

479

December 12th 14.

Sir,

I concluded my last despatch on the 6th instant by reporting that as the "Canopus" had asked for a large supply of fresh meat other cruisers might be expected. Next morning (7th inst.) about 10 a.m. the following H.M. Ships arrived "Invincible", Vice-Admiral Sturdee, "Carnarvon", Rear-Admiral Stoddart, "Inflexible", "Kent", "Cornwall", "Glasgow" and "Bristol", the last two coming into the inner harbour. Late in the day the armed merchantman "Macedonia" (P. & O.) also arrived. Colliers were placed alongside, and provisions supplied during the day. I was asked to provide for the following day anything up to 15,000 pounds of mutton as five of the fleet would leave on the 8th inst. We managed to have 9,000 pounds all ready, but had no opportunity of delivering it.

About 7 a.m. on the 8th instant the outposts at Sappers Hill and Lake Point reported that a fleet of 5 cruisers was approaching from the South, and just before 7.30 a warning gun was fired from H.M.S. "Bristol" - all crews were recalled and steam raised as quickly as possible. At 9 a.m. two cruisers, which we afterwards learned were the "Gneisenau" and "Nuremburg" approached within about a couple of miles of the wireless, and the officer at the observation hut on Engineer Point saw that they were training guns on the buildings with crews all stationed at quarters. H.M.S. "Canopus" then fired 5 rounds of 12" shell over the hill, the third shot (we believe) striking one of the vessels. They ported helm immediately, and steamed quickly out of range to E.S.E. to meet

The Secretary,

London.

No. 479 per

(12.12.14.)^{2.}

the other three Germans which were about 9 miles to the South steering N.East. The first two steamed slowly after getting out of range to enable the three to come up with them. Meanwhile all our fleet which was quite invisible to the enemy were raising steam and getting under way with the utmost speed. H.M.S. "Kent" was out first, and stood off for a while to attract the attention of the Germans; by 11 a.m. all the others, except the "Bristol", were outside. As soon as the Germans saw the number that were here, they made off as fast as they possibly could towards E.S.E. At 12.30 the "Bristol" and "Macedonia" went to W.S.W. towards Fitzroy as we learned by telephone that three colliers had anchored off there in the morning. Soon after 3 p.m. heavy firing was heard to E.S.E. and this continued until 5.45. At 6.30 we learned by wireless that the "Scharnhorst" and "Gneisenau" had been sunk and a little later that the "Leipsig" was on fire; she subsequently turned turtle and sank. About midnight a message was received that the "Bristol" and "Macedonia" had caught up the colliers "Baden" and "Santa Isabel" with 14,000 tons of coal between them. A wireless was sent to the Admiral asking whether they were to be brought into port, but the reply was that the orders were to sink them, and that they should be carried out. The "Macedonia" thereupon took off the crews (22 officers and 88 men) and sent the ships with the 14,000 tons of coal to the bottom. The "Bristol" then went in chase of the third vessel, which I learn is the (? armed) merchantman "Seydlitz" with a large number of reservists on board.

December 9th. 7 a.m. "Macedonia" arrived with the crews. At 3.30 p.m. H.M.S. "Kent" arrived with news that she had sunk the "Nuremburg". Her own foretopmast had been shot away carrying away the aerials of her wireless; hence she had been unable to report before. She had been hit about 26 times, one shell exploded in the Commander's cabin destroying everything. She

479 per

(12.12.14.)

3

had 5 killed and about a dozen wounded. Two of those died in the Hospital the same night. H.M.S. "Cornwall" arrived about 6 p.m. with considerable damage but ~~no~~^{no} casualties.

December 10th. H.M.S. "Glasgow" arrived about 1 a.m. with one man killed and several wounded. She had picked up about 7 survivors from the Leipzig including the Navigating Officer.

December 11th. 4 a.m. H.M.S. "Bristol" arrived - but had not been able to catch up the "Seydlitz". The "Dresden" and "Seydlitz" are therefore still at large.. At 7 a.m. "Invincible" and "Inflexible" returned the former having severe damage, one shell holing her at the water line. One man killed buried at sea. Store ship "Crown of Aragon" arrived. 9 a.m. "Orisa" arrived. In the afternoon the funeral of 7 men took place; many hundreds of men were landed from the fleet to attend it. Later H.M.S. "Carnarvon" returned - had gone north to convoy the "Orama", "Crown of Aragon" and various colliers.

December 12th. The Officers of the colliers corroborate that the Germans must have had a terrible surprise. They thought that the "Glasgow" and the "Defence" would be here, and their plan of campaign was first to demolish the wireless then for all 5 to destroy the "Glasgow" and "Defence". After that they intended to occupy the town and bring in their colliers from Fitzroy and coal. What else they would have done can be better imagined than described, - there is no question that Stanley would have been burned to the ground.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the narrowness of our escape, - 48 hours either way would have made all the difference. If the Germans had come before the arrival of our fleet there would have been only the "Canopus" against 5, and if they had arrived after five of our fleet had left there would have been only the "Canopus" and two light cruisers against them, - that is to say against the heavily armoured Scharnhorst and Gneisenau the Leipzig, Dresden and Nuremberg. In either case the place would have been bombarded, and must have been pretty well wiped

479 per

(12.12.14.)

4

out. It would seem to have been almost a direct intervention of Providence that they chose to visit this place on one of the two days when 8 of H.M. Ships were concentrated here, It happened to be a really beautiful morning and from the hill we had the experience of a lifetime. A hostile fleet of five comparatively close in to the shore on the South, and our own fleet of 7 on the other side of the hill feverishly getting under way. The Germans had not the remotest idea of the surprise awaiting them, and the sight of six of our vessels tearing out at full speed was one never to be forgotten.

2. I have to refer back to my 477/24 on the subject of the engagement of Mr Adam as extra clerk for the Stanley Office and Store. Mr Allan wanted Adam back at Darwin whilst so many Stanley people were taking refuge there, and we proposed to let him remain until stock had been taken at Darwin; the arrival of the fleet increased our work here so much that I have him back in Stanley again. After being here for a week or so he tells me he cannot get suitable lodging for less than £7.10.0. per month; with the increased price of mutton and other stores, people cannot do it for less, and if his salary is £12 per month only, he would only just be able to exist on it, and would not be in a position to save anything. As he is 25 years of age he does not care to contemplate remaining here without saving something, or without some prospect of betterment. He would, I understand, engage for a couple of years at £14 per month for the first year increasing to £15 for the second, and I should be glad to know whether the Directors would sanction this. He asks whether, in the event of Mr Moir leaving, he would have a chance of succeeding him. The new Camp teacher Stephens, I think, looks forward to the Darwin post eventually, but Adam has I consider a prior claim as he has already served the Company 5 years, and when Mr Moir has been ill or on leave has carried out the duties of bookkeeper very satisfactorily. I have told Mr Adam that no doubt he would be considered for the post, but that we cannot give any guarantee.