

From: - F/Lt. Almack, O.C. "E" Flight, 292 Squadron.

To: - Wing/Cdr. Starling, O.C. 292 Squadron, Jessore.

Progress Report 20.10.44

It is now 5 weeks since you have had a progress report from us. There are a number of reasons for this.

(1) The Sea Otter position got so acute that the Station Commanding Officer, Group/Cpt. Rutter, called a "Swatter" conference with all Officers i/c Sections on the Station to explain the delay in completion of these aircraft. The inquest resulted in some strip tearing and I was told by the G/C to signal you that we should definitely have 7 Sea Otters complete in every way, tested and fully serviceable by September 30th. (The two we have (incomplete) + 5 more complete.) and that he the G/C would signal Delhi that he had promised us these aircraft by 30.9.44. I did not signal you as I was confident those aircraft would not materialise as promised. They didn't. They still haven't 20 days later. Not one of them. We have drawn one of our Wireless sets out from stores and fitted it up (our one wireless mechanic + 1 WOP/AG) in 24 hours and got a 400 miles range. Previous best results obtained by this station was 12 miles range on our aircraft for about 5 min.

(2) Sea Otter JM.773 damaged the undercarriage on landing with F/Lt. Holmes, exactly 30 days ago. Estimated time to repair this aircraft on the Station 2 days. 773 is still not serviceable. Our only other aircraft (JM.771) has been on 40 hour inspection and it has taken this Station 3 weeks to make 3 simple set spanners to dismantle and remove the prop as called for result this aircraft has been U/S for a total of 27 days. On completion of the inspection which was carried out by our own bods, I test flew this aircraft which was found to be fully serviceable. The first time on has passed test first time on this station!

(3) this means that we have lost 1 months training and still have only 1 serviceable aircraft. Malaria has attacked this camp very badly and I have had over 25% of ground crew and nearly 50% aircrew in hospital at the same time. This entails about 3 weeks sick leave when they come out of hospital. Twice I have nearly had to go to Base Hospital myself having attacks of fever and have been feeling lousy. Have had no time off and am about all in. Last month I flew over 70 hours giving dual instruction (my best time was 17 hours in 2 days) as well as test flying.

(4) It was hoped that you would have been over to investigate our troubles before this. As it is I shall fly across on a very hasty visit to Jessore about the end of this month. On say first week of November. No one who has not been on this Station would believe our difficulties by just reading about them.

(5) By hook or by crook we shall be ready to move across to Chittagong the first week in January (advance party starting from Drigh Road). Any further suggestions that the Sea Otters are not suitable for use in area where enemy activity is to be expected will be hotly challenged by myself and my Flight. WE have been operating Walrus which are much more vulnerable than our Swatters within sight of the enemy for the last 3 years. On one occasion it took 10 ME 108's 20 minutes to shoot down 1 Walrus. We had been calling up the Spits to come and help. They arrived and shot down 9 of the 109's. Another Walrus arrived and rescued the crew of our original Walrus. Final score 9 109's confirmed for 1 Walrus (crew safe). If you want us to patrol a back area please appoint another Flight Commander. Am I to understand a Warwick actually sighted a Jap fighter!? We have actually landed on ASR operations and picked up aircrew within 400 yards of jerry machine guns and inspite of fighter opposition.

(6) Sport. In the finals of the Sind Cricket Championship our F/O Whibley made top score for the Europeans in both innings. We had 3 men playing in a mixed Navy, Army, R.A.F. and civilian team. Boxing. We have 2 men fighting in the Lahore championship this week having won the station championship and also beaten the local Americans. Football just started. Sailing in full swing every week.

Rowing just starting. Xmas party "E" Flight, 292 Squadron. Funds Rupees 1425. Beer, Cold buffet, Xmas cake, Cabaret arranged for.

(7) "C" Flight will get their Sea Otters delivered by us to them next month.  
There will be no point in writing you further until after I arrive at Jessore on my flying visit.  
When we move from here we look like being still short most of our essential operational equipment.

O.C. "E" Flight, 292 Squadron.

P.S. Talking to Air Marshall Lees yesterday he seems to know friend Hoche just as well as you do!