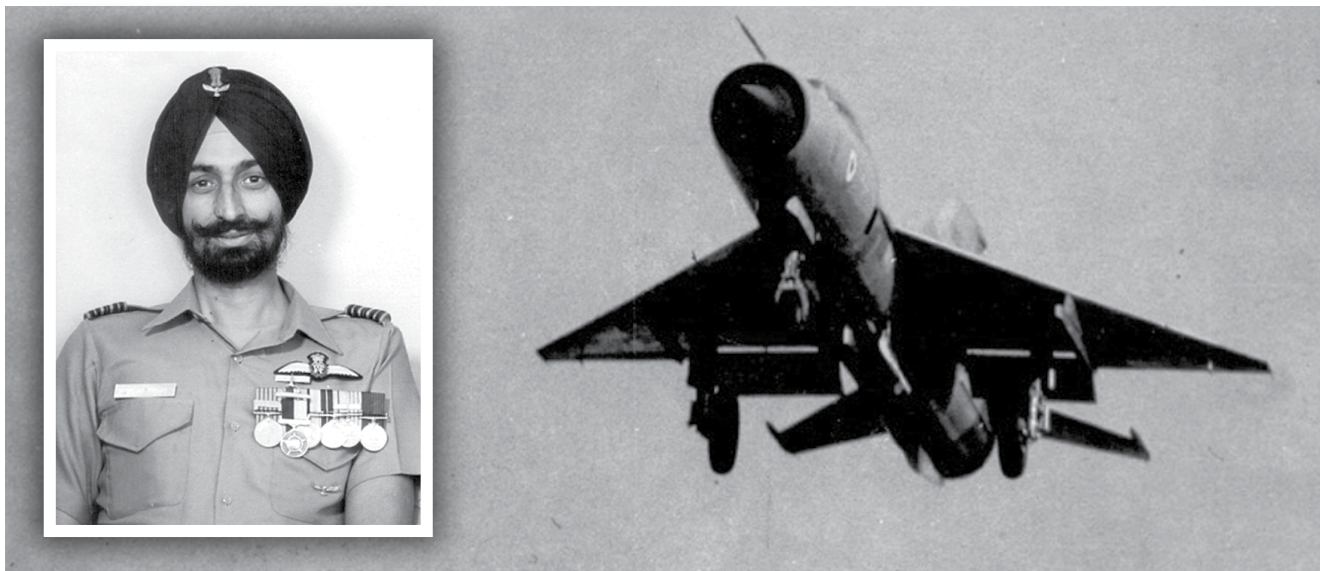


Even as *The Golden Arrows* take off in their new avatar,  
Air Marshal (R) Harish Masand pays a tribute to Air Commodore Jasjit Singh who  
commanded No.17 Squadron 45 years earlier, then flying the MiG-21.

# My Tribute to Jasjit Sir



The highly-publicised arrival of Rafales in an arrow-formation on 29 July 2020 at AFS Ambala as the initial tranche for No.17 Squadron, *The Golden Arrows*, brought back a flood of memories of my association with this Squadron. While I was in Hashimara with 37 Squadron for four years from 1968-1972, No.17 was our sister squadron. Those memorable days of camaraderie and fun, including operations during the 1971 war, remain still fresh in my mind (but would be part of another article on Hashimara and No.37 Squadron).

I had just finished a year as an instructor at the Air Force Academy, Dundigul in July 1975 when my posting to 17 Squadron on MiG-21s came about. Initially, I was reluctant since I was working on my A-2 category and needed just six more months to collect the 300 instructional hours and appear for the categorisation. However, Air Commodore 'Baba' Katre, the Commandant, advised me "to go convert on the MiG-21s", the mainstay of the IAF at that time, "and worry about A-2 Cat on MiG-21s later." Following his counsel, we packed our bags and moved to Halwara. From Delhi, I drove up alone in my faithful

Ambassador, since we were told that there was no married accommodation and the Station Commander, Gp Capt Man Singh, did not permit ladies in BOQs. My wife, Malini was a little upset since we had just been married in late November 1974 and didn't like the idea of staying back. However, she accepted reality and stayed back with my brother in Delhi till I organised some accommodation in Halwara.

I drove up on 17 August 1975, next day being a Monday, my reporting date. Fortunately, there were some friends from Hashimara still with the squadron and I washed up and got to the bar in time to celebrate the reunion. As it happened, the CO of 17 Squadron, Wg Cdr Jasjit Singh, walked into the bar a little later. Bonny Mukherjee, who was with me at that time, immediately introduced me to the CO as an old friend from Hashimara days. Jasjit Sir shook my hand but gave me a look and said, in his typical laconic way, that there was no hurry and I should first find a barber before I came to the squadron. My brother Sonny, from the 85<sup>th</sup> pilots' course, had already told me a bit about Jasjit Sir including that he was his instructor at the basic stage, was a thorough professional and an excellent

flier but was demanding of his pupils so this didn't come as too much of a surprise.

I hunted down the barber early next morning and charged to the squadron just as they were all coming in from the met briefing. Flt Lt AL 'Oscar' Deoskar, Adjutant of 17 Squadron, gave a funny look at my short hair, having met me at Srinagar in May 1972 with long hair, and ushered in an almost bald Harish, but impeccably dressed with a peak cap and logbooks in hand as was customary, into the CO's office. Wg Cdr Jasjit Singh gave me a cup of tea but refused to look at my logbooks. He didn't say much but exploded a bomb under my chair saying that he did not want me in the squadron – without stating why! I sat there dumbfounded for a moment or two and then told Jasjit Sir, "Well, Sir, you were in P Staff till recently, know most people there, why didn't you get the posting cancelled. You could've saved us both some time and effort?" – or words to that effect!

Our first meeting had ended on that not so pleasant note. Before my MCF on type in Adampur and later, while I was waiting to start flying, I would be sitting in the crew room sipping endless cups of tea or coffee and reading aviation magazines or Russian