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**ACTION REPORT**

COMMANDER DESTROYER DIVISION 12

SERIAL 10

AUGUST 16, 1943

ACTION REPORT FOR NIGHT OF AUGUST 6 - 7,  
1943.- BATTLE OF VELLA GULF.

54090

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FB12/A16-3  
Serial (10)

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August 16, 1943

From: Commander Destroyer Division TWELVE.  
(CTG 31.2)  
To : The Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific  
Fleet.  
Via : (1) The Commander Task Force THIRTY-ONE.  
(2) The Commander Third Fleet.  
Subject: Action Report for Night of August 6-7,  
1943 - Battle of Vella Gulf.  
Reference: (a) PacFlt Conf. Ltr. 24CL-42.  
(b) U.S. Navy Regulations, Articles  
712, 874(b), and 948.  
Enclosure: (A) ComTaskForce 31 desp. 050814 of  
August 1943, p. 2.  
(B) Battle Plan, p. 3.  
(C) Narrative, p. 6.  
(D) Track Chart, p. 20.

1. In compliance with references, enclosures  
are forwarded herewith.

Frederick MOOSBRUGGER.

Advance Copy to:

Cominch.  
CincPac.

Copy to: ComThird Fleet  
Cincpac  
ComTaskForce 31  
Comdespac  
RepComDesPac.

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EX 11C DATE 8-2-63

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AUG 050814

PRIORITY

COMDR MOOSBRUGGER IN DUNLAP WITH DIVISION ABLE ONE  
AND ABLE TWO LESS GRIDLEY AND WILSON DEPART TULAGI AT  
TWELVE THIRTY SIXTH AND PROCEED VELLA GULF VIA  
ROUTE SOUTH OF RUSSELLS AND RENDOVA ISLAND

TO ARRIVE GIZO STRAIT AT TWENTY TWO HUNDRED SAME  
DATE X MAKE SWEEPS OF VELLA GULF X AVOID MINEFIELDS  
ON LINE VANGAVANGA TO MAKUTI ISLAND X IF NO ENEMY  
CONTACT IS MADE BY ZERO TWO HOURS SEVENTH

RETURN DOWN SLOT AT MAXIMUM SPEED TO PURVIS

WARFIELDS PETER TARES WILL REMAIN IN PORT X KELLYS  
PT BOATS WILL OPERATE IN SOUTHERN KULA GULF X ALL  
TIMES LOVE X COM AIR SOLS REQUESTED TO FURNISH BLACK

CAT SCOUTS AND FIGHTER COVER SIXTH AS PRACTICABLE AND  
DAWN SEVENTH X STERRETT ACKNOWLEDGE X CTG 31.3 PASS  
TO PAWNEE AND RAIL FOR INFO.

AUG 5/43/GBA

CTF 31

CTG 31.2/TG 31.2/STERRETT  
COMAIRSOLS

COM SOPAC/ALL TFC  
SOPAC/TF 31 (CLASS 3)/

MAINYARD ADEES/CNB  
TULAGI

③

ENCLOSURE (A)

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BATTLE PLAN

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1. ORGANIZATION -

Div. A-1 (CDD-12)  
(MOOSBRUGGER)

Div. A-2 (CDD-15)  
(SIMPSON)

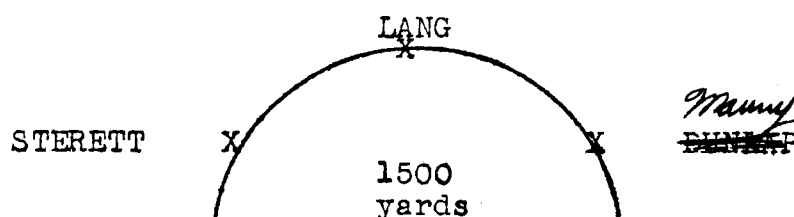
DUNLAP (IVERSON)  
CRAVEN (WILLIAMSON)  
MAURY (SIMS)

LANG (WILFONG)  
STERETT (GOULD)  
SIACK (NEWTON)

Distance 500 yards.

2. Underway at 1130 August 6, 1943. Arrive off GIZO STRAIT Point OPTION 8°03' Latitude, 156°41' Longitude at 2200 and conduct sweeps VELLA GULF for enemy destroyers, submarines, and small craft, destroying same.
3. Indications that Japs intend reenforce VILA, using destroyers. Zero time landing Midnight Sixth. It is possible that an enemy cruiser may be present. There is also some barge traffic between VELLA and KOLOMBANGARA.
4. All surface contacts encountered in VELLA GULF are enemy. Own PT boats will not operate in VELLA GULF tonight.
5. Own PT boats will operate in Southern KULA GULF, retiring, if necessary, to LEVER HARBOR, keeping close to shore. ARC 28 will be in LEVERS HARBOR, guarding 3785 - also PTs. Kelly's PT's voice call "SPRUCE".
6. PAWNEE and RAIL available for towing. If required, request ComTaskForce 31, Info 31.3 and PAWNEE and RAIL. PAWNEE will leave RUSSELLS 1800 6th for point five miles South of Point Pleasant. RAIL will be North Matui at Midnight.
7. We will search VELLA GULF for Japanese destroyers and troop carrying barges, engaging and destroying same. Primary target destroyers; secondary barges. If barges encountered at same time as destroyers, avoid contact with barges so as not to disclose our position to enemy destroyers. If no contacts have been made with DDs by black cats or otherwise, destroy barges.

During daylight, take special AA formation.



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8. Courses will be changed at approximately the following times:-

COLUMN THRU GIZO AT 15 KNOTS

About 2200 at POINT OPTION slow to 15 knots column

When SIMPSONs abeam LIAPARI "~~Div Form.~~ Form 150 ~~DIV~~"

<sup>34</sup>  
At ~~34~~ minutes after passing OPTION, Div Corpen 124.

<sup>62</sup>  
At ~~62~~ minutes after passing OPTION, Div 000 Corpen.

<sup>87</sup>  
At ~~87~~ minutes after passing OPTION, Div Corpen 030. Speed 25.

<sup>123</sup>  
At ~~123~~ minutes after passing OPTION, ~~Div 270~~ Corpen.

<sup>143</sup>  
At ~~143~~ minutes after passing OPTION, Corpen 200. ~~Div Form 330.~~

<sup>181</sup>  
At ~~181~~ minutes after passing OPTION, Div. 124 Corpen. Speed 15.

<sup>213</sup>  
At ~~213~~ minutes after passing OPTION, Div. Corpen 000.

<sup>240</sup>  
At ~~240~~ minutes after passing OPTION, Div. Corpen 030.  
Speed 27 knots.

Division A-2 will take station as indicated above not more than 4000.

9. Division A-2 will take station bearing 150° from Division A-1 and maintain this approximate station during sweeps. In case of enemy contacts with destroyers or larger, Division A-1 will approach for torpedo attack. Approach will be made towards point 300, distance 6,000 yards on enemy's bow, making radical changes of course on way in. When at the 11,000-10,000 yards, Division may make radical change of course by either turn or column movement in the expectation that the enemy will fire torpedoes at about 10,000 yards, and we may be able to draw their torpedo fire by such a feint. There will be radical changes of course on approach.

Division A-1 will be prepared to fire 4, 8, 12, or 16 torpedoes as ordered, depending upon the size and composition of the force encountered. This does not restrict Commanding Officers from firing at targets of opportunity on own initiative. After torpedoes hit, plan to open gun fire.

10. Division A-2 will support Division A-1 during its approach, remaining at most effective gun range and clear of Division A-1. If enemy opens fire on Division A-1, Division A-2 will open fire on enemy to distract them. Division A-2 be prepared to support with torpedoes if enemy force is a large one.

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13. In case good sound contact is made ship making contact remain with it.
14. In case of air attack, flares, or bandits at night do not open fire until attacked.
15. Use intermediate torpedo speed. Depth settings 5' and 9' (Destroyer Targets).
16. Obtain ammunition, fuel, etc. at TULAGI.
17. Man following circuits:

NPM

TBS

3785 - night

6050 - day

3000 or 2902

4205 - DUNLAP and LANG. Others on Lotes.

18. Black Cat call \_\_\_\_\_ frequency \_\_\_\_\_  
Fighter call \_\_\_\_\_ frequency \_\_\_\_\_
19. Rebroadcast important data from Black Cat over TBS.
20. Standby TBS frequency at night will be black cat frequency - In daytime it will be fighter director frequency.

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I. COMMENTS AND SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING EVENTS

During the period between 2340 August 6, 1943 (zone minus eleven time) and 0027 August 7, 1943, in VELLA GULF, Task Group 31.2 continuously engaged and destroyed a Japanese force of four ships estimated to be a cruiser and three destroyers.

No damage and no casualties were suffered by our force.

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Task Group 31.2 was organized as follows:

Commander Task Group 31.2 - Commander F. Moosbrugger, USN

DIV. A-1 (Cdr. F. Moosbrugger)	DIV. A-2 (Cdr. R.W. Simpson)
USS DUNLAP (Lt. Cdr. C. IVERSON)	USS LANG (Cdr. J.L. WILFONG)
USS CRAVEN (Lt. Cdr. F.T. WILLIAMSON)	USS STERRETT (Lt. Cdr. F.G. GOULD)
USS MAURY (Cdr. G.L. SIMS)	USS STACK (Lt. Cdr. R.A. NEWTON)

II. PRELIMINARY EVENTS

On August 4, 1943 CTG 31.2 reported to headquarters of CTF 31 on Guadalcanal, having relieved the night before. While at headquarters it was learned that CTF 31 was desirous of sweeping VELLA GULF with two destroyers and a number of motor torpedo boats. Conversation with Captain Doyle, Senior Member of Staff CTF 31, and motor torpedo boat representatives dealt with Japanese activities in the VELLA GULF area. As a result of this conversation a conference was scheduled to be held on board the DUNLAP at Purvis Bay on August 5th to make plans for the proposed operation. CTG 31.2 sent a signal to CDD-15, second in command of CTG 31.2, inviting him to attend the conference. Attending were Commander F. Moosbrugger, USN (CTG 31.2), Commander R.W. Simpson (Commander Destroyer Division A-2), Commander R.W. Culvert, USN (ComMTB Flotilla One), Lieutenant Commander H. Farrow, USN (MTB Squadron Comdr) and Lieutenant McClure (Intelligence Officer MTB Flotilla One). At this conference much valuable information was obtained from the MTB representatives regarding barge traffic and destroyer sightings in the VELLA GULF area. Plans were made for a combined operation. This operation did not materialize due to more urgent matters. However the information received at the above conference proved invaluable in the later action.

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## II. PRELIMINARY EVENTS (Cont'd)

Late on the afternoon of August fifth CTG 31.2 received a despatch from CTF 31 directing CTG 31.2 with Division A-1 (DUNLAP, CRAVEN, MAURY) and Division A-2 (LANG, STERRETT, STACK) depart Tulagi at 1230 August sixth proceed to VELLA GULF via route south of Russell and Rendova to arrive GIZO STRAIT at 2200 and make sweeps of VELLA GULF avoiding mine fields. If no enemy contacts by 0200 August seventh return north of KOLOMBANGARA at maximum speed to Purvis.

Another despatch directed CTG 31.2 to report to headquarters of CTF 31. CTG 31.2 proceeded to Koli Point accordingly in the DUNLAP. CTF 31 gave further information that he believed the Japanese would try to reinforce the VILA area about midnight August sixth using destroyers and possibly a cruiser. He inquired what CTG 31.2 intended to do. As a result of the previously mentioned conference in the DUNLAP CTG 31.2 was immediately able to outline a proposed general plan of action for the following night to CTF 31 and Captain Doyle, Senior Member of the Staff. This was substantially approved and CTG 31.2 returned to Purvis to make out a rough draft of the battle plan.

CTG 31.2 invited Commander Division A-2 to have breakfast with him the next morning during and after which final plans were made. A conference of Commanding Officers was held at 0930. The Battle Plan was discussed and information exchanged. This conference was of great value as it enabled any doubtful points to be cleared up. There was complete mutual understanding of all possible situations to be encountered.

### THE FOLLOWING ASSUMPTIONS WERE MADE:

Remote possibility enemy submarine(s) may be encountered in GIZO STRAIT.

GIZO STRAIT is not mined.

Enemy MTB's may be operating in VELLA area.

That enemy snoopers would be active.

Enemy troop carrying barges equipped with the equivalent of 40 M.M. guns may be encountered; in the GIZO STRAIT area, close to the fringing reefs north and east of GIZO ISLAND, in the BLACKETT STRAIT area, and close to the western shore of KOLOMBANGARA ISLAND.



II. PRELIMINARY EVENTS (Cont'd)

THE FOLLOWING ASSUMPTIONS WERE MADE: (Cont'd)

Enemy destroyers would approach either: (1) from the north through VELLA GULF to the area of VANGA POINT, SANDELY HARBOR, TONGO, or BLACKETT STRAIT; or (2) through WILSON STRAIT and GIZO STRAIT. (the latter seemed improbable as our motor torpedo boats had been giving that area a complete going over, so plans were made on the first assumption).

That enemy cruiser(s) may be present.

That the enemy force might consist of two groups well separated.

That the enemy surface force would be at a disadvantage due to having its decks loaded with troops.

That the element of surprise is in our favor and must be exploited.

That in a night surface engagement under favorable conditions our primary and most devastating weapon is the torpedo.

That our gunfire is superior to that of the Japs.

III. PLAN

To pass through GIZO STRAIT in column of division columns at 15 knots entering VELLA GULF after moonset (Fifteen knot speed was selected as; it gave an efficient sound search speed, produced a wake difficult for snoopers to detect, would permit arriving at selected position at 2325).

On passing abeam of LIAPARI ISLAND form Division A-2 bearing 150°T, distant about 4,000 yards from Division A-1 and sweep at 15 knots on course 124°T within a mile or two of GIZO REEFS, then north close to west shore of KOLOMBANGARA searching for barges. Division A-2 equipped with 40 M.M. guns, was selected as the inshore division and Division A-1, equipped with 44 torpedoes was selected as the off shore division to engage any destroyers or heavier ships arriving earlier than expected. It was planned to destroy barges detected on this sweep only on the condition that reports from the black cats indicated an efficient search with definite information that there were no destroyers or heavier ships in the area. In the absence of this information contacts on barges were to be passed up until the second trip around.

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### III. PLAN (Cont'd)

To arrive at a point opposite VANGA POINT prior to 2330 so that if the enemy arrived on time we would be in perfect position to intercept with land between us and the enemy making our radar more effective.

At this point come to course 030°T at 25 knots to make quick sweep of the remaining western coast of KOLOMBANGARA and to arrive at a point to the north of KOLOMBANGARA so we could make a radar sweep north of VELLA LA VELLA. Then to set course west still at high speed (formation speed limited to 25 knots due to MAURY being unable to make more than 27 knots) to a point off VELLA LA VELLA and parallel this coast on course 200°T. When off LIAPARI ISLAND duplicate the previous low speed sweep concentrating this time on "mopping up" barges.

Since the Task Group was to operate as a destroyer attack unit it was decided that Division A-1 upon making contact would dash in to a close torpedo firing position, let go her torpedoes, haul tail to about 10,000 yards watch the torpedoes hit then open with gunfire or/and make further torpedo attacks depending on the effectiveness of the first attack. After the initial attack Division A-1 was to be on the alert to intercept a possible second enemy force. It was known that on previous occasions the Japanese had operated with two well separated groups. It was therefore vital in case of an engagement that our force be so disposed as not to be taken by surprise by this second force. Division A-2, when A-1 started the torpedo attack approach, was to cover A-1 taking station clear of A-1 and if possible on the disengaged bow of the enemy. If the torpedo attack division was taken under fire during the torpedo approach, division A-2 was to take the enemy under fire with her five inch as a diversion. If A-1 was not taken under fire A-2 was to commence firing when torpedoes hit and to take advantage of opportunities for secondary torpedo attacks as conditions warranted.

### IV. SUMMARY

Task Group 31.2 departed PURVIS BAY at 1130 August 6, 1943, one hour prior to scheduled time. This early departure was necessary because of the condition of USS MAURYS' engineering plant which limited her speed to 27 knots.

#### IV. SUMMARY (Cont'd)

Proceeded south of SAVO, the RUSSELLS, and RENDOVA ISLANDS and arrived at point OPTION ( $8^{\circ} 03' S - 156^{\circ} 41' E$ ) at 2159. Slowed to 15 knots, changed course to  $050^{\circ} T$  and entered GIZO STRAIT conducting careful search for the enemy. Upon traversing GIZO STRAIT Division A-2 formed on bearing  $150^{\circ} T$ , distant 4,000 yards from Division A-1.

At 2228 course was changed by division column movement to  $124^{\circ} T$ , a sweep was made of the reefs fringing GIZO ISLAND and the approach to BLACKETT STRAIT.

At 2256 course was changed by division column movements to  $000^{\circ} T$  to sweep the western shore of KOLOMBANGARA ISLAND.

At 2318 DUNLAP made radar contact bearing  $090^{\circ} T$ , distant 4,060 yards. This contact was reported as a good contact course  $000^{\circ} T$ , speed 16 knots. Verification was requested of other ships of formation but no verification was received, although DUNLAP still reported it as a good contact. At 2323 changed course to  $030^{\circ} T$  speed 25 knots. The contact also changed course and increased speed proving itself a phantom contact.

#### CHRONOLOGICAL LOG OF BATTLE

At about 2333 immediately after discarding the phantom contact the DUNLAP made radar contact bearing  $359^{\circ} T$ , range 23,900 yards. It is believed contact would have been made at a greater range had the radar not been distracted to some extent by the previous phantom contact.

Verification of the new contact was requested of other ships. In the meantime at 20,000 yards two large and distinct targets were distinguishable on the S.G. screen, three at 19,000 yards on course  $180^{\circ} T$ , speed 25 knots.

At 2336 CRAVEN verified contact. The Task Group Commander immediately gave orders by general signal over TBS for Division A-1 to prepare to fire full port torpedo broadside (Prep 8 William 2) and came to course  $335^{\circ} T$  the computed course to the torpedo firing point. At 15,000 yards four distinct contacts were reported on the S.G. screen, ships in column. The CRAVEN reported her solution as enemy course 180, speed 26. Track Angles were being announced by the Torpedo Officer from the torpedo director solution.

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CHRONOLOGICAL LOG OF BATTLE (Cont'd)

At 2340 when track angle of  $290^{\circ}$  was announced the Task Group Commander gave orders over TBS "Execute 8 William 2". Allowing for delays in execution (ships were approaching at a rate of about 50 knots) a nearly perfect mean division torpedo track angle should have been the result.

At 2341-42 Division A-1 fired 24 torpedoes, range to target between 4,820 and 4,300. Approximate torpedo runs to target track 4,000 yards. Surface visibility at this time was less than 4,000 yards. No ships had been sighted visually.

At 2344 ships of the division reported torpedoes on their way. The Task Group Commander thereupon gave the order "Division One, execute upon receipt, "Turn 9". This was done to maneuver the division clear of possible enemy torpedo fire and to make station for further action. In the meantime division A-2 had changed to course  $270^{\circ}$ T then to  $190^{\circ}$ T.

The next few minutes were an eternity.

Finally at 2346 the sound operator reported "I hear torpedo explosion". None had been seen visually as yet; the thought flashed "We should have seen it before hearing it, What can be wrong?". Before the answer presented itself three terrific explosions were observed in succession from left to right followed by successive violent explosions totalling between seven and ten. It appeared as if two ships were blown to pieces and a third which appeared to be a cruiser was enveloped in a mass of flames with successive explosions occurring.

At 2346 Division A-2 changed course to  $230^{\circ}$ T (later to  $270^{\circ}$ T) and opened fire with her five inch battery.

This division (A-2) concentrated on a destroyer to the west of the flames and at 2351 reported that the target had turned over and sank. During this time the STACK believed she saw a large ship in flame area and fired 4 torpedoes.

Division A-1 now, at 2352 changed course to  $180^{\circ}$ T by turn movement to join in the gunfire.

Two pips were on the screen one of which was assumed to be the burning cruiser, the other was to the south of it.

The havoc caused the enemy by the torpedo attack was terrific. The whole area was a great mass of flames and explosions which continued without interruption under the continuous pounding of our forces until all the enemy except a few survivors had perished.

(12) -6- 11  
ENCLOSURE (C)

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CHRONOLOGICAL LOG OF BATTLE (Cont'd)

At 2355 CTG 31.2 ordered his flagship to open fire with gun battery on the contact to the South and left (as viewed from the East of the burning mass). The DUNLAP opened up followed by the other two ships of the division. Hits were observed which appeared as gun flashes from the enemy. She may have returned fire but not for long and if so not more than a few rounds. Division A-2 had also joined in the pounding of the target and it was torn to pieces and disappeared at 0000.

There was no doubt at this time that the battle with this group was won. It was only a matter of time before complete destruction of the enemy would be an accomplished fact.

Only one contact remained on the P.P.I. scope the bearing indicating it was the furiously burning and intermittantly exploding cruiser.

At 0003 CTG 31.2 ordered Division A-1 to change course to 310°T to pass a few thousand yards to the North of the burning mass and to take a position near the Northwest entrance to VELLA GULF so as to be in position to intercept any other enemy force approaching.

In accordance with previously made plans with ComDiv A-2, Division A-2 was to do the "mopping up". Division A-1 was to retain a broadside for an attack on fresh enemy forces.

While on course 310°T ships intermittantly fired on the burning cruiser.

At about 0017 a destroyer was observed dead in the water silhouetted against the flames of what was left of the cruiser. Due to the relative motion of the division it appeared the destroyer was moving ahead slowly but it was apparant that it was an immobile, silenced and ineffective unit. Before the guns of Division A-1 could be brought to bear on this target it was smothered by highly effective gunfire from Division A-2. This 5 inch fire gave the appearance of machine-gunfire sweeping across the deck, obliterating the topside as it progressed and culminating in a large explosion aft; and, as someone on the bridge so aptly and gleefully shouted, "there goes the de-stry-er!"

At 0020 CTG 31.2 directed Division A-1 to change course to 090°T as CDD A-2 had informed him over TBS that he (CDD, A-2) was going to sink the cruiser with torpedoes and desired the range to the Northwest clear.

CHRONOLOGICAL LOG OF BATTLE (Cont'd)

At 0022 Division A-2 fired six torpedoes at what was left of the burning cruiser.

At 0027 CTG 31.2 ordered Division A-1 to change course to North. All radar screens in the force had been reported as clear. This course was taken in order that a radar sweep could be made North of the coast of VELLA LA VELLA.

At 0032 Changed course of Division A-1 to 060°T. In the meantime Division A-2 was forming up. Radar search revealed no contacts.

At 0035 Changed course to 210°T to head for and circle the blazing wreckage.

At 0055 Steadied on course 050°T.

At 0105 Changed course to 210°T to look for survivors.

At 0115 USS MAURY reported bearing in main feed pump burned out and that she probably could only maintain present speed for another hour.

At 0118 CTG 31.2 retired down the "slot" with Division A-1 at 22 knots (MAURYS' maximum speed now) and directed CDD A-2 to attempt to pick up survivors for intelligence purpose. These attempts were futile and at 0200 CDD A-2 departed VELLA GULF at 30 knots to rejoin.

During this period the Units were in TBS communication with each other.

When CTG 31.2 retired, the area in which the enemy ships had been sunk was still aflame from burning oil.

At times during the above period individual ships maneuvered independently to avoid reported torpedo wakes. There was an unidentified plane in the area which made threatening runs but dropped no bombs or torpedoes. It was not taken under fire and seemed confused as to the identity of ships in the area. It was later learned that no friendly planes were in the VELLA GULF during the battle.

A friendly photo plane over VILA area reported having seen, at about 2400 August 6th, four fires which appeared to be on the shore of VELLA LA VELLA. Weather prevented closer inspection. As plane turned away two crew members aft saw large explosions from two of fires.

Friendly Motor Torpedo Boats operating in KULA GULF reported seeing loom of battle about midnight and three tremendous explosions.

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CHRONOLOGICAL LOG OF BATTLE (Cont'd)

Wind from Southeast, force two.  
Weather overcast with frequent rain squalls.  
Ceiling about 4,000 feet.  
Surface visibility about 3,000 yards.  
Moonset at 2226.

V. SPECIAL COMMENTS ON ENEMY FORCES

(a) Number -- four.

Types -- One cruiser, three destroyers. From information at hand it is impossible to definitely classify the type of cruiser. That it was a large ship approximately twice as long as a destroyer, had superimposed turrets and took a great deal of punishment before sinking is an established fact.

Some observations picked at random are quoted:  
"Saw two superimposed turrets but could not say for sure how many stacks the ship had".

"Three stacks, a high bridge structure forward and superimposed turrets".

"Large cruiser 600 feet long with low high turret arrangement forward, bridge well forward, long low straight lines from bridge".

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

"Two low S.P. stacks, raked built up mainmast with pole mast, high catapult abaft mainmast, two superimposed turrets aft".

Taking the above descriptions at their face value either the Japanese had a new type cruiser or the cruiser was a heavy cruiser with the after control tower mistaken for a stack.

The destroyers were not definitely classified as to type but are believed to be of modern type about 1,500 tons.

Tactics -- Ships were in column, apparently using a shallow zigzag on course 165°T and 180°T, at speed between 25 and 30 knots.

No enemy communications were heard or seen. There were no maneuvers. The enemy was so badly hit by the torpedo attack that they were in complete confusion from then on.

Some enemy gunfire was reported it was of short duration and ineffective.

## ESTIMATED MATERIAL & PERSONNEL CASUALTIES

All four ships were destroyed.

Personnel casualties were undoubtedly high, there was no opportunity for orderly abandonment. It is believed that all four ships were carrying troops and supplies. Very few, if any, personnel on the ship assumed to be a cruiser survived as it was a flaming and exploding mass from the time the torpedoes hit until it sank.

### VI. SPECIAL COMMENTS ON OWN FORCES

Number - - Six destroyers.

<u>SHIP</u>	<u>TORPEDOES</u>	<u>DIVISION A-1</u>			<u>RADARS</u>
		<u>5" GUNS</u>	<u>40M.M. GUNS</u>	<u>20M.M. GUNS</u>	
USS DUNLAP	12 (in 3 mts)	4	0	8	SG; SC-1
USS CRAVEN	16 (in 4 mts)	4	0	7	SG; SC-1; FD
USS MAURY	16 (in 4 mts)	4	0	7	SG; SG-1; FD

<u>DIVISION A-2</u>					
USS LANG	8 (in 2 mts)	4	2 twin	4	SG; SC-1; FD
USS STERETT	8 (in 2 mts)	4	2 twin	4	SG; SC-1; FD
USS STACK	8 (in 2 mts)	4	2 twin	4	SG; SA; FD

Six Black Cats were assigned the Task Group for coverage and search.

At no time was communication established with the Black Cats. They had radar trouble and were handicapped by bad weather.

### GUNNERY AND TORPEDOES

Torpedo and gun control on all ships was superb. The torpedo director was trained on radar bearings the solution for target course and speed was obtained by C.I.C. using radar bearings and ranges. The enemy was not seen prior torpedo explosions.

Full or partial radar control was used by gun control.

Gun and torpedo batteries in general performed smoothly and efficiently. There were some minor casualties such as are present in target practice.



~~SECRET~~

VI. SPECIAL COMMENTS ON OWN FORCES (Cont'd)

GUNNERY AND TORPEDOES (Cont'd)

Torpedoes ran true, hit and mortally damaged the enemy. The magnetic feature of the exploder mechanism had been rendered inoperative. Torpedoes were set for 5 and 9 feet.

Gunnery was excellent. Five inch hits were very effective. Both common and A.A. common projectiles were fired.

Flash eliminators on the torpedo tubes functioned effectively.

Flashless powder is excellent. No blinding effect was apparant but resultant smoke was excessive.

The Sugar George Radar with its P.P.I. scope made the success of this operation possible. It is a marvelous instrument. The S.G. radar installed in the DUNLAP picked up a low flying plane at 54,000 yards and followed it in over the formation. This occurred after the Sail George had been rendered inoperative for a very short time by the shock of gunfire. Shock proofing of all radars is not considered adquate.

Torpedoes fired -- 34

Five Inch fired -- about 800 rounds

MATERIAL DEFICIENCIES

RADARS - Susceptible to being made inoperative due to shock of gunfire. Lack of ruggedness and proper shock proofing is believed the cause. See individual ships reports for details.

P.P.I. Repeaters - No P.P.I. repeaters are installed in the pilot house of destroyers. It is understood that they will be installed when they become available. (This is not considered soon enough).

In some destroyers the P.P.I. scope is located in the emergency cabin, in others in the chart house a deck level below the pilot house. At night the Commanding Officers and Division Commander do not have a complete and immediate picture of the situation at all times, necessitating a dash into the emergency cabin or chart house on occasions of doubt. Twice during the engagement

VI. SPECIAL COMMENTS ON OWN FORCES (Cont'd)

MATERIAL DEFICIENCIES (Cont'd)

the Task Group Commander deemed it necessary to make such a dash to the chart house. A P.P.I. repeater in the pilot house would have been invaluable.

CASUALTIES TO PERSONNEL

No damage to ships or casualties to personnel were suffered.

VII. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

That mutual understanding between commanders and commanding officers is requisite to complete and coordinated destruction of the enemy.

That our destroyer doctrine is sound.

That surprise throws the enemy into utter confusion.

That our torpedo fire is equal to or better than that of the enemy.

That our present torpedoes are effective and can be counted on to run true, hit, and explode.

That a successful torpedo attack is devastating to the enemy.

That the primary weapon of the destroyer is and always has been the torpedo battery.

That a night torpedo attack is a deadly weapon and must be fully exploited.

That in a combined night operation with other types under conditions of low visibility (such as will enable a destroyer attack unit to arrive at torpedo firing point without detection) destroyers can best be used as the primary attack unit, the cruiser unit being used as a support or covering force.

That the C.I.C. is a highly important part of the destroyer organization and must be developed to the peak of efficiency.

That the S.G. radar is invaluable in a night action. P.P.I. repeaters must be installed in the pilot house of all destroyers.

That our flashless powder is effective and is a requisite for night gun action.

That advantage should be taken of land background to give an initial radar advantage over the enemy.

~~SECRET~~

VII. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS (Cont'd)

That our radars are superior to those of the enemy. The enemy gave no indication of being aware of our presence leading to the belief that the Japanese vessels are not equipped with a radar comparable to our S.G. radar. The fact that the enemy took no action is not conclusive proof of absence of radar, because (1) our force was close to land making radar detection difficult (2) the enemy was approaching comparatively friendly waters where she could expect friendly barge traffic. If the Japanese force did make radar contact it was probably hesitant about taking immediate violent action. The two forces were approaching each other at the rate of about 50 knots and before she could do much it was too late.

SECRET  
OF THE MESSAGE  
SAC. THE ENEMY  
DECLASSIFIED  
ECCLASSIFIED

VIII. COMMENDATIONS

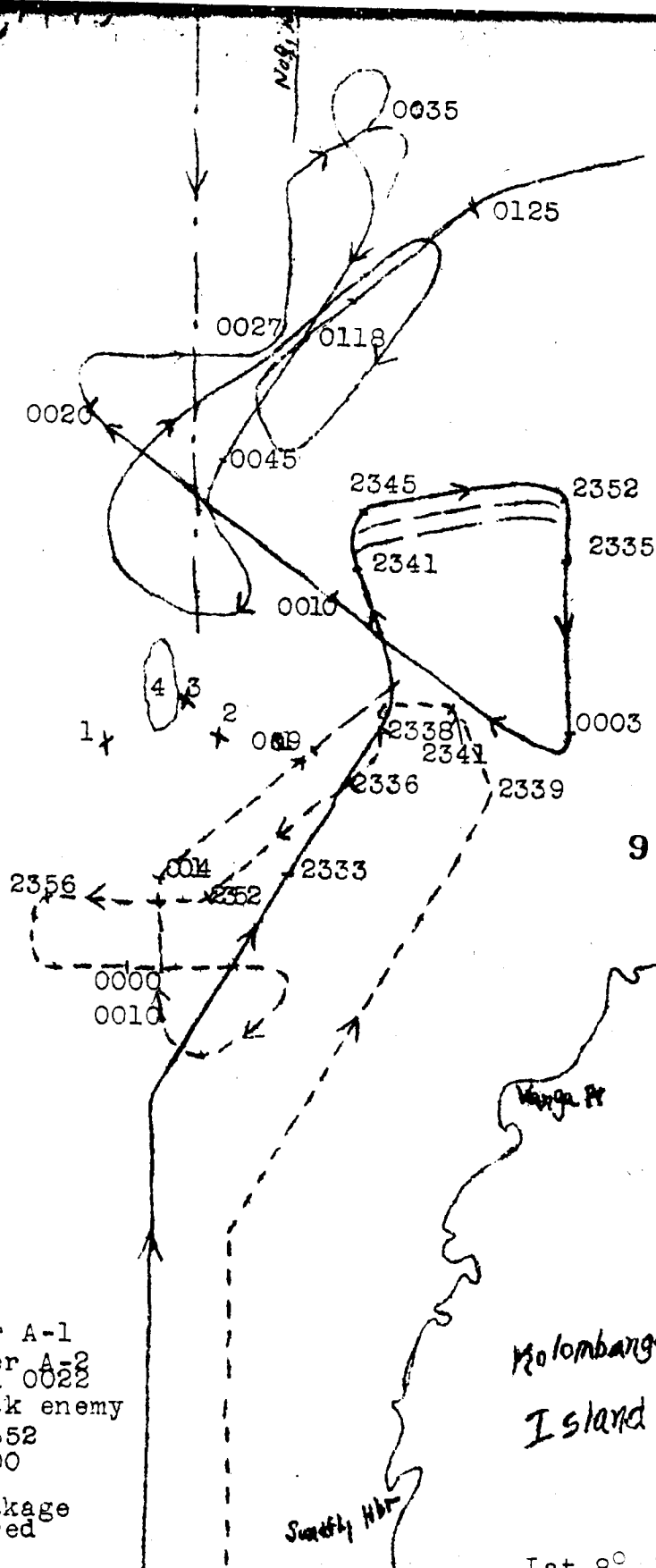
Commendations recommended in separate correspondence.

# DECLASSIFIED

Vella  
La Vella

Boko Pt (Boko Pt)

VELLA GULF



Scale 1" = 4000 yards

- Track Division Leader A-1
- Track Division Leader A-2 until 0022
- ..... Approximate mean track enemy
- ① First DD reported sunk at 2352
- ② Second DD disappeared at 0000
- ③ Third DD eliminated at 0021
- ④ General Area of Burning Wreckage of cruiser totally disappeared from S.G. screen at 0027

Lat 8°

DECLASSIFIED

3 September 1943

SECRET

SECRET REFERENCE to  
ComDesDiv 12 (CDS 31.2)  
ltr FM12/416-3 serial  
(10) dated 16 Aug 43.

FROM: Commander Task Force THIRTY-ONE.  
TO : Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet.  
Via : Commander Third Fleet.

Subject: Action Report for Night of August 6-7,  
1943 - Battle of Vella Gulf.

1. This report describes an unique and highly successful operation wherein a force of six U. S. destroyers annihilated an enemy force of four vessels of which three are known to have been destroyers by testimony of survivors, and the fourth is believed to have been a cruiser. The complete destruction of these vessels, carrying, again by the testimony of survivors, a substantial number of troops, was accomplished without loss or damage to any of our own ships and without the loss or even wounding of a man.

2. From contact reports of vessels in the BARAKU area and from other indications, it appeared that a "Tokio Express" might run on the night of August 6th, presumably to reinforce the KOLAKAPARA garrison with men and supplies. These indications became a parent on August 5th. At that time there were eight destroyers available to Commander Task Force THIRTY-ONE in the GUADALCANAL area. Of these, two were obligated on escort duty, but the remaining six were free for use to intercept the suspected enemy. There was not adequate time for a cruiser task force to reach the area and no request for additional forces was therefor made by Commander Task Force THIRTY-ONE, particularly since, unless the enemy appeared in great strength, six destroyers were believed to be adequate for the purpose.

3. It was assumed that in order to achieve maximum benefit of darkness for both approach and retirement, the enemy force would arrive at VILA at approximately midnight.

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3 Subgroups 1001

Serial

00359

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WAVE INCIDENT (Cont'd)

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

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His recent experiences in the KULA GULF might well lead him to avoid that approach route and it appeared probably that he would take the more direct route through VELLA GULF and BLACKETT STRAIT. On either course, however, he could be intercepted by vessels placed to the northwestward of WILKINSONARA.

4. The usual route for our intercepting forces has been "up the slot" between NEW GEORGIA and SANTA ISABEL, as determined ordinarily because of the shorter distance and the usually brief notice afforded of enemy approach. On this route, however, our forces have usually been detected by float planes and possibly by Japanese coast-watchers or radar equipment, which has been suspected on WEST POINT.

5. In this case, ample time was available and, in order to avoid such detection and forewarning of the enemy, the destroyer detachment was sent to the southward of the NEW GEORGIA group and through GILBERT STRAIT to arrive in VELLA GULF by 2230, in ample time to intercept the enemy force if inferences as to his movements were correct.

6. On the evening of August 5th, Commander HUGHES was orally advised of all information available, and appropriate operation order was issued by dispatch. From then on, the matter was in his hands.

7. How well he disposed of it can, of course, be judged by the results. His preparations, his battle plan and his consequent operations constitute a sound foundation and framework for the culminating success of the engagement itself.

8. His report evidences a thorough consideration of the situation and proper indoctrination of his commanding officers. Commander Task Force THIRTY-ONE is in complete agreement with the "lessons learned and recommendations" in page 12 of the report.

DECLASSIFIED

Serial

00399

OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER  
Office of the Commander

DECLASSIFIED

SECRET - UNCLASSIFIED (Cont'd)

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

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9. It is believed that this action represents the first independent destroyer action in the South Pacific area. By reason of the demand for escort duty for convoys to the forward areas and of the necessity of screening aircraft carriers, battleships and other task force dispositions, there has been little opportunity for destroyers to operate in formation, train in squadron and division attacks. Although it is most gratifying that, despite this lack of training, these two divisions were so competent and efficient in an independent destroyer action, it illustrates the desirability, when other demands do not prevent, of affording adequate unit training to destroyer squadrons and divisions in night and day destroyer attacks.

10. Again, when night action by cruiser task forces have been in prospect or have occurred, the usual formation has been a miniature fleet disposition, with destroyers ahead and astern as screens for the cruisers. This formation, while protecting the cruisers from submarine attack, yet prevents independent and planned use by the destroyers of their major weapon, the torpedo, except as a weapon of opportunity. The successful use of the torpedo in this engagement is a renewed emphasis of the value of destroyers as torpedo carriers, a value which has been somewhat neglected in recent years, with the attention concentrated on the gun power. In night action where surprise, aided by our superior radar, may be hoped for with some confidence, it would appear preferable to mass the destroyers as an attack unit ahead of the formation, with the cruisers in supporting distance. By such tactics an undiscovered torpedo attack, as in this engagement, may be achieved, with equally damaging results before gun fire has warned the enemy of our presence.

11. Commander Task Force THIRTY-ONE believes that the highest commendation is due all participants in this engagement. In separate correspondence he is recommending the award of the Navy Cross to Commander ROBERTSON. It



10/1/41 (2000-4)

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Serial 00339

00339

DECLASSIFIED

10/1/41 (Cont'd)

Subject: Action Report for Battle of August 6-7  
 1943 - Battle of Vella Gulf.

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 It is presumed the latter will make recommendations for awards  
 to his subordinates, in which recommendations, to the degree  
 which may be considered appropriate by Commander South  
 Pacific, the Task Force Commander heartily concurs.

W. S. MILLINGTON,

Copy to:

- Comdesop
- Comdesop 11
- Comdesop 12
- Comdesop 13
- Comdesop 14

CONFIDENTIAL

REPORT FOR COMMANDER DESTROYER DIVISION TWELVE.

MONTH OF JULY

During the month of July, 1942, Destroyer Division Twelve did not act as a unit. The U.S.S. BENHAM and U.S.S. ELLET were attached to Task Force Sixteen. U.S.S. DUNLAP and U.S.S. FANNING on July, 1942, were attached to Task Force One.

1 July 1942

Zone plus 7

G.C.T.      L.C.T.

FANNING and DUNLAP moored at Naval Air Station Dock, San Diego, Calif., operating as a unit of Commander Task Force ONE as plane guard and screening vessels for U.S.S. LONG ISLAND.

1507      0807

DUNLAP proceeded out of harbor in company with LONG ISLAND to act as plane guard while LONG ISLAND is engaged in training pilots for carrier qualification.  
FANNING at anchor for upkeep.

*me*

2 July 1942

Zone plus 7

DUNLAP moored to Buoy # 18, San Diego, Calif., for upkeep. FANNING acting as plane guard for U.S.S. LONG ISLAND.

*me*

3 July 1942

Zone plus 7

1535      0835

FANNING and DUNLAP underway to conduct Battle Torpedo Practice "AFFIRM".

*me*

2145      1445

Moored to Buoy # 18, San Diego, Calif.

CONFIDENTIAL

REPORT FOR COMMANDER DESTROYER DIVISION TWELVE.

MONTH OF NOVEMBER

During the month of November, 1942, Destroyer Division TWELVE did not act as a unit. Due to reorganization of Destroyers Pacific Fleet, The Division now consists of USS DUNLAP, USS CASE, USS FANNING and USS CUMMINGS. The USS CASE and USS CUMMINGS were on detached duty. The USS DUNLAP and USS FANNING attached to Task Force ELEVEN. The following report covers the movements of the USS DUNLAP and USS FANNING only.

1 November 1942  
Zone time plus 9 $\frac{1}{2}$

Moored to buoy X-6, in Pearl Harbor, T.H. *mc*  
Operated with USS WAHOO during the day.

2 - 3 November 1942  
Zone time plus 9 $\frac{1}{2}$   
G.C.T.      L.C.T.

Moored to buoys in berth X-6, Pearl Harbor, T.H.

1606      0636      Underway in accordance with CINCPAC Despatch *mc*  
291925 of October and COMDESRON SIX Serial 0204  
of 29 October to conduct training exercises in  
operating areas off Oahu, T. H.

4 - 5 November 1942  
Zone time plus 9 $\frac{1}{2}$

Moored to buoy X-7, Pearl Harbor, T. H. *mc*

6 - 9 November 1942  
Zone time plus 9 $\frac{1}{2}$   
G.C.T.      L.C.T.

Moored to buoy X-7, Pearl Harbor, T. H.

1600      0630      Underway proceeding out of harbor in accordance *mc*  
with Commander Task Force ELEVEN ltr. A16/3/01  
of 5 November, 1942, for training exercises.

10 - 11 November 1942  
Zone time plus 9 $\frac{1}{2}$

Moored to buoys X-7, Pearl Harbor, T. H. *mc*

Reg. No. 1066  
R.S. No.

1066

CONFIDENTIAL

WAR DIARY

Destroyer Division TWELVE

From: Commander Destroyer Division TWELVE  
To : The Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.

1943 OCT 17 11 59

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF  
FLAG OFFICE  
RECEIVED

*Received*

Copy to Cincpac

*[Signature]*

57179

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INDEXED

1



DESTROYER DIVISION TWELVE  
U.S.S. DUNLAP, Flagship

COMMANDER DESTROYER DIVISION TWELVE WAR DIARY FOR THE MONTH OF  
AUGUST 1943

1 August 1943

CDD-12 in DUNLAP operating as part of Task Group 31.2 under Commander Task Force 31. 1300 CDD-12 in DUNLAP with SC 531 escorting LST 395 and LST 399 from Guadalcanal to Rendova Island, New Georgia group.

U.S.S. CASE acting as escort for USS RIXEY enroute Noumea, New Caledonia to Guadalcanal.

U.S.S. CUMMINGS moored at Noumea, New Caledonia.

U.S.S. FANNING moored at Noumea, New Caledonia. 1006 Underway in company with Task Group 36.3

2 August 1943

USS DUNLAP and SC 531 escorting LST's to Rendova. After arrival DUNLAP made anti-submarine sweep towards Russells Islands, SC 531 made anti-submarine sweep in Blanche Channel. 1750 returned Onaiavisi Entrance. 1953 DUNLAP, SC 531 escorting LST 399 from Onaiavisi to Guadalcanal.

U.S.S. CASE enroute Guadalcanal.

U.S.S. CUMMINGS underway in company with Task Group 36.3

U.S.S. FANNING underway in company with Task Group 36.3

3 August 1943

Commander Destroyer Division TWELVE relieved Commander Destroyer Division 44 as Commander Task Group 31.2. Composition Task Group 31.2 USS DUNLAP (CDD-12), USS MAURY, USS GRIDLEY, USS CRAVEN, USS LANG (CDD-15), USS STACK, USS WILSON, USS STERETT. USS CRAVEN escorting LST's Guadalcanal to Rendova, New Georgia. USS STACK escorting LST's from Rendova to Guadalcanal. USS DUNLAP arrived Purvis Bay from Rendova. USS MAURY, GRIDLEY, LANG, STERETT, WILSON at Purvis Bay, Florida Island.

2

DESTROYER DIVISION TWELVE  
U.S.S. DUNLAP, Flagship

3 August 1943 (Cont'd)

U.S.S. CASE 0900 arrived Guadalcanal; fueled,  
and returned to anti-submarine patrol for USS RIXEY.  
U.S.S. CUMMINGS underway with Task Group 36.3  
U.S.S. FANNING underway with Task Group 36.3

4 August 1943

U.S.S. CRAVEN escorting LST's to Rendova and  
return.  
U.S.S. STACK arrived Purvis Bay from Rendova.  
U.S.S. STERETT escorting LST's from Guadalcanal to  
Rendova.  
U.S.S. DUNLAP, MAURY, GRIDLEY, LANG, WILSON at  
Purvis Bay. CDD-12 in DUNLAP proceeded to Koli Point,  
Guadalcanal to report to CTF 31, then returned to Purvis.  
U.S.S. CASE 0900 Departed Guadalcanal for Noumea,  
New Caledonia.  
U.S.S. CUMMINGS underway with Task Group 36.3  
U.S.S. FANNING underway with Task Group 36.3

5 August 1943

U.S.S. CRAVEN arrived Purvis from Rendova.  
U.S.S. STERETT escorting LST's to Rendova and return  
U.S.S. WILSON escorting LST's from Guadalcanal to  
Rendova.  
U.S.S. DUNLAP, MAURY, GRIDLEY, LANG, STACK at  
Purvis Bay. CDD-12 reported to headquarters CTF 31 at Guadalcanal  
for conference then returned in DUNLAP to Purvis Bay.  
U.S.S. CASE enroute to Noumea, New Caledonia.  
U.S.S. CUMMINGS underway with Task Group 36.3. 1646  
moored in Havannah Harbor, New Hebrides.  
U.S.S. FANNING underway with Task Group 36.3 1513  
moored in Havannah Harbor, New Hebrides.

DESTROYER DIVISION TWELVE  
U.S.S. DUNLAP, Flagship

6 August 1943

U.S.S. DUNLAP (CDD-12), U.S.S. CRAVEN, MAURY, LANG (CDD-15), STERETT, STACK enroute Purvis Bay to Vella Gulf and Battle of Vella Gulf (See action report).

U.S.S. GRIDLEY escorting LST's from Guadalcanal to Rendova.

U.S.S. WILSON escorting LST's to Rendova and return.

U.S.S. CASE enroute Noumea, New Caledonia.

U.S.S. CUMMINGS moored as before.

U.S.S. FANNING moored as before.

7 August 1943

U.S.S. DUNLAP - Battle of Vella Gulf then to Koli Point for report by CDD-12 to CTF 31, then to Tulagi to replenish fuel, torpedoes and ammunition.

U.S.S. STACK - Battle of Vella Gulf then escorting LST's from Guadalcanal to Rendova.

U.S.S. CRAVEN, MAURY, LANG, STERETT - Battle of Vella Gulf then to Tulagi to replenish fuel, torpedoes and ammunition, then to Purvis Bay.

U.S.S. GRIDLEY escorting LST's.

U.S.S. WILSON arrived Purvis from Rendova.

U.S.S. CASE Arrived Noumea and anchored.

U.S.S. CUMMINGS moored as before.

U.S.S. FANNING moored as before.

8 August 1943

U.S.S. JENKINS reported for duty in Task Group 31.2 relieving USS MAURY detached.

U.S.S. DUNLAP Tulagi to Purvis Bay.

U.S.S. GRIDLEY escorting LST's.

U.S.S. STACK escorting LST's to Rendova and return.

U.S.S. JENKINS escorting LST's from Guadalcanal to Rendova.

U.S.S. CRAVEN, LANG, STERETT, WILSON at Purvis Bay.

DESTROYER DIVISION TWELVE  
U.S.S. DUNLAP, Flagship

8 August 1943 (Cont'd)

U.S.S. CASE at Noumea, New Caledonia; routine upkeep.

U.S.S. CUMMINGS moored as before. 1328 underway and moored alongside USS MEDUSA for repairs.

U.S.S. FANNING moored as before.

9 August 1943

U.S.S. DUNLAP (CDD-12), USS CRAVEN, USS GRIDLEY, USS LANG (CDD-15), USS STERETT, USS WILSON enroute Purvis to Vella Gulf and sweeps of Vella Gulf. (See action report).

U.S.S. STACK escorting LST's.

U.S.S. JENKINS escorting LST's to Rendova and return.

U.S.S. CASE 0600 Underway as escort for convoy. 2200 Convoy dispersed and CASE proceeded to Havannah Harbor.

U.S.S. CUMMINGS moored as before.

U.S.S. FANNING moored as before. 0704 underway in company with USS McCALL and USS S-31 for exercises. 1610 moored in Havannah Harbor.

10 August 1943

U.S.S. DUNLAP, CRAVEN, GRIDLEY, LANG, STERETT, WILSON sweeps of Vella Gulf, then to Tulagi for replenishment ammunition and fuel, then to Purvis Bay.

U.S.S. STACK escorting LST's to Rendova.

U.S.S. JENKINS returned Purvis from Rendova.

U.S.S. CASE 1630 arrived Havannah Harbor.

U.S.S. CUMMINGS moored as before.

U.S.S. FANNING moored as before.

11 August 1943

U.S.S. EATON and PHILIP reported for duty in Task Group 31.2 relieving U.S.S. GRIDLEY and WILSON, detached



DESTROYER DIVISION TWELVE  
U.S.S. DUNLAP, Flagship

11 August 1943 (Cont'd)

U.S.S. STACK escorting LST's to Rendova and return.

U.S.S. DUNLAP, CRAVEN, STERETT, LANG, PHILIP at Purvis Bay.

U.S.S. CASE at anchor Havannah Harbor.

U.S.S. CUMMINGS moored as before.

U.S.S. FANNING moored as before. 0648 underway with USS SAN DIEGO and USS S-31 for exercises. 1657 moored in Havannah Harbor.

12 August 1943

U.S.S. JENKINS escorting LST's to Rendova and return.

U.S.S. EATON escorting LST's from Guadalcanal to Rendova.

U.S.S. DUNLAP, CRAVEN, STERETT, LANG, STACK relieved by units of Desron 22 and detached from Task Group 31.2

Commander Destroyer Division TWELVE relieved by Commander Destroyer Squadron TWENTY-TWO as Commander Task Group 31.2. CDD-12 detached from TG 31.2, reported to CTU 32.4.4 for escort duty.

U.S.S. CASE anchored Havannah Harbor. 0630 Underway for anti-submarine training.

U.S.S. CUMMINGS moored as before.

U.S.S. FANNING moored as before. 0000 underway in company with USS McCALL, McCALLA and MASSACHUSETTS for tactical and gunnery exercises.

13 August 1943

U.S.S. DUNLAP underway patrolling for transports during unloading operations.

U.S.S. CASE underway for anti-submarine training.

U.S.S. CUMMINGS moored as before.

U.S.S. FANNING underway in company with USS McCALL, McCALLA and MASSACHUSETTS for tactical and gunnery exercises. 1759 moored in Havannah Harbor.