonstration of familiarity with me during the lunch at the Mess in Sargodha. They felt checkmated and decided to go for plan-B as I called it, and I soon found myself being hunted. From June 1972 onwards, the following events took place. The words scripted below came from a man of unimpeachable integrity, Air Cdre Zulfiqar, the Base Commander. The other incidents were my personal experience.

Machinations against Me

The Base Commander had gone to attend the monthly operational preparedness meeting. He narrated his experience to me when he returned. He said that after the meeting he was walking towards the Air Secretary's office when he met Air Vice Mshl Saeedullah Khan in the CAS office block.

Saeedullah beckoned Zulfiqar and chatted about Sargodha in general. As Zulfiqar asked his leave, Saeedullah said, "By the way Zulfi, how is that bastard behaving?" Zulfiqar was not used to such insolence and asked him to whom was he referring. "Nosy Haider, of course, he needs to be reigned in." This was the second time Saeedullah had used the expletive against me, totally uncalled for and unprovoked.

Air Mshl Rahim Khan, while still the C-in-C had instituted a new tradition of presenting Squadron Colours to units which had performed exceptionally well in war. No 19 and No 5 Squadrons were the first to be presented these colours - No 19 Squadron for its unmatched performance during attack on the Indian columns at Wagha and the devastating strike against Pathankot airfield during the 1965

War, and No 5 for its role in Chhamb and air defence of Sargodha during the 1965

War. As OC Flying Wing I received the colour in an impressive ceremony, which was attended by Air Vice Mshl Saeedullah Khan instead. The event was widely covered by all the important newspapers.

One day, I received a letter directly addressed to me by the CAS, Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry. It had my photo attached to the letter in which I was photographed while receiving the Squadron Colours. In his letter, instead of endearments or a well-done, the CAS admonished me for supporting a hair-cut unbecoming of a commander. Some other equally ridiculous lines were written just to put me down. I could not believe that a service Chief would address an OC Flying Wing about his choice of hair-cut! I showed the letter to the Base Commander, who did not consider it worthy of any comment, except, "Well Sajad, there you are, watch out for your neck!"

A few days later, the PSO to the CAS Wg Cdr Kamal, who had served under me in No 11 Squadron in its formative years, arrived at my office to say hello and to catch-up with our past association. I smelt a rat and gave him my full attention, waiting for him to end his hyperbole. I went on the offensive and asked him if he knew about the letter that had come from the Chief's Secretariat.

He feigned ignorance and asked me “Which letter”? I pulled the letter from my drawer and putting it in front of him asked if his boss had nothing important to do than to address letters castigating an officer not serving directly under him.

He pretended to read it as though for the first time, which was a joke because nothing from the CAS went anywhere without the (Personal Staff Officer) PSO’s knowledge. He looked at me smilingly and said, “Well sir, the CAS gets irritated with appearance and uniform discipline.” Not wanting to prolong his visit, I picked up the letter, folded it and tore it into pieces. Throwing it in my waste paper basket while looking straight in his eyes, I said, “Kamal, we go a long way back, but this is crass pettiness and you can tell your Chief not to expect a response of remorse or apology. It would be best to re-address it to the Base Commander.” He looked somewhat apologetic but his clever mind must have been revving at very high RPM. Reporting my insubordination would be another feather in his hat full of many precious feathers.

Some days later, I had gone for sports in the evening and from there, I drove-off to the ADA hut to chat with the Mirage pilots, who manned the ADA from dusk to dawn, when the next lot of F-6 pilots replaced them. After half an hour or so, I called my home to check on my son Adnan, since he was always alone without me. He told me, “Daddy, Uncle Zulfiqar is looking for you and wants you to see him at his residence.” I left immediately, wondering what was up next. As I entered the Base Commander’s residence, Agha Jee met me at the door. He looked very sombre and serious as he ushered me towards his drawing room. As I entered, I saw Begum Zulfiqar sitting in a sofa to the right with a tea trolley standing near her, as always with several knick-

knacks. Agha Jee asked me to sit down and if I would like a cup of tea. I said, "Thank you sir; is everything alright"?

Begum Zulfiqar answered my question and said, "No, for you nothing is going right." It was then that I noticed that her eyes were red. She then turned towards her husband and said, "Tell him what Khaqan said to you about him."

Presumably, Khaqan Abbasi had just visited them. I was perplexed as to why Khaqan Abbasi's visit would produce so much anguish in her. Soon enough I found out. I was told that Khaqan Abbasi especially flew into Sargodha to come and ask Zulfiqar as to why he was protecting me so strongly when the CAS did not approve of me¹. He had cautioned Zulfiqar that he was putting his own good image on the line with the CAS. Zulfiqar had told him that a special report to be written by a former Base Commander three months after he (Zulfiqar) had given Haider a good annual report stinks of intrigue against the OC Flying Wing, whom he considered a good officer and commander.

Begum Zulfiqar interrupted him and told Zulfiqar, "Tell him about the Staff College story and breaking Sajad's teeth." Zulfiqar was a bit agitated and pensive, obviously upset by the audacity of Khaqan's visit. Begum Zulfiqar again interjected saying Abbasi told Zulfi, "*Tusi barre bhole ho*(you are a simpleton), just raise a special report on this chap because the Air Chief wants him out of the PAF; we will knock Nosy Haider's teeth out anyway, so why do you want to lose your good stead with the Chief?" Zulfiqar had reminded Khaqan Abbasi, "Khaqan, was I a simpleton when I rescued you and your career at the Staff College, when I was an instructor and you had been blamed for plagiarism in an 'Exercise Solution?" Thereafter, Zulfiqar told me that they were closing-in on me with all guns firing, but did not suggest what I should do to get out of their line of fire.

1The matter pertained to the annual report which I had been asked to submit to AHQ for reassessment by my previous commander Air Cdre Haider but Zulfiqar had intervened and stopped it.

After Air Mshl Rahim Khan's departure, the paradigms of conduct by the officers at the summit had changed within months. The new leadership had a different agenda to pursue and the inner circle comprised the Air Chief (CAS), his Vice Chief (VCAS Saeedullah Khan), ACAS-O (Khaqan Abbasi) and the Director of Air Intelligence, Mufti. Another one in the inner circle was the Air Secretary Gp Capt Aslam, reputed to be amongst the favourites. He was basically a decent fellow, but his survival as a medically de-categorised pilot depended upon his unremitting loyalty to the Air Chief in carrying out the hatchet jobs he was tasked with. Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry suffered a major delusion – he believed that since he was chosen by ZAB, he was invincible. As he went higher in rank, it was clear to many that he always held in contempt the aggressive, strong willed and confident pilots whose self-esteem was more important than making a good impression on seniors and looking for choice postings and promotions. Yet, owing to his split personality Zafar Chaudhry's demeanour outside the service with civilians, especially with powerful bureaucrats, was extraordinarily polite and charming. People outside the PAF

could never believe that Zafar Chaudhry was capable of being vicious to his contemporaries and particularly those under his command who did not fall in line with his perceived specifications of a gentleman officer.

Air Mshl Rahim Khan, in his typical good heartedness had sent these three, Zafar Chaudhry, Saeedullah and Khaqan Abbasi and some others to Jordan and the PIA, to stave-off intrigues within the PAF. He could have retired them and rid the PAF of lurking danger. The problems for this team started from the beginning due to their inherent prejudice

against the decorated fighter and bomber pilots who had performed well during the 1965 War.

Predictably, the next missile fired at me came in the shape of instructions from AHQ ordering Air Cdre Zulfiqar to raise a special report on me. Evidently, Khaqan Abbasi, after his visit to Air Cdre Zulfiqar at Sargodhahad connived and convinced the CAS that Zulfiqar instead of Ghulam Haider should be asked to raise a special report on me. Air Cdre Zulfiqar did as asked, but it arrived with the effect of a cruise missile in answer to their ballistic missile. One day Zulfiqar called me to his office and spoke me, "Sajad, something new has come up and I feel it is my responsibility to make you aware of the developments about your future. If you don't agree with my perception of your endangered future and my recommended course of action then you are on your own from here on." His sombre tone had foreboding connotations, and I could sense his own turmoil.

He told me about the special report he had been asked to raise on me and said that he had written exactly how he had judged my performance during these few months and if he had found me failing, he would have said so, without any hesitation. "Therefore, the report that I have written is going to defuse their plans to go for you in any professional context. So, as a consequence of my report, they can do nothing to you, if they accept it as I have written, but that is not likely to happen, since it would be received with attending rant and rave. I do not know what they will do next," he warned. "You are up against a mountain and hitting your head against it is not going to hurt the mountain, but you will be in dire straits until the day the hammer will come down on you. My considered advice to you would be to get out unscathed and I will try and get a normal retirement for you."

I became emotionally charged and asked him what was my crime? If I had committed none, which was the case, why should I whimper out from the service to which I had given my life and soul and proven my worth? I said respectfully to Air Cdre Zulfiqar that I had fought bigger battles and was ready to take on the mountain head-on. He looked at me ruefully and said, "If you had done some thing wrong, it would be I who would take action, but that is not the issue with the CAS, he just wants you out of the PAF. In my judgment taking them (the high command) on would be suicidal, but it's your life and certainly your prerogative, I can only give my best advice."

An Endless Witch Hunt

With all the machinations and witch-hunting, my only catharsis was to keep flying in the day and have four Scotches in the evening instead of the usual two or three. No more than a week after the encounter I was summoned by the Base Commander in the morning just as I was stepping out towards No 5 Squadron for a Mirage sortie. I asked the Base Commander's PA if I could come after the mission, he quipped back saying, "No sir, it is urgent and you have to see him immediately." By this time I had become immune to unsavoury news but despite that mindset I felt anxious about what was in store for me this time. I entered and saluted the Base Commander. Without uttering a word he picked up a long signal message from his tray and pushed it across asking me to see the good news. It was a postings signal with a score of innocuous postings of junior officers and some senior till I came upon the name Air Cdre Zulfiqar Ali Khan, posted as Commandant of PAF Academy, Risalpur.

I was stunned with the realization that he had been posted out after a mere 8

months stint in Sargodha; and to top it my batch mate Jamal A Khan had been posted in his place. What the hell is going on here was the question in my mind as I looked up at him with sheer agony, feeling responsible for this unjust decision by Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry. Zulfiqar pursed his lips typically when he was angry and told me to keep reading as there were more surprises imbedded in the long and harmless looking signal. As I browsed down, I saw my name and I may well have been posted to hell directly: Gp Capt Sajad Haider posted as Director Flight Safety (under ACAS-Ops, Khaqan Abbasi), to replace Gp Capt Khurshid Mirza, who, wonder of wonders, was posted as Director of Plans (never having flown a fighter or bomber in war and with only a brief command of a fighter squadron). I looked up with a huge question mark on my face. That is when Zulfiqar told me some harsh truths.

Zulfiqar told me that it was time I knew some harsh facts which he had not revealed earlier because he could shield me from unfair bashing. I was appalled when he told me that for some months the CAS had instructed him that I was not to be allowed to leave Sargodha on leave or weekends. This meant that I was placed under virtual base arrest by AHQ. The reason he gave to Zulfiqar was that it had been reported to him that I was involved in a brawl at the Rawalpindi Intercontinental Hotel's club and that I had thrown a plate at some person. This was absolutely incorrect, because the Base Commander checked to see when I had last visited Rawalpindi. I had only been to Rawalpindi once in the morning to drop-off my wife when we had decided to part company. These were the only few hours I had spent leaving my wife at Col Ismail Khan's residence before flying the small communication aircraft back the same afternoon. Before that my last trip to Command Operations Centre had been during the war. That

too because I had been asked by the C-in-C to meet the IAF POWs held at the PAF

recruiting centre on the Mall. Since then, I had no interest or reason to go to Rawalpindi as I did not have any friends or relatives there. Such were the incredible lies told by the Air Chief and his team.

Air Cdre Zulfiqar also told me, to my utter surprise, that I had been under surveillance by the Field Intelligence Unit (FIU) around the clock ever since the changes at the PAF's top command (much later Zulfiqar told me that both of us had been under surveillance and our telephones tapped). I was appalled to hear this but refrained from further discussion on the senseless behaviour of such senior level officers. He once again offered that he would get me an early retirement if I agreed with his suggestion to avoid a bigger catastrophe which he felt certain was on the anvil.

For the second time in a week I replied, "Sir, I have served my country and the PAF with total commitment, dedication and pride. I have many faults and weaknesses like any human being and will never claim to be a pure and wholly innocent creature. But as far as my conduct as an officer and commander is concerned I have done nothing wrong; I have not embarrassed my service by irresponsible acts or moral turpitude. Sir, they are accusing me of being a 'renegade Haider' without an iota of evidence of wrong doing on my part except to contort stories and twist them. Please ask them to charge me with the smallest misconduct and if I am found guilty, then they can punish me. Their frustration stems from the fact they have nothing against me. Sir, I am not going to be bullied by them and I will take them head-on."

Once again he listened to me with a pained expression, because he was imagining the worst for me. At the end of my passionate plea, I requested the Base Commander to give me a few days off, because I wanted to consult my father and seek his guidance, while I fully appreciated and respected his recommendation. He knew he had specific instructions not to let me leave Sargodha, which was a reprehensible and an illegal order. He told me to go ahead and take whatever time I needed, since the posting was to take effect a few weeks later. I told him that I would pack up my few belongings right away and move to Peshawar on time to enter the Coliseum and face the toothless lions. I told him that I would leave my contact with his PA.

I called my father at Quetta and spoke with him about my predicament and Zulfiqar's advice to take a retirement. He asked me if I had any misgivings about facing the threat. I replied in the negative and assured him that it was a consequence of sheer envy and vindictiveness. My father paused and said, "Then you must fight on and we will pray for your absolution from Allah even though you have not committed any grave indiscipline". His words were divinely guided and I felt a surge of energy which acted like a tranquilizer.

Akbar Bugti had visited my father a few days after my call and my father had narrated my desolation to Akbar Bugti, who was like a son to him. Akbar Bugti told him that Bhutto had been trying to meet him about the governorship/chief minister-ship of Baluchistan, which he was not inclined to accept as he did not trust ZAB but added that he knew that he would get to meet him sooner or later.

He assured my father that this would be the first issue he would discuss with him when they met.

Meanwhile, I asked Zulfiqar Ali Khan for a weeks leave to go to Karachi and meet my friend Ali Afridi for some catharsis from all the tension obtaining in the work environment and also to consult with him on my future course of action. On the last day of my leave I was contacted by my office from Sargodha, and informed that I had been invited to a dinner for the President of Pakistan at the Punjab Governor House two days later. I cannot recall the date, but the news came as a wisp of fresh breeze in the sultry atmosphere. That same day, the news spread like wild fire that Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti had accepted the Governorship of Baluchistan. Ali thought this was Divine intervention and helped me get a seat on PIA to Lahore the same afternoon. We tried to connect the events and felt that Akbar Bugti might have spoken to ZAB as he had promised. That turned out to be true.

As soon as I reached Lahore I called my father to inform him about the invitation to the Governor House. He said that this was a good portent and I should call Akbar Bugti and thank him and that he also wanted to speak with him about his recent appointment. I contacted Akbar Bugti the next morning after his residence gave me the telephone number at Governor House, Quetta. He was in the conference room at that time and his staff officer took my telephone number and said that they would connect me as soon as he got back to his office. Within an hour, I got a call from the Baluchistan Governor House. Akbar Bugti told me he had already mentioned to my father that morning that the first thing he discussed with ZAB was my situation, to which ZAB told him that he knew me (pronouncing my name as Hy-der) and in fact had met me at Sargodha not so long ago, and that I should have spoken to him about the problems at that time. Akbar Bugti said that ZAB had assured him that he would take up the matter with the Air Chief very soon.

By the time I arrived at the Punjab Governor House, I was oozing with confidence, hoping that the storm may well recede with Akbar Bugti's intervention, especially because I had done no wrong and was being witch hunted for no rhyme or reason. There was a lot of brass and top elite in the big Durbar Hall as I entered the Governor House congregation venue. The first person I recognized as he walked towards me was Rafi Raza, one of ZAB's most trusted protégés who was well known to me. He took me by the arm and steered me away from the gentry present in the Durbar Hall and told me, "Hey Nosy, your problems are going to be over; the boss (ZAB) sent for the Air Chief this afternoon and gave him something to think about; he will lay-off you and stop harassing you". I suggested to Rafi Raza that the best solution would be to send me on a posting abroad for few years so that I could stay out of the Air Chief's gun sight. Rafi told me that I should not worry, a solution would be found for me soon even though the Air Chief was very distraught when the Boss asked him why he had not carried out the instructions of Mr Aziz Ahmed, Minister of State for Defence, when he was told to post you away from AHQ in a suitable command position. He said that the "Air Chief tried to belly ache about his authority being undermined by the interference of MOD, but he was told to post you out to an appropriate post".

Words cannot describe my sense of relief at hearing this, but not without a lingering feeling that as long as I was within shooting distance of the Air Chief it was not going to be fun. As we stood talking, Mustafa Khar, Governor at that time, also entered the hall and made a bee-line for Rafi Raza where we were standing. As he came close, he addressed me and said, "*Bhai, aap ki mushkil khatam ho jaye gi, big boss ne Zafar Chaudhry ko sakhti se mana kia hai ke aap ko tung na karey, laikin baat filhal apne paas hi rakhye, Rafi Raza aur mein bhi wahan moujood thay* (Your problems are

over but keep it to yourself that the big boss has sternly told Zafar Chaudhry, in the presence of Rafi Raza and me, to stop harassing you)". This was a double whammy as far as my state of mind was concerned, yet the lurking thought of going back to AHQ was even more chilling. The real bonanza came when ZAB made his entrance. He had walked to the middle of the hall and was instantly surrounded by the guests. About 10 minutes later, he spotted me in the far corner and called out loudly, "Hy-der, come here". I briskly walked towards him and greeted him in the military convention. He said, "Hy-der, Akbar Bugti spoke to me about your problem. Why didn't you tell me about the goings-on? I especially asked you at Sargodha to come and see me." And then he said something that remains wedged in the recesses of my mind. He lifted his right arm up, and pointing at me he said "Hyder, as long as I'm the President of Pakistan, nobody can raise a finger at you; and yes, I have spoken to your Air Chief. You should go back and don't worry; no harm will be allowed to come to you".

Amongst the ladies surrounding the President, one I suspected, might have been the wife of the Intelligence Chief, Mufti. Air Mshl Azim Daudpota², my colleague and a friend reminded me in October 2006 that he was standing right behind President Bhutto at that moment and remembered the incident exactly as narrated here. The news apparently travelled back at lightning speed.

A few minutes after this encounter, dinner was announced and every one moved to the dinner table and that is where I spotted Air Cdre Zulfiqar in the far corner; I dashed up to him and excitedly asked him if he knew what had happened. He was at a distance from where he could not witness ZAB's exhortation but could see him talking to me. He asked me what ZAB had said.

As everybody was moving towards the long buffet table, I quickly recounted what had happened. He jovially asked if I had seen the Director of Air Intelligence (DAI) amongst the guests. I said no, and asked, "Is he here, sir?" He replied in the affirmative and nodded towards the table and said there he was on the far end of the table. I could see the hunch backed figure of the DAI. I said, "Sir, for sure he knows what the President has said and must be suffering discomfiture and is restless to get back to report to his Chief, because now it occurs to me that the woman I noticed standing with ZAB when he addressed me was Mufti's wife". I thought to myself that even though the CAS had been instructed personally by ZAB, the fact that he had made it known to me publicly, would hit the PAF like a sledge hammer. Undoubtedly there would be a strong reaction. The Base Commander asked me to get back to Sargodha the next morning and meet him in his office.

2 In 2006, Omar Daudpota had an air force re-union for his father. During the evening, taking a trip down memory lane, AM Daudpota mentioned to me that he was standing right behind ZA Bhutto and heard every word he had uttered.

This incident characterized ZAB outside the labyrinth of politics. He must have had compassion for the underdog. A version of this episode is narrated by Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry in his book *Kuch Din Aur Saal Air Force Ke Sath*.

However, his version is pure fiction and belies the truth. Both Mustafa Khar and Rafi Raza are still around and living testimony to the real event. In his book Zafar Chaudhry's narrative about meeting Bhutto at the Governor House and the story about being told by Aziz Ahmed to post a particular officer out from AHQ was this author.³

I really could not eat as I had lost my appetite in the excitement of the sensational happenings that evening. The protocol demanded that all the guests must remain until

ZAB and the Governor had left the Durbar Hall. I drove back to Sargodha early the next morning, and arrived at the Base Commander's office at 1000 Hrs. He was not present in the office when I arrived and his PA asked me to take a seat because the Base Commander had gone for flying but should be back any minute. I told him that I would go back to my office and that he should call me as soon as the Base Commander was back, unless I met him in 33

Wing. After half an hour I got a call from the PA, who said that the Base Commander wanted me in his office right away. I drove to his office immediately, entered and saluted him. He had his usual smile, "So young man, you think you've won the battle?"

"I am not too sure", I told him and expressed my apprehension about my future at AHQ. He said philosophically, "You have only won a battle, but you have to be prepared for the war; don't let your guard down even for a minute because now they will definitely go all out to manipulate a situation and chase you like a wounded predator". I left his office wondering what fate had in store for me, but my faith in Divine justice was strong and intact. I still had some days to report to my new posting, so I busied myself flying as much as I could, fearing the worst that this may be my last chance to be on active flying. At the end of January, the Wing gave me a farewell and presented me with a very nice silver box. I made a passionate farewell speech and advised every one present that there are good times and not such good times. This was a time of greater test for them than any war. I suggested they stand fast and concentrate only on their profession and keep their personal lives happy and peaceful. Nothing is permanent in life except change and that is nature's way of putting us mortals through trials and tribulations. I said a sad goodbye to Sargodha, where I had fought the war and lived a full,

enjoyable life until the Sword of Damocles hung over my head.

I arrived at Peshawar in February 1973 and stayed in the Officers' Mess before finding residence in University Town. The objective of living so far away from the AHQ was to keep as far away from the DAI, Mufti, and his sleuths, who in any case would be hounding me, but at least they would have to travel a long way and be conspicuous on the deserted roads of University Town. I spent some days trying to grasp the requirements of staff work with the help of Wg Cdr NA Khan, an outstanding officer and a gentleman, along with the technical officers posted in the directorate. I told NA Khan that we must change the paradigms of flight safety concepts and make it a meaningful exercise. I thought for hours about how to effect changes, because Flight Safety Directorate had become a mere statistical entity, only visible during the inter-base flight safety reviews. It suddenly caught my attention that the manner in which an accident was investigated by the Accident Investigation Board (AIB) was intimidating.

The defect that I discerned was that an accident was probed with the primary focus of apportioning blame to the pilot. This had created a lurking fear in the minds of pilots to an extent that when the aircraft developed a serious malfunction in the air and an instant decision had to be made as to the handling of the emergency, the pilot's mind was invaded by the fear of the AIB. I decided to make a resolute effort to bring about a change in the psyche of the pilots. It was a major task and would need a policy change at the highest level.

3 *Kutch Din Aur Saal Air Force Ke Sathby Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry.*

I sent up the final draft to the ACAS (Ops) Khaqan Abbasi and had also marked the file for the CAS, with detailed comments about pilots suffering anxiety of investigation and the inevitable blame instead of handling the emergency to their best ability. I had recommended that the Directorate of Flight Safety be allowed to check on selective accident inquiries to carry out a study of how to restore the confidence of pilots in the AIB. Happily, when the file came back, I noticed that the ACAS (Ops) had made no remarks, except "Seen" and initialled it. But it was a pleasant surprise to see comments in green ink in the margin by the CAS; these were encouraging remarks, as well as the approval for the accident investigation synopsis and the suggestion for including an Urdu version in the pamphlet. I had drawn the attention of my superiors to one of the articles written by me, which focused on "Pilot's psyche in an emergency and the role of the AIB". I asked NA Khan to make a summary of all incidents and accidents, in which the onus of blame had been placed on the pilot in the last six months.

When a pilot was blamed for an accident, it made a damaging impact on his career as well as depriving him of his Green Endorsement, which was a kind of reward from the

C-in-C/CAS for flying every 500 accident-free hours. I had the proud privilege of having 5 Green endorsements and the 6th one was on the way. Also during my command of No 19 Squadron as well as No 33 Wing, we had virtually accident free years. We won the Flight Safety Trophy during my command. Much more than all this, during the 1965 War, we had flown 571

operational missions without the loss of a pilot or an aircraft. This was the only squadron that had such a unique distinction. Consequently, I had practically lived with the

widest spectrum of flight safety and had developed a philosophy that a high grade mission accomplishment had to be planned with a finely tuned balance between operational mission optimization and flight safety, without comprising either aspect.

One fine morning, sometime after my arrival, I was asked by the Personal Staff Officer (PSO) to the Chief of Air Staff (CAS) to come to his office at 1300

Hrs. Every body knew that Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry had gone through a painful operation for the removal of his piles, so I wondered if he was already in the office so soon after the episode. Sure he was there but not in the chair behind his desk.

Instead, I saw him in a chair reclining almost 30 degrees from the horizontal with a wheeled briefing stand across his chair, with some papers on it. He started by saying (words to the effect, considering the time elapsed), "Haider, you have a good record as a fighter pilot and there should be no reason why you should not occupy that chair (pointing at his desk and meaning his chair). However, there are things that you ought to know that need to be rectified if you want to make a career of the air force. Your idiosyncrasies and your lifestyle are incompatible with the service traditions of sobriety and decorum. There should be no need for an officer of your rank and status to seek redress through political channels. The service provides with a clear prerogative to address your grievances to your superiors and you can raise the level right to the highest authority, if you are not redressed".

At this moment, I knew I had never faced such hypocrisy before. He went on with his admonishing pep-talk for long enough that his mouthwent dry and he had to take sips of

water several times from the glass in front of him. At that moment, I almost felt empathy for him as a Chief, dealing with a non-entity Group Captain and becoming dry in his mouth as he tried to run me down.

Clearly, he lacked conviction in what he was accusing me of, because all of it came at the behest of ACAS (Ops) Khaqan Abbasi from snoops working for or in tandem with the frail-minded Director of Intelligence. Special mention was deserved by the telecom snoop who was a debauch and pathologically corrupt person and had been assigned to monitor all the perceived detractors of the Air Chief and Khaqan Abbasi.

The Air Chief's thrust was about my social behaviour and his main attack was about me having too many civilian friends and that my interaction with these friends was more than with my PAF colleagues. He also censured me for my influence on the young pilots and too much freedom and laxity on discipline of those under my command. Also my manner of dressing and fondness for haute-couture was un-service like. His most serious complaint came from what he described as my over confidence and arrogance, especially when dealing with the senior officers. My mind was churning like a turbine wheel at 100% power and was trying to decide whether to respond and how to respond when he finished. It seemed like an eternity as he went on and on listing my failings and the reports he had been receiving for years. Finally, when his invective ended, he asked me looking some what tired "Do you have anything to say"?

First I thought of saying nothing but that would not be me, pussy footing out.

My riposte was short and crisp, "Sir, it is strange to hear that my grievances could be redressed through the proper

channels. You should know that all escape routes have been shut for me. Air Cdre Ghulam Haider was pressurized by the VCAS to change his assessment given to me in my P-57 (Annual Confidential Report) in the end of January this year, prior to his posting to AHQ. He was censured severely for recommending me for the gallantry award of a second Sitara-e-Jurat. Surely, he being a simple Simon had little choice but to oblige. Then, it was the ACAS

(Ops) who tried to brow-beat my Base Commander to give me an adverse report.

Fortunately, Air Cdre Zulfiqar could not be coerced and I believe that the special report about me was against the AHQ's expectations. All these events have made me think which authority could I expect justice from when my VCAS refers to me as a bastard and ACAS (Ops) travels to Sargodha to intimidate my Base Commander into writing an adverse report on me and threatens to break my teeth for being critical of high command? There was no hope of defending my dignity and career, except to approach the highest authority, the Defence Minister, who happens to be the President of Pakistan. It was a Hobson's choice for me. That's all I have to say, sir".

He seemed riled at my response and said, "Haider, have no illusions about yourself, I can throw you out of the air force in 24 hours if I so decide". I grimaced and said, "So be it sir. Respectfully, may I have your permission to leave". He responded, "Yes, you may go" (meaning, "Get the hell out of my sight"). All this time I had not a clue that I was supposed to have been posted out of AHQ by the orders of Mr Aziz Ahmed.

I returned to my office dispirited for the first time, but not in despair. I called Wg Cdr NA Khan and shared with him my

experience with the CAS. He sounded his concern and asked, "What exactly do they have against you, because what you just told me is largely hearsay and even then does not constitute any offence". I told him that the most serious criticism by the CAS

was about my life style, and criticism of senior officers. In fact, what was bugging them was that the President had intervened and they felt hapless for the time being, until they could bring a major charge against me, which even the President would not be able to waive-off. I was always psychic and sometimes it terrified me, when I saw my premonitions come true.

I decided to try my best at my job and get on with what I was meant to do.

NA Khan had prepared a summary of the accidents and incidents, where pilots were blamed. After a detailed synopsis, I picked on one accident, in which one of the finest PAF pilots, Flt Lt Tariq Habib had been blamed for retracting his nose gear as he was about to taxi out in an F-86. Something was not right about the narrative of the investigation and I decided to ask for the investigation file from the AIB, which was headed by Wg Cdr MS Baig, who had been our engineering officer during the Attacker days, in No 11 Squadron; Wg Cdr Mubariz was the pilot on Baig's team. The investigation was successfully completed in a week and sure enough it was a technical malfunction, not Tariq Habib's fault. We started to prepare a summary and by the next morning, it had been sent to the attention of ACAS (Ops) as well as the CAS. I had sent a file to the ACAS (Ops) with a request that I may be allowed to visit bases and check the flight safety aspects during a major air exercise, which was scheduled for next week and almost the entire Ops branch was leaving AHQ. The ACAS (O) refused my

request out right and curtly remarked, “Stay here and do your job, you have done enough flying”.

So I let it go at that.

Then one day NA Khan came to discuss some issue with me when he asked me if I had heard the comments made by some one in AHQ about the Tariq Habib case. I answered in the negative. He said that a rumour was doing the rounds that by probing into Tariq Habib’s accident, I was trying to instigate the pilot community against the policies of the Air Staff for the callous handling of aircraft investigations which are aimed at always blaming the pilots. I just looked at him and thought to myself that damned if I do it, and damned if I don’t.

A Vulgar Threat

Soon after the newly conceptualized flight safety pamphlet had been printed and circulated, I was called in by the ACAS (Ops) Khaqan Abbasi. I thought he was going to comment on the ideas floated by me about flight safety. I was overly optimistic. As I entered his office he started lecturing me about good behaviour, and did not ask me to take a chair, like I was being tried on a charge.

He told me that it was a great opportunity for me to prove my worth as Director Flight Safety since I was the most experienced fighter pilot who was current on all fighters. He wasn’t fooling me with his hypocritical hyperbole. I took him head on saying, “Sir, it would strike any fair commander in the PAF as odd to post an officer in the most combat sensitive assignment as the Director of Plans, who is the least experienced in operational flying, has not even qualified for the Fighter Leaders Course and has little to boast about his performance during war and has

commanded a Squadron only as a carrot given out by a sympathetic boss. How can I accept that my experience makes me suitable for a Flight Safety appointment while the other, who hasn't seen the cockpit of a fighter or bomber aircraft during the two wars, is qualified to make future war plans for the PAF?"

My tone was bitter and sarcastic.

He became himself very swiftly and said, "As long as you are in my Directorate you had better keep your mouth shut and do what you are told or", he made a gesture with his right forefinger slicing across his tongue; meaning that if I did not heed his warning, my tongue would be severed. Continuing his salvo he warned, "It is time and an opportunity for you to clean your slate and start afresh". The moment he paused, I shot back at him, "Sir, it is your slate that needs cleaning, mine has been pristine clear and I have served the PAF with my life". Someone should have been there to see his expression; he could have strangled me if he had the physical or the moral strength.

I did not despair and rather derived some extra courage from the encounter and felt that my honour and dignity must stay on top of my priorities in life. I was not going to be brow-beaten by a man who was held in contempt for his forked tongue by the majority in the PAF fighter/bomber force. He dismissed me by saying, "I think you will never learn". I returned to my office and sat down to reflect upon the uncalled for confrontation perpetrated by this vituperative and vindictive person. I wondered why he had opened the Pandora's Box, especially after the CAS had already given me a piece of his mind.

Evidently, the high command had been receiving information about the severe criticism that echoed in the

AHQ in the mornings and at my house in the evenings. What they did not factor into their plans for me was the simple fact that what goes around comes around like a boomerang.

16

ATTOCK CONSPIRACY

One day early morning, I was called by Gp Capt NA Khan and was advised to report directly to the PAF cinema hall for an important address. I was puzzled to say the least, because this was a very unusual kind of a venue. When I arrived at the cinema hall, I met MM Alam first and asked him if he knew what was going on. He told me that something big had happened but he had not been able to put his finger on it. We both walked into the hall and he went off in one direction and I in another to occupy a seat. At the assigned time, Air Vice Mshl Rab Nawaz, the ACAS (Admin) addressed the gathering. He disclosed that a conspiracy to overthrow the elected and legitimate government of Pakistan had been unearthed and several arrests have been made from within the PAF besides other services. He informed us that several other officers may be called in for the investigation of this serious event but only those who were directly or indirectly involved would be detained.

He gave us some more details but the news hit everyone like a bludgeon. At the end of this sensational disclosure, Air Vice Mshl Nawaz asked if anybody had questions. There were not many because everyone seemed quite shaken and apprehensive. Only Alam and myself asked a question or rather, expressed our apprehension. We both asked that since there had been lot of witch-hunting in the PAF recently, this may well be used to frame those not involved, especially those who had differences with the air force leadership. Air Vice Mshl Nawaz assured us that no

victimization would be done and that the investigations would be very thorough and above board. Nobody needed to worry about this major happening as long as there was no involvement. Everybody returned to their place of work pretty shaken up.

As I entered the AHQ I saw my batch-mate Air Cdre Arshad in the veranda looking very busy and anxious. Walking up to him I asked Arshad what the hell was going on. He gave me a very wishy-washy answer but did tell me that some of the senior lot from Sargodha Base had been involved in the dangerous conspiracy. I asked him who they were, but he excused himself saying he had to go to Shorkot and Sargodha on a mission. Soon I found out that he was assigned the job to collect the suspected officers and bring them to AHQ. That day seemed like doomsday at AHQ. The hierarchy was busy celebrating in an eerie way, for this was their opportunity to sort out all the sceptics and critics of their repressive leadership, who had caused them sleepless nights.

In the next few days, familiar names started to pop-up. Wg Cdr Hashmi and Sqn Ldr Ghaus were the first two arrested, blind folded and taken to Attock Fort.

Gp Capt Sikandar, a good officer, was also blindfolded and brought from Karachi. It was a chilling realization for many, except the ones who were in the inner circle. Slowly, many other officers started disappearing from their place of work and did not return home either. There was mayhem, the like of which nobody could have imagined. In the coming weeks nearly 100 officers were taken to interrogation centres and some unusual methods were applied to extract information. The list was so blatant and appalling because it contained the names of the very best in the PAF. MM Alam, Azim Daudpota, Arif Manzoor (brought in from Damascus, I think)

and Arif Iqbal were taken for interrogation, their self-esteem torn to pieces. Since none of the officer class had imagined being in such a quandary, they were not prepared for the psychological and physical indignities they were subjected to. Only hardened criminals could withstand such techniques of investigation and extraction of confessions.

Finally, about 14 plus were committed to solitary confinement preceding their confessions extracted under duress and the lowest form of black-mail. These confessions were a prelude to the summary of evidence for charges to be framed against the accused prior to the Court-Martial.

Many in the country felt a sense of doom and gloom but particularly the kith and kin of the accused officers who felt helpless because of the grave circumstances of the case. What became the biggest casualty even from the very beginning, was the mutual trust between officers of the armed forces, an indispensable ingredient for esprit de corps. Every one felt like a potential suspect, in terror of being arrested. Our closest comrades in arm also became overly cautious because the criterion for arrest was fanciful. All that the needed was even a single contact between Hashmi and Ghaus and any colleague they met, after the conspiracy was unearthed months earlier. The numbers multiplied over the months. A more sensible and half way patriotic leadership could have nipped the problem the moment the names of Wg Cdr Hashmi and Sqn Ldr Ghaus were made known by the ISI. The image and well earned reputation of the entire service should have been protected but it was turned into a vicious vendetta by the AHQ team at the alter ego of personal prestige. In addition, the leadership may have thought that it was a devil given opportunity to prove their loyalty to the Prime Minister and prove to him that the few miscreants involved in denigrating

the Air Chief during the March fly-past were the real culprits in planning a coup against Bhutto.

In several cases, even close relations, not to speak of life time friends, stayed away from those arrested and did not want to be identified with them.

The conspiracy was directed against ZAB and his cabinet members who had come to power as a populist party after the horrendous years of Martial Law.

The existence of the coup was reported by the Army Chief Gen Tikka Khan, a Bhutto disciple. This was Zafar Chaudhry's defining moment.

I was, to say the least, terribly concerned keeping in view the events of recent weeks. There was a colossal metamorphosis in the PAF and mutual mistrust and intrigue spawned like weed. If memory serves me right, the conspiracy had been unearthed in the month of March but only the Army Chief Gen Tikka Khan and the ISI Chief Gen Ghulam Jilani Khan were aware of it.

The PAF leadership was made aware after most of the suspects from the army had been arrested. I came to know later that the CAS was informed about this conspiracy with the involvement of only two officers at that time. During the trial, we learnt many things, which I prefer to include here to keep the sequence rather than to go into deeper details of the ensuing Court-Martial.

The CAS ordered the perpetually nervous Gp Capt Mufti to start surveying everyone who had been contacted by Ghaus and Hashmi. Although the operation started as early as March, it was kept top secret and no arrests were made. As already mentioned, their unholy objective was to bring everyone into the net who had been on their black list.

Indeed, this was a long list. Sqn Ldr Ghaus was a C-130 Captain, therefore his duties took him to every base in Pakistan and at times even abroad, where PAF contingents were assigned to different Arab countries. Ghaus had many friends and course mates and the fool that he was, when he was on the C-130 round-robin sorties between the bases, he went out of his way to meet all the disgruntled pilots at all the fighter bases of Pakistan. He was being trailed in the air and on the ground by Mufti's organisation. The same was true of Hashmi as revealed during the CourtMartial. These officers had been contacted by the master-minds of the conspiracy, Brig FB Ali and Col Aleem Afridi, both considered to be outstanding officers and had been instrumental in Yahya Khan's removal.

Bhutto, instead of appreciating their cardinal role in the removal of a dictator and bringing him in, made them targets and removed from the service. Soon they had become disillusioned with ZAB's modus operandi and attempted a coup d'etat. Besides several young army officers they recruited Hashmi and Ghaus from the PAF and encouraged them to widen their net to include highly reliable and dependable detractors of the Government and those critical of Bhutto's policies. A large part of the PAF operational command, especially the mid-level officers, had no truck with the government per se but harboured serious grudges against the Air Chief and his cabal and thus became susceptible to luring by Ghaus and Hashmi.

They merely wanted a change in the PAF high command.

In fact, the target of the master minds was Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and his cabinet including the Governors and Chief Ministers. Consequently, the PAF

involvement with the main conspirators was limited to Ghaus and Hashmi; the remainders were essentially after the PAF leadership. Meanwhile, a long list was being compiled by the Director of Air Intelligence (Waheed Mufti) of officers being contacted by Hashmi and Ghaus. The latter had flown to Jeddah and reportedly also to Tripoli. Both countries had huge contingents of PAF officers serving as advisors. He made it a point to discuss the details of “something big”

happening soon and tried to seduce the officers he was able to contact to join in the affair, which he imagined to be a revolution. Some of these accused were definitely involved in the conspiracy, and their motivation for joining the renegade army group of conspirators was neither Bhutto nor the PAF leadership, but they saw little future in the PAF through the professional ladder, so they chose to ride high on a blimp, not realising it could burst easily. For them this was a short-cut to reach the top echelons.

It should be understood that the general morale of the PAF had been shattered by the wrong priorities of the high command soon after the ugly event of misbehaviour during the Pakistan Day fly-past. Many officers did not care about the higher political vistas of the masterminds; they only wanted to see a change in the top leadership of the PAF. This, therefore, became the soft belly of the PAF. A dark shadow seemed to permeate the hearts and minds of this gallant air force owing to the vengeful witch-hunting by a handful at the top. The consequences became debilitating because the opportunity was exploited for personal gain by the Air Chief and his cronies. Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry told an angry President, “You see sir, didn’t I tell you that there were a few miscreants and I will sort them out.” These words were noted by the President and written in his own hand writing on a file with the ISI, which I had seen with my own eyes. It pains me to once again bring the PAF’s official

history (1988) into focus, which in its wisdom shifted the entire blame on the DAI who was just a quisling and following orders. The book ignores all the infirmities committed by the CAS, his Vice Chief and the main instigator, Khaqan Abbasi.

Mufti was too insignificant and an officer with shaky credentials to bear the burden of such a colossal event. I believe that neither Zafar Chaudhry nor Saeedullah had the capacity for such high intrigue as became evident, which left only Khaqan Abbasi fully capable and competent to create a spider's web around his own operational service, jeopardizing the sterling reputation of the PAF. AHQ had become a cesspit of high intrigue disguised under the euphemism of "we need to save the PAF's reputation." There was little time or energy devoted to the daunting challenges and deficiencies in the operational effectiveness caused by the ominous post-1971 War events. The airmen had rebelled at Drigh Road, Mauripur, Korangi and elsewhere. The catalyst of their disobedience and refusal to eat their meals had been the recall of the Ferozpur Mirage strike by Saeedullah Khan, which snowballed into a serious mutinous situation. The morale of the officers had been shattered owing to the general sense of mayhem which pervaded the PAF.

Within the next two weeks, a spectre of terror was let loose mercilessly with such vengeance and terrible consequences that even our arch enemy could not have inflicted this upon the PAF. When I heard the name of Wg Cdr M Sikander (once my OC Flying Wing and an outstanding fighter pilot and an officer with great presence) being arrested, I immediately told people that this was the beginning of a virtual genocide of gallant fighter pilots, most of them with Sitara-e-Jurats pinned on their chests. Sikander had been a victim of ACAS

(Ops) vituperative targeting for a long time and everybody in the PAF knew that just because Sikander could stand his ground and look them in the eye, he had become their prey. He was given the most demeaning posting of being in-charge of air guard establishment at PAF detachment Malir. These air guards flew on PIA flights to deter hijacking. He was bashed about for no valid reason and that put his back against the wall just like me. This is how they turned perfectly good and sane people into dangerous renegades.

In all 40 officers, mostly fighter pilots, many from Sargodha and especially the ones suspected of cat-calls during the previous year's fly-past were arrested like dangerous criminals, manacled, blind-folded and humiliatingly dragged into transports and shoved on aircraft to be brought to Peshawar. The old block at the Peshawar Officers' Mess was cleared to put each suspect in oneroom, considering that not even a court of inquiry or summary of evidence had been held. This was a reprehensible way to treat officers, most of whom proved to be innocent. One of them became an Air Marshal later in the PAF and some made it to the rank of Air Commodore. Harsh methods were used and air force officers put in charge of the investigations. Two particular officers, one from the air force commandos, a reprehensible character called Sqn Ldr CA Waheed (alias 'Kukkar', meaning a rooster), became the blue-eyed boy of the leadership; the other was the afore-mentioned spook from electronic intelligence, whose whole life had been spent snooping on service officers and debauchery in his free time. He made millions through graft and kick-backs during a certain period when the PAF purchased electronic intelligence and counter measure equipments from an Italian electronic company called Electronica and two used Falcons to carry the equipment.

Like blood-hounds, these two were given carte-blanche to use any methods to extract confessions from the arrested officers and if they could not get any, then they were to cook-up confessions in the office of the DAI and use any terrifying method to obtain the signatures of the incarcerated officers. One has to understand the psyche of the arrested officers; they lived a life of glory and were not hardened criminals, who could resist the tactics of these two animals in PAF

uniform. One particular incident became known to me and the others one day.

CA Waheed and his associate had taken Sikander blind-folded and handcuffed with a long chain, to a house where pilots like Sqn Ldr Pervez (former ADC to Air Mshl Rahim Khan), and some others were being detained. They had been asked to write their confessions and confirm their meeting with Ghaus and Hashmi with intent to conspire, advising them if they did not, they would be subjected to the treatment which they would witness later that afternoon.

This house was a barrack-like structure with rooms next to each other and a long veranda with a gravel driveway. At the promised time, they brought Gp Capt Sikander blind-folded. The long end of the chain was held by CA Waheed, who manipulated it in a way that Sikander tripped over a projection and fell. Waheed dragged him within the view of the young officers, watching from little holes in their covered window panes. It must have been a terrifying scene to see their former OC Flying Wing with a Sitara-e-Jurat, being treated so disgracefully by a third-rate officer. Obviously, the tactic worked and the confessions were signed after modifications by the DAI under the instructions of Khaqan Abbasi to ensure that the confessions were

corroborative. All these were typed at the DAI's office on PAF stationary and by his typists (I received this information from the horse's mouth and it was this disclosure, which became an instrument for the defence lawyers and the straw that broke the camel's back). Talking about Sikander, I am reminded of one morning sometime earlier; he had peeped into my office at AHQ

and stood chatting for a few minutes. He was livid with Khaqan Abbasi and the CAS for humiliating him and told me that I was lucky to still be in the mainstream and that one day he would teach Khaqan Abbasi a lesson. Unfortunately for him, he became the hunted and Abbasi the hunter.

Some weeks later, I was almost catapulted out of my chair one morning when the ACAS (Ops) called me on the intercom and said, "Haider, I think you need a break, I want you to go for the Mirage ferry to France and bring back 4

aircraft. You can go to Sargodha and do a check ride and some instrument flying, TACAN let-downs because the weather in Europe and en route can get very murky." I could not help but say, "Sir, are you serious or pulling my leg", considering he had tried to give me a drubbing not long ago and had refused to let me visit bases during the exercise just recently. He said, "I am serious but if you don't feel like going, then tell me." I wouldn't have missed the opportunity for anything. It was April when I went to Sargodha and my log book reflects two instrument flying missions, a check-ride and one night strike on Rafiqui Base.

Tariq Habib was one of the pilots selected to go with me, which pleased me because I had a lot of respect for his professional competence. We arrived at Bordeaux in France onboard a C-130, which was our support aircraft. The ferry went well except that I was to discover later the real reason

for getting me out of Pakistan for a little while to wire-up my house when I was away.

Botched Frame-Up

Upon return I was appalled to discover through my friends in the ISI that while I was away my house had been bugged and cautioned that I should be careful as the Air Chief and his team were after my blood to involve me in the conspiracy come hell or high water. Great news, I thought. There comes a time in one's life when you are against a hard rock and deep blue sea and only Divine intervention can rescue you. So that is how I conditioned myself for the worst case scenario to be the fall guy. Meanwhile, life had to go on and with all the trimmings but without the trepidation of being hounded. The arrests had been completed (so I thought), and some of the best officers and fighter pilots and commanders had been rounded-up, including several flown in from the Middle-East, where they were on exchange postings. We heard that their confessions were being extracted with terrible provocations and intimidation as well as torture.

Legally, the confessions were required to be recorded by a magistrate in his office and declared voluntary by him and then stamped to validate the confession. It may sound preposterous, but a magistrate was brought from the tribal belt, where he was working under a political agent who in turn was a subordinate to my friend Omar Khan Afridi, the Interior Secretary for the NWFP. The magistrate had been purportedly given a commitment personally by the CAS that he would be rewarded if he cooperated without any resistance with the DAI, Sibtain and Waheed and other investigators. It was this magistrate who under direct provocation from the CAS, yet against all moral ethics, agreed to sign all the confessions without questioning their

validity and conformity with the law. For this heinous collusion he was provided an air-conditioned office at Badaber with all the facilities.

The very first evening after the arrests were made, Lt Col Sarwar (I am not sure of the name), in charge of the ISI safe-house at Peshawar, sent a message from the DG ISI for me through one of his officers Arbab Fateh, who was my friend. The message he conveyed was that the DG wanted me to feel relaxed because all the intelligence agencies and the ISI knew that I had no involvement of any kind with the conspiracy. This was a tremendous relief for me because the vile behaviour of the leadership towards me, as well as their recent history of gunning for me, had caused apprehensions in my mind. This was to be a chance of their life time to frame me in this conspiracy and kill all the birds with one stone since the conspirators had planned to overthrow ZAB and his government.

After I heard about Sikander's anguish, it fuelled my rage and I became vociferous in condemning the leadership openly and especially in front of their ignoble coteries. I made a resolve that I was going to disregard niceties and make known the disgraceful conduct of CA Waheed and the other snoop, if I ran into them. As though someone up there was hearing me, one morning I went to see Saad Hatmi (who had served with me as Flight Commander in No 19

Squadron at Mauripur and was a good friend) in the Ops Directorate, to give vent to my rage and anguish. As I entered his office, I almost did not believe my eyes. Waheed and his intelligence snoop were in Saad's office. As they saw me, they stood up and greeted me. I did not acknowledge their greeting, instead I addressed Saad Hatmi and said, "Saad, did you hear what the investigating bastards did to

Sikander by dragging him with a chain? You know I want them to know that one day, I will make shoes out of their putrid hide.”

At that point, CA Waheed spoke in such a humble tone that if I did not know him, I would have thought him to be a Buddhist priest. He swore that what I had heard was not exactly true, but that they had a job assigned by the CAS and they were performing it as properly as they could. Still not looking at him, I told Saad that when somebody commits a heinous crime at the behest of his benefactor, he is even worse for obeying illegal orders. Saad looked visibly uncomfortable with my outburst so I marched out and returned to my office. I had invited Air Cdre Zulfiqar in the morning to have dinner with me that evening. He had consented to travel from Risalpur. The ambiance was very charged and abuses were hurled at the appropriate level of the PAF hierarchy. That evening, Arbab Fateh told me to watch out for two things, one that the rooms in my house had been wire-tapped during the time I was away in France, saying that “The very purpose of sending you away was to wire-up your place, especially with no one but an old cook in the house”. Mine being an open house, any friend could drive-in and make themselves comfortable. He said that the second thing was about a fruit seller on my street, who watched over the house and reported all activities to DAI. He also told me not to worry, because “We are keeping an eye on all of them.” After dinner when Zulfiqar Ali Khan was leaving, he suggested that the next week-end, I should come to Risalpur and have lunch with them.

In the ensuing week the situation became nastier and I could sense the heat.

As had been planned during the dinner at my home, I drove to Risalpur on Saturday noon time to meet Air Cdre Zulfiqar.

I arrived at Risalpur in half an hour and drove straight into the Commandant's Residence, where I was greeted by the sprightly Shireen, the only daughter of the couple. Begum Zulfiqar came and sat with me in the drawing room saying that Agha Jee (Zulfiqar) would be coming in shortly. We sat and chatted about the deteriorating situation in the PAF, she sharing the burden of her husband's sense of apprehension and disillusionment with the leadership. Moments later Zulfiqar arrived, and greeted me with his usual affection, "Young man, are you in or out of trouble"? I suggested in a whisper that we should move to the lawn. He took the cue and we walked out. As we walked into his spacious lawn I cautioned him that his telephone and house were bugged as were mine, so it was better to talk in the open. I had never seen him look so distraught and his opener startled me: "Well, young man I am seriously considering resigning from the PAF while honour is on my side." He added that he had some feelers that they were trying to involve him in the ongoing hunt. I was visibly perturbed to hear about his intention. He was an absolute gentleman and an outstanding commander; for him to feel hunted was really the last straw and I knew something had to give.

It must have sounded jocular to him when I seriously told him, "Sir, you should be thinking and planning how to run the PAF because I have a strong gut feeling that soon something good will come out of this imbroglio." I then told him that if I could get to Lahore, I could mobilize the support of Afzal Agha (Chief Secretary Punjab and a great gentleman), and Mustafa Khar to get me an audience with ZAB. Zulfiqar offered that I take a Harvard from Risalpur that afternoon as long as I didn't crash it and come back the next day. I was excited at the suggestion and requested that he give me a quick OJT (On the Job Training) on the Harvard as it had been a very long time since I had flown this aircraft. Shireen Zulfiqar came running toward us and said lunch was

ready. I requested Zulfiqar's permission to call a friend in Lahore to ask him to pick me up from the PAF base. He told me to go ahead and ask the operator to connect me, but to be careful about what I said. After lunch Air Cdre Zulfiqar drove me to the airfield and gave me a short brief on the WW-II Harvard aircraft.

Soon I was heading for Lahore, travelling down memory lane. I recalled my formative cadet days at Risalpur and the training on the Harvard. Upon landing, I noticed that the person marshalling me in was a senior technician from the maintenance wing Sargodha. I wondered what he was doing at this non-flying base.

As I alighted from the aircraft, he came forward and helped me down. Then he stood back and saluted me with a somewhat anxious demeanour. As I started walking towards the air movement section, I asked him what a Mach-2 fighter technician was doing at Lahore. He said, "Sir, I had serious family problems, which compelled me to get posted here on compassionate grounds." Then he abruptly asked me to stop and said, "Sir, we are very concerned about you, because the Field Intelligence Unit people have been waiting for you to arrive." I was stunned by this revelation, wondering how in hell they could have found out that I was coming from Risalpur in a Harvard. Presumably, I was under surveillance more effectively than any sworn enemy. They had lost their marbles for sure.

After ZAB's intervention they obviously had become desperate and considered the conspiracy a window of opportunity to frame me and destroy my credibility and humiliate me. They had underestimated the power of Divine intervention, however. Meanwhile, there was more shock coming to me, as the Sergeant nearly knocked me off my feet when he said, "Sir, they even said that Gp Capt Haider

might be escaping to India, which sounded very shocking to us because you are our national hero and how can these people think such things about you." I felt a rage searing through my veins and was ready to kill some one. I asked who were these people, and where were they waiting? He said that one of them was a tall corporal wearing white *shalwar kameez*, but the other one had gone somewhere. The blood was rushing to my head as I stepped out and entered the room to sign the aircraft serviceability form. Sure enough, I saw the tall man identified by the Sergeant standing at the end of the veranda pretending not to notice me. I shouted, "Corporal, come here." He seemed taken aback at me addressing him as Corporal. He walked to me and stood to attention. I said, "You are one of Mufti's spies from FIU"? He stammered, "No dir,I just came to meet a friend." He lied blatantly just like his director would have. I told him, "You call that Gp Capt Mufti now and tell him that I only kill the enemy and am not a coward to find refuge with them. Also tell him that his big bosses at AHQ

are the ones that are likely to run to India. Tell him that the next time I see one of his intelligence dogs spying on me, I will break his legs and dispatch him by bus to AHQ." The man's hands were trembling as he saluted me in *shalwar kameez* which is against the correct protocol, when not in uniform.

My friend Jehangir Malik was there to receive me and we drove to Nawabzada Naushad Ali Khan's house. When we reached the house, my hostess Jabeen, who had adopted me as her brother, said to me with anxiety writ all over her face, "*Bhai, kya ho raha hai, do ghanton se koi banda phone karta hai, aur poochta hai ke Gp Capt Haider pahunch gaye hain, aur phir jab maine kaha ke abhi to nahi pahunche, laikin kon baat kar raha hai, to woh phone band kar deta hai, koi char baar phone kar chukka hai*(Brother, what's up,

an anonymous caller has been calling for the last couple of hours, asking if Gp Capt Haider has arrived. I told him that he has not arrived and when I asked who's calling, he dropped the call. He has called 4 times)". I felt the kind of anger that words would fail to describe. I said, "I will see these jackals, don't worry." I called the Punjab House and finally got to speak with Mustafa Khar, who told me that he was badly caught up in a political situation and there were several people with him. He asked me to come to the Governor House and that his ADC

would look after me till he was free.

I arrived at the Governor House at around 1900 Hrs and the guards had been informed about my arrival as one of them took the seat next to my driver and guided him towards the main building porch, where an army Captain was waiting to receive me. An hour later as the clock struck 8 o'clock, the ADC said that there seemed to be a logjam in the discussions going on with some politicians and offered me a drink. I accepted the offer with some relief. It was about 10 o'clock and I was getting weary when I decided that I should leave because the ADC sounded frustrated at the unending session between the Governor and his visitors. I thanked the ADC and asked him to apologize to the Governor and ask him to please arrange the appointment with Mr Bhutto as quickly as possible, because things had taken a worse turn after the President's intervention with the PAF. I told the ADC that Mustafa Khar would understand the gravity of my message as soon as he passed it on to him. He had meticulously noted down every word I said and assured me that once he had spoken with the Governor, he would get in touch with me.

Thereafter, even though pretty late, I drove to Chief Secretary Afzal Agha's residence in the GOR (Government

Officers' Residences). Agha Sahib was also a very kind and considerate friend. He received me with his usual warmth and poured me a drink before I sat down. He asked me how come I was in Lahore. I told him about my abortive trip to the Governor House and the purpose of my visit. He assured me that he would be meeting the Governor first thing next morning and he would make certain that Mustafa speaks with ZAB. The next morning a call did come from the Governor House but after I had left for the airfield. I returned to Risalpur by mid-day, thanked Agha Jee (Air Cdre Zulfiqar) and updated him on my visit. I again implored him not to make any hasty decisions and instead asked him to make good use of this time to make plans on how to run the air force. My optimism was so ill-timed and sounded utterly ridiculous, sending Agha Jee into a fit of laughter. He saw me off and I remember him waving as I turned out of his gate. As soon as I got home I had a message to contact the Chief Secretary, Punjab. Through Afzal Agha I came to know that he had spoken to Governor Khar, who had already spoken to the President and had passed my serious apprehensions of being incriminated and framed by the Air Chief and his team.

On Monday morning, I called my deputy, Wg Cdr NA Khan in my office and told him, "NA Khan, in case one fine day you see my hat on that filing rack and I am missing for too long, I want you to inform these people and send telegrams as laid-out in this paper." I pushed a folded paper towards him. I could see a shadow come over his face and his eyes smartening as he unfolded the paper and asked, "Sir, but why? I don't think that they can stoop to victimize you without cause." I told him to relax and that this was just a precaution in an emergency and not any threat that I had received directly. He left my office looking distraught. As soon as he was out, I called the DAI on the intercom and asked him if I could see him right away. "Oh please, come

right away Haider, I will have some teaready for you". I did not have to say this but I was never a hypocrite, so I told him that once I have spoken to him, he may not offer me that cup of tea. He said, "Come, come, drop-in and let's talk." I marched off to his office and was received by an apprehensive looking DAI. Once I sat down, he again asked me if I liked regular or green tea. I told him it was not necessary and I would not take much of his precious time to tell him how angered and outraged I was at the tactics of his Directorate to have me chased around by his two penny sleuths, harassing my friends in Lahore and barking filth that I would try to escape to India.

Continuing my outrage, I said, "Gp Capt Mufti, if I ever catch another one like your minion at the Lahore air movement section, I will physically break his legs and dispatch him to AHQ without crutches. Then don't blame me for assault because it would be a case of self-defence to safeguard my dignity."

After my outpouring, I stared at the little hunched back Gp Capt and waited for his reaction. Then he reached down and pulled his drawer out; instead of pulling a .38 revolver which for a second I thought he was going to do, he lifted a bottle of Valium-10 (a very strong sedative) and whimpered, "You know, Haider, I'm surviving on this tranquilizer to keep my sanity intact." He continued in a weak and weary tenor, "Haider, I swear to you, I don't know who is chasing who at this time. Please believe me that I've not asked anyone to keepsurveillance on you." At that moment I wondered how one could deal with a person who could lie so blatantly. So I got up and fired my last shot, "If your Chief thinks that I'm guilty of a crime, tell him to investigate me, but if he has no proof, tell him to lay off me! As far as escaping to India is concerned, it's your bosses who will soon need to do that, I only know how to fight them." With thatlast salvo, I marched

out with my fists and teeth clenched and returned to my office.

Gestapo at My Door

I had barely sat down in my chair, my heart pounding from the encounter, when my secretary told me that Gp Capt MS Baig, the Director of Air Investigation Board (AIB), wanted to see me along with Wg Cdr Mubariz regarding an urgent matter. I told them to come right away because I was going to leave in the next few minutes. The two arrived within 5 minutes, and sat down rather sheepishly in the chairs in front of my desk. Baig had a long history with me from the Attacker Squadron days at PAF Station, Drigh Road as PAF Base Faisal was then called. Mubariz had been with No 20

Reconnaissance Flight throughout his flying years. Baig opened the dialogue by imploring me not to pursue the proposal I had sent to the Air Chief through the ACAS (Ops) Khaqan Abbasi, about Tariq Habib's 'nose wheel collapsing incident'. Mubariz looked on quite ruefully as I replied, "Baig, this is a matter of restoring pilot confidence to handle emergencies. However, if you feel strongly and are confident that you have been correct in your findings, then you folks should have no problem taking a stand with the CAS. If you are proven right I will tender my apology, if you can't, then you will know that there is accountability for all."

Baig said, "You know we are both about to proceed on postings abroad; I'm going to France and Mubariz to Saudi Arabia." I said, "However, should you want to revise your decisions and not blame the pilots unjustly in all the cases our Directorate is reviewing, send it to me in writing, I will try to ease my stance". By this time, I suspected that they must have got the information through the ACAS (Ops). As we were talking, suddenly I noticed that Mubariz turned pale

as he looked at the door to my office, which was located slightly behind me and I could not see what had caused him to look vexed. As I looked back my heart missed a beat at the ominous sight. I saw Khaqan Abbasi, holding up the 'chick' (a curtain made from weed to protect one from heat) on my door.

Mufti and the contemptible character CA Waheed (Zafar Chaudhry had assigned him the task of investigating the accused in the conspiracy case owing to Waheed's repugnant reputation), were flanking him. "Ok Haider, this is it.

Come on, it's time to move. You are placed under close arrest. Waheed will escort you away for some questioning." Now I knew why Mubariz had turned pale. I got up deliberately and slowly, walked to pick-up my hat and stared in the eyes of the Machiavellian Khaqan Abbasi, who looked back venomously as I approached him. Destiny had come calling; not just for me, but for all of them standing in the doorway.

This was not a total surprise but considering that the DG ISI had explicitly said that I had nothing to worry about, my arrest was a serious foreboding. I felt sure that the high command had decided to frame me in the coup d'etat. Also, many thoughts started buzzing in my mind about how ugly the leadership could make it for me. I just looked at Khaqan Abbasi and especially Mufti, wanting to use some expletives to tell them that they were lying cowards, but the bravado in me had taken a back seat for those perilous moments. As we approached the vehicle, I was appalled to see the unsavoury Wg Cdr Sibtain known as the 'Master Snoop' for his devious electronic intelligence against PAF officers. He got out of the car with a chuckle and said some conciliatory words, which I chose to ignore and just sat down in the rear

seat. I told CA Waheed that I was confident that I would not be returning home soon, therefore, I would like to go to my house and lock it up. He readily agreed and drove me to University Town.

Anwar Khan Afridi had already come and gone. I put my toilet and shaving kit and a change of clothes in a plastic bag and asked him to drive me to Anwar Khan Afridi's house so that I could leave the keys with him. I was driven to the address as I directed the driver. Anwar always napped in the afternoon. I entered his house and knocked on his door which startled him as he saw me looking anxious, to say the least, with Waheed in tow.

Thereafter, I was driven to Room No 2 in the old block at the Officers'

Mess, declared a sub-detention centre. The Air Chief and his group could not have chosen more unethical and unscrupulous characters from the PAF for this hatchet job. They were sure to perform to high command's expectations. What Zafar Chaudhry and Khaqan Abbasi forgot to factor-in to this destruction of the PAF's sterling reputation was the hand of Allah. They left me in my room with a bright naked bulb glowing from the hanging wire and a bed with a pillow and a blanket. All the window panes had been covered on both sides with pasted newspapers to prevent light from coming in. After they left, I sat down on the bed and my tormented heart screamed, "God why have you ordained me to this purgatory?"

I shall never forget the sense of desolation because my mind could not grasp any options out of my predicament in those agonizing moments. The PAF high command had cast me in a trap where no one could rescue me except Divine justice. I imagined the worst because I realized that they

would resort to any methods to frame me in this conspiracy. If successful, Zafar Chaudhry would have proved to ZAB that I was a traitor to the country and disloyal to him, thereby effectively neutralizing any options that I may have had. Those moments of one's life are not easy to pen down because there was a colossal storm that permeated the mind and my vision was blurred. Time is the proverbial healer and memory fades away, especially when it is bitter as it was.

Only those who have suffered the purgatory of isolation in solitary confinement, in circumstance where all legal and just courses are denied, can sense my desolation. That was when I recall, I reached out to God Almighty and said aloud, "Ya Allah, what have I done to deserve this. You know all the secrets of hearts and minds." That precise moment reminded of somebody's quotation, "When I was on top of the mountain, I did not turn to God and ask him why me was I at the top." It is only in one's utter desolation that your entire being cries out and screams for Divine intervention.

In that dark and eerie room, I knew that I had been deposited there and rendered completely incommunicado with the outside world. What I did not know then was if Wg Cdr NA Khan had taken the actions I had assigned to him.

I had no idea if my parents had received the telegram I had written and given to my deputy that very morning. I also had no way to tell that the two interrogators were trying to get the magistrate to get an involuntary confession from me. Soon enough I came to know what was ahead when there was knock on the door and Waheed and Sibtain entered my room. At that moment a strange kind of feeling captured my mind, "Don't cave in to intimidation." It was my father's voice and I felt an amazing metamorphosis from

the frailty that had encapsulated me moments earlier. I was asked to accompany them for a confessional statement.

Frankly speaking, I did not know the significance of a confessional statement under these particular circumstances, even though I was familiar with the term because of my basic knowledge of PAF law. I asked the duo what confession they were talking about. Sibtain said, "Sir, it is just a statement that you had some elementary notion that a group was planning something and that you had reported your apprehensions to Air Cdre Zulfiqar Ali Khan". In spite of the situation I was in, when I heard Zulfiqar's name and the suggestion that if I did what these Gestapo rats were saying, that it would end my predicament immediately, I went wild for a few minutes and said, "Both of you are little midgets and be sure that I will be out sooner than you think; and then I will make life such hell for you that both of you would wish that you were not born.

Air Cdre Zulfiqar is the most honourable officer in the PAF and will be the man to lead it one day soon; lay off him. Your suggestion to implicate him for my personal safety is despicable. You don't know me I will protect Zulfiqar Sahib with the last drop of my blood". They looked at each other and left the room and bolted it from the outside but returned after some 15 minutes.

This time Waheed said that I have to accompany them to a magistrate, who was waiting for my statement and suggested that if I made a wise decision, I would be a free man. I was driven to the outskirts of Peshawar on Warsak Road.

About one mile down the road, they parked the car and Waheed reminded me again, "Sir, please don't try any funny stuff in front of the magistrate, just state what we have

advised.” I told him to get lost saying that I was not like any of their bloody bosses. He gave me the fish eye and left for the house, about 100

yards off the main road. We must have waited for about 15 minutes where after Gestapo Waheed returned alone. As he got to the car, he told Sibtain, “*Woh to kahin chala gya hai, tum ne to kaha tha ke woh ghar pe rahe ga, ab us ko kahan dhoondhain*(He has gone away somewhere, you said he will be at home, now where should we find him)”. Sibtain suggested that they should go to the MI Directorate and get the statement typed and signed anyway and he would get it signed by the magistrate when he returned. I figured that they were desperately looking for the magistrate.

I came to know much later that the magistrate had deliberately disappeared and the next day, he told them that he had signed all the confessions but he would not do it in the case of Gp Capt Haider. This I came to learn later from my friend, who was a senior bureaucrat with the NWFP government. The magistrate had gotten wind about my close relationships with the Governor from his provincial secretaries in the government. As told to me by my friend, much after the case had ended, the magistrate had travelled back to see his political agent in the tribal belt and had broken down in front of him and confessed that the PAF’s Chief had compelled him to sign confessions which were not voluntary and in most cases, he had not even seen the faces of the officers. I am not sure what happened after that but the first time I laid my eyes on the magistrate was after the Court-Martial had begun.

Anxious and nervous, they took me to AHQ and Waheed went to the Directorate of Air Intelligence, but presumably, as I gathered from the whispers between the two, the DAI had not agreed with CA Waheed about taking my statement

in his office to be typed by his PA. This was the method they used in all their other cases. Then I was merely conjecturing but as I write this, I came to know this for a fact because Mufti knew very well that my arrest had been made on the orders of the Air Chief for my intransigence and severe criticism of the Air Chief and not for any role in the conspiracy. Mufti must have feared that their machinations to bring charges against me would not stick and he did not want to take a chance with procedural infirmity in my case. In any case, he also knew very well that if he managed successfully to frame me in the conspiracy, the inevitable disclosure by me to the court that my statement was recorded in the DAI's office or even AHQ would be very damaging for their case.

Solitary Confinement

I was brought back to my room and left there. It was well after dusk that a knock on my door got me out of my disturbed stupor and I sprang up in my bed.

The bolt outside opened and I saw Sqn Ldr Zuzarte, the flight surgeon, also a very fine human being. He approached my bed and asked how I felt and if I needed any medication. I said, "Doc, what the hell is going on here? I have no idea about any conspiracy, so why am I being put through this ordeal?" He looked extremely apologetic and replied, "Sir, I am not permitted to talk to you about any matter except health problems. I am extremely sorry sir." I told him I understood his disposition and that I did not need any medication. He left me quietly and bolted the door outside. At 8 pm, there was another knock and the bolt opened. The mess waiter Sheikha with his white beard and perpetual smile had been my favourite. He was carrying a tray with dinner but his effusive smile had been wiped away from his face. Again, as I tried to get a word with him, he said to me

in Pushto that he had been given a very stern warning not to talk, bring or take any messages.

As he left, my mind went back to the book *Papillion*, the famous book

about a man kept in solitary confinement in a cave somewhere on the French Isles. I was in solitary confinement and that was a sure thing. At about 10 pm, I heard a lot of noise in the veranda, somebody was screaming and hurling abuses and calling Waheed and Sibtain foul names. I recognized the voice. It was Sattar Choudhry (Gharram to friends, for his superficially put on accent). He was allegedly related to Mufti and I wondered when and how he was arrested. Later on, as we were released from solitary confinement for a few hours during the summary of evidence, I asked Sattar what had happened a few nights ago, when I had heard him yelling. He told me, "Those bastards CA Waheed and Sibtain had handcuffed me and were blind-folding me when I started yelling at them".

He said they took him on a drive for several hours to terrorize him in order to extract a confession from him.

Before I was arrested, I knew that 40 or more officers were interrogated including MM Alam, Aftab Alam, Hakimullah and some were even brought back from Libya and Jeddah like the consummate professional Arif Manzoor.

They were terrorized in a psychological sense, given the choice between a Court-Martial and becoming approvers. To become an approver against one's own comrades was a matter of shame. Some officers from No 33 Wing were promised incentives, if they agreed to give evidence against me. I learnt that no one agreed. Finally, 14 officers were

targeted for summary of evidence followed by a Court-Martial. I think my exhortation to CA Waheed in Saad Hatmi's office earlier followed by my candid discourse with the DAI, finally spilt the CAS's cup of patience and thence the arrest. I must have fallen asleep past midnight from the mental fatigue rather than physical torment.

At about 0230 Hrs, I woke up startled, my heart pounding, as I heard an explosion in the complete darkness near my door. Waheed had kicked hard on the door to create a terror effect as he walked in with Sibtain in tow. As he put the room light on, I observed that he had a sheaf of A-4 sized papers in his hand.

I said, "What do you mean by this obnoxious behaviour?" He said, "Sir, I'm very sorry, I completely forgot that you were in this room, I thought it was another accused". I knew the bastard was lying but there was not much I could or wanted to do but to accept their misbehaviour. He said, "Sir, you can walk out of here tomorrow if you write on these papers which I will leave behind for you.

They recount everything that happened at Sargodha and later on at Peshawar as well as the purpose of your visits to Karachi and Lahore in the past months." I said, "Waheed, the only things that I recall of relevance is that I was enraged and used strong language against Zafar Chaudhry, Saeedullah and Khaqan Abbasi owing to their witch-hunt to expel me from the PAF."

He said, "Sir, we have several reels of the recordings of conversations between you, Air Cdre Zulfiqar and your civilian friends for the entire period you were at Sargodha and later at Peshawar. Just write all that you recall having said with reference to the CAS, and Air Cdre Abbasi; also state the things you shared with Air Cdre Zulfiqar when you

heard there was some conspiracy cooking. Since you passed the information to your superior officer your responsibility ends there and I think you will be set free if you write the whole truth." I snarled at him and said, "You thick skin, first you tried to influence me to utter this nonsense in front of a magistrate, now you seemed to have forgotten what I told you about the devotion I have for Air Cdre Zulfiqar. I tell you again that one day soon, he will be the Chief and then you will regret all these Nazi tactics. So don't even think for a second that I will so much as even mention Zulfiqar Sahib's name even if they hang me. Aside from this, you mean to tell me that your boss and his cronies at the top want to read the vile expletives I used for them? Someone has to be very sick to hear himself being abused; why don't you replay the Sargodha tapes you told me about and play them loud because I meant every word I said."

I could not believe that the high command had made a case of my arrest on such flimsy grounds. "However, you leave enough papers with me, and I will write the story of Zafar Chaudhry and myself," I told him. He asked me to have it finished and ready by noon the next day. I said I would try. Then they left me till the next afternoon. It became apparent that their attempt at the confession had stood on its head and now they wanted some hot stuff for the Chief to read and get into a rage. I learnt much later that the high command had been holding conferences, which were Haider-specific on how to get the noose around my neck. The major decision was whether they could include me in the summary of evidence. As stated earlier, this summary is a prelude to a Court-Martial because the basis of charges against the accused officers are purported to have been established beyond doubt. The contents of this summary become the basis of the Court-Martial. The Chief had the choice of ordering either just a Court-Martial (CM) or in more serious cases the General Court-Martial (GCM). If the

commission of an offence is tantamount to mutiny, sedition or treason then the service chief has to get clearance from the head of the state for a Field General Court-Martial (FGCM). The last option is extremely serious, and has to be completed within a very short period of days. The accused persons are only allowed "Friends of the accused," which means an officer of the PAF and legal assistance restricted to PAF personnel. Such an option has never been exercised to the best of my knowledge, because the punishment by a Field Court General Martial is either death by a firing squad or life imprisonment. The accused really does not have a chance to defend himself, leave alone acquit himself.

The next afternoon, the two agent provocateurs of the CAS arrived and I handed over approximately 24 written pages, which covered all the incidents from the mid-fifties, the incident of cross-fire on radio until my stay in Sargodha as Staff Ops and the manipulative tactics which resulted in my posting directly under my arch enemy Air Cdre Khaqan Abbasi. I left nothing to the imagination and said it as it was, in scathing and candid words. Waheed browsed through a few pages and passed them on to his underling and nodded in a gesture of approval of what he was reading. He even smiled and told me, "Sir, thank you, this is what the CAS really would like to see." He replied menacingly, now that he had in his hand, the next best thing to a confession, "As soon as the Chief has read your deposition, and orders us to carry out his further instructions, we shall be back to tackle you".

One morning, I discovered through the Mess waiter that he had heard my sister was in town. The waiters had over a period started to be of great help in carrying our whispers through paper messages. I wrote one and asked him to deliver it to a certain young pilot from the Squadron at Peshawar. My message was delivered with great courage by

the Mess waiter and acted upon with even greater guts by the young officer, who contacted one of my close friends and a senior official of the NWFP government to find out how to contact my sister. I later found out that she had been running between pillar and post, imploring the CAS to allow her to visit me, but was blatantly refused. Even Omar Afridi and the Frontier Governor Aslam Khattak could not help her.

Nothing happened for the next few days, but I was delighted to discover that my younger brother Jawwad had flown in from the USA on hearing the news. He tried to meet Zafar Chaudhry but was denied an appointment.

However, he was allowed to make one visit to me. It was an emotional high and no words were said for a few minutes. Then I told him the whole episode and asked him to try and get a message to the DG ISI, only to say that he should know the circumstances preceding my arrest and that I had absolutely no knowledge of any conspiracy. He assured me that he was going to stay on and try to do everything needed to get me out of this situation. I was most pained to learn that my dearest sister Kausar had arrived again in Peshawar along with my son Adnan. This was disclosed to me by Jawwad. He told me a funny story.

Adnan was used to talking to me at least two to three times a week before my arrest. Suddenly, there were no calls. He kept asking my sister, father and my mother as to why I was not calling him, suggesting something had happened to his father. My sister told him that I often go on air force exercises, where there is no telephone available and that I would be back soon. I received a touching letter from my son during that period which I keep to this day as a cherished memory from those dark days.

One day, Adnan happened to see my name on the first page of DAWN, which my father read very regularly. He saw my name under a heading, which said something about a conspiracy and the accused persons. Even though very small, he was a very bright kid and his antennas popped out as he ran to my sister and said, "I know something is wrong with my father, look at the newspaper, what is conspiracy and accused?" He made a lot of fuss and went into a screaming fit, yelling he wanted to be with his father. My dear sister had just returned from Peshawar when she found out that Jawwad was on his way and my other brother Bunyad was to take-over after a month, thus keeping a rotating schedule to ensure that one of them was always at Peshawar. She decided to bring Adnan to Peshawar and her dilemma about where to keep him was resolved very easily when Air Cdre and Begum Zulfiqar told her that he would stay with them at Risalpur.

After two weeks of my incarceration, I was told that I could take a walk under armed escort in front of the block for 30 minutes between 1600-1700 Hrs.

This was my first step out of the room onto the road running along the tennis courts. The feeling when I took the first step out of my door was something that has been burnt into my memory. I suddenly understood the meaning of freedom, to be a free person in a free society and in a free country. I cannot find the right words to describe my emotions and the strange and strong impulse that I wanted to stay out and not go back into that stifling room and exercise my free will to go where I want and do what I like. I felt a surge of intense hatred for the people who had placed me in this predicament. It was such a clumsy and almost vulgar attempt to dehumanize me. As I looked around at the familiar edifice of the Mess building, and the huge manicured lawns, where tennis was played everyday, all

seemed very nostalgic and like a dream. I saw Air Cdre Riffat Mehmud, the head of medical services of the PAF and a good friend of my brother's and well known to me. I discovered the gravity of my situation and the fealty of the people when I waved at the tennis players, especially Air Cdre Riffat Mehmud, but was totally ignored as they pretended not to recognize me, leave alone wave back at me. The only persons who went out of their way were Omar Afridi (then the Home Secretary Frontier) and his wife, who would come to the Mess and sit in their car for hours waiting to get a glimpse, when I was escorted out for a brief walk.

Somewhere in early June, all the accused officers were asked to be ready to report to the 'Ladies Room' (a hall in a lounge where private parties were held) for the summary of evidence. It was strange hearing the legal jargon because most of the officers had never dreamt that they would have to one day face such a contingency. This was the first time that all the 14 accused were put together in one room and the summary process began. Also it was the first contact I had with the remainder 13 officers, because other than Ghaus, Hashmi, Sikander, Pervez and Wamiq Rashid, whom I knew about having been arrested, I was not aware as to who the others were. They were: Dilawar Hussain (the brave fighter pilot from No 19 Squadron), Gp Capt Sattar Choudhry, Sqn Ldr Javed Afzaal, Sqn Ldr Aslam Khan, Sqn Ldr Humayun, Flt Lt Dehlvi, Sqn Ldr Rao Akhtar (a complete surprise because he had recently been appointed Squadron Commander of No 14

Squadron re-formed at Sargodha, when the pilots returned from former East Pakistan) and Sqn Ldr Khan from the Provost Marshal's branch.

I have had several conversations with the President of the Court-Martial, Air Vice Mshl Nawaz in the past four years and

was able to learn several aspects of the case, which were not known until recent years. The PAF prosecutor Sqn Ldr Butt (he was from the PAF legal branch - very clever, extremely vindictive, the sole choice of the CAS) looked very aggressive and contemptuous, but one could see a degree of nervousness in his demeanour. This was because he wanted the proceedings go exactly as he had planned without any serious altercations by the accused about the criminal manner of cooked-up and crosscorroborated confessions, which they had been coerced to sign. He made some crude and cutting remarks to humiliate those he knew could not get away with it.

What I recall vividly was Ghaus and Hashmi walking up to me and after salutations saying, "Sir, what the hell are you doing here?"

Ghaus added sheepishly, "Sir, when we heard the news of your arrest, we could not stop laughing, because to tell you the truth, you were on our hit-list for being a Bhutto fan and for the rough time you had given me at Mauripur." I said, "Ghaus, you have convinced me even more this day that you were a dunce just like your comic plan to overthrow a government." Then looking at Hashmi, I said, "I thought you were a dedicated professional, how could you get roped into this bizarre mockery of a revolution and what gave you and these other accomplices the idea that you could run a country when most of you have barely managed a Squadron? And in the case of your co-conspirators from the army, they march on their heels most of their wakeful life in khaki, which transfers the heel shock to their brains and inflicts serious and irreparable brain damage by the time they reach a major's rank. How could you chaps denigrate your own service for such a senseless adventure? Now you have got many innocent people in trouble." In the next few hours, all of the 12 confessions were read out one by one

and the statements of the accused recorded, except in my case and that of Sattar Choudhry.

Sattar Choudhry was protected by Mufti and saved from the confession, although as it turned out during the prosecution case, he did have a minor part in the conspiracy for allowing the conspirators to hold a meeting at the PAF

Officers' Mess when he was the Base Commander, Lahore. I was getting more and more shocked as I heard the confessions. They were pejorative and highly corroborative, as though all of them had sat in a room and conspired to match their confessions to avoid contradictions. These were inexorably contrived by the two investigators under the supervision of Mufti, with a mere smattering of truth. It seemed rather spurious that my name appeared in Hashmi's confession, in which he had said that he had mentioned to me, as his commander, the low morale all around in the service which could damage the PAF, to which I had responded by saying that ZAB is the only authority which could save the PAF

and also suggested that Zulfiqar Ali Khan was the only hope for the PAF to extricate it from the prevalent morass (or words to the effect). I looked at Hashmi, who was sitting behind me and scolded him that it was on his calling that I even let him express an opinion even though what he had said was almost correct but totally irrelevant to the case he was involved in. What was the point of dragging my name in a stupid exercise, especially when every one in the PAF

knew well the adversity I was facing?

He said, "Sir, Waheed who was on the investigation team and a major domo asked me to mention you and Zulfiqar Sahib, promising me that my ordeal would be reprieved if I

did so. Since all of the Squadron Commanders had sounded you on the depleting morale of pilots, I could say something I considered harmless, but I had never dared comment in front of Air Cdre Zulfiqar. The rest I will tell you as soon as they finish the summary, about the torment and torture under which the army investigators extracted a statement from me. It was small mercy that Waheed ('Kukkar') and Sibtain were not allowed by the army team to interfere with the investigation and confessions at Attock Fort. Later, I came to know that Hashmi, Ghaus, Sikander and possibly Pervez were thrown into the dungeons of Attock Fort. They were manacled throughout the period they were in this solitary confinement and had to eat, sleep and perform ablutions with their hands cuffed, using the antique commode as table as well as toilet.

Hashmi had been childless for 20 years and finally his wife had given birth to a daughter at Sargodha. Quite naturally he was very excited about the child.

The PAF interrogators, after taking them over from the army team told him that his wife was in the hospital in critical condition and the child's health was also deteriorating. If he signed the confession without resistance, they would let him meet his wife and child. He didn't believe them but had little choice but to pretend he trusted their word. As expected, after he had signed, he never saw the light of day, until just before the summary of evidence. Some of the other accused told me that they never saw a magistrate's face and had signed prepared confessions in their solitary detention. For the first time I heard the plan of the conspirators. Hashmi and Ghaus had been contacted by the masterminds, Brig FB Ali and Col Aleem Afridi, both outstanding officers but mavericks. These two officers had a personal but justified grudge against ZAB for having targeted them after taking

over instead of appreciating their role in his ascent to power.

After Hashmi and Ghaus, Gp Capt Sikandar (Siki Boy) and the others were recruited. They had a totally different agenda of their own but saw this as a window of opportunity to avenge their detractors, the PAF high command. I recall that most of the others besides Ghaus and Hashmi were not included in the real planning sessions which took place at some movie theatre called Nadir Cinema (belonging to the family of Major Nadir Pervez, now a politician from the PML Nawaz group) near Chandni Chowk in Pindi. Meanwhile, an army officer whose demeanour proved he was any thing but a gentleman officer, got wind of the conspiracy through another army captain, whom he referred to as his closest buddy. This Captain Naseer Ahmed (later Maj Gen and DG DP), contacted the COAS (Army Chief) Gen Tikka Khan, transcending his entire chain of command and the proper channels. Another officer, a commando I had met once with the gallant Col TM Khan was Maj Tariq Rafi; both were planted as snoops within the hard core group of the conspiracy. The proceedings and the names were daily reported to the DG ISI, in charge of the case. Then one day the Intel moved in and grabbed all the renegades. My name was never heard or mentioned by any one through out this plot.

The summary was completed and the 12 accused were made to sign statements before they were escorted back to their rooms/cells. Some how none of them objected to the contents of their confessions until the trial started. Sattar Choudhry and I did not have any confession; we were merely asked if we had anything to say in our defence. Defence against what? Just because Hashmi had mentioned my name out of context on a totally different issue, unrelated to the conspiracy, was no reason for me to be

there at all. I told the prosecutor Sqn Ldr Butt that I would show him my defence one day soon. He retorted, "I will see you in the dock soon." After the proceedings were over we were taken back to our rooms/cells.

CAS Recommends Field General Court-Martial After the summary was over, the findings and recommendations had to be processed by the Judge Advocate General (JAG), who in turn sent the case to the CAS with his recommendations, which did not recommend a Court-Martial.

The CAS was to take the final decision as to who amongst the accused would have to face a Court-Martial, and the type of Court-Martial. This decision was normally based on the substance and legal acceptability of the confession of the accused and the seriousness of their crime, as recommended by the JAG, the head of the legal branch. In this case Sqn Ldr Butt was calling the shots, as he had a carte blanche from the CAS to convict the maximum officers out of the accused. The JAG Gp Capt Sikandar Bakht, a decent officer, was kept out of the loop because he had advised the CAS Zafar Chaudhry against the methods employed. The junior lawyer Butt became careless in his enthusiasm to hurry through the 'summary' to get the show (Court-Martial) on the road. In the process short cuts were taken by him and the intelligence hounds.

Sqn Ldr Butt had created the impression with the high command after the summary, that it would be a cake-walk to get a thundering conviction against all the 14 accused. This became the bane of the CAS's unwise decision in recommending a Field General Court-Martial (FGCM). FGCM is an instrument of punishment during war or national emergencies where time and resources do not allow the luxury of a proper trial and defence by the accused. No lawyers are allowed and in the case of this trial it could have

meant maximum punishment for most of the accused, which was the death penalty. After the summary was concluded the news of the proceedings had leaked out. The logical question being asked by fair minded officers in the PAF was why were the accused, especially me, being kept in solitary confinement? It became known that after the CAS had read my 24 page scathing statement, in which I had given my penpicture of the Air Chief, Saeedullah and Khaqan Abbasi, and their insecurities which were harming the PAF as well described the long history of incidents and his hatred of me, he had flown off the handle. I had also written about his being highly unpopular from his cadet days. His bashing and whipping of his older son in the middle of Sargodha bazaar for taking his father's car, was also thrown in by me to intimidate him as much as I could, now that my fate seemed sealed. On reading the scathing criticism of his insecure and vindictive personality, he became livid. He was alleged to have told Sqn Ldr Butt, who used to see the CAS daily, one-to-one, unless Khaqan and Saeedullah happened to be present, "I want this man (Haider) hung, I don't care about the rest." How ironical that all this information came to me from his closest confidant, Sqn Ldr Butt, after his attempt to frame me had boomeranged.

Small notes, which we called bombs, started circulating between the rooms after a few weeks of our incarceration. One day I heard that the CAS had made a strong plea to the Prime Minister for a Field General Court-Martial (FGCM) of the arrested officers; a desperate effort to send all 14 of us to the gallows, or at least give us life imprisonment surely and swiftly. We also heard that the Attorney General of the Punjab had been appointed prosecutor along with Sqn Ldr Butt. When we heard the shattering news about the possibility of a Field General Court-Martial, it sent shock waves amongst the accused, our kin and supporters. But

Providence was watching as after a few days, the news went around that the Attorney General Punjab after studying the shabbily conducted summary of evidence, the manufactured confessions and discovering the FGCM

recommendations by the Chief, refused to lead the team of prosecutors.

It would be informative to also unravel some of the happenings outside our solitary confinement during this period, even though I came to know about them much later. The first presentation of the Court-Martial was given to ZAB in Nathiagali by the two service Chiefs of Army and the PAF. Naturally ZAB was made to believe, especially by the PAF's Chief, that the conspirators had planned to take-over the government with the help of the Rawalpindi 111

Brigade meant for the defence of the government. Thereafter, a strong argument was presented to terrify the Prime Minister by asserting that all the accused had voluntarily confessed in front of a magistrate in his court and that the PAF

accused had planned to sever the heads of the President, Prime Minister and his ministers as well as all the provincial Chief Ministers and Governors. One can only imagine the aura pervading that venue where the presentation was being made. It would be pertinent to mention again that my arrest came about on the 26th of May or so, nearly two months after the conspiracy was unearthed and arrests made. Why this delay in conducting the summary of evidence, when all the confessions were in place? There was just one twist to the tale - how to frame and arrest Sajad Haider and destroy his credibility completely with the Prime Minister of Pakistan. This was their golden but last chance to fire their broadside at me. For this reason alone, they were

holding back the summary of evidence proceedings, till they had nabbed me.

After the summary of evidence, a second briefing was scheduled for the Prime Minister and held at the end of May at Nathiagali/Kalabagh (I am not sure of the timing, but it could be plus or minus one week). During this final presentation, ZAB looked at the names and asked the PAF Chief, "Zafar, I did not see Hy-der's name before and I have not been told about his involvement by any of the agencies, why is his name appearing here now (or words to the effect)?"

This was personally told to me by the PAF Judge Advocate General (JAG), Gp Capt Sikandar Bakht, after the Court-Martial, since he was in attendance during all the presentations. At that point, according to the JAG, Gp Capt Mufti jumped up from his seat and told ZAB a blatant lie, that he had a 24 page confessional statement from Sajad Haider. Zafar Chaudhry vociferously validated the DAI's false claim and said that I may well have master-minded this at Sargodha because most of the seriously involved officers arrested were from my command.

Unscrupulously, both senior officers were twisting facts and had construed those 24 pages of my narrative as a confession. It seemed that the PAF high command was confident in getting my 24 page narrative signed by the magistrate by coercing and threatening him. ZAB on hearing about the confession allegedly said, "Alright, if you are so certain of his involvement, then try him."

There was never any confession by me on record at the time of the summary of evidence as claimed during the presentation to the Prime Minister or during the Court-Martial. To the CAS this ploy about the confession may have

seemed a convincing argument, but ZAB was not born yesterday and was a legal eagle himself. Besides, he knew full well what was going on. This presentation had three resounding boomerang effects, which put the PAF high command into an inverted spin.

The Prime Minister categorically rejected the recommendation for FGCM, especially because the Army Chief had not suggested such a drastic course.

Besides, ZAB knew fully well the acrimony between the CAS and myself, in which he had to personally intervene. Aside from rejecting the FGCM, the Prime Minister ordered that it would be an open General Court-Martial and all the accused would be allowed to hire any lawyer they liked. We heard through the grapevine that the rafters had rumbled at AHQ, when the bosses received the executive decision rejecting the FGCM and simultaneously a letter from the Punjab Attorney General refusing to pursue this prosecution.

We discovered with great awe and excitement that Saeedullah Khan and Khaqan Abbasi were disassociated/sacked from their official duties with immediate effect on allegations of intrigue and witch-hunting in the PAF.

Neither of them was allowed to attend their offices till they were unceremoniously and pre-maturely retired when the PAF command changed.

Even till today this has been kept a guarded secret. Nonetheless, it is a recorded fact that Saeedullah Khan and Khaqan Abbasi were ordered out of their jobs.

All this was great news for those of us who had been framed in the conspiracy essentially as a personal vendetta, but the game was still to begin. However, I did not lower my guard,

as I sensed real and up close danger lurking, especially from the two wounded men from the high command, owing to their ignoble removal. My premonition proved correct; as mentioned earlier, the CAS had commanded the prosecutor that if he could get me hanged he did not care if all the rest went free. This was the precarious situation I found myself in. I was incommunicado with the world and did not know what to do.

I had already managed to get a bomb (chit rolled up) through the mess waiter to a pilot who delivered it to my dear sister who was battling to see me. My message asked her to speak with Afzal Agha, the Chief Secretary Punjab, and the Governor Punjab to get a desperate message to ZAB that the PAF was about to be struck a fatal blow if he did not intervene. She recalls how a young pilot phoned her and asked her to meet at a pre-assigned place and be very discreet. She had made her camp at the home of old friends Anwar Tareen and his wife Alia, my sister's class fellow from childhood.

Mufti's intelligence hounds knew where she was staying, and kept her under surveillance. She disguised herself under a bed sheet wrapped around her and took a rickshaw to the PAF camp and received my message from the young pilot who told her they were praying for my safe exit. She also told me that she had a long and acrimonious dialogue with Gp Capt Arshad Choudhry, the CAS's brother-in-law, and told him to tell his Chief that the prayers of many righteous and honourable persons were with her brother, warning him of Divine justice.

My devoted sister Kausar had created a major front in Peshawar against the AHQ bosses. She received tremendous moral support from Gp Capt Azim Daudpota and his wonderful wife, as well from my buddy Omar Afridi and his

wife. The result of her war was that one evening I received a call from Afzal Agha. The security personnel were baffled and they contacted their superiors for clearance, especially as Agha Sahib asked why I was not readily available on the phone. He asked why I was being held in solitary confinement. By the time I spoke to him, there was a commotion in the Provost Squadron. Agha Sahib assured me that injustice would not be done to me under any circumstances and suggested that I go through with the proceedings and let them bring evidence against me, and to have faith in God Almighty. He told me this trial would also be over soon and said he would do his best to communicate my concerns to the Boss.

Charged with Treason and Mutiny

Wg Cdr MS Baig was the Unit Commander at AHQ, who had the responsibility of handling discipline issues. He had visited me a couple of times and reassured me that everyone outside knew about my situation and *Inshallah* I would get out of the present situation soon. Any words like these coming from even the junior most officers or a bearer seemed like rays of hope and created a sense of optimism. But I had reached out to the Almighty through my prayers for He was the final arbiter. Throughout my quandary, I drew tremendous strength by connecting with Almighty God and seeking his guidance and moral strength to withstand this storm without crumbling. I have no doubt that my prayers were heard and Allah's hand was behind me as it always had been through my difficulties and dangers like the two ejections under very dangerous circumstances.

This strength manifested itself as I faced the Court-Martial with unbelievable moral strength. One fine morning, there was a knock on the door, the bolt slid open and Baig walked in, but without his usual cheer. He handed me a charge

sheet. I felt a chill in my bones as I read the blood curdling charge sheet. My heart began to sink and hope dissipated fast. I looked at Baig in sheer agony and asked, "You've been telling me that things will turn out right, what the hell is this"? He mumbled some apologetic syllables without meaning them because he was merely a messenger. The language of the charges cannot be possibly remembered after 32 years, but were something like this:

You are charged with:

- 1) Attempting to over throw the legitimate government of the State of Pakistan by criminal force.
- 2) Attempting to cause mutiny in the rank and file of the air force through illegal means.
- 3) Attempting to subvert the loyalty of the officers and men against Pakistan.
- 4)

Cannot recall the wording, but it was equally brutal.

The roller-coaster ride down hill had started. The high command must have been sure that they had the deck stacked against all the accused, and particularly me. The crux of the charge sheet was that all the charges carried maximum penalty of facing a firing squad or life imprisonment, nothing less. The actual wording was in legal form, but the four charges (fourth I cannot recall) conveyed the essence of the charge sheet. It flattened everybody especially those who were not really involved in the conspiracy against the government but got caught in the whirlwind, hoping that through this enormously dangerous route they would succeed in effecting a change in the PAF leadership. Then there was I, who was there because I had taken on the bullies. I think there was a period of one week between the charge sheet and the day we were carted to

Badaber, outside Peshawar, which was the venue selected for the Court-Martial. We were under such heavy escort, that I am today reminded that it was like the infamous camp at Gitmo Bay.

The PAF law lays down that during a Court-Martial, the accused persons are allowed to select one officer as 'Friend of the Accused', who keeps the contact between the accused during his arrest and incarceration and his family and lawyer as well as providing any other assistance as described by the relevant law. For me personally, this provision made a tremendous difference in how I handled myself during the Court-Martial, obtaining information otherwise denied, such as corroboration and veracity of certain documents and evidence as the trial progressed. Flt Lt Rahim Yousafzai, a pilot from No 19 Squadron and close to me, volunteered for this risky assignment. He performed miracles during the proceedings and put his career and at times his life at stake. His family life suffered because he was with me virtually 18 hours of the day. His sacrifice, courage of conviction, and steadfastness shall always remain as a fond memory during the defining moments of my purgatory.

My memory is hazy on the day to day happenings in the court, because there was just too much going on all around with each accused and their lawyers and the friends of the accused running around, trying to establish a viable defence for the accused. Families sat in the court room watching in awe and often in shock as the prosecution witnesses gave evidence in front of the court with a highly motivated and arrogant PAF prosecutor.

General Court-Martial Begins

We were taken to Badaber, the former US intelligence (ELINT) collection base linked with the U-2 spying mission over the Soviet Union. It had been abandoned by the US project squadron long ago, and therefore, was in a state of poor repairs. A block which contained nearly 40 rooms on two levels was established as a detention camp on the second level. There were very tiny cubicles with a bed and a metal closet. A security check-point was established in the foyer, with a duty officer manning it around the clock. There were about 10

security guards guarding the upper floor and about 40 around the perimeter, which was heavily barbed-wired. There were 10 common toilets and showers on each floor. The barrack was supposed to be air-conditioned but it never worked.

Now we were free to mingle with each other and discuss the case and future course of action. Some of the heavy-weights of Pakistan had been hired by the accused as their defence lawyers. These were names such as Manzoor Qadir, M

Aslam, Khalid Ishaq, with his understudy the young lawyer Zahid Aslam (later Chief Justice of Pakistan) and others on the second tier of the legal profession.

Two of my personal and family friends from the legal profession, Ali Khan Afridi and the renowned Dr Pervez Hassan, volunteered to appear on my behalf.

Both were big time corporate lawyers without any experience in criminal law.

After the initial proceedings, they decided to employ a criminal lawyer and I was landed with a character called Aftab Farrukh (later Justice of the Punjab High Court) at fairly high fees, which were borne by my poor family. He proved to

be more of an irritant rather than a source of inspiration for my defence.

The court comprised the following officers as judges:

Air Vice Mshl Mohammed Nawaz – President of the Court-Martial
Air Cdre Hafeez Rana – Member

Air Cdre Athar Hussain – Member

Gp Capt MN Butt – Member

Gp Capt Butt – Member

Gp Capt GS Butt – Member

Wg Cdr M Ismail – Member

Prosecution Team: Sqn Ldr Butt, Attorney General and Deputy Attorney Generals of NWFP.

The court was assisted by a representative from the PAF legal branch on behalf of the JAG, who turned out to be an amazingly upright officer, with tremendous courage and an outstanding legal mind, especially chosen by the JAG to prevent serious miscarriage of justice. Sqn Ldr Anwar acted as the Judge Advocate (JA), who declared on day one that his terms of reference were to assist the court in legal matters as well as the accused persons. Since he was new in the PAF and had reportedly been trained in the US to specialise in law, he had an extremely pragmatic, unbiased and upright approach to his responsibilities.

This became known as the case progressed. He took a firm stand on legal matters, especially repudiating the arrogant prosecutor Butt, when the latter stepped out of his class.

The composition of the court was extremely important from our point of view. All the officers appointed to the court were decent air force officers, none known for any hint of vindictiveness in them. They were career officers and would not want to rock their boat or step on any toes.

Consequently, while the accused did not feel threatened by any particular member, at the same time there was a feeling that if intimidated and coerced by the hierarchy, they may not take a strong position against them. The President Air Vice Mshl Nawaz was an officer with good credentials, and was a source of positive energy for me personally because I felt that he would not crumble and be unjust.

It has been well over 30 years since this incident and it is virtually impossible to recollect the sequence of events and the proceedings of the CourtMartial. Therefore, I will try to summarize and highlight its important aspects to the best of my memory. For the accused officers it was nail-biting, adrenaline pumping and prayers were flowing towards heaven during the seven months of the prosecution's case being presented. On the first day, all the accused were arraigned and charges were read to each accused person separately. The crackling, emotional tension permeated the entire assembly. There was pin-drop silence except for the PAF prosecutor virtually lapping up the contrived charges of heinous crimes against each accused. If I recall well, the proceedings ended at 1400 Hrs and the accused people were informed that they would be allowed an opening statement in their defence the next day.

The next morning, we were picked up at the precisely given time and escorted to the court room. When everybody was seated, the judges arrived and took their seats. The President then asked the accused No 1 to make his statement. Hashmi made a fairly long speech, the contents of which I cannot recollect, nor for that matter can I recollect any other statements of the accused.

But right or not, generally the common theme was that they had been victims of Zafar Chaudhry's vindictive policies and

a Qadiani conspiracy to damage the PAF. The only statement which was unique and nearly stunned everyone was by Sqn Cdr Ghaus, the main accused. Ghaus stood up and said, "Your honour, I decline to make any statement in my defence, what ever I did was out of conviction." That was virtual admission that whatever he did, was with strong belief and that he would not detract from what he believed to be the best for the PAF and Pakistan. Thereafter, the first witness for the prosecution was called in by the prosecutor.

Case for the Prosecution

The first as well as the crown witness (if I recall correctly) was Major Tariq Rafi, a commando by profession and an extremely hard nut to crack even by the best of the defence lawyers. His deposition was the core around which the entire conspiracy hinged and the defence had to break this witness to have even the remotest chance to save their clients. His evidence was incontrovertible; he had remembered every moment in immutable detail during the hours spent in Nadir Cinema and elsewhere, where the conspirators had held their meetings. He was indestructible, and the sarcastic remarks made by the big time lawyers merely bounced off him. He was equally steadfast during the soft spoken but penetrating cross examination by the invincible Khalid Ishaq. His recollection of every single event, meeting, every word uttered and by whom, at what time and place, was recounted with stunning detail and accuracy. Those were tenuous moments for all the accused, especially me, waiting with a pounding heart wondering when my name would be mentioned by him. However, he did not allude to me even by inference.

After his deposition was over, he was put through the most gruelling and aggressive cross-examination by the defence lawyers over the next several weeks. M Anwar had a very

heavy and loud voice, added to that the mike in front of him nearly rattled the roof whenever he became aggravated by the intransigence and firmness of the witness. The President had to often intervene to caution M Anwar to lower his voice, suggesting that no one was deaf in the hall. He would remove the mike and throw it towards his deputy in a highly dramatic manner. Nothing affected the crown witness. Tariq would not cave-in to any one. He had been well chosen by the agencies and he performed like a super star in a mega-hit. It was a theatrical masterpiece.

His cross-examination lasted over several weeks, eight hours a day, and six days a week. He mentioned the names of most of the accused, in some context or the other, except mine. Some details were innocuous and others very damaging. I have to admit that I waited throughout his deposition sitting on the edge of my seat, while I learnt for the first time the incredible details of this conspiracy. As his deposition progressed, I could sense some of the accused almost crumbling in their seats, because their fate seemed to be getting sealed by Major Tariq's testimony. Others felt the shock waves from the possible consequences of their minor involvement, which got them roped in during vulnerable moments of their lives.

On the first day of his deposition, during the daily tea break at 1100 Hrs, Major Tariq saw me with a cup of tea in my hand and he walked up and saluted me, and said, "Sir, I had no idea that you were included in the Court-Martial. I don't recall your name ever being mentioned." As much as it was comforting to hear that, it would not make much of a difference, because I was already an accused person, at the behest of the Air Chief and that was a dreadful reality. I told Major Tariq that I was a victim of circumstances and not a conspirator, because such an act was below my dignity and contrary to my ideas about the meaning of glory.

Back at 'Stalag-14' (the infamous Nazi prison camp of WW-II), as we called our barrack, at lunch time everyone would gather around munching food and discuss the day's proceedings. Sikander had initiated several of us into playing chess and soon after lunch and dinner was over, everybody huddled around and either played or watched the chess game. Hashmi was the best player in the crowd and I the worst, but I never said 'die' and kept going, whenever I could. Almost everyone started to pray five times a day including me. I used to pray alone in my room and discovered that in the lonely silence, Allah's presence was powerful and real. I drew amazing strength from sensing His presence and that provided me the energy and the courage to face the Court-Martial with such aggression that it became irritating for the President of the Court-Martial on several occasions. We discovered that whenever he got angry at someone for bad behaviour, he would go red in the face, pick-up the metallic paper cutter and place the pointed head on his right ear.

Capt Naseer Ahmed was an anti-climax to Major Tariq Rafi in so far as personality and presentation of his evidence was concerned. Meek and servile looking, his story began when he was travelling from his regiment based in NWFP to Rawalpindi or Lahore. En route, he claimed to have broken his journey to visit an army captain whom he referred to as his best friend in the army and had lunch with him. After the lunch, his friend was alleged to have told him that some highly professional senior officers (Brigadiers FB Ali and Aleem Afridi), supported by a large group from other services, were planning to revive the image of the armed forces. They felt their image had been severely sullied by Bhutto and his political party, including his ministers and governors.

According to Capt Naseer, his host and best friend disclosed to him that he had joined the dissident group in whom he had full confidence and that they would bring about a change in the country's leadership. His friend allegedly asked him to join the group of these supposedly revolutionaries since he considered him like a brother. Naseer digested what he heard and went on his way. On the way back to his unit Capt Naseer stopped to see his friend again. During the brief stay the same story was repeated with greater persuasion for Naseer to join the crowd. Naseer claimed to have told his 'best friend' that he would give it a serious thought and let him know. Capt Naseer apparently did give it a serious thought but from a different angle of how to cash-in for his personal benefit.

He decided to bring the matter to the attention of the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) Gen Tikka Khan in person. The PSO to the COAS was contacted.

To recall exactly what was said by Capt Naseer is not possible, therefore, I am trying my best to stay as close to his statement as memory permits. The PSO to Tikka had asked him some searching questions why he wanted to see the Chief without going through the proper channels. Naseer told him that was a matter of dire threat to the national security and he would only disclose it to the Army Chief. Finally, he managed to meet the COAS and told him about what his best friend had tried to involve him in. From his evidence, it seemed that the COAS

discussed the matter with the DG ISI and it was decided to plant this officer amongst the conspirators and thus penetrate the core of the conspiracy.

Major Tariq Rafi was also inducted because he was considered a smart and intelligent officer. Clearly, there was

little doubt that Capt Naseer had a quid pro quo upper most in his mind and hoped to enhance his career (Capt Naseer did become a general officer with an odious reputation till the end). He repeated almost verbatim what Major Tariq had disclosed to the court. His evidence also dragged on as the lawyers hammered away at him to find some small crack in his evidence which they could exploit. I think that his evidence was even weaker in content against Dilawar and a few others, who were really spectators without participation. His cross examination proceeded and the lawyers of each accused grilled him up to 6 hours of the day.

One afternoon, as we were defiantly flying kites (we had been ordered not to do so!) the duty officer came down from his post and tried to stop us. I told him that he should go back to his desk, if he wanted to be able to walk to his transport later on, suggesting his legs might be in danger of our wrath. Just then, a service car appeared and stopped in front of the security gate of the compound.

I saw Begum Zulfiqar Ali Khan coming out, holding the hand of my son Adnan.

This was the first time I saw my son after a long spell. The security guard tried to stop him but was told by Mrs Zulfiqar to let him through. He ran to me screaming "Daddy, Daddy, what's happening to you?" As I held him close to my chest, it was an amazing feeling and I could not hold back my tears. I held him for what seemed a long time and over his shoulder, I greeted Begum Zulfiqar, "*Sajida Apa, Assalam-o-Alaikum*, thank you for bringing Adnan to me and for taking care of him."

She said she would come back in half an hour so that Adnan could spend sometime with me. I left my kite with one of the officers and took Adnan to my cell-like room. I tried to

explain to him as gently and simply as I could without causing him too much trauma about what might happen to me. I did have to answer a question he asked me, "But Daddy who has ordered for you to be in this camp, guarded by the police (he thought that the guards were all police)?" I replied that the Air Force Chief Air Marshal Zafar Chaudhry did not like me and that is the only fault I have, but *Inshallah*, I would not be there for long and then we could be together again. The duty officer knocked at my door and informed me that Begum Zulfiqar had arrived to take my son back. I walked him to the barbed-wired entrance across from the small compound, where Sajida Apa was waiting outside her car. As I waved to her, she said, "We are praying for your health and good news." I shouted back, "Sajida Apa, tell Agha Jee (Zulfiqar) to start preparing to lead the PAF, it is just a matter of time." She said, "Sajad, *tum baaz nahi aao gay* (Sajad, you will not change)". I said, "I don't need to change at all, it's the other side that needs the change." She quickly got into the car and drove away.

One day I was in deep thought when I heard a knock at the door. I asked the knocker to come in. It turned out to be a rather shaken duty officer for the day. I asked him what the problem was. He said, "Sir, there was a small incident caused by your son, who arrived an hour earlier than the visiting hours, so I told him to wait around in the compound with the other children (these were the children of the accused officers, who were camping in a broken down barrack adjacent to ours and used to play in the compound). But he got upset and started shouting at me saying, 'You don't know who my father is, he will fix you when he finds out that you're not letting me see him'. He was quite upset and took out a newspaper cutting, which was actually a photograph of Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry. He asked me if I recognized who this man was, and I told him yes, he is the Chief of the Pakistan AirForce. Then he threw the picture on

the floor and starting kicking it and squishing it with his heels with tears flowing in his eyes.

He was screaming obscenities about the CAS. I tried to pacify him affectionately but he ran out and refuses to come up.”

I apologised to the duty officer and told him that my son was well brought up but even at this age, a child cannot see his father under such conditions. I told him not to get upset and I would go down and bring him to my room. As I went down, I saw my son standing with the guards and chatting away. I wondered if he was also giving the guards a piece of his innocent mind. These are some of the episodes that have left a lasting impression on my mind and I revisit them as a haunting memory of the purgatory hell I was committed to for a vendetta that was not of my making. This was just a sample of how the families of the accused were crushed emotionally, not to speak of the financial burden, which left all the accused and their family members in financial insolvency.

Examining the Prosecution Witnesses

The day before, it was going to be my lawyer’s turn to cross-examine the witness on my behalf. I prepared a questionnaire for him and handed it to him as he came at the usual time in the evening to discuss the progress of the case. That particular evening, when he read the dozen or so questions, he shook his completely bald head from shoulder to shoulder and said his oft repeated comment, “Gp Capt Haider, why do you insist on shoving your head on the executioner’s block. He has said nothing about you and you should be saying *Nafals* (Muslim prayers of thanks) for not appearing on his list.” I got furious with my lawyer and told him that it was not easy to concoct and manipulate

additional names because that would destroy the credibility of the crown witness in moments. “How the hell can he talk about me now after his deposition? As a lawyer, you should know that if the key witness changes his original statement, he can be tried for perjury.” A heated argument ensued as he felt offended, saying I was trying to teach him how to suck eggs etc.

Before he left, I told him that he has to listen to my instructions because it was my neck not his. The next day, it just so happened that my lawyer friends Ali Afridi and Dr Pervez Hassan were both away to Lahore and Karachi respectively to attend some important hearings. It is important to mention here the profound role played by my lawyer friends. Both Ali Afridi and Dr Pervez Hassan had sound practices and both had several important cases running concurrently in various higher courts of the country. Ali Afridi was based in Karachi and Dr Pervez Hassan at his law offices in Lahore. Dr Pervez Hassan was staying at my house, while Ali Afridi was staying with his brother Omar Afridi but after ZAB told Omar Afridi at the Governor House that the Air Chief had bitterly complained about his interference in the case, Ali had to move out and stay with his eldest brother Anwar Khan Afridi, where he could use his office facilities to prepare briefs and other legal documents.

Dr Pervez Hassan used to arrive on Sunday night by air and depart on Friday noon time to catch-up with his own work, which must have indeed been piling-up high by the day. Ali Afridi used to come for weeks together, leaving his own legal obligations at Karachi. Once Ali had been engaged by Aftab Sherpao, who was the Minister for Water & Power and he had a crucial meeting in Abu Dhabi for important negotiations. Ali told Sherpao that he could not participate since he was busy with my case, which was at a critical stage.

Imploring by Aftab Sherpao did not detract Ali from his abiding commitment to a friend. Months had passed and I realized that the mere expense of their travelling to and from Peshawar was a heavy burden, the time and days of the weeks spent at Badaber notwithstanding. There are no words in any language written or spoken, which can describe my personal gratitude and debt as well as that of every member of my family to these true friends for the support and sacrifice they made to defend me. Ali Afridi stayed on the case to its final minutes and even petitioned on behalf of five of my co-accused, after the court's decision which was not acceptable to an obdurate CAS.

As mentioned earlier, on that particular day, both Ali Afridi and Pervez had been away because the heat of the crown witnesses had receded, and no mention about me had been made. The cross examination of Captain Naseer was expected to be over by Friday, which made it easy for them to catch up with their own work. They could not foresee any problem. The court assembled as usual and the proceedings began, with the prosecutor opening the proceedings for the day. It was towards the end that my turn came and procedurally my lawyer was asked if he would like to cross-examine the witness. To my utter surprise and irritation, he stood up and recited a verse from Mirza Ghalib (the famous poet) about betrayal by a beloved. To this the President responded with a red face, "Mr Farrukh, I have warned you severely not to indulge in light hearted comics, do you have a question or not"? Before Aftab Farrukh could open his mouth, I shot up from my chair directly behind my lawyer and said, "Your honour, my lawyer has 12 questions to ask of this witness, I'm now instructing him to proceed with the cross examination or else I will do it myself".

There was a silent hush in the hall as the moment became tense and the President of the court lifted the paper cutter

and took it up to his ear addressing me in anger, “Haider, the witness has said nothing about you, why are you so keen to invite antagonism. You are represented by a lawyer, which disallows you to question the witness.” I rebelled, “Your honour, this is not a trial of Sajad Haider, this fact should have manifested itself by now; this is the trial of the entire Pakistan Air Force, its very existence and potential is in serious danger.

Therefore, I implore you to allow me the right to question the credibility and character of this witness. In the meantime, to abide by your honour’s directive about the presence of my lawyer, I request my lawyer to withdraw from the court room since he has disregarded my instructions.” I cannot describe my own emotions and the frenzy that overtook the quiet ambiance of the court room. My lawyer got up from his chair in deliberate slow motion and gathered his books and files. He turned around and handed a slip of paper as he angrily walked away from the court room. The President was visibly taken aback by my behaviour and when I asked the court’s permission to question the witness, the President’s angst reverberated in the acoustic prone hall, “Go ahead, but make it short and relevant.” I looked at the witness and tried to intimidate him by asking that he face me and look me in the eye. The President interrupted and said, “Haider, ask the damn question”.

I tore the witness to pieces and suggested to him that he was just a weasel and not fit to wear the uniform because he did not conduct himself with courage to stop his best friend from wrong doing and instead cashed in on him. At that moment the President interrupted my questioning and asked me, “What is the point you are trying to make”? I said, “Sir, I will make the point now.”

Addressing Capt Naseer, I said, "I suggest to you Capt Naseer that you are unworthy of the uniform that you wear because you did not exercise the sacred responsibility towards another comrade, the one you called your best friend; your one and only purpose then and now in life is to climb over your comrades, even their dead bodies to get to higher ranks". At that point, the President sternly stopped me and ordered me to sit down and declared that I was taking advantage of the leniency of the court. Whatever the President thought, I felt much lighter, almost floating from the satisfaction of having called the witness the worst name for a man in uniform.

Ali Afridi and Dr Pervez Hassan were communicated the scene in the court during the weekend and I was seriously admonished by both of them and warned that if I opened my mouth again in the court, they would abandon me. I got the message and had no intention of any further cross examination because I had made my point all around. Looking back, I think that my conduct that day was monstrous and down right dangerous because I learnt from the President of the court, many years later, that all the judges had been riled up with my uncalled for theatrics during the Court-Martial.

The next witness sworn in was Sqn Ldr Dr Zuzarte, a Christian officer. I helped the lawyers prepare the questionnaire for the good doctor also. The central theme of my thought process was to establish that we were unlawfully kept under the worst kind of solitary confinement. Only the doctor could help establish that, if he would tell the stark truth without embellishment.

He was sworn in on the Bible because of his faith, while all the others had sworn on the Holy Quran. Zuzarte stood ten feet above all the witnesses and spoke the truth all through

his deposition and cross-examination. M Aslam roared in the courtroom, saying that the fact that the accused were subjected to conditions worse than criminals convicted for capital crime was a major caveat against the prosecution case. This evidence was like a rapier thrust between the ribs of the prosecutor Sqn Ldr Butt. The next witness will be the last one of my episode to keep it from becoming a runaway story.

Other than the two crown witnesses already covered, the most dubious evidence came from the devious magistrate, who was purported to have recorded all the ten confessions in his court room using all the official court facilities and his PA for the purpose of fulfilling the legal pre-requisites of a confession. After he swore on the Holy Quran and promised to tell the truth and nothing but the truth, he lied blatantly. From day one, I developed a severe contempt for the man because he had stooped to the gutter to further his career. He conceded any shred of dignity or self-esteem he may have possessed before his reprehensible conduct in his case. I cannot remember his name, but consider that of least consequence because there was no other magistrate or judicial officer involved in obtaining confessions from the accused. He had to be broken and I was very upbeat about nailing him down, even though he had declined the pressure from CA Waheed and Sibtain to stamp any contrived confession on my behalf.

He made his deposition about each of the accused, whose confessions had been obtained by fair or foul means. Each time he mentioned the accused by his name, he would seek permission from the court to go close to the accused person to ensure that it was the same person, whose confession he had recorded, explaining that he had weak eye-sight and could not recognize the accused from a distance. Of course, this was a ruse master minded by the prosecutor Butt to

lend credibility and seriousness to the magistrate's evidence. I do not think he succeeded in fooling the court or the accused and their lawyers. He was a big, swarthy man exuding poor health, with jaundiced eyes. His deposition took days because each confession had to be read out by the prosecutor and then endorsed by him as being valid and taken after ensuring that the accused was not confessing under duress, threat or intimidation and that he had gone the extra mile to ensure that the accused were not subjected to any mental or physical torture.

The challenge for the lawyers was to demolish the credibility of the magistrate's deposition by proving that solitary confinement was tantamount to third degree torture to officers and gentlemen in uniform. Secondly, they had to challenge the veracity of his statement that the confessions were voluntary and made in his office and his presence and typed by his staff. It was manifestly clear that in any confession which he could prove to be completely genuine, the accused person had little chance to escape, especially when corroborated with the evidence of the prime crown witness. This was the time when the friends of the accused, especially Flt Lt Rahim Yousafzai and Hashmi's friend, who was an ex-PAF officer turned lawyer, went with full after burners everywhere to find a chink in the magistrate's armour protection.

As far as I recall, the first piece of information that came through to me was to scrutinize the register, which was maintained by the magistrate about the details of the recording of confession, times, dates, duration etc. I recall Rahim Yousafzai getting some very credible information about the anomalies that became evident from the content of the magistrate's statement of offences and the recordings in the register. He was grilled devastatingly by the lawyers. I also received extremely valuable information suggesting

that the confessions ought to be exposed for their several unlawful aspects. Our evaluation and analysis of the confessions as disclosed to the lawyers was awesome and provided a firm base for demolishing the magistrate's evidence by the lawyers. The cross-examination exposed the following: The confessions of Hashmi, Ghaus and Sikander comprised nearly 30 pages on the average. These were alleged to have been recorded in the magistrate's office, which was established by the lawyers as a very small cubicle and for 30

plus pages of confession, at least 5-6 hours were required. According to the register, the recording time was ridiculously less than the minimum estimated.

The confessions were taken during the months of June and July, when temperatures soared to unbearable degrees and sitting in one room for 5-6 hours with just a fan was a test of human endurance, especially that of a fat and unhealthy magistrate.

To type close to 9,000 or so words without a single typographical error or punctuation was impossible for a magistrate's PA under such sweltering conditions; not even the most professional typist in the CAS's office could have achieved such miraculous results. Such perfection by a typist in the Provincial Government was too much of a miracle for any sane person to believe. This became even more untenable because the magistrate claimed that the procedure for recording the evidence was that the accused person was stating it verbally and the typist was typing with speed and making no phonetic, typographical, spelling and punctuation errors. There was not one such error in any of the confessions. Presumably, this was the work of a diligent, well educated criminology expert. It should not be too hard to figure out who that evil genius could have been.

The water marks on the papers on which confessions were recorded were not the NWFP Government's official stationary. It was proven by the lawyers with some help from my friend Yousafzai that the watermarks were exactly those used by the Intelligence Directorate at AHQ. The fonts, size and all other characteristics of the typewriter were totally different to the one supplied by the Frontier Administration to the bureaucrats and judicial officers. Once again, with the help of my 'Friend of the Accused', it was established that the typewriters used were exactly like those used by DAI's (Mufti's) office.

When the magistrate started to cave-in, he tried to change his stance and probably admitted (I can't remember exactly how that happened) that a few of the confessions were recorded in a room at Badaber and also admitted that he carried his stamps with him to validate confessions at the facility provided by the PAF. He, however, used the pretence that this was done only when the courts were closed and the accused had agreed to confess voluntarily late in the evenings.

To make a very long cross-examination process short, the prosecutor seemed to be losing the few hairs he had left on his bald head as the magistrate began to crumble. One particular day, as the President adjourned the court for tea break, we came out laughing with some relief that the confessions would lose their derogatory impact on the case to some degree. I saw the magistrate coming out of the court room, when I had joined Akhtar Rao and Pervez Iqbal's families waiting under a tree. I had a strong impulse to do something to the magistrate. It was a dangerous move on my part, but I went ahead anyhow. I called him a fat pig and said he was a Kafir, who lied against innocent fighter pilots and told him that soon I would make mince meat of his loathsome body. I probably threw in some more vile

expletives and the funny thing was that the prosecutor standing close by like his body guard was taking it all in.

When the court reassembled, the magistrate broke down and between sobs told the court how he had been abused. The President almost shouted at me, "Did you or did you not abuse him?" I replied, "Your honour, he is lying because I did not abuse his mother or father at all, I did say some other things and I can recall them if you like." I saw the paper cutter lifting up to his ear and the President angrily told me that I was going to get my head in the noose by my terrible behaviour. I felt a surge of joy inside me; the accused and the lawyers and especially the visitors must have loved every moment of that unconventional cross-examination.

We were into the 8th month of the incarceration and the 6th month into the Court-Martial. The President had enhanced the court timings in order to speed up the process because the prosecution had dragged on for too long and the defence would take its own time. This could mean almost a year of lives wasted for the satisfaction of an ego-maniac. By the time the prosecution ended its case; there were 1,100 or so pages of evidence in front of each judge, some of them just barely visible behind the massive pile of documents. Finally, there was a day when the prosecutor wrapped up his case and held all the accused guilty of all charges pressed against them. He asked that all the accused be convicted on the basis of their submission and awarded punishments according to the dictates of law for such a heinous and capital crime.

At this stage, the court sought the advice of the JA as to the process to be followed. Sqn Ldr Anwar made an opening speech about the defence of the accused. He declared that his job was not restricted only to advise the court, but he was also advisor for the accused persons. He said that he

would be available throughout the preparation by the defence lawyers on any legal advice that the accused persons may seek. He stated that his advice would strictly be on legal aspects only and not in any way regarding the prosecution's case and evidence recorded. He also reiterated that he had been advising the court on the admissibility or otherwise of the prosecution's evidence and the methods adopted by the prosecutors. He would continue to assist the court as well as the accused during the defence phase.

Case for the Defence

It may be recalled that I had packed-off my lawyer when he had tried to make a mockery of the cross-examination I asked him to conduct against Capt Naseer. By this time, only Ali Afridi remained for my defence. The President of the court had been kept under increasing pressure by the CAS to manipulate the case to ensure 100% convictions. As mentioned earlier, Air Vice Mshl Nawaz personally told me once while I was visiting Gen Jillani, when he was the Secretary General Defence that the Air Chief had instructed him to be briefed every single day at the end of the proceedings. That was not all; Air Vice Mshl Nawaz said that the CAS used to give him long instructions, which he would jot down on the margin of his own brief for the CAS to keep a record for posterity in case he was called upon to justify his actions and conduct. He said that he went through a very tenuous trial himself because he was not being allowed an even playing field. In the final analysis, his conscience won over coercion and he would not go against what Allah guided him to do. Justice was his only wont whatever the risks involved.

It was in these circumstances that Ali Afridi had been mulling over the idea of the recourse available to the

accused known in the legal jargon as 'Plea of No Case'. What it meant in essence was that the prosecution had failed to establish a prima-facie case against me. I was the only person accused without any solid, leave alone corroborative, evidence. However, there was a lacuna in this option. If the court was even under pressure and not firmly unbiased, they could decide that the 'Plea of No Case' could not be accepted as it would be tantamount to preadjudication before the case for the defence was presented. This in turn would infer that there was a case against the accused established by the prosecution. For the first time in my life, I really understood the actual nuance of the 'Catch-22

Situation'. You could be damned if you do it and damned if you don't.

The court had adjourned for some time for the defence lawyers to prepare their defence case. This was a defining moment of my life and the final decision had to be with my full consent. Ali Afridi had excellent logic for being in favour of this plea and had prepared with deep earnest a 'Plea of No Case'. I took the opportunity, with Ali's approval, to seek advice from the JA, Sqn Ldr Anwar.

He arrived in my room at the appointed time and we had a very pleasant interaction before I posed the question to him. I asked Sqn Ldr Anwar that my lawyer and I were on the horns of a dilemma as to whether it would be wise and safe to seek redress to the injustice done to me through a 'Plea of No Case'.

He gave me a penetrating look and said, "Sir, I cannot advise you on what you should do or not do, because that would be morally and professionally incorrect. What I can do is to explain to you the pros and cons of 'Plea of No Case'." I

told him that Ali Afridi was my tested friend and a consummate lawyer, who had gone into the ramifications of this plea and wanted to go ahead with it but for me it was a question of my honour more than safety that was involved. After a few minutes he got up to leave, but before he turned away, he said, "Sir, you have the reputation of being a brave person. You can only be courageous and nothing else". Having said that, he turned around and left.

I contacted Ali Afridi later that evening and asked him to visit me. When he came, he jokingly asked, "Are you getting nervous about the day after tomorrow? Remember, the final decision to go or not will be yours and I will fight it to the nth degree, which ever way you want to go". I said, "Ali, I feel that your option is the only honourable course for me. I don't want to be seen as dithering because Allah knows and I know that the whole episode is about framing me. You go ahead and blitzkrieg through those 1,100 pages of evidence". No one else knew about our conversation or the final decision until we entered the court, when it re-assembled. The President asked the lawyers if they were ready to put up their defence. One by one all the lawyers nodded in affirmative except Ali Afridi. Ali stood up to seek the court's permission to make a plea on behalf of his client. He was told to go ahead. He made a short deposition in which he implored the court, "My client has been a victim of a witch-hunt, intimidation of the most cruel kind by the powers that be, and when all failed to implicate him to destroy his career, he was framed in this case without an iota of evidence to prove that he even had an inkling of the conspiracy. I therefore seek a 'Plea of No Case' for my client because the prosecution has utterly failed to prove their case against him."

There was a hum in the hall and one could almost sense the resounding echo of my heart beat and possibly of several

others. The prosecutor Butt was furiously whispering in the ears of the senior prosecutor, who stood up and said that it was too early for the accused No 13 to seek 'Plea of No Case' without putting up his defence. At this stage, the JA spoke up and said, "Mr Prosecutor, it is the prerogative of the accused person to challenge your case for the prosecution. It is your call now to prove his involvement and then he could be asked to put up his defence." There was deathly silence as all the judges were focused on the prosecution team, which was haemorrhaging from the looks of it.

Sqn Ldr Butt stood up and asked the court for one week's adjournment for them to prepare their reply.

The President of the court looked at the JA, who had already started to address the prosecutors. I cannot remember the precise words but will try my best to recapitulate the JA's contention: "Mr Prosecutor, you have taken 7

months, 1,100 and more pages of evidence to establish your prima-facie against the accused officers. Why should you ask for a week more to prepare something which should already be present in this pile that is lying in front of the honourable court? With your expertise and the case for the prosecution, you may be allowed an hour or two at the most to re-produce the evidence against accused No 13 which could justify rejection of his plea. This should be done in a few hours not days. Finally, of course, it is up to the honourable court to give their decision on the matter." This was a stunning performance by a man with courage of his conviction and a sense of dignity for rule of law. Even the court seemed to be baffled at this straight talk.

The President adjourned the court for half an hour. For the first time since the start of these proceedings, most people

did not want to leave the court room, but it was procedurally required that the court be vacated when an adjournment is ordered. This was a very nervous half an hour of my life as well as for Ali Afridi and all the well wishers. For the co-accused, my success meant a new window of opportunity for them; because it would prove that victimization of dissenters had been the prime cause of involving several officers not really guilty of the charges slapped on them. During this break, as I learnt later, the President contacted the CAS, Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry as per his orders, in any unusual development. Air Vice Mshl Nawaz was directed to provide the prosecution the time they needed. Legally and morally the interlude was incorrect. The President agreed on a 3 days adjournment.

As the court re-assembled, the decision to adjourn for three days was announced and frankly it came down like a hammer on my head, because the CAS was capable of any nasty plan to undermine this opportunity. From the exhortation and courage shown by the JA, one thing was clear; Ali Afridi had taken the right course. These 3 days will remain the longest days and nights of my life. I can still feel the chill in my spine as I recall the episode. I was confounded with anguish, every wakeful minute was tormenting and fraught with dangers; the nights were very long and sleepless and agonizing. My coaccused tried to raise my morale by hypothesizing that no new evidence could be put forward and it was most unlikely that some dramatic development would take place and a new witness for the prosecution may be produced. But it was my life and my honour which was the target and the sharp-shooters in and outside the AHQ were going to leave no stone unturned to neutralize our attack.

Incidentally, the news about the JA being pressurized to play the prosecutor's game was told to me during those

tormenting three days of adjournment by my friend Major Fateh, whose organisation was keeping surveillance on the PAF intelligence personnel. After what seemed like a lifetime, finally the day arrived when we were escorted back to the court room for my fate to be decided. Perhaps it was my own state of mind that sensed a climax having been built-up to that point in the Court-Martial. I am not sure if I have mentioned earlier but there were two civilians who attended every single day of the proceedings. They were strangers to the PAF and later turned out to be intelligence agents, who were reporting directly to the Prime Minister's Secretariat. The rest of the hall was completely full with families and many first time visitors from the PAF. The judges had not arrived yet and Ali Afridi was busy discussing the ensuing proceedings with Khalid Ishaq.

There was a noisy altercation at the entrance to the hall. Rahim Yousafzai marched off towards the entrance to check what was going on. Soon we found out that there were about twenty young officers from Risalpur, who had turned up to witness the verdict. Some settlement was made and the young pilots were allowed to stand behind the spectator's gallery. The members of the court entered and the atmosphere was a mixture of sombreness and palpable tension.

There was a different kind of synergy that bonded the spectators, the accused and the lawyers together. The prosecution squad seemed every bit like the villains in a melodrama. I had difficulty keeping my heart within its natural rhythm, because it was pounding inside my body. One thing that was holding me together was my faith in Allah and I was trying to fast rewind all the critical situations of my life such as the ejections from burning aircrafts, facing death once too often during the 1965 War and some decisive moments of the 1971

War. The Hand of Allah has always protected me. I tried to conjure-up His presence and protection in the ensuing imbroglio.

The President addressed the Chief Prosecutor and asked, "Have you had enough time to prepare your case, please let us hear it." This must have been the first moment of agony for Sqn Ldr Butt and by inference; one can imagine what went on behind the scene in the Air House during the adjournment period. If I recall well, it was prosecutor Butt who read out a page of the most non-sensible argument as to why my 'Plea of No Case' should be rejected and I should be ordered to present my defence. I cannot recall the absurd argument put up by him, but I do recall the short but hard hitting opinion by Sqn Ldr Anwar (JA) after the President turned to him and asked him to make his comments. The JA was sensational. He said, "Mr Prosecutor, there is not a mono-syllable in your argument which could incriminate accused No 13 Gp Capt Sajad Haider. There is neither a shred of evidence which justifies his being present as an accused, nor is there any corroborative evidence of what you have tried to present as his crime. You have the responsibility now to explain to the accused as to the basis on which he has been subjected to this treatment for 7 months. You owe him an explanation" (I have only tried to recollect from memory what I remember, as the comments by the JA cannot be reproduced without the actual record, which is not available. Therefore, I have paraphrased the essence of his address).

The court adjourned to re-assemble after one hour. Indeed, Allah had put me on a trial and was testing my resilience and tenacity to withstand the incredible pressure that had been building up for the 4th day. The final hour came as the bell rang and everybody swarmed back into the court room. It would be futile to try and describe the charged emotion,

the hope, expectation and fear of intervention by the CAS as we knew for sure that he was receiving minute to minute accounts (until he departed for Chaklala, which I learnt later from my course mate Air Vice Mshl Masood Khan, who was then the Base Commander of Chaklala air base, and had given him the news about the court's final verdict). From what he told me years later, Zafar Chaudhry had taken-off in the Falcon for Chaklala after the prosecution's last ditch effort to denigrate and incriminate me. Butt was not looking up, but Allah was looking down and His hand was protecting me!

The Verdict

The judges took their seats and there was a deathly pin drop silence before the President of the court, Air Vice Mshl Nawaz addressed everyone. My eyes were like a radar beam, moving from the members on the extreme right through each one of the seven to the last one on the left, Wg Cdr Ismail. My first scan did not achieve any lock-on with any pair of eyes. The President was shuffling some papers and the members of the court wore a completely blank expression. I hated them all just for those few seconds. Then I picked up the last man on the left, Ismail and got a lock-on to his eyes for a fleeting second and his fist, which was visible between the piles of evidence, moved and I saw his thumb rising from the horizontal upwards, but I could not tell if he was indicating a middle of the way decision or one that was in my favour. The President spoke and said words to the effect:

“THE MEMBERS OF THE COURT HAVE DELIBERATED VERY CAREFULLY THE EVIDENCE PRODUCED BY THE PROSECUTION

THROUGHOUT THE TRIAL AND TODAY AS RESPONSE TO THE
'PLEA OF NO CASE' BY THE LEGAL COUNSEL OF ACCUSED
NO

13, THE COURT FINDS THE PROSECUTOR'S CASE AGAINST
THE

ACCUSED INDEFENSIBLE. IT IS THE UNANIMOUS DECISION
OF

THE COURT THAT THE 'PLEA OF NO CASE' IS ACCEPTED AND

ACCUSED NO 13, GROUP CAPTAIN SAJAD HAIDER SAYED,

STANDS EXONERATED AGAINST ALL CHARGES LEVELED

AGAINST HIM. HE IS FREE TO LEAVE THE COURT ROOM."

On this day, at that moment in my life I understood the true
essence of the maxim 'Poetic Justice'. I believe that I
suddenly matured into a man on that day.

I must have been shaking with excitement, relief and
euphoria, as I stood up and thanked the court with these
words: "Your Honours, today by confirming my innocence
you have upheld justice and may well have saved this great
air force.

This is not only my victory but also yours for standing up to
coercive authority."

The members were leaving their chairs and were not likely
to come and congratulate me for good reasons.

Elsewhere, however, there were shrieks of joy and a
pleasant kind of mayhem, if I may be forgiven for using the
word, which implies catastrophe.

There were embraces and congratulations flying across the hall as each of the accused embraced me followed by the lawyers, until I turned around and held Ali Afridi very tight and close for a long time, with tears flowing down two pairs of eyes. The readers would think just as I did that my trial was over. Not true, because the Air Chief had too much to lose if he let me go that easily. The President of the court received orders from the CAS immediately after he was conveyed the news of my exoneration by Air Vice Mshl Masood Khan, to keep me under arrest at Badaber. This was indubitably an open admission of the malice and vindictiveness seething inside him for years. He had lost the war against me even though he had won many battles on the strength of his rank.

Now was the time for him to resign as he had promised in front of a gathering of all the commanders of the PAF. But he was not of the mettle who place honour above all else. The following happened subsequent to the court's announcement as narrated to me by friends and especially Air Vice Mshl Masood Khan, an officer of unimpeachable character, but a cautious person. That was why it took him 21 years to think it was alright to spill the beans.

Masood Khan told me in 1995 that he was commanding the base at Chaklala when all hell had broken loose at Badaber. He recalled that he had been informed about a VIP movement of the Falcon, which was carrying the Chief of Air Staff to Chaklala. Minutes before the arrival of the aircraft, Masood Khan received a call from Gp Capt Mufti, the DAI who told him in a rather sombre tone that the CAS had to be informed immediately on his arrival that Gp Capt Sajad Haider had been exonerated of all the charges, by the members of the Court-Martial, through a unanimous verdict. Masood Khan told me that he had difficulty holding back his tears of joy at this news. Soon he had to rush to the tarmac

to receive the Air Chief. He said to me, "Sajad, I was standing at the foot of the ladder as the Air Chief alighted from the Falcon. I saluted him and he shook my hand asking how I was. After the preliminaries were over and he started for his staff car, I told him, 'Sir, I have been asked by the DAI a few minutes ago to convey to you that the court at Badaber has exonerated Gp Capt Sajad Haider through a unanimous verdict'".

Masood told me that the news was received by the Air Chief as though he had been hit by a bolt from the sky. "He turned pale and stared at me looking somewhat bewildered. Then he said 'I want you to contact the DAI immediately and tell him to inform Nawaz (Air Vice Mshl Nawaz - President of the court) to keep this chap Haider under close arrest and he is not to leave the detention camp". Masood, of course had no choice but to pass the message on, but as he narrated the story, he said, "Sajad, every one knew that they were hunting you, but I realised that day how petty Zafar Chaudhry really was after I witnessed his reaction and his appalling response."

Ali Afridi drove me back and asked me to get my stuff packed and he would be back in an hour or so to take me to my house. Back at Stalag-14, I was greeted passionately by the security personnel, as they had already received the news of my acquittal. I walked up to my room and sat down on my bed. My head was buzzing with the fast moving events of the week and all I keptwhispering was, Thank you my Allah, for giving me this moment and my freedom. I fell in *sajda* (prostration in front of God) to thank the Creator for his miracle. Slowly, I got up and looked around very deliberately. I had little hope of being set free just a week ago and the size of my cubicle had been closing in on me. I recall vividly, pinching my fore-arm to sense the reality of the moment. Yes, this was the end of the terrifying episode

as I called out aloud, but only to my own hearing; there were no thoughts in my mind about 'what next'. I had started to put my clothes together when the hand of fate seemed to have whipped me across the face.

There was a knock on my room door which could not have been Ali Afridi, because he could not have been back so quickly. I said "Come in" and I saw the Duty Officer staring me in the eye. He informed me that the President of the court was on the telephone line and wanted to speak to me. A million thoughts flashed through my mind. "Could the members of the court have had a split vote," was the horrifying thought that struck me. I walked up to the Duty Officer's desk and took the call. Surely, it was Air Vice Mshl Nawaz himself and this is what he said: "Haider, I don't know how to say this to you (that's when my heart beat so fast that I shall never forget it as long as I live). The Chief of Air Staff has ordered that you cannot leave the premises, and that unfortunately, you will remain incarcerated." Having said that, he tried to assure me that it was just a temporary phase and that the verdict of the court could not be changed.

It was evident that Zafar Chaudhry had not expected this news and was shattered at the very idea of me running free. What was his take and how he intended to justify my continued incarceration, was to be seen. My problem was that I sat alone in my room every morning as the rest of the officers left for the court room. It was only after 1400 Hrs when they returned that I had some one to talk to and find out how the defense case was proceeding. Four or five days passed like that, and I was getting very agitated even as Ali Afridi had made a plea about the injustice being meted out to me.

Petition to the President

Ali Afridi wasted no time and put up a strong petition to the Defence Minister appealing for strong action against the violation of law and sheer injustice to a person who had been vindictively framed in the conspiracy. I did not know what was going on behind the scenes, but apparently the petition reached ZAB, who was also the Defence Minister at the time. In the meantime, he had also received information through the agencies about my unlawful detention ordered by the Air Chief.

One morning, I went to the common lavatories as usual and was going to brush my teeth before taking a shower. The tooth paste tube was near its end but good for a few more days. I squeezed it in anger and said loudly that this is the last bloody day I am going to use it (meaning the tube) and squeezed out 3

inches of tooth paste wrapping it around the brush. My mouth was full of tooth paste, when I heard unusual boot steps resounding loudly in the corridor. I had not switched on the lights of the lavatory and it was dark inside but a fairly lit-up corridor. The steps came to a stop near the lavatories and lo and behold who was there, but Butt, the prosecutor. The brush in my mouth was caught by me under my teeth and some wild ideas circulated in my mind before I spoke to this loathsome character. "What the hell do you want now; have you come to take me back"? It would be difficult for me to recapture the complete change in his demeanour, his shattered self-esteem and degraded humility as he opened his mouth and said: "Sir, I have good news for you." I shouted back, "Well, Mr Prosecutor, that would mean very bad news for you, and I do carry out my promises. I hope you recall our exchange at the entrance to the court-room with that ape magistrate alongside you."

He walked inside the lavatory and said, "Sir, I was only following the orders of the CAS. I am a small fry and had no choice even if I was not giving you the respect you deserved. I apologize for being insubordinate and for anything wrong that I may have done." He had not an iota of self-esteem in his body or soul, he was the most pitiful human specimen I had seen crumble so quickly from such a high perch. I continued brushing my teeth as I heard him say that the CAS had ordered my immediate release and a service car would be there to drive me home.

I then packed up a few other things lying around and waited till the Duty Officer told me that the car was there to take me. Few would be able to guess as to where I went from the detention camp. I went straight to the AHQ and called on my good friend Air Cdre Azim Daudpota, who was the D of Ops at the time. He met me with a rib-crunching embrace and said some wonderful things. He told me that his wife had been meeting my sister regularly, which had caused some high grade raging fits against the Air Chief for disallowing my sister from meeting me.

He asked me about my plans for the day to which I replied I had none but would give my right arm to get into an aircraft and check-out my flying ability, if it was still intact. Without a second word, he phoned the Squadron Commander at the Peshawar Base and asked for two aircraft to be readied as soon as possible and to confirm when they were available. He then drove me to the Squadron to get fitted with the parachute and obtained a helmet from one of the pilots.

I saw Abbas Khattak in the squadron and asked him to come fly with me. It was an exhilarating experience to be free and in the air, in control of my fighter and the unlimited sky above. I do not think that I enjoyed a brief flying sortie in my life as much as I did that day. It felt like my first solo in the

Harvard, when you kept looking back to check that you are alone. The seven-month purgatory had taken its toll on my health and nervous system. I think it was during my third looping manoeuvre with Abbas following me close on my starboard wing, that I felt queasy in my stomach and had to be content with lesser G

manoeuvres. After landing, I was picked up by Daudpota and treated to a sumptuous lunch at his home with his wonderful wife. I returned back to my home, which looked ghastly and deserted.

My faithful Pathan servant Toreh, who was tough and bulldog faced but loyal to the core, came running out from the rear of the house. He stopped, not knowing if he could embrace me, but I got my arms around him as he cried unashamedly, talking at the same time and abusing the people who had taken me away. I was back and I was free!

17

HIGH COMMAND CRUMBLES

I took a ride in the C-130 to Quetta. It was an emotional crescendo meeting my fraught parents and my dear sister. From Quetta, I travelled to Lahore and visited my esteemed friend Afzal Agha, the Chief Secretary, who received me with great fervour and as mentioned earlier, had been the only senior government servant of his seniority other than Omar Afridi to have been in touch with me during my crisis. He entertained me with a partridge dinner and a long chat. I was still reeling from the infirmities committed upon me and poured out my resentment in front of Afzal Agha. The central theme of my sojourn was that my exoneration would not stop the deluge, which would destroy the very structure of the air force, unless there was a major change at the top. Afzal Agha asked me in passing “Haider boy! Is there an officer at the senior level who could lead the air force out of its present morass”? I responded instinctively, “Air Cdre Zulfiqar Ali Khan is the only officer who might be able to mitigate the damage inflicted upon the morale and confidence of the PAF and restore mutual confidence amongst all the cadres”. He asked me some more questions about Zulfiqar Ali Khan and said that this question had popped up between the Prime Minister and Mustafa Khar. He said that as soon as he got an opportunity to meet the Governor he would tell him about our conversation. I have never repeated this story until recently but feel that this was an important period for the PAF and history should be holistically recounted.

In the next few weeks, I met Mustafa Khar who also asked me the same question Afzal Agha had posed. I repeated what I had told Afzal Agha and Mustafa Khar said that the Chief Secretary had spoken to him about my comments. Thinking aloud, he said that it was necessary to chance a meeting between the Prime Minister and Air Cdre Zulfiqar. This in fact took place at the Engineering College Officers' Mess at Risalpur, where ZAB was the guest of honour and Air Cdre Zulfiqar was invited, being the Commandant of the PAF Academy. Ostensibly, the meeting with the Prime Minister was meant to seem innocuous. Air Cdre Zulfiqar later told me about the meeting with the Prime Minister without elaborating on any details. I never broached the subject with him ever again, nor did he, especially because that meeting had changed many destinies.

In the meantime, I had set-up camp at Chaklala and was keeping in close contact with Air Vice Mshl Yousuf, who was Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Defence at that time and dealing with the PAF conspiracy case. He had been extremely sympathetic to me because he knew that I was merely a victim of witch hunting. One evening, when I was visiting his room at the Signal Officers' Mess on the Mall, opposite the Inter-Continental Hotel in Rawalpindi, he asked me what I was planning to do. I told him that I wanted to see the Prime Minister and tell him about the serious problems in the PAF. Air Vice Mshl Yousuf suggested that nothing worthwhile could change in the PAF until the conspiracy case was finally over. He told me that he had spoken to Ali Afridi and suggested that I should take ex-Pakistan leave and stay out of harm's way, because the Air Chief was in a deadly mood, especially after my exoneration.

After a few days, Ali Afridi called me and said that he was visiting north and that I should meet him. He told me, "Sajad, why don't you go and visit Bunyad and Jawwad in

the States. I'm sure that Bunyad can send you a ticket knowing your financial insolvency". I contacted my brother Dr Bunyad Haider and he happily agreed to send me a PTA (Pre-Paid Ticketing Advice) and told me that Jawwad and he were excited to have me with them.

I arrived in New York probably end of December or thereabouts. My brothers took great care of me and tried their best to distract my mind from the hell I had been through. I had not been to the US since my training days in the mid-fifties. Therefore, it was a novel experience to see the astronomical change technology had brought to the United States. My brothers had a large circle of friends and we started to have a wonderful time partying especially on the weekends. My brother Dr Bunyad Haider had become a renowned cardiologist by that time. Unlike most émigrés who go out of their way to make a fortune, Bunyad never did and till today, he has not indulged in private practice or charged for his infinite services over the past fifty years. This is despite the fact that he is presently a Professor Emeritus, Chairman and Head of Medicine at the New Jersey University of Medicine and Dentistry, one of the largest university hospitals on the East coast. Bunyad is the only doctor from South Asia to hold this position.

One morning, I was making my breakfast, which had become a routine since both my brothers went away to their work place and I was left alone to fend for myself. The telephone rang and it was my brother Bunyad calling from his hospital. He said to call Ali Afridi in Pakistan and gave me a telephone number suggesting I call him right away because it was around mid-night in Pakistan. I asked him what it was all about. He said to contact Ali and find out from him. After a few attempts, I got through to Ali Afridi in Karachi. I had obviously woken him up as I could tell from his sleepy voice, but he came on fully awake as he said,

“Sajad, I want you to return immediately, there are some unhealthy developments and your Chief is doing his best to pre-maturely retire you from the service. Air Vice Mshl Yousuf and I have discussed the developments and feel your presence in Pakistan is absolutely imperative”. I was, to say the least, taken aback because I was in my third week and did not feel like going back. I told Ali that I would return in 10 days or so but he screamed at me and said, “It’s your bloody career and after all that has happened, you have to fight it out”. I did not want to argue with him and told him that I would try to book myself on the first flight available. He told me that he was returning to Dubai but would come back as soon as I landed in Pakistan.

I sat back and felt a kind of depression overtake me. I had fallen head over heels in love with a lovely girl, Mercedes Miranda of Spanish descent, and I did not really care what Zafar Chaudhry was up to anymore. I seriously thought there was every reason for me to say farewell to the PAF and pursue matters of the heart. I thought of some colleagues around my own seniority, specialists with smiles pasted on their faces when they interacted with superiors and frowns and fangs while dealing with their subordinates, who would replace those who had been sacked. Did I really want to live the rest of my life amongst such persons?

The answer was ‘NO’ and my biggest motivation was Mercedes Miranda Hernandez, who had gotten under my skin forever. It may sound melodramatic but my friends and even my children today know that she still remains the eternal love of my life. Soon reality got me down from the flight of fancy and the world of fairy tales. I decided to discuss the whole thing thread bare with Mercedes and we even made our vows to wait for each other till I was free of encumbrances and I promised to marry her if it was the last thing I would do in my life. With that commitment and a

heart filled with love, I hesitantly returned to Pakistan after dragging my visit on for one more week. Ali Afridi's calls became incessant and he told Bunyad to physically put me on a plane to Pakistan.

After my arrival, I went to Peshawar and re-opened my house and began to evaluate the situation prevailing and started to develop an aggressive plan of action. Incidentally, I held no appointment after my exoneration nor did the CAS

want to see me hanging around AHQ or even the bases. Therefore, I had time and the freedom to do as I liked. I informed Ali that I was back in Peshawar, waiting for him before I tried to meet Air Vice Marshal Yousuf, who was my only real access to the activities forging ahead at AHQ. A few days after my arrival, an official envelope arrived from AHQ. It contained a document called the Pen-1

(Pension Notification 1), which is like an FIR prior to retirement. It instructed an officer to commence the process of his retirement from the service. Ali had also arrived and when I showed him the Pen-1 sheet, he said, "Didn't I tell you so, and there you are coming 10 days after I told you to return immediately". He advised that I should sit on it and not take any further action. Without informing him, I decided to use that as my gauntlet of my defiance to the powers that were at the helm of PAF. I tore-up the Pen-1 sheet into pieces, put them back in the envelope, scotch-taped it and placed it in a larger envelope and addressed it to the Chief of Air Staff, Air Headquarters, Peshawar.

In the meantime, the defence case had reached its final stages and I believe in the next week or ten days while I was there, the court gave its final verdict in end February/March 1974. The news of the conspiracy had been occupying the front page of every newspaper in the country throughout

the trial. Finally, one morning the court verdict made the headlines and I was thrilled to learn that six others of my co-accused had been acquitted. These included Gp Capt Sattar Choudhry, Sqn Ldr Dilawar Hussain, Sqn Ldr Javed Afzaal, Sqn Ldr Humayun, Sqn Ldr Aftab Alam and probably Flt Lt Dehelvi. The two main accused, Wg Cdr Hashmi and Squadron Ldr Ghaus were given 14 years rigorous imprisonment. These two had little chance of escaping, especially Ghaus, who had no remorse about his inane decision to join the conspiracy.

Unfortunately, Gp Capt Sikander, Sqn Ldr Pervez Iqbal and Sqn Ldr Wamiq Rashid received between 5-7 years rigorous imprisonment, if memory

serves me right. However, I learnt the same day that the CAS had refused to accept the acquitted officers back in the PAF. His reason for the refusal was personal to say the least. His ego had been injured severely at my exoneration but it got blown apart after the acquittal of six more. There was a clear message in the acquittal, which placed Zafar Chaudhry's very integrity and moral fibre in question. Gp Capt Mufti, the intelligence head honcho and particularly Saeedullah Khan and Khaqan Abbasi, shared the responsibility of reprehensible behaviour equally, if not more.

I flew to Rawalpindi on the advice of Ali Afridi and tried to have an audience with the Prime Minister. To get time with an extremely busy head of state was not an easy task in spite of my history with him and my easy access to his close confidants. Finally, Afzal Agha spoke to a certain Mr Saeed Ahmed Khan from intelligence services (highly controversial personality), who was the PM's Chief of Security at that time. I met him and he said that he would forward my request to the Prime Minister. Soon after I had met Mr Saeed

Ahmed, he got a message to me to be at his office at 1000 Hrs in the second week of April 1974. I arrived at the PM's Secretariat at the appointed time and Saeed Ahmed received me in his office and told me that the Prime Minister would see me whenever he had some free moments and that I may have to wait for some time.

I told him that meeting the PM was more important than anything else at that moment in my life. Mr Saeed seemed to be fully informed about what had been going on with regard to the conspiracy. Yet he asked me some searching

questions, to which I gave him answers as best as I could. He was pleased to see that my attitude was not one of an injured bird but my cardinal concern was the future shape of the PAF and the shattered morale and loss of mutual confidence in the PAF.

At about mid-day, Mr Saeed was called in by the PM and he excused himself saying that he would remind the Prime Minister about my presence in his office. He returned after 45 minutes or more and said, "Gp Capt Haider Sahib, the Prime Minister is mired in some crucial parleys with some politicians (religious fundamentalists) and he has asked me to tell you that he has already taken action about the situation obtaining in the PAF and that you will know about it within a day. The PM has assured me that he will meet you at another time and said for you not to worry, all will be well soon" (or words to the effect). Then he asked whether I was aware that the conspiracy case had been reviewed by Mr Hafeez Pirzada and Yahya Bakhtiar for their analysis, comment and recommendations. I said I had no idea about this but I knew both the gentlemen extremely well and would try to get in touch with them. At that, he said, "Don't worry, because their recommendations have already been received by the Prime Minister and I can only guess that he has taken

some important decisions in view of the recommendations, so I recommend that you just sit and wait, and *Inshalla* everything will sort itself out especially since the PM has taken a serious view of the affairs in the PAF”.

I had no choice but to contend with what I was told. From his office, I decided to visit Air Vice Mshl Yousuf, the one person in the MOD who knew what was happening in the air force. He met me very warmly and asked me what I had been up to. I told him about my visit to the PM’s Secretariat. He said, “You’ve done a good thing by registering your presence with the Prime Minister, because the CAS is absolutely adamant that he will not have you back in the PAF irrespective of the court’s verdict and has informed the Ministry of Defence officially to retire all the others who were exonerated by the court. I told him that I have done my best and now it’s up to God Almighty to save the PAF or let it slide over the cliff without a parachute”. Air Vice Mshl Yousuf told me to stay in touch and come back whenever I was in the area. I told him that I would be in daily contact with him and remain on call in case he gets any news.

That same evening, it was probably 15th or 16th of April, 1974, I got a call from Air Vice Mshl Yousuf at about 6 pm and he asked me to see him immediately. I did not try to even ask why and got into my car and sped away towards ‘Pindi. As soon as I knocked on his door, he told me to come in. I saw a big smile and a huge frown, a typical expression of Air Vice Mshl Yousuf, who had a built-in frown even when he was smiling. He said, “Well, there you are Sajad”, waving a file cover with a sheet of paper on it. He said, “You would be astounded if you could read this directive from the PM’s Secretariat, but I need to keep it buried until the press release comes out in the media tomorrow”. It was an urgent press release from the office of the Prime Minister ordering the removal of Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry on charges of

vindictiveness and witchhunting officers owing to personal dislikes and having them framed in a conspiracy against the government and then making it a matter of personal prestige and insisting upon kicking out those who had been acquitted of all charges by a seven member court.

After hearing Air Vice Mshl Yousuf giving me the gist of the press release, I touched the floor with my forehead and thanked Allah right in front of the Air Vice Mshl. I will say this with complete earnestness that it was the survival of the PAF that was central to my emotions as much as my personal case. The Air Vice Mshl graciously offered me a drink to celebrate the end of a tyranny that had jeopardized so many good and patriotic officers. The same press release carried the appointment of Air Cdre Zulfiqar Ali Khan, who was promoted to the rank of Air Vice Mshl as the new Air Force Chief. This was Divine intervention. The press release also contained the Prime Minister's decision to honourably reinstate all the acquitted officers. The convicted officers stood retired and their punishments were to be confirmed by the Prime Minister. The government had also decided to punish the investigating officers appointed by the sacked Air Chief for committing crimes against accused officers.

I suffered through the night for not being able to share the glorious news with my friends, family and all those wonderful seniors who had supported me during those agonizing months, almost one year after my arrest. The night was too long and every few hours, I would wake up and look at the watch. The newspaper did not arrive till 6:30 or 7:00 AM. I must have fallen asleep in the early hours of the morning from mental exhaustion and a sense of catharsis because when I woke up, I was not sure for a few seconds where I was and what was happening. Then suddenly, the memory tape went on fast rewind and I

almost jumped out screaming for Toreh, my faithful batman, yelling “Where is the newspaper”? A somewhat bewildered Toreh ran across with the newspaper and handing it to me said he would bring my tea right away. I almost tore open the newspaper looking for the headlines. Suddenly, my mind and body went completely numb. There was nothing there. I furiously went to the editorial page; nothing there either. I looked at the entire paper half a dozen times but there was not a syllable about the PAF leave alone the press release.

I reached for the phone with my hands shaking; I tried to get in touch with Air Vice Mshl Yousuf. It took me the better part of an hour to get through to him just as he entered his office. Meanwhile, I had called a few friends in Peshawar and asked them if they had seen anything about the PAF in other newspapers. I hoped and prayed that the paper I got may not have received the press release. But the answer was no from everyone I called and they were curious as to why I was up so early and what was the news that I was looking for. I made some feeble excuses because I had been told not to share the press release with anyone until it was published. When Air Vice Mshl Yousuf came online, he said, “I know you must be concerned but the directive has been withheld for the moment”. I interrupted him and asked, “Sir, what the hell has happened”? Before I realized the impertinence of using such a strong word, he said, “Calm down Sajad”, and told me that after had I left him, he received instructions from the PM house to hold back the press release until the next day.

What we found out later on was that Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry got wind of the Prime Minister’s decision through his moles and he did a quick fox-trot and implored one of the legal eagles who had been directed by the PM to study the case and make his recommendations, to save his reputation. That is what had delayed the press release. The

Prime Minister reportedly agreed to concede but not without resistance; he agreed that only the word dismissal be changed into pre-mature retirement. Once again my nerves were put on trial for another 24

hours until on 18th April, when the morning papers carried the news of Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry's pre-mature retirement and Air Cdre Zulfiqar being appointed as the new Air Chief. One of the press releases of that morning's newspapers is reproduced in Appendix 'H'. For the first time in the history of Pakistan, a head of government had ascertained all the facts before taking such a major decision.

He had also directed that an immediate probe be instituted against all the investigators who were involved in the interrogation of officers, and had committed excesses and tortured accused officers and forcibly extracted involuntary confessions from them.

The order read that if these allegations proved to be correct, the officers would be dismissed and punished for their misdemeanour. It was also mentioned that the Prime Minister had consulted the top legal experts of the country, the Judge Advocate General of PAF, Gp Capt Sikander Bakht and the President of the Court-Martial to fully satisfy himself before taking these major decisions of dismissals and reinstatement. The Prime Minister had been convinced that Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry had indulged in witch-hunting of highly professional officers and purposefully involved them in the conspiracy, making it a matter of personal prestige. This brought to an end the darkest chapter of PAF's history. It left the PAF shaken and its morale in smithereens.

The grand finale has to be seen and judged in the context of the author's agony suffered through the years (along with

several others) at the hands Zafar Chaudhry, Saeedullah Khan and particularly Khaqan Abbasi. The PAF history most unfortunately has been inexplicably circumspect and in fact lays the blame at the door of the little man Mufti, who was no more than a 'puppet' being manipulated as the coercive arm of the hierarchy. The PAF history has tried to pull a blind over this debilitating event, construed by a band of senior officers who climbed the ladder all the way up before being booted out. Many more ugly incidents were attributed to them through the years, such as the loss of a top secret file from the operations branch, which put Air Cdre Rahim Khan in the dock.

Zafar Chaudhry was an intelligent officer and a fairly good flier and I said this to his face, but he had a blind spot in his vision, which prevented him from using his talents positively. He will forever be remembered as a vindictive villain.

The purpose of narrating the details of this episode is for every one in commanding positions to draw some lessons from the insalubrious conduct of persons in authority and the consequences the service had to face and the ignominy which brought them crashing down. There is an exemplary lesson for the present and future commanders of the PAF as well as the other two services.

As a service Chief, your hands must be on the pulse of the operational elements, their proficiency, morale and singleness of purpose. Sitting in moral judgment, looking through prejudiced prisms and seeing distorted images will surely bring a service to its knees. Personal integrity and an impeccable sense of justice are indispensable for an officer to reach the higher echelons of the service.

The leadership of our fighting men must make a resolve that their time and life in uniform will be spent resolutely and patriotically in achieving and ensuring professional excellence beyond the call of duty and at the cost of their personal and individual interests. Had a war come in the period under review, it could have spelt disaster for Pakistan. The PAF had to pass through two years of its critical life needing absolute and laser sharp focus on development after the 1971 tragedy of losing a substantial percentage of its manpower, especially aircraft technicians and pilots after the break-up of Pakistan. The PAF's official history has failed to highlight a single improvement in the PAF's operational preparedness, training and manpower reclamation, not to speak of any tactical or strategic policy decisions to enhance the operational, logistic and training aspects of the air force during Zafar Chaudhry's turbulent stint. It only mentions the commissioning of Nawabshah airfield as a forward base, which in effect means nothing at all.¹

The lesson learnt from this dreadful episode in PAF's history was that the Air Chief and his inner team, all of them, fell from grace and he (Zafar Chaudhry) ended up becoming a car salesman in Hartford, Connecticut. After a failed attempt at business he became a full time preacher of the Ahmedia sect in Europe; the Vice Chief Saeedullah Khan retired into oblivion playing the stock market in the company of Hamid Qureshi, the 1965 War drop-out, and later worked for a rogue financial company which made an escape out of the country for illicit financial wheeling and dealing. Unfortunately, Saeedullah Khan, being a financially honest individual, was a likely victim of circumstances. The DAI Mufti stalked around for a job and worked with the Rawalpindi Flying Club for a while before joining Jaffer Brothers. He was shown the door for back biting his own benefactor, Air Cdre Polly Shah, who had helped him get the

job. The last but the most controversial, Air Cdre Khaqan Abbasi, became a millionaire (allegedly he was already one before his removal) through his networking during his postings to Jordan, Kuwait and the PIA. His end was most unfortunate and catastrophic; he was fatally struck by a missile during the Ojhri Camp blast and in the attending mayhem most unluckily, his young son was totally incapacitated. Such are the ways of God in matters temporal. We all have to beware of God's justice and seek forgiveness for our sins, especially about the lies that are told to harm others in order to derive personal benefit or satiate one's ego.

1 *The Story of the Pakistan Air Force, 1988, Page 654.*

Finally, I would say that this entire episode from the fly-past fiasco to the end of the regime was an uncalled for tragedy waiting to happen because the men at the summit got carried away with the intoxication of temporal power and ended up in disgrace. They left the PAF buffeted and rattled from a war within.

Interestingly, all the victims of the PAF regime who were hunted and framed in the conspiracy are flourishing today as successful men in which ever field they strived to work in. Their talent became their fortune and the PAF was deprived of some formidable fighter pilots. Good luck to all of them where ever they are.

18

NEW LEASE FOR THE PAF

When Zafar Choudhry was at the helm, servitude, cronyism and being a conformist were the jumping boards to success more than professional abilities.

Would this change with Air Vice Mshl Zulfiqar? It was my hope but not a firm conviction. I had to wait and see and pray.

I called Air Vice Mshl Zulfiqar to congratulate him and his late son Asad picked up the phone and sounded very excited and said, "Uncle Haider, you must have heard the news." I told him I was part of the news and asked him if I could speak to his father. He said that there was a drawing room full of officers and their wives, but he would try to get his father to speak to me. "Hello young man, how and where are you?" he asked before I could congratulate him. He sounded very endearing and said, "Sajad, get a good haircut, and I want to see you at AHQ tomorrow morning." I suggested to him that he should give it a second thought about my relocation. Meanwhile, I suggested to him that he would need a trustworthy ADC under the circumstances and recommended Flt Lt Rahim Yousafzai as his aide. He said he would see but someone would contact me the next day and that I should make myself available.

I had a compelling thought to request the new Chief to let me go and make a new life for myself. I thought of all the vagaries I had faced not on professional or any other tangible faults but as a victim of an insecure person's

vengeance. I could not see life as a bed of roses even with him as the Chief, because the forces that had caused me so much anguish had neither perished nor been completely neutralized. The sacked team had their sympathizers and cronies crawling around, and I would probably have to perform trapeze acts to ensure my survival. I did not have the stamina for any more acrimony from persons who might have been already conjuring up their offensive plans. But then I had to wait and see what the new Chief had in store for me.

It was beautiful spring day in Peshawar and I drove dreamily to the Officers' Mess and decided to wait for a message from the Chief's Secretariat, where I had left a message about my location. At about mid-day, I saw an excited Flt Lt Rahim Yousafzai wearing an armed band with ADC knitted on it.

He said, "Sir, the Chief wants to have a one-to-one lunch with you in the VIP

Guest House¹and you're to take the air force list with you." I told him, "I am flattered about the lunch but what has the air force list got to do with me, I have never looked at the blasted document ever?" He said that he would get the PAF

list and I should just make myself available at the VIP Guest House. It was a delightful hour and a half spent with Air Vice Mshl Zulfiqar Ali Khan.

The first thing the new Chief asked me was if I knew that the pilots were not willing to participate in the traditional fly-past for the outgoing Chief, and opined that it would be a poor show. I said that I had heard the rumour doing the rounds but did not realize that it had reached him. I opined that it was just as well that he had not insisted, and

suggested that the general mood in the PAF was resentful and needed therapeutic healing. The fly past did not take place. This was another incident not mentioned in the PAF history. During the lunch the Air Chief came out with some real anecdotes, which had happened on his first day in the office.

Air Vice Mshl Saeedullah had asked to see the new Chief on his first day of command. Saeedullah entered the CAS's office, clicked his heels and said, "Sir, I would like to offer my services to continue serving under your command, if you accept." Zulfiqar had frankly declined his offer and commented sardonically to me about the moving finger of fate. Then he told me about Zafar Chaudhry's special request to him regarding my person, "He has requested that he would prefer if Sajad Haider was not present at his Dinning Out night." Shocked, I said, "Sir, could there be a better admission of malice and victimization of Sajad Haider by the very officer who framed me in a General Court-Martial? I take this as his parting gift and am ecstatic on both counts!" Zulfiqar laughed in his effusive, charming way and told me to forget it and bury the past behind me. I replied that I had already forgiven him, but forgetting would not be that easy even though retribution would come through poetic justice and it was not in my character to stoop to avenge. I say with confidence that I have stuck to this till today.

The Chief discussed many future thoughts on lifting the PAF out of the present morass and hinted about cleaning out the PAF of the devious and intriguing lot. Somehow, the good Chief never got around to doing it even after he had become the first Air Chief Marshal of the PAF. His priorities changed as he settled into his chair; a phenomenon so inherent in Pakistan's leadership. I have never been able to conjure up that larger picture every leader talks about when they do

not keep up the tempo of their earlier pious resolves. What is that mystique about the larger picture that confounds the very best in the profession who witness professional merit being rendered irrelevant and mediocrity taking the front seat? I will never be able to find out why leaders at all levels cannot learn from history and the role of sycophants in the destruction of institutions.

Sadly, this phenomenon took over some time after the welcome change had taken place in the PAF.

1The small bungalow which was traditionally occupied by Rahim Khan. During the 1965 War it was given to me for the duration of the war and I lived in it with my family.

The new CAS said that I should take over as Director of Ops for the moment till he decides what to do with me. The day was 16th of April 1974; the PAF had been bludgeoned and badly bruised from March 1972 for two whole years. The PAF history (1988) has been circumspect about these machinations, which were at the behest of the Air Chief and he should have been man enough to have admitted his own weaknesses rather than to blame Saeedullah or Khaqan Abbasi. Instead, and most brazenly, Zafar Chaudhry has further confounded the truth through his writings and twisted tales of his failures and vindictive conduct. Had he not pursued such a ridiculous course, and appreciated the silent course I had chosen, he would not have been exposed. I would have used much more discretion and watered down his misdemeanours. As an errant Chief of a sterling air force, he should have taken advantage of the healing quality of time.

Amazingly, the PAF historians have conveniently disregarded the incontrovertible charges against Zafar Chaudhry and the fact that he had made a commitment that he would resign from his job if even one of the accused

persons was acquitted. The official history also has made stupefying remarks that antiQadiani sentiments were sweeping the country at that time, inferring that Zafar Chaudhry was made a victim (since he is a Qadiani) and his abrupt departure may have been precipitated by this hate wave. It was a sad attempt at ignoring the truth of history on the part of every one associated with the writing of this chapter in the PAF's official history.

The new Chief had an arduous and uphill task to repair the harm that had been done to this air force. The misconstrued negative impression about the performance of the PAF in the 1971 War was yet another contrived adversity that the new Chief had to undo. Fortunately, the foundations of the PAF had been laid deep and in steel cast by Air Mshls Asghar Khan, Nur Khan and Rahim Khan. The powerful force of upheavals like the conspiracy and the debacle of Dhaka could not uproot these solid foundations, but shaken they were. Air Chief Mshl Zulfiqar had to come to grips with the problems resolutely with empathy, compassion and firmness. For this, he needed an invincible team of competent persons of high integrity, with genuine and selfless loyalty to the PAF and indomitable professional reputation.

Air Chief Mshl Zulfiqar, however, chose a different combination which may well have been the choice of the ousted regime. In my considered opinion his philosophy was not conducive to putting a highly professional dream team together. His unexpected and meteoric ascent from thoughts of resignation to the reality of the highest post had over awed him some what and he did not feel secure enough to affect a metamorphosis. This he told me personally when I suggested that this was the most opportune moment to get rid of all the termites in the PAF. He had replied that he was not well grounded enough to do

that. He decided to adopt the path of live and let live. This meant a new life was given to the perpetual survivors and mediocre professionals. It may sound cruel but the non performers of the 1965 and even the 1971 Wars were promoted against the norms and standards set by the founding fathers of the PAF. Each one of the three founding chiefs had been very clear on the selection of commanders. Each one on different occasions had personally said to me that the only criterion for selection of officers in sensitive appointments was on the merit of how well they were respected as leaders in the air and that their personal habits carried little importance in their assessment.

It was the self-confidence and conventional wisdom of the founding chiefs that had provided the PAF its spine and spirit. There was a cardinal difference between the first three commanders and those who followed in their chairs but not their tracks. Air Chief Mshl Zulfiqar achieved some remarkable milestones in lifting the morale of the PAF, the enhancement of its manpower, qualitative training, restructuring and refurbishing of the operational assets and establishing the Combat Commander's School. But like most compassionate and gentle people, he did not possess the ruthlessness that was also necessary to keep professional sycophants and self promoters out of the main stream, and stream in hard core, selfless and uncompromising professionals.

By the middle of his tenure, Air Chief Mshl Zulfiqar had surrounded himself with a community of 'yes-men' and 'smart Alec' senior staff officers, whose professional prowess lay more in presentations with maps and charts than their operational record in war and peace. Their art of survival lay in their false facade of humility, congeniality and the ability to never disagree or step on any toes. This was also Air Chief Mshl Zulfiqar Ali Khan's wont, because he

disliked aggression and over zealous professionals which opened the flood-gates for mediocre officers while the intrepid and aggressive were somewhat marginalized. An incident illustrates my contention. I was playing golf with Air Chief Mshl Zulfiqar Ali Khan at the Peshawar Golf Club and as we moseyed along the fairways, he looked at me with his disarming smile and asked, "So young man, I understand that you have serious reservations about the mediocrity pervading the service".

I was taken by surprise not so much at his question but for the fact that just a day earlier I had uttered my concern in this respect to a senior colleague holding a sensitive appointment at AHQ, again while playing golf. I grasped the situation fast and responded by saying that yes I had high hopes that professional paradigms would change with his assuming the command but the very fact that one of my colleagues, working close to him had carried the news to him without wasting any time, seemed a good example of the point I had made to him in all sincerity. I added that the officer concerned had agreed with my observation and even suggested I should voice my fears to the Air Chief. Zulfiqar changed the subject and it never got mentioned again. Unwittingly, at that point with a bubbling confidence level I thought I was being a good Samaritan; but I ended up being taken for a smart cynic. Presumably, I had made a faux pas which was to dent my relationship with the Chief in the times ahead. Air Chief Mshl Zulfiqar later admitted to Bill Latif that he had regretted choosing his vice chiefs but most of all sending ZI Ahmed (alias 'Teli' because he was famous for his sycophancy) on a posting abroad. ZI Ahmed was sent to the UK as an attaché and was found out by the ISI to have been selling End User Certificates at high prices to gun-runners. He was sacked but saved from the disgrace he deserved and flourished like most people in that category in Pakistan.

Fortunately, there were also goodmen on Air Chief Mshl Zulfiqar's team, who helped him to keep his priorities in place. He left behind a refurbished PAF

operational force in good stead and better morale than what he had inherited.

Why he lost his affection for me will never be known to me since he is no more in this world. There was surely a concerted campaign against me by those who considered me a threat to their own ambitions. Nonetheless, I got it from the horse's mouth that the campaign was successful in that Zulfiqar was constantly reminded how I had let him down in Washington, which was an absolute lie and Air Vice Mshl Hassan was responsible for the misunderstanding. Zulfiqar told me years after his retirement that he never saw any letter addressed by Sahabzada Yaqub Khan which emphatically and explicitly declared that I had been victimized in the Shahinshah of Iran's case and had been completely exonerated by the inquiry commission comprising the Iranian ambassador Ardasher Zahidi and ambassador Yaqub Khan. The Foreign Secretary had written to my Ambassador and stated clearly that I had been victimized and that I was completely cleared of the intrigue against me.

What to do with Sajad Haider?

While I thought it was going to be a repeat of Air Mshl Rahim Khan's era with peace and tranquillity allowing everyone to get on with their jobs, it was wishful thinking on my part. I wanted and expected to be appointed as the Director of Operations, because I felt a deep and sincere commitment to rejuvenate the operational command, restore mutual confidence between officers and commanders and get the operational readiness on track, which had suffered a serious

drubbing. I was asked to occupy the chair of the Director of Operations by the Air Chief for sometime. I may be paranoid but I still think that another kind of whispering campaign was already in its embryonic stage as the Air Chief mentioned to me that I needed some rest and recreation and that he was thinking of a suitable posting abroad for me.

I resisted that and told the Chief and I would be much happier serving directly under him and said jokingly that he would be able to keep a strict eye on me, but it seemed that he was determined that I should get away from AHQ and from Pakistan. I am convinced that it was not his personal wont to get rid of me because he knew my resolute loyalty to him and my professional capabilities, having seen and judged me from all aspects during two major command tenures and under the most extraneous circumstances. But his fondness for me was waning and there were many forces deriding me and barbed comments were being communicated to the Air Chief through the grapevine. What was actually behind his urgency to send me away so soon became clearer as the time passed.

It really was wishful thinking on my part that Zulfiqar would feel comfortable with me buzzing around in AHQ or for that matter in Pakistan, after the events which had catapulted him to the highest chair from virtually ground zero.

Everyone knew too well my bonding with Zulfiqar and his family and the role I had played during that desolate period. On his part, I was given the impression that owing to my financial disposition after the legal battle I should become financially solvent by earning a good salary on a lucrative foreign posting. I thought at the time that it was with this in mind that I was assigned as the Commander of the UAE Air Force to replace Air Cdre Sadruddin, who was the first PAF

commander of the UAE Air Force and was completing his tour of duty.

Air Mshl Zulfiqar called me and told me about his decision and suggested that this was an ideal posting because I would be commanding the fighter force of the UAE flying Mirages and Hunters and to top it, I would be getting a handsome salary. He suggested that he would recall me after two years and by then I would be ready for an appropriate post. I had no choice but to concede to his decision, which seemed positive career planning at that moment. However, my perceptions were not correct.

Over the next months, I went to Sargodha, and got checked out on the Mirage again and flew some missions on Mirage-V and F-86-Es at Peshawar.

The Head of Accounts, a colourful but controversial character, Gp Capt Salahudin (Sally to friends) dropped in one day and gave me an idea of the kind of salary I would be getting in my new assignment for which orders had already been issued. I almost fell backwards when I discovered the large amount in foreign exchange which I would earn. During the interim period, there was much celebration and bonhomie all around. I think ten days before I was to depart; I was busy with my briefings with various government departments such as the Foreign Office and the ISI. When I called the Staff Officer to DG ISI Lt Gen Ghulam Jilani Khan, I was called back within the hour and asked that I was required by the DG ISI immediately that day.

I drove off to the directorate to see the good General, who had always been very understanding and kind to me. I was shown in immediately upon arrival and the General was as usual chewing anti-acid tablets as the ends of his lips were chalk-white. He greeted me and ordered some green tea for

us. He opened the conversation with the words, "Why does intrigue and conspiracy precede you wherever you go"? I was taken aback and asked what I had done now. The General said, "I can't believe it myself that people can stoop to such levels in creating intrigues against their own comrades". I was sitting wide-eyed listening to the General as he pulled out one of his drawers and took out the blue paper of a writing pad and shoved it towards me saying, "Read this bloody thing and you will understand what I am saying." It was a hand written letter from a gentleman named Saghir Ahmed, who had been the Director of Intelligence Bureau in Pakistan prior to his appointment in the UAE. I knew Mr Saghir quite well as a rare gentleman in the intelligence world. As I read on, my mercury rose rapidly.

The letter was addressed directly to the DG and said that it was ironical for Gp Capt Sajad Haider to be in the centre stage of an intrigue perpetrated by one of his former subordinates (I will keep his name out but it should not be difficult to guess from his stooped character, how he gave himself away as a POW in 1971

war). This officer was allegedly soliciting the support of others of his creed, who were told that Sajad Haider had declared that he would stop the mercenary behaviour of the pilots; that he would start strict flying, enforce academic standards and proverbial air force discipline. The Sqn Ldr had mustered the support of a couple of officers and had been meeting the Pakistan Ambassador by the name of Jamiluddin Hassan. This Ambassador was intimately known to my (recently divorced) ex-wife. He spearheaded the deceptive ruse against me with the ruling family of the UAE. In fact, he asked for an audience with Sheikh Saroor Al-Nahyan, the Chamberlain of the Amiri Court, the most powerful man after the ruler (it would be prudent to add that the episode being narrated here was told to me by

Sheikh Saroor personally in Washington, when he visited there during my tenure and was the guest of His Excellency Saeed Ghobash, the Ambassador of the UAE in Washington and a good friend).

The Pakistan Ambassador in his meeting had sounded serious caution to Sheikh Saroor with the story that Gp Capt Sajad Haider, posted as the next commander, was involved in a conspiracy against ZAB, which could be problematic if he was accepted as the Chief of the UAE Air Force. Alleged by Saghir Ahmed in his letter to the DG ISI, he said that the Ambassador gave the background of the Attock conspiracy and my involvement and arrest as well as Court-Martial without having the integrity to tell him the outcome of it all. It was also confirmed that Khaqan Abbasi had visited the UAE about the same time and had a role in the intrigue with the two PAF officers. Sheikh Saroor got alarmed since the Ambassador of Pakistan was himself denigrating his own countryman and an officer from the defence forces.

Sheikh Saroor had later lamented to me that he was grossly misled and would like to compensate by asking Mr Bhutto, whom he had personally called to stop my posting, this time to get me back in the UAE. The UAE Ambassador Saeed Ghobash, a good friend at the time, had obviously given Sheikh Saroor the run down on me. Getting back to Mr Saghir's letter, he recommended that the Air Chief be informed that "This poor chap Haider does not seem to get a fair break, and before even he has arrived, the Palace has been fed with conspiratorial theories and I suggest that he be sent elsewhere rather than to come into this web spun by his future subordinates (interestingly the Sqn Ldr who had started the campaign was later charged with false travelling claims and conduct unbecoming, which resulted in his pre-mature recall by the PAF. Not surprisingly, he made it to the Air Vice Mshl rank)".

The news reached the Chief of Air Staff and he was rather upset at the whole affair. He spoke with DG ISI and insisted that I should go to UAE. The DG ISI advised the Chief that since the matter had been taken up at a very high level in the UAE, it would be prudent to send me on a non-controversial post.

This is how I was appointed as Air Attaché to the USA and Canada.

Air Attaché in Washington DC

I arrived with my son Adnan in the US and settled down fairly soon to the mundane life at the embassy. All our weekends were spent in New York with my brothers but my prime reason to head-off every Friday was to be with Mercedes. Once I got to know Washington well and made many friends, our visits receded but then Mercedes would fly-in every other week. Washington was an easy place to get to know and we began to enjoy life. Soon a storm hit the embassy with the news that ZAB was to visit the USA.

ZAB's visit was expected in February 1976 and there was already a flurry of activity and planning visible in the precincts of the embassy. Iqbal Riza, the DCM, was heading the team of diplomats, who were assigned different aspects of his visit. I learnt through the DCM that there was a glitch about the place where the PM and his entourage were to be accommodated. According to White House protocol, only heads of state were accommodated at the official Blair House, located opposite to the White House. ZAB being the PM and not the President of Pakistan, the US state department was playing games about not offering Blair House and instead were suggesting one of the premier hotels, where Prime Ministers of countries were accommodated.

This was not going to auger well for the Pakistan Embassy in Washington; therefore, serious efforts were afoot to secure Blair House for the visit. This was finally agreed and the hitch was removed. The Ambassador called me in the context of the PM's visit and told me to prepare a brief on the PAF issues of fighter aircraft and equipment, highlighting the current status and any progress made on PAF's requirement. Secondly, he mentioned that the DCM would be formulating a team for the banquet, which the Prime Minister would host as return of hospitality for the US

leadership. I am not sure whether he said in humour or in seriousness, "Gp Capt Haider, the Prime Minister expects the banquet to be absolutely perfect in every sense and the Prime Minister has said that he will hang you by the embassy chandelier if any thing is not up to the expected standards."

Finally, ZAB arrived at Andrews Air Force Base on a crisp and rather chilly morning. ZAB's children, including Benazir, were standing there to meet their father. He was shaking hands with everyone without really looking at them. As he moved along and came to me, I felt something strange about his handshake. There was a strange indifference in my opinion. Possibly, it was my own over-sensitivity that sensed such gestures. The next time I met ZAB was at the banquet.

At the end of the banquet, Mr Bhutto clinked his plate with a spoon to draw the attention of the guests and stood up saying that he promised not to make a speech but merely to greet friends, whom he could see but had not had the opportunity to meet earlier. Then he greeted several people sitting on the tables, mostly the US politicians and lawmakers. The only diplomat he greeted was Ambassador Farland sitting on our table. He said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I just want to say hello to old and good friends

and tell you that the hand of Pakistan has been out and waiting for a response to shake with the American hand, but it has not been forthcoming (he raised his right arm and extended his hand fully, dramatically). The Pakistani people have to retract their hand because it has been kept out too long and it is tired. The nation wants to reassess its friendship and alliances. Therefore, I am compelled to say farewell friends.” This gesture and his words got him something we had not expected. The US Government announced major concessions for Pakistan by the time Bhutto left the US.

There was a violin recital at the end of the banquet. As the recital came to a thankful end, the Prime Minister along with Mr Rockefeller and Mr Henry Kissinger moved together through the narrow aisle and came close to where I was standing. Then something unexpected happened. Mr Bhutto put his hand on my shoulder and told Henry Kissinger, “Did you know that my Air Attaché tried to carry out a coup against me recently”? Henry Kissinger had met me twice before, therefore, my face was familiar to him. He raised his eyebrows and said, “Really, Mr Prime Minister is that why you appointed him here?”

“No, I am joking, but they did Court-Martial him and cleared him.”

Everyone standing up on either side nearby heard the PM clearly, especially the FBI agents, easily recognized by their earphones. As soon as the three had left the room, a few Americans including a lady surrounded me. They were asking if it was true what they heard. I said we should retire to the hotel lounge and I would tell the story. From this incident emerged a friendship with Peter Goldsmith and his beautiful wife Deborah. Peter had been a student together

with Bhutto in the University of California (UCLA) and they were good friends.

This is the reason why they were invited as ZAB's guests.

US Embargo Lifted

As a consequence of the visit, the US congress gave in. Bhutto's visit became iconic, since the US Government lifted the arms embargo from Pakistan. This news hit the headlines while Bhutto was in New York, after he had addressed the American Congress and forcefully and successfully pleaded his case. Unfortunately, in this victory came debilitating news. Hayat Sherpao, one of Bhutto's closest associates, had been murdered during a public meeting. It was a national loss, for Hayat Khan Sherpao was a clean and rising leader in the country. Bhutto dropped everything including his appointments and flew back to Pakistan immediately.

One morning I was called in by the Air Chief and told that he expected to visit the United States on an invitation by the United States Air Force in a few months. He directed me that I should try to make out a comprehensive itinerary for his visit in liaison with the concerned people. I told him that I would do so in consultation with the foreign liaison department at the Pentagon. The USAF had a major event on his arrival at the Andrews Air Force Base, where General Jones, Chief of the USAF and his wife received the visiting Begum Zulfiqar.

The first and the most interesting visit was to the Strategic Air Command (SAC) complex at Oklahoma. The Commander was a four star General of African descent, who had a voracious appetite for flying and food. He was an extremely warm and open person and the 24 hours spent in his

command were memorable. The visit to the underground Headquarters was quite awesome. We had to travel in special carts for almost a mile underground through turning and twisting tunnels till we arrived at the huge operation centre. There was a massive screen from wall to wall, which had the air borne strategic bombers locations with all sorts of computerized images. The General gave a comprehensive briefing on how the SAC operated. It was extremely impressive but when the General told the Air Chief Marshal if he would like to see a demonstration of simulated SAC alert, the Air Chief gratefully appreciated his gesture. This was really special for all of us, because it was being done for the Chief of the Pakistan Air Force. After the Air Chief's visit things returned to routine and life was exciting. For me there never was a dull moment in life.

During their entire visit I had accompanied the Air Chief and Begum Zulfiqar. The impression I gained during the several one to one evenings with him was aloofness and distant feelings which I had never experienced before.

There was no doubt that I was not in favour with him. But why? That I never found out but when he told me one evening at the Watergate Hotel over a drink that he had decided to extend my tour in Washington so that I could relax longer to wear-off the effect of my desolation at Badaber, I sensed there was more to it than words conveyed. He added as I did not respond with glee, that he would give me a local rank of Air Commodore because it was the PAF's turn to takeover as Defence Attaché. Ostensibly, this was meant to keep me away from the mainstream PAF for a long time. Fate, however, had other plans for all of us.

More Shocks

It was towards the middle of the year 1976 that two major events created upheaval in our otherwise calm life. My son Adnan had been complaining of occasional head aches when at school for some months and this time I had to make an appointment with a neurosurgeon. I made a swift appointment with the most renowned neurosurgeon in the US, Dr Ommaya. I do not recall the details but Dr Ommaya had said that there was nothing to worry about. Twenty six years later, my son Adnan at the age of 39, developed a cyst in the third ventricle of his brain and almost did not make it after having a massive seizure. It is amazing that I had completely forgotten about his EEG in the US when he collapsed in Islamabad on the morning of my birthday, 25th December 2002. Luckily, we found a great neurosurgeon in Pakistan who saved his life by operating on him in the nick of time. It just goes to show how a human body can fester with such small imperfections and they show up decades later. But then Allah is the final arbiter in all matters, including life and death. We saw Him perform a miracle with my beloved son, who was bestowed with a second life. Adnan is now back at work (he is a banker), healthy and with a renewed appreciation of life.

In Washington, I was to run into another big problem. Sahabzada Yaqub Khan, who was my Ambassador in Washington, continues to tell friends in good humour that “Air Commodore Haider *ki mushkilat safeeron aur wazeeron tak mehdood nahi rahin, inki problems to Shahinshahon ke sath hoti hain*(troubles of Sajad Haider are not limited to Ambassadors and Prime Ministers, his problems have been with Emperors)”. Thus was written the prologue to the mother of all intrigues that I faced in life. The story is often retold by Sahabzada Yaqub Khan to the surprise of most and envy of some. It was a shameful conspiracy, masterminded by my detractors of which there was no dearth. One Iranian diplomat, head of the feared SAVAK in the embassy named

Mr Kazmian had been married to Mr Aziz Ahmed's daughter, and was full of envy for me. Together with two top American executives from the defence industry whom I had riled up for promoting middlemen in the PAF business, they unleashed a crusade to unhinge me from my assignment in Washington.

Simultaneously, there was a campaign perpetrated against me by Pakistani Seths and several senior retired army officers in the defence procurement business in consort with the blue eyed remnants of the sacked PAF leadership. These officers were occupying the all important operations, plans, radars and electronics warfare directorates. They were aided and abetted by those who had unholy alliances with middlemen of the defence business in Pakistan. As a consequence an unscrupulous nexus emerged on a wider scale with their target sights on me because I had made their kick-back business with the PAF difficult. This time the cabal struck very effectively by provoking none other than the Shah of Iran.

Shah of Iran Charge Sheets Me

I was having an early lunch at a restaurant when the Ambassador's secretary called and asked me to see the Ambassador immediately. I told him that my food was going to get cold, could I come after 15-20 minutes. He said, "Sir, it is extremely important and you should come right away." Adrenalin started spiking my empty stomach and I virtually jogged to the Embassy. Huffing and puffing, I got into the elevator and pressed the ambassadorial floor. I first peeped into the PSO's office and asked jokingly, "Is it serious or very serious."

He looked very sombre and disturbed and said, "Sir, you better go in right away." I straightened my tie and said,

“Bismillah” as I entered the office of the Ambassador. I immediately noticed his troubled expression. He asked me to sit down and said, “Gp Capt Haider, I have a telex message in front of me from Mr Aziz Ahmed, the Minister of State for Defence and Foreign Affairs. Indeed, it is an encrypted message, which has been deciphered and I want you to read it.”

The message was marked ‘Secret’ for PAREP, meaning the Ambassador, and it read something like this:

FM MIN DEF AND FORNAF TO PAREP

DURING THE FIRST RCD MEETING AT IZMIR BETWEEN THE ARYAMEHR SHAHINSHAH OF IRAN AND MR BHUTTO, THE

SHAHINSHAH DISCUSSED IN DETAIL THE PAKISTAN AIR ATTACHÉ

AT WASHINGTON, GP CAPT SAJAD HAIDER. THE SHAHINSHAH

TOOK STRONG EXCEPTION TO THE DEROGATORY COMMENTS

MADE BY THE AIR ATTACHÉ AGAINST ARYAMEHR SHAHINSHAH

OF IRAN’S PERSON AND FURTHER ALLEGED HE HAS BEEN

SPREADING DISCONTENT AMONGST THE IRANIAN COMMUNITY.

THE SHAHINSHAH WANTED IMMEDIATE ACTION AGAINST THE

AIR ATTACHÉ. CONSIDERING THE SENSITIVE RELATIONS

BETWEEN IRAN AND PAKISTAN YOU ARE TO REPATRIATE THE
AIR ATTACHÉ INSTANTLY.

As I read on, my mind was like a jet turbine whirring and imagining what in the hell this was all about. It sure was a big one and outrageous at that. I looked up at the Ambassador as he asked if I had some explanation for this serious allegation. I replied, "Sir, you know very well that I have superb relations with every senior diplomat from the Iranian Embassy, including the Ambassador, Ardarsheer Zahidi. I have super relations with all the diplomats of their defence division as well as with DCM Nasir Majd and even his replacement Tawallali. I have never even thought about the Shah leave alone mentioned his name. He has never cropped up in any conversation on any occasion. Sir, I am never afraid to accept any slips and mistakes, but this is so incredulous that I cannot even think about it."

The Ambassador looked extremely unhappy and I could see why. He knew that I was well regarded by the top most Iranian diplomats, and this allegation surely had strains of intrigue. The Ambassador listened to me intently after I assured him that I was courageous enough to admit any indiscretion against the Shahinshah of Iran. The Ambassador sombrely said, "Haider, I can understand your sense of shock at such a serious allegation but the message has come from the highest level and concerns a matter of bilateral relations with a most important country. Therefore, as it stands at the present moment, you should hand-over charge to Brig Chaudhry, the Military Attaché, right away." My riposte was spontaneous, "Sir, I am not shocked at the allegation but definitely disappointed at the manner in which Mr Aziz Ahmed has practically declared me guilty. I am a senior officer of the Pakistan Air Force and cannot be treated like an NCO. Sir, I have the prerogative to ask for a

Court-Martial to exonerate myself from this outrageous and totally unjustified action by my country. I believe Pakistan is a sovereign nation and I have certain rights. I have just landed safely out of a serious Court-Martial for no fault of mine but as a victim of high intrigue, and will face another one if I am pushed into a corner.

Secondly, with your permission sir, I would prefer to hand-over to the Naval Attaché Capt Raza and not Brig Choudhry for reasons that the latter is an extremely contemptuous person, constantly judgmental about my person and you are aware of this fact”.

The Ambassador fully assimilated my indignation as well as my request to hand over charge to the Naval Attaché. I had always carried the impression that the Ambassador was quite fond of me and also fully appreciated the good work I had been doing in Washington. I can say with confidence that he was unhappy at the way this issue had been handled. Half an hour after I returned, I took the second call from the secretary to the Ambassador. He asked me to come back as the Ambassador wanted to speak to me again. I knocked and entered to see the Ambassador, sitting away from his desk on the sofa seat and asked me to take a seat. He said, “I have spoken to Pakistan and I am happy to say that we have time on our hand to investigate the matter further. The Prime Minister has asked for an inquiry to be conducted by me with the help of Ambassador Zahidi to determine the facts of this matter, therefore, you need not hand-over because it will take time to investigate the matter”.

He added that even though I had more time, but considering the issue had been raised by the Shahinshah, I may have to return somewhat earlier than my tour of duty. To this, I replied, “Sir, I have spent over two years and frankly would

be more than happy to be back in the Air Force and doing what I like best. Of course, I will be faced with enormous financial constraints because the few things I own are on credit extending over the years, therefore, I will need to sell my car and raise money to clear myself of all liabilities". The Ambassador asked me to write a letter to him explaining the situation. All I was asking was for some time to clear up my liabilities.

A couple of months later, I was asked by the Ambassador's secretary that he wanted to see me sometime that day before going home. I went to see him in the late afternoon after lunch. He told me that he had received a letter from the Foreign Secretary, Mr Shahnawaz Khan, that the Government of Pakistan had completely and unconditionally exonerated Gp Capt Haider from the false accusations made against him and that there would be no adverse effect on his future career. However, the Iranian Ambassador in Pakistan named Zilli had been making rounds of the Foreign Office and claiming that the Head of the Amiri court of Iran had been asking him to report the action taken against Gp Capt Haider with regard to the complaint registered by the Shahinshah personally to Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto.

The FO explanations about the findings of the inquiry by the Iranian Ambassador had become an embarrassment for the Iranian Foreign Ministry but they were under pressure from the Amiri court nonetheless to recall the Air Attaché from Washington. Finally, Mr Aziz Ahmed felt that since the matter was being played up by the Iranians and to keep the bilateral relations between Iran and Pakistan on even keel, it would be prudent to get the Air Attaché back to his service as a token of response to the Iranian Ambassador's persistent demands. Ambassador Yaqub Khan said that he would be very sorry to lose me but it seemed that the time had come for me to get back to the PAF. I told the

Ambassador that I had no problems anymore about returning, however, I wondered if the PAF had also been kept in the loop about the findings of the enquiry as well as the FO's comments. The Ambassador showed me that he had already written to the AHQ and made it clear that I was unfortunately framed by vested interests in this episode. It would be prudent to mention here that I came to know as late as December 1996 (when I fished out Gen Yaqub Khan's letter to me, assuring me that he had sent a letter to VCAS at AHQ about my exoneration), that the letter from Ambassador Yaqub Khan had been addressed to the Deputy Chief of Air Staff and not the Chief of the Air Staff. Air Chief Marshal Zulfiqar was allegedly not shown the letter by Air Vice Mshl Hassan.

The Iranian Ambassador invited me for a one to one lunch and told me about the investigation. He told me how unfortunate it was that his Embassy had been the cause of such consternation, where I had only admirers and no critics.

When I asked him if he could share his findings for my mental satisfaction, he had identified the culprits. He said that Ambassador Yaqub was aware of the prime culprit, who was a top executive of the defence related Fortune Forty Corporation. The Iranian Ambassador assured me that there were others and that this American executive had been summoned to his office and that he was shaking like a leaf when questioned about his unethical behaviour, just because he could not get his way with me. I asked him if there was any Pakistani involved, he laughed and said that Ambassador Yaqub Khan would find out and let me know more.

A Requiem for Air Mshl Rahim Khan

Rahim Khan had been virtually exiled and sent to Spain as the Ambassador around this time. He called me from Madrid and asked what had happened. I briefly gave him the gist. He invited me to visit him in Spain on my way back to Pakistan. I frankly told him I had no money for a ticket. He arranged my travel and I left my son Adnan with Capt TK Khan who was the Naval Attaché in London and spent two wonderful nights as the guest of Rahim Khan. He was generous and empathetic. We sat till very late and I gave him a run down on the PAF with details of my Court-Martial. He had tears rolling down his eyes as he listened to how his service had been debased. He later resigned and moved to the US and lived hand to mouth till his sudden death from a wrong diagnosis by the American medics post a kidney transplant.

For the umpteenth time in our short history, yet another gallant and true son of the soil departed, but with dignity and courage. Air Mshl Rahim Khan passed away in oblivion, silently and gently - just like the man he was. The media announced his demise in a matter of fact way - without remorse or sorrow. But let us make no mistakes; his death tore many hearts; the hearts of those airmen, soldiers, seamen and friends all over the world who idolized him, especially those from the Pakistan Air Force. They loved his mumblings, which were straight forward truths, uttered with typical dignity, humour and large heartedness.

Those who knew him would say unflinchingly that never in his life, had Rahim Khan spoken about any one with malice; not even his worse detractors and enemies. He was a man at the helm at a time of the most lucrative opportunities, which were exploited by many so called friends as the PAF

entered the Mirage-III contracts with Marcel Dassault. He died on the fringes of poverty like the few honest and

courageous men left in Pakistan. None of his beneficiaries and the parasites living in the lap of luxury in London ever bothered to even call him during his last, desolate years. We, the majority of fighter pilots of his era, will cherish his memory for his compassion and incredible love for the Pakistan Air Force. He set stunning examples of grit and courage by flying deep inside enemy territory and destroying their assets during the 1965 War. I was an eye witness to him leading from the front.

His only weakness and failing was that he was magnanimous with even those snakes who derided him while breeding on his kindness. He always gave them the benefit of the doubt and his worst retribution was to send such contemptuous officers on lucrative postings abroad or to the helm of the PIA.

May Allah rest his soul in heavenly peace.

I returned to London and collected Adnan at the Embassy from Captain TK

Khan's (later the Naval Chief) office. We arrived back at PAF Chaklala, where we were accommodated in a small room near the entrance gate to the awful and dilapidated Officers' Mess; our room could not have been any worse. The roof leaked every time it rained and there was hardly any space to even seat a couple of visitors if friends came to see us. I had no idea about a posting for the first week until I was sent for by the CAS at Peshawar.

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IN THE SHADOW OF MYSELF

As I stepped into the CAS Secretariat, the PSO received me cordially and asked if I would like some tea as the Chief had one of the PSO's with him. I accepted the offer and made some small conversation, all the time remembering the one time I had been in this Secretariat when Zafar Chaudhry had summoned me for a dressing down and threatened to throw me out of the PAF in 24 hours. I was hoping for a much better interaction this time with my favourite superior as the Chief. I was called in as Air Vice Mshl Hassan walked out of his office and chatted with me to find out how I was and when I had arrived etc. I walked in and saluted the Chief. Something large was writ over his face. He looked sombre and the life-long manner in which he used to address me ("Hello, young man") was completely missing. He shot at me saying, "So you finally let me down. Khaqan had warned me right in the beginning against your posting to Washington." I was shell-shocked to hear those words and felt like he had swung a mace across my skull by mentioning Khaqan Abbasi.

I said, "Sir, I don't know why I am being censured after having been brutalized unjustly by the Shahinshah of Iran at the behest of an American corporate executive, who had a grudge against me for snubbing him. Also, the Foreign Secretary as well as Ambassador Yaqub Khan had informed you through a letter, detailing that it was a well conspired intrigue against me and the perpetrators had been identified and that I was completely exonerated. Sir, after the inquiry had been completed, I was told by Ambassador

Yaqub Khan on 7th July 1976, 'You have been completely exonerated from any blame and that it would not be held against you in any way'. The Chief replied, "I have not received any letter from either of them and feel very let-down by this whole affair." He continued, "I am posting you as SASO Air Defence Command under Sadruddin, who is also looking after 'Project Crystal', the induction of a new air defence system with which you are quite familiar."

I felt very dejected because I saw that this was the last straw that broke the camel's back as far as my future was concerned. At that moment in my life I felt hapless and never forgot that feeling because everything seemed to crumble around me. Before leaving, I took a strident stand and told the Air Chief, who I respected so reverently, "Sir, I cannot believe that Khaqan is already back in circulation in the PAF, particularly after his removal for the intrigue he had perpetrated in the PAF, and he was after you as much as he was after me. As far as the case of the Shahinshah, I had absolutely nothing to do with it and none other than the Shah's own son-in-law, the Ambassador of Iran in Washington DC, invited me and told me the entire sordid episode and said how sorry he was for his embassy to have caused me so much trouble. Now it's upto you to believe me or punish me."

I silently left his office, my mind rebelling in a way that I did not like. How could this happen to me all the time, when I was completely innocent and every time I had to prove my innocence? I had had enough and something snapped inside me at that moment and never recovered as far as my dedication to the PAF

was concerned. The first thing I did was to write a letter to Ambassador Yaqub Khan, telling him that no communication had been received by the Air Chief yet and that I was still

being held responsible for the indiscretion against the Shahinshah of Iran. Within three weeks of my mailing the letter, I received a reply from Sahabzada Yaqub Khan. His letter was unambiguous and removed my trepidations about what the CAS had said to me. What was most shocking was that the Ambassador had written to the DCAS, as he mentioned in his last paragraph, which was supposed to have been referred to the CAS. I also had an occasion to run into Mr Shahnawaz Khan, the Foreign Secretary, at a dinner by Shahid Hassan, who had been appointed Advisor on Finance to the Prime Minister.

I had confronted Shahnawaz about making such a hullabaloo of an intrigue perpetrated by third-rate people. He said that the Prime Minister had been briefed on my case and I had been cleared from any blame with the explicit conclusion that the unfortunate manipulation would not affect my career in any way. I asked him why he had not informed the Air Chief about the findings. He told me that he had definitely addressed such a letter to the DG ISI, who is the direct boss of all military officers posted abroad and that he should have communicated with the AHQ.

After arrival, I was required to provide a de-briefing about my stay in Washington to the ISI. In this case, the DG ISI, Lt Gen Ghulam Jilani Khan had instructed his staff to direct me to his office as I came. The General greeted me with his usual warmth and genuine affection. First, he had a good laugh and said, "How was it at the hustings?" I did not think it was funny and lamented why fate always landed me in the eye of the storm, wherever I went. The General gave me the rundown on the reaction produced on this side after the Shahinshah formally denounced me in the meeting with Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto at Izmir, Turkey. He said that he as the DG ISI in charge of all military personnel abroad was asked to put up a brief to the Prime Minister on my case. The

General showed me a file and asked me to read only the penned remarks in the margin. These remarks read something like this, as far as I can remember: “Min FA & Def – I would like an explanation as to why Gp Capt Haider, the Air Attaché in Washington, was called back by you without making reference to his Air Chief and to the DG ISI. What was so compelling to repatriate him after I had decided to order an investigation by the Pak Ambassador in coordination with the Iranian Ambassador, and their findings found nothing against the officer and he stood exonerated; why was he recalled?”

Obviously, it is not possible to recall precisely after 40 years, what I read in the margin of the file just once, but this was the gist of the Prime Minister’s note on the ISI file. The General told me that the problem was dragged unnecessarily by the Iranian Ambassador Zilli, who was making weekly rounds and claiming that he was under pressure from the Amiri Court of the Shahinshah, who wanted to be informed if I had been censured or not. He said it was most unfortunate that my detractors, whose activism created hostility with the UAE Amiri Court first, had then gone chasing after me in Washington. The General said he would speak to Air Chief Mshl Zulfiqar at the first opportunity, because he thought it was not fair to put me through double jeopardy and that too without any cause. I suggested that he should not waste his time with Air Chief Mshl Zulfiqar, because he was holding my promotion where as my last two promotions had placed me ahead of several of my senior colleagues. The General was somewhat taken aback at my bitter refrain because he was privy to my enduring loyalty and support for Air Chief Mshl Zulfiqar during his desolate time in the PAF. I left his office feeling some load off my shoulder, but I did not see a particularly bright future on the highway ahead.

Last Meeting with ZAB

This was about the time that my younger brother Dr Bunyad Haider was getting married in Islamabad. The Prime Minister and Begum Bhutto were amongst the invitees that night and had accepted the invitation, especially owing to their close association with my sister-in-law Shama and her parents Mr and Mrs Muhammad Aslam. Mr Aslam was Federal Secretary for Commerce and later Chairman PM's Inspection Team. I recall vividly, that was to be my last encounter with Mr Bhutto. The Begum arrived first and took her seat next to the bride, followed a few minutes later by Bhutto himself. Those were ominous times in the political history of Pakistan and especially tenuous for Bhutto's political career.

After Bhutto had settled down and everyone had paid their compliments to him and the Begum, he noticed me standing nearby. I was not going to join the line of his admirers but waited till he caught my eye and then I walked up to him and greeted him. He asked me to sit down and said, "Hyder, it is a cruel world and I understand your disillusionment for having been put through some very hard and trying times when you were Court-Martialed. I could have easily pulled you out especially because the intelligence agencies had reported that you had no involvement in the conspiracy but were criticizing the actions of Air Mshl Zafar Chaudhry. As you recall, I had already intervened with Zafar Chaudhry. If I had used the option to get you released, unfortunately posterity would have held you guilty of conspiring for all times. I knew the hardships of incarceration and the trauma of being tried for such serious offences, but I thought it best that the court make its independent decision. When I was informed about your exoneration, I had to send my Chief of Security to end your being kept interned, despite the court's decision."

Then smilingly he said that the Shahinshah must have a lot of time on his hands to be chasing after an Air Attaché. He then used an expression for the Shah of Iran which made my evening and kept me smiling for a long time. What struck me most were his words, “This is a cruel world Hyder,” not knowing that it was almost a prophecy about his own destiny. Just a few months later, the tables had turned on him for his own intransigence and miscalculations.

SASO Air Defence Command

The Air Defence Headquarters of the PAF at that time was located away from all the buzzing and busy activities of AHQ. Sadruddin was the Air Officer Commanding (AOC) – Air Defence Command, which was the central command controlling the whole of Pakistan. Working with Air Vice Mshl Sadruddin was a comforting thought, because he understood me and my ways with empathy rather than scepticism. It was quite obvious that Air Chief Mshl Zulfiqar had preferred Air Vice Mshl Hassan to be his deputy rather than Sadruddin. That was a faulty move by the Air Chief in my opinion because Sadruddin was highly professional whereas Hassan was at best mediocre. Zulfiqar had vested far too much authority in his deputy whereby mediocrity and sycophancy flourished and merit suffered.¹ That unfortunately was a weak point of Air Chief Mshl Zulfiqar Ali Khan, even though I respected him passionately till he died.

Factually, we had both been side-lined for reasons known to Zulfiqar, which for me was the final disillusionment and I lost all interest in further service.

¹ The mega air defence project (called Crystal) was taken away from Air Vice Mshl Sadruddin and placed under Air Vice Mshl Hassan. That was like opening the floodgates of corruption by a small group of officers in the radar and electronic field.

Myriad Political Problems

Bhutto's quest for ultimate power and control over the state became his Achilles' heel and finally cost him his life. The 1977 elections were won by Bhutto with a comfortable majority but his loyalists thought it should be no less than an absolute majority. This was the beginning of Bhutto's end. The Mullahs raised their head with the PNA movement in the spring of 1977, screaming foul play in the elections. Following on the heels sprouted the Qadiani issue and after their success of having the Qadianis declared non-Muslims, the fundamentalists never looked back. Rioting and the threat of a break down of civil order were responded to with carrots by the way of banning alcohol and gambling. Bhutto kept backing up. His offer for re-elections at the provincial level (and in case the PNA succeeded it would follow with national elections) was being discussed with all the religious party leaders, who along with Air Mshl Asghar Khan had been interned at the Sihala rest house. All these leaders except Asghar Khan were taken each day from Sihalato meet with Bhutto and dropped back in the evening after their parleys.

Asghar Khan was adamant that these

maulvis(preachers) should take notes of the discussions for the record, to avoid backing out once peace was restored.

However, they disregarded this, boasting that they knew how to handle Bhutto and were firmly in control of all that was discussed and decided. If this was not comical enough, the Air Mshl once recalled that these Mullahs would arrive usually close to the Maghrib prayers' time, and after brief discussions and the day's diatribe, they would proceed for these prayers; each to their own room.

They refused to pray together as each belonged to a different school of Islamic interpretation and held each others beliefs in contempt. What a debilitating commentary on these hypocrites who were using the pious name of Islam to bring *Nizam-e-Mustafa*, under the garb of their own agendas. If these charlatans, all from the Sunni sect, would not even say prayers behind each other, how did they perceive coming together on fundamental jurisprudence and which version of the *Hadith*(sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) would they apply in establishing *Nizam-e-Mustafa*?? Part of this simple question could be found in the Munir Report (by Justice Munir who was commissioned to establish the definition of a Muslim; 7-8 of the heads of the religious groups including Maudoodi and Mufti Mehmud could not agree on the definition of a Muslim). In any case once again in the shadows, a devilish figure in the army was watching the events and just when a solution was in sight, he pounced like a vulture along with his gang of four and Bhutto was history.

Another incident took place which precipitated Bhutto's downfall. A prominent lawyer Mr Kasuri was shot and killed. The clumsy act was performed by a police officer, Masood Mehmud, of loathsome reputation. Bhutto did not realise that he had chosen his own hangmen twice owing to sheer bad judgment.

Sacking the army and PAF chiefs was his first blunder. The second was a natural corollary, because if you can not value friendship, you choose enemies as your vanguards. Bhutto had replaced Gen Gul Hassan with the mediocre Gen Tikka Khan who never ever forgot he was from the ranks and humbled himself in front of all his seniors, which resulted in his utter loyalty to the boss. Once Tikka ran out of tenure, Bhutto played Russian roulette with his own political career and life by appointing Zia ul Haq as army chief.

Bhutto was befooled because much earlier Zia ul Haq as the GOC Multan had requested an audience with the Prime Minister, unsolicited, who accorded him just 5 minutes. Zia had pulled a copy of the Holy Quran from under his tunic, and had sworn his and his family's allegiance. This only proved that Bhutto was a bad judge of character. Bhutto had also appointed Masud Mehmud as the head of special security service, because he knew this man's dreadful reputation. This was his final blunder that was to cost him his life.

Zia and his coterie of four generals clubbed the agreement between the PNA and Bhutto on the 4th of July, 1977. Martial-Law came ominously with all the fire-works of the American Independence day (celebrated on the 4th of July), with bands playing requiem for Pakistan's political future, as well as for whatever hope for democracy we had. Bhutto was arrested but later released and elections were announced by Zia in 90 days as he had sworn on Allah that he would order elections and never renege on his sworn promise.

People may have believed him but I think there was one man, Air Mshl Asghar Khan, who had doubts about Zia's character. As the time was closing in on the 90 day deadline, Zia and his cabal were in close huddle figuring out how to maintain the status quo. The Junta decided to eliminate Bhutto by blaming him for the murder of Zahoor Elahi. The Lahore High Court bench presided over by the abysmal Chief Justice, Maulvi Mushtaq, was only too happy to oblige Zia and the Junta, to pay back his gratitude for re-appointing him after he had been superseded for the Chief Justice post by ZAB earlier. Maulvi Mushtaq was unqualified to sit on judgment against the accused person.

Bhutto's appeal filed by Yahya Bakhtiar with the Supreme Court also fell on the deaf ears of yet another dishonest

Chief Justice, Anwar-ul-Haq, who too had been denied this very assignment by ZAB. Zia's cunning and despicable mind had stacked the deck against ZAB. Some honourable lawyers made a last ditch effort to appeal to the Shariat Court to find redemption through Islamic jurisprudence. What an irony that the upholders of Allah's law disgracefully evaded their decision till three weeks after the execution had been carried out by an infamous Brigadier. He became a general for sure; as such acts of valour are well rewarded by despotic dictators. But then this general also became a fugitive when Benazir was returned to the high pedestal of premiership. April 3rd 1979

was a shameful day when a coward ordered the execution of ZAB. Even after Bhutto was murdered, his ghost kept haunting Zia.

ZAB's trial had become an international controversy and was condemned by international as well as regional experts in jurisprudence. The last moments of this highly intelligent leader have been captured graphically by many, but the most vivid and painful was by the army colonel who was with him till the last scene of ZAB's murder.

Pakistan lost a political leader with tremendous potential, who gave the country its nuclear power, a Constitution, got all the Muslim heads to sit together for the first time in history and took the American monster head-on. He was the first prime minister who rescued Pakistan's pride and sovereignty from America's total dominance. He paid the price with his life for defying the American threat. Notwithstanding his serious flaws and feudal mind-set, his final departure at the hands of Zia ul Haq was painfully unjustified.

National Defence College

I discovered soon after my visit to the Air Chief that his lecture about the National Defence College (NDC) benefiting my future career held no water.

There was enough evidence to tell me that a NDC course had very little significance for the PAF Air Chief and it was more of a holding pattern (side track) than a career jumping board. I joined the NDC course in 1978 and found only a few interesting personalities on the course. The prominent one who I befriended because I was impressed with his intellect, integrity and openness, was Maj Gen Mohammed Safdar (later CGS, then a great Governor of the Punjab appointed by Pervez Musharraf, and finally the Vice Chancellor of Punjab University).

Truthfully speaking, I began to enjoy the course once I got into it. The more I read and researched, the more it became evident that I had a latent thirst for knowledge, which had been suppressed by my fury and passion for matters strictly air force in all their manifestations. By the time I started on my final thesis for the course, I had become a social nuisance for my after hour friends. I had picked up a subject for my thesis which nobody wanted to touch, because of its sensitive nature. The subject for my thesis was "Psycho-social Analysis of Pakistani Society." This was a subject relevant to the time and particularly the unholy circumstances pervading Pakistan. Not surprisingly, I learnt from the senior directing staff that none of the renowned speakers on the selected list of the NDC wanted to give a talk on this subject. As a part of my thesis in midcourse, an in-house presentation on the subject was on the syllabus and quite unexpectedly, I was appointed Chairman of that session.

It was extremely interesting for me to discover through the writings of some true intellectuals the psyche of the Muslims

in the Subcontinent. I made this a subject of all dinners and parties to solicit the views of my friends as well as those who were not in the category of my friends. Sometimes, there would be a hue and cry directed at me to stop this serious nonsense, which tended to divide the gathering into those who had the intellect to argue and those who did not have a particular fondness for debate and discussion beyond drawing room gossip. Gen Shah Rafi Alam and his wife Tammy were frequent visitors to my humble abode in Islamabad and naturally subjected to my enthused and newly acquired knowledge about Islam and Pakistani society. A time had come when Rafi Alam would say upon entering the door to my house, "Ok Nosy, let's get your thesis bull--- out of the way in precisely 10 minutes and then give me a stiff drink. No more thesis after that or I will throw you out of the room". So this was how I managed to develop my thesis!

During the Martial-Law days Gen Shah Rafi Alam (Rufus to his friends) was functioning as the Deputy Martial-Law Administrator for this area. He had a house in a barrack near the old President House, and occupied a couple of rooms converted into modest bedrooms and a sitting room. Mufti Hashim and I were frequent visitors to his home. We played back-gammon whenever we were together. At the same time I had met Brig Mukeet Khan, an aviator, and was good friends with Brig Afzaal. They would also turn up once in a while, but not as frequently as I liked owing to distance and the fact that were always single on these trips to Islamabad and had a curfew to abide by after a certain hour imposed by their spouses.

At this point in time ZAB Bhutto was still on trial, on fabricated charges.

After Bhutto's unlawful murder, I developed revulsion for Zia ul Haq. This feeling was further accentuated after his Hadood melodrama and the hypocritical manner in which he denigrated Islam. Soon we were all calling him by his infamous but well-deserved alias of Lash ul Haq (Whipper of truth).

The Last Affair

While I was enjoying life at the NDC, when one evening at dinner with my friends Munir Peerzada and Naushi I met one of their friends, Faryda, who was visiting from Jordan. I always had a problem with temptation. I took it to be nature's provocation and that for me was irresistible. Once I was locked onto someone enticing, I never, I mean never, lost the game. Such was the irony of that evening and I put on my fighter pilot's spiel and I had the bull's-eye, or so it seemed for a few years. Perhaps I was subconsciously suffering from bachelor fatigue and felt ready for another enduring sojourn. One thing led to another and a year later, we decided to get married but with a lot of reservations from both sides (I was still in love with Mercedes and was on the rebound). The strange thing is that the one I really loved, I never married. Each time I married, I would have a premonition that I was making a wrong move, but being a maverick I would go ahead anyhow.

Our Walima (Wedding Dinner) was held at Lahore because of my aging parents and scores of friends being in the Punjab. It was held jointly with my youngest brother Jawwad and his new bride Nevine; his for the first time and mine for the third. Several dinners had been accepted by us post the Walima dinner. My friend Behram Avari had graciously offered us his Presidential Suite at the Lahore Avari Hilton. It was the 3rd of April, and we were getting ready to go to lunch with my family when the shattering news of Bhutto's

execution came like a sledge hammer. I was numbed for a long while; my latest (and thank God, last) wife couldn't hold back her tears. It was a strange feeling as we left the hotel, like doomsday. We promptly cancelled all the dinners that had been laid out by friends and all our hosts also agreed with our decision. The atmosphere was utterly remorseful and people felt hapless. Even Bhutto's worse detractors were rattled at the news. I can never forget the intensity of sadness that pervaded our lives for a long time. He had been personally fair to me even when I was framed in the conspiracy to overthrow him. Pakistan seemed like entering the mouth of hell, and that it did for what seemed like an eternity till the evil was blown to smithereens in a C-130, disappearing in thin air. The unfortunate part had been the death of some good PAF men and my friend Gen Mian Afzaal, who became the collateral damage. Such are the ways of Allah, when he delivers divine justice.

I settled down back in Islamabad with my third wife. A handsome son, Zohare, was born to us on 4th January 1980, 9 months and one day after our marriage. This was followed by Allah granting my ardent desire for a daughter, when the beauty Zaiena was born on 8th April 1984. Several years later, however, my third wife and I eventually parted ways.

My marriage took place after I completed my course at the NDC. A bunch of us had been selected to proceed on an educational trip abroad to the Far East.

But before we left, we had an address scheduled by the President of Pakistan.

The Commandant had asked selected students if they would like to have an audience with the President after his lecture at the NDC. I was one amongst those who had the dubious distinction of meeting the President one to one. It was a

pleasant enough encounter, especially after Zia ul Haq had made some endearing comments about me in front of the entire course during the tea-break.

With this background, I felt quite confident to speak to him. He asked me about my seniority level and after I mentioned where I stood, he shook his head and said something like, "Let us see who will be the lucky one between you three to get to the top, but meanwhile how would you like if I sent you to put PIA on even keel and then returned you to your service". I was completely taken back by surprise and thought he was possibly just sounding me off. But soon thereafter the matter was confirmed by the Air Chief. However, that story came to a pass and I was none the worse for it.

The study tour abroad was to Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, and Sri-Lanka. At that time, perhaps the best Ambassador ever in Pakistan's history, was our Ambassador in Tokyo. For lack of space and in deference to the late General, I will spare the other visits and only recount the trip to Japan. Through his brother Manoucher, who had been my childhood friend, the Ambassador (for discretion I will use the acronym HE for the venerable gentleman) found out that I was expected to visit Japan with the NDC team. He asked Manoucher to tell me that I would be staying with them. I gratefully acknowledged the offer but suggested that I did not want to burden them and could stay in the hotel with the rest. I told Manoucher that it was most gracious of HE to invite me as their house-guest but between us, it would hamper my freedom largely. My plea went unheard and I resigned myself to enjoying the hospitality of my hosts.

Gen Zia's Piety Unveiled

The Ambassador had invited the entire group for a dinner on the eve of our arrival. He gave an outstanding brief on Japan, its culture, and Pakistan's interests in Japan and theirs in Pakistan. Thereafter, he explained the international situation, keeping Japan as the central focus. It was an informal talk but everyone came away impressed by the superior analysis given by the Ambassador in a completely impromptu environment. After a sumptuous meal, extremely well served, the Ambassador took parties of four in his personal car to their far away hotel because the driver was off duty by then. Surely, he had every right to hold him back on extra time since this was an official visit, but that was the character of the Ambassador.

A most interesting encounter took place at the elegant reception held at the Ambassador's residence and attended by friends and diplomats. This needs to be narrated for the sake of posterity, as well as many other considerations, as they reflect the real character of General Zia.

The reception was meant to introduce two delegations to the local gentry.

One was our group; the second was led by my friend Kassamali, at that time Zia's cabinet minister. It was a crowded and colourful reception, with the Ambassador and his wife's warmth flowing every where. I learnt that evening from a Japanese lady that the Ambassador's wife was the toast of welfare organisations in Tokyo. She was the chair person of one of the biggest charities and admired like Florence Nightingale. I also discovered later that evening to my shock that she was in the terminal stage of cancer all the time we were there. Peace be upon her soul, she never once showed it through out our stay. It was impossible to guess that beyond her brave front, the cursed disease was eating her inside. That was real character and that too of a

Pakistani. She was considered at par with her husband as far as building Pakistan's image was concerned.

During the course of the evening I noticed an extremely attractive young lady standing in a corner looking almost stranded (this incident occurred before I got married). Stridently, I walked towards her and introduced myself. She had a Pakistani sounding name, which I thought rather strange but possibly I heard it wrong. I asked her if she was in college, assuming her to be a college sophomore. She smiled and said she had finished college some years ago and ran a trading and shipping business. That put the brakes on my next move and I switched to small talk about Pakistan, of course extending her an invitation to visit my beautiful country. She replied that she visited Islamabad and Pindi often. I said, "Great, then you must call me next time and I will show you around." She gently said, "We are sort of bound by the President House protocol when we go there, because we have to stay there". I said, "Wait a minute, what have you got to do with the President, you do mean Zia, don't you?" She replied, "Yes, you see Uncle Zia and my father went to school together and are close friends, that's why."

Holy cow, I shouted, "Are you telling me that your Dad is a Pakistani?" I felt rather silly. "Yes" she replied. "No wonder you are so beautiful, but listen, Zia only went to a Madressa not to a school," I joked. As luck would have it, my friend Kassamali noticed me in deep conversation and sauntered towards us. He addressed her taking her first name, "Be careful with this fighter pilot, he is dangerous." She quipped, "I am beginning to discover that, he thinks Uncle Zia went to a Madressa not to a school." Kassamali burst out laughing, as I asked him how he knew her. She replied saying that the Kassamalis are well known in Japan

for being the world's foremost ship owners, that they had a huge establishment in Tokyo and Osaka.

Of course I already knew that the Kassamali family had nearly 60 offices the world over, from Japan to Washington State on the West coast. Kassamali asked why I was conversing with a Pakistani lady in English, a foreign lingo. I asked what he meant by that as I did not know Japanese. The girl laughed and said, "*Aap ne baat he angrezi mein shuroo ki to main ne bhe usi tarah jawwab dia*" in perfect Urdu ("You started in English so I also responded back in English"). I nearly fell backwards hearing a Japanese speak with such a perfect Urdu accent. I said, "Next thing you will speak in *theth*(dialectic) Punjabi." She rapid fired in Punjabi and I was totally charmed by her coyness. I was really beginning to like this female and started thinking how to ask her out to dinner. Kassamali was the only chance I thought. I said to her if she would like to dine with Kassamali and I the next evening. She said it was possible, and looked at Kassamali, as though for approval. He said he had a previous arrangement as his brother was arriving the next day, saying perhaps the day after if he was not caught up.

I was mad at him, but he managed to wink when she was not looking. I wondered what he had meant by that signal. I found out soon after the guests had departed and the general and his wife had excused themselves. Before departing Kassamali whispered to me not to make any plans for the next day with the young lady as he would pick me up at 8 PM and tell me why he had winked at me. Curious as I was, soon after the last guest had left, I walked up to the Ambassador and asked him what the plan was for the rest of the evening, dying to get a quiet minute alone with him to ask about the girl. The Ambassador suggested we retire to the study and have a drink in peace.

He smiled and said, "You were cozying up to Miss Shefta I noticed. Check if your watch is still there." I looked at him wide eyed and asked what he was talking about and who was that female. He poured two drinks and sat down, relishing every moment as he unravelled the mystery of the Japanese-Punjabi girl. What I heard was a shocking exposé of the allegedly pious Zia and his hypocritical façade of being a good Muslim.

Hidden Fountain of Kick-Backs

This is going to sound incredible to some and horrifying to others. The irony is that it is the whole truth, exposed by the most credible sources. The Ambassador told me that the young lady I was engaged in conversation with was the scion of a Pakistani named Shefta, allegedly a close associate of the President Zia ul Haq. Shefta had a criminal record of graft and other serious commercial misdemeanours, which were just the tip of the iceberg. He had been declared a persona-non-grata by the Hong Kong government, Hong Kong being the centre of vice and every kind of wheeling-dealing of the world. This person was on their "No entry list." Being married to a Japanese woman provided him the protection against deportation from Japan. Shefta, the Ambassador said, had his finger in every pie as far as the entire spectrum of bi-lateral business between Japan and Pakistan was concerned. The kick-backs were received on every commercial deal. He disclosed that the embassy had a file on him, but it was dormant owing to his high powered links with Zia. It transpired later when I had dinner with Kassamali and his brother, who had come for the launching of two of the ships on order by their Group that the reason Kassamali wanted me to avoid contact with Shefta's daughter was because her father was a big Mafioso and was therefore, a dangerous liaison.

In fact, Zia ul Haq had told Kassamali on an earlier occasion when he visited Japan on official business that his friend Shefta Sahib would get in touch with him at Tokyo and to see how he could help him with the shipyards. My good friend Munir Pirzada was working for the Saigol group at the time and had business with the shipyards. Upon my return from the NDC tour when I met Munir I casually mentioned the name Shefta to him and he had a fit. He asked if I knew him or had met him. I said I had not and told him about the encounter with his daughter. Munir told me that he had been introduced to Shefta by the Manager of the National Bank at Tokyo, who had taken Munir to the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo where Shefta had been living with his wife and two daughters for 20 years.

I couldn't believe any Pakistani could afford to live in the Imperial Hotel for a month let alone 20 years! This meant the man was loaded with money.

Munir told me that during one small 100 million dollar contract by PNSC for ships, Shefta received 3% commission (3 million dollars). Much to my amazement he said the minister heading the government group dealing with the Kawasaki shipyard, and the trading house Misshoiwao, knew that Shefta was receiving commissions on this and every other deal. He had been advised by General Zia to help personally to take care of Shefta. By coincidence I narrated the amazing story to a dear friend months later at a dinner in his house in Islamabad. He was in the higher echelons of the Central Board of Revenue and seemed to know a lot more than I could digest!

I figured it would be best to let this story be buried in my mental archives.

Today, I have no qualms about penning it for the present and future generations to read and draw their own conclusions. This was the Islam that Zia practiced, in stark contrast to the financial integrity and dignity of the Quaid-e-Azam. I have heard people say that Zia never went to the Quaid's Mazaar to offer a prayer.

Learning about these shenanigans I can see why. He must have suffered from a foreboding that the wrath of Allah might bring the roof down on his head, if he went near the grave of the great leader.

After leaving Japan, our next stop was Indonesia, which was quite straightforward and nothing to write back home about. Our next and last destination on the tour was Sri Lanka. This was an experience diametrically opposite to Indonesia, even though the hospitality of my Sri Lankan hosts, who had been asked by my friends in Pakistan to look after me, was heart warming and deeply sincere. What struck me as most fascinating was the functioning of democracy in an extremely poor country. Coming from Pakistan, which was under the despotic rule of Gen Zia ul Haq, Sri Lanka was a refreshing experience. I mentioned my impressions to Gen Zia on one occasion when he visited the NDC during our course. I said, "Sir, the people were so poor that I saw men and women with broken sandals at the bus stand near our modest hotel.

They were all standing in a line without any one attempting to jump his place."

The next experience I recall was when we were all gathered at a huge auditorium to be addressed by the Minister of Commerce. The Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff of Sri Lanka and the three service chiefs were present in the hall.

In walked a young handsome man in his late twenties or early thirties at the most. All the service heads saluted solemnly and waited till the minister had taken his seat across a desk on the centre stage. Thereafter, all the military brass took their seats. Reverence and respect for the young minister was exuding visibly from the faces of the senior armed forces officers, all of whom were nearly twice the age of the minister. In the next 45 minutes, the young minister was heard in pin-drop silence for the content and substance of his talk. It was all very impressive. It was quite an experience for my army mates who would never stoop to such democratic norms!

The course finally ended and I was informed by Ambassador Bashir Babar, who was one of the Directing Staff, that Brig Muhammad Safdar had topped the course with a rare 'A' grading and that I was graded 'B' along with two others on the course. The Commandant's ire for me was poured out in my course report as I was told by the Air Chief, when I met him after the course. He told me that he had decided to post me as Director Joint Plans, which did not work out because General Sharif (Chairman Joint Chiefs) considered me an arrogant officer. Thus I landed at GHQ as Director Joint Warfare. Inexorably, the Air Chief had ended my career in the PAF with this innocuous posting.

I felt that the Air Chief wanted to keep me away from the mainstay, possibly because as mentioned by him sometime ago, my contemporaries did not get along with me. I had begun to be convinced that I had been abandoned and was considered dispensable. I felt that what Air Chief Mshl Zulfiqar had mentioned fleetingly in his suite at the Watergate Hotel in Washington about my compatriots not getting along with me, was becoming a disconcerting reality.

Clearly, they had won the confidence of the Air Chief and created a gulf between him and me. The chief may have felt that my proximity to AHQ might become troublesome for him. I did not share his trepidation because in the past 27 years, I had never crossed anybody's path for my own ambitions and had no desire to create imaginary competition in my mind.

This is how I ended up at GHQ, what ever that stood for but surely away from AHQ. My spirit and motivation suffered a set-back and I felt suppressed by the attitude and barriers I sensed at the AHQ. C'est la vie was the paradigm on which I decided to restructure my own attitude. The future was not in my hands and I had to let fate take me where I was destined. All that time though, I retained my deep respect for Air Chief Mshl Zulfiqar and felt sorry that he had been smoked screened.

PAF Command Changes Hands

In July 1978, the PAF Chief was on a tour of Sweden to discuss the Swedish fighter and trainer aircraft. A while before his departure, Zulfiqar Ali Khan had been in a meeting with Zia ul Haq and his coterie of generals which generally included the four Governors (also Generals) including Zia's right hand and the greatest accessory to Zia's hunt and hound campaign, Gen Akhtar Abdul Rehman, the Director General of Inter Services Intelligence (DG ISI). Air Chief Mshl Zulfiqar narrated the episode to me long after his retirement when he was kept in suspended animation about his ambassadorial appointment. He said that Zia ul Haq had asked him to stay on for another stint since his retirement date was nearing. Zulfiqar had rejected the extension offer saying to me that he could not continue to be a part of a fascist Martial-Law regime. Peeved at Zulfiqar's intransigence, Zia ul Haq tried to subvert Air Vice

Mshl Hassan to take-over command of the PAF while Zulfiqar Ali Khan was still in Sweden. Air Vice Mshl Hassan suggested that it would only be proper for him to wait till the CAS

Zulfiqar Ali Khan was back. This sent Zia ul Haq's ego into a frenzy.

Unluckily for the PAF, Zia ul Haq's infamous brother-in-law, Air Cdre M

Saleem, had been assigned as the Air Secretary against all service traditions which required a pilot from General Duties branch to hold this extremely important post. Along with his drinking pal heading the electronic intelligence directorate, the PAF went on a real spree of corrupt practices and the once sterling service became the talk of Pakistani media and society. The fraudulent behaviour was spawned during Zulfiqar's last years but was kept discreet.

Fortunately, there were some officers of high integrity at the top of operations, maintenance and administrative branches. They proved to be saviours for the PAF during this challenging period. Had it been a different team, God alone knows what trauma could have over-taken the service.

Pervasive Corruption

After Zia ul Haq crashed in the C-130, the country came under the spell of a tainted version of democracy. Corruption was propelled even higher, to a very different level. It went up to millions of dollars over the next 10 years. Not once but four times the hands changed between plundering political leaders and their family members and touts. The naval chief was ordained by the head of the government to alter the recommendations of the Naval Staff in favour the French weapons system, asserting that Pakistan needed to strengthen its strategic alliance with

France. It sounded as a cruel joke to the professional officer. The Naval Chief being a reputed gentleman called in his Senior Naval Staff and told them what had transpired. He informed them that he had asked the head of the government to order it in writing, if the government insisted upon vitiating the evaluation by the project team. In writing it came; the evaluation was fidgeted and fudged. Resultantly, the French won the Battle of Waterloo in Pakistan. The original cost of the contract was inflated up from 890 million USD to over 1.2

Billion USD to provide the whipped cream for the interlocutors. Two naval officers of relatively junior rank were punished for awe and effect.

Interestingly, the half-baked investigative reporters went berserk condemning Admiral Mansoor-ul-Haq, but for the wrong kick-backs. He had no part in the submarine-deal; it had already been steam-rolled before he destroyed the navy's good reputation. Where Mansoor went gaga was buying torpedoes and missiles for the submarines while these were eons away from being seaworthy. All sane advice to desist from keeping in storage missiles which have a shelf-life fell on blocked ears. His story about shifty foot-work in the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation received the contempt it deserved through the papers, but the irresponsible media was deficit on the true facts. His appointment as naval chief days before his retirement was done with ulterior motives and not for the betterment of the service. So he wanted his pound of flesh too, but went about it in clumsy fashion, earning the calumny he well deserved. All the reprobates who indulged in massive graft were condemned as white-collar criminals by Pakistani as well as international law. They livelike fugitives in the Middle East, UK, and the US, perpetually conspiring to make a come back to Pakistan for more booty.

Yet again, the poor country went through a bout of under-hand wheeling dealing when the shoulder fired missile Mistral was procured from France under extremely dubious hypothesis to justify its imminent procurement. Allegedly, the construed threat analysis propounded by vested interests was that an attack was imminent against the Kahuta nuclear facility by the IAF in collusion with the Israeli Air Force. Who could have dared question the funding of such a project? This was a subterfuge and contrived pressure. Even if there was an iota of real threat to our nuclear assets, it had to be at night, against a low-level, extremely high-speed assault with stand-off weapons fired from ranges well outside the Mistral range.

What was remorseful yet comical in this manipulated threat was that the missile procured at the time did not have night capability, as I was told by an officer from the operations branch. The deal for the Mistral was made first by the navy for reasons I do not know, followed by the PAF, allegedly with massive kick-backs. So what was new!

Some members of the kitchen-cabinet of the incumbent prime minister, particularly an appendage from the 'house of diplomacy' attached to the Prime Ministerial Secretariat went out of their way to facilitate the deal. In another major defence procurement deal for a radar retrofit programme, a senior officer posted at the Ministry of Defence Production Division, whom I thought to be a clean officer, coerced the stake-holders by holding the case files till hefty sums were paid to oil the wheels of the case. His own brother-in-law gave me the details of the change in the life-style of what was a previously middle class family. Finally, this officer retired to become amillionaire because within a short period of his retirement, he took the electronic-weapon system agency away from the businessmen who were pursuing it as legitimate representatives of the firm.

Following this was the purchase of a large number of F-7s (the Chinese MIG-21

version) along with the acquisition of Chinese electronic counter measures of old generation technology for the Mirages. The professionals were floored with this decision, but few could risk their careers by making noise that the seller did not possess the sophistication required to retrofit a French aircraft. Thank God for small mercies that the procurement of the Mirage 2000-5 (at a price tag of 98

million-plus USD per aircraft) was resisted by the Air Board until the air force high command changed. Interestingly, the new chief had not been recommended by the outgoing CAS and the appointment came as a shock to him.

The operational staff were directed by the new Air Chief to prepare a lighter version of the Mirage 2000-5 which came to around USD 25 million-plus a copy (this was 1/3rd the price proposed by the manufacturer). But an iniquitous lawyer with connections with the media convinced the vested interests that the whipped cream would be miniscule if the air force insisted on the lighter version.

Fortunately, even before the command had changed, the decision making body had dug their heels and stood firm against a hasty decision, refusing to be browbeaten to bring the nation under such a phenomenal debt of billions of dollars. Bravo to all those courageous Air Marshals who battled to decimate the proposal even though the PAF desperately needed a fresh new fighter, but not at that outrageous price.

Luckily for the PAF, the command changed at the right moment but the new incumbent was told by the head of the

government to go ahead and get the Mirage 2000-5. “We will manage the funds,” a constrained chief was told.

Nothing doing was the attitude by the new leadership. They procrastinated, dragging their feet at some risk no doubt. For their intransigence the PAF

leadership was denigrated by being maligned openly through pressures exerted by the already obliging press under a democratic dispensation.

Back to the stables, my first week at GHQ was a pleasant surprise on more than one count. I was received with warmth and welcomed even if I say so myself. I got that impression from the indulgence of the Vice Chief, Gen Mohammed Iqbal, who was the virtual boss of the army, the Chief of General Staff (CGS), Gen FS Lodhi and the Director Military operations, Brig Mian M

Afzaal (the only officer I had known from his young days as G-2 to General Gul Hassan, when the latter was the DMO). These senior officers called the shots at the GHQ. Owing to their open mind and consideration for my professional reputation they began to associate me with all those issues and projects which involved any and every matter related to aviation, air defence systems, and even communications where it concerned Air Contact Teams (ACTs). This was a motivation for me even though the directors concerned were not happy with what they considered outside interference.

There are a lot of stories about how the Mushaq training aircraft was selected by the army to replace the versatile L-19 observer aircraft on flimsy evaluation by vested interests and Memon Seths behind the deal. I made candid comments when the case was referred to me by the VCOAS.

Thereafter, the Signals (SO-in-C) and I had a tussle about his acquisition of UHF radio equipment for Air Contact Teams (ACTs) which came into focus during the CGS conference. I spoke up and told the CGS that the equipment being referred to by the SO-in-C was in fact redundant and would not synchronise with the radio of fighter aircraft. The signal boss was livid but I never looked back since the CGS was most encouraging about my observations. I asked why the army signals branch is trying to re-invent the wheel when the PAF had the latest and the most efficient UHF radio installed in the fighter aircraft, including the F-16s as well as the Chinese fighters. I argued that since communication would be the sine non qua of success in CloseAir Support missions, it should be a foregone conclusion to ensure compatibility and connectivity between the fighter pilot and the contact team, be it land based or airborne. That the ex-signal officer-in-chief figures on every defaulters list published when the government changes, was not surprising for me.

The procurement of the Swedish air defence system and the ground to air (RBS- 70, Anti-Aircraft guided missile) from M/s Bofors was an incredible graft ridden drama in which I was assigned by the VCOAS to be an advisor. The Secretary Defence Production from 1978-79 did not like my candid observations about the serious weaknesses in the system any less than 'Commander AckAck', Maj Gen Hayat. Yet even more intriguing was the interest shown by the PAF director in-charge of Air Defence procurement, who approached me to recommend Siemens's low-looking radar instead of the Swedish Giraffe radar. I may have had reservations about the Giraffe radar for its unwieldy antenna neck and exposure to ground fire in a tank battle, but I had serious qualms about Siemens. Their reps in Pakistan were notorious for their kick-back strategy to beat the competitors, in every field from hospital equipment,

communications to air defence and civil aviation equipment. I was privy to a telephone conversation in London between the Siemens's marketing manager and one of our radar experts. The RBS missile system was procured after I was told by the Secretary Defence Production during the second meeting when I provided statistics and rationale against the project that he had already decided to procure the system and condescendingly told me that he will keep my observations (euphemism for 'hyperbole') in mind. Owing to space restraint, the epoch of my battles in business shall follow, if God wills, as a sequel to this book which will be about the dangerous games played in Pakistan's procurement world, involving some very big stars of Pakistan's power games.

I have merely given a glimpse of the shenanigans in the services. It was painful for me to chronicle what I have but what I have not included owing to the limitation of space would be far more agonizing to unravel. In the same vein, I want to make it absolutely clear that these individuals, who were responsible for conduct unbecoming, were very miniscule and represented a mere fraction. Ninety nine point nine percent of the men in uniform possessed the highest calibre and integrity.

Sadly, a minority brought indignity to the patriotic and proud majority, tarnishing the sterling image of the Armed Forces of Pakistan. I hope and pray that there will be a lesson here for the defaulters; ultimately what you sow, you shall reap.

Ominous Warnings

One morning, Brig Mian Afzaal walked over to my office while I was in deep reflection upon the depressing atmosphere pervading Pakistan. Seeing him provided an

opportunity for catharsis as we sat over cups of tea and sandwiches, discussing the prevailing situation. It was really a monologue because Afzaal was listening to my hyperbole and saying little. When I took a pause, he looked at me and said, "Sir, what is your bloody problem; do you think you can change anything as you think fit? No you can't. What you need to do immediately and resolutely is to stop criticizing the President and people close to him." He also shared with me the fact that he met Zia ul Haq practically everyday and the President knew what people in uniform, especially the likes of me were discussing in their offices, drawing rooms and bedrooms. He sincerely advised me to keep my nose out of the way Zia ul Haq was running the country.

I knew well that Zia ul Haq was extremely fond of Brig Afzaal and that the latter was a potential Chief of the Army, sooner rather than later. I told Afzaal that I fully appreciated his deep concern about my welfare, but what justification could he give about my brother, Prof Bunyad's, father-in-law who had been a most respected Federal Commerce Secretary and was rounded up along with his noble wife by hounds and thrown in cells along with hardened criminals. Their crime had been to be waiting to hear the speech of a PPP stalwart, a former army chief (Tikka Khan) who never turned up in the end. And what about poor people getting whipped for having a drink just like he and I and many others imbibed when we needed to relax in the stifling environment? The session was inconclusive, yet I did tell Afzaal that I would make an effort to be more subtle.

However, my feeble words failed to assuage his concern.

Inevitably, that was the dusk of my career and I knew I had to relax. I waited for fate to make its next move. Whenever time for change came near in my life, it was amazing how

my psychic sense came into play. Intuitively, I felt the onset of a metamorphosis, not knowing which way the winds would blow.

But all was not as grim at that time.

I had been called by Lt Gen FS Lodhi, the CGS, one day and he told me that the Vice Chief of Army Staff Gen Sarwar Khan had recommended me for a Sitara-e-Imtiaz for my contribution towards Joint-Warfare concepts. He said that the recommendation had been sent to Air Headquarters and I should be hearing soon about the award, which would definitely appear on the 23rd March awards list. Frankly speaking, the knowledge about the award did not create much excitement as I always considered civil awards a curse and in fact highly detrimental to the morale of dedicated professionals who lacked the propensity of soothsayers during peacetime but were cougars in the skies in war. The real achievers and truly professional officers seldom pined for such rewards, because they were graded very low on their fawning abilities. None the less it would be interesting here for the reader to see how the top generals of the army characterized me (Appendix 'I'). As it transpired, Air Cdre Saleem (the brother-in-law of Gen Zia) did not present this first time recommendation of a PAF

officer by the army high command to the Air Chief and made it disappear.

It was during this period that I received a call from Air Cdre Yameen Khan, who was the Secretary Air Board at the time. He told me that the Air Chief wanted to meet me and if I could come to the Chaklala Base, where the Chief of Air Staff was scheduled to attend the graduation ceremony of No 35 Transport Wing Conversion School. I promptly arrived

at the premises of the Wing. The Air Chief arrived and told me that he would speak to me after the ceremony.

When the function was over the Air Chief told me that President Gen Zia had spoken to him and that he wanted me to go to PIA for a couple of years. The Chief wanted my reaction. I told him that this point had been brought up by the President when I met him at the NDC several months ago, and I had said to him that I had full confidence in my ability to handle PIA, provided there was no outside interference, especially from the Aviation Division at the Ministry of Defence. I had the same consternation even then and would need assurance of non-interference. The Air Chief said that the President wanted me to shift almost immediately and remain under study with Anwar Jamal for a few months, in order to grasp the magnitude of the responsibility.

Anwar Jamal was about to retire in a few months. I thanked the Air Chief for his support and left. Outside, I met Air Cdre Yameen, who said to me, "Sajad, the Air Chief has given you a thundering report, which was drafted by me and has been sent to the Ministry of Defence for a proper letter of appointment as the Air Chief has decided to have the appointment regularized through normal channels as recommended by the PAF and not as a political appointee". It felt strange that Zulfiqar had side-lined me and Air Chief Mshl Shamim was being so fair to me. A couple of weeks later, Mehmood Haroon, who was the Interior Minister at that time, had come for dinner because my brother Prof Bunyad Haider was visiting from the States and was a close friend of the Haroon brothers. I vividly recall two issues that came up during the evening. First, Mehmood Haroon asked me what I was doing in Islamabad because he had heard the President mention my appointment to PIA a couple of weeks

earlier. I told him that I was waiting for a nod from AHQ before I moved to Karachi.

The second issue that came under discussion was the anger and frustration endemic amongst the people under the present dispensation. Mehmood told us that he was the first one to brief the President every morning about the internal turmoil.

When I asked why something was not in the offing to release the tension and pressure before it boils over, Mehmood Haroon said that the President listened to his briefings with rapt attention and agreed with his assessments, but did not do anything to implement his recommendations. I distinctly remember him saying, “Bhai, mera asteefa meray kheesay main har waqt hota hai, laikin woh President sahib nahi janay detay (Brother, I keep my resignation in my pocket but the President won’t let me go)”. I retorted and said, “Mehmood Sahib, a resignation is not meant to be kept in the pocket but placed on the table of your office with a paper-weight on it. After that you should pack your bags and get back to your huge empire in the UAE.” Everyone laughed and the matter ended for the time being. Both issues turned sour as chronicled below.

One day the CGS called a spot meeting of all the directors. It turned out to be a probe into what the officer class felt about Martial-Law and the forthcoming elections promised by Zia. “The feeler meeting by the CGS” had to be perceived within the overall preview of the political canvas, which had emerged after Bhutto’s hanging and Zia’s moral and spiritual destruction of Quaid-e-Azam’s vision of Pakistan. Earlier elections were cancelled by decree on March 1, 1978; Zia banned all political activity, although political parties were not banned. The same month, some 200 journalists were arrested, and a number of newspapers

were shut down. Zia, however, maintained that there would be elections sometime in 1979. Members of some of the PNA parties, including the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Pakistan Muslim League (all the perennial *lotas*), joined Zia's cabinet as he tried to give a civilian cast to his farcical Majlis-e-Shoora. But brutal suppression of the PPP continued, and several times Bhutto's widow, Nusrat, and his daughter, Benazir, were placed under house arrest or jailed. Elections for local bodies were held in September 1979 on a non-party basis, a system Zia continued in the 1985 national and provincial elections. Many of those elected locally identified themselves as *Awami Dost* (Friends of the People), a designation well known as a synonym for the PPP.

Zia announced national and provincial elections for November 17 and 20, 1979, respectively, but these, too, were cancelled. Many thought that the showing of the *Awami Dost* made him fear that a substantial number of PPP sympathizers would be elected. As further restrictions were placed on political activities, the parties were also banned.

Face-Off with Gen Zia

Two days after the meeting called by CGS to throw feelers to judge the mood of the Directors at GHQ, a confidential notice was circulated announcing an address by the President of Pakistan on a morning of the second week of November 1979. No acting Director was required to replace the head of the directorate in case the Director was out of station and unavailable. One could already feel the disquiet caused by the unusual nature of the directive. On the appointed day, which incidentally was about 48 Hrs ahead of the announced date for elections, it was anybody's guess as to the content and context of the Presidential address. The venue was Ayub Hall, the auditorium of the National

Defence College in Lal Kurti. On that fateful day, Ayub Hall was packed.

Members from Zia's cabinet who were present on the dais were Agha Shahi, Mehmood Haroon, and Gen Akhtar Abdul Rehman. There was just one Federal Secretary sitting on the dais amongst the brass and the ministers, who clearly had the trust of the junta and the despotic President.

At the end of a three hour exposé of Pakistan's external and internal challenges presented eloquently by Agha Shahi and Mehmood Haroon (who said every thing contrary to what he had told me a couple of days earlier about the debilitating state of Pakistan), was capped by Gen Akhtar A Rehman's typical ISI hyperbole. Finally, the President wound up as Roedad Khan, the only one not to speak, sat snugly, enjoying the honour of being the hardcore member of the junta and the only Federal Secretary given that honour.

Zia ul Haq wrapped up the speech with words to the effect, "Gentlemen, this is the state of things within and without Pakistan. Politicians are thoroughly and completely dishonest and are too inept to run the country. Therefore I consider it prudent and important to share the import of my decision with 'My Constituency'".

Condescendingly, he added "Therefore, the armed forces will have to continue managing the country indefinitely until a nucleus of God fearing good Muslims enter politics and are thrown up by the *Ummah*." To fulfil this commitment, he later gathered together the sons of feudal landlords who have always ruled and helped destroy Pakistan in the Majlis-e-Shoora. The women he selected were not exactly Mother Teresa models either by any stretch of the imagination.

On that fortunate day Allah gave me the courage to give Gen Zia my strongly worded discordant note, knowing well it would mark the end of my career in the PAF. Gen Zia sat down after his closing remarks, which had stirred the rebel in me. He looked around in a final gesture before getting up to indicate dismissal of the congregation. Just at that moment, as though overcome by an uncontrollable urge, I jumped up and addressed the President. My mind was so enraged that I froze for a few seconds not knowing how to start. Gen Zia provided the cue. He said, "Air Cdre Haider, I do not want to extend this meeting any longer than the three or more hours we have been here. The honourable ministers have given a truly candid evaluation of the prevalent situation and therefore there should be no need for any question/answer session.

If something has escaped you, we can discuss it at another time."

I persisted even though Gen FS Lodhi sitting next to me tugged at my trousers to compel me to sit down. I kept standing for a few seconds which seemed like an eternity, not knowing where to start. I asked the President to allow me a brief statement and assured him that I did not have any questions to ask but wanted his permission for a short comment. He appeared to be even more angered at my stubborn behaviour and said, "Alright, make it very short and there will be no further discussion." I could see he did not want any comments or critique at that juncture. Some force was propelling me because as I spoke, the words came streaming out of my mouth effortlessly. Here is what I recall having said, but it has been a long time ago and I can only rely on my memory:

"Mr President, Pakistanis seem to live in a constant state of foreboding and terror of the intelligence agencies. These

intelligence agencies have never told the truth as it is not in their culture to do, nor are they telling the truth to you about the state of the hearts and minds of the nation. Are these hearts beating for Pakistan or from the fear of getting lashed in public or thrown in dirty cells with convicts on the mere suspicion of being dissenters? These agencies have carefully crafted the fall of every government. What is to stop them from doing the same to your government? Sir, the road from the airport to the President House does not reflect the soul of Pakistan; which in fact lurks in the dark and pitted backstreets of Pakistan. But these agencies would not suggest that you take a peek there and see the realstate of the wretched Pakistani nation. The press, Mr President, is stifled and people are petrified to speak their distressed minds. I have worn this uniform with incredible pride and never hesitated to put my life on the line for the defence of my country. Tragically, I do not feel the same sense of pride as I did a decade ago, when people almost kissed our hands when they saw us in uniform in a public place. Today, the tables have turned.

People have visible contempt for us and our uniform. Since in some small way, I share the responsibility of this metamorphosis, I do not feel proud wearing this uniform anymore. Mr President, I live in Islamabad and everyday my exit from GHQ brings me on an intercept course with the Corps Commander also going home. But there is a difference. The gallant men of God, who are under oath to defend the people, the property and the frontiers of this country travel with outriders on motorcycles; red-beacons flashing and sirens screaming to herald the approaching cavalcade. In the meanwhile all citizens on foot or in transports at the T-junction from GHQ to the old President House are shooed-off the road to clear the path for the defenders of Pakistan. This is not the way defenders should conduct themselves amongst their own people. I think that

we have ceased to sense the ire that ordinary citizens feel at such intimidation.”

As I mentioned, I cannot recall the exact words that I uttered that day, but consultations with several colleagues present there in that meeting agree that this is the gist of what I said. Some of those who have corroborated the essence of my dissenting opinion include Air Mshl Azim Daudpota, Gen Mohammad Safdar and Aitezaz-ud-Din Ahmed. In a recent publication by Mansoor Shah, *The Gold Bird*, my discordant note on that day has been briefly recounted by the author².

After this episode several colleagues from GHQ visited me in my office during the next few days; all of them had a common theme in their comments.

They cautioned me that I was in major trouble and that my future was fairly grim. The PIA job was history. I had no qualms about my future and had a sense of foreboding that the hammer was going to fall on me sooner than later. I knew that Gen Mian Afzaal was most upset at my harangue with the President and told me in so many words that I had screwed up a bright career. I assured him I would do it again if careers are built on indignity and acceptance of despots. I had begun to hate Zia's rule with his absolute power over the wretched population which was kept submissive through cruelty and subjected to constant fear. I decided to unchain myself from my obsession for the air force. The time had come to move on and see how the outside world would treat me.

I asked to meet the Air Chief but before I could get an appointment, I came across him at the Islamabad Club's tennis courts, where he had been invited as the Guest of Honour during the South Asia Tennis Championship. I was sitting with a couple of young lady friends up in front when a

smart young Flt Lt wearing an ADC arm-band came to me and said that the Air Chief would like me to join him. I asked him where the Air Chief was sitting and he pointed behind, under the big canopy meant for VVIPs. I joined the Air Chief a few minutes later. He had been my roommate in the early fifties at Drigh Road when he arrived from Australia after his graduation and was posted to No 11 Attacker Squadron. That bonding remained till my last day in the PAF. As usual, he was extremely amiable and asked me how life was treating me, adding humorously, "How is it going after the clash with the President?" I told him that everything I said was in utter sincerity, hoping that he would prod more into how the people in uniform felt about the continuation of Martial-law.

The Air Chief laughed and said, "Your perception of life has always been black and white. You should understand that something in Gen Zia's disposition does not take scathing criticism lightly." Air Chief Shamim then asked me if I was serious about continuing in the PAF as he had it in his mind to give me the command of Masroor Base. I told him that I was grateful for his constant support, despite all the ISI reports that must be reaching him, but after the incident with the President, I felt I should say farewell to the PAF. Enough was enough. I told the Air Chief that I felt very uneasy with Gen Zia around and did not wish to serve under his rule anymore. "Do you have any plans if you decide to retire? I know that you don't possess any such thing called assets or savings to start a new life. What are you going to do?" I said, "Sir, I don't worry about my future, it is not the way I am made. I have learnt to survive and succeed with good conscience through all these years. Destiny is in the hands of Allah and my faith in Him is unshakeable; He has pulled me from burning aircraft and inverted tail-spins of all manners caused by my own demeanours but mostly contrived by others. I shall survive." The Chief then said

something quite profound. “I know you and am confident that you will either move up in life to wherever you aim or you will simply crash-out”. I agreed with him and asked him that he should let me quit, while honour was still an option.

2 *The Gold Bird* by Mansoor Shah, Oxford University Press, 2002, Page 302.

Farewell to Arms

The story of my eventful, turbulent yet exciting life in the service of my motherland as a fighter pilot finally ended with a requiem. I harbour no remorse for leaving the PAF because I truly had no ambition to seek higher ranks. I was clear in my mind that there would be a day when all of us would have to make space for the younger generation. I decided to put space behind me and what I had loved more than life. I acquitted myself of all the facilities given by the PAF

in spite of the offer by the Air Chief that I could retain my house and facilities for as long as he was in the chair. I gratefully declined the offer and started a completely new life with just Rs 17,000 as my bank balance. I had no plots, or other assets except a 10 year old left-hand drive Toyota car.

I left the PAF in 1980, twenty eight years ago, but I stayed engaged with the well being of the PAF and always took a vociferous stand for its development against critics and cynics of all kind. I wrote articles in the prestigious dailies and magazines and faced the fiercest anchor-persons, arm-chair critics and selfproclaimed strategists to defend the PAF’s policies and plans. At the same time I was emphatic about the wrong policies of the service when it came to my knowledge and offered candid critique, which was always received well by those inside and outside the service. PAF

remained my passion in spite of the many good reasons why I should have remembered it with bitterness. But it was never the institution but a few individuals towards the end of my career that were responsible. What I would say with utmost pride and conviction is that I gave to the PAF my all in substance and spirit despite my remorseful departure.

However, there comes a time when one has to leave matters for the professionals and fade away leaving good wishes behind.

In 2002, the attack on the Indian Parliament set into motion ominous events which threatened the entire world, particularly South Asia, as the nuclear flash point between India and Pakistan moved closer by the hour. Only time will prove if the melodrama was contrived by Pakistan's arch foe. India's short and long term intentions have been enunciated by thinkers like Subramanian (Adelphi papers).

Former Director Military Operations, Maj Gen Palit and scores of others have clearly suggested the destruction of Pakistan. Whatever the truth of the attack on the parliament, it was a tenuous time for Pakistan. Our leadership had to take a firm even though terrifying stand, that if Pakistan was attacked it would have no choice but to opt for a nuclear response. The Indian and Pakistani leaders understood the catastrophe that would result for both antagonists.

By mid-June that year a foray by Indian armed forces into Azad Kashmir seemed imminent. The air was tense with anticipation, yet I wondered why the Pakistani nation was so blasé about the looming threat, since no civil defence measures were being implemented, nor any public awareness of how to deal with damage and destruction in the case of war breaking out. For me the national déjà vu

was aggravating as I knew very well the intensity and ferocity with which the conflict would engulf cities and towns. My nagging conscience tormented me incessantly as to how I could be of some assistance at this hour of national crisis.

I remembered that several months earlier the PAF chief, Air Chief Mshl Mushaf Mir, had asked me if I would like to address the Air War College and follow up by visits to the fighter bases and share my operational and war experiences with the officers. I had agreed and he immediately instructed the operations branch to organise my visit. As a consequence, I received letters from the DCAS (Training) as well as the Commandant Air War College, asking my availability for the visit to the College for a start. Eventually, a date had been fixed and my flights confirmed to Karachi. Just a few days prior to my departure, suddenly a national emergency was declared and all peacetime activity was suspended. With that my prospects of a visit also vanished.

Keeping that proposed visit offer in mind I decided to write to the Air Chief asking if he could use my services in any other capacity, and be of assistance in this hour of alarming threat. In response, Air Chief Mshl Mushaf Mir visited me at my home and invited me to visit the forward bases as quickly as I could and share my war experiences with the fighter crews and to give him my own assessment of the state of preparedness and morale at the bases. He told me that war was imminent and shared his feelings even about the timing. In the mean time, an outstanding officer and fighter pilot Air Cdre Waseem was assigned to conduct me through the tour of the bases as soon as it was convenient for me to start. I was contacted by Air Cdre (now Air Vice Mshl) Waseem the same day on June 2002 and I suggested we launch off without delay.

Predictably, the very thought of the opportunity to have a week with these gallant men of the PAF Tactical Command, after 22 years, was an exciting prospect. As I moved from one base to another, I felt proud, yet amazed at the spectacular state of PAF readiness and to see the pilots bubbling with confidence for the execution of their assigned tasks. The interaction with the fighter pilots ranging from young flying officers to Air Cdres and especially their response to my motivational talks as well as the hospitality I was shown at every base was extremely genuine and touching. At the end of these memorable visits, I wrote of my experiences to Mushaf Mir, and sincerely congratulated him on his leadership. He promptly acknowledged my communication with his own feedback of my visit.

I carry profound memories of my time spent at the Operational Bases of Tactical Command. Air Cdre Qadri, the young Base Commander briefing me at PAF base Minhas, gave me a conducted tour of the whole base. This fearless son of the nation, when asked by me if he was able to stay current in flying, answered proudly that he was fully operational on all fighters under his command. Soon after my visit, this young commander while flying an F-7

crashed after engine failure at very low height. His parachute did not deploy before he impacted the ground. May this gallant fighter pilot's soul rest in heavenly peace.

Soon after my visit I was interviewed by the electronic media on the prevailing situation and wrote an article as well for concerned citizens stressing upon the spirit and readiness of the PAF. I learnt from across the border that my TV interview was especially recorded and shown to the Defence Minister of India. The morale of the PAF pilots and the crews was at its zenith during those ominous hours; I

saw fire in their eyes, emanating from courage and confidence in their professional competence.

Since that period and after the tragic death of Air Chief Mshl Mushaf Mir and three future commanders of the PAF in the ill-fated Fokker crash at Kohat, I have lost touch with the Pakistan Air Force. In any case there is a time for every thing and I needed to get on with my cherished dream of writing my memoirs, in which the PAF would take centre stage. However, the PAF did not render any assistance to me for reasons best known to them. This attitude is retrogressive because it denudes the present generation from learning the lessons of history.

The present operational status of the PAF and other services is beyond my pale at the moment as I have little contact left with the movers and shakers of the defence services and therefore, retain only a detached interest in where they are heading. Nonetheless, I wish the fighting men all the good luck they can use and advise them that true professional warriors only concern themselves with the defence of the country from the enemy within and without.

A commander's greatest achievement is the legacy of professional excellence, moral and financial integrity by which he shall be remembered and eulogized. Hesitatingly, I have to say that things do not auger well for the leadership of the three services. PAF needs leadership of a kind which should lead their men from the front in the highest traditions set by the founding fathers, who are fortunately amongst us even today. For starters, the two living icons, Asghar Khan and Nur Khan, should be immortalized in their life-time by the present generation. They are both symbols of excellence. It amazes me that tradition has lost its glamour and has been rendered to the dustbin of history.

Badges of ranks appear to rule the roost where as in the past tradition, merit and excellence and not shoulder stripes accrued recognition. The PAF performed superbly not because it had F-104, F-86 or Mirage fighters, but because of the intangibles of leadership, high morals and its natural by-product, a high morale which created the do or die spirit amongst the men in blue.

Here ends the story of my life with the PAF, in and out of uniform. I did not even consider re-employment with the dictator's government nor went back to the PAF for any assistance ever. I continued on and did it my way, all the way.

From here on, I shall attempt to recapitulate mere glimpses of how fate had conspired to drive me towards my destiny, once again propelling me towards success of a different kind.

Destiny Comes Calling

For nearly three months I woke up every morning with the hope of some break. I wrote to a few companies in Pakistan and abroad seeking a decent employment. I was given a pretty lucrative offer by the Galadari brothers to set up business in the UAE. So, I had these offers when one day I received a call from my friend Kassamali who had returned from London the night before and asked to visit me that evening. It was always a pleasure to have his company. He has always been one of the most pious persons I have met in my life. Kassamali looked perturbed when he arrived that evening. After he had settled down he asked me if it was true that I had decided to say goodbye to the air force. I answered in the affirmative and told him briefly what had happened. He told me something quite astounding. He said the boss (meaning Zia ul Haq) had spoken to him about me

and suggested that no help should be forthcoming to me from him and his family. "This sounded like a directive more than a request.

However, I decided to let you know how enraged Zia is for what he considers your irrational behaviour. But I told him that you were a family friend and if you asked for support the family will decide," Kassamali continued to tell me.

Frankly, I was confounded by this revelation. I told Kassamali that I would never put him or his brothers in any embarrassing situation viz-a-viz Zia ul Haq was concerned, especially considering he was a minister in Zia's cabinet.

To that he came up with a resounding suggestion, "Sajad, we are friends and would like to offer you any assistance you need at this hour." I was incensed with President Zia's vindictive arrogance and told Kassamali that I would like to try again and see Zia ul Haq to ask him why he was being so excessively vicious about me for having told him nothing but the truth. Kassamali felt that it would be a waste of effort and time because it was most unlikely that Zia would give me the time of day. Again, he asked me when I could go to Geneva. I looked at him in bewilderment and confided that I couldn't travel to Dubai with my present financial liquidity, until I had received my pension. He laughed and said not to worry about minor issues; all I needed was to tell him when I could go and meet the brothers. Travel and other arrangements would be made for me. I was not sure how to respond to the generosity of this noble family or if I really wanted to put them in harm's way after the dictator's advice to Kassamali. I mentioned to Kassamali the offer from Abdul Rahim Galadari as well as his brother Wahab and the kind offer by Anwar Ali Khan (son of Qurban Ali Khan, former IG police and Governor of Baluchistan) to run his ceramics factory near Gujrat.

Kassamali suggested that I should take a few days and brain storm over what I really want to do with my life, it being a difficult decision but now that I had choices, their offer would remain open for as long as it took me to arrive at a decision. After Kassamali had left and I sat with a snifter in my hand, I felt as though God had set the course for me and destiny was calling. It did not take me long to decide that my best course was to go with Kassamali and his brothers; which proved to be a wise decision for my family and I. But what was my expertise in business and what did I have to offer them in return for their generosity, was the thought that wandered in my mind. However, I felt comfortable with the thought that I would be indoctrinated into this totally new career slowly and hard work would bear results. With those vague images in my mind I found myself heading for Geneva for my first business interaction soon after obtaining a visa.

The story of my eight years in the business world was no less than swimming with the crocodiles and piranhas of the Pakistani business worlds. I saw the big industrialists, Seths and multi-millionaires in their real size and moral demeanour. Yet, I also came across some of the finest men in uniform in the defence purchase and communications sector. But that story deserves a separate book and if God ordains and bestows me with time and fortitude, I shall bring these incredible episodes to print and expose the high and mighty so that readers can discern the real men who make the wheels of the armed forces turn in the right direction and those who bring ignominy to the service.

Finally, I had to pull down the shutters on my modest business when corruption became endemic and was encouraged by Zia ul Haq to keep a hold on the corrupt through intimidation and help from the DG ISI during those ruthless and demeaning years of Pakistan's history. I had to

choose between an honourable life or get on the band wagon of shared corruption and graft. That was not an option, and I faded away into oblivion and left the field to the sharks. I had become reasonably solvent and paid back Kassamali and his family what I owed them. My present and future generations will remain in eternal debt and gratitude to their family for rescuing me from the claws of despondency and worse still from the curse of a despot, who wanted to see me with a begging bowl in my hand.

I can proudly say that I have given quality time to the upbringing of all three of my children from my first and last marriages. I am extremely happy to say that all my children are upright, bright and possess an incredible sense of pride in our values of truthfulness, sincerity and respect for family traditions and especially consideration for the poor and needy. They have not been top students in academics, but have earned commendable comments about their personalities and qualities as solid human beings and leaders in their respective careers. They have made me proud by their professionalism which has accrued praise by all those who matter, for their tenacity, dedication to their assigned jobs, financial integrity and outstanding performance in their fields. What else could a father ask from God than what he has bestowed upon me; the greatest blessing is to have obedient, disciplined and loving children. Irrespective of their status, king or knave solicits no distinction from my scions. May God Almighty keep them on the path of piety, honesty and intrepidity.

EPILOGUE

In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act.

George Orwell

During my research spanning nearly a decade, I have developed an irrevocable belief that Pakistan's dismantling was started as early as the 1950s. As I started to seriously think about my country's fate it was an enigma to me as to how the rot had set in so deeply. I did not know the answers. That is when a powerful urge propelled me to peep into the history of events past. I wanted to find answers to the nagging question of why we as a nation have stooped to such degradation where truth, honesty and integrity have become afflictions instead of virtues. That was the catalyst which compelled me to search for at least the outer periphery of truth within the scope of my story.

Pakistan's cardinal misfortune was that the Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah was martyred in the service of this wretched nation with his boots on. Had he lived just a couple of more years Pakistan would have had a Constitution, which would have been a reflection of his beliefs which are spelled out in his speeches of 11th August and all the others he made from 1938 onwards. The government's cardinal responsibility, he preached, had to be the well-being and security of all citizens, especially the poor masses, and the "ministers were to be the servants and the people their virtual masters" (MA Jinnah, Lahore, 1944). Unlike India, which had a large basket of mature and committed politicians and specialists to choose from, the tragedy of Pakistan was that most of the seasoned politicians it inherited in the Punjab were Unionists (lackeys of the British); the Frontier was the domain of the Red shirt leader Abdul Ghaffar Khan who wanted to be part of India; and Baluchistan had Abdul Samad Achakzai, both diehard Congressite under Mohan Chand Gandhi's spell. That left the Bengali politicians who whole heartedly and unreservedly

supported Pakistan and the Quaid except for the avoidable language imbroglio. The bureaucratic cabal which took control in Pakistan aped the British 'Gora Sahib' tradition of administration rather than adopting an indigenous outlook for the well-being of the nation in its embryonic stage. Thus the mooring of politics, bureaucracy and governance was extremely frail and vulnerable to exploitation by those who wielded power. Its manipulators lacked the integrity and patriotism to emulate the Quaid's concern for the poor masses as well as the nation as a whole. Such were the problems which confronted the frail and ailing father of the nation. Yet, he stubbornly defied his doctors and faced the vagaries of a new state, working beyond known human endurance. His detractors, Nehru and Mountbatten, had given Pakistan just weeks to disintegrate and Pakistanis will never know how much they owe to that clairvoyant man of steel.

The Quaid-e-Azam had decried corruption as a curse in India and said that the "educated intelligentsia was selfish, morally and intellectually corrupt and that the disease was rampant amongst this category of Muslims". Incontrovertibly, this characterisation by the Quaid-e-Azam became an enduring and ugly reality. MA Jinnah himself upheld the Islamic values of truth, social justice, fraternity and equality of all citizens and created Pakistan with his indomitable will and intellectual integrity. His understanding of Islam was clearer than Maulana Maududi and his ilk. He preached what he practiced and had pre-ordained that Pakistan could become a role model of Islamic values (emphatically rejecting any role for theocracy in governance). Tragically, his hopes and dreams were to be buried with him.

The Quaid also abhorred despots with the contempt they deserved - on 6th February 1919, he had denounced the bill

recommended by the Rowlette Committee that had a clause to provide emergency powers. He had called the bill obnoxious, abhorrent, shocking and coercive. He had said that under emergency laws (the equivalence of Martial Law) he could not protect his people from the draconian legislation. In protest he denounced his membership of the council. Now that was his legacy and our inheritance.

What did his successors do to the tradition and glorious principles of the Quaid? Ayub Khan denigrated the lofty ideals personified by the founder of our nation and set Pakistan on the perilous path of Martial Laws and emergencies. The nation has capitulated to every one who has come to rule it since then. A Constitution written by our founder would have been sacrosanct and no one would have dared to mutilate a word from the document. But that was not to be and manipulating his name and his ideals has only given us infamy as a nation. We have descended to the bottom of the pit, for mega corruption, nepotism, terrorism, sectarianism and despotism; all of what he had predicated.

The teachings of the Quaid have been reduced to mere slogans and each successive government gives hollow promises of following his legacy. Where are we headed is now the question on the lips of the silenced majority; the eroding backbone of Pakistan. They have not been privy to the truth behind our degeneration. For generations, people have been fed blatant lies and contrived illusions and myths about Pakistan's history, in which despots and scoundrels are masqueraded as heroes.

Regrettably, I learnt that the downward slide began with the Quaid's lieutenant, Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan. But such truths are sacrosanct like the Holy Grail. Before discovering the facts through research, I had thought that Liaquat Ali Khan had attempted to carry on the mission of the Quaid

with complete sincerity. I was pained to discover that the evidence and verdict of history was to the contrary! The purpose and details of Liaquat Ali Khan's visit to Quetta along with the super bureaucrat, Choudary Mohammed Ali, when the Quaid was critically ill, are proof of how Mohammad Ali Jinnah perceived Liaquat as he descended into the sunset of his life.¹

When Liaquat Ali Khan along with Choudary Mohammad Ali visited the Quaid at the Quetta residency, Ms Fatima Jinnah had advised the Quaid to meet them the next morning owing to his precarious health. The Quaid had said that Liaquat had come to look at his condition and so to let him come and see for himself the state of his health. Liaquat had spent 20 minutes or so with the Quaid alone and when Ms Fatima Jinnah went back to his bedroom, the Quaid looked distressed and deep in thought. Liaquat and Choudary Mohammad Ali guffawed throughout the dinner later when Fatima Jinnah was compelled by her brother to play hostess to them. She was appalled at the ebullience of the duo. My father got a first hand account of what took place in Ziarat from my cousin Colonel M H

Shah (the long time administrator of the Jinnah Post Graduate Hospital at Karachi and a pre-eminent heart specialist, who had the confidence of Ms Fatima Jinnah as a cardiologist). He was present when the Quaid-e-Azam had become very ill and had narrated some sad incidents concerning the Quaid and Liaquat to my father.

¹ *My Brotherby Ms Fatima Jinnah.*

The Pakistani nation had perceived Liaquat Ali Khan as the moral successor to the Quaid. He proved to be anything but that when the Quaid passed away because he did not have the stature or the stellar qualities of his mentor. Liaquat Ali

Khan gave away Kashmir while Brig Sher Khan, Generals Akbar, Hayauddin, Habibullah and Iftikhar were imploring him to let their troops capture Srinagar. Liaquat Ali Khan refused on the pretext of finding a diplomatic solution through the UN. The golden opportunity went down the pipes for personal agenda and fear of the Indians going all out for war; the syndrome which capsized Ayub Khan in 1965 viz Kashmir, and Yahya in 1971 viz East Pakistan. All were deficit in courage.

It was Liaquat Ali Khan's responsibility to have burnt midnight oil to get a constitution for Pakistan based on the ideals and principles which the Quaid had lived by. However, Liaquat Ali Khan was not a populist leader and his energies were spent on creating a niche and constituency for himself. His best advisor Choudary Mohammad Ali, though a brilliant bureaucrat, was smitten by the fundamentalism of Maudoodi which manifested itself in the pre-amble he wrote for the first Constitution, making it religious centric by bringing Islam into governance. This was against the founder's vision. Even before independence there was complete unanimity with Quaid's guiding principle that Pakistan would have a secular federal system of governance and a parliamentary form of democracy. It was never allowed to take root. The question which should agitate minds is why? And who prevented the democratic polity to flourish?

It was startling to discover that the Quaid's lofty vision of a great country in the making was soon put on a diametrically opposite track by Liaquat Ai Khan. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan and the members of the Constituent Assembly deliberately deferred the framing of the Constitution because few had a constituency from where to get elected during a general election, a sine qua non of parliamentary democracy and the essence of a constitution.

Subsequently, in an attempt to pacify the people, Liaquat Ali Khan moved on 7th March 1949 the so called 'Objectives Resolution', which was passed by the Constituent Assembly in minutes.

The cardinal element of Jinnah's legacy, UNITY was lacerated, not by the Bengali language issue which some protagonists propound. Urdu as a national language was proposed for the very reason of forging unity through a common language which did not belong to any province of Pakistan. Mischief was fanned by the treacherous Hindu politicians and used as bait for over ambitious political quislings to capitalise upon by causing enmity and mayhem over a non-issue and sever the unity of the new nation.

Which language do Pakistanis communicate in since Bangladesh emerged out of the ashes of financial, moral and racial inequity, not the language? The real damage to the Quaid's desire for unity was done through the extremely controversial Objectives Resolution, which by design discriminated against religious minorities and spawned interfaith and sectarian bigotry.

The Objectives Resolution divided society and gave the mullahs a superior stature overnight, destroying the Quaid's vision of a caste and creed free society which would be secular and progressive with no role for the theocracy in governance. The purpose behind delaying the Constitution and substituting this Resolution could well have been a ruse to capitalize on the religious emotions of the ignorant masses in order to perpetuate the status quo and avoid general elections.

Misfortune struck another blow when Ghulam Mohammad occupied the Quaid's chair as Governor General. He further polarized the fractured nation and played Russian roulette

with the Constitution and the constituent assembly while the Objectives Resolution hung like the Sword of Damocles over the nation's future. Eventually, on 4th February 1953 it led to the massacre of Pakistani citizens by the bigots of religious parties for the crime of belonging to different faiths and religious beliefs. On March 4th 1953, Shariah was declared from Wazir Khan *Masjid* (Mosque) in Lahore by religious zealots of the Jamaat-i-Islami and Ahrars (both imports from India and sworn enemies of Quaid-e-Azam and the idea of Pakistan).

When a young police officer was sent into the mosque to talk to the extremists, his lacerated dead body was thrown out in minutes. The recent Lal Masjid episode perpetrated by the Mullahs was a terrifying reminder of history repeating itself if its lessons are glossed over callously. The Pakistani nation on the whole has little propensity for history, otherwise people would not be showing sympathy towards the renegade zealots of Lal Masjid who terrorized the capital and else where. In stony silence, we accept twisted versions of our contemporary history; witness the loathsome Haddood Laws imposed by a dictator and their adverse effect on our minorities. We survive on perceptions rather than harsh realities. As the author of the *Murder of History*, the venerable KK Aziz has pointed out generations have been fed with selective history, hence their inability to discern the distortions.

However, disregard for the truth of history comes at a price and the Pakistani nation is paying for this neglect.

The 1953 riots led to the sacking of the lame duck Prime Minister, Khwaja Nazimudin. Vetted and revised by Sir Ivor Jennings, a constitutional expert without moral integrity, the constituent assembly came close to giving the country a Constitution in 1954, with religious over tones and it was

found acceptable by Maulana Maududi. Resultantly, it was not what the Quaid-e-Azam would have wished for, but it was in line with Liaquat Ali Khan's divisive Objectives Resolution, endorsed by a bigot who would not agree with others religious bigots on the definition of a Muslim to the Munir Commission. The next Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra left for the US after he was certain that the new Constitution would become effective on the birth anniversary of the Quaid-e-Azam. On 24th October, Ghulam Mohammad sacked the constituent assembly because the new Constitution had taken away the unbridled power he had usurped from the constitutional head, the prime minister and bequeathed it upon himself. Our infamous Chief Justice M Munir was at hand to legitimise the abhorrent act of the Governor General to curry personal favour. The cursed law of necessity (the brain child of a controversial constitutional expert and lawyer, AK Brohi) was conjured to abrogate the Constitution. This was Ghulam Mohammed's style of governance.

As history witnessed the exit of Ghulam Mohammad, the cabinet had chosen the Interior Minister and strong man Iskandar Mirza as the acting Governor General. As soon as the Constitution was ready Mirza became the President and a bevy of ineffective Prime Ministers followed one after another in quick succession.

Time passed tumultuously and the demon of Martial Law became a fait accompli. From all credible accounts, there was a clear agreement by President Iskandar Mirza with Ayub Khan and three of his close generals, Sheikh, Burki and Yahya about the imposition of Martial Law weeks before the event. Surreptitiously, Ayub had different plans to pay back Iskandar Mirza for his friendship and confidence which had prompted him to get Ayub Khan an extension in service from Bogra.

As I got deeper into the intrigues and machinations, I discovered that Ayub Khan had planned his coup years in advance.

Ayub Khan's plan to capture power had been reportedly conceived in 1954, at the Dorchester Hotel in London. In preparation and by arm twisting the Punjab government, Ayub Khan took control of the border police in the 1950s to pre-empt any possible resistance against his ambitious adventurism.

This fact is borne out by Ayub Khan's feelers reported by the British and the American diplomats in Pakistan during that period in time. On 6th October, 1954, the Charge d' Affaires at the US

embassy had sent a Top Secret message to the US Secretary of State, J Foster Dulles, communicating that Ayub Khan had told the visiting General Sexton that he found the political situation unacceptable. Ayub Khan had said that "something would be done". "No mistaking he meant military would takeover if necessary. Ayub had asked his conversation not to be mentioned to any Pakistani or British."²

Ayub Khan did not want the British to get wind of his intentions because Pakistan still had a Dominion Status and Ayub Khan had been cautioned by Iskandar Mirza in 1953 that any attempt by him of a military take-over would be tantamount to treason. At the same time Ayub Khan knew that time was against him because he was to retire the following year and had to make his move before he was out of uniform. It has been suggested that it was Iskandar Mirza who fought to get Ayub Khan a 4 year extension in service despite Prime Minister Bogra's firm intention to retire Ayub Khan in 1955. While Ayub Khan and his immediate coterie of generals (four in all) had been accessories to Iskandar

Mirza's declaration of Martial Law, Ayub Khan, known for his trepidation for adventurism which entailed any personal risk, had distanced himself from Iskandar Mirza and travelled to the Northern Areas till the storm had abated. He was terrified of the possibility of facing treason charges and escaped the scene of the crime. As soon Ayub Khan felt that the heat from the international community had petered out, he descended down the slopes of the Karakoram in the style of the Mughal conquerors to deliver the coup de grace.

2 Top Secret telegram No 474, Dated Oct 6 1954. Secret Reports by Sir Alexander Symon, British High Commissioner in Pakistan and notes by Sir Gilbert Laithwaite on Ayub Khan. Ref: Public Record Office DO 35/8943, 16th Oct 1958. The *coup* and Ayub Khan.

Inexorably, Ayub Khan wanted a shoulder from where to fire his gun, even as the C-in-C of the army. He knew that the American President, the US Secretary of State, the Australian and British Prime Ministers had accepted the new paradigms and had written back to Iskandar Mirza asserting that while they understood the rationale behind Mirza's action they were encouraged by the President's intention to lift Martial Law in the shortest possible time. This was a sort of No Objection Certificate (NOC) by the world powers whose goodwill was indispensable for Pakistan's leadership.

Ayub Khan had earlier nudged Ghulam Mohammed in March 1953 into declaring Martial Law in the areas where religious bigots were rioting. This was the first taste of army intervention in state affairs and it finally led to Ayub Khan's 1958 mid-night coup. The coup was executed by his coterie of Generals like Burki (imagine a doctor leading a *coup*), Sheikh, Azam Khan and Yahya. Few would know that to give the coup an inter-service legitimacy, Ayub Khan had asked Air Mshl Asghar Khan to join in, but he rejected it out right given the man of integrity that he was. Air Mshl Asghar Khan refused the illegal order and declined to take part in

an unconstitutional adventure. Ayub Khan set the pace of Pakistan's future on the materialistic and capitalist way of life of the Americans, bartering Pakistani ingenuity, sovereignty and moral high ground which the Quaid had set as the path to the future. The army was set on a steep decline under mediocre generals in command of one of the best armies in the world.

Consequently, the Ayub era has been an important part of my dissertation.

To justify his coup, the yarn about Brig Qayyum Sher and Air Cdre Rabb having been ordered by the President to arrest Ayub Khan and his cabal on their return from Dhaka was an ostensible concoction. In March 2008, Brig Qayyum Sher refuted Gauhar Ayub's conjectures in his recently published book, by decrying in *The News* (dated 01-03-2008) Ayub Khan and his son Gauhar Ayub's incorrect claim about Qayyum Sher having been asked by Iskandar Mirza to arrest Ayub Khan. He says that he only met Iskandar Mirza once in his life, that too after a March 23rd parade where all the commanders were invited, and that he was never approached by Iskandar Mirza or Air Cdre Rabb or anyone else for any task.

However, as the commander of the equivalent of the 111

Brigade in Chaklala, he was ordered by Ayub Khan to initiate the process for the 1958 coup. Interestingly, he also states that Gen Musa had called him and reversed the earlier instructions for the coup by Ayub Khan, which would have been tantamount to a counter coup; which Brig Sher said he had ignored and followed Ayub's orders. There is no mention of Air Cdre Rabb. He was not a coup maker by any stretch of the imagination. The claims by Ayub Khan seemingly have little veracity and appear to have been concocted to justify

his unlawful coup. He struck on 27th October 1958 and deposed the President in a most degrading manner. Gauhar Ayub's diatribe in his publication about Mirza's corruption is blatantly incorrect. To expose the truth I have tried to put the facts right for posterity.

The instructions by Iskandar Mirza to his secretary upon being deposed by his untrustworthy friend are placed in Appendix 'K'

for readers to see how financially proper Mirza was even in his desolation. His death papers and bank statement as well as the distribution of his total assets are a clear exoneration of the man; they are placed in Appendix 'L'. The facts of the entire episode were eloquently recorded by the British High Commissioner Alexander Symon and his staff in secret reports sent to the Commonwealth Office in London.³

Ayub Khan and his son have manufactured incorrect stories about the financial misappropriations of Iskandar Mirza to veil their own family's corruption. I hold no brief for Iskandar Mirza nor any malice for Ayub Khan and his family. However, this is a dispassionate research about those who held the reigns of power to sift the truth from the untruth. Therefore, there shall be no holds barred. This is my right as a citizen to question the falsehoods of history and the reasons for Pakistan's endangered future.

Interestingly, I had greatly admired Iskandar Mirza's handsome son Anwar Mirza, also a fighter pilot in the PAF, who had crashed in 1953 in a Sea-Fury fighter. For a President to have lost his son in the service of the nation was an undeniable sacrifice.

³ Secret reports by HA Twist, Ref: FCO 37/468 dated 26th Feb 1969 and earlier reports by the British High Commissioner Alexander Symon to Sir Gilbert Laithwaite, Ref: DO/35/8943 and Annex J.

Also, Ref: 35/8944-45, dated 28th Oct and 4th Nov 1958; DO/134/26 dated 3rd Nov 1958, are a damning expose of Ayub Khan's involvement and intrigue in the Martial Law and coup and his reprehensible treatment of his benefactor Iskandar Mirza.

In the same vein it was comical to read Ayub Khan's son lament that they (he and his brother were both retired captains) did not join their units in the 1965 War because they were members of the provincial assembly! I must admit though, that I held Naseem Aurangzeb (Ayub Khan's graceful daughter) in great esteem for her elegance, dignity and honesty. Her consternation about the corruption of her brothers when she admitted to the British High Commissioner the conduct of her siblings must have been moments of deep anguish. I would like to pay a tribute to the late Naseem Aurangzeb for her courage and the élan she brought to Pakistan in acting as the first lady while accompanying her father abroad. May her soul rest in eternal peace.⁴

Why had Gen Ayub Khan assumed power unconstitutionally and contemptuously rejected to uphold the Constitution of Pakistan? Justice Munir was again at hand to deride Jinnah's Pakistan. This was an issue that should have rattled the nation long ago and people should have demanded an answer. Instead we have foolishly and ignorantly held Ayub Khan as a champion of democracy and a symbol of progress on the basis of the relentless propaganda churned out by his touts, courtesans and later by his scions. Yes there was industrial uplift and reforms in agriculture, but on the crutches of American aid.

The Ayub Khan era was masked by his lackeys as the decade of reforms. Meanwhile, the subjugation and

bartering of national sovereignty to placate the US placed Pakistan in the nuclear cross bar of the USSR after the shooting down of a U-2 spy plane. The blunder and consequences of 1965 War for Ayub Khan were compounded by the subsequent shutting down of Bedaber spy station. (Incidentally, Mr Roedad Khan, the super interior secretary of Zia-ul-Haq's tyrannical era has mentioned in his recent book that Bedaber was the base from where the U-2 flown by Garry Power had taken off. It would be prudent to clarify that Bedaber did not have space for a helipad for even a helicopter to take off. It was only a communication monitoring station with housing for the American operators. The U-2 operated from PAF base Peshawar from the start to its final exit). The closure of Bedaber station riled the American administration and LB Johnson gave Ayub Khan a Texan-style drubbing and shut off the main US aid valve. The moment the Americans found no further use for Ayub Khan's prostration sans the spying station, they pulled the rug from under his feet and up went in smoke the US aid and Ayub Khan's power base crumbled. That was what prompted Ayub Khan to have the book *Friends not Masters* allegedly written in Altaf Gauhar's prose. However, his time had come to an end and he bitterly witnessed the students' riots and the nation as well as the army turning against him. Pakistan narrowly escaped his son Gauhar Ayub to play a lead role in the fullness of time. But the escape was not permanent as Nawaz Sharif needed sons of dictators to be at his beck and call for aggrandizement. Hence the three scions of Ayub Khan, Zia and Akhtar Abdul Rehman entered the arena of leadership.

4 HA Twist's meeting with Begum Aurangzeb. Ref FCO 37/468. British High Commission, Rawalpindi. 26th Feb 1969. Paras 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, placed at Appendix 'J' are eye openers; Paras 13 and 14 are about the family's corruption.

My biggest surprise came when I learnt that Ayub Khan had a well documented inferior soldiering career which had earned him the Quaid's wrath. The Quaid-e-Azam had ordered that Ayub Khan was not to be promoted beyond the rank he held at the time as a brigadier. That may well have been the prime motivator for him to hide in the shadow of Ghulam Mohammed and later Iskandar Mirza and wait for a safe moment to strike and usurp power. To Pakistan's misfortune, he set one of the finest armies onto the path of professional decline and moral decay. The night when Gen Sheikh held a gun at Iskandar Mirza's head to make him sign his resignation, compiled by Gen Yahya and typed by Capt (later Lt Gen Majid Malik), the President's own Military Secretary Brigadier Nawazish, had filched 14 suits from his boss Iskandar Mirza's closet soon after he was arrested.⁵ The paradigms of the *raison d'être* for the defence forces might have suffered a shift that night after Ayub's usurpation.

I am convinced that the real rot which besets our lives at this point in time is rooted in the decades of Ayub Khan and the Zia ul Haq epoch. The former set the pace of despotic rule and military power through deceit to subjugate the nation and enacted draconian press laws to stifle the voice of dissent; the latter did the same AND used Islam as a subterfuge to debase the religion and tear apart the fabric of a moderate society. Ayub Khan also presided over the capitulation of Kashmir and manufactured a victory by misrepresenting the 1965 War and turning his military blunders into celebrations, which eventually boomeranged and brought the self-appointed 'Field Marshal' crumbling down.

However, the contrived victory of the 1965 War flourishes despite the chasm between myth and truth. The masquerade of the 1965

victory prevented any lessons to be learnt from the blunders of military high command and mediocres who stayed hidden in bunkers rose to dizzy heights, which led to the catastrophic culmination of the 1971 debacle.

5 Interview with Mrs Shahtaj Imam, daughter of the first President of Pakistan the late Iskandar Mirza.

We can trace the embryos of most of our misfortunes to that period of Ayub Khan and find the blossoming of all social evils culminating in Zia ul Haq's era which completely destroyed the Quaid's vision of a modern, united, multi-faith and multi-cultured progressive society. He brutalised dissent and pushed Pakistan into a quagmire which has intensified with time. To Ayub Khan's credit, there can be no denying that he was very tolerant of other faiths and took religion out of governance. Kudos to Ayub Khan for his efforts to heel the zealots to some degree.

After taking over the country, Ayub Khan's contribution to alienating the East Pakistanis is etched in stone and now admitted his own *Diaries*. It is a painful discovery to read how a President thought and acted so maliciously towards the East Pakistanis and the Baluch people. Instead of taking cognizance of their genuine problems and demands and solving them, he relished humiliating⁶ the Bengali majority and denigrating the proud Baluch. Since my memoir focuses on the 1965 and 1971 wars, my intensive research was apolitical. Nonetheless, I had to place all the main actors who were responsible for setting the clock back for Pakistan in pursuit of their personal ambitions, particularly this President and his cabal, on the centre stage.

Ayub Khan set the Pakistani nation on a road to total subservience to external hegemony by bartering sovereignty with a begging bowl, as well as internal

hegemony by megalomaniacs of the future, irrespective of their credentials, whether in military uniform or civilian clothes. Each one followed his legacy and today the begging bowl and the hole in its bottom has got bigger for plunder by the elite. The legacy to traumatise and humiliate the nation with vengeance and vendetta has continued as the coercive weapons against dissent and opposition. The tradition of nepotism, corruption, courtesan-ship, cronyism and soothsayers has flourished with each successive leader at the helm, without a compass or sails to steer the capsized nation towards true North.

The forebodings of a total crash at the hands of inept and corrupt leaders many with dual nationalities is terrifying for the nation.

6 *Ayub Khan Diaries, Pages 37, 202-206, 260-261-262-263 are just a smattering of Ayub Khan's contempt for Bengalis which was the prime cause of their eventual break-away.*

Yahya Khan is the most denigrated dictator because politicians and civilian dictators always need a fall-guy to be the whipping boy for the ills of Pakistan. That he lost East Pakistan was true but the events during the decade leading up to 1971 were full of contradictions and the finger points squarely at that decade and the Punjabi cabal. Yahya Khan's military incompetence and political naiveté delivered the coup de grace to Pakistan's integrity, solidarity and the dignity of the armed forces. Still, no one really wants to know the whole truth about Yahya, except to make him a punching bag for the break-up of Pakistan. Yahya Khan's greatest crime was not to have shown integrity and courage during 1965

War when Akhnur was waiting to be captured and more devastatingly, when the chips were down as the Indian marauders invaded our territory in East Pakistan in 1971. In

the former he capitulated to the plot by President Ayub Khan, and in the latter, he failed to execute the much touted war plan with the motto that the defence of East Pakistan lay in West Pakistan. After committing colossal political follies he should at least have let the army attack in the West. He lacked the courage and the will to defend East Pakistan.

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto arrived with great fanfare (after the coup by the group led by FB Ali and Aleem Afridi) at the invitation of the C-in-C's of the Army and the PAF for ushering in democracy.

ZA Bhutto ushered in a brief period of democracy, but destroyed the country's economy through nationalisation. His decision to sack the service chiefs was like preparing his own coffin when he chose Zia ul Haq (for perceived loyalty to him). The tyrant delivered him to the gallows for a crime Bhutto had not committed and in spite of the imploring of the whole world. Bhutto was a brilliant man with a vision and a super mind, but an ego bigger than all of his other assets. Arrogance and a superiority complex steered him off course and his course correction at the time when the PNA movement had started was not swift and substantial. His finale was most tragic, but before that he had compromised the social Islamic doctrine, providing the fundamentalists with even more space in a quasi-secular and tolerant society. In the process the freedom of the more progressive elements of society to live according to their preferred social culture was diminished dangerously.

His self-created phantom was waiting in the shadows and pounced when Bhutto may have in fact found a compromise solution, unfortunately with the religious reprobates and not with Asghar Khan. Zia ul Haq was too insecure to keep Bhutto alive.

Zia's evil agenda perverted the egalitarian doctrine and liberalism which Jinnah had bequeathed upon the nation. His regressive vision spawned through the mushrooming of Madressahs (27,000

extremist hatcheries run by illiterate maulvis today) and the birth of Islamic militants. These centres today harbour intolerant extremists like sectarian groups and the human beasts branded as the Taliban of Pakistan. In their most extreme form they take on the mantle of suicide bombers. These elements are attempting to annex the seriously depleted space of the social freedom of our society.

Seldom does one hear about the fourth war (after the wars of 1947, 1965, 1971) which rages in perpetuity. Few know Pakistan's role in the American proxy war Zia ul Haq got Pakistan embroiled in. This war heavily used up the resources of the PAF, which flew 10,939 air sorties during the Afghan war. There were 2,476 air violations by the Russians. During the bombing by the Russians more than a thousand Pakistani nationals were killed or wounded.

The fighter pilots of the PAF shot down five Soviet aircraft but the war took a huge toll on its own resources. The F-16s were almost out of spares and other logistics by the time the Americans made a shameful and hasty retreat after the defeat of the Soviets. Pakistan is still bearing the cost of its faulty decision to fight the American war. The real beneficiaries of the war besides the US were the top intelligence agency head honcho and his coterie who siphoned off hundreds of millions of dollars from the massive Samsonite pipeline from the US to the Mujahideen via the ISI. Many went on to become part of Pakistan's infamous galaxy of multi-millionaires from the Afghan war booty. Notoriously heading the list are the sons of dictators and their abettors heading the top military intelligence

agency, bureaucracy and ministries. Today, that fourth war perpetuates and ravages the people of Swat, Waziristan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar and Quetta.

The nation has never felt such a threat to its security; nor has internal security been in such incompetent and corrupt hands. The safety of 170 million has been blatantly compromised for the sake of protecting a corrupt few at the helm.

What Zia ul Haq did to Pakistan, Bal Thackeray, the BJP cabal and Hamid Karzai together could not achieve if they had their way.

The deluge of drugs, the mayhem caused by access to weapons and the rise in heinous crimes and proliferation of nuclear technology (by the now infamous A Q Khan), rampant, open and legalised corruption (NRO) are just the tip of the iceberg and a Zia ul Haq legacy. Zia degraded women through his odious Haddood Ordinance and pushed the nation morally, psychologically, sociologically and spiritually into an abyss. Contriving political surrogates like IJI through the unscrupulous misappropriation of funds by the ISI have created surrogate political monsters in Pakistan who have excavated the banks and every other asset they could gouge. Now they sit in stony silence as closet supporters of Al Qaeda as alleged by an ISI snoop recently. Zia's legacy has become a bete noire for decent Pakistanis because where ever one looks one sees his finger prints on all that has bloody portents for the future. Be it Waziristan, Swat, Lal Masjid and the big cities soaked in innocent blood – they all bear Zia ul Haq's seal and his phantom stalks the dark corridors of power in the form of his scion, zealots, surrogate politicians and beneficiaries who served him in uniform.

Zia's disappearance in thin air brought a euphoric relief for the stifled and stymied liberal Pakistanis in the persona of Benazir Bhutto. She had suffered a great deal and learnt a lot in her political desolation. I was enthralled and filled with hope for my country, hoping that perhaps Pakistan would finally be pulled back out onto the path that the great Quaid-e-Azam had envisioned for the country. I supported her whole heartedly and beyond, in my own personal way. Alas! She of all the people in the world fell prey to graft, kickbacks and plunder, purportedly under the spell of her husband. I was tormented by her demeanour because she had a large inheritance and her six generations could have lived on it in opulence, keeping the deviant in check. Her departure brought yet a bigger curse and a cabal of boorish political surrogates of the dictator Zia ul Haq, manufactured by the ISI honchos, who plundered the country's financial institutions as family inheritance.

(Emphasis added) For eight long years the PPP and PML (N) played musical chairs, slipping and tripping over sham of democracy which was more of a corruptocracy in which the willing bureaucrats took political positions and got rich as a premium for loyalty to persons and party. Both the prime ministers were removed in disgrace and humiliation twice each for corruption, nepotism and violation of human rights. It was devastating for the country. The leaders played havoc with the bottomed out national coffers. Politics was permanently sullied through horse trading, coercion and graft and reduced to the status of the oldest profession in the world. Democracy has never really entered Pakistan. The West has embellished this ghost of democracy to supplant weak captives who dance to their tunes unashamedly. Today the embryo of democracy is being mutilated by despotic leaders from Sindh and Punjab. Some are famous for deception and wheeling dealing, others for

deficit grey matter. In 20 years nothing has changed except there is more sleaze and hypocrisy in politics.

Then came another military general riding a stallion and swishing his sword, promising to decapitate the curse of corruption and restore national pride. He found the banks were empty as were the government reserves. The first three years of Pervez Musharraf's rule seemed like a dream come true with technoprosessionals in-charge. A lot of good things happened and were visible to the eye. Big fish were being hauled up for their financial plunder. People rejoiced and wanted more blood of those caught in the NAB web. The crocodile tears and whimpers about political victimisation were scorned at contemptuously by the entire nation.

The horizon seemed to be clearing and national sovereignty and Pakistan's dignity was actually sensed for the first time in five decades. Investment was pouring into the country. Then entered the Commonwealth head honcho Don McKinnon who was peddling the Anglo-American (but Pakistan-specific) model of democracy.

Thus returned the sham of democracy through opaque elections and laws were fiddled. It was *deja vu*, albeit to please the West and secure Musharraf's future. Ominously, he inducted the most unpopular and controversial Punjab based Chaudhry clan and other equally infamous politicians, especially the sons of tyrants (dictators) who always wore a price tag on their sleeve for loyalty for sale to those in power. Then came the horror of 9/11. It would be appropriate to say that for experienced pilots, especially consummate fighter pilots, the attack by the three airliners could not have been by untrained pilots. It could only have been achieved with controlled precision and timing, defying the dragnet of the air defence system of the USAF, in which

fighters can react within five minutes. Any how the Armageddon changed the paradigms for Pakistan. However, to my mind fate had opened a window of opportunity for Musharraf to restore to the nation its sovereignty and dignity in full measure by telling the Americans that he would have a national referendum to decide whether to join them or remain neutral. Even if he was checkmated, the Americans should have been told that the nation's co-operation would come with a condition that all its debts were written off and commerce and trade routes opened up. Unfortunately, that was not to be.

Musharraf's military-pseudo politico regime repeated the fratricidal history with even greater aplomb. However, in all fairness he was not a vindictive dictator like Zia or financially corrupt like many other dictators and leaders who came before and after him. Yet he had his limitations like all his predecessors and failed like all the rest in the arena of Pakistan's grubby politics. On too much of an ego trip, he did not recognize that his ego balloon was fully inflated; a pin prick was all that was needed to deflate it, and that is what happened. Resultantly, each of these helmsmen left behind a legacy worse than their predecessors, confounding this otherwise compliant but resilient nation.

In Pakistan today, financial crimes and manipulation of the law has been institutionalised through the despicable National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO). It was not national reconciliation but a murky deal made between power seekers, to the ultimate detriment of the nation. The NRO is a black blotch on Pakistan because with its provisions, ours shall be the only country in history where white collar criminals, bank defaulters, sullied and corrupt bureaucrats and crooks will be legitimized and propelled to dizzy heights. The plunderers, extortionists, defaulters and banned politicians have been provided amnesty, to defy the

legacy of Quaid-e-Azam and all the virtues Islam teaches us through God's teachings to His Messenger (PBUH). The NRO has been legalized by none other than the President, the cabinet and the Supreme Court of Pakistan in the greater 'national interest'. Now it is about to be put in the assembly of half-witted legislators to become legitimate law. Passage of the bill would be more loathsome, devastating and a bigger betrayal than break up of Quaid's Pakistan. The NRO will spell nemesis for many generations unless it is uprooted through a revolutionary act of a truly representative parliament comprising honest and educated Pakistanis of integrity; when the courts are occupied by non-political, unbiased, truly honourable and ethical judges who understand the Islamic ethos of justice and will dispense justice without malice, in the name of Allah. Presently, that hope and prayer is mere utopia.

In all fairness to the besieged nation, the recently deposed Chief Justice and the incumbent must share the burden of legitimizing unconstitutional and illegal acts as PCO judges, irrespective of the time and circumstances of the act. Also, the allegations about the intrusive conduct with the rule of law to benefit their scions ought to be erased through transparent adjudication by the appropriate jurisprudential authority, to separate myths from truth. It would shift the onus and burden of proof upon the critics.

I only wish that the recent lawyer's movement had in its phase two changed its velocity from an individual towards national reformation with Jinnah's example as its engine for holistic change. Historically, Pakistanis are adept creating heroes out of men of straw, even persons who welcome military dictators and then play to the gallery. This has been the bane of the Pakistani nation. The cult of hero worship has lowered the bar of heroism to reprehensible depths. Those who sell the honour and security of the country are

perceived as super heroes by a nation of trusting people, stunted through invasive propaganda. That is nothing short of a divine curse not to be able to distinguish between good and evil, villains and patriots.

The decisions made by Chief Justices from Mohammad Munir to Maulvi Mushtaq, Anwar-ul-Haq, Naseem Hassan Shah and the many more must surely make the souls of noble Justices Cornelius, Kiyani, Yaqoob, Dorab Patel, Hamdani and a few others like them turn in their graves. Fear of authority in power and not fear of the Omnipotent Creator is indeed a curse upon our nation. Surely, a nation of 170 million plus has a divine right to expect a few honest man to be God's true vicegerents to provide temporal justice to the deserving victims across this tormented land.

Today, the top political leaders in Pakistan have record folders stashed with all manner of financial crimes and convictions by courts in Pakistan and abroad and their vote bank is kept intact through money pumped into the propaganda mediums and paid to their touts. No robber leaves a receipt of his loot behind. So the touts who keep harping on that no case has been proven against the defaulters, plunderers and others when they were in power are just wrong. It is our legal system that is at fault unlike the Swiss, European and American justice systems, where crime is a crime irrespective of the status of the accused. Here, it appears that crime has become the law (NRO) and law a crime. How shameful that people accused of massive crimes against the state are beyond law and censor and their devious larceny has official pardon as well as legitimacy! Soon all those at various tiers of power shall be outside the pale of law by an act of constitution. Where does that road lead to? How did all this become possible? It is the people of Pakistan, especially the silenced majority which provides these political reprobates their life support system

by proxy – by not voting to bring morally upright and intelligent men and women into power, of which there is no dearth, if one looks hard enough.

Had there been a single ruler who wanted to look beyond his self interest and do good for the people and had he earnestly implored the people to change their indifferent and irresponsible attitude towards their state to alter the course of destiny, Pakistan would have been a great country by now. Pakistan needs a few honest, dedicated men with vision and integrity to give people true meaning of freedom, justice, security and equality amongst all. But that has not happened with the phantom of democracy roaming in the wilderness; rhetoric and hollow promises has been the fodder offered and consumed by the people. Then when the honeymoon is over, people turn against those they had anointed as heroes. The nation's affliction of branding reprobates and factual villains as heroes has stunted the national intellect and created low standards in the widest human spectrum. The case of our nuclear episode is a stark example of how ignorant the common man is for not realising that their hero played Russian roulette with their fate.

Pakistan is a nuclear pariah today because of one man, Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan, who is inexplicably hero worshipped for what in reality a team of several highly dedicated professionals had achieved. Each one was indispensable in the development of our nuclear programme and they contributed no less than the metallurgist Dr Khan, who is not a nuclear scientist as peddled falsely by media. He was also not amongst those such as Dr Hafiz Qureshi and the PAF team, who finally created the formidable weapon, capable of being carried by a fighter and delivered with accuracy. All these men with the exception of Dr AQ Khan were proud but humble about their achievements in the

style of Dr Abdul Kalam of India. They did not sell themselves and their expertise to rogue bidders. Undoubtedly, Dr AQ Khan made a crucial contribution for separating U-235 from UF-6 with his reversed engineered centrifuges to complete the uranium cycle. The nation has paid him the highest tributes and he was adorned with medals given by dictators and despots, for which he allegedly wrote his own citations. The glory which he should have shared was usurped.

Poetic justice, however, finally caught up with AQ Khan, when the dragnet was thrown around his dangerous enterprise by General Musharraf.

AQ Khan had teamed up with the likes of Urs Tiner, the Swiss nuclear smuggler (under trial now). AQ Khan admitted to selling nuclear technology in 2004 in a dramatic turn of events. All the nihilistic diatribe by AQ Khan in the media these days is indefensible brouhaha aimed at 'fooling the people all the time'.

This has now come to an end and he knows it, hence the brush fires he tries to create by dishonestly plagiarizing intellectual work, to detract attention from the erudite and courageous expose by people tired of his histrionics. A Cdre Mazhar Abbas, Admiral Taj Khattak, Miangul and others have eloquently called his bluff in recent days.

Another most significant and indelible proof of his façade has been exposed by the latest compendium, 'The Excitement of Science' by the Pakistan Academy of Sciences, about eminent scientists in Pakistan. Dr AQ Khan has been omitted from even a mention in the book released in October 2009. The scientists have sent a firm message that a colleague, however famous, must possess the

inalienable attribute of honesty to be counted amongst their group.

I have written all this because I have witnessed his painful self projection, so manipulative yet successful, for three decades. I had written a piece well before he was exposed, challenging Dr AQ

Khan's conduct which was printed finally by the young editor of the Urdu newspaper, *Khabrain* (the late Adnan Shahid). I was recently sent copies of some documents anonymously which leave little doubt about how Dr AQ Khan operated to acquire status and silver.

One such instance was to attain the Presidency of Academy of Sciences. In 1997, he gave a hefty amount equivalent of Rs 10, 000,000 to the Academy of Sciences drawn on a foreign Swiss account and donated by an anonymous person. The donation in foreign exchange was objected to by the treasurer of the Academy for lack of identity of the donor and he had written that the law required the name, address and a letter from the donor for the donation to be legally valid as per State Bank regulations. But Dr AQ Khan declined to provide the identity. The question is what was the quid pro quo for such unusual generosity?

To have bartered the nation's honour and the future of our present and future generations by peddling nuclear technology for money, which he has evidently accumulated in abundance, is indefensible. Dr AQ Khan deserves national censure as his real character and wheeling dealing comes to the fore; and not kudos and heroic status. He is not my hero by any stretch of the imagination, nor should people shut their eyes to his part in Pakistan being branded a most corrupt nation. Pakistanis are not corrupt as a nation and do not deserve being branded as such; it is their chosen

leaders and some of the usurpers and their accomplices who have brought this ignominy so undeserved by the majority. AQ Khan has much to answer for the financial fudging he has done in the past 30 years; and for delivering the coup de grace to national dignity and security.

The emotional characteristics of our people far surpass rationale, logic and the value of hard truth; they rather believe in myths and hear say. On the other end of the spectrum, those who have performed beyond the call of duty and those who have the urge for excellence and could be achievers given the opportunity, are suppressed and made to feel like pariahs. This has denuded the excellence coefficient of our budding youth. Unless there is a transformation in the national attitude towards truth, excellence and achievement, we are doomed to remain beholden to mediocrity and its natural corollary, retrogression.

Our leadership shall continue to be subservient to those whom we ask for dole, and Pakistan will remain the whipping boy with a begging bowl. Our sovereignty was staked at the altar of Western powers albeit the American global strategy right from its nascence.

Since the 1950s when the leaders mortgaged our sovereignty to the Baghdad Pact we have remained economically subservient and militarily shackled to the Western global agenda. Ayub Khan's era was the zenith of the trade-off of our sovereignty. Then most devastatingly we lived through the legacy of Zia's tyrannical decade and ominously the fourth war of attrition on our armed forces, with its debilitating impact on civil society, paying a price in blood, carnage and a stagnant economy.

Pakistan is marooned in economic despair and is being told that its military is not doing enough for the dole it receives from Uncle Sam to demolish the Taliban phenomenon. A movement spawned by the Americans and perpetuated by Zia-ul-Haq's twisted religiosity to fight the infidels (Soviets), has become the Al QaedaTaliban (PTT) hydra head octopus. The Taliban do not preach and practice the true values of Islam. Their killing of innocent Muslim men, women and children is indeed an abominable crime and it is demolishing Pakistan's present and future; yet it is not a threat to the West by any sane logic. However, the entire Western block rallied under Bush and placed Pakistan at the centre of this vortex, declaring Pakistan as the cause of the storm and the resulting inferno. They have turned Pakistan into a battle ground where the battle has escalated into an internecine guerrilla war by the self appointed soldiers of what at best could be described as a medieval cult; ominously pregnant with the strains of brutalising the entire innocent citizenry of Pakistan. It has portents of conflagrating on all fronts; north, east and west, which could explode into a war with nuclear connotations.

We can blame the West, MOSAD, KHAD and RAW for the mayhem in our cities, but why can we not understand that the leadership of every country is held responsible by the nation to provide them with security and ensure justice and livelihood. The question we need to address is whether our leaders have acted in the interest of Pakistan or has their personal agenda been sole and supreme? The irony is that everyone knows the answer!

The current war against the terrorists of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan is not about Shariah or Islam; it's simply about money, power and the terrorising of innocent citizens and the destabilisation of Pakistan. There are external powers involved in this ominous plan, but the most danger to

Pakistan's security comes from within. Not from a faceless enemy but from the likes of men of enduring ill repute, appointed by this dispensation, to protect national interests at home and abroad. One such foreboding by a spin master holding the most sensitive appointment has been reported by the media to be allegedly complicit in hurting Pakistan's future through misplaced authority in the world's first capitol. It has been alleged that the US was purposefully misled and misguided in the construct of "Enhanced Partnership" in the Kerry-Lugar Bill, to create mischief and denigrate the Armed Forces of Pakistan and to defang them by their total capitulation to civilian authority.

My serious concern is for the Armed Forces of Pakistan, the gallant men who are ready and have the will to fight with their lives. Their blood has spilt and is spilling this very moment for the sake of their motherland. They have been denigrated by third rate politicians and the hyperventilating media. No one cares about what damage they are inflicting upon their last vestige of viable defence against the threat to Pakistan's very existence. The morale of the fighting men is not cast in steel and is susceptible if their spirit dwindles from this drubbing. These men of honour have to be distinguished from those star spangled brass that have been in the throes of real-estate and corporate businesses rather than the singleness of purpose to lead their men from the front and keep them battle ready. The words armed forces encapsulate the large majority of the dedicated men who have pride of profession and passion for their country. Let us not amalgamate them with the handful of brass, no more than 0.001% of the total military strength, if even that, who have brought a bad name to the honour of the uniform by their insatiable greed for power or money or both; past and present. Finally, it is a truism that the armed forces should be accountable across the board for their strategic plans, operational readiness and procurement system. But for this

there can be no compromise on the pre-requisite of vision and knowledge about the functioning of the military and honesty and integrity of those who must carry out the monitoring and accountability of the armed forces.

In the final analyses, the chasm between survival and destruction is deepening by the minute. An inept, corrupt and dubious cabal currently confounds the confused nation, while they hide in their safe bunkers of the ghost-like white edifices on Constitution Avenue. Time is fast running out and to prevent a fatal crash we need to seek answers to some harsh realities and denounce the perversion of Islam by brutal fiends. We need to boldly expose the lies and myths which have become pervasive and endemic. If the nation shows collective courage to re-capture its lost dignity, perhaps a course change may be possible.

What people do not realize is that by ignoring history by not learning from its lessons has taken a devastating toll on the nation; and equally severely on those who came to power and laughed in the face of history. The present political scenario is a mirror reflection of history and it will repeat itself again and again until political maturity is attained by the nation and we learn to distinguish and reject the self-serving evil from the genuinely good.

The young generation has little to look forward to when the intelligentsia and the elite is mired in corruption and the middle class is shackled in confused conservatism in which they support any act, however odious, if performed in the name of religion. It has been a flaw in our culture not to encourage the spirit of inquiry.

However, the new generation does give me some hope - the youth I speak with take pride in their national identity, family's honour, integrity and financial propriety. They ask,

“How come people who steal, blunder, extort and are famous for every thing except honesty, are offered the highest chairs; why are criminals who were caught red handed celebrated as heroes?” I am at a loss to give them a tangible reply and urge them not to lose hope.

May Allah give the enlightened youth the fortitude to forge ahead and alter the paradigms of Pakistan’s future in the spirit envisioned by the Quaid-e-Azam. Let us stop creating pseudo heroes out of every glib talker whose rhetoric is about self perpetuation in the high chair. Let us be clear that there was one and only one political martyr, the Quaid-e-Azam. Every single word uttered by him through the last century holds more validity today than ever before, for our fractured and rudderless nation. The youth must rise with a spirit to sacrifice to change Pakistani society from the status of a mob, back to the proud nation state it once was with the Quaid at the helm.

Unless every upright Pakistani collectively decides to dismantle the politico-feudal-bureaucratic-extremist network, this nation will remain in the state of flux induced by national inertia.

With the way things are at the moment, I may not live long enough to witness this metamorphosis, but my spirit will be with the young and angry revolutionaries who can evolve and resurrect Jinnah’s vision of Pakistan. First, however, there must be collective understanding of the Quaid’s legacy of ‘Unity’ at the national level, transcending religious, political, sectarian and tribal divides; then ‘Faith’ in oneself to achieve what seems difficult and finally a resolute will for ‘Discipline’ to defy the coercive power of the establishment and bullying from regional and super powers. Only then would we be able to fight collectively to redeem our lost honour and learn to become self-reliant. If we show

courage, we can meet our destiny with honour; even death will seem frail and we will smile at it when it eventually comes.

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Sl No	Type of Mission	1965 War (22 days) Sorties Flown	1971 War (14 days) Sorties Flown
1	Air Defence	1,304	1,748
2	Air Support to Army & Navy	647	951
3	Day Strikes Against Enemy Airfields, Radars, etc.	100	160
4	Night Strikes Against Enemy Airfields, Radars etc.	165	130
5	Other Missions (Photo recce, helicopter, etc)	148	38
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Flight of the Falcon

“Sajad Haider is one of the gallant few who helped save Pakistan in 1965”.

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— **Professor Khwaja Masud**

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— **Mansoor Shah** (author of the *The Gold Bird*)

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