

»THE MEMORIES OF THE JOURNEY OF THE HIS MAJESTY SHIP SAIDA«

THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN MILITARY NAVY SHIP JOURNEYS AS SEEN
THROUGH THE EYES OF SLOVENIAN SEAMEN



POMORSKI MUZEJ »SERGEJ MAŠERA« PIRAN
MUSEO DEL MARE »SERGEJ MASERA« PIRANO


INTERNAUTICA
INTERNATIONAL BOAT SHOW

The second half of the 19th century brought about a stiff competition of European states at the discovering of "the new world". Also Austro-Hungarian Monarchy entered this race to look for the new markets for her products and to search for the cheaper raw materials needed for her own industrial production. The basis for the Austro-Hungarian expansion was her military navy that was becoming stronger and stronger, trying to catch up the navies of other great sea nations. Numerous Austro-Hungarian ships sailed into distant countries, especially to the Far East and on the journey around the world. These ships also had scientific and diplomatic assignments and carried along also different scientists (geographers, cartographers, geologists, biologists, ethnologists), painters and photographers. These journeys contributed a great deal to the education of navy officers, as they were a compulsory practical part of the naval academy and non-commissioned officers school education. Such journeys opened the horizons of the students because they were able to get to know different countries and learned different peoples and their culture. These expeditions that reached their peak towards the end of the 19th century attracted the individuals of all nations of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy who worked on ships as officers, non-commissioned officers, sailors or naval academy students. Among these seamen there were also Slovenian (some 3%).

The young men joined the navy on the recruitment basis or on the voluntary basis. Some joined the navy to avoid the military service on the mainland. The sea or the military profession fascinated others; some were looking for new adventures, a different way of life and learning foreign countries. And all that was within the reach to the sons of poorer parents as well.

The recruits usually had to serve 5 years of the military service. The volunteers signed up mostly for 12 years, which gave them a better chance for promotions. Both, the recruits and the volunteers could follow the non-commissioned officers schools in Pulj, Šibenik and Đenovići in Boka Kotorska.

The officers were educated at the naval academies. As opposed to the merchant academies the naval academies were free of charge. These academies gave also the young men from lower social classes the possibility to study for an officer. The academies were in Venice (1814-1848), Trieste (1848-1965) and Rijeka (1865-1918). The civil secondary school graduates could follow a one-year navy candidates course on their way to become a navy officer. The officers-to-be had to perfect and prove their knowledge at sea. After the theoretical part of the education, they had to spend 2 years at sea. Only then they could approach to the exam for the navy officer. Usually they spent 6, 12, 18 or even more months at sea. Many of these young men travelled around the world as navy students, navy officer candidates and sailors or later as non-commissioned officers and navy officers.

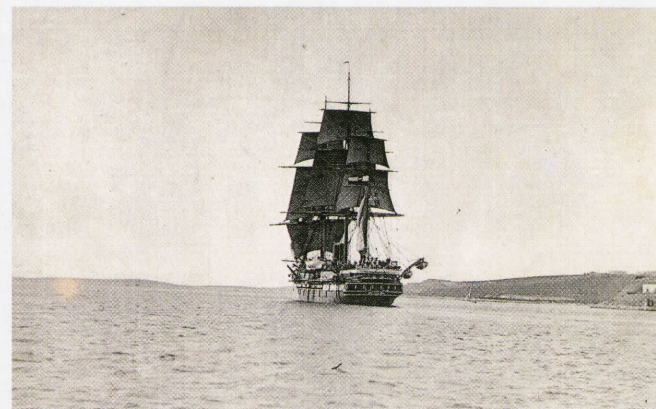
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The long journeys into the distant countries were at that time still only very occasional. Therefore they were of a great interest for the participants as well as for the public. The seamen told the stories from the journeys to their friends and relatives, they sent letters and postcards from the journeys. Some of them (Anton Dolenc, Vinko Vidmar, Vilelm Potočnik, Matija Domjan and Jožef Perme) published their diaries and impressions in different magazines and newspapers. Other left only their manuscripts. One of these was also a non-commissioned officer of the Austro-Hungarian Navy Ivan Rupnik.

Published as well as unpublished travel diaries, numerous photographs, different objects and documents are at present a very important source of studying the seamen's life on a journey, their culture and the places they visited during their journeys.

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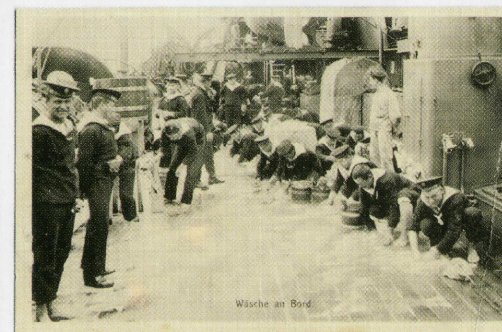
The Austro-Hungarian military navy ship journeys as seen through the eyes of Slovenian seamen.



The Austro-Hungarian war ship Saida (a photograph from a book by H. Marchetti, Die Erdumsegelung S.M.Schiffes »Saida« in den Jahren 1890, 1891, 1892, Wien, 1894)



The seaman and navy academy students had to patch and sew their torn clothes (a photograph from the photo album of Metod Ciril Koch from his journey around the world on the Donau ship (1894-1895)



The cleaning of the deck (a photograph from the legacy of Ivan Rupnik)

Memories Of The Gone By Days

Memories Of The Journey Of The His Majesty Ship "Saida"

1898 – 1899

Fragments from the manuscript of the navy clerk Ivan Rupnik

Many a young man yearning to cross the ocean once and to discover a far away, unknown world considers the sailor's profession to be a very lucky one. But after a closer look one gets a second thought. It is indeed very agreeable profession but at sea one has to weather many a bitter and difficult hour and moment.

The same thing happened to us - the young and inexperienced sailors dreaming of visiting foreign countries and unknown places. After returning from our regular vacation, the 1898 graduates from the non-commissioned officers' navy school in Šibenik boarded the His Majesty Ship "Saida" in Pulj on the 19th September 1898.

Full of hope and with a certain degree of impatience we could not wait for the day when the Saida would be untied from the buoy that held us in the harbour and set sail for one year long across the wide open sea to foreign places and countries.

The Saida. The ship was completed in 1878 from the oak tree wood and iron shafts. A covered corvette with three rather high masts, each of them with 4 sail crosses. The ship had the length of 71 meters. The crew consisted of 12 officers, 12 navy academy students, 2 doctors, 5 steam-enginemens officers, one commissioner and 380 sailors.

The charcoal, ammunition, necessities of life, with one word everything needed for a long journey was being loaded on board up to the day before we set sail. After a couple of days of loading and boarding, the 1st October, the day of our journey approached. We got up at 4 AM as usual at the sound of the trumpet and the boatman's whistle. Sleep drunk we got up, made our beds - hang mats and washed on the upper deck. The washing procedure was very quick because we did it with salt water. The fresh water was scarce and used only for drinking and cooking.

After having a breakfast - black coffee, more precisely brown water with a piece of bread called Parsetelj, everybody smoked a cigarette. We had in general very little free time.

Many of the fresh baked sailors had a hard time leaving the hometown. Not so long ago we still had a company of our families, parents, brothers and sisters. Many an eye was filled with tears. It is hard to leave the home country, the places where you spent your youth and start a dangerous journey at sea - God knows if we would be happy, if we would return home safely.

In the meantime the anchor of the "Saida" was lifted. At 8 AM we were summoned by the boatman's whistle and his thundering voice: "Alle Mann an die Anker Stationen!" We hurried to our designated posts.

From the nearby peninsula we could hear a navy music. A crowd that had gathered for the occasion waived us good-by with their white handkerchiefs for a long time. The ship's band was playing cheerful marches on board.

On the same evening, at about 6 PM our faces cheered up a little bit. Here and there one could see small groups of sailors sitting on the floor, gathered on the basis of their mother tongue: the Croats, Istrians, Czechs, Hungarians, Austrians. Every group was on its own, the Slovenians no exception, and soon there came a singing and commotion. Who would have thought that one can hear so many different languages and voices in the middle of the sea. The Dalmatians sang rather childish and dragged out single voice songs. One could also hear nice Slovene songs but they were not very numerous because there were only about 15 of us Slovenians there.

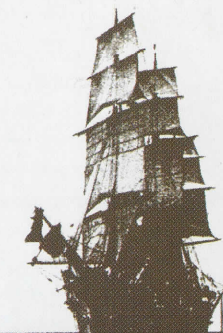
At the occasional music performances we hop around and play social games: bingo for money or cards (which is both strictly forbidden). The Italians play the so-called "mora" - showing fingers and counting; or the question-answer game - "frate". If there is a nice evening one can always find something entertaining. After a hard working day, you can lie on the deck, put the rope rolled up in a circle under your head and rest your tired and sore knuckles and horny hands. This is allowed only on the upper deck. On the lower deck only those that are off duty can stay. And even these not always. If the sea is calm, the scarce spare time can be a lot of fun. In the bad weather with the sea thundering across the upper deck, there is not much fun. We also have little peace in the stormy weather, climbing and descending the waves that look like high water hills. It is not very agreeable if a splash of salt water hits your face and your neck. But your fellow sailors find it very funny.

Every day we had plenty of work with almost no breaks from dawn till dusk. The ship's crew was divided into 2 halves and each half was again split in two. The shifts at sea change every 4 hours. Every day we get up at 5 AM, make up the beds, wash and go to breakfast. After the breakfast the deck is washed every day with water. Every Saturday we sand the deck and do the laundry. Every Thursday and Sunday the sailor's underwear is changed. We have to wash it in the salt water because the fresh water is as precious as gold. We cannot and must not use the fresh water without an explicit permission except for cooking and drinking. There is even a guard there to prevent the stealing of water. This water is used only for drinking and it is produced out of salt water if it runs out.

The bedclothes are washed several times a month during the deck washing (half an hour). There is also the cleaning of clothes and shoes (Tagskleider), cleaning of metal parts, every Saturday there is the doctor's check up. Daily we have the uniforms check up (Tagskleidervisite), and afterwards school, education, exercises until 11.30 AM. During that time we had a 15-minute break. At noon the meal is served, followed by a break until 1 PM. In the afternoon the procedure is more or less the same until 5 PM. Then we change our clothes. During the day we wear our better clothes, during the night we have our ordinary clothes on. At 6 PM they check our presence. After that there is the evening meal and free time until 8 PM. At 8 PM it is time to go to bed. The same schedule every day, on and on.

On the third day my ship knife rope around my neck was not clean. I almost had been punished. I could get away with the excuse that it got dirty a moment ago while working at the lower cross of the sail.

The ship set sail from Pulj across the Adriatic and Mediterranean Sea through the Suez Canal, along the east African Coast, across the Indian Ocean to Australia, Japan and back. The sailors visited Port Said, Suez, Aden, Zanzibar, Dar es Salaam, the Mayotte islands, Madagascar, Mozambique, Durban, Fremantle, Hong Kong, Kyushu, Singapore, Port Victoria and some other ports.



The seamen in their free time (a photograph from the photo album of Ludvik Erjavec)



The maritime baptism on the equator (a photograph from the photo album of Metod Ciril Koch from his journey around the world on the Donau ship (1894 in 1895))

The clothes and underwear were usually changed on Sunday and Thursday. The laundry was done on Friday morning. The clothes were hung on the ropes that were prepared especially for the occasion. It was very difficult to wash in the salt water, the soap simply glided through the fingers and would not foam. The fresh water could not be used to do the laundry. Once washed, the clothes were hung and were supposed to be taken off the ropes only upon the order. We were waiting for the order every time like the wolves to get our clothes back from the ropes. The one who got back all his clothes (and clean tool) could count himself very lucky. With the permission of the officer on duty we could wash also during the night if our duties permitted that. The night laundry could also have been dangerous: one could put his clothes under his head during the night. Waking up from one's dreams in the morning, you could put your dirty laundry back into the sack with the rest of your clothes.

At the Red Sea there is a constant temperature up to 36°C in the shade. There we wore white, textile clothes. Twice a day we got a cold-water splash on the upper deck to cool down but the cooling down lasted only while the water was running. We wore neither shoes nor underwear. Even that was too much. During the night we lay without bedclothes, instead of underwear we had swimming pants on. Although we were very tired, no one could sleep because of the heat.

In the days of extreme heat and with no wind, we had to work with the machines. We had to rake charcoal and throw it into the kettles. Nobody liked that job although they gave us half a litre of wine every 2 hours. I had compassion with the ship's stokers who had to work there much longer than we did! The skin peeled off from our faces and some of the limbs got stiff. Some of my fellow sailors had to rest for a couple of days because of exhaustion.

On 19th November the ship's commander gave a speech on the occasion of the birthday anniversary of our beloved Empress Elisabeth whom everybody of us bore in his mind. We were really touched and a full-hearted "hurray" was heard from all the present seamen.

In the afternoon we expected to reach the equator. We got properly prepared for the occasion. Dressed in our ordinary clothes and barefoot the whole crew gathered at the back of the upper deck. Near the equator, closely observing the sextant instruments, the servants of the sea god Neptune, dressed up like the blacks, took over the steering wheel and brought the ship to a gradual halt. Neptune and the goddess of Equator came along on the carriage, wearing a crown. They were accompanied by the music and some other men dressed in all kind of clothes.

Neptune got up to the command bridge, took over the ship's control and on his command the ship stopped. Meanwhile on the upper deck his companions began funny games, such as cutting the sailor's hair with a big wooden scissor, shaving them with a sword, pulling out the teeth with an ordinary tongs. These were very funny scenes. But all of a sudden it becomes a real war: the water is spilt and splashed. Everybody has to be baptized: one after another with no exception, being a sailor or an officer, even the ship's commander is not spared. Many members of the crew fled on the lower deck but nobody stayed dry. An

officer even took a couple of pictures of all that cheerful chaos. Afterwards we changed our clothes. At the evening meal we were served twice as much wine as usual. The upper deck quickly got dry in the hot afternoon. This is how our crew celebrated our first Equatorial baptism that is an old custom among the sailors on every ship.

Ivan Rupnik

Born in 1880 in Podkraj near Ajdovščina, he volunteered into the navy in 1895. After finishing the Navy Non-Commissioned Officers School in Šibenik in 1898, he boarded the Saida ship and sailed on her around the world. He later became an artillery sergeant and in 1917 a navy clerk.



A dance on the ship (a photograph from the photo album of Metod Ciril Koch from his journey around the world on the Donau ship (1894-1895))

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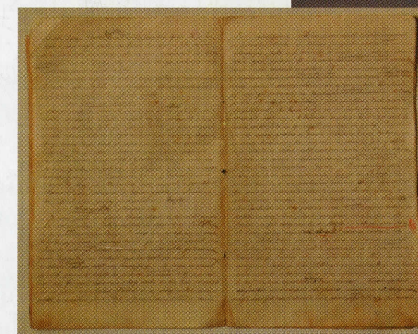
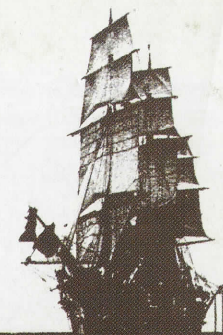
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A manuscript of the memories by Ivan Rupnik and the photographic material are kept by the Maritime Museum "Sergej Mašera" Piran



The manuscript "The Memories Of The Gone By Days" by Ivan Rupnik (a photograph by Igor Presl)



The map from the diary "The Memories Of The Gone By Days" by Ivan Rupnik (a photograph by Igor Presl)