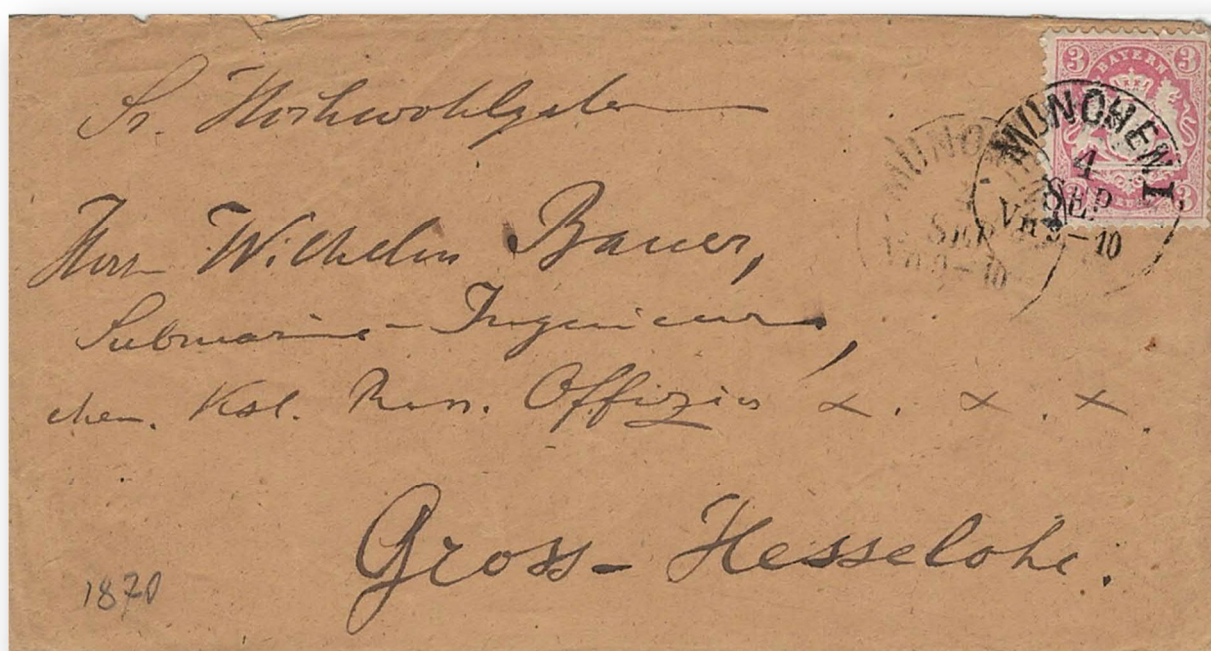


## Wilhelm Bauer - a misunderstood genius?

In a letter from 1870 to Wilhelm Bauer in Grosshesselohe, I was puzzled when I read the addition submarine engineer and thus gradually learned more about an inventor who obviously had no resounding success in Germany.

Wilhelm Bauer was born in Dillingen on the Danube in 1822. He was probably born with an affinity for water; he became a wood turner, but then joined a cavalry regiment. Perhaps the craft of arms already provided him with a secure livelihood at that time. In any case, there he invents a hoist for transporting cannons. Can we imagine this as an improved version of a pulley block?

From 1848 onwards, there were revolutions in Europe, and in northern Germany there was even a war between Schleswig-Holstein and Denmark. Bauer took part in this conflict in the rank of a corporal of the Bavarian Auxiliary Corps (German Confederation). Bauer later recounts that during the battle he thought about how to better fight the enemy by using an underwater weapon. In 1849 he returned to Bavaria and, after studying the swimming movements of seals, he submitted to a Bavarian commission a design for an "incendiary diver" that could be used to break through enemy lines underwater and set fire or detonate explosives in the enemy's rear. His ideas were not accepted, he resigned from Bavaria and joined the Schleswig-Holstein army in Rendsburg. In Kiel, Bauer is now allowed to demonstrate a 70 cm model to the navy. The positive test with the diving apparatus leads to no order Bauer smashes the model, fearing the theft of his ideas. Karl Wilhelm von Willisen, Lieutenant General and commander of the Schleswig-Holstein troops learns of Bauer's ideas and sets up a commission and Bauer is allowed to build a prototype. But too little money leads to a scaled-down version that ultimately sinks and remains aground. Schleswig-Holstein then falls to Denmark.



Bauer returns to Munich and presents his ideas to the regents there and also to Emperor Franz Josef - he does not receive any concrete construction orders. The English Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha invites Bauer to London to build another submersible. Bauer found out that the contract with the shipyard there only meant great risks for him, so he left London in a hurry for Russia. The London shipyard finished the vessel, but during the first test run the submersible sank together with the crew.

In 1855, Bauer was able to build the "Sea Devil" in St. Petersburg; it moves in the water by muscle power of the crew, can dive and climb independently - after 133 diving trips, the Sea Devil sinks, the crew can save themselves through a hatch. Bauer constructs an icebreaker, gets the order to lift a sunken liner with balloons. In 1858, a dispute arises with Russian authorities; Bauer returns to Munich. In the same year, he develops equipment for salvaging ships and laying cables at Lake Constance; he has the steamer Ludwig lifted. Underwater firing tests at Lake Starnberg also prove successful. Bauer also tinkered with flying machines.

Bauer was obviously an impulsive person who often felt cheated and ripped off. In 1874 his daughter Constanze died, in 1875 he himself.

Constructions in museums, names of ships and artworks on squares remind of Wilhelm Bauer, the submarine engineer of the former Imperial Russian Navy - and just this letter and philatelic items below!

Further literature: wikipedia.org

