



RESOURCES FOR MODELERS

My Own Private Grail

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Note: *This article originally appeared in the December 1995 issue IPMS Orange County's newsletter. With the passage of more than seven years, I have acquired another couple of these kits, just to be safe, along with achieving a couple of other long time grail quests. Sadly, both AccuScale and its "consignment rack" are gone. Not all changes are for the better.*

Everyone who considers him/herself a "serious" modeler has at least one. Some have quite a number. A kit they want, would love to have, but are unable to find. Usually, the desired kit has some personal meaning that makes it that much more valuable than so many ounces of plastic. Because it is old and long out of production, no matter how many shops he hits, what catalogs he scours, he can't find one.

Call it whatever you like, I call it seeking a Grail. A grail is literally, a cup. In this sense it is something sought for, like the Holy Grail of Arthurian legend (and a certain Monty Python movie), and of such value and rarity that, sometimes, the searcher will despair of ever finding it.

For me, my personal grail has been a rather obscure kit from Revell, and a ship to boot – SMS Seeadler. At 1/232, it is an odd scale, and frankly, it is not the most accurate or detailed of models.

Seeadler (Sea Eagle) was a three-masted merchant sailing ship that was converted by the Imperial German Navy into a disguised raider during World War One. Mounting hidden guns and a crew of naval officers and men, her task was to breakout into the Atlantic and capture and/or sink British and French merchant ships. Because she looked like an innocent merchant sailing ship, she could sail right up to her intended victim before running up the German ensign and dropping the screens to reveal her guns. Under the command of Count Felix von Luckner, the Seeadler set off into history. Though she did not sink as many ships as other raiders, her voyage was of truly epoch stature.

Author Lowell Thomas wrote two books about von Luckner and his experiences, both with the Seeadler, and his experiences in the merchant service prior to the war. It was this kind of "real life" adventure book that I read when I was a kid, and I became fascinated with von Luckner and his ship. Though, with the benefit of the wisdom that comes with age, I realize that Thomas may have painted a picture a little larger than life, yet it is still a great story.

Revell originally released the kit in the late 60's. Actually, it used the same hull and masts of their USCG Eagle sailing ship. Though the model was a fair representation of Eagle, it was a poor representation of Seeadler. The only two things those ships have in common was that they were both ships and had three masts. Anyway, Revell added some deck guns and some deck houses, and viola...a Seeadler.

When I first read Thomas's book "Count Felix von Luckner, the Sea Devil" it would have been along about 1971. Though I had seen the kit in the Revell Catalog for a couple of years, it was not until reading the book that I appreciated the significance of this kit...and my own private grail quest began.

I quickly discovered that the local stores did not carry it, even the local hobby shop where I lived in Seattle did not have it. That's when I discovered – Mail Order and a company called Squadron! Boy was I disappointed when they sent me back the money order and said they could not fill my order. With that, I went straight to the source, I wrote to Revell directly in that far off and mystical place – Venice California. No such luck there either, come to find out that the kit was no longer in production and there was no remaining stock...at this point, at a tender age, I came to understand that any quests worth the name would not be easy.

For me, the grail had long been sought, like 25 years long. The few original issue Seeadler kits I had seen listed in the collector catalogs were either sold before I could call, or priced beyond my budget of the moment. A number of years ago, Revell Germany re-released this kit very briefly, but I was unable to locate one of that issue either.

My quest came unexpectedly to an end last week when I came across one of the reissued kits in the consignment rack at AccuScale Hobbies.

I was so excited! At last, my private grail quest was at an end! Without a moment's hesitation I bought the kit for a fair price. Restraining myself from dancing around the shop and out to my car was the really hard part, but somehow I managed, much to everyone present's relief.

The moral of this story is: Keep on seeking that elusive project, keep seeking your own private grail – this particular grail is soon to assume a place of honor in my apartment.

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