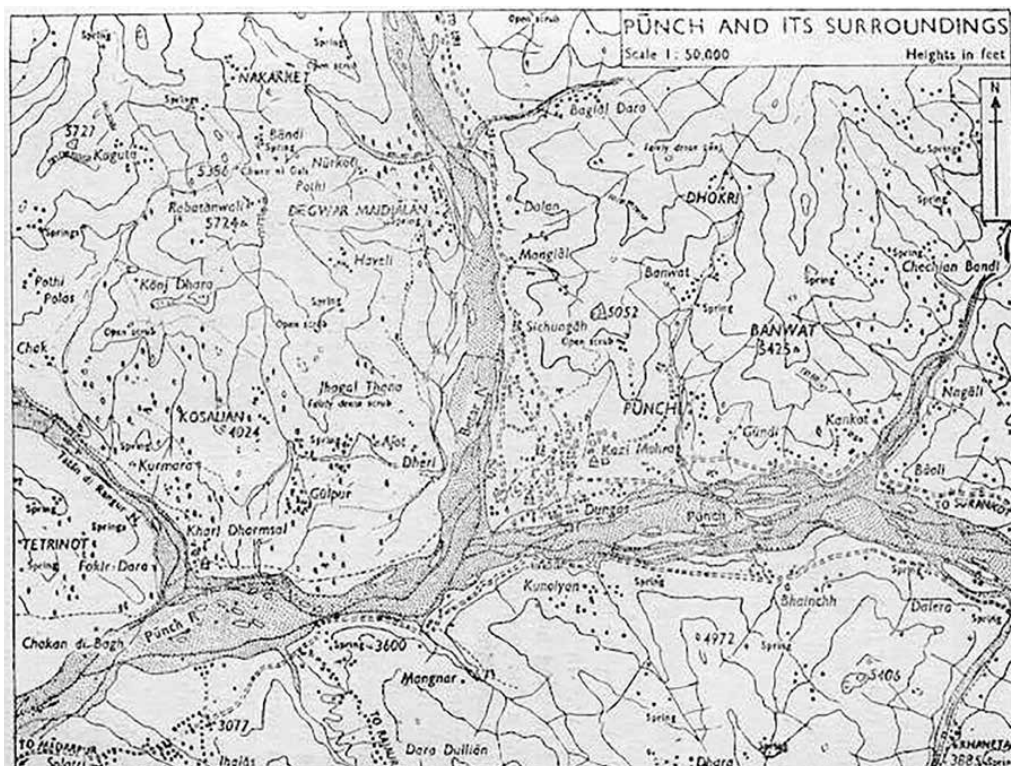


Historical Series On The IAF Operation Poonching

It should have been a Mosquito light bomber squadron. Formed on 1 December, 1945 as a Spitfire squadron at Kohat, No. 12 Sqn of the Royal Indian Air Force converted to the Airspeed Oxford in Bhopal but within months was to become the first transport squadron of the RIAF. It drew its pilots from the existing fighter squadrons, most of them having flown Spitfires, Hurricanes and Harvards. An Air Marshal recalls, "We were given our training on the twin-engined Oxford and we were to go on to the Mosquito. But the Mosquito was an aircraft which had a fuselage made of plywood! Well, not quite basic plywood, but something like that. Amazingly, Mosquitos gave great service in Europe but here, in the tropics, they fell apart! Moisture and heat!"

With the induction of the Mosquito being shelved, but with the pilots already having done part of the twin-engined training, it was decided that a Dakota squadron would be formed instead. From Bhopal, the Squadron was shifted to Mauripur, Karachi, an existing RAF airfield which is a major PAF base today. Recalls Air Marshal LS Grewal, at that time a Flying Officer with No. 12 Sqn, "Training on the Dakotas began, but that was still underway when partition (of the country) came about. Just half a dozen pilots were fully operational while most of us



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were only trained for daytime flying. The squadron was on the move to Chaklala and Risalpur, some of us were still at Karachi, when a few days before partition, it was decided that the Dakota squadron would move to Agra. We had six aircraft and half a dozen reasonably trained pilots who each had about 30–40 hours on the Dak, while people like me had just 15–20 hours, all of which was by day". It was Shivdev Singh (now a retired Air Marshal) who was commanding this 'hotchpotch of a squadron' in late August 1947.

Within the next two months, the situation in J&K became alarming. While Maharaja Hari Singh dilly-dallied and Kashmir's fate seemed to hang fire, plans for annexing the state by Pakistan were beginning to take shape. In an interview published in the "Defence Journal" (Karachi, June–July 1985) with Maj. Gen Mohammad Akbar Khan (code named "General Tariq"), who was the commander of the raider forces, he goes on record to say, 'A few week after partition, I was asked by Mian Iftikharuddin on behalf of Liaquat Ali Khan (Prime Minister of Pakistan) to prepare plan for action in Kashmir.'

On the 24th October 1947, a tribal lashkar attacked Muzaffarabad and successfully captured it. The next day they advanced and captured Uri. On the 26th, they occupied Baramulla and Maharaja Hari Singh fled from Srinagar to Jammu where he finally acceded the State



Initial days at Srinagar Airfield – a civilian bus embarks troops as a civilian Dakota in the background gets ready to take on civilian refugees for the return flight.