

dived under in a few seconds, then broke in halves, the two ends floating for some time. At 1718 PERTH's pom-poms opened fire at a reported periscope. By 1721 some of our destroyers were screening EXETER with smoke and others apparently attacking through the smoke. EXETER was steering 130° having been ordered to Sourabaya and PERTH trying to drive off spotting aircraft.

9. At 1725 Allied cruisers were led by the Admiral between EXETER and the enemy, presumably to draw their fire. Anyway, it did this and gave EXETER a breathing space and a chance to get out of the area. At 1729, DE RUYTER led away to the Southward; enemy cruisers were still firing very accurately. At 1745, Allied cruisers were again in single line ahead (except EXETER) and emerged from the smoke screen on opposite course to the enemy 8 in. cruisers. (Enemy in sight were now the three cruisers and only five destroyers.)

Whilst passing behind the smoke screen after circling EXETER, I was under a very accurate 8 in. fire continuously, although obviously the enemy could not see me. It was presumably radar control. At 1750 EXETER fired one salvo. At 1752 the enemy destroyers once more moved into attack and PERTH was firing on destroyers as they came into view in gaps in the smoke screen; the destroyers also peppered me for some minutes. At 1810 no Allied cruisers were firing, but there were several destroyer duels going on.

10. At 1812 our destroyers retired, and I found myself on opposite course to the two 8 in. cruisers at a range of 21,000 yards and engaged the right-hand ship. After getting in for line, the target was found and several rapid salvos got in on the target, two of which hit, and one of which caused a very big explosion aft in the target with volumes of bright lava-like emissions and a pink smoke. Both enemy cruisers then retired behind this smoke and a funnel smoke screen. When the smoke cleared away our target appeared to be stopped, the bow rose in the air and then seemed to settle back. We then lost sight of her, whether because she sank or whether the light failed I do not know.

11. During this engagement, HOUSTON was engaged with the left-hand cruiser, JAVA and DE RUYTER were both firing at something. HOUSTON reported to me that she had very little 8 in. ammunition left and I informed the Admiral. By 1830 no enemy were in sight and DE RUYTER led our forces off to the North-east, and subsequently (presumably) as requisite to try and work round the enemy escort and get at the convoy. Speed 22 knots.

12. At 1927 I sighted four ships on the port beam and reported them. The range was about 9,000 yards, and about the same time, what I thought was a star shell but which was an aircraft flare, burst on our disengaged side and I opened fire at 1933 with main armament first, then tried star shell, but these fell short. HOUSTON also opened fire; I saw a row of explosions in one ship, but thinking these might be torpedo fire, I turned away, and all ships followed motions. JUPITER (on the port bow) moved in probably to counter-attack but there was no gunfire.

13. Cruisers then formed up again in line ahead and were led on various courses by DE RUYTER to intercept. We seemed to drop a couple of destroyers in this last move. The search went on without event (except that we appeared to get into very shallow water). About 2100, whilst still in shallow water, one of the American destroyers blew up with a tremendous explosion and sank. At 2150, another aircraft flare appeared overhead and shortly afterwards a line of about 6 brilliant calcium flares in the water straddled our line at right angles. This happened every time we steered a new course and it was soon obvious that our every move in the moonlight was being reported, not only by W/T but also by this excellent visual means. The enemy's dispositions of his forces must have been ridiculously easy. At 2217, we passed through a very large number of survivors. They did not seem to be English, but may have been either Japanese or Dutch. I do not yet know if any Dutch ships were sunk.

14. At 2230, I sighted two cruisers on the port beam. HOUSTON reported them at the same moment. They were a long way off but one of them fired a salvo shortly after I sighted. I immediately opened a heavy fire on him and both cruisers opened up on us. This fire was extremely accurate again but very slow. Two of my salvos at least, and possibly three, struck home (we were spotting by moonlight). The same ship opened up with a stream of star shell and obliterated the target as they fell short. One enemy shell hit DE RUYTER on the quarterdeck, DE RUYTER turned 90° away and I followed as I thought he may have seen torpedoes. Whilst the line was halfway round this turn, the whole of JAVA's after-part blew up and she stopped heavily on fire. She was not under gunfire at that time, so the explosion may have been due to a wandering fire or a torpedo. I suspect we were led over a submarine for almost at the same moment, although she had completed her 90° turn, DE RUYTER blew up with an appalling explosion and settled aft heavily on fire. I just managed to miss her by the use of full helm and one engine stopped. HOUSTON headed out to starboard. By now the American destroyers had been detached to Batavia to refuel, and all other destroyers had disappeared, possibly due to the frequent 90° turns done by DE RUYTER. The Admiral's verbal instructions had been that any ship disabled must be left "to the mercy of the enemy," to use his own words. I left DE RUYTER and JAVA, took HOUSTON under my orders, made a feint to the Southeast then turned direct to Batavia at high speed.

15. I had now under my orders one undamaged 6 in. cruiser, one 8 in. cruiser with very little ammunition and no guns aft. I had no destroyers. The force was subjected throughout the day and night operations to the most superbly organised air reconnaissance. I was opposed by six cruisers, one of them possibly sunk, and twelve destroyers. By means of their air reconnaissance they had already played cat and mouse with the main striking force and I saw no prospect of getting at the enemy (their movements had not reached me since dark, and even then the several reports at the same time all gave different courses).