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BATTLE OF THE JAVA SEA, 27TH FEBRUARY, 1942

The following Despatch was submitted to the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet on the 17th March, 1942, by Commodore J. A. COLLINS, C.B., R.A.N., Commodore Commanding China Force.

REPORT BY COMMODORE COMMANDING CHINA FORCE.

17th March, 1942.

1. Attached brief account of the naval action off Sourabaya on 27th February is based on:—

(a) A written report of the action by the Captain of PERTH compiled from his own report notes on the forenoon of 28th February and handed to Commodore Commanding China Force at Batavia on PERTH's arrival at that port. This was only a rough initial report.

(b) Report from senior surviving officer of JUPITER.

(c) Report from senior surviving officer of ELECTRA.

(d) Informal conversation with Captain of PERTH and HOUSTON during the afternoon of 28th February at Batavia. No track charts or plots are available and this report is necessarily incomplete.

2. The Eastern Striking Force was formed at Sourabaya* on 26th February under the command of Admiral Doorman in DE RUYTER. It consisted of:—

Cruisers:

DE RUYTER (Flagship) and JAVA (Dutch), EXETER (British), HOUSTON (U.S.), PERTH (Australian).

Admiralty footnote:—

* A Western Striking Force, under the command of Commodore J. A. Collins, R.A.N., and composed of "D" class cruisers and "S" class destroyers of the Royal Navy, was based at Batavia.

Destroyers:

ELECTRA, ENCOUNTER and JUPITER (British), KORTENAER and WITTE DE WITT (Dutch), EDWARDS, ALDEN, FORD and PAUL JONES (U.S.).

3. This force proceeded to sea 1830/26th* and steered to the Eastward along the North coast of Madura Island until 0100/27th, then to the Westward until 0930/27th. Nothing was sighted during the night. The force was shadowed by enemy aircraft from 0855/27th until it entered the Sourabaya swept channel at 1330/27th, but was only attacked twice by single aircraft.

4. At 1427 an enemy report was received of a convoy in the vicinity of Bawean Island. The striking force reversed its course and proceeded to intercept.

5. At 1614 enemy forces were sighted consisting of two 8 in. cruisers, Nachi class, preceded by two 6 in. cruisers of Sendai class and 13 destroyers in two groups. The order of battle of the Allied cruisers was DE RUYTER, EXETER, HOUSTON, PERTH and JAVA, speed 26 knots. They were preceded by a screen of the 3 British destroyers and followed by the Dutch and U.S. destroyers.

At 1616 enemy 8 in. cruisers opened fire at a range of 30,000 yards on EXETER and HOUSTON. DE RUYTER led round and action was engaged on parallel courses at a range of 26 to 28,000 yards, at which ranges only our 8 in. cruisers could reply. The enemy's gunfire was extremely accurate; the average spread was estimated at 150 yards for elevation, firing 10-gun salvos.

6. The rear enemy destroyer flotilla moved in to attack soon after action was joined. One destroyer was hit by gunfire from PERTH and the flotilla retired behind smoke.

Admiralty footnote:—

* Times quoted in this report are in local, i.e., Java time which is G.M.T. + 7½ hours.