

Enclosure No. 1 in Nore Letter  
No. 831/469B of 18/2/42 19

S E C R E T .  
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DESTROYER ATTACK

on

"SCHARNHORST", "GNEISENAU" and "PRINZ EUGEN"

off RIVER MAAS.

Thursday 12th. February 1942.

( Captain (D) 21's No.31/11 of 16th. February 1942.)

DELIVER

H.M.S. "CAMPBELL".  
16th February 1942.

Miss G. Jones  
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SECRET

Captain D 21 F 7

H.M.S. CAMPBELL.

No. 31/11.

16th February, 1942.

Sir,

I have the honour to submit the following report of the attack carried out by destroyers under my command on the German Battle Cruisers SCHARNHORST and GNEISENEAU and Cruiser PRINZ EUGEN off the mouth of the river Maas on Thursday 12th February 1942.

2. During the forenoon of the 12th I was carrying out independent gunnery and torpedo practices off Harwich between 52 buoy and the Aldeburgh Light Float with the following ships:- CAMPBELL, VIVACIOUS, MACKAY, (Captain (D) 16), WORCESTER, WALFOLE and WHITSHED.

3. At 1156 Vice Admiral Doyer's signal t.o.o. 1145 was received, reporting that the enemy battlecruisers were passing Boulogne at about 2 knots and ordering me to proceed in execution of previous orders. I immediately ordered all the destroyers, which were widely dispersed, to rendezvous and form up in the following pre-arranged order:-

1st Division CAMPBELL (D.21), VIVACIOUS, WORCESTER.  
2nd Division MACKAY (D.16), WHITSHED, WALFOLE.

4. Appreciation of the situation at 1200 and 1300.

1200. With the enemy proceeding at 20 knots it was possible to carry out the original plan, which was to cross QZX 403 by the specially swept channel and to intercept east of the Hinder Banks (Vice Admiral Doyer's signal t.o.o. 2009A/3/2), with an hour in hand. Course was therefore shaped for 53 buoy.

1300. As reports received from the Vice Admiral Doyer gave the enemy a much greater speed than at first reported, it was realised that our only chance was to cross the mine barrier and to attempt an interception off the Maas. This I decided to do, going between the lines of shallow mines.

5. At 1318 all ships had closed up in station, and with our position accurately known I altered course to 090° and increased to the maximum station-keeping speed of 28 knots. Almost at once WALFOLE began to drop astern, and reported that her main bearings were beginning to run; she was subsequently forced to return to harbour.

6. At 1430 we were clear of the mine barrier, and, as no further information of the enemy's movements had been received, course was altered to 075°, which cleared the southern edge of QZX 402.

7. At 1335 a Ju 88 had been sighted which shadowed for some time, and at intervals on the way across four single bombing attacks were carried out from about 1500 feet. Bombs fell close to MACKAY and WORCESTER, the nearest being 30 yards from the latter ship; this attack was made at 1445 by a Hampden at which fire was not opened until the bombs were seen to have been released.

8. Contact.

At 1517, just as Commander-in-Chief, The Nore's signal "If nothing is sighted by 1515, search to south west as enemy speed may be reduced, t.o.o. 1509" was received on the bridge, CAMPBELL's type 271 R.D.F. detected two large echoes bearing 145°, range 9½ miles, followed two minutes later by a third echo. CAMPBELL's position was 51° 57' N. 3° 15' E. and the echoes agreed with my estimated of the enemy, and gave an average speed of advance of 27 knots since 1312. Later, five smaller echoes at a closer range (obviously the destroyer screen) were detected, which put them, by the plot, about 1000 yards fine of the port bow of the leading battlecruiser.

From observations  
repeatedly

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9. The visibility, which during the early afternoon had improved to seven miles, had now, fortunately for us, closed down to about four miles.

10. Appreciation at 1520.

The position of the enemy force was now known, and also their speed of advance and approximate course. Visibility was about four to five miles and the R.D.F. plot showed that there was little chance of gaining any appreciable bearing. On the assumption that shadowing aircraft had reported our progress during the afternoon, and that I had presumably been detected by R.D.F., I felt that the only course of action was to close as rapidly as possible without losing bearing. This was best achieved by continuing on my present course. On sighting I proposed to turn on to the attacking course at once and to press in as close as the opposition would allow and the loss of bearing made advisable.

11. Sighting.

At 1542 gun flashes and then A.A. tracer were observed bearing 155° and at 1543 CAMPBELL sighted the enemy battlecruisers at a range of four miles in line ahead five or six cables apart, with the destroyer screen concentrated five cables fine on their port bow. PRINZ EUGEN was not sighted, but from the analysis it appears that she was at least a mile astern.

At this time the R.D.F. plot gave the enemy a speed of about 24 knots.

12. THE ATTACK.

Divisions, separately, turned in to attack.

(a) 1st Division.

The 1st Division was engaged by the main armament of the battlecruisers and destroyers while closing. Shells of all calibres were falling very close with frequent straddles and it seemed incredible that no actual hits were being received. At the same time the 3" and 12 pounder guns and all close range weapons were keeping up continuous fire at aircraft. It is no exaggeration to say that every 20 seconds one or more enemy aircraft appeared out of the clouds. Several aircraft were observed to be hit but none were seen to crash. VIVACIOUS was lucky not to be hit by a torpedo which broke surface 15 yards on his beam, the track having been clearly seen passing under his stern.

During the approach all three ships were carrying out a fine zigzag to reduce the chances of being hit, and CAMPBELL's type 271 was giving me excellent reports of range in 100 yard steps as we closed.

At 3500 yards I felt that our luck could not possibly hold much longer. Ships were being well straddled and we were closing fast and also dropping bearing. At 3300 yards I saw a large shell, which failed to explode or to ricochet, dive under the ship like a porpoise, and I felt that this was the time to turn and fire torpedoes. VIVACIOUS, on my starboard quarter, turned and fired at the same time. WORCESTER, further astern, pressed in closer and came under even heavier and more concentrated fire, receiving severe damage. She was by this time abaft the beam of the target and had to make a large alteration to fire. Torpedoes were fired in local control at a range of about 2400 yards, but by this time the target had begun to turn away.

All ships attacked the leading battlecruiser.

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All ships attacked the leading battlecruiser.

From observations by officers and ratings in all three ships two hits on the leading battlecruiser are claimed. Commanding Officer, H.M.S. WORCESTER states quite definitely that he saw one very large underwater explosion as he was turning to fire; he was not certain about a second but other officers and ratings stated that they saw two. Observers in CAMPBELL and VIVACIOUS definitely saw two, one before the mainmast and one just abaft it.

From the attached track chart these hits appear to have been obtained by CAMPBELL as WORCESTER had not yet fired and VIVACIOUS missed astern. WORCESTER's torpedoes probably missed ahead owing to the enemy's turn away.

From the R.D.F. plot in CAMPBELL which was continued until the range had opened to 4 miles it was clearly shown that the enemy's speed was very much reduced, and gave a mean speed of about 19 knots.

(b) 2nd Division.

A full account of the attack carried out by MACKAY and WHITSHED is given in the attached report by Captain (D) 16, a summary of which is as follows:-

This division, about nine cables astern, turned to close at the same time as CAMPBELL. Their target was a large enemy unit sighted bows on and at first thought to be a battle cruiser but later identified as the PRINZ EUGEN. The target turned to starboard and MACKAY turned to fire on opposite courses at a range of 4000 yards. WHITSHED continued to close as the target turned directly away, but half a minute later the enemy made a further turn to starboard. WHITSHED then turned and fired torpedoes at a range of approximately 3000 yards.

Captain (D) 16 reports that "One hit may possibly have been made".

13. Shortly after CAMPBELL and VIVACIOUS had fired their torpedoes visibility decreased considerably and the battlecruiser were lost to view, but the destroyer screen was engaged by gunfire.

14. Gunnery conditions throughout were extremely difficult owing to the high speed and frequent alterations of course in heavy swell. Seas were breaking green fore and aft and there was continuous spray over the bridge. Conditions for training the torpedo tubes were equally difficult, especially for the ships of the second division, which were beam on to the seas on their own course.

In CAMPBELL, the crew of 'Y' gun were at times knee deep in water and the gunlayer at 'A' gun was removed from his seat and thrown across the forecastle, while the Engineer Officer was thrown through the guardrails and only saved himself by clutching a passing stanchion. These were only a few of many similar incidents which occurred in all ships, and give some indication of the difficulties experienced.

15. At 1558 while retiring on a course of 277° I sighted a ship in the haze about two miles on my port beam. Course was altered to investigate and the ship was found to be WORCESTER. She was lying stopped, badly on fire forward and amidships, with smoke and steam pouring from both funnels, rafts and floats drifting clear, and men in the water.

16. CAMPBELL and VIVACIOUS assisted in picking up the man and informed WORCESTER that I would take him in tow as soon as this had been done. He later signalled that he hoped to have steam shortly.

17. During this period various types of hostile aircraft were sighted intermittently flying in and out of the very low clouds. All ships were subjected to air attacks but these were driven off by gun fire from CAMPBELL and VIVACIOUS. Several friendly aircraft were also sighted and at 1615 three Beauforts came in low, the second of which was seen to drop a torpedo. This torpedo was heard approaching on asdic, and although there were rafts alongside, I reluctantly had to go full speed astern, and the torpedo passed ahead. We were fortunate in being able to come up to the rafts again and pick up their occupant.

18. The picking up of survivors was most difficult because of the rough weather and the inability of the men to help themselves owing to wounds, coldness and exhaustion. When all men had been recovered I closed WORCESTER to take her in tow but before this could be done she had raised sufficient steam to move slowly ahead and with CAMPBELL and VIVACIOUS as escort she retired to the westward.

19. Having ascertained that WORCESTER was capable of proceeding on her own at eight knots, I returned to Harwich with VIVACIOUS in accordance with Commander-in-Chief, The Nore's signal t.o.o.1615/12 at 20 knots, which was the maximum speed possible in the existing weather conditions.

LACKAY and WHITSHED were returning independently.

20. CAMPBELL and VIVACIOUS berthed alongside Parkston Quay at 2320 and landed 46 men who had been picked up from WORCESTER. These included 19 wounded and four dead.

21. By 0145 on 13th February all ships had refuelled, ammunition and embarked torpedoes and I left harbour at 0330 with CAMPBELL, VIVACIOUS, GARTH, FERNIE, LACKAY (Captain (D) 16), WHITSHED and BERKELEY to establish patrol on the Eastern edge of the mine barrier by 0645 as ordered by Commander-in-Chief, The Nore's signal t.o.o. 2328/12.

GENERAL REMARKS.

22. R.D.F.

The R.D.F. reports from Dover were most helpful and very quickly received.

The combination of Types 271 and 286P in CAMPBELL was invaluable. Type 271 detected the surface force at a range of 9 1/2 mi and then gave an accurate plot during and after the attack until the enemy were 10 miles away. Type 286P gave warning of practically all aircraft that approached.

23. Communications.

Communications appeared to work very well and all signals were quickly received.

24. Enemy Reports.

There was a complete lack of enemy reports from aircraft. These reports if available would have been invaluable after the R.D.F. plot had faded.

25. Aircraft.

Throughout the engagement, and especially during our first approach and attack, a great number of all types of friendly and enemy aircraft were observed. Some of the latter, mistaking our identity

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25. Aircraft (Continued).

repeatedly fired their recognition signal - four red balls, in the shape of a diamond; while many of our own clearly took us to be hostile. The following remarks of Captain (D) 16th Destroyer Flotilla give a very clear picture of the air situation:-

"The mixture of aircraft in the vicinity of the heavy German units was extraordinary. Low there were large numbers of Me.109's and occasional Beauforts: a bit higher up Hampdens, Dorniers and Me 110's were mixed up: while higher up still a few Halifax's etc., were to be seen. In the course of the afternoon the following types were sighted Me.109, Me.110, Junkers 88, He.111, Dornier 215, Spitfire, Whirlwind, Hampden, Beaufort, Wellington, Halifax, Manchester. Many of the enemy aircraft obviously thought we were friendly while a few of our own aircraft made it evident that they considered us hostile. We on our part opened fire on several occasions on aircraft later recognised as friendly. The aircraft of both sides must have found the situation very confusing. We were fortunate in being attacked by Dorniers and Heinkels only and not by Junkers dive bombers."

The A.A. fire of HUNT class destroyers if they had had the speed to keep up would have been most useful and effective.

26. Engine Room Department.

Credit is due to the Engine Room departments of all the ships for maintaining such a high speed under most unpleasant conditions. This applies particularly to VIVACIOUS and WHITSHEP who were steaming at practically full speed from 1300 until the end of the action.

27. H.M.S. WORCESTER.

I consider that the skill, courage and resource shown by the Commanding Officer, officers and men of H.M.S. WORCESTER in raising steam, subduing fires, repairing damage, keeping the ship seaworthy and finally bringing her back to harbour are most commendable.

I have the honour to be,  
Sir,  
Your obedient Servant,

*D. P. Pizer*

CAPTAIN (D)  
XXI DESTROYER FLOTILLA.



The Commander-in-Chief,  
The Nore.  
(Copy to: Flag Officer Commanding  
Dover.)

Closures:-

1. Track Chart.
2. Captain (D), 16th Destroyer Flotilla's Report of Proceedings dated 14th February, 1942.
3. Commanding Officer, H.M.S. WORCESTER's Report of Proceedings dated 14th February, 1942.
4. Commanding Officer, H.M.S. VIVACIOUS's Report of Proceedings dated 14th February, 1942.
5. Track Chart of Torpedo Attacks.
6. Signals.

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