

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

To: Area A.S.R. Officer, Headquarters Eastern Air Command.
Copy. A.S.R. Ops. Strategic Air Force.
Area Marine Office, c/o Strategic Air Force
Headquarters, No. 222 Group
Advanced Headquarters, No. 224 Group.
Officer Commanding, No. 900 Wing.
O.C. "C" Flight (Ceylon) No. 292 Squadron
O.C. "E" Flight (Cox's Bazaar) No. 292 Squadron

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Monthly Progress Report

No. 292 Squadron

February, 1944.

1. General Position.

Despite the Squadron move and the shortness of the month, we have again broken all records for operational flying – 282 hours – all done by four aircraft detached to Alipore during the move. Again this large number of hours was entirely due to our having the Liberators, as all the flying was well outside the range of the Warwicks. Unless either something drastic is done to increase the range of the Warwicks, or the policy of taking the Liberators away when the Warwicks become serviceable is changed, the outlook for this Squadron is somewhat depressing. B.29's and Liberators working at extreme range cannot be given effective coverage by medium range aircraft, and this theatre of War particularly lends itself to long range rescue work as at these extreme ranges the aircraft are seldom far from land, and the distress position given should be accurate and very easy to locate. This has been twice proved in the first ten days of March. "E" Flight, Sea Otters. This flight has been trying its best to operate twice its established number of aircraft from three bases. It has now been suggested by the A.O.C. No. 231 Group that we withdraw all except the established three until a new establishment is implemented. The A.S.R., calls for this Flight have been almost non-existent this month, but the morale of the Flight has been kept up, the crews kept in practice, and at the same time useful rescue work done by evacuating casualties from forward areas where the amphibious nature of the Sea Otter has had special value.

2. Operations.

As mentioned before, by putting an operational flight at Alipore, operations were not seriously affected by the move. The monthly increase in flying hours was gratifying, but there were some unfortunate difficulties experienced over navigation. Information on this has been passed to Group and everything is being done to discover the trouble.

3. Intelligence.

We have set up a Squadron Operations Room which is working extremely well. The Intelligence Officer is being somewhat embarrassed by the ever increasing number of returns and reports being asked of him. Having no typewriter or clerical staff, the Squadron as a whole having been asked to investigate the possibilities of reducing the number of clerks already on our strength, there appears to be no way to avoid getting in arrears on our returns. As every other Unit must be experiencing the same trouble and coping with varying degrees of success, would not a "Quick Report", (Form Orange) and a Form 541 on time, be better than "Quick Reports", "Sortie Reports", "Opreps" "Reports on Operations",

"Daily Postagrams" and Forms 541, all largely redundant and invariably late? This would just leave a monthly total of non-operational flying, and would be well within the capabilities of the Intelligence Officer without any help. With the present ration of clerical staff to work demanded, I feel this suggestion should not be regarded as impertinent.

4. Training

Apart from the usual ditching and parachute drills, little training was done because of the move.

5. Rations (Flying)

We are still awaiting "A" and "B" Flying Rations. We were informed that 25 of each were being sent for trial. In accordance with letter KKN/4630/CAT we have also demanded them through normal channels.

6. Photography

A Cpl. (not yet arrived) has been attached to the Squadron, so that once he arrives we can start up a photo section. There is a building at Agartala for this.

7. Armament

At first we were at a loss to find a rain and fire proof building for storing our large numbers of flame floats, sea markers, etc. However, we obtained the use of the fuselage of a crashed Commando which is ideal for the purpose.

100% serviceability of turrets is at present being maintained, but it is anticipated that when components wear, spare parts will be required. As we do not hold the appropriate air publication giving the R.A.F. section and ref. numbers, demanding spares is a major problem.

8. Engineering

Except for fuel cell trouble in one, and a damaged tail in another, a high state of serviceability has been kept with the Liberators, and our one Warwick has been permanently u/s after one flight.

During the move, which started on the 11th., aircraft and ground crews were detached to Alipore, so that there should be no break in operations. On arrival at Agartale??, much work had to be done. The pens were found unsuitable as they were on a slope and despite the fact that we had twenty people under the tail, one Liberator started gathering speed backwards resulting in a bucked bell-frame for the tail bumper. This is now being repaired by No. 136 R. & S. U. Some of the pens require the aircraft to be towed 60 – 100 yards. Until we get some heavy tractors which are able to tow a Liberator up hill, we are having to use the Bit-hess{??} dispersal yard. This will be useless once the rains come.

On the 18th., Warwick BV394{??} landed and the pilot reported excessive vibration on the port engine. Examination revealed that the fitting of the diagonal damper struts had fractured, a failure that has been met before. The aircraft has been A.O.G. for a new fitting ever since.

9. Safety Equipment

There is a very fine parachute section at Agartala, in fact there are two, so we can have one to ourselves. The veranda has been covered in, providing space for a dinghy section. Storage of the lifeboats presents a problem as water is very scarce. Plans are in hand for getting a pit dug and lined for keeping the boats moist and a modified scheme is to place a water bag around the boat.

10. Signals/Radar

The section is now settled in a building specially made for the purpose. Liberators. Since last report, a great number of demands for spares have been satisfied. It is expected that the remaining items required will be arriving shortly. A request through normal channels is to be submitted to H.Q., 231 Group

that the Squadron may be permitted to use, in the manufacture of a Liberator test and training layout, the column 7 equipment of the next "write-off" aircraft within the group. Harvard. Permission was refused for the fitting of I.F.F., a pity as this aircraft has to go down to Ramree Island.

11. Messing.

Messing has been set back in standard by the change of location. Works services to obtain a satisfactory standard of kitchen and dining-room constructions are under way. The change of N.C.O. i/c messing arranged by the previous Catering Officer has not proved a success and 231 Group have promised us yet another change. Basic ration issues seem more generous than previously.

12. Welfare

The move disrupted activities to a certain extent, but our communal spirit improves in spite of innumerable difficulties. The canteen is a ramshackle basha, the contractor is very ordinary and incapable so far of laying on adequate services. We have no light and no furniture. Owing to our being administered by 231 Group but in 224 Group area our supply services seem to have broken down. Nevertheless our monthly Squadron party in the newly constructed "Beer Garden" went with its usual swing. The "Beer Garden", an enclosure surrounded by trees containing a small open air stage and small tables improvised out of disused cable drums and basha, is the work of a small committee of enthusiastic B.O.R's. The stage is completed with footlights, microphone, piano and drum-set, and should prove invaluable for Squadron Entertainments. The "Beer Garden" would also be an ideal sight for a sixteen m.m. open-air cinema if a projector were available to supplement the admirable but terribly overcrowded station facilities. The Concert party "its a Wow" gave a show on the 24th. & 26th. February, which was excellent.

A program of talks, discussion groups, debates, gramophone recitals, whist drives and "housie" has been arranged and is only awaiting lighting in the key buildings on the domestic site.

13. Works Services.

On the 1st. March I.W.S. took over aerodrome works from R.E.W.S. All the colliers previously employed by R.E.W.S. to pump water from the wells to the surface under Unit supervision, disappeared (dismissed without notice by the Garrison Engineer – who pleaded as his excuse that he had no authority to employ). Half-completed works, inaugurated by R.E.W.S. were abandoned, and workmen are now reluctantly trickling back after a lapse of days. An interview with the Garrison Engineer proved unproductive. It is essential that we have the fullest co-operation of the Garrison Engineer (even to the extent of him "ignoring the book" on occasion) if we are to fulfil all our commitments. The new one offers us no hope whatever of lighting our domestic site; very little of our obtaining our minimum requirements of furniture. The water pumping problem is not yet solved – the answer would be power-pumps. We would provide the necessary maintenance and supervision.

14. Fire Services.

The countryside and bashas are as dry as tinder – hardly a day passes without a bush fire endangering some part of the camp area. On the 27th February an oil dump, containing approx. 1600 gallons (the existence of which was previously unknown to anyone on the Station) went up in flames. We have no fire tender, no extinguishers, no appliances of any kind, no static water. Old petrol cans have been filled with earth and water and placed in strategic spots. An alarm system has been devised. It is only a matter of time before some items of valuable equipment go up in smoke. We are doing what we can but it seems pitifully inadequate. Additional equipment – demanded and refused – is a necessity – fire tender and foam equipment (including the haversack type) are suggested.

15. Hygiene & Sanitation.

The domestic areas were left littered with insanitary rubbish. The accumulation of months will take some time to clear away. Latrines etc., are, on the whole, satisfactory.

16. Dress, Etc.

The wearing of long sleeves and slacks East of the river is being strictly enforced. Additional issues of slacks will be made in the near future.

17. Office Equipment.

The long-carriage typewriter on order since August seems to be on its way. M.R.D. RAFSEA, have ordered 313 M.U. to "release one from frozen stocks". Apart from this the position is satisfactory. The "monetary allotment" system of ordering office supplies is causing under-ordering certain items (e.g. stencils) and other difficulties.

18. Clerical Deficiencies.

The Intelligence Officer reports that owing to a new system of ops, reporting he is to carry out, he must have a clerk and a typewriter. He has a considerable amount of paper work previously, but the latest instructions double it. He cannot be spared the requested clerical assistances from the Squadron resources. Increases of clerical commitments of this kind seem to be at variance with the principles laid down in recent directives and to be efficiently fulfilled will require the posting of an additional clerk.

19. Personnel Generally.

Position satisfactory.

20. Administration Generally.

There is no reason why existing difficulties should not, in a very short time, be overcome provided that co-operation from all sides is forthcoming. Our present big snags are water, lights and furniture (the minimum only has been asked for).

(E. A. Starling)
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