

= German battleship Gneisenau =

Gneisenau was a German capital ship , alternatively described as a battleship and battlecruiser , of Nazi Germany 's Kriegsmarine . She was the second vessel of her class , which included one other ship , Scharnhorst . The ship was built at the Deutsche Werke dockyard in Kiel ; she was laid down on 6 May 1935 and launched on 8 December 1936 . Completed in May 1938 , the ship was armed with a main battery of nine 28 cm ( 11 in ) C / 34 guns in three triple turrets , though there were plans to replace these weapons with six 38 cm ( 15 in ) SK C / 34 guns in twin turrets .

Gneisenau and Scharnhorst operated together for much of the early portion of World War II , including sorties into the Atlantic to raid British merchant shipping . During their first operation , the two ships sank the British auxiliary cruiser HMS Rawalpindi in a short battle . Gneisenau and Scharnhorst participated in Operation Weserübung , the German invasion of Norway . During operations off Norway , the two ships engaged the battlecruiser HMS Renown and sank the aircraft carrier HMS Glorious . Gneisenau was damaged in the action with Renown and later torpedoed by a British submarine , HMS Clyde , off Norway . After a successful raid in the Atlantic in 1941 , Gneisenau and her sister put in at Brest , France . The two battleships were the subject of repeated bombing raids by the RAF ; Gneisenau was hit several times during the raids , though she was ultimately repaired .

In early 1942 , the two ships made a daylight dash up the English Channel from occupied France to Germany . After reaching Kiel in early February , the ship went into drydock . On the night of 26 February , the British launched an air attack on the ship ; one bomb penetrated her armored deck and exploded in the forward ammunition magazine , causing serious damage and a large number of casualties . The repairs necessitated by the damage were so time consuming that it was determined to rebuild the ship to accommodate the 38 cm guns as originally intended . The 28 cm guns were removed and used as shore batteries . In 1943 , Hitler ordered the cessation of conversion work , and on 27 March 1945 , she was sunk as a blockship in Gotenhafen ( Gdynia ) in German @-@ occupied Poland . She was eventually broken up for scrap in 1951 .

= = Construction and configuration = =

Gneisenau was ordered as Ersatz Hessen as a replacement for the old pre @-@ dreadnought Hessen , under the contract name " E. " The Deutsche Werke in Kiel was awarded the contract , where the keel was laid on 6 May 1935 . The ship was launched on 8 December 1936 , after which fitting @-@ out work was begun . The ship was completed in May 1938 and commissioned for sea trials on the 21st , under the command of Kapitän zur See ( KzS ) Erich Förste . The trials revealed a dangerous tendency to ship considerable amounts of water in heavy seas . This caused flooding in the bow and damaged electrical systems in the forward gun turret . As a result , she went back to the dockyard for extensive modification of the bow . The original straight stem was replaced with a raised " Atlantic bow . " A diagonal cap was fitted to the smoke stack to keep the main mast free of smoke . The modifications were completed by September 1939 , by which time the ship was finally fully operational .

Gneisenau displaced 32 @, @ 100 long tons ( 32 @, @ 600 t ) as built and 38 @, @ 100 long tons ( 38 @, @ 700 t ) fully loaded , with a length of 234 @. @ 9 m ( 770 ft 8 in ) , a beam of 30 m ( 98 ft 5 in ) and a maximum draft of 9 @. @ 9 m ( 32 ft 6 in ) . She was powered by three Germania geared steam turbines , which developed a total of 165 @, @ 930 metric horsepower ( 163 @, @ 660 shp ; 122 @, @ 041 kW ) and yielded a maximum speed of 31 @. @ 3 knots ( 58 @. @ 0 km / h ; 36 @. @ 0 mph ) on speed trials . Her standard crew numbered 56 officers and 1 @, @ 613 enlisted men , though during the war this was augmented up to 60 officers and 1 @, @ 780 men . While serving as a squadron flagship , Gneisenau carried an additional ten officers and 61 enlisted men .

She was armed with nine 28 cm ( 11 @. @ 1 in ) L / 54 @. @ 5 guns arranged in three triple gun turrets : two superfiring turrets forward ? Anton and Bruno ? and one aft ? Caesar . Her secondary armament consisted of twelve 15 cm ( 5 @. @ 9 in ) L / 55 guns , fourteen 10 @. @ 5 cm ( 4 @. @ 1 in ) L / 65 and sixteen 3 @. @ 7 cm ( 1 @. @ 5 in ) L / 83 , and initially ten 2 cm ( 0 @. @ 79 in ) anti

@-@ aircraft guns . The number of 2 cm guns was eventually increased to thirty @-@ eight . Six 53 @-@ 3 cm ( 21 @-@ 0 in ) above @-@ water torpedo tubes , taken from the light cruisers Nürnberg and Leipzig , were installed in 1942 .

= = Service history = =

Gneisenau left Germany for a round of trials in the Atlantic in June 1939 . As it was peacetime , the ship carried primarily practice ammunition , with only a small number of live rounds . She was back in Germany when war began in September 1939 . On the 4th , the day after the British declaration of war , Gneisenau was attacked by fourteen Wellington bombers , though they made no hits . In November , KzS Förste was replaced by KzS Harald Netbandt . The ship 's first combat operation , under the command of Admiral Wilhelm Marschall , began on 21 November 1939 ; the ship , in company with her sister Scharnhorst , the light cruiser Köln , and nine destroyers , was to patrol the area between Iceland and the Faroe Islands . The intent of the operation was to draw out British units and ease the pressure on the heavy cruiser Admiral Graf Spee , which was being pursued in the South Atlantic . Two days later , the German flotilla intercepted the auxiliary cruiser Rawalpindi .

Scharnhorst fired first , followed by Gneisenau eight minutes later . The ship was quickly reduced to a burning wreck ; Marschall ordered Scharnhorst to pick up survivors while he stood by in Gneisenau . The cruiser Newcastle arrived on the scene , which prompted Marschall to halt rescue operations and flee . Four allied capital ships , the British Hood , Nelson , Rodney , and the French Dunkerque followed in pursuit . The Germans reached Wilhelmshaven on 27 November , and on the trip both battleships incurred significant damage from heavy seas and winds . After returning to Kiel , Gneisenau went into drydock for repairs for the storm damage . During the repairs , the bow was remodeled a second time to incorporate additional flare and sheer , in an attempt to improve her seaworthiness . Gneisenau went into the Baltic for trials on 15 January 1940 , after the completion of the refit . Her voyage back to the North Sea was blocked by ice in the Kiel Canal until 4 February .

= = = Operation Weserübung = = =

Gneisenau was assigned to the forces participating in Operation Weserübung , the invasion of Denmark and Norway . She and her sister were the covering force for the assaults on Narvik and Trondheim ( Flag Officer Vize Admiral Günther Lütjens ) . The two ships left Wilhelmshaven on the morning of 7 April , along with the heavy cruiser Admiral Hipper and fourteen destroyers . The cruiser and destroyers carried the assault forces for Narvik and Trondheim , while Gneisenau and Scharnhorst provided cover for them . Later that day , at around 14 : 30 , the three ships came under attack by a force of British bombers , though the bombers failed to make any hits . On the morning of 8 April , the destroyer Z11 Bernd von Arnim encountered the British destroyer Glowworm . Before being sunk , Glowworm rammed Admiral Hipper , though the latter was not seriously damaged . The crews of the two battleships went to battle stations , though they did not take part in the brief engagement . At 21 : 00 , Gneisenau and Scharnhorst took up a position west of the Vestfjorden to provide distant cover to both of the landings at Narvik and Trondheim .

At 04 : 30 on the 9th , Gneisenau located the British battlecruiser Renown with her Seetakt radar ; the call to battle stations rang out on both Gneisenau and Scharnhorst , though it was Renown that fired first , at 05 : 05 . Gneisenau scored two hits on Renown ; the first failed to explode and the second exploded on her upper deck and damaged the radio equipment . Gneisenau and Scharnhorst then turned to disengage . Almost simultaneously , two of Renown 's 15 in ( 38 @-@ 1 cm ) shells struck Gneisenau . One shell hit the director tower and passed through it without exploding ; regardless , it cut several cables and killed one officer and five enlisted men . The second shell disabled the rear turret . This prompted Gneisenau to cease firing and increase speed in order to break away from Renown . Vice Admiral Wilhelm Marschall feared that the destroyers escorting Renown could be used to make torpedo attacks against his unescorted battleships . In the course of the action , Gneisenau fired sixty 28 cm and eight 15 cm rounds . During the high @-@

speed escape , both Gneisenau and Scharnhorst were flooded by significant quantities of water over their bows , which caused problems in both of their forward gun turrets .

Admiral Hipper rejoined the two battleships off Trondheim on the morning of 11 April , and the three ships returned to Wilhelmshaven , arriving the following day . There , the damage incurred during the engagement with Renown was repaired . She was then drydocked in Bremerhaven for periodic maintenance on 26 ? 29 April . The ship was to go to the Baltic following the completion of repairs , but on the morning of 5 May , while steaming at 22 knots ( 41 km / h ; 25 mph ) off the Elbe estuary , Gneisenau detonated a magnetic mine about 21 m ( 68 ft 11 in ) off the port rear quarter and 24 m ( 78 ft 9 in ) below the hull . The explosion caused significant damage to the hull and flooded several compartments , which caused the ship to take on a half @-@ degree list to port . The concussive shock from the blast damaged many internal and topside components , including the starboard low @-@ pressure turbine and the rear rangefinders . Repairs were effected in a floating drydock in Kiel from 6 to 21 May . A brief shakedown cruise followed in the Baltic , and by the 27th , she was back in Kiel at full combat readiness .

Gneisenau and Scharnhorst left Wilhelmshaven on 4 June to return to Norway . They were joined by Admiral Hipper and four destroyers . The purpose of the sortie was to interrupt Allied resupply efforts to the Norwegians and to relieve the pressure on German troops fighting in Norway . On 7 June , the squadron rendezvoused with the tanker Dithmarschen to refuel Admiral Hipper and the four destroyers . The next day , the trawler Juniper was discovered and sunk , along with the oil tanker Oil Pioneer . The Germans then launched their Arado 196 float planes to search for more Allied vessels . Admiral Hipper and the destroyers were sent to destroy Orama , a 19 @,@ 500 @-@ long @-@ ton ( 19 @,@ 800 t ) passenger ship , while Atlantis , a hospital ship , was allowed to proceed unmolested . Admiral Marschall detached Admiral Hipper and the four destroyers to refuel in Trondheim , while he would steam to the Harstad area .

At 17 : 45 , the German battleships spotted the British aircraft carrier Glorious and two escorting destroyers , Ardent and Acasta , at a range of some 50 @,@ 000 m ( 55 @,@ 000 yd ) . Scharnhorst was closer and therefore fired first . Scharnhorst had some boiler difficulty , which reduced her speed to 29 knots ( 54 km / h ; 33 mph ) . This allowed Gneisenau to overtake her sister during the action . Although the destroyers attempted to cover Glorious with smoke screens , the German battleships used their Seetakt radar to assist the gunlaying . In less than an hour 's shooting , Glorious was reduced to a burning hulk . Gneisenau then turned her fire on Acasta , while Scharnhorst dispatched Ardent . Before Acasta was sunk , she fired a spread of torpedoes at Gneisenau , which the latter successfully evaded . One of them struck Scharnhorst , however , and caused serious damage . After all three British ships had been sunk , Marschall withdrew his force to Trondheim to conduct emergency repairs to Scharnhorst . In the meantime , Marschall sortied with Gneisenau , Admiral Hipper , and four destroyers , though after two days he returned to Trondheim when it became clear that the British convoys were too heavily guarded .

Admiral Günther Lütjens replaced Marschall as the commander of the squadron , and on 20 June he sortied with Gneisenau , Admiral Hipper , and four destroyers in the direction of Iceland . His intention was to give the impression he was attempting to break out into the Atlantic , to draw British attention away from Scharnhorst as she made the return voyage to Germany . About 40 nmi ( 74 km ; 46 mi ) northwest of Halten , however , the submarine Clyde torpedoed Gneisenau . The torpedo hit the ship in the bow , just forward of the splinter belt , and caused serious damage . The ship took on a significant amount of water in the two forward watertight compartments , and she was forced to return to Trondheim at reduced speed . In Trondheim , the repair ship Huascaran effected temporary repairs that permitted the ship to return to Kiel on 25 ? 27 July , escorted by Admiral Hipper , Nürnberg , four destroyers , and six torpedo boats . A strong force from the British Home Fleet attempted to intercept the flotilla , but it failed to find it . Upon arrival , Gneisenau went into drydock at the Howaldtswerke dockyard for five months of repair work . In August , the ship 's commander was replaced by KzS Otto Fein , who would captain the ship for the majority of her active wartime career .

= = = Operation Berlin = = =

Scharnhorst joined Gneisenau , in preparation for Operation Berlin , the planned breakout into the Atlantic Ocean designed to wreak havoc on the Allied shipping lanes . Severe storms caused damage to Gneisenau , though Scharnhorst was undamaged . The two ships were forced to put into port during the storm : Gneisenau went to Kiel for repairs while Scharnhorst put into Gdynia ( Gotenhafen ) . Repairs were quickly completed , and on 22 January 1941 , the two ships , again under the command of Admiral Lütjens , left port for the North Atlantic . They were detected in the Skagerrak and the heavy units of the British Home Fleet deployed to cover the passage between Iceland and the Faroes . The Germans ' radar detected the British at long range , which allowed Lütjens to avoid the British patrols , with the aid of a squall . By 3 February , the two battleships had evaded the last British cruiser patrol , and had broken into the open Atlantic .

On 6 February , the two ships refueled from the tanker Schlettstadt south of Cape Farewell . Shortly after 08 : 30 on 8 February , lookouts spotted convoy HX @-@ 106 , though it was escorted by the battleship Ramillies . Lütjens ' orders prohibited him from engaging Allied capital ships , and so the attack was called off . Scharnhorst 's commander , KzS Hoffmann , however , closed to 23 @,@ 000 m ( 25 @,@ 000 yd ) in an attempt to lure Ramillies away from the convoy so that Gneisenau could attack the convoy . Lütjens ordered Hoffmann to rejoin the flagship immediately . The two battleships steamed off to the northwest to search for more shipping . On 22 February , the pair spotted an empty convoy sailing west , though it dispersed at the appearance of the battleships . Gneisenau sank three ships , and along with a fourth destroyed by Scharnhorst , the pair accounted for 25 @,@ 784 GRT of Allied shipping .

Lütjens then decided to move to a new area , as the surviving members of the dispersed convoy had sent distress signals . He chose the Cape Town @-@ Gibraltar convoy route , and positioned himself to the northwest of Cape Verde . The two ships encountered another convoy , escorted by the battleship Malaya , on 8 March . Lütjens again forbade an attack , though he shadowed the convoy and directed U @-@ boats to attack it . A pair of U @-@ boats sank a total of 28 @,@ 488 GRT of shipping on the night of 7 ? 8 March . Malaya turned on the two battleships and closed to 24 @,@ 000 m ( 26 @,@ 000 yd ) , well within the range of the Germans ' guns , but Lütjens refused to be drawn into an engagement . He instead turned toward the mid @-@ Atlantic , where the two ships refueled from the tankers Uckermark and Ermland on 12 March .

On 15 March , the two battleships , with the two tankers in company , encountered a dispersed convoy in the mid @-@ Atlantic . Gneisenau captured three tankers and sank a fourth , totaling 20 @,@ 139 GRT of shipping . The next day , stragglers from a convoy were sighted . Gneisenau sank seven ships for 26 @,@ 693 GRT , while her sister accounted for six vessels for 35 @,@ 088 long tons ( 35 @,@ 651 t ) . One of the surviving ships radioed the location of the German battleships , which summoned the powerful British battleships Rodney and King George V. Scharnhorst and Gneisenau used their high speed to escape in a squall , and the intervention by the British battleships convinced Lütjens that the chances of further success were small . He therefore decided to head for Brest in occupied France , which the ships reached on 22 March . She then entered drydock for periodic maintenance .

= = = Air attacks in Brest = = =

After arriving in Brest , Gneisenau was the subject of repeated British air raids . The first attack took place on the night of 30 ? 31 March , and a second occurred on 4 ? 5 April . During the second raid , a 227 kg ( 500 lb ) armor @-@ piercing ( AP ) bomb narrowly missed the ship . As a result of the attacks , the ship was moved out of the dry dock and moved to the harbor . On 6 April , the ship was attacked by British torpedo bombers , which managed to score a single hit . The Bristol Beaufort that struck the ship was piloted by Flying Officer Kenneth Campbell . The torpedo struck Gneisenau in the vicinity of the rear main battery turret . Some 3 @,@ 050 t ( 3 @,@ 000 long tons ) of water flooded the ship and caused a 2 degree list to starboard . The flooding also disabled several components of the ship 's propulsion system . The explosion caused significant destruction to the side plating as well as the starboard and centerline propeller shafts . The concussive shock also

caused widespread damage to the ship's electronic components . A salvage tug came alongside to assist in the pumping effort . Following the attack , Gneisenau returned to the drydock for repairs .

Three days later , on the night of 9 ? 10 April , several British bombers dropped around 25 t ( 25 long tons ) of 227 kg AP bombs on the ship , four of which hit . All four hit the starboard side of the forward superstructure . Two of the bombs exploded on the main armor deck while the other two failed to detonate . The attack killed 72 initially and wounded 90 , of which 16 later died of their injuries . The bombs slightly damaged the main armor deck and caused some structural damage on the starboard side . It was decided to make alterations to the ship while she was drydocked for repairs ; these included the installation of fourteen additional 2 cm anti @-@ aircraft guns and six 53 @.@ 3 cm torpedo tubes amidships . The aircraft hangar was rearranged , and the catapult that had been mounted on top of it was removed . The length of repairs and modifications precluded participation in Operation Rheinübung , the sortie by the new battleship Bismarck in May 1941 . The British continued to attack the ship in drydock , though no further damage was done . On 6 February 1942 , a bomb fell close to the ship , but caused no damage .

= = = Operation Cerberus = = =

On 12 January 1942 , the German Naval Command , in a conference with Hitler , made the decision to return Gneisenau , Scharnhorst , and the heavy cruiser Prinz Eugen to Germany . The intention was to deploy the vessels to Norway to interdict Allied convoys to the Soviet Union . The so @-@ called " Channel Dash " , codenamed Operation Cerberus , would avoid the increasingly effective Allied radar and patrol aircraft in the Atlantic . Vice Admiral Otto Ciliak was given command of the operation . In early February , minesweepers swept a route through the English Channel , though the British failed to detect the activity .

At 23 : 00 on 11 February , Scharnhorst , Gneisenau , and Prinz Eugen left Brest . They entered the Channel an hour later ; the three ships sped at 27 knots ( 50 km / h ; 31 mph ) , hugging the French coast along the voyage . The British failed to detect their departure , as the submarine that had been tasked with observing the port had withdrawn to recharge its batteries . By 06 : 30 , they had passed Cherbourg , at which point they were joined by a flotilla of torpedo boats . The torpedo boats were led by Kapitän Erich Bey , aboard the destroyer Z29 . General der Jagdflieger ( General of Fighter Force ) Adolf Galland directed Luftwaffe fighter and bomber forces ( Operation Donnerkeil ) during Cerberus . The fighters flew at masthead @-@ height to avoid detection by the British radar network . Liaison officers were present on all three ships . German aircraft arrived later to jam British radar with chaff . By 13 : 00 , the ships had cleared the Strait of Dover , though half an hour later , a flight of six Swordfish torpedo bombers , with Spitfire escort , attacked the Germans . The British failed to penetrate the Luftwaffe fighter shield and all six Swordfish were destroyed . Several more attacks were launched over the next two hours , but the Luftwaffe screen repulsed them all .

Five British destroyers mounted an attack on the German squadron at 16 : 17 . The ships attempted to close to torpedo range , though heavy seas and overcast conditions hampered their attack . Gneisenau and Prinz Eugen inflicted serious damage to the destroyer Worcester . At 19 : 55 , Gneisenau detonated a magnetic mine off Terschelling . The mine exploded just forward of the rear gun turret but caused only minor damage . Slight flooding was quickly stopped , though the shock disabled the center turbine . The ship stopped for less than 30 minutes before resuming the voyage ; by 03 : 50 , Gneisenau and two destroyers reached Helgoland . After being joined there by Prinz Eugen , the ships left for Kiel , but thick ice in the canal forced the ships to stop in Brunsbüttel . While maneuvering in port , Gneisenau struck a submerged wreck . The collision tore a hole in the hull and caused some minor flooding . Gneisenau reached Kiel the following day , where she went into a floating dry dock at the Deutsche Werke dockyard .

= = Fate = =

Repair work on Gneisenau was completed by 26 February 1942 , and she was scheduled to deploy to Norway on 6 March . Her ammunition stores had been restocked and she was prepared for a

short round of trials before her departure . On the night of 26 ? 27 February , however , the British launched a heavy air raid on the ship . The ship was hit by a single bomb in her forecastle that penetrated the armored deck and exploded . Red @-@ hot bomb fragments ignited propellant charges in the forward turret and caused a tremendous explosion . The turret was thrown off its mount and the entire bow section was burned out . The crew partially flooded the magazine to prevent a more catastrophic explosion . The blast killed 112 men and wounded 21 others .

The extensive damage convinced the Naval Staff to rebuild Gneisenau to mount the six 38 cm guns originally planned , rather than repair the ship . The damaged bow section was removed in order to attach a lengthened bow , which would correct the decrease in freeboard that would have been caused by the heavier 38 cm guns . On 4 April , the ship went to Gotenhafen , escorted by the training ship Schlesien and the icebreaker Castor . She was formally decommissioned on 1 July . Her crew were paid off and redeployed to the U @-@ boat arm .

By early 1943 , the ship had been sufficiently repaired to begin the conversion process , but Hitler , angered by the failure of German surface raiders at the Battle of the Barents Sea in December 1942 ordered the cessation of all work . Gneisenau was disarmed and her 28 cm and 15 cm gun turrets were used in shore batteries . Turret Caesar was installed in a coastal fortress in Trondheim as the coastal battery Orlandet .

Gneisenau remained unused in Gotenhafen until the end of the war . As the Red Army advanced on the city , the remaining crew took the ship out to the entrance of the harbor and sank the vessel as a blockship on 27 March 1945 . In 1947 , the Polish government ordered the ship be removed , and initial salvage operations began . The ship was sealed and refloated on 12 September 1951 then completely scrapped , though it is believed that some of her steel was used in the construction of Polish merchant vessels . She was the largest ship raised at the time . Norway offered to return the turret from Trondheim in 1979 , though the offer was rejected . The gun turret was instead preserved as a museum in Norway .