PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU(DEFENCE WING) GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

AIR HEADQUARTERS COMMUNICATION SQUADRON by Wg Cdr R. Shankar

Two and a half decades back the RAF Air Chief Sir Thomas Pyl who was on his official visit to India, was to go to Agra. Barely he sat in the IAF Viscount and strapped his seat belt, he ordered a cup of coffee. When the flight steward brought the coffee, the RAF Air Chief placed it on table in front. The air craft took off and landed at Agra, but coffee remained untouched. When the pilot at the completion of the flight came to him Sir Thomas showed the coffee to him, and said "I have tried this all over but this is the first time in my long flying career, did the coffee not spill. Well done! It was a lovely take off and very smooth landing. Keep it up".

The pilot was Squadron Leader (later Air Marshal (Retd) B.W. Chauhan.

Sir Thomas Pyke was not the first passenger to have travelled in the aircraft of the Air Headquarters Communication Squadron. Its passengers read like an international 'Who is who' - Eleanor Roosevelt, Lord Mountbatten, Marshal Tito, Jawaharlal Nehru, Queen Eliezebeth, Chou EnLai, President Nasser, Mr. Hruschev, Lord Mac Millan, Dalai Lama, U Thant, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, President Mitterand, Giani Zail Singh - all have been on board in its aircraft as passengers. Not only this. All the Presidents of India, Vice Presidents, Prime Ministers, Defence Ministers and Chiefs of three Services have travelled entirely without exception by the aircraft of the Squadron in internal flights - throughout the 37 years of the Squadron's existence.

Brilliant flying feats ...

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Formed on November 1,1947 at Palam, the Squadron began operating with the Airseep Oxford aircraft and its first major actionment was to fly Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on a survey of the sorrowful sight of strife-torn areas of the sub-continent. In 1948, the Squadron received the Devon aircraft. It won national acclaim when a Devon aircraft of the Squadron with Sardar Patel on board developed engine trouble but landed successfully after an emergency. Flt Lt Bhima Rao, the pilot involved, received Kudos from the entire nation for his skill and efficiency in handling the situation. Even the constituent Assembly placed its appreciation for the pilot on record. Now came a series of brilliant piloting feats. On February 3, 1952, Flt Lt Suhas Biswas was piloting a Devon aircraft carrying four Army Generals and Z Brigadiers got airborne from Lucknow. Soon after getting airborne he found his port engine had caught fire and fell off. Braving fading light conditions and with a single engine, he successfully landed on a flat piece of land and earned the Ashok Chakra Class I. It was the Dakota of this Squadron which created a world record by landing in the world's highest airfield at Chusul, again the Illushin to land at Lhasa (elevation 14,200 feet and the first AVRO to land at the Advanced Landing Ground at Fukche (elevation 13,734 feet) belong to this Squadron. No wonder it is then, that two of its pilots, Squadron Leader V.Natarajan and Flt Lt NM Rai were selected as the members of the third Antartic expedition to fly the MI-8

helicopters....

Took part in all the operations

For a transport squadron, this squadron enjoy: the unique record of taking part in all the military; operations. During the Hyderabad police action, the Squadron's Dakotas were converted into bombers and carried out bomting sorties over Addilabad air field railway bridges near Bidar. When the nation was suddenly attacked in 1947, the Squadron mounted 23 sorties airlifting troops ammunition and war material, thereby augmenting the overall military effort which turned the tide. During the Goa operation, a total of 33 hours were flown, airlifting troops and spares secretly thereby securing tactical surprise. During the 1962 conflict, the Squadron flew 147 hours, airlifting troops and conveying the VIPs to and fro from the areas of operations. In 1965 more than 100 hours were flown conveying troops and spares. In the 1971 operations the squadron performed 29 sorties of maritime reconnaissance.

Assistance to UN and neighbouring countries

The squadron has teen called on numerous occasions to provide assistance to UNO and the neighbouring countries. These include airlift of UN peace keeping forces to Indo China Flood relief operations in Sri Lanka, the secret evacuation of King Tirubhuvan of Nepal, evacuation of the Oalai Lama, the tours of the UN Secreyary General over the disputed Indo Pak border...

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disputed Indo Pak border areas and the evacuation of prisoners of war from Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Rendition of Medical Aid

Another regular feature of the squadron is the airlifting of doctors and patients to save their lives. Such flights included King Birendra of Nepal, Jayaprakash Narayan and J.B. Kriplani, When Mrs. Mugabe fell sick during the retreat of the leaders in Goa during CHOGM, she was flown by the squadron to Delhi so that she could have timely dialysis.

Special Features of the Squadron

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The Squadrons' pilots and technicians are the most highly qualified in the IAF on transport. Only those transmort pilots who are rated best in other transmort Squadrons are chosen to be posted to the communication Squadron where they, despite all their skill and experience start at the bottom and convert to the Squadrons' aircraft. All the aircraft of the Squadron are repaired and serviced at the Squadron itself unlike other Squadrons who send their aircraft to Base Repair Depots, for rebair and servicing. The Maintenance crew of the squadron

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have maintained...

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have maintained the aircraft in such perfect condition that all the aircraft of the squadron are always on the highest zero error"level. After each flight the aircraft is so throughly maintained that it is the boast of the Squadron that even the FBI and Scotland Yard would be hard put to find a single finger print! The skill of the pilots and maintenance crew of the Squadrom is so high that the Squadron is barred from taking part in several competitions to preclude the loss of incentive on part of other transport squadrons. No wonder it is that the squadron had bagged the best Transport Squadron Trophy in 1983 and the Flight safety trophy.

The Squadron has two other unique distinctions. It has a full fledged catering division to serve the VVIPS/VIPS on flights; Socondly, the Squadron has its own section for fabricating the VIP fitments and furnishing and upholstery. Award of 'Colours' by the President.

 ${ t t}$ is but natural that the Squadron has received numerous by the Constitutent Assembly, three Ashok Chakras, two Shaurya Chakras, eleven Vayu Sena Medals, four Vishiht Seva Medals and twenty commendation by the Chief of Air Staff and innumerable letters of appreciation from all the world leaders.

It is but fitting that the President, Giani Zail Singh, will be awarding the Squadrons' Standard to the Squadron on December 11,1984 - a fitting tribute from the Suprome Commander to the squadron which has more than lived up to its motto 'Seva aur Suraksha(Service and safety). (PLEASE LINK THIS FEATURE WITH PHOTO NO. 29465)

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