

Subject: Report of Proceedings of H.M.S. ENCOUNTER, 25th Feb., 1942, until 1st March, 1942.

Date: 23rd November, 1945.

CONFIDENTIAL.

Sir,

I have the honour to submit the following report of proceedings of His Majesty's ship ENCOUNTER under my command from 1600 on 25th February, 1942, until noon on 1st March, 1942, at which time the ship was sunk in action with Japanese Naval Forces in the Java Sea.

2. It is regretted that, as all records were lost and, in order to prevent any information falling into enemy hands, no records were made until after release from captivity, exact times, positions, courses, etc., cannot be given.

3. Times given are zone - 7½.

4. At 1600 on 25th March I sailed ENCOUNTER from Tanjong Priok in company with H.M. Ships PERTH, ELECTRA and JUPITER under the orders of Commanding Officer, H.M.S. EXETER, arriving at Sourabaya about 1600 on 26th February. Here ships refuelled and a conference was held by the Admiral Commanding the Allied Squadron. The Squadron sailed from Sourabaya at 1900/25. Orders were received that a sweep would be carried out by the squadron to the eastward along the north coast of Madura Island and if no enemy was sighted, turning 180° and carrying out a similar sweep along the north coast of Java until daylight. ELECTRA was stationed 5 miles ahead of the Admiral with JUPITER and ENCOUNTER 5 miles to starboard and the two Dutch destroyers DE WITTE and KOTENOER 5 miles to port of ELECTRA. If any enemy was sighted instructions were that destroyers in the van were to attack with torpedoes and immediately clear the area for the cruisers, who would attack with gunfire and finally make way for destroyers in rear to attack with torpedoes. All ships proceeding independently to Tanjong Priok after disengaging.

5. No enemy was sighted during the night and the squadron was ordered to return to Sourabaya to refuel, but at about 1430, when entering the searched channel an air reconnaissance report was received of an enemy force and convoy to the northward. Course was altered to the northward; JUPITER, ELECTRA and ENCOUNTER were spread on a line of bearing 270°, 5 miles ahead of the Admiral and 5 miles apart from port to starboard in the above sequence; speed 25 knots course 330° approx.

6. Shortly after 1600 I sighted the masts and tops of two enemy cruisers to the N.N.W. about 15 miles steering to the westward. I increased speed to close and investigate. An enemy report in the course of coding was cancelled on the receipt of a similar report from ELECTRA. Within a few minutes of this sighting ELECTRA came under fire and a further enemy force of cruisers and destroyers were sighted to the westward of the original force. DE RUYTER lead round to the westward, the squadron conforming. This manoeuvre placed me astern of the cruisers so I altered course so as to regain station ahead of the Admiral by passing on the disengaged side. I found that ENCOUNTER was only capable of making good 29-30 knots at full speed and thus I was only able to regain station very slowly. When I was approximately one mile on the port beam of EXETER a salvo of torpedoes was observed approaching from starboard in time for avoiding action to be taken - one torpedo

moving 30 yards ahead - but although I sounded my syren and flashed S.P. I was not able to warn ships in the vicinity in time and the Dutch destroyer KOTENOER was struck amidship, broke in two and sank in about 1½ minutes.

At about the same time as the above incident EXETER having been altered course to port followed shortly afterwards by the Admiral and the remainder of the squadron executing the turn together making smoke. I was now able to rejoin ELECTRA and JUPITER on the starboard beam of the Admiral and assist in covering the retirement with smoke. The American destroyers were doing likewise on the port side. The enemy followed these movements and a retiring action ensued.

The action had continued in this fashion for some time when a signal was received from ELECTRA to stand by for a counter attack as a force of enemy destroyers had been observed approaching on the starboard side of the cruisers. ELECTRA altered course 180° to starboard with ENCOUNTER and JUPITER forming astern in that order. As far as could be ascertained the Japanese force consisted of one light cruiser and six large destroyers (six - 5" gun class). A short but spirited action ensued but no results could be observed owing to the immense amount of smoke. However, the enemy flotilla withdrew and did not reappear. Expecting the enemy to be sighted to the east I had ordered all torpedoes to be brought to the ready with shallow setting. On passing through the smoke screen contact was made with the enemy at about 2,000 yards range on opposite courses. Fire was opened and deciding that I might not have another opportunity to fire torpedoes, I turned to starboard with ELECTRA and fired a full salvo (4 torpedoes). A deflection of 20 knots was used - anticipating a turn away - with the leading enemy ship in sight as target. ELECTRA and JUPITER were not observed to fire torpedoes. The range was close enough for close range weapons to be used. Course was altered 180° together to starboard after the counter attack to regain station on EXETER. During this alteration of course ELECTRA passed out of view into the smoke screen and was not seen again. Shortly after the American destroyers carried out a torpedo attack against the following Japanese cruisers.

With these counter attacks the action came to an end, the enemy, for some reason, not pursuing the squadron further. When clear of EXETER and the destroyer DE WITTE were detached to Sourabaya the remaining ships forming up and continuing a westward sweep along the coast with JUPITER and ENCOUNTER as A/S screen. This course was maintained for about one hour when an alteration was made to the northward for about 20 miles when contact was made with the enemy. After a few rounds were fired it was discontinued and course was again altered to the southward. At 2130 approx. I observed JUPITER, who had dropped astern during an alteration of course, to be hit amidships on the starboard side by what appeared to be a torpedo. She then dropped astern out of sight.

I continued with the squadron until 2200 when I was detailed to the Admiral to recover survivors from the Dutch destroyer KOTENOER whom we had just passed in the water. I was so engaged until midnight - about 100 out of the original crew of 130 being recovered. I had no further instruction, being short of fuel and without information as to the position of the squadron I decided to return to Sourabaya. I arrived at Sourabaya 0500/28.

At 1900/28 I sailed ENCOUNTER in company with U.S.S. POPE under orders of Commanding Officer, H.M.S. EXETER, with instructions to proceed to Colombo by way of the Java Sea and Sunda Straits. No information was received prior to sailing about our own or enemy forces. Course was shaped to pass east of Bawean Island and then to pass along the south coast of Borneo.

00/1 two enemy transports escorted by a large destroyer or cruiser were sighted ahead steering to the southward. I informed with EXETER's movements to pass to the northward of this force. At 0700 two enemy cruisers were reported by EXETER to the southward and course was shaped to avoid them. It was subsequently learned that this force had sighted us and flew off reconnaissance aircraft which kept us under observation until their forces in the vicinity made contact.

At 0845 whilst on approx. course 270° a large enemy destroyer was sighted ahead steering north. The range closing rapidly, this ship was engaged by EXETER and ENCOUNTER but on being attacked altered course 180° to port. Simultaneously two enemy 8" gun cruisers were sighted on the starboard bow closing rapidly. EXETER altered course 180° to port with POPE and ENCOUNTER conforming. It was then observed that there was another enemy force closing in from the south consisting of two 8" gun cruisers and four 6 - 5" gun destroyers.

The approximate course was now 090° and I found it necessary to alter full speed in order to maintain station on EXETER. In order to prevent EXETER from being engaged on both sides I laid a smoke screen to shield her from the southern force. The enemy destroyers closed in until the range was about 16,000 yards and engaged POPE who was then about 1 mile fine on my port bow. As this range was too great for ENCOUNTER's guns and as POPE appeared to be drawing the fire I closed the enemy to a range of 12,000 yards; opening fire at 14,000<sup>x</sup> against the second ship in the line, leaving the leading ship as target for POPE. When I closed the range the enemy opened fire against ENCOUNTER and although there were four ships I observed no more salvoes falling near POPE. By this time, although I was proceeding at full speed, POPE was drawing ahead so I continued to close the range to draw his fire in the hope that POPE might get away.

The opening salvoes of the enemy fell short followed by an "up ladder" with two successive salvoes always falling at the same range. I continued on a steady course until two successive salvoes had fallen about 200 yards short then altered course 30° to starboard. The next two salvoes fell over after which an alteration of 30° to port put the next two salvoes short again. By continuing this zig-zag I managed to avoid the enemy's fire. The rate of fire was slow but the spread exceedingly small. ENCOUNTER's target appeared to sustain hits during the engagement and a large column of water, thought at the time to have been a bomb, was observed abreast the third ship, which dropped out of the line.

The action continued as above until about 1140 when EXETER was observed to have slowed down or stopped. With the object of circling around and laying a smoke screen whilst repairs were made I turned back towards EXETER. However, I had no sooner done so than a report was received from the engine room that the main engines were out of action. I therefore turned to the northward to cover myself with my own smoke. As the sprayers were shut down the smoke screen stopped so that the enemy, now I was unable to manoeuvre, soon found the range and I was subjected to an intense and accurate concentration. I received the report that both suction pipes to the Forced Lubrication pumps had fractured, due, it was at first reported, to shell splinters, and that this damage had not been discovered until all the bearings had gone. I learnt, further, that it would take at least 20 minutes before the bearings would have cooled sufficiently for anything to be done to them. I ordered my Engineer Officer to do what he could deciding to continue as long as the guns were in action. I also ordered all cyphers and recognition signals to be burnt and W/T and P. to be jetisoned in weighted bags.

6. By this time I noticed that no guns were firing so I asked G.C.O. whether all guns were out of action and received the reply that "all guns were out of action". I subsequently found that B gun was still in action but would not bear on the enemy; the report having been incorrectly received.

7. The situation presented itself to me as follows:-

- (a) The main engines were out of action and it was unlikely that anything could be done in the short time available.
- (b) Main armament guns were out of action and ammunition was running low. (Estimated about 15% remaining).
- (c) I was not aware that PERTH and HOUSTON had been sunk, I was not certain that DE RUYTER and JAVA had been sunk and I thought that HOBART was still in the vicinity. I, therefore, considered that there was a reasonable chance of at least some personnel being recovered by our own ships.
- (d) That further efforts to effect repairs under the heavy bombardment would result in disproportionately heavy casualties.
- (e) A concerted effort by the enemy might result in boarding.

When I had received reports that all C.Bs and S.Ps had been destroyed I ordered the Engineer Officer and Gunner to sink the ship; transmitting to Batavia W/T station a message that the ship was "out of action" - no acknowledgement was received. This message was made in plain language so that it would be known that all codes etc., had been destroyed. Having done this I ordered the ship's company to their stations for "Abandon Ship".

8. I had remained on the bridge some time when I decided to go and investigate the state of affairs below. As I turned I noticed Lieutenant Falle on the after end of the bridge. I asked him why he had not gone to his abandon ship station to which he replied that he was waiting for me and would not leave the bridge until I did so: I record this incident as this act of loyalty was typical of this officer's conduct throughout his service under my command.

9. When I arrived on the upper deck I found that all carley floats were out also the whaler: but the Motor Boat was still at the davit heads; the after ship having jambed. I set about with the crew to get this out but a shell struck the ship's side, wrecking the boat and wounding the coxswain and stoker P.O. The skiff also was hit whilst I was trying to get it out. I found the mess decks clear, engine room flooded and at least one boiler room on fire; the ship had taken on a list to starboard. Having satisfied myself that there was nothing further could be done and that the ship was sinking I told the remainder to abandon ship and when they had all done so I left the ship myself. The ship heeled over to starboard capsized and sank; the time being about ten minutes past noon.

10. Two of the enemy destroyers which, by this time, had closed, circled around but after discharging a few rounds, which we imagined were at the people in the water, disappeared from sight. (I subsequently learned that they were very nervous of our submarines being in the vicinity which probably explained the firing). Their disappearance brought relief to me as I was still hopeful of being recovered by our own ships. The next day at about 1000 a Japanese destroyer reappeared and made it apparent to me that we were unlikely to have any forces in the vicinity. I, therefore,

assured those who were with me in the water that their only hope of rescue was at hand and having seen the remainder of the party recovered I swam to the destroyer and surrendered myself.

Whilst in the water great trouble was caused by oil fuel particularly to the eyes. Combined with the bright and hot sun in these latitudes the irritation caused was so great that it would have prevented one enduring much longer than that experienced. It was, therefore, suggested that watertight rubber goggles, similar to those used for bathing, etc., with tinted glass would be a useful addition to the life saving equipment.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(Sgd.) E. MORGAN,

Lieutenant Commander, Royal Navy.

Secretary of the Admiralty,  
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