

Form 540: March 1945

159 Squadron

Place	Date	Time	Summary of Events
			Month of March 1945
			Part I – Operations.
Digri	Mar 1945		During the month of March operational flights have been made at regular intervals and targets attacked more frequently than has been the past policy. However smaller numbers of aircraft have been generally used. Very good results were obtained particularly on bridge strikes. On one operation using twelve aircraft four bridges were definitely destroyed and confirmation was obtained from PRU reports.
			A total of 108 sorties were flown by A and B Flights during the month and the following bombs were dropped on enemy targets: 409 X 1000 lb, 33 X 500 lb. 46 x 500 lb. M78 1.B. 16 X 100 M17 1B 240 Recco. Flares. 174 Mines were laid in enemy waters.
			C Flight flew 4 sorties for the month. Two stations were pin-pointed, one on Car Nicobar, and the other in Northern Sumatra, while a third at Sabang was confirmed.
			Training has continued on the Squadron and results have been satisfactory. Cross country exercises have been flown by two crews and the pilots are now fully converted as Captains. Six crews have carried out Dinghy drill at Kharagpur.
			Navigators
			13 have received lectures (3) and 5 have received 2 lectures on Loran. ?? hours have been devoted to practice manipulation.
			Air Bombers
			3 Loran lectures have been given and 5 ½ hours have been devoted to manipulation. 22 M.L and L.L. practice bombing exercises were carried out and 221 practice bombs dropped.
			Wireless Ops.
			New crews received ground instruction on B.P. Turrets. Practice on turret manipulation and drift taking while on practice bombing.
			The following summary covers a brief outline of the month's operational activities:
			2nd/3rd Makasan Rly Workshops 8 aircraft bombed and one jettisoned. Two aircraft used as PFF. " Mining – Bangkok River – 3 A/C. 4th/5th Bangkok Noi Rly Station – 12 A/C. 6th/7th Sittang East Ferry Sidings – 12 A/C. 8th Bridges Q27 & Q28 Burma-Siam Rly – 12 A/C. 11th Bridges 13 & 26 Bangkok-Cnienmai Rly – 11 A/C. 15th Bridges 147 148 Moulmein-Ye & Bridge Q127 Burma-Siam Rly – 12 A/C. 17th/18 Mining - Amherst, Heinze Bay, Tavoy, Bangkok – 5 A/C. 20th/22nd ASR Search – 3 A/C. 22nd Nububg – Moulmein, Mergui, Bangkok – 6 A/C. 24th Mining – Amherst, Tavoy, Heinze Bay – 3 A/C. Two aircraft detailed to mine Meklohng River failed to reach the target owing to unfavourable weather conditions. 27th Mining – Bangkok, Meklohng River, Prachuab Girikan – 4 A/C. 29th Mining – Rangoon, Moulmein – 5 A/C. 31st/1st Mining Pakchan River, Bangkok River, Mergui – 6 A/c.
			"C" Flight Sorties.
			1st. Port Blair – Car Nicobar – Sumatra. 5th. Gt.Cocos – Mergui – Butang – Penang – Diamond Pt. – Sabang – Car Nicobar. 9th. Rangoon – Moulmein. 18th. Rangoon – Mergui.
			Flying Hours.
			Operational      Non-Operational      Total
			"A" Flight            734.05            116.10            850.15
			"B" Flight            748.00            102.50            850.50
			"C" Flight            68.20            ----            68.20
			Total:                1550.25            219.00            1769.25

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			Aircraft "G" has been posted missing from the operation of the 15th. Nothing was heard from the aircraft after leaving base.
			As a result of A.A. fire while over the target at Bangkok, R.153102 W/O. Orton N.R. Navigator, of aircraft "K" received wounds from which he died on the return journey.
			On the 6th March 1945, the following personnel of the Squadron proceeded to Calcutta by air to be present at an investiture in honour of W/Cdr. J. Blackburn D.F.C. D.S.O. late Commanding Officer of the Squadron, at which he was decorated with the American D.F.C. The aircraft took off at 10.00 hrs. and was piloted by F/O. Borthwick. The following comprised the party:- F/Lt. E. Burchmore – Eng. Officer. P/O. G.R. Gilbery – Engineer Leader. F/Lt. G. Brennan – Nav. Officer. P/O. L. Willshire. F/Sgt. J. Jung N.CO. i/c "A" Flight. F/Sgt. A. Watson N.C.O. i/c instruments. F/Sgt. G. Allen, W/O. E. Stanier – W/Cdr. Blackburn's Gunner and W/Op. respectively. L.A.C. Williams – Orderly Room, L.A.C. King, L.A.C. Burke, L.A.C. Cawkwell – Fitters on W/Cdr. Blackburn's aircraft.
			Part II. – Administration.
			Notification was received that the Squadron was to be made into a "Special Squadron" of the Group in order to carry out any particular hazardous and complicated operations which might be required including pathfinding, specialist bombing etc. An intensive training programme would be carried out and for this purpose the Squadron would be free from operations for a period during April in order that crews may be trained to the highest possible efficiency. A considerable number of crews would need to be posted out and experienced ones from various Squadrons posted in.
			On 7.4.45. the Squadron received a visit from the Allied Air Commander in Chief, Air Marshal Sir Keith R. Park K.C.B., M.C., D.F.C., who landed at 09.15 hrs. and inspected various units on the station, departing at 11.00 hours.
			The health of the Squadron remained satisfactory. Two ground crew personnel were repatriated during the month on medical grounds. Adequate supplies of drinking water are now to be had on flights. Four case of malaria occurred, one new case and three relapses. Three cases of V.D. were admitted to 56 M.F.H. for treatment. In one case it was proved that infection had occurred locally, in spite of numerous orders regarding the danger of infection from coolie women.
			Numerous outbreaks of fire among the undergrowth occurred on the 8th and 9th of the month, these being particularly dangerous in view of their proximity to the bomb dump. Steps were taken to clear all unnecessary dry grass etc. and the result has been highly successful.
			Part III. – Personnel
			On 8.3.45. 28 ground personnel ex U.K. arrived to replace personnel who had been repatriated. On 10.3.45. 20 N.C.O. aircrew personnel arrived.
			Aircraft "G" failed to return from operations on the 15.3.45. and the crew, consisting of the following, was listed as "Missing Particulars Unknown":-
			J.12488 F/O. William Murray Tree – Capt.
			J.43995 P/O. Thomas Clement Reeve – 2nd Pilot.
			J.43407 F/O. Walter Garfield Cunningham – Nav.
			J.44123 P/O. William Francis Stafford – B/A.
			R.258143 T/Sgt. Donald Lee Haberthur – WOP/AIR
			1306199 T/Sgt. J. M. Fletcher – (A.G.) – Flight Eng.
			R.212692 T/Sgt. John William Paterson – Nose Gnr.
			R.263488 T/Sgt. Gerald Francis Greenlee – Tail Gnr.
			The Unit was visited by the R.C.A.F. Liaison Officer – S/Ldr. Ferguson and F/Lt. Burns ("P" Staff 231 Group) on 15.3.45. the latter to enquire into the position regarding crews.
			Two airmen of the unit were fortunate in being able to proceed on the newly introduced mid-tour leave scheme for the R.A.F. on 16.3.45. – by air.
			On 22.3.45. W/O. N.R. Orton R.158102 (Nav) died from wounds sustained as the result of enemy action while over the target.
			Part IV – Honours and Awards
			Notification was received of the award of D.F.C. to P/O. J.A. White J.45138 in respect

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			of outstanding devotion to duty on the 11.2.45. P/O. White was the navigator of an aircraft detailed to carry out an attack on an enemy railway bridge. During the first run in the aircraft was engaged by intense and accurate A/A fire which pierced the navigator's compartment. P/O White sustained injuries to his chest which resulted in a great loss of blood but carried on with his work and continued to navigate the aircraft a further 7 ½ hours, successfully bring the machine to base. Twice during the homeward trip he fainted through weakness but recovered and by sheer courage and fortitude carried on with his duties.
			Part V – General.
			Welfare.
			An E.N.S.A. Concert Party "To Your Liking" ran for three nights on the station and was appreciated by all ranks. During the month a R.A.F. Reportory Company Show – "Lifeline" – a play in three acts about the Merchant Navy in wartime was also received. This proved not so popular as the revue or variety type of entertainment. The Canteen continued to operate with great success. Many of the special lines received – propelling pencils, watches etc. – were appreciated and these were usually disposed of by ballot. The Recreation room and quiet room are used considerably and the library is extremely popular.
			Sport.
			Sport continues to be very popular although the more energetic types such as football, hockey etc. have been curtailed in favour of badminton, tennis etc. A tennis court has been constructed at Wing and is available to various units on the Station on different days.
			Resume of Month's Work and Morale of Unit.
			Excellent morale and a very high standard of efficiency on the part of all ranks were again the keynote of the month's work and keen co-operation between air and ground crews assumed once again a very high level. The number of operational and training sorties carried out demanded of all personnel very considerable effort, and serviceability figures give ample evidence that this requirement was not found lacking. Damage to aircraft, in the main from small arms and L.M.G. fire from railway targets attacked at low level was more than in the previous month and on the attack against Bridges Q.27 and Q.28 on the Burma/Siam Railway on the day of 8th March 1945, no less than 7 aircraft out of the total of 12 received damage, severe enough in the cases of two aircraft for them to be declared complete write-offs. This increase in opposition encountered has naturally caused an added burden to the ground crews from the point of view of serviceability but in all case of damage to aircraft repairs were rapidly and efficiently effected. During the month two considerable successes attributable to the Squadron's mining were brought to light – one 200' Merchant Vessel sunk in the Bangkok River just opposite the Government Oil Refinery, observed by photo recco, and the 2500 ton Japanese Tanker "Kuisho Maru" also sunk in the Bangkok River in January 1945 reported from Clandestine sources. News of this kind has so far been rather limited, and in consequence notification of the above successes was very enthusiastically received by all personnel. Excellent results of bombing especially the attacks on Makasan Railway Workshops, Bangkok, and the Bangkok Noi Railway Station, together with the exceptional successes attained in low level attacks against railway Wedges <sup>1</sup> , both by night and day, all combined to develop a very good Squadron spirit. Towards the close of the month, considerable curiosity mingled with apprehension and perhaps a little doubt, as the future role of the Squadron was discernable amongst all personnel, particularly aircrews.
			(L.B. Ercolani) Wing Commander Commanding

<sup>1</sup> Record says "Wedges", but perhaps should be "Bridges".

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			No. 159 Squadron, R.A.F.