1943 â€“ A Legend Takes Shape in the Solomon Islands

Description

On this date in 1943, PT-109 was sunk in the night action off Rendova.



From the Navy History Site, the report of the run in with the Tokyo Express:

COMMANDER MOTOR TORPEDO BOAT SQUADRONS

SOUTH PACIFIC FORCE

13 January 1944.

CMTB/L11-1
Serial 006
Declassified (8 SEP 59)

From: Commander, Motor Torpedo Boat Squadrons, South Pacific Force.
To: Commander-in-Chief, United States Fleet.

Via: Commander, South Pacific Force.

Subject: Loss of PT-109 â€“ Information concerning.

Reference: (a) ComSoPacâ€™s secret ltr. L11-1(11) Ser. 002867 of 30 December 1943.

Enclosure:

(A) Copy of ComMTB Rendova action report of 1-2 August 1943.
(B) Copy of ComMTB Rendova action report of 7-8 August 1943.

(C) Copy of Intelligence Officersâ€™ Memo to ComMTB Flot One of 22 August 1943.

1. Enclosures (A), (B), and (C) are forwarded in compliance with directive contained in reference (a).

2. Enclosures (A) and (B) are copies of action reports of Commander, Motor Torpedo Boats, Rendova, and contain information in connection with the loss of the PT 109. Enclosure (C) is a memorandum compiled by Intelligence Officers of Motor Torpedo Boat Flotilla ONE on the basis of information given them by survivors of PT 109. It is the most detailed account of this incident and it is hoped that it will provide the information requested in Enclosure (A) to reference (a).

E. J. MORAN.

W. C. SIECHT,
By direction.

Enclosure (A)

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MOTOR TORPEDO BOATS, RENDOVA

5 August 1943.

MTBR/A16-3
Serial 0034
Declassified (8 SEP 59)

From: The Commander.
To: The Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet.
Via: Official Channels.

Subject: PT Operations night 1-2 August 1943.

1. Force: All available boats (15) on patrol.

2. Enemy contracts: Five enemy destroyers, attacked in Blackett Strait, five or possibly six torpedo hits scored.

3. Weather: Overcast, visibility poor.

4. Patrols:

AREA B (BLACKETT STRAIT)
DIVISION B â€“ OFF VANGA VANGA
Lt. H. J. Brantingham PT 159 OAK 27
Lt. (jg) W. F. Liebenow PT 157 OAK 21
Lt. (jg) J. R. Lowrey PT 162 OAK 36
Lt. (jg) Jack Kennedy PT 109 OAK 14

DIVISION A â€“ OFF GATERE
Lt. A. H. Berndtson PT 171 OAK 44
Lt. (jg) P. A. Potter PT 169 OAK 31
Lt. (jg) S. Hamilton PT 172 OAK 47
Ens. E. H. Kruse PT 163 OAK 19

DIVISION R â€“ EAST OF MAKUTI ISLAND
Lt. R. W. Rome PT 174 OAK 50
Lt. (jg) R. E. Keresey PT 105 OAK 7
Lt. (jg) R. K. Roberts PT 103 OAK 1

DIVISION C â€“ SOUTH OF FERGUSON PASSAGE
Lt. G. C. Cookman PT 107 OAK 13
Lt. (jg) R. D. Shearer PT 104 OAK 4
Lt. (jg) D. M. Payne PT 106 OAK 10
Lt. (jg) S. D. Hix PT 108 OAK 16

INCOMING TOKYO EXPRESS
All boats on the stations above indicated by 2130.

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At 2400 Division B made radar contact indicating 5 craft approaching from the North close to the coast of Kolombangara Island. Visual contact was made shortly thereafter, by PT 159 which saw 4 shapes in column heading Southeast close into the coast at 15 knots. The PT 157 saw only two. The shapes were first believed to be large landing craft. The PTs 159 and 157, after directing the PTs 162 and 109 to lay to, began closing to make a strafing attack. In a moment the enemy opened fire with many large caliber guns, which was continued for several minutes. PT 159 fired a spread of 4 torpedoes and the PT 157, 2 torpedoes, all at a range of about 1800 yards. The torpedo tubes of the PT 159 flashed and one caught fire. A large explosion was seen at the target by personnel on both of these boats. They then retired to the Northwest laying puffs of smoke and making frequent radical course changes, until they were in Gizo Strait, where they lay to. It was decided that PT 157 should return to station and that the PT 159 should return to base, as it was out of torpedoes, all of which was done. PTs 162 and 109 lay to as directed. When the firing began, there was so much and over such a long stretch of coast, they thought shore batteries had opened up and retired to the Northwest, but did not regain contact with the other two boats. After the firing had ceased, they were joined by PT 169 from Division A, and after receiving radio orders to do so, took up station, but did not make contract with PT 157. The PT 169 stayed with the PTs 162 and 109 on Division Aâ€™s station off Vanga Vanga.

DIVISION A: Around 0004 Division A picked up 4 destroyers headed close in shore off Gatere. When PT 171 got in position it was abeam the first destroyer. Estimating its speed at 30 knots, the PT 171 closed to 1500 yards, at which point the destroyers fired starshells and opened fire, straddling the PT 171 and splashing water on its deck. Fire was also opened with automatic weapons and one destroyer turned on its searchlight but did not pick up PT 171. The PT 171 let go 4 torpedoes at the second destroyer. The tubes flashed and the destroyers turned directly toward it to evade. One destroyer stood on South toward Ferguson Passage. The last destroyer was soon to drop 2 1/2 miles behind the others. The

PT 171 retired to the South laying smoke puffs and then getting out from behind them to the right and left. Feeling that the first destroyer might be blocking Ferguson Passage the PT 171 reversed course and proceeded Northwest along the reefs to the East of Gizo and out Gizo Passage departing for base, having expended all its torpedoes. The other three boats, PTs 170, 169 and 172 did not receive the contact report or any message to deploy for attack and could not fire their torpedoes after the destroyers opened fire, as PT 171 was in the way crossing their bows in its turn to the South. Contact between PT 169 and the other 3 PTs was lost as it reversed course to the Northwest after hearing radio message that destroyers might be blocking Ferguson Passage. After proceeding some distance North, (where it joined the PTs 159 and 157), the PTs 170 and 172 were straddled by the gunfire from the 2 destroyers, which they saw, but could not fire at because PT 171 was in front of them, retired zig-zagging and laying smoke puffs to the South thru Ferguson Passage. Going thru they were attacked by 4 float planes which dropped 3 flares and 2 bombs, which missed. They proceeded to the South and East, but returned to station on orders at 0255. Nothing further happened.
[â€¦]

Itâ€™s great readingâ€¦

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In May 2002, Robert Ballard located the wreck of the PT-109 and conducted a full underwater survey for National Geographic.

Update â€“ PT Boat Info!: PT Boat History Page at Geocities
Save the PT-658 Organization

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1. History
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