

DESTROYER DIVISION FIFTEEN
U.S.S. LANG, Flagship.

FB4-15/A16-3/clh
Serial 005

C/o Fleet Post Office;
San Francisco, Calif.,
12 August 1943.

~~SECRET~~
~~DECLASSIFIED~~

From: The Commander Destroyer Division FIFTEEN.
To : The Commander-in-Chief, FIRST Fleet.

Via : (1) The Commander Task Group THIRTY-ONE POINT TWO.
(2) The Commander Task Force THIRTY-ONE.
(3) The Commander THIRD Fleet.

Subject: Action Report for Night of 6-7 August 1943.

References: (a) PacFlt Conf. Ltrs. No. 24CL-42 and 36CL-42.
(b) U. S. Navy Regulations, 1920, Articles 712,
874(6) and 948.

Enclosure: (A) Narrative.

1. In compliance with references (a) and (b) enclosure (A) is submitted herewith. For Track Chart see U.S.S. LANG's report.

2. This well planned and executed torpedo and gun action was in accordance with Navy Tradition. The enemy stunned by a sudden blow was destroyed before it could recover. All hands are deserving of credit. Of the many deserving cases it is hoped that those selected as outstanding will be fully recognized by higher authority.

RODGER W. SIMPSON

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(Enclosure (B))

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COMMANDER DESTROYER DIVISION FIFTEEN'S NARRATIVE
REPORT OF THE BATTLE IN VELLA GULF NIGHT OF 6-7 AUGUST 1943

1. CONTENTS ON AND SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING EVENTS - ALL TIMES MINUS ELEVEN:

In accordance with directives of Commander Task Force THIRTY-ONE, six destroyers of CTG-31.2 departed Guadalcanal area about noon 6 August for a sweep of Vella Gulf with orders to destroy any enemy cruisers, destroyers, or landing barges encountered.

The Task Group entered Vella Gulf by way of Gizo Strait at 2230 and began a careful search of Gizo Island and then Kolombangara, in a counter clockwise direction looking for landing barges. Careful radar search of the Gulf for bigger game was maintained. At 2335 radar contact was made with a group of four vessels standing down the center of the Gulf at 25-27 knots. Division A-1 was leading with Division A-2, 4,000 yards on starboard quarter. Division A-1 turned and headed for the contact. When at a range of about 4,000 yards Division A-1 fired a full broadside of eight torpedoes per ship then executed a Turn Nine and retired. Division A-2 went column left prepared to support Division A-1 by attack with guns or torpedoes. When the torpedoes from Division A-1 arrived and showed four ships apparently hit, Division A-2 opened fire with guns, keeping the enemy on fire. The enemy ships were either dead in the water or moving slowly due to the torpedo attack and three of these recognized as destroyers were sunk by gunfire. A Japanese cruiser burned furiously, but did not sink. Division A-2 finally fired torpedoes at this cruiser which sank her and ended the battle.

Attempts by Division A-2 to pick up survivors were unsuccessful and the Task Group departed for a fast run down the Slot.

The possibility of additional enemy units exists. Many observers stoutly maintain they saw ships destroyed by Division A-2 and STACK torpedo attacks. The three destroyers sunk by gunfire and the burning cruiser sunk by torpedoes of Division A-2 are certain. No enemy units escaped and all sank.

2. PRELIMINARY EVENTS:

On August 5 Commander Calvert, (ComITBBase #2) with members of his Command met with CTG-31.2 (ComDiv A-1) and ComDiv A-2, and explained Motor Torpedo Boat Operations in Vella Gulf. Every detail of their experiences was related as well as Japanese actions there. That evening orders for Task Group 31.2 to make a sweep of the Gulf the following night were received. The two Division Commanders had breakfast together and discussed the entire operation from every angle. A mutual understanding as to the action of each in event of any type of contact was reached. Division A-1 had two ships with sixteen torpedoes and one ship with twelve. Division A-2 had but eight torpedoes per ship, but also

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a 40 mm battery. Destruction of Landing Barges appeared the most probable type of action with a possibility of a fast force of destroyers or cruisers to be expected. A sweep of the Gulf, close to the shore, was selected as most logical. Division A-2 was placed 4,000 yards bearing 150° True from Division A-1. This permitted the latter with its large number of torpedoes to be nearest any big ships entering the Gulf from the North and placed Division A-2 close inshore where it could use its 40 mm as well as its 5"/38 against barges. This also permitted better use of radar in event of contact with heavier units. The Battle Plan was then written. At 0930 a conference of Commanding Officers was held and the entire plan explained to them. This also permitted further review of the situation by the Division Commanders.

The Task Group formed in the vicinity of Savo Island and took course West of Russells and Rendova to enter Vella Gulf by Gizo Channel. The Task Group was organized as follows:

CTG-31.2 COMMANDER MOOSBRUGGER

<u>DIV A-1</u>	(MOOSBRUGGER)	<u>DIV A-2</u>	(SIMPSON)
DUNLAP	(IVERSON)	LANG	(WILFONG)
CRAVEN	(WILLIAMSON)	STERETT	(GOULD)
MAURY	(SIMS)	STACK	(NEWTON)

In accordance with the Battle Plan the Task Group arrived at Point Option, Lat. 8-03; Long. 156-41, at 2210, slowed to 15 knots and began a careful search for enemy craft. Upon traversing Gizo Strait Division A-2 took station 150° True, distance 4,000 yards from Division A-1. The Task Group then turned Southeast, searched Gizo Island and Brackett Strait, then turned North to carefully check the West Coast of Kolombangara. At 2320 course 030, speed 25 was executed. At 2335 ComDiv A-1 reported three contacts bearing 350° T., 19,000 yards.

Six BlackCats were assigned to CTG-31.2, operating in two groups of three each. One group on station at a time. Contact with either group was never established.

About 1730 a delayed plane contact report was received "Fast Fleet 4-50 South Latitude 154-40 East Longitude, course 190, speed 15". Estimated that this force could reach Vella Gulf by direct route about midnight if they made 21 knots.

Wind from Southeast, force two --- Many rain squalls---
Overcast---ceiling 4,000 feet---
Sea calm
Visibility 3,000 yards
Moonset 2225.

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3. CHRONOLOGICAL LOG OF BATTLE:

- NOTE: The Division Commander, Division A-2 had a view of the PPI scope of the SG radar from the Pilot House and checked the general situation at least once each minute.
- 2335 CTG-31.2 announced over TBS contact bearing 350° True, distance 19,000 yards. This contact was verified over TBS by CRAVEN. Shortly thereafter came report that targets had developed into four and making speed 26 and on course 180° True.
- 2339 CTG-31.2 directed Division A-1 to take course 335° and prepare to fire torpedoes. Division A-2 turned by column movement to follow Division A-1. ComDiv A-2 asked CTG-31.2 if he was going to cross over (such a move was indicated in the Battle Plan). The reply was negative. Division A-2 changed course to 270° . CTG-31.2 directed his division to fire eight torpedoes to port.
- 2342 Division A-1 fired torpedoes. Division A-1 executed ships right 90° . Division A-2 changed course to 190° .
- 2346 Torpedoes fired by Division A-1 began hitting the enemy. About six explosions were seen on four targets. Division A-2 changed course to 230° . A large fire spreading over considerable area developed in the center of the explosions. LANG was directed to open fire. As the situation cleared, LANG was directed to search and fire on the first ship to the left of the flames. A target was picked up by FD radar and LANG opened fire. An early hit illuminated the target. STERETT and STACK joined without signal in accordance with Division Doctrine. Under the pounding of all three ships the target turned over and sank. It was a destroyer. Division A-2 changed course to 270° during this firing. STACK believing she saw a large ship in the flame area fired four torpedoes (a target of opportunity). Explosions were seen, but the results were obscured by the fire. (Not confirmed by radar).
- 2354 Check of the PPI scope showed only two pips. The ComDiv A-2 believing there were four enemy units originally assumed one ship must have been sunk by torpedoes. LANG was directed to search right and left of burning area with FD radar, but with no results. It was then directed to fire on any target in burning area. A few salvos were fired which increased the burning.
- 2356 Division A-2 changed course to 090° . As the division turned to the new course gun flashes were seen to the right of the burning area, firing toward Division A-2.

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Division A-1 began shooting at these flashes. Division A-2 joined the firing. Tracers began going back and forth for a few seconds, but this ship was smothered and sank under the pounding of the two divisions. It was literally torn to pieces.

- 0001 Only one enemy pip remained on PFI scope. Sweep of entire area with SG and FD radars showed one target, the blazing cruiser.
- 0003 TBS reports were received of possible shore battery firing from Kolombangara. ComDiv A-2 had intended changing course to N.E., but on receipt of these reports revised his plans and ordered a course change to 270°. When completed, course was changed to 300°. TBS changes of course by Division A-1 which had been moving West left doubt as to their intention. PFI scope showed them beyond target and to North. Division A-2 changed course to 000° to close the range and to see where Division A-1 was going.
- 0012 ComDiv A-2 requested of CTG-31.2 his intentions - stating that Division A-2 was going to sink the cruiser by torpedoes and wanted the range to Northwest clear. Division A-2 took course 050° preparatory to firing torpedoes. CTG-31.2 ordered his division to take course 090°. There was but one enemy pip on PFI scope at this time. The cruiser was clearly seen visually.
- 0018 When about ready to fire torpedoes at the cruiser an apparently undamaged destroyer backed clear of the flames. This was not shown on the radar scope. This destroyer had possibly been attempting to take survivors off the cruiser. Division A-2 immediately opened fire on this vessel. The range was under 5,000 yards. All three ships began hitting. An early salvo from the STEWART, hitting aft, struck her magazine causing a terrific explosion. The vessel went down stern first, the bow rising to a vertical position. There was still one pip on the PFI scope.
- 0021 Division A-1 being well clear, ComDiv A-2 directed his division to fire two torpedoes per ship, broadside fire to port at the burning cruiser in sight visually. Three violent explosions resulted. When the explosions subsided the PFI scope showed no enemy vessels. The cruiser could not be seen. Burning oil continued for the next hour and a half.

0030

Division A-2 maneuvered to join Division A-1. Both divisions turned toward burning oil, for a close look. The area was carefully searched by radar and visual means. Division A-2 ran through many groups of rafts, debris, etc., with large groups of yelling men on them and in the water. The divisions turned N.E. and started to leave the area. At 0120 CTG-31.2 directed Division A-2 to return and attempt to pick up prisoners. At 0200 the attempts to get survivors aboard having proved futile Division A-2 departed Vella Gulf at 30 knots to rejoin the Task Group Commander.

4. SPECIAL COMMENT ON ENEMY FORCES:

The cruiser had three stacks, even lines, heavy mainmast structure and high turret aft.

The destroyers had no torpedo tube well forward of the bridge, twin gun mounts, two stacks, tripod foremast.

The complete surprise of the torpedo attack and the large oil fire started on the cruiser apparently disorganized the enemy. One destroyer apparently went alongside the cruiser to rescue personnel, while another was taken under gun fire immediately and sunk. After several minutes one destroyer did attempt gun fire and probably fired torpedoes, but it was smothered in gun fire and sank. The last destroyer when backing clear of the cruiser was seen by Division A-2 and destroyed by gun fire.

The cruiser was hit by torpedoes in her oil tanks. The large red flame and heavy black smoke was definitely an oil fire. Each time the flames subsided gun fire built them up again. Explosions at various times would indicate powder also being set off, but it required more torpedoes to sink her.

The enemy was in column when first observed on course 180°, speed 25 to 27 knots. Zig-zag of some form was plotted. There were no maneuvers, no radio traffic observed, and no visual signals seen. They were so badly hit by the torpedo attack that they appeared to be in complete confusion from then on.

The large numbers of men on rafts and men and debris etc., seen in the water would definitely indicate that the force was carrying large quantities of supplies and troops.

5. SPECIAL COMMENT ON OWN FORCES:

The torpedo attack by Division A-1 was superb. Division A-2 in accordance with plan turned to support the attack and to follow with guns or torpedoes as the situation indicated. The explosion from the torpedo attack showed clearly the battle was won. To insure the complete destruction of the enemy was all that remained. The cruiser was burning badly and it seemed only a matter of time until she would explode and sink. To sink the destroyers before they could recover and fire guns or torpedoes

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appeared the first problem. To this end radar search for them was instituted. LANG picked up one to the left of the flames and an early hit caused a bright yellow glow. All ships of Division A-2 saw this and the ship was turned over and sank under a heavy concentration. The second destroyer was seen when it attempted to fire on Division A-2. Nearly all ships jumped her and she was torn to pieces. The third, when seen, suffered a like fate. A salvo from the STERETT blew up her magazine and the ship sank stern first in a few seconds.

All destroyers took turns keeping the raging fire going on the cruiser. When after thirty minutes she refused to blow up, she was sunk with torpedoes.

The gunnery was excellent. Nearly all ships used radar control and early hits were observed in almost all cases. There were minor troubles on some ships, but they were quickly corrected. The firing was slow and deliberate. Salvos got on and stayed on.

The flashless powder is excellent. There is practically no blinding effect.

From the results obtained, a better torpedo performance could not be expected. The magnetic feature had been made inoperative in all torpedoes of Division A-2.

The Commander Task Group 31.2 had so disposed his forces close to the shore that in the event of contact with heavy units he would have free use of radar, while denying this advantage to the enemy.

By continually checking with the SG radar the Division Commander could see the disposition of forces at all times and maneuvered accordingly. Coordination at night has been made possible by radar. PPI scope repeaters should be installed in the Pilot House of all ships.

6. COMMENDATIONS WHERE MERITED:

In separate correspondence Commander Division A-2 has recommended the following:-

NAVY CROSS:

Commander John Lester Wilfong, U.S. Navy, Commanding U.S.S. LANG.
Lieutenant Commander Roy Arthur Newton, U. S. Navy, Commanding U.S.S. STACK.
Lieutenant Commander Frank G. Gould, U.S. Navy, Commanding U.S.S. STERETT.

SILVER STAR MEDAL:

Lieutenant Pemberton Southard, U. S. Navy, Executive Officer, U.S.S. LANG.

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LEGION OF MERIT, DEGREE OF LEGIONNAIRE

BLAKELY, Silas Marx, 375-64-11; Chief Signaller,
Acting Appointment, U. S. Navy, Flag Allowance,
Commander Destroyer Division FIFTEEN.

These recommendations are in addition to those made by the individual Commanding Officers of Division A-2.

No damage was sustained by any of the attacking ships. The stunning and decisive blows inflicted on the enemy in the original torpedo attack and followed by a relentless gun action merits the best tradition of the service.

7. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. ComDiv A-2 looking back feels that he is perhaps open to criticism in at least two instances:-

(1) The cruiser should have been torpedoed earlier. At the time, however, it did not appear that she could long survive the fire raging her entire length.

(2) When the survivors refused to be rescued, ComDiv A-2 should have destroyed them with depth charges.

B. The CIC as now used in destroyers requires the services of too many officers. At present destroyers have 50% to 75% extra officers under training, but as they go to New Construction this necessary activity will suffer. Three to five officers are now stationed in CIC at General Quarters. It is the most unimportant activity on the ship. It is strongly recommended that destroyer complements be increased by one quartermaster first class, two quartermasters second class, and two quartermasters third class. Quartermasters are admirably suited for this work involving practicable navigation and tracking.

C. From previous experiences and proper planning the destroyers were at all times prior to the engagement close to shore. This permitted excellent use of their radars and at the same time hampered the use of radar by the enemy.

D. The complete understanding of all possible situations to be encountered by the Division Commanders and Commanding Officers is largely responsible for the success achieved. Each knew what he was supposed to do and capably carried it out. It is strongly recommended that destroyers be operated as division units instead of single ships whenever possible. The three ships of Division A-2 are regularly assigned to Destroyer Division FIFTEEN. The Division Commander is very proud of their first action as a unit.

VELLA GULF

FIRING AND
SURVIVOR AREA

USS. LANG 399

TRACK CHART

NIGHT AUG. 6-7, 1943

↑
NORTH

SCALE 1" = 2 mi

2227

156-50 E

156-55 E

8-00 S

7-50 S

7-55 S

157-00 E

KOLOMBANGARA

VANGA PT

TOMBULU

VANGA VANGA

2259

GIZO
ISLAND

9

UNITED STATES FLEET
HEADQUARTERS OF THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF
NAVY DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, D. C.

SECRET MEMORANDUM

Subject: Distribution of ComDesDiv 15, Serial 006 of 16 August 1943. (Subject: Action report of Surface Engagements in Vella Gulf night of 9-10 August 1943.)

CominCh
(F-105; F-48(2); F-30)
VOpNav
(Op-02; Op-16; Op-20; Op-20-G;
Op-23)

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ComTask Force 22
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Serial 006

C/o Fleet Post Office,
San Francisco, Calif.,
16 August 1943.

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S-E-C-R-E-T

From: The Commander Destroyer Division FIFTEEN.
To : The Commander-in-Chief, FIRST Fleet.
Via : (1) Commander Task Group THIRTY-ONE POINT TWO.
(2) Commander Task Force THIRTY-ONE.
(3) Commander THIRD Fleet.
Subject: Action report of surface engagements in Vella
Gulf night of 9-10 August 1943.
References: (a) Pacific Fleet Conf. ltrs. No. 24CL-42 and
No. 36CL-42.
(b) U.S. Navy Regulations 1920, articles 712
and 874(6).
Enclosure: (A) Narrative.

1. In compliance with references (a) and (b),
enclosure (A) is herewith submitted. For Track Chart see
U.S.S. LANG's report. - *m-serial 53808*

2. There were no individual instances deserving
praise or censure. The U.S.S. LANG, U.S.S. STERETT, and
U.S.S. WILSON conducted themselves in a very creditable
manner.

RODGER W. SIMPSON

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1. CominCh ✓
2. CinCFirstFleet

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2. ComThirdFleet
3. ComTaskFor 31
4. ComTaskGroup 31.2
5. ComAirSoPac
6. ComDesPac
7. RepComDesPacSoPac
8. ComTaskFor 38
9. War Diary, copy attached to.
10. File.



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DESTROYER DIVISION FIFTEEN
U.S.S. LANG, Flagship.

COMMANDER DESTROYER DIVISION FIFTEEN'S NARRATIVE
OF ENGAGEMENTS IN VELLA GULF NIGHT OF 9-10 AUGUST 1943

1. COMMENTS ON AND SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING EVENTS -
ALL TIMES MINUS ELEVEN:

In accordance with directives of Commander Task Force THIRTY-ONE, Task Group THIRTY-ONE POINT TWO made a sweep of Vella Gulf on the night of 9-10 August 1943, with orders to destroy any enemy forces encountered.

The Task Group entered Vella Gulf at 2300 by Gizo Strait. At 2320 contact with one barge was made, but passed. Search of Gizo Island, Brackett Strait was negative, and the Task Group went up the West Coast of Kolombangara. At 0015 contact was made with three or more barges. Division A-2 damaged all, sinking at least two. The Task Group then steamed over to Vella Lavella and searched that area. At 0116 made contact with a large barge and sank it. The Task Group then returned to the West Coast of Kolombangara. At 0149 contact was made with another barge which was sunk. Task Group then headed for Gizo Strait and went through it at 0248.

2. PRELIMINARY EVENTS:

The two Division Commanders held a short conference prior to departure. It was agreed that Battle Plan used on night of 6-7 August 1943, would be followed. On that night the Task Group was nearly out of Vella Gulf when the enemy contact was made. It appeared probable that the Japanese thought we had come up the Slot that night.

The Task Group formed in the vicinity of Savo Island and took course West of Russells and Rendova to Gizo Strait. The Task Group was organized as follows:

Task Group 31.2, Commander F. Moosbrugger, U.S.N., in command:

DIVISION A-1:-Commander F. Moosbrugger, USN;

USS DUNLAP (F), Lieut-Comdr. C. Iverson, USN;

USS CRAVEN, Lieut-Comdr. F.T. Williamson, USN, and

USS GRIDLEY, Lieut-Comdr. J.E. Kotes, USN.

DIVISION A-2:-Commander Rodger W. Simpson, USN;

USS LANG (F), Commander J.L. Wilcox, USN;

USS STREETT, Lieut-Comdr. F.G. Gould, USN, and

USS WILSON, Lieut-Comdr. W.E. Price, USN.