

found and the results of our fire could not be observed. Shortly after this a single enemy destroyer offered a favourable target through the smoke at 9,000 yards, but fire had to be withheld as our own destroyers were in the line of fire.

22. When DE RUYTER passed ahead after reversing course, the Admiral enquired by signal as to damage sustained and was informed that, as the result of a boiler room hit, speed was reduced to a maximum of 15 knots, this reply being repeated to PERTH. The Admiral then ordered EXETER to proceed to Sourabaya.

23. Shortly after this, when EXETER had dropped considerably astern, a single enemy 8-inch cruiser was seen to the Northward and fine on the port quarter closing EXETER. Fire was at once opened with Y turret and course altered to open "A" arcs.\* The range was about 16,000 yards and after a few salvos the enemy turned away to the Northwards under smoke.

24. By this time the remainder of the Allied squadron, which, with the exception of the KORTENAER, appeared to have suffered little if any damage, was steering to the Eastward firing intermittently and EXETER gradually shaped course for Sourabaya. Light was failing and the time must have been about 1830. When almost dark the Dutch destroyer DE WITT, then about 5 miles to the Eastward, signalled on shaded lamp that she would lead EXETER through the Sourabaya minefields.

The only other incident during the return to Sourabaya was the sighting of star shell some distance away to the Northwest. EXETER anchored in Sourabaya roads just before midnight and proceeded to a berth alongside at the Naval Base at 0700/28.

25. The following are general remarks on the action:—

(i) The total period that EXETER was in action was about two hours, but a detailed timetable of events cannot be given since all records were lost when the ship was sunk on 1st March. As a result, this report may tend to give a misleading conception of the interval between the various episodes of the action, e.g., between being hit in B boiler room and engaging the four-funnel cruiser leading the torpedo attack, there was sufficient time to restore the High Power, check main armament receivers and verify ammunition remaining.

(ii) This action demonstrated in a very marked manner the difficulty of working with a heterogeneous squadron composed of ships of different nationalities, all of whose methods, but in particular those of signalling and fire distribution, differ from our own and with whom there had been no opportunity of even the briefest discussion on such matters.

(iii) It was clear that the Dutch cruisers were outranged for most of the daylight action and their splashes only made spotting more difficult for the remainder.

(iv) The enemy made use of a number of spotting aircraft; these were engaged as

opportunity presented. It was unfortunate that EXETER's Walrus aircraft was unserviceable as the result of blast damage sustained during frequent enemy air attacks.

(v) During the action an attack was made on the enemy cruisers by land-based bombers from Sourabaya, and several bomb splashes were observed. The enemy appeared to be unaffected by this attack. About the time that the Allied squadron reversed course and when the enemy torpedo attack had developed, the four American destroyers previously stationed astern fired torpedoes. It was not clear what was their target but the majority of these torpedoes were seen to be running on the surface in the direction of the Japanese destroyers.

26. Enemy air raids were continuous throughout daylight of 28th February. The funeral of those killed in action took place with full naval honours at 1700, every assistance being given by the Dutch Navy, all local naval authorities being represented.

#### 27. Results of action.

*Four-funnel Sendai class cruiser referred to in para. 16.*

(a) Some survivors of HOUSTON and PERTH stated that an enemy cruiser, believed to have been under fire from EXETER, was seen to sink stern first. It is possible that this may have been the cruiser referred to in para. 16.

(b) While at Macassar P.O.W. Camp the Navigating Officer of the first Sendai class cruiser engaged by EXETER visited the camp. He was friendly and spoke good English. In the course of conversation he stated that while his ship had not been hit, EXETER's splashes had been so close that water from them fell on the bridge. When asked what happened to the second 6-inch cruiser he did not reply and quickly changed the subject.

#### 8-inch cruisers.

(a) As stated in para. 18 this cruiser was seen to have been hit and only one 8-inch cruiser was sighted from EXETER during the remainder of the day action.

(b) After return to Sourabaya information was received that aircraft had reported a Japanese 8-inch cruiser on fire.

#### Other reports.

According to surviving officers of HOUSTON and PERTH hits were obtained by HOUSTON on the leading enemy 8-inch cruiser, and an enemy destroyer was sunk during the torpedo attack.

28. EXETER sailed from Sourabaya at 1900, 28th February, 1942, in compliance with a signal received from C.C.C.F., which directed EXETER, ENCOUNTER and POPE to sail at dark proceeding as follows:—

20 miles to the Eastward from Sourabaya Northern entrance, thence Northward to pass Eastward of Bawean Island, thence North-westward and Westward and through Sunda Strait to Colombo.

29. The Netherlands destroyer DE WITT was also directed at the last minute to accompany me. When I sailed it was understood that she would follow at about 2100 joining me shortly after midnight. Anticipated courses and speeds were accordingly given to the Navigating

*Admiralty footnote:—*

\* "A" arcs—the arcs on which all guns of a ship's main armament will bear, thus allowing them to fire simultaneously at the enemy.