

Extract from a letter from the foreman in charge, to the author, from H.M.S. PRINCE of WALES June 1st. 1941. in harbour at Scapa Flow.

On Thursday May 15th. (1941) we left harbour to undertake a night and dawn sheet. The number of rounds to be fired per gun was six. All the gear worked perfectly during both drills and there was a clean sheet, 60 rounds altogether being fired. Lieut. Lancaster reported from 'Y' turret that the gear was so smooth he could have carried on indefinitely. As I was in 'B' turret I can say no trouble was experienced by any member of the crew in that turret.

During the action with the BISMARCK the following were the recorded number of rounds fired the respective turrets:

1st. Engagement. 18 Salves.

'A' Turret.		'B' Turret.		'Y' Turret.	
NO. 1 GUN	1	No. 1 GUN	7	NO. 1 GUN	4
No. 2 GUN	8	No. 2 GUN	8	No. 2 GUN	2
No. 3 GUN	8			No. 3 GUN	3
No. 4 GUN	9			No. 4 GUN	6

Note, 'Y' Turret bore on the target for the last ten salves only.

It will be noticed that No. 1 gun of 'A' only fired one round. This was due to the nose of the shell being driven into the arrester. On examination, it was found that the speed of the rammer was much too fast, being below two seconds.

It was explained to the ship's staff that the speed of these rammers must not be increased, after trying over Nos. 2, 3 and 4 and finding that these also were very fast, and suspecting they also had been altered. We overcame the difficulty for the time being by closing down the control valve to half turn open.

In 'B' everything went off according to drill until it became necessary to lock the revolving shell ring to 'SHIP' to refill the ring. The (marine) engineers had shut off the starboard side ring main, not being aware that the revolving shell ring was only driven from that side. This meant that 'B' missed three salves, although ready to carry on, with shell in the guns when the action finished.

'Y' also had bad luck due to faulty drill. While the shell ring was fully loaded and locked to 'SHIP' a rammer number (in the shell room) released his anti-burging stop from a shell and as the ship rolled, the shell slid forward across the fixed trays, and into the revolving ring.

This happened just at the time the trunk traversing number was taking over, and when he began traversing (the ring) he buckled two trays and also fouled the revolving ring. It took some considerable time to dismantle the trays, so in order to keep going, the mounting was trained back to the fore and aft centre line to reload.

2nd. Engagement. 12 salvos from 'A' and 'B'
6 salvos from 'Y'

From the experience gained in the first action, the percentage of rounds fired in the second action was much higher :

'A' Turret.	'B' Turret.	'Y' Turret.
No. 1 GUN 2	No. 1 GUN 6	No. 1 GUN 3
No. 2 GUN 6	No. 2 GUN 5	No. 2 GUN 3
No. 3 GUN 6	No.	No. 3 GUN 3
No. 4 GUN 4		No. 4 GUN 3

In 'A' No 1. Gun failed due to the initial strain.

The missed round in 'B' was due to a jammed tube (in the firing lock) and though only a few seconds were spent in releasing it, we missed the salvo.

3rd. Engagement. 2 salvos from 'A' and 'B' only
'Y' was not bearing.

'A' Turret.	'B' Turret.
No. 1 GUN 0	No. 1 GUN 1
No. 2 GUN 1	NO. 2 GUN 1
No. 3 GUN 0	
No. 4 GUN 11	

After the action, and we had turned for home, (being relieved by King George V. and other ships, and having smashed upper bridge) got permission to dismantle, in turn No. 1 and 3 arresters in 'A' I found that they were very tight in the ~~guide~~ guides, and also that the sprocket wheel and rack had been ~~stra~~ strained. After some relatively minor adjustments the ~~arreste~~ arresters worked perfectly.

Signed W. Barbear.

From the foremans report of the subsequent engagement in the Denmark Strait, it will be noted how very easy it is, under such circumstances for even trained men to get into difficulties. It might be more fair to say, how difficult it is to avoid doing so. A new ship, new in every department, may have similar routines, all the details of most familiar things must be unfamiliar, especially when finding out why something is not doing as it was expected to do.

Men might be critical minutes finding the solution.

Some of the special features of the report, which should be considered are as follows,

First Engagement.

A Turret. Although number 1 gun in this turret was soon in trouble, the other three fired ninety three per cent of the rounds required from them.

The reason for the trouble in No. 1 system is explained at length.

B Turret. Eighty three per cent of the rounds were got away, and the reason is given why the remainder failed.

It may not be necessary to be specific, but the engineers referred to, are the engine room staff, who supply power, for the revolving ring, at shell room level.

Y Turret. The comment that this turret only bore on the target for the last ten salvos, must mean, that P. or W. was sailing so direct for the enemy ship, that the guns of Y. which is the stern quadruple turret, could not be trained sufficiently far ahead to bear, and this requires a modification to the ships course. When this had been given the guns of Y. were brought to bear.

S. W. Roskill Esqr,
Churchill College,
Cambridge.

8. Dunclutha Road
Hastings. Sussex,
Dec. 13. 1965.

Dear Sir,

I am afraid my signature will convey little, however I was manager of Vickers Armament Shops at Barrow-in-Furness and later was Chief Designer.

On one memorable occasion we met briefly in Vickers House, before a small party left for Germany to visit the Cruisers Prinz Eugen.

Since I retired I made some notes of Vickers works and practice, which I later sent to the Firm.

As I have a copy in rather indifferent typescript; there is a portion about 20 pages which was written to more or less satisfy myself, countering in some small way the Criticisms of H.M.S. Prince of Wales in his book "The Bismarck Episode" by Author Capt. Trenfell.

As I was responsible for the mounting of this battleship during manufacture and later in section on board, and final adjustment at Scapa, I thought these notes should pass into your hands, though perhaps of interest more than present value.

If you care to take a copy of them, I would feel honored, but as they complete my notes I would like them to be kindly returned.

If you would send a copy of your typing I will be grateful indeed.

I am yours faithfully,
John W. Wilkinson

John W. Wilkinson O.B.E.