

Epilogue: The Rest of the Story

Space limitations dictated that the story of the “Going” of the *Deutschland* from New London, be omitted. To add further depth to the story, here is “the rest of it.”¹

The *Deutschland* sailed from New London in the middle of the night on November 16, contrary to the captain’s assurance he would leave in daylight. It was escorted by two tugs of the T.A. Scott Company. The *T.A. Scott, Jr.* was ahead of the *Deutschland* as they reached the Race, an area of very tricky currents and tides near the tip of Fisher’s Island as one enters the Sound. The *Scott* was caught by the current and swung broadside to the *Deutschland*, which was unable to stop and crashed into the tug, sinking it almost immediately. The only survivor was Captain Frederick Hinsch of the *Willehad* and manager of the Eastern Forwarding Company, the American based arm of the German Overseas Navigation Company, owners of the *Deutschland*. He was thrown from the bridge of the tug and barely rescued when a sailor on the *Deutschland* threw him a life ring. His rescue was somewhat of a miracle as he could not swim and was wearing a heavy topcoat!

The Telegraph’s headlines on November 17 read, “*DEUTSCHLAND SAILED EARLY THIS MORNING.*” This is one time that the paper probably wished they had not scooped the rival *Day*, since by the time *The Telegraph* hit people’s front porches, the *Deutschland* was back at State Pier and five local men who worked for a most well-respected local company were drowned. An extra edition of the paper was immediately printed with a new headline: “*FIVE MEN LOST WHEN DEUTSCHLAND SINKS TUG T.A. SCOTT, Jr.*” *The Day’s* afternoon headline was huge and even more dramatic. Two lines of 1½ inches each proclaimed: “*DEUTSCHLAND IN DASH OUT HITS TUG, 5 ON TUG LOST, CAPT. HINSCH SAVED.*”

For the next five days, the papers eulogized the drowned men, reported on the inquiry held, on the condition of Capt. Hinsch, on the regret of Captain Koenig and the German Ambassador, and on the ensuing lawsuits. These were filed by the families of the dead against the owners of the *Deutschland* in amounts ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000 each, and by the T.A. Scott Co. in the amount of \$12,000. Because of what really was the murky ownership of the sub, agents for the Eastern Forwarding Company and the German Overseas Navigation Co. made some haste to post bonds for the boat, allowing it to return to Germany as quickly as possible.

The inquiry exonerated Captain Koenig and laid the blame for the collision on the *Scott’s* captain who, it was said, sounded an improper signal to the *Deutschland* when he realized his situation. However, this was not the first time that Koenig had problems with collisions and near collisions. Messimer reports that he almost hit a barge (probably the *Atlantic*) on his entrance to New London, and he did hit another tug

¹ All of the information referenced comes from accounts in *The Day* and *The Telegram* between 11/17 and 11/22.

on his way out of Wilhelmshaven.² One has to wonder if the former captain of passenger liners, whose bridges sat high above the water, was really comfortable with or competent in sailing a boat that rode so low in the water. We can only speculate. *The Day* reported the full text of the crew's suit against the *Deutschland* on November 20,³ but the outcome of the lawsuits is of yet uninvestigated [by me]. It would be an interesting project to follow this story to its conclusion, which must have been disrupted by the onset of war. Mystic Seaport's library has in its collection the papers of the T.A. Scott Co., which include all papers in reference to this incident, and the rest of the information is most likely available in public records.

On November 22, the column "Breakfast Briefs" in *The Telegraph* dryly commented: "Exit the *Deutschland*. Captain Koenig made his second start in broad daylight. What a pity he did not do this the first time." The same paper on the same day reported on the throngs of people who lined the waterfront and Pequot Avenue in their automobiles to wave and cheer as the boat departed. "Daylight Departure gives Hundreds Here a Chance to View the Craft From the Shore." Included among these were sailors on the *USS Columbia*: "As the submarine passed the *USS Columbia*, Uncle Sam's men gave them a rousing cheer, its echo being heard across the waters."⁴ One of the sailors was "placed in irons in the 'brig' of the vessel, ...according to his comrades on board the ship," the paper reported, but this appeared to be because the captain felt it was inappropriate for a neutral ship to salute a belligerent. The reporting "comrade" was quoted as saying "I believe they class it as a violation of the laws of neutrality, ... but we ordinary sailors cannot understand that point. I know there is no cause for complaint when we return a cheer from British men-of-war and there is not complaint when we line up to show respect for visitors from the British or French vessels."⁵ American neutrality was apparently showing strains, especially on the part of military leadership.

What this entire incident of the sinking and the departure illustrates is more of the same. The population of New London was still fascinated by the *Deutschland*, even if the government was suspicious of it (the government represented by Captain Johnston of the *Columbia*), and even though it had been involved in a very tragic accident for the city. On November 17, the main editorial in *The Day* lamented the loss of the Scott's crew, placing greater emphasis on the loss in the context of the community's great new development than on the sorrow "that all of us experience in the sudden taking away of those fellow townsmen," and not once does it mention the wives and children left without husbands and fathers. Since it bolsters the argument regarding the significance of the *Deutschland's* coming to New London, it is worth quoting some of this editorial:

² Messimer, P. 112, and 118

³ *The Day*, 11/20/16 "Damage Suits for \$175,000 brought *Against Deutschland*"

⁴ *The Telegraph*, 11/22/16 "*Deutschland* takes Inner Course Starting Home Trip."

⁵ *Ibid.* "Sailor who shouted goes to the 'Brig' "

It is the hard fortune of New London that the very first occasion of the employment of its new terminal facilities as the point of departure of a trans-Atlantic merchant ship should be marked by a shocking tragedy. Only those who can understand what it means to a community to witness the *concrete realization of the high aspiration of many, many years*, can realize just what the rounding out of the *Deutschland's* voyage meant to us New Londoners. It has never been of the slightest significance to us that this ship was a German ship or that she could travel beneath the surface of the waters. It would have been the same if she had been a British or a French or a Japanese steamer. *Her coming was epochal* because she was the first to bring overseas the beginnings of a world commerce to the docks of New London. *We have idealized the event, have seen in it the very dawn of a great new day for the city that we love.*

And only those who can understand and appreciate New London's attitude toward this initial voyage of the city's first ocean liner, can sense the emotions with which this community received the sorry news that came to us from the Race this morning. It is impossible for any of us to escape a special kind of depression that gets its potency from the timing of the tragedy. ...

....

But when all is said and done, these men of the Scott gave up their lives for a great ideal ... it was a vast enterprise in which they were engaged ... For *they were helping to make a new centre of the commerce of the world*, a new mart where the work of the hands of man will meet the works of the hands of man in barter from the four corners of the earth. ... the five will be our harbor's immortals, because they are the pioneers in the giving of their all *to the future greatness and dignity and usefulness of the estuary of the Thames.*⁶

It is doubtful that anyone in New London a century later remembers "these five" nor is there is a memorial to them anywhere. The T.A. Scott Co. is remembered by a lobster shack restaurant (Scott's Lobster Dock) named after the illustrious founder of the company, Captain Thomas Scott, a renowned diver and wrecker, whose company built the foundations for the Race Rock Lighthouse and New London Ledge Light (on Southwest Ledge). The State Pier became a berthing area for submarines of the US Navy during WWI and continued so well into the Cold War. By the last quarter of the 20th century the submarines were gone, and it was in almost total disrepair. Once again, at the urging of New London's business community, the Pier was salvaged at the end of the century and rebuilt in time for OpSail 2000 CT. Half a dozen Tall Ships were docked there during the festivities. Connecticut is now touting New London as "the best natural harbor in Connecticut"⁷ to bring more cargo into what is now known as the Admiral Harold E. Shear State Pier after a more recent advocate for the facility. The city of New London is soliciting

⁶ The Day, 11/17/1916. "Scott's Men our Harbor's Immortals"

⁷ *Port Connecticut: Transportation and International Trade Resource Directory*, 2003. Publication of the State of Connecticut Department of Transportation. Pp. 15-16

cruise ships to use the port both as a stop on New England cruises, and as a point of embarkation. Its first success in this venture was the coming of the “Regal Empress” in the fall of 2002 for a one-day layover on her autumn New England Cruise. The ship’s return in October 2003 has been enthusiastically awaited. The company that owned the “Regal Empress” went bankrupt in late April of 2003, and the ship was seized for back taxes. We proceed on.