

= SMS Gneisenau =

SMS Gneisenau was an armored cruiser of the German navy , part of the two ship Scharnhorst class . She was named after August von Gneisenau , a Prussian general of the Napoleonic Wars . The ship was laid down in 1904 at the AG Weser dockyard in Bremen , launched in June 1906 , and completed in March 1908 , at a cost of over 19 million goldmarks . She was armed with a main battery of eight 21 cm (8 in) guns , had a top speed of 23 knots (43 km / h ; 27 mph) , and displaced 12 985 metric tons (12 780 long tons ; 14 314 short tons) at full combat load .

Gneisenau was assigned to the German East Asia Squadron based in Tsingtao , China , along with Scharnhorst , in 1910 . They served as the core of Vice Admiral Maximilian von Spee 's fleet . After the outbreak of World War I in August 1914 , the two ships , accompanied by three light cruisers and several colliers , sailed across the Pacific ocean in the process evading the various Allied naval forces sent to intercept them before arriving off the southern coast of South America . On 1 November 1914 , Gneisenau and the rest of the East Asia Squadron encountered and overpowered a British squadron at the Battle of Coronel . The stinging defeat prompted the British Admiralty to detach two battlecruisers to hunt down and destroy von Spee 's flotilla , which they accomplished at the Battle of the Falkland Islands on 8 December 1914 .

= = Construction = =

Gneisenau was laid down at the AG Weser shipyard in Bremen , Germany in 1904 , under construction number 144 . She was launched on 14 June 1906 , and commissioned into the fleet nearly two years later on 6 March 1908 . The ship cost the German government 19 243 000 goldmarks . The ship had been designed for service with the High Seas Fleet , though they were found to be too weak for service with the battle fleet ; instead they were deployed overseas , a role in which they performed well .

Gneisenau was 144 m (474 ft) long overall , and had a beam of 21 m (71 ft) , a draft of 8 m (27 ft 7 in) . The ship displaced 11 616 metric tons (11 433 long tons ; 12 804 short tons) standard , and 12 985 t (12 780 long tons ; 14 314 short tons) at full load . Gneisenau 's crew consisted of 38 officers and 726 enlisted men . The ship was powered by coal fired triple expansion engines that provided a top speed of 23 knots (43 km / h ; 27 mph)

Gneisenau 's primary armament consisted of eight 21 cm (8 in) SK L / 40 guns , four in twin gun turrets , one fore and one aft of the main superstructure , and the remaining four were mounted in single wing turrets . Secondary armament included six 15 cm (5 in) SK L / 40 guns in MPL casemates , and eighteen 8 cm (3 in) guns mounted in casemates . She was also equipped with four 44 cm (17 in) submerged torpedo tubes . One was mounted in the bow , one on each broadside , and the fourth was placed in the stern .

= = Service history = =

Field Marshal Alfred von Schlieffen , the former Chief of the General staff , christened the ship at her commissioning on 6 March 1908 . Captain Franz von Hipper was the ship 's first commanding officer ; he took command of the ship the day she was commissioned . He was tasked with conducting the ship 's shakedown cruise , which lasted from 26 March to the middle of July . She officially joined the fleet on 12 July . The ship then departed for Asia , though Hipper left the ship and went on to command the I Torpedo boat Division in Kiel . Gneisenau was assigned to the Ostasiengeschwader (East Asia Squadron) , where in 1910 she joined Scharnhorst , which had been assigned to the unit the previous year . The two ships formed the core of the squadron , with Scharnhorst serving as the flagship . The pair were crack gunnery ships ; Gneisenau won the Kaiser 's Cup four times during her career : twice while in German waters in 1908 and 1909 and twice in Asia in 1910 and 1911 , and Scharnhorst 's finished in second place in 1913 and 1914 .

In June 1914 , the annual summer cruise of the East Asia Squadron began ; Gneisenau rendezvoused with Scharnhorst in Nagasaki , Japan , where they received a full supply of coal . They then sailed south , arriving in Truk in early July where they restocked their coal supplies . While en route , they received news of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo . On 17 July , the East Asia Squadron arrived in Ponape in the Caroline Islands . Here , von Spee had access to the German radio network , where he learned of the Austro - Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia and the Russian mobilization . On 31 July , word came that the German ultimatum , which demanded the demobilization of Russia 's armies , was set to expire . Von Spee ordered his ships be stripped for war . On 2 August , Kaiser Wilhelm II ordered German mobilization against France and Russia .

= = = World War I = = =

At the outbreak of World War I the East Asia Squadron consisted of Gneisenau and Scharnhorst , and the light cruisers Emden , Nürnberg , and Leipzig . On 6 August 1914 , Gneisenau , Scharnhorst , the supply ship Titania , and the Japanese collier Fukoku Maru were still in Ponape ; von Spee had issued orders to recall the light cruisers , which had been dispersed on various cruises around the Pacific . Nürnberg joined von Spee that day . Von Spee decided the best place to concentrate his forces was Pagan Island in the northern Marianas Islands , a German possession in the central Pacific . All available colliers , supply ships , and passenger liners were ordered to meet the East Asia Squadron there . On 11 August , von Spee arrived in Pagan ; he was joined by several supply ships , as well as Emden and the auxiliary cruiser Prinz Eitel Friedrich .

The flotilla was reinforced with the arrival of Emden and Nürnberg ; the ships then departed the central Pacific , bound for Chile . On 13 August the captain of Emden , Commodore Karl von Müller , persuaded von Spee to detach his ship for commerce raiding . On 14 August , the East Asia Squadron departed Pagan for Enewetak Atoll in the Marshall Islands . The ships again coaled after their arrival on 20 August . In order to keep the German high command informed , von Spee detached Nürnberg on 8 September to Honolulu to send word through neutral countries . Nürnberg brought back news of the Allied capture of the German colony at Samoa on 29 August . Gneisenau and Scharnhorst sailed to Apia to investigate the situation , but on 14 September found no suitable targets .

At the Battle of Papeete on 22 September , Gneisenau and the rest of the East Asia Squadron bombarded the colony . During the bombardment , the French gunboat Zélée was sunk by gunfire from the German ships . Fear of mines in the harbor prevented von Spee from seizing the coal that lay in the harbor . By 12 October , Gneisenau and the rest of the squadron had reached Easter Island . There they were joined by Dresden and Leipzig , which had sailed from American waters . Dresden was stationed in the Caribbean , but had been in San Francisco when von Spee issued the order to consolidate German naval forces in the Pacific . After a week off Easter Island , the ships departed for the Chilean mainland .

= = = Battle of Coronel = = =

To oppose the German squadron off the coast of South America , the British had scant resources ; under the command of Rear Admiral Christopher Craddock were the armored cruisers HMS Good Hope and Monmouth , the light cruiser Glasgow , and the auxiliary cruiser Otranto . This flotilla was reinforced by the elderly pre - dreadnought battleship Canopus and the armored cruiser Defence , the latter , however , did not arrive until after the Battle of Coronel . Canopus was left behind by Craddock , who likely felt that her slow speed would prevent him from bringing the German ships to battle .

On the evening of 26 October , Gneisenau and the rest of the squadron steamed out of Mas a Fuera , Chile , and headed eastward . Von Spee learned that Glasgow had been spotted in Coronel on the 31st , and so turned toward the port . He arrived on the afternoon of 1 November , and to his surprise , encountered Good Hope , Monmouth , and Otranto as well as Glasgow . Canopus was

still some 300 miles (480 km) behind , escorting the British colliers . At 17 : 00 , Glasgow spotted the Germans ; Craddock formed a line with Good Hope in the lead , followed by Monmouth , Glasgow , and Otranto in the rear . Von Spee decided to hold off on engaging the British until the sun had set more , at which point the British ships would be silhouetted by the sun . At this point , Craddock realized the uselessness of Otranto in the line of battle , and so detached her .

At 19 : 00 , the German ships closed to attack . In the span of five minutes , the German cruisers ' guns had seriously damaged Good Hope , which was destroyed by a magazine explosion . Monmouth attempted to escape to the south ; she was burning furiously and her guns had fallen silent . Nürnberg closed to point @-@ blank range of Monmouth and poured shells into her . Glasgow was forced to abandon Monmouth after 20 : 20 , before fleeing south and meeting with Canopus . Monmouth eventually capsized and sank at 21 : 18 . Over 1 @,@ 600 men were killed in the sinking of the two armored cruisers , including Admiral Craddock ; German losses were negligible . However , the German ships had expended over 40 % of their ammunition supply .

= = = Battle of the Falkland Islands = = =

Once word of the defeat reached London , the Royal Navy set to organizing a force to hunt down and destroy the East Asia Squadron . To this end , the powerful new battlecruisers Invincible and Inflexible were detached from the Grand Fleet and placed under the command of Vice Admiral Doveton Sturdee . The two ships left Devonport on 10 November , and while en route to the Falkland Islands , they were joined by the armored cruisers Carnarvon , Kent , and Cornwall , the light cruisers Bristol and Glasgow , and the Otranto . The force of eight ships reached the Falklands by 7 December , where they immediately coaled .

Gneisenau and Nürnberg , the first two ships in the German line , approached the Falklands on the same morning , with the intention of destroying the wireless transmitter there . Observers aboard Gneisenau spotted the two battlecruisers in the harbor of Port Stanley , and when 30 @.@ 5 cm (12 @.@ 0 in) shells were fired from Canopus , which had been beached as a guard ship , the Germans turned to flee . The Germans took a south @-@ easterly course at 22 kn (41 km / h ; 25 mph) . Von Spee formed his line with Gneisenau and Nürnberg ahead , Scharnhorst in the center , and Dresden and Leipzig astern . The fast battlecruisers quickly got up steam and sailed out of the harbor to pursue the East Asia Squadron .

By 13 : 20 , the faster British ships had caught up with Gneisenau and the other cruisers , and began to fire at a range of 14 km (8 @.@ 7 mi) . Von Spee realized his armored cruisers could not escape the much faster battlecruisers , and so ordered the three light cruisers to attempt to break away while he turned about to engage the British with Gneisenau and Scharnhorst . However , Sturdee detached his armored and light cruisers to pursue the German light cruisers , while the battlecruisers dealt with Gneisenau and Scharnhorst . Inflexible attacked Gneisenau while Invincible opened fire at Scharnhorst . Sturdee attempted to widen the distance by turning two points to the north to prevent von Spee from closing to within the range of his smaller 8 @.@ 2 in (21 cm) guns . Von Spee counteracted this maneuver by turning rapidly to the south , which forced Sturdee to turn south as well . This allowed Scharnhorst and Gneisenau to get close enough to engage with their secondary 5 @.@ 9 in (15 cm) guns ; their shooting was so effective that it forced the British to haul away temporarily .

At 16 : 04 , Scharnhorst was observed from Inflexible as having rapidly listed to port , and she sank at 16 : 17 . Shortly before she sank , von Spee transmitted one last order to Gneisenau : " Endeavor to escape if your engines are still intact . " Damage to the ship 's boiler rooms had reduced her speed to 16 kn (30 km / h ; 18 mph) , however , and so the ship continued to fight on . Gneisenau scored a hit on Invincible as late as 17 : 15 . By 17 : 30 , however , the ship was a burning wreck ; she had a severe list to starboard and smoke poured from the ship , which came to a stop . Ten minutes later , the British ships closed in and the flag on Gneisenau 's foremast was struck ; at 17 : 50 , Sturdee ordered his ships to cease fire . Gneisenau 's captain ordered the crew to scuttle the ship , as they had expended their ammunition and the engines were disabled . The ship slowly rolled over and sank , but not before allowing some 200 of the survivors time to escape . Of these

men , many died quickly from exposure in the 39 ° F (4 ° C) water . A total of 598 men of her crew were killed in the engagement . Leipzig , and Nürnberg were also sunk . Only Dresden managed to escape , but she was eventually tracked to the Juan Fernandez Island and sunk . The complete destruction of the squadron killed some 2 @, @ 200 German sailors and officers , including two of von Spee 's sons .