

Letters to the Editor

A BAD WEATHER TRIP.

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Here is an example of what the weatherman did during the Kashmir operations.

Once our garrison at Poonch was rather in bad state and wanted supplies urgently. Weather was deteriorating. After nerve-racking scrutiny of the insufficient data on his charts the weatherman had declared that only one trip to Poonch and back would be possible early next morning. Weather will become impassable afterwards.

Two Dakotas fully loaded with emergent supplies took off from Jammu airfield early next morning on the supply mission within 10 minutes of each other. They were finding it rather difficult. The Captain of the first Dakota knew the track very thoroughly and, in addition, had plenty of experience in bad weather flying. He was pressing on in spite of the weather. The Captain of the second Dakota was not that much confident. They were both experiencing icing on their aircraft due to low temperature and rain. After some R/T talk between the two Captains about the weather the second Dakota decided to return to base.

The Captain came straight to the weatherman after landing and told him about his experience. He was extremely sorry for not having been able to fulfill his mission. The weatherman scratched his head, looked up again at the sky and consulting his latest upper wind chart said "Listen, old fellow, will you try again with me at your side: I think we can still get through and make our trip back. That is even now my estimate." Not many pilots have very much confidence in weatherman in respect of bad weather flying and less so in such dangerous undertakings over hilly countries. Somehow this pilot said "yes" to the weatherman and they started off on the trip again.

Thick mass of dark clouds were all round, below, above and at the flying level. The rain was steadily falling at places. While inside the clouds and in rain flakes and pellets of ice were found depositing on the aircraft and brushing away. Everything around was grim and it was grimmer still when some high peaks suddenly came into view through the cloud masses. Nevertheless the plane negotiated a high peak, diverted to port for getting into a river valley and followed its course. It slipped into Poonch hiding itself under cover of a peak on its left to avoid enemy bullets.

Poonch valley was not raining. The Captain made one of his carefully calculated landings on the insufficiently long "Kuccha" runway surrounded by hillocks and parked in the usual place. The batch of our Army Jawans, who were always on duty there, started unloading the precious supplies immediately, while the aircrew and weatherman had their routine mug of "cha".

The aircraft started on its way back immediately after unloading and reached Jammu in good time to get away from there after a hasty meal. Bad weather was fast approaching and Jammu airfield (then with "Kuccha" runway) was to get bogged for a few days to come.

Those were the days of nerve-racking calculations. We had no proper airfields. One heavy shower was sufficient to put those airfields out of action for four days and more. We wanted to make as many "sorties" as possible right up to the last minute prior to the arrival of bad weather and then to despatch all our aircraft away to proper bases in the back areas. In the absence of sufficient data the weatherman had to strain all his nerves to be able to issue timely warnings and correct estimates of approaching weather. The winter and transition months are the most treacherous in Jammu and Kashmir in respect of weather; and the first six months of Jammu and Kashmir Operations fell within the above period. The total number of "sorties" flown by our aircraft during that period was tremendous. Our pilots were flying in days, at nights and all sorts of weather in view of urgent operation requirements. But we are happy to be able to state that not one of our aircraft was ever caught in any unexpected bad weather.

Palam, Delhi.

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