

*Wings of Duty*  
*A Memoir*

## Wings of Duty

Syed Muhammad Ahmad (1925-2017) was the oldest son of Dr Mir Muhammad Ismail and the nephew of the Promised Messiah<sup>as</sup>. He served as a Spitfire pilot in the Royal Indian Air Force during World War II, before being called by Hazrat Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad<sup>ra</sup> to fly one of two planes purchased by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community during the Partition. Afterwards he joined the Pakistan Air force where he rose to the rank of wing commander. He was a member of the Electoral College of Khilafat for three elections. Upon his demise Khalifatul-Masih V, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad said: 'He was very righteous and discretely prayerful... He had a strong relationship with Khilafat-e-Ahmadiyya...May Allah the Exalted elevate his status and have mercy on him.'



Deputy Mian Muhammad Latif (1919-2002) was the son of Deputy Mian Muhammad Sharif. After receiving flight training from the Lahore Flying Club, he joined the Royal Indian Air Force at the beginning of the Second World War and served with distinction. During the conflict he was also captured as a Japanese prisoner of war. Later he was called by Hazrat Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad<sup>ra</sup> to fly one of the planes of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in the years of the Partition.

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Syed Muhammad Ahmad

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By Syed Muhammad Ahmad

Present English Edition: UK 2018  
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Published by:  
Islam International Publications Ltd  
Unit 3, Bourne Mill Business Park,  
Guildford Road, Farnham, Surrey UK, GU9 9PS  
United Kingdom

Printed and bound by CPI Group  
(UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

ISBN: 978-1-84880-350-3

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## Note

The essays translated in this book were first published in the daily Urdu newspaper of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community the *Alfazi* in three parts under the title پارٹیشن کے زمانے کی چند یادداشتیں۔ جماعت احمدیہ کے ہوائی جہازوں کی مختصر کہانی (*Partition ke zamane ki chand yaddashten: Jama'at Ahmadiyya ke hawai jahazon ki mukhtasir kahani*) between 26 to 30 August 2010.

Because of their frequency of use and for ease of reading, foreign words, Islamic terminology and terms common to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community have, for the most part, not been italicised or transliterated in the main body of the text. Anyone interested in the meaning or correct pronunciation of these words can refer to the glossary at the end of the book.

Moreover, place names are used as they appear in the original essay, and in such cases where the name has changed, the modern word appears in brackets in the first instance. For example, Bombay (Mumbai).





## *Foreword*

These beautiful memories from a far removed time were written in a sleepy sun-room at my home in Hershey, Pennsylvania, a place where my father loved to lounge, read and write and where he spent several summers overlooking our backyard in all of its leafy splendour.

It has been my honour and privilege to have enjoyed my father's company and to have played a small role in urging him to record those parts of his life that we, his children, have come to cherish over the years.

These memoirs shed light on the various challenges faced by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community during the Partition years, the strength and incredible foresight shown by Hazrat Khalifatul-Masih II<sup>ra</sup> during this period, the perseverance and fortitude of everyday Ahmadis and of course the numerous aviation adventures that the community found itself thrust into during the departure of the British from India and the largest mass migration in human history that followed it.

They present a story of courage, triumph over adversity and the ever-present helping hand of God.

They also offer a glimpse into my father. He was a highly honest man who possessed a truly noble spirit and a kind heart. For me he was an empowering figure in an age where girls had fewer opportunities. He had a remarkably broad perspective on life. He taught his children about time management, financial integrity, decency and kindness. Most of all, he showed us to perceive and love God in a deeply personal way, beyond just ritual and customs and to remember God with each breath and step of our lives as the Supreme Being Who transcends time and space. And it is exactly this love of God which comes across so strongly in these recollections. He relished travel, nature, stimulating company and had an uncanny ability to connect with people of all ages and backgrounds with empathy and kindness. These qualities too shine through in this book.

Despite the various setbacks in his life, my father was never bitter or regretful. He was a man who when given lemons made lemonade and it was with this same spirit that he so dutifully fulfilled his role as a pilot of one of the planes of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community during the years of Partition. I hope that

whoever comes across these memoirs is able to take as much pleasure from them as I have over the years.

Ayesha Ahmad  
Hummelstown, PA



## *Early Days*



Left to right: Sahibzada Mirza Tahir Ahmad<sup>th</sup>, Deputy Muhammad Latif, the author. (Author's collection)

I have a photograph at home which was taken on the northern veranda of the lower portion of Darul Barakat, the home of Syeda Umme Tahir in Darul Masih<sup>1</sup>, Qadian. The three people in the photograph

<sup>1</sup> The home of the Promised Messiah<sup>as</sup>. [Publishers]

would all go on to serve as pilots. On the left stands Sahibzada Mirza Tahir Ahmad<sup>th</sup> who was 14 years old when the picture was taken, in the centre, dressed in his Air Force uniform is Deputy Muhammad Latif aged 23 and I am on the right aged 17.

I have chosen to describe Sahibzada Mirza Tahir Ahmad<sup>th</sup> (who later became the Fourth Khalifa of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community) as a pilot because one of the meanings of this word is to ably and successfully command and control an organisation or movement. And as the 21-year-period of his khilafat testifies, he led and guided the organisational, social, educational, moral and spiritual needs of the community with unparalleled patience, strength, courage, steadfastness and zeal.

The other two individuals in the photograph, Deputy Muhammad Latif and myself, merely became pilots of airplanes. However, due to the infinite grace of Allah, in 1947 both of us had the honour of serving the community by flying a small fleet of aircraft that the community owned. The two of us saw many divine signs during this period and for that too we were extremely grateful to Allah the Exalted. I will mention these signs in greater detail later on.

Hazrat Khalifatul-Masih II<sup>ra</sup>, the Second Khalifa of

the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, was not only an intelligent, attentive, brave, steadfast and far-sighted individual, he was also a peerless leader. He realised long before Partition that because Qadian was situated amid villages which were home to Sikh hardliners, if the law and order situation deteriorated at the time of independence, it was possible Qadian's links with the outside world could be severed with railway networks, roads, postal services and telephone lines likely to be out of commission for extended periods. Hence, he felt the community needed to acquire at least one small airplane to avoid becoming completely isolated.

It is possible that Huzoor was influenced by the memory of the attack against his great-grandfather, Mirza Ata Muhammad, in which extremist Sikh elements raided 85 villages that belonged to him in the environs of Qadian and took possession of them, leaving only Qadian under his ownership. A group of Sikhs known as the Ramgarhia<sup>2</sup>, later entered Qadian and captured it too. They created great havoc in the town, destroyed many mosques and houses and forced Huzoor's forebears into exile to other parts of

<sup>2</sup> The Ramgarhia are a Sikh community belonging to the Punjab. Members of the Ramgarhia were traditionally carpenters but also pursued other artisan occupations like stonemasonry. [Publishers]

the Punjab. Eventually, during the last decade of the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Mirza Ata Muhammad was able to return to Qadian and regain five of the 85 villages his family had lost. During these years away, the family's residence—now known as Darul Masih—fell into decay. Only the frame of the building partially remained; everything else had been looted, stolen or destroyed.



Some 15 years before Partition, towards the end of 1932, a small three-seater plane called a Puss Moth came to Qadian. The plane landed on a large field to the west of the railway station. The owner and pilot of the aircraft was Mr R N Chawla who in 1930 was the first Indian to fly a de Havilland Puss Moth from India to England. He had brought his plane to Qadian with the intention of taking it to London and then flying from there to Karachi to create a record for the shortest ever air journey between the two cities. At the time, the airport in Karachi was considered the centre of civil aviation in India.

According to his proposed itinerary, he had to call in at 15 locations on the way to Karachi as his plane was unable to fly more than 300 miles at a time.



In addition, planes in those days did not have the electronic instruments required to navigate at night and there was also the matter of his sleep and rest. Therefore, Mr Chawla had estimated he would need at least 15 days for this journey. Since he did not have the requisite funds to undertake it, estimated to be Rs 10,000, he had sent out requests for donations to the maharajas, rajas and nawabs of various Indian states. Each donor was asked to give Rs 500 to enable this expedition and enhance India's prestige in the world.

A copy of this request was also sent to Hazrat Khalifatul-Masih II<sup>ra</sup> and Huzoor was the first person to respond to it. Huzoor wrote back to him saying that if he came to Qadian in his plane and took a few members of the community for a ride in it, he would donate Rs 500 to him. And so it was that Mr Chawla brought his plane and a mechanic with him to Qadian. The plane landed in the town at 7pm on 30 December 1932.

Back then, Qadian had a population of between 3000-4000 people. The entire town came out to see this airplane for the duration of its stay. There were oval semi-circles marked on each side of the landing ground and during the day, they would fill up with spectators. The visit of this plane took place a year

before the infamous convention of the Ahrar which saw them enter Qadian and promise to destroy it brick by brick. The convention was held close to the Arya school which was near the railway line.

Mr Chawla spent the second day of his stay tending to technical and logistical issues before making a test flight. He also met with Huzoor in his office and requested him to come and see the plane for himself. On 1 January at 11am Huzoor, accompanied by a group of khuddam and some elders of the community, went to see the airplane. I was 8 years old then and one of many enthusiastic spectators. As soon as Huzoor arrived, Mr Chawla made a short test flight and, after landing, he invited Huzoor to come up with him. But for the first flight, Huzoor chose his brother Sahibzada Mirza Bashir Ahmad<sup>ra</sup> and his eldest daughter Sahibzadi Nasira Begum. For the second flight he nominated his youngest brother Sahibzada Mirza Sharif Ahmad<sup>ra</sup> and second daughter Sahibzadi Amtul Qayoom. On the third flight, Huzoor went himself with Sahibzada Mirza Sharif Ahmad<sup>ra</sup>.

During Huzoor's flight the plane did not land after completing its circuit. Instead, it flew higher in an easterly direction and after a while it disappeared from view, causing a wave of anxiety to spread through

the crowd. There were people who thought that this might have been a secret plot to abduct Huzoor. Others started to cry, while some began to pray. Their prayers were ongoing when the plane came into sight from the east, flying at a considerable height. There was a sudden sense of relief and various people fell in prostration in gratitude to God. After landing, Huzoor explained that he had asked Mr Chawla to fly to the Beas River so that he could see the area between Qadian and the river from the air.

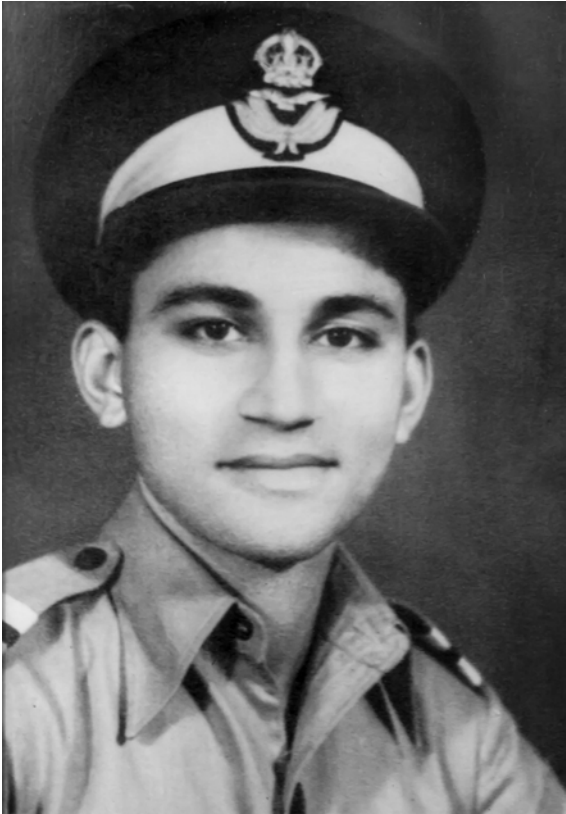
The pilot's seat was at the front of the plane and a wide seat for two passengers was at the back. Huzoor announced a list of names of those who would take turns going up. Each person was given the opportunity to fly for one circuit, which lasted about 7 minutes. The following day—the last one of Mr Chawla's visit—some children were also given an opportunity and one adult and two children would go up in turns. My heart yearned for the chance to fly. Perhaps Huzoor sensed something of my desire because suddenly I heard my name called out. I felt like I had won the lottery. In my group there was Sahibzada Mirza Daud Ahmad, later a colonel in the army, Huzoor's daughter Sahibzadi Amtul Hakeem who was 7 years old at the time and of course myself. The experience made me keen to fly

and this desire was fulfilled 10 years later when I was commissioned in the Royal Indian Air Force.



I first joined the Air Force out of necessity. In 1939, when I was 14, I passed my Matriculation exam from Talimul-Islam High School in Qadian with a score of 68 per cent—a first division grade. I had the fifth highest score in my class. I wanted to attend Government College Lahore in the FSc Pre-Medical programme, as by then I wished to become a doctor. Despite knowing of my desire, my father had decided that I should become a civil engineer. He had me admitted to an FSc Pre-Engineering course, with the idea that after completing this, I would go to Mughalpura Engineering College, which is now the University of Engineering and Technology. Back then, only 30 boys were admitted to the college every year and of those only four gained entry on an open merit. The rest of the places were reserved for the sons of railway engineers and Public Works Department engineers. Therefore, to be sure of gaining admission, I needed a grade of at least 75 per cent in my FSc exams and this I was not able to achieve.

My father was deeply disappointed with me and remained so for a long time. Left with no other



Cadet Officer S M Ahmad. (Author's collection)

choice, I stayed on at Government College to do my BSc which was then a two-year degree. When I turned 18, and with few options ahead of me as my father was no longer supporting me financially, I decided to join the Air Force. This was a painful period of my life, as I was neither able to become a doctor—which I had so badly wanted—nor was I able to become a civil engineer as my father had wished. Young people today might find this strange, but when I was growing up, it was normal for parents to decide the careers of their children without giving thought to what the children actually wanted.

In August 1943, I joined the Air Force as a flight lieutenant. Due to an urgent demand for trained pilots during the Second World War, our flight training was accelerated and completed in short order. We were taught the four stages of flying (basic flying, applied flying, operational flying and air gunnery and weapons) in only 18 months. Nowadays, it takes five years to complete this level of instruction. We received our training at the Air Force bases in Pune, Begumpet, Ambala and Peshawar. Being a bright student, I was selected for the Empire Flying Training Scheme in Canada during our training period in Begumpet. However I could not go because the program was

ultimately cancelled, and I returned to Begumpet after basic training in Bombay (Mumbai).

In 1944 I was commissioned in Ambala. In March 1945, immediately after completing my training in Peshawar, I was sent with the No. 8 Fighter Squadron to the Burma (Myanmar) front. Our squadron was based northeast of Calcutta (Kolkata) at the Baigachi Air Force base in what is now Bangladesh and our job was to protect Calcutta from Japanese air raids. We flew the British Spitfire Model 9 aircraft.

The threat of attack never materialised, so to maintain our sharpness, we had mock dog fights almost every day with the Lightning P-38 fighter planes from a nearby US Air Force base. We nearly always won because in those days the British system of flight training was better than the American one. This is no longer the case and the Americans now lead the way.

The advance of the Japanese from the north into Burma had been halted and Allied forces were beginning to make gains. The Burmese front line was slowly shifting to the south. We had been at Baigachi for only a few months when we received orders to proceed to Mingaladon Air Force base near the Burmese capital Rangoon (Yangon). Since the journey from Calcutta to

Rangoon was to be made by sea, we had to leave our fighter planes behind.

The ship that carried us from Calcutta was called the *MV Devonshire*. On board were numerous officers from different units of the armed forces along with their staff. As there was a danger of ambush by Japanese submarines, we travelled as part of a convoy which included other passenger ships and several navy destroyers for our protection.

This was my first experience travelling by sea. Because our cabins were comfortable, I very much enjoyed the week-long journey. However, when we arrived at Rangoon, there was such chaos and confusion at the port that it took us two days to locate our baggage and find our living quarters. Our accommodation was ghastly, but during the war, things were often that way. The runway of the Air Force base was also in a terrible state, similar to how the Rabwah to Chiniot road used to be many years ago.

The RAF Fighter Squadron 607 had left behind 15 Spitfire Mark VIII airplanes for us at Mingaladon, while they went to our previous base at Baigachi. It was customary that after a six-month stint on the front line, a weary squadron was sent back and a fresh one took its place.





Flt Lt S M Ahmad in 1944. (Author's collection)

Not only was the runway at Mingaladon in a state of disrepair, the apron was limited in size resulting in a number of accidents. I too once had a collision after making a landing. I was taxiing to my squadron's apron when a petrol tanker collided with my plane. My propeller was torn off and my fuselage also received some damage. Another time, not long after this, I was hovering immediately above the airport in preparation for a landing, when my drop tank broke off and plummeted to the ground due to a technical fault. It fell almost in the middle of the airport, where 35 parachutists were boarding a Dakota airplane for a mission. At the sound of the explosion, the parachutists ran away and flung themselves into a trench. They only emerged again when their fears had been allayed and they were reassured that the fallen object was a drop tank and not an explosive.

The worst incident that took place during my time there, however, involved an RAF squadron of 16 Spitfire Mark 22s which were used for special missions. These planes could fly above 40,000 feet and required more petrol than other Spitfire models. They were also fitted with state-of-the-art cameras. The squadron's assignment was to take reconnaissance photos, and these pictures were then supplied to the Army and

the Air Force as and when needed. The planes' only defence was the height at which they flew, as in those days none of the Japanese fighter planes could fly at a similar altitude.

Because space was limited at Mingaladon, and the front line had moved far south of Rangoon, this squadron received orders to change to a more southerly base. The day they were to fly out, all 16 planes were full of gear and topped up with petrol. They were parked in close proximity only 200 feet away from the right side of the runway, wing tip to wing tip. The pilots were drinking tea in a tent behind the aircraft. All of a sudden a Dakota airplane lost control and rapidly spun 45 degrees to the right, ran off the runway and before its pilot could bring it under control, it crashed into the first of these planes which burst into flames. Since the tanks were filled with petrol, all of them caught on fire. We watched this spectacle from the opposite end of the air base and all we could see was a terrible blaze. Within two hours, each of the 16 planes had been burnt to ashes. Thankfully the pilots were safe, but they did not even have a change of clothes because all their personal belongings had been on the aircraft. It was a chilling sight and one which shook us all.



The war soon took a turn for the better. There were victories on almost all fronts and also a marked improvement in our living conditions. But we still thought the fighting would not end by late 1945 or early 1946 because the Japanese continued to hold out resolutely. However, unbeknownst to us, Allied forces were planning a large-scale operation to defeat Japan as soon as possible. As a result, a number of fresh fighter squadrons began arriving at Mingaladon. Despite the military engineers working day and night to build a new and longer runway, space was still tight at the air base.

On 6 and 9 August 1945 the United States of America dropped two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, destroying both of them. The Japanese government collapsed and Japan surrendered. A few days after hostilities ended, the most high-ranking Japanese commander of the region came from Singapore to the Mingaladon Air Base on a Japanese transport plane. We saw him and his delegation surrender arms to his Allied counterpart, General Slim, later field marshal and governor general of Australia. Later, the supreme commander of the Allied forces in South Asia, Admiral Mountbatten,

also came to Mingaladon and from there he took a special transport plane to Singapore, where the highest-ranking Japanese commander in South Asia also surrendered arms. Finally, a representative of the Japanese government surrendered to General MacArthur at a ceremony on the American aircraft carrier USS Missouri on 2 September 1945. With that the Second World War came to an end.

Though the war had ended, there were Japanese units still hidden in the dense jungles of Burma who refused to surrender, either because they were unaware that the war was over or for reasons known only to them. For weeks our squadron supported the ground forces that fought against them. This operation was concluded at the end of October 1945. According to official records, I flew the last operational mission on this front.

During our stay in Mingaladon, I was involved in a major accident. On 28 September 1945, the engine of my Spitfire failed during a flight and I had to make a crash belly landing onto a water-soaked paddy field 40 miles south of Rangoon in rainy conditions. By the sheer grace of Allah I was unhurt, but my plane was completely destroyed. It is strange that though two-thirds of Burma is covered by thick jungle, the

area around the River Irrawaddy to the southwest of Rangoon does not have a single tree. There are only rice fields for miles and beyond which grow some of the best rice in the world. If it had been a tree-covered area, I might not have survived.

Despite living in Rangoon for eight months, I was unable to visit the grave of the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, because this was strictly forbidden to servicemen. On the way to the grave there were a number of signs which read *out of bounds to troops*. Perhaps the government was afraid that Indian servicemen would be inspired by a zeal for independence by going there.

Some months after the peace declaration, our squadron was sent to Trichinopoly (Tiruchirappalli) air base in southern India. Our ground party with baggage in tow departed for Madras (Chennai) by sea. The others who were taken by air travelled slowly, calling in at Akyab (Sittwe), Calcutta, Jamshedpur, Raipur, Hyderabad Deccan, and Rachenpul. After taking a few days to acclimatise, we settled into our routine of peacetime flying.

There are two things worth mentioning about our stay here. First, as a keen sightseer since I was a child, I would make the most of my Sundays and other time

off by touring the area surrounding Trichinopoly. In a few months, I had seen most parts of southern India by train, such as Mysore, Coimbatore, Medora, Madras, Bangalore (Bangaluru), Cody Canal, Nandipur, Wellington, Ootacamund (Ooty), Dhanshkody and so on. I was unable to go to Goa because it was still a Portuguese colony, though after Partition, India annexed it from Portugal. During these visits, I saw many south Indian temples and palaces. In this way, I learned a lot about the culture of south India and about Hindu religion and philosophy.

Second, in February 1946, there was a mutiny on a group of Royal Navy vessels anchored in the port of Bombay. Rebel Indian sailors took their ships out to sea and some of them also killed the English officers on board. To crush this revolt, the Navy sent a company of fighter planes. Our squadron was also summoned to Bombay so that if needed, we could attack the mutineer ships. On the way to Bombay's Santa Cruz Airport via Hakimpet, my airplane had a small accident for which I had to stop in Hakimpet for repairs. The rest of the squadron continued to Bombay. What had happened was that during my landing the tail wheel collapsed because the locking pin had broken. The lower rudder was also damaged and it took a few days to have it

repaired. During my short stay, I spent a few days at the home of Seth Abdullah in Hyderabad Deccan whose hospitality, piety and goodness impressed me deeply.

By chance, certain faculty members of Talimul-Islam College in Qadian were, at the time, being trained at the RAF Technical Training School (TTS/NTTS) in Hyderabad Deccan at the suggestion of Sahibzada Mirza Nasir Ahmad<sup>ra</sup>. They included Chaudhry Muhammad Ali who was later promoted to Professor of Psychology at TI College, Fazal Ahmad who went on to become the inspector general in the Indian Police Service and possibly Master Fazaldad, later a senior staff member at TI College. I met with them when I went to the RAF TTS to get help in fixing the broken rudder. Once my plane was repaired, I flew from Hakimpet to Bombay's Santa Cruz Airport where I learnt that the Navy had subdued the mutiny and our squadron returned to its base in Trichinopoly.

I was reminded of this in 2009 when I received a book published by the British company which made the Spitfire. The book listed every Spitfire which had ever been involved in an accident, regardless of its model or the extent of damage it had received. I learnt that the same airplane whose rudder had been



broken was later in service for three years with the Indian Air Force. It was then retired and placed in the Indian Air Force museum. Many years later, the RAF museum in England needed a Model-14 Spitfire and purchased the retired airplane at a great cost from India. It now sits in the RAF museum in London. If Allah wills, I hope to visit London again some day, a city I have been to many times and have my photo taken next to this airplane. In addition to this, the book also mentioned in detail the other three Spitfire accidents I was involved in: that is to say, the ground collision between a petrol tanker and my plane, the time my drop tank fell off my plane and my crash belly landing when my engine failed, including the reason for the engine failure.

We had been in Trichinopoly for about eight months when we received orders that three squadrons of the Royal Indian Air Force, including ours, were being sent to Kolar Air Force base. Kolar is a district in the south Indian state of Karnataka which is known for its gold fields. The base was situated about 60 miles to the east of Bangalore. We usually visited Bangalore about once a week, sometimes for work and at other times for recreation.



A Spitfire, similar to the author's, in the RAF Museum, Grahame Park Way, London.  
(Mr Bilal Atkinson 2016)

## *Partition*

In 1947 I was transferred under a special programme to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and began to fly with Indian National Airways in Delhi. The situation in Punjab had already started to deteriorate because of the looming independence and partition of India. In July, I had to go to Qadian after learning of the death of my father, Dr Mir Muhammad Ismail. Due to nationwide disturbances, means of communication and travel routes were greatly disrupted. I received the news of his passing very late and the train journey took so long that I only reached Qadian two days after his funeral. After remaining there for a few days, I returned to Delhi to resume my work.

While I was in Qadian, I learnt that under Huzoor's instructions the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community had purchased a small two-seater Stinson L-5 airplane. A few days earlier, Deputy Muhammad Latif—whom I have mentioned already—had brought the plane to Qadian and landed it on the main road of Darul Anwar that was to the east of the Al-Nusrat residence. Electricity poles and wires ran the length of this path, therefore, there

was only a short unpaved stretch of about 250 yards in its eastern extension where a small light airplane could land. After this short trip, Deputy Muhammad Latif flew the L-5 to Walton Airport in Lahore and left it under the care of the CAA, while he returned to his job in Bombay.

The L-5 was used by the American Air Force in the latter part of the Second World War to survey battlefronts and take injured troops from the frontline to medical facilities in the field. It was a sturdy airplane that could land in the tightest of places, which is why it was often referred to as an *air jeep*. At the front was the pilot's seat. The back seat also had controls to fly the plane and there was a lever which could be pulled to convert the seat into a stretcher for injured soldiers to lie on. This plane was such a success during the Second World War that the Americans made a more advanced version of it, the L-19, which is still used by the Pakistani Air Force.

The L-5 bought by the community did not have electronic instruments to navigate in the dark. Therefore, even though it was possible to take off and land, one could not fly the plane at night without the help of a land-based radar system which the country did not have at the time.



Here, let me recount how this plane came to be purchased by the community.

Deputy Muhammad Latif belonged to a respectable Ahmadi family of Lahore. He was the second son of Deputy Muhammad Sharif, who was referred to as *Deputy* because he was in the civil service. In fact, the title preceded the names of all three of his sons. Latif joined the Royal Indian Air Force at the beginning of the Second World War. In 1943, while commanding a fighter squadron on the Burma front, his plane was shot down by the Japanese. He crash-landed and survived, but was captured and became a prisoner of war. Having endured many tribulations during his time in the camp, he returned home after the war ended only to face another ordeal.

Many Indian military personnel captured by the Japanese on the Burma front had joined the *Indian National Army* which was instituted by the Japanese and led by a former Congress Party president, Subhas Chandra Bose also known as Netaji. Netaji convinced the Indian soldiers that Japan was going to win the war. If the Indians joined the Japanese to fight the Allied forces, he claimed, they would soon overthrow the yoke of British slavery and be heralded as national

heroes after the war ended. As a result of his persuasion, many of them joined the Indian National Army. But the Japanese lost the war and the Allies arrested the treacherous servicemen.

At the end of the war, the British set up a commission to try those troops suspected of treason. They were divided into three groups. The first group comprised high-ranking officers including generals who were heavily involved in the sedition. The second group consisted of those accused of mid-level treason and who were to receive median punishments. The third group, which was also the largest in number, was made up of soldiers suspected of minor complicity and involvement. The latter ended up being removed from their posts.

In the case of Deputy Muhammad Latif, not only did he not join the Indian National Army, he remained a Japanese prisoner until the end of the war. Such a charge should never have been levelled against him. But due to the false testimony of a Hindu inmate, he too was removed from his position. Forced into a new job shortly before Partition, he was working as a pilot for a company in Bombay which had bought some surplus American airplanes such as the L-5 after the war had ended. These planes were then sold for Rs

5,000 each to various interested parties. It was through Muhammad Latif's efforts that the community bought its first L-5 airplane. Like everyone else, the community paid Rs 5,000 for it.



I had been back in Delhi for only a few days, this was either at the end of July or the beginning of August 1947, I do remember that it was Ramadan as I was fasting, when I was woken up one night by a visitor from Qadian. My residence back then was in the house of Sahibzada Mirza Munir Ahmad in Ballygunge. The visitor handed me a letter from Sahibzada Mirza Bashir Ahmad<sup>ra</sup>, telling me to go to Lahore immediately and fly the community's L-5 plane to Qadian, which was stationed in Lahore's Walton Airport under the supervision of the CAA. Along with his letter was a letter of authorisation to the manager of Walton Airport permitting the delivery of the plane to me.

Early the next morning and without informing the airline I was working for, I made my arrangements to go to Lahore. I took the Indian National Airlines flight to Walton Airport in the afternoon and from there went by coach to Faletti's Hotel. The coach I was on had a permit to travel during the curfew in the city and I was able to spend the night at Faletti's and the

next morning, again by coach, I returned to Walton Airport.

Upon taking delivery of the plane, I found that its tyres were almost flat, its batteries were dead and it was covered in dirt. In those days, due to civil unrest, it was difficult to find any workmen. I spent half a day patching up the plane myself and managed to get it airworthy. I also succeeded in getting it reasonably clean, though in the process I became filthy myself. By afternoon the plane was ready to fly and I had been able to locate a map. Despite never having flown a plane of that type before, I was able to manage a test flight. After that, taking Allah's name, I flew to Qadian and reached there in 45 minutes.

I knew where I was supposed to land in Qadian, but on my approach, I saw that what looked to be a clear landing strip on the eastern side of Darul Anwar was at closer inspection 9 inches of mud due to recent rains. There were deep ruts in the surface and the plane slipped from side to side as I applied the brakes during the landing. Once I had made my descent, I taxied slowly to an open plot in Darul Anwar to park the airplane. After getting out, I stuck spikes into the ground at the tips of both wings and tied the wings to the spikes with rope so that the aircraft would not move if there was a



strong wind. I then went to report for my duty.

I learnt that Sahibzada Mirza Nasir Ahmad<sup>ra</sup> would have charge over the plane. He was at the time the president of Khuddamul Ahmadiyya and was also supervising the security arrangements in Qadian. With his permission, I spent the next few days flying over the environs of Qadian for an aerial survey. On a map, I marked the villages near Qadian which had Sikh majorities, villages with Muslim majorities and those with Muslim minorities that were susceptible to violence. Villages in which Muslims were outnumbered had already begun to be attacked with homes being set on fire. The rising smoke from these flames could be seen from numerous dwellings many miles away and livestock would graze freely in the fields without anyone to tend to the animals.

A jeep-type vehicle belonging to Khuddamul Ahmadiyya was also conducting a land survey of villages near Qadian. I would often see them from my airplane. Whenever I was needed, they would wave a small flag and I would land in a nearby field. After listening to their reports I would immediately return to Qadian. Sometimes, I would have to land in such narrow places that it would be difficult to take off again. On many occasions, I was close to crashing into

the trees. I usually met up with the ground survey team when they saw a group of armed Sikhs moving towards a Muslim village.

When the Sikhs began attacking Muslim villages near Qadian with greater frequency, many refugees came to the town for shelter and as a result the Muslim population there increased considerably. This meant that not only was there a soaring demand over the food stocks of the community, this also angered the local Sikhs who felt threatened by the build-up of a large Muslim centre in an area which they felt belonged to them. However, they could not do anything about it because it was assumed by everyone that Qadian was to become part of Pakistan. But on 17 August 1947, in what was a grave injustice, the Boundary Commission placed Qadian and its environs in India. This emboldened the Sikhs within the area and opened the way for more disturbances.

One day, we received news that Sikh horsemen had attacked five Muslim villages in Aliwal near Batala and were committing a massacre. I immediately flew there and saw many Muslim homes on fire. The bodies of men, women and children were strewn in the courtyards of these residences. The only thing I could do against this was to buzz the horsemen. Buzzing means to fly an aircraft low and fast over people to shock and

disorientate them. I made this manoeuvre repeatedly. Those Sikhs who were on foot ran away and hid while those on horseback dispersed in different directions. I buzzed one of the horsemen so low that it terrified his mount and the animal flung him hard onto the ground. Seeing this gave me a great deal of satisfaction.

By the third week of August, burning villages and rising smoke were so common a sight that the flames could be seen from Amritsar to the River Beas. Livestock numbering in the hundreds of thousands grazed freely in the area. It was both frightening and painful to see and yet we would have to look upon such terrors on an almost daily basis.

After 17 August our air surveys were discontinued. Since Qadian was now a part of India, we had to fly more frequently from Qadian to Lahore and back. Each day we would take a worker of the community to Walton Airport, who carried with him important papers, documents, records and funds belonging to Sadar Anjuman Ahmadiyya and Tehrik-e-Jadid, as well as detailed accounts, historical records and photographs. The community worker would spend the day in Lahore taking care of essential business and then return to the airport late in the afternoon before being flown back to Qadian around sunset. On the return journey, the

worker would bring back necessary items purchased in Lahore because it had become almost impossible to go to Batala or Amritsar to buy certain essentials required by the community. After a few days, there was a change to this routine and the worker from Qadian began to stay in Lahore overnight while we would fly back with the worker who had come the previous day. In this way, whoever was sent to Lahore would get a whole day in the city, rather than just six or seven hours.

It is hard to explain just how difficult it was to receive technical assistance in Lahore immediately after Partition. For example, it was difficult to find anywhere to recharge airplane batteries. There was a devoted Ahmadi named Muhammad Latif who owned a shop in Lakshmi Chowk where car batteries could be charged. He had rigged a special circuit in his shop where, whenever required, the community's airplane batteries could be restored to power. Many years later he closed this shop and today his sons have a car dealership on Jail Road called Latif Motors. I always keep Muhammad Latif in my prayers and also pray that his sons are successful in their trade.

One morning, just before our daily flight from Qadian to Lahore was set to leave, Huzoor called me to his office in Qasr-e-Khilafat. He told me that I had

to take the thing he held most precious in his life to Lahore. I was instructed to diligently protect it and deliver it to Shaikh Bashir Ahmad, who was at the time the local head of the community in Lahore, by calling him to Walton Airport. He also said that I had to tell Shaikh Bashir Ahmad to safeguard this item in his, that is Huzoor's, own words. I was to then take a receipt of delivery from him and come back and give it to Huzoor.

Owing to the immaturity of youth, I had the rather silly notion that perhaps Huzoor was entrusting me with a box of jewels. However, after giving me my instructions, Huzoor got up and from the next room brought me a small canvas travel bag that had seen better days. Even its zip was broken. The bag was full of papers. Huzoor placed it in front of me and said that though a part of the *tafsir* of the Holy Qur'an that he had been working on had been published, another part of the work was still not printed and the major portion of it had yet to be written. Since writing this *tafsir* was one of the major objectives of his life, he said that he had a habit that whenever a new insight came to him regarding an explanation of a verse of the Holy Qur'an, whether by day or night or during any sort of engagement, he would write it down on a

piece of paper and put it into this bag. This way, the new interpretation would be preserved. Despite the disorderly way the papers were placed, it was clear that they were very precious to Huzoor.

I took the bag and flew to Lahore. I dropped off the community worker at Walton Airport so that he could go about his work. I then went to the control tower and phoned Shaikh Bashir Ahmad, asking him to come to Walton Airport immediately. I also told him that I had brought something important from Huzoor, which I could only hand over to him in person. Thankfully, there was no curfew in place on that day.

The area between the Lahore canal and Ferozepur Road where Walton Airport was located was not heavily built up. One could see the traffic on Ferozepur Road from the airport tarmac. Shaikh Bashir Ahmad reached the airport within 45 minutes. Standing close to my plane, I saw his car turn towards the airport's main gate. As he drew near, I took out Huzoor's bag and placed it on the tarmac. After we greeted each other, I nodded towards the bag and told him in Huzoor's words the importance Huzoor had placed on its safekeeping. I handed it to him, and received a signed receipt. I then told him to wait with the bag while I went to the control tower to run an errand. He waited for me in the same

spot with the person accompanying him. By the time I came back, the previous day's worker had also arrived. With that I took leave of Shaikh Bashir Ahmad, certain that he would have safely secured the bag in his car.

After he had left, I made preparations for take off. As a matter of habit, I looked in the rear view mirror and there I saw Huzoor's bag sitting on the tarmac at a short distance from the tail of the plane. I was so shocked I did not know what to do. Shaikh Bashir Ahmad had left 20 minutes earlier. Unlike today, back then there were no mobile phones with which to call people. And even if I hurried to the control tower to phone him, he would not yet have returned home. Perplexed by the situation I got out of the plane and stood on the tarmac. I hoped that once he arrived back, he would realise he had left the bag behind and would return for it. But by then it would be too dark for me to fly back as there were no flares in Qadian for night landings.

In a state of deep dismay, I suddenly saw a car turning left off Ferozepur Road and coming again towards the airport's main gate with such ferocity that two of its wheels lifted off the ground. Fortunately, the car did not turn over and continued roaring towards us at great speed. It was then that I recognised Shaikh Bashir Ahmad's car. A sense of gratitude to Allah arose

from the depths of my heart. Shaikh Bashir Ahmad rushed out and could not contain his remorse. He was extremely thankful that I was still there and the bag had not been lost. When he saw it on the tarmac, he was able to breathe a little more easily. He picked it up and said farewell to me once again before leaving in his car. I thanked Allah and we flew back to Qadian.

After reaching Qadian, I went straight to Sahibzada Mirza Bashir Ahmad<sup>ra</sup> and told him what had happened. He urged me that under no circumstance was I to tell Huzoor that Shaikh Bashir Ahmad had forgotten the bag at the airport. Therefore, when I met Huzoor, I gave him the receipt but did not mention the incident to him, neither at the time, nor afterwards.



Three more things need to be mentioned about this period. First, for private airplanes, there was a strict system of rationing. The quota for our L-5 was 4 gallons of petrol per week which was insufficient for our needs. We required 12 gallons just to fly from Qadian to Lahore and back.

At Walton Airport there was a Shell petrol pump for small airplanes. The person who managed it was a young Anglo-Indian man who lived with his family in a house at the airport. There were no shops between



the canal and Ferozepur Road intersection until Model Town and beyond. For this reason, the young man had to go into the city to get food and other sundries. But due to the almost daily curfews, he found it difficult to purchase provisions.

When I first went from Delhi to Walton Airport to take delivery of the L-5, the young man in question had helped me a great deal. As our acquaintanceship grew, I offered to bring him rations and other necessities from Qadian. I told him that if he let me know a day in advance, I could bring him meat, vegetables, eggs and baked goods. He was so pleased by this arrangement that in exchange he said that he would allow us to purchase as much petrol as we required, without any permits or vouchers. He would also adjust the paperwork for it himself.

From then on, I brought him rations from Qadian and he in turn gave me an unlimited supply of fuel. I would fill the plane's 35 gallon tank at the end of each day, 6 gallons of which would be used during the flight back to Qadian. There, with a rubber tube, I would remove 20 of the remaining 29 gallons from the petrol tank and store it in a drum. Nine gallons would be left in the tank for the next day's journey to Lahore. Since I flew to Lahore daily, I added 20 gallons to our stocks

every day. I did this in case conditions deteriorated and petrol was no longer available in Lahore. This way, the community would have a sufficient stock of fuel in case of emergency and our plane would not be stranded in Qadian.

The second thing I want to mention is that there was a young Hindu man in Lahore who had completed his flight training and longed to join one of the main Indian airlines. He also owned an L-5. Since his training was done, he wanted to sell his plane to us. Though its engine was in a somewhat worse condition than the one in our plane, having flown 300 more hours, he was still asking Rs 5000 for it and was not willing to lower his price. Finally, with Huzoor's consent, I accepted his offer and we purchased the plane for the community. He handed it over to our possession, but said that he would provide the registration papers once he had received his payment. Unfortunately, due to growing unrest in Lahore, he left for India before we were able to pay him. Later, when I told the CAA in Pakistan about this, they issued new registration papers to us. In this way, a second L-5 was obtained by the community at no cost at all.

Third, just as we had acquired a second plane, Deputy Muhammad Latif resigned from his job in

Bombay and returned to Lahore. He would go on to fly the second L-5 plane to Qadian with me. From here on in, I would fly one plane and he would fly the other.



The first people to migrate from Qadian to Lahore left on 25 August 1947. Most of the female members of the Promised Messiah's<sup>as</sup> family were part of this group including his widow Hazrat Amma Jaan<sup>ra</sup>. The car at the head of the convoy was a blue Dodge wagon which belonged to Sahibzada Mirza Mansoor Ahmad. His wife, Sahibzadi Nasira Begum, had three days earlier given birth to a baby boy, Mirza Maghfoor Ahmad, who later became a surgeon in the US. Therefore, a thick mattress was laid out on the floor of the car for mother and child to lie on.

That day, I was also flying to Lahore from Qadian. I recognised the convoy between Amritsar and Batala from the blue Dodge. Even though I had no such orders, I decided to land in a field near the road the convoy was travelling on. I left the plane's engine running and walked a few steps towards the head of the convoy. The cars also stopped when they saw me. Since everything was in order, both the convoy and I continued to Lahore. When I reached there, I phoned

Shaikh Bashir Ahmad and communicated to him that the convoy was well and told him when it was scheduled to arrive.

We had always assumed that our stay in Lahore would be temporary, and as soon as conditions improved, we would return to Qadian. It never crossed anyone's mind that this would be a permanent migration. On 31 August 1947, Huzoor also reached Lahore by road. He did not come in a convoy. Instead, he was accompanied by a military escort, led by an English commando. Back then, a number of British officers were in both the Indian and Pakistani armies.

In early September, the East Punjab government issued orders to impound our planes. The orders came when both Deputy Muhammad Latif and I were on our way from Lahore to Qadian. We each carried a community worker with us, as well as some essential items. The police officer who brought the order, first went to the office of Khuddamul Ahmadiyya and showed the papers to the person in charge. The staff members in the office knew we were expected to reach Qadian shortly. Therefore, they quietly told four khuddam to hurry to the landing site and warn us, as soon as we arrived, to unload the items we were carrying and then immediately return to Lahore. The

moment we landed, the khuddam signalled to us not to turn off the engines. They quickly removed the relevant items from the plane and helped the passengers off. Back in the office, the officer and the other policemen with him were entertained with tea and various stories to divert their attention. The person presiding over the office kept them there as long as it took for us to fly back to Lahore.

Even after this incident, I flew from Walton Airport to Qadian daily to survey its environs and check if there was any threat to the town. I would also look out to see if the daily convoys of Ahmadi refugees going from Qadian to Lahore faced any difficulties. But after a few days, I had to halt these flights because the police and army units in Qadian had started firing at my plane. You cannot hear ground fire from an air force plane due to the noise of its engine, but in a small plane like mine it was possible to hear machine gun or rifle shots.

The first time I was fired at, I was miraculously saved by Allah. The top half of my L-5 cockpit was made of perspex. The windows could be opened inwards and buttoned at the bottom. I often flew with both the side windows buttoned down, meaning that they were kept half open. The roof of the cockpit was

also made of perspex through which it was possible to get a good view. On that day, while conducting an air survey over Qadian, I flew very low from TI College towards Minaratul Masih. When passing near to Reti Challah and just above the police station, I heard the sound of gunfire from below towards my left. However, by chance, I chose to look out of the window towards the right to see what had happened. I suddenly heard a short explosive sound and felt pieces of perspex fall from the cockpit's roof to the left of my neck. I also felt some movement in my hair on the left side of my head. I quickly took control of the plane and increased the altitude, turning rightwards at the same time. I then looked up at the roof and saw a hole where a bullet had passed through at exactly the place where my head should have been. Passing a hand over my hair, I felt that some of it had been singed. It was truly a miracle that my head had not been straight or tilted to the left at that precise moment. If it had been, the bullet would have gone straight through it and I would never have been able to write these memoirs.

There was a passenger in the back seat who had accompanied me to see Qadian. He also realised that something perilous had happened, but was not exactly sure what. He gestured to me with his hands, and I did

the same in an effort to tell him that we had been shot at. However, he was unable to understand my signals. I immediately changed our direction and flew towards Pasrur rather than Lahore. Worried that the lower part of the engine might have been hit and that it might fail at any minute, I felt that the best thing to do was to enter Pakistani air space so that if a crash landing was required, it could be undertaken in Pakistani territory and the closest point to the border was near Pasrur just by the Ravi River. I breathed a sigh of relief when we reached the Ravi and then I flew along its western bank until we arrived at Walton Airport in Lahore and landed safely.

After we had touched down, I explained to my companion that we had been shot at and showed him the hole in the cockpit roof and the burnt hair on my head. He fainted in shock and fell on the tarmac before coming around a few minutes later. He had accompanied me with great enthusiasm on what for him was a 'sightseeing' tour of Qadian. Prior to the trip, he had spent days asking me to take him on an air survey. But after this, he swore off from ever flying with me again.

A second miracle happened a few days later in early September. Huzoor needed to send an important

letter to the administration in Qadian. I suggested to him that if we made a tricolour streamer, I could put the letter in it and drop it on the field in front of TI College where Khuddamul Ahmaddiya had set up a temporary camp, and that way the administration in Qadian would receive it. We used to do this during the Second World War when we had to send important messages to our commandos hidden in the jungle on the Burma front. For this we would need a canvas bag about 9 inches by 12 inches, with one side open which could be closed with a button. The opposite side would have three coloured streamers—blue, red and yellow—4 inches wide and 3 feet long, sewn onto the bag at one end and free at the other. When the bag would fall, not only would the streamers help secure it, but they would make it visible over a long distance.

Overnight, members of the Lahore Lajna Ima'illah prepared two bags made to our specifications. I put Huzoor's letter in one of them, took it to Walton Airport and started off for Qadian. Since I was certain that I would be fired at, I did not take anyone else with me. I also decided to fly low to avoid being seen from a distance. My plan was to fly straight to the TI College field and drop off the streamer so that by the time the police and soldiers were ready to open fire, I



would have made the drop. Afterwards, I would return immediately to Lahore again at a low altitude.

While I was still a few hundred yards away from my target, I flew a little higher and the sound of machine gun fire broke out to my left. Thanks to Allah, despite facing a barrage of bullets, my plane was not hit. I continued to fly ahead and, when I was about 100 feet above the target, I dropped the streamer. I then turned rightwards and returned to Lahore. Later we learned from a telephone call that Huzoor's letter had reached the intended recipients.

But the story of what exactly happened in Qadian after I had made my drop was only relayed to us when those who were on the ground that day finally came to Lahore. This too was an extraordinary episode.

There was another field slightly north-west of TI College and north of the Jamia Ahmadiyya building, where there was a military and police check post. It was from here that my plane was fired at. When I dropped the streamer, two khuddam on duty saw it fall and ran towards it. However, at the same time, two officers also rushed towards the streamer. They reached the site where the Jalsa Salana used to take place and where the khuddam were present and ordered them to hand over whatever had been dropped from the plane.

Because of the height of the trees, it is unlikely that the officers had seen anything drop out of the plane themselves. They must have assumed this to be the case. The khuddam answered that they had nothing with them. Not believing them, the officers conducted a search but could not find anything on their person.

After they had left, the khuddam anxiously looked for the streamer which they had clearly seen fall from the sky. They thought it might have landed further away and went ahead in search of it. When the officers were finally out of sight, the khuddam were approached by a young boy of about 10 or 11, dressed in shorts and a dirty shirt. He lifted his shirt, took out the streamer and handed it to them. He told them that the streamer had fallen near him, but because he had seen two officers approaching, he quickly wrapped the streamer around his body and covered it with his shirt. In this way, Huzoor's important message reached the administration in Qadian. To this day I do not know if that boy was an angel or just a very intelligent child. I have never been able to find out who he was.

The third miracle happened a little while after Huzoor's arrival in Lahore, probably in the third week of September. In those days a convoy of refugees arrived in Lahore from Qadian almost every day and each convoy

comprised hundreds of men, women and children. The convoys usually started from Qadian in the morning and reached Lahore in the evening.

One day, a convoy did not arrive and Huzoor was extremely concerned. By nightfall we were unable to determine its whereabouts and Huzoor called an urgent meeting. Someone suggested that we could fly an airplane over the area and search for it with a flashlight. I replied that because it was dark, I would have to fly at a minimum height of 500 feet. In addition, an ordinary flashlight was of no help. As a point of interest, when a plane lands at night, it has all of its landing lights on, the intensity of which is about 20 million candlepower whereas a flashlight would only have about 50 or 60 candlepower. I also told him that our small plane could take off and land at night if the runway was lit, but it had no instruments for navigating in the dark during the flight.

Despite this, I decided to fly out and look for the convoy. Huzoor's anxiety made my decision for me. I could not bear to see him like this and it gave me all the courage I needed. Sahibzada Mirza Munir Ahmad also decided to come with me on this mission. A few years earlier, he too had received some flight training, before eventually deciding to pursue a career in business.

The two of us along with a driver took the community's jeep and drove to Walton Airport. We went straight to the airport manager's home and apprised him of our situation. He told us that, officially, we were not allowed to fly at this time because the airport, and more importantly, air traffic control were closed. But if we wanted to go out at our own risk, then we would have to light the flares needed for take-off and landing at both ends of the runway ourselves. He pointed us to the store where the flares were kept and told us to collect them.

The three of us got into the jeep, collected the flares, and then took them to the start of the shorter runway. Unlike today, where every runway is fitted out with permanent electric lights, back then we used flares that somewhat resembled the fabled lamp of Aladdin. They relied on kerosene oil and had thick cotton wicks which were lit with a match like a lantern. Even in strong winds, these flares did not go out, so once they had been used they had to be extinguished manually. The night was dark and despite having our headlights on, we had great trouble finding our way. After almost an hour, with all three of us working together, we managed to light up enough flares to allow our L-5 to take off and land.

Unfortunately, the airport manager had not told us that there was a Dakota-type airplane parked in the middle of the short runway. Nor did we notice it ourselves. Perhaps he had assumed we would use the longer runway. But I chose the shorter one to save us time as it was closer to where the flares were stored. Therefore, we failed to see the plane, even with the headlights of our car on.

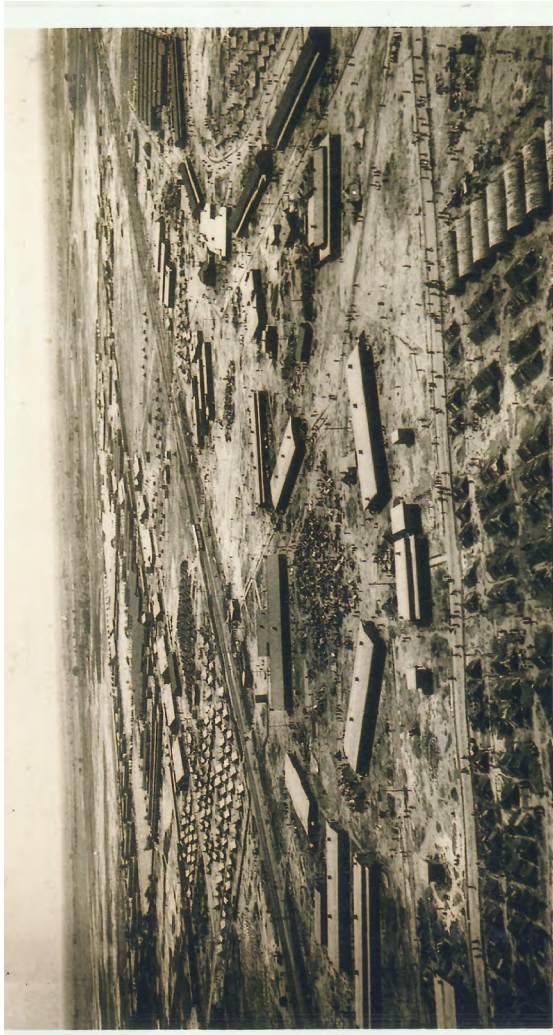
Later we found out that the Pakistani government had chartered a dozen Dakota-type airplanes from the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC), the forerunner of British Airways, through the British government, and these planes made daily flights from Delhi to Lahore and back to Delhi. These were passenger planes reserved for government officials and their families who were coming and going from Delhi to Lahore. On that particular night, one of the planes had engine trouble and could not return to Delhi, therefore, it had been left on the short runway.

But there was another peril ahead of us which we were soon to discover. There was a large refugee camp near Walton Airport where the railway line running towards Karachi was situated (this area is now called Bab-e-Pakistan, the gateway to Pakistan). Back then, hundreds of thousands of Muslim refugees, mostly

from eastern Punjab, had come to Pakistan. They had brought with them livestock in the thousands which now grazed on both sides of the railway line. As there were no arrangements for their containment, the livestock would often wander over to graze in the fields between the two runways of the airport.

Oblivious to both these dangers, Sahibzada Mirza Munir Ahmad and I got ready and boarded the plane. I started the engine and taxied towards the smaller runway. After checking everything, I revved up for take off. We had perhaps moved 150 yards when, with a sharp bang, we crashed into something. The plane's nose fell against the ground, the tail rose and we somersaulted forward. We landed upside down and continued skidding in this position before eventually coming to a stop. Despite receiving injuries to both knees, I quickly unbuckled my safety belt and ran away from the plane as fast I could, fearful that it would catch on fire from the petrol pouring out of its tank.

However, within moments, I had to rush back because I realised that Sahibzada Munir Ahmad was still in the plane. He was lying head down trapped in his seat. With the plane upside down, his seat was 10 feet above the ground and he could not open his safety belt. With my help, he was able to get out, or



Aerial view of the refugee camp adjacent to Walton Airport—September 1947. (Author's collection)

perhaps it would be more accurate to say, he was able to fall out of the plane. The aircraft, however, was totally wrecked. I put the torch on to find out what had caused the accident. To my surprise I saw that it was a cow. Half of its body lay near us while the other half was sprawled 50 yards behind where we had hit it.

After taking in the scene, we proceeded to walk down the runway. We must have gone about 100 yards when a soldier told us to halt. We went closer, turned on our torch, and saw the BOAC airplane ahead of us. The soldier who had stopped us was guarding it. Seeing the plane shook both of us to the core. If Allah had not sent the poor cow to save our lives, we would have hit it with such speed—almost 100 miles per hour—that both our plane and the other one would have been blown to bits. Allah be praised, He truly saved our lives in a miraculous way that night.

However, we were not out of the woods quite yet. The sound of the crash caused members of the airport staff to come out to where we were. The airport manager recorded the flight in his report as being both illegal and unauthorised. Other than that there was not much else he could do. It took us a long time to put out the flares and take them back to the store. We returned to Ratan Bagh, where Huzoor was



staying, at a very late hour.

In the morning Huzoor learnt of what had happened. In his heart he must have been relieved that we had not been harmed. Outwardly, however, he was furious with us for breaking the discipline of the community and for not obeying his instructions. The previous night he had told us to stop by Chaudhry Zafarullah Khan's home on our way to the airport and find out if he had received news of the missing convoy. If any information had come to him, we were supposed to abort the assignment. Shortly after we had left for the airport, Chaudhry Zafarullah Khan had phoned Huzoor and told him where the convoy had stopped and that it was safe and would reach Lahore the following afternoon. Thus our night-time mission to find the convoy had been in vain. The reason we had not stopped by Chaudhry Zafarullah Khan's house was that we did not want to disturb him so late into the night. However, we ended up receiving our due punishment for disobeying Huzoor.

After this accident, we were left with only one airplane. However, by then, Deputy Muhammad Latif had taken leave with Huzoor's permission to look for a job. So just as the community was left with one airplane it was also left with one pilot—myself.

A few days later, we received news that in a place called Ajnala which was within the boundaries of the new Indian border north-west of Amritsar, hundreds of Muslims were trapped in their houses because Hindus and Sikhs were conducting a blockade of their town to starve them out and kill them. Huzoor was very upset at this news and immediately ordered the community in Lahore to prepare thousands of rotis in the langar khana and make small provision packs. I was told to fly to Ajnala and drop these packs on the roofs of the Muslim homes that were under siege.

We took a large number of packs by jeep to Walton Airport. I was helped by Huzoor's driver, Nazeer. He and I filled all the space behind the back seat of the L-5. We flew to the designated area, and with great care, dropped the packs in twos and threes over the houses. The people below were so desperate with hunger that whenever a person picked up a pack, someone sturdier would snatch it away from them. In this scrimmage, many of the provisions were wasted. The staff at the langar khana had also made the mistake of making the packs out of old newspapers. As soon as they were dropped from the plane, the paper would fly off and the unwrapped rotis would land on the ground. Despite this, these deprived people were still able to

receive something to eat. We returned to Walton to pick up more packs and after four flights all of them had been distributed.

## *War in Kashmir and Rejoining the Air Force*

Some time later, in October 1947, war broke out in Kashmir. I had to fly the community's airplane to Sialkot and Rawalpindi numerous times as the Grand Trunk Road between Lahore and Gujranwala was broken in many places or submerged in water due to flooding. Most of these flights were undertaken on official business of the Muslim League or the administration of Azad Kashmir.

Towards the end of October 1947, Huzoor was informed that the de Havilland company had four Fox Moth airplanes for sale in their all-India office in Karachi. These planes had been initially imported from Canada by a Hindu party. They had arrived by sea in containers and were now finally being assembled at Karachi Airport in a hangar owned by de Havilland. During Partition, the Pakistan government had forbidden these planes from leaving the country, making it necessary for de Havilland to sell them within Pakistan. The price for one airplane was £2000 or Rs 29,200. Two of the planes had already been bought by the government of Sindh

for the Chief Minister, Muhammad Ayub Khuhro.

When Huzoor found out, he immediately sent me to Karachi with instructions to buy both the remaining planes. One would be for the community which it would pay for. The other would be for the government of Azad Kashmir and they would make the payment for the purchase. Back then, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was to some extent involved in the administrative affairs of Kashmir.

I remained in Karachi for many weeks. Once both planes had been assembled and our test flights were completed, they were registered by the CAA. I then flew the first plane which belonged to the community to Lahore via Jacobabad and Multan. A few days later, I returned to Karachi by train and flew the second plane by the same route to Lahore and then on to Chaklala Airport in Rawalpindi. The Azad Kashmir government had an office in Rawalpindi and I handed the airplane over to them. Unfortunately, the administration did not take care of its plane. Both its flight and technical supervision was under the care of unskilled and negligent personnel. The result was that within two months the plane was involved in two accidents, in the second of which it hit a tree on taking off and

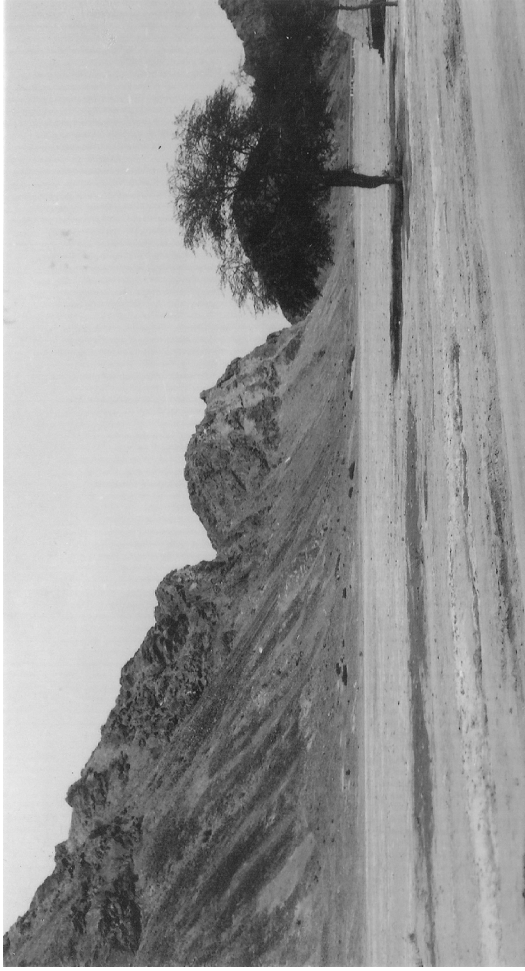
was destroyed. Thankfully the pilot suffered only minor injuries, but the plane was a total write-off.



The Fox Moth had a passenger cabin immediately behind the engine. One of the seats had its back to the engine meaning that it faced the tail. Opposite to it was a slightly longer seat where two passengers could sit facing the front of the plane. Behind the passenger cabin was the pilot's cockpit, which had a sliding top. There was a small round window between the cockpit and the passenger cabin and the pilot and passengers could communicate by signals or by passing notes. Like the L-5, the Fox Moth's average flying speed was slightly over 125 miles per hour. However the L-5 was a monoplane while the Fox Moth was a biplane. The L-5's engine was quite powerful given the plane's size and weight. The Fox Moth was slightly underpowered.

The community had two airplanes once again. For a few months the needs of the community and the Kashmir War kept us heavily engaged. However, with time, communications in Pakistan started to improve and the need for these airplanes began to diminish.

I remember when Huzoor went to Rabwah for its inauguration in June 1948. Two days earlier, I had flown to Rabwah in the Fox Moth and landed in the



Rabwah in 1948. (Author's collection)

spot where Qasr-e-Khilafat now stands. At that time both this area and the area where Darul Sadar, the Sadar Anjuman and Tehrik-e-Jadid offices and the homes of community workers now stand, was an uneven rocky field. After staying there for a few hours, I laid down some chalk lines on the ground with the help of a community member to mark off a future landing ground for Rabwah. This, however never came to fruition.

On another occasion, when Huzoor was going on an official tour of Sindh, I flew to Karachi via Multan and Jacobabad. After that I flew to Hyderabad and Kunri. Since Huzoor's residence was 25 miles to the north in Mahmoodabad State, his estate in interior Sindh, I rode there by horseback and with the help of Syed Abdur Razzaq Shah we prepared a landing ground very close to Huzoor's office and residence. I rode back to Kunri and flew the plane to Mahmoodabad. After a few days I flew back to Lahore via Karachi.

On my return to Lahore, I made many flights for the community. This was in 1948 when the community had sent an infantry battalion of Ahmadi volunteers (the Furqan Battalion) to join the Pakistan Army fighting in Kashmir. The training centre for the Furqan Battalion was a few miles south of Sarai



Alamgir, on the banks of the River Jehlum. Whenever I flew between Lahore and Rawalpindi on official work, I would fly over the centre and buzz them. The Furqan Battalion was led by Colonel Muhammad Hayat Qaisrani. They were on the front line during the Kashmir War and not only defended their territory with great determination, but performed as well as any battalion of the Pakistan Army.

On one occasion, Huzoor flew with me in the Fox Moth from Sialkot to Lahore. Accompanying him were his wife Syeda Mehr Apa and his daughter Sahibzadi Amtul Basit. For technical reasons, Walton Airport was closed that day and we landed in the Lahore Cantonment airport which back then was an Air Force base where civilian craft were not allowed to land. On another occasion, I was supposed to fly to Quetta in Balochistan, but due to floods in Sindh and roads being blocked, I had to leave the plane in Jacobabad in Sindh for technical reasons.

In 1950, Huzoor decided to sell both of the community's planes. Flying the planes in turn, I took them to Karachi. The community in Karachi tried to sell the planes according to Huzoor's instructions, but could not find any buyers. In addition, the cost of parking them and maintaining their flight worthiness



Wing Commander S M Ahmad. (Author's collection)

was very high. Huzoor eventually decided to donate both planes to an organisation.

Afterwards, Huzoor allowed me to return to the Air Force where I served from 1950 to 1965. I retired after the 1965 War. During my time in the Air Force, I was an instructor at the Operational Flying School before taking command of two different fighter squadrons,



FLC at RAF West Raynham, 1953. (Author's collection)

the No. 5 Squadron which was the second jet fighter squadron of Pakistan and the No. 15 Squadron.

In 1952, I first attended the Instrument Rating Examiners (IRE) course at RAF Station Syerston in Nottinghamshire, followed by the Air Gunnery Instructor's Course (AGIC) and the Central Gunnery

Command (CGC) at RAF station Leconfield, Yorkshire. In 1953, I attended the Fighter Leaders' Course (FLC) at the Central Fighter Establishment at RAF station West Raynham, Norfolk.

I then commanded the 33 Jet Fighter Wing. At the same time I was a member of the Pakistan Air Force's famous aerobatics team, the *Falcons*. On 2 February 1958 this team made aviation history when a formation of 16 F-86 Sabres performed a simultaneous loop. I still have a photograph of it.

In 1958, I graduated from the Air Force Staff College with the *PSA* symbol (BSc in War Studies). From 1960 to 1963, I spent over two years as an instructor at the Army Command and Staff College in Quetta. My final posting before retiring was as head of one of the branches in the War Planning Department of Air Headquarters in Peshawar.

It is now 2010 and, at the age of 86, I am in America, at my daughter Dr Ayesha Ahmad's house, writing down my memories of things that happened over 60 years ago. I feel it is important to record these events so that future generations might come to know of what happened in Qadian in 1947 and be acquainted with the story of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community's small fleet of airplanes.



Loop performed by 16 aircraft—the author's plane is in the centre column, third from the front. (Author's collection)



## Glossary

**Furqan Battalion or *Furqān Battalion*** (فرقان بٹالین) the Furqan Force or Furqan Battalion was a volunteer military unit which was formed at the request of the Pakistani government to help Pakistan in the fight against India during the First Kashmir War.

**Hazrat or *Hadrat*** (حَضْرَت) an honorific Arabic title.

**Jalsa Salana or *Jalsah Sālānah*** (جلسه سالانہ) the annual convention of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Often shortened to just jalsa.

**Khalifa or *Khalifah*** (خَلِيفَةُ) a term used for Islamic spiritual leaders, particularly the successors of the Holy Prophet<sup>sa</sup> and the Promised Messiah<sup>as</sup>.

**Khalifatul-Masih or *Khalīfatul-Masīh*** (خَلِيفَةُ الْمَسِيحِ) a title conferred on the spiritual successors of the Promised Messiah<sup>as</sup>.

**Khuddamul Ahmadiyya or *Khuddāmūl Ahmadiyyah*** (خُدَامُ الْاِحْمَدِيَّةِ) an auxiliary youth organization of the

Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

**Khuddam or *Khuddām*** (خدام) members of Khuddamul Ahmadiyya.

**Lajna Ima'illah or *Lajna Imā'illāh*** (لجنه اماء الله) an auxiliary organization for the female members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

**Langar Khana or *Langar Khānah*** (لنگر خانہ) commune kitchen.

**Roti or *Rotī*** (روٹی) a flat bread commonly eaten in the sub-continent which is part of the staple diet.

**Sadar Anjuman or *Şadar Anjuman*** (صدر انجمن) the central administrative body of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

**Tafsir or *Tafsīr*** (تفسیر) Arabic word for exegesis usually of the Holy Qur'an.

**Tehrik-e-Jadid or *Tehrik-e-Jadīd*** (تحريك جديد) the central administrative body of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community for foreign missions.







