

ACTION REPORT USS GAMBIER BAY

GENERAL NARRATIVE

1. At approximately 0645, 25 October 1944, Task Unit 77.4.3. made almost simultaneous contacts, through an ASP plane and radar, with an enemy surface force, about twenty-five miles to the northwest. This Japanese force consisted of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers, estimated speed 26-30 knots, course 120° (T). Our own Task Unit was then in approximately Latitude 11-46 N. Longitude 126-09 E.
2. The six EYE's of the Task Unit were in a circular disposition within a circular screen consisting of 3 DD's and 4 DE's. Wind about 10 knots from ENE. Flying conditions average with numerous squalls and heavy rain showers in close proximity.
3. Immediately the contact was identified as enemy, the OTC changed the disposition's course toward the east to a heading which was sufficiently close to the wind to permit launching and which at the same time did not tend to further close the range. Maximum speed was made, slightly in excess of 19 knots, and by 0710 all immediately available aircraft 10 VF and 8 VT had been launched.
4. Ranges closed rapidly. WHITE PLAINS and FANSHAW BAY were first taken under fire and large caliber shells were falling well within the formation with several salvos scraggling those two ships. At this time all ships were ordered to make smoke and the screening vessels left the disposition to launch a torpedo attack. Fire was opened with the ship's one 5"/38 and observers reported several hits scored on the closing heavy cruisers.
5. By 0750, the disposition had been maneuvered in successive steps to a south-westerly course which left KALININ BAY & GAMBIER BAY on the exposed windward flank of the formation where smoke afforded little or no protection. (Our smoke drifted to starboard and aft) Meanwhile, a part of the enemy force had turned our flank and was closing the range from northeast. Three enemy CA's were thus in a position to close at will, since no screen remained to intervene. They maintained a heavy and disastrous fire with 8" guns while at the same time, salvos from the enemy's main body astern fell dangerously close to the ship's side and may have caused some underwater damage not immediately apparent. Notwithstanding this concentrated fire, the ship by maneuvering on each side of the base course successfully avoided salvo after salvo until first hit at 0810. Thereafter, the ship was hit almost continuously in the flight deck and in spaces above the waterline. Few of these hangar and flight deck hits reached any vital parts of the ship. They did kill and wound a number of officers and men. Fires caused by the hits prior to loss of all power were brought under control.
6. At about 0820 the forward engine room received a hit below the waterline and with all available pumps in use flooding could not be controlled. The water rose above the level of the burners and it became necessary to secure and abandon the forward engine room at 0827. The ship slowed to 11 knots and dropped astern of the disposition.
7. Ten minutes later steering control forward was lost as a result of a hit near the island structure which probably severed liquid lines to the steering telemotor, and a subsequent hit which opened circuit breakers on the main distribution panel prevented the reestablishment of steering control at either Bat II or the truck wheel prior to the time that all power in the ship was lost. Within three minutes after this event a shell entered No. 3 boiler in the after engine room, and all steam pressure was lost. At 0845 the ship was dead in the water, there was no power and water was rising rapidly in all spaces below the second deck which resulted in a decided list to port. By 0850, three enemy cruisers had closed and were firing into the ship at point blank ranges. At this time many fires were burning within the ship, which was now listing badly to port, and it was ordered abandoned by the Captain. Approximately 750 men left the ship, taking with them many seriously wounded of whom a number were subsequently rescued. At 0907 the ship capsized to port and sank at 0911 in Latitude 11-31 N. Longitude 126-12.E. As the ship capsized, an enemy cruiser was still firing into her at a range of less than 2,000 yards.
8. Forty-five hours later, the majority of the survivors were rescued from the sea by a number of LCI's and PC's dispatched from Leyte Gulf.

RUNNING LOG ON USS GAMBIER BAY

October 25, 1944

- 0415 - Manned all Flight Quarter Stations
- 0430 - Manned all General Quarter Stations
- 0457 - Commenced launching VF by Catapult
- 0505 - Completed launching 8 VF
- 0616 - Sunrise
- 0635 - Received TBS message from OTC 'Set Condition 3 at discretion of CO'
- 0637 - Secured from General Quarters. Set Condition 3.
- 0640 - Anti-Aircraft fire observed to the Northwest
- 0643 - Intercepted an almost unintelligible excited VHF transmission from an ASP plane from T.R. 77.4.2 to its base to the effect that the Japanese Fleet was sighted 30 miles from base. (T.U. 77.4.2 was operating 10 miles south of our position at the time.)
- 0645 - A large unidentified surface force indication appeared radar bearing 300° (T) distance 23½ miles.
- 0645 - Sounded General Quarters.
- 0647 - OTC signaled by TBS 'Make maximum speed possible'
- 0647 - All G.Q. stations were manned
- 0648 - The OTC commenced passing information concerning the contacts and made urgent requests for immediate assistance to C.T.G. 77.4 and Commander Support Aircraft Central Philippines. Enemy 'Chatter' was heard intermittently on this circuit but apparently no attempt was made to effectively jam it.



- 0650 - Order given to jettison three remaining napalm bombs located on No. 5 sponson
- 0654 - Gun flashes observed on horizon to the Northwest and large caliber salvo splashes were seen falling near the ships on the northern side of the formation. (Enemy's initial firing range estimated as approximately 35,000 yards)
- 0655 - All planes on the flight deck were turning up ready for launching.
- 0657 - Commenced launching planes
- 0705 - Brought 1 TBM-1c up the forward elevator
- 0709 - OTC signalled by TBS 'All carriers launch all aircraft'
- 0710 - Launched 1 TBM (loaded with 1 torpedo) Destroyer screen deployed making smoke to cover the CVE group.
- 0715 - 0730 Foul weather between own Task Unit and closing enemy force momentarily checked fire and only a few salvo's splashes were observed in the formation during this period.
- 0723 - Changed course on TBS signal to the south.
- 0730 - Picked up on radar two or three vessels bearing 170° (T) distance 19 miles.
- 0731 - Advance cruiser unit moving around our northeast flank. Estimated speed of this unit 30 knots.
- 0731 - Salvos splashing intermittently near GAMBIER BAY; WHITE PLAINS & FANSHAW BAY under concentrated fire.
- 0732 - Destroyer screen ordered by OTC to deliver a torpedo attack.
- 0733 - One TBM-1C loaded with a torpedo brought up from hangar deck on forward elevator.
- 0734 - Commenced pumping aviation gasoline to gas the plane now on the flight deck.
- 0738 - Completed gassing and purged the gasoline system. (Pumped inert gas in risers to all filling stations)
- 0740 - OTC gave TBS order to "open fire with the 'pea shooters' when range is clear"
- 0741 - Commenced firing 5" gun at enemy cruiser on port quarter
- 0745 - Launched one TBM, enemy salvos straddling the ship
- 0745 - 0810 Salvos fell near the ship shortly after fire was opened with the 5" gun. During this period the ship was maneuvered to avoid salvos.
- 0746 - Changed course to 210° (on this course there was not enough wind across the deck to catapult a loaded TBM)
- 0750 - Jettisoned one TBM by catapult. (This left only 1 plane on board which was on the hangar deck near the forward elevator.)
- 0750 - Three unidentified ships sighted on horizon dead ahead of formation. Sent effective major war vessel challenge on 24" searchlight. All three ships responded immediately with correct reply. On the strength of this identification (too far away to be identified by sight), on order from the Captain, the Signal Officer sent "BT WE ARE UNDER ATTACK BT K". The center vessel "dashed" for each word and 'rogered' for the message.
- 0800 - Changed course to 200° (T)
- 0810 - First hit, after end of flight deck starboard side near Batt II. Fires started on flight and hangar deck - personnel casualties small.
- 0820 - Hit in forward (port) engine room below waterline.
- 0821 - Two portable electric submersible pumps placed in operation. Bilge pumps turned on.
- 0825 - The Captain informed OTC by TBS that ship had been hit hard and had lost one engine.
- 0825 - Engine room flooded to burner level. Boilers secured.
- 0826 - All loads shifted to after generators and engine room.
- 0827 - Forward engine room secured. Slowed to 11 knots, dropping astern and out of formation.
- 0837 - Lost steering control forward probably as a result of ruptured liquid lines shell fragments from hits in or near the island structure.
- 0840 - Radars went out of commission.
- 0840 - After engine room hit - 8" shell entered skin of ship pierced No. 3 boiler and probably lodged in the lower part of generating tubes.
- 0842 - Water poured rapidly into after engine room from the sea.
- 0843 - All boilers secured on order of Eng. Officer.
- 0845 - Ship dead in the water. Ordered all classified material jettisoned.
- 0850 - Gave order to "Abandon Ship" (The ship was in a sinking condition surrounded by three enemy cruisers firing at point blank range)
- 0855 - The Navigator, who, as Officer of the Deck, had remained with the Captain on the open bridge until then, was directed to abandon ship and did so via the starboard bridge life lines just as another salvo pierced the island structure.
- 0858 - The Captain attempted to reach the interior of the ship via interior island structure ladders but was driven onto the flight deck then aft over the starboard side by hot black toxic smoke.
- 0907 - Ship capsized to port.



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0911 - Last sign of ship disappeared from surface of the water

0930 - 1230 During this period the majority of the survivors assembled into seven or eight separate groups. They lashed life rafts and floater nets together and collected sections of flight deck planking and any other floating debris with sufficient positive buoyancy to support those for whom there was no room on or around the rafts.

At least three attacks before noon by groups of four to six TBM's each with escorting FM's were observed on enemy ships to the Northeast, East, and Southeast. Inaccurate bursts of anti-aircraft fire were seen as these attacks were being made. With the exception of a large vessel with a destroyer standing by to the southeast, none of the enemy ships were seen by the survivors in the water. This particular ship has been definitely called a Kongo battleship by a few and not so positively identified as a heavy cruiser by others.

1300 - Dive bombing attack (6-8 SBD's or SB2C's) to the northeast. Planes and AA bursts seen.

1530 - A group of 40 planes approached at 10-12,000 feet from the northeast, made a complete circle around to the south, and took departure to the northwest. (Presumably in pursuit of the retiring Japanese force) As this flight circled around our group intermittent but effective bursts of AA fire were observed apparently from the ship or ships damaged and dead in the water and by their escorts.

1800 - Large enemy vessel (Kongo Class BB) with a destroyer nearby in sight during the forenoon still visible and observed on a northerly course heading at slow speed, by some of the survivors. (This ship was not seen the next morning.)

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0900 - 1 TBM and Q FM, together, passed five (5) miles to the east at 6,000 feet. Red and green Very Stars were fired and dye markers thrown in the water. The planes apparently saw none of these and continued on their northerly course.

0945 - Same two planes observed at 0900 returning five (5) miles to the west on a southerly course. All attempts to attract attention were to no avail. From time to time, several groups of survivors sighted each other and closed to within hailing distance.

1200 - All groups were about equally spaced along either side of a line bearing 260-080° 35-45 miles from coast line of Samar.

2230 - T.G. 78.12 (2 PC's and 5 LCI's) sighted Very Stars fired by various groups of survivors. (Note: This task group had been dispatched from Leyte Gulf to locate and rescue the survivors of ships sunk in this engagement. They had arrived at the reported position of sinking, which was about 15 miles southeast of the estimated actual position, at 0800 26 October. This group made continual sweeps north and south with the search line running east and west until they sighted the Very stars indicated above.)

0000 - 0500 Ships of T.G. 78.12 picked up approximately 700 survivors from the GAMBIER BAY 15-20 miles east of Samar.

*Editor's Note: There is a hell of a lot more to this report, but it would take six yeomen six weeks to type it . . . . .*