

Mutiny On The High Seas

"Hell-Fire Jack" Pedersen-- Manhandler.

"Hell-fire Jack" is a name which has been applied to many man-handling skippers, but perhaps never, with more justice than to Adolf Pedersen, the master of the U.S. barkentine "Puako," which sailed from British Columbia on April 27, 1918, bound for Cape Town.

Four months later Cape Town got a wireless message from an outward bound troopship to send an armed guard to the "Puako," as mutiny had broken out aboard.

An amazing story was disclosed, which has scarcely been equalled even in fiction. When the vessel arrived at Cape Town the skipper reported that the crew had mutinied and tried to murder him and his two sons, who were the mates, and two of his men had jumped overboard. He handed over to the police nine members of the crew, who had been badly knocked about. They were detained in Cape Town pending their removal to the United States for trial. They said that prison was far preferable to the "Puako."

In order fully to grasp the astounding yarn it is necessary to mention the following members of the crew:

Stewart, cook.

Smithson, cabin boy.

Olsen, boatswain.

Mattson, carpenter.

Jorgensen, Grielen, Relly, Jensen, Jones, Hansen, Joe and John Campbell, seamen.

In his sworn account of the voyage Pedersen said that he found that his crew had so little knowledge of sailing ships that the sails had to be furled and the gasoline engine used.

At the beginning of May he had occasion to complain of the cook's failure to supply fresh vegetables, of which there were plenty on board, and a few days later he pointed out to Grielen that he was not handling a rope correctly. Grielen at once became very excited, and shouted "Kill me, kill me; I'll jump overboard." As he became stubborn and asked to be shot, it was thought best to place him in irons and confine him to the lazarette, but on his promising to be of a different behavior he was released the following day and allowed to go about his work as usual.

About that time, Captain Pedersen said, he found that most of the crew were members of the "I.W.W." When nearing the Tropics it was noticed that the men were acting peculiarly, and on May 21 Stewart approached the Captain in the dining-room, and, after stammering a few words, produced a large knife and assumed a threatening attitude. He was pacified and returned to his work, but later in the day Smithson informed Pedersen that it was Stewart's intention to murder the Captain.

The affidavit continues: Two days afterwards, whilst I was taking an observation at 8 a.m., I had occasion to tell Stewart to go away from where I was. That was the last time I saw him alive. At 10.15 a.m. the second mate reported that Stewart had jumped overboard. I said "Get him," and went on deck right away. The ship was lying almost still and the weather was dead calm. Everyone was on deck except Hansen and Grielen. I later found that these men had practically driven the cook to do this, as they had told him to kill me or jump overboard. This was about the locality where I was informed by the authorities that the German raiders were operating. When I reached the deck I saw the cook about 30 feet below the surface. He appeared to be drowned. Ropes had already been thrown to him and were hanging over the side. The second mate was stripped and ready to jump, but I stopped him, as I thought the cook was crazy and might drown him as well. There were several sharks about, and I saw it was too late to do anything. None of the crew made any effort to effect a rescue.

After this, according to Captain Pedersen, the crew began to act queerly and talk amongst themselves of committing suicide. The cabin boy became insubordinate, and was placed in irons for putting poison in the milk intended for the officers' table. Subsequently he was set at liberty, and on July 4 he admitted putting tobacco in the beans for breakfast.

fast with the intention of getting the cook into trouble.

Smithson, who was questioned about a pair of handcuffs that were missing from the Captain's room, at first denied any knowledge, but "after a slap or two" admitted stealing them, with the intention of putting them on the second mate and detaining him in the galley. The crew thought that when the Captain heard him calling he would go to his assistance, and thus give them the opportunity of killing the pair.

And so this astonishing affidavit continued. Olsen was placed in irons on August 11 because he was suspected of planning to destroy the ship and kill the Master. Jensen confessed to putting broken glass in the bread and small pieces of tin in the dinner meat with the idea of getting rid of the Captain and his sons. He also confessed to being a friend of one Count von Alstorf, an Austrian, who resided at 817 Washington Avenue, Minneapolis. On August 20 and 21 Jensen, Jorgensen, Smithson and Jones were placed in irons because the Captain thought they were German spies. Campbell was also placed in irons, and the next day Relly was manacled on suspicion of being implicated with the others in the plot to scuttle the ship.

From that time onward, according to his own admission, Captain Pedersen became afraid of the men forming his ship's company, and told them if they came near him he would shoot them. This was the time they got their bruised faces. He had to hit them in self-defence.

A number of "confessions" signed by various members of the crew, admitting that they had been bribed by Germans to wreck the ship and murder the officers, were handed to the police.

Along with Smithson, Jensen made a joint "confession" and disclosed the plans they intended to carry out. Stewart was to poison the Captain or stab him, otherwise Stewart was to be killed. The Captain, mates, carpenter and John Campbell were to be poisoned by placing Lysol, scraps of tin, soap and glass in their food, but the Captain was too sharp for them. Another plan was to bore a hole in the hull of the ship. Grielen was to use oil from the gasoline tank to set the "Puako" on fire. After disposing of the vessel and the officers the conspirators were to get ashore by means of the gasoline launch, and proceed to America to receive payment for their services from the Count.

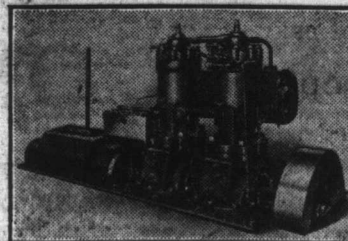
On the other hand, the crew made some startling affidavits. In describing the death of Stewart, Relly said that he was at the wheel at the time and the sea was dead calm. Suddenly he heard the carpenter shout, "Cook has gone overboard." The second mate threw him a line, but no effort was made to launch a boat.

Whilst the crew were in irons Captain Pedersen at the point of the revolver compelled them to smash each other. Relly was forced to beat Jones, and Jensen, Campbell and the second mate battered Relly. Campbell dragged Relly round the deck by the hair of the head whilst the second mate belaboured him with a club. The black eye which he showed to the Cape police was caused by the second mate hitting him with a slung shot without any cause. As a result of the blow he bled a lot on the deck, for which he was beaten by the Captain and his sons. Grielen and Olsen signed statements under compulsion confessing all sorts of crimes.

Describing how Hansen met his death, Relly stated: "I was on deck at the time and heard the second mate order him to set the fore-royal. The mate smashed and kicked him before he went up and abused him whilst he was in the rigging. Hansen loosed the lee side of the sail, and the second mate told him to hurry up. Hansen replied that he was doing his best. He had no sooner slid to the deck when the second mate jumped on him and kicked him where he lay. He was then ordered aloft again, and as he was going up the mast the second mate called him back and again struck him. Hansen cried out: 'I

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can't stand this any longer; I'll jump overboard." He made a lurch to the side, and as he had his hand on the main rigging and was about to jump the second mate again kicked him, and said, "Go to it, you—" Hansen then jumped into the sea. He did not sink but swam aft, and hung on to the log line and cried, "Save me, save me." Captain Pedersen, who was leaning across the rail, shouted, "Drown, you—" I was standing at the main rigging, and shouted, "Captain, he can be saved. All there is to do is to pull on the line." Pedersen replied, "Let him drown."

Later, at the Captain's dictation, the second mate wrote a statement and asked me to sign it. I declined on the grounds that if I did so I would be perjuring myself. Pedersen said I would have to sign before I left the cabin, and, jumping from his bed, took a revolver from under the pillow and threatened to shoot. I was therefore forced to sign to save my life.

Jones said he was once shackled to Jensen and placed in the pumphole amongst the deck cargo. Whilst there the carpenter set the gasoline engine going and pumped salt water on them for a hour at a time for two days and two nights.

Jensen, trying to explain his injuries, was forced to admit that he could not tell when he received them. Once he was knocked to the deck because he had no hot water for the boss. Another time when he had plots on the brain, Pedersen, senior, hit him with the leaf of an oak table and broke the leaf, and on another occasion assaulted him with a razor strap, leaving the hook in Jensen's scalp.

When the ship was docked at Cape Town the police, on making a search, found a loaded truncheon, knuckle-dusters, a truncheon bored ready for loading, a hardwood staff, batons, an automatic pistol fully loaded, a rifle, and repeating shot guns in the officers' cabins.

The officials responsible for the report submitted to the American Consul at Cape Town for transmission to Washington, gave it as their opinion that Captain Pedersen was either out of his mind or was suffering from hallucinations with regard to various "plots" to destroy himself, his sons, and the ship. They drew attention to the fact that it was not until seven weeks after Stewart's death that Pedersen discovered he supposed conspiracy, and then he turned back to the 23rd May and logged a dead man for two separate attempts to murder, and fined him \$50 dollars for each offence.

After a few weeks' stay at the Cape the "Puako" and its crew returned to America under the command of Captain Pearson, of Observatory, and in

February of this year Captain Pedersen and his two sons were taken to England and handed over to a file of American marines at Southampton, and later removed to the Tombs Prison in New York.

The three men were found guilty on several counts of assault. Captain Pedersen received 18 months' imprisonment, consideration being taken of the fact that he had been in custody for nearly 18 months, and his sons, who were recommended for leniency, were each sentenced to six months.—Family Herald and Weekly Star.

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S.S. Diana left Daniel's Harbor, St. Barbe district, at 9 a.m. yesterday.

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