

May 26, 1942.

**From:** Commanding Officer.  
**To :** Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet, (Chief of Naval Operations).  
**Via :** (1) Commander Destroyer Squadron ONE, (ComTaskGroup 17.1)  
 (2) Commander Cruiser Division SIX, (ComTaskGroup 17.2)  
 (3) Commander Cruisers, Pacific Fleet, (ComTaskForce 17)  
 (4) The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

**Subject:** Engagement With Japanese Force, May 8, 1942 in Coral Sea.

**References:** (a) U.S. Navy Regulations, Art. 712 and 874.  
 (b) CINCPAC Comd. letter 16CL-42.  
 (c) PHELPS comd. serial 067 of May 15, 1942.

**Enclosure:** (A) Report of Executive Officer, U.S.S. PHELPS.

1. On May 8, 1942 this vessel was operating as a unit of Task Force 17 in the Coral Sea area. The fleet axis was 305° and prior to the engagement (at 1052) course was changed to 025° speed 20 knots. PHELPS station (referred to the axis) was 3000 yards on the starboard bow of LEXINGTON (guide) and was interposed between U.S.S. CHESTER and MINNEAPOLIS on the same circle; distance between PHELPS and cruisers was in the order of 12-1500 yards.

2. Ship had gone to General Quarters at 0943 in view of the general situation existing. LEXINGTON-YORKTOWN striking group was launched about this time. At 1056 report was received "Large group of unidentified aircraft bearing 020° T distant 68 miles". At 1104 report was received definitely establishing aircraft as enemy - torpedo planes accompanied by fighters, same bearing at 35 miles. At 1112 changed course by simultaneous turn to right to 125° T speed 25 knots (into wind - S.E.).

3. At 1114 first enemy planes were sighted by the ship coming in fast from bearing (025° T) off port bow at an altitude estimated at 3000 feet. Approach was made in long glide about 30-35 degrees from horizontal. Certain enemy planes were being engaged by our fighters. About 1115 surface units opened fire. PHELPS engaged such enemy planes as came in range with 1.10 and 20 M.M. batteries. Two 5"/38 partial salvos were also fired. No good targets were available to PHELPS at any time during the engagement - all were high deflection shots at or outside of maximum effective range of automatic weapons.

4. The engagement lasted approximately twenty minutes during which time all units maneuvered radically, conforming with the carriers, to avoid torpedoes and bombs.

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS' REPORT AFTER BATTLE OF  
CORAL SEA ON MAY 8, 1942.

1. At 0943 the ship went to General Quarters and set material condition "AFIRM". At 1018 sighted smoke on the horizon bearing 205° T. At 1113 received word that enemy torpedo planes were coming in on port bow. At 1115 the fleet opened fire on Japanese planes approaching from far side of formation. About 1120 the LEXINGTON was hit by a bomb dropped from a Japanese dive bomber and a fire started on her forecastle. At 1130 the LEXINGTON appeared to have extinguished her fire. About 1135 the members of the crew of gun 24 (after port 20 M.M.) sighted a Grumman fighter making a crash landing in water 4000 yards abeam to port and reported fact to bridge and sky control; the PHELPS stood toward the plane. At 1145 picked up the pilot, Lieutenant (Junior grade) Richard G. Crommelin, U.S. Navy, attach to U.S.S. YORKTOWN fighting squadron. At 1347 set condition II and material condition "BAKER".

2. During the action the 20 M.M. and 1.10 batteries took underfire all enemy aircraft coming within range. For the most part few targets presented themselves except aircraft which had completed their attack; and then at longer ranges (over 1500 yards). In general the shooting of these batteries was accurate and well disciplined. Reclipping of 20 M.M. ammunition during action proceeded rapidly; but more magazines than the eight per gun now supplied, are required.

3. The main battery was able to fire only two salvos at torpedo planes because of the presence of own ships in line of fire.

4. The PHELPS did not appear to have been singled out for attack by any enemy aircraft and received no casualties either to material or personnel.

5. The performance of duty under fire of all the officers and men of this command was excellent.

6. Except for excessive vibration of the ship in the vicinity of the machinery spaces when at high speeds the performance of the ship in action appeared to be satisfactory.

  
B. H. S. TRIPPENSKE,

Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy,  
Executive Officer.

May 26, 1942.

~~SECRET~~  
~~DECLASSIFIED~~

Subject: Engagement With Japanese Force, May 8, 1942 in Coral  
Sea.

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The first wave of enemy planes came in generally from the same direction, i.e., 020° T, but during the latter part, attacks appeared to come from other sectors. The main effort of the enemy seemed to be concentrated upon LEXINGTON, though a good portion was directed toward the YORKTOWN which separated from the former carrier during the initial phase of the attack. It was quite apparent the bomb and some torpedo hits were scored on LEXINGTON. She was observed to be burning forward on port side at 1117. At 1129 PHELPS passed through a wake of a torpedo dropped from her port side. Several enemy aircraft (10 to 12) were observed to have been destroyed during the encounter by own fighters and surface anti-aircraft fire.

5. The engagement was terminated about 1135. At 1143 PHELPS hauled out and stood toward one of our own planes which had had a forced landing. 1145 rescued Lieutenant (junior grade) Richard G. Crommelin, U.S. Navy, (fighter pilot, YORKTOWN) in good condition.

6. PHELPS suffered no material or personnel casualties. Battery performance was very good except for some stoppages in 1.1 battery. Round expended: 5"/38 A.A. - 16; 1.10 - 500; 20 M.M. - 1400. The conduct of personnel during the engagement was considered excellent. Particular credit is due the crews of the 20 M.M. battery which had only recently been installed. Opportunity had been had to fire only a few practice shots from these guns prior to this action.

7. While not a part of the engagement described in this report although an aftermath thereof, PHELPS assisted in rescue of LEXINGTON personnel during the late afternoon, and sank that vessel later with torpedoes in accordance with orders of the Task Force Commander. The sinking of the LEXINGTON was reported separately under reference (c) direct to Commander Cruiser Division SIX, (Commander Task Group 17.2).

  
E. L. BECK.

One copy direct to:

In Reply  
Refer To:

COMMANDER DESTROYER SQUADRON ONE, PACIFIC FLEET

A16-3/WAR  
Serial (00190)

May 26, 1942.

**DECLASSIFIED**

FIRST ENDORSEMENT to  
CO PHILIPS SECRET LTR.  
DB360/A16-3 (079) of  
May 26, 1942.

From: Commander Destroyer Squadron ONE,  
(Commander Task Group 17.4).  
To: The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet,  
(Chief of Naval Operations).  
Via: (1) Commander Cruiser Division SIX,  
(Commander Task Group 17.2).  
(2) Commander Cruisers, Pacific Fleet,  
(Commander Task Force 17).  
(3) The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet.  
Subject: Engagement with Japanese Force, May 8, 1942  
in Coral Sea.  
1. Forwarded.

*A.R. Early*  
A.R. EARLY.

A16-3/  
Serial (09)

COMMANDER CRUISER DIVISION SIX

05/kk

**DECLASSIFIED**

June 15, 1942.

SECOND ENDORSEMENT to  
CO PHELPS SECRET LTR.  
DD360/A16-3 (079) of  
May 26, 1942.

From: Commander Cruiser Division Six.  
(Commander Task Group 17.2)  
To: The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet.  
(Chief of Naval Operations)  
Via: (1) Commander Cruisers, Pacific Fleet.  
(Commander Task Force 17)  
(2) The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet.  
Subject: Engagement with Japanese Force, May 8, 1942 in  
Coral Sea.  
1. Forwarded.

*T. C. Kinkaid*  
T. C. KINKAID.

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET  
CRUISERS, PACIFIC FLEET

A16-3/(0022N)

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**DECLASSIFIED**

June 22, 1942.

THIRD ENDORSEMENT to  
CO PHELPS Secret ltr.  
DD360/A16-3 (079) of  
May 26, 1942.

From: Commander Cruisers, Pacific Fleet.  
To: The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet.  
Via: The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet.

1. Forwarded.

*Frank Jack Fletcher*  
FRANK JACK FLETCHER.