

The Westland Wapiti, history and its service with the IAF



Foreword by Marshal of the IAF Arjan Singh DFC

About eighty years ago, on the 1 April 1933, two RAF Officers, alongwith a couple of dozen Indian airmen formed No.1 Squadron, Indian Air Force. The Squadron was not more than a flight in size, equipped with four Westland Wapiti aircraft – and they welcomed the five newly commissioned Indian officers who had finished training at RAF Cranwell in the United Kingdom. Over the next eight years, they were joined by another dozen Indian officers, also trained at Cranwell. These officers operated on the North West Frontier flying this aircraft.

The joke, almost a fact, was that it took off, flew and landed at the same speed i.e. 75 mph. It had a radial, uncovered engine. Even if two plugs and flames came out,



it continued functioning. I was the last of the officers who graduated from Cranwell, finishing my training along with Prithipal Singh in December 1939. However, by the time I joined 'Q' Flight (formerly 'A' Flight) of No.1 Squadron at Drigh Road, the Wapitis had been replaced by the more marginally modern Hawker, Hart and Audax.

