CHAPTER I

EARLY HISTORY OF INDIA'S AIRPOWER
The evolution of India's air power was by and large synonymous with the birth and growth of Airpower in general and the Royal Air Force of Great Britain in particular. The conquest of air by man was a recent but great achievement. This unique accomplishment had its beginning by the launching of Hot air and Hydrogen gas balloons in the space. In 1709 Lowrenzo de Guzmán of Portugese successfully used Hot air balloons. But the first man carrying balloons were launched by Montgolfier brothers on 15th Oct. 1783.1 It was followed by Airships propelled first by electric motors and then by Petrol engines. Graf Von Zeppelin of Germany flew his first rigid airship over Lake Constance in 1900. But the world's first practical airship was produced by Lebandy brothers in the year 1903. This covered a distance of 38 miles.2 On 9th October 1906 in a remarkable flight the newly built LZ3, Zeppelin flew 60 miles in two hours. As a result the Zeppelin airships became a force to be reckoned with in both military and civil aviation in Germany.3 On 17th December 1903 after several tests the conquest of air had a successful beginning. Orville wright in a short flight flew the first powered flying machine which lasted for about 12 seconds and covered 120 feet. After the power and acceleration of the flying machine improved, the Wright brothers succeeded in making aeroplanes with more

2. Ibid. PP.8-10.
speed in shorter duration of time. In the year 1905, they
covered a distance of 24 miles in 38 minutes.\textsuperscript{4} Inspired by
their achievement Louis Bleriot of France flew his plane across
the English Channel in June 1909. This feat had a popular but
significant impact on Great Britain. It was then she began to
think beyond her maritime defence. The result was the creation
of air battalion of the Royal Engineers comprising of one
company of Men lifting kites, One company of Airships and One
of Balloons and one of Airplanes. The first unit of British
Military Aviation was created in 1911.\textsuperscript{5} This was followed by
the creation of Royal Flying Corps. A joint service of military
and naval wing was also formed by inducting a few adventurous
young officers who had learnt flying at their own initiation and
expense. In addition a Central Flying School was established
in 1912.\textsuperscript{6} In 1910, the Commander-in-Chief of India received
an application from an officer of the Indian army for employment
as an airman. But it was not entertained. In 1912, an adventurous
Royal Artillery Officer imported a Faman Bi Plane from France and
made air manoeuvres at Rawalpindi. It was the first flight ever
made on Indian soil. Subsequently an Indian Flying School was
started at Sitapur. The mechanics and aeronautical material
were procured from England.\textsuperscript{7} During the first World War this
unit went to Egypt in 1914 along with the Indian expeditionary
forces. They did a valuable service in reconnaissance related

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{6} Dean Maurice. \textit{The Royal Air Force and two world wars}. Cassell.
\textsuperscript{7} Indian Armed forces year book. 1955. Bombay. PP 73-75.
with Turkish attacks on Suez Canal. Later the Indian flying corps was relieved by a squadron of the Royal Flying Corps. Its personnel were sent to Mesopotamia. As the organisation for the war had been centralized by the British Government, the Indian flying corps lost her status as a separate body in 1915.

Meanwhile, the panic-stricken public of England demanded an Airforce which could retaliate the German Zeppelin menace. On 28th November 1916 London was bombed by a LVG-CII German bomber. The twin-engined Gotha G-IV bombed the city in June 1917. Later the huge 138 feet long Zeppelin-Stacken R-VI did the rest of the bombing. To put an end to the menace Prime Minister Lloyd George of England instituted a special committee under Field Marshal Jan Christian Smuts to investigate the serious plight of Britain's air defence. The Committee in turn unequivocally recommended that an independent airforce must be created immediately. On 6th June 1918 the Independent Royal Airforce under the command of Maj. Gen. Sir Hugh Trenchard was officially formed. The Royal Air Force in fact was formed by the amalgamation of the Royal flying corps and Royal naval air service. Immediately after the first world war, the infant Royal Airforce was adapted to peaceful tasks of the British Empire serving as police force in the British protectorates and colonies.

8. Ibid 74.
9. Ibid- P.75.
11. Ibid.
task was carried out with some degree of success along the North West frontier in India, in Iraq, and Aden protectorate and in East Africa.\textsuperscript{13}

The First detachment of the Royal flying corps arrived in India in December 1915 and was stationed at Nowshera, but subsequently shifted to Risalpur. From 1916 to 1918 no remarkable operation was undertaken, but frequent flights were sent to North West frontier province. A second squadron was organised in 1918 and the strength of the air force in India became eighty officers and six hundred airmen.\textsuperscript{14} In 1919 four more squadrons were added. From its Headquarters at Ambala, the Royal Air Force was soon shifted to Delhi in 1919.\textsuperscript{15}

The changing political trends and the effect of the freedom movement warranted the British government effect certain changes in the army. The officer corps of the Army was indianised. But the Airforce had been kept as a close preserve of the British. There were some enterprising Indians, who had earned their commissions in the Royal flying corps during the first world war. Notable among them were Harjit Singh Malik, Lt. Indra Lal Roy who was the first Indian to win a distinguished flying posthumously. In recognition of the service rendered by Indians in the war two single seater squadron were put under the process

\textsuperscript{13} The Encyclopedia of Airwarfare OP.Cit. P.56.
\textsuperscript{14} The Army in India and its revolution, Superintendent, Calcutta, Government Printing. India 1924 PP 174-181.
for a year as apprentice aircraft hand at RAF Drige road, Karachi. The first batch of Indian pilots were graduated with King's Commission on 8th October 1932. With this manpower the first flight 'A' with four aircraft of Indian Airforce was formed in April 1933. Under the leadership of commanding officer Flt. Lt. Boucher and supervision of few British officers the Flight 'A' devoted its time to intensive training of its aircrew and ground personnel. Two more flights were raised and the three flights together formed the No. 1 squadron of the Indian Airforce in October 1937. To meet the growing need of flying training it was decided to start a Flying Training School in India at Risalpur near Peshawar. When the Second World War broke out in 1939 the Indian Airforce squadron which had been placed under the direct command of Squadron leader Subroto Mukerji had a total of sixteen officers and one hundred and fourteen airmen. As for the participation in real war the Indian Airforce had to satisfy with her limited involvement in the year 1935. When it was co-operating with the Sind Brigade, it performed watch and wait duties in the North West Frontier Province. In 1937 it flew over to Miranshah to do policing work against the freedom loving tribes like Afridis, Muhamands the Wazaris.

23. A summary of important matters connected with the defence services in India 1934-35. Published Documents Govt. of India PP. 6-13.
At the outbreak of Second World War the Indian airpower was only an incomplete army co-operation squadron equipped with Wapiti aircraft. It had sixteen commissioned officers, one warrant officer, two hundred and sixty eight other ranks and one thousand three hundred and forty three airmen of different categories. A general scheme for the expansion of the Indian Air force was instituted in 1940 in which it was decided to produce three squadrons by the end of 1941 and another four squadrons by the end of March 1942. In September twenty four Indian pilots were despatched to fly with the Royal Air Force in Britain. At the end of 1941 the combined strength of the Royal Air Force and the Indian Air force in India was one thousand and ninety seven officers and six thousand five hundred and eighty three air men.

In 1939 the Indian air force witnessed expansion in different areas and character as the Second World War progressed. Five coast defence flights were raised to guard India's three thousand miles coastline at Madras, Bombay, Calcutta, Karachi and Cochin. The sixth one was located later at Visagapatnam. Since no new or additional aircraft could be obtained from England, those aircraft available in India were reallocated. In addition some civil aircraft were also availed from the Tatas, who had at the time few Dragon Rapides and DE-86.

25. A summary of important matters connected with the defence services in India 1934-35. Published Document. Govt.of India. P.13.
All the flights were commanded by British officers who had their training at Risalpur in India. Apart from this a good number of young Indians who were members of flying clubs at Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras and Lucknow had been incorporated in the Indian Air force as technicians through volunteer reserve programme. It should be noted that the volunteer reserve programme was abolished in 1942 and the personnel were absorbed in the regular service of Indian Air force. To keep pace with the war requirements the measures undertaken by the authority were quite rapid. In all, the Indian command was equipped with twenty-nine operational squadron and twenty other squadron involved in training, equipment, transport and photo reconnaissance in which the Indian air force had nine squadrons. By November 1943 there were 285 air fields out of which 140 were fully operational. In addition to protect air fields, the Royal force regiment was expanded with five field squadrons and fifty Anti-aircraft flights. New signal units and the Indian observer corps posts were created in the industrial areas of Calcutta and Jamshedpur. The wireless observer units hitherto administered by the Royal Air Force personnel had been duly replaced by eleven Indian mobile observer companies. For the first time Indian airmen were posted in the

27. Ibid. P.559.
29. Ibid.
Warning System. In order to provide training facilities to both Indian and Royal Air force personnel in India itself, several new establishments namely the Airlanding School, Signal School, Code and Cypher School, General Reconnaissance School, Fighter Reconnaissance Operational Training Unit, Disciplinary School for Officers, Disciplinary School for Junior Commissioned Officer, Parachute Packing School, Royal Air force Regiment Training School, Army Co-operation Section, a rest camp to cater to the units in South India and the rest were instituted in India. By the end of the 1943 as many as twenty four ground training establishments were in operation. At the final stage of Second World War the Indian airforce was equipped with modern aircrafts like Hurricanes, Vultee and Vengeance Dive Bombers of America. Although more and more air forces were sent to India for the "Air Command-South east Asia", the Indian Air force was not expanded further on the ground of increasing shortage of suitable man power. On 1st July 1945, a few weeks before the end of the second world war, the Indian Air force and the Royal Air force in the war theatre had a formidable strength of 2,07,632 officers and men under different categories as shown below.

32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
1. Royal Air Force Officers - 13,225
2. Other Ranks (British) - 1,18,682
3. Indian Air Force Officers - 1,638
4. Other Ranks (Indian) - 26,000
5. Non-Combatants enrolled - 13,727
6. Non-Combatants unenrolled - 26,469
7. Cadets & Civilians - 7,891

Total Personnel - 2,07,632

During the Second World war, operational requirements of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) were met by the Indian air force. As the role played by the No.1 Squadron of the Indian air force was inadequate against the increasing activities of the rebel tribes, a second squadron No.2 was formed in 1941 with Wapitis aircraft drawn from Calcutta and Madras coast defence flights. After a brief training at Peshawar, it moved to Miranshah. It assisted the Army to make advance upto Tochivalley by providing adequate offensive

and reconnaissance sorties. On 16th April 1941 Indian Pilots were called upon to fly transport aircraft to and from the war areas in the Middle East to evacuate helpless women, children and troops to Basra in Iraq.

In the east, it was for the first time the Indian Air force entered against a major power. In the midst of Japanese total air superiority, the poor Wapiti and Andaxes aircraft of India were to fly against the sophisticated Oscar aircraft of Japan. They were assigned to the gigantic task of protecting India's coast line and shipplanes. An army co-operation squadron and the No.3 Coast Defence Flight of Calcutta were sent to help in the defence of Burma. The Lysander aircraft of the No.1 squadron were ideally suited to army co-operation work. Japanese occupied bases at Menongao and Siam, Moulmein dockyard and Railway station became targets of the Indian Air force. The Indian pilots also carried out patrol sorties against the Japanese advance in Burma. After a year in December 1943, the Second phase of North Burma campaign opened up in which the Indian air force was called upon to carry out tactical reconnaissance in the war zone and to render close support to the army in action. Along with American and Royal Air Force the No.6 and No.8 squadrons of India arrived at Cox's Bazar on the Arakan coast. During the engagement, innumerable reconnaissance

sorties were made to get information and photographs of enemy's defence lines and dispositions so as to enable the army commanders to plan their advance accordingly. Thus the No.6 squadron earned the title of "Eyes of the 14th Army". Apart from the regular war, the Indian Air force's No.7 squadron rendered a valuable support to Gen. Wingate's Chindits, the Guerilla band, in which the Guerilla soldiers were to be flown in by gliders and landed in North Burma to fight against the Japanese. For them, the Dakota transport planes provided the lift and the Vengeance dive bombers offered the aerial support to bomb targets indicated by the Chindits.

Both at Imphal and Kohima which had then been besieged by the Japanese the Dakota transport aircrafts were called upon to do supply dropping missions. Further the No.1 squadron was called to carryout fighter reconnaissance duties for twenty weeks. In the Imphal front alone the Indian Air force carried out 1600 sorties. The No.7 squadron, on her part carried out bombing operations over enemy dumps, troops concentrations and line of communication. The destruction of three vital link bridges in Manipur was considered a major achievement of the Indian Air force.

Throughout the war the Indian air force flew over 16,000

40. Prasad Biheshwar. OP.Cit. PP.262-70.
sorties, involving over 24,000 operational flying hours over Burma of which 4813 sorties involving 7219 flying hours went to the credit of No.1 squadron alone.42 Air Marshal Sir John Baldwin, Air commander of the Third Tactical Air force in charge of the Indian Air force operations was appreciated for the service rendered by the Indians under his command. The citation says "The air and ground crew of the IAF have made a magnificent contribution to our success. You and your pilots have earned honour and glory. When victory is won India will have a debt of gratitude to her flying sons of the Indian Air force."43 In commendation of the contribution made by the Indian Air force in the war, His majesty the King of England bestowed the prefix "Royal" to the force on 12th March 1945. Thus it came to be known as Royal Indian Air Force (RIAF) until 26th January 1950 on which date India became a Republic. The Indian Air force relinquished the title "Royal". In addition No.4 squadron was specifically selected as a reward for its distinguished service to join the British Common Wealth Forces in Japan.44 At the conclusion of the Second World war in 1945, India's air power modestly composed of ten squadrons comprising of three fighter reconnaissance squadrons, two ground attack squadrons, two light bomber squadrons and two fighter squadrons. The total manpower inclusive of officers,

42. Lal. P.C. OP.Cit. P-45.
Pilots, Airmen, Trainees, Enrolled followers and civilians was 39,400 personnel.45

In the post war demobilization programme, the strength had been considerably reduced. In the process the British government asked the officers and airmen to exercise their option either to remain in service or to go out. Those who opted for the first, were judged on the basis of their records and were retained for nine years. The 12,000 strong enrolled followers were disbanded.46