

## FIRST INDIAN PILOT

"A Manly Young Maratha in Our Air Force!"

\*India's FIRST AIRPLANE PILOT WAS A MARINE ENGINEER.....\*

The Story of the First Indian Pilot Dattatray Laxman Patwardhan was born at Ratnagiri on 10th July, 1883. Fondly called "Dattu", he was educated upto 5th std. but was driven out of the house due to his teasing nature, by his father Lakhutatya.

Dattu walked down to Kolhapur and travelled to Mumbai without rail-ticket and worked as a Railway-coolie at Masjid Bunder for six months. He shifted to Matunga Railway Workshop as a wireman and became an Engine Driver.

To gain employment, he changed his surname as an Anglo-Indian - he became "D Lacman Pat"! All of a sudden, one day, he boarded a German Ship, named "Strance Fells" in the Mumbai harbour and hid himself in a coal-gunny bag at the time of inspection. After the boat came far out in the sea, he convinced the German Captain Heinrich Jyodell and secured a job as a wireman and engine-maintenance. Heinrich took him to Germany without a passport and taught him Marine- Engineering at Hamburg.

Dattu went to Scotland thereafter and joined a ship - "Ocean King" as a Marine Engineer. That ship ferried between Liverpool and New York a number of times during 1911. Pleased with his engineering work, he was sent to Mumbai in 1912 to install the engine on the ship "Tukaram."

When the First World War started in 1914, Dattu went to Britain's "War Office" and secured an assignment in "Ambulance Corps."

Considering his sincerity, he was promoted as a "Soldier" in "Sussex" Brigade. He got trained in handling the latest weapons, guns and cannons.

So he was dispatched to France to fight on the actual battlefield. \*Afterwards, he was promoted to Royal Air Force and acquired skill to drive Cargo and Bomber aircraft and became an ace pilot. Bombing Berlin by taking advantage of thick mist, Dattu bombed Berlin directly. Ducking the anti-aircraft fire, Dattu played havoc and straightway bombed "Kaiser Palace." He was honoured as the first Bomber Pilot in the world to bomb Berlin\*!

King George the Fifth decorated Dattu in person, by pinning the Military Award and Award of Valour on his coat. He was presented with "Sword of Military Honour." After the ceremony, Dattu informed the King of England that he was in

fact Dattatray Laxman Patwardhan and gained entry to the army by adopting the Anglo-Indian name of " D Lacman Pat "!

The king exclaimed with equal playfulness - " A Manly Young Maratha in Our Air Force!" and ordered that no action be taken against Dattu for impersonation. This event took place on 24th April, 1919 ! He was promoted to "Lieutenant." on a princely Salary- Rs. Twelve Hundred p.m.! Dattu exclaimed spontaneously - " This is the luckiest moment in my life !"

Back to India in 1921 --The British Governor of Mumbai invited Dattu in 1921 as a "Royal Guest". Dattu returned to Ratnagiri and he married Chandratai Shevde of Amravati.

He retired in 1930.

His adventures were published in London Gazette on 25th March, 1919. London Newspapers and "Graphic" carried out his detailed biography on 13th May, 1919. The famous Marathi Daily- "Kesari" gave a detailed account of Dattu's heroics on 13th May, 1919. A book, titled " India's First Pilot", written by Ratnakar Shivram Washikar and Anant Laxman Marathe was published on 18th October, 2003.

Second World war started in 1939 and as per the order from London, Dattu was entrusted with establishing "All India Military, Naval and Airforce Academy" at Delhi. Dattu trained many Indians in this academy. Dattu died of cancer on 18th October, 1943. His wife and son settled down at Nagpur.

His grandson- Prabhakar Patwardhan is running his own engineering business at Kandivali, Mumbai.