



Combat Lore: Indian Air Force 1930-1945

Somanth Sapru

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The Indian Air Force is today 82 years old, a battle-scarred, highly professional force. How it reached this level is an epic saga of struggle against bias and racial prejudice for the officers and men from early thirties to the beginning of World War II. The charge was that Indians lacked leadership qualities and could not fly military aircraft and technically maintain them. In just three years, IAF technicians and pilots imbibed the discipline of the Air Force and performed magnificently in the North West Frontier Province. By 1939, when the war broke out, there was just one squadron. In 1941-42, the Japanese onslaught on Burma provided the IAF with an opportunity to show its competence and leadership in battle. As the Allied armies were retreating, along with the RAF, the IAF provided air cover. By 1944-45, there were nine squadrons and till the end of the war there were constantly in action. History records events taking an impersonal view. What our younger generations need to know is people. Without people there are no units and no organization. This narrative is an effort to bring to the reader the fierce joy at fighting for the country, the professional pride of doing one's duty and finally the personal touch: "I did it." Through the mouths of youngsters (who are no longer youngsters and some who have passed away) the reader can imagine himself to be there whether in the North-West tribal region, or flying over the thick jungles of Burma. It is the first-person account that provides the flesh and blood to history by describing hopes, fears, and pride in facing death and the enemy at close quarters on the frontier or in Burma. The narrative has interviews with those who took part in operations. This is a story of the Indian Air Force coming of age after being bloodied in war.

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