

# Blues Skies Podcast

## Season 1, Episode 11

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay - Flying the lethal Mi-35 Gunship

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

The requirement was that if there is a bridgehead, the enemy makes, or if you make or they make a bridgehead, and if it is spotted late, could the helicopters take on the massive concentration that occurs on the other side of the bridgehead.

[Intro music]

Ganapathy:

Hello, and welcome to the Blue Skies Podcast.

Ganapathy:

I am delighted today that we have as our guest, a very experienced test pilot, fighter pilot and helicopter pilot group Captain Pradeep Mulay, who joined the Air Force in 1972 when he was commissioned as part of the 107th Pilot course. Group Captain Mulay, after a service of many years in which he was an experimental test pilot, at Staff College, commanded an attack helicopter Squadron, retired to do some very interesting things after that in the teaching field, which we'll also spend some time on. But today we're going to spend some time with Group Captain Mulay, understanding his career and journey and more importantly, what it was like to operate one of the most lethal helicopters in the Air Force's inventory, the Mi 35 Hind. Welcome to the program, sir.

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Thank you.

Ganapathy:

So let's start off by just, you know, getting a sense for your background and your journey, how you ended up joining the Air Force. Where did you grow up and what motivated you to join the Air Force?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

My father was in the army and I moved with him wherever he got transferred. Studies wise, studied in Hyderabad, then went on boarding in Jabalpur in Christchurch. And then the last one or two years I studied in KV at Pachmarhi. That was an army station cantonment where my dad was posted. I finished my gut time 11th used to be the higher secondary dream(?). I finished my 10th and thereafter since I was underage, I couldn't appear for 11th and my dad

told me you appear for NDA. So I appeared for NDA. I got through and just went along. So after just completing my 10th I went into NDA. I didn't even complete my 11th. So that's how it became that I was joining the Air Force in the beginning, but it's just that it happened that way. I didn't complete my 10th to 11th. I went on to join then from NDA. From the NDA it was the usual three years there thereafter our training in various academies and on HT2, Harvard, Vampire, then we had the Hunter for our operational conversion.

Ganapathy:

Where did you do Hunter conversion?

[03:51]

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Hunter conversion was in Jamnagar at time at OCU. And then we went on to make some of us went on to Chandigarh for the conversion and a chunk of us, about eight or ten of us back to Tezpur to 28th Squadron. That's where we did our conversion our first CO was BK Bishnoi and the second CO was your father...

Ganapathy:

Right

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

...Wg Cdr Ramachandran. That's where we caught up with him.

Ganapathy:

That's where I first got to know you. I think I was all of three years old. Wonderful. So why Air Force as opposed to the army where your father was or the Navy ?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

As a matter of fact some of the attraction was more towards the Air Force and choice was going to the Air Force that time we didn't think too much, but yes it appeared like a very attractive kind of career, a lot of glamour thrown in. Flying always had glamour attached to it and that's what attracted a large number of us there and I think the glamour and attraction continue right in the end till we continue flying somehow that it gets on to you and you there have to continue liking it and the more you do it the more you like it, That kind of a thing. So we converted on to MiGs at Tezpur and then I just got posted to the operation Squadron across the tarmac to 4th Squadron, also at Tezpur.

Ganapathy:

Which was commanded by Denzil Keelor at the time ?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Yeah that time was commanded by Denzil Keelor and that time what I remember both the Squadron was so nice to be in you know, a very homely kind of atmosphere you had there were no issues otherwise and most of the focus in Tezpur is nothing else to do but to you maybe fly a fair amount of effort was spent on learning everything. Yes it was very nice experience to be in Tezpur get the flying. Then the first Squadron moved on to Bareilly and

Bareilly also was quite a nice experience though I stayed there for a very short time but then the MiG bis got inducted to the Air force. The 21 Squadron had moved, when the MiG bis came in I moved to 21 Squadron. We set up 21 at Puna, very nice place it was an attraction in terms of buying a new aircraft and being in a good place as well, quite a change after Tezpur and Bareilly you know.

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

From there the attraction to Test Pilot's course was actually when I came across one of the person I came across with your father, when he's commanding 28 from that time on was a bit of you hit it in very high esteem doing that or the option was either to do when we are at that stage five or seven years of service, either do your instructor course or you get the option of doing the test pilot's course rose so I opted for the test pilot course and just went wrong it was so smooth reduction went through the selection he came out, went to Bangalore, did the course, no major hiccups anywhere along the road.

Ganapathy:

When you went to test pilots course, you were a Flight Lieutenant then?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Yeah, I was a Flight Lieutenant, very junior that was just about six and a half years of service.

Ganapathy:

How many hours of flying experience did you have by that time? They required 1000 hours if I remember?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

At barely touching thousand, about touching thousand, most of it on MiGs. Say about sortie wise must be about 850 hours on sorties on MiGs. At the time of the TP.

[08:04]

Ganapathy:

okay if I could take you back to your first jet experience which is the vampire and then after that transitioning to the Hunter which is quite a beautiful aircraft everybody says and then of course, the MiG, which is again lovely beast and something that all of you who have flown it just have a lot of deep love for. But you were probably flying the Hunter with a few hundred hours under your belt and the MiG with just maybe 250 hours under your belt. What was the feeling like to fly something that fast, that complex, that demanding and any interesting anecdotes, experiences, thoughts that you might have from that time?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Really with Hunters when we came to, it was quite a jump from Vampire. Then you had power controls and the first time when you took off in a Hunter, it just kept baggling. You just couldn't maintain your wings level. It was so sensitive. But after one or two sorties you got used to it and that after that was a beautiful aircraft to fly. We have very experienced lot of instructors teaching us at OCU. Most of them, this was just after the 71 war and all of them

were veterans that went through it. CO was Donald Conquest. I think he got a VrC for attack on Karachi, it was oil tanks there. So they were very qualified and we really looked up to all of them. They gave us a lot of motivation in terms of whatever they did.

Ganapathy:

Did you feel somehow bummed that you joined a little too late, that you missed the war?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Yeah, definitely. Our course was supposed to get commissioned in December. But then everything started somewhere in October, November. All our instructors pushed off to the operational squadrons. And the only thing we did occupy was maintained the board you know, watching what has happened, writing down the daily whatever tallies came across we heard on the radio, all that. So that's what we did. Very unfortunate. As a matter of fact, the course is before us, that is 106 or 37th NDA. You know, they had got Commission by the time, they got commissioned in June. And all of them had a lovely time in spent as FACs during the war. What an experience those guys had. They were across right in the Western Front coming the east. And they keep writing, still writing stories about what they saw, what they did firsthand. Some of them had real narrow escapes. So I think we did miss one battle roll, definitely, would've loved to be in the Air Force at that time. I don't think it will hit us anyway

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Ganapathy:

28th Squadron would have been really exciting at that time because the squadron had just participated in some quite dramatic action during the war that some say had a direct connection to the early surrender of the East Pakistanis. What was it like in the Squadron at that time?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Squadron was commanded by Wg Cdr Bishnoi. He was one of the guys leading a strike on the governor of the house on the day before the surrender, you know when they fired rockets at his office then. Then he was the CO and all of them, like I said, when we came across the initial years, both in Hunters and also in 28th squadron, we had such a lot of senior people there all experience just been the war, they could tell us a lot of stories, all of them were there, by the time we spent about a year or so many of them moved out and then we went on, I went on to 4th Squadron commanded by Denzil Keelor, he was by then very famous for that ...

Ganapathy:

Sabre Slayer he was called. He and his brother I think had so many Sabres to their credit. So by the time you moved from 28 to 4, were you operational on the MiG or did that come later?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

No, not yet. But 28th Squadron had, we had nearly completed our day syllabus being cooperation, the only a few sorties were left which you completed in 4, and then in 4 squadron we went on to the night flying part we got a fully operation that took us some time

night flying and all those there was that time a Dirk of trainers there were some issues. Night flying took a little time but the amount of flying was a fair, fairly good amount of flying every person got in a month 25, 30, 35, 40

Ganapathy:

Oh my, that's pretty impressive, that's almost a sortie a day.

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Ah nearly a sortie a day. 28, on an average between 25 and about 35 -37 sorties a month. Sometimes when a lot of guys were on leave you got 35-38-40 and if everyone was present in the squadron somehow it came down. Then night flying was there, your number of sorties increased because you flew day and also night. Quite interesting time that way in Tezpur.

[13:46]

Ganapathy:

Yes, In Tezpur, you were flying the Type 96 in 4th Squadron and 28th?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Oh right, Tezpur was all Type 77s.

Ganapathy:

77s. Okay right.

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Type 77. Type 96 had just come into the Air Force and they were largely on the west, equipping a few squadrons, 108 and others on the Western side. The Sus (Su 7BMKs) which got converted on to Type 96 generally were to the west side. In the east we had mainly Type 77. Then we moved on to Bareilly from there, spent a few, little bit of time in Bareilly and then I moved on to Poona, where we formed on MiG bis 21 (No 21 sqn). 21 we had interesting time because all of us were I was the junior most but we all had close to about 1000-500-700 sorties on the MiG and CO and the flight commanders were the best lot of Type 77, who'd come there, right from, the CO was Wg Cdr Rathore, quite an experienced guy, Tipnis, Ratnaparki, Sukrutraj, Massey, all of them were there, some of instructors during our flying stages were all there. So quite a rusty lot we had and we got fully operational on Type your MiG bis very quickly, this is all experience very little time maybe in six to eight months time all of us were fully operational.

Ganapathy:

And tell me about test pilot school. What was that experience like? And I'm told test flying and squadron flying are very very different in that you've got to think a lot about the engineering and the planning and things like that, what was your preview at the end of TP school? Which aircraft were you given to preview and what was that experience?

[16:00]

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

I, that time, I did it on Marut, Marut I think one of the last few just coming to the ASTE hangar

and I got Marut, some got Ajeet and that way. So I did Marut it's quite a change from what squadron flying was because over here your preparation was a lot, what you wanted to do then you had a lot of studies to catch up on, go back and write reports, so you spent, so you burnt a lot of midnight oil while definitely what's worse I think in terms of pressure in terms of the amount of work that you did definitely far more than most other courses. On top of that you are flying you have very restricted amount of any got in the air you have to get the results and each time you flew new aircraft, you were more concerned about flying back safety, took some time to get used to all this.

Ganapathy:

Yeah I'm often wondering about that with you test pilots that, particularly in these aircraft the memory items in an emergency, how do you keep your head straight and don't let habit interfere in a particular aircraft when you face a situation? Were there any drills or little tips and tricks that you all followed that allowed you to stay safe on that particular front?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

You know actually, generally I have always felt you took that split second before you took any action. When the actions are premeditated you just do it like as an automated then you're likely to end up in trouble, but if you quickly decide to take the right action you take that split second to look inside, that your hand's on the right switch, you're safe. Even when you see a fire warning light or whatever it is, you still get that little bit of time to plan out what you want to do find it very quickly in your mind because you're used to it but then you get time if you panic and take sort of immediate action then you land up in trouble like feathering the wrong engine on a twin engine aircraft, all these things happen when you sort of panic under certain situations without thinking what you're doing or what action you should be doing, you take that split second, and you take the right action and I don't think he'll deteriorate so so quickly that you can't control. I think all of us get used to that normally whenever in squadron you're flying the same aircraft day in and day out, you put the switches on switches off without even looking where your hand is, you know, so when you applying in your aircraft the only thing you need to do is maybe just glance inside where your finger is, you're putting on the right switch around, that kind of a thing I think you get to the habit over a period of time. When you fly different aircraft you kind of get used to the idea that I will take an action only going fully aware of what I am doing. That kind of a thing not that I just pull off a switch, put off a switch, I'm sure all of us go through the same experience.

Ganapathy:

Did you have any memorable emergencies in the time leading up to coming to test pilot school in the MiG or in the Hunter?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Coming to test pilot school was no major emergency as such, except for minor things like maybe my last dark night sortie for my fully operational on Type-77, I landed normally and when I pressed the brake lever, it snapped in my hand.

Ganapathy:

Oh my goodness.

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

So I had no brakes. Fortunately anyway there were emergency brakes. I managed to ...minor things. I didn't have any major emergency which required ejection or anything like that. So no bird hits. Bird hits were there but nothing leading to anything major. I think I went to very, very smoothly, all my time. Yes we had emergencies, went to certain things but nothing no, you can say that there weren't any major.

Ganapathy:

One of the things we want to do with this program is just get people to get into the cockpit through your description of what it's like. So any memorable sortie that you particularly remember, just very beautiful, very demanding that you came through and very proud of or satisfied with how it turned out? Any memorable sorties that you'd remember from your time flying the MiG and operational squadron?

[21:17]

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Yes, in the MiG series, we had like when we joined 21, we went into a fair amount of emphasis got put on night flying, using it for night attacks and various other things. So we started doing a lot of night navigation, get airborne with drop tanks and put one or 2 hours of flying, one and a half hours flying, from one place, took us quite some time to get used to the terrain at night, go by what lights you see, try and recognize the house lighting patterns and all that. That is quite interesting. But yes, interesting thing happened when we did the Matra Magic trials. Very interesting trial on Type 75. Then you had the inboard drop tank being put on the Type 96 went a little unstable and all kinds of things happen then. Very interesting. One thing I remember is once the aircraft Type 96 with the unstable drop tank configuration had to be fell back from Jodhpur to Bangalore, back to do the modification. So that time your telephonic service is not any great. So by the time you got clearance to take off from the destination, I feel like Poona, the weather could have changed in any way. We got airborne from Jodhpur and nobody told me that I was alone. There were clouds. I entered clouds around 500, 700 metres and I just didn't come out of clouds and don't have very much of navigation aids on Type 75 or 96. That thing helped till the time. The most saving grace was when the Ozar radar gave me a call that we have you on our radar and finally I broke cloud on a GCA approach in Poona. That was one sortie I just all through and that tanks are unstable. So the auto levelling mode in the Type 96, you had a semi autopilot as it was called and even that was not working because of the drop tank. That was one sortie I think I will remember for a very long time.

Ganapathy:

Just for the sake of our listening audience who are not familiar with the term. What is the GCA if you can give us a sense of that?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Oh, it's a ground controlled approach you know like nowadays everyone comes onto ILS. When we started MiGs, there was nothing like this. Even in the civil airfields, you had what

they called ground controlled approach, the precision approach radar, you had search radar, they brought you in line with the runway, at the right height and speed. They had light indicators on their scope. So they got you along and till your minimum height of maybe 100-150 metres or 200 metres, depending upon your rating. They got you down and thereafter you sighted the runway and you landed

Ganapathy:

So the controller is telling you left right, to descend?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Yeah, the controller is telling you all along. Yeah. He tells you on glide path and otherwise he tells you about glide path. So instead of having an ILS, here you are being guided by a controller there. And these controllers are very, very helpful. Whenever you heard their voice, you could land whatever be the weather.

Ganapathy:

For the listening public, most fighter aircraft are brought, in bad weather using a GCA. Most military airfields typically have a GCA, right?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Yeah, Most of them.

Ganapathy:

Wonderful. Okay. You had spoken about some of those trials that you did in the firing of the Matra Magic of the MiG. It has always been fascinating for me how the Indian Air Force, because of the armament and aircraft that we got from all over the world, and then we integrated these things. I think even today, Bison is an example of how we've integrated Israeli technology with Russian technology. And then we had a French missile in the Matra Magic and we put it on a Russian aircraft. I'd love to hear as much as you can share of the experience of doing some of those things. What was the thought behind it? What was the experience of doing it?

[26:10]

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Generally, you had instrumented aircraft and these guys, the French French chaps, were there always just to come and do the integration part. And we had flight test engineer, very experienced lot in ASTE put it all, boost the groundwork in terms of fitting. Then they give you the parameters that you have to get, what height, what all you had to do. You have to maybe check out the highest level at which integration prior to all these that you carried out and on the ground, you did like, I was very surprised. First set of trials we did was on an aircraft in Halwara, Air Force Station Halwara. Missiles were fitted. So before getting airborne, we had to check out whether the missile's were locking onto the heat source. We had this French chap, went about 50 yards ahead of the aircraft, lit a cigarette and that is what your missile would lock onto. I was quite amused by the whole of it. So when I came back, when I landed back and I asked him, I said, very nice, you are doing. That's what we do. And then he told me, he said, you know how good the sensor is, picked up the cigarettes



so far away. Imagine what will pick up in the air as far as the exhaust, some of these small experiences that you had.

Ganapathy:

Yeah. I remember my father telling me about the first firing of the Matra magic which they did over the SHAR range. And there was this worry that the exhaust of the missile would cause the engine to flame out. And so Meenambakkam airport was shut down and we had Nagalia in the tower so that he could divert to the Meenambakkam and do a dead stick landing in case he had to. And I think they were carrying the conformal fuel tanks with a camera to film the thing. So you had no excess fuel at all. It's just barely enough to climb towards, accelerate to Mach two, fire the missile and then get back with just a few pounds to spare. It's quite an experience, it sounded like.

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Quite an experience. All operating on the edge.

Ganapathy:

That's what the test pilots do I guess, is find out where the edge is. Right. So after you finish your test pilot school, you were posted to ASTE as a test pilot?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Yeah, I was in the test pilot's flight test squadron for some time before I shifted over to the test pilot school. I was there for about a couple of years in the school itself. Go from the school where you went on for one or two piles whenever there's a need. But generally you are the [.....]. There were two courses we went through as is practise. And then I went to staff college. And then after I went on to little bit of a medical issue, so I then convert it to helicopters.

Ganapathy:

As a test pilot, you learn how to fly a helicopter, isn't it?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Yeah, but that was not. You flew helicopters but not operationally or long distance. Yes. You could take off land. That's what we did a number of times when you went to helicopter unit flying is a little different. You're going on flying to the hilly areas, high altitude and adding load and what have you, all those things.

Ganapathy:

So which helicopters did you start flying initially?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Converted on Chetak and then after I did my reoperation conversion also on Chetak, then I very little experience, at maybe about 100-120 hours of solo experience in Chetaks, I took over command of 132 Helicopter Flight at Udampur. It was quite an experience. I didn't have much helicopter experience. One and a half years I flew a lot. I flew close to about 1000 hours+ on helicopters. And that unit that I'm averaged going up to Siachen that's where

are operational areas. Yes. Phenomenal exposure to helicopters.

Ganapathy:

Which year was this?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

It was 1991 or so, so fair amount. So went on to Siachen , flew there. Then across to JnK to the forward most post. By the time you finished a year or so, you knew the area like the back of your hand, you didn't need a map, you didn't need anything. Lovely time flying there. Yes, there were shades everywhere, but very, quite an experience.

[31.30]

Ganapathy:

Yeah. You were operating the helicopter close to the edge of its limits. Right. Particularly in Siachen with loads and things like that.

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Then we decided once the, that time president Venkataraman wanted to visit Amarnath with his wife, we landed right next to the cave, there's nothing else there's no helipad there's small clearance. There's a cliff ahead. Anyway, they cleared us we went in and landed. We went to the temple, came back quickly enough. That way being in that unit very near, close to all those shrines I became very a holy man. I went to Amarnath at least 10-12 times, Vaishno Devi was every second day, whenever someone wanted to go, so in that way yes, from there we went on to a large number of this side, even towards Uttar, all those holy places visited. Flew a lot.

Ganapathy:

Tell me about the Mi 35. When was your first encounter with the Mi 35 and firstly what was the aircraft designed for? When did we acquire it? For what purpose?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

See the Mi 35, I went to be 35 after commanding as the second command on the Mi 35. That was around 92 and Mi 35 was an improved version of Mi 25 which the Indian Air Force had acquired some years back about 85-86. They were based on Pathankot and Mi 35 by itself was inducted in 1990 that had a little more in terms of carriage capacity, engines and avionics so slightly better, that was based on Bathinda when I took over and then the operational control of the Mi 35 vested with the army and administrative and other supporting was by the Air Force. So we were operating from the Bathinda air base but our operational tasking was with the army. So while we did all our conversion, all the flying otherwise but we are always associated with them for their exercises, for whatever else they want us to do. Mi 35 basically a heavy helicopter, I think it was made or designed primarily in the NATO environment where you had these Operational manoeuvre groups, OMGs as the Russians used to call them. They were supposed to be the first ones to go and land so they had these helicopters had a carriage capacity of about six to eight troops in the rear and they also had the weaponry to sanitise an area where they could land the troops. This is kind of a combination. This quite in contrast to the Western view of attack helicopters where they were

mainly anti armor or anti replacements. So the helicopter is designed for that heavier. You couldn't do things that maybe the NATO helicopters could do hide behind trees and all that and wait for the armor to come in and take them on. Not the kind of employment you could use the Mi 35 for, so whatever with the limitations we did a fair amount of trials and operational exploitation with the army. Army was quite involved that time by the army commander was it only became the Army Chiefs and We did a lot of new things with them. We use the helicopter Mi 35 for night. Their main requirement was that if there's a bridge head the enemy makes or if you make or they make a bridge head and if it is spotted late, then the helicopters take on the massive concentration that occurs across the other side Of the bridge head. So we did a large number of trials at night, they used to help us by flying, by firing the army formations, guidance is to fire the very cartridges or even the lighting thing that we used to try and pick up the enemy on the other side and engage it at night. But very extensive.

[36:22]

Ganapathy:

What sort of armament did the Mi 35 have?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Mi 35 carried a variety of things. They could carry bombs, rockets and they had the Shtrum Anti tank guided missiles and the range of about four and a half to 5 kms. We obviously use it on the range, quite effective. What one or two firings I did.

Ganapathy:

It had a powerful nose mounted gun also.

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Yes we had nose mounted gun

Ganapathy:

And was it enslaved to the helmet so you could just turn your head and turn the gun, that sort of thing?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

No no that is not there. You had to manually put, the copilot or the pilot sitting in the front cockpit to use the guns that is there and that way during our experience with the Mi 35s fair amount of operation flying we did then we were also used in our Air Force exercises where one of the major ones that took place in 93, where we used to try and attack these forward deployed radars. Early warning radars, low level early warning radars. So they used to give us a rough area and a couple of times that we were tasked doing it we managed to locate the radar and even brought back photographs of our gunsight on the aerial, on their antenna and other things. So fair amount of operational flying, we did there and it was a new aircraft, a lot of SOPs got formalised and I think they continued, now you have much better helicopter, attack helicopter, the Apache but yes that served its purpose.

Ganapathy:

So for you you went from a single pilot, fighter pilot to flying in a multi crew environment in a light helicopter the Chetak, back to a heavy attack helicopter but again in a multi crew environment what was it like to operate with somebody else and how did you divide the responsibilities for both crew members, Pilots in the Mi 35? Were there controls, could both the pilots operate the aircraft?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Yeah both of them were pilots. The person in the rear cockpit was the captain, unless he was being instructed by the person in the front. Otherwise two of them the front chap was mainly used for the firing of guns and other things and otherwise there's always kind of a coordination of weapons used and other things. He used to help out with the missile firing as well. So the degree of coordination needed but yes that was there. It is not too complex the complex kind of systems that nowadays have in fighters, they were not complex, rear cockpit chap had a moving map display, radar warning receivers. That's what helped us in getting the radars but not that complex, not much of in terms of coordinating. Yes he had the controls also

Ganapathy:

And in terms of defensive expendables did the Mi 35 have chaff and flares and some of those things?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Yeah it had chaff dispensers. It was supposed to have those infrared kind of rotating kind of thing which kind of diverted the missiles that is also there and they were used, chaff was used quite extensive. They used a lot in Sri Lanka and after the same were also fitted in Mi 17 which we used in Siachen during the 1999. Fair amount.

Ganapathy:

And so how long was that command tenure of the Mi 35 Squadron?

[40:32 ]

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Mi 35 command tenure was about 2 years. So I had about four years of command, three and a half four years, good time in terms of flying and otherwise. And then subsequently I got posted to College of Air Warfare where I have command post. Then I went to staff College. From there it went on to USSR and India wanted to get some Mi 35s. So we went on to check out whether Mi 35 were in good condition or no. Then we went to Belarus also same thing. Yes, it did help us a little bit overall. Yes, quite enjoyed both kinds of.

Ganapathy:

If there was one thing that you would have liked the Mi 35 to have that you feel like it's lacking, what would that have been?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

One is it is very heavy. Second is that you needed more aids. It would be an ideal aircraft if it had Night vision, where it could pickup things at night, fly load at night

Ganapathy:

No NBG things like that

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Yeah, night vision plus the instrumentation of the things. I think subsequently they did modify the Mi 35 for night operations with the Israeli help and other things. But how effective it was, I don't really. It had its limitations. But yes, an improvement. When you don't have anything, it is much better than being able to do something at least. Because night is where and if you're supporting the army, night is where all the action takes place. As far as they are concerned. You're ganging up your concentrations, all that happen.

Ganapathy:

Correct.

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

If you can do that then

Ganapathy:

Coordination with the army or being under the control of the army, how effective was that? Did they fully understand your capabilities and exploit your power? Was the coordination and the use of you as an asset? Do you think that was effectively done?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

It depends largely on the people in place. I've always felt people who get things going. If there's a very high degree of your idea you work together, then things work out the way you want to. But at times it's not every time that these, functioning is very smooth. They talk about operational control. Sometimes people down the line don't really know what the aircraft is capable of. Then they ask you to do funny things like land next to their unit where the unit is located in a desert. No. Not realizing the limitations. So yes, a degree of always felt that there was a little bit of lack of understanding of the aircraft helicopter capabilities. Most of the guys were there who I interacted with. Few of them were very nice. When you told them this is what we can do. They didn't ask you to do anything more than, others somehow never understood that. That's all that can happen. Like they wanted to use Mi 35 in Kargil. You need to understand what the helicopters can do. You can't ask to do something is not physics. So that kind of knowledge, exposure, little limited in the army as far as I that is my thing, down the line. Hopefully there's a lot of coordination going on and I think subsequently, even for Mi 35s, it improved a lot. They went on to Congo, your Sierra Leone also. They operated there along with the UN, with the Army, with the Indian Army. There it was quite ok, quite extensive.

Ganapathy:

How about Sri Lanka? Did you see action there in IPKF?

[44:46]

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

No, I got converted to helicopters after the war. I have been missing wars all the way. I got commissioned later after the war. I converted to helicopters just after the Sierra Leone conflict, somehow I missed that but yes, a lot of guys in my squadron and the youngsters also had been to Sri Lanka and yes heard a lot about it. They did a lot of good work there. And my flight commander Mi 35 were used in Sri Lanka, one of them flew quite extensively and they said they were used quite extensively in Sri Lanka by the Army.

Ganapathy:

And so when you left service how many hours of total time did you have?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

I had close to 4000. 2000-2500 on helicopters and 14-1500 on fixed planes. Why? I remember this number is, when I left I [ ] down the ALTP on both, that's how the figure I give you that I had enough hours to an ALTP, though I didn't go into that that experience for that

Ganapathy:

Wonderful. In a few minutes we have left you did something very interesting. After leaving service you became a school teacher as a Teach for India fellow just love to hear a little bit about what caused you to do that, what that experience was like not only for yourself but also for the kids. I mean I cannot believe as a child having a former Air Force officer, attack gunship pilot, fighter pilot as my teacher it must have been an exhilarating experience

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Actually what happened was I was heading I'd set up a business school for NRI from UK running it when Teach for India got in Hyderabad they wanted a location for their classes, for the regular classes that they held for the candidates who used to come. So I used to offer them my premises. So one day I casually asked one of them, I said what you take me as one of your teachers? Why not? Then thereafter when I asked him again he said he'll give it to 35. I was already beyond 60 then in case, I said you please check because I said the last formal employment that I would like to wind up my career with was something like this would quite appeal to me. So when I pressured them a little bit finally they accepted my request. They got me in and two years I genuinely had such a fabulous experience

Ganapathy:

Which class were you teaching?

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Class three and four.

Ganapathy:

Class three and four. My goodness, that's such a lovely age

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

So youngsters and you know and me having brought up children all day dealing with them is nothing very major. I got along with them beautifully. I took them when I was there. I used to

take them out a couple of times. I took them to the passing out parade also at AFA I spoke to the Deputy Commandant I took the whole, about 200, entire school is very small. 150-200 of them in 2 buses. I took them for the rehearsal passing out. They were really unbelievably []. So yes, it was quite an experience. The only thing is yes, unless those kids have that kind of a thing over a period of time then their aspirations also go up. They bring about a change in outlook for the child that he looks a little further than like. I'll give you an example. Simple thing. The first few months when you are sitting with them and you ask them what do you want to be now these kids, nothing wrong, the background is such one of the fathers was a Mason. The other guy parents were delivering milk and the other guy was a hand cut vegetable. When I started to get amazed, their aspiration level. Not all the boys. I want to become that beat cop to go around the house because he's the biggest person. No, he's the most influential guy there because everywhere he went, everyone salaam. It took them quite some time to realize that something there is a lot more than that. And unless I feel you build up those aspirations and you maintain that question, Then people come out. But you need to organize wonderful I think. I felt the main emphasis is to open up the world to them Where they see that they can go beyond what they experience. And once that urge comes in, then you start doing lot of

Ganapathy:  
Absolutely.

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

There's one thing very enlightening experience, those two years generally. Maybe they should make, Teach for India should take some edery people .

Ganapathy:

Well, they certainly hit gold with you, and I just cannot thank you enough for spending the time with me here today and for speaking about your experiences flying various aircraft in the air force. And then, of course, your second chapter of giving back to society or service through teach for India is just a truly inspiring story. And I want to thank you on behalf of all the listeners for your service and for your time today and for patiently answering my questions, helping us get into the cockpit of the Mi 35 as well as get into the cockpit of the MiG 21 and that of a test pilot. Really very grateful to you of your time.

Gp Cpt Pradeep Mulay:

Someone who knows a lot about flying has also asking the right questions. Very nice. I also enjoyed talking to you. I hope in some way or the other this helps me. Thank you.

Ganapathy:

Well, folks, that's all we have time for this week. Join us again next week. In the meantime, sign up for updates at [blueskiespodcast.com](http://blueskiespodcast.com). There you'll find links to follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. You can also write to us with your comments, questions, suggestions and feedback from the website or to [blue skies@prganapathy.com](mailto:blue skies@prganapathy.com). Subscribe to the podcast on any podcasting platforms such as Stitcher, Google podcasts, Spotify, Apple podcasts, and even on YouTube. If you like what you heard, share it with your friends, give us a rating in your favourite podcasting app and write us a review. It will help other people

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