

# THE FIRST INDIAN FRONTLINE FIGHTER PILOT

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CAPTAIN KLYDE ROSS “RONIN” NAIDOO



(Author)

## INTRODUCTION

A notable event in the South Africa Air Force history transpired on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2020 when Captain Klyde Ross “Ronin” Naidoo took to the skies at Air Force Base Makhado to mark his first solo flight as well breaking of the sound barrier in the SAAB Gripen Fighter Jet. Naidoo currently based at 2 Squadron in Limpopo successfully completed the flight leader course at 85 Combat Flying School in 2019 and officially became the first South African Fighter Pilot of Indian descent to fly a frontline fighter aircraft and go supersonic. In accordance with aviation tradition, Naidoo was carried and thrown into a cold bath of ice after landing to mark both the milestones in his career.

## CHILDHOOD

Naidoo whose roots stem from Reservoir Hills in Durban joined the South African Air Force in January 2011 after declining the opportunity to study medicine to become a pilot. After completion of his basic military training, he went onto officer’s formation course to learn the etiquette of being an officer and a gentleman in the South African Air Force. His career path led him to the Military Academy in Saldanha and thereafter to complete a grueling basic survival training course which includes various forms of survival training as well escape and evasion land survival training.

## EARLY MILITARY CAREER

The dawning of his aviation training commenced in 2013 with the basic pilot training course at Central flying school in Langebaanweg. The Pilatus PC7Mk2 was the first aircraft Naidoo made his maiden voyage as a pilot before progressing onto the BAE Systems Hawk Jet trainer at 85 Combat Flying School. In his last stage to achieve Fighter pilot status, Naidoo was transferred to 2 Squadron in December 2019 to begin Gripen Operational Conversion Course. A source has stated the first milestone in becoming an Operational Gripen Fighter Pilot is to take to the skies solo which Naidoo has successfully achieved making him the first South African Indian Frontline Fighter Pilot. Major Kevin “Saffron” Chetty, also based at Air Force Base Makhado is also the first Indian Strike Navigator and Weapon System Operator on the SAAB Gripen Fighter Jet. Social media platforms erupted with praise, congratulating Naidoo on his recent achievement. A video of his wife Marcia found its way onto social media where she is caught shedding a tear of joy as the young pilot took to the skies in the background. Many critics engaged in online debates to who the first Indian fighter pilot was in South Africa.

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### THE FOREIGN INDIAN FIGHTER PILOT

In the 90s the South African Air Force contracted a foreign Indian fighter pilot who was trained by the Indian Air Force but never served on high speed jets. Two other locally trained Indian pilots opted out of the career line prior to reaching the Gripen fighter.

### THE FIRST SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN PILOT

First civilian Indian Air Pilot in the Union of South Africa was Mr Mohamed A.R. Gani (20) of Klerksdorp in 1939 at the Union Aviation Company in Germiston. Later his younger brother also pursued being a pilot. (Cape Standard Newspaper - 14 November 1939)

### THE AIRCRAFT

The SAAB Gripen Fighter Aircraft has outstanding agility in close combat situations and its unrivalled performance can reach speeds of 2460 km/h (Mach 2). Its multi-purpose roles allows for fitment of various armament to carry out offensive and defensive counter strikes operations including Air to Air combat, Air to Surface strikes and long range reconnaissance missions.

### THE DREAM

Through many sacrifices, dedication and perseverance, Naidoo has finally achieved his dreams of being a pilot. Today Captain Klyde Ross Naidoo is amongst the privileged to call himself a fighter pilot in the South African Air Force.



Captain Klyde Ross "Ronin" Naidoo – Photo 1



**Captain Klyde Ross "Ronin" Naidoo – Photo 2**