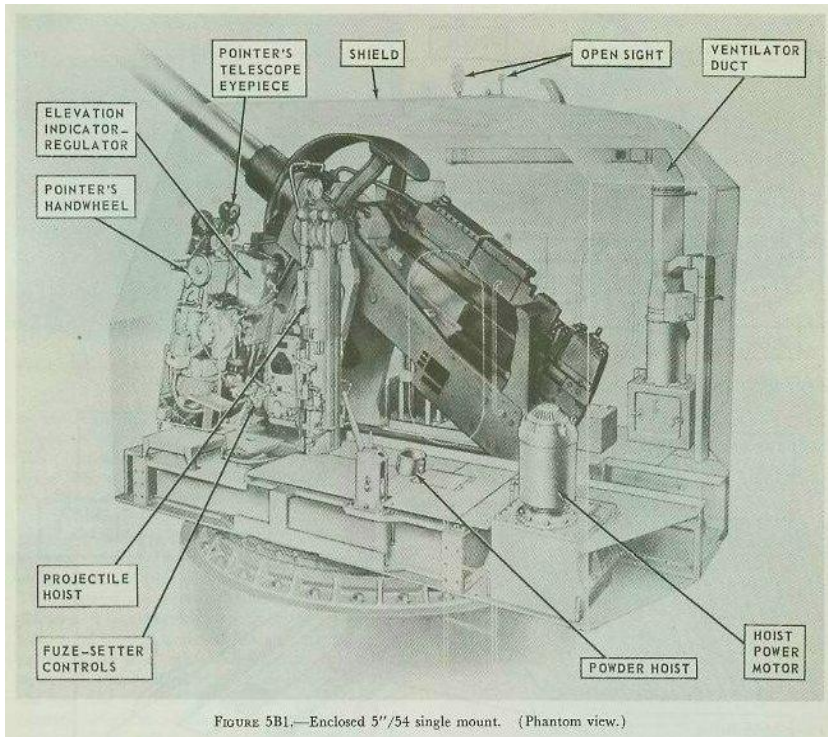


TERROR IN MOUNT 51

Do you remember what it was like inside of a 5"38 gun mount? Here are a couple of pictures to jog your memory and for those of you who have never been inside of a mount you going to get some insight as to what went on. Especially if something goes wrong.



Such was the case while I was a sight-setter in mount 51 on the USS Collett DD 730 (1963-1966).

Do you remember what was involved in loading the gun?

Several things had to happen. In the handling room below the mount, the handlers would place a powder case into the powder hoist and send it up to the inside of the mount. Likewise, a projectile was placed into the projectile hoist and it also was sent up to the inside of the mount. (Refer to top picture for the locations)

Everything was supposed to be a well timed operation.

Before the powder or projectile was loaded into breech, the power spade had to be lowered, then the powder case was loaded then the projectile was loaded in front of the powder. Then the projectile-man would press the lever to ram the powder and projectile into the barrel.

Then automatically, the power spade would retract along the upper channel above the breech and remain there.

When the round was fired, the powder case would be ejected from the barrel - down along the breech - under the power spade and out the rear of the gun.

The next thing to happen was - the power spade was lowered so that the procedure could be repeated.

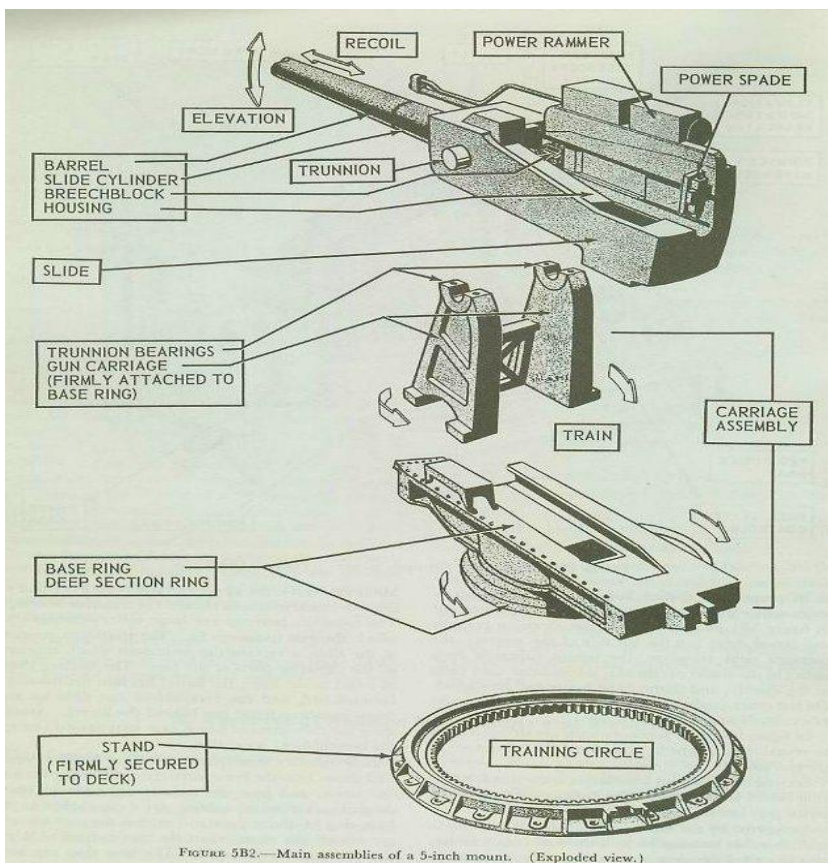
All of this was going on as the ship was rockin' and rollin'. And - to make things worse, Anti-Aircraft fire meant the barrel was constantly moving - up and down and the entire mount was moving left or right.

Well. . . That's where the story begins.

On this one - not so nice day, we were having AA practice trying to knock down the sleeve that was being towed behind a plane. The wave heights were about 10-12 feet. Not a very nice ride at all.

Several rounds were fired with out incident. Then

the seas got the best of the spade man and he got a little disoriented and his timing was off. The powder man never paid attention to the spade.



Due to the rapid fire and everything that was going on, I guess since we operated like a well oiled machine, he assumed all was ok and he placed the powder case in the breech before the spade was lowered. The projectile man saw something was amiss and did not load the projectile.

The powder case was sliding toward the rear of the gun because the spade was not lowered. As the barrel angle increased upward, the powder kept moving and began to exit the rear of the breech.

The mount captain had the ability to freeze the mount but did not see what was happening until it was too late.

The powder case was more than half way out of the breech when the barrel started going down. As the powder case finally exited the rear of the breech, and having no force behind it, it fell straight down. Due to the angle with which it hit the deck, it fell forward and laid half way in the cavity below the gun (see the top figure where the rear of the gun seem to be below the surface of the deck). The barrel angle started to increase causing the rear of the gun to go down. The gun came down on top of the powder case and started to crush it. It was at this time, the mount captain froze the mount.

So there we are inside of a gun mount with a full powder case crushed and nearly cut in half under the gun. Now What!!

I have to admit I was scared and just figured myself for dead. If it was going to blow - Oh Well!

When things calmed down, the decision was made to lower the barrel, remove the powder case and toss it over the side.