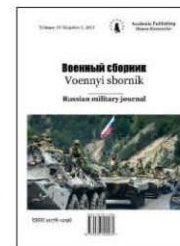


ISSN: 2309-6322

Founder: Academic Publishing House *Researcher*

DOI: 10.13187/issn.2309-6322

Has been issued since 1858.



Voennyi Sbornik. Russian Military Journal
--

UDC 94(436).08

Austro-Hungarian Destroyers of the *Tátra* class and their derivatives

Zvonimir Freivogel

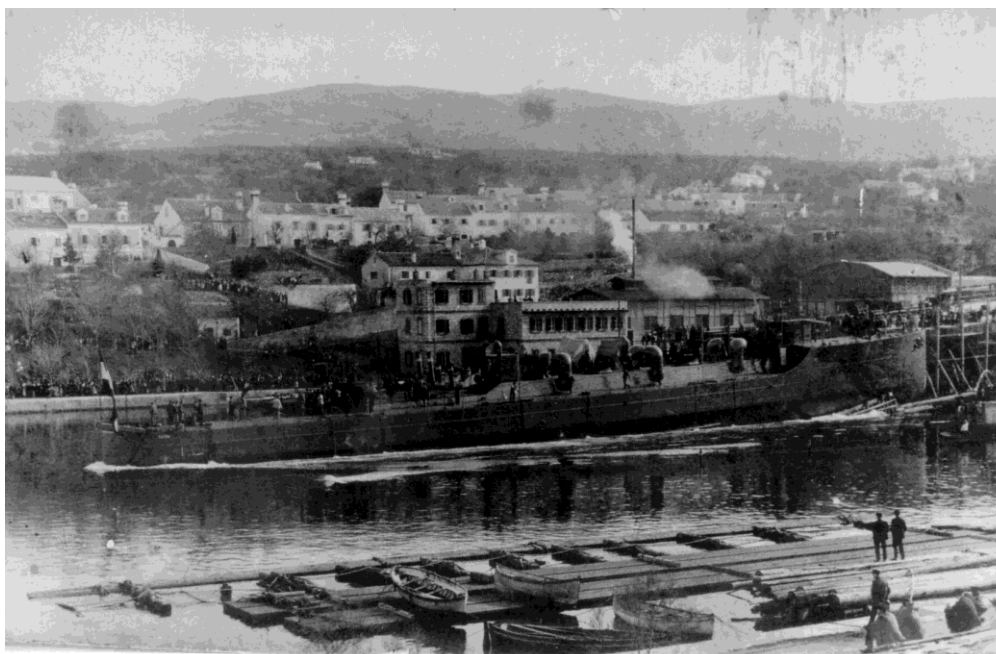
Dr., DD., German Society for the Maritime and Naval History, Germany

Abstract. Austro-Hungarian Navy was initially ordering its early destroyers abroad, or building them in licence after foreign designs, like the numerous Yarrow-designed and VTE-powered *Huszár* class, but shortly before World War One, Austro-Hungarian ship-builders developed an excellent design. The steam turbine-powered, fast and strongly armed destroyers of the *Tátra* class were very successful on the Adriatic during the 1914-18 war. At first only six were built, and the second batch was cancelled after the war broke out, but after two of these valuable ships were sunk by mines in a single action, four additional and slightly modified vessels were ordered, and completed late during the war. Together with scout cruisers of the *Admiral Spaun* and *Saida* classes they formed the backbone of the A-H light naval forces, and were very active during the war. The surviving vessels were divided by the victors, serving for several years after the war under French and Italian flags.

Keywords: Austria-Hungary; Imperial & Royal Navy; World War One; naval warfare; Adriatic; destroyers; *Tátra* class.

Introduction. At the end of the 19th Century the Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian Navy was searching for the best solution for her destroyers. In the A-H naval parlance they were called "torpedo vessels" (Torpedofahrzeuge), and placed between the bigger "torpedo cruisers" and "torpedo ships", and smaller torpedo boats. First A-H units of this category were a collection of prototypes built abroad by the destroyer building yards of Palmers in Great Britain and Schichau in Germany. These units, **SMS Meteor**, **Blitz** and **Komet** built between 1886 and 1888 by Schichau, **SMS Planet** built by Palmers and her sister-ship **Trabant** built in licence by the STT shipyard San Rocco in the then Austrian Trieste, were followed by two more destroyers of the German origin, the SMS **Satellit** completed in 1893 and the bigger SMS **Magnet**, built by Schichau in 1895/96 on the lines of the **Emir Buchariskij** class destroyers delivered to the Imperial Russian Navy. Finally the more promising project was found in the Yarrow-built destroyer **SMS Huszár**, completed in 1905 and followed by eleven sister-ships built at Trieste by STT and at Fiume by Danubius after the original plans. The project for these 400 ts units was based on modified plans of the Yarrow export destroyers that were represented by the **Ikazuchi** and **Akatsuki** classes developed for Japan. The Austrian units were armed with an 66 mm L/45 gun (called 7 cm gun in the A-H Navy) and seven 47 mm L/44 guns, together with two 450 mm torpedo tubes, but from 1913 the artillery armament was changed to one 66 mm L/45 and five 66 mm L/30 guns. The original *Huszár* was lost after grounding in 1908 and a new ship was built in 1911 by the Naval Arsenal at Pola, using parts of machinery and armament salvaged from the lost unit, receiving again the name **Huszár**. There was an 14th unit as well: after the outbreak of the World War I, A-H Navy purchased an already completed destroyer of the **Huszár** type, that was ordered by China and completed as **Lung Tuan**, but not taken over, probably because of the turbulent political situation in China in 1912. The purchase of the ship, renamed **Warasdiner** and rearmed with the Austrian-pattern guns, brought the total of active units to 13.

All these ships were useful for the A-H Navy, but some were too old and slow for the service with the torpedo boat flotillas or the main fleet during the years before the WW I. The SMS *Magnet* and the ships of the *Huszár* class were modern for their time, but were having the steam reciprocating machinery, that reached the peak of its development at this period. Greater speed was possible only by using steam turbines and the A-H Naval Section of the War Ministry invited in 1909 several shipyards from Austria-Hungary and abroad to send their offers for a 600 tonnes destroyer. The STT and Danubius were proposing vessels armed with two 100 mm guns, four 47 mm guns, and two or three torpedo tubes, the offer from Germania shipyard from Kiel was to have two 100 mm guns and four TT's, and other two German shipyards invited, the Vulcan from Stettin and Schichau from Elbing offered ships armed with two 105 mm or three 100 mm guns and three or four TT's respectively. The British firms of Yarrow and Thornycroft were proposing more lightly armed ships with only six 66 mm guns and four TT's (Yarrow) or armed with two 100 mm, two 75 mm and only two TT's (Thornycroft). There was an unconventional project too, proposed by the company Schnabl & Co. from Trieste in the name of the US Lewis Nixon shipyard from New York, for a destroyer with gasoline engines propulsion (!), and armed with four 127 mm guns, six Colt machine guns and four torpedo tubes.



Launching of *Tátra*

All these offers were not satisfactory enough and in January 1910 A-H Naval Command invited again four shipyards (STT from Trieste, CNT from Monfalcone, Danubius from Fiume and Vulcan from Stettin) to submit their projects for 800 tonnes destroyers. The deadline for proposals was 15th July 1910. The ships were to reach an maximum speed of 32.5 knots on the statute mile and to maintain this speed for four hours, to have reliably engines (i.e. steam turbines of a proven type), Yarrow boilers with mixed firing (1/3 coal and 2/3 oil) and an armament of two 100 mm guns and four 66 mm guns, completed by three 450 mm torpedo tubes. Three shipyards sent their projects in June 1910, followed by Danubius one month later, but because of the intervention of the Hungarian Minister of Commerce, A-H Navy negotiated only with the Danubius shipyard at Fiume, a Hungarian enclave on the Croatian Adriatic coast. Original plans were modified during the following months according to the wishes of the Navy, but the order for six ships of the new class was made already on 13 June 1911, to be followed three months later by detailed drawings made by the shipyard. Later modifications brought the displacement over the 800 tonnes mark, but the ships were made longer and stiffer, and the armament was augmented by two additional 66 mm guns and one torpedo tube.

Final construction displacement of the *Tátra* class reached 850 tonnes, with a full displacement of 1050 tonnes. The hull was 83.5 metres long, 7.8 m wide and was having a draught

between 2.42 am 3.2 m. Six water tube boilers were producing steam for two AEG Curtis steam turbines with an total output of 20,500 ihp and the ships were to reach an maximum speed of 32,6 kts. The armament comprised two 100 mm/L50 guns, one fore and another aft, six 66 mm/L45 guns (two of these in the anti-aircraft variant), one 8 mm machine-gun and two twin 450 mm torpedo tubes. The crew was comprised by five officers and 100 ratings.

The six new destroyers were christened after mountains, lakes and provinces in Austria-Hungary, and all were built by Danubius at the the Porto R  shipyard facility at Kraljevica. First three units were completed in 1913, but the last three ships entered service after the outbreak of WW I.

Building data

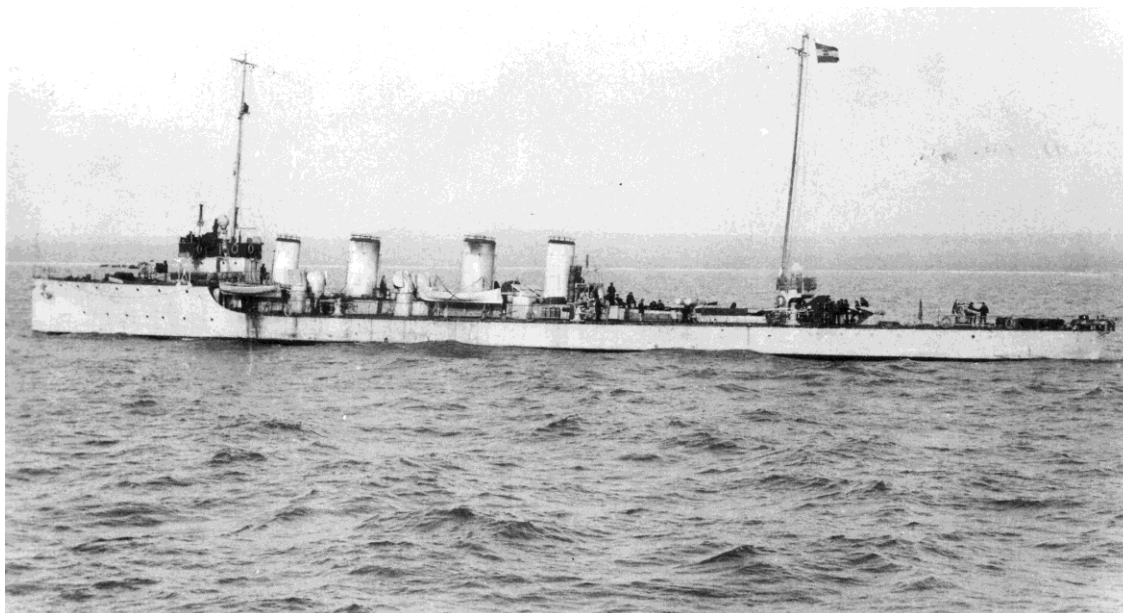
Name	Shipyard	Laid down	Launched	In service
T�tra	Danubius, Porto R�	19 Oct 1911	5 Nov 1912	12 Oct 1913
Balaton	"-	6 Nov 1911	16 Nov 1912	28 Oct 1913
Csepel	"-	9 Jan 1912	30 Dec 1912	29 Dec 1913
Lika	"-	30 Apr 1912	15 Mar 1913	8 Aug 1914
Triglav	"-	1 Aug 1912	22 Dec 1913	8 Aug 1914
Orjen	"-	4 Sep 1912	26 Aug 1913	11 Aug 1914

These fast, well armed and reliable destroyers were intensively used during the war on the Adriatic. SMS **T tra** was part of the squadron that sailed from Pola on August 7th, 1914 to meet and protect the German battle cruiser **Goeben** with her consort **Breslau** after shelling the French North African ports. Austria-Hungary was at this moment technically not in war with France and Great Britain, so it was probably better that both German ships proceeded to Constantinople and A-H fleet detachment returned to Pola on the same evening, without an encounter that could have thrown the A-H Navy into an not yet declared war. **T tra** was later in August searching for survivors of the A-H torpedo boat **26**, lost in an mine field off Pola and formed later with her sister-ships the 1st and the 2nd Group of the Ist Division of the 1st Torpedo Flotilla. **Balaton** and **Csepel** rescued on 13th August 1914 the survivors of the passenger ship **Baron Gautsch**, mined by a navigational error off Rovigno. The sporadically actions against the French Fleet entering the Adriatic on several occasions were fruitless, but after the Italian war proclamation against Austria-Hungary on 23 May 1915, the Imperial and Royal Navy responded in force and shelled Italian coastal cities, the units of the **T tra** class covering the battleships or serving with the scouting groups. **T tra** and **Lika** sank Italian destroyer **Turbine** on 24 May 1915 and **Balaton** destroyed on 29 December 1915 French submarine **Monge**, that was lying on the surface, waiting for A-H units to leave Cattaro. During the attack against Durazzo on the same day, **Lika** was mined and sunk in a newly laid French minefield, followed few hours later by the **Triglav**, damaged in the same minefield and scuttled because strong enemy naval forces were nearing the A-H unit slowed by the towed destroyer. **Csepel** was damaged during the same action, but the remaining destroyers and the fast scout cruiser **Helgoland** reached the safety of A-H naval bases after a long running battle. In the meantime the ships of the Ist Division were active against the Italian-occupied island of Pelagosa and later against the Otranto barrage, "constructed" by Entente naval forces to prevent German and A-H submarines to enter the Mediterranean and came back unmolested. **Csepel** lost her stern on 4th May 1916, being hit by an torpedo fired by the French submarine **Bernouille**, but she was later repaired and received an new stern, being lengthened to 85.28 m over all. During the well known attack of the fast A-H cruisers against the drifters of the Otranto barrage, in the night between 15th and 16th May 1917, the destroyers **Balaton** and **Csepel** - working independently - destroyed the Italian destroyer **Borea** and two of the three steamers from her convoy. The fast destroyers were later securing the operations of A-H seaplanes and shelling enemy coasts, and an typical action was the attack against Brindisi, undertaken on 18th/19th October 1917 by the cruiser **Helgoland** and the destroyers **Triglav**, **Lika** and **Csepel**.

The loss of the one third of the modern A-H destroyers was an heavy blow for the Imperial and Royal Navy, that at the outbreak of war cancelled the already authorised six additional units of the same class. So this decision was reversed in 1916, and four units of the slightly modified **T tra** class were ordered, to replace lost ships and to strengthen destroyer divisions. The construction

displacement was raised to 880 tonnes, but the full displacement of 1050 tonnes remained the same. They were 85,28 m long (like the repaired *Csepel*), but other characteristics were identical to the *Tátra* class. These destroyers were known as "*Ersatz Triglav*" class, being built by the Ganz-Danubius shipyards at Fiume and Porto R , and were named *Triglav* (II), *Lika* (II), *Dukla* and *Uzsok*. Last two names came from mountain passes in the Carpathians on the Russian war theatre. The ships were completed late in the war and entered service between July 1917 and January 1918.

Name	Shipyard	Laid down	Launched	Completed /Commisioned
<i>Triglav</i> (II)	Danubius, Fiume	24 Aug 1916	24 Feb 1917	9 Jun 1917 /27 Jul 1917
<i>Lika</i> (II)	Danubius, Fiume	24 Aug 1916	8 May 1917	6 Aug 1917 /5 Sep 1917
<i>Dukla</i>	Danubius, Porto R�	11 Sep 1916	18 Jul 1917	8 Oct 1917 /7 Nov 1917
<i>Uzsok</i>	Danubius, Fiume	25 Sep 1916	26 Sep 1917	18 Dec 1917 /25 Jan 1918



Lika (II) on sea

Up to eight ships of the *Tátra* and *Ersatz Triglav* classes were participating in most operations of the light units until the end of the war, lying mines, attacking Italian and Albanian coasts and protecting old battleships when shelled Italian positions on the South-Western war theatre. They were present but not involved in the sailors' mutiny in the Bocche di Cattaro during the first three days of February 1918. On 23/24th April 1918 *Triglav* (II), *Csepel*, *Uzsok*, *Dukla* and *Lika* (II) were sent again to attack Otranto barrage and encountered British destroyers *Hornet* and *Jackal*, that were heavily damaged during the short battle. A-H units returned to port pursued by Italian flotilla leaders *Mirabello* and *Poerio*, and destroyers *Bronzetti* (Italian), *Comet*, *Torrens*, *Redpole*, *Rifleman*, *Alarm* (British) and *Cimeterre* (French). The next great operation against the Otranto barrage was planned for 11th June 1918, but this action was cancelled after the loss of A-H dreadnought *Szent Istv n* on 10th June. Additionally to the scout cruisers of the *Spaun* and *Saida* class four units of the *T tra/Ersatz Triglav* class were to participate in this operation, namely *T tra*, *Csepel*, *Triglav* (II) and *Lika* (II). The war was nearing the end and these modern destroyers were to attack Italian coast during several actions.

The cease-fire found them lying in the Bocche di Cattaro on 31st October 1918, when all former A-H ships were transferred to the newly established State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (SHS).

In accordance with the peace treaties, all remaining A-H units were divided between victorious powers, notably Italy and France in case of *Tátra* and *Ersatz Triglav* class destroyers. Royal Italian Navy received *Tátra*, *Balaton*, *Csepel*, *Orjen*, *Triglav* (II), *Lika* (II) and *Uzsok*, and French Navy retained the destroyer *Dukla*. Italian units were renamed *Fasana*, *Zenson* (I), *Muggia*, *Pola*, *Grado*, *Cortelazzo* and *Monfalcone* respectively, and the single French unit became *Matelot Leblanc*. *Fasana* and *Zenson* (I) were already worn out, and were used only as a source of spare parts for remaining units, being stricken in 1923. *Muggia* (ex-*Csepel*) remained in service until 1929, being lost by stranding in Chinese waters on 25th March. *Pola* (ex-*Orjen*) was renamed *Zenson* (II) in 1931 and remained in service until 1937, having similar fate as her half-sisters *Grado* and *Cortelazzo* (former *Triglav* and *Lika* /II). Third Italian ship of the *Ersatz Triglav* class - *Monfalcone*, ex-*Uzsok* - was stricken in 1939, after serving on secondary duties in the later part of her career. *Matelot Leblanc* was tested by the French Navy (that was painfully missing this type of vessels during the Great War) and the experiences were probably useful for the design of the well known French *contre-torpilleurs*, built in series between the wars. The ship was stricken and scrapped in 1936.

All these strong and fast destroyers were forming the backbone of active Austro-Hungarian naval forces during the World War I on the Adriatic, together with scout cruisers of the *Spaun* and *Saida* classes. The short-sighted decision to cancel six more destroyers at the outbreak of the supposedly short war delayed the building and completion of these useful ships for two years. A flotilla of ten or twelve units of this class would have been an decisive factor during first war months against the Italian and other Allied Navies, probably changing the duration, but not the results of the naval war in the Adriatic. They were to be followed by even stronger Austro-Hungarian destroyers, projected during the war, that are to be described in detail in another article.

References:

1. Franz F. Bilzer: Die Torpedoschiffe und Zerstörer der k.u.k. Kriegsmarine 1867-1918, H. Weishaupt Verlag, Graz 1990.
2. Harald Fock: Z-Vor!, Internationale Entwicklung und Kriegseinsätze von Zerstörern und Torpedobooten, 1914 bis 1939, Koehlers Verlag, Herford 1989.