

48. When EXETER was hit and started to lose way ENCOUNTER and POPE drew rapidly ahead, still engaging the enemy destroyers. They had ceased making smoke and when last seen were a considerable distance ahead. No report from the Commanding Officer of U.S.S. POPE is available, but in conversation with him I understood that his ship was chased by the enemy cruisers but drew away from them taking advantage of rain squalls. He endeavoured to work round to the North and West until repeatedly attacked by high level and dive bombers, which latter eventually succeeded in putting the ship out of action, necessitating her abandonment at about 1330.

49. Throughout this final action both ENCOUNTER and POPE were well handled and well fought. Their effective smoke laying was undoubtedly of great value.

50. Some 400 survivors of EXETER were picked up after about one hour in the water by two Japanese destroyers, which then left the scene of the action on an Easterly course. The remaining survivors were indeed fortunate to be picked up after about 24 hours in the water by a Japanese destroyer working in company with a cruiser or cruisers, the majority of survivors being subsequently transferred to the Dutch hospital ship OP-TEN-NOORT, then in Japanese hands. Three days later this ship proceeded to Macassar where all prisoners on board her were transferred on 10th March to the Dutch military barracks which had been turned into a P.O.W. camp.

51. General Remarks.

(i) No signals were intercepted from PERTH or HOUSTON to indicate the presence of Japanese surface forces in the vicinity of Sunda Strait, nor was any information concerning enemy forces received after sailing from Sourabaya p.m. 28th February.

(ii) As stated in para. 33 no acknowledgment was obtained of the enemy report made and repeated about 0800/1. The following extract from a note written after release from Japan by the C.P.O. Telegraphist in charge of EXETER's W/T Department, may throw some light on the difficulties of enemy reporting in this area at this time.

"Four messages were transmitted, after being coded, by the P.O. Telegraphist in the Remote Control Office on the wave frequency used by ship to shore, H.M.S. ANKING and an Australian station (name uncertain but may have been Port Moresby, I cannot recall). No receipt was received from the above station who was calling H.M.S. ANKING, the W/T guardship at Batavia, who had proceeded to sea thus taking away the link with Batavia. Remote Control Office reported "No receipt" so the last two messages were also broadcast on the Indian Ocean station wave on the "I" method wave frequency used by Colombo, Bombay and Aden. We abandoned ship immediately after their transmission but it is almost certain that they were received by one of the three stations."

52. Results of action.

(i) *Destroyer mentioned in para. 34.*—The Gunnery Officer of U.S.S. POPE, which was stationed on the starboard bow of EXETER, informed me that on board POPE they felt certain that this enemy destroyer was hit. This was not seen in EXETER as the destroyer was enveloped in smoke but POPE was in a better position to see after the enemy's turn away under smoke.

(ii) *Destroyer mentioned in para. 42.*—The hit on this destroyer was made by EXETER's main armament. Her ultimate fate was not seen because of smoke, but a Japanese officer subsequently stated that this destroyer's stern was blown off killing 70 men.

(iii) *Damage to enemy aircraft.*—From a statement by a Japanese officer on board one of the cruisers to which survivors were initially transferred, EXETER's A.A. armament shot down one aircraft and damaged another. The latter with tail damage was shown to the Director Gunner of EXETER.

It is understood that both ENCOUNTER and POPE claimed hits on the enemy destroyers but no doubt these will be made in their separate reports.

(Signed) O. L. GORDON,
Captain, R.N.

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