

AIR MARSHALL SHERWIN TULLY
THE UNSUNG HERO OF THE BATTLE OF LONGEWALA



Born 17th March 1937, passed away on 10th November 2016. The Anglo-Indian Community mourns the loss of one of its leading lights and great sons.

He will be remembered by all who knew him as a humble man and a perfect gentleman. The Military dispatches states “He rendered distinguished service of an exceptional order”.

The Tully Family

Sherwin Derek Leslie Tully was born into a Railway family in Lallaguda, Secunderabad in 1937 to Sheila and Cedric Tully.

He was the first child to Sheila and Cedric and the first grandchild in the extended family. He was doted upon by his family and, in particular, by his aunts (Sheila’s younger sisters), Lorna and Philly. He loved to read and devoured books, much to the disgust of his younger brother Errol, who would have preferred to go shooting.

His father worked on the Railways and when he was posted out to Purna, a remote railway junction north west of Secunderabad, Sherwin was sent to boarding school at St Joseph’s College, Coonoor.

Early Years

Sherwin set the bar high at St Joseph's College with his academic ability, being first in class, head boy and sacristan of the school.

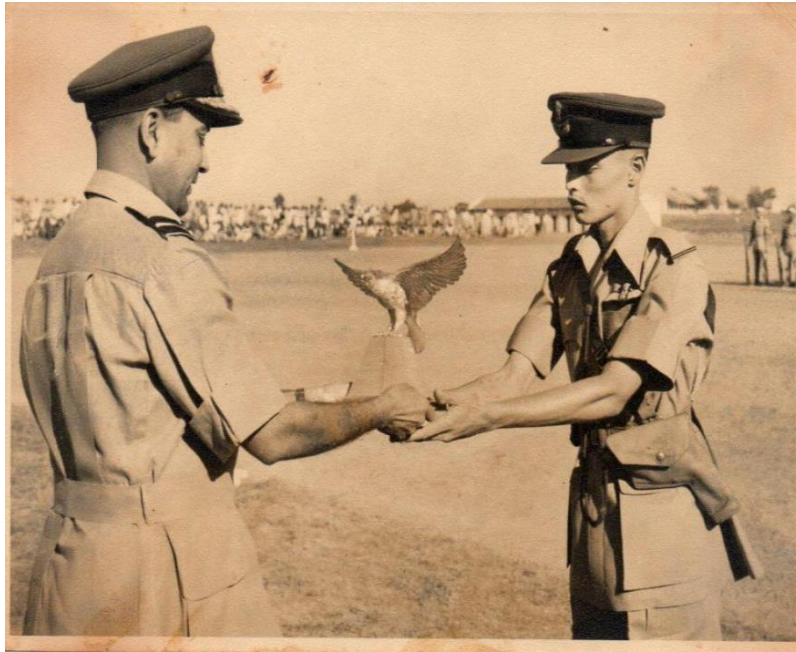
He played in the 1st Eleven in cricket and hockey. He excelled in debating and all these put together, made him a 'hard act to follow', especially for his younger brother Errol, who would follow him to St Joseph's a few years later. In the last year of school his choices were to become a God pilot or a Sky pilot.

During the time at Purna an uncle, Alex Stroud, an Air Force pilot, stirred up the railway junction in a Tempest 2, a powerful piston engine airplane. Sherwin climbed on the roof to wave to his uncle as he made a number of passes, frightening the local population, many of whom had never seen an aircraft. The servants were terrified and spoke of it for a long time afterwards.

The seed was sown. He was selected for training at Begumpet, near his home town of Secunderabad, to which the family had returned.



He won the NABHA trophy at his passing out parade.



He was posted to 20 Squadron on Vampires at Halwara, the start of a distinguished career as a fighter pilot.

He cared deeply for family and from a very young age he felt responsible for them. As soon as he commenced earning a salary, he would regularly send a portion of his earnings to his family. At a later stage he paid for his younger siblings' school and college education. This led to a distinguished career in educating children.

He flew a number of fighter and training aircraft in the Indian Air Force. He also went to Iraq to train their pilots in 1967/68.

He was based at Jamnagar in 1971 during the conflict with Pakistan. He was soon deployed to Jaisalmer in command of a flight of 6 Hunter aircraft.

Under his command the aircraft stopped a Pakistani armoured thrust consisting of tanks, artillery and infantry. History records it as the battle of Longewala. The aircraft flew in pairs, two attacking and two being refuelled and re-armed to take over so that the Pakistani army thought it was a much larger number of aircraft attacking them.

Sherwin's wingman, Ft Lt Suresh hit a dune and managed to make it to base with Sherwin's guidance.

The following is a report from Fl Lt Kukke Suresh:

“Sherwin Tully and I took off late in the morning with Sherwin as leader. It was an awesome sight at Longewala with several tanks on fire and some still smouldering. We had carried 12 T-10 rockets to be fired in three passes, to be followed by 30ml cannon attacks.

Tanks were going around in crazy circles, kicking up dust in an attempt to avoid being seen.

During a gun attack, one of the tanks main guns pointing towards me fired a shell. Although the shell did not hit me, the flames and dust blinded me, and the aircraft fell out of control. I hit the sand dune at 420 knots and am living to tell the tale. During those fleeting moments I remembered my entire life. As the dust cleared, I found myself flying very low, but the aircraft was just about controllable.

Sherwin had by then started heading home and I called out to him since I could not catch up, the speed was not building up beyond 250 knots, even with full throttle. He quickly joined up with me and his talking to me eased all the tension. I flew the aircraft back to base and landed safely with his encouragement. About 4ft of the jet pipe was missing and amazingly the engine continued to function.

Sherwin Tully was an example of leadership and professionalism who let his deeds do the talking. He did the maximum number of strike missions across the border (among all IAF pilots). Hats off to him for his modesty.”

This is an example of the person that Sherwin was, his consideration was for other people around him and not for himself.

Sherwin was always aware of the essential part played by the ground crew in keeping aircraft flying under very trying circumstances. They changed a tail-plane and rudder, fixed a damaged wing and the aircraft never failed in the air. This was all done under the most primitive conditions. In particular, he paid tribute to MWO Goswami, who always knew what was happening and was a veritable magician.

In Sherwin's own words “success in war can only come through human endeavour. This was displayed by 99% of those involved in the Indo-Pakistan conflict of 1971”.

As Air Vice Marshal he was Director of training, then as Air Marshal he was Air Officer directing Southern Air Command and acted briefly as Commander in Chief of the Air Force.

In 1993 he was presented with the ATI Vishisht Seva Medal in recognition of distinguished service of an exceptional Order, presented by the President of India, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma.

In the citation that he received it was stated that during the battle of Longewala of 1971, while in command of Hunter aircraft he displayed conspicuous courage and bravery. He commanded a front-line squadron where he used his initiative and innovativeness in bringing notable improvements in operational standards.



During his retirement years, he and his wife Honey helped their daughter Ayesha with the care of their granddaughter Kyra, and this was a time of great personal happiness for them. Kyra is an exceptionally bright girl and absorbed all the knowledge he was passing on to her. He tutored her in maths, science and English so that she excelled in her school examinations. This close relationship was a wonderful bonus for all of them.

Sherwin was a legend, not only his immediate family but also his extended family. He never ever compromised his integrity, his sense of justice and always did what was right. He loved to have deep and meaningful discussions and enjoyed company. He had a way with words and a delightful sense of humour. He was extremely well read and was interested in current affairs,

international and domestic politics, literature and art. He treated everyone he met with respect and was always able to tap into their interest and have a conversation with them.

Sherwin passed away on 8 November 2016 after a gallant fight with lung cancer. He died with dignity and was in control of his situation even when the disease had the upper hand. He was considerate to the end for the welfare of his family and friends. He displayed his usual strong will and independent streak but along with this continued to demonstrate great courage and did it his way.

He left behind His wife, Honey and daughters Sandra, Tanya and Ayesha and grandchildren Vir, Tej and Kyra, who all miss him deeply.

His sister Penny and brothers Preston and Errol were all with him during the last few days.

ARAIA thanks Errol Tully for his contribution to this article.

