

## Naval Power Austria

In the 14th century parts of the Adriatic coastal area already belonged to the Habsburgs, but the slowly developing maritime trade was merely based on the initiative of its inhabitants, who also protected trade ships against Ottoman and Moorish pirates. At first nobody thought of building up a navy. Only in the wars against the Ottomans in the 17th and 18th centuries an imperial Danube flotilla was created to oppose Ottoman naval power on the river Danube on the one hand and to support military operations on land on the other. During the reign of emperor Joseph II an Austrian navy was created, but it comprised only few warships due to financial difficulties. With the Peace at Campoformido (1797) not only Venice and Dalmatia became part of the Habsburg territory, but also the Venetian fleet which should later on form the basis of the imperial navy. During the first half of the 19th century Venice remained the main harbour of the navy, as new harbours like Pola and Cattaro were built only later in the century. The importance of the Austrian navy manifested itself in the victories at sea of Wilhelm von Tegetthoff at Helgoland (German-Danish War of 1864) and at Lissa (Austrian-Italian War of 1866). In the following years the fleet experienced a continuous building up with iron replacing wood as building material.

Apart from the merely military tasks the navy was also of importance to the national economy and science which manifested itself in various research voyages of Austrian warships. Apart from the first circumnavigation of the fregate „Novara“ from 1857 to 1859, voyages to Asia, America, Africa, Australia and the Arctic were made. On these journeys the crew, mostly naval officers-to-be, was trained, research work on nature and ethnology was carried out and the Austrian ensign was flown on all oceans.

It was the navy commanders Spaun, Montecuccoli and Haus, who finally created World War I's „modern“ fleet. Due to the support of the heir apparent, Franz Ferdinand, many new ships were built, and from 1908 onward even the first Austrian submarines entered naval service. Thus the monarchy disposed of one of the most powerful fleets at the beginning of World War I.

During World War I the navy's main task was to protect the Dalmatian coast; due to the allied blockade at Otranto its operational area was confined to the Adriatic Sea. After the fall of the Habsburg monarchy in autumn 1918 Austria lost its maritime possessions; its ships were distributed among the successor states and the allies.

## Showcases and other objects

The Navy room is divided into three main parts which represent the following topics:

The entrance area is dedicated to the chronological development of the Austrian Danube flotilla. The showcase on the left shows the most important types of ships from 1750 to 1850. The gunboats and the so called „Tschaiken“ were built according to the plans of Ottoman ships and were manoeuvred by „Tschaikisten“, mostly civil sailors, on the Danube. As the return transport of the „Tschaiken“ upstream was too expensive, they were demolished after use and replaced by new ships. On the right side model ships of the modern Danube flottilla are presented. The two Danube monitors „**Maros**“ and „**Leitha**“, built between 1870 and 1872, were the first turret ships of the Austrian navy. In total ten monitors were built which proved to be very valuable in the combats against Serbia and Romania.

The left part of the room reflects Austrian naval history from its Venetian beginnings to the naval battle at Lissa. In the first two showcases exhibits of the first half of the 19th century are shown. Apart from a one-pound naval gun and **the teaching model of the „Belle Alliance“** the „**Uchatius**“-**type bomb** thrown from balloons can be seen. They were used during the Revolution in 1849 against the besieged town of Venice; this was considered the first airraid in history. In the big showcase the different types of wooden warships of the 19th century, from the Venetian „Brigg“ to the „Korvette“ are shown. The big painting by Alexander Kircher showing the naval battle at Lissa represents the thematic end of this period.

Passing on to the right side of the room the visitors will get an insight into the Austro-Hungarian Arctic expedition by Payer and Weyprecht from 1872 to 1874, with the painting „**Nie Zurück**“ (There can be no going back) by Payer being the most important object. Then follows the showcase with exhibits of the **intervention at Crete in 1897 and the turning down of the Boxer rebellion in 1900**. Finally the visitors enter the area of the „modern“ fleet. The most outstanding exhibit is the biggest sectional model in the world, „**Viribus Unitis**“ (flagship of the navy during World War I). It shows the structure and buildup of the last generation of Austro-Hungarian ships. The special features of these „Dreadnoughts“, called „Tegetthoff“-class by the Austrian navy, become evident especially when comparing them with other battle ships exhibited in the big showcase. Other showcases deal with submarines, naval aviation and „smaller“ units of the navy.

The **conning tower of the submarine U „20“**, sunk off the mouth of the Tagliamento river, salvaged in 1962 and handed over to the Museum of Military History, symbolizes the end of the Austro-Hungarian navy.