

Readers have asked to have more on post cards from Germany in TPA over and over again. There are even several collectors who wish to learn more on the region TPA comes from. Well, as I mentioned several times before, I do not collect German topo cards, even not of my hometown. I buy cards from Rastede when I see any reasonably priced (this keeps my collection small). Also I think there is only little of interest around in north-western Germany compared with other parts of Germany with its typical touristic spots and names of international fame.

But requests continue to come in and so I decided to do something on the nearby seaport of **Wilhelmshaven**. Not only this city has an interesting (short) history but because there are plenty of cards around, the majority dealing with "Marine" (Navy) topics, as this was the only reason of the city foundation.

### Wilhelmshaven's History

In Europe you are used to old cities and places, founded long ago, some dating back to Roman times. Even small towns like Rastede for example are usually quite old. My hometown was founded in the year 1059. This is not the case with Wilhelmshaven!

In the early 19th century there was no "Germany" as we know it today. There were numerous smaller (semi-) independent states and numerous of conflicts and changing alliances. During the first German-Danish War in 1848-50, which broke out because Denmark as well as the German League wanted to control the state Schleswig-Holstein, the Danish fleet blocked the German ports. The German League and especially Prussia which dominated this alliance had no navy and first attempts to built up an own fleet flopped, the few ships were sold in 1852. Something had to be done to assure free trade and to built up own naval forces. It was the Prussian Prince Adalbert (1811 - 1873) who found an solution. Secret talks between Prussia and the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg began in 1852. A suitable place for a fort and harbour on the North Sea coast was the area of today's Wilhelmshaven which belonged to Oldenburg. Talks had to kept secret as the neighbouring Kingdom of Hannover (which belonged to

# Gruss aus Wilhelmshaven



England until 1837) don't wanted Prussia to gain more power. Initial plans were to erect a fort for coastal protection, together with a shipyard. The talks ended successfully and Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV. and the Grand Duke Nikolaus Friedrich Peter of Oldenburg signed the agreement on 18./20. August 1853. It became public on February 15, 1854 and led to political rumours. Oldenburg had sold 1300 acres of land to Prussia, which obliged in return to built a naval station and to protect the Oldenburg coast. The development was delayed by Prussian-Austrian War of 1866 and the Franco-German War of 1870/71. Oldenburg sold another 110 hectare of land in 1873 to Prussia, while plans had changed and instead a number of forts a bigger port was planned. The official "birth date" of the Prussian port of Wilhelmshaven was June 17, 1869 and from April 1, 1873 it belonged politically to province Hannover. The former Kingdom of Hannover had been annexed by Prussia, because Hannover had fought on the Austrian side in the war of 1866.

On some cards you sometimes find the name "Rüstringen" together with/instead of Wilhelmshaven. The neighbouring towns/communities *Bant*, *Heppens* and *Neuende* formed the city of Rüstringen in May 1911 and belonged to the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg. A number of naval facilities were found in Rüstringen and both cities were more or less one. This became official in April 1, 1937 and the name "Rüstringen" disappeared again.

Wilhelmshaven was erected in a rural area with only few people living there. The subsoil consisted of marshy soil together with mud, sand found not until depths of 8 to 12 metres. This subsoil made all building work (mostly by shovel and wheelbarrow) difficult. Another problem faced with were diseases which claimed many victims among the workers. Between October 1858 to September 1872 a total of 26021 workers were employed. During this period 19011 of them suffered from Malaria, something which surprised me as I had not expected this 'popular' disease to be found in our "cold" area.



Map of northwestern Germany to give readers a idea about where to find **Wilhelmshaven**, as well as **where the 'TPA headquarter' is located**. The map I used for illustration is at least 35 years old. The cross north of the city of Oldenburg (population 155,000) stands for Rastede (pop 20,000). Bigger cities included for better orientation: **Hannover**, **Bremen**, **Hamburg**. On the left hand, divided by a thicker line you see **The Netherlands**. Nowadays you hardly notice the border anymore. Only the traffic signs and car license plates make clear that you have entered another country. With the Euro currency now in circulation you even do not need to exchange any currencies.

To give you a rough idea of distances, it takes about one hour by car from Oldenburg to reach the Dutch "border". Less than 30 minutes by car from Oldenburg to Wilhelmshaven (on direct motorway and without traffic jams). Most of the shown region belongs to the state *Niedersachsen* (Lower Saxony). The darker area seen at top right hand is the state *Schleswig-Holstein*. Bremen (incl. the port Bremerhaven) and Hamburg are also independent city states.

Wilhelmshaven became a official Imperial Navy Port on June 1883. The Navy and all the other industrial/military facilities dominated the town. Navy acts of 1898 and 1900 decided to station a squadron of eight regular service ships permanently at Wilhelmshaven. This meant more docks and quais, bigger locks and harbour entrance, better fairways to avoid tidal problems etc.

The *Gruss aus Wilhelmshaven* card (thanks Chris!) on previous page is typical. Top left: sailor and coastal gun emplacement; top center: *S.M.S. Mars*, artillery training ship built at Imperial Shipyard, Wilhelmshaven in 1879 (3251 tons, 84 m length, in service until 1914); top right: signal station. Plus a view of the "Adalbertstrasse" (named after the Prussian Prince), perhaps also good for parades and finally a view of the city hall. No publisher/printer listed, only a small "1244". Late postal use in 1908; first published c.1897-1899.

### The Wilhelmshaven Shipyard(s)

The construction of the first shipyard began in 1864 and was completed in 1871. The name changed several times over the years:

until 1872	Königliche Werft
01.01. 1872	Kaiserliche Werft
16.04. 1919	Marinewerft
01.01. 1921	Reichswerft
01.01. 1923	Marinewerft Wilhelmshaven
01.06. 1935	Kriegsmarinewerft Wilhelmshaven
08.05. 1945	Marinewerft Wilhelmshaven Naval Dockyard

The dismantling (all was transported to Russia) began in June 1946 and the shipyard history ends finally in March 1950. A total of 165 ships were built at Wilhelmshaven, from small fish cutters to 40,000 ton battleship "Tirpitz".

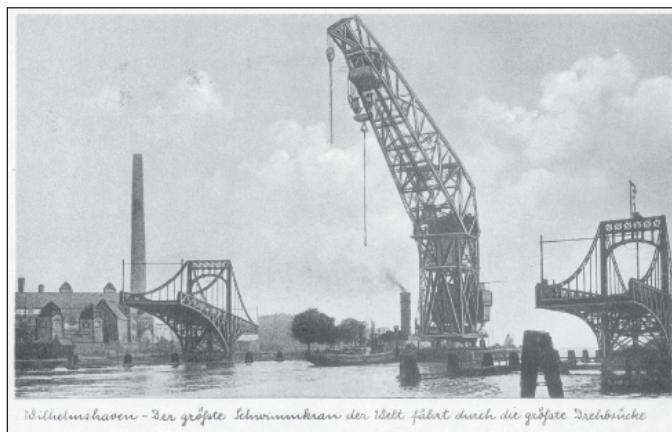
Below you see a enlarged portion of an (aerial) photo card. The mention of "Reichswerft" helps to date this postally used, but illegable postmark, view to published around 1921-1923. No publisher listed, only a (card) no. "209". Several bigger war ships, some smaller units and a freighter can be seen.

→ One of the many, many postcards of the Wilhelmshaven navy port.

A busy day on the quay. With plenty of potential customers for this view. Good quality coloured halftone printing by unidentified printer for the (postcard) publisher *Albert Rosenthal* from Bremen. Card. no. 536. Not p/u, post 1905.

→ World's biggest floating crane passing the biggest swing bridge. B/w collotype printed view published by "Nordseeverlag Wilhelmshaven" as card no. 4. Postally used in 1937, view taken in the late 1920's I believe. Crane nicknamed "*Langer Heinrich*" ("Tall Henry") and is found on many (maritime) cards.

→ The swing bridge was named after *Kaiser Wilhelm* and is described on this card from the early 1950's as Europe's biggest swing bridge. Opened officially in 1907 (length 159 m, width 8 m, weight 758 tons) this bridge is still working today, not destroyed, not dismantled by Allies.



The docks were constantly enlarged, three harbour entrances suitable for the biggest battleships were built until WW2 years, a 40,000 tons dry dock, the "Uto-Werft" was erected (submarine + torpedoboat shipyard) in pre WW1 years, fitting-out industries grew a.s.o. There is not enough room in this issue to list all. But the navy, shiyards and associated industries clearly dominated life in Wilhelmshaven.

A number of (war) ship histories are closely connected with this port (see next page please). Of interests is also what happened after the end of WW1. The Treaty of Versailles peace allowed only minor ship builing in Germany. The "Uto-Werft" became a branch of "Deutsche Werft AG" in 1920. They built trawlers, repaired ships of the Roland and HAPAG shipping companies, but also doors, windows and rotary irons. Former navy ships were rebuilt for civil use, over 500 locomotives were repaired but finally there was no work anymore and the firm closed down in late 1924. No "Golden Twenties" in Wilhelmshaven.

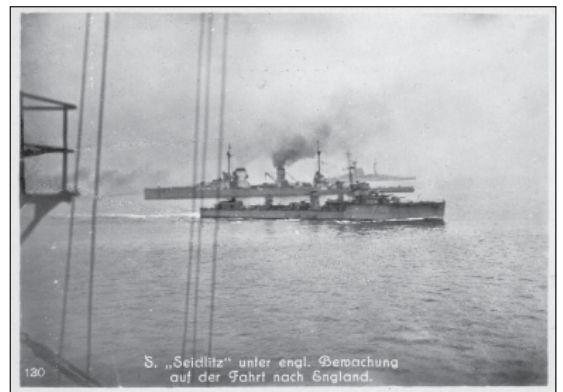
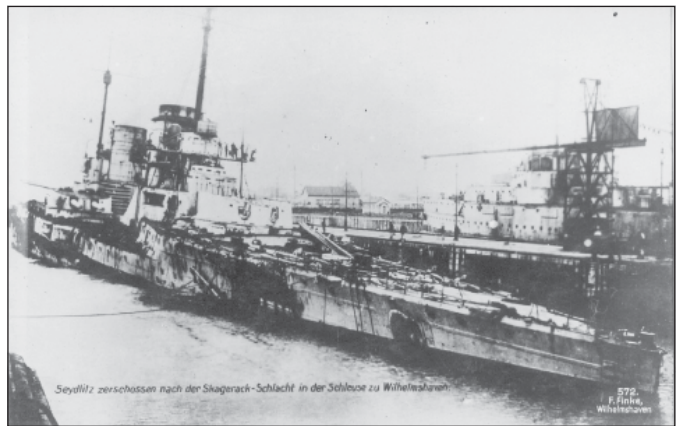
Several scrapping firms were established in the dock area after the end of WW1 and the business boomed. Many (war)ships had already been given to other countries. Others had to be scrapped according the Treaty of Versailles. Between 1919 to 1923 a total of 112 former German navy ships were scrapped at Wilhelmshaven plus 82 German vessels. In addition some 100 ships from the USA, Great Britain and France had to be scrapped. The biggest was the US vessel "St. Paul" (18,000 tons). This meant work for some years (until the late 1920's).

**The WW1 Years**

Wilhelmshaven was one of the major German naval port at that time (another was Kiel). The submarine and torpedo-boat shipyard was very busy, major naval operations were directed from this place and, battleships had to be repaired. I pick out only one ship here, which is widely documented on postcards.

The battle cruiser "**Seydlitz**" (24,988 tons, length 200 m) was built at "*Blom & Voß*" shipyard Hamburg, and came in service in May 1913. "Seydlitz" took part in the bombardment of Yarmouth on Nov. 3, 1914; bombardment of Hartlepool on Dec. 16, 1914; the Dogger Bank Battle on Jan. 24, 1915 where it was hit heavily twice, both rear twin-turrets burning, many casualties; ran on a mine while on the way to attack Lowestoft/Yarmouth again on April 25, 1916, march back with 1400 tons of water in ship. But it became even worst. Battle cruiser "Seydlitz" took part in the Battle of Jutland on May 31, 1916. Responsible for the explosion/sinking of the British battle cruiser "Queen Mary" (1278 men lost their live) together with German battle cruiser "Derfflinger". Both German cruisers received many heavy hits and returned to Wilhelmshaven. "Derfflinger" (who also sank the British "Invincible") with 3,000 tons of water in ship. The Seydlitz received a total of 23 hits and was hit by an torpedo from British destroyer "Petard". 28 cm turrets D and E burnt out. Despite an total of 5,300 tons of water inside the ship the "Seydlitz" returned to Wilhelmshaven 'reversing', draught finally at bow 14 metres and 8,5 metres at stern. Many tricks were needed to get this ship home in one piece. Repaired at Wilhelmshaven and back in service on Sept. 17, 1916. Some other minor operations followed. After the war the "Seydlitz" interned at Scapa Flow in Nov. 1918. Self-sinking on June 21, 1919, raised in November 1928, scrapped at Rosyth until 1930.

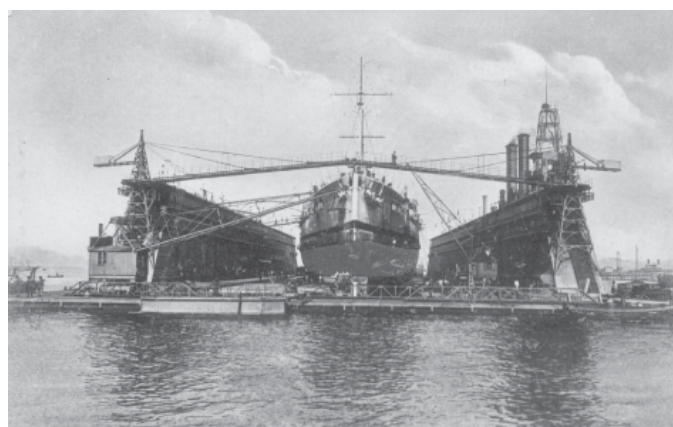
➔ The local photographer and postcard publisher "Fritz Finke" published this photo card (no. 572) of the worst looking "Seydlitz" in Wilhelmshaven lock. Not p/u. At least 3 other "Seydlitz" photocards by same photographer known.  
 ↘ Another card by the firm of Fritz Finke. Stencil coloured bromide birthday "naval" greetings. P/u 1933.



➔ The "**Seydlitz**" on its way to Scapa Flow under escort of British warships. This sepia photocard (no. 130) comes from an huge set of cards by unidentified publisher. Most of only average quality (bad weather photo shots). Perhaps press photos or shot secretly by crew member.

➔ "**Der Abend des 10ten November 1918 in Wilhelmshaven**", signed (also published by) *Karl Blossfeld*. What happened on the night of the 10th Nov., 1918? Lots of signal rockets in the night sky over Wilhelmshaven port. The war was over! And it was revolution time. First revolt attempts/strikes had taken place among navy crews already in June to mid August 1917. Not only because of the food shortage but also because nothing happened. After the Battle of Jutland most of the German naval forces stayed at ports, as the Kaiser did not want to risk the loss of further ships. Two of the strike leaders, *Albin Köbis* and *Max Reichpietsch* were shot on Sept. 5, 1917, three others were imprisoned. More serious revolts began on Oct. 27, after the official order to send all ships to the Belgian coast to support German troops on their march back. Called

naval forces incl. submarines managed to stop first rebellions on the regular service ships "Thüringen" and "Helgoland" and a total of 500 sailors was arrested. But more and more red flags turned up, and many navy men tired of war followed the political appeals. Stoker Bernhard Kuhnt (1876- 1946) is one of the enigmatic persons of that time. He proclaimed the (short-lived) "*Socialist Republic Oldenburg-Ostfriesland*" on Nov. 10, 1918.



← Regular service ship "**Ostfriesland**" (24,700 tons), built in Wilhelmshaven and in service from autumn 1911 on, seen here in the 40,000 dry dock of the Imperial Shiyard. Published by "*Deutscher Flottenverein*", Berlin. Printed by "*Graphische Gesellschaft AG*", (big ppc printer!) also from Berlin. Good quality, machine coloured collotype card.

**Heading for the next war**

And it started all over again. The dock area was enlarged, a fourth harbour entrance built. The first modern warship of the Reichsmarine, the cruiser "Emden" (the third ship to carry this name) was built at Wilhelmshaven and launched in 1925. Others followed: cruisers *Königsberg*, *Köln*, *Leipzig* etc. The big battleship "*Scharnhorst*" was launched on Oct. 1936 and the biggest of all (also the biggest ship of the German navy) was the "*Tirpitz*" 42,900 tons, length of 251 metres (launched April 1, 1939, in service in 1941). The Wilhelmshaven navy shipyard, which alone employed some 25,000 workers in 1940, concentrated on submarine construction during WW2 years.

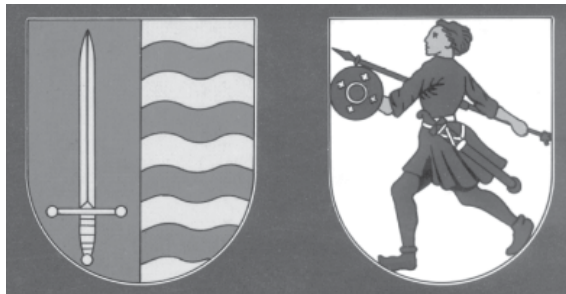
Wilhelmshaven's population had increased to about 81,900 in 1916 and declined afterwards. It reached the 100,000 mark in 1938 and the highest ever population was during WW2: 133,000 lived and worked here in 1940. This concentration of military (and related industries) made Wilhelmshaven of course one of the favourite targets of allied air-raids. The first attack on Sept. 3, 1939 and the final took place in April 1945, a total of about 100+ air-raids. The destruction of the city was impressive, work in the shipyards continued without greater interruptions however.

The final war related comment on Wilhelmshaven comes from my mother who had the 'pleasure' to go to school during WW2. There were quite a number of heavy air defense batteries situated around Wilhelmshaven. A number of them found opposite the city and the marshy land along the Jade Bay. My mother lived on a farm (about 40 km's southeast of Wilhelmshaven), the next battery was about 15 km's away. As attacks on Wilhelmshaven were usually by night, the steady firing guns together with the noise of the bombers and explosions made sleep impossible, even over the above mentioned distance. They had also a elderly couple from Wilhelmshaven quartered with. Their home was early hit by bombs. I must say that I am quite happy that I haven't lived during that time!

**New Beginning**

When the war was over, all industrial facilities still of use were dismantled and transported to Russia, France and Great Britain. Former military facilities as well as most port buildings were demolished/blown up. Those in charge sought a new function for Wilhelmshaven which would enable the city to develop in the future on his own, independent of one-sided, military considerations. The new German navy returned to the city in mid 1950's. Being Germany's only deepwater port, the port for big oil tankers was built together with pipelines leading to Cologne and Hamburg. The latest decision is to build a new port suitable for the new generation of big container ships to come. This is very welcome as Wilhelmshaven has great problems with unemployment after other industries had closed down and over 10,000 workers lost their jobs. Population went under the 100,000 mark again (about 94,500 today). Wilhelmshaven is still Germany's largest naval site. It is also an important location of activity in the field of marine technology and marine commerce. Lots has been done to make Wilhelmshaven more attractive to visitors and tourism in general. My own opinion about Wilhelmshaven is mixed.

Below: Left ill: the new city crest after Wilhelmshaven and Rüstringen were united. Officially used from March 1939 to January 15, 1946. Banned by Allied Military Government. New WHV city crest (right ill) in use since Nov. 18, 1948.



**Wilhelmshaven - Gökerstr.**, one of the older streets of Wilhelmshaven. Left we see changing of the guard in front of an (unknown to me) official building (barracks?). Published by local firm *Albert Maas*, who proudly shows (good retouched - but actual size?) own advertising on the wall (bookbinder & stationery shop - with postcards of course). Printed by *Louis Glaser*, Leipzig (coloured *Auto-Chrom* process), postally used in Dec. 1901.



**Wilhelmshaven - near the railway station.** Photo(graphic) card published by "*Teco*" = *Trinks & Co.*, Leipzig. View no. 75. Not p/u, but typical for late 1920's to mid 1930. Of course with some marines in view (and young women). This card was surely on sale at the kiosk seen on the left side.

I have not found any bigger postcard publishers in Wilhelmshaven, except several local photographers. But all major German ppc publishers had card of this city in their programmes. The navy meant good business.

Below: **Greetings from the seaside town Wilhelmshaven.** Deckle-edged multi-view (collotype printed!) published by local firm *E. Stamsen* (no. 422 - printer no?). P/u June 1960. Ills: Youth hostel; open-air pool, Genius Beach, oil port.

