

FORT AUSTRÅTT the 28 cm triple gun turret at Fort Austrått

The History

The gun turret at Lundahaugen is large and impressive. Originally it was the stern gun turret on the German battleship «GNEISENAU».

The turret now at Lundahaugen was one of three turrets comprising the main artillery on board.

Building of the «GNEISENAU» began in March 1935 at the «Deutsche Werke» in Kiel.

The shipyard finished its work in December 1936 and the ship was fully equipped on 21 May 1938. The ship's displacement (weight of displaced water) was officially 26,000 tons, while its real weight was 31,850 tons.¹⁾ Its top speed was 32 knots (c.f. the Treaty of Versailles dated 18/06/1919 and the German-British fleet agreement dated 18/06/1935).



Figure 1. The battleship «GNEISENAU».

1) Tons = English tons = 1016 kg.

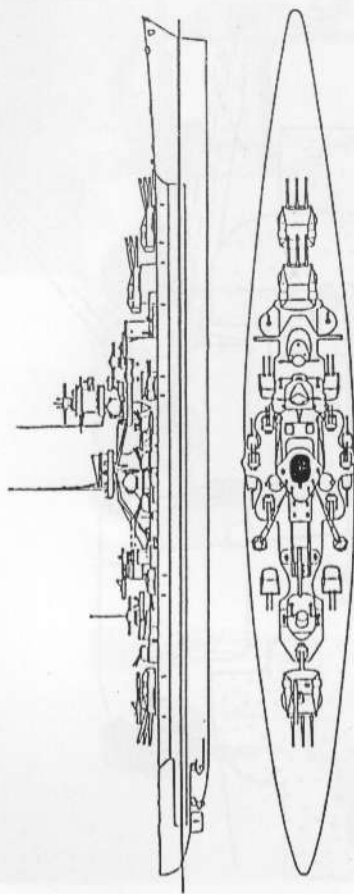


Figure 2. Cross section and plan view of the battleship «GNEISENAU».

The ship's armament was:

- nine 28 cm (11 inches) guns placed in three triple turrets which were designated as A, B and C turrets (called Anton, Bruno and Cäsar).
- twelve 15 cm (6 inches) guns placed in four twin mounts and four single mounts.
- fourteen 10.5 cm (4 inches) guns placed in seven twin carriages. These were dual purpose guns (anti-aircraft as well as marine-target guns.)
- sixteen 37 mm (1.4 inches) anti-aircraft (AA) guns placed in eight twin carriages.

The ship also carried four ARADO AR 196 reconnaissance planes. They were equipped with pontoons and were launched by means of a catapult. On returning to the ship they had to land on the sea and be hoisted on board by a crane.

The war had scarcely begun before the «GNEISENAU» was attacked by British bombers on 4 September 1939. The vessel was then lying in Brumsbüttel. The attack caused no damage on board. Later the same autumn, the ship was operating in Skagerrak around the Norwegian south coast. After this it operated in the channel zone, in the North Atlantic and out from the harbours and fjords of occupied Norway.

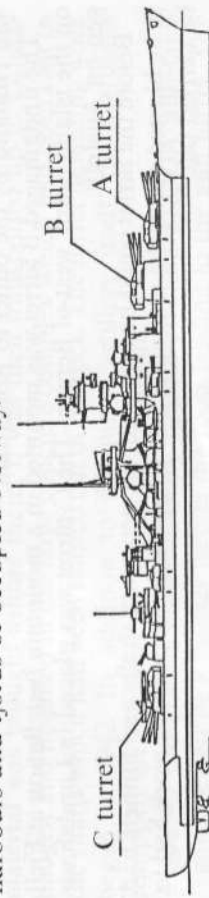


Figure 3. The distribution of the main on-board artillery.

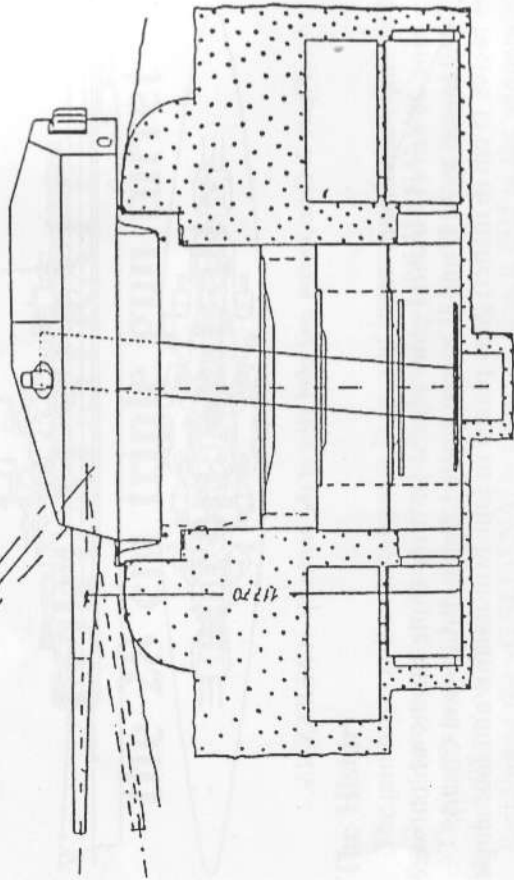


Figure 4. Cross section of the construction which shows the comprehensive concrete work.
The shaft's radius is approx. 23-24 metres (75-78 feet).
(Adapted drawing from the regulations).

On 15 and 16 March 1941, the «GNEISENAU» sank seven ships before she sailed to Brest on 22 March 1941. Brest was blockaded by British planes and naval ships. It was not until almost one year later, on 12 February 1942, that the «GNEISENAU» managed to break out from Brest. On 26 and 27 February 1942, the ship was at the floating dock at Kiel where it was attacked by British bombers and was so badly damaged that it was declared a partial wreck on 4 April 1942. The ship was then towed to Gotenhafen where it was later used as a block ship.²⁾ The guns on board were taken on shore in the spring of 1942. The A turret was dismantled and the gun barrels were set up as individual guns in Hitler's Atlantic ocean rampart at Hoek Van Holland by the outlet to Rotterdam.

The undamaged B turret was mounted in a mountain installation at Fjell on the island Sotra, west of Bergen. The C turret was placed in Lundahaugen on Austrått.

Before the turret could be mounted, the necessary shafts and tunnels had to be blasted out of the mountain and comprehensive concrete work had to be carried out.

²⁾ BLOCK SHIP: A ship (vessel) which is sunk so that it blocks a waterway e.g. the entrance to a harbour.

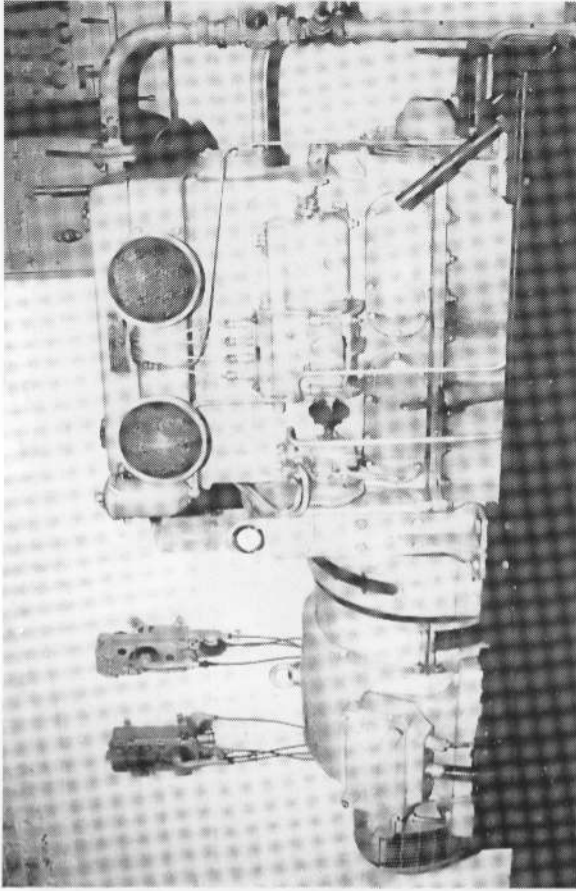


Figure 5. One of the power units in the machine station.
(Photo by the author, May 1990).

Concrete rooms were built in the rock around the turret's shaft. Some were used for storage of ammunition, some for fuel and water tanks, and one was used as a power station. Living quarters for all of the turret's crew were also built in the same area. These man-made caves had their own entrances in the rock under the turret. A large ventilation system provided air for the living quarters and the diesel engines in the machine station.

Manpower was supplied by 3-400 Serbian (Yugoslavian) prisoners of war. They were kept in a wretched prison camp which was situated on a plain southeast of the turret along the road to Austrått Hall. These prisoners of war were treated roughly, many were killed or died during the work.

It is believed that the Germans used Danish railroad ferries to transport material to Austrått. A harbour was built just south of Austrått hall and the material was brought ashore there. It was then transported up to Lundahaugen and installed in the large concrete complex which had been cast in the shafts which had been blasted out of the rock. The turret mounting work began in 1942. In addition to the turret artillery itself, the Germans equipped the fort with the following armament:

- one 4.7 cm (1.8 inches) stationary muzzle-pivoting SKODA anti-tank gun, located in a bunker beside the road leading to the gun turret. The gun's lateral and horizontal revolution point was in a ball bearing mounted on the gun's muzzle and fixed to the bunker wall.



Figure 6. From the test firing in September 1943. First a salvo with only slight elevation was fired in order to check that the mounting work had been carried out correctly. (Photo from the Norwegian Armed Forces Museum's (FMU) archives).

– three 40 mm (1.6 inches) Bofors anti-aircraft guns (AA-guns).
 – six 20 mm (0.8 inches) anti-aircraft (AA) guns (Flak – Flugabwehr Kanone).

Some of the latter anti-aircraft guns were placed on wooden platforms.

At the same time Lundahaugen was taking shape, blasting and concreting work was also being carried out in Lørbern, approximately three kilometres further northeast. This is where the fire-control centre for the battery was built. The building and installation work was finished in September 1943 and the technical test firing was carried out in September 1943.

The triple turret at Lundahaugen has never seen battle as coastal artillery. The German gun-turret crew consisted of ten officers and 107 soldiers, as well as the thirty men in the fire-control centre at Lørbern. In addition to this, there were men for the other weapons in the area and a smaller local defence force and administrative personnel.

The turret battery's fire-control centre was in Lørbern. The measuring instruments in the fire-control centre were tracking columns, model 1938.

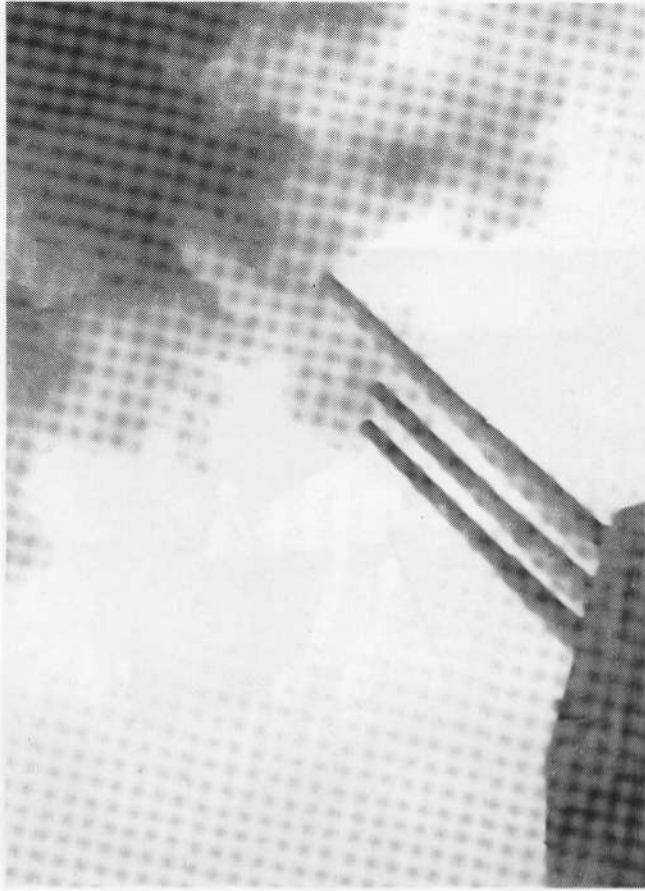


Figure 7. From the test firing of September 1943. Here a high-elevation salvo is being fired. Elevation: The gun barrel's angle to the horizontal plane (erection). (Photo FMU).

which gave the bearing to the target, as well as a 10.5 metre (34.5 feet) stereoscopic range-finder. There were four forward tracking stations at Tarva, Garten, Løkhaug (Agdenes) and Skippervik (Nes). Their bearings were converted to bearing and distance to the target from the battery's fire control centre. The corrections were made with instruments in the fire control centre.

In the spring of 1945 the turret guns were jointly taken over by Norwegian and English forces. The guns were test fired for the first time after the war by German soldiers with Norwegian/English observers on 2 October 1945. In 1945 the battery became part of the Trøndelag coastal artillery brigade, later called Fort Austrått.

Training of the Norwegian battery crew took place in 1948 and refresher training courses were held in that year and in 1951 and 1953. Late in the summer of 1948 the 8.8 cm interior guns were test fired, but the full calibre firing planned in 1951 had to be cancelled because of fog. During the exercises in 1953 full calibre firing took place on 16 June with good results. The target used consisted of drifting rafts which were put out to sea at Tarva.