

Air Marshal Harish Masand (R) says...

I learnt more than flying from them

Preface

In this series, I intend to narrate stories about my early experiences in the life of aviation and the Air Force to express my gratitude to all those who taught me not just flying but about life itself. I have been meaning to do this for some time but, somehow, in the hustle and bustle of daily life and other commitments, I never got to put pen to paper in this area. So, before it gets too late and before more of those folks leave us, let me start the series.

I feel that without such seniors, and even some juniors, and the lessons they taught me, I would not have survived in the Air Force this long, much less reach where I finally did. Obviously, all my instructors and seniors taught me something; most on what to do but even others who, at least, showed me what not to do when I become senior. Though I should actually start this series with my first flying instructor in life,

Captain Homi Mistry of Indore Flying Club, I want to move a little randomly to those stories that come to my mind readily.

Cecil V Parker

Let me start with my tribute to Air Vice Marshal Cecil Parker, who, as a Wing Commander, was commanding the Operational Training Unit (OTU) on Hunters in Jamnagar in July 1968 when our course moved on from 20 hours on Vampires in Poona over six months to convert on to Hunters in OTU. In the unit, we had senior instructors like "Mumee" Bharadwaj, "Kammo" Vohra, "Herbie" David as Squadron Leaders and some Flight Lieutenants like "Kaka" Sawhney. All of them, under the guidance of the CO, were always ready to help us in their efforts to make us good officers. As a matter of fact, Herbie and some others would take me regularly for their outings. I was

taken particularly since I could drive heavy vehicles including the 3-tonner, which was the only vehicle available those days for such activities. Being the regular MTD on unpaved surfaces for these trips, I even earned the nickname of Corporal Masand.

Wing Commander Parker used to take just one pupil from every course and I was the one chosen by him from my course. As the CO, we naturally tried to keep a little distance from him but both Wing Commander Cecil and Mrs Shirley Parker were so nice and warm to us that, soon, we were bouncing them at one in the morning on weekends along with the staff pilots of OTU. The Parkers always opened the door and welcomed us with a drink or two with Mrs Parker making sure that none of us went back without something to eat regardless of how late it was.

In such an environment, we naturally flourished and did our best at the theory and

