

## The Battle of the Java Sea February 27th-28<sup>th</sup>, 1942

### Introduction

- Good evening and welcome to my presentation on the Battle of the Java Sea.
  - The aim of the battle was to intercept and disrupt a Japanese invasion force that was bound for the eastern part of Java.
  - The battle was fought between an Allied squadron of Dutch, American, Australian and British cruisers and destroyers, who engaged the Japanese cruisers and destroyers that made up the escort group that had been assigned to support the invasion force.
  - The Battle of the Java Sea was one of six or seven engagements fought by Allied naval forces, between January and February 1942, in defense of the NEI.
  - Some military historians refer to these engagements collectively as the Java Sea Campaign.
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## Setting the Scene

- By the last week of February 1942, the situation for the Allies in South East Asia was dire to say the least.
  - Hong Kong and Wake Island had been captured, while the Philippines had been invaded, and US and Filipino Forces had withdrawn to the Bataan Peninsula and the fortified islands of Manila Bay.
  - Malaya had been lost and Singapore had surrendered, resulting in 130,000 British, Australian and Indian troops becoming POWs.
  - Closer to home Darwin itself had been attacked by the Kido Butai, or Striking Force, which consisted of four of the six carriers that had caused such massive destruction at Pearl Harbour only three months before.
  - By February 20th 1942, the situation for the Allies in the NEI had become especially tenuous.
  - The Japanese had occupied all of the strategically important islands in the Archipelago, except Java, and two large Japanese invasion forces were at sea headed for the island.
  - The Western Force was tasked with landing Japanese troops at Bantam Bay, near the entrance to the Sunda Straits which separates Java and Sumatra.
  - This force consisted of 56 transports supported by the carrier Ryujo, five heavy cruisers and numerous destroyers.
  - The Eastern Force was similarly impressive, consisting of 41 transports, a Close Escort of one light cruiser and six destroyers and a Covering Force of two heavy and one light cruiser and eight destroyers.
  - This invasion force was responsible for landing Japanese troops on the north-east coast of Java, to the west of the major Dutch naval base at Soerabaja.
  - It was the Allied attempt to engage the Eastern Invasion Force that resulted in the Battle of the Java Sea.
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## Chronology of Main Event - The Daylight Phase

- On Feb. 25th a Catalina flying boat spotted the Japanese Eastern Invasion Force.
  - In response, Dorman's squadron sortied from Soerabaja naval base on the evening of February 26th, and carried out a sweep to the north east of Java looking for the Japanese force.
  - After failing to locate the Japanese, Dorman returned to Soerabaja to refuel.
  - At 14:25 on February 27th, as Doorman's squadron was about to enter the naval base, he received word that the Japanese invasion force was only 80 km off the coast.
  - Doorman immediately ordered his ships to reverse course and head towards the last known position of the Japanese.
  - However, floatplanes from the Japanese cruisers were keeping Admiral Takagi, the Japanese commander, continuously informed as to the movements of Doorman's force.
  - So, when Doorman reversed course, Takagi responded by sending the invasion transports north, to keep them out of harm's way, while he dealt with Dorman's squadron.
  - The core of Doorman's force consisted of five cruisers, the De Ruyter, his flagship, followed by Exeter, Houston, Perth and Java.
  - The cruisers were supported by a total of nine destroyers. On the port side of the cruisers were the Dutch destroyers Witte de With and Kortenaer, followed by the US destroyers Edwards, Alden, Ford and Paul Jones, while on the starboard side sailed the three British destroyers Electra, Jupiter and Encounter.
  - Admiral Takagi's Covering Force, whose job was to protect the transports of the invasion convoy, consisted of; two heavy cruisers the Haguro and Nachi, supported by four escorting destroyers. These ships were further bolstered by two destroyer squadrons, each led by a light cruiser, and containing a total of ten destroyers.
  - Both the Japanese and Allied warships spotted each other at 16:10 hours.
  - A few minutes later the two Japanese heavy cruisers, Haguro and Nachi opened fire on HMS Exeter and USS Houston at a range of 28,000 yards.
  - Doorman was out gunned by the Japanese heavy cruisers as Haguro and Nachi could bring a total of 20 x 8-inch guns to bear on his force, whereas Exeter and Houston only had 12 x 8-inch guns between them with which to reply.
  - Dorman's strength in armament lay with his light cruisers which mounted a total of 25 x 6-inch guns between them, as against 14 x 5.5-inch guns on the Japanese light cruisers Naka and Jintsu.
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## Chronology of Main Event - The Daylight Phase (contd)

- Accordingly, at 16:35 Doorman altered course to bring the 6-inch guns of his light cruisers into range.
  - At the same time the Japanese cruisers and destroyers began to launch torpedoes against the Allied ships.
  - These were the deadly Type 93, 24 inch Long Lance torpedoes. Each torpedo carried a 1,100-pound (500kg) warhead and had a range of 22,000 m, when set to run at its maximum speed of 49 knots. In comparison British and American torpedoes only carried a 660 lb. (300 kg) warhead and had a range of only 3,000-4,000 m when running at their maximum speed of 36 knots.
  - At 17:13 hours, one of the Long Lance torpedoes struck the Dutch destroyer Kortenaer amidships, causing the ship to break in two, and sink in two minutes. Amazingly 94 of her crew of 150 (62%) survived the sinking and were eventually rescued.
  - However, the pivotal moment of the Battle had occurred five minutes earlier when a Japanese 8 inch shell, had slammed into HMS Exeter's boiler rooms, putting six of the ship's eight boilers out of commission, reducing her speed from 27 to 11 knots and cutting power to the main guns.
  - Unfortunately, Exeter's sudden loss of speed completely disrupted the Allied line. After Exeter was hit, her commanding Officer, Captain Oliver Gordon ordered a turn to port to avoid colliding with the ships astern. The Houston, Perth, and Java, which were following Exeter also turned to port assuming that they had missed a signal to do so from Doorman's flag ship the Ruyter, which was leading the Allied column.
  - This forced Doorman to turn the De Ruyter around in order to regain control of his force.
  - At the same time, Captain Waller in HMAS Perth laid a smoke screen around HMS Exeter to cover her withdrawal from the battle.
  - Doorman ordered the British destroyers Electra and Encounter to execute a torpedo attack against the Japanese. This would buy him time to reorganize his force and also give Exeter an opportunity to move out of range of the Japanese warships.
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## The Destroyer Action

- The two British destroyers were hopelessly outnumbered and out gunned, and their attack against the Japanese light cruiser Jintsu and six large and powerful destroyers was never going to end well.
  - Electra being further ahead of Encounter engaged the Japanese first.
  - Initially, Electra seemed to have a charmed life and was able to inflict serious damage on the Japanese destroyer Asagumo, which brought the vessel to a temporary halt.
  - However, Electra was soon set upon by Jintsu and six destroyers, who fired a constant stream of 5.5 inch and 5-inch shells into her.
  - As a result, Electra's bridge was wrecked, all of her main armament was knocked out and multiple fires broke out on the vessel.
  - Finally, at 18:16 hours, Electra sank, and fittingly the last part of her to disappear beneath the wave was her White Ensign that had been flying from the main mast.
  - Only 54 of Electra's crew of 145 (37%) survived her sinking.
  - HMS Encounter fared somewhat better than Electra. After a brief skirmish with the Japanese destroyer Minegumo, Encounter's captain came to appreciate the extent of the forces ranged against him, and prudently opted to withdraw from the action.
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## Conclusion of the Daylight Battle

- Doorman reformed his cruiser force with De Ruyter leading, followed by Perth, Houston and Java.
  - He ordered Exeter to head for Soerabaja and detached the Dutch destroyer Witte de With to act as her escort.
  - With dusk approaching, Doorman decided to break contact with the Japanese warships in order to find a new path to attack his priority target, which were the transports of the invasion convoy.
  - To this end Doorman ordered his four US destroyers to carry out a torpedo attack against the Japanese to cover his withdrawal.
  - These ships were relics of the US Navy's First World War building program, all members of the Clemson class. Their main armament consisted of 4 x 4 inch guns and 12 x 21 inch torpedo tubes and by 1942 were only capable of 28 to 30 knots. None of the vessels had been upgraded during their service life and had a distinctly quaint appearance with their four funnels and straight decks from bow to stern. As a result, they were often referred to as "four pipers" or "flush deckers".
  - Accordingly, the Edwards, Alden, Ford and Paul Jones closed with the Japanese warships and launched a total of 41 torpedoes at ranges between 10,000 and 13,000 yards. All of these torpedoes missed.
  - Believing that Doorman was returning to base at Soerabaja, Admiral Takagi ordered the invasion convoy to resume its southward course towards the invasion beaches.
  - So ended the Daylight phase of the battle. On the Japanese side, Takagi had prevented Doorman from achieving his principal objective of attacking the transports of the Japanese invasion fleet.
  - In contrast the serious damage sustained by Exeter meant Doorman now had only one 8 inch cruiser available to him, the Houston. Furthermore, the sinking of Kortenaer and Electra, and the need to detach Witte de With to escort Exeter significantly reduced the size of his destroyer force.
  - However, Doorman remained determined to attack the invasion convoy and at 18:31 hours he turned to the north-east, assuming that the Japanese transports were located somewhere to his north.
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## The Night Phase of the Battle

- Doorman's change of course to the north-west was observed by one of the Japanese float planes that had been shadowing the Allied Squadron since it had steamed out of Soerabaja in the early afternoon of the 27th.
  - This information was immediately radioed to Takagi who once again ordered the transports of the invasion force to steam northwards and out of harm's way, before once again heading south to engage Doorman.
  - Doorman's Squadron now consisted of the cruisers De Ruyter, Perth, Houston and Java supported by two British and the four US destroyers.
  - The opposing fleets sighted each other at 19:27 hours, and a brief and inconclusive gun duel occurred between the Allied cruisers Perth and Houston and the Japanese warships Haguro and Nachi.
  - The Japanese also launched torpedoes and Doorman responded by changing course to the south east, while Takagi subsequently withdrew to the north west.
  - Doorman's force was further reduced at 21:00 hours when the four US destroyers had to return to Soerabaja to refuel and rearm.
  - As Doorman's remaining ships neared the Java coast, he turned on to a westerly heading, and shortly after this, HMS Jupiter struck a mine that had been laid by the Dutch only the night before. Her engine and boiler rooms were flooded, which resulted in a loss of power, and she sank four hours later, but fortunately with no loss of life.
  - This calamity persuaded Doorman to immediately change course to the north away from the Java coast.
  - Now only the four cruisers and the destroyer Encounter remained.
  - At 22:00 hours, Doorman's force sailed through an area littered with life rafts. These were the sailors from the destroyer Kortenaer that had sunk some five hours earlier. The Encounter was detached to recover the survivors and take them to Soerabaja.
  - Now only the four cruisers remained, but this in no way eroded Doorman's determination to locate and attack the transports of the Japanese Eastern Invasion Force.
  - Japanese float planes had continued to shadow Doorman's force and duly notified Takagi of the Dutchman's change of course to the north.
  - Takagi, realizing that this would take Doorman in the general direction of the Japanese transports decided to head south with the heavy cruisers Haguro and Nachi, in order to counter this threat.
  - This put the two squadrons on a reciprocal and converging track.
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## The Night Phase of the Battle (contd)

- By 22:00 hours the Japanese floatplanes that had been shadowing Doorman's force were running low on fuel and had to be withdrawn, thus depriving Takagi of the advantage in reconnaissance that he had enjoyed since the start of the battle.
  - At 23:02 hours lookouts on Nachi spotted Doorman's force, and Takagi turned his ships to the north on a parallel course with Doorman's squadron.
  - It wasn't until ten minutes later that Doorman's force spotted the Japanese cruisers and opened fire. The Allied and Japanese ships exchanged fire at a fairly slow rate as both sides were running short of ammunition. The Japanese ships only had 30% of their 8 inch shells remaining, while Houston only had 300 8 inch shells left and Perth was down to just 160 6 inch projectiles or 20 rounds per main gun.
  - The two Japanese cruisers then launched torpedoes at 23:32 hours at a range of 14,000 yards.
  - Four minutes later one of the Long Lance torpedoes struck Java causing the aft magazine to explode and blowing off about 100 feet (30 m) of the ship's stern. Of the Java's 528 crew, only 19 survived to be rescued.
  - Doorman tried to avoid the torpedoes by turning to starboard, but a Long Lance torpedo slammed into the De Ruyter on the starboard side near the stern. This resulted in a loss of power, and started a large fire, which engulfed the whole after end of the vessel.
  - The De Ruyter sank at 02:30 hours on February 28<sup>th</sup> 1942, with the loss of 344 of her crew, including Admiral Doorman who went down with his ship.
  - Perth and Houston prudently withdrew from the Java Sea and returned to Soerabaja.
  - The Battle of the Java Sea was over.
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## Post Script to the Battle:

- The only warships to survive the Battle of the Java Sea were the cruisers Perth and Houston and the destroyers HMS Encounter, HNLMS Witte De With and the US destroyers Edwards, Alden, Ford and Paul Jones.
  - For most of these ships, this reprieve was to be short lived.
  - Perth and Houston were sunk the following night at the entrance to the Sunda Strait. Ironically both ships achieved what Doorman had tried so hard to accomplish the day before. They stumbled on to the transports of the Japanese Western Invasion Force as they were unloading troops in Bantam Bay. Hopelessly outnumbered both ships were sunk with heavy loss of life, while the survivors were left to endure nearly four years of brutal captivity as “guests of the emperor”.
  - Exeter and Encounter fared no better. They departed Soerabaja on February 28<sup>th</sup>, in company with the US destroyer Pope, also intending to leave Java via the Sunda Strait. Unfortunately, all three vessels were sunk the next day, when they ran into a force of four Japanese heavy cruisers and four destroyers.
  - Witte De With was supposed to accompany Exeter, but her departure was delayed for too long and the decision was made to scuttle her at Soerabaja instead.
  - The only Allied participants in the Battle of the Java Sea to escape destruction were the four US destroyers Edwards, Alden, Ford and Paul Jones. These vessels made their escape from Java via the Bali Strait, instead of through the Sunda Strait. Although the Japanese did station four destroyers to guard the Bali Strait, the US vessels were able to slip through after a brief skirmish and reached Fremantle on March 4<sup>th</sup>.
  - Perhaps the most fitting epitaph for the Allied warships that fought in the Battle of the Java Sea came from President Roosevelt when he stated “when ships and men went down still fighting, they did not go down in defeat”.
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## Analysis: Why Wasn't Doorman More Successful

- Most military historians agree that, given the quantity and quality of the Japanese naval and air forces ranged against him, Doorman had little chance of preventing the invasion of eastern Java.
  - However, the question has to be asked “Why was Doorman’s squadron unable to inflict any significant damage on the Japanese warships that it engaged in the Java Sea”?
  - Doorman’s force consisted of five cruisers and nine destroyers, and represented the largest concentration of warships that the Allies had deployed against the Japanese in South East Asia to date.
  - Yet Doorman’s squadron failed to sink a single Japanese warship, while all of the cruisers and five of the nine destroyers were lost between February 28<sup>th</sup> and March 1<sup>st</sup>, 1942. Only the four old “flush deck” US destroyers survived to reach Fremantle three days later.
  - As a result, the Japanese were able to carry out their invasion of eastern Java unhindered and their timetable for the conquest of Java was not delayed by even a single day.
  - There are two main reasons for Doorman’s lack of success:
    1. The complete lack of air support provided for the Allied Squadron.
    2. Significant command and control problems associated with operating what was probably the first multinational force to be deployed in the Pacific War.
  - The failure to provide Doorman with adequate aerial reconnaissance and fighter cover were critical. Adequate reconnaissance would have provided Doorman with essential information on the location, course and speed of the Japanese transports and their escorting warships, thus making their interception much more likely.
  - The lack of fighter cover meant that the Japanese float planes, which shadowed Doorman’s force throughout the battle, continuously reporting its location and every change of course, could have been shot down or at least driven off.
  - Doorman’s difficulties with command and control were also significant and mainly related to communication with the ships under his command.
  - The orders issued by Doorman had first to be translated into English and then sent to the US, British and Australian ships by liaison officers stationed on the Dutchman’s flagship. This system was cumbersome and time consuming and sometimes resulted in misunderstandings and confusion on the part of the recipients.
  - To make things worse most of the Doorman’s ships had not worked together before. The Perth, Exeter, Electra, Encounter and Jupiter had only been assigned to his squadron two days before the Java Sea action.
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### **Analysis: Why Wasn't Doorman More Successful (contd)**

- When this is combined with differences in operational doctrine that existed between the US, British and Dutch navies, it becomes clear that Doorman faced very significant handicaps compared to his Japanese counterpart who faced none of these limitations.
  - Although Doorman did the best he could, he faced a well trained and equipped enemy, who had the advantage of momentum on their side. Hence the Battle of the Java Sea was unlikely to ever end in a resounding victory for the Allies.
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