



Krupp, Friedrich Alfred (1854-1902)

by Alex Hunnicutt

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Friedrich Alfred Krupp.
Archiv für
Sexualwissenschaft,
Berlin.

Friedrich (Fritz) Krupp entered the world as the heir to the largest privately owned industry in Germany. For years, his family had forged steel, built weapons and armor, and armed whichever governments, of whatever political persuasion, could afford to pay.

Krupp's father, Alfred, the Cannon King, had amassed the largest personal fortune in Germany; his power was so great that crowned heads negotiated directly with him on terms approaching equality. However, Krupp himself was to die under a cloud of shame, accused of betraying his birthright by pursuing homosexual pleasures in the south of Italy.

Born on February 17, 1854, Friedrich was from the beginning expected to follow his father in the steel and arms business. Although Fritz showed a real flair for marine biology and pursued the subject on his own throughout his life, his father forced the boy through a regimen of business education designed to mold the son into the father's likeness. Fritz's keen mind and natural creativity helped him mask his distaste for the grueling world of big business. In fact, his personal charm and tact frequently helped him resolve problems that confounded his father.

Because of poor health, he frequently traveled to Mediterranean locales. Out of the sight of his father and wife (he had been forced to marry as well), he could indulge his love of oceanography. He also discovered that the young men of the Mediterranean held even more allure for him.

In 1898, Krupp took up a semi-permanent residence on Capri where he could pursue both science and young men. Although the locals probably knew the nature of his interests in their men, most people managed to overlook the irregularities since Krupp spent so generously in the local community. In 1900, the Capri city council made him an honorary citizen.

Business demands would not allow him to remain in Capri full time, yet he did not want to forgo his young male companions. Krupp sent several Italian men to the Hotel Bristol in Berlin, where he arranged for them to have nominal jobs with the understanding that when he stayed there, the men's duties revolved exclusively around him. The men proved to be unsuitable as hotel staff. Worse, when Krupp stayed there, other guests complained about the noises coming from his suite.

Early in 1902, Italian newspapers threatened to expose him as a homosexual if he returned to Capri. Krupp seemed oblivious to the gathering peril. He apparently did not know the papers had photos they were prepared to publish if necessary. Nor did he realize the Berlin Chief of Police possessed an extensive dossier of his indiscretions, many of which violated the law against sodomy.

Gradually, lurid stories of orgies on Capri found their way from the Italian press to the German papers. Krupp's wife was confined to a mental asylum, possibly to ensure her discretion. In little less than a month, the stories evolved from mere insinuations into outright accusations, culminating in an article titled, "Krupp in Capri." Krupp sued for libel and requested an audience with his friend, Kaiser Wilhelm.

On the day he was to meet the emperor, November 22, 1902, Krupp was found dead in his home. The circumstances of his death remain secret.

His wife, evidently restored to sanity by her husband's sudden death or suicide, returned to normal activity, and the Krupp firm passed to their older daughter, Bertha, after whom the famous cannon used against the allies in World War I was named.

It is difficult not to observe that had Krupp lived a century later, the events that drove him to premature death would hardly have been more than a day's tattle in a tabloid. American mogul Malcolm Forbes and Fritz Krupp bear many similarities in that each owned major business concerns, conducted his life in the eyes of the public, and, although married with children, was homosexual. Whereas Forbes shrugged off whatever shame his sexuality may have brought, Krupp apparently buckled under its weight.

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Alex Hunnicutt received a B.A. in English in 1991 and an M.A. in History in 2003, both from the University of Texas, Arlington. He is currently a doctoral candidate in the transatlantic History program at U.T.A., focusing on the status of executioners in England, France, and America. In addition, he is actively researching aspects of gay and lesbian history in modern Europe and America.