

White Ships, Black Smoke

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The regular steamship liner services on the eastern coast of the Adriatic endured for over 120 years, making the steamer era the most dynamic, interesting and eventful part of the shipping history. Unfortunately, these years are long forgotten. Except among the narrow circle of maritime historians and passionate shiplovers, the days of steam are rarely mentioned. So it's no wonder that the story of the three black years that wiped out the Adriatic white steamers, sailed into oblivion.

We know for a fact that in only three years of the last century, 1963-1965, the fleet of 26 coastal steamships was sent to ship graveyard, 'Brodospas' breaking yard at Sveti Kajo in the vicinity of Split. Nothing similar happened anywhere else in the world! Which is yet another reason to recollect those fine white ships and black smoke tailing behind.

The author's ambition is not to write even the shortest history of steam navigation on the eastern coast of the Adriatic. But the life stories of 26 steamers sentenced to death over such a short period are history in their own right. They were a motley group (or bunch if you like) of steamships ranging from 19th century veterans to modern liners built in 1931. And each of them had a place in the Adriatic shipping history.

All these steamers sailed in the fleet of Jadranska Linijska Plovidba, the Yugoslav state shipping enterprise generally known as Jadrolinija. It was established in January 1947 and assembled the nationalized ships of Yugoslav pre-war shipping companies Jadranska Plovidba d.d. from Sušak (today a part of Rijeka), Dubrovačka Plovidba a.d. from Dubrovnik and Zetska Plovidba d.d. from Kotor. Jadranska Plovidba was by far the largest among

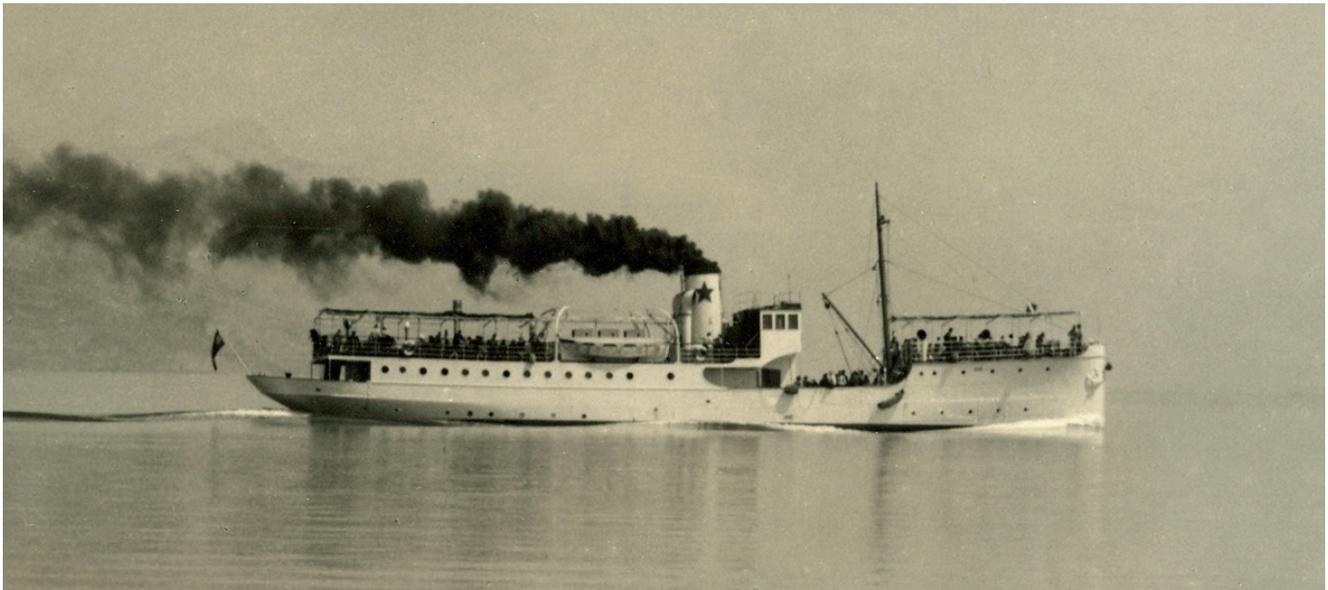


Figure 1.
White liner tailed by black smoke – the handsome 'Rab'.

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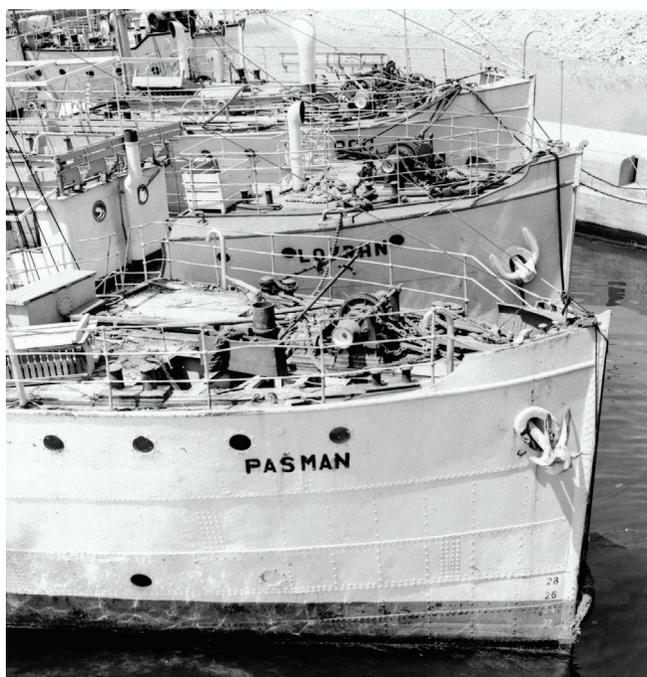


Figure 2.
Breaking yard at Sveti Kajo packed with coastal steamers.

them. Just like Jadrolinija in 1947, at the time of its foundation in 1923, Jadranska Plovidba consisted of ships of pre-war (World War I) companies. A great majority of ships had come from Ugarsko-Hrvatsko Dioničko Pomorsko Parobrodarsko Društvo, better known under the Italian abbreviation Ungaro-Croata, and 'Dalmatia' Austrijsko Parobrodarsko Društvo na Dionice.

There is clearly a pattern here: Ungaro-Croata was established by the merger of small steamship companies from the northern Adriatic in the late 19th century, while 'Dalmatia' emerged in 1908 as a result of the merger of four leading companies in Dalmatia. The mid 1960s Jadrolinija fleet included ancient steamship liners like Brač, which bore witness to all of these changes. Originally owned by a Makarska shipowner, captain Ante Rismondo, she became part of 'Dalmatia' in 1908, Jadranska Plovidba in 1923 and finally Jadrolinija in 1947!

Side by side with the old 'Brač', the fleet also had ships like 'Bakar', 'Rab' and 'Šipan', modern coastal liners built in 1931. These ships were extensively renovated after the war and in an excellent condition. Consequently, the most frequently asked question is why all of them had to die at the same time? The usual answer is that the completion of a modern freeway along the eastern Adriatic coast made all steamers redundant.

Commonly called Jadranska Magistrala, this road was completed between 1963 and 1965 and connected dozens of ports along the coast. Suddenly there was no need for many regular shipping lines established a century ago. Cars were now

pouring down the coast and ferryboats became the ships of utmost importance. Furthermore, in 1963 Jadrolinija's fleet was strengthened with four state of the art inter-island motorships of the 4P class ('Porozina', 'Perast', 'Punat' and 'Postira'). Maritime experts generally consider these ships to be the best ever built for local service. Back in 1955 three small, but high quality coastal motorships of the 'Town' class ('Ohrid', 'Valjevo', 'Karlovac') were built. In 1957 the next trio of much bigger coastal liners of the 'City' class was delivered to Jadrolinija: 'Trogir', 'Tuzla' and 'Takovo'.

But, there was still room for newer steamships, built in the thirties and known for their good performances. Only rare shipping experts know what happened! To encourage Jadrolinija to replace all steamships with motorships built in the national shipyards, the Yugoslavian Government allocated lavish subsidies for breaking up steamers. Almost the entire fleet of coastal steamships ceased to exist in only three years.

'Kormat' was by far the oldest of the 26 white steamships sent to Sveti Kajo. Scrapyard records show that she arrived there in July 1964 after 73 years of navigation. And she was still in good shape! She was built as 'Croatia' by a renowned German shipyard Howaldtswerke from Kiel and delivered in November 1891 to Ugarsko-Hrvatsko Dioničko Pomorsko Parobrodarsko Društvo. (For practical reasons abbreviation Ungaro-Croata will be used hereinafter). At the time, she was the most modern coastal liner of Ungaro-Croata.

It has to be noted that after World War I all ships owned by Austro-Hungarian companies were seized by the Paris-based Inter-Allied Reparations Commission. In September 1920, Italy and the recently formed Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later renamed Yugoslavia) concluded the Trumbić-Bertolini Agreement and divided the fleets of coastal shipping companies amongst themselves. As a final document, this Agreement was

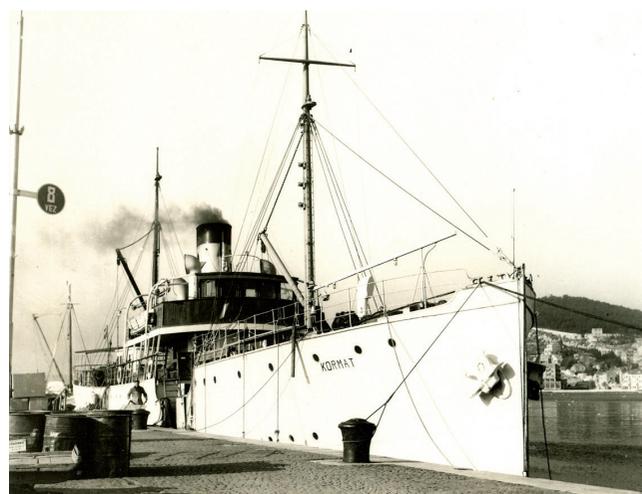


Figure 3.
'Kormat' – the veteran from Kiel sailed for 73 years.



Figure 4.
Awkward looking 'Beli' was built in 1898.

confirmed by the Inter-Allied Reparations Commission in August 1921. 48 out of 54 steamships owned by Ungaro-Croata were allocated to Yugoslavia.

In 1923, 'Croatia' became a part of the Jadranska Plovidba fleet, under a new name 'Hrvatska'. She sailed peacefully until 1941 when she got caught up in the winds of war. After the defeat of Yugoslavia in the short April War the entire fleet of Jadranska Plovidba was seized by Italians. All ships were renamed and 'Hrvatska' became 'Sansego'. In May 1944, she was sunk by Allied aircrafts at Mali Lošinj. Two years later, she was raised and towed to Kraljevica where she was rebuilt. That was one of the reasons why she lasted for 73 years.

Seventeen years after 'Croatia', the Kiel shipbuilders delivered 'Brasso', another ship for Ungaro-Croata. Following the Trumbić-Bertolini Agreement she became 'Cetinje' sailing under Jadranska Plovidba, but flew the company's flag for only two

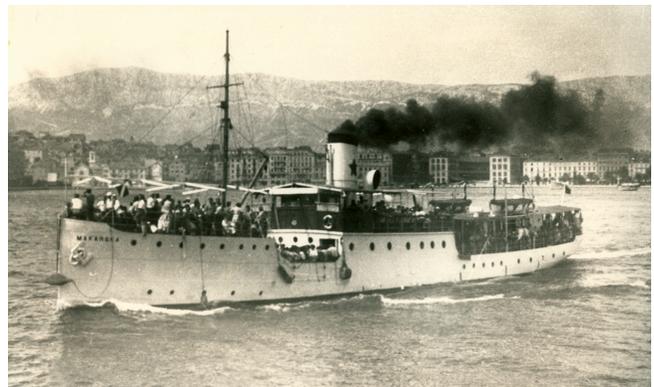


Figure 5.
'Makarska' sailing full steam ahead.



Figure 6.
'Makarska' loading coal from the barge.

years. After being sold to Italian owners she sailed as 'Cherso', 'Calitea' and 'Scarpanto'. In September 1943, 'Scarpanto' was seized by the German Navy and actively served in the northern Adriatic. In March 1945, she was attacked and sunk by three British gunboats, off the Istrian coast. The steamer spent seven years at sea bottom before being raised in March 1952. She was towed to Split and completely renovated under a new name - 'Pag'. Delivered to Jadrolinija in July 1953, she was sold for scrap in June 1963.

The Howaldstwerke yard also built the steamer 'Brač', another oldie from the Jadrolinija's white fleet. She was a rather small ship, being only 36.1 meters long. She was delivered to German owners as 'Brunsbüttel II' in 1896 and seven years later sold to captain Ante Rismondo from Makarska. In 1908, Rismondo's ships became part of new company 'Dalmatia' Austrijsko Parobrodarsko Društvo na Dionice registered at Zadar. Except for the WWII years, when Italians renamed her 'Malinsca',

this steamer sailed as 'Brač' for 60 years, and was finally delivered to the breakers in the autumn of 1963.

In the three black years for white ships, another two 19th century veterans met their end at the Sveti Kajo breaking yard: 'Beli' and 'Hercegnovi'. 'Beli' was built in Trieste in 1898, by the Arsenale di Lloyd Austriaco shipyard. She was one of the numerous coastal liners built in Trieste for Ungaro-Croata and was named 'Sava'. After WWI she was purchased by Brodarsko Akcijsko Društvo 'Boka' from Kotor and sailed on local lines at Boka Kotorska as 'Morava'. She was lucky enough to avoid the perils of WWII and become 'Bar' in Jadrolinija's fleet in 1947. In 1962 she was renamed 'Beli' and scrapped the next year.

'Hercegnovi' was also built in Trieste and sailed for the same owner, the 'Boka' shipping company. She was constructed by the Stabilimento Tecnico Triestino shipyard in 1897 for Trieste-based Societa di Navigazione a Vapore Istria-Trieste, as 'Arsa'. Upon her arrival to Boka Kotorska in 1931, she was renamed 'Hercegnovi',

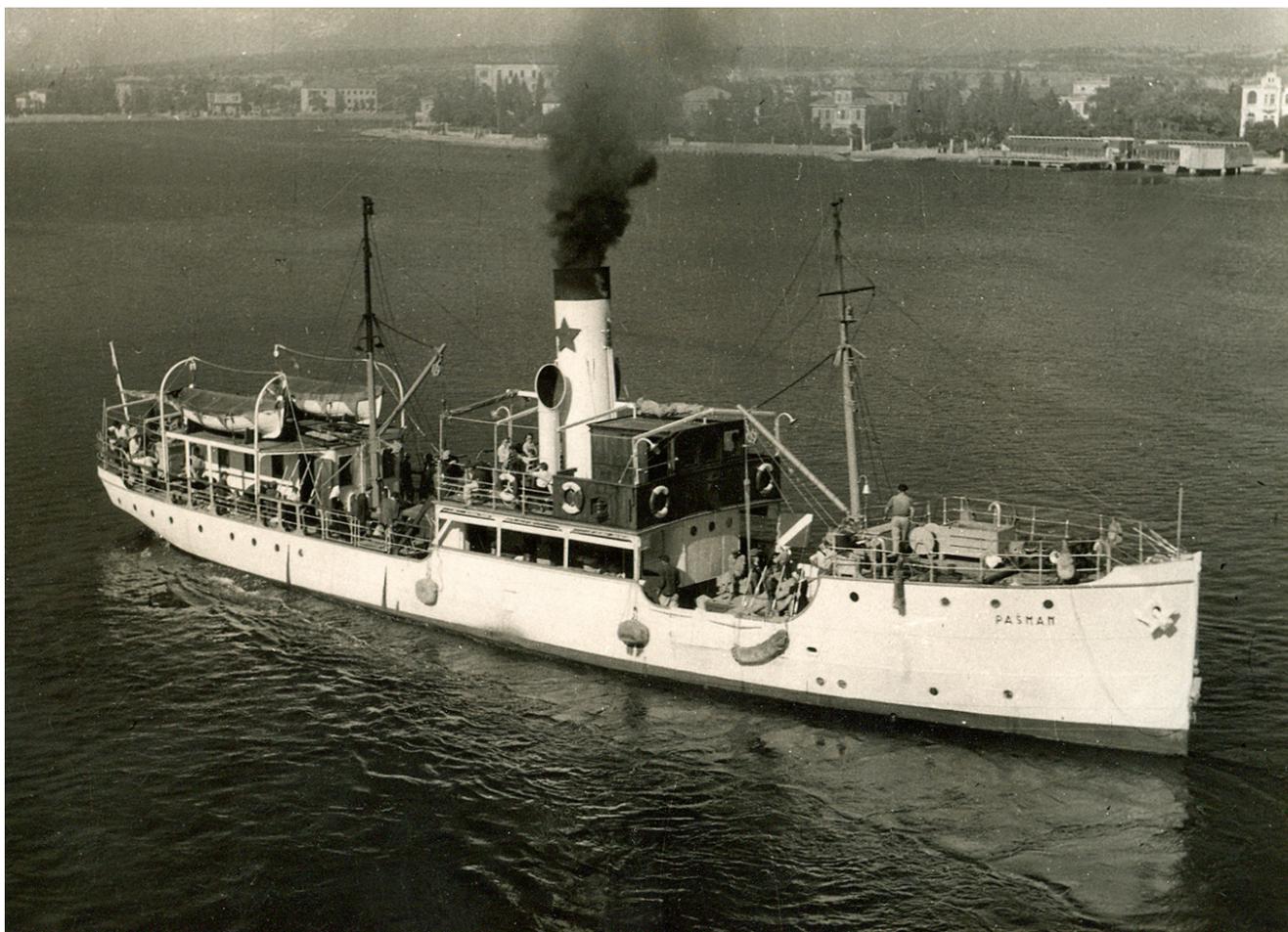


Figure 7.

'Pašman' was one of many Trieste built ships.

but was not as lucky as 'Morava' sailing for the same company. Being seized by Germans in September 1943, she served as a military transport ship in the Zadar area. In October 1944, during the Allied heavy bombardment, she was sent to the bottom of the Zadar harbour. After the war, 'Hercegnovi' was raised and finally rebuilt at Kraljevica in 1948. Sixteen years later she ended up at Sveti Kajo.

Five more steamers built by the Stabilimento Tecnico Triestino (STT) were wiped out in the mid-sixties. The most prominent were the sister ships 'Gradac' and 'Makarska', ordered by 'Dalmatia' and delivered in 1908, the first in September, the second in October. The 'Gradac', originally built under the name 'Cetina', was renamed in 1947 upon joining Jadrolinija's fleet, while 'Makarska' sailed under the same name her entire life. They were born together and died together: both arrived at the Sveti Kajo ship graveyard in early 1965.

In 1908, Stabilimento Tecnico Triestino built a third ship for 'Dalmatia' and delivered her only a month after 'Makarska'. She was smaller than the first two ships but undoubtedly better looking. She was originally named 'Adria' and was renamed 'Pašman' in 1921. She arrived at Sveti Kajo in January 1963. It is interesting that all three vessels built in 1908 for 'Dalmatia' survived the four years of WWII unscathed.

In the early 1900s, the Ungaro-Croata shipping company also had two coastal steamers built at Trieste's STT shipyard. 'Tatra' was delivered in 1905 and 'Senj' two years later. While 'Senj' spent her entire life under her original name, 'Tatra' changed names frequently. Both were victims of WWII. 'Tatra' joined the fleet of Jadranska Plovidba as 'Triglav', the Italians renamed her 'Medea' in 1941, the German Navy christened her G.310 in 1943, Jadrolinija named her 'Opatija' in 1948, then she became 'Vida', then 'Opatija' once again, only to finally go back to 'Vida'!

Both ships were amongst the first victims of the April War of 1941. They were scuttled together with other steamers of Jadranska Plovidba at Soline Anchorage on the island of Krk on April 11th to avoid capture by Italians, but were raised and repaired in a matter of weeks. The 'Senj' became a victim for the second time in October 1943 when Allied aircrafts sunk her at Starigrad. Four years later she was raised and repaired at Kraljevica in 1949. The 'Triglav' became a wreck in 1944 near Trieste, but was raised and repaired, also at Kraljevica.

By far the biggest builder of Adriatic coastal liners was the Marco U. Martinolich shipyard on Mali Lošinj. Many survived both world wars and nine were broken up at Sveti Kajo in the dark sixties. The tenth, steamship 'Knin', also ended up there but not until 1991, only to become the very last among 630 ships scrapped there!

Indeed, 'Knin' had a very colourful life! She was delivered to Ungaro-Croata in October 1913, as the very last newbuild in company's history. As a brand new ship she was suitable for various duties in the Austro-Hungarian Navy in World War I,



Figure 8.
'Knin' – a colourful history.

finally being armed as a submarine chaser! In April 1941, she once again found herself in the naval service, this time as Italian 'Ugo Botti'. The capitulation of Italy in September 1943 found her in the Split shipyard where Partisans scuttled her to avoid capture by Germans. She was raised only a month after the liberation of Split, in November 1944 and returned to service in 1945.

In 1963, Jadrolinija decided to sell 'Knin' for scrap, but she was saved by the entertainers! The 'Pozornica' enterprise from Opatija purchased the steamer to have her converted into a luxury floating restaurant, striptease bar & dancing room at the 'Viktor Lenac' shipyard. Named 'Barba Rude', she was the very first ship of that kind in socialist Yugoslavia. After 1978, she served the same function at various tourist locations: Biograd, Pakoštane, Vodice, Betina... Finally, the former 'Knin' arrived at Sveti Kajo in the summer of 1988, but was held there for four years before being scrapped.

The first of the Martinolich built steamers to be broken up in the dark sixties was the 'Lovran'. She arrived at Sveti Kajo in January 1963, being followed, in that same year, by 'Cres' and 'Ugljan'. In 1964 'Poreč', 'Ulcinj', 'Rovinj' and 'Pelješac' ended up there. The list was closed in 1965 when steamers 'Ston' and 'Kupari' were broken up. The majority of these ships were built for Ungaro-Croata, but not the 'Ston', which also had an eventful life.

In 1908, a group of investors from Dubrovnik founded a coastal shipping company called Obalna Paroplovitba Društvo and ordered a new liner from the Martinolich shipyard. Everything went smoothly until delivery in 1909. The owners had a fierce discussion about the name of the new ship. The flared passions were subdued by an unusual proposal: let's name the ship simply 'Naš' (meaning 'Ours' in Croatian). 'Naš' sailed for full 19 years. Upon being purchased by Dubrovačka Parobrodarska Plovidba, she was renamed 'Ston', under which name she arrived at Sveti Kajo.

Of all the steamships wiped out in the mid-sixties only two were built in Italy: 'Podhum' and 'Starigrad'. These handsome sister ships were ordered at Chioggia by Hrvatsko Parobrodarsko Društvo from Senj and delivered in 1904 by Ditta Giovanni Poli. Their original names were 'Ante Starčević' and 'Hrvatska'. They sailed together for six decades, proved to be lucky in the two great wars together and finally died together at Sveti Kajo.

As previously mentioned, the great controversy of the dark sixties is that Jadrolinija didn't only scrap the 19th century veterans, but also sent her most modern steamships to scrapyard. These were 'Bakar', 'Rab' and 'Šipan', built in 1931. Sister ships 'Bakar' and 'Rab' were especially handsome steamers, ordered from the British shipbuilder J. Samuel White & Co. Ltd. of East Cowes on

the Isle of Wight. Upon their delivery to Jadranska Plovidba in March 1931, they immediately became the most modern inter-island steamships on the Adriatic. 'Bakar' and 'Rab' soon came to be praised by passengers for their comfort and seaworthiness.

And then war came to Adriatic shores. Seized by Italians in April 1941, they were renamed 'Buccari' and 'Arbe' respectively. At the time of Italian capitulation, 'Bakar' was moored at Split. Taken by Yugoslavian Partisans, she sailed to a small port of Bobovišće on the island of Brač to avoid German air raids on the Split harbour. On September 14, 1943 her crew hoisted the Yugoslav flag with the red star. Being the very first steamship under the new ensign, the 'Bakar' was held in high regard in communist

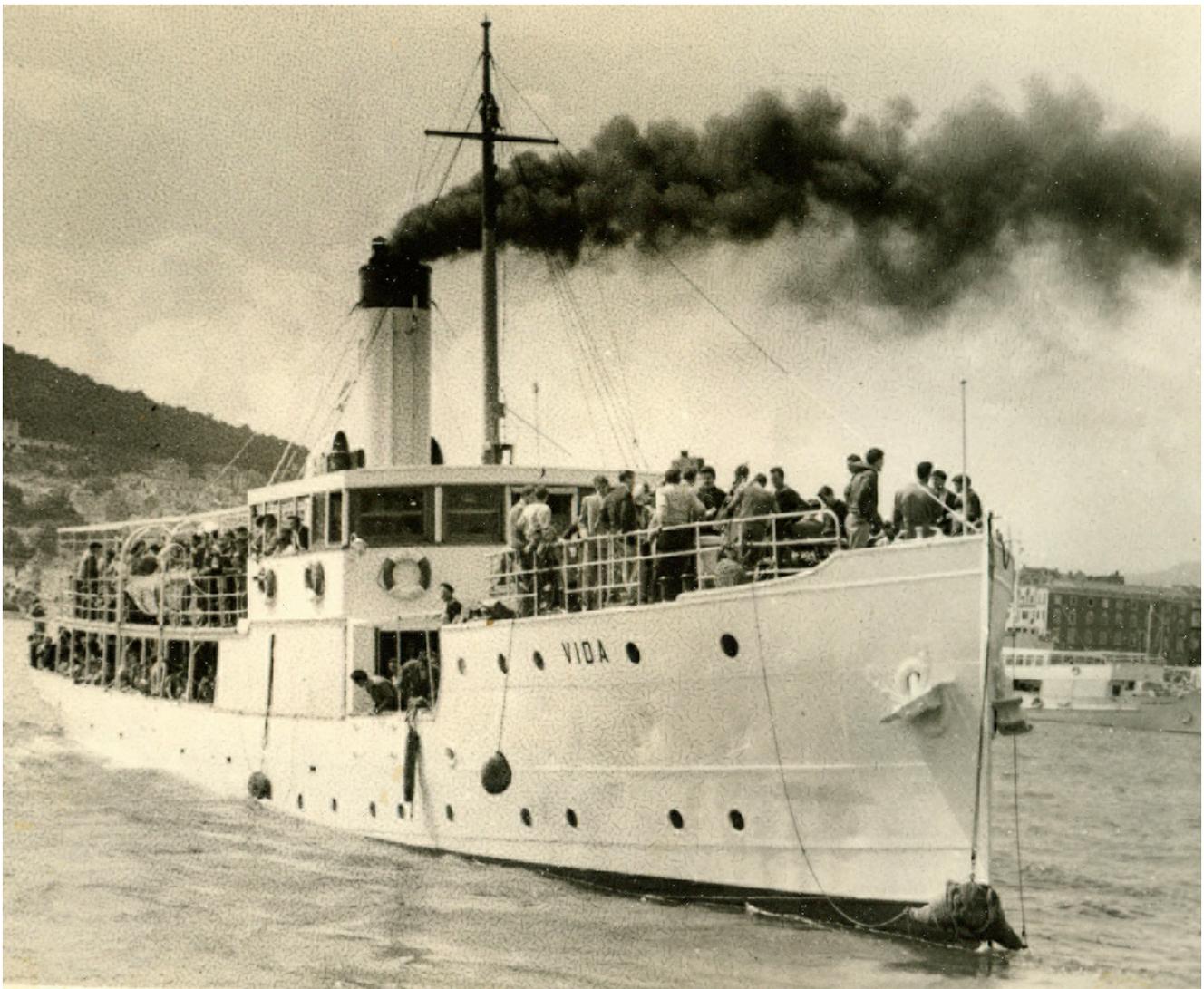


Figure 9.
'Vida' – so many names for one ship.



Figure 10.

'Ston' – remembered for the battle of 'Naš'.

Yugoslavia. Moreover, in May 1964, she became the first and the only ship awarded the Order of National Liberation.

But the days of pride and glory abruptly ended in December 1965 when 'Bakar' arrived to the ship graveyard at Sveti Kajo. The country was shocked with the news: The hero ship was going to be scrapped! She was immediately declared a protected heritage monument and scrapping was banned. But her bad luck persisted! Between 1968 and 1973, the unprotected and practically abandoned 'Bakar' sunk three times at three different anchorages and each time she was raised and repaired. Her sad story finally ended in 1982: the steamer was broken up at Korčula. Her bow section was shipped to Split and remains preserved at the courtyard of the Croatian Maritime Museum to this day.

Her sister ship 'Rab' was seized by Germans in September 1943 and next month she was engaged to carry troops during the fierce battle for the Pelješac peninsula. On the morning of October 24, 1943 she was sunk by British aircrafts near the village of Crkvice. But she wasn't seriously damaged. Raised while the war was still raging, in March 1945, she was towed to Split and repaired. Her sailing days ended at Sveti Kajo in 1965.

A year earlier another modern steamer of the 1931 vintage arrived to Sveti Kajo. It was 'Šipan', a sturdy coastal liner built for Dubrovačka Parobrodarska Plovidba by renowned shipbuilders

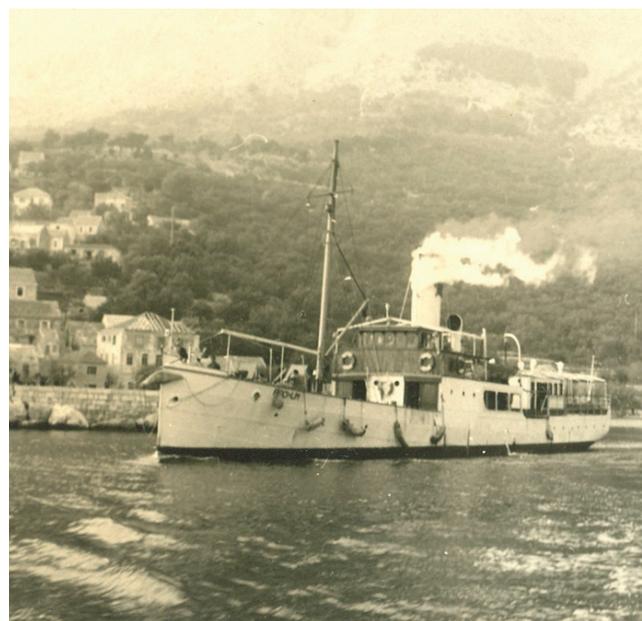


Figure 11.

'Podhum' was built at Chioggia.



Figure 12.
Perils of the sea - sturdy 'Šipan' in the storm.

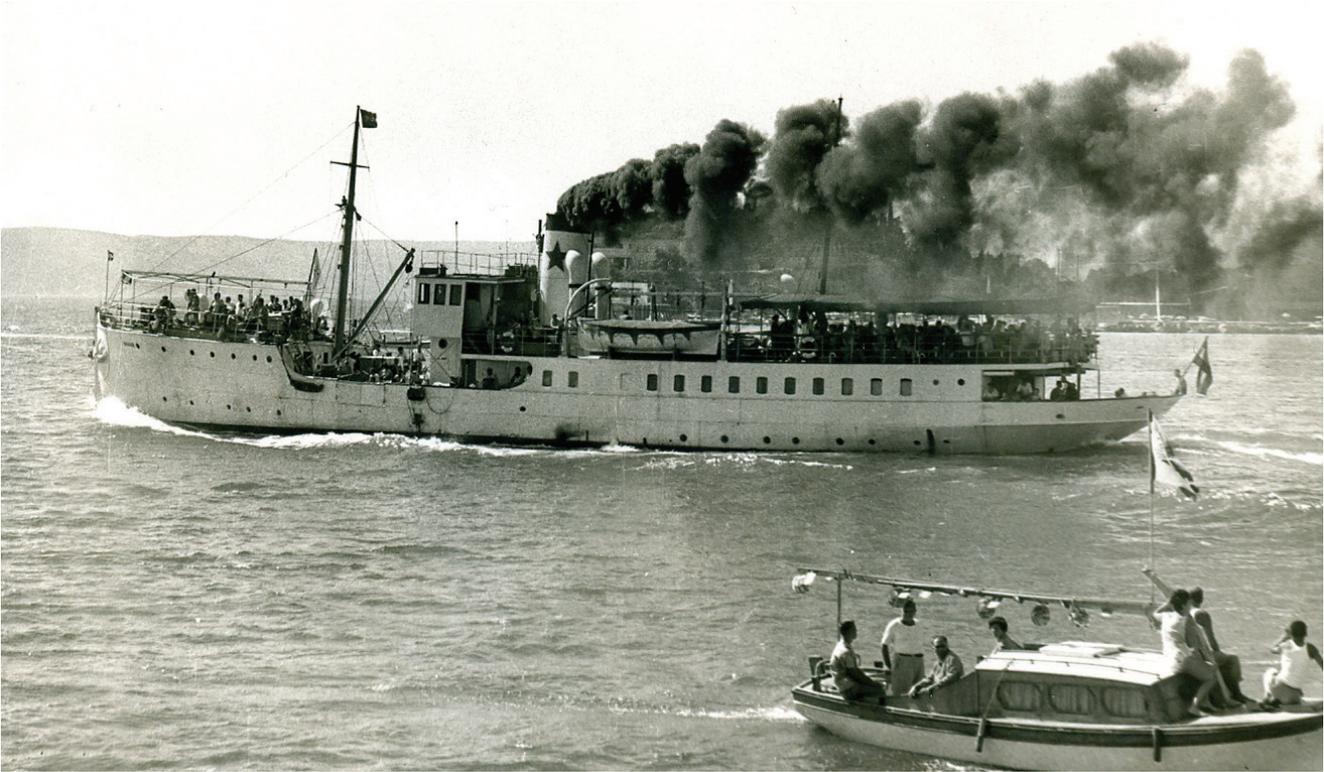


Figure 13.

'Bakar' - a ship of glory and sadness.

F. Schichau G.m.b.H. from the German city of Elbing, today Polish Elblag. She sailed on routes in the Dubrovnik area all her life. During the Allied air bombardments in the spring of 1944 she sought shelter in Jansko, a small cove in the vicinity of Slano,

but was discovered and sunk in an air raid on May 15th. Quickly raised after the war, she was fully renovated at the Tivat Naval Yard. The fact that she was like new didn't save her from the breaker's torches...