

January 1945 Form 540

203 Squadron

Place	Date	Time	Summary of events
			I. Operations
Madura			Eight operations were flown during the month as follows:-
			Convoy Escorts 2 - 18 hours 50 minutes
			A/U Patrols 6 52 hours 30 minutes
			In addition to which a number of exercises have been carried out, including the shadowing of surface forces and searching for and attacking submarines by day and night. Of these exercises eleven were flown from Minneriya and three from Madura.
			The month started with a sighting of a submarine by a Merchant Ship 50 miles west of Cape Comorin (It was subsequently decided that this could not have been a U-Boat sighting). One of the Squadron's Liberators and a Catalina were despatched to search the area of the sighting, and in the course of its patrol the Catalina reported sighting a periscope at 2 miles range, in the vicinity of the ship. A Hunt to Exhaustion was commenced in which three of the Squadron's Aircraft took part, the first aircraft being compelled to return to base prior to its P.L.E. owing to damage sustained early in the patrol.
			Technical.
			With an average aircraft strength for the month of 11, an average of 7 ½ serviceable aircraft was achieved. Delays continued to be experienced in obtaining replacement fuel tanks and two cases occurred of sparking plugs breaking off in the cylinders necessitating cylinder changes. This trouble has recently become prevalent among other Liberator Squadrons in the Command.
			Non-Operational Flying.
			Totalled 315 hours including 48 ½ hours night flying. This included exercises with submarines and Naval Forces, Navigational exercises over a variety of courses, Bombing and Gunnery Practice and Radar Exercises. Additionally two crews (F/O Aldcroft and F/O. Morris) completed courses at No 21 A.P.C. Cholvaram
			After being out of use for more than two months awaiting spares the Squadron's Harvard aircraft was made serviceable again towards the end of the month.
Madura	4/5 Jan	0800	S/L. Gane's crew were briefed to investigate U-Boat sighting reported by M/V Richard Coulter in position 0805N 7642E and give the ship any assistance required. Whilst crossing coast line sliding door flew off front turret, when this was rotated, and lodged in main plane leading edge causing eddies, and vibration in fin and rudder, and damaging starboard Interrogator aerial. Aircraft continued to sighting position and commenced square search. The only ship in the area, a Tanker, was challenged OE and replied with weak Aldis Signals. This was with difficulty identified as British Resolution. An oil patch was investigated, and later a First Sighting Report from a Catalina in the area was intercepted. Orders were received to home on the Catalina using Wide Wide, but as no signals were picked up landfall was made to check position and course set for sighting position 0820N 7550E, where contact was made with Markers and the Catalina, and fresh Markers dropped. At this point it was decided that the turret door was affecting the safety of the aircraft and a relief aircraft was requested from base. Base ordered aircraft to return, which it did after informing the Catalina and dropping Markers.
Madura	4th Jan		Between 1500 and 1600 hours three more aircraft were despatched to carry out searches 4 (a) (b) and (c) of the Submarine Hunt to Exhaustion as laid down in IOGROPS Tactical Instruction No. 22.
			The first aircraft (F/L. Waterton – Capt) flew to the datum position, but observed

			no sea markers. They commenced their patrol, and sighted the markers after 3 circuits. After 5 circuits base ordered a transfer to search 5. Half an hour later the Captain decided that P.L.E. had been reached and went off patrol having previously informed base of his E.T.A. The aircraft landed with a considerable reserve of fuel, but no previous consumption test had been carried out.
			The second aircraft (P/O. Roigard – Capt) found the markers without difficulty and commenced search 4 (c). This took them over the shipping lane and a number of shipping contacts were obtained. One suspicious contact was homed on. The contact disappeared but a brown oil patch was observed on the sea. A signal was received ordering transfer to search 5 (B) but owing to a fault in decoding was understood to order search 5 (c). This was accordingly carried out until the end of the patrol.
			The third aircraft (F/L. Ensom – Capt) carried out patrol 4B. Again the patrol was over the shipping lane and many contacts were obtained. The signal to transfer to search 5 (c) was improperly decoded and not understood. Accordingly this aircraft was on patrol 4B throughout the sortie. A signal Wide Wide was received from Base. This was intended to home a relieving aircraft, but not being sent in accordance with Tactical Instructions, was interpreted as ordering our aircraft, to listen out for homing signals. A Flashing white light was investigated. Nothing else was visible at this position, but a naval Escort vessel was seen to be circling the vicinity. The aircraft was off patrol after carry out 7 ½ circuits of patrol 4 (B).
Madura	8th Jan		Night escort was provided for Force Aintree by two aircraft from last light until dawn on the following morning. Pilots were W/O. Lyons and S/L. Mosher. The Force, comprising one Merchant Ship, a Cruiser and two Destroyers is understood to be that which conveyed H. H. The Duke of Gloucester to Australia, on taking up his post as Governor General. The first aircraft homed on the Catalina on prior escort using Loop Wide Wide Procedure. The second aircraft had to search with S.E. owing to the first aircraft not having picked up the signal from base ordering Wide Wide, and the convoy was found after 1 hour. One suspicious contact was investigated, which disappeared on approach. Continuous escort was provided without other incident.
Madura	24th Jan		F/L. Sandall in the course of a consumption test flew a patrol of the East Coast Shipping Lane to Cuttack flying North on the "Inner" lane and returning the following day on the "Outer Lane". The trip Northward took longer than anticipated owing to a head wind, and the crew having been briefed not to send an E.T.A., their late arrival caused some anxiety.
	25th Jan		The return trip was carried out without incident.
			Training Flights.
Minneriya	3/4 Jan		W/O. Hudson took his aircraft to Minneriya from which Station he carried out Exercise Dog E??W of Ceylon with one of H M Submarines by night. After a search with Radar at 1000 ft. a contact was picked up at 5 miles on which the aircraft homed. No flares were carried, but a half moon directly overhead provided sufficient light to distinguish the submarine at the last moment of the run. The first run was an overshoot. On the second, the sub was slightly to port. In all, three attacks were made, and full reporting procedure carried out, followed by loop Wide Wide homing. Markers were dropped at the submarines diving position. Homing signals were transmitted until 4 Avengers were sighted in the area.
Minneriya	13th Jan		F/L. Ensom carried out a shadowing exercise from Minneriya with a Naval Force off Trincomalee. The Force was sighted visually from 10000? ft through a gap in the clouds, and shadowing was carried out at 20 miles range up-sun, taking advantage of cloud cover: and sighting reports transmitted periodically. When attacked by two Seafires evasive action was taken in cloud. Other fighter attacks were made during the exercise, only one of which was considered by the crew to have been successful.

Minneriya	16th Jan		Three Crews (S/L. Gane, F/O McKay and P/O. Le?w) were detached to Minneriya to carry out day and night Anti-Submarine exercises. Each crew carried out two day time and one night exercise each. Numerous dummy attacks were made, & the crews became familiar with the appearance of a submarine at varying ranges and stages of diving trim, and at varying speeds on the surface.
			The night exercises gave crews their first practice in the use of A/S Flares and also provided valuable experience for S.E. Operations. One crew only reported successful night attacks. The illumination obtained by dropping 3 A/S Flares simultaneously, combined with the speed of the aircraft, gave the pilot very little indication of the Submarines position until almost over it. Homing courses were not always sufficiently accurate.
			The exercises were carried out for three days, and the Detachment returned on January 20th.
Madura	30th Jan		Similar exercises were flown from Madura by F/L. Waterton, F/L. R?ussell and F/L. Taylor, the first two carrying out day exercises and the last mentioned a night exercise. Successful Radar homings were effected. During some attacks the submarine dived, and on others attempted evasive action on the surface.
			Similar difficulties were experienced during the night exercise the tenancy being to overshoot on each attack. sightings being made too late for an accurate run over the target. This tendency was further increased owing to the S.E. operations ranges being overestimated.
			II. Administration.
			Welfare.
			The programmes of camp entertainment during the month included Male Voice Choir, and Music Club activities, Whist Drives and Tombola evenings and Brains Trusts. An R.A.F. Band and E.N.S.A. party visited the Station both entertainments being extremely popular. The Squadron Band also performed on several occasions and there was community singing in the Canteen.
			Football and hockey matches continued, also cricket. In Madura a match was played by the Station football team against a Naval team in aid of the District Commander's War Fund and more than Rs. 300/- were collected.
			III. Personnel.
	5 Jan		4 aircrews were posted to No. 354 Squadron.
			Captains: F/O. V. E. James 130937 P/O. F. M. Corbett J.89410 W/O. J. H. Thomeas 617075 W/O. R. F. Cottam 1396490
			Arrival. F/O. W. L. Scott 154188 (Pilot) was posted to the Squadron.
			During the month 25 airmen were repatriated.
			IV. General
			Although operational flying was extremely small, efforts were made to provide interest in the form of extensive training flying of all types. By this means the Squadrons operational efficiency on Liberators was greatly improved & interest was maintained. With such little operational flying the task of keeping up morale & therefore interest, is very difficult especially in the present location where local welfare is limited. However morale is considered satisfactory. A Station cinema would greatly help to provide entertainment. Every effort has been made to obtain one & it is expected soon.