

DD445/A16-3  
Serial No. (s)-3

U.S.S. FLETCHER  
c/o Fleet Post Office  
San Francisco, Calif.

~~SECRET~~  
DECLASSIFIED

December 3, 1942

From: Commanding Officer.  
To: Commander Task Force Sixty Seven.  
Subject: Action Report.  
Enclosure: (A) Track Chart, Destroyers Van.  
(B) SG Radar screen sketches.  
(C) Report of Executive Officer, U.S.S. FLETCHER.

1. During the night of November 30-December 1, 1942, Task Force Sixty Seven engaged Japanese surface forces attempting to land reinforcements for their troops near Tassafaronga, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands.

2. The Destroyers, Van, consisted of FLETCHER (Senior Destroyer Officer), PERKINS, MAURY, and DRAYTON, in that order. The Main Body consisted of MINNEAPOLIS (OTC), NEW ORLEANS, PENSACOLA, HONOLULU and NORTHAMPTON. Destroyers rear, consisting of Comdesdiv 9 in LAMSON and LARDNER joined this force just prior to entering Lengo Channel.

3. (a) In accordance with the "Night Action" annex to the Operation Plan and subsequent despatch from OTC, the destroyers van were stationed about 5000 yards bearing 340° from the leading cruiser. Instructions for pending engagement were given them as follows: "Anticipate using individual torpedo target plan X intermediate speed setting X will try to furnish Maury with target course speed and bearing others use sail george X will use unenciphered general signal book or plain language".

(b) Entrance to the area southwest of Savo Island was made by way of Lengo Channel. The formation was maneuvered by course and turn signals as shown on the track chart until contact was made; subsequent movements shown are individual.

4. At 2308 received report of "two strangers off Point Baker" (Cape Esperance). At 2310 Fletcher picked up this contact bearing 285°, distance 14000 yards.

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5. (a) Tracking was commenced. On the SG radar screen the contact developed into five ships, four of them about a mile and a quarter off the beach in column and the fifth about half a mile outside abreast the second ship. A solution of 15 knots and course  $150^{\circ}$  (later determined as  $140^{\circ}$ ) was obtained. At 2316 permission was requested for destroyers to fire torpedoes, the enemy formation then bearing  $243^{\circ}$  with a range of about 7000 yards. The OTC questioned whether target was within range, which was answered affirmatively. At 2321 "William" was received from OTC.

(b) At 2322 ten torpedoes were fired on SG Radar bearing in two half salvos, the center of the enemy disposition bearing  $197^{\circ}$  true,  $267^{\circ}$  relative, from FLETCHER, distance 7300 yards. This gave a torpedo range of 9600 yards for the leading destroyer and about 8200 yards for the fourth destroyer. "Affirm William" was reported to the OTC by TBS when last torpedo had cleared, which was a few seconds after cruisers had opened fire.

6. At 2323 order was received from OTC by TBS; "Roger, and I do mean Roger!" Commenced firing a few seconds after cruisers, using FD radar control on rear enemy ship as target. Range 7500 yards, bearing  $188^{\circ}$ . At 2325 the target was lost by FD radar, ceased firing, having expended 60 rounds.

7. The ship stood on at 25 knots, followed closely by destroyers van, and a short opportunity was afforded to observe the battle. No enemy ships could be seen. Illumination was fairly good in front of what appeared a wall of splashes from our gunfire. Torpedoes had not yet had time to reach the targets, and their effectiveness was not observed later. Sporadic gunfire was seen from the general direction the enemy ships we had engaged. At about 2326 a salvo of three splashes was seen about 100 yards ahead of this ship, followed by another salvo 200 yards on port beam. No torpedo tracks were observed near us. The coastline of Savo Island was carefully observed by SG Radar; no ships were picked up.

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8. At 2327 changed course to 350° to retire in accordance with doctrine. About 2330 one enemy ship (or possibly two, one of which quickly disappeared) was observed on the SG screen, bearing 190° distance 12500 yards, standing northwest toward Cape Esperance very close to the beach. The FD radar was matched in train with SG but was unable to pick up the target and it eventually disappeared from the SG screen. It was not observed visually.

9. At 2332 changed course 310° and increased speed to 35 knots. Then circled outside Savo Island as shown on the track chart, followed by the three destroyers in close order and by the HONOLULU. At 0004 speed was reduced, recognition lights were flashed, and the destroyers stood south toward own forces apparently still in the action area.

10. About 0020 course was reversed to join HONOLULU northeast of "Point Arirm" (Savo Island). She was not located in that area and at 0042 orders were received by TBS to join HONOLULU who was reported as shelling troops landing off Point Baker (Cape Esperance). At 0104 ordered by HONOLULU to send two destroyers to stand by NEW ORLEANS. Her position was reported as ten miles east of Tulagi, although it was assumed that the reference point was Savo Island rather than Tulagi. The MAURY and DRAYTON were detached for this duty. At that time course was changed to east and then southeast to investigate and identify the vessels in that vicinity. At 0120 sighted HONOLULU and at 0135 fell in astern of her and headed back out towards Savo Island. At 0150 CTG 67.2.3 ordered FLETCHER and DRAYTON to stand by burning NORTHAMPTON.

11. From that time until 0435 both FLETCHER and DRAYTON were occupied in picking up survivors. Forty two officers, the senior of whom was the gunnery officer, and over 600 enlisted men were rescued by FLETCHER. None of them were seriously injured. The NORTHAMPTON sank at 0257.

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12. At 0435 no more men could be found in the water and both ships stood east at 25 knots in hopes of effecting a rendezvous. CTG 67.2.3 could not be raised by TBS. When south of Tulagi one large vessel accompanied by destroyers was seen headed for that port but it was not possible to establish satisfactory communication either by TBS or visual. About this time a message was received from Guadalcanal stating that unidentified planes were approaching from the westward and, with 1000 men aboard this destroyer, it was decided to forego further attempts to establish contact in "Ironbottom Bay". Both vessels stood through Sealark Channel, expecting to overtake own retiring forces in Indispensable Strait. Despatch was sent to CTF 67, info Comsopac, informing him of circumstances and advising that unless a rendezvous was ordered we would proceed to Button.

13. Late that afternoon a despatch was received designating a rendezvous with HONOLULU at 1700 but she could not be located and FLETCHER and DRAYTON proceeded toward Base BUTTON. About 0330 further information was received as to HONOLULU'S position and she was intercepted by this unit at daybreak.

14. No damage or casualties were sustained by FLETCHER as a result of enemy action. One motor motor whaleboat was capsized and abandoned during rescue operations; NORTHAMPTON #2 motor whaleboat was recovered.

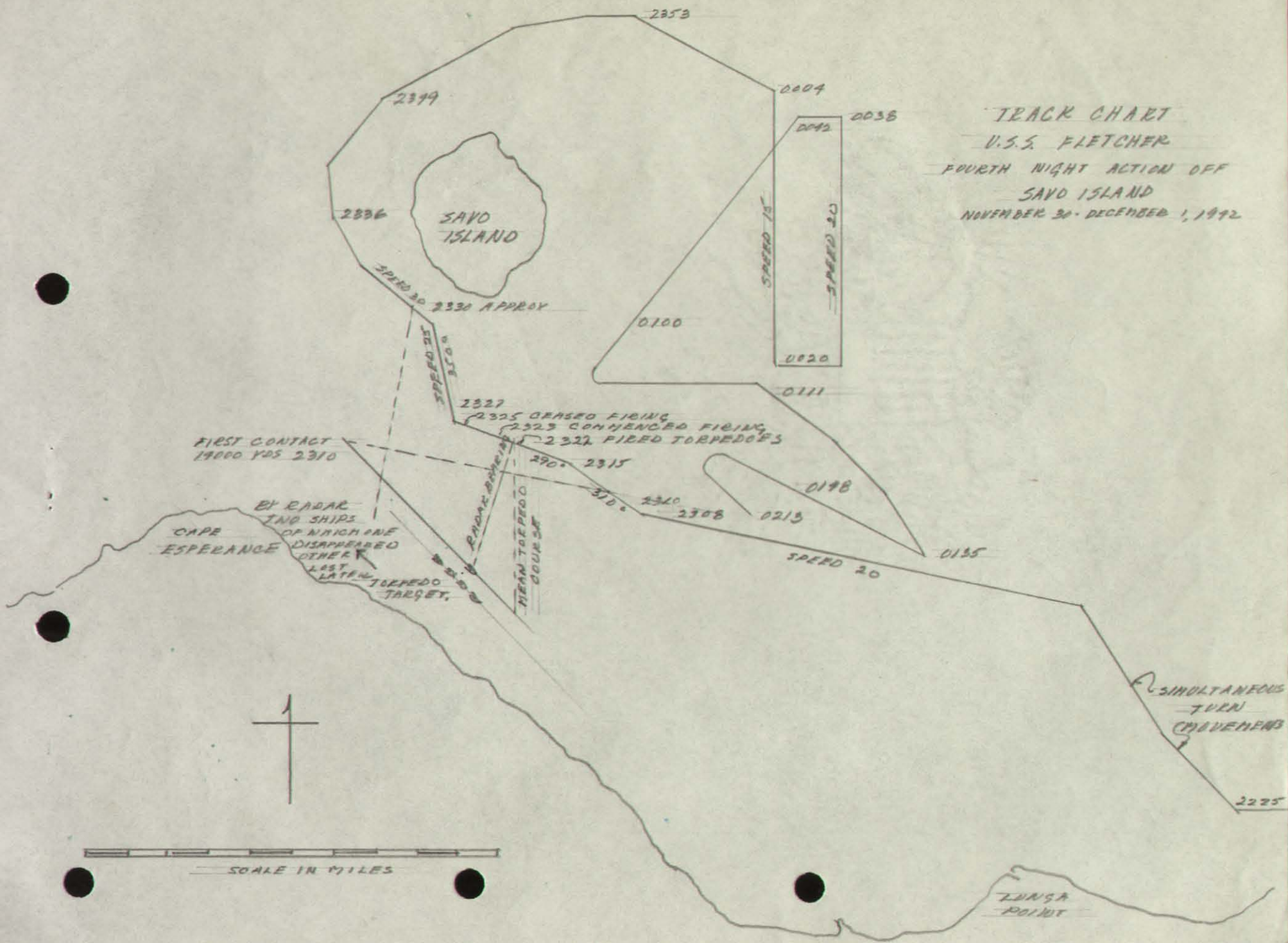
15. The conduct of all officers and men was excellent. The internal organization functioned efficiently and effectively. Certain personnel distinguished themselves during rescue operations, as given in the enclosed report of the Executive Officer.

16. The appearance of the SG radar screen during four phases of the battle are enclosed (Enclosure B). Positions are not necessarily accurate since they were sketched from memory, but the general composition is considered reasonably accurate.

*W.M. Cole*  
W.M. COLE.

cc: Comsopac

TRACK CHART  
U.S.S. FLETCHER  
FOURTH NIGHT ACTION OFF  
SAVO ISLAND  
NOVEMBER 30 - DECEMBER 1, 1942





SAVO

ORIGINAL CONTACT

Time 2310 ; Bearing 285 T.  
Range 13,700 yds

At this point enemy showed as  
two pips.

Enemy

DD

CA



Fired Torpedoes

Time 2322

First salvo:

Torpedo director matched with  
S.G. Radar. Radar trained on  
two pips, one back of other.

Second salvo:

Picked second ship in van. All  
targets now abaft beam.

DD

CA

Enemy

1st salvo  
2nd salvo  
3rd salvo  
4th salvo  
5th salvo  
6th salvo  
7th salvo  
8th salvo  
9th salvo  
10th salvo



CRUISERS BREAK FORMATION

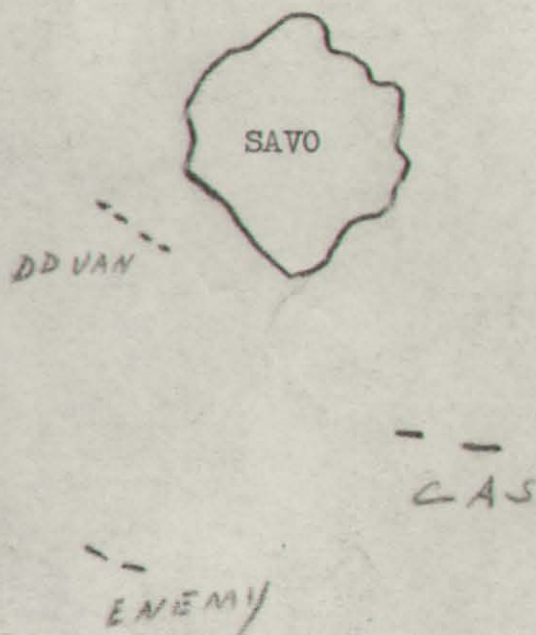
Time 2327

Two enemy pips due south.  
Range 12,000 yds.

DD VAN

CRUISERS

ENEMY



COURSE 310 T.

Time 2333

Two of our cruisers seemed to be following us out. Later one dropped out and only the Honolulu followed us around. The two enemy targets were still south of us at an estimated thirty knots. Range 12,000 yds. (other cruisers out of range.)

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U. S. S. FLETCHER  
% Postmaster  
San Francisco,  
California

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December 3, 1942.

From: The Executive Officer.  
To : The Commanding Officer.  
Subject: Action Report.

Reference: (a) U.S. Navy Regulations, Art. 948.

1. This vessel engaged with enemy in a night action between Savo Island and Cape Esperance, Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, at about 2320 November 30, 1942.

2. During the action the torpedo and gunfire was directed, as usual, from the SG Radar. Torpedo and gunnery control parties functioned smoothly and without incident, the only fault being an apparent reduced sensitivity in FD Radar. This was later determined to be a defective tube.

3. The conduct of all officers and men during the action was excellent, though without particularly noteworthy personnel incidents <sup>at</sup> that time. No damage was received.

4. (a) From about 0150 to 0435 the ship was engaged in rescuing survivors from the NORTHAMPTON. Four cargo nets, previously rigged for this purpose, were put over the side as well as two floater nets and all available sea ladders. Most of the survivors were able to climb aboard without assistance.
- (b) Our port whale boat was lowered in charge of Ensign C. F. Gressard, U.S.N., and started out to tow several rafts to the ship. At the first raft, however, too many men grabbed at the side and the boat capsized. An attempt was made to right her but soon abandoned to free men for other activities.

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- (c) A NORTHAMPTON motor whaleboat came alongside and her crew was replaced with FLETCHER men as follows:  
Coxswain - JENKINS, L.C., #376 19 85, Sealc, U.S.N.,  
Engineer - GEPHARDT, J.F., #268 07 99, MMLc, U.S.N.,  
Bow Hook - JARRELL, J.W., #636 48 89, Sea2c, U.S.N.R.  
This boat worked for over two hours with two rafts in tow, making numerous trips away from the ship, loading boat and rafts, and returning to unload abreast the cargo nets. Their conduct was most praiseworthy.
- (d) Several men, HOWELL, J.E., #268 71 28, Flc, U.S.N., STRICKLAND, D. (n), #552 00 41, Sealc V6, U.S.N.R., THOMAS, H.W., #662 02 35, Sealc V6, U.S.N.R. and KROM, D.E., #393 38 58, TM2c, U.S.N. went over the side to rescue men who could not reach the ship. Their courage and bravery, particularly that of HOWELL who several times swam out as far as 100 yards carrying lines to weakened men, is worthy of official commendation.
- (e) A total of 42 officers and over 600 men were rescued by this ship and carried as passengers from the Guadalcanal to Base BUTTON.

5. During this action, as during that on the 13th of November, the SG Radar was used for both torpedo and gunnery control. Its tremendous value cannot be overemphasized. Without it the targets would not have been sighted and neither torpedoes nor guns could have been brought to bear. As for navigation, it was used for entry through Lengo Channel, it was used to round Savo Island at 30 to 35 knots, and before day break to enter Sealark Channel at 25 knots.

6. The performance of the engineering personnel during and after the action when full power was called for, and during the 25 knot run back to BUTTON was a splendid example of efficient organization and operation.

7. In summation, the entire ship's company is one of which the Commanding Officer may well be proud.

*J. C. Wylie*  
J. C. WYLIE.

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