

cruisers were disposed in pairs, one pair approximately abeam to starboard and the other on the port quarter. They closed gradually to a range of about 18,000 yards and then appeared to maintain this distance. Later five destroyers (Asashio class), which had not been in sight when action was joined, appeared from the Southwest and drew ahead, passing on the starboard beam at a range of about 14,000 yards shortly before EXETER was hit in A boiler room.

39. About the time that the enemy cruisers found the range, POPE made smoke without receiving an order to do so. ENCOUNTER followed suit and, conditions for smoke being good, the resulting smoke screens were decidedly effective. Firing on both sides was necessarily intermittent, targets being engaged by EXETER whenever seen clear of smoke, and it was seldom that it was possible to spot on more than four to five salvos.

40. A review of the situation at about 1100 was not encouraging. It was known that no support from surface forces could be expected, and it was believed that the Allied air forces would be fully employed against the Japanese invaders. EXETER's maximum speed was 25 knots with about 20 per cent. of main armament ammunition remaining. ENCOUNTER had fired all torpedoes in the action on 27th February. Consideration was given to a reversal of course, but no advantage could be seen, while such action would have given the enemy cruisers and destroyers a very decided position of torpedo advantage. I considered that the best policy was to continue to the Eastward and to conserve ammunition by continuing to engage the enemy on either side when clear of smoke in the hope of reducing the odds by crippling one or more of the enemy cruisers. About this time two slight rain squalls to the Eastward gave rise to the hope that others of greater intensity might be met and used to advantage. This was not the case, but POPE did make use of rain squalls later, after EXETER and ENCOUNTER had been sunk, in her endeavour to work round to the North and West.

41. The action continued much as previously described. Neither EXETER nor destroyers had yet been hit but now, despite the use of smoke (from funnel and smoke floats), salvos were falling close and snaking was necessary to avoid being hit. At one time it was seen that a number of EXETER's salvos straddled the leading enemy cruiser on the starboard beam, but with smoke interference it was impossible to say if hits were obtained. A torpedo target at long range was presented by the two enemy cruisers on the port quarter at about 1100. As the enemy were making no attempt to close the range and so provide a better target, the port tubes were fired. No hits were obtained, the target ships taking avoiding action by alteration of course.

42. The five enemy destroyers were by this time nearly abeam to starboard and just within effective range of EXETER's four-inch armament, which engaged them, as did the 8-inch armament when other targets were obscured by smoke. ENCOUNTER and POPE engaged the two leading destroyers. EXETER engaged the third destroyer which was hit and dropped out of line.

43. Throughout the action the enemy had spotting aircraft up consisting of single float seaplanes and one large type monoplane was also seen. These were engaged by EXETER's A.A. armament as opportunity offered.

44. It was at about 1120 that EXETER received a vital hit in A boiler room which started a large fire necessitating immediate and complete evacuation of this boiler room. Steam pressure dropped rapidly to 170 lbs./sq. in. and then more slowly until the main engines had to be stopped. All power in the ship failed shortly afterwards, and with it the whole of the main armament and also the secondary armament control.

45. It was at this time, as EXETER was losing way and ENCOUNTER and POPE drew ahead, that the enemy fire became really effective. EXETER was being repeatedly straddled and hit. To sum up, the situation was as follows:—

(a) Main engines stopped and all power in the ship failed or failing (one dynamo was kept running until steam also failed to this).

(b) Main armament and control out of action.

(c) Secondary armament control out of action.

(d) "A" boiler room on fire, with the after bulkhead of the four-inch magazine situated four feet from this boiler room necessitating the flooding of this magazine.

(e) Port torpedo tubes fired and no target available for starboard tubes.

(f) Fire had broken out in the officers' quarters aft.

(g) Enemy cruisers straddling and hitting from long range and enemy destroyers drawing ahead and now barely within secondary armament range.

46. There was now no possibility of saving the ship, and to ensure that she should not fall into the hands of the enemy the order was given to sink the ship and a few minutes later (estimated at about 1135), to abandon ship. This was carried out in an orderly manner but, with the failure of power, no boom boats could be got out. All rafts, float-a-nets and available woodwork were thrown overboard and good use was subsequently made of these. As a result of her final speed of 26 knots the ship still had slight headway when abandoned and without doubt this was instrumental in reducing casualties, since the water around the ship was alive with splashes from the enemy gunfire. The ship was evidently leaking oil fuel considerably, which, with a slight lop, made conditions in the water decidedly unpleasant at first.

47. About the time that abandoning was completed, the ship, which had already settled appreciably with a list to port, heeled further to port to a considerable angle. Some ten minutes later a very heavy explosion was observed starboard side amidships, the column of water from this explosion being higher than the masts. This is believed to have been the result of a torpedo hit, probably fired by an enemy destroyer. The ship quickly righted, rolled over to starboard and sank at about 1150 in some 30 fathoms in very approximate position 04 degrees 38 minutes South, 112 degrees 28 minutes East.