

Marshal of the Air Force: Arjan Singh, DFC

India's only Five-star general turns 90

INDIA'S ONLY LIVING FIVE-STAR Marshal of the Air Force, Arjan Singh, turns a glorious 90 on 15 April 2009. While in service, the original "air warrior" inspired the IAF to achieve greater heights. Long retired he still remains an awe-inspiring figure for the armed forces as a whole.

But what is the secret of his life? "Moderate habits and a very happy family life," he says. He adds, with a mischievous smile: "My wife Teji... she is being more helpful than usual now."

The Indian armed forces have had only three Marshal-rank officers, the highest honorary rank possible, till now. The first, Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, regarded as the architect of the military operation to liberate Bangladesh in 1971, died last year at the age of 94.

The second, Field Marshal K M Cariappa, the first commander-in-chief of the army, died in 1993 at the age of 94. Arjan Singh, on his part, was the IAF chief from 1964 to 1969 and the first one to be promoted to the Air Chief Marshal rank in December 1965 after he successfully steered his force during the Indo-Pak war.

Born on April 15, 1919 at Lyallpur, Arjan Singh was commissioned into the Royal Indian Air Force in December 1939. The similarities between Manekshaw and Singh are quite striking. Both won their battles during the Burma campaign of the World War II. If Manekshaw won a Military Cross, Singh was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross. In 1960s, Singh set inspiring standards for the IAF by his combat flying. He also served as India's envoy to Switzerland and Kenya in the 1970s.



[Courtesy: Times News Network]