

= Japanese battleship Kong? =

Kong? ( ?? , " Indestructible " , named for Mount Kong? ) was a warship of the Imperial Japanese Navy during World War I and World War II . She was the first battlecruiser of the Kong? class , among the most heavily armed ships in any navy when built . Her designer was the British naval engineer George Thurston , and she was laid down in 1911 at Barrow @-@ in @-@ Furness in Britain by Vickers Shipbuilding Company . Kong? was the last Japanese capital ship constructed outside Japan . She was formally commissioned in 1913 , and patrolled off the Chinese coast during World War I.

Kong? underwent two major reconstructions . Beginning in 1929 , the Imperial Japanese Navy rebuilt her as a battleship , strengthening her armor and improving her speed and power capabilities . In 1935 , her superstructure was completely rebuilt , her speed was increased , and she was equipped with launch catapults for floatplanes . Now fast enough to accompany Japan 's growing carrier fleet , Kong? was reclassified as a fast battleship . During the Second Sino @-@ Japanese War , Kong? operated off the coast of mainland China before being redeployed to the Third Battleship Division in 1941 . In 1942 , she sailed as part of the Southern Force in preparation for the Battle of Singapore .

Kong? fought in a large number of major naval actions of the Pacific War during World War II . She covered the Japanese Army 's amphibious landings in British Malaya ( part of present @-@ day Malaysia ) and the Dutch East Indies ( now Indonesia ) in 1942 , before engaging American forces at the Battle of Midway and during the Guadalcanal Campaign . Throughout 1943 , Kong? primarily remained at Truk Lagoon in the Caroline Islands , Kure Naval Base ( near Hiroshima ) , Sasebo Naval Base ( near Nagasaki ) , and Lingga Roads , and deployed several times in response to American aircraft carrier air raids on Japanese island bases scattered across the Pacific . Kong? participated in the Battle of the Philippine Sea and the Battle of Leyte Gulf in 1944 ( 22 ? 23 October ) , engaging and sinking American vessels in the latter . Kong? was torpedoed and sunk by the submarine USS Sealion while transiting the Formosa Strait on 21 November 1944 . She was the only Japanese battleship sunk by submarine in the Second World War , and the last battleship sunk by submarine in history .

= = Design and construction = =

Kong? was the first of the Imperial Japanese Navy 's Kong? @-@ class battlecruisers , which were almost as large , costly and well @-@ armed as battleships , but which traded off armored protection for higher speeds . These were designed by the British naval engineer George Thurston and were ordered in 1910 in the Japanese Emergency Naval Expansion Bill after the commissioning of HMS Invincible in 1908 . These four battlecruisers of the Kong? class were designed to match the naval capabilities of the battlecruisers of the other major naval powers at the time , and they have been called the battlecruiser versions of the British ( formerly Turkish ) battleship HMS Erin . Their heavy armament of 14 @-@ inch naval guns and their armor protection ( which took up about 23 @.@ 3 % of their approximately 30 @,@ 000 @-@ ton displacements in 1913 ) were greatly superior to those of any other Japanese capital ship afloat at the time .

The keel of Kong? was laid down at Barrow @-@ in @-@ Furness by Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering on 17 January 1911 . Under Japan 's contract with Vickers , the first vessel of the class was constructed in the United Kingdom , with the remainder built in Japan . Kong? was launched on 18 May 1912 , and then transferred to the dockyards of Portsmouth , England , where her fitting @-@ out began in mid @-@ 1912 . All parts used in her construction were manufactured in the U.K. Kongo was completed on 16 April 1913 .

= = = Armament = = =

Kong? 's main battery consisted of eight 14 @-@ inch ( 36 cm ) heavy @-@ caliber main naval guns in four twin turrets ( two forward and two aft ) . The turrets were noted by the U.S. Office of

Naval Intelligence to be " similar to the British 15 @-@ inch turrets " , with improvements made in flash @-@ tightness . Each of her main guns could fire high explosive or armor @-@ piercing shells 38 @,@ 770 yards ( 19 @.@ 14 nmi ; 35 @.@ 45 km ) at a firing rate of about two shells per minute . In keeping with the Japanese doctrine of deploying more powerful vessels before their opponents , Kong? and her sister ships were the first vessels in the world equipped with 14 @-@ inch ( 36 cm ) guns . Her main guns carried ammunition for 90 shots , and they had an approximate barrel lifetime of 250 to 280 shots . In 1941 , separate dyes were introduced for the armor @-@ piercing shells of the four Kong? @-@ class battleships to assist with targeting , with Kong? 's armor @-@ piercing shells using red dye .

The secondary battery of Kong? originally consisted of sixteen 6 @-@ inch ( 15 cm ) 50 caliber guns in single casemates located amidships ( " 50 calibre " means that the lengths of the guns were 50 times their bore , or 300 inches ) , eight 3 @-@ inch ( 7 @.@ 6 cm ) guns , and eight submerged 21 @-@ inch ( 53 cm ) torpedo tubes . Her six @-@ inch naval guns could fire five to six rounds per minute , with a barrel lifetime of about 500 rounds . The 6 @-@ inch / 50 calibre gun was capable of firing both antiaircraft and antiship shells , though the positioning of these guns on Kong? made antiaircraft firing mostly impractical . During her second reconstruction , the older three @-@ inch guns were removed and then replaced with eight 5 @-@ inch ( 13 cm ) 5 @-@ inch / 40 calibre dual @-@ purpose guns . These guns could fire from eight to 14 rounds per minute , with a barrel lifetime of about 800 to 1 @,@ 500 rounds . Of Kong? 's guns , the 5 @-@ inch guns had the widest variety of shell types : antiaircraft , antiship , and illumination shells . Kong? was also armed with a large number of 1 @-@ inch ( 2 @.@ 5 cm ) antiaircraft machine guns . By October 1944 , Kong? 's secondary armament was reconfigured to eight 6 @-@ inch ( 15 cm ) guns , eight 5 @-@ inch ( 13 cm ) guns , and 122 Type 96 antiaircraft rapid @-@ fire cannons .

= = Service history = =

= = = 1913 ? 1929 : Battlecruiser = = =

On 16 August 1913 , Kong? was completed and commissioned into the Imperial Japanese Navy ( I.J.N. ) . Twelve days later , she departed from Portsmouth headed for Japan . She was docked at Singapore from 20 October to 27 October , before arriving at Yokosuka Naval Arsenal on 5 November , where she was placed in First Reserve . In January 1914 , she docked at Kure Naval Base for armament checks . On 3 August 1914 , the German Empire declared war on France and then invaded via Belgium , sparking the beginning of World War I in the West . Twelve days later , Japan issued a warning to Kaiser Wilhelm II of the German Empire , ordering him to withdraw the German troops from their base at Tsingtao , China . When the German Empire did not respond , Japan declared war on Germany on 23 August , occupying the former German possessions in the Caroline Islands , Palau Islands , Marshall Islands , and Marianas Islands . Kong? was quickly deployed towards the Central Pacific to patrol the sea lines of communication of the German Empire . Kong? returned to the port of Yokosuka , Japan , on 12 September , and one month later , she was assigned to the First Battleship Division . In October , Kong? and her new sister ship Hiei sortied off the Chinese coast in support of Japanese army units during the Siege of Tsingtao . Then Kong? returned to Sasebo Naval Base for upgrades to her searchlights . On 3 October 1915 , Kong? and Hiei participated in the sinking of the old Emperor Nikolai I as a practice target . She was a Russian pre @-@ dreadnought that had been captured in 1905 during the Russo @-@ Japanese War that had next served as an I.J.N. warship . With the defeat of the German East Asia Squadron by the Royal Navy at the Battle of the Falkland Islands in December 1914 , there was little or no need for I.J.N. operations in the Pacific Ocean . Kong? spent the rest of World War I either based at Sasebo , or on patrol off the coast of China . In December 1918 , following the end of the hostilities of World War I , Kong? was placed in " Second Reserve " . In April 1919 , she was fitted with a new seawater flooding system for her ammunition magazines .

With the conclusion of World War I , and the signing of the Washington Naval Treaty on 6 February

1922 , the size of the I.J.N. was significantly limited , with a ratio of 5 : 5 : 3 required between the capital ships of the United Kingdom , the United States , and the Japanese Empire , since the latter was only responsible for one ocean , rather than the two of the other country , and fewer warships for France and Italy . This Treaty also banned the signatories from building any new capital ships until 1931 , with no capital ship permitted to exceed 35 @,@ 000 long tons ( 36 @,@ 000 t ) in displacement . Provided that new additions did not exceed 3 @,@ 000 tons of displacement , the existing capital ships were allowed to be upgraded with improved anti @-@ torpedo bulges and armored main decks . By the time that the Washington Naval Treaty had been fully implemented in Japan , only three classes of World War I type capital ships remained active : the Ise @-@ class battleships , the Kong? @-@ class battlecruisers , and the Fus? @-@ class battleships .

In April 1923 , Kong? gave transportation to Emperor Hirohito during his official visit to the Japanese possession of Taiwan . In November 1924 , Kongo docked at Yokosuka , where modifications were made to her main armament , increasing the elevation of her main guns and improving her fire @-@ control systems . In 1927 , Kong? underwent major modifications to her superstructure , rebuilding it into the pagoda mast style to accommodate the growing number of fire @-@ control systems for her main guns . In May 1928 , her steering equipment was upgraded , before she was placed in reserve in preparation for major modifications and reconstruction in 1929 ? 31 .

= = = 1929 ? 1935 : Reconstruction into battleship = = =

Prohibited by the Washington Treaty from constructing new capital ships until 1931 , Japan resorted to upgrading their World War I era battleships and battlecruisers . Beginning in September 1929 , Kong? underwent extensive modernization and modification in drydock at Yokosuka Naval Arsenal . Over the next two years , Kong? 's horizontal armor near her ammunition magazines was strengthened , and the machinery spaces within the hull were given increased torpedo protection . Anti @-@ torpedo bulges were added along the waterline , as permitted by the Washington Treaty . She was refitted to accommodate three Type 90 Model 0 floatplanes , though no aircraft catapults were fitted . To increase her speed and power , all 36 of her Yarrow boilers were removed , and then replaced with 16 newer boilers , and Brown @-@ Curtis direct @-@ drive turbines were installed . Kong? 's forward funnel was removed , and her second funnel was enlarged and lengthened . The modifications to her hull increased her armor weight from 6 @,@ 502 to 10 @,@ 313 long tons , directly violating the terms of the Washington Naval Treaty . In March 1931 , Kong? ? now capable of a speed of 29 knots ( 54 km / h ) ? was reclassified as a battleship .

On 22 April 1930 , Japan signed the London Naval Treaty , placing further restrictions on the signatories ' naval forces . Several of her older battleships were scrapped , and no new capital ships were built as replacements . After minor fitting @-@ out work , Kong? 's reconstruction begun in September 1929 and was declared complete on 31 March 1931 . On 1 December 1931 , two months after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria , Kong? was assigned to the First Battleship Division and also designated the flagship of the Combined Fleet . Additional rangefinders and searchlights were fitted to her superstructure in January 1932 , and Captain Nobutake Kond? assumed command of the vessel in December . In 1933 , aircraft catapults were fitted between the two rear turrets .

On 25 February 1933 , following a report by the Lytton Commission , the League of Nations agreed that Japan 's invasion of China had violated Chinese sovereignty . Refusing to accept the judgement of this organization , Japan withdrew from the League of Nations on the same day . Japan also immediately withdrew from the Washington Naval Treaty and the London Naval Treaty , thus removing all restrictions on the numbers and sizes of her capital warships . In November 1934 , Kong? was placed in Second Reserve in preparation for further modifications . On 10 January 1935 , Kong? was toured by the Nazi German naval attaché to Japan , Captain Paul Wenneker , as part of a gunnery demonstration .

= = = 1935 ? 1941 : Fast battleship = = =

On 1 June 1935 , Kong? was dry @-@ docked at Yokosuka Naval Arsenal in preparation for upgrades that would enable her to escort Japan 's growing fleet of aircraft carriers . Her stern was lengthened by 26 feet ( 7 @. @ 9 m ) to improve her fineness ratio and her 16 older boilers were removed and then replaced with 11 oil @-@ fired Kampon Boilers and newer geared turbines . In addition , her bridge was completely reconstructed according to Japan 's pagoda mast style of forward superstructure , and catapults were added to support three Nakajima E8N or Kawanishi E7K reconnaissance and spotter floatplanes .

Kong? 's armor was also extensively upgraded . Her main belt was strengthened to a uniform thickness of eight inches ( up from varying thicknesses of six to eight inches ) , and also diagonal bulkheads of depths ranging from 5 to 8 inches ( 127 to 203 mm ) were added to reinforce the main armored belt . The turret armor was strengthened to 10 inches ( 254 mm ) , while 4 inches ( 102 mm ) were added to portions of the deck armor . Kong? 's ammunition magazine protection was also strengthened to 4 @. @ 0 inches ( 10 cm ) . This reconstruction was finished on 8 January 1937 . Capable of greater than 30 knots ( 56 km / h ) , despite the significant increase in her hull displacement , Kong? was now reclassified as a fast battleship .

In February 1937 , Kong? was assigned to the Sasebo Naval District , and in December she was placed under the command of Takeo Kurita in the Third Battleship Division . In April 1938 , two float planes from Kong? bombed the Chinese town of Foochow during the Second Sino @-@ Japanese War . Throughout 1938 and 1939 , Kong? steamed off the Chinese coast in support of Japanese Army operations during the war . In November 1939 , Captain Raizo Tanaka assumed command of Kong? . From November 1940 to April 1941 , additional armor was added to Kong? 's armament barbettes and ammunition tubes , while ventilation and firefighting equipment was also improved . In August 1941 , she was assigned to the Third Battleship Division under the command of Vice Admiral Gunichi Mikawa alongside her fully modified sister warships Hiei , Kirishima and the Haruna .

= = = 1942 : Early war service = = =

Kong? and Haruna departed from the Hashirajima fleet anchorage on 29 November 1941 to begin the War in the Pacific as part of the Southern ( Malay ) Force 's Main Body , under the overall command of Vice @-@ Admiral Nobutake Kond? . On 4 December 1941 , the Main Body arrived off the coast of southern Thailand and northern Malaya in preparation for the invasion of Thailand and the Malayan Peninsula four days later . When Britain 's " Force Z " ? consisting of the battleship Prince of Wales and the battlecruiser Repulse ? was quickly defeated by Japan 's land @-@ based aircraft from southern Vietnam , Kong? 's battlegroup withdrew from Malayan waters . This battlegroup subsequently sortied from Indochina for three days in mid @-@ December to protect a reinforcement convoy traveling to Malaya , and again on 18 December to cover the Japanese Army 's landing at Lingayen Gulf , Luzon , in the Philippines . The Main Body departed Cam Ranh Bay in French Indochina on 23 December bound for Taiwan , arriving two days later . In January 1942 , Kong? and the heavy cruisers Takao and Atago provided distant cover for air attacks on Ambon Island .

On 21 February , Kong? was joined by Haruna , four fast aircraft carriers , five heavy cruisers and numerous support ships in preparation for " Operation J " , Japan 's invasion of the Dutch East Indies . On 25 February , the Third Battleship Division provided cover for air attacks on the Island of Java . Kong? bombarded Christmas Island off the western coast of Australia on 7 March 1942 , and then she returned to Staring @-@ baai for 15 days of standby alert . In April 1942 , Kong? joined five fleet carriers in attacks on Colombo and Trincomalee on Ceylon . Following the destruction of the British heavy cruisers HMS Dorsetshire and HMS Cornwall on 5 April 1942 , this naval task force moved southwest to locate the remainder of the British Eastern Fleet , then under the command of Admiral James Somerville . On 9 April , one of Haruna 's reconnaissance seaplanes spotted the aircraft carrier HMS Hermes south of Trincomalee . On the same day , Japanese air attacks sank the carrier , and Kong? was attacked but missed by nine British medium bombers . Having crippled the offensive capability of Britain 's Eastern Fleet , the Third Battleship Division returned to Japan .

Kong? reached Sasebo on 22 April . From 23 April to 2 May , Kong? was drydocked for reconfiguration of her antiaircraft armament .

On 27 May 1942 , Kong? sortied with Hiei and the heavy cruisers Atago , Ch?kai , My?k? , and Haguro as part of Admiral Nobutake Kond? 's invasion force during the Battle of Midway . Following the disastrous loss of four of the Combined Fleet 's fast carriers on 4 June 1942 , Kond? 's force withdrew to Japan . On 14 July she was assigned as the flagship of the restructured Third Battleship Division . In August , Kong? was drydocked at Kure to receive surface @-@ detection radar and additional range finders . In September , Kong? embarked with Hiei , Haruna , Kirishima , three carriers , and numerous smaller warships in response to the U.S. Marine Corps 's amphibious landing on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands . On 20 September , this task force was ordered to return to the Truk Naval Base in the Central Pacific north of the equator .

In the aftermath of the Battle of Cape Esperance , the Japanese Army opted to reinforce its troops on Guadalcanal . To protect their transport convoy from enemy air attack , Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto sent Haruna and Kong? , escorted by one light cruiser and nine destroyers , to bombard the American air base as Henderson Field . Because of their high speeds , these two battleships could bombard the airfield and then withdraw before being subjected to air attack from either land @-@ based warplanes or American aircraft carriers . On the night of 13 ? 14 October , these two battleships shelled the area of Henderson Field from a distance of about 16 @,@ 000 yards ( 15 @,@ 000 m ) , firing 973 14 @-@ inch high @-@ explosive shells . In the most successful Japanese battleship action of the war , the bombardment heavily damaged both runways , destroyed almost all of the U.S. Marines ' aviation fuel , destroyed or damaged 48 of the Marines ' 90 warplanes , and killed 41 Marines . A large Japanese troop and supply convoy reached Guadalcanal on the next day .

During the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands on 26 October 1942 , Kong? was attacked by four Grumman TBF Avenger torpedo bombers , but she received no hits . In mid @-@ November , this battleship and other warships provided distant cover for the unsuccessful mission by the I.J.N. to bombard Henderson Field again and to deliver more Army reinforcements to Guadalcanal . On 15 November 1942 , following the Japanese defeat and the sinking of Hiei and Kirishima during the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal , the Third Battleship Division returned to Truk , where it remained for the rest of 1942 .

= = = 1943 : Movement between bases = = =

Throughout 1943 , Kong? engaged no enemy targets . In late January 1943 , she participated in " Operation Ke " as part of a diversionary and distant covering force to support I.J.N. destroyers that were evacuating Army troops from Guadalcanal . From 15 February through 20 February 1943 , the Third Battleship Division was transferred from Truk to the Kure Naval Base . On 27 February , Kong? was drydocked to receive upgrades to her antiaircraft armament , with the additions of two triple 25 mm gun mounts and the removal of two of her 6 @-@ inch turrets , while additional concrete protection was added near her steering gear . On 17 May 1943 , in response to the U.S. Army 's invasion of Attu Island , Kong? sortied alongside Musashi , the Third Battleship Division , two fleet carriers , two cruisers , and nine destroyers . Three days later , the American submarine USS Sawfish spotted this naval task force , but she was unable to attack it . On 22 May 1943 , the task force arrived in Yokosuka , where it was joined by an additional three fleet carriers and two light cruisers . This force was disbanded when Attu fell to the U.S. Army before the necessary preparations for a counterattack had been finished .

On 17 October 1943 , Kong? again left Truk as part of a larger task force consisting of five battleships , three fleet carriers , eight heavy cruisers , three light cruisers , and numerous destroyers . These sortied in response to U.S. Navy air raids on Wake Island . No contact between the two forces was made , and the Japanese task force returned to Truk on 26 October 1943 . She soon left Truk for home waters , and on 16 December 1943 , Kong? arrived at Sasebo for refits and training in the Inland Sea .

== 1944 : Combat and loss ==

In January 1944 , Kong? was dry @-@ docked for a reconfiguration of her anti @-@ aircraft suite . Four 6 @-@ inch guns and a pair of twin 25 mm mounts were removed and replaced with four 5 @-@ inch guns and four triple 25 mm mounts . The Third Battleship Division departed Kure on 8 March 1944 . Arriving at Lingga on 14 March 1944 , the division remained for training until 11 May 1944 . On 11 May 1944 , Kong? and Admiral Ozawa 's Mobile Fleet departed Lingga for Tawitawi , where they were joined by Vice @-@ Admiral Takeo Kurita 's " Force C " . On 13 June , Ozawa 's Mobile Fleet departed Tawitawi for the Mariana Islands . During the Battle of the Philippine Sea , Kong? escorted Japanese fast carriers , and remained undamaged in counterattacks from US carrier aircraft on 20 June . When she returned to Japan , 13 triple and 40 single 25 @-@ mm mounts were added to her anti @-@ aircraft armament , for a total of over 100 mounts . In August , two more 6 @-@ inch guns were removed and another eighteen single mounts installed .

In October 1944 , Kong? departed Lingga in preparation for " Operation Sho @-@ 1 " , Japan 's counterattack during the Battle of Leyte Gulf , the largest naval engagement in history . On 24 October , Kong? was undamaged by several near misses from American carrier aircraft in the Battle of the Sibuyan Sea . On 25 October , during the Battle off Samar , Kong? ? as part of Admiral Kurita 's Centre Force ? engaged the US 7th Fleet 's " Taffy 3 " , a battlegroup of escort carriers and destroyers . She succeeded in scoring numerous hits on the escort carrier Gambier Bay as well as the destroyers Hoel and Heermann . At 09 : 12 , she sank the destroyer escort Samuel B. Roberts . After a fierce defensive action by the American ships , which sank three Japanese heavy cruisers , Admiral Kurita elected to withdraw , ending the battle . While retreating , Kong? suffered damage from five near misses from attacking aircraft . The fleet arrived at Brunei on 28 October .

On 16 November , following a US air raid on Brunei , Kong? along with Yamato , Nagato and the rest of the First Fleet , departed Brunei for Kure in preparation for a major reorganization of the fleet and battle repairs . On 20 November , they entered the Formosa Strait . Shortly after midnight on 21 November , the submarine USS Sealion made radar contact with the fleet at 44 @,@ 000 yards ( 40 @,@ 000 m ) . Maneuvering into position at 02 : 45 , Sealion fired six bow torpedoes at Kong? followed by three stern torpedoes at Nagato fifteen minutes later . One minute after the first salvo was launched , two of the torpedoes were seen to hit Kong? on the port side , while a third sank the destroyer Urakaze with all hands . The torpedoes flooded two of Kong? 's boiler rooms , but she was still able to make 16 kn ( 30 km / h ; 18 mph ) . By 05 : 00 , she had slowed to 11 kn ( 20 km / h ; 13 mph ) and was given permission to break off from the fleet and head to the port of Keelung in Formosa along with the destroyers Hamakaze and Isokaze as escort .

Within fifteen minutes of detaching from the main force , Kong? was listing 45 degrees and flooding uncontrollably . At 5 : 18 the ship lost all power and the order was given to abandon ship . At 5 : 24 , while the evacuation was underway , the forward 14 @-@ inch magazine exploded and the broken ship sank quickly with the loss of over 1 @,@ 200 of her crew including the commander of the Third Battleship Division and her captain . The escort destroyers Hamakaze and Isokaze rescued 237 survivors .

Kong? is believed to have sunk in 350 feet ( 110 m ) of water approximately 55 nautical miles ( 102 km ; 63 mi ) northwest of Keelung . She was one of only three British @-@ built battleships sunk by submarine attack during World War II . The other two were the British Revenge @-@ class battleship HMS Royal Oak and the Queen Elizabeth @-@ class battleship HMS Barham .