



The Sinking of the Bismarck: The History of the Battle that Destroyed Nazi Germany's Most Famous Battleship

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures

*Includes accounts of the battles and the Bismarck's sinking by sailors on both sides

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“The Bismarck had put up a most gallant fight against impossible odds, worthy of the old days of the Imperial German Navy, and she went down with her colours flying.” - Vice Admiral John Cronyn Tovey, commander of the task force fighting the Bismarck

Immensely powerful and thickly armored, armed with eight 15-inch guns aimed by one of the most sophisticated target acquisition systems of its day, the Third Reich's premier battleship, the KMS Bismarck, left an indelible trail of legends behind it during its single, fatal foray against the British in 1941. Victorious over the HMS Hood, prowling the Arctic waters north of England, and circling in a desperate effort to evade the Royal Navy and reach the safety of Brest in France, the Bismarck's first and last combat voyage lasted a brief total of eight days.

Though well-constructed for the most part and extremely formidable, the KMS Bismarck did not represent the world's most powerful battleship at the time, subsequent myth-making notwithstanding. The Americans, Italians, and indeed the pre-invasion French already possessed equal or slightly superior combat craft. The Japanese soon produced much stronger vessels. Nevertheless, Nazi Germany deployed no warship more powerful, so the Bismarck's loss caused a disproportionately high loss of German morale and a similar boost to English confidence during one of the darkest periods of the war.

Naval warfare in 1941 sat on the cusp between the past – when battleships and their massive gun batteries ruled the waves – and the very near future – when aircraft carriers proved stunningly dominant over ships armed only with artillery. A single aircraft carrier involved itself in the pursuit and destruction of the Bismarck, causing one of the pivotal events of “Exercise Rhine” through nearly wholly random chance.

The KMS Bismarck's destruction represented neither a predestined conclusion nor the result of the impending radical change in naval tactics and strategy. The Bismarck sailed during the narrow window at the start of World War II when the battleship remained a viable independent instrument of war rather than the mobile defense for aircraft carriers or the floating artillery battery supporting shore operations it became.

Instead, human decisions and pure chance conjoined to result in the Bismarck's destruction. Admiral Gunther Lütjens, overall expedition commander, committed several major errors during the operation. Towards its end, he wallowed in despair, failing to carry through on several ruses devised by his subordinates which, in the hands of a commander not already resigned to death, might have tipped the scale to the Bismarck's survival.

Both sides made crucial errors, but those of Gunther Lütjens proved most decisive. As Charles de Gaulle

pithily observed, "Victory often goes to the army that makes the least mistakes, not the most brilliant plans." The sinking of the Bismarck demonstrated the truth of this aphorism. A handful of poor choices at vital turning points on the part of one man – Lütjens – decided the fate of the KMS Bismarck and cost the lives of 2,088 men aboard her (or 94.7% of her crew), including his own.

The Sinking of the Bismarck: The History of the Battle that Destroyed Nazi Germany's Most Famous Battleship chronicles the demise of World War II's most famous ship. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about the Bismarck like never before, in no time at all.

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