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REVIEWS STATE OF USSR FLEET

Surface Craft

The USSR did not formerly occupy a prominent position among the seafaring powers. It made no significant achievements either in the field of shipbuilding or in its naval operations. The Soviet Navy is well aware of this deficiency and explains it on the basis of its lack of access to the open seas. As a result of the past war, the Soviet Union gained access to ice-free oceans. Postwar external political developments, furthermore, did not ostensibly weaken the position of the two world naval powers, the USA and England. Acceleration of the naval construction program is receiving top priority along with the production of atom bombs and the expansion of the Air Force. Whatever can be done for the Soviet Navy is being done today.

Today the USSR possesses at least four battleships: in the Baltic Sea, the Oktyabr'skaya Revolyutsiya, and in the Black Sea, the Parizhskaya Kommuna, the Molotov, and the Giulio Cesare, recently taken over from Italy. If the Marat, which suffered heavy damage during the war, is rebuilt, the USSR would then have five large battleships. Except for the Molotov, all are older models (1914) but were modernized in the period between the two world wars. The Molotov has been redesigned. No details can be furnished on it since it has been seen only from a distance, but it can be conservatively estimated at 23,000 tons. Although the Giulio Cesare, with its 23,622-ton displacement, 27-knot speed, oil-firing, Belluzzo turbines, and heavy armament, was built in 1911, it has been modernized and represents a considerable reinforcement for the Black Sea Fleet.

It is not known whether the Russians succeeded in capturing the decisive naval-artillery secrets of the German battleships and armored ships. In the case of the Bismarck-Tirpitz class, for example, this secret consisted in the ability, after radar determination of the directional data, to aim within 15 seconds all guns on one side on one point from an electrically operated

fire-control center, and to fire them simultaneously. It is also not known if the Russians have a catapulting device for depth charges such as were mounted on large German war vessels.

In 1941 the USSR had four heavy cruisers, among them three 8,000-ton 100,000-HP cruisers of the Kirov class built in 1938 - 1939, 183 meters long, and with 18-centimeter guns. The Kirov and Maksim Gor'kiy were in the Baltic, and the Voroshilov in the Black Sea. Also in the Black Sea was the Krasnyy Kavkaz, launched in 1916 and subsequently modernized. After heavy bombardment by the German Air Force, the Kirov finally had to be written off the books. The other three cruisers survived the war. In the harbor of Kronshtadt there is anchored, in addition, the Krasnaya Zvezda, a heavy 10,000-ton cruiser of the German Admiral Hipper class (probably the former Lützow), 195 meters in length, capable of a speed of 32 knots, with eight 20.3-centimeter guns, 24 antiaircraft guns, and 12 torpedo tubes arranged in sets of three. The Baltic Fleet soon may be reinforced with such newly designed ships as the Kuybyshev and the Ordzhonikidze, which were planned as early as 1939.

The light cruisers are stationed chiefly in the Black Sea. The only light cruiser in the Baltic is the Marty, now suitable only for mine laying. The most important of the five light cruisers in the Black Sea Fleet are the Tashkent and the Duca d'Aosta, both of which were built in Livorno. The 2,800-ton Tashkent was completed in 1938 and the 7,283-ton Duca d'Aosta in 1935. The latter's 39-knot speed is noteworthy.

At the beginning of the war, the destroyer arm probably consisted of approximately 50 ships, some of which were lost during the war. Today, however, 48 destroyers are stationed in the Black Sea alone. The USSR therefore must have sharply accelerated destroyer construction since 1945. The destroyers have 13-centimeter guns, while nearly all other Russian surface craft are equipped with 10.2-, 7.5-, and 3.7-centimeter antiaircraft guns as well as with 53.3-centimeter traversable torpedo tubes arranged in groups of threes.

The capacity of Soviet shipyards for building light surface craft is comparatively high. The torpedo boats, stationed mainly in the Baltic Sea and the Arctic Ocean, have a displacement of 700 tons and a speed of 29 knots; the mine layers have a displacement of 2,030 tons. In addition, each destroyer carries 60 mines. Mine sweepers of the Fugas type have a displacement of 500 tons. Soviet gunboats are of high quality. They serve chiefly in the Caspian Sea as well as in the Far East in the Amur Red Banner Flotilla, which includes the five most powerful river monitors in the world, each having eight turrets with 114-millimeter armor plate and 12-centimeter guns. Other monitor flotillas are on duty on the Volga, the Amu-Dar'ya in Turkestan, and the Danube. A few gunboats saw service also in the Baltic Sea during the last war and proved their worth.

Construction of coastal defense vessels has been pushed strongly since 1945. A considerable number of them are concentrated in Odessa. It should be kept in mind, however, that some of the ships of the coastal defense and waterways service are responsible to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Considerable attention is being given to the construction of motor torpedo boats, speedboats of the Italian MAS type, assault boats, and pontons (flat barges). In the Black Sea, Kherson, and Balaklava near Sevastopol' are centers for speedboats and naval-infantry exercises, and in the Leningrad zone, Sherem /Sheremet'yevka/ and Mor'ye on Lake Ladoga are important training centers for assault craft and pontons. The most important tasks of light surface vessels are coastal defense, convoy duty, and troop landings. For large-scale landing operations Russia could resort to the "Siebel Ferry," a combination of assault boat and ponton developed in 1940 by the Siebel-Werke

at Halle-on-the-Saale. For troop transports in long-distance convoys, ships with a displacement of 8,000 tons and a speed of 30 knots are available.

Submarines

Russia entered World War II with approximately 160 submarines of varying combat strength. Of great importance is the fact that the German Naval Experimental Station at Gdynia, having the latest combat-ready submarine developments, fell into the hands of the Russians. It is common knowledge that the Germans had created in the "Walterboot" a submarine capable of remaining under water for days and thereby evading radar detection (radar is effective only above the surface). It was carefully kept a secret even from the Allies. The Soviet Navy has since concentrated the bulk of its naval construction program on the construction of these "Walterboote" which are driven by a mixture of hydrogen and oxygen.

According to conservative estimates, Russia today has 250 submarines, which include 100 captured German vessels and approximately 150 new vessels built after 1945. It should be remembered, however, that in emergencies generally only one-third of the submarine arm can be used at the front while the remaining two-thirds are employed in training or undergo repair.

Russian naval staffs in Germany showed particular interest in searching for any data on a possible combination of submarines with V-weapons. As is known, German experiments in firing rockets with low initial velocity from submarines without endangering the craft had reached a fairly advanced stage. The Russians also paid considerable attention to such modern auxiliary equipment for the submarine arm as ocean-going buoys and automatic weather stations.

The ocean-going buoy is dropped disassembled from long-range aircraft and assembled in the water; it rests on a rubber ring and is protected from aerial visibility by its ocean-colored cellophane cover. Anchored at points where there are no deep-sea currents, the buoys hold three or four men, who watch important convoy routes and radio orders to submarines to fire upon enemy convoys. The ocean-going buoy may also be used in supplying submarines with food and fuel, or in rescuing crews. The automatic weather stations are particularly important for naval warfare in the Arctics. They are anchored just below the surface and are equipped with telescopes which emerge periodically to measure all essential meteorological phenomena, which data is then transmitted by radio.

Coastal Defense

Coastal defense measures initiated after 1945 are extremely broad in scope. They indicate an anxiety over the vulnerability of the extensive coastal regions.

Immediately after the retaking of Odessa, the old ring of fortifications around this city was restored and a second one was subsequently built. Today this port is protected by fifty 30.5-centimeter guns and two superheavy coastal batteries as well as by extensive mine fields. Forty batteries of 30.5 centimeter guns are stationed on the 60-kilometer-long Tenderov islet at the mouth of the Dnepr to protect the city of Odessa, the Nikolayev shipyards, and the approach to Perekop. The harbor entrance of Nikolayev was mined a year ago as a precautionary measure.

Sevastopol' is being made into the strongest fortress of the Black Sea region. The greatest massing of firepower so far is to be found on the

northwestern banks where there are three batteries of 45.5-centimeter and six batteries of 30.5-centimeter guns, supplemented by V-2 launching ramps. In addition, 150 heavy antitank guns were placed in position around Sevastopol' and large tunnels were driven into the mountain to serve as subterranean torpedo storage facilities.

Russia's most formidable sea fortress is the Oreshek Fortress on the Island of Kronshtadt, located off the entrance to Leningrad. At present it has no less than ten superheavy batteries, each with four 45.5-centimeter guns. Not counting the light weapons, Kronshtadt's defenses consist of 256 guns. Further, Kronshtadt is protected by a belt of "Sesselminen." Kronshtadt can be taken by sea only with massed air support. On the Soviet side of the Gulf of Finland, the coastal defenses extend from the barracks city of Kiviyli (northeast of Narva) via Narva and Reval to Paldiski. Paldiski and Hangö, which is on the opposite side, should prevent access to the Gulf of Finland. The approach to the Gulf of Riga has been given improved protection by new structures on the Island of Ezel'. A mine blockade has been placed off the city of Riga itself. In addition, Kaliningrad is being converted into a sea fortress.

Since 1945 the Soviet Union has built large airfields with concrete runways near naval installations in Korsak-Magila (near Melitopol') in Feodosiya in the Crimea, in Izmail on the Danube, in the Baltic states, etc. Work on the new Moscow-Kharkov-Perekop-Simferopol'-Sevastopol' superhighways is being given high priority. A new road leading from Sevastopol' to Kerch' has been completed, a double-track railroad between Nikolayev and Kherson is under construction, and -- it is believed -- a subterranean oil pipe between Feodosiya and Sevastopol', too, has been finished. The Batumi-Baku line has been electrified and a number of purely strategic roads have been built through the Caucasus toward the Black Sea. Additional improvements in communications are in progress in the Leningrad sector.

Shipbuilding Industry

On the basis of experiences gained in the last war, the Russians have refrained from building any new large shipyards at Odessa. Only lesser works and improvements are being carried out there. In the harbor of Ingerman, the new Sevastopol', however, there are three huge shipyard shops, each being 400 meters long and 100 meters wide. All are equipped with the best German machine tools. Ingerman is replacing Odessa in the building of ocean-going units. The "Southern Shipyard" of Kherson, too, is again operating.

The extensive shipyards of Leningrad have been in full operation for a considerable period. The Baltic Shipyard, now called the Zhdanov Shipbuilding Plant, is equipped to built ships of all types, including larger submarines. The Kronshtadt shipyards, however, are equipped to repair only ships of up to 10,000 tons. On the Russian side of the Baltic Sea only the shipyards and the drydock at Riga are of greater importance.

Between Leningrad and the Arctic Ocean there is, among other things, extensive production of assault boats and pontons in Sherem on Lake Ladoga, medium-sized shipyards in Petrozavodsk on Lake Onega and in Belomorsk on the White Sea, large submarine-building yards in Arkhangel'sk, extensive yards in Murmansk which were built after 1945, as well as the heavily guarded Molotovsk yard, which is 60 kilometers from Arkhangel'sk and is Russia's largest shipyard in the Arctic Ocean region. Disregarding the submarine shipyards of Vladivostok and Komsomolsk in the Far East, the only other notable shipyards located within Russian sovereign territory are those in Astrakhan', which supply the gun-boat flotillas on the Caspian Sea. The shipyards along the Volga are of lesser importance militarily since they can build only river monitors.

The "Krasynn Oktyabr'" Steel Plant in Stalingrad, the "Stalin" Metal Plant in Leningrad, and the "Metallist" Combine in Vol'sk produce armor plate for ship bulkheads and gun towers, as well as structural steel for turbines, Diesel engines, and boilers. The "Stalin" Plant also supplies turbines. Heavy guns for ships and coastal batteries are supplied by the "Krasnaya Barrikada" Steel-Processing Plant in Stalingrad and heavy cranes for port installations and for launching motor torpedo boats are supplied by the Kirov Plant in Leningrad.

Worth noticing is the ambition with which Russia has been developing its oil plants. Fuel for submarines and destroyers is to be produced from bituminous oil shale, of which Estonia is the main source.

The Russian shipbuilding industry gained great advantages from the occupation of Eastern Germany as well as from the military-economic coordination of certain shipyards and industrial enterprises of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary.

By the summer of 1948 all war-damaged port installations had been restored by erection of piers, breakwaters, and loading ramps. Extensive work has been in progress since the end of the war, particularly in the port of Molotovsk. This city will be the largest Russian naval base of the Far North.

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