

11. At about 1415 when the Allied force was entering the minefields through the Western channel, the Admiral led round 180 degrees and signalled that information had been received of an enemy force of two cruisers and six destroyers some 90 miles to the Northward steering South at high speed, which force he intended to engage. Later reports showed that the large enemy convoy previously referred to was remaining in position some 10 miles West of Bawean Island.

12. The Allied force, still retaining the previous cruising order, steered 350 degrees at 20 knots to intercept.

13. At approximately 1610 masts were sighted to the Northward. These proved to be two four-funnel Sendai class cruisers, each leading a flotilla (or division) of six Asashio type destroyers. At this time these were the only enemy ships in sight. Speed was increased until subsequently the action was fought at about 27 knots.

14. Weather conditions were:—wind N.E. force 1-2, sea 10, one tenth cloud, visibility extreme.

15. At about 1620 the leading cruiser opened fire apparently at ELECTRA, the starboard wing destroyer of our screen. The main armament reporting that this cruiser was now within gun range, EXETER opened fire at approximately 27,000 yards, this being outside DE RUYTER's extreme range. After some 12 salvos from A and B turrets had been fired, when it appeared that straddle range had been obtained, the target cruiser turned away under smoke. Fire was then shifted to the second four-funnel cruiser. It was about this time, or shortly before, that further masts were sighted to the N.N.E. and some distance in rear of the cruisers and destroyers previously referred to. These proved to belong to two cruisers of the Ashigara or Atago classes. The above mentioned enemy ships, namely, two Ashigara or Atago class cruisers, two Sendai class cruisers, and 12 Asashio class destroyers composed the enemy force during daylight on 27th February as far as could be seen from EXETER, although officers from HOUSTON and PERTH subsequently stated that six or more enemy cruisers were present.

16. The second four-funnel cruiser engaged turned away under smoke after about 10 salvos and was momentarily re-engaged when again seen clear of her own smoke after having made a turn of some 180 degrees. The hitting range of this cruiser was quickly found and I am convinced that hits were obtained, particularly as she was last seen disappearing in a thick high column of smoke and only one four-funnel cruiser was seen subsequently.

17. Target was then shifted to the rear (right-hand) of the two 8-inch cruisers previously referred to. The reason for selection of the rear and not the leading cruiser was the fact that HOUSTON next astern of EXETER, was already engaging the leading cruiser and, in view of the difficulties of signalling together with the time that would be lost during the change over, it was considered better to accept the situation as it was found and engage the right-hand ship although this meant crossing fire with HOUSTON.

18. At first difficulty was experienced in identifying our own splashes until it was realised that HOUSTON was using brown splashes. Fire was opened at extreme range and the first splashes were not seen. This together with difficulties already referred to, made it some time before range was established, in all about 15 salvos. Shortly after this a hit was observed by myself, other officers on the bridge and several members of the Director Control Tower's crew including the Gunnery Officer, in the vicinity of her lower bridge structure. Almost immediately afterwards she turned away under smoke.

19. While engaging this cruiser it appeared that the enemy fire was concentrated on EXETER who was eventually straddled and sustained either a hit or a near miss underwater well aft. This had the apparent effect of lifting the whole ship in a most remarkable manner. Subsequently some after underwater compartments were found to be flooded. A few minutes later a shell, passing through S.2 four-inch gun shield, entered B boiler room causing casualties at S.2 mounting and in this boiler room. The opinion was formed on subsequent examination that this shell did not detonate but exploded on entering a boiler, since the base-plate complete and a large portion of the nose were recovered. (Similar failure of some enemy shells to detonate was experienced by other Allied ships.) Six out of the eight boilers were put out of action with the following main results:—

(i) Deafening escape of steam through the waste steam pipe.

(ii) Initial reduction of speed to 11 knots with a subsequent maximum of 15 to 16 knots.

(iii) Temporary failure of the High Power system putting the main armament out of action.

20. EXETER started to haul out of the line gradually to port simultaneously with the development of a torpedo attack by the enemy destroyers led by the one remaining four-funnel cruiser. The Admiral now led round to port to an approximately reciprocal course presumably as an avoiding action. The remaining cruisers of the Allied squadron turned short and reformed astern of the Admiral. At this point ELECTRA made a lone and very gallant counter-attack, JUPITER and ENCOUNTER also engaging enemy destroyers while covering EXETER's turn by smoke. Later information indicated that ELECTRA was last seen stopped and still in action with enemy destroyers. It is believed that the attacking destroyers fired their torpedoes at a range of about 8 to 10,000 yards. Torpedoes were seen approaching, one exploding in the water and another hitting and blowing up the Dutch destroyer KORTENAER, whose back was broken and who remained afloat for some minutes with bow and stern only showing. It was during this period that EXETER's main armament was lined up and made ready for action.

21. While the enemy torpedo attack was developing and after EXETER had turned to a Southerly course, the main armament engaged the four-funnel cruiser leading the attack, the four-inch armament also being engaged with enemy destroyers. This cruiser turned away under smoke immediately straddle range was