

TIME BINDING

That Sinking Feeling

In 1625, Sweden's king, Gustavus Adolphus, decided that his country needed a strong navy if Sweden was to be considered a major world power. He ordered construction of a number of fighting ships, including a massive super gun-boat, the *Vasa*.

In 1628, when the *Vasa* was launched, the king was away attempting to conquer Poland. The *Vasa* sailed a short distance, fired a salute, heeled over, and sank. (Heeled over means turning onto its side) The news upset the king, and he ordered an investigation.

The naval architect who oversaw the building of the ship managed to escape the investigation by dying before the *Vasa* was launched and was unavailable for comment. The investigating committee agreed that the *Vasa* had been well built, but the ratio of her dimensions did not agree with time-tested ratios. The investigation quietly went away.

One might ask, if the ratios, that is, length, to width, to height, to weight, had been established for years, why did the designers ignore them? For one thing, the king had approved the disastrous design. Some historians think the king might have had some say in the original design. Knowing all this, who would have dared to tell the king that his new toy would not float?

Have you ever seen someone doing something foolish, and they would not listen to you? Maybe you said nothing because you simply did not want to upset the individual, or get that person angry with you. How do you think you might have handled the *Vasa* situation if you were alive then? Was the king an active time-binder? Why or why not?

In 1961, marine historians recovered the *Vasa* and it sits in a museum in Sweden. If you want to get more information on the *Vasa*, go to www.vasamuseum.com, and click on the English paragraph.