

= Action off Lofoten =

The Action off Lofoten was a naval battle fought between the German Kriegsmarine and the British Royal Navy off the southern coast of the Lofoten Islands , Norway during World War II . A German squadron under Vizeadmiral Günther Lütjens consisting of the battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau met and engaged a British squadron under Admiral Sir William Whitworth consisting of the battlecruiser HMS Renown and 9 destroyers . After a short engagement , Gneisenau suffered moderate damage and the Germans withdrew .

= = Background = =

The German invasion of Norway , Operation Weserübung , began on 9 April 1940 . In order to prevent any disruption of the invasion by the British , the Kriegsmarine had previously dispatched a force under Vice Admiral Günther Lütjens to protect the troop convoy landing at Narvik . The German squadron consisted of the battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau , the heavy cruiser Admiral Hipper , and 10 destroyers . With intelligence suggesting that the Germans were massing ships , the British sent out a squadron under Admiral Sir William Whitworth to deny German access to neutral Norwegian waters by laying mines in Operation Wilfred and prevent any German naval movements into the Atlantic Ocean .

Shortly after departing German waters on 7 April , Lütjens ' force was attacked by British bombers which did no damage to the squadron . On 8 April , Admiral Hipper and the German destroyers were dispatched to Narvik while the German capital ships headed north for a diversionary manoeuvre into the North Atlantic . As Admiral Hipper left , she met and engaged the British destroyer HMS Glowworm which had become separated from Admiral Whitworth ' s main force . Though Vizeadmiral Lütjens ' and the two German battleships ' was nearby , their assistance was deemed unnecessary , and Admiral Hipper sank Glowworm , though taking some damage in return . Whitworth ' s main force then caught sight of the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau at 03 : 30 on 9 April and moved to engage the battleships .

Whitworth ' s force consisted of the battlecruiser Renown and the nine remaining destroyers . HMS Hotspur , Hardy , Havock , and Hunter were " H " -class destroyers while HMS Esk was an " E " -class destroyer and HMS Ivanhoe , Icarus , and Impulsive were of the " I " classes . HMS Greyhound was of the " G " class . Renown had been completely reconstructed between 1936 and 1939 , with lighter machinery , increased armour and upgraded armament . She mounted a main battery of six 42 @-@ calibre 15 @-@ inch guns with improved shells and greater range and a dual @-@ purpose secondary battery consisting of twenty 4 @.@ 5 inch (QF 4 @.@ 5 inch L / 45) arranged in ten turrets [The four " I " and " E " -class destroyers had been rigged for mine laying and most of their normal armament had been removed ; they only possessed two 4 @.@ 7 @-@ inch (120 mm) guns each . Greyhound and the " H " -class destroyers were more capable ships , with each armed with eight torpedo tubes and four 4 @.@ 7 @-@ inch guns . Of the H @-@ class destroyers , Hardy was built as a destroyer leader and thus had an additional 4 @.@ 7 @-@ inch gun .

The German force consisted of the two Scharnhorst @-@ class battleships , each with a main battery of nine 28 @.@ 3 cm guns and a secondary battery of twelve 15 cm guns . In a close range engagement , the British force was superior , but at a distance the guns on Whitworth ' s destroyers were outranged and the German firepower was greater . The German force also held a speed advantage over Renown , having a top speed of 32 knots (59 km / h ; 37 mph) to the battlecruiser ' s 30 knots (56 km / h ; 35 mph) , but was slower than the destroyers , which could steam at 36 knots (67 km / h ; 41 mph) . Thus , Lütjens clearly held an advantage over Renown , though the German force was significantly vulnerable to attack from Whitworth ' s destroyers .

= = Battle = =

At 04 : 30 , Gneisenau sighted Renown on its radar and the German ships cleared for action . Due to poor weather conditions , neither side was able to engage the other until 05 : 05 , as heavy seas

and poor visibility prevented the two squadrons from closing within range . Renown began the action by attacking Gneisenau with her 15 @-@ inch guns . The German warships returned fire at 05 : 08 with Gneisenau scoring two hits on Renown with her 11 inch shells . Both shells failed to explode , with the first hitting the British battlecruiser ' s foremast and the second passing through the ship near the steering gear room . About the same time , Renown struck Gneisenau with two shells . These hits damaged the German battleship ' s director tower , forward range finders , and aft turret . Renown then moved her fire to Scharnhorst . These early salvos were sporadic and lasted until 06 : 00 , when the engagement was broken off for 20 minutes due to waves breaking over Renown ' s forward turrets .

At 06 : 20 , the action reignited , with ineffectual fire coming from both sides . Fearing a torpedo attack on the damaged Gneisenau , the Germans increased their speed and disengaged at 07 : 17 . The German battleships retreated when Renown ' s escorts opened fire , despite the fact that the destroyers ' guns did not have sufficient range to successfully engage Lütjens ' ships . The Germans mistook Whitworth ' s smaller vessels for much more powerful capital ships and as a result thought they were heavily outgunned . Determined to steer clear of what he thought was a superior force , Lütjens managed to shake off the British squadron and end the action by sailing west into the Arctic Ocean .

= = Aftermath = =

Despite the Royal Navy winning a minor tactical victory over the Kriegsmarine , the Germans considered the engagement a strategic success due to the fact that Whitworth ' s force was delayed long enough to keep it from interfering with the landings at Narvik . After the action had ended , Whitworth ' s force continued to search for the German capital ships . With the British squadron occupied , the German destroyer @-@ transports managed to make their way through to Narvik after destroying two Norwegian coastal defence ships in their path . After their engagement with Renown , the German battleships linked up with Admiral Hipper on the 11th near Trondheim . From there , they returned to Germany , reaching Wilhelmshaven on 12 April where the damage to Gneisenau was repaired .