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Man's fight to change ship's Nazi-linked name succeeds

First published Thursday 12 February 2015 in [News](#)

A PENSIONER'S crusade to change the name of a ship which had links with a former SS officer has succeeded.

John Donovan, 67, of Colchester, launched an online petition calling for the vessel, the world's largest crane ship, to be re-named.

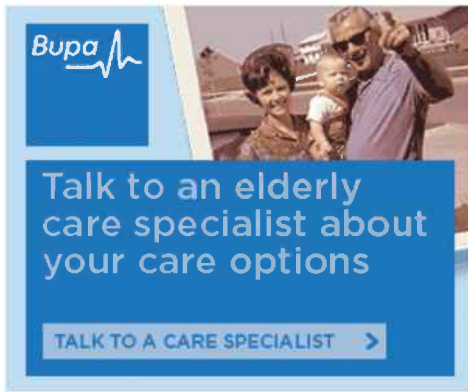
The 403,342 gross tonne vessel had been named by the owner The Pieter Schelte after his father.

He was a Dutch officer in the Waffen-SS who eventually became an informant for the Dutch resistance in 1943.

But the name sparked outrage among leaders of Jewish communities and Holocaust memorial groups in Britain and in the Netherlands.

Mr Donavon, a retired contract worker for Shell, said: "Shell was signed up as one of the first customers and these companies knew this ship was going to be named in this way..

"When I heard the ship was being finished and was on its way to Rotterdam for the



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final fitting of equipment I decided to launch the petition."

The petition on change.org was started on December 22, but was slow to attract support.

Mr Donovan, of Mill Road, said: "I then thought, what shall I do, how do I drum up some interest? I wrote to various Jewish groups, including the Jerusalem Post.

"The following day they published an article about it and there has since been a lot of newspaper coverage about it."

The international transport Union ITF also got behind the campaign.

He said: "One way or another, opposition snowballed as more people realised what was going on."

Towards the end of last week, Mr Donovan said the ship's builder Allseas came under pressure from Shell to change the name.

On Monday, it announced the Pieter Schelte had been renamed the Pioneering Spirit.

Allseas is owned by a Dutchman, Edward Heerema, who is the son of Pieter Schelte Heerema.

Mr Donovan said: "It's a crazy story. I was told Edward Heerema had seen sense and decided to change the name.

"I thought it had to happen sooner or later and I was pleased he had done it and praised him for that, because it must have been difficult for him – free speech means he should be able to name the ship as he picks.

"But what would have happened if someone wanted to name a ship The Adolf Hitler?

"It just so happened this was the name of a far less prominent Nazi."

Allseas had originally said the ship's first name had been in honour of Schelte's "great achievements in the offshore oil and gas industry".

Schelte was a renowned maritime engineer, but also an avowed antisemite who joined the Waffen SS.

After the war, he was sentenced in Holland to three years in prison for war crimes, but was released early due to his work for the resistance.

Allseas was asked to comment, but instead sent a press release confirming the name change of the ship. It stated: "The name of the vessel reflects what she stands for: a new technological step in platform installation and decommissioning."

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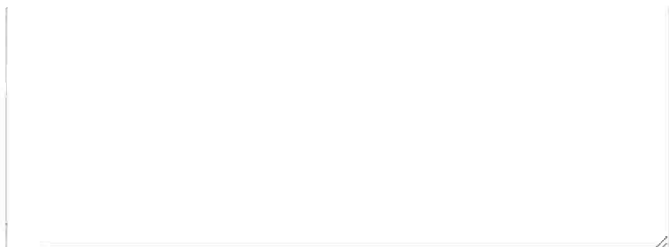
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