

February 1945: Form 540

358 Squadron

Place	Date	Time	Summary of events
	February	1945	
Digri	2		Operation Order No. 11.
	5		Congratulatory Message from A.O.C., Strategic Air Force received reads "Congratulations to 357 and 358 Squadrons on most successful completion of very strenuous operational period. This has involved many extremely long and difficult sorties and the success achieved reflects the greatest credit on all concerned. The work of ground crews has also been first class. A very good start for No.358 Squadron who have had to work under great difficulties."
Jessore	19		Operational Order No. 12.
	20		Operational Order No. 13.
			Ten aircraft detailed for operations. Aircraft 'G' KH282 (F/O. J. B. Smart) did not return. Aircraft 'U' KG925 (Capt. F/O. J. G. Wood) developed trouble in fuel system and Nos 3 & 4 engines cut out about 35 miles N.E. of Jessore (Base). Captain ordered crew to bale out. All got down safely except 1567157 Sgt. McLuskey, J. WOP/Air. who jumped out clinging to the second pilot. When the parachute opened he was thrown free and fell from 2500 feet and was killed. The aircraft and crew came down in the vicinity of Tirpol a village one mile West of Talmar, Bengal, Map reference 2330N. 8955E. Air craft burst into flames setting fire to one or two huts and killing one Indian Civilian and seriously injuring three others. The body of Sgt. McLuskey has not yet been found.
			Personnel Missing – Liberator VI. KH282.
			F/O. J. B. Smart. 171567 GD(P)
			F/O. T. A. Brown 135527 GD(P)
			P/O. H. J. A. Johnson 165517 GD(Nav)
			P/O. P. P. Parker 165276 GD(Nav)
			F/O. J. E. M. Wilson 159979 GD(Gnr.S)
			1584988 Sgt. Hazlewood, L. Air/B
			1587400 Sgt. Wise, J. R. A/G.
			1479656 Sgt. Smith, W. W. A/G.
			798789 Sgt. Pumphrey, G. M. WOP/A.
	21		Operation Order No. 14.
	22		Operation Order No. 15.
	23		Operation Order No. 16.
	24		Operation Order No. 17.
	25		Operation Order No. 18.
			Nine aircraft detailed for S.D. Ops. Aircraft 'H' EW188 (Capt. F/O. L. P. Cloutier) failed to return to base. Last known location – Base.
			Personnel Missing Liberator VI. EW188
			F/O. L. P. Cloutier J.24817 GD(P)
			F/O. D. J. Boston 164443 GD(A/B)
			Aus.437058 F/S. R. G. Pryor 2nd Pilot.
			657237 F/S. G. E. Foster Nav.
			Aus.430230 F/S. M. R Vagg WOP/Air
			Aus.429146 F/S. E. F. Warmer WOP/Air
			1796476 Sgt. J. P. J. Power A/G.
			934689 Sgt. G? W. Mount A/G.
	26		Operation Order No. 19.

	27		Operation Order No. 20.
	28		Operation Order No. 21.
			Operational Summary for February 1945
			In the course of 11 operational days during February, No.358 S.D. Squadron flew a total of 67 sorties for which 16 A/c were airborne for a total of 796 hours 41 minutes.
			These operations consisted of dropping a varied assortment of supplies on targets widely distributed between Burma, French Indo-China and Malaya – with the emphasis on French Indo China. The success of these operations was considerably hampered by weather; 21 of the total of 36 failures were due to conditions which were mainly thick low cloud over dropping zones. Other reasons for unsuccessful missions were eight incorrect signals or layout at reception or, no reception at all, and six failures due to technical faults which ranged from too heavy fuel consumption to sudden unserviceability of such important instruments as compass and auto-pilot. Only one crew reported inability to find their D.Z.
			The month's operations opened on the 2nd with five sorties, only two of which were successful. This day's work marked the last missions of the January moon period and also the last operations from Digri. The next moon period's operations started on the 19th by which time the Squadron had started to settle down at R.A.F. Station, Jessore.
			Twenty eight sorties were successful and a few reports of some of them have filtered back from the field and are recorded in the following extracts.
			Operational casualties during the month totalled three aircraft and 18 men. Two of these aircraft were missing with crews totalling seven officers and 10 N.C.Os while the third crashed in Bengal, one N.C.O. losing his life in bailing out.
			On 29th February, F/O. Smart, an experienced captain, took off in A/c 'G' (crew of 9) on an operation over Northern French Indo China, screening a new crew, the captain of which, F/O. T. A. Brown, flew as second pilot. This A/c. did not return. The target was in a hilly district where peaks were jutting up through thick cloud – condition which prevented any of the seven other A/c on this operation finding the D.Z.
			The crew of A/c. 'N', captained by W/O. Adams of New Zealand, reported that while over the D.Z. area a Liberator – "was seen 2,000 yards ahead at 6,000 ft on a course of 112° ..... Suddenly this A/c turned 90° as if something had been sighted below. It turned again and banking steeply went down through cloud. A/c. 'N' followed and found the hole in the cloud through which this A/c. had disappeared, but did not follow as hilly country could be seen below with peaks sticking up through the cloud."
			From this and other interrogations of crew on this operation it is conclusive that this was the last sighting of A/c. 'G'. Finally a report from the field stated that: "A British plane has been found by the French smashed and partly burnt 25 kilometres north west of Bao Ha. This plane probably crashed on 20th at about 2100 hours." "The bodies of four airmen have been found. The only personal belongings found are:- 1 identity plaque; James Wilson 159979. R.A.F. and 1 bakelite plaque: NFAH 798789 Airman G. Pumphrey, R.A.F." "It is not known if the plane was a Liberator of Dakota".
			This message undoubtedly refers to the Liberator captained by F/O. Smart missing on the night 20/21st February.
			While returning on the same operation, A/c. 'U', captained by F/O. Wood of Canada, crashed through lack of fuel in Bengal, approx. 50 miles from base. The order to jump was given when the situation was realised, but the first wireless operator, Sgt. McLuskey could not find his parachute. The second

			pilot, F/S. C. E. Collins, told McLuskey to hang on to his shoulders and they would attempt the drop with the one parachute. When the parachute opened, however, Sgt. McLuskey was torn off and lost his life. The A/c. finally crashed in a village near Faridpur with consequent death and injury to the inhabitants and damage to their property.
			On 25th February, Liberator 'H' captained by F/O. Cloutier, a French Canadian, took off on an operation over Central French Indo China and was not seen again. An ETA signal was received from him while returning, from, it is believed, a position over Northern Burma. Later a Liberator was reported crashed in the Chin Hills but on investigation by one of the Squadron's A/c. it was identified as an American B-24.
			Despite the fact that the weather was indifferent, this must be considered as a poor month operationally. The serviceability was not high, and far too many operational failures occurred prior to take off. A big drive is being made to improve the serviceability and it is hoped that March will be a more successful month.
	Feb. 1945		II – Administration.
Digri	2	1030	Small advance party 'A' of 1 officer, 2 NCOs & 4 BORs flown to R.A.F. Station Jessore (F/O. M. R. Davison).
	4	0830	Advance Party 'B' (3 officers, 11 SNCOs, 45 BORs, 1 IOR, & 14 E/Fs – 74) proceeded by road to Jessore in a convoy of 14 vehicles carrying rations for oncoming parties and essential aircraft servicing equipment.
	5		H.Qs, 231 Group Organisation Instruction No.29 received notifying intention to move the Squadron from Digri to Jessore. Target date for move February 8th.
	8		Main Party by rail moved off from Digri at 20.00 hours. Very little time was left for this move as a result of numerous delays in producing rolling stock. Goods wagons for loading were not placed until the afternoon of the 7th, but all heavy equipment was loaded in good time. Passenger stock arrived at 18.30 hours and entrainment took place in the dark. All loading took place in the Military siding of three branch lines and an amusing incident concerning the engine driver of the goods train may be related. This man arrived with his train in the main station at Chandrakona Road and was instructed by the Station Master to shunt the goods vehicles into the Military Siding which ran off into the jungle about 2 miles. This he flatly refused to do and stated that he had never been into that Siding before and would not take the responsibility if anything happened to his engine. The Guard offered to do the job but was promptly quashed. In the end the Area Pilot had to be brought 30 miles to shunt the trucks during the afternoon 7th February.
	10		Air Party flown from Digri to Jessore in 17 Liberator Mk.VI aircraft in two uplifts.
Jessore	12		Jessore presented many more domestic problems than Digri. Here it was found that the SNCOs (aircrew & Ground crew) and the airmen were to be billeted in the town in various ill defined areas amongst native dwellings and shops. The area originally occupied by our predecessors, No. 292 Squadron, was totally inadequate to take all the bodies of this Squadron, and 200 men were accommodated in a new unfurnished site at Santolar apparently built for a Station Headquarters. There was also a shortage of charphoys and over 200 men had to sleep on the concrete floors of this site. The airfield and H.Qs & Flights were situated 4 ½ miles from the domestic site and this idiotic dispersal placed a great strain on the M.T. which had to convey approx 200 men from Santolar to Jessore for meals a distance of 4 miles three times a day, in addition to normal working commitments.

	13		A considerable portion of requisitioned civilian property originally allotted for R.A.F. use had been occupied by various Army Units and as further requisitioning could not be done, the only solution to the accommodation problem was the provision of tents. H.Qs, 231 Group were approached to supply these. Furniture was in short supply having been obviously carefully removed by other units before our arrival.
			III. Personnel.
	22		Information received from local Police that body of Sgt. McLuskey had been recovered and was being buried at Faridpur today, under arrangements made by the Civil Authorities.
			F/O. J. Wheatley despatched to Faridpur to obtain full particulars.
			Summary – February 1945.
			Flying.
			During the month the Squadron flew 796.41 hours – Operational and 122.10 hours non-operational a total of 918.51 hours.
			S.D. Operations: 248 Containers 105 Packages were dropped.
			Wastage of Aircraft: 3 – 2 missing from operations and 1 Crashed on 21st.
			Wastage of Aircrew:
			Missing:- 4 pilots, 3 navs, 2 B/As, 4 WOP/As. 4 A/Gs.
			Total – 17.
			Killed:- 1 WOP/Air. Total – 1.
			Total Wastage – 18.
			Personnel Strength at end of month:-
			49 Officers, 241 SNCOs, 485 BORs, 20 IORs, 59 E/Fs. Total 854.
			Ops. Record Book – 358 Squadron Signals Section Appendix 13
			Ops. Record Book – 358 Squadron Navigation Section Appendix 14
			Ops. Record Book – 358 Squadron Armament Section Appendix 15
			Ops. Record Book – 358 Squadron Medical Section Appendix 16
			Ops. Record Book – 358 Squadron Engineer Section Appendix 17