

= Maximilian von Spee =

Maximilian Reichsgraf von Spee (22 June 1861 ? 8 December 1914) was a naval officer of the German Kaiserliche Marine (Imperial Navy) , who famously commanded the German East Asia Squadron during World War I. Spee entered the navy in 1878 and served in a variety of roles and locations , including on a colonial gunboat in German West Africa in the 1880s , the East Africa Squadron in the late 1890s , and as commander of several warships in the main German fleet in the early 1900s . During his time in Germany in the late 1880s and early 1890s , he married his wife , Margareta , and had three children , his sons Heinrich and Otto and his daughter Huberta . By 1912 , he had returned to the East Asia Squadron as its commander , and was promoted to the rank of Vizeadmiral (Vice Admiral) the following year .

After the outbreak of World War I in July 1914 , Spee led his squadron across the Pacific to the coast of South America . Here on 1 November , he defeated the British 4th Cruiser Squadron under Rear Admiral Christopher Cradock in the Battle of Coronel , sinking two of Cradock 's cruisers and forcing his other two ships to retreat . A month later , Spee decided to attack the British naval base in the Falkland Islands , though a superior British force surprised him . In the ensuing Battle of the Falkland Islands , Vice Admiral Doveton Sturdee 's squadron , which included two powerful battlecruisers , destroyed the East Asia Squadron . Spee and his two sons , who happened to be serving on two of his ships , were all killed , along with about 2 @, @ 200 other men . Spee was hailed as a hero in Germany , and several ships were named in his honor , including the heavy cruiser Admiral Graf Spee , which was built in the 1930s and was defeated in the Battle of the River Plate during World War II .

= = Early career = =

Maximilian Johannes Maria Hubert von Spee was born in Copenhagen , Denmark , on 22 June 1861 , though he was raised in the Rhineland in Germany , where his family had an estate . He joined the Kaiserliche Marine (Imperial Navy) in 1878 and initially served in the main German naval base at Kiel . He was commissioned an officer at the rank of Leutnant zur See (Lieutenant at Sea) , and was assigned to the gunboat SMS Möwe , which was sent to western Africa . During this voyage , the Germans signed treaties with local rulers in Togo and Cameroon , creating the colonies of Togoland and Kamerun , respectively . In 1887 , Spee was transferred to Kamerun where he commanded the port at Duala . He contracted rheumatic fever while there , and had to be sent back to Germany to recover , though he occasionally suffered from rheumatism for the rest of his life . After returning to Germany in 1889 , he married his wife , Margareta Baroness von der Osten @-@ Sacken . With her he had two sons ? Otto , born on 10 July 1890 , Heinrich , born on 24 April 1893 ? and one daughter , Huberta , born on 11 July 1894 .

In December 1897 , Spee was stationed in Germany 's East Asia Squadron after it seized the concession at Kiautschou Bay , with its port at Tsingtao . Here , he served on the staff of Vizeadmiral Otto von Diederichs . During the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900 , Spee saw action at Tsingtao and on the Yangtze . After arriving back in Germany , he was promoted to the rank of Korvettenkapitän (Corvette Captain) and assigned as the first officer aboard the pre @-@ dreadnought battleship Brandenburg . Between 1900 and 1908 , Spee held command of several ships , including the aviso Hela , the minelayer Pelikan , and finally the pre @-@ dreadnought Wittelsbach . During this period , he was promoted to Fregattenkapitän (Frigate Captain) on 27 January 1904 and to Kapitän zur See (Captain at Sea) exactly a year later ; his command of Wittelsbach followed the latter promotion . In 1908 , he was assigned as the chief of staff to the commander of the North Sea Station , and in 1910 he was promoted to the rank of Konteradmiral (KAdm ? Counter Admiral) . Spee was then assigned as the deputy commander for the reconnaissance forces of the High Seas Fleet .

= = East Asia Squadron = =

In late 1912 , Spee was given command of the East Asia Squadron , replacing KAdm Günther von Krosigk on 4 December . Spee raised his flag on the armored cruiser Scharnhorst , and departed on a tour of the southwest Pacific along with Scharnhorst 's sister ship Gneisenau , during which Spee made visits to several ports , including Singapore and Batavia . Spee was promoted to Vizeadmiral the following year . Over the following year and a half , Spee met with the leaders of several East Asian countries . From 1 April to 7 May 1913 , Scharnhorst took Spee to Japan to meet the Taishō Emperor . Later in the year , Spee met with Chulalongkorn , the King of Siam . In May 1914 , Spee took Scharnhorst and the torpedo boat S90 on a visit to Port Arthur and then to Tianjin ; Spee continued on to Beijing , where he met with Yuan Shikai , the first President of the Republic of China . He came back aboard Scharnhorst on 11 May and the ship returned to Tsingtao .

Spee thereafter began preparations for a cruise to German New Guinea ; Scharnhorst departed on 20 June . The two armored cruisers proceeded to Nagasaki , Japan , where they coaled in preparation for their tour . While en route to Truk in the Caroline Islands , they received news of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand , heir to the throne of Austria @-@ Hungary . On 17 July , the East Asia Squadron arrived in Ponape in the Carolines , where the ships remained while tensions steadily rose in Europe . In Ponape , Spee had access to the German radio network , and he learned of the Austro @-@ Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia on 28 July , followed shortly thereafter by the Russian mobilization ? tantamount to a declaration of war ? against Austria @-@ Hungary and possibly Germany . On 31 July , word came that the German ultimatum that Russia demobilize its armies was set to expire ; Spee ordered his ships ' crews to prepare for war . On 2 August , Wilhelm II ordered German mobilization against Russia and its ally , France . Following Germany 's violation of neutral Belgium during its invasion of France , Britain declared war on Germany .

= = = World War I = = =

The East Asia Squadron consisted of Scharnhorst and Gneisenau and the light cruisers Emden , Nürnberg , and Leipzig . At the time , Nürnberg was returning from the west coast of the United States , where Leipzig had just replaced her , and Emden was still in Tsingtao . Spee recalled his ships to consolidate his forces ; Nürnberg arrived on 6 August and the three cruisers plus their colliers moved to Pagan Island in the Marianas , at that time a German colony . Emden and the liner Prinz Eitel Friedrich , which had been converted into an auxiliary cruiser , joined the squadron there on 12 August . The four cruisers , accompanied by Prinz Eitel Friedrich and several colliers , then departed the central Pacific , bound for Chile . On 13 August , Commodore Karl von Müller , captain of the Emden , persuaded Spee to detach his ship as a commerce raider . On 14 August , the East Asia Squadron departed Pagan for Enewetak Atoll in the Marshall Islands . While en route across the Pacific , Spee relaxed formalities aboard his ships , integrating the messes for officers and non @-@ commissioned and engineering officers .

To keep the German high command informed , on 8 September Spee detached Nürnberg to Honolulu to send word through neutral countries . Nürnberg returned with news of the Allied capture of German Samoa , which had taken place on 29 August . Scharnhorst and Gneisenau sailed to Apia to investigate the situation . Spee had hoped to catch a British or Australian warship by surprise , but upon his arrival on 14 September , he found no warships in the harbor . Spee decided against attacking the Allied troops ashore , since doing so would risk killing Samoans and damaging German property . On 22 September , Scharnhorst and the rest of the East Asia Squadron arrived at the French colony of Papeete . The Germans attacked the colony , and in the ensuing Battle of Papeete , they sank the French gunboat Zélée . The ships came under fire from French shore batteries but were undamaged . Fear of mines in the harbor prevented Spee from seizing the coal in the harbor . Spee then continued across the Pacific , passing through the Marquesas Islands , where his ships acquired supplies including fresh meat by barter , purchase , or confiscation . On 12 October , the squadron reached Easter Island , where it was reinforced by Leipzig , Dresden , and four more colliers . Spee 's ships were off the coast of Chile by 1 November , when he learned that the British cruiser Glasgow was moored in Coronel , ostensibly alone ; he decided to try to sink the

ship .

=== Battle of Coronel ===

Glasgow was assigned to the 4th Cruiser Squadron , under Rear Admiral Christopher Cradock ; as it turned out , Glasgow was joined by the armored cruisers Good Hope and Monmouth and the auxiliary cruiser Otranto . After discovering the entire squadron off Coronel , Spee decided to engage the British ships , but he delayed the action using his ships ' superior speed until later in the day , when the setting sun would silhouette Cradock 's ships . The German ships would meanwhile be obscured against the Chilean coast , making the task of the British gunners more difficult . At 18 : 07 , Spee issued the order to open fire , with his two armored cruisers battling Cradock 's armored cruisers and his light cruisers engaging Glasgow and Otranto . Cradock quickly detached Otranto , as she had no place in the line of battle . By 18 : 50 , Gneisenau had disabled Monmouth and so shifted fire to Good Hope ; the combined firepower of Scharnhorst and Gneisenau neutralized Good Hope by 19 : 23 . Spee then withdrew his two armored cruisers and sent in his light cruisers to finish off Monmouth and Good Hope . The British had lost both ships and suffered more than 1 @, @ 600 dead , including Cradock , though the German ships had expended around 40 percent of their ammunition supply . Spee had inflicted the first defeat on a Royal Navy squadron since the Napoleonic Wars a century earlier .

After the battle , Spee took his ships north to Valparaiso . Since Chile was neutral , only three ships could enter the port at a time ; Spee took Scharnhorst , Gneisenau , and Nürnberg in first on the morning of 3 November , leaving Dresden and Leipzig with the colliers at Mas a Fuera . There , Spee 's ships could take on coal while he conferred with the Admiralty Staff in Germany to determine the strength of remaining British forces in the region . In addition , Spee sought to counter British press reports that attempted to minimize their losses and exaggerate German casualties . A reception followed at the German Club of Valparaiso , though Spee insisted that the event be restrained in tone . He received a bouquet of flowers to celebrate the victory at Coronel ; Spee replied that they would do nicely for his grave . He stated that ,

You must not forget that I am quite homeless . I cannot reach Germany . We possess no other secure harbor . I must fight my way through the seas of the world doing as much mischief as can , until my ammunition is exhausted , or a foe far superior in power succeeds in catching me . But it will cost the wretches dearly before they take me down .

While in port , Spee received the order from the Admiralty Staff to attempt to break through to Germany . The ships remained in the port for only 24 hours , in accordance with the neutrality restrictions , and arrived at Mas a Fuera on 6 November , where they took on more coal from captured British and French steamers . Dresden and Leipzig took their turn in Valparaiso , after which the re @-@ formed squadron continued south and rounded Cape Horn into the South Atlantic . In the meantime , the Royal Navy sent a pair of battlecruisers ? Invincible and Inflexible ? commanded by Vice Admiral Doveton Sturdee to hunt down Spee 's squadron and avenge Cradock 's defeat .

=== Battle of the Falkland Islands ===

On the morning of 6 December , Spee held a conference with the ship commanders aboard Scharnhorst to determine their next course of action . The Germans had received numerous fragmentary and contradictory reports of British reinforcements in the region ; Spee and two other captains favored an attack on the Falkland Islands to destroy the British wireless station there , while three other commanders argued that it would be better to bypass the islands and attack British shipping off Argentina . Spee 's opinion carried the day and the squadron departed for the Falkland Islands at 12 : 00 on 6 December . The ships arrived off the Falkland Islands two days later ; Gneisenau and Nürnberg were delegated for the attack . As they approached , observers aboard Gneisenau spotted smoke rising from Port Stanley , but assumed it was the British burning their coal stocks to prevent the Germans from seizing them . As they closed on the harbor , 30 @. @ 5 cm (12

@. @ 0 in) shells from the elderly battleship Canopus , which had been beached as a guard ship , began to fall around the German ships , which prompted Spee to break off the attack . As Spee withdrew , Sturdee quickly got steam up in his ships and sortied to chase the Germans .

By 13 : 20 , the battlecruisers had caught up with Spee , who realized his armored cruisers could not escape the much faster battlecruisers . He ordered the three light cruisers to attempt to break away while he tried to hold off the British squadron with Scharnhorst and Gneisenau . Sturdee instead ordered his cruisers to chase down the fleeing German light cruisers while Invincible and Inflexible dealt with Scharnhorst and Gneisenau . Spee deftly maneuvered his ships , taking the leeward position ; the wind kept his ships swept of smoke , which improved visibility for his gunners . This forced Sturdee into the windward position and its corresponding worse visibility . Scharnhorst straddled Invincible with her third salvo and quickly scored two hits on the British battlecruiser . The German flagship was herself not hit during this phase of the battle . Sturdee attempted to widen the distance by turning two points to the north to prevent Spee from closing to within the range of his numerous secondary guns . Spee counteracted this maneuver by turning rapidly to the south , which forced Sturdee to turn south as well to keep within range . This allowed Scharnhorst and Gneisenau to turn back north and get close enough to engage with their secondary 15 cm guns . Their shooting was so accurate that it forced the British to haul away a second time .

The British gunfire became increasingly accurate , and by 16 : 00 , Scharnhorst had begun to list badly , while fires raged aboard the ship . Spee ordered Gneisenau to try to disengage while he turned Scharnhorst toward his attackers in an attempt to launch torpedoes at them . At 16 : 17 , Scharnhorst capsized and sank , taking her entire crew with her , including Spee . The British , still focused on Gneisenau , made no effort to rescue survivors . Gneisenau , Leipzig , and Nürnberg were also sunk . Only Dresden managed to escape , but she was eventually tracked to the Juan Fernández Islands and sunk . The complete destruction of the squadron killed about 2 @, @ 200 German sailors and officers , including both of Spee 's sons ; Heinrich died aboard Gneisenau , and Otto was killed aboard Nürnberg .

= = Legacy = =

In September 1917 , the second Mackensen @-@ class battlecruiser was named Graf Spee , and was christened by Spee 's widow Margarete . Construction of the ship had not been completed by the time of the Armistice of 11 November 1918 , and she was broken up for scrap by 1921 . In 1934 Germany named the new heavy cruiser Admiral Graf Spee after him ; as with the earlier vessel , a member of Spee 's family christened the ship , this time his daughter . In December 1939 , Admiral Graf Spee was scuttled by her crew after the Battle of the River Plate off the coast of Uruguay . Between 1959 and 1964 the Federal German Bundesmarine operated the training frigate Graf Spee .