



*The German coaster, the m/s Bärbel. Right, in the center: The Russian sailor, Andrej Lapin, was charged with the murder of the captain and the crew – five men all told. Lapin left the Landgericht in Osnabrück a free man.*

# The real axe ship

Jens Henrik Jensen's novel, *The Axe Ship*, is inspired by a real life drama that caused a sensation in Denmark and Germany and made headlines all over the world.

On August 18, 1993, a German coaster, the m/s Bärbel was found drifting in the North Sea with no one aboard. Only member of the crew, the Russian sailor Andrej Lapin, was found in a life raft with 60,000 D-marks in his possession.

The police found traces of violence and arson on board the ship, and the Russian sailor was arrested and charged with the murder of the captain and the crew – five men all told. According to Lapin, two members of the crew had attacked the captain and two other crew members with axes, had managed to kill all three of them, and Lapin had had to kill the two murderers in self-defence, using their own axes.

Realizing that no one would believe his story, he had dumped the bodies into the sea, set fire to the ship and jumped into a life raft. The 60,000 D-marks he claimed to be his own profits from a previous sale of Russian icons.

Since both the ship and the captain were German, the Russian sailor was handed over to the German court system for prosecution, but neither the Danish police nor the German courts were able to disprove the Russian sailor's story, despite intense efforts to establish his guilt as a cold blooded killer.

On February 3, 1995, Andrej Lapin left the Landgericht in Osnabrück a free man, and to this day, the Russian sailor is the only one who knows what really happened on the infamous axe ship on those fatal days in 1993.