

#NEST#

Some birds are born in nests but I am assembled in a factory - bit by bit, part by part. A million wires run through my nervous system. I have a designer metal body that houses the engines that propel me to fly and soar, and that is what I am meant for, and that is what I like best. I am the metal bird and my nest is the hangar that I am made in and subsequently nestle in for the rest of my life.

///

The covers are coming off slowly and I can feel them sliding off my smooth skin. I feel the cool air and shiver. It is still time to daylight, but I am used to this early awakening by the ground crew almost every day. Once they unclothe me, my panels are opened and I groan and clank. Men with torches clamber all over me and check out the multitude of tubes, wires, pipes and aluminum that make up my insides. Each of the guys have their tasks cut out. While one checks the electricals, the other checks my hydraulics and yet another the engines. Soon, all systems are checked and I am good to go. I am refueled, greased, oiled, and charged, ready for yet another day in the sky.

A tractor strolls into the hangar with a rattling towing arm bouncing behind, and is maneuvered to be attached to my front wheels. With an initial tug and a jerk, I move; and we start rolling along the yellow line which will lead us into the parking bay. I am the heavier one and very soon, one won't be able to tell if the tractor is pulling me or I am pushing the fellow! But as of now, he is the boss and he parks me in the bay with my nose wheel over the white roundel meant for it. He returns to the nest to get my other sisters who also have gone through the same routine as I.

With the first rays of sunlight peeping over the horizon, our immaculately parked gleaming machines present a picture for a postcard.

The pilots would soon walk out of the crew room after their briefings and take over us. The weather is beautiful and the early morning ride promises to be smooth - no bumps, no birds and nothing that can stop me from cutting smoothly through the air. I always enjoy these first sorties of the day. And yes, I do have a busy schedule. Different sets of pilots fly me as I take to the skies three to four times a day. And if there are night assignments, you could add another two or three flights. Night flying sorties are so cool - no harsh maneuvering, just simple turns and gentle climbs.

We need to work hard, my sisters and I. After all, we have a national security task at hand. Our young pilots will soon graduate to bigger, sophisticated, and mightier birds which are designed to kill. They will use all that they have learnt here to kill birds who are not of our feather and flock - a task that requires stronger and fitter machines.

I too need to be maintained well to remain fit. To look after our overall welfare, we have a big-daddy who has an office in the nest. He plans and plots our maintenance and utilization, mine and my sisters'. In my portion of the nest, a number of hands take over to keep me well

fed, oiled, greased and serviced, so as to undertake my assigned tasks with assurance. I need my parts changed on time. Can't have failures in flight, can we? No roadside assistance here!

Once in a while, after I have done my bit of aviating, I need to go back to another nest. This nest is different from the one I live in, and is more like a multi-specialty hospital. It has all the instruments and labs needed to check me thoroughly. And, while all the worn-out gaskets, seals and other parts are replaced, I get time to rest and recuperate. Once a while, I have landed up with major problems and leaks due to which I have had to be stripped to bone. The good part is that parts from other birds are interchangeable; and therefore, they get me fit and declare me fly-worthy.

My typical day (and my life too!) is full of turns and twists, both literally and figuratively. They throw me around and take me to the limits of my envelope. And when they do that, my joints creak with the excessive forces on my poor body.

Sometimes, it is bad landing which gives me sore feet and tyres. Back on ground, it is re-energizing time. My tanks are filled to their capacity. Gases and oils are checked and topped up, as required. This short and sweet break between sorties is rejuvenating and soon I am in the air, enjoying the wind passing over my wings.

As flying for the day gets over, the tractor is back again with its yellow towing arm. Soon, I will be back in the cozy confines of my nest for the night. But before I go to sleep, they need to do a 'LFS' (Last Flight Servicing) on me and put my covers back on. The hangar becomes dark and so does my cockpit; and the humdrum of the day fades into the quiet of the night.

I lie in wait silently for another beautiful morning when the covers will come off again.

In a few years from now, I would have lived my life in the air and could be ground to dust. However, I am optimistic that I would be chosen to be hoisted on a stand and festooned to the ground, away from my nest, living the rest of my life under the skies, on public display. I am sure to have birds of the feathered kind for company who will keep reminding me of my good-old-days when I ruled the air!

Nitin Sathe, 14 Nov '21
nitinsathe.com