

The Never Ending Story of Training Ships

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TEACHING ON THE WAVES: THE GERMAN SAILS

The history of training ships in the world of navigation, both merchant and naval, is a never ending story. From the age of sails, through the days of steam and motor propulsion to the most sophisticated vessels of 21st century there were so many ships of all sizes and shapes used as schools on the waves. To make a choice and declare 'the most famous training ships' is the mission impossible and so this author doesn't dare to do such a selection.

Training ships are not only the essential part of world-wide shipping but also one of the most interesting. The conclusion of a search through the author's huge personnel archives the author is that the major role in the entire history of training on the high seas belongs to Germans. As this fact is not widely accepted and German importance and influence is not recognized even in the maritime community it is worth to be presented in ToMS.

It is generally accepted that the first training vessel in the world was the British ship 'Marine Society'. She was former merchantman 'Beatty' purchased in 1786 by London-based Marine Society. There is no doubt that Society, founded in 1756 by Jonas Hanway, was the world pioneer in training boys for seafaring duties, but the ship 'Marine Society' never sailed and spent her entire career moored between Deptford and Greenwich in the Thames.

The first records on vessels actually sailing with cadets comes from Germany. In 1844 the Prussian Navy used sailing corvette 'Amazone' as the training vessel (Schulschiff in German). Four years later in the Navy of Deutschen Bundes (German Confederation) served training frigate 'Deutschland'. At the same time the Navy of Schleswig-Holstein used schooner 'Elbe' for training. In 1861 Prussian corvette 'Amazone' was replaced



Herzogin Cecilie.

by 'Niobe', being followed by training vessels 'Mercur', 'Gefion', 'Thetis' and 'Arcona'. Strong tradition of practical training for future naval officers had been continued by the German Imperial Navy. Three-masted steam corvettes with auxiliary sails 'Moltke', 'Stosch', 'Stein', 'Gneisenau' and 'Charlotte' were the best known training ships before the First World War.

At the end of the war the Imperial Navy ceased to exist. The entire surviving fleet had been taken by the Allies as a prize. Persistent to keep the tradition of teaching the seamanship Navy of the Weimar Republic, as early as 1922, acquired a 4-masted



The biggest ever – 'R.C. Rickmers'.

1913-built steel hull schooner. Originally she was Danish vessel 'Morten Jensen'. Rebuilt into a 3-masted barque she was christened 'Niobe' in the memory of previous Prussian training vessel.

Ten years later 'Niobe' met her tragic end. In the summer of 1932 she was on the training routes in the Baltic Sea with 35 crew members and 74 cadets onboard. July 26th was a very warm day and she sailed with all hatches and portholes opened. While in the vicinity of Fehmarn Island a sudden squall hit 'Niobe'. She capsized and sank within minutes. Freighter 'Theresia L.M. Russ' and the crew of Fehmarn lighthouse managed to rescue 40 lives while the remaining 69 were lost.

Sinking of 'Niobe' was especially tragic for the post-war Germany, being the greatest maritime disaster of that time. It seemed certain that the very idea of training sailing ships would be abandoned. But Germans surprised shipping world: in the wake of 'Niobe' tragedy Kriegsmarine ordered four new sailing schoolships at the renowned shipyard of Blohm & Voss at Hamburg! Being state of art ships these 3-masted steel barques are generally considered the best training vessels ever. The proof of that opinion is fact that, using 1933 blueprints, the identical vessel was built in 1958. She is still sailing and four of her precedents from 30's are afloat these days.

Only four months after the 'Niobe' disaster work began on 'Gorch Fock'. She was launched on May 3rd and delivered to the German Navy on June 26, 1933. Lesson of the Baltic tragedy was learned: new ship had a righting moment large enough to bring her back in the upright position even when she heels over to nearly 90 degrees!

The second sister 'Horst Wessel' had also been constructed fast. Keel was laid down on February 15th, she was launched on June 13th and commissioned on September 17th – all of 1936. Next year Blohm & Voss delivered ship 'Albert Leo Schlageter'. Construction of the fourth ship 'Herbert Norkus' began in 1939 but due to the war she was not completed. In 1938 identical ship

named 'Mircea' was built for the Romanian Navy.

Three German sisterships survived the war and were quickly seized by the Allies. 'Gorch Fock' became the Soviet Navy's 'Tovarisch' while 'Horst Wessel' and 'Albert Leo Schlageter' were taken over by Americans. The first one became Coast Guard training ship 'Eagle'. 'Albert Leo Schlageter' was sold to the Brazilian Navy and sailed as 'Guanabara'. In 1961 she was acquired by the Portuguese Navy to become 'Sagres'.

But that was not the end of story on 'Gorch Fock' class. A quarter of century after the original 'Gorch Fock', in 1958 Blohm & Voss built the very same ship of the very same name for the German Navy. Design was so successful that Spanish shipyard Astilleros Celaya at Bilbao, between 1968 and 1982, built four similar ships for the South American navies: 'Gloria', 'Guayas', 'Simon Bolivar' and 'Cuahatemoc'.

In the shadow of the celebrated schoolships of 'Gorch Fock'



'R.C. Rickmers' as 'Neath'.

class is a story of numerous German merchant marine training vessels. German fleet of ships created to prepare young men for duties on all kinds on cargo-carrying steamers and motorships had been the biggest in the world. In the general perception of 20th century Britannia rules the seas, but true master of sailing



'Magdalene Vinnen'.

and teaching routes was Germany.

At the turn of centuries two German figures emerged in the world of mercantile training ships: respected shipping company Norddeutscher Lloyd of Bremen and Deutscher Schulschiff-Verein (German Schoolship Association) of Oldenburg. The major difference was in fact that ships of NDL were used for training during commercial voyages and DSV ships carried no cargo and served exclusively for training.

The first step was made at the very end of 19th century: in 1899 Bremen owners purchased huge 4-masted steel barque 'Albert Rickmers' of 2.591 gross tons. Built five years earlier at Bremerhaven she was converted into a training ship and renamed 'Herzogin Sophie Charlotte'. Her training duties ceased in 1913 when was sold to shipowners Schluter & Maak.

Next ship was a brand new 'Herzogin Cecilie', also 4-masted steel barque, of 3.242 gross tons. She was also Bremerhaven born, being built in 1902. In 1919 she was allocated to France as part of war reparations but soon went under Finnish flag for commercial sailing. Still carrying original German name she became total loss in April 1936 after running aground at Sewer Mill Cove, Devon.

Oldenburg association started in 1901 with full-rigged steel ship 'Grossherzogin Elizabeth', a newbuilding from Tecklenborg yard at Geestermünde. She was the only training ship to remain under German flag after the First World War. But her turn came in 1946. Allocated to France she became 'Duchesse Anne', training ship of the French Navy. After only six years she was withdrawn to be used as an accommodation ship. Now she is permanently moored at Dunkirk.

The second newbuilding came in 1910 from Blohm & Voss shipyard. It was full-rigged ship 'Prinzess Eitel Friedrich'. In 1919 she was taken over by the British, but in 1920 became French 'Colbert' of the St. Nazaire's maritime school. Sold in 1929 to

Poland she became 'Dar Pomorza', training ship for Gdynia Naval Academy. She remained in service until 1982, and now is very popular museum ship at her home port.

The last of the trio, 'Grossherzog Friedrich August', came from Geestermünde yard, being delivered in 1914. Shortly after the Peace Treaty she was taken by British and in 1921 sold to the Norwegians. Being renamed 'Statsraad Lehmkuhl' she is still, after 90 years, active in training of Norwegian cadets.

The honor of the biggest training ship in German history goes to the huge sailing freighter 'R.C. Rickmers', 5-masted steel barque with auxiliary engine. This giant was of 5.548 gross tons and cargo capacity of 10.500 tons, 146 meters in length overall and beam of 16.3 meters. She was built at Bremerhaven by Rickmers shipbuilding and shipowning company for own fleet. But, she was also remembered for the shortest career of all the training ships. In 1914 Rickmers was celebrating company's 80th anniversary and fitted her out for training. Few months later, in August 1914, she was seized at Cardiff by the British as a war prize, renamed 'Neath' and immediately transferred to cargo routes. On March 27, 1917 she was sunk by German submarine U 66 off the Irish coast.

After the Peace Treaty of 1919 the German merchant marine disappeared. In 1923 Deutscher Schulschiff-Verein returned to the scene with 4-masted barque 'Oldenburg'. She was former French 'Laennec', built in 1902 at St.Nazaire. In 1928 she passed under Norddeutscher Lloyd ownership but kept training until 1930 when was sold to the Finnish Navy. As 'Suomen Joutsen' she was in active duty until 1956 when became a stationary schoolship at Turku.

Four years later from Tecklenborg yard at Wesermunde came the first newbuilding, 5-masted full-rigged ship 'Schulschiff Deutschland'. She kept sailing until 1939 on overseas routes



'L'Avenir' was lost as 'Admiral Karpfanger'.

and until 1944 in Baltic Sea only. In 1952 she became stationary training ship at Bremen. Today is moored at Vegesack as a museum ship. She was followed by barque 'Schulschiff Pommern'. Purchased in 1928 she was 12 years old and spent her youth as cargo carrying 'Elfrieda'. Her training career proved very short! In November of the same year she was hit by gale in English Channel. Being demasted and heavy damaged she was broken up at the beginning of 1929.

In the mid-20's various German shipowners emerged with training vessels for their own officers. Four ships arrived in 1924 alone. Gebrueder Vinnen of Hamburg purchased in France full-rigged steel ship 'Edouard Bureau'. She was a real veteran, being built back in 1892 at Sunderland as British 'Winscombe Park'. After necessary adjustments for training duties she was renamed 'Grief'. But her career was a short one: three years later she was scrapped at Belfast.

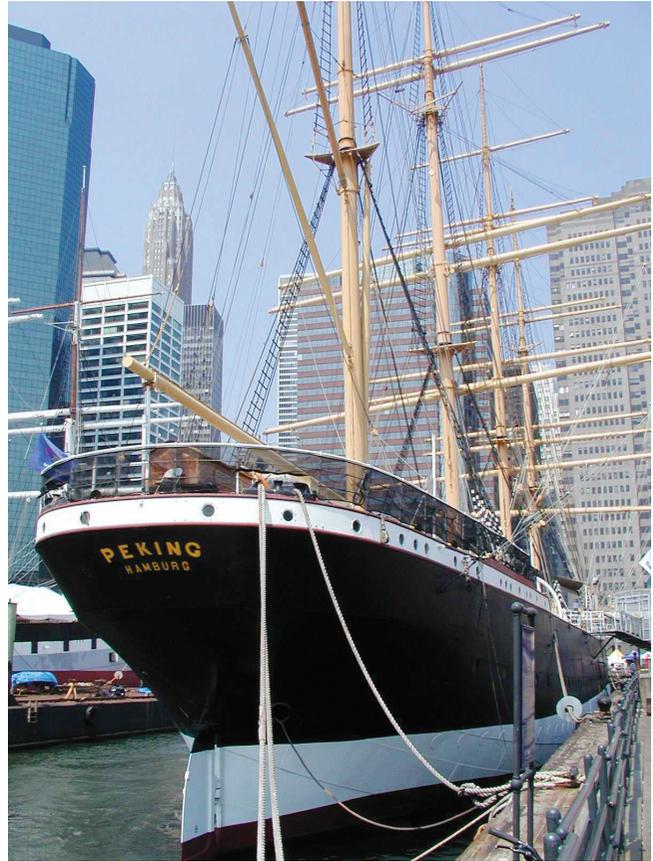
Old Bremen company Adler Reederei purchased Swedish barque 'Bohus' which soon proved ill-fated. Also the 1892 veteran she was originally German owned 'Bertha', built at Grangemouth. After only few months of service 'Bohus' was wrecked on Shetland Islands in April 1924.

Two French built ships, 'Bremen' and 'Hamburg', also entered fleet in 1924 being purchased by Bremen Shipowners' Association (Bremer Rhederverein). 'Bremen' was built in 1902 at St. Nazaire as French 'Rene' and came under German flag in 1921 as 'Lisbeth'. She sailed as a training ship for nine years before being scrapped. And 'Hamburg' was a schoolship for less that a year! Being built in Nantes in 1901 as French 'Marechal de Castries', she shortly sailed as German 'Henriette'. Purchased by BSA in 1924 she entered training in 1925 and went to the scrapyard in 1926!

In 1936 Norddeutscher Lloyd acquired 4-masted steel barque 'Magdalene Vinnen' of 3.476 GRT, built in 1921 by famous



Ill-fated 'Pamir' in her better days.



'Peking' as a museum ship at New York City.

Krupp Germaniawerke yard at Kiel. She was converted into training barque 'Kommodore Johnsen'. Luckily survived the war, she was allocated to the Soviet Union as reparations and renamed 'Sedov'. Under the very same name she is sailing for 67 years now, presently being a training ship for the Russian naval school at Murmansk.

In 1937 well-known shipping company Hamburg-Amerika Linie purchased former Belgian training ship 'L'Avenir' and christened her 'Admiral Karpfanger'. She was already 30 years old, being built in 1907 at Bremerhaven. In 1932 she went under Finnish flag without change of name and was used for cargo carrying. She returned to training in 1937 as 'Admiral Karpfanger' but only a year later was lost with all hands. Her loss remained one of the biggest mysteries of the seas.

On February 8, 1938 she left Port Germain in Southern Australia fully laden with 3500 tons of wheat in bags for Hamburg. A month later 'Admiral Karpfanger' with 27 crew and 33 cadets reached Cape Horn area and on March 12th sent short radio message 'All well'. And not heard of again. Many ships searched for her but in vain. The months later the wreckage discovered

on Navarin Island near Cape Horn was identified as parts of 'Admiral Karpfanger'. Investigation of the tragedy was closed with conclusion that 'the most reasonable assumption is that the vessel struck an iceberg, probably at night, and foundered very suddenly.'

The very last entry on German schoolships was made in 1938 when Hamburg based tanker owner John T. Essberger purchased wooden vessel 'Bandi'. This ship was built back in 1919 in Gulfport, Mississippi as American 4-masted schooner 'Elizabeth Bandi'. When sold to Finland in 1931 her name was shortened to 'Bandi'. For training duties she was re-rigged to barque and renamed 'Seute Deern'. Her sailing career ceased in 1947 when she became floating hotel at Hamburg.

Zucker kommt zuletzt, according to the old German proverb, and it is the story of famous Flying P Line. Still existing

Hamburg company Reederei F. Laiesz was founded back in 1824 and became world famous as the highest quality fleet of sailing vessels. At all the company operated a total of 86 sailing vessels, 66 of which bore names beginning with a 'P'. As these sailing ships, carrying mainly Chilean nitrate cargoes around Cape Horn, were extremely fast, the Laiesz's fleet was called Flying P Line.

Five 'P' 4-masted steel barques were used for training. The oldest one, 'Pamir', had the most adventurous life becoming, at the very end, one of the symbols of disasters at sea. She was built in 1905 by Blohm & Voss at Hamburg. Being of 3.181 GRT she was 96.4 meters in length and 14 meters in breadth. After the First World War, according to the Treaty of Versailles' stipulations, nearly all German merchant ships were turned over to the Allies as war compensation. So were the 'Flying P Line' ships and 'Pamir' was awarded to Italy.

But at the beginning of 1920's Laiesz company managed to bring back six ships, including the 'Pamir'. In 1931 she was sold and became a part of famous Finnish 'grain fleet' operated



'Padua' as Russian 'Kruzenshtern'.



'Sagres' was originally 'Albert Leo Schlageter'.

by Capt. Gustav Erickson, the last big owner of sailing ships in the world. Ten years later 'Pamir' was seized by New Zealand as a war prize. Being returned to Capt. Erickson in 1949 she sailed to Europe only to be sold for scrap to Dutch company V.F. van Loo, together with six years younger sistership 'Passat', also built by Blohm & Voss.

In 1951 both ships were saved from breakers by Lubeck shipowner Heinz Schliewen. He was keen to revive long German tradition of training under the sail. Both ships were sent to Howaldtswerke yard at Kiel for a complete refit. On December 18, 1951 'Pamir' sailed from Hamburg for Rio de Janeiro with 50 cadets onboard. 'Pamir' and 'Passat' proved a complete success and Schliewen purchased two more ships. Famous 4-masted barque 'Moshulu' and 5-masted schooner 'Carl Vinnen' were intended for training. But crisis changed his plans entirely!

'Pamir' and 'Passat' were laid up, while 'Moshulu' and 'Carl Vinnen' were resold. In 1955 the group of German shipowners established foundation Pamir und Passat Stiftung to operate famous training ships. Unfortunately the 'Pamir' disaster was waiting to happen! On August 10, 1957 she left Buenos Aires with 86 souls, 35 crew and 51 cadets, laden with barley for Hamburg. Forty-one days later she had a tragic encounter with hurricane 'Carrie' in the middle of Atlantic, some 600 miles west of Azores. The struck of wind was so intense that crew hadn't time to shorten sails. 'Pamir', driven by enormous strength of wind started to list to portside. Finally she capsized and sunk very quickly. Radio distress call was sent but the nearest ships were hundred miles away. Sinking of 'Pamir' proved a great disaster: there were only six survivors.

And only six weeks later 'Passat' managed to escape the same fate and arrived at Lisbon heavily damaged in a storm. She was soon withdrawn from service and in 1959 sold to the City of Lubeck for use as a cadet's accommodation ship.

Training ships of the Flying 'P' Line were also 'Peking'

and 'Priwall'. These 4-masted steel barques also came from Blohm & Voss, being built in 1911 and 1920, respectively. Like other German ships 'Peking' was taken over by Italians as war reparations but was repurchased by Laeisz company in 1922. She spent a decade on training routes and in 1932 went to Britain to become 'Arethusa', stationery training ship in River Medway. In 1975 she once again crossed the Atlantic! She was sold to the Americans to be a part of South Street Seaport Museum in New York City, where she is still moored under her original name 'Peking'.

Her sistership 'Priwall' was not so lucky. The outbreak of the Second World War met her at Valparaiso where she was interned

by Chilean Government. Willing to save her from possible seizure by the Allies, German in 1941 donated 'Priwall' to the Republic of Chile. Allocated to the Chilean Navy she was used as a cargo-carrying training ship 'Lautaro'. She met her end on February 28, 1945 off the Peruvian coast. Laden with cargo of nitrate she was completely destroyed by fire.

The very last of Laeisz's training ships was 4-masted steel barque 'Padua' coming from Tecklenborg yard of Wesermunde in 1926. Twenty years later she was seized by Soviet Union as a war prize and renamed 'Kruzenshtern'. She is still sailing as a training ship, now under the Russian Navy ensign.



The second 'Gorch Foch' was built in 1958.