

= Italian battleship Impero =

Impero was the fourth Littorio class battleship built for Italy's Regia Marina ( Royal Navy ) during the Second World War . She was the fourth ship of her class and was named after the Italian word for " empire , " in this case referring to the newly ( 1936 ) conquered Italian Empire in East Africa ( Somaliland , Eritrea and Ethiopia territories ) as a result of the Second Italo Abyssinian War . She was constructed under the order of the 1938 Naval Expansion Program , along with her sister ship Roma .

Impero was laid down in May 1938 and launched in November 1939 . The entrance of Italy into World War II forced the Regia Marina to refocus its construction priorities on escort warships , which meant that Impero would not be completed . After Italy surrendered to the Allies on 8 September 1943 , the rest of the Italian Navy steamed to Sardinia to rendezvous with their American contemporaries . Impero was still incomplete in Trieste and was captured by the Germans , who used her for target practice . Sunk by Allied bombers in February 1945 , she was refloated in 1947 and scrapped in Venice from 1948 to 1950 .

= = Background = =

For additional information , see Littorio class battleship

The Italian leader Benito Mussolini did not authorize any large naval rearmament until 1933 . Once he did , two old battleships of the Conte di Cavour class were sent to be modernized in the same year , and Vittorio Veneto and Littorio were laid down in 1934 . In May 1935 , the Italian Naval Ministry began preparing for a five year naval building program that would include four battleships , three aircraft carriers , four cruisers , fifty four submarines , and forty smaller ships . In December 1935 , Admiral Domenico Cavagnari proposed to Mussolini that , among other things , two more battleships of the Littorio class be built to attempt to counter a possible Franco British alliance ? if the two countries combined forces , they would easily outnumber the Italian fleet . Mussolini postponed his decision , but later authorized planning for the two ships in January 1937 for the 1938 Naval Expansion Program . In December , they were approved and money was appropriated for them ; they were named Roma and Impero .

= = Description = =

Impero was 240 meters ( 789 ft ) long overall and had a beam of 32 m ( 107 ft ) and a draft of 9 m ( 31 ft ) . She was designed with a standard displacement of 40,992 long tons ( 41,650 t ) , a violation of the 35,000 long ton ( 36,000 t ) restriction of the Washington Naval Treaty ; at full combat loading , she displaced 45,485 long tons ( 46,215 t ) . The ship was to be powered by four Belluzzo geared steam turbines rated at 128,000 shaft horsepower ( 95,000 kW ) . Steam was provided by eight oil fired Yarrow boilers . The engines provided a top speed of 30 knots ( 56 km / h ; 35 mph ) and a range of 3,920 mi ( 6,310 km ; 3,410 nmi ) at 20 kn ( 37 km / h ; 23 mph ) . Impero would have had a crew of 1,830 to 1,950 if she had been completed .

Impero's main armament would have consisted of nine 381 millimeter ( 15 in ) 50 caliber Model 1934 guns in three triple turrets ; two turrets were placed forward in a superfiring arrangement and the third was located aft . Her secondary anti surface armament would have consisted of twelve 152 mm ( 6 in ) 55 caliber Model 1934 / 35 guns in four triple turrets amidships . These were to be supplemented by four 120 mm ( 4 in ) 40 caliber Model 1891 / 92 guns in single mounts ; these guns were old weapons and were primarily intended to fire star shells . Impero was intended to be equipped with an anti aircraft battery that comprised twelve 90 mm ( 3 in ) 50 caliber Model 1938 guns in single mounts , twenty 37 mm ( 1 in ) 54 caliber guns in eight twin and four single mounts , and sixteen 20 mm ( 0 in ) 65 caliber guns in eight twin mounts .

The ship was protected by a main armored belt that was 280 mm ( 11 in ) with a second layer of

steel that was 70 mm ( 2 @. @ 8 in ) thick . The main deck was 162 mm ( 6 @. @ 4 in ) thick in the central area of the ship and reduced to 45 mm ( 1 @. @ 8 in ) in less critical areas . The main battery turrets were 350 mm ( 14 in ) thick and the lower turret structure was housed in barbettes that were also 350 mm thick . The secondary turrets had 280 mm thick faces and the conning tower had 260 mm ( 10 in ) thick sides . Impero was to be fitted with a catapult on her stern and equipped with three IMAM Ro.43 reconnaissance float planes or Reggiane Re.2000 fighters .

= = History = =

Authorized to be built by Ansaldo of Genoa , the new battleship 's keel was laid down on 14 May 1938 and launched on 15 November 1939 . At her launching , she was christened Impero , after Italy 's empire in Africa . With Genoa being in bombing range of France , and war now a definite possibility , Impero was moved to Brindisi on 8 June 1940 due to fears of French attack . Trieste was considered a better location , but Roma was fitting out there and the shipyard could not handle two battleships at one time . While at Brindisi , some of her machinery was installed , along with parts of her smaller caliber weaponry . Despite the intent to move Impero to a safer location , Brindisi was still hit by Allied bombers , though Impero was not damaged . Nevertheless , the Regia Marina decided to shift production priorities to desperately needed escorts for merchant convoys . As a result , construction of Impero was delayed to expedite those ships . The only work done was the fitting of the engines and some gun mountings .

Fitted with small @-@ caliber anti @-@ aircraft and anti @-@ surface weaponry , Impero was sailed ? using her own propulsion ? to Venice on 22 January 1942 . At some later time , she was moved again to Trieste , though no further work was done on the ship . After Italy 's capitulation to the Allies in September 1943 , Impero was seized by the Germans , who intended to break her up for scrap . This was evidently never completed , as the hulk was discovered by Allied forces in Trieste after the war half @-@ sunk . The Germans had instead used her as a target ship and the Allies had damaged her during an air attack on 20 February 1945 . Impero was stricken from the naval register on 27 March 1947 . The hulk was raised sometime that year and towed to Venice and beached , where she was scrapped from 1948 to 1950 .

At the time of the capitulation , Impero 's hull was 88 % complete and the engines were 76 % complete , but overall the ship was only 28 % complete ; it would have required about eighteen more months of full work to be finished . Key features such as the armament , electrical wiring and a reworking of the bridge had still not been completed .