



Brutality on Trial: Hellfire Pedersen, Fighting Hansen, and the Seamen's Act of 1915 (New Perspectives on Maritime History and Nautical Archaeology)

E. Kay Gibson

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Brutality on Trial tells the story of landmark legal victories against abuse on the high seas. These were the first documented violations of the Seamen's Act of 1915, signed into law by Woodrow Wilson to hold officers and ship owners legally accountable for abusing their crews. This is the first book to explore the outcomes of that act, including a series of criminal and civil trials that at last brought dignity to the lives of common seamen.

Drawing on newspaper accounts and corroborating research that includes all relevant maritime documents, State Department consular reports, signed statements of those involved, and extensive court records, Gibson has chronicled not only the terror on the voyages of the barkentines Puako and Rolph but also the significant statutory, legal, and societal changes in the merchant seaman's status, rights, and life at sea. This exhaustive account of murder, suicide, and mayhem on American sailing ships argues that the final years of the sailing ship era were far from romantic. As late as 1918 and 1919, American seamen were still suffering under the brutal hands of officers such as Adolph Cornelius Pedersen of the Puako and Frederick Hansen of the Rolph. *Brutality on Trial* mirrors a critical era in maritime history and law--emerging from the values of the nineteenth century into the post-WWI world.

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