

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

To: Area Air Sea Rescue Officer, Headquarters E.A.C.
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Headquarters, Strategic Air Force
Area Marine Office, c/o S.A.F.
Headquarters, No. 222 Group
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

January, 1944.

1. General Position.

This has been the best month the Squadron has ever had. We have done more flying with the Liberators in the month of January, than we did in seven months with twice the number of Warwicks. The Sea Otters of "E" Flight have been operating right up forward and were one of the first aircraft to be in Rantes?? Isle. "C" Flight Ceylon appear to have had a very quiet month from the scanty information we have received. No. 292 Squadron Catalina Flight, although a myth has caused us more trouble than all the rest of the flights put together. A directive stated that No. 212 Squadron was absorbing this non-existent Flight. The M{?} D.s immediately redirected everything meant for us to No. 212 Squadron. As 212 Squadron are spread between Karachi and Calcutta, it has been a major operation getting our spares back.

2. Operations ("A" & "B" Flights – Liberators.)

A record hourage of 2?08 hrs 45 mins was done, made up of almost exactly 50:50 day and night flying. There was one sighting of enemy shipping, and also the sighting of a ditched B.29 at night. Almost all the operations were long range jobs, and it is interesting to not that only Four operations during the month could have been done by the very much shorter ranged Warwicks. Whatever the Air Ministry like to say, the fact remains that A.S.R. out here has to cover Liberators and B.29s working at extreme range, an a three hour search one thousand miles from base is our minimum requirement. Particularly as at this distance there are a number of small islands where aircraft in distress can make for. It is doubtful whether the Warwick could ever be boosted up to this range, and as far as I know no effort is being made to try.

Search results have been rather disappointing, but it must be remembered that in the short range work done in the North Sea, a search is usually carried out by six aircraft in line abreast. Until we have enough aircraft to do this out here, too much rest not to be expected.

3. Training

166 hrs training and other flying was done during the month, of which 65 hrs were night flying. Most of this flying was practice cross-countries. Converting the Warwick Crews to Liberators was completed, and all Lib. Flying during the month was done by ex-Warwick crews. Practice Lindholme drops were carried out in a local lake, and it is hoped that we will shortly get mirror-cameras so that these drops can be properly assessed.

4. Intelligence

The Squadron Intelligence Officer arrived on the 10th. And this section has been taken well in hand. He visited Cox's Bazaar and Akyab to confer with "E" Flight's Sea Otter Detachments.

Action required. Conforming with accepted custom in the U.K., we have painted a two inch yellow circle round the roundels on the sides of our fuselages. The Squadron letters are also pointed in yellow. This serves two purposes. Firstly an aircraft in distress know that he is being escorted by an A.S.R. machine if he sees these markings, and secondly if a machine with these markings is seen circling something on the water, other aircraft know they must keep their distance as a rescue is going on. Now that the number of A.S.R. aircraft operation in India has been at least tripled, this should be either made official in India and the other A.S.R. Squadrons fall in line; and the matter given general publicity, or condemned and we paint the yellow out.

Our job is twofold. Firstly actual rescue, and secondly the improving of moral to those flying over the water. Unless wide publicity is given of the number of hours done on A.S.R. ops., the number and kinds of security patrols, etc., etc., half the use of our flying is completely lost. Hardly anybody seems to know that these safety patrols are being carried out, and successes should be widely publicised not just to "blow our trumpet" but to hearten and encourage our potential customers.

5. Security.

The matter of security of operations has been talked over by section commanders and the D.O., and a scheme has been worked out whereby it is hoped that operations will be kept secret. The I.O. has also arranged to see that the need for this security is kept well in mind by the aircrew. A.S.R. security patrols has made this important for the first time. The warning of one of these patrols is also the warning of a bomber raid.

6. Photography

A case was put up for the establishment of photographers with each flight, and the development of the use of photography. This case received the immediate support of Eastern Air Command who forwarded it on to H.Q., A.C., S.E.A. In brief we asked for mirror cameras to record Lindholme and Boat drops for analysis of faults and general training purposes. We asked for facilities for developing night photography so as to be able to identify strange lights seen on the water at night.

7. Navigation

The Navigation Officer has this section well to hand. All equipment that we have is serviceable, demands and hasteners have been sent in for the equipment that we are short of. A daily conference has been initiated among the Navigators and pilots, and every effort is being made to improve the standard of navigation.

8. Liaison with other services

Six of our crews visited the H.S.L. units this month and each spent a week with these units seeing how they worked. A reciprocal invitation has been issued to the H.S.L. Units to visit this Squadron and possibly fly with us.

9. Armament

Trouble has been experienced with the Emerson Nose Turret gun cocking mechanisms, For 1022 is being raised, and in the meantime Gunner have been instructed to handle this equipment with as much care as possible.

Difficulty is being experienced obtaining spares from stores: the main difficulty being in finding a Section and Ref. number that the M.U. can trace: part numbers being insufficient.

Consumption of Pyrotechnics has been extremely high owing to the amount of flying we have done. We used 841 Signals Drift Mk.VI, and 153 Smoke Floats No.1, Mk.IV. At the present rate of expenditure stocks will last approx. another six weeks. No. 325 M.U. is unable to meet our demands

dated 9/1/45 and is taking provisioning action. 1,000 Flame Floats No.3, Mk.I. have been allocated to R.A.F. Jessore. When it is finally decided where we move to on Feb 6th, action will have to be taken to divert these Flame Floats.

Three L.A.C.s have been recommended for promotion to T/Cpl to fill establishment vacancies. No. F/Sgt. Has been posted in to fill establishment vacancy. Sgt. Wood has been recommended to acting promotion as he has shown great keenness and efficiency. A report on the manning position of the Armament Section has been forwarded to H.Q. No.231 Group.

10. Engineering

The Equipment situation has been and still is acute, spares for airframes and engines having to come from 357 Squadron and No. 136 R.S.U. These Units have been most co-operative. The ground crews are far more interested in Liberators than they ever were with Warwicks, chiefly because they are more reliable and repay the attention given them. A closer friendship now exists between air and ground crews than ever before.

The Sea Otters operating from Cox's Bazaar, Akyab, and Ramree have been coming back to base for inspections and repairs. The counterbalance cylinder trouble has been obviated by a modified valve, the suggestion of Cpl. Green, Fitter IIa.

Sea Otters J.M.766 & 773 came back to base with hull plating damaged by water landings and have been handed over to No.136 R.S.U. for repairs.

A.P.U. trouble on the Liberators has been giving a lot of trouble: the big-ends failing. Spares and/or replacements for these A.P.U.s are very scarce and a A.O.G. has been outstanding since 23rd. December 1944.

The N.C.O.s lent from 215 Sq. and 184 Wing returned to their respective Units after instructing our crews on Liberator Aircraft. Their efforts have been greatly appreciated. Several Senior N.C.O.s have left for the U.K. and their replacements are awaited. Gas Flight Sgt. Has been posted to this Unit with only 6 weeks to complete his tour in India. Not much use to us.

11. M.T.

The refuellers have given a lot of trouble; the two Bedfords have choked delivery systems due to foreign matter in the pipelines of the Bulk Installation. They were sent to Burma Shell (Calcutta) for cleaning. The A.E?C. refuellers have been replaced by four Autocars.

12. Signals/Radar

In the Liberators, emergency inter-com, extensions are being fitted as fast as equipment allows. These are in the bomb-aimers waist-gunners, and flight-deck positions, so improving the A.S.R. facilities on the aircraft. We can and are now calibrating the radio-altimeters.

In the Sea Otters it has been found that pending the ultimate fitting of Marconi T1154/R1155, the old T1115 is more satisfactory than the T1083 which was tried out for 231 Group. As I write the news has come through that the V.H.F. Equipment has arrived in Calcutta. A.S.V. is still held up for Aerial Switching Units, Type 8.

13. "E" Flight Sea Otters – General

This Flight, in spite of every kind of difficulty, has put up a very good show this month. It has rescued a Spitfire pilot, found a lost invasion barge and directed Corvette to its assistance, it has done special jobs for "E" Group, it did a 300 ft. recco. of Ramree Isle prior to the Invasion, it has carried Supreme Allied Commander in Chief to one of his ships. Amongst congratulatory messages received there is one from the Admiral in Charge of the Akyab/Ramree operations, and the flight was one of the first units to operate from Ramree Island.

The Flight's difficulties are many. Firstly although it is generally agreed that the establishment has been increased from three to six aircraft and the Flight Commander's rank has been up-graded to Squadron Leader; no new establishment has yet appeared. The Flight Commander has the difficulty of being one of several F/Lts. in the Flight, and the Flight is having to operate from Cox's Bazaar, Akyab,

and Ramree with an establishment sufficient to maintain three fighter aircraft plus bodies scrounged from other Flights ?????????? approaching the disorganization throughout the Squadron. I had ??????????that is the new establishment allowance has been made for the fact that although it is a single engined aircraft, it is a large complicated aircraft with all the added troubles connected with a flying boat.

Another difficulty is the fact that three Sea Otters are operating from the battle area, their armament is poor, they have absolutely no armour, and the petrol tanks are not self-sealing. As a result two gunners were killed in a week, with one aircraft lost and one damaged. With the help of H.Q. No.231 Group, flak-jackets have been obtained from the Americans, and arrangements are now being made for the Flight to have three Spitfires so that it can escort itself without having to call on already overworked outside fighters -- a practice that has been used for years in U.K.

14. Welfare

The P.S.I. Accounts for the four months ending 31st. Dec. show that over Rs.1500 were spent on Airmen's welfare during that time chiefly on sports gear and indoor games.

The big news of the month is the purchase of a piano by the joint efforts of the Squadron and Group Welfare. We are very pleased with the piano and it has already proved its value. Additional musical instruments are needed and a sharp lookout is being kept for suitable ones.

A Squadron party was held on the 27th January at which the piano was played, songs were sung, football cups were presented, the monthly beer ration was drunk. 8000 cigarettes recently received from the Overseas League were ??cked and a good time was had by everyone.

On the 31st. January the "Airborne" Road Show gave the first of two once-nightly performances in the Canteen. It was a bright, entertaining little show well above the average for its type and was very well received.

All our normal welfare activities, including bi-weekly whist and "housie", weekly gramophone recitals, library etc., continue to flourish and the Airmen's Mess used as Welfare Centre is ???ly ??????.

15. Office Equipment Etc.

The long-carriage typewriter, subject of previous "binds" is still undelivered. Apart from this the situation is not unfavourable.

(E. A. Starling)
Wing Commander, Commanding,
No. 292 Squadron, R.A.F.