

**Air Marshal (R) Harish Masand says...**

# **I learnt more than flying from them: VP Kala and “Babla Senapati”**



*Harvard at Yelahanka 2009 (Photo: Simon Watson)*

**D**uring my flying training days in the 98th GD(P) Course, after finishing our flying on the HT-2 at PTE, Allahabad in September 1966, we were given a bit of leave to refresh our relations with near and dear ones and reached Air Force Flying College (AFFC) at Jodhpur in late October 1966. The intermediate stage was those days conducted at AFFC on Harvard Mk IV and Texan T-6G with minor differences between the two aircraft.

I was assigned to then Flight Lieutenant VP (Ved Prakash) Kala and my flying commenced on 14 November 1966. As per my memory, refreshed with the log book, I flew with a lot of instructors for some strange reason that I could not figure out then or even now. This included Flt Lt Ambady and Sharma, Sqn Ldrs Banerjee and M Paul apart from the Flight Commander,

Sqn Ldr SS Ahuja and the ACFI, Sqn Ldr CK Bali. While this had its own advantages since I got to learn different things from different instructors, I suppose it also had its downside in the lack of continuity and the feeling of belonging to none.

Without doubt, VP Kala was an excellent instructor and very smooth on controls, a habit that I picked up and formulated my own technique on this quality as I gained more experience. He also gave me a great technique and some very useful tips on instrument flying which again stood me in good stead when I later started doing many things on instruments, including day/night aerobatics and sometime the entire air test profile till on finals, the latter with a safety pilot in the trainers that I flew so that they could take over if the situation was getting dangerous at any time, something that

fortunately never occurred in my flying career. Due to such an instructor and what he taught me, I also found that recovery from unusual attitudes also became a cinch and saved me in many occasions when I inadvertently got into thick thunder clouds. Perhaps because VP Kala was an ex-transport pilot, he subtly passed me onto some ex-fighter pilots so that I could learn more about aerobatics and extreme handling of the aircraft from them.

Where VP Kala became very angry with me and almost stopped teaching me was after my night flying solo. VP did many and let me do many similar low overshoots wherein the aircraft just about touched or kissed the runway during the overshoot process. Without switching off, he asked me to go solo and do two or three low overshoots before landing. Unfortunately, the copycat