

# International Journal of Naval History

Volume 1 Number 1

April 2002

## **Officer Training in the Prussian Navy: The Professionalization of the Naval Officer Corps in the 1860s**

*Terrell Gottschall, Walla Walla College*

The history of the Prussian Navy essentially began in 1815. Seeking to restore peace to Europe after the battle of Waterloo, the Congress of Vienna compelled Sweden to cede Pomerania and six small gun sloops to Prussia. The acquisition of Pomerania, which significantly increased Prussia's Baltic coastline, created the need, in turn, for a coastal defense force, which would later become the foundation of the Prussian Navy. The gun sloops themselves became the core of the new Coastal Flotilla (Küstenflotille) under the direction of the Ministry of Trade and commanded by Lieutenant Diedrich Longe, a Finnish naval officer formerly in Swedish service.

Longe established the Navigation School in Danzig in 1817 as the new fleet's first training facility for potential officers. Most of the school's graduates, however, entered the merchant marine instead since master's mates could command the oared gun sloops. In fact, Longe and a fellow Finn, Lieutenant Heinrich Murck, remained the flotilla's only commissioned officers for the next thirty years. This circumstance continued until 1844 when Prussia commissioned sailing corvette *Amazone* (12) to serve as a training ship for both naval and merchant marine officers. The fleet did not commission its first Prussian-born officers until 1847, following Murck's death in 1845 and Longe's retirement in 1846.<sup>1</sup>

One year later, the revolutions of 1848 produced new impetus for naval development. When the specter of a unified Germany led to war with Denmark, Prussia formally elevated its naval force from coastal flotilla to Navy (Marine) and placed it under the control of the Ministry of War. Lieutenant General Prince Adalbert of Prussia, who had long shown interest in naval affairs, became chief of the Naval High Command (Oberkommando der Marine) while Dutch-born Commodore Jan Schroeder exercised operational command. Since the war against Denmark required more ships and therefore more officers, Adalbert recruited gunnery officers from the Army and able seaman from the merchant marine.<sup>2</sup> He also secured the placement of four Prussian midshipmen aboard USS *St. Lawrence*.<sup>3</sup> When hostilities ended in 1850, the Prussian Navy had ten regular and thirty reserve officers.<sup>4</sup>

The growth of Prussian sea power, from coastal flotilla to navy, required the development and training of a professional naval officers corps (Seeoffizierkorps). This, in fact, became the major focus of the Prussia Navy in the 1850s and 1860s, particularly as Otto

# International Journal of Naval History

Volume 1 Number 1

April 2002

von Bismarck's wars of unification required the rapid expansion of the Navy. Prince Adalbert, promoted to the rank of "Admiral of the Prussian Coasts" in 1854, was primarily responsible for the development of a professional officer corps, which he developed through a revised training regimen and the inculcation of new naval customs. His initial program combined training cruises to the South Atlantic with academic work at the Midshipmen Institute (Seekadetten-Institut), which had replaced the Navigation School in 1851. Modeled after the United States Naval Academy, the school had a two-year curriculum of navigation, gunnery, seamanship, naval science, English and French. Training did not forgo education of the body, as cadets studied gymnastics, fencing, and dancing as well.<sup>5</sup> Since the naval officer corps lacked the traditions that helped to produce a more cohesive spirit or Korpsgeist, he also developed new maritime customs, using both the Prussian Army and the British Royal Navy as models. Finally, Adalbert looked to personal character as another requirement for his officers. He thus sought candidates who had a "good origin and upbringing, a healthy body, and an unspoiled character open to all noble impressions."<sup>6</sup>

With this foundation in place, Adalbert drafted a more defined, four-year regimen in the early 1860s. First, he created new age and academic requirements. He sought aspirants between ages 14 and 17. Because naval officers needed a strong technical background, he also developed an entrance exam that was similar to the Abitur, the examination needed to graduate from Germany's elite secondary schools. Following selection, the new cadets would then board one of the Navy's sailing ships for an initial year-long training cruise to the South Atlantic "to educate the cadets in every type of practical service" and prepare them for the Midshipman's Exam (Seecadett-Prüfung) which tested knowledge in gunnery, navigation, and seamanship. The newly-rated midshipmen then embarked on a two-year training cruise, initially to the South Atlantic and later to East Asia, for additional experience. Finally, midshipmen completed their training with a year of academic studies at the new Naval School (Marineschule), which would replace the Midshipmen Institute for the 1866 academic year. Midshipmen who completed the course work and passed an officer's exam received commissions as lieutenants, j.g., (Unterleutnant zur See).<sup>7</sup>

These reforms coincided with a need for additional officers, particularly when naval disasters discouraged interest in a naval career. Two officers and two midshipmen died when schooner *Frauenlob* sank in a typhoon off Japan in September 1860. Four more officers and nineteen cadets died when *Amazone*, the Navy's original training ship, sank in a storm in the North Sea in November 1861. Because of these tragedies, only three young men applied for admission to the officer corps in 1862. The Navy attempted to fill this void with reserve officers, particularly when a new war with Denmark broke out in 1864.<sup>8</sup> Reserve officers, however, often failed to meet Adalbert's character and professional expectations. Alfred von Tirpitz later wrote in his memoirs that the "influx of these uneducated sea-dogs from the merchant service of those days brought many a joke into our mess; we called them Hilfsbarone, and they included some remarkable

# International Journal of Naval History

Volume 1 Number 1

April 2002

characters.”<sup>9</sup> Additionally, in the midst of Bismarck’s wars of unification, the Ministry of the Navy proposed a major naval expansion in 1865 that would increase the naval officer corps from 80 officers to 200 over the next twelve years.<sup>10</sup>

The rapid expansion of the Prussian Seeoffizierkorps provided the opportunity for a variety of young men to seek admission to the Navy. One of these applicants was Otto von Diederichs, who joined the Prussian Navy in 1865. Diederichs’ experiences, both conventional and unique, provide the focus of this paper. He was born in 1843 to a family recently raised to the Prussian nobility. His grandfather had received a patent of nobility in 1816 for service to the crown as a jurist; his father rose to sub-cabinet rank in the royal Ministry of the Treasury.<sup>11</sup> Diederichs himself hoped to follow this family tradition of government service but chronic ill-health in his youth undermined his attempts to gain the necessary academic credentials. When he completed his formal education at the age of eighteen in December 1861, he had not finished the secondary program (Gymnasium) required for university admission. Without a degree, Diederichs had little chance of following his father and grandfather into civil service.<sup>12</sup>

Diederichs also faced the military service (allgemeine Wehrpflicht) required of all adult Prussian males. His aristocratic roots made him eligible for admission to the Army officer corps but his academic record again proved to be a problem. Officer candidates who had completed Gymnasium qualified for a normal tour of three years with the hope of a full career in the regular Army. Because Diederichs had completed only six years of the nine-year program, he could serve only a single year as a temporary reserve officer. Thus, he had no hope of an Army career.<sup>13</sup>

In any event, Diederichs began his military service with the 33<sup>rd</sup> Infantry (East Prussian Fusiliers), a line regiment that had a long and famous tradition. He reported for duty at the Cologne Kaserne on New Year’s Day 1862 where he received the substantive rank of ensign and was assigned to 7 Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. His service, however, came to an abrupt halt after only six months. Cologne’s damp winter climate and Diederichs’ own cold quarters in an aging stone barracks exacerbated his chronic pulmonary problems. Following a physical examination by the regimental surgeon in early June, Diederichs resigned his commission on the grounds of poor health. As a possible solution to Diederichs’ medical problems, the surgeon also recommended that he take a sea cruise.<sup>14</sup>

These circumstances left Diederichs with two unresolved issues. Prussian law still required him to fulfill his military obligations while family tradition demanded public service. Ironically, a sea cruise could resolve both problems. He learned that a two-year stint in the merchant marine would satisfy his Wehrpflicht and that the merchant marine also provided an alternative route to the naval officer corps. A draft protocol in current preparation by the Navy allowed older applicants or those with inadequate academic records to seek admission to the officer corps with proof of three years service at sea. Because Diederichs fit this bill of exceptions, a sea cruise would both fulfill his

# International Journal of Naval History

Volume 1 Number 1

April 2002

Wehrpflicht and pave the way to a naval career.<sup>15</sup> As he later noted, “Poor health and medical advice ended my Army career but gave me the opportunity to fulfill a youthful aspiration to go to sea.”<sup>16</sup>

Diederichs’ service in the merchant marine began immediately. Only twelve days after his formal separation from the Army on 12 June 1862, he signed on as an apprentice seaman (Leichtmatrose) aboard SS Amaranth bound for China with a load of German trade goods. Diederichs spent the next three years before the mast, serving on a series of coasters, plying their trade between Shanghai and Singapore. When he returned to Hamburg in April 1865, his ship’s master formally discharged him from service with a positive recommendation: “He fulfilled his duties aboard ship to my complete satisfaction. His skills and knowledge testify to his abilities as an effective seaman.” Diederichs forwarded this reference and a copy of his service record to the Navy on 13 May 1865 as the first formal step towards seeking admission to the naval officer corps.<sup>17</sup>

Diederichs learned upon his return to Berlin that he had already missed the regular date for the naval entrance examination. Twenty–six candidates had taken the exam in April but only eleven had passed. Because Adalbert wanted at least twenty–five cadets to fill out the year’s draft, he sought additional applicants in May.<sup>18</sup> Following receipt of Diederichs’ application a few days later, the Navy invited him to sit for the entrance exam, which he passed with a score of “excellent.”<sup>19</sup>

Diederichs formally mustered into the Navy aboard SMS Niobe in Danzig on 7 September 1865, his twenty–second birthday. Niobe was a sail frigate purchased from the Royal Navy in 1862 to replace Amazone as a training ship. Because of his previous experience in the merchant marine, Diederichs was rated as a seaman second class. The other cadets, who lacked prior service at sea, received a lower rate—seaman fourth class—and less pay.<sup>20</sup> As Diederichs unpacked his sea chest, he met the other twenty–two cadets aboard Niobe, including sixteen–year old Alfred Tirpitz.<sup>21</sup>

Niobe weighed anchor on 9 September for a brief orientation cruise around Danzig harbor. Captain Ferdinand Batsch timed his departure poorly, however, as the ship promptly ran aground in low tide. Towed off by a steam tug, the ship proceeded on her way before returning to Danzig in the afternoon. Diederichs’ prior experience at sea served him in good stead during this early period; while the other cadets were still learning “the ropes” and other basic ship routines, he regularly stood anchor watches as a signalman.<sup>22</sup>

The ship departed a week later for a shake–down cruise to Kiel. As Niobe proceeded on a westerly course, Diederichs used his spare time to record the minutiae of naval life in a personal logbook. He made repeated references to sail drill aloft and gunnery drill on deck as the cadets learned the complex art of sailing ships in often difficult conditions. Diederichs did not limit his record to memories of training alone. When Niobe passed

# International Journal of Naval History

Volume 1 Number 1

April 2002

through narrow waters that separated Prussia from Denmark, he noted a tense exchange of formal salutes with Danish ships and gun batteries in an area where the Prussian and Danish ships had exchanged gunfire only months earlier. He also described dangers that existed even in peacetime. When heavy fog obscured navigational buoys marking the narrow channel into the Kiel fiord, the captain had to send a seaman into the chains with a sounding lead to find the channel and prevent the ship from running aground.<sup>23</sup>

This was Diederichs' first visit to Kiel, which had recently become the Navy's primary naval station. His logbook describes a vibrant and flourishing base and notes the presence of most of the Prussian fleet. This was also an active period aboard Niobe as crew and cadets commenced final preparations for the training cruise. Cadet training shared time with formal naval ceremony, the occasional liberty, and work details. In the mornings, the cadets and crew loaded supplies and munitions. On an occasional afternoon, Diederichs went ashore to taste the delights of Kiel, made informal visits aboard other warships anchored in the harbor, or sailed a small boat across the fiord. After a busy week, the ship was finally ready for sea. Rear Admiral Eduard von Jachmann, commander of the Baltic squadron, came aboard Niobe on 27 September to inspect the ship and observe the cadets at their drills. At the end of the day in a formal speech to the crew, he declared Niobe "ready in all respects for sea" and granted permission to Batsch to commence the training cruise.<sup>24</sup>

Niobe weighed anchor and proceeded to sea on the 29<sup>th</sup>. Although a temporary lack of winds forced Batsch to heave to off Skagen, passage out of the Baltic and down the North Sea coast to the English Channel was largely uneventful. A brief call at Plymouth (5–7 October) allowed Diederichs and the other cadets a momentary respite from ship's routine. The cadets toured the Royal Dockyard and attended a performance of Macbeth at the Plymouth Theater.<sup>25</sup>

At sea again, Niobe weathered rough autumnal conditions in the Atlantic. Heavy squalls struck the ship repeatedly, causing extensive damage to sails and spars. At the height of the storms, Batsch suspended drills as the cadets and crew feverishly worked for several days in hazardous conditions to complete the required repairs. No sooner had the weather moderated and the ship returned to normal routine when disaster struck. Diederichs notes in his entry for 20 October that the day's training had included both gunnery and boarding drill. Perhaps the youthful cadets, boisterous after several days of stress and tension, had grown careless. A missed step, an inadvertent stumble on a crowded deck, a momentary distraction to observe the sights and sounds of an active ship and, suddenly, fire, the most fearful threat possible to a wooden ship, flared up near the forward magazine. The crew responded quickly to put out the flames before the fire could spread to the gunpowder stored below but not before the mainmast sustained damage. New squalls further damaged the ship's masts and rigging on the 21<sup>st</sup> when the foremast topyards fell and became entangled in the jib and bowsprit. Cadets and crew worked hard for two days to make the needed repairs.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps Diederichs paused

# International Journal of Naval History

Volume 1 Number 1

April 2002

momentarily to reflect on Macbeth, the play he had seen only days earlier: “So foul and fair a day I have not seen.” (Act 1, Scene 3.)

To the relief of all aboard, lookouts sighted Madeira Island, a Portuguese possession off northwest Africa, on the morning of 23 October. The sight of land brought relief—emotional and meteorological—to the tired crew. As light winds and warm temperatures replaced bitter storms, Niobe anchored in the Funchal roadstead. Early the next morning, in clear weather and with the temperature 90 degrees, the crew spread awnings for shade. Also present were two other Prussian training ships: Rover and Musquito.<sup>27</sup>

Batsch now implemented a more regular training schedule. The ship’s bosun piped the cadets out of their hammocks for reveille at 0600. Inspection and breakfast followed immediately at 0640 with a formal cadet parade at 0800. The daily training schedule commenced promptly at 0930. The cadets paused for lunch at 1200 before resuming training at 1400. The training officers again paraded the cadets for inspection by Captain Batsch at 1630. The cadets then had an hour of boat or sail drill at 1700. Supper followed at 1800. The cadets returned to their quarters at 2000 for studies—reviewing navigational and gunnery manuals—or free time before the bosun piped lights out at 2200.<sup>28</sup>

Diederichs used his limited free time to keep up his personal log. His entries are succinct but informative as he records the events of shipboard life: wind and sea states, temperature, and a brief reference to the day’s activities, all in a quick, spidery script. A few diversions overcame this tedium. On one day, training officers led the cadets on a mad scramble up Niobe’s towering masts to study the ship’s rigging. On another day, the cadets disassembled and cleaned small arms and practiced sword drill with cutlass and rapier. On a third day, Diederichs commanded a gun crew of cadets as they manned one of Niobe’s gundeck 68pdr guns in competition with the regular crew at the quarterdeck 32pdrs. On the next, cadets learned that etiquette and protocol were an indispensable part of an officer’s education. And, occasionally, the cadets rested on a seventh day. Momentarily relieved from training for a few hours of recreation ashore, Diederichs notes joyously that “beautiful weather (clear, 36 C) and a fresh sea breeze favored the day.”<sup>29</sup>

Niobe weighed anchor and proceeded south to the Cape Verde islands, another Portuguese possession, in November. With the ship sometimes at anchor and sometimes under way, the training continued. Routine entries fill Diederichs’ log for November, December, and January with little variation. For example, the entry for 21 November notes laconically, “Removed and repaired bowsprit spars and rigging. Cadet small-boat drill.” Diederichs records a few incidents, some near tragic, some merely social, to break the monotony. Seaman Eberhardt fell overboard while the ship was under way but Bosun’s mate Selphin dove into the water to save him; a court-martial punished Private Lemke, a member of Niobe’s naval infantry detachment, for sleeping on duty. On another

# International Journal of Naval History

Volume 1 Number 1

April 2002

day, Diederichs and his peers challenged Rover's cadets "to meet ashore to play ball." He did not record the ensuing score.<sup>30</sup>

The cadets received substantial training with small arms and small boats. Since Prussian warships did not usually embark marines (naval infantry), the Navy provided its officers and seamen with extensive training with small arms, infantry tactics, and amphibious operations. Diederichs, who had brief military experience, unlike his younger peers, noted with some pride that he had easily qualified on the rifle range ashore, but admitted to less success with revolvers.<sup>31</sup>

During this time, Batsch himself complained in a report to the Naval High Command in early December that the number of cadets and midshipmen aboard Niobe, then forty, had proven excessive. The four training officers were unable to provide adequate opportunity for individual or small-group direction. This was particularly true, he noted, in ship-handling, navigation, and sail drill. He therefore recommended that the High Command either reduce the number of trainees or increase the number of officers.<sup>32</sup>

The Christmas holidays brought new diversions. The cadets visited the 60-gun Russian steam frigate Dimitri Danskov, which had stopped briefly to load fresh food supplies while in transit to East Asia. Diederichs' log entry for Christmas Day contains no melancholy reference to his absence from distant family celebrations but rather notes succinctly, "Good Russian brandy."<sup>33</sup>

Following the brief holiday season, the cadets faced a series of mid-cruise examinations. Batsch personally administered one such exam on navigation and seamanship. On the next day, under the watchful eye of the training officers, the cadets began gunnery exercises auspiciously by clearing the portside guns for action in two minutes and thirty seconds. The exercise became less successful at that point, however, as the cadets hit the target only twice out of 36 rounds. Diederichs' relevant log entry made no mention of the captain's presumably scathing evaluation of the cadets' performance.<sup>34</sup>

New Year's Day, 1866, began with a formal address by Captain Batsch and ended with liberty at Porto Grande on St. Vincente Island. Gunnery results notwithstanding, the cadets had passed at least the navigation and seamanship portions of exams and now had an opportunity to celebrate. Wearing their dress uniforms and with the ship decorated for the holidays, the officers and cadets later hosted a ball to mark Twelfth Night, inviting civilian guests from several visiting steamers.<sup>35</sup>

Niobe turned north in February to return to European waters, marking the end of the first phase of the training cruise. This segment had focused on fundamental naval skills intended to educate the cadets as sailors. The next stage, based on visits to various European ports, would educate the cadets more thoroughly as "officers and gentlemen."

# International Journal of Naval History

Volume 1 Number 1

April 2002

Because German naval officers in the nineteenth century often represented their country acting as diplomats, their training needed a cultural and political element.

Niobe arrived in Cadiz, Spain in February 1866 and remained for more than a month. The cadets toured the port, inspected the existing naval base at Rota, rode inland to Seville, visited a circus, and watched a bullfight. Niobe's crew hoisted flags overall and raised the Prussian flag at the fore to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty King William I on 22 March. Batsch marked the occasion by awarding prizes to the leading cadets, presenting Diederichs with a special edition of Feodor von Kl n's Ein Strau8 fñr Schleswig, inscribed as an "Ehrengeschenk der Matrose II Klasse Ottos von Diederichs."<sup>36</sup>

Diederichs' stay in Cadiz was not all fun and games. When high winds caused a passenger ferry to capsize and drove a schooner aground, the cadets joined the crew to rescue the passengers and tow the grounded schooner into deeper water. They were able to save all but two of the passengers. Diederichs also recorded events reflecting political unrest in the city. In fact, Spain was currently embroiled in political upheaval that would lead eighteen months later to the overthrow of Queen Isabella and result in events that would cause the Franco–German War in 1870.<sup>37</sup>

Niobe continued northwest around the Iberian Peninsula to Lisbon in early April. Diederichs recorded one significant exception to routine. Niobe exchanged salutes with USS Kearsarge, which arrived in port on 11 April following anti–slavery patrols on the African coast. The ship, which had gained fame during the American Civil War for a famous ship–to–ship duel with CSS Alabama, reported the presence of the dreaded "yellow jack," or cholera, aboard. Two officers, the surgeon, and four stokers had already died. Under normal conditions, Diederichs and the cadets would have visited Kearsarge but the ship remained in quarantine, maintaining only limited contact with the shore to replenish supplies.<sup>38</sup> Batsch cited Kearsarge when he reported to the High Command that the health of the cadets and crew aboard Niobe was good.<sup>39</sup>

Before Niobe's departure from Lisbon two days later, Batsch briefed the crew on growing tensions between Prussia and Austria. Although the two states had fought Denmark as allies only two years earlier, conflict over the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein threatened to cause another war since both sides had broken off negotiations and mobilized for war. The Prussian consul in Lisbon had warned Batsch that several Austrian warships were operating in Atlantic and Channel waters. Alert for the imminent outbreak of hostilities, Batsch therefore assumed a war footing aboard Niobe as she departed Portuguese waters.

As Niobe entered the English Channel on the morning of 25 April, a lookout sighted an unidentified steam warship trailing astern in the fog. Batsch feared that the ship might be Erzherzog Friedrich, a modern Austrian steam sloop more powerful and faster than



# International Journal of Naval History

Volume 1 Number 1

April 2002

Niobe. When the mysterious warship secured sails and raised steam, a possible sure indication of hostile intent, Batsch ordered all hands to clear for action. Although the ship soon disappeared back into the fog, Batsch kept the crew on full alert for the next twenty-four hours until a second sighting identified the ship as a neutral Swedish warship. Hours later, Niobe put into Plymouth harbor long enough to make minor repairs and learn that the threat of war had briefly waned.<sup>40</sup>

Niobe's arrival in home waters a few days later signaled not only the end of the training cruise but also the onset of final examinations. Diederichs and his fellow cadets sat for their midshipmen exams, which tested knowledge of gunnery, navigation, and seamanship. The gunnery exam required the cadets to demonstrate proficiency in both ship's artillery and small arms plus the mathematical skills necessary to lay individual guns. The navigation section tested knowledge of astronomy and the use of navigational instruments and charts. Seamanship examined the cadets' practical skills in sail, signal, and small-boat drill.<sup>41</sup>

Following the exams, Admiral Jachmann came aboard to observe the cadets as they demonstrated their newly developed skills. He declared the cadets in "good order" and joined in their commencement exercises.<sup>42</sup> Before he packed his log book away in his sea chest, Diederichs paused to make a final entry before disembarking to visit his parents in Berlin: "The cadets left the ship to begin four weeks leave."<sup>43</sup>

Diederichs had barely arrived at home when the long-awaited war with Austria broke out on 14 June. He immediately received orders, which recalled him from leave and directed him to report aboard SMS Gefion at Kiel. The warship, captured from the Danes in 1849, was an aging 48-gun sail frigate that the Prussian Navy had converted to an artillery training ship. Fearing an overland attack from Austrian forces in nearby Holstein, the High Command now intended to use Gefion as a floating battery in support of the defense of the Kiel naval station.<sup>44</sup> The war, however, lasted too briefly for Diederichs or the Navy to see action. As he noted in his log, the Prussian Army used an early version of Blitzkrieg to defeat the Austrians at the decisive battle of Königgrätz on 3 July. Diederichs and the rest of Gefion's crew could do little more than celebrate the Army's victory.<sup>45</sup>

While aboard Gefion, Diederichs also received formal notification that he had passed the midshipman exams. He had scored "excellent" in each of the three areas, an accomplishment that also earned him royal commendation from King William I. Based on these scores and a positive recommendation from Captain Batsch, the Navy promoted Diederichs to the rate of midshipman on 24 June 1866.<sup>46</sup>

At this point, the existing training regimen called for new midshipmen to embark on an additional two-year training cruise. While the other midshipmen departed for the South Atlantic, Diederichs remained aboard Gefion. His three-year experience in the merchant

# International Journal of Naval History

Volume 1 Number 1

April 2002

marine exempted him from the second cruise and allowed him instead to proceed to the next step of training, an academic year at the new Naval School (Marineschule), which replaced Berlin's Seekadetten-Institut, in Kiel. Since the Navy had just begun to develop a site in Dürstenbrook, a Kiel suburb, revise the curriculum, and transfer faculty and staff from Berlin, Prince Adalbert postponed the opening of the school until November. Diederichs therefore remained aboard Gefion to take an advanced gunnery course.<sup>47</sup>

Adalbert had high hopes for the new school. As outlined in his formal proposal, the school would offer "a systematic education whereby candidates may develop the necessary professional skills for service as regular officers." Adalbert drew the school's professional faculty from the Navy's "best and brightest" officers and its adjunct faculty from the University of Kiel. Appointment to the faculty, he hoped, would become a professional honor. (Diederichs himself later served two four-year tours on the faculty of the Marineschule in the 1880s.) The academic year would begin on 1 August and end on 30 June. Each year would have two terms—fall (August to December) and spring (January to June)—with mid-term and final examinations in each subject. Because of delays caused by the transfer of the school to Kiel, Adalbert abbreviated the first term for the year 1866–1867 academic year to three months (November, December, and January) and the second term to five (February through June).<sup>48</sup>

Diederichs and fifteen other midshipmen reported to the Naval School on 30 October. His final log entry aboard Gefion noted matter-of-factly, "Pinnacle transported coal from station. Cleaned hand weapons. Reported to Marineschule."<sup>49</sup> Six of the sixteen midshipmen eventually achieved flag rank: Diederichs, August Thomsen, Gustav von Senden-Bibran, Paul Hoffmann, Iwan Oldekop, and Max Plüddemann. (A class photograph in the Diederichs Nachlaß shows Diederichs standing in the rear nearly obscured by the midshipman to his left. He wears what appears to be either long sideburns or a beard.)

The shortened school year passed quickly for the busy midshipmen, who faced a rigorous curriculum. The first term blended professional courses with the liberal arts. Diederichs attended twenty-four 90-minute lectures each week, Monday through Saturday, on mathematics (five class periods), natural science (four), French (two), and English (two) plus additional lectures on navigation (three), gunnery (four), and tactics (four). He spent Tuesday and Thursday afternoons in labs. The spring term consisted of seventeen lectures per week on professional subjects, including navigation (three), tactics (two), gunnery (four), ship design (four), steam engineering (three), and naval protocol (one).

The curriculum did not neglect physical education. Adalbert had originally intended that the midshipmen practice gymnastics and fencing in winter months and take swimming lessons in the spring. Since the new school still lacked adequate athletic facilities at its new Mühlstraße address and Kiel's frigid waters prevented swimming lessons until

# International Journal of Naval History

Volume 1 Number 1

April 2002

June, Diederichs fenced and danced his way through Kiel's cold and damp winter months.<sup>50</sup>

Director C. A. Liebe filed mixed reports on the students at the end of the first term. He singled out Diederichs and several other cadets for academic achievement but also complained to Berlin that more than one-quarter of the students—unidentified—had contracted syphilis. To deal with the problem, Liebe invited Admiral Jachmann to speak to the midshipmen about their behavior as naval-officers-to-be.<sup>51</sup>

The midshipmen sat for the lieutenant's exam at the end of the spring term in June 1867. Diederichs and only four other midshipmen passed the exams; the other eleven had failed.<sup>52</sup> Diederichs received his highest score—excellent—in drafting. He performed well in navigation, seamanship, general service knowledge, ship design, and English. He received fair scores in gunnery, steam engineering, and French, and a single satisfactory in naval tactics.<sup>53</sup>

New orders assigned him to SMS Musquito, a former British sloop-of-war purchased in 1862, as a training officer in preparation for a new cadet cruise. After a brief furlough, he reported for duty on 26 August 1867. At noon on the 27<sup>th</sup> with the crew mustered in the waist, Diederichs stood proudly at attention as he received his commission as lieutenant, j.g. (Unterleutnant zur See).<sup>54</sup> He had achieved his goal and finished his quest. Like three generations of Diederichs before him, he would now swear honor and duty to the Prussian crown.

Although steam later replaced sail and steel replaced wood, the training regimen that Adalbert implemented in the 1860s remained largely intact until World War I. The single exception was the establishment of the postgraduate Naval Academy (Marineakademie) in 1872 whose graduates assumed staff positions after completion of a two-year curriculum in advanced professional courses and the liberal arts. Modeled after the Army War College (Kriegsakademie) in Berlin, the Marineakademie was the world's first postgraduate naval academic program, anticipating the foundation of the United States Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island, by twelve years. Lieutenant (s.g.) Otto von Diederichs was one of twelve officers who matriculated with the Marineakademie's inaugural class.<sup>55</sup>

Diederichs' naval career reflected the successful foundation he received in his initial officer training in the 1860s. He commanded SM Gunboat Natter during the Franco-German War of 1870–1871 and then served in the Torpedo Service (Torpedowesen) later in the decade as the German Navy pioneered that new weapons system. Following a two-year tour as executive officer aboard an overseas cruiser in East Asia, he returned to Germany in the 1880s to serve on the faculty of the Marineakademie. He served several staff tours in the Navy's War Plans Division that resulted in his development of the first operational plans for wars against France, Russian, Britain, and the United States. He

# International Journal of Naval History

Volume 1 Number 1

April 2002

returned to sea in 1897 as commander of the Cruiser Squadron in East Asia, seizing Kiao-chou Bay, China, for the Navy's only overseas naval base in November 1897 before confronting an American squadron at Manila Bay in summer 1898. After thirty-seven years of active duty, he finally retired from the Navy in 1902 because of his opposition to the belligerent policies of Emperor William II and Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz as embodied in the "risk fleet."<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Eberhard von Mantey, Deutsche Marinegeschichte (Charlottenburg, Verlag Offene Worte, 1926), 43–47. For biographical details on Longe, see Hans Jürgen Witthöfft, Lexikon zur deutschen Marinegeschichte (Herford: Koehlers Verlagsgesellschaft, 1977), 1: 179.

<sup>2</sup> Bundesarchiv–Militärarchiv, Freiburg, Germany, RM 1/1849, Denkschrift über der oberen Marinebehörden, 1848–1871. See also Walther Hubatsch, Der Admiralstab und die obersten Marinebehörden in Deutschland, 1848–1945 (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag für Wehrwesen Bernard & Gräfe, 1958), 17–18, 220.

<sup>3</sup> National Archives, Washington, D.C., Record Group 45, Subject File VI–8, "Notes regarding assistance desired by Germany from the United States in forming a Navy, 1848–1849."

<sup>4</sup> Rangliste der Königlich Preußischen Marine aus den Jahren 1848 bis 1864 (Berlin: Mittler und Sohn, 1894), 6–7.

<sup>5</sup> For the development of the Seekadetten–Institut, see BAMA, RM 1/741, Manteuffel to Frederick William III, 19 April 1855, and Allerhöchste Kabinetts Ordre, 13 May 1855. For the school's curriculum and training regimen, see BAMA, RM 1/202, Nachweisung des Königlichen Seekadetten–institut, 25 January 1865. See also Karl Peter, "Seeoffizieranwärter–Ausbildung in Preußen–Deutschland von 1848–1945," undated manuscript, Militärgeschichteforschungsamt, Freiburg.

<sup>6</sup> BAMA, RM 1/1845, Die Entstehung der preußisch–deutsche Flotte. See also, Lawrence Sondhaus, "'The Spirit of the Army' at Sea: The Prussian–German Naval Officer Corps, 1847–1897," *International History Review* 17 (1995): 459–484.

<sup>7</sup> BAMA, RM 1/143, Verordnung über die Ergänzung der Offizier–Corps der Königlichen Marine, 16 June 1864. An earlier draft proposed a two–year curriculum for

# International Journal of Naval History

Volume 1 Number 1

April 2002

the Marineschule but the Navy decided to compress the study into a single year to allow more time for practical training at sea; see BAMA, RM 1/202, Entwurf zu Grundzügen der Einrichtung der Marineschule, 29 December 1864.

<sup>8</sup> BAMA, RM 1/202, AKO, 17 July 1862, and Marineministerium to Oberkommando, 11 February 1865.

<sup>9</sup> Alfred von Tirpitz, My Memoirs (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1919), 1: 2–4

<sup>10</sup> BAMA, RM 1/2873, Plan zur Gründung der preußische Kriegsmarine, 17 June 1865; and RM 1/1849, Plan zur Erwerbung der preußische Kriegsmarine von 1865. For the list of officers, see Rangliste, 73–73.

<sup>11</sup> BAMA, N 255/1, “Kurzbiographie von Otto von Diederichs.” For other details, see Gothiasches Genealogisches Taschenbuch der adelige Häuser (Gotha: Justus Perthes, 1939), 114–115; and Deutschen Adelsarchiv, Genealogisches Handbuch des Adels: Adelslexikon, edited by Walter von Hüek (Limburg am Lahn: Starke, 1974), 2: 473.

<sup>12</sup> Diederichs’ academic records are in BAMA, N 255/1.

<sup>13</sup> Steven Clemente, For King and Kaiser! The Making of the Prussian Army Officer, 1860–1914 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 28–33. See also George Paulsen, German Education Past and Present (New York: Scribners, 1908).

<sup>14</sup> Alfred von Cronsaz, Die Organization des Brandenburgischen und Preußischen Heeres seit 1640 (Berlin: Reimschneider Verlag, 1873), 2: 37–43. See also BAMA, N 255/1, physician’s note.

<sup>15</sup> BAMA, N 255/1, Interior Ministry to Diederichs, 26 June 1862; and holographic note, folio 60. See also BAMA, RM 1/143, Verordnung über die Ergänzung der Offizier-Corps der Königlichen Marine, 16 June 1864.

<sup>16</sup> BAMA, N 255/1, holographic note, folio 60.

<sup>17</sup> BAMA, *ibid.*, Service Record, 13 May 1865.

<sup>18</sup> BAMA, RM 1/143, Adalbert to Roon, 24 April and 6 May 1865.

<sup>19</sup> BAMA, N 255/1, Heldt to Bothwell, 26 August 1865.

<sup>20</sup> BAMA, RM 1/1614, Batsch to Ministry, 30 June 1865; RM 1/186, Seekadetten-Institut to OKM, 27 May and 6 November 1865.

# International Journal of Naval History

Volume 1 Number 1

April 2002

<sup>21</sup> BAMA, N 255/43, log entries, 6–7 September 1865. Diederichs also kept a personal log during his service aboard SMS Gefion (1866) and SMS Luise (1878–1880).

<sup>22</sup> BAMA, *ibid.*, log entries, 9–15 September 1865.

<sup>23</sup> BAMA, *ibid.*, log entries, 16–20 September 1865.

<sup>24</sup> BAMA, *ibid.*, log entries, 21–28 September 1865. For the establishment of the Kiel naval station, see BAMA. RM 1/736, AKO, 24 March 1865; RM 1/1850, AKO, 29 December 1865. For a brief history of the Kiel station, see Michael Salewski, "Kiel und die Marine," in Geschichte der Stadt Kiel, edited by Jürgen Jensen and Peter Wulf (Neuminster: Karl Wachholtz Verlag, 1991), 272–286.

<sup>25</sup> BAMA, N 255/43, log entries, 3–7 October 1865.

<sup>26</sup> BAMA, *ibid.*, log entries, 20–21 October 1865.

<sup>27</sup> BAMA, *ibid.*, log entries, 23–24 October 1865.

<sup>28</sup> Peter, Seeoffizieranwärter–Ausbildung, 114.

<sup>29</sup> BAMA, N 255/43, log entries, 23–30 October, 1–3 November 1865.

<sup>30</sup> BAMA, *ibid.*, log entries, 6 and 16 November, 3 December 1865.

<sup>31</sup> BAMA, *ibid.*, log entries, 30 November and 1 December 1865.

<sup>32</sup> BAMA, RM 1/2460, Batsch to OKM, 4 and 21 December 1865.

<sup>33</sup> BAMA, N 255/43, log entries, 24 and 25 December 1865.

<sup>34</sup> BAMA, *ibid.*, log entries 28 and 29 December 1865.

<sup>35</sup> BAMA, *ibid.*, 1 and 6 January 1866.

<sup>36</sup> BAMA, *ibid.*, log entries, 25 February–22 March 1866. The book is in N 255/34.

<sup>37</sup> BAMA, *ibid.*, log entries, 28 February, 8, 10, 14, 22 March, and 1 April 1866. See also, RM 1/2461, Batsch to OKM, 22 February and 18 March 1866.

<sup>38</sup> BAMA, N 255/43, log entry, 11 April 1866.

# International Journal of Naval History

Volume 1 Number 1

April 2002

<sup>39</sup> BAMA, RM 1/2461, Batsch to OKM, 9 April 1866.

<sup>40</sup> BAMA, *ibid.*, Batsch to OKM, 27 April 1866; N 255/43, log entry, 25 April 1866.

<sup>41</sup> BAMA, *ibid.*, log entries, 11–14 May 1866. For the examinations, see RM 1/143, Verordnung über die Ergänzung der Offizier-Corps der Königlichen Marine, 16 June 1864.

<sup>42</sup> BAMA, RM 1/2461, Jachmann to OKM, 19 May 1866.

<sup>43</sup> BAMA, N 255/43, log entries, 15, 18, 20, and 21 May 1866. For Diederichs' examination results, see N 255/1, Zeugniß der Reife zum Seecadett für den Matrosen 2te Klasse Ernst Otto von Diederichs, 23 June 1866.

<sup>44</sup> BAMA, N 255/43, log entry, 23 June 1866; Hildebrand, *Kriegsschiffe*, 2: 133–135, describes Gefion's role in the defense of Kiel.

<sup>45</sup> BAMA, N 255/43, log entries, 24 June–4 July 1866.

<sup>46</sup> BAMA, RM 1/2827, AKOs, 17 and 24 June 1866.

<sup>47</sup> Diederichs' personnel records were later updated to show that he received seventeen months service credit for sea duty for the thirty–four months of merchant marine experience from June 1862 to May 1865; see, BAMA, N 255/1, Stosch to station chief, 26 October 1874.

<sup>48</sup> BAMA, RM 1/203, Marineministerium, 4 September 1866; RM 1/205, Bestimmungen über die Organisation der Marineschule, 15 May 1866.

<sup>49</sup> BAMA, N 255/43, log entry, 30 October 1866.

<sup>50</sup> BAMA, RM 1/203, Adalbert to Navy Ministry, 18 October 1866; Liebe to OKM, 24 October 1866.

<sup>51</sup> BAMA, *ibid.*, Liebe to OKM, 8 and 9 December 1866.

<sup>52</sup> BAMA, RM 1/2827, AKO, 13 July 1867.

<sup>53</sup> BAMA, N 255/1, Zeugniß der Reife zum Offizier für den Seekadett Ernst Otto von Diederichs, 18 August 1867.

<sup>54</sup> BAMA, RM 1/2827, AKO, 27 August 1867.

A Global Forum for Naval Historical Scholarship

# International Journal of Naval History

Volume 1 Number 1

April 2002

<sup>55</sup> BAMA, RM 1/215, Promemoria zum Immediatvortrag, 1 March 1872; RM 31/43, Studien-Plan der Vorlesungen, 1872–1873.

<sup>56</sup> BAMA, N 255/1, Personalbogen.