

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

## **I learnt more than flying from them: MINHI BAWA**



**Air Marshal M S Bawa**

*All above images from Wikipedia*

Air Marshal Mohinder Singh “Minhi” Bawa was yet another Air Force luminary that I met rather late in my service career. By the time I reached Adampur in December 1972 to join 101 Squadron, “The Falcons of Chhamb”, Minhi Sir had finished command of the other Su-7/22 squadron colocated in Admapur, 26 Squadron, in late 1970 and had moved on in his career to Jaisalmer. However, I did hear some stories about his feats in Jaisalmer as the Station Commander during the 1971 War and Jaisalmer’s role in the Battle of Longewala. Since there was not much in writing about this battle, or even the entire 1971 War, by that time and one only heard stories by word of mouth in the old Indian tradition of the Guru giving gyaan to his disciples. Much later, I was to hear the story from the horse’s mouth, so to speak, from Minhi Bawa himself. Later, by the time I came to Jamnagar to TACDE for the FCL course in March 1978, he had just left for greener pastures in the UK for the RCDS course for senior officers. Our paths in the Air Force finally crossed when Minhi Sir took over as Chief

Instructor (Air) in Defence Services Staff College, Wellington in late November 1985.

I had been on the staff at DSSC since October 1984 and had just got back in November after many months in Madras (as it was called those days) representing the Staff College for the court case in Madras High Court filed by some Air Wing students. So, in our first meeting, Minhi Sir wanted to know all about this case and how we had won it. Thereafter, in the very first staff meeting of the Air Wing, Minhi Sir laid out his vision about what and how we should be conducting our instructions and exercises. Having done over a year as a teaching DS, I had been put in the training team under the well-known HOTT (Head of Training Team) Air, Gp Capt Vapilla “Vaps” Nair. Vaps and I had hit it off well and under his directions and the free hand he had given us, we were already working on revising the exercises with the objectives of moving away from the set solutions for the students, or the “Pinks”, thus encouraging original and out of the box thoughts and also free up their time for more self-study, time in the library for research as also greater interaction with the Army and Navy students to develop a better understanding of the ethos of the other services and their operations. While Minhi Sir largely agreed with

these objectives laid out by Vaps, he did differ on a few modalities and, highlighting his experiences in Jaisalmer in the Battle of Longewala, wanted us to focus a little more on tactical air operations. I admired the way Minhi Sir let everyone have their say, without imposing his thoughts and ideas on us, even though many of us voiced differences with his approach and wanted the future generations to give due importance to strategic air operations and strategic thought. Minhi Sir also showed an open mind and finally accepted what most of us had to say.



Even within the air wing staff, Minhi Sir encouraged original thinking and free and frank voicing of opinions. I got a real taste of that when on 15 April 1986, the United States carried out a bombing raid on Tripoli, Libya in retaliation to the alleged terrorist bombing of a discotheque in Germany and/or the alleged Libyan retaliation to the sinking of two Libyan ships in the Gulf of Sidra a month earlier in March 1986. Whatever be the reason for President Ronald Reagan to order this raid, I was listening to the Voice of America while getting ready for work on the morning of 15 April, as was my habit for many years, when I heard this piece of news. When I went to work, I reported this to Vaps Nair as also the CI, Minhi Bawa. Minhi Sir heard me out and immediately took me to the Commandant Staff College, then Lt General Billimoria, and asked me to narrate what I had heard on the radio. Minhi Sir also volunteered

