

= French battleship Bretagne =

Bretagne was a battleship of the French Navy built in the 1910s , and the lead ship of her class ; she had two sister ships , Provence and Lorraine . The ship was laid down in July 1912 at the Arsenal de Brest , launched in April 1913 , and commissioned into the fleet in February 1916 , after the outbreak of World War I. She was named in honour of the French region of Brittany , and was armed with a main battery of ten 340 mm (13 in) guns .

Bretagne spent the bulk of her career in the French Mediterranean Squadron . During World War I , she was stationed at Corfu to prevent the Austro -@-@ Hungarian fleet from leaving the Adriatic Sea , but she saw no action . She remained in service during the 1920s and 1930s , while her sisters were placed in reserve . She participated in non @-@ intervention patrols during the Spanish Civil War . Bretagne escorted convoys after the outbreak of World War II in September 1939 , and was stationed in Mers @-@ el @-@ Kébir when France surrendered on 22 June 1940 . Fearful that the Germans would seize the French Navy , the British Royal Navy attacked the ships at Mers @-@ el @-@ Kébir ; in the attack Bretagne was hit badly and exploded , killing the majority of her crew . The wreck was eventually raised in 1952 and broken up for scrap .

= = Design = =

Bretagne was 166 meters (544 ft 7 in) long overall and had a beam of 26 @. @ 9 m (88 ft 3 in) and a full @-@ load draft of 9 @. @ 8 m (32 ft 2 in) . She displaced around 25 @, @ 000 metric tons (25 @, @ 000 long tons ; 28 @, @ 000 short tons) at full load and had a crew of between 1124 and 1133 officers and enlisted men . She was powered by four Parsons steam turbines with twenty @-@ four Niclausse boilers . They were rated at 29 @, @ 000 shaft horsepower (22 @, @ 000 kW) and provided a top speed of 20 knots (37 km / h ; 23 mph) . Coal storage amounted to 2 @, @ 680 t (2 @, @ 640 long tons ; 2 @, @ 950 short tons) .

Bretagne 's main battery consisted of ten 340mm / 45 Modèle 1912 guns mounted in five twin gun turrets , numbered from front to rear . They were placed all on the centerline ; two were in a superfiring pair forward , one amidships , and the last two in a superfiring arrangement aft . The secondary battery consisted of twenty @-@ two Canon de 138 mm Modèle 1910 guns in casemates along the length of the hull . She also carried seven 47 mm (1 @. @ 9 in) Hotchkiss guns , two on the conning tower and one on the roof of each turret . The ship was also armed with four submerged 450 mm (17 @. @ 7 in) torpedo tubes . The ship 's main belt was 270 mm (10 @. @ 6 in) thick and the main battery was protected by up to 300 mm (11 @. @ 8 in) of armor . The conning tower had 314 mm (12 @. @ 4 in) thick sides .

= = Service = =

Bretagne was laid down at the Arsenal de Brest on 1 July 1912 , launched on 21 April 1913 , and completed in September 1915 . She was commissioned into the French Navy on 10 February 1916 . After entering service in 1916 , Bretagne and her sisters were assigned to the 1st Division of the 1st Battle Squadron , their unit for the remainder of the war , Bretagne becoming flagship of the squadron . They spent the majority of their time at Corfu to prevent the Austro @-@ Hungarian fleet from attempting to break out of the Adriatic . The fleet 's presence was also intended to intimidate Greece , which had become increasingly hostile to the Triple Entente . Later in the war , men were drawn from their crews for anti @-@ submarine warfare vessels . As the Austro @-@ Hungarians largely remained in port for the duration of the war , Bretagne saw no action during the conflict . Indeed , she did not leave port at all for the entirety of 1917 , due to a severe shortage of coal at Corfu . Around July 1918 , the ship 's foremast was replaced by a tripod foremast that mounted an experimental fire @-@ control director and her mainmast was shortened to allow the ship to fly a captive kite balloon . Bretagne returned to Toulon in November 1918 .

The ship received a lengthy refit at Toulon from 12 June 1919 to 18 October 1920 . This included modifications to her gun turrets that increased the elevation of the 340 @-@ millimeter (13 in) from

12 ° to 18 ° and thus their maximum range to 21 @, @ 000 meters (23 @, @ 000 yd) . The four forward 138 @-@ millimeter (5 @. @ 4 in) guns were removed . Both 75 @-@ millimeter (3 @. @ 0 in) anti @-@ aircraft (AA) guns and two 47 @-@ millimeter guns were replaced by four 75 mm AA guns mounted on the forward superstructure . A Vickers fire @-@ control director replaced the experimental model and it was equipped with a 3 @. @ 66 @-@ meter (12 ft 0 in) rangefinder . Two additional 2 @-@ meter (6 ft 7 in) rangefinders were installed , one on each side of the superstructure , to control the 138 mm guns . Bretagne became flagship of the Mediterranean Fleet in mid @-@ June 1921 and the ship accompanied Provence to Le Havre for a naval review , and were back in Toulon in September . In 1922 , Provence and Lorraine were placed in reserve , leaving Bretagne the only member of her class in service . She spent the 1920s conducting periodic fleet maneuvers and cruises around the Mediterranean and to French colonial possessions in West Africa . Provence became the fleet flagship in September 1923 .

Bretagne received a major refit at Toulon from 1 May 1924 to 29 September 1925 , during which the elevation of her main armament was increased to 23 ° , giving her a maximum range of 23 @, @ 700 meters (25 @, @ 900 yd) , the forward hull armor was removed to make her less bow heavy , one group of boilers was converted to oil @-@ firing and two 1 @. @ 5 @-@ meter (4 ft 11 in) high @-@ angle rangefinders were added for the AA guns . The ship resumed her position as flagship of the Mediterranean Fleet in October after her refit was completed , but Provence assumed that role in October 1927 when Bretagne began another refit to repair her boilers . The navy took the opportunity to upgrade her fire @-@ control systems ; replacing her Vickers system with a French Chamond @-@ Granat model , adding a 4 @. @ 57 @-@ meter (15 ft 0 in) rangefinder at the top of the foremast and another on the conning tower .

Bretagne was modernized in 1931 ? 32 ; her torpedo tubes and four more 138 mm guns were removed while four more 75 mm anti @-@ aircraft guns were added . In 1934 , Bretagne and Provence were assigned to the 2nd Squadron in the Atlantic . There , they joined fleet exercises off the Azores , Madeira , and Morocco . The two ships took part in a cruise to Africa in 1936 . In August , they were involved in non @-@ intervention patrols after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War ; these patrols lasted until April 1937 .

== = World War II == =

At the outbreak of World War II in September 1939 , Bretagne was based in Toulon . At the time , Italy remained neutral , so there was no immediate threat for the Mediterranean Fleet . In December , Bretagne covered convoy traffic in the Atlantic . On 4 December , she and Provence , along with the cruisers Colbert , Dupleix , and Primauguet and several destroyers and submarines operated out of Dakar . Around the middle of the month , the task force began to return to the Mediterranean . After returning to Toulon , Bretagne underwent an extensive overhaul , which lasted until 3 March 1940 . On 11 March , she left France carrying 1 @, @ 820 boxes of gold bars from the French treasury along with the cruiser Algérie , which carried another 1 @, @ 179 boxes . They arrived in Halifax on 10 April . On the return voyage , they escorted two American merchant ships carrying 82 aircraft bought by France and arrived at Toulon on 10 April . On 27 April , Bretagne and her two sisters were transferred to Alexandria . Bretagne and Provence returned to Mers El Kébir on 18 May .

== = Loss == =

Following the French surrender on 22 June , the French fleet was to be disarmed under German and Italian supervision , under the terms of the Armistice . The British high command , however , was concerned that the French ships would be seized by the Axis powers and placed in service . The Axis navies would then outnumber the British Royal Navy . Prime Minister Winston Churchill therefore ordered Vice Admiral James Somerville , the commander of Force H , to neutralize the French fleet at Mers @-@ el @-@ Kébir . He was instructed to order the French vessels to join the British with the Free French , surrender for internment , to scuttle themselves , or be sunk . On 3

July , Somerville arrived and delivered the ultimatum ; the French rejected it , and so the British ships opened fire .

Bretagne was hit by four 15 @-@ inch (380 mm) projectiles from HMS Hood , HMS Resolution , and HMS Valiant (no ship is especially credited for) . The two first shells struck simultaneously at the third British salvo . The first one hit the ship below the waterline under the turret IV , igniting some 340mm shells and triggering a massive explosion . The deflagration blew up bulkheads and watertights doors , and set all the stern ablaze , killing about 350 sailors . In the meantime , the massive hole on the starboard side of the ship allowed a massive amount of water (estimated at a rate of 300 tons per minute) to pour in . This flooding prevented the complete destruction of the ship : it limited the fire around the aft 340mm magazines , which were now opened to the air .

The second shell struck above the waterline , in the aft engine room , killing all the sailors inside and damaged the internal communication system of the ship .

Seven minutes later , two other high @-@ caliber shells struck the Bretagne at the same time . The first one detonated at the base of the tripod mast , igniting some ready @-@ to @-@ use anti @-@ aircraft projectiles which were stored in lockers next to the anti @-@ aircraft mounts . The second one went through the central 138mm casemate , exploding deep inside the ship . A huge fire started , with leaking oil burning next to the ship . In about thirty seconds , the ship rolled over while a massive explosion occurred .

The sinking caused the loss of 977 of her crew , the vast majority of the 1 @,@ 147 French naval personnel killed in the attack . Some initial salvaging work was done in the aftermath of the attack , but the Allied invasion of North Africa in November 1942 interrupted the work . Because she was an impediment to the work of extension of the military harbor (which was now a full military complex with anti @-@ atomic bunkers) ; Bretagne ultimately was salvaged from 1952 to 1954 . The hull was cut in to big parts , which were raised and scrapped ashore .