

# THE ORIGINS OF ITALIAN MOTOR TORPEDO BOATS

## Podrijetlo talijanskih motornih torpednih čamaca

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### *Summary*

*Although the first projects to make a “petrol engine torpedo boat” to be used in the Adriatic date back to November 1906, following the experience gathered in Great Britain at Yarrow and Thornycroft shipyards, the engines produced in that period, heavy and not very powerful, postponed the construction of the first unit until the beginning of the Great War, when airplane engines became available, having a better power/weight ratio and low rotation regimes, avoiding the use of cumbersome adapters for transferring power to the propellers.*

*The Regia Marina also became interested in planning small units armed with torpedoes, able to develop satisfactory speed by using internal combustion engines, which had just begun their development. Even though there were some very good examples with valuable features, much time was lost on vessels that were a failure.*

*On the basis of this study we must conclude that the Regia Marina started using the technically unprepared but not inexperienced national industry only at the beginning of 1916, keeping an eye on what was happening in Europe during the whole of 1915. The national industry was indeed not ready to organise production. It was nevertheless very eager to guarantee its favourable position with important sponsors and in the military world. Armstrong saw Alessandro Pecori Giraldi as the ideal manager for the new establishment in Pozzuoli, as he was very good at keeping important relations. This example was soon imitated by Ansaldo with Nabor Soliani and by Franco Tosi with Vincenzo Goeta, which only until a few days before their employment worked as testers and technicians of the Regia Marina. Homonymy was not uncommon in the boards of directors of many factories back then. A more prudent attitude on the part of the Government would most likely have avoided the purchase of 46 vedettes employed in barrages, in mine sweeping and in submarine hunting. These were mainly fishing ships of smaller tonnage that had mostly been purchased in Norway (16 units), in Spain (14 ships) and France (6 units).*

Finally, there is the mysterious story of the ships marked by the characteristic “G” as Giappone (Italian for Japan), the country from which 47 units had been purchased in 1916 and registered in the Register of Shipping in 1917. Chapter X of the State Commission concisely states: “The attention of the Commission focused particularly on the purchase of ships for the Regia Marina in the Far East. Other inquiries, to ascertain possible irregularities in purchases carried out elsewhere, are still (October 1922) underway. As regards the purchases carried out in the Far East, we have reason to suspect that certain facts occurred on the occasion of such purchases, which damaged the Treasury and which can be pursued criminally. These facts are therefore sent to the competent Authority.” This was in October 1922: then fascism came to power and it all ended in nothing.

**Key words:** Italy, Regia Marina, develop, torpedo boat



■ **Figure 1**  
The MAS 1  
at Venice as  
minelayer



■ **Figure 2**  
The MAS 7  
at Brindisi  
in 1916

### Sažetak

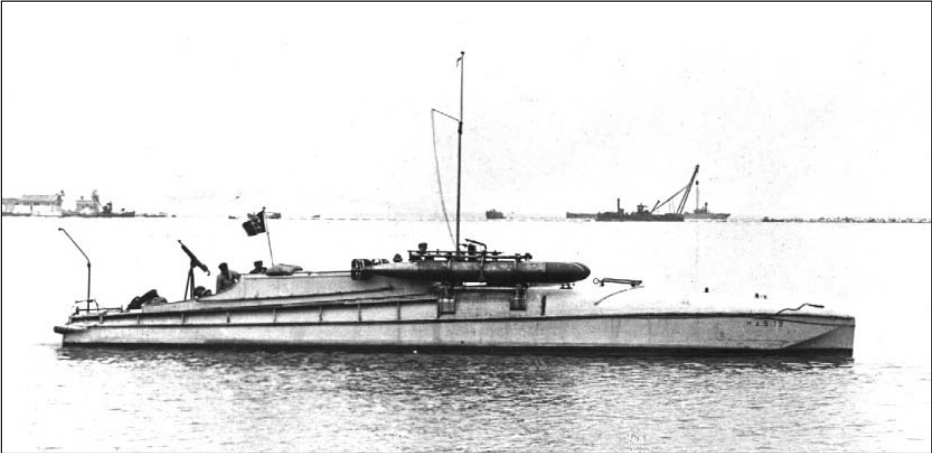
Unatoč tomu što su prvi projekti za izradu "torpednog čamca pogonjenog benzinskim motorom" za upotrebu na Jadranu zabilježeni u studenome 1906., nakon iskustva u Velikoj Britaniji u brodogradilištima Yarrow i Thornycroft, zbog ograničenja u tadašnjoj proizvodnji motora koji su bili teški i nedovoljno snažni, gradnja prve jedinice odgođena je do početka Prvoga svjetskog rata, kad su se pojavili zrakoplovni motori s boljim odnosom snage i težine i s niskim brojem okretaja, čime se izbjegavala upotreba glomaznih prijenosnika snage na propelere.

I Regia Marina počela se zanimati za projektiranje malih jedinica naoružanih torpedima, koje su mogle doseći velike brzine zahvaljujući motorima s unutarnjim izgaranjem. U ono se doba ta vrsta motora tek počela proizvoditi, a mnogi kvalitetni primjerci s vrijednim karakteristikama izgubljeni su zajedno s brodovima koji su bili promašaj. Unatoč tomu, na temelju ovoga istraživanja možemo zaključiti da je Regia Marina tek prvih mjeseci 1916. počela koristiti tehnički nespremnu, ali ne i neiskusnu, nacionalnu industriju, dok je 1915. još uvijek promatrala što se događalo u Europi.

Iako nacionalna industrija nije bila spremna za organizaciju proizvodnje, pomno je pazila kako će si osigurati, prije svega, prvo mjesto kod važnih sponzora i dobro mjesto u vojnom svijetu. Armstrong je Alessandra Pecorija Giraldira uočio kao idealnog direktora novoga pogona u Pozzuoliju (bio je izvrstan zbog važnih odnosa), a taj primjer ubrzo su imitirali Ansaldo s Naborom Solianijem i Franco Tosi s Vincenzom Goetom, koji su sve do nekoliko dana prije zapošljavanja bili članovi timova ispitivača i tehničara Regije Marine. Tada je bilo čudnih homonimija u upravnim odborima mnogih tvornica. Opreznijim stavom vlade vjerojatno bi se izbjegla kupnja od stranih država 46 izvidničkih brodova koji su se upotrebljavali kod baraža, u čišćenju od mina i lovu na podmornice. Riječ je pretežno o ribarskim brodovima male nosivosti koji su, u najvećem broju, kupljeni u Norveškoj (16), Španjolskoj (14) i Francuskoj (6).

Naposljedku ostaje zagonetna priča o brodovima označenima karakterističnim slovom "G" kao Giappone (tal. Japan), država gdje je 1916. kupljeno 47 brodova koji su upisani u Registar brodova 1917. godine. U 10. poglavlju Državne komisije stoji kratka napomena: "Pažnju Komisije privukla je posebice kupnja brodova za Regiju Marinu na Dalekom istoku. Još uvijek se vode dodatne istrage (u listopadu 1922.) kako bi se provjerilo je li bilo nepravilnosti u kupnji brodova u drugim regijama. Što se tiče kupnje brodova na Dalekom istoku, postoje osnovane sumnje da su se tom prigodom zbili događaji koji su oštetili državnu riznicu i koji bi mogli biti predmetom kaznenog progona, stoga se prikupljene činjenice prosljeđuju nadležnim tijelima." Bilo je to u listopadu 1922. godine. Nakon toga nastupio je fašizam i cijela je priča ostala bez zaključka.

**Ključne riječi:** Italija, Regia Marina, razvijanje, torpedni čamac



■ *Figure 3 The MAS 15 of Luigi Rizzo at Ancona in 1918*



■ *Figure 4 The MAS 95 at Venice*



■ *Figure 5 The MAS 204 at Massaua, again in service in 1940*