

An annotated transcript of UK National Archives document AIR27/1522.

255 Squadron RAF : Unofficial Diary

31st October 1944 to 21st January 1945 + a May 1943 misfile

The handwritten text in AIR27/1522 was re-keyed in July/August 2018 by Chris Eley, working from a microfilm copy of the original. E&OE. Transcribed material is © Crown Copyright, reproduced here under the Open Government Licence v 3.0.

Names of people and places, where known to be corrupted in the original, have been corrected so as to facilitate computer searches. Additionally, some abbreviations have been expanded in the interests of clarity. Please refer back to the original whenever a published quotation is to be made, citing the source as “TNA : AIR27/1522”.

Most of this document is an unofficial Squadron diary covering most but not quite all of the period of roughly three months between the Pisa Detachment's arrival in northern Italy and the move of Squadron HQ from Foggia to Rosignano. This includes the period when the serviceability of the Beaufighters became a dire problem, later solved by replacement with Mosquito aircraft. The contemporary account transcribed here was written primarily from the standpoint of the pilots based first at Pisa and then at Rosignano.

An apparently misfiled page of a report about Intruder Patrols over Sardinia in 1943 is also transcribed here, so as to reflect accurately the content of the original material.

CE
Harrow, Middlesex
August 2018

Transcript begins:

The inside front cover of the original commences with a handwritten list headed "Aircrew on Detachment" and their radio callsigns. This list appears consistent with the Squadron Detachment sent north – initially to Pisa – whilst the main body of the Squadron was still at Foggia Main. The list is undated, but the inclusion of Reynolds and Rudling as "Deceased" hints at dates spanning 24.Nov.1944, the occasion when their Bristol Beaufighter Mk.VI serial ND295 failed to return from a defensive scramble from Rosignano :

Aircrew on Detachment

F/Lt REYNOLDS	F/O RUDLING	FIGET 34	(Deceased)
F/Lt KINNELL	F/O KIRKMAN	" 29	(Returned to Base)
P/O BONE	P/O RAE	" 42	
F/S WINGFIELD	F/S CRAWFORD	" 53	
F/S WAITE	F/S NIMMO	" 54	
W/O HALE	F/O COOPER	" 15	
NCO i/c	F/S CORNWALL		
W/O JOHNSON	F/S COLES	" 35	
W/O FISHER	W/O WALSH	" 44	

The next page, machine stamped as Folio 1, is an added page of typescript that has no relevance here and clearly has been mis-filed. It comprises Page 1 (only) of a report headed "SECRET : Summary of No.255 Squadron's activity over Sardinia" and relates to the period 23rd March to 13th May 1943. The handwritten note "I.O." crossed out suggests that the copy was at one time intended for the Intelligence Officer. The typescript reads:

Seventy-three Intruder Patrols have been carried out by this Squadron during the period 23rd March to 13th May 1943, inclusive.

It is quite certain that the results achieved are much greater than would at first appear. Undoubtedly the enemy's night flying organisation was seriously disrupted on a number of occasions.

In addition to the air and ground targets attacked much information has been gathered regarding the enemy system of aerodrome lighting and their visual aids to night navigation. Several times the method of controlling night fighters visually was seen. Lights would expose in the path of our aircraft giving its course to the following night fighter.

The first patrol was made on the night of 23rd March, 1943, by F/O Gloster, D.F.C., and F/S R.B. Wall who damaged one of six aircraft which were attempting to land at Decimomannu.

Intruder Patrols were continued for several nights without signs of aerial activity being seen and without incident until the night of

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1st/2nd April when F/O Humes, G., and F/S J.L. Sayer were lost during one of these patrols. It has been impossible to establish what caused the crash, but it may be noted at this point that no other aircraft was lost during the remainder of our Sardinia effort.

On the night of 5th/6th April, F/O J. Ward and Sgt E.G. Marsden had an interesting patrol. It was impossible to get close enough to attack two enemy aircraft which took off from Elmas, but the crew brought back a very detailed description of the procedure used by aircraft and aerodrome control for take off.

The next item of interest was reported on the night of 10th/11th April when F/O Street and F/S Thomas saw an enemy aircraft crash and burn furiously on Oristano aerodrome. Later in the patrol the crew dropped a number of beer bottles causing consternation to the ground defences who replied with heavy fire from a number of positions. The following night F/O P.R. Brook and F/O C.J.D. Greenland attacked an aircraft which was about to land at Villacidro. This aircraft was burning a tail light only, and was a very difficult target. No claim was made.

On the same night F/O L.J. Leppard and P/O P.J. Houghton reported to the naval authorities the presence of a large ship possibly of the heavy cruiser type in Cagliari Harbour.

At this point the misfiled document abruptly ends, although one might have expected it to continue with further reports extending into mid-May 1943 so as to embrace all such intruder operations. Would any reader discovering further fragments of this report please alert both 255 Squadron Association and the National Archives.

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Transcription of the main part of the work (commencing at Folio 2):

31.10.44

Three Beaufighters arrived from Foggia at 16:00 hours.

Aircraft Nr. KW 115, letter "K", Crew F/Lt. Kinnell and F/S Kirkman.

" MM 860 " "N", " F/Lt. Reynolds and F/S Rudling

" ND 295 " "Y", " P/O. Bone and P/O Rae

Passengers: F/Sgts Wingfield, Crawford, Waite and Nimmo.

Weather was good for trip up. Parked aircraft on taxi strip on SW end of runway, very little room. Camp site very disorganised owing to mud, lack of good cookhouse and unsatisfactory latrine, the latter having no

roof. Will get things improved as we go along. Went into Wing with Adjutant and found out about the people I should have to deal with. Returned to camp 21:30 hours.

01.11.44

Sent F/Lt Kinnell back to Foggia with two R.C.A.F. Corporals who were due for repatriation. Also told to collect remainder of kit etc. The two other aircraft, "N" & "Y", were NFT'd¹ and placed on state that night. One was on immediate readiness, the other at 30 minutes. Weather was poor, raining steadily. Started work on cookhouse. Organised furniture for dining tent. Had other tent put up for F/Lt Kinnell and myself, also to be used for 255 Squadron office. No scramble or Stand-By.

02.11.44

Had two aircraft, "N" and "Y", NFT'd. Rained very hard. Went round campsite and inspected condition of ground, also tents as ditches were overflowing into them. Message from 'Ops B' - aircraft to be ready to go to Florence, owing to danger of River Arno overflowing its banks and flooding 'drome. Had P/O Bone and F/S Wingfield stand by aircraft. 16:30 hours ordered to scramble to Florence. 'Ops B' asked if "Y" intended to evacuate to 338 Wing, Leghorn, as all American Air Corps were pulling out. Decided not to evacuate as all camp site equipment would have to be moved. Had four trucks stand by at Wing to help evacuation if I decided to leave. Enough transport on site to take all personnel with belongings. Ordered all personal kit to be packed and warned all personnel to be ready to evacuate at 5 minutes notice. Had all A.I. and radio equipment packed on lorry, and placed guard on same. 17:00 hours all American personnel started to evacuate their camp, this going on all night until they finally blocked all roads out of camp. Tried to arrange a party to go to Florence to look after our two aircraft but road was flooded. Rained heavily all night and by 07:00 hours all Americans had left. Spitfire CO and I decided to stay and drown if necessary before we could move all camp kit. My own personal opinion was that the Americans panicked, causing Wing to panic. We were on the spot and

¹ NFT = Night Flying Test. Aircraft due to be on stand-by overnight were routinely test-flown in daylight before being placed on "state" (state of readiness).

therefore knew the position better than they did. In the morning, we had the 'drome to ourselves. No state as to aircraft. Weather u/s.

03.11.44

First thing after breakfast I went down and examined river as I thought there was little danger of the 'drome being flooded, though river had flooded Pisa. American aircraft started to trickle back. Have now got cookhouse built, and rubble organised for campsite paths. The big marquee was set up, and rubble laid down as a floor to keep it as dry as possible. Went to Wing to get rubber boots for personnel. Had a message through by Spitfire that our Beaus at Florence would be home as soon as 'drome cleared of aircraft. They did not arrive that day. F/Lt Kinnell returned from Foggia.

04.11.44

Had aircraft "K" D.I.'d² and placed on state. Phoned Ops B and informed them, asked for information regarding our aircraft at Florence. Told they were having 'Mag.' trouble³ but expected to be back in the afternoon.

21:45 hours Flight Sergeant Waite and Flight Sergeant Nimmo scrambled after bogey at 20,000ft. Bogey turned North and climbed to 25,000ft as soon as our Beau was scrambled. Suspect Jerry knew about our scramble. No aircraft returned from Florence, so arranged for ground crew to fly with me to Florence in the morning. Also scrounged one magneto from American 416 Beaufighter Squadron.

05.11.44

Weather very doubtful. Thought against risking our only aircraft being stuck at Florence in the event of a clamp. However, NFT'd aircraft and placed it on state. Camp site now a bit organised. Latrines built with roof on. Ration tent put up beside cook's tent to prevent theft, as civilians were starving. Organised laundry run twice each week, as camp was being invaded by women. Chased two of them out of airmen's tents,

2 DI = Daily Inspection.

3 Magneto – a part of the engine ignition system.

so no excuse for letting them on camp site. 237 Spitfire detachment having same trouble, so told CO he could use our laundry facilities.

06.11.44

Took off for Florence 09:20 hours with fitters and three spare magnetos, but owing to 10/10 low cloud was forced to turn back. Sent off party by road to get aircraft serviceable and returned. Sent message to Pilot Officer Bone that if further spares were required, to signal me immediately. Signal was sent in mistake to 255 Sqdn Foggia. Had signal back from Base Foggia, asking for particulars. Tried to signal reason for aircraft being dispersed, but signal traffic disorganised owing to weather, all teleprinters being unserviceable. Had Ops B phone Base, Foggia, through MACAF Caserta. State kept up with "K".

07.11.44

Arranged to fly to Florence first thing, but 'Ops B' reported 'drome u/s. Also weather. Both aircraft returned in the afternoon and in the evening ground crews returned by road. Corporal Dougal, i/c party, reported to me and informed me all three magnetos used and lucky not to require more. Had aircraft "K" and "N" serviced and NFT'd and placed on state. Sent signal to Base informing them aircraft had returned here. Everyone now happy. Found out, through 338 Wing, that the Americans panicked, also that their Area Commander, Colonel Bates, knew nothing of evacuation and had created hell because of it. Since then, they have returned. Things were just quietening down when 338 Wing, Leghorn, phoned me to go straight to Wing as I have been appointed president of Court of Investigation⁴ on Beaufighter KW 155, which took off from Pisa on the 20th Oct 44 on a ferrying trip and crashed, killing the pilot and injuring Navigator.

08.11.44

This Court of Investigation business keeping me very busy. Hope to have it 'buttoned up' by tomorrow. Meantime, two aircraft on state, "N" and "K". They have been NFT'd. Have seen a/c Scott and S.L.A. about move to new 'drome and arranged to go over to inspect billets beforehand.

4 Presumed drafting error – Probably should read Court of Inquiry at each occurrence.

Should move on the 15th.

The camp site is not permanent, but it is fairly comfortable, every consideration is given to the airmen including occasional liberty runs into Pisa. Everyone is contented and coping very well. One of the three-ton lorries⁵ u/s owing to water trouble. Bedford⁶ sent back today, leaving two three-tonners serviceable. Hope 15 cwt from Foggia is on its way, as three tonner for my transport is impracticable and wasteful. Water bowser with personnel arrived today after being on the road for 8 days.

09.11.44

Two aircraft NFT'd. Court of Investigation still pending owing to absence of documents. Message from 338 Wing about move to Rosignano. Have to meet SLA tomorrow at 09:00 hrs. Two aircraft on state.

10.11.44

Went to Rosignano and arranged billets; seems to be OK and could be made very comfortable. Move arranged for 10:00 hrs 13.11.44. Two trucks will be supplied by Wing to help move the tentage, as two trucks of ours still u/s awaiting spares.

11.11.44

Two aircraft NFT'd for state. Went to Rosignano to look over dispersals. Not very much room, no hard standing, just gravel. Saw W/Comdr B and asked if move was to be kept to 13th. He told me not to worry about it as he was looking after that side. Collected 15 cwt Dodge on loan from Wing. Sent F/Lt Kinnell to Foggia for spares.

12.11.44

No message to cancel move, so NFT'd two aircraft for state. In the morning Thunderbolts moved into our dispersal. As I did not feel happy

5 Correctly, this text uses the military rather than the civilian nomenclature for vehicle weights and capacities. A "three-tonner" in the military is a vehicle capable of transporting a load not exceeding 3 tons. The equivalent civilian nomenclature for such a vehicle would be "7.5 tons", the maximum all-up weight when fully loaded. The military approach tends to prevent over-loading of individual vehicles, but can be problematic when hazards such as a weak bridge are encountered.

6 Not a person or place; this makes reference to a truck manufactured by the firm Bedford.

about move I went to Rosignano to check up on hardstanding for dispersal. Found it had just been started and would obviously take 3-4 days before being ready. Went back to Wing but could not contact W/Comdr Barker, so phoned him in the evening and asked him if he was going to cancel move. Was told not to worry about his part and to continue to prepare removal. I wanted to move in two moves, and give them their state at Rosignano.

13.11.44

First thing in the morning, pulled down dispersal after aircraft had been NFT'd. Struck camp except for six tents which I intended to leave until next day. We would move in two moves and keep state at Rosignano. Two three-ton trucks arrived from Wing. Loaded tentage in same, and sent them off. Remaining trucks were packed and sent to Rosignano with Flight Sergeant Cornwell i/c, leaving me with 10 airmen and aircrews. All telephone lines were disconnected and used by 293 Sqdn. Lines between dispersal were removed and instruments taken away. Message from W/C Bonnor not to dispatch aircraft 'till 16:00 hrs. Held them back until 14:30 when weather began to deteriorate, so tried to take off. Was refused permission as weather too bad. Came back but Spitfires of 237 Sqdn took off without permission. 15:00 hrs decided to test weather, took off without permission. Ceiling was 150 feet and no point in going to R now as 'drome would be u/s because of rain. Rained heavily; tried to get through to 'Ops B' but no lines. They sent message to 293 to contact us, so went over to 293 and phoned 'Ops B'. They wanted a state, so told them what to do. Asked me if I would tell the a/c the same, so told them to get him on the phone. After complaining to him [assume omitted word "about"] the position, he still insisted on a state. This was at 17:50 and at 18:40 we had a scramble line to 'Ops B' and two aircraft on 15 minutes. Weather was u/s.

14.11.44

Recalled ground crew from Rosignano, began to reorganise camp site. Two aircraft NFT'd. 13:00 hrs campsite had been put back. Ground crew arrived back from Rosignano. Rained very heavily in the evening.

15.11.44

Camp site nearly flooded. River Arno in danger of overflowing. Message from 'Ops B' that aircraft had to stand by for evacuation to Corsica. Two aircraft had already done P.I.'s⁷ that evening. Wind sprang up and increased to hurricane strength, which blew down dispersal, dining tent and two airmen's tents. 'Ops B' notified by 'phone that if they scrambled our aircraft, we would evacuate whole camp to 338 Wing, Leghorn, or go to our billets at Rosignano. I think this sobered them up; our aircraft were not evacuated.

16.11.44

Two aircraft NFT'd; tents blown about were put up again; water subsided. In the evening F/Lt Kinnell & F/O Kirkman⁸ had two scrambles⁹. No sightings as they were too late in receiving warning. Time to scramble three minutes.

17.11.44

Two aircraft NFT'd. One aircraft to Foggia for spares. Returned the same day with oil cooler, scanner, compressor and other parts. In the evening F/Sgt Wingfield and N.R. Patrolled North of Corsica. This patrol was a complete shambles, as GCI stations had no local communications. Eventually flew into 342 Sector and were intercepted by friendly night fighters.

18.11.44

Three aircraft NFT'd. Went to 338 Wing to see Group Captain Scott, kicked up hell about previous night's effort, made myself bloody unpopular and told the Group Captain that we would send no more patrols there unless things were cleared up between Sectors, especially liaison. Went over at night on patrol to see what score was and found a slight improvement. On return to base aircraft "R" was belly-landed on runway by F/Lt Reynolds. Today we moved dispersal to north end of runway, as

7 Practice interceptions – an activity involving a minimum of two aircraft and one GCI station.

8 Illegible in original. Data imported from AIR27/1519 folio 100 side 2.

9 Only one scramble recorded in ORB. Hostile, believed at the time to be a "GAF Transport" (German Air Force, Luftwaffe, but with the benefit of hindsight possibly Luft Hansa), reported 35 miles East of Cap Camerat (which is near Saint-Tropez). Plot faded, once again illustrating the inadequacy of Allied radar cover in this area, which plagued attempts to shut down the principal 'escape route' from Germany to Spain.

more Thunderbolts arrived.

19.11.44

Two aircraft NFT'd, and "R" replaced by "K" from Foggia.

20.11.44

Two aircraft NFT'd. Camp site packed up, as message received 10:00 hrs. By 16:00 hrs all camp site had been removed from Pisa and arrived Rosignano 19:00. Two aircraft on state 17:00 hrs.

21.11.44

Two aircraft NFT'd. In the evening F/Lt Kinnell & Nav scrambled. Bogey turned out to be friendly.

22.11.44

Two aircraft NFT'd. P.I.'s and patrol in evening. Everybody settling down in billets, and dispersal being organised.

23.11.44

Two aircraft NFT'd.

F/Lt Reynolds scrambled at 22:45 (270° Angels 5)¹⁰. Initial vector given by phone - 2 hostiles on board. F/Sgt Wingfield on high readiness but stood down shortly afterwards.

24.11.44

Black day. F/Lt Reynolds & F/O Rudling did not return from last night's scramble. Apparently they were scrambled after a bandit way out West & chase was soon given up as bandit travelled out of GCI's scan. F/Lt Reynolds was then sent after a bandit north of Florence but chase was discontinued after approximately 20 minutes and he was brought back. F/Sgt Wingfield - on 2nd readiness - heard him pass over in cloud on the way out to sea¹¹. The weather was very bad & F/Lt Reynolds was last

10 "Angels 5" - Code for 5,000ft altitude.

11 Descent through low cloud was, by choice, done over the sea. The Squadron's Beaufighters had only barometric altimeters, not radio altimeters. There may have been a reluctance to update by radio either QNH or QFE (the "zero" settings for height above sea level and height above airfield respectively). Such information, if intercepted, would have been useful to the Luftwaffe's meteorological service for wider forecasting purposes.

plotted on a heading of 100, conflicting reports giving his distance from base as 16 and 25 miles. His last transmission stated he was at Angles 0.4 and it is assumed, though not confirmed, that he was then still in cloud. No search was then possible owing to the very low ceiling but F/Sgt Wingfield took off at dawn to join in the search. F/Lt Kinnell took over from him at 09:30 hrs and P/O Bone carried out a search in the afternoon - all without success. This loss is a big blow to the detachment, which F/Lt Reynolds helped so much to bring into being. Both he and F/O Rudling were very popular with everybody and they will be missed very much.

NFT's were carried out on all three searches but "N" developed engine trouble - F/Lt Kinnell having to do another NFT on it after dark.

P/O Bone and F/Lt Kinnell were on 1st and 2nd Readiness respectively. There was no incident.

25.11.44

P/O Bone was to have returned to Foggia this morning for spares, but the weather was u/s. P/O Bone and F/Sgt Waite did NFT's.

F/Sgt Waite and F/Sgt Nimmo scrambled at 18:45. After 10 minutes Excise said that other aircraft might possibly be a friendly and as the weather was bad (cloud down to 2,000ft) they were brought back to base and landed at 19:05. After the night before last we have come to an agreement with Ops B that there are no scrambles in ropey weather unless there is a good chance of a bandit being on the tube. Everyone is now extremely weather-conscious at night.

26.11.44

P/O Bone again attempted to make Foggia, this time with a passenger from Wing. The weather was OK this time, but just as he climbed away from base the front cowling cable on the starboard engine snapped and pieces started flying off all over the place. P/O Bone very wisely decided to return to base, which he did minus the engine cowling and side panel, the whereabouts of which are still a mystery. He remains undaunted and

is determined to make a third attempt to reach Foggia and thereby bring relief to the detachment.

F/Sgt Waite NFT'd "K" for F/Lt Kinnell who was in Wing, fixing up the bump attached to F/Lt Reynolds' accident, getting organised on fuel for the cookhouse and arranging for 2 Italians to work in the cookhouse & mess to compensate for the shortage of AC4's. The Italian situation must be approved by the Squadron, but he was promised a supply of coal on Wednesday next with amazing rapidity. More amazing still, we have been offered a Chevrolet utility truck which we didn't even ask for. Needless to say the offer was accepted and the truck is now reposing in the rear of the casa.

This afternoon it commenced to rain heavily with the result that S/Ldr McTavish at Flying Control declared at 16:00 hrs that the aerodrome was in danger of becoming u/s. Since it is still raining at 20:00 hrs and there is a new river flowing past dispersal he was obviously correct in his prophecy. F/Lt Kinnell informed Ops B of this, but they thought they ought to have some sort of a state to keep up appearances so F/Lt Kinnell appeased them by going on 60 minutes as first readiness. Their enquiry as to who would be on 2nd readiness was replied to extremely civilly. We couldn't have put the bowser¹² on anyway, because it won't float.

In the evening a liberty run was organised to the American cinema at Rosignano. Sgt. Coard, as a result of his acquaintance with the bailiff and an amazing knowledge of the Italian language, has procured six bottles of red wine gratis which he kindly donated to the bar. Along with the whiskey ration and three bottles of rum only to be issued in inclement weather (such as today!) the detachment promises to become a very merry place in future.

F/Sgt Cornwell went to 111 RSU, Pisa, and returned with cowling etc for "N".

12 Presumed to be a reference to the fuel bowser being unable to access the Beaufighter.

27.11.44

Still raining first thing this morning but stopped at about 09:00 hrs. Flying Control say that 'drome will be u/s for only 24 hrs if it doesn't rain in the meantime.

The following photograph is not part of the original document:



“The Casa”, initially the HQ just of the Rosignano Detachment, later became the whole Squadron's base and thus, both before and after VE Day, a pivotal location in RAF night operations throughout Italy – this because 255 Squadron (once re-equipped with Mosquito aircraft) assumed the role of Night Fighter cover for the whole of Italian airspace. Photo credit: Dr. Harry Vernon Reeves (1916–1990).

No NFT's possible and there'll be no state tonight. Both “X” and “N” are serviceable. The Chevrolet appears to be developing a spot of trouble. F/Lt Kinnell has been appointed to attend the Court of Inquiry on

F/Lt Reynolds' accident at Wing tomorrow morning. A Beaufighter circled the aerodrome this morning. A crew was prepared to dig it out of the mud on the runway but, apparently, it was not one of ours because it went away without calling Flying Control. Liberty run to Rosignano cinema in the evening.

28.11.44

'Drome still u/s. No NFT's. F/Lt Kinnell departed for Court of Inquiry at Wing and returned in the evening, having waded through piles of bumph. Flying Control informed us during the afternoon that the 'drome would be serviceable at night for scrambles in case of dire necessity. Yank Beau at Pisa on 1st readiness. P/O Bone on 2nd readiness in "K". "N" is serviceable but is due for immediate inspection and will be flown to Foggia as soon as possible. Wing, after kindly presenting us with the Chevrolet two days ago, have demanded it back immediately. In the meantime it has developed dozens of snags - looks very fishy. We are now waiting to discover whether or not we have to repair it - that would appear fishy (or maybe we're biased). More taxi demands from "O/C Smoke" - have received an order from 338 Wing to provide 1 Beau at 05:00 hrs on 30th November for the observers of a firework display over Leghorn. No chances to be taken. The Beau must fly not lower than 12,000ft and the pilot will be "selected" in advance (whether for good looks or whether Married or Single is not stated) and will receive two (repeat two) copies of the order, one to sign and one to use to the best advantage. No scramble or stand-by.

29.11.44

F/Lt Kinnell - F/Sgt Wingfield on Court of Inquiry at Wing. P/O Bone made a third unsuccessful attempt to take "N" back to Foggia for inspection. He got only as far as dispersal and discovered that the weather at Foggia was very bad. Laundry has been organised - once again thanks to Sgt Coard's fluent Italian. The first batch arrived back yesterday and was very satisfactory.

F/Sgt Wingfield combined an NFT and a liaison trip with an MTB. He was on 1st readiness / stand-by. No scramble.

30.11.44

F/Sgt Waite - NFT. P/O Bone once again unable to take off for Foggia due to a clamp there. Weather quite good here, but a strong wind. 22:40 hrs - F/Sgt Waite scrambled after a hostile 30 miles South-East of Nice travelling North-East. Plot faded soon after take-off. He completed an unsuccessful patrol and returned to base, landing at 00:15. O/C "Smoke" carried out his exercise without the aid of our Beau.

01.12.44

Weather good - although windy - but Foggia still having bad weather and it's doubtful whether "N" will be able to go down there today. F/Lt Kinnell - NFT and 1st Readiness. Three stand-by's - no scramble.

02.12.44

At last P/O Bone's endurance has been rewarded. He finally managed to get "N" to Foggia - returned, much to everyone's surprise, in "B" this evening. Apart from bringing back a new aircraft, this trip was very popular because he brought back two sacks of papers and parcels for the detachment. F/Sgt Wingfield did an NFT in the faithful "K" and was on readiness at night. He had one scramble in the evening but the plot faded soon after take-off and he returned to base.

03.12.44

Two NFT's this morning by F/Sgt Wingfield and P/O Bone. P/O Bone was on 1st Readiness and F/Sgt Wingfield on 2nd - one stand-by, no scramble. Both aircraft did a P.I. with BANDBOX - result satisfactory. F/Sgts Waite & Nimmo and F/O Kirkman went out this evening on a vino-hunting expedition and returned the proud possessors of a litre bottle of Vino Bianco. This sortie will probably be repeated in the near future.

04.12.44

Two NFT's - P/O Bone and F/Sgt Waite. During the NFT "B"'s port fire extinguisher decided to prove that it was in good working order. There was no trouble at the time but we've just learnt that the dinghy in the port wing has also decided to prove its capabilities by inflating itself. Although it's very reassuring to know that these devices do actually

work, it means that "B" is u/s at the moment and may have to be flown back to Foggia - which will disappoint Wing because we'll be unable to give them the P.I.'s they desire with only 1 aircraft. F/Sgt Waite - 1st Readiness. Quiet night. Weather deteriorating.

05.12.44

F/Sgt Wingfield was to have taken "B" back to Foggia but the weather is u/s. Cloud base is down to 1,000ft and it has been raining steadily all morning. F/Lt Kinnell did an NFT in "K". The weather improved a little in the afternoon and F/Sgt Wingfield took off for Foggia, accompanied by fond farewells from the rest of the detachment. A message from Ops B said that he landed at Foggia at 15:05 (sighs of relief!). F/Lt Kinnell on 1st Readiness. Scrambles only in emergency, owing to very strong cross-wind. No emergency, no scrambles, no standby-by, no nothing, no regrets.

06.12.44

Very dull morning - still a strong cross-wind blowing. Has been raining in heavy showers. Rain increased in afternoon - no NFT possible. 'Drome practically u/s - P/O Bone on 60 minutes readiness in the mess.

07.12.44

'Drome still u/s. F/Lt Kinnell went into Wing to try to arrange some form of lighting for the casa - nothing doing. Had no trouble arranging for another supply of coal with the Adjutant. P/O Bone and P/O Rae are spending their 2 days off on a "sight-seeing" trip in Florence. Ops B want "K" on 60 minutes readiness. F/Lt Kinnell obliged them.

08.12.44

F/Lt Kinnell was awakened by the 'phone ringing at 07:10 hrs this morning. He was greeted by the following message: "Hello, this is Ops B. Fidget 29 can stand down now." Whereupon F/Lt Fidget 29 Kinnell replied "OK" and went back to sleep!

Our "all-weather" airdrome [sic] is still u/s this morning! Heavy rain during the afternoon hasn't helped the runway any and no NFT is possible. No state - not even 60 minutes.

09.12.44

'Drome still u/s. Thanks to the electricians, nobly aided by electricians' mates, we at last have electric light in the casa. All attempts to have something done in the matter by Wing have proved unsatisfactory so we had to fix up our own system - making use of the AI test generator. It only provides light for a few rooms but it's better than the old hurricane lamps.

10.12.44

Weather much improved. F/Sgt Waite NFT'd "K" after lunch. There was a 100% aircrew parade in the front of the casa this morning for a Sunday morning walk, one purpose of which was to look after the fowl in the local farms - some were also interested in the farmers' daughters. The fowl situation looks fairly good and we may be able to organise something for Xmas - in exchange for cigarettes (preferably Piccadilly¹³).

F/Sgt Waite on 1st readiness was scrambled early in the evening but his cockerel and canary¹⁴ were u/s and he was brought back to base. The gubbins was changed and it was discovered that the oil cooler would also need changing. We thought that "K" had failed us at last but, thanks to good work by the ground crew, the necessary changes were soon made and she was again in a condition to keep the Huns from Leghorn. The Huns' "Y" Service¹⁵ was obviously good because no more hostiles were reported during the night. F/Sgt Waite did a patrol later - without incident.

11.12.44

F/Lt Kinnell took advantage of the unusual condition of the runway to do an NFT in the morning. In the a.m. the weather began to close in as per usual - there was a spot of panic when Ops B phoned through to say that 53 (F/Sgt Wingfield) was 20 minutes away from base. The panic changed to amazement when it was reported about 5 minutes later that a Beau had just landed. When Flying Control rang up to ask who was the Wing Commander in the Beau and, upon enquiry, gave the callsign 14 everything

13 An up-market, swanky brand name of the Carreras Tobacco Company, later (1958) merged with Rothmans.

14 An oblique reference to Radar and IFF apparatus - as is "gubbins" further down the same paragraph.

15 Radio interception, described here using terminology more appropriate to its British equivalent.

became clear. F/Sgt Wingfield landed about 15 minutes later. This was a big day for the detachment. Not only was the aircraft strength increased by 200% (for a short while) but we were very honoured to have a visit by the CO and his Navigator (F/Lt Noyes).

In the evening we were able to have 2 aircraft on the state - much to the surprise of Ops B - F/Lt Kinnell and F/Sgt Waite were the drivers thereof (NB Certain Nav/R's on this detachment have threatened to go on strike because the pilots' names and not theirs are always mentioned. The writer's opinion is that the Navs. have achieved sufficient fame on the squadron and it's only fair to give the pilots a chance. Anyone reading this (if anyone can manage it) will naturally know what famous personality each pilot is associated with - I hope¹⁶). Shortly before going on state the rains came and the state lasted a matter of two hours. It consisted of numerous telephone conversations between F/Lt Kinnell and Ops B with Flying Control as interpreters. It went something like this:

19:00 F/Lt Kinnell to Flying Control: "How's the runway?"

FC to F/Lt K: "Lousy. OK for emergency scrambles"

Ops B was informed and decided to put 29 on 15 minutes and 54 on 30 minutes.

19:30 (after 30 minutes solid rain)

F/Lt K to FC: "Any more gen?"

FC to F/Lt K: "Lousier. Will probably be u/s all night.

Ops B were again informed and put 29 and 54 on 30 minutes.

19:45 (still raining)

Ops B decided to wait 1 hour and if it was still raining they'd

16 Alternatively, see the corresponding Form 541 in AIR27/1519.

be convinced that the runway was u/s.

20:45 (raining like hell)

Ops B "29 on 60 minutes readiness".

F/Lt Kinnell: "OK. If you want us again, call the mess."

On the way back to the casa, the Dodge had to plough it's way through mud, rivers and deep lakes so, presumably, the runway was u/s.

12.12.44

'Drome u/s all day. Only thing of note was a visit by W/C Kempe, F/Lt Kinnell and their Navigators to 14023 AMES to check up on coverages. This entailed a journey by Dodge up mountain paths before "Circle" controller was finally run to earth. The reason for this visit and one to Ops B was to discover a method of intercepting the Hun bus-service which runs South of the French coast from Spain to Genoa Bay.

Another point of interest was the formation of the detachment band which is composed of mouth organ, paper and comb, tin plates, spoons, biscuit tins and a musical bell - which is very much out of place. Although not musical, the effect is naturally very pleasing to ardent swing fans. Talk about improvisation!

13.12.44

'Drome u/s all day. The only excitement was caused by a body of Wing-types who suddenly descended upon us armed with large-size fly sprays. They departed as suddenly as they arrived leaving behind them a casa which smelt like an Medical Inspection Room.

14.12.44

F/Sgt Waite and P/O Bone did NFTs in the afternoon and were on readiness at night - nothing doing.

15.12.44

F/Lt Kinnell and F/Sgt Waite NFT'd "B" and "K" in the morning. The 'drome is now serviceable but very soft in places. The CO left for Foggia at 11:00 hrs. In the afternoon F/Lt Kinnell managed to win some torch batteries from Wing using the threat of "No torch batteries - no state".

In the evening 29 and 54 did a Practice Interception on Spotlight (E. Corsica). It was not very successful, probably due to the fact that Spotlight had had no practice for a long time. On landing "B"'s starboard wheel touched down in a soft spot and swung badly but it was corrected by F/Lt Kinnell aided by much ardent praying from F/O Kirkman in the back.

At 23:10 "B" was scrambled after a hostile 140 miles West of north Corsica, travelling North-East. The Type 14 station BANDBOX had no information on this hostile but put 29 onto two bogies travelling North-Easterly towards the French coast. A contact was obtained at 2 miles crossing Starboard to Port but was lost in the land echoes which covered the tube as 29 turned in towards the land (approximately 2 to 3 miles away). Angles was 0.5. The bogey was then said to be orbiting to Port and F/Lt Kinnell saw a red light on his port side which may have been a red Very. From odd messages picked up on the R/T, it is believed that this bogey was an American night-fighter controlled by Turnscrew in the south of France and Fidget 29 was vectored onto this friendly which was itself being vectored onto the hostile. Fidget 29 got into contact with this American on R/T - he gave his position as 60 miles NW of Corsica which was then 29's approximate position. In the sortie report it has been suggested that better liaison between 338-340 Wings is necessary to avoid this happening. 29 returned to Base. The rest of the night was spent in peace and oblivion.

16.12.44

F/Sgt Wingfield and F/Lt Kinnell did NFTs in the afternoon and were on the state at night - very quiet. Ops B's plea for a Practice Interception was refused on the grounds that every night was a bit much and this also meant that the same pilot was on two nights running.

17.12.44

NFT's - F/Sgt Wingfield and P/O Bone. "B"'s undercarriage developed locking trouble and is operationally u/s. It will be flown back to Foggia tomorrow, weather permitting. It rained this a.m. And in the evening Flying Control decided the runway was u/s. P/O Bone was put on 60 minutes readiness. About 5 minutes later Ops B phoned to say that the runway would be serviceable later and they would like "K" on immediate readiness. They showed surprise when told that P/O Bone would be on 1st readiness in approximately 20 minutes but the matter was made clear by informing them that it took a short while to change from 60 minutes readiness in the mess to immediate readiness on the 'drome. The airdrome was to all intents and purposes u/s all night and there were no stand-by's or scrambles.

18.12.44

Further rain this morning has put the runway definitely u/s and NFTs were not possible. F/Lt Kinnell had to go all the way to Florence and back today for MT spares as this was apparently the nearest place from which we could get them.

There is no state tonight and, needless to say, "B" has not left for Foggia.

There is growing apprehension concerning the bringing of Xmas fare from Foggia. "B" is our present hope and this depends upon the runway becoming serviceable. (NB "B"'s undercarriage trouble is quite authentic.)

19.12.44

'Drome u/s all day. In the afternoon and evening there was a run into Wing, Rosignano, to see a MACAF stage show "One for the Road". It was a very good show and one member of the cast was Ray West, ex-255 Squadron. A few more shows of that type would be very welcome here.

20.12.44

'Drome as usual. Most uneventful day.

21.12.44

'Drome - see above. The 'drome has not been improved any by trucks which have been running up and down it. Metal stripping is being laid on the Eastern half. A Boston belly-landed last night and added it's mark to the already numerous ruts and ditches.

22.12.44

'Drome is at last serviceable and F/Lt Kinnell and F/Sgt Waite went down this afternoon to do an NFT and take "B" back to Foggia. On the way Wing Commander Bonner (OC Flying) met them in his car and cancelled both trips on account of a strong cross-wind blowing across the runway (which is only 70ft wide, because engineers are laying stripping on the Eastern half).

Arrangements are being made for Xmas. There is a good stock of liquor and food and the shortage of members of the female sex is being overcome by conscription. There will be an invitation to dinner & dance in the mess on Xmas day.

In the late afternoon F/Lt Bradley and his Navigator arrived at Pisa to replace F/Lt Kinnell who is proceeding on a course. F/Lt Bradley was not allowed to land at Rosignano due to the cross-wind, and the Dodge was sent to Pisa to bring him to the casa. We welcome the new CO and his Navigator although everyone is sorry to lose F/Lt Kinnell. He is to leave for Foggia tomorrow in "B".

F/Lt Kinnell celebrated his last night on the state. Owing to the still-strong cross-wind scrambles were only to be given in emergencies. An emergency apparently occurred at 22:40 because he was scrambled on 300 max Angles¹⁷. On being handed over to Never (GCI) there was no information available and F/Lt Kinnell, after struggling up to 19,000ft, was immediately told to reduce to 10,000. Soon after reaching 10,000 the weapon decided to go u/s and 29 was vectored to Base. A landing was attempted but was extremely difficult owing to the very narrow runway and strong cross-wind. Flying Control told 29 to go to Pisa. 29 landed

¹⁷ Taken to mean set Course 300°, climb to maximum altitude.

there and received a pleasant welcome from 416 Squadron who provided toast and coffee. Ops B thought it inadvisable to carry on the state from Pisa and sent a car to take 29's crew back to Rosignano. They arrived at 02:30 and, with one unserviceable aircraft on the 'drome and two serviceable ones (except for "K"'s weapon) at Pisa, both slept happily ever after.

23.12.44

The ground crew went over to Pisa today in a 3-tonner to do Daily Inspections on "K" and "N". "K" was found to be u/s - a whole line of rivets having come out of the undersurface of the Starboard wing during last night's trip (where ignorance is bliss). No.111 RSU are attending to this. The D.I. Was completed by mid-day but it was still impossible to move "N" to Rosignano due to the cross-wind still prevailing. Wing, however, in their usual brilliant manner, solved the situation. They decided we should do readiness from Pisa - the only apparent difficulty being the distance from the detachment - approximately 30 miles. F/Sgt Waite and F/Sgt Nimmo [at this point in the original is written the mathematical symbol for 'therefore', \therefore] surrounded by ground staff and the sides of a 3-tonner, set out for Pisa at 16:30. They arrived without mishap at 18:00 and another $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours was spent arranging for the Americans to fuel the aircraft, fixing up a scrambling point in 293 Squadron's mess and contacting Ops B. They were then in the unenviable position of facing a $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile sprint to the aircraft in the event of a scramble. Sure enough there was a scramble at 19:30 and the race was won by a short head by F/Sgt Nimmo in the record time of 1 minute 26.3 seconds. This is regarded as a World Record but, since it is the first time that the $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile has been run in flying boots and Mae West, it can't be accepted as worthy of F/Sgt Nimmo being entered for next year's Olympic Games¹⁸.

F/Sgt Waite scrambled on 270 Angels 3 and after a delay Excise gave him vector 310 Angles 20. He was told there was no information on any hostile and, as weather was very bad, he asked to return to Base. After

¹⁸ The Olympic Games, by tradition, do not take place in time of war. Therefore, hidden here, there may be an expression of hope that WW2 was nearing its end. In fact, the next Summer Games did not take place until 1948 (London), the first since 1936 (Berlin).

landing, he discovered that the scramble was cancelled just as he was taking off and apparently, since he was airborne, Ops B decided he could do a patrol at Angles 20! The fact that the 'drome was clamped a short time after 54 landed did not improve the opinion of Ops B's decision.

24.12.44

Still a strong cross-wind and it has started to snow a little - which won't improve the runway a lot. It is assumed that we still do state from Pisa but an attempt is being made to cancel this idea. It would mean sending a crew to DI the aircraft and aircrew tonight to be on readiness there. There are no facilities for meals there and all food for the day has to be taken along with the men.

F/Lt Kinnell is unable to take "B" back to Foggia while the 'drome is u/s.

F/Sgt Wingfield brought "N" back from Pisa this morning. The wind has died down a little now and the 'drome is OK. F/Sgt Wingfield on readiness - no scrambles.

25.12.44

F/Lt Kinnell left for Foggia this morning. Preparations are all made for celebrating Xmas. A piano was obtained from a farm down the road - we're expecting Ray West to arrive this afternoon with his accordion.

Dinner was a great success thanks to the efforts of the cooks. The afternoon was noted for the invasion of crowds of Italians looking for something to eat. Plenty of liquor and music made the casa a very gay spot. Most of the "guests" left as soon as the food had gone and the party gradually developed into the usual thrash. A good time was had by all. Unfortunately, P/O Bone and P/O Rae were on readiness - there was no scramble - but they intend to get really tight at New Year to compensate for it!

26.12.44

A very quiet day. Everyone is feeling the effects of last night. F/Lt Bradley on readiness - no scramble.

27.12.44

F/Sgt Waite could not NFT "N" due to cross-wind on runway. On readiness at night - all quiet.

28.12.44

F/Sgt Wingfield NFT'd "N" - loss of oil pressure. A second NFT in the afternoon had same results. "N" u/s pending new carburettor. "K" still in the hands of 111 RSU. No state tonight. Signal sent to base for 2 aircraft - on the assumption that if you ask for 2 there's a good chance of getting one!

29.12.44

Both aircraft still u/s. F/Sgt Cornwell returned with carburettor from Pisa this morning so it may be serviceable tomorrow.

P/O Bone and F/O Kirkman attended a Punch Party at 338 Wing and returned without incident.

30.12.44

Two relief aircraft reported landed at FANO, due to bad weather.

31.12.44

F/Sgt Waite NFT'd "N" - now OK. Two aircraft arrived this morning with new crews - W/O Hall & F/O Cooper and W/O Johnson & Sgt Cole. Both aircraft - "B" and "P" - were u/s on arrival so we have 4 aircraft now but only 1 serviceable. As soon as there is another aircraft serviceable, F/Sgt Wingfield and F/Sgt Crawford will be leaving us, which is a bad thing.

New Year's Eve was celebrated with a thrash. F/Sgt Waite was unfortunately on readiness but joined in with "Auld Lang Syne" on the 'phone. Everyone very pissed and noisy.

54 had 1 scramble - after a friendly.

01.01.45

The New Year started off well, with two aircraft and the runway serviceable at the same time. F/Lt Bradley & P/O Bone on readiness.

P/O Bone scrambled at 03:30 in the morning for a bandit, but plot faded soon after take-off.

02.01.45

We bid a sad farewell to F/Sgts Wingfield and Crawford who are returning to the Squadron. F/Lt Bradley has received a message to return to base as soon as possible, so it looks as if we'll have yet another C/O.

P/O Bone and W/O Johnson on readiness. At 05:00 an order was given to scramble but this was immediately cancelled. The rest of the night was peaceful.

03.01.45

F/Lt Bradley left this afternoon in "P", leaving "N". W/O Hall NFT'd "N" but AI and R/T were u/s. Late in the afternoon we welcomed to the detachment W/O's Fisher and Walsh who arrived in "U" complete with full kit, 2 sacks of mail and one bottle of gin which was disposed of later in the evening.

W/O Hale was on readiness in "U" and was scrambled at 02:30. The plot faded soon after take-off and he returned to Base after 15 minutes.

04.01.45

W/O Hall and F/Sgt Waite did NFT's. "N" still u/s due to AI trouble. F/Sgt Waite on readiness in "U". All quiet.

05.01.45

Heavy rain all day and strong cross-wind. Metal strip now down over full length of runway. "N" still u/s. W/O Fisher on 30 minutes - all quiet.

06.01.45

P/O Bone NFT'd "U". W/O Fisher went to Pisa in the [?] and brought "K" back. P/O Bone and W/O Fisher on readiness. No scramble.

07.01.45

P/O Bone and W/O Johnson on readiness. 17:30 - PI on Moppitt. 20:00 - Scramble, later cancelled when W/O Johnson was at end of runway. 03:30 - Scramble. Plot faded soon after take-off - no joy.

08.01.45

W/O Hale and W/O Johnson on readiness - all quiet. All three aircraft are serviceable.

09.01.45

W/O Hale and F/Sgt Waite on readiness. Liberator bogged on the runway - both crews returned to the mess on 60 minutes readiness until 10 o'clock when the runway was cleared. No scrambles - weather bad.

10.01.45

Heavy fall of snow early this morning. [At this point there is a pronounced, unexplained change in the handwriting.] W/O Fisher and F/Sgt Waite were able to carry out NFT's this afternoon. W/O Fisher on first readiness was scrambled, but recalled before reaching the end of the runway.

11.01.45

P/O Bone and W/O Fisher on readiness. There were no incidents throughout the night state.

12.01.45

P/O Bone and W/O Johnson successfully carried out NFT's but there were no scrambles.

13.01.45

W/O Hale and W/O Johnson were on readiness. Once again there were no interruptions throughout the night state.

14.01.45

F/Sgt Waite & W/O Hale did NFT's during the morning. The former had F/O Kirkman as his crew, replacing F/Sgt Nimmo who was on the sick list. PI's were arranged, but were cancelled because the port tyre on "K" was found to be flat at the last moment. F/Sgt Waite actually manoeuvred into the take-off position before being recalled to dispersal.

15.01.45

W/O Fisher and F/Sgt Waite successfully completed NFT's this morning. Once again PI's were the form, but did not materialise because "N" was u/s.

16.01.45

P/O Bone did NFT during the afternoon in "K" which is the only aircraft serviceable currently but experienced a peaceful night. Squadron Leader North accompanied by F/O Pickthall came from Foggia to take F/O Kirkman back to Base. We learn that the first pilots and R/O's are receiving their training at Base for the new Mosquitoes which are expected to arrive in the near future.

F/Sgt Nimmo received information of his promotion to rank of Warrant Officer. Sgt Coles also promoted to F/Sgt.

17.01.45

P/O Bone and W/O Johnson on readiness. NFT's took place during the afternoon and PI's under the control of CIRCE GCI¹⁹ were carried out during the early part of the evening. There was no more "joy" [omitted word "in"?] the latter period of readiness.

18.01.45

W/O Johnson and W/O Hale did NFT's this morning. During the afternoon W/O Johnson carried out an Ack-Ack cooperation flight in the Leghorn and Pisa sector. There were no incidents during the night state.

19 Sic. Drafting error for CIRCLE.

19.01.45

W/O Johnson and W/O Hale on readiness again. W/O Hale carried out a defensive patrol of the Leghorn sector but returned to base early with port engine trouble and weapon bent.

W/O Johnson was scrambled after a "bogey" angels 22 which turned out to be friendly, no contact was obtained. Later vectored onto a Hun in the Nice area but at no time was contact obtained although control claims to have brought W/O Johnson within a mile of the bandit. Note by W/O Johnson: "The aircraft behaved splendidly throughout".

20.01.45

F/S Waite and W/O Fisher on readiness. The former did two NFT's in "N" and "K" respectively. This is the procedure now carried out if all three aircraft are serviceable prior to NFT's. Heavy rain was experienced during the night. There were no scrambles.

21.01.45

P/O Bone and W/O Fisher Did NFT's this morning. W/O Fisher had the port engine in "U" cut just after take-off and several times after, but landed with both engines still functioning OK.

-o0o-

[At this point the hand-written text abruptly ends without explanation. A period of snow restricted operations at "Base" (Foggia Main) in the following days. There, conversion to Mosquito aircraft was under way – something that would continue after the move north.

At the beginning of February 1945 the Squadron relocated its base from Foggia to Rosignano, establishing its HQ in the same "casa" as had to date been used by the detachment. As predicted by Wing Commander Kempe's notes made at the end of January 1945 (AIR27/1519 folio 110), the Squadron was subsequently fragmented into a number of detachments spread right across Italy and the South of France. There are no known instances of more recent single-site Squadron diaries surviving; submission of personal jottings from this time period would, therefore, be especially welcome.]