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WAR DIARY

COMMANDING OFFICER U.S.S. PHELPS

From: The Commanding Officer, U.S.S. PHELPS

To: Chief of Naval Operations.

Original to: Chief of Naval Operations (Office of Naval Records  
and Library)

*May*

41403

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REPORT FOR COMMANDING OFFICER U.S.S. PHELPS  
Operating under Commander Task Group 11.4, U.S. Pacific Fleet  
(Commander Destroyer Squadron ONE).

Enclosure: (A) Report of Battle of Coral Sea  
(B) Report of sinking of U.S.S. LEXINGTON.

TASK ORGANIZATION:

11 Rear Admiral A. W. Fitch (ComCarDiv 1).  
11.2 MINNEAPOLIS, NEW ORLEANS, Rear Admiral T.C. Kinkaid.  
11.4 Desron 1 less HULL, MACDONOUGH, DALE. Capt. A.R. Early.  
11.5 LEXINGTON. Captain F.C. Sherman.

Changes: On 3 May U.S.S. WORDEN detached on independent duty  
as escort of U.S.S. TIPPECANOE.  
On 6 May Task Force 11 joined with Task Force 17  
On 7 May U.S.S. FARRAGUT detached joined Australian  
Squadron.  
On 11 May Task Force 11 detached from Task Force 17.  
ComCruDiv 6, Rear Admiral T.C. Kinkaid OTC. AYLWIN  
remained with Task Force 17.  
On 13 May U.S.S. WORDEN rejoined  
on 16 May joined Task Force 16 and became a part  
of that force.  
On 18 May U.S.S. MONAGHAN rejoined.  
On 27 May U.S.S. AYLWIN rejoined.  
On 31 May U.S.S. DEWEY detached as escort to U.S.S.  
PLATTE and U.S.S. S. CIMARRON.

1 May 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
1838	0608	Sighted Task Force 17 bearing 100°T, distance 15 miles which remained within visual distance.
2030	0800	Posit. 16-11S 162-14E. Cruising disposition 11SV
0030	1200	Posit. 15-46S 162-03E. Course and speed made good course 285°T, 4 knots.

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1 MAY, 1942. (CONT'D)

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
0106	1236	U.S.S. TIPPECANOE joined formation. MONAGHAN detailed as screen.
0135	1305	U.S.S. CHICAGO and U.S.S. PERKINS joined formation.
0830	2000	Posit. 17-158 161-30E.

2 MAY, 1942.

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
2030	0800	Posit. 16-00S 161-35E. Cruising disposition 11SV Task Force 17 within visual distance.
2250	1020	Commenced fueling cruisers from U.S.S. TIPPECANOE. Sea smooth, wind north, force 2.
0030	1200	Posit. 16-19S 161-57E. Course and speed made good 190 T, 1.4 knots.
0600	1730	Commenced fueling destroyers. Fueling to continue throughout the night until completed.
0700	1830	CHICAGO, PERKINS left formation and joined Task Force 17.
0824	1954	Moonrise.
0830	2000	Posit. 17-00S 162-33E.

3 MAY, 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
1630	0400	Completed night fueling of destroyers.
1930	0700	Taskforce 17 departed on course north.
2030	0800	Posit. 16-22S 162-02E. Cruising disposition 11SV.
2045	0815	Commenced fueling LEXINGTON.
0030	1200	Posit. 16-21S 161-30E. Course and speed made good - 263, 1 knots.
0225	1355	Completed fueling. U.S.S. TIPPECANOE with U.S.S. WORDEN left formation for independent duty.
0530	1700	Change clocks to (-11) LCT.
0900	2000	Posit. 15-49S 160-03E.

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4 May 1942 (Cont'd)

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
2100	0800	Posit. 14-56S 156-57E. Cruising disposition 11SV.
2145	0845	Australian force consisting of AUSTRALIA, HOBART joined formation.
2317	1017	The following despatch received from ComTaskForce 11 "TASKFOR 17 IS ATTACKING FLORIDA ISLAND AREA NOW AND HAS DIRECTED THAT THIS FORCE JOIN HIM AT POINT CORN 15S 160E SUNRISE LOCAL 5TH"
0100	1200	Posit. 15-40S 157-57E, course and speed made good - 285 T, 9.6 knots.
0900	2000	Posit. 16-50S 158-35E.

5 MAY, 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
2014	0714	U.S.S. PERKINS joined formation.
2100	0800	Posit. 14-52S 160-05E. Cruising disposition 11SV.
2205	0905	Sighted Task Force 17 and received following despatch. "YORKTOWN AIRCRAFT ATTACKED TULAGI (Florida Island area) REPEATEDLY ON 4 MAY X 2DD 4AT 1AM SUNK X 1CL BEACHED AND SUNK X 1CA VERY BADLY DAMAGED X 1CL 1AP 1AM 1AK BADLY DAMAGED X 5 PLANES DESTROYED X OUR LOSSES 1TBD 1VF"
2300	1000	Task Force 17 commenced fueling from NEOSHO.
0100	1200	Posit. 15-08S 160-00E. Course and speed made good - 077 T, 6 knots.
0345	1445	Received following despatch for CTF-17 "YORKTOWN FIGHTERS DESTROYED ENEMY FOUR ENGINE SEAFPLANE TRACKER ABOUT 0800 TODAY"
0415	1515	Received following despatch from CTF-17. "SUB SIGHTED BY OUR PLANES AT 0807 ON SURFACE X IMMEDIATELY SUBMERGED X POSITION 14S 158E COURSE 105"
0600	1700	Set clocks to -11 1/2 LZT. Task Force 17 completed fueling for day.

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5 MAY, 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
0830	2000	Posit. 15-24S 160-14E. Task Force 11 ordered to operate within 10 miles of Task Force 17 during night.

6 MAY, 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
1939	0709	Task Force 17 recommenced fueling.
2030	0800	Posit. 14-54S 158-01E. Cruising disposition 11SV.
2330	1100	Task Force 17 completed fueling. Task Force 17 and 11 organized as one force under CTF-17 in accordance with CTF-17 secret OpOrd 0007N. Formed cruising disposition 17 VICTOR. This group designated as 17.2 (Attack group), composed of PHELPS, DEWEY, MONAGHAN, AYLWIN, MINNEAPOLIS, NEW ORLEANS, Task Group Commander, ComCruDiv 6, Rear Admiral Kinkaid.
0030	1200	Posit. 15-10S 158-36E. Course and distance made good - 269 T, 3.6 knots.
0730	1900	Formed cruising disposition 17L.
0830	2000	Posit. 14-32S 157-52E.

7 MAY, 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
2030	0800	Posit. 13-06S 154-23E. Battle of Coral Sea. Events occurring during this period are covered in CDS-1 secret serial 00185 report of engagement with Japanese Force 7-8 May, copy enclosed.
0030	1200	Posit. 12-31S 154-18E. Course and speed made good - 306 T, 11.4 knots.
0530	1700	Set clocks to -11.
0900	2000	Posit. 13-10S 154-34E.

8 MAY, 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
2100	0800	Posit. 14-34S 154-29E. Battle of Coral Sea. Events occurring during this period are covered in CDS-1 serials 00185 and 0179. Reports on engagement with Japanese force 7-8 May and Sinking of U.S.S. LEXINGTON respectively, copies enclosed. (Removed) to AR Files 5-600

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

8 MAY, 1942 (Cont'd)

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
0100	1200	Posit. 14-40S 155-16E, course and speed made good, 168 <sup>o</sup> T, 5.4 kts.
0900	2000	Posit. 15-13S 155-25E.

9 MAY, 1942

2000	0700	Task Force rejoined at rendezvous and formed cruising disposition Victor on course 155 <sup>o</sup> T, speed 25 kts.
2100	0800	Posit. 19-02S 155-05E.
2225	0925	Received following signal from OTC "Enemy aircraft carrier 175 miles, bearing 310 <sup>o</sup> T.
2236	0936	Received report unidentified aircraft on radar screen. Went to General Quarters. YORKTOWN radar out of commission. CHESTER radar guard. Many unidentified aircraft reported throughout the day but none of the contacts materialized as enemy.
2338	1038	Received the following signal from OTC "IT IS VERY DOUBTFUL WHETHER WE HAVE BEEN SPOTTED."
0100	1200	Posit. 20-23S 155-46E, course and speed made good, 175 <sup>o</sup> T, 14.3 kts.
0900	2000	Posit. 22-08S 157-02E.

10 MAY, 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
2100	0800	Posit. 23-57S 160-33E, cruising disposition 17SL.
2148	0848	Received following signal from Task Force Commander "ENEMY AIRCRAFT EXPECTED TO BE SIGHTED."
2300	1000	Formed cruising disposition Victor. Received many reports of radar contacts with unidentified aircraft but none were developed as enemy.
0100	1200	Posit. 24-45S 160-43E, course and speed made good, 134 <sup>o</sup> T, 15.9 kts.
0325	1425	Received following message from CTF17 to Crudiv 6, "AFTER DARK EXPECT TO FUEL AND MAKE COAL BAG TRANSFERS OF LEXINGTON SURVIVORS X DESIGNATE DD TO ACCOMPANY ME WHEN WE SEPARATE X

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10 MAY 1942 (Cont'd)

GCT    LCT

WHEN WE SEPARATE X WHEN DIRECTED PROCEED NOUMEA WITH OTHER SHIPS OF TASK FORCE 11 AND AWAIT ORDERS FROM CINCPAC AND CTF16" AYLWIN was designated to accompany Task Force 17.

0600 1700 Commenced fueling operations. Destroyers fueling from cruisers throughout the night and transferring LEXINGTON survivors by coal bag to cruisers.

0900 2000 Posit. 26-08S 161-03E.

11 MAY 1942

GCT    LCT

2045 0745 Fueling operations completed, formed cruising disposition 17SL.

2100 0800 Posit. 26-26S 163-22E

0100 1200 Posit. 26-29S 164-23E, course and distance made good, 118 T, 9.4 knots.

0500 1600 Sighted 4 friendly planes, B17s, on course Southwest.

0600 1700 Left formation bound for Noumea, New Caledonia, in company with MINNEAPOLIS, NEW ORLEANS, ASTORIA, ANDERSON, and DEWEY. Comcrudiv 6 in MINNEAPOLIS OTC. Received following message from CTF17 addressed to Comcrudiv 6, "UPON TAKING LEAVE OF YOU, I WISH TO THANK YOU AND YOUR TASK GROUP 17.2 FOR YOUR EFFICIENT AND LOYAL COOPERATION WHILE IN THIS TASK FORCE IN ACTIVE OPERATION AGAINST THE ENEMY X I PARTICULARLY APPRECIATE YOUR EXCELLENT WORK IN RESCUING SURVIVORS FROM THE SINKING AND BURNING LEXINGTON AND YOUR SUBSEQUENT EXPEDITIOUS FUELING OF DDS AND TRANSFER OF LEXINGTON PERSONNEL UNDER TRYING AND ADVERSE CONDITIONS AT NIGHT X GOOD LUCK AND GOOD HUNTING TO YOU AND YOUR OFFICERS AND YOUR MEN WITH YOU"

0900 2000 Posit. 25-40S 165-23E

12 MAY 1942

GCT    LCT

2100 0800 Sighted coast of New Caledonia and U.S.S. FLUSSER on anti-submarine patrol off entrance to Noumea.

2215 0915 Two FBY patrol planes arrived and provided air coverage for this force.

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

12 MAY; 1942 (Cont'd)

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
0025	1125	Entered Noumea Harbor and anchored in Great Harbor. Ships present U.S.S. TIPPECANOE, U.S.S. CURTIS, U.S.S. WORDEN, U.S.S. MONAGHAN, and U.S.S. FLUSSER. Commenced fueling, replenishing and transfer of survivors and wounded to U.S.S. ASTORIA. Course and speed made good, 025 <sup>OT</sup> , 11.3 kts.

13 MAY, 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
1300	0100	Set clocks to -12 LZT.
2000	0800	Anchored Great Harbor, Noumea, New Caledonia.
2300	1100	Sortied from Noumea in company with MINNEAPOLIS, NEW ORLEANS, DEWEY, WORDEN, and PHELPS with orders to join Task Force 16 at rendezvous.
2400	1200	Posit. 22-29S 166-29E.
0800	2000	Posit. 23-13S 167-47E.

14 MAY, 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
2000	0800	Posit. 19-54S 168-19E, cruising with cruisers in column and destroyers in anti-submarine screen 3S.
2400	1200	Posit. 18-57S 168-11E, course and speed made good, 024 <sup>OT</sup> , 9.7 kts.
0800	2000	Posit. 16-45S 169-90E.

15 MAY, 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
2000	0800	Posit. 13-46S 168-37E, steaming as before.
2400	1200	Posit. 12-56S 168-12E, course and speed made good, 000 <sup>OT</sup> , 15 kts.
0800	2000	Posit. 12-02S 169-21E.
1100	2300	DEWEY reported sighted unidentified ship on port bow. distance 4000 yards. Destroyers deployed to investigate.

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15 MAY 1942 (Cont'd)

GCT    LCT

1158    2328    Obtained radar range on object at 28000 yards, identified as Fataka Island. Shape of Island and visibility conditions which enabled it to be sighted made it appear to be an oil tanker.

16 MAY 1942

GCT    LCT

1828    0628    Sighted Task Force 16 on port bow bearing 320°T.

2000    0800    Posit. 12-34S 171-41E. Joined Task Force 16 and formed cruising disposition 7V. Task Force 16 composed of U.S.S. ENTERPRISE (CTF16 Rear Admiral Halsey), U.S.S. HORNET, NORTHAMPTON, PENSACOLA, SALT LAKE CITY, VINCENNES, BALCH, CONYNGHAM, BENHAM, ELLET, MAURY and MONSSEN.

2135    0935    Formed cruising disposition 10V.

2150    0950    Set clocks to -11 LZT.

0100    1200    Posit. 13-44S 171-37E, course and distance made good, 104 T, 8.2 knots.

0900    2000    Posit. 15-19S 171-25E.

17 MAY 1942

GCT    LCT

2100    0800    Posit. 17-52S 170-25E, in cruising disposition 10V.

0100    1200    Posit. 18-38S 170-52E, course and distance made good, 188 T, 12.4 knots.

0900    2000    Posit 19-51S 172-13E.

18 MAY 1942

GCT    LCT

2100    0800    Posit. 21-34S 170-41E, in cruising disposition 10V.

2210    0910    Plane from HORNET crashed. U.S.S. DEWEY rescued personnel.

2300    1000    U.S.S. CIMARRON and U.S.S. PLATTE escorted by MONAGHAN and HUGHES joined formation.

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

18 MAY, 1942 (Cont'd)

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
0100	1200	Posit. 21-06S 171-19E, course and distance made good, 170° T, 6.3 kts. Received following message from Task Force Commander "IT IS VITAL THAT THIS FORCE NOT REPEAT NOT BE DETECTED."
0550	1650	BENHAM had man overboard. Rescued by BENHAM at 1700.
0900	2000	Posit. 19-31S 172-33E. Set clocks to -12 LZT.

19 MAY, 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
1900	0700	U.S.S. ATLANTA joined formation.
2000	0800	Posit. 17-10S 174-04E, formed cruising disposition 8 Victor and commenced fueling operations.
2400	1200	Posit. 16-30S 174-33E, course and speed made good, 034°T, 14.5 kts.
0400	1600	Completed fueling operations.
0800	2000	Posit. 14-59S 175-46E.

20 MAY, 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
1900	0700	U.S.S. SALT LAKE CITY detached and left formation.
2000	0800	Posit. 13-05S 178-24E, formed cruising disposition 7 Victor.
2400	1200	Posit. 12-20S 179-07E, course and distance made good, 047°T, 15.1 kts.
0800	2000	Posit. 11-07S 179-08W.
1200	2400	Set clocks to $\neq$ 12 LZT.

20 MAY, 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
1730	0530	ENTERPRISE plane crashed. CONYNEHAM rescued radio-man, pilot lost.
2000	0800	Posit. 09-59S 176-37W, cruising disposition 7 Victor.

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20 MAY 1942 (Cont'd)

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
2400	1200	Posit. 08-55S 175-11W, course and distance made good, 058 T, 16.5 knots.
0800	2000	Posit. 7-59S 173-38W, set clocks to + 11 LZT

21 MAY 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
1900	0800	Posit. 6-07S 171-10W. Cruising disposition 7V
2300	1200	Posit. 5-20S 170-24W. Course and distance made good - 053 T, 15.5 knots.
0700	2000	Posit. 3-14S 169-33W.

22 MAY 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
1900	0800	Posit. 00-06S 168-37W. Cruising disposition 7V
1923	0823	Crossed equator heading north in Longitude 168-40W.
2300	1200	Posit. 00-53N 168-08W. Course and distance made good - 020 T, 16.5 knots.
0700	2000	Posit. 03-01 N 167-20W.

23 MAY 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
1900	0800	Posit. 5-43N 165-51W. Cruising disposition 7V
2300	1200	Posit. 6-41N 165-24W. Course and distance made good - 025 T, 16 knots.
0700	2000	Posit. 08-30N 164-32W.

24 MAY 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
1900	0800	Posit. 11-25N 163-06W. Cruising disposition 7V
2300	1200	Posit. 12-05N 162-24W. Course and distance made good - 029 T, 15.4 knots.
0700	2000	Posit. 13-41N 161-40W.

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

25 MAY, 1942

GCT    LCT

0530    Formed cruising disposition 11 VICTOR.  
1900    0800    Posit. 16-37N 160-17W.  
2340    1140    Formed cruising disposition 10 VICTOR.  
2400    1200    Posit. 17-13N 159-38W. Course and speed made good-  
028 T, 14.5 knots.  
0700    2000    Posit. 19-06N 159-06W. Set clocks to  $\neq$  10 LZT.

26 MAY, 1942

GCT    LCT

1250    0250    WORDEN left formation; main engine failure. ELLET  
standing by.  
1330    0330    WORDEN and ELLET rejoined - repairs completed.  
1800    0800    Posit. 20-26N 157-50W. Cruising disposition 10 VICTOR.  
1900    0900    Sighted Oahu bearing 23 T, 30 miles. Made prepara-  
tions for entering Pearl Harbor.  
2012    1012    PENSACOLA lost man overboard. Man rescued by  
ATLANTA.  
2200    1200    Posit. 21-18N 157-57W. Course and distance made  
good - 021 T, 11.4 knots.  
2230    1230    Entered Pearl Harbor with Task Force. Moored  
Pearl. Fueling and replenishing. Berth M-3, Merry's  
Point.

27 MAY, 1942

GCT    LCT

1800    0800    Moored Pearl, Berth M-3, Merry's Point.  
2100    1100    U.S.S. AYLWIN arrived Pearl in company with Task  
Force 17.

28 MAY, 1942

GCT    LCT

1800    0800    Moored Pearl, Berth M-3, Merry's Point.

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28 MAY 1942 (Cont'd)

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
2000	1000	Sortied from Pearl in company with Task Force 16, composed of ENTERPRISE, HORNET, MINNEAPOLIS, NEW ORLEANS, VINCENNES, PENSACOLA, NORTHAMPTON, PHELPS, DEWEY, WORDEN, MONAGHAN, AYLWIN, BALCH, BENHAM, ELLET, MAURY, MONSSEN, CONYNGHAM, CIMARRON, PLATTE, Rear Admiral Spruance, Task Force Commander.
2200	1200	Posit. 21-10N 157-59W. Course and distance made good - 180 T, 5.3 knots. Cruising disposition 10V.
0542	1900	Set clocks to + 10 LZT
0600	2000	Posit. 22-01N 158-51W.

29 MAY 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
1800	0800	Posit. 24-35N 159-41W. Cruising disposition 10V
1900	0900	HORNET plane missing. MAURY left formation to search for it.
2200	1200	Posit. 25-24N 160-03W. Course and distance made good - 336 T, 11.6 knots.
2215	1215	MAURY rejoined formation. Results of search negative.
0600	2000	Posit. 26-12N 162-07W.

30 MAY 1942

<u>GCT</u>	<u>LCT</u>	
1110	0110	ELLET reported sound contact.
1144	0144	ELLET reported contact lost.
1324	0324	ELLET rejoined formation.
1800	0800	Posit. 27-39N 164-49W. Cruising disposition 10V.
2000	1000	All Ships fired 20mm and .50 cal. at sleeve target.
2200	1200	Posit. 28-07N 165-46W. Course and distance made good - 298 T, 14.5 knots.

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

30 MAY, 1942

GCT LCT

0100 1500 All ships fired 5" AA guns at burst target.  
0700 1800 Set clocks to / 11 LZT.  
0700 2000 Posit. 29-03N 167-53.8W.

31 MAY, 1942

GCT LCT

1620 0520 Commenced fueling operations.  
1900 0800 Posit. 30-07N 169-38W. Special cruising disposition  
for fueling.  
2300 1200 Posit. 30-18N 169-35W. Course and distance made  
good - 303 T, 9.6 miles.  
0200 1500 Completed fueling operation. Formed cruising dis-  
position 10 VICTOR. CIMARRON, PLATTE escorted by  
DEWEY and MONBSEN left formation.  
0700 2000 Posit. 30-59.9N 171-17.2W.



E. L. BECK,  
Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy,  
Commanding U. S. S. PHELPS