

= SMS Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse =

SMS Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse ( " HMS Emperor William the Great " ) was a German pre-dreadnought battleship of the Kaiser Friedrich III class , built around the turn of the 20th century . The ship was one of the first battleships built by the German Imperial Navy ( Kaiserliche Marine ) as part of a program of naval expansion under Kaiser Wilhelm II . Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse was built in Kiel at the Germaniawerft shipyard . She was laid down in January 1898 , launched in June 1899 , and completed in May 1901 . The ship was armed with a main battery of four 24 cm ( 9 in ) guns in two twin gun turrets .

Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse served in the main fleet ? the Heimatflotte ( Home Fleet ) and later the Hochseeflotte ( High Seas Fleet ) ? for the first seven years of her career . She participated in several of the fleet 's training cruises and maneuvers , primarily in the North and Baltic Seas . Her peacetime career was relatively uneventful and she suffered no accidents . She was decommissioned for a major reconstruction in 1908 ? 10 , after which she was assigned to the Reserve Division with her four sister ships .

At the outbreak of World War I in 1914 , the battleship and her sisters were placed back in active service as the V Battle Squadron of the High Seas Fleet and tasked with coastal defense in the North Sea . They were also deployed briefly to the Baltic but saw no action . In 1915 , the ships were again withdrawn from service and relegated to secondary duties . Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse was used as a depot ship in Kiel and eventually a torpedo target ship . After the war , the Treaty of Versailles greatly reduced the size of the German Navy . The vessel was sold for scrapping to a German company and broken up in 1920 .

= = Design = =

Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse was 125 m ( 411 ft 1 in ) long overall and had a beam of 20 m ( 66 ft 11 in ) and a draft of 7 m ( 23 ft 0 in ) forward and 8 m ( 26 ft 3 in ) aft . She displaced 11 ,097 t ( 10 ,922 long tons ) normally and up to 11 ,785 t ( 11 ,599 long tons ) at full load . The ship was powered by three 3-cylinder vertical triple-expansion steam engines that drove three screw propellers . Steam was provided by four Marine-type and eight cylindrical boilers , all of which burned coal . Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse 's powerplant was rated at 13 ,000 metric horsepower ( 12 ,822 ihp ; 9 ,561 kW ) , which generated a top speed of 17 .5 knots ( 32 .4 km / h ; 20 .1 mph ) .

The ship 's armament consisted of a main battery of four 24 cm ( 9 in ) SK L / 40 guns in twin gun turrets , one fore and one aft of the central superstructure . Her secondary armament consisted of eighteen 15 cm ( 5 .9 inch ) SK L / 40 guns and twelve 8 .8 cm ( 3 .45 in ) SK L / 30 quick-firing guns . She also carried twelve 3 .7 cm ( 1 .5 in ) machine cannon . Six 45 cm ( 17 .7 in ) torpedo tubes were mounted in above-water swivel mounts . The ship 's belt armor was 300 mm ( 11 .8 in ) thick , and the deck was 65 mm ( 2 .6 in ) thick . The conning tower and main battery turrets were protected with 250 mm ( 9 .8 in ) of armor , and the secondary casemates received 150 mm ( 5 .9 in ) of protection .

= = Service history = =

= = = Construction and early service = = =

Kaiser Wilhelm II , the emperor of Germany , believed that a strong navy was necessary for the country to expand its influence outside continental Europe . He initiated a program of naval expansion in the late 1880s ; the first battleships built under this program were the four Brandenburg-class ships . These were immediately followed by the five Kaiser Friedrich III-class battleships , of which Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse was the third . Her keel was laid on 22 January 1898 at the Germaniawerft shipyard in Kiel , as construction number 22 . She was ordered under

the contract name Ersatz König Wilhelm , to replace the obsolete armored frigate König Wilhelm . Her scheduled launching on 29 April 1899 was delayed to 1 June after a large fire at the shipyard damaged the slipway . Louise , the Grand Duchess of Baden , christened the ship after her father Wilhelm I of Germany , the ship 's namesake . Wilhelm II gave the launching speech for the ship commemorating his grandfather . After completing fitting @-@ out work , dockyard sea trials began on 19 February 1901 , followed by acceptance trials that started on 18 March . These were completed by May , and she was formally commissioned on 5 May . That year , Erich Raeder ? who went on to command the Kriegsmarine in World War II ? was promoted to serve as a watch officer aboard her .

After commissioning in 1901 , Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse joined her sister ships in the I Squadron of the Heimatflotte ( Home Fleet ) . After her sister Kaiser Friedrich III ran aground and had to be docked for repairs , Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse replaced her as the I Squadron flagship , which was commanded by Prince Heinrich , the brother of Wilhelm II . She held this post until 24 October , when Kaiser Friedrich III returned to service . In the meantime , Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse was present for the Kiel Week sailing regatta in June and the dedication of a monument at the Marineakademie ( Naval Academy ) in Kiel . At the end of July , she led the squadron on a cruise to Spanish waters , and while docked in Cádiz , they rendezvoused with the Brandenburg @-@ class battleships returning from East Asian waters . The I Squadron was back in Kiel by 11 August , though the late arrival of the Brandenburgs delayed the participation of the I Squadron in the annual autumn fleet training . The maneuvers began with exercises in the German Bight , followed by a mock attack on the fortifications in the lower Elbe . Gunnery drills took place in Kiel Bay before the fleet steamed to Danzig Bay , where the maneuvers concluded on 15 September . Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse and the rest of I Squadron went on their normal winter cruise to Norway in December , which included a stop at Oslo from 7 to 12 December .

In 1902 , the new battleship Wittelsbach ran aground off Korsør ; Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse took her under tow back to port . The I Squadron went on a short cruise in the western Baltic then embarked on a major cruise around the British Isles , which lasted from 25 April to 28 May . Individual and squadron maneuvers took place from June to August , interrupted only by a cruise to Norway in July . The annual fleet maneuvers began in August in the Baltic and concluded in the North Sea with a fleet review in the Jade . During the exercises , Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse was assigned to the " hostile " force , as were several of her sister ships . The " hostile " force was first tasked with preventing the " German " squadron from passing through the Great Belt in the Baltic . Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse and several other battleships were then tasked with forcing an entry into the mouth of the Elbe River , where the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal and Hamburg could be seized . The " hostile " flotilla accomplished these tasks within three days . The regular winter cruise followed during 1 ? 12 December .

In 1903 , the fleet , which was composed of only one squadron of battleships , was reorganized as the " Active Battle Fleet " . Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse remained in the I Squadron along with her sister ships and the newest Wittelsbach @-@ class battleships , while the older Brandenburg @-@ class ships were placed in reserve to be rebuilt . The first quarter of 1903 followed the usual pattern of training exercises . The squadron went on a training cruise in the Baltic , followed by a voyage to Spain from 7 May to 10 June . In July , the I Squadron went on its annual cruise to Norway . The autumn maneuvers consisted of a blockade exercise in the North Sea , a cruise of the entire fleet first to Norwegian waters and then to Kiel in early September , and finally a mock attack on Kiel . The exercises concluded on 12 September . The winter cruise began on 23 November in the eastern Baltic and continued into the Skagerrak on 1 December .

= = = 1904 ? 14 = = =

The I Squadron held its first exercise of 1904 in the Skagerrak from 11 to 21 January . Further squadron exercises followed from 8 to 17 March . A major fleet exercise took place in the North Sea in May , and in July the I Squadron and the I Scouting Group visited Britain , stopping at Plymouth on 10 July . The German fleet departed on 13 July , bound for the Netherlands ; the I Squadron

anchored in Vlissingen the following day . There , the ships were visited by Queen Wilhelmina . The I Squadron remained in Vlissingen until 20 July , when it departed for a cruise in the northern North Sea with the rest of the fleet . The squadron stopped in Molde , Norway , on 29 July , while the other units went to other ports . The fleet reassembled on 6 August and steamed back to Kiel , where it conducted a mock attack on the harbor on 12 August . The fleet then began preparations for the autumn maneuvers , which began on 29 August in the Baltic . The fleet moved to the North Sea on 3 September , where it took part in a major landing operation , after which the ships took the ground troops from the IX Corps that participated in the exercises to Altona for a parade for Wilhelm II . The ships then conducted their own parade for the Kaiser off the island of Helgoland on 6 September . Three days later , the fleet returned to the Baltic via the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal , where it participated in further landing operations with the IX Corps and the Guards Corps . On 15 September , the maneuvers came to an end . The I Squadron went on its winter training cruise , this time to the eastern Baltic , from 22 November to 2 December .

The ships of the I Squadron went on a pair of training cruises during 9 ? 19 January and 27 February ? 16 March 1905 . Individual and squadron training followed , with an emphasis on gunnery drills . On 12 July , the fleet began a major training exercise in the North Sea . The fleet then cruised through the Kattegat and stopped in Copenhagen and Stockholm . The summer cruise ended on 9 August ; the autumn maneuvers that would normally have begun shortly thereafter were delayed by a visit from the British Channel Fleet that month . The British fleet stopped in Danzig , Swinemünde , and Flensburg , where it was greeted by units of the German Navy ; Kaiser Wilhelm II and the main German fleet were anchored at Swinemünde for the occasion . The visit 's impact was lessened by the ongoing Anglo @-@ German naval arms race . As a result of the British visit , the 1905 autumn maneuvers were shortened considerably , from 6 to 13 September , and consisted only of exercises in the North Sea . The first exercise presumed a naval blockade in the German Bight , and the second envisioned a hostile fleet attempting to force the defenses of the Elbe . During the exercises , Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse won the Kaiser 's Schiesspreis ( Shooting Prize ) for excellent gunnery in the I Squadron . In October , the ship was reassigned to the I Division of the II Squadron . In early December , the I and II Squadrons went on their regular winter cruise , this time to Danzig , where they arrived on 12 December . On the return trip to Kiel , the fleet conducted tactical exercises .

Over the winter of 1906 ? 07 , Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse underwent a major overhaul in Kiel , which was completed by the end of April . By this time , the newest Deutschland @-@ class battleships were coming into service ; along with the Braunschweig @-@ class battleships , these provided enough modern battleships to create two full battle squadrons . As a result , the Heimatflotte was renamed the Hochseeflotte ( High Seas Fleet ) . Starting on 13 May , major fleet exercises took place in the North Sea and lasted until 8 June with a cruise around the Skagen into the Baltic . The fleet began its usual summer cruise to Norway in mid @-@ July . The fleet was present for the birthday of Norwegian King Haakon VII on 3 August . The German ships departed the following day for Helgoland , to join exercises being conducted there . The fleet was back in Kiel by 15 August , where preparations for the autumn maneuvers began . On 22 ? 24 August , the fleet took part in landing exercises in Eckernförde Bay outside Kiel . The maneuvers were paused from 31 August to 3 September when the fleet hosted vessels from Denmark and Sweden , along with a Russian squadron from 3 to 9 September in Kiel . The maneuvers resumed on 8 September and lasted five more days .

A shorter period of dockyard work took place from 7 December to 27 January 1908 . She returned to the fleet for the normal peacetime routine of training exercises , and after the conclusion of the autumn maneuvers , Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse was decommissioned in Kiel on 21 September . She was taken into the Kaiserliche Werft shipyard in Kiel for an extensive modernization that lasted until 1910 . During the refit , four of the ship 's 15 cm guns and the stern @-@ mounted torpedo tube were removed . Two 8 @. @ 8 cm guns were added and the arrangement of the 8 @. @ 8 cm battery was modified . Her superstructure was also cut down to reduce the ship 's tendency to roll excessively , and the ship 's funnels were lengthened . After reconstruction , the ship was assigned to the Reserve Division in the Baltic , along with her sister ships . She was reactivated on 31 July

1911 and assigned to the III Squadron during the annual fleet exercises , then returned on 15 September to the Reserve Division . She remained there for the rest of her peacetime career .

= = = World War I = = =

As a result of the outbreak of World War I , Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse and her sisters were brought out of reserve and mobilized as the V Battle Squadron on 5 August 1914 . The ships were prepared for war very slowly , and were not ready for service in the North Sea until the end of August . They were initially tasked with coastal defense , but they served in this capacity for a very short time . In mid @-@ September , the V Squadron was transferred to the Baltic , under the command of Prince Heinrich . He initially planned to launch a major amphibious assault against the Russians at Windau , but a shortage of transports forced a revision of the plan . Instead , the V Squadron was to carry the landing force , but this too was cancelled after Heinrich received false reports of British warships having entered the Baltic on 25 September . Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse and her sisters returned to Kiel the following day , disembarked the landing force , and then proceeded to the North Sea , where they resumed guard ship duties . Before the end of the year , the V Squadron was once again transferred to the Baltic .

Prince Heinrich ordered a foray toward Gotland . On 26 December 1914 , the battleships rendezvoused with the Baltic cruiser division in the Bay of Pomerania and then departed on the sortie . Two days later , the fleet arrived off Gotland to show the German flag , and was back in Kiel by 30 December . The squadron returned to the North Sea for guard duties , but was withdrawn from front @-@ line service in February 1915 . Shortages of trained crews in the High Seas Fleet , coupled with the risk of operating older ships in wartime , necessitated the deactivation of Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse and her sisters . Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse first went to Hamburg , where her crew was reduced on 5 March . She was moved to Kiel on 30 April , where the rest of her crew were removed . She was disarmed and thereafter used as a depot ship . The following year , the ship was used as a torpedo target ship . In November 1918 , Germany surrendered and signed the Armistice at Compiègne that ended the fighting . According to Article 181 of the Treaty of Versailles , signed on 28 June 1919 , that formally ended the war , Germany was permitted to retain only six battleships of the " Deutschland or Lothringen types " . On 6 December 1919 , the vessel was struck from the naval list and sold to a shipbreaking firm based in Berlin . The following year , Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse was broken up for scrap metal in Kiel @-@ Nordmole .