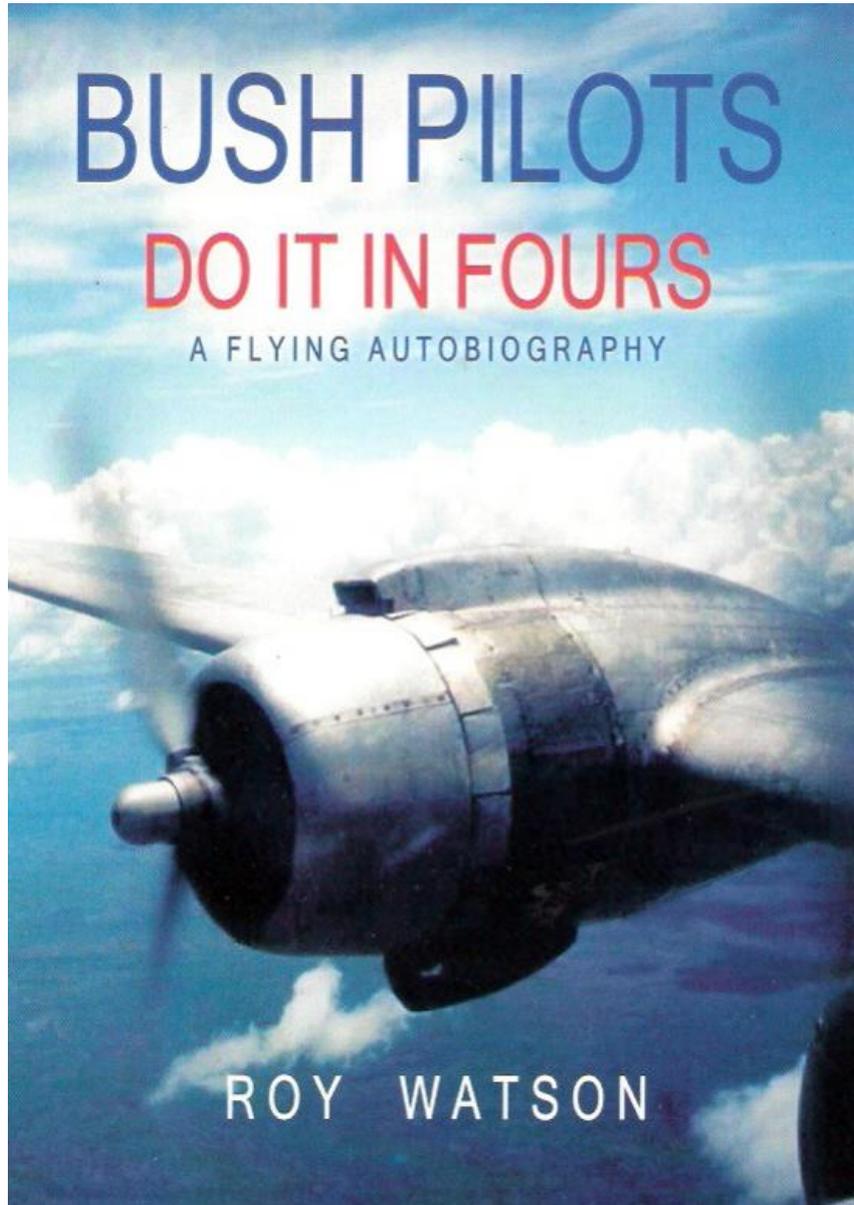


## EXTRACTS FROM 'BUSH PILOTS DO IT IN FOURS'

A flying autobiography

by Roy Watson  
Published 2006



Bush Pilots do it in Fours follows Roy Watson's flying career and his fascination with all things airborne, from the very first steps through the restoration of a Tiger Moth, Aeronca and Zlin and some exposure to aerobatics in these 'older' flying machines.

Thereafter, it moves towards larger aircraft, with his experiences maintaining Hawker Siddeley 748s. Roy was heavily involved in establishing an airline, specifically aimed at supplying food, to impoverished Africa and a close involvement with Russian Aircraft and Douglas DC-4s. What follows is his first taste of true 'bush flying', which evoked a distinct passion and love for the DC-4 (which inspired the title of the novel itself).

The novel finally ends up with the challenging repair and subsequent conversion onto the Boeing 707. The flying exploits vary from humorous undertakings and happenings with his elderly light aircraft up to major expeditions in commercial airliners stretching from the Antarctic as far as the Northernmost Parts of Africa. Roy describes many incidents in the air, on the ground, and with the local population in a light-hearted and entertaining light that is sure to evoke a smile or two.

**What follows are extracts from the book that covers Roy's years with de Havilland Tiger Moths, The Johannesburg Light Plane Club and the old Baragwanath Airfield.**

## CHAPTER 2

On the appointed day we all arrived at Baragwanath Airfield. Bearing in mind that I had not seen a small airfield other than Rand at the air show, it was another new experience and I felt in my element as we walked up to the training school with the aircraft parked out on the apron. The atmosphere driving up to the flight school and inside the school was captivating. The aircraft that Dad had organized was a four-seater, and so there was a seat for me, as well as the two Americans. Other than one airline flight to Durban as a child, I had never been in an aircraft and the prospect was awesome. We walked out to a low-wing aircraft that we were told was a Piper Cherokee. I did not even know how to get into an aircraft. Nick showed us how to climb onto the wing and open the door. Thomas, the exchange student, and his girlfriend climbed into the back seat and Nick got into the left seat. He told me to get in next to him and close the door. I stepped down into the craft and settled into the seat and pulled the door shut. He leaned over me and showed me how the double latch at the top of the door worked. I looked with amazement at the array of instruments, and was particularly surprised at the duplicate set of controls in front of me.

We all strapped in as instructed, and Nick started the engine. He explained the basic controls to me and told me to put my hands lightly on them to feel how he taxied. I did so and was soon taxiing on my own. He explained how I must break the urge to try to 'steer' with my hands, and to steer only with my feet on the rudder pedals.



My first flight with Nick

It brought me back to the time I read about aircraft controls in Dad's old book 'Dykes Aircraft Engine Instructor' that had a section on the theory of flight. I used to climb into the big tree in our backyard, get myself comfortable and sit reading technical books for hours. The information that had been carefully filed away in my brain now came alive.

As we taxied down to the end of the runway, Nick explained how to take off into wind, how the circuit was arranged and a few other basics. He carried out his checks, tested the engine and we taxied onto the runway. To my complete amazement he told me to continue holding the controls and he would talk me through the take-off and only assume control if it became necessary. He opened up the throttle and we accelerated down the runway. At the correct moment he told me to pull back the control column and I heaved back for all I was worth. My youthful glee at the prospect of leaping into the air did just that and with lightening reaction Nick pushed the stick forwards to save the day. Calmly, and with a degree of understatement, he explained that such drastic movements would leave us all in a pile of bits on the runway. I had no idea how gentle a pilot's movements must be. In fact it was a valuable lesson in how an aircraft must always be handled with care and respect.

## CHAPTER 7

I followed Uncle A inside and he introduced me to Harry Sharman, who operated the outfit. I soon realised that he had the most amazing vocabulary, and that the rules of his speech obviously required him to use the more colourful side at least as often as punctuation. The resulting adjectives emanating could easily strip off a good coat of paint! He was the official maintainer of the JLPC (Johannesburg Light plane Club) fleet. The two Tigers that the club had were ZS-DLK and ZS-BSF. Harry proceeded to explain to us that 'BSF had some years earlier suffered a broken crankcase and as such was in pieces.

What transpired was that the pilot had a propeller break on him and he was not quick enough to react to the situation and throttle back. The result was a cracked crankcase. I put myself in the pilot's shoes and could not imagine how I would cope in a similar situation. The vibration must have been horrific, I wondered if he still had some teeth in his head.

As we looked at the sorry sight of 'BSF lying in pieces all over the hangar, Harry kept on explaining the situation. The club's demand for Tiger flying had dropped off and as a result they had cannibalised 'BSF to keep 'DLK flying. They were looking at selling off what remained of her.

"What," I thought, "is going on here, how do I fit in?"

They started talking price and soon a figure of R500 was thrown about. As an illustration of current value, I can barely fill the Tiger's tank for that amount today.

Uncle A took me outside and said. "You have always said that you want a Tiger, now we will see how serious you are. What I propose is that we get her together. I have two engines that have been taken out of the Dragonfly and we could use one of them. If you are prepared to undertake the rebuild, I will put in the engine as my part to offset your work."

I could not believe what I was hearing. As he continued to explain that he was a licensed maintenance engineer and had cut his teeth on Tigers at de Havilland, my ears and eyes nearly burst from their sockets in exuberance. I could not wait to get home and see my folk's reaction.

We left the airfield and my mind was soaring. We arrived home and I burst in on Dad, blurting the whole thing out. Once all the garble had been straightened into a sort of logic, my father came forth like was his form. Being the most wonderful father he came up with the support that all dreamers dream of. Not only did he readily come forth with the required R250 for my share, but he was fully supportive of all my efforts in all the years to come.

As I write these words some 35 years later on, it is quite ironic that my Tiggy has just undergone her second rebuild in my ownership and both my sons are itching to get their conversions on her.

We then made a second trip back to Bara, this time accompanied by a truck that Arthur had arranged. At Bara we started the loading process. All the major components were easy to identify and we were aware that many instruments and undercarriage components were missing, but some smaller ones that were not readily apparent slipped through our net. Later we were to meet the Strecker family in our quest for spares and establish a relationship that was to test the passage of time.

Even though overjoyed at the acquisition, it would be many years before I realised that I was only 17 years old and embarking on such an ambitious project was quite unusual. I was in first year engineering at university and with all my rebuilding interest, it just seemed natural to me. This was just going to be another rebuild project, although this time without four wheels.

When we got home I proudly walked in with a most tremendous grin to announce our arrival. Everybody came out to see this amazing 'aircraft'. Although Dad was right behind me, I am sure that the general feeling was not a reflection of my own optimism. We offloaded and made a huge pile of bits in the back yard. All I can recall is a mixed feeling of intense happiness and confusion, with little idea of where to start. I was blindly confident that, with Uncle A's help and Dad's support, anything was possible and that I would succeed.



Stored in a friend's garage

## CHAPTER 12

The day of the air show and race dawned and my whole family came out, suitably equipped with a whole picnic. In those days the clubhouse was very small and there was a small lawn in front of it. Rocky and I left the family to settle on the lawn and we went to check up on Tiggy, who had been out all night after the scrutineering. She was all safe and sound with all the other competing aircraft, although we were not allowed access to her till later. By this time the whole field was buzzing with activity, the organizers were putting the final touches to the barricades and the stall operators were laying out their wares. There was a constant stream of visiting aircraft coming in to land, adding to the atmosphere.

When we could get to her, we proudly put the race number on the tail, did our pre-flight checks and, at the required time, moved her to the flight line. In due course Rocky pulled over the prop and our world sprung into a life of vibration and wind. We taxied out in our allotted turn and waited for our flag-off time. We sat there idling with scarcely enough flying time left to get a good flight of butterflies going in our stomachs. I remember being flagged off and opening the throttle with gusto. We had not been restricted at the briefing on our first turning point. We were taking off on the old runway (35 I think it was) and so barely halfway down we had the tiny red and white striped control tower on our left.

I approached the tower, knowing that we would be well off the ground by the time we reached it. I saw it coming and as soon as I drew level, I cranked the stick to the left and heaved back. I remember thinking that I would go through the floorboards, and my vision went a bit funny. I realised at that point that I had overdone it a bit, but to my surprise, she did not bat an eyelid. We executed the sharpest, smartest 90-degree turn that I would have imagined possible.

With my heart in my stomach, the adrenaline pumping through my veins and the wind whistling past my ears, I straightened up and set course for Baragwanath. As we passed over the suburbs rather sedately but somewhat lower than normal, my thoughts wandered. I suddenly realised how close I had been to creating an ugly spectacle as I turned after my take-off. I wondered if Rocky knew how close to disaster we had been. I am sure that it was a classic case of ignorance being bliss and that he was none the wiser!

Getting closer to Bara the housing density decreased, and so did my height, but I was aware of the minimum height on the turns being at 300 feet above ground. I flew towards the windsock (the turning point) and as soon as I got overhead pulled into another knife-edge turn. This was what Arthur had said would minimise time loss in the turn. I knew that I was 300 feet up so I felt much better than at the start. As we set course on the next leg to Vereeniging I got bold enough to try the low stuff. At the new height the whole vista changed from the normal cross-country view. The horizon got so close that it was like looking out of an upstairs window, and the trees became huge monsters looming over us. The only thing was that we were now hurtling along the ground at little short of 100 miles per hour. There was no way that I could do anything except keep my wits about me and keep the aircraft in the air. Rocky seemed confident that he knew where we were and so I had to leave it at that. With the coarse prop, I was flying at full throttle and she was not exceeding the rev. limit, so I kept up the monstrous pace.

I watched the trees and fences come hurtling towards me, and eased the stick back just to slide gently over them and resume our low-flying crouch on the other side. My mind was so busy with the task at hand, just keeping us safely in

the air, that I had no thoughts of navigation. Rocky kept a calm, continuous report of where we were, so much so that I was not sure whether to be amazed at his talent or just consider us lost.

Soon enough his credibility was reinforced as he called the approach to the next turn. I eased the stick back to regain our 300 feet minimum and executed another bone-jarring turn onto the next heading. With a gentle descent we were on the next leg.

A handicap air race is based on the aircraft being set-off at different times to attempt a simultaneous arrival at the finish. To achieve this, the speed obtained on the test flight is used to calculate the expected flight time. This time is taken from the finish time to give each entrant's start time. Thus the first aircraft over the finish line has beaten their handicap time by the greatest margin and so is the theoretical winner. As a result you don't see anyone until close to the end when everyone tends to bunch up.

Our last turning point was Krugersdorp, and as I approached, I saw my first fellow competitor ahead of me. I had a bit of height as there were a number of industrial buildings below and I looked at the high wing aircraft ahead of me to try my aircraft recognition skills. As we both approached the turning point I realised that potentially we would be there together. My problem, however, was that the Air Navigation Regulations say that I must overtake on his right. If I did that I would then risk cutting inside the corner, unsafe, and risking disqualification. I guessed that perhaps this was different and so planned to pass him on his left. As we approached I saw that it was a J-3 Piper Cub and as we turned simultaneously I passed him on his left. I could not believe that anything was so slow, and I seemed to scream past him, waving as I did. The little yellow bird seemed so effortless and gentle with the 65 hp motor protruding from the sides of the nose. I could only presume that he also was doing all he could, but the ease with which we passed him was amazing.

As we crossed the mountain ridge, I looked at my compass to make sure that I was on track, and as I looked up I saw the valley beyond the ridge. It was a beautiful sight, the squares of farmland in the lush valley were all different shades of green and it all unfolded before us like a patchwork quilt.

The final leg to Grand Central was relatively short and I looked back to see how the J-3 was doing. He had already dropped back quite substantially and I saw more aircraft in hot pursuit. Too far away to recognize, some of the black dots were obviously coming up at a great rate of knots. I checked the throttle to see if there was any more travel, but alas it was fully open. I adjusted the mixture to get a few more R.P.M. to strengthen my position but no, all I could do was to fly as smoothly as possible and helplessly watch them pass me. I maintained the ridge height and looked ahead, wondering about the merit of going lower to benefit from the compression effects of the air under my wings. I was weighing up the situation in my mind, my main concern being that of fuel. We knew that it was critical, and I was reminded of that as the indicator attached to the float bobbed up and down, only just visible. When the indicator disappeared completely we would have 20 minutes of flying time left.

As we crossed the last ridge I realised that it would be wiser to keep the height that I had, as an engine stoppage at zero feet would be a bit embarrassing, to say the least. As I looked ahead I saw a glint on the horizon, I checked my compass, and yes, I was on track. As I strained to identify it, I saw a few specks also concentrating on their progress. Looking back I saw the specks of the pursuing aircraft getting bigger. Would they pass me before I got to the finish? Who were they? They were too small to recognize. Could I pass any of those ahead of me?

Heading straight towards the glint, it seemed likely that it was in fact the reflection of the afternoon sun on the hangars. As we got closer, this was clearly the case as the airport became identifiable. The sky was filled with aviators stretching their machines to their limits. There were eight ahead of me, and a whole gaggle behind. This got the adrenaline going in my blood again and I eased the stick forward to best utilize all the energy I had. The aircraft ahead were at a variety of heights with a number visibly below the specified 300 feet.

My final attempt at pipping the others to the post resulted in me zooming over the finish line at hanger height to finish 9th. I was ecstatic.



"Tiggy" at Baragwanath

## CHAPTER 16

Baragwanath itself was also going through some changes. The airfield was being cut down in size and the old hangars and T-hangars to the East were being replaced by a new series alongside the runway. The future looked good, the clubhouse would remain untouched and the only real loss was the cross runway. There were a number of members who did not even fly but used the club rather like a country club.

The club was accommodated in the most magnificent, thatched building that had a large lounge with a lovely fireplace at one end and an adjoining, well supported, dining room. On the weekends the dining room used to produce the most wonderful homemade meals, and in the evenings in winter we used to sit round the warm fire with our sundowners. The overall result was that one felt truly at home and like a family. Outside the main building were a series of 'igloos' for out-of-towners to rent. I always got the impression that there were more full-time residents in them than there were visitors.

It was a very active sport aviation club, the home of the Johannesburg Light Plane Club, and it supported two parallel runways. The larger runway was hard paved and was used for the power aircraft, while the other runway was used for the gliders. Consequently, the power circuit was always to the East and the glider circuit was always to the West. It was quite something getting used to flying on base leg, about to turn onto final, looking at a glider coming towards you on his base leg.

It was not long before we were officially notified that both the races had been cancelled. Disappointed, we had no option but to sit on the grass under our aeroplanes, bemoaning the weather and watching a handful of commercial fly-pasts keeping the crowd amused. I wandered over to the large hangar and saw Hansie Haraf, the Aero Club chairman. I had met him previously with Dad, and so greeted him and commiserated with him over the unfortunate situation caused by the weather. He vocalised how distraught the organisers were at the way it was turning out. I had a suggestion. With the enthusiasm that is only brought about by the naivety of youth, I suggested that, as the Tiger Moth race was cancelled, we should replace it with a pylon race. He emphatically rejected my idea, pointed out that pylon racing had been banned since before the war and wondered if I was crazy.

"Was I talking on behalf of the entire group of Tiger pilots?" He inquired.

I said that I certainly could not talk on behalf of every pilot, but those that I had spoken to were very keen to participate. As I looked north I saw Brixton tower.

"We can do our first turn around there," I said pointing and looking to the West I continued," and then we could fly around Orlando Power Station and back here. A few laps of that I am sure will keep the crowd cheering and us pilots happy."

We parted company, with me having firmly planted a seed that I was sure would grow over the next hour or so, and him shaking his head at us pilots. All I had to do now was to get the word around to all the Tiger pilots. I was confident of success.

While we were idly chatting and watching the remnants of the air show, I repeated what I had suggested to Hansie, and explained my thoughts to the group. A few enthusiastic pilots soon got the mood going and it was not long before all the Tiger pilots were right behind me. All we had to do was wait. I was confident that before long we would be called.

Some time later Nick Turvey caught up with me. As I had expected, out of desperation, the organisers had reluctantly agreed with my pylon race concept. Nick had been sent to find me and arrange a briefing outside the large hangar.

I rushed off and soon gathered all the Tiger pilots together to attend the briefing. I will long remember Nick's face as he gave the briefing. Concern was written all over it as he talked to us. His reservation about the race was clear as he told us not to go anywhere near Brixton Tower, but to turn around the end of the mine dump on the extended centre line of the runway. There was already a marshal on his way to the end of the dump to erect some sort of marker. From there, as per my original suggestion, we would turn around the towers at the power station. Thereafter we would return and turn around the old control tower on top of the hangar. Five laps of that would keep us happy and should keep the crowds cheering.

His final words were: "Remember chaps, be careful, don't crash, its ugly."

To this day those words will ring in my ears every time the situation warrants it. He then produced a hat and we were invited to draw a number to get our starting positions. He then got more marshals together and left us to our own thoughts and preparations.

Like a group of naughty school kids, we chatted as we wandered back to our aircraft to get ready. A marshal was due to flag us off in the order that we had picked out of the hat. We lined up all the Tigers in that order and waited with butterflies doing aerobatics in our stomachs. We all donned our flying kit and were soon ready to go. We each looked enviously towards the lucky guy at the front who drew number one, and waited. The marshal, with a white flag, got into position and we all strapped ourselves in and waited for our respective starters to swing our props. As the aircraft engines started one by one the number one guy was flagged off.

I cannot remember my position among the 15 Tigers, but I just remember being near the end. Tigers surrounded me, with their engines running, and my brother was swinging my propeller for me. For the first time ever my Tiger would not start promptly, with all the noise he must have been unable to hear the fuel while he was priming, and flooded her. Murphy was against me. I watched in horror as a string of aircraft took to the skies ahead of me. At last she fired. I was last in line. I taxied immediately to the runway and lined up on my take-off roll. As I turned I remember seeing three aircraft all with their wheels on the runway simultaneously.

The last aircraft was still on the runway as I slotted in, with my throttle fully open, and began to raise my tail as the speed built up. I was on my way. As she picked up flying speed I kept her low to allow the speed to build up and also to cope with the slipstreams of the other aircraft. I headed straight for the mine dump with all the speed I could squeeze out of her.

As previously, I was using the Dragonfly propeller giving me a good turn of speed (in Tiger terms of course!) at the expense of my climb. Heading straight for the mine dump I saw the turning marker ahead, and as soon as I got there I pulled into a steep turn, and set sail off on the next leg for the cooling towers.

Another max rate turn over the towers and I was on my way back to the 'field, heading straight for the little object on the top of the hangar. At this point I must explain that the old control tower was a small hut perched on top of the hangar roof on the centre of the crown. Up the side of the hangar, and running along the one side of the roof to the hut, was a long staircase with a handrail along the outside.

A number of newspaper reporters had congregated inside the hut, in their efforts to get the 'perfect' shot, and as I pulled into a steep turn just above the hut, I had a wonderful view of a bevy of bodies tumbling down the staircase. They were obviously setting themselves up and had been totally petrified by the sight of the crazy airmen (and one woman) in the biplanes approaching at eye-level as fast as each entrant could go. I watched a human cascade pouring down the stairs and across the hangar roof all fighting to exit as fast as possible. I must say that even though the moment of rounding the corner was tense, it brought quite a grin to my face and perhaps had a little to do with how low I was.

We then proceeded to repeat the course for another four laps. I recall trying so hard to pull up a few places. One turn over the control tower with two other machines was quite dramatic. On one lap as I approached the hangar it became evident that three of us would arrive simultaneously. As we got closer we all maintained our positions and started an

unplanned, max rate, formation turn. I remember Myrtle was above me as we turned and I looked down at the other Tiger below me. All three of us were in perfect formation, in a near vertical turn and I remember thinking what would happen if one of us slipped or skidded in the turn.

Between the mine dump and the cooling towers, we flew over a long slimes dam (a long narrow dam of slurry deposit that gradually hardens), and I was trying all I could to get a few extra m.p.h. out of her and to save a few seconds on each turn. As I roared along the slimes dam on each lap I got lower and lower, trying to increase the benefit of ground effect. At the edge of the dam I saw a ridge of bushes presumably growing on a mound of soil. On each lap I pulled up slightly to clear it, each time getting a little bolder (or more stupid depending on how you see it!). On the penultimate lap I was as pleased as punch, I had passed a few machines and was somewhere near the middle of the field. I was just clearing (or so I thought) the bush when there was a sharp bang and I felt the whole aircraft shudder. I had collected the bank!

I had no option but to press on, still trying my utmost until I crossed the finish line. Then my thoughts would concentrate on the landing task ahead.

On the ground things were happening as well. The table where the DCA (Division of Civil Aviation) officials were sitting had been placed directly in line with our route between the hangar and the mine dump. As we came out of our turn over the hangar we had the full height of the hanger to convert into speed as we zoomed down low over the airfield to again get max benefit from the ground effect. Our minds were far away from DCA and their table. In fact, as we passed over them, they were getting spattered with drops of oil, and their tempers were being tested. Nick told us afterwards that they were jumping up and down, calling to stop the race. He just maintained, with a smile on his face, that he had no communication with us and in any event anybody with a radio would have it off or not listen to it anyway. So the race continued unabated.

As I came over for the last time, my family saw long tentacles hanging from my undercarriage and they were a bit perplexed. They were not privy to DCA's tantrums (probably so much the better) and so were only concerned about the bits hanging from the underside, wondering what it was, and what it meant.

Back in Tiggy, as I completed the last lap, I continued straight on to join the circuit. The undercarriage is not visible from the cockpit of a Tiger and so I had no idea what the state of it was, and even if it was all still there. All I could do was continue and make the gentlest landing ever and hope for the best.

I will never forget the hollow feeling as I rounded out and held the stick back for my landing. With glee and relief I felt both wheels contact the runway. I taxied off the runway and, as soon as I could before getting back to the crowds, I stopped and got out to assess the position. The axles were covered in mine dump sand but fortunately there was no sign of damage. I brushed off all the sand and removed the few bits of remaining foliage and taxied sheepishly up to the apron.

## **CHAPTER 18**

One of the Baragwanath stalwarts was Bob Hay. He got his Tiger Moth a few years after I did and we had often attended events together. He and I had become close friends over the years. He bought his Tiger from Mozambique and rebuilt it himself and then moved it directly to Bara to get her flying. When I moved permanently to Bara, our time together increased and the friendship was sealed.

At Baragwanath, because we had a number of active Tiger enthusiasts, we often had formation flying sessions, and usually both of us were part of the goings-on. One of the members of the group had a video camera, quite a modern innovation at that time. We used to practice while he would video us. After the flight we would congregate in a hangar where he had set up a television screen. We would then be able to have a constructive de-brief, something quite new in the times of the 8mm movie camera! We also frequented various air shows with the group, or even occasional ad hoc excursions, as the mood would take us.

I always loved formation flying, and to this day it is a wonderful exercise. It demands a fair concentration in the air and a thorough briefing before taking off. Flying formation on another aircraft demands looking at them the whole time, to the extent that one has to rely implicitly on the leader's judgement. The leader on the other hand has to fly as if the formation is one huge aircraft, taking all obstacles and limitations into account. It becomes apparent that each pilot must have great confidence and trust in the leader. With it all together, flying along, the feeling of being the components of a huge flying machine takes some beating.



## CHAPTER 21

We were always supporters of the air-show circuit, and at the height of it there was a small air circus going. The 'Pomp and Jive Air Force' was the name coined by the mainstay of the aviators at Baragwanath Airfield. One of the acts in the 'Air Circus,' that had been an old favourite in the past, was 'Snoopy'. Although we had always flown in and often done some formation flying, I had not been actively involved in the show acts, and so my time had now come. I was to be involved in recreating the Snoopy act as well as a balloon-busting act for an air show in Pietersburg.

The balloon act involved a wing walker and Dave, one of the enthusiastic pilots, was 'volunteered' for the job. As I had not taken anybody on the wing anywhere near the ground before, and Dave had not done any wing walking at all, we embarked on some practice. Both of us were very cautious and so it all started with quite a serious briefing. I showed him safe footholds and where not to stand, and then we went to Tiggy to try it out.

With memories of a Tiger dropping into the trees, I opted for Dave keeping on the walkway rather than on the wing itself. I was quite happy to do these strange things, but only if I could keep control of the odds against me by being cautious. My mind always reminded me of the saying: "There are old pilots and there are bold pilots, but no old, bold pilots."

'Daring Dave', as he became known, was required to stand on the aircraft and shoot at a row of balloons with a revolver in one hand, while holding the nearby strut with his other hand. While all this was taking place I would fly the aircraft low over the 'Snoopy Kennel'. The balloons were attached to the house with short strings and as soon as I lined the aircraft up he would shoot at the balloons. Most of the time, as soon as the puff of smoke passed me, I would see the one of them pop, and I would zoom up for the next pass. After the weekends practise, his shooting got quite good and I was happy flying with him on the wing. We were ready for the show...

Once we had all got ourselves together, the show was ready to begin. We watched the glider being towed up to open the show. Dave and I were next, so we taxied to the holding point and got ready. I took off and as soon as I was safely aloft, Dave got out onto the wing and braced himself. As I flew alongside the runway, Dave levelled his revolver at one of the balloons attached to the Snoopy Kennel. On each pass as soon as I saw the puff of smoke I would pull up for another pass. On almost every pass I would see the balloon burst as the revolver barked. After his last shot he got in and we landed. We taxied up to the cheers and whistles of the appreciative crowd. With the inner warmth it gave us, we knew that our first act was a success. I parked and we got out to watch the next few commercial aviation slots and flypasts.

Next up was the Snoopy bit. I took off on my own while the crew on the ground buzzed around the kennel getting ready. When they indicated that they were ready, I turned and zoomed at the Snoopy figure atop the kennel to the sound of 'my' rapid machine gun fire added over the public address system. As I turned, I could see Snoopy waving his fist and dragging along his big cannon. With only my wooden floorboards to protect me from it, I made another low pass. As I approached I saw Snoopy bending down over the cannon getting ready to fire. I passed low over the white figure and with my hand outside dropped my bomb over the side of the fuselage. Looking back I saw the explosion and almost at the same time heard the sound of his big gun having a go at me. Dust and smoke poured out of the

muzzle as I turned for the last pass. I saw Snoopy waving a white flag in surrender. I had won. I came in to land and for the second time that day taxied up past the cheering crowd.

This was the usual type of participation in the air shows. Obviously we were not using anything other than blanks and pyrotechnics but the effect was good and the spectators loved it. Dave was our pyromaniac and as he got more into his pyrotechnics, the displays got even better. I remember a show at Grand Central where the grass caught fire (our occupational hazard) and the huge dedicated aircraft fire engine appeared to put it out. To the organiser's embarrassment, all that emerged from its automatic systems was a pitiful trickle, and we all ended up beating the fire out ourselves.