


Sea History Vol. 6 1977

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NOTE: Captain Klebingat retired from the sea at age eighty a few years back. "I do not know," he said once talking with Karl Kortum, director of the San Francisco Maritime Museum, "when I first made up my mind to go into the Southsea trade. It may have been in the Anna on a voyage from Antofagasta to Newcastle, when we passed through the Austral Group and met Southsea schooners...." He went on to serve in the barkentine S.N. Castle out of San Francisco to the Marquesas, Tahiti and Samoa. In 1916-17 he served as mate in the Falls of Clyde, now preserved in Honolulu, Hawaii, by the Bernice P. Bishop Museum, who have published a remarkable memoir of his entitled Christmas at Sea. Here he tells what it was like in his first voyage in the Anna, from Dunkirk, France, to Brooklyn, New York, in the summer of 1906.—ED.

"All hands lay aft," said Gau, the chief mate of the four-masted bark Anna, formerly the Otterburn. "The port captain wants to speak to you."

The Anna had recently returned from Australia with a full cargo of wheat and was lying now in the port of Dunkirk, in France. The wheat had been discharged, a broken fore upper topsail yard had been repaired and a half cargo of chalk taken aboard. It came from a quarry in the form of chalk rock. Two thirds was stowed in the lower hold in a mass that reached from the floor of the hold to under the 'tween deck beams. The other third was in the 'tween deck, also a mass, in the middle of the ship, that reached to the beams of the deck above. On either side of this partial cargo of chalk there was an empty hold and an empty 'tween deck.

In the after hatch, the French long-shoremen had dumped about a hundred tons of quarried granite; some of the lumps may have weighed 100 or 150 pounds. We distributed this in the bilges abaft the mizzenmast and the bilge pump suction.

The cargo was well stowed, and that was to play its part in this voyage.

Some of the sails were bent, stores were on board, and we would have been

Looking forward from the Anna's poop deck. The cro'jik (crossjack) yard, from which the author fell to the deck, is in use as a cargo boom. ▶

It should have been a peaceful passage, after all it was *Summer—North Atlantic*

By Captain Fred K. Klebingat

ready for sea except that we were short of crew. A boardinghouse master in Antwerp had supplied the men and we were full-handed a few days ago. But some of these had deserted a day or so later. We were short six men.

We assembled aft, the older AB's in front and the ordinary seamen, of which I was one, somewhere behind and half out of sight. Capt. Kuhlmann, the port captain, a man about six feet tall, be-whiskered and stout, was there to receive us. Beside him was Capt. Koester, the ship's commander, of the same build and whiskery face. In back of them was Mr. Gau, the *steuermann*, as we called him, a man about five-foot-six with a straggling moustache but of husky build.

It was a motley crew that stood before them. There were a few Germans but most of them were men of all nations. Some of them had come on board with just what they stood up in; overalls, a shirt, a coat; one wore carpet slippers.

"Are these *all* your men?" said Kuhlmann to our captain, pointing a finger from man to man as if to count them. Capt. Koester answered in the affirmative.

"Men," said the port captain, collecting himself, "you know why I have asked you to lay aft." His gaze went from man to man as if mentally to assess each man's worth and capabilities.

(Could this little group handle this big ship?) "Men," he said finally, "your Capt. Koester just has told me that you are the finest crew he ever shipped on board here. I agree with him. No one has to tell me that each of you knows his stuff." The crew straightened a little and looked proud.

"Men," said Capt. Kuhlmann, resuming, "you know why I wanted to speak to you. It is on account of those men that we are short." He hesitated, and then said, "Capt. Koester here has tried his best to replace those men, but without result."

There was a pause. Some of the men now nudged George, a German, who was in front of the crowd and was the most talkative man in the fo'c's'le. They whispered and urged him to make a reply.

"I hope you get those men," said George to Capt. Kuhlmann finally. "This is a heavy ship.* Those men that deserted thought so, too...."

"There is no time to get more men,"

*The *Otterburn* (now the *Anna*) was like the *Springburn*, *Celticburn* and other four-masted barks built for the Scotch shipowner Shankland in the '90s in that she did not cross royals. She only had double topgallant yards. But there was enough canvas in those upper 'gans'ls to make any number of royals. The topgallant yards were tremendously long and she was lofty at the same time—you knew that when you were up there in port looking around at the other ships.

said Capt. Kuhlmann, "but Capt. Koester says he would not mind to go to sea short-handed with men like you. He is sure that you can handle the vessel. I may point out too that it is summer on the North Atlantic."

"We appreciate your worth," Kuhlmann brought his harangue to a climax. "When the *Anna* comes to New York, Captain Koester will divide the wages of those men we're short among you."

That did the trick.

"Three cheers for Capt. Kuhlmann," said George. "Hip-hip-hooray"..."

"And by the way," said Kuhlmann to Capt. Koester, "please tell your steward to give these men a couple of bottles of rum to celebrate this occasion."

The bottles duly came forth and the crew trooped forward. We finished bending sails that day, took in the last of the stores, and topped off the fresh water tanks. Next morning the French tug *Atlas* took a line from our fo'c's'lehead, and a smaller tug made fast on the quarter. We let go our lines and, as they were dry, stowed these hawsers below. Slowly we passed through the different basins heading for sea. The docks were full of sailing ships. It would be a long time before we again would see the beauties of the A. D. Bordes Company assembled again—the four-masted ship *Tarapaca*, the four-masted bark *Atlantic*, the *Loire* and the *Wulfram Puget* of the same rig. The *Anna* passed out between the two jetties that marked the harbor entrance. We set the sails, and in another half hour the tug let go.

The wind in the Straits of Dover came from the west and southwest, moderate, but it soon turned into fog. How long we beat in the narrows between Calais and the English shore I do not know. We were in the fog for at least ten days. It was only a matter of luck that we escaped collision in these narrows, the main highway of the sea, where ships of all nations funnelled through into the North Sea.

Whistles and the sound of foghorns were constantly heard on all sides. With apprehension, the captain or the mate listened to the bass tone of some ocean liner as it approached, and showed his relief when the sound receded in the distance. Another horn would be heard somewhere ahead of us. From the poop, "Keep that fog horn going there on the fo'c's'lehead!"

San Francisco Maritime Museum



SUMMER-NORTH ATLANTIC

It was pitiful to hear that instrument, the "Norwegian piano" as we called it. We knew that it could not be heard at any very great distance. At times we might hear the three blasts of another sailing ship using a similar foghorn that told us that nearby was a windjammer returning to her port. Then it ran through our thoughts that it could be years before we in this ship, the *Anna*, would be homeward bound.

As we groped our way through that gray and sightless realm, our chief preoccupation, apart from tacking ship—we went about every couple of hours or so—was heaving the lead. That put us in touch with *something*. It was a reassuring contact with the bottom of the sea.

Heaving the lead is no easy task on a windjammer. The tub with the leadline, 120 fathoms, is carried on deck along with the lead, thirty-five pounds. Next we turn to the ship herself.

"Let go the cro'jick tack and sheet...cro'jick clew garnets."

The men haul the clews of the sail up.

"Weather cro'jick braces!"

The mate lets go the lee cro'jick brace, the mizzen lower topsail, upper topsail, and 'gallant braces as well. The men to windward hauling the braces. It is a hard pull at first, but as the sail starts to pass through the wind, the work becomes more easy.

The sails are now aback on the mizzen. "Belay cro'jick braces!"

"Keep her close..." the captain gives the order to the man at the wheel.

A seaman carried the lead to the fo'c's'le head; others pass the leadline along the weather side of the ship, outboard of everything, and hitch it to the lead.

A man is stationed at each mast in the weather rigging—he has a few bights of the line in his hand.

The ship loses way. She is now just drifting ahead.

"Drop the lead!"

The man on the fo'c's'le head lets go. As the lead sinks towards the bottom, the men stationed at each mast let go in turn, warning the next mast to be ready with the cry, "Watch her, watch!"

The plunging line comes past the mizzen rigging. "Watch her, watch!" The man lets go his coil.

In a moment it will be perpendicular under the chief mate, stationed at the last mast, known as the jigger.

The mate pays out the line rapidly until it touches bottom. He reads the mark on the line.

"Take in the line..."

The crew drops the line into a small

lead block made for this purpose, and then race along the deck, heaving it in. The lead breaks water.

"Easy now!"

The mate studies the arming of the lead as it rises to the rail—the arming is tallow, pressed into a hole in the bottom. It shows whether the lead has touched sea bottom, and what kind of a bottom—sand, mud, gravel or shell.

"Lee, cro'jick braces!"

The yards are swung; the sails fill.

"Set the cro'jick...let go the lee cro'jick garnet...cro'jick sheet!"

The watch hauls in the sheet.

"Let go the weather cro'jick garnet...cro'jick tack, now..."

The sail fills, and the ship continues to gather way. The mate enters the fact that the lead was dropped and at what time, in the logbook. Also the depth of water and what kind of bottom. This is compared with the dead reckoning position on the chart, and if the depths and bottom match with the depths on the chart, then it is reasonably certain that the dead reckoning position is correct.

It is far more difficult for a ship coming up the English Channel, racing before a gale. Say the wind is southwest and the visibility poor. They are uncertain of the fix, but they are sure that they are on soundings. The ship is under a press of sail...she has too much canvas on her. They know that they should drop the lead. But in order to do so, they will have to first shorten sail and then heave to...the ship's speed has to be reduced before taking a sounding.

That means shortening down to lower topsails, in all likelihood. And it may be dangerous to heave to; the Old Man has been avoiding it. She will take heavy seas on board, sweeping the decks, as she comes up to the wind before losing speed. It is an uneasy position for the ship's commander.

Let's say he carries on and counts on

luck. The weather stays thick.

Suddenly, "Breakers ahead!"

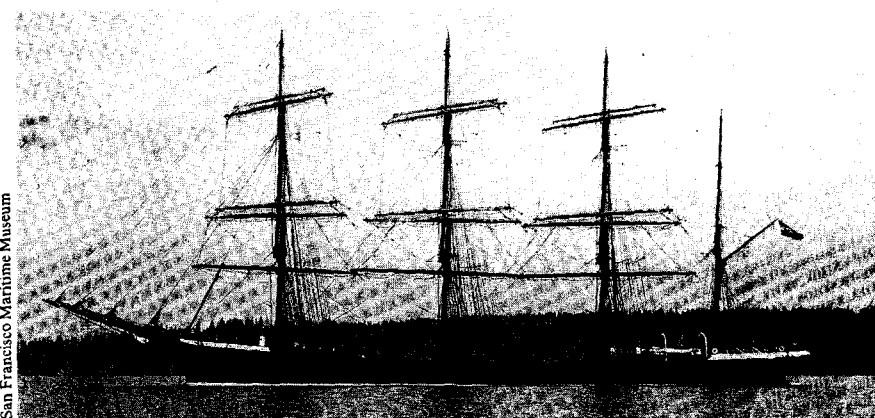
By now it may be too late to save the ship.

It was almost two weeks before we had worked our way out into the Atlantic. We never saw land. By this time the after guard and we ordinary seamen as well (novices or greenhorns at sea though we were) had found out that those who had signed on the *Anna* as able seamen were not so able. Some could have been called seagoing imposters.

There was George, the noisiest one of the gang in the port fo'c's'le. Judging by his looks when he first came aboard, there could be no better sailor than George. Hé was of medium height, well-built, and dressed in a rigger's overalls held mid-ships with a belt and sheath knife. He had homemade canvas shoes on his feet and on his head was a tam o'shanter. No one could look more like a sailor than George. But what a fraud and coward he turned out to be! A few years in Kaiser Bill's Navy, so we heard, was the only experience at sea that George ever had. He tried to lord it over us ordinary seamen but did not get very far with that.

There was a stray cat on the ship, a cat of quite good size that had shanghaied itself aboard at Dunkirk somehow. The cat stayed wild. No doubt it had plenty to eat as there was quite a multitude of rats on every grain ship—grain was the *Anna's* previous cargo. At night the cat would scoot along the fo'c's'lehead, very likely on the lookout for water. This ghostly creature darting about in the night nearly scared George to death. He talked about the ship being haunted. An unusual noise would scare him, such as a piece of gear that was not properly secured and which thumped about in the forepeak as the ship rolled.

The four-masted bark Anna, ex-Otterburn.



San Francisco Maritime Museum

"Dear God, if this is a hurricane I hope you never let me see another one."

Three weeks after we left Dunkirk the wind finally turned fair. It increased in force and with a clear sky the ship was making course for New York. Our watch left the deck at midnight with all sails set. *Anna* was going at least 12 knots. At 2:00 AM there was the call, "All hands on deck!"

It didn't take us long to jump into our clothes and get out of the fo'c's'le.

We found a moonlight night, a full moon, with scattered clouds driving past its face. The wind had increased to a gale.

"Take in the upper 'gans'ls!" was the order.

We had trouble getting in these sails. Something was up—a wind this strong so suddenly upon us.

"Clew up the cro'jik and the main-sail!" was the next order. There were few hands to do this as some men were still aloft trying to furl the 'gans'ls.

"Take in the flying jib and the outer jib!" came next. Then, "Take in the lower 'gans'ls."

The wind continued to increase and the sky became overcast. The moon disappeared. The sea grew in size. The wind was from the starboard quarter, and the ship was travelling at great speed. Frequent flashes of lightning lit up the eerie scene. The wind was now abeam and while I worked, a five-masted schooner appeared like an apparition in a lightning flash and then was gone. She was right on top of us. I noticed the men on deck working in a hurry to take in sail. It was a miracle that we escaped collision.

Although we had a few men still aloft trying to furl the 'gans'ls, this didn't account for the feeling that some of our hands were missing. There was a scarcity of men to do the work...could that blowhard George and some of his sulky followers be hiding? Scared to death? We were all frightened; the ship was plainly in the grip of a malevolence whose power was increasing minute by minute. What would happen next? It settled one's nerves a bit to have work to do. I clung to the mizzen upper topsail yard, working. Near me on the spar, trying to save the topsail, was the mate, Gau, and Capt. Koester.

Daylight appeared slowly and lit up this turmoil—an angry sea, the wind

shrieking through the rigging, the squalls and clouds scudding overhead.

The *Anna* had only a half cargo in her, so she took little water aboard, but she rolled and pitched violently. We had managed to furl the sails, but it was exhausting work. I came down the main rigging and jumped from the rail to the deck. The mate came up to me and said, cupping his hands close to my ear, "Go down in the cabin, Fred, and secure whatever has gone adrift."

"I hurried aft into the cabin by the after companionway and found some barrels out of the storeroom rolling across the deck. I secured these.

On a bracket secured to the after bulkhead of the saloon was the mercurial barometer, a long, upright shaft of rosewood. It was swinging wildly in its gimbals.

Capt. Koester, in streaming oilskins and southwester, appeared suddenly in the cabin. He crossed to the barometer, studied for a moment, and left for deck again with a worried look on his face.

On the cabin table, propped up, I saw a volume—*Findlay's North Atlantic Directory*—and I glanced at it. The book was open to the chapter: "Hurricane." Now I knew what we were in for.

About 8:00 AM, the sky all at once cleared and the sun shone and the wind ceased. The ship was laboring violently. A wall of water came from right ahead and half buried the jibboom. The men working on the boom, furling the sails, jumped on a stay to save themselves. "Wear ship!"

But there was little wind and the vessel was nearly unmanageable.

We labored away at the braces and had got the yards square—all of a sudden the wind came from the opposite direction. It hit the sails with a force no canvas could stand. The chain sheet of the lower topsail broke and dropped amongst us.

"Stand out from under!"

My watch partner and I got onto the poop and lashed ourselves to the pinrail. A human being could not stand against the wind. The spume that filled the air and drove over the ship was more salt water than rain.

Now our best canvas, the foresail and the three lower topsails, blew away.

The sound they made as they went was like the big guns in a sea battle. The tearing away of the rags and the remnants that followed had the sound of a mass of machine guns firing. (Even when I left the *Anna* twenty months later, hemp fiber pounded together like papier mache could be found in the eyes of the rigging.)

The sails that we had made fast followed after these sails that had been set. The wind would worry a corner loose and then get a further grip and finally the gasket loosened and off went the sail. In a few minutes the yard was bare.

The main yard took charge. The topping lifts carried away and one end of the ninety-foot spar rose high in the air, the other end struck the rail a might blow. As the ship rolled, the opposite yardarm would swing down to the rail and the other end would rise to the top-sail yard. A wild disorder had taken charge of our orderly ship that was fearful to see. We could secure nothing as the force of the wind prevented us from moving. I prayed as I stood there lashed fast to the pin rail on the poop. I said, "Dear God, if this is a hurricane I hope you never let me see another one."

About noon, the wind tapered off and died out entirely. A tremendous sea, like a boiling cauldron, was now on every side. The ship rolled and pitched. In the calm we secured the main yard. The ship rolled as I have never seen a ship roll before or since. We thanked the Lord that the cargo below was stowed so well that it did not take charge and put us on our beam ends.

"I was the last one out on the yard and we were hurrying down because there were pancakes for breakfast. I jumped for the rigging and missed... They picked me up for dead and put me on a hatch cover..."

We had labored, we had done our utmost, and we lay down for an hour or so now, exhausted.

Our masts stood. We rose and set to work to reeve off new gear.... But there is an end to everything—even a West Indian hurricane. There is an end if your ship survives....

Only two sails were left of those that were bent. The courses and topsails and topgallants that we had painstakingly furling had been clawed off the steel yards by the hurricane. The two that remained were staysails that had been lowered throughout the gale. We broke out spare sails now and sent them aloft. Less than twenty-four hours later, everything was set and the *Anna* laid course for New York.

About a week later, I fell from the

SUMMER-NORTH ATLANTIC

cro'jik yard and miraculously was not much hurt. I fell all the way to deck from close to the slings on the starboard side. I was the last one out on the yard and we were hurrying down because there were pancakes for breakfast. I jumped for the rigging and missed.

I landed on my feet; I struck my hip on the fiferail. They picked me up for dead and put me on a hatch cover; I was unconscious. They carried me in to the sail locker, a spare cabin under the poop. At the back of the room were a couple of bunks. These were filled with onions. These were hastily emptied out of one of the bunks. When I came to, a couple of hours later, it was onions that I smelled—my first sensation of life.

Captain Koester looked after me and there were no bones broken. I was back at work in a week.

Ten days later I was sitting in the fo'c's'le door eating a plate of beans, breakfast, and here comes the second mate plummeting down. Off the foreyard.

He fell from a crane line that leads from the after part of the top to the t'gallant backstay. As I remember, some men were swift in the rigging—taking the slack out of the lower shrouds. (This gear can be seen abaft the mizzen top in the deck photograph of *Anna*.) The crane line was rotten and it gave way. I saw the second mate drop; luckily he landed on one of the boats—went right through the wooden cover. It broke his fall, but he broke his jaw. The second mate was paid off when we reached port.

Another hurricane approached and we reduced sail down to goosewing lower topsail. But the storm changed track and was only a false alarm.

The cook on the *Anna* was named Pagel; he had sailed in the *Rickmers*

Capt. Klebingat greeted his old ship, the Falls of Clyde, at Honolulu when she arrived there in 1963 to be reregged as a museum ship.



San Francisco Maritime Museum

“The captain drew some money next day.... It was divided evenly among all the men, and amounted to \$3.17.”

ships and used to brag about how they carried sail. These were Bremen vessels, too, and they had a reputation for fine upkeep, good gear, and skippers who cracked on. One of them, the *Peter Rickmers*, was, in the opinion of many, the most beautiful steel sailing ship ever set afloat. She was launched at Port Glasgow by the firm of Russell & Co., whose *Falls of Clyde* still survives as a museum ship in Honolulu. The *Peter Rickmers* was of 2,989 gross tons, the *Clyde* is smaller, 1,807 tons.* With her green hull, white superstructure, and four soaring masts, each crossing seven yards (she had double topgallants, royals and skysails), the *Peter Rickmers* was always spoken of admiringly by seafaring men.

But to return to Pagel, our grub spoiler: We had reduced sail to lower topsails; the *Anna* had encountered one more gale toward voyage end. The watch trooped past the galley door; all of a sudden the upper part (it was in two halves) opens a little and Pagel peers out:

“Hello, what is this? Packing in the upper topsails? My God, you will never reach New York that way. Why, in the *Peter Rickmers* we would be carrying upper t'gallants in all four tops...” Bang! The iron door slams shut.

The champion of the *Rickmers* line left us in New South Wales. He had fed us badly, and nobody shed a tear.**

“And where was George? I heard the captain ask one afternoon. The Old Man was pacing up and down the deck. “I don't recall that I ever saw him on the night of the hurricane.”

The captain was addressing the mate.

*I joined the *Falls of Clyde* as chief mate ten years after the voyage described.

**The *Rickmers* ships loaded coal in Wales, or case oil at New York, or Point Breeze, Philadelphia, for the Orient or Australia. After discharge of their cargo, they would sail to Bangkok or Rangoon to load a cargo of rice for the mills that the firm owned in Germany.

In looks, upkeep, and in their reputation for fast passages, the *Rickmers* vessels were the equals of the Laeisz ships of Hamburg, the famous Flying P Line engaged in the nitrate trade around the Horn. I have met many men who sailed for *Rickmers* and they were proud of the fact, but none were quite as boastful as our cook.

“And there were others missing, *steuer-mann*.”

There had been a sullenness in the fo'c's'le. Not on the part of those who had grappled with the hurricane on the yards of the *Anna*, but on the part of those who hadn't. It was the young men, the boys, the quiet men who had been up there. George and his followers, the talkers, the bluffers, had not. They had malingered and put the heavy burden of a heavy ship on the rest of us. The younger element had a new confidence. The hurricane had “separated the men from the boys,” in the modern expression—and it was the men who were found wanting. Or at least some of them.

I was interested to hear this discussed at the other end of the ship.

“The man at the wheel was there at least six hours,” said Capt. Koester to the mate. “He should have been relieved in that time.”

“I tried to locate them, but there wasn't time to really search the ship,” said Gau.

“Hoboes,” said Capt. Koester. “Cowards and hoboes!”

On the 45th day, we sighted the pilot boat outside New York. A tug came out and got hold of us. There was a short squabble about the price. We towed to Brooklyn and made fast at 5th Avenue Pier. We unbent the sails that day and the stevedores came on board and rigged up the cargo gear to discharge the cargo of chalk.

The captain drew some money next day and all hands laid aft to get the extra share that Capt. Kuhlmann promised. It was divided evenly among all the men, and amounted to \$3.17. This would go a long way in this man's country, if one was a little careful. A schooner of beer cost only 5¢ with all the free lunch you could eat.

“And you are the watchman, Paul,” said the captain to one of the AB's. “Well, if anybody in the crew wants to beat it, don't stop him. If anything, give them a hand.”

“Turn to,” the mate said next morning, but there were only six or seven left.

“Most of the men have deserted,” said the mate to the captain.

“That's fine,” Captain Koester replied, “I'm glad I have seen the last of George and the others like him. They aren't the best shipmates for *summer on the North Atlantic*.”

The irony in his words wasn't all for the shirkers; he saved some of it for that blithe phrase of the port captain's long ago in Dunkirk. †