



BIGGIN HILL AIRPORT BUGLE

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BOB NEEDHAM INCURSION Our very own Aussie aviation correspondent formerly Biggin Hill – Zimbabwe (*Rhodesia, as most of us prefer*) sends this picture of an Australian built fighter trainer aircraft, the Wirraway. It is claimed that one of these, actually shot down a Japanese Zero – must have been a lucky shot considering the performance comparisons.



The Wirraway had a 7 cylinder radial producing 600HP whilst the Zero had a 14 cylinder 900 HP engine. Bob forgot to include a complete picture of the Wirraway, which was produced under licence from NA Aviation in their hour of need.

The picture of Bob was taken recently at Luskindyre aerodrome (*home of the Aussie Tiger Club*) near Maitland in the Hunter Valley. The name Wirraway is an aboriginal name meaning ‘Challenge.’

Bob has also sent a following article which explains the definition of the word ‘Aviator.’ This is a true account developed over some 400 years of military interception and several invasive follies into unknown hostile territories. These first pioneers of

flying required no medical examination or flight training all Danger Areas unmarked at this period in time were just prior to their first landing and where one needed to be to surprise the enemy

Origin of the word ‘AVIATOR’

This is an absolutely true story as verified by the bartender at the O’Club. For all you history buffs, here is some useful information

Aviators come from a long line of a secret society, formed around one thousand years ago.

They were warriors, and here is the proof! Ground pounders can read and weep!

A little known fact is the origin of the word, “Aviator.”

In the immortal words of John Bryan: “I did not know that.”

the name of Phu Khen.

A ‘Khen’ was a subordinate to a ‘Khan’ (pronounced ‘(konn’) in the military structure of the Mongol hordes. Khan is the Turkish for leader. Most know of the great Genghis Khan, but little has been written of his chain of command.

Khen is also of Turkish origin, although there is not a word in English that adequately conveys the meaning. Roughly translated it means, “One who will do the impossible, while appearing unprepared and complaining constantly.”

Phu Khen was one of the ten Khens that headed the divisions, or groups of hordes, as they were known, of the Mongol Army serving under



Phu Khen (pronounced Foo Ken) 1169-? is considered by some to be the most under-recognised military officer in history. Many have never heard of his contribution to modern military warfare. The mission of his society is to bring honour to

Genghis Khan. His abilities came to light during the Mongol’s raids on the Turkistan city of Bohicaroo. Bohicans were fierce warriors, and the the Turkistan city of Bohicarro. Bohicans were fierce warriors, and the city was well fortified. The

entire city was protected by huge walls and hordes were at a standoff with the Bohicans. Bohicaroo was well-stocked and it would be difficult to wait them out. Genghis Khan assembled his Khens and ordered each of them to develop a plan for penetrating the defences of Bohicaroo.

Operation Achieve Victory (AV) was born. All 10 divisions of Khens submitted their plan. After reviewing AV plans 1 thru 7 and finding them all unworkable or ridiculous, Genghis Khan was understandably upset.

It was with much perspiration that Phu Khen submitted his idea, which came to be known as AV8.

Upon seeing AV8, Genghis was convinced this was the perfect plan and gave his immediate approval. This plan was beautifully simple. Phu Khen would arm his hordes to teeth, load them into catapults, and hurl them over the wall. The losses were expected to be high, but hey, hordes were cheap! Those who survived the flight would engage the enemy in combat. Those who did not? Well, surely their flailing bodies would cause some damage.

The plan worked and the Bohicans were defeated. From that day on, whenever the Mongol Army encountered an insurmountable enemy, Genghi Khan would give the order, "Send some of the Phu Khen AV8-ers."

This is believed, though not by anyone outside our secret society, to be the true origin of the word "Aviator (AV8-er)".

Phu Khen's AV8'ers were understandably an unruly mob, not likely to be socially acceptable. Many were heavy drinkers and insomniacs. But when nothing else would do, you could always count on an AV8-er.

Phu Khen Aviator. Denied, perhaps rightfully so, his place in history,

Phu Khen has been, nonetheless immortalised in prose.

As the great poet Norman Lear never once said:

*There once was man named Phu Khen.
Whose breakfast was whiskey and gin
When e'er he'd fly, he'd give a mighty war cry;
Bend over, here it comes again*

Consider it an honour to be a Phu Khen Aviator. Wear the mantle proudly, but speak of it cautiously. It is not always popular to be one of us. You hear mystical references, often hushed whispers, to 'those Phu Khen Aviators.'

Do not let these things bother you, as with any secret society, we go largely misunderstood, prohibited by our apathy from explaining ourselves.

You are expected to always live down to the reputation of the Phu Khen Aviator - a reputation cultivated for centuries, undaunted by scorn or ridicule, unhindered by progress. So drink up, be crude, sleep late, urinate in public, and get the job done. When lesser beings are offended, you can revel in the knowledge that YOU are a PHU KHEN AVIATOR!

'OTTO' THE CLUB DOG DIES



For those that remember 'Otto' (named after John 'Otto' Grubb) another of our well known members. Otto passed away on the 14th June, he was 17 years old.

He resided at Pilots Pals for many years in his bed under a small table near the entrance. He would often have a good slurp of beer before retiring for the night in a rather intoxicated state.

Any other time whilst sober, he would have your fingers off if you were to interfere with his privacy whilst in his bed.

The Bugle is always on the look-out for interesting true stories, so don't be shy, send the details to johnbryan13@sky.com if you can't remember the complete details of such a story, we know others that can probably provide further information long forgotten, and make it into a true story.



AMARJIT SINGH BAMRAH
Singh came to England some 40 + years ago and has spent most of this time at Biggin Hill building an Empire in aviation almost larger than the Raj of India. Singh also possesses a majestic persona equal to that of the Taj Mahal.

'Pilot' magazine published an enlightening article in their June issue of Singh and his achievements (including his family) about Falcon Flying Services.

The article is reproduced as published for our Bugle readers only, who are world-wide and often do not have access to the Pilot magazine, (*which rapidly sold out for the month of June 2011*) Nothing has been altered or added to this June 17, 2011 publication.

BIGGIN HILL'S VERY OWN "SINGH" BAMRAH!

Article reproduced from June 2011 issue of Pilot Magazine



The Falcon family

Engineer and entrepreneur Amarjit Singh Bamrah has battled prejudice and bureaucracy to establish a thriving training company - this is his story

Words & Pictures Nick Bloom

In 1972, a 22-year-old Sikh from Africa graduated as an aviation engineer from a college in Scotland. Armed with A, C and X (airframe, engine and compass) licences, he set out to find employment. Jobs were advertised for someone with his qualifications, but when he sent in applications everyone turned him down. The political situation in his native Tanzania prevented him from returning there, as had been his original intention. He had no choice but to earn his living in the UK by whatever means he could. So for the next year he worked the night shift – six in the evening until seven in the morning – at the McVities biscuit factory in Hayes. It must

have been miserable: menial night work, and living in a single room half a world away from family and friends.

Today, with his two sons Shonu and Anoop, the same man runs a successful aviation company that offers PPL and Commercial training, leases some 25 aircraft to flying clubs, schools and private owners, and employs ten engineers who maintain and repair aircraft. His daughter, Mona, is in her early twenties and works for Goldman Sachs.

To find out more about his extraordinary history, I've come to meet him at the family firm, Falcon Flying Services at Biggin Hill. His first name is Amarjit, but in the aviation community everyone knows him as 'Singh'.

So far in our conversation he has described a golden childhood. His father managed a saw mill and chipboard business employing 1,000 people. Singh had a sister and three brothers (he was the middle one).

He was a promising pupil at the German Catholic Missionary School, invariably top of his class. He was also a chess and cycling champion, and a master swimmer. By the age

of fifteen, though, classes were beginning to bore him and he began to be awarded B grades instead of As. Perhaps because he loved to build balsawood and tissue, rubber-powered model aeroplanes, his father decided that Singh should take his A levels in Britain – as a Tanzanian, he was entitled to a British passport – and then become an aircraft engineer. "Also, I think

the job sounded prestigious to him," adds Singh. His father decided what careers all his children should follow. Singh's brothers and sister went to study medicine in India, which was less expensive than sending them to Britain.

At 17 he arrived at Heathrow Airport. "I was astonished to see a white man cleaning the floor," he remembers, "and even more



PILOT PORTRAIT

amazed to see a white man clearing the toilet. Where I grew up, white men were the bosses."

A month or two later, while in a newsagent's shop he noticed an elderly lady looking at his turban. Eventually she came over. "Your poor head," she said. "I hope it gets better soon."

After a year of the two-year course at West Norwood Tech the family became aware that Air Service Training College might take Singh just on the strength of

been a bitter disappointment, I suggest. "It was, but I didn't allow it to get me down," says Singh. "My parents, especially my mother, wrote wonderful letters and they never lost their faith in me. I bought *Flight International* each week and applied for every one of the vacancies."

So why did it take so long to get a job? "Things were different back then. I think English people didn't know how to react to me," Singh replies, without rancour.

arrived with my tools and overalls, he took one look and sent me away."

I'm interviewing Singh in a busy office. The phone rings, engineers pop in, customers come and go and his two boys are intermittently present. One of them happens to be there when Singh tells me this story.

"Don't print that," say both father and son. They are anxious not to seem bitter. I remind them that it's all a long time ago and,

At the end of the year in the biscuit factory he was offered a job as an aircraft engineer. This was with Air Touring at Biggin Hill. What was it like? "I had a lot to learn about hands-on engineering," he says. "I was a mechanic learning the trade, working eight to five and living in a rented room nearby."

His life finally began to come together. In 1975 he learned to drive... and he got married. "It was an arranged marriage and all I knew about her until we met was that she lived in Nairobi and her father owned a Mercedes dealership there. We were allowed a twenty-minute interview before the marriage. I said I had no money and was living in a one-room bedsit. She said, 'It doesn't matter, I like you,' so it was agreed that we would marry."

As well as bringing up three children, Mrs Bamrah has stepped in occasionally to help run the family business, and even took charge of the flying school when it first opened. After the children left home, she announced that she intended to become a solicitor. Today she has her own practice, specialising in personal damages claims.

Singh learned practical mechanics quickly and became Air Touring's chief engineer in 1976, but, "I felt I was being paid below the going rate, so I thought I'd just start up my own business instead".

"We've got a common goal: we're focused because we want our family to do better. Our work is going to affect all of us, not just a bunch of faceless shareholders"

his O Levels. There would be no need for a second year at the Tech. Singh applied and was accepted, leaving London for Perth in Scotland. The course was excellent, he remembers, though the approach was rather military with a stress on discipline. The students, who lived in barracks, came from all over the world – no more than 10-15% were British.

Qualifying and then not being able to find an engineering job must have

And what was life like at the biscuit factory? "I've always been a bit lazy," he says (clearly untrue – but he is a modest man), "and my workmate and I calculated that if we worked furiously we could get ahead of the production line and catch 45 minutes' sleep several times during our shift. The biscuit tins rattled and made a noise that woke us up when it was time to get busy again."

Against the odds

During the year at the factory there was one cruel disappointment. For some reason, Singh telephoned first before sending in a job application (usually he just sent a letter). "The boss said, 'I'll take you. When can you start?' I said, 'Don't you want to meet me first?' He said no, and told me to come at nine on Monday. When I

however painful, race prejudice is part of the story. Later, they give me their blessing to keep the anecdote in.

Singh is a deeply spiritual man and there is little anger in him, nor in his sons. What measure there is, he regrets. For instance, in later years he again met the engineer who had sent him away when he realised that he had taken on a Sikh. Singh confesses to me that he reminded the man of their earlier meeting. "I shouldn't have done that, should I?" he asks. His repentance is visible in his face. I tell him it was a very small sin. "Is it, though?" he asks, still troubled.

Singh's patience was rewarded eventually.





Left "You should know what you sell": Anoop Bamrah, Flight Training Director - and Singh's youngest son - has completed 40 hours of his PPL training

He realised that dream in 1977, and so Falcon Flying Services was born.

Why 'Falcon'? "It was the symbol of a guru I admired," he says. Singh's religion is obviously important to him - there is a picture of another guru flanked by joss sticks in the company's hangar. When I ask one of the sons if Singh has any hobbies, he says, "Reading. He gets through a lot of books" - which, it turns out, are all spiritual texts. He doesn't watch much television - although he's a fan of *Planet Earth* and, perhaps surprisingly, enjoys action movies such as the Matrix trilogy. He has several close friends, and attends Temple once every fortnight.

Singh loves to fly. He obtained his pilot's licence in 1978 and has over 1,500 hours under his belt. He has flown the family on holiday many times, to Jersey, France, and the Isle of Wight. His favourite aircraft are the Piper Aztec and Arrow. Both of his sons are currently learning to fly.

One of Singh's greatest qualities is determination - and if anyone needed it, he did. When he was eight, a botched operation lost him the sight of one eye. Somehow this resulted in a CAA doctor classifying him as colour blind. It took four months' effort to break through the bureaucratic barriers, but eventually the classification was changed. Singh was given a Medical and was at last able to take flying lessons.

When Singh's business was up and running, a newly appointed CAA official arranged to have Falcon's licence withdrawn. Another long fight followed, and Singh was forced to enlist the help of a

solicitor. The CAA apologised, reinstated the licence, and shunted the official into another department.

Falcon Flying Services began life in a corner of a blister hangar, "just me and my toolbox". Perhaps inevitably, some past customers defected along with Singh, so he had no trouble finding work. "And I still don't, from that day to this," he adds.

Rival maintenance companies at Biggin Hill weren't too happy about the change. Singh reckons he was swiftly evicted as a result of their complaints. He bought a large box van and continued, using that as his premises. Then, in 1980, he was supported by the Civil Service Flying Club and the Metropolitan Police Flying Club in a bid to construct a hangar at Biggin Hill to maintain their aircraft. His bank turned down the request for a £15,000 loan (with Singh putting in £10,000), but his parents and the clubs came through in its place.

Keeping it in the family

At this point, Singh was living with his wife and first child in the three-bedroom house in Bromley that they had bought on a mortgage when they got married. "Houses were cheap then," he says. By 1980, things were going well enough for the family to move to a bigger property nearby. Anoop was born two years later, then Mona in 1987. Today the family has three houses in Bromley, Shonu has two young children, and Anoop is a newly-wed.

Ashley Soares, the company's chief engineer joined in 1990 and the company expanded into flying

training in the same year. That came about when the EFG (Experimental Flying Group), originally at Croydon, had its lease for sale. "That coincided with a demand by one customer that we paint the six aircraft we were leasing to them red," Singh remembers. "When I objected, the customer said, 'OK, take the aeroplanes back then,' so I did, and we started a flying school." The school is now run by Anoop, who took charge of the business six years ago.

Looking back, would Singh have chosen a different career? "No, I'd do everything the same," he says. "Aviation has such a buzz, you know. And you meet so many wonderful people. There are days when the sun is shining off whirring propellers... just seeing an aeroplane leave the ground is a miracle. I always marvel whenever I see it, even after all these years. I don't think I'll ever retire."

The late eighties and early nineties were probably the zenith of Falcon's fortunes (although a recent move into commercial flight training may change that). Singh explains: "The volume of work has fallen, both from flying clubs and from private owners. Things have declined noticeably in the last seven years as the costs of parking, hangarage and landing fees have risen. At one time we had 55 aircraft that we leased out and today we have 25. I remember an instructor in this office saying to me that he'd flown 180 hours in one aircraft in a month. Today you'd be lucky to fly twenty. Money was easier then and, with hindsight, maybe it was because people were living

Far Left Spirituality is very important to Singh, who named Falcon Flying Services after a favourite Sikh guru

Left Shonu Bamrah, who was just 12 when he first started flying, is now an engineer for Falcon – and he has ambitious plans for the business



beyond their means. One customer, a school, closed – they had fourteen aeroplanes. We lost £300,000 when they ceased trading.”

I ask Singh's oldest son Shonu, 34, how he came into the family business. “I knew from when I started coming here in the holidays as a schoolboy that I'd want to work here,” he says. “I liked the idea of being outdoors, not being cooped up in an office and travelling by air to different airfields to fix aeroplanes. I was twelve when I first took the controls – flying is in the blood.”

Shonu got his engineer's licences at Brunel University. “The paperwork really is the only downside,” he says. He has just flown his first solo, which he found both “scary and exciting”.

Looking to the future

Shonu is ambitious for the maintenance business and thinks that it should move into maintaining turboprops, “but we wouldn't want to leave the schools behind,” he adds. He recently introduced an ELT service centre into the family business, which has since helped to boost the turnover.

Shonu makes a phone call and his younger brother Anoop drives over from the other side of Biggin Hill Airport where he's been working in the flying school. Anoop is 28, but has already made a big mark on the business. After studying for an Entrepreneurship degree he worked briefly in the City as an IT consultant, but “when I was doing twelve hour days for someone else's

business, I thought, wouldn't it be better to do it for ours?”

He applied his business analysis skills to flying training and concluded, “ab initio training has low profit margins, is too seasonal and too vulnerable to unpredictable weather. Commercial training is better”. He recruited Bob Bolster – now Falcon's head of training – and between them they took on the challenge of winning the school an FTO. It came through last July and the company began with its first two FIC students early this year.

Anoop got married in June 2010. He's training for a PPL, currently 40 hours in – “you should know what you sell”, Anoop is the company's flight training director, and works closely with Singh and Shonu.

Having the brothers together, I ask how they get on with each other. “We're best mates,” they tell me.



Anoop says, “Shonu's kids are like mine, we're a very tight-knit family. Our three houses are quite close.”

“Dad's raised us to work as a team,” says Shonu. “We've got a common goal. We're focused on what we do because we want our families to do better. What each of us does is going to affect the whole family, not just a bunch of faceless shareholders”.

The three of them are keen that I should also meet their chief engineer, Ashley Soares, another graduate from the college at Perth, who has been with the company since 1986. Aged 46, he previously worked on light aircraft in Kenya and is married with two boys. He too is training to be a pilot. “I particularly enjoy teaching people,” he tells me. “Many of the engineers I trained now have jobs with the airlines. The only thing I don't like is the cold.”

Singh returns to the office at this point – he's been talking to a customer in the hangar – and chips in, “Me too. It's too bloody cold in this country.”

“What's your relationship?” I ask. “My brother,” Ashley answers. “My son,” says Singh, at exactly the same moment, and they laugh together.

Businesses based around light aircraft are notoriously fragile, especially in these tightened recessionary times, and only the strong will survive. Falcon deserves its success, and nothing could be a better guarantee for its future than the talented Bamrah family. Singh has much to be proud of. ■

Left Chief engineer Ashley Soares has been with the company for 25 years, and is also training for his PPL