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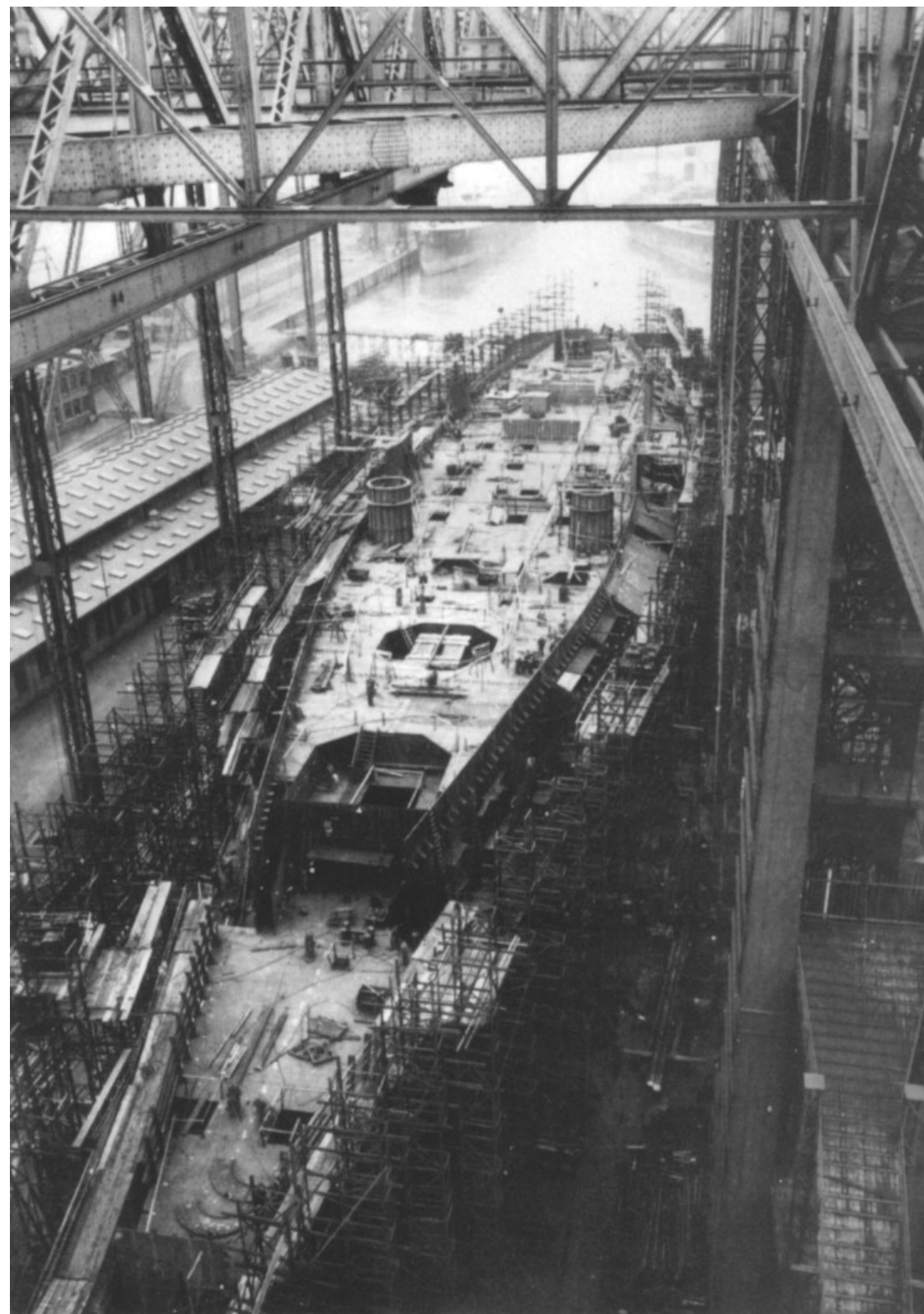


The battleship war in the Atlantic was driven by the attempts of German capital ship commerce raiders—two battleships, the *Bismarck* and the *Tirpitz*, and two battlecruisers—to influence the Battle of the Atlantic by destroying Atlantic convoys supplying the United Kingdom.

Bismarck was the first of two Bismarck-class battleships built for Nazi Germany's Kriegsmarine.

Named after Chancellor Otto von Bismarck, the primary force behind the unification of Germany in 1871, the ship was laid down at the Blohm & Voss shipyard in Hamburg in July 1936 and launched in February 1939. Work was completed in August 1940, when she was commissioned into the German fleet. *Bismarck* and her sister ship *Tirpitz* were the largest battleships ever built by Germany, and two of the largest built by any European power.

Bismarck was ordered under the name Ersatz Hannover ("Hannover replacement"), a replacement for the old pre-dreadnought *SMS Hannover*, under contract "F". The contract was awarded to the Blohm & Voss shipyard in Hamburg, where the keel was laid on 1 July 1936 at Helgen IX. The ship was launched on 14 February 1939 and during the elaborate ceremonies, *Bismarck* was christened by Dorothee von Löwenfeld, granddaughter of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck.





construction & charac

Bismarck, Germany's largest warship, displaced more than any other European battleship, with the exception of *HMS Vanguard*, commissioned after the end of the war.

Bismarck displaced 41,700 t (41,000 long tons) as built and 50,300 t (49,500 long tons) fully loaded, with an overall length of 251 m (823 ft 6 in), a beam of 36 m (118 ft 1 in) and a maximum draft of 9.9 m (32 ft 6 in).

Powered by three Blohm & Voss geared steam turbines and twelve oil-fired Wagner superheated boilers, which developed a total of 148,116 shp (110,450 kW) and yielded a maximum speed of 30.01 knots (55.58 km/h; 34.53 mph) on speed trials. The ship had a cruising range of 8,870 nautical miles (16,430 km; 10,210 mi) at 19 knots (35 km/h; 22 mph).

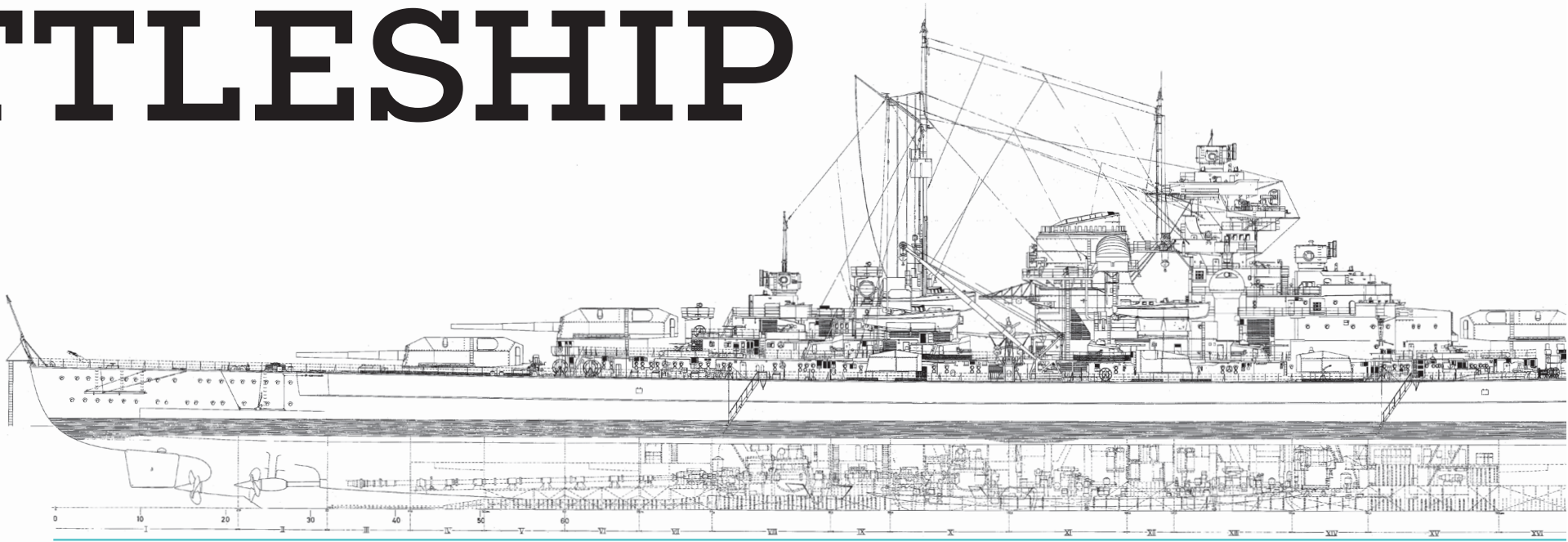
The standard crew numbered 103 officers and 1,962 enlisted men. The crew was divided into twelve divisions of between 180 and 220 men. The first six divisions were assigned to the ship's armaments.

- One through Four for the main and secondary batteries
- Eighth division consisted of ammunition handlers.
- Five and Six manning anti-aircraft guns.
- The last three divisions were the engine room personnel.
- Seventh division consisted of specialists, including cooks and carpenters.
- The radio operators, signalmen, and quarter-masters were assigned to the Ninth division.

Bismarck was armed with eight 38 cm (15 in) SK C/34 guns arranged in four twin gun turrets: two super-firing turrets forward—"Anton" and "Bruno"—and two aft—"Caesar" and "Dora". Secondary armament consisted of twelve 15 cm (5.9 in) L/55 guns, sixteen 10.5 cm (4.1 in) L/65 and sixteen 3.7 cm (1.5 in) L/83, and twelve 2 cm (0.79 in) anti-aircraft guns.

Four Arado Ar 196 reconnaissance floatplanes, with a single large hangar and a double-ended catapult. The ship's main belt was 320 mm (12.6 in) thick and was covered by a pair of upper and main armoured decks that were 50 mm (2.0 in) and 100 to 120 mm (3.9 to 4.7 in) thick, respectively. The 38 cm (15 in) turrets were protected by 360 mm (14.2 in) thick faces and 220 mm (8.7 in) thick sides.

BISMARCK-CLASS BATTLESHIP



| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Namesake | Otto von Bismarck |
| Builder | Blohm & Voss, Hamburg |
| Laid down | 1 July 1936 |
| Commissioned | 24 August 1940 |
| Honours & Awards | 3 times mentioned in the Wehrmachtbericht |
| Fate | Scuttled following incapacitating battle damage, 27 May 1941 in the North Atlantic – 48°10'N 16°12'W |

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Displacement | 41,700 t (41,000 long tons) standard 50,300 t (49,500 long tons) full load |
| Length | 241.6 m (792 ft 8 in) waterline 251 m (823 ft 6 in) overall |
| Beam | 36 m (118 ft 1 in) |
| Draft | 9.3 m (30 ft 6 in) standard |
| Propulsion | 12 Wagner superheated boilers; 3 geared turbines; 3 three-blade screws 148,116 shp (110,450 kW) |
| Speed | 30.01 knots (55.58 km/h; 34.53 mph) during trials |

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Range | 8,870 nmi (16,430 km; 10,210 mi) at 19 knots (35 km/h; 22 mph) |
| Complement | 103 officers 1,962 enlisted men |
| Armament | 8 × 38 cm (15 in) SK C/34 (4 × 2) 12 × 15 cm (5.9 in) SK C/28 (6 × 2) 16 × 10.5 cm (4.1 in) SK C/33 (8 × 2) 16 × 3.7 cm (1.5 in) SK C/30 (8 × 2) 12 × 2 cm (0.79 in) FlaK 30 (12 × 1) |
| Armour | Belt: 320 mm (12.6 in) Turrets: 360 mm (14 in) Main deck: 100 to 120 mm (3.9 to 4.7 in) |
| Aircraft carried | 4 × Arado Ar 196 floatplanes |

10-4-41 Operation Dornington

18

The heavy cruiser Prinz Eugen sailed at about 21:00 on 18 May 1941 from Gotenhafen (now Gdynia, Poland), followed at 2:00 am, 19 May, by Bismarck. Both ships proceeded under escort, separately and rendezvoused off Cape Arkona on Rügen Island in the western Baltic. They then proceeded through the Danish Islands into the Kattegat.

20

Entering the Kattegat on 20 May, Bismarck and Prinz Eugen sailed north toward the Skagerrak, the strait between Jutland and Southern Norway where they were sighted by the Swedish aircraft-carrying cruiser Gotland on around 1:00 pm. Gotland forwarded the sighting in a routine report.

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On 21 May, the Admiralty was alerted by sources in the Swedish government that two large warships had been seen in the Kattegat. The ships entered the North Sea and took a brief refuge in a fjord near Bergen, Norway on 21 May, making a break for the Atlantic shipping lanes on the 22nd. By this time, Hood and Prince of Wales, with escorting destroyers, were en route to the Denmark Strait, where two cruisers, Norfolk and Suffolk were already patrolling. The cruisers Manchester and Birmingham were to guard the waters south-east of Iceland.

23

On the evening of 23 May, Suffolk sighted Bismarck and Prinz Eugen in the Denmark Strait, close to the Greenland coast. The Admiralty was alerted and Norfolk and Suffolk, hopelessly outgunned, shadowed the German ships. British naval groups were redirected to either intercept Lutjens' force or to cover the troop convoy.

26 27

MAY 1941

LAST BATTLE OF THE BATTLESHIP BISMARCK

APPROX. 300 NMI
WEST OF BREST, FRA

The last battle of the German battleship *Bismarck* took place in the Atlantic Ocean, approximately 300 nmi (350 mi; 560 km) west of Brest, France, on 26–27 May 1941. The battle was a sequel to the Battle of the Denmark Strait, fought on 24 May 1941, in which *Bismarck* and the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* sank the British battlecruiser *HMS Hood* and damaged the battleship *Prince of Wales*, which withdrew due to the malfunctioning of her main armament. Following that battle *Bismarck* was pursued for more than two days by ships and aircraft of the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. Eventually, on the evening of 26 May, her steering gear was crippled by a torpedo bomber attack, and on the following morning she was brought to battle, crippled and scuttled by her crew.

Rediscovered late morning on the 26th by a Catalina flying boat from No. 209 Squadron RAF. Subsequently shadowed by aircraft from Force H steaming north from Gibraltar.

EIN

The first phase late on the 26th consisted of air strikes by torpedo bombers from the British aircraft carrier *Ark Royal*, which disabled *Bismarck*'s steering gear jamming her rudders in a turning position, preventing her escape.

ZWEI

The second phase was the shadowing and harassment of *Bismarck* during the night of 26/27-May by British destroyers, with no serious damage to any ship.

DREI

The third phase on the morning of 27-May was an attack by the British battleships *King George V* and *Rodney* supported by cruisers.

VIER

After about 100 minutes of fighting *Bismarck* was sunk by the combined effects of shellfire, torpedo hits and deliberate scuttling. On the British side, *Rodney* was lightly damaged by near-misses and by the blast effects of her own guns.

FÜNF

British warships rescued 111 survivors from *Bismarck* before being obliged to withdraw because of a by aircraft of the *Luftwaffe*, resulting in the loss of the destroyer *HMS Mashona*, and German ships and U-boats arrived later at the scene of the sinking and saved five more survivors.

48.10.16.17

15

SEP

Three weeks after her commissioning, *Bismarck* left Hamburg to begin sea trials in Kiel Bay. Sperrbrecher 13 escorted the ship to Arcona on 28 September, and then on to Gotenhafen for trials in the Gulf of Danzig. The ship's power-plant was given a thorough workout; *Bismarck* made measured-mile and high speed runs. While her stability and manoeuvrability were being tested, a flaw in the ship's design was discovered. While attempting to steer the ship solely through altering propeller revolutions, the crew learned that *Bismarck* could be kept on course only with great difficulty. Even with the outboard screws running at full power in opposite direc-

24

JAN

The ship was scheduled to return to Kiel on 24 January 1941, but a merchant vessel had been sunk in the Kiel Canal and prevented usage of the waterway. Severe weather hampered efforts to remove the wreck, and *Bismarck* was not able to reach Kiel until March. The delay greatly frustrated Lindemann, who remarked that "[*Bismarck*] had been tied down at Hamburg for five weeks ... the precious time at sea lost as a result cannot be made up, and a significant delay in the final war deployment of the ship thus is unavoidable." While waiting to reach Kiel, *Bismarck* hosted Captain Anders Forshell, the Swedish naval attaché to Berlin. He returned to Sweden with a detailed description of the ship, which was subsequently leaked to Britain by

06

MAR

Bismarck received the order to steam to Kiel. While en route, the ship was escorted by several Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighters and a pair of armed merchant vessels, along with an icebreaker. At 08:45 on 8 March, *Bismarck* briefly ran aground on the southern shore of the Kiel Canal, though she was freed within an hour. The ship reached Kiel the following day, where her crew stocked ammunition, fuel, and other supplies and applied a coat of dazzle paint to camouflage her. British bombers attacked the harbour without success on 12 March. The Naval High Command (Oberkommando der Marine or OKM), commanded by Admiral Erich Raeder, intended to continue the practice of using heavy ships as surface raiders against Allied mar-

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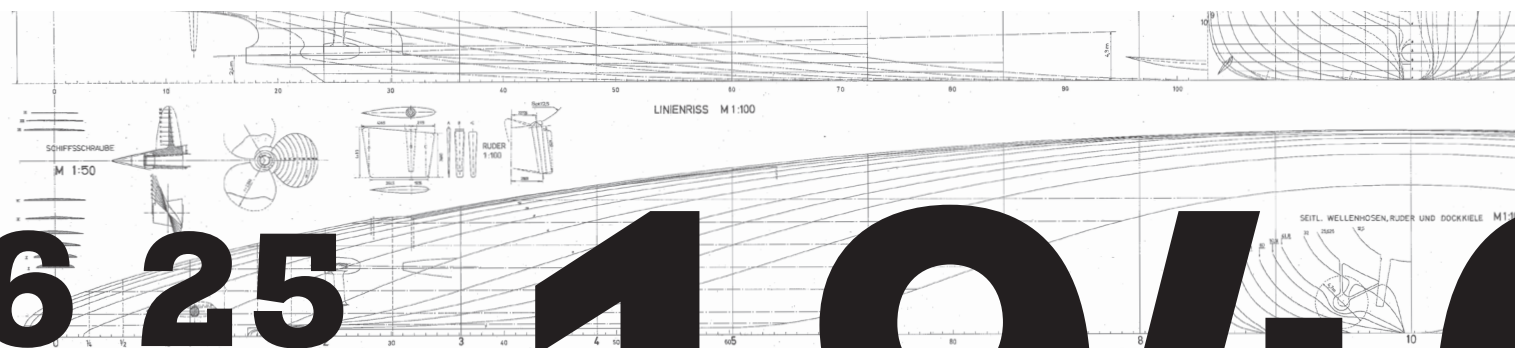
APR

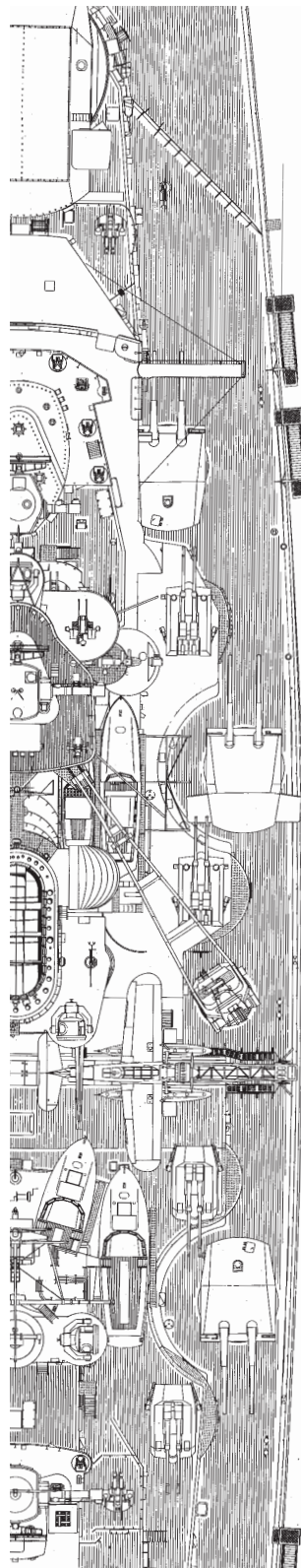
The two Scharnhorst-class battle-ships were based in Brest, France, at the time, having just completed Operation Berlin, a major raid into the Atlantic. *Bismarck*'s sister ship *Tirpitz* rapidly approached completion. *Bismarck* and *Tirpitz* were to sortie from the Baltic and rendezvous with the two Scharnhorst-class ships in the Atlantic; the operation was initially scheduled for around 25 April 1941, when a new moon period would make conditions more favourable. Work on *Tirpitz* was completed later than anticipated, and she was not commissioned until 25 February; the ship was not ready for combat until late in the year.

1941

SERVICE HIST

Work on *Tirpitz* was completed late: anticipated, and she was not commissioned until 25 February; the ship was not ready until late in the year. To further complicate the situation, *Gneisenau* was torpedoed and damaged further by bombs while *Scharnhorst* required a boiler overhaul. Operation Berlin; the workers discovered during the overhaul that the boilers were in worse condition than expected. She would also be unavailable for the planned sortie. Attacks by British bombers on supply depots in Kiel delayed repairs. The two ships would not be ready for action until August. Admiral Günther Lütjen (Fleet Chief) of the Kriegsmarine, commanding the operation, wished to delay the operation until either *Scharnhorst* or *Tirpitz* had





24 May // Denmark Strait

5:52 am

Less than 10 minutes after the British opened fire, a shell from Bismarck struck Hood near her aft ammunition magazines.

24 May // Denmark Strait

6:05 am

Soon afterward, HMS Hood exploded, and sank within three minutes with the loss of all but three of her crew. Prince of Wales continued to exchange fire with Bismarck but suffered serious malfunctions in her main armament as the British battleship had not fully worked up after only being completed in late March 1941 and soon broke off the engagement.

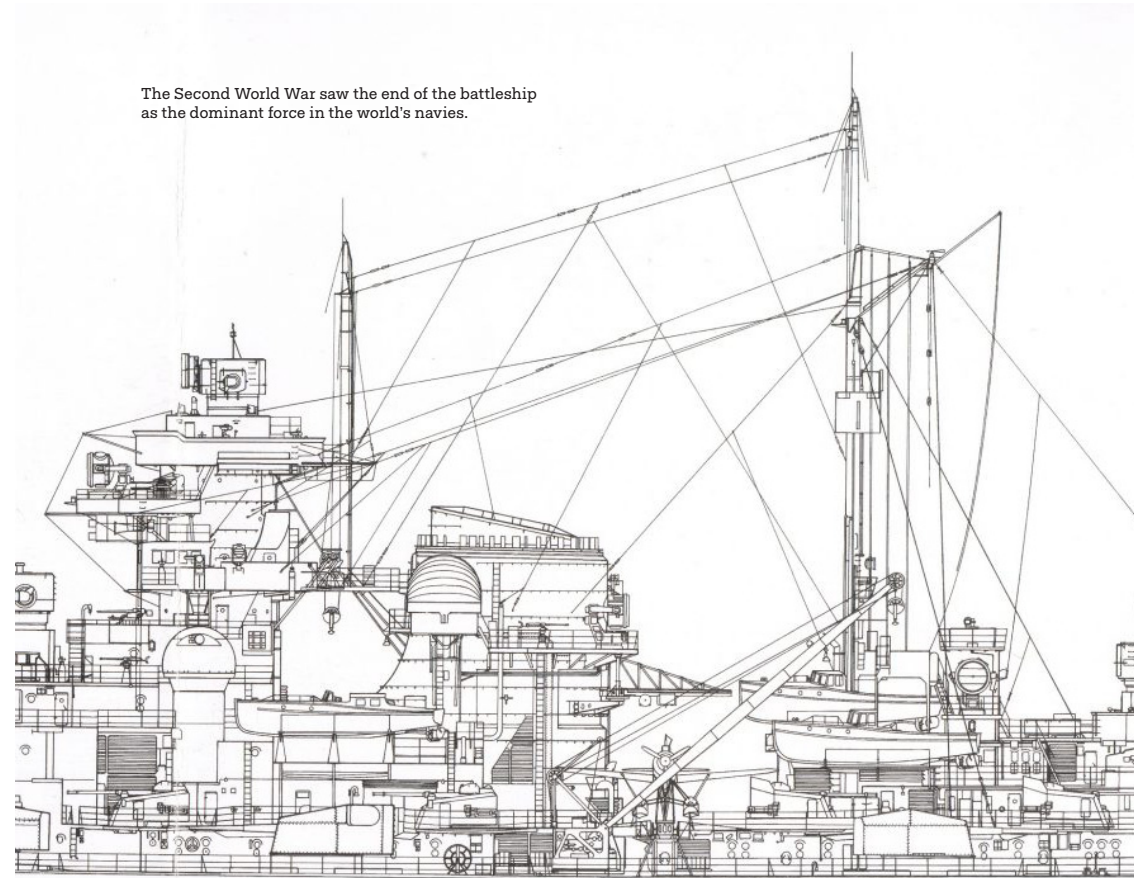
24 May // Denmark Strait

6:13 am

The battle was considered a major tactical victory for the Germans, but its impact was short-lived; the damage done to Bismarck's forward fuel tanks forced the abandonment of her Atlantic breakout mission and necessitated an escape to safe dry dock facilities in occupied France, producing an operational victory for the British. Incensed by the loss of Hood, a large British force pursued and sank Bismarck three days later.

Battle of the Denmark S

The Second World War saw the end of the battleship as the dominant force in the world's navies.



GERMAN BATTLESHIP
BISMARCK-CLASS