

PIONEERS OF THE AIR FORCE



Airmen of the infant IAF loading bombs on a Wapiti army co-operation aircraft at Miranshah, 1937.

The first of the IAF's "Few" were few indeed but their pioneering spirit and professional approach laid the firm foundation of a service that was to grow through the baptism of many fires into one of the world's foremost air arms. The pioneers were a small band of officers and airmen, young men from all parts of India, most of them just out of colleges or from technical institutions. The very first six Cadets selected were A. Singh, B. Singh, Sarkar, S. Mukerjee, A.B. Awan and Tandon, who were sent for training to the RAF Flying College, Cranwell, England, in 1930. After successfully completing training, they returned to India with their wings in 1933 and were posted to the lone Flight ("A") of the lone Squadron (No.1) of the

infant IAF at Drigh Road, Karachi. Also trained at Cranwell subsequently were A.M. Engineer, K.K. Majumdar, Narendra, Henry Runganathan, H.E. Khan, R.H.D. Singh, Mehar Singh, Prithipal Singh and Arjan Singh.

The airmen were, however, trained at the RAF Depot, Drigh Road, Karachi, in batches of 20 to 24 individuals. Training of the first batch started in November 1931, and "Hawai Sepoys" Harjinder Singh (later, Air Vice Marshal), Ram Singh (later, Group Captain), U.K. Nair (later, Group Captain), R.P. Sharma, Pritam Singh and K.L. Mitra were some of the graduates from technical institutions who joined the I.A.F. in the very first batch. They were basically trained by Warrant Officer Newing (who later

became a Group Captain), Warrant Officer Harper, Flt. Sgt. Hill (Technical Instructor) and Flt. Sgt. Tilbury (Drill and P.T. Instructor), all from the Royal Air Force. The airmen's training started in a most discouraging and unfriendly atmosphere, since the Raj was only reluctantly disposed towards its progress. Barring a few officers and airmen of the RAF, who were keenly interested to see the Indian Air Force grow, a great number of their colleagues unfortunately were not kindly disposed towards the IAF, its officers and men. For the Indian airmen this was not the only handicap. The rigidity of Army discipline which was enforced on them, their rank structures viz., Hawai Sepoy, Hawai Naik and so on, the new environment and the equally