

'WINGS' FOR GROUP CAPTAIN HARJINDER SINGH

New Delhi, April 14.- Among the young pupil-pilots who will receive their "wings" from Air Marshal Ronald Ivelaw-Chapman, C-in-C, IAF, at a commissioning and wing-presentation parade to be held at No.1 Air Force Academy, Ambala, tomorrow, April 15, will also be 41-year-old Group Captain Harjinder Singh, Officer Commanding, IAF Station, Kanpur.

By earning his "wings" at this comparatively ripe age, Group Captain Harjinder Singh adds yet another record to the many which he has established in the IAF since he started his Service career in the early thirties in the lowest rank, then known as 'Hawai Sepoy'. An aeronautical engineer by trade, he recently started teaching himself flying on an aircraft constructed all by himself.

While commanding one of the most important and largest IAF Stations, the Base Repair Depot at Kanpur, where most of the operational and trainer aircraft used by the Service are maintained, Harjinder Singh devoted every minute of his time, after his arduous office duties had been attended to, to complete his training as a full-fledged Service pilot. His Senior Administrative Officer, Squadron Leader E.D. Masillamani, who is a qualified flying instructor, assisted him in his 'advanced flying' stage. In qualifying for his 'wings', Group Captain Harjinder Singh has completed the curriculum of all the ground and air training, which is required of pupil-pilots at the flying training establishments before they can earn their flying badges.

Ability and hard work which mark Group Captain Harjinder Singh's career, have been responsible for his meteoric rise from a mere 'Hawai Sepoy' to a Group Captain.

Born in Hoshiarpur (Punjab) in 1909, Harjinder Singh

completed his engineering studies at the Maclagan Engineering College, Lahore. Although on the merits of his technical qualifications alone he could have aspired for a higher initial rank, he chose to join the newly-formed IAF, as a mere 'Hawai Sepoy', the lowest rank in the Service. By sheer dint of merit and hard work, he belied the then prevalent prejudices against "un-technical-minded Indians", and worked his way up to become the first IAF Corporal, the first sergeant and the first Indian warrant officer, soon after to become Chief Technical Officer at the RAF Station, Peshawar, with over 1,000 technicians working under him.

Harjinder Singh was commissioned in 1942 after his return from the first Burma air-operations where, as a Warrant Officer, in charge of ground crew, he earned immense praise from the late Wing Commander Mujamdar, who was then commanding No.1 IAF Squadron.

In 1948, Harjinder Singh took over command of the IAF Base Repair Depot, Kanpur, from Group Captain (now Air Commodore) D.A.R. Nanda, which important post he still holds.

A strict disciplinarian who can appreciate problems that confront men in free India's rapidly-expanding Air Force, Group Captain Harjinder Singh has greatly endeared himself to all ranks of the young Service. His latest feat of earning "wings" at an age when even trained pilots restrict their flying is yet another personal example which he sets to inspire the younger men in the Service and outside.

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