

= SMS Grosser Kurfürst (1913) =

SMS Grosser Kurfürst was the second battleship of the four *König* class . Grosser Kurfürst (or *Großer Kurfürst*) served in the German Imperial Navy during World War I. The battleship was laid down in October 1911 and launched on 5 May 1913 . She was formally commissioned into the Imperial Navy on 30 July 1914 , days before the outbreak of war between Germany and the United Kingdom . Her name means Great Elector , and refers to Frederick William I , the Prince -elector of Brandenburg . Grosser Kurfürst was armed with ten 30 cm (12 in) guns in five twin turrets and could steam at a top speed of 21 knots (39 km / h ; 24 mph) .

Along with her three sister ships , *König* , *Markgraf* , and *Kronprinz* , Grosser Kurfürst took part in most of the fleet actions during the war , including the Battle of Jutland on 31 May and 1 June 1916 . The ship was subjected to heavy fire at Jutland , but was not seriously damaged . She shelled Russian positions during Operation Albion in September and October 1917 . Grosser Kurfürst was involved in a number of accidents during her service career ; she collided with *König* and *Kronprinz* , grounded several times , was torpedoed once , and hit a mine .

After Germany 's defeat and the signing of the Armistice in November 1918 , Grosser Kurfürst and most of the capital ships of the High Seas Fleet were interned by the Royal Navy in Scapa Flow . The ships were disarmed and limited to skeleton crews while the Allied powers negotiated the final version of the Treaty of Versailles . On 21 June 1919 , days before the treaty was signed , the commander of the interned fleet , Rear Admiral Ludwig von Reuter , ordered the fleet to be scuttled to ensure that the British would not be able to seize the ships . Unlike her sister ships , Grosser Kurfürst was raised in 1938 for scrapping and subsequently broken up in Rosyth .

= = Construction and design = =

Grosser Kurfürst was ordered under the provisional name *Ersatz Kurfürst Friedrich Wilhelm* and built at the AG Vulcan shipyard in Hamburg under construction number 4 . Her keel was laid in October 1911 and she was launched on 5 May 1913 . At her launching ceremony , Prince Oskar of Prussia christened the ship . Due to the heightening political tensions in Europe in mid 1914 , the final construction work was accelerated , so the first set of dockyard trials were conducted on 15 July , and fitting out work was completed by the 30th , the day she was commissioned into the High Seas Fleet . Grosser Kurfürst cost the Imperial German Government 45 million Goldmarks .

Grosser Kurfürst 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 m (575 ft 6 in) , a beam of 19 m (64 ft 0 in) and a draft of 9 m (30 ft 2 in) . She was powered by three AEG -Vulcan steam turbines , each of which drove a propeller shaft and developed 44,483 shp (33,171 kW) and yielded a maximum speed of 21 knots (39 km / h ; 24 mph) . Steam was supplied by three oil -fired and 12 coal -fired Schulz -Thornycroft boilers operating at up to 16 atmospheres of pressure . The ship had a range of 8,000 nautical miles (15,000 km ; 9,000 mi) at a cruising speed of 12 knots (22 km / h ; 14 mph) . She had a crew of 41 officers and 1,095 enlisted sailors .

She was armed with ten 30 cm (12 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 . Her secondary armament consisted of fourteen 15 cm (5 in) SK L / 45 quick -firing guns , six 8 cm (3 in) SK L / 45 quick -firing guns for surface use and four 8 cm anti -aircraft guns and five 50 cm (20 in) underwater torpedo tubes , one in the bow and two on each beam . The ship 's main armored belt was 350 millimeters (14 in) thick . The deck was 30 mm (1 in) thick ; the main battery turrets and forward conning tower were armored with 300 mm (12 in) thick steel plates .

= = Service history = =

After her commissioning in July 1914 , Grosser Kurfürst underwent sea trials in the Baltic . The ship 's first combat operation was the Raid on Yarmouth on 2 ? 3 November 1914 . The raid was conducted by the battlecruisers of Rear Admiral Franz von Hipper 's I Scouting Group . Grosser Kurfürst and the other dreadnoughts sailed in distant support of Hipper 's force . After a brief bombardment , the German fleet withdrew back to port . On 7 December , Grosser Kurfürst sustained no damage when she accidentally rammed her sister König .

Her second operation , the raid on Scarborough , Hartlepool and Whitby , followed on 15 ? 16 December . On the evening of the 15th , the German battle fleet of some twelve dreadnoughts and eight pre @-@ dreadnoughts came to within 10 nmi (19 km ; 12 mi) of an isolated squadron of six British battleships . However , skirmishes between the rival destroyer screens in the darkness convinced Admiral Friedrich von Ingenohl , the fleet commander , that he was faced with the entire Grand Fleet . Under orders from Kaiser Wilhelm II to avoid risking the fleet unnecessarily , von Ingenohl broke off the engagement and turned the battlefleet back toward Germany .

On 22 January 1915 , Grosser Kurfürst 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 . Following the loss of SMS Blücher at the Battle of Dogger Bank , the Kaiser removed von Ingenohl from his post on 2 February . Admiral Hugo von Pohl replaced him as commander of the fleet . Grosser Kurfürst then took part in several sorties into the North Sea . On 29 March , she sailed with the fleet out to Terschelling without any contact with the enemy . Another fleet advance occurred on 22 April , again without result . On 23 April , III Squadron returned to the Baltic for another round of exercises lasting until 10 May .

Grosser Kurfürst participated in a fleet advance into the North Sea from 29 until 31 May which ended without combat . The ship covered a minelaying operation on 11 ? 12 September off Texel . Another uneventful fleet advance followed on 23 ? 24 October . Grosser Kurfürst ended the year with a two @-@ week training cruise in the Baltic , which lasted from 5 to 20 December . Another round of exercises in the Baltic followed on 18 ? 23 January 1916 . Grosser Kurfürst went into drydock in Wilhelmshaven for periodic maintenance on 12 February . Work lasted until 3 March ; two days later the ship sailed for a sweep into the Hoofden , though this again failed to encounter any British forces . The fleet conducted another sortie on 23 March to the Amrun Bank , followed by another a month later to Horns Reef on 21 ? 22 April .

On 24 ? 25 April , Hipper 's battlecruisers conducted another bombardment of the English coast ; Grosser Kurfürst and the rest of the High Seas Fleet sailed in support . The battlecruisers left the Jade Estuary at 10 : 55 CET , 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 .

= = = Battle of Jutland = = =

Grosser Kurfürst was present during the fleet operation on 31 May and 1 June 1916 that resulted in the Battle of Jutland . 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 . Grosser Kurfürst was the second ship in the German line , behind her sister König and followed by Markgraf and Kronprinz . The four ships 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 . The III Squadron was followed by 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 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 resulted 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 , the order to open fire was given .

Grosser Kurfürst engaged the battlecruiser HMS Princess Royal at a range of 21 @,@ 000 yd (19 @,@ 000 m) . Simultaneously , her secondary guns fired on British destroyers attempting to make torpedo attacks against the German fleet . The faster British ships began to pull away from their pursuers , and at 18 : 00 Grosser Kurfürst was forced to shift fire from Princess Royal to the battleship Valiant , though by 18 : 16 Valiant too had moved out of range . Grosser Kurfürst 's shells straddled Valiant four times and her gunners incorrectly claimed a hit on the British ship . The ship did not escape unscathed herself though ; at 18 : 09 she was hit by a 15 in (380 mm) shell from either the battleships Malaya or Warspite . The shell struck the water some 30 to 60 ft (9 @.@ 1 to 18 @.@ 3 m) from the ship and either ricocheted or exploded , impacting the hull approximately 85 ft (26 m) from the bow . The hit caused no significant damage . During this period , she claimed three hits from her 15 cm battery on a destroyer , which was most likely Moorsom . At 18 : 22 , the ship briefly fired her secondary guns at the destroyer HMS Moresby at extreme range , without scoring a hit . At the same time , Grosser Kurfürst came back into range of the battleship Valiant , and engaged her with her two forward turrets . The ship fired for eight minutes , though her shots all fell short of their target .

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 3rd and 4th 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 . Grosser Kurfürst 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 . Grosser Kurfürst fired a pair of salvos at extremely close range from her main guns at the armored cruiser Defence , which , under heavy fire from several German capital ships , exploded and sank at 19 : 19 . Observers aboard the ship noted that both salvos hit Defence , though did not ascribe credit for the latter 's destruction to the hits . Grosser Kurfürst then shifted fire to the armored cruiser Warrior , which was heavily damaged and forced to withdraw . Warrior foundered on the trip back to port the following morning .

By 20 : 00 , the German line was ordered to turn eastward to disengage from the British fleet , commanded by Admiral John Jellicoe . Shortly thereafter , four British light cruisers from the 2nd Light Cruiser Squadron resumed the attacks on the crippled Wiesbaden ; the leading German battleships , including Grosser Kurfürst , opened fire on the cruisers in an attempt to drive them off . Grosser Kurfürst began firing at 20 : 07 , at ranges between 10 @,@ 000 and 18 @,@ 000 yd (9 @,@ 100 and 16 @,@ 500 m) . Despite the heavy fire , the British cruisers managed to escape without serious damage . At around the same time , the British fleet came back into range and seven battleships took the V Division under heavy fire . Grosser Kurfürst was hit seven times , four hits occurring at 20 : 18 and 20 : 19 . Three of the hits were from the 13 @.@ 5 in (34 cm) guns of Marlborough , though her gunners incorrectly claimed a fourth hit . The remaining four hits came from the 15 @-@ inch guns of Barham or Valiant . One of the 15 @-@ inch shells destroyed the No. 2 port @-@ side 15 cm gun , and another struck the main belt and burst on impact . Though it did not penetrate the belt , it forced the plating in by as much as 13 in (33 cm) for a length of some 26 ft (7 @.@ 9 m) . Damage control teams managed to temporarily stop the resulting flooding , after approximately 800 t (790 long tons ; 880 short tons) of water had entered the ship . The flooding caused a list of 4 ° , though counter @-@ flooding efforts reduced it to less than a degree . As the battle continued , the flooding worsened , and by the time Grosser Kurfürst reached Helgoland the following morning , an estimated 3 @,@ 000 t (2 @,@ 950 long tons ; 3 @,@ 310 short tons) of

water had entered the ship . More hits were sustained , but these shells burst on impact and caused relatively minor damage .

The heavy fire of the British fleet forced Scheer to order the fleet to turn away ; this turn reversed the order of the fleet and placed Grosser Kurfürst toward the end of the line . After successfully withdrawing from the British , Scheer ordered the fleet to assume night cruising formation , though communication errors between Scheer aboard Friedrich der Grosse and Westfalen , the lead ship , caused delays . The fleet fell into formation by 23 : 30 , with Grosser Kurfürst the 15th vessel in the line of 24 capital ships . Around 02 : 45 , several British destroyers mounted a torpedo attack against the rear half of the German line ; Grosser Kurfürst spotted six unidentified destroyers in the darkness . She engaged them with her 15 cm and 8 @. @ 8 cm guns while turning away to avoid any torpedoes that might have been launched . Grosser Kurfürst scored one 15 cm hit on the destroyer Nessus at a range of about 2 @, @ 200 yd (2 @, @ 000 m) , disabling one of Nessus 's boilers . Heavy fire from the German battleships forced the British destroyers to withdraw .

The High Seas Fleet managed to punch through the British light forces without drawing the attention of Jellicoe 's battleships , and subsequently reached Horns Reef by 04 : 00 on 1 June . Off Helgoland , Grosser Kurfürst had taken in so much water that she was forced to reduce speed . She fell out of formation , but later rejoined the fleet outside the Schillig roadstead . Upon reaching Wilhelmshaven , Grosser Kurfürst went into harbor while several other battleships took up defensive positions in the outer roadstead . The ship was transferred to Hamburg where she was repaired in AG Vulcan 's large floating dock . Repair work was completed by 16 July . In the course of the battle , Grosser Kurfürst fired a total of 135 shells from her main battery and 216 rounds from her 15 cm guns . She was hit by eight large @- @ caliber shells , which killed fifteen men and wounded ten .

= = = Subsequent operations = = =

Following completion of the repair work , Grosser Kurfürst conducted training maneuvers in the Baltic until 4 August . Admiral Scheer attempted a repeat of the original Jutland plan on 18 ? 19 August . The battlecruiser squadron , however , had been reduced to only two operational ships ? Von der Tann and Moltke ? so Grosser Kurfürst , Markgraf , and the newly commissioned Bayern were temporarily transferred to the squadron . 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 .

Unit training with the III Squadron followed from 21 October to 2 November . Two days later , the ship formally rejoined III Squadron . On the 5th , a pair of U @- @ boats grounded on the Danish coast . Light forces were sent to recover the vessels , and III Squadron , which was in the North Sea en route to Wilhelmshaven , was ordered to cover them . The British submarine J1 torpedoed Grosser Kurfürst some 30 nmi (56 km ; 35 mi) northwest of Horns Reef . The torpedo destroyed the port @- @ side rudder and flooded the rudder rooms , though the ship maintained a speed of 19 kn (35 km / h ; 22 mph) . She returned to the AG Vulcan dockyard , where she was repaired from 10 November to 9 February . That same day , while in transit to Kiel , the ship ran aground off Krautsand in the Elbe river . Damage was minimal and the ship proceeded to unit training in the Baltic , but on the return to the North Sea on 4 March , she accidentally rammed Kronprinz . Her bow was pushed in , necessitating repairs in the Imperial Dockyard in Wilhelmshaven until 22 April .

Grosser Kurfürst rejoined the fleet on 23 April and conducted training with the rest of III Squadron in the Baltic from 17 May to 8 June . After returning to the North Sea the ship was assigned to security duties in the German Bight . Another round of exercises in the Baltic followed on 11 ? 23 September . She then sailed to Putziger Wiek to prepare for Operation Albion , the planned conquest of the islands off Riga . On 12 October , Grosser Kurfürst took up a position in Tagga Bay off Cape Ninnast . But she struck a mine while maneuvering into firing position , which allowed around 280 t (280 long tons ; 310 short tons) of water into the ship . Despite the mine damage , the ship continued with the bombardment of Russian coastal guns on the Cape . She was detached from the invasion force later that day ; she sailed to Wilhelmshaven via Kiel , where repairs were completed

by 1 December .

Upon her return to service , Grosser Kurfürst resumed picket duties in the Bight . She was present during the abortive anti @-@ convoy operation on 23 ? 25 April 1918 . While entering the lock outside Wilhelmshaven following the conclusion of the operation , the ship was damaged . She was back in dock for repairs from 27 April to 2 May . At the end of the month , Grosser Kurfürst ran aground just off the Helgoland 's north harbor . The ship 's port @-@ side propeller shaft was bent , necessitating repairs at the Imperial Dockyard in Kiel from 2 ? 9 June and 21 ? 31 July . She finally rejoined the fleet on 12 August .

= = = Fate = = =

Grosser Kurfürst and her three sisters were to have taken part in a final fleet action at the end of October 1918 , days before the Armistice was to take effect . The bulk of the High Seas Fleet was to have sortied from their base in Wilhelmshaven to engage the British Grand Fleet ; Scheer ? by now the Grand Admiral (Großadmiral) of the fleet ? intended to inflict as much damage as possible on the British navy , in order to retain a better bargaining position for Germany , despite the expected casualties . However , many of the war @-@ weary sailors felt the operation would disrupt the peace process and prolong the war . On the morning of 29 October 1918 , the order was given to sail from Wilhelmshaven the following day . Starting on the night of 29 October , sailors on Thüringen and then on several other battleships mutinied . On the 31st , Scheer ordered the fleet dispersed ; Grosser Kurfürst and the rest of III Squadron was sent to Kiel . On 4 November , the ship 's crew joined the general mutiny and hoisted the red flag of the Socialists . The unrest ultimately forced Hipper and Scheer to cancel the operation . When informed of the situation , the Kaiser stated , " I no longer have a navy . "

Following the capitulation of Germany in November 1918 , most of the High Seas Fleet 's ships , 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 escorted 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 , and their crews were reduced to 200 officers and men .

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 1919 , 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 at the next opportunity . 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 . Grosser Kurfürst sank at 13 : 30 ; unlike her sisters , she was ultimately raised on 29 April 1938 and sold for scrapping in Rosyth . Her bell was sold and was used for many years as a garden ornament . It was sold at auction in March 2014 and was bought by the National Museum of the Royal Navy , Portsmouth , Hampshire .