The Imperial Russian Navy in the First World War: The Myth and the Reality

Senior Thesis

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Prof. Paul F. Jankowski, Advisor

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by

Robert T. Santamaria

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Robert T. Santamaria

Committee members (if applicable):

Name: ___________________________ Signature: ___________________________

Name: ___________________________ Signature: ___________________________

Name: ___________________________ Signature: ___________________________
Abstract

The Russian Imperial Navy has never been thought highly of, and this is especially true of the fleet of Nicholas II. This fleet has been maligned for its poor performance at Tsushima and its revolutionary activity that overthrew the Tsar and established Lenin's rule. It has been assumed that its ships were terrible, its technology was bad, and its officers were cowards or simply incompetent. However, these are mere myths. The following will address these incorrect assumptions by identifying the roots of the myths in the legacies of Tsushima and of the Bolshevik Revolution. The assumptions will then be corrected by demonstrating the technical strengths of the ships and the tactical creativity and visionary leadership of its officers. The myth of the Bolshevik sailor will also be disproved, for while the sailors were revolutionary, they were not Bolsheviks. The following will utilize memoirs and documents from the period as well newly published works to disprove the myths and correct the false assumptions.
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Introduction

When one thinks of the Russian military, one is invariably drawn towards the Russian army, that powerful and unrelenting host which brought about the end of conquerors and tyrants like Napoleon Bonaparte and Adolf Hitler. Ingrained in the Russian memory are the great leaders who defended Russia from the invaders and expanded her borders. Names like Nevsky, Suvorov, Kutusov, Brusilov, Zhukov, and above all Peter the Great ring today with the same glorious memory as when they won glory for Russia in the great wars. However, Russia is more than just a great land power, Russia is much more than the powerful grizzly bear that has so often mauled those who believed they could conquer her. Russia is a mighty polar bear, capable of combat on land and sea. Although today we may know the Russian Navy for its lost submarines, like the Soviet K-19 or the more recent Kursk disaster, the historical fleet of the Russian Empire had been a powerful and modern fleet for its day. This is especially true of the fleet of Nicholas II. Although the fleet of Russia's last monarch has been much maligned and mocked for its debacle at Tsushima, the fleet that fought in the First World War was not the incompetent force that many today wrongly imagine it to be. It was in fact as modern as Russia could possibly afford at the time. While small in size, the post-Tsushima fleet consisted of fully capable warships equipped with some of the finest naval artillery produced and certainly the best mine warfare doctrine among the great powers. Despite what Eisenstein and the Soviets wished to portray, the Russian Imperial Navy was not a mutinous collection of seaborne Bolsheviks oppressed and forced to fight by cowardly officers. Its captains were not dull aristocrats sending their men on suicidal missions while they relaxed safe onshore. Instead the officers were highly skilled and motivated, willing to put themselves at risk in battle in order to act decisively against a numerically superior foe.

How could there be such a disparity between the legend and the reality of the fleet? This thesis will provide an answer to this question by investigating Russian and Western sources. The flawed Soviet memory and the biased Western perceptions will be compared to explain why academic
differences have occurred. Naval designs and technical data will be analyzed to show the modernity of the ships and the superiority of artillery and mine technology. Combat records, from both Russian and German perspectives, will be used to show the aggressive and effective actions of the Russian fleet as well as to demonstrate its innovations, in particular land and sea coordination. First hand accounts by Russian officers will be used to explain the non-Bolshevik, but still revolutionary, nature of the personnel of the fleet. This of course is not to say that the fleet of Nicholas II was a fleet without flaws, for it was just as flawed as the state that created it, but that it is an impressive fleet for a state such as Russia to wield against the mighty German battleships that it faced in the Baltic and the Black Seas.

On the subject of sources it is important to begin with a disclaimer. The use of primary material is, unfortunately, limited. This is due in part to the challenge of finding original Russian documents from the reign of Nicholas II. It is difficult for an inexperienced researcher to find such documents, and translating them is a laborious process. Thankfully, many Russian nobles were multilingual and their exploits during the Great War and the Russian Civil War were popular in the English language press in the years immediately following the war. While these sources come from a limited section of the population, educated sea-going White Army emigres, they share many similar descriptions and generally describe only what the author himself saw during his service. While this clearly makes a biased sample, it is useful in presenting one side of an argument where no side has really been heard before. To supplement this, English language sources of the same period are also available and are useful, as are new books that rely heavily on previously unused primary source material.
Chapter I: Assumptions, 1905

The Root of the Problem: Tsushima

To begin, the general incorrect assumption is that the Imperial Russian Navy was an incompetent flotilla of rust-buckets waiting to be sunk or mutiny. While this is perhaps a slight exaggeration of the matter, to say that this does not reflect the commonly held perception of the fleet would be even more false. The Russian navy has always been doubted, as has the ability of the Russian at sea. However, it was difficult to point to a precise moment and say definitively that the Russians were bad at sea. That remained a challenge to prove until May 27, 1905. On that date, Russia's Baltic Fleet, then renamed the Second Pacific Squadron, provided the world with perhaps the most referenced example of naval incompetence and failure yet known. The Battle of Tsushima played out as a completely lopsided battle with results far more horrible than the annihilation of the Spanish squadrons at the hands of Dewey in 1898. During this battle, and in its aftermath, all the negative tropes of the Russian Navy were exhibited. Cowardice, incompetence, malevolence, feuds, and mutinies all played a role in the debacle.

Before being able to discuss the battle, it is necessary to describe the absurd journey of the Baltic Fleet from its base in Kronstadt all the way to its fate at the bottom of the Straits of Tsushima, a journey half way around the world. Before even leaving Europe, the Baltic Fleet managed to cause a ridiculous incident that set the tone for the entire voyage. After passing Skagerrak the fleet had received information that Japanese torpedo-boats were operating in the North Sea. How that even began to make sense is unknown, but that was their information and the Russian commander, Admiral Z.P. Rozhestvensky, ordered the fleet to be on alert for Japanese attackers. At night while passing through Dogger Bank a flotilla of small boats was sighted and identified as Japanese torpedo-boats. Of course, there was no way for Japanese torpedo-boats to have been in the North Sea unless Britain had joined the war, and if that was the case then torpedo-boats would be the least of their concerns.
Instead, this small flotilla was a group of English fishing trawlers. The Russian ships opened fire and sank one of the fishing boats. However that was not the end of the night's incident as later the Russian cruiser division, which had lost contact with the fleet earlier, came back into view of the main battle line. The battleships mistook the cruisers *Aurora* and *Dmitri Donskoj* as Japanese scout cruisers and opened fire, scoring six hits in quick succession in the dark. A Russian officer aboard the battleship *Suvorov* put a silver lining on the event by saying, “the only comforting thought is that our gunnery is good.”

On their way to Africa, the fleet anchored at Tangier where the cruiser *Anadyr* managed to get her anchor caught on a cable. The cable was ordered cut by an impatient Rozhestvensky who desperately wanted to get his ships to Port Arthur as soon as possible in order to relieve the beleaguered garrison. It was only when they reached Dakar that the Russians realized what they had done. The cable that was cut had been the only direct telegraph cable between Europe and Africa. Now having severed direct connections between the European powers and their colonies, the Russian fleet appeared to many as a menace to society. King Edward VII had already been considering a war against Russia over the incident at Dogger Bank and his subjects had taken to calling Rozhestvensky's ships “the squadron of mad dogs.” The British even escorted the battleship division to Tangier, fearing another Dogger Bank. Of course, this escort could not have prevented the *Anadyr’s* encounter with the cable, and so the mad dogs continued their journey replete with collateral damage.

After Tangier, the destruction factor lessened, as civilian ships began giving the Russians plenty of space lest they too be mistaken for Japanese torpedo-boats. Rozhestvensky then faced the ridiculous assignment of waiting for the arrival of additional ships sent from St. Petersburg. These ships were not welcome reinforcements, as they were in fact the worst and oldest ships in the entire fleet. Rozhestvensky himself had determined not to take the ships with him when he left Russia, but political pressures from the desk-jockey Captain Klado induced the Tsar to send the ships out as
reinforcements. These ships were an unwelcome addition to the fleet, and pressures to await their arrival delayed Rozhestvensky in Madagascar from December until March, when he finally left without them. It was only on April 26 in the waters of French Indochina that the broken and rusting reinforcements managed to link up with the main fleet.

The main damage of these unsolicited reinforcements was not their uselessness, although Rozhestvensky did say, “Nebogatov adds four bad warships and eight transports to defend, which will be a burden for the squadron.” Instead, it was the long wait, almost five months, that did the most damage to the fleet. Not only did crew morale suffer due to being stuck at sea for such an extended period of time, but five months in the tropics plagued them with an assortment of ailments. Heat stroke was particularly common, but every other tropical disease was encountered as well. Bad news, such as the fall of Port Arthur, did not help morale either. Of course, the ships suffered just as badly as the crews. The hulls were fouled by a buildup of barnacles, reducing speed and increasing coal consumption. Having been at sea and in constant operation since September 1904, the tired engines were in a bad state. Many ships had engine trouble, Felkersam's detachment actually broke down as it reattached to Rozhestvensky's command in Madagascar. On top of the overburdened engines and fouled hulls, the ships were overloaded with coal, making them rest deeper in the water than would be safe. Excess coal was carried because Rozhestvensky was rightly concerned that his inefficient fleet would exhaust its fuel before it could reach Vladivostok, the target after he was informed of the fall of Port Arthur. The fleet was able to reach the battle space, however they did so at a sluggish pace. When battle began, Rozhestvensky's fleet could make a battle speed of just 8 kts to Togo's 15 kts. That of course is not to say that Rozhestvensky's ships were all slow, as some ships were rather fast, such as the cruisers Izumrud and Zhemchug. However, the fleet's battle speed, the highest speed it could maintain in combat while keeping cohesion, was limited by the unreliable support ships and the even less reliable ships of Nebogatov's 3rd Pacific Squadron. It is important to keep in mind this
decayed state of the Russian ships that reached Tsushima when evaluating their subsequent performance.

When the battle began on May 27, 1905, Rozhestvensky issued orders for the fleet to move from line ahead to line abreast formation. Rozhestvensky had thought that the Japanese would attack him head on, so by taking up a line abreast formation all his ships would be able to engage the enemy. However, the Japanese came from the side, forcing Rozhestvensky to redeploy to line ahead. Errors in signaling and execution resulted in the fleet forming two parallel columns, offering the worst aspects of both formations without any of the benefits. This formation limited forward firepower as well as halving the fleet's broadside potential, as half the fleet's guns would be blocked by the other ships of the fleet in any direction. This limitation on firepower combined with poor Russian accuracy, as the crews were ill-trained and in poor health, to allow the Japanese to execute a dangerous maneuver that placed their line perpendicular to the Russian course. Upon taking this commanding position, crossing the T as Nelson was always fond of, the Japanese poured accurate shellfire into the Russian block. As Rozhestvensky had inexplicably stopped giving orders after the shooting commenced, the Russians just plodded along absorbing Japanese fire.

Besides the accuracy of the Japanese gunners, the Japanese shells had the horrifying ability to set fires as well as release poison gases. While the Japanese shells did not penetrate armor, they exploded with such intensity that the paint of the Russian ships caught fire, a disturbing image that many Russians took to mean that the steel was burning. The poisonous fumes of the shells also did not help matters as the gases killed, or in the best cases disoriented, the Russian crews. One Russian surgeon likened the effect of the gases to a combination of severe bronchitis, dehydration, and headache, all of which he said “had a psychological effect.” With the ships being slow moving and poorly maneuverable due to their extended time at sea, the fleet was a sitting, or rather slowly moving, duck for accurate Japanese gunnery. Combining the psychological as well as physically damaging
aspects of the Japanese shells, which were said to create holes “big enough to drive a troika through,” it is without wonder that the Russians ships were so effectively destroyed by the Japanese.\textsuperscript{18}

What is surprising though is how the Russian sailors put up with these difficulties. The crew of the battleship \textit{Borodino} kept firing and manning their guns even as the ship slipped under the waves.\textsuperscript{19} The flagship \textit{Kynaz Suvorov} also went down fighting. Even after Rozhestvensky and many officers were evacuated, the crew and the remaining officers kept fighting, and even issued a cheer for the evacuation of their injured admiral.\textsuperscript{20} Even when completely outgunned and outmatched, when morale had already suffered and the ships were already broken by extended time at sea, the sailors kept fighting. It could be said that it was panic and fear that kept them firing, just as it was panic and fear that scared the crews to fire at Dogger Bank when their officers attempted to stop them. It could have been that they saw no way out other than to kill or be killed. It could have been that they were patriotically defending the Fatherland from the enemy, and so refused to abandon their posts. It could have been a number of things that kept the crews fighting long after the situation had become hopeless, but it is important to note that they kept fighting. As the French General Staff said of the Russian sailor in 1898, “He has stamina, selflessness, and devotion … These qualities make the Russian an admirable soldier; but it is one thing to attack the enemy bravely in hand-to-hand combat, and something quite different to attack him with the complicated machines that are modern naval vessels.”\textsuperscript{21}

Despite the bravery of the Russians, there was no chance that Rozhestvensky could have won a victory at Tsushima. The task was simply impossible. No fleet could be expected to sail 18,000 miles around the world, with an undesirable three month delay in the harsh tropical conditions of Madagascar, before engaging a well-trained and well-maintained enemy on a battle space familiar to the foe. The fact that the Russians accomplished two world records in the process, one being the longest journey by a coal-powered steel battle fleet and the second being the most coal loaded in one hour by a single ship, is impressive but does not change the outcome of the campaign.\textsuperscript{22} The simple
fact was that at Tsushima the Baltic Fleet, which had been sent out six months earlier, finally was annihilated at the hands of the Japanese. Even more humiliating was that four of the battleships were captured by the Japanese and put into service against Russia. It is this humiliation that is remembered in both in the West and not the bravery of the Russian sailors who knowingly went to their deaths on May 27. The Russians themselves recalled the bravery, but the fleet was greatly shamed for the debacle, which came back to them in 1914 when the Japanese offered to sell three of the captured battleships back to Russia.

The Issue of Fleet Culture

As a result of Tsushima, the Russians went into the First World War with more or less a new fleet in the Baltic. However, the new ships did not solve the innumerable cultural problems of the fleet, some of which had plagued it from its birth. The fleet had problems of armchair admirals directing active service captains, bureaucrats squabbling with admirals over funds, problems of patronage and nepotism, and the continuation of what was essentially serf-squire relations. The last problem, class conflict, was exacerbated by the cramped confines of the iron-hulled warships. The fleet in 1914 appeared as more or less a case study in Russian social problems, magnified among the small numbers of the fleet. The extent of these problems invariably leads to the creation of a poor image for the Russian fleet going into the war.

From the very beginning, the Russian fleet has had problems that they have referred to as “economizing.” The navy was criticized after Tushima for “economizing on training,” just as it was after the Crimean War for saving instead of investing in new technology. According to Belavenets, the Fleet's chief historian after the Russo-Japanese War, where the Russians saved on ammunition and did not train, the Japanese expended it in long gunnery exercises. Belavenets quotes a Japanese source as saying that in the interim between the Battle of Port of Arthur and the Battle of Tsushima, the
“Japanese expended five battle complexes” of shells. This translates to mean that the Japanese spent about five naval depots worth of ammunition for the fleet's heavy guns in target practice. As he also points out, target practice was an unheard of concept in Russia, “squadrons were for a long time delayed in leaving because ammunition was not ready and it was supplied to them in the most limited of quantities.” The famed A.V. Kolchak said as much in a 1920 interrogation with the Cheka, “Target practice was only done so as to acquit ourselves of an assignment... our navy did not know how to shoot.” Even worse, the economizing of the shells went so far as to reduce production costs by using substandard quality materials. At Tsushima, the Russian shells were not even made of steel, but were instead made of poor quality iron. As a result, the far less resilient iron failed to pierce armor and instead shattered on impact. With this poor quality ammunition, the few Russian shots that landed on target during Tsushima failed to cause any damage. Having already discussed the outcome of Tsushima, the result of this economizing has already been made evident.

In 1914, the main source of Russian savings was on coal. The Russians a had a moderate stockpile of anthracite coal with which to fuel their ships when the war began. The problem was that this coal was not sourced domestically, and instead came from Britain. While in peacetime it seemed sensible to source coal from Britain as it was the cheapest source of quality coal, in wartime the decision meant that the fleet could not resupply its coal stores. As the coal passed through the Baltic on its way to the main bases at Helsingfors and Kronstadt, the moment the war began the Germans could cut that route if the British did not immediately abandon it themselves. By August of 1914, those shipments through the Baltic ended and the fleet was left without coal. Even before, when the threat of war was with Britain, the Russians sourced their coal there. The only explanation for sourcing essential coal from the expected enemy would be, as the Russians say, economizing.

There were of course reasons for the economizing: the navy's share of the defense budget was minuscule. In 1914, the navy received just 8.7% of military spending while the army took the rest.
In 1913, the navy took in 25.46% of military spending, but this amounted to just 30,000,000 rubles more than in 1914. In comparison, the army took 716,718,000 rubles for its expenses. During the period from 1907 to 1914, when the Tsar promoted a new “small plan” for naval development, the navy received a total of 1,142,158,000 rubles of which 870,000,000 rubles were allocated to new constructions. Of that 870,000,000 rubles only 352,200,000 rubles were actually spent on new warships. Considering the inefficiencies of Russian naval yards, it was estimated that Russian yards cost 40% more to build ships than to buy them from abroad, the budget appears much less impressive.

In this regard, the fleet of Nicholas II paralleled the fleets of former Russian monarchs. Since the time of Peter the Great when the fleet was first created, the fleet had been a non-continuous institution. Its pattern has been that one monarch builds it up while the successor lets it rot at the docks. As Belavenets said, “Under the successors of Peter the Great too little attention was paid to the fleet as a result of which it grew weaker, and the malicious economizing which went so far as the forbidding of sending ships to sea without a special royal command on every occasion.” Under Catherine the Great the fleet was revived, but under her son Paul I it once again fell to pieces. Under Alexander I the fleet took to sea once more in the Napoleonic Wars, but its legacy was shattered by the Anglo-French at Sevastopol during the reign of Nicholas I. Under Alexander II, with the guidance of his brother Grand Duke Constantine, the fleet was reborn. During the reign of Alexander III the fleet stagnated after the forced retirement of Constantine, but it was again expanded in the 1890's. Unfortunately, Nicholas II squandered that at Tsushima and the navy's prestige was severely damaged, leading into another period of decline.

The problem of the cycles of rise and decline was pointed out by Grand Duke Constantine Nikolaevich during the cycle which ended with the Crimean War. What he noticed was that the cycle had a negative impact on morale as it denied the fleet a tradition from which to draw inspiration and motivation. He compared this to his opponent, the British Royal Navy, which had a long and
successful naval tradition. In a memorandum from February of 1854, Constantine noted that, “It is said, perhaps, that the English captains are no more experienced than ours because their present generation has not seen war. This remark would be true to some extent, but against this it can be seen that the uninterrupted service at sea … the present generation had kept alive the traditions of the previous.” He follows this with a simple question: “can we say the same about our captains?” To this question, the answer is no. As the Grand Duke noted, the English could draw upon the great glories won by Drake and Nelson passed down by word of mouth through a continuous line of sailors spanning generations. For the Russians, the cycles of decline meant that by 1854 the glories of Ushakov were already disconnected stories from a forgotten age. By Tsushima, Constantine himself had been forgotten in the past. Despite the Russian cultural tradition of its heritage, the cycles left Russian naval development stuttered and inconsistent, with each new cycle having to reinvent the basics. In terms of training, this meant no seasoned NCO’s to teach the new recruits in seamanship, which resulted in poor quality seamen. In terms of morale, the lack of glorious tradition left room for revolutionary activity to grow, a problem that became increasingly apparent from 1905 onward. These issues were clearly displayed in 1854, and by 1914 the problems were only magnified by the inability to correct them while the numbers of personnel in the fleet grew.

After Tsushima, the fleet had the problem of rebuilding and replacing the sailors lost in battle. Officer replacement was not as a significant an issue as many officers had abandoned their ships during the battle, and so survived where their crews died fighting. The need for replacements compounded the problem of decline because the veterans were dead and morale was shattered by the defeat. To make matters worse, there was a revolutionary problem within the skilled and semi-skilled labor class. When recruiting for the navy, the personnel conscripted can not just be any random tavern drunk like with the army. The navy instead drew its stock from coastal communities, where the people had a seafaring tradition. In the age of steel and steam battleships, the navy also required skilled labor to maintain and
operate the advanced machinery. Between these two conditions was a small pool of men capable of fleet service. According to Stephen McLaughlin, the personnel of the Baltic Fleet was drawn mostly from Russians, with the Balts and the Finns intentionally excluded from conscription. This led to an even smaller pool from which to draw recruits. This small pool was concentrated in the largest industrial center of the region, which was coincidentally not only the empire's capital but also the center of revolutionary activity in Russia. Soviet historians in the 1960's would later make it the central point of their studies to identify the class origins of the sailors in order to prove the inherent Bolshevism of the sailors. In the Black Sea, 65% of the sailors were Ukrainians, which meant that in 1918 the fleet was torn between duty to White Russia, Soviet sympathies, and Ukrainian nationalism.

Among the officers, the ethnic discrimination was not so much an issue. The officer corps consisted of not only Russians, but Finns, Swedes, Poles, and Baltic Germans. There was of course one problem with the officer corps: it consisted almost entirely, 93 percent, of men from the aristocracy. Unlike the army, which had taken in an increasing portion of non-noble origin officers, the navy remained the preserve of the nobility and the gentry. Like the Baltic Fleet which sank at Tsushima, the Baltic Fleet of 1914 was still the source of occupation for the sons of the mid to low level nobility. Condensed within the officer corps was the stereotypical squire: a man who was just there but did not really do anything useful other than harass his peasants. The officers, as was customary for the time, did not interact with the men outside of giving commands and remained aloof and contemptuous. The sailors, being a condensed population of workers with revolutionary sympathies, viewed the officers as the embodiment of everything wrong with the aristocracy. Unsurprisingly, relations between the officers and the crews were poor.

Mutiny is the best expression of how poor such relations were, and there is no better known mutiny than that of the battleship Kniaz Potemkin Tavrichesky. This mutiny, immortalized in Eisenstein's classic film Battleship Potemkin, has perhaps had an even greater impact on the perception
of the fleet than any of the issues already discussed. Where Tsushima displayed incompetence, the

Potemkin mutiny displayed outright rebellion and revolution. The events of the mutiny are well

known: rotten rations incite the crew to revolt, the sailors kill the officers, the ship sails around the
Black Sea with the loyal fleet dithering about in a half-hearted attempt to catch them, and the ship is
finally scuttled in Romania. The political repercussions of the mutiny were highly influential, affecting
not only the ruling regime but also the revolutionaries who wanted to change it. However, the mutiny
has perhaps had a greater impact on how the fleet has been viewed and to this day remains an important
lens through which many view the Russian Imperial Navy. Just as it did then, when officers thought,

“Each time the Black Sea Fleet sails, I fear lest another Potemkin be among them, and another
Matyushenko amongst its crew,” the image of the mutiny still haunts present views of the fleet.42 This
view owes much of its staying power to Eisenstein's film. The film has been lauded for almost a
century, at one point in 1958 it was even considered the world's greatest film, and is still today
considered “one of the fundamental landmarks of cinema.”43 As the famed critic Roger Ebert pointed
out, “Its famous massacre on the Odessa Steps has been quoted so many times in other films (notably
in `The Untouchables’) that it's likely many viewers will have seen the parody before they see the
original.”44 It is a quintessential image in cinema that knowledge of the scene, which is completely
fictional, is taken for granted. In fact, that image is so pervasive that, “the bloodshed on the Odessa
Steps is often referred to as if it really happened.”45 The film, very much to Lenin's adage about lies
and truths, has successfully poisoned how people today view the Russian Imperial Navy. At the
mention of the Imperial Russian Navy, a person today is likely to think of Eisenstein's film and view it
as a repressive and backwards element instead of as a modern fighting force. In this way, due to its
cultural staying power, Eisenstein's film has done more to discredit the Russian fleet then the actual
problems that fleet faced going into the war.
The Farce at Penang

Russian shortcomings of the pre-war period certainly presented a poor image for the fleet, but there were also disasters during the war that have presented similarly negative views of the fleet. Even when the fleet was not at fault, poor performance by the land forces can cause a poor image for the entire Russian military. Mistakes by the Tsar cast a shadow over the entire military and the destruction of his regime left no institutions behind to glorify the fleet. On top of this, the fleet did have one particularly embarrassing episode early in the war.

The 3rd class cruiser Zhemchug was launched in 1903 at the Nevksy Yards in St. Petersburg. Displacing 3106 tons 347.5 feet in length with a beam of 41.5 feet and a draft of 16 feet, she was similar in size to her foreign counterparts. Her engine to could develop 17,000 horsepower capable of propelling the ship at 23 knots, making her one of the fastest ships in the Russian fleet. Like her near-sister Novik, lost during the Russo-Japanese War, she was designed for colonial service, possessing the long range and speed for quick responses to colonial problems. Armed with eight 4.7 inch quick-fire guns, each firing a 46 pound projectile at 2,700 feet per second, the Zhemchug could penetrate up to 9 inches of enemy armor at a range of 2,000 yards. Compared to the more modern Dresden-class light cruisers of Germany, the Zhemchug had a significant advantage in firepower. The Dresdens were armed with ten 10.5 cm SK L/40 guns firing a 35 pound shell at a muzzle velocity of 2,300 feet per second. In terms of torpedo armament, the Zhemchug had four submerged 18 inch torpedo tubes to the Dresden's two. In respect to size and speed, the the Zhemchug and the Dresden-class ships were equals. However, despite the massive superiority in firepower, when the Zhemchug met the Dresden-class cruiser Emden in October of 1914, things did not turn out in her favor.

On October 13, 1914 the Zhemchug was sent from Hong Kong to Penang to form up with an Allied squadron in order to hunt the soon to be famous German raider Emden. Penang, normally a civilian port, had been militarized by the British as a base from which they could hunt down the
Already operating from the area was the British light cruiser *Yarmouth* and a squadron of French torpedo-boats and torpedo-boat destroyers. On October 28, the French destroyer *Mosquet* was patrolling the outer harbor while the *Zhemchug* and the other three French ships lay anchored in the inner harbor, *Yarmouth* having left days earlier to chase after German colliers. The previous night the captain of the *Zhemchug*, Captain 2nd Rank I. A. Cherkassov, had gone ashore to meet his mistress, and as was customary, he took the keys to the ship's stores with him. Early on October 28, a four-funnelled light cruiser resembling *Yarmouth* steamed into port past the *Mosquet*. The ship then pulled up to the *Zhemchug*, raking her with shell fire before sinking her with a torpedo. *Mosquet* slowly realized that the ship was not the *Yarmouth* and was instead the *Emden* rigged with a dummy fourth funnel. She gave chase to the fleeing German raider, but was terribly outgunned and was quickly destroyed. The Russians lost 88 men killed and 121 wounded. Within 50 minutes of the first shots fired, both *Zhemchug* and *Mosquet* were sent to the bottom as the victorious *Emden* sailed off.

In the aftermath of the battle, Cherkassov and his first officer Kubilin were sacked and lost their standing in the table of ranks. Cherkassov was court-martialed for taking the ship's keys ashore, which resulted in the *Zhemchug*'s slow response to the *Emden*'s attack. Kubilin was court-martialed for the loss of the ship and the inability of the ship's gun crews to hit the *Emden*, despite the fact that it was his efforts that spurred the ship to action. The powerful *Zhemchug* had been quickly defeated by the very ship it was sent out to hunt. The poor response of the Russian crew was noticed by observers. One noted that the *Zhemchug* failed to hit the *Emden* even at a range of 200 yards and instead “peppered every nearby merchant ship.” The Russian fleet was once again shamed in Asian waters, perhaps more so now that it was clear that the gun crews could not hit the broadside of a ship at a stone's throw away. The only mitigating factor in the debacle was that the Germans left without realizing they could have sunk the three surviving French torpedo-boats at anchor, since it was 30 minutes after the *Zhemchug* went down that one of those ships left its berth.
With the failure at Penang it appeared that the Russians were not capable of operating on the sea, especially the Pacific. Poor response time and even worse accuracy all damned the Russians to failure at Penang. Of course, the locked munition stores and the lack of a captain during the engagement did not help such matters. Undoubtedly, the Battle of Penang displays the worst traits of the Russian navy. However, it would be incorrect to place blame upon the entire fleet for the failure at Penang. The Zhemchug was anchored in a secure allied port. Penang was in fact one of the main bases for the hunt for the Emden and as a result it was supposedly well-guarded. Three of the French ships were at anchor just like the Zhemchug, with many of their officers onshore as well.\footnote{When the Emden entered the harbor she was flying the British ensign and was rigged to look like the British cruiser Yarmouth, a disguise which could not be disproved in the early light of the morning. The resulting attack came as a complete surprise when the British ship turned out to be German. The British who commanded the port obviously did not expect the Emden to come sailing into the hunting squadron's main base, and so discipline was lax. With the French crews and the British garrison in such a calm state, the Russians could hardly have done anything else but accept the calm and do as their allies did. By the time the Russians broke open the munitions lockers and began manning the guns, the ship had already been raked by German fire, throwing it in disarray. The short range of the engagement meant that German fire could be exceptionally accurate and the rapid fire of the 10.5 cm guns and machine-guns could keep the decks of the Zhemchug clear. To stand by the exposed guns on deck was suicidal, yet the sailors took their places and attempted to fight back. Under such a withering fire, how could they be expected to take aim? Even if they were to aim, a German torpedo was already in the water, and a ship that is at anchor is a ship that can not maneuver. Despite the bravery of Senior Lieutenant Kubilin and the gun crews, the Zhemchug had no chance once the Emden slipped past the Mosquet into the harbor.}
When the battle commenced, it took 30 minutes for one French ship to steam over to where the
Zhemchug had sunk. The British garrison did nothing but watch the Zhemchug and Mosquet sink, only
setting up a field hospital after the French started bringing survivors ashore. As the New York Times
correspondent who witnessed the battle said, “[The failures of the Zhemchug] become insignificant
when we consider the case of the French torpedo-boats, whose help the Zhemchug had a right to
expect. Here they lay in the harbor with fully ten minutes warning of a hostile ship approaching. Yet
they allowed that ship to enter the harbor, steam around it, turn, and make her escape without so much
as firing a shot.”57 Russia's allies had clearly failed her, a theme which would continue throughout the
war. However, the battle still reflected poorly on Russia.
Chapter II: Doctrine, 1907-1908

Before going any further, and getting to the actual performance of the Russian fleet in the First World War, it is important to stop and identify the primary schools of thought that guided world navies in the early Twentieth Century. In this age of coal and steel battleships, although the line tactics of the fleet were reminiscent of the old age of sail, new views of naval power and the development of new technologies fundamentally changed the way naval war was planned and conducted. Some focused on continuing the old lines of battle while others advocated the abandonment of the battleship itself. All agreed however, that the technologies and developments of the day would make naval warfare unrecognizable from what it had been for hundreds of years.

Alfred Thayer Mahan and the Battleship

Of the late 19th Century naval theorists, none was more well-known and more influential than the American admiral and historian Alfred Thayer Mahan. Mahan had been active in historical naval discussions as well as policy debates from 1883 until his death in 1914. During his lifetime he saw the transition of sail to steam and from wood to iron, but the most radical changes occurred during his career as a writer. It was in this time that the ironclad battleship came into its own and the purpose of the navy seemed to change as European powers became more extensively involved in colonization across the globe.

What Mahan realized in the 1880's, culminating in his 1890 publication of The Influence of Sea Power on History, was that in the game of war the object is generally to take resources, of which commerce is the most significant. As he said in his introduction to the famed text, “The profound influence of sea commerce upon the wealth and strength of countries was clearly seen long before the true principles which governed its growth and prosperity were detected. To secure one's own people a disproportionate share of such benefits, every effort was made to exclude others.” In the 1880's, this
commerce had become increasingly important as its scale grew exponentially, as it was the middle of the massive economic growth of Globalization II. Not only was inter-state commerce larger than it ever was before, but intra-state, or rather intra-empire, commerce was larger as well, and even more diverse. The massive trade network operated by Great Britain during the Victorian Era had outposts in locations from the bustling urban cities of Europe, to the mines of Africa, to far-flung Pacific islands. With these massive trading networks spanning across the oceans, the ships of the great powers carried the goods and wealth produced from one corner of the globe to the other. Even the mostly isolated Russian Empire had a significant tonnage of merchant shipping, even though it appeared minuscule in comparison to any of the other great powers.

However, the challenge of protecting that valuable trade had been made greater by its scale. How could the British or the French be able to defend their vast global trade from the other? It is an impossibility of scale to attempt to guard the ships by patrolling the shipping lanes. Large scale convoys became increasingly impractical as the scale of shipping would simply create excessive traffic and delays. To overcome these challenges, Mahan proposes the idea of guarding the “cross-roads,” the intersection of multiple shipping lanes. At these strategic locations, flotillas could be positioned to defend the area from enemy raiders. Of course, the value of the cross-roads is equally apparent to the raiders, who can see it as an area where shipping will be likely to pass through. Even if in times of war, when merchant ships may scatter from established routes to avoid interception by raiders, the civilian shipping must pass through certain cross-roads to reach its destination. The English Channel, Straits of Gibraltar, the Suez Canal, and the Straits of Malacca are just a few notable cross-roads that ships at the time passing from Europe to the Pacific were likely to pass through. For a ship passing from the Western Pacific to the Atlantic, in the time of of Mahan there was but one option, the Straits of Magellan. Shortly before his death, the Panama Canal opened, creating another important cross-roads for trade.
To respond to this, navies invested not in the ironclad battleship but the armored cruiser. Whereas the battleship was built to wield heavy guns and take hits, the armored cruiser was designed for endurance so that it could sit on station and deter or engage raiders. The problem with the armored cruiser was that it was necessarily cheaper than a battleship and that one needed many of them to cover the numerous straits, as the Royal Navy came to find out in the early 1900's. In exchange for armor and firepower, the armored cruiser received a reliable engine and plenty of stores, but did not trade any of the costs. As merchant ships became faster, as they adopted more powerful steam engines to get their goods around the world faster, it became apparent that the indefatigable but ponderously slow armored cruisers would have trouble coping with raiders which would likely get faster to catch their prey. The development of protected cruisers and scout cruisers, all in the scope of the light cruiser, as high speed offensive weapons posed a challenge to the armored cruiser. In Britain there was a additionally the fear of fast merchant ships being converted into commerce raiders. The armored cruiser, of which there were never enough to guard all the important locations, was simply an inefficient means of guarding trade. It was of course more efficient than anything previously tried, but it was a flawed system.

Given the difficulty of running down a fast raider, the intention should then be to prevent those raiders from taking to sea. For Mahan, this meant a blockade of the enemy's harbors. Mahan distinguished between two types of blockade: the close blockade and the commercial blockade. The purpose of the commercial blockade is to cut off supplies to the enemy army. However, it does not just extend to blocking military imports. “Money, credit, is the life of war; lessen it, and vigor flags; destroy it, and resistance dies,” as Mahan said. “It [the seizure of private property on the sea] is a belligerent measure which touches every member of the hostile community, and, by thus distributing the evils of war, as insurance distributes the burden of other losses, it brings them home to every man, fostering in each a disposition to peace.” The idea of the close blockade, to deny enemy ships the
ability of action on the sea, is not actually designed to keep the enemy locked to port and out of the war. It is instead a tool used to force the enemy to take the offensive, whereby the blockading fleet becomes the defender and thus receives certain tactical advantages. “If compelled to choose between fortified ports of the enemy and his fleet, the latter will be regarded as the true objective; but a blockade or an attack upon them, may be the surest means of bringing the ships within reach.”

Leaving harbor to attack the blockading force, the besieged ships have limited space to maneuver while the now defending blockading force has the entire ocean to take up “the decisive position.” At the end of the day, the purpose of the fleet is to destroy the fleet of the enemy in battle, and in doing so make the job of commercial blockade easier so that the war will end victoriously.

This leads to the idea that Mahan has been most famous for: the decisive battle by the large battleships of the fleet. The decisive battle was to be the end all to the question of which side ruled the waves. The great fleets would meet and do battle until one was annihilated. Mahan based much of this on the actions of Nelson, his personal hero, and the idea of the Nelson Touch. To summarize the Nelson Touch, it is acting out of surprise and with much force to throw the enemy off balance and destroy him. At Trafalgar, Nelson himself described his plan as the Nelson Touch. In the age of steam and steel, it was Togo who executed the modern Nelson Touch. At Tsushima, not only did Togo throw his Russian enemies into disarray with the force and confidence of Nelson, but he also used the technique of the defensive, as described by Mahan, to gain a further advantage over the Russians, who had been exhausted by months at sea.

It was Mahan's description of the decisive battle that caught the attention of the naval leaders across the globe. Even the French, who had the Jeune Ecole of torpedo-boats, adopted the big battleship as the symbol of its naval power. With the powers of the world engaged in colonization, Mahan's ideas of controlling strategic locations appealed to them as an excuse to justify further solidification of their trade empires. Through his descriptions of the decisive battle and its influence
on the outcomes of wars, Mahan influenced the great battleship arms race. Hilary Herbert, Secretary of the Navy for President Cleveland told Mahan himself that it was *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* that convinced him to order new battleships in 1890, all the more impressive because Herbert and Cleveland had intended to gut the US Navy's budget and even get rid of the Naval War College at which Mahan taught.\(^68\) In Wilhelmine Germany, naval officers were instructed to read Mahan and his books were published in large numbers to promote Tirpitz's new battle fleet.\(^69\) The British were heavily influenced by Mahan as well, although they placed a strong focus on the armored cruisers and trade protection. Even in Russia, Mahan's recommendation of the battleship was taken in, as Alexander III built the impressive battle fleet that his son would squander at Tsushima.

**Theophile Aube and the *Jeune Ecole***

There was another, although receding, doctrine of naval thought active at the time. This alternative was the French *Jeune Ecole*, or Young School. Originally derived from the negative naval experiences of France during the Napoleonic Wars, the doctrine was focused on using new technologies as alternatives to expensive battleships. Development of torpedo and self-propelled torpedo technology, now more well known as mines and torpedoes respectively, was coming into the vogue in the 1870's just as the widespread adoption of iron-hulled warships began making battleship bigger and more expensive than before. As torpedo efficacy improved following the developments of the American Civil War, it seemed to the French to be a viable weapon against the far larger fleet of Great Britain. French Admiral Theophile Aube deduced that in naval warfare, all things held equal, the side with the most battleships will win control of the sea and since naval size is known before a war and does not change much during it, the control of the sea will immediately pass to the larger navy.\(^70\) Given this situation, and that battleships were costly to produce and technology changed rapidly so as to make them obsolete within a decade after being produced, Aube saw no reason for spending on battleships.
Instead of buying an expensive battleship, a multitude of small torpedo-launching craft could be procured. These ships while being many times smaller and weaker would rely on the power of their torpedo to destroy the mighty battleship. Unfortunately, the inability of the torpedo to perform as a guaranteed one-shot-one-kill wonder weapon was a major factor in the failure of Aube's doctrine from catching on as well as Mahan's.

However, the *Jeune Ecole* did not advocate for the decisive fleet battle, as it determined that no such battle would take place because the weaker fleet would know that it would lose, and thus would avoid battle. The primary objective was instead the *guerre de course*, commerce raiding. Just as Mahan theorized that an isolated island country would always have a naval superiority over a land based country, Aube noticed that an island country was completely dependent on imports for its production and survival.\(^1\)\(^2\) Looking at the experience of the American Civil War, when rebel commerce raiders like the *Alabama* brought terror to American shipping around the globe, it was clear that individual raiders acting independently could wreak terrible destruction on shipping. In fact, Arne Roksund noted that the damage caused by the *Alabama* had such an effect on US merchant tonnage that it crippled the US shipping industry for decades.\(^3\) Of course, those raiders were all hunted down and destroyed by the US Navy, but they had proven an effective point. The version of *guerre de course* advocated by the *Jeune Ecole* was not just individual raiders heading out to be licensed privateers, as in the age of sail, but instead an organized system of high speed cruisers.\(^4\) These cruisers were to be scattered across many ports, whereupon the outbreak of war they could slip through enemy blockades and begin raiding the enemy's trade routes. The cruisers would be able to concentrate once at sea and hit enemy defenses in force, overcoming the escorts to enable them sink the merchant ships.\(^5\) The power of this attack would come from the speed of the cruisers and their armament of torpedoes, as well as the brutality of the campaign. It was recommended that French commerce raiders sink any suspected enemy merchant on sight, an even greater violation of the rules of war than even Mahan's
blockade policy. Torpedo-boats were expected to tail merchant shipping from a distance in daylight and then sneak up and sink them without warning during the night, and at no point was the torpedo-boat expected to identify who owned the target ship.\textsuperscript{76}

Aube and his disciples placed great emphasis on technology, especially on engines and torpedoes. It was believed that improving technology would lead to faster boats capable of wielding stronger and more reliable torpedoes. Torpedo-boat design was also enhanced in an attempt to overcome the inherent problem of a small boat on the rough seas. Submarines were also developed as early as 1886.\textsuperscript{77} The submarine was developed as a tool to break blockades by sneaking up to enemy battleships on the blockade line and torpedoing them, just like the \textit{H.L. Hunley} of Confederate States of America. Its slow speed and short range, at the time, prevented the submarine from being anything more than a harbor defense weapon. However, there were those in France and Germany who saw it as a wonder weapon capable of eliminating the British battleship from the seas. Like all wonder weapons, its weakness was its dependency on undeveloped technology and the exaggerated hopes of its proponents. The submarine was too slow and the torpedo far too unreliable to defeat the battleship.

In terms of defense the Jeune Ecole recommended itself towards coastal defense, based on torpedo armed craft and torpedo shore batteries. Other coastal defense theories focused on inter-woven artillery and torpedo batteries complemented by grids of minefields remotely detonated from shore positions, exemplified by the US naval fortifications of the 1890's.\textsuperscript{78} The Scandinavian strategy was to use coastal defense battleships and torpedo-boats, a highly regarded strategy throughout the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} Centuries. However, coastal defense was generally a secondary or even tertiary concern of most fleets. Mahanian doctrine, focusing on the decisive fleet battle, had little to say about coastal defense while the \textit{Jeune Ecole} saw coastal defense as a means to help commerce raiders run the enemy blockade by weakening its grasp. Neither Mahan nor the French theorists of the \textit{Jeune Ecole} saw much value in the defense, both focused on different aspects of the attack.
Julian Corbett and the Trap

There was a third naval doctrine in practice at the turn of the century which tended to focus on the advantages of the defensive. This strategy was both a critique of Mahan's emphasis on battleships as well as being a development of his general principles. The strategy was developed by Sir Julian Corbett, a British naval historian and theorist. Unlike Mahan and Aube, Corbett was not a military man but a civilian with a great interest in naval matters. Despite his lack of military background, his ideas were noticed by Sir John “Jacky” Fisher and so Corbett came to have great influence within the Admiralty. Fisher's battlecruisers actually grew out of Corbett's ideas, as they were designed to hunt down enemy raiders in order to better protect focal points, or what Mahan had termed cross-roads.79

It may be surprising to think that the battlecruiser, essentially a high-speed lightly armored battleship, could be conceived as a defensive weapon. The defensive advantage of the battlecruiser comes from Corbett's focus on trade protection. Like Mahan, Corbett thought that the economic effects of trade disruption were of great importance to determining the outcome of a war, but unlike Mahan, he emphasized it over fleet combat. “Defeat the enemy's fleets as we may, he will be but little the worse.”80 The key for Corbett, as both Mahan and Aube understood, was to destroy the trade of the enemy and so starve them out of the war. As he said, “the primary method, then, in which we use victory or preponderance at sea and bring it to bear on the enemy's population is to secure peace, is by the capture or destruction of the enemy's property, public or private.”81 This then leads to the question of how to attack and defend trade. Like Mahan he agrees with the idea of attacking and defending “focal points,” or Mahan's cross-roads.82 This leads to the problem of building many long-ranged but slow armored cruisers to cover the trade areas.

It is from this problem that Fisher's battlecruisers are born. The battlecruiser was the development of the armored cruiser, specialized to have good speed and battleship level firepower. Instead of being positioned in guard locations, the battlecruisers were to be concentrated in a port and,
once an enemy raider was identified, then be sent out to intercept the enemy ship. Its speed meant it would catch its target and its firepower meant it would succeed in destroying the target. This idea of concentration draws from another of Corbett's ideas. “The ideal concentration, in short, is the appearance of weakness that covers a reality of strength.” In commerce defense, this is done by concentrating the battlecruisers away from the focal points of trade, and thereby entice the enemy raider to attack. Once the raider attacks, the battlecruiser would then be able to hunt and destroy him.

This idea of a trap is the core of Corbett's recommendations for fleet battles. A weak division can be used to lure the enemy out to sea, where it can be engaged and destroyed. As he said, “regard every detached squadron as a trap to lure the enemy to destruction.” In the case of a strong and dominant navy against a weaker navy, this trick can be executed through a blockade. Like Mahan, Corbett identifies that, “military, and even commercial, blockade are primarily concerned with forcing the enemy to a decision.” By feigning weakness, the blockading fleet can lure the besieged fleet out to battle. In a commercial blockade, the economic pressures should convince the enemy fleet to take to sea in an attempt to break the blockade. Either way, the enemy's actions enables the fleet to take a defensive stance, conferring on it a positional advantage. This advantage is that the defender knows the area in which combat is to take place and from what direction the attacker will come, if the trap is set correctly. Corbett identifies Tsushima as an example, as Togo put his fleet between the Russians and their objective with the knowledge that his opponent would have to pass through the Tsushima Straits. By setting up such a trap, Togo ensured the positional advantage that he maintained during the battle. Since ships can not hold the sea like armies can hold ground, the essential factor of defense and control is mobility. Being able to move around, from position to position, to gain an edge over the enemy in each trap is the basic strategy to control the enemy's sea power.

If this at all sounds similar to guerrilla warfare on land, this is because it was an intentional comparison made by Corbett. “Everything was counterattack, whether upon the enemy's force or his
maritime communications. On land, of course, such methods of defense are also well known, but they belong much more to guerrilla warfare than to regular operations." This realization of the need for defensive operations in an uncontrollable battle space makes Corbett's ideas valid for both dominant and weak powers. Mahan's big battleships and decisive battle only makes sense for dominant naval powers and Aube's *Jeune Ecole* only has appeal to the weak who do not even wish to contest control of the seas. Corbett's defensive and positional approach applies to both dominant powers, who can use their fleets to blockade and force the enemy to action, and to weaker powers, who can use their small fleet to concentrate on isolated enemy elements or trade focal points to cause damage before dispersing like guerrilla fighters.

**Doctrine and the Imperial Russian Navy**

The question in regards to the Imperial Russian Navy, is which of these three popular doctrines did it follow? Like much of the world, the Russians were infatuated with the big battleship fleet proposed by Mahan. To possess a massive fleet of big battleships was the Mahanian dream to which the weaker countries of the world aspired. Russia, like Germany and even France, felt the need to have the prestige of a big fleet, even if it was not going to actually be useful. Publicly, the Russians declared in favor of the big fleets and decisive battles but quietly its captains prepared for a war of coastal defense using the most advanced torpedoes and torpedo-boat destroyers.

Admiral Belavenets, the fleet historian for the Baltic Fleet and a leader of the public campaign to rebuild the navy, made several Mahanian suggestions in his 1910 book *Why We Need a Fleet*. The book, which was a response to the navy's shattered post-Tsushima prestige and consequentially smaller budget, focuses on valorizing the fleet and its development from the times of Kievan Rus to the 1890's. In his last chapter, where he deals with the legacy of Tsushima, Belavenets made his recommendations for how to improve the fleet according to modern naval principles. To start, Belavenets demanded the
end of penny-pinching economizing that had been the standard complaint of most forms of Russian
development since Peter the Great. He accused this economizing of not only causing the disaster at
Tsushima, but also for the defeat in the Crimean War and for poor showings during Napoleonic naval
battles. Simply, the economizing meant cutting costly procedures and there was nothing so costly as
gunnery training, since it required the expenditure of ammunition while the ship was sailing at sea.
“Squandering, the gift of spending money, God, save us! But worse, saving on training -- every penny,
spent on useful study, always brings returns a hundredfold.”89 Unlike the Western naval theorists,
Belavenets recognized the need for training because it was something that was not to be taken for
granted in Russia. Tsushima, and almost every naval battle Russia has participated in since the Great
Northern War, proved definitively that a poorly manned and ill-prepared fleet could not defeat a better
armed and trained foe. Belavenets hoped to change this introducing training to the navy, especially
with a more liberal application of gunnery training. The intent was not to just start shooting off rounds
without aiming, as Kolchak recalled to the Cheka, but to instead learn to aim and hit targets. “Boats
without trained crew are like a body without a soul,” which phrased less poetically implies a corpse.90

One important Mahanian claim was that Russia needed a great fleet to protect its trade empire.
Despite a lack of merchant tonnage, the Russian Empire had a vast international trading ring. Most of
this trade was carried in foreign hulls, simply because there were few Russian merchant ships
compared to the innumerable British and American ships. Also problematic was the fact that the navy
held all merchants as auxiliary cruisers, which had a discouraging effect on their attractiveness in the
market for cargo hauling.91 Perhaps more surprising is that the Russian trade power in Asia actually
increased after the Russo-Japanese War. With the defeat of the navy at Tsushima and the general loss
of Russian military influence in Asia following the the disastrous war, the merchant fleet was
eventually freed from military control and its status as a reserve of auxiliary cruisers. In 1909, the
Ministry of Trade and Industry gained control of Russian merchant shipping, which enabled them to
market it as a commercial and non-military organization. This rebranding helped to expand the influence of Russian commerce in Asia as merchant ships were now independent of Russian military power. Cooperation between Danish and Russian shipping led to increased Russian penetration of Asian commerce, especially in terms of direct imports of tea from China and exports of kerosene. So without military aid, or rather because it was gone, Russian trade expanded greatly in Asia in terms of both exports and imports, which now came direct from Asia without the interference of European middlemen. However, Mahanian logic dictates that a commercial fleet requires a war fleet to protect it, and Belavenets demanded that Russia should follow that logic. As he said, “The state that can not use its fleet, will play the role of an extra on the world scene.”

Like Mahan, Belavenets saw battleships as a means to obtain power projection and international prestige. “[Russia's] neighbors, seeing the growth in Russian naval strength, of course, began to treat Russia with respect and as a result would give her credit more easily,” he said of the battleship building program of 1900. How much of these new loans were caused by the expansion of the fleet or by the growing Franco-Russian cooperation to counter Germany, or even by the improved economic situation within Russia, is debatable. The fleet likely had no impact on foreign investment, but it at least made Russia appear to be a credible ally for France against German naval strength at the time. As A.P. Izvolsky said, “If we have battleships … we shall become a very valuable ally.” It must be noted that before the Russo-Japanese War, the Russian Imperial Navy had the third largest fleet in the world, behind Britain and France. This powerful, on paper, fleet consisted of the third largest number of battleships, including some of the most advanced designs such as the Borodino-class. The navy was divided into three almost equally powerful fleets, with the pride being in the Baltic and the most advanced being in the Pacific. It was only after the failure at Tsushima that other nations seriously began to doubt Russian prowess in military affairs, and it was only after Tsushima that two of those three fleets ceased to exist.
The main point was that by having battleships and large battle fleets, a country could appear more powerful than its enemies and seem more useful to its allies. This simply boiled down to a matter of national prestige, for the public had an important role in determining the importance and form of the fleet. Even in autocratic Russia, the public had an important role in determining the type of fleet to be fielded. Belavenets and other writers of similar minds encouraged subscription campaigns to fund new battleships, which the public responded enthusiastically towards. The public desire to see strong world-class battleships tied the government's hands, as to not build mighty warships would imply a weakness in Russian power. As the prestige of the country and the power of the Tsar were important factors in the legitimacy of the autocracy, the replacement of the battleships lost at Tsushima and the development of new dreadnoughts were important aspects of maintaining that legitimacy. With both the public and the regime interested in maintaining the prestige of a large fleet, especially with public involvement through subscription campaigns, the official line was for a Mahanian big-gun battleship fleet. As Belavenets said, “All Russia must realize that our Fatherland's fleet is necessary and if this belief is firm, then we can find the money [to pay for it].”

However, the official line was not what was best for Russia. Russia could ill afford the large battle fleet that Belavenets and other influential writers, including the now retired Klado, demanded. Public subscription campaigns could not possibly raise enough funds to keep pace with the accelerating naval arms race between Great Britain and Germany. There too was the problem of the United States, a rising industrial power that was steadily producing more warships. The other problem is that even if Russia could afford all the new ships, it would be impossible for her to build them all at home. Russian shipyards were not as large as Western shipyards and were inefficient, meaning ships took longer to build and cost more. Worse, Russia sometimes did not have the capabilities to make certain components, such as certain types of turrets and armor, and so had to order these components from abroad. In fact the armored cruiser Rurik, the pride of the fleet, had actually been built in Britain.
If Russia could not follow the official Mahanian line, then was it to follow the guidance of Aube? That idea was also rejected. Kolchak, a captain of the second rank before the war, published an article in the unofficial section of the *Morskoi Sbornik* in June and July of 1908. The article was titled “*Kakoi nuzhen Rossii flot?”* translated as “What Kind of Fleet Does Russia Need?” While Kolchak's article did not speak for the navy of 1908, it did have a great impact on how the fleet functioned during the war, as Kolchak was a central figure in many of the fleet's successful wartime operations. The article gave a unique prescription on how the fleet should be constituted. This unique, at the time, perspective was to do away with the all battleship fleet and to do away with the all raider fleet. The answer to Russia's problems was to have a combined arms fleet consisting of some battleships supported by cruisers for scouting and destroyers for screening. Additionally, specialized warships such as monitors and new aviation technologies could be deployed to assist the fleet. While this may not sound at all unique or inventive today, at the time it truly was unique. The Germans for instance built only battleships and battlecruisers, ignoring light cruisers and destroyers, while the British viewed armored cruisers as expensive trade protection vessels. To put it into perspective, the Imperial German Navy had more modern battleships and battlecruisers than it had modern light cruisers, 14 and 5 compared to just 16.\(^{104}\)

One reason why Kolchak developed the idea of the combined fleet of capital and light ships was to avoid the risks of specialized development. “Given the circumstances of our state we have no right to squander tens of millions of rubles on experiments and hazard even a part of our statehood on a dubious and unsatisfactory force.”\(^{105}\) Kolchak was specifically speaking against the *Jeune Ecole* inspired plans of Captain of the Second Rank Beklemishev, but his meaning applied to any such concentration of development in a single area. Kolchak believed that a well-rounded fleet was better than one that specialized in one specific area, such as submarine warfare. However, Kolchak saw value in the submarine and the sea mine and encouraged their development as accessories to the battle fleet.
He cautioned that while submarines were more or less static defense weapons, they could be highly dangerous if they could develop in range and speed.  

Russia also had to deal with three distinct strategic problems: the Baltic Sea against Germany, the Black Sea against the Ottoman Empire, and the Pacific against any other power interested in attacking Russia's trade. While a Jeune Ecole inspired doctrine would work in the Baltic, a battle fleet would work well against the small fleet of the Ottomans, and a cruiser based trade defense strategy would work in Asia, this would leave Russia with three distinct and separate naval policies. The purpose of Kolchak's combined battle group was to create a unit of ships that could fulfill any of the three missions. A battle group would need enough battleships to form a main line to engage the enemy battle fleet. It would need light cruisers to spot the approaching enemy as well as to harass enemy supply lines. Destroyers would be needed to screen the battle line from enemy ships and to pursue the enemy battle line if it turned off the engagement. The armored cruiser would serve as a bridge between all three roles, relying on speed to screen and on firepower to have an impact on the battle line.

It is important to note that the armored cruiser Kolchak describes is very different in form and function from the armored cruiser as it is known in the West. Whereas Western armored cruisers were long-ranged, lightly armored, lightly gunned, battleship sized trade protection vessels, Kolchak's armored cruisers were fast, long-ranged, heavily armed, battleship sized offensive vessels. He described the ship as such: “The modern armored cruisers seem to be like ships of the line [battleships] in that they have the same displacement, with equal quality of artillery and armor systems, but with greater mobility and range of action.”  The resemblance of Kolchak's armored cruiser concept to Fisher's battlecruisers is readily apparent. Both were essentially fast, lightly armored battleships that could meld into the battle line after making contact with the enemy. As it was discussed earlier, battlecruisers were designed as powerful anti-raider interceptors, but their speed and firepower also lent them to the respective roles of the scout and the line-of-battle ship. The Royal Navy deployed them
in this manner after the destruction of von Spee's Pacific Squadron at the Falklands, notably at Jutland. In this way, the armored cruiser, or battlecruiser, was a highly versatile warship capable of participating in all naval operations. For Russia, with its limited resources, Kolchak's armored cruiser seemed to be a cost-effective solution to the problem of fleet composition by providing one ship that can fulfill multiple missions. It was not without great pride that Kolchak wrote of his armored cruisers, “I have developed a type of ship par excellence, if I may say so, representing a possible compromise between the three elements [offensive firepower, defensive armor, and mobility].”

Despite the cost-effective versatility of Kolchak's armored cruiser, Russia only built one such ship, the Rurik. While Russia did plan for the Izmail class, a powerful full battlecruiser designed by Kolchak himself and armed with nine powerful 14 in. guns in three triple turrets, none of the class were completed due to the war. The problem was that the Russian naval industry was not prepared to build such large and powerful ships. However, Kolchak offered a solution to this problem: the monitor. This type of ship owes its name to the USS Monitor, the revolutionary turreted ironclad which dueled the CSS Virginia at the Battle of Hampton Roads during the American Civil War. Like the original Monitor, the monitors of the early 20th Century were generally single turret, shallow-draft, low freeboard gun platforms suitable for coastal operations or on calm seas. A monitor could mount the largest naval artillery in service, giving it the same range and penetrating power of a full battleship. The monitors were limited in number of guns, one or two big guns, but made up for this in their small size. Kolchak compared the American Florida class monitors with the British Dreadnought, and he found that the little American ships performed quite favorably. By his estimates, Russia could have built five Floridas for the cost of single Dreadnought. The numbers add up and five little monitors would be capable of delivering the same firepower at range as a battleship. Additionally, the monitors could operate in the skerries, which had been a major concern for Russian naval officers throughout history including Grand Duke Constantine Nikolaevich. Of course, Kolchak preferred to have eight
battleships instead of 40 monitors, a ridiculous all-or-nothing comparison he himself made. However, a dreadnought battleship can not operate among the skerries and for that reason having a few monitors could provide some useful tactical flexibility in coastal operations.

Another influential naval officer, and the one who was responsible for the appearance of the fleet in 1914, was Admiral N.O. Essen. Essen had served in the Russo-Japanese War under Makarov and was assigned to the Baltic Fleet after the war ended. His post was initially of the fleet's mining squadrons, but was later promoted to command of the Baltic Fleet. As commander of the mining squadrons, Essen promoted an aggressive mining tactics as well as training. Unlike Kolchak and many other critics of the navy's policy, as a squadron commander Essen was in a position to make a noticeable change in regards to training. Men like Kolchak, who had individual ships under their command, and men like Belavenets, mere historians and academics, were in no position to actually train a significant body of men. Essen was, and he made use of his position to train his squadron to perform under pressure. According to the historian Donald Mitchell, Essen even went so far as to make reforms to the relations between officers and men. H.K. Graf and D.N. White, two naval officers who survived both the war and the following revolutions, each made it a point in their memoirs to mention Essen's positive attitude and his willingness to meet and talk with the junior officers under his command, even when he was commander of the entire Baltic Fleet. It is hard to describe what the nature of his reforms, in terms of crew relations, were but from what the junior officers said, it was a clear improvement in communication and respect between the junior and senior officers.

Unlike Kolchak, Essen did not concern himself with making recommendation for the composition of the fleet in terms of ships. His objective seemed to be in making a trained and professional fleet. His supporter and later superior, Admiral I.K. Grigorovich, was more involved in the naval constructions. Grigorovich made an effort to standardize the weapons and ship types of the fleet, especially in terms of the battleships. Predreadnoughts were standardized with a main battery
of four 12 in. guns mounted in two twin turrets with a secondary battery of twelve 6 in. guns, mounted individually or in twin turrets. The semi-dreadnoughts of the Andrei Perizovannii-class had the same primary armament but had a heavy secondary armament of fourteen 8 in. guns. The destroyers were standardized off the design of the destroyer Novik, which had a heavy battery of torpedoes mounted in four center-line dual launchers. Grigorovich also improved shore facilities and the quality of materials issued to the fleet, improving its performance. Like Essen and the other critics of naval policy, Grigorovich wanted a trained navy with modern equipment.

However, the state determined what the navy could get and despite Grigorovich’s efforts to work with the politicians in the Duma, the budget was not all the navy could have hoped for. Through the tight budget, which was greater than it had been in previous years but was still not sufficient to build all that was needed, the fleet was only able to build a fraction of the new ships it needed. Most of the large ships were delayed in construction and some light cruisers were over a decade behind in production. Kolchak’s four Izmail-class battlecruisers, that had been ordered in 1912, had been canceled due to cost overruns and a loss of technical components, which had been sourced from Germany. The planned dreadnoughts were completed, but entered service late between the end of 1914 and early 1916. With this in mind, Russia entered the war weak in terms of capital ships and so she had to rely on her light ships.

Thankfully, Essen had prepared the Baltic Fleet for this eventuality through his training of the mine and torpedo squadrons. However, Essen’s training did not reach the Black Sea, but they did not expect to have a challenging war against the outdated and small fleet of the Ottoman Empire. So it was with the small fleet left over after Tsushima augmented by a few new ships that Russia entered the First World War. In theory Russia followed a Mahanian doctrine, but for lack of resources the fleet followed a policy more in line with Aube’s advice. With this question of doctrine cleared, the point can be advanced to closely look at Russian naval performance during the war.
Chapter III: The Battles, 1914-1917

The war at sea for all nations was mostly empty of combat. Each nation engaged in only a few major battles, which were generally inconclusive. While it was clear in many cases that one fleet would yield the battle space to the other and in doing so confer victory to its opponent, but these victories were hollow and their effect on the land war was minimal. Most of the actions taken by the fleets of all nations were simply patrolling the sea or defending and raiding trade. These were the actions that made the most difference, as they protected the supplies flowing into the country and denied the same flow to the enemy. For Russia, the fleet was in no position to complete any of those roles. Only in the Black Sea did the opportunity to raid supply lines present itself. However, with the absence of such roles, the Russian fleet developed new roles based on wholly offensive action that were intended to make direct impacts on the war on the ground. Looking at the few key battles fought by the Russian fleet in the Baltic and Black Seas the offensive strategy and effectiveness of the Russian fleet can be demonstrated.

The Baltic Sea, 1914-1915

The first, and perhaps most daring, operation conducted by the Baltic Fleet in the opening days of the war was the mining of the Baltic, from the Gulf of Finland all the way to the German naval bases in East Prussia. This operation was conducted with limited ships, many of which were not minelayers but were full warships that had been quickly modified to accept mines and the associated gear to deploy them. Graf, a senior lieutenant aboard the destroyer Novik, described the fleet of August 1914: “Our Baltic Fleet consisted then only of four battleships, ten cruisers, (of which nine were obsolete), thirty-six old destroyers, five submarines of the old type, six mine-layers, and the Novik, the only modern ship.” Of the four battleships, one was under repair, leaving only three of the old ships available for immediate action. It is important to note that of the Russian ships available for action in
the Baltic, only two could be considered modern. Of these, of course, there was arguably the best destroyer in the world in terms of speed and firepower, the Novik. The other ship was the Rurik, the British built armoured cruiser that was the pride of the fleet and Essen's flagship. Against this humble force the Germans could deploy the entire might of their modern High Seas Fleet, although in actuality they would send only a handful of old cruisers supported by a few minelayers and destroyers.

Technically outnumbered, definitely out-gunned, and with ships that were obsolete and ill-designed for the purpose they were being used for, Essen ordered a massive mining operation in the first moment of the war. According to Kolchak, “It was decided to commence planting the mines at dawn without waiting for orders from Petrograd. The whole operation consisted of concentrating near Parkalaud a mine-laying squadron with 6,000 mines.” Of the mines, only about half were laid, but the operation took place all in a single day utilizing the six minelayers of the fleet. However, Essen wished to do more with his ships than to sit safely in port behind his curtain of mines. He was offensively minded and he had not spent the last eight years training his crews to sit around. No, he had trained them for offensive action! The problem was that he had only obsolete ships at his disposal. However, he did have plenty of sea mines. Mines may be well regarded for their ability to quickly destroy the unfortunate ship that runs into them, making them excellent defensive weapons, but they are not known for their offensive capabilities. Essen saw an opportunity to use the mines as an offensive weapon: place them off the German Baltic naval bases.

The plan was to sneak minelayers to the German shipping routes off of Memel and in the Bay of Danzig where three sets of mine barrages would cut German naval communications. The problem was that the six minelayers the fleet possessed were old and slow, so there was no chance that those slow ships would be able to sneak behind the German patrols. The solution Essen adopted was to modify his destroyers to accept mine rails, enabling these small and fast ships to carry mines. Besides being the fastest ships in the Baltic, the small size of the destroyers gave them an element of stealth
which they could use to their advantage. The ships capitalized on these capabilities by operating independently from the main fleet, sometimes even operating as individual ships. The destroyer *Novik* went to sea on two occasions in 1914 completely alone and unsupported.\(^\text{124}\) Despite their small size the destroyers could carry an impressive payload of mines, for example, the *Novik* could carry 50 mines while having a displacement of only 1,240 tons.\(^\text{125}\) Between October 31 and November 5, the destroyers of the Baltic Fleet laid three mine barrages: two off Memel and one off Pillau.\(^\text{126}\) According to Graf, on board the *Novik*, the *Novik*'s mine barrage was laid in only eight minutes and twenty seconds, although this was after hours of tense sneaking across the Baltic.\(^\text{127}\)

This first operation proved to be highly successful. Between the three barrages laid during the operation, 290 mines were laid. The barrages off of Memel claimed victims almost immediately. The German armored cruiser *Friedrich Karl* was sunk on November 17 on its way from Memel to Libau and a steamship rushing to her assistance also hit a mine and sank.\(^\text{128}\) Additional mining operations were carried out by the destroyers, supported now with the fleet's cruisers in the hope that the Germans would sortie to prevent the destroyers from laying the mines. However, the Germans did not sortie and the cruisers found no targets to engage. Kolchak noted that, “Contrary to our expectations, every time the enemy came out to sea, his movements were exceedingly passive … this gave us a chance to advance.”\(^\text{129}\) Having converted his destroyers to minelayers, Essen decided to add mine rails to his cruisers so that they too could join in his unorthodox mining strategy. All of Essen's available cruisers, even the powerful *Rurik* and the obsolete training cruiser *Rossiia*, were given mine rails. According to White, the junior officers of the *Rossiia* had to convince Kolchak to convince their captain to accept the mines.\(^\text{130}\) Apparently, “Kolchak, himself an exceedingly active man,” liked the idea so much that not only did he convince her captain to take on the mines but he also accompanied her on the mission.\(^\text{131}\)
The mission of the old cruiser *Rossiia* was part of a larger operation involving the cruisers *Bogatyr* and *Oleg*, both loaded with mines as well. Kolchak described the operation:

“This activity began by planting a series of mine defenses opposite the Baltic coast of Germany. This was carried out by a number of cruisers, among them the cruiser *Rossiia*, on which I was when we went past Bornholm and as far as Karkoli, where we planted mine barrages about New Year’s Day [Old Calendar] of 1915.”

Even more impressive is that the slow and obsolete *Rossiia* managed to lay its mines off of Cape Arkona in Western Pomerania while the other two cruisers stopped to lay their set east of Bornholm. The three old armored cruisers laid together 294 mines which had the results of disabling the German cruisers *Augsburg* and *Gazelle* while also sinking two German cargo ships.

Other cruisers, including the Rurik which laid 120 mines on its own in the Bay of Danzig, also laid mines behind enemy lines.

Despite the size of the cruisers and their ability to carry more mines, the brunt of the operation was carried out by the destroyers of the fleet. The actual purpose built minelayers of the fleet did very little in regards to the offensive operation, although they had laid a far larger number of defensive mines in the Gulf of Finland. In total between October 1914 and February 1915, when Essen's mining campaign came to an end, Greger estimates the Baltic Fleet's cruisers and destroyers laid 1,598 offensive mines in German waters. During this time, the mines destroyed one armored cruiser, three minesweepers, and at least fifteen cargo ships while damaging, and removing from the war, two light cruisers, a destroyer, and two additional minesweepers. In May of 1915, after the death of Essen, Admiral V.A. Kanin ordered a continuation of Essen's mining offensive, although he relied more heavily on the cruisers than Essen had. Under Kanin, the Baltic Fleet laid an additional 1,850 mines, of which 1,260 had been laid by cruisers at the end of the year. This new addition of mines, all laid in what were considered German waters, claimed more German ships. Throughout the war, the Germans lost 42 warships and 26 cargo ships to Russian mines. Additionally, four light cruisers had struck
mines and were so damaged that they were not repaired and played no further role in the conflict. While half of the German losses to mines were minesweepers, which is itself an ironic achievement in its own right, the success of the Russian mining operation against the German fleet is an impressive achievement. When it is considered that the Russians were at all turns outmatched by the possibility of superior German warships and that almost all their offensive mining operations were conducted by old warships hastily modified to lay mines, the campaign becomes all the more spectacular.

Of course, the Russians did have one advantage that the Germans did not have: they knew where their enemy would be. Throughout history, the Russian intelligence service has been renowned for its abilities in espionage. While its Soviet era operations are perhaps more well-known and glamorously portrayed, the Imperial intelligence services were just as capable. It is known that the Russian intelligence service had turned Alfred Redl, chief of Austro-Hungarian counter-intelligence, as a double agent and used him to acquire numerous Austrian war plans. The intelligence service of the Baltic Fleet also broke German signaling codes, although to this they had the advantage of having acquired code books from the cruiser *Magdeburg* which had aground at the beginning of the war.

Technically, the intelligence service was actually the communications department of the fleet, but under Admiral A.I. Nepenin it was able to use the fleet's radios and aircraft for intelligence gathering. Supported by Russian spycraft, Nepenin's department was able to build an important intelligence network over the Baltic which yielded the positions of German patrol routes. White credits the success of the *Rossiia*’s mission to “the remarkable organization built up by Admiral Nepenin.” The fact that none of the minelayers were ever intercepted by the Germans, even the old training cruiser *Rossiia* which made it all the way to Cape Arkona undetected, speaks to the ability of Nepenin's network to identify the German patrol schedule.
The Black Sea, 1915-1916

In the Black Sea, the Russians faced a different scenario. The fleet there was not as advanced as the Baltic Fleet, as it was not decimated in the Russo-Japanese War and thus was less in need of replacements. However, its enemy was almost insignificant. The fleet of the Ottoman Empire was barely worth mentioning, as its ships were even more out of date and fewer in number than the Russian ships. The only danger in the Black Sea was the German battlecruiser *Goeben*, masquerading as an Ottoman ship under the name *Yavuz Sultan Selim*. Even then, she was but one ship and the Black Sea Fleet had five predreadnought battleships and the fleet's two dreadnoughts, armed with twelve 12 in. guns, would come on line in 1915. The situation in the Black Sea could only improve for the Russians, enabling them to take on more creative uses of the fleet.

The war in the Black Sea began with a surprise attack on Odessa by the *Yavuz Sultan Selim* and all seaworthy elements of the Ottoman fleet. The attack, launched three days before the declaration of war on November 2, threw Russian planning into initial chaos. Offensive mining operations were temporarily postponed in favor of an ad hoc defense around Sevastopol. This defense depleted much of the Russian mine stocks in the Black Sea, leaving only a few hundred to be deployed offensively against Ottoman shipping routes in the Bosporus and at Trebizond.\(^{139}\) While dedicated minelayers were able to deploy 847 mines at exit of the Bosporus and another 400 off of Trebizond, these mines were far less effective than the Baltic mines.\(^{140}\) In 1915, the submarine mine carrier *Krab*, the first submarine minelayer built in the world, penetrated the Bosporus and laid a set of mines that succeed in only damaging the Ottoman gunboat *Issa Reis*.\(^{141}\) The only real success of the offensive mines had been the damaging of the German-Ottoman battlecruiser which managed to hit two mines on December 26, 1914 but was able to return to port and was repaired.\(^{142}\)

Even when the *Yavuz Sultan Selim* was at sea, she could do no harm to the Russians so long as the old battleships of the Black Sea Fleet operated together. In the skirmishes between the one
battlecruiser and the squadron of old battleships, the Russian ships held their own and forced the enemy to retire every time. In the first engagement, the battleship *Evstafi* got the first shot off and managed to detonate an ammunition rack in one of the secondary gun casemates of the battlecruiser. While the *Yavuz Sultan Selim* returned fire and scored hits against the *Evstafi*, the five Russian battleships were enough to convince her to break off and return to port. Once the dreadnoughts came on line, this became easier, as their presence allowed the older battleships to conduct other operations.

In 1915, the old battleships were primarily assigned to deal with coastal bombardment of Ottoman supply stations and fire support for Russian ground forces. Having control of the seas, as the *Yavuz Sultan Selim* was damaged in the early part of the year and was countered by the completion of the Russian dreadnoughts, the fleet was allowed to conduct purely offensive operations against Ottoman supply routes. Destroyers hunted convoys and battleships shelled supply stations. In the first battle of January 1915, the battleships of the Black Sea Fleet encountered a convoy protected by two Ottoman cruisers, including the German crewed *Midili*, and destroyed 51 sailing ships laden with supplies for Ottoman ground forces fighting in the Caucasus. In February, the battleships repeated their success destroying two steamships and 49 sailing ships on February 8. These actions could have continued on throughout the rest of the year without change, but in March Admiral A.A. Eberhardt made a change to the operations.

In March, the fleet began to make more use of its aviation and seaplane carriers. In 1915, Russia had a total of eight seaplane carriers, of which seven were stationed in the Black Sea. Taking advantage of this asset, the Black Sea Fleet conducted the first naval operation in which aviation formed the primary strike force while the battleships of the fleet lay back in support. This operation took place on March 30, 1915 against the Ottoman coal port of Zonguldak. As destroyers attacked the ships at sea, the aircraft bombed the shore facilities. While the attack was not particularly successful, due to heavy fog, it was a signal of things to come. Eberhardt's carriers operated in three battle
groups: two with the dreadnought *Imperatritsa Maria*, two with the dreadnought *Imperatritsa Ekaterina II*, and the rest operated with the predreadnoughts. The aircraft from the carriers were primarily used as scouts while at sea, but they were used as strike craft once the group approached the target area. On February 6, 1916, *Imperatritsa Maria* and her two carriers went to repeat the attack on Zonguldak. The weather was much better this time, and the aircraft were able to effectively identify targets. Fourteen aircraft participated in the strike which sank the cargo ship *Irmingard*, another milestone for Russian naval aviation. However, the surprise arrival of two German submarines caused chaos in which two seaplanes were abandoned by the retreating carriers.

In April, the fleet's dreadnoughts and their carriers provided escort and supporting fire for the landing of two infantry brigades behind Turkish lines at Trebizond. Here the Black Sea Fleet deployed a unique class of transport ships known as the *Elpidifor* type. These ships were small with incredibly shallow drafts of just 1.83 m, enabling them to get much closer to shore which allowed troops to disembark faster. Eight *Elpidifors* in conjunction with several conventional transports were able to land over 8,000 Russian troops in under nine hours. The operation at Trebizond was highly successful, with ground forces not only capturing the city with supporting fire from the fleet observed by aircraft, but the destroyers of the fleet also managed to annihilate fleeing Ottoman sailing ships, sending 58 of them to the bottom.

The carriers and *Elpidifors* formed the core of Russian operations in the Black Sea, as the undisputed dominance of the fleet relegated it to the role of army support. The carriers and battleships destroyed Ottoman shore facilities while the *Elpidifors* shipped in supplies to Russian ground forces advancing deeper into Anatolia. Meanwhile, the destroyers slaughtered Ottoman supply ships of all sizes with impunity. The modern German warships, both damaged by mines and with limited coal from the destruction of the coal-carrying convoys, could do nothing to impede the Russian victories. Each time the fleet encountered an Ottoman convoy it was a replication of Nakhimov's triumph at
Sinope, little to no damage for the Russians and total annihilation for the Ottomans. However, very few warships were caught, with only one cruiser being destroyed and that being to a defensive mine.

In July 1916, Eberhardt was replaced by Kolchak, who promptly decided to put his experience in the Baltic to good use. Kolchak returned to a policy of aggressive mining operations behind enemy lines, this time specifically targeting the Bosporus as it was the only part of the Black Sea where the Ottomans could still marshal up a defense. Additionally, German submarines made their appearance known, becoming a threat to the ships of the fleet. Kolchak, being the mine innovator that he was, determined that he could use mines to destroy the German submarines based along the Ottoman and Bulgarian coast. He redesigned his battle groups to specialize in anti-submarine warfare. These new battle groups consisted of submarines to observe enemy movements, destroyers to lay mines, and carriers to provide air cover and hunt enemy submarines. American historian Donald Mitchell described the operations of Kolchak's mine laying groups: “Submarines, which were the first to arrive on the scene, planted buoys in predetermined positions; then following destroyers rapidly laid mines. At times during such an operation seaplanes attacked the enemy in order to divert attention from the mine laying.” As a result of Kolchak's operations, which laid 5,743 mines in the Bosporus and off Varna between July of 1916 and July of 1917, eight enemy warships, including three German submarines, were destroyed.

While these numbers are small compared to the number of enemy ships destroyed in the Baltic, it must be taken into account that coal shortages and Russian naval dominance limited the number of ships the Central Powers were willing to risk in the Black Sea. Additionally, there were few ships to begin with and once the mines appeared off their coast, the Ottoman and Bulgarian warships were much less inclined to go to sea. This of course makes no mention to the absolute slaughter of merchant shipping conducted by the Black Sea Fleet's destroyers and submarines. Russian submarines sank 20 Ottoman steamships and an additional 122 sailing ships. Russian destroyers sank 58 Ottoman
steamships, not including the number captured, and Rene Greger, who compiled a detailed day by day account of Russian naval operations during the war, provided no numbers for how many sailing ships the destroyers sank. Given these considerations, the relatively small number of ships destroyed by Kolchak's mines becomes all the more impressive as most of the enemy ships were already destroyed or damaged.

The Battle of Moonsound, October 1917

Combat operations in the Black Sea mostly shut down after the ousting of Kolchak in June 1917, a delayed effect of the February Revolution. However, in the Baltic combat escalated as the Germans, sensing weakness in Russia and unable to make any headway in the North Sea, prepared to utilize the might of the High Seas Fleet in support of an amphibious invasion against the Moonsound Archipelago. Codenamed Operation Albion, the objective was to seize the islands while German forces advanced overland on Riga. By October, when the operation was launched, Riga had been captured and Russian war weariness had taken its toll on the defenders. Against the weakened Russian defenses, Admiral Reinhard Scheer sent ten dreadnoughts with the battlecruiser _Moltke_ supported by nine cruisers and fifty-five destroyers. Among these dreadnoughts were the four ships of the _König_-class which formed the core of the fleet and the powerful _SMS Bayern_, armed with eight 15 in. guns. Against this the Russians could deploy two predreadnoughts, two armored cruisers, and half as many destroyers as the Germans. Surprisingly, on October 17, the small Russian force gave battle to the numerically and technologically superior German fleet.

For almost two weeks before this battle, the Germans had used minesweepers to clear a path for their battleships to approach the islands and bombard the Russian coastal batteries. Russian attempts to stop this were sporadic and ineffective, losing the destroyer _Grom_ in the process. Mostly, the fleet covered the evacuation of the demoralized ground troops, who had fled their positions almost as soon
as the Germans approached.\textsuperscript{163} Attempts to mine the approaches to prevent the German transports from landing troops came to nothing as the minelayer assigned to the task refused to carry out orders, a result of the lack of discipline caused by the shipboard soviets.\textsuperscript{164} On land, reinforcements sent by the Bolshevik controlled Tsentrobalt mutinied and refused to cross over to the island.\textsuperscript{165} Not even Bolshevik troops were willing to obey orders. The defenders who remained at their posts were supported by indirect fire provided by the predreadnoughts, under the command of Admiral M.K. Bakhirev on the cruiser \textit{Bayan}, which stalled German landing attempts. On October 17, German seaplanes forced Bakhirev to commit his flagship \textit{Bayan} with the predreadnoughts \textit{Slava} and \textit{Grazhdanin} to battle.

Against this meager force the Germans sent the battleships \textit{König} and \textit{Kronprinz Wilhelm}, each ship having more firepower than the combined Russian flotilla. \textit{Slava} and \textit{Grazhdanin} had four 12 in. guns each while the \textit{Bayan} only mounted two 8 in. guns. Against this the German ships each had ten 12 in. guns. A discussion of the secondary batteries of the ships, where the Russians did hold an advantage, is irrelevant as the battle took place at a range of 20 km, well beyond the range of the secondary batteries. Fearing mines and the few coastal guns still in operation, the German battleships stayed at long distance, engaging in sporadic fire with the Russian ships during the course of the day.\textsuperscript{166} Ironically, this put the Germans in a worse position as they sat at the very maximum of their range, while being perfectly in range of the old Russian battleships.\textsuperscript{167} The \textit{Slava} was distinguished for landing shots around the \textit{König}, compelling the German battleships to temporarily withdraw.\textsuperscript{168} This withdrawal allowed the Russians to concentrate their fire upon the German minesweepers that were attempting to clear a path into Moonsound. Eventually the German ships withdrew and Bakhirev came to think that he had stopped the German actions for the day, and so he signaled the fleet to have a midday meal.\textsuperscript{169}
He was, unfortunately, incorrect in his assumption, as the minesweepers had succeeded in clearing a path before they withdrew. It was through that path that the König and Kronprinz passed through to close the range on the Russian flotilla. The Germans closed to 16.5 km before they registered hits on the Russians. The shock of this surprise was severe and Bakhirev ordered a retreat, with the Slava, having taken multiple hits below the waterline, taking up the rear of the column. Slava, despite being severely damaged, continued to fight on against the German ships, absorbing more hits while the other ships escaped through the shallow channel between the islands of the archipelago. Unable to pass through the channel, the Slava attempted to sink herself in the middle of it so as to deny the Germans the ability to pursue. However, she struck a mine and was run aground to the side of the channel. With the withdrawal of the fleet, the remaining defenders on the islands surrendered as the Germans could land unimpeded.

The battle was a clear defeat for the Russians, with the only success being that two German battleships managed to run into mines in a completely unrelated event. Still, it must be considered that Bakhirev was given the task of taking three old warships against the most powerful and newest ships in the German fleet with the objective to stop that overwhelming force from taking control of a badly defended archipelago. Given this seemingly impossible task, Bakhirev came surprisingly close to success. By positioning his fleet in Moonsound, Bakhirev shielded his ships from view while allowing them the ability to fire indirectly on the German landing craft and minesweepers. For three days, from October 14 to October 17, Bakhirev's three ships managed to prevent the Germans from landing or sweeping away the mines. The Russians were only defeated when German destroyers and minesweepers continued to sweep while under long range fire. Sixteen minesweepers were sunk in the operation that finally cleared a path through the mines, so it was at that cost that enabled the German dreadnoughts to close the range and effectively engage the Russian ships. Had the German minesweepers not been so willing to endure losses and shellfire, then the battleships would not have
been able to get into an attack position. In such a case, Bakhirev could have held until he ran out of coal or ammunition, both of which he could resupply from Reval. However, because of the determination of the German minesweepers, the mines were cleared and Bakhirev's position became untenable, leading to his withdrawal.
Chapter IV: The Developments of the Fleet

As can be seen from the outcomes of the battles, there was a significant contrast between the performance of the Imperial Russian Navy in 1905 and its performance in 1914. Such a difference makes it appear that the fleet of 1905 and the fleet of 1914 were two completely different fleets. This difference is entirely correct. The old navy perished at Tsushima and a new navy, born out of the lessons from the battle, took its place. Russia showed great adaptability in understanding the faults of the fleet and rectifying them. The ships of 1905, which were in many cases advanced and modern designs, were improved with distinct attention paid towards armor and fire control. Penny-pinching economizing was in many ways overcome, as the value of quality became fully appreciated in regards to training and ammunition. The improvement of already advanced mining technology allowed for a more aggressive doctrine to be pursued. These improvements enabled the Imperial Russian Navy to take an advantageous position over the Ottomans and even the Germans.

Russia had historically been at the forefront of artillery development since the time of Peter the Great. Russia under Nicholas II was no different. The guns were of high quality and the ammunition had theoretically good armor penetration. The failure of the Russian armor piercing shells at Tsushima was caused by economizing in both training and materials. Instead of using hardened steel, the shell casings were made of iron, which shattered under stress instead of bending. As was discussed earlier, when the Russian shells hit their Japanese targets, the cases shattered on impact and thus failed to penetrate and cause damage to the target. The navy learned from the mistake and began to properly manufacture the ammunition out of the correct materials. One the shells were made of hardened steel, their penetrating power increased significantly. In fact, the shells had slightly less penetrating power than the British post-Jutland Greenboy armor piercing shells, which only entered service at the end of the war.\textsuperscript{175} Going into the war, the Russians had by far the superior armor piercing shells for the big guns of the fleet. High explosive shells were also improved with a more substantial bursting charge.
The AP ammunition for the 12 in. guns of the battleships used at Tsushima had a bursting charge of just 5.3 kg while the HE shells had 12.4 kg of explosives.\textsuperscript{176} The shells used during the First World War had 12.84 kg and 61.5 kg of explosives respectively.\textsuperscript{177} The bursting charge was also made of TNT, instead of gun cotton, further increasing the explosive force.\textsuperscript{178} Similar improvements were made to the 8 in. ammunition used by the guns of the armored cruisers. Additionally, efforts were made to improve the rate of fire, allowing the crews to put more rounds downrange.

Fire control was also improved between the wars, as the lack of accuracy in 1905 was evident. By 1911, Russia had standardized on the Geisler system, although other fire control systems were present.\textsuperscript{179} All the fire control systems were modern and used range clocks. Range finders were varied in type, but all were made by Zeiss, and were thus of the highest quality available.\textsuperscript{180} In the Russo-Japanese War, fire control was mostly guesswork based on gut instinct and confirmed by ranging salvos, slowly brought on target by observers in the spotting tops. By 1914, rangefinders enabled the range to be found far more quickly while range clocks were able to keep a lock on the target's movement so that shots would remain on target even as the target maneuvered to change course and speed. With these improvements to ranging and targeting, as well as the improvements in rate of fire, the Russian ships of 1914 could put a heavier and more accurate fire on their enemies.

The Russians also developed a unique firing system that enabled the ships of the fleet to concentrate fire on a single target. Traditional naval battles were essentially duels between individual ships that sailed in parallel columns. If two ships tried to engage the same target, the observers tended to get confused as to which hit or miss corresponded to his ship or to the other ship that was engaging the same target. The more ships firing on one target, the harder it became for each observer to identify which hits came from his ship. Taking advantage of radio technology, the Russians developed a solution that slaved the firing control of each battleship brigade to one ship. Operating in groups of three, the middle ship would handle all range calculations while the other two ships adjusted their firing
based off their location relative to the middle ship.\textsuperscript{181} This eliminated the problem of multiple spotters, as all the shots were controlled from one ship. In fleet engagement this targeting method would have enabled the Russians to focus fire on individual ships, knocking them out of the battle faster than in the traditional duel method. As the Russians never did engage in a full fleet battle, this advantage would seem purely academic. However, the battles in the Black Sea, where three predreadnoughts engaged one battlecruiser on numerous occasions, proved the value of this system as the three Russian ships were able to effectively target the enemy ship.

Russia was also the undisputed leader in mine warfare, as it had been since it first introduced naval mines during the Crimean War of the 1850's. The most common mine in the Russian inventory was the Model 1908 mine which carried a charge of 250 lbs. of TNT.\textsuperscript{182} According to Gary Cartwright, Marc Lemaire and Vladimir Yakubov, the Model 1908 mine served into the 1960's, a testament to its quality.\textsuperscript{183} Given that Russian mines were of the highest quality and that the defensive doctrine of mine warfare was of equal quality, the next logical development was to find offensive uses for the mines.

Not only did these advanced mines enable Essen to lay his offensive barriers off German ports, but they also enabled Kolchak to modify them to deny German submarines access to the Black Sea. By laying mines off German bases in the Black Sea, he effectively destroyed German submarine operations by the end of 1916. Mines in Russian service were actually the most effective ASW weapons, destroying two thirds of all submarines sunk by Russia during the war.\textsuperscript{184} They were of course highly effective against surface ships as well, for example in December of 1916 the Forward Position mine barrier in the Gulf of Finland sank seven modern German destroyers.\textsuperscript{185}

The Russians had recognized the importance of mines during the Russo-Japanese War, as two Japanese battleships had been sunk by mines during the war. One of the main developments between the wars was the creation of the submarine minelayer \textit{Krab}. The \textit{Krab} was the world's first submarine minelayer when she was built in 1908. She had a maximum payload of 60 mines, although in combat
operations she tended to carry 50 mines. The purpose of the design was to have a vessel capable of penetrating enemy defenses unseen and to lay, unnoticed, a minefield where the enemy would least expect it. While such a stealth mission could be undertaken by surface ships, as the old cruiser Rossiia ably demonstrated in 1914, there was far less risk of being spotted if the minelayer traveled beneath the waves. However, Krab, like many other experimental ships, was unreliable and with many flaws. The Russians failed to develop on the Krab, and so she remained a one of a kind design in Russian service. Other countries, notably Germany, later developed undersea minelayers of the UC type.

Russian submarine design was weak and often flawed, which also did not help in developing a more advanced submarine minelayer. The best submarines in Russian inventory were imported American Holland type ships, designated AG. Of course, Holland type submarines were the world standard in submarines, with many countries buying them directly from the United States or licensing them for domestic production. Russian domestic developments to submarines were the poor quality Bubnov types and a bizarre predilection for externally launched torpedoes. Known as the Dzhevetskii Gear, the external torpedo mounts enabled the submarine to aim its torpedoes without having to aim the entire ship at the target. A nifty feature, but not particularly more useful or reliable than a regular internal launch tube. Additionally, the external launchers could not be reloaded while submerged, where as the internal tubes could.

While submarines were a weak point of the fleet, surface torpedo craft were perhaps the most advanced elements of the fleet. Based on the 1911 destroyer Novik, Russian destroyers carried an impressive centerline battery of torpedoes. British and German destroyers tended to have the ability to launch a barrage of four torpedoes, from either four single mounts or two double mounts. The Novik could deliver a broadside of eight torpedoes from four double mounts. The Derzky-class, a Novik variant operated in the Black Sea, could deliver a ten torpedo broadside. Later developments, implemented on the Orfey-class and the Izyaslav-class of Baltic Sea destroyers, included a triple
torpedo mount that was capable of aiming each tube individually so as to enable a controllable spread to the torpedoes. 191 This was especially useful for browning shots, or shots into the enemy line and not aimed at individual ships, which was a common torpedo doctrine used mostly by the British but by other nations as well. 192 The Orfeys and Izyaslavs each had three triple torpedo mounts along the centerline, enabling all the torpedoes to be fired to either side of the ship. The only other nation that could match the Russian destroyers for torpedo quantity was the United States with the “Thousand Tonners,” which mounted four triple torpedo mounts. However, the American ships did not mount the launchers on the centerline but instead had two launchers on each side of the ship, limiting broadside firepower. It is important to consider that the “Thousand Tonners” were late war designs while the Novik had been in service since 1911 and the Derzky type entered service in 1915.

Besides having good torpedo firepower, the Novik and her derivatives were also well armed in terms of guns. Novik had four 4 in. (102 mm) guns, the Derzkys had three 4 in. guns, and the Izyaslavs had five 4 in. guns. In comparison to the destroyers of Russia's enemy, the German destroyers usually mounted three 88 mm (3.5 in.) guns. 193 In terms of size and number, the Russian destroyers held an advantage over their German foe. The success of the Black Sea destroyers against their Ottoman opponents, who used older German types, may be connected to the Russian superiority in artillery. Certainly, the Black Sea destroyers posted impressive successes against Ottoman convoys and escorts with their guns.

In addition to their weapons, the destroyers were also fast. Novik was the fastest destroyer in the world, making 38 kts, when she was launched, and she remained so for many years after. 194 The Novik derivatives, like the Derzkys, were also fast but could not surpass the speed of the Novik. German prewar destroyers could reach a maximum speed of 30 kts while ships developed during the war reached 32 kts. 195 No other destroyer could come close to catching the modern Russian destroyers in the open. This speed was put to good effect during the Black Sea convoy raids as well as during the
Baltic mining operations, when the speed enabled the destroyers to get to the target area quickly and to speed away from enemy patrols.

The good quality of the *Novik* type ships also allowed them to be modified to take on additional missions. Although they were not intended to be used as minelayers, both Essen and Kolchak put them to good use in that role. The destroyers served as the core of the Baltic offensive mining operations, as their small size and speed made them ideal for stealth infiltration of German waters. Of course, carrying mines made the ships unable to engage in combat, as mines blocked torpedo mount and that it would be suicidal to open fire on an enemy ship while carrying a load of mines on deck. However, once the mines were laid, the destroyers could resume regular combat operations. The *Novik* type destroyers were truly multi-role combat ships that gave the Imperial Russian Navy an advantage over the Germans and Ottomans.

Another important development the Russians invested in was aviation. Although aviation was only experimented with in the Baltic, in the Black Sea it was placed at the disposal of fleet commanders like Eberhardt and Kolchak who put it to use in normal combat operations. Development began only in 1912, but it had progressed rapidly so that Eberhardt was able to use his seaplane carriers effectively for scouting at the outbreak of the war. By 1916, when Kolchak took over, naval aviation had developed to undertake anti-shipping strikes as well as the bombing of shore facilities. The effectiveness of these raids, such as the strike on Zonguldak in 1916 which sank the German collier *Irmingard*, was unquestionable. Combined carrier-battleship groups were able to block coal supplies from Zonguldak, effectively limiting Ottoman surface operations due to lack of coal.

These operations are even more impressive when it is considered that the Russians were given poor quality materials to work with. It would seem that the poor Russian economy prevented them from producing effective local aircraft, which is partially true. Local limitations meant that engines could not really be produced at home, although the airframes were of good quality and handling.
Engines had to be imported from abroad, usually the United States or France. As a result, Russia also ordered aircraft from abroad. The most common were the Curtiss Type F, imported from the United States. These aircraft were of high quality, but when Russia placed a new order for Curtiss Type K aircraft, the American manufacturer sold a defective product. The Type K was made of poor materials, had an unreliable engine, and had poor handling. The objective was to put together a new aircraft quickly so as to secure the lucrative $2,000,000 contract, valued in 1915 USD, offered by the Russian government. In efforts to make this happen, the quality of the work suffered accordingly. Curtiss, which had a reputation as the leader in seaplanes, was quick to blame any problems with the new aircraft on the Russians. However, it became increasingly apparent that the aircraft were deeply flawed, as Curtiss test pilots and engineers could do nothing to overcome the generally poor quality of the design. While this was happening, the Russians had to execute a backup plan, developing their own seaplane, the M.5. By 1916, the M.5 and the later developed M.9 had become the standard Russian seaplane, replacing the Curtiss types in service. While in the long run the Type K did have the benefit of expanding Russia’s domestic aviation industry, it would have been much more useful if the Black Sea carriers had more aircraft available in 1915.

Of course, the Americans were not the only ones to sell Russia defective technology and then blame the Russians for making a fuss about it. The British routinely sold the Russians defective aviation engines and the French sold worn-out obsolete aircraft, both pretending that they were selling new builds. The assumption was that the Russians were beggars and thus they should not complain about the poor quality. The undertone was also that if Russia were not so backward, then she could have built the engines and aircraft herself. Russia, as it has been pointed out already, was not backward but it would be theoretically cheaper to import proper parts from abroad. Unfortunately, the theory failed to hold up to Western anti-Russian bias, and thus the Russians were forced to make do with what they had.
Chapter V: The Officers and the Men

Fortunately for the Imperial Russian Navy, creative minds were abundant at all levels to enable them to use their limited resources to the best effect. This was as much true with naval aviation as it was for the destroyers, mine warfare, and battleships. These officers were not the old and incompetent aristocrats who lived removed from the realities of war. They were willing to take risks, both tactical and personal, and to utilize the assets given to them in unconventional ways. Visionary leaders like Essen and Kolchak became the inspirational face of the fleet while more reserved and less outspoken officers like Nepenin and Eberhardt served the fleet with their quiet but effective leadership.

The Admirals

Nikolai Ottovich von Essen was a Baltic German born in 1860 and entered navy service in 1880. He served notably in the Russo-Japanese War and in the First World War before his death in 1915. Essen was an aggressive commander, but not one who would charge foolishly into the teeth of a superior foe. In the defense of Port Arthur in 1904, Essen commanded the cruiser Novik, the German built half-sister of the Zhemchug and Izumrud, which he sailed aggressively against the Japanese attackers. According to Graf, who recounted a stirring biography of the admiral, Essen's ship was the first to sally out to meet the Japanese and closed to a distance of 3,000 yards, about 2.7 km, before returning to port. While it may sound suicidal and vainglorious to charge that close to the enemy line, Essen pulled it off without receiving much damage in return. The audacity of the attack and the maneuverability of his ship, as the Novik and her half-sisters were the fastest and most maneuverable cruisers in the fleet, surprised the Japanese and threw off their attack. Essen repeated his attacks, coordinating with the torpedo-boats and destroyers, and by doing so effectively denied the Japanese control of the seas around Port Arthur. In Graf's words, “the Novik was always in motion, always and everywhere first in the field, she was the terror of enemy destroyers.” After the death of
Makarov, Essen was transferred to the battleship Sevastopol where he continued his aggressive attacks. The slower battleship received more fire than his previous command, but Essen was always able to bring the battered ship back to port after each sortie. He managed to delay the siege by bombarding Japanese artillery positions and on one occasion he even attempted to ram a Japanese warship (Graf 34).  When Port Arthur was lost, Sevastopol was the only ship the Japanese could not recover, as Essen had made sure that he scuttled her in deep water.

Woodward describes him of being of “the Makarov Tradition,” an aggressive commander who was willing to take risks to achieve victory. By emphasizing the aggressive nature of both Makarov and Essen as fighters, the real value of men of their type is missed. Any man can fight aggressively and charge headlong into the enemy's line, but few men can earn the respect of their crews and get those men to follow them willingly into what would appear to be certain death. The true value of the Makarov type was the personal force of character. Graf, in recalling his first meeting with Essen, struck upon this theme, “He comes back to my memory as if he were alive … Of small stature, with lively gray eyes, a small auburn beard, quick and energetic movements, he made a powerful impression from the first time I saw him.” The power of his personality was such that during the 1905 Revolution his barracks was the only barracks at Kronstadt to not join the revolt. Graf remarked that it was not for lack of revolutionary spirit that the crews did not revolt, but that it was Essen, blocking their path out of the barracks, who spoke to them and convinced them to remain inside. Graf attributed much of the devotion to Essen to his ability to interact with is officers and his crews. Essen's “paternal and just bearing towards his subordinates inspired deep affection from all ranks.” One of Essen's first actions upon being given command of the Baltic Fleet in 1908 was to improve relations between the officers and the men. While this was ultimately ineffective for the whole of the fleet, for those around Essen and those who met him, it seems clear that the reform had an effect.
Another of Essen's virtues was his ability to communicate effectively with his superiors and to organize and improvise. Working with Grigorovich, Essen was able to focus on improving the light ships of the fleet, overcoming the Mahanian pressures of the vocal Captain Klado and fleet historian Belavenets. The development of mining techniques and the application of mine rails to nearly every destroyer and cruiser in the fleet allowed the Baltic Fleet to maximize Russia's advantage in mine technology. As mine warfare caused the Germans more losses than any other form of combat during the First World War, this focus greatly served the Russian cause. Essen's approach to gunnery training, the idea that it should actually happen, turned Russia's weakness into a strength. This training held its effectiveness long after his death, with the long-range accurate fire from Bakhirev's squadron delaying the German dreadnoughts at Moonsound. Fire discipline was also an important and often forgotten aspect of the fleet. During the night infiltrations of German waters during the mining operations of 1914, the Russian ships held their fire, even at close range, to avoid detection by the Germans. This not only improved the survivability of the Russian ships engaged in the operation, but also maximized the success of the minefields, as the barriers were only discovered after the Germans lost a few ships to each one.

Kolchak, with an equally powerful personality, came to represent the face of the fleet after the death of Essen. Like Essen, he was an aggressive commander who spent his time on the sea instead of commanding from the shore. During the Russo-Japanese War, Kolchak had been the commander of the destroyer *Serditi*, responsible for protecting Makarov's flagship during the battles. He had served with Essen in the destroyer force of the Baltic Fleet while at the same time being attached to General Staff of the Navy, an organization he was influential in creating. He is best remembered for being the Autocrat of Russia during the Civil War, but before the war he was known for being an Arctic explorer, having been part of three different missions from 1900 to 1912. In Graf's words, he had "immense energy, intelligence, and courage … he had something which attracted the eye and the heart;
at the very first glance he charmed and inspired faith.”  Even the Cheka, who investigated and shot
him in 1920, respected him immediately. K.A. Popov, the Vice Chairman of the Omsk Cheka,
remarked on Kolchak's personality:

What was his bearing during the examination? It was that of the captive commander of a defeated
army; and from this standpoint it was entirely dignified. In this he differed sharply from most of his
ministers with whom I had to deal as investigator in the trial of the Kolchak Government. In the
cases of those men, there was, with rare exception, cowardice, a desire to represent themselves as
involuntary participants … There was none of this in Kolchak's demeanor.

Even with his impressive personality and character, it is still surprising that he managed to
accomplish so much during his career. In 1916, Kolchak was twice promoted from Captain to Rear
Admiral to Vice Admiral. The promotions were in quick succession and were notable because of
Kolchak's age. At only 41, Kolchak had become a Vice Admiral and the commander of the Black Sea
Fleet. It is important to note that Kolchak had no important family connections nor was the fleet a
true meritocracy, so his rapid promotion at a relatively young age was a sign of true exceptional ability.
Of course, Kolchak was known to be very vocal and was a notorious self-promoter, but his actions
certainly seemed to justify the attention. In both the Baltic and Black Seas, Kolchak was known for
risk taking. In the Baltic he was aboard the obsolete training cruiser Rossiia when she laid mines off
the Pomeranian coast. In the Black Sea he organized fire fighting efforts on the battleship Imperatritsa
Maria, which were ultimately unsuccessful but had placed him in great danger on an exploding
warship.

Other than risk taking, Kolchak had a skill for coordination. At a time when it was uncommon
for two Russian infantry battalions to coordinate even when they were next to each other, Kolchak
managed to coordinate the guns of his ships with artillery spotters on shore. In the Baltic he first tried
this in the successful 1915 defense of Moon Sound, when the guns of his squadron pinned down the
German advance. This was later expanded upon in the Black Sea during the operation against
Trebizond in 1916. Successful naval support fire aided the ground troops in clearing out Ottoman
defenses, while it was his innovative use of the *Elpidifors* that made the operation possible. Additionally, it was his experience with mines, gained during his service with Essen's destroyers, that aided him in curtailing German submarine operations in the Black Sea.

Kolchak is often given credit for creating battleship-carrier task forces, but these had already been created by Eberhardt before Kolchak's arrival in the Black Sea. In fact, the greatest triumph of the carriers, the air raid on Zonguldak, had been achieved under the direction of Eberhardt. The fact that such an achievement has been wrongly attributed to Kolchak is indicative of the great faith that was held in him then and even still today. While very few people remember Eberhardt, as he is only mentioned in passing in most books on the subject if he is even mentioned at all, Kolchak's name rings with familiarity for anyone who knows about Russia's navy.

Of course, Andrei Augustovich Eberhardt was also an important force in the navy. This was not so much because of his personal traits, for he was not a charismatic or particularly active man. He was rather generic in ability. Eberhardt appears most commonly in the historical record as simply the admiral who commanded the Black Sea Fleet before Kolchak. Even then, historians disagree on why Kolchak replaced him. Sondhaus suggests that he was replaced because he failed to sink the *Yavuz Sultan Selim* and the *Midili* in July. Mitchell suggests that it was simply because Kolchak was a vigorous and youthful leader while Eberhardt was older and more conservative in his tactics. Woodward offers no explanation and merely states that in July of 1916, Kolchak replaced Eberhardt. All note that the new ships Eberhardt had ordered before the war, including more seaplane carriers and *Elpidifors*, were delivered in July of 1916. Eberhardt, the man who had ordered these ships, never had a chance to use them in action while his successor did, and so was given all the credit for them. In this way, history has been unfair to Eberhardt, whose creativity in fleet composition and tactics has been neglected due to his lack of charisma and daring. Michael Duffy summed up Eberhardt's downfall the best: “Despite a naturally aggressive predilection he determined to adopt a decidedly defensive posture
while awaiting replacements ships. His logic was sound but ultimately rendered him a political liability.  

A lack of aggressive action has often been taken to mean cowardice and incompetence. However, this is often a false conclusion as many cautious leaders proved to be the best. However, the First World War was primarily a war of attack minded officers who viewed success in terms of ground gained and who would not be content to leave ground in enemy hands. In the West, defensive leaders were replaced by aggressive, and in many ways ignorant, officers. At Verdun, the defensive Petain was replaced by the aggressive Nivelle, with tragic consequences for the poilus under his command. In Britain, the cautious Jellicoe was replaced with the arrogant and bombastic Beatty, who fortunately realized the value of caution and stuck to Jellicoe's policies. All three defensive commanders, Eberhardt, Petain, and Jellicoe, were replaced in 1916 for their lack of aggression. Their superiors had overlooked the victories they had already won, instead focusing on their lack of aggression for the reason why total victory had not been achieved. Petain had stopped the German advance on Verdun and brought German losses to near parity with the French. Jellicoe had maintained British control over the North Sea and the blockade he implemented was slowly starving Germany. Eberhardt's task forces were an effective counter to the Yavuz Sultan Selim while his raids against Zonguldak cut off the battlecruiser's coal supply. Like Jellicoe, Eberhardt had maintained complete control over the sea but had failed to sink the pride of the enemy fleet.

Another mostly forgotten leader was Adrian Ivanovich Nepenin, who was similar in age to Kolchak and was also promoted to Vice Admiral in 1916. After the Revolution, Nepenin is remembered, if he is remembered at all, for being the commander of the Baltic Fleet who was executed by revolutionaries during February Revolution. Graf described Nepenin as somewhat dithering and bad at understanding politics, which ultimately led to his assassination in March 1917.

However, he praised Nepenin's skills as an intelligence gatherer, saying, “how many times had the Chief of
Communications, by his striking information, saved our ships from great mishaps, and how often had very difficult expeditions succeeded, only owing to his great knowledge." As Graf was keenly aware, Nepenin's greatest skill was as a desk bound intelligence chief. It was Nepenin who had turned the Communications Department of the Fleet into an intelligence network and it was Nepenin who first used radio waves to track the positions of German warships. When the *Magdeburg* ran aground, it was Nepenin's men who deciphered the codebook and passed it on to Churchill directly.

The value of Nepenin's network was proven with the effectiveness of the minefields. Without Nepenin, who knew the positions of German ships and their primary lanes of travel, the minefields could not have been into position. White remembers that on the *Rossiia*'s minelaying mission to Pomerania, two men from Nepenin's department accompanied them to intercept German signals. Their purpose was not only to decipher German transmissions for later analysis but also to provide immediate notice if the Germans reported spotting Russian ships or mines. In this way, the intelligence officers provided an immediate protective effect on the ship. Such supporting efforts largely go unappreciated in histories, as people tend to be more concerned with the action, and this is one of the reasons why men like Nepenin have faded from memory.

As we have seen, the men commanding the Imperial Russian Navy were far from the cowardly, incompetent aristocrats of the stereotype. Some were bold and aggressive like Essen and Kolchak. Others were more subdued but ingeniously creative like Eberhardt and Nepenin. While ship captains did seem to be overly cautious, as was the captain of the *Rossiia* in 1914, the boldness of their superiors and the enthusiasm of their subordinates tended to goad them to action.

The Junior Officers

The role of the junior officers was essential to the fleet. They were the men who put orders into action, made the navigation calculations, supervised the engines, directed combat, provisioned the
crews, and maintained order. The junior officers of the fleet in 1914 were not the same men who had been at Tsushima. At Tsushima, many of the officers had come from the nepotistic Petersburg aristocracy. Then, the navy had been the place for the second sons of noble families, men who had no other place to equal the prestige of their name. After Tsushima this had changed. The navy no longer had the prestige it once had, and so the men seeking comfortable and prestigious employment had to look elsewhere. Now, the men who made up the officer ranks who entered the fleet with the intent to reestablish its greatness. Graf and White were two of such men. White described his decision to join the navy:

As a youngster I was convinced that, first, there was something worth while in risking one's life for one's country in peacetime as well as in war, and second, that it was up to my generation to make the Russian navy a strong force, to eliminate the possibility of such incidents as the Rusalka catastrophe [a major post-Tsushima naval accident], and to bring the flag of St. Andrew to a place of honor on the seven seas, as in the days of Admiral Seniavin.229

Of course, among the aristocracy White's opinion was in the minority. He noted how his schoolmates mocked him for wanting to be a part of the navy after Tsushima, but this only served to strengthen his resolve.230 As he saw it, “it was up to me to join the service, popular or unpopular, perhaps the more so because it was unpopular.”231 Among other naval officers, he was not in the minority. Many seemed to be just as motivated as he was to rebuild Russia's naval glory. While this may sound, and may very well be, a romantic image of the fleet, it was the image that White believed in. As a career officer and dedicated monarchist, who when given the option to leave Russia in 1917 chose to remain to fight the Bolsheviks, he was dedicated to the cause of the navy. The writings of the historian Belavenets, jingoistic as they may be, touch upon the same themes as White's memoirs: the importance of the flag of St. Andrew and the defense of Russia. Graf also makes special reference to the flag of St. Andrew and to the professionalism of the officers. Throughout his memoir, Graf recounts the stories of his brother officers who were just as motivated and dedicated to the monarchy as he was. While the war was certainly not as glorious as the men made it sound, they did believe in their
cause and were willing to fight for it long after it ceased to exist, as was the case with White. As Graf pointed out, “they remained because they felt it was their duty to fight with the external enemy of their country.”

Of course, there were dissident officers who attempted to ingratiate themselves with the new revolutionary regime. Such is the case in any regime change, especially particularly violent ones. White mentions that most of these men were not career officers but had instead been commissioned by the necessities of war. “Only the inferior personal [Graf's incorrect word] on the ships was partly composed of the sub-lieutenants of war-time.” In fact, many of these new officers were university students, who by their nature were more inclined to revolutionary views. Graf pointed out that he did know a certain former student who had “become a naval officer only for the purpose of leading revolutionary propaganda more easily.” Of the regular career officers, there were some defectors to the revolutionaries. Graf noted that such men tended to come from less active parts of the fleet, in part due to the men being somewhat disgraced and upset at their post. It is of course hard to imagine that “the mass of naval officers were homogeneous in nature,” as Graf said, but it is difficult to imagine that men who owed so much to the imperial system and who had derived so much prestige from rebuilding the fleet, would abandon it. As many of the officers continued to fight on, first with the Provisional Government against the Germans, and later with the Whites against the Reds, it appears that the dominant belief was dedication to the fleet and by extension the monarchy.

Besides motivation, the new generation of officers were highly professional. Much of this had to do with the new attention to training paid by Essen and Grigorovich, but the dedication of the new officers certainly contributed to maximizing the effect of the training. The widespread knowledge of mine warfare, which in other navies was a specific skill set, is indicative of the extent of the training. The good accuracy of the fleet at range, as shown by the battleships at Moon Sound, showed the ability of the gunnery officers to identify ranges and to coordinate accurate fire. The fact that at Moon Sound
the gunnery was indirect, fired over the nearby island, makes this more impressive. The officers were willing to follow orders, often encouraging some of the more dangerous ones, such as the junior officers of the *Rossiia* who persuaded Kolchak to send them on the most dangerous mining mission of the campaign. As just an anecdote to the professionalism of the tsarist officers, in early November 1917, Tsentrobalt ordered to the Baltic Fleet's destroyers to Petrograd to aid in the Bolshevik coup against Kerensky. The officers obeyed and brought their ships and crew to the center of the new revolution. There were cases when ships disobeyed orders, but most of these cases were determined by the sailors and their shipboard soviets.

The Sailors

This then brings up the question of how revolutionary were these revolutionary sailors? The common take is that the sailors were revolutionaries to the core and loyal to the Bolsheviks, who held control over the fleet and the men. This myth has been cemented by the ideas put forth in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*, which implied that the sailors had been Bolsheviks since the 1905 Revolution. However, this is in fact a myth. The reality of the situation was that the sailors were not Bolsheviks, but were still very much revolutionary. Their actions during February 1917 prove their revolutionary credentials while their revolt against Bolshevik autocracy in March 1921 is evidence of their opposition to Bolshevism. When social origin is taken into account, the myth of worker-sailor is also dispelled.

To begin with, the myth of Bolshevik sailor in 1905 is a lie. A.N. Matyushenko and G.M. Vakulinchuk, the martyred leaders of the mutiny on the *Potemkin*, were not Bolsheviks. Of the two, only Matyushenko had any experience with Bolshevik ideas, having attended RSDLP circles led by a future Bolshevik in 1898. Despite this influence, Matyushenko, like many other mutineers, had not been a member of any revolutionary party and their ideas of revolution were not clearly defined on ideological grounds past the destruction of the tsarist autocracy that treated them like serfs. In fact,
Matyushenko “had openly rejected their party [the Bolsheviks],” earning him the hatred of Lenin, who made an effort to discredit Matyushenko's legacy. When Eisenstein made the film to glorify, and hijack the memory of, the mutiny he focused on Vakulinchuk as his hero instead of Matyushenko. For the Bolshevik director it was easier to appropriate the memory of the man who was dead at the start of the mutiny than the one who actually led it and turned away the Bolsheviks.

When social composition of the 1917 fleet is considered, the fleet comes off decidedly less Bolshevik. During the 1960's, it became popular in the Soviet Union to analyze the social composition of the October Revolution. The navy had conducted its own study and concluded that most common background for sailors was to have been farmers. The problem with this study was while it provided detailed statistics for many different job backgrounds, ranging from broad categories such as farmer to very specific categories like machinists and the separate category of lathe operators, was that the miscellaneous category made up 19.8% of the fleet. Miscellaneous was the second most populous category, and nearly 20% of the fleet being of a miscellaneous background when numerous other professions were included seems suspiciously opaque. The navy then opened its archives to scholars and soon two new views developed. The first was made by D.A. Garkavenko who picked apart each category to determine whether the category consisted of proletarians or bourgeois. Garkavenko determined that 53.5% of the fleet was of true proletarian background, of which the largest category was factory workers making up 30.8% of the entire fleet. He was immediately criticized by S.S. Khesin who said that Garkavenko's insistence on proletarian origins was incorrect and overestimated. Khesin estimated that the fleet was actually only 25.4% proletarian, 25.9% semi-proletarian, and 48.6% peasant or petty bourgeois. The clear difference between Garkavenko's and Khesin's estimates is the semi-proletarian category, which Garkavenko mostly applied to the true proletarian category while Khesin clearly defined them as separate. Given the social and economic conditions of Russia during World War I, Khesin's conclusion makes more sense. The Russian working
class at the time did not consist of many true workers, but rather it consisted of seasonal workers from the countryside who were peasants in dress, mindset, and name. While the fleet did employ an over-representative amount of true workers, which can be seen in both Garkavenko's and Khesin's studies, it would also have pulled many of these seasonal workers, the semi-proletariat, into service.

With the semi-proletariat being of peasant background, it would seem that Bolshevism would not be the ideology that they would have held true sympathies for. The ideology that most represented the needs of the peasantry, and by extension the semi-proletariat, would have been the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries, better known as the SRs. Their party platform was self-explanatory: they wanted a socialist revolution and they wanted it immediately. According to Reginald Zelnik, “Most SRs were of the ultra-revolutionary persuasion. They were often high-energy revolutionary performers, and their patience with any schemes for a 'transitional' or temporary phase, postponing socialism to some more distant point in time, was, for the moment, very thin.”

Statements from the Kronstadt Soviet from 1921 give a strong indication of SR thought. In February 1921, the Kronstadt Soviet released the following statement to the workers and peasants of Petrograd:

All the revolutionary energy of Kronstadt, its guns and machine-guns, will be resolutely directed against the Constituent Assembly, and against all retreat. But, if the workers, having become disillusioned with the 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' take a stand against the new imposters, for free Soviets, for freedom of speech, press, organization and actions for workers and peasants of all ideological tendencies – Anarchist, Left Social-Revolutionary or otherwise – if the workers rise up in a third, genuinely proletarian revolution for the real slogans of October, then Kronstadt will support them with all its strength, unanimously and with the will to conquer or die.

Kronstadters were clearly disillusioned with Lenin's dictatorship of the proletariat, viewing it as a Bolshevik usurping of the power of the people. This difference, the belief that the proletariat should control the soviets, goes straight to the SR populist roots of Kronstadt, and by extension, the fleet. The core of the SR party platform was populism based on the needs of all the down-trodden classes in Russia. This clashed with the Bolsheviks who focused only on the workers but believed that control should belong to the top echelons of the party, who were not workers but instead professional
revolutionaries. At the end of 1920, 93.9% of sailors at Kronstadt had served in the Imperial Navy before the revolutions. Kronstadt in 1921 represented the entire Red Navy in the Baltic, as it was the only proper naval base left in the Baltic as the others had been lost to break-away states like Finland and Estonia, so the statistic is representative of the whole fleet. As the fleet of 1920 and early 1921 consisted almost entirely of men from the Imperial Navy, then the SR platform of the sailors can be applied to the sailors during the First World War.

During the February Revolution, the main fleet base at Kronstadt was indeed a base for SR and Menshevik ideas. Even in October, when the fleet formed the core of the Bolshevik coup, the Bolsheviks had at most one third of the seats in the Kronstadt soviet and had similar strength in all other naval bases. Even though the Bolsheviks managed to secure top fleet leadership positions for their party, the SRs filled many of the intermediate and low ranking positions in the power structure. When the Bolsheviks disbanded the Tsentrobalt committee in an effort to consolidate their power in the fleet they ran into some opposition from the SR delegates, who wanted to maintain the democratic principles of the revolution. These principles of democracy and violence all had their roots in the terror campaigns of the 1870's that spawned the SR party. Democracy referred to power being given to the masses and the destruction of the old ruling class by violence. While Lenin and the Bolsheviks certainly agreed with the latter, it was the former that they could not abide. The controversy over Tsentrobalt was just one of numerous instances of the Bolsheviks attempting, usually successfully, to hijack the revolution of the masses. Bolshevik propagandists tried infiltrating ships to spread their message, but officers either stopped them or the crews would send them away. Graf recounted one instance on the battleship Sevastopol after the October Revolution when the crew attempted to throw the Bolshevik propagandists overboard. In this case, the crew rebelled against the Bolsheviks after they had criticized the ships officers, but in other cases it was because the Bolsheviks were coming to tell them how to run their democratic revolution. The sailors had already slaughtered the officers they
hated and had already elected their replacements. They had no need of Bolsheviks meddling in their affairs, especially when the Bolsheviks came with their own lists that they wanted the sailors to vote for. The sailors had not overthrown tsarist autocracy to exchange it for a Leninist autocracy. They were after all more sympathetic to the SR cause than to Lenin's.

The sailors had served the revolutionary cause well, with even the active destroyers of the fleet, still led by their monarchist officers, following Bolshevik orders during the assault on Petrograd in October 1917. The base at Kronstadt served as a major rallying point for revolutionary troops and its sailors were the shock troops of the October Revolution. However, like many other dedicated revolutionaries, the sailors fell afoul of the Bolsheviks' self-serving desire for absolute power. In February 1921, the Kronstadt sailors and soldiers revolted against the Bolsheviks with the declaration that, “if the workers, having become disillusioned with the 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' take a stand against the new imposters, for free Soviets, for freedom of speech, press, organization, and action for workers and peasants of all ideological tendencies … then Kronstadt will support them with all strength, unanimously and with the will to conquer or die.” This open rebellion of what was once considered the “Vanguard of the Revolution” was something that Lenin could not abide by. Despite playing down the threat of the revolt in the press, Lenin said, “counter it with rifles, no matter how innocent it may appear.” Trotsky was then sent to the area, where he promptly began organizing Red Army units for an assaults against the rebels. As the rebels had until that moment been considered the most loyal revolutionaries, Trotsky brought in more commissars and loyal party member volunteers to augment the regular forces, and to maintain their loyalty to the party. After a failed first assault on March 8, Trotsky brought in additional politically reliable reinforcements, including Red Army officer cadets and 10th Party Congress delegates. After a week of preparations and political indoctrination, Trotsky gave the order for the final attack on March 16. From March 16 to March 18, Red Army troops led by M.N. Tukhachevsky and supported by the highly motivated kursanti cadets charged
across the frozen sea where they engaged the sailor-rebels in brutal urban combat. Backed by heavy artillery, the Red Army eventually battered down the rebels strongholds and forced even the mighty dreadnought battleships to surrender. With the capitulation of the dreadnought *Petropavlovsk* the battle ended and the rebellion was crushed.

With the rebellion crushed, and the sailors who had once been the heart of the revolution killed or forced to flee to Finland, there was punishment to be meted out. For the Bolsheviks, the betrayal of the sailors left a mark, and they would not be willing to trust the fleet again. Israel Getzler said that, “Lenin's response [to Kronstadt] blocked what was still left of the revolution's political open-endedness, completed the formation of the highly centralized and bureaucratized single-party dictatorship, and put Russia firmly on the road to Stalinism.” As Lenin himself said on March 15, 1921, “there are only two kinds of government possible in Russia – a government by the soviets or a government headed by a tsar.” With his insistence on Bolshevik domination of the soviets and his policy of war communism, it was clear that Lenin intended to be the new red tsar.

The implication of the sailor's revolt was that the sailors had not been members of the Bolshevik system. They had undoubtedly fought for it during the revolution, but it is unlikely that they were aware of what they were actually fighting for. It is perhaps unsurprising that the sailors did not know what Bolshevism stood for, since Lenin and his followers keenly made their platform sound more inclusive and peaceful than it actually was. What is surprising is how little they knew about Marxism and socialism in general. During White's escape from Russia in 1920, he found himself disguised as a Bolshevik sailor on a train of former-sailor chekists in the middle of Siberia. His only defense was a copy of Bukharin's latest book, which he used to start a discussion of Marxism to distract the chekists. Retelling his story, White said, “As we went on, line by line ad page by page, I soon discovered that none of the youngsters had the slightest idea of what Marxism was all about, while two men in workers' clothes seemed to tend very definitely towards anarcho-syndicalism.” Logic would dictate that a
chekist would know what Marxism, especially Bolshevism, was about. However, the train full of former-sailor chekists seemed to know nothing more about Marxism than that it, “meant the destruction of monarchy, aristocracy, bureaucracy, and the officer class.” Even the political commissar for the Red Fifth Army, who was also present on the train, was not well-versed in his Marxism. The man described his decision to join the Bolsheviks: “As far as I'm concerned, I joined the Bolshevik Party after the beginning of the Civil War. During the World War I served as a temporary second lieutenant. I always hated the rotten old regime that lost us the Japanese War and was losing the World War.”

While this is a Civil War anecdote, it rings true for many sailors and soldiers of the February and October Revolutions. At the time, most people agreed that the imperial autocracy was not working well for Russia and that the phrase “peace, land, and bread,” a Bolshevik slogan, sounded like a good idea. The only people who could tell the difference between various radical groups and their ideologies were the educated classes, which meant the intelligentsia and not the common folk. The common folk merely wanted their oppressors destroyed and would happily join whichever group was willing to aid them in that goal. When the February Revolution broke out, the sailors at Kronstadt were some of the first to take up arms against the regime. They were also the first to purge their officers, killing 200 in the night between February 27 and 28. The killing quickly spread to other naval bases, notably at Reval where Graf and White watched small groups of sailors execute numerous officers. For the revolutionaries, the officers were physical manifestations of the oppressive regime they sought to overthrow, and so they had to die with the regime. Of the revolutionary parties active during 1917, only the Bolsheviks had the drive and organization to make widespread pronouncements and coordinated demonstrations. Despite the ideologically more attractive message of the SRs, the inferior SR organization was unable to compete with Lenin's charisma. It was through this charisma and organization that the Bolsheviks were able to hijack the Russian Revolution, although cunning and deceit certainly aided their cause in October.
The sailors, like the whole of Russia, had been misled by the Bolsheviks and Lenin's autocratic aims. The fact that Lenin also managed to hijack the memory of the revolution, and in doing so buried the memory of the sailor-revolutionaries of Kronstadt, goes back to the old adage commonly attributed to him: “a lie told often enough becomes truth.” Eisenstein's films certainly helped that lie become a truth, convincing many viewers that not only was the massacre on the Odessa Steps real but that the sailors of 1905 had been Bolsheviks. While the Bolsheviks twisted and distorted the memories of 1905 and 1917, one thing they did not change was the violence of the crews. The crews did murder their officers, and they certainly needed no encouragement from the Bolsheviks to do so. To say that the crews were not Bolshevik is not the same as saying they were non-revolutionary. By the nature of the SR ideology, they were likely more revolutionary than the Bolsheviks. Where Lenin and his followers wished to tear down the state in order to build a dictatorship that they would control, the sailors seemed to believe in the soviets and the new powers granted to them. As White pointed out with his conversations with the chekists, the nature of their revolt was with the rejection of the tsarist autocracy which held them down.²⁶⁵ There was no indication that these sailors having freed themselves from one autocracy would accept another.
Conclusion

The general assumptions about the Imperial Russian Navy have mostly been negative. Very few outsiders sang its praises, and when they did it was for the steadfast nature of the crews and not for any technological advancements or tactical skill. It appeared as a fact of life that the Russians could not exist upon the seas and could only exert power on land. However, these general assumptions have been wrong. The Russians were quite capable on the seas, as well as beneath the waves and flying high above them. While there have been moments that have cast doubt on Russian naval prowess, such as the debacle at Tsushima or the farce at Penang, none of these failures were representative of the fleet that fought against the Germans and the Ottomans during the First World War. There were of course fundamental problems with the fleet, such as the debilitating economizing and the poor quality of the officers, who saw the navy as just a prestigious little job for their aristocratic stature. Relations between officers and men, representative of the old days of the squire and his serfs, were notably poor. All of Russia's problems, ranging from economic woes to rising class conflict, were condensed in the harsh and cramped atmosphere of the ships of the fleet.

However, the problems of 1905 had been actively addressed in the interwar years. The duo of Grigorovich and Essen managed to dodge pressures of the fleet historian Belavenets and the infamous and ignorant Klado, and avoided building the over-expensive and not particularly useful battle fleet. Instead, Grigorovich and Essen spent the budget on new destroyers that were the fastest and most heavily armed in the world. They invested in mines and ammunition, realizing the value of quality. Most importantly, they invested in training. Junior officers were trained in the newest forms of mine warfare and fire coordination, as well as being in closer proximity to the fleet commanders who now worked more closely with their subordinates. The sailors too received their share of training, with a special focus on gunnery drills.
In the war, the Imperial Russian Navy performed above expectations. In the Black Sea it had undisputed control of the sea and it slaughtered Ottoman convoys with impunity. Aircraft were used to good effect as spotters for the ships against shore targets and even managed to conduct their own bombing raids. Landing craft were used to conduct successful amphibious landings against heavily defended positions. Mines were adapted for anti-submarine duty, effectively neutralizing the German u-boat in the Black Sea. In the Baltic, audacious mining operations put mines off of German ports as far as Western Pomerania. The mines sent 42 German warships, and numerous merchant ships, to the bottom of the sea. In one of the only gunnery battles between capital ships, long after the Tsar had been deposed, the Bakhirev's small and obsolete squadron managed to delay the German invasion at Moonsound for three days.

These successes were all due to the improvements of the interwar years. Improved gunnery training and ranging equipment enabled Bakhirev to outrange his technically superior German foes. The mines, the training, and the Noviks enabled Essen to conduct his 1914 mining offensive. The new seaplane carriers and the Elpidifors allowed Eberhardt and Kolchak to destroy Ottoman coal supplies, giving Russia domination over the Black Sea.

The admirals who ran these operations were far from the stereotype of incompetent, old aristocrats callously sending men to their deaths. Kolchak and Nenenin were both relatively young for their ranks, and despite their youthfulness they proved to be exceptionally talented within their fields. Even Essen, who died of exhaustion in 1915 at the relatively young age of 55, had led with exuberance. Essen and Kolchak had led from the front, putting themselves in harms way along with their crews. Kolchak routinely put himself in the most dangerous situations, sailing on the Rossiia during her mission to Western Pomerania in 1914 and in 1916 he personally led firefighting efforts on the doomed dreadnought Imperatritsa Maria. In the style of Makarov, the hero and martyr of Port Arthur, both Essen and Kolchak led by example and spent much of their time meeting with junior officers.
Eberhardt and Nepenin were more reserved but no less capable, serving as effective organizers and creative leaders. Eberhardt pioneered the carrier-battleship task force while Nepenin's intelligence service tracked German ships by their radio signals.

The junior officers were just as inspired as their commanders. The good-for-nothing status-minded aristocrats of the old fleet had left. After Tsushima, there was no prestige for them in the navy and so they went elsewhere. New men, still aristocrats of course, joined the fleet seeking to rebuild it and regain the lost prestige. They were determined to succeed and were willing to take great risks in order to defend Russia. They were professionals, dedicated to the service, and many of them had been trained by Essen. They would fight for Russia, and continued to fight long after the Tsar had abdicated.

For the sailors, the myth had been that they were mutinous former-factory workers who wished to kill their officers and establish Bolshevik rule. However, that was not the case. The sailors were not Bolsheviks, nor were they factory workers. Very few of the sailors were part of any political factions and most were not even workers. Even Soviet scholars of the 1960's estimated only a small portion of the fleet was actually made up of workers, as little as 25.4% and and as much as 30%. Most of the fleet was made up of peasants with no loyalty to the Bolsheviks or to Lenin. The peasant sailors had much more in common with the SRs and many of their soviets were headed by SR candidates. The Bolsheviks only exerted control over the top levels of the soviet structure and they were forced to rely on the SR majority to pass their policies. This does not mean that the revolutionary sailor was a myth, for in fact the sailors were the most revolutionary of the revolutionaries. As White said, “the terror of the Russian bourgeoisie – the vanguard and pride of the Revolution – the bluejackets of the Baltic Fleet.”

It was the bluejackets of the Baltic Fleet who had started the February Revolution by massacring the officers of the fleet. It was the bluejackets again who were the shock troops of October, although it was their officers under Bolshevik orders who brought them to Petrograd. When Lenin's
dictatorship of the proletariat ran foul of the democratic principles of the revolution, it was the bluejackets who once again were the first to the fight at Kronstadt. Their energy and devotion to the revolution destroyed the Imperial Navy, but that same devotion brought the Red fury down upon them for disagreeing with the new Leninist autocracy. Their destruction at Kronstadt was the final death of the old fleet. The proud Imperial Russian Navy, created by Peter the Great and led by heroes such as Nakhimov, Makarov, and Essen, was no more. Its memory doomed to fade under the crimson banner of Bolshevism and its glories forgotten by the world. But, the Imperial Russian Navy was not devoid of excellence nor glory as the false memory suggests. It was a powerful fleet that was done in by the harsh revolutionary efforts of its time. Knowing this, the undeserved negative reputation of the fleet can be erased, replaced by the true memory of the proud fleet. Graf predicted as much when he first wrote his memoirs in 1923:

And so St. Andrew's flag is no more. Where it once waved now the red flag flies: it has the color of blood, of civil war, of torture and treachery; our ships, the pride of our former days, have been dishonored, as the whole of Russia has been … Is it death then? For these skeletons of ships – it is death; but for the idea of a Navy it is but a long sleep. The time will come when Tsarist Russia rises from the dead and the Navy will revive. And then will on the masts of its new ships wave again in the wind St. Andrew's flag: white with a blue transversal cross.
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