

= SMS Kronprinz =

SMS Kronprinz was the last battleship of the four *König* class of the German Imperial Navy . The battleship was laid down in November 1911 and launched on 21 February 1914 . She was formally commissioned into the Imperial Navy on 8 November 1914 , just over 4 months after the start of World War I. The name Kronprinz (Eng : " Crown Prince ") refers to Crown Prince Wilhelm , and in June 1918 , the ship was renamed Kronprinz Wilhelm in his honor . The battleship was armed with ten 30 cm (12 in) guns in five twin turrets and could steam at a top speed of 21 knots (39 km / h ; 24 mph) .

Along with her three sister ships , *König* , *Grosser Kurfürst* and *Markgraf* , Kronprinz took part in most of the fleet actions during the war , including the Battle of Jutland on 31 May and 1 June 1916 . Although near the front of the German line , she emerged from the battle unscathed . She was torpedoed by the British submarine HMS J1 on 5 November 1916 during an operation off the Danish coast . Following repairs , she participated in Operation Albion , an amphibious assault in the Baltic , in October 1917 . During the operation Kronprinz engaged the *Tsesarevich* and forced her to retreat .

After Germany 's defeat in the war and the signing of the Armistice in November 1918 , Kronprinz and most of the capital ships of the High Seas Fleet were interned by the Royal Navy in Scapa Flow . The ships were disarmed and reduced to skeleton crews while the Allied powers negotiated the final version of the Treaty of Versailles . On 21 June 1919 , days before the treaty was signed , the commander of the interned fleet , Rear Admiral Ludwig von Reuter , ordered the fleet to be scuttled to ensure that the British would not be able to seize the ships . Unlike most of the other scuttled ships , Kronprinz was never raised for scrapping ; the wreck is still on the bottom of the harbour .

= = Construction and design = =

Kronprinz was ordered under the provisional name *Ersatz Brandenburg* and built at the *Germaniawerft* shipyard in Kiel under construction number 182 . Her keel was laid in May 1912 and she was launched on 21 February 1914 . The ship was scheduled to be completed in early 1915 , but work was expedited after the outbreak of World War I in mid 1914 . Fitting out work was completed by 8 November 1914 , the day she was commissioned into the High Seas Fleet . She had cost the Imperial German Government 45 million Goldmarks .

Kronprinz displaced 25,796 t (25,389 long tons) as built and 28,600 t (28,100 long tons) fully loaded , with a length of 175 m (575 ft 6 in) , a beam of 19 m (64 ft 0 in) and a draft of 9 m (30 ft 2 in) . She was powered by three Parsons steam turbines and three oil fired and twelve coal fired boilers , which developed a total of 45,570 shaft horsepower (33,980 kW) and yielded a maximum speed of 21 knots (39 km / h ; 24 mph) .

She was armed with ten 30 cm (12 in) SK L / 50 guns arranged in five twin gun turrets : two superfiring turrets each fore and aft and one turret amidships between the two funnels . Her secondary armament consisted of fourteen 15 cm (5.9 in) SK L / 45 quick firing guns , six 8 cm (3.1 in) SK L / 45 quick firing guns and five 50 cm (20 in) underwater torpedo tubes , one in the bow and two on each beam .

= = Service history = =

Kronprinz was completed in November 1914 ; following her commissioning she joined the III Battle Squadron of the High Seas Fleet . Kronprinz completed her sea trials on 2 January 1915 . The first operation in which she participated was an uneventful sortie by the fleet into the North Sea on 29 ? 30 March . Three weeks later , on 17 ? 18 April , she and her sisters supported an operation in which the light cruisers of the II Scouting Group laid mines off the Swarte Bank . Another sweep by the fleet occurred on 22 April ; two days later III Squadron returned to the Baltic for another round of exercises . On 8 May an explosion occurred in the center turret 's right gun . The Baltic exercises

lasted until 13 May , at which point the III Squadron returned to the North Sea . Another minelaying operation was conducted by the II Scouting Group on 17 May , with the battleship again in support .

Kronprinz participated in a fleet operation into the North Sea which ended without combat from 29 until 31 May 1915 . The ship supported a minelaying operation on 11 ? 12 September off Texel . The fleet conducted another sweep into the North Sea on 23 ? 24 October . Several uneventful sorties followed on 5 ? 7 March 1916 , 31 March and 2 ? 3 April . Kronprinz supported a raid on the English coast on 24 April 1916 conducted by the German battlecruiser force of the I Scouting Group . The battlecruisers left the Jade Estuary at 10 : 55 CET , and the rest of the High Seas Fleet followed at 13 : 40 . The battlecruiser Seydlitz struck a mine while en route to the target , and had to withdraw . The other battlecruisers bombarded the town of Lowestoft unopposed , but during the approach to Yarmouth , they encountered the British cruisers of the Harwich Force . A short gun duel ensued before the Harwich Force withdrew . Reports of British submarines in the area prompted the retreat of the I Scouting Group . At this point , Admiral Reinhard Scheer , who had been warned of the sortie of the Grand Fleet from its base in Scapa Flow , also withdrew to safer German waters .

= = = Battle of Jutland = = =

Kronprinz was present during the fleet operation that resulted in the battle of Jutland which took place on 31 May and 1 June 1916 . The German fleet again sought to draw out and isolate a portion of the Grand Fleet and destroy it before the main British fleet could retaliate . Kronprinz was the rearmost ship of the V Division of the III Battle Squadron , the vanguard of the fleet . She followed her sisters König , the lead ship , Grosser Kurfürst , and Markgraf . The III Battle Squadron was the first of three battleship units ; directly astern were the Kaiser @-@ class battleships of the VI Division , III Battle Squadron . Directly astern of the Kaiser @-@ class ships were the Helgoland and Nassau classes of the II Battle Squadron ; in the rear guard were the obsolescent Deutschland @-@ class pre @-@ dreadnoughts of the I Battle Squadron .

Shortly before 16 : 00 , the battlecruisers of I Scouting Group encountered the British 1st Battlecruiser Squadron under the command of David Beatty . The opposing ships began an artillery duel that saw the destruction of Indefatigable , shortly after 17 : 00 , and Queen Mary , less than half an hour later . By this time , the German battlecruisers were steaming south to draw the British ships toward the main body of the High Seas Fleet . At 17 : 30 , König 's crew spotted both the I Scouting Group and the 1st Battlecruiser Squadron approaching . The German battlecruisers were steaming to starboard , while the British ships steamed to port . At 17 : 45 , Scheer ordered a two @-@ point turn to port to bring his ships closer to the British battlecruisers , and a minute later , the order to open fire was given .

Kronprinz 's sisters opened fire on the British battlecruisers , but Kronprinz was not close enough to engage them . Instead , she and ten other German battleships fired at the 2nd Light Cruiser Squadron . Kronprinz fired at HMS Dublin from 17 : 51 to 18 : 00 at ranges of 17 @,@ 000 ? 18 @,@ 600 m (55 @,@ 800 ? 61 @,@ 000 ft) , then shifted her fire to the fast battleship Malaya at 18 : 08 at a range of 17 @,@ 000 m . Kronprinz fired first with semi @-@ armor @-@ piercing shells to find the range to her target , then with standard armor @-@ piercing shells . By the time Malaya drew out of range 13 minutes later , only one hit had been reported by Kronprinz 's gunners . According to naval historian John Campbell , this hit was more likely " the flash of the Malaya 's guns seen through haze and smoke " . During this period , several salvos fell close to Kronprinz , though none struck her . Kronprinz again reached a firing position against Malaya at 18 : 30 , but was only able to fire for six minutes before the British ship again pulled away .

Shortly after 19 : 00 , several British destroyers attempted a torpedo attack against the leading ships of the German line . The destroyer Onslow fired a pair of torpedoes at Kronprinz at a range of 7 @,@ 300 m (24 @,@ 000 ft) , though both missed . The German cruiser Wiesbaden had been disabled by a shell from the British battlecruiser Invincible , and Rear Admiral Paul Behncke in König ordered his four ships to maneuver to cover the stricken cruiser . Simultaneously , the British III and IV Light Cruiser Squadrons began a torpedo attack on the German line ; while advancing to torpedo

range , they smothered Wiesbaden with fire from their main guns . Kronprinz and her sisters fired heavily on the British cruisers , but failed to drive them off . In the ensuing melee , the British armored cruiser Defence was struck by several heavy caliber shells from the German dreadnoughts . One salvo penetrated the ship 's ammunition magazines and , in a massive explosion , destroyed the cruiser . John Campbell notes that although Defence 's destruction is usually attributed to the battlecruiser Lützow , there is a possibility that it was Kronprinz 's fire that destroyed the ship . After the destruction of Defence , Kronprinz shifted her fire to Warrior ; the British cruiser was badly damaged and forced to withdraw from the battle . She was unable to reach port , and was abandoned the following morning .

By 20 : 00 , the German line was ordered to turn eastward to disengage from the British fleet . Markgraf , directly ahead of Kronprinz , had engine problems and fell out of formation , then fell in behind Kronprinz . Between 20 : 00 and 20 : 30 , Kronprinz and the other III Squadron battleships engaged the British 2nd Light Cruiser Squadron as well as the battleships of the Grand Fleet . Kronprinz attempted to find the range by observing the British muzzle flashes , but the worsening visibility prevented her gunners from acquiring a target . As a result , she held her fire in this period . Kronprinz was violently shaken by several near misses . At 20 : 18 , Scheer ordered the fleet to turn away a third time to escape from the murderous British gunfire ; this turn reversed the order of the fleet and placed Kronprinz toward the end of the line . After successfully withdrawing from the British , Scheer ordered the fleet to assume night cruising formation , though communication errors between Scheer aboard Friedrich der Grosse and Westfalen , the lead ship , caused delays . The fleet fell into formation by 23 : 30 , with Kronprinz the 14th vessel in the line of 24 capital ships .

Around 02 : 45 , several British destroyers mounted a torpedo attack against the rear half of the German line ; Kronprinz spotted several unidentified destroyers in the darkness . Kronprinz held her fire , and she and the other battleships turned away to avoid torpedoes . One torpedo , fired by the destroyer Obedient , exploded about 100 yd (91 m) behind Kronprinz , in the battleship 's wake . Both Obedient and Faulknor reported a hit on Kronprinz , though she was undamaged by the near miss . Heavy fire from the German battleships forced the British destroyers to withdraw . The High Seas Fleet had managed to punch through the British light forces and subsequently reached Horns Reef by 04 : 00 on 1 June , and Wilhelmshaven a few hours later . The I Squadron battleships took up defensive positions in the outer roadstead , while Kronprinz , Kaiser , Kaiserin , and Prinzregent Luitpold stood ready just outside the entrance to Wilhelmshaven .

In the course of the battle , Kronprinz had fired 144 armor @-@ piercing and semi @-@ armor @-@ piercing rounds from her main battery guns , though the exact numbers of each are unknown . The ship did not fire her secondary 15 cm or 8 @.@ 8 cm guns during the entire engagement . Of the four König @-@ class ships , only Kronprinz escaped damage during the battle .

= = = Subsequent operations = = =

On 18 August 1916 , Kronprinz took part in an operation to bombard Sunderland . Admiral Scheer attempted a repeat of the original 31 May plan ; the two serviceable German battlecruisers ? Moltke and Von der Tann ? supported by three dreadnoughts , were to bombard the coastal town of Sunderland in an attempt to draw out and destroy Beatty 's battlecruisers . The rest of the fleet , including Kronprinz , would trail behind and provide cover . The British were aware of the German plans and sortied the Grand Fleet to meet them . By 14 : 35 , Admiral Scheer had been warned of the Grand Fleet 's approach and , unwilling to engage the whole of the Grand Fleet just eleven weeks after the decidedly close call at Jutland , turned his forces around and retreated to German ports .

Kronprinz participated in two uneventful fleet operations , one a month prior on 16 July to the north of Helgoland , and one into the North Sea on 18 ? 20 October . Kronprinz and the rest of III Squadron were sent to the Baltic directly afterward for training , which lasted until 2 November . Upon returning from the Baltic , Kronprinz and the rest of III Squadron were ordered to cover the retrieval of a pair of U @-@ boats that were stranded on the Danish coast . On the return trip , on 5 November 1916 , Kronprinz was torpedoed by the British submarine J1 near Horns Reef . The

torpedo struck the ship beneath the forward @-@ most gun turret and allowed approximately 250 metric tons (250 long tons ; 280 short tons) of water into the ship . Kronprinz maintained her speed and reached port . The following day she was placed in drydock at the Imperial Dockyard in Wilhelmshaven for repairs , which lasted until 4 December .

After returning to the III Squadron , Kronprinz took part in squadron training in the Baltic before conducting defensive patrols in the German Bight . During training maneuvers on 5 March 1917 , Kronprinz was accidentally rammed by her sister ship Grosser Kurfürst in the Heligoland Bight . The collision caused minor flooding ; Kronprinz shipped some 600 t (590 long tons ; 660 short tons) of water . She again went into the drydock in Wilhelmshaven , from 6 March to 17 May . On 11 September , Kronprinz was detached for training in the Baltic . She then joined the Special Unit for Operation Albion .

= = = Operation Albion = = =

In early September 1917 , following the German conquest of the Russian port of Riga , the German navy decided to eliminate the Russian naval forces that still held the Gulf of Riga . The Admiralstab (the Navy High Command) planned an operation to seize the Baltic island of Ösel , and specifically the Russian gun batteries on the Sworbe Peninsula . On 18 September , the order was issued for a joint operation with the army to capture Ösel and Moon Islands ; the primary naval component was to comprise the flagship , Moltke , along with the III Battle Squadron of the High Seas Fleet . The V Division included the four König @-@ class ships , and was by this time augmented with the new battleship Bayern . The VI Division consisted of the five Kaiser @-@ class battleships . Along with nine light cruisers , three torpedo boat flotillas , and dozens of mine warfare ships , the entire force numbered some 300 ships , supported by over 100 aircraft and six zeppelins . The invasion force amounted to approximately 24 @,@ 600 officers and enlisted men . Opposing the Germans were the old Russian pre @-@ dreadnoughts Slava and Tsesarevich , the armored cruisers Bayan , Admiral Makarov , and Diana , 26 destroyers , and several torpedo boats and gunboats . The garrison on Ösel numbered some 14 @,@ 000 men .

The operation began on 12 October ; at 03 : 00 König anchored off Ösel in Tagga Bay and disembarked soldiers . By 05 : 50 , König opened fire on Russian coastal artillery emplacements , joined by Moltke , Bayern , and the other three König @-@ class ships . Simultaneously , the Kaiser @-@ class ships engaged the batteries on the Sworbe peninsula ; the objective was to secure the channel between Moon and Dagö islands , which would block the only escape route of the Russian ships in the Gulf . Both Grosser Kurfürst and Bayern struck mines while maneuvering into their bombardment positions , with minimal damage to the former . Bayern was severely damaged , and had to be withdrawn to Kiel for repairs . After the bombardment , Kronprinz departed the area for Putziger Wiek , where she refueled . The ship passed through Irben Strait on 16 October .

On 16 October , it was decided to detach a portion of the invasion flotilla to clear the Russian naval forces in Moon Sound ; these included the two Russian pre @-@ dreadnoughts . To this end , Kronprinz and König , along with the cruisers Strassburg and Kolberg and a number of smaller vessels , were sent to engage the Russian battleships . They arrived by the morning of 17 October , but a deep Russian minefield thwarted their progress . The Germans were surprised to discover that the 30 @.@ 5 cm guns of the Russian battleships out @-@ ranged their own 30 @.@ 5 cm guns . The Russian ships managed to keep the range long enough to prevent the German battleships from being able to return fire , while still firing effectively on the German ships , and the Germans had to take several evasive maneuvers to avoid the Russian shells . By 10 : 00 , the minesweepers had cleared a path through the minefield , and Kronprinz and König dashed into the bay . At around 10 : 15 , Kronprinz opened fire on Tsarevitch and Bayan , and scored hits on both . König , meanwhile , dispatched Slava . The Russian vessels were hit dozens of times , until at 10 : 30 the Russian naval commander , Admiral Bakhirev , ordered their withdrawal .

On 18 October , Kronprinz was slightly grounded , though the damage was not serious enough to necessitate withdrawal for repairs . By 20 October , the fighting on the islands was winding down ; Moon , Ösel , and Dagö were in German possession . The previous day , the Admiralstab had

ordered the cessation of naval actions and the return of the dreadnoughts to the High Seas Fleet as soon as possible . On the 26th , Kronprinz was more seriously grounded on the return trip to Kiel . She managed to reach Kiel on 2 November , and subsequently Wilhelmshaven . Repairs were effected from 24 November to 8 January .

= = = Fate = = =

On 27 January 1918 , the Kaiser directed that the ship be renamed Kronprinz Wilhelm in honor of the Crown Prince . The ship was formally renamed on 15 June 1918 , the 30th anniversary of the Kaiser 's reign . Kronprinz Wilhelm and her three sisters were to have taken part in a final fleet action at the end of October 1918 , days before the Armistice was to take effect . The bulk of the High Seas Fleet was to have sortied from their base in Wilhelmshaven to engage the British Grand Fleet ; Scheer ? by now the Grand Admiral (Großadmiral) of the fleet ? intended to inflict as much damage as possible on the British navy , in order to retain a better bargaining position for Germany , despite the expected casualties . Many of the war @-@ weary sailors felt the operation would disrupt the peace process and prolong the war . On the morning of 29 October 1918 , the order was given to sail from Wilhelmshaven the following day . Starting on the night of 29 October , sailors on Thüringen and then on several other battleships , including Kronprinz Wilhelm , mutinied . The unrest ultimately forced Hipper and Scheer to cancel the operation . Informed of the situation , the Kaiser stated " I no longer have a navy . "

Following the capitulation of Germany in November 1918 , most of the High Seas Fleet , under the command of Rear Admiral Ludwig von Reuter , were interned in the British naval base in Scapa Flow . Prior to the departure of the German fleet , Admiral Adolf von Trotha made clear to von Reuter that he could not allow the Allies to seize the ships , under any conditions . The fleet rendezvoused with the British light cruiser Cardiff , which led the ships to the Allied fleet that was to escort the Germans to Scapa Flow . The massive flotilla consisted of some 370 British , American , and French warships . Once the ships were interned , their guns were disabled through the removal of their breech blocks , and their crews were reduced to 200 officers and men .

The fleet remained in captivity during the negotiations that ultimately produced the Treaty of Versailles . Von Reuter believed that the British intended to seize the German ships on 21 June 1919 , which was the deadline for Germany to have signed the peace treaty . Unaware that the deadline had been extended to the 23rd , Reuter ordered the ships to be sunk at the next opportunity . On the morning of 21 June , the British fleet left Scapa Flow to conduct training maneuvers , and at 11 : 20 Reuter transmitted the order to his ships . Kronprinz Wilhelm sank at 13 : 15 ; The British guard detail panicked in their attempted to prevent the Germans from scuttling the ships ; British soldiers aboard a nearby drifter shot and killed a stoker from Kronprinz Wilhelm . In total , the guards killed nine Germans and wounded twenty @-@ one . The remaining crews , totaling some 1 @, @ 860 officers and enlisted men , were imprisoned .

Kronprinz Wilhelm was never raised for scrapping , unlike most of the other capital ships that were scuttled . Kronprinz Wilhelm and two of her sisters had sunk in deeper water than the other capital ships , which made a salvage attempt more difficult . The outbreak of World War II in 1939 put a halt to all salvage operations , and after the war it was determined that salvaging the deeper wrecks was financially impractical . The rights to future salvage operations on the wreck were sold to Britain in 1962 . The depth in which the three battleships sank insulated them from the radiation released by the use of atomic weapons . As a result , Kronprinz Wilhelm and her sisters are one of the few remaining sources of radiation @-@ free steel . The ships have occasionally had steel removed for use in scientific devices . Kronprinz Wilhelm and the other vessels on the bottom of Scapa Flow are a popular dive site , and are protected by a policy barring divers from recovering items from the wrecks .