

“The *Dudhope* Mutiny”

The arrival of the British tall ship *Dudhope* in San Diego harbor on November 30, 1914 was an impressive sight. Describing her “massive yards and mast and the white sails hauled tight by the brisk breeze” the *Union* called the 2000-ton ship a “marine spectacle.”

The steel-hulled bark had the historic distinction being the last cargo-carrying windjammer to enter San Diego via the storied Cape Horn route. But the ship would be better remembered for a surprising mutiny.

When the *Dudhope* arrived in San Diego the crew was startled to learn that since her departure from Hamburg, Germany in early July, war had begun in Europe. The ship’s 35-man crew, which included nine Germans, took the news quietly. The *Dudhope*’s British master, Francis Hodgins, was confident there would be no trouble with his men.



Captain Hodgins had actually learned of “the Great War” several weeks earlier. Off the west coast of South America on the night of October 21, the *Dudhope* had passed a French steamship that flashed the coded news with a lamp: “ENGLAND AND GERMANY AT WAR CAUTION.” Only Hodgins and his first mate saw the message, which they cautiously kept to themselves.

In San Diego, the *Dudhope* anchored at Spreckels’ Wharf to unload a cargo of iron ore and fertilizer and resupply the ship for its next port of call, Seattle. But the seamen were restless. Nearly a third of the mostly European crew demanded their wages and release, fearing that with the world at war they were “liable to capture or death by the sinking of the English ship.”

A retired American naval officer, William R. Cushman, agreed to represent ten of the men in U. S. District Court. In a suit filed on behalf of the sailors from Norway, Sweden, Germany, Denmark, and Finland, Cushman argued that men who signed ship’s articles in a time of peace could not be “compelled to undergo the hazard of war.”

The attorney demanded that the *Dudhope* be confiscated and sold if necessary to pay off the sailors. “The men want to return to their homes,” Cushman said, “and do not care to take any chance of being picked up by a German or Austrian cruiser or sent to the bottom.”

The court was sympathetic and on December 10 gave Captain Hodgins 24 hours to pay and let the men go or the ship would remain tied up in San Diego. With their liberation pending, most of the men returned to ship. But four German seamen deserted. Suspicious of their captain's intentions, the sailors disappeared in San Diego.

At 5 a.m. the next morning Captain Hodgins called every man on the ship to his cabin. As the sailors stood at attention, Hodgins reminded them that they had all signed three-year contracts in Hamburg, months earlier. He then read a few sentences from Admiralty law and asked the men if they had any complaints about their treatment aboard ship. The men said no; they had no fault with the ship, the officers, or the food.

"Then we shall go about our regular duties," the captain said. "Do any of you refuse, remembering that to do so constitutes a state of mutiny?" Seven sailors stepped forward and declared they would not obey orders.

"Bellowing like a bull," Captain Hodgins ordered his first mate to bring handcuffs. "Without more ado he clapped the manacles on the wrists of each of the mutinous seamen and ordered them confined in the forecabin, the Germans on one side, the Scandinavians on the other."

Hodgins immediately took his ship out to sea, anchoring three miles off shore in view of the Hotel del Coronado. He then took a boat ashore to take care of last minute business, including the recruitment of several sailors to replace his missing Germans.

Later in the day the captain was served by a deputy U.S. marshal with a citation ordering him to appear in District Court on December 28 to answer the charges of his crew. Hodgins pointed out that his ship was anchored in international waters. He ignored the summons and returned to the ship. That night the *Dudhope* weighed anchor and sailed away, headed for Seattle.

Left behind were four unrepentant German seamen. The sailors found refuge with a local grocer, a German immigrant named Fred Eickmeyer, who hid the men on ranch near Otay until the *Dudhope* sailed. Two of the deserters eventually enlisted in the U.S. Navy. Another joined the crew of John D. Spreckels' yacht the *Venetian*. The fourth man found work in a San Diego tuna cannery.

The *Dudhope* sailed to the northwest as planned and then, carrying American wheat loaded in Portland, headed home to England. But the ship would not survive the war. On July 15, 1917, the *Dudhope* met a German U-boat 200 miles from the coast of Ireland. Captain Richard Hartmann captured the windjammer, set the crew adrift in lifeboats, and then sank the ship with his deck guns.

Captain Hartmann would get his comeuppance less than two months later. Off the coast of France, *U-49* fired two torpedoes at the English freighter *British Transport*. When the torpedoes missed, the freighter turned and rammed the submarine, sinking the U-boat with all hands.



The views of the *Dudhope* off the coast of San Diego in 1914 are courtesy of the *Maritime Museum Association of San Diego*.

Originally published as “Outbreak of World War I sparks a mutiny,”
by Richard Crawford, *San Diego Union-Tribune*, Oct 31, 2009. p. CZ.1