



Naval Aspects of the Spanish Civil War (1936 – 1939)



Presented at HMGS Cold Wars 2005

by *Admiralty Trilogy*





Background of the Spanish Civil War

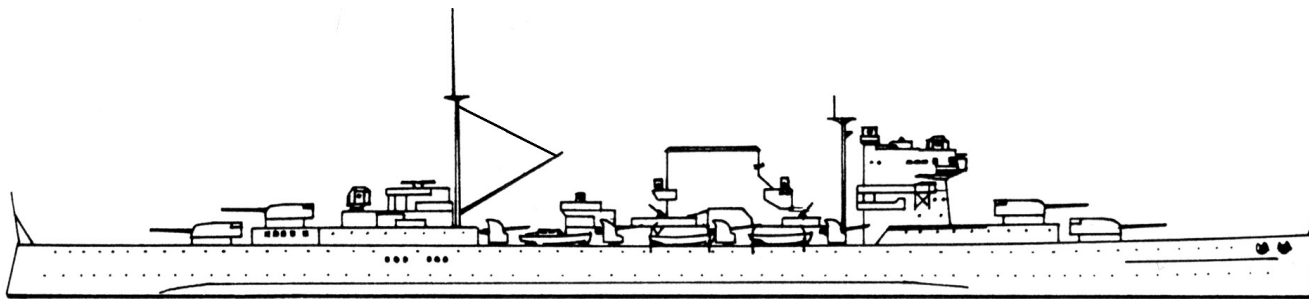
- ◆ Apr 1931 – End of Spanish Monarchy, Socialist Government in power
- ◆ Nov 1933 – Conservatives in power: revoking social reforms
- ◆ Nov 1936 – Social Revolutionaries back in power: collectivizing farms, attack church institutions
- ◆ 17 Jul 1936 – Revolt by Moroccan Garrison to put down ‘social revolution’ as letting the nation fall apart – become known as ‘Nationalists’
- ◆ The remaining government forces which remained loyal to the Republic became known as ‘Republican’





Division of the Spanish Fleet

- ◆ Most of the officers were Nationalists, most of crew were Republican
- ◆ Most of the ships were Republican
- ◆ Never any prolonged or massive engagement during the war – usually just skirmishes
- ◆ Most naval activity was convoy warfare, shore bombardment, port blockade and counter-blockade operations



**Nationalist Heavy
Cruiser *Baleares***



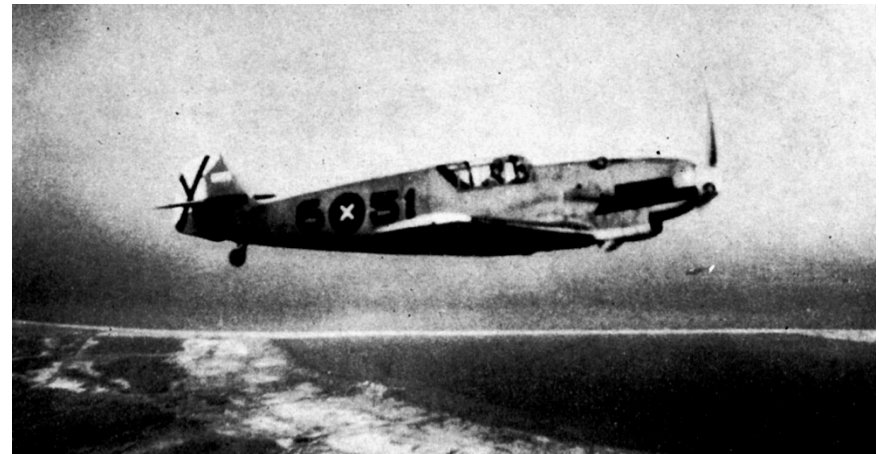
Division of the Spanish Fleet

	Nationalists	Republicans
Battleship	1	1
Heavy Cruiser	2	
Light Cruiser	2	3
Destroyer	5	16
Torpedo Boat	5	7
Gun Boat	5	1
Mine Layer	3	-
Patrol Craft	4	5
Submarine	2	12
Men	7,000	13,000



International Conflict

- ◆ Nationalists supported by Italy and Germany
 - Both send arms, supplies, advisors and volunteers to assist.
- ◆ Both recognize Franco's government - Nov 18, 1936
- ◆ Italians initiate submarine campaign Nov 36 – Feb 37: Italian sub, Italian crew, single Spanish officer
- ◆ Republicans supported by Soviet Union and France
 - Soviet support is arms, munitions, advisors,
 - French support is aircraft and artillery. Government is pro-Republic, but general population is divided
- ◆ Lyon Conference 1936:
Need to stop support to both sides before civil war becomes general European war. France stops. Germany and Italy do not.



German Condor Legion Me-109

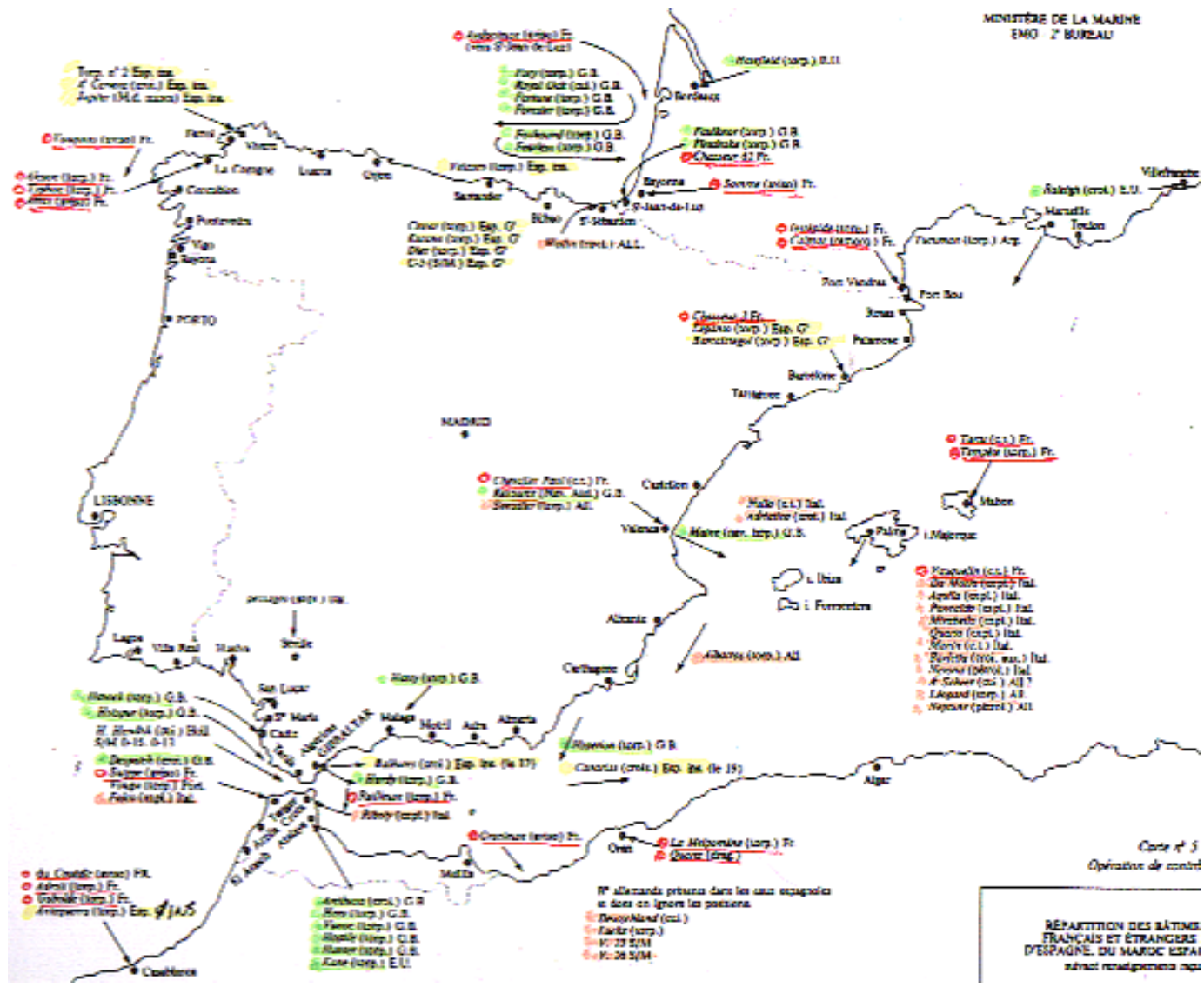


International Conflict

- ◆ Many nations had warships in Spanish waters shortly after the civil war began – primary mission to evacuate citizens or non-combatants from danger.
- ◆ France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, United States – later followed by Argentina, Mexico, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Netherlands, and Norway.
- ◆ Example: US Navy evacuated over 1,500 people, only 633 were US citizens; German Navy evacuated 9,300 in two months, over half were not German.
- ◆ Combined navies evacuated 50,000 non-Spanish and 10,000 Spanish citizens by the end of 1936.

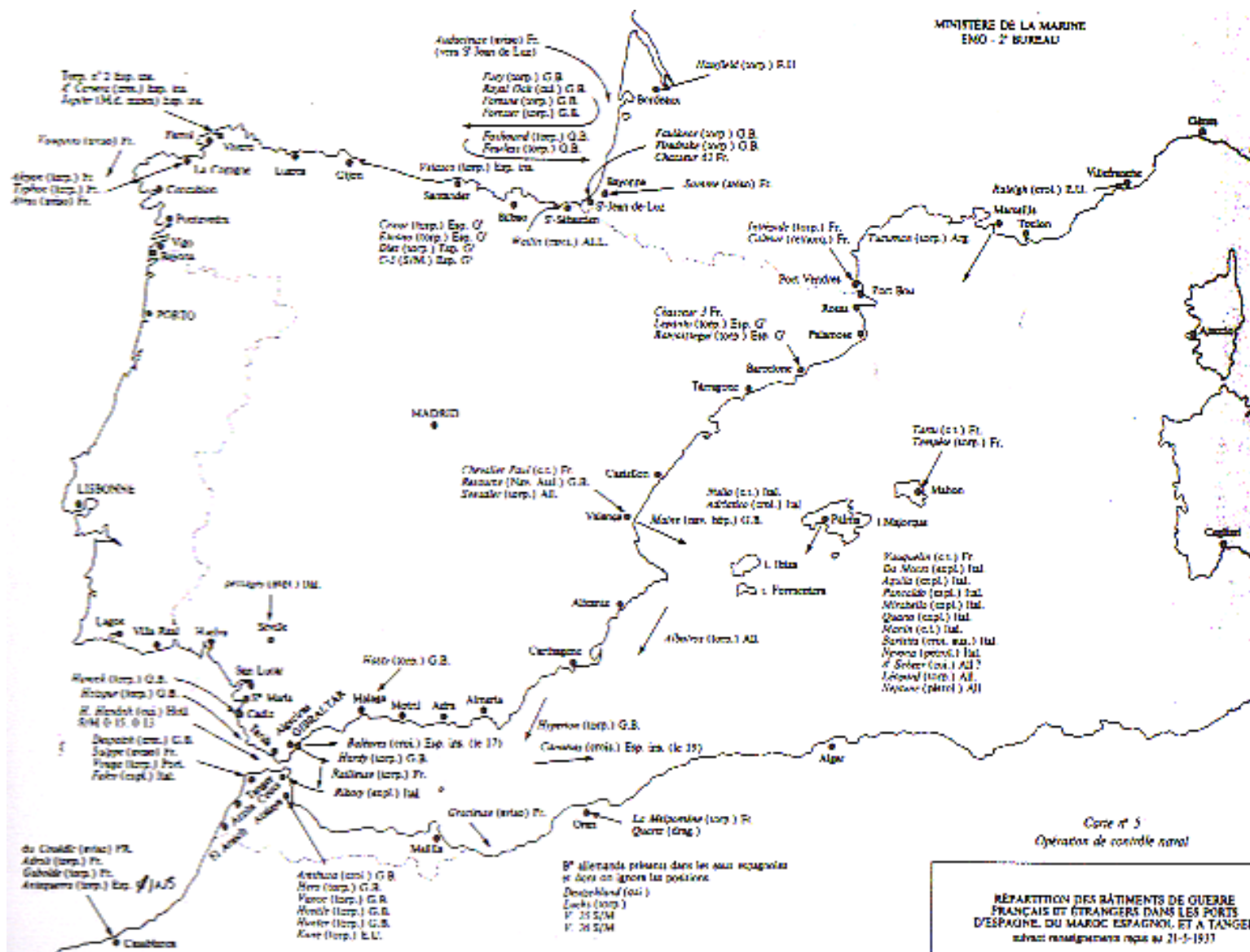


Sample of Navies Involved – May '37





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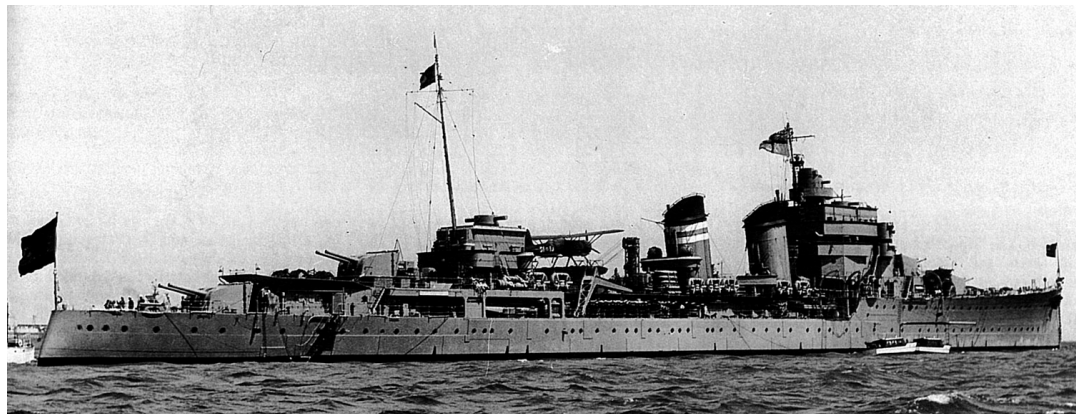


Highlights of the Spanish Civil War

- ◆ Initially Republican ships blockade Straits of Gibraltar – trap Nationalists in Africa
- ◆ Franco and troops ‘airlifted’ by German and Italian to Spain
- ◆ Republican cruisers pulled north to deal with conflict in Bay of Biscay
- ◆ Nationalist ships sortie into Straits and gain control
- ◆ Nationalists blockade Republican coast backed by Italian and German air power (and Italian submarines)
- ◆ When northern Spain is taken, blockade in Med intensifies



Republican Light Cruiser
Miguel de Cervantes





Theaters of Naval Action

◆ Northern Area – Bay of Biscay

- Gijon
- Santander
- Bilbao

◆ Straits of Gibraltar

◆ East Coast – Mediterranean

- Cartagena
- Valencia
- Barcelona
- Palma, Majorca
- Mahon, Minorca





Phases of the Naval War (Summary)

- ◆ Phase 1: Jul 36 – Apr 37
- ◆ Phase 2: Apr 37 – Sep 37
- ◆ Phase 3: Sep 37 – Sep 38
- ◆ Phase 4: Sep 38 – Apr 39



Phase 1 (Jul '36 – Apr '37)

- ◆ 20 Jul – Republican PM appeals to France for arms and ammunition, General Franco appeals to Germany and Italy
- ◆ Evacuation of foreign nationals by various navies at Spanish ports
- ◆ 21 Jul – Nationalists take El Ferrol Naval Base in NW Spain
- ◆ 26 Jul - COMINTERN agrees to send aid to Republic, Hitler agrees to send aid to Franco
- ◆ 27 Jul – Airlift of Nationalist forces from Africa to Spain by German and Italian aircraft
- ◆ 8 Aug – France ceases to sell arms and ammunition under public pressure
- ◆ 9 Sep – Non-Intervention Committee meets in London
- ◆ 29 Sep – Battle in Straits of Gibraltar
- ◆ 12 Oct – Soviet aid arrives in Spain
- ◆ 6 Nov - Republican government moves from Madrid to Valencia
 - 18 Nov – Germany and Italy recognize the Franco government



Phase 2 (Apr '37 – Sep '37)

- ◆ Blockade and evacuation of Bilbao (est 13,500 evacuated)
- ◆ Capture of Bilbao by Nationalist forces
- ◆ 30 Apr – Nationalist BB *Espana* hits mine off coast of Bilbao - sinks
- ◆ Internal conflicts within Republican government and military, Communists versus Socialists
- ◆ 28 May – Chamberlain replaces Baldwin as British PM
- ◆ 17 Jun – Republican battleship *Jaime I* blows up off Cartagena
- ◆ Blockade and evacuation of Santander and Gijon (est 8,500 evacuated)
- ◆ Capture of Santander and Gijon by Nationalist forces – all N. Spain
- ◆ 26 Jul-4 Sep – 30 different cargo ships attacked by unknown submarines
- ◆ Conference invitation in London to discuss, but 6 Sep USSR accuses Italy of sinking 2 ships. Italy and Germany refuse to attend if Soviets attend
- ◆ 10-14 Sep – Conference in Nyon. Signed agreement is Nyon Accords to protect surface traffic in the Mediterranean by aggressive anti-sub patrols.



Phase 3 (Sep '37 – Sep '38)

- ◆ 7 Sep – Battle of Cherchell
- ◆ Impact of Nyon Accords is quick – submarine attacks fall off
- ◆ 30 Sep – Italy is added into patrol sectors of Nyon Accords, in Paris Accords
- ◆ 20 Oct – Republican submarine *C6* scuttles during Nationalist air attack
- ◆ 21 Oct – Republican destroyer *Ciscar* sunk by Nationalist aircraft
- ◆ Oct – Multiple attacks of cargo vessels by aircraft stationed in Minorca
- ◆ 31 Nov – Republican government moves from Valencia to Barcelona
- ◆ 6 Mar – Battle of Cape Palos
- ◆ 1 May – Republican government attempts to negotiate peace with Franco
- ◆ 15 Jun – Republican gunboat *Laya* sunk by Nationalist aircraft
- ◆ Relaxation of Nyon Accord patrols as renewed Non-Intervention negotiations occur between Germany, Italy and France, Britain



Phase 4 (Sep '38 – Apr '39)

- ◆ 9 Oct – Republican submarine *C1* sunk by Nationalist aircraft
- ◆ 30 Dec – Republican destroyer *Diez* so badly damaged by Nationalist cruiser *Canarias*, she is forced to beach to avoid sinking – interned
- ◆ Feb – Negotiations for renewed Non-Intervention fail, Nyon Accord patrols are re-implemented
- ◆ Feb-Mar – Final evacuations from Spain
- ◆ 27 Feb – France and Britain recognize Franco's government
- ◆ Early Mar – Internal conflict within Republican leadership, control taken from PM by leading Republican military.
- ◆ 4 Mar – Republican Fleet gets underway in protest over leadership fighting and sails into Bizerte on Mar 6 to be interned voluntarily
- ◆ 29 Mar – Nationalists enter Madrid
- ◆ 1 Apr – Franco declares war is over. Franco's government recognized by United States



Significant Naval Actions/Events

- ◆ 29 Sep 36 – Nationalist cruisers drive Republican destroyers from Straits of Gibraltar, sinking *Almirante Juan Ferrandiz*. Nationalists control the Straits from this point onward.
- ◆ 12 Oct 36 – Republican submarine *B5* sunk by Nationalist aircraft
- ◆ 21 Dec 36 - Republican submarine *C3* sunk by Nationalist aircraft
- ◆ 30 Apr 37 – Nationalist Battleship *Espana* hits mine and sinks off Santander
- ◆ 12 Jun 37 – Republican Battleship *Jamie I* explodes and sinks off Cartagena
- ◆ 7 Sep 37 – Battle of Cherchell – Nationalist cruiser *Baleares* engages Republican light cruisers escorting convoy.



Significant Naval Actions/Events

- ◆ 22 Feb 38 – Nationalist cruisers *Canarias*, *Baleares* and *Almirante Cervera* bombard Valencia. *Almirante Cervera* is attacked and damaged by Republican aircraft.
- ◆ 6 Mar 38 – Battle of Cape Palos – *Canarias*, *Baleares* and *Almirante Cervera* escorting four-ship convoy engage Republican squadron of 2 light cruisers and 5 destroyers. *Baleares* is hit by guns and torpedoes at same time, suffers magazine explosion and sinks shortly thereafter. The Republican ships quickly withdraw in the heavy weather and head for home. The convoy arrives safely and the two cruisers return for survivors. 700 of 1200 crew are lost.

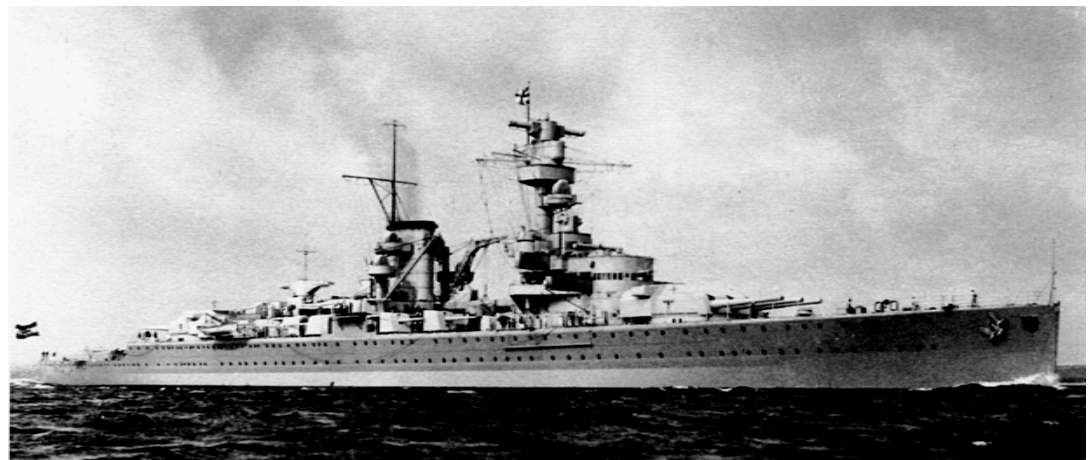


Significant Naval Actions/Events

Samples:

- ◆ 30 Aug 36 – *USS Kane* attacked by Spanish aircraft
- ◆ 18 Jan 57 – French destroyer *Maille Breze* attacked by aircraft
- ◆ 13 May 37 – *HMS Hunter* hits Spanish mine
- ◆ 26 May 37 – Italian auxiliary *Barletta* bombed
- ◆ 31 May 37 – German battleship *Deutschland* bombed
- ◆ 19 Jun 37 – German cruiser *Leipzig* attacked by unknown submarine
- ◆ 31 Aug 37 – *HMS Havock* attacked by unknown submarine
- ◆ 24 Jan 38 – French destroyer *La Poursuivantee* bombed

German “Pocket Battleship”
Deutschland





International 'Cooperation'

- ◆ Non-Intervention Patrols (Aug 20, 1936): Britain, France, Germany, Italy
 - Britain and France patrol Nationalist coastline
 - Germany and Italy patrol Republican coastline

- ◆ Nyon Accords (Sep 14, 1937) – Britain and France
 - Need to stop attack by submarines on shipping, expanded to include aircraft as well
 - Attacks by submarines decrease when 27 destroyers take station to prevent
 - Suspended in May 1938, renewed in Feb 1939



Conclusion of the War

- ◆ Increased tensions and fear of general European war
 - England and France did not push too hard for compliance by Germany, Italy, and Nationalist out of fear for going to war
- ◆ Vulnerability of ships to aircraft gets greater attention
- ◆ France realizes need to reinforce defenses in Mediterranean, especially at Oran and Mers-el-Kebir
- ◆ Germany, Soviet Union, and Italy tested new weapons of war in prelude to World War II, especially aircraft and tanks
- ◆ Both Germany and Soviet Union wanted Spanish Civil War to go on and on
- ◆ Estimated that between killed and expatriated, Spain lost over 1 million people – of which over 200,000 died from malnutrition, over 125,000 from execution, and 400,000 fled to other countries



Summary and Impact

- ◆ Britain willing to make concessions to Hitler on land, but not at sea
 - Tradition of England at sea strengthened Chamberlain's resolve
- ◆ Cooperation between France and Britain at sea developed and tested (*Entente Cordial* at sea)
- ◆ Use of force to get concessions encouraged Hitler and Mussolini
 - Germany goes after Czechoslovakia and Italy after Albania
 - Hitler told Austrian Chancellor to either yield to German demands or Austria would become another Spain
- ◆ Spanish Civil War tested the various political philosophies and ideologies in crucible of bloody war and many of them failed with the flow of blood
- ◆ Resources and technology were seen to be critical factors that spelled success when combined with ruthless application of force