

FROM...THE COMMANDING OFFICER, H.M.S. "VIVACIOUS",

DATE...14th FEBRUARY 1942.

Ref. No...F.64.

TO.....THE CAPTAIN (D), 21st DESTROYER FLOTILLA.

SUBJECT:- REPORT OF ACTION WITH GERMAN BATTLE CRUISERS ON 12th FEBRUARY 1942.

The following narrative is submitted:-

Enemy report received at 1157 and ships formed in Two Divisions as previously arranged by Captain (D) 21. Speed was increased to 28 knots at 1320 when all ships were in station; This was very nearly full power for Vivacious and the highest speed that could be maintained without making a lot of smoke.

2. Many aircraft were seen, both hostile and friendly. At 1446, a Hampden dropped a stick of six bombs which fell right across the bows of Worcester.

3. At 1530, an R.D.F., report was received from Campbell, giving an enemy bearing of 150° - 7 miles. Six minutes later, our own 286M reported echoes to starboard. At 1540, gun flashes were observed bearing 150°, apparently firing at aircraft making an attack.

4. At 1543, Campbell altered to close, and ships having previously been ordered to attack independently, I altered to starboard almost immediately. Ships at once came under very heavy fire from guns of all calibres, from both the battle cruisers and destroyers. Vivacious opened fire with 4" at the nearest destroyer, but spotting was impossible, owing to spray, smoke etc., and independent fire was ordered.

5. Weather conditions were very bad, A and Y gun's and Tubes crews often being up to their waists in water, and heavy spray was constantly over the bridge. Great difficulty was experienced in training the tubes, and the crew could not see the target, when torpedoes were fired.

6. During the run in, the 1st Division was all the time under very heavy fire and at least three straddles were observed on Campbell. Vivacious was also straddled, and when salvos were getting very close course was twice altered 20° in, to throw off enemy fire control and I consider that it was only due to this that the ship was not hit. Aircraft were continually being fired on, throughout the attack.

7. At 1547, turned to Port to fire torpedoes, range 3,500 yards at about the same time as Campbell who approximately Red 70° - 4 to 5ables at this time. I felt that to have attempted to close any further would have exposed the ship to such a risk of serious damage that the chance of being able to fire torpedoes at all would have almost disappeared. During the turn, the track of a torpedo was seen to pass either under the afterend of the ship or very close astern. This torpedo momentarily broke surface on the port side, abreast the bridge about 15 yards away. It is considered probable that this was an aircraft torpedo.

8. Worcester was observed to have been hit and enveloped in steam soon after we had fired. During this period, many hostile aircraft mistook Vivacious for one of their own ships and fired recognition signals (consisting of 4 red balls in the shape of a diamond) which were red on.

REPORT OF ACTION WITH GERMAN BATTLE CRUISERS ON
12th FEBRUARY 1942. (Contd).

49

9. Steadied on a retiring course of 300° and made smoke, still under heavy fire. Several officers and men noticed two large explosions with a lot of spray aft on the leading battle cruiser. After two or three minutes, a rain squall reduced visibility and the accuracy of enemy fire diminished and few more splashes were seen.

10. Closed Campbell and reduced to 20 knots. At 1606, Campbell altered to port and later a destroyer (Worcester) was sighted on fire and enveloped in smoke and steam, with many men and wreckage in the water. My first thought was that another ship had been sunk.

11. Owing to the heavy swell and strong wind, it was very difficult to manoeuvre the ship alongside rafts, and the men on them, rapidly becoming numb, could not catch hold of, or secure heaving lines. Intermittent air attacks took place during this time and were driven off by gunfire.

12. The whaler was lowered, and was of great assistance in the rescue work. It was stove in against the ship side by the heavy swell and became waterlogged, but the crew remained in it until all the men were off the rafts. A Petty Officer who went over the side to assist the rescue work also deserves special mention.

13. 1703. No more men could be found in the water, proceeded course 250°, 7½ knots Campbell and Worcester in company.

R. Alexander.

Lieutenant Commander
in Command.