

HOUSTON, the latter with very little ammunition and her after turret out of action from previous bombing. No destroyers remained in company.*

No further reconnaissance reports of the enemy convoy had been received since night-fall. The Allied cruisers were under continual air observation and illumination by flares. To continue the action was clearly hopeless and PERTH had no hesitation in deciding to withdraw the remnants of the striking force. HOUSTON was ordered to follow and course was shaped at high speed for Tanjong Priok.

20. The withdrawal was not opposed by enemy surface forces. HOUSTON and PERTH were located by enemy reconnaissance aircraft a.m. 28th when within 60 miles of Priok. In response to a "Help" call from PERTH, fighter aircraft were sent out from Batavia and escorted the cruisers in; no air attack developed on them. They arrived at Priok at 1330.

21. It should be noted that throughout this action the Allied forces suffered from communication difficulties. The force as a whole had never acted before as a tactical unit. Visual signalling was restricted to simple signals in English by flashing lamp in Morse Code. British Liaison Officers with small signal staffs were on board DE RUYTER and JAVA, but it had not been practicable to adopt a common system of flag signalling.

(Signed) J. A. COLLINS,

Commodore Commanding China Force.

ENCLOSURE 1.

REPORT BY C.O., H.M.A.S. PERTH.

Action Narrative—Day and Night Action Off Sourabaya, 27th February, 1942.

(All times zone - 7½.)

At about 1425 the Striking Force was approaching the minefields off Sourabaya. Squadron consisted of DE RUYTER (Flag), EXETER, HOUSTON, PERTH, JAVA, ELECTRA, ENCOUNTER, JUPITER, two Dutch destroyers and four U.S. destroyers. The force was returning from an abortive sweep carried out the night before.

2. At 1427 a message was received giving the position of the convoy in the vicinity of Bawean Island.

DE RUYTER immediately turned 180° and led the force off to intercept. British destroyers were spread ahead, Dutch on the port quarter and U.S. destroyers astern. The order of the cruisers was as in paragraph 1. HOUSTON's after turret was out of action due to a previous bombing attack.

3. At 1550, squadron was on course 315°, 24 knots. At 1614 an enemy cruiser was sighted on starboard bow. Speed was increased to 26 knots. Enemy now appeared as two 8 in. cruisers (Natai class) and ahead of them was

one cruiser (Zintu class) and six destroyers (Asashio class). At 1616 the enemy 8 in. cruisers opened fire at a range of 30,000 yards directing their fire mostly on EXETER and HOUSTON. ZINTU opened fire about the same time on ELECTRA, at 1617 EXETER opened fire, HOUSTON at 1618.

4. DE RUYTER led round about 20° to port and range of 8 in. cruisers remained at about 26,000 to 28,000 yards for some time. PERTH could not open fire as the range was outside extreme, but at about 1625 PERTH opened fire on the right-hand destroyers (the destroyers appeared to be moving in preparatory to attack). The second salvo hit, but immediately this destroyer and the others made smoke and retired behind a very effective screen with the cruisers. Several "follow up" salvos were fired into the smoke.

5. DE RUYTER now led round to starboard. Enemy long range fire was extremely accurate, mostly pitching very close short or over. The spread was incredibly small, never more than 150 yards for elevation and much less for line. They were ten-gun salvos with extremely small splashes.

Enemy aircraft were overhead the whole time, no doubt spotting.

6. At 1635 DE RUYTER led towards the enemy on course 267°. About this time the rear enemy cruiser was evidently hit in the boiler room as she emitted very large clouds of black smoke for some time, but continued firing. As the smoke cleared one enemy destroyer was seen to be on fire, and PERTH now came under a very accurate fire from the rear cruiser for a long period. The other cruiser was firing straight at EXETER and HOUSTON. PERTH was straddled several times and the salvos rarely fell less than one cable over or short. Every effort was made in handling the ship to estimate the correction the enemy would use.

7. The rear enemy cruiser was now on fire. PERTH was still out of range of enemy cruisers and I found a long period of being "Aunt Sally" very trying without being able to return the fire. (Range was still over 26,000 yards.) The Dutch cruisers all this while were firing occasionally. At 1700 enemy cruisers checked fire. At 1702, the leading enemy cruiser appeared to be hit aft but both cruisers opened fire again. At 1707 the enemy destroyers delivered a long range torpedo attack and Allied cruisers had to turn away to let torpedoes comb the line. Allied cruisers ceased fire. Enemy still firing but shots falling short. At 1714 EXETER stopped and reported hit in boiler room. She shortly proceeded at 15 knots and I closed her and screened her with funnel smoke and all available smoke floats. While doing this the Admiral made "All ships follow me" but I continued to smoke screen EXETER and reported her damage to the Admiral who told me by V/S* to follow him, when I proceeded to do so.

8. At 1715 an Allied destroyer (I think ELECTRA) suddenly blew up close ahead of me,† having, I think, been struck in the engine room by a torpedo. She capsized and

Admiralty footnote —

* The U.S. destroyers delivered torpedo attacks on the Japanese cruisers at 1814 and 1819 in which they fired all their torpedoes. At 2100, owing to their fuel supply running low and lack of torpedoes, their Senior Officer withdrew them to Sourabaya to refuel and obtain new torpedoes, thus anticipating a signal to do so made half an hour later by Rear Admiral Doorman.

Admiralty footnotes —

* V/S—visual signal

† The destroyer in question was the Dutch KORTENAER.