

March 1945 Form 540

203 Squadron

Place	Date	Time	Summary of events
			I. Operations.
Kankesa nturai			For the first half of the month the Squadron was engaged in settling in at the new Station and in intensive training for anti-shipping operations. Operation Instruction No. 1 (App.A) sets out the means to be employed and the Tactics. The aim was for the Squadron to become fully operational on shipping strikes by March 17th, and on that day a signal was received demanding a maximum effort for last light on March 18th, but this first operation was subsequently postponed for two days.
			Sorties for the month totalled 20, and the operational hours amounted to 254 hrs 30 mins.
			One aircraft failed to return from the first operation, and the crew of this aircraft are missing.
	Mar 20		Six aircraft were briefed for the first operation, which comprised a last light anti-shipping strike at Oelehleh, the railway terminus at the Northern tip of Sumatra. P.R. had indicated that a convoy was putting in at this port, the ships of which would form the primary target for five aircraft. To the sixth aircraft was assigned the task of bombing the railway bridge across the mangrove swamp just behind the town. In the event of shipping not being present, secondary targets were assigned to the aircraft, including the jetties, warehouses and railway buildings.
			The approach to the target was made at 50 ft. in vics of three aircraft, the first coming in from the westward and the second from the direction of Sabang.
			Aircraft "G" (P/O. Lyons, accompanied by the Commanding Officer, W/Cdr. Fox) was the first to go in and sighted shipping near the Jetties and anchored in a small bay to the West of the town. The attack was made on a small coaster (approx. 200 tons) alongside the main jetty on which hits were scored, and this ship was subsequently seen to have capsized. Other aircraft attacked the ships in the bay. At least two of these were badly damaged (by F/Lt. Sandall and F/L. Fletcher) and all were subjected to machine gun attacks. In all, at least six standard wooden coasters were sighted and two patrol craft.
			S/Ldr. Mosher attacked the Railway Bridge in the face of considerable opposition from A.A., but owing to the non-operation of his bombing gear and the difficult position of the target, which was obscured by trees, six runs were made before the bombs were finally released by means of the jettison switch.
			All aircraft encountered considerable A.A. fire, both M.G. and 20 mm. S/Ldr. Mosher's aircraft was hit, and one member of his crew injured in the foot. Shell bursts were seen close to Liberator "F" (F/O. Morris) which shortly afterwards was seen to fall into the sea just East of Peuhasoe? Island and break up. It is considered possible that this aircraft may have been flying too low and hit the water.
			Cameras were used by all aircraft, but the light was insufficient to obtain results.
	Mar. 22		For this operation four aircraft were briefed, again to attack shipping and the Railway Bridge at Oelehleh. An engine of S/L. Gane's aircraft cut on take-off. He succeeded in maintaining control, jettisoned his bomb load and overload fuel tank over the sea, together with other equipment, and subsequently made a safe landing.
			Thereafter F/L. Russell became formation leader, and was assigned the task of bombing the bridge. He bombed with two sticks of four, both of which were

			estimated to have straddled the bridge, but the results of the bombing could not be seen. A considerable amount of L.A.A. and M.G. fire was encountered, but this was inaccurate for height, and the aircraft was not hit.
			The remaining two aircraft (F/L. Ensom? and P/O. Roigard?) attacked the Jetty and shipping in the Bay, including two Standard Wooden Coasters. Again, owing to the bomb delay and bad light the results could not be observed, but the ship attacked on the previous raid could be seen sunk alongside the jetty.
	Mar. 23		Two aircraft carried out a night anti-shipping sweep South Eastwards from Nancowry. Owing to a faulty compass F/Lt. Fletcher's patrol was too far northward, but after pinpointing on Great Nicobar this was corrected. F/Lt. Sandall's patrol was uneventful, and nothing was sighted by either aircraft.
	Mar. 24		Two aircraft carried out a night sweep round the Andaman Islands from Cinque Island northward up the East coast of the Islands to Landfall Island. Each aircraft reported numerous S.E. blips on rock and small islands which had to be investigated, and on the approach to the area one aircraft experienced what appeared to be an attempt at jamming on the Radar screen.
			P/O. Lyons sighted a suspected ship on one Radar homing and prepared to attack on reciprocal course, but on the bombing run the contact disappeared, and this is assumed to have been an Allied submarine.
			No other sightings were made by either aircraft. W/O. Hudson jettisoned his bombs on the return flight, being uncertain of his fuel consumption.
	Mar. 29/30		Six aircraft carried out an anti-shipping sweep at last light off the North West tip of Sumatra, without making any sightings. The aircraft flew in formations of three, one formation approaching South of Peunasos? Island and back through the Bengal Passage, and the other approaching through the Bengal Passage and leaving round the North of Sabang. A convoy had been sighted by P.R. proceeding N.W. up the North of Sumatra coast but they were not encountered.
			All aircraft returned safely, but P/O. Law was off track on the return to Ceylon and landed at Arkonam (near Madras).
			Bad weather was encountered on the outward and homeward flights, but over the patrol area conditions were good, with visibility up to 30 miles.
Kankesanturai			Non-Operational Flying (Total hours: Day 212 Night 4)
	Mar. 1		The Squadron's move to Kankesanturai was completed on this last day of ferrying.
	Mar. 3		F/O. Morris carried out exercise UBX.5 with a submarine in Colombo sanctuary. Seven dummy attacks were made in all. During the second part of the exercise the submarine twice succeeded in diving before the aircraft could make an attack.
	Mar. 8		A formation homing exercise was attempted with the aid of "Rooster" but was unsuccessful due to lack of co-ordination. Three aircraft participated.
	Mar. 16		Supply dropping by night was successfully carried out at Minneriya.
			12 Navigation Exercises were flown, totalling 90 hours.
			Bombing Exercises included High Level Bombing at China Bay with the Mk.XIV bombsight and intensive low level practice at Jaffna Lagoon. Depth charges have also been dropped.
			Technical
			Serviceability during March averaged 8 ½ out of a total of 10? aircraft.
			Three failures occurred: engine failure of Liberator "A" during take-off due to a faulty magneto, collapse of the port main wheel tyre of Liberator "L" on landing owing to puncture by a screw, and failure of the nose-wheel oleo leg

			of the replacement "L".
			In the case of the tyre failure, the aircraft (JH190 <sup>1</sup> ) ran off the runway into rough ground and was badly damaged necessitating write-off. The other two aircraft were landed without damage.
			II. Administration.
			The establishment of Navigators (N) has been increased by 8 P/Os and 8 N.C.Os to 32 in all. This allows for two Navigators per aircraft, thereby lessening the strain and fatigue felt by Navigators on long flights. No additional Navigators have yet arrived on the Squadron.
			The Health of the Squadron has continued good. There have been no cases of malaria. Owing to the change in the weather there has been a slight increase of skin troubles on the Sick Parades.
			Sports
			Soccer. An inter-section competition has been in progress, and has aroused considerable enthusiasm.
			Rugger. A heavy fall of rain made two matches possible. Teams comprised the Squadron v the Rest and Officers and N.C.Os v Airmen.
			Swimming. Daily swimming runs have been provided to the bathing beaches whenever drivers have been available.
			Entertainment.
			The Station cinema has been in operation six nights a week, the film being changed every second night. On the seventh night a weekly programme of classical records has been arranged.
			III. Personnel.
			(a) Movements and Promotions.
			The following officers and aircrew arrived during the month.
			188?4073 Sgt. D. J. Brooks?? (2nd Pilot) from 222 Group Unit.
			1585962 Sgt. D. E? Olden? ( " ) " "
			1265423 W.O. K. H. M?ickering? (Nav.B.) " Kankesanturai
			1801957 F/Sgt. J. C. Boyd (Nav.W?) " 222 Group Unit.
			1600?396 W.O. L? Pearson " " " "
			188?4938 F/Sgt. J. S. De Laroque " " " "
			1316918 F/Sgt. C. W. Watkins " " " "
			943952 F/Sgt. W. H? Idle?? " " " "
			170?586 P?/O J. W. Brown? (Tech(Sigs.Rad)) from No. 183 Wing.
			The following officers and aircrew left during the month.
			1801633 F/Sgt. V. S. Pilcher? (F/Engr) to No. 230 Squadron.
			J.88737 P?/O T. W? Cross (Nav.B) " 222 O.T.U.
			J.23897 F/O. H. J. Doohing??? (Pilot) " 111 O.T.U.
			J.21756 F/Lt. C. ?? Young (Nav.B) " B.H.Q. Bombay
			A.417132 F/O. G. P ????? (Nav.B) " 230 Squadron.
			The following promotions became known during the month.
			To F/Lt. T/F/Lt. J.22813 F/O. S. W. Morris (Pilot) w.e.f. 22.1.45.
			To T/F/Lt. C.23507 F/O. W. A. McKay (Pilot) w.e.f. 5.2.45.
			To T/F/Lt. 130836 F/O. D. M. Hai????????????(Wop/Air) w.e.f. 17.10.44.
			{the above frame is very faint, and hard to read – not to be trusted}
			(b) Casualties.
			The following complete crew was posted missing believed killed as a result of enemy action on operations w.e.f. 20.3.45.
			J.22813 F/O. S. W. Morris Pilot R.C.A.F.

<sup>1</sup> Record says JH190, but this was KH190.

			153776 P/O. L. M. J. Grant	"
			1829311 Sgt. A. Hned??	A/G.
			1895393 Sgt. D. G? Oakuhm?	"
			1387779 F/S. E. F. Leftwiom?	WOP/AIR
			1318346 F/S. J. D. Silkstone	"
			1312970 F/S. W. A.. Collins?	"
			1126910 Sgt. A. M. Lang	WOM/AIR
			1894482 F/S. A? Peters	F/ENG.
			A.421460 W/O. A. P. Smith	NAV.B. R.A.A.F.
			The following officer received foot injuries as a result of enemy action on operations on 20.3.45.	
			185077 P/O. E? Hartley	WOP/AIR.
			IV. Honours and Awards	
			The following Mentions in Despatches became known. They were published in the London Gazette on 1.1.45.	
			(1) 908392 Cpl. Newstead?, D. E. (C.W.F.) whilst on the strength of the Squadron was in charge of a pump engaged in fighting the fire at the Bombay Docks on 14th April, 1944 and following days. He manned his pump for very long periods as a time with complete disregard for personal tiredness and discomfort. He also showed considerable initiative in setting up his pump in the most useful position when he could get no satisfactory orders from officers present.	
			(2) 646662 LAC. Surrey, H. J. (F.II.E) whilst on the strength of 12 O.T.U. between January 1944 and November 1944, organised a section for dealing with a modification to aircraft, which was highly successful. The airman has given this information himself. No copy of the official recommendation is available.	
			General	
			This month is a landmark in the history of the Squadron, for during it the Squadron changed its role and commenced operating in earnest against the Japanese. The morale of the aircrew and ground rose to admirable heights and the enthusiasm shown by all ranks may be judged by the fact that ALL personnel turned out to receive the six crews returning from the sortie flown on the 20th inst at approximately 0130 hours. This state of affairs is all the more creditable when it is remembered that the Squadron has been inactive, from an operational point of view, for the last 14 months, except for a very occasional escort or search. The loss of F/O. Morris (since F/L) and crew is a great loss to the Squadron. His cheerfulness and leadership will always be remembered. The Squadron is rapidly nearing a period of transformation, for a large proportion of the ground and aircrew who arrived in India with the Squadron in December of 1943 will be tour expired.	