

AUSTRIA-HUNGARY'S DANUBE RIVER FLOTILLA IN WORLD WAR I

This exhibit relates to the naval flotilla deployed along the Danube River from Austria to the Black Sea from the beginning of the war in 1914 to its end in 1918. Austria-Hungary used patrol craft on the river for several centuries but did not provide meaningful firepower until monitors with heavy armor and 8" naval guns were launched in 1871. Additional ships were added in 1892, 1904 and 1914-1915, each time involving larger and faster craft. During the war, the flotilla consisted of 10 monitors, a handful of river patrol boats and some auxiliaries.

Operating out of Petrovaradin in Hungary, the initial action of the flotilla came on the day after the declaration of war when three of its monitors bombarded the Serbian fortifications on the south bank of the river on 29 July 1914. After the conquest of Serbia, the ships bombarded the forts at Giurgiu during the invasion of Romania in 1916. Later, a few of the monitors went through the Black Sea to Odessa and Cherson in Ukraine in support of the advance of the Austrian army into that area. When the Dual Monarchy surrendered to the Allies at the end of October 1918, the heavier ships were divided up between Yugoslavia and Romania, with Hungary being permitted to retain only a few patrol boats.

Personnel of the flotilla could send cards and letters free of postage if an official unit cachet was applied. To satisfy this need, a substantial variety of such markings was produced, thus providing the primary basis for the story in this exhibit. The order in which the material is shown starts with the cachets used at the flotilla headquarters, followed by operating units (such as the minelaying squadrons), then the specific vessels and finally the related shore-based facilities.



Registered fieldpost card mailed in October 1917 from Budapest to FPO 299 at Braila, Romania for delivery to the Danube Flotilla hospital ship *Kulpa* at Karansebes. It bears the two-line cachet of the "Imperial & Royal Naval Detachment/Budapest."

With patience and diligent search, flotilla mail can be acquired. However, it is collected by a number of avid philatelists, particularly by naval specialists. As a result, competition for unusual items is keen. In fact, some of the ship markings are quite elusive, and assembling the examples shown here has taken more than two decades.

**DANUBE FLOTILLA
Headquarters Cachets**

Budapest
January 1917

FPO 299
19 May 1917

FPO 449
19 October 1918



These fieldpost cards show three different oval, circular and straight-line cachets of the "K.u.K. Donauflottillenkommmando (I.&R. Danube Flotilla Headquarters)." Note that nearly all markings of the Dual Monarchy include "K.u.K." which stands for the German equivalent of "Imperial & Royal" and signifies that the Emperor of Austria was also the King of Hungary. The upper example was sent by the captain of *S.M.S. Bodrog* from the administrative headquarters of the flotilla at Budapest. Lower examples were sent from the operating headquarters at Braila and Turnu-Severin, Romania.

DANUBE FLOTILLA
Minelaying Unit Cachets

FPO 170
21 February 1915

Etappenpost Belgrad
8 December 1917

FPO 316
14 November 1916



Some of the smaller vessels were engaged in laying mines to protect the installations from enemy naval attacks. Three different cachets shown above were those of the 2nd and 3rd River Minelaying Detachments.

DANUBE FLOTILLA
Monitor Cachets
Class of 1871

FPO 299
 26 June 1917

FPO 191
 10 January 1916

S.M.S. Leitha
& Maros

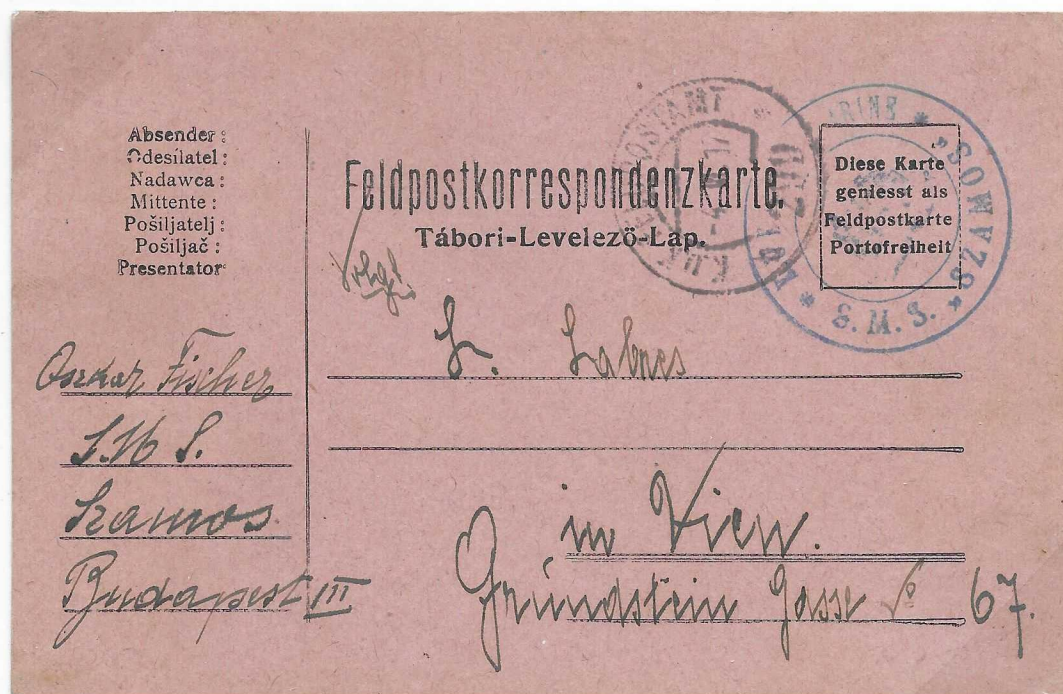
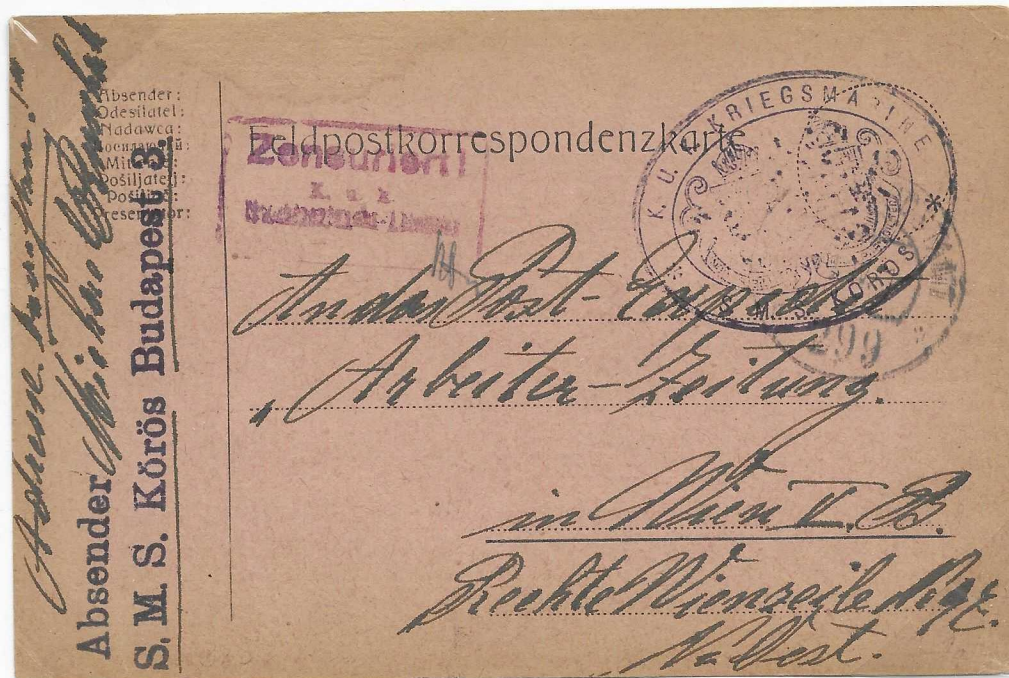


The *Leitha* and *Maros* were the oldest monitors in the fleet, having been built in 1871. They each displaced 310 tons, had a top speed of 8.5 knots and mounted a single 4.7" gun. The above cards were mailed from Giurgiu, Romania and Orsova, Hungary respectively.

DANUBE FLOTILLA
Monitor Cachets
Class of 1892

FPO 299
 April 1917
 4 June 1917

S.M.S. Koros
& Szamos



The *Koros* and her sister ship *Szamos* were the other 19th Century monitors in operation during World War I, built in 1892. They each displaced 448 tons, had a top speed of 10 knots and mounted two 4.7" guns. Shown here are fieldpost cards with cachets of these ships.

DANUBE FLOTILLA

Monitor Cachets

Class of 1904

Orsova
28 December 1915

FPO 299
28 April 1917

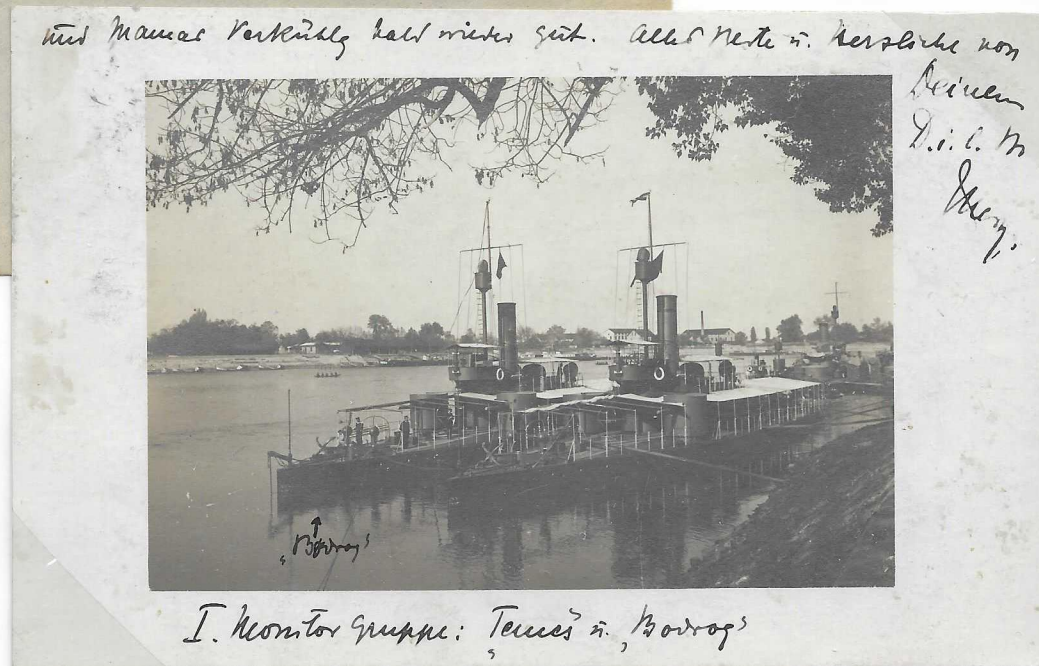
S.M.S. Bodrog & Temes



Kuck. Jygel. Weiden
Im Tennen' Byrd III

Takori postā

Fräulein Grete Travnice 12



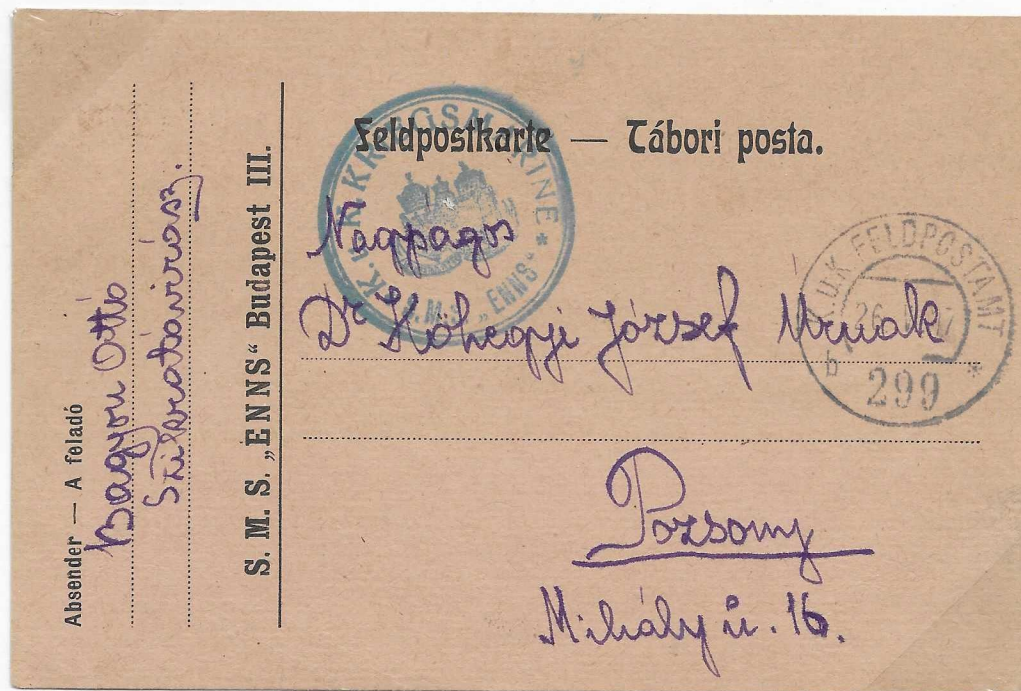
The *Bodrog* and *Temes* made up the 1904 class of monitors. They displaced 440 tons, with a top speed of 13 knots. Each mounted three 4.7" guns, two in turrets facing forward. These fieldpost cards were sent through Orsova and FPO 299, then at Giurgiu, Romania. The photo card mailed from the flotilla base at Petrovaradin shows both *Bodrog* and *Temes*.

DANUBE FLOTILLA
Monitor Cachets
Class of 1914

FPO 299
 26 June 1917

Oswiecim
 9 May 1915

S.M.S. Enns
 & *Inn*

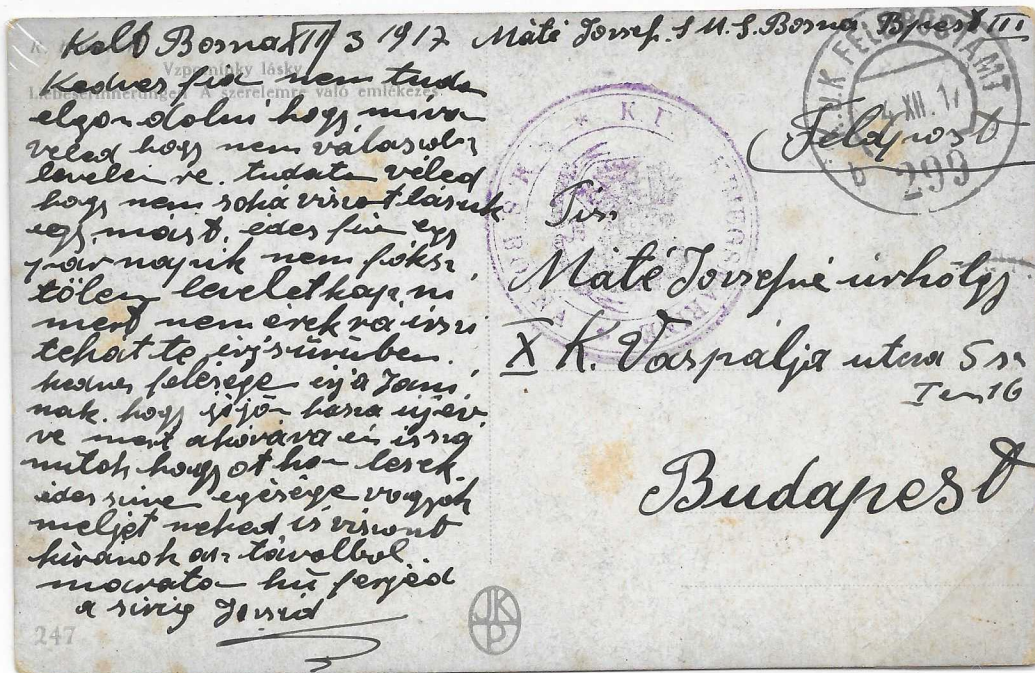


The *Enns* and her sister ship *Inn* were relatively new monitors in the fleet, built in 1914. They each displaced 536 tons, had a top speed of 12 knots and mounted five 4.7" guns. The above fieldpost cards show their circular cachets.

DANUBE FLOTILLA
Monitor Cachet
Class of 1915

FPO 299
14 November 1917
4 December 1917

S.M.S. Bosna
& Sava



The *Bosna* and her sister ship *Sava*) were the newest monitors in the fleet, built in 1915. They displaced 600 tons each, had a top speed of 13 knots and mounted four 4.7" guns. Shown here are fieldpost cards with circular and oval markings.

DANUBE FLOTILLA
Patrol Boat Cachets

Turnu Severin
 1 July 1917
 6 March 1917

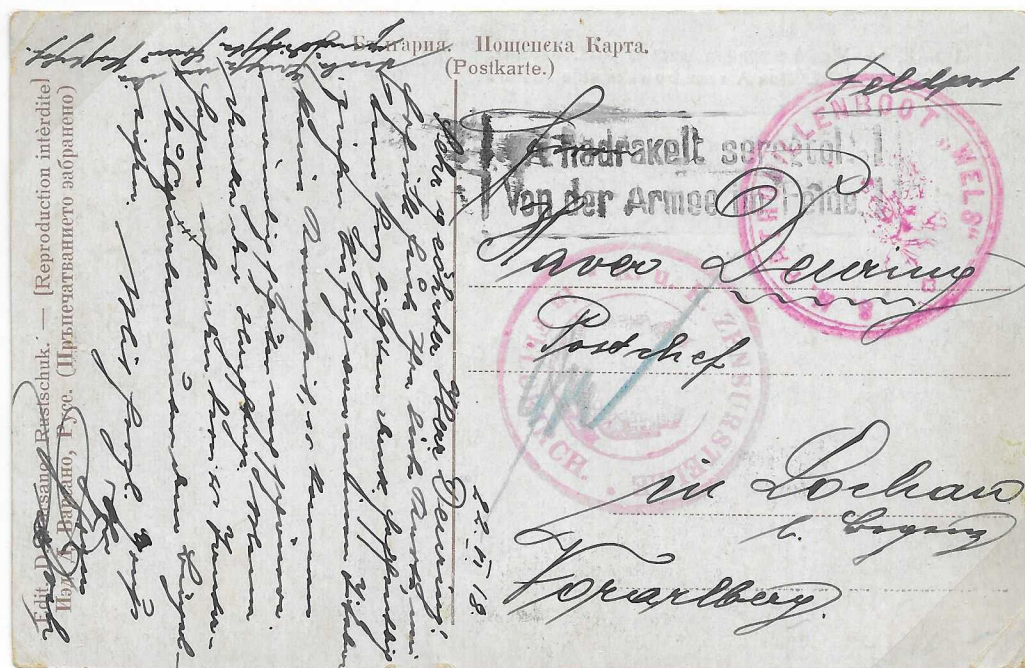
Budapest
 13 August 1916



The flotilla also included a number of small patrol boats. These examples are from the *Barsch*, *Compo* and *Viza*, and were sent from Romania and Hungary. Such vessels had very small crews and mail from them is difficult to find.

DANUBE FLOTILLA
Patrol Boat Cachets

Ruschuk
17 April 1916
22 June 1918



Most of the patrol boats originally were designated by letter rather than by name, and a few cachets were used with this format. For example, patrol boat "L" was later named the *Wels*. Both types of cachet for this vessel are shown above, with the former being highly unusual.

DANUBE FLOTILLA
Armed Steamer Cachets

Orsova
 26 January 1916

FPO 299
 22 October 1916

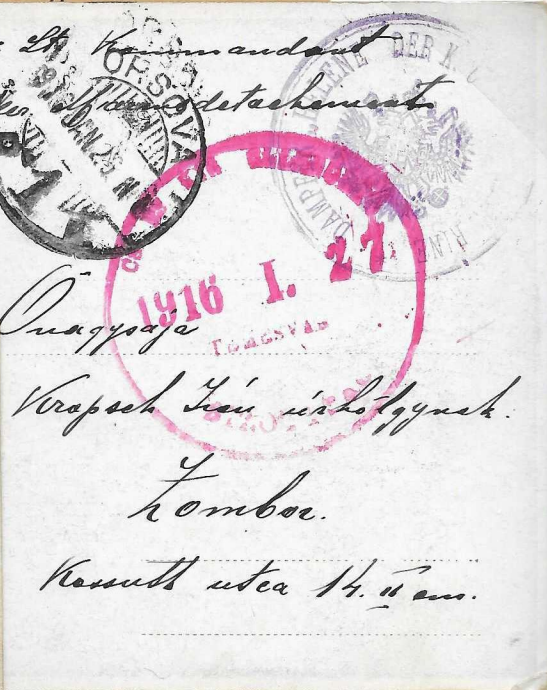


Several steamships were commandeered from the Donau Dampfschiffsfahrts Gesellschaft (Danube Steamship Company) for use as auxiliary warships, including *Almos* and *Balaton*. They were fitted with 2.5" guns and 8mm. machine guns. Mail from the armed steamers is particularly elusive.

DANUBE FLOTILLA
Armed Steamer Cachets

FPO 299
11 December 1916

Orsova
26 January 1916

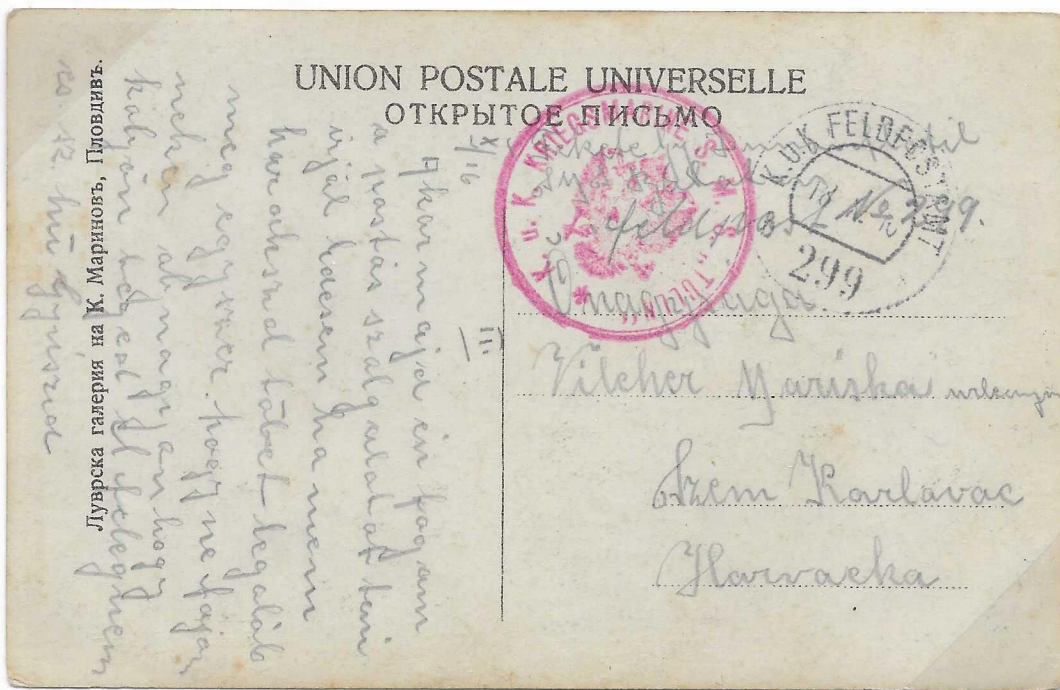
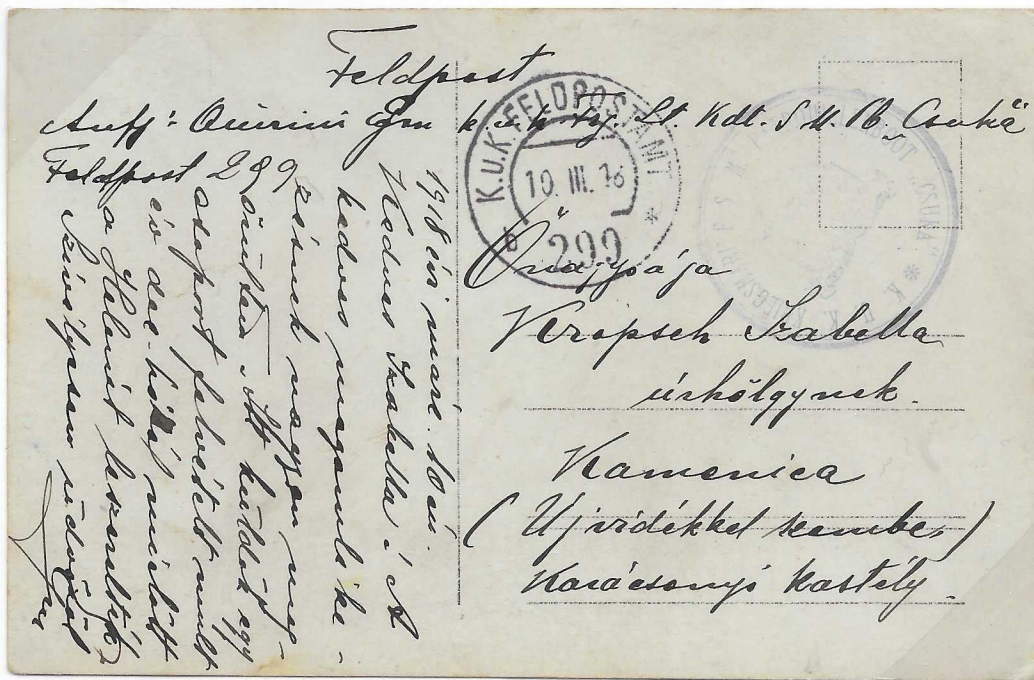


Additional steamships used by the Danube Flotilla included the Hebe, Helene, Samson and Vag, and examples of their markings are shown above. All of these are quite scarce.

DANUBE FLOTILLA

Auxiliary Vessel Cachets

FPO 299
10 March 1916
18 October 1916



The flotilla also included several types of other minor vessels. These examples are from *S.M.S. Csuka*, a small patrol craft, and *S.M.S. Tulln*, a tug used for transporting munitions, both sent from FPO 299 in Braila, Romania. Such vessels had very small crews, and mail from them is very elusive.

DANUBE FLOTILLA
Shore Station Cachets

Belgrad
27 October 1918



Shore stations were established to service the flotilla. This one was located at Belgrade, Serbia and used an appropriate cachet on its mail. This example was mailed just three days before Austria-Hungary dropped out of the war.

FPO 348
2 November 1917

FPO 299
12 October 1918



A feladó neve és lakása: <i>C. Jouggiis</i> <i>K. u. K. Expositur</i> <i>Bozila der</i> <i>E. F. L.</i> <i>Telefon 299</i>	Tábori post Fel. Nr. 165 Tábori postai szállítólevél.	Ára 2 fillér. Raktárkönyv vagy kézbesítő könyv folyószáma: Franko 12 X K Frankójegyek felragasztására szánt hely (folytatása a hát-lapon):
A küldemény neve: <i>1 Kiste</i> A küldemény tartalma: <i>Lebensmittel aus Rumänien</i>		
Czím: <i>Tunis</i> <i>Jouggiis Mirri</i> <i>Gilli (Stuk)</i> <i>Guelastrassi 15</i> <i>Quartier</i>		
Rendeltetési hely: Uteza, házszám: Utolsó posta:		
A vastagon bekerített részt a feladó tartozik kitölteni.		
Postai előjegyzések: Súly: kg g Porto: K f Irányítás: Kézb. (ért.) díj: " " " " K f.		

A címet czélszerű magára a csomag göngyöltetére írni. — A csomagra és a szállítólevélre irt címnek teljesen meg kell egyezni.

A major shore station was operated at Braila, Romania. These cachets show this usage, with the parcel address card to Cilli representing a package of much needed food for the homeland late in the war.

Cherson, 19. August 1918. Liebe Jimmy, recht herzl. Dank
für deinen lieben Brief, wenn jemand so selten schreibt,
so hat man immer Freude mit einem endlich erhal-
tenen Nachricht. So auch ich, zumal durchaus keine
unangenehmen Nachrichten für mich drinstecken.
Am allerwenigsten die in deinem Briefe letzt-
angeführte, betreffs Papa's. Diese Angelegenheit ist für
mich bereits in voriger Pfortin - S.M.S. Bosna - K.u.K. Donauflotille - Budapest III.
war nämlich damals

Fräulein

Jimmy Fortin

Schloss Gaimach

via Trippen

Steiermark

Later in the war, S.M.S. Bosna was sent through the Black Sea to support army activities in Ukraine following the Treaty of Brest Litovsk. Above is a letter written by a crew member at Cherson on the Dneiper River. This is about as unusual a usage as can be imagined for Danube Flotilla mail. No other such example seen by exhibitor.