The Wreck of the German Landing Transport Vessel MFP F 956, Named DTM Kec near Piran

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Abstract
With the development of diving tourism, wrecks have become the main attraction for numerous dives. Most wrecks in our waters do not have their proper name, and their shipwrecks and stories have sunk into oblivion over the years. Not far from Piran, there is a sunken military vessel from the Second World War, an unknown landing transport. In June 2006, a large quantity of ammunition was removed from the ship. This article reveals the story of the German ship MFP F956, which was part of the 10th Landing Fleet (10. Landungsflottille) and its shipwreck. The development of landing transports and the operations of the German navy in the Adriatic in the last year of the war are described. A proposal for managing the wreck as underwater cultural heritage is also presented.

Keywords: Adriatic Sea, Istria, Second World War, Kriegsmarine, Marinefaehrprahm, MFP F 956, DTM Kec, shipwreck, archaeological remains.

Abstract
With the development of diving tourism, the wrecks have become the main attraction for many divers. Most shipwrecks in Slovenian sea does not have their real name and their fates have become unknown over the years. Not far from the town of Piran, there is a wreck from the Second World War, an unknown naval ferry lighter (F-lighter). In June 2006, a large amount of ammunition was removed from the ship. The article is dedicated to uncovering the story of the German ship MFP F956, which was part of the 10th landing fleet (10th Landungsflottille) and its shipwreck. The development of F-lighters and the operation of the German navy in the Adriatic in the last year of the war are described. There is also a proposal to manage the wreck as an underwater cultural heritage.

Keywords: Adriatic Sea, Istria, World War II, Kriegsmarine, Marinefaehrprahm, MFP F 956, F-lighter, DTM Kec, shipwreck, archaeological remains.

Introduction

Near Piran lies a well-preserved wreck of a military vessel that hides an interesting shipwreck story. Advanced divers mostly explore the interior of its cargo hold. Other ship compartments are dangerous due to siltation and difficult access, so only a few venture inside.
In its interior, one can observe rich fish life, making the wreck a true oasis of peace and providing nature some respite from commercial fishing.
The landing transport is called "Marinefaehrprahm" in German, meaning naval ferry barge, abbreviated MFP F or simply with the letter F. Italians called it a motor raft, "moto zattera" with

the abbreviation MZ. Among the crews, the name "I muli del mare", i.e., mules of the sea, stuck (Marcon, 1998). In Yugoslavia, it was called "desantni tenkonosac minopolagalac", abbreviated DTM.
The wreck is known by the popular name DTM Kec. It probably got its name from the marking on the nautical chart of diving instructor Lado Celestina, on which it was marked with the number 1. "Kec" means a school failing grade of 1 in slang. And so wreck No. 1 on the chart became Kec. In the records of the Ministry of Culture, it is registered under the unit evidence number (immovable cultural heritage): 29418.
Smaller vessels in navies were not given names, so they were only designated with letters of the vessel type and numbers. DTM Kec had the original name F 956 (Germek, 2020).
From video recordings of the operation to remove unexploded ordnance, called the NUS action-MFP-2006 (NUS - "unexploded ordnance"), a documentary film Kec was made by authors Bojan Paliska and Sandi Cunja. At the first screening in January 2008, the authors summarized everything that was known and speculated about the wreck at that time, and well documented the condition of the wreck with photographs (RTVSLO, 2008).

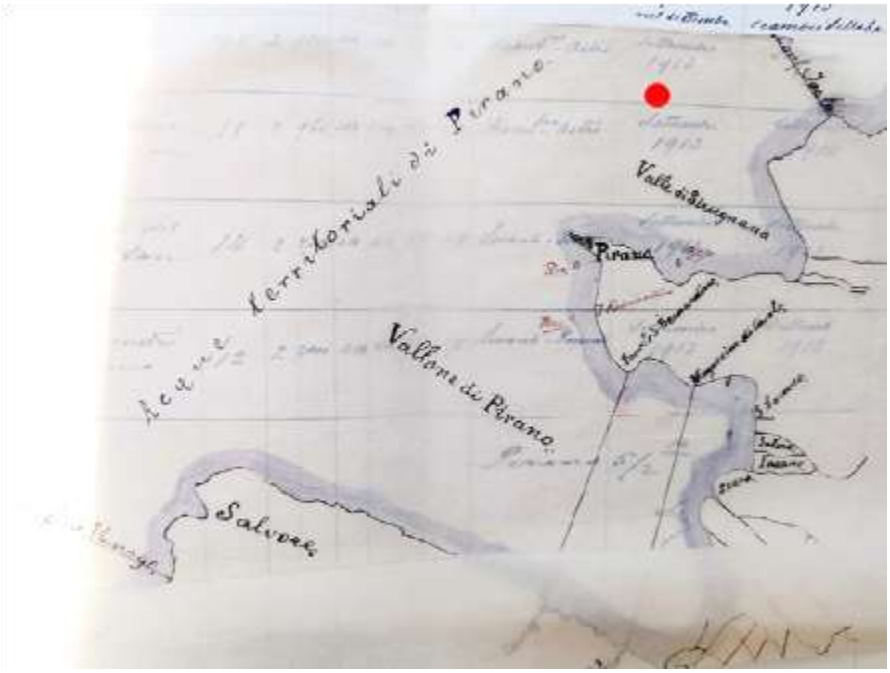


Figure 1: Shipwreck marking on the sketch of Piran's territorial sea (PAK Piran, 1913).

The German Navy in the Adriatic During the Italian occupation of Yugoslavia, there were no German military vessels in the Adriatic. The first appearance of the German Kriegsmarine in the Adriatic war zone occurred only in September 1943 and was magnificently successful. This was partly due to the chaos and disintegration of the Italian armed forces following the announcement of the armistice with the Allies. German units and vessels were better prepared for this situation. The main actors in this first act were two German torpedo boats "Schnellboote", which were berthed in Taranto for maintenance work. These were S-54 "Krokodil" under the command of Klaus Degenhardt Schmidt and S-61 "Morska deklica" under the command of Friedel Bloemker. They were also accompanied by DTM F 478 with its cargo of mines. During the voyage from Taranto

In addition, they captured merchant navy vessels totaling more than 6,000 GRT and significantly contributed to the surrender of Venice to German troops. The torpedo boat crews earned the nickname "Corsairs of the Adriatic" (Erminio Bagnasco, 2006).

Figure 2: Torpedo boat S-55 "Penguin" in the Mediterranean 1943 (S-boot.net, 2023).

The remaining German ships in the Adriatic were former Italian military vessels, captured in September 1943. Later they acquired additional ships that were built in local shipyards and smaller vessels transferred from other operational areas. A major problem was the shortage of crews and their competence in using available equipment and weapons. Through improvisations and mobilization of local personnel, by October 10, 1943, about 30 warships had come under the flag of the German Admiral of the Adriatic. However, only 20 were technically operational, and even fewer were combat-ready (Kriegsbereit Kb.). The command of the Naval Group South sent a request to the German Naval High Command at the beginning of October, listing the units that were needed:

- Two flotillas of torpedo boats (S-boot), one flotilla of attack midget submarines (Molch).
- Three flotillas of coastal minesweepers (R-Boot) for reconnaissance, escort, and mine-hunting duties, plus additional mobilized coastal vessels for escort and mine clearance.
- Three groups of submarine hunters (U-Bootjaeger).
- One minelayer and one department for laying nets and barriers.
- Several anti-aircraft F-lighters.
- One or more transport flotillas with numerous ferries, barges, F-lighters, and tugboats.
- Several artillery lighters (Marine-Artillerie-Leichter/MAL) for local defense.

The response from the German Naval High Command came almost immediately. The response was positive on all points, with the exception of midget submarines. The same message ordered the formation of a security flotilla (Sicherungsflottille), which would include ships found in Italian ports (Freivogel and Rastelli, 2016).

The staff of Admiral Adria was responsible for organizing German troops on the eastern and western Adriatic coasts all the way to the Ionian Sea. This simplified the command structure and the use of the handful of available transport and escort vessels in the Adriatic.
For the logistical needs of both Adriatic coasts, approximately 100,000 tons of cargo were to be transported monthly from the northern Adriatic. Of this, 35,000 tons were destined southward to Sibenik, Split, and Dubrovnik. Smaller coastal vessels supplied garrisons on the islands and landed troops in the Dalmatia area. Available shipping capacity was insufficient, with a shortfall of approximately 26,000 tons of cargo per month.
The second, urgent, task was to transport by sea 250,000 Italian prisoners of war from the south to northern Italy and Germany. Upon Italy's armistice with the Allies, Germany occupied most of Italian territory. The Italian soldiers were offered surrender and captivity or continuation of the joint fight against the Allies by the German authorities. German distrust of their former allies was great.
In the area between Venice and Vlora, the Germans seized the following merchant ships: four larger steamers, each over 20,000 GRT, and 59 smaller steamers between 150 and 15,000 GRT, totaling 208,163 GRT (Freivogel and Rastelli, 2016).

Figure 3: Division of administrative areas of the Adriatic (KTB Adria Admiral, 1943). For the coordination of German transports, the Office of the Chief of Maritime Transport in the Adriatic (Seetransportchef Adria) was established in January 1944, headquartered at Opicina near Trieste. At the head of the office until its dissolution in December 1944 was Commander (Fregattenkapitaen) Erich Lehmann. Under his command was the 10th Landing Fleet (10. Landungsflottille), the 6th Transport Fleet (6. Transportflottille), the 22nd Naval Anti-Aircraft Artillery Department (22. Marinebordflakabteilung), which together with the Office of the Maritime Transport Chief (Seetransporthauptstelle) in Trieste provided crews for anti-aircraft guns on transport

ships. Both fleets with landing and transport vessels were from December 1944 directly subordinated to the 11th Security Division (11. Sicherungsdivision).
On the Italian coast of the Adriatic, the 2nd Transport Fleet (2. Transportflottille) also operated, established in September 1943 in Marseille and transferred in January 1944 to the Adriatic with bases in Ferrara and Venice (Freivogel and Rastelli, 2016).

The Adriatic Battlefield in 1944

After the collapse of Italy and after four months of fierce fighting with partisans, most of the islands and a large part of the coast were taken by German units. But with the new year, British warships and Allied aircraft together with armed vessels of the NOVJ posed a serious threat to all large and small vessels participating in traffic along the Adriatic coast. To prevent attacks by German forces and aircraft on their own coastal transport shipping and local fishermen, vessel owners marked their hulls and sails with German swastikas (James Caffin, 2015).
The Allied landing in Normandy on June 6, 1944 had no direct impact on the Adriatic war zone, but it nevertheless helped the liberation struggle. NOVJ fighters were much better informed about the second offensive, which the Soviet Red Army launched on the front on June 10. The third great boost was the arrival of Marshal Josip Broz Tito on Vis. Tito withdrew from the German offensive on Drvar on May 25 and was flown to Italy by plane on June 3, arriving on Vis on June 7 aboard the destroyer HMS Blackmore escorted by HMS Eggesford, where he remained until September 19. Thus, the island of Vis briefly became the capital of the future Yugoslavia.
The German retreat on all fronts began slowly. The German navy in the Adriatic was at its peak in the summer of 1944, followed by its decline. In the occupied Italian shipyards in Venice, Trieste, and Rijeka, several torpedo boats were completed and handed over for use. The first F-lighters and anti-submarine corvettes and destroyers were also assembled (Freivogel and Rastelli, 2016).

equipped with radars, the decline of the German F-lighters began. They had stronger armament, but the British boats were more maneuverable and faster.
After the war, the JRM (Yugoslav War Navy) kept several captured German F-lighter vessels in service and built dozens of new ones for operations along the Yugoslav coast. Small submarine hunters of the "Kraljevica" class, similar to the German R-boot minesweepers, were also ordered in large series, confirming the positive German experience with these types of vessels in the Adriatic (Freivogel and Rastelli, 2016).

Development of the German Landing Transport Vessel (MFP)
At the beginning of the Second World War, the German war navy did not have a landing vessel with which it could carry out modern amphibious operations. After the victory over France in 1940, a landing in England was planned (Operation Sea Lion). Since there were no proper landing vessels, they attempted to improvise by converting various types of vessels (rafts, barges, yachts, port barges) into landing craft. At the end of the year, the navy published, based on experience with converted vessels, the first requirements for the design and operation of a new landing vessel. The new landing vessels would have to be suitable for actual landing/beaching operations and supply/logistics tasks.
The resulting design was similar to all later variants of Type A, B, C, and D F-lighters. The design had a raised bow and stern. In the middle and stern of the deck, there was to be a 2 cm anti-aircraft gun. The propulsion was to consist of three BMW aircraft engines, each with 600 HP, which were to have a minimum speed of 13 knots. The vessel's length was to be 46 m, width 6.5 m, bow draft from 0.56 m, and it was to carry three tanks of 20 tons. Aircraft engines that were no longer approved for use in aircraft because they had exceeded the number of operating hours, but were still technically fully functional, were to be used (Historisches Marinearchiv, 2021).

Figure 4: Marinefaehrprahm Type A (Marco Guerk, 2021). Marinefaehrprahm Type D
Although the Type A F-lighter was very successfully fulfilling its tasks, improvements were continuously incorporated from war experience up to the new series production designated as Type D. This had better longitudinal strength, a more suitable hull form for navigation, a larger cargo space, a stronger ramp, improved armament, and better crew accommodation. Design work had already begun in 1942. The hull was welded. The reinforced cargo space floor was designed to accommodate heavy loads, such as the 65-ton Tiger tank or a heavy howitzer with a 5.5-ton axle load. The loading space profile corresponded to the railway loading gauge, so all standard cargo and vehicles could be transported.

To improve navigation and stability, the vessel was widened to 6.59 m and lengthened to 49.8 m. This shifted the command bridge, engine room, and ship's gun somewhat forward.
The vessels were equipped with armament only in their designated geographical area of operations, so the armament varied considerably between war theaters. The F-lighters were powered by three diesel engines with manual transmissions, which used hollow sheet metal propellers instead of the previous cast iron screws. This avoided their breakage and also achieved better efficiency.
Due to fuel shortages, by the end of 1944, it was planned that the F-lighters would be equipped with gas generators to power two engines. The third engine would continue to run on diesel, so there would be no need to wait for the required amount of gas to be produced for startup.
Compared to Type A, the armor thickness was increased from 20 mm to 25 mm of St60 steel plate. The ammunition storage ceiling was additionally protected with 10 cm of concrete.
The crew consisted of 3 non-commissioned officers and 18 men (Historisches Marinearchiv, 2021).

Figure 5: Marinefaehrprahm Type D (Marco Guerk, 2021). Technical Characteristics of MFP F 956 The construction contract for F 956 was signed on 4.5.1944 at the San Marco shipyard within the consortium Cantieri Riuniti dell'Adriatico (CRDA) in Trieste. Construction number: 1624. Launch: 21.9.1944. On 14.10.1944, it was handed over to the 10th Landing Fleet (Landungsflottille), Group 4, Sibenik (Historisches Marinearchiv, 2021).

Figure 6: drawing of the emblem of the 10th Landing Fleet (ASTS, uncategorized material, 2022).

The 10th Landing Fleet was established in May 1943 by taking over personnel and assets of the Southern Transport Operational Staff of the Luftwaffe. The fleet was deployed in the Strait of Messina, where it

participated in the evacuation of Sicily and suffered heavy losses from air attacks. But the evacuation was very successful. On August 17, 1943, the fleet was deployed for the evacuation of the island of Sardinia and later Corsica until October 4, 1943. The fleet's boats were then loaded onto railways in Genoa and other ports in Liguria and transported to the Adriatic.
Here the headquarters was established in Susak near Rijeka.
At the beginning of 1944, the fleet was deployed at various Yugoslav ports: Dubrovnik, Split, Trogir, and Trieste. The fleet was used for transport and landing operations.
On April 18, 1945, the fleet base at Susak became a combat zone. All still operational F-lighters and infantry transport boats from Trieste sailed to Rijeka for the wounded. On May 2, 1945, the German troops, after withdrawing from Trieste, ran the remaining 10 F-lighters aground at the mouth of the Tagliamento River and surrendered to New Zealand troops (www.lexikon-der-wehrmacht.de, 2023).
The armament of the Type D F-lighter from 1.10.1944 onwards was (this is the official record, but the vessel also had two 20 mm anti-aircraft guns Oerlikon, one is on display at the Maritime Museum Sergej Masera Piran, the other disappeared from the seabed):
- 1 naval gun of 88 mm.
- 1 anti-aircraft gun Breda of 37 mm.
- 1 quad anti-aircraft gun of 20 mm.

- 1 anti-aircraft gun Oerlikon of 20 mm.
- 6 smoke floats
- 1 Wabo (depth charge)

Technical data of the ship:

Displacement: 239 t.
Length: 49.84 m. Width: 6.59 m.
Draft max: 1.35 m. Freeboard: 2.75 m.
Propellers: 3
Engines: 3 x 6 cylinder, 4-stroke diesel.
Engine power: 375 HP.
Speed empty: 10.3 kn.
Fuel: 4.1 t.
Range 1 (nm/kn): 520/10. Range 2 (nm/kn): 1120/7.
Crew: 21
Capacity: 140 t (three Panzer IV or 200 soldiers).
(Historisches Marinearchiv, 2021).
The shipyard data differ slightly and state: displacement 310 t. Engine power 390 HP. Maximum speed 12 kn (Gelner and Valenti, 2007).

San Marco Shipyard in Trieste.

The shipyard was established in 1840 on the initiative of Gaspare Tonello as the San Marco slipway, located next to Lloyd's arsenal. In 1877, it ceased its activity under the name Stabilimento Navale Adriatico. This was followed by 1895, when the Stabilimento Tecnico Triestino shipyard took over the old San Marco, as it was in a more favorable and better-protected position than their San Rocco yard. The San Marco shipyard was closer to the Sant'Andrea machine factory, and with its acquisition, Stabilimento Tecnico Triestino transformed into an industrial entity of great importance (Gelner and Valenti, 2007).

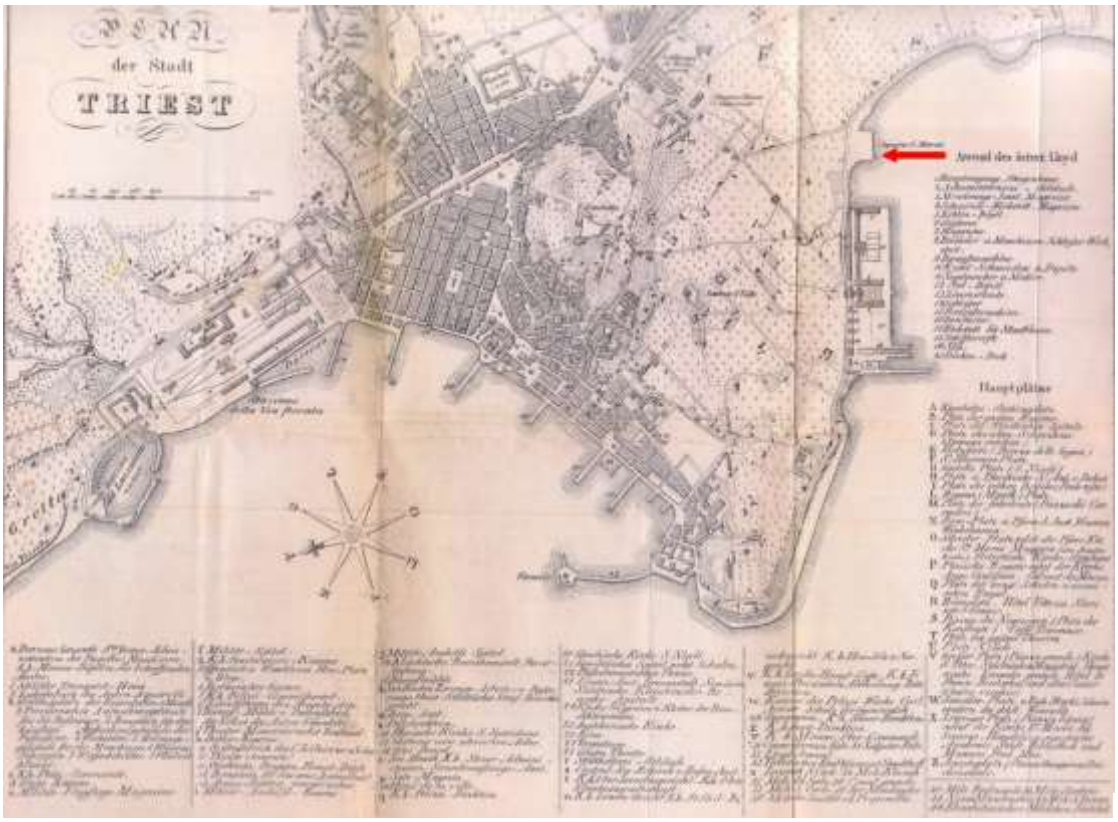


Figure 7: the still small San Marco shipyard marked with an arrow on the city map from 1857 (Lloyd-Reisefuehrer Triest, 1857).

Figure 8: emblem of the S.T.T. shipyard and the CRDA shipyard association (Gelner and Valenti, 2005).

On June 16, 1930, the San Marco shipyard became part of the large maritime-engineering association "C.R.D.A. - Cantieri Riuniti dell'Adriatico". At that time, the facility had orders for at least two years ahead, with a workforce of about 2,000 workers and modern workshop equipment and four surfaces for building large ships. Together with the shipyard in Monfalcone, they were intended for the construction and outfitting of ships, while the smaller and older San Rocco was redirected to ship conversions and repairs, i.e., naval refit (Gelner and Valenti, 2007, p. 113).
After the announcement of the armistice, the Germans occupied Trieste, which thus became part of the Adriatisches Kuestenland. In the shipyard, the construction of warships and cruisers was abandoned, and work continued on smaller ships for the Adriatic needs of the Kriegsmarine. On June 10, 1944, Allied bombing of Trieste also began, severely damaging all industrial facilities, which drastically reduced work activity.
The San Marco production from September 1943 to May 1944 delivered to the German navy six destroyers TA 37-42 (Torpedoboote Ausland), one anti-submarine corvette UJ 201 (U-boot-Jaeger), and 14 F-lighters (Gelner and Valenti, 2007).
To maintain the supply of German units in the Adriatic and all the way to Greece, the Kriegsmarine ordered 110 F-lighters to be built for transport and cargo shipping needs using raw materials supplied directly from Germany. Of these, 81 would be built in Monfalcone, which already had established practice building F-lighters under Italy, and 29 in San Marco, but in the end only 34 were completed. The German navy also ordered the San Marco shipyard to assemble ten KT-type transport steamers (Kriegstransporter), as it had only one left in the Adriatic, but the worsening war conditions did not allow their construction (Gelner and Valenti, 2007, p. 191).

Figure 9: MFP F 956 sailing off Contovello, Trieste (collection Matjaz Babic, 2021).

The Story of the Shipwreck

In mid-August 1944, a new danger appeared for the transport fleet. British torpedo boats moved from Vis to Ancona and on their very first night voyage toward Istria sank the steamer Numidia, 3 nm west of the port of Porec.
In the autumn of 1944, the German and NDH navies were withdrawing from Dalmatia toward the Kvarner. The Allies had complete air superiority. By day and night, RAF air units hunted larger and smaller shipping in the northern Adriatic. The German navy operated mostly at night. Surprisingly, F 956 did not experience any Allied attack from its launch to its sinking. For the F-lighters, we can conclude that they did not have good nautical qualities. Their hull had a flat bottom, had no proper bow, and all three propellers were right-turning, which could make navigation difficult even in slightly rough seas. In the archival fond of the Piran harbor captaincy, several accidents with these vessels during their docking in the port in 1944 are recorded. In the war diary of the 10th Transport Fleet, we notice that for longer night voyages along Istria, the F-lighters were towed by tugboats or minesweepers. Probably due to fuel shortages and greater efficiency of such navigation.

10.10.44	F i u m e	S t a b :
	SO 4-5 bedeckt,Regen,	K.B. : 3 I.-Boote A.K.B. 1 I.-Boote
17.00	See 2-3 Sicht 6-8 sm.	I-01 Fiume aus nach Sibenik, im Geleit 1.Gruppe zur Überführung an 2. Gruppe Sibenik. Alarmstufe I.
09.30-12.30		Fliegeralarm, kein Angriff. Mit 10.10. ist die 4. Gruppe von Triest nach Fiume verlegt worden.
	T r i e s t	1. Gruppe:
	Wetter wie Stab	K.B.: 4 SF K.B.: 3 MFP A.K.B.Zara 1 MFP Ausbildung und Ausrüstung 4 MFP (974,956,951,975)
17.00		MFP 942,973,625, Führung Ob.Lt.z.S. H o r s t mit MDS "Habicht" und I-01 Fiume aus nach Sibenik. Nachschubfahrt,(Nachtmarsch).
10.10-13.25	Triest	Fliegeralarm, kein Angriff.

Figure 10: first mention of F 956 in the diary of the 10th Landing Fleet, built and outfitted (KTB 10. Landungsflottille, 1944, p. 66).

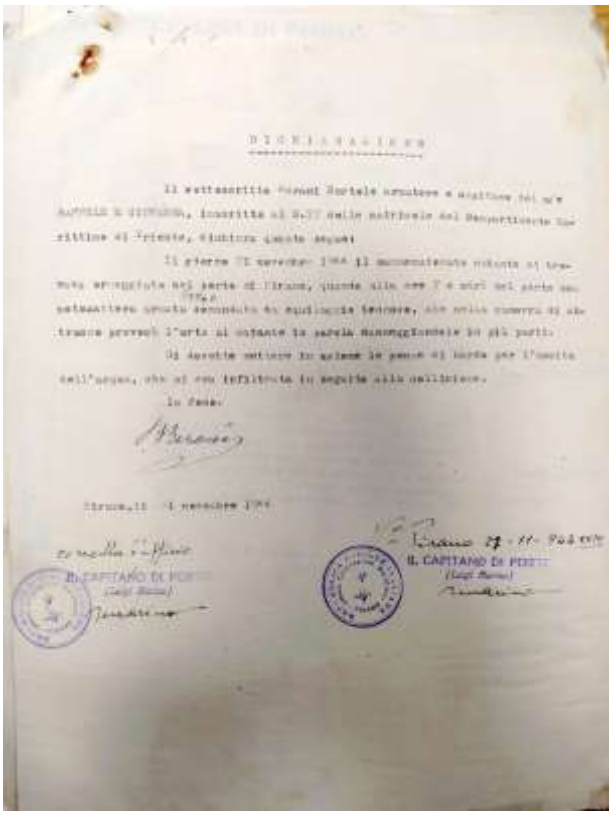


Figure 11:
Statement of damage caused by F956:
The undersigned Berani Bortolo, owner and captain of the vessel RAFFELE & GIOVANNA, registered under No. 77 at the harbor captaincy of Trieste, declares that on November 21, 1944, the said vessel was moored in the port of Piran, when at 7 a.m. an armed F-lighter (F 956), commanded by a German crew, entered the port and during the docking maneuver caused the said vessel to collide at several points.
It was necessary to activate the pumps on the vessel to pump out the water that entered after the collision.
In faith... (PAK Piran, 1944).

On 29.10.1944, F 956 departed on its second voyage, from Trieste to Rovinj, towed by the tugboat Chirone. The following night, the tugboat Chirone also hitched F 951 and F 948 and they departed toward Pula. The tugboat and F 948 turned into the port. F 958 and F 951 continued with minesweeper R 187 toward Rijeka, where they arrived on 31.10 at 6 a.m. (KTB 10. Landungsflottille, 1944).
On 5.11.1944, after the morning air raid on Rijeka, F 484 and F 956 set off toward Opatija to camouflage positions; F 956 continued to Krk. A few hours later, in the mid-afternoon, F 484 suffered an air attack and was completely destroyed.
On 6.11.1944, F 956 returned from Krk to Rijeka. Toward the evening, fuel was pumped from boat i-51 for F 956 (KTB 10. Landungsflottille, 1944, p. 106).
After two successful months of navigation, a telegram appeared at the naval command in Trieste:
On 15.12.1944 at 17:30, F 956 experienced a collision with the steamer KT 6. The German transport ship KT 6 was heading from Trieste to Rasa. In the dusk, approximately 1.5 nm southwest of Piran, it collided with MFP F 956 under the command of junior officer ("Bootsmann") Edwin Guderian, who was approaching from the direction of Umag. F 956 suffered considerable damage but remained on the surface. The steamer KT 6 attempted to tow it toward Trieste, but F 956 capsized at 20:15 at the height of Strunjan and sank. Damage to KT 6: a crack on the bow, above the waterline, approximately 150 cm long (KTB der SeetransporthauptstelleTriest, 1944, p. 567).
A more extensive account was given by the commander of F 956, Guderian, at a hearing on December 16, 1944 in Trieste. After departing from Umag on 15.12.1944 at 16:30, he followed in a straight line 200 m behind the vessel F 522. Past Savudrija, they turned 45 degrees to the right, and in the distance they spotted the Trieste lighthouse Faro della Vittoria. Shortly after, the crew of F 956 noticed that the leading F 522 was changing course to the

left. A cry from the non-commissioned officer on deck followed: "Ship ahead of us on the starboard side!" (KTB 10. Landungsflottille, 1944, p. 909).
On the starboard side ahead, they spotted KT 6 in a direction approximately 20 degrees to the right, at a distance of about 200 to 300 meters, approaching at high speed. It was too late to turn right, as they would have cut KT 6's path right in front of its bow. To avoid a collision, they turned hard to port, engines at full power. Due to the ship's speed, the weight of the cargo, and the lack of maneuverability, the relative position with KT 6 did not change. A violent impact occurred on the rear starboard side of F 956, between compartments 3 and 4 (KTB 10. Landungsflottille, 1944).
KT 6 cut through the hull at the rear of the ship and at the level of compartment 2 (the radio room) climbed with its bow over it. F 956 tilted to starboard during the violent collision and submerged from the stern to the quad anti-aircraft gun amidships. Between compartments 4 and 2, water began to rush in on the starboard side. The ladder for access below deck was knocked out, and the cover of the deck hatch was knocked off so that it could not be closed. Because of this, water rushed into the living quarters, and within 2 to 3 minutes the stern was already submerged. All crew immediately gathered at the forward part of the vessel, except the radio operator, who was in the radio room and was rescued at the last moment by being pulled out from below deck. The box with confidential documents from Pula remained in the radio room and later sank with the ship.
Two crew members who fell overboard during the collision were rescued by minesweeper R 10, which was escorting the transport ship KT 6. As there was a danger that F 956 would sink, Commander Guderian ordered that part of the crew with the wounded transfer to KT 6. During the transfer, the crew also passed along all still accessible ammunition magazines for the quad gun and machine guns.
Then KT 6 finally slid off the stern of F 956 and moved away. Initially, they tried to tow the damaged F 956 with the help of F 522. It soon became apparent that the engine power of F 522 was insufficient for towing, and they hitched the tow to KT 6.
Around 20:15, the tow lines suddenly snapped. F 522 immediately sailed to F 956 and found that the boat had settled on the bottom by the stern, while the landing ramp protruded about 3 to 4 meters out of the water. All crew members were rescued. Four soldiers suffered minor injuries (KTB 10. Landungsflottille, 1944).
The commander of the lead ship F 522, Werner Heinecke, at the hearing provided the essence of the event and did not blame his comrades in any way. He stated that KT 6 was sailing past them in almost the opposite direction at a distance of about 100 meters, while minesweeper R 10 followed at a distance of about 250 meters, slightly to the left. Behind the stern of F 522, F 956 was sailing somewhat to the right at a distance of about 200 meters and turned sharply to port. KT 6 meanwhile maintained course; a few seconds later, the collision occurred. All subsequent measures were carried out in accordance with the orders of convoy leader Ob. Faehnr. Benedix (KTB 10. Landungsflottille, 1944).
The report on the accident and total loss of vessel F 956, addressed to the command of the 10th Landing Flotilla in Trieste, summarized that all previously taken rescue measures were appropriate under the given circumstances. And that perhaps the towing of F 956 to Piran should have been attempted immediately, rather than to Trieste. The confidential material in the box in the radio room could no longer be saved, as water immediately rushed in and the radio telegraphist barely managed to escape at the last moment. The bow was still protruding from the water and was marked with a rescue buoy. F 956 was carrying a cargo of 90 tons of cement. There were no fatalities. Four crew members were injured (KTB 10. Landungsflottille, 1944).

The commander of the anti-aircraft defense on KT 6, Prigge Karl, described the entire event as follows: On the voyage from Trieste to Rasa, after sunset as it was getting dark, I noticed two shadows off the bow, slightly to the right, approximately 3 miles away. Then I noticed their change of course. We passed the lighthouse at "Punta Madonna" Piran on our port side. When it was completely dark, these vessels were no longer visible. At that time, five sailboats were motoring past our port side. Suddenly, both shadows appeared ahead of the bow. We observed one and it had a steady course from the left toward our bow; the other shadow was slowly moving away from the bow to the right. The course of their navigation ahead of us could not be determined.

These observation positions were confirmed by the 1st deck officer, who was standing next to me on the anti-aircraft platform. A few minutes later, one MFP rushed past on the starboard side at a distance of 50 m. At that very moment, the shadow from the left area also rushed past in front of the bow and the collision occurred (KTB 10. Landungsflottille, 1944, p. 916).

One month after the accident, on January 17, 1945, the Naval High Command South reported to the Naval High Command: The investigation regarding the collision of KT 6 and F 956 has not yet been concluded. The question of fault has not been definitively clarified. Both convoys were aware of the possibility of meeting.

The following day, they issued a statement noting that the command of KT 6 should have given way to the first vessel approaching from the opposite direction (F 522) and could have maintained course and speed when passing the second one (F 956). Since from their observations they determined that the distance between the two was small and that the shadows, belonging to the same group, were on the same route. When KT 6 identified both vessels, it should have either slowed down, stopped, or turned the helm to port, and the collision would not have occurred. But they did none of the above.

As for the commander of F 956, they were critical of his deficient procedures in managing the situation on his vessel. They were most surprised that Guderian, after the collision, first went to F 522 and returned to the deck of F 956 when the crew began salvaging weapons and ammunition by order from KT 6.

The commander of the 10th Landing Fleet was ordered to punish Guderian for mismanagement of the boat and unmilitary behavior. They also noted the mitigating circumstance that at the moment of the collision, Guderian was thrown against the ship's plating and thus suffered head injuries. This was said to be the reason for his leaving the vessel and for the unclear orders to the crew.

The command also found it incomprehensible that the vessel was not towed to the nearby port of Piran, which would have certainly saved it, and instead they headed toward the bora wind toward Trieste (KTB 10. Landungsflottille, 1944).

As an interesting point, it should be noted that the command of the 10th Landing Fleet devoted 13 pages of hearings and findings to the shipwreck report. This is the only example in the German war diaries in the Adriatic where a staff so extensively investigated the causes and consequences of a specific event. No other naval battle, shipwreck, or collision at sea consumed as much paper as DTM F 956 near Piran.

Unfortunately, the speed of both vessels is not recorded anywhere. We can only guess that F 956 had a cruising speed of 7 knots and the oncoming KT 6 about 10 knots. The collision must have been violent, and it surprises me that they recorded only minor injuries among the crew. That Guderian left his vessel with most of the crew is completely understandable. KT 6 had climbed on top of them and was pushing them down with its own weight. F 956 was completely submerged from the stern over the command bridge to the middle of its length. It was night, December, the bora wind was blowing, and the crew was battered and soaked. Only when they managed to push KT 6 away did the injured commander Guderian return to his own vessel, where he supervised the salvage of part of the armament and the beginning of the towing of the sinking

vessel. The commander of landing transport vessel F 956, Edwin Guderian, survived the war and died in 1996.

Figure 12: crew on MFP F 956. Commander Edwin Guderian is on the far right (collection Matjaz Babic, 2021).

Kriegstransporter, KT 6

And a brief description of the co-participant in the maritime accident, the German military transport vessel of the KT "Kriegstransporter" class. Following the model of the American "Liberty" type merchant ship, the German navy produced its own smaller version with steam propulsion.

Figure 13: Paolo Klodic, Steamer KT6 (Civico museo del mare Trieste, 1945).

62 ships were built, but only KT 6, after the Italian capitulation, served in the eastern Mediterranean and the Adriatic. It was approximately 67 meters long, a good seventeen meters longer than "Kec", with a tonnage of 843 GRT. After a long period of evading Allied air and naval forces, it was sunk by Allied aircraft in the port of Rijeka on November 5, 1944. After being raised and quickly repaired, it participated in the evacuation of the Germans from Zadar on November 30. In mid-December 1944, it collided with our F 956, and on March 7, 1945, it sank again during an air attack in the Bay of Rasa (Wilhem M. Donko, 2018).

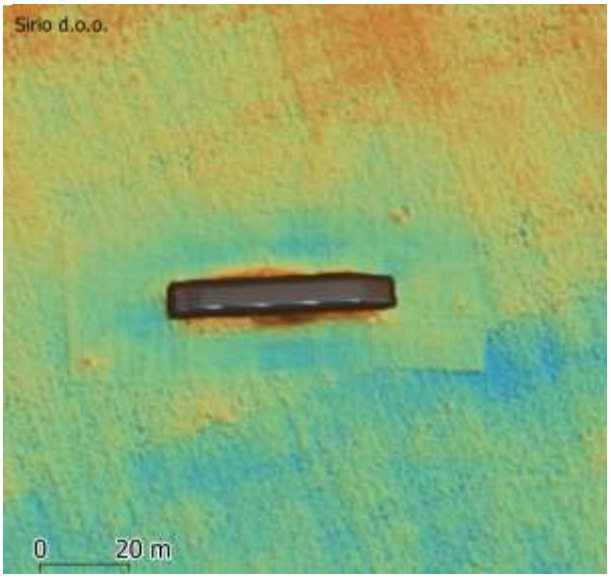
KT 6 w Monfalcone w lutym 1944 roku, uwagę zwraca ciekawe malowanie jednostki. Fot. zbiory Reinharda Kramera

Figure 14: KT 6 undergoing repairs at the Monfalcone shipyard in 1944 (www.paluba.info, 2022). In 1946, after a diving inspection, the wreck was renamed Karlo VI. Brodospas raised it to the surface in March 1947. The Yugoslav Navy took it over and added it to its units, giving it the name PT-21 "Krk" (auxiliary transport). Then it was renamed in 1949 to PT-21 "Tunj". Reportedly, along the Adriatic coast, it was colloquially called "Karlo". In 1962, it was decommissioned and a year later scrapped for iron. In its last years of operation, it could not exceed 12 knots due to engine deterioration (Zvonimir Freivogel, 2020, p. 245).

Figure 15: PT-21 and F-lighters during JRM exercises in 1951 (collection Zvonimir Freivogel). It is interesting how British intelligence and the RAF monitored the activity of German shipping in the Adriatic. After the war, an extensive report on air force activity was published, from which it is evident that they knew that F 956 had sunk in a collision with KT 6. In the report Losses of Enemy Shipping Traffic in December 1944, it was recorded: With the onset of winter and bad flying weather, the pressure of external demands on air power, and the increase in enemy nighttime shipping traffic, the air formations achieved little in December. Of the total losses they caused, there was only one sunk landing transport, one motor boat, one tugboat, three barges, and three sailboats. There were no amphibious operations and no evacuations to disturb the quiet routine of coastal shipping with which the enemy supplied its bases and troops. The navy also had no luck with enemy ships. Mines sank only two sailboats. MFP F 956 (naval ferry barge) was lost in a collision with KT 6 (the only military cargo ship still operating in the Adriatic) NW of Piran in the Gulf of Trieste on December 15... (Air Ministry - Air Historical Branch, 1944-1945, p. 299). Regarding the winter weather and the bora wind, we can see that for several days the Beaufighters of 272 Squadron RAF, equipped with rockets and specifically tasked with hunting all shipping from Venice to Losinj and Rijeka, were also grounded. On December 12, there were no flights. The next day, two Beaufighters flew over the sea to Savudrija without spotting anything. On December 14, there were no flights. On December 15, four aircraft flew only over the Marano lagoon to Udine at noon and in the afternoon, thus missing the moored F-lighters in Umag. On December 16, there were no flights. On December 17, they flew from Venice to Trieste without encounters, recording "very foggy" at 600 m altitude. On December 18, again there were no flights (TNA, AIR 27/1578/48, p. 6).

Current State of the Wreck

DTM Kec lies on the bottom upside down, with propellers facing the surface and guns facing the bottom. The starboard side is buried in the seabed at a depth of 23 meters. The port side is merely resting on the bottom and allows access to the living quarters inside through a small opening.



Pioneer sonar measurements in the Slovenian sea for archaeological purposes were carried out as early as 1984, producing a sonogram of DTM Kec. Current sonar measurements are carried out by the company Sirio d.o.o., formerly Harpha Sea, which between 1999 and 2005 performed seabed measurements of the Slovenian sea with side-scan sonar and single-beam echosounder. This was followed by systematic multibeam sonar surveys between 2006 and 2008 in a project funded by the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Slovenia (Poglajen and Slavec, 2012).

Figure 16: multibeam sonar image of the wreck on the seabed (Sirio d.o.o. Koper, 2022).

The hull is overgrown with oysters, and the interior of the living quarters and the cargo hold are quite silted up. The propeller shafts and propellers and both rudders are clearly visible. At the stern, the mount of the 20 mm anti-aircraft gun is clearly visible. Past it, a narrow entrance to the below-deck area opens to the right. Toward the middle of the hull, one enters the cargo hold from the side at the level of the anti-aircraft "quad gun" (Fierling). Here, one turns left into the latrines and ammunition storage. Through a hatch on the silted bottom, the mount of the 88 mm naval gun can still be seen. The cargo hold can be swum through its entire length to the loading ramp and provides a diverse shelter for marine life.

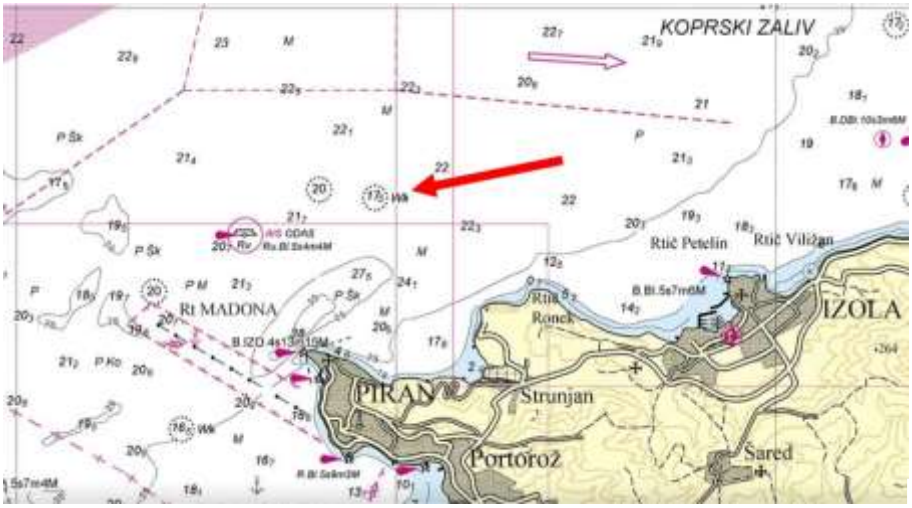


Figure 17: the wreck of DTM Kec is marked with an arrow on the nautical chart (Ministry of Infrastructure, Small Charts - Gulf of Trieste, 2023).

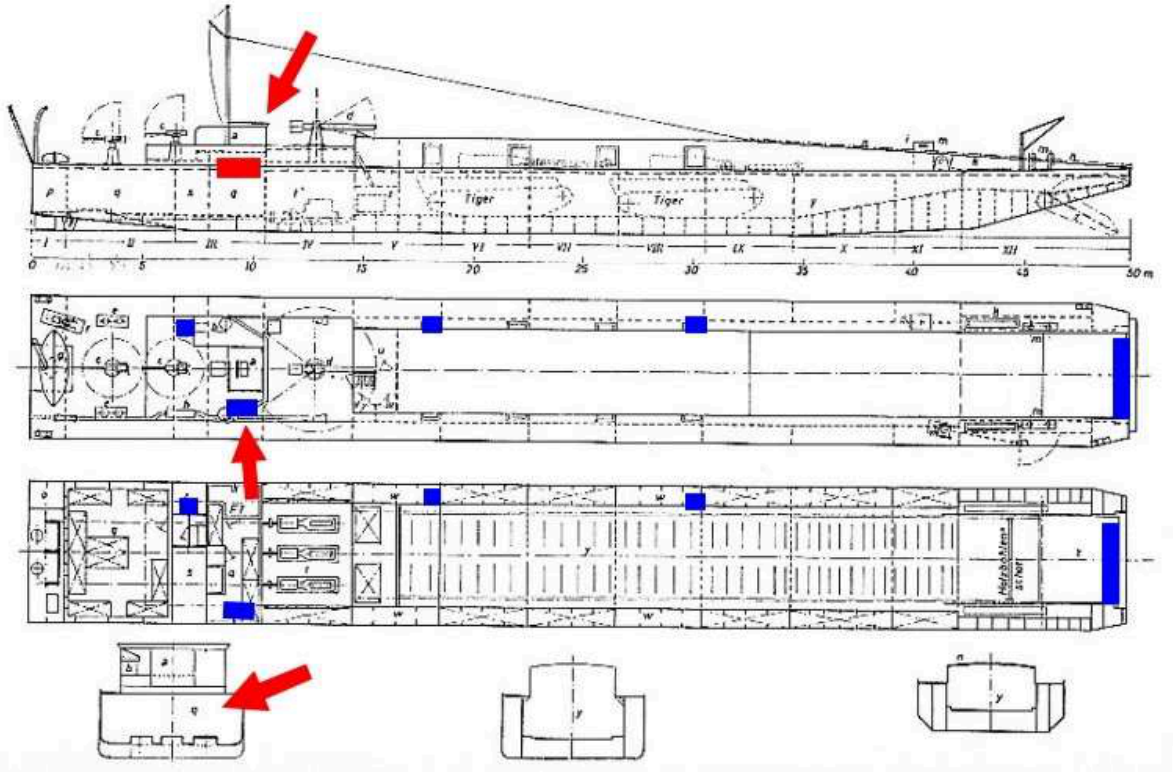


Figure 18: the point of collision is marked with a red arrow, and all current entrances into the interior of the vessel are marked in blue. On the upper sketch, in the third section of the ship, is the opening created during the collision with KT 6, which allows quick access to the radio room (Historisches Marinearchiv, 2021).

Figure 19: radio station in the radio room (photo: Germek).

Figure 20: silted 20 mm Oerlikon at the stern (photo: Germek).

Figure 21: left - mount of the 3.7 cm Breda anti-aircraft gun and right - narrow entrance through the below-deck area into the ship's corridor (photo: Germek).


Figures 22, 23: entrance to the ammunition storage and ship's latrine (photo: Germek). Proposal for Managing the Wreck for Diving Visits The DTM Kec vessel is the best-preserved ship from the Second World War in our sea and represents the only wreck that still has its rich armament. By excavating the deposited silt and sediment from under the ship's hull, the armament of the 20 mm anti-aircraft gun at the stern could be uncovered. At the same time, this would be a non-invasive intervention in the integrity of the cultural heritage itself. The work would begin at the stern port mooring bollard, where an access path 3 meters long, up to 50 cm deep, and 1 m wide would be created. By rough calculations, approximately 1.5 cubic meters of sediment would need to be suctioned. How quickly new silt would fill the excavation is not yet known. A zinc protection against galvanic currents would be placed on the uncovered gun barrel, which would mitigate the deterioration of the metal. Diving and viewing this interior section is not demanding and, with appropriate equipment with a rope, would ensure adequate safety for divers. There are no more unexploded ordnance in this section, as they were removed during a working action by divers and pyrotechnicians in June 2006. With video recordings from the documentary film Kec, which was released in 2008, we can compare the current state of the wreck after seventeen years. The hull is more overgrown, and corrosion has significantly affected certain parts of the structure. Safety measures against visits that were installed in the ammunition storage at that time are still in place. No damage or theft of wreck parts has been observed. With field measurements, the difference in siltation of the wreck's interior spaces could be compared.

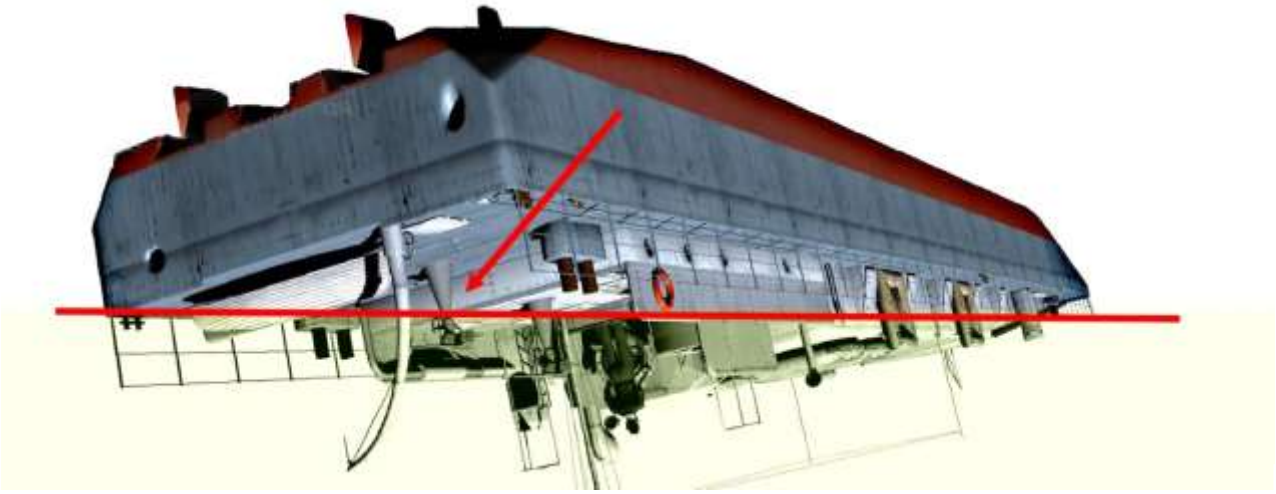


Figure 24: depiction of the wreck's position on the seabed. The arrow indicates the proposed excavation of the stern gun. The line marks the boundary of the superstructure's submersion in the sediment (drawing by Germek). Further excavation of sediment to the other 37 mm gun, the rudder, and the ship's 88 mm gun is not feasible. This intervention would require incomparably more time and archaeological experience than the first, partial excavation. Furthermore, the ship rests on them and the excavation could jeopardize its stability on the seabed and diver safety. It would be much easier to suction silt from the radio room. This would allow safe viewing of the interior space and the radio station, as well as the remains of the metal box of secret documents. An observation window could be created in the wall with the engine room, which would only allow a view of the ship's engines that hang from the current ceiling. Over time, the ship's engines will outlast the rusting base to which they are attached and will one day break off and fall to the floor. Therefore, it is important that the engine room remains inaccessible. The Maritime Museum Sergej Masera Piran, or the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, would manage the heritage in such a way that all interested diving clubs or companies engaged in courses would pay an annual membership fee for visiting the wreck. In return, the museum would maintain accessibility with a mooring buoy for boats and underwater safety for visitors with ropes and descriptive signs. As needed, newly deposited silt would be suctioned from the excavated sections, which could now also be measured.

Figure 25: the anchor of DTM Kec adorns the courtyard of the fire station in Visnja Gora. The anchor is a gift from the twinned Piran firefighters from 1979. The underwater raising of the anchor was performed by Zvone Kralj (photo: Germek). Summary The German navy in the Adriatic was at its peak in the summer of 1944. In the occupied Italian shipyards in Venice, Trieste, and Rijeka, several torpedo boats were completed and handed over for use; the first landing transports, anti-submarine corvettes, and destroyers were also assembled. The German navy was exhausted in the autumn of 1944 by Allied superiority in the air and at sea; additionally, the coast and islands were unsafe due to strong partisan activity. Toward the end of the war, the bulk of German logistics in the Adriatic depended only on landing transports, which, for safety from air raids, conducted maritime traffic only at night. Not far from Piran lies the wreck of a vessel with the popular name DTM Kec. It is the German MFP F 956 (Marinefaehrprahm). Built in Trieste, it was handed over to the 10th Landing Fleet on 14.10.1944.

After two successful months of navigation, on 15.12.1944 in the evening hours, it experienced a violent collision with the steamer KT 6 near Piran. DTM Kec suffered considerable damage and began to sink. The steamer attempted to tow it toward Trieste, but at the height of Strunjan, the DTM capsized and sank.
DTM Kec is the best-preserved ship from the Second World War in our sea and represents the only wreck that still has rich armament. It is a good tourist diving adventure. It currently represents an important spawning ground and shelter for fish life.

Summary
In the summer of 1944, the German navy in the Adriatic was at its peak. In the occupied Italian shipyards of Venice, Trieste and Rijeka, several torpedo boats were completed and put into operations. And the first F-lighters, anti-submarine corvettes and destroyers were assembled.
The leverage of the German navy in the autumn was great due to the Allied superiority in the air and at sea. Also the coast and the islands were not safe, due to the strong partisan movement.
Towards the end of the war, the bulk of German logistics in the Adriatic depended only on F-lighters, which sailed only at night due to day heavy air raids.
Not far from the town of Piran there is a wreck with the local name DTM Kec, it is the German MFP F 956 (Marinefaehrprahm). Built in Trieste, it was included in the 10th Landing Fleet on 10/14/1944. After two successful months of navigation, in the evening hours of 15 December 1944, it collided with the steamer KT 6 near Piran.
DTM Kec was significantly damaged and began to sink. The steamer tried to tow it towards Trieste, but at the height of Strunjan, the DTM turned and sank.
DTM Kec is the best-preserved ship from the Second World War in our sea and is the only shipwreck that still has its rich armament. It offers a good potential for divers and currently represents an important spawning ground and shelter for fish life.

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