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DD449/A18-5

By E.C.W. Date 8/4/58

Serial No. 005.

U. S. S. NICHOLAS

No.

Re-Relief

July 7, 1943

From: The Commanding Officer,  
 To: The Commander in Chief, United States Pacific Fleet.  
 Via: (1) The Commander Task Unit 36.1.4.  
 (2) The Commander Task Group 36.1.  
 (3) The Commander South Pacific Force and South Pacific Area.

Subject: Action Report.

References: (a) Article 712 and Article 874(6), U.S. Navy Regulations 1930.  
 (b) Pacific Fleet Confidential Letter 24CL-42.

Enclosure: (A) Navigational Track Chart.

1. (a) This vessel, as a unit of Task Group 36.1, engaged an enemy force of cruisers and destroyers off the north east coast of Kolombangara Island, British Solomon Islands during the early morning of July 6, 1943. The task group, after bombard- ing enemy installations in Sula Gulf on the morning of July 5, 1943, had retired into Indispensable Strait enroute to fueling rendezvous south east of San Cristobal, and at 1200 July 5, received orders to proceed to the northward of New Georgia Island to intercept enemy shipping which was expected to be engaged in reinforcing Jap posi- tions in the Vila area. A later despatch directed the retirement of the task group at 0800 Love July 6, 1943, in case contact had not been made.

(b) The formation course and axis after passing Savo Island was 092°T, the cruisers being in column, U.S.S. MONMOUTH, U.S.S. HOLMES, U.S.S. ST. LOUIS, in the order named with destroyers disposed as follows: U.S.S. NICHOLAS No. 1 (2045), U.S.S. O'BANON No. 2 (2215) from the MONMOUTH, and the U.S.S. JENNIES No. 4 (2225) and U.S.S. RADFORD No. 3 (2155) from the ST. LOUIS. Formation speed 25 knots.

(c) The action can be divided into two major phases in which the entire task group participated, and a third phase in which only the RADFORD and NICHOLAS were engaged.

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(a) (Cont'd) During the first phase, enemy light forces, believed to be four destroyers and one cruiser, were engaged by gunfire and all of them are believed to have been destroyed. Near the mid of this phase the HELENA was struck by torpedoes and sunk. The second phase commenced when enemy cruisers, believed to be three light cruisers and one heavy cruiser, were attacked with gun fire and torpedoes by the task group as they stood out of Kula Gulf. Upon the completion of this phase there were no enemy contacts remaining. The task group then stood to the westward to get a look into Vella Gulf, and finding no enemy there, retired to the eastward. When passing through the waters of the first phase, the bow of the HELENA was observed and the RADFORD and NICHOLAS were ordered to pick up the survivors. These ships later engaged two different enemy groups as they stood out of Kula Gulf.

2. (a) The enemy force involved is believed to have consisted of 1 CA, 3 CL's, 4 - 6 DD's, and about 4 AK's. First contact was established at about 0145 as the enemy ships skirted the north east coast of Kolombangara Island. These ships were in line of bearing and rather close formation, about two miles off shore.

(b) Upon making contact, at 0145, battle formation was ordered, placing ships in column in the following order, NICHOLAS, O'BANION, HONOLULU, HELENA, ST. LOUIS, JERKINS and RADFORD.

(c) Weather conditions were as follows: Wind 110°T, force 1, sea from 110°S, heavy cloud layer at about 5000 feet, no moon, very dark night, with visibility about 2000 yards.

3. Chronological Log of the Battle. Initial contact was made at 0145 and battle formation ordered at that time. First contact reported by TSS was at 0147 by HELENA, bearing 804°T, distance 9 miles.

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5. (Cont'd.) Chronological Log of the Battle.

- 0148 Ships left to 232°.
- 0152 Ships right to 228°, leading target bearing 197°T, distance 11,650 yards from this vessel, tracked on course 230°T, speed 24 knots.
- 0152 - 0159 Normal fire distribution given. Ordered to attack by gun fire first. Waiting reports from cruisers that they were ready to commence firing.
- 0159 Commenced firing at leading ship, target believed to have been a destroyer.
- 0203 Target turning away and headed towards beach.
- 0206 Ships right 180° to course 113°T, ceased fire, line of fire obstructed by O'BARRON.
- 0211 Ships right 30° to 142°T to close range on ships standing out of Kula Gulf. Targets believed to be three light and one heavy cruiser.
- 0217 Ships left to 082°T.
- 0224 Ships right to 113°T.
- 0228 Ships right to 262°T.
- 0235 Contact on enemy ship on port bow, course 120°T, speed 12 knots.
- 0242 Fired half salvo torpedoes spread, and commenced firing, target bearing 206°T, distance 5000 yards.
- 0244 Ceased firing. Target is believed to have been a badly damaged destroyer and is believed to have been sunk.

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3. (Cont'd.) Chronological log of the battle.

- 0244 Ships right to 232°. No enemy contacts now on radar screen.
- 0254 Changed speed to 28 knots.
- 0256 Received orders to proceed ahead and make sweep of Vella Gulf, left task group at 35 knots.
- 0309 Task group reversed course to 112°T.
- 0315 No contacts in Vella Gulf, reversed course when ordered to rejoin.
- 0335 RADFORD identified bow of HELSEA and was ordered to stand by survivors.
- 0337 Ordered to assist RADFORD in picking up survivors.
- 0340 Arrived near survivor area - lowered boats and proceeded with rescue work.
- 0405 Obtained contact bearing 271°T, 1600 yards and went to 27 knots on course 320°T to investigate.
- 0408 Contact bearing 274°T distance 1600 which reversed course and headed 300°T at 30 knots.
- 0414 RADFORD reported two contacts standing out of Kula Gulf, unable to pick them up.
- 0417 Contact continued on 300°T at 30 knots, so returned to survivor area.

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5. (Cont'd.) Chronological Log of the Battle.

- 0516 Contact bearing 159°T distance 15,500 yards.
- 0522 With contact bearing 175°T distance 7950 yards on course 313°T, speed 30 knots, fired half salvo of torpedoes at intermediate speed. Went ahead full power on course 070°T.
- 0528 Heard torpedo detonations. Contact bearing 207°T, distance 6750 yards.
- 0532 Changed course to 210°T. HADFORD opened fire on a target.
- 0537 Opened fire on enemy ship with star shells and also illuminated. Identified as a Sordal Class light cruiser, target bearing 255°T distance 9650 yards. Hits were observed being made and a large cloud of black smoke was observed to the left of target. It is believed this was two targets, a cruiser and a destroyer. The cruiser was probably sunk by torpedoes and the destroyer probably received one hit. Survivors in the water saw two ships, one of which they believe sank shortly after the torpedo detonations. The cruiser was the only ship sighted when target was illuminated. The cruiser returned our fire sporadically and ineffectively.
- 0559 Ceased fire, turned away to avoid possible torpedoes and returned to survivor area.
- 0605 Contact bearing 178°T distance 12,450 yards standing out of Kula Gulf on course 310°T, speed 24 knots.
- 0610 Enemy opened fire, bearing 208°T, distance 9,650 yards. Fire was returned. Went ahead full power on course 110°T, retiring to Tulagi.
- 0707 Fighter cover overhead.

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4. (a) The performance of gun and torpedo batteries is considered to be excellent, except for continued loading jams. Gun # 3 had a jammed cartridge during the first phase which prevented the plug from being fully closed or opened. This gun was not cleared and brought back into operating condition until about 0300. The hydraulic shell hoist in Gun # 5 became inoperative while firing on the Jap cruiser at 0257 and could not be operated either in power or manually. This left the NICHOLAS with only three, five inch guns, and no torpedoes when taken under fire by another Jap unit at 0610. 376 rounds of 5"/39 cal. ammunition were expended. Radar spotting was not effective, probably because of the rather long range. Hits on the enemy could be easily identified.

(b) All ten torpedoes were expended. All torpedoes apparently made normal runs, the first spread of five torpedoes was fired at 0242, target bearing 308°T, range 8000 yards, target course 120°T, speed 12 knots. Depth setting, according to doctrine had been set at 10 feet, but prior to firing the depth was set at five feet because the target was believed to have been a damaged destroyer. The second attack was made at 0322 while dead in the water picking up HULLERSA survivors. A spread of five torpedoes were fired at the target bearing 178°T, range 7950. This target had been tracked in from 13,500 yards, giving a course of 20°T, speed 30 knots. At about 0328 two distinct underwater explosions were heard. The target speed immediately dropped from 30 to 24. Survivors in the water state that they could see two ships, one of which broke in two and sank. A second ship was also apparently hit at the same time and was observed to be proceeding slowly on a southerly course, smoking badly, this ship may have been beached on Kolombangara.

(c) When taken under fire by an enemy unit at 0610, this force retired, returning the fire until out of range. Several enemy salvoes landed between this vessel and the RADFORD. None of them are believed to have been closer than 500 yards. Smoke was used during retirement until target was out of range.

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5. Communications with the Task Group were entirely by TBS. Shortly after parting company with the Task Group Commander at about 0340, he advised by TBS that he would request air coverage at dawn. This message was not received, and this fact combined with the rapid approach of daylight, had considerable bearing on the decision to abandon further rescue work.

6. Comments on Engineering and Medical Departments.

(a) Engineering Department: For practically the entire battle the engineering plant was operated at almost full power, except when picking up survivors. On the return to Tulagi, full power with a maximum of 400 R.P.M. was used in order to obtain a fighter coverage as quickly as possible. During the latter part of the battle, speed was used. Operation was on split plant. Performance of the entire plant was highly satisfactory and the speed produced and maintained was a source of satisfaction for all hands. After reaching an area where it could be safely done, the engines were slowed gradually in accordance with the best engineering principles, tubes were blown, and two boilers placed in standby status.

(b) Medical Department: One HELENA survivor died as result of serious burns. Another had a broken leg which was reset on board. The remainder had only slight injuries. The immediate need in temperate climates when survivors come aboard is to get their nose and eyes cleaned of oil, and to check their bodies for serious wounds. An organization must be effected to keep the men moving toward one or the other of the battle dressing stations, and from there, below decks where they may cleanse themselves with diesel oil and rags. A shower, clean clothes, warmth and rest below decks are next steps to be taken.

7. Comments and Recommendations.

(a) This operation is an excellent argument in favor of a second SS radar in all ships, and urgently needed in all flagships, including destroyer leaders.

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7. (a) (Cont'd) This action definitely shows that all ships must maintain a careful check on the remainder of the formation as well as the location of damaged ships.

(b) The use of flashless powder must be regarded as highly important because of the concealment feature, and the better visibility it affords own ship personnel. The destroyer allowance should be doubled, and flashless powder always used in the forward two guns. It is also recommended that the allowance of 8 inch cannon be increased to 200 rounds.

(c) In recovering survivors, too much time was lost waiting for boats to tow the rafts and nets alongside. The engine cannot be used with people in the water near the stern. It is necessary to get lines to the rafts and nets from the ship itself by swimmers. Boats render great service by picking up single people, collecting rafts and nets into larger groups and removing seriously wounded to the rescue ship.

(d) It was fortunate that the HANFORD had a fighter director unit on board, from a previous duty assignment. However, all destroyers CIC should be capable of taking over the fighter direction. Present equipment is sufficient.

(e) The doctrine of attacking an enemy with gun fire and torpedoes, then turning away in time to avoid his torpedoes under cover of smoke, appears sound. This procedure was used.

8. The performance of duty of all personnel was outstanding. In several cases the conduct of officers and men was a glorious inspiration. The following officers and men are deserving of very special credit and recognition:



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B. (Continued).

Lieutenant Commander Lewis L. SPIDER, USN, -  
CIC Evaluator.  
Lieutenant (jg) John C. EVERETT, D-V(O), USNR. -  
Torpedo Control Officer.  
Lieutenant John H. STONE, D-V(O), USNR. -  
Gunners Officer.  
Lieutenant James P. COLEMAN, USN. -  
Engineer Officer.  
Lieutenant William B. SALISBURY, D-V(O), USNR. -  
Communication Officer and Officer of Deck.

BOYKIN, Maurice E., CGM(AA), O-1, USNR. -  
CIC Plotter.  
SCARBROUGH, John Louis, RdMSc, V-3, USNR. -  
Radar Operator.  
WILE, Steve A., RdMSc, U. S. Navy. -  
Radar Operator.

BOATS CREWS:

ANDERSON, Kenneth R., Cox, U. S. Navy.  
FRIDIN, Walter (n), Slc, V-6, USNR.  
ANCHUSAUX, Louis J., Flc, U. S. Navy.  
PIPES, Ralph Hallie, Slc, U. S. Navy.  
DEKTRADERS, William J., SP2c, U. S. Navy.  
MOLL, Joseph M., Jr., SMSc, U. S. Navy.  
SCHMIDT, Lowell L., SSc, USNR.  
GLASFILLE, William F., Slc, U. S. Navy.  
ROCK, Earl W., PSc, V-6, USNR.  
BALLARD, William C., PSc, U. S. Navy.

The matter of approximate awards for outstanding performance of duty by individuals during this series of engagements will be made the subject of separate correspondence.

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A. J. HILL.

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