

# The Pirate

## Author's Note:

In April of 2005, Lyons Press will release my new book: *Cruise of the Sea Eagle*. In my research of this epic story, I found myself learning a great deal about the Masonic order and the risks associated with it in Nazi Germany. My father-in-law, Edward Wilson, is a Mason and helped me understand some of the background necessary to tell this story.

It is my hope that members of the Masonic Order will enjoy this true story about one of their members, Count (Graf) Felix Alexander von Luckner.

To understand the role of the Masonic order in the story of Count von Luckner and the *Sea Eagle*, you must go back to the beginning, to a simpler time, when honor and pride meant something more than it does today...

Blaine Pardee

**F**elix von Luckner was born in 1881 in Germany, the first son of Count Heinrich Von Luckner and heir to the family title. The von Luckners were cavalry men, but young Felix sought a life on the high seas. A rebellious youth, at the age of 13 he ran away from home and a life of luxury to become a common sailor. The young Count became a cabin boy, emptying latrines and scrubbing down pigs' stalls.

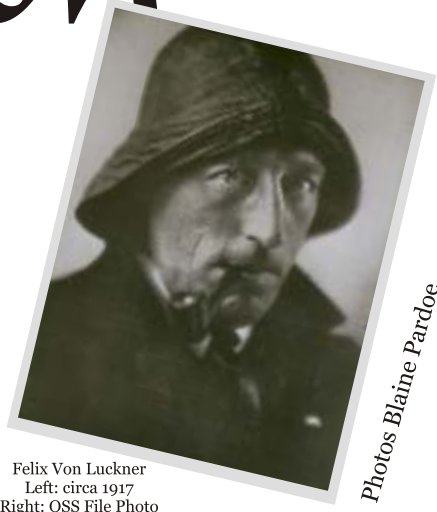
Over the next seven years he learned mastery of sailing ships. He returned home at the age of 21 and became an officer in the German navy. When the Great War broke out Von Luckner was something of a celebrity in the Kaiser's royal court. He was not like the other royals; he had lived a hard life and had earned

his living with his hands and heart. He was a gunnery officer aboard a Dreadnought and fought in the massive battle of Jutland.

Germany had a need for such a man. They sent out merchant raiders, commerce ships with hidden guns, disguised as neutral ships, to penetrate the Royal Navy's blockade. One such ship was the former American windjammer, *Pass of Balmaha*. It was armed with two 4.2 inch guns and re-christened the *Seadler* (*Sea Eagle*). The ship was outfitted with secret compartments, traps and was disguised as a Norwegian lumber ship right down to a Norwegian speaking German crew and even one man wearing a dress, posing as the Captain's wife. The *Seadler*

# Mason

By Blaine Pardoe



Photos Blaine Pardoe

Felix Von Luckner  
Left: circa 1917  
Right: OSS File Photo

would have made James Bond green with envy.

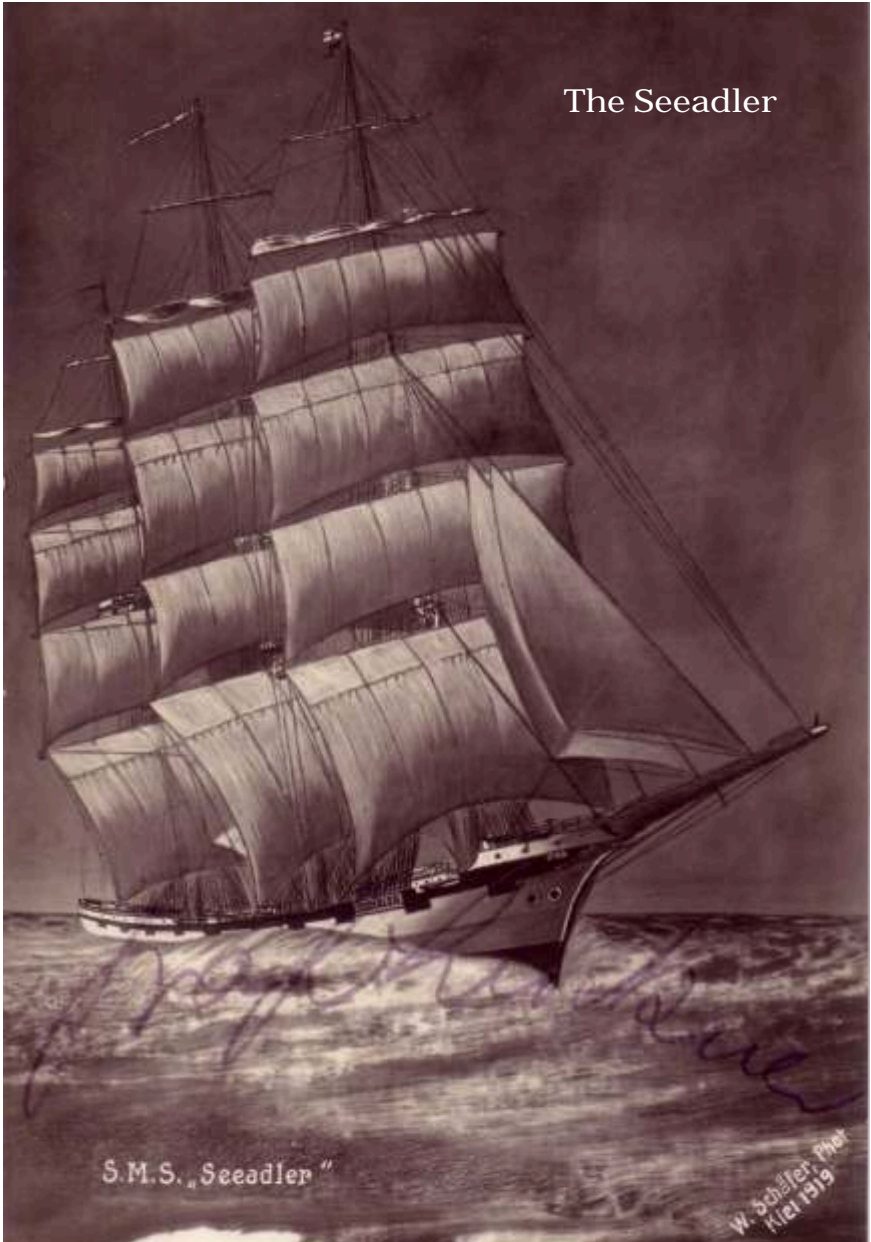
There was only one officer with the rank and experience to command such a large sailing ship – Felix von Luckner. In a hurricane force gale in 1917, he sailed through the British blockade. His ship was apprehended but through guile, bluff, and sheer luck, he and his crew fooled the British boarding party and made a good getaway.

The Seeadler sailed the Atlantic for months. It would lure in merchant ships by posing as a Norwegian. Then the crew would run up the German flag and don their naval uniforms (in keeping with maritime law). They would force the ship to surrender, usually with a shot across the bow. Then, they would take the crew prisoner

and sink the merchant ship.

It was all very legal, but Von Luckner did it with, well, style. Rather than treat his prisoners as captives like other raiders did, he put them on his payroll. As a former merchant seaman he knew how to appeal to a sailor's heart. He offered them a bounty of a bottle of champagne and a bonus if they spotted a potential target. Soon the rigging of the Seeadler was as filled with, "prisoners," as it was German sailors. He even formed a "Captains' Club," with his fellow captains, dining together daily.

Throughout his time in the Atlantic he only took one life. A shot to disable an armed ship accidentally killed a young boy. Von Luckner held a tearful funeral for the young man – the

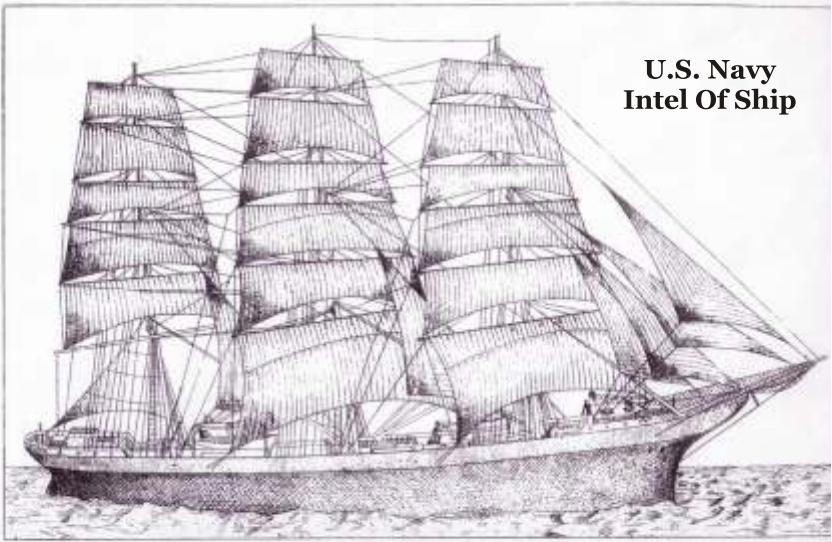


only victim of the Seeadler throughout the course of the war.

After several months there were over 200 prisoners aboard

the Seeadler. Von Luckner captured a ship and cut her masts to reduce its speed. He transferred his prisoners over to the ship and set them loose to





**U.S. Navy  
Intel Of Ship**

*Sketch made by a Master of a merchant ship.*

constable. While they had enough firepower to capture the island, the crew and their captain were not wearing uniforms. To defend themselves would have marked them as spies, pirates, or worse...and he was unwilling to sacrifice his honor.

While a prisoner in New Zealand Von Luckner and a handful of other POWs escaped, stealing the POW camp commandant's launch. They captured another ship, but were soon apprehended by an auxiliary cruiser of the New Zealand Royal Navy. While Von Luckner was returned to prisoner status, his remaining crew on Mopelia captured a ship and made their way to Easter Island and eventually to Chile.

His daring exploits during

the war did not alter Germany's fate. Von Luckner, though, remained a hero of the German people. His pluck and daring were respected and he often spoke to groups of young Germans to inspire them. Books of his adventures, oftentimes exaggerated, were sold around the world.

The German government engaged him as an ambassador of peace. He traveled to the US where he became an instant celebrity. His former captives spoke highly of him and crowds packed auditoriums to hear him tell his story. He was granted several honorary citizenships in the U.S. and abroad.

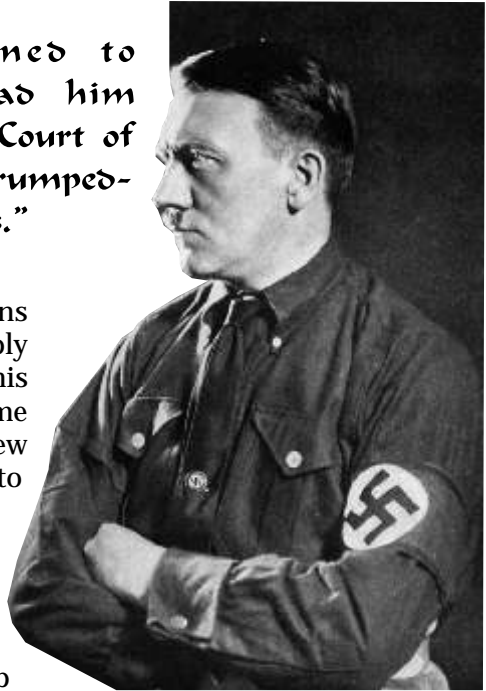
During this time, in the late 1920's, he became a Mason and eventually became a Knight Templar. Von Luckner took his

**“When he returned to Germany Hitler had him brought up before a Court of Honor on a string of trumped-up and falsified charges.”**

membership in the Masons quite seriously. He was deeply religious and considered his Masonic obligations to be some of his most honored. In a few years, they would come close to costing him his life.

With the rise of Hitler in the late 1930's, Von Luckner found himself less wanted. He refused to join the Nazi party but tried to help Germany. His trip to Australia in 1938, sponsored by several party members, was something of a debacle for Germany. Von Luckner was not a shill for the Nazi Party and did not spout the propaganda that the Nazis hoped he would.

When he returned to Germany Hitler had him brought up before a Court of Honor on a string of trumped-up and falsified charges. He was implored to renounce his foreign citizenships and refused. Moreover, he was ordered to renounce his membership in the Masons and refused. The Nazis viewed the Masonic order as a direct threat – a loyalty that Germans might hold above the Nazis' own dark



cause.

Von Luckner took a great deal of risk in defying Hitler. His popularity with an entire generation of Germans spared his life. He was placed under a form of house arrest in Halle, Germany, his family's hometown. His books, once required reading, were burned and he was no longer allowed to meet groups in public.

In 1945 the U.S. Army's 104th Division (The Timberwolves) approached Halle and the entrenched Germans there. Halle was the largest city in Germany that had been spared widespread strategic bombing attacks. The city held thousands of German



Felix von Luckner at Halle, Germany

civilians and thousands of American POWs who were being treated in her hospitals.

Von Luckner realized that Halle would be destroyed by the U.S. Army if they resisted. In the middle of fighting he snuck through the battle lines, meeting up with a pair of reporters who were seeking him out. The old Count, former privateer, and hero met with General Terry Allen and successfully negotiated a German withdrawal from Halle. His actions alone saved hundreds if not thousands of lives on both sides.

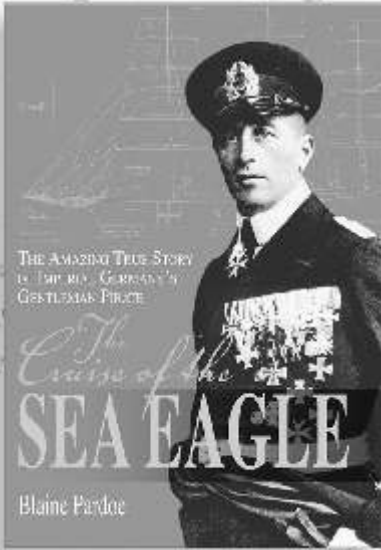
When the war was over the Count did not return to the speaking circuit. Bitterness with Germany after years of war and

strife strained relations. The Russians entered Halle and declared that that the American Army had never been there – that they had liberated the city. General Patton himself helped get the von Luckner family out of the hands of the Russians and to the Countess's home in Sweden.



Blaine Pardoe is the author of "Cruise of the Sea Eagle" as well as several novels in the BattleTech Science Fiction Series.

# A GENTLEMAN PIRATE RAIDS THE HIGH SEAS



## CRUISE OF THE SEA EAGLE

*The Amazing True Story of  
Imperial Germany's  
Gentleman Pirate*

By Blaine Pardoe

KEY	
	Route of <i>Sea Eagle</i>
	Route of <i>Compass</i>
	Route of <i>Olaf</i>
	Route of <i>Osaka</i>
	Route of <i>Osaka</i>
	Shipwreck

On December 21, 1916, a three-masted sailing ship slipped out of the river Weser in northern Germany. Her captain had false papers, a deliberately damaged logbook, and a young sailor with a blonde wig to pose as his wife. The ship sailed under a false flag, and even her name—the Hero—was a ruse. So begins the amazing true story of *The Cruise of the Sea Eagle*, author Blaine Pardoe's account of Felix von Luckner, the Imperial German Navy raider set upon the high seas to sink Britain's vital wartime supply ships during World War I.

Using sheer determination, pluck, and the quick of his wits, von Luckner steered clear of the British Navy to board and sink as many merchant ships as he possibly could. Within a month, he had already boarded and sunk three vessels. But unlike Germany's vaunted submarine fleet, the gentleman pirate made room on his ship for all prisoners, and never fired a shot unless it was unavoidable.

Discover the most remarkable tale of piracy and adventure since Daniel Defoe's vivid imaginings, a tale all the more remarkable since it actually occurred in an era when pirates were still possible.



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