

Twenty Five years of the Society

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THE spirit of adventure and imagination resulted in man's successful defiance of earth bound heritage and he took to the air at the turn of the current century. First World War established the supremacy of military aviation. Lindberg's cross Atlantic Flight 50 years ago also established the aircraft as a means of international transportation. The supremacy in the air was closely related to the altitude and speed of flight. With the development of faster aircraft, the limitations of the operators came to the forefront. Physicians had been associated with attempts to fly even in the balloon age. To combat the high accident rate in the First World War, it was therefore, natural for the medical profession to be called upon to share the responsibility for safety and the challenges faced by the man in the air. Thus began the science of Aviation Medicine.

The Second World War provided a tremendous impetus to scientific research in the wake of which a series of aeromedical problems arose. Their solutions remained a closely guarded secret. International events also pitch-forked India into the field of aviation. As adequate number of RAF medical personnel were not available to look after the growing needs of the infant Indian Air Force, three Army medical officers were selected in January, 1941 as the nucleus of Air Force Medical Service. These pioneers, M M Shrinagesh, Ajit Nath and B K Manduri started the practice of the new discipline of Aviation Medicine with borrowed technology from RAF. Independence and introduction of jet aircraft brought our deficiency in this science in sharp focus and a hurried attempt was made to catch up with the past. Ad hoc Aeromedical research was started at No. 1 Aero-medical unit, Aviation Medicine Research Centre and a Cell in the Defence Science Laboratory. Individual medical

officers tried to solve Aero-medical problems at various flying bases with ingenuity and considerable success. The success of air operations in 1947-49 in Jammu and Kashmir was made possible in many important respects by these pioneering individuals efforts.

It was soon realised that a forum must be created for exchange of ideas and scientific knowledge so that Aero-medical requirements of the Air Force could be served. The necessity for such a forum resulted in the formation of the Aero-Medical Society of India on 22 Dec 52 at Air Headquarters, New Delhi. It was started entirely as a voluntary effort by about 50 medical officers serving with the Air Force at that time. This team was headed by late Gp Capt P P Chowdry who became the Founder President under the patronage of Air Marshal G E Gibbs, the then Commander-in-Chief of the Air Force. Late AVM Shrinagesh was the main guiding spirit behind the Society. It was supported entirely through voluntary contributions of its members. This position still remains unchanged even today.

The Society held its first annual meeting on 22nd January 1954 in New Delhi. Delivering the opening address Air Marshal G E Gibbs Commander-in-Chief of the IAF said "not every one realises that the peculiar medical needs of the Air Force are already urgent and vital. One might think that Aero-medical needs of high altitude and high speed flying were as remote from the practical things of today as may be the inter-planetary society. It is not so, for we are already being overtaken by events. Many vital special needs of the Indian Air Force on the Medical side are hardly being tackled. We cannot remain indefinitely dependent on the results of research and development in other

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countries. Moreover, the operational use of aircraft in the heat of India raises new problems of flying efficiency." Sqn Ldr A K Basu, a member of the Society presented the first research paper on "Development of Anti G Valve." It was an enterprising piece of work on self help basis and brought praise to the Aviation Medicine Research Centre.

The year 1954 was eventful and historic for the Society. In April, 1954, IAF was fully nationalised with the appointment of Air Marshal S Mukerjee as the first Indian Chief of Air Staff and Commander-in-Chief. He became the patron of the Society. The second milestone was the publication of the first annual number of "Aero-medical Society" Journal in April, 1954. This was an important step in spreading knowledge and removing prejudices and ignorance about the new discipline. It was well received at home and abroad and has not looked back since then.

The Society started growing from a modest beginning and laid the firm foundation of Aviation Medicine in India. It created a sustained interest of scientists and focussed the attention of others on the enlarging field of Aviation Medicine. "Self sufficiency and indigenisation" was the slogan of the day and posed further challenge to the members of the Society and an opportunity to show their worth. The confidence placed in them has been fully justified by the events.

1957 was another noteworthy and eventful year. Aviation Medicine was recognised as a full fledged speciality in Armed Forces and Air Force School of Aviation Medicine was established in Bangalore under the stewardship of late Wg Cdr R ARUNA-CHALAM as its first Officer Commanding. "There is no doubt that the activities of the Society, its annual meetings and the issue of the Journal have played an important part in establishing the need for both" said Air Marshal S Mukerjee, the CAS IAF.

Despite the yeoman service and appreciation of the good work done by the Society it failed to publish the Journal in 1958 and 1959 due to financial constraints. Ironically, at this time the interest in Aviation Medicine did not remain exclusive to Air Force doctors as many civilian doctors and engineers participated in the meetings of the Society. The membership of the society, hitherto confined to Air Force doctors, was opened

in 1959 to other military and civilian scientists who had contributed to the growth of Aviation Medicine.

In April 1965, the Society was registered under "The Societies Registration Act" and the Government accepted it as an Expert Body on Aviation Medicine. It however did not succeed in getting a grant-in-aid from the Government and continued to subsist on voluntary subscriptions only.

The main impetus to the society was provided by late Air Marshal S Mukerjee during his term as Patron. His death on 8th November 1960 was a set back to the progress of the Society which honours his memory annually in the form of Subroto Mukerjee Memorial Oration at its Annual Meetings. In spite of this initial set back, the membership and activities of the Society have increased several folds. Today its membership exceeds 500 and includes not only service medical and dental officers but eminent scientists and civilian doctors interested in the field of Aviation. It also claims the honour of having eminent personalities and scientists as its Honorary Fellows and Elected Fellows. These include:

HONORARY FELLOWS

	Year
1. Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh, DFC (Retd)	1967
2. Shri JM Srinagesh, ICS (Retd)	1967
3. Lt Gen SP Bhatia, MC, OBE (Retd)	1968
4. Air Chief Marshal PC Lal, DFC (Retd)	1968
5. Dr VM Ghatage	1968
6. Lt Gen SN Chatterjee, PVSM, MC (Retd)	1970
7. Maj Gen SL Bhatia, MC (Retd)	1970
8. Dr KK Datey	1970
9. Air Vice Marshal MM Srinagesh, PVSM, AVSM, OBE (Retd)	1970
10. Shri JRD Tata	1970
11. Lt Gen Inder Singh, PVSM (Retd)	1971
12. (Hony) Brigadier, Dr Baldev Singh, Emeritus Professor at AIIMS	1971
13. Air Marshal Shivdev Singh, PVSM (Retd)	1972
14. Dr BK Anand	1972
15. Air Chief Marshal OP Mehra, PVSM (Retd)	1973
16. Prof V Ramalingaswamy	1974
17. Gp Capt Peter Howard (RAF), OBE	1974
18. Admiral SN Kohli, PVSM (Retd)	1975
19. (Hony) Brigadier, Dr BN Sinha, Emeritus Professor at Lucknow University	1976

ELECTED FELLOWS

1. Air Marshal Ajit Nath, PVSM (Retd) 1974
2. AVM JHF Manekshaw, PVSM, AVSM (Retd) ..
3. AVM D N Gupta, AVSM, PHS ..
4. Air Commodore B Bharia (Retd) ..
5. Brig J M Rao, AVSM (Retd) ..
6. Air Commodore K S Rao, AVSM (Retd) ..
7. Air Commodore S P Verma, VM ..
8. Gp Capt V S N Murty ..
9. Gp Capt J S Sant ..
10. Gp Capt S K Mukerjee ..
11. Gp Capt M I. Wadhawan ..
12. Gp Capt G N Kunzru ..
13. Wg Cdr K G Sinha, VSM ..
14. Wg Cdr P M Sundaram ..
15. Wg Cdr N Mohan Murali ..
16. Dr C A Verghese ..
17. Wg Cdr K R Banerjee ..
18. Gp Capt K K Majumder 1975
19. Wg Cdr P C Chatterjee 1975
20. (Hony) Brigadier Dr K S Mami 1976
21. Wg Cdr K Rajan 1976
22. Wg Cdr P C Sharda 1976

The Annual Sessions of the Society have become a regular feature and are well attended. These meetings and the Journal act as a medium of propagation of knowledge of Aviation Medicine and results of Aero-medical Research and serve as means of extension work. These sessions have been addressed by eminent scientists such as:

- Prof JBS Haldane
- Sir CV Raman
- Dr CG Pandit
- Dr SS Kothari
- Prof AS Paintal
- Dr KK Datey
- Prof BK Anand

In 1971 the Society instituted a medal in the memory of late Air Marshal Subroto Mukerjee, the first Indian Chief of the Air Staff and 'father' of the IAF. He was the first Indian patron of the Society whose foresight and encouragement placed it on firm footing. The Subroto Mukerjee Memorial Oration has been delivered by eminent scientists such as:

- Prof V Ramalingaswami
- Lt Gen Inder Singh
- Gp Capt Peter Howard
- Air Vice Marshal MM Shrinagesh
- Dr PN Chhattani
- Dr Baldev Singh

It is appropriate to pay homage to some of our founder members who are no longer with us. We lost Gp Capt (later Maj Gen) PP Chowdry, MC, the first founder President in 1963, and two founder members Air Cdre KN Kothaneth on 27 April 1976 and AVM MM Shrinagesh, OBE, PVSM, AVSM on 26 December 1976. The latter was in many ways the founder of Aviation Medicine in India and a pioneer scientist. Although retired, he continued to serve the cause of Aviation Medicine as an Hony. Consultant till his sad demise. The Society owes a debt of gratitude to the three pioneers.

The role played by the members of the Society in Aero-medical research and their contribution to Aviation Medicine can be judged by the scientific papers and research projects listed elsewhere in this Issue. They have also succeeded in placing the speciality on a firm footing in the country. Post graduate course in Aviation Medicine leading to Diploma of the Bangalore University was started in 1967. Bangalore University has since granted recognition to the Institute for conducting M.D. (Aviation Medicine). The authorities of Bangalore University have earned our gratitude and deserve credit for their vision in supporting the new science of Aviation Medicine. National Board of Examiners have also decided to approve it as a subject for the highest professional examinations in the country. MAMS, Government and Medical Council of India have recognised Aviation Medicine as a separate speciality this year. The members are intimately associated with aeronautical industry and have assisted in human engineering aspect of development of indigenous aircraft.

From the very modest beginning in 1952, the Society has achieved a recognised professional status in the scientific circles. These achievements would not have been possible without the support and encouragement from the successive Chiefs of Air Staff and all ranks of the Air Force throughout our existence. The Society acknowledges its gratitude to them. It also acknowledges its gratitude to the eminent personalities and civilian scientists who have honoured us by their association with our activities. In the Silver Jubilee year, the Society can look back with pride and satisfaction at its progress and the contribution made by its members to Aviation in India — both civil and military and to flight safety. On this occasion the members re-dedicate themselves to the service of flying fraternity and to the Science of Aviation Medicine.