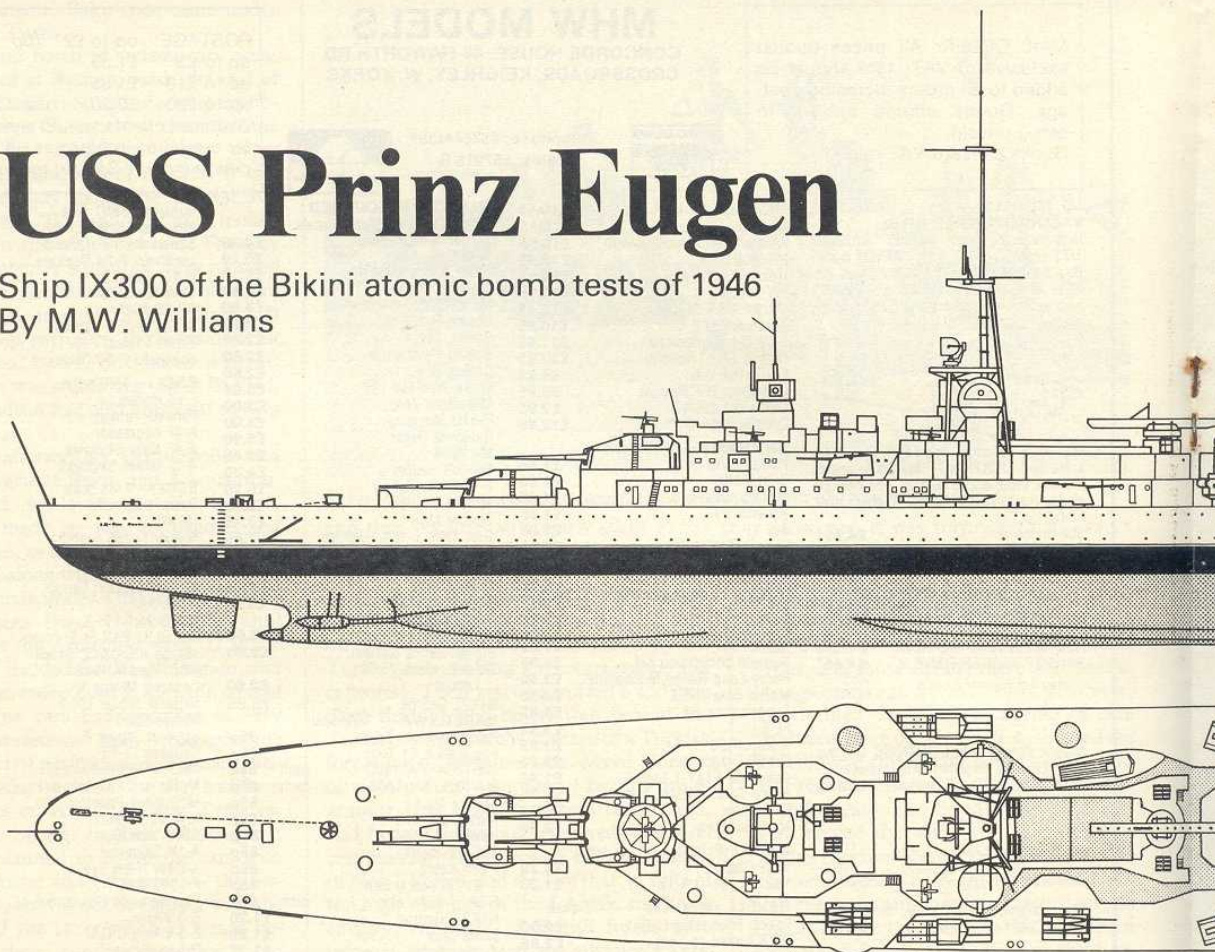


USS Prinz Eugen

Ship IX300 of the Bikini atomic bomb tests of 1946

By M.W. Williams



The USS Prinz Eugen IX-300, June 1946.

At the end of the war in Europe, all that remained of the fine ships of the Kriegsmarine now lay wrecked, their decks awash and their superstructures just gutted shells, littering the shallow waters and harbours of the defeated Reich; the fleet created by Grossadmiral Raeder had now ceased to exist.

But throughout these years of war and final cataclysmic months the largest warship to survive destruction or serious damage, was perhaps one of its most famous; she was the *Prinz Eugen*.

Her involvement in the German war at sea, was from the very start of her commissioning into the Kriegsmarine, in August 1940, one of very active participation. She took part in Operations, *Rheinübung* 'the *Bismarck* cruise', and *Cerberus*, 'the Channel Dash', and survived mine damage in April 1941, a torpedo hit in February 1942 and a collision in October 1944. Eventually she saw service in the confined waters of the Baltic, trying at first to check the Russian advance, then finally supported the massive evacuation of refugees to the West, before the collapse of Germany.

All these operations and events are well-known and have been written about before, so I will not go into them here in any great detail. But what actually happened to the *Prinz Eugen* after the war? Most histories and articles quickly mention her use in the post war atomic bomb tests and subsequent sinking in 1947, and very little else.

What I have tried to do in this short article is to cover these 'missing' years and the events which overtook the *Prinz Eugen* after the war in as much detail as possible, and to outline the changes in her appearance and equipment at this time, to enable a faithful model of her to be produced depicting her as she would have appeared as the USS *Prinz*

Eugen, test ship IX300, destined for Bikini Atoll and her final operation in July 1946.

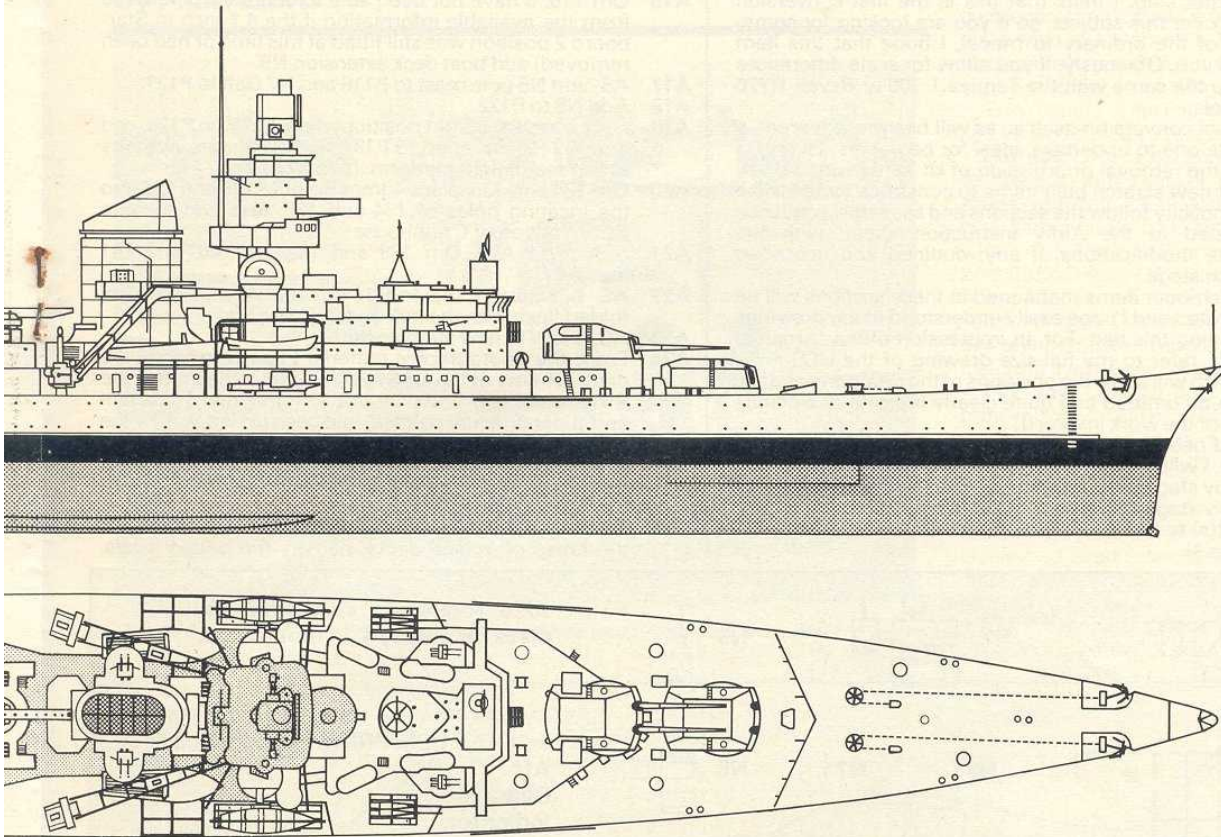
History of the USS *Prinz Eugen*

The end of the war found the *Prinz Eugen* lying in Copenhagen; she had arrived there on the 20 April 1945 after escaping from the attention of Allied bombers at Swinemünde; it was while she was in Copenhagen that hostilities ceased.

Her commanding officer, Captain Reinicke, received his final order from Naval High Command East, on the 7 May 1945 commanding him to haul down his ensign at 1600 hours on 7 May, and prepare to hand over his ship and her complement of 1400 men to Allied control.

Rear Admiral Holt commanding the British Naval units in this area took possession of the *Prinz Eugen* on 8 May for the Allies, and proceeded to de-ammunition and neutralise the offensive equipment over the following days. Eventually on the 26 May she sailed from Copenhagen along with the light cruiser *Nürnberg* for Wilhelmshaven, being escorted on this short voyage by the British cruisers, *Devonshire* and *Dido*. They arrived in Wilhelmshaven on 28 May and it was here the *Prinz Eugen* was to stay until the Allied powers had decided her fate.

Being the largest German warship to survive the war in a serviceable condition, she was greatly prized by the victorious Allied Navies of Britain, America and Russia, and each now offered their claims to take her over. The American member of the Control Commission, Captain Graubart, describes how neither of the involved parties would give up its claim, so it was decided that the matter could only be settled by the drawing of lots. That is how the ship was assigned to



MWW 81

the Americans, on the 13 December. They then moved her to Wesermünde.

It was not until the 13 January 1946, that the *Prinz Eugen*, now under the American flag, finally set out from Germany, to cross the Atlantic to Boston, where she arrived on 22 January. When the actual decision to use the ship in the forthcoming atomic tests was taken I can't discover, but certain alterations and modifications were deemed necessary to prepare her for her part in them, so she was taken to the Philadelphia Navy Yard in February for the work to commence, the main parts of which were the removal of the two 8 inch guns from A (Anton) gunhouse, and the two 4.1 inch mountings from the port side 2 and 3 position (with also the possibility of one mounting from the starboard side in the midships position). The main additions were all forward on the conning tower and forward fire control station, here the 7m rangefinder was removed and a US Army radar van and radio mast was fitted. She was by now classified as the USS *Prinz Eugen* Ship IX300 (IX is the US Navy designator for experimental vessel). With this work completed the ship was ready for her last voyage to the test area. She left the Philadelphia Navy Yard on 3 March 1946 heading for Bikini Atoll, and Operation Crossroads.

Operation Crossroads initially called for the testing of three atomic devices. In test Able, an air detonation was planned, with Baker and Charlie both being underwater detonations. The location for these experiments was the remote Bikini Atoll of the Marshall Islands in the Western Pacific, under the overall control of Vice-Admiral Blandy in the command ship USS *Mount McKinley*.

For the first test (Able) on 1 July, some 77 ships were to be used; the *Prinz Eugen* herself was to be placed 1200 yards

away from ground zero, in this test. At 0900 local time a bomb, about the equivalent of 20,000 tons of TNT, was detonated over the Atoll, but the damage inflicted upon the *Prinz Eugen* was minimal. Besides scorching of the exposed painted surfaces the only physical damage was a bent foremast and the extreme tip of the mainmast broken off.

She was not alone in surviving this test, except for a number of ships very close to the centre of the air detonation which did suffer mortal damage (one cruiser, two destroyers and two auxiliaries), the majority received varying degrees of acceptable damage.

This was all to change though in test Baker. Again the *Prinz Eugen* was 1200 yards away from the detonation point, when at 0834 on the 25 July, a device similar to Able's was exploded underwater. The effects on the ship were devastating. The massive underwater shock wave distorted the outer plates and structure, but she still remained afloat, a tribute to her construction. The measured effects of test Baker confirmed the destructive nature of an underwater explosion on ships hulls, so well that the third test, Charlie, was cancelled.

The battered *Prinz Eugen* was now taken to the Kwajalein Atoll, 160 miles to the south of the test area, along with other survivors of the tests, on what proved to be the last part of her long voyage from Germany. In the following months her damaged hull slowly opened to admit the sea, and she started to settle by the stern. In an attempt to delay her sinking for as long as possible, she was manoeuvred until her stern rested on the nearby reef, but eventually the flooding advanced amidships then towards the bows, until in late December 1947, a year and a half after the tests, she finally succumbed to her damage and capsized on 22 December 1947.

The remains of the USS *Prinz Eugen*, late of the

Kreigsmarine, were subsequently broken up at Kwajalein Atoll during 1962-65.

Model Conversion

This conversion using the Airfix 1:600 scale *Prinz Eugen* as the base, will finally produce an example of a unique type of ship, a target ship. I think that this is the first conversion article to cover this subject, so if you are looking for something out of the ordinary to model, I hope that this item appeals to you. Obviously, if you allow for scale differences you can do the same with the Tamiya 1:700 or Revell 1:720 scale models.

The actual conversion itself is, as will become apparent, a very simple one to undertake, ideal for beginners, involving as it does the removal or omission of kit parts, with a small number of new scratch built items to construct. I will for the sake of simplicity follow the sections and assembly sequence as illustrated in the Airfix instruction sheet, with the appropriate modifications, if any, outlined and described during each stage.

All scratch-built items mentioned in these sections will be fully illustrated and I hope easily understood in the drawings accompanying this text. For an impression of the complete conversion, refer to my full-size drawing of the USS *Prinz Eugen*, which will show the positions of the new parts and the kit ones to be omitted and quite clearly indicate at a glance the extent of the work involved.

To avoid needless repetition and to save valuable magazine space, I will use the following abbreviations throughout the stage by stage progress through the instruction sheet:

Assembly stage 1, 2, etc = A1, A2, etc. Assemble as shown = AS. Part(s) to be omitted = Om. Part(s) = P. New scratch built item = N.

boats and one 8.0m pinnace, from a spares box (only if you want to represent the *Prinz Eugen* as she was on her last voyage, the above mentioned boats were removed before the actual tests, so if the boats are omitted it will represent the *Prinz Eugen* as she was in early July 1946).

- A16 Om 115, (I have not been able to definitely determine from the available information if the 4.1 inch in Starboard 2 position was still fitted at this time or had been removed) add boat deck extension N5.
- A17 AS, add N6 pole mast to P116 and N7 Gaff to P121.
- A18 Add N8 to P122.
- A19 Only one searchlight positioned centrally on P126, add new N9 (50cm radar) to P131, and N10 cross supports to the searchlight platform, (two sides).
- A20 Om 134 and 135, place 40mm Bofors P136 and 137 into the locating holes of 134 and 135, also add a spare 40mm on top of C gunhouse.
- A21 Similar to A20, Om 138 and 139, use 140 and 141 instead.
- A22 AS, but place P142 and 144 in the stowed position, folded flush with the hull and pointing aft.
- A23 AS, add N11 new stern anchor.
- A24 From the photographic material I have available, the paint scheme of the USS *Prinz Eugen* at the time of the Bikini tests, appears to be overall light grey. Some hull and superstructure painting had been undertaken by the USN while she was at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, so along with the fact that the ship was in the hands of a reduced 'transit' crew in these last few months, meant that the ship quite understandably has a rather weathered patchy finish to the hull and superstructure; the areas of 'metal' decks, namely the bridge levels,

NEW SCRATCH BUILT ITEMS

Also required, two 3mm 10 thou discs for empty 4.1" mountings.

Aft Sinkage Indicator

USS PRINZ EUGEN IX-300

Port side aft

All you have to do now to produce an example of the *Prinz Eugen* in July 1946, is to follow the stages below and apply basic modelling skills to the subject.

- A1 8 inch gunhouses, B (Bruno) and C (Caesar), gunhouse B remove the base and lockers for the AA mounting and file flush, gunhouse C — AS.
- A2 and A3 — AS.
- A4 8 inch gunhouses, A (Anton) and D (Dora), gunhouse A — Om. 15 and 16, the 8 inch guns, blanking off the resulting gaps to resemble tarpaulin covered, gunhouse D — AS.
- A5 AS, make up four 4.1 inch mountings.
- A6 Om 33 and 34, only the catapult retained.
- A7 and A8 — AS.
- A9 Om 58, 59 and 60 and carefully par away the three paravanes (the torpedo like objects) moulded on P50.
- A10 AS, with the addition of N1 as shown.
- A11 Om 75, 76, 77, 78, 82, 88 and 89. Add N2 the radar van, and N3 the mast on top of the conning tower.
- A12 AS, modified A10 and A11.
- A13 Om 94.
- A14 Om 98.
- A15 AS, omitting the two 4.1 inch mountings, shown in port 2 and 3 positions. Instead place a 3mm diameter disc of 10 thou plastic card over the positions to indicate the empty mountings, add N4 boat deck extension forward of the crane, and if possible obtain two 11.5m liberty

and the area amidships between the bases of the AA directors were dark grey; the rest of the decking being bare weathered planking basically a tan/light brown, the submerged hull portion would have been hull red, with the black boot topping now extended up to the degaussing coil. Minor painting items such as the funnel grille, AA guns and ships boats are all dealt with as usual.

Finally in this section I would like to point out the use of white sinkage indicators, applied to the *Prinz Eugen's* bow and stern, along with her name on the quarters, while she was at Bikini; also I indicated the position of the empty light AA mountings around the decks by applying small dark grey circles where appropriate; these I have indicated on my final drawing.

Conclusion

In researching this article I have read through quite a few histories on the *Prinz Eugen*, which contained quite a few contradictory dates to deal with, to finally gather together what is I think a true history of her activities after the war.

But I feel there are still gaps and questions concerning these years. If anyone can supply corrections to my text or provide additional information I am sure the readers interested by this article would appreciate further coverage of this subject, possibly through the readers column of the *Airfix Magazine*.