

From: O.C. 292 Squadron Ceylon Flight.

To: O.C. 292 Squadron, Jessore.

Date: 18th August, 1944.

Report for Period 7th August to 17th August, 1944.

Your Bulletins Nos. 4 & 6 have come to hand. Congratulations on Strombes's successful job – a jolly good show.

However, I hope we can claim the first "live rescue": The special job about which I hinted in my last report, and for which I have requested odd pieces of equipment, was the B.29 raid on Palenbang on the night of the 10th-11th August. For this job we moved up to China Bay on the morning of the 10th, and set off on set patrols in the early hours of the 11th, in order to be out in the area of the returning bombers. In addition to our Warwicks and Walrusses, there were about 11 Catalinas, 5⁺ Beaufighters, numbers of Vengeances, the odd Sunderland, a cruiser and 3⁺ destroyers. Only one aircraft ditched, but it sent a pretty useless position, which the American authorities forgot to pass on to the rescue controllers:: Consequently, the crew were not even properly looked for on the first day. However, K^{???} saw the periscope of a U-boat whilst we were frigging around on patrol about 300^{??} miles from land. There was a destroyer on patrol and very far away, so having sent a report to base, we bound the destroyer and passed the message by V/S. She got awfully excited and pushed off at a remarkable rate of knots. Group also put a few Libs on the job. Whether or not it was co-incidence I do not know, of course, but this dammed boat (the sub., I mean) was lying directly on the track of the B.29's. Late in the day, we picked up a single S.O.S. and dash, with no callsign. I naturally assumed that this came from a dinghy radio, as there was no callsign, and as the volume was maximum, we carried out a little square search of our own, but nothing could be bound.

Early the next morning an enormous force of 40 B.29's, 12 Catalinas, 11 Beaufighters, Vengeances, relays and relays of Spitfires, Walrusses, and the Warwicks set out again on an organised search. I happened to be by luck. We were going out to patrol an area about 250 miles from land, but about 90 miles out I saw a B.29 which looked as if it was about to prang, and in looking across at him I noticed what at first I thought was a barrage balloon in the distance. Then it occurred to me that there should not be any merchant shipping in that area, and anyway, what would any ship want to fly a balloon for in an area so far from enemy activity So we went to investigate, and the "balloon" on closer acquaintance, prove to be a box-kite, at the end of a dinghy aerial. We did all the necessaries, then went to drop the blokes (there were two dinghies tied together) a Lindholme as they looked rather crowded. We made several runs at them ain the hope that they would pull in the kite and aerial, but they were too busy waving excitedly to get the idea: Finally, I knew it would be useless to expect them to paddle far to pick up the Lindholmes, so we wiped up their kite with the mainplane and dropped the Lindholme set absolutely plumb. I was not ascending to Thormaby^{??} Rules, for there was a heavy smell, so I dropped the first contained about 18 feet from the dinghies" (No, it is not a line: we have pictures of it.)

After about 5⁺ hours a destroyer arrived by our homing and picked up the 9 survivors.

It is an interesting point that the S.O.S. which we picked up the previous day was received in a position 230^{??} miles from the dinghy. Normal – try to use a decent aerial when in a dinghy, otherwise the range of signals is about 10 – 20 miles.

On the 16th August, we were visited by W/Cdr. Laye and S/Ldr. "Freddie" Flash from D.A.S.N?,A.M. They brought out some "Walter" sets, with which we carried out some remarkable tests. The results absolutely staggered us; our Warwick made 100% homings, even when "Walter" was in jungle so dense that the sky could not be seen from the site. It should be very useful in Air/Jungle Rescue as well as A.S.R. The A.O.C. had a full report on the tests, and has promised to back the equipment as much as possible, and to press for its issue on a large scale in Ceylon.

Incidentally, I believe I mentioned in a previous report that I had agreed to be responsible for all Air/Jungle Rescue in Ceylon (from the aircraft angle, of-course). Plans are afoot for our scope to be increased, and Group has applied for additional Walrus aircraft to be used by us exclusively for A.J.R. purposes.

By the way, Group were a little surprised, and we were somewhat flabbergasted, to receive your signalled reply that no soluble plugs were available at Jessore just about four days after you had said (in Bulletin No. 5????) "We have had no trouble in getting soluble plugs and can spare some if you are still in trouble". Naturally, we should not have asked you to let us have some unless we needed them urgently. However, we did the job with static lines fitted to all the aircraft Lindholme sets.

I can quite understand that being Station Commander keeps you busy. I have been in command of Ratmalana for the odd few days, and am taking over from Group Captain Paul for the three weeks of his leave from the end of this month. The main trouble here is not the admin. side of the Station, but the fact that almost every day there is some V.I.P. either arriving or departing, and has to be looked after. Tomorrow I have to receive Lord Louis. The position here is rather tricky, and calls for a certain amount of tact, there being a Wing Commander on the Station. However, command has been given to me by S.A.S.O., in writing, so ... "ours not to reason why, etc. :."

Group have asked me to take over my old Tiger Moth again, and all the boys are having a whale of a time with it. It does definitely improve their flying. Also I intend to train every member of each crew to fly at least sufficiently well to fly an aircraft home on a steady course. There have been far too many crews lost just because the pilot has been hit, and the remainder of the crew could not cope. They do not have to be able to land, but just to fly home and bail out.

Our maintenance lads have been experiencing some difficulties here on account of there being no hanger accommodation. The aircraft are dispersed some considerable distance away from even the smallest shed in which a bench could be put, and also a like distance from our stores. All this complicates and slows up our maintenance work. However, I had a brainwave which, I think would help you too. I thought if we could get a trailer we could convert it into a mobile workshop-cum-stores, and simply park it under the nose of the aircraft that was being worked on. Also, when we go on a rush detachment, we simply close the doors and send the trailer by rod to the operational aerodrome. I put the idea up to 222 Group, and they were so tickled by the scheme that they gave me, not a trailer, but a brand new lorry, and are having it converted and fitted for me by a firm of contractors:

We had a single aircraft scrambled on the 19th to look for a parachutist reported to have landed in the sea off the coast. Nothing was found. Later in the day we flew the very first Air/Jungle Rescue sortie from Ceylon. A government agent and his daughter were reported lost in the jungle in the south-east of the island. The trip was pretty abortive, for in the area concerned it was not possible even to see the ground, the jungle was so thick. Anyway, the bloke was found the next day by search parties on foot. Personally, I don't think it was his daughter at all::

The jobs of the week concerns the army. We had undertaken to supply by air a party of army jungle specialists walking through Ceylon. We have had special food containers made to fit the Warwick, and were all set to make the first sortie on 20th. However, on the evening of the 19th I had a telephone call postponing the supply dropping until further notice as "all the troops taking part had been arrested for vagrancy, and they could not be got out of jail"::::