

The position now is that the manpower ceiling has almost been reached as regards R.A.F. personnel, and the provision for future expansion in this Command, the necessity for which no one can doubt, is a problem still to be solved.

That the W.A.A.F. should be brought to the rescue was an idea that did not come to fruition within the period of this Despatch.

40. *The Indian Air Force (I.A.F.).*

Previous Despatches from the India Command have not so far dealt specifically with developments in this Service, and a stage has now been reached when a review of it is opportune.

The Indian Air Force has now almost reached the peace time strength of the Royal Air Force ten or eleven years ago. Numerous facilities for technical and flying training have been thrown open to the youth of the country who, as regards technical training, have realised the value of what was being offered to them and responded accordingly.

The process of expansion, however, has been so rapid that many difficulties have arisen. The Indian Air Force is at the moment completely Indian, with the exception of a limited number of R.A.F. N.C.Os. No European can hold a commission in the Indian Air Force, which differs in this respect from the Royal Indian Navy and the Indian Army. Up till the beginning of 1942, R.A.F. officers did in fact command I.A.F. units without, however, being specifically commissioned in the I.A.F. After the success of No. 1 Squadron in the Burma campaign, policy was changed and since that date only one Royal Air Force officer (for a brief period of two or three months) has commanded an I.A.F. Squadron. It will be seen then, that as far as possible, the Indian Air Force as a service has been kept Indian.

In regard to efficiency, however, the I.A.F. up to November, 1943, had hardly succeeded as well as its first Squadron did in Burma. Owing to the rapid expansion of the Service since the outbreak of the War there is a definite lack of officers suitable for important commands. At the moment it depends almost entirely for its leadership on the limited number of officers who in pre-war days were trained at Cranwell. The intake of officers since war broke out has been large, and their training necessarily has been far less thorough than that given at Cranwell.

It is early yet to form any idea as to whether and to what extent the I.A.F. should be assisted by a cadre of R.A.F. personnel. Several completely Indian Squadrons will shortly go into action. If these acquit themselves well, their success will obviously reduce the number of R.A.F. personnel necessary to give assistance. It may, however, be necessary later to increase the R.A.F. element in I.A.F. Squadrons.

With regard to the recruiting of Indian manpower for the I.A.F. the rate of intake of the previous six months was maintained.

The rate of intake, although it only amounted to 60 per cent. of the target, was still six times greater than the 1942 average, and recruiting in fact has been successful beyond what was expected.

The recruitment of airmen with the ultimate object of finding suitable material as officers, presented some difficulty. Those few I.A.T.C. cadets who were keen to become pilots were

not willing to enter the ranks and take their chance of being subsequently selected for pilot training, when they could probably obtain direct commissions in the Army or the Royal Indian Navy. The policy of commissioning from the ranks was vigorously pursued, but few of the men selected were good officer material, and fewer succeeded in completing their training as pilots. After the success of the campaign for technicians, however, an aircrew publicity campaign was launched, stressing the adventurous aspects of flying. Experienced officers were detailed to tour India, with the result that a list of over 400 candidates was obtained for interviews by the Officers' Selection Board.

Moreover the Air Training Corps, which is already functioning in six universities and is due to begin shortly in two others, has now been converted to an organisation for the production of general duties officers. On the other hand the number of recruits required to keep up the ten I.A.F. squadrons has increased, and there has also been an increase in training wastage. It is not, therefore, certain as yet that an adequate flow of recruits will be maintained.

With the above manpower difficulties and complications it was not surprising that the original target of ten squadrons for the I.A.F. had not been achieved by the end of 1943. Eight were ready and two were forming. All ten should be operational by the end of 1944.

Future policy regarding the I.A.F. is not clear-cut though it has been laid down in principle.

Since pilots are scarce, and R.A.F. crews are already employed in I.A.F. squadrons, it is not intended to form further I.A.F. squadrons for some time. The future in peace time of the I.A.F. will best be served by making these squadrons as efficient as possible, and for this purpose the pilots trained under the Empire Training Scheme, many of whom will gain operational experience in Fighter Command at home, and certain I.A.F. officers who will have gained similar experience by posting on an 'exchange' basis to Royal Air Force fighter squadrons in India, will prove extremely useful.

The next stage in the I.A.F. expansion desired by the Indian Government is the building of I.A.F. maintenance, training and administrative units appropriate to the firstline strength. It would be possible to work in this direction by increasing the Indian element in certain agreed units suitable to the purpose, but no final commitments have been entered into as yet.

41. *I.A.F. Training.*

The actual training of officers and airmen of the I.A.F. has presented difficulties owing to the almost complete absence of R.A.F. officers with a knowledge of India, the general shortage of instructional staff, and inevitable delays over building projects. Elementary and service training for I.A.F. pilots have indeed been carried out, but the wastage rate was alarmingly high, often amounting to over sixty per cent. During the period under review, thirty-seven pilots left for Canada under the Empire Air Training Scheme after completion of their elementary training, and thirty-two successfully passed out of the Service Flying Training School.