

APPENDIX.

The following Despatch was submitted to the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty on the 1st October, 1945, by Captain O. L. GORDON, M.V.O., R.N.

U.S.S. GOSPER.

At sea.

1st October, 1945.

I have the honour to submit the following report on the circumstances and actions which occurred between 25th February, 1942, and 1st March, 1942, culminating in the loss of H.M.S. EXETER under my command on the latter date. More than three and a half years has elapsed since the events covered by this report took place, but the essential points were recorded within three weeks of that time and have been most carefully preserved throughout my captivity by such devices as concealment in a large empty shaving cream tube and similar subterfuges, causing me considerable concern during frequent searches by the Japanese.

2. Since all records were lost when H.M.S. EXETER was sunk, detailed accuracy in such matters as times, courses, etc., cannot be guaranteed but I am confident that the report gives as accurate a picture as it is possible to present in such circumstances. All times given are zone - 7½.

3. In accordance with orders received from the Commodore Commanding China Force (C.C.C.F.), EXETER with PERTH, ELECTRA, JUPITER, and ENCOUNTER in company sailed from Batavia at 1600, 25th February, 1942, for Sourabaya, with instructions that on arrival this force was to be under the orders of Rear Admiral Doorman, Eskadier Commandant (E.C.). The passage was without incident except for the location by radar of a large formation of enemy aircraft heading for Sourabaya, which information was passed to Sourabaya by signal.

4. On arrival at the entrance to Sourabaya minefields at about 1230/26, destroyers under the orders of ELECTRA were ordered to proceed ahead and on arrival to pass a fuel requirement signal to E.C. ELECTRA and EXETER embarked pilots inside the minefields and the latter with PERTH in company anchored at Sourabaya at about 1600.

5. Instructions were received for ships to be ready to sail at 1800, which prohibited cruisers from completing with fuel since no oilers were available and time was insufficient to proceed to oiling berths inside a basin. Destroyers also experienced difficulty in obtaining fuel but all eventually fuelled though some were unable to complete to full stowage.

6. Rear Admiral Doorman had called a meeting of Commanding Officers for 1700 but no information of this was received until nearly that time when the British Liaison Officer attached to DE RUYTER arrived on board EXETER. As a result the Commanding Officer of PERTH and myself were very late in joining this meeting, and only arrived at the risk of our lives in the fastest and most dangerous motor car ride through traffic that we had ever experienced.

7. The instructions at this meeting were necessarily brief and consisted only in Rear Admiral Doorman's intentions regarding:—

(a) Order of leaving harbour.

(b) Cruising formation and destroyer screening.

(c) Patrol area and movements to cover this area to best advantage, based on meagre information available of a large enemy convoy Southwest of the Celebes and steering in a Southwesterly direction.

(d) Method of attack if enemy forces, and in particular an enemy convoy, were met.

(e) Subsequent destination in the absence of other information—

(i) If no enemy were sighted.

(ii) If action was joined and ships or units became separated.

(f) Night Recognition Signals.

8. The Allied force consisted of:—

Cruisers:

DE RUYTER (Flag),
EXETER,
HOUSTON,
PERTH,
JAVA,

in the order of ships as formed at sea.

Destroyers:

British—ELECTRA (Commander May),
JUPITER, ENCOUNTER;

American—JOHN D. EDWARDS
(Commander Binford), ALDEN,
PAUL JONES, JOHN D. FORD;

Dutch—DE WITT, KORTENAER.

9. This force sailed from Sourabaya at 1900/26. After clearing the minefields the force assumed the cruising order previously arranged, namely, cruisers in single line, British and Dutch destroyers screening ahead, and U.S. destroyers forming a separate unit astern. Rear Admiral Doorman's reason for stationing the U.S. destroyers astern was due to their inferior gun and superior torpedo armament. The cruising order of the force was in reality designed for a night encounter with an enemy convoy, when it was the Admiral's intention that cruisers and British and Dutch destroyers should engage enemy escort forces, at the same time endeavouring to circle the convoy, while the primary duty of the U.S. destroyers was to sink the troop ships comprising the convoy. Course was first set to the Eastward (085 degrees) to intercept any attempted landing on Madura Island and was reversed at 0100/27 to 270 degrees.

10. The night of 26th/27th passed without incident, the EXETER being at the first degree of readiness throughout. Shortly after daylight enemy reconnaissance aircraft located the force and during the forenoon minor bombing attacks were experienced, mostly by single aircraft, and without damage to the Allied force. At about 1030/27, when some 60 odd miles to the Westward of Sourabaya, course was reversed and the Admiral signalled his intention, in the absence of further information, of anchoring inside the minefields off Sourabaya and repeating the previous patrol that night.