

THE STORY OF THE U.S.S. HOUSTON /

Nov. 27, 1941

We are in Cavite Navy Yard for over-haul. All necessary repairs have been speeded up and we have been taking aboard our capacity of fuel and ammunition. Anti-aircraft gun crews started standing watches on the anti-aircraft battery.

Nov. 28,

We have been warned that if we are attacked it will be a surprise attack from the air.

Nov. 29

All gun captains and anti-aircraft director crews were shown pictures of Japanese ships and aircraft and were told to study them. ~~Aircraft~~ Anti-aircraft gun crews are sleeping by their gun stations

Nov. 30

All Navy Yard workmen and equipment have left the ship with the exception of one gang working in the engineroom.

Dec. 1

Houston underway on thirty minutes notice. Spent about an hour testing our de-gaussing gear on the way out (in Manila Bay).

Dec. 4.

Arrived at the city of Iloilo on the island of Panay. (Phillipines). We are awaiting the arrival of Admiral Glassford (Commander Yangtze Patrol). Liberty for the crew.

Dec. 5

Payday. Went ashore with "old Man" Heavy and "pappy" Trim.

Dec. 6

All motor launch crews are standing outer harbor patrol watches in the motor launches. Our duties on these watches is to make certain that no strange craft attempts to approach the Houston undetected.

Dec. 8

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1-1

Dec.8

At daybreak all hands were sent to their battle stations. When all stations had reported manned and ready the word "For the information of all hands. A state of war exists between the United States and Japan. Japan has bombed Pearl Harbor inflicting some damage." Everything was quiet for a few minutes then everyone started talking at once. Things returned almost to normal although there was an undercurrent of excitement.

At about 1730 Admiral Glassford arrived by "Catalina" from Manila. Houston got underway at dusk. We were running with no lights naturally and when we were about an hour and a half out of Iloilo the city and harbor were bombed by some Japanese planes. We were in the shadow of some mountains and were not seen so we had no trouble with them. It was evident that someone had reported our whereabouts to The Japs.

Dec.9

We met the U.S.S. Boise and two of our old four stack destroyers just after sunrise.

Dec.10

Picked up a convoy consisting of the U.S.S. Holland, Langley, and Pecos plus two more of our old four stackers. Changed course South.

Dec.12

After dark we spotted an enemy cruiser and a destroyer. Japs turned and ran. We did not chase them far however as that would have left our convoy open to trouble

Dec.14

Crossed Equator which is usually a time for fun. Things started off alright with the pollywogs and Shellbacks having brawls all over the ship but the Commander

was afraid that some of the crew might get hurt so he called a halt to the celebrations

Dec.15

Arrived at Balikpapan, Dutch Borneo with convoy. Houston tied up to dock to fuel. When fueling was almost completed one of the big fueling hoses broke and an officer who was standing nearby took an involuntary oil bath to the amusement of the crew.

Left Balikpapan before daybreak with convoy. Still headed South.

Dec. 17

Houston left convoy and increased speed. Changed course.

Dec.18

Arrived Soerabaja, Java. Fueled and provisioned ship. All personnel attached to Admiral Hart's Flag were transferred to the beach.

Dec.19

A.A. Defense sounded at 1100. Guns were Manned in record time. Planes were identified as four of our Fortresses from the Philippines

Dec.21

Houston underway at 1400.

Dec28

Arrived at Darwin Australia and refueled. Liberty for the crew.

Dec.30

Underway for Thursday Island to pick up a convoy.

1942, Jan. 2

Arrived at Thursday Island and anchored.

Jan. 3

U.S.S. Pensacola arrived with a convoy consisting of the Chaumont, Wm. Holbrook and the Blume Fontaine (a Dutchman). The latter two ships carrying U.S. troops. Pensacola left to return to the States.

Jan. 5

Arrived at Darwin with convoy.

Jan.6

Anchored in bay.Receiving provisions from the Chaumont and the Holland.Fueling from oil barge.While on the last trip to the Holland for stores there was an electrical fire in my motor launch.The Gold Star called away her Fire and Rescue details but we managed to get things under control ourselves and we were furnished a tow back to the ship.

Jan.8

The harbors anti-submarine net is being repaired so extra lookouts were detailed to guard against the possibility of any minature subs getting in the harbor.

Jan.10

Left Darwin with two destroyers.

Jan13

Stopped a freighter and sent a prize crew over to investigate her papers.She was a Filipino so we let her go.

Jan.14

Met another freighter and sent our prize crew over to have a look.She was a Russian and her papers were in order so she was allowed to proceed.We also had a look at some of the women they had on there and they looked like coal heavers.What a size.

Jan. 16

Cruising slowly along the coast of Timor We don't know what we are looking for.

Jan.17

In P.M.we sighted a derilict.A destroyer was sent to investigate and reported that the victim appeared to be a Dutch inteer-island steamer which had been torpedoe d about twelve hours earlier.No survivors in vicinity so we pulled out of there in a hurry as there was a possibility that the sub was still in the vicinity and might try to slip us a fish.

Jan.18

Arrived in Kebola Bay and feuled from

the Port side of the Trinity while the Boise fueled from the Starboard side. We were informed that we were to be a striking force to raid Japanese shipping in Macasser Straits. In P.M. we were told that the orders were cancelled. Boise and three destroyers headed West and Houston and three destroyers headed East.

Jan. 20

Arrived at Thursday Island and met convoy consisting of Pres. Polk, Hawaiian Planter, and a Dutchman. Underway for Darwin immediately.

Jan. 22

Arrived outside of Darwin. The Dutchman went in and the Pecos (tanker) came out to take her place in the convoy. Changed course to the North.

Jan. 25

A.A. defense sounded at 1500. Plane was identified as a Dutch Naval Patrol plane. In late P.M. entered Bali Straits.

Jan. 26

Entered Soerabaja, Java where we learned that the destroyers made a night torpedo attack on the Nip ships in Macasser Straits and were very successful. Spent the day transferring torpedoes for the destroyers in my motor launch.

Jan. 27

Houston moored to dock. Went ashore on liberty.

Jan. 28

Fueling and provisioning ship. Took aboard ten tons of canned ham.

Jan. 29

Left Soerabaja in late afternoon in company with two of our destroyers.

Feb. 1

Marblehead and some destroyers left to make a night torpedo attack on a Nip Convoy in Maccaser Straits. Houston and two

destroyers left about six hours later in order to meet the Marblehead at the South entrance of the Straits so that if she ran into too strong a force and was forced to retire we could give her some support. The attack is scheduled for the second.

Feb. 2

Received a message stating that the attack had been called off because the bright moonlight would remove the element of surprise. Contacted the Marblehead about dawn and headed for Madura Straits after dark.

Feb. 3

All last night more ships were arriving and by morning the bay held more ships than we had seen at one time since we left Pearl Harbor in October 1940. With us were the Marblehead, ~~the~~ U.S. destroyers, the Dutch Light Cruisers DeRuyter, Javay and Tromp, with ~~six~~ Dutch destroyers. Again we learned that we were to be a striking force to raid Macassar Straits. At 1100 the detectors picked up the sound of planes approaching. Some ten minutes later we sighted fifty planes flying at about 25,000 feet. They passed over us and kept on going. Later they came back over and again they by-passed us. We learned by radio that the docks at Soerabaja had been bombed causing some damage.

Feb. 4

Last night a Dutch officer (Lt. Van Lear) came aboard to facilitate communication between the Dutch and American forces. Fleet underway before dawn but we were expecting a visit from the Nip planes. Sure enough, at 1000, while in the Flores Sea, South of the Kangean Group, we were attacked by ~~twenty~~ ^{thirty} seven Nip planes. They approached in groups of nine planes each in a very flat (v) formation. The Houston was the biggest target and the planes made straight for us.

Meanwhile our force had scattered out a bit in order to be able to maneuver. The first wave came in from Port and dropped their guts but by adopting evasive tactics the bombs all missed us but straddled the ship aft and threw water over the entire stern of the ship. The second wave came in from Starboard but didn't drop anything. The third wave came in from Port and dropped their load. We were in a hard turn to Starboard and were making about thirty knots and one bomb hit the side of the ship aft. (Normally the place it hit would be below the water line) Luckily it just glanced off and failed to explode but it did manage to spring a few plates. On this run one plane peeled off with his Starboard motor afire. He circled down and evidently tried to crash into the Marblehead but was driven off by heavy fire from the machine guns and A.A. battery. Each time they made a run we could see them being tossed about from the concussion of the exploding A.A. shells. There were some more runs made and on the last run one bomb hit the Port yardarm antenna on the mainmast. That evidently started the delayed action mechanism. It went through the searchlight deck, entered the after leg of the tripod, made its' exit from there about two feet above the deck of searchlight control. Bruce Atkins was laying on the deck of control right where the bomb made its' exit and it cut him almost in half at the waist. Several of the other men on this station were hit by flying shrapnel. The bomb continued its' course to the main deck where it exploded. Turret three was trained to Port and the sides of the turret was pierced in a hundred places by the shrapnel which ignited the exposed powder bags. As a result of this fire all but two men of the turret crew were

instantly killed. The flaps to the magazines were open and the flash travelled down ~~the~~ there killing the crews of the electrical deck, powder circle, shell deck and hoist crew. The magazine was flooded immediately and as a result two men were drowned. It was a case of them or the ship because it was very possible that if the magazines had not been flooded when they were, they might have exploded. The after repair Party which was on the second deck and right below the place where the bomb exploded were all killed with the exception of two men. My motor launch was literally blown apart as was the other launch. Everything was quickly organized and other repair parties were arriving from their parts of the ship to render what assistance they could. A fire hose was trained inside the turret and the water caused a short circuit on the firing mechanism which caused the center gun to fire. The Doctors and Pharmisests' Mates were very busy doing emergancy operations and taking care of the wounded. Someone said there was some brandy passed out but the men on the guns never saw any of it. It all went to the freeloaders who had no gun or battle station. There was also a bunch of these guys who suddenly remembered that they had not been to church in a long time so went to the Chaplains room and tried to make up for lost time. Some of them even began carrying their Bibles around in their pockets with them.

The Skipper decided that it was time to get out of there and the rest of us were inclined to agree with him so the Houston made tracks to get out of there but our Captain noticed that the Marblehead was having some trouble. She was cruising around in circles and feul oil was running down both sides up forward

She had taken at least two hits amidships and another one back aft of the after twin which had torn up her after steering engine. Our Skipper asked the Marblehead if we could help them in any way but their Skipper told us that he thought he could make out alright so we shoved off with the planes still buzzing around. We headed for Bali Straits taking advantage of the cover offered by a few rainsqualls which lay on our course.

Feb. 5

Entered Tlapjap, Java and immediatly started to build coffins for our dead. There were about ten of us on this job and we managed to get all the available lumber in the town plus three tailor-made coffins. Altogether we had sixty-one coffins to build. Fourty-eight for ourselves and thirteen for the Marblehead. We started the job at at 1300 and worked through until 0400, at which time I had to quit to go on watch. The rest of the boys kept on and finished about an hour later. At about 0500 there was an electrical fire in the damaged turret was soon put right and the ship settled down again. All the dead were on the fantail covered wiht canvas. They had been rained on a few times and were beginning to smell a bit strong. Near morning a Dutch hospital train arrived and took the wounded to an Army hospital in the mountains.

Feb. 6

Early this morning trucks began to arrive to take our dead to the cemetary. As each was carried over the side the band played the Dirgewhile the entire crew stood at attention on their gun stations. As the last coffin left the ship the bugler played Taps while the crew ~~stood at~~ saluted and the trucks began to move off. It is hard to describe the emotions which ran through us and what we were thinking of the Japs is not to be put on paper.

At 1500 the Marblehead entered port and what a mess she was. She had no business even being afloat after the beating she took. The thirteen Marblehead dead were put in a ware-~~xxx~~ house on the dock where the Houston stationed a military guard of honor over them. The marblehead crew came over to the Houston to take a bath, Shave, and get cleaned up in general. Their water installations had been put out of commision and they had not even been able to get a facewash since the raid. After a bit the Marblehead got underway and entered a floating drydock which was too small to take her all at once so had to take her one end at a time. In there some temporary repairs were made which might enable her to get back to the States.

Feb. 7

Temporarily repairing our damage. The bomb which had hit us had been a big one and had twisted and cracked two of the steel longitudinalens which supported the main deck so Capt. Rooks appropriated two rails from a nearby railroad and had our Shipfitters put them in place in order to equalize the strain Feuling and provisioning ship. Also took ~~xxxx~~ aboard 500 rounds of A.A. ammunition to replace that which had been expended in the raid. Adrimal T.C. Hart and General Wavell came aboard to have a look at our damage. Capt. Rooks pointed out the fact that we still had 87 percent of our fire power and were still the most powerful ship the Allies had out there so there was no use of our going home yet. Against a Jap cruiser we had one strike against us before we came to bat owing to our damaged turret but our gunnery was superior to the Nips so that might even things up a bit. Admiral Hart agreed so we are to stay out here at least until we are relieved. Houston buried Marblehead dead with full mititary honors. The offical score is Marblehead dead--THirteen

Houston dead--Forty-eight
Houston wounded--Twenty-six
Feb.8

Dutch light Cruiser De Ruyter arrived. Made us feel pretty good when they cheered us as they went by. Marblehead to go to the States for repairs. De Ruyter underway again with her band playing "A Hunting We Will Go" Houston underway.

Feb.11

Entered Darwin in late P.M. and tied up to the dock where we are receiving provisions and fuel.

Feb.12

U.S. troops are being loaded on four transports. They are the 147th and 148th Field Artillery from Washington and Oregon. They are all out of cigarettes and that no-good supply officer of ours won't open the storeroom so our storekeepers can break out some cigarettes for the boys, so all the Navy men were throwing most of theirs up to them. It looks like we are to have another convoy job on our hands. We don't care for this job very much because it gets too monotonous. Left at sunset with one destroyer, two corvettes, and the four transports. The destroyer Perry is in the screening position and the two corvettes are on the beams.

Feb.14

Sighted an enemy four-engine flying boat and a message was sent to Darwin for some air support. A little later our air support arrived. It was one P-40 but who are we to complain. Gun 8 fired two rounds in the direction of the Nip plane so the P-40 would know where to find it. The P-40 streaked toward the Nip like a bullet and then turned around and headed for home (P.S. he never got there and was never heard from again). Seeing just one gun fire must have given the Nip some ideas that we did not have much shooting material and he started to make a

run on us coming in from Port. With his bomb load, his ceiling was only 12 or 13 thousand feet. As soon as he got in our gun range the four five-inch on the Port side opened up. We knew we were getting in close because we could see the plane being tossed about a bit from the concussion of the shells. As soon as he got in a bit closer our two Port-side pom-poms opened up and then he was in trouble. The plane was not very maneuverable so the pom-poms were stitching holes all over him. The plane got a bit worried then and turned off, dropping his load, which landed about 500 yards away from the ship, and grabbed some altitude. A few minutes later there was a big explosion and a splash near the horizon so we thought it was pretty safe to add him to our bag. Later as prisoners we were asked so many questions about that plane that Lt. Comdr. Galbraith figured that some big shot must have been aboard. If he was, he still is.

Feb. 15

After sunrise we sighted another of those four-engine boats. He stayed in sight but would not come into gun range. It got annoying after awhile because as long as he stayed there all hands had to stay on their gun stations and we had not had our breakfast yet. But we figured that before long we were going to catch a bit of hell and as usual we were right. At 1130 we sighted forty-five twin-engined bombers in the clouds and right behind them were twenty-seven flying boats. As usual they were in flights of nine planes each flight and we were the main target again, because if they could get rid of us they could work on the transports at their leisure. As soon as the attack started the transports shifted to a column formation and the leading transport started to lay a heavy screen of smoke so most of the time

we did not know if the transports had been hit or not. As each wave came in we opened up with everything but the saluting battery and managed to turn back a fair percentage of them but some of the flights managed to get through the stuff we were throwing up. While all this firing was going on we were running up and down the line of transports like a mother hen protecting her chicks. Our Skipper later claimed that it was probably the first time a ship ran after a bunch of planes and managed to catch some of them. We had one of our signelmen on the U.S.A.T. Meigsand according to his story the Captain of the Meigs ran from side to side of his bridge sying over and over, "look at that bastard, will you, I thought she'd leave us" He also said that from there it looked like a solid sheet of flame covered the whole flight deck and boat deck because of the continuous gun flashes. The last run made on us was made from three directions at once and was our first experiance with Pattern bombing and we did not like the looks of it at all. Ono group came in from the Port bow one group from the starboard beam and one group from the Port quarter. They all came in at once and we were pretty busy for a while. Christ himself must have been at the wheel because they dropped so many, so fast and so close that the transports couldn't see us for a while because of the sheets of water obscured us from their view. So the planes finally left but some of them did not go home. we were credited with seven for the day and ten more probables. In that forty-five minute raid, eight five inch guns expended over nine hundred rounds of ammunition which was an average of 112 rounds per gun. After the planes had left we took stock of our casualties and found that the only casualty was a Filipino seaman on one of the

transports who had been hit by a bomb splinter from a near miss. Our doctors prepared the operating room and the Houston lowered a whaleboat to pick up the wounded man from the transport. As the Houston approached the transports we were given quite an ovation by the troops. The boat picked up the man and upon returning was hoisted aboard. They rushed him down to the operating room and went to work on him but he died a few hours later.

Feb. 16

Reversed course and headed back to Darwin upon receipt of orders. We found out then that our destination had been Koepang, on the Island of ~~Timor~~ Timor where the troops were to reinforce Allied troops already there.

Feb. 18

Entered Darwin with our convoy still intact. Houston fueled and departed.

Feb. 19

Received word via radio that Darwin had been bombed to hell. The destroyer Peary had been sunk and of the four transports we had brought back yesterday two had been sunk, one was disabled, and one was beached in a sinking condition. There were quite a few of the soldiers killed, the airport was flattened, and the town was a smoking ruin which had to be evacuated by the civil population temporarily.

Feb. 21

Arrived in Tlapjap, Java. fueled and provisioned ship. As we were coming through the minefield on the way in, a Catalina flying boat came near us and dropped a depth charge near us. We thought he had dropped it on a sub and were a bit worried for a while as there was no room to maneuver in the minefield. However, it turned out that he had a hole in his wing about three feet in diameter and did not have much control over

his plane due to a run-in with a Nip ship. So he could not land with the depth charge still on the plane.

Feb.22

Departed from Tlapjap and headed for the eastern end of Java.

Feb.23

Entered Java Sea by way of Sundra Strits enroute to Soerabaja to join the striking force.

Feb.24

Entered Soerabaja during an air raid but the All Clear siren blew a few minutes later. Tied up to the feul dock where we are receiving feul. In the late P.M. the air raid sirens started to moan again so naturally we all went to our gun stations and were ~~xxx~~ surprised to see the crew of the Dutch cruiser which was tied up astern of us abandoning ship and running to the air raid shelters on the docks. Across the bay from us sits a merchant ship which was hit in one of yesterdays raids. She is loaded with rubber and it is burning like hell and the column of black smoke it is sending up can be seen for miles. It also helps the Nips to estimate the ground wind which doesn't help us any. The planes only came in our gun range a few times so we didn't do much firing. In the evening a Dutch minesweeper came out and tried to sink the merchant ship by gunfire but it didn't do any good so a bit later a torpedo boat came out and launched a torpedo which did no good either so they gave up and she still sits there burning.

Feb.25

Air raid sirens moaned again at 1105. The planes came over and dropped their stuff but our A.A. fire kept them pretty high so they missed us by a couple hundred yards. The only actual damage they done which was visable to us was a direct hit on a nice house. The bricks and lumber were scattered all over the joint.

Three air raids here today. There is a submarine anchored in midstream and we have noticed that every time there is an air ~~air~~ raid on she just submerges and stays there till the raid is over. Shifty, eh? Houston underway at dusk.

Feb. 26

Entered Soerabaja again at daylight and anchored in midstream right across from the still burning freighter. Three raids again today. We received orders from the Dutch not to fire over the city because of the danger to the inhabitants but what the hell, there is a war going on so anytime they came into range we opened up. Only two runs were made on us today but they weren't close enough to worry about. There were plenty of fish floating around when it was all over though. The concussion knocks them out and they float belly up on the surface until they come to and then swim away.

We are happy to welcome to our small force the H.M.S. Exeter (of Graf Spee fame) 8-inch cruiser, the H.M.A.S. Perth six inch cruiser, Three British destroyers, Jupiter, Electra, and Encounter, We also have the Dutch light cruisers Java, and De Ruyter (5.9 inch) and the Dutch destroyers Kortenaar and Witt de With. And of course we still have four of our faithful old four stackers, Ford, Alden, Pope and John D. Edwards.

Fleet underway at dusk. All hands at battle stations as we cleared the harbor. Fleet made an all night patrol along the coast of Madura Island looking for an enemy convoy which had been reported in the vicinity. Nothing was sighted, crews stayed at battle stations all night.

Feb. 27

Clouds very low this A.M. Some enemy planes started a run on us but were driven back by heavy A.A. fire. Bombs missed fleet,

we missed planes, so no one is out anything. In the morning we headed West toward Mandilika. At noon Admiral Doorman (in the De Ruyter) reported to Admiral Helfrich, "Personnel have now reached the point of exhaustion". In the afternoon, hoping to give us time for a brief rest, we headed for Soerabaja and entered the harbor at 1530 and were again met by the moans of the air raid sirens. Meanwhile a report was received that an enemy force consisting of about forty transports, two or three cruisers and twelve destroyers, with a strong covering force nearby had been sighted. Admiral Doorman in the De Ruyter signalled "Am proceeding to intercept enemy units. Details later. Follow me". We were hoping to get a bit of rest first but here we go again and it looks like the circus is about to start. The fleet reversed course and headed out the channel again. The two Dutch destroyers stepped out ahead to act as scouts. When those destroyers pour on the steam they can really step out and go. The stern squats down, the bow raises a bit, the water starts to churn and they're off.

The Admiral sent out "Prepare to meet the enemy, c/cNNE, c/s28 knots". The Dutch cans came back and reported the enemy to starboard. Our formation now went to full speed (33 knots).

As soon as we sighted the enemy our course was changed 45 degrees to Port to parallel the course of the Nip force. Our disposition now was one British destroyer leading the column, with the De Ruyter (Flagship), Exeter, Houston, Perth, Java, four U.S. destroyers, and one Dutch destroyer in column astern, one Dutch destroyer abeam of the Houston to Starboard, and the remaining two British cans on the disengaged, or Port side.

The formation speed of the Nip force was about 28 knots. The Houston having the longest range guns opened fire first. Our first

target was the leading ship in the Nip column. The opening range was 29,000 yards. It took us three salvos to get on the target (The gunnery Officer of the Perth claims our first target was a battleship, as does the C.S.M. of the Houston and the Capt. of the leading can). we thought it was a cruiser. After the third salvo our turrets were laying them right on the target and getting in some good hits. After 5 or 6 salvos (6-8 inch per salvo) our target pulled out of line to the disengaged side of the Nips' line smoking like hell. By this time the Exeter was also in range and had picked herself the (now) leading Nip and was doing pretty well. The Nips were also in range and were sending us messages of love which for a while were falling short. The Perth opened up with her sixes but was short, as were the 5.9's of the Dutch cruisers. However the range was continually decreasing and it did not take long before all the cruisers were in range of each other. The Houston had changed targets as soon as her first target had pulled out. We were firing at a rate of six salvos per minute which was a damn high rate but ~~high~~ hard on the gun crews.

Our opponents were the covering force previously mentioned and consisted of six cruisers, two battleships (Kongo or Ise class) and thirteen destroyers which made their force superior in numbers as well as in fire power.

On our second target the turrets laid in about a dozen salvos and got a hit on his midship turret. The black smoke towered upwards for hundreds of feet and he too pulled out of line.

The Nips had a Plane up now to furnish gunfire corrections but he stayed out of reach of our ack-ack. There was a continued rapid exchange of shots between the cruisers. All the time the Houston was weaving back and

forth. Moving in on the unders, next salvo would be over, so we'd move out to the over and the next would be would be another under. The Admiral sent a message to Capt. Rooks telling him to keep in formation, but we resumed our zig-zag tactics and didn't do so bad. The wonder of it all was that the Nips did not catch on to what we were doing.

By this time our first target had gotten her fires under control and resumed her position in the formation and began firing again. This was just before our second target retired. After our second target had retired we said good afternoon to target number one again. We were fortunately able to put him out of action again and later it was reported that a large ship was floating upside down so it was probably one of the two ships we had put out of action.

About this time the fight started to get dirty. The Dutch destroyer which had been on our Starboard beam had moved forward to a position about midway between the Exeter and Houston and was about 300 yards from our main line. She caught a torpedo amidships, rolled over, and broke in two with both the stern and the bow sticking straight up in the water. There were a few men standing upright on each piece and they had the guts to give us a "thumbs up" as we went by. Then both pieces sank very quickly. Not nice to see. Then some planes were sighted momentarily but were out of sight before they could be identified. Some ten minutes later huge geysers of water and explosions could be seen in the area where the transports had been reported. We knew then that the air force had shown up. Of course we realized that it was important to give the transports a bit of hell but we wished the planes would give the Nip battle line a few too, just to give the Nips something to think about and possibly make it a bit easier for us. (But they didn't).

The Nips started a destroyer attack which was driven back with the Perth possibly sinking one. The pom-poms are very handy for work like this. They just sweep things clean like a broom but it is a bit messy.

Admiral Yamamoto, in command of the Nip forces (as we found out while P.O.W.'s) had planned the action pretty well because we ran into a submarine trap and the torpedos were getting pretty thick. I looked over the side one time and saw that a torpedo had overtaken us from astern and was steaming right alongside of us. We were doing about thirty knots so the torpedo must have been doing about forty-five. It was only fifteen feet out from the side of the ship. Scared? Damn right I was scared,

By this time enemy gunfire had decreased considerably. An explosion took place on the rear enemy cruiser with a large column of smoke headed skyward. There were also other column of smoke on their rear ships indicating other hits.

At this time the British destroyer which had been on the disengaged side of the Perth moved up fast, dropped some depth charges and peices of a Nip sub flew up in the air. The can immediately turned hard to Starboard crossed the battle line between the Houston and Perth, came up abeam of us and about 250 yards out from our main line and fired a torpedo toward our bow and halfway between us another sub went up. That was two subs for Jupiter in 5 to 7 minutes which was pretty good work on her part. Torpedos were still pretty thick and the Exeter was hit by a salvo of 8-inch in her after engine room which killed fourteen men and slowed the Exeter down to twelve knots. Our force laid a smokescreen around the Exeter behind which she was able to retire and head back to Soerabaja, picking up survivors from the destroyer which had been torpedoed.

The Nips also laid a smokescreen and contact with them was lost for a little while. We came back to our original course and soon regained contact and the shells were again coming and going pretty fast. The Nip cans came out of the smoke toward us for what was apparently a torpedo attack with a couple of cruisers behind them for support. They were again driven back with the Java getting credit for the sinking of one can. One of our cruisers hit the leading Nip cruiser in the stern causing some damage.

The Nips still have that spotting plane up and he still stays out of range of our ack-ack. Half of our A.A. gun crews were secured in order to move ammunition from the still useless after turret to the forward turrets because they were getting low on ammunition. The two turrets had already expended over nine hundred rounds and the liners of the guns were sticking out beyond the muzzels of all six guns, two inches (which is very unusual).

The Nips drew back out of range and we steamed along just keeping them in sight. At about 2000 (it was pretty dark by this time), flares started dropping on our disengaged side which kept us silouetted for the enemy fleet. Apparently six or eight flares were tied together, dropped from planes and lit upon hitting the water. The flares were always dropped to parallel our course.

After the flare episode, enemy destroyers were observed on the Port bow of the De Ruyter so our course was changed to Starboard.

At about 2030 it was reported that torpedos were fired on the Port bow of the De Ruyter and the course was again changed. To Port this time.

Our U.S. destroyers left on what we thought was to be a night destroyer attack on the enemy transports but we later found out that they had to go into Soerabaja to refuel.

22

At 2130 while on a Westerly course we passed through crowds of swimming Nip soldiers. It must have been the area where our planes had attacked the transports. They looked like flies and were hanging onto life rafts, floating debris, or anything they could find that would keep them afloat. As we went by they were blowing whistles, shouting, and making a hell of a racket. If any of them got tangled up in our wake they didn't last long.

Our force now consisted of Encounter, De Ruyter, Perth, Houston, Java, and Jupiter in that order.

The Jupiter met up with a torpedo and signaled "Jupiter torpedoed"--Subtract one more from the weak side.

Sometime after 2300 two enemy cruisers were spotted and a few salvos were exchanged during which they received a few hits. They sent up some star shells which illuminated between us and obscured them from us and they shoved off.

Shortly after this exchange the Java was hit by a torpedo, there was a hell of an explosion. The entire after part of the ship seemed covered with flame and explosion followed explosion in rapid succession with each one sending a tower of flame and debris a hundred feet in the air while the old Java just rocked and bucked. She didn't last long after that. The worst thing a ship can get is a hit in the ~~magazines~~ magazines so we subtracted another one from the weak side. It seemed as though we were pretty lucky all afternoon but they were catching up to us now. We didn't think things could get much worse but just to show how wrong we could be, about five minutes after the Java caught her fish, The De Ruyter caught one too and it was just a ~~repetition~~ repetition of the Java only on a bigger scale. She also took her hit in the magazines and it was like a July Fourth celebration. The Perth had to swing sharply to Starboard or she would have collided with the poor

old De Ruyter, who had all the trouble she could take care of.

We realized then that if the invasion of Java was to be stopped somebody better send out some more help plenty fast.

So far we had lost the Java, De Ruyter, Jupiter, Electra, Kortenaar, with the Exeter damaged. We stayed at battle stations all night. The Captains of both ships decided that we had enough excitement for one day and it was time to go home anyway so we headed for Batavia and less dangerous areas.

Feb. 28

We pulled into Batavia at noon, tied up to the docks and started to feul but could not get nearly enough.

There was no activity in the dock area at all with the exception of twelve small tanks coming out of a shed near the quayside

One of our shipboard planes was out on a reco flight and long about the time he was expected back we spotted a plane we thought was ours. As it came by the end of the dock at an altitude of 250 feet a Dutch destroyer opened up with machine guns as did the ~~Per~~ Perth which was tied up on the other side of the pair from us. The Perth also had her pom-poms firing and as the plane banked over our bow we could see the fried eggs on the wings so our guns got busy too but everything happened so fast that we all missed what should have been an easy shot. The ~~x~~ trouble was that they have a shipboard plane which is an exact duplicate of ours, hence our delay. The Nip pulled away and shoved off but as he passed the tug which was serving as tender for the anti-submarine net he dropped two small bombs which missed by forty feet.

About fifteen minutes later our plane returned and unfortunately took approximately the same course the Nip plane had taken. Of course the Dutch can opened up with her guns again, then the Perth started. Fortunately they both missed

We again held our fire and this time we were right. Of course our pilot was surprised to see our forces firing at him but he went out to the middle of the bay, landed and taxied to the ship where he was hoisted aboard and things were satisfactorily explained to him.

On taking stock of our damages from yesterday's battle we found that we had been hit only twice. The first had gone through the fo'c'sle, down through the Warrent Officers quarters where it passed through Mac-hinest's Mays' pillow, down through the canteen storeroom and then out the side of the ship

Either it was a dud or the delayed action mechanism had delayed too long. The store-keeper who had that for a cleaning station was sure mad at those Nips.

Our other hit was aft and went through a fuel oil tank and then out the side of the ship. It, too, was an eight inch shell and failed to explode. Aside from these two hits, whose damage was negligible, we got out of it lucky. Not even a man hurt.

Perth and Houston underway. The dope had come out that we were headed for the 'States for reconditioning, leave, liberty, and recreation. Cleared harbor at sunset and headed for Sunda Straits, which lies between Java and Sumatra.

Condition 3 was set on the A.A. battery and being worn out from lack of sleep we slept on deck by our gun stations. The sound of gunfire woke us up and then our claxons started to moan, calling us to our gun stations. The firing had been from the Perth and the time was 2315. It was impossible to tell how many enemy ships were there but they had plenty because that was the first of their landings on Java and their position was not such that they could move around uncontested yet. Three heavy cruisers were hugging the shadow of the mountain but the only time

we could see them was when they fired a salvo at us. Some destroyers came in from the Starboard quarter but were driven off by the fire from our 5-inch, pom-poms and machine guns. The 5-inch blew the bridge off one destroyer after which she glided off into the night.

Then we caught a salvo in the after engine room which hit either the turbins or the main steam line. The hot steam cooked the entire engine room crew so fast that they never knew what happened to them. Not a single man got out of there.

There were two steam exhausts on the boat deck near the forward bulkhead and the hot steam came out of them in clouds and fogged the lenses of the after A.A. director so we could not see the target or use the machine. The ammunition ready boxes on the Boat Deck got so hot that we were expecting them to blow up and the gun crews couldn't get near them to remove the ammo.

One of the marines on gun 7 was heard to pray "Lord, I don't know much about praying but if you could get us out of this mess I'd sure appreciate it. Amen.

Then we were caught in the glare of three searchlights and every gun on the ship which could bear on them tried to put out the lights. They were all from Starboard and although we ~~succeeded~~ succeeded in putting out one of the lights another one was immediately put on us. Some of the 5-inch guns were already firing starshells because they had nothing else left.

We had a big fire blazing in the forward paint locker while another was burning the sick bay down and was so hot that no body could get near it. The marine compartment was in flames and we received a hit in the forward messing compartment which damaged the freezing apparatus in the soda stand and the fumes of the gas used for freezing (freon)

were so strong no one could get in there. A torpedo came in from starboard and ~~knock~~ hit us amidships knocking over the Starboard aircraft catapult as a result of the explosion. It fell inboard and succeeded in blocking the quarterdeck with wreckage.

Number two pom-pom received a direct hit which killed the entire crew on that gun while number four was busy cutting a torpedo boat in half after which it exploded.

The old "Galloping Ghost" was taking quite a beating this time. Another torpedo drove in from Starboard and hit us up forward and rocked us quite a bit. The old Houston started to list to ~~Port~~^{Starboard} and the bow was getting lower in the water.

There was a fire close to the five-inch magazines and they had to be flooded. All the 5-inch guns were firing starshells by this time and the turrets were very low on ammo.

The climax came when number two turret got a hit that tore through the faceplate and exploded in the gun chamber killing all but a few of the turret crew. At about this time the Perth went down, victim of ~~two torpedos~~ four torpedos. Capt. Rooks rushed down from the bridge to see how badly the turret was damaged and was hit by shrapnel which ~~the~~ tore his back apart. His last words were "Head for the nearest land. we've got to give the men a chance". The fire in the turret was spreading rapidly and the magazines were in danger of going up so they were flooded after the handling room crews were evacuated.

Some of the whose battle stations had been put out of commission and others who had no stations were busy getting liferafts ready to go over the side because it was evident

that the old ship couldn't last much longer.

The Brig was on fire and a shell had exploded in our bake shop killing a bunch of men who had been outside in the passageway

The bodies were stacked waist high in there I'm sure of that because I fell over them on my way through there. the 5-inch were not firing as fast now because the crews were a bit short handed, but the pom-poms that were still in commision were still going strong and the machine guns were still giving them hell and doing O.K.

The word was finally passed to Abandon Ship. the steering engine was out of commission and the ship was going in circles. then the word was passed to man our stations again. we picked up some of the men who had been hit pretty bad and put them in the motor whaleboat and cut the lashings on the boat in hopes that when the ship went down the boat would remain afloat thereby giving the wounded men a chance.

The word was passed again to Abandon Ship and the call was blown on the bugle. One last look about then over the side I went. water was already ankle deep on the Starboard side of the quarterdeck. Another torpedo hit on the starboard side forward. Some of the Chinese Officers Cooks had to be driven off the ship at the point of a gun. They did a fine job but were afraid of the water.

We floated there in the water and watched some of our men still on the ship still firing at the Nips as the ship glided off with the searchlights still on her and the nips still shooting at the old girl.

finally the stern lifted up high and she slid down so smoothly it surprised us all.

so we ~~we~~ turned around and struck out for a life raft about a quarter of a mile away. nip shells were still striking the water and exploding which caused a feeling similar to stomach cramps which caused us to double up and they hurt like hell in the guts.

we reached the raft with Java still $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles away. I had been on the raft for about

two hours and most of the men wanted to stop and rest. I couldn't see any use in that and was in a hurry to get out of there so Atterbury and I left the raft and struck out for the beach. "Tex" Austin later decided to go along but we knew nothing about it at the time. He was never seen or heard of again. We swam on and were constantly carried in different directions as we hit first one current and then another. Three times we heard planes flying around and also heard machine gun fire so our first thought was that the yellow bastards were shooting our men in the water (which they might have been doing).

Sometime during the night three invasion barges full of troops passed us so close we could hear them talking. Each time they passed us we stopped and kept very still so they would not get us. Our intention was to get to the beach as quickly as possible, go to Batavia and get a boat by hook or by crook and get out of there fast. At sunrise we were still about a mile and a half from the beach and saw a line of Nip transports headed in our direction so we swam with renewed vigor (which wasn't much). Soon the ten transports passed about 300 yards from us. We could see the Nip soldiers pointing at us and laughing at us. Luckily none of them thought of taking a shot at us. We also noticed that the guns mounted on the ships were only lengths of pipe secured to blocks of wood.

We got going again, still hoping to make the beach before they spread out too much and cut us off. About an hour later a landing barge flying the Geneva Cross approached us with a Nip sargent in the bow. He had a pistol pointed at my head and it looked about as big as a five inch at least. I put my hands over my head and told Atterbury to do likewise. I have heard about these dead heroes but couldn't see myself in that role. The

boat stopped alongside and I reached up to pull myself ~~xxx~~ aboard but found that although I had felt strong up to that time I did not have enough strength left in my arms to pull myself up so the Nip reached down and grabbed me by the seat of the pants and pulled me in. Then he did the same for Atterbury. We were each given a cigarette and a drink of cold tea which made me feel a lot better

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For the first time I realized that I had passed through an oil slick. I had oil in my hair, my ears, eyes, and mouth. Then my eyes commenced to burn and I could find no relief. We were brought to the beach where some of our other survivors were already collected. By asking questions around we found that pulled up on the beach were a large aircraft carrier, burned and laying on its' side and still smoking, one hospital ship burned and lying on its' side (she had no business being there anyway so they can't blame us for that anyway), one destroyer beached, four transports beached. They had evidently been hit pretty bad and were run up on the beach so their gear could be salvaged. We had also seen one tanker burning out there last night but we did not know if that was a Nip or not. It is also safe to assume that some of our victims sank before they could get to the beach.

Last night's battle had lasted an hour and twenty minutes. Atterbury and I had been swimming for about ten hours and when we were picked up we were about a quarter of a mile off the beach and had swam about seven and a quarter miles.

Of the Houston's crew of eleven hundred men we were only able to locate three hundred and sixty-five. ~~Eighty~~ Approximately sixty of these died as P.O.W.s.

AMEN.

In the middle of April, 1942, after we had been moved to Batavia as prisoners, all the Officers, Cheifs, and Petty Officers got together and reconstructed the wartime log of the Houston so there would be an accurate record of our cruise available for the Navy Department. All through forty-two months of Prison life all our gear was searched on an average of once a week. The Nips never did get a copy, but this is ~~the only copy~~ which ^{was} brought back to Gods country. In India, ~~it was turned in to~~ it was turned into the Naval Liason Officer He had a copy made and the original was returned to me from which this copy has been made.

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