



BISMARCK SURVIVOR REPORTS

This document contains interrogation reports of those *Bismarck* survivors rescued by the British. A copy of the original file (ADM 267/137) was obtained from the British National Archives at Kew, London and provided to us by Frank W. Allen.

Information from Prisoner ex BISMARCK

The enclosed report from H.M.S. DORSETSHIRE is the first to be received of interviews with prisoners from BISMARCK. It is of interest that according to prisoner the Gunnery Officer of the ship and ex Assistant Naval Attaché, London, the morale of the ship's company had deteriorated by the morning of the 27th May. This information, concerning which he was subsequently more reticent, may have been given to the Petty Officer whilst suffering from shock.

2. Von Mullenheim when in London was found to be of a somewhat taciturn disposition.
3. DORSETSHIRE's 2124.B/28/5/41 has already been received and distributed in the Admiralty.
4. The notebooks and documents referred to are being dealt with in N.I.D.

(Sgd.) H.N.R. CAMPBELL.
For D.N.I.
31.5.41

It is confirmed that HOOD did hit with her third salvo; it is hoped that this will be given wide publicity.

(Sgd.) M. STEVENS
for D.O.D.(H).
31.5.41

Noted concurring with D.O.D(F). D.P.D. has been added to the marking.

(Sgd.)
for D. of P.
2.6.41.

Noted, concurring with D.O.D.(H).

Lieutenant Michell, late of H.M.S. MAORI, informed me that prisoner picked up by the MAORI states that HOOD scored three hits forward which reduced BISMARCK's speed.

(Sgd.) A.W. LONGLEY COOK
for D.T.S.D.
7.6.41.

It is considered that the publicity afforded should be wide enough to reach officers and men serving afloat and that it should do so without delay.

(Sgd.) A.W. LONGLEY COOK.

Publicity has already been given to the hits scored by the HOOD before she sank.

The B.B.C. Home programme on the BISMARCK operation was given after the 6 o'clock and 9 o'clock News on Thursday 5th June.

On Saturday 7th a programme to America and Overseas was given.

In all these programmes it was stated by the officer sent down by C. in C., H.F., to broadcast that the HOOD had scored hits.

The material from which these broadcasts were written was made available to the press on Thursday 5th and many newspapers made use of it in their issues of Friday 6th June.

(Sgd.) F.R. BAXTEN.
For DIRECTOR OF PRESS DIVISION.
8.6.41.

Noted. D.N.C. has been added to the marking.

(Sgd.)
for D.N.O.
11.6.41.

INFORMATION FROM KAPITAN LEUTNANT BARON BURKARD VON MULLENHEIM,
EX GERMAN SHIP 'BISMARCK'

1. The following information was volunteered to Petty Officer Eric C. Robbins, D/J. 106021, by one of the survivors soon after being rescued.
2. The statement as far as it can be recalled was as follows. Begins.

The survivor's Action Station was in the Centre Control, of which BISMARCK was fitted with three, in addition to local control in each of the turrets.

The survivors seemed to be under the impression that BISMARCK was holding her own against H.M.S. KING GEORGE V. and RODNEY, and would have continued to do so had the Main Control Position not been hit by what he thought was a shell from DORSETSHIRE. The main armament was then put into local control, and he moved into 'B' (?) turret. Evidently 'B' (?) turret was ordered to engage DORSETSHIRE, but only fired one salvo at the ship. It appeared that by this time the personnel in the turret were becoming demoralised and began vacating the turret, remarking "Why should we stay here for target practice". He left the turret also.

Asked what secondary armament was fitted, he said three turrets of 5.9 inch guns each side. He remarked that two were out of action, not by gunfire but by the sea.

He spoke about the action with H.M.S. HOOD and said that HOOD had scored hit/hits with here third salvo. The first salvo was over, the second short. HOOD was sighted at "4.42" and blew up at "4.58". HOOD cost Germany 40 shells and blew up on BISMARCK's 5th salvo. HOOD rushed in, fired three salvos, made smoke and was hit as she turned to port, the smoke possible assisting ranging.

He was not impressed by RODNEY's shooting at first as she took 20 minutes to hit the BISMARCK. He timed this himself.

He saw DORSETSHIRE firing and had been under the impression that 8-inch shells would be ineffective until they began to hit BISMARCK. They caused damage considerably greater than was expected, including penetration of her armour.

This survivor was identified as Kapitan Leutnant Baron von Mullenheim, who was later interviewed by the Commanding Officer. His attitude then was much more guarded and although his account was substantially the same, there were certain details which he did not mention or he avoided, such as the personnel's collapse of morale.

He was in command of a destroyer at the battle of Narvik and had been in BISMARCK since she commissioned last August. Before the war he was Assistant Naval Attaché to the German Embassy in London.

A copy of DORSETSHIRE's signal timed 2124B of 28th May giving further information is attached.

IMPORTANT.
From – DORSETSHIRE.

To – Admiralty
Repeated C. in C. H.F.
ARK ROYAL.

Your 1510B/27. BISMARCK's senior survivor Lt. Cdr. Baron Burkard Von Mullenheim states attack delivered by torpedo bombers at approx. 2100B/26/5 secured a hit on starboard quarter which jammed BISMARCK's rudders putting her out of control and thus reducing her speed of advance and so ensuring her subsequent destruction. Further emphatically he states that only torpedoes which struck were from aircraft, three in number, and destroyers torpedoes did not hit.

T.O.O.2124B/28/5/41.

BISMARCK – INFORMATION GIVEN BY PRISONERS OF WAR.

The following statements have been made by prisoners of war and are circulated with reserve: -

Armament.

“Bismarck” had 20 M.G.s. and sixteen 3.7-cm. Guns.

BISMARCK's Gunnery.

During the first attack some 50-55,000 rounds were fired.

Effect of British Attacks. The first shells penetrated the armoured deck, and started a fire. The third or fourth hit penetrated the armoured deck into the W/T room below it. Prisoners thought that a single shell would not have penetrated the armoured deck, but that several must have hit it on the same spot. There were also further hits on the armoured deck.

No casualties or damage below the armour of the upper deck resulted from these hits; nor was there damage amidships in the battery deck below, although later the companion-ways from the battery deck to the upper deck were destroyed.

One prisoner, who then climbed up on the port side (passing compartment 11 where there were no dead) to the superstructure (Aufbaudeck), found a scene of general ruin: nearly everything had been swept away, the rear mast had been broken off, the aircraft hangar was still standing, though on fire. The aircraft burnt last of all.

A torpedo upset the steering.

(S gd.)
D.N.I.
9.6.41

This information is too obscure to be used but may be so important that D.N.I. is requested to obtain if possible some further particulars.

According to drawings the W/T offices are at 'X' 'X' so that A implies the armour deck was reached and penetrated.

But if the battery deck is in the position shown “presumably” in the rough sketch, B implies that the armour deck was not reached.

What it is very desirable to know is which deck was penetrated and what was the thickness of armour penetrated.

(Sgd.) S.V.GOODALL
D.N.C.
21/6/41.

COPY
SECRET

REFERENCE SHEET

FROM – D.N.I.
DATE – 1st July, 1941.
TO – D.N.C. Bath.

BISMARCK

A prisoner of war has stated that, as far as he knew, even right up to the end no shell penetrated the armour of BISMARCK.

(Sgd.)
for D.N.I.

COPY

REFERENCE SHEET

N.I.D. 0995

From: Director of Naval Intelligence

Dated: 2nd July, 1941.

BISMARCK

Following from a prisoner of war:-

“The shell hit was right forward, close up to my action station, and all we noticed of it was a crump, a sudden whine and swish. We thought at first that it had landed right here in Compartment 17 near the action station. We immediately checked upon the “Unter-offizier’s” quarters on the port side; everything was all right there, and then we noticed how the water was slowly leaking through the armoured bulkheads. We went in with water up to our knees.

The shell struck at about the level of the between-deck and battery deck. The battery deck ripped open. It is lucky it didn’t explode.

A girder that came down had to be slowly welded. We were ordered to do so but couldn’t. However, they managed to weld on some sort of thing overhead. A bit later it went wrong again.

The battery deck was in a frightful state. I was up to my waist in water after the shell struck.

Shortly afterwards when the between deck was flooded – the armoured deck of course – she went deeper at the bow but not so much as 9 ft.”

The shell was probably from the PRINCE OF WALES. The Controller suggests that D.N.C. might be able from this description, to trace the probable course of the shell.

(Sgd.).....
for director of Naval Intelligence

ll.

Noted.

The information hereon has been discussed with D.N.O. It has not been possible to identify the shell with the hits in the action 24.5.41, nor to trace the path of the shell.

(Sd) S.V. Goodall

15/7/41

Mr. Mason.
D.D.N.C.
D.N.C.

On 9.7.41 N.I.D. R/S 0995 of 2.7.41. was discussed with Captain Woollerton, as a result of D.N.C.'s memo. To D.N.O. of 5.7.41 – Mr. Mason being occupied on other duty at the time of Captain Woollerton's visit.

It was agreed that the statement in the N.I.D. R/S was too indefinite to allow any conclusions to be drawn.

Para. 1 resembles the hit in Compartment XIV from HOOD or PRINCE OF WALES. Para. 3 suggests that the damage occurred some time before the final action, but paras. 2, 4 and 5 are more suggestive of the final action.

Captain Woollerton phoned today to say the D.N.O. did not propose to reply. The reply to N.I.D. could, it was suggested, state that the information had been discussed with D.N.O. but that it had not been possible to identify the shell with the hits in the action of 24.5.41. or to trace its path.

Propose to reply on these lines

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- (i) Gotenhafen;
- (ii) Plön.

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON INTERROGATION OF SURVIVORS OF THE GERMAN
BATTLESHIP "BISMARCK", SUNK ON 27 MAY, 1941.

1. Introductory Remarks.

Of 108 survivors 75 were selected for interrogation, and of those selected only a portion have at present been interrogated. The youth and inexperience of many of the survivors precludes much reliable information being obtained. Most of the survivors have only knowledge of their own part of the ship. It seems evident that much information has been withheld from the ship's company. Direct interrogation has produced only a limited amount of information and the prisoners are very security conscious when it comes to a question of discussing any matter which they consider, or may have been told, to be secret. It is anticipated that further information will be obtained by methods other than direct interrogation. Whilst mostly young, the four surviving officers and the crew appeared to have withstood their ordeal and were impressed with the treatment they received on board the rescuing ships.

Statements which follow must be treated with reserve until confirmation for them is obtained.

II. Crew of the "Bismarck".

It seems probable that the normal crew of the "Bismarck" was between 1900 and 2000. In addition, the Admiral's Staff of about 50 – 80 and a Prize Crew of 80, including one officer, were embarked.

The ship's company was divided into twelve Divisions. Each Division had 150 to 180 men and was divided into "Kaporalschaften" of ten to twelve men under a Petty Officer. Divisions 10, 11 and 12 were Technical Divisions each in command of a Lieutenant-Commander (E), Divisions 5 and 6 were 'Flak' Divisions and it was stated that between 350 and 400 men were concerned in the 'Flak' organisation. (An incomplete list of the Officers of the Bismarck is appended).

Four Officers in all survived.

The senior officer survivor is Kapitänleutnant (Lieutenant-Commander) Freiherr von Müllenheim-Rechberg. He was the Third Gunnery Officer and was stationed in the after-gun control position; he has still to be interrogated.

Kapitänleutnant (Lieutenant-Commander) (E) Junak was a turbine specialist, but was very security conscious and had been involved with the Gestapo. This officer, when in the water, went so far as to warn other survivors 'to keep their mouths shut if picked up'.

A number of ratings stood by the ship during her construction at the Blohm and Voss Yard in Hamburg, and a large number joined before commissioning on 24 August 1940. A number of cadets from the "Tirpitz" were undergoing training in the "Bismarck" but left the ship before she sailed from Gotenhafen.

Most of the crew had civilian occupations before joining the Navy.

III. Admiral's Staff.

No information is at present available regarding Admiral LÜTJENS' Staff, which may have consisted of from 50 to 80 persons and included Marineoberkriegsgerichtsrat (Deputy Judge Advocate) LANGE. Kapitän zur See (Captain) LINDEMANN was the Captain of the ship.

IV. Early History of "Bismarck" and Trials.

Laid down July, 1936 at Blohm and Voss, Hamburg.

Launched 14 February, 1939, and named by Hitler. The ship commissioned 24 August, 1940, and proceeded to Gotenhafen having visited Kiel for fourteen days en route. From

Gothenhafen trials were carried out. Ship returned early in December to Hamburg for adjustments. Left Hamburg again early in March, 1941, for Kiel and Gotenhafen. During trials, prisoners stated, the ship exercised fuelling from tankers at sea. Several exercises were carried out in company with "Prinz Eugen" and these included firing practises. During the gun trials, it was stated, only one full broadside (with main and secondary armaments) was fired at fifteen thousand metres (16,404 yards). Sub-calibre and A.A. firing was also carried out, but details are not yet available.

The "Prinz Eugen" had to visit a yard, not Gotenhafen, for minor adjustments before sailing, but returned to Gotenhafen about 14 May. The actual date of sailing was kept very secret.

V. First and Last Cruise of "Bismarck".

(i) Preliminary Movements.

Admiral LÜTJENS and his staff embarked at 1700 on 18 May, 1941. "Bismarck" sailed at 0200 on 19 May and proceeded alone North of Bornholm to Kiel. "Bismarck" sailed the same evening from Kiel in company with "Prinz Eugen", two destroyers, the "Friedrick Eckholdt" and "Hans Lody", and two boom defence vessels. Prisoners agreed that this cruise was a raiding expedition and that the ship would be at sea for some months. They also thought that she would oil from a tanker. No tropical kit was supplied and it is not known whether she was completed with oil fuel on leaving Gotenhafen.

During the night 19/20 May the Kattegat was negotiated, three Minesweepers preceding the squadron. Later the Minesweepers parted company and a destroyer from the Narvik Flotilla joined. The squadron was off Bergen at 2242 20 May where British reconnaissance aircraft were sighted.

During the night 20/21 May air attacks were anticipated and the crew were at action stations. At 1115 21 May "Bismarck" anchored in a fjord south of Bergen. At 1945 the same evening the squadron sailed and proceeded on a northerly course at 24 knots, being then off the entrance to the Sogne fjord. At 0300/22 the three destroyers parted company. Trondheim was passed at 0700 and, according to a diary, at 2100 the position was given as 68° N – 2° W. At 0400/23 speed was increased to 27 knots and the position was given as 180 miles N.E. of Iceland. At 1030 the passage through the Denmark Strait was commenced. On the evening of this day "Norfolk" and "Suffolk" sighted the enemy and shadowed them during the night in spite of the visibility at times being only one mile. At 1928 on the 23 May "Bismarck" fired three salvos at one of the cruisers which turned away. One of the diaries expressed relief that the enemy had been evaded. At 0415/24 the "Prinz Eugen" reported smoke had been sighted to port. Thus opened the action with the "Hood".

(ii) Action with H.M.S. "Hood".

H.M.S. "Hood" and H.M.S. "Prince of Wales" sighted "Bismarck" in the early morning of 24 May. Action was immediately joined.

According to "Bismarck" prisoners "Hood" first opened fire, the salvo being over. The second salvo was short and the third hit. Prisoners state that three shells in all struck the "Bismarck". Once passed through the bows without exploding but caused the entry of a considerable volume of water in compartments 20, 21 and possibly 22. This was successfully isolated by closing watertight doors and hatches. According to prisoners this hit reduced "Bismarck's" speed to 28 knots. It also created a potential fuel shortage as forward fuel tanks could no longer be used. A second shell struck "Bismarck" on the port beam, below water, against the armoured plating protecting compartment 14. The armoured plating was not penetrated, but sprung, and water entered. This leak was checked by the pumps, but work in the compartment was abandoned owing to escaping steam. The same shell caused damage in the Electrical Turbo-generator room. Some prisoners believe this shell was fired by H.M.S. "Prince of Wales". The third shell passed over the deck without exploding, but it wrecked two pinnaces. Five men were slightly injured by these shells. Kapitänleutnant (Lieutenant-

Commander) Freiherr von Müllenheim-Rechberg, 3rd Gunnery Officer aboard "Bismarck", now a prisoner of war, described the gunnery of the "Hood" as exceptionally good.

The same officer stated that action was joined at 0442 and "Hood" blew up at 0458.

The Commanding officer of H.M.S. "Norfolk" states that "Bismarck's" first salvo was 100 yards short and that the second salvo straddled and hit.

Kapitänleutnant von Müllenheim-Rechberg states that "Hood" blew up on the 3rd salvo after making smoke and turning to port, the smoke possibly assisting ranging. "Bismarck's" hits all landed amidships. It was surmised on board the "Bismarck" that petrol storage tanks provided for "Hood's" aircraft had been fired, and that burning petrol had penetrated below causing the magazine explosion. "Hood" broke her back and sank, the forward half remaining some minutes above water before disappearing. In all "Hood" cost "Bismarck" 40 shells. There was great jubilation on board "Bismarck" which culminated in radioed information from Germany that Hitler had awarded the Knight Insignia of the Iron Cross to Korvettenkapitän (Commander) SCHNEIDER, 1st Gunnery Officer.

(iii) Pursuit of the "Bismarck".

The chase now continued on a South-westerly course with H.M.S. "Norfolk" and H.M.S. "Suffolk" shadowing the enemy. It appeared that "Bismarck's" speed had been slightly reduced, and reconnaissance aircraft of the Coastal Command reported she was leaving a wake of oil. On the evening of 24 May H.M.S. "Prince of Wales" again made contact and action was joined for a short time. The German ships turned to the Westward and the swung to a Southerly course with our forces pursuing.

On 25 May at 0015 naval torpedo-carrying aircraft from H.M.S. "Victorious" made an attack and "Bismarck", according to prisoners, was hit by one or two torpedoes which struck the side but did not penetrate. One of these torpedoes widened the hole made against the side of compartment 14 by a shell during the "Hood" action. As the torpedo struck, a column of water was flung up as high as the masthead. There was one casualty – a Petty Officer who was flung against a bulkhead and suffered a fractured skull.

Prisoners state that a tremendous 'Flak' barrage was put up, guns being fired until red hot. According to one man up to 50,000 rounds of light and heavy 'Flak' ammunition were expended.

Touch with the enemy was lost shortly after 0300 on 25 May when the chase had reached a point approximately 350 miles South South East of the Southern point of Greenland.

According to prisoners "Prinz Eugen" had parted company soon after the "Hood" battle and had proceeded away to refuel.

According to prisoners "Bismarck's" course was now being directed from land by Admiral Carls. Information of powerful British naval concentrations, which he must have received from land, appears, at this time, to have convinced Admiral LÜTJENS of the hopelessness of his position for, at 1150, he called the crew together and, addressing them, stated that while it had been possible to direct the "Prinz Eugen" to safety "Bismarck" had not been able to shake off her pursuers. The British would be able to concentrate their fleet and force then to do battle. It was hoped that help in the form of U-Boats and seaplanes would be forthcoming, but it was feared that the best that could be expected was that "Bismarck" would take one or two of her opponents to the bottom with her. It was therefore up to the crew to remember their oath to be true to the death to the Führer. The effect of this speech on the crew was one of utmost depression. There also appears to have been some friction between the Admiral's Staff and the "Bismarck's" officers and, in addition, according to one prisoner, confusion was increased by incorrect information from land, based on false reports provided by German Air Force reconnaissance planes, which resulted in "Bismarck" losing half a day on her course. The opinion of one prisoner was that this lost half day made all the difference between disaster and safety.

Nevertheless, as the day wore on the hopes of the crew revived. According to the diary of one prisoner "Bismarck" reached the declared area of German U-Boats at 1850 of this day, and he added that: "there is little chance of meeting with British main forces, but it is probable that German U-Boats will be encountered". "Bismarck" was now heading for Cape Finisterre, hoping to creep along the French Atlantic coast to a safe harbour. When the enemy was again sighted at 1030 26 May by a Catalina of the Coastal Command, "Bismarck" was alone and in a position about 550 miles West of Land's End. Touch was lost by this aircraft but regained at 1115 by aircraft flown from H.M.S. "Ark Royal" who continued shadowing until 2230.

Throughout this day which brought no contact with heavy British forces, and no intensive air attack until nightfall, the hopes of the "Bismarck's" crew were high. The arrival of a large flight of German bombers, and a swarm of U-Boats was expected hourly.

Prisoners complained bitterly after their capture that no support at all was vouchsafed to them and that they had been completely let down by both the German Air and U-Boat arms. One prisoner also made a statement suggesting that information was signalled to "Bismarck" that destroyers, which it was intended to send to their relief from Brest, could not put out owing to heavy seas. This prisoner added the comment that it was obvious that the heavy seas did not deter British destroyers.

The next attack on the "Bismarck" came between 2055 and 2155 when an attack was made by 15 Swordfish torpedo aircraft flown from H.M.S. "Ark Royal", under cover of the darkness which the "Bismarck" crew falsely believed was to be their shield. In this attack one torpedo hit amidships on the port side, one on the starboard quarter, and possibly a third on the port quarter. The torpedo which struck to port amidships, according to prisoners, exploded, without doing damage, against compartments 7-8, but that on the starboard quarter wrecked the steering gear, jamming the rudders at 15° and filling compartment 2 with water. This completely disabled "Bismarck" which began to turn slowly in circles. Frantic efforts were now made to repair the damage. According to one account it was announced that the man who succeeded in his task would be given the Knight Insignia of the Iron Cross. The ship was stopped and a diver was lowered over the stern who managed to clear one rudder, but this still did not enable the ship to be steered. There now appears to have been a flare up among the officers and, according to one prisoner, Admiral Lütjens, when asked for further instructions shouted passionately: "Do what you like; I have finished with it". In the midst of this uproar, at 2350, a wireless signal arrived from Hitler reading: "All our thoughts are with our victorious comrades".

Between 0120 and 0150 27 May another attack was made on "Bismarck" by H.M. destroyers and at least two hits were obtained with torpedoes. These hits do not, however, appear to have materially added to the damage already done. (See "Maori's" report).

At this time "Bismarck" was endeavouring to proceed slowly forward, steering with her engines.

By now the crew had become thoroughly alarmed and at 0145 a signal, according to a diary, was passed from the Commander-in-Chief to the Captain: "Please inform the crew that early in the morning 81 Junkers 87 aircraft will join us, in addition two tugs and one tanker. The U-Boats have received orders to close with "Bismarck". K.I. has already arrived." This signal may have been given without justification in order to bolster morale, as no help came.

Two salvos were fired at an unknown ship at 0230. At 0307 one prisoner wrote in his diary: "Everyone is now eagerly awaiting the aircraft promised by the Führer".

The intention of the C-in-C Home Fleet to close "Bismarck" at dawn and sink her by gunfire from H.M.S. "King George V" and H.M.S. "Rodney" who were then in position with H.M.S. "Dorsetshire" and other ships, was abandoned owing to poor visibility and it was not until shortly before 0900 that the British battleships engaged with their heavy armament. "Rodney" opened fire on "Bismarck" at 0847; "King George V" at 0848 ½. "Bismarck" opened fire on "Rodney" at 0850, her first salvo being 1000 yards short. The next salvo straddled the enemy round being only 20 yards short. At 0851 "Rodney" straddled "Bismarck". At 0858 the enemy was firing steadily at "Rodney" with main and secondary armament. Kapitänleutnant von

Müllenheim-Rechberg, when interrogated, ventured the opinion that "Bismarck" could still have held her own against "Rodney" and "King George V" had not a shell from, he believed H.M.S. "Dorsetshire", hit the Main Control Position. This blew out "Bismarck's" brains. Main armament was then put into local control and von Müllenheim-Rechberg moved to "B" turret which was ordered to engage H.M.S. "Dorsetshire". Only one salvo was fired. The gun's crew had become thoroughly demoralised and mutinied and left the turret saying: "We are not going to stay here for target practice." Müllenheim-Rechberg also left the turret. Similar scenes were taking place all over the ship for at this time "Bismarck" was taking terrific punishment.

According to one prisoner one officer drew his revolver and shot down some of the crew when they refused to obey him. Turret after turret was silenced, and communications were wrecked. Shell after shell hit the upper deck which was speedily reduced to a mass of twisted steel scourged ever again by fresh shells. Fires had broken out amidships and aft. Sheets of flame were pouring out of the funnel and the ship's four aircraft were also burning. One shot snapped the mainmast which spun down over the quarter deck creating fresh carnage. Slowly the ship began to heel to port, water began to pour below through ventilators on the port side, water also rendering two port secondary armament turrets useless. Below on the Battery Deck ratings fought to escape with others who jammed the companionways, afraid to run the gauntlet of fire sweeping the decks above. The order to "Abandon Ship" never reached many parts of the vessel. Groups of men acted independently for themselves, but many such groups were blown to pieces before they could leave the ship.

By 0930 "Bismarck" had been completely silenced. By 0940, "Rodney" closing, range was down to 4000 yards. "Rodney's" 16" shells had caused indescribable devastation. One hit had blown the back of "Bismarck's" "B" turret into the water. One straddle made four huge holes in her side. The top of her bridge structure had been blown away. "Rodney" had also fired her outfit of torpedoes scoring at least one direct hit. The ship was an inferno.

Kaptänleutnant von Müllenheim-Rechberg has stated that he saw H.M.S. "Dorsetshire" firing and had been under the impression that 8" shells would be ineffective until they began to hit the "Bismarck". This caused damage considerably greater than expected.

H.M.S. "Dorsetshire" was now ordered in to sink "Bismarck" by torpedoes. There is no definitive evidence from the German side as regards the actual manner of sinking, but there is some reason to believe from prisoners' statements that the inevitable end of "Bismarck" was hastened by the explosion of special fixed "scuttling charges" by members of the crew.

Details are also lacking as to the fate which overcame Admiral Lütjens and Kapitän zur See Lindemann. One prisoner states that as the ship went down he saw the two officers standing side by side at the bow of the vessel waving farewell to those of the crew who were already in the water.

As regards the final phase of the destruction of the "Bismarck" a conversation between two prisoners is worthy of notice. One remarked that a number of members of Germany's Propaganda Kompanie were on board who filmed the scenes during the last battle. His companion said: "If that film was ever shown in Germany there would be no more volunteers for the German Navy.!"

VI. Details of the "Bismarck".

(i) Construction.

No information is as yet available as to exact tonnage; the Engineer Officer prisoner stated that "Bismarck" was 35,000 tons, without fuel.

"Bismarck" was divided into 22 main watertight compartments, longitudinally, numbered from aft. There were no torpedo tubes.

"Bismarck" was degaussed.

Crew space was below the upper deck on the "Batteriedeck" (Main deck) and on the deck below, "Zwischendeck", which was on the top of the armour deck. The ship's company messes according to their divisions.

The officers' quarters were on the upper deck in the superstructure.

"Bismarck" had two parallel rudders, operated electrically.

Bilge keels were fitted, but no bulges.

"Bismarck" rolled somewhat in heavy seas, but there was little pitching.

Below the "Panzerdeck" (armour deck) were three platform decks – "Oberplattformdeck", "Mittelplattformdeck" and "Unterplattformdeck"; and below these the hold "Stauung" and double bottoms (not triple).

The had steering gear was in Compartment 2 on the "Oberplattformdeck", adjacent to the steering motors. There were four steering positions – "Friedensfahrstand" (in front of bridge), "Gefechsfahrstand" (abaft the bridge, armoured portion), "Kommandozentrale" (on "Oberplattformdeck", in Compartment 14) and in the after control position.

One prisoner stated that the length of the ship was 243 metres (797.2 feet) and beam 31 metres (101.7 feet).

(ii) Armour and Protection.

No definitive information has as yet been obtained as to the thickness of armour; all prisoners agreed that this subject was considered most secret. One prisoner stated that the armour had been manufactured by a special process.

The main side armour was stated to extend 1 ½ - 2 ½ metres (4.9 – 8.2 feet) above and below the water-line, and was then tapered to the upper deck and as far down as the "Mittelplattformdeck" (i.e. two deck below the armour deck). The upper deck was stated to be a 5 cm (1.96 inches) armour deck, forming part of the ship's construction.

One prisoner stated that the side armour was 28 cm (11.02 inches) thick. Another prisoner stated that vents for underwater shell explosions were fitted in the armour deck.

(iii) Machinery.

(A) Main Engines: "Bismarck" had 3 propeller shafts.

The starboard and port engine rooms were in Compartment 10, and the after engine room in Compartment 8.

Main engines were turbine, manufactured by Blohm & Voss. Maximum shaft revolutions 240/minute, with 7 to 1 gearing.

Maximum speed obtained during trials was stated to be 31 knots, and that ship made 30 knots at 220 revs/minute. H.P. on each shaft was stated to be 35 – 45 thousand, but no official statement has been made in this respect.

It was stated that the main engines were not damaged during the action.

(B) Boiler Rooms: There were 12 main water tube boilers, two in each of six boiler rooms. Three boiler rooms athwart ships in Compartment 13, and three in Compartment 11.

Auxiliary machinery rooms for the boilers were situated in Compartment 12, between the two groups of boiler rooms. The water-tube boilers were stated to be destroyer type,

working at a very high pressure (40 Atmospheres) and at considerable superheat temperature (400° C?).

It was stated that there were two oil fuel sprayers, one oil heater and one oil fuel pump for each boiler, and two feed pumps in each boiler room.

Stokeholes could be operated closed or open.

One steam blower was fitted for each boiler, and one electric fan in each boiler room.

An auxiliary boiler for ship's heating in harbour was situated in Compartment 14.

(C) Electrical Equipment: Two turbo generators (manufactured by Laumeyer) were situated in Compartment 14 in separate watertight sections, immediately above the double bottom. Compartment 14 was evacuated during the action, and became flooded. These turbo generators supplied D.C. at 220 volts, with a normal output of about 200 amperes, maximum of about 500. Switchboard for these turbo generators in each compartment. In Compartment 8 outside the after engine room were two Diesel generator rooms, each containing 4 Diesel generators, each about 750 H.P.

(iv) Armament.

(A) Main Armament consisted of eight 38 cm (14.9 inch) guns, mounted in four centre line turrets A, B, C and D. These turrets were operated hydraulically. The 38 cm magazines were immediately under the armour deck on the platform deck, and the shell rooms below the magazines on the "Mittelplattformdeck."

The 38 ammunition was supplied in two charges, the main charge ("Hauptkartusche") weighing about 160 lbs., being supplied in a brass cartridge case, and the smaller charge ("Vorkartusche") which is loaded first is supplied in a linen or silk bag, and weighs 80 lbs. Total weight of full charge is therefore 240 lbs. The weight of the shell was given as from 6 cwt. To 800 lbs. The rate of fire was given as one round per minute (both guns). It was stated that one local sight was fitted outside each gun.

(B) Secondary Armament: consisted of twelve 15 cm (5.9 inch) guns, mounted in pairs, in three turrets each side. The charges and shells are stowed in the same compartment. Charges were supplied in brass cartridge cases stated to weigh 25 kilos (55.1 lbs.), the brass cases were stowed in the magazine in additional protected polished iron cases of material about 3 mm (.118 inch) thick. Shells weighted 45 kilos (99.2 lbs.). A prisoner stated that all shells were painted yellow, and were supplied either with nose fuzes (K.Z.Kopfzünder) or with base fuzes (B.D.Z Bodenzünder).

It was stated that 175 shells were supplied per gun.

Subsequent interrogations suggested that armour-piercing shells (P.S. = Panzer Spreng Granaten) were used in both the 15 and 38 cm guns.

Ammunition was stated to be a Cellulose-Glycerine derivative.

Elevation of 15 cm guns stated to be 80°.

(C) A.A.

There were sixteen 10.5 cm A.A. guns in twin mountings on the superstructure deck. In addition there were a number of 10.7 cm and 20 mm A.A. guns. 10.5 cm guns (4.1") had fixed ammunition ("Einheitsmunition"). A splinter shield was provided for the 10.5 cm (4.1") guns. It was stated that twelve men formed a crew of a 10.5 cm twin mounting. One prisoner stated that there were altogether fifty assorted A.A. guns, some of the smaller types being twin and triple mounted.

Notes:-

Flashless propellant is not used for main armament.

No information is as yet available regarding venting of explosions between decks, nor anti-flash arrangements.

The range-taking personnel was 36 in number. Optical rangefinders were stereoscopic, manufactured by Zeiss.

(v) Fire Control.

Optical Rangefinders.

"Maori" reported that there were fifteen optical rangefinders. A prisoner stated that the larger range-finders were 10 metres (32.8 feet) which were used in the main armament turrets and the three main control positions. The H.A. guns used 3 metre (9.8 feet) rangefinders, which were mounted in the two H.A. director towers forward, and two on the deckhouse Decke, i.e. deck above the superstructure (4 in all) as stated by "Maori". Von Mullenheim-Rechberg, the 3^d Gunnery Officer, who has not yet been interrogated, was in the after gun control position (Achtere Stand); this position was not heavily armoured, and received no damage, except that the 10 metre rangefinder was shot away.

Fire control cables were not specially protected.

The after transmitting room (Achtere Artillerie Rechenstelle) was in Compartment 7 on the "Oberplattformdeck". The forward transmitting room (Vord. Artillerie Rechenstelle) was in Compartment 15, as was also the transmitting room for the A.A. guns. "Schaltstellers" (change over switch room) were in proximity to the transmitting rooms for both the main and the A.A. armaments. Once seaman prisoner carried out his duties of "Rechensteller", applying the corrections for speed, deflections etc. on the "Schusswehrrechner", an automatic reckoner made by Siemens. The orders regarding speed etc. were passed from a control tower and after correction transmitted to the guns. It was stated that 10 men operated the "Schusswehrrechner"; the three main 10 metre rangefinders were numbered E.M. 1, 2 and 3 (Entfernungsmesser), the upper one being fitted on the "Vormars" (foremast), the second one on the "Vorderer Stand" (fore Control Position) near the bridge, and the third about the "Achterer Stand" (the After Control Position).

Ranges taken by rangefinders on main turrets were reported to the "Rechenstelle", but were not taken into account, as they were considered unreliable. It was stated the Control Officer (1, Artillerie Offizier) made spotting corrections, after first shot fell, and communicated these corrections direct to turrets and not via the "Rechenstelle". Position of 1.A.O. was in the Vormars, immediately under the rangefinder. Control for secondary armament was in the "Vorderer Stand" (near the bridge). Control for 'Flak' in the two H.A. director towers starboard and portside of superstructure deck.

The close range A.A. weapons (3.7 and 20 mm) were controlled locally, independently of the 10.5 cm (4.1") guns.

Both controlled and barrage ("Zonenfeuer") fire are used.

The 10.5 A.A. guns could either be director fired or independently controlled, the armament being divided into 4 sectors if required.

A prisoner stated that aircraft were not engaged with blind fire while still in cloud.

(vi) Aircraft.

Four Arado Type 115 or 116 reconnaissance aircraft, float type, were carried in hangars on the "Aufbaudeck" (superstructure deck), a single one each side of the funnel, and a double one abaft the funnel. Two fixed catapults ("Flugzeugschleuder") were fitted abaft the funnel, likewise two cranes, electrically driven, which were also used for the boats. It was stated that five motorboats were carried stowed on the "Deckhaus Deck" (deck above the superstructure deck). Catapulting was by air pressure. Trials with the Arados had been carried out in the Baltic, and it was stated that all 4 machines could be catapulted in half an hour; it was understood that the ship had to be stopped to embark the planes.

Planes were not used during this cruise, owing to heavy seas, and the difficulty of re-embarkation.

(vii) R.D/F.

Although it has been reported that the R.D/F arrangements for main and secondary armament were efficient for elevation, no interrogation has as yet given any definitive information regarding these arrangements. One of the 'Flak' rangefinders stated that R.D/F was not used for 'Flak' control. It is known that the R.D/F system is referred to as DT (decimetre telegraphy ?). One prisoner of war stated that, although the Germans are aware that their R.D/F transmissions were being masked, they had a remedy, and were able to fire successfully, in spite of the masking. The D.T. was stated to have been operated by three specialists, and had a range of 30 kilometres (18.6 statute miles). A statement was made that the normal R.D/F referred to as E.E.M.G. (Electrisches Entfernungs Mess Gerät) was of French origin, and had been improved by the Germans, and that the aerials for these were fitted on top of the mast. No information is as yet available regarding cone-type transmitters.

(viii) Damage Control Organisation.

A "Lechwehrzentrale" (Damage Control Centre) existed. From this centre orders were given to flood or pump out various compartments. A telephone system for this purpose was fitted; those communications remained intact during the action. A number of portable salvage pumps were used.

It was stated that a type of Foam apparatus was used.

(ix) Paravanes.

It is thought that "Bismarck" was fitted with paravane gear. One prisoner also stated that an anti-mine device was fitted, which he described as a horizontal bar on the bows below the water.

(x) Fire Appliances.

Electrically driven fire pumps were fitted, supplying usual fire mains. It was stated that there were no automatic fire extinguishing arrangements. The use of some form of Foam apparatus was mentioned.

(xi) Fuelling Arrangements.

No information is as yet available regarding fuel capacity or fuel consumption. A prisoner stated that six thousand tons of fuel oil was taken in before departure. Another prisoner stated that four thousand tons of fuel oil were transferred from the forward to the after tanks when some of the forward compartments were flooded. Electrically driven oil fuel storage pumps (Heissölförderpumpen) were fitted, one in compartment 8 on the Unterplattformdeck, and another in the forepart of the ship.

One prisoner stated that the "Prinz Eugen" had been fuelled from the "Bismarck", but this is not confirmed.

(xii) Anti-gas Measures.

One of the prisoners belonged to an anti-gas party; they had been trained to cope with "Gelbkreuz" gas (mustard gas).

All the prisoners of war had gas masks, which had been tested with tear gas more than once, the most recent instance of a test being February this year.

(xiii) Magazine Flooding and Cooling.

Magazines were fitted with supply and exhaust fans.

Magazine cooling plants (Munitions Kühl Maschinen), brine-operated, were situated in Compartment 17 forward on the Unterplattformdeck, and in Compartment 6.

In addition to magazine flooding arrangements, magazines are fitted with sprays ("Berieselungsanlage"). These sprays are fitted on the roofs of the magazines and can be operated inside the magazine as well as outside; the same applies also to the flooding valves. Once prisoner stated that magazine temperature was 25° C.

It was stated that the larger magazines could be flooded in two minutes.

(xiv) Food.

All prisoners agreed that the food on board was a great improvement on the landlubber's diet. The actual bill of fare of the "Bismarck" for the last two days of her voyage were committed to paper by the clerk (RISSE), who was responsible for typing them. As all German prisoners of wars' accounts of the excellent and plentiful food in Germany is largely wish-fulfilment, this document is highly significant. The actual food is chiefly bulk (soup and potatoes), with bread only for breakfast. The amount of cheese per man is about 2 oz., the coffee probably malt coffee.

25.5.41. Breakfast: Coffee, Butter, Jam.

Lunch: Potatoes with dumpling pudding.

Dinner: Tea, Butter, Egg, Sausage.

26.5.41. Breakfast: Coffee, Dripping.

Lunch: Soup, Potatoes, Sauce, Meat, Lemon.

Dinner: Coffee, Butter, Cheese, Sausage.

(xv) General Notes.

It was stated that no mines were carried.

Cable passages (Käbelganger) were built into the ship on the Oberplattformdeck, i.e. below the armour deck in which the electric cables were run; reserve cables were also supplied.

A refrigerating plant and a refrigerating room were fitted forward in Compartment 17, stated to be operated by S.O₂.

VII. Cruiser "Prinz Eugen".

"Prinz Eugen" was in a yard (not Gotenhafen) shortly before sailing, and returned to Gotenhafen about 14 May. "Prinz Eugen" carried out some exercises with "Bismarck", including firing exercises. "Prinz Eugen" parted company with "Bismarck" on 25 May. One prisoners thought the "Prinz Eugen" had refuelled at sea.

VIII. Other German Main Units.

(a) "Tirpitz".

According to various prisoners' statements, "Tirpitz" arrived at Gotenhafen in January, 1941; she was still undergoing trials when "Bismarck" sailed on 19 May. She had actually left Gotenhafen for further trials a few days before the "Bismarck" sailed.

It was considered likely that she would have to return to Hamburg for overhaul, as the facilities at Gotenhafen were inadequate. One prisoner expressed the opinion that it would be a further 6 months before she was ready.

(b) "Graf Zeppelin".

"Graf Zeppelin" was stated to be in dock in Gotenhafen; it was believed that no further work was being done upon her. She was stated to be by no means finished. One prisoner said that although the guns had been mounted, they had since been removed from the "Graf Zeppelin".

(c) "Lützow".

Several prisoners stated that "Lützow" was undergoing trials from Gotenhafen, and was there from March up to the time "Bismarck" left.

(d) Cruisers.

The following cruisers were stated to be in Gotenhafen:

"Köln" "Emden" "Leipzig" "Nürnberg"

The "Emden" was being used as a "Schulschiff" (Training Ship).

(e) "Schleswig-Holstein".

She was also stated to have been at Gotenhafen.

(f) "Seydlitz".

She was stated to be nearing completion.

IX. Other Ships.

One prisoner stated that whilst in Hamburg he saw about 25 U-Boats being built, but the area in which they are being built is carefully guarded. At Gotenhafen he saw several U-Boats at sea, which he thought were training.

Another prisoner saw three 500 ton U-Boats being built at Blohm & Voss, and during the period he was at Hamburg from December, 1940 to February, 1941, he saw ten completed boats from 300 to 500 tons, leave the dockyard.

One prisoner had worked from 1935 till April, 1940 at the Neptun Werft in Rostock; he stated that about 2,500 workers were employed, and that they were turning out vessels of about 3000 tons.

Von Müllenheim-Rechberg stated that only U-boats and destroyers were being built, and he emphasised the shortage of officers for the U-Boat service.

X. Bases.

(i) Gotenhafen.

Germany is very apprehensive of attack from Russia, since the latter absorbed the Baltic States. There are stated to be large concentrations of troops on the Russian border. For these reasons Gotenhafen is blacked out, and there were even rumours that "Bismarck" would remain in the Baltic.

Adequate facilities for warship refits were not available, although the harbour had been well planned. Some of the buildings ashore had been adapted for naval use in a temporary manner. It was stated that the A.A. defences had been strengthened.

(ii) Plön.

Once prisoner had been employed in training Raider personnel at Plön, and mentioned that the crew of Raider No.26 had been trained by him.