

U. S. Cruiser Helena Lost Whipping Japs

Ten Tokyo Warships Sunk or Damaged; Report More Trapped Near Kula Gulf

LONDON, July 7.—(U.P.)—A radio broadcast here Wednesday said the remainder of the Japanese fleet defeated in the Kula Gulf battle had been trapped in the narrows south of Kula Gulf.

By C. YATES McDANIEL

ALLIED HEADQUARTERS IN AUSTRALIA, July 7.—(P)—A United States naval victory in the Solomons—probable sinking of six Japanese warships and damaging of four others out of a cruiser-destroyer force at a cost of one cruiser—was announced Wednesday, one week after the outbreak of the current Pacific offensive.



CAPT. CHAS. PURCELL CECIL
Commanded the Cruiser Helena

Cruiser Sunk in Kula Damaged At Pearl Harbor

WASHINGTON, July 7.—(P)—The 9,700-ton cruiser Helena, which was sunk in the Battle of Kula Gulf in the central Solomon Islands early July 6, was one of the ships which the Japanese damaged at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. She was subsequently repaired and returned to sea service and reportedly had an active career in the Pacific, although details of her accomplishments have not been made public.

The light cruiser, named for the city of Helena, Mont., was commissioned at the New York Navy Yard September 18, 1939. She was equipped to carry four aircraft and her armament included 15 six-inch guns and eight five-inch antiaircraft guns.

The skipper, Captain Charles Purcell Cecil, of Louisville, Ky., was a veteran of naval service. He was graduated from the Navy Academy in 1916 and saw escort duty during the World War.

Before the present conflict started, he was serving as executive officer of the Naval Training Station at Great Lakes, Ill. But was detached from that duty in June, 1941, to take command of a destroyer division at Honolulu. In March, 1942, he was given command of a destroyer squadron.

Captain Cecil won the Navy Cross for heroism as leader of a destroyer group assigned to a task force during the battle of the Santa Cruz Islands last October.

He maneuvered his ships into a defensive screen around an American carrier and his brilliant tactics and performance of duty were credited with inflicting heavy losses on the enemy and protecting American vessels.

Cecil assumed command of the Helena in November, 1942.

(In Washington a Navy communique Wednesday afternoon disclosed that the American cruiser lost in Kula Gulf was the 9,700-ton light cruiser Helena, under command of Captain Charles Purcell Cecil, of Louisville, Ky. Neither the fate of the skipper nor the safety of individual crew members was reported. The cruiser had been damaged at Pearl Harbor and was restored to service during the first 12 months of war in the Pacific.)

The triumph, recorded by guns of American ships which flashed in darkness of July 5-6 in the Kula Gulf above New Georgia Island, was sketched in a communique from headquarters of General Douglas MacArthur.

(Admiral William F. Halsey's South Pacific headquarters, which has immediate direction of the Solomons operations, announced Wednesday that the Kula Gulf action has ended and that United States forces continue to hold the initiative on land and in the air, as well as on the sea.)

Although bearing out in clearer outline an earlier announcement from the Navy in Washington that the Kula Gulf battle definitely was an American victory, General MacArthur's communique left many details to be filled in, including how many of the enemy ships hit were cruisers and how many destroyers. One definitely was a destroyer, blasted by 500-pound bombs of American planes after it had been beached by damage suffered in the naval engagement.

("The Japs have taken another damned good licking," Navy Secretary Frank Knox told cheering shipyard workers at Bremerton, Wash., Tuesday.)

Rendova Reinforced

The communique also bore the assuring news that American forces of Rendova Island, seized at the outset of the new drive in the Central Solomons June 30, now have been reinforced and that frantic efforts of the Japanese Air

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Force to checkmate the offensive by fresh raids on Australia, New Guinea and our Solomons holdings have been broken up.

Defeat of the Japanese naval forces left imperiled the most immediate objective of the Solomons operations—the enemy air base of Munda on New Georgia.

Above it, Bairoko anchorage, main source of supply, had been battered by shells of United States warships in a bombardment from Kula Gulf the night before the naval battle. The U. S. destroyer Strong was lost during that action.

Below it, the reinforced American garrison on Rendova has been shelling it from five miles away. And on New Georgia, American forces at Viru harbor are in a position to move overland, having consolidated positions there.

The latest communique said:

"Preliminary dispatches report that our naval surface units intercepted an enemy force of cruisers and destroyers in the Kula Gulf during the night of the warship engagement.

"Details are not yet available and a final assessment cannot be made but it is indicated that six enemy ships probably were sunk and four damaged.

"We lost one cruiser.

"One damaged enemy destroyer, beached near Sambera Harbor, was attacked by our medium dive bombers which scored seven direct hits with 500-pound bombs, resulting in violent explosions and fires"

Limited Engagement

The fact Kula Gulf is only 15 miles long and about eight miles across at its widest point made it obvious that the battle was between limited and comparatively light sea armament. (In Washington, unofficial comment was that "the decisive naval action of the present offensive in the South Pacific apparently is still to be fought," with neither side as yet throwing in its battleships and aircraft carriers.)

In air battles over the Solomons fighting scene, seven more Japanese planes were reported downed, bringing enemy losses there alone to 164. Eighteen raiders inflicted some damage Tuesday on our Rendova positions but three were destroyed by ground defenses. The other four were bagged by planes over Kula Gulf as they attempted to break up the bombing of the beached destroyer.

Twenty-seven enemy bombers with an escort of 21 Zeros tried a daylight raid on Darwin, Australia, causing slight damage. Spitfires manned by Australians and British pilots downed five bombers and two Zeros. Seven Spitfires were lost but three pilots were saved and three others were seen to bail out.

Fifteen Japanese planes raided the Nassau Bay area, 12 miles down the coast from Salamaua, New Guinea, where Americans landed June 30 in another daylight stab, but the enemy planes failed to inflict damage.

Nine Jap bombers and four fighters went after the Bena Bena area 90 miles northwest of the Salamaua front where the Allies perhaps possess landing fields known to have been built there before the war. The raid was characterized as ineffective.

The Allied air force also was busy. Flying 500 miles northwest of Darwin, our two-engined bombers set off explosions at the enemy airdrome of Penfoei at Koepang, on Dutch Timor. Other Allied planes struck at Lae, and at enemy bases far to the northwest on Dutch New Guinea.