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# S/S Gerda Tofts forlis

23. december 1954

*af matros Bjarne Skov Poulsen*



S/S Gerda Toft  
Registration letters OYHA

## **The loss of S/S Gerda Toft on 23.12.1954**

The crew of 30 people and one passenger perished.

Here is the story about a tragic loss but also about heroism and good seamanship.

While writing I am especially thinking about the wives of the crew, several of them had journeyed to Brunsbützel at the western end of the Kiel Canal, to go on board Gerda Toft to celebrate Christmas with their husbands. Remember at that time you were only able to contact ships by telegraph. The women were standing there waiting and waiting with presents and goodies from their homes in Denmark. Late in the afternoon on 23.12.1954 Danish Radio announced that S/S Gerda Toft had problems on the North Sea, but the Danish women waiting for Gerda Toft in Brunsbützel did not hear this. I do not know how long the women waited and when they realised Gerda Toft was not coming, but it is quite sure that the journey home was a very long one.

You also have to remember that they did not have the modern navigation instruments we know today. Radar was invented in 1954 but Gerda Toft did not have it.

It was not common for ordinary ships to have radar.

They had to manage with the good seamanship they had. It was not always enough, but they were clever seaman. How can I talk about this, I was not there. Yes, it is a fact they succeeded in getting a lifeboat into the water; getting it off its blocks and getting 15-20 men into it. This, from a ship with a heavy list in a hurricane so violent that other ships in the area trying to render Gerda Toft assistance were only able to make good a speed of 1 to 2 knots. Old sailors know what it means, “what do you say you lads, the wimps do not know which hatch beam, batten, wedges, have to be driven in and how to be ready to go to sea with 3 tarpaulins to fold correctly, so the sea is unable to catch them and tear them off and they are lost and so is the ship. It is not often you get a chance to redo it.”



That is how a batten hatch looks, it is important that the corners are folded correctly and the wedges are fitted right. (from Snesejleren The snow sailor Willy Brorson).

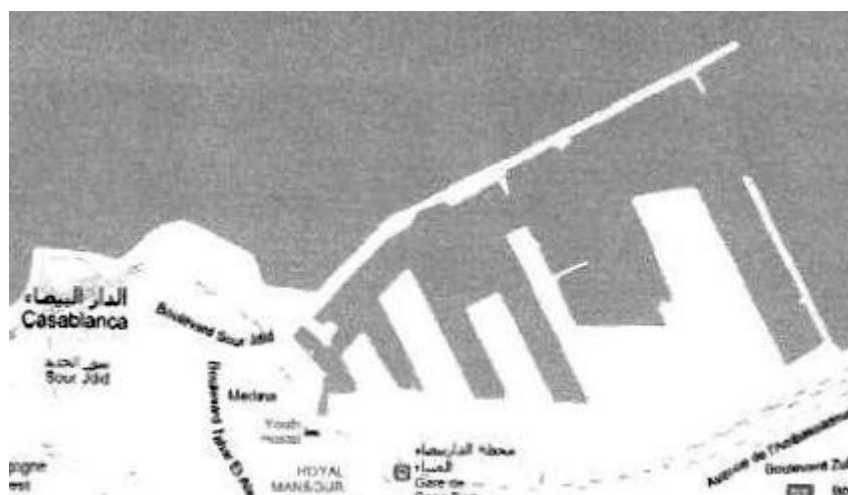
Those of us who have tried to hove to in the North Sea know what we are talking about. Those "experiences" are not for wimps. With all the modern gear we have to day, could it happen again. Yes. Nature knows no mercy, but you have to do your work well and properly as in all other jobs and when you have done that you cannot do any more. Then it is up to God.

Fully loaded with phosphate S/S Gerda Toft ran into a hurricane in the south end of the North Sea, (more explicit the German Bight namely 45 sea miles from the island of Helgoland,) where they could shelter. However, they did not reach it and their fate was sealed. Despite the great efforts from the crew of the British ship M/S Iberian Coast and with great danger to themselves none of Gerda Tofts large crew of 31 were saved all were lost.

## Preface.

I am telling the truth when I tell you, I have been around most of the world the last 2 to 3 years to try to find information about S/S Gerda Toft's loss. I have found several families and people who know something about the catastrophe and they have been a great help and I would like to thank them.

It would not have been possible to write such an exact account of the loss of Gerda Toft without you. I have also studied meters and meters of the whole country's newspaper columns from 1954 to 1955 on micro film, visited several national archives and visited the Memorials which the shipping company Jutlandia placed at Haurvig Church just south of Hvide Sande. There is very little information around Gerda Toft's last journey. I only know that Gerda Toft sailed from Casablanca on 13 December 1954 fully loaded with 4300 tons of phosphate and with course towards Kiel Canal to Stettin in Poland for unloading. That they had been in Zeebrugge on 20.12.1954, where captain Erik Morten Rasmussen sent a report to the shipping company that they had got an extra cook (Werner Sandahl from Randers) and the crew consisted of 30 men and a consular passenger (Leif Beck Olsen) who came onboard in Casablanca.



The harbour in Casablanca, Marocco. (From Google).



Gera Toff's last journey from Casablanca towards Kiel Canal (From Google).

The call at this Belgian harbour could have been due to bad weather as they had used more coal and therefore had to bunker for the further sailing.

On reading the statistics for accident at sea from 1954 at the Maritime Library all the fundamental facts which we believed to be true were corroborated.

I went searching for the original documents from the Maritime Inquiry which had been held at the Maritime and Commercial Court on 20 January 1955 in Copenhagen. The documents from The Maritime and Commercial Court from that period had been sent to the National archive for Zealand. Here I had the disappointing message that only

the record book of the court is available. All documents from 1951 to 1959, which the records refer to, have unfortunately not been recorded properly by mistake.

There is one thing which made me happy but also a little sad. The ship which came to the assistance of the Gerda Toft was the Iberian Coast and its Captain was Daniel Collin. I was put in touch with his daughter, Dorothy Tuck, who informed me that her father had died only a few years earlier, at the age of 91. He had never forgotten the Gerda Toft, the loss and the crew from the lifeboats of the Gerda Toft which had come alongside his ship. He said it had touched him much more than his experiences as a sailor during the 2nd world war. So near and still so far away.

In 1955 Captain Daniel Collins and his crew from M/S Iberian Coast were commended by the then Minister of Commerce, Industry and Shipping, Candidatus polit. Lis Groes, for trying to save the Danish sailors and for their fine seamanship. What they did late in the afternoon on that fatal 23 December 1954 was life-threatening.

We can thank Inger Batchelor from the Danish Church Newcastle for finding Daniel Collin's daughter. With the help of the English paper The Shields Gazette which had written about the loss.

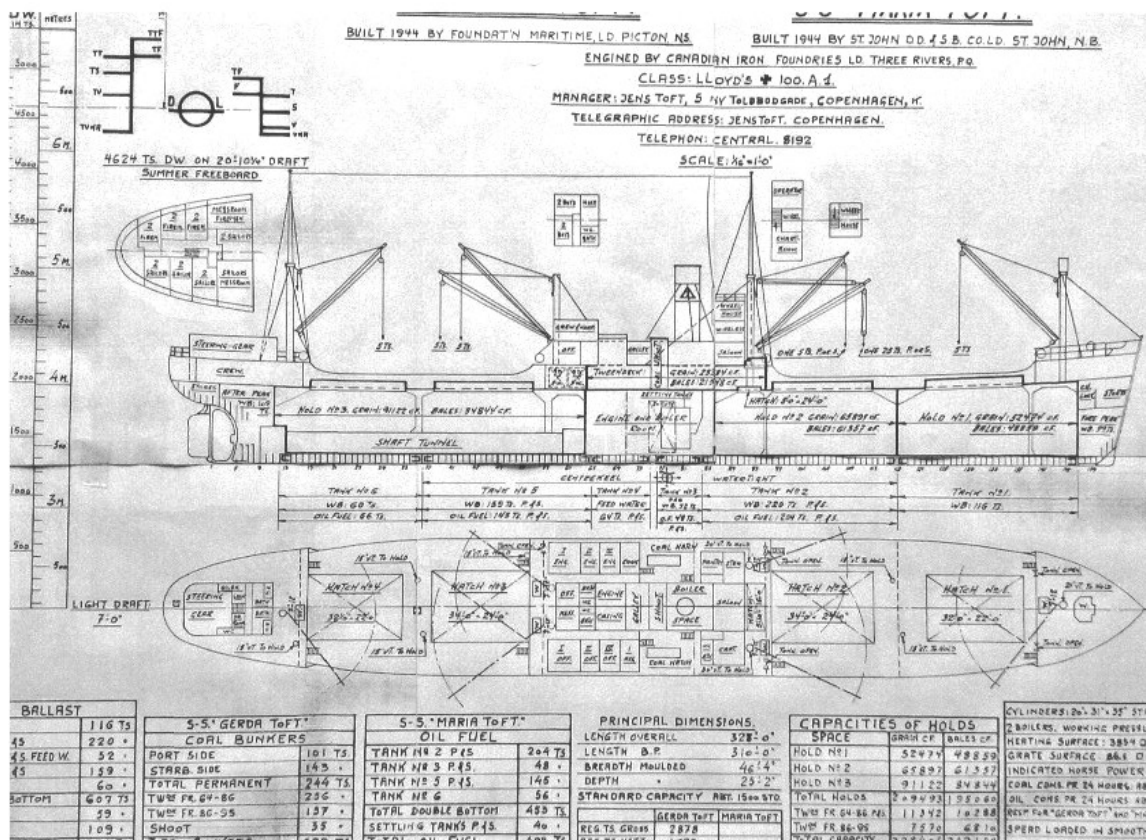
### **The Steamship Company Jens Toft A/S. Jutlandia.**

The steamship Company Jutlandia was founded in the days after World War 1 by coffee merchant Jens Toft, who wished to have part of the large profits in shipping in the wake of war. It was not so easy. In fact the business made a loss in the early years and Jens Toft had to be financially supported by his other businesses. During the years it became a row of steamships that sailed in European tramp trade. During World War 2 Jutlandia lost most of its fleet. One of its ships was the third. Danish ship which was lost in 1939. Another Jutlandia vessel ran into a mine near the British coast a few weeks before the liberation. Jutlandia's most famous ship was without doubt the last in the fleet

Inge Toft. When she was built in 1959 she sailed under an American flag with a Jewish background and sailed for an Israeli company with goods from Israel to Japan. The journey went through the Suez Canal but it did not go to plan. The ship was detained in Port Said and there were more than 230 days waiting for the political situation to be clarified. The ship sailed towards Japan via Panama Canal in February 1960. Jutlandia sold Inge Toft in 1964 and from then on it became an investment company until 2004.<sup>1</sup>



picture- M/S Inge Toft ( Source .The Maritime Museum in Kronborg).



Drawing and measurements for Gerda and Maria Toft (Privately owned)



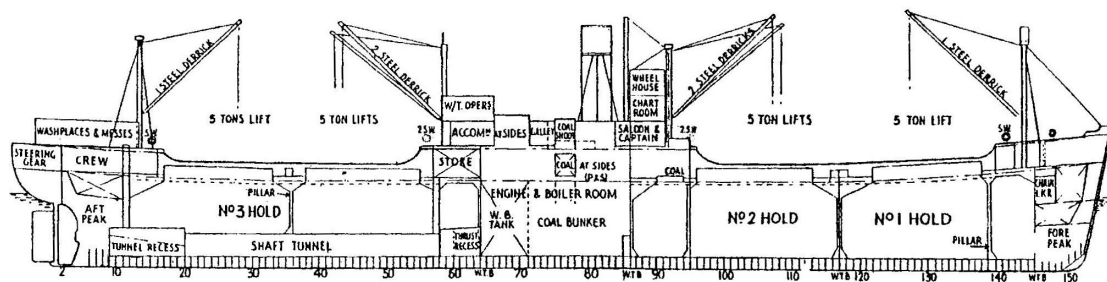
## S/S Gerda Toft

Gerda Toft was built by Foundation Maritime Ltd., Pictou Nova Scotia, Canada, as building nr. 11 and was delivered 24. April 1944 to the Canadian Company, Park ss Co. Montreal (Montreal Shipping Co. Montreal) and was named Bresford Park.

In 1947 she was renamed Federal Ambassador by the same shipping company.

On 12 July 1948 it was announced that Steamship Company Jutlandia A/S (O. Toft), Copenhagen, had bought the ship from the Canadians. Then she was renamed Gerda Toft, and got the registration letters OYHA under Danish flag.

The ship was classed Lloyd's 100 A 1



Scandinavian-type

drawing Scandinavian-type  
picture Drawing of Gerda Toft. (Privately owned).



Foundation Maritime Ltd., Pictou, Nova Scotia, Canada, (From Google}.



The yard seen from Acadia St

(Source Albert H. Elliot, Pictou ,Nova Scotia, Canada. (Source Google)



Memorial

(Source Albert H. Elliot, Pictou ,Nova Scotia, Canada. (Source Google)



.lloyd's logo.

Gerda Toft was a so called Park - type ship and the first ship financed under the Marshall Plan.

The ship has 1 deck. Cruiser Stern. Gy.C. 2907 N

GRT.1645 NRT. 4370+767+244 TDW.

Registration measurement:

Length: 315,5 feet                      96,25 meters

Width: 46,5                                14,22 “““

Depth: 21,9                                6,86 “ “

Loading: + fuel                          4624 ton

Gerda Toft had 4 hatches with two 3 ton booms for each hatch.

Main engine: 1 T 3 cyl. 20", 31" & 55" – 1285 HP. Built by Canada Iron Foundations, Three Rivers, P.Q.Canada. Gerda Toft was a coal fired steamship. S/S stands for Steam Ship.

Gerda Toft burned about 20-24 tons of coal every 24 hours, in bad weather she used more.



Gerda Toft's bridge.

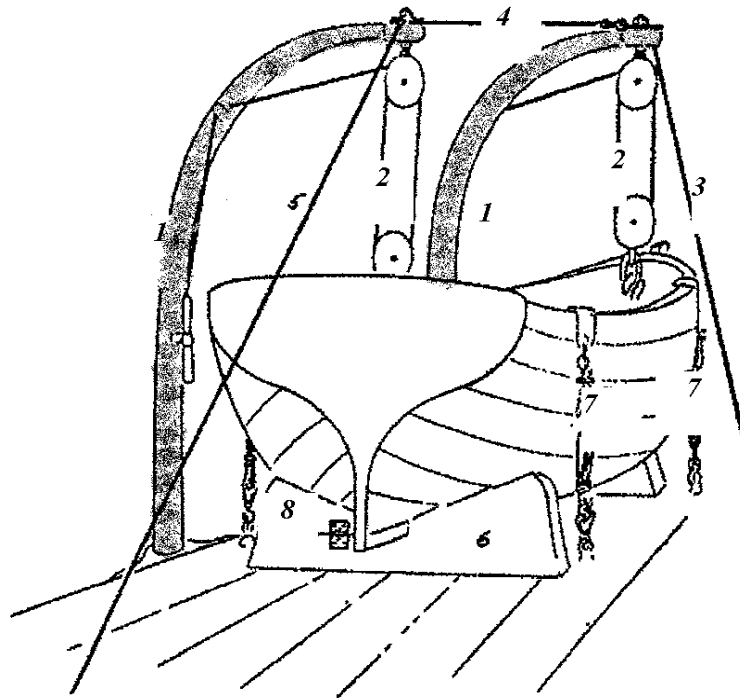
(Photo from the film, source the Danish Film Institute)

### **Safety Gear.**

Gerda Toft had 2 large lifeboats estimated to carry 46 persons, mid ships on each side.

1 smaller lifeboat with a motor at starboard side astern.(fitted later by Elsinor Shipping Yard). These lifeboats sat in scantling and were hung in swing davits, with in and out halers and were manually lowered.

In addition a life raft was later installed by Elsinor Shipyard. A number of cork life vests and life buoys, distress rockets, flares and maroons were at hand.



Drawing Lowering of life boats  
(Source, Jørgen Aagaard, Martec Frederikshavn).

Onboard Gerda Toft lowering of lifeboats were carried out as follows:

Figure ;

1. Davit
- 2 Boat Tackles
- 3 Fore Runner
4. Middle Stay
- 5 Aft Runner
- 6 Boat Scantling
- 7 Boat Lashing
- 8 Hinged Scantling

Lifeboats sit in scantlings (figure 6 and 8) normally fitted with hinges that allow these to be laid down to avoid having to hoist the boat over the scantlings while lowering or hoisting the boat. Lowering the boat entails thus only laying down the scantlings, taunting the tackles and pushing the boat clear. Even if the boats sits in their adapted scantlings with tackles taut and secured, it has to be further furnished with lashings fig. 7 as otherwise in heavy weather

they risk being thrown off their position, the lashings are fastened to ring bolts in the deck at the end of each scantling by lanyards, Lanyards are each furnished with slip hooks to allow fast removal. The boats are protected against the sun drying them out causing cracks and leakages by awnings or wooden covers. The davits (fig.1.) which are able to swing 360 degrees have between them a middle stay fig.( 4.) and have at each end a fore or an aft runner (fig.3. and 5.) by which the davits can be positioned and held as required.

If the boat is to be lowered the awning or the covers as well as the lashings are removed. The tackles are tautened and the scantlings are laid down. Now, by working the aft and the fore runners the boat is swung clear of the ship. The runners are secured and a painter fastened from the front end of the boat leading to the forward of the ship to control the boat once it is in the water. The life boat is now ready to be lowered



You see Stb. Gerda Toft, with lifeboats hung in the mentioned davits.  
(Photo from the film. Source the Danish Film Institute).

Then two or three men get into the boat and it is lowered into the water. The two men then have to hook the blocks when the boat is down and this has to happen at the same time otherwise the boat is hanging in a boat tackle and is smashed against the side of the boat. When the blocks have been hooked you have to be careful not to be hit by wild swinging blocks, if you are hit in the head it is generally serious. How do the rest of the crew get into the boats? By a rope or a ladder and you crawl down and try and come onboard a jumping and dancing boat with the waves washing in over you. Some just jump in the sea and try to get onboard the lifeboat this way. When everyone is onboard you row away. Everything is done manually and it is not for wimps.

The crew on Gerda Toft got 15 to 20 men onboard in one of its three lifeboats in a hurricane with huge waves, they showed fantastic seamanship. If there was anyone, who fought for their lives, it was them. Unfortunately it did not help them, but it was very close.



Drawing of S/S Gerda Toft (Source Master Huggo Lorentzen)

### **Arriving in a Danish port for the first time.**

Gerda Toft arrived in Copenhagen on Friday 29 October 1948 about 18.30 hours with a load of coal from Immingham. Gerda Toft was commanded by Captain C.M. Tversted. At that time Gerda Toft had a crew of 26 men, who flew from Copenhagen to Alexandria in Egypt on 22 June, where the shipping company Jutlandia took over the ship. Gerda Toft arrived in Copenhagen and was filmed by Danish Cultural film.

The film is a short black and white talking film, and is of an amazing good quality.



S/S Gera Toft unloading coal in the harbour in Copenhagen. The photo is from Oct./Nov. 1948 (Photo from the film. Source, The Danish Film Institut)

### **Story from one of S/S Gerda Toft's journeys in the winter 1952/1953.**

The captain Frits Pedersen tells the following story in an article in the Danish paper Bornholms Tidende on 19 April 1986.

The ship was hove-to for a south western storm on the North Atlantic about 50 Nautical miles south of the Faeroe Islands, when number two hatch was knocked in.

It was the winter 1952/1953 and Gera Toft was on her way to Poland from Reykjavik with a load of coal. The ship was sailing in time-charter between Poland and Reykjavik, from there in ballast to Murmansk, where they loaded fertilizer for Poland.

It was rough sailing in winter days.

My cabin was directly under the bridge with portholes at the front edge towards the fore deck. I was lying fully dressed on the settee without sleeping, all the time following the ship's rhythmic movements, down towards the trough and then slowly up again

towards the crest of the wave. I was lying there with a bad conscience and annoyed that we did not alter course more southerly as we would have gone south of the Faroe banks as the waves on the shallower water over the banks crested quite violently in bad weather.

There was no comfort from the radio, the weather forecasts were gloomy, several ships were in difficulties in other places on the North Atlantic, there was talk about flood in Holland and Scotland. Suddenly I felt the ship jumping a bar in her movements, it did not follow with up, as it should. I looked through the porthole ahead and I saw a vertical wall of water on its way in over the bows. The front top lanterns sent their light into the grey wall so I could see it mirrored there and you could see the white surf around the top of the foremast. A moment later and the ship was buried in the sea. It was quiet for a moment and I thought that was how it must be to be onboard a submerged u boat.

Slowly the ship came up again and I had reached the bridge, where the mate, helmsman and look-out man were on duty. The automatic telegraphy was on slow it was turned to stop. Suddenly the ship felt so heavy that it was staying on top of the wave without moving from the course for about ten fifteen minutes at a time and when it began to fall it could be brought up again against the wave by driving the machine for a few minutes.

The bridge and the wheel house were razed to the ground but the mast light over the foredeck were still burning so the foredeck was lit up and I saw that number 2 hatch was broken in. I had the feeling that yet another wave like that over the ship and the ship would not raise again. The cable drums on the banks had been torn out of the rear deck and thrown down two- hatch, where they had torn the hatch awnings and the sea could get hold of it and tear the awnings even more and push the hatch planks.



The derrick braces where both number two derricks were fastened were torn out of the deck and both the heavy derricks were swinging from board to board following the ships movement and with the ladders still fastened to the end of the boom.



(Photo from the film. Source the Danish Filminstitut).

I had a short consultation with the mates and we agreed how the situation should be handled. A suggestion to hove to with the stern against the sea to give shelter for the foredeck was abandoned. All the deck crew (except two Maltese) - able seamen lead by first mate and third mate started to clear the foredeck. The detached cable drums were thrown overboard, the two derricks were lowered down and lashed with wire to the bulwarks in both sides. And then it was the open 2 hatch. Every time a wave came over the ship tons of water surged into the holds, the bilge pumps were going full speed, but it did not do much good.

There were some lead plates left in the hold by mistake after loading a cargo of mixed cargo several months earlier. Nobody wanted these plates, no one had since asked for the plates and no one had complained of any manko. We had taken the plates, which were 2 meters long and half a meter broad, out of the hold and put them on the grating over the stokehold top so they could be delivered if the owner should appear. Luckily the rope lashings across the hatch held and had stopped the broken awnings and the loose hatch planks from being washed overboard. The hatch planks were put in place and covered by the tattered awnings and as the work progressed little by little the plates were placed over the hatch and the whole thing was

nailed with three inch nails and the rope lashings were placed across the hatch.



Gerda Toft is seen fully loaded fore ship with holds 1. and 2. full.  
(Photo from the film. Source The Danish Film Institute).

I kept the second mate, a very young man, on the bridge, where he stood leaning over the bridge plate, with one hand he directed the searchlight towards the sea and in the other hand he held a megaphone. When he could see a wave coming in over the fore ship, he shouted in the megaphone down to the foredeck; Hold on! Then all the men threw themselves down on their stomachs holding onto something fixed, while they kept tools and loose things in the other hand. Time after time they were buried in water and every time the ship rose again, they worked on determindly without as much as a glance at the sea and every time they counted and ascertained that nobody had been swept overboard.

In the end the hatch was closed and completely covered by lead and the rope lashings placed over the lead plates and the bile pumps could start being useful and help the heavily laden ship. I went round the ship and it looked like we had the situation somehow under control.



Aft edge.

(Photo from the film. Source The Danish Film institute).

There was a deck house with cabins at the stern side of the boat deck. There were two Maltese able seamen living in one of the cabins. They had not taken part in the work in the foredeck. The severe weather sailing on the North Atlantic in winter was a little too rough for those two who had sailed on the Mediterranean all the time.

The light was on in the cabin. I opened the door and peeped in. They sat on the edge of their bunks each with a rosary in their hands and murmured prayers. They hardly observed me and I closed the door carefully and carried on with my inspection. I started thinking about the holy script: Call me on your day of need and I will hear you I thought again of the dogged chaps who unrelenting worked at the foredeck to save the ship .Time after time they were buried in water and I remembered another old word. Help yourself then God helps you. This time the ship managed. As a rule a ship is condemned when a hatch is knocked down. It does not happen twice. Next time the ship is in the same situation it is finished.

I arrived in Dunkirk onboard another ship, where I had been transferred to in the meantime about a year after the dramatic happening in the North Atlantic. It was the night before Christmas in 1954 late in the afternoon. There was a storm over the North Sea and the weather forecast promised strengthening wind to hurricane

Shortly after our arrival at the harbour in Dunkirk we heard from the radio.

Distress signal from my old ship somewhere in the North Sea. The radio officer managed to send a message about the ship's position. It was near Helgoland and then it came: Number two hatch has been knocked down.

I saw it in front of me and thought to my self: You poor people, this time providence unfortunately has not provided you with fifty square meters of lead plates, by chance placed on the grating over the stokehold top as it was reckoned to lead cover the two hatch. This time you do not have the two despondent Maltese able seamen onboard with the connection to the higher powers



Frits Pedersen (Donated by his son, Jes Maribo).

### **Portrait**

Master Frits Pedersen, Rønne came from the west coast of Jutland. He went to sea in 1929 and sailed in foreign trade until 1959 when he got a job in 66 company later Bornholmstrafikken (a ferry service to Bornholm) where he served until 1979.

He has now unfortunately died.

## **S/S Gerda Toft's last journey.**

Thursday 23 December 1954 started with storms over most of Denmark.

The Weather station on Fanø reported force 10 from the West about 4 degrees C. and rain all day. The unit of measurement was then 0-12 assessed by estimate and not the not the best of weather for sailing. Gerda Toft and the shipping company Jutlandia no doubt thought that Gerda Toft would reach the Kiel Canal before Christmas.

The wives of some of the crew had travelled to Brunsbuttel to celebrate Christmas with their husbands. Brunsbuttel is the town in Germany where the first lock to Kiel Canal is placed.

Gerda Toft reported to the shipping company on 23.12.1954 at 09.20 (or 09.50) that the ship was in hove to 42 sm VNV of the Helgoland. The distress signal from Gerda Toft was picked up by the radio when she was at the light buoy on 54° 17' N. 6° 38' Ø and stated that 2 hatch was damaged and help was needed immediately.

The Swedish ship Kamas which was about 17 sea miles from the position given, replied, a few minutes later, that it was coming to the rescue, but the storm was strong and the speed was not more than a couple of sea miles. The Swedish radio operator sent Gerda Toft's distress signal to all the ships in the area. Another two Swedish ships, a German steamer and the English motor ship Iberian Coast heard it and changed course. They all went towards the given position. They defied the storm and the whipped up sea to try to help 31 Danish sailors. They hurried to their aid through the hurricane. The next message from Gerda Toft came 10 minutes later, when they sent a new SOS signal out into the ether and stated that after the last bearings the position was to 54° 20' N 6° 25' Ø.

That meant a place in the North Sea 50 sea miles west of the island Orkum. He finished his SOS to all ships in the waters by saying: We are near light buoy P.6. Nearly at the same time the Swedish Kamar's Norddeich Radio station called. Kamar gave her position as 10 sea miles from the light buoy and a little later, because of Gerda Toft's last given position, said that she was turning towards the place of the catastrophe, speed 1 to 2 sea miles.

At that time the German and Dutch land stations gave the wind speed to be 8 to 10,

one single 11. On the open sea was a hurricane which is seldom seen. The 31 men fought onboard a wrecked Danish ship while other ships fought to help if possible.

**That is how real seamen are.**

(Other ships hear it, as do land stations and aeroplanes when a ship such as Gerda Toft sends out distress signals. Ships which have just a little chance to help, stop what they are doing and try to help whatever the wind and weather. If you can help you do it. In some cases they risk their ship and their lives. That is how it was and that is how it still is).

From 15.15 hundred hours to 16.21 hours there is radio contact to Gerda Toft

**The last radio contact  
( telegraph)**



Norddeich Radio station . 1955  
(Source. Privately ownend).

**At 15.15 hundred hours there is a radio message SOS from  
Gerda Toft.**

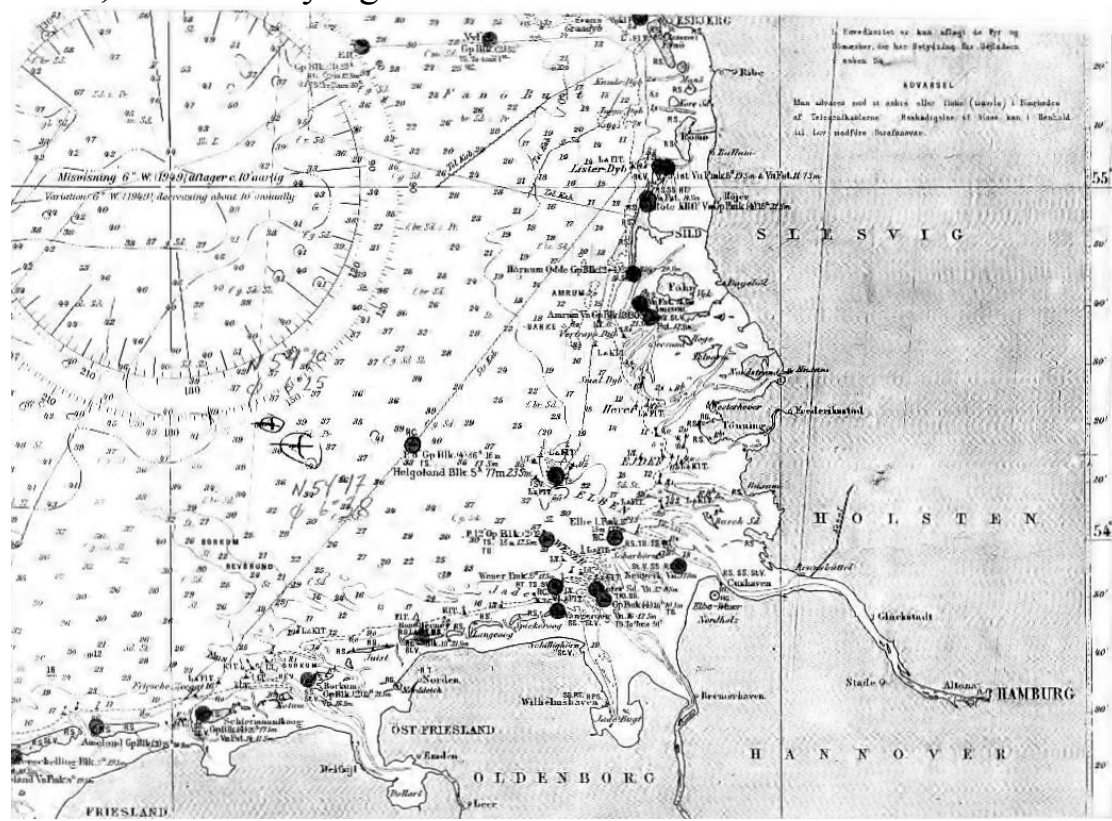
Then Norddeich Radio takes over the rescue operation.

>SOS, 54`17N-6`38 Ø. 2.hatch damaged, help necessary<

At 15.40> SOS we are drifting in distress,<  
 At 15.55> SOS, Weather worse, not possible to repair hatch speedy help<  
 At 16.21. The last message from comes from Gerda Toft's radio operator Jens Johannes Mortensen and is short> SOS, 54°20' N 6°25' Ø. Leave the radio station send speedy help.<

**From then on Gerda Toft's Radio is silent.**

You expect that captain Erik Morten Rasmussen and Jens Johannes Mortensen are the last to leave the ship. It is likely that they “only” got one boat in the water and my guess is the boat on the port side. It is also my guess that they had immense port side doldrums and if this is correct it would not have been possible to get the starboard boat in the water but this is pure guess work. The guess work is based on my knowledge of the North Sea and ships and what I have read and heard, but still only a guess.



Gerda Toft's last positions, N54°20' Ø 6°25', the first was N54°17' Ø 6°38', marked as crosses on the maritime chart. (Source privately owned).

There are 5 wrecks within a radius of about 1 nautical mile and one of them is Gerda Toft. We know this from the fishermen, who note where they have had placed their gear.

## SOS

(International distress signal in Morse code) It consists of: "...---..." (or 3 dots, 3 dashes and 3 dots, ) which represent SOS in Morse code. SOS was translated "Save Our Souls", "Save our Saucepans", "Save Our Ship" or "Send Our Savoir" but originally this sequence was chosen because it was simple for any radio operator to understand even with noise on the cable/signal. SOS was sent as a single signal instead of 3 signals to state it is not an abbreviation. It became the international distress signal in 1906 when it replaced the distress signal CQD.

The equivalent distress signal at radiotelegraph is 'Mayday'.

## M/V Iberian Coast.



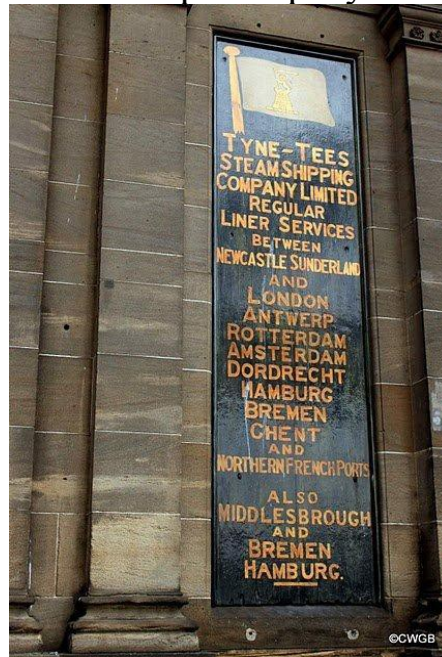
M/V Iberian Coaste

(Source, COASTERS & OTHER SHIPS REVIVE, v/Miguel Zambrass)

The English Ship Iberian Coast was built by George Brown & Company in Greenock, England and started as Sandringham Queen, for Queenship Navigation Ltd. London. It was rechristened on 31.3.1950 Iberian Coast and on 1st June it was taken over by the shipping company Tyne Tees Steam Shipping Company in Newcastle. Iberian Coast was a diesel driven smaller ship at 1220 BRT, and its speed was 11 nautical miles. Its Captain was Daniel Collins from Newcastle and it was his ship



which came closest to Gerda Toft. Below is the report which Captain Daniel Collins sent to Steamship Company Jutlandia.



From the office of the shipping Company in Newcastle  
(Source COASTERS AND OTHER SHIPS REVIVE, V/ Miquel Zambas)



Captain Daniel Collins.

**The report from Captain Daniel Collins, M/V Iberian Coast to Steamship Company Jutlandia. Produced in the maritime and commercial; court on 20.1.1955 at 10.00 hundred hours.**

The report was read by Robert Hove, President of the Court.

M/V Iberian Coast sailed from Hamburg on 23.12.1954 to the Tyne in England In the afternoon on 23.12.1954 she was on her way from

Hamburg to the Tyne. Iberian Coast sailed West/North West in a completely North West storm and very rough sea. The speed was about 4 knots. I realised it was reported that Gerda Toft was in difficulties near the P.6 buoy. It was on our route and at about 16.30 we observed red distress signal rockets and occasionally, between the flashes and the waves, a ship was seen, probably S/S Gerda Toft she looked like she had strong doldrums. I assessed at that time we were between four and five nautical miles away.

I informed Norddeich Radio station and kept in constant contact with this station

until I had resumed my journey. We were unable to see the sinking ship after about 16.50 hundred hours in the advancing twilight and tall waves but were guided to the area by repeated red distress rockets.

Shortly after 5 o'clock we passed some floating wreckage but we were unable to identify it. At nearly the same time we noticed a life boat in the light from a red distress rocket. The ship was about two cable lengths away (about 370 meters) and bearing North. I immediately brought the headway of the ship down to dead slow keeping to the windward of the boat and slowly the Iberian Coast turned to starboard giving lee to the life boat on my starboard side with ship now heading North-East.

As we came nearer we could see that there were 15-20 men onboard and the ship was completely filled with water right up to the gunwale and there was no sign of anybody working to move the lifeboat forward. All the men sat or lay over the thwarts and stayed in that position during all our connection with the boat; apparently half unconscious or possibly dead. The only exception was a man standing in the stern dressed in a yellow duffle coat.

In the meantime my officers and crew had prepared every possible way of helping them heaving lines, ropes, lifebelts into lines and placing ladders along the starboard side of Iberian Coast. We succeeded in getting the lifeboat along side my stern which gave shelter and caused hardly any movement and all sorts of lines were thrown to the men in the boat. After the boat was driven along side about 100 feet ( circa 30,5 meters) the man in the stern of the lifeboat, without any help at all from his friends, succeed to fasten the boat to the side with a heaving line. Iberian Coast had at that

time the wind and sea on the port side and rolled violently. All of my disposal officers and crew on the ship were on the deck and passed everything which could be of help down to the lifeboat's crew so they could crawl up onboard, but none of them were able to lift a hand to help themselves. My opinion is that the man in the stern could have saved himself, as he was the only one of the lifeboat's crew who seemed to be able to judge the situation. However, he preferred bravely to try to help the others who were unable to help themselves.

My crew started to go over the side down the ladders to help when we to our horror saw an especially violent wave turn the lifeboat round completely. Then all lines of communication burst and the boat fell abaft and disappeared from sight.

I stayed in the area for about an hour, sailed very slowly with all disposable

viewing means and using lights but we were completely cut off from even establishing contact with the lifeboat again, men or even wreckage. At 18.20 it was with sorrow I had to take the decision to carry on the journey because any more searching would have been hopeless.

In a personal message accompanying the letter to the report Captain Collins from Iberian Coast writes, "I use this occasion to ask you to give my, my officers and crews heart felt sympathy to the families of these brave men who lost their lives and I regret the loss of their ship. I can only assure you that the utmost effort was done to save the survivors but extraordinary weather conditions literally tore them out of our hands at the last moment and made our following search fruitless."

Only a low sobbing from the deceased's survivors who had come to the court was heard in the stillness during the President of the court Hoves's reading of the English's Captain's report. Many asked themselves who could the man in the yellow duffle coat be? But nobody will ever know. Everyone who attended the moving maritime inquiry developed for themselves a picture of a lifeboat filled with water with a fearless man standing in the stern still submerged by violent waves and nearly hidden by fog from the blown off crest of foam



M/V Iberia Coast

(Source COASTERS 7 OTHER SHIPS REVIVE, V/Miguel Zambras) .

### **Had crack in the deck on the outward journey.**

The President of the Court, Hove, who was the maritime assessor and had Captain H.L. Barfoed and Commodore H. Bilsøe by his side, produced the quite copious material in spite of the missing witness evidence and ship's journals that were collected to throw light on the loss on 23. December

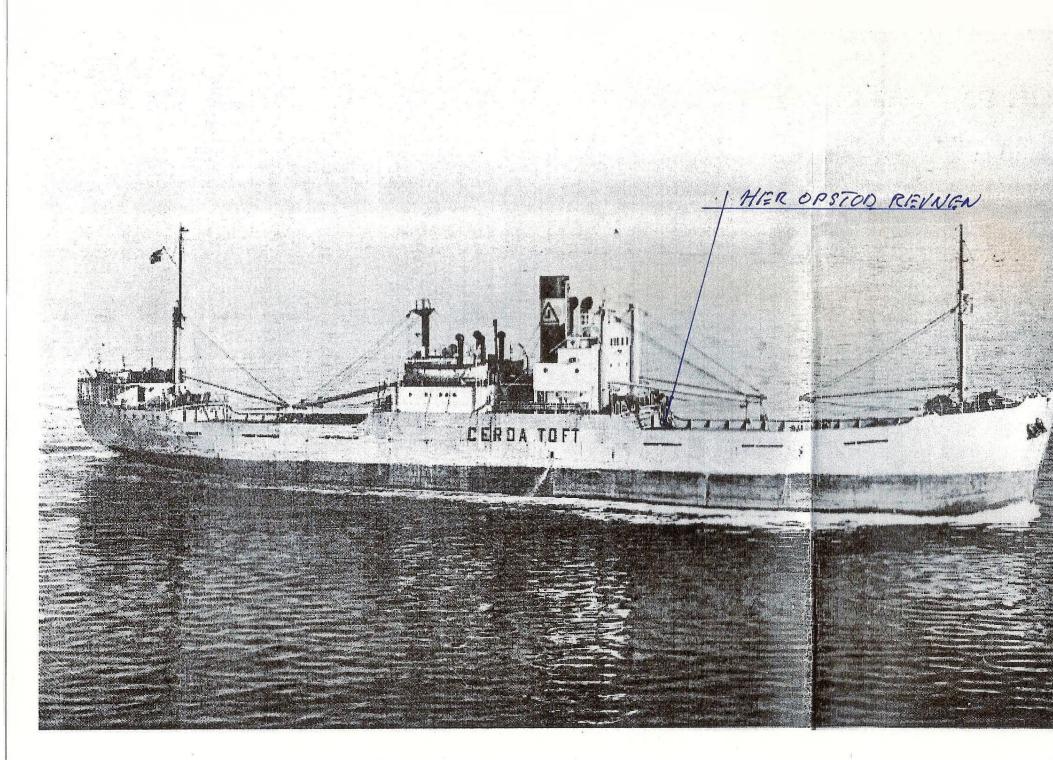
The only new information was that Gerda Toft on her outward journey towards Lisbon in hard weather had received a crack in the mid ship deck between the bridge and 2 hatch's aft edge. Barrister Reumert, who was the representative for the shipping company, explained about the repair of the damage when Gerda Toft was in dock in Lisbon. The damage had been welded on 11 December shortly before the steamer started the journey which was to be her last. The repair was surveyed by an expert from Lloyds Register of Shipping and a certificate of seaworthiness was issued.

The safety gear was also as ordered. A member of the family of a lost man asked in the court for closer information about the crack in the deck because it was 2 hatch which became filled with water during the hurricane and helped to cause the loss.

However they could refer to the damaged having been repaired and to the fact that an expert had fully approved the repair. Besides, it was stated that the load of phosphate was heavy and not absorbent and therefore allowed water to float on top of the load which damaged the ship's movements in the sea and the hurricane's strength was unusual.

There was report of wind force 12 where Gerda Toft went down. The Court President, Hove, ended the maritime inquiry by reading the names of the 31 men who had perished and "Honoured be their memory".

Note 2 The Ministry has to suppose that the loss was due to the earlier repair of the crack at 2 hatch. Due to the ships strong movements in the sea it cracked again and therefore water had come into the ship.



It was here, in front of the bridge building and astern of the 2 hatch, that the aforementioned crack in the deck appeared. (Source, Politikken a Danish news paper).

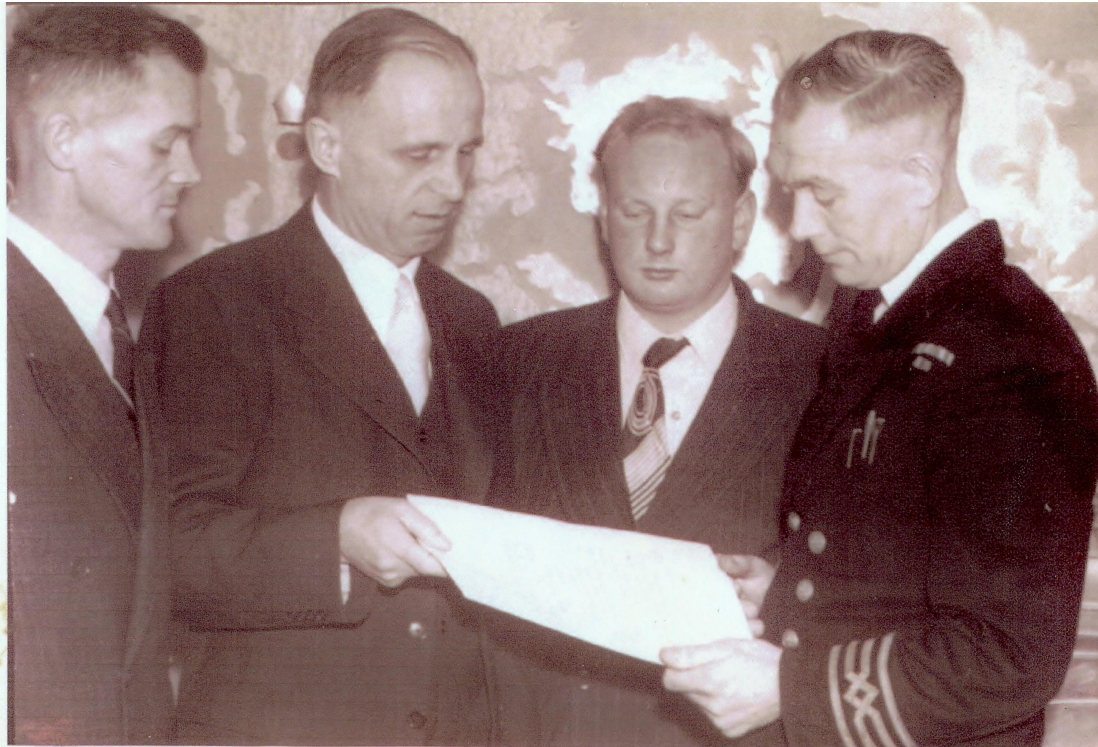
### **Transcript of M/V Iberian Coast's logbook.**

16.30 distress signal straight ahead. Saw a ship with strong hove to, possible Gerda Toft.

16.50 distress signal close by us.

17.10 sail through wreckage

1725 lifeboat in close proximity 15-20 men onboard, the ship sheltering from our ship,  
One man is standing up the others are lying down. Throw safety ropes down but the man preferred to help his friends instead of saving himself. 2 minutes later the boat capsized. We searched around the capsized boat. We were unable to find any survivors.  
1820 start our journey again. All search in vain.



On the right Captain Daniel Collins, on the left chief engineer J. Huntley receiving Commendation from The Danish government, signed by Lis Groes. It is clear to see that it is not a happy atmosphere.  
(Photo given by Daniel Collin's daughter Dorothy Tuck, Newcastle)



1953-57 Minister for commerce, industry and shipping Cand Polit Lis Groes



Commutation from the Danish state, signed by Lis Groes.  
(Given by Daniel Collin's daughter Dorothy Tuck, Newcastle).

### **Captain Daniel Collins, (Iberian Coast)**

Captain Daniel Collins was born in South Shields in England in 1912. He worked as a sailor in the British Merchant fleet which he loved very much. This was only surpassed by his love for his family and friends. He started his career as a young deck hand and worked his way up to being a Captain. Captain Daniel Collins went ashore in the middle of 1970 and started his retirement.

Daniel Collin' died in November 2003 at the ripe old age of 91 years. His ashes were strewn over the river Tyne which he loved so much. Chief engineer J. Huntley died a few years earlier, he too was from Iberian Coast. Two brave sea men had gone.

## Master Mariner's Final Trip to Sea.

# MASTER MARINER'S FINAL TRIP TO SEA TYNE IS DANNY'S RESTING PLACE

By NICK WHITTEN

**A MASTER mariner's ashes have been laid to rest on the river he loved so much.**

Daniel Collins was given a send off fitting for a man who had devoted his life to the sea when he had his ashes scattered on the Tyne.

Mr Collins was born in South Shields in 1912 and spent his whole life working for the Merchant Navy, starting as a deckhand and working his way up to become a master mariner with full Merchant Navy honours.

Almost 92 years of age, he died on November 15, leaving behind three daughters, Joan, Pat and Dorothy as well as four grandchildren and eight great grandchildren.

Danny, as he was known to family and friends was a well loved man in the South Shields area, especially for his sense of humour and bubbly personality.

His youngest daughter, Joan Hogg, 55, said: "The funeral director said he had never seen so many people at a 91-year-old's funeral, and when they played the Last Post, followed by Danny Boy the whole place was in tears.

"He had a terrific sense of humour, but he could never get to the end of a joke he was telling for laughing as he



**FINAL RESTING PLACE ... Daniel Collins.**

already knew the punchline."

In the 1950, Mr Collins and his crew were commended by the Danish government for putting their lives at risk and going to the aid of the Danish ship, Gerda Toft, which had put out a distress signal during severe gales.

The ashes were scattered from one of the pilot boats which recently towed the HMS Ark Royal into the river.

Mrs Hogg explained: "After the funeral, we went to see if the funeral director could have dad's ashes scat-

tered at sea and it was just a coincidence that the Ark Royal was sailing out of the Tyne later that week."

And to add an extra sentiment to the scattering of the ashes, it fell on the same day of his late wife's birthday who passed away 17 years ago one year before their golden wedding anniversary.

Mrs Hogg added: "It was really perfect that we were able to get them scattered from the pilot boat into the Tyne, from dad's point of view he couldn't have got a better send off."

Daniel Collins  
(Source. The Gazette South Shields).

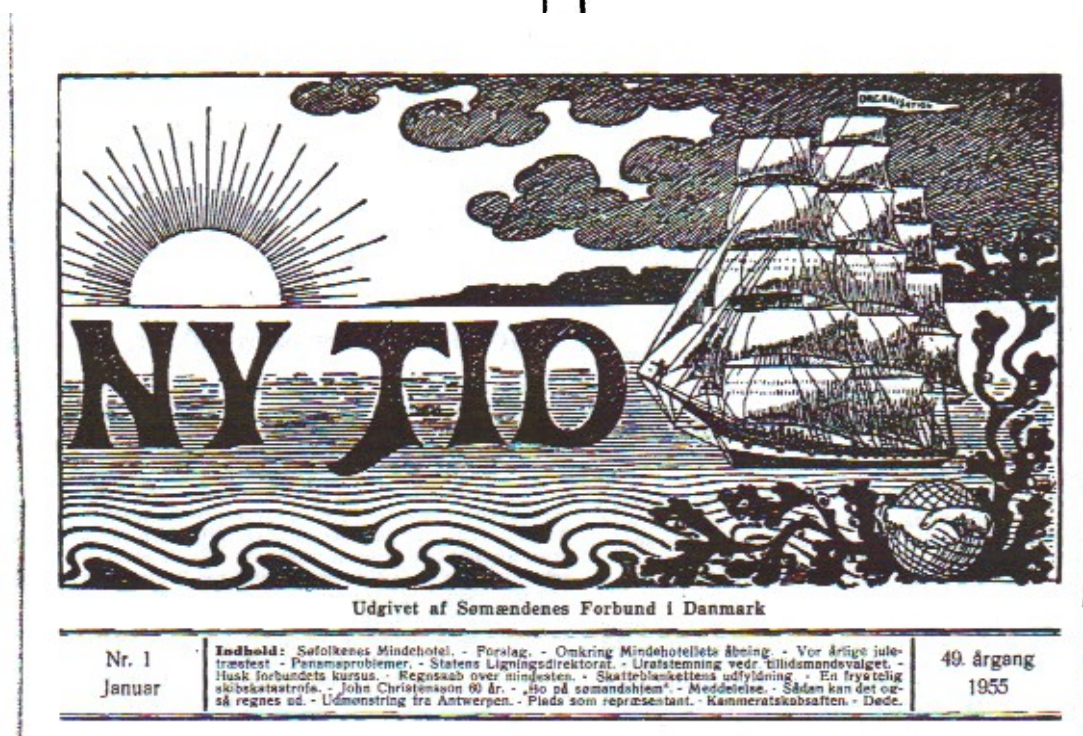
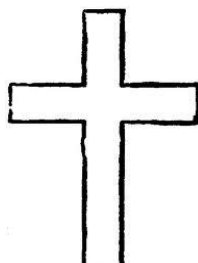


### **The perished from Gerda Toft.**

Captain	Erik Morten Rasmussen, Postparken 17, Kastrup married, born 20.8.1918 , 36 years old.
Chief Mate	Jess Anton Eghoff, Møllergade 47, Svendborg married born 07.11.1919, 35 years old.
2. Mate	Erhard Phillip Rasmussen, Lauravej 25, Valby married, born 19.12.1897. 57 years old.
3, Mate	Karl Peter Jensen, Buegangen 4, Marstal married, born 08.06.1928 , 26 years old
Chief Engineer. Copenhagen	Robert Chr. J. Burchardi, Rud. Bergesgade 21, married, born 23.07.1889, 65 years old.
2 Engineer	Evan Sørensen, Krogvej, Nordby, Fanø married, born 13.04.1927, 27 years old
3 Engineer	Børge Andersen, Fuglsøvej 10, Risskov married, born 09.07.1924, 30 years old
Machine assistant	Gunnar Gregers Forum Rudfeld, Låsby married. born 12.11.1910, 44 years old
Radio operator	Jens Mortensen, Classensgade 49, Copenhagen unmarried, born 08.06.1928, 26years old
Purser	Christian Peter Hansen, Havnevej 5, Humlebæk married, born 24.06.1890 64 years old.
Cook Copenhagen	Magnus Johannes Peter Hansen, Jagtvej 43, unmarried, born 05.11.1906 48 years old
Cook	Werner Sandahl, address missing, Randers unmarried.
Cook's mate	Bent Richard Mortensen, Silkeborgvej 64, Aarhus unmarried, born 27.11 1936 18 years old

Boatswain	Leo Hjorth Madsen, Blok 3, Skælskør unmarried, born 15.06 1927 27 years old
Able seaman	Hans Kristian Jørgensen, Søby. Ærø married , born 04.07 1912 42 years old
Able seaman	Martin Krogh, Lorentzgade 5, Randers married, born 31.08.1930 24 years old.
Able seaman	Børge Ravn Lejrskov, pr. Lunderskov unmarried, born 01.05 1931 23 years old.
Able seaman	Max Remon Dettman Svendsen, Copenhagen unmarried, born 2207 1933 21 years old.
Ordinary seaman	Olaf Friis Clausen, Sønderbrogade 121, Horsens unmarried, born 16.051936 18 years old.
Ordinary seaman	Erik Just, Darumvej 72, Esbjerg unmarried, born 16.05 1935 19 years old.
Midships man Copenhagen	Svend Aage Mikkelsen, Hessensgade 19, unmarried, born 10.12.1935 19 years olds
Engine Crew member	Eli Hansen, Fredericiagade 42, Copenhagen married born 15.08 1917 37 years old.
Stoker	Ramon Altuna, Spain. unmarried, born 16.09.1915 39 years old.
Stoker	Jens Chr. Waldemar Frandsen, Enghave,Harndrup, Fyn married, born 20.10.1904 50 years old
Stoker Copenhagen	Kurt Carl Chr. Jensen, Hedebygade 9B, married, born 31.05 1914 40 years old.
Stoker	Edmund Johnsen, Hedebygade 9A, Copenhagen unmarried, born 08.12 1927 27 years old.

- Trimmer Bent L.L.søe Sørensen, Læsøgade 29, Aarhus  
unmarried, born 27.01 1936 18 years old.
- Ship s boy Kurt Robert Hartvig, Esberns Alle 1, 2., Søborg  
unmarried, born 14.09 1937 17 years old.
- Cabin boy Palle Clausen, Nansensgade 72, Copenhagen  
unmarried, born 17.05 1938 16 years old.
- Cabin boy Leon Kaj Rasmussen, no address, Horsens  
unmarried, born 18.12.1935 19 years old.
- Passenger Leif Beck Olsen , Villingevej 151, Vanøse  
unmarried 26 years old.



**The Seamen's union wrote in their trade paper Ny Tid (New Time) nr. 1 January 1955.**

An awful ship's catastrophe. S/S Gerda Toft.

We received the sad message at the start of Christmas on the evening of 23. December that it had to be presumed that the shipping company Jurlandia's ship Gerda Toft was lost on the North Sea on her way to Kiel Canal with a load of phosphate which was being transported from Casablanca to Poland. Unfortunately this presumption was correct and none of the 30 men crew were saved.

There is only a little information from the ship after they sent their SOS the first time but in the last transmission it was stated that a hatch was knocked down and water was pouring into the load and even though the shipping company chartered assistance straight away, and the relief organisation was started there was no trace of "Gerda Toft" or her crew. We lost 9 of our good friends in this tragic and meaningless accident. Boatswain Leo Hjorth Madsen , member nr. 544, Frederikshavn's branch, A.K. nr.26.841, born on 15 June 1927 in Skelskør, joined the union on 25. March 1947.

Able seaman Hans Kristian Jørgensen member nr. 123, Leningrad's branch, A.K. nr. 11.723, born 4. July 1912 in Heils, joined the union 18. March 1935<sup>2</sup>

Able seaman Martin Krogh, member nr. 30.033, Copenhagen branch, A.K.nr.30.033, born 31. August 1930 in Kellerup, nr. Svendstrup, joined the union 3. November 1949.

Able seaman Martin Krogh, member nr. 2642, Aarhus b ranch, A.K nr.26.327, born 1. May in Lejrskov, joined the union 25. September 1948.

Able seaman Max Remo Dettmann Svendsen, member nr. 292, New York branch,A.K. nr.27.891, born 22.July 1933 in Aalborg, joined the union 24. August1950.

Ordinary seaman Olaf Friis Clausen, member nr.33.176, Copenhagen branch, A.K.nr. 33.176, born 26 September1936 in Randers, joined the union 22. August 1952.

Ordinary seaman Erik Just, member nr. 33.455, Copenhagen branch, A.K. nr. 33.455, born 16.May 1935 in Esbjerg, joined the union 18. May 1953.

Mid ships man Svend Åge Mikkelsen, member nr. 33.775, Copenhagen branch,A.K. nr. 33775, born 10. December 1935 in Torup, joined the union on 15. March 1954

Ship's boy Kurt Robert Hartvig, born14. September 1937.

All these friends, who lost their lives in a tragic way while doing their work, each one made an effort to improve our standing.

We are sorry for the loss of our friends, who had to go far too early, and we send our deepest sympathy to the families who have lost their husband, father, son or brother.

We know that these words are poor consolation for the great sorrow you have suffered in reverence we remember our friends and express All Honour to their memory.

(Source .Seamen's Union in Denmark)



Erik Mortensen  
(The managers of shipping)

**Master Erik Morten Rasmussen.**

Erik Morten Rasmussen was born in Copenhagen on 20. August 1918 and went out to sea in 1932 with M/S Siam, ØK, and continued later on various sail and steam ships in coasting trade and foreign trade, until he started navigation school in Copenhagen

He acquired his mate- and masters papers in 1942. He then passed the Naval Reserve Officers School and was commissioned Sub Lieutenant and later Lieutenant of the reserve in 1945 and served as such until 1947. Returning to civilian life he served from 1948 as 2nd and 1st mate in the ship owners company of Holm & Wonsild in S/S Jutlandia. He was appointed Master in 1952.

Captain Rasmussen was a capable, conscientious and ambitious navigator well thought of by all who knew him.

He was married and lived in Kastrup, Erik Mortensen was 36 years old.



Jes Anton Eghoff  
(Source. Managers of Seafarers).

**Chief Officer Jes Anton Eghoff.**

Jes Anton Eghoff was born in Svendborg on 27. November 1919. He went to sea with M/S Garibaldi from Svendborg in 1935 and later on different sail and motor ships, until he started at Svendborg School of Navigation in 1942 and passed Mate, Masters and radio operator's examination in 1943 then he came out as a Mate at C.K. Hansen's shipping company. He did his national service in the navy in 1945 – 1946 then he came to D/S Jutlandia, where he became an officer in 1953. He was a careful and clever navigator with a good practical and theoretical education and he was well reputed, where he had worked Jes .Anton Eghoff was 35 years old.



Erhard Philip Rasmussen  
(source. Managers of Seafarers)

## 2. Mate Erhardt Philip Rasmussen.

Erhard Philip Rasmussen was born in Copenhagen on 19 December 1897. He went to sea in 1911 on different Danish sail and steamships until he started at the navigation school in Copenhagen in 1918 and passed his mate's examination in 1919 then he came out in ØK as a Mate. In 1935 he changed to D/S Tom. Through the years he often changed shipping company, as he has been relief mate for shorter or longer periods for instance in D/S Norden, D/S Vendia, D/S Dania Dansk Esso and some smaller ships .He was restrained in getting promotion due to not having a master's ticket, which contributed to him changing jobs so often. He was a nice and good person and a clever seaman and navigator, he was well liked where he worked. He was married and lived in Valby. Erhardt Philip Rasmussen was 42 years old.



Robert Chr. J. Burchardi  
(Source.The family V/Robert Jesper Burchardi)

### **Chief Engineer.**

Robert Chr. J. Burchardi was 65 years old, he was born on 23. July 1889 in Copenhagen. He was looking forward to retiring nearer the summer as so many other sailors in his age group did. Burchardi's place of learning was Copenhagen's floating dock and ship yard. After he had passed all his exams, he signed on as an assistant engineer with S/S Ulrik Holm. Later Burcardi went on many of Brorson and Overgaard's controlled ships – here he was very much appreciated due to his marked sense of order. In 1920 he was employed in a shipping company in Rødbyhavn and followed A/S Alf to the shipping company Alfred Christensen, where he stayed for more than 25 years, only interrupted by the last war, when he sailed for Britain. He survived no less than three boats being destroyed during the war. He sailed for the shipping company Jutlandia the last years, first in Karen

Toft and from the summer 1954 with Gerda Toft. .Robert Chr. J. Burchardi was married and lived in Copenhagen. He was buried on Saturday 19.2.1955 in Copenhagen



Evan Sørensen.  
(Source. Danish Metal).

## **2.Engineer Evan Sørensen.**

Evan Sørensen,, Nordby, Fanø was 27 years old. He was son of Captain Chr. Sørensen, Nordby. He passed his exam in Esbjerg in 1947, did his national service

in the Navy on “Hekla” Evan Sørensen signed on M-S Jytte Skov in September 1949 where he stayed until January 1950 when he got a job in the shipping company Jutlandia serving on Jens Toft. In the spring of 1952 he changed to Gerda Toft, where he stayed until the accident brought a sudden full stop to this young sailor’s career Evan Sørensen lived in Nordby, Fanø, was married, and left his wife and two little girls.



Børge Andersen  
(Source. Danish Metal)

## **3. Engineer Børge Andersen**



Børge Andersen, Risskov, Aarhus, passed the extended examination for an Engineer's certificate in the Summer of 1953 then he went to sea on Gerda Toft to achieve the steamer time he needed. It was his intention then when the papers were in order to try to get a job ashore - hopes which were smashed with the loss. Børge Andersen left his wife and a little newborn girl, he never saw. The little girl was baptised later and got the name Jytte, she currently lives in Odder. Børge was only 30 years old.



Gunnar Gregers Forum Rudfeld  
Source. Danish Metal).

### **Assistant Machine Engineer Gunnar Gregers Forum Rudfeld.**

Gunnar Gregers Forum Rudfeld (my uncle) was son of chemist Rudfeld, Borgergade, Alderslyst and was 44 years old. His work life did not follow quite the normal pattern. After his GCSE's he became an apprentice in Horsens. He had served his apprenticeship in 1930. From 1930 to 1932 he studied for the ordinary and extended examination for an engineer's certificate and electrician's test for engineers.

Then he sailed as an Assistant Machine Engineer on S/S Nelly for 6 months.

He worker for a time at a certified electrician's firm to get his certificate as a certified electrician, sailed for a time with S/S Christiansborg. Then he wanted to become an engineer so he studied at Copenhagen's technical college. He completed his studies in 1939 and got a job at Th. B. Thrige, and later work for, amongst others F. L. Schmidt and Søren Wistoft & Co.

Gunnar Rudfeld ran his own company for some years, then he worked at a machine factory in Silkeborg. In the end he followed his old longing for the sea and applied to the shipping company Jutlandia and he ended up on Gerda Toft. Gunnar Rudfeld is described as a clever, quiet and modest man. He leaves his wife and 2 teenage children. Gunnar was 44 years old.



Jens Johannes Bau Mortensen, the photo is from about 1950. (Source given by his brother Jørgen Bau Mortensen, unfortunately Jørgen died in late 2011)

### **Radio operator Jens Johannes Bau Mortensen.**

After recruit training Jens Johannes Bau Mortensen served at the Danish Command in Itzehoe in Holsten. He started here in 1949, came home from Germany on 20 April 1950 and was sent home from Artillery Roads barracks in Copenhagen on 25. April 1950.

He started as a civilian employed (radio technician) on Tuesday 15 May 1950 at Holmen in Copenhagen He studied radar technique and passed his radio operator's examination while he was working at Holmen.

He experienced the catastrophe at Holmen on 23. November 1950. An explosion in a mine chamber killed 16 and wounded 80 many of them rescue staff. At the start of 1954 he signed on at S/S Gerda Toft, it was his first service – and it also became his last. Jens was only 26 years old

### **Purser Christian Peter Hansen.**

Christian Peter Hansen was born on 24.6.1890 and sailed until the years after the war when he went ashore and took over Humlebæk inn, which he ran for some years with his wife. For years Christian Peter Hansen sailed on D F K ships, where due to his good skills and endearing nature he was respected and well recommended. The pull of the sea was too hard and in 1951 he came on board Gerda Toft where he managed well in spite of his advancing years.

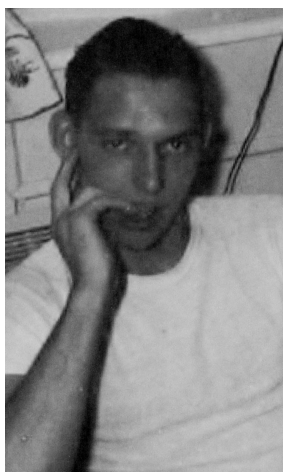
Christian Peter Hansen left a wife and several grown up children. He was 64 years old.

### **Cook Magnus Johannes Peter Hansen.**

Magnus Johannes Peter Hansen was a calm, quiet man who's conscientiousness was beyond any doubt. He was born in Svendborg on 05.11.1905. He had sailed most of his life. Lastly, before he came to Gerda Toft, he sailed with the shipping company Hejmdals' ships. Only kind things can be said about Magnus Johannes Peter Hansen. He was never unwilling and always in his place. He was unmarried and died at 48 years old.

### **Cook Werner Sandahl.**

It was found that yet another human life was lost at Gerda Toft's loss. Information to the shipping company from Zeebrugge was that cook Verner Sandahl, Tegelvej 34, Randers, signed on the ship on 20 December. Just before it left the harbour. There is no doubt, that Sandahl, who was 26 years old also perished at the ship wreck. He was engaged to a girl from Randers and they lived together. They had been to Belgium together and wanted to go home for Christmas. Werner who had sailed for some years as a purser, ship's cook, as cook's mate wanted to go ashore and planned to buy a little tobacco kiosk in Elsinore with his fiancé. It happened that Gerda Toft was in the harbour just before Christmas and Werner thought he might as well sign on. Then he could be home for Christmas. His fiancé took the train home.



Leo Hjort Madsen  
(Given by a friend and work colleague John Thor Pedersen).

### **Boatswain Lea Hjorth Madsen.**

We do not know very much about Leo Hjorth Madsen, but we know little and here is a small account from John Pedersen. John Pedersen signed on ØK's Nikobar on 11 December 1951 in Vancouver and he sailed together with Leo Hjort Madsen, yes, they shared a cabin. They sailed on

the East and the States The last time John and Leo were together was in Stettin in Poland, John was onboard Kirstine Toft and Leo on Gerda Toft. They were moored at the same quay. It was the last time John saw Leo. John tells, that Leo was a good seaman, good colleague and friend who was nice to be with. The two of them always went ashore and partied when there were parties. They kept in contact and informed each other of where they were on the globe and which ship they were on. Until Gerda Toft's loss. Leo was unmarried and became just 27 years old.



John Thor Pedersen  
(Source .John. T. Pedersen).



ØK's Nikobar  
Source. Snesejleren v/Willy Brorson).



Hans Kristian Jørgensen  
(Given by the family V/Thomas Jørgensen).

### **Abel sailor Hans Kristian Jørgensen.**

Hans Kristian Jørgensen was born 04.07-1912 in Heils, Nørre Tystrup near Vejle. He was married to Else Marie on 09 October 1936 and they had 4 children. Hans Kristian was a good sailor and he had been onboard

Gerda Toft for some years. He was onboard Gerda Toft in the winter of 1952-1953 when it was nearly wrecked in a strong gale in the North Atlantic about 50sm. south of the Faeroes but he saved the ship by hammering lead plates, which they had not unloaded by mistake, over 2 hatch which had been knocked in by a wave and therefore saved the ship and came in port of refuge. Hans Kristian Jørgensen became 42 years old. He left a wife and 4 children. The youngest of the children Erik fell in the harbour at Ærøskøbing and drowned a few years later.

### **Ordinary sailor Erik Just.**

Ordinary sailor Erik Just Erik Just was son of grocer K. Just, Darumvej 72, Esbjerg, he had sailed on Gerda Toft for a few years and he was onboard at the Faroe Islands when Gerda Toft also had 2 hatch rammed in. He came onboard straight from school He wanted to sail as an ordinary sailor for a few years before he started studying as a navigator. Erik Just was 19 years old.



Svend Aage Mikkelsen  
(Source. Politiken).

### **Mid ships man Svend Aage Mikkelsen.**

Svend Aage Mikkelsen was born on Mors near the little village Karby on 10 December 1935. He had his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday 13 days before the loss. His parents were labourer Vilhelm Mikkelsen and Sidsel Marie Poulsen. The family moved to live in Copenhagen for a time and lived at Hessensgade 19, groundfloor. Svend Aage had an unusually strong constitution, which he distinguished himself by on several occasions, and was able to remain completely calm in sudden situations.

He went to sea when he was 16 years old. He sailed for instance on Greenland with motor ship Sigrid S and had signed on Gerda Toft a

month before the accident. It was his idea to study to become a navigator, as soon as the coming national service in the navy was over. Svend Aage had a brother Eigil and a sister Olga, who both died later.



Eli Hansen  
(Source Danish Metal).

**Engine crew member Eli Hansen.**

He was born in Ulsted on 15, August 1917 and joined the Stokers Union on 9.2.1939 and his union number was 6839. Eli Hansen was married. He died when he was 37 years old.



Jerns Chr. Frandsen.  
(Source. Danish Metal).

**Stoker Jens Chr. Frandsen.**

Jens Chr. Frandsen was born in Struer on 20. October 1904. He rejoined the Stokers Union on 01.06 1947. His union number was 2549. Jens Chr. Frandsen was married and he died at 50 years old.



Kurt C. Chr. Jensen.  
(Source Danish Metal).

**Stoker Kurt C. Chr. Jensen.**

Kurt C. Chr. Jensen was born in Copenhagen on 31. May 1914 and rejoined the Stokers' Union on 16.06 1939 His union number was 7648. Kurt was married and he was 40 years old when he died.



Edmond Johnsen.  
(Source. Danish Metal).

**Stoker Edmond Johnsen.**

Edmond Johnsen was born in Copenhagen on 18. December 1927 and joined the Srokers' Union on 15.03.1954. His union number was 14887. Edmond Johnsen was unmarried and he was 27 years old when he died. A couple of years ago I met a man, who told me he was born in Hedebygade at Vesterbro, I seemed to remember the street name and a day later I gave him some material, which I asked him to think about. He did so and he said, he had delivered milk as a boy to Mrs Johnsen. He also said that Mrs. Johnsen's daughter became married to Kurt Chr. Jensen and they had a flat at the back of the property. The son became a stoker like his brother in law but he still lived with his parents. Both of them signed on Gera Toft. It is a somewhat rough story as this daughter, lost her husband and young brother at the same time.



Bent Illsøe Sørensen.  
(Source Danish Metal).

### **Trimmer Bent Illsøe Sørensen.**

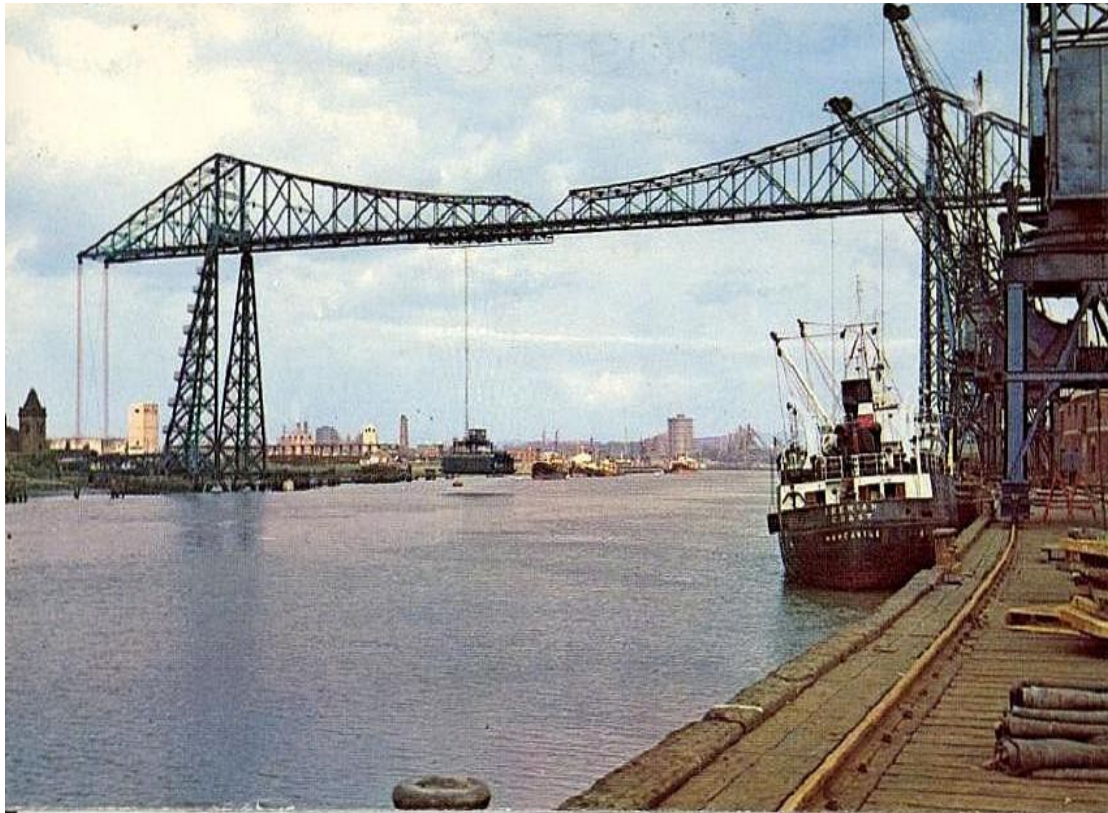
Born in Galten on 27, January 1936, he joined the Stokers Union on 12.07.1954 and his union number was 14931. Bent Illsøe was unmarried and died at only 18 years old.

### **M/S Iberian Coast's loss/**

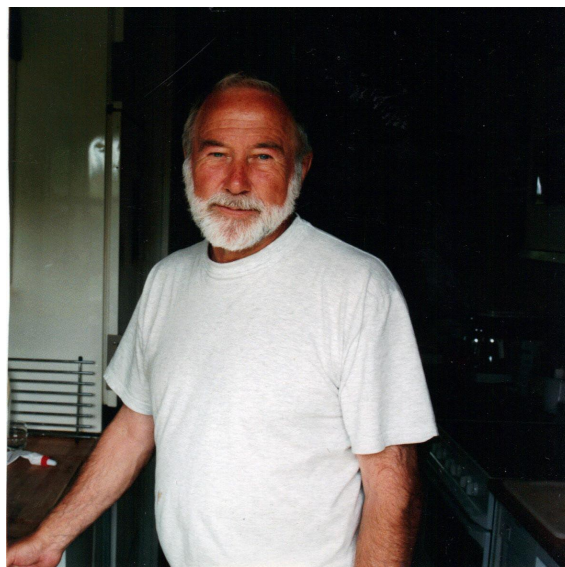
The shipping company Tyne Tees shipping sold Iberian Coast in 1966 to the shipping company Spiridion Lucci, Venedige Italien, and she was renamed M/S Pupi. In 1976 she is taken over by the shipping company Annivas Maritime – Hellas Ltd. Piræus and is named M-S Agios Nicolaos. After a fire in the engine room she was shipwrecked West of Crete on a journey from Barletta in Italy to Mozambique, with a cargo of



wheat. I have no information that there was anyone lost during this shipwreck.



M/V Iberian Coast with a little port side hove to during loading/unloading.  
Source (Coasters & Other Ships Revived, V/Miguel Zambras).



John Christensen (Given by himself)

**Many years later John Christensen told me this:  
Account from a Machine engineer.**

24.07.1954

I met machine engineer Børge Andersen at Aarhus railway station. We had been apprentices at the machine factory Thomas Sabroe in Aarhus and I knew him well.



Machine engineer Børge Andersen  
(Source. Danish Metal).

Børge's Wife was there too, she was expecting a baby. (Børge never saw his youngest child). We were going on S/S Gerda Toft in Gent in Belgium. We arrived by train on Sunday morning from Aarhus. We went to the harbour and saw a ship, what a sight – rust – it looked like something pulled up from the bottom of the sea, it had Gerda Toft written on the ship. We went onboard apparently there was no one there. We were hungry after the long train journey. We found the purser's office and the purser but he was quite "dead". He managed to stammer that there was no food until 10 o'clock but there is a box of beer in the corner – you can take a handful.

We went into the mess and oh God it was filled with cockroaches (that was the case in many ships at the time).

Sounds from the galley, - the cook had started. We looked into the galley, at first we thought it was one of the stokers. It turned out the cooker was coal fired too and it was the cook looking like a stoker, dirty from the coal, later the chief engineer arrived, he was going home on holiday.

I was signing on as second engineer and the second engineer was being promoted to first engineer. We were shown around on the ship, there were no outside alleyways, all passage from fore to stern had to take place inside. There were no door handles – it was bad – like an old cow shed.

The Ship was a "Hansa" type that means, there were "wells" fore and abaft. When there was swell and the ship was filled with water on the deck it was necessary

to rig walkways to the bridge to be able to get from fore to abaft with dry shoes.

First machine engineer Evan Sørensen told us that after lunch we were going to see

the machine to look at the main bearings which had been hot.

The stokers complained that they had to carry so much coal. The agreement with the Stokers' Union in Denmark, said "There had to be 2 stokers on each shift if more than 18 tons of coal was used." The ship burned more than 20 tons every 24 hours and the shifts were shortened to 3 hours. We had lunch with beer and snaps, there after we went down to the machine and looked at the "bearings", luckily I had trained at Sabroe, so I realised what work was involved. The next day we had to bunker coal. We were laying in ropes, when we left we knocked the propeller into one of the ropes. We were wondering what would happen with the defected propeller, it turned out that the stuffing-box to the H-T cylinder was leaking and it was hissing nastily.

We were on our way to North Africa to load shifting sand to Poland.

From Poland, we went to Copenhagen, where we went into dock to have the propeller repaired. The wives came to visit us. They were not very enthusiastic about the cockroaches. We cleaned the place thoroughly and put down some poison.

The customs officers came onboard in Copenhagen. I had 8 cartons of cigarettes too much. Børge had promised to hide them for me but the customs officers found them in the bunkers. They had second machine engineer written on them and I had to pay the fine.—Øv. From Copenhagen we were going in ballast to Kara. (Barents sea/Kara sea, North Russia). The master said there would be an ice pilot on board due to the fact that the river we were going to navigate was only open two months a year because of the ice. We sailed north for 8-10 days. There was frost at night in late July.

Prisoners loaded tree trunks in Karka, some of the prisoners spoke a little English, they said "Communism no good."

The trip to Hamburg took about a month, then we were going to bunker coal in Tromsø. The ship arriving before us had dumped a deck cargo of props on the

quay. Therefore we had to go to Liverpool instead. Børge told us he was unable to swim and he would like a life vest in his cabin. The reason being there was always a lot of water on the deck in bad weather.

The Purser and the cook were not very good friends. The cook liked whisky very much. The purser told him off, shouted and screamed. One day he ran after the cook with a big frying pan, he wanted to hit him on the head, but he did not do it. Another

time the cook locked the purser into the freezer room, the alarm did not work. He was stiff as a board when we got him out but he survived. The cook was thrown ashore at the first given opportunity.

We had a wire in the propeller when we arrived in Liverpool and divers came onboard and saw to the problem. The Dockers were on strike indefinitely. We loaded after 2 weeks. Coal was loaded in Poland and taken to Belgium. I had been told I had to discharge at Copenhagen when the ship arrived there between Christmas and the New Year.

The 20. November 1954.

I was on the 4-8 shift and when I was free I took a bath and went out on the deck. We were on our way into Brunsbüttel "The Kiel Canal" The gangway was set and 2 men came onboard, one of them asked if I was Christensen? I confirmed this and he asked if I am ready to go home. I said no, I did not know I was to be discharged in Brunsbüttel.

I was happy and hurried to pack my gear, I forgot to put my work clothes and shoes, in the suitcase so it stayed onboard.

The other gentleman who came onboard was chief engineer Robert Burchardi, who was signing on.



John Christensen (Given by himself).

The Maritime Inquiry on 20. January 1955. I have always been wondering why I was not summoned to the Maritime Inquiry as I was the last person to leave the ship before it was lost. After that I started to sail with

Kosan Gas, signed on Rasmus Tholdstrup on 8. January 1955 in Aarhus. We were going to Le-Havre. Before Christmas I got a Christmas card from stoker Ramson on Gerda Toft and his address was in Le-Havre. It was sent from Casablanca. The chief officer and I went to the address when we arrived it was a public house which Ramon's mother owned. I brought the Christmas card and showed it to her. Ramon's wife was there too she threw her arms around my neck crying and giving me a hug. She had heard I had been discharged from Gerda Toft before she was ost. John Christensen is a pensioner and lives in Silkeborg.



John Christensen together with his x wife and children  
(Given by himself).

22      Se om udfyldningen side 9-10!

Mønstringkontoret i København 19 AUG. 1954

A. Afmønstreret fra den 24-7 1954 med  
15/15 Gerda Voff  
af Holtenau (04117)<sup>1)</sup>,  
der ligger i Gent (medholdig)  
Stilling ombord 2. Maskinmester 2. kl.  
Skibsførelses navn E.O. Rasmussen  
Hvorhen skibet er bestemt Gent, Barcelona  
og videre, den 24-7 1954

Mønstringkontoret  
Aarhus

B. Har gjort tjeneste som 2. Maskinmester  
fra og med den 24/7 1954 til og med  
den 20/11 1954 (alt 3 måneder 26 dage.)  
20/11 1954 J. E. P. Eghoff<sup>2)</sup>

C. Skibet har været udenfor indsejlsfart  
Afmønstreret:  
Holtenau, den 20/11 1954

E. Eghoff<sup>3)</sup>

1) Skibets type (S/S, M/S, fiskerfartøj etc.). 2) Registreringsbogstaver; for skibe under 20 reg. tons br.: Havnekedings-nr. (Fiskeri-nr.), stenfisker-nr. etc. 3) Skibsførerens daterede underskrift.

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23      Se om udfyldningen side 9-10!      44106

A. Afmønstreret fra den 8 JAN 1955 1955 med  
af Rasmus Tholstein  
af Holtenau (O.Y. 9.7.)<sup>1)</sup>,  
der ligger i Aarhus  
Stilling ombord 2. maskinmester 2. kl.  
Skibsførerens navn B. P. Sørensen  
Hvorhen skibet er bestemt Nordeuropæisk  
Havn og videre  
Mønstringkontoret  
Aarhus den 17 JAN 1955  
P. H. V.

B. Har gjort tjeneste som 2. maskinmester  
fra og med den 8 januar 55 til og med  
den 10 marts 55 (alt 2 måneder 2 dage.)  
Holtenau 1955 P. B. Tholstein<sup>2)</sup>

C. Skibet har været udenfor havn  
Afmønstreret:  
Mønstringkontoret  
Holtenau, den 10 marts 1955  
G. Sørensen<sup>3)</sup>

1) Skibets type (S/S, M/S, fiskerfartøj etc.). 2) Registreringsbogstaver; for skibe under 20 reg. tons br.: Havnekedings-nr. (Fiskeri-nr.), stenfisker-nr. etc. 3) Skibsførerens daterede underskrift.

Discharge book. Transcription from John Christensen's discharge book.  
Signed on in Gent 24.07.1954 and discharged 20.1954 in Holtenau. The master is  
Erik Morten Rasmussen, signed by chief engineer Jess Anton Eghoff.  
(Given by John Christensen).

### The man in the yellow duffle coat found.

Something happened on 31. December 1954, a body was found  
on 31. December drifting in the North Sea. It's odd nothing is mentioned  
about it at the Maritime Inquiry. It's not mentioned at the Memorial  
Service held on 08. January 1955 either.

I have only found 2 Newspaper articles which are not dated, I don't  
know the names of the papers. I am also missing information about where  
and by whom he was found!

It is certain that the man was mid ships man Svend Aage Mikkelsen. The  
papers write amongst other things:



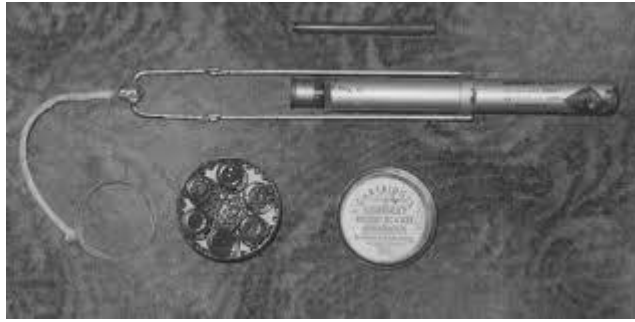
Mid ships man Svend Aage Mikkelsen from Gerda Toft. (Source. Politiken , a Danish newspaper).

A 19 year old mid ships man from Gerda Toft has been found with one sleeve blackened by the fire from the distress rockets. There can be no doubt, that the sea has given the hero in the yellow duffle coat back.

The fearless sea man who gave his own life trying to help his 15-20 friends in a life boat filled with water from the steamer Gerda Toft. The 19 year old mid ships man Svend Aage Mikkelsen is the only one of the 31 from the shipwreck who have been found. He was drifting in the North Sea in his yellow duffle coat with the left sleeve blackened by the fire from the distress rockets.

There was a service for Svend Aage Mikkelsen on 21 January 1955 at Allehelgens Church, Amager and he was buried at Sundby Kirkegård on Amager.

It was found out that the burn mark on the left sleeve of Svend Aage Mikkelsen's duffle was caused by a distress-rocket launcher that he had held over his arm and that was just what Captain Daniel Collins onboard the British motor vessel Iberian Coast had observed. An unknown hero standing in the bows of the lifeboat signalling for help to his 15-20 shipmates, all lying more or less unconscious over the thwarts in the swamped life boat.



Distress rocket aggregated.

Svend Aage Mikkelsen was standing quiet in the stern while the violent waves were still flooding the lifeboat. It was from Iberian Coast that they saw the distressed Danish seamen from one of the red distress rockets. The unknown seaman, who after all can be no other than Svend Aage Mikkelsen, managed to fasten one of the lines coming from the British ship. According to the British Captain Daniel Collins he could have saved himself when the Iberian Coast came but stayed in the lifeboat trying to help the others. A violent wave capsized the boat, the line was broken and the shipwrecked drifted astern and disappeared in the darkness.

#### **Transcript from the parish register.**

Name: Svend Aage Mikkelsen, unmarried.  
Address: Hessensgade 19 st. (2300) Copenhagen S.  
Born: 10. December 1935 Karby parish, Mors Thisted  
Parents: Labourer Vilhelm Mikkelsen and wife Sidsel Marie Poulsen.  
Date of death: Drowned on 23. December in a shipwreck in the North Sea.

Found on 31. December 1954 in the North Sea.

Date of burial 21. January 1955 at Sundby Church Yard.

I can only say one thing!! Splendid chap. A pity you had to pay the ultimate price in an attempt to save the others, who could not help themselves. I bow in deep respect and admiration together with many others.

His father Vilhelm Mikkelsen died on 03.11.1957. His mother now Sidsel Marie Mikkelsen moved to an address near Sundby Church Yard, where Father and Son were buried .

Sidsel Marie Mikkelsen died in 1969

His brother Egil and sister Olga died later.



## **The remarkable happenings.**

It was not the only remarkable thing which happened. We know that Gerda Toft on her way from Casablanca to Stettin went into the Belgian harbour Zeebrugge on 20.12.1954. Was it to take bunker coal onboard? Gerda Toft endured hard weather for most of the journey from Casablanca and perhaps she had used more coal than they had reckoned on. We also know they got a cook onboard here. Werner Sandahl from Randers.

They already had a purser, a cook and a cook's mate on board. It was not normal at that time, as it is now, to have 2 cooks onboard on general cargo ships such as Gerda Toft. Perhaps the reason was there were some wives in Brunsbüttel at the entrance to Kiel canal and they were coming onboard to sail with us through the canal to

Holdenau at the western end of the Canal and Werner Sandahl had to help with the catering for Christmas?

When I was sailing over seas we seamen had a concept we called work away. That meant you signed on a ship from A to B .You worked for free (to be able to travel for free)

Perhaps that is what Werner did. We will never get an answer to these questions.

## **Statement from the Danish Government.**

The papers wrote on 26. December No hope for the 31 men onboard Gerda Toft.

Minister for Commerce, Industry and Shipping Lis Gros gave a moving memorial speech on the radio before the greetings to the seafaring people on 23. December 1954

The Christmas greetings to Danish seafarers on the oceans had a tragic touch on 23.12.1954. The hurricane which sent the Danish steamer Gerda Toft to the bottom of the North Sea, a shipwreck which costs 30 Danish and one Spanish seamen their lives got commercial minister Lis Groes to go to the microphone before the many greetings from families and friends ashore wishing the seafarers a Happy Christmas.

The Minister of Commerce said:

On this day which should bring the message of celebration and happiness the message of sorrow has come to 30 Danish Homes and with those homes there are many, many more – far beyond the circle of the family and friends. No one of us can fail to feel very moved. We have yet again had it stressed how dangerous the seamen's work is and yet again we bow

in deep admiration for their contribution. As a minister for Shipping I would like, on behalf of the Government, to express my deepest sympathy to every home which has been hit by this accident - and express all honour to the memory of the seafarers.

### **Remembrance of the 31 shipwrecked in Holmen's Church.**

On Saturday 8. January 1955 there was a memorial service in Holmen's Church.

seamen's pastor Eilschou – Holm spoke to the families of the shipwrecked.

People who do not have a grave to lay flowers and wreaths on to remember their death came together in Holmen's Church to a heart rendering ceremony with hundreds of others to remember the 31 men who lost their lives when the steamer Gerda Toft was lost in the North Sea on 23.12.1954.

The Danish flag( Dannebrog) was symbolically placed in the choir where the coffins should have been with the shipping company Jutlandia's large wreath covering just a patch of the flag.

The shipping Company's white office flag was placed down the choir steps followed by wreath after wreath and bundles of flowers some of them with names on the lost written on white crosses. The shipping company Jutlandia had invited the families and many others just arrived. About 1000 people filled the old oak benches in the seamen's cathedral and listened to Pastor Eilschou-Holm's word about the seaman's wet grave and the Boolsen Quartet sang from the organ loft- sorrow's own hymn " Now no murmur, bide out firmer".

The different organisations for shipping let their colours parade in the choir. After that followed the hymn "Commit thou all that grieves thee". Mrs Lis Groes the seamen's own minister had come with Head of Department Ove Nielsen and Office Manager from the ministry of seamanship's department. In the boxes nearer the choir you saw the chairmen of different organisations for shipping and the ship owners brothers Ove, Arne og Knud Toft from the shipping company which was hit by the disaster, ship owner A.P. Møller, rear admiral E.M. Dahl, director Maegaard and consultant Gammeltoft steamship's shipping union and harbour master Thøgersen.

Pastor Eilschou-Holm gave his memorial speech from the church's heavy renaissance pulpit. He talked about the boundless despair which hit so many homes, which were in the middle of the preparations for the Christmas Celebrations . The slender hope about salvage which broke. Nobody knows what happened, there was no one there. We only know that all the men stayed out there. We now have to await the ocean giving

the dead back so they can have a place in their homelands' soil. We have been reminded again that it is not child's play to go to sea. In spite of technical advances, in spite of people being clever, people can still fail. There was literally only a plank between those seamen and death. Nobody failed all had shown their heroism in their daily work as our seamen always do. Nis Petersen writes about the seaman, that it is man's work to rock on the ocean and the women have to follow his journey. We all followed the many homes which were hit. We would have liked to cry with all those crying and all those grieving, those who sat in the darkness and the shadow of death on that holy night. Sorrow is lying close and heavy over them. We share their great sorrow and we would like to take part in tying a memorial wreath for them who dutifully did the day's deed. We bless their graves in the large church yard in the sea. We will honour their memories among us.

Pastor Eilschou-Holm slowly read the names of the 31 perished seamen. Every one stood up listening to the reading. The stillness in the church was only broken by a feeble sobbing from the families of the perished. Many flowers and wreaths were placed at the memorial anchor in Nyhavn after the memorial service.



The memorial Anchor at Nyhavn.

Word by word repetition of Pastor Eilschou-Holms speech at the memorial service:  
(Source. Given by Pastor Eilschou-Holm's family)

We were all paralysed on 23.12.1954 on the evening when the first alarming news came about "Gerda Toft" and its crews' fate. We did not believe that Danish shipping had to be stricken again by a catastrophe so shortly after "Rikke Skou's loss".

When we opened our papers on the morning of 23.12.1954 It was not as usual bearing the joy over the coming festival. Full page headings told

about the accident which had brought deep sorrow and boundless despair to the many, many homes which were in the middle of the preparations for the Christmas celebrations.

We followed the news on the radio the very scarce information, which all gave less and less hope that any of the large crew were saved. The official account from the shipping company came on Christmas morning that all the crew and one consular passenger had to be seen as perished.

The Christmas message which I started reading. "The light from on high has visited us to shine for those sitting in the dark and the shadow of death (Luke. 1, 78-79), got a strong emphasize. At Christmas and the days that followed there were far too many who experienced, what it meant to sit in the dark and the shadow of death.

Nobody can inform us what happened. The radio messages from the ship expressed bad weather and slow speed but quickly after they sent the first S.O.S. signals. "Gerda Toft" sent a message that they needed immediate assistance. A hatch had been broken in by a wave and the water flowed down into the cargo. The last sign of life came shortly after; the ship was sinking and there was a storm with hurricane like strength and the crew were going in the boats.

Nobody knows what happened. Nobody was there. We only know that all the men stayed out there and we are only able to wait and see if the ocean gives back its dead

so they can have a place in their homelands' soil. People who live in the dark shadow of death have again been reminded that it is not child's play to sail. It's necessary to sail but it can be with your life at risk. It's not child's play to go to sea. In spite of technical advances, in spite of people being clever, people can still fail. It's often the sailors who fight the elements and gain the victory but every now and then there are some who succumb. On 23.12.1954 the sea was so violent and the hurricane like storm raged too wild for the lifeboat to manage. It was a fight between life and death

There was literally only a plank between those seamen and the sea.

Nobody failed all had shown their heroism in their daily work for peace as we know our seafarers always do. We do know that it's about being faithful to duty in the every day work which often brings a sudden accident that the poet Nis Petersen writes the following lines.

It is a man's work to rock on the wave  
and the woman's to follow his journey,  
and his now and then to stay out there  
and hers to remember his worth.

All Danish people had heart ache when they heard the message about the accident and our sympathy, thoughts and warm prayers followed all the many who were hit so hard. We could not say anything. We would very much have liked to cry with the crying and grieving, all those who sat in the darkness and the shadow of death on this holy evening. We knew that Father and Mother cried over their big, strong boy and wife and children were sitting literally humanly speaking inconsolable because the sorrow lay heavy as lead over their minds. You shall all know, who we are and where we are now, that we, your countrymen in our heart take part in your great sorrow and we would like to take part in binding a memorial wreath to every one of the many who with the sailors being faithful to duty lost their lives while doing their daily work. These are the men, whom we remember here in Holmen's church this afternoon and it is what the shipping company are saying by inviting us to this memorial service and to thank all the crew and show the perished the last honour. When all this has been said and we have ascertained our own powerlessness, where are we going to seek help? We humans stand with empty hands with all our life philosophy and all our beautiful mental images in the middle of the darkness, where the shadow of death comes over our lives.

The old Christmas word meets us as it has done during the past days. The light from up high has visited us to shine for those who sit in the darkness and shadow of death.

A light had been lit in our dark world. There is one we can put our trust in and who can give our lives meaning. It's him we sing about

The light of heaven came to the earth  
shine to new great enlightenment  
good that we know by night  
know as children our Father mild.

We would not have had anyone steady to turn to if Jesus hadn't been born. He, who himself came to know the darkness and shadow of death. He experienced the surf merge around him so he in his powerlessness had to call out "My God, My God, why did you abandon me?" "He could in the middle of his fear be secure in his Father and say: "Father! Into your hands I place my spirit".

My wish, for all of you who grieve, is that you will be able to see this light. He can give comfort and hope where everything human has become broken. He is the light, who always has the strength. If this light had not been lit for us everything would be hopeless.

To believe in a perishable world would be foolish. But to dare to believe in God and search for the light which he let shine into the world gives comfort. God does not take away sorrow and loss but makes us comfortable in the middle of the sorrow but shines a light from the higher on a road where we have a light to follow in our last hour.

### **An Old pilot was dying.**

He was dying the old pilot. As he was dying his face lit up and he said:” I see a light.” His friends thought he was dreaming and asked:” Is it the Highland light you are seeing.” “No!” he answered A moment later he said again: “I see a light” “Is it Boston Light House?” the friends asked. “No!” answered the pilot. For the third time he said: “I see a light”. “Is it Minon light house?” “No!” It is the light of the glory. Let the anchor go” The old pilot was in harbour.

He had sailed as a pilot for many, many years from New York and was familiar and known with the many lighthouses on this coastline and as he now at his life’s end turned into the heavenly harbour yes, then it was the last light on his journey and it was not unknown to him. It was what he had sailed towards for many years and never lost sight of.

Happy old pilot. Now he has let the anchor go in the safest harbour. May we always have the light in sight. This heavenly light. The glorious light.

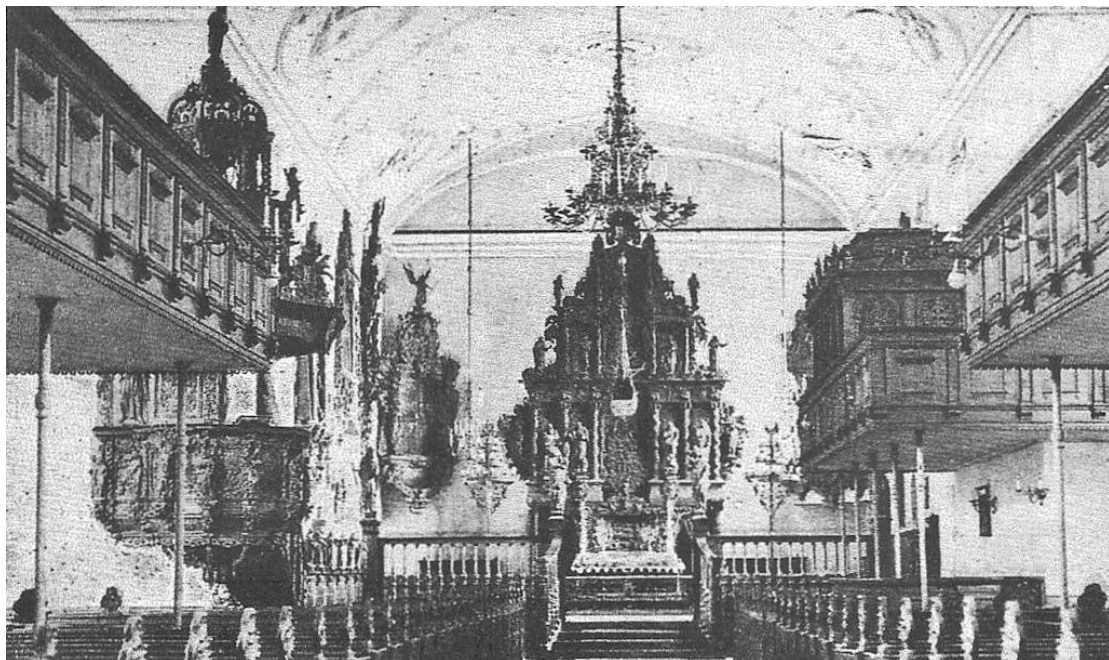
### **Names of the crew were read out.**

Captain	Erik Morten Rasmussen
Chief mate	Jess Anton Eghoff
2. Mate	Erhard Phillip Rasmussen.
3. Mate	Karl Peter Jensen
Chief engineer.	Robert Chr. J. Burchardi
2 Engineer	Evan Sørensen
3 Engineer	Børge Andersen
Machine assistant	Gunnar Gregers Forum Rudfeld
Radio operator	Jens Mortensen
Purser	Christian Peter Hansen
Cook	Werner Sandahl
Cook	Magnus Johannes Peter Hansen
Cook’ mate	Bent Richard Mortensen
Boatswain	Leo Hjorth Madsen
Able seaman	Hans Kristian Jørgensen
Able seaman	Martin Krogh

Able seaman	Børge Ravn
Able seaman	Max Remon Dettman Svendse
Ordinary seaman	Olaf Friis Clausen
Ordinary seam	Erik Just
Mid ships man	Svend Aage Mikkelsen
Engine crew member	Eli Hansen
Stoker	Ramon Altuna
Stoker	Jens Chr. Waldemar Frandsen
Stoker	Kurt Carl Christian Jensen
Stoker	Edmund Johnsen
Trimmer	Bent LLsøe Sørensen
Ship s boy	Kurt Robert Hartvig
Cabin boy	Palle Clausen
Cabin boy	Leon Kaj Rasmussen
Consular passenger	Leif Beck Olsen

**The following hymns were sung at the Memorial service on 8 January 1955 in Holmen's Church for the perished at the loss of S/S Gera Toft.**

Now no murmur, bide out firmer  
 Commit thou all that grieves thee  
 Children of the heavenly Father.  
 Nearer my God to thee.



Holmen's Church.

## **One of Gerda Toft's lifeboats drifted in on West Coast of Jutland on Saturday 5. February 1955.**

The boat drifted in with the bottom up, where two men were wedged in between oar and thwarts and the boat had to be demolished to free the 2 sailors and the salvage work was a fight against the tide. A large lifeboat from S/S Gerda Toft who was lost on the evening of 23.12.1954 with 31 men onboard in the Southern part of the North sea had drifted to Holmland's banke near Årgab in Strandfoged Refsgaards Strandlen.

There were two men in the boat which came in with the bottom up an older and a younger, they were unrecognizable after months in the water. The two sailors were wedged between oar and thwarts in the boat, one in a twisted position. The sand had bound the boat so hard it was impossible to turn it around.

Therefore 4 men from Falck in Ringkøbing had to break the port side to free the 2 sailors. Apart from a deep scratch on the starboard side under the name Gerda Toft

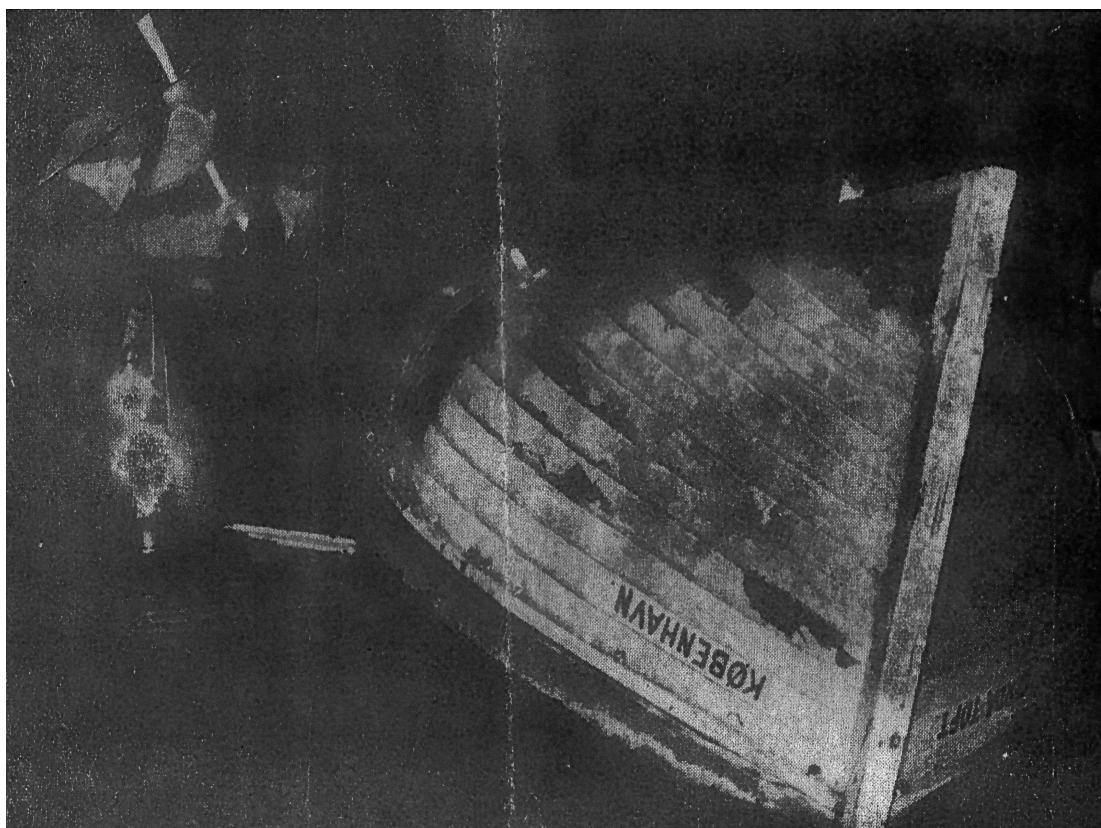
the lifeboat was, as far as could be seen, intact and watertight. It's likely the lifeboat capsized straight after it came into the water perhaps even during the setting of it into the water. The big scratch points to the boat having hit something sharp or perhaps it had been run into by a ship. The lifeboat which had been washed ashore is no doubt the boat the German ship Buscher observed drifting capsized

3 sea miles VNV of the Elbe II lightship on 29 December 1954.



Elbe 2 lightship stored. The lightship was in position 53'59N 8'25 Ø





The lifeboat from Gerda Toft which drifted in at Årgab south of Hvide Sande.  
(Source. Chr.Oluf Iversen, Hvide Sande).

A report had been given to Blåvand radio, which had asked all ships in the southern part of the North sea to keep a look out for lifeboats and wreckage from Gerda Toft.

The German ship tried to turn the boat around, but was unable to do so, and it drifted away again. It will never be known if there were other than the two lifeboats which have been found. The boat was seen some sea miles from the coast a few days before it drifted in.

It was Friday night before it reached the beach. On Saturday you were able to walk around it without getting your shoes wet. The customs guard Frederiksen noticed the lifeboat before he received the report from the wreck master about it.

The customs frontier service together with a police man and people from Strandfoged farm tried to move the lifeboat to reach the 2 sailors who you could catch a glimpse of underneath the boat. At low water on Saturday 5.2.1955 at 16:30 hundred hours. The police man contacted the Chief Constable, who was the Manager of Forstrand and asked permission to knock the boat to pieces so they could rescue the sailors as they were unable to turn the boat. The Emergency Services from Ringkøbing sent as many people as they could to Årgab with axes and saws and other tools.

The lifeboat was laying on a peninsula cut off from the beach by a ditch, nearly 2 metres deep and 20-30 meter wide, when the rescue party arrived. The rescue party had to carry the heavy tools over the rows of dunes then about 1 km along a soft sand tongue, which the waves washed over several times. While the rescue party knocked the port side out the high water came quickly and the rescue party worked in water to over their knees in the end. Wreck master, Refsgaard, established a pram route across the ditch, which became deeper and deeper and the two shipwrecked sailors were taken across to a cart which took them over the dunes to the Strandfoged farm. The rescue party knew when they started the work that they only had less than one hour to manage the job. There was a danger the sea could take the boat again and take it out to sea if they did not succeed.

They would now try to identify the two sailors helped by their clothes, their dental records and so on. Wreck master Refsgaard salvaged more things from the lifeboat for instance some copper containers. There was a barrel of water and some hardtacks in the lifeboat. The dead seamen did not have papers of any sort on them which could help the search work. The shipping company Jutlandia had been in contact with Strandgaarden, but they were only able to report the bare data about the lifeboat drifting ashore. The lifeboat was still on the beach on Sunday dinner time. It was expected to be broken by the waves in the following days. There was inspection of the bodies at Strandfoged farm in the late afternoon.

**One of the two seamen from, Gerda Toft's lifeboat was identified on 9. February.**



Chief engineer Robert Burchardi and supposedly his wife.  
(Given by the family V/Robert Jessper Burchardi).

He was the oldest member of the crew. The 65 year old chief engineer, Chief Engineer Robert C. J. Burchardi (Rudolf Bergsgade 21), was recognized because of a fracture of the thigh-bone . He was born in 1889. The two crew members from the steamer Gerda Toft who were washed ashore in a lifeboat at Årgab, were at Strandfoged farm while identification work was going on from Ringkøbing and the Danish Police forces' search department in Copenhagen.



Burchardi's wrist watch, which helped to identify him.  
(Given by the family V/Robert Jesper Burchardi).

The police learned from information that the then chief engineer Burchardi had broken one thigh bone when he fell in 1949 and as it was presumed that the body of an older man could be him.

The police and the county medical officer went to Strandfoged farm and the county medical officer ascertained the afore mentioned fracture of the thigh bone on the body. Also a mark in the wrist watch and a label from the laundry helped to identify the body.

The perished chief engineer was brought to Copenhagen and given to his family.

The other person was a very young man. His body remained for a few days more at Strandfoged farm, then he was be placed in an open grave at Haurvig Church Yard while they hoped to identify him. The dead seaman was to be buried at Haurvig Church if they did not succeed. On Thursday 17. February they gave up identifying the other of the 2 sailors who as mentioned was a very young man.

The young man was buried on 18. February, a representative from the shipping Company Jutlandia was present. Later the shipping company Jutlandia erected a memorial stone on Haurvig Church Yard for the 30 Danish and one Spanish sailor who perished in the North Sea at Christmas 1954. The Church Yard is not very far away from the place on the coast where the lifeboat drifted in.

To the right of the memorial stone, there is a small stone which says. It states simply:

God gave

God took

God be praised.



Here rests the unknown, young Danish sailor. (Source. Privately owned).



Memorial stone and the little grave in memory of the perished sailors. You can just glimpse Ringkøbing fjord in the background (Source. Privately owned).



The Memorial Stone was placed by the shipping company Jutlandia in 1955. (Source. Privately owned).

## **Atypical day of work on Gerda Toft at sea. Sea watch.**

The crew is divided into deck, machine and cabin crew. Both Deck and machine have 3 shifts watches 8-12, 12-16, 16-20 and so on.

The deck: 1st Officer, navigates 3 from the common part of the deck's crew, 2 able seamen and typical 1 ordinary sailor who take turns to sail the ship, look out and whistle turn. After 4 hours watch they are relieved by the new watch and so on. The deck crew consists of Master, officers, boats wane, able sailors, seamen, mid ships men and deck's boy. The Master often takes the 8-12 watch together with the 3rd officer, who typically is the most inexperienced of the 3 officers.

The watches on the bridge are as follows

8-12 watch 3rd officer together with the Master.

12-4 Watch 2nd Officer.

4-8 Watch 1st Officer

The machine: chief engineer, 2 stokers and trimmers and are relieved by the next watch after 4 hours.

The watch in the machine is divided like this

8-12 Watch, machine assistant /the chief engineer

12-4 Watch 2nd engineer

4-8 1st Engineer.

The radio operator has his own watch.

All others onboard have normal working hours when the ship is at sea

When in harbour those not required go ashore except 2 able sailors who take it in turn to keep watch over the deck at night.

They can choose to let the sea watch carry on if the ship is in harbour less than 24 hours. That is up to the Master/officers.

The galley starts at 0600 in the morning and finishes after supper with breaks in between. The purser, cook, cook's mate and the cabin boys belong to the galley crew.

## **Childhood Memories: I was born in 1945 and was then a little boy of 9 years old.**

One late afternoon I was playing with my computer as I called it. It was special different web sites on the net with articles about ØK's ships and earlier "snesejlere" ( as we old ØK people called ourselves), that I was interested in. I have no idea today .how and why I suddenly ended on a web site with copy of an article about S/S Gerda Toft's loss 23.12.1954. I thought "I know that ship." I read and read. Then everything was set in motion. Since that evening the loss of Gerda Toft and the crew of 30 and 1 passenger's fate has been a great part of my every day.

Slowly I have had to acknowledge that Gera Toft has followed me unnoticeably all my life.

The tragedy has been on my mind since 23.12.1954 53 years ago, when my Mother shaken and moved came into the kitchen and told us that she had just heard on the radio that Gerda Toft was in difficulties on the North Sea and had sent an SOS signal. My great-uncle machine assistant Gunnar Gregers Forum Rudfeld from Låsby. a member of the family whom I and my family were close to was onboard.

My family and I lived at Vejrø. The only connection to the world was a post boat which sailed to Kragenæs and Fejø.



Vejrø . Our house is in the middle of the island. Our house is on the left, my school is on the right. Vejrø light house (Source. Google).

My brother, (who is three years younger than me) and I looked forward to going to Jutland to celebrate Christmas as usual with the family at my Mother's parents home.

The whole family was going to be there and there was a great chance our uncle, who sailed as a machine assistant on Gerda Toft would be home for Christmas. We two brothers were especially looking forward to that as he always brought exciting things home from the big world. It was a disappointment for us two brothers when the Christmas holiday in Jutland was cancelled on 23.12.1954 in the morning due to storm. The post boat did not sail and we had to stay on the island.

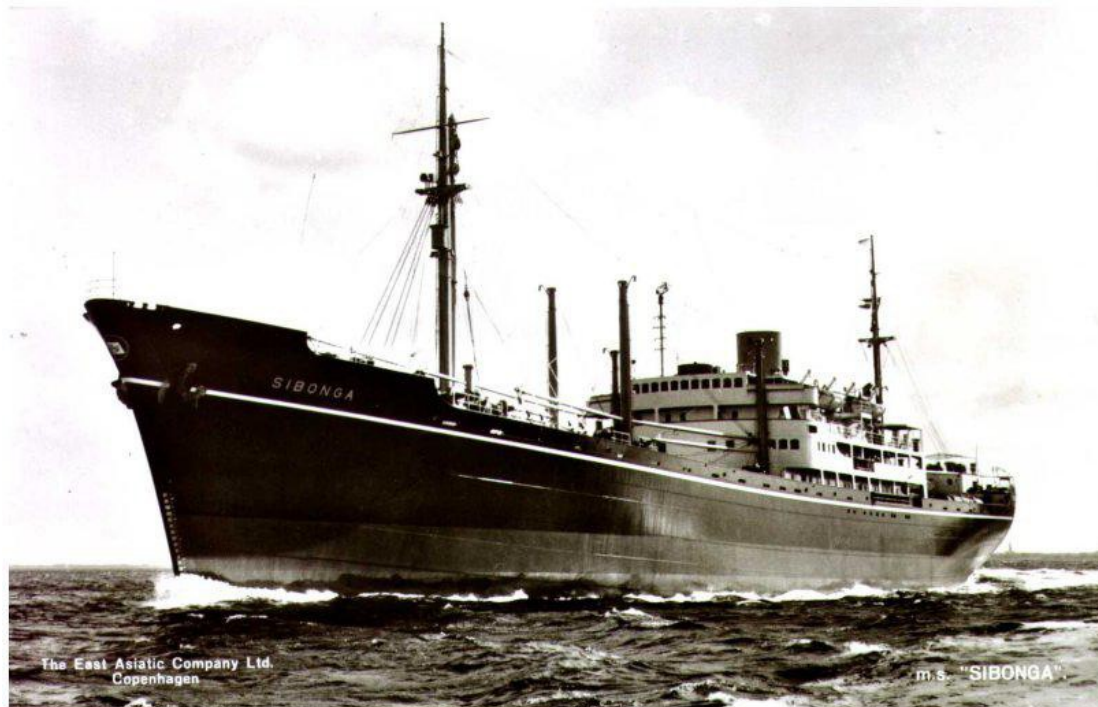
We were sitting in the kitchen drinking hot chocolate, when my Mother came with the shocking news about Gerda Toft's problems in the North sea.

The rest of Christmas was spent in front of the radio and on many walks to the light house, where my Mother borrowed the phone to talk to her parents.

I will never forget it.

With time the tragedy became clearer. Gerda Toft went down and not one of the 31 onboard survived. The tragedy did not alter the fact that I, as a 15 year old, wanted to go to sea, that was 6 years later. No way would my Mother allow this. Today I can see she had her reasons but at the time I found it quite unreasonable. My parents gave in after a few months of pressure and persuasion. The problem was I was unable to get a discharge book without my parents permission. In the end my Mother gave in but only if I went to a navigation school first. I think she was hoping that the stay at the navigation school would frighten me. I became a pupil at the state navigation school in Sønderborg on 20. November 1961.

I signed on Øk's M/S Sibonga, she sailed Copenhagen the Fareast. in April 1962 with my new discharge book in my back pocket. The dream about seeing the world came true and I became a sailor.



M/S Sibonga  
(Source, . Snesejleren, v/Willy Brorson).



Over the years I had thought about Gerda Toft and her loss. But it was not something I wondered about until a few years ago. I was on the bridge of a tug boat, the ship was on the North sea on its way from Rotherdam towards Kiel Canal to Stettin in Poland. I thought we had to be near to where Gerda Toft went down. A closer look at the last information about Gerda Toft's position confirmed my supposition. We were close. There was no way back when I saw a web site copy of a newspaper article from Christmas 1954 about the loss. When I came home from the tug boat. I started to collect information, to find documents, search the internet and e-mail many people, and find relatives of the perished crew

The first relatives I came into contact with were Torben and Lone. It turned up that Torben too was searching , his Father in Law, Lone's Father was captain Erik Morten Rasmussen on Gerda Toft.

The first person I came in contact with when I started to search for members of the crew and relatives from Iberian Coast in England was Dorothy, daughter of Captain Daniel Collins from Iberian Coast. It was odd and I was wondering whether there was a higher meaning to this. You could believe it.

### **List of found relatives of Gerda Toft's crew.**

Gerda Toft's crew so on.	relatives and
Captain Erik Morten Rasmussen	Daughter
Chief engineer Robert Chr. J. Burchardi	Grandson
2. engineer Evan Sørensen	Daughter
3. engineer Børge Andersen	Daughter
Machine assistant Gunnar Gregers Forum Rudfeld	My uncle
Radio operator Jens Mortensen	Brother
Boatswain Leo Hjorth Madsen colleague	Work's
Able sailor Hans Kristian Jørgensen	Daughter
Able sailor Børge Ravn	School friend
Mid ships man Svend Aage Mikkelsen	Neighbour
The crew of Iberian Coast and so on	relatives
Captain Daniel Collins	Daughter

1.officer D. Pudham Seaman's Church Newcastle	Danish
Chiel engineer J. Huntley seaman's Church Newcastle.	Danish
Boatswain P. Donduey or Dondney Seaman's Church Newcastle.	Danish

### **Conclusion.**

I have talked with many about this tragic loss, relatives, sisters and brothers of the perished and family members in 2nd and 3<sup>rd</sup> generations together with friends and old sailing friends. I have discussed the loss with retired and present day sailors and also sailors who had been signed on onboard Gerda Toft, masters, chief engineers, yes even ship owners, in other words people who know what they are talking about and know what the sailors onboard Gerda Toft were thinking when they realised they were unable to save the ship.

Everyone agrees with my conclusion about the loss. They did what was humanly possible with the means they had available. They fought to save Gerda Toft and to save themselves but unfortunately they had to give up the struggle against the sea they loved so much. I tried to imagine what they thought when they saw the lanterns from Iberian Coast and what the crew on Iberian Coast thought when it was all over. I can only guess. I talked to Captain Daniel Collins daughter Dorothy Tuck recently, she repeated what she had told me in a letter, that her father was very moved over the loss. It troubled him all his life that they could not save them, he never forgot it.

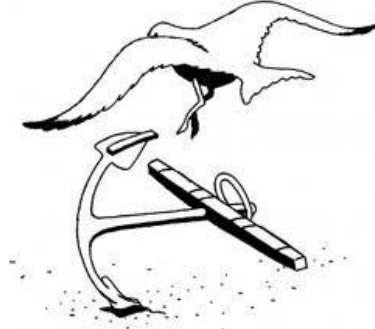
They tried to help, risking their lives, they hove to Iberian Coast with nearly no speed to give shelter for the lifeboat and the 15 to 20 men lying in the water filled boat.

It meant the water constantly poured over deck and hatches on Iberian Coast. Imagine 10 to 15 meter high waves beating down on the sailors who were on deck trying to rescue Gerda Toft's crew, yes some of them were out on ladders, which were hung overboard to be able to get down to the people in the lifeboat to help.

Imagine you are onboard a ship which due to the weather is unable to sail normally. In those situations you choose to slow down the engine it is also the most careful way to protect the ship, cargo and crew but there is a risk the ship hits the bottom in low water.

Gerda Toft was a good 96 meters long and where they were in the North Sea they had about 35 10 40 meters under the keel.

It is not difficult to imagine how much water Gerda Toft had under the keel in a trough of waves, not much, when you know the waves in the North Sea in a storm or hurricane can become 10 to 15 meters high. The North Sea is no fun when the weather is bad because there is not so much water. Most of the North Sea is flat with a depth of about 20 to 45 meters. In storm the waves become choppy and hit the ship horrifyingly hard. Then you wish you were at home in the garden weeding the radishes with your wife. When the weather is so bad and the waves roll in under the ship the propeller often comes out of the water and when that happens the engine goes faster because there is no resistance on the propeller and the whole ship shakes and trembles (the modern ships have a regulator to prevent this.) When the ship falls down in the sea again it jumps up and down, this is what sailors call “pitch heavily in the water” and then you risk falling out of bed



It is not up to me to decide the reason for the loss but I can't help thinking about what I have heard and read.

At the maritime inquiry it was written that the loss was due to a crack in the deck. I do not believe this as it does not fit in with the timing. Gerda Toft was in contact with the shipping company at 9.20 or 9.50 hundred hours and informs they are hove to and only at 15.15 hundred hours comes the first SOS and at 16.21 hundred hours they leave the radio station and that means in seamen's language that they give up the ship and go into the lifeboats. If this should fit with a crack in the deck, then the crack must have been very big if the pumps were not able to manage and you can repair a crack in many ways. I know a case where they water proofed a leak with a joint of pork, sailors are rather resourceful.

It is written that the first SOS came at 15.15 hundred hours and the last one came a good hour later. A good hour passes, when they know something is wrong. In that hour so much water could get into the ship from a crack in the deck that they are lost even if their pumps are going full speed.

It is not a leak radio operator Jens Mortensen talks about in his first SOS but that hatch nr. 2 is knocked in and if that happens things go quickly. The pumps cannot manage. That fits the timing better. It was not the first time they had problems with hatch nr. 2. They were nearly lost a year

earlier about 50 sm. south of the Faroese Islands but saved the ship with the help of some lead sheeting they had available.

I dare to state that it's the breaking of nr. 2 hatch that is the reason for the loss not a crack.

I have also heard that Gerda Toft was badly maintained, that they had no paint, ropes, wires and there were only one awning for each hatch. Yes, it may be that they had sold these things, (crews in some ships did so to supplement their rather low pay).



Compass card.

but to sell the awnings is pure suicide, so I don't believe that. At that time we did not have patent hatches as we have to day. The rules were that only for short distances and in the summer we did sail with 1 or 2 awnings on. However, in the winter and spring there were always 3 awnings on and we did not cheat with that.

The signing on period for sailors at that time was a minimum of 18 months and then you could sign off and get your travel home paid. You had to pay for your own travel home and your replacement's journey out if you wanted to sign off before the 18 months were up and not many could afford this. There were other rules if a ship came into a Danish harbour.

I have heard the Gerda Toft was a "drinking" ship, yes, perhaps it was. There were many ships which were at that time. You could normally buy as much beer and spirits as you wanted and it didn't cost much. At the beginning of the 1960s a small Danish snaps costs 3.75kr. Drinking to excess at sea was unheard of. The stokers drank quite a lot but they moved up to 25 tons of coal with a shovel in 24 hours and that was in all weathers.

Today you do not find beer or spirits onboard most Danish ships. I personally think it is good. Try to eat a delicious steak and then "enjoy" a glass of juice, it is rubbish but there has to be a limit.

Accusation of bad seaman ship has also been mentioned. "Business is one thing and philanthropy another" I don't even want to hear it because it is

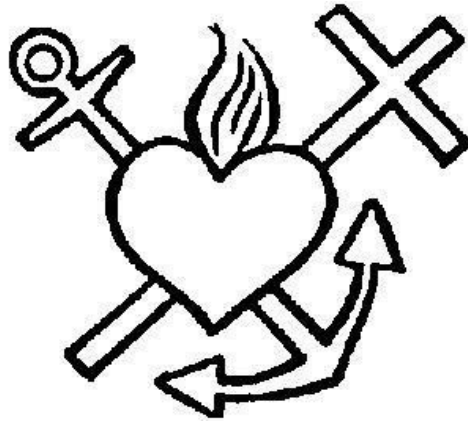
an attack below the belt and people who come out with that talk, in that sort of situation, do not know anything about ships or sailing and should keep their mouth shut and keep to things they perhaps know about. My friends, they were clever and brave sailors who just did their job but were in the wrong place at the wrong time. The more I worked with the account the more I have felt I was the only survivor. In some situations I have felt I knew every one onboard, their relatives and friends.



3. engineer Børge Andersen and Jytte, here together with her Father.  
(Source Co. Metal). (Photo of Jytte given by herself).

As this account draws to an end I am left with some big gaps which have also been felt by the families of those involved, and not least those who signed off before the loss who knew the sailors well, warts and all. I found 3rd Engineer Børge Andersen's daughter Jytte by coincidence, she lives in Odder today, (see page 33-34-41) and after 17 photos of the 31 crew from Gerda Toft were found Jytte and I took a trip to Silkeborg to visit John.

John's eyes filled with tears when he saw Jytte and the photos of the crew from Gerda Toft. The loss still marked the old chief engineer. Suddenly the tragedy was alive again, suddenly Børge and John were again on the railway station in Aarhus saying farewell to Børge's highly pregnant wife. One minute Jytte was standing in the lounge, the little newborn, whom Børge never saw, the next, she was there, it was moving to witness. I was moved, I did not think such a situation would move a "rough" sailor like me. On this point I became wiser.



**Honoured be their memories.**

This account is written in memory of S/S Gerda Toft, M/S Iberian Coast and their crews.

Only 3 of the 31 large crew were found; chief engineer Robert Burchardi. Mid ships man Svend Aage Mikkelsen and a young man who could not be identified.



Christmas roses



Haurvig Church.

### **What happened to the old ships?**

The history of the Park boats?

Great Britain was seriously threatened after the fall of France in 1940 they started discussion with USA about building of ships there. At that time Canada had already started building ships for the Mother land. USA and Canada's shipbuilding was stagnating in the years between the wars and there were only 10 shipyards with about 2000 employees. There were 7 ship yards on the West coast and 11 on the East coast by 1942 and "The Great Lakes", which built standard ships of various types e.g. "Ford type" of 10.000 TDW. "Canadian Victory type" the same size and "park type". Of the last there was a type of about 10.000 TDW. and 3600 TDW. Finally, there was another type of 4.600 TDW. cargo boats. 42 of them were built of which 3 later sailed under Danish flag.

The ships were 2.700 Brt. Corresponding to 4.600 TDW. Length over all 312 feet, width 46 feet and depth of 22 feet. The ships had 4 hatches with two 3 ton derricks to each hatch. The machine was a triple expansion steam machine of 1280 IHP.

The British government sold the ships after the war, and two Danish owners D/S Jutlandia and D/S Bothnia bought 3 of them. "S/S Kalø" (D/S Bothnia) were built by Foundation Maritime Ltd., Pictou in 1943, and sold in 1946 as "Tatuk" to a Canadian ship owner. "Tatuk" was sold to D/S Bothnia in 1948 and was renamed "Kalø". The shipping company sold her to Liberia as "S/S Ester". She was sold 3 times in the years 1964, 65 and 66 first as "John P." then as "Ramsdal I" and finally as "Rio Attrato" under Columbian flag, where she ended her days.

"S/S Maria Toft" (D/S Jutlandia) build in 1944 by the ship yard Saint John Dry Dock and Shipb. Corp. of Canada. She was taken over by a private Canadian owner under the name "Federal Ranger" in 1947 and she was sold again in 1948 to D/S Jutlandia and renamed "Maria Toft." During the Korean War with the sky high ship prices she was sold to Sweden as "J.E. Manne" and in 1956 she was sold to Norway as "J.E.M.Næss". In 1963 Greek interest bought her as "Herman Leader" and in 1969 she changed name for the last time to "Leader One" still under Greek flag.

S/S Gerda Toft was also built in Canada but that has already been written about.

S/S Gerda Toft was mainly sailing in the North and Baltic seas and some engagement in the North Atlantic tramp trade. Unfortunately we know her fate far too well.

**The End.**

Able sailor Bjarne Skov Poulsen  
Copyright.



### **Legend of maritime language..**

Aft. (rear end of ship)

Port (left side of ship marked by red lantern)

Forecastle (front end of ship where the windlass is situated)

Ballast (a ship in ballast has no cargo on board)

Ships biscuits (twice baked biscuits, emergency provisions)

Blocks (oval formed contraptions made of wood or metal with one or more sheaves to form a tackle facilitating easier means of lifting or lowering heavy weights i.e. life-boats)

Boom-end (outer end of boom)

Board to board (swinging from side to side)

Bridge screen (front edge of the bridge)

GRT (gross tonnage)

Boat deck (deck where life-boats are placed)

Bunkering (loading propulsion means (coal or oil) for further cruise)

Was a brave (proficient) seaman.

Buoy (we were moored in buoys)

Bunkers (compartment in a ship where propulsion fuel is stowed)

Cruiser Stern (sharply formed front end of a ship)

Cyl (cylinder) Quotation (made by Preben Møller Hansen , chairman of Danish Seaman's Union during a televised press conference).

Dock, (shipyard).

Wells (low-laying decks with loading hatches. These decks were in older steamships (well- deckers) inclined to be swamped in adverse weather).

Steam engineer (engineer crew member entailed with the duties of providing steam or other means of power to windlass, derricks, heating etc.

Fall astern (drift off) .

Slack off (slack, slide out of control).

Life raft (Pontoon, earlier typically made of aluminium now more often rubber furnished with various cordage to hold on to).

Painter (rope fastened to front or rear end of a ships boat).

Fall off (change ships direction or drift downwind from originally steered course).

Foremast (the foremost mast of a ship).

For good (forever)

Shifting sand, used in porcelain- production).

Stoke hold top (ledge above the stoke hold in the ships engine room).

Freeboard (the vertical distance from the uppermost watertight deck to the waterline measured amidships).

Whistle-turn (seaman on duty who can be summoned by whistle- signal

from the bridge).

Gear (stuff)

Hook off the blocks (take off the blocks).

HP (horse power).

Purser (in charge of the galley (ships kitchen) personnel)

Wedges (ordinarily made of wood).

"Classed" (classified).

Knot (unit describing a ships speed. One knot = One nautical mile (1852 metres or 2000 yards) per hour).

Heaving line (thin line furnished with a small sandbag or a knot in the free end. Used as a first connexion between ships or from ship to land. The mooring lines are hauled to the pier with the heaving line).

Capsize (topple over).

Galley (kitchen).

Single up (reduce). By departure the fore and aft mooring lines are reduced to a minimum.

Having in hand (knowing the job).

Signal Letters or Reconnoitring Signal (A ships specific code in letters or numbers signifying its name and country in the International Maritime Signal Handbook). Code for Danish ships always begins with the letter O. GERDA TOFT'S code was OYHA.

The bunk (the bed).

Hatches (wood, planks).

Lloyds Register of Shipping (maritime insurance).

Cabins (berths)

Catwalk (to get from one end of a ship to another catwalk ensured a relatively dry passage in heavy weather).

Trim coal (showel coal).

Leak (Ship or boat has a hole in it).

Ladder (rope ladder with wooden steps also called pilot-ladder).

Gangway (connexion between ship and shore).

M/V Stands for motor Vessel.

Nautical Mile (1852 metres or 2000 yards).

NRT (Net register tonnage, the measure of the useful capacity of a ship).

The yard arm.

Wardroom or officers mess (ships officers lounge and dining room).

Hurricane (wind force 12 on the beau fort scale corresponding to 32,6 metres/sec or 117 kilometres/hour).

Gun whale (upper edge of a ships side).

Rocket launcher (contraption used by firing of distress- rockets).

Seamanship, (good seamanship signifies well carried our work onboard).

Slacking (loosen up).

Nautical mile (distance at sea 1 nautical mile = 1852 metres or 2000 yards)

Southerly .

Gutter ledges (steel or wooden beams supporting overlaying hatch planks).

Battens (iron girders placed along the edges of a hatch on top of the tarpaulin and between the cleats. Wedges are then driven in between these, holding the hatch watertight).

SOS (international distress signal in Morse Code).

Starbord (Ships right side marked with green lantern).

Stem (end of a ship, front =bow, rear =stern)

Greetings to seamen (every year at Christmas, Danish Broadcasting Service transmits personal greetings to Danish seamen worldwide).

Marooned (fired and sent ashore)

Lanyard (fastening two parts, i.e. two eyes of wires together with the lanyard woven more times between the eyes).

Tight (taught).

Telegraphy (Morse code communication).

(Ton weight unit, 1 ton =1000 kilos).

Time Charter (affreightment of a ship for an agreed period of time).

Thwart of rowers (benches in a small boat).

TDW. Tons Dead Weight (ships total loading capacity i.e. full cargo, full propulsion means and fully equipped for sea when loaded down to lowest legal (summer) freeboard).

Tramp Trade (sea transportation carried out by merchant vessels with no fixed schedule, taking freight as it is offered as opposed to vessels in the line trade)

Hove-to (to heave-to is to situate the ship against wind and sea with minimum steerageway in order either to create conditions to put a boat in the water etc. or in adverse weather to minimize storm-damage).

Windward (the side from which the wind is coming).

Wind Force (the Beaufort scale operates within a 0 to 12 range, where force 12 indicates Hurricane-strength).

Wire-drums. (Contraptions around which mooring-wires can be rolled when not in use).

Yard arms (end of sails).

