

= French battleship Dunkerque =

Dunkerque was the lead ship of the Dunkerque class of battleships built for the French Navy in the 1930s . The class also included Strasbourg . The two ships were the first capital ships to be built by the French Navy after World War I ; the planned Normandie and Lyon classes had been cancelled at the outbreak of war , and budgetary problems prevented the French from building new battleships in the decade after the war . Dunkerque was laid down in December 1932 , was launched October 1935 , and was completed in May 1937 . She was armed with a main battery of eight 330mm / 50 Modèle 1931 guns arranged in two quadruple gun turrets and had a top speed of 29 @. @ 5 knots ( 54 @. @ 6 km / h ; 33 @. @ 9 mph ) .

Dunkerque and Strasbourg formed the French Navy 's 1ère Division de Ligne ( 1st Division of the Line ) prior to the Second World War . The two ships searched for German commerce raiders in the early months of the war , and Dunkerque also participated in convoy escort duties . The ship was badly damaged during the British attack at Mers @-@ el @-@ Kébir after the Armistice that ended the first phase of France 's participation in World War II , but she was refloated and partially repaired to return to Toulon for comprehensive repairs . Dunkerque was scuttled in November 1942 to prevent her capture by the Germans , and subsequently seized and partially scrapped by the Italians and later the Germans . Her wreck remained in Toulon until she was stricken in 1955 , and scrapped three years later .

= = Development = =

The French Navy 's design staff spent the decade following the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty attempting to produce a satisfactory design to fill 70 @, @ 000 tons as allowed by the treaty . Initially , the French sought a reply to the Italian Trento @-@ class cruisers of 1925 , but all proposals were rejected . A 17 @, @ 500 @-@ ton cruiser , which could have handled the Trentos , was inadequate against the old Italian battleships , however , and the 37 @, @ 000 @-@ ton battlecruiser concepts were prohibitively expensive and would jeopardize further naval limitation talks . These attempts were followed by an intermediate design for a 23 @, @ 690 @-@ ton protected cruiser in 1929 ; it was armed with 305 mm ( 12 @. @ 0 in ) guns , armoured against 203 mm ( 8 @. @ 0 in ) guns , and had a speed of 29 kn ( 54 km / h ; 33 mph ) . Visually , it bore a profile strikingly similar to the final Dunkerque .

The German Deutschland @-@ class cruisers became the new focus for French naval architects in 1929 . The design had to respect the 1930 London Naval Treaty , which limited the French to two 23 @, @ 333 @-@ ton ships until 1936 . Drawing upon previous work , the French developed a 23 @, @ 333 @-@ ton design armed with 305 mm ( 12 @. @ 0 in ) guns , armoured against the German cruisers ' 280 mm ( 11 in ) guns , and with a speed of 30 kn ( 56 km / h ; 35 mph ) . As with the final Dunkerque , the main artillery was concentrated entirely forward . The design was rejected by the French parliament in July 1931 and sent back for revision . The final revision grew to 26 @, @ 500 tons ; the 305 @-@ mm guns were replaced by 330mm / 50 Modèle 1931 guns , the armour was slightly improved , and the speed slightly decreased . Parliamentary approval was granted in early 1932 , and Dunkerque was ordered on 26 October .

= = = Characteristics = = =

Dunkerque displaced 26 @, @ 500 t ( 26 @, @ 100 long tons ) as built and 35 @, @ 500 t ( 34 @, @ 900 long tons ) fully loaded , with an overall length of 214 @. @ 5 m ( 703 ft 9 in ) , a beam of 31 @. @ 08 m ( 102 ft 0 in ) and a maximum draft of 8 @. @ 7 m ( 28 ft 7 in ) . She was powered by four Parsons geared steam turbines and six oil @-@ fired Indret boilers , which developed a total of 112 @, @ 500 shaft horsepower ( 83 @, @ 900 kW ) and yielded a maximum speed of 29 @. @ 5 kn ( 54 @. @ 6 km / h ; 33 @. @ 9 mph ) . Her crew numbered between 1 @, @ 381 and 1 @, @ 431 officers and men . The ship carried a pair of spotter aircraft on the fantail , and the aircraft facilities consisted of a steam catapult and a crane to handle the floatplanes . The floatplanes were initially Gourdou

@-@ Leseurre GL @-@ 832 HY , and later Loire 130 .

She was armed with eight 330mm / 50 Modèle 1931 guns arranged in two quadruple gun turrets , both of which were placed in a superfiring pair forward of the superstructure . Her secondary armament consisted of sixteen 130 mm ( 5 @. @ 1 in ) / 45 dual @-@ purpose guns ; these were mounted in three quadruple and two twin turrets . The quadruple turrets were placed on the stern , and the twin turrets were located amidships . Close range antiaircraft defense was provided by a battery of eight 37 mm ( 1 @. @ 5 in ) guns in twin mounts and thirty @-@ two 13 @. @ 2 mm ( 0 @. @ 52 in ) guns in quadruple mounts . The ship 's belt armor was 225 mm ( 8 @. @ 9 in ) thick amidships , and the main battery turrets were protected by 330 mm ( 13 in ) of armor plate on the faces . The main armored deck was 115 mm ( 4 @. @ 5 in ) thick , and the conning tower had 270 mm ( 11 in ) thick sides .

= = = Modifications = = =

Dunkerque was modified several times throughout her relatively short career . In 1937 , a funnel cap was added and four of the 37 mm guns , which were the Modèle 1925 variant , were removed . These were replaced the following year with new Modèle 1933 guns . The 13 @. @ 2 mm guns were also rearranged slightly , with the two mounts that were located abreast of the second main battery turret moved further aft . A new 14 m ( 46 ft ) rangefinder was installed in 1940 on the fore tower .

= = Service history = =

Dunkerque was laid down in the Brest Navy Yard , on 24 December 1932 , in the Salou graving dock number 4 . The hull was completed except for the forward @-@ most 17 m ( 56 ft ) section , since the dock was only 200 m ( 660 ft ) long . She was launched on 2 October 1935 and towed to Laninon graving dock number 8 , where the bow was fitted . Sea trials were carried out , starting on 18 April 1936 , before the superstructure was complete . The trials lasted until late @-@ April 1937 . Dunkerque represented France at the British Naval Review in May 1937 , marking the coronation of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth . Later that month on May 27 , she took part in another review off Île de Sein , where the French Mediterranean and Atlantic squadrons were assembled following combined exercises ; Dunkerque hosted the Navy Minister and the new Chief of Staff of the French Navy , Vice Admiral François Darlan .

On 20 January 1938 , Dunkerque departed for a tour of French colonial possessions in the Atlantic ; ports of call included Fort @-@ de @-@ France in the Antilles and Dakar , Senegal . She returned to France on 6 March , where she was placed on active duty on 1 September . She joined the Atlantic Squadron and became the flagship of Vice Amiral d 'Escadre ( Squadron Vice Admiral ) Marcel @-@ Bruno Gensoul . The ship then went into drydock in Brest for periodic maintenance on 29 November ; repairs lasted until 27 February 1939 . After emerging from drydock , Dunkerque was assigned to the Force de Raid , a fast task force created in response to the Sudetenland Crisis with Germany . Strasbourg joined the Force de Raid in March ; the two Dunkerque @-@ class battleships formed the 1ère Division de Ligne ( 1st Division of the Line ) . The ships received division stripes on their funnels , one for Dunkerque as division leader , and two for Strasbourg . By that time , the Force de Raid consisted of the two Dunkerques , three light cruisers , and eight large destroyers . The squadron was based in Brest . The German Deutschland @-@ class cruisers were operating off Spain at the time tensions began to rise over the Sudetenland Crisis in early 1938 , so the Force de Raid was sent out to cover the return of the cruiser Jeanne d 'Arc on 14 ? 16 April . The Sudetenland Crisis ultimately was resolved in the Munich Agreement in September 1938 and led to a temporary slackening of tensions in Europe .

The 1ère Division de Ligne made an official visit on 3 ? 4 May 1939 to Lisbon , Portugal , commemorating the discovery of Brazil by Alvares Cabral . On 23 May , the two battleships and other ships of the Force de Raid visited Britain , including stops in Liverpool , Oban , Staffa , Loch Ewe , Scapa Flow , and Rosyth . They returned to Brest on 21 June . On 2 September 1939 , the day after Germany invaded Poland , the Force de Raid sortied from Brest , since the Deutschland

@-@ class cruisers were reported to be operating in the Atlantic . After four days at sea , the squadron returned to Brest . In October , Dunkerque was assigned to Force L , along with Béarn and three cruisers ; the squadron was based in Brest . The ships were tasked with hunting down the cruiser Admiral Graf Spee .

On 25 November , Vice Admiral Gensoul ordered Dunkerque , the French 4th Cruiser Division , and the British battlecruiser HMS Hood to intercept the German battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau , which had sunk the Armed Merchant Cruiser HMS Rawalpindi , north of the Faroe Islands on 23 November . While the German battleships attempted to break into the Atlantic , Dunkerque suffered bow damages in a huge North Atlantic tempest and had to be docked for repairs on 3 December . On 11 December , Dunkerque and the cruiser Gloire carried a shipment of part of the Banque de France 's gold reserve to Canada . The ships arrived on 17 December and covered a troop convoy on the return voyage . After returning to Brest on 4 January 1940 , Dunkerque underwent another period of maintenance , which lasted until 6 February . The ship then conducted sea trials and training maneuvers through March .

Faced with increasingly hostile posturing by Italy during the spring of 1940 , the Force de Raid was dispatched , on 2 April to the Mediterranean . The squadron was quickly ordered to return to Brest several days later , in response to the German landings in Norway on 9 April . The Force de Raid was transferred subsequently to Mers @-@ el @-@ Kébir on 24 April , arriving on 27 April . Reports of Axis vessels in the area on 9 ? 10 May prompted Dunkerque and Strasbourg to sortie . Dunkerque remained in the Mediterranean when the Italians declared war on France and Britain on 10 June . Two days later , Dunkerque and Strasbourg sortied to intercept reported German and Italian ships that were incorrectly reported to be in the area . On 22 June , however , France surrendered to Germany following the Battle of France ; during the truce negotiations , the French Navy proposed demilitarizing Dunkerque and several other warships in Toulon .

= = = Mers @-@ el @-@ Kébir = = =

The only test in battle for Dunkerque came in the attack on Mers @-@ el @-@ Kébir on 3 July . The British Force H , commanded by Admiral Somerville and centered on HMS Hood and the battleships Revenge , and Valiant , arrived off Mers @-@ el @-@ Kébir to coerce the French battleship squadron to join the British cause or scuttle their ships . The French Navy refused , as complying with the demand would have violated the Armistice signed with Germany . To ensure the ships would not fall into Axis hands , the British warships opened fire . Dunkerque was tied alongside the mole with her stern facing the sea , so she could not return fire .

Dunkerque 's crew loosed the chains and started to get the ship underway just as the British opened fire ; the ship was engaged by HMS Hood . She was hit by four 15 inch ( 381 mm ) shells in quick succession . The first was deflected on the upper 330 mm turret roof , though it killed all the men in the right half turret ; the left half remained operational . The second shell damaged the aircraft installations , the last two passed through the 225 mm armored belt , which had not been designed to resist 15 @-@ inch shells . The third shell penetrated the handling room of the starboard twin 130 mm turret and penetrated to the forward turbine room , putting it out of action . The fourth shell holed the belt and reached the central boiler room ( BR 2 ) , causing severe damage . The damage forced the crew to beach the ship on the other side of Mers @-@ el @-@ Kébir roadstead . Part of the crew were then sent ashore .

The British fire ceased after less than twenty minutes , which limited the damage inflicted . Admiral Esteva , Admiral Sud ( C. in C. French Navy in North Africa , at Bizerta ) , reported to the French Admiralty that the ship had suffered " moderate " damage , and boasted , in a communiqué to the Algerian press , that Dunkerque would soon be able to return to Toulon on her own steam . After learning of the status of Dunkerque , the British Admiralty ordered Somerville to return to Mers @-@ el @-@ Kébir and to put Dunkerque permanently out of action . Since Dunkerque was beached just in front of a village , Admiral Somerville , preferred to attack with torpedo bombers to avoid causing serious collateral damages to civilians . The second attack took place on July 6 . One of the torpedoes hit the small patrol ship Terre @-@ Neuve , which carried a load of depth charges , and

was moored alongside Dunkerque . The explosion of fourteen depth charges , equivalent of 1 @, @ 400 kg of TNT , ripped an enormous hole in the battleship 's hull and killed a further 40 seamen . Dunkerque sank in shallow water . Another torpedo struck the ship and tore a hole in two compartments . The ship probably escaped a total loss by flooding the 330 mm gun magazines which had been ordered as soon as the torpedo @-@ bombers appeared . The total number killed on Dunkerque during the two attacks of July 3 and July 6 reached 210 .

Temporary repairs began immediately , but due to the limited drydock space in the port , repairs to the hull were not effected until 11 September . Dunkerque was refloated on 27 September and her propulsion system was returned to operational status . A major fire broke out on 5 December , however , which slowed down the repair effort . Repair work lasted for the entirety of 1941 , and on 25 January 1942 another fire broke out . The temporary repairs were completed by 19 February , which permitted the ship to depart Mers @-@ el @-@ Kébir , under heavy escort , bound for Toulon . She arrived the following day , and entered the large Vauban drydock for comprehensive repairs .

= = = Scuttling at Toulon = = =

Repair work proceeded slowly , owing to a shortage of material and labor . After the Wehrmacht occupied the Zone libre in retaliation for the successful Allied landings in North Africa , the Germans attempted to seize the French warships remaining under Vichy control on 27 November . To prevent them from seizing the ships , their crews scuttled the fleet in Toulon , including Dunkerque , which still lay incomplete in the Vauban drydock . Demolition charges were placed on the ship and she was set on fire . Her commanding officer , Capitaine de vaisseau ( Captain ) Amiel , initially refused to sink his ship without written orders , but was finally convinced to do so by the Commanding Officer of the nearby light cruiser La Galissonnière .

The Italians took control of the wreck , but they found her a total loss , and so began to dismantle Dunkerque . As part of this process , the ship was deliberately damaged to prevent the French from being able to repair her if she was recaptured ; the Italians cut down the main battery guns to render them unusable . The partially scrapped hulk was in turn seized by the Germans when Italy surrendered to the Allies in September 1943 . In 1944 , the Germans removed the ship 's bow to float her out of the drydock to free up the dock and continue the scrapping process . While in Axis possession , she was bombed several times by Allied aircraft . The hulk was condemned on 15 September 1955 and renamed Q56 . Her remains , which amounted to not more than 15 @, @ 000 tonnes ( 15 @, @ 000 long tons ; 17 @, @ 000 short tons ) , were sold for final demolition on 30 September 1958 for 226 @, @ 117 @, @ 000 francs .