

Form 540: April, 1945

159 Squadron

Place	Date	Summary of Events
		Month of April, 1945
		Part 1. – Operations.
Digri	April 1945	The month of April has been exceptional where training has been concerned, but the period of 1st to 8th and one or two days during the rest of the month produced some successful Minelaying Operations.
		The extensive training programme was due to the Squadron having changed over to the duties of a "Pathfinder Force" entailing maximum accuracy in bombing and navigation. These two important items represented the basis of the training programme.
		Of the minelaying operations, 30 sorties were carried out with a total of 1199 hours, 30 minutes.
		These sorties required the aircraft and crews to enter into some of the most heavily defended waters, but little opposition was encountered. Two aircraft reported tracer fire, one from Tavoy Island and another from vessels in Mergui. Another aircraft reported 4 – 5 L.M.G. positions in Tavoy, but no damage to aircraft was reported. One of our aircraft flew on five S.D. Operations from Jessore and one from Digri, between the 1st and 8th of April, whilst another aircraft of this Squadron carried out on S.D. operation from Jessore, making two aircraft in all on this work on the one day.
		On the night of the 27th the first P.F.F. Tactics were tried out by this Squadron, accompanied by a Bombing Force consisting of three more Squadrons, namely, No. 99, 355 and 356 Squadrons. The job 159 Squadron had was to find good bombing winds, mark the target and pass a suitable wind to the other Squadrons; this was very successful, and enabled the other Squadrons to bomb without the slightest delay. After 159 dropped their bombs they flew around for approximately half an hour, to observe and photograph the results. This method of bombing proved highly successful as was stated when later interrogation of the crews was completed. Since this operation a letter of congratulation has been received by the Squadron, commending them on such a fine job of work. This has served to boost up the morale of the Aircrew and Ground Crews.
		159 Squadron "C" Flight continued its work on Radar investigations from a base in Ceylon, the aircraft and crew being detached there for approximately three weeks. Special operators were carried to record Jap W.T. and R.T. messages, in addition to the normal investigations. These trips also were highly successful, 12 signals having been received, of these 4 – 5 were plotted accurately, and positions obtained. Met. recordings and Search Light positions were also brought back, being of great assistance when briefing bomber crews.
		The two sorties flown were as follows:-
		23rd April, 1945: Covered Sumatra – Lower Malaya – Penang & Sabang.
		28th April, 1945: Covered the same trip as above, whence greater success was obtained.
		Flying times for the month are as follows:-
		Operational:                      Non-Optnl:                      Total:
		"A" Flight:                      266.45                      338.25                      605.10
		"B" Flight:                      270.25                      323.55                      594.20
		"C" Flight:                      35.00                      -----                      35.00
		572.10                      662.20                      1234.30
		A list of Operations are as follows:-
		1/4/45:                      S.D. Operations from Jessore.
		2/3 April, 1945.                      S.D. Operations from Jessore.
		4/5 April, 1945.                      S.D. Operations from Jessore.
		6/7 April, 1945.                      S.D. Operations from Jessore.
		8th April, 1945.                      S.D. Operations from Jessore.
		13 April, 1945.                      Minelaying from Digri:                      Heinze Bay – Tavoy – Mergui – King Island – Misseraing 6 a/c.
		18th April 1945.                      Minelaying from Digri:                      Rangoon – Heinze Bay – Mergui – Fell Passage – Pachan River – Pucet Harbour – Kisseraing 12 a/c.
		23rd April 1945.                      Minelaying from Digri:                      Rangoon – Tavoy – Pachan River – Mergui. 6 a/c.
		27th April 1945.                      Minelaying from Digri:                      Bangkok – Meklohng River – Prachuab Girikan – Ghumbhorn – Fell Passage. 6 a/c.
		27th April 1945.                      P.F.F. and Bombing.                      Rangoon Area L. 6 a/c.
		Training:

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		From the 9th to the 25th training was in progress on a large scale. A great number of practice bombs were dropped on Medium and High level targets with great success. Full use was made of all available aircraft and crews. For this period, the results being most encouraging. In addition, training was carried out before and after the actual period allotted, with the result that the total hours on training for the month amounted to 511 hours 35 mins day, and 80 hours 50 minutes night. Details of training are as follows:-
		Pilots: Five pilots were screened on their first operations and are now operating with their own crews. There are at present no crews requiring further screening, all crews now being operational to the required standard of efficiency.
		Navigators: In addition to Navigators flying on all bombing training flights, with a view to obtaining practice in finding a good bombing wind, two Loran Training flights were carried out during the month, as Loran training formed the major part of navigational training for the month. Details of this are found under ground training later in this record.
		Air Bombers: Bombsight calibration and bombing formed the major part of the total training carried out, the details of this training being listed below. a total of 2964 practice bombs were dropped during the month, being divided into fur groups as follows:-
		Flash:            Smoke:            Total:
		Medium level:            356            1419            1775
		Low Level:                ----            1189            1189
		356            2608            2964
		More time than had been anticipated was spent on bombsight calibration, with the result that advanced exercises originally planned were not carried out. From the period 9th to 25th, a total of 2659 Bombs were dropped, 356 by night and 2303 by day. Working on a basis of 8 bombs for a day exercise and 6 bombs for a night exercise, this amounts to each crew completing 12 day exercises and two and a half night exercises. These numbers are considerably below the amount anticipated, but in this period there were two factors contributing to a curtailment of the training, the first being operational demands; these took about 5 days of the time – and secondly, extensive thunderstorms on 5 separate nights, limiting night flying practice.
		Ground Training:
		In addition to the extensive air training carried out by all sections, an effort was made to increase Ground Training with the following results:-
		Pilots: Lectures were held for Pilots on the following subjects:
		(a) Engine handling and operation; instruction for the B.24s. by a technical representative of the Consolodated Aircraft Corporation.
		(b) A film on the principles and setting of the C.I. Automatic Pilot.
		(c) Principles of Loran.
		(d) Two separate discussion groups were set up on Range, Endurance, and Aircraft handling generally, these were presided over by the Commanding Officer.
		Navigators: The main subjects of Navigational Training were as follows:-
		(i) Introduction and operation of Loran.
		(ii) Screened operation.
		(iii) Gyro, Fluxgate compasses.
		(iv) Film on I.F.F.
		(v) Methods of finding and calculating winds for bombing.
		(vi) Alignment of Drift meters and rear turrets.
		(vii) Modifications of Sextant.
		(viii) Log Analysis.
		Loran Training has progressed favourably, and several navigators reached a stage where they have been able to fix themselves by Loran on operational Flights. Extensive ground training has been conducted on actual sets. Two Loran experts from U.K. visited the station and gave several valuable lectures. In addition, all navigators have seen films on Loran operation.
		Air Bombers: A general revision of this section was necessary due to the intensive work of calibrating all bomb sights. All air bombers received instruction on Loran manipulation, also the following:-
		(1) Fighter control.
		(2) Mechanism of Mark XIV Bombsight.
		(3) New methods of ground levelling.

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		Air Gunners: The Gunnery section was re-organised extensively with a view to intensifying the training of gunners, actively engaged in flying operations. Lectures were given on Search and sighting, which proved beneficial. A zone trainer was brought into operation and approximately 15 hours instruction was given. Tail gunners were instructed in turret manipulation and method of drift taking.
		Flight Engineers: This section was also re-organised, with an aircraft Captain filling the role of Engineer Leader. The advent of fully trained Flight Engineers to replace Air Gunners and other trades who had been acting as Engineers, proved beneficial. A refresher course was opened by the Squadron Engineer Officer. In addition, Flight Engineers received instruction in Gunnery and Turret Manipulation from the Gunnery Section.
		Signals: An extensive Signals training was carried out this month, with ground lectures for all operators. Instruction in Morse and Liaison Equipment was carried out which included ten Operators training for Grade I Board standard. All operators obtained practice QDMs. during flying training and four operators were screened on operations. The foregoing repeats a detailed account of the Squadron's activities during the past month, but in addition to this an Officer from "E" Group gave a lecture on Escape to all aircrew, whilst another told of his experiences whilst escaping.
		An Air Sea Rescue Section has now been set up in the Station with a view to presenting to all Aircrews a comprehensive picture of Air Sea Rescue aids available.
		(L.B. Ercolani) Wing Commander, Commanding, No. 159 Squadron, R.A.F. India.
		Part II. Administration.
Digri	2/4	New working hours commenced as follows:-
		Commence Work            07.00 hours.
		Cease for Tiffen            12.30 "
		Commence work.            16.30 "
		Cease work.                18.00 "
		Sunday working hours - 08.00 to 12.30 hours.
		It was decided, as a result of the many cases of personnel frequenting Brothels, to stress even more the grave results of such indiscretions. The matter is being publicised as much as possible, and the fact that Brothels and disorderly houses of any class or description are OUT OF BOUNDS to all ranks is being stressed frequently.
	3/4	A message of Congratulation was received from Headquarters, Air Command South East Asia concerning the excellent results achieved by 159 Squadron, and congratulations were added by General Stratemeyer. this greatly boosted morale generally.
	10/4	Wing Commander L.B. Ercolani, D.S.O., assumed command of the Squadron vice Wing Commander B.F. Burbridge – posted to R.A.F. Station Kolar.
	19/4	The Dental Officer of the Station made a general tour round the Squadron during working hours and inspected as many personnel as possible. Owing to the Cholera epidemic which has now broken out in severity in Calcutta, all ranks have been warned to take inoculation as a disciplinary and precautionary measure, no one being permitted to leave the camp without having first been inoculated against Cholera at least 48 hours beforehand.
	25/4	Clothing Parade – first for two months owing to the shortage of material and cloth, prevalent throughout the province of Bengal at this particular time.
		With the War in Germany looking very favourable to the Allied Forces, thoughts were turned to the events which would take place when the War was actually terminated there. a Conference was therefore held in the Commanding Officer's Office to discuss the events generally which might take place on the "V.E" day, and Officers were appointed to be in charge of various types of social activities, essential duties, etc.
		The health of the Squadron remained very good. There were two cases of Syphilis contracted in Calcutta. One case was put on D.I. list owing to complications setting in which necessitated an operation. He subsequently improved and was taken off the D.I. list. Nineteen cases of Enteritis and Dysentery were admitted to S.S.Q. and the Hospital. of which 15 were Officers. In addition a number of other officers were affected to a mild degree. In the space of three days there were about 12 to 15% of the Officers in the Mess affected, of whom tests showed one to be an Amoebic Dysentery, and two to be Bacillary Dysentery. The remainder, though no specific organism could be found were probably bacillary dysentery. This epidemic was entirely attributable to the bad construction of, and the unhygienic conditions existing in, the Officers' Mess Kitchen, and materially reduced the efficiency of

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		the Squadron for about a week. Though the general hygiene of the kitchens has improved as a result of the epidemic, food handling by Indian Cooks, which is undoubtedly a contributory cause in the origin of such diseases, cannot be entirely abolished as is laid down in the instructions for cookhouses, owing to the shortage of British Cooks.
		There were two cases of tonsillitis, probably due to the dust storms which have been prevalent this month.
		There have been no cases of Malaria. This is attributable to this area being a practically mosquito free area during the present period.
		Very full information on Hot weather precautions has been given to all personnel. Adequate supplies of drinking water are provided, especially on the working sites. Adequate salt intake has been stressed as has also the avoidance of alcoholic drinks (except perhaps in the evenings and then not in excess). Protection of the head by topee of bush hat has been enforced. As a result, (though the weather has not been excessively hot), there have been no cases of heat exhaustion or heat stroke.
		Hospitalization. No. 56 Mobile Field Hospital, which has been working on this Station for four months, has now closed down, owing to frequent thunderstorms during which the wind has reached gale strength, thus rendering the tents uninhabitable. However, emergency surgery is still being carried out using the crash room of S.S.Q. as an operating theatre, and specialist opinions are still available. Other cases needing transfer to Hospital are now taken to the Combined Military Hospital at Midnapore 15 miles away. It is hoped that the M.F.H. will be functioning again on completion of the permanent site which is now being built on this Station.
		Part III Personnel
	8/4	The following crews were posted out from the Squadron to the units shown:-
		all Heavy Bomber units:-
		4 Crews to 355 Squadron.
		3 Crews to 99 Squadron.
		2 Crews to 215 Squadron.
		2 Crews to 356 Squadron.
		The following crews were posted in from the units shown:-
		5 Crews from No. 99 Squadron.
		2 Crews from No. 215 Squadron.
		3 Crews from No. 355 Squadron.
		2 Crews from No. 356 Squadron.
	9/4	Wing Commander Pape, the R.A.A.F. Liaison Officer, visited the Squadron. He was met and shown round by Flying Officer S.J. Smith, the senior R.A.A.F. Officer of the Squadron.
	3/4	The following proceeded to B.R.D. Worli for repatriation to U.K. after their overseas tour of duty:- Five Senior N.C.Os and Two Airmen.
	10/4	In view of the fact that the Squadron has been given a special role, the most experienced and picked crews in the Group have been posted here, as a result of which it was found necessary to create the following appointments:-
		O.C. "A" Flight. S/Ldr. J.M. Stroud. Navigation Off: F/Lt. G. Brantingham.
		O.C. "B" Flight. F/Lt. T.W. Watson. Signals Leader: F/O. Oakley.
		Deputy "A" Flt. F/Lt. C.F. Williams. Gunnery Officer F/Lt. Gall.
		Deputy "B" Flt. F/Lt. R.W. Williams. Engineer Ldr. F/O. Haycock.
		Signals "A" Flt. F/O. L. Marsh. Bombing Ldr. F/O. J.R. Deer.
		Signals "B" Flt. F/O. Edgerley. Training Off: F/Lt. C.F. Williams.
	14/4	Eight Radar Mechanics arrived on the Squadron, having travelled all the way from England by air, thereby setting a precedent in reinforcement of personnel on this Squadron.
	16/4	S/Ldr. Doherty (Group Bombing Leader) visited the Squadron in connection with the intensive training programme which is taking place on the Squadron at the present time. He returned to 231 Group on 19/4/45.
	20/4	Seventeen airmen of various ground and technical trades, arrived on the Squadron ex Convoy KMF.42.
	22/4	One officer, on Senior N.C.O. (Aircrew) and Two airmen proceeded to B.R.D. Worli en route for U.K. on Home Leave. These people proceed by air from Worli to U.K.
	24/4	A further six Radar Mechanics (Two of them senior N.C.Os) arrived, having travelled straight out from the U.K. by air. The radar strength is now 19.
		A return of personnel who come under the Release Classification 1 to 20, was forwarded to 185 Wing.

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		There are seven in all, on the unit.
	25/4	One Flight Sergeant and two A.Cs. proceed to B.R.D. Worli, Bombay, on the completion of their overseas tour of duty, for onward transmission to U.K.
		The following were granted commissions and reported as Officers on the Squadron on the dates stated:-
		W/O. Temple-Smith. R.R. A.422754 Pilot. 24.4.45.
		W/O. Fisher. A.L.P. A.427505 Nav.B. 27.4.45
		F/S. Richards. G.A. 1811969 F/Eng. 7.4.45.
	28/4	P/O. J. Ewels – Signals Officer, also Savings and Education Officer for the unit, proceeded on posting to No. 5769 M.S.U. Salbani. P/O. E. Osmond – Radar Officer, took over the duties of Squadron Education Officer and F/O. J. Corlett the duties of Unit Savings Officer.
	28/4	The death occurred at about 12.00 hours of 928224 Cpl. Harmsworth. A.E. Driver M.T. under the following circumstances:-
		Cpl. Harmsworth was returning from Midnapore in Bedford Articulator No. B.A.279051 which was loaded up with thirteen large almirahs destined for H.Q. 185 Wing. At 11.15 a.m. he left Midnapore, and had reached a spot some two miles away from Salbani when a bullock cart was observed proceeding in the same direction. Cpl. Harmsworth commenced to sound his horn, at the same time reducing speed, and steered to the right hand side of the road, apparently anticipating that the bullock cart would go to the left, instead of which it swung right across the path of the vehicle. Cpl. Harmsworth ran off the road down the embankment, and collided with a large tree resulting in his being severely injured and the cab of the vehicle badly damaged on impact. Cpl. Harmsworth was unconscious when picked up by a passing Ambulance and life was found to be extinct when the ambulance subsequently arrived at Midnapore Hospital. A Post Mortem was held 13.00 hours the same day and the cause of death attributed to the following:- Shock: Extensive fracture of the base of the skull. The funeral took place at St. John's Church, Midnapore, Bengal at 14.00 hours on 29th April. A Court of Inquiry was convened for this accident, and assembled on 28th April. F/O. J. Corlett was detailed as Officer to form Committee of Adjustment on Cpl. Harmsworth, and to gather together his effects.
		Part IV. Honours & Awards.
		The following received awards as stated for meritorious service whilst on the squadron.
		149322 F/O(A/F/Lt) F.P.A. Pilot D.F.C. 24/4/45 Heynert.
		129222 F/Lt. R.A. Clarke. Pilot D.F.C.(Imm.) 11/4/45
		1336817 F/Sgt. B.F. Bailey. B/Amr. D.F.M.(Imm.) 11/4/45
		1382302 W/O. V.A. Coles. W/Air. D.F.M. 6/4/45
		61033 F/Lt. P.L.F. O'Reilly. Pilot. D.F.C. 6/4/45
		55053 F/Lt. G. Pendleton. Pilot. D.F.C. "
		R.151664 W/O. A.E. Campbell. Nav. D.F.C. "
		1321484 W/O. R.A. QuaiFFE. Pilot. D.F.C. "
		1348601 W/O. G.P. Houstoun. Nav.B. D.F.C. "
		539477 F/Sgt. F.W. Jones. Fitt IIE M.I.D.
		936351 Sgt. P.A. Stanier. Clk/GD. M.I.D.
		967277 LAC. T.V. Irwin. F.M.E. M.I.D. (Service on previous unit)
		Part V. General & Welfare Etc.
	21/4	Spontaneous and severe rainstorms are being experienced at the present time. Rethatching of the whole Station has however, been carried out since the 15th of this month, but as the whole of the Camp will take some time, there have necessarily been a number of billets on the domestic site which have suffered, and rain is leaking badly into about three of them. The matter has been reported and priority is anticipated for work on these particular billets.
	27/4	A Rifle Shooting competition is being organised, and Group Captain G.F. MacPherson, A.F.C., Station Commander, has kindly agreed for the range to be opened at specified periods, and also at any time where there is a sufficient number at one time, in order that practice shots may be obtained.
	28/4	The new Mineral Water Plant commenced operating, and has now reached a turnover of 80 dozen bottles daily. At present this is a big success, and is used to supply the Airmen's Canteen, Officers and Sergeants' Messes.
	30/4	An E.N.S.A. Concert Party visited the Station and gave the production "Stepping Out". the majority of the Squadron personnel were able to attend, and the show generally was appreciated by all.

Place	Date	Summary of Events
		Resume of Month's Work and Morale of Unit.
		April was a month of big changes for the Squadron. This was as a result of the decision to form a "special" Squadron, and for it to be trained up to the highest possible standard, to enable them to act as 'Pathfinder' to the remainder of the Group, and also to be able to undertake more difficult tasks than those normally called for.
		To this end the best crews were selected from all the Squadrons and posted to 159 Squadron. Their operational experience varied from Nil hours to 250 operational hours. There was also a complete change in all the aircrew Leader Posts, Flight Commanders and Commanding Officer. This to some extent at the beginning of the month resulted in rather an unhappy feeling amongst the Squadron, the aircrews tended to gather in their own separate "corner" by squadrons and the ground crews rather wondered what it was all about and felt rather unsettled.
		An intensive Training Programme was started. The future policy was fully explained both to the aircrew and to the ground crew and much emphasis was laid on the point that the work expected from this Squadron was to be the finest possible, and much better than anything done in the past. This was also the time when there was some doubt concerning the length of tour; it was definitely explained that the tour was now 400 hours and the matter closed. The whole Squadron set to in a wholehearted manner, and some really useful training was completed. A separate and specialised Bombsight Section was started and organized by Flying Officer Hughes and Cpl. Vervaeet, and proved an immense asset towards lowering the bombing errors. The ground crews realised the importance of this training and before long were almost as keen to know what the practice bombing errors were as when the Squadron was operating.
		Towards the end of the month the first Pathfinder mission was arranged. The route was effectively marked, bombing times and heights allocated, the I.P. and target marked, with the result that the Main Force – consisting of all other Squadrons in the group – were able to follow straight through and bomb the target in a far shorter space of time than had previously been possible, achieving at the same time a high concentration of bombs on the target. Several successful mining operations were also completed and the general morale increased very considerably, and the showing at the end of the month was a heightening of the morale and a Squadron working well together and keen to show what they could do.
		(L.B. Ercolani) Wing Commander, Commanding, No. 159 Squadron, R.A.F. India.