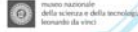


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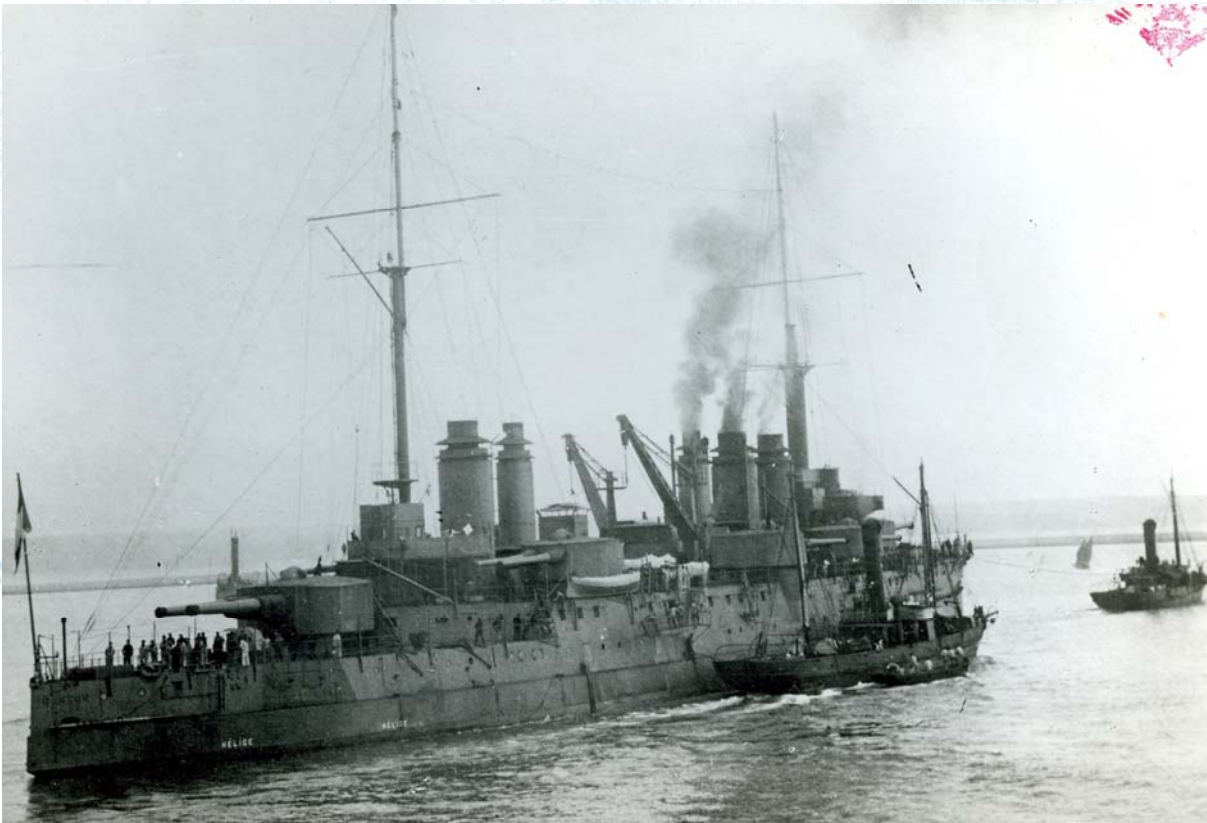
THE REAPPEARANCE OF THE DANTON

The Sinking of the Danton

Torpedoed – 19 March 1917

The battleship *Danton* built in Brest in 1910 corresponds to the following specifications:

- Length: 146.6m
- Draft: 8.7m
- Displacement: 18,300 tonnes (19,760 tonnes fully laden)
- Speed: 19 knots
- Propulsion: 4 groups of shaft drive Parsons steam turbines – 4 propellers
- Armament: 4 x 305 mm cannons – 12 x 240 mm cannons – 16 x 75 mm cannons
2 x 450mm torpedo tubes
- Complement: 920 men

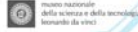


The Danton - copyright : © musée national de la Marine

The battleship *Danton* had left Toulon on 18 March 1917, after a refit and various trials, destined for Corfu to rejoin the naval forces deployed there. She was escorted by the destroyer *Massue*. 946 officers and sailors were on board plus 155 passengers - sailors returning to their allocated postings. The order to stand-by had been given on leaving the bay of Toulon.

The commander, Captain Delage, had decided to sail via Cap Corse and the Strait of Messina, but in the morning of 18 March, information was received advising the presence of enemy submarines on patrol in the Tyrrhenian Sea. The commander then changed his mind and decided to pass to the West of Sardinia.

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THE REAPPEARANCE OF THE DANTON

In the morning of 19 March, coded information was received on board confirming enemy submarine activity near to the route chosen by the *Danton*, but giving no indication of a submarine alert to the South of Sardinia.

At 13h15 on 13 March the *Danton* was 28 miles South West of the Island of San Pietro, on passage at 14.5 knots on a heading of 140 degrees when she was suddenly attacked. It was the masthead lookout that raised the alarm on sighting a wake, originating close by: between 300 and 600 meters according to witnesses.

The bridge sounded the alert. The guns were made ready, but because no periscope emerged there was no target and the ships artillery could not open fire.

The battleship was struck by two torpedoes in quick succession, forward and mid-ships. She listed 5 to-7 degrees to port, settled by the head and remained in this position. The sailors had the impression that the ship could hold like this. The commander chose to make for Bizerte but, after ten minutes, the list began to increase, slowly at first, then rapidly and the ship capsized after 30-35 minutes. It was impossible to launch the lifeboats, as all electrical equipment was out of action. Rafts and wood stored on the bridge were thrown into the sea.

The last order of the commander, stationed on the bridge, was to signal abandon ship. Then, standing in full view, he uttered the cry "Vive la France". A thousand voices picked up the shout, repeating it three times, each man leaving the ship by jumping into the water either over the side or by sliding down the hull. The destroyer *Massue* busied herself picking up the crew. In two hours she was able to save 500 sailors. The trawlers *Louise Marguerite* and *Chauveau* arrived on the scene and were also able to save more than 300 men, mostly survivors on rafts.

Captain Delage, clung to the bridge until the end and the majority of the officers and marines perished. 296 were recorded dead or missing.

The *Massue* arrived in Cagliari around 23h00 on 19 March. The French consul was waiting on the quayside with all the Italian authorities. On 21 March, the citizens of Cagliari, led by the archbishop and city officials accompanied the bodies of four sailors to the cemetery. The funerals gave rise to an impressive demonstration of Franco-Italian friendship.

It emerged after the war that the *Danton* had fallen victim to torpedoes from the German submarine U 64.

Source : Service Historique de la Défense – Département Marine – SHM 7 DDI 782

Contacts :

Ministère de la Défense
Direction de la Mémoire du Patrimoine et des archives
Service historique de la Défense
Chef du département
Capitaine de vaisseau Serge Thébaut
Chateau de Vincennes
BP 166 – 00468 Armées
Tel. + 33 0141934300
Fax. +33 0141934307

Ministère de la Défense
Commission du Patrimoine de la Marine
Commissaire général (2S) Olivier Laurens
15 rue de Laborde – Paris 8°
BP 2 -00300 Armées
Tel : + 33 0153428759
Fax : + 33 0153428799
e-mail: cpmar.sg@marine.defense.gouv.fr