

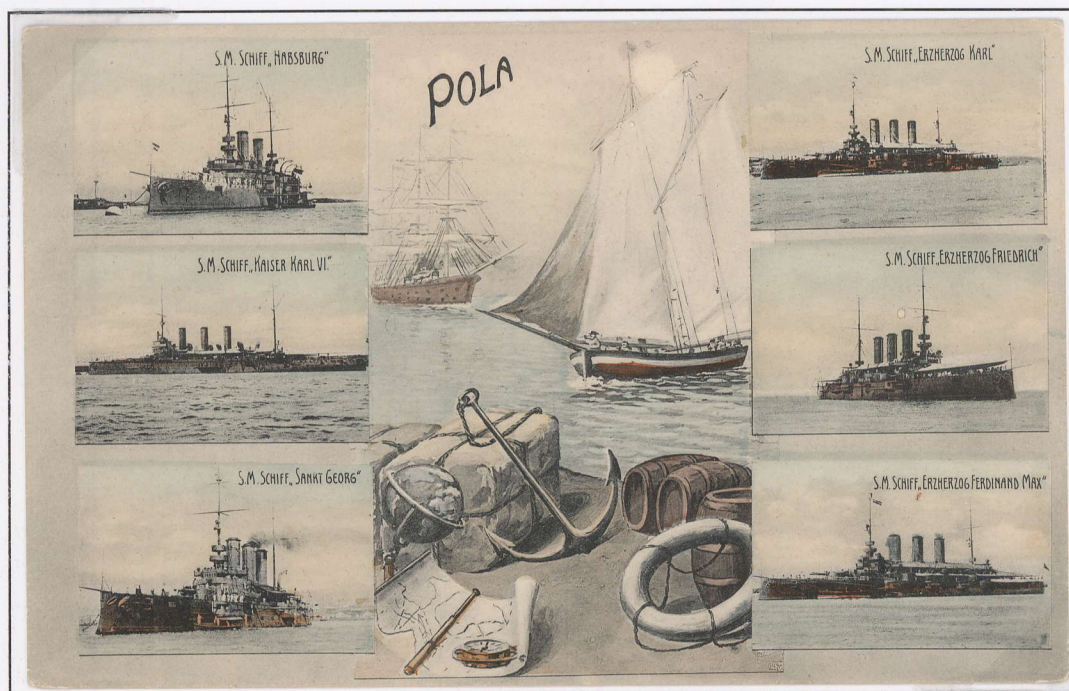
Austrian Battleships in World War I



The purpose of this exhibit is to conduct a postal study of one of the world's more obscure fleets of battleships, that of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. For centuries Austria was one of the most powerful nations in Europe, but by the end of the 19th Century its power was waning, despite the 1867 union with Hungary. Its royal family resisted the democratic reforms that swept most of the rest of Europe, and World War I began in Austria with the assassination of a member of the royal family.

In the war, Austria was allied with Germany and Turkey against Britain and France, later joined by Italy and the United States. With seacoasts on the Adriatic and Black Seas, Austria brought a powerful navy to the war. Its fleet of 16 battleships was based in the Adriatic, opposite old enemy Italy. Although there were many skirmishes in the Adriatic, pre-war strategies had never addressed the question of what to do if the enemy's battle fleet would not come out and fight.

Throughout most of the war, Austria's battleships, well aware of the potential threat allied against them, remained secure at their protected bases, and no great high seas battle ever took place. Nevertheless, the very existence of these mighty ships forced the Allies to devote considerable resources to keeping them there — a classic example of the "Fleet in Being."



All 16 battleships are represented here by postmarks, censor and other types of ship's markings. The primary battleship base was at Pola, which also had the only Fleet Post Office ("Marinefeldpostamt Pola"). On-board post offices were supervised by the First Lieutenant, who also censored mail.

The standard reference is Tranmer's *Postal Markings of the Austro-Hungarian Navy, 1914-1918*. Of Tranmer's many types of postal markings, only his Types 3, 6a and 7 were used on battleships:



Type 3



Type 6a



Type 7

Lead ship of the class. 22,000 tons, length 500 feet, complement 988.
Armament: 12 12-inch guns in four triple turrets, two each fore and aft.
Built at Stabilimento Tecnico, Trieste. Completed October 1912.

Sailed from her base at Pola only once, in June, 1918, in company with SMS PRINZ EUGEN, in an effort to relieve the French-Italian blockade of the Adriatic. The mission was abandoned when SZENT ISTVÁN was sunk by an Italian torpedo boat.

VIRIBUS UNITIS remained at her base in Pola thereafter. On October 31, 1918 the Austro-Hungarian Empire was dissolved and the great battleship raised the red-white-blue flag of the new nation of Yugoslavia. That night, however, Italian frogmen made their way into the harbor and attached a mine to VIRIBUS UNITIS' hull. The explosion was fatal, and the ship capsized and sank around dawn. She was Austria's finest battleship, symbolic of the country's effort to become a real sea power.



Tranmer Type 3 cancel September 15, 1915, with ship's censor mark
Pola Marinefeldpostamt transit cancel same date.

VIRIBUS UNITIS is one of few battleships to be pictured on a contemporary national postage stamp, an Austrian semi-postal issued in 1915 to raise funds for the war.



Built at Stabilimento Tecnico, Trieste. Completed July 1913.

Sailed from her base at Pola only once, in June, 1918, in company with SZENT ISTVÁN in an effort to relieve the French-Italian blockade of the Adriatic. The mission was abandoned when SZENT ISTVÁN was sunk by an Italian torpedo boat.

Surrendered to Italy after the war; served as a naval museum at Venice through the 1920s.



(Above) Tranmer Type 3 postmark, dated Nov. 1, 1915; Pola transit machine cancel Nov. 3.

(Below) Boxed censor mark, Pola Marinefeldpostamt transit cancel Oct. 12, 1917.

(SMS is the German equivalent to "His Majesty's Ship.")

Built at Stabilimento Tecnico, Trieste. Completed June 1914.

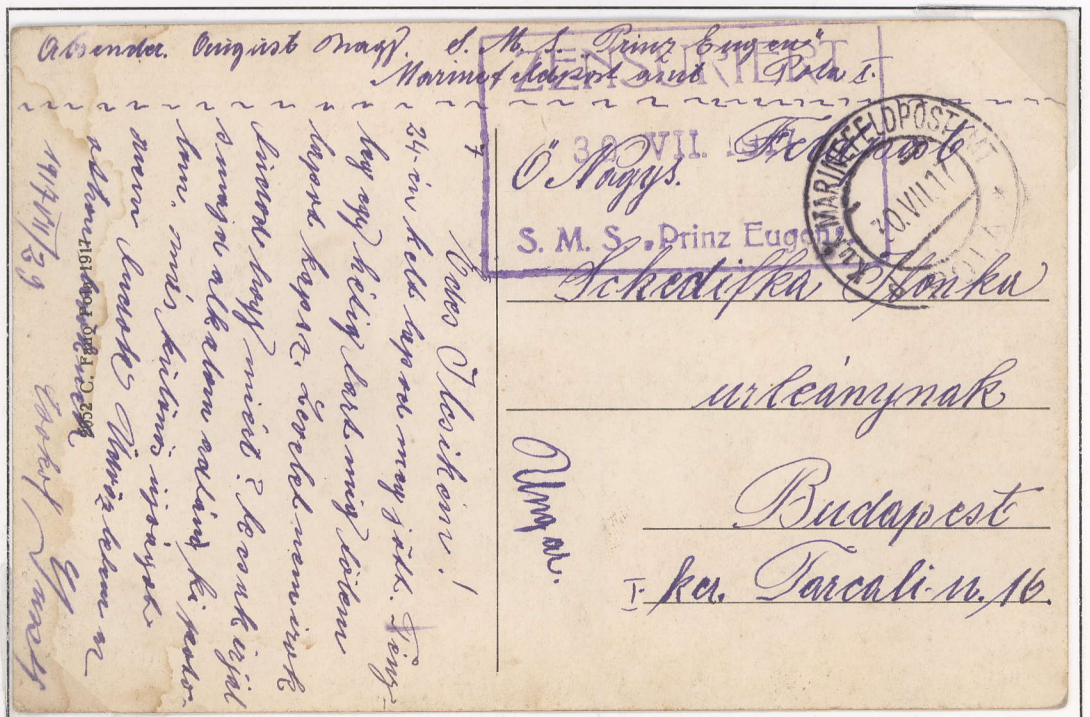
Sailed from her base at Pola only once, in June, 1918, in company with SMS VIRIBUS UNITIS, in an effort to relieve the French-Italian blockade of the Adriatic. The mission was abandoned when SZENT ISTVÁN was sunk by an Italian torpedo boat.

Given to France in 1918 as war reparation.



Registered cover with Tranmer Type 3 cancel. Pola station "2d" postmark on 35-heller stamp; the sailor's free mail privilege does not extend to registry fees. Pola registry label.

Rectangular censor mark 30 July 1917, with Pola Marinefeldpostamt transit cancel same day.



Built at Danubius Co., Fiume. Completed September 1915. Last of the Austrian dreadnoughts.

Sailed from her base at Pola on June 9, 1918, in company with SMS TEGETTHOFF, in an effort to relieve the French-Italian blockade of the Adriatic. The small flotilla was intercepted by the Italian torpedo boats Mas-15 and Mas-21. The former was captained by LT Rizzo, who had earlier sunk SMS WIEN in the harbor at Trieste. Both boats fired on the pair of battleships, but only LT Rizzo's torpedo struck home on SZENT ISTVÁN. The great ship was mortally wounded in the 3:30 am attack, and rolled over and sank about 6:00 am. The event was filmed; the sight of the men scrambling for a foothold on the capsizing hull is one of the most riveting early live motion picture films.

Austrian feldpost card, ship's large circular censor mark with Pola Marinefeldpostamt transit cancel Dec. 25, 1915. Text at upper left indicates place for sender's name ("Absender" in German); in seven different languages, reflecting the cultural scope of the late Austro-Hungarian Empire.



Christmas postcard with Imperial Eagle censor mark, postmarked Pola Marinepostamt Dec. 21, 1916.

First ship of the class, although not the namesake.
14,500 tons, length 456 feet, complement 830; a semi-dreadnought design.
Armament: 4 12-inch guns in two twin turrets, one each fore and aft.

Built at Stabilimento Tecnico, Trieste. Completed in 1910.

Remained at Pola throughout the war, and saw no action.

Given to France in 1918 as a war reparation.



Tranmer Type 3 postmark, January 3, 1916. Pola Marinefeldpostamt transit cancel same date.



Real photographic postcard of the ship.

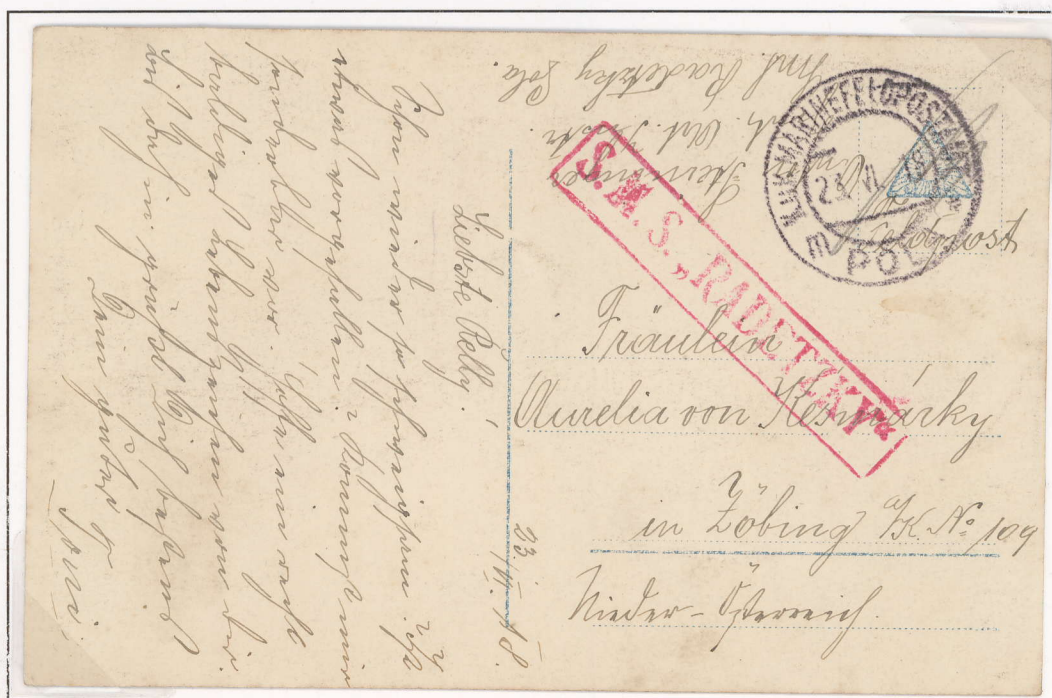
Namesake ship of the class, although not the first completed.
Built at Stabilimento Tecnico, Trieste. Completed in 1911.

On October 21, 1914 RADETZKY arrived at the harbor at Cattaro and took under fire French artillery guns that had been placed on hills surrounding the strategically important harbor. Her 12-inch guns soon persuaded the French to abandon the position. She saw no further action in the war.

Briefly occupied by United States forces after the war. Given to Italy in 1918 as a war reparation.



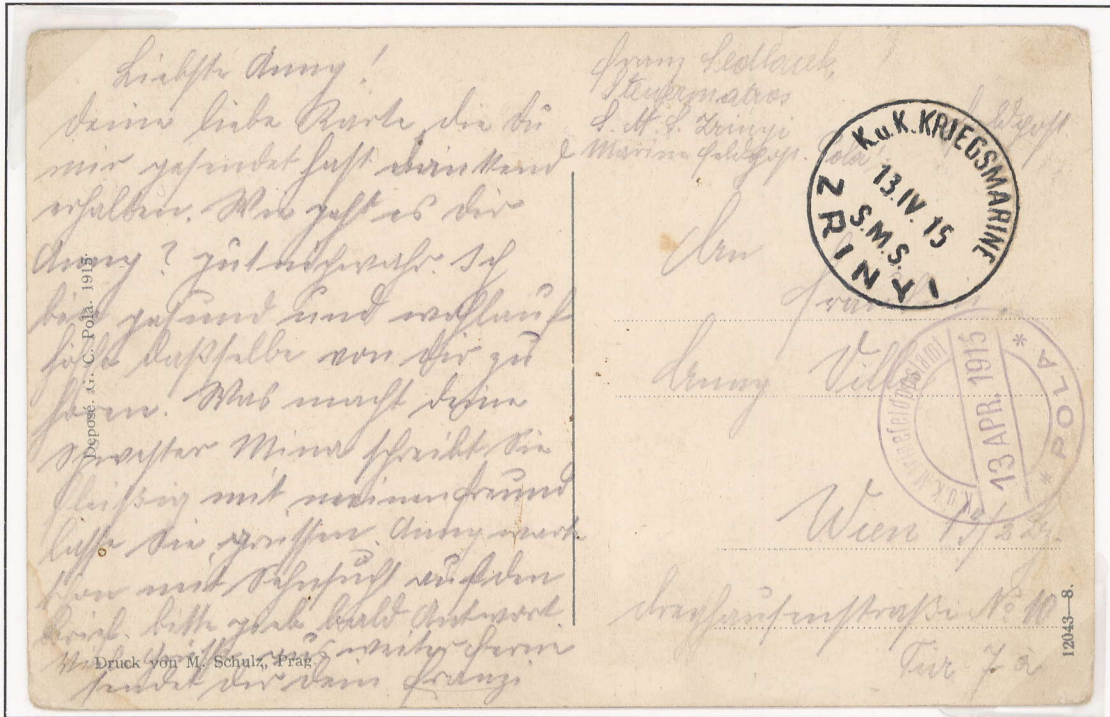
Tranmer Type 7 postmark, November 4, 1916. Pola Marinefeldpostamt transit cancel same day.



Boxed ship's identity mark, verifying free postage. Pola Marinefeldpostamt cancel June 23, 1918.

Built at Stabilimento Tecnico, Trieste. Completed in 1911.

Saw no real action in the war. Absorbed into the newly-organized Yugoslavian Navy as the war ended. On November 22, 1919 she was turned over to United States representatives at Spalato, Dalmatia and commissioned in the United States Navy as USS ZRINYI. She remained inactive at Spalato until November 7, 1920, when she was towed by USS CHATTANOOGA to Papada, Italy, and turned over to the Italian government at Venice. She was later scrapped.



Tranmer Type 7 postmark, April 13, 1915. Pola Marinefeldpostamt transit cancel same date.



Picture post card of Pola harbor in more peaceful times.

Lead ship of the class.

10,600 tons, length 390 feet, complement 748. A pre-dreadnought design.

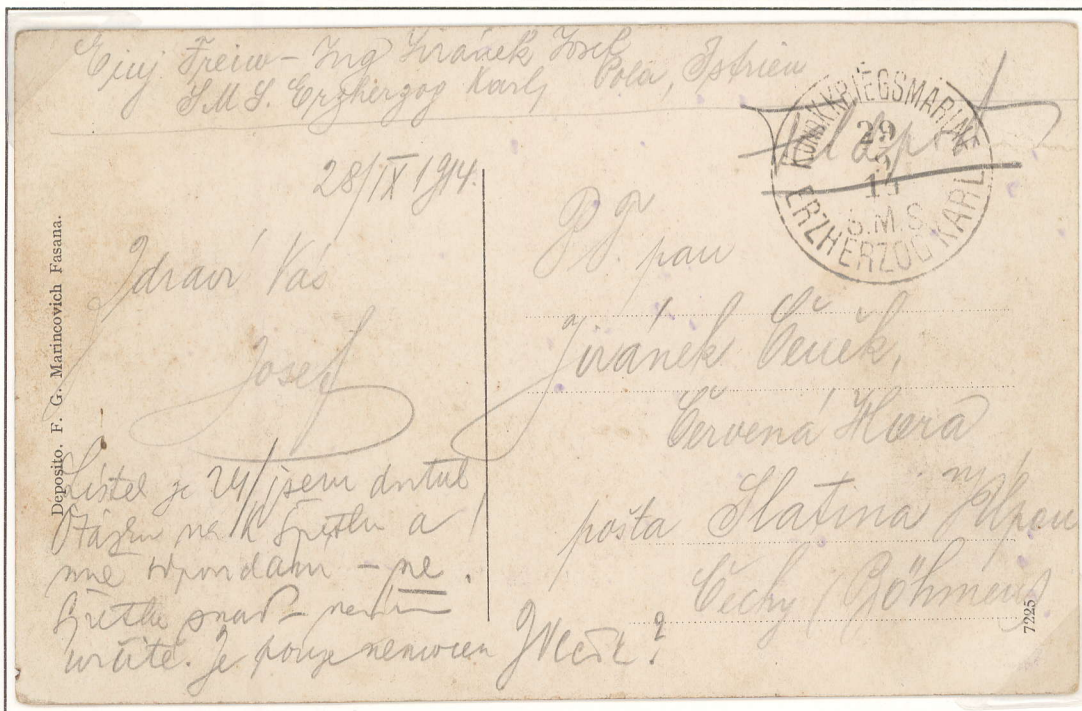
Armament: 4 9.4-inch guns in two twin turrets, one each fore and aft.

Built at Stabilimento Tecnico, Trieste. Completed February 1905.

Based at Pola during the early part of the war, the three sister ships of the ERZHERZOG KARL class were moved to the harbor at Cattaro in 1917 and operated as harbor defense vessels during heavy fighting in the southern part of the Balkans. They remained there for the rest of the war.

Given to France in 1918 as a war reparation. She ran aground in the harbor at Bizerta, Tunisia and was scrapped there in 1921.

Tranmer Type 6a postmark, May 2, 1915. Pola Marinefeldpostamt transit cancel. Patriotic post card of an imaginary battle scene at sea.



Tranmer Type 7 (variant: "K und K", date vertical), Sept. 29, 1914, early in the war.

"Erzherzog" is German for Archduke.

Built at Stabilimento Tecnico, Trieste. Completed October 1906.

As fighting in the Balkans grew more significant in the later part of the war, the three sister ships of the ERZHERZOG KARL class shifted to the harbor at Cattaro in 1917 to guard the harbor against potential enemy artillery positions on the high hills surrounding the anchorage. They remained there for the rest of the war.

Given to France in 1918 as a war reparation.

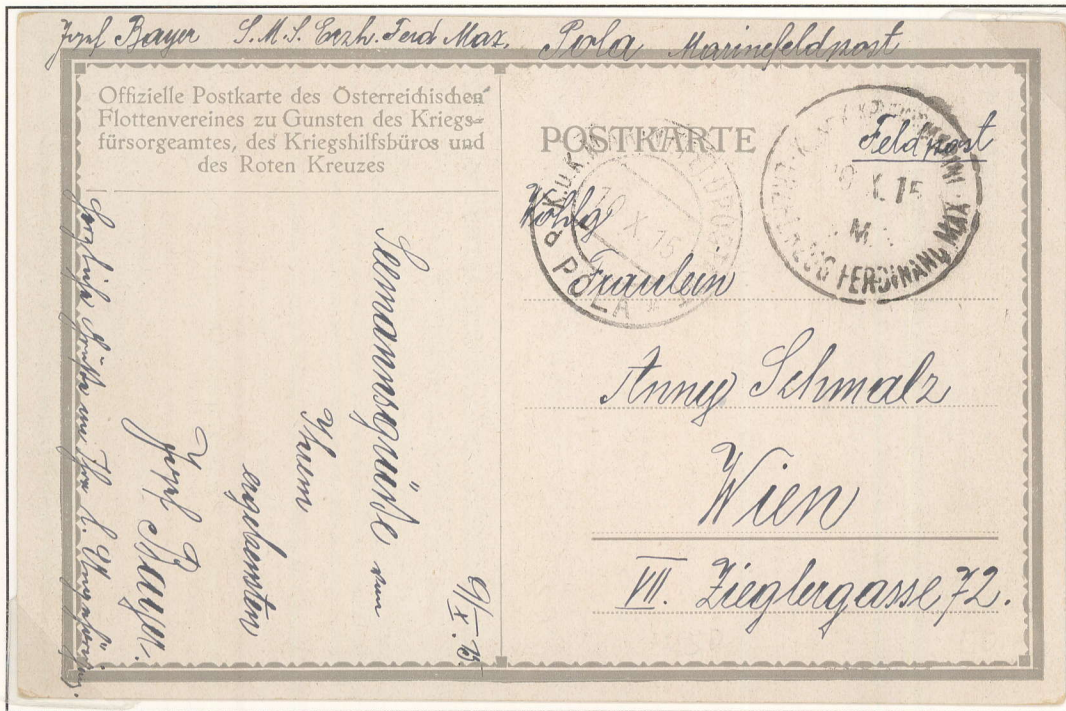


Bottom: Tranmer Type 6a postmark, May 13, 1915 on a custom-printed feldpost card for the ship. Pola Marinefeldpostamt transit cancel. Top: same marking in 1916 usage with "Censored" removed and usual transit cancel, on a patriotic post card.

Built at Stabilimento Tecnico, Trieste. Completed April 1907.

The three sister ships of the ERZHERZOG KARL class were moved to the harbor at Cattaro (now the town of Kotor, Montenegro) in 1917 to serve as harbor defense vessels. They remained there for the rest of the war.

Given to France in 1918 as a war reparation.



Tranmer Type 3 postmark, October 10, 1915. Pola Marinefeldpostamt transit cancel. Patriotic post card of the launching of a ship.



Ship's censor mark on a scenic viewcard, postmarked Oct. 28, 1918 at KuK Etappenpostamt 267 (Austrian Base Post Office) at Cattaro

Lead ship of the class.
8,340 tons, length 354 feet, complement 653. A pre-dreadnought design.
Armament: 3 9.4-inch guns in two turrets, twin fore and single aft.

Built at Stabilimento Tecnico, Trieste. Completed in 1903; substantially rebuilt in 1911.

Saw no action in the war, her design being too early for effective use in the era of the dreadnought. Remained in Pola harbor throughout the war.

Given to Britain in 1918 as a war reparation.



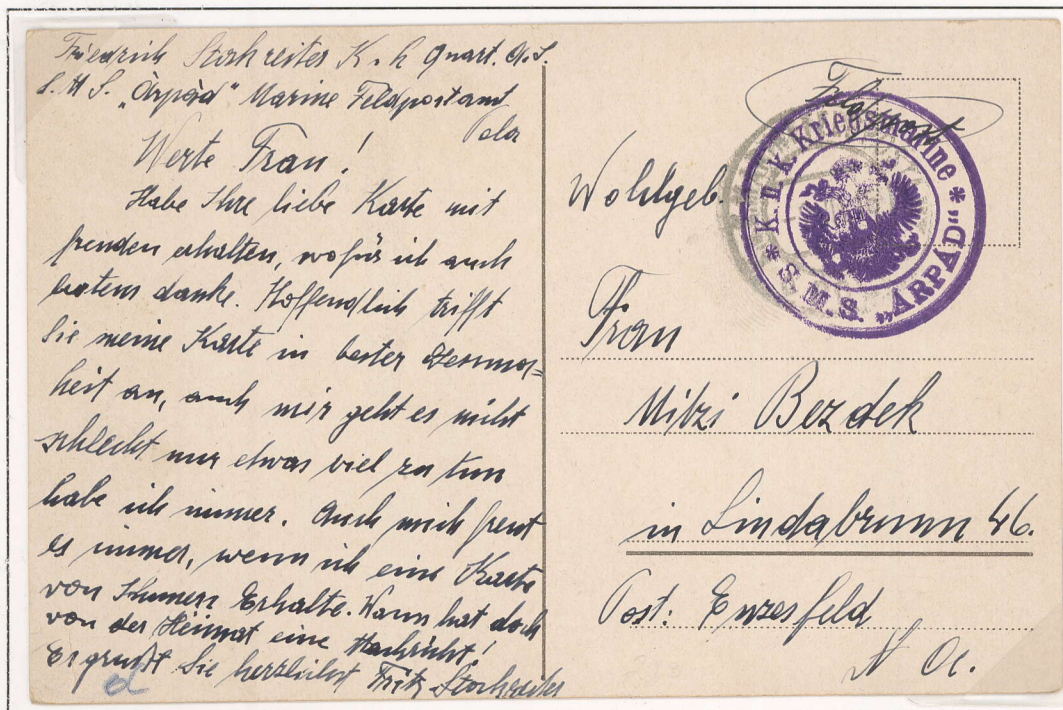
Tranmer Type 7 postmark, April 14, 1916. Pola Marinefeldpostamt transit cancel same date. Comic post card.

Built at Stabilimento Tecnico, Trieste. Completed in 1903; substantially rebuilt in 1912.

Saw no action in the war, her design being too early for effective use in the era of the dreadnought. Remained in Pola harbor throughout the war. Given to Britain in 1918 as a war reparation.



Tranmer Type 7 postmark on art card dated Feb. 8, 1915. Straight line censor.

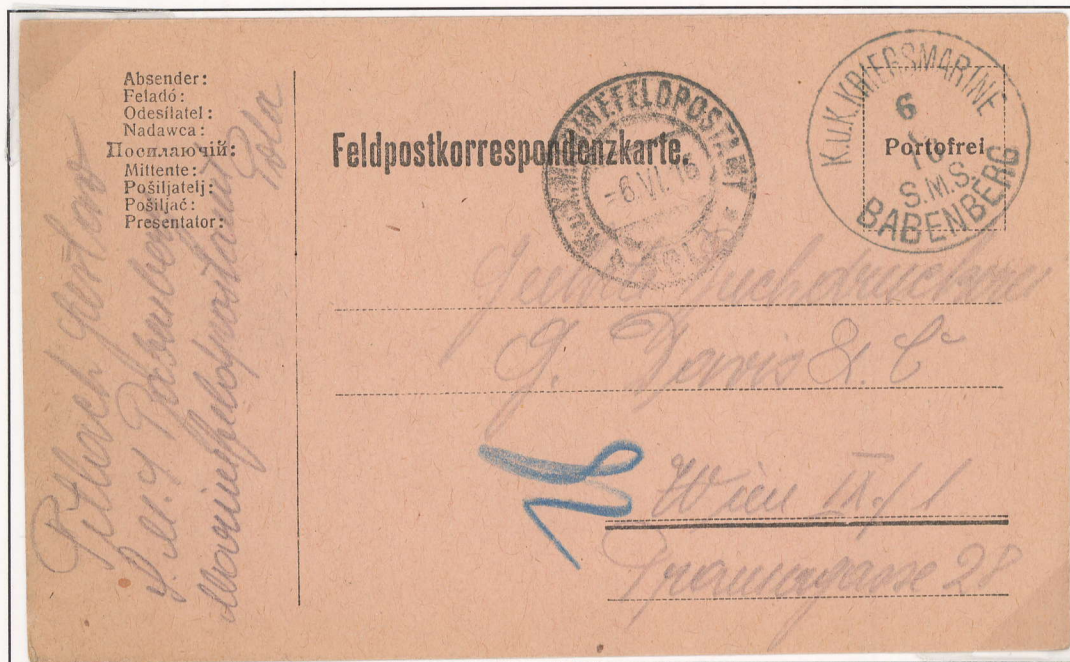


Large ship's mark with imperial eagle in the center, but no onboard postal marking. Overstruck with Pola Marinefeldpostamt transit cancel. Picture post card of scene in Pola.

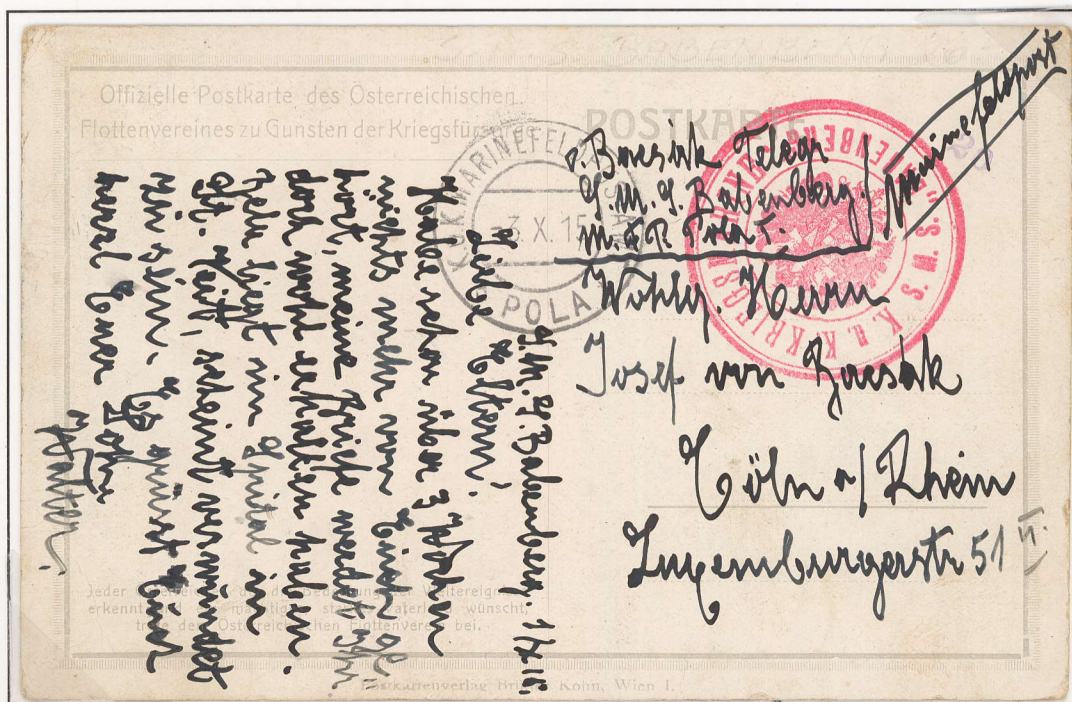
Built at Stabilimento Tecnico, Trieste. Completed in 1903; substantially rebuilt in 1913.

Saw no action in the war, her design being too early for effective use in the era of the dreadnought. Remained in Pola harbor throughout the war.

Given to Britain in 1918 as a war reparation. Scrapped in Italy in 1921.



Tranmer Type 7 postmark, June 6, 1916. Pola Marinefeldpostamt transit cancel same date. Austrian feldpost card; "sender" now printed in nine languages.



Imperial eagle ship's mark. Postmarked Pola Marinefeldpostamt cancel Oct. 3, 1915.

Lead ship of the class.

5,600 tons, length 323 feet, complement 441. Early pre-dreadnought design.

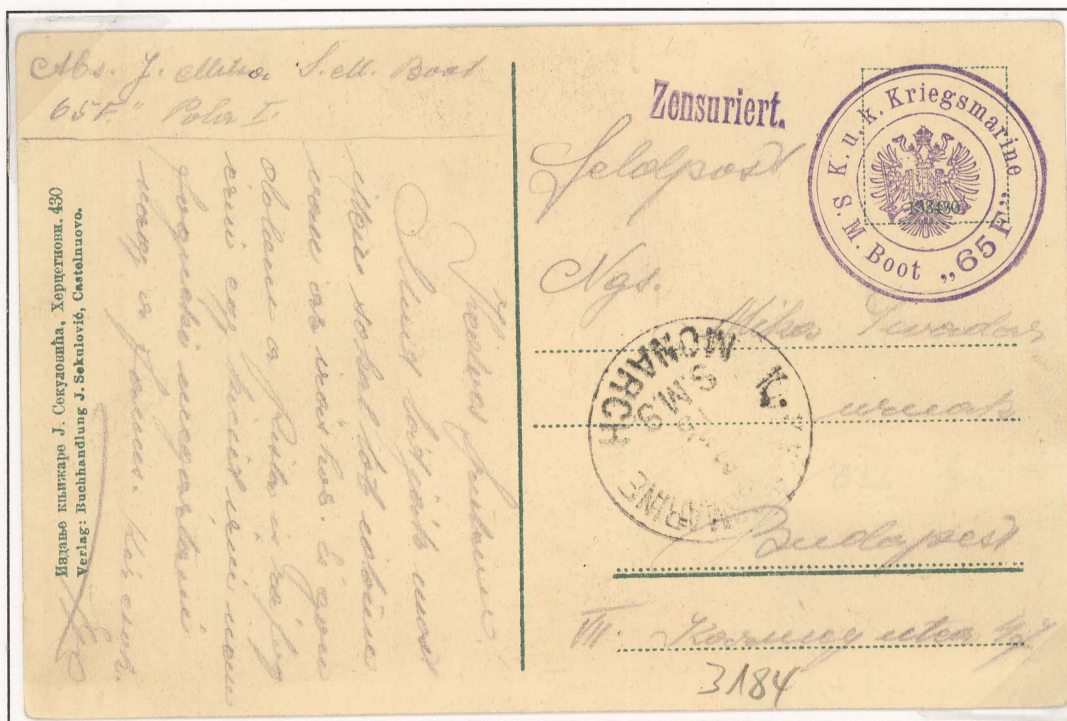
Armament: 4 9.4-inch guns in two turrets, twin fore and aft.

Built at Stabilimento Tecnico, Trieste. Completed in 1895.

Served as an accommodation ship during the later part of the war.

The three ships of the MONARCH class were moved to Cattaro Harbor in 1914 to counter French artillery guns placed on Mount Lovcen overlooking the harbor. The ship's small guns proved ineffective, and SMS RADETZKY eventually arrived to drive the French from their positions.

Given to Britain in 1918 as a war reparation.

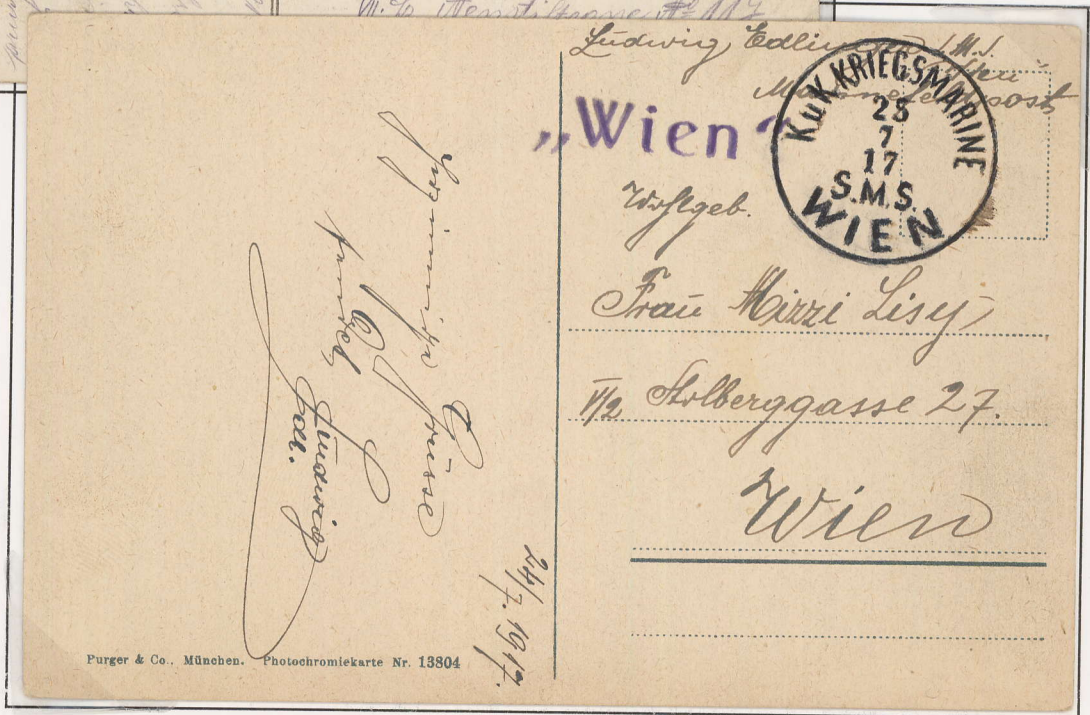


Originally posted in SM BOOT 65F, a 200-ton oceangoing torpedo boat with a complement of 29. Given over to the post office in MONARCH, and struck with Tranmer Type 7 cancel dated March 8, 1915.

View card of a monastery.

Completed in 1895 (WIEN) and 1896 (BUDAPEST).

Both ships sailed from Trieste in November 1917 and bombarded the Italian coast only a few miles from Venice. In retaliation, LT Rizzo entered the harbor at Trieste on December 10, 1917 commanding the torpedo boats Mas-9 and Mas-10. WIEN was torpedoed and sank; BUDAPEST was badly damaged and was eventually demilitarized and used as a barracks ship. She was given to Britain in 1918 as a war reparation and scrapped.



Tranmer Type 7 cancels dated 1914 and 1917. Additional censor and ship's marks for each.