

From: Officer Commanding, No. 292 Squadron. R.A.F.

To: Area Air Sea Rescue Officer, Headquarters Bengal/Burma
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Headquarters, Strategic Air Force
Area Marine Office, c/s B.A.F.
Headquarters, No. 175 Wing.
O.C. "C" Flight Ceylon No. 292 Squadron

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Monthly Progress Report

No. 292 Squadron

December, 1944.

1. General Position.

As aircraft, the Liberators have proved a great success. Our serviceability has been very much better than when we had the Warwick. Their tremendous range has enabled us to take on jobs which would be out of the question with Warwicks, and we have found that the view out for searching very much better than first expected. Against this the Liberator is undoubtedly too fast for efficient searching and the radius of turn is so big that a dinghy can easily be lost again even when found. The whole morale of the Squadron has gone up now we have good aircraft and plenty of flying.

"E" Flight, Sea otters. The advanced party is already at Cox's Bazaar, a pick-up out of the Sunderbans was done on the second day the Flight became operational, so on the whole the Flight is on "the crest of the wave".

"C" Flight, Ceylon. Other than that they have two Liberators and have moved to another aerodrome, this Headquarters knows nothing of their activities this month. A visit to them has been quite out of the question.

2. Operations ("A", "C" & "E" Flights)

147 hrs operational hours were carried out, comprising 22? Searches. An American Major who had forced landed a fighter in the Sunderbans was picked up by landing in the river close to where he was, and in much the same area the signal flares of a crashed B.29 crew were sighted. We carried out a safety patrol for a raid by B.29's, and the Squadron is keen to do more of these.

3. Training ("A", "C" & "E" Flights)

Flying training has gone very well this month, but the ground training has not gone as well as was hoped. This is partly due to the disorganization caused by postings and attachments, and partly by the courses that have been carried out in Calcutta. Forty aircrew have attended these to date, and another twenty will be on the course as from the 1st of January.

4. Navigation

Our new Staff Navigation Officer has arrived, but he has hardly had time to settle down yet.

5. Intelligence

The Squadron was assured that an I.O. was on his way, so there is no need to reiterate the need for one. The reading room for the aircrew is well fitted out, but is not used as much as it should be. Efforts are being made to rectify this.

6. Photography

Being the only photographic section on the station, it has been extremely busy doing photographs for both No. 136 R. & S. U. and 357 Squadron. For the Squadron it has been working hard at photos for identity cards, and people being repatriated. To do this we have one L.A.C. (on loan) ably assisted by enthusiastic amateurs and in some cases with their equipment. No. 99 Squadron want this L.A.C. back, and it is not understood how a Station of some 1,600 strong is expected to get on with the present "set-up".

7. Liaison with other services.

Nothing in this line has been done this month, but a January roster has been made out for visits to the A.S.R. Units.

8. Engineering.

Liberators. As the result of brake-drum trouble on two newly arrived aircraft, orders have been sent to the M.U.s to part aircraft with brakes off, in order to prevent the brake sack swelling and diminishing the clearances between drum and shoes. Normal troubles, chiefly electrical and armament, have been overcome by hard work rather than knowledge. The 231 Group Order stating that 357 Squadron must help us with spares is hardly satisfactory as they have not enough to meet their own requirements. The supply of "X" Type lubricating oil was not satisfactory. Barrels of oil were received with numerous markings and arrangements have now been made to supply the correct grade of oil, correctly marked. A 'Case' type tractor is urgently required for moving Liberator aircraft.

Mr. Larsen, the Consolidated Representative, visited this Unit and gave us some useful advice. Her reported favourably on the knowledge the ground crews had attained.

Sea Otters. The boost override control is giving continuous trouble. The inner flexible cable fouling the outer casing. Tyre trouble due to a consignment of very old tyres (one dated 1935) was eventually overcome. The valve on the undercarriage counterbalance cylinder is proving unsatisfactory. The opening of the valve for topping up after the weekly retraction test starts a leak. Form 1022 action has been taken. Tools for Mercury engines are still urgently required, and there are still many Sea Otter stores items urgently required before they move forward.

8. Armament

Teething troubles are gradually disappearing as the armourers become familiar with the American equipment. Requests have been made for American Turret Reps. to visit the Station. We are assured that as they become available this Unit will be included in their visits.

Insufficient Pyrotechnic Stowages exist for our purposes. Smoke Float boxes have been modified to carry six standing in a vertical position, the boxes being fixed to the aircraft. "E" Flight is doing the same for their Sea Otters.

9. Signals/Radar

Liberator serviceability generally good. Majority of troubles due to unfamiliarity with the equipment. This is curing itself. Calibration of Radio Altimeters is not yet complete.

A personnel crisis is expected as the Squadron must supply "E" Flight with bodies before they go forward, which will leave us denuded here if the promised Liberator ground crews do not arrive in time.

Organisation and Administration

10. Messes

The Sanitary Diary report for December was most unsatisfactory. Considerable difficulty is being experienced in getting CP & D and the local municipality to carry out work demanded. Lack of a S.H.C. is hampering this piece of the work. Strenuous efforts are being made to remedy the situation so far as possible. An Anti-Dysentery drive is in progress at the moment and amongst other things all messes and sections have been circularised with "propaganda" to draw peoples attention to the ways in which they can keep down the menace. The promised supervision by the Balgechi catering Officer has not yet materialised and there are still complaints of lack of both quantity and quality.

11. Welfare

The main interest this month was concentrated on the Xmas activities. The messing people surpassed themselves and every-one had a terrific spread. The Aimans' mess was lavishly decorated and there was a very merry party on Christmas night. All Welfare activities continue to flourish and a weekly "Entertainment Notice" to all Messes has been introduced in order that all entertainment organised may be brought to everyone's notice a week in advance. A considerable sum has been laid out in hockey gear this month, and in general more and more supporters are appearing to give a hand to any project.

12. Works Services

The situation continues to be difficult. C.P.W.D. and M.E.S. need continual supervision. As previously reported No.7 S.Ad.U. and 6 C. & M. have been without a C.O. and have been badly understaffed. The S/Ldr promised in 231 Group letter, as C.O. has not yet arrived and whilst the staff position is a little easier it is still far from being satisfactory and energies which should be use in running a Squadron are being diverted to improvising station services.

13. Hygiene and Sanitation

A minor "Blitz" on the municipality has also ensued as a result of the unfavourable Sanitary Report mentioned in para 10. Once again these are entirely Station matters and should not be prescription of a Squadron Commander.

14. Personnel

Issue has been joined with Group on establishment and strengths generally on several occasions. At present our Warwick Establishment is totally inapplicable and for administrative services our strength is swollen to 100% approx of normal. In spite of these factors draft notes posting personnel out, presumably on the basis of the previous Form 1753, continue to come in. It is requested that action in this direction be suspended until policy is crystallised. We have, in fact, deficiencies in certain trades. During the month an Intelligence Officer has been added to the Establishment. If and when the appointment is made he will be a distinct asset to the Squadron.

15. Discipline

The unfortunate incident involving civilians on Xmas Eve (reported according to instructions, and at present under investigation by Court of Inquiry) was the only major blot on our record. Various minor offences occurring over the festive period were treated with the traditional leniency.

16. Spiritual Welfare

The padre (Rev. S/Ldr. Scott) recently appointed to Jessore is proving a distinct asset. He has the confidence of the men and in addition to his secular activities is displaying a keen interest in welfare and educational matters.

17. Office Equipment and Stationary

Position generally improving. Mid December saw a major crisis developing due to someone at M.U. being unable to distinguish between the various types of stencils, but supplies came through in the nick of time. There were 5 left on the Station when they arrived. Long carriage typewriters first ordered last August still not supplied although demands for small machines have been met and situation greatly eased. It is understood the demand for a long carriage machine has now got as far as the M. F. O.

18. Official Mail

The new air services to Group is greatly appreciated and a definite aid to efficiency.

19. Returns.

Numbering still hampered by lack of policy letters earlier than about May 1944. Any omissions are regretted and every effort is being made to avoid recurrences. Ops. C.S., A.C.S.E.A., has been included in the distribution of this report in order that they may be kept informed of our activities in spite of their remoteness (geographically) from us.

(E. A. Starling)

Wing Commander, Commanding,
No. 292 Squadron, R.A.F.

AKYAB HAS JUST FALLEN. Herewith application to be one of the first Squadrons to move there. We must move from here and four hours will be saved on every trip taking us further South than Akyab, in other words, on every trip.