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LOSS OF H.M. SHIPS PRINCE OF WALES AND REPULSE

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 17th December, 1941, by Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, K.C.B., D.S.O., Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet.

*Office of the British Naval
Commander-in-Chief,
Eastern Fleet,
17th December, 1941.*

Be pleased to lay before the Board the accompanying reports on the operations resulting in the loss of H.M. Ships PRINCE OF WALES and REPULSE on 10th December, 1941.

2. These reports comprise a narrative of the operations drawn up by my direction and the original reports from the Commanding and surviving Officers of H.M. Ships concerned.*

3. The press of time and circumstances have prevented a more thorough analysis of the operations being made so far and I consider it preferable to despatch forthwith the available evidence, as many of the officers concerned are now returning to the United Kingdom.

4. In the circumstances, I feel unable, as I would wish to have done, to bring to the special notice of Their Lordships cases of individual good service, of which there were many. I will submit my further observations at a later stage, but in the meantime I would ask Their Lordships to obtain from Captain W. G. Tennant, R.N., and Lieutenant-Commander A. G. Skipwith, R.N., their recommendations for the recognition of those who were specially deserving.

5. All accounts agree that in coolness, determination, and cheerfulness in adverse circumstances, the ships' companies of these two ships

Admiralty footnote :—

* Only the reports by the Captain of H.M.S. REPULSE and senior surviving officer of H.M.S. PRINCE OF WALES, named in paragraph 4, are here reproduced

lived up to the best traditions of His Majesty's Service.

(Signed) G. LAYTON,*
Vice-Admiral,
Commander-in-Chief.

NARRATIVE OF OPERATIONS OF FORCE Z.

(All times are Zone GH ($-7\frac{1}{2}$ hours) unless otherwise indicated).

Intentions of the Commander-in-Chief.

It was the intention of the Commander-in-Chief to attack Japanese transports and warships which had been reported early on 8th December to be landing troops on the east coast of the Kra Isthmus and at Kota Bharu.

2. It was known by noon on that day that our Air Force and aerodromes in the north were being heavily attacked and that large Japanese forces were landing at Kota Bharu in Malaya and between Singgora and Pattani in Thailand. It appeared likely that our Army and Air Force would both be hard pressed and it seemed to the Commander-in-Chief unacceptable to retain a powerful naval force at Singapore in a state of inaction.

3. The Commander-in-Chief hoped that, with fighter protection if possible, or failing that, by surprise, he might attack the Japanese forces off Singgora and Kota Bharu at dawn on the 10th.

Admiralty footnote —

* Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Layton, K C B , D S O , relinquished command of the China Station to Admiral Sir Tom S V Phillips, K C B , at 0800GH on the 8th December, 1941, it having been decided by the Admiralty to merge the command of the China Station with the Eastern Fleet. Admiral Layton assumed command of the Eastern Fleet at about 1500GH on the 10th December, 1941. He had therefore no responsibility for the operations of Force Z nor for any other operations during this period.

4 The question of fighter protection and reconnaissance was discussed with Royal Air Force Headquarters before the Force sailed. The Air Officer Commanding, Royal Air Force, Far East, stated that he hoped to be able to provide air reconnaissance, but was doubtful about fighter protection off Singgora at daylight on the 10th December. After full investigation, he confirmed later to the Chief of Staff, Eastern Fleet, that such protection could not be provided.*

Composition of Force Z.

5. Force Z consisted of H.M. Ships PRINCE OF WALES (Captain J. C. Leach, M.V.O., D.S.O., R.N.) flying the flag of Admiral Sir Tom S. V. Phillips, K.C.B., REPULSE (Captain W. G. Tennant, C.B., M.V.O., R.N.), ELECTRA (Commander C. W. May, R.N.), EXPRESS (Lieutenant Commander F. J. Cartwright, R.N.), H.M.A.S. VAMPIRE (Commander W. T. A. Moran, R.A.N.), and H.M.S. TENEDOS (Lieutenant R. Dyer, R.N.).

JUPITER and ENCOUNTER were under repair and STRONGHOLD had to be used for meeting a division of U.S. destroyers expected at Singapore p.m. 9th December.

DURBAN was available but the Commander-in-Chief decided not to take her.

Movements of the Fleet up to the time of Air Attacks.

6. Force Z sailed at 1735 on 8th December and proceeded at 17½ knots to pass to eastward of Anamba Islands thence to the northward. The Commander-in-Chief informed the Force that the enemy Battle cruiser KONGO together with Cruisers and Destroyers were supporting the transports he intended to attack off Singgora and Pattani and that the landing was probably supported by submarines and mining.

7. In signal 2253GH/8 Chief of Staff informed Commander-in-Chief that fighter protection on 10th would not be possible.

8. Weather conditions during most of Tuesday, 9th December were favourable for evasion, with frequent rainstorms and low cloud. There was an unconfirmed report of sighting an enemy aircraft at 0620 on 9th December by VAMPIRE, the machine being seen for one minute by one lookout only. This was disregarded.

Between 1700 and 1830 the weather cleared and three Japanese naval reconnaissance aircraft in swift succession were sighted from the PRINCE OF WALES.

Admiralty footnote —

* Before sailing, the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet asked the Air Officer Commanding, Royal Air Force, Far East for

- (a) reconnaissance 100 miles to north of Force daylight 9th December
- (b) reconnaissance 100 miles mid point Singgora 10 miles from coast starting first light 10th December
- (c) fighter protection off Singgora at daylight 10th December

The Air Officer Commanding subsequently informed the Chief of Staff, Eastern Fleet, who remained ashore, that he could provide (a), hoped to be able to provide (b), but could not provide (c). The Chief of Staff, Eastern Fleet signalled accordingly to the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, then at sea (see signals attached as Appendix III)

Chief of Staff was Rear-Admiral A. F. E. Palliser, D.S.C., who remained ashore in charge of the Commander-in-Chief's office at Singapore.

9. TENEDOS was ordered to return to Singapore at 1834 on the 9th December on account of her low endurance.

10. Before these sightings, the Commander-in-Chief had intended to detach the remaining destroyers at 2200 on 9th December and make a high speed descent on Singgora with the heavy ships only. He considered the destroyers would be very vulnerable to air attack and their low endurance was an anxiety. The Admiral intended to rely on the speed and surprise of the heavy ships' attack to avoid damage to these ships sufficient to slow them down, believing that Japanese aircraft encountered would not be carrying anti-ship bombs or torpedoes and that the Force on retirement would only have to deal with hastily organized long range bombers from bases in Indo-China.

11. On knowing that the Force had been sighted the Commander-in-Chief decided that the risk of attacking Singgora was no longer justified, as the ships would be expected, their targets might well have been withdrawn and a very large scale of air attack must be faced.

12. As soon as the reconnaissance aircraft had been shaken off after dusk, Force Z therefore turned to southward with the intention of returning to Singapore.

13. The situation was however altered by the receipt of Chief of Staff, Eastern Fleet's message timed 1505Z/9 at about midnight, which stated "Enemy reported landing at Kuantan." It seemed improbable that the enemy would expect Force Z, last located steering to the northward in the latitude of Singgora to be as far south as Kuantan by daylight. Kuantan was not far off the return track to Singapore, was 400 miles from Japanese aerodromes in Indo-China and was considered a key military position which every effort must be made to defend.

At 0052 on the 10th December, therefore, the Force turned for Kuantan and increased speed to 25 knots.

14. Between 0630 and 0730 enemy reconnaissance aircraft were sighted PRINCE OF WALES and REPULSE flew off aircraft for reconnaissance and A/S patrol.*

15. Force Z arrived off Kuantan at 0800 on 10th December. No enemy forces were sighted and EXPRESS, who was sent to investigate the harbour, reported "complete peace."

16. One hour before reaching Kuantan, Force Z had passed at extreme range what appeared to be one small ship with a number of barges or junks. On finding Kuantan all quiet, the Commander-in-Chief decided to go back and investigate these barges before returning to Singapore. It was while steaming to the eastward to do this that Force Z was attacked by enemy aircraft.

17. The only signal from the Commander-in-Chief addressed to his base at Singapore was his 1455GH/9 which he directed TENEDOS to transmit at 0800 on 10th December. This stated that 0630 on the 11th December was the earliest time Force Z was likely to pass through position 3° 25' N. 106° 40' E. on return and asked that all available destroyers should be sent out to meet him.

Admiralty footnote —

* A/S patrol—anti-submarine patrol.

18. A summary of the aircraft attacks on Force Z follows:—

(i) *Preliminary.*

Force Z course 095° speed 20 knots, destroyers in S.D.3* Ships in first degree of A-A readiness

Aircraft detected by R.D.F.,† sighted 1100, Blue 135°‡ executed.

Speed increased to 25 knots during first attack.

(ii) *Attack A. (1118)*

9 H.L. § Bombers at 10,000 feet in tight line abreast formation attacked REPULSE from ahead, dropping one bomb each simultaneously. One hit on port hangar (entry hole 15in. diameter), bursting on armoured deck below Marines' mess deck, one near miss starboard side abreast B turret, remainder close on port side.

No serious damage.

(iii) *Attack B. (1144)*

9 T/Bs|| attacked PRINCE OF WALES on port side. Ship turned towards but was hit by one torpedo¶ abreast P.3 and 4 turrets.

Ship listed 13° to port and speed dropped to 15 knots. Both port shafts out of action, steering gear failed and ship was never again under complete control.

Five 5.25 inch turrets out of action temporarily owing to power failure and/or list.

Two aircraft shot down, falling on disengaged side, one other possibly damaged.

(iv) *Attack C. (1156)*

8 or 9 T/Bs attacked REPULSE on port side. Ship turned towards and was successful in combing the tracks.

(v) *Attack D. (1158)*

H.L.B.** attack on REPULSE.

No hits, but near.

REPULSE made emergency report of the attack.

(vi) *Attack E. (1222)*

T/B attack by 9 aircraft, in two groups. 6 came in slightly first on the starboard side and fired at PRINCE OF WALES who was incapable of taking avoiding action and was hit three times on starboard side:—

(a) Near stem.

(b) Abreast B turret.

(c) Aft.

List was reduced to 3° and speed dropped to 8 knots.

One aircraft was shot down.

REPULSE was committed to turning to starboard when three aircraft attacked her from the port side, scoring one hit amidships. The ship stood this hit well, continuing to manoeuvre at 25 knots.

(vii) *Attack F. (1225)*

9 T/Bs attacked REPULSE from various directions First hit abreast gunroom (port

side) jammed rudder, putting ship out of control. Three further hits, one port side aft (wardroom bathroom), one abreast port engine room and one starboard side of E boiler room.

Ship listed to port, capsizing and sinking at 1235, position 3° 45' N. 104° 24' E

Two aircraft shot down.

ELECTRA and VAMPIRE picked up survivors.

(viii) *Attack G. (1246)*

9 H.L. Bombers attacked PRINCE OF WALES. One hit near S 3 turret, bursting on Main Deck, and near misses both sides aft. Speed 6 knots. EXPRESS went alongside starboard side at 1305 and got clear as PRINCE OF WALES capsized to port and sank at 1320 in position 3° 36' N. 104° 28' E.

(ix) *Summary*

PRINCE OF WALES hit by four (possibly five) torpedoes and one bomb.

REPULSE hit by 5 torpedoes and one bomb.

Aircraft shot down—about 8.

19. When information was received at Singapore at 1204 that Force Z was being attacked by aircraft, the fighter squadron which was standing by at Kallang was immediately despatched. Six Buffaloes took off at 1215 and arrived on the scene of action just as the PRINCE OF WALES was sinking and when all enemy aircraft had taken their departure.

Destroyers, having made a thorough search for survivors, returned to Singapore, arriving between 2310 and 2400.

20. *Japanese aircraft.*

(a) The T/Bs were twin engined monoplanes (Naval type 96) and it is probable that H.L.B.s were the same, viz. *shore-based* aircraft.

(b) Four T/B squadrons each of 9 aircraft were used. Three H.L.B. attacks were made, possibly all by the same squadron.

(c) Torpedoes were dropped at ranges between 1,000 and 2,000 yards and at a height noticeably greater than we do. Torpedoes ran very straight and the tracks were readily visible. There is no indication that the pistols were other than contact.

(d) The get-aways appeared clumsy, doubtless partly due to the heavy aircraft. In many cases they continued across the line of advance quite close to their targets. Some opened fire with their machine guns.

(e) No attempt was made to interfere with the rescue of survivors.

INITIAL REPORT BY CAPTAIN
W. G. TENNANT, C.B., M.V.O., R.N.

To:—Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet.

From:—Captain W. Tennant (late of H.M.S. REPULSE).

Date:—11th December, 1941.

1. In the sinking of H.M.S. REPULSE I deeply regret to report the loss of 27 officers and 486 men. The survivors number 42 officers and 754 men.

Admiralty footnotes —

* S D 3—an anti-submarine screen formation

† R D F—radar

‡ Blue 135°—ships ordered to turn together to course 135°

§ H L—high level

|| T/Bs—torpedo bombers

¶ Subsequent investigation has established the fact that PRINCE OF WALES was struck at this time by two torpedoes simultaneously

** H.L.B.—high level bombing.

2. I should like to record here the magnificent spirit of my officers and ship's company throughout their ordeal. Cases occurred of men having to be ordered to leave their guns to save themselves as the ship was actually turning over.

3. Should Their Lordships think fit I am ready for a further seagoing command.

4. As I am regrettably the senior surviving officer I am preparing a report of the operation and the loss of the ships PRINCE OF WALES and REPULSE. I would only wish to state here that I was in entire agreement with every action taken by the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, with the information that was then, as far as I knew, available to him. REPULSE was attacked constantly between 1110 and 1233 on the 10th December by H.L.B. and T/B attacks. Altogether she received one bomb hit, several near misses and four or five torpedoes. I was successful in the early attacks in combing the tracks of at least 15 torpedoes but in a later attack when committed to comb one attack another lot came close in on my beam and hit.

5. Shortly after this the ship was torpedoed aft and the rudder jammed; this was followed by attacks coming from all directions, when she suffered two or three further hits. I then knew that she could not survive, and ordered all up from below, and to cast loose Carley floats.

6. The ship remained afloat about six minutes after this and it is fortunate that the number above mentioned were rescued.

7. Lastly I think you should know that the attacks were pressed home by the Japanese with great determination and efficiency—the H.L.B. attacks in close formation at 10,000 feet were remarkably accurate. Large numbers of aircraft, possibly over 50, must have been employed. The torpedoes ran very straight and shallow and showed a distinct track.

8. I understand that Captain L. H. Bell of H.M.S. PRINCE OF WALES has given you a preliminary report of the loss of that ship.

9. The Destroyers ELECTRA, EXPRESS and VAMPIRE were handled most skilfully and I cannot say enough for the rescue work and care of survivors that they showed.

FURTHER REPORT BY CAPTAIN W. G. TENNANT, C.B., M.V.O., R.N.

1. At about 1230 Monday, 8th December, I was called to a meeting on board PRINCE OF WALES with the Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, at which were present the Chief of Staff, the Captain of the Fleet, the Captain of the PRINCE OF WALES and some Staff Officers. The Commander-in-Chief described the intended operation which was broadly to make a raid on the Japanese communications to Kota Bharu, Singora and Pattani.

2. PRINCE OF WALES, REPULSE, and four Destroyers sailed from Naval Base at 1730 and passed the boom at 1830. The Commander-in-Chief decided that in view of possible minefields it was necessary to pass to the eastward of Anamba Islands before turning to the northward.

Tuesday, 9th December.

3. Constant low clouds and heavy rain storms continued until about 1645 and with the exception of an unconfirmed report of sighting of aircraft by VAMPIRE at about 0630 there was no other reason to suppose that the Force had been sighted. However, at about 1645 the sky cleared considerably and the Force was very soon being shadowed by at least three aircraft. One Catalina was seen at about this time. During this period the course of the Force was north so that the enemy had still no knowledge of our intention to turn in towards Kota Bharu. At 1900 the course was altered to north west and speed increased to 26 knots. TENEDOS was ordered to return to base at about this time. At about 2000 I received a signal from the Commander-in-Chief that he had decided to keep the Destroyers in company and to cancel the operation in view of the fact that the whereabouts of the Force was actually known to the enemy; it would therefore be improbable that we should meet any convoy in the morning, and the enemy would have at least twelve hours to concentrate his airforce to attack us. At about 2030 the course was altered to south eastwards, I believe with the intention of shaking off the shadowers, and later to 150° speed being reduced to 20 knots to conserve the destroyers' oil. Later at approximately midnight course was altered to 245° and speed increased to 24 knots; this after signals received reporting an enemy landing at Kuantan. It was understood to be the Commander-in-Chief's intention to be off the coast at daylight in this vicinity. The remainder of the night passed without incident.

Wednesday, 10th December.

4. At about 0630 to 0700 an enemy reconnaissance aircraft appeared. The Force continued steering to the coast and PRINCE OF WALES flew off one aircraft and carried out a reconnaissance of it. Later EXPRESS was also sent in to investigate ashore. The Force passed down inside the seven fathom shoal which lies immediately to the eastward of Kuantan at approximately ten miles from the coast. When EXPRESS rejoined at about 0845 on reaching the northern end of the seven fathom patch, course was altered to the eastward at about 0935. I suggested to the Commander-in-Chief that REPULSE'S aircraft should carry out A/S patrol for two hours and then fly direct to Singapore then only about 140 miles distant. When approaching Kuantan at dawn a small tug with four barges was sighted at 0514. It was thought that they might conceivably be motor landing craft and I signalled to the Commander-in-Chief that we might profitably examine them on our return, with which he agreed. At about 1015 the Commander-in-Chief signalled first degree of H.A. readiness.* REPULSE R D F. shortly after picked up enemy aircraft bearing 220 degrees approximately. The aircraft were first sighted at about 1100; the Commander-in-Chief had the Force manoeuvred by blue pennant and the Capital ships were now in quarter line formation.

5. I am now about to describe the various phases of the air attacks which finally caused

Admiralty footnote —

* H.A. readiness—readiness of High Angle anti-aircraft guns.

the destruction of REPULSE. They are divided into five separate attacks with varying periods between them, the interval between numbers four and five being very brief.

6. The first attack developed shortly after 1100 when nine aircraft in close single line abreast formation were seen approaching REPULSE from about Green 50* and at a height of about 10,000 feet. Fire was at once opened on them with the Long Range H.A. by PRINCE OF WALES and REPULSE. It was very soon obvious that the attack was about to be entirely concentrated on REPULSE. The formation was very well kept and bombs were dropped with great accuracy, one near miss on the starboard side abreast B turret and one hit on the port hangar burst on the armour below the Marines' messdeck and caused damage. The remainder of the salvo (it was thought seven bombs were dropped altogether), fell very close to the port side and this concluded this attack. There was now a short lull of about twenty minutes during which the damage control parties carried out their duties in a most efficient manner and fires which had been started by this bomb had all been got under control before the next attack; and the bomb having burst on the armour no damage was suffered below in the engine or boiler rooms. It is thought that the bombs dropped were about 250 pounds.

7. The second attack was shared by PRINCE OF WALES and REPULSE and was made by torpedo bomber aircraft. They appeared to be the same type of machine, believed to be Mitsubishi 86 or 88. I am not prepared to say how many machines took part in this attack but on its conclusion I had the impression that we had succeeded in combing the tracks of a large number of torpedoes, possibly as many as twelve. We were steaming at 25 knots at the time. I maintained a steady course until the aircraft appeared to be committed to the attack when the wheel was put over and the attacks providentially combed. I would like to record here the valuable work done by all Bridge personnel at this time in calmly pointing out approaching torpedo bombing aircraft which largely contributed to our good fortune in dodging all these torpedoes. PRINCE OF WALES was hit on the port side right aft during this attack and a large column of water appeared to be thrown up, larger than subsequent columns of water which were thrown up when REPULSE was hit later on.

8. The third attack was a high level bombing attack again concentrated on REPULSE. Possibly the enemy were aware, and particularly so if they were using 250 pound bombs, that these bombs would have had little chance of penetrating PRINCE OF WALES'S horizontal armour. I was manoeuvring the ship at high speed at the time and we were actually under helm when the bombs fell. No hits were received. There was one near miss on the starboard side and the remainder fell just clear on the port side. The attack was carried out in the same determined manner as was the first. PRINCE OF WALES had "not under control" balls hoisted at this time and I exchanged some signals with the Commander-in-Chief. I asked PRINCE OF WALES about

her damage and she appeared to have a list to port but I got no reply though she still made some signals by Aldis light after this. Although uncertain at this time of the signals PRINCE OF WALES had made, I made an emergency report "Enemy aircraft bombing" followed immediately by an amplifying report which was just about to be transmitted at the time the ship sank. I also made a visual signal to the Commander-in-Chief telling him that we had up to date fortunately avoided all torpedoes fired at REPULSE and that all damage received from the bomb had been got under control. I also asked the Commander-in-Chief whether his wireless was still in action in case he wished me to make any reports. I closed PRINCE OF WALES at this time and reduced to 20 knots, the better to ascertain her damage, and to see if I could be of any assistance. Very shortly after this the fourth attack started to develop.

9. In the fourth attack about eight aircraft were seen low on the horizon on the starboard bow. Being low down it signified another torpedo bombing attack was impending. When about three miles away they split into two formations and I estimated that those on the right hand would launch their torpedoes first and I started to swing the ship to starboard. The torpedoes were dropped at a distance of 2500 yards and it seemed obvious that we should be once more successful in combing their tracks. The left hand formation appeared to be making straight for PRINCE OF WALES who was at this time abaft my port beam. When these aircraft were a little before the port beam at a distance of approximately 2000 yards they turned straight at me and fired their torpedoes. It now became obvious that, if these torpedoes were aimed straight, REPULSE would be most certainly hit as any other alteration of course would have caused me to be hit by the tracks of those torpedoes I was in the process of combing. One torpedo fired from my port side was obviously going to hit the ship and it was possible to watch its track for about a minute and a half before this actually took place. The ship was hit amidships port side. The ship stood this torpedo well and continued to manoeuvre and steamed at about 25 knots. There was now only a very short respite before the final and last attack.

10. I think it is interesting to report here the remarkable height from which the torpedoes were dropped, estimated to be between three and four hundred feet and all torpedoes appeared to run perfectly straight from the point of dropping.

11. The second Walrus aircraft which had been damaged by the first bombing attack was successfully got over the side to avoid a petrol fire.

12. From what I saw myself and from evidence I received at this period it became evident that the whole ship's company were carrying out their duties as if they were at ordinary peace exercises. The damage control parties working under Commander R. J. R. Dendy had replaced damaged lighting, had put out fires, and successfully coped with every situation as it arose.

13. The torpedo bombers had carried out some machine-gunning on the port deck and the gunnery control positions aloft but this was not experienced on the Bridge.

Admiralty footnote —

* Green 50—50° on the starboard bow.

14. The Navigating Officer, Lieutenant Commander Gill, who controlled the ship under my orders carried out his duties in a most calm and exemplary manner, on one or two occasions when the whole H.A. armament was firing he had considerable difficulty in passing helm orders to the Quartermaster in the Upper Conning Tower but I do not think that this in any way caused the ship to be hit. The delay in giving helm orders in one or two cases was perhaps half a minute.

15. In the attacks up to date and in the last one which I am about to describe, it is estimated that four or five enemy aircraft were shot down but the Air Defence Officer informs me that he did not until the very end engage those torpedo bombers which had dropped their torpedoes but kept his fire for further aircraft approaching. I had previously told the Gun- nery Officer that there was not to be any wasteful expenditure of H.A. ammunition.

16. The enemy attacks were without doubt magnificently carried out and pressed well home. The high level bombers kept tight formation and appeared not to jink. I only observed one torpedo bomber who apparently had cold feet and fired his torpedoes at a distance of at least two miles from the ship. The torpedoes ran very straight and the tracks were exceptionally easy to see in the calm water and the torpedoes appeared to be running shallow although one of the last hits was observed to be under the starboard bilge keel between 87 and 102 stations, when the ship finally rolled over. I think the ship had a list to port at the time of this hit.

17. I had intended to recover the Walrus aircraft at 1215. Under the circumstances this became impossible. She subsequently made a forced landing on the sea and was towed into harbour by STRONGHOLD.

Fifth and Last Attack.

18. The respite from the previous attack was brief. Torpedo bomber aircraft seemed to appear from several directions and the second torpedo hit the ship in the vicinity of the Gun- room and apparently jammed the rudder, and although the ship was still steaming at well over twenty knots she was not under control. Shortly after this at least three torpedoes hit the ship, two being on the port side and one on the starboard side. I knew now that she could not survive and at once gave the order for everyone to come on deck and to cast loose Carley floats. It has been learnt that the broadcasting apparatus was still working throughout the ship with the exception of the compartments down below aft but word was quickly passed down from Y turret and the after control. The decision for a Commanding Officer to make to cease all work in the ship below is an exceedingly difficult one, but I felt very sure that she would not survive four torpedoes and this was borne out for she only remained afloat about six or seven minutes after I gave the order for everyone to come on deck. I attribute the fact that so many men were fortunately able to be saved to these six or seven minutes, combined with the fact that the broadcast apparatus was still in action.

19. When these final two or three torpedoes detonated the ship rapidly commenced to take up a heavy list to port. Men were now pouring

up on deck. They had all been warned, 24 hours before, to carry or wear their lifesaving apparatus. When the ship had a 30 degrees list to port I looked over the starboard side of the Bridge and saw the Commander and two or three hundred men collecting on the starboard side. I never saw the slightest sign of panic or ill discipline. I told them from the Bridge how well they had fought the ship and wished them good luck. The ship hung for at least a minute and a half to two minutes with a list of about 60 degrees or 70 degrees to port and then rolled over at 1233.

20. With the exception of those officers I have mentioned who were immediately under my notice I find it very difficult specially to recommend any particular officer or man for decoration because every officer and man in the ship carried out his duties to the utmost, and it is possible that if comparison could be made, many of those who were lost are of all the most deserving.

21. Destroyers VAMPIRE and ELECTRA immediately closed and picked up survivors. They did their work in a most efficient manner and I cannot say enough of their work of rescue and care of the ship's company on the way back to harbour. ELECTRA subsequently went off to assist in searching the water round PRINCE OF WALES for survivors while we did the same on the Bridge of VAMPIRE on whose Bridge I was, and I am very certain that no one surviving was left.

22. From what I saw myself and reports I have received the work of the medical officers was tireless and beyond all praise.

(Signed) WILLIAM TENNANT.
Captain, R.N.

14th December, 1941.

REPORT BY LIEUTENANT COMMANDER A. G. SKIPWITH, R.N.

Singapore.

12th December, 1941.

I have the honour to submit, in accordance with Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet signal 0946GH/11th December, the following brief narrative of events leading to the loss of H.M.S. PRINCE OF WALES.

2. At the time of the first air attack the squadron was returning to Singapore under the orders of Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet.

3. At 1113 on 10th December fire was opened on eight twin engined high level bombers which attacked REPULSE in close formation.

4. At 1141½ fire was opened on nine torpedo bombers which attacked H.M.S. PRINCE OF WALES from the port side. The ship was hit by a torpedo at 1144 in a position approximately abreast P 3 and P.4 turrets. The damage caused by this hit was as follows and the result apparent before the next attack developed.

(a) The ship assumed a list of 11½° to port and increased her trim by the stern, the port side of the quarterdeck being awash by 1220.

(b) "B" Engine Room, "Y" Boiler Room, the port Diesel Room and "Y" Action Machinery Room flooded.

(c) Both propeller shafts stopped.

(d) Steering gear was affected and the ship was never again under complete control, N.U.C. Balls* being hoisted at 1210

(e) The warning telephone system failed.

(f) Power failed at both after groups of 5.25 inch guns and P 1 turret jammed in training: power failed at P.2.

5. A further torpedo bomber attack developed on the starboard side at 1220. Three minutes later the ship was hit by two torpedoes, one at the stem and the other in the after part of the ship, starboard side. At 1224½ the ship was hit by a torpedo abreast B turret on the starboard side. Amongst other results "A" propeller shaft became jammed, the list was gradually reduced, and the ship settled appreciably.

6. At 1241 fire was opened with remaining 5.25 inch guns, namely S.1., S.2 and P.1, and pom-poms, at a high level bombing formation of eight aircraft. Three minutes later the ship was straddled and a hit sustained on the catapult deck. The armoured deck was not pierced. Near misses may have caused further damage.

7. Soon after this attack H.M.S. EXPRESS closed and came alongside the starboard side of the quarterdeck. Orders were given by the Captain to disembark wounded and those not required to fight the ship. Finally, the order to abandon ship was passed.

8. As much detailed evidence as possible is being taken.

9. I wish to record that H.M.S. EXPRESS was magnificently handled, remaining alongside until the last possible moment.

10. The officers and ratings whom I saw displayed great courage and steadiness.

11. H.M.S. PRINCE OF WALES heeled over quickly to port and sank at about 1320.

(Signed) A. G. SKIPWITH,
Lieutenant Commander, R.N.

APPENDIX I.

*Air Headquarters Far East,
Singapore.*

12th December, 1941.

Sir,

I have the honour to forward herewith a report made by Flt./Lt. Vigors, temporarily commanding 453 Squadron, who took his squadron over to provide fighter cover to H.M. Ships PRINCE OF WALES and REPULSE.

The tributes paid by Flt./Lt. Vigors to the magnificent conduct of the officers and men of the PRINCE OF WALES and REPULSE are tributes which the whole of the personnel under my command would like to join in.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(Signed) C. PULFORD.

*Air Vice-Marshal, Commanding,
Royal Air Force, Far East.*

*The Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet,
H.M. Naval Base,
Singapore.*

*R.A.A.F. Station,
Sembawang.*

11.12.41.

To:—*Commander-in-Chief, Far Eastern Fleet.*
SIR,

I had the privilege to be the first aircraft to reach the crews of the PRINCE OF WALES and the REPULSE after they had been sunk. I say the privilege, for during the next hour while I flew around low over them, I witnessed a show of that indomitable spirit for which the Royal Navy is so famous. I have seen a show of spirit in this war over Dunkirk, during the "Battle of Britain," and in the London night raids, but never before have I seen anything comparable with what I saw yesterday. I passed over thousands who had been through an ordeal the greatness of which they alone can understand, for it is impossible to pass on one's feelings in disaster to others.

Even to an eye so inexperienced as mine it was obvious that the three destroyers were going to take hours to pick up those hundreds of men clinging to bits of wreckage, and swimming around in the filthy oily water. Above all this, the threat of another bombing and machine-gun attack was imminent. Every one of those men must have realised that. Yet as I flew around, every man waved and put his thumb up as I flew over him.

After an hour, lack of petrol forced me to leave, but during that hour I had seen many men in dire danger waving, cheering and joking as if they were holiday-makers at Brighton waving at a low flying aircraft. It shook me for here was something above human nature. I take off my hat to them, for in them I saw the spirit which wins wars.

I apologise for taking up your valuable time, but I thought you should know of the incredible conduct of your men.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

(Signed) T. A. VIGORS,
Flt./Lt., O.C. 453 Squadron.

APPENDIX II.

*Operational Signals made, by
Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet,
on 9th December, 1941.*

TO: Force Z FROM: C.-in-C., E.F.

Besides a minor landing at Kota Bharu which was not followed, landings have been made between Pattani and Singgora and a major landing 90 miles north of Singgora.

2. Little is known of enemy naval forces in the vicinity. It is believed that KONGO is the only capital ship likely to be met. Three Atago type, one Kako type, and two Zintu type cruisers have been reported. A number of destroyers possibly of fleet type are likely to be met.

3. My object is to surprise and sink transports and enemy warships before air attack can develop. Objective chosen will depend on air reconnaissance. Intend to arrive objective after sunrise to-morrow 10th. If an opportunity to bring KONGO to action occurs this is to take precedence over all other action.

4. Subject to Commanding Officer's freedom of manoeuvre in an emergency Force Z will

Admiralty footnote:—

* N.U.C. Balls—"not under control" signal.

remain in close order and will be manoeuvred as a unit until action is joined. When the signal "Act independently" is made or at discretion of Commanding Officer, REPULSE will assume freedom of manoeuvre remaining in tactical support but engaging from a wide enough angle to facilitate fall of shot.

5. Intend to operate at 25 knots unless a chase develops and subsequently to retire at maximum speed endurance will allow.

6. Capital ships should attempt to close below 20,000 yards until fire is effective but should avoid offering an end on target. Ships must be prepared to change from delay to non-delay fuzes according to target.

7. PRINCE OF WALES and REPULSE are each to have one aircraft fuelled and ready to fly off if required. If flown off aircraft must return to land base. Kota Bharu aerodrome is understood to be out of action.

8. TENEDOS will be detached before dark to return independently to Singapore.

9. Remaining destroyers may be detached during the night 9th/10th should enemy information require a high speed of advance. In such case these destroyers are to retire towards Anamba Island at 10 knots until a rendezvous is ordered by W/T.

TO: PRINCE OF WALES, REPULSE

FROM: C.-in-C., E.F

Inform Ships' Companies as follows: Begins—
"The enemy has made several landings on the north coast of Malaya and has made local progress. Our Army is not large and is hard pressed in places. Our Air Force has had to destroy and abandon one or more aerodromes. Meanwhile fast transports lie off the coast.

This is our opportunity before the enemy can establish himself. We have made a wide circuit to avoid air reconnaissance and hope to surprise the enemy shortly after sunrise tomorrow Wednesday. We may have the luck to try our metal against the old Japanese battle-cruiser KONGO or against some Japanese cruisers and destroyers which are reported in the Gulf of Siam. We are sure to get some useful practice with the H.A. armament.

Whatever we meet I want to finish quickly and so get well clear to the eastward before the Japanese can mass too formidable a scale of an attack against us. So shoot to sink."—
Ends.

APPENDIX III.

Signals made by Chief of Staff, Eastern Fleet, to Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet.

TO: C.-in-C., Eastern Fleet. FROM: Chief of Staff, Eastern Fleet.

IMMEDIATE.

R.A.F. reconnaissance to depth of 100 miles to the north-westward of you will be provided by 1 Catalina from 0800 onwards tomorrow 9th.

(ii) It is hoped that a dawn reconnaissance of coast near Singgora can be carried out on Wednesday, 10th.

(iii) Fighter protection on Wednesday, 10th will not, repeat not, be possible.

(iv) Japanese have large bomber forces based Southern Indo-China and possibly also in Thailand. C.-in-C., Far East, has requested General MacArthur to carry out attack with his long-range bombers on Indo-China aerodromes as soon as possible.

(v) Kota Bharu aerodrome has been evacuated and we seem to be losing grip on other northern aerodromes due to enemy action.

(vi) Military position near Kota Bharu does not seem good, but details are not available.

T.O.O. 2253GH/8.

TO: C.-in-C., Eastern Fleet. FROM: Chief of Staff, Eastern Fleet.

MOST IMMEDIATE.

One battleship, "M" class cruiser, 11 destroyers and a number of transports reported close to coast between Kota Bharu and Perhentian Island by air reconnaissance this afternoon.

T.O.O. 1125Z/9.

Correct my 1125/9. Force was sighted at 0900Z/9 (1630GH/9).

T.O.O. 1155Z/9.

TO: C.-in-C., Eastern Fleet. FROM: Chief of Staff, Eastern Fleet.

IMMEDIATE.

Only significant enemy report is contained in my 1125Z/9th. Enemy apparently continuing landing in Kota Bharu area which should be fruitful as well as Singgora.

2. On the other hand enemy bombers on South Indo-China aerodromes are in force and undisturbed. They could attack you five hours after sighting and much depends on whether you have been seen today.

Two carriers may be in Saigon area.

3. Military situation at Kota Bharu appears difficult. Aerodrome is in enemy hands.

4. All our northern aerodromes are becoming untenable due to enemy air action. C.-in-C., Far East, hints he is considering concentrating all air efforts on defence of Singapore area.

5. Extremely difficult to give you clearer picture because air reconnaissance communications are so slow due partly to damage to aerodromes.

T.O.O. 1415Z/9 (2145GH/9).

TO: C.-in-C., Eastern Fleet. FROM: Chief of Staff, Eastern Fleet.

IMMEDIATE.

Enemy reported landing Kuantan, latitude 03° 50' North.

T.O.O. 1505Z/9.