

## Episode 8. 2nd Schleswig War (1864): Success and victory at sea - but on land the defeat was total



*In the middle of the picture is the frigate Sjælland followed by the ship of the line Skjold,*

On land, the Danes were everywhere in retreat in the 1864 war, but the navy provided the all-too-rare encouragement to a gradually discouraged and war-weary Danish population.

The fleet was barely equipped before the war broke out, but still managed to establish a total naval blockade against the German ports.

The combined Austrian and Prussian naval forces never posed a real threat to the Danish fleet, but unfortunately the wars were not only decided at sea.

The threatening political conditions had meant that, already at the end of 1863, various military measures had been taken, including meant that, in November 1863, they began to equip the navy's ships for war.

However, it was not possible to get the entire fleet fully equipped before hostilities started on 1 February 1864, but the fleet was nevertheless ready to solve its part of the task.

### The fleet at war again

After the first Prussian-Austrian troops had crossed the Eider, a similar order was immediately issued to the equipped Danish ships:

***"All Ships under any German Flag would be brought up and brought to the nearest port".***

The tasks of the Danish navy during this war were:

- Destroy or block the Prussian fleet, so that an attack from the sea side was excluded and at the same time secure the sea route for the Danish military and mercantile transports.
- Support for the army's operations by direct intervention from the sea, as well
- Establishment of a trade blockade of the German ports

At the outbreak of war in February 1864, the navy was tasked with establishing a blockade of the German ports. Two squadrons were equipped, one in the western Baltic under War Captain F. Muxoll and one in the eastern Baltic under the command of Rear Admiral CE van Dockum, where the only German naval forces, units of the newly established Prussian fleet, were based.

## Naval blockade



The screw frigate Niels Juel, under the command of orlog's captain Johan L. Gottlieb, had been stationed in Skagerak since the end of January for, among other things, to keep a watchful eye on 3 Prussian gunboats possibly staying in the North Sea.

It turned out, however, that the gunboats were not currently in the North Sea.

When the war broke out on 1 February, the commander was already ordered a few days after to leave the Norwegian coast and move to the waters between Borkum and Heligoland.

*Model of the screw frigate NIELS JUEL*

Soon after, Niels Juel was ordered to sail through the English Channel and expand the area of operation so that it stretched as far as Falmouth.

The task was still to keep an eye out for any Prussian warships and at the same time bring up any German merchant ship that it encountered.



War Captain Johan L. Gottlieb

The presence of the Danish screw frigate Niels Juel in the North Sea and the English Channel caused a great stir in German shipping circles. The fear of being brought up was great!

However, the weather in the North Sea was rough at this time of year and in mid-March the frigate had to return to Copenhagen after some accidents.

The frigate was replaced by the screw corvette Dagmar, Commander Captain Lt. GFW Wrisberg, and it was soon to appear that the Danish naval blockade was as effective as it was during the First Schleswig War 1848-50



Screw the Corvette Dagmar

## In battle for the first time

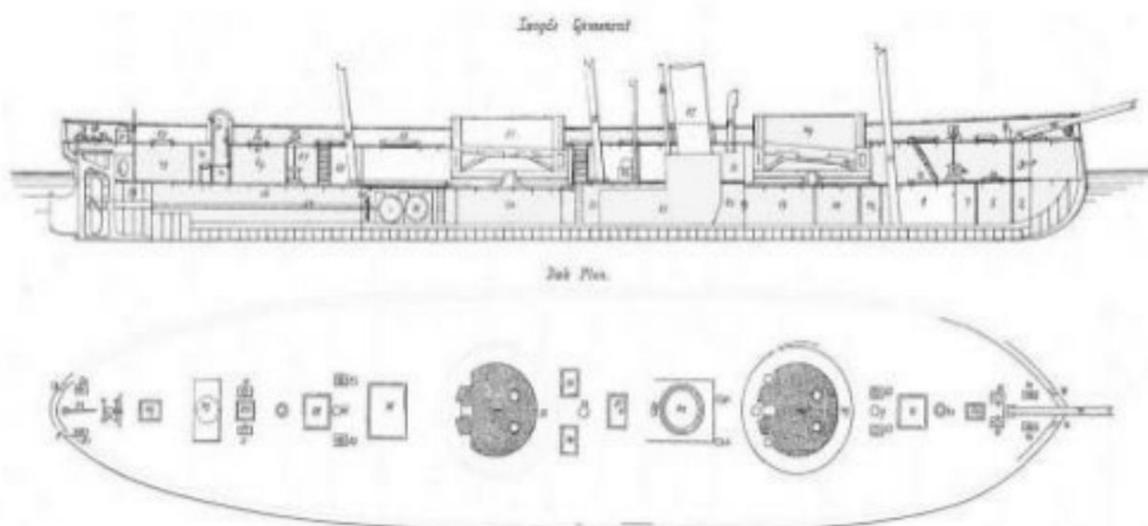


War captain  
Hans Peter Rothe

The Danish navy's newest ship, the armored battery ROLF KRAKE, had completed trial voyages in the Baltic just the year before, when the war against Prussia and Austria broke out on 1 February 1864.

At the outbreak of war, the ship was not equipped and it was not until 11 February 1864 that the ship was able to take command, with the 51-year-old war captain Hans Peter Rothe as commander.

The armored battery and its 141-man crew were immediately ordered to join the Squadron in the western part of the Baltic Sea, with station at Sønderborg.



*Sidetegning og dæksplan af panserbatteriet ROLF KRAKE*

## Fast in war

As early as 18 February, just a week after the ship had left Copenhagen, the armored battery had to fire its 4 pieces for the first time. 60-pound smooth-bore guns for real.

Rolf Krake was given the task of shelling a bridge that the Prussians had built over the outlet from Nybøl Nor.

The ship therefore entered through Flensburg fjord and off Egersund a heavy indirect shelling of the bridge now began. The shallow waters did not allow Rolf Krake to get close enough to get a direct shot in.

After 1½ hours and after firing 57 shots and being under heavy fire, it was decided to return to Sønderborg.

The ship itself had been hit approx. hundred times and had three wounded on board, but the Prussian artillery had not succeeded in breaking through Rolf Krake's armour, even though the Prussian shots had been fired at a distance of between 1400 and 2000 metres.

## Prussian consternation

After Rolf Krake had returned to the anchorage at Sønderborg, its damage was inspected by a commission from the Orlogsværftet in Copenhagen.

The commission immediately believed that the ship should be sent to Copenhagen for repairs, but the Danish High Command believed that the ship could not be dispensed with in the area, and the damage was therefore repaired with local assistance while the ship lay in Sønderborg for the next few days.

The Prussians, on the other hand, had caused some consternation by the efforts of the armored battery. It was the first time they had seen an armored battery in action.

Unfortunately, history showed that the cooperation between the maritime leadership and the army leadership was not developed, and thus the coordinated effort did not have the importance that it might have had. In addition, the possibilities to communicate between ship and land were not sufficient.

## Continued reconnaissance in the area

On 22 and 26 February, ROLF KRAKE was again on reconnaissance in Vemmingbund to investigate how things were going with the supposed arrangement of the Prussian artillery positions.



But even if the ship was often only 500 meters from land, neither troop movements nor other military activity could be observed. The ship remained then also not exposed to any kind of shelling from land.

The area around Als

## **New threat from the south**

In order to protect the German merchant fleet against the total Danish blockade, Austria, which was allied with Prussia in the German Confederation, decided to send a larger naval force from the Mediterranean to the North Sea, in order to break the Danish naval blockade if possible.

Already at the beginning of March 1864, the Marine Ministry had received intelligence that the Austrians were preparing to send this naval force to Danish waters.

This resulted in the Ministry of the Navy immediately deciding to form a North Sea squadron, consisting of the frigate Niels Juel as flagship, with naval captain Edouard Suenson as squadron leader, and the screw corvettes Dagmar and Hejmdal, with a view to countering this new threat.



The screw corvette Hejmdal

## **The storm at Dybbøl**

At 3 o'clock in the morning on 28 March 1864, the Prussian troops launched the first major attack on the positions at Dybbøl.

As soon as it got light, the armored battery Rolf Krake took off from Sønderborg and headed into the northern part of Vemmingbund. Here it was immediately fired upon from the high-lying Prussian artillery positions at Broager.

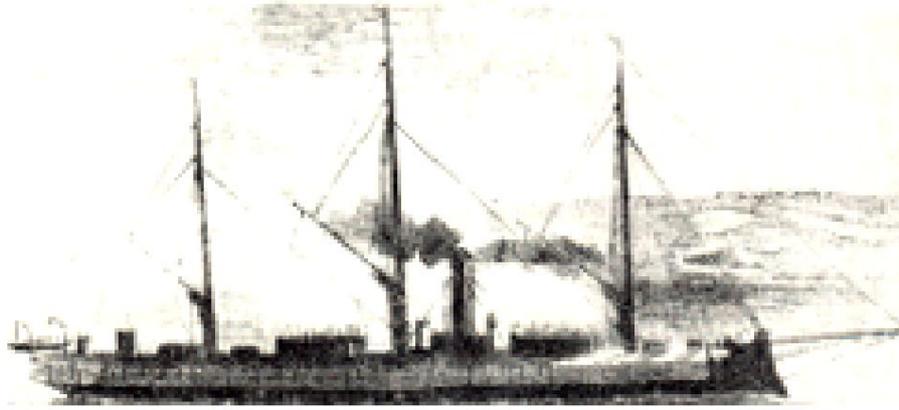
From the armored battery you could see what was going on, and the commander, war captain Rothe, immediately chose to enter Vemmingbund to support the Danish forces, even though he had not received the agreed signal.

The advancing enemy columns were immediately taken under fire, at the same time that Rolf Krake was also exposed to heavy enemy fire.

The ship received several hits, but chose not to return fire. It continued to the ravine in front of the two front redoubts in the Dybbøl position, redoubts I and II - where the armored battery opened a particularly effective flank fire against the advancing Prussian troops.

Despite the fact that Rolf Krake received countless hits, the ship still managed to intervene disruptively and fire a total of 95 shots against the advance of the Prussian forces on the right wing.

Yes, at one point the Prussians were even thrown back here.



ROLF KRAKE in Vemmingbund with reduced salary

The shelling from the armored battery, together with the fierce resistance from the Danish positions, quickly caused disorder in the Prussian ranks, after which the attack came to a standstill.

The main Prussian force chose to retreat, while a smaller force, which did not find it possible to retreat through Rolf Krake's barrage, was captured by the Danish forces. In total, 1 officer and 26 men were captured.

But Rolf Krake's efforts could of course not have any decisive influence on the efforts ashore, and when the Danish troops had been pushed back towards Sønderborg around noon, the commander chose to keep the ship moving for some time out of the Prussians' firing range.

Once again the Prussians had seen what an armored battery could accomplish!

The Prussian rush towards Dybbøl had initially been repulsed, and after firing 38 shells, the armored battery returned to Sønderborg. Rolf Krake had suffered no loss of personnel, but had again received a number of injuries.

The High Command stated that the fire from Rolf Krake had had an excellent effect

### **The fishing net against the armored battery**

Now the Prussians decided to use unconventional methods to stop Rolf Krake's interference.

The following nights they therefore laid out a larger number of fishing nets in Vemmingbund.

The purpose was quite clearly that the armored battery should either get them in the screw, or that for fear of this, they would not let the ship enter the bay.

From Rolf Krake, however, the nets were quickly observed and on a foggy morning, 10 April, the ship sent one of its vessels into Vemmingbund to pick up the nets or lower them.

The vessel's driver, Lieutenant WB Jespersen, quickly managed to neutralize several nets.

But when the fog lifted, the vessel came under fire from the Prussian side and they had to retreat.

## The Eastern Squadron

The Eastern Squadron was augmented at the end of February under the command of Rear Admiral van Dockum.



Commander Captain C. van Dockum, commander of the Baltic Squadron

It then consisted of the screw frigates Jylland and Sjøælland,



The screw frigate Zeeland



The screw frigate Jutland

as well as the screw corvettes Thor and Heimdal



the screw corvette Thor

The Prussians had a squadron under Kapitän zur See Jachtmann which, when ready for action in mid-March, consisted of the closed screw corvette Arcona, (26 guns, 12.4 knots) and the open screw corvette Nympe, (13 guns, 12 knots), with station in Stettin/ Swinemünde and a flotilla consisting of the paddle steamer Loreley, (4 guns, 10.5 knots), 18 steam gunboats and 4 gun dinghies based in Stralsund.

On 16 March, Jachtmann observed that the Danish squadron, which was at anchor 2 nautical miles east-southeast of Sassnitz, was now only on three ships. The frigate Jylland had been sent to Copenhagen with engine damage, so only Sjælland (42 guns, 10 knots) and the two corvettes Thor (14 guns, 9 knots) and Hejmdal (16 guns, 10 knots) were left.

Jachtmann therefore decided to try to break the Danish blockade the next day with the above-mentioned forces.

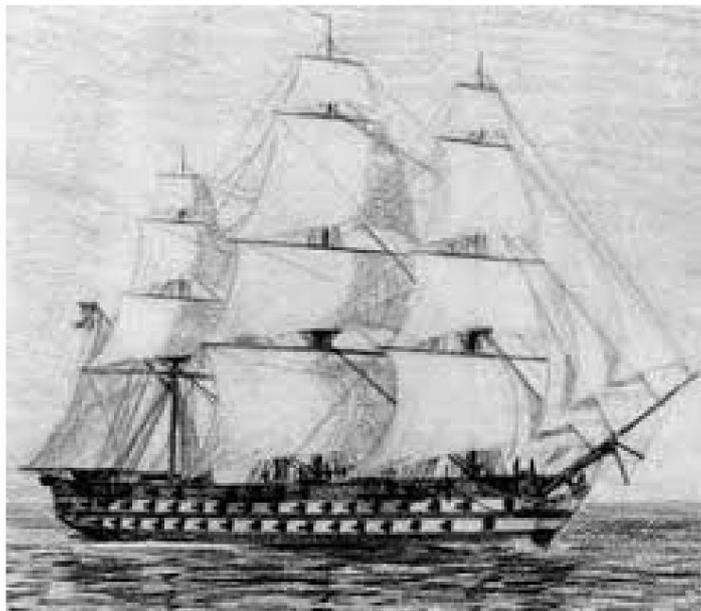
## The skirmish at Rügen

On 17 March 1864, Prussian naval forces tried to break the Danish naval blockade, as the corvettes Arcona and Nympe set out from Swinemünde heading east to investigate whether there were Danish ships in the waters.

As no Danish presence was immediately detected, the Prussian ships continued westward and were reinforced here with the aviso<sup>1</sup>) Loreley and six steam gunboats. The combined Prussian squadron now faced north in front order.

When Jachtmann approached from the south at noon on March 17, however, the picture had changed completely. Off Jasmund, the Prussian squadron was targeted by the Danish force, under the command of Rear Admiral CE van Dockum.

The flagship Sjælland was still there, but in addition to the two corvettes Thor and Hejmdal, it had now been joined by the screw-line ship Skjold, (64 guns, 9.7 knots), which had encountered in the morning,



The screw liner Skjold

and a screw frigate was also approaching from the north.

Van Dockum had hoped it was the Jutland, (44 guns, 12 knots), but when it turned out to be the smaller and slower Tordenskjold, (38 guns, 8 knots), he headed south towards the attacking Prussian ships without await reinforcement.



The screw frigate Tordenskjold

At three o'clock they had come to firing range and, after exchanging a few broadsides, the enemy turned south and the following almost two hours took the form of a retreating skirmish, where in the end only the Danish bow guns and the Prussian rearguard came into use.

Shortly afterwards there was a fierce exchange of fire between the two naval forces, but no major damage was done.

After less than an hour and a half of fighting, the Prussian naval forces withdrew to the south. The Prussian ships' speed advantage of approx. 2 knots meant that the distance gradually increased to ½ nautical mile, after which the shooting had to be stopped - without the Danish fleet succeeding in cutting off their retreat. Towards evening the Prussians escaped to Swinemünde safely. The gunboat flotilla came to play no part.

Thus, Prussia did not immediately succeed in breaking the Danish naval blockade, but the affair meant that the Danish navy had to concentrate many units for a continued blockade.

## **Naval blockade maintained**

Losses were limited to three killed and 19 wounded in Zealand, the Prussians lost five killed and eight wounded. It was the baptism of fire for the young Prussian fleet, and shortly after the skirmish Jachtmann was promoted to rear admiral.

But the attempt to break the Danish blockade was unsuccessful and although the Prussian fleet received reinforcements in the following months it was not repeated.

The Danish fleet maintained sea supremacy in the eastern Baltic as well as in the other two operational areas during the rest of the war.



17 March 1864 In the middle of the picture, the screw frigate SJÆLLAND is seen firing its bow guns at the fleeing enemy, probably Jachtmann's ARCONA, which responds with its stern gunner. To the right of the picture is the line screw ship SKJOLD, which is probably no longer on call.

### North Sea Squadron

Already at the beginning of March 1864, the Marine Ministry had received intelligence that the Austrians were preparing to send a larger naval force to Danish waters in an attempt, together with the Prussians, to break the effective Danish naval blockade. On March 18, the corvette Dagmar succeeded in bringing up the Hamburg schooner Tekla Schmidt off Texel in the North Sea.

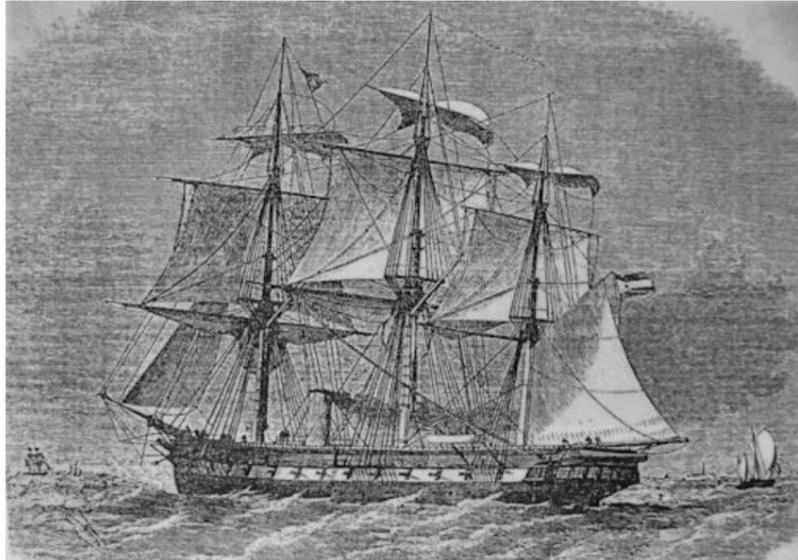
The corvette also served as an advanced observation post in the North Sea.



The screw corvette Dagmar

This caused the Ministry of the Navy to immediately decide to multiply a North Sea squadron. The squadron was to consist of the corvette Dagmar, which was already in the area, as well as the frigate Niels Juel and the screw corvette Hejmdal, which was in Copenhagen. The Ministry of the Navy had appointed War Captain Edouard Suenson as commander of the squadron. On the morning of April 4, the frigate, after repairs had been completed, and Hejmdal were ready to sail at Københavns Red.

Barely an hour after the two Danish ships had left the Nest, the Ministry of the Navy received a telegraphic message that the Austrian frigate Radetzky had left Gibraltar, heading north.



The Austrian frigate Radetzky

## Edward Suenson



War captain  
Edward Suenson,

The Ministry of the Navy's choice of war captain Edouard Suenson as squadron commander was hardly a coincidence. Suenson had already gained honors and war experience in the First Schleswig War 1848-50 as commander of the paddle steamer Hekla, not least in the battle at Neustadt on 20 July 1850. Already the following month, he took part in the skirmish between Hekla and the steamship Løwe and 4 Schleswig-Holstein gunboats in the Kieler Fjord. In addition, Suenson had also gained valuable experience already around 1830, when he served for a period in the French Mediterranean fleet.

## Course towards Norway

After sailing in stiff gales in the Kattegat, the two Danish ships arrived at Kristianssand in Norway on 8 April, where they had expected to meet the corvette Dagmar, to have the squadron assembled. When Dagmar was not in Kristianssand, Suenson assumed that it was a sign that the Austrian warships were still not in the North Sea, an assumption he later had confirmed by the Ministry of the Navy.

The weather was rough when the ships sailed towards Kristianssand. It was, on the other hand, pure weather when the squadron commander decided to sail from Kristianssand on April 9, heading south to join Dagmar in the North Sea, ready to take on the challenge of the Austro-Prussian squadron that was expected to appear soon in the North Sea.

Two days later, on April 11, the squadron made contact with Dagmar, and war captain Edouard Suenson now had his entire squadron assembled, ready to solve his task.

But there was still no reliable information about the whereabouts of the Austrian and Prussian ships. Telegrams kept pouring in telling of their movements from Gibraltar and heading north.

### **Under the Russian flag**

Suenson used the intervening time to secure his supply lines, not least to ensure that he could obtain the necessary quantities of coal for his ships. The necessary orders for the impending battle were also issued and rehearsed.

All the while, the squadron maintained the continued blockade against the German ports, and several attempts were made to retrieve suspicious vessels.

The blockade was now so effective that several pro forma deals were made with merchant vessels, so that several German ships now sailed under the Russian flag to secure themselves against the Danish blockade. Quite often a ship was brought up immediately after it turned out that it had been taken over by a Russian pro forma company just a few days before. This made blockade service very difficult.

### **Silence before the storm**

Towards the middle of April, increasing hostile activity could be felt from the Danish side, despite the diplomatic attempts to stop the war. A conference had thus been called in London, 20 April 1864, with a view to achieving an armistice between Denmark and Prussia/Austria.

But from the Danish side there was no doubt that the Prussian side would use all their efforts to take Dybbøl before the conference began, and the Danish forces therefore remained on full alert.

### **The storm at Dybbøl - for the 2nd time**

18 April 1864, at 4 in the morning, the Prussian forces began a fierce bombardment of the Danish positions to break down their last resistance.

Precisely at the stroke of 10, the artillery fire ceased and the Prussian onslaught against the Danish positions began.

From the armored battery Rolf Krake you could see what was going on and the commander, war captain Rothe, chose to immediately enter Vemmingbund to support the Danish forces, even though he had not received the agreed signal.



The advancing enemy columns were immediately taken under fire, at the same time that Rolf Krake was also exposed to heavy enemy fire. Suddenly an enemy shell penetrated the deck and burst into the deck just around the mezzanine mast, killing Lieutenant WB Jespersen and wounding nine men.

Almost at the same time, a shrapnel penetrated through the grating of the forward gun turret, and badly wounded one of the artillerymen.

Lieutenant WB Jespersen

## Temporary ceasefire

After Dybbøl had fallen, the army now concentrated on the defense of Sønderborg and Als.

Rolf Krake was therefore already ordered on 19 April to take station in Augustenborg fjord, out of range of the Prussian guns on the Jutland side. The ship remained here until 12 May, when a temporary armistice between Denmark and Prussia/Austria was established.

On the same day that the armistice was a fact, the ship left for the Orlogsværftet in Copenhagen for the necessary repairs after the many encounters in the initial battles.

## Lack of intelligence

In the late days of April, Suenson gradually missed accurate information about both the enemy's strength and where the enemy was. However, it was considered absolutely certain that the Austrian naval units had still not reached the North Sea.

A report that Dybbøl had fallen on 18 April reached us, but did not help to raise the mood on board the Danish squadron.

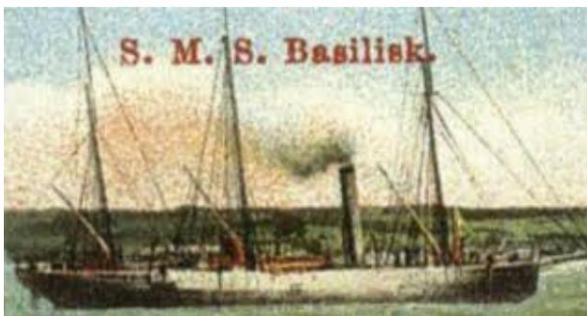
On the afternoon of April 19, the corvette Dagmar had set course westward for Texel, while Hejmdal had set course for the mouth of the Elbe to collect a prize, when Suenson received information that two Austrian frigates had left Brest on the 18th or 19th, and that the Austrian liner Kaiser was expected next week.

Knowing that the Danish corvette would be at its mercy if it ran into a superior Austrian force, Suenson decided to replace Dagmar and regroup his squadron.

Along the way, Niels Juel managed to make contact with Hejmdal, who had to give up his attempt to board a German prize, and together the two ships now set full steam after Dagmar.

At dawn you could see Dagmar in the binoculars on her way to Den Helder in the Netherlands, and during the afternoon the squadron was gathered again and could set course back towards Heligoland.

The commander of the corvette Dagmar, Captain Lieutenant GFW Wrisberg, was even able to inform that in Nieuwediep he had observed the three Prussian gunboats Blitz, Basilisk and Seehund as well as the paddle steamer ADLER, which the navy had been searching for since January.



The gunboat SMS Basilisk



The paddle steamer SMS Adler

## Back towards Kristianssand

On 21 April, the squadron was back at Heligoland, but after a boat had landed, it could only be noted that there was no new intelligence or instructions from the Ministry of the Navy.

Via a private telegram it had been learned that Als had been run over in the course of a few days, and there was therefore great uncertainty as to whether the Ministry of the Navy had the opportunity to get in touch with the squadron in the North Sea.

On board the squadron, it was also speculated whether the country might have more need for the maritime force in the defense of the belts and the Baltic Sea, as the Prussian troops pushed forward.

The lack of intelligence made it difficult to form a clear picture of the situation, and since the few intelligence received were sometimes directly contradictory, Edouard Suenson decided to gather his three ship commanders for a council of war on board the Niels Juel, in order to discuss the situation.

Here it was decided to pull the North Sea squadron back to Kristianssand, not least to be able to get in reliable contact with the Ministry of the Navy, but also because from here you would continue to have a good starting point to solve your task, without being cut off from any possibility of retreat.

At 8 o'clock in the morning on 23 April, the North Sea squadron anchored on the nest at Kristianssand, after which a telegram was immediately sent to the Ministry of Marine in Copenhagen, and at the same time, supplies were arranged for the ships, not least coal, so that they were ready to put to sea as soon as possible again.

## News from the Ministry of the

**Navy** In the Ministry of the Navy in Copenhagen, until they received the telegram from Suenson from Kristianssand, they were still of the opinion that the North Sea squadron was at Heligoland, and the ministry knew nothing that the intelligence service had failed as completely as it had had happened. The Ministry of the Navy could now inform that the two Austrian frigates had not yet left Brest, just like the 2nd division of the Austrian squadron with, among other things, the liner Kaiser was still at and around Lisbon.



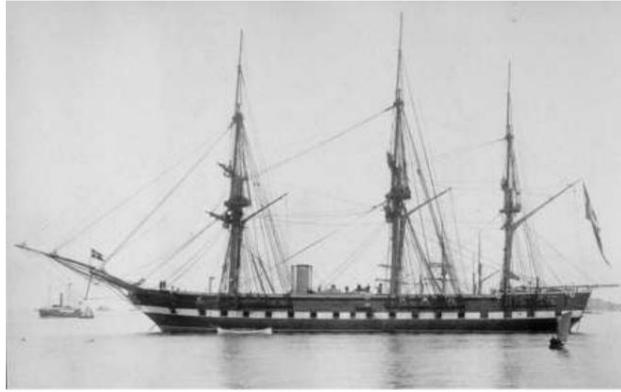
The liner SMS Kaiser



War captain PC  
Holm

The Ministry of the Navy announced that the screw frigate Jylland, which was otherwise a sister ship to Niels Juel, under the command of War Captain PC Holm, would be attached as reinforcement to the squadron. This was a particularly welcome reinforcement, but at the same time it was curiously announced that the corvette Dagmar was to be retired from the squadron.

Suenson was then instructed to patrol with his squadron in a line between Kristianssand and Hanstholm until Jutland appeared from Copenhagen.



The screw frigate Jutland

## While we wait for JUTLAND

In the following days, the squadron continued its patrols in the area between Hanstholm and Kristianssand, all while waiting for reinforcements from Copenhagen. On 28 April, Dagmar was ordered home, at the same time as Suenson was ordered to expand his operational area further south, as it could now be stated that the two Austrian frigates had left Brest, but were still in the English Channel.

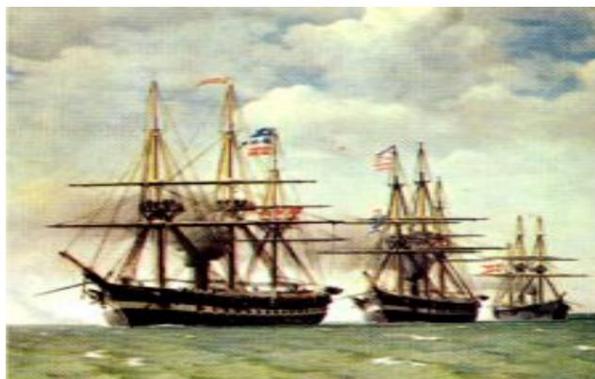
Niels Juel and Hejmdal continued patrolling the area with occasional additions to the supplies in Kristianssand. On 30 April the squadron commander received a signal that the two Austrian frigates were now at Dover.

After the 4th May squadron had again gone into Kristianssand to supplement the stocks with e.g. water and coal, on the way out they could see a warship in the distance.

This soon proved to be the long-awaited frigate, Jutland. Orlogskaptajn Holm, commander of Jutland, brought new orders to Suenson, who immediately ordered the squadron south towards Heligolands Bay with the aim of seeking contact with the Austro-Prussian squadron.

On 6 May 1864, the combined North Sea squadron, now consisting of the frigates Niels Juel and Jylland and the screw corvette Hejmdal, therefore stood south towards the Heligolands Bay to resume the blockade of the German ports and, to the extent necessary, try to stop the Austro-Prussian squadron .

From several sources it could be confirmed at the same time that the 1st part of the Austrian squadron, under the command of Captain Tegetthoff, had already arrived in the waters and had joined the three Prussian gunboats in Texel.



North Sea Squadron in line formation May 9, consisting of the frigates NIELS JUEL (front) and JYLLAND and the corvette HEJMDAL.

The combined Austro-Prussian squadron, which now consisted of the two Austrian frigates Schwarzenberg and Radetzky, as well as the Prussian gunboats Blitz, Basilisk and Seehund, and the paddle steamer Adler, had now taken station at Cuxhafen.



The Austrian frigate SMS Schwarzeberg

### **A few problems along the way**

Throughout the night, the Danish squadron continued under full steam south in the North Sea in a fresh south-easterly wind. On Saturday morning May 7, Hejmdal had to signal that the port boiler was leaking. It happened at a very unfortunate time, and forced the squadron to lay still due to roped sails, while the crew on board Hejmdal worked at high pressure to repair the damage.

Fortunately, the damage could be repaired by the crew, and twelve hours later the Danish squadron could continue its voyage to the south.

When the squadron arrived in Heligoland Bay on 8 May in the morning, a steam frigate was sighted. Jutland was sent after this frigate, which later turned out to be the British frigate Aurora.

The Austro-Prussian squadron had not yet been targeted, but from the commander of the Vesterhavssøerne, Captain Lieutenant OC Hammer, they were informed that the enemy's naval force had been observed in the area.



British frigate HMS Aurora

## Where was the Danish squadron

The Austrian squadron commander, Captain Tegetthoff, had, like the Danish squadron, lacked reliable information about the situation in the area for long periods after he had been reunited with the three Prussian ships in Cuxhafen on 3 May.

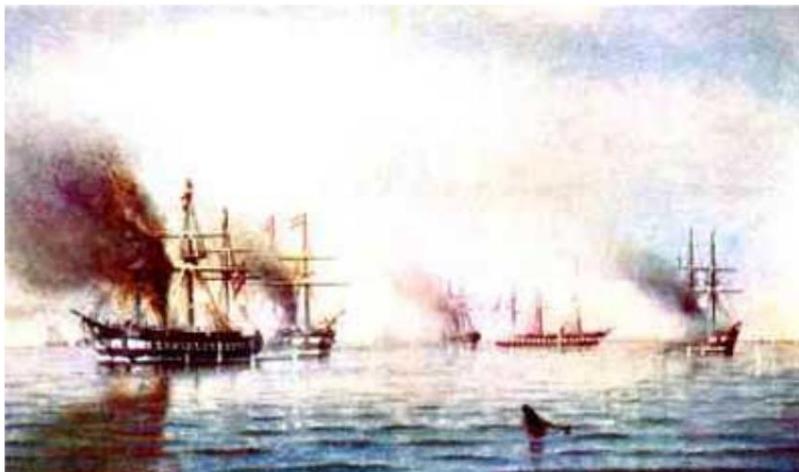
He had therefore been forced to sail out every day, only to find that there were no Danish ships in the area. On 7 May, a frigate was targeted, which was thought to be Danish, but at close range it turned out to be the British frigate Aurora again.

From several sources it could now be confirmed that the Austrian squadron under the command of Captain Tegetthoff had already arrived in the waters and had joined the three Prussian gunboats and the paddle steamer Adler in Texel. The combined Austro-Prussian squadron had now taken station at Cuxhafen.

## The Battle of Heligoland

On the morning of 9 May, the Austrian squadron had been on reconnaissance when, on returning to Cuxhafen, they were informed that the Danish squadron had been observed in the area around Heligoland.

Immediately, the combined Austro-Prussian squadron stood north in wake order to meet the Danish North Sea squadron in an attempt to break the Danish naval blockade.



The Austrian frigate Schwarzenberg (right in the picture) is set on fire and turns away, while Radetzky just astern moves forward to cover it.

The strength ratio between the two squadrons was almost equal. The Austrian guns were, however, slightly superior to the Danish ones in several ways.

## Enemy in sight

There must be an armistice on land and at sea from May 12, so was the message at a conference in London, but this morning, May 9, 1864, this message had not reached the naval forces that were rapidly approaching each other.

When the sun rose on 9 May 1864, the Bay of Heligoland lay calm and shiny in the fresh morning light, while a calm south-easterly breeze blew a little. A few fishermen, who were out fishing their nets, were glimpsed, while the Danish North Sea squadron came sailing from the north.

At 10 o'clock the lookout on board Niels Juel saw a ship under Helgoland. Once again it turned out to be the British frigate Aurora. A little later, however, the lookout was able to report another five ships in sight in a south-southwest direction.

Soon after, it was established that the two leading ships were frigates, while the other three were a little more difficult to identify. No doubt, the enemy was in sight, and on board the Danish ships they had the crew procured and dressed.

After this, Suenson let the other ships in the squadron run at the behest of Niels Juel and gave a short speech to the crews:

***"There you have the Austrians, people. Now we meet them. I trust we would fight like our brave comrades at Dybbøl!"***

After this, preparations were made for battle on board the Danish ships, which at the same time fell into the already ordered wake formation with the frigate Niels Juel in the lead as the flagship.

## **Ready for battle**

The strength ratio between the two squadrons was almost equal, as the Austrian guns were slightly superior to the Danish ones in several ways. The outcome of a match was therefore by no means a foregone conclusion.

Had the Ministry of the Navy not chosen to send the corvette Dagmar to the Baltic Sea, the situation would have looked quite different, and Suenson would have had a clear advantage with four ships, and the result thus almost a foregone conclusion.

Now the balance of forces was almost equal when the squadrons met at Heligoland on 9 May 1864, and the outcome of the battle was therefore not guaranteed in advance through a concentration of superior forces.

## **Fire opening**

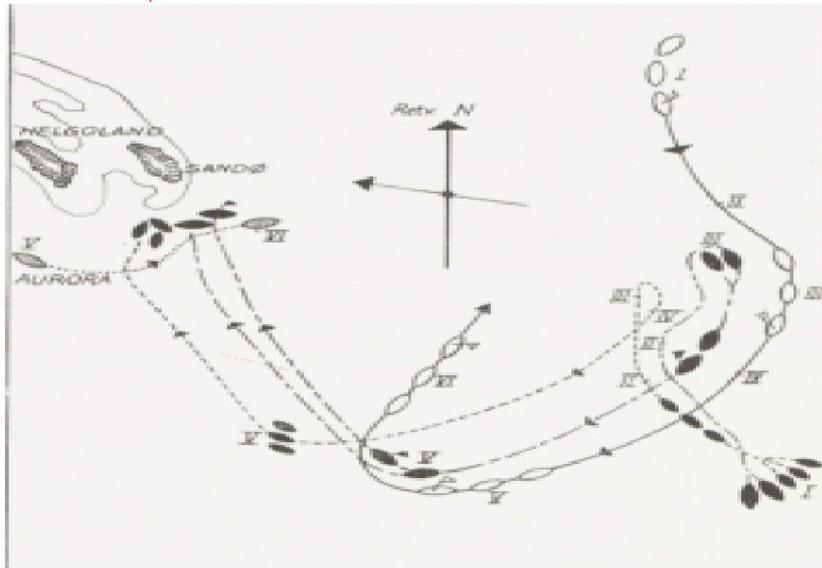
At 1345 the Austrian frigate Schwarzenberg opened fire on the Danish ships at a distance of about 3700 metres.

But only when the distance had become much smaller did Suenson give the order to open fire from the Danish side. The Austrians initially kept a somewhat easterly course, as if they intended to run ahead of the Danish line.

The Danish squadron, however, countered this by turning to port, thus forcing the Austrians back again on the opposite course.

The forces then passed each other at approx. 1800 meters distance under intense shooting.

Suenson noticed that the three Prussian gunboats had lagged somewhat astern, and therefore tried to break the enemy's line.



The Danish ships are here white, Austrian and Prussian black.

The Roman numerals indicate the simultaneous positions of the two forces during the various phases of the battle.

However, Tegetthoff soon realized the danger that the three gunboats would be cut off and therefore turned to starboard and now stood in front order down towards the Danish line in order to get in close range, and possibly attempt an entry.

## Intense fight

The three Danish ships, which kept a close wake formation, received the Austrian frigates with such heavy fire that the Austrian squadron commander was forced to change course.

The distance between the two squadrons was gradually reduced to only 400 metres, and at the same time the Danish cannon fire increased in intensity.

The two flagships Niels Juel and Schwarzenberg fired on each other, while Jylland and Hejmdal concentrated their fire on the Austrian frigate Radetzky. The Prussian gunboats kept at such a distance that their fire was totally ineffective.



The Battle of Heligoland 1864

In this way, the Danish squadron gained an artillery superiority, which on the Austrian side especially went beyond Schwarzenberg, which caught fire twice. Several guns were destroyed and the number of killed and wounded increased.

On the Danish side, it mostly spread over Jutland, where an Austrian shell hit gun no. 9, killing or wounding the entire gun crew.

## **The decision**

The battle reached its decisive turning point around 1530, when a shell exploded in the belly of Schwarzenberg's foresail and ignited the dry sail and ropes, which were soon exposed to light.

On board Schwarzenberg, it soon proved impossible to extinguish the fire, as the engine pump had been destroyed during the fight. The consequences of this injury therefore forced Tegetthoff to break off the fight and move towards neutral English territory at Heligoland.

Radetzky placed himself between the burning Schwarzenberg and the Danish squadron to protect the Austrian flagship, which thus avoided further damage.

Suenson immediately ordered his ships to pursue the evasive Austro-Prussian squadron, but just at that moment a shell exploded in the commander's cabin aboard the Jutland, destroying the frigate's steering gear. The error was quickly rectified, but this brief delay was enough to give the enemy a decisive lead.

The Danish squadron had also lost the opportunity to cut off the enemy's retreat to neutral territory, not least when the English frigate Aurora lay between them.

At 1630 the battle had ceased, and Suenson ordered his squadron northeast over and lay down to observe the enemy.

## **Win or draw**

However, the crippled Austro-Prussian squadron managed to get back to Cuxhafen under cover of darkness without the Danish squadron being able to intervene.

Subsequently, questions were raised about whether the Battle of Heligoland could be considered a Danish victory, or whether the battle actually ended in a draw!

The fact is, however, that the Danish navy succeeded in maintaining the blockade against the German ports.

The Battle of Heligoland was thus unconditionally a tactical Danish victory, which forced the enemy naval forces into neutral territory in such a strong state that they were incapacitated for several days afterwards.

Shortly after the battle, Suenson was ordered to depart for Norway as an armistice was in the offing.

The temporary armistice between Prussia and Denmark entered into force on 12 May 1864, after which the Danish naval blockade was lifted.

The battle had cost Denmark 14 dead and 55 wounded, while Austria had suffered a loss of 32 dead and 59 wounded. The Prussians had suffered no losses.

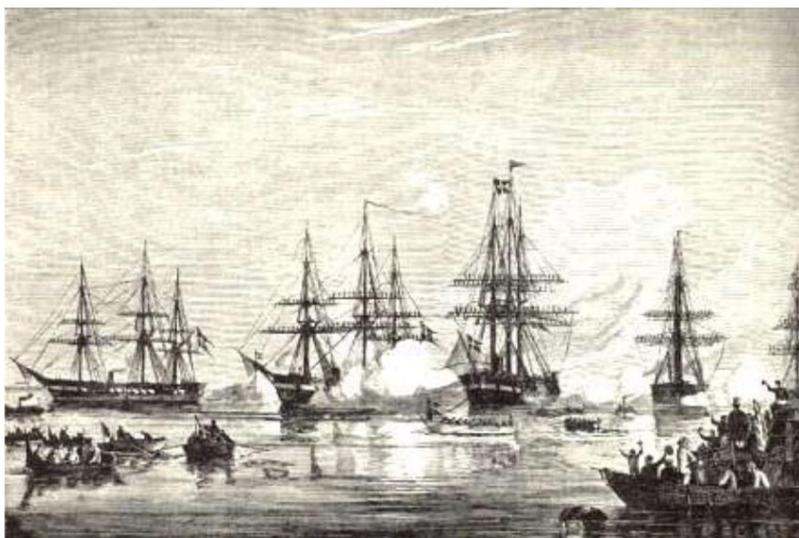
When the Danish squadron left the Bay of Heligoland, it once again passed Kristianssand, where the dead from the battle were buried.

This was Denmark's last actual naval battle, where ships fought directly against ships.

## Hero's reception in Copenhagen

In Copenhagen, there was no doubt about the outcome of the battle. It was a Danish victory!

A victory that the needy nation needed in a difficult time. When the Nordsø squadron arrived in Copenhagen, it was celebrated as a real Copenhagen event with, among other things, royal visit on board.



The North Sea Squadron on Copenhagen Red after the battle at Heligoland.  
A salute is fired, and the crews man the deck when the King visits on board.

## Negotiations in London

As early as 25 April 1864, negotiations had begun in London on English initiative, the so-called "London Conference".

All parties to the war participated in this conference. The conference discussed various divisions of Schleswig, without being able to reach an agreement.

Probably derived from the Danish victory at Heligoland on 9 May 1864, however, they succeeded in getting a truce implemented, which came into force on 12 May.

However, the negotiations in London broke down on 20 June when the Danes insisted on the demand for a Danish border at Dannevirke, a solution that neither Prussia nor Austria could accept.

Denmark would also not accept that a possible border drawing should be drawn by arbitration, which would mean that foreign powers would have to draw the future border.

## Ready for the defense of Als

Rolf Krake was ordered to depart to a position north of Als, where War Captain Rothe was ordered to occupy his former station in Augustenborg Fjord. It was his task, in cooperation with the army, to prevent the enemy from crossing over Als fjord and the northern part of Alssund.

The Prussian forces had taken advantage of the armistice to set up a large number of batteries with rifled guns on the Jutland side, which made it almost impossible for the Danish ships to sail the Als fjord during the day.

To ensure that Rolf Krake could intervene at the right time, a signal system was also agreed with the army, which was to light some beacons ashore if the Prussian forces attempted to cross the Alssund.

The armored battery then remained unanchored in Augustenborg fjord with high alertness, i.e. under constant clear ship and steam under the boilers. At the same time, the ship regularly sent patrol vessels out to the northern part of the Alssund to keep an eye on whether the Prussian forces should begin a transition across the strait.

## The ceasefire expires

The truce had barely expired on 26 June 1864 before the Prussian forces launched an attack with storm boats over Alssund.

At 2 o'clock in the morning, 29 June, heavy rifle fire could be heard from Rolf Krake from Alssund, and the commander assumed that a Prussian attack and the crossing over Alssund was underway.

An alarm was immediately raised on board and War Captain Rothe immediately ordered the ship to move to a position north of Alssund.

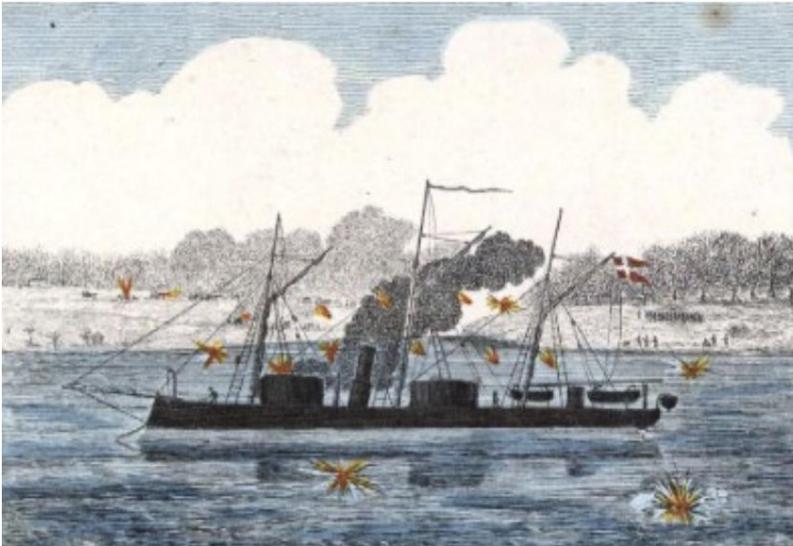
The armored battery Rolf Krake reached the northern part of Alssund at 03:00, and from here you could observe that the strait was full of boats going back and forth across the strait.



The German advance to Als 29 June 1864

From Rolf Krake, fire was immediately opened on the many boats. At first they were shot with slingshots<sup>2</sup>) and a little later with grenades. The heavy fire from the armored battery spread death and destruction among the small boats crossing the strait.

Many of the boats were dispersed and sought land as quickly as possible on both sides of the Alssund and the transfer of troops was temporarily brought to an immediate halt.



Rolf Krake Shells the German batteries

On board Rolf Krake, however, one had no immediate overview of the military situation on land or any idea of how many forces the Prussians had managed to transfer.

After having kept the ship going in Augustenborg Fjord for some time without getting the necessary information, knowing that as soon as it became light, the ship would be exposed to a very heavy shelling at close range from the Prussian batteries

After being repeatedly exposed to enemy fire and at the same time not knowing whether more good could be done on the spot, the commander, after consultation with his second-in-command, Captain-Lieutenant E. Duntzfelt, decided in accordance with his order to go around Als to assist in the eventual evacuation of the troops from Als.



Captain Lieutenant  
E. Duntzfelt,

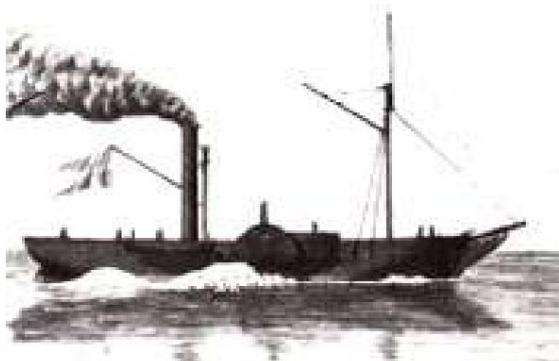
For the next almost 2 weeks, the squadron patrolled the waters between the southern tip of Langeland and the Kieler Fjord, and daily the Prussian forces in the occupied areas could see the smoke from the considerable naval force.

## Planned withdrawal

After having for some time kept the ship going in Augustenborg Fjord without getting the necessary information, and after being repeatedly exposed to enemy fire, War Captain Rothe decided, in accordance with his relative order, to go around Als to assist in the eventual evacuation of the troops from Als.

A little before 5 in the morning, Rolf Krake therefore stood up north in Als fjord under heavy fire from the enemy batteries on the Jutland side.

A small Danish force was stationed in Al's fjord, consisting of the paddle steamer Hertha, commander lieutenant HE Bluhme, and the screw gunboat Willemoes, commander lieutenant ACR Bærentzen, as well as 3 bomb gun chalups and 1 bomb gun dinghy.



The paddle steamer HERTHA.



The screw gunboat Willemoes

In daylight these ships would be heavily threatened by the Prussian artillery and with no possibility of escape. War captain Rothe therefore decided to bring the ships north on and out of the enemy's firing range. The ships were then moored two at a time to the starboard side by Rolf Krake, where they were protected from the Prussian fire.

First they succeeded in bringing Hertha and a gun-chalup out of the fjord, then Willemoes and another gun-chalup were brought out. The tows took place under heavy Prussian fire and Rolf Krake returned fire.

It was not possible to get the bomb gun chalup no. 19, reserve lieutenant HP Marcher, and the bomb gun dinghy Baagø, reserve lieutenant PC Petersen, from Als fjord. These ships were therefore blown up and the crews taken on board the other ships.

## Als was lost

After evacuating the other Danish ships out of Prussian range, Rolf Krake continued around Als for possible to assist in the transfer of the Danish troops to Funen.

The panzer battery had managed to fire a total of 116 shots on this 29 June 1864, but the loss of Als was a fact.

Even the armor battery had been hit several times again without succeeding in breaking through the ship's armor. However, the mezzanine mast was so severely damaged that it had to be cut.

In total, the armored battery Rolf Krake received 306 units from March to June 1864. 60-pounder shells in the Battle of Als, but this alone could not save the island from the Prussian invasion.

## The Western islands are abandoned as the last redoubt



In the West Sea Islands, a small force under the command of Captain-Lieutenant OC Hammer had succeeded in keeping the islands clear of enemy landings until the day before the cessation of hostilities.

The force consisted of two small armed steamships, 8 gunboats, a number of customs cruisers and a company of soldiers, and had succeeded throughout the war in fending off several attempted mutinies.

Captain  
Lieutenant OC Hammer

But the position on the islands seriously worsened when the Danish North Sea Squadron left the North Sea after the Battle of Heligoland. Until then, Hammer had been able to concentrate on the defense towards land, but now he was also shut in from the lake. On 11 June, the Austrian fleet arrived in Heligoland Bay and now also blocked the islands from the sea side.

An Austrian attempt to attack Sild from the sea side was, however, prevented by the Danish gunboats.

But in the long term the situation was untenable, and just the day before the armistice took place,

Hammer had to capitulate on 19 July after he had initiated the destruction of the gunboats.

After this, all the islands with the exception of Fanø were occupied by the enemy.

## Peace, but Sønderjylland is lost

Until the armistice between Denmark and Prussia-Austria was concluded on 20 July, the armored battery Rolf Krake, together with other ships, including the armored schooner Esbern Snare, continued the patrol in the waters between Als and Funen, to prevent a possible enemy transfer to Funen.



The armored schooner Esbern Snare

On 7 August 1864, the armored battery Rolf Krake returned to Copenhagen.

But the loss of Als had caused grief and anger throughout the country, and it was about finding a scapegoat for this loss. Disappointments were directed at the army, but also at Rolf Krake's performance.

At the peace negotiations in Vienna, Denmark was faced with the ultimatum that, among other things, Schleswig, Holstein and Lauenborg were to be ceded to Prussia and Austria in union.

Denmark had no choice, and on 30 October 1864 the peace was signed in Vienna and approved shortly after in the Danish Diet. With this peace, Denmark had become smaller again.

As had been the case in 1814, when Norway was lost, this time it was the dukes' turn, so that Denmark's southern border now ran roughly along the Kongeå River.

A commission court established in 1865, after i.a. war captain Rothe's wish, investigated the conditions and dispositions in connection with the defense of Als and in December 1866 was able to acquit Rothe of charges. He had done what was possible.

L.E.K

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- 1) Dictionnaire de la Marine Française 1788-1792 (by Nicolas-Charles Romme) describes avisos as "small boats designed to carry orders or despatches", i.e. a small and fast-sailing (lightly armed) military vessel for intelligence service.
  - 2) A slanted sack is essentially the same as a tub desk, but with the difference that a slanted sack is, as the name describes, a small sack with a wooden bottom, in which there is stuffing. Slant sacks are launched with a cannon and inflict heavy casualties on the enemy by the spreading small pieces, the sklan (*Skrå is an old word for iron waste*)



Example of an oblique sack filled with iron balls