**Pakistan Air Force Day**

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From Ibn Firnas’ bamboo-framed airborne contraption of the 9 century to the contemporary pinnacle of aerial engineering—the F-35, a long-range stealth strike marvel of 5th generation—aviation has come a long way. So much so that air power has become a supreme expression of military power. Pakistan [Air Force](https://www.nation.com.pk/tag/air%20force), in this context, has been fortunate to have been blessed with a visionary leader like Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who in the formative years was well aware of the emergence and significance of airpower. He was cognisant of the paramount role that air power was destined to play in future conflicts. Thus, he emphasised, “Pakistan must build up its [air force](https://www.nation.com.pk/tag/air%20force) as quickly as possible. It must be an efficient [air force](https://www.nation.com.pk/tag/air%20force), second to none.”
Since then, Quaid’s inspiring vision have been enshrined within the PAF’s doctrine and the year 1965 is a manifestation of that–a narrative etched with valour and defiance, a chapter that history would come to celebrate with reverence. The skies became a theatre of courage as the initial chapter of the narrative unfolded on September 1st, 1965, when two F-86 Sabres, guided by Squadron Leader Sarfaraz Ahmed Rafiqui and Flight Lieutenant Imtiaz Bhatti, defied the odd and with their professional mastery downed four Indian Vampire fighters in the Chamb sector. Just two days later, a new chapter unfolded as the skies witnessed a surge in activity at supersonic speeds. Two F104s, flown by Flight Lieutenant Hakimullah and Flying Officer Abbas Mirza, created their own tales up above when an Indian Gnat fighter faced its fate, finding itself in a situation it could not escape and force landed at Pasrur, an airfield near Gujranwala. The Indian Gnat, once a potent symbol, now stood as a testament to victory–a trophy of valour.
The saga continued on September 6th, 1965, as an F-104 Starfighter, piloted by Flight Lieutenant Aftab Alam Khan, downed a Mystere IV, showcasing the skills of a high-level interceptor in a dogfight. A day later, Squadron Leader Muhammad Mahmood Alam swiftly downed five Indian Hawker Hunters in a mere 60 seconds in Sargodha. As the days unfolded, the PAF etched its name deeper into history with accomplishments like striking heavy guns at Attari, neutralising threats at Wagah, and shattering Indian aircraft at distant airfields. When the Indian forces surged forward with ominous offensive aimed at capturing Lahore, the PAF emerged as the valiant guardians of the homeland. The BRB canal, once a peaceful waterway, now saw intense fighting. In the midst of this chaos, PAF successfully disrupted the Indian formations, altering the course of the conflict and safeguarding Lahore’s integrity. With uncanny precision, they provided close support to the Pakistan Army on the ground. With each engagement, the PAF’s legacy grew, resulting in unparalleled victories that continue to shine brightly in the annals of air power history.
The echoes of those moments reverberate in the words of history. Lachhman Singh’s ‘Missed Opportunities’ speaks of the surprise and impact caused by the F-86 intervention. General Sukhwant Singh’s as a witness from within Indian military core, reminisced about an anecdote in ‘Defence of the Western Border’ that speaks volumes about the awe-inspiring power of the PAF’s aerial response.
PAF made it possible through its superior training, high morale, and outstanding operational strategy, all intricately guided by visionary leadership. For the past 58 years and counting, PAF has consistently maintained its dedication to excellence by preserving high training standards and ensuring the quality of its equipment. In 2020, it firmly focused on transitioning of its fleet to fourth-generation and fourth-generation plus standards. In this vein, PAF’s participation in various air shows and exercises of extreme significance always make headlines in prominent media outlets captivating a global audience. The spotlight shone brightly on the thunderous performance of its JF-17 Thunder Aircraft in an air show in 2022. The PAF performed air-to-air refuelling on international waters through its own tanker for the first time in long haul ferry mission and the performance remained the highlight of the show–a testament to the PAF’s prowess and innovation.
From becoming the ninth nation to introduce and operate an armed unmanned combat aerial vehicle (UCAV), Burraq to introducing two major weapon systems into its illustrious inventory: the J-10CE Dragon multi-role fighter aircraft and the Bayraktar Akıncı high-altitude, long-endurance (HALE) unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) to bolster the force’s combat capabilities. The recent years marked a significant addition to PAF’s inventory and a constructive development in the PAF’s modernisation efforts to maintain its qualitative edge. The tremendous Bayraktar’s role in combat is well known, most notably showcased during the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict, where its ability to deliver substantial impact at a minimal cost came to the forefront. Considering the fact that only a few countries have access to such HALE UAV capability, this is a testament to PAF’s innovative spirit.
Today, PAF, despite being a small [air force](https://www.nation.com.pk/tag/air%20force), continues to wield a mantle of professional excellence akin to its distinguished 1965 legacy. Be it safeguarding against external adversaries or arranging relief efforts within, the PAF stands resolute and has proven time and again that it is, in fact, second to none.