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From Glasgow to Genoa under three flags – the Yugoslav flotilla leader *Dubrovnik*

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Abstract. Royal Yugoslav Navy followed the tradition of the Austro-Hungarian Navy, but was missing modern warships, and her first new acquisition was the powerful destroyer-leader *Dubrovnik*, built in Great Britain. Two envisaged sister-ships were not built, and the single ship served before the war mostly to „show the flag“. She remained inactive in 1941 during the short „April War“, and was captured by the Italians, to serve under the name *Premuda* until summer of 1943. After being captured by the Germans, she received a new designation *TA 32*, she took part in several operations in the Ligurian Sea, to be scuttled at Genoa in 1945 during the German withdrawal.

Keywords: Royal Yugoslav Navy; Destroyers; Leaders; *Dubrovnik*; 1920s – 1930s; World War Two; April War 1941; *Premuda*; *TA 32*; Naval Operations; Adriatic; Mediterranean.

The former Royal Yugoslav Navy (RYN) was established after the World War One, and inherited the tradition and the personnel of the dissolved Austro-Hungarian Navy, but from the „bounty“ it received only some old and small vessels, and was compelled to build the fleet from the scratch. Only in the late 1930s Yugoslav shipyards were capable to build their own warships, because the A-H yards at Trieste, Fiume and Pola were taken over by Italy, the small shipyard at Kraljevica was on the verge of bankruptcy, and the small arsenal at Teodo/Tivat in the Bocche di Cattaro was not equipped for shipbuilding.

Many small navies were between the wars trying to order stronger and better vessels than those of the potential attackers. The RYN was no exception, with only one difference: *Dubrovnik* was to remain a single ship, in spite of the fact that initially a class of three big destroyers was planned: Yugoslav navy was considering and trying to introduce the French principle of *contre-torpilleur* half-flotillas.

During the World War I, French Navy lacked modern flotilla leaders and light cruisers, in contrast to the Austro-Hungarian adversaries. French destroyers on the Adriatic were coupled with British and Italian light cruisers and flotilla leaders to carry out their operations. After the war French Navy started to build several classes of strong destroyers (*torpilleurs d'escadre*), and even stronger flotilla leaders (*contre-torpilleurs*). French destroyers, similar to the British war-built *V & W* classes, were armed with four 130 mm guns; the leaders mounted five 130 mm or 138 mm guns, and last two units, belonging to the exaggerated *Mogador* class, carried eight 138 mm guns in twin gun-houses. *Contre-torpilleurs* were to operate as destroyer leaders with smaller destroyers or as

half-flotillas of three units that could theoretically overwhelm fast but weakly armoured Italian light cruisers of the *Condottieri* type.

During the World War One and afterwards, typical destroyer-leaders belonged to British *Scott* and *Shakespeare* classes, that represented a linear enlargement of the already powerful *V & W* class destroyers. In the 1920s and 1930s, several British yards were building and planning leaders for Spanish, Argentine, Romanian, Dutch and Polish navies. One of the best known shipyards was Yarrow & Co Ltd, Scotstoun, Glasgow, a traditional destroyer building company. At the time when the Yugoslav Navy was looking for a prototype flotilla leader, Yarrow shipyard was well prepared and ready to help.

It is interesting that the RYN was looking for British help to build ships after a French concept, but French shipyards were in late 1920s fully employed with the build-up of their own naval forces. Yarrow shipyard was having free stocks (building no destroyers for the Royal Navy between 1924 and 1933, when its prototype HMS *Ambuscade* was seemingly too costly for the *Royal Navy*), and was open to suggestions concerning the armament of the new class. Yugoslav customers were planning to mount Czechoslovakian Skoda guns on their ships; a solution that the French were obviously not willing to accept at the time, preferring to sell their own weapons.

The final reason to order first destroyer in Great Britain was the most significant: British Yarrow shipyard was going to buy the bankrupt shipyard at Kraljevica (Porto Ré), and to build ships or their parts in Yugoslavia. The Kraljevica yard was bought in 1930, and together with another shipyard at Split (Spalato), bought in 1931 by the French firm "Ateliers et Chantiers de la Loire", and with the small "Lazarus" yard at Susak (on the outskirts of the Italian occupied Rijeka /Fiume), was to be a part of the new consortium "Jadranska brodogradilista d.d." (Adriatic Shipyards Ltd Co.).

But all this was to happen in the future, after the first Yugoslav destroyer was built. First designs were based on the *Shakespeare* class, and to be armed with five 4.7in guns. Because Yugoslav ships were envisaged as counterparts to Italian *esploratori* ("scouts") of the existing *Leone* and the projected *Navigatori* classes, an enlarged *Shakespeare* was preferred, with five guns of 140 mm calibre (5.5in). The armament was later reduced to four mountings because of the excessive top weight, but in an intermediate design a seaplane was envisaged, to be finally replaced with the stronger AA battery in form of an 83.5 mm twin mounting.

According to the correspondence between Yarrow and Skoda, initially twelve 140 mm guns were ordered, which confirms the fact that one half-division of three *contre-torpilleurs* was to be built. World financial crisis put a stop to these plans, and only one unit was ordered and completed, the future *Dubrovnik*.

Royal Yugoslav Navy was to operate on the Adriatic and in the Mediterranean. To reach allied French bases in North Africa or British in Malta and Alexandria, an exaggerated operating range of 7000 nautical miles was envisaged. It is interesting to know that Japanese cruisers, built for the Pacific war theatre, were having the range of only 4000 miles, and British cruisers scheduled to operate worldwide of 6000 miles.

Regarding her armament and her range *Dubrovnik* could almost be classified as a light cruiser. In addition she was to serve as a Royal Yacht for state visits and cruises in the Mediterranean, Black Sea and probably on the Atlantic Ocean as well.

Name:	Builder:	Keel laid:	Launched:	Completed:
<i>Dubrovnik</i>	Yarrow, Glasgow	10 June 1930	11 Oct 1931	1932

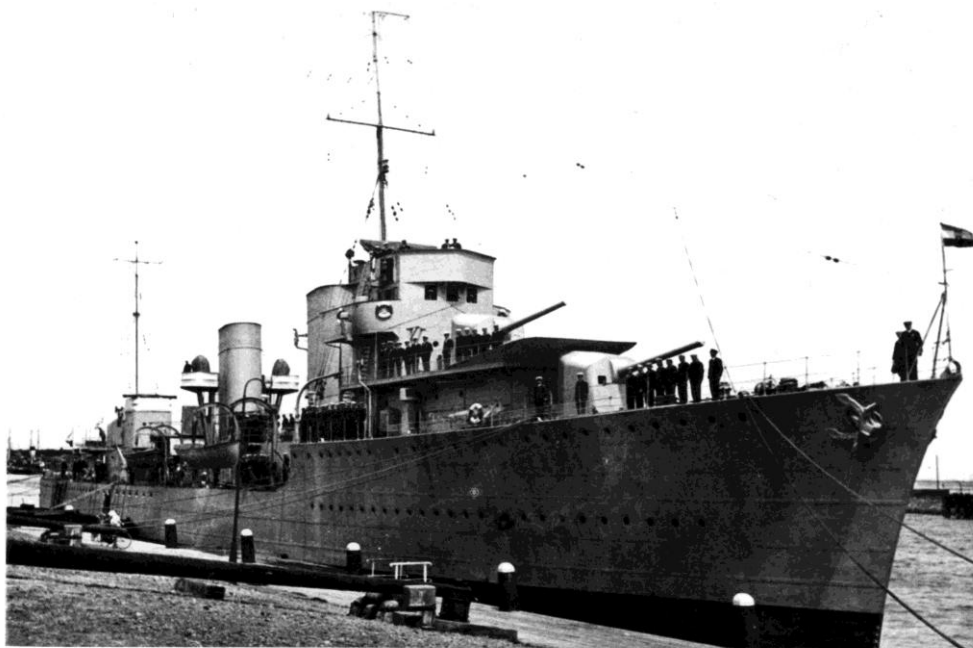
The new ship was christened *Dubrovnik*, after the famous Croatian Merchant Republic in southern Dalmatia, independent until the French occupation in the early 19th century, and having a large merchant fleet at its disposal. After the fall of Napoleon I, the city-state became in 1815 part of the Austrian ruled Dalmatia, later of first and second Yugoslavia, to be at least reunited with the Croatian motherland after the proclamation of Croatian independence in 1991.

RYN destroyer *Dubrovnik* was similar to the contemporary British destroyers and leaders, with a square box-like bridge, a long forecastle, and a sharp raked stem typical for British leaders of the *Tribal* class and following destroyer classes. Her stern was rounded and adapted for mine laying.

Her main machinery comprised two Parsons geared steam turbine sets in two separate machinery rooms, driving two shafts with two propellers. The overall output amounted to 42,000 shaft-horse-powers (shp), and reached a maximum of 48,000 shp at full power, for the designed speed of 37 knots. In 1934 and under ideal conditions an outstanding speed of 40,3kts was achieved. Later in the war, at the end of her career, *Dubrovnik* reached only 30 knots. One 900 shp Curtis cruising turbine was installed to maintain the cruising speed of 15 kts, and making the already mentioned range of 7,000 miles possible. The steam was generated by three Yarrow water-tube boilers with side firing, with each boiler in a separate boiler room. The working pressure reached 20.3 kg/square cm. In Italian hands the performances of the machinery were slightly different; the range was given with 5,070 nautical miles at 13 knots (with the cruising turbine only) and with 4690 miles at 18 knots. The bunkers were having a capacity of 590 tons, but under Italian flag it fell to only 543 tons, after the ship was rebuilt, ballast added and the displacement increased.

Yugoslav destroyer-leader was armed with four single semi-automatic 140 mm/L56 Skoda guns in super-firing mountings, two forward and two aft. Heavy anti-aircraft artillery was represented by a twin 83,5mm/L55 M.1929 Skoda mounting on the central „pavilion“ between two torpedo sets. Six 40mm/L67 Skoda guns (in one twin and four single mountings), and two 15mm Skoda heavy machine guns served as the light anti-aircraft battery. Torpedo armament comprised two triple 533mm Brotherhood torpedo-tube banks. For anti-submarine warfare (ASW) *Dubrovnik* carried two depth charge throwers (DCT), and two depth charge rails, and she was equipped to carry 40 mines.

Under Yugoslav flag *Dubrovnik* was manned by 20 officers and 220 ratings, in Italian hands - as *Premuda* - there were 13 officers and 191 ratings listed, and as the German TA 32 the number of crew members was given with 220.



Operational history

Dubrovnik was completed in 1932 in Glasgow, where her main and light anti-aircraft artillery were mounted, and received her 83,5mm AA guns at Tivat arsenal in the Bay of Cattaro in Yugoslavia, in Montenegro of today. In autumn 1933, under command of Captain (*kapetan bojnog broda*) Armin Pavich, the future C-in-C of the RYN, she served as Royal Yacht for a Marmara, Black and Aegean Sea cruise, to bring back Yugoslav King Aleksandar I and Queen Marija, who were visiting Romania. In Balchik the Royal couple was having their Quarter in the Villa of the Romanian Queen, the mother of Queen Marija. The Sovereigns came to *Dubrovnik* together with the Romanian King Karol and his spouse, to proceed afterwards to Bulgaria. On the way back other

Sovereigns and Heads of State were met, like the Bulgarian King Boris, President of Turkey Gazi Kemal Pasha, and Greek delegates at Korfu, where wreaths were laid for Yugoslav victims of World War One, perishing from wounds and sickness on this island. The voyage to the Balkan states was organised to promote a Balkan Pact, proclaimed on 9 February 1934. Afterwards Commander (*kapetan fregate*) Vladimir Shashkijevich replaced Captain Pavich as ships' Commanding Officer and remained at this post (being promoted to Captain in 1937) until April 1941.

In autumn of 1934, King Alexander was going to visit France aboard *Dubrovnik*, living Zelenika in the Bocche on 6 October, and suffering from sea-sickness underway to Marseilles, to be assassinated there on 9 October shortly after leaving the ship. His body was brought back to Yugoslavia aboard *Dubrovnik*, which was escorted through the Mediterranean by the units of the French Mediterranean Fleet (heavy cruisers *Duquesne* and *Colbert* with destroyers *Vautour* and *Gerfait*) and by an Italian naval detachment (light cruiser *Alberigo di Giusanno* with several destroyers) during the passage through Italian waters. After the death of King Aleksandar, Yugoslav Kingdom was leaving the Western Sphere of influence and became more attached to the Axis Powers; her newest warships, eight motor torpedo boats, were ordered in and delivered by Germany, and two oldest submarines were to be replaced by German vessels.

The later career of *Dubrovnik* under the Yugoslav flag was less dramatic: in 1937 *Dubrovnik* sailed to Piraeus together with the seaplane mother-ship *Zmaj* and submarines *Hrabri* and *Smeli*, to proceed to Istanbul afterwards. She remained the mightiest vessel of the small navy, and she served from 1940 onwards as the leader of the 1st Torpedo Flotilla (comprising new French-designed destroyers *Beograd*, *Zagreb* and *Ljubljana*). After the outbreak of World War Two, Yugoslavia remained neutral at first, but was attacked by Axis powers on 6 April 1941. Small Royal Yugoslav fleet was inactive during the short conflict, in spite of downing several Italian aircraft, which attacked Bocche fleet anchorage. The ships were changing their positions in the Bocche to remain hidden from the air, but finally most vessels were captured by the Italians after the capitulation was signed on 17 April 1941. Some of the ships – including ***Dubrovnik*** – were damaged by the civilian population before Italians took command of the whole Bocche di Cattaro.

In Italian hands ***Dubrovnik*** was renamed ***Premuda***, and was brought on 21 May 1941 to Taranto, together with the smaller *Beograd*, to be repaired and refitted there. She was the second Italian *Premuda*, the first was the former large German destroyer *V 116* from WW I. Both were named after the island, where on 10 June 1915 Italian motor torpedo boat *MAS 15* sank the Austro-Hungarian battleship *Szent István*. The after deckhouse with the emergency bridge was replaced with an anti-aircraft platform, her mainmast and the funnels were shortened. Her original anti-aircraft armament was replaced by a 120mm/L15 howitzer for star shells (replacing the 83,5mm twin mounting), and four single 20mm/L65 Breda heavy machine-guns (light anti-aircraft guns). Later a 37mm/L54 twin anti-aircraft mounting replaced the howitzer, and two additional single 20/65mm guns were mounted abreast of the after funnel.

Premuda was commissioned in February 1942, and served on North African convoy routes. From 12 to 16 June 1942 she took part in the operations against the British convoy „Harpoon“ underway to the beleaguered Malta. Almost the whole might of the *Regia Marina* (battleships *Littorio* and *Vittorio Veneto*, heavy cruisers *Trento* and *Gorizia*, light cruisers *Garibaldi* and *Aosta*, destroyers and submarines) was engaged in attacks against units of the British *Royal Navy*, supported by German E-boats from the 3rd Flotilla. *Premuda* operated with the Italian 10th Destroyer Flotilla, supporting the 7th Cruiser Division (light cruisers *Eugenio di Savoia* and *Raimondo Montecuccoli*). *Royal Navy* lost the cruiser HMS *Hermione*, three destroyers (HMS *Partridge*, HMS *Nestor* and the Polish *Kujawiak*), and several merchantmen from enemy air attacks, submarines' torpedoes and mines. Italian surface units were repelled, but the convoy hasn't reached Malta, this feat was accomplished only two months later during the Operation "Pedestal". Italian battleship *Littorio* and the cruiser *Trento* were damaged by aerial torpedoes, and the cruiser later sunk by a British submarine. After the battle, *Premuda* – under command of Lieutenant Commander (*Capitano di Corvetta*) Mario Bartalesi - towed the damaged Italian destroyer *Vivaldi* to Pantelleria, and both were escorted by the destroyer *Malocello*.

Between 6 January and 7 February 1943 *Premuda* served with other Italian destroyers (*Mitragliere*, *Carabiniere*, *Camicia Nera*, *Ascari*, *Da Noli*, *Granatiere*, *Zeno*, *Corazziere*, *Pigafetta*, *Malocello*, *Legionario*, *Bombardiere*, *Bersagliere*) to transport troops to Tunis in groups of three to five destroyers. Between 9 February and 22 March 1943, *Premuda* took part on two of

these voyages. Under the Italian flag she sailed to 130 operations, 57 as an escort and 14 as a fast transport, and during these operations she covered 30,966 nautical miles.

The „Italian career“ of *Premuda* came to an end on 17 July 1943, after developing serious machinery troubles off La Spezia. The ship was brought to Genoa to be repaired and rebuilt on similar lines as Italian destroyers of the *Navigatori* class, and her beam was to be increased for better stability. Because 140 mm shells for her Skoda guns were almost expended, it was planned to rearm the ship with new Italian 135mm/L45 single mountings, envisaged for the future (but never completed) Italian destroyers of the *Comandanti Medaglie d'Oro* class. These 135 mm /45 guns – but in twin mountings – served as the main armament on Italian cruisers of the *Capitani Romani* class, and in the triple mountings as the secondary armament of the modernised *Doria* class battleships.

The works on the ship were far from completion before the Italian armistice, and *Premuda* was captured by the Germans at Genoa on 9 September 1943. Her envisaged artillery was not ready, and Germans attempted to rebuild the destroyer as a night-fighter direction ship with only three German single 105 mm /L45 anti-aircraft guns, and with German *Freya* and *Würzburg* radar sets, with an additional FuMO 21 surface-fire-control set on her bridge. Because German Navy was lacking destroyers and torpedo boats on the Mediterranean, and many of captured Italian and French units were lost shortly after their commission, or still incomplete in the shipyards, this decision was reversed, and the ship completed without *Würzburg* and *Freya* radar sets as a „foreign torpedo boat“ (*Torpedoboot, Ausland*) under the new designation **TA 32**. She received four 105 mm/L45 guns, eight, and later ten 37mm anti-aircraft guns (in four twin and two single mountings), thirty-two to thirty-six 20 mm guns (in seven quadruple and four twin mountings!), and retained only three of her 533 mm torpedo tubes.

TA 32 was commissioned on 18 August 1944 under Lieutenant Commander (*Kapitänleutnant*) Emil Kopka for the German 10th Torpedo Boat Flotilla (*10. Torpedobootsflottille*). She was based in the Ligurian Sea, and she was almost immediately thrown into the battle. Together with other units of the Flotilla she shelled Allied positions along the Italian coast in August 1944, and was later undertaking scouting missions or laying mines in the western part of the Gulf of Genoa.

Last three operative units of the 10th Flotilla, **TA 24**, **TA 29** and **TA 32**, were sent out on 18 March 1945 to lay a minefield in the Ligurian Sea, but was ordered to switch-off their radar sets, to escape detection from enemy vessels. The group was intercepted by British destroyers HMS *Meteor* and HMS *Lookout*, and thanks to the better (and active) radar equipment and stronger artillery of British vessels, **TA 24** and **TA 29** were sunk. **TA 32** developed rudder damage, was driving in circles, and disappeared from British radar screens, so former *Dubrovnik* survived this encounter unscathed. One month later, when German troops were withdrawing from Genoa, **TA 32** was scuttled in harbour on 24 April 1945. After the war, her wreck was raised together with hundreds of other relics, to be broken up in the 1950s.

Yugoslav *Dubrovnik* was followed in 1940 by three smaller destroyers of French origin. Another larger flotilla leader, that was to be named *Split*, and armed with five 140mm/L56 automatic guns, has her keel laid at Spalato in 1939, but was completed after the WW II to a different design, being armed with four US 127 mm guns, a heavy anti-aircraft suite (40 and 20 mm guns), and with five torpedo tubes. Some Yugoslav sources were maintaining the fact that *Dubrovnik* served as a prototype for the British *Tribal* class, but *Tribals* represented a logical step in British destroyer development, and were the British answer to large Japanese, Italian and German destroyers, with a different general layout, reduced range, and the numerically stronger low-angle armament (but unfortunately “forgetting” to include a heavy anti-aircraft battery). Very similar to *Dubrovnik* were Portuguese destroyers of the *Vouga* class built by Yarrow and under licence in Portuguese shipyards.

Yugoslav “super-destroyer” was meant to cooperate with the French navy, but her capacities – like her “long legs” – were at best used by the Italians, the original enemy. Under the German flag she was restored too late to be successful, especially in face of the powerful Allied naval forces in the Mediterranean.

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