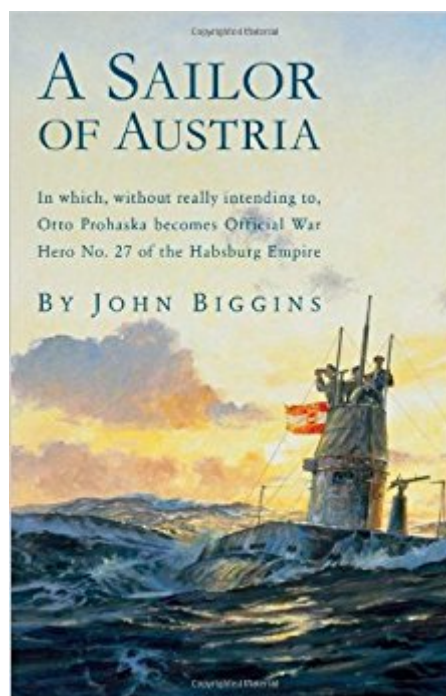


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A Sailor Of Austria: In Which, Without Really Intending To, Otto Prohaska Becomes Official War Hero No. 27 Of The Habsburg Empire (The Otto Prohaska Novels)



Synopsis

In this ironic, hilarious, and poignant story, Otto Prohaska is a submarine captain serving the almost-landlocked Austro-Hungarian Empire. He faces a host of unlikely circumstances, from petrol poisoning to exploding lavatories to trigger-happy Turks. All signs point to the total collapse of the bloated empire he serves, but Otto refuses to abandon the Habsburgs in their hour of need.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ignore the Kirkus Review and see what readers have to say. This is an extraordinary book. I read it perhaps two years ago, but it is unforgettable. One of the most enjoyable reads I've ever had. And a most unusual story. The life of a submariner in the Austro-Hungarian navy in the first world war? I think I learned a lot (the author is a scholar specializing in the history of that region) and it was a terribly amusing but realistic tale. I loaned it to a colleague with a love for sea stories, and he read it immediately and voraciously and was upset to find it was out-of-print as he wanted to send copies to friends. I rarely read books twice, but this is one I'd like to return to again and again.

Wonderful debut historical novel set in the Austro-Hungarian Empire circa WWI. The book is presented as the memoirs of a Polish Czech who served in the royal navy as a submarine commander. The bulk of the book focuses on his exploits in the fledgling submarine corps patrolling the Adriatic. Biggins is masterful at depicting the cramped life and sketchy technology of the earliest submarines. The detailed descriptions of combat are as gripping and engaging as anything in "The

Hunt for Red October", with the added bonus that Biggins can actually write. It is a very strong historical novel which manages to depict a confusing time and place with total believability. Highly recommended for those interested in Central Europe circa WWI and those interested in military history. Followed by The Emperor's Coloured Coat and The Two-Headed Eagle.

Most naval fiction is Napoleonic. Most of what's left is of the US and can range from the American Revolution to modern times. That takes care of about 95% of all that is out there. Most of the rest falls into a few types as well but this book is completely different. Little is ever written of the First World War and even less is ever written of Austria. When you have a story that involves Austrian U boats in the First World War, you know you have found something very different from average. This is such a book. Even better, it is interesting and well written. The book is a reminiscence of Otto Prohaska, an officer of the Habsburg monarchy. U Boats are still fairly new and are considered experimental. Otto does a good job of proving the technology and has a series of adventures in doing so. One of these involves trying to transport a live camel on a U Boat. The book has a sense of humor. It brings out some little known information about a neglected part of a seldom written of war. It is outstanding all around.

One of my favourite novels of the past decade. I think I've read it more than a dozen times and the appeal never fades. Not a conventional war story by any means, the book it most closely reminds me of, strangely, is Joseph Heller's classic "Catch 22". Although the books are poles apart, they are both concerned with the absurdity of war, but whereas "Catch 22" is black and manic, "A Sailor of Austria" is gently sardonic. Biggins accurately conveys the crumbling pretensions of the Austro-Hungarian empire and the utter meaninglessness of its military efforts in this tepid backwater of the War to end all Wars. Part of the allure of the story for me was the very obscurity of the campaign Biggins is describing. Prior to reading this I had no idea that Austro-Hungary even had a navy, let alone a submarine fleet. The depth of Biggin's research is obvious and extremely impressive. His hero and narrator, Otto Prohaska, is a likeable sea-dog, with a healthy cynicism regarding the doddering Empire he serves, but whose loyalty to that same crumbling edifice remains steadfast until it literally falls to pieces around him. The final scenes aboard his submarine as the Austro-Hungarian flag is taken down for the last time and his crew prepares to break up are among the the most moving in the book. The book has plenty more to recommend it - humour, romance, intrigue, in short a must-read for anyone interested in war and the sea.

This is my first review ever and probably my last but I was delighted to see this work reissued after a long hiatus. This rather "obscure" author is in my view far superior to better known historical-fiction genre authors such as Cornwell (the Sharpe series), let alone Clancy. In a nutshell, not only does Biggins place you into the WWI submarine service, he transports you into the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Navy with an accuracy and amusing flair rarely found. Alas, the set-up as an aging mariner in the UK is a bit tiresome but this is rapidly followed by his saga. I have read 3 other Biggins books; this is his first and best. I found it abandoned by a local library; for a while it was available online for a considerable price, so this is a bargain. Even though my military background is considerable, I needed to conduct some research to fully appreciate the nuances of this great saga of WWI. Don't hesitate to go to Wikipedia, e.g., to get a better feel for the now defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire and its military. I HIGHLY and UNRESERVEDLY RECOMMEND THIS BOOK to anyone with an interest in naval history, the First World War or simply good prose by a vastly underrated author. As you read this saga, you must ask how better the world today might be if this Empire were still intact!

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