

July 1945 Form 540

203 Squadron

Place	Date	Time	Summary of events
			I. Operations.
			With the exception of two sorties on July 3rd., all operations during the month were performed by the Squadron Detachments at Akyab and the Cocos Islands. This latter base become fully operational at the beginning of the month, and three of the Squadron's Liberators were detached on July 16th to operate in conjunction with the detachment of 321 (Dutch) Squadron already on the Island. S/Ldr. Fletcher was in command of the detachment.
			It then became possible to cover an area embracing the Southern coast of Sumatra, the Sunda Straits, and the Western half of Java, in which the enemy had hitherto been comparatively immune from attack: and, for the first time, shipping in the 5,000 ton class was sighted. In this area enemy aircraft were more in evidence than had been the case during previous operations, but even so they continued to withhold their attacks with the object of conserving the limited numbers of aircraft available to them in the event of a full scale invasion.
			After operation successfully for four months without losing an aircraft, in spite of a number of incidents and of long return flights by damaged aircraft, it is sad to have to record the loss of F/Lt. Elmes and his crew, missing from the operation of July 23rd. Nothing was heard from this aircraft after taking-off from China Bay, and it can only be assumed that they may have been shot down whilst making a low level attack on the target at Sigli before any signal could be made. A.S.R. searches on their homeward track failed to make any sighting.
			Akyab Detachment
			this was in effect a second detachment at this base, the detachment of the previous month having been recalled, but certain aircraft and crews still remained, owing to unserviceability.
			The second detachment of 5 aircraft arrived at Akyab on June 30th. and was commanded by S/Ldr. Fletcher. The object of the detachment was to be prepared to attack two merchant ships, which had been reported in the Gulf of Siam. Crews were at readiness for five days, but no further movements of these ships were reported.
			With the monsoon at its height the serviceability of the aircraft was seriously affected. On July 5th two aircraft were required for operations against coastal shipping off the Kra Isthmus, but only one was able to take off.
			From this date until the detachment returned on July 11th. operations were carried out against this coastal shipping with considerable success, and without opposition from the enemy.
			Monthly total of operations.
			No. of sorties. Hours.
			Akyab 7 78.
			Kankasanturai 2 14:30 (1 aircraft missing)
			Cocos 5 62:45
			Total 14 155:15
			Results: Destroyed Damaged
			2 Coasters. 1 M/V., 4,000 tons
			1 Barge At least 4 Coasters
			1 Motor Launch.
			Non-Operational Flying.
			Training programmes were curtailed, owing to the large numbers of aircraft

			away on detachment. A considerable total of operational transit flights were flown to Akyab and the Cocos Islands.
			A long range exercise using a stripped-down aircraft, gave very satisfactory results. Request was made for authority to modify all Squadron aircraft for V.L.R. operations, but the matter is still under consideration.
Akyab	5th. July		Two Liberators were required to carry out a sweep through Puket Island, Songkla, and Chumphorn, but only one serviceable aircraft was available, as the second Liberator and the reserve aircraft were both unserviceable at the last moment. F/Lt. Elmes carried out the patrol in Liberator "H", an aircraft which on previous occasions had proved to have unreliable bombing gear. Once again, despite careful previous testing, failure occurred at the critical moment. Two coasters were sighted near Ko Samui Island, but when the attack was made, the bombs hung up. The bombs were later dropped from 3,000 ft., aimed at schooners anchored off Chumphorn, but missed by ½? mile.
	6th July		The following day two aircraft took-off to attack the two ships previously sighted, but these were not seen. S/Ldr. Fletcher, however sighted other coasters. One 128 ft. ship was sunk, and two attacks were made on a slightly smaller ship, the bombs overshooting in each case. A considerable amount of other small shipping was also sighted. In no case was any enemy opposition encountered. F/O. Cocks made his attack at Bandon?, where 5 coasters were lined up at the ship-building yard. He straddled with 8 bombs, and much damage was seen to be caused by the explosions. Another ship under construction on the shore was also successfully strafed. Still another camouflaged coaster was successfully strafed south of Chumphorn on the run home.
Akyab	8th July		Four Liberators patrolled the East coast of the Kra Isthmus, and at position 1003N 9911E all aircraft attacked a wooden coaster of 120 ft. Again F/Lt. Elmes experienced trouble with the bomb release of aircraft "H", but a straddle was estimated. S/Ldr. Fletcher suffered engine trouble on his bombing run, and was compelled to jettison bombs and return to base. F/Lt. Aldcroft made successful attacks with bombs and MG and estimated a straddle. The ship was left on fire. F/Lt. Brown overshot with his bombs but scored MG hits. As a result of these combined attacks the coaster, which carried a deck load of oil barrels, was seen to sink. Later F/Lt. Brown sighted and strafed other shipping, including an oil barge, a coaster, and a motor launch. The latter was left apparently sinking. His remaining bombs were aimed at the railway track, but undershot. F/Lt. Aldcroft also found and attacked with gunfire another 100 ft. coaster, claiming hits.
KKS	17th July		Two Liberators (F/Lt. Elmes and F/O. Webster) took off on an anti-shipping sweep of the North Sumatra coast to attack a convoy of 5 coasters and escort reported by submarine and P.R. aircraft. The aircraft intended to refuel at China Bay en route, to achieve maximum range, but shortly after take-off both were recalled to base, and operation postponed for 24 hours.
	18th July		The same two aircraft and crews were sent off on a second attempt to intercept this convoy, but again were recalled from China Bay.
	23/24 July		Two Liberators (F/Lt. Elmes and F/O. Rau) took off on an anti-shipping sweep off Northern Sumatra, re-fuelling at China Bay en route. Again a convoy of 5 coasters had been reported on a easterly course, and the crews were briefed to patrol from Pidie Point to Meuradoc at last light. F/O. Rau sighted the convoy stationary south of Sigli with one small escort, and made two attacks. The bomb explosions were not seen, but at least one of the coasters was estimated to have been hit; one of them being left

			<p>smoking, and another low in the water. Intense, but generally inaccurate, MG fire was put up from all the ships, the aircraft being hit in No. 4 engine, causing it to smoke badly. The engine was feathered and all loose equipment jettisoned, and the aircraft was able to maintain height and return to China Bay.</p> <p>No message of any kind was received from the other aircraft (F/Lt. Elmes), which did not return. The convoy did not appear to have been under attack when F/O. Rau approached, but he reported having seen a large fire which might have been a petrol fire, near the shore, in the vicinity of the convoy, when he made his attack. On the other hand, other small bush fires were burning in the area, so evidence was inconclusive. A.S.R. searches over two days failed to make any sightings.</p>
Cocos	21st July		Aircraft standing by in the event of a sighting being made by 321 Squadron Liberator, during a reconnaissance between Padang and the Sunda Strait. No sighting was reported.
	22nd July		<p>F/O. Webster took off at 0700 hrs on a coastal reconnaissance from Padang to Sunda Strait.</p> <p>The 4,000 ton M/V. previously reported at Ekmahaven was seen to have been moved to Bokngoes Bay, one mile south of the port, where it was lying under the shelter of the hills. An attack was made from 100 ft. and three bombs were seen to hit and explode on the ship. No AA fire was encountered. The aircraft continued patrol to Lias, sighting small coastal craft and one small naval vessel.</p>
	24th July		F/Lt. MacDonald took off at 0600 together with two Liberators of 321 Squadron to carry out further attacks on the M/V. The aircraft made individual attacks. The ship was still lying in the Bay, together with other small shipping and although it appeared to be deserted, no damage from the previous attack was apparent. Two low level bombing runs were made, but on each the bombs failed to release, due to an error of manipulation. Again there was no AA fire from the ship.
	28th July		<p>F/Lt. Fletcher flew an unarmed reconnaissance to Tjilatjap on the South coast of Java. Landfall was made 60 miles east of the harbour. Low cloud on the harbour reduced visibility to ½ mile. Only 2 ships could be seen, a 300 ft. M/V and a Sugar Dog.</p> <p>Along the coast gun emplacements and barbed wire defences could be seen. Natives waved to the aircraft from the beach. One mile west of the town on Kambanean Island Barrack blocks, surrounded by a barbed wire fence were seen, apparently a prison camp. Mirror and hand held photographs of the area were taken.</p>
	31st July		F/O. Webster and F/O. St. John flew on anti-shipping sweep from Heknoelen to Sunda Strait. On the way out a signal was received that no ships under 200 ft. were to be attacked. At Henkoelen a ship was sighted, which was estimated to be under this length, and was not attacked. No other shipping larger than 100 ft. was seen, and the aircraft went off patrol at 0558S 104.30E having obtained photographs of shipping, lighthouses and other landmarks.
			II. Administration.
			Welfare – Education
			A station education building has been opened. The section is spacious and well-appointed, and provides facilities for private study and reading, including a large information room, library and lecture room.
			Health has remained fairly good. A strong wind has served to make conditions somewhat cooler, though this has been accompanied by considerable dust storms.
			III. Personnel
			Change of Command.

KKS.	July 5th.		Wing Commander G. R. Brady O.B.E. took over the command of the Squadron from Wing Commander L. Fox D.S.O. D.F.C. W/Cdr. Fox was posted to Headquarters No. 222 Group, after commanding the Squadron for exactly a year.
	July 16th.		The Adjutant, F/Lt. T. J. Meredith, became tour-expired and was repatriated. His position was filled by F/Lt. G. H. E. Foley from No. 191 Squadron.
			Canadian Personnel.
			Owing to the policy of transferring Dominion personnel out of the Command, 8 Canadian A.Gs. have been posted, and others are awaiting unscrambling.
			Establishment.
			Shortages in establishment were overcome by employing technical personnel (by the terms of B.P.O. Memo 52/45) in the Orderly Room and Equipment Section.
			Casualties.
			The following are missing from the operation off Northern Sumatra on July 23rd., when Liberator "D" failed to return:-
			F/Lt. C. R. H. Elmes A.413842
			F/O. J. V. Prosser 164532
			W/O. K. H. C. Pickering 156423
			F/S. J. F. D. Churchill 1867412
			F/S. K. T. Cook A.430973
			F/S. C. H. Hamilton A.435624
			F/S. H. B. Francis A.442421
			Sgt. P. K. Grainger 1250282
			Sgt. F. R. Marchant 1320334
			Wing Commander Commanding,
			203 Squadron, R.A.F.