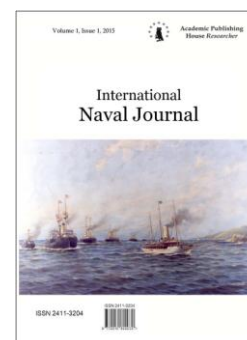


Copyright © 2015 by Academic Publishing House *Researcher*



Published in the Russian Federation
International Naval Journal
Has been issued since 2013.
ISSN 2411-3204
Vol. 5, Is. 1, pp. 7-13, 2015

DOI: [10.13187/inj.2015.5.7](https://doi.org/10.13187/inj.2015.5.7)
www.ejournal37.com



Articles and Statements

UDC 94(436).08

Turreted ironclads "Kronprinz Erzherzog Rudolf" and "Kronprinzessin Stefanie"

Zvonimir Freivogel

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

Abstract

This work gives a describing of construction and a history of service of the first Austro-Hungarian turret ironclads "Kronprinz Erzherzog Rudolf" and "Kronprinzessin Stefanie".

Keywords: Austria-Hungary, Imperial & Royal Navy, World War One, naval warfare, Adriatic.

First and only Austrian and later Austro-Hungarian ship-of-the-line was the twin-decked "Kaiser", with an combined sail and steam propulsion, built at Pola from 1855 through 1862, being followed by the "armoured frigates" (broadside battery ironclads, built at Trieste) "Drache" and "Salamander", "Kaiser Max", "Prinz Eugen" and "Juan de Austria", "Erzherzog Ferdinand Max" and "Habsburg", that all participated in the battle of Lissa in 1866. From 1867 through 1881 three centre battery battleships were built, "Lissa", "Erzherzog Albrecht" and "Tegetthoff". Some of the older vessels were officially "modernised", remaining in service until the end of the XIX century: in fact they received new hulls and were built as centre battery ships, retaining only parts of the machinery, armour and names of the Lissa veterans. Old "ship-of-the-line" "Kaiser" was rebuilt along the same lines: upper part of her hull war built anew from iron and the ship remained in service and in reserve until the end of WW I, from 1902 through 1918 without propulsion as a hulk re-named "Bellona". First barbette ironclads, "Rudolf" and "Stefanie", were built in the 1880s, to be followed during the last years of the 19th century by first modern battleships of the "Monarch" class. Most A-H battleships were smaller and weaker than the contemporary units of other navies, because they were designed to operate in the Adriatic and Eastern Mediterranean, protecting the coast of an enclosed sea, like the Imperial German Navy during her early years. The leadership of the A-H Navy was not giving enough thoughts to the protection against torpedoes and mines, but was commissioning the very first triple-turreted Dreadnoughts of the world, being followed by other navies shortly thereafter. During their construction, bigger and better armed battleships of the "Super-Dreadnought" type were designed, to replace old units of the "Monarch" class, but the outbreak of WW I postponed these plans, that were cancelled with the disappearance of the A-H Empire in 1918.

A-H battle fleet was obsolete in the last decades of the 19th century, and the leading naval architect Moriz Soyka was ordered to design two new ironclads of the barbette type (called turreted ironclads by the A-H Navy). They were modelled after the French vessels "Victorieuse", "Dévasta-

tion" and "Admiral Duperré", built between 1875 and 1879, and marked the transition from centre battery ships with auxiliary rigging to barbette battleships with steam propulsion only. Because of long building time they were obsolete at their commission, but other states, like France and Russia, proceeded for some time to build barbette ironclads.



"Kronprinz Erzherzog Rudolf"

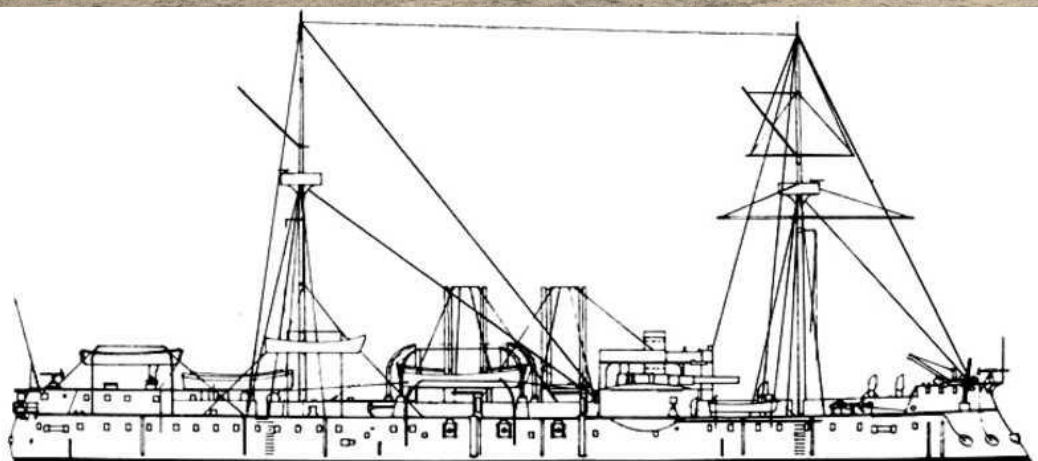
Some other A-H warships mounted at the same their guns in barbets, like the cruisers of the "Franz Josef" class and the armoured cruiser "Maria Theresia", that were meant to replace costly battleships in the long run. These hopes vanished soon and the money was actually spent on several useless warships, what postponed the construction of new battleships until 1893. The A-H Navy was partially lucky, because her fleet was not composed of many single battleship prototypes, like the French navy, that was notorious for that matter.

These A-H "turret" battleships were named SMS "Kronprinz Erzherzog Rudolf" and SMS "Kronprinzessin Erzherzogin Stefanie" after the Crown Prince and the only son of the Emperor Franz Josef I, and his spouse. The better informed readers would remember Prince Rudolf because of his forbidden affair with the Countess Maria Vecera, and their joint suicide in the Mayerling Castle. Prince Rudolf was also in some occasions visiting Zagreb, and well known are the Rudolf Military Barracks. The letters SMS (or S.M.S.) had the meaning "Seiner Majestät Schiff", i.e. "His Majesty Ship" (HMS).

"Kronprinz Rudolf" was built by the Naval Arsenal at Pola and "Kronprinzessin Stefanie" by the Stabilimento tecnico triestino (STT) at Trieste. The ships needed five years to be completed, being commissioned in 1889, but the building time of "Stefanie" was shorter because of her smaller dimensions, and the better experienced shipyard at Trieste.

Appearance

Both units belonged officially to the same class, but differed in many points. "Rudolf" was bigger, armed with three main guns, but her secondary armament was of smaller calibre than on the sister-ship and she was having only one mast, placed aft of the second funnel. "Stefanie" was smaller, and she was armed with only two main guns, her secondary battery was of bigger calibre and she was having two masts. Hull of both ships was relatively short, but the form of the hull differed too: "Rudolf" was flush-decked, and "Stephanie" was having raised forecastle and poop, and her secondary artillery was placed one deck lower than on the bigger vessel. Two of the barbets were installed forward, on ships' sides, and the third (on "Rudolf" only) was placed aft.



"Kronprinzessin Stefanie"

Middle part of the hull was recessed, to make possible for the artillery to fire over the ship's ends. The conning tower was topped by an open bridge; and both ships were having two funnels. The submerged ram forward was more pronounced on the "Rudolf", and the ships were having two propellers and one rudder of the simple streaming form. Both units were having stern galleries, a relic of the sailing man-of-war era. Open galleries were retained for the long time in the A-H Navy, being disposed off after the "Erzherzog" class, being built between 1902 and 1907. Other navies retained the galleries longer, like the British Royal Navy up to the "Revenge" class built in 1915.

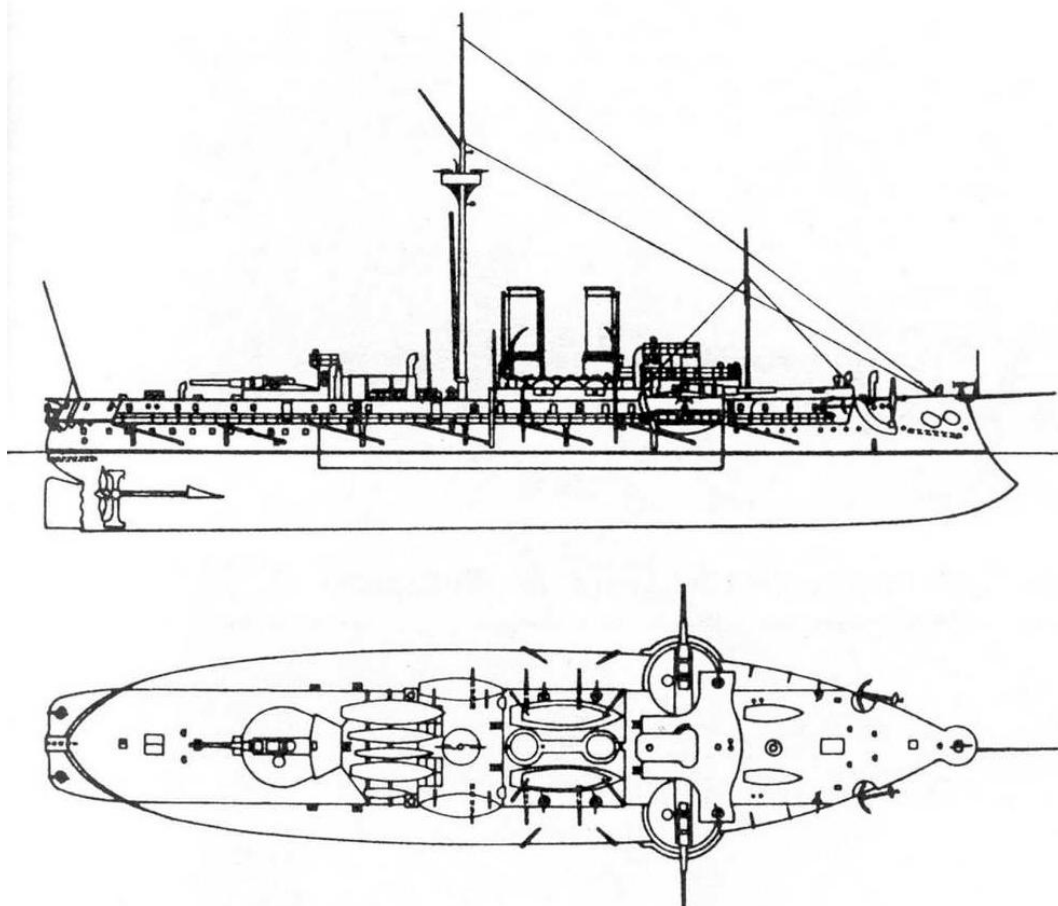
Propulsion and armour protection

"Stefanie" was having two three-cylinder compound steam reciprocating engines with an output of 8000 ihp (indicated horsepower) or 5,882 kW and reached the maximal speed of 17 knots (kts). "Rudolf" received two more modern three-cylinder triple-expansion steam reciprocating engines. The output was lower with only 6,426 ihp or 4,725 kW, but according to some sources the output was greater with 10,000 ihp (7,352 kW). Because of weaker machinery or of bigger displacement the ship reached only 15.72 knots.

The ships were armoured with "compound" plates of iron and steel, placed on layer of wood to augment the elasticity. On "Rudolf" her side belt, 222 to 305 mm thick, was protecting the hull

between the forward and after barbettes. Bulkheads were between 203 and 243 mm thick, closing the armoured citadel from both ends, and armoured deck was between 50 and 70 mm thick. Barbetttes were having 245 mm armour and conning tower 305 mm.

"Stefanie" was having thinner side armour of only 229 mm, but it covered the whole length of the hull. Conning tower was protected by 225 mm of armour, the barbettes with 283 mm and armoured deck was only 25 mm strong. In spite of smaller protected area "Rudolf" was better armoured of the pair.



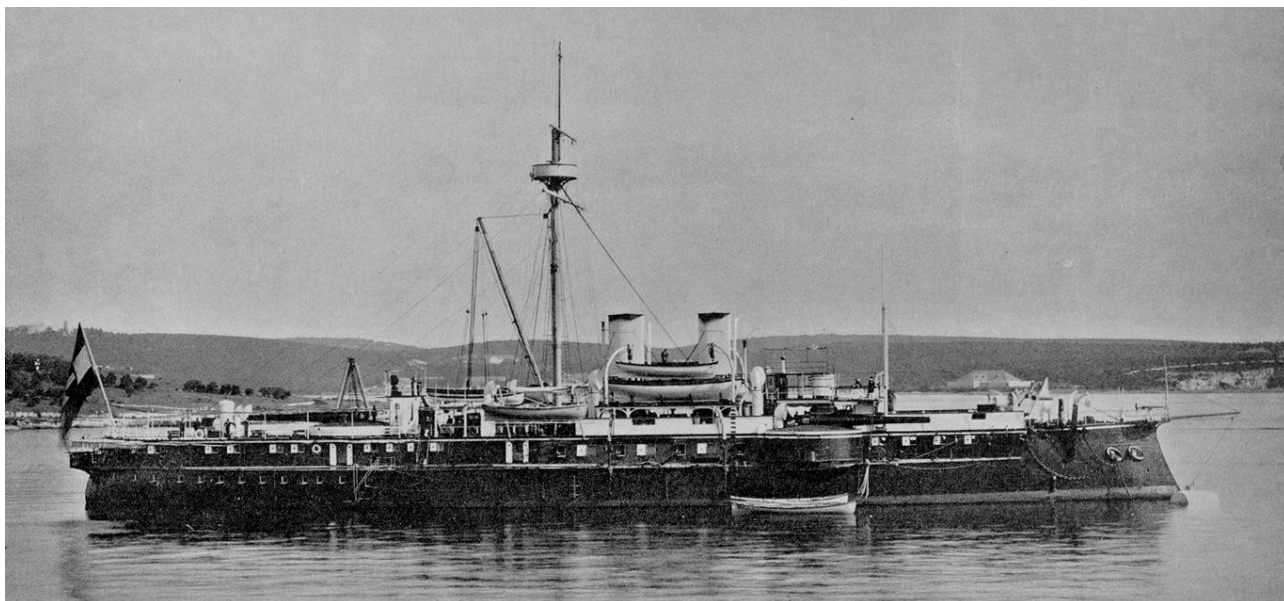
"Kronprinz Erzherzog Rudolf"

Armament and crews

"Rudolf" carried three heavy guns of the Krupp C 80 type in calibre 305 mm/L35 (length of the barrel was 35 calibres) on sliding mountings produced by Armstrong, Mitchell & Co. Two guns were placed forward side by side, to fire over the bow and stern, but this was not tested in practice, because of possible damages to the hull and superstructures. Third barbette was placed on the stern, one deck higher than both forward guns. Secondary armament included at first six "iron-bronze" guns of 120 mm calibre, replaced later by six 120 mm/L35 QF (quick-firing) guns made by Krupp. For use against torpedo boats "Rudolf" was armed with numerous light pieces: five Hotchkiss 47 mm/L44 QF guns, two 47 mm/L33 QF guns, two 37 mm/L44 QF guns and two 66 mm/L15 guns of the Uchatius type for landing parties. Two of the QF guns were placed in the "fighting top" on the single mast. Torpedo armament comprised four 400 mm tubes: one on the bow, one on the stern and two broadside torpedo tubes, placed below and aft of the after barbette.

"Stefanie" was having only two 305 mm/L35 Krupp C 80 guns and six secondary Krupp C 86 guns of 150 mm/L34 calibre. The anti-torpedo boat battery was having more guns than on her half-sister, comprising seven 47 mm/L44 QF guns, two 47 mm/L33 QF guns, two 37 mm/L44 QF guns and two 66 mm landing guns. Two single guns were placed in fighting tops on both masts. The torpedo battery was the same as on the "Rudolf".

The complement of "K. E. Rudolf" included between 447 and 450 crew members (officers and men) and of "K. E. Stefanie" some 430 crew members.



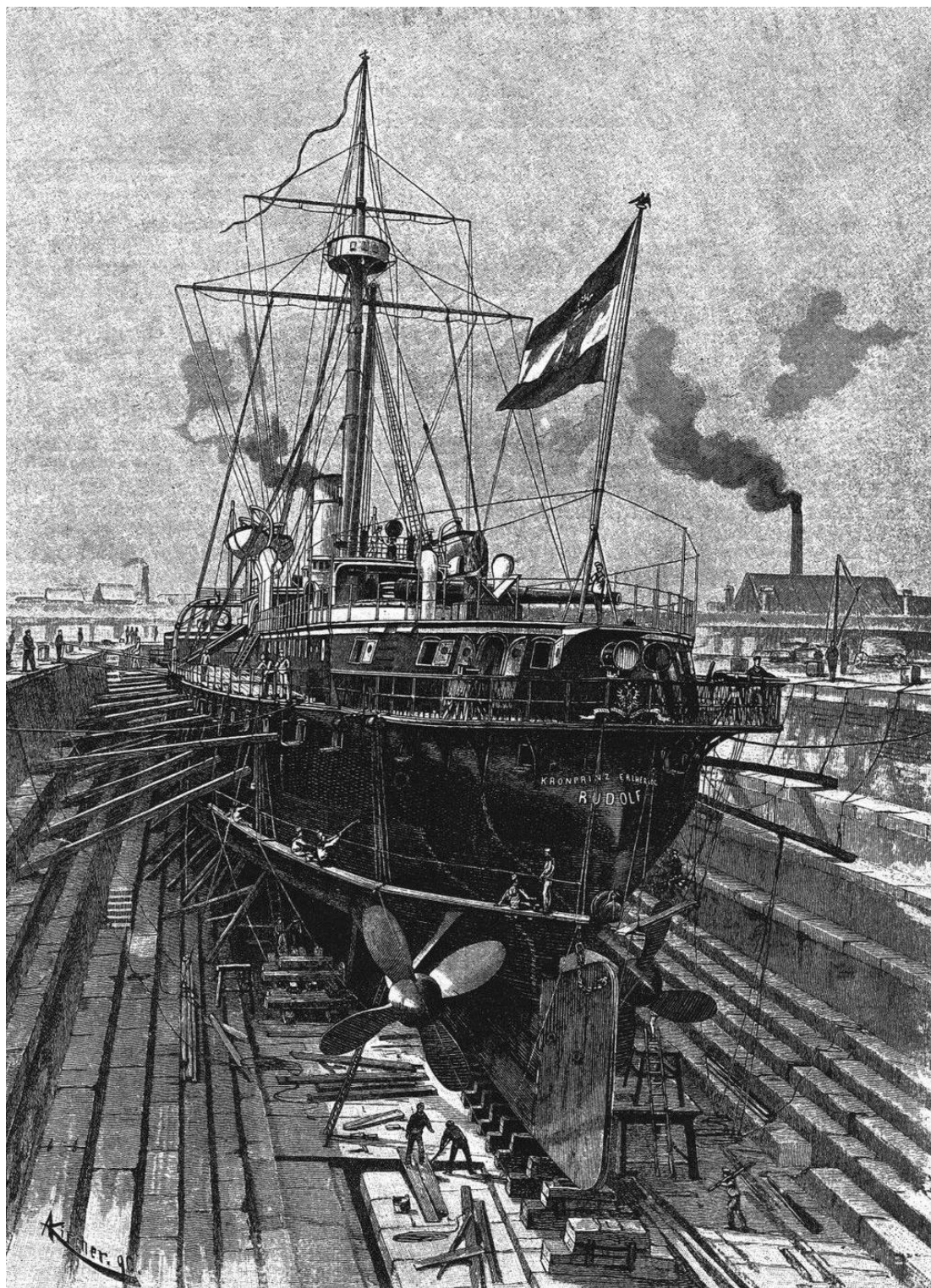
"Kronprinz Erzherzog Rudolf"



"Kronprinzessin Stefanie"

Service and fates

Both ships were completed and commissioned in 1890, to be sent in company of the cruiser "Kaiser Franz Josef I" to a training cruise in the Baltic, being invited there by the German Emperor William II. The units underway visited the harbours of Gibraltar, Portsmouth and Cowes, participating there in the fleet review honouring British Queen Victoria. During the cruise in the North and the Baltic Seas the ships exercised together with the units of the Imperial German Fleet, and "Rudolf" was detached to the Swedish naval base of Karlskrona, to be repaired there. The A-H naval detachment left northern waters and during the return to the Adriatic made port calls at Cherbourg, Lisbon and Palermo. In 1891 both ironclads were part of the "summer squadron" (A-H ships were activated for exercises during the summer and taken into reserve during the winter, except some active vessels) and in 1892 visited Genova (again together with the cruiser "Franz Josef I") during the festivities of 400th anniversary of the Columbus' first voyage to America. "K. E. Rudolf" was at this time the flagship of the A-H fleet.



"Kronprinz Erzherzog Rudolf"

"K. E. Stefanie" was in 1897 sent to Candia (Chania of today) on Crete, together with the torpedo vessel (destroyer) "Satellit" and three torpedo boats, to augment the A-H naval squadron operating there, and trying to maintain peace between Greek and Turkish population on this island under Ottoman administration. Local A-H squadron initially included the armoured cruiser "Kaiserin und Königin Maria Theresia" with the torpedo ship "Sebenico" and was part of an international fleet of 23 British, French, Italian, Russian, German and Austro-Hungarian ships. Later A-H forces were reinforced by small cruisers "Tiger" and "Leopard", torpedo vessels "Blitz" and "Ko-

met", five torpedo boats, and the auxiliary ship "Cyclop". Because of adverse weather, the international fleet left Candia and sailed to the Suda Bay. On 7 March 1897, sailors from "K. E. Stefanie", together with the crews of other ships, took part in the rescue of 2000 Turks, encircled by rebellious Greeks in the valley of Kandanos. Some 570 armed seamen were sent to help the negotiations, and to evacuate enclosed Turks. There followed other similar operations, like the resupplying of isolated Turk garrisons and demolition of abandoned houses near the fortresses, that were used for covert attacks against Turk soldiers. The sea blockade was organised at the same time, to cut the supply of the "rebels" with arms and ammunition, and the ships of the international fleet stopped a Greek fleet detachment under Crown Prince George, that was coming to aid the Greeks on Crete, and compelled these ships to withdraw. A-H warships were fired upon on 30 March and 12 April, but nobody was hit. "K. E. Stefanie" then left Crete - in company with other units of the international squadron - and was sent to Phaleron near Athens, where the Greek population was in unrest, treating the foreign nationals, because in the meantime the Ottoman Empire proclaimed war against Greece. Crete was finally put under Greek control, the above mentioned Crown Prince George became the first governor of the island (but Crete remained a Turkish protectorate until 1913), and the international fleet was free to return home.

Two ironclads of the "Rudolf" class were not sent to China in 1900 to operate against "Boxer" rebels, because A-H cruisers, like "Maria Theresia" and three new units of the "Zenta" class, were better suited for this role.

In the meantime new battleships were built for the A-H Navy, and both ships of the "Rudolf" class were transferred to the reserve fleet, to be decommissioned in 1906. "K. E. Stefanie" was in 1908 sent to the Bocche di Cattaro to serve as a local defence ship, and "K. E. Rudolf" followed two years later. "Stefanie" was disarmed and hulked in 1913 (losing her armament and machinery), to become the accommodation ship of the mining school at Pola, under the name "Gamma". She was interned there in 1918, delivered to Italy in 1920, to be scrapped soon.

"Rudolf" served during the WW I at first as the local defence ship, and from 1916 onwards as the headquarters ship of the mine defence in the Bocche, being anchored off Kumbor. Her crew participated in the sailor's mutiny in February 1918, but she was fired upon and damaged by the coastal batteries, when trying to enter the Bay of Tivat (middle bay of the Bocche) to reinforce the mutineers on auxiliary ship "Gäa" and armoured cruiser "Sankt Georg". She was compelled to return to her anchorage, and after the mutiny was put down, all older warships were decommissioned, including SMS "Rudolf".

After the WW I – in accordance with the decisions of the peace conference – "Rudolf" was left to the new navy of the Kingdom of SHS (later Yugoslavia) as its only (but totally obsolete) battleship. She was renamed "Kumbor", and was to serve as a training ship (or stationary school ship) but was stricken and scrapped already in 1922.

УДК 94(436).08

Башенные броненосцы "Kronprinz Erzherzog Rudolf" и "Kronprinzessin Stefanie"

Звонимир Фрифогель

Германское общество морской и военно-морской истории, Германия
Доктор

Аннотация. В работе дается описание конструкции и история службы первых австро-венгерских башенных броненосцев "Kronprinz Erzherzog Rudolf" и "Kronprinzessin Stefanie".

Ключевые слова: Австро-Венгрия, Императорский и Королевский флот, Первая мировая война, война на море, Адриатика.