

150 GODINA RIJEČKE TVORNICE TORPEDA

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF CAPTAIN G. B. LUPPIS, BORN IN RIJEKA 190 YEARS AGO

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I. – THE NAVY OFFICER

Giovanni Biagio (in German: Johann Blasius) Luppis was born in Rijeka one hundred and ninety years ago, the twenty.seventh of January 1813. Some historians mean, it was in 1814.

At his birth the father Ferdinando – a ship-owner in the important and busy Adriatic harbour of Rijeka – was absent from his home, sailing somewhere over the oceans. The mother Giovanna Perich was helped by the midwife Maria Inch, who announced the happy event to the authorities and provided the christening by don Giuseppe de Spingaroli. In Rijeka the young Giovanni Biagio frequented the grammar-school and the Nautical Institute, but during holidays he crossed the seas together with his father specially visiting the ports in the Mediterranean and in the Black Sea. And more and more increased his interest in maritime matters.

In that period the croatian town of Rijeka and its territory belonged to the Austrian Empire; Trieste and Rijeka were free-ports since 1719. Between the european important seaports Rijeka took the position number 9.¹ A young man who intended to enter the Austrian Navy as officer had to go to Venice and frequent, for some years, the “Collegio Navale”/”Collegio di Marina” (Naval Academy) of the Veneto-Austrian Navy.

The Collegio was founded by the Austrian Emperor Franz I. in 1820, five years after the second austrian occupation of the Veneto. Some conditions to be admitted to the Collegio were:

- 1) Age of entrance: 9 do 11 years
- 2) Best health (Medical Certificate requested)
- 3) Good knowledge of the Italian language
- 4) Knowledges in correspondence and mathematics²

1 v. LIT (9)

2 v. LIT (25), pg. 49

Before admission the boys had to take stiff examinations. During the week the future Navy officers wore a simple house dress, on sundays a special uniform. The official language was the Italian, sometimes mixed with words and expressions in Venetian dialect. The students coming from German, Czeko-Slovakian, Hungarian and the others non-Italian speaking Provinces of the Empire did very hard – not so G. B. Luppis whose family spoke Italian too.

SCHATZ/LUPPIS

Only two names of famous Austrian Navy officers who as boys frequented the “Collegio Navale” some years later will be mentioned in this paper: – Wilhelm von Tegetthoff (1827–1871), victorious at Helgoland (1864) and at Lissa/Vis (1866)³, and: – Maximilian von Sterneck (1829–1897), Commanding officer of the flagship ERZHERZOG FERDINAND MAX at Lissa, later on Chief-in-Chief of the Austro-Hungarian Navy (Kriegsmarine), buried in “his” Navy church Gospa od mora in Pula.

On November 16, 1835 the Cadet G. B. Luppis left the Collegio and did his job as an young Navy officer for some years on board of various Imperial warships (S. M. S. – Seiner Majestät Schiff. In GB: H.M.S. – His/Her Majesty Ship). During the blockade of Venice (1848/49)⁴ G.B. Luppis, on board of the frigate BELLONA (III) goes through the troubles of the revolution. In began with the murder of the Commander of the Navy Arsenal. The frigate BELLONA (III) was a new ship, launched in Venice in 1842 (1260 tons, 48 x 13 x 6 metres, 32 guns). The crew consisted in 6 officers, 8 cadets, 1 chaplain, 3 physicians and 319 sailors. In 1848, at the beginning of the revolution, the BELLONA (III) was to find in the port of Pula. Commanding officer: Johann Buratovich.⁵

Now happened a very strange but characteristic manouvre: Nearly half of the crew, exactly 151 sailors, had to leave the ship... they all were Venetian people! With a new crew – G. B. Luppis included – the frigate, some month later, sailed to Venice and she participated in the blockade (April-august 1849). During the revolution the Venetian fleet consisted of 95 ships: 9 corvettes and 11 gun-boots, and the rest were smaller units. Coming under Austrian control many Venetian warships changed the name:

DROMEDARIO/DROMEDAR	ECATE/HECATE
ELISABETTA/ELISABETH	FENICE/PHÖNIX
VULCANO/VULKAN	VENEZIA/TRIEST
VENERE/VENUS	VICENZA/CAORLE ⁶

3 v. LIT (32)

4 v. LIT (13)

5 v. LIT (5), pg. 122

6 v. LIT (25) pg. 5

Years later German became the official language in the Austrian Navy. G. B. Luppis took also part in the operation against the port of Ancona (June 1849).

After the Venetian adventure the Austrian Navy began to transfer its Fleet to Pula in Istria, where the construction of a new Arsenal made good progress. The foundation-stone had been laid in 1856 and the first big warship, the KAISER, was launched two years later. Pula advanced soon to be the Central Navy Base of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. It was in Pula that at the end to World War One the last Austro-Hungarian flagship, the dreadnaught VIRIBUS UNITIS, was sunk by Italian frogmen. Together with his ship disappeared her Commanding officer Janko Vuković de Podkapelski. The Croatian colours replaced the Austrian flags in red-white-red...

But let's return to Captain Luppis. We find him during the war against the French and the Sarde-Piedmontese ships (1859) in the Adriatic sea commanding the Austrian frigate VENUS (ex Venetian frigate VENERE, launched in 1832 in Venice. There were some fights along the Dalmatian coast.⁷

A new period in the career of Captain G. B. Luppis began as – after the year 1859 – he went to Trieste to assume the management of the Commission which had to purchase all the wooden material the Navy needed. Since a lot of years the Navy was in possession of large forests (specially oaks) in Istria (for instance near Pula and Labin) and in the Gorski Kotar (north of Rijeka).⁸

Similar to Luppis an other Austrian inventor worked in the Slovenian and Croatian forests (specially in the valley of river Mirna and around Motovun, a zone called Domain San Marco) – he worked to find convenient wooden material for ship-building. It was the “Marine-Forstintendant” Josef Ressel (1793-1857).

He invented the Archimedean ships-propeller and tested it in the port of Trieste (1828 and 1829) on board the CIVETTA (that means owl). The first tests were not really successful, the Police didn't allow further experiment, it was found to be dangerous. But the ships-propeller was born!

In 1861 Captain G. B. Luppis retired from Navy service with the rank of “Fregattenkapitän” corresponding to “Oberstleutnant” in the Army.

He was awarded with the “Iron Crown III class”.⁹

II. – THE “COAST-SAVIOUR”

Since 1860 Captain Luppis had begun to realize his dream and to think over the problem of a new offensive weapon to be used in warfare. Bayer von Bayersburg

7 v. LIT (4)

8 v. LIT (21)

9 v. LIT (4)

writes. "...Luppis built a model of a torpedo, giving it the name "Küstenretter"/"coast-saviour"/"salvacoste"... and he had from the first the idea to create a "torpedo" with the form of a fish..."^{10, 11}

The first model of Luppis' "coast-saviour (or: "coast-saver") was built on board the frigate BELLONA (III). The purpose of that weapon was to try to defend the Adriatic coasts of the Empire against possible attacks of Italian patriots, the so called "irredentisti". The "coast-saver", in the length of one metre, was swimming on the helm. Loaden with explosive in had to be directed against the target. But the complicated strange thing which reminded the ancient "brulotto" failed. Now Captain Luppis turned to the generosity of the Emperor Franz Josef I. The audience was accorded by Prince Leopold and took place in the Viennese Imperial Palace. The Kaiser was very interested in the activities of his Navy officer. But the finally decision had to come from the Tecnical Committee. The answer in 1861 was negative: Propulsion and course of the "coast-saviour" had to be improved. Therefore Luppis started the construction of "coast-saviour number two". This second exemplar had a length of six metres and an autonomy of half a kilometre, reaching the speed of six knots. The launching-station was prepared on deck of torpedoboats. But all these innovations were only hypothetic and seemed to have no importance in a future war.

It was a matter of fact that Luppis was not able to resolve the difficult technical problems presented by the project. He practically had reached the last phase of his mechanical knowledge.

On March 10, 1864, Captain Luppis returned to Vienna. There he proposed, the Government might take over all material concerning the "coast-saviour". On April 11, 1864, the first negative decision given in 1861, was conferred. And Vienna added, that "it wasn't possible to spend five-thousand to six-thousand Gulden, necessary to examine the new weapon.

Three days later Captain Luppis sent an other letter to the Ministry of Defence and wished to be assisted in his work by the Tecnical Section of the Austrian Navy. Also this proposal was declined and G. B. Luppis was ordered to finish contacting the Ministry and to turn to other institution for help.

Captain Luppis was in contact to Giovanni de Ciotta, an ex Colonel in the Austrian Army. This man nov was to find in the municipal Council. He was very interested in Luppis' project and so he advised Luppis to go in search of an expert in naval construction who had the necessary financial resources and brought him in contact with Robert Whitehead.

Captain Luppis' "coast-saviour" in Vienna had not been accepted as a well working weapon, but the Emperor appreciated the good will and ennobled the

10 v. LIT (4), pg. 115

11 v. LIT (30)

Captain with the predicate “Ritter von Rammer”. The German verb “rammen” means in English “to ram”, for instance “to ram a ship”, as it was done later on, in 1866, by Admiral Tegelhoff at Lissa/Vis. The coat of arms showed a ship hit by a flash of lightning and the inscription said: “Beharrlichkeit siegt”, that means: “Persistence leads to Victory”.¹²

III. – THE “BRULOTTO” TO ATTACK SHIPS AND BURN THEM¹³

Luppis' idea really was not a new one. Greeks and Romans used this “secret” weapon to destroy the hostile wooden ships. The “brulotto” (or “Brander” in German) was specially in use during the centuries 16 until 19. In the night of October 1st, 1805, the “brulotti” helped the English in the fights against Napoleons Great Fleet (more than 2.200 units), when, on the western coast of France, it loaded about 160.000 men and 10.000 horses. This was the repetition of the occupation of England actuated by the Romans.

The “brulotti” were small vessels in the length of about 7 metres. They navigated on the surface and transported a large quantity of inflammable items. The “brulotti” were towed or drifted by current and wind. A revolution in this matter was the invention of the “coast-saviour” by Captain G. B. Luppis.

The “brulotti” came out of use at the end of the 19th century, when wooden ships became very rare. Only some wet linen and/or a lot of spears applicated to the wooden ships could save them and prevented a disaster.

IV. – THE “MINE-VESSEL”, LATER: “TORPEDO”¹⁴

In Rijeka Giovanni de Ciotta had arranged that in August 1864 G. B. Luppis came in contact to Robert Whitehead, an English engineer at the Stabilimento Tecnico di Fiume/Rijeka. A first contract gave Whitehead the possibility to continue the work there where Luppis had ceased in the construction of his “coast-saviour”. Two years of hard work, then the torpedo was born. Luppis communicated the good news to Vienna: “The mine-vessel is ready!”

The Austrian Vice-Admiral Ludwig von Fautz (Chief of the Navy-Section from 1865 to 1868) decided: The mine-vessel had to be tested, and he invited Whitehead and Luppis, the two inventors, to come to Vienna.

But the conflict started here – the differences of opinion on financial and other matters were insuperable. De Ciotta tried to calm the waves but in vain. Luppis decided to leave Rijeka as soon as possible and – together with his wife Elisa de Zotty – he took refuge in Milano.

12 v. LIT (9)

13 v. LIT (17)

14 v. LIT (9)

V. – EPILOGUE

G. B. Luppis, inventor of the first primitive torpedo, died on January 11, 1875 in Milano. His apartment there was situated downtown in Via Sant' Andrea number 19, near the central Via Montenapoleone.¹⁵ Shortly after 1870 he had left Rijeka to spend his last years in anonymity, far from the eternal quarrels in Rijeka and Vienna. Therefore his sudden death remained secret for some time.

In contrast to Luppis' invention, the defensive “coast-saviour”, Whitehead's torpedo was now an offensive weapon.

In the night of January 25 to 26, 1878, three years after the death of Captain Giovanni Biagio Luppis, three Russian torpedoboats sunk a Turkish coastguard, hit by two torpedoes, made in Rijeka.¹⁶

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15 v. LIT (20), pg. 518

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Sažetak**KRATAK ŽIVOTOPIS KAPETANA G. B. LUPPISA,
ROĐENOG U RIJECI PRIJE 190 GODINA***Erwin Schatz***I. Časnik ratne mornarice**

Giovanni Biagio (na njemačkom: Johann Blasius) Luppis rođen je u Rijeci prije 190 godina, 27. siječnja 1813. Neki povijesničari misle da je to bilo 1914. godine.

Zajedno s ocem, brodovlasnikom u Rijeci, tada važnoj i prometnoj jadranskoj luci, mladi Giovanni Biagio prešao je brojna mora, a njegovo je zanimanje za pomorstvo sve više raslo. U to doba hrvatski grad Rijeka sa svojim teritorijem pripadao je Austrijskome Carstvu. Mladić koji je kanio ući u austrijsku ratnu mornaricu kao časnik, morao je otići u Veneciju i nekoliko godina pohađati Pomorsku akademiju – Collegio Navale ratne mornarice Veneta i Austrije.

Dana 16. studenoga 1835. kadet G. B. Luppis završio je Akademiju i služio kao mladi časnik na raznim ratnim brodovima austrijsko-ugarske flote (S.M.S. – Seiner Majestät Schiff – brod Njegova Veličanstva).

Godine 1861. Luppis je umirovljen s činom “kapetan fregate” (dopukovnik u vojsci).

II. Obalni spasilački brod

Od 1860. kapetan G. B. Luppis započeo je ostvarivati svoje snove o novom oružju. Prvi model njegova “obalnoga spasilačkog broda” napravljen je na austrijskoj fregati Bellona (II) (porinut 1811. u Veneciji, 1814. uvršten u flotu ratne mornarice Veneta/Austrije). Namjena toga novog oružja bila bi, prema Luppisu, obrana jadranske obale u sklopu Monarhije od mogućih napada talijanskih patriota, tzv. iredentista.

Godine 1864. Luppis je predstavio svoj naum austrijskome Ministarstvu obrane u Beču, ali je Komisija odbila projekt. Novo oružje ratne mornarice trebalo je biti izgrađeno uz više tehničkog znanja u Rijeci, nakon povratka G. B. Luppisa u rodni grad.

III. Brulotto koji napada brodove i pali ih

Luppisova ideja doista nije bila nova. Grci i Rimljani upotrebljavali su to tajno oružje za uništenje neprijateljskih drvenih brodova. Brulotto ili spaljivač posebno je bio u optjecaju od 16. do 19. stoljeća.

IV. “Brod-mina”, kasnije “torpedo”

Godine 1866. u Beču je predstavljena nova ideja: “brod-mina”. Projekt je bio prihvaćen. Ali sada Luppis više nije bio sam u stvaranju novoga smrtonosnog oružja. Još 1864. stupio je u vezu s Whiteheadom. I Whitehead je bio taj koji je izgradio prvi stvarni torpedo. Kapetan G. B. Luppis odlazi iz Rijeke iza 1870., zajedno sa svojom ženom Elisom de Zotty, i nalazi utočište u Milanu gdje je umro 11. siječnja 1875.

Abstract

**A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF CAPTAIN G.B. LUPPIS,
BORN IN RIJEKA 190 YEARS AGO**

Erwin Schatz

I. – The Navy Officer

Giovanni Biagio (in german: Johann Blasius) Luppis was born in Rijeka 190 years ago, the 24th January 1813. Some historians mean, it was in 1814.

Together with his father, a ship-owner in the important and busy Adriatic harbour of Rijeka, the young Giovanni Biagio crossed the seas and increased his interest in maritime matters. In that period the croatian town of Rijeka and its territory belonged to the Austrian Empire. A young man who intended to enter the Austrian navy as officer had to go to Venice to frequent for some years the “Collegio Navale” / “Collegio di Marina” (Naval Academy) of the Veneto-Austrian Navy.

On November 16, 1835, the Cadet G.B. Luppis left the Collegio and served as young officer on board of various warships of the Imperial Fleet (S.M.S. – Seiner Majestät Schiff, eng. H.M.S. – His/Her Majesty Ship).

In 1861 Luppis retired with the rank of “Fregattenkapitän” (Oberstleutnant in the Army).

II. – The “coast-saviour”

Since 1860 Captain G.B. Luppis began to realize his dreams of a new weapon. The first model of his “coast-saviour” (“salvacoste”, “Küstenretter”) was built on board of the austrian frigate BELLONA (II) (launched in 1811 in Venice, 1814 incorporated in the Veneto-Austrian Navy). The designation of the new weapon is, that G.B. Luppis tried to defend the Adriatic coasts of the Empire against eventually attacks of italian patriots, the so called “irredentisti”.

In 1864 Luppis presented his invention to the Austrian Ministry of Defence in Vienna, but the Comission rejected the project. The new naval weapon had to be built with more technical knowledge in Rijeka when G.B. Luppis returned to his native town.

III. – The “brulotto” to attack ships and burn them”

Luppis's idea was really not a new one. Greeks and Romans used this “secret” weapon to destroy the hostile wooden ships. The “brulotto” or “Brander” was specially used during the centuries 16. and 19.

IV. – The “Mine-Vessel”, later “Torpedo”

1866: A new idea is presented in Vienna: The “Mine-Vessel”. The project is accepted. But it was not Luppis alone to create that new mortal weapon. Already in 1864 he contacted Robert Whitehead. And it was Whitehead who built the first real torpedoes. Captain G.B. Luppis leaves Rijeka after the year 1870 together with his wife Elisa de Zotty and refuges to Milano, where he died on January 11, 1875.

