

Searching for role models

Pak. Defense 6.9.2003
The News

Every nation has some cherished junctures in its history that are celebrated to let the preceding generations be aware of the events that have been the hallmark and the moments of glory. **Ayiesha Uzair** talks to Squadron Leader **Mohammad Mahmood Alam**, known as M. M. Alam to refresh some memorable moments.

These also serve as an instance where the follies can be re-assessed, strengths can be gauged honestly and strategies can be re-defined in light of emerging needs and apprehensions. The role models also emerge out of these situations that serve as the beacon of light for the generations to come so that they could seek guidance and inspiration from them to succeed in their life.

The Defence Day of Pakistan is one such occasion that is celebrated on September 6 each

year to mark the anniversary of the gallantry shown by armed forces of the country during the war of 1965. Till to-date, that remains the most coveted moment in the history of Pakistan Armed Forces that otherwise has found itself in the heart of controversy with repeated take-over of elected regimes and subsequent allegations of all sorts.

The middle of the year 1965 was unquestionably the peak point of the Pakistan Air Force's 54-year history. It brought into focus the fundamental character of this relentless air force when faced, for the first time, with a full scale confrontation with its number one foe, the Indian Air Force.

That crucial juncture in history unfolded to us one of the finest pilots of fighter-plane who wrote his name in history books with an unprecedented display of his fine professional skills and bravery. It is perhaps appropriate to recall his achievements on the 38th Defence Day of Pakistan and take the message to the younger generations.

More commonly known as M. M. Alam now, Mohammad Mahmood Alam, who was born in 1935 in the state of Bihar, Western Bengal, is so far the top scorer fighter pilot of PAF. In the war of 1965, he shot down nine Indian planes (five in one sortie) and damaged another two. On September 6, 1965, during an aerial combat over enemy territory, Squadron Leader Mohammad Mahmood Alam, in an F-86 Sabre Jéf, shot down two enemy Hunter aircraft and damaged three others. For the exceptional flying skill and valor displayed by this Squadron Leader, Alam was awarded Sitara-i-Juraat [The Star of Courage]. On September

7, 1965, Alam is said to have destroyed five more enemy Hunter aircraft in less than a minute, which remains a record to this today. Overall he had nine kills and two damages to his credit.

It is worth quoting an Indian author here from his book 'Fizaiya', regarding this remarkable achievement of M. M. Alam: "The claim of shooting down five Hunters within 30 seconds by Squadron Leader M. M. Alam OC No. 11 Squadron (F-86F), if true, would be a feat unprecedented in the annals of jet air warfare, probably in the history of all air warfare. A Luftwaffe pilot in WWII downed five Soviet aircraft in a single sortie, but no one (except M. M. Alam) could claim five in the space of less than a minute."

According to M. M. Alam himself, he is now a changed man. After his promotion to Wing Commander, he began to question and rectify his

lifestyle, and reached the conclusion that the abandonment of traditional Islamic values were negatively affecting the society and the institutions. He not only took the initiative himself but also persuaded his other colleagues and contemporaries to follow Islamic teachings and mend the ways of their life.

Since then, his life has changed considerably. He has begun to live a life of simplicity, residing in a sparsely furnished apartment in Karachi with little more than a pile of books.

It is interesting to note that during his appearance on Pakistan Television with his fellow war veterans in 1994, this once dashing Ace of Pakistan made very few remarks about his brilliant war time achievements, which is quite indicative of his new humble and peaceful nature. "That had been another, earlier Mohammad Alam," as Alam himself admitted in this interview. Indeed this new Alam is a different man, more concerned with his spiritual integrity than with glorifying his old dogfights.

On this Defence Day of Pakistan, we should honor and pay tribute to this honest and God-

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conscious man, not only for the great courage he demonstrated in the 1965 war and for the other landmarks in his PAF career, but also for his courage and efforts in bringing the code of Islamic values in life with utmost commitment and zeal.