

## Down the Memory lane: 38<sup>th</sup> Course Reunion - Khadakvasla 15-17 June 2007

Soon after Teji Randhawa was cleared for his Air Marshal rank, Vishnu Chaturvedi floated the idea of having a get together of the Course at the NDA. This idea was further strengthened when quite a few of us met in Delhi while attending the marriage of Sarawat's daughter, in October last year. It's a real tribute to the Course spirit that many of us have kept contact with one another, even though a fair number of us have left the Services. So much so that Mandy Dhillon's son is married to Teji Randhawa's daughter!

There were a number of guys who did yeoman service in getting this act together. Deepak Bajaj was the moving force behind this venture. Rohit Kalia in Pune was in charge of the co-ordination, and nodal points at various places like Prakash Bhat, Rocky Chadda and Sudhir Sabharwal took on the difficult task of getting slumbering guys to wake up in time to shell out the necessary finance and buy tickets fast enough to get better rates.

It's a tribute to them and to The Commandant, that the whole project took off with write ups in News papers, and interest generated in various quarters.

The guys started to trickle in on the 15<sup>th</sup> with their gals trailing along with them. Identity Cards were issued with "Cadet time" photographs on them, alongwith the names, Sqn and the Arm one

was commissioned into. Many recognized each other even without referring to the I card. That was amazing, because in many cases it was a meeting after a span of 37 years ! In some cases one had to peer into the name & sqn to realize who the blighter was. Irrespective of recognition or not, the hug and yelling were really emotional. It was an eye opener for the ladies in tow !

We were all accommodated in H Sqn, and another Sqn was kept in readiness to take on spillovers, if any. The din at the reception was mind boggling. The current Sqn Cdr of H Sqn and some of his other officers, were truly amazed at seeing so many senior officers all together, and most really letting their hair down, and getting rid of the "prim & proper" attitude reserved for dealing with youngsters and subordinates. The higher one goes -- [or the older one gets] --- it is lonely

at the top. So meeting with contemporaries is such a blessing. As the guys kept trickling in, the dinner schedule for 7.30 pm at the Commandants House, was nearly forgotten. Then there was a flurry of activity to have a bath and change before heading out for the dinner.

The bathrooms were curtained off --- though some of the guys took pleasure in stripping down to their underwear. Going any further would have been a dead give away of the age that had caught up ! The ladies also had an insight of how we had



to rough out while at the academy. In some cases there was a definite effort that had to be put in, to climb the high stairs. It was amazing to even think of how we used to front roll down them or try to back roll UP them [that was easier than the front roll, I guess] The cabins now have fans, a Godrej cupboard [instead of the chest of drawers] and a reading light. Other than that, there seemed to be hardly a change. I tentatively tried the Seventh Heaven position, but wisely decided not to go any further.

Those of us who had sent away their vehicles on arrival settled for the common bus for transportation. It was eerie seeing the Sudan Block, the Drill square, with the QMs fort behind it. I peered hard to see if the Commandants Balls still acted as the sentry to its entrance! The Science Block is now called the Manoj Pande Block. The gym looked the same and I saw the ventilators that I had surveyed long ago, when I was on relegation warning for swimming --- and instead of learning how to swim, my twisted mind was looking at ways to sneak into the office to alter the test results!!!

The Commandants House was magnificent. The drive way was out of this world, and Maya remarked, “Wow. What Institute is this ?” The



dinner date was on his lawns --- a beautiful spread of green top, overlooking the Peacock bay. The clouds which had threatened us earlier backed off, and we had a splendid evening ahead of us. The “gale milna” and war cries were never ending, and the camaraderie increased along with the depleting liquor. A few stalwarts gave words over the microphone, often tinged with the nostalgia that all of us were overflowing with. Some stalwarts refused to part with the microphone !! A singer rendered beautiful old Hindi numbers to relive our long ago stay. It was midnight by the time we bid farewell to the wonderful host and his gracious wife.

### 16<sup>th</sup>

The bugle blew at sharp 6 am. A decision to have some more shut eye was shattered by two bag pipers who traversed the length and breadth of the corridors. That did wake us up fully. The early birds who wanted to catch a round of golf were already on their way. The morning “chai” was brought around by waiters. The traditional “mugs” were missing though. The chai however was available at the tea room too. Hen pecked hubbies were spotted going there with flask in hand to give tea to their still slumbering better halves! Breakfast was a hurried affair, since most of us were late. Nostalgic memories of how many toasts one ate, with the last ones dipped in cocoa, ruled the conversation.

The retired ones were in shirt and tie, while the serving officers were in their ceremonial regalia. It was such a pleasure to see the guys in their smart regalia, and then mentally visualising them on their bicycles !! At 9.30 sharp we were at the Hut of Remembrance where Vice Admiral Sanjeev Bhasin laid a wreath on behalf of the entire course. The silent moments that we spent in upright attention was flooded with memories

of those departed souls. A great sense of déjà vu prevailed over us all, for we were truly satisfied with our achievements and for the knowledge that it was all because of our dear Alma Mater.

The next stop was at the new ATT building which is adjacent to the Hut of Remembrance. And next to the ATT there is a second Olympic standard Swimming pool too. The ATT received a bust of the late NJ Nair, AC, KC. This was donated by the Course as a mark of respect for this distinguished brave Course mate. Not many have been decorated like NJ, and we are all so proud. I wish that he were alive to see how proud we are of him. Unfortunately, his widow, Manju, could not undertake the trip. I am sure that she and her son Sivan [named after Shivaji] would have been proud to see the affection with which 38<sup>th</sup> Course regards him with.

The bust of Arun Khetarpal stands guard near the mast of the Drill Square. The Course is extremely proud of this brave mate also. He was killed in the '71 war, and was awarded the highest war time glory of the Param Vir Chakra. Maj Gen J P Singh rendered a moving eulogy about Khetarpal, and his rendition did bring tears to many eyes.

The steps of the Sudan Block are massive and one feels small when standing next to it. But when the 120 of us along with our wives and some children crowded there for a memorable photograph, the mammoth steps did not look so imposing after all. The strength of 38<sup>th</sup> Course spoke out, I guess ??? The resultant snapshot with many retired guys and the serving ones resplendent in their uniforms, is something to cherish for a long long time. The auditorium was our next stop, where we had some tea, before being briefed by Teji. This is a norm where the Commandant gives a brief whenever any Course gets together at the NDA. But this was a special

occasion where he was briefing his own Course mates! That was followed by a film on the Academy, which brought back very fond memories.

A quick change and we were at the Peacock bay for lunch. The sylvan surroundings of the bay with Singhad Fort as a backdrop was superb. Other features surrounding the landscape like 2475 and Madhubala's vital statistics were often overheard !! The Guests of Honour were the retired civilian Instructors who taught us during our time. It was really wonderful to meet them, and they were so happy to see so many of the "bachha party" that had gone through their hands. Deepak Bajaj rounded off the luncheon get together by complementing the old teachers by saying, " We owe a lot to these old gentlemen for moulding us in our formative years. All that we are, as well as all that we are not, is because of them !" That drew considerable laughter. Mr Sawardekar made an emotional mention of how rewarding it was to see his 'young' pupils do so well, and come together again for this reunion in large numbers. A silver salver was presented by the Course to the NDA.

The tiring schedule did not faze the die hard golfers from running to the Golf course at 3.30 pm. I flaked out, the Pune heat was enough to sort anyone out. I tell you, being a Bangalorean, we are spoilt rotten because of its terrific weather ! Tea was announced at 5 pm and it was in the Battalion area.

That gave us a chance to again meet and yakkity yak with people – especially with the



ladies, since mostly we were catching up with long lost friends.

Somewhere in between all this – I forget when – we had a ride down to the Equitation Lines to say hello to the horses. Such lovely specimens indeed. I thought back to my first ride – on “Naughty Boy”, and the ab initio lessons that he taught me, and the long walk that I had to undertake after he flipped me over his head, and galloped away to the Equitation Lines ---- nearly 5 kms away from the scene of my first aerodynamic experience with the help of Kinetic Force generated by that rascal !! The Gliderdrome and the Cross Country view points were next on the agenda. The Old Lone Tree does not exist anymore!

A bath, change and we were back in the Cadets Mess for dinner. Mr Mistry was there rendering all old English numbers, and I could visualise the old EPs and LPs at 45 RPM ! The numbers on the floor increased @ liquor downed ! Soon the floor was overcrowded and nostalgia overflowed along with the sweat ! One great disservice that has been done to the Mess, in that the wooden flooring has been replaced with tiles ! That was a great loss, and a let down of sorts. It was nearing midnight when the tired limbs finally took its toll, and many --- very reluctantly – wanted to call it a day. Deepak Bajaj once again took centre stage to thank one and all for the great support that he received from various quarters, and for the various financial help rendered, the many sponsors who came on the scene, and all of which contributed to many souvenirs that could be given free of charge, yet funds being left over in the coffers. That was really heartening indeed.

Various people took on the arduous task of finding sponsors for various functions, for which they spent their own time effort and moneys. The

final great help was the fact that Teji was the Commandant, and his team of Officers were there to take on the enormous Administrative details. A sincere round of thanks to all those --- Course mates and others who took on this onerous task of putting it all together. As for us, we came, enjoyed, and departed. But for those who toiled behind the scene, should be given the credit for this reunion of the 38<sup>th</sup> Course.

### 17th

Teji and his wife spent the night in the Sqn ! I wonder if any Commandant has ever done that ? That wonderful couple was there up and about at 6 am --- to say “Au revoir” to those wanting to make a quick early morning get away. I wonder if we will ever again manage a get together, one this large or with such grandeur. I consider myself blessed that I could attend this wonderful occasion, and also give Maya the chance to observe and feel the strength of the COURSE SPIRIT for which the NDA is so famous for.

### **GOD BLESS**

**[Col KJoseph Samual (210/67, 38 NDA) was the Executive Director of Air Deccan. He was awarded SM (gallantry) in 1994. He along with Capt Gopinath (38 NDA) were instrumental in raising the Deccan Aviation. Another course mate of theirs from 38 NDA, Col Poviah is also with their venture. He was the first pilot to join Deccan.]**