

# *The Star Of Russia*



A grand 1800's square rigger



Now a grand dive



in Port Vila

*A souvenir of your dive with*

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# A Unique Dive

Thanks for taking the time to pick up a copy of our specially produced story of the Star of Russia.

The 'Star' as we affectionately know her, is a grand old wreck. I know that I never get sick of diving her myself.

Whether you're a wreck freak, a snap-happy photographer or just out to see some great fish life, she offers something different to see every dive.

During the 30 years we've been diving the Star, the staff at Nautilus have collected some interesting bits and pieces of information on her past. Rather than letting it collect dust we thought we should put together a bit of a tribute to her.

This souvenir has been put together so that people like yourself could find out a little bit more about the Star's unique story and also so you could take home and keep a memento of Port Vila's biggest and most fascinating shipwreck.

And for the avid researcher of wrecks, we've included a range of references inside if you are interested in ferreting out any more information.

Happy reading and safe diving!

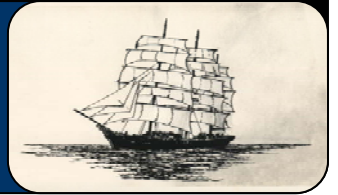
**Pete**



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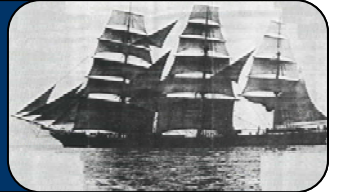
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References to source material researched in the writing of this book are contained inside.  
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# The Irish 'Stars'

Harland and Wolff built the Star of Russia in 1874. This Belfast shipping company built hundreds of ships, both steam and sail, but is a household name these days due to the infamy of another ship they built, the Titanic.

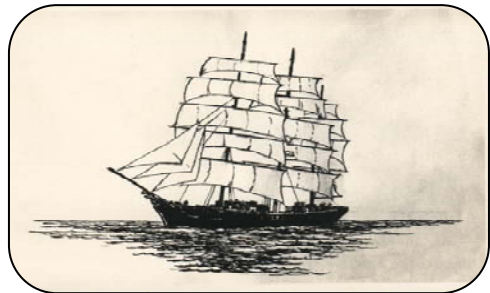
The Star of Russia was assigned the official British Reg. No. 63958 and signal NSLB.

Iron hulled and a fully rigged three masted ship, she truly exemplified the grand old square-riggers of the late 1800's. Her dimensions were as follows:

## Dimensions

**Length:** 84.03-metres  
**Breadth:** 12.38-metres  
**Depth:** 7.38-metres  
**Tonnage:** 1981 Gross 1898 Net

Originally built for the Indian jute trade, the Star of Russia was one of a number of similar square-riggers built at the time. This was one of the last great booms of the sailing era, and in the ten years around the time of the commissioning of the Star of Russia, Harland and Wolff built over 110 ships.



The Irish company J.P. Corry commissioned a fleet of 12 iron-hulled ships from Harland and Wolff, and of them the Star of Russia was the largest.

Most of the references to the Star of Russia in maritime history talk about 'The Star's' good looks, her speed and, common amongst most of Harland and Wolff's ships, her seaworthiness.

## J.P. Corry's Fleet of Stars

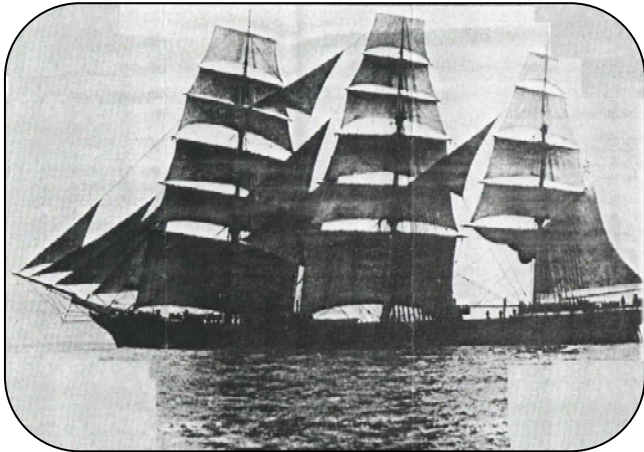
Ship	Year	Rig	Gross Tons	Lgth	Brdth	Dpth	Built By
Star of Erin	1862	Iron Ship	949	200.0	32.0	21.9	Harland and Wolff, Belfast
Star of Denmark	1863	Iron Ship	998	213.2	32.1	21.7	Harland and Wolff, Belfast
Star of Scotia	1864	Iron Ship	999	212.0	32.1	21.8	Harland and Wolff, Belfast
Star of Albion	1864	Iron Ship	999	214.5	32.1	21.5	Harland and Wolff, Belfast
Star of Persia	1868	Iron Ship	1227	227.0	35.0	22.2	Harland and Wolff, Belfast
Star of Greece	1868	Iron Ship	1227	227.0	35.0	22.2	Harland and Wolff, Belfast
Star of Germany	1872	Iron Ship	1284	232.0	35.0	22.0	Harland and Wolff, Belfast
Star of Bengal	1874	Iron Ship	1797	262.8	40.2	23.5	Harland and Wolff, Belfast
Star of Russia	1874	Iron Ship	1892	275.5	40.6	24.2	Harland and Wolff, Belfast
Star of Italy	1877	Iron Ship	1571	257.1	38.0	22.3	Harland and Wolff, Belfast
Star of France	1877	Iron Ship	1569	258.0	38.0	22.8	Harland and Wolff, Belfast
Star of Austria	1886	Iron Ship	1693	264.7	38.7	23.1	Harland and Wolff, Belfast

## An Esteemed Career

The Star of Russia enjoyed a long career with a number of good passages to her credit. At the time the Star of Russia made her first journey, the steam ship was encroaching on the clipper trade, making it difficult for the Star's owners to obtain jute cargoes from India.

Yet the Star of Russia proved to be a speedy and efficient ship, one to rival some of the steam ships of the day.

Her maiden voyage to Calcutta took just 87 days and she returned to London in only 95 days.



But perhaps the most infamous journey of the Star of Russia took place in 1884 when she transported a 4000-ton cargo, consisting mostly of cement, from London to Melbourne. This was her tenth journey and she was still under the command of the same skipper, a Captain Simpson.

The 'Star' set out from London on the 4th Dec 1884 and arrived in Melbourne 75 days later.

On the way she recorded her best days run, covering 388 miles over 23 ½ hours, an average of over 16 ½ knots!

During the journey she also proved her seaworthiness, braving a number of fierce storms throughout the journey. In fact the crew believed it to be some of the wildest weather they had ever experienced. The journey was actually slowed by having her main upper topsail blown out, and she continued on to Melbourne without being able to set a full topsail.

The speedy journey was made even sweeter by the fact that the Star of Russia had managed to outrun another fully rigged ship completing the same route, the Sobraon, by more than five days. The Sobraon had been carrying passengers to Australia and arguably had more favourable weather for sailing than the 'Star' throughout the passage.

## Life Aboard the Star

Life aboard the Star of Russia during its ocean crossings could best be described as 'rugged'.

There was often no escaping the damp wet living quarters, the crew lived on meagre rations and had to battle through atrocious seas. There were no such things as safety harnesses in the Star's day and work on (and above!) the deck was extremely hazardous.

Many of the texts referenced elsewhere in this booklet provide a good insight into life on board the square riggers of the day.

# Tragedy on the Star

Twenty years on from her first voyage, on a horrid night in 1895 the Star of Russia was to lose all hands on watch, apart from the helmsman. That night the wind and sea had been building but the mate waited until the ship began to steer wildly until bringing down any sail.

With the rest of the crew forward the helmsman allowed the ship to luff and the mate and watch were washed overboard never to be seen again.

The helmsman's dramatic account of the nights events have been recorded in Fenceless Meadows by Bill Adams, which ended as follows:

"The sail reefed, they [the second mates watch] descended to the deck. Each man in passing me either avoided me or scowled savagely. The second mate hastened aft to the poop. I, most cold and hungry, a horrid fear upon me, followed his men along the swamped deck to the forecastle. I entered the forecastle behind the last of them. They stared at me. 'Where are Scot, Dougal and the mate? Where are my watch? A sailor then stepped towards me, then, 'They're drowned,' he said 'You luffed!'

"This tragedy gave the ship an unenviable reputation as a man killer. I don't think it was really merited, she had no more incidents of the kind recorded against her, and the probability is that she was in no sense to blame. She was a fast and beautiful ship, like all her sisters, and one cannot feel a pang of pity for a ship thus branded for life with the mark of Cain."

## Recorded List of Journeys with J.P.Corry's

Left	On	Arrived	On	Time
London	April 5 1875	Calcutta	July 10 1875	97 days
Calcutta	August 14 1875	London	November 17 1875	95 days
London	January 27 1876	Calcutta	May 1 1876	95 days
London	May 14 1878	Calcutta	August 16 1878	94 days
London	March 7 1879	Calcutta	June 10 1879	95 days
London	March 3 1880	Calcutta	June 7 1880	96 days
London	October 28 1881	Melbourne	January 25 1881	89 days
London	October 21 1882	Melbourne	January 20 1882	90 days*
London	October 31 1883	Melbourne	January 24 1883	85 days
London	September 18 1884	Melbourne	December 4 1884	77 days
London	November 22 1886	Melbourne	February 16 1886	86 days
London	December 5 1887	San Francisco	April 11 1887	128 days
Antwerp	February 20 1889	Melbourne	May 14 1889	83 days
London	March 3 1890	Sydney	May 30 1890	88 days
Sydney	June 23 1890	San Francisco	August 17 1890	55 days
San Francisco	September 23 1890	Sharpness	January 15 1890	114 days
Barry	April 4 1891	Port Pirie	June 19 1891	76 days
San Francisco	January 11 1892	Queenstown	April 25 1892	105 days
Cardiff	June 28 1892	Cape Town	Aug 31 1892	64 days

Had to return to the Downs after having lost the topsails in a gale on October 24-25. Left the Downs on October 27 and reached Melbourne 84 days out from the Downs

# A Change of Hands

In March 1898, the Star of Russia was sold to Shaw, Savill and Co.

Two years later the ship was sold to the Alaska Packers Association, who were established to service the growing salmon fishing industry in Western Alaska. Their impressive fleet of square-riggers transported supplies and labour north from San Francisco and then returned at the end of the season with canned fish for the markets.



The Alaska Packers Association also acquired a number of Harland and Wolf's iron hulled ships, and could boast one of the last great fleets of square-riggers in the world. Among them were some of the Star of Russia's original sister ships including the equally speedy and beautiful Star of Bengal and the Star of France.

The Star of France, pictured opposite later became the ill fated fishing vessel Olympic II and is now a wreck dive off the coast of the USA. For more information check out [www.cawreckdivers.org/Wrecks/Olympic.htm](http://www.cawreckdivers.org/Wrecks/Olympic.htm)



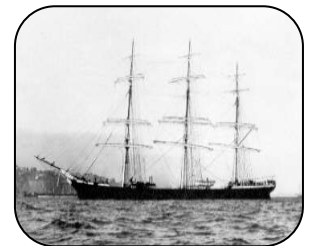
Also amongst the fleet was the Star of India, (pictured opposite and originally the *Euterpe*), which is still sailing American waters to this date.



It is now fully restored and carrying a different cargo, tourists visiting the San Diego Maritime Museum. Check out [www.sdmaritime.com/star.htm](http://www.sdmaritime.com/star.htm) for more info.

Interestingly the *Euterpe* and other ships lost their original names as the Alaska Packers Association based all of their ship names on the pride of the fleet, the Star of Russia.

The Alaskan fishing trade was a fitting twilight to an esteemed career. The Star of Russia raced with a fleet of 15 other square-riggers to and from the fishing grounds in Alaska once a year, spending the rest of the winters at rest with her sister ships.



*Above and Left: The Star of Russia and Alameda in docvk, Alameda. Right Above: The Star at anchor in San Francisco harbour*

"Year after year these races took place, and in the years following the Great War when sail had been almost swept away from the seas, a fleet of some fifteen wind jammers was still fitted out and sent to sea each April after the winter's idleness in Oaklands Creek. The last of these races took place in 1929 and then one more trade closed to the square-rigged ship." (Sailing Ships of Ireland, page 34)

While she was re-rigged down to a barque, the Star proved her speediness in many of the races north and homeward, her fastest passage being in 1924 when she placed first with the Star of Greenland on the return to San Francisco.

The Star was finally moved to the backwaters of the New Hebrides where she was used as a hulk primarily for copra cargoes and bore the name Dupetit Thours.

In Epics Of Square Rigged Ships, Charles W Domville-Fife describes the surprise a Captain Olsen received when he laid eyes on the ship he had once sailed:

"She was hulked, stripped of her towering spars, and even her deckhouse was gone; this was all that remained of the Star of Russia, once a famous Belfast clipper, and to quote the Captain "one of the smartest ships that ever sailed the seas."

By 1953 she was lying on Port Vila's harbour floor. Having been battered on her mooring by numerous cyclones, she surrendered herself to the sea.

### Recorded Journeys of the Star under Alaska Packers' Association

Year	Left	Arrived	Time
1920	San Francisco	Alaska	14 days
1924	Alaska	San Francisco	12 days
1925	Alaska	San Francisco	14 days

## The South Pacific: End of the Line

The Star was to complete her last voyage in 1926, when she was sold to the French to be used as a cargo hulk in the South Seas. In April of that year she left Tacoma bound for Apia, Samoa arriving 43 days later.

There, she was converted into a hulk by Burns Philp and renamed La Perouse. She was later moved to Noumea and served as a coal barge, under the name Bouganville.

She was later moved on to Sydney and in 1929 she was re-united with her original owner, Sir James Corry. He boarded what was once the grand 'Star' and found that while her hull was in fine condition, the rest of the ship had been either stripped or left to deteriorate.

## References

Any text not directly quoted has been researched from the following text references:

- Epics of the Square Rigged Ships by Charles W. Domville-Fife (Reprinted in Scuba Diver Feb 1972)
- Sailing Ships of Ireland Pgs 32 -35
- NZ Dive Apr/May 1982
- The Last of the Windjammers 166-168

The following online sites were also useful and are worth a look if you have the time:

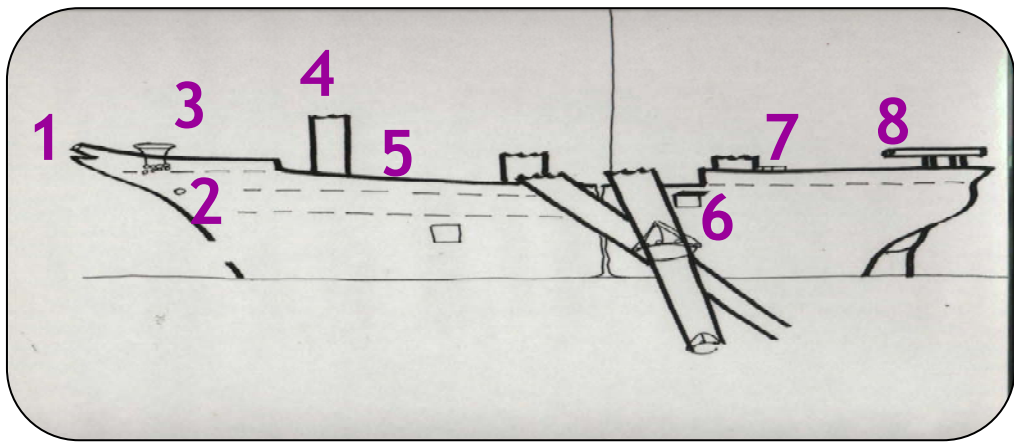
- <http://www.harland-wolff.com/>
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- <http://fp.redduster.f9.co.uk/CORRY2.htm>
- <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~diving/articles/russia95.htm>
- [http://pc-78-120.udac.se:8001/WWW/Nautica/Ships/Owners/Fleet\\_lists/Alaska\\_Packers.html](http://pc-78-120.udac.se:8001/WWW/Nautica/Ships/Owners/Fleet_lists/Alaska_Packers.html)
- <http://www.synergyicons.com/pac/pdfs/star/starhistory.pdf>

# A tour of the Star of Russia - NOW

These days the Star of Russia sits in 36m of water in a sheltered area of Port Vila harbour. Because of its location the Star can be dived in pretty much any weather.

A typical dive with Nautilus will take the diver through all three levels of the now open ship (the teak decking having rotted away along time ago). Along the way divers can check out the remains of a crows nest on one of the huge masts, a massive

bollard near the ships romantically shapely bow, together with the anchor weighing equipment. Returning to the stern of the ship, divers can check out the rudder and the wheel machinery, which the crew used to manipulate it. While it is easy to get a feel of the ship in one dive, due to its size the Star warrants at least two day dives, and a night dive on the Star is also an experience in itself.



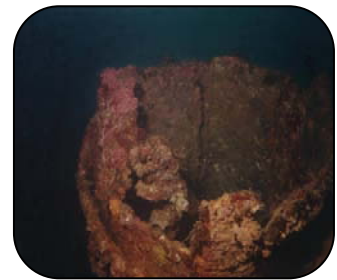
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