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## Admiral Thomas C. Hart And The Demise Of The Asiatic Fleet 1941 – 1942

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Admiral Thomas C. Hart And The Demise Of The  
Asiatic Fleet 1941 – 1942

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of History  
East Tennessee State University  
In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in History

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by  
David DuBois  
May 2014

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Keywords: Admiral Thomas C. Hart, U.S. Navy WWII, Asiatic Fleet, ABDA, USS Houston,  
Battle of the Java Sea

## ABSTRACT

Admiral Thomas C. Hart And The Demise Of The  
Asiatic Fleet 1941 – 1942

by

David DuBois

*Admiral Thomas C. Hart And The Demise Of The Asiatic Fleet 1941 – 1942* is a chronicle of the opening days of World War II in the Pacific and the demise of the U.S. Navy's Asiatic Fleet. Beginning with the background of Four Star Admiral Thomas Hart, this chronicle shows the history of the nearly obsolete ships that fought in the beginning of World War II. The reader will come to realize how and why this fleet ceased to exist within ninety days from the start of the war. Historical evidence will show that the damage inflicted on the Japanese was much greater than what was recorded in popular history. Hart was relieved of his command due to political considerations but not a single ship was lost while he was in command of the Asiatic Fleet. Hart fulfilled his orders to preserve the integrity and safety of the American Asiatic Fleet.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have accomplished this mid-life career change, let alone this paper, without the loving support of my wife Vickie, who literally nursed me back to health after a near-fatal medical crisis in February 2008. She has proof read my papers, made suggestions and offered her keen insight into a multitude of papers that I am sure she found mostly uninteresting, as she is not a historian. She listened to me ramble on about inane subjects that interested me and rarely told me to shut up about them. She patiently spent a portion of the summer of 2013 in Washington, D.C. during a major heat wave, while I spent days and days in the National Archives locating source material for this paper.

I would also like to acknowledge three important family members. My father served in Europe during World War II, and stories of his experiences sparked my interest in the largest war in the history of mankind. An uncle served in the Navy in the Pacific in World War II, and while I did not spend much time with him as a child, he spoke of the island hopping campaign to defeat Japan. My mother also served in the Navy during World War II, filling in more of the history of that war from a personal perspective. Following in their footsteps, I joined the Navy in 1970 and served a tour in Vietnam, giving me a greater insight into what my family members and countless others had sacrificed for this country. During my enlistment, I spent months at sea at a time and gained a familiarity with what the crews of the Asiatic Fleet endured. I have been to the Philippines several times and know that the Filipino people are still very proud of their role in World War II.

I must also acknowledge the survivors of the Asiatic Fleet for their memoirs and oral histories, for without them, much of this information would have been lost. I tried to portray their story in a way that would do them justice, although they were given a task that could not possibly have been successful. Each of their books and memoirs filled in blanks in the official narrative compiled by the Office of Naval Intelligence. I must also thank those nameless men

and women at the ONI (Office of Naval Intelligence) who compiled the official report on the Java Sea Campaign, and who worked without the input of the survivors of the Asiatic Fleet to create a record of events based on the knowledge that they had at the time.

I must also thank the professors who have helped me along the way, both as an undergraduate and a graduate student, especially Dr. Emmett Essin III. Without their collective guidance and support, this thesis, and all of my other academic achievements, would not have been possible. I would also like to thank my fellow graduate students and members of Phi Alpha Theta for their support and help, and letting me vent my opinions without too much reprisal on their part.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

On 27 November 1941, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Harold Stark sent a secret dispatch to his senior Flag Commanders in the Pacific, Four Star Admirals Husband E. Kimmel at Pearl Harbor and Thomas C. Hart of the Asiatic Fleet in Manila. This “War Warning” read:

This dispatch is to be considered a war warning: Negotiations with Japan looking toward the stabilization of conditions in the Pacific have ceased. An aggressive move by Japan is expected within the next few days. The number and equipment of Japanese troops and the organization of naval task forces indicates an amphibious expedition against either the Philippines, Thai or Kra Peninsula or possibly Borneo. Execute appropriate defensive deployment preparatory to carrying out the tasks assigned in WPL 46. Inform district and Army authorities. A similar warning is being sent by War Department.<sup>1</sup>

Army Generals Walter Short and Douglas MacArthur also received a similar warning. What the President, the State, War, and Navy Departments, and the British, failed to foresee, was the simultaneous attacks on all these targets as well as the attack on Pearl Harbor. Admiral Kimmel and General Short at Pearl Harbor and General Douglas MacArthur in the Philippines disregarded the War Warning. Commander of the Asiatic Fleet, Admiral Hart, had been working furiously for months because he too had seen that the Japanese were getting ready for war. Hart and MacArthur had been at loggerheads for several months on how to deal with the pending situation. Their personalities were diametrically opposed to one another; MacArthur was loud and brash, while Hart worked with quiet determination to accomplish the goal of getting the Asiatic Fleet ready to defend the Philippines.

Unfortunately, because of the lack of proper equipment and ammunition and a very small fleet composed of obsolete ships that were incapable of withstanding the onslaught of a large modern Japanese fleet, the Asiatic Fleet would be destroyed. MacArthur’s lack of properly trained and equipped Filipino troops meant that the Japanese landed in the Philippines unopposed. The Asiatic Fleet could have existed much longer, although it would have had to

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<sup>1</sup> David Arthur Thomas, *The Battle of the Java Sea*, pp. 26-30.



withdraw to the safety of the Indian Ocean or to Australia, if it were not for the incompetent leadership that replaced Hart. A personal vendetta by General Douglas MacArthur and political grandstanding by both the Dutch and the British, coupled with a previous confrontation with then Assistant Secretary of the Navy and future President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, played a major role in replacing Admiral Hart in the middle of February 1942, and the Asiatic Fleet ceased to exist within two weeks of Hart's transfer.

By the time of his dismissal, Hart had been a naval officer for more than 40 years, one of only four Four Star Admirals in the U.S. Navy, a graduate of Annapolis and both the Navy and the Army War Colleges. The Dutch commanders who replaced Hart had very little command experience, a total lack of organization, and a blind plan to attack the Japanese and defeat them. After Hart's replacement in February 1942, Dutch and British command ignored the clear evidence that ships could not stand alone against aerial attack without an air cover defense. Despite the sinking of HMS *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* due to a lack of air support, ABDA (American, British, Dutch, and Australian) Command continued to sortie unprotected ships against the well-equipped and highly trained Japanese who employed proper air support. The only effective attacks that delayed the Japanese invasion were the attacks by the very limited Allied aircraft against the Japanese forces invading Bali.

For years the government had ignored the Asiatic Fleet, sending nearly obsolete WWI era ships and equipment to the West Pacific. The ammunition that the Asiatic Fleet depended on for defense was old and had a failure rate as high as 80 percent.<sup>2</sup> The Mark 14 torpedo had a design flaw that caused no more than 20 percent to function properly. The Navy suffered from the depression in the United States in much the same manner as the rest of the country, and in late 1941 there was no time left to rectify that situation. Many of the officers in the Asiatic Fleet fell into one of two categories: older officers at the end of their effective career who had already

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<sup>2</sup> Walter G. Winslow, *The Ghost That Died at Sunda Strait* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984), pp. 35.

retired but were on active duty, or officers who were incompetent and found a safe billet aboard a vessel of the Asiatic Fleet. Even when money was finally allocated to improve the equipment of the Asiatic Fleet, such as RADAR (Radio Detection and Ranging) for the USS *Houston* or improvements to the bases in Manila, there was no time to make the improvements.

Hart was replaced by a Dutch flag officer who had never commanded squadrons of mixed types of ships, a group that lacked a common language or means of communicating between ships, and a total lack of air support or even the ability for Allied reconnaissance aircraft to report Japanese sightings to the navy. This was a time for shifts in the basic paradigm of naval strategy. Large battleships were proven incapable of defense against aircraft; aircraft carriers became the new capital ships of the modern navy. Drastic changes were made in tactics, weapons, ships, and planes to fight this new warfare of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. World War II was the largest war in the history of mankind and early 1942 set the stage for this new type of warfare. These conditions brought about the demise of the Asiatic Fleet as a fighting force. The Japanese sank many of the ships and machine-gunned or abandoned the survivors in the water, and some ships just disappeared, never to be heard from again.

The early days of World War II in the Pacific are little studied; the Asiatic Fleet was obliterated mostly because of neglect by the U.S. government. Pearl Harbor is well known because it was a “sneak attack,” but in reality, the U.S. government knew that attacks were pending, lacking only the targets. Popular historians ignore the Asiatic Fleet and the attempts made to hold off the Japanese conquests. They leap from Pearl Harbor to the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo later in 1942, and when reporting the Asiatic Fleet and the Battle of the Java Sea, grossly underestimate the amount of damage suffered by the Japanese. The Asiatic Fleet, despite losing the battle against the Japanese, played an important role in the early days of 1942.

## CHAPTER 2

### PREPARING FOR WAR

The United States of America maintained an Asiatic Fleet that started in 1852 and continued through the early part of 1942 to protect its interests in the Western Pacific and Asia. In 1852, Commodore Mathew Perry brought two steamships, USS *Susquehanna* and USS *Mississippi*, each towing a sailing ship, into Tokyo Bay, where he established the first American contacts with the Japanese. Perry returned a year later with an eight-ship fleet, signed a treaty with Japan, and subsequently visited Shanghai, Canton, and Hong Kong to show the U.S. flag. Some of these ships became the first U.S. military ships in Asian waters. The Asiatic Squadron spread itself among the ports of China and Japan, and in 1898, Admiral Dewey used the squadron plus ships leased from the British to defeat the Spanish fleet in the Battle of Manila Bay. The capture of the Philippines gave the United States a colony in Asia that necessitated the need to not only protect U.S. interests in Asia but also to defeat the insurgent Filipinos in their attempt to free the islands from foreign control. Damage to the battleship USS *Oregon* during the Boxer Rebellion in China in June 1900 proved the necessity of forward repair facilities in the Pacific; the naval base at Cavite in Manila Bay served this purpose with oil storage, a dry dock, hospital, and all the support needed to maintain the fleet. Another even larger dry dock was later built in nearby Subic Bay to accommodate larger and heavier ships.

In the nineteenth century, the United States maintained one of the largest merchant fleets in the world. American clipper ships covered the world's oceans. In 1852 alone, American shipyards launched 66 clipper ships and maintained a high production rate for many years. The trading ports of China and whaling near Japan required the Asiatic Squadron to protect the interests of the United States and American citizens in foreign waters. The ships the United States Navy sent to the Asiatic area, as additions to the Asiatic Squadron and later the Asiatic Fleet, seldom returned to the United States. This proved to be true of the sailors sent to Asia as

well; they would serve their entire enlistment in Asia, often marrying an Asian girl and remaining in Asia when they retired, giving rise to the term “old China hand.” The cost of living was low and if the sailors lived in their own homes on shore, it reduced the billeting requirements of the Navy. Sailors who took up permanent residence in Asia usually did not acquire venereal diseases and maintained a stabilizing influence on other sailors, and the Navy actively encouraged the practice. Enlisted sailors tended to be career men and kept their invaluable experience within the Asiatic Fleet. Officers, however, often were sent to the Fleet because they were considered “less than desirable” for the Pacific or Atlantic Fleet. The Asiatic Fleet would move north into the cooler climate of the Shantung Peninsula in China during the summer months and wintered in the warmer climate of Manila. Officers commonly brought their families to Asia from the United States, and the families moved north and south with the fleet.<sup>3</sup>

On July 25, 1939, Four Star Admiral Thomas C. Hart assumed command of the Asiatic Fleet onboard the heavy cruiser USS *Augusta*, anchored in Shanghai Bay, relieving Admiral Harry Yarnell. Hart had spent the previous five days being briefed by Yarnell on his new duties: to protect American interests in Asia, show the flag, and participate as a military diplomat in the international community in China. His position as a military diplomat justified his high rank in the Navy, putting him on equal terms with other senior officers



Figure 1. Admiral Thomas C. Hart

from the other navies in Asia. At that time, China hosted naval ships from Great Britain, France, Italy, and the ever-expanding Japanese Navy. The Asiatic Fleet was small, consisting of one heavy cruiser, *Augusta* (CA-31), one light cruiser, USS *Marblehead* (CL-12), 13 four-stacker

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<sup>3</sup> Edwin Palmer Hoyt, *The Lonely Ships: The Life and Death of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet* (New York: McKay, 1976). pp. 35-85

(Clemson Class) World War I vintage destroyers, six submarines, a variety of auxiliary support ships and the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment, as well as the Yangtze River Patrol. The Yangtze River Patrol was under the command of Rear Admiral William A. Glassford, Jr., and maintained a U.S. presence far inland in China. In his new duties, Admiral Hart also assumed command of the naval facilities in the Philippines, more than 1,000 miles to the south, along with the facilities at Cavite Naval Base and the dry docks both in Cavite and nearby Subic Bay.<sup>4</sup>

Admiral Hart was well qualified for this command. He had begun his naval career as a cadet in 1893 at the Naval Academy, one month before his sixteenth birthday. Hart graduated seventh in his class in June of 1897. Naval policy dictated a six-year period to gain a commission and Hart spent the next two years after graduation aboard the battleship USS *Massachusetts* (BB-2). During the Spanish American War, *Massachusetts* became part of the American fleet blockading the Spanish squadron at Santiago de Cuba. Hart received a letter of commendation for his leadership in getting U.S. Army troops ashore through a difficult reef and offshore surf in the small rowboats used as landing craft. After getting the Army troops ashore, and because of his ship handling skills, Hart was sent to augment the crew of a converted yacht, USS *Vixen*, under Lt. Alexander Sharp Jr. and executive officer Ensign Arthur MacArthur III, older brother of Douglas MacArthur. The three quickly became life-long friends.

Prior to the war, Sharp had been the naval aide to the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Theodore Roosevelt, and *Vixen* picked up each day's dispatches from the Army as well as resupplying the troops ashore. Hart was qualified as a dispatch rider and would take the dispatches ashore. Colonel Roosevelt often used this opportunity to come aboard *Vixen* to shower, shave, and eat dinner, getting to know Hart and exploring the wine collection left aboard

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<sup>4</sup> James R. Leutze, *A Different Kind of Victory: A Biography of Admiral Thomas C. Hart* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1981). pp. 146-147.

by the previous owner of *Vixen*. After dinner, Roosevelt, his clothes freshly laundered, headed back into Cuba.

As was the case with other young naval officers, Hart was given a variety of assignments. By chance or through other mitigating factors, the Navy saw fit to send him to the Naval Academy at Annapolis to teach cadets. There he courted and married Caroline Brownson, daughter of the Superintendent of the Academy, Captain Willard Brownson, who would later command the Asiatic Fleet from 1906-07. Before, during, and after Bronson's appointment as Superintendent, the Academy was changing and modernizing its curriculum and enlarging its enrollment. Never before had the U.S. Navy had such a champion in the White House as was Theodore Roosevelt, who believed that a large modern Navy was the cornerstone of effective foreign policy. Hart became the drill instructor for the midshipmen and taught classes in ordnance and gunnery. Hart, under the supervision of Commander William Fullam, re-wrote the textbook on gunnery and ordnance in 1903 and it became the textbook used for fifteen years.<sup>5</sup>

Hart's experience over the next few years gave him additional qualifications for higher command. They ranged from a gunnery officer on the new battleship USS *Missouri* (BB-11) to the command of a Bainbridge class destroyer, USS *Lawrence* (DD-8). *Lawrence* was quite fast and instead of heavy guns (the primary armament of most ships of the time), *Lawrence* carried torpedoes. Hart became the most proficient officer in the Navy regarding torpedoes, so much so that in 1907, when a billet at the Bureau of Ordnance came open, he was assigned to this post, although a rear admiral had previously filled that position. After three years of exemplary service that cemented Hart's reputation as an ordnance expert, Hart's next assignment was as a gunnery officer on the battleship USS *Virginia* (BB-13). The commanding officer was Alexander Sharp, from *Vixen*. With Sharp's encouragement, Hart trained the gunnery crews to the point that *Virginia* came in second in the heated battleship gunnery competitions held a few months after

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 29.

Hart's assignment to *Virginia*. Hart earned a promotion to Lieutenant Commander and a transfer to USS *North Dakota* as gunnery officer.

Hart's expertise in ordinance made him the choice to assume command of a new torpedo factory in Newport, R.I., building the British-designed Whitehead torpedo. Hart's engineers started with the British specifications and modified them to suit American requirements. Early in 1911, the Navy ordered 95 Mark V, Model 3 torpedoes and 75 Mark V, Model 5 torpedoes, an order that took almost nine months to complete. The factory, under Hart's direction, produced a product equal to or better and cheaper than any torpedo available elsewhere, and orders soon increased. The workload increased almost 60 percent in the following year, thereby increasing the civilian workforce at the factory. The increased workload led to conflict between Hart and the Machinists' Union. This conflict brought Hart into adverse contact with Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy. Hart and FDR were on opposing sides of the issue on dealing with the Unions, a confrontation that would come back to haunt Hart in 1942. The issue taught Hart early in his career the knack of getting along with the leaders of labor and making himself popular with the rank and file.<sup>6</sup> Hart knew the language of labor; he grew up among manual laborers in Michigan and his disagreements were with the Union, not the workmen or the quality of their work. Hart believed in an honest day's pay for an honest day's labor, and knew that the civilian workers were already getting better pay than workers in a civilian plant.<sup>7</sup>

Starting on 1 January 1914, Hart began keeping a daily diary, admitting that he did not know exactly why he was doing so, but acknowledging that he should have started earlier. His diary continued until shortly before his death in 1971, encompassing 21 volumes, and his entries for January clearly show that his sentiments were with the workers at the torpedo factory, but

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 40.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-41.

that he “[got] tired of the constant search for benefits” from the Union. His entries also give a distinct view of Hart’s personality. For instance, in April 1914, he wrote that he spent the entire day on the torpedo range “watching five new torpedoes show how many different... ways there are of making bad runs.” On 22 June 1914, Hart discussed the ban on alcohol that had just been enacted by Josephus Daniels, President Woodrow Wilson’s Secretary of the Navy, who Hart referred to as a “Pot house politician from North Carolina.”<sup>8</sup>

Hart spent three years at the torpedo factory, gaining an intimate knowledge of torpedoes, politics, and politicians. His next assignment was as the executive officer of the battleship USS *Minnesota* (BB-22), the youngest executive officer of a battleship in the Navy. Hart gained invaluable experience dealing with foreign politicians when President Woodrow Wilson intervened in Mexico by seizing Veracruz in 1914 and *Minnesota* put its Marine detachment ashore. Hart had the additional title of Chief of Staff of the Landing Force, placing him temporarily in a position of authority over Army generals. Hart had little good to say about Major General Fredrick Funston, in charge of the Army forces in Mexico, as Funston was an alcoholic. Hart also had no respect for the Mexican Army and their ragtag operations, especially their embezzlement of their own payroll and any customs revenues.

It was also during this time that the United States Navy experienced trouble with its submarine fleet. The submarine F-4 sank near Hawaii in March 1915 with the total loss of the crew. Complicating the issue with the submarines, the U.S. torpedoes were not performing properly. In February 1916, Hart was assigned as commander of the Third Submarine Division, based in Pearl Harbor. At the newly established base at Pearl Harbor, the night life proved to be too much of a temptation, so Hart decided that the division would spend enough time cruising the waters around the Hawaiian Islands to ensure that his men did not become too comfortable, including himself. Hart had never been on a submarine before, but soon became an “old

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 41-42.



submariner” in the small, crowded, smelly, and uncomfortable boats, accurately and affectionately known as “Pig Boats.” Hart believed that the crews were not training up to his standard. Some of the officers were openly disparaging of Hart’s discipline. Lieutenant-Commander Hart, however, would tolerate no criticism from lower ranks. He called the worst offenders into his office and ordered them immediately to pack their gear, as he had already arranged their transportation back to the mainland the next day. Hart had cemented his reputation as “Terrible Tommy” Hart. Practice runs and torpedo accuracy began to improve, and Hart increased durations of cruises up to a 500-mile, 10-day cruise to Hilo. Hart’s annual fitness report reflected the drastic improvements in the division, and he was rewarded with promotion to Commander in January 1917, two months before the United States entered World War I.

In April 1917, Hart was promoted to Captain and assigned to take an expeditionary force of submarines across the Atlantic to conduct anti-submarine warfare against the Germans in the waters surrounding the United Kingdom. The route took the first group of four submarines to the Azores by way of Nova Scotia; the plan was for an ocean-going tug to tow the submarines part of the way, as submarines of that class were not designed for an 1800-mile journey across open ocean. As soon as the first group of submarines were safely in the Azores, Hart returned to Philadelphia to bring another group of seven submarines, three sea-going tugs, and two tenders across. Within a short time, Hart was ordered back to Washington D.C. to report on British submarine warfare, and by October of 1918, Hart was named Director of Submarines for the U.S. Navy.<sup>9</sup> Hart spent the next few years charting the course of submarine development; by 1941, the U.S. Navy had a world-class submarine with a torpedo that had several severe design flaws despite Hart’s efforts to get these problems addressed.

Hart left his billet as Director of Submarines to attend the Naval War College, a requirement of all flag officers, graduating in May 1923. Shortly after graduation, Hart received

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 41-66.

an unusual opportunity to attend the Army War College, a rare offering for naval officers, and he remained an additional year as an instructor there. In early 1925, Hart was assigned as Commanding Officer of USS *Mississippi* (BB-41), joining her at Pearl Harbor. As Commanding Officer, Hart gained a great deal of experience in battleship operations and in flotillas of mixed types of ships, fighting them effectively despite President Calvin Coolidge's cost-saving measures such as allowing the Navy to dwindle to 80,000 men.

After two years as commanding officer of *Mississippi*, Hart returned to submarines and assumed command of the torpedo station at Newport, RI in 1927. In 1930, Hart was promoted to Rear Admiral and assigned as the Commander of the Submarine Division. Congress decided that all submarines would be under a single command and under a single Admiral, Hart. His title was changed to Commander, Control Force, and he assumed command of all submarine forces in both the Atlantic and Pacific. The London Naval Treaty set a limit of 52,700 tons for submarines, necessitating the reduction of the submarine fleet from 106 submarines to 55 submarines and plans for any new submarines put on indefinite hold.

Hart became Superintendent of the Naval Academy in May 1931, which was not an assignment Hart would have chosen for himself. The Superintendent is normally a job reserved for an older Admiral, but Hart worked diligently and earned high praise and excellent performance reviews. The Navy had given Hart a broad range of experience, command of ships and flotillas, submarines in both major oceans, administrative assignments, and extensive travel throughout the world, from Europe to Japan and China. Without a doubt, his greatest accomplishment was in the design and operations of submarines.<sup>10</sup>

From the Naval Academy, Hart took command of Cruiser Division 6 in July 1934 after declining a division of battleships. Battleships, Hart thought, "seldom got off on their own," and

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<sup>10</sup> James R. Leutze, *A Different Kind of Victory: A Biography of Admiral Thomas C. Hart* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1981). pp. 65-90.

Hart believed he had already spent enough time with battleships. Heavy cruisers were a new type of ship, he felt working with them would be more stimulating. The U.S. fleet at this time consisted of a Battle Force composed of newer battleships, the Carrier Force, consisting of two divisions of cruisers and four squadrons of destroyers, and the Scouting Force, with three divisions of cruisers and three squadrons of destroyers. Cruiser Division 6 was part of the Scouting Force commanded by Vice Admiral Harris Laning; Hart took command of the Scouting Force in February 1935 and in June 1936, Hart began an assignment to the General Board in Washington D.C., which at that time set future policy of the Navy and of ship design, where Hart had a major influence, both for surface ships as well as submarine design.<sup>11</sup>

A number of Naval Treaties signed during the decades following World War I limited the tonnage of naval ships in an effort to prevent future warfare. The Washington Naval Treaty between the United Kingdom, United States, Japan, France, and Italy limited the construction of battleships and battlecruisers (the capital ships of any Navy of the time) and aircraft carriers. The treaty called for a ratio of 5:5:3:1.75:1.75 between the five signatories of the treaty. Capital ships were limited to 35,000 tons with no guns larger than 16-inch. Aircraft carriers were limited to 27,000 tons, but each signatory could modify two capital ships under construction into aircraft carriers, not to exceed 33,000 tons. The United States scrapped fifteen existing battleships and thirteen more that were under construction.

The economic cutbacks accompanying the depression also constrained Navy expenditures in training, ship maintenance, weapon design, and updates to the existing ships. The Navy cut costs at every point, especially weapon testing; faulty ammunition and torpedoes were issued to the fleet. The Mark 14 torpedo would plague the Navy from the outbreak of World War II until the advent of the Mark 18 in 1943.<sup>12</sup> Inadequate testing and a malfunctioning detonator allowed a

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 91-138.

<sup>12</sup> Walter G. Winslow, *The Ghost That Died at Sunda Strait* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984). pp. 35, 59, 67.

faulty weapon to be issued throughout the Navy. The torpedo ran deeper than set (often as much as 30 feet deeper than set), the magnetic detonator would explode prematurely, and the contact detonator often failed to function at all.<sup>13</sup> More than 80 percent of torpedoes failed to explode as designed. Ammunition for naval guns was improperly tested nor replaced at the end of its service life, leaving many ships to go into battle with faulty ammunition.<sup>14</sup>

Compounding the problem with the Mark 14 torpedo, and unbeknownst to the U.S. Navy, the Japanese torpedo far exceeded the ability of the American torpedo, even if the American product worked perfectly. The Japanese Type 93 torpedo, better known as the “Long Lance” torpedo, carried almost twice the explosive charge as the Mark 14 and ran faster and more accurately. The Mark 14 had a maximum range of 8,000 yards while the Type 93 had an effective range of up to 40,000 yards, almost 25 miles (although it was never launched at such extreme range), and worst of all for the Americans, the Type 93 carried self-contained oxygen, meaning that the torpedo left no telltale torpedo track. This usually meant that the target ship had little or no time to make last minute alterations in course to avoid the oncoming torpedo.<sup>15</sup>

Issues were heating up between the United States and Japan in the late 1930s; the Japanese attacked and sank the U.S. gunboat USS *Panay* (PR-5) on the Yangtze River in China in 1937, annexed Korea and invaded Manchuria. From a naval point of view, there was no doubt that a naval war was brewing in the Pacific, and Admiral Thomas C. Hart was tasked to assume command of the Asiatic Fleet.

The Asiatic Fleet at the time of Hart’s assumption of command consisted of:

1. Heavy Cruiser USS *Augusta*, built in 1930, weighing 9,200 tons and equipped with nine 8-inch guns, eight 5-inch guns, and four small Seagull scout seaplanes launched by catapult and landing on the water for recovery.

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<sup>13</sup> Ian W. Toll, *Pacific Crucible: War at Sea in the Pacific, 1941-1942* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012). pp. 256

<sup>14</sup> Thomas C. Hart, Admiral, *Narrative of Events, Asiatic Fleet Leading up to War and from 8 December 1941 to 15 February, 1942* (College Park, MD: National Archives at College Park, 1942). pp. 53, 64, 67.

<sup>15</sup> David Arthur Thomas, *The Battle of the Java Sea* (New York: Stein and Day, 1969). pp.36.

2. Light Cruiser USS *Marblehead*, built in 1923, weighing 7,160 tons and equipped with twelve 6-inch guns, four 3-inch anti-aircraft guns, and six torpedo tubes.
3. Destroyer Squadron 29 commanded by Captain H. Wiley, consisting of thirteen *Clemson* class destroyers, commonly called “four-stackers,” and a Destroyer Tender USS *Black Hawk* (AD-9). The *Clemson* class destroyers were WWI vintage destroyers and were obsolete compared to the new classes of Japanese destroyers being built at the time. Each was 1,200 tons, carried four 4-inch guns and 12 torpedo tubes. (The 4-inch guns were not capable of elevating up to be used as anti-aircraft guns).
4. Submarine Squadron 20 commanded by Commander John Wilkes, consisting of six S Class submarines, all nearly twenty years old and obsolete. Submarine Squadron 20 also had the submarine tender USS *Canopus* (AS-9).
5. Patrol Wing 10 commanded by Captain F. Wagner, consisting of 36 PBV flying boats, a handful of smaller aircraft, and several seaplane tenders.
6. A variety of coastal and river gun boats used by the Yangtze River Patrol, including inshore patrol craft, tankers, minesweepers and a relief flagship, the USS *Isabel* (PY-10).
7. The 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Regiment numbering approximately 1,000 Marines, that had been stationed in Shanghai, China to protect the interests and safety of American citizens since 1927.

In the two and a half years between Hart’s assumption of command of the Asiatic Fleet and declaration of war against Japan, the Asiatic Fleet was augmented with as many ships and submarines as could be sent from the Pacific Fleet. The submarine squadron was augmented with 23 *Sargo* class submarines. These were new submarines displacing 1,450 tons with a range of 11,000 nautical miles, equipped with eight torpedo tubes and the capacity to carry an additional sixteen torpedoes. Unfortunately, these were the faulty Mark 14 torpedoes. Hart complained to the Chief of Naval Operations that while the Navy had augmented the quantity and quality of the submarines in the Asiatic Fleet, no additional support ships initially were included. Submarines required a great deal of maintenance, and while the submarine tender *Canopus* could maintain the additional submarines for a short period, wartime patrols required an additional tender. The tender USS *Holland* (AS-3) arrived in November 1941, escorting the last few submarines to join the Asiatic Fleet.

On 4 December 1941, USS *Boise* (CL-47) arrived in Manila escorting a convoy of much needed material for the Army. *Boise* was assigned to become part of the Asiatic Fleet and as such, was the newest ship of the fleet. Armed with five triple turrets of 6-inch guns, *Boise* was also the only ship in the fleet with RADAR.<sup>16</sup> Along with *Boise* came USS *Langley* (CV-1), the United States' first aircraft carrier. *Langley* had been modified in 1936 to shorten the flight deck to serve as a large seaplane tender and abide by the Washington Naval Treaty, so that *Langley* could no longer launch or retrieve Navy planes from the flight deck. *Langley* was too slow to keep up with the modern carriers of the time and too small to carry a large compliment of aircraft, so converting her to a seaplane tender was the only option under the Washington Treaty. USS *Guadalupe* (AO-32), a fleet oiler, arrived carrying six motor torpedo boats (commonly known as PT Boats) strapped to her deck. Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron 3, commanded by Lieutenant J. D. Bulkeley, brought experienced crews for each of the six torpedo boats. Bulkeley later earned a Medal of Honor for his defense of the Philippines and for taking Douglas MacArthur from Corregidor to Mindanao, which allowed MacArthur to escape the Japanese invasion.<sup>17</sup>

The new flagship of the Asiatic Fleet was USS *Houston* (CA-30), launched in September 1929 at Newport News, Virginia. *Houston* was fitted to accommodate an admiral and his staff, and was meant to be the flagship of the Asiatic Fleet from the day it was designed. *Houston* displaced 9,200 tons to keep to the agreement in the Washington Naval Treaty but produced 130,000 horsepower, giving a speed of almost 33 knots. Armed with nine 8-inch guns in three turrets, eight 5-inch guns that could be used for anti-aircraft fire or surface targets, and four Seagull scout/observation seaplanes, *Houston* was well equipped to become the flagship of the Asiatic Fleet. "No detail, however small, was overlooked by naval architects, engineers and

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<sup>16</sup> Walter G. Winslow, *The Fleet the Gods Forgot: The U.S. Asiatic Fleet in World War II* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1982). pp. 13-14.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 302-309.

scientists in making this cruiser the supreme combination of all that is superb and efficient in fighting ships,” said the civilian executive secretary of the Cruiser Houston Committee.<sup>18</sup> The crew slept on bunks instead of hammocks, including the enlisted men, with footlockers instead of sea bags hanging on hooks. The crew’s head and showers had hot and cold running fresh water, a luxury normally reserved for officers on other ships. *Houston* conducted a shakedown cruise in the Atlantic to England, France, and Holland; in January 1931, it became the flagship of the Asiatic Fleet until relieved by *Augusta* in November 1933. *Houston* was a shining example of the best the U.S. could produce and the crew kept the ship in immaculate condition at all times.<sup>19</sup>



Figure 2. USS Houston CA-31 off the coast of California, 1937

In 1934, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt chose *Houston* to take him from Annapolis, Maryland through the Caribbean and the Panama Canal to Portland, Oregon by way of Hawaii. *Houston* was the President’s favorite ship. It was fitted with special elevators and handrails to accommodate the President’s disability. The following year, FDR boarded *Houston* in San Diego, California for his return trip home. In July 1938, FDR again chose *Houston* to carry him

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<sup>18</sup> James D. Hornfischer, *Ship of Ghosts: The Story of the USS Houston, FDR’s Legendary Lost Cruiser, and the Epic Saga of Her Survivors* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006). pp. 14 - 21.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21.

for a review of the Pacific Fleet in San Francisco Bay, viewing battleship after battleship passing in a stately progression, followed by the heavy cruisers of the Scouting Force. Following the Fleet Review, *Houston* and FDR set course to San Diego and after a short time in southern California, continued on to the Panama Canal en route to Pensacola Bay. During the 24-day cruise to Pensacola, the President spent a great deal of time fishing with a crew of young sailors in one of the small motor launches; he chose a 20-year-old coxswain to be his personal fishing guide. FDR endeared himself to the crew, remembering crewmembers by name from trip to trip, and ordering the captain to forgo weekly inspections of the crew while he was aboard. On the ninth day out of San Diego, *Houston* crossed the Equator, with the crew anticipating initiating the President in the traditional crossing the equator ceremony. To their dismay, this was FDR's nineteenth crossing of the Equator, making him the "Senior Shellback" (people who have crossed the equator previously) on board. He reveled in the festivities, relaying orders from King Neptune with threats of the ocean deity's vengeance on all "pollywogs" (people who had not crossed the equator). FDR spent the next several days fishing in the waters of the Galápagos Islands before continuing his journey to Pensacola. *Houston* continued training cruises and fleet maneuvers until returning to the Philippines in November 1940 to relieve *Augusta* as flagship of the Asiatic Fleet.<sup>20</sup>

The Asiatic Fleet began to prepare for war in January 1941 when the Department of the Navy sent Commander McCrea to Manila to brief Admiral Hart and his staff with the latest War Plan. At the same time, talks were underway with the British and Dutch in Singapore to coordinate an allied response to a war with Japan. The War Plan's intention was to reinforce the Asiatic Fleet with a minimum of a full Cruiser Division — one aircraft carrier and a full squadron of modern destroyers. By April 1941, that plan had been reversed; the Asiatic Fleet

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<sup>20</sup> James D. Hornfischer, *Ship of Ghosts: The Story of the USS Houston, FDR's Legendary Lost Cruiser, and the Epic Saga of Her Survivors* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006). pp. 14 – 21.



was to receive no surface ship reinforcement, while the British Fleet around Singapore was to be heavily reinforced with battleships and a carrier.

Command of naval forces oscillated between British and American command, depending on which country had the greater number of ships in the area. Dutch naval forces were relegated to a third position, and although the Dutch commanders were in frequent contact with the British, the Dutch had little contact with the Americans. By the time war began in December 1941, the United States had no formal commitments to the British or the Dutch except to furnish the British Far Eastern Fleet with destroyers, if and when the British Fleet grew to contain capital ships and aircraft carriers. Unfortunately for all the allied forces, the Asiatic Fleet had acquired no familiarity with the Dutch naval forces or the Malayan waters. There was a great deal of preparation for communications between the Dutch and the British, communications that broke down in the scramble to save Java after the fall of the Philippines and Singapore.<sup>21</sup>

Admiral Hart began the process of shifting all American assets under his control to Manila and out of Chinese waters. All surface ships that could be moved to Manila were moved, but the Yangtze River boats were not ocean-going craft and moving them out of Chinese waters would be difficult at best. Eventually, and with excellent seamanship on the part of the crews, the gunboats USS *Tulsa* (PG-22) and USS *Asheville* (PG-21) were brought down the coast of China and across the South China Sea to the Philippines. These two ships, built just after WWI, were 241 feet long, each with a crew of 185. These were coastal craft, not riverboats, but they had only a single screw and were capable of no more than 12 knots. They were armed with three 4-inch guns, three 3-pounders, and three 1-pounders. The rest of the Yangtze Patrol were true riverboats, lightly armed and flat bottomed, built in the 1920s for service on the shallow rivers of China. USS *Tutuila* (PR-4) was 1,300 miles up the Yangtze River at Chunking, so it was turned over to the Chinese Nationalist forces of Chang Kai-shek. USS *Wake* (PR-3) was 600 miles up

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<sup>21</sup> Hart, *Narrative of Events*, pp. 1-3.

the Yangtze in the Japanese held city of Hankow. The commanding officer ignored Japanese orders to remain in Hankow and steamed down river to Shanghai to meet with two other riverboats, USS *Luzon* (PG-47) and USS *Oahu* (PR-6). Shortly after midnight on 29 November 1941, *Luzon*, carrying Admiral Glassford, left Shanghai along with *Oahu*, but the Japanese captured the *Wake* and the crew became POWs. During the crossing of the South China Sea, the two riverboats encountered a typhoon and at one point both were given up as lost. The two ships arrived in Manila on 5 December 1941, and Admiral Glassford related to Admiral Hart that at one point, the inclinometer on *Luzon* was registering rolls of an astonishing 56 degrees. A fifth riverboat, USS *Mindanao* (PR-8), stationed in Hong Kong, was to cross the South China Sea by herself. Departing Hong Kong on 2 December, she was at sea when she received word that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. On 9 December, *Mindanao* attacked and sank a Japanese ship, taking ten POWs, the first Japanese POWs taken at sea in WWII.<sup>22</sup>

The 4<sup>th</sup> Marines were also still in Shanghai, although all replacement troops for the Marines were diverted to Manila. When Admiral Hart arrived in Manila, known more formally as the 16<sup>th</sup> Naval District, he found that the commanding officer, Rear Admiral John M. Smeallie, was mentally unstable and there were reports of Smeallie's attempted suicide. Smeallie's replacement was also sent home after little more than a month. In the year preceding the declaration of war, the 16<sup>th</sup> Naval District had five commanding officers, the last being Rear Admiral Francis W. Rockwell, who assumed command in November 1941 just before the Japanese attack. This constant changing of leadership of the 16<sup>th</sup> Naval District led to a lack of proper preparation, and Hart wrote in his Narrative of Events:

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<sup>22</sup> Walter G. Winslow, *The Fleet the Gods Forgot: The U.S. Asiatic Fleet in World War II* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1982). pp. 50 - 53.

The Naval establishment in Manila Bay was, of course, most inadequate and difficulties of an industrial nature were very great. Unfortunately, the best personnel obtainable, which in such a situation might have improved matters to a great extent, was not available. The Department had for far too many years sent officers, line officers in particular, to the 16<sup>th</sup> District who were not of a quality that the conditions called for.<sup>23</sup>

The industrial force at Cavite was expanded to the limits of physical capacity; ammunition and supplies were dispersed to ensure that if one area was destroyed, others would remain intact. Aviation gasoline was put in 55-gallon drums and scattered around the Philippines, as were many of the patrol aircraft. Corregidor was heavily fortified with extensive underground facilities for storing torpedoes, ammunition for the submarine squadron, and spare parts and provisions. Underground construction included moving the vital radio communications from Cavite and Sangley Point. The Naval Air Station at Sangley Point was allocated 5 million dollars for improvements, almost none of which were made. Sangley Point was vulnerable to attack both by sea and by air, so improving it would have been a waste of money and effort in a time in which neither was readily available. Many of the directives from the Navy during this period were either impossible to achieve or of such low priority that they were never attempted. Hart observed that the months before the Japanese attack, the Navy Department received a mass of directives “involving alterations to ships.” Most were similar to ships of other stations while some did not seem to fit the Asiatic Fleets’ requirements. If these alterations had been “taken on,” it would have “swamped” available industrial facilities.<sup>24</sup>

Two projects of critical importance were another naval base at the southern tip of the Bataan Peninsula, the U.S. Navy Base at Mariveles, which was completed in July 1941, and an auxiliary air base at Olongapo (Subic Bay).<sup>25</sup> The Navy planned to disperse the fleet throughout the Philippines, outside of the threat of attack from Japanese aircraft, especially after Japan acquired French Indochina with the fall of France to Germany in 1940.

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<sup>23</sup> Hart, *Narrative of Events*, pp. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

During these same weeks, Hart, a long-time friend of General Douglas MacArthur, began to write in his diary of his increasing frustration with the lack of cooperation from MacArthur and the Army. Hart had known the MacArthurs for almost forty years; one of his closest friends was Douglas MacArthur's brother Arthur. Hart was one of the few people in the world who would call MacArthur by his first name. In Hart's official correspondence and war diary, he noted that there was no cooperation from MacArthur on critical issues; MacArthur repeatedly ignored what the Navy knew to be proper procedures and capabilities. MacArthur was convinced that the Japanese could not attack the Philippines prior to 1945 or 1946 at the earliest. Four Star Admiral Hart outranked Three Star Lieutenant General MacArthur, yet MacArthur made it clear that he intended for there to be no cooperation between the Army and the Navy. MacArthur was openly disparaging of Admiral Hart, resenting Hart's four stars to MacArthur's three stars. MacArthur described the situation as a "Small Fleet, big Admiral."<sup>26</sup> MacArthur had taken up residence in the penthouse of the Manila Hotel with three bedrooms and room to entertain several hundred people.<sup>27</sup> Hart had a much smaller apartment in the Manila Hotel, mostly because the hotel was only three hundred yards from the Naval Headquarters in the Marsman Building. MacArthur seemed to go out of his way to humiliate Hart, in November 1941 when Hart wrote in his diary:

The General came down to my living quarters, right under his own. Characteristically he had his wife telephone me for the appointment and he came down in his bathrobe. The occasion was a dispatch from the War Department about Army reinforcements on the way . . . after extolling the Big Show which he would, eventually, have he said: "Get yourself a real Fleet, Tommy, then you will belong." "I listened to such patronizing talk," Hart wrote, "and under the circumstances it was not pleasant."<sup>28</sup>

Hart developed a deep-seated irritation for the General, despite his long friendship with him. MacArthur refused to keep Hart informed of Army plans, and openly disparaged the "sister

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<sup>26</sup> James R. Leutze, *A Different Kind of Victory: A Biography of Admiral Thomas C. Hart* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1981), pp. 218

<sup>27</sup> R. M. Connaughton, *MacArthur and Defeat in the Philippines* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2001), pp. 72.

<sup>28</sup> James R. Leutze, *A Different Kind of Victory: A Biography of Admiral Thomas C. Hart* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1981), pp. 218

service.” Hart wrote his wife, “The truth of the matter is that Douglas is, I think, no longer altogether sane . . . he may not have been for a long time.” Hart wrote to Admiral Stark, Chief of Naval Operations, that Stark should keep MacArthur’s personality and mental issues in mind when selecting the next commander of the Asiatic Fleet, and that Hart expected further trouble from MacArthur and from his supporters in Washington.<sup>29</sup>

In November 1941, Hart began to disperse his fleet south away from the Philippines, out of range of the Japanese bombers. *Houston* had been fitted with four new 1.1-inch anti-aircraft guns. If there had been more time, RADAR had arrived to be installed on *Houston* and four new searchlights. When Hart received Stark’s “War Warning,” he ordered *Houston* out of Manila Bay as quickly as possible without the intended RADAR or searchlights. The ship was sent to Iloilo Harbor, 250 miles south of Manila, on Panay Island. Iloilo Harbor is open to the sea with no protection from Japanese submarines, which meant that the four observation planes had to fly constant anti-submarine patrol, with motor whaleboats patrolling around the clock closer to shore. From the moment they left Manila, all anti-aircraft guns were manned around the clock, and unbeknownst to the crew, that situation would remain in effect for months.<sup>30</sup> Hart sent four destroyers and the destroyer tender *Black Hawk* to Balikpapan in Dutch Borneo. *Marblehead* and four additional destroyers were sent to Tarakan, also in Dutch Borneo but further north, in case this group was needed back in Philippine waters, 800 miles away.

Hart divided his fleet into separate Task Forces: Task Force 4 contained Patrol Wing 10, seaplane tenders and all aviation resources, Task Force 5 contained all surface ships and was placed under the command of Admiral William A. Glassford, Task Force 6 contained the submarine forces including tenders and rescue ships, and Task Force 7 contained the motor torpedo boats and the Yangtze River Boats *Tulsa* and *Asheville*.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 218 – 219.

<sup>30</sup> Winslow, *The Ghost That Died at Sunda Strait*, pp. 25-27.

November 1941 was a busy month on both sides of the Pacific. Admiral Yamamoto (Chief Architect of the attack on Pearl Harbor) and General Terauchi (Commander of the Southern Expeditionary Group of the Japanese Army) summarized their plans for war against the United States.

1. Simultaneous air attacks on Luzon in the Philippines, the British Malay Peninsula and Hong Kong, followed by amphibious landings, including landings at Miri in North Borneo.
2. The American Pacific Fleet is to be attacked by carrier aircraft at Pearl Harbor.
3. Secondary objective is to secure Manila and Mindanao in the Philippines, Wake Island, Bangkok in Thailand, and Singapore.
4. Seizure and occupation of Netherlands East Indies to secure supplies needed to continue the war against China.<sup>31</sup>

Yamamoto repeatedly told his superiors that a war with the United States would be a “calamity” and should be avoided at all costs. Yamamoto had spent a great deal of time in the United States and knew the industrial might that could be brought to bear against Japan. He wrote to Mumao Harada, secretary to Prince Saionji, “To fight the United States is like fighting the whole world. But it has been decided. So I will fight the best I can. Doubtless I shall die on board the *Nagato* [his flagship]. Meanwhile Tokyo will be burnt to the ground three times.”<sup>32</sup>

On 26 November 1941, the United States added petroleum products to the embargoed items that would no longer be sent in an effort to force Japan to withdraw from China. Roosevelt had met with his Cabinet and the Cabinet was unanimous in their opinion that the American people would support a strike against Japan if Japan attacked British Malaya or Dutch East Indies. At the same time, Admiral Stark, Chief of Naval Operations, of his own initiative, sent a “War Warning” to Admiral Hart. Stark knew that war was eminent:

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<sup>31</sup> David Arthur Thomas, *The Battle of the Java Sea* (New York: Stein and Day, 1969), pp. 28.

<sup>32</sup> Ian W. Toll, *Pacific Crucible: War at Sea in the Pacific, 1941-1942* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), pp. 117.

This dispatch is to be considered a war warning: Negotiations with Japan looking toward the stabilization of conditions in the Pacific have ceased. An aggressive move by Japan is expected within the next few days. The number and equipment of Japanese troops and the organization of naval task forces indicates an amphibious expedition against either the Philippines, Thai or Kra Peninsula or possibly Borneo. Execute appropriate defensive deployment preparatory to carrying out the tasks assigned in WPL 46. Inform district and Army authorities. A similar warning is being sent by War Department.<sup>33</sup>

Japanese fleets were already moving into strike positions at this point, south past Taiwan to attack the Philippines, south from French Indochina to attack Malaya, and east from Japan to attack Pearl Harbor. On 1 December 1941, the Japanese Cabinet met in the presence of Emperor Hirohito and confirmed General and Prime Minister Tojo's decision to go to war with the United States. The date for the simultaneous attacks was 8 December 1941 Tokyo time, 7 December in Hawaii. The Japanese Ambassador to the United States delivered Japan's last ultimatum to Secretary of State Cordell Hull after the attack at Pearl Harbor had begun. Cordell Hull had already received a radio message from Pearl Harbor, "AIR RAID ON PEARL HARBOR X THIS IS NO DRILL."<sup>34</sup> World War II had begun.

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<sup>33</sup> David Arthur Thomas, *The Battle of the Java Sea*, pp. 26-30.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30 – 31.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE FIRST DAYS OF WAR

Japan's war planning method was unique to the peculiar nature of the Japanese government. The Japanese nation, politically and economically, had become dominated completely by its military. The military was equally divided between the Army and the Navy, independent yet interwoven, although technically the Emperor held dominion as the head of the state and every action was taken in his name. The military completely controlled access to the Emperor, and it held all posts in the government cabinet, but could exercise power only through mutual agreement. The cabinet consisted of the Prime Minister, War Minister, Navy Minister, Foreign Minister, and various other ministers, all primarily concerned with the economic and political administration of Japan. The cabinet controlled the materiel and manpower used to execute their war effort.<sup>1</sup> It was with this coordinated effort that Japan began the war, conducted the war, and ultimately lost the war.

At 0748, 7 December 1941 local time, the Japanese began an aerial bombardment of the United States Navy base at Pearl Harbor in two waves consisting of 353 Japanese warplanes launched from six aircraft carriers. At 0758, Rear Admiral Patrick Bellinger sent a message reading "AIR RAID ON PEARL HARBOR X THIS IS NO DRILL."<sup>2</sup> The attacking aircraft sank three battleships, capsized one and damaged four others, along with three cruisers, three destroyers, and other smaller ships. In addition to these devastating losses, the Army Air Force lost ninety-six aircraft, the Navy lost ninety-two planes, and the United States casualties included 2,280 lives lost and 1,109 wounded. The Japanese lost only twenty-nine aircraft and five midget submarines. Fortunately for the United States, the Japanese did not damage the oil

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<sup>1</sup> *The Campaigns of the Pacific War*. ([Washington]: U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey (Pacific) Naval Analysis Division, 1946), pp. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific; 1931-April 1942* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1948), pp. 98-101.



storage facilities or repair shops at Pearl Harbor, and the two Pacific Fleet aircraft carriers were at sea at the time of the attack.<sup>3</sup> At 0330 in Manila, Admiral Hart was awoken with the news, quickly dressed and headed to the Asiatic Fleet Headquarters in the Marsman building. His fleet had been dispersed south, but his submarines were still based in Manila. Tons of supplies and ammunition had to be moved, and thousands of small tasks had to be dealt with. Hart's first order to his fleet was simple, "Japan has started hostilities. Govern yourselves accordingly."<sup>4</sup>

General Douglas MacArthur was told of the attack a short time later and at 0530 received a cable from Washington directing him to execute War Plan Rainbow 5, the long-range strategy for war assuming that the United States is allied with Britain and France. General Brereton, in command of all Army Air Force assets in the Philippines, had put all his personnel on alert at 0400, and requested permission of MacArthur to launch pre-emptive bombing raids on Formosa. MacArthur's Chief of Staff, Richard Sutherland, would only permit reconnaissance flights, and refused to allow Brereton to speak to or see MacArthur. After the war, MacArthur insisted, "My orders were explicit not to initiate hostilities against the Japanese."<sup>5</sup> MacArthur also claimed that "he had not the slightest doubt he would be attacked" and denied he had ever been informed of Brereton's request to bomb Formosa, although Army records of the time clearly indicate that he was told.<sup>6</sup> There are differing stories about what happened to MacArthur, but most claim that MacArthur was in a catatonic state in his hotel suite. Regardless of MacArthur's physical or mental state, no orders were issued for an active defense of the Philippines from MacArthur, there was only silence. Admiral Stark, Chief of Naval Operations, sent a similar message to

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<sup>3</sup> R. M. Connaughton, *MacArthur and Defeat in the Philippines* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2001), pp. 162-163.

<sup>4</sup> James R. Leutze, *A Different Kind of Victory: A Biography of Admiral Thomas C. Hart* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1981). pp. 231.

<sup>5</sup> John Costello, *The Pacific War, 1941-1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009). pp. 142.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 142.

Admiral Hart ordering him to execute the existing war plans against Japan, war plans that involved moving the surface ships to the south.<sup>7</sup>

The Japanese had planned a dawn attack for the airfields of the Philippines. The Philippines were not an essential conquest for Japan, as there were no vital raw materials in the Philippines. The Japanese could not, however, allow the Philippines to remain in American hands, to hinder their supply lines between the oil rich islands of Indonesia to the south. The major threat to the Japanese were the airfields and aircraft, but the attack on the Philippines from Formosa was delayed by weather. Fog covered most of the airfields in Formosa the morning of 8 December 1941, delaying the four hundred planes that should have been over Luzon at dawn. The weather cleared in Formosa, so that at about 1015, 192 Japanese aircraft took off to attack Clark and Nichols Fields in the Philippines.

Brereton notified Clark and Nichols Fields about the attack in Pearl Harbor and a general alarm went off at Clark about 0830. All flight worthy planes were launched, but by 1000, an “All Clear” was sounded at Clark and the aircraft returned to refuel and for the crews to eat lunch. All the aircraft were still on the ground at 1245, when the Japanese began their bombing runs, remaining above the effective altitude of the 3-inch anti-aircraft guns. Flying at 25,000 feet, the Japanese bombers were free to take their time to line up their targets accurately and destroyed twelve B-17 bombers and thirty P-40 fighter planes on the ground; five additional B-17s were severely damaged.<sup>8</sup> Adding insult to injury, the ten-year-old anti-aircraft ammunition failed to explode much of the time, allowing the Japanese fighter planes to strafe Clark for more than an hour. Similar attacks destroyed American RADAR sites and most other aircraft in the Philippines. Eighteen B-17 aircraft survived, one that was on a reconnaissance flight, and seventeen others that were based in Mindanao in the southern Philippines, along with fifteen

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas C. Hart, *Narrative of Events, Asiatic Fleet Leading up to War and from 8 December 1941 to 15 February, 1942* (National Archives at College Park, MD, 1942). pp. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific ; 1931-April 1942* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1948). pp. 170-174.

P-40's. Two additional P-40s survived the attack at Clark because they were flying patrol north of Clark. The Japanese lost seven planes in the attack.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time as the air assault on the air bases on Luzon, Japanese forces invaded the Philippine island of Batan, about 125 miles north of Luzon, but with the overwhelming success of the attacks at Clark and Nichols Fields, the planned Japanese airstrips were never built on Batan. Without effective American or Filipino air or ground defense, the Japanese had planned to take airstrips on the north coast of Luzon, but these airstrips were unneeded to protect the Japanese landings, due to the lack of any serious American air support.<sup>10</sup>

*Houston* left Iloilo as soon as Admiral Glassford came aboard on 8 December and proceeded south to Balikpapan, Borneo. The crew was at general quarters and the guns would remain manned continuously until *Houston* sank the night of 1 March 1942. *Houston* missed the attention of the Japanese pilots on patrol, and in company with *Stewart* and *John D. Edwards*, escorted two fleet oilers and *Langley* out of the war zone.<sup>11</sup>

Admiral Hart could only watch helplessly at noon on 10 December 1941 as more than eighty Japanese bombers leisurely bombed the U.S. Navy base at Cavite, the small crowded base of the Asiatic Fleet. The few 3-inch anti-aircraft guns could do little to stop the bombers as the Japanese destroyed the power plant, repair shops, oil storage, ships, and about a third of the city of Cavite, as the anti-aircraft gun's range could not reach the height of the Japanese planes. The entire base, as well as the city of Cavite, was on fire from one end to the other. Fortunately no direct hit on the ammunition depot spared that important resource. Bombs fell on the submarine USS *Sealion* and the minesweeper USS *Bittern* took direct hits, killing four men. USS *Seadragon*, moored next to *Sealion*, also suffered damage but did not sink.

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<sup>9</sup> R. M. Connaughton, *MacArthur and Defeat in the Philippines* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2001). pp. 165-170.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific ; 1931-April 1942* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1948), 174-176.

<sup>11</sup> James D. Hornfischer, *Ship of Ghosts: The Story of the USS Houston, FDR's Legendary Lost Cruiser, and the Epic Saga of Her Survivors* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006). pp. 32.

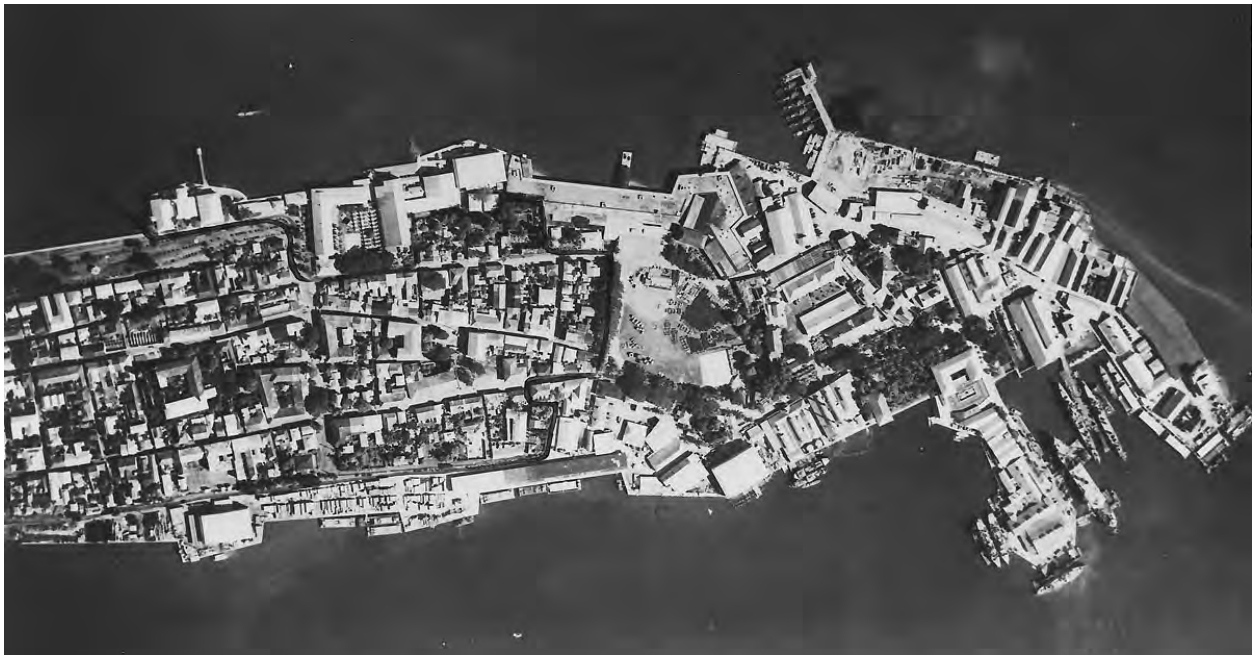


Figure 3. The American naval base at Cavite, Philippines, 27 October 1941

USS *Peary* (DD-226) and USS *Pillsbury* (DD-227) were both in Cavite when the Japanese attacked. *Pillsbury* had her boilers lit and was able to get underway under her own power. *Peary*, however, was in for repairs and was lying “cold iron” at the dock. It was struck by a Japanese bomb that killed the commanding and executive officers along with several others and undoubtedly would have sunk if not for Lt. Commander Charles Ferriter, commanding officer of the minesweeper USS *Whippoorwill* (AM-35). *Whippoorwill* was able, after several attempts, to pull *Peary* to safety. *Peary* was repaired enough to make her seaworthy again and on the night of 26 December 1941, *Peary* was able to escape Manila Bay, the last surface ship to do so.<sup>12</sup>

Admiral Hart observed the two-hour attack from the roof of the Marsman Building, noting the total absence of any American fighter protection. Hart watched as Cavite was left a “burned-out, smoking shambles, which he judged to be ‘utterly ruined.’ For all practical purposes, Admiral Rockwell’s command was out of business.”<sup>13</sup> That night, Tokyo Rose announced that

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<sup>12</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific; 1931-April 1942* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1948), pp. 172-173.

<sup>13</sup> James R. Leutze, *A Different Kind of Victory: A Biography of Admiral Thomas C. Hart* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1981). pp. 233.

Roosevelt's favorite cruiser, the flagship of the Asiatic Fleet, had been sunk in Manila Bay, the first of many reported sinkings of *Houston*, leading to the nickname, the "Galloping Ghost of the Java Coast."<sup>14</sup>

Hart sent all the tenders south with the exception of *Canopus*, along with his relief flagship *Isabel*, a few smaller craft, and more than two hundred thousand tons of merchant shipping that had taken refuge in Manila Bay. He advised Washington that Manila was 'untenable' as a base because of the air situation, but that he would continue submarine and reconnaissance operations as long as possible. Patrol Wing 10 lost seven PBVs on 12 December, when Japanese fighters followed a PBV back from a reconnaissance patrol and destroyed them on the water.<sup>15</sup> Later that day, Hart attended two meetings and a press conference with MacArthur, although there was little reason left for any cooperation with MacArthur. MacArthur was not pleased with the support, or lack of, that he expected from the Navy, in particular, escorting a convoy of supply ships from Brisbane, Australia to Manila. Many voices in Washington had already argued that these supplies would be better sent to another location rather than waste them on the defense of the Philippines. Hart told MacArthur that he had little to protect the convoy and that by the time the convoy was ready to leave Australia, the Japanese would have blockaded all access to the Philippines. In Hart's biography, James Leutze writes, "This reply was distinctly unsatisfactory to MacArthur who, in a tone that was to become familiar, complained to Washington about Hart's attitude, the 'inactivity' of the Asiatic Fleet and the consequent 'freedom of action' enjoyed by the Japanese Navy"<sup>16</sup>.

In a highly coordinated effort, the Japanese landed troops on the coast of Malaya from a group of nineteen transport vessels at the same time as the attack on Pearl Harbor. This third

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<sup>14</sup> James D. Hornfischer, *Ship of Ghosts: The Story of the USS Houston, FDR's Legendary Lost Cruiser, and the Epic Saga of Her Survivors* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006). pp. 33.

<sup>15</sup> James R. Leutze, *A Different Kind of Victory: A Biography of Admiral Thomas C. Hart* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1981). pp. 233-234.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 234.

invasion group disproved the accepted military notion prior to the war that the Japanese could only strike at a single location at a time. The British had intended to further fortify their island fortress of Singapore with a large group of surface ships, including the new battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* and the heavy battlecruiser HMS *Repulse*, supported by four modern destroyers, HMS *Electra*, *Express*, *Encounter* and *Jupiter*. Admiral Hart had agreed to supplement this group, known as Force Z, with several destroyers from the Asiatic Fleet in the event of war with Japan. There were plans to supplement Force Z with an aircraft carrier, probably HMS *Hermes*, but the lightning fast Japanese attack made this impossible.

Force Z had arrived in Singapore only days prior to the Japanese attack, and when word reached Singapore that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor, the commanding officer of Force Z, Admiral Tom Phillips, ordered his forces out to sea. Reconnaissance flights had found the large Japanese surface force proceeding south from French Indochina, and Phillips meant to intercept this group as far from Singapore as possible. Phillips knew that he was leaving without air cover, either carrier-based or land-based, but there was nothing that could be done about that critical shortfall at that point. For two days the British hunted the Japanese fleet until a British patrol plane located them.

Force Z was all state-of-the-art war ships, and despite conclusive evidence of the vulnerability of warships to aircraft, the crews were confident that this would be a short battle. When word reached the *Repulse*, the Officer of the Deck on the Flag Deck remarked to CBS radio correspondent Cecil Brown (on board as a press observer), “Oh, but they are Japanese. There’s nothing to worry about.” When Brown asked the officers in the Ward Room if they were overconfident, one officer replied, “We are not overconfident; we just don’t think the enemy is much good. They could not beat China for five years and now look what they are doing out here,

jumping all over the map instead of meeting at one or two places. They cannot be very smart to be doing that.”<sup>17</sup>

The Japanese air assault of Force Z began about 1100 on 10 December 1941, and by 1230, *Repulse* had been sunk; half an hour later, *Prince of Wales* also went to the bottom. Force Z had lost the pride of the British Fleet along with 47 officers and 793 enlisted men. The lack of air protection meant that the land-based Japanese could bomb the British at their leisure and in textbook fashion. The sinking of Force Z vindicated U.S. General Billy Mitchel’s air combat doctrine that ships without air protection could not defend themselves against air attack.<sup>18</sup> The widely accepted theory by the heads of both the United States Navy and the British Navy was that a new, well-armed battleship with crews of properly trained was self sufficient to protect against enemy air assault. The loss of Force Z and the loss of battleships at Pearl Harbor rang the death knell for battleships in a modern navy. Battleship admirals had discounted the attack at Pearl Harbor because those ships had been “sitting ducks,” but this was the first time free-moving battleships had been destroyed by aircraft.<sup>19</sup>

On the afternoon of 14 December 1941, the majority of the Asiatic Fleet arrived in Balikpapan, Borneo. This hodgepodge of ships consisted of cruisers *Houston*, *Boise*, and *Marblehead*, accompanied by destroyers *John D. Ford*, *Parrott*, *Stewart*, *Paul Jones*, *Barker*, and *Pope*. These ships of the line escorted fleet oilers *Pecos* and *Trinity*, tenders *Otus*, *Holland*, and *Langley*, and the alternate flagship of the Asiatic Fleet, *Isabel*. The destroyer tender *Black Hawk* and destroyers USS *Alden*, *Whipple*, *John D. Edwards*, and *Edsall*, had been at anchor in Balikpapan since before the Japanese attacks. The trip had taken longer than normal due to the requirement to zigzag, changing course and speed to avoid attack by Japanese submarine, and because of the slow speed of many of the tenders and auxiliary ships. Several times during the

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<sup>17</sup> Ian W. Toll, *Pacific Crucible: War at Sea in the Pacific, 1941-1942* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), pp. 53 - 58.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 53-58

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific; 1931-April 1942* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1948). pp.189-190.

trip, destroyers picked up SONAR (Sound Navigation and Ranging) contacts that could be submarines, and each one had to be thoroughly investigated.<sup>20</sup> At one point during the journey, the gunners on *Langley* opened fire at a suspected Japanese aircraft; it turned out that the anxious gunners were firing at Venus.

From Balikpapan, the mixed group of ships moved further south to Surabaya, on the eastern end of Java, and from there many of the auxiliary ships left for Australia. The Dutch in Java expected that this group was the first of a large group of reinforcements that the United States would send to Java to protect the Dutch colony. The Dutch were unaware that the U.S. Navy had been struck a crippling blow at Pearl Harbor and there were no reinforcements to send. No contingency plans had been set, and the movement of the Americans south was not part of a pre-determined plan; the Asiatic Fleet was fleeing for its life. Washington had ordered Admiral Hart to get his ships out of harms way and get them to Darwin, on the northern coast of Australia. Darwin was to be built into a large allied base for shipments to Java and maintenance of ships, out of the range of Japanese bombers. Plans had been discussed for operating American ships out of Singapore, and the British were expecting this to happen despite the loss of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*. Singapore proved to be vulnerable to Japanese bombing, so a base in Australia was deemed safer.

Over the course of the next month, *Houston*, *Boise*, and *Marblehead*, with most of the destroyers of the Asiatic Fleet, were engaged in convoy duty escorting merchant ships from northern Australia to the Dutch East Indies. The British and Dutch commanders in Java wanted the Americans to patrol north of Java, to attack Japanese ships and prevent the Japanese from moving south into the Java Sea. The Americans were ordered to continue to escort convoys of men and material from Australia to resupply the Philippines. After months of mixed signals from Washington regarding the Asiatic Fleet, the Navy Department now began to orchestrate not only

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<sup>20</sup> *Ship's Log, USS Houston*, December 1941. From the National Archives at College Park, MD. pp. 1081 – 1109.



long-term strategy but also the day-to-day tactical movements of all American ships. The attacks at Pearl Harbor, Wake Island, Guam, the surrender of Hong Kong, and the string of victories by the Japanese shook the Navy Department so badly that ships were moved around from Australia to the Indian Ocean in almost a random fashion. This haphazard movement frustrated the British and the Dutch, but they were beyond Hart and Glassford's control.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time, MacArthur was putting the blame for his situation on the lack of support by the Navy, despite his earlier lack of interest in anything Hart tried to get his cooperation on prior to the war. MacArthur wrote continuously to General George C. Marshall and Secretary of War Stimson regarding his perceived failures of Hart and the Navy. Most of MacArthur's complaints to Marshall were ignored, but Stimson found benefit in blaming the Navy for Army shortcomings. While FDR publicly expressed his desire that no effort be spared in getting convoys through to Manila, CNO Admiral Stark told Hart that the military stores in the convoys might be more useful in the defense of Port Darwin. Hart was aware of MacArthur's communications with Marshall and Stimson, and of MacArthur using Hart as a scapegoat for his own shortcomings. On 19 December 1941, Hart wrote in his diary, "He (MacArthur) is inclined to cut my throat and perhaps of the Navy in general. So I have to watch the record and keep it straight lest I wake up some morning and read that T. Hart lost a war or something."<sup>22</sup>

A major issue for Hart was that his submarine force was not very effective against the Japanese, primarily due to the faulty Mark 13 torpedo, with report after report of either missing the target or failing to explode. The submarines were also not able to work in the shallow waters around Luzon, where they were easily visible by Japanese aircraft. Hart did the best he could; he was limited to PT boats and small patrol craft to keep Manila Bay open. *Canopus* remained in Manila Bay to service the submarines that could still go in and out of the bay submerged.

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<sup>21</sup> Ian W. Toll, *Pacific Crucible: War at Sea in the Pacific, 1941-1942* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), pp. 235 - 237

<sup>22</sup> James R. Leutze, *A Different Kind of Victory: A Biography of Admiral Thomas C. Hart* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1981). pp. 238-240.

On 22 December 1941, Japanese forces landed on the shores of the Lingayen Gulf, northwest of Manila. Ignoring MacArthur's promise to meet the Japanese on the beaches, his forces retreated in a panic, and despite his previous assertion that withdrawal to Bataan and Corregidor was defeatist, MacArthur retreated to Corregidor. He announced his intentions to revert to the previous plans to retreat to Corregidor and Bataan and announced that Manila would become an open city as of Christmas Day 1941. Hart was informed of this decision on 24 December, giving him less than 24 hours to get his forces out of Manila. Tons of supplies, ammunition, and critically needed spare parts were left behind in the scramble to get his people out of harms way. While Hart agreed that the defense of Manila was hopeless, he was irritated at MacArthur's habit of disappearing for long stretches of time while the Army sat idle waiting for him to issue orders. MacArthur became known in the Philippines as "Dugout Doug" for his penchant of hiding during Japanese attacks. This didn't stop the President of the Philippines from awarding MacArthur a \$500,000 personal payment from the Philippine treasury.<sup>23</sup>

Operating submarines out of Manila Bay now became impossible and it was too late to try to get *Canopus* out of the area. Two of the three PBV aircraft that were intended to transport personnel out of the Philippines were destroyed by the Japanese, leaving one PBV and one submarine to evacuate Navy personnel to Java. Hart knew that these people should have gone with the rest of the fleet on 10 December, but Hart had been assured that the Army would fight to hold the Philippines. Hart sent his most valuable officers in the PBV, and he himself left aboard the submarine USS *Shark*, abandoning thousands of naval personnel to their fate. The two remaining U.S. destroyers in Manila, *Pillsbury* and *Peary*, left the following day. On 31 December 1941, the last U.S. submarine left Manila, taking as many Naval staff and material as possible. On 2 January 1942 the Japanese entered Manila unopposed.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ian W. Toll, *Pacific Crucible: War at Sea in the Pacific, 1941-1942* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), pp. 243

<sup>24</sup> *Office of Naval Intelligence - The Java Sea Campaign*, January 8, 1943, Combat Narrative, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. pp. 8 -9.

Unbeknownst to Hart during his 1,000-mile journey to Java, MacArthur was spreading false information about Hart to Washington. He blamed the landings on the lack of any Navy effectiveness or the outright refusal to engage the enemy. Admiral Stark knew full well that nothing the Navy could have done would have stopped the Japanese and that MacArthur was to blame for his own situation, but his answers fell on deaf ears in Washington. MacArthur was accusing Hart of cowardice, when in reality, the fall of the Philippines was due to his own incompetence. MacArthur's differences with the Navy were to last throughout the rest of his career, as he never seemed to grasp the basic differences between the Army and Navy. He refused to acknowledge that the Asiatic Fleet had to be based far south of Manila. Hart had tried to explain for a year how the Navy must fight, in alliance with the British and Dutch, and with proper air cover. The withdrawal of the Asiatic Fleet had been forced on the Navy due to the air superiority of the Japanese; they bombed Manila at will, Cavite was destroyed, and any ships left in Manila were defenseless. The defeat in the Philippines was of MacArthur's own making.<sup>25</sup>

As Hart was leaving Manila, *Houston* was steaming to Australia. Naval tradition requires that the first log entry of a new year be written in rhyme, and that duty fell to Lieutenant (jg) Harold Hamlin Jr., officer of the deck, on board *Houston* that night. He recorded:

Steaming on true-course one zero eight,  
En route Port Darwin to Torres Strait.  
The standard compass reads one-two-three  
(The degaussing increases the error, you see).  
*Alden, Whipple, and Edsall*, destroyers lean,  
About us form an inner sound screen.  
Seven, six, three, and two are the boilers we need  
For fifteen knots, which is standard speed.  
To keep from sinking (and that's no joke)  
Material is in condition "Yoke."  
The guns in condition of readiness two  
Are waiting to sink any ship named Maru,  
While all is as dark as the ace of spades,  
As a means of protection from enemy raids.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> John Costello, *The Pacific War, 1941-1945* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), pp. 104-105, 183-184.

<sup>26</sup> *Ship's Log, USS Houston*, December 1941. From the National Archives at College Park, MD. pp. 45- 68.

*Houston* was en route to Thursday Island, a small group of islands between New Guinea and Northeastern Australia. There they rendezvoused with the light cruiser USS *Pensacola*, to escort two troops ships and a Dutch merchantman to Darwin, arriving there on 5 January 1942.

*Houston* stayed in Darwin until the morning of 12 January to patrol north of Timor Island, about 800 miles from Darwin. After five days of patrolling with destroyers *Edsall*, *Alden* and *Whipple*, *Houston* returned to Darwin to begin preparations to attack the Japanese at Balikpapan.<sup>27</sup>

On 2 January 1942, Admiral Hart arrived in Surabaya, Java aboard *Shark*, one of sixty-six passengers in addition to the normal crew of fifty-four men. The temperature inside the submarine often exceeded 100 degrees, but the worst part for Hart was that he was out of communication for eight days. Upon arrival, Hart received a message from Stark alerting him to the allegations of cowardice being leveled at him by MacArthur and that these accusations were having an effect on the official opinions in Washington. Hart's reply detailed the careful records he had kept, and that in his opinion, the Philippines had been a lost cause from the time control of the air was taken by the Japanese, 1400 on the first day of attack. While Hart had been out of communication, the allied forces created the ABDA Command (American, British, Dutch, and Australian) or ABDACOM, led by British General Archibald Wavell. Wavell was the Commander-in-Chief of India; Hart was named Commander of Naval Forces (ABDA Float) with Dutch Admiral Conrad Helfrich as his second in command. Helfrich's small submarine force had been very effective during the opening days of the war, sinking many Japanese ships. On 27 January, USS *Swordfish* arrived in Surabaya and reported sinking four Japanese ships off the coast of Hainan.<sup>28</sup> Helfrich's orders to defend Dutch possessions at all costs conflicted with Hart's orders to conserve as many ships and equipment as possible. This problem was

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 45-68.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 12.

compounded by Wavell's discounting the ability and equipment of the Japanese, a common thought among the British at that time.<sup>29</sup>

The Navy and War Departments in Washington judged that the Malay barrier would not serve to stop the Japanese advance and chose not to develop a major base on Java. Darwin, Australia was too far away for effective command of Naval operations north of Java, so an operational command center was established in Surabaya. Dutch Naval Command was in Batavia (present day Jakarta), 500 miles to the west, and Hart was urged to move his command there. Surabaya was a better location, so U.S command remained there, but Hart spent the first week or so in Batavia helping to organize ABDA. Wavell took formal command on 15 January 1942, establishing his own command in Lembang, approximately 100 miles to the southeast of Batavia, further complicating communications between the different headquarters. Hart set up an American radio and coding unit in Lembang to help with communications. Air bases scattered around Java had little or no communication with any of the headquarters, often the fastest route to deliver sightings was to send a courier by car. ABDA consisted of four Army, four Navy, and six Air organizations, aggravated by differences in national attitude, strategy, and goals. Only the Dutch were able to read their detailed maps and sailing instructions, maps that were vastly superior to our own. Each nation maintained direct control of its military forces, a necessity for this loose command structure to work. ABDA was never a unified command in the strictest sense of the term.<sup>30</sup>

During January 1942, British forces, assisted by the Dutch, escorted troop convoys to Singapore. This work was seen as vital by Wavell and the Dutch but prevented the four navies from ever exercising together to gain a familiarity with each other. When the Dutch were not

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<sup>29</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific; 1931-April 1942* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1948), pp. 280-282.

<sup>30</sup> *Office of Naval Intelligence - The Java Sea Campaign*, January 8, 1943, Combat Narrative, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. pp. 12-14.

helping the British, their ships operated together to escort Dutch shipping. By this time, the tactics of the Japanese had become clear. They depended heavily on their air power to protect their ground forces and naval assets. They had almost total air superiority over all of the areas in which they operated. As the Japanese advanced, they built new bases for their aircraft, and moved them forward to advance their ground attack. Carrier aircraft and even sea planes performed the same function for the Japanese Navy. Their tactics were well suited for the island nation of the Dutch East Indies. The absence of interior communications between islands meant that the Japanese only had to capture a few key locations on each island. The allied fighter aircraft were no match for the technologically superior Japanese planes, and the Japanese pilots were more experienced, having fought for a number of years in China prior to the declaration of war against the United States. Patrol Wing 10 performed better than expected, flying reconnaissance missions in their highly vulnerable PBY seaplanes, dodging in and out of cloud formations to escape Japanese fighters, and using the mobility of sea plane tenders to hide their operations from attack. In the first five weeks of the war, the only reinforcements sent to the Asiatic Fleet were sixteen additional PBY aircraft sent to Patrol Wing 10. Of the 28 PBY's that were assigned to Patrol Wing 10 at the start of the war, twenty of them had been lost on reconnaissance or attack missions.

On 22 January, submarines USS *Porpoise* and USS *Pickrel* reported an enemy force moving south through the Makassar Strait. USS *Sturgeon*, stationed a bit further south in the strait, made SONAR contact with a large, multiple screw ship, either a heavy cruiser or a small air craft carrier. *Sturgeon* fired two torpedoes into the target and celebrated with the radio message “*Sturgeon* no long virgin.” The heavy Japanese air activity of the previous day was gone after the attack, confirming that the *Sturgeon* either sank or damaged an aircraft carrier.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific; 1931-April 1942* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1948), pp. 283

The planned attack against the surface ships consisted of four of the twenty-year-old destroyers, *John D. Ford*, *Pope*, *Parrott*, and *Paul Jones*, supported by *Boise* and *Marblehead*, commanded by Admiral Glassford on *Boise* and Commander Paul Talbot in command of the destroyers. *Boise*, the only ship in the Asiatic Fleet with RADAR, en route to rendezvous with *Marblehead* and the destroyers for an attack on the Japanese landing forces at Balikpapan, struck an uncharted pinnacle rock, ripping a large gash in the hull near the keel. This damage forced Glassford to shift his flag to *Marblehead* and for *Boise* to return to Java and ultimately to the United States for repairs. *Marblehead* experienced engine trouble and could only maintain a speed of 15 knots, so the destroyers were ordered to proceed and *Marblehead* would provide cover for their withdrawal.

*Clemson*-class destroyers, such as *John D. Edwards* and the destroyers attacking Balikpapan, carried 12 torpedoes in four triple mounts, two on each side, with four 4-inch guns. Air defense was limited to a single 3-inch gun and several fifty-caliber machine guns, completely inadequate for defense against air attack, but fortunately, *Sturgeon* removed the threat of air attack with her successful attack on the Japanese aircraft carrier.

Allied air reconnaissance reported nine Japanese transports, four cruisers and fourteen destroyers moving toward Balikpapan in small groups, and a total lack of Japanese air activity. On the afternoon of 23 January, Dutch bombers attacked the convoy, reporting hits on two cruisers, four transports, and a destroyer. That same afternoon, Commander Talbot issued his orders for the attack that night. The primary weapons for the attack would be torpedoes; the primary target would be the transports, attacking other ships as necessary to accomplish the primary tasks. At midnight, the destroyer group saw a light in the distance. At first the light was thought to be a search light, but as the ships got closer to Balikpapan, the light was found to be fires burning on one of the Japanese ships hit by the Dutch bombers earlier in the day.

At 0245 and at full speed of 27 knots, *John D. Ford* with Commander Talbot aboard, followed by *Pope*, *Parrott*, and *Paul Jones*, in constant voice contact with each other, began their attack. Lookouts on *John D. Ford*, sighted nine transports approximately 5,000 yards away. A minute or two after sighting the transports, *John D. Ford* passed a Japanese destroyer on an opposite course. *John D. Ford* fired a torpedo at the Japanese destroyer that missed astern. At 0300, *Parrott* spotted a smaller group of transports at anchor and fired three torpedoes into the group, which caused a large explosion in the middle of the group, followed by flames that leapt 500 feet into the air. More torpedo shots by other destroyers also resulted in large explosions among the Japanese transports. The deck gunners also opened fire on targets as they presented themselves, especially the Japanese destroyers that could not get an accurate range or target information on the American destroyers moving at high speed in the dark. Machine gunners strafed burning transports as the attacking force maneuvered through the anchorage. The only hit by Japanese destroyers on the attackers was a small shell hit (about 3-inch) on the stern of *John D. Ford* that did little damage.

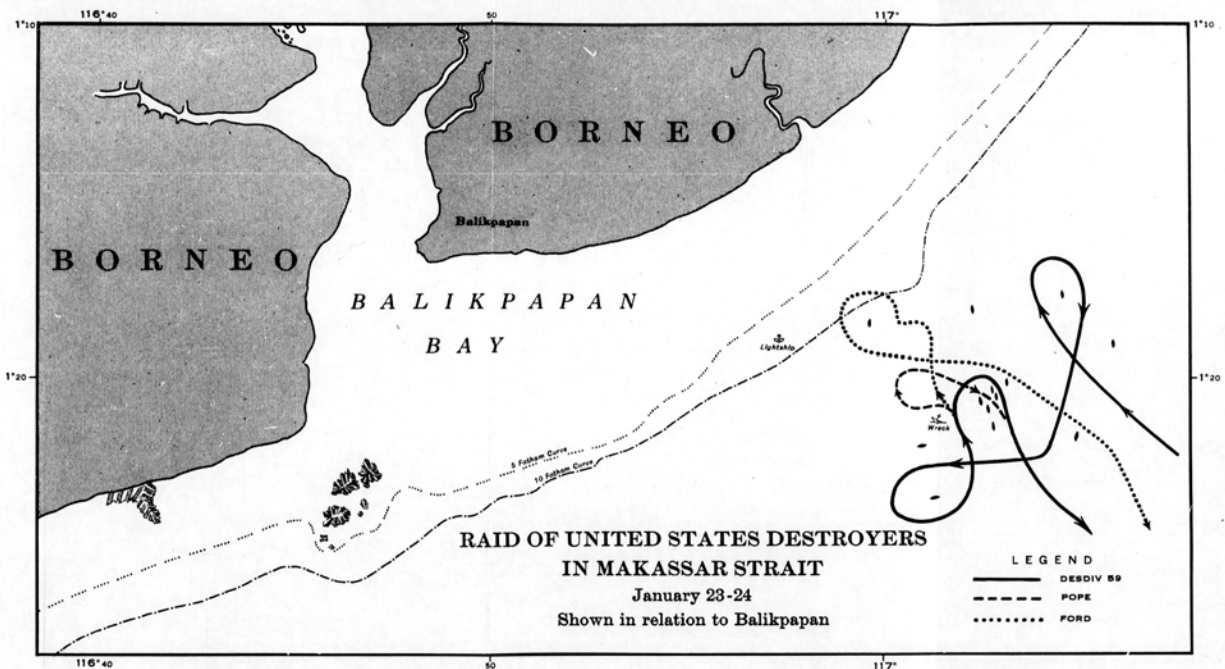


Figure 4. Battle of Balikpapan Bay



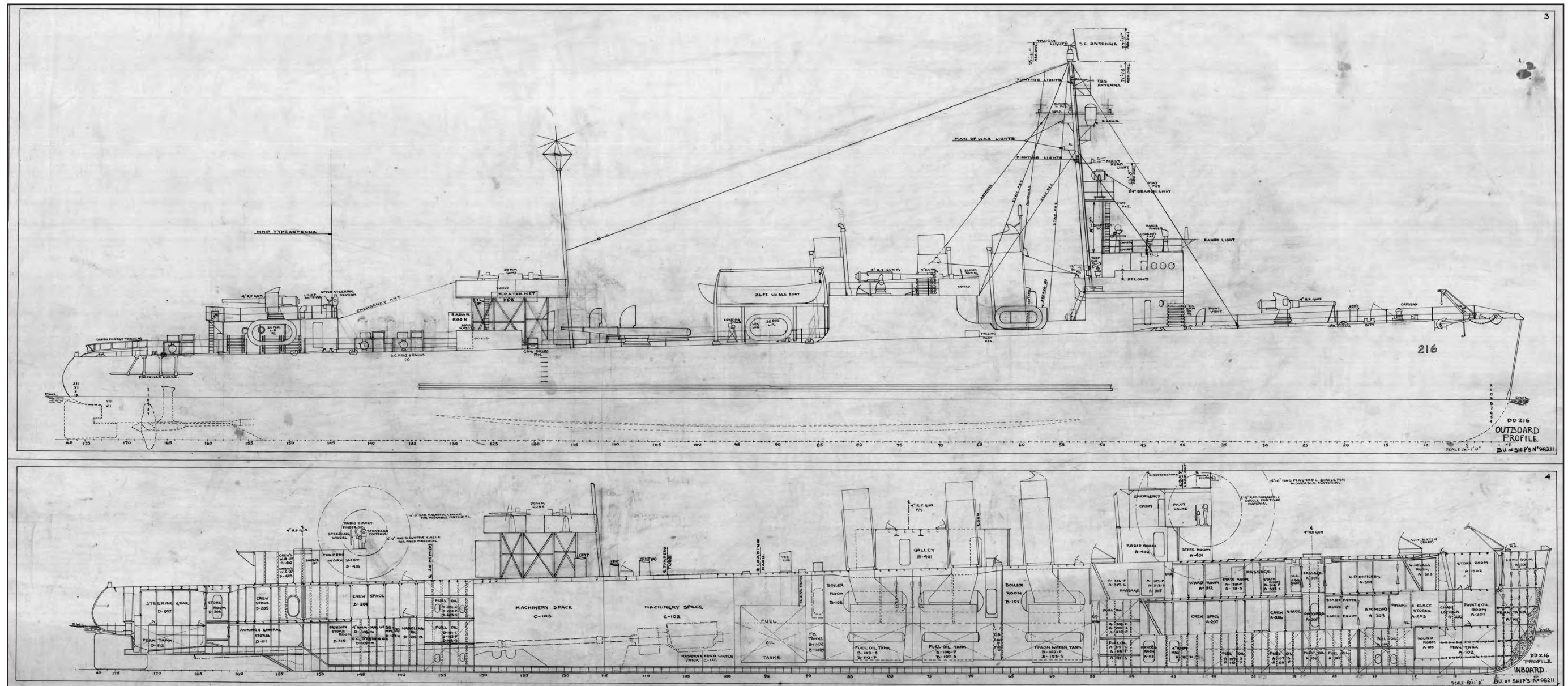


Figure 5. USS John D. Edwards DD-216

By 0700 on 24 January, all four attacking destroyers were well clear of the area, having expended all torpedoes and low on fuel. The attack had sunk as many as six transports, damaging others, and sinking at least one Japanese destroyer. Because of the large nature of the explosions, at least two of the transports were either fuel or ammunition. A Dutch submarine commander reported that the attack had sunk thirteen enemy ships, but that count was never verified. That same Dutch submarine torpedoed a Japanese cruiser the day after the American attack at such close range, that the explosion damaged the attacking submarine. The sub safely returned to base several days later. The entire attack took place within a four or five mile radius. The following day, United States Army bombers attacked the remaining Japanese ships at Balikpapan, sinking two additional transports. Twelve Japanese pursuit planes attempted to intercept the bombers, five of which were shot down by U.S. fighter aircraft. Unfortunately, the Japanese had landed their troops in the hours preceding the destroyer attack, so this battle did not stop the Japanese from taking Balikpapan, although the Dutch had succeeded in destroying the fuel tanks and oil refineries there. The attack did stall the Japanese advance south towards Java for some time.<sup>32</sup>

While the Japanese recovered from the damage at Balikpapan, their bombers were now in range of the remainder of Borneo and southern Sumatra. Japanese bombers could now reach Surabaya and Timor to begin the “softening up” process for invasion. The Japanese now controlled all the northern approaches to Java and the rest of the Dutch East Indies. *Marblehead* required repairs to its engines due to mechanical problems and a lack of maintenance, and our destroyers were beginning to show the effects of extended operations without maintenance. American submarines had been running patrols of up to fifty days at a time and surface ships had been at general quarters for almost two months. Torpedoes were in very short supply and none were coming from the United States.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp 17 -24.

# TRACK OF UNITED STATES DESTROYERS OFF BALIKPAPAN January 23-24

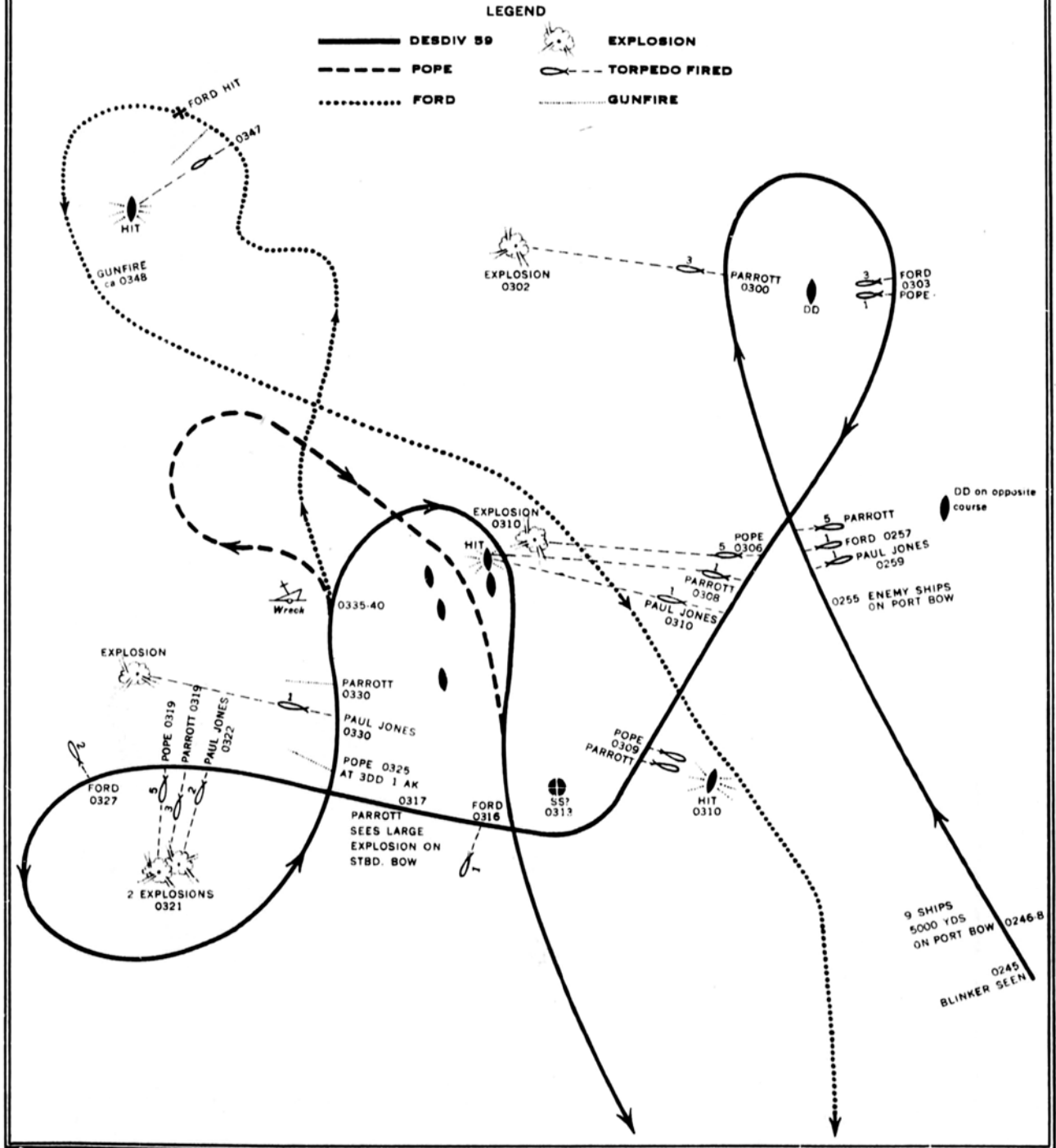


Figure 6. Battle of Balikpapan Bay

The need to build a strike force capable of stopping the next Japanese onslaught propelled Admiral Hart to call a conference of all the senior naval officers in ABDA. This meeting took place on 2 February at the ABDA headquarters in Lembang between Hart, Dutch Admiral Helfrich, British Commodore Collins, and American Admiral Glassford. As a result of this meeting, Dutch cruisers and destroyers were joined with American ships and the British released some ships from the Singapore convoys. Dutch Admiral Karel W.F.M. Doorman was put in charge of this new strike force, but because there was no time for joint training, it became a tactical difficulty that would haunt all those involved in the weeks to come.

*Langley* was sent to Fremantle to load Army P-40 aircraft now so desperately needed in Java. Air reconnaissance reported an enemy convoy at Balikpapan preparing for an advance to the south. It reported twenty transports, three cruisers, and ten destroyers, and enemy aircraft carriers were also thought to be in the area. Hart's plan was to strike this force before it could make an effective landing at Makassar or perhaps Bandjarmasin or both. Admiral Doorman's strike force consisted of Dutch cruisers HNLMS *De Ruyter* and *Tromp*, and American cruisers *Houston* and *Marblehead*. Accompanying the strike force were the American destroyers *Stewart*, *John D. Edwards*, *Barker*, and *Bulmer* and Dutch destroyers *Van Ghent*, *Piet Hein*, and *Banckert*. Although Japanese reconnaissance planes had passed over the assembling strike force at Surabaya, Admiral Doorman proceeded with his plans to attack. The ships left Surabaya in small groups, rendezvousing at 0500 east of Surabaya to begin their strike up the Makassar Strait.



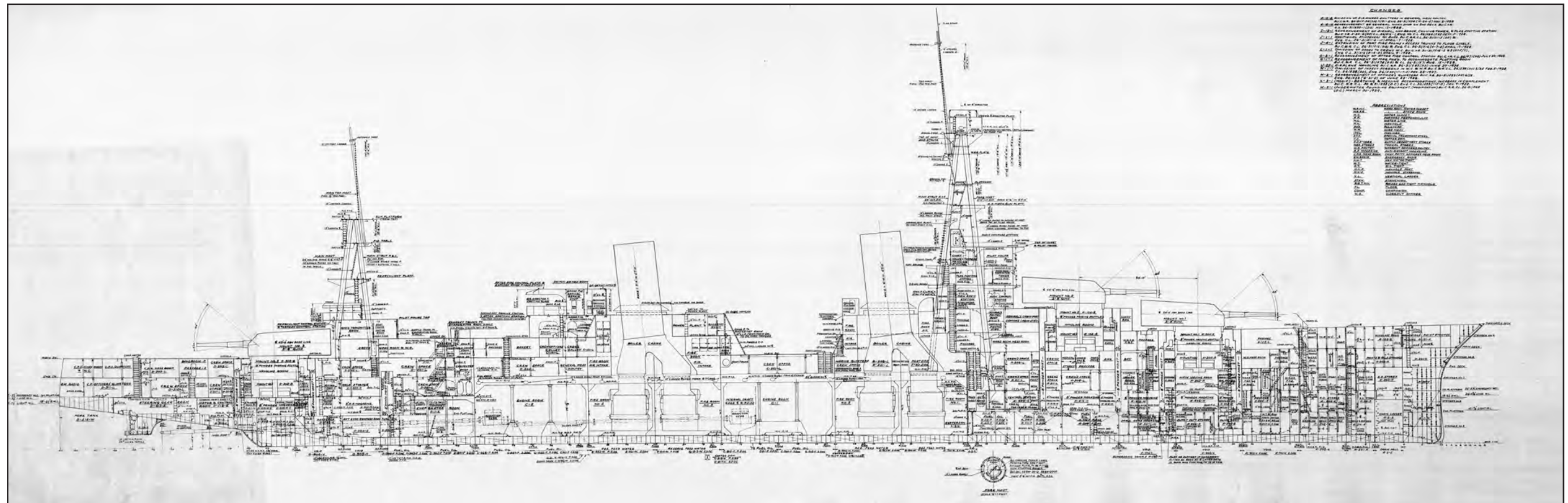


Figure 7. USS Houston CA-30

The crews of *Houston* and *Marblehead* were effectively unprepared for battle. They had not been allowed to fire their guns in more than a year and then only at short range. The fire control equipment was obsolete and badly in need of replacing. None of the current gunners on *Houston* had ever fired the 5-inch anti-aircraft guns. A few months before the war, air defense officer Lieutenant Commander Jack Galbraith received a report that the 5-inch ammunition that *Houston* was carrying was defective. Testing had shown that less than 20 percent of the shells would detonate. This information was passed to Captain Rooks and Gunnery Officer Commander Arthur Mahr, and the three officers decided not to tell the crew of this situation. New ammunition had been ordered but never arrived prior to 7 December.

At 0935, Admiral Doorman warned the ships in the strike force that thirty-seven Japanese planes had been reported heading towards their location and were crossing the Bali Sea. Doorman, on board the *De Ruyter*, led the group with *Houston*, *Marblehead*, and *Tromp* following, with about 700 yards between ships. The American destroyers formed an anti-submarine screen slightly ahead of the cruisers, with the Dutch destroyers screening for submarines astern. Shortly before 1000, lookouts reported the thirty-seven bombers approaching in groups of nine. The ships separated and the bombers went after the cruisers, and ignored the destroyers for the next three hours. Less than 20 percent of the 5-inch anti-aircraft ammunition of *Houston* detonated, but those that did, exploded successfully within the bomber groups. There was nothing amiss in the accuracy of the American gunners. Captain Rooks carefully maneuvered *Houston* as a spotter watched for the release of the Japanese bombs, and Rooks quickly turned the ship to spoil the aim of the bombers, often putting the starboard engines in emergency reverse while putting the port side engines to emergency flank speed and then reversed the throttles.

The Japanese scored two hits on *Marblehead* in quick succession, one forward and one aft. The forward hit destroyed the sickbay, knocked out the electrical supply in the area, and blew a

large hole in the bottom of the ship. The second hit the stern, doing much more damage than the first. The bomb passed through the main deck and exploded in the main steering room, jamming the rudder full left. *Marblehead* was steaming in circles at twenty-five knots. By 1100, the fires were out, but thirteen men on *Marblehead* were dead and more than thirty wounded. By 1300, the rudder angle had been reduced to nine degrees and by changing engine speeds from one side of the ship to the other, they could maneuver. This was a difficult way to maneuver but better than steaming in circles.

A six-plane formation of twin-engine Japanese bombers began a bombing run on *Houston*, but most of the 500lbs bombs fell harmlessly to starboard as Rooks continued to violently maneuver the ship. One plane that was slightly behind the others dropped one bomb shortly after the rest of the group, and that bomb passed through the searchlight platform on the aft mast, starting the delayed action fuse. As it continued down, the bomb tore a ten-foot gash in one leg of the mast, went through the radio room and exploded just above the main deck, but forward of the rear 8-inch gun mount that was trained to port. Had the bomb penetrated the main deck and exploded below decks, *Houston* would have been completely destroyed; below the gun turret was the aft magazine, full of powder. The bomb killed forty-eight, wounded another twenty, and rendered turret three inoperable for the rest of the campaign. During the three-hour attack, *Houston* fired approximately four hundred 5-inch anti-aircraft shells, most of which were duds.

The Japanese broke off their attack after noon and at 1255, Admiral Doorman ordered the force to set course to the west, with orders for *Marblehead* and *Houston* to proceed through the Lombok Strait en route to Tjilatjap. A commercial floating dry dock was available at Tjilatjap, although it was not large enough to accommodate *Marblehead*. Engineers on the dry dock managed to raise the front half of *Marblehead* to patch the hole in the hull, while burial parties came ashore to bury the dead. The wounded were taken to a Dutch hospital, where they were later evacuated to Australia. Repair work on both ships continued around the clock, for the

Japanese could attack again at any moment; Tjilatjap itself was within range of Japanese bombers. Admiral Hart toured both ships and spoke to Captain Rooks about sending *Houston* for further repairs in company of *Marblehead*, but Rooks pointed out that without *Houston*, there was no ship left to provide any serious threat to a Japanese cruiser. Although *Houston*'s heavy guns were reduced by a third, Rooks felt they would still be necessary to the war effort in the area. Fortunately, before *Boise* had left Java, they had off-loaded good 5-inch shells that quickly replaced the worthless ammunition on *Houston*. On 11 February, *Houston* headed east back to Darwin and on 13 February, *Marblehead* was capable of putting back to sea, sailing west to Ceylon and on to South Africa for further repairs. Almost half that distance was covered with the rudder still jammed at a nine degree left turn.<sup>33</sup>

During January, MacArthur had still been insisting on the impossible from the Navy, specifically, demanding supplies be brought to Corregidor. By the time the supplies were available for shipment in Australia, the Japanese had total air and sea domination for 1,000 miles south of Manila. A supply convoy would be impossible except by submarine and then it was still nearly suicidal to attempt such a mission. When Hart replied to Admiral Stark that a supply convoy such as MacArthur was demanding was impossible, Stark forwarded Hart's reply to Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall, who sent it on to MacArthur. MacArthur replied that at best, Hart had a "defeatist attitude," and at worst, "was a coward." This, in his mind, was more proof that Hart was incapable of command of the Asiatic Fleet and must be replaced immediately. The Navy Department advised Hart that "conditions" in Washington made resupply of Corregidor "imperative." Hart was collecting the ammunition, although he honestly believed that the small amount of ammunition that could be brought in by submarine would not make any difference in the defense of Corregidor.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., pp. 27 -32.



Personalities between the British and Americans in ABDACOM also clashed. Wavell's Chief of Staff, General Henry Pownall, openly wrote that the "Americans needed to be put in their place." The British regarded Hart's respect for Japanese efficiency and military skill out of place and "bad form."<sup>34</sup> Helfrich also felt that in his dual position of Commander in Chief of the Royal Netherlands East Indian Navy and as Minister of Marine in the Royal Netherlands civilian government, he was better suited to command the defense of the Dutch East Indies. Helfrich constantly needled Hart about the performance of American submarines. Hart was convinced that Helfrich withheld vital information and on at least one occasion had lied about the availability of Dutch ships.<sup>35</sup> Wavell began to communicate with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill that he thought a Dutch naval commander would be better suited to the task of ABDA Float. He told Churchill that he thought Hart had "exaggerated ideas of Japanese efficiency."<sup>36</sup> Churchill relayed these concerns to President Roosevelt; never a supporter of Hart, dating back to the days when they clashed over union squabbles at the torpedo factory, FDR was inclined to let the British have their way.

On 25 January, Admiral King sent a dispatch to Hart stating that "they" (FDR) were disquieted to learn that the Dutch were unhappy that Admiral Helfrich was not higher in the command structure of ABDA Float. Hart replied that the command structure was set up by Wavell and the British, and he had sought to include Helfrich in every detail of ABDA Float. Wavell had only a couple of weeks experience working with Hart, and his Chief of Staff was openly disparaging of the Americans overall, frequently and loudly to all within earshot.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Duane P. Schultz, *The Last Battle Station: The Story of the U.S.S. Houston* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1985), pp. 73.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 73.

<sup>36</sup> James D. Hornfischer, *Ship of Ghosts: The Story of the USS Houston, FDR's Legendary Lost Cruiser, and the Epic Saga of Her Survivors* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006), pp. 41.

<sup>37</sup> James R. Leutze, *A Different Kind of Victory: A Biography of Admiral Thomas C. Hart* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1981), pp 271-273.

Hart brought the issue to a head during a meeting with Wavell on 29 January. Hart told him that if he felt a change in naval command was needed, Wavell should ask the Dutch Governor for a letter requesting Helfrich be made ABDA Float commander, because in Hart's view, this was a political rather than a military issue. Hart wrote in his diary that Wavell was embarrassed at this suggestion and he left Wavell's office believing that Wavell would take no further action on this matter. In reality, Wavell began to insist that Hart be replaced, stating to Churchill that while Hart was a charming fellow, Hart himself had offered to step down in favor of a Dutch commander. This information was passed to FDR, who passed it to Admiral King. King sent a dispatch to Hart asking him if he felt that he could not carry on as commander of ABDA Float.<sup>38</sup>

King was unaware at that time that FDR had already agreed with Churchill to replace Hart. Hart replied to King with a record of all of the events and conversations that had taken place in the few weeks since Wavell's arrival. King was disturbed by the actions of the British and Dutch and he did not want to relieve Hart, but FDR had already made up his mind. Hart was out. Admiral King sent a telegram to Hart saying that an "awkward political situation" had arisen in Washington and that it might be best for Hart to ask to be detached for "medical reasons."<sup>39</sup>

Hart did not wish to give up command but reluctantly he agreed that on 15 February, Admiral Helfrich would replace him. Hart had become a pawn in an international game of chess. Hart had been out of favor with FDR for twenty years; MacArthur had done everything in his power to poison Washington's opinion about Hart, blaming Hart for his own shortcomings. A bitter battle was raging in Washington about the debacle at Pearl Harbor and the ease at which the Japanese were storming through the Pacific. Perhaps Hart should not have been chosen as commander of ABDA Float, but because he had been, Washington and the military hierarchy

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 274.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp, 277.

should have supported Hart instead of micro-managing the Asiatic Fleet from ten thousand miles away.<sup>40</sup>

15 February 1942 marked the end of the existence of the Asiatic Fleet; the fleet now became part of the command of the South West Pacific Area Command. The crews of *Houston* and *Marblehead* knew that after seeing Hart scrambling around the damaged ships like a teenager, officers recorded that they had to run to keep up with him, that Hart was not retiring because of health reasons. His staff and subordinates all marveled at the pace the sixty-four year old Admiral kept. After his detachment, Hart went on to conduct the Naval inquiry into the Pearl Harbor attack, which he completed in April 1944. It was at that time he retired from the Navy to his home in Connecticut. When Connecticut Senator Francis Maloney died suddenly in January 1945, Hart agreed to fill his term as a Senator, which he did from 15 February 1945 until 5 November 1946. Hart steadfastly refused to run for election despite the assurance that he would win easily. Hart died quietly at his home at the age of ninety-four in July 1971.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 252-282.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE DEMISE OF THE ASIATIC FLEET

With the departure of Admiral Hart, operational command of the ABDA naval forces fell to Vice Admiral Helfrich. Rear Admiral Johan van Staveren assumed direct command of the Dutch naval forces and British Admiral Arthur Palliser became Chief of Staff, leaving Admiral Glassford the only American commander in ABDAFLOAT. The Japanese bombed Surabaya daily, so the ABDA ships could not remain in port during daylight hours, which forced the American Naval administration to move to Tjilatjap, for all intents abandoning Surabaya, despite the ample repair facilities and fuel. Glassford knew that Tjilatjap would be a stopgap location, that as soon as the Japanese moved further south in Sumatra or took control of the neighboring island of Bali, Tjilatjap would become untenable as a base as well. Port Darwin on the north coast of Australia was the next closest available base and as such, Glassford moved his auxiliary vessels there. *Holland* and *Black Hawk*, escorted by the destroyers *Bulmer* and *Barker*, were sent to Darwin. The Dutch were hesitant to remove the fuel from Surabaya, so Glassford sent a civilian tanker ship under charter to the U.S. Navy, the *Erling Brovig*, to Ceylon, and USS *Trinity* to Persia, both for fuel.<sup>1</sup>

*Houston*, in company with American destroyers *Perry* and Australian corvettes HMAS *Swan* and *Worrenigo*, had departed Darwin on 14 February escorting four transports with the 147<sup>th</sup> and 148<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery units to Dutch Timor to assist in the defense of that small island. Timor was a necessary stopping point to refuel fighter aircraft on their way to Java from Australia. At noon on 15 February, lookouts on *Houston* spotted a large four-engine Japanese flying boat circling the convoy just outside of the range of the anti-aircraft guns. The commanding officer of *Houston*, Captain Rooks, immediately radioed Darwin in an

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<sup>1</sup> *Office of Naval Intelligence - The Java Sea Campaign*, January 8, 1943, Combat Narrative, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. pp. 34-36.

attempt to get fighter cover for the convoy. *Houston*'s 5-inch guns were the only anti-aircraft guns capable of reaching the altitude of the flying boat; the smaller ships carried only 3 - or 4 - inch anti-aircraft guns. *Houston* could not protect the defenseless transport ships with hundreds of American troops on board, but the flying boat ignored the transports in an attempt to bomb the American cruiser. The flying boat made two bombing passes at the *Houston*, but the *Houston* now had working ammunition for her anti-aircraft guns, forcing the bomber to miss. As the Japanese bomber began its second bombing run, a lone P-40 fighter arrived from Darwin, but *Houston* was unable to make radio contact with the fighter, and the pilot was unable to locate the bomber. The fighter finally located the bomber just as the bomber completed its second bombing run and both planes disappeared to the north.<sup>2</sup> Later that night, word reached the convoy of the fall of Singapore, the British island fortress, and the surrender of more than 110,000 British and Indian troops.

At 1100 on 16 February, more Japanese twin-engine land-based bombers attacked the convoy. Rooks ordered *Houston* to full speed and began to zigzag around the convoy, using the fire from the anti-aircraft guns to defend the entire convoy against waves of attacking bombers. None of the ships were hit, although a near miss killed one man and wounded two others on a transport ship. Several hours after the attack, *Houston* received orders to bring the convoy back to Darwin, returning on the morning of the 18 February, to find Darwin harbor filled with more than twenty merchant ships, an Australian hospital ship, several additional Australian warships, and a variety of American ships. Rooks immediately began refueling *Houston*, and at that time, learned of the departure of Admiral Hart. Rooks ordered *Houston* to get underway as soon as refueling was completed, so that at 2200 18 February, it headed for Tjilatjap. The Americans and the Australians were unaware that the Japanese had moved a large fleet into the Timor Sea,

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<sup>2</sup> Walter G. Winslow, *The Ghost That Died at Sunda Strait* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984), pp.99-101.

northwest of Darwin. This fleet, under the command of Japanese Vice Admiral Nobutake Kondo, consisted of two battleships, five cruisers, a number of destroyers, and, most importantly, four aircraft carriers.

The Japanese launched 188 aircraft at dawn on 19 February, supplemented by 54 land-based bombers, and attacked Port Darwin, catching the Allies completely by surprise. By the time the attack was finished, the airfield at Darwin was destroyed and thirteen ships in the harbor were sunk, including the transports *Houston* had convoyed and returned. Two British ammunition ships were destroyed, USS *Peary* sank with almost no survivors, two Australian corvettes sank, and many others were destroyed or damaged. Casualties were high and hundreds of tons of valuable supplies and equipment were lost.<sup>3</sup> That night, Tokyo Rose spoke on the radio in length about the destruction of Darwin and again incorrectly reported the sinking of *Houston*, enhancing the name of the “Gallopig Ghost of the Java Coast.”

On 18 February, Japanese forces invaded the southeast coast of Bali and quickly took control of its airfield. Dutch Admiral Doorman decided to send a strike force of three groups, the cruisers *De Ruyter* and *Java* with destroyers HNLMS *Piet Hein*, USS *Ford* and *Pope* in the first group, Dutch cruiser HNLMS *Tromp* with destroyers USS *Stewart*, *Parrott*, *John D. Edwards*, and *Pillsbury* in the second group, followed up by Dutch torpedo boats. The first group attacked the Japanese in the Badoeng Strait the night of 19 February, starting about 2130, along the southeast coast of Bali. The Allied forces opened fire and the Japanese returned fired almost immediately, indicating that the Japanese were expecting an attack. The Japanese ships were arranged to defend against an attack from the North. However, the Allied ships were attacking from the South, causing confusion among the Japanese. The destroyers *Piet Hein*, *Ford*, and *Pope* bore the brunt of the attack, firing both guns and torpedoes at the Japanese ships. *Piet Hein* was struck and set afire, as were several Japanese ships. About the time the *Piet Hein* was hit and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 104-105.

began to sink, a shell cut the after fall of the *Ford's* motor whaleboat, necessitating the cutting loose of the motorboat. It landed right side up, and at dawn the next morning, thirty-three survivors of *Piet Hein* climbed aboard and successfully made their way back to Java. During the first attack, two Japanese destroyers were reported sunk and several others damaged.

The second group attacked with the destroyers leading the Dutch cruiser *Tromp* at 0130 on 20 February, with *Stewart* in the lead. *Stewart* noticed two ships ahead that were signaling each other off the port bow. Japanese ships' lights all had a distinctive green color, giving an advantage to the Allied attackers. *Stewart* and *Parrott* both fired torpedoes but scored no hits, but the column began to receive fire from a Japanese cruiser. Fire from an 8-inch shell passed completely through *Stewart* but did not explode and did little damage. *Tromp* reported an engagement with a Japanese cruiser and that the Japanese ship had exploded. The Allied column proceeded northeast and began engaging additional Japanese ships at 0212. *Pillsbury* reported sinking a Japanese ship while the other destroyers opened fire on additional targets, including

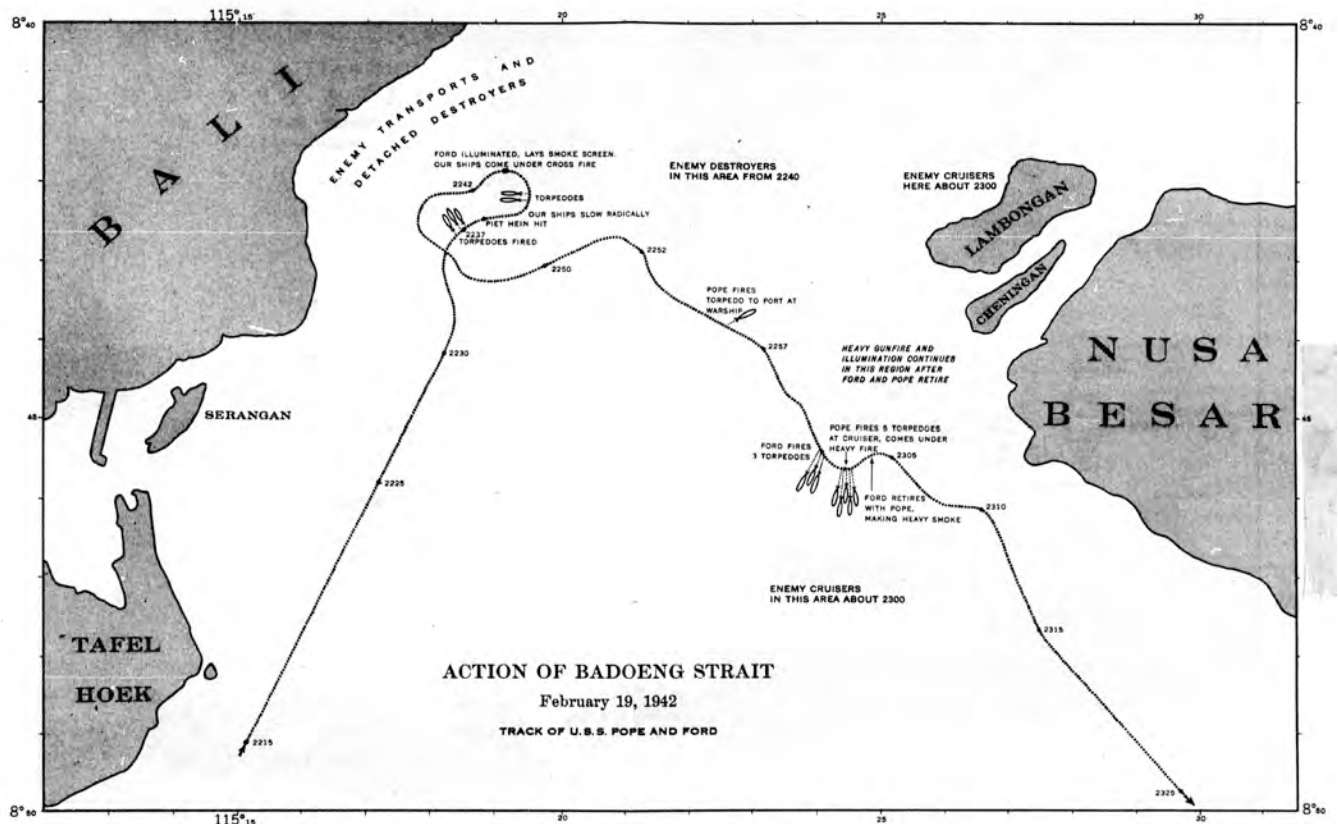


Figure 8. Battle of Badoeng Strait

three torpedo hits on the Japanese. *Tromp* was the last ship in the column, and the Japanese reserved most of their fire for the Dutch cruiser, scoring eight or more hits, damaging her badly. By 0225, the fighting ceased and the ships made their way back to Java. *Tromp* was sent on to Australia for repairs, not to rejoin the Allied fleet until May 1942.<sup>4</sup>

Two days after the Battle of Badoeng Strait, a convoy left Freemantle, Australia bound for Ceylon. Among them was *Langley* carrying 32 assembled P-40s on deck with pilots and ground crews on board, with 27 more still in shipping crates in the hold of MS *Seawitch*, escorted by the American cruiser USS *Phoenix*. One of Admiral Helfrich's first acts as commander of the Allied Naval Command was to order *Langley* and *Seawitch* to detach from the convoy and divert to Java. It is doubtful that fifty-nine fighters would have made any difference in the defense of Java, especially because nearly half of them had to be assembled, but *Langley* left the convoy immediately and several hours later *Seawitch* turned north. *Langley* and *Seawitch* were sent to Tjilatjap, where *Langley* was met by U.S. destroyers *Whipple* and *Edsall*. *Langley's* shortened flight deck would not allow the fighters to launch, nor was there any way to get the planes from the docks to the nearby airfield, but Helfrich was grasping at straws. *Langley* was less than 100 miles from Tjilatjap when, at 0900 on the morning of 27 February, a Japanese plane found the nearly defenseless ships. *Langley's* captain reported the situation to Admiral Glassford and requested fighter planes to escort *Langley* to Tjilatjap, but there were no fighters left on Java. At 1140, a group of nine twin-engine Japanese bombers came from the direction of Bali and *Langley* took five direct hits. After pushing all the fighters off the flight deck, the fires onboard were finally brought under control, but *Langley* was sinking.

The Captain ordered the crew to abandon ship at 1332 and due to the skillful ship handling of *Edsall* and *Whipple*, the destroyers managed to pull almost the entire crew and passengers out

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<sup>4</sup> *Office of Naval Intelligence - The Java Sea Campaign*, January 8, 1943, Combat Narrative, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. pp. 40-44.



of the water. Out of the entire crew, six were confirmed dead and five others were missing. *Edsall* and *Whipple* arranged to meet the fleet oiler *Pecos* at Christmas Island and transfer the survivors to *Pecos*. A Japanese bomb group attacked Christmas Island just as the *Pecos* arrived, forcing the ships to flee the area. The Commanding Officer of *Pecos*, Lieutenant Commander E. Abernethy, plotted a course well south of the aircraft of Bali, but the Japanese had moved several aircraft carriers into area and at 1000 on 1 March, a scout plane discovered the nearly defenseless *Pecos*.

At 1145, Japanese carrier-based dive-bombers began to attack the *Pecos* and over the next four hours, struck the *Pecos* with five direct hits. The Commanding Officer ordered the crew and *Langley* survivors to abandon ship. The water surrounding the *Pecos* was heavy with the oil that *Pecos* had carried, and the Japanese planes made several strafing runs on the survivors in the water before departing. After the survivors spent about four hours in the water, at 1930, *Whipple* returned in response to the frantic radio signals sent by *Pecos* during the attack. *Whipple's* Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Commander Eugene Karpe, carefully maneuvered through the water picking up survivors. At 2141, *Whipple's* SONAR detected a submarine in the water, so *Whipple* had to suspend the rescue efforts to deal with the new threat. After several depth charge passes, they lost contact with the submarine and *Whipple* returned to search for survivors in the dark. The commanding officers of *Langley*, *Pecos*, and *Whipple* agreed with the Destroyer Division 57 Commander, that to remain in the area after dark was foolhardy, so that at 2207, *Whipple* left the area. Of the combined crews of *Langley* and *Pecos*, 672 officers and men, *Whipple* had rescued 220 survivors including two wounded Army Air Force pilots, severely crowding the small four-stacker destroyer.<sup>5</sup> *Whipple* arrived in Fremantle, Australia on 4 March 1942. *Edsall* was never heard from again, but after the war, Japanese Navy film showed the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 46-50.

*Edsall* being attacked by a Japanese cruiser, with no survivors.<sup>6</sup> The *Seawitch* made the journey to Tjilatjap and successfully unloaded the crated fighter aircraft, but the aircraft were destroyed before ever being assembled to keep them from falling into the hands of the Japanese.<sup>7</sup>

*Houston* had arrived at Surabaya on 24 February 1942 and remained there for nearly three days. On the night of 26 February, *Houston*, with Dutch light cruisers *Java* and *De Ruyter* and six American and Dutch destroyers, moved north out of Surabaya looking for Japanese convoys, under the command of Rear Admiral Karel Doorman. Doorman's strike force was composed of ships from four different navies, but there had been no opportunity for developing common tactical doctrines. Radio communication between the flagship and all the other ships was nearly impossible. Lieutenant Otto Kolb, the communications officer for Destroyer Squadron 29, was aboard *De Ruyter* to facilitate communications with the rest of the strike force. Flashing lights in Morse code or intermittent high frequency radio communications were sent from *De Ruyter* to *Houston* to be relayed to the other ships in the strike force, but these methods were hit-or-miss at best. There were no common flag signals and the other means of communications broke down frequently.<sup>8</sup>

Japan had invaded Bali on 18 February and the Allies knew that Java would be attacked next. Japanese convoys were known to be en route to Java but the lack of proper air support or RADAR kept the Allied ships from making contact with the Japanese, so they returned to Surabaya the next morning. General Wavell was convinced that the defense of Java had become a futile effort, as there were no fighter aircraft left and on 23 February, Wavell was ordered to move his headquarters off Java to a location of his own choosing, but absolutely off Java, which

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<sup>6</sup> Walter G. Winslow, *The Fleet the Gods Forgot: The U.S. Asiatic Fleet in World War II* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1982), pp. 242-244.

<sup>7</sup> *Office of Naval Intelligence - The Java Sea Campaign*, January 8, 1943, Combat Narrative, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. pp. 49-50.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50-52.

he did on 25 February. The Dutch remained adamant to defend Java, but ABDA Command ceased to exist. Admiral King ordered Admiral Glassford to report for duty to Vice Admiral Helfrich.

Later that day, around 1600, the British heavy cruiser HMS *Exeter*, the Australian light cruiser HMAS *Perth*, and three British destroyers, *Jupiter*, *Electra*, and *Encounter*, arrived in Surabaya. Captain Rooks immediately went to Doorman's flagship *De Ruyter* to discuss the patrol that the fleet would go on that night. Helfrich had already ordered all available submarines, three Dutch and two American S-Class subs, into the Java Sea. A message from Douglas MacArthur warned that an invasion force of nearly 100 Japanese ships had assembled at Jolo, Philippines. Aerial reconnaissance confirmed that the group was moving south through the Strait of Makassar and by 26 February, the invasion force was off the southeast coast of Borneo, only two hundred miles from Java. Helfrich ordered Doorman to attack the Japanese and prevent a landing on Java. Doorman announced to the assembly of commanding officers of the strike force that he had decided to make another sweep to the east and north of Madoera Island and

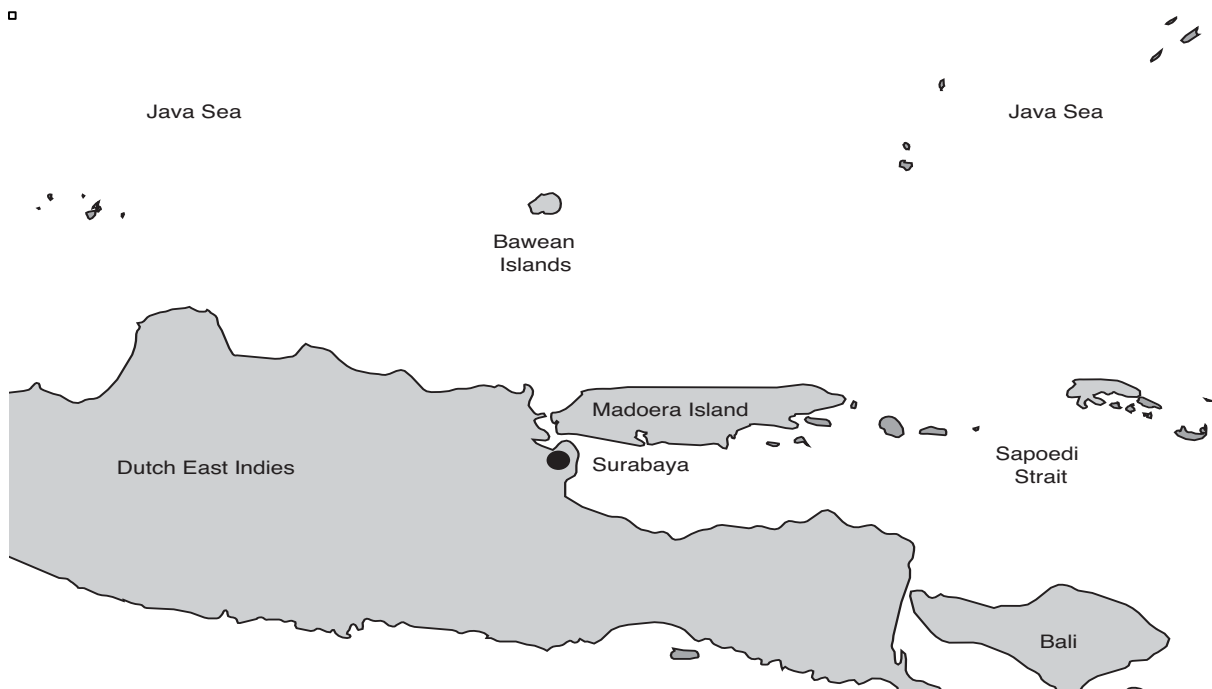


Figure 9. Map of Eastern Java

then proceed to the west end of Java towards Batavia, modern day Jakarta. Helfrich's battle plan was simple, "In case of contact British and Dutch destroyers were to attack at once and retire, then cruisers attack and retire, then United States destroyers come in and deliver a torpedo attack."<sup>9</sup> Despite Doorman's request to be informed promptly of any reconnaissance reports regarding the Java Sea, at 1830, two U.S. Army Air Force Bombers reported the Japanese convoy northeast of Bawean Islands. By the time this information reached Doorman a little after 2200, the Strike Force was 180 miles away in the Sapoedi Strait. After searching all night, Doorman reported that the personnel of the Strike Force had reached the point of exhaustion, and by early afternoon of 27 February, returned to Surabaya for fuel, some rest, and a more accurate position of the Japanese. The Strike Force did not get the fuel or rest at Surabaya.

Admiral Glassford wrote in his report that "By 5 p.m. local time on the 27th the enemy forces had been developed with reasonable accuracy. It was known that a convoy of 39 to 45 transports, escorted by 2 or 3 cruisers and 8 to 12 destroyers, was in a position approximately 20 miles west of Bawean Island, 60 miles north of the west entrance to Soerabaja." Another group was reported by the British to Glassford, "The *Exeter* reported 1 enemy cruiser and 4 destroyers in this locality, and later 3 cruisers and 4 destroyers. *Electra* reported 2 battleships (really heavy cruisers), 1 cruiser, and 6 destroyers; and later 1 cruiser and a large number of individual ships. The *Jupiter* made one report of scattered forces consisting of 4 cruisers and 14 destroyers. Thus the two groups of the enemy, namely the convoy plus escort and the covering force to the southward of the convoy, were fairly well known and developed by early evening of the 27th."<sup>10</sup>

Admiral Doorman's strike force was at the entrance to Surabaya, within the mines guarding the entrance to the harbor, when at 1500 on 27 February, he ordered the group to turn around to

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 54.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 55-56.

intercept the Japanese. He signaled, “Am proceeding to intercept enemy unit. Follow me. Details later.” The only written reports of the engagement are from the American destroyers that survived the engagement and escaped to Australia, as well as supplemental reports filed after the war by the senior surviving American officers. The destroyers had no direct contact with Doorman on *De Ruyter*. The destroyers broke off engagement with the Japanese while the battle was still ongoing, leaving gaps in the written record.<sup>11</sup>

Japanese carrier-based aircraft discovered the Strike Force almost immediately and at 1530, *Houston* opened fire, causing the aircraft to miss badly astern. Admiral Doorman requested fighter protection but the eight remaining fighters were needed to escort four dive-bombers on an attack against the Japanese convoy.<sup>12</sup> *De Ruyter* and Admiral Doorman led a column of allied cruisers followed by *Exeter*, *Houston*, *Perth*, and *Java*. American destroyers *John D. Edwards*, *Alden*, *Paul Jones*, and *John D. Ford* were about 4,000 yards astern with two Dutch destroyers, *Kortenaer* and *Witte De With*, struggling to reach the front of the column. Boiler trouble kept *Kortenaer* to a speed of 24 knots, equal to the cruiser’s speed. Approximately five miles ahead of the main body, three British destroyers, *Electra*, *Jupiter*, and *Encounter*, formed an anti-submarine screen. This deployment was an unorthodox way to deploy naval assets such as the Strike Force, so either Admiral Doorman knew nothing of established naval tactics or he chose to ignore them. Standard doctrine of the time would be to deploy the forces by groups of a specific type, allowing each group to use their strength to their advantage. Conventional tactics would have put the *Houston* and *Exeter*, with their 8-inch guns in the lead, followed by the light cruisers; the destroyers should have been allowed to use their speed to attack the Japanese with their torpedoes. Keeping the destroyers in the rear left them useless in the coming battle.<sup>13</sup> Doorman issued the American destroyers conflicting orders, their assigned position was to the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 56.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 57.

<sup>13</sup> Walter G. Winslow, *The Ghost That Died at Sunda Strait* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984), pp 113.

disengaged bow of the cruisers, yet they were also ordered not to go ahead of the Dutch destroyers.<sup>14</sup>

At 1600, the British destroyers in the lead reported Japanese contacts, misidentifying two Japanese heavy cruisers as battleships. At 1611, the Japanese ships came into view of the rest of the Strike Force; this was the enemy's covering force, between the Strike Force and the Japanese transports. The two Japanese cruisers were IJN *Nachi*, flagship of Vice Admiral Takeo Takagi, commander of the Japanese ships, and the second cruiser was IJN *Haguro*. Each carried ten 8-inch guns in five turrets as well as eight torpedo tubes carrying Long Lance torpedoes, with a range of more than 30,000 yards and a speed of 49 knots. The Japanese cruisers were spotted bearing 30 degrees relative to starboard of the Strike Force and Doorman change course to parallel them. Behind the *Nachi* and *Haguro*, and further from the Strike Force, were at least four and as many as seven additional cruisers, accompanied by 2 groups of Japanese destroyers, seven in one group and six in the other, each group led by a light cruiser.<sup>15</sup>

The Japanese opened fire at extreme range at 1616, about 30,000 yards, but the shells fell some 2,000 yards short of the Strike Force. A few minutes later, *Houston* and *Exeter* opened fire with their 8-inch guns, and shortly thereafter, so did *De Ruyter* and *Perth*, although it is doubtful that the 6-inch guns on both ships had the range to hit the Japanese. The *Houston's* stern 8-inch turret was still out of action from the earlier bomb hit; *Houston's* salvos were six shells instead of nine. The British destroyers moved back to parallel the American destroyers. Gradually the range between the two groups diminished.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Ship's Log, USS Edwards*, February 1942. From the National Archives at College Park, MD. pp. 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 59.

# DISPOSITION OF ENEMY AT FIRST CONTACT BATTLE OF JAVA

27 February

(As Reported by JUPITER, 1626)

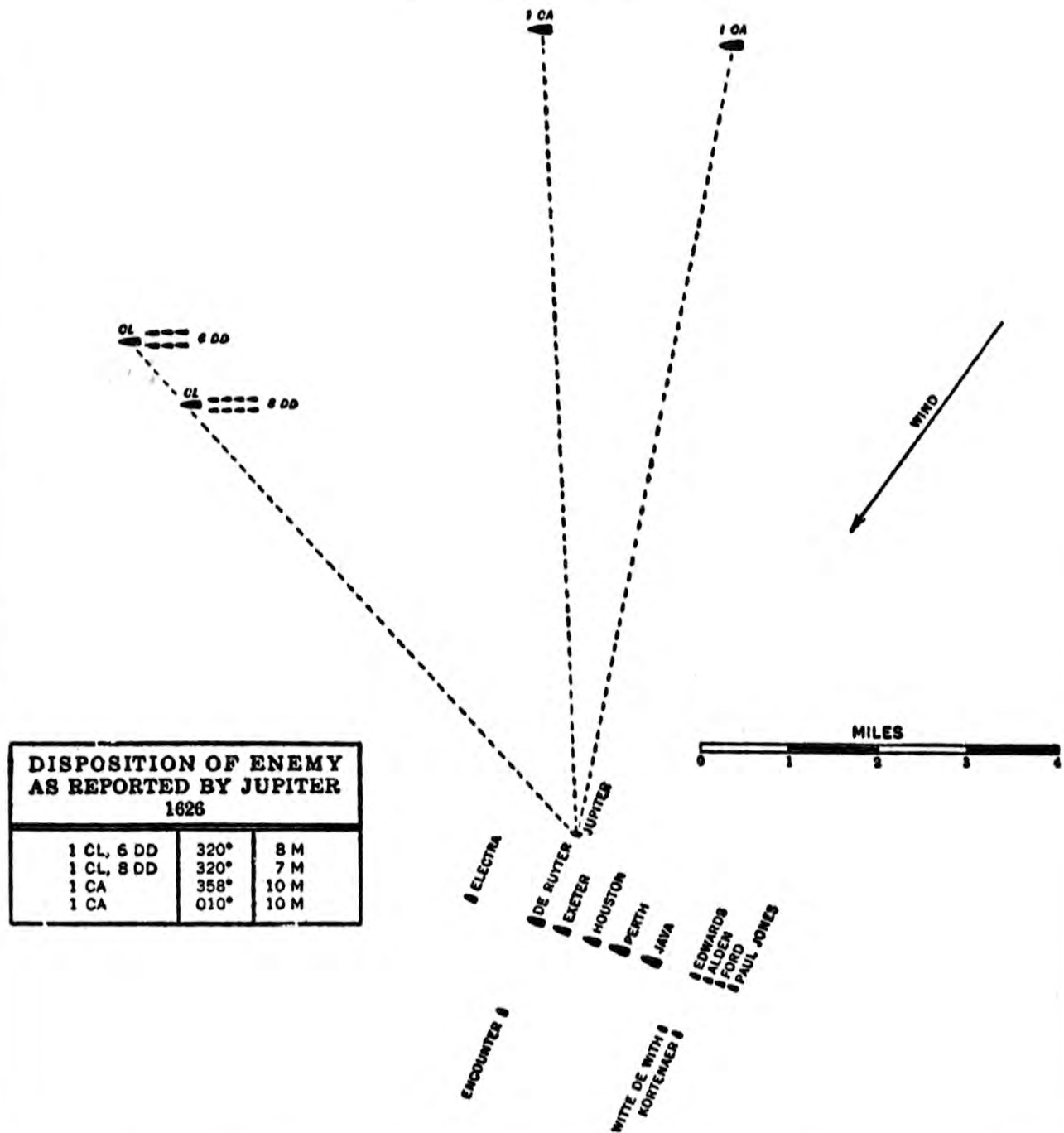


Figure 10. Disposition of ABDA Fleet at the beginning of the Battle of the Java Sea

At 1629, the Japanese straddled *De Ruyter* with several salvos, scoring at least one hit, although it did no serious damage. Because of the extreme range, the shells were landing almost vertically, making accuracy more difficult for both sides. The Japanese had the advantage of spotter aircraft to report the location of each salvo. *Houston's* fire was the more accurate of the Strike Force and was firing at a rate of five or six salvos a minute. *Houston's* rate of fire was extraordinary because shortly after the first few salvos, a fuse box failed in the number 1 turret, putting the automatic rammer out of action. The gun turret crew manually loaded the 260 pound 8-inch shells and heavy bags of powder, an operation thought impossible in peace time, continuing this herculean task for sixty-five salvos until the fuse box was repaired.<sup>17</sup>

At 1630, *Houston* scored a direct hit on a Japanese heavy cruiser near the forward turrets, followed by several more hits. The cruiser was afire, ceased firing and the bridge officers of *Alden* as well as the commander of *Ford*, reported a large explosion on the cruiser. In an effort to screen their damaged cruiser, at 1634, the Japanese destroyers made a torpedo attack. This attack was repulsed by gunfire from *Perth*, hitting and possibly sinking one Japanese destroyer and damaging others.<sup>18</sup> *Exeter* scored several direct hits on a light cruiser, sending it out of action, on fire and smoking. At about 1645, the remaining bombers from Java made an attack on the Japanese transports, but scored no hits, and were shot down by Japanese fighters. A few minutes later the Japanese destroyers re-formed, and led by a light cruiser, made another torpedo attack. *Exeter* and the light cruisers of the Strike Force fired at the attackers, and at a range of about 15,000 yards, the Japanese fired forty-three torpedoes, but at that range hitting a moving target was nearly impossible.<sup>19</sup> The Strike Force made an immediate turn to the port to present as small a target as possible for the oncoming torpedoes. *Edwards* reported a periscope off their port side, and two minutes later reported a large explosion where the periscope was seen. Large pieces of

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<sup>17</sup> Walter G. Winslow, *The Ghost That Died at Sunda Strait* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984), pp 115.

<sup>18</sup> *Office of Naval Intelligence - The Java Sea Campaign*, January 8, 1943, Combat Narrative, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. pp. 61.

<sup>19</sup> Tameichi Hara. *Japanese Destroyer Captain* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press), pp 70.



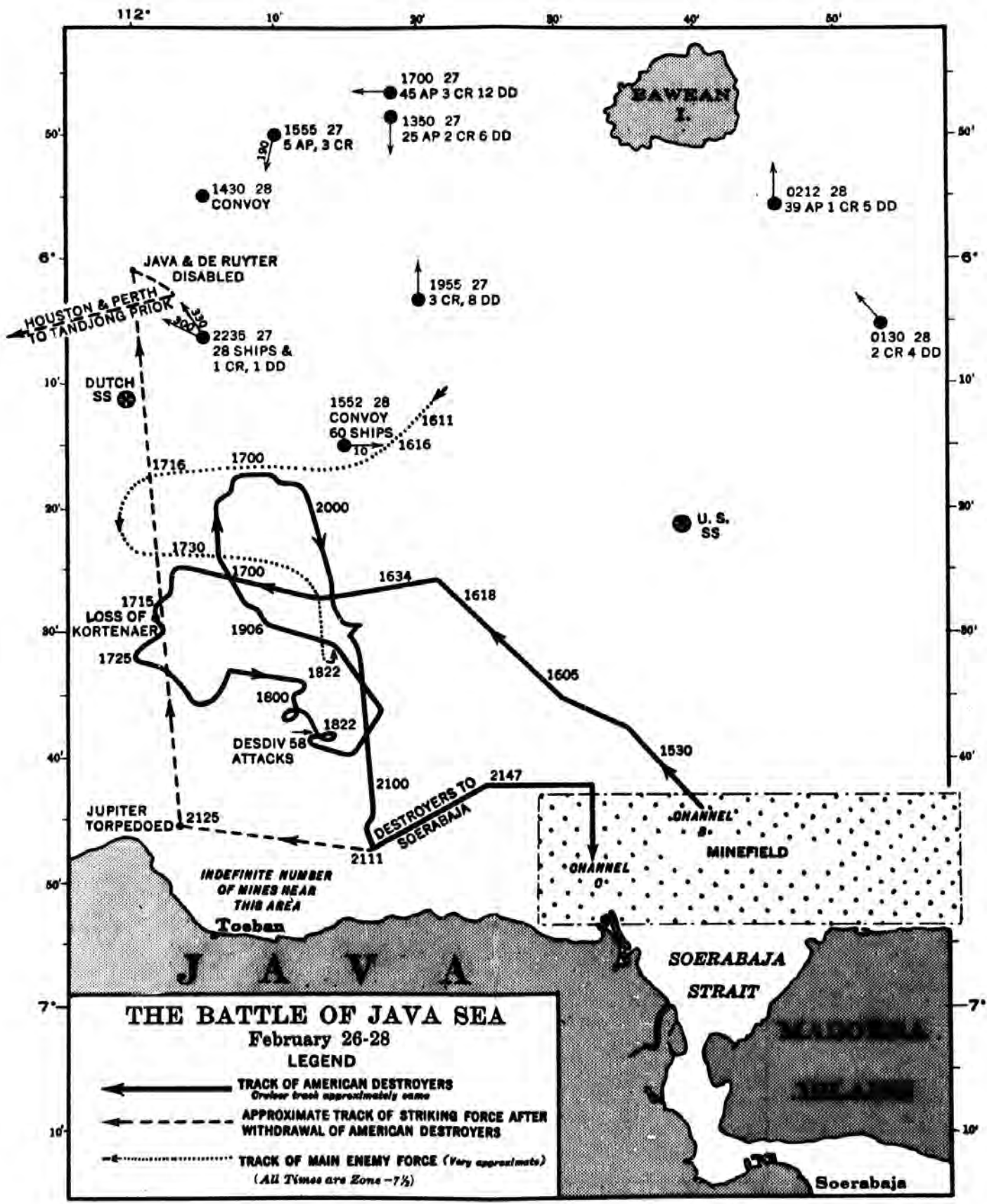


Figure 11. Battle of the Java Sea

metal and other debris were seen in the area falling back into the sea, so it is possible that the Japanese torpedoes struck one of their own submarines, as there were no Allied submarines in the area.<sup>20</sup>

At 1655, a 6-inch shell struck *Java*, causing little damage and not injuring any of the crew. Shortly afterward, an 8-inch shell passed through the main deck of *Houston* and passed out the starboard side without exploding. Shortly thereafter, *Houston* was again struck on the port side aft, but again, did not explode and received only minor damage.<sup>21</sup> Fearful that the Strike Force might escape to the west in the growing darkness, Admiral Takeo Takagi ordered his ships to close with the enemy. At 1725, *Exeter* was hit in a boiler room, killing fourteen men and knocking out six of the eight boilers. The damage reduced *Exeter's* speed to less than 15 knots, forcing *Exeter's* commanding officer to turn to port to avoid the faster ships behind her. The action forced the remaining cruisers to also turn to port. The destroyers were also maneuvering to avoid torpedoes but at 1730, *Kortenaer* was struck by a torpedo, folded up like a jackknife, and sank within a minute of the original explosion. No survivors were seen. *Edwards* spotted another submarine to the west, and a few minutes later, observed a torpedo coming from the direction of the submarine. Japanese ships at this point were all to the north.<sup>22</sup>

By 1726, the Strike Force had reformed and Admiral Doorman ordered all ships to follow *De Ruyter*, minus *Exeter*. *Exeter* began to move slowly to the south while the British destroyers created a smoke screen north of the column of cruisers that was now moving to the east. *Edwards* reported seeing *Perth* adding to the smoke screen and covering the crippled *Exeter* by steaming between the Japanese ships and *Exeter*, allowing *Exeter* to withdraw to the south. *Edwards* reported a second Japanese submarine exploding about 2,000 yards off her starboard

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<sup>20</sup> *Ship's Log, USS Edwards*, February 1942. From the National Archives at College Park, MD. pp. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Walter G. Winslow, *The Ghost That Died at Sunda Strait* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984), pp 116-117.

<sup>22</sup> *Ship's Log, USS Edwards*, February 1942. From the National Archives at College Park, MD. pp. 2.

bow, sending much debris high into the air.<sup>23</sup> The Japanese continued their attack by sending their destroyers in close to torpedo *Exeter*. The only ships in a position to defend *Exeter* were the British destroyers, and Doorman signaled for them to counter attack at about 1730. As *Electra* turned to enter the smoke screen, three Japanese destroyers emerged from the smoke and all four ships opened fire on one another. *Electra* scored four hits on one of the Japanese destroyers, but *Electra* was in turn hit by Japanese fire, one shell exploding in her boiler room and another destroying her ability to steer. *Electra* was now dead in the water. The damaged Japanese destroyer moved away, but the other two moved in closer and continued to fire salvo after salvo into the crippled *Electra*. The Japanese were so close, they could use machine guns on the survivors in the water. By the time *Jupiter* reached the site of the fighting, *Electra* had sunk, and the remaining two destroyers opened fire on *Exeter*. *Jupiter* attacked and the two remaining Japanese destroyers broke off and retreated into the smoke to the north. *Exeter* fired on the light cruiser leading the Japanese destroyer attack and the cruiser also moved back into the smoke. Doorman ordered *Exeter* to retire to Surabaya, escorted by *Witte de With*, which had suffered damage when one of her depth charges had been knocked overboard and had exploded close astern.<sup>24</sup>

At 1745, Doorman signaled a turn back to the north and opened fire at a range of about 18,000 yards, making several strikes on the Japanese ships. Lieutenant Commander Cooper, commander of the *John D. Ford* reported, "At 1745 our main body again opened fire on the enemy, their fire was particularly effective as fire was seen on one of the enemy battleships and two fires noted on one of the cruisers. These did not appear to have been brought under control as long as we could see them."<sup>25</sup> Several reports mention a Japanese battleship in the area, but

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Office of Naval Intelligence - The Java Sea Campaign*, January 8, 1943, Combat Narrative, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. pp. 69.

<sup>25</sup> Report of action of Allied Naval Forces with Japanese Forces off Soerabaja, Java, N.E.I., February 27, 1942, *John D. Edwards*, March 4 1942. From the National Archives at College Park, MD. pp. 3.

Japanese records neither confirm nor deny this possibility as most records were destroyed during or shortly after the war. The Japanese commander, Vice Admiral Takeo Takagi, was killed during the Battle of Saipan on 8 July 1944, and he left no surviving diaries or any other documents regarding Japanese battle damage.<sup>26</sup>

At 1806, Dorman signaled from *De Ruyter* to “Counter attack,” followed quickly by “Cancel counterattack” and “Make smoke.” A few minutes later, Doorman signaled the American destroyers to “Cover my retirement.” The reason for this order is unclear as the Strike Force had the range of the Japanese ships and several of them were on fire. It is possible that Doorman wanted to disengage the Japanese war ships and go after the transports. The Commander of the American destroyers, Commander Binford, ordered a torpedo attack, and the destroyers closed to 14,000 yards before firing their starboard torpedoes. The destroyers then reversed course and fired their remaining port side torpedoes at 1827. The torpedo attack succeeded in forcing the Japanese ships to turn to the north. An American plane observed this portion of the battle and reported that one of the heavy cruisers had brought its fires under control but that three Japanese destroyers were on fire and left behind. At 1830, one of the torpedoes fired by the American destroyers hit one of the Japanese ships, as a large explosion was reported in the Japanese battle line.<sup>27</sup>

In the growing darkness, the two forces lost contact with each other, but at 1930, a Japanese plane dropped eight green parachute flares to mark the position of the Strike Force. At this point, the Strike Force was moving north looking for the Japanese; *De Ruyter* signaled, “Target to Port.” Flashes on the Japanese ships indicated that they had fired torpedoes at the force, necessitating a turn to the east. Japanese planes continued to drop flares above the Strike Force, causing alterations in the course of the Strike Force, but it remained heading south. The

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<sup>26</sup> Tameichi Hara. *Japanese Destroyer Captain* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press), pp 60.

<sup>27</sup> *Office of Naval Intelligence - The Java Sea Campaign*, January 8, 1943, Combat Narrative, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. pp. 71-72.

destroyers had expended all their torpedoes and were running low on fuel, as they had not been able to refuel in Surabaya and had been operating at full speed throughout the day. At 2111, the destroyers retired to Surabaya to refuel and Commander Binford signaled that after the destroyers had refueled, they would proceed as directed by Admiral Doorman. Binford never received any future messages from Doorman. By the time the destroyers reached Surabaya, *Exeter* and *Witte de With* had already arrived.<sup>28</sup>

The Strike Force was moving west along the coast of Java in a column led by *Encounter* with *De Ruyter*, *Perth*, *Houston*, *Java*, and *Jupiter* following in that order. At 2125, *Jupiter* was rocked by a large explosion amidships on her starboard side, next to her engine room, leaving her dead in the water. The rest of the Strike Force turned north and at 2217, passed the area where *Kortenaer* had sunk and survivors were seen in the water. *Encounter* was ordered to stop and rescue the 113 survivors from a crew of 153, including the commanding officer Lieutenant Commander Kroese.<sup>29</sup> *Encounter* then steamed for Surabaya, leaving the cruisers without any

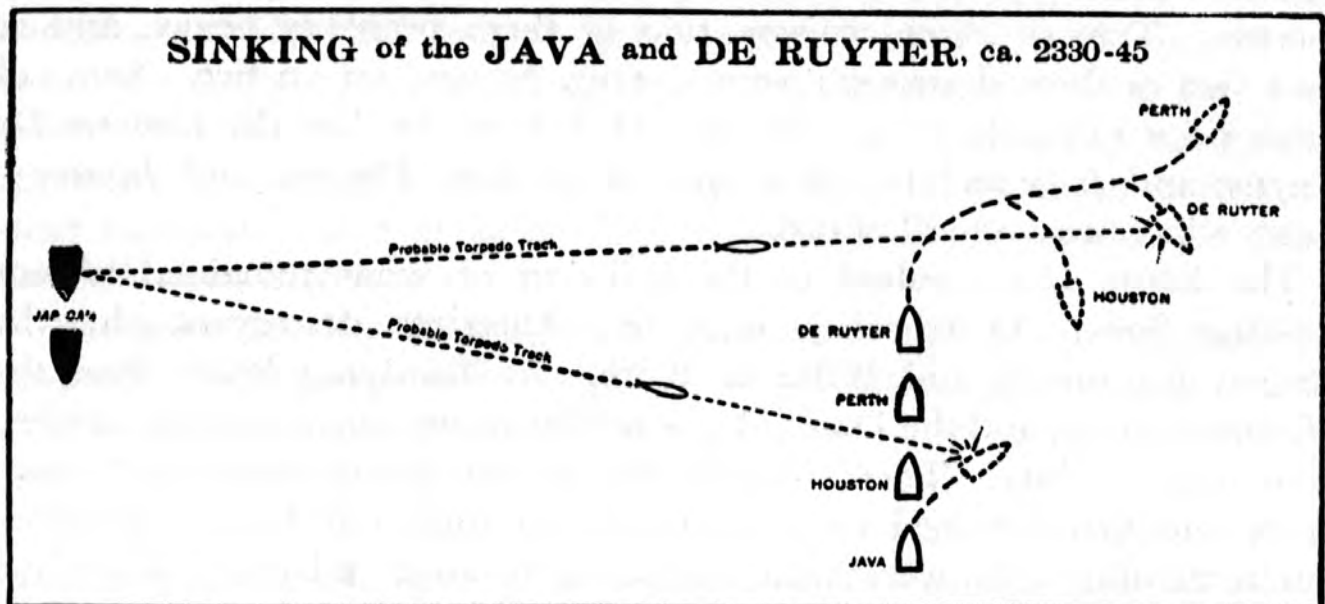


Figure 12. Sinking of *De Ruyter* and *Java*

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 73.

<sup>29</sup> Walter G. Winslow, *The Ghost That Died at Sunda Strait* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984), pp 123.

destroyer protection. Admiral Helfrich's orders to Doorman were to continue attacking until the Japanese fleet was destroyed. At 2235, a PBY from Patrol Wing 10 spotted the Japanese transports southwest of Bawean, just a few miles northwest of the Strike Force, but the report of the transport's location never reached Doorman.<sup>30</sup>

At 2315, *De Ruyter* spotted two Japanese cruisers, *Nachi* and *Haguro*, who opened fire at a range of about 9,000 yards. *Perth* replied with several salvos and scored several hits on one of the cruisers. *De Ruyter* received a torpedo hit aft and turned away from the attacking Japanese. As *Java* began to follow, a torpedo struck her and within minutes, the entire aft part of the ship was in flames. *De Ruyter* continued to turn to the southeast and forced *Perth* to turn quickly to port to avoid a collision with the Dutch ship.<sup>31</sup> *Houston* had fired only a single salvo as she was almost out of ammunition for her 8-inch guns.<sup>32</sup>

The Strike Force now consisted of *Houston* and *Perth*. Admiral Doorman's last signal was for the two ships to retire to Batavia and not stay in the area to look for survivors. About the same time, American destroyers *John D. Edwards*, *Alden*, *John D. Ford*, and *Paul Jones* left Surabaya through the shallow waters of the Bali Strait and escaped to Australia. *Exeter*, escorted by *Encounter* and the American destroyer *Pope*, were forced to go west, as the Bali Strait was too shallow for *Exeter*. On 1 March, they were attacked by Japanese heavy cruisers and sunk.

*Houston* and *Perth* made their way to Batavia, low on fuel and ammunition, and arrived at 1200 on 28 February 1942.<sup>33</sup> During the night, a U.S. submarine S-38 picked up fifty-six survivors from *Electra*.<sup>34</sup> *Houston* had fired more than 100 salvos from each of the two functional turrets the proceeding day, a total of 597 8-inch shells from her forward turrets.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 74-75.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 76.

<sup>32</sup> Walter G. Winslow, *The Ghost That Died at Sunda Strait* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984), pp 124.

<sup>33</sup> *Ship's Log, USS Houston, supplemental*. Written and filed by Lt. Commander Hamlin, captured by Japanese and held as POW until August 1945. Supplement log written September, 1945. From the National Archives at College Park, MD. pp. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Edwin Palmer Hoyt, *The Lonely Ships: The Life and Death of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet* (New York: McKay, 1976), pp. 258-259.

Concussion from the guns had played havoc with the interior spaces of *Houston*, glass was broken, drawers had fallen to the deck and anything not bolted down had been thrown about the interior of the ship. All during the night after the sinking of *De Ruyter* and *Java*, the entire crew was involved in moving the 260 pound 8-inch shells from the after magazine under the useless turret 3 to the magazines for turrets 1 and 2. This operation lasted until 1730.<sup>35</sup> The life span of a navy 8-inch gun was 300 salvos and the guns of *Houston* were at the end of their service life. The liners of the barrels extended more than an inch from the gun barrel muzzles. During the battle, temperatures inside the turrets and engineering spaces remained above 140°, a testament to the courage and bravery of the entire crew. The gunnery crews had worked for hours firing salvo after salvo, manhandling shells when the fuse box blew, standing in more than three inches of melted gun grease, sweat, urine and vomit sloshing on the deck. Most naval battles lasted no more than twenty to twenty-five minutes, yet during the proceeding day, the crew had fought through a marathon four-hour gunnery battle.<sup>36</sup>

Upon arrival at Batavia, *Houston's* Captain Rooks and *Perth's* Captain Hector Waller went to the British Naval Liaison Office for instructions. Rooks spoke by phone with Admiral Glassford who relayed orders from Admiral Helfrich to steam to Tjilatjap. Glassford told Rooks that he did not agree with Helfrich to continue the fight to defend Java. It was obvious that the remaining ships could do nothing to stop the Japanese. Helfrich, however, was determined to fight to the last ship. The British informed Rooks and Waller (incorrectly) that Sunda Strait to the west of Java was open, and that the Bali Strait to the east of Java was too shallow for the cruisers. In reality, just north of the western end of Java was a large Japanese force of as many as sixty transports, support ships, four heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, numerous destroyers, and

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<sup>35</sup> *Action Report, USS Houston, supplemental*. Written and filed by Captain Maher (former gunnery officer USS *Houston*, senior surviving officer, captured by Japanese and held as POW until August 1945. Supplement log written November, 1945. From the National Archives at College Park, MD. pp. 1.

<sup>36</sup> James D. Hornfischer, *Ship of Ghosts: The Story of the USS Houston, FDR's Legendary Lost Cruiser, and the Epic Saga of Her Survivors* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006), pp. 89.

the aircraft carrier IJN *Ryujo*. Amazingly, an Army report of the location of these ships was in the hands of the Dutch Army, in the same building as the British Liaison Office, but General Wijbrandus Schilling, commander of the Dutch 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division on Java did not even know of the arrival of *Houston* or *Perth* until after the ships had left port.

Rooks and Waller had needed to refuel and had planned to do so at Batavia, but the Dutch port officials were ordered by Admiral Helfrich not to give any American ships fuel, so they refused to refuel *Houston* and only gave *Perth* three hundred tons of fuel. The Dutch said that they were under orders to save the fuel for Dutch Naval ships, and despite being told that all Dutch ships had been sunk or had left the area, they refused to refuel *Houston*.<sup>37</sup> Admiral Glassford told Captain Rooks that if needed, *Houston* could receive fuel in Tjilatjap from the oiler *Pecos*.<sup>38</sup> Captain Waller of *Perth* was the senior officer and as such, in overall command of surviving ships. The Captains had planned to leave Batavia at 1830 in company of a Dutch destroyer HNLMS *Evertsen*. The Dutch destroyer, however, had no orders to leave, her boilers were not lit and she could not get under way. The Dutch pilot who was supposed to guide the ships through the minefield outside the harbor never showed up, so at 1930, *Perth* led the way out of the harbor. After they cleared the harbor, both ships went to 28 knots and headed for Sunda Strait.<sup>39</sup>

The Action Report filed by the senior surviving officer, Commander Arthur Maher, *Houston's* gunnery officer, filed in November 1945, describes the condition of the *Houston* and her crew. Maher describes the intense pride of the entire crew in their ship, that morale was very high but the crew was exhausted. They had been at wartime conditions since 1 December 1941; anti-aircraft crews had been at General Quarters around the clock since that time. Supply and

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<sup>37</sup> Edwin Palmer Hoyt, *The Lonely Ships: The Life and Death of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet* (New York: McKay, 1976), pp. 259.

<sup>38</sup> James D. Hornfischer, *Ship of Ghosts: The Story of the USS Houston, FDR's Legendary Lost Cruiser, and the Epic Saga of Her Survivors* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006), pp. 98.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 270.



repair facilities had been nearly non-existent for the previous three months. Battle Stations had been maintained for the previous four days, and food was irregular and inadequate. The engineering crews suffered the most; Maher reported more than 70 cases of heat exhaustion in the boiler and engine rooms. Maher wrote that materially, “*Houston* had no serious defects, despite being struck twice by 8-inch shells that fortunately did not explode.”<sup>40</sup> Despite the lack of fuel from the Dutch, *Houston* still carried about 350,000 gallons of fuel, enough to get to Tjilatjap or even Australia at reduced speed. *Houston* and *Perth* sped through the evening hours of 28 February 1942, hoping to escape to the south. The sea was calm, no wind, and a full moon, with just a few clouds.<sup>41</sup>

The two ships approached the northern entrance to Sunda Strait and found the Japanese invasion force attacking Java on the northwestern most point of the island, Bantam Bay. Neither group expected the other to be there at that time. Both *Perth* and Japanese destroyers attempted to signal each other at 2315. *Perth* opened fire and changed course to the north to leave Bantam Bay with *Houston* following, with both firing on the Japanese to the west. *Perth* was almost out of ammunition; she had less than twenty rounds per 6-inch gun left.<sup>42</sup> Nine additional Japanese ships were spotted to the north and *Perth* continued turning to starboard, circling back towards Bantam Bay.

Maher described the fight as a melee, as *Houston* and *Perth* engaged targets on all sides, and the two ships were between the transports and the Japanese war ships screening the invasion. *Perth* changed course again, turning to port and then back to starboard to avoid torpedo attacks.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Action Report, USS Houston, supplemental*. Written and filed by Captain Maher (former gunnery officer USS Houston, senior surviving officer, captured by Japanese and held as POW until August 1945. Supplement log written November, 1945. From the National Archives at College Park, MD. pp. 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1.

<sup>42</sup> James D. Hornfischer, *Ship of Ghosts: The Story of the USS Houston, FDR's Legendary Lost Cruiser, and the Epic Saga of Her Survivors* (New York: Bantam Books, 2006), pp. 106.

<sup>43</sup> Walter G. Winslow, *The Ghost That Died at Sunda Strait* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984), pp 136.

As *Perth* again settled on a northerly course, several torpedoes struck her. She sank at 0025. The Japanese ships fired torpedoes at the *Houston*, their own ships and transports close to the shore. Captain Rooks continued to maneuver *Houston* to avoid torpedo attacks, and *Houston* was free to shoot any ship they could see, as all ships were Japanese at that point. *Houston* scored hit after hit on the Japanese forces, sometimes at ranges as close as 1,500 yards. Bridge officers on *Houston* reported seeing at least one cruiser capsize and sink, and another on fire and attempting to move out of battle. *Houston* received a direct hit which set turret number two on fire, forcing the abandonment of the Bridge.<sup>44</sup>

*Houston* was on fire in several places and began to take torpedo strikes, but guns continued to fire the secondary 5-inch and the anti-aircraft guns. Captain Rooks ordered “Abandon Ship” at 0025, but since *Houston* was still moving at about 20 knots, the order was countermanded at 0029. Captain Rooks had reached the communication deck below the bridge when a Japanese salvo struck an anti-aircraft mount on the deck, killing Captain Rooks almost immediately. The Executive Officer, Commander David Roberts, passed the word to “Abandon Ship” again about 0033. Roberts and *Houston*’s navigator, Commander John Howell, went to the boat deck to see if any of *Houston*’s boats could be launched to carry survivors. Neither was ever seen again. *Houston* was listing badly to the starboard side, so most of the crew went over that side of the ship. As the crew moved away from *Houston*, the Japanese continued to fire into *Houston*, which sank at about 0045 1 March 1942.<sup>45</sup>

*Houston* had left Batavia on 28 February 1942 with 50 officers and 961 enlisted men. After the battle, 26 officers and 625 enlisted men were missing and presumed dead. On *Perth*, from a pre-battle crew of 681 officers and men, 23 officers and 330 enlisted men lost their lives, including Captain Waller. During their captivity as POW’s of the Japanese, *Houston* lost an

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<sup>44</sup> *Action Report, USS Houston, supplemental*. Written and filed by Captain Maher (former gunnery officer USS *Houston*, senior surviving officer, captured by Japanese and held as POW until August 1945. Supplement log written November, 1945. From the National Archives at College Park, MD. pp. 4-7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

additional 76 men to starvation, disease, and brutality. Only 284 men came home from a ship's company of 1,011 men.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Walter G. Winslow, *The Ghost That Died at Sunda Strait* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984), pp 180-181.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION



Figure 13.  
Captain Albert Rooks

Two men stand out for special recognition from *Houston*. Captain Albert H. Rooks posthumously received the Congressional Medal of Honor on 24 June 1942 for “Extraordinary heroism, outstanding courage, gallantry in action and distinguished service in the line of his profession as Commanding Officer of the USS *Houston* during the period of 4 to February 27, 1942, while in action with superior Japanese enemy aerial and surface forces.” In 1944, Destroyer USS *Rooks* (DD-804) was named in his honor.<sup>47</sup>

The other man from *Houston* that stood out among the many heroes was *Houston*'s Chaplain, Commander George Rentz. Rentz had been tireless in moving about *Houston* during the battles, even though at age 59, he was the oldest man on *Houston*. Rentz carried a thermos full of cold water and pockets full of candy bars that he passed out to the men, making Rentz a source of comfort during *Houston*'s battles. Rentz went into the water with the rest of *Houston*'s survivors, clinging to a float with them. Several times during the night, as the float they were clinging to sank lower and lower into the water, Rentz tried to swim away to keep it from sinking. Each time, a sailor ignored Rentz's wishes and pulled him back. Rentz was holding a young sailor named Walter Beeson who was wounded and without a life jacket. Rentz gave his life jacket to Beeson, said a brief prayer for the men on the float, kicked away from the float and was gone. Beeson survived as a POW and was liberated in 1945. Rentz was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross, the only Chaplain so honored during World War II. USS *Rentz* (FFG-46) was named in his honor in 1984 and still serves with the United States Navy today. USS

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<sup>47</sup> Duane P. Schultz, *The Last Battle Station: The Story of the U.S.S. Houston* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1985), pp. 231.

*Houston* herself was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation “For outstanding performance against enemy Japanese forces in the southwest Pacific from December 4, 1941, to February 28, 1942.... *Houston* went down gallantly fighting to the last against overwhelming odds. She leaves behind her an inspiring record of valiant and distinguished service.”<sup>48</sup> The fate of *Houston* and *Perth* was not known until December 1942, and the full story of their fight was not known until after the war and the return of her surviving crewmembers.

The Asiatic Fleet ceased to exist in February 1942. The ships were obsolete, especially compared to the modern Japanese ships. Training and morale among the crews was excellent in spite of pre-war cost cutting measures, lack of support after the war began, an Anglo-centric bias of British superiority regarding the ability of the Japanese, and the openly expressed opinion that the Americans needed to be “put in their place,” i.e. under British domination.<sup>49</sup> Douglas MacArthur, who refused to acknowledge that his Army could not function without the Navy, belittled the Asiatic Fleet. The Navy could not operate without air cover. MacArthur’s mishandling of the opening days of early December 1941 doomed both his men and the Asiatic Fleet. The Asiatic Fleet was further damaged by the removal of Admiral Hart for political reasons by officers who thought to advance their own careers at the expense of Hart, and the fight to the last man attitude of the Dutch, fighting a battle that could not be won.

Maher wrote in his report that none of the Asiatic Fleet had any modern equipment such as RADAR, 40mm anti-aircraft guns, or functioning torpedoes. He attributes part of the results of the Battle of the Java Sea and the sinking of *Houston* and *Perth* to:

The difficulty in establishing and maintaining communications between units of Allied forces was forcibly brought to light in all operations. The Japanese force had entered the Java Sea on a southerly course from the vicinity of Bangka Island on 27 February 1942. This was an entirely different force from that participating in the battle of the Java Sea. Due to the slow speed of the convoy this force could not be more than one hundred twenty miles away from Bantam Bay at 1200 on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Information since obtained

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 204, 249.

<sup>49</sup> Duane P. Schultz, *The Last Battle Station: The Story of the U.S.S. Houston* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), pp. 73.

from Allied prisoners of war indicates that this force was observed, and also that Allied patrol vessels had been sunk in the Bantam Bay area on the afternoon of 28 February. The only report received by the HOUSTON was to the effect that an enemy convoy was seventy miles northeast of Batavia heading east.

It appears definite that at some parts of the battle the Japanese fired at their own ships. This is understandable in view of the large number of Japanese ships present; the restricted sea room and the radical maneuvers of the HOUSTON in avoiding torpedoes. Apparently the Japanese did not have an efficient system of night identifications signals. Fortunately we had no such difficulty as after the sinking of the PERTH all ships were considered enemies.<sup>50</sup>

Commander H. E. Eccles, commander of USS *John D. Edwards*, remarked on these same topics in his General Conclusions and Recommendations after the Battle of the Java Sea. He wrote that after having served in a variety of commands, British in Singapore, Dutch in Java, and of course the Asiatic Fleet, he concluded that:

- A. Communications and liaison and doctrine must be firmly established before combined operations commence.
- B. It is impossible to operate ships successfully from a base which is subjected to unopposed bombing.
- C. The material condition of these ships is such that they can give good service in their proper sphere if allowed to overhaul – otherwise they will become merely targets.
- D. During battle it is essential that all possible information be transmitted to the Destroyer Commander in order that he may act intelligently to further the plan of action. This was not done at Bawean and resulted in great confusion.

Eccles then recommended:

- A. That the ships of the Squadron should be used for submarine patrol in South Australian waters, officered by the selective fleeting of the present junior officers and use whatever excess officers that are now available.
- B. It is finally recommended that every attempt be made to pick nucleus crews from the experienced men of this Squadron to fit out new destroyers and destroyer leaders for duty in combat zones and that the invaluable battle experience of the present officers be utilized by the maximum fleeting up and selective transfer of officers to command these new ship.<sup>51</sup>

Eccles addressed the major issues that beset the Asiatic Fleet from the beginning of the war. The fleet had no air support and the Japanese could bomb Manila at will. The ships of the

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<sup>50</sup> *Action Report, USS Houston, supplemental*. Written and filed by Captain Maher (former gunnery officer USS *Houston*, senior surviving officer, captured by Japanese and held as POW until August 1945. Supplement log written November, 1945. From the National Archives at College Park, MD. pp. 16.

<sup>51</sup> General Conclusions and Recommendations based on War Operations to date., *John D. Edwards*, March 4 1942. From the National Archives at College Park, MD. pp. 1-3.

fleet, despite being nearly obsolete twenty-one year old destroyers, could and did continue to carry out their mission, but lack of proper maintenance severely hampered their efforts. Most important of all, clear lines of communications between all branches of the services were essential to carry out their mission. The Strike Force could not accurately communicate with each other and the Japanese could. Even though the Japanese ships were not from an established group, they were assembled for this specific invasion, and their tactics and battle plans were all based on a Navy standard. The Japanese had issues with night time operations, as they lacked RADAR and reacted slowly to changes in the battle plan, but they overcame these with superior numbers, better maintained ships. and a much superior torpedo.

After the battles, there was a great disparity in the amount of damage sustained by the Japanese; reports from U.S. Navy officers put the damage much higher than Japanese sources. An accurate accounting of the damage to the Japanese is impossible to obtain at this point, but officers and men throughout the Allied forces maintained that the Japanese suffered many more casualties than they admitted. In a report written in 1946 by the U.S. Technical Mission to Japan, “The Japanese Naval Ministry probably kept the most meager and inaccurate records of any major Navy Department in the world. The majority of what records were compiled during the war were burned either when the Naval Ministry was destroyed by fire in the spring of 1945, or by order during the period 15-17 August 1945, during which the Japanese Government was reaching the decision to surrender.”<sup>52</sup> The survivors of *Houston* and *Perth* both reported seeing many transports capsized or sunk the morning of 1 March 1942, while the Japanese reported that one minesweeper and four troop ships sunk or grounded, one cruiser damaged, with ten men killed and thirty-seven wounded. There is evidence from Allied survivors that the true toll was many more than that, including an 18,000 ton sea plane transport, at least two destroyers, several

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<sup>52</sup> Walter G. Winslow, *The Ghost That Died at Sunda Strait* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1984), pp 180-182.

motor torpedo boats, and at least twelve and as many as fifteen transports sunk. Most obvious of the transports was *Ryujo Maru*, the headquarters ship for Lieutenant General Hitoshi Imamura, commanding general of the Sixteenth Army invading Java that night. This ship is not listed as damaged or sunk, yet Imamura's account of his ship sinking and how he had to swim to shore covered in oil was published during the war in the *Nippon Times* and read by Allied POW's. The *Ryujo Maru* may have been sunk by Japanese torpedoes; a record uncovered by the Allies after the war stated that as many as eighty-seven torpedoes were launched at *Houston* and *Perth* that night. Allied POWs reported being beaten during interrogation because the Japanese interrogators could not believe that two damaged cruisers could inflict such serious damage to the Japanese Navy. The interrogators insisted that there must have been another heavy cruiser or battleship involved.<sup>53</sup>

The Battle of the Java Sea was one of the most confusing battles fought at sea during World War II. Part of this confusion is that Allied estimates of Japanese losses were compiled by officers who were not present, such as Admiral Glassford, who admitted that his report was based "on my own individual appreciation of what probably happened." Eyewitness accounts state that there were many more Japanese cruisers involved than the two heavy cruisers and two light cruisers claimed by the Japanese. American destroyers reported the presence of Japanese submarines, and the certain destruction of at least two of them. The Japanese insist that only one destroyer was hit and damaged, yet every officer that survived reported extensive damage and the destruction of several Japanese destroyers and cruisers. It is entirely possible that the Battle of the Java Sea sank many more Japanese ships than Allied ships, based on sworn accounts by Allied naval officers.<sup>54</sup> The Japanese won because they began the battle with a greater depth in the number of ships available to them.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 183-186.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 217-229.



Historical records should reflect more accurate accounts of the extremely capable commanders, such as Admiral Thomas Hart, as well as the inept, but politically protected, General Douglas MacArthur. General Short and Admiral Kimmel were both replaced in the days after the Pearl Harbor attack for failing to prevent such a large loss of life and military assets. MacArthur did nothing to prepare, despite having an eight-hour advance warning of the impending attack on the Philippines, and he allowed his admittedly small air force to be destroyed on the ground, yet he was proclaimed a hero. MacArthur led his army to the greatest defeat of American forces in the history of the United States. He profited materially from his position in the Philippines, securing a personal fortune from the Philippine treasury, while building a Philippine Army that was incapable of performing even the most basic of tasks in defense of their country. Instead of being relieved as Kimmel and Short had been, MacArthur remained in command of the Pacific forces for the next nine years, until relieved by President Harry S. Truman in 1951.

Despite the superiority of the Japanese navy, and despite all the adverse conditions in the area surrounding Dutch Indonesia, Admiral Hart did deliver the Asiatic fleet nearly intact, but badly damaged, to be repaired and to fight until the end of the war. On 15 Feb 1942, none of the surface ships of the Asiatic Fleet had been sunk, and *Canopus* was still functioning in Manila Bay. The nine ships of the Asiatic Fleet that were sunk by the Japanese took place *after* Hart's dismissal.

The Battles of the Java Sea and Sunda Strait is little mentioned in the history of World War II. This is partly because of the perception that the Allies lost badly in those battles and there was no excuse such as a "sneak attack" as was the case at Pearl Harbor. It is also due to the fact that for many months after the battles, little was known about what happened, and by the time it was known, other more exciting battles, i.e. battles the Allies had won, were in the forefront of the news. Unless there is a compelling reason, American historiographical accounts

tend to ignore battles that are lost, but the story of the brave men of the Asiatic Fleet and the ABDA command should be known.

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## APPENDIX

### FATE OF THE ASIATIC FLEET

Name of Ship	Fate	Date
USS Houston CA-30	Sunk by Japanese in Battle of Sunda Strait	01-Mar-42
USS Marblehead CL-12	Repaired - Decommissioned after the war	01-Nov-45
USS Boise CL-47	Repaired - Decommissioned after the war	01-Jul-46
USS Langley CV-1	Sunk by Japanese	27-Feb-42
USS Pecos AO-6	Sunk by Japanese	01-Mar-42
USS Trinity AO-13	Decommissioned after the war	28-May-46
USS Paul Jones DD-230	Repaired - Decommissioned after the war	05-Nov-45
USS John D. Edwards DD-216	Repaired - Decommissioned after the war	28-Jul-45
USS Alden DD-211	Repaired - Decommissioned after the war	15-Jul-45
USS Whipple DD-217	Repaired - Decommissioned after the war	09-Nov-45
USS Edsall DD-219	Sunk by Japanese	01-Mar-45
USS Stewart DD-224	Severely damaged Battle of Badoeng Strait Scuttled in Surabaya*	22-Feb-42
USS Barker DD-213	Repaired - Decommissioned after the war	18-Jul-45
USS Parrott DD-218	Damaged again beyond repair 2-May-44 - Decommissioned	14-Jun-44
USS Bulmer DD-222	Repaired - Decommissioned after the war	16-Aug-46
USS John D. Ford DD-228	Repaired - Decommissioned after the war	02-Nov-45
USS Pope DD-215	Sunk by Japanese	01-Mar-42
USS Peary DD-216	Sunk by Japanese	19-Feb-42
USS Pillsbury DD-227	Sunk by Japanese	2-Mar-42
USS Black Hawk AD-9	Decommissioned after the war	15 Aug 45
USS Asheville PG-21	Sunk by Japanese	3-Mar-45
USS Tulsa PG-22	Repaired - Decommissioned after the war	6-Mar-46
USS Oahu PR-6	Sunk by Japanese	8-Apr-42
USS Isabel PY-10	Decommissioned after the war	11-Feb-46
USS Holland	Decommissioned after the war	18-Jun-52
USS Canopus AS-9	Damaged by Japanese, Manila Bay and scuttled **	10-Apr-42
USS Otus ARG-20	Decommissioned after the war	20-Aug-46

\* Refloated by Japanese and recommissioned in IJN as Patrol Boat #102. Recovered by US Navy and formally decommissioned 23 May 46.

\*\* Damaged by Japanese bombers, *Canopus* was beached and disguised as a wrecked hulk. *Canopus* continued to repair small boats and submarines.

Last submarine repair completed 1 Jan 42, *Canopus* continued to repair small boats and equipment of Allied forces on Bataan, scuttled 8 April 1942.

## VITA

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