

= SMS König =

SMS König was the first of four König class dreadnought battleships of the Imperial German Navy (Kaiserliche Marine) during World War I. König (Eng : " King ") was named in honor of King William II of Württemberg . Laid down in October 1911 , the ship was launched on 1 March 1913 . Final construction on König was completed shortly after the outbreak of World War I ; she was commissioned into the High Seas Fleet on 9 August 1914 .

Along with her three sister ships , Grosser Kurfürst , Markgraf , and Kronprinz , König took part in most of the fleet actions during the war . As the leading ship in the German line on 31 May 1916 in the Battle of Jutland , König was heavily engaged by several British battleships and suffered ten large caliber shell hits . In October 1917 , she forced the Russian pre dreadnought battleship Slava to scuttle herself in the Battle of Moon Sound , which followed Germany 's successful Operation Albion .

König was interned , along with the majority of the High Seas Fleet , in Scapa Flow in November 1918 following the Armistice . On 21 June 1919 , Rear Admiral Ludwig von Reuter gave the order to scuttle the fleet , including König , while the British guard ships were out of the harbor on exercises . Unlike most of the scuttled ships , König was never raised for scrapping ; the wreck is still on the bottom of the bay .

= = Construction and design = =

König was ordered under the provisional name " S " and built at the Kaiserliche Werft dockyards in Wilhelmshaven , under construction number 33 . Her keel was laid in October 1911 and she was launched on 1 March 1913 by the King 's cousin , Albrecht , Duke of Württemberg . Fitting out work was completed by 9 August 1914 , the day she was commissioned into the High Seas Fleet . She had cost the Imperial German Government 45 million Goldmarks . The first of what were eventually four ships in her class , König would later be joined in service by Grosser Kurfürst , Markgraf , and Kronprinz .

König displaced 25 , 796 t (25 , 389 long tons) as built and 28 , 600 t (28 , 100 long tons) fully loaded , with a length of 175 . 4 m (575 ft 6 in) , a beam of 29 . 5 m (96 ft 9 in) and a draft of 9 . 19 m (30 ft 2 in) . She was powered by three Parsons steam turbines , which developed a total of 42 , 708 shaft horsepower (31 , 847 kW) and yielded a maximum speed of 21 knots (39 km / h ; 24 mph) .

She was armed with ten 30 . 5 cm (12 . 0 in) SK L / 50 guns arranged in five twin gun turrets : two superfiring turrets each fore and aft and one turret amidships between the two funnels . König was the first German battleship to mount all of her main battery artillery on the centerline . Like the earlier Kaiser class battleships , König could bring all of her main guns to bear on either side , but the newer vessel enjoyed a wider arc of fire due to the all centerline arrangement . Her secondary armament consisted of fourteen 15 cm (5 . 9 in) SK L / 45 quick firing guns , six 8 . 8 cm (3 . 5 in) SK L / 45 quick firing guns and five 50 cm (20 in) underwater torpedo tubes , one in the bow and two on each beam .

= = Service = =

Directly after commissioning , König conducted sea trials , which were completed by 23 November 1914 . Her crew consisted of 41 officers and 1 , 095 enlisted men . Afterward , the ship was attached to the V Division of the III Battle Squadron of the German High Seas Fleet , where she would later be joined by her sister ships . On 9 December , König ran aground in the Wilhelmshaven roadstead . Her sister ship Grosser Kurfürst , following right behind , rammed her stern and caused some minor damage . König was then freed from the bottom and taken back to Wilhelmshaven ; repair work lasted until 2 January 1915 .

= = Operations in the North Sea = =

König took part in several fleet sorties in support of Rear Admiral Franz von Hipper 's battlecruisers of the I Scouting Group ; however , due to her grounding outside Wilhelmshaven , the ship missed the first operation of these battlecruisers on the night of 15 ? 16 December 1914 , when they were tasked with bombarding the English coast to lure out a portion of the British Grand Fleet to the waiting German fleet . On 22 January 1915 , König and the rest of III Squadron were detached from the fleet to conduct maneuver , gunnery , and torpedo training in the Baltic . They returned to the North Sea on 11 February , too late to assist the I Scouting Group at the Battle of Dogger Bank .

König then took part in several sorties into the North Sea . On 29 March , the ship led the fleet out to Terschelling . Three weeks later , on 17 ? 18 April , she supported an operation in which the light cruisers of the II Scouting Group laid mines off the Swarte Bank . Another fleet advance occurred on 22 April , again with König in the lead . On 23 April , III Squadron returned to the Baltic for another round of exercises lasting until 10 May . Another minelaying operation was conducted by the II Scouting Group on 17 May , with the battleship again in support .

König participated in a fleet advance into the North Sea which ended without combat from 29 until 31 May . She was then briefly assigned to picket duty in the German defensive belt . The ship again ran aground on 6 July , though damage was minimal . The ship supported a minelaying operation on 11 ? 12 September off Texel . Another fleet advance followed on 23 ? 24 October ; after returning , König went into drydock for maintenance , rejoining the fleet by 4 November . The ship was then sent back to the Baltic for more training on 5 ? 20 December . On the return voyage , she was slightly damaged after grounding in the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal during a snow storm . König was in the Baltic on 17 January 1916 for further training , then on 24 January returned to the North Sea . Two fleet advances followed on 5 ? 6 March and 21 ? 22 April .

König was available on 24 April 1916 to support a raid on the English coast , again as support for the German battlecruiser force in the I Scouting Group . The battlecruisers left the Jade Estuary at 10 : 55 , and the rest of the High Seas Fleet followed at 13 : 40 . The battlecruiser Seydlitz struck a mine while en route to the target , and had to withdraw . The other battlecruisers bombarded the town of Lowestoft unopposed , but during the approach to Yarmouth , they encountered the British cruisers of the Harwich Force . A short artillery duel ensued before the Harwich Force withdrew . Reports of British submarines in the area prompted the retreat of the I Scouting Group . At this point , Admiral Reinhard Scheer , who had been warned of the sortie of the Grand Fleet from its base in Scapa Flow , also withdrew to safer German waters . König then went to the Baltic for another round of exercises , including torpedo drills off Mecklenburg .

= = = Battle of Jutland = = =

König was present during the fleet operation that resulted in the battle of Jutland which took place on 31 May and 1 June 1916 . The German fleet again sought to draw out and isolate a portion of the Grand Fleet and destroy it before the main British fleet could retaliate . König , followed by her sisters Grosser Kurfürst , Markgraf , and Kronprinz , made up the V Division of the III Battle Squadron , and they were the vanguard of the fleet . The III Battle Squadron was the first of three battleship units ; directly astern were the Kaiser @-@ class battleships of the VI Division , III Battle Squadron . Directly astern of the Kaiser @-@ class ships were the Helgoland and Nassau classes of the II Battle Squadron ; in the rear guard were the obsolescent Deutschland @-@ class pre @-@ dreadnoughts of the I Battle Squadron .

Shortly before 16 : 00 CET , the battlecruisers of I Scouting Group encountered the British 1st Battlecruiser Squadron under the command of David Beatty . The opposing ships began an artillery duel that saw the destruction of Indefatigable , shortly after 17 : 00 , and Queen Mary , less than half an hour later . By this time , the German battlecruisers were steaming south to draw the British ships toward the main body of the High Seas Fleet . At 17 : 30 , König 's crew spotted both the I Scouting Group and the 1st Battlecruiser Squadron approaching . The German battlecruisers were steaming to starboard , while the British ships steamed to port . At 17 : 45 , Scheer ordered a two @-@ point turn to port to bring his ships closer to the British battlecruisers , and a minute later at 17 : 46 , the

order to open fire was given .

König , Grosser Kurfürst , and Markgraf were the first to reach effective gunnery range ; they engaged the battlecruisers Lion , Princess Royal , and Tiger , respectively , at a range of 21 @,@ 000 yards . König 's first salvos fell short of her target , and so she shifted her fire to the nearer Tiger . Simultaneously , König and her sisters began firing on the destroyers Nestor and Nicator with their secondary battery . The two destroyers closed in on the German line , and after having endured a hail of gunfire , maneuvered into a good firing position . Each ship launched two torpedoes apiece at König and Grosser Kurfürst , although all four weapons missed . In return , a secondary battery shell from one of the battleships hit Nestor and wrecked her engine room . The ship , along with the destroyer Nomad , was crippled and lying directly in the path of the advancing German line . Both of the destroyers were sunk , and German torpedo boats stopped to pick up survivors . At around 18 : 00 , König and her three sister ships shifted their fire to the approaching Queen Elizabeth @-@ class battleships of the V Battle Squadron . König initially engaged Barham until that ship was out of range , then shifted to Valiant . However , the faster British battleships were able to move out of effective gunnery range quickly .

Shortly after 19 : 00 , the German cruiser Wiesbaden had become disabled by a shell from the British battlecruiser Invincible ; Rear Admiral Paul Behncke in König attempted to maneuver his four ships to cover the stricken cruiser . Simultaneously , the British III and IV Light Cruiser Squadrons began a torpedo attack on the German line ; while advancing to torpedo range , they smothered Wiesbaden with fire from their main guns . König and her sisters fired heavily on the British cruisers , but even sustained fire from the battleships ' main guns failed to drive off the British cruisers . In the ensuing melee , the British armored cruiser Defence was struck by several heavy caliber shells from the German dreadnoughts . One salvo penetrated the ship 's ammunition magazines and , in a massive explosion , destroyed the cruiser .

Shortly after 19 : 20 , König again entered gunnery range of the battleship Warspite and opened fire on her target . She was joined by the dreadnoughts Friedrich der Grosse , Ostfriesland , Helgoland , and Thüringen . However , König rapidly lost sight of Warspite , as she had been in the process of turning east @-@ northeast . Nearly simultaneously , British light cruisers and destroyers attempted to make a torpedo attack against the leading ships of the German line , including König . Shortly thereafter , the main British line came into range of the German fleet ; at 19 : 30 the British battleships opened fire on both the German battlecruiser force and the König @-@ class ships . König came under especially heavy fire during this period . In the span of 5 minutes , Iron Duke fired 9 salvos at König from a range of 12 @,@ 000 yards ; only one shell hit the ship . The 13 @.@ 5 @-@ inch shell struck the forward conning tower but instead of penetrating , the shell ricocheted off and detonated some 50 yards past the ship . Rear Admiral Behncke was injured , though he remained in command of the ship . The ship was then obscured by smoke that granted a temporary reprieve .

By 20 : 00 , the German line was ordered to turn westward to disengage from the British fleet . König , at the head , completed her turn and then reduced speed to allow the vessels behind her to return to formation . Shortly thereafter , four British light cruisers resumed the attacks on the crippled Wiesbaden ; the leading German battleships , including König , opened fire on the cruisers in an attempt to drive them off . The pursuing British battleships had by this time turned further south and nearly managed to " cross the T " of the German line . To rectify this situation , Admiral Scheer ordered a 16 @-@ point turn south and sent Hipper 's battlecruisers on a charge toward the British fleet . During the turn , König was struck by a 13 @.@ 5 @-@ inch shell from Iron Duke ; the shell hit the ship just aft of the rearmost gun turret . König suffered significant structural damage , and several rooms were filled with smoke . During the turn to starboard , Vice Admiral Schmidt , the commander of the I Battle Squadron , decided to turn his ships immediately , instead of following the leading ships in succession . This caused a great deal of confusion , and nearly resulted in several collisions . As a result , many of the German battleships were forced to drastically reduce speed , which put the entire fleet in great danger . In an attempt to mitigate the predicament , König turned to port and laid a smokescreen between the German and British lines .

During the battle , König suffered significant damage . A heavy shell penetrated the main armored

deck toward the bow . Another shell hit the armored bulkhead at the corner and shoved it back five feet , breaking off a large piece from the armor plate in the process . Shell splinters from another hit penetrated several of the casemates that held the 15 cm secondary guns , two of which were disabled . The ammunition stores for these two guns were set on fire and the magazines had to be flooded to prevent an explosion . The ship nevertheless remained combat effective , as her primary battery remained in operation , as did most of her secondary guns ; König could also steam at close to her maximum speed . Other areas of the ship had to be counter @-@ flooded to maintain stability ; 1 @,@ 600 tons of water entered the ship , either as a result of battle damage or counter @-@ flooding efforts . The flooding rendered the battleship sufficiently low in the water to prevent the ship from being able to cross the Amrum Bank until 09 : 30 on 1 June . König was taken to Kiel for initial repairs , as that was the only location that had a floating dry dock large enough to fit the ship . Repairs were conducted there from 4 to 18 June , at which point the ship was transferred to the Howaldtswerke shipyard . König was again ready to join the fleet by 21 July . In the course of the battle , she suffered 45 men killed and 27 wounded , the highest tally for any surviving battleship in the German fleet .

= = = Subsequent operations = = =

Following completion of repairs , König was again detached to the Baltic for training , from the end of July until early August . König was back in the North Sea on 5 August . A major fleet sortie occurred on 18 ? 20 August , with König again in the lead . The I Scouting Group was to bombard the coastal town of Sunderland , in an attempt to draw out and destroy Beatty 's battlecruisers . However , as Von der Tann and Moltke were the only battlecruisers in fighting condition , the new battleship Bayern and two of König 's sisters , Markgraf and Grosser Kurfürst , were temporarily assigned to the I Scouting Group . Admiral Scheer and the rest of the High Seas Fleet would trail behind providing cover . The British were aware of the German plans and sortied the Grand Fleet to meet them . By 14 : 35 , Scheer had been warned of the Grand Fleet 's approach and , unwilling to engage the whole of the Grand Fleet just 11 weeks after the decidedly close call at Jutland , turned his forces around and retreated to German ports .

König remained in port until 21 October , when the ship was again sent to the Baltic for training . The ship returned to the fleet on 3 November . König and the rest of III Squadron then steamed out to Horns Reef on 5 ? 6 November . König was then assigned various tasks , including guard duty in the German Bight and convoy escort in the Baltic . 1917 saw several training missions in the Baltic during 22 February ? 4 March ; 14 ? 22 March and 17 May ? 9 June . König then went into Wilhelmshaven for maintenance on 16 June . The installation of a new heavy foremast and other work lasted until 21 July . On 10 September , König again went into the Baltic for training maneuvers .

= = = Operation Albion = = =

In early September 1917 , following the German conquest of the Russian port of Riga , the German navy decided to eliminate the Russian naval forces that still held the Gulf of Riga . The Admiralstab (the Navy High Command) planned an operation to seize the Baltic island of Ösel , and specifically the Russian gun batteries on the Sworbe Peninsula . On 18 September , the order was issued for a joint operation with the army to capture Ösel and Moon Islands ; the primary naval component was to comprise the flagship , Moltke , along with the III Battle Squadron of the High Seas Fleet . The V Division included the four König @-@ class ships , and was by this time augmented with the new battleship Bayern . The VI Division consisted of the five Kaiser @-@ class battleships . Along with 9 light cruisers , 3 torpedo boat flotillas , and dozens of mine warfare ships , the entire force numbered some 300 ships , supported by over 100 aircraft and 6 zeppelins . The invasion force amounted to approximately 24 @,@ 600 officers and enlisted men . Opposing the Germans were the old Russian pre @-@ dreadnoughts Slava and Tsesarevich , the armored cruisers Bayan , Admiral Makarov , and Diana , 26 destroyers , and several torpedo boats and gunboats . The garrison on Ösel

numbered some 14 @, @ 000 men .

König departed Kiel on 23 September for Putziger Wiek , where the ship remained until 10 October . The operation began on 12 October ; at 03 : 00 König anchored off Ösel in Tagga Bay and disembarked soldiers . By 05 : 50 , König opened fire on Russian coastal artillery emplacements , joined by Moltke , Bayern , and the other three König @-@ class ships . Simultaneously , the Kaiser @-@ class ships engaged the batteries on the Sworbe peninsula ; the objective was to secure the channel between Moon and Dagö islands , which would block the only escape route of the Russian ships in the Gulf . Both Grosser Kurfürst and Bayern struck mines while maneuvering into their bombardment positions , with minimal damage to the former . Bayern was severely wounded , and had to be withdrawn to Kiel for repairs . At 17 : 30 , König departed the area to refuel ; she returned to the Irben Strait on 15 October .

On 16 October , it was decided to detach a portion of the invasion flotilla to clear the Russian naval forces in Moon Sound ; these included the two Russian pre @-@ dreadnoughts . To this end , König and Kronprinz , along with the cruisers Strassburg and Kolberg and a number of smaller vessels , were sent to engage the Russian battleships . They arrived by the morning of 17 October , but a deep Russian minefield thwarted their progress . The Germans were surprised to discover that the 30 @.@ 5 cm guns of the Russian battleships out @-@ ranged their own 30 @.@ 5 cm guns . The Russian ships managed to keep the distance wide enough to prevent the German battleships from being able to return fire , while still firing effectively on the German ships , and the Germans had to take several evasive maneuvers to avoid the Russian shells . However , by 10 : 00 , the minesweepers had cleared a path through the minefield , and König and Kronprinz dashed into the bay . By 10 : 13 , König was in range of Slava and quickly opened fire . Meanwhile , Kronprinz fired on both Slava and the cruiser Bayan . The Russian vessels were hit dozens of times , until at 10 : 30 the Russian naval commander , Admiral Bakhirev , ordered their withdrawal . König had hit Slava seven times ; the damage inflicted prevented her from escaping to the north . Instead , she was scuttled and her crew was evacuated on a destroyer . In the course of the engagement , König struck the cruiser Bayan once . Following the engagement , König fired on shore batteries on Woi and Werder .

On 20 October , König was towed by mine sweepers into the Kuiwast roadstead . König transferred soldiers to the island of Schildaum which was then occupied . By that time , the fighting on the islands was winding down ; Moon , Ösel , and Dagö were in German possession . The previous day , the Admiralstab had ordered the cessation of naval actions and the return of the dreadnoughts to the High Seas Fleet as soon as possible . On the return voyage , König struck bottom in a heavy swell . The ship was repaired in Kiel ; the work lasted until 17 November .

= = = Final operations = = =

Following König 's return from the Baltic , the ship was tasked with guard duties in the North Sea and with providing support for minesweepers . König returned to the Baltic on 22 December for further training , which lasted until 8 January 1918 . Another round of exercises was conducted from 23 February to 11 March . On 20 April König steamed out to assist a German patrol that was engaged with British forces . The ship was part of the force that steamed to Norway to intercept a heavily escorted British convoy on 23 ? 25 April , though the operation was canceled when the battlecruiser Moltke suffered mechanical damage . König was briefly grounded in the northern harbor of the island of Helgoland on 30 May . Two months later , on 31 July , König and the rest of III Squadron covered a minesweeping unit in the North Sea . The ship then went to the Baltic for training on 7 ? 18 August , after which König returned to the North Sea . König conducted her last exercise in the Baltic starting on 28 September ; the maneuvers lasted until 1 October .

König was to have taken part in a final fleet action days before the Armistice , an operation which envisioned the bulk of the High Seas Fleet sortieing from their base in Wilhelmshaven to engage the British Grand Fleet . To retain a better bargaining position for Germany , Admirals Hipper and Scheer intended to inflict as much damage as possible on the British navy , whatever the cost to the fleet . On 29 October 1918 , the order was given to depart from Wilhelmshaven to consolidate the

fleet in the Jade roadstead , with the intention of departing the following morning . However , starting on the night of 29 October , sailors on Thüringen mutinied . The unrest spread to other battleships , including König . The operation was ultimately canceled ; in an attempt to suppress the mutiny , Admiral Scheer ordered the fleet be dispersed . König and the rest of III Squadron were sent to Kiel . During the subsequent mutiny , König 's captain was wounded three times , and both her first officer and adjutant were killed .

= = = Fate = = =

Following the capitulation of Germany in November 1918 , most of the High Seas Fleet , under the command of Rear Admiral Ludwig von Reuter , were interned in the British naval base in Scapa Flow . Prior to the departure of the German fleet , Admiral Adolf von Trotha made clear to von Reuter that he could not allow the Allies to seize the ships , under any conditions . The fleet rendezvoused with the British light cruiser Cardiff , which led the ships to the Allied fleet that was to escort the Germans to Scapa Flow . The massive flotilla consisted of some 370 British , American , and French warships . Once the ships were interned , their guns were disabled through the removal of their breech blocks .

The fleet remained in captivity during the negotiations that ultimately produced the Versailles Treaty . Von Reuter believed that the British intended to seize the German ships on 21 June , which was the deadline for Germany to have signed the peace treaty . Unaware that the deadline had been extended to the 23rd , Reuter ordered the ships to be sunk . On the morning of 21 June , the British fleet left Scapa Flow to conduct training maneuvers , and at 11 : 20 Reuter transmitted the order to his ships . König sank at 14 : 00 ; the ship was never raised for scrapping , unlike most of the other capital ships that were scuttled . The rights to future salvage operations on the wreck were sold to Britain in 1962 .

The ship is now a popular dive site in Scapa Flow , lying at a depth of 40 m (130 ft) on a sandy floor to the east of Cava . She turned over as she sank and the hull faces upwards at about 20 m (66 ft) down . There are several dynamited holes in her superstructure where salvagers have gained access to obtain non @-@ ferrous metals .