

Episode 2: The Birth of the Fleet: Around 1510



(Source: KGB digital collections)

Admiral Peder Skram (ca. 1503 - 1581) was for long periods at the head of the Danish fleet. He took part in the Swedish wars under Christian the Second, and was then in foreign service. Under Christian the Third, in 1535 he was commander of a Danish-Swedish-Prussian naval force which cleared the Baltic Sea of ships from Lübeck. This gave him the nickname "*Denmark's daredevil*". Among other things, he chased a force from Lübeck up through the Little Belt, and when they could not pass the redoubts at Middelfart, they had to try to escape through Svendborgsund.

Peder Skram followed them and captured most of the ships, which eventually ran aground and were set on fire.

The fires were put out, and he got himself a new admiral ship, which

the Lybækkers had previously conquered from Denmark. He had also sent ships around Svendborgsund so that they could take care of those who had to escape through the strait. They were captured on the eastern voyage, except for one, which was first captured all the way down the German coast.

Peder Skram's victory was total.

When Denmark went to war with Sweden almost 30 years later, it was again the old admiral who was put in charge of the Danish naval forces.



(Source: KGB digital collections)

Herluf Trolle (1516 - 1565) was chosen by the king to be admiral because he was a good administrator. He had no background as a sailor. He was a noble and became a councilor in 1557 and in 1559 supreme commander of the navy. One of his captains gave the following description of Herluf Trolle:

"We have a good and capable admiral who does everyone good, and if there are any things we don't understand, he teaches us."

He was largely at sea from the start of the Nordic Seven Years' War in 1563 until his death. In two battles at Øland in the summer of 1564, he defeated Swedish naval forces. In 1565, he was seriously wounded by a shot in the arms and legs during a skirmish between his ship "Jägermester" and the

Swedish ship "Troilus" near the Mecklenburg coast. He was taken to Copenhagen, where he died of his wounds. Shortly before, he had been visited by the learned theology professor Niels Hemmingsen, who advised him to stay ashore, because he had already contributed so much. To this Herluf replied Trolle with the words about his defense efforts and his privileges, which Hemmingsen could then use during his funeral sermon in Our Lady's Church:

"If I lose my life, I guess I will get life again. Do you know why we were called gentlemen, if we wore gold chains and had landed estates and wanted to be superior and more highly esteemed than others? Therefore we have this honor for others, that when our king and lord, country and kingdom have the need, then we should fend off, protect and shield the enemies of the kingdom with power and all the wealth of our fathers' kingdom, that our subjects may live and be in peace and tranquility".



(Source: KGB digital collections)

Søren Norby (ca. 1470-1530) was an atypical naval commander. He belonged to the lava tribe and came from Funen and thus had no estates himself, nor good connections. He became a fleet commander by virtue of his skill, and since 1507 he had operated with a Danish squadron in the eastern Baltic Sea.

He later became Christian the Second's handmaiden, and the king appointed him to be royal courtier in Iceland from 1515 to 1517. When the war in the Baltic Sea escalated, Søren Norby was appointed sheriff of Gotland in 1517, whom he knew well from his previous expeditions and from 1519 also as sheriff on Øland. He took part in the following siege of Stockholm, and after the city's surrender he was knighted. He also stood by Christian the Second under it

Stockholm massacre. When the king then wanted to send an expedition to Greenlandic waters and wanted Søren Norby as leader, Søren Norby announced that after Easter in 1521 he *"will be ready and run to Greenland or elsewhere, where Your Grace wants me in the world"*. Before it got that far, Christian the Second was chased out of both Sweden and Denmark. Søren Norby remained loyal, as the only sheriff, and he sought for a time to balance between Frederik the First, the Swedish king Gustav Vasa and the trade center or city-state in Lübeck. Christian the Second escaped to the Netherlands with parts of the Danish fleet. Here Søren Norby appeared, ready to serve the majesty, but he did not need him. Instead, he enlisted with his imperial brother-in-law, Emperor Charles V, in whose service he fell during the siege of Florence in 1530.

The admiral title originates from the Arab countries. During the Arab expansion period, when the entire north coast of Africa and parts of present-day Spain and Portugal were subject to Arab princes, a naval commander was called "amir-al-bahr". Directly translated, it means "emir of the sea" or "ruler of the sea". This title came to Europe via Sicily in the 12th century, and in 1249 the title was also used in France, where a naval commander was called "admiral". Before the end of the 13th century, the title was also used by the English, who then possessed the "Cinque Ports" ("The Five Ports").

There were five ports on the current French Channel coast. The English in the Cinque Ports mixed the title "admiral" with the Latin word "admirabilis", which means "admirable", so they called their naval commanders "admirals".

In Denmark, at the beginning of the 16th century, the title "admiral" was used for a commander of a force during a certain period or on a certain campaign, and it was therefore a matter of an appointed commander, not of a rank. After just a few years it became a degree designation.

The crew of Christian the Third's ship "Fortuna" included 3 skippers (navigators), 4 helmsmen, 120 boatswains (sailors), 4 pøkers (young men/light sailors) and 3 carpenters. The warfare involved 31 riflemen and 200 men of war. Finally, there were on board the ship 5 cooks and cellarmen, 2 mustache cutters (who took care of wound treatment, amputations etc.), 4 pipers and drummers and 1 preacher, a total of 377 men. The main armament consisted of approx. 50, probably less, guns.



(Source: KGB digital collections)

King Hans (b. 1455, 1481 - 1513)

Many have probably learned at school "that the fleet originates from the time of King Hans". That is also true. But before then there had been many different initiatives to establish some form of "sea power" in relation to the royal power. In the years before, the king had his own ships, which were sometimes equipped for war. He could hire merchants, shipowners (shipowners) or skippers to carry out tasks for him, and he could issue letters of privateering to skippers. With such a letter, they became a kind of state-authorized pirates in the waters where the king wanted to demonstrate his power.

Only around the reign of King Hans do you start to get Danish sources that can shed light on the construction of the fleet. Before then, the historians have been referred to mainly Swedish, German and Dutch sources, and since these have often been the adversary, the sources perhaps give a distorted picture. King Hans was king of Denmark and Norway, and for a shorter period from 1497 he had also been king of Sweden. The king had followed developments in other countries, including England and the Netherlands, where royal navies were established in the 1480s. A strong Danish navy could create peace in the Baltic Sea and remove the Hansa's trade monopoly. Denmark could take over this trade and bring Sweden back into the Union.

The birth of the fleet is dated to 10 August 1510. Here, King Hans in Copenhagen on Saint Laurentii day (10 August) 1510 gives the sheriff of Laholm, councilor Henrik Krummedige, an order "as chief captain and chief of staff for all sea captains". The ship commanders in the fleet are initially referred to as chief officers, which in some cases covers the designation as chief of the strength of soldiers on board. The chiefs were not necessarily trained navigators.

The four most important commanders around the birth of the fleet were Henrik Krummedige, Jens Holgersen Ulfstand, Søren Norby and Tile Giseler, who was also married to Søren Norby's sister. They were not designated as admirals until some years later. Tile Giseler is mentioned as admiral in 1523.

A number of factors played a role in the establishment of the Danish navy. The king was interested in the very extensive trade in the Baltic Sea area. The transports took place by ship, but it was mainly German merchants from the city-states or the Hansa in Northern Germany, especially Lübeck, Rostock, Wismar and Danzig, who profited from the trade.



(Source: Wikimedia)

The sea route into and out of the Baltic Sea went via Øresund, and the Danish king controlled the entry and exit. With a fortress on each side and well-equipped ships nearby, the king could levy taxes on the passing ships. With this, the sound customs duty was introduced, but the tax did not go to the state but rather to the king personally. From these funds he then paid for a fleet that could keep the peace in the Baltic Sea so that maritime trade could thrive without interference from competing powers or pirates.

The king thus acquired a naval fleet. The word "oorlog" means war in Dutch. There were not enough ships in the fleet in the early years, so right up until the time of Christian the Fourth, ships were "written up for war". In 1543, for example, a fleet of 40 ships was equipped, half of which were warships.

The enemy was first of all Lübeck and then Sweden. And since Russia also had an antagonistic relationship with Sweden, it created the basis for an alliance between Russia and Denmark that lasted for many hundreds of years, even though in some periods there has also been close to war between the two countries. As mentioned, King Hans was crowned king of Sweden in 1497, but in 1500 quite unexpectedly lost a battle in Ditmarsken against the local farmers. After this, there was unrest in both Norway and Sweden, which wanted another king. The rebellion in Norway was put down by Henrik Krummedige. Instead of marching into Sweden with an army, King Hans used the fleet to blockade Swedish ports. The Lybækkers therefore had to give up trading in Sweden, and the Swedes saw themselves forced to make peace with Denmark in 1509. In the period 1510 - 1512, the antagonisms with Lübeck escalated as their ships plundered the coasts at Øresund, on Lolland and in Blekinge.

Twice Bornholm is involved in the war. In 1512 the Lübeck fleet was defeated and Lübeck was forced out of the war. The Danish fleet had won its first victory. At the peace agreement in 1512, the power of the Hanseatic League was reduced, and the city had to pay a large indemnity. King Hans could declare on this occasion that

"the currents in Our countries are free, and We have no intention, to the detriment of the kingdom and to the benefit of Lübeck, to close them to any seafaring nation."



Christian the Second (b. 1481, 1513 – 1523)

After the death of King Hans in 1513, Christian the Second becomes king. He conquers Stockholm after several sieges and carries out the "Stockholm massacre" which is aimed at the nobility. The king must flee to the Netherlands in 1523, and he takes most of the fleet with him. In 1531 he tries to return with a naval force of 25 warships and 7,000 men. The following years are characterized by rebellion and "the count's feud". Around 1536, the Danish fleet re-emerges as a power in the Baltic Sea. Lübeck is no longer a threat, but Sweden will be.

(Source: KGB digital collections)

The crews and the equipment

In the Viking Age, ship crews had two functions. They made up the crew of their ship with sails and oars, but they were also soldiers when they went ashore or if you had to fight with another ship's crew at sea. In the time leading up to the reign of King Hans, an exciting development occurred, which led to a division, so that some took care of the sailing, and others of the combat tasks.

The ship captains and their sailors took care of the sailing, while the nobles provided troops and trains take care of the fight. A British historian has described the corresponding development in England:

"There were gentlemen and there were sailors in the navy of Henry the Eighth. The problem was that the gentlemen were not sailors, and the sailors were not gentlemen".

In English, it contains a small play on words around the word gentleman in relation to the nobles:

"There were nobles and there were sailors in Henry the Eighth's fleet. The problem was that the nobles did not were sailors, and the sailors were not gentlemen".

Among other things, the king hired some skippers from German and Dutch ports who had sailed for years in Danish waters. Two of the skippers in King Hans' fleet had been in North America approx. 20 years before Columbus! It was Hans Pothorst and Didrik Pining.

These were experienced and extremely tough people who were used to operating in waters with enemies and pirates.



Pothorst is depicted together with his coat of arms, on a fresco in Sankt Maria Kirke in Helsingør.

(Source: Kalkmalninger blogspot)

The ships and the shipyards

The ships are known from city coats of arms and seals, frescoes and drawings on church walls and carvings in church pews. The dimensions and the execution of the work are known from correspondence between the king and the shipyard or letters between, for example, the Danish and Scottish kings. On the other hand, it is very difficult to have knowledge about the details of the ships, such as rigging, hull shape, sail guidance, inspiration from Mediterranean sailing ships, etc. Normally, the Nordic ships were clinker-built, that is to say, one plank went beyond the underlying one, from the keel plank up towards the rail. Ships from the Mediterranean were most often built in crawlspaces, where the tables lay edge to edge.

The northern German trading towns accounted for a fairly large part of the trade in the Baltic Sea, and it developed from here most common merchant ship, the Koggen. - Of other ship types, the following must be mentioned:

- Holk, which was a relatively large ship, often equipped for war,
- Kravel or caravel, a type from the Mediterranean,
- Karak, a plump/round merchant ship with mainmast and mizzenmast,
- Krejert, a smaller merchant ship that replaces the Koggen and
- Snicke (or a snail).

You know that large ships are referred to as "mast ships", that is to say, they are so large that there is a mast/platform in the mast, above the mainsail. Later, on the historical illustrations, you can see large ships with mares baskets, where there are people with bows, rifles or small cannons, who can fire at people on the deck of enemy ships. Carracks had to have a greater draft than similar hulls, and they had difficulty passing Danish waters because of the draft.



(Source: unknown)

Merchant ships were modified for war use, and they had castles built fore and aft. It was a kind of "fortress" for the crews, and when firearms were introduced ("gays" - that is, guns and guns), the ships had to be specially built to carry these weapons. Some of them were called "stonemen" because they shot stone balls, others were called "snakes". They were long-barreled rifles or cannons. Often there was light gunfire in the fore and aft castles and up in the battlements, while the heavier ones guns, for reasons of stability, had to be placed as low as possible, and they had to fire through gunports.

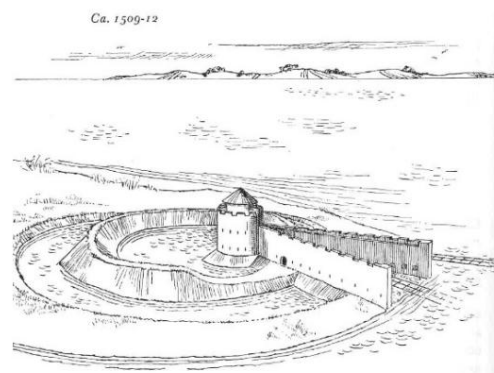
King Hans began the construction of two very large ships around 1509. The "Angel" was ready in 1510 and the "Maria" in 1514. They were probably built in Sønderborg and Bremerholm respectively in Copenhagen. Other European regents had a "prestige ship" built, which could show the outside world what power the regent in question possessed. The two Danish magnificent ships created respect for the Danish fleet very far from Denmark. They were each around 300 - 400 loads, that is to say approx. 600 - 800 tonnes, maybe a little bigger, as there was a difference between the "loads". In 1510, Henrik Krummedige was quartermaster on the "Engelen".

In the same period, King Hans takes a new naval yard into use. He founded a shipyard on the small island of Æbelø in Nakskov Fjord, which he acquired in 1508.

The island's name is changed to Slotø, and the castle Engelsborg is built near the shipyard. The king visits the yard in 1511. The yard was ideally located.

It was close to the sheltered streams, but it was well protected in difficult navigable waters, but with a deep trench all the way to the yard.

Finally, there was a royal shipyard in Kalundborg. The king also procures ships from England, just like he requisitions ships from his nephew, King Jacob the Fourth of Scotland.



(Reconstruction: Associate Professor Marius Hansen)

Christian the Third and Frederik the Second

Under **Christian the Third** (b. 1503, 1534 - 1559) it was re-established a Danish naval fleet which created admiration around Europe.

The king was so proud of his flagship "Fortuna" that he ordered the head of the fleet, Admiral Christoffer Thrunsen, to have a faithful copy of the ship, two cubits long, made.

This probably laid the foundation for the Navy's beautiful model collection.



(Source National History Museum – Frederiksborg)



The following king, **Frederik the Second** (b. 1534, 1559 - 1588), attached great importance to the safety of navigation, so he provided lighthouses at Skagen, Anholt, Kullen and at Falsterbo. So that trade could go unhindered from the "West Sea" (North Sea) to the Baltic Sea.

In 1561, he also published "Frederik the Second's law of the sea", in which he explained the legal situation at sea, which sea areas belonged to him and the right to conduct maritime trade and fishing. He ensured that Danish warships patrolled the waters that the king claimed.

(Source National History Museum – Frederiksborg)

The Swedish king **Gustav Vasa** (1523 - 1560) built in his 37 years long reign a fleet which gradually became a threat to the Danish fleet. His successor, Eric the Fourteenth, was eager to show his power, and when Frederick the Second wished to restore the union and set himself on the Swedish throne, then the Nordic Seven Years' War broke out in 1563.

Peder Skram was fleet manager in the first year, but resigned due to age. Afterwards, Herluf Trolle took over, who died of his wounds in 1565. Otto Rud took over the fleet on Herluf Trolle's death, but his ship was isolated during the fighting on 7 July 1565, when only 100 out of 1,100 men were fit for battle, Rud had to fly the flag. Otto Rud died of plague in Swedish captivity three months later. During the summer of 1565, Denmark had thus lost two fleet commanders in just two weeks.



(Source: Livrustkammeren – Stockholm)

Gustav Vasa

When the war ended, Russia had captured Narva and thus gained access to the Baltic Sea, from which it Polish fleet would prevent the Russians from conducting trade. The Russian Tsar therefore hired a Danish veteran from the Seven Years' War, Carsten Rode. On 30 March 1570, the Russian fleet thus got its first admiral, as the tsar wrote in the privateer's letter: "*Carsten Roden Muschovitichen bestalten Admirals in die See Bestallung*" (Carsten Rode, licensed as admiral from the Moscow Empire).

After the war, Frederik the Second consolidated his power in the Baltic Sea and in the straits. Then followed a forty-year period in which trade in the area flourished. The newly gained security of conditions in the Baltic Sea led Frederik the Second to increase the strait customs duty. This gave him sufficient funds to be able to demolish the old castle Krogen and build a new, prestigious and fearsome castle Kronborg, from where he could collect taxes from the passing ships.