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## The Fledgling Years - Wg Cdr C H L Digby

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*Those who have served in the Indian Air Force have made their marks in different ways. Some are remembered for being great pilots, of course, and some for being great commanders. A few are remembered for being effective administrators, or technical wizards, or for doing other unglamorous but valuable work outside public view. This is the story of a man whose major contribution - notwithstanding some highly effective episodes of squadron service and command - may have been in flying instruction, teaching others that fundamental Air Force skill. Here, then, is an encounter with one of the IAF's pioneer QFIs:*

*Wing Commander Cecil "Digger" Digby, IAF (Retd), a veteran of service from the 1940s to the 1960s,*

nonshu, which was to be their base for the rest of their stay.

### Pt Offr Digby in a Spitfire XVIII



From Miho, it was actually possible to fly to Korean airspace - the distance was just about 200 miles - and they would often do so. One of their primary tasks was in fact to patrol the seas between Japan and Korea, and interdict smugglers and illegal migrants originating from Korea. Japan was at the time (and still remains) highly sensitive about illegal Korean migrants.

Two squadrons of the Royal Australian Air Force, equipped with North American P-51 Mustangs, used to come to Miho periodically for range work. Digby does not remember the squadron numbers, but the Australian fighter squadrons which served with the Occupation Force in Japan were 76, 77 and 82 Squadrons, RAAF. (77 Squadron RAAF was to remain at, and fly out of, Iwakuni, up to and right through the Korean War.)

1946, he went for midnight mass, and took a Catholic priest from the 1st Section along with him. Probably knowing that Digby would be away for an extended period that night, Sqn Ldr Engineer led a group of the squadron boys in an episode of horse-play, during which they threw Digby's personal effects out of his room and into the snow.



L to R: Laurie Elkins, Tony Soares, Balan Dandapani, Cecil Digby, Unid'd signals officer.

From left Rampal, FS Hussain, Jeff Carlton, Balan Dandapani.



Pt Oftr Digby checks out the nuances of firing a Lee Enfield Rifle At the local shooting range in Miho. The imposing-looking standing figure is an RAF Armoury Sergeant



Digby says gleefully, "I got my own back during the New Year's Eve party!" He and Anthony "Tony" (aka "Sue") Soares were good friends, and during the party they stole into Sqn Ldr Engineer's room and threw his entire bed out of the top floor window. For years afterwards, Engineer was convinced that this deed had been perpetrated by Flt Lt Shipurkar, who was somewhat the worse for his liquid intake of the evening, at the time. (Soares was later to receive a Vir Chakra in Kashmir, a bar to the VrC while flying for the UN in the Congo, serve as CO of No 5 Squadron, and retire as an Air Commodore.)

The squadron spent the entire winter of 1946/47 in Miho. It is not generally realised how cold the Japanese winters can be; and Miho was snow-bound for three months during the winter. Some far-seeing RIAF Logistics officer had ensured that the RIAF brought along chains for the wheels of their MT vehicles. As it turned out, the RAF hadn't! Digby and some of the squadron personnel had the opportunity to try their hands out at skiing, on nearby slopes.



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Spring returned, and with it better weather, Japanese cherry blossoms, and occasional visitors. As is known, the only fatal accident suffered by the squadron in Japan occurred on 11 June 1947, when Flying Officers GS Sekhon and JA Martin (flying TX979 and SM925