

SUBJECT.....REPORT OF ACTION WITH ENEMY BATTLECRUISERS
ON THE 12TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

FROM.....THE COMMANDING OFFICER, H.U.S. "WORCESTER"

DATE.....14TH FEBRUARY, 1942.

TO.....THE CAPTAIN (D) 21ST DESTROYER FLOTILLA, H.U.S.
"CAMPBELL".
(Copy to:- THE CAPTAIN (D), 16TH DESTROYER
FLOTILLA, H.U.S. "MACKAY".)

The following narrative is submitted.

2. It is regretted that records made previous to sighting the enemy were lost and that none were possible later owing to damage and casualties. The narrative is, therefore, without Times, Bearings and Courses. Diagram of the Relative Positions of Worcester's attack is included in your own Action Diagram. List of Major damage is attached. List of casualties has been reported. List of recommendations for awards will be forwarded later.

3. "Worcester" and "Whitshed" had just completed throw off shoots and were close by Aldeburgh Light Float, when report of the enemy was received and we were ordered to rendezvous with Captain(D) 21st Destroyer Flotilla at 4A Buoy. "Worcester" slipped her High Speed Target and ships proceeded at 28 knots.

4. "Worcester" had only been firing her after 4.7" guns in Director Firing as the foremost pair were stiff after bad weather and due to be lifted the next day. "Worcester's" rangefinder was also out of action owing to "misting".

5. Rendezvous was effected and ships proceeded at 28 knots in the order Captain(1) 21 in "Campbell", "Vivacious" "Worcester" Captain(D) 16 in "Mackay", "Whitshed" and "Walpole" via 6. 54 Buoy, thence 270 degrees for six miles thence 090 degrees for 32.5 miles, thence 075 degrees for 30 miles until the enemy was sighted.

6. During this period:

- (a) The Boiler room fan broke down causing a lot of smoke that could not be prevented. Repairs were just completed by the time the enemy were sighted.
- (b) A "Hampden" dropped a bunch of six bombs within 30 to 50 yards of "Worcester's" bow without damage.
- (c) A "Blenheim" dropped six more on "Mackay" missing by about 100 to 150 yards on her Port side.
- (d) Other "friendly" aircraft approached the Flotilla dangerously, and would not reply to recognition procedure.
- (e) Some of these, all enemy planes were damaged and driven off on several occasions.
- (f) "WALPOLE" dropped stern and returned to Base.
- (g) There was a complete lack of enemy reports.
- (h) Instructions were received from Captain (D) 21 to disperse as much as possible during the attack.

(i) Signal was received from Commander-in-Chief, The Force who thought the enemy's speed might be reduced.

7. The enemy was sighted just before the starboard beam, bearing approximately 150 degrees $\frac{4}{4}$ miles, and all ships went in to attack.

8. The enemy appeared to consist of one Leader and two or three destroyers close ahead of a Battlecruiser, with a second Battlecruiser about a mile astern. "PRINZ EUGEN" was not seen. Visibility was poor and appeared to be much better than it really was.

9. The A/A shells were fired from the 4.7" guns and fire was opened on the leading Battlecruiser with A.P. shells. It was soon found that the "stiff" forward group could not keep pace with the movements of the ship and they were ordered into independent quarters firing, and continued to engage the leading Battlecruiser. The after group continued in Director Firing at the second Battlecruiser, but were soon ordered into independent quarters firing, owing to the rapid swiveling of the ship. It was very difficult to spot the fall of shot, owing to the enemy's fire and that of other ships, and the poor visibility.

10. When "CAMPBELL" turned towards I followed round, gradually diverging. A great number of salvos directed at "VIVACIOUS" and "MORCOSHNER" fell out of line at this time, and by zig-zagging on a fine inclination hits were avoided.

11. The range by R.D.F. when "CAMPBELL" turned towards had been 5000 yards and I thought this might be the range of the enemy destroyers who I assumed to be on the engaged side of the enemy. I therefore judged the range of the Battlecruisers to be then about 8000 yards, and 5000 yards when "CAMPBELL" turned to the North Eastwards.

12. I did not realise that "CAMPBELL" was turning to fire torpedoes at this moment. "CAMPBELL's" distance being then about 8 cables. So, to increase the chance of hitting, to ensure the torpedoes crossed and to achieve divergence, I increased to full speed and steered directly at the leading Battlecruiser, altering back immediately to fire torpedoes.

13. Just prior to firing torpedoes, a very large explosion was observed on the stern of the leading Battlecruiser, which, on the information I have now, must undoubtedly have been a torpedo hit scored by "CAMPBELL" or "VIVACIOUS".

14. The inclination of the enemy was about 120 degrees left when I altered in, and had dropped about 90 degrees left by the time I fired my torpedoes. The range closed rather rapidly and the R.D.F. range on firing was 2200 yards.

15. No hits were received until a moment before torpedoes were fired, when the ship was hit twice, on the 12-Pdr., and one exploding in the Oerlikon Starboard Magazine locker. The latter caused considerable bridge casualties and Mr. L.G.C. Wellman, Gunner (T) reasonably supposed that the Bridge was out of action, and rightly fired the torpedoes at the tubes, using 22 knots left deflection.

Results were not observed for many reasons, chiefly bad visibility and the smoke of battle.

23. At 1718 the ship got under way. Our position and a check on the Standard Compass were given us by "CAMPBELL" together with the Recognition Signals up till 0100. "CAMPBELL" then had to return to Base with "VIVACIOUS" to complete with torpedoes, and no further attacks of any kind were made on "ORCESTER".

The ship proceeded at 80 revolutions making good about 12 knots until about 1915 steam was temporarily lost. It was then found possible to start two more fans which produced sufficient draught to overcome loss by the holes in the after Boiler Room ship's side, and the ship got under way again about 1921.

At 2012 speed was reduced to 45 revolutions while the steam joint on the steam pipe to the fans, which was leaking very badly, was repaired.

At 2020 steam was lost and the ship for an hour drifted off our course, beam on to a heavy swell, and things began to look bad owing to the stopping of the ejectors and the fire and bilge pump, which had up till then kept under control the considerable ingress of water into No. 2 Boiler Room from No. 1 Boiler Room, and elsewhere. The large amount of additional water in No. 2 Boiler Room caused the ship to heel dangerously to leeward. Depth charges and any 4.7" ready use ammunition left had already been jettisoned, and now the heavy lifebuoy and considerable other removable gear high up in the ship was thrown overboard by a party under Lieutenant Taudevin, RNVR to assist stability and avoid counter flooding. The reason for the loss of steam was that the steam ejectors together with the shot away auxiliary exhaust pipe had used up all the feed water. Water was then admitted to the feed tanks and it is worthy of note that the sea cock fitted for the purpose was insufficiently large, and additional supply had to be provided by a hose from the fire and bilge pump. Eventually the feed pumps obtained sufficient suction and the boiler was flashed up and steam raised.

At 2130 the ship was able to proceed at 3 knots until No. 2 Boiler Room flooding was reduced sufficiently to consider it safe to proceed at 6 knots again.

Considerable difficulty was experienced in keeping the level of the sea water in the feed tanks with the sea cock alone and at 2200 speed was reduced to 4 knots and the Fire and Bilge Pump was run off No. 2 Boiler Room bilge and used for feed water, leaving only the ejectors on the bilge.

At 0117 the tank was filled and the fire and bilge pump was run back on the bilges and the ship was able to proceed at 6 knots again until arrival.

The ship proceeded on to pass well south of the Galloper then picked up Oxfordness Light and passed Sunk Light at dawn and proceeded without further incident to Harwich.

I consider without the untiring and indomitable efforts of Mr. Griffiths, Commissioned Engineer, the Engineer Officer, the ship would never have reached harbour safely. I was also greatly assisted by Sub-Lieutenant C. D. Agard-Butler, R.N. with the navigation, and Lieutenants Winterbottom and Taudevin as Officers of the Watch, in spite of the fact that the two first named were tired out with lifesaving and the latter had been slightly wounded and never off duty.

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32. The German destroyers showed up very badly and made no determined attempt to drive us off but they may have been minesweeping.

33. The amount of punishment taken successfully by the ship demonstrates the strength of these older ships with their closer frames as compared with the more modern destroyers.

34. The result of our torpedo attack could not be observed, but I am not without hope that a hit might possibly have been obtained.

35. The number of casualties and the amount of damage sustained by my ship is very much regretted.

E C Coats

LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER IN CHARGE.