

USS Washington Gunfire on 15 November 1942

0016 to 0019 fired 42 rounds 16", opening at 18,500 yards at large cruiser or BB which it is believed was sunk.¹

From 0100 to 0107 fired 75 16" and 107 rounds 5" at ranges from 8,400 to 12,650 yards.

U.S.S. *Washington* fired S.B. 133 rounds between 0025 and 0034 at ranges of 10,000 yards at light craft engaging U.S. destroyers.

There are eyewitnesses from U.S.S. *South Dakota* which refer to a main battery salvo from the *Washington* that may have hit U.S.S. *Preston*, but this is not part of *Washington's* action report and I have no way to prove it. To my knowledge neither Bob Ballard's expedition nor the Paul Allen group have made any attempt to find the wreck of *Preston* which may be the only way to prove this mystery about the battle.

At 0031 *Washington* reported three excellent optical ranges were obtained on a burning ship at 10,200 yards (*Ayanami*). *South Dakota* 0031.20 fired her eleventh salvo (all Turrets) This range corresponds to *Washington* which is about 7,000 yards astern and to port. *South Dakota* entered into her logs at 0033 of many shells landing over with few short on *Washington*. She reported this fire as a hail of fire equal to what *South Dakota's* secondary battery could put out. There are no Japanese ships to the port side of U.S. forces and no Japanese shore batteries took part in the battle. This gunfire does not correspond to any Japanese ships either. *Ayanami* is firing currently on *Gwin*, setting her on fire amidships. *Nagara* is firing on *Preston* hitting her as well. *Nagara's* destroyers are firing on *Walke* and *Benham*. range 10,700 yards spot MC at the *Ayanami*. *South Dakota* fired at 0031.58 her 12th main battery salvo at the *Ayanami*.

During this part of the action Cdr. Stormes of the *Preston* reported a heavy cruiser came in on the port side of the column virtually undetected. This "cruiser" opened fire on *Preston* at very close range. At 0032 *Preston* was hit on the port side by part of a salvo of she estimated to be eight-inch shells. As near as can be determined the ship was hit by three projectiles. The whole after part of the ship from the stacks aft was a mass of blazing, red-hot wreckage. One projectile hit the engine room exploding after it hit the generators. A second projectile hit between the secondary control section and number three gun. The third projectile hit number four gun. Almost every man aft of the after-machine gun nest was killed, including the executive officer. The gunnery officer gave the order for the guns one and two to continue firing if possible, but the force of the explosion had jammed them both in train and elevation and they could not fire. This gunfire damage may have also coincided with a torpedo hit to starboard simultaneously for the ship immediately listed sharply to starboard and began to settle by the stern.

There were never any Japanese ships to *Preston's* port side. Henry Stewart of *South Dakota* reported in a post war interview – 'At the time of the power outage, Commander Uehlinger [exec of *South Dakota*] and I saw the *Washington* open fire to her starboard, the *Preston*, a destroyer was hit and burning, and to us it looked as if the *Washington's* fire had caused the accident. I was told by Commander Uehlinger to "forget what we just saw." *Washington's* deck logs are blacked out at this critical time period. It appeared *Walke* had taken the *Washington* under fire at 0031 and Commander Taylor of the *Benham* also thought he saw a small cruiser to port aft firing at the rear destroyers. After this point Admiral Lee will not let *Washington* open fire unless he was sure the target was an enemy ship. *Preston's* sudden

¹ Washington, Action Report, Night of November 14-15, 1942, page 1.

USS Washington Gunfire on 15 November 1942

capsizing to starboard in less than 30 seconds may indicate a torpedo hit from the *Ayanami* as it occurred at virtually the same time that gunfire hit her. The gunfire alone would not have caused the sudden capsizing and the ship sinking so fast at the locations given in her report. Certainly, Commander Sakuma believed one of his torpedoes has scored.

If *Washington* did not fire, then *South Dakota's* fired at 0031.58 her 12th main battery salvo at the *Ayanami*. *Preston* may have sailed into her line of fire, or *Washington* is missing a main battery salvo which has been covered up to bury a friendly fire incident. Even if the wreck of *Preston* is located, she can only tell us if she was hit by a 16-inch shell, but not which battleship hit her. So, this mystery is probably unsolvable, but I am certain *Preston* was hit by friendly fire. There are no Japanese ships on her port side period.

Time	Documentation	Salvo	Number of guns	Target	Comments
0016	Main battery opened fire on target at a range of 18,500 yards S.B. opened fire on closer targets possibly DD groups 1 and 3 firing (2 mounts each). Probably about 15,000 yards range, possibly less. S.B. Group officer stated that there appeared to be 3 DD in the group at which he fired. ²	1	9	Sendai	
0016	M.B. spotters blinded by S.B. opening at time of splash. First salvo observed "over" by radar 3 (FC), spotted down Radar 3 lost target after second salvo observed to be a straddle by radar 4 (FC) . Radar operator reported "following the second salvo the indication appeared to drop down and finally disappeared from the screen" M.B. director lost target optically.	2	9	Sendai	Likely second salvo is between 0016-30 and 0016-45 assuming a standard 30 second reload and time for corrections

² Washington, Action Report, Night of November 14-15, 1942., page 8.

USS Washington Gunfire on 15 November 1942

Time	Documentation	Salvo	Number of guns	Target	Comments
	Radar 2 (SG) officer reported that the second or third salvo landed on the target which caused the signal to weaken and then only a fuzzy flicker indication could be found where previous indication had been. Previous signal was very strong; signals from other ships continued strong. ³				
0017	<i>South Dakota</i> opened fire on target to the left and closer near one of the S.B targets. Heavy black smoke from M.B. target and a nearer vessel reported as obscuring the target, possibly smoke screen. Results of S.B. fire undetermined. Three secondary battery radars FD's 7,9, and 10 reported that the first MB salvo straddled the target. It is believed that what they saw was the first salvo of the <i>South Dakota</i> . Second M.B. salvo was fired with radar train, remainder in generated. ⁴	3	9	Sendai	Third salvo was probably fired around this time again considering a 30 second reload and time to adjust. Estimate between 0017 and 0017-15
0018	No entry	4	9	Sendai	Forth salvo estimated between 0017-45 and 0018
0019	M.B. ceased firing as the result of losing the target. ⁵	5	6	Sendai	Fifth salvo estimated between 0018-45 and 0019. Only six gun salvo to reach total of 42 shells fired.

³ Washington, Action Report, Night of November 14-15, 1942., page 8.

⁴ Washington, Action Report, Night of November 14-15, 1942., page 8-9.

⁵ Washington, Action Report, Night of November 14-15, 1942., page 9.

USS Washington Gunfire on 15 November 1942

Time	Documentation	Salvo	Number of guns	Target	Comments
<p>From Brad Fisher via NavWeaps</p> <p>During her 15 November 1942 battle with the Japanese battleship Kirishima, U.S.S. <i>Washington</i> (BB-56) opened fire at a gun range of 18,500 yards (16,900 m) using radar ranges and optical train and hits were definitely obtained by the third salvo. In the first part of the battle, <i>Washington</i> fired 42 rounds in approximately 3 minutes (precise time not available) or 1.56 rpmpg. During the second phase <i>Washington</i> fired 75 rounds in 5 minutes 24 seconds, or 1.54 rpmpg. <i>Washington</i> fired a total of 117 out of a possible 131 shells, or 89%. Of the 14 missed salvos, the most notable was the center gun of turret 3 which missed five salvos due to a ball check valve being jarred loose by the firing shock, causing a loss of hydraulic pressure for that gun. This loss of pressure prevented the pointer from matching up in the load position. One other gun had a misfire which caused it to miss two salvos. The other failures were primarily "error in drill" related.</p>					
0100	<p>Main Battery opened fire bearing 008degrees true, range 8,400 yards on target, apparently a BB.⁶</p> <p>The main battery hit the battleship with at least 3 salvos with projectiles exploding.</p>	6	9	Kirishima	Salvo reported as straddle no hits observed and this is confirmed by testimony from Japanese officers on Kirishima.
0101	No documentation or entry for this time.	7	9	Kirishima	Estimated time accounting for a 30 second reload. This salvo was observed to score one hit in Pagoda superstructure which was confirmed by Kirishima's crew testimony to hit the 03-level compass bridge level and forward telegraph room.
0101-30	No documentation or entry for this time.	8	9	Kirishima	Estimated time. Salvo was observed to land amidships starting fires believe hits are scored around casement gun 9 and hits below casement gun 5 and 7.
0102	Green light reported on port beam. Group 3 hit the ship that had search lights on South Dakota until lights went out,	9	6	Kirishima	Estimated time. Washington fires two six-gun salvos and I believe this is the first. Hits are scored in the forward bow of Kirishima and I also believe

⁶ Washington, Action Report, Night of November 14-15, 1942, page 11.

USS Washington Gunfire on 15 November 1942

Time	Documentation	Salvo	Number of guns	Target	Comments
	then shifted to 2 others in turn until their lights were out. Fires were started on ship which South Dakota was hitting. ⁷				turret one is destroyed on this salvo or the next. Kirishima took at least 17-20 5" hits and Atago took two hits from 5" guns.
0102-30	Cease firing given in control on receipt of erroneous report the target was sunk. ⁸	10	6	Kirishima	Another 6-gun salvo estimated around this time. 39 shells fired.
0103	Reports the enemy was still firing at us apparently with 3 turrets. Believed to have fired 2 salvos in the minute and a half during which fire was ceased. ⁹				
0104	Bride, "If you can see anything to shoot at, go ahead" Main Battery resumed fire. Salvo 2 reported as a short straddle. More hits obtained. Jap BB continued fire with 1 turret aft. Warning given to keep a good lookout for enemy DD's on both bows. ¹⁰	11	9	Kirishima	First salvo observed to be a straddle. Hits to turret two may have occurred at this time but it is not known when turret two was destroyed. Turrets three and four are still operational but firing independently giving the impression only a single turret is operational aft.
0105	No documentation	12	9	Kirishima	Estimated time two hits observed in Kirishima stern. Wreck shows three hits in stern plus a hit into aft hydraulic pump room. Projectile exits hull and detonates under keel damaging both port side propellers.
0106	No documentation	13	9	Kirishima	Kirishima is attempting to withdraw and has her stern pointing directly at Washington. Salvo lands around her stern

⁷ Washington, Action Report, Night of November 14-15, 1942., page 11.

⁸ Washington, Action Report, Night of November 14-15, 1942., page 11.

⁹ Washington, Action Report, Night of November 14-15, 1942., page 11.

¹⁰ Washington, Action Report, Night of November 14-15, 1942., page 11.

USS Washington Gunfire on 15 November 1942

Time	Documentation	Salvo	Number of guns	Target	Comments
					jamming her starboard rudder and breaking the shaft seals to her starboard outboard engine. Kirishima begins to circle to port
0107	Green light reported on port bow. Control reported that forward group was getting to its limit of train (148). Cease firing. Main battery target burning and heading away. Enemy BB ceased firing. Main battery continued to track the burning ship for ten minutes. During this time, she made a turn of at least 500 degrees. ¹¹	14	9	Kirishima	Last salvo observed as a straddle, but two underwater hits scored one into port side hydraulic pump room and turret two magazine port side.
<p>This brings <i>Washington</i> to 117 main battery rounds fired according to her report.</p> <p>Based on the 2019 survey of the Kirishima wreck and accounts from her crew I feel confident U.S.S. <i>Washington</i> hit her between 17-21 times by 16-inch shells and 17-20 times with 5-inch shells. Due to the condition of the wreck not all reported hits can be confirmed.</p>					

¹¹ Washington, Action Report, Night of November 14-15, 1942., page 11.