

Touch The Sky With Glory – Story of Veer Squadron Leader Samir Abrol

*Sushma Abrol**

“If our country is worth dying for in time of war let us resolve that it is truly worth living for in time of peace. Our nation will remain land of the free only so long as it is home of brave. Because patriotism is not outburst of emotions on national holidays, but dedication of a lifetime.” – Veer Squadron Leader Samir Abrol.



We welcomed Samir on 17th July 1986 in our lives, and he became the epicentre of our world. He was very active and there is so much to write about him. He was a versatile student, sharp and intelligent. I still remember keeping a small diary with me to record his activities throughout the day. My house is full of certificates of his achievements. In fact, one day I asked him to arrange all his certificates and documents properly in a folder. He did that and wrote his name in large fonts.

Samir completed his schooling from Ryan International School, Ghaziabad. He had many friends and had knack of making everyone comfortable. He was a school topper throughout till the 12th standard and excelled in extra-curricular activities- sporting events, computer competitions or inter-school debates.

Once we went to Amritsar during a vacation. While witnessing the Beating Retreat ceremony at Attari Border, Samir was inspired by enthusiasm of the soldiers and a cheering crowd. It left such an indelible impact on him that he started preparing

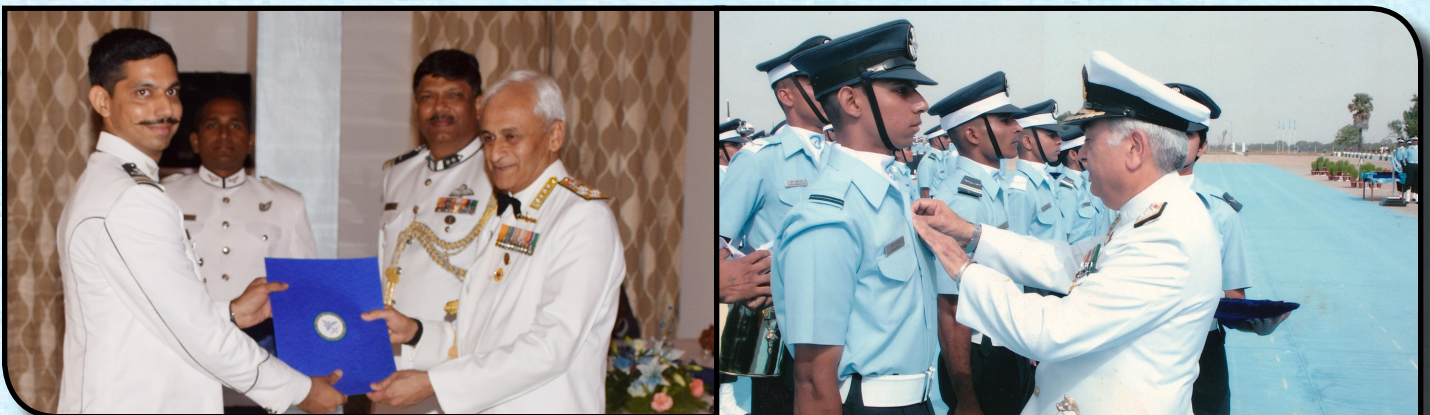
** Mother of Veer Squadron Leader Samir Abrol*

for Defence Services and in Class 12th, he appeared for the NDA exam. Like a concerned mother, I asked him to keep filling more entrance forms. And like an obedient child, Samir studied and prepared for all the exams in which I wanted him to appear.

One day, when I entered his room, I saw him staring at the ceiling with a book open in front of him. He was so lost that he didn't realize I am standing there. "What are you looking at?" I asked. "Mummy, I feel like I am flying...", he whispered. I closed his book and said, "Fly first and then when you come down, study again." He insisted, "I know where I have to go and what I have to do. Why lose focus of my dream?" I understood that his aim is clear. After his board results were out, the NDA merit list was announced, and he had made it to the Academy. He also cleared his SSB. There was a retired Colonel of the Indian Army who we knew, and Samir went to him for advice. He said, "Either become a fighter pilot or join the Army". When he came back, he said, "Mummy, I will become a fighter pilot."

In 2004, he joined NDA and enrolled for 112 course in Juliet Squadron. He was selected for IAF flying branch and commissioned in fighter stream on 21st June 2008 from AFA, Dundigal. When he wore his uniform, I cannot express the joy my husband and I felt. He was the first member of the family to have ever joined the Defence Services, let alone the history that he had created by becoming a fighter pilot.

Once when we were in Gwalior, we went to see the technical area. It was also the time for Samir's sortie and an officer ushered us to the runway so that we could see him. That was the first time I saw him flying. I still remember the name of his aircraft - Mirage 142, because this is also our house number in Ghaziabad. It felt as if he was home. That's how much he loved what he did. He got married to Garima in 2016 and we were a happy family, satisfied with what God had bestowed upon us. Our fondness for each other overwhelmed me sometimes and Sameer used to pull my leg, saying, "my mother can cry over anything, anytime. Sacred rivers flow from her eyes", and I used to tell him that tears of happiness are truly sacred.





Before passing out he won 3 awards – 1st in flying, 1st in academy and overall 1st. After passing out as a best cadet he was sponsored by the U.S. Govt. for aviation program of 10 months in Mississippi and trained along with fighter pilots from across 30 different countries. He was commissioned as a fully operational fighter pilot in the Mirage -2000, No. 7 squadron, Battle Axes, in Gwalior in 2010, where he served for five years.



Always an enthusiast and hunger to achieve more led him to opt for test pilot school, entry to which is one of the toughest for any pilot. He successfully cleared that in his first attempt and relocated to Bangalore in 2017. After a rigorous training for almost a year which he completed with distinction, he was finally inducted as an Experimental Test Pilot in 2018 and was posted to Aircraft and Systems Testing

Establishments (ASTE). He liked flying single seater aircraft and had 3500+ hours of flying experience. He had experienced flying Sukhoi-30, Tejas, Hawk, Jaguar, Mig 21 and Mig 29 but Mirage 2000 was very special to him.

Even in his busy schedule he always motivated others and he proved he is not only an ace pilot but also a gentleman. While serving in ASTE, he installed coffee machine for poor sweeper working on casual basis near hangers (closed building for protection from the weather, and for maintenance, repair, manufacture, and storage of aircraft) and made his job permanent.

He always used to tell everyone that never take advantage of others name or profession. Make your own identity. And even he followed it by making his own achievement and identity. He also treated everyone with same respect. He also believed there is no age for learning and achieving success. He was very fascinated by music, was pursuing his passion of learning drums and an active member of Indian Bull Riders Motorcycle club of Bangalore.

In February 2019, he was assigned the task of organising Airshow in Yelahanka, Bengaluru and he had completed most of his work perfectly with utmost dedication.

Little did I know that they wouldn't last long?

On 1st February 2019, I was at a friend's place when I received a call from Samir's course mate. He spoke slowly, "Aunty, can you come to Bangalore? Samir has met with an accident." They were posted in Bangalore then. On hearing this, I immediately left for home. I didn't want to think of any unbearable truth turning into a reality. When I reached home, people had started gathering outside. We had lost him in a crash.

On that fateful day, Samir, and his co-Pilot Squadron leader Siddharth Negi both were tasked for final sortie on an upgraded Mirage 2000 trainer aircraft. This aircraft had already been flown six times by test pilots of HAL and it was his second sortie for the IAF. As soon as the flight took off, the computer sent an uncommanded pitch and dragged the plane down with a thud seconds after the engine took off. This sudden jump down led to the breaking of the landing gear of the aircraft. Since the plane was on heavy configuration with additional fuel drop tanks, it landed on them and due to abrasion, the drop tanks damaged and fuel started to flow out. The pilots could have taken the decision to eject right there as Mirage is capable of zero ejection, i.e., on ground ejection, but following the SOP pilots decided to engage with the arrester barrier at the end of the runway to save the aircraft and any other unwarranted harm it could have caused as the wall of the HAL directly relates to a busy road in the middle of Bangalore city.

To their ill fate, the barrier failed to engage the aircraft. Due to the failed rescue attempt and already burning aircraft due to fuel leakage, the pilots decided to eventually eject, but by then the aircraft blew apart and due to the wind conditions, the pilots landed into the burning wreckage.

When this incident took place, there were just 7 ASTE pilots in India and Samir was one of them along with Siddharth Negi.

It is only when we reached Bangalore and saw his course mates waiting to receive us, I was forced to face the reality. I insisted that we take him to Ghaziabad one last time. The same home where we welcomed him the first time. We have dedicated a room to Samir's belongings and photographs. I sit there for hours and cherish all the time we had together. His certificate folder still has his name clearly written in big fonts and I recall every incident that I wrote in my diary, while pages have given in to the vagaries of weather. Sometimes I wonder why do I remember such small details about him? Is it because I had to lose him so soon and live with his memories?

When Samir went to NDA, I was asked how I could allow my child to join the Defence Services. They said it is dangerous and risky. But every scripture says that life and death are always in the hands of God. No human can alter anyone's time on earth. And in an unknown fear, I couldn't have held my son back from catching his dreams. Both my boys did what they wanted to. Samir became a Fighter Pilot while Sushant chose to be a Fashion Designer. Absolutely different professions but same passion!

I strongly believe that as a mother it was my duty to let my children do what they wanted to do in life. If Samir was to be with us for such a short time, the only thing that makes me smile is that I let him touch the sky, and I don't regret it.

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Advisor Speaks

There is no greater honour in life than to serve the nation in its defence against the enemy. There is no greater sacrifice than to lay down one's life in this endeavour. Samir Abrol lost his life pursuing this noble profession in the line of duty. It has been a deeply personal and tragic loss for the family. One wonders what heights this brilliant young man might have achieved, if his life had not been snatched away so prematurely!

It is also very impressive how a mother can write an account of his short but illustrious life with such equanimity and equipoise in the face of this tragic loss. The entire staff at Samvedana joins the nation in saluting Sqn Ldr Samir Abrol and his family. □□□

Dr. Praveer Jain, USA

Reviewer's Comments

It is a poignant tale of a young and versatile pilot Veer Sqn Ldr Sameer Abrol, narrated by his loving mother first hand and will move and inspire young and old alike.

Here's a young man, an Excalibur, who fulfilled his childhood dreams of "Touching the Sky" to safeguard his nation and in doing so paid the supreme sacrifice, in the line of duty, keeping the nation's interest foremost till the last moments of his life, as he delayed ejection from Zero position to prevent collateral damage, while test flying an upgraded Mirage 2000, which unfortunately had malfunctioned and crashed.

Armed Forces of India are blessed to have such soldiers in their folds and it's their sacrifice and the glory they achieve for their nation, that is etched in "Gold" in the annals of history of this nation, inspiring many to follow their footsteps and to serve their nation with "Honour, Courage and Fidelity" unmatched.

No remembrance of such braves can be complete without expressing gratitude this indebted nation feels for the parents of such braves, for it's the values and ethics that they imbibe in their children which gives India such fearless soldiers who, without batting an eyelid, are forever ready to meet any challenges for this wonderful nation and smilingly embrace death, to keep the nation safe.

Jai Hind.

Col. RNG Dastidar
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